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EDITORIAL

The Diaspora in Transition

The post World War II immigration wave to the United States has succeeded in establishing a strong presence there. Over the time it has diminished in numbers and vitality, not having a new inflow from Belarus in nearly half a century.

In the early 1990's after the break up of the Soviet Union, the next wave of immigrants started at first as a trickle. Some joined the existing Belarusian-American institutions, others disappeared in wider ex-Soviet communities. Eventually, after the introduction of the United States' immigration lottery, and the worsening economic situation in Belarus, their numbers grew to form the new wave of emigration.

The countries of Europe also became a magnet for those who feared prosecution for their involvement in anti-government political actions, in pro-democracy demonstrations or even for participation in unregistered NGOs. Many applied for political asylum in order to be able to live and work in their adopted countries. Students who were dismissed from institutions of higher learning for their political or human rights activity involvement, joined the influx in order to continue their studies abroad. And, those who were leaving Belarus for economic reasons, either temporarily or for good, formed the largest group.

Over the last decade the economic emigrants have formed a sizable Belarusian diaspora worldwide. They occasionally found the need to reach out to the earlier immigrants on holidays and other special occasions. Otherwise, they appeared more comfortable in the wider ex-Soviet Russian-speaking environment, such as in the Brighton Beach area in New York, and similar areas elsewhere. This was mainly due to the decades-long russification since most of their education had been in the Russian language. In addition, the long term exposure to the Communist atheistic ideology left many of them either non-believers, or infrequent churchgoers. And, with many of the diaspora activities taking place at the church centers, they tended to stay away. As a result, predominantly economic immigrants didn't join the existing Belarusian institutions in large numbers, and their lives became essentially family-centered. Some maintain close ties with their relatives and friends in Belarus, others only pay occasional visits there. This large segment of the émigré community remains outside of the scope of the organized diaspora, and thus outside of this paper's focus.

The Joiners and Others

The remaining immigrants and/or refugees fall into two main categories, those who tend to join the existing institutions, and those that prefer to form their own. Compared to the economic immigrants, they maintain interest in the situation in Belarus, and act in support of freedom and democracy in their homeland.

Some become members of the existing civic, cultural, academic and political organizations, also joining the various

Belarusian congregations. In many instances, their computer and Internet skills help to modernize the old 'brick and mortar' institutions, augment or replace the printed paper press by eye catching up-to-date Internet versions. A number have assumed leadership positions upon the departure of the older leadership. This transition occasionally causes a change in the character and method of operation of these organizations and institutions. In the view of the oldtimers, who tend to forget their past internal conflicts, the newcomers are less able to work cooperatively or harmoniously as a group or less able to seek compromise solutions for the good of the whole. This condition is judged by some observers to be the result of being raised in an authoritarian, non-democratic and materially oriented environment of the Marxist society of the Soviet Union. However, there is reason to believe that, guided by the more liberal Western values, those civic minded among them will impact positively the Belarusian-American civic and religious organizations in the future.

Others, younger and possibly more action oriented, view the existing Belarusian institutions as outdated and not sufficiently dynamic. To quote one young activist: "the existing diaspora tends to focus on organizing parties, dances and other such events. We have a new model of diaspora activity by organizing the needed (human rights or political) campaigns and by communicating via Internet, whether we are in Washington, DC, Florida or California. While living in the United States, it is not essential to join the local organizations, we can choose to join those in Brussels or Paris (via Internet), or wherever it is more interesting for us. I can't say that I am an American Belarusian, rather I am a Belarusian of the global diaspora." Thinking more traditionally, however, one can question whether such a dependence on virtual contacts can long survive without some physical connections and interaction.

Following this type of virtual organizational thinking, these groups are setting up many websites, blogs and chat-rooms. Some of them go to the trouble of securing adequate financing to continue and expand, others do it on a wave of enthusiasm, that unfortunately, soon fades. Still others, having applied for a grant and secured financial support for establishing a website, fail to maintain it properly, eventually disappearing, once this support is exhausted. (While preparing this paper, I scanned some of these sites, and I came across one offer to sell the domain name, another website, while still being located under the original name, is now promoting pornography, instead of democracy.)

Some enterprising new arrivals go beyond establishing web sites. They found, and sometimes register whole organizations with minimal membership, but with questionably grand names, such as The Union of Belarusian Political Refugees, Belarusian-European Association, Belarusian Youth Movement of America, the Union of Belarusians Abroad. Under those names they are able to win grants for specific projects, or collect contributions for their various activities. In a number of instances, they not only compete with other more established organizations and institutions, but often take credit for most of the Belarusian activity in a given area in their promotional material, particularly on-line.

Finally, there are some among the new arrivals who have a darker agenda. They readily join the existing organizations,

volunteering their energy and skills in order to become valuable members of the organization. Their apparent dedication to the Belarusian democratic causes allows them to win the trust of the aging leadership. It helps them to reach leadership positions, at which time the masks are removed, their support for the dictatorship becomes apparent, as is their attempt at takeover. One such attempt almost succeeded in the New York community.

One of the outspoken newcomers views the main distinction between the old and the new diaspora in the newcomers' desire to eventually return to Belarus. Interestingly enough, that was exactly the aim of the members of the old diaspora half a century ago. The longevity of the Communist totalitarian rule prevented that aim from being realized. One wonders, will the prolonged present dictatorial rule repeat that scenario for the younger emigrants of today?

Conclusion

What could be done to make the leadership transition from the post WW II immigrants and the recent wave, smoother, if not seamless? Perhaps the major handicap in achieving a smooth transition was the lengthy duration of the Soviet rule in Belarus. It lasted nearly fifty years after the war, a span of two generations. The leadership of the earlier wave is long gone, their successors are at best now in the senior citizen category, with the next generation substantially assimilated, creating a major generational gap between the new and the old. Such a generational gap is difficult to overcome in achieving a smooth transition, and yet there are some examples of success. Generally, it is accomplished by searching for conscientious leadership among the new arrivals, without prematurely giving up the key positions, and then mentoring the budding leaders along democratic guidelines. Such guidance might over time produce valued professionals and responsible political leaders, as it has in the neighboring Baltic countries, who will return to Belarus at the right time, to help educate and guide that society toward true independence, based on democracy, the respect for law and human rights.

Walter Stankievich

From the Publisher

Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 5970) was introduced in May in the House of Representatives by Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey. Eleven other Representatives have cosponsored this bill to date. More are needed to assure its passage. Please phone, or e-mail your Representatives and urge them to become cosponsors. Their contact information can be found on site www.Congress.org.

The full text of H.R. 5970, as well as the latest amendments can be found on the following site: www.thomas.loc.gov

Our publication depends on the subscriptions and the generous gifts by our readers. Some have provided gift

subscriptions to their elected representatives, some to their former educational institutions' libraries. This way the elected representatives, students and scholars are being kept informed of the latest developments in and around Belarus.

The following readers have been especially generous this year, so far: Alice Kipel. Anatol Lukjanczuk, George and Lorraine Kipel, Thomas Bird, Peter Kasaty, Nicholas Sniezko, Karnella Najdziuk, Natalia Rusak, Anatol Sankovitch, Olga Wilson, Jana Branisa-Hall, Vladimir Kushel. Many thanks!

DID YOU RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

28-th Biennial Convention Of Belarusians of North America

This social, cultural and partly political event will take place this Labor Day weekend, August, 30-31st and September 1 at the Belarusian Community Center Polacak in the vicinity of Cleveland, Ohio.

The following activities are planned: A folk fair – **Kirmash** with folk music, ethnic foods, games, Belarusian arts and crafts workshops, recent documentary films, stands with souvenirs, books and discs. The evening will feature music, songs and games around a campfire.

The next day will feature a banquet and conference following the church service. The conference, titled **the Year of Belarusian Statehood** — related to the 90th Independence Declaration Anniversary, will include a panel discussion with a number of well-known speakers.

An exhibition of the works of Belarusian-American artists will be followed by a Grand Concert and a Ball, featuring groups and artists from the various Belarusian communities from the United States and Canada.

For additional information please write to: BAZA.HQ@hotmail.com or phone 732 222 1951 in U.S. or 905 760 7447 in Canada.

FEATURES

Pawns on the March

By Iryna Vidanava

When the Lukashenka regime cracks down on an opposition rally, youthful activists respond with cheerful insouciance.

MINSK — Spring is supposed to be the harbinger of warm weather, when people return to Minsk's parks with their chess sets in hand. When a number of political prisoners were released in early 2008, many hoped that a thaw had come to the diplomatic chess game between the United States, European Union and Belarus.

But relations are instead getting chillier, with Minsk and Washington recalling their ambassadors. The Americans are disappointed that a major figure in the opposition, former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, remains behind bars. And Belarus' young democrats, pawns in a larger game, are being captured right and left.

To intimidate youth, the foot soldiers of the opposition, the regime continues to use overt repression, such as arrests and expulsions from university. But the authorities have also changed the rules of the game by employing a new move. In addition to the courts, the government of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is using the army to thin the ranks of young democrats.

Despite old and new threats, youth are again at the forefront of the peaceful protests this spring, the "hottest" season for opposition demonstrations, which were kicked off on 25 March, Belarus' Independence Day. While young activists continue to risk their freedom, education and livelihood, there is a growing feeling that it is the regime itself that is facing checkmate. Who are some of these small pieces that might become major players in a future Belarusian endgame?

POSTCARD BOY

Andrei Kim, 21, was arrested in January during a peaceful demonstration of small-business people in Minsk. Now in prison, he could spend six years locked up for allegedly committing "violent actions against a police officer." Kim is part of a new generation of activists who joined the democratic movement in March 2006. Expelled from Belarusian State University for participating in protests that spring, he chose to stay in Belarus and start his own organization, known today as Initiative. The group's reputation is built on creative happenings, like placing the banned white-red-white historical flag on the tallest buildings around the capital. But Initiative's best known action is asking ordinary people on the streets to sign postcards that are then sent as a sign of solidarity to political prisoners. The group was able to collect and mail more than 1,500 postcards to prisoners last Christmas Eve.

"The most rewarding part is to see people's reactions when we talk to them on the streets," Kim told me in an interview last fall. "I was shocked to discover that most didn't know that we have political prisoners in our country."

He couldn't have known then that in just a few months thousands of his friends and supporters, including some of those he'd met on the streets, would be sending letters of support to his own prison cell.

Despite being humiliated in prison, where his crucifix was torn from his neck, his stylish long hair cut, and his head shaved, Kim remains optimistic about his uncertain future. An online support site has recently been created. In addition to information about the jailed youth leader, photos and videos from rallies demanding the release of political prisoners in Belarus, it also offers a series of cartoons with Kim as the main character.

Kim's spirits remain high as he awaits the April Fools' Day court hearings on two charges against him. He is planning to organize a party for his buddies on one of the rooftops of Minsk after he is released.

IN THE ARMY NOW

The saga of Zmicier Zhalieznichenka has all the makings of a Hollywood thriller. A third-year honors student at Homel State University and a member of the Belarusian Popular Front, the math whiz was expelled in September 2007 for "chronic violations of discipline"—regime-speak for political activism. A week later, he was arrested as a suspect in a rape case. The charges were soon changed to cursing in public — the preferred means to detain and punish activists — and he was sentenced to eight days in prison and fined about 200 euros. After one court had denied his appeal against the university, a higher court upheld it and he was reinstated in January 2008.

The case was significant because it was the first of its kind in which a political activist won in court. But a week later, Zhalieznichenka was tossed out again. That same month, he was arrested and accused of theft. The next morning he was drafted into the army.

After starting a hunger strike against the repeated violations of his rights, Zhalieznichenka was taken to a military hospital and threatened by defense ministry officials with a criminal charge of "avoiding army service through the deliberate imposition of a disability on oneself." After halting the hunger strike and being sent back to his unit, Zhalieznichenka filed another appeal and continues his struggle.

University students have the right to finish their studies before undertaking mandatory military service. Despite refusing to take the military oath, Zhalieznichenka was sent to a military unit in Zhlobin. In an interview, he said, "I was called up for military service illegally and we will prove it in court as soon as we have an opportunity."

A court recently dismissed his complaint about the illegal call-up. But even as a private, Zhalieznichenka continues to play the system like a grand master. He demands to be addressed in Belarusian rather than Russian by officers, defends his rights by filing appeal after appeal, and serves as an example of brave and clever behavior to other young activists.

BAD STYLE

Several other youth activists are being threatened with being drafted into the army this spring. One is Franak Viachorka, a prominent youth leader who was expelled from Belarusian State University in February for failing to pass two exams. A third-year journalism student, he was known for his strong academic performance. In January, he was arrested near a court building where he had come to support his friends who were on trial for taking part in peaceful protests.

Viachorka and several others were sentenced to 15 days in prison. He missed his exams because he was in jail at the time. The state-appointed university officials didn't consider this excuse to be relevant but did establish a special commission to test him. On one exam in Belarusian stylistics, Viachorka was given a bad mark, even though he is a well-known advocate of the Belarusian language and had done well during class.

FRANAK VIACHORKA

Viachorka's father, Vincuk Viachorka, who is an opposition leader and well-known Belarusian language scholar, believes that kicking his son out of school is just payback for Vincuk's views on Belarusian stylistics, which are quite different of those officially taught. One thing is clear: the Viachorka family has caused lots of headaches for the current regime.

Franak Viachorka is not about to give up. He appealed to the minister of education to reinstate him at the university, but was ignored. Viachorka is now filling a legal appeal. In the meantime, he was ordered to appear at a military recruiting office in Minsk on the evening of Independence Day.

"I was simply phoned and told to be there. Maybe they sent a summons, but I didn't receive anything. ... I have other plans for this day," Viachorka said. So did the police, apparently. Viachorka was taken by police from a café several hours before the demonstration began. He could be sent straight to the army from his detention cell.

YOUTH MOVE ON ALL FRONTS

Despite the opposition's generation gap, the "fathers" have launched a campaign in support of their "sons." Liavon Barshcheuski, chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front, sent an open letter to the minister of defense, Leanid Maltsau, calling on him to stop using the army as a political tool against democratic youth. Opposition leaders have also appealed in protest to Education Minister Alyaksandr Radzkow against the persecution of student activists.

And since the repression continues, democratic leaders have called on international partners to stop academic exchange programs with Belarusian universities that violate the rights of students. The Swedish Foreign Ministry and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency are already considering suspending ties with the journalism department of Belarusian State University over

the expulsion of Franak Viachorka and crackdown on other pro-democratic students.

"People who stifle dissent and are ready to sacrifice the best and brightest Belarusians have no right to talk about belonging to the freedom-loving academic community in Europe," Vincuk Viachorka said in a recent interview.

There is no doubt that the regime will continue to come up with innovative methods of attacking youth activism, but it seems to be in a bind. There is a growing tide of brave kids in Belarus who are willing to struggle for the ideals of freedom and democracy. The state can try to restrict, impose, threaten and repress, but it really can't determine what young people wear, listen to, read, watch or believe. In the 21st century, no matter how hard it tries, the regime cannot fully control young peoples' hearts and minds and, therefore, it will never be able to rest in peace.

The pawn is the weakest piece on the chess board, but also the only one that can become stronger. The government's sallies and countermoves against youth seem to be failing. As Lukashenka was playing his diplomatic games with the U.S. embassy, the Young Front, one of the oldest and largest youth opposition groups, announced the beginning of a "Youth to Europe" campaign. On 19 March, the second anniversary of the rigged presidential elections, Young Front activists flew a white-red-white flag together with the EU flag in one of Minsk's parks, right in front of the KGB headquarters.

The pawn is the weakest piece on the chess board, but the only one that can become stronger.

What will the next move be?

Sometimes, however, life in Belarus isn't just a game. As I'm writing this, security forces in Minsk are still hunting for some of the thousands who took part in the Independence Day demonstration. More than 100 people, most of them youth, were detained, including the youth leaders Zmitser Dashkevich, Artur Finkevich, Ivan Shyla, Krystsina Shatsikava and Katsyaryna Salawyova. Many injuries were reported. Twenty-six demonstrators were given short jail sentences and 50 more handed fines.

It was clear from the actions and comments made by officials that they weren't about to let people peacefully celebrate Independence Day. But despite the threats and preventive arrests, young people took to the streets with national flags, flowers and smiles. There were people of all ages taking part, but the young people were clearly the leading force. And there were very many new faces.

This time around, the column of protestors had no official "head," since the opposition leaders were dispersed in the crowd. It was the young people who made the police chase them and who kept the flags flying. Though many were brutally beaten and arrested, they held Minsk's main avenue for more than two hours, facing men in black who hid their eyes, but not their sticks. The first match ended in a draw, but it's only the beginning of spring. Play on. *Iryna Vidanava is a young activist from Belarus who frequently writes on youth-related topics.*

Source: TransitionsOnLine, 28 March 2008

Independent Media Targeted by Authorities

By Michael Scollon,

Raids on the offices of independent media outlets, journalists' private apartments, and the recent mass arrests of opposition activists in Belarus have evoked a harsh reaction by the West -- but the criticisms have apparently fallen on deaf ears.

The Belarusian authorities this morning resumed their crackdown, a day after dozens of journalists were detained for questioning by the KGB. Many of them also had their private apartments searched.

In a telephone interview with RFE/RL, independent journalist Alena Stsyapanava described the KGB's search of her home in Vitsebsk.

"Around 9 a.m. someone rang to my apartment -- not from the house intercom but the doorbell," Stsyapanava said. "My husband opened the door. I heard that he was being asked for the passports of residents because, they said, it was a check of whether the residents have the right to live there. Only after that did they show us a search warrant."

Targeted were media outlets or journalists with ties to the outside world, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Investigators also zeroed in on employees of Radio Racja and Belsat, both primarily Polish-funded, and the EU-funded European Radio for Belarus -- which have all been denied government accreditation.

U.S. Criticism

In a statement issued on March 27, U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack condemned the raids, saying, "some 30 independent journalists in 12 cities were detained without legitimate cause."

He said this week's incidents show that a "brutal, authoritarian dictatorship that blatantly ignores human rights and fundamental freedoms" is in power in Belarus.

Polish President Lech Kaczynski expressed the "deepest possible anxiety" over the developments, and said the situation in Belarus is taking a turn for the worse.

Homel-based independent journalist Anatol Hatouchyts spoke to RFE/RL after his home was searched on March 27.

"I have been a professional journalist for more than 30 years. Naturally, I have a computer, and my wife has a computer. I have tape recorders, diskettes. All this was confiscated. They confiscated 31 items in total. In fact, all this was done in order to paralyze the work of journalists who work for nonstate media," Hatouchyts said.

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maryya Vanshyna said on March 27 the searches were being conducted to uncover journalists working illegally in Belarus. "The illegal character of these individuals' activities in Belarus has never been hidden by their foreign owners," she said.

Cartoons Controversy

Belarusian Deputy Prosecutor-General Alyaksey Stuk, however, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service the same day that investigators were looking for signs the targeted journalists had cooperated with the creators of animated cartoons deemed insulting to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Independent journalist Stsyapanava supported Stuk's claim. "The search was linked to me. The search warrant stated that I have to be a witness in a criminal case opened in 2005 against citizens by the name of Marozau, Minich, and Abozau," Stsyapanava said. "While staying abroad, they allegedly disseminated -- via the television company Belsat -- cartoons that defame the president of the republic of Belarus."

Andrey Abozau, Pavel Marozau, and Aleh Minich fled Belarus in 2007 to avoid arrest in connection with the cartoons, which were originally posted on their website, "Third Path," and continue to circulate on the Internet.

Defaming the Belarusian president is punishable by up to four years in prison.

The Polish-funded television station Belsat, which has broadcast the cartoons, said 20 of its Belarusian employees were detained. The Belarusian Journalists Association recorded 16 journalists who were either detained or whose apartments were searched.

A human rights activist was also reportedly detained during a search of a journalist's apartment in Visebsk for swearing. Pavel Levinau had arrived on the scene to ensure that the search was being conducted in accordance with the law.

The Belarusian Journalists Association has petitioned the Prosecutor-General's Office to stop the searches, and has objected to the confiscation of audio and video equipment and printed material.

Embassy Recall

The crackdown came on a day that 17 U.S. diplomats left Belarus -- a concession to Minsk's recent demand that the U.S. Embassy's staff be halved. U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Karen Stewart was recalled two weeks ago, and some embassy services in Minsk have been curtailed or suspended.

The staff reductions followed accusations that the embassy had recruited a dozen Belarusians to pass information for use against Belarus to the FBI -- allegations the United States has denied.

U.S.-Belarusian relations were further strained when truncheon-wielding Belarusian police violently broke up a street rally on March 25 and detained some 80 demonstrators. Several hundred opposition activists had gathered in a Minsk square to mark the 90th anniversary of the creation of the Belarusian People's Republic, which was subsequently crushed by Bolshevik forces.

The newly appointed U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, David Kramer, told RFE/RL earlier this week that breaking up the rally was "thuggish behavior on the part of the security forces."

Historians Debate 1918 Declaration of Independence In Belarus

By David Marples

On March 25, opposition demonstrators marked the 90th anniversary of the declaration of independence of the Belarusian National (People's) Republic (BNR). The crowd was estimated at several thousand and refused to be confined to the officially sanctioned route from the National Academy of Sciences to Banhalor Square. Instead, an attempt to congregate in the more central Yakub Kolas Square was countered by police carrying batons, resulting in about 100 arrests (Radio Polonia, March 26; RIA-Novosti, March 25). Among the arrested were some familiar figures, several of which have been released from detention recently: Zmitser Dashkevich, Artur Finkevich, Katsyaryna Salawyova, Krystsina Shatsikava, and Ivan Shyla. According to one report, the number of arrests was limited only by the amount of space available in the police vans (*Naviny*, March 26).

Such repressive tactics are hardly new to Belarus and the response seemed familiar in other respects, too. Thus on March 23, the authorities commemorated the 65th anniversary of the Khatyn tragedy, reportedly (not all historians accept the official version of events) burned down by the Nazi occupants in the middle of the German-Soviet war, killing 149, including 75 children. Representing President Alexander Lukashenka was the head of his administration, Henadz Nevyhlas, who declared that Khatyn was "a bleeding wound, preventing our people from forgetting the historic memory" (*Itar-Tass*, March 23). The recognition of an official Soviet-era tragedy and the crackdown on demonstrators suggest that little has changed on the part of the Belarusian government. The current impasse with the United States only adds to that conclusion (see EDM, March 14).

However, a remarkably candid discussion of the BNR took place over three days prior to the 90th anniversary in the presidential newspaper (*Belarus' Segodnya*, March 22). Hosted by the paper's editor, Pavel Yakubovich, it featured six leading historians of Belarus, five of which are affiliated with the Institute of History at the National Academy of Sciences: Alyaksandr Kavalenya, Mikalai Smyakhovich, Uladzimir Lyakhousky, Valyantsin Mazets, and Syarhey Tratsyak; and one, Vitaly Skalaban, from the National Archives. The discussion took place in the form of a roundtable, and comments were solicited from the general public. Clearly these comments were not censored, and the surprise engendered is evident from one reader who writes that the roundtable is the first public discussion about the BNR in the past 80 years!

Some observations would still fit well into the former Soviet analysis. Smyakhovich seems upset that discussion centered on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the First World War, because the panel was forgetting that the possibility of statehood developed only after the victory of the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks' position was that every

"A reminder, I think, of the total lack of respect that the authorities have demonstrated in the past for citizens' rights to assemble and speak freely. It is very unfortunate that a number of people not only were arrested, but many beaten up by the authorities. Totally uncalled for," Kramer said.

Kramer at the time touted a united U.S.-EU front in calling for the Belarusian authorities to ease restrictions on citizens and civil society.

"Belarus is in the heart of Europe, and it remains the last dictatorship in Europe, and it is a country where, together, the United States and the European Union feel we need to both apply pressure on the government so that it demonstrates greater respect for human rights for its own citizens, but also where we reach out to civil society and the democratic opposition and NGOs in Belarus to show that we support what they are trying to achieve in their country," Kramer said.

The EU has echoed the U.S. condemnation of the recent events in Belarus, calling on Belarus to end the crackdown if it wants to improve relations with the bloc.

Since the beginning of the year, President Lukashenka has indicated that he wants to improve relations with the EU. He has released most of the country's political prisoners — a key EU demand — and given the European Commission the go-ahead to open up a branch in Minsk.

However, one former Belarusian political prisoner, Syarhey Skrabets, believes Brussels could do more:

"I think all this [political persecution] takes place only because the European Union maintains permanent contacts with the current authorities. Had they taken the position that was taken by the United States, all this would not have happened."

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, March 28, 2008

Quotes of Quarter

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

MARGARET MEAD

"Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it."

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

"In the truest sense, freedom cannot be bestowed; it must be achieved."

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

nationality in the Russian Empire had the right to a national home. Tratsyak maintains that all facets of real statehood were absent from the BNR. Rather it was a political center with pretensions to statehood. Smyakhovich also points out that aside from a small portion of the peasantry, the majority did not support the new state; it lacked the support of the most vital element — the people.

The other panelists, including the Lukashenka acolyte, Yakubovich, who begins by stating that “The BNR is part of the history of Belarus...the event has relevance for each of us,” offer broader perspectives. Yakubovich feels it is critical to provide an objective appraisal of events today, when Belarus is on the path of national statehood. Kavalenya comments that the Soviet view was critical largely because the BNR leaders were negative toward Bolshevik ideals. Others focus on the limitations of statehood under German military rule and the lack of official recognition even from neighboring states, but acknowledge the significance of the event.

Lyakhousky, who is the most sympathetic toward the BNR, remarks that in the Soviet period, it was regarded as a puppet state, but “in our view” it was a political formation created in February 1918 from the organizational structure of the 1917 all-Belarusian Congress, having as its goal real independence. Thus the formation of the BNR constituted an important stage in the path to sovereignty of the Belarusian nation. Later he adds that the proclamation of the BNR influenced the future political steps in Belarus — elsewhere the next stage is stated to be the formation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Not surprisingly there are limitations to the discussion. No mention is made, for example, of the continuation of the BNR in emigration, and it is declared to have lasted in exile form only until 1925. Most historians make reference to the nation-building campaign of the Lukashenka government, thus a political purpose to the discussion cannot be ruled out. However, the debate appears open and frank, resembling in form some of the early revelations under Gorbachev’s glasnost campaign of the late 1980s. Having opened this most sensitive issue, the historians are unlikely to stop here. Moreover, it can be surmised that the debate has the approval of the authorities. Yakubovich noted that only certain questions had been broached but this would not be the last such meeting.

The contrast between the official display of force against those recognizing the anniversary and the calm and frank discussion of its importance by members of the Institute of History suggests mixed signals on the part of the regime. The most positive sign is that the roundtable appeared in the most widely circulated newspaper in Belarus.

The authorities have resolved to include this pivotal event in the new national history but seem to be incapable of moderating their violent attacks on those who commemorate it.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, March 27, 2008.

Impact of DEMYC’s Study Visit To Belarus

Following is an interview with the Secretary General of the European Christian Political Youth Network (ECPYN) Jonathan Van Tongeren

The interview on behalf of BELARUSIAN REVIEW was conducted by Raman Kavalchuk, chairman of Youth Movement of Belarusian Popular Front “Young Revival.”

Secretary General of ECPYN and International Secretary of PerspectiveF – Youth of Christian Union, JONATHAN VAN TONGEREN (the Netherlands) joined Democrat Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC) delegation in its Study Visit to Belarus’ on 10-13 January, 2008.

Mr. van Tongeren kindly agreed to share his opinion and impressions with BELARUSIAN REVIEW on the situation in Belarus, on the DEMYC Study Visit and conclusions made in the aftermath of his visit.

BR: Dear Mr. Tongeren, what did you expect from this Study Visit to Belarus? Is there anything that really confused or surprised you in this country?

Van Tongeren: I wanted to have a clear image on what does it mean to live in a dictatorship. In Western Europe we all understand that you don’t have free and fair elections. That is all we actually understand. When I was in Belarus’ I observed all kinds of restrictions creating an unfree society. That was the main impression. Another impression was that Belarusians are much more culturally European than I expected. In the Netherlands we are still referring to Belarusians as “White Russians” and thus, of course, we get the impression that they are like Russians, but they are more European than Russians.

BR: During this conference here in Helsinki I spoke with retired Finnish politicians. They also asked me whether Belarusians are Russian-oriented or not. They were previously convinced that most Belarusians are Russian-oriented...

Van Tongeren: I saw in Belarus’ that most people there are not only pro-European from the political point of view, but they are Europeans in the cultural sense. They are really Europeans. And now we have the idea of a free and united Europe and are presuming solidarity among Europeans. Belarus needs to be a part of this solidarity, to become one of the free European nations.

BR: Did you make new friends in Belarus’? Did you meet representatives of political parties or youth organizations you had never contacted before? What kind of practical relationships did your meetings may have helped to establish? For Your Dutch organization itself and on the international level for the ECPYN?

Van Tongeren: Before the Study Visit we have already maintained contacts with several Belarusian political organizations. When I was in Belarus I have learned more about different political groups there, I have learned about their political profiles.

I have also met many people, representing different organizations, among whom I discovered a lot of enthusiasm. For me it was really encouraging. It was like a chemical reaction, like a spark.

When I went back home to the Netherlands, I heard that some young Belarusians, whom we met, were arrested and detained for two weeks. I was outraged by this fact and wanted to take an immediate action. Thus I gained a more clear and distinct view on Belarus' that made it easier for me to act in support of its young people.

BR: What kind of actions have you worked out in support of the Belarusian democratic opposition?

Van Tongeren: We pointed out that in the Netherlands our first goal would be to create more awareness among Dutch people of what is going on in other parts of Europe. It is tied with the idea of solidarity among European nations. For a long time it seemed impossible because of the Iron Curtain, that split Europe in two parts. And some Western European countries called the rest of free nations to join them and bring freedom to the people behind the Iron Curtain. That is why we have the same obligation towards Belarusians. We have to do it by means of actions and discussions.



Jonathan Van Tongeren

We could also stage some events while contacting the members of Dutch Parliament from our mother party. We would contact our Belarusian partners and propose some concrete plans. Within ECPYN we should have some concerted actions. We will participate in demonstrations in the Hague and in other capitals of Europe, supporting the cause of freedom in Belarus.

BR: Are you showing movies about the repressions against Belarusian opposition to the regime and about brutal deployments of the riot police against peaceful demonstrations?

Van Tongeren: Yes, we are not only showing the movies but also conducting many productive discussions and are cooperating with human rights organizations based in the Netherlands that pay particular attention to Belarus. We are also informing our small entrepreneurs about the lack of freedom of conscience in Belarus, and are raising this and related issues in Dutch media.

BR: Thank you for your answers!

Belarus' Forum

The Poet's Place

By Siarhey Khareuski

Lukashenka personally allowed removing the monument of Maksim Bahdanovich from the site it long occupied. This monument is listed in the second category of UNESCO's World's Historical and Cultural Treasures (code 1a1E404457). Its image of the poet Maksim Bahdanovich was created in 1981 by the sculptor Siarhey Vakar, and in 27 years it became associated with its site.

Architects Leanard Maskalevich and Yury Kazakou, co-creators of the monument, opposed its transfer. In 1981 they were forced to economize on details and a good arrangement of the monument. It would have been worthwhile to complete their work. However, today the monument has been removed from its original site.



In a cynical and demonstrative fashion, it has been moved to another, obviously inferior place, thus lowering its status.

Previously the Bahdanovich monument was facing the Svislach river, and the Upper City (*Verkhni Horad*), and stood on the most visible spot on the Trayetskaya Hill. Now, it will be standing in deep shade, facing the noisy thoroughfare, looking on the Suvorov Academy with its scrupulously restored inscriptions "Stalin, Stalin."

The drastic transfer of the monument closer to buildings will distort its scale. It will appear insignificant next to the edifice of the theater, new recently added statues, and other nearby buildings. It will require a new, larger pedestal.

... Any transfer of monuments amounts to a gesture equal to their demolition. Generally speaking, the monument of the nation's favorite poet is an exclusive symbol. In 28 years of the latest history this monument became an important symbol of national identity. People used to visit it with flowers at weddings and various other celebrations.

The event is the latest in a series of measures, designed to devalue national symbols: renaming the Skaryna Prospect, placing public toilets in the house of (the writer) Karatkevich, refusal to name a street in Bykau's name. It's a clear message: it's OK to break or change anything, to do anything to prevent the elevation of national treasures. Note that nothing similar has happened to monuments of the Stalin era in Belarus. Even renaming the tiny Berson street drew protests from above.

Regardless of their motives, the initiators of the Bahdanovich monument transfer delivered a painful blow to Belarusians's national feelings.

Source: *Nasha Niva*, April 25, 2008 (excerpts from an article.)

Volha Siankova's Deed Gives Hope To All of Us

The educational department of Salihorsk town executive committee adopted an illegal decision to expel one of the leaders of Salihorsk branch of the Young Front, Ivan Shyla, from the secondary school No.4 "due to his public activities and numerous detentions at street actions."

Headmaster Volha Siankova resigned in protest. Her assistant was dismissed for "unsatisfactory educational work." After that the teachers unanimously voted to expel Ivan Shyla from the school.

Volha Siankova confirmed that her resignation was connected with Ivan Shyla's expulsion:

"I am discouraged working in the sphere of education. This is why I resigned from my post as a school headmaster," she said in an interview to Euroradio.

The former deputy minister of foreign affairs, and presently the international coordinator of the Charter'97 press-center, Andrei Sannikau, who resigned from his office in November 1996, protesting against the illegal referendum, comments on the deed of the headmaster of Salihorsk school No.4, Volha Siankova.



Volha Siankova

"It is a very courageous act, and it can be only welcomed. It gives hope to all of us, the hope that there are honest people in the country, who are ready to defend not only their dignity. In this case it was dignity of one's pupils. Such people can be and should be an example. Unfortunately, recently we hear of such deeds less and less frequently. We know that many people are dissatisfied with the existing system, but they are choosing a conformist's way of time-serving. I think that in this or that way it will tell on them, as it is impossible to believe other things and serve this regime, it is impossible to live a double life for a long time. It is difficult psychologically and even physically," Sannikau told Radio Liberty

Ivan Shyla, an 11th grade pupil, successfully passed two final exams, and was supposed to take the third one (in English) today. A police guard was sent to school to prevent the boy from taking the exam.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, June 5, 2008

Trials and Dismissals: Regime's Reaction to Protests

On June 5, 2008 a district court in Minsk started special hearings of two former teachers from the nearby settlement of Druzhny. On April 25th they took part in a rally organized by residents of Druzhny to protest against the planned construction of a toxic chemical pesticide plant by the Russian company "August-Bel."

Due to their participation in the protest rally the two women were also forced to submit requests for a voluntary resignation from their jobs.

The authorities also exerted similar pressure on other Druzhny residents, who signed appeals to the U.N., OSCE and the president of Belarus.

The authorities seem to exert all kinds of pressure on citizens who assumed an active civic position. In the view of Aliaksandr Milinkevich, the leader of the "For Freedom" movement, the regime ultimately broke away from the people.

"The pressure on the civic society assumed unprecedented proportions. The people don't demand the president's resignation, nor are they shouting political slogans. The just defend their elementary rights for clean air, water and soil - for themselves and their children. To care for these rights should undoubtedly be a duty of the state. However, the present Belarusian regime is now removed from the citizens and their needs to such a degree, that it is ready to suppress any citizens' activity, in order to promote interests of unknown foreign business, close to the regime itself," says Aliaksandr Milinkevich.

Source: Press Center of the movement "For Freedom" info@milinkevich.org.

Quotes of Quarter

"Increasing the number of English lessons in schools may be also regarded as an intention to prepare a labor force for abroad"

Head of President Lukashenka's
Administration
NATALIA PETKEVICH

"Those who are too smart to engage in politics are punished by being governed by those who are dumber."

PLATO

Freedom is not worth
having if it does not include the
freedom to make mistakes."

MAHATMA GANDHI

Political Prisoner As Swap Commodity

By Jan Maksymiuk,

Alyaksandr Lukashenka this year had a golden opportunity to free all political prisoners in Belarus and take an important stride toward improving the country's standing in the West. Instead, the Belarusian president chose to pass on the chance and retain Belarus's status as the only country in Europe that imprisons people for political convictions.

On January 23, Belarusian authorities released Zmitser Dashkevich, the leader of the opposition Youth Front, after he served 16 months of an 18-month sentence for heading an unregistered organization.

Dashkevich's release was followed by that of another Youth Front leader, Artur Finkevich. Finkevich spent two years under a "restricted freedom" regime for writing political graffiti, and then in October 2007 had his sentence extended by another 18 months for violating the rules of his correctional facility. On February 5 of this year, however, the court considered Finkevich's appeal, unexpectedly shortened his second term to six months, and released him immediately.

Ten days later, President Lukashenka ordered the release of Andrey Klimau, an opposition politician who in August 2007 was sentenced to two years in prison for insulting the president and calling for revolution in an article posted on the Internet. Klimau, who served as a legislator in the Supreme Soviet of Belarus in 1995-96, had been jailed twice before. He served four years of a six-year sentence he received in 1998 on charges of embezzlement; in 2005, he was sentenced to 18 months of "restricted freedom" for his role in organizing a demonstration in Minsk.

Following the decision on Klimau, it became apparent that some backstage deal had been made between Minsk and Brussels on the issue of political prisoners. So it was no surprise at all when on February 22, Belarus's Supreme Court shortened a three-year prison term given to journalist Alyaksandr Zdzvizhkov to three months. Zdzvizhkov was sentenced in January for republishing the controversial Danish cartoons displaying the Prophet Muhammad in an independent newspaper in 2006.

In the meantime, it became known that in the first half of February, Belarusian Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynau — who is among Belarusian officials currently subject to an EU travel ban — secretly visited Germany. There, it can be presumed, Martynau suggested how Europe might reward Minsk for releasing its political prisoners.

The details of the deal were not made public. But it was clear to all that its ultimate success depended on the release of the last of Belarus's prisoners of conscience, former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was serving a 5 1/2-year prison term for leading an antigovernment demonstration in the wake of the 2006 presidential election.

Carrot And Stick From EU

For the past 10 years, the European Union has concocted a rich brew of measures meant alternately to punish Lukashenka for un-European behavior, to lure him into behaving in a more respectable manner, or to financially and morally support his opponents in their attempts to oust him. As of yet, such efforts have been to no avail.

Lukashenka tops the list of 36 Belarusian officials banned from entering the EU because of their role in vote-rigging and cracking down on human rights. The last country to invite the Belarusian leader for an official visit was France, in 1996. Ironically, after his meeting with French President Jacques Chirac, Lukashenka said he greatly admired France's presidential form of government — to the degree that he wanted Belarus to emulate it without delay. In November 1996, Lukashenka staged an infamous and heavily rigged constitutional referendum that handed him authoritarian powers and did away with the fledgling democracy Belarus had acquired at the time.

To that stricture, Brussels added a sweetener, issuing in November 2006 a "new message to the people of Belarus," in which the European Commission promised to rain the benefits of its European Neighborhood Policy upon Belarus in exchange for democratic concessions from the governing regime. There are 12 conditions the EU extends to partnership governments in this money-for-democracy trade — including transparent elections, freedom of expression and association, fair treatment by the judicial system, and the release all political prisoners.

When Lukashenka freed Dashkevich, Finkevich, Klimau, and Zdzvizhkov, it was clear that he was acting under a swap deal concluded with Brussels. But the deal collapsed when it came to Kazulin.

The Kazulin Case

In 1994, when Lukashenka was first elected president, Kazulin was a deputy education minister. In 1996, Lukashenka appointed Kazulin rector of Belarusian State University (BDU) in Minsk. Kazulin, who was known at the time to refer to himself as "the president's man," was reelected to the same post by BDU professors in 2000. From 1998-2001, Kazulin held the rank of minister in the Belarusian Cabinet of Ministers. In 2001, however, Kazulin's luck began to turn. Lukashenka fired him in connection with a criminal investigation into a company affiliated with the BDU, although Kazulin's complicity in the case has never been confirmed.

In 2005, Kazulin switched to the opposition, joining one of Belarus's cantankerous social-democratic parties. In 2006, he unsuccessfully challenged Lukashenka in the presidential race. Kazulin positioned himself as an opposition candidate, although the united opposition stood behind another hopeful, Alyaksandr Milinkevich. In his words and actions both before and after the March 19 election, Kazulin proved to be much more radical than Milinkevich.

In the second of his two campaign appearances on state-run television, Kazulin stunned the nation by touching upon Lukashenka's family life and morals. He disclosed that the incumbent president had a mistress, and a young

son from the relationship. The nominal first lady, Halina Lukashenka, had meanwhile been living in a provincial city since Lukashenka's inauguration in 1994. Lukashenka was far from pleased to have his personal life parsed by a political opponent. Kazulin was subject to a harsh beating by presidential bodyguards when he tried to enter the so-called All-Belarusian Assembly, a grand propaganda event intended to endorse Lukashenka as "the people's candidate" two weeks before election day.

On March 25, 2006, during an opposition march led by Kazulin from downtown Minsk to a prison holding several hundred protesters incarcerated in the wake of the presidential election, Kazulin was arrested. In July 2006, he was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison on charges of hooliganism and disorderly conduct. At the time, some commentators suggested that Lukashenka saw Kazulin — a charismatic and strong-willed politician — as a potential threat, and was determined to keep him in jail past the point of a second presidential challenge in 2011.

During his incarceration in a penal colony in northern Belarus, Kazulin staged a 53-day hunger strike, demanding that the UN Security Council place Belarus's human rights situation on its agenda. His demand was not fulfilled but, nevertheless, his protest had resonance on the international scene, and even prompted the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations to raise the issue at a closed-door Security Council session.

On February 23, 2008, Kazulin's wife Iryna died after a long battle with breast cancer. Kazulin was given a three-day release from the penal colony to attend her funeral in Minsk. While at home, he confirmed the previously reported rumors that Lukashenka offered him an early release to help his wife seek treatment abroad but only on the condition that they would never come back to Belarus. He said both he and his wife refused to accept this condition. Kazulin, who gave a spate of interviews to both international and independent domestic media during those three days, returned to prison with the bearing of a man with unbending political convictions, if not that of a national hero and martyr.

Lukashenka subsequently tried to quell the furor incited by Kazulin's appearance in the capital by publicly vilifying the Belarusian opposition in general as paid mercenaries of the West, and Kazulin in particular as "used toilet paper." But it is now obvious for everyone that, with the Kazulin case, the Belarusian president showed not only his well-known malevolence but also a less well-known political weakness — wanting to get rid of a political rival by forcing him to emigrate.

Another Lukashenka Growing Up?

There are apparently no immediate threats to Lukashenka's rule in Belarus. Russia's continued benevolence in subsidizing gas supplies to Belarus supports the Belarusian "market-oriented socialism" as a viable economic model. But recently, perhaps inspired by the Vladimir Putin-Dmitry Medvedev power deal in Russia, Lukashenka has begun to publicly muse about his successor.

In April, state-run television showed Lukashenka in the company of a small, fair-haired boy. While visiting a provincial city, Lukashenka reiterated a curious but casual remark dropped earlier this year that his youngest son would be Belarus's future president. And the Interfax news agency, while commenting on this news, noted in passing that Lukashenka has "three sons, and the youngest, Mikalay, is four years old." The identity of the boy has not been officially confirmed, but there is some speculation in the independent Belarusian press that Lukashenka is indeed thinking about preparing this mysterious child to succeed him.

If so, Lukashenka would have to continue in his current post for the next 31 years until his purported youngest son reaches 35 and becomes constitutionally eligible to run for the presidency. By then, Lukashenka would be 85 years old. Given his current good health, and the political-longevity model of fellow leaders like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, who remains vigorous at the age of 83, Lukashenka could well attempt such a strategy.

But there are other potential options. Some publications, citing Lukashenka's predilection for changing the constitution (he's already done it twice), suggested he could adjust it again to lower the age of presidential eligibility to 18. In that case, a changeover could be expected in 2022 — meaning just another 14 years of Lukashenka's rule to go.

More Political Prisoners Coming

Lukashenka, for the time being, has abandoned any plan to swap Belarusian political prisoners for better relations with Europe.

On April 22, a Belarusian court sentenced opposition activist Andrey Kim to 18 months in prison for allegedly attacking a police officer during a protest in January. Two days later, another activist, Syarhey Parsyukevich, received a 30-month sentence for allegedly beating a guard while serving a 15-day sentence for participating in the same protest.

On May 22 and 27, in relation to the same protest, a court in Minsk sentenced nine youth activists to two years and one to 18 months of "restricted freedom" without sending them to correctional institutions. The verdict implies that if they violate the regime of serving their sentences, they may be sent to real penal colonies.

In other words, the pool of political prisoners in Belarus has been partially restored in preparation for any possibility that Brussels will once again launch negotiations with Minsk about improving relations. However, it seems advisable for any future EU negotiators to take into account the other 11 demands formulated in November 2006 — not only the one about releasing political prisoners. Apparently, releasing some political prisoners is a serious problem for President Lukashenka. But putting them behind the bars is not a problem at all.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, May 28, 2008

Lukashenka has abandoned any plan to swap political prisoners

Lukashenka Abandons Courtship of West

By Brian Whitmore

Dissidents are being rounded up. U.S. diplomats are being kicked out. And European officials are once again pointing accusing fingers at the continent's "last dictatorship."

Belarus's tenuous and clumsy courtship of the West has decisively hit the skids. And in case there was any doubt, authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka made it clear in his annual speech to the nation on April 29 that the West had no right to demand the release of political prisoners. A day later, Belarusian authorities gave 10 U.S. diplomats 72 hours to leave the country.

In his speech, Lukashenka used a particularly mocking tone — and some colorful language — in reference to the person the West has been pushing hardest to have freed: imprisoned opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin.

"He wanted the entire world to make speeches to free him and for the Belarusian authorities to cave in under the pressure. Who needs you?" Lukashenka told the nation. "You are like used toilet paper, and you think somebody needs you."

Kazulin, a former university rector, finished far behind Lukashenka in a 2006 election and was jailed for helping organize mass protests against the results. The United States and the European Union have called for Kazulin's release as a condition for better relations.

The April 29 speech and the diplomatic expulsions mark the latest in a series of low points in Belarus's rapidly deteriorating relations with the West. The moves follow a fresh crackdown on pro-democracy activists this month.

Back And Forth

Analysts say the events of the past two days are a clear signal that Minsk is scrambling firmly back into Russia's orbit.

"Lukashenka has decided that since relations with Russia aren't bad, then why play some games with the West. What's the point?" says Valery Karbalevich, a political analyst with the independent Minsk-based Strategy Center for Political Analysis. "Therefore the Belarusian authorities have settled on this policy."

After falling out with Russian President Vladimir Putin early last year over Moscow's demand that Belarus pay market prices for energy, Lukashenka haltingly tried to improve ties with the United States and the European Union.

But the rapprochement stalled over several issues, most notably Lukashenka's refusal to release Kazulin. Karbalevich says that while Lukashenka was willing to release some political prisoners, he is adamant about keeping Kazulin locked up.

"Lukashenka is simply afraid of him. He is afraid that if he were free then he would become a decisive opposition leader," Karbalevich says. "Also, Kazulin was not long ago a member of the old nomenklatura. Lukashenka wants to show what happens to people who go over to the opposition."

As a result, the European Union, which demands the release of all political prisoners, would not lift visa restrictions on Belarusian officials. And the United States responded to the refusal by freezing the accounts of the state-controlled oil-processing and chemical company Belnaftakhim and barred Americans from dealings with it.

Belnaftakhim earns about one-third of Belarus's foreign-currency revenues and is widely rumored to be among the main sources of Lukashenka's personal fortune.

At the same time, relations with Russia dramatically improved when Moscow agreed to a heavily subsidized price of \$128 per 1,000 cubic meters for the second quarter of 2008.

Russia's state-controlled natural-gas monopoly Gazprom had previously indicated that Belarus, which was paying \$119 per 1,000 cubic meters, would face a much steeper price increase.

Minsk subsequently demanded that the United States reduce the staff of its embassy in the country to five people, a move Washington called "unprecedented and unwarranted." U.S. officials confirmed on April 30 that they would "do everything possible" to meet the 72-hour deadline for 10 diplomats to leave the country.

'Authoritarian Modernization'

Authorities have also stepped up their campaign against pro-democracy activists.

On April 22, a Belarusian court sentenced opposition activist Andrey Kim to 18 months in prison for allegedly attacking a police officer during a protest in January. Two days later, on April 22, another activist, Syarhey Parsyukevich, received a 30-month sentence for allegedly beating a guard while serving a 15-day sentence for participating in the same protest.

In his April 29 speech, Lukashenka fiercely defended the crackdown, ridiculed the young pro-democracy activists, and questioned the motives of opposition leaders.

"Who should we protect in this case? Hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens or a group of unrestrained loafers who want to play the role of professional revolutionaries with someone else's money," Lukashenka said. "Honestly, I feel sorry for these kids who are posing as revolutionary fighters. They are put in the front lines like meat, while those behind them seek to fulfill their own personal political ambitions. A whole dynasty of professional revolutionaries is emerging."

In response to the crackdown, Hans-Gert Poettering, the president of the European Parliament, called Belarus "Europe's last dictatorship."

Lukashenka in his speech pledged to modernize Belarus's economy, bring the country into the ranks of "leading nations," and double average monthly wages by 2011.

But with a command-style economy that is heavily dependent on Russian largesse, he left it unclear how this would be accomplished.

Minsk-based political analyst Alyaksandr Klaskouski tells RFE/RL's Belarus Service that Lukashenka is feeling

economic pressure but has decided that opening up the country politically and economically carries too much risk for the regime.

"I would say this is like putting old wine in new bottles," says Klaskouski. "They want to modernize the country. They want to build nuclear power plants and attract investment. But they don't want to lose even one bit of their power. They have decided to pursue an authoritarian modernization."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 2, 2008

An Opinion Poll in Belarus Reveals Skepticism Among The Public

By David Marples

Belarus has attracted international attention recently for all the wrong reasons: attacks on demonstrators, arbitrary arrests, searches of apartments of independent journalists, and the refusal to release political prisoners, particularly Alyaksandr Kazulin, the former Rector of Belarusian State University. But how does the population view recent events? To what extent are people disaffected and seeking change? Perhaps the best and most reliable evidence of current thought is the survey conducted in March by the Independent Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research (NISEPI), which operates from Minsk, although it is officially registered in Vilnius, Lithuania. The survey interviewed 1,500 respondents over the age of 18 from different parts of the country. Some 57 percent were over the age of 40, and about 25 percent were over 60 years old, which is similar to the makeup of the population as a whole. Since the survey is extensive, the focus here will be on political leadership and opposition, as well as the attitude toward Russia and the EU.

To the question "if there were an election tomorrow, for whom would you vote?" 42.5 percent stated that they would vote for President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, 8.8 percent for Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who was the candidate of the United Democratic Forces in 2006 but now heads the "For Freedom" movement and 5.2 percent would opt for the imprisoned Social Democrat Kazulin. When asked how they had voted in the 2006 elections, 49.4 percent claimed to have supported Lukashenka, 12.8 percent Milinkevich, 5.5 percent Kazulin, and 2.6 percent Haidukevich, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party and a supporter of the president. Notably, therefore, support for both the president and Milinkevich has fallen. In the election, Lukashenka allegedly received 83 percent of the vote, but the survey suggests that his actual total was considerably lower and perhaps not even enough to have won outright in the first round.

Thus, the question of whether elections in Belarus are falsified is very pertinent. Over half of the respondents believe this to be the case. As to which agency has been

responsible for the falsifications, 23 percent blame the authorities and 13.6 percent the Election Commission. An outside observer might have some difficulty separating the two. Paradoxically, 40.8 percent nonetheless believe the information about election results provided by that same commission, whereas 35.6 percent place more faith in observers from international organizations. Ironically, the most credible appraisal of the elections is said to come from international observers themselves (45.1 percent), although a large portion (34.8 percent) consider that observers from toiling collectives are more reliable.

When asked in what areas Lukashenka had been successful, 66.3 percent (the highest total) said that he had brought order to the country, but more surprisingly 64.5 percent maintained that he was constructing an independent Belarusian state, while 60.1 percent felt that he had succeeded in cooperating with other countries of the CIS. Also notable is the fact that over 54 percent consider that he has succeeded in promoting the Belarusian language and culture. The areas of his administration that draw the most criticism include the creation of a Union State with Russia (only 37.4 percent said that he has made progress), the protection of democracy and political freedoms (35.3 percent), cooperation with the countries of the West (29.1 percent), and the creation of conditions favorable for business (27.9 percent). A very high proportion of respondents are unhappy about the curtailment of social benefits for most categories of the population (students and pensioners in particular), and 61 percent believe that the president initiated this change. On the other hand, if there were a protest against the deterioration of the economic situation, only 17.9 percent would participate in it; 72.4 percent would decline to take part.

A majority of respondents do not believe that the recent elections in Russia will bring changes to the relationship between the two countries. On the other hand, if there were a referendum about a union of Belarus with Russia, 41.6 percent would oppose it, and 35.8 percent would be in favor, while 11.3 percent would not take part in such a vote. If there were a choice between union with Russia and joining the EU, 45.3 percent would opt for the Russian variant and 33.4 percent for the EU. However, 52 percent believe that the population of the EU enjoys better living standards than those in Belarus. If a referendum were to be held on whether Belarus should join the EU, the result would be a tie: 35.4 percent in favor and the same number opposed. The respondents generally approve of the fact that many Belarusians work in European countries; and they also agree that by joining the EU, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia have improved the lives of their residents over the past four years.

To summarize: Belarusians remain somewhat skeptical about most issues. Support for the Lukashenka regime is not overwhelming, especially given that the survey focused on an older section of the population. Youth groups would most likely have been even more critical. No opposition leader, however, currently commands widespread backing. Residents of Belarus prefer to live in an independent state rather than join Russia or the EU, although they do recognize that living standards are higher

in Europe. Implicitly at least, they think the government could do better in its relations with Western countries and ease restrictions on foreign investment. Additionally, about a quarter of respondents say that their material situation has worsened in 2008, and over one-third think that the overall development is proceeding "in an incorrect direction" (NISEPI, March 3-13; <http://www.iiseeps.org/opros49.html>).

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, April 22, 2008

Belarusians Deprived of Cheap Schengen Visas due to the Crackdown On the March 25 Rally

European deputies do not want to sign the declaration for lowering the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens, due to the harsh response of Belarusian authorities to the opposition rally on March 25 in Minsk.

The initiators of the campaign wanted the European Commission to start talks with the Belarusian government on lowering costs, at least to €35, as Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan citizens are paying now.. Belarus remains the only country of the EU Eastern neighbourhood whose citizens have to pay €60 for a single-entry Schengen visa. Yet it appears that, in the light of past events in Belarus members of the European parliament would not be willing to hold any negotiations with the Belarusian government, including visa talks.

One of initiators of collecting signatures, the MEP Justas Paleckis (Lithuania) has stated that there is no chance to collect the needed number of signatures.

"I think that the events in Minsk connected with the celebration of the 90th anniversary of Belarus' independence, and certain measures by the regime have influenced some of MEPs, and they do not want to sign. We won't be able to collect half of signatures," MEP Justas Paleckis said in an interview to Radio Liberty.

Only 150 signatures have been collected, while at least 393 are needed. In a week it will be possible to collect signatures in Strasbourg during a 4 day period. However Mr. Paleckis is pessimistic about the chances. According to him, initiators "hoped to collect 100-150 signatures over the last week, but it won't be enough".

Three European deputies of the Social Democratic faction initiated the collection of signatures. Mr. Paleckis believes that the mistake was not to widen the circle of initiators by members of other factions. However, in his words it's a temporary failure, as at least attention of the parliament and especially the of delegation on ties with Belarus had been attracted.

The chairman of the delegation for relations with Belarus, Jacek Protasiewicz, visited Vilnius, Riga and Warsaw. He held negotiations with the internal and foreign ministers. They discussed how visa costs for Belarusians for traveling to Schengen states, and especially to neighboring states, could be reduced using the EU mechanisms.

"I don't doubt that in the near future a new document for the declaration or resolution will appear in the European parliament, and this campaign will continue. But again, an

agreement between all 27 states of the EU should be reached in order to support such an initiative by the European parliament," the MEP said.

As we have been informed, in the beginning of the year, members of the Social Democratic faction of the EU Justas Paleckis (Lithuania), Genowefa Grabowska (Poland) and Hannes Swoboda (Austria) initiated a campaign under the slogan "Say YES to Cheaper Visas for Belarusians". The text could be sent to the EU Council and the Commission in case more than 393 members of the organization will be in favor of the declaration.

The initiators of the campaign wanted the European Commission to start talks with the Belarusian government on lowering costs, at least to €35, like Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan citizens pay. Belarus remains the only country of the EU Eastern neighborhood whose citizens have to pay €60 for a single-entry Schengen visa.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, April 11, 2008.

Is The Belarusian Opposition Losing The Battle For Young Minds?

By RFE/RL analyst Jan Maksymiuk, June 10, 2008

Looking at the current Belarusian opposition, it is difficult to find a leading figure who did not possess notable political, social, or cultural standing in Belarus prior to July 1994, when President Alyaksandr Lukashenka came to power.

* Stanislau Shushkevich, whose signature adorns the dissolution act of the Soviet Union, was the chairman of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet in which Lukashenka started his political career.

* Lyavon Barshchewski, from the Belarusian Popular Front, was a people's deputy in 1991-95, along with his then-comrades-in-arms Zyanon Paznyak and Yuras Belenki.

* Anatol Lyabedzka, from the United Civic Party, was a people's deputy in the same legislature.

* Social democrat Alyaksandr Kazulin was a deputy education minister in Prime Minister Vyachaslau Kebich's cabinet.

* Social democrat Mikola Statkevich was the founder of the Belarusian Association of Servicemen.

* Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who served as a provincial university professor and deputy head of the city administration in Hrodna, is perhaps the only leading oppositionist who kept a low profile in the pre-Lukashenka era.

Fourteen years later, after a series of disappointing political failures, virtually the same people can be found in the top ranks of the Belarusian opposition. But while these politicians could once mobilize 50,000 people in Minsk for a street protest against the ruling regime, today 2,000 people at an opposition rally is deemed a huge success.

Without a doubt, an objective generation gap between the veteran leaders of the opposition and younger Belarusians is responsible to a significant degree for the dramatically weakened public appeal of opposition parties in Belarus. But it can also be argued that the lack of an adequate political strategy on the part of the opposition and the regime's ability to respond to some essential needs and expectations of the younger generation are no less important in marginalizing the opposition movement or even reducing it to a replica of the Soviet-era dissent.

Belief in Showdown

During a recent online news conference with RFE/RL, Mikola Statkevich spoke for many Belarusian opposition leaders when he asserted that change in today's Belarus is possible only through a political showdown during presidential elections.

"Decisive action by some 1,500 demonstrators under circumstances in which the authorities keep everything under tight control is impossible," Statkevich said. "But there is one night in five years when the authorities' control, so to say, wavers. This is the night of political miracles. This is the night of presidential elections."

Past tactical moves of the Belarusian opposition — as well as those of its Western sponsors — followed this strategic guideline. Targeted financial, organizational, and propaganda resources were spent by the Belarusian opposition on three major campaigns of the Lukashenka-era: the presidential ballots in 2001 and 2006 and the constitutional referendum in 2004, when Lukashenka lifted the two-term limit on the presidency. The parliamentary-election campaigns in Belarus in 2000 and 2004 were of significantly less importance to the opposition and its sponsors. Indeed, nobody seems even to remember that Belarus also held local elections in 1999, 2003, and 2007.

It is unsurprising that during the above-mentioned presidential campaigns the role of younger opposition activists was confined to collecting signatures, distributing campaign materials, and, primarily, participating in street protests. Their older colleagues made decisions about the allocation of campaign resources and represented the Belarusian opposition abroad. There was hardly any space for young oppositionists to develop or test their own political ambitions.

Parliamentary and local elections presented much better opportunities for young activists, who could run for seats as people's deputies and local councilors, to demonstrate their political initiative and gain political experience.

Meanwhile their older colleagues, believing that participation in parliamentary elections — let alone local ones — was a waste of time and energy, busied themselves with symbolic electoral activities in major cities.

Combined with a questionable political strategy that favored political change from the top over a grassroots approach, the generational gap within the Belarusian opposition grew wider and wider.

Carrots And Sticks

When speaking about the repressive nature of Lukashenka's regime, one must understand that its control

apparatus is aimed almost exclusively at containing potentially effective antigovernment activities during major political campaigns, as well as at those citizens who try to infect the wider social strata with the "opposition virus." Otherwise, Belarus is relatively free with respect to cultural and intellectual life. Or more accurately, state control over "apolitical" cultural and intellectual activities in the nonstate sector is lax. In other words, life in today's Belarus is a far cry from the stale and depressing atmosphere of the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union.

Previously banned Belarusian rockers are being offered clemency in exchange for a refusal to perform at opposition events (RFE/RL). There is a curious analogy that can be drawn between the political climate of today's Belarus and that of Poland in the early 1980s, after the introduction of martial law and the ban on Solidarity. The Polish communist authorities significantly relaxed cultural and social policies in the country while they kept a watchful eye on Solidarity members and followers. The main objective of that two-pronged policy was presumably to prevent Polish youths from engaging in politics and to protect them from the influence of the political opposition. Suddenly, native rock music and drug experimentation flourished in Poland; and in the 1980s it became much easier to get a foreign-travel passport and to travel abroad. Common wisdom maintained at that time that the Polish communists deliberately steered young people to indulge in vodka, sex, drugs and rock music — or to emigrate — instead of participating in politics or public life.

The current Belarusian regime appears to be replicating this approach. Young Belarusians seeking to organize an election-monitoring network are tried under articles of the Criminal Code relating to terrorism, while those joining the state-sponsored Belarusian National Youth Union are promoted during their university studies and in their post-university careers. And major Belarusian rock musicians, who were previously banned from appearing on radio and television, are unexpectedly invited to the presidential offices and offered clemency in exchange for their refusal to perform at opposition events.

How successful is this selective carrot-and-stick policy? Some sociological data indirectly suggests that it may have been quite successful. According to a survey conducted by the Vilnius-registered Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies (NISEPI) in March, 64 percent of Belarusians believe that improving the economic situation of their country is more important than keeping the country independent, while 24 percent think otherwise. Among those aged 18-29, the ratio of respondents opting for a better economic situation rather than the country's independence is 71 percent to 22 percent. NISEPI, which holds comprehensive surveys of public opinion in Belarus twice each year, concludes that the data attest to a growing "mercantilism" and "pragmatism" of Belarusian society at the expense of "patriotism."

The Belarusian opposition continually asserts that Lukashenka's policies will lead to the economic — and, consequently, political — annexation of Belarus by Russia, but the NISEPI results suggest that the overwhelming

majority of Belarusians are not worried about this possibility. What is more, the youngest generations — more socially mobile and better educated than the others — seem to be even less concerned about the country's independence than their older compatriots. Why?

An immediate answer is that Lukashenka has actually succeeded in bringing up young pragmatists who care more about their stomachs than national pride. On second thought, one is also prompted to suppose that the younger generations of Belarusians may not believe, as the opposition asserts, that the loss of independence under Lukashenka is a real threat to their country or to them personally. They are primarily worried about an economic downturn, which is a common concern today in many societies, democratic and autocratic alike. In either case, the NISEPI results are bad news for the opposition and its prospects of mobilizing support among young people.

New Language Needed

Why might Lukashenka be perceived among young Belarusians as a benefactor rather than a tormentor?

First and foremost, because he has something essential and desirable to offer to the younger generations in exchange for the measure of political conformism he expects from them. The regime's major "gifts" to youths are free education, freedom of movement (including foreign travel), and increasingly attractive prospects for pursuing professional careers within the country, in an economy that slowly but inevitably is undergoing "authoritarian" modernization.

When two-thirds of Belarusians believe the current political situation is safe and stable, the Belarusian opposition needs to reappraise its political objectives — or at least its language — if it wants to survive as a significant political group, let alone attain some leverage within the power system.

The main prerequisite for such a reappraisal should be the opposition's acknowledgment that Lukashenka, despite his erratic and uncivilized political behavior and language, may also be building something significant that will outlast his political rule. In fact, this significant something may be the foundation for the political and economic institutions of an independent nation — one that no longer needs to be reassured that today's Republic of Belarus is at least as good as yesterday's Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

If such a reappraisal takes place, it will be easier for opposition parties in Belarus to reconcile with the fact that winning seats on local councils and the national legislature is no less important than campaigning for the presidency. The Belarusian opposition may eventually shed its political frustration and make use of the talents and energy of the increasingly pragmatic younger generations, who want a better life for themselves now, rather than for their children and grandchildren in a hazy future.

The views presented in this commentary are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of RFE/RL

Poland, Sweden Breathe New Life into Eastern Neighborhood

By Ahto Lobjakas

BRUSSELS -- Poland and Sweden have floated a plan to set up a new EU "Eastern Partnership" for Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The initiative, unveiled at an EU foreign ministers meeting in Brussels, seeks to reinforce the bloc's ties with its eastern neighbors — with a view to putting at least some of them on the path to EU membership.

It also reflects growing concerns among the EU's newer member states that the bloc is neglecting its eastern neighbors.

Speaking ahead of the EU foreign ministers meeting at the European Policy Center on May 26, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski said closer ties with countries like Ukraine and Moldova are hampered by what he called "enlargement fatigue" within the EU.

The EU's current European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) makes no distinction between the bloc's eastern and southern neighbors. (ENP participants include Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine.) Crucially, the ENP is designed to remain noncommittal about countries' future membership prospects.

This is a circumstance Poland wants to change. Sikorski said Warsaw and Stockholm are looking for an "ideological" enhancement of the ENP.

"We in Poland make a distinction between the southern dimension and the eastern dimension [of the ENP] and it consists in this — to the south, we have neighbors of Europe, to the east we have European neighbors," Sikorski said.

He said that this constitutes "a big difference. These are countries — Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova — whose entire territories lie in Europe, and by the provisions of the [EU's founding] Treaty of Rome they all have the right one day to apply, to fulfill the criteria [for EU membership], and, perhaps, to become members."

Meanwhile, the EU's southern member states have secured two-thirds of the 12 billion euros (\$18.9 billion) available to the ENP between 2007-13 for North African countries — although they have already been deemed ineligible for EU membership. France is spearheading efforts to set up a "Mediterranean Union" to coordinate EU cooperation with the southern neighbors.

Sikorski said the Eastern Partnership would be one of the main priorities of the EU's Polish presidency in 2011. But the initiative is likely to kick off even sooner.

Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra told journalists as he arrived at the Brussels meeting that the Czech EU presidency in 2009 will also work to "balance" the EU's eastern and southern dimensions.

"We support this Polish-Swedish initiative very much," Vondra said. "It goes in the same direction that we want."

And we see that the next year, we need to balance. This year, it is a Mediterranean year. So, the next year would be the eastern year."

Grand Bargain Within EU

Diplomats say the EU's larger member states -- who often oppose the smaller "new" states over issues related to the former Soviet space — are supportive of the Eastern Partnership initiative. France, which will take over as the next EU presidency in July, is motivated by the need to build support for its Mediterranean strategy among the eastern member states. Germany traditionally takes a close interest in the EU's eastern policy, while Britain is traditionally one of the staunchest supporters of continued enlargement.

It also appears the Polish-Swedish initiative is part of a grand bargain within the EU that has seen Lithuania formally drop its objections to an EU-Russia strategic partnership deal. EU foreign ministers have agreed that the long-delayed talks with Russia can begin at the EU-Russia summit at Khanty-Mansiisk on June 26-27.



*Polish foreign affairs minister
Radosław Sikorski*

Significantly, Poland and Sweden led the EU mediating effort earlier this month when Lithuania first stepped in to veto the talks. Vilnius's concerns — ranging from trade complaints, the status of criminal investigations, and Russia's recent aggressive moves in Georgia — are now to be addressed in the course of the EU-Russia negotiations.

The Polish-Swedish initiative is unlikely to bring with it an immediate sea change in the EU's eastern policy. Reflecting the weight of the consensus within the bloc, the EU's external relations commissioner, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, said on May 26 that she does not think it is a good idea to introduce distinctions between the eastern and southern neighbors.

Instead, Ferrero-Waldner said the Eastern Partnership initiative would need to show it can "add value" to the existing Neighborhood Policy. "In Eastern Europe, indeed, there are some issues which can suitably be addressed at a regional level — for instance, on energy, transport networks, maybe cooperation on trafficking, [cooperation] against illegal immigration," she said.

Ferrero-Waldner appeared particularly concerned the new plan could interfere with the EU's "Black Sea Synergy" scheme announced last year — which also involves Russia and Turkey.

Poland's Sikorski also stressed the importance of practical cooperation, but in a subtly different sense. He said Ukraine, Moldova, and eventually Belarus would be well-advised to follow the example of the Visegrad group, which was set up by Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary to pursue regional cooperation before those countries were granted entry into the EU.

Sikorski noted that while eastern membership hopefuls "cannot change the rules of accession, they can change the perceptions" in the EU if they demonstrate an ability to work together and reform. This, in turn, could stand them in good stead when the EU "catches its breath" and recovers from the current enlargement fatigue.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 26, 2008

QUOTES of QUARTER

Pearls of Wisdom by

ALYAKSANDR LUKASHENKA

"I agree to have early elections held even tomorrow, although you're forcing me to violate the constitution. However, if I win with a majority of over 90%, Belarus will become a member of the European Union and the European parliament. "

"The unique nature of the situation in Belarus lies in the fact that I don't owe anything to anybody."

"Of course, it's up to you to decide, yet it will be the way I said it would be."

"I categorically forbid any kind of demonstrations, while the farmers are working in the fields. Everything will be postponed until winter."

"Of course, a dictatorship is bad. Yet in this 'dictatorship' — in quotation marks — some things are not that bad. We do know some really dictatorial states, where people are being captured in streets, eaten up, and so forth.. Nothing like this occurs in our state."

Guess Who Controls the Tap?

Alyaksandr Lukashenka threatens to shut down oil and gas pipelines if the EU adopts U.S.-backed sanctions.

[The following article by Vladimir Solovyev, "Transit Threatened: Alyaksandr Lukashenka Blackmails EU With Russian Energy Resources," was published in the independent Moscow newspaper *Kommersant* on 15 May.]

The Reuters news agency published an interview with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka [on 14 May] in which he threatened the European Union with energy sanctions for the first time if it did the bidding of the United States and pursued a tougher line against his country. The Belarusian leader also announced for the first time that he intends to run for yet another presidential term, his fourth in all. There is only one way Mr. Lukashenka will abandon this plan: if he becomes a political figure on a union scale.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka has discovered new opportunities for effectively standing up to the West, which has recently been increasing its political and economic pressure on Minsk. Yesterday the Reuters news agency published its second interview with the Belarusian leader in the past 12 months. In this interview, Lukashenka explicitly warned the EU's authorities that they should not listen to the United States and introduce economic sanctions against his country (Washington introduced [stepped-up] sanctions against Belarusian enterprise Belnaftakhim, a major source of revenue for the state, this spring), as Minsk would react very sharply to this.

"The United States is trying to get the European Union to introduce sanctions against Belarus. This would be to the detriment of Europe. Fortunately for everyone concerned, the EU has so far not adopted the American position," Alyaksandr Lukashenka said, praising the European Union; he then proceeded to threaten it: "If you must do it, go ahead and join [the sanctions], but do not forget that half of your oil, half of your petroleum products, and 30 percent of your gas goes through Belarus." The Belarusian leader then advised the European Union to think about its current behavior towards the Belarusian authorities. "You criticized the USSR for the iron curtain. And what are you doing now? How did we manage to frighten you so much that you have forbidden me and other people from entering your countries? We are situated between two important blocs, which are very different from one another. We are a unique bridge, and we must unite these contrasts," Alyaksandr Lukashenka said, reproaching his Western colleagues.

Through its efforts to plant democracy in his country, "the West is trying, if not to destroy this bridge, then at least to make it wobble," the Belarusian president said. "I cannot understand why they feel compelled to do this. Today, in such a critical situation, when energy resources determine everything, you are trying to destroy the bridge

over which the oil and gas flows," Mr. Lukashenka said, once again reverting to threats.

A BOLD DARE

In the course of his many quarrels with Europe, the Belarusian president had never before resorted to energy blackmail. Furthermore, Mr. Lukashenka is the first leader of the post-Soviet countries who has dared use the transit position of his country, through which the oil and gas pipelines pass, for his own foreign policy purposes. Until now only Moscow, which has grown accustomed in recent years to playing the energy card against Western countries, had used this unique instrument.

It is quite possible, meanwhile, that the threats uttered by Mr. Lukashenka will actually be carried out. The Yamal-Europe gas pipeline and the Druzhba [Friendship] oil pipeline both run through Belarus, and the latter is a key route for pumping oil from Russia to the EU. In the best of years, up to 70 percent of Russian oil has passed through this pipeline.

Mr. Lukashenka's intention to employ this time-honored Russian weapon in his stand-off with the West is hardly likely to please the Russian authorities. Indirect confirmation of this can be found in [the 14 May] announcement by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who said that Russia should implement the BTS-2 oil pipeline project, which would deliver Russian oil to Europe without passing through Russia's fellow union state [Belarus]. But this project will take time to implement. For now — and Mr. Lukashenka understands this perfectly well — there is no alternative to the Belarusian route for Russian energy supplies. Feeling every bit the master of the situation, the Belarusian leader, whose current presidential term expires in 2011, stated in the same Reuters interview that he intends to run for a new presidential term, the fourth of his career. "If the situation remains the same as now, both with me personally and with the country, then of course I will run for another term. If the situation with me or the country changes, then I could make a different decision. So far I am a healthy man, the people do not criticize me all that strongly, and the West is beginning to understand. It is possible. Expect the worst," Mr. Lukashenka said.

NO MENTION OF RUSSIA

It is worth pointing out that Alyaksandr Lukashenka did not mention Russia even once in the interview. Speaking with journalists from the very same Reuters news agency back in February of last year, on the other hand, the Belarusian president repented to the West that he had pursued a one-dimensional foreign policy, focusing exclusively on Moscow. After offering the West friendship, he then went on to criticize Russia for its "imperial policy" and even threatened to send its union ally a bill for the use of military facilities on Belarusian soil and transit to Kaliningrad Oblast. These threats were never implemented, however.

At the same time, the fact that Mr. Lukashenka did not say anything about Russian-Belarusian relations this time does not at all mean that he is not paying due attention to them. In late April, during a visit to one of the country's regions, he criticized Moscow quite sharply for trying to

bring about a friendly takeover of Belarus: "The path that has been proposed to us by Russia is unacceptable. We cannot become part of any other state, not only of Russia." The proposals that Mr. Lukashenka was referring to may have been presented to him in December of last year, when Vladimir Putin paid an official visit to Minsk. It was reported in the media at the time that a constitutional act would be signed during a meeting of the supreme state council of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, which would proclaim a union state with Vladimir Putin as president and Alyaksandr Lukashenka as head of the union parliament. It is difficult to say whether this integration option was presented to Minsk or not. It is known, however, that the talks between the two presidents, which lasted for many hours, led nowhere: the constitutional act was never signed, and the union state continues to exist only on paper.

Nevertheless, Alyaksandr Lukashenka has not buried the idea of building a union with Russia, but he will only do so on terms that are more favorable to himself. During his last address to the people and parliament of Belarus, he declared: "When I say that we and Russia are prepared to build our union state, this is indeed the case. This is not a game." That means the Belarusian president is counting on one day being able to realize his dream of heading the union state, which he once discussed with Russia's first president Boris Yeltsin. Alyaksandr Lukashenka often hints that he would be able to manage Russia's riches far better than the current rulers of his neighboring country. He has long made a tradition of meeting with Russian journalists and telling them that in his country "even a milkmaid makes \$500 [a month] during a good season." He also drew numerous parallels with Russia in the aforementioned address to the Belarusian people. It is revealing that while communicating with his fellow countrymen Mr. Lukashenka pronounced the word "Russia" 26 times but mentioned the name of his own state only 18 times. For the most part he was comparing the economic and social indicators of the two countries, which, naturally, did not favor Russia.

Experts do not doubt that if Alyaksandr Lukashenka were allowed constant, open access to the Russian media, he might very well rival Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin in the ratings. "If they gave him media opportunities in Russia, he would rise very quickly there. He is a player, and he likes to play in unpredictable situations. And if Medvedev were running the country without Putin's guardianship, Lukashenka would actually beat him in every area," Leanid Zaika, head of Belarus's Strategy Analytical Center, told Kommersant.

Incidentally, the Belarusian leader might soon get the opportunities the expert was talking about. The thing is that last September, after a long period of inactivity, the Union State Television and Radio Broadcasting Organization (Union TRO), came back to life. It was established under an agreement between Russia and Belarus dating back to 1998, but until recently it was virtually standing idle. In 2006, famous showman Igor Ugolnikov became its chairman. Late last year, TRO's television channel started broadcasting via satellite, and yesterday Mr. Ugolnikov told Kommersant that on 1 June the channel would begin

broadcasting via all cable networks in Belarus. TRO's chairman even plans to make it a full-fledged federal channel covering all of Russia. "We want to develop, and at the next meeting of the union state's council of ministers we will present a plan for the development of TRO, which we want to make a federal channel. For me, TRO is ORT [Russia's state-run Channel One TV]," Mr. Ugolnikov said.

Source: BBC Monitoring, TransitionsOnLine, 28 May 2008



SPORTS

Viktoria Azaranka a Mixed-doubles Champion!



The 18 year-old Belarusian tennis player Viktoria Azaranka and her American partner Bob Bryan became mixed-doubles champions in the French Open tournament on June 6, 2009, by defeating the Slovenian-Serbian couple of Katerina Srebotnik and Nenad Zimonjic.

Selling Belarus' Family Jewels

Will Belarus's famous tractors be up for sale?

By Yury Drakakhrust

While the system constructed in Belarus over the last decade may not have been the most repressive in the post-Soviet world, it was certainly the most Soviet — in terms of both the people that run it and the socioeconomic reality.

It is in Belarus, after all, where a memorial to "Stalin's Line" of fortifications was erected, where the president continues to address compatriots as "comrade," and where the private sector's share of gross domestic product (GDP) is the lowest among the CIS states. Belarus has preserved not only a Soviet-style welfare state, but also Soviet-era attitudes toward private property.

But things appear to be changing. Mobile-phone operators, factories, banks — the family jewels of the national economy — are suddenly up for grabs. Belinvestbank, the country's fourth-largest bank, is being sold to Germany's Commerzbank. Russia is in talks to purchase Belarusian automobile giant MAZ and the Palimir chemical factory. And Turkey is set to buy the mobile-phone company BeST.

What is going on? The most obvious explanation is pure fiscal expedience. The increase in the price Belarus pays for Russian energy initiated in 2006 left a gaping hole in the Belarusian economy. By 2011, Belarus will pay market rates for Russian gas. Efforts to identify alternative cheap energy sources (Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Iran) have thus far yielded few results, and Europe won't provide economic aid without fundamental political reforms. There is nothing left to do but sell.

Oligarch Envy

However, there are other, social motivations for the current spate of sales.

The Belarusian ruling elite is acutely envious of its counterparts in other post-Soviet states, especially in neighboring Russia and Ukraine. Government officials there — or, more accurately, the ruling business elites — tend to be very wealthy individuals. They vacation on the Riviera and educate their children at the Sorbonne and Harvard.

Their counterparts in Belarus, on the other hand, are forced to be cagey about their relatively meager wealth, which is under constant threat of seizure by the authorities. Pity these martyrs of Belarusian social equality! The Gini coefficient (a measure of inequality of wealth distribution) is comparatively low for Belarus (3-4). By contrast, Poland and Lithuania have a coefficient of 6-7; the United States, 9; and Russia, 13.

The recent burst of privatization is not only a gold rush for the already powerful, but could herald a fundamental change in the style and substance of Belarus's political system.

Belarus's president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, long ago abandoned the populist people's avenger persona that

brought him to power in 1994. He has long since exchanged that role for one of "leader of the bureaucrats." Privatization may lead to the further consolidation of this role — in defending Lukashenka, the new Belarusian oligarchs will also be protecting their own wealth.

This presents Belarus's leader with a few problems. First, exerting control over oligarchs is trickier than controlling cowed subordinates. Second, in the wake of the privatization process, Lukashenka will likely lose the support of his traditional power base — the common people. Economic circumstances already make it difficult to provide socialist-style subsidies for all, and privatization will only exacerbate that difficulty.

In the short term, a shift in the power base — from the broad masses of the poor to the narrow circles of the rich and influential — might even result in a strengthening of the system. In the long term, however, the ever-widening gap between the haves and have-nots will undoubtedly lead to corruption and possibly social unrest. In such circumstances, Belarus could rapidly descend on a path similar to the one that led to the demise of the USSR. It was, after all, the corruption of the system under Khrushchev and Brezhnev that augured the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union.

Source: RFE/RL, Comments, June 3, 2008

Regime Declares The Chernobyl Impact to be Over

By David Marples

Approaching the 22nd anniversary of the nuclear accident at the Chernobyl plant in northern Ukraine, which will be commemorated in Belarus by the opposition with a march through Minsk on Sunday, two Belarusian scientists have firmly reiterated the official government position that irradiated territories no longer pose a problem for inhabitants; on the contrary, the key task is now to overcome "radiophobia" among the local population, which is hindering the full re-cultivation of land.

Anatol Skryabin, who is head of the laboratory for radiation hygiene with the Republican Scientific-Practical Center of Radiation Medicine and Ecology of the People, announced that people living in contaminated territories are today receiving an insignificant dose of radiation that does not approach even the natural background level. He added, however, that some people had refused to relinquish the views and mentality about the disaster that they adopted 20 years ago. The average natural background radiation levels are said to be 3-4 millisieverts (msv) per year, but the dose being received by Belarusian residents is reportedly 0.15 msv per year.

These comments are bolstered by those of Deputy Chairman of the Permanent Commission on the Problems of the Chernobyl Catastrophe and Parliamentary Deputy Mikola Serhienka, who believes that nuclear power stations are no more dangerous than other industrial enterprises

and who had responded to local opposition to the newly proposed nuclear power plant in Belarus by stating that it is necessary to combat "radiophobia" with a clear and methodical informational program about the situation today in formerly affected regions.

Serhienka notes that in 2008 about 4 percent of Belarus's budget is being spent on measures to minimize the consequences of Chernobyl, much of which is taken up with capital investment in contaminated regions (Homel' and Mahileu oblasts are the most affected), as well as in agricultural production on lands that were irradiated. In his view, all the territory has now been successfully rehabilitated and there is not a "square kilometer of land that cannot be cultivated." He also anticipates the possibility of constructing new industrial factories in the contaminated zone, which, he says, will be able to apply the same sanitary norms as enterprises in "clean zones."

These comments merit reflection. About one-fifth of Belarusian territory was contaminated by radioactive cesium and strontium in the 1986 disaster. These have half-lives of up to 30 years. In addition, about 85 percent of the republic was subjected to the fallout of radioactive iodine, which resulted in alarming levels of thyroid cancer among those under the age of five at the time of the accident. Altogether in the first two decades after Chernobyl, this illness was diagnosed in more than 12,000 patients in Belarus. About 1.8 million people, including more than 400,000 children, live in the affected regions and require regular medical check-ups.

The European Parliament has also called on Europeans to provide assistance to continuing relief efforts to combat problems in Belarus that were caused by the accident. The comment follows warnings from Dr. Yuri Bandazhevsky, the former director of the Homel' Medical Institute, who was working on problems arising from the disaster. Incensed at the results of Bandazhevsky's earlier research, the Belarusian authorities sentenced him to eight years in prison in 2001, allegedly for accepting bribes from parents of his students. He was released in 2005 and currently resides in Lithuania. Bandazhevsky has been very critical of official reports and investigations of the health impact of the nuclear accident. The European Parliament welcomed a proposal to found a research and development center in Lithuania that would help former cleanup workers who worked in the Chernobyl zone.

For the Belarusian authorities, however, Chernobyl has become mainly a political issue that is associated with activities of the opposition. Virtually all non-government NGOs dealing with assistance to the victims of the accident have been disbanded or forced to re-register with the authorities, subjected to audits, and/or obliged to move their premises. While Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko visited the Chernobyl region on the eve of the anniversary to inaugurate a new nuclear waste and storage processing center, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is not expected to note the occasion. He is, however, eager to raise agricultural output and recently dismissed Minister of Agriculture Leanid Rusak, replacing him with Syamon Shapira. Agriculture has been the weak link in what

is officially described as a booming economy, not least because of the loss of arable land through radioactive contamination.

In addition, the commissioning of the Belarusian nuclear power station--considered essential to resolving the country's energy dilemma--has also been hindered by the continued attention to problems caused by the Chernobyl disaster. Blaming the population for "radiophobia" overlooks the onset of very serious medical problems caused by radiation fallout, as well as alarming mortality rates over the past fifteen years. No doubt, the Belarusian public is fearful of the effects of radiation and may incline to attribute a variety of medical problems to the now distant disaster, yet few observers would accept that Belarus has successfully overcome its consequences. Banning or restricting public

commemorations and harassing scientists who uncover disturbing information is tantamount to sweeping the disaster "under the carpet." Today in Belarus, people are not dying from radioactive fallout, but land remains contaminated and medical problems persist (*Belorusskii Rynok*, April 21-28; www.sciencedirect.com, Sept 6, 2006; *UNIAN* (Kyiv), April 23; www.charter97.org, April 18, *Belorusskie novosti*, April 18).

Source: Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, April 25, 2008

Official view: "not a square kilometer of land that cannot be cultivated."

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

March 11, 2008

BELARUSIAN PHYSICISTS OBJECT TO PLANNED NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Several prominent Belarusian nuclear physicists have urged the authorities to abandon their plans for the construction of a nuclear power plant, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on March 10. The physicists said at a March 9 meeting that the construction of a nuclear power plant is not an "unavoidable necessity" for Belarus, and that the country does not meet the economic and technical conditions for its construction. Yavor Fyadzyushkin, the head of the Institute of Humanitarian and Environmental Technologies of the Minsk-based International Academy of Information Technology, said that "the idea of building a nuclear power plant in Belarus could bring about a lot of trouble and difficult ordeals, which the authorities seem to be ready to put on the shoulders of the people." "Under no circumstances would we agree that it is feasible to build the plant in Belarus," he said. "Since the dispute about whether or not a nuclear power plant should be built began, nobody has ever offered any distinct data in favor of the nuclear power industry," Fyadzyushkin said. The Belarusian Security Council in mid-January made "an ultimate political decision" regarding the construction of a nuclear power plant. The government intends to put the first unit of the 2,000-megawatt plant into operation in 2016, and launch the second one in 2018.

March 18, 2008

BELARUSIAN YOUTH FRONT LEAVES OPPOSITION COALITION

The Youth Front, an organization that has failed in several attempts to register in Belarus, but was recently registered in the Czech Republic, has decided at a conference in Minsk to withdraw from the United Pro-Democratic Forces, Belarus's main opposition coalition, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on March 17. "This idea was prompted by the complete ideological and organizational disunity among the members of the coalition, who have neither a common strategy nor a single leader," Zmitser Dashkevich, who was elected chairman of the Youth Front, told BelaPAN. "Furthermore, the members of the coalition are increasingly dominated by the Communist leader [Syarhey Kalyakin], who openly positions himself as a candidate in the next presidential election. That's why the Youth Front has announced its withdrawal from the coalition and recalled its representatives from the coalition's Political Council." Dashkevich also suggested setting up an alliance of center-right pro-democratic groups as an alternative to the United Pro-Democratic Forces. Participants at the Youth Front's conference also decided to continue attempts to obtain legal status in Belarus. The lack of such status gives the authorities grounds for prosecuting Youth Front members for acting on behalf of an unregistered organization. However, the Belarusian authorities, in striving for warmer relations with the West, recently released Dashkevich and Artur Finkevich before the end of the prison term they were given for leading an unregistered organization.

March 26, 2008

BELARUSIANS MARK ANNIVERSARY OF STATEHOOD

Around 3,000 people took part in a March 25 rally in Minsk marking the 90th anniversary of the proclamation of Belarusian People's Republic, which pro-democratic Belarusians regard as a key event in the formation of Belarusian statehood in the 20th century, Belapan reported. The Minsk city authorities permitted demonstrators to march from the National Academy of Sciences to Bangalore Square on the outskirts of the city, but the organizers rejected that route, calling on the public to gather at Yakub Kolas Square in the downtown. The square was sealed off by riot police, who forced people to move toward the Academy of Sciences. Several hundred people attempted to march in the opposite direction, but the police blocked the way. Those who managed to push their way through the police cordons were dispersed from the main avenue to quieter streets, where some were beaten and detained. The rally took place in front of the Academy of Sciences, where Belarusian Popular Front leaders Lyavon Barshcheuski and Vintsuk Vyachorka delivered speeches. Vyachorka accused the Russian government of using its energy resources as a tool to incorporate Belarus. The gathering decided to disperse rather than to march to the square on the outskirts of the city. According to Ales Byalyatski, head of the Vyasna Human Rights Center, around 100 people were detained during the demonstration.

April 21, 2008

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PARTY REELECTS CHAIRMAN

At a convention held in Minsk on April 20, the United Civic Party (AHP) reelected Anatol Lyabedzka as its chairman, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The gathering

also elected Yaraslau Ramanchuk and Leu Marholin as the party's two deputy chairmen. Addressing the convention prior to his reelection, Lyabedzka said that the "lack of sufficient organizational and material resources" is the party's main shortcoming. He also pointed to a lack of AHP ties with the private business sector. "Private businesses have been either almost ruined or are close to the government," he said. On the other hand, Lyabedzka praised the performance of the AHP's youth wing. "I like the trends observed in the organization. They have created effective chapters in the provinces recently," he said. Mikalay Haurylenka, who was Lyabedzka's opponent, called on the AHP's leadership to launch a party newspaper and for the party's leader to run for president in the 2011 election.

April 28, 2008

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MARKS ANNIVERSARY OF CHORNOBYL DISASTER...

At least 1,000 people marched on April 26 in Minsk to mark the 22nd anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine near the Belarusian border, Belapan reported. Police put the number of participants at no more than 750. The march, organized by Belarusian opposition supporters, began in front of the National Academy of Sciences, where politicians addressed the gathering. Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who leads the Movement For Freedom organization, said his group is circulating a petition urging the Belarusian government to scrap plans to build a nuclear power plant. Another opposition politician, Mikalay Statkevich, renewed criticisms of the Soviet-era authorities for their failure to promptly inform the public about the 1986 accident at Chornobyl, while Lyavon Barshcheuski, the leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, criticized the current government for ignoring widespread opposition to the nuclear power project. "We must solve the energy problem, but not through such methods," Barshcheuski said. The crowd then marched to a church built in memory of Chornobyl victims, where demonstrators observed a minute of silence and laid flowers at a monument commemorating those who died as a result of radiation-linked illnesses. Riot police deployed at the march route did not interfere

2. ECONOMY

April 23, 2008

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SUGGESTS FURTHER INCREASES IN FOOD PRICES

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on April 22 in Hrodna Oblast that food prices in Belarus should be brought into line with those in neighboring countries, BelaPAN reported. "Prices in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and European Union countries will be more or less the same," Lukashenka said. "They are a bit lower here today. We are keeping price caps, but this is wrong and paves the way for [disadvantageous] sales of products abroad. There is no other way for us; we will have to raise food prices to prevent products from being washed away to neighboring countries." According to the government statistics office, retail food prices in Minsk rose by 17.6 percent year-on-year in the first three months of 2008.

May 12, 2008

BELARUSIAN DICTATORSHIP WON'T RECEIVE INVESTMENTS FROM EU?

Countries of the EU are launching the EU's Neighborhood Investment Facility (NIF). Unlike the neighbouring Ukraine, Belarus has lost a chance to receive the EU's assistance.

The budget of the EU's Neighborhood Investment Facility is near €1 billion. The exact figure cannot be named still, as some countries like Spain and Greece haven't defined their contribution exactly. The European Commission plans to allocate €700 million.

The NIF is a new financial instrument for the EU neighbours. Commenting on this event, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner underlined:

"With this Investment Facility we will not only promote the construction of transport and energy infrastructure interconnections between the EU and our neighbours but we will also address common environmental challenges such as the use of renewable energy and the de-pollution of Mediterranean and Black Seas. Concrete projects financed under this facility will bring tangible benefits to citizens of the neighbouring countries and the Union alike and will bring our partners closer to the EU."

Although the NIF will concentrate on the energy, transport and environment sectors, its support may also be provided for SME development and to social sector projects.

The geography of the EU partners includes a number of countries including the CIS countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). But Belarus is not among them.

"These countries, as well as Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and some others had signed the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plans agreed with the EU. And this document wasn't signed with Belarus. That's the reason of such a result. We will get just a few kopecks from this project. And even this money we'll receive thanks to our immediate neighbours, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. As far as I know, they have offered several projects embracing both their territory and frontier regions of Belarus. These are so-called trans-border projects.

If Belarus contacted with the EU decently, and cooperated with them, we would get much more money," the well-known Belarusian political analyst Andrei Fyodarau said to Radio Liberty.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, May 12, 2008

3. REGIME ACTIONS & STATEMENTS

March 26, 2008

BELARUSIAN KGB CONFIRMS REPORT ABOUT U.S. SPY RING

The Belarusian KGB has confirmed a report aired on March 23 by Belarusian television that a U.S. spy ring was smashed in Belarus, BelaPAN reported on March 25. "Everything that was broadcast by First National Channel is true," KGB spokesman Valery Nadtachayeu told BelaPAN. The same day, KGB chief Yury Zhadobin said that no one was arrested in connection with the spy ring. "We are doing prevention work now. We are probing to what extent this or that article of law, this or that provision was violated," he said. "The fact that they are trying to dictate their rules to us on our own territory...is unacceptable," he added. According to the report, the U.S. diplomatic mission in Minsk organized a ring involving some 10 Belarusian citizens who passed to the United States information "for the use to the detriment of Belarus." The information was passed to "an FBI officer who worked at the U.S. Embassy," the report said.

It also said that almost all members of the group were arrested on March 13 at a "secret address half a kilometer from the U.S. diplomatic mission." The report named U.S. Embassy officers Bernard Nixon and Curt Finley as being involved in the spy ring. Jonathan Moore, deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, denied the report. "We have no spies operating in Belarus," Moore said. Moore also said that Nixon and Finley are part of the embassy's security service and had contacts with the Belarusian police as part of their duties. Moore added that Nixon left Belarus in July 2007 and Finley is expected to leave the country this week.

March 28, 2008

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR CONFIRMS ORDERING RAIDS ON BELARUSIAN JOURNALISTS

Minsk deputy prosecutor Alyaksey Stuk told RFE/RL's Belarus Service on March 27 that he ordered the searches of the homes and offices of independent journalists all over Belarus. Stuk said that investigators believed that the journalists might be cooperating with the authors of animated cartoons defaming President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and contributing to their online dissemination. He said that the searches were part of proceedings in a criminal case opened in August 2005 against Andrey Abozau, Pavel Marozau, and Aleh Minich, who posted on the website of their organization, Third Path, cartoons lampooning Lukashenka. Abozau, Marozau, and Minich fled Belarus in early 2007 to avoid arrest. The officers who conducted searches seized computers, office equipment, and various data-storage devices. In Vitsebsk, during a raid on the apartment of a correspondent of the Polish-based Radio Racja, they arrested human rights activist Pavel Levinau. The Foreign Ministry the same day defended the raids on the offices of independent broadcasters funded by the European Union and Poland, and the apartments of journalists working with them. Ministry spokeswoman Maryya Vanshyna said in a statement that the media outlets were not accredited with the ministry, Belapan reported. "I would like to recall right away that activities carried out by foreign journalists on the territory of the Republic of Belarus are governed by the law on the media. It stipulates that reporters of foreign media outlets require accreditation to work in Belarus, like in many other countries," Vanshyna said. "As for the foreign media structures mentioned at present by the media, I can officially state that their representatives do not hold accreditation to work in Belarus," she said. Vanshyna added that the targeted reporters are "just some individuals among Belarusian nationals who were illegally engaged in journalistic activities for foreign money on the territory of the Republic of Belarus for a long time."

March 28, 2008

FORMER HEAD OF BELARUSIAN PETROCHEMICAL FIRM SENTENCED TO FIVE YEARS IN PRISON

The Supreme Court on March 27 sentenced Alyaksandr Barouski, a former chairman of Belnaftakhim, to five years in a minimum-security correctional institution on a charge of abuse of office, Belapan reported. The court also barred Barouski from serving in administrative and managerial positions for an additional three years. The court found Barouski guilty of causing large-scale damages through the abuse of office. According to the prosecutor, Barouski ordered the Naftan oil refinery in Navapolatsk to cancel supply contracts with Russia's Tyumen Oil Company and conclude more expensive contracts for the supply of 80,000 tons of light oil with two Belarusian companies,

Triple and Interservice, with whose executives he had a "friendly relationship." Naftan allegedly paid two Belarusian companies \$1.6 million more than it would have paid for the same supplies to the Russian company.

March 31, 2008

BELARUSIAN INTERIOR MINISTER SAYS POLICE ARRESTED OPPOSITION'S 'CASHIER'

Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau said on March 28 that during the crackdown on an attempt to stage a demonstration in central Minsk on March 25, police detained a "cashier" for the opposition, BelaPAN reported. Navumau said that police detained a woman affiliated with an opposition party in whose bag 8 million rubles (\$3,726) in 100,000-ruble wads of notes was found. "She explained that she wanted to buy something the following day, but she could not explain why bills were packed up in wads totaling 100,000 rubles each," Navumau said. "We are 100 percent sure that this money was to have been paid to those people who participated in clashes with police," he said. Navumau did not provide the woman's personal details. "All fairy tales about the funding of street demonstrations staged by the opposition have never been corroborated by photo or video materials, not even once," the leader of the opposition United Civic Party, Anatol Lyabedzka, told BelaPAN.

April 4, 2008

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WORRIES ABOUT FURTHER NATO EXPANSION

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said at a conference with senior military officials in Minsk on April 3 that Belarus must boost its defense capabilities in order to defend the union state with Russia, Belarusian state-run media reported. "In defending Belarus, we are defending the western border of the union state. The treaty with Russia is sacred," Lukashenka noted. He also expressed his concern at the possible expansion of NATO into the post-Soviet area. "We cannot simply sit back and say that everything around us is peaceful, that there are no problems around Belarus," Lukashenka said. "The NATO bloc has set its sights on former Soviet republics. I believe it is a matter of time before Ukraine and Georgia join NATO. No one is taking any heed of the position of Russia, Belarus, and other post-Soviet republics."

April 8, 2008

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES 'TO DO EVERYTHING FOR VIETNAM'

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said in Hanoi on April 7 that his country is ready "to do everything for Vietnam," Belarusian state media reported. Lukashenka, who arrived in Vietnam on a two-day state visit on April 7-8, met with Non Duc Manh, secretary-general of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and Vietnamese President and Prime Minister Nguyen Minh Triet. Both sides reportedly signed a contract on the delivery of more than 500 Belarusian tractors to Vietnam. Lukashenka stressed the need for Belarus and Vietnam to increase their trade almost tenfold in the next two or three years from \$63.6 million in 2007.

April 21, 2008

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT APPOINTS NEW AGRICULTURE MINISTER

Alyaksandr Lukashenka on April 18 dismissed Agriculture Minister Leanid Rusak and appointed Syamyon Shapira to

replace him, BelaPAN reported, citing the presidential press office. Lukashenka gave no reason for Rusak's dismissal, but Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski, while introducing Shapira, criticized the performance of the Agriculture Ministry. Sidorski said that "unfortunately, the previous minister and his deputies paid little attention to the fulfillment of rural development programs." "There were discussions basically, but no real work was done to execute it," Sidorski added. Shapira previously served as director-general of a state-controlled poultry company in Minsk Oblast. Between 1999 and 2004, Shapira headed the economy department in the Agriculture Ministry.

April 25, 2008

DECREE RAISING OFFICE RENTS FOR NGOS TAKES EFFECT IN BELARUS

The decree issued by Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on October 23, 2007, to abolish concessions for renting offices by many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), took effect on April 24, BelaPAN reported. Prior to this decree, nonprofit NGOs enjoyed the privilege of paying one euro (\$1.56) per square meter for renting up to 75 square meters of office space, whereas commercial organizations paid 10 euros per square meter. The decree preserved the favorable rent for nonprofit NGOs that are engaged in charity activities or run children's and youth sports-training groups and children's theater, and dancing, literary, or art studios. The low rent has also been preserved for small-business owners and organizations if at least half of their employees have disabilities, and for art associations that rent space for workshops, galleries, exhibitions, studios, or laboratories. "This is one more economic noose on nongovernmental organizations," Hary Pahanyayla of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee told Belapan. "Some organizations will retain the privilege, but it will again be up to the authorities to decide to whom the lower rate should apply," he said. Most of the office buildings in Minsk are under the control of the presidential administration, while in the provinces such buildings are controlled by local governments.

April 28, 2008

PRESIDENT SLAMS OPPONENTS OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

During a visit to Homel Oblast on April 26, the anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka described opponents of a planned nuclear power plant in Belarus as "enemies of the people," BelaPAN reported. Lukashenka accused opposition politicians of capitalizing on the issue for political gains ahead of this year's parliamentary elections. "They will not manage to do this. I will not allow them to do this, using all resources and all the power that I have in my hands today," Lukashenka said. He said that the critics of the nuclear project "would have done just what I am doing, they would have supported me, if they truly cared about the welfare of our people." Lukashenka said that Belarus is surrounded by nuclear plants, and faces nuclear risks in any case. "Was the Chornobyl plant located on our territory? No. Who suffered most from this catastrophe? We, the Belarusians," he said. "Where is the guarantee that a plant in Russia, Ukraine, or even [elsewhere] in Europe is the safest? There are no such guarantees.... So why do we refuse to have a station of our own?" The Belarusian government in mid-January agreed to move toward the construction of a nuclear plant expected to start operating in 2018.

April 29, 2008

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES TO SOLVE CHORNOBYL PROBLEMS WITHIN FIVE YEARS

During a visit to a heavily contaminated area near Khoyniki, in Homel Oblast, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said that all Chornobyl-related problems will be solved in Belarus within the next five years, BelaPAN reported on April 28. Lukashenka cited the government's efforts to revitalize districts affected by the fallout from the accident. "Some time has passed and we see renovated towns here. The mortality rate has dropped by 20 percent and the birthrate has gone up in these districts. People have made up their mind. They are wiser than us, we should simply not traumatize them," Lukashenka said. Lukashenka accused the country's previous leadership of failing to help people living in contaminated areas. "We have managed to change this mind-set. We have explained to the people that we will not abandon them, but provide necessary support," he added.

4. REPRESSIONS

March 18, 2008

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES JAIL ACTIVIST OVER PRO-EUROPEAN LEAFLETS

A Minsk court on March 17 sentenced youth activist Zmitser Kaspyarovich to 12 days in jail for allegedly using foul language with police officers, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Kaspyarovich was detained on March 15 by the traffic police, who found in his car leaflets calling for integration with Europe. At the police station, Kaspyarovich was charged with the use of foul language and detained in a pretrial detention center. Meanwhile, a group of people facing criminal charges over their participation in the January 10 protest against government restrictions on the activities of small-business owners petitioned the Prosecutor-General's Office on March 17 to drop the charges and punish the officials who filed them. The Minsk city police opened a criminal case against at least 10 people, accusing them of "organization of, preparations for, or active participation in actions flagrantly violating public order."

March 27, 2008

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES JAIL, FINE PARTICIPANTS OF OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATION

Five district courts in Minsk on March 26 heard the cases of detained participants of the opposition demonstration marking the 90th anniversary of the proclamation of Belarusian People's Republic, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. Twenty-eight demonstrators were sentenced to terms from three to 15 days in jail and 42 demonstrators were fined from \$81 to \$489 for participating in an unsanctioned rally. Among those arrested or sentenced are youth activists Zmitser Dashkevich, Artur Finkevich, Ivan Shyla, Krystsina Shatsikava, and Katsyaryna Salauyova. Dashkevich, leader of the unregistered organization Youth Front, received a 15-day jail term. Riot police also detained two journalists from the Minsk-based independent *Nasha Niva* newspaper, staff writer Syamyon Pechanko and photographer Andrey Lyankevich. Both had press cards and were working on the newspaper's online coverage of the demonstration. Pechanko was sentenced to 15 days in jail, while Lyankevich's trial was postponed until March 27. Police also briefly detained Lithuanian reporter Ruta Ribaciauskiene and her cameraman Jonas Griskonis, who had accreditation from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, and seized a videotape containing footage of the demonstration and

its violent dispersal. The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry on March 26 handed Belarusian Ambassador Uladzimir Drazhyn a note demanding an explanation of the detention and the return of the seized tape.

March 27, 2008

BELARUSIAN KGB RAIDS MINSK OFFICE OF POLISH-BASED RADIO RACJA...

Belarusian Committee for State Security (KGB) officers in Minsk on March 27 set a trap for correspondents of the Polish-based Radio Racja, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. In the morning, officers waited near the apartment rented as the Minsk office of the broadcaster and detained everyone headed toward it. They later searched the apartment. Eugeniusz Wappa, head of the Belarusian Union in Poland, which founded Radio Racja, told "RFE/RL Newslines" that the KGB detained three of the station's correspondents: one in Minsk, one in Brest Oblast, and one in Hrodna Oblast. The correspondent in Vitsebsk notified the broadcaster's office in Bialystok, Poland, that his apartment was broken into. Similar searches were also made of the offices and private apartments of independent journalists in Brest, Hrodna, Vitsebsk, and Homel, including the office of the European Radio For Belarus and the apartments of correspondents of independent Belsat television. The KGB accused the journalists of slandering the president.

April 14, 2008

BELARUSIAN COURT FINES ACTIVIST FOR PROTESTING PLANNED CHEMICAL PLANT

A Belarusian district court on April 11 found Syarhey Abrazouski guilty of organizing an unauthorized protest against the construction of an agricultural chemical plant in the town of Druzhny, some 30 kilometers southeast of Minsk, Belapan reported. The court fined Abrazouski 1.4 million rubles (\$656). Some 500 Druzhny and area residents took part in the March 22 protest. "I disagree with the position taken by the district authorities, who have repeatedly violated people's rights by not allowing them to demonstrate," Abrazouski told BelaPAN. The planned factory in Druzhny will reportedly manufacture toxic chemicals, including pesticides and herbicides, and reprocess old fertilizers collected from sites across Belarus.

April 23, 2008

BELARUSIAN COURT SENTENCES 10 YOUTH ACTIVISTS OVER UNSANCTIONED RALLY...

A district court in Minsk on April 22 sentenced 10 youth activists to prison, labor, or fines for their "active participation in group actions grossly disturbing the public peace" during an unsanctioned demonstration on January 10, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The rally was held in support of the rights of small-business owners and market vendors. The court sentenced Andrey Kim, who was also found guilty of "violence or threats of violence against a police officer," to 18 months in a minimum security correctional institution. Seven activists — Mikhail Pashkevich, Alyaksey Bondar, Artsyom Dubski, Ales Straltsou, Ales Charnyshou, Mikhail Kryvau, and Tatsyana Tsishkevich — were sentenced to two years of "corrective labor" at a residential facility. Uladzimir Syarheyev and Anton Koypish were fined 3.5 million rubles (\$1,633) each. The trials of another four activists on the same charge — Alyaksandr Barazenska, Pavel Vinahradau, Mikhail Subach, and Maksim Dashuk — were postponed to a later date. Jonathan Moore, the deputy mission

chief at the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, described the 18-month prison term given to Kim as a political decision. "The obvious conclusion is that Andrey Kim is a political prisoner," Moore told BelaPAN. "The United States has called and will continue to call on the Belarusian regime to release all political prisoners. At present these are Alyksandr Kazulin and Andrey Kim," he added, referring to the former presidential candidate who is serving a 5 1/2-year sentence for organizing antigovernment protests.

April 24, 2008

BELARUSIAN COURT SENTENCES SMALL-BUSINESS ACTIVIST TO 2 1/2 YEARS IN PRISON...

A district court in Minsk on April 23 sentenced small-business activist Syarhey Parsyukevich to 2 1/2 years in a minimum-security correctional institution for allegedly beating up a police officer, Belapan reported. The court also ordered Parsyukevich to pay 1.1 million rubles (\$513) to the police officer in "moral damages." Parsyukevich has been in jail since March 4 in connection with an incident that occurred when he was serving a 15-day jail term over his participation in an unsanctioned protest of small-business owners in Minsk on January 10. Parsyukevich insisted that he was beaten on January 21 by a police officer in the detention center. However, the officer, Alyksandr Dulub, alleged at the trial that it was he who had been beaten up by Parsyukevich, and he produced a medical certificate of light bodily injuries. According to Dulub, when Parsyukevich did not follow an order, he took him from his cell to an interrogation room, where Parsyukevich punched him in the face. Alyksandr Taustyka, who was Parsyukevich's cellmate, testified in court that Dulub burst into the cell, rudely ordered Parsyukevich to stand up, kicked him in the legs, and took him away. Taustyka said that about 10 minutes later he and other people in the cell heard Parsyukevich cry: "Help! They are killing me!" Taustyka added that Dulub falsely accused Parsyukevich in order to escape punishment for his violence.

April 29, 2008

RFE/RL'S BELARUS SERVICE EXPERIENCES MASSIVE ATTACK ON WEBSITE

The website of RFE/RL's Belarus Service remained unavailable from the afternoon of April 26 to the morning of April 28 due to a denial-of-service attack, RFE/RL reported. The attack, which coincided with marking by the Belarusian opposition of the 22nd anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster near the Belarusian border, also affected the availability of other RFE/RL websites. The director of RFE/RL's Belarus Service, Alyksandr Lukashuk, said that the website was bombarded with a huge amount of fake requests that exhausted the capabilities of the server and made the website unavailable to visitors. However, the attack brought about a show of solidarity among the electronic media in Belarus. "At least 30 independent organizations and websites became our volunteers. They were printing and publishing coverage of our journalists as their top stories," Lukashuk said.

5. BELARUS & the WORLD

March 10, 2008

BELARUS RECALLS AMBASSADOR OVER U.S. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS...

Minsk has recalled Ambassador to the United States Mikhail Khvastou for consultations over economic sanctions imposed in November 2007 by the U.S. Treasury Department against Belarus's largest petrochemical company, Belnaftakhim, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on March 7. "This step was forced upon us, and it may lead to a search for some sort of a compromise. But, I repeat, the American side forced us to take this step," Anatol Krasutski, the deputy chairman of the foreign relations committee in the Belarusian Chamber of Representatives, said on March 7. The U.S. Treasury Department has frozen all assets under U.S. jurisdiction belonging to Belnaftakhim and its representatives, and has forbidden Americans from doing business with the company on the grounds that it is controlled by Belarusian President Alyksandr Lukashenka. Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou said the same day that U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Karen Stewart "has been urgently recommended to leave Minsk for the same purpose." Papou continued: "During a rather long period of time, Belarus took quite a number of consistent and constructive steps for the purpose of normalizing relations with Western countries. By ignoring agreements reached earlier, the United States has violated the agreed procedure of actions toward the normalization of the relations." Papou was referring to the Helsinki Final Act, in which the United States "pledged to refrain from any act of economic compulsion aimed at subordinating the exercise by other participating states of the rights inherent to their sovereignty [or] its own interests."

March 10, 2008

BELARUS, EU SIGN AGREEMENT ON EU DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN MINSK

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Varanetski signed an agreement in Brussels on March 7 on the establishment of a European Commission delegation in Minsk, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. "We are ready to re-engage with you, and move toward normalization of our relations, provided that additional serious steps are taken in Belarus toward democratization," Ferrero-Waldner said. The European Commission has been trying to open a Minsk office since 2005. A significant development in relations between Brussels and Minsk took place in late 2007 when President Lukashenka authorized Varanetski to negotiate with the commission and sign the final agreement. In addition, the recent release of several people regarded by the West as political prisoners has contributed to the warming of relations. "I look forward to Belarus confirming these signals with the release of [imprisoned oppositionist] Kazulin," Ferrero-Waldner said. Kazulin, who ran in the March 2006 presidential election, was arrested during antigovernment demonstrations that followed the polls and sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison for organizing events that disturbed the public order. Kazulin returned to a high-security correctional facility near Vitsebsk after recently being granted three days of leave to attend his wife's funeral.

March 21, 2008

U.S. EMBASSY SUSPENDS ISSUING VISAS FOR BELARUSIANS

The U.S. Embassy in Minsk said in a March 19 statement that it has temporarily stopped the issuance of visas because of the government's urgent request for staff cuts. "The U.S. government is in the process of reviewing the request made by the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 17 that the U.S. Embassy in Minsk reduce its staffing," the embassy said. "Therefore, visa processing has been temporarily suspended while our resources are engaged addressing other priorities. Some visa appointments have been postponed. Further information will be provided once the extent of the U.S. Embassy's ability to provide visa services in Belarus has been determined." Diplomatic relations between Minsk and Washington have deteriorated due to the economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. Treasury Department against Belarus's largest petrochemical company, Belnaftakhim. In November 2007, the department froze all assets under U.S. jurisdiction belonging to Belnaftakhim and its representatives, and barred Americans from doing business with the company, which it says is controlled by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

March 24, 2008

U.S. EMBASSY MEETS BELARUS' DEMAND TO CUT STAFF

Jonathan Moore, deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, on March 24 told the Belarusian Foreign Ministry that the embassy has cut its staff to the number that the Belarusian diplomatic mission in Washington has in pursuance of Minsk's request, Belapan reported. "The United States views this demand as groundless and inconsistent. But it will abide by it and the number of diplomats in Belarus will be reduced to 17 by the end of the day on March 27," Reuters quoted Moore as saying. Moore said that around 30 diplomats are currently working at the embassy. "The United States will with great regret reduce the number of American staff at our embassy in Minsk by almost half, at the insistence of the government of Belarus," the U.S. State Department said in a statement the same day. "The unfortunate actions by the Belarus authorities demonstrate that Belarus has taken a path of confrontation and isolation rather than a path of engagement and democratic reform. We would like a different relationship with Belarus, but that can only happen when the government of Belarus shows commitment to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms," the statement added. U.S.-Belarusian relations have deteriorated recently over economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. Treasury Department against Belarus's largest petrochemical company, Belnaftakhim. In November 2007, the department froze all assets under U.S. jurisdiction belonging to Belnaftakhim and its representatives, and barred Americans from doing business with the company, which it says is controlled by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. On March 7, Minsk recalled its ambassador to the United States, Mikhail Khvastou, for consultations and urged U.S. Ambassador Karen Stewart to temporarily leave Belarus, which she did on March 12. On March 17, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry "urgently recommended" that the U.S. Embassy reduce its staff. Belarusian television on March 23 even reported that a U.S. spy ring was smashed in Belarus, but the report was immediately denied by the embassy. "We have no spies operating in Belarus," Moore said.

March 26, 2008

BELARUS SUGGESTS U.S. LIFT ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou said on March 25 that if the United States really wants "a different relationship" with Belarus, it should lift its sanctions, Belapan reported. Papou was responding to a U.S. State Department statement that the United States wants "a different relationship with Belarus, but that can only happen when the government of Belarus shows commitment to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." Papou said that the State Department "misleads the international and American public, attempting to put the blame for the current situation in Belarusian-American relations on the Belarusian side." "Such attempts may be viewed as a manifestation of the moral and political weakness of the U.S. stance toward Belarus," Papou said. He said that it is Washington that should take the blame for the deterioration of the bilateral relationship and that the United States is seeking to "cause the Belarusian people and state as much damage as possible for the sake of subjecting our country to American interests." Minsk on March 7 recalled its ambassador to the United States, Mikhail Khvastou, for consultations as a response to the economic sanctions imposed in November 2007 by the U.S. Treasury Department against Belarus's largest petrochemical company, Belnaftakhim. Minsk also insisted U.S. Ambassador Karen Stewart temporarily leave Belarus for the same reason, which she did on March 12. Belarusian television has also accused the U.S. Embassy of organizing a spy ring. The Belarusian Committee for State Security (KGB) detained U.S. lawyer Emanuel Zeltser in Minsk on March 12, but has yet to give any reason for the detention.

March 28, 2008

U.S., EU CONDEMN CRACKDOWN ON MEDIA, DEMONSTRATORS IN BELARUS

U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a statement posted on the department's website on March 27 that the United States "condemns today's crackdown on independent media in Belarus, during which some 30 independent journalists in 12 cities were detained without legitimate cause." He continued: "This follows the violent breakup of peaceful demonstrations in Minsk on March 25, which was accompanied by scores of arrests. The regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka has again shown itself as a brutal, authoritarian dictatorship that blatantly ignores human rights and fundamental freedoms." McCormack called on the Belarusian authorities to release all those arrested and jailed as well as to hold those responsible to account. "We also call on Belarus to stop its harassment of the remaining independent media still striving to report on the realities in Belarus and to respect freedom of assembly, speech, and independent media in Belarus," he added. The same day, European Parliament President Hans-Gert Poettering condemned the violent dispersal of the March 25 demonstration in Minsk, Belapan reported. "The use of violence by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful demonstrators and the harassment of independent journalists are in contradiction to the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression and is not compatible with democratic fundamental rights," Poettering said in a statement. Meanwhile, Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov said that people involved in political activities in violation of the law are sent to jail in all countries.

History of Belarus will be Removed From Schools' Curriculum

The history of Belarus - as a separate subject - will not be taught in schools anymore. It will be replaced by the General History course, which may (or may not) include events specific to Belarus. A special text book is now being prepared for this subject - to be taught in Russian only.

Source: <http://news.tut.by>, May 15, 2008



*Symbolic Execution
of Belarus' history*

Belarusian Free Theater Awarded Special European Recognition .

The award ceremony for the most prestigious Theater Europe Prize took place in Thessaloniki, Greece last April. The Free Theater from Belarus received a special recognition in the category of New Theatrical Reality.

The Free Theater presented the following plays: Generation Jeans, Being Harold Pinter and the premiere of The Zone of Silence directed by Uladzimir Scherban. One of the founders of the prize, the former French Culture Minister Jack Lang stated that after the political situation changes in Belarus, the award ceremony would be held in Minsk.

The award ceremony was attended by Robert Palmer, Director of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Council of Europe; Gottfried Wagner, head of the European Cultural Foundation; Erik Ehn, one of the heads of California Institute of the Arts; Boris Gerrets, professor of Netherlands Media Art Institute; Michael Billington, the Guardian's theatre critic, as well as Alyaksandr Milinkevich. The leader of the Free Theater, Mikalaj Khalezin called it a historic day not only for the Belarusian theater, but for the whole country.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, April. 14, 2008

The Castle in Niasvizh: Restored or Gradually Demolished?

In an interview with *Nasha Niva*, architect Uladzimir Papruha, the former chief state inspector of architectural monuments, expressed his shock and dismay at the direction of restoration activities now carried out in the historical castle in Niasvizh.

In his words, authentic architectural features of the castle and the Radzivil palace are either being demolished or replaced by cheap imitation mock-ups.

The so-called restoration process led to tearing down the castle's main passage gallery, one of its unique features. A 300-years old wall was recently torn down, actually taken apart brick by brick, allegedly due to its poor condition.

Specialists in the field of monument protection are warning that these events will eventually lead to the deletion of the Niasvizh castle from the UNESCO World Heritage list.



President Lukashenka who recently visited the castle, criticized the sluggish pace of the restoration, and was particularly displeased by the fact that the castle remains closed to tourists. "If there is nothing left to restore, let us fence in the ruins and use them for sight-seeing purposes," said the president.

Source: *Nasha Niva*, May 15, 2008

Quotes of Quarter

"Historical memory is a great creative force. All authorities are aware of it, and our authority is simply afraid of it. It is not the first time we witness attempts to transform thousand years of our history into a very brief one, beginning perhaps in the 20th century. The history is being rewritten to conform with the official ideology. "

Well-known writer and historian
ULADZIMIR ARLOU

BELARUS ABROAD

USA: Opening of the Center for Belarusian Studies

The Center for Belarusian Studies at Southwestern College held its grand opening in Wichita, Kansas on April 19, 2008. Dignitaries attending the ceremony included Stanislaw Shushkevich, first president of independent Belarus, and Ivonka Survilla, president of the Belarus Democratic Republic in Exile. Guests from New York, New Jersey, California, and Kansas gathered to make the day long event a success. Activities for the grand opening included displays of Belarusian art, literature, and music.

At a special luncheon, Dr. Andy Sheppard announced that a complete set of the *Belarusian Review* had been donated to the Center by Board Member, Joe Arciuch. Dr. Paula Survilla also announced the forthcoming publication of a work by Dr. Zina Gimpelevich that will serve as the first work in a Belarusian Studies Series. In addition to Dr. Shushkevich's keynote address, participants engaged in an active round table discussion that was led by the Center's founder, U.S. Ambassador David Swartz (ret.) and co-Director Dr. Paula Survilla.

According to Andy Sheppard, Academic Vice President at Southwestern College and co-director of the Center, *"The opening ceremony was an accomplishment in itself but the true victory was that the people who carry a love for Belarus in their hearts attended and made the Center an expression of their love for the country."* A record of the grand opening, including press coverage, photographs, and a transcript of Dr. Shushkevich's address, can be found on the Center for Belarusian Studies web page: www.sckans.edu/belarus <<http://www.sckans.edu/belarus>>



*US Ambassador to Belarus,
David Swartz (ret.) speaking,
flanked by Ales Lahviniec (Belarus)
and CBS co-director Dr. Paulina Survilla*

GENERATION GAP? OR BELARUSIAN DIFFERENCES IN GOALS, VALUES, STRATEGY

was the title of a 3-day international conference that was held in Warsaw, Poland, on June 3-5, 2008.

The event was organized by:

The Institute of Civic Space and Public Policy at the Łazarski School of Commerce and Law (LSC) in Warsaw, Poland (www.civicspaceinstitute.com)

The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (www.belinstitute.eu)

ARCHE journal (www.arche.bymedia.net)

Tuesday, June 3rd

A guided tour of the Warsaw Royal Castle and the Warsaw Trakt Krolewski. It concentrated on Belarusian traces in Warsaw.

Presentation of book publishing programs:

Valer Bulhakau, (Minsk), ARCHE Journal publishing program
Alaksandra Dynko, (Minsk), Nasha Niva publishing program
Alena Makouskaja, (Minsk), Backauscyna (World Association of Belarusians) publishing program

Siarhiej Salej (Hrodna), Vit publications

Presentation of the newly established satellite program beamed to Belarus — Belsat TV

Wednesday, June 4th Greeting speeches delivered by: the Administration of Łazarski LSC, **Ivonka Survilla**, President of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile.

Round table **The Generation Gap: the Motor or the Brakes?**

Chair: Dr. Valer Bulhakau, (Minsk, ARCHE)

Speakers:

Dzianis Mieljancou, (Minsk, European Humanities University / BISS). **Generation Gap in the Belarusian Opposition: Is This a Conflict?**

Ales Michalevic (Minsk, BPF Party). **Generations in the Opposition on BPF Example**

Andrej Kazakievic, (European Humanities University / Palitycnaja sfera). **Generational Composition of the Administrative Elite in Courts (Since 2003)**

Walter Stankievich (New York, Belarusian American Association).

The New Wave of Emigrants: Varied Goals and Values

Jan Maksymiuk, (Prague, Radio Liberty). **Is the Belarusian Opposition Losing the Battle for Young Minds?**

Discussants:

Valeryja Kasciuhoa, (Minsk, nmnb.org),

Rev. Alexander Nadson, (London).

Presentation by Dr. Kiryla Hajduk., **Social contracts study program of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies**

Round table: **Conflicting Perceptions of Changes in and around Belarus after 2006**

Chair: Prof. Rainer Lindner, (Berlin, Fund for Science and Politics).

Speakers:

Alexander Chubryk, (Minsk, Institute for Privatization and Management). **What Reforms Do Belarusians Wait For Now**

Dzmitry Kruk, (Minsk, Institute for Privatization and Management). **And Maybe, Reforms Have Already Started? Reforms**

Indicators in Belarus

Mikola Kacuk ,(Minsk, Academy of Sciences). **Evolution of Values of Young and Old Belarusians**

Juraj Marusiak, (Bratislava, Society for Central and Eastern Europe). **EU and Visegrad Policy to Belarus**

Prof. Lucan Way, (University of Toronto). **Post-Soviet Authoritarianism: Vulnerabilities and Sources of Strength**

Jury Chavusau, (Minsk, Supolnasc Center). **The Belarusian Opposition in 2007-2008**

Dr. Vital Silicki, (Minsk, BISS). **Belarus: Prospects and Prognoses**

Discussant:

Volha Stuzhynskaja, (Brussels, Office for a Democratic Belarus)

Thursday, June 5th

Round table: **A Languid Nation? Public Activity or Passivity: Age Factor.**

Chair: Iryna Vidanava, (Minsk, CD Magazine).

Speakers:

Taciana Culickaja, (EHU). **The Term 'Democratic Outlook' as Understood by Belarusian Students**

Siarhiej Bohdan, (Bonn, Bosch Foundation). **Belarus Reloaded: Evolution of Belarusian Culture and Different Projects of Belarus**

Dr. Nelly Bekus, (Minsk-Warsaw, Polish Academy of Sciences). **Belarusian Nation in the Light of Different Nation-Formation Strategies**

Dr. Jury Drakakhrust, (Prague, Radio Liberty). **Cultural Types and the Political Process**

Dr. Imke Hansen, (Hamburg university). **Communication, Presentation and Identification - Observations around the Generation Change**

Prof. David Marples, (Edmonton, University of Alberta). **Creating New National History from Old: the Role of Historical Memory in Contemporary Belarus**

Discussant:

Uladzimier Arlou, (Minsk), writer.

Presentation by Andy Sheppard, Co-director of the Center for Belarusian Studies at the Southwestern College, Kansas, USA

Round table: **The Voice of the Youth: Motivations for Resistance.**

Chair: Prof. Andrej Vardamacki, (Minsk, BISS)

Speakers:

Iryna Vidanava, (Minsk, CD Magazine). **New Media as a Form of Youth Resistance**

Nadzieja Sychuhova, (Minsk-Warsaw, Polish Academy of Sciences) **Youth Movement in Belarus. 2006-2008**

Paval Sieviaryniec, (Minsk, Belarusian Christian Democracy). **Christian Movement**

Focus – Why I Became a Civic Activist, and My Schoolmates Didn't

Mikhas Pashkievich (Minsk – for participation in demonstration was sentenced to forced labor. His paper was read), Jury Mielashkievich (Minsk), Ales Chyhir (Babrujsk), Ales Zarambiuk (Masty), Darka Slabchanka (Minsk), Vital Brouka (Viciebsk), Volha Karach, (Viciebsk).

Discussants:

Prof. Jan Kubik, (Rutgers University, New Jersey), Volha Kazulina, (Minsk).

Final remarks by Prof. Andrzej Sulima Kamiński (Washington, Georgetown University and Institute of Civic Space),

HISTORICAL DATES

June 14, 1900

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

June 19, 1924

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



Towards the end of his life he was forced to seek refuge abroad. He lived in Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic. He was forced out of his homeland due to attacks in the state-run press and censorship of his writings. The regime continues to take revenge against Bykau even after his death. Vasil Bykau's

books are not being republished in Belarus and films about his life and creative work are banned.

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

July 7, 1882

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

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

In addition to his literary activities, he was a valuable civic leader, and the editor of the *Nasa Niva* newspaper in the 1910s. He died tragically in Moscow in 1942.

July 7, 1887

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

July 15, 1410

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

MEDIA WATCH

Press Review

Putin Appointment to 'Belarus-Russia Union' Post Concerns US

Excerpts from an article in Washington Post, May 28, 2008

By Desmond Butler

WASHINGTON — The United States is concerned about a new sign of deepening ties between Belarus and Russia at a time of heightened tensions with both countries.

On Tuesday, Russia and Belarus named Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to the post of prime minister of an alliance of the two neighbors.

Officials and analysts in Washington say it is unclear whether the move is a step toward closer political union or a mere formality. But it comes as U.S.-Belarus relations have been in crisis. Belarus has protested U.S. sanctions aimed at punishment for its heavy-handed treatment of critics and intolerance of dissent. The standoff has led to the brink of cessation of diplomatic relations.

While tensions have also flared periodically between Moscow and Minsk, the announcement could be a sign that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is seeking closer ties with Russia in the face of the sanctions, a bad local economy and greater domestic opposition.

Belarus immediately downplayed the significance Putin's appointment, announced by the Belarusian and Russian presidential offices.

The post — officially called the chairman of the union's Council of Ministers — has been held by the Russian prime minister since 2000. The position was created in December 1999, along with the post of chairman of the Supreme State Council, which has been held since its creation by Lukashenko.

Russia and Belarus signed an agreement in 1996 that envisaged close political, economic and military ties, but efforts to achieve a full merger have foundered. Structures of the alliance serve coordination purposes and have vague responsibilities.

Lukashenko angrily rejected a Kremlin proposal in 2002 to incorporate his nation into Russia, and negotiations on strengthening the union have stalled. He has also sparred with Putin over Russian energy exports. Last year, he denounced Russia as a "huge monster" when Russia more than doubled the price of natural gas and imposed a customs duty that made oil more expensive.

The new appointment follows Putin's transition from president to prime minister earlier this month and the inauguration of his hand-picked successor Dmitry Medvedev as the new president. Kremlin observers are watching for signs that Putin is trying to consolidate power in the new post.

Many say that Russian politics are particularly hard to read at the moment, because the lines of authority between Putin and Medvedev are unclear. Lukashenko's decision making is even more murky.

"As Alice in Wonderland would say, 'It's getting curiously and curiously,'" said Leon Aron, director of Russian studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Aron said Lukashenko may be warming to Russia under the pressure of a bad economy, combined with rising commodity prices and well-aimed U.S. sanctions. Russia has recently provided loans to Belarus, ostensibly to help it handle rising Russian energy prices. "I think it is in his interest in staying in power to do pretty much whatever Putin wants," he said.

Source: *Washington Post*, May 28, 2008

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