



In this issue:

EDITORIAL

Big Stakes in Belarus' Polls — p. 2

FEATURES

Open Letter to the Belarusian People — p. 3

No Rewards for Lukashenka — p. 3

Helsinki Commission Hearings

On Elections in Belarus — p. 4

Sen. McCain: His Views on Belarus — p. 6

Belarusian Statehood in the System

Of International Relations — p. 7

Missile Defense Front Lines — p. 9

BELARUS' FORUM

It's Time to Demonstrate Power — p. 10

ECONOMY

Belarus' Privatization Plan Reveals

Change in Thinking — p. 12

CHORNOBYL LEGACY

Sharapova to Donate \$210,000

for Chornobyl Victims — p. 13

'Chornobyl Child' Causes International Stir — p. 13

SPORTS

Beijing Olympics Results — p. 13

BATE Barysau in Champions' League — p. 14

THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS

Minsk's Own Version of 'Fathers and Sons' — p. 15

Belarus Prepares for Parliamentary Elections — p. 16

Lukashenka Signs Restrictive Media Law — p. 17

Why Did Lukashenka Pardon

His Toughest Opponent? — p. 18

Election for Leverage with EU — p. 19

Assessing the Minsk Explosion — p. 21

Belarus Reponds Cautiously to

Georgian Crisis — p. 23

U.S. Drops Some Sanctions — p. 24

NEWS BRIEFS — p. 25

BELARUS ABROAD

Notes from the Convention — p. 28

Dialogues on Belarusian Identity

In Diaspora Generations — p. 28

Resolution of the 28th Convention — p. 29

Center for Belarusian Studies — p. 29

Prague: Rally in Support of Boycott — p. 30

MEDIA WATCH - Press Review

"Last Dictator" Caught Between

East and West — p. 31

Belarus and Ukraine Are Playing

Their Cards Very Carefully — p. 32

EDITORIAL

Big Stakes in Belarus' Polls

The upcoming legislative elections in Belarus on September 28 may be another meaningless exercise in simulated democracy, as were those in 2004 and 2000, but this time stakes seem to be much higher than previously for both the ruling regime and the opposition. And for the West as well.

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka sent an unambiguous signal in an interview with *The Financial Times* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on September 19 that he wants the West to recognize these polls as more or less democratic. And it is fairly comprehensible why.

In the wake of Russia's war with Georgia, Lukashenka must realize that his policy of integration with his eastern neighbor may soon be facing a crucial dilemma — either to steer Belarus toward full independence from Russia (which means losing most, if not all, of Russia's subsidies and benefits bestowed upon the Belarusian economy) or to surrender part of the country's economic and political sovereignty in exchange for staying in power in Minsk for some more time. When the newly resurgent Russia did not hesitate to use tanks in Georgia, why can't Moscow now use economic leverage in Belarus for asserting its influence in the "near abroad"?

But to balance his "eastern vector" of Belarusian politics with a "Western one" Lukashenka needs to make some democratic concessions in order to break the 12-year-long political isolation in the West.

According to Lukashenka, by allowing the opposition to be represented on district election commissions, he made enough progress on the path toward a democratic electoral process to earn the West's appreciation. The opposition, however, is of a different opinion.

According to the opposition, election falsifications essentially take place at the level of local election commissions, which are in total control of the authorities. Therefore, the opposition argues, the progress in democratization in Belarus is illusory. Besides, there is no mechanism in place for monitoring the security of ballot boxes during early voting or even verifying the voters lists by opposition representatives or international observers. In other words, the September 28 elections in Belarus are business as usual.

These are the main reasons why some leaders of the opposition initially opted to boycott the vote. But they were not heeded by rank-and-file activists, who managed to register as candidates and chose to campaign even in such an unfavorable election environment. There are many arguments put forward against the boycott but the most essential one boils down to the conclusion that the boycotts of the 2000 and 2004 elections by the opposition have proven totally ineffective.

Given such an insubordination among their ranks, the

United Democratic Forces — the main coordinating body of the Belarusian opposition — have half-heartedly withdrawn from the boycott. But, because of these contradictory moves, the opposition's election campaign lacks vigor and passion. The only hope of the opposition seems to be in the circulating rumors that Lukashenka, in order to invite a positive assessment of the elections from the West, will allow some opposition candidates to be "appointed" to the 110-seat Chamber of Representatives.

However, regardless of the election results, it appears that Belarusian opposition parties are poised to undergo serious crises in the wake of the vote. Because this election campaign has clearly shown that there is a serious generation gap in the Belarusian opposition between leaders and rank-and-file activists, which increasingly affects the opposition's political strategy.

The West's stake in these Belarusian elections seems to be quite significant, too. It is apparent that the West is very interested in some democratic progress in Belarus in order to give the Lukashenka regime a slightly higher score than during previous election campaigns. The temptation to drag Belarus somewhat further from Russia — which has been obviously rekindled by Lukashenka's reluctance to follow Moscow in its recognizance of Abkhazia and South Ossetia — is strong. Therefore, if the upcoming elections are not too blatantly rigged, we may witness a sort of about-face in the West's approach to Lukashenka.

Jan Maksymiuk, Deputy Editor

From the Publisher

Another tightly manipulated and fatally flawed election took place in Belarus. The regime will score another 'elegant' victory, this time possibly gaining some undeserved approval in the West, weary of the lack of progress of democracy in Belarus. Both the EU and the United States government may tacitly accept the election results, disregarding the progressive emasculation of the opposition political parties, total state control of the media, prohibition of public gatherings, blatant stacking of the electoral commissions while disallowing independent observers. The crushing of demonstrations and liquidating attempts to organize by NGOs and the trade unions, coupled with summary jailing of democratic activists, have become tolerated norms by states and bodies interested in improving diplomatic and trade relations.

The Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 5970) is a needed, albeit small measure in support of whatever democracy may exist in Belarus. Contacting your Representatives is key for the bill's passage this year.

The list of the more generous contributors to our publication has grown through the addition to it of Alla Orsa Romano, Irene Kalada-Smirnov and Kola Romano. The appreciated annual contribution by BNR Rada helps us to reach many political figures worldwide.

OPEN LETTER TO THE BELARUSIAN PEOPLE by the President of the BNR Rada

Dear Belarusian countrymen,

As you must have noticed, I seldom address my open letters to you - I do it only when I believe that your lives and the Belarusian state are in great danger. Today I write to you in connection with the events in Georgia and Alexander Lukashenka's intention to sign new military agreements with Moscow.

At a time when the entire democratic world condemned Moscow's aggression against Georgia, Lukashenka traveled to meet with Russia's President, not to speak up in defense of the wronged sovereign state, but on the contrary, to congratulate him. He called Russia's aggressive action 'beautiful'. Unfortunately, I observe that some of you instead of expressing outrage at this assessment of events in Georgia, believe the Kremlin's propaganda and consider its actions reasonable and acceptable.

And that is not all!

Alexander Lukashenka pledges to conclude new "defensive agreements" with Moscow in your name, in the name of the silenced Belarusian people, who are not free to express their own judgment on this or any other crucially important subject. These agreements will again draw our nation into foreign wars, making Belarus the first victim of Russia's geopolitical ambitions.

My dear countrymen, do not allow such an agreement to be concluded. Do not let those, now in power, to trade away your homeland and destroy your lives! Such a military agreement with Moscow will result in the trading away of your most valuable asset: the land of your ancestors, of your children and grandchildren.

It is the duty of all of us to defend this land given to us by God. I pray to the Almighty that my message will reach you, that you may realize to what extent today's events threaten your future. Russia, in attacking Georgia has displayed her true face, demonstrating once again that concepts of morality and human dignity are for her foreign and incomprehensible. The way she attacked the tiny Georgia, Russia will use the first opportunity — or invent one — to send tanks into Belarus. Then, alas, it will be too late to resist. We must resist now.

Protest with all your strengths against the conclusion of the proposed pseudo-defensive agreement with Moscow, lest it dig our common grave.

Long Live Belarus!

Ivonka Survilla,

August 21, 2008

Fall 2008

No Rewards for Lukashenka

By TransitionsOnLine

It's too early to ease the pressure on Belarus' authoritarian regime.

Dmitry Medvedev is facing mounting criticism for reneging on a European Union-brokered cease-fire as Russian troops continue to occupy Georgia. A man once seen by Brussels and Washington as a moderate heir to Vladimir Putin — "a smart guy who understood the issues very well," as a smiling George W. Bush said of Medvedev in July — may be shaping up to be more dangerous than his predecessor.

But the president of Belarus thinks Medvedev is doing a fine job. Russia's repulse of Georgian forces in South Ossetia and subsequent incursions into Georgia were handled "carefully and nicely," President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was quoted as telling the Russian leader at a meeting in Sochi.

Lukashenka also met this week with the leaders of Georgia's two breakaway regions and condemned Tbilisi's armed aggression in its territory of South Ossetia.

The Belarusian president is an exemplary breed of lapdog when it comes to the Kremlin. Unlike other former Soviet republics that cherish their independence, Lukashenka has virtually cleaved his country to Russia. Belarus is not queuing up behind Ukraine and Georgia for NATO membership. It's the only former Soviet republic in Europe not in the Council of Europe, but it is a loyal member of the lifeless Commonwealth of Independent States. For as long as Lukashenka stays entrenched in power, little is likely to change in this vestige of the Soviet Union.

Yet not everything is ideal in this relationship. Lukashenka is squeezed between East and West, both geographically and politically, and sometimes it hasn't been comfortable. Under Putin, Gazprom scrapped the generously subsidized prices Belarus was paying for oil and natural gas, giving Belarusians a taste of the Kremlin's energy-fueled foreign policy. When Lukashenka at one point suggested he could punish Europe at any time by shutting off the energy pipelines that traverse his country, his friends in Moscow weren't happy about the threat to tinker with their gold rush.

The Belarusian leader is also squeezed from the West. Washington accuses Lukashenka of being a brute and has steadily ramped up sanctions, both against the country and Lukashenka himself, leading Minsk to expel several top U.S. diplomats earlier this year. The EU has set conditions — including free elections and the release of jailed opposition politicians — for normalization of relations. Poland and Sweden have teamed up to call for an even more concerted EU effort to bolster democracy on its eastern fringes.

NOT YET A JACKPOT

The pressure may be paying off. So far this month, Lukashenka has released Social Democratic Party leader Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was sentenced to more than five years in prison on bogus charges of hooliganism and organizing riots. Youth activist Andrei Kim and businessman Sergei Parsyukevich, who were jailed on trumped-up

charges stemming from peaceful demonstrations early this year, also were set free.

The EU and United States have made the release of Kazulin, a vanquished presidential candidate, and other opposition figures a condition of improved relations. Both welcomed the move, and the U.S. State Department announced it would send a senior envoy to meet with Belarusian officials as a sign of a possible thaw.

But Lukashenka's actions aren't reason enough for Westerners to lower their guard. Lukashenka can be a mercurial figure. Last winter he released several political prisoners but has done nothing to reform draconian laws that criminalize free expression or to end the ruthless policies of the secret police, still called the KGB. And just days before Kazulin was freed on 16 August, security forces raided the offices of the Young Front organization and arrested two of its leaders and a representative of the European Belarus group, which advocates integration with the EU. Riot police also arrested at least one Young Front leader during a pro-Georgia demonstration outside the Russian Embassy on 11 August.

The Minsk government also has ignored appeals from the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and leading human rights groups to account for the disappearance of several leading Belarusians who ran afoul of the Lukashenka regime.

But the real test for the regime could come next month, when the country holds parliamentary elections. Since he took power in 1994, Lukashenka has rigged elections to suit him – no opposition candidates won seats in the last parliamentary contest four years ago. The regime assured visiting representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in June that the voting would be free, fair, and open to international monitors.

Andrei Sannikov, one of the leaders of European Belarus, told the civil rights group Charter 97 this week it was the pressure from Western countries that forced Lukashenka to free some of his political prisoners. Very probably the regime will exploit their release to gain international standing, he said.

With his main ally increasingly isolated from the West over the Caucasus conflict, even the loyal Lukashenka may have to look elsewhere for friends. But it would be premature to reward him now. If his government ends its callous arrests and sham prosecutions of activists, removes shackles from the media, and carries through with its pledges to allow competitive elections on 28 September, only then should the West start to loosen its grip.

Source: TransitionsOnLine, 22 August 2008:

Quotes of Quarter

PRESIDENT LUKASHENKA has declared in advance of the recent parliamentary elections:

"We want to show western countries and Russia how elections should be organized."

HELSINKI COMMISSION HOLDS HEARING ON UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN BELARUS

**Commission on Security and
Cooperation in Europe**

September 16, 2008

"Business as Usual?" Belarus on the Eve of Elections"

The hearing examined the state of democracy and human rights in Belarus and how the Belarusian authorities are complying with their election commitments to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in advance of the September 28 parliamentary elections. Last month, authorities released Belarus' most prominent political prisoner, Alexander Kazulin, and two others, fulfilling a key demand of the United States and European Union. This, together with Belarusian leader Lukashenka's unenthusiastic response to Russia's aggression in Georgia also has raised a glimmer of possibility for an improvement in Belarus' ties with the United States and European Union. Nevertheless, to date, there has been no appreciable progress in human rights and democracy in the run up to the elections.

Excerpts of the statements by the key members of the Helsinki Commission (CSCE) follow, as well as excerpts of testimonies of the expert witnesses:

Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, CSCE Chairman

— The human rights and democracy situation in Belarus is so wanting that it will undoubtedly take a long time and considerable effort to reverse the damage done over the course of the last fourteen years. As I remarked in Minsk in March 2006, the Belarusian people deserve better. However, should the Belarusian authorities display a concrete willingness to begin making progress with respect to their democracy and human rights, the United States should be open to prudent and measured engagement.

Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, CSCE Co-Chairman

— Today's hearing comes at an intriguing moment, with the release of political prisoners and Minsk's reluctance to endorse the Russian aggression in Georgia. On the other hand, the current state of affairs does not appear encouraging. From initial reports, it does not appear that we are yet witnessing meaningful improvements in the run-up to the September 28 parliamentary election, and many in the democratic opposition are already calling it an electoral farce.

Hon. Christopher H. Smith, CSCE Ranking Minority Member

— Of course, we welcome the Belarusian government's recent release of some political prisoners, including Aleksandr Kazulin, and the inclusion of a few members of the opposition on precinct election commissions. But given President Lukashenka's record as Europe's last dictator and leading abuser of human rights, we shouldn't create false hopes that these gestures portend a new springtime

for democracy in Belarus... In his long tenure as President of Belarus, Lukashenka has liquidated his country's democratically elected parliament and conducted a series of phony, stage-managed elections.

Hon. David J. Kramer, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

— As we have discussed many times with the Belarusian authorities, the release of Mr. Kazulin and the other two political prisoners provides the opportunity for the United States and the European Union to start a dialogue with the Belarusians about ways to improve relations.

My colleague, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, David Merkel traveled to Minsk August 21 to 23 to explore the possibilities for a real dialogue between our two governments, as well as to deepen our contacts with the democratic opposition.

Following Merkel's visit, the Department of State, in coordination with the Department of the Treasury, approved a six-month suspension of sanctions against two subsidiaries of Belarusian state-owned enterprise Belneftekhim. We will watch Belarus closely to determine whether to extend this suspension and take other such steps.

The release of political prisoners shows that the United States and the European Union can be effective in bringing about change when we are united. We regularly coordinate with our European allies on the situation in Belarus (in fact Deputy Assistant Secretary Merkel has been in Brussels yesterday and today doing just that) and have been united in our desire for the unconditional release of political prisoners in Belarus and for the authorities to respect the human and civil rights of the Belarusian people.

In closing, as President Bush has said, "The United States will continue to stand with the people of Belarus and all those who are working to help Belarus take its rightful place in the community of democracies." Our policy toward Belarus has never been driven by Minsk's relationship with Moscow, whether warm or cold. Instead, our policy has been driven by the government of Belarus treatment of its own people. We have shown our determination to take action against Belarus officials responsible for human rights abuses, assaults on democracy, and state corruption. The targeted sanctions and penalties we have imposed are not directed against the people of Belarus. With the release of all political prisoners by the Government of Belarus we have begun a review of these sanctions and are allowing certain transactions to move forward. We never have sought regime change per se, merely a change in regime behavior, and we hope we are seeing positive signs of such a change. Again, we hope the Government of Belarus shows a true, sustained commitment to democratic reform and respect for human rights so that we have the opportunity to move our relationship forward.

Ms. Laura Jewett, Director of Eurasia Programs at NDI

— The conduct of the upcoming elections will serve as a measure of the Government of Belarus intentions... She listed six particular items (shown abbreviated):

1. Of the two thirds opposition candidates that were registered, will any be de-registered for minor infractions, such as spelling errors, etc.
2. The Opposition has 2.5% of the district election commissioners, and 0.06% of those at the precinct level. Will even this miniscule number be able to exercise their responsibilities?
3. Do the candidates have freedom to conduct active campaigns without fear of repercussions?
4. Do candidates have access to government news media, beyond the allotted five TV and radio minutes?
5. Are domestic and international observers granted accreditation and full access to the whole process?
6. Are complaints given due hearing by the appropriate bodies and are violators prosecuted?

If the answer to most of these questions turns out to be "NO", we can conclude that these elections are "business as usual" in Belarus.

Mr. Steven B. Nix, Director of Eurasia Division at IRI

— In assessing whether these elections will be free and fair, or "business as usual," it is instructive to review the factors which the OSCE has stated contributed to the failure of the past elections: namely, the executive control on election commissions, abusive registration procedures, excessive regulation of campaign activities, significant restrictions, including intimidation on all the fundamental freedoms, state media bias with very limited access, minimal transparency during early voting and the vote count.

He concluded that it appears it is "business as usual" in Belarus and the odds are overwhelmingly stacked in the regime's favor...yet, if the elections were free and fair the Unified Democratic Forces (UDF) would be represented in the parliament... IRI's polling demonstrates that the citizens of Belarus are ready for change...

When asked whether reforms in Belarus were necessary, responses were overwhelmingly affirmative: 83% said yes to reforms in the economy, 82% — in social welfare, 62% — in politics, 85% — in health care, 71% — in education.

Voters want change, and the democratic forces represent that change. We owe it to them to acknowledge their dedication and stand with them until they witness the fruition of their goal for a free and democratic Belarus.

Mr. Rodger Potocki, Director for Europe and Eurasia at NED

To win Transatlantic political and economic concessions, the regime is altering the way it conducts elections in three ways: by allowing international scrutiny, asserting technical improvements, and moderating the campaign climate...

Lukashenka wants a "quiet election" that will advertise "progress" on several fronts and can be sold to the West, while still producing the predictable outcome.

The regime's first adjustment towards muting international criticism has been to open up the elections to the outside world. Unlike Russia, Belarus has welcomed international monitoring of the upcoming elections... Lukashenka has declared: "We want to show western countries and Russia how elections should be organized."

The second tack to temper international dissatisfaction with the election process is the regime's focus on organizational and technical matters rather than political contests. Lukashenka has declared that "we want the elections to be held in an open and democratic way so that nobody will be able to criticize us."

The third means to insure a "quiet election" is to temper political noise at home. The regime has made an effort to moderate its repression against the democratic opposition. Candidates report that the current election environment is appreciably better than that of 2004, when the regime barely cared about international opinion and made little pretense in allowing any semblance of competition. The state-run media's coverage improved in the sense that there has been less vitriol flung at the opposition.

During Soviet times, Belarus was known as "The Quiet Republic." The regime is doing all that it can to make this a "quiet election" palatable to the West. But "the sounds of silence" emanating from Minsk insure that this will not be a free and fair election. To answer the question in the title of this hearing, it's not business as usual in Belarus this fall, but a scam is still in the works.

Sen. McCain: His Views on Belarus

By Joe Arciuch

Our Judeo-Christian principles dictate that we do what we can to help people who are oppressed throughout the world, and I'd like to tell you that I still think that even in the worst places in the world today, in the darkest corners, little countries like Belarus—they still harbor this hope and dream someday to be like us and have freedom and democracy.

--U.S. Senator John McCain

Sen. McCain's statement at the August 16, 2008, presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain discussion at the Saddleback Civil Forum in Lake Forest, California.

In the past, Senator McCain had shown his keen interest in and unwavering support for the Belarusian people on a number of occasions. One of these was his February 6, 2004, keynote address at the conference on "The Future of Democracy beyond the Baltics" in Riga, Latvia. The conference was hosted by the Latvian government and was attended by leading Belarusian opposition members and European foreign ministers, parliamentarians, and senior officials, American and European civic leaders, United States Senators and Representatives, and leading members of the press.

In his address, McCain greeted leading opposition members present at the meeting as "heroes who serve and sacrifice under the most trying of conditions for the cause of a free, democratic, and sovereign Belarus." He continued:

"...Given the scale of Alexander Lukashenka's tyranny, our Belarusian friends face a greater challenge. The leaders of the Belarusian opposition who are participating in this conference stand as proof that their people value liberty no less than others. Your campaign to end tyranny of fear that rules your nation inspires all of us whose values are not tested every day, as yours are, and who pay no great price for our beliefs, as you do. You are patriots whose love of your country will change history. We stand with you."

In conclusion he said:

"As we did with the Soviet Union, the United States and Europe's democracies must ally ourselves with you, the dictatorship's democratic opposition, and provide moral leadership backed by political will to liberate the Belarusian people from the rule of Europe's last tyrant. The United States and Europe should make clear to Moscow that support for autocracy next door will exclude Russia from company of Western democracies, and make supporting democratic change in Belarus a condition for better relations between Russia and the West.

Europe's last dictatorship cannot long survive the democratic revolution that swept the world over the last 15 years, and whose waves of change are already lapping at the shores of tyranny's redoubt in Minsk. The history of the consciousness of freedom should give all of us great hope for the coming democratic transformation of Belarus and Ukraine, and with it the hopes and dreams of millions of your citizens for a new day. It is coming, and we in the West will stand by you until it does."

(McCain's address in full appeared in the *Belarusian Review*, spring 2004 issue, Vol. 16, No. 1.)

Prior to the Belarusian parliamentary election scheduled to take place in October 2004, the senator planned to visit Belarus. He applied for a Belarusian visa but was rejected in late August. "That Senator McCain did not receive a visa was hardly surprising, as Belarus has regularly rejected visa applications from persons deemed likely to be outspoken in their opposition to the Lukashenka government," wrote Dr. David Marples, Professor of History, University of Alberta, on August 30, 2004, in the *EURASIA Daily Monitor*. And further:

"U.S. Senator John McCain (R-Arizona) ... has declared that the world community will help the people of Belarus to overthrow the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. McCain emphasized that a regime change did not imply a military incursion, but would be achieved by 'international pressure'." He continued:

"McCain, a senior figure in the U.S. Senate, symbolizes the American commitment to regime change in Belarus, as well as the isolation of a president referred to by McCain as a 'dictator,' who is about to supervise 'bogus' elections on October 17 (Associated Press, August 23). The dismissal of the election as a sham so far in advance suggests that the Belarusian president has no chance of redeeming himself in the eyes of the Americans. McCain also declared that the Belarusian population had lost faith in Lukashenka. In Riga, he met with the leader of the Five Plus opposition group, Anatoly Lyabedzka; as well as with Fralou; Belarusian

Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka; the head of the disbanded Party of Labor, Alyaksandr Bukhvostau; and the sons of imprisoned activist Mikhail Marynich, the former Belarusian ambassador in Latvia, who was arrested in April (Charter'97, August 24). "McCain is also one of the authors of the draft document on democracy in Belarus, currently before the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. The bill specifies financial support to the opposition, a reduction of foreign aid to the Belarusian government, banning strategic exports to the republic, and a veto on the travel of certain government officials in Belarus to the United States (*Pravda*, August 23)."

It should be noted that the first draft of the Belarus Democracy Act was authored by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in 2001. This version failed to pass because some members of Congress felt it was too specific and too harsh in tone. The bill was resurrected in March 2003. A watered-down version, minus the funding for fiscal year 2004-2005 included in the 2003 bill, was passed with bipartisan support in October 2004 as Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 and signed into law by President George W. Bush.

It goes without saying, Senator McCain has been a good friend of the Belarusian people and one of the strongest advocates of a free and independent, democratic, sovereign Belarus integrated into the European community.

Quotes of Quarter

"If this time, the elections are viewed as undemocratic, we'll stop all talks with them (the Western governments),"

ALYAKSANDR LUKASHENKA responded in Minsk to an Interfax-West correspondent.

In an interview in Minsk on September 19 with correspondents of the Financial Times and Frankfurter Allgemeine, **PRESIDENT LUKASHENKA** made two interesting observations:

"In case of such an unlikely event (Russia's intervention in Belarus, similar to the one in Georgia), Europe would have full right to oppose Russia, not limiting itself in either methods or leverage."

"I have no dictatorial ambitions to remain in power, but I'll be fully responsive to the will of the people"

Belarusian Statehood in the System of International Relations

By Ilya Kunitski

This year Belarus celebrates 90th Anniversary of the proclamation of Belarusian People's Republic (BNR), and, therefore, 2008 was declared the year of the Belarusian Statehood. Undoubtedly, BNR is one of the most significant phenomena of the Belarusian history as it was a culmination of the Belarusian nation's formation process. By declaring the independence of the BNR in 1918 the Belarusian people aligned themselves with the rest of the world's nations who had already gained their own state or would do so in the future.

At the same time, it should be stressed that the history of statehood on the territory of the Belarus started eleven centuries earlier. The Belarusian town of Polatsk is first mentioned in the historical chronicles during the year of 862. At that time it was the center of an independent and strong state – the Principality of Polatsk. Belarusian scientists proved that the Slavic tribes of Kryvichy, who founded Polatsk, and Dryhavichy lived within the borders of the Principality. These two Slavic tribes became the nexus of the subsequent Belarusian nation. That is why Principality of Polatsk can be considered the first Belarusian state.

In the middle of the 13th century a new state – The Grand Duchy of Litva – with its capital in Navahradak emerged on Belarusian lands. It is necessary to note, that the term "Litva" corresponds to the area next to Navahradak which is located on the territory of present Belarus. Litva was the starting point of a great state which became the largest in Europe in the 15th century. Historical sources allow us to speak of the Duchy as of the Belarusian state since it was founded on Belarusian land, the majority of the population consisted of the aforementioned Belarusian ethnic groups, and the official language was Old Belarusian.

Unfortunately, from the end of the 16th century Belarusian statehood temporarily declined. First, the Grand Duchy of Litva signed the Union with Poland. In the new federation – Rzecz Pospolita – the Polish half immediately tried to dominate and implemented a policy of cultural assimilation known as Polonization. Later, Rzecz Pospolita was divided by the great powers of Prussia, Austria, and Russia at the end of the 18th century and Belarusian lands were incorporated into the territory of the Russian Empire. Polonization then gave way to even more aggressive Russification.

However, even such unfavorable events as the loss of statehood and forced assimilation by neighbors did not stop the completion of the Belarusian nation's formation. During the 19th century an authentic Belarusian literature and book-printing revival appeared, followed by the surge of national movement, the creation of political parties, and, finally, the proclamation of BNR's independence.

Overall, the rise of the Belarusian national movement in the 19th century occurred together with the mobilization of national struggle all over Europe. From the time of the French Revolution to the end of the 18th century, the nation state took the place of the huge multi-national empire on the stage of world politics. The foundation of the present system of international relations, however, was laid in 1648 when the Peace of Westphalia established the notion of territorial sovereignty as a doctrine of noninterference in the affairs of other nations.

The first characteristic of this system which is sometimes called Westphalian is the central attribute of the nation state. Although some scholars maintain that Westphalian system is eroding as growing interdependence and successful regional cooperation introduces a new, post-modern, system of international relations, the evidences suggests that this new world order has yet to emerge. For instance, one of the most successful projects of integration in the world – United Europe – recently seriously stumbled over the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. The Irish “no” during national referendum is a reflection of the European states’ reluctance over deeper integration and a reminder of how significant national interests still are.

The second characteristic of this system of international relations is the dominating role of several great powers. Such countries as the US, Great Britain, Japan, Germany, France, China, and Russia (USSR) have attempted to shape the world order according to their interests. They are seen as responsible for global security, yet they started a number of wars including two worldwide ones. They are seen as the guarantors of states’ sovereignty; however, they redrew the map of the world after each major military conflict. At the same time, great powers maintain the relative stability of the system by means of the so-called balance of power. If one of the great powers gains additional military and economic might and starts to threaten the stability of the system, a coalition of the other big states emerges to “outbalance” the one seeking hegemony.

The formation of Belarusian statehood was influenced by this system. The aspiration of Belarusians to obtain national statehood and the interference, sometimes indirect, of great powers determined the creation of independent Belarusian state.

The proclamation of the BNR on ethnic Belarusian lands came during World War I from the ashes of Russian Empire, several months after the Bolshevik Revolution. However, the BNR was recognized only by newly formed and small states. The great powers of Germany and Bolshevik Russia did not recognize the state and, moreover, divided its territory according to the controversial Brest-Litovsk Treaty. When occupying German forces retreated, Russians came in to establish their power. The fact of BNR’s independence declaration, however, could not be ignored, and the Bolsheviks, together with Belarusian communists, created their national alternative to the BNR – the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s another national movement’s upsurge and the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the independence of the Republic of Belarus. Great powers again played their role. Some of them, for instance, the US, UK and Russia, became the “guarantors” of the independence and territorial integrity of several former Soviet republics in exchange for giving up the nuclear arsenals which they inherited from the Soviet Union. Therefore, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine agreed to send the nuclear weapons back to Russia hoping that the great powers would adhere to their promises in the future. Recent events, however, showed the opposite: Russia threatened to fuel the secession of Crimea peninsula if Ukraine pursues NATO membership; in addition, Moscow pushed Belarus to allow the deployment of Russian missiles on its territory, creating a direct threat to republic’s independence.

What are the implications of the present political situation for Belarus?

First of all, the country has to be guided by its national interests. Unfortunately, the present Belarusian regime is concerned with its own interests and not that of the country it heads. The key for prosperous development of the state in today’s world is strategic partnership and close cooperation with neighboring countries. The Belarusian government, however, is oriented on close relations with only one state – Russia. Recently this state showed its true imperialistic and aggressive face during its conflict with Georgia.

Therefore, it is dangerous for a small state such as Belarus to maintain close economic and political ties with such a powerful neighbor within the framework of a Belarus-Russia Union, not to mention the military treaty which is, allegedly, being discussed between presidents Lukashenka and Medvedev. Very soon Belarusian authorities who heavily depend on Russia economically might lose any leverage against their Russian counterparts. Six years ago Mr. Putin already offered Belarus the “opportunity” to become part of the Russian state, and it is unlikely that Moscow has abandoned the idea of incorporation since then. The looming possibility of Russian missiles being deployed on the territory of Belarus creates a very real threat to Belarusian statehood once again.

Ilya Kunitski is a historian from Belarus studying Political Science with a focus on International Relations at New York University’s Graduate School of Arts and Science in New York City. The article was prepared for the conference “The Year of Belarusian Statehood” in the framework of 28th Convention of Belarusians in North America.

Quotes of Quarter

Comment by **RODGER POTOCKI**, NED director for Europe and Eurasia during the Helsinki Commission Hearing on Sept. 16, 2008.

“It’s not business as usual in Belarus this fall, but a scam is still in the works.”

Belarus on the Front Lines of the Fight over Missile Defense

By Volha Charnysh

On the crossroads between the East and West, Belarus could become a bridge in the security architecture of the post-Cold War Europe, but it is turning into Russia's shield instead. With American rockets to be stationed on its western border and Russian rockets to be deployed on its territory, the future of the country hardly looks secure.

In response to U.S. plans to build a radar station in the Czech Republic and place interceptor rockets in Poland, Russian ballistic missiles may be deployed in Kaliningrad and Belarus. The air base Machulishchy, near Minsk, could soon welcome strategic bomber aircrafts from Russia as well. In addition, Belarus plans to re-equip its military with Russian Iskander short-range missiles and purchase a conventional missile system by 2020.

After the Russia-Georgia clash over the separatist region of South Ossetia oiled the wheels of 18-month long negotiations between the United States and Poland, U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice and Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski sealed the deal on August 20. Ten missile defense interceptors on Polish soil will allay America's fears of missiles from Iran and other rogue states; in exchange, 20 U.S. Patriot missiles will reduce Warsaw's anxiety over Russia. The upgraded Polish air defense will face Moscow and, of course, Minsk.

But just how much safer will Warsaw feel possessing 20 American Patriots, which are already drawing threats from its powerful eastern neighbor? Sikorski admitted that Poland did not see the need for the missile shield to defend Europe against Iran; Warsaw signed the missile treaty hoping for the U.S. commitment to help Poland in times of trouble.

On the very day of the Polish-U.S. deal, Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Aliaksandr Lukashenka met in Sochi and agreed to sign an air defense system agreement this fall. On the next day, emboldened Defense Minister of Belarus Leonid Maltsev said that Belarus was strongly opposed to the U.S.-Poland deal and would take appropriate measures.

Moscow argues that the defense shield in Poland will undermine its nuclear deterrent. Although Russia's rhetoric should be taken skeptically, American plans are definitely weakening Russia's influence in the region. However, Belarus still remains unquestionably loyal to Russia. In an interview with *BelaPAN*, the deputy chair of the CIS committee on foreign affairs and relations Siarhei Kastsian stated, "all decent people must support Russia to put an end to the unipolar world under the political influence of the United States and the EU."

The U.S. missile defense aspirations go back to 1980s and, although fascination with Reagan's "Star Wars" technology has passed, the current system - ambitiously claiming to be able "to hit a bullet with a bullet" - has not been proved

in realistic conditions. Moreover, despite over \$100bn put into its creation, adversaries could find ways to defeat the system. So, strategically, missile defense may not be worth the political fracas it has caused.

Just like in the 1990s, when the eager denuclearization by Minsk was presented as an example to reluctant Kyiv, Belarusian military cooperation with Russia is designed to play a pedagogic role for other CIS states. The benefits of scratching Russia's back are obvious: while Belarus enjoys low fuel costs, Russian Transneft cut the flow of crude oil to the Czech Republic by 40 percent on the day after the Czech Republic agreed to host a US radar base, and the CIS state of Ukraine has suffered artificial fuel crises on a regular basis since the "orange revolution."

However, military cooperation with a state as disliked as Russia brings certain risks and is especially imprudent at a time when neither Belarus nor Russia are trusted by the West. The economic benefits of Minsk accommodating Moscow notwithstanding, it is important to ask whether Russia could and would adequately protect the country made a target by such military closeness.

The Military Doctrine of Belarus states that "expansion of military blocks and alliances to the detriment of the military security of the Republic of Belarus" leads to "a violation of the balance of power." However, the country seems to tip the balance even more by hosting Russian missiles, easily ignoring its commitment to neutrality proclaimed in the 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty and reaffirmed in its two post-Soviet Constitutions. Minsk needs to realize that military integration with Russia may exacerbate its situation at a time when Minsk is already not on speaking terms with most of the powerful actors on the international stage.

After the Belarusian government released three internationally recognized political prisoners, Europe seemed to soften its criticism of Belarus. According to the statement on General Foreign Policy and Security made by the EU Council on August 26, the European Council considered revising its sanctions against Belarus. The decision to host Russian missiles may prevent this from happening and lead to even further alienation of the republic.

Maintaining relations with the West is no luxury for a small country like Belarus, and establishing rapport with the rest of Europe could give it more leverage in its relationship with Russia. On the other hand, annoying the West and becoming Russia's shield in exchange for economic benefits may end tragically. Although a shield basks in glory in times of peace, it takes the most blows in fighting. By entering into military cooperation with Russia, Belarus is allowed to the big kids' table. Unfortunately, it has yet to realize that Russian roulette is being played there.

Volha Charnysh is studying political science at Smith College, Massachusetts - with focus on Eastern European security.

It's Time to Demonstrate Power

By Andrei Sannikau,

The nature of the "election" and its result is quite clear today. Democrats making up only 0.07% out of the total number of precinct commission members, vividly demonstrates the fact that the regime is not going to lose control over the chief element of the elections: the vote count. At the same time, opposition representatives make up about 40% of the total number of candidates for deputies, writes Andrei Sannikau, the leader of the civil campaign "European Belarus".

Even in 2004, the opposition had 0.2% in precinct election commissions. How many oppositionists were elected to the parliament in 2004? None. And at that time, many more pro-democracy candidates were nominated.

This year the proportion is almost the same, but not quite. Half as many candidates have been nominated. It is evidence that there is no desire, either to participate in such an "election," or to vote. Even the chairperson of the Central Election Commission, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, complains that people won't come to ballot-boxes. But there is one more circumstance which differs this year from the year 2004: the weight of the opposition's decisions is much heavier. Representatives of democrats, who make up 40% of the total number of the candidates, can adopt an important decision, which would demonstrate the real power of the opposition. If democrats withdraw from the "elections," there would be one candidate in almost a half of the constituencies, and the plan of the authorities, which is aimed at guaranteeing recognition of the regime, would fail totally. Then a serious discussion on holding real elections and return of Belarus into the European family could begin.

Without a right to vote

Amazing things happen with dictatorships. After some time, representatives of the democratic world "get tired" of defending their own principles, they get bored of fighting for human rights, and they seem to be ready to agree that the path to democracy goes through a dictatorship. It is hard to explain in any other way, why international observers believe it to be a step forward when opposition representatives, without a right to vote, are present in the Central Election Committee. Is it really a democratic breakthrough that spectators have been invited to the show in the CEC? Considering that our parliament is not a real parliament, but a sham, subordinate to the executive power, and the people are deprived of the right to vote, is the opposition's presence in the CEC, without a voice indeed a loud achievement of democracy?

The main question is: how to return to people their voices and the right to elect their leaders. It can in no way be achieved through becoming a member of the CEC without a right to vote, without a possibility to control vote counts at parliamentary elections, which are subordinate to, and controlled by the dictatorship.

Elections or privatization

Actually, this "election" in Belarus has attracted great attention to our country, not because a chance for democratization appeared, (and it has appeared), but because the hard situation could force the dictatorial regime to sell out state possessions. Everyone understands that with the existing international reputation of the regime, and while the market economy is absent, property will be sold cheaply. Business is business. Adventurous businessmen from the West could come to Belarus just on the basis of the regime's promises and predictions of forthcoming economic reforms. But what for, if little means will be spent on political lobbying and international recognition of the dictatorship could take place? There have been such experiences: with the USSR, with Latin America's dictatorships, and then with Central Asian regimes. However, businessmen understand perfectly well that their chances of survival in Belarus have an exact numerical value: 0.07%. It is equal to the number of oppositionists allowed to join precinct elections commissions. But if the political smoke-screen in the form of the regime's recognition would be guaranteed, then the risk's magnitude would not be important. In case of failure all expenses could be covered by one's own states, using state insurance of investments, saying something like "We were not warned that there is a dictatorship there." In general, today shifting the responsibility for all expenses of private business of democratic states on to governments of these states is being lobbied. Why is everyone so excited? Such an administrative economic wonder, as in Belarus, is unprecedented for thousands of kilometers either to the north, or to the south, or to the east, not even speaking of the west. Who wants to be late for dividing the Belarusian "pie" into parts?

Russians are coming

In the interim, Russia invaded independent Georgia and does not want to leave. For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, under the pretext of defending its "own" citizens and its interests, Russia has carried out an invasion and reveled in it. Lukashenka has enjoyed this as well, judging by his statements. First, he seemed to be frightened, and kept silent, but after a reprimand from the Kremlin, he found touching words about the aggression's "beauty", so that even Russian leaders were taken aback. They could not have invented such words. They were stunned, but made note to remember this. If a person is so sensitive to the international situation, then he will not object if a few divisions with nuclear arms are sent to him, for example, to finish the harvesting campaign successfully. And then they would be retained to ensure introduction of the single currency and carrying out privatization "properly."

Historically, in supporting personal rule regime, Lukashenka maneuvered on the Russian field rather successfully, promising indestructible devotion and strategic permissiveness. Today, his possibilities have significantly narrowed, and Russia is demanding payment on accounts more and more insistently. In addition, energy blackmailing has become a habitual instrument in Russia's world policy. How will the upcoming "elections" help solve not just problems, but real threats to Belarus' independence? What could the participation of the opposition in the rightless parliament do for defense of our independence? Should participation

in the regime's scenarios be discussed at all, while they are designed only for defense of Lukashenka's personal power? The game, according to the rules imposed by the regime and international mediators, between the money and the dictatorship could be too dangerous.

What does it mean, to go all the way?

For today there are two approaches to the election which is to take place in a month: a boycott and participation. The party opposition has discussed the situation several times, trying to adopt the most advantageous decision, put forth conditions which haven't been accepted by the regime, however, ultimately deciding to take part in the "election". Despite the repressions, the opposition parties have engaged in full-fledged participation, at all stages of the electoral campaign: nomination of candidates, collection of signatures, and nomination of candidates to electoral commissions of all levels. The final stage is left, the election itself. The opposition has decided to take part in the vote with a message regarding the necessity of a civil control over the authorities. It is really necessary now. It is extremely important today, in order to prevent robbing the country, and to prevent Belarus' from being drawn into Russia's military plans. However, participation in pseudo-elections will not bring us closer to solving the problem of civil control. On the contrary, this will decrease the influence of the opposition. Participation in the "elections" according to the regime's rules, will be result in recognition of the regime's "democratic character", vesting it with all the necessary authority for further decisions, which could be exceptionally dangerous for Belarus. Furthermore, it is unlikely to be a good excuse later, to state that "we were taking part in the electoral farce to the end".

Refuse to let the occasion slip

The release of Alyaksandr Kazulin, Andrei Kim and Syarhei Parsyukevich has created new hope in the society. Solidarity with the political prisoners inside the country, international demands to release them and the sanctions imposed by the US for violation of human rights have made the Belarusian authorities release the innocent prisoners of conscience. It was obviously done in the run-up to the elections, with the expectation that such a noticeable and undoubtedly positive step would become the main argument in favor of the regime's recognition. However, the release of political prisoners does not affect the nature of the "election", which remains undemocratic.

The release of political prisoners should be used, not as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the west, but as an impulse for real transformations in the country. It is crucial to think how to advance forward.

The enormous amount of work done by the parties, candidates and their teams must not be used by the regime and some foreign advisors to advance their scenario, which would be disastrous for the opposition and for the country. Today it is said almost openly what this bargaining is about: one seat for the opposition in the "chamber of representatives". It is simply humiliating. It is humiliating that such a plan is illegally forming behind the Belarusians' back, if the parliament is in fact discussed. It is humiliating because the opposition is given a role of an actor with a non-speaking part, not of a participant in the politics.

Today there are numerous possibilities to achieve real, positive changes in Belarus. People are not interested in the elections. Apart from the opposition's internal discussions regarding its participation or non-participation, on the outside no one is speaking about the elections. People do not pin their hopes for change on electoral farces. They are tired of observing them for many years. We shouldn't deceive people and the international community by participation in this farce, and we shouldn't help reinforce the dictatorship. None of the conditions put forth by the opposition for its participation in the elections have been fulfilled. But the opposition has demonstrated its strength: 40 per cent of the candidates representing democratic forces. The time has come to demonstrate power. We should not waste such serious potential for the one deputy-democrat deal, authorized by the dictator.

A decision, in principle, to withdraw all democratic candidates and not to participate in the electoral farce is needed. It is necessary to demand truly free parliamentary and presidential elections, to defend democratic demands on the Square. The conditions for holding new elections should become an issue for holding direct negotiations between the opposition and the regime, with the mediation of international organizations. Everyone will gain from that, primarily the people of Belarus.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Aug. 25, 2008

Dictatorship Made Belarusians A Nation of Suicides

Belarus has reached the world highest suicide rate in the last ten years. The suicide rate is high throughout the world, but Belarus has got ahead of other countries. Scientists explain this lurid rise by increased alcohol abuse, subjective feeling of lacking life prospects, depressive environment and the low level of culture.

A recent Gallup Institute survey showed a relation between a number of suicides and religiosity of society. Gallup Polls from 2005 and 2006 show that more religious countries tend to exhibit a lower suicide rate, *Nasha Niva* reports.

The Gallup Institute survey included only 67 countries, as recent suicide data were unavailable for many countries. Results were based on telephone and face-to-face interviews conducted in 2006 with approximately 1,000 adults per country. For all countries, reliability ranges of figures used to generate the mean Religiosity Index scores were within + 3 percentage points from the national percentages shown here.

Country	suicide rate	religiosity
Belarus	36.80	35
Russia	36.15	28
Kazakhstan	29.95	43
Hungary	28.45	36

Gallup Poll reveals that poor countries that are more religious might tend to underreport suicides — because of subpar medical documentation, or the added social stigma suicide carries in more religious countries. However, an analysis focusing only on wealthy countries, where documentation of suicide is likely to be excellent, still reveals a robust association between religiosity and national suicide rates.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, July 18, 2008

ECONOMY

Belarus's Privatization Plan Reveals Change In Thinking

By Jan Maksymiuk

Should Belarus's ambitious privatization plan come to fruition, the country's state-dominated economy could be in store for a breakthrough.

The sheer numbers contained in the two-year plan are impressive -- more than 500 state-run enterprises and some 150 businesses partly owned by the government would be up for sale.

But since the program was announced in July, it has attracted its share of skeptics who question its true objectives.

"The purpose of the privatization is to keep state control over the economy, attract investments, and thus support this unworkable system," says Belarusian economist Leanid Zlotnikau.

Few family jewels of the national economy are included on the list of Belarusian businesses slated for privatization. The Belarusian Automotive Plant in Zhodzina, the Minsk Engine Plant, Homselmash (a producer of agricultural machinery) in Homel, and two operators of the Belarusian section of the Druzhba oil pipeline are the exceptions.

Prime Minister Syarhey Sikorski said in early August that the government expects the program to inject \$80 billion in investment into the economy over the next five years, compared to a reported total of just \$20 billion over the past five years.

This leads to the question of just who is in line to become the new owners of Belarus's state-run enterprises.

Who Profits?

While there is broad consensus that potential Belarusian investors — be they businesspeople or representatives of the ruling elite — possess significant amounts of cash, they don't come close to the billions the government is anticipating.

As for Western investors, they have so far shown little interest in Belarus's industrial enterprises, and there is no apparent reason to expect that dozens of them will come to Belarus in the near future.

To the east stands Russia — and its ample supply of billionaires. Is the Belarusian economy doomed to find itself in their hands, as the Belarusian opposition has predicted almost since the very start of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's presidency?

Such apprehensions are apparently shared by managers of Belarusian state-run companies. Iryna Barkouskaya of the State Property Committee, while outlining the 2009-10 privatization plan last month, sought to dispel such anxiety by saying that the government will take an "individual approach" to each privatization.

"Some of our managers are worried that Russian capital will buy up everything. We won't allow that," Barkouskaya

told journalists. She also suggested that in the first stage of the plan, the government would offer no more than a 25 percent stake in each business to be privatized.

The opposition remains unconvinced, however.

Former Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Sannikau, who went over to the opposition in 1996, believes that the announced privatizations will enrich only representatives of the authorities and the businessmen associated with them -- while the people of Belarus will gain nothing.

Economist Zlotnikau agrees. "The danger is not in Russian capital but in domestic bureaucracy," he says. "If this bureaucracy is going to sneakily sell out Belarus for bribes, nothing will help us -- neither Western nor Russian capital. If there is no competitive political system, no strong opposition, no independent press, it is impossible to curb bureaucracy and corruption."

No Transparency

There is little hope that Belarus's political system will become more competitive or that the Belarusian opposition much stronger in the next two years. And this means that President Lukashenka, if he really intends to implement the privatization plan, can do whatever he likes.

But since privatization unavoidably means transfer of control over some part of the economy -- either to Russian or newly created domestic oligarchs -- Lukashenka may in the longer term face new political problems and potential social unrest.

The most serious of these potential problems are connected with his primary supporters -- poor collective farmers and industrial workers; have-nots who are not in line to become beneficiaries of the current privatization drive. This power base, courted by Lukashenka for the past 14 years with visions and promises of Belarus's thriving "market-oriented socialism" in the sea of capitalism, may dislike this sudden leap into capitalism.

But it seems that in the face of fiscal expediency, Lukashenka has no other choice than to allow wider privatization if he hopes to replenish state coffers.

Belarus paid \$119 per 1,000 cubic meters for Russian gas in the first quarter of 2008. In April, Gazprom increased this price to \$128. Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov recently predicted that, in 2009, the price of Russian gas destined for Belarus could reach 80 percent of that paid by Poland (Poland currently pays \$320).

It is also indicative that Minsk is putting its section of the Druzhba oil pipeline up for sale. This appears to be a move intended to persuade Moscow not to build oil pipelines circumventing Belarus. Lukashenka may have realized that efforts to cut out the middleman could someday become a reality, and Belarus could lose its influence as an important transit country.

Therefore, even if the privatization plan is never implemented in its entirety, its publication indicates that Lukashenka's regime has started to take into account challenges and problems that it previously ignored or underestimated.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, August 25, 2008 •

Chornobyl Legacy

Maryia Sharapava to Donate \$210,000 for Chernobyl Victims

Tennis star and UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Maryia Sharapava will donate \$210,000 in an initiative offering scholarships to youth from regions of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia affected by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident.

Announcing the joint initiative between United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and her private foundation, Sharapova noted her own connection to the issue she was born in 1987 after her family fled Belarus for Siberia because of concerns about radiation in the wake of the Chernobyl accident.

"It has always been my dream to contribute to the recovery of a region where I have a personal connection," she said. "Enabling talented young people to pursue higher education is part of a broader effort to build a brighter future for the region," she added.



The Maria Sharapova Foundation will award 12 students five-year scholarships to study at two leading universities in Belarus. Working with UNDP, which coordinates the UN's work on Chernobyl, the first scholarship recipients will begin their studies in September 2009.

UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis warmly welcomed the alliance. "Her engagement helps to convey a message of optimism to young people in a once-blighted region where a return to normal life is now a realistic prospect," he said.

UNDP implements programmes to encourage economic and community development across the region, based on scientific findings that indicate radiation is below negative health-affecting levels. Sharapova had previously donated USD 100,000 to youth-oriented projects implemented by UNDP in Chernobyl-affected regions.

Source: The Economic Times, Sept. 19, 2008

'Chornobyl Child' Causes International Stir By Refusing To Return to Belarus

By Farangis Najibullah (excerpts from an article)

After spending the better part of nine summers with her Californian host family, Tanya Kazyra has decided against returning to her native Belarus.

The 16-year-old "child of Chornobyl" says she wants to stay permanently with Debra and Manuel Zapata and their three children, whom she calls "my real family."

But Tanya's decision is having a global impact -- infuriating officials in Minsk, leading to rifts in diplomatic circles, and threatening the efforts of international organizations intended to reach out to children living in the shadow of the Soviet-era nuclear disaster.

Belarusian officials responded to Tanya's refusal to return home by banning foreign exchanges of children affected by the 1986 explosion at Chornobyl. Minsk said it would not allow children to travel to Western countries without guarantees that all will return home.

According to Roche, some 50,000 children from areas in the Chornobyl zone travel annually to the United States and EU countries, including France, Spain, Portugal, and Britain. In the United States alone, where the CCPI has an affiliate office in New York, some 1,400 children make the trip every year to spend time with American host families.

... Tanya's nine summers in California with the Zapata family were organized by the Petaluma-based Chernobyl Children's Project. The organization is part of the Children of Chernobyl, United States Alliance, which groups a number of U.S. humanitarian organizations working with children affected by the disaster.

Prior to Minsk's decision to impose the controversial ban, a high-ranking Belarusian official reportedly met with Tanya and the Zapatas on three occasions in an attempt to persuade the girl to return home.

Tanya failed to change her mind, however, and the Zapatas instead hired a lawyer to secure a student visa that would enable Tanya to continue her education in the United States. According to the lawyer, Tanya's current tourist visa expires on December 5.

The girl herself has said she comes from a troubled background and that her legal guardian, her grandmother, has given her blessing for her stay in the United States.

Source: RFE/RL, Sept. 14, 2008

SPORTS

Beijing Olympics Results: Belarus Wins 19 Medals

During the 29th Olympic Games, held in Beijing, China in August 8-24, 2008, Belarusian athletes posted some remarkable achievements; 1 world record, 2 olympic records and 19 medals (4 golds, 5 silvers , 10 bronze). In the overall ranking Belarus placed 16th among 88 participating countries.

List of Belarusian Medal Winners:

GOLD:

- Men's Kayak Fours, 1000m
Vadzim Makhneu, Artur Litvinchuk, Aliaksei Abalmasau, Raman Piatrushenka
- Men's Canoe Doubles, 1000 m
Andrei Bahdanovich, Aliaksandr Bahdanovich
- Women's hammer throw = 76.34 m. - OLYMPIC record
Aksana Miankova

- Men's weightlifting 94-105 kg. 436 kg.(200+236) - WORLD record

Andrei Aramnau

SILVER:

- Men's Decathlon, 8551 pts.

Andrei Krauchanka

His results in individual events:

100m sprint = 10,96 sec.
Long jump = 7, 61 m.
Shot put = 14,39 m.
High jump = 2, 11 m.
400m race = 47,30 sec.
110m hurdles = 14,21 sec.
Discus throw = 44,58 m.
Pole vault = 5, 00 m.
Javelin throw = 60,23 m.
1500 m. race = 4:27.47 sec.

- Men's hammer throw = 81,61 m.

Vadzim Dziewiatouski

- Women's shot put = 20,28 m.

Natalla Mikhnevich

- Rhythmic Gymnastics Individual All-Around

Ina Zhukava

- Men's weightlifting, 77-85 kg. = 394 kg (185+209) - OLYMPIC record

Andrei Rybakou

BRONZE:

- Rhythmic Gymnastics Group Competition

Alesia Babushkina, Hlafira Marcinovich, Anastasia Ivankova, Ksenia Zankovich, Zinaida Lunina, Alina Tumilovich

- Men's Kayak Doubles, 500m.

Vadzim Makhneu, Raman Piatrushenka

- Men's Wrestling free style, 66-74 kg.

Murad Hajdarau

- Men's hammer throw = 81,51 m.

Ivan Tsikhan

- Women's shot put = 19,86 m.

Nadzeya Astapchuk

- Men's shot put = 21,05 m.

Andrei Mikhnevich

- Rowing: Women's single sculls, time = 7:23.98

Kaciaryna Karsten

- Rowing: women's pair without coxswain

Yulia Bichyk, Natalla Helakh

- Men's Greco-Roman Wrestling, 60-66 kg.

Mikhail Siamionau

- Women's weightlifting, 48-53 kg.= 213 kg (95-118)

Nastasia Novikava

Editor's Note: An unpleasant aftertaste

Two Belarusian track-and-field athletes: hammer throwers Vadzim Dziewiatouski and Ivan Tsikhan did not pass the doping test, and subsequently had to return their medals.



*Decathlon competitors
Andrei Krauchanka - Belarus (Silver)
Brian Clay - USA (Gold)
A. Suarez - Cuba (Bronze)*



*Canoe Doubles
Bahdanovich brothers*

BATE Barysau Reached Group Stage of Champions League!

BATE held Bulgarian Levski to a 1-1 draw on 27 August in Barysau for a 2:1 on aggregate. BATE Barysau is the first Belarusian club to reach the group stage of the Champions League.

Barysau football players remained in ten in the 43th minute after dismissal of forward Bliznyuk who was shown a second yellow card by an Austrian referee.

Syarhei Sasnouski opened the scoring for the hosts after 14 minutes, Bulgarian Vladimir Gadjev drew level in the 38th minute.

Drawing procedure for the third and final qualifying round takes place tomorrow. The only thing that is clear now is that star teams of world football will come to Belarus.

Alyaksandr Hleb, who began his career in BATE, will also take part in the matches of the Champions League. His new club Barcelona won over Polish Wisla 4-1 on aggregate. The yesterday's match in Poland ended 0-1, the score was 4-0 in the first match in Barcelona. Belarusian united team's captain Alyaksandr Hleb came off the substitutes' bench in the 66th minute making his debut in the new club.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, August 28, 2008

Thoughts and Observations

Minsk's Own Version Of 'Fathers And Sons'

By Yury Drakakhrust

In the wake of a Minsk bombing earlier this month, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka fired two top aides and brought in some newcomers. But who are these people? And what do the changes really mean?

First, a word about what they don't mean. In the past, government officials — and journalists eager to pass their message along — would often paint pictures of the "evil masterminds" or the "liberal angels" of the regime. And then it would turn out that even when the onerous reactionary ideologues were toppled and the "angels" ascended — inexplicably nothing changed.

It seems unwise to think former Security Council Secretary Viktor Sheyman's fall will auger a new era of liberalism.

The new faces in the Lukashenka team are Uladzimir Makay, Yuri Zhadobin, and Vadzim Zajtseu. Although the three have very different biographies, they do have certain things in common — if one can believe the drips of information that sometimes seep out of the government's almost hermetically sealed inner sanctums.

Makay has been rumored to be among the cadre of high-ranking officials who are close to Lukashenka's son, Viktor. Zhadobin, who last year replaced Stsiapan Sakharanka as head of the KGB, has also been connected with Viktor Lukashenka.

Convenient Pretext

Of course, one would think Zhadobin, as KGB chief, also bore some security responsibilities for the Independence Day bomb blast. Yet whereas Sheyman got the ax, Zhadobin got promoted. This seems a strong indication that the explosion was merely a convenient pretext to eliminate the losers in an internal clan showdown.

After last year's reshuffle, the KGB still seems to be monitored with a scrupulous eye. Tellingly, its new chief, Ihar Rachkouski, does not come from its ranks. Instead, he is the former overseer of the border guards — and, once again, purportedly a good friend of Viktor Lukashenka.

Clan, team, generation — call it what you will. But it's evident — if we go by the available information — that the people who have now come to power did not do so solely on the basis of their professional resumes.

The recent reshuffle of cadres proves one thing: Even if the masses in Belarus do not clamor for change, change is inevitable.

The generational hypothesis is less than clear-cut. Sheyman turned 50 this year, and so has Makay. Zhadobin is four years older. So what talk can there be of a generational shift? Still, it is worth noting that those in Lukashenka Junior's immediate "clan" are all closer to his own age of 33. Deputy presidential administration chief Natalya Piatkevich is 36, youth leader Usevalad Jancheuski is 32, and the aforementioned new KGB chief Ihar Rachkouski is 40.

All of the above, it may be argued, can be described as "post-Soviet," rather than "Soviet" individuals. That doesn't make them better, but it does make them different from those who came before. They do not view Lenin and Stalin as symbols of the nation. Nor do they consider Moscow the center of the universe or socialism the shining light of humanity's future.

President Lukashenka's cynicism notwithstanding, such sentiments are an intrinsic part of his psychological makeup. But not so for younger team — which, incidentally, is rumored to have been the driving force behind the recent burst of privatization in Belarus. One might assume that now that their presumptive acolytes have filled some important positions, this process will be expedited.

Shifty And Duplicitous

Recent overtures to the West have also been described as the initiative of this younger group. Of course, the bargaining we've witnessed in the past is often shifty and duplicitous, based on the premise of giving a little in order to gain a lot. Allowing 42 opposition representatives seats on district electoral commissions, for example, makes barely a dent in the EU's list of 12 demands for democratic reform.

Be that as it may, any bargaining at all can be viewed as an effort to foster at least some dialogue. In the light of the cadre changes, these tactics will also probably continue.

The recent reshuffle of cadres proves one thing: Even if the masses in Belarus do not clamor for change, change is inevitable. And often it happens through the slow, incremental shift of generations.



Lukashenka, son Viktor

During an April 2007 press conference Alyaksandr Lukashenka [said] that neither his first- or second-born son would ever be president.

Some analysts espouse the view that all these cadre reshuffles point to an heir-apparent scenario for Viktor Lukashenka, who has been steadily promoted by his father to his present position of senior aide. It should be noted, however, that during an April 2007 press conference Alyaksandr Lukashenka himself flatly disavowed such a scheme, saying that neither his first- or second-born son (Viktor or Dzmitry) would ever be president.

"Viktor is today and will tomorrow be weaker than the current president," Lukashenka said. "Why groom someone who is weaker?"

Certainly, Lukashenka may have been being less than honest, but why would he offer up such a harsh characterization of someone he was intending to promote?

Perhaps what it comes down to is that Viktor Lukashenka, rather than being the heir apparent, is more likely the key government representative of a group of young politicians surrounding the president. And this group is exploiting the closeness that exists between father and son to promote its interests — even if those interests don't envisage posters bearing the words "Viktar for President!"

Yury Drakakhrust is a broadcaster with RFE/RL's Belarus Service. The views expressed in this commentary are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of RFE/RL

Source: RFE/RL, July 21, 2008

Belarus Prepares for Parliamentary Elections

By David Marples

Preparations for the parliamentary elections scheduled for September 28 are well under way. Chair of the Central Election Commission Lidziya Yarmoshyna has declared that the election is intended to "smash stereotypes" about Belarus (*Moscow Times*, September 14). Although some opposition parties are taking part, Charter 97, European Coalition, and the Belarusian Popular Front intend to withdraw their candidates on September 23 and hold a protest in Kastychnitskaya Square on the evening of the September 28.

Following Belarus's release of the last designated political prisoner Alyaksandr Kazulin last month, the European Union has declared its readiness to ease sanctions, provided that the September 28 vote is conducted in a democratic fashion. The EU imposed a visa ban on 41 of Belarus's leading officials in 2006, and declared both Yarmoshyna and President Alyaksandr Lukashenka *personae non gratae* (*EU Observer*, September 16). Despite some reticence—Czech Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexandr Vondra said that the Czech Republic would not back the immediate lifting of sanctions, for example (*www.naviny.by*, September 16)—the Europeans seem prepared to adopt a more conciliatory attitude to the Lukashenka regime.

The Belarusian authorities have noted the positive response of the electorate toward the elections. A survey in late August suggested that 79.6 percent of the respondents knew about the elections and a further 14.5 percent had "heard about them." The director of the Information-Analytical Center with the Administration of the President of Belarus, Aleh Praleskouski, commented that 84.6 percent of those polled intended to vote in the elections (62.2 percent had made a firm decision to do so), a figure that has hardly varied since last May. Less than 10 percent, on the other, hand, declared their intention not to take part (*SB Belarus' Segodnya*, September 16). Similarly, 54.3 percent of the respondents were satisfied with procedures for advance voting (very common in Belarus), 29.4 percent had neither positive nor negative sentiments, and only

12.9 percent were negative (*Belorusskoe telegrafnoe agentstvo*, September 16).

On September 12 Yarmoshyna reported that of 279 registered candidates for the 110 seats, 89 were representatives of political parties (31 percent), including 63 from the opposition: 23 from the United Civic Party, 15 from the Popular Front, 13 from the two Communist parties (the Communist Party of Belarus, however, is pro-government), and 11 from the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada). The leader of the rival wing of the Social Democrats, Stanislau Shushkevich, is running as their sole candidate (*Belorussy i Rynok*, September 15-22).

The media is at pains to point out the "normal procedure" of the election campaign. One typical report related how the Brest city government had permitted Social Democrat candidate Ihar Maslowski to hold rallies at different locations and is reportedly meeting with voters in factories and going from door-to-door without hindrance (*BelaPAN*, September 15).

In many respects, however, the campaign is notable for similarities with the past. Opposition parties may have candidates running but they are practically excluded from the election commissions that run the process and count the votes. Of the 111 people running from the United Civic Party in Brest region, for example, only seven members were nominated for the commissions (*Politika*, August 13). In contrast to the statements by Yarmoshyna, apathy in single-candidate constituencies signifies that the candidate is unlikely to receive the necessary total of 50 percent of the possible votes; and repeat elections are likely (*Belorussy i Rynok*, September 15-22). On September 16 riot police violently dispersed an unsanctioned opposition rally in central Minsk, commemorating the ninth anniversary of the abduction of politician Viktor Hanchar and businessman Anatol Krasouski. Those assaulted included United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka, a parliamentary candidate. The police tore up European and the national white-red-white flags on display (*www.charter97.org*, September 16).

At a press conference on September 16, Zmitser Bandarenka, one of the leaders of the "European Belarus" campaign, urged voters not to listen to politicians from East or West but to boycott the contest and take part in the protest on the square. Also present was Lyavon Barcheuski, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, which is also backing the boycott. Zyanon Paznyak, leader of the rival Christian Conservative Party of the Belarusian Popular Front, has endorsed the boycott and says that European states are deceiving themselves into believing that a democratic election is taking place (*www.charter97.org*, September 15 and 16).

A member of the United Civic Party from Vitsebsk, Volha Karach, has denounced those supporting a boycott, singling out Charter 97 in particular. She bemoans the betrayal of supporters who have risked their jobs and suffered intimidation by working for opposition candidates, and she says that those who choose to back out cannot expect public support in the future. In her view, the United Democratic Forces is being hijacked by Charter 97, which she says is neither a party nor a public organization. She mocks the

neither a party nor a public organization. She mocks the view that boycotting the election can lead to a political dialogue and “real elections” in future, commenting that the only beneficiaries will be pro-government candidates who gain office without competition (*Politika*, September 17).

For the Lukashenka regime, the benefits of a more positive international press are considerable at a time of tension with Russia. The campaign can hardly be described as democratic, however. Although the new parliament may contain a few token opposition figures, it will remain a rubber-stamp assembly in the hands of the president. As for the opposition, there are bitter divisions over the issue of a boycott, and the unity exhibited in the 2006 presidential elections is sadly lacking.

Source: The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 18, 2008

Despite Protests, Lukashenka Signs Restrictive Media Law

New York, August 5, 2008—The Committee to Protect Journalists is troubled to learn that President Alexander Lukashenko has signed a restrictive new media law, which, according to CPJ research, will allow authorities to further restrict press freedom in Belarus.

The Belarusian parliament—before its adjournment in late June—rushed the bill through in three consecutive readings and passed it to the Constitutional Court for review. According to the local press, the court rubberstamped the bill in July and Lukashenko signed it into law on Monday.

Concerned with the draconian measures, CPJ [sent a letter](#) to President Lukashenko in June calling on him to scrap the proposal. Among other provisions, the law equates the Internet with regular media, making sites subject to the same restrictions; bans local media from accepting foreign donations; allows local and state authorities to shutter independent publications for minor violations; and requires accreditation for all foreign journalists working in the country.

“Not content with controlling traditional media, with this legislation, Belarus is now seeking to restrict online publications,” said CPJ Deputy Director Robert Mahoney. “We urge President Lukashenko to reconsider this repressive new law and, in the meantime, use his influence to ensure that its most restrictive provisions not be used to stifle critical journalists.”

Andrei Bastunets, a lawyer with the Minsk-based Belarusian Association of Journalists, told CPJ he was not surprised that Lukashenko signed the bill, since it was initiated and controlled by the president’s office. “We knew that he [Lukashenko] would sign it, yet hoped he would finally listen and respond to calls coming from local groups and international press advocates,” Bastunets told CPJ. “Unfortunately, Belarusian authorities are deaf to foreign calls, so now we have to deal with the reality and hope for a dialogue on the issue of Internet regulation.”

The new media law places control over the Internet-based media in the hands of the Council of Ministers. Bastunets told CPJ that the law does not define what qualifies as Internet-based media and leaves room for interpretation to state officials. “They seem to have no idea how to approach the Internet, so now we have a mess as according to the law, any Web site could be considered mass media,” Bastunets told CPJ.

In June, the local press quoted presidential administration representative Natalya Petkevich as saying that the new media bill is not restrictive but aims at “bringing discipline and setting the rules” for the local media. According to the news Web site *Telegraf*, Petkevich said, “only Internet analogues of printed media will be regulated by the new law.”

Aside from Internet control, the new media law also requires Belarusian and international journalists to seek individual accreditation from multiple state agencies, creating further hurdles. It also obliges Belarusian media to seek re-registration from state authorities—a process that could be fatal for outlets critical of state officials.

Additionally, under the new law, the Ministry of Information receives broad authority to suspend media outlets; the ministry and state prosecutors are given the authority to shut down outlets permanently. These state agencies can suspend or close the outlets if they find their content to be inaccurate, defamatory, “not corresponding to reality,” or “threatening the interests of the state or the public.” The bill leaves the interpretation of these terms in the hands of state authorities.

CPJ is a New York-based, independent, nonprofit organization that works to safeguard press freedom worldwide. For more information visit www.cpj.org.

Businessman Fined for Speaking Belarusian

Ales Taustyka, a businessman from the Zhdanovichy market has been fined 140,000 rubles for... speaking Belarusian.

“I was told that a woman filed a complaint against me to a regional tax inspection for my speaking in an incomprehensible language with customers,” told the businessman to *Narodnaya Volya*.

“As far as I can figure out, “incomprehensible language” is Belarusian, and I always speak Belarusian. The complaint was forwarded to the district tax inspection, but I wasn’t allowed to read it. I was fined 140,000 rubles. Under some rules they have a right to adopt such decisions.

The explanation was as follows: for an inappropriate way of talking to a customer. But that woman was not buying anything from me at all. It was just a person who came and started to swear and insult me. If it were a man, my conversation and actions would be completely different, I must say...”

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, August 17, 2008

Why Did Lukashenka Pardon His Toughest Opponent?

By Jan Maksymiuk

Last week President Alyaksandr Lukashenka signed an act of clemency for political prisoner Alyaksandr Kazulin.

Kazulin, who had been serving a 5 1/2-year sentence since March 2006, said in a written statement that he does not accept his pardon on moral grounds, and demands full rehabilitation plus compensation of 2 million euros from the state.

In February of this year, Kazulin was allowed to leave prison to attend the funeral of his wife, who died after a battle with breast cancer. It became known at that time 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.

Both Kazulin and his wife refused to accept this condition.

Lukashenka's current pardon was welcomed by a number of Western officials as an auspicious step of the Belarusian regime toward normalizing Minsk's relations with the West.

'Step In The Right Direction'

Lluís Maria de Puig, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), said that for his organization, "bringing Belarus into the fold of European democracies is a priority and the release of political prisoners an unfaltering demand." De Puig added that Kazulin's liberation is a "step in the right direction."

Andrea Rigoni, PACE rapporteur on Belarus, said Kazulin's release "is revealing of the dynamics within the Belarusian leadership and of the willingness of at least part of it to engage in a dialogue with European institutions and to respond positively to their demands."

Jonathan Moore, charge d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that Kazulin's pardon is an "important step" which, if followed by more "positive steps" on the part of the Belarusian government, could significantly repair relations between Washington in Minsk. Following a series of mutual expulsions in a bitter diplomatic row, Moore is now in charge of a skeleton staff of five U.S. diplomats in Minsk.

Belarusian human rights defender Ales Byalyatski, vice president of the International Federation of Human Rights, said that both Belarusian and international human right watchdogs should take credit for the liberation of Kazulin.

"It is a common achievement of Belarusian human right defenders and various foreign structures, both governmental and nongovernmental," Byalyatski said. "We also contributed our part, so for me this news was cause for a lot of joy. I'd like this trend to be continued after Kazulin because there are two more political prisoners [in Belarus]."

Return To Politics

The two mentioned by Byalyatski are Andrey Kim and Syarhey Parsyukevich. In April, Kim was sentenced to 18

months in prison for allegedly attacking a police officer during a protest in January. Parsyukevich received a 30-month sentence for allegedly beating a guard while serving a 15-day sentence for the same protest.

Kazulin postponed a press conference on his pardon until August 20. But in the meantime he met with a number of opposition politicians, including Social Democrat Mikalay Statkevich.

Statkevich told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that Kazulin is going to return to politics, despite the fact that earlier this month he was dismissed from the post of chairman of the opposition Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada).



Kazulin after release

"Certainly, Mr. Kazulin, even without the official post of leader of his party, is already an [important] factor in Belarusian politics," Statkevich said. "It is up to him how he is going to dispose of his potential that he gained thanks to his courage."

Kazulin is generally seen as the most radical and uncompromising of all prominent opposition leaders in Belarus.

During the 2006 presidential campaign, in which he ran as a candidate, Kazulin -- in an appearance on state-run television -- accused Lukashenka of leading an immoral personal life. He disclosed that the incumbent president had a mistress and a young son from the relationship, while the nominal first lady had been living in a provincial city since Lukashenka's inauguration in 1994.

In March, during an opposition rally, Kazulin called on demonstrators to go to a prison holding several hundred protesters incarcerated in the wake of the presidential campaign. He was arrested during that march, charged with hooliganism and disorderly conduct, and imprisoned.

Why Now?

Why did Lukashenka decide to free Kazulin now, after missing an excellent opportunity earlier this year, when he released several other political prisoners and seemed to be willing to enter into a significant dialogue with the West?

The current timing for taking such a step seems to be very good, and Lukashenka is known for his instinctive ability to exploit any ripple in international politics to his advantage.

First, there is the Russian-Georgian conflict over South Ossetia, which is poised to bring another icy period in relations between Russia and the West. Although purportedly building a union state with Russia, Lukashenka neglected to offer Moscow even the slightest verbal support in the first week of the war -- an omission that, in the post-Soviet neighborhood, spoke volumes.

Meeting on August 19 with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Lukashenka hastily backtracked, effusively praising Russia for its "wisdom... at the time of aggression" and for bringing "peace" to the region. But his initial silence, like Kazulin's pardon, could be interpreted as a "pro-Western" signal to the world.

Second, Kazulin's release, at least for Western observers, overshadowed the fact that polling-station commissions for Belarus's September parliamentary elections were formed by Belarusian authorities with only symbolic participation of the opposition.

The opposition, which maintains that most electoral falsifications are made at the level of polling-station commissions, proposed some 1,300 candidates for these commissions, while the authorities accepted fewer than 50. According to opposition parties, the upcoming parliamentary ballot will most likely be similar to previous parliamentary campaigns, when it was completely impossible to verify election results.

The opposition suspects that by offering clemency to Kazulin, Lukashenka may be inviting the West to finally recognize the way he has become used to holding electoral campaigns in Belarus.

Source: RFE/RL, August 19, 2008

Construction Time Bomb

Construction of dwelling houses without taking into account modern energy saving technologies "is a time bomb for our state," head of the National Bank Pyotr Prakapovich said.

"We are planting a time bomb for whom we are building houses without taking into account modern energy saving technologies," P. Prakapovich said at the session of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers on Tuesday in Minsk during the discussion of fulfilling of Lukashenka's directive #3 on energy saving, Interfax reports.

By his estimate, in particular, the technologies often used in Belarus lag far behind those used in the rest of the world - from the point of view of energy saving. "A house lives for 50-100 years," the head of the National Bank said, suggesting to think what negative effect for economy may these houses bring in the future. He also emphasised the local authorities and building organisations didn't want to solve these issues in spite of focusing on this topic. P. Prakapovich also stressed that this approach in the construction and other spheres would lead to investment and innovation lag.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, August 26, 2008

Elections for Leverage with EU

By Balazs Jarabik and Alastair Rabagliati

A bomb that exploded during an Independence Day celebration attended by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka may mark the beginning of the end of Belarus' era as a mini, updated version of the Soviet Union.

Belarus has only one political option, one (state-controlled) economy, and one leader. During Lukashenka's 14-year tenure he has been able to charge a large part of the bill for that system to Russia.

However, in the days after his "re-election" in 2006, Gazprom announced a gradual gas price increase, and Russia started to collect duties on crude oil at the Belarusian border. Lukashenka suddenly found he was not only out of contact and isolated from the West but also out of Russian money.

Nevertheless, from of this no-man's land he has been able to gradually maneuver his country between East and West - attempting to take as many benefits as possible from both. Without introducing any major reforms, although introducing some slightly more liberal regulations, Minsk is working hard to attract private investment. Without making any serious political concessions, Minsk is influencing a change in the policy of the European Union that could lead to the de facto acceptance of Lukashenka by Europe. He needs to clear one hurdle, however: the parliamentary elections on 28 September.

Belarusian authorities have been taking advantage of Brussels' desire to engage them. Although the 12 points of the European Commission (from the "What the European Union EU Could Bring to Belarus" report of November 2006) are still in force, the office of EU foreign policy representative Javier Solana has managed to strike a five-point "memorandum of understanding" on the main conditions for restarting a deeper dialogue and engagement with Belarus. These conditions include that that opposition would have their candidates registered, their representatives would be included in the election commissions, campaign meetings would be allowed, and opposition representatives would be present in the new parliament. In addition Minsk, through its ambassador in Brussels, has promised to release former presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin from prison just before the elections.

There are signs that Minsk is moving toward fulfilling these conditions, although it is yet to be seen whether all will be fulfilled (notably the release of Kazulin) and what Brussels will consider sufficient opposition representation in parliament. Of particular interest will be whether Minsk will allow duly elected opposition representatives in Parliament, or whether Lukashenka will simply select them.

Paradoxically this agreement might mean that Belarus, for the first time since the flawed 1996 referendum created an all-powerful presidential system, could meet some key Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe election commitments by allowing opposition groups a seat on the electoral commissions. While such an election

may still be far from genuinely democratic, opposition representation would mark a verifiable improvement in Belarusian politics.

Another paradox is that while the opposition is, at least on paper, well prepared for these elections, it may end up boycotting them and seeking instead to maintain the status quo. The United Democratic Forces – albeit with Alexander Milinkevich's For Freedom Movement outside of the process – was able for the first time to agree on a unified list of 110 candidates, one for each electoral district. But the opposition groups have identified four conditions for their continued participation in the election and threaten to withdraw if these are not met.

Two of these conditions -- registration of nominees as candidates and inclusion of representatives in election commissions at all levels -- are relatively verifiable, while one of the others -- proper conditions for campaigning -- can be very subjective. Signs are that the opposition will be represented on only one-third of the constituency election commissions, illustrating that the authorities may only be paying lip-service to the EU conditions. This means that discussion of a boycott is likely to continue through the election campaign and is liable to overshadow the opposition's campaign message.

NO TIME FOR A BOYCOTT

If ever, now is the time when the opposition should run its campaign without fear of the elections results, especially as there is a chance that the votes will actually be counted. Should the opposition instead choose to boycott the vote, it could become completely discredited both at home and in Brussels. Such a last-minute boycott, especially if the EU conditions were met, could render the opposition irrelevant while the regime gets a green light for deeper engagement with Brussels. This would likely lead to agreement with Belarus on a European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan and taking high-ranking officials, including perhaps eventually Lukashenka himself, off the EU visa ban list.

Moves to meet the EU conditions may also be more likely following the fallout from the 3 July bomb blast, which wounded more than 50 people, with Lukashenka taking the opportunity to fire two of his most senior hard-line officials.

Both Viktor Sheiman, chairman of the Security Council, and Henadz Nyavyhlas, head of the Presidential Administration, were sacked on 8 July. They were considered the old guard who were perceived as obstructing rapprochement with the West. While Sheiman was a core part of Lukashenka's team since 1994 and chairman of his election campaigns, he was heavily implicated in the political disappearances of the late 1990s. As a result he was placed on the first EU visa-ban list and was known to be very hostile to the West and a serious obstruction to dialogue.

The old guards are losing ground to an emerging group of technocrats led by Prime Minister Sergey Sidorsky and backed by Lukashenka's son Viktor. Indeed, the new heads of the Security Council and Presidential Administration, Yury Zhadobin and Uladzimir Makey, are directly loyal to the president and his son.

The sacking of senior officials was a very strong indication that the different parts of the bureaucracy are fighting one another for power and influence, and that the Lukashenkas are not in full control of the domestic situation. There are also reports that the security services are demoralized and that rival agents may have been behind the Minsk bombing.

Meanwhile, the authorities are using the bombing to carry on their usual tactics of harassing the opposition, sparking fear among potential opponents, and discouraging any opposition activity. Even though Lukashenka said he would not "tighten the screws" on them, the government mouthpiece newspaper Belarus Sevodnya blamed the opposition for inspiring the attack, and numerous arrests of opposition activists have followed.

As all these events unfurl, Moscow is monitoring the changes in Minsk. Belarus continues to pay \$119 per 1,000 cubic meters for gas supplied by Gazprom, despite the agreement on a formula to increase prices for gas supplies to Belarus. Revisions to the agreement have meant that there was only a \$9 increase for this year, although Moscow may push that higher after the elections. The softening of its policy since 2006 is a clear signal, nevertheless, of the sensitivity of Moscow toward Minsk, especially at a time when Lukashenka is in open dispute with the United States. This gives Lukashenka further leverage in his tactics, increasing his ability to use the West in its negotiations with Moscow and vice versa.

The key question is whether Minsk is willing or able to take steps toward relatively normal elections. Insiders know that the United States was engaged with Minsk earlier this year in a similar process to the one the EU is now. However the U.S. offer to open up relations if political prisoners were released failed as the authorities refused to free Kazulin. Washington held its ground and introduced "clarifications" to its previous sanctions on the state-owned oil exporter Belneftekhim. This led to the recent high-profile diplomatic row and the reduction of staff in the U.S. Embassy.

Lukashenka clearly needs the EU, but there is no guarantee – similarly to the engagement with the United States -- that Belarus will fulfill its obligations. His vision of Belarus, being in between East and West and taking full benefit from both, is unlikely to change. However, Lukashenka's mission to achieve de facto acceptance from the West plays well with the growing influence of the pro-Western technocrats.

Therefore, the EU must be prepared to react swiftly. It should have a plan in place on how to react if there are verifiable improvements in the election process, but it should not compromise if its conditions are not met. Brussels must be prepared to further isolate Belarus if there is no progress in elections.

But Brussels also must be careful not to isolate the opposition in a dash to engage the Belarusian authorities. The EU should reward only a credible process, not a farce where Lukashenka selects a small number of opposition representatives to sit in parliament just to keep the EU happy, playing divide and rule within the opposition in the

process. For their part, the opposition factions must stay in the race. A boycott of the polls would allow Lukashenka to declare a transparent election without any danger of his critics being elected.

If there is legitimate progress in the elections, that will be the real shock in Belarus. But we should learn a lesson from the recent bombing in Minsk and not trust that everything is really the way it is presented. After all, this is still and will remain Lukashenkaland.

Balazs Jarabik is the Kyiv-based representative of the Pact for Belarus and Ukraine, associate fellow of FRIDE in Madrid and senior associate at the Democratization Policy Council in Washington. Alastair Rabagliati is the author of numerous analyses on developments in Belarus. He works for the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

Source: TransitionsOnLine, July 18, 2008

Mass Interrogation in Minsk.

Militia officers visit Minsk dwellers at home in the connection with July 4 blast. Minsk dwellers should answer the questions on a special form. The Charter'97 press center offers the text of the form.

Respondents must indicate their name and surname, their education, dates of graduation, place of work and their position at work, the address of their registration and residence, numbers of their home, work and cell phones.

Militiamen are also interested in what a respondent knows about persons who:

- are interested, produce or keep explosive agents, pyrotechnics, homemade explosive devices (firecrackers, squibs and so on);
- carry on unauthorised digging on sites of WWII military operations to find and sell ammunition and arms;
- possess knowledge and skills in chemistry, that may be used to commit offences using pyrotechnical devices;
- extract opium with acetone, are interested in purchasing large amount of hydric dioxide;
- say they want to explode or warn that a blast might happen;
- were at the concert and were eyewitnesses to the crime.

It should be noted that a militiaman, who files the form, must write whether he is certain of a respondent's sincerity. Variants of answers are "yes" or "no."

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, July 19, 2008

Assessing the Minsk Explosion

By David Marples

At 12:30 A.M. on July 4, when thousands of Minsk residents were attending a concert to commemorate the official Independence Day (July 3) near the monument to the "Hero City," a bomb exploded injuring 54 people. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who designated July 3 as the official annual holiday celebrating the day in 1944 when Minsk was freed from German occupation by the Red Army, was present at the ceremonies and concert, although he was not close to the explosion area (Belorusy i Rynok, July 7-14).



A second, larger bomb had been found earlier at the site and there are unconfirmed reports that a third was discovered afterward. Astonishingly, the concert continued until 2:00 A.M., despite the casualties and evident danger. On July 4 the Belarusian TV program "Panorama" devoted only three minutes to the event, and not until two days later did it become the main news item in Belarus (*Svobodnye Novosti Plus*, July 9-16), although it had captured major headlines worldwide.

Initially, the authorities reacted cautiously. The incident was investigated as an act of "hooliganism" (Article 330 of the Criminal Code), and the president declared that there would be no crackdown on the opposition as a result. Several days later, however, he dismissed two leading officials, charging them with failure to prevent the attack: Viktor Sheiman, state secretary of the Security Council and a former head of the presidential administration, and Sheiman's successor in the latter post, Henadz Nyavyhlas (www.naviny.by, July 8). Sheiman is widely believed to have been responsible for the disappearances of several prominent statesmen and activists in 1999 and 2000, including Viktor Hanchar, Yuri Zakharanka, Anatol Krasouski, and Dzmitry Zavadski.

The dismissals indicate that the event has been upgraded from an act of "hooliganism" to one of terrorism. Lukashenka has been at odds with Sheiman for some time and promoted his own son Viktor to a more prominent role as presidential aide on national security (EDM, December 6, 2004). In other words, the explosion may have provided a pretext for a long-anticipated change. Nevertheless, the focus on Nyavyhlas as well reflects the more serious attitude adopted belatedly by the Belarusian leadership.

Despite Lukashenka's initial statement about a moderate official response, numerous opposition activists were arrested and detained for periods of up to 10 days; all but one had been released by July 20 (Interfax, July 20). The apartment of the secretary of Batskaushchyna (Fatherland), Nina Shydlouskaya, was searched; and the head of the United Civic Party, Anatol Lyabedzka, reported that several opposition figures had been summoned to militia headquarters for questioning (www.charter97.org, July 8). Such maneuvers have developed into a familiar ritual in Belarus, but they explain little.

Two key questions remain unanswered: who planted the bombs and why?

Analyst Valery Karbalevich cited and rejected a statement by leader of the unofficial Communist Party Syarhey Kalyakin that the Belarusian authorities could have been behind the explosion. He noted that the opposition was not currently a serious threat to the government and therefore such a provocation as an excuse for a crackdown would be unlikely. The tragedy undermines Lukashenka's constant assertions about building a peaceful society in Belarus free of civil strife, and it raises serious questions about the country's stability (*Svobodnye Novosti Plus*, July 9-16).

As for the opposition, various analysts point out that it is incapable either to create such explosive devices or to plant them amid lines of militia and security forces assembled for the July 3 events. Nor would assembling such a device in any way aid the opposition, which supports democratic practices and would not want to alienate its supporters in the West through terrorist tactics.

Karbalevich also discussed and dismissed a second theory that the incident reflected an internal power struggle (*Svobodnye Novosti Plus*, July, 9-16). Other analysts also speculate on a rift between a pro-European faction within the government and an opposing group that would prefer the president to reject the initiatives coming from Brussels in particular (*ODB, Belarus Headlines*, June 22-July 9). Possibly, the July 4 incident was perpetrated by a group rather than an individual, as the bombs were planted in different locations. There is, however, little hard evidence to support this line of thought.

By July 9 four people had been detained: Syarhey Chyslau, Ihar Korsak, Viktor Lyashchinski, and Miraslau Lazouski (AFP, July 9). All are members of a nationalist group known as the White Legion, part of the youth wing of an organization banned in 1999 called the Belarusian Union of Military Personnel (BUMP). Chyslau, the group's leader, lives in Moscow and has reportedly spoken of his preference for violent methods to attain authentic independence for Belarus. The Russian FSB is assisting in the investigation. However, the head of the "For Freedom" movement, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, maintains that the focus of the White Legion's activities is sports and the study of history and language, not terrorism (*Kommersant*, July 11). All four BUMP members were released by July 18 (www.naviny.by, July 18).

Terrorist incidents have occurred before in Belarus. In September 2005 there were two explosions less than nine

days apart at different locations in Vitsebsk, when home-made devices injured more than 50 people. A so-called "Belarusian Liberation Army" claimed responsibility, but no court case ever materialized (*Belorussiy i Rynok*, July 7-14).

The most recent bomb, made out of nuts and bolts, appears to have been intended to injure rather than kill people. From the authorities' perspective, however, the worrying factor is that an organization or group penetrated the security cordons of an official celebration with impunity; and the implication is that if the goal had been to assassinate or severely injure the president, then such an outcome could have been achieved.

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

HISTORICAL DATES

August 5, 1506

Anniversary of the **Battle of Kletsak**, when the military force of the Grand Duchy of Litva, led by hetman Mikhal Hlinski, defeated a numerically superior Crimean Tatar army.

August 6, 1517

Francis Skaryna of Polatsak printed the first book in Belarusian - the Bible - in Prague.

August 9, 1910

Birthdate of the Belarusian poetess **Larysa Hieniyush**, in the town of Zelva.



Larysa Hieniyush

August 14, 1385

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

September 2-29, 1621

Anniversary of the **Battle of Khotsin**, when the 70,000 strong united army of the Republic of Two Nations (Grand Duchy of Litva and Poland), under the leadership of Litva's top hetman Jan Karol Khadkievich defeated the Turk-Tatar forces of 220,000 men.

September 8, 1514

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

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

Belarus Responds Cautiously To Georgian Crisis

By David Marples

One of the features of the Russia-Georgia conflict has been the sluggish support Russia has received from its allies. Perhaps most notable has been the reaction in Minsk, where the government of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has acted ambivalently and still appears to be vacillating on the wisest course of action.

Belarusian Television, as well as the official media, greeted the news that war had broken out in Tsinkhvali with silence. For several days most residents of Belarus received newsfeeds about events only from the Russian television channels. Even investigative programs like Panorama failed to give the war a mention.

On August 12, four days after the conflict began, Aleksandr Surikov, Russia's ambassador to Belarus, commented angrily on what he termed the "incomprehensible silence" of official Minsk with regard to the Russian-Georgian war. Despite the fact that Russia had always backed Belarus, particularly during its international isolation based on its treatment of opposition leaders, Belarus had not supported Russia's position in the war, nor had it offered aid or sanctuary to troops and civilians from South Ossetia who were injured or homeless (Reuters, Aug 12).

The Russian on-line newspaper *Vzglyad* likewise termed Belarus' reaction a "betrayal" of its close ally and seemed particularly incensed with a call for an end to the conflict and the laying down of arms by both sides by a Belarusian media spokesperson (<http://vz.ru/politics/2008/8/13/196365.html>). Surikov noted that only a minor official from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry had provided a statement concerning Belarus' response. In the main organ of the president, the newspaper *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, a balanced article by Ihar Kalchenka called for an end to the armed conflict and a peaceful solution (*SB Belarus' Segodnya*, Aug 9).

However, at a previously scheduled meeting with Russian president Dmitry Medvedev at Sochi on August 19, Lukashenka decided to offer support to Russia. He thanked the Russians for "establishing peace in the Caucasus" and declared that Russia's thrust into Georgia did not constitute an act of war. Rather it was a calm response that led to peace in the region. Everything was done, he commented, "excellently, very calmly, wisely, and beautifully" (krasivo). The two countries then announced that they would sign an agreement on a unified air defense system later in the fall (*Belorusy i Rynok*, Aug 25- Sept 1).

After Medvedev ratified the Russian Duma's decision to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Lukashenka sent a message to Moscow, stating that with the situation getting ever more complex, the only moral choice for Russia was to support South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, he did not offer recognition from Minsk and went on to say that it would be expedient to examine the issue of the two regions' independence at the forthcoming meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in Moscow on September 5 (BelaPAN, Aug 28), along with the other members of the organization: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Russian news agencies then reported that although to date no countries had followed Medvedev's appeal to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Belarusian authorities intended to do so "in the next day or two." Almost instantaneously, a government source in Minsk issued a statement that no further comment would be forthcoming from the Belarusian side (*RIA Novosti*, Aug 28, Reuters, Aug 28). In other words, Belarus has stopped short thus far of recognizing the breakaway regions.

On August 16, just over a week after the conflict began, Lukashenka issued a pardon for the last remaining designated political prisoner, Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was detained at a penal colony in Vitsebsk region, having served just over two years of a 5.5 year sentence. Kazulin immediately appealed to the United States and the European Union not to commence a new dialogue with Belarus based on his release, and noted the difficulties to which he and his family had been subject. Though awarded a pardon by the president personally he had signed no document nor had he been aware of the nature of his release. Further his conviction was not revoked (www.charter97.org, Aug 16; www.naviny.by, Aug 20).

The release of Kazulin and the nebulous Belarusian position on the Russia-Georgia conflict suggest that the government of Lukashenka is hoping for a relaxation of applied US sanctions on its oil processing company Belnaf-takhim, as well as closer cooperation with the EU through its Eastern Neighborhood program. Such concessions could not be forthcoming if Belarus were to take an unequivocal position alongside Russia with regard to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Adding to Belarus' dilemma is the planned construction of a US anti-missile base in Poland, which Lukashenka has strongly opposed, and at the same time the need to reach a modified agreement with Russia on a new \$2 billion loan as well as gas prices, which some sources fear could rise to \$200. Russia has also demanded frequently that the two countries should switch to the use of a single currency, i.e. the Russian rouble (*Kommersant*, Aug 20). Thus the authorities are conducting a balancing act, not wishing to offend either Russia or the West.

Lukashenka has assured Medvedev that Belarus remains a close friend and supporter of Russia (BELTA, Aug 28). However, Belarus' position in reality is that of reluctant partner of Russian adventurism. As one writer noted, the republic would likely be the first casualty of a new Cold War and be incorporated into a new imperial Russia (*Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, Aug 26).

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 2, 2008.

Quotes of Quarter

Comment by **RODGER POTOCKI**, NED director for Europe and Eurasia during the Helsinki Commission Hearing on Sept. 16, 2008.

"Lukashenka wants a 'quiet election' that will advertise 'progress' on several fronts and can be sold to the West, while still producing the predictable outcome"

U.S. Drops Some Sanctions Against Belarus

By Mike Scollon

MINSK -- Washington has dangled a carrot in front of the Belarusian authorities by dropping sanctions against two firms just ahead of the country's September 28 parliamentary elections.

The move to drop the sanctions for six months appears to be a reward for Minsk's release of a prominent political prisoner last month, but stops short of giving one of the country's largest exporters a clean slate or dropping visa restrictions.

The sanctions imposed in May against two companies belonging to one of Belarus's largest exporting concerns have been dropped for now, but Washington will be looking for further political reforms from Minsk before taking additional steps.

The two joint-stock companies -- Lakokraska, a paint and varnish manufacturer, and Polotsk Steklovolokno, a fiberglass maker -- belong to Belarus's massive oil-products firm Belneftekhim, which brings in approximately one-third of the country's foreign-currency earnings. Sanctions remain on a number of Belneftekhim's entities.

Release of Political Prisoners

The move comes after Belarus released a number of political prisoners in recent months, and following the country's lukewarm support for Russia following its recent military action in Georgia.

Aleksey Yanukevich, deputy head of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that the move came because of the release of political prisoners.

"The response by the United States is, in my opinion, smart and limited in time -- because the sanctions are suspended for six months. This gives the Lukashenko regime an opportunity to make a step toward democratization of the country," Yanukevich said.

"If there is no such step, and it is possible, then the United States will bring back the sanctions and maybe will introduce additional ones."

Significantly, last month saw the release of Alyaksandr Kazulin, an opposition politician who was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison in March 2006 for organizing protest rallies after President Alyaksandr Lukashenko was reelected to a third term as president.

Washington had long sought the release of Kazulin, who ran unsuccessfully against Lukashenko in the election considered to be fraudulent by the United States and the European Union.

United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka told RFE/RL's Belarus Service on September 5 that more "positive" steps from the West can be expected if the country's upcoming parliamentary elections are conducted relatively fairly.

"Now the ball is in the Belarusian authorities' court. They need to demonstrate that they can change the

situation by changing their behavior. Their first test will be on September 28 [when they can show] that they count the votes fairly and that participants in the election campaign and monitors are involved in the process of monitoring the vote count," Lyabedzka said.

U.S. Pressure

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Merkel traveled to Minsk in late August to discuss ways of improving the United States' strained relations with Belarus. AP reported that the envoy made clear to the Belarusian authorities that the conduct of the September 28 polls would be a key consideration in whether sanctions and visa restrictions imposed against Belarus would be dropped.

A State Department spokesman told the news agency that the United States wants Belarus to allow the return of diplomats who were kicked out of the country earlier this year after increased sanctions were imposed against Minsk.

The Office of Foreign Assets Control, which oversees the U.S. Treasury Department's Belarus Sanctions Program, said in a statement September 5 that while Lakokraska and Polotsk Steklovolokno would be allowed to resume transactions with U.S. entities for a period of 180 days, all property and interests of the two companies that were previously blocked by the United States will remain blocked.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 05,

HISTORICAL DATES

September 27, 1605

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

November 2 - Remembrance Day (Dziady)

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

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

November 1830 through 1831

The national liberation uprising against the Russian empire and for the renewal of the *Recpaspalitaja* (Republic) of Two Nations (Poland and Litva)

November 1st through December 31, 1920

The Anti-Bolshevik Slucak Uprising

Anti-Bolshevik military action in the region of Slucak, organized by representatives of the Belarusian Democratic [National] Republic.

NEWS BRIEFS

July 4, 2008

Dozens hurt in Belarus bomb blast

At least 50 people have been injured in Belarus after a bomb exploded during a concert in the capital, Minsk. The event was taking place in the centre of the city to mark the ex-Soviet nation's independence day. President Alexander Lukashenko, whose rule has been denounced as autocratic by the US and the European Union, was attending the concert.

Police later found an unexploded device in Minsk, Russia's Interfax news agency quoted the interior ministry as saying. There is no clear motive for the attack, but police say it may have been an act of "hooliganism". The explosion happened just after midnight local time (2100 GMT), as thousands of people were gathered for a concert at a war memorial in the capital.

Dmitry Kudyakov, 32, said he felt a strong shockwave and saw smoke. "People started crying. Some fell on me and there was a lot of blood," he told the Associated Press news agency.

Screws and bolts have been found at the scene, leading officials to speculate that the device was a home-made bomb.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, BBC

July 8, 2008

Belarusian Activist Forced To Strip By Police; She Calls Experience 'Torture'

Alesya Yasyuk, an activist of the opposition Belarusian Social Democratic Party, complained to RFE/RL's Belarus Service on July 7 that the previous day she was subject to a brutal and humiliating treatment by police in Minsk.

Yasyuk, who lives in Barysau, a city some 60 kilometers east of the Belarusian capital, was arrested in Minsk on June 6 by police officers who found in her bag several stickers calling for a boycott of parliamentary elections due in September.

Yasyuk was taken to a police station where she was stripped naked by a female police officer, while two male officers filmed with a video camera. Yasyuk demanded that the cameramen leave the room, but no one heeded her. On the contrary, the police officers reportedly threatened to take her to a prison and put her into a cell with vagrants.

Yasyuk spent six hours at the police station and was released without any formal paperwork. She told RFE/RL that she was in a state of shock and called what happened to her at the police station a case of "torture."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

July 9, 2008

Sheiman and Nyavyhla dismissed

Alyaksandr Lukashenko relieved State Secretary of the Security Council Viktor Sheiman and head of his administration Henadz Nyavyhla of their posts.

On 8 July the head of state signed a decree to relieve Viktor Sheiman of the post of the State Secretary of the Security Council and Henadz Nyavyhla of the post of the head of the Presidential Administration, Interfax reports referring to Lukashenko's press service.

It is reported that both Sheiman and Nyavyhla were relieved of duties "in connection with the transfer to another job".

It should be reminded that Lukashenko criticised State Secretary of the Security Council at a meeting with the heads

of secret services on investigation bomb explosion on 4 July. "I don't think, you Mr Uladzimir, should take this position after the incident. It is you who are blame first of all," A. Lukashenko said.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

July 24, 2008

Venezuelan Leader Visits Belarus, Decries 'U.S. Imperialism'

MINSK -- Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has vowed to work with Belarus, an ex-Soviet state long at odds with Washington, to defeat "hegemonistic" U.S. imperialism.

Chavez, a self-styled socialist revolutionary, was making his third visit to Belarus in as many years after overseeing energy deals in Russia that consolidated his country's relations with Moscow.

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenko, described by Chavez as a "brother," has long railed against the influence of the United States in world affairs. Western nations accuse him of flouting freedom of speech and assembly in 14 years in power.

"We are struggling against the same adversary -- U.S. imperialism, against countries which serve as lackeys of that imperialism," Chavez said after receiving the "Friendship of Nations" award from the Belarusian leader. "We are winning, but a long battle still lies ahead. The hegemonist aims have collapsed. American imperialism will continue to fall."

Lukashenko was more reserved during the ceremony in a square named after Latin American revolutionary hero Simon Bolivar, praising Belarus's alliance with Venezuela and calling for the creation of a "multipolar" world.

Source: Reuters, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

July 24, 2008

Negotiations between Malady Front (Young Front) and Polish party "Law and Justice" (PiS) took place in Warsaw.

On July 24, 2008 negotiations between Malady Front (Young Front) and the Polish party "Law and Justice" took place in Warsaw.

The Vice-Chairman of Malady Front Artur Finkevich met with the Vice-Chairman of "Law and Justice" Adam Lipinski. During the meeting the politicians discussed perspectives of cooperation between the organizations, and also signing of agreement between Malady Front and Youth Organization of "Law and Justice".

Adam Lipinski stated he is sure that "meeting with Mr. Artur Finkevich in Warsaw will become a beginning of steady contacts between our organizations, taking into consideration that we are united by the ideas of freedom, national and Christian values and determination to fight for democracy in Belarus".

"I am pleased to mention that our meeting confirmed that we have similar estimation of the situation in your country, as well as of the postulates regarding the necessity of help from the Polish side to Belarusians who are now fighting for total independence and democratic freedoms.

Artur Finkevich commented results of negotiations with Mr. Lipinski to the press service of Malady Front: "I assume that this meeting is one of the biggest successes of Malady Front in the direction of establishing contacts with the Polish parties and organizations for the last several years."

Source: Malady Front Press Center

August 4, 2008

Belarusian Opposition Party Sacks Leader Ahead Of Vote

MINSK -- A Belarusian opposition party has sacked its jailed leader, seen in the West as the country's most prominent political prisoner, ahead of parliamentary elections in September.

The Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) decided on August 3 to replace Alyaksandr Kazulin, a former presidential candidate who is serving a 5 1/2-year prison sentence for organizing protests against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's 2006 reelection, by Anatol Lyaukovich, a former deputy head.

Kazulin, who had been involved in a personal dispute with Lyaukovich, was appointed the party's honorary chairman, a ceremonial position.

Kazulin last year refused an offer by Lukashenka to go free on condition he leaves Belarus, saying that amounted to exile. Western countries demand his release as a condition for resuming dialogue with Minsk, accused of violating basic rights.

His supporters argued that the move to replace Kazulin would play into the hands of the government.

"This is a terrible political mistake and it goes against common sense," senior party official Ihar Rynkevich told the party conference. "Only the authorities will benefit from depriving the party of Kazulin."

Source: Reuters, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Aug. 11, 2008

Belarusian Popular Front set forth conditions to the regime

At the extraordinary congress of the Belarusian Popular Front on August 9 two important resolutions have been adopted: on possible non-participation of the BPF party in the "parliamentary elections, if the regime continues repressions against candidates of the BPF and the democratic forces, and about the resolute disagreement of the BPF party with the attempt of some European politicians to reach agreement with Lukashenka".

The Charter'97 press-centre has been informed about the congress of the Belarusian Popular Front party and its decisions by the deputy chairman of the party Viktor Ivashkevich:

"The gist of the foreign political resolution is to voice dissent with the ideas expressed by some European mass media and some European politicians that understanding should be achieved with Lukashenka's regime, and that demands to democratize Belarus should be dropped. We believe that such a "commercial" approach to the situation in our country (underpinning which is a desire of some European business-structures to take part in the secret Belarusian privatization) is unacceptable. In fact it is the sale of human rights in exchange for illusory possibilities to take part in privatization of Belarusian property. We state that any such agreements endanger independence of Belarus. Any agreements on privatization which would be concluded with Lukashenka in such a manner, secretly and non-transparently, won't be recognized by the new democratic government of Belarus," Viktor Ivashkevich said.

A resolution on possible withdrawal of the Belarusian Popular Front party members from the electoral campaign of the upcoming presidential elections has been adopted at the congress.

"We have set forth conditions under which the BPF party won't take part in the elections. In the resolution we have enumerated facts of repressions against our activists during the electoral campaign: dismissals, arrests, and interrogations by the KGB. We state that the BPF can stop its participation in the unjust and non-transparent campaign of the "parliamentary elections"

and widely inform the world and Belarusian community about that in case new facts of discrimination or crackdown on the Front members would occur, and if the BPF activists or other democratic parties' activists (belonging to the United Democratic Forces) won't be included into the electoral commissions in the constituencies where party members run. The BPF has nominated 300 candidates for the electoral commissions, and if they won't be allowed to become members of the commissions, it would be a sign that the regime is preparing falsifications," Viktor Ivashkevich said.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Aug. 18, 2008

Political prisoner Kazulin released

On August 16, on the Day of Belarusian Solidarity, the former candidate for presidency in Belarus, Alyaksandr Kazulin, was released. Alyaksandr Kazulin's press-conference is to take place on Wednesday. The Charter'97 press-centre has been informed about that by the daughter of the politician Volha Kazulina.

The release of Alyaksandr Kazulin coincided with the death of his father-in-law. On August 17 the politician took part in the funeral ceremony. The politician hasn't given an interview to journalists yet. Meanwhile, informational agencies with the reference to their sources informed that Alyaksandr Kazulin was pardoned by a special decree of Alyaksandar Lukashenka.

The United States welcomes Kazulin's release, according to the statement of State Department spokesman Sean McCormack on August 16.

"We are waiting from the authorities of Belarus other positive steps which would open possibilities for significant improvement in the relations between the US and Belarus," McCormack said.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Aug. 19, 2008

Lukashenka calls Russia's actions in Georgia "beautiful"

Alyaksandr Lukashenka called actions of Russia during the war in Georgia quiet and accurate. "Everything has been done perfectly, in a very calm, wise and beautiful manner," Lukashenka said in Sochi at the meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

Lukashenka noted that actions of the Russian Federation in settling the conflict are to contribute to peace in the region "for a long time".

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Aug. 21, 2008

Syarhei Parsyukevich released by Lukashenka's decree.

Political prisoner Syarhei Parsyukevich has been released from Minsk penal colony No.1.



"Today I was summoned to see the head of the colony. He told me to be ready for release. I was given 15 minutes to pack my things, I didn't even had enough time for that. I was told I am

released by Lukashenka's decree," Syarhei Parsyukevich told in an interview to the Charter '97.

"I think the regime wants the EU to recognize the parliamentary elections, but my release is not enough. I have understood, that there were no changes in the country," Syarhei Parsyukevich said.

Syarhei Parsyukevich has spent more than 5 months behind bars. He served the term in penal colonies of Shklou and Minsk.

"It was a shock for me to see what was going on in the colony. The most important thing, the aim is to humiliate and crush a person there," Parsyukevich noted.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Aug. 21, 2008

Political prisoner Andrei Kim released

Political prisoner Andrei Kim has been released from Babrujsk colony today. Like Alyaksandr Kazulin and Syarhei Parsyukevich, Kim was released by Lukashenka's decree.

At the moment Andrei Kim is on his way from Babrujsk to Minsk.

The Tsentralny district court of Minsk (judge Alena Illina) sentenced the youth leader Andrei Kim to 1.5 years of imprisonment. The court found the youth leader guilty of participating in an unauthorized protest action of entrepreneurs and in attack on traffic police officer Yuri Sychou. The video materials of the KGB, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Belarusian TV showed Sychou was hit by another policeman. Andrei Kim was not near the policeman.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Aug. 23, 2008

Andrei Sannikau: "Recognition of the regime in its present form would worsen the situation in Belarus"

Today Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs David A. Merkel, who is on a visit in Belarus, has met with representatives of democratic political parties, civil society and former political prisoners. The situation in Belarus in the run-up to the parliamentary elections was discussed, as well as estimation of the election campaign by democratic activists.

David Merkel met with the leader of the civil campaign "European Belarus" Andrei Sannikau, the former candidate for presidency Alyaksandr Kazulin, the leader of the United Democratic Forces Anatol Lyabedzka, Vintsuk Vyachorka, Syarhei Kalyakin, Mikalay Statkevich, Zmitser Dashkevich, Paval Sevyarynets, Ales Byalatski and the chairperson of the Belarusian Association of Journalists Zhana Litvina.

Yesterday, as we have informed, David Merkel met with the Foreign Minister of Belarus Syarhei Martynau. The press-service of the Foreign Ministry of Belarus did not reveal details of the meeting of Martynau with Merkel.

"Undoubtedly, the issue of the imminent parliamentary elections was in the focus of attention, and how the Belarusian democrats evaluate the campaign and participation of some oppositionists in it. In general, the estimation of Belarusian participants was unanimous. Even now we could say that the practice of the regime in holding electoral farces, not elections continues; repressions against the opposition and civil society go on and intensify. None of the opposition's proposals were adopted by the authorities, though these proposals touched upon only general conditions of carrying out elections, necessity to include oppositionists to precinct election commissions, and guarantee minimal conditions for campaigning. The regime

hasn't made any concessions, that is why the issue of participation by the opposition in the elections remains open," said Andrei Sannikau.

"During the meeting we spoke about the danger of recognition of the regime in its present form. It would preserve and even worsen the situation in Belarus. Most of the participants from the Belarusian side noted the unshakable and principled position of the US in the issue of respect to human rights. The US has played a key role in release of Belarusian political prisoners," the leader of the "European Belarus" Andrei Sannikau said.

During the meeting with the Belarusian pro-democracy activists David Merkel noted that his visit to Minsk had become possible after the political prisoners were released. The US diplomat wanted to learn first-hand about the situation in Belarus. Thus he met oppositionists and officials, regarding the issues worrying the Belarusian opposition and the world community.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center

Sept. 13, 2008

Going all the way

Leaders of a number of oppositional parties and Alyaksandr Milinkevich's movement have stated at a press-conference in Minsk that the "election" planned for September 28, won't be free and democratic, and called upon the international community not to recognize its results. Most of the press conference participants believe they should go all the way in this process.

One of the leaders of Alyaksandr Milinkevich's movement, Viktor Karneenka, has stated that the United Democratic Forces won't boycott the parliamentary elections.

Participants of the press-conference stated that, in order to observe the vote-counting process, the UDF would concentrate attention on those constituencies where they have "strong and competitive candidates for deputies with teams that are ready to show that the election was falsified".

"We state that we won't ever recognize this electoral campaign as just and legitimate. We will state that not only at the Political Council on September 21, but we will propose to confirm that by personal signatures of any candidate for deputy from the single list of the UDF."

"In the final stage of the electoral campaign we will concentrate our efforts on receiving access to the vote-counting process and publicizing facts of election campaign falsifications. Understanding that our resources are limited we would concentrate attention on those constituencies where we have strong and competitive candidates for deputies with teams capable of fulfilling this function. We won't scatter our efforts over the entire territory of Belarus.

We will concentrate on these constituencies only. That's what we have discussed and approved. As for the rest, you can fantasize yourselves," said the leader of the United Civil party Anatol Lyabedzka.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Sept. 13, 2008

Quotes of Quarter

ALEXANDER DUGIN, the guru of new Russian ultranationalism:

"If the US recognizes our sphere of influence, then we could recognize theirs."

BELARUS ABROAD

Notes from the Convention

The 28th Convention of Belarusians of North America was held this year on the grounds of the Belarusian-American Community Center Polacak near Cleveland. It was organized by the Belarusian-American Association (BAZA) and the Belarusian Canadian Alliance (ZBK), and hosted by the local branch of BAZA.

The first day allowed the participants from many US states, Canadian provinces, from Great Britain and Belarus to mingle, exchange the latest family news and political concerns, view the art and craft stands, buy books and souvenirs, see recent documentary films, take part in the volleyball tournament, and taste traditional foods. The day ended with a sing-along accompanied on accordion by Fedzia Paulavets who flew in from Las Vegas for the occasion.

The next day was somewhat more formal. After the various church services, and after the raising of US, Canadian and Belarus flags, the Polacak President Anatol Lukjanczuk, the local BAZA head Siarhei Ramaniuk, and the heads of the sponsoring organizations, Walter Stankievich and Dzmitry Elyashevich invited the guests to enter the Center.

The BNR Rada President Ivonka Survilla and Ambassador David Swartz, the Co-Executive Director of the Center for Belarusian Studies (CBS), addressed the gathering.

The key element of the Convention—the Conference Panel Discussion focusing on the Convention's theme “The Year of Belarusian Statehood”—was moderated by Vital Zajka, the President of the New York BAZA Branch. The Round Table dealing with the role of the future diaspora generations, was led by Paula Survilla, Wartburg College professor and the Executive Director of CBS. (Some conference selections and the text of the adopted resolution are featured elsewhere in this issue.) The panel speakers were Alena Makouskaya, the head of Batskaushchyna, the worldwide Association of Belarusians, Valentyna Tryhubovich, an activist in the ecumenical movement in Belarus, historian Illa Kunitski, and Zianon Pazniak, the leader of the Belarusian Conservative Christian Party.

On display in the hall were the works of a number of Belarusian artists from US and Canada. The final part of the event—the Convention Ball—was preceded by a well-received concert, arranged and MC'd by Alla Orsa Romano. Representing Canada at the concert were soloists Sviatlana Litvinava and Valentyna Shauchenka, accompanied by Yuras Zhvalikoski, and the US—Fedzia Paulavets, poet-bard Siarzhuk Sokalau-Voyush, his sons Svetavit and Slavamir, Valentyna Yakimovich and the video presentation of songs by Danchyk.

A number of locations in Canada and the United States are under consideration as the venue for the Convention in 2010.

Dialogues on Belarusian Identity in Diaspora Generations

By M. Paula Survilla

The value of identity of course is that so often it comes with purpose (Richard R. Grant)

Identity and purpose reflect the needs, challenges, and desires of each generation differently. With this in mind, a roundtable focused on identity and experience was held during the 28th Convention of Belarusians in North America from 30-31st of August in Cleveland, Ohio. Participants represented newly arrived, as well as, second- and third-generation Belarusians from the United States and Canada. The group included students, professionals, academics, and retirees. The discussion was energized, and served to clarify the concerns of Diaspora members who are defining the role of their Belarusian identities while, in many cases, also experiencing the challenges of recent migration. Several key concerns and recommendations emerged. These points address practical needs but are also considered necessary for the encouragement and expansion of contact, continuity, and solidarity within the Belarusian community as a whole.

1. **Newly arrived Belarusians should have immediate access to information about the breadth of the Belarusian community.** The community should identify a network of members who would be willing to help find temporary housing and provide general orientation for Belarusians upon arrival. This network should be well advertized, where possible at departure and arrival points for immigration.
2. **Participants emphasized the need for more practical mentoring** that would include advice in application processes, grant preparation, and higher education programs. Other types of mentoring were also mentioned, such as in business and other employment environments. It was suggested that a resume pool be established under the auspices of the Center for Belarusian Studies in order to have a central archive of emerging professionals.
3. The group recommended the organization of workshops and conferences/symposia to allow for continuing dialogue, the exchange of information and of expertise, and for community development.

The round table served to illustrate that Belarusian identities amongst younger generations continue to be defining and purposeful. Belarusians new to the Diaspora, as well as second- and third-generation participants expressed the desire to find and maintain connection as a community. Finally, and perhaps most important, all participants were well-aware that the generosity of the Belarusian community would be key in the implementation of these and other initiatives, and that beyond time and expertise, a culture of philanthropy, of giving and giving back, would define the nature of opportunity and of connection for this generation and for those to come.

Dr. M. Paula Survilla is Associate Professor of Music at Wartburg College, Waverly Iowa, where she specializes in Belarusian contemporary music and culture. She serves as President of the North American Association for Belarusian Studies, and is Executive Director of the Belarusian Studies Center at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.



Panel discussion in Strongsville, Ohio



Ambassador Swartz speaking

RESOLUTION OF THE 28TH CONVENTION OF THE BELARUSANS OF NORTH AMERICA AND CONFERENCE "THE YEAR OF BELARUSAN STATEHOOD"

In defense of the Belarusian language, culture, freedom and independence

We, the participants in the 28th Convention of the Belarusians of North America, having gathered in the Free World, with wide representation from the Belarusian community of the U.S.A. and Canada, and also from Belarus, and the entire world,

- Declare that, the anti-democratic regime in Belarus has deprived the majority of its residents of true civil and human rights, including the right to use the Belarusian language, and to obtain a public education and information in the Belarusian language. In contrast to those of us who are present here, Belarusians in the homeland are deprived of the right to free elections, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

- Protest against the persecution of democratic forces in Belarus, against the sellout of Belarusian independence, against the destruction of historical memory, cultural attainments and traditions, and the decimation of everything Belarusian, which the pro-Moscow Lukashenka regime carries out today.

- Protest against the openly cynical violation of the electoral rights of the Belarusian people by the Lukashenka regime, and against the anti-democratic election campaign, the results of which cannot be recognized as legitimate.

- Protest against any aim to create a military-political union with Russia, against the return of Russian missiles and nuclear arms to Belarus, against the presence of Russian troops in any form.

- Declare that, only a free Belarus, truly independent of outside forces, can become truly their own state for the

Belarusian people and a true home for Belarusian culture, language and traditions.

- Express our support for the Georgian people in their resistance to Russian aggression, and declare that, only the solidarity of the peoples who were captives of Russia, can halt the attempts to revive the imperial ambitions of Russia.

- Call upon Belarusians and friends of Belarus, in the homeland and in the rest of the world, to unite in support of freedom and independence for Belarus, in opposition to the dictatorial regime and the attempts by Russia to weaken and eventually destroy Belarusian statehood.

Belarusian American Association
Belarusian Canadian Alliance

Strongsville, Ohio, U.S.A.
31 August 2008

Center for Belarusian Studies: Preserving Heritage . . . Promoting Revival. . . Inviting Support

Regular readers of *Belarusian Review* will recall reporting on the creation of the first-ever entity in the United States devoted to the academic study of Belarus and Belarusians. The Center for Belarusian Studies (CBS) was established at Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas, the alma mater of the first U. S. ambassador to the again-independent Belarus following dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. This project was thoroughly vetted in advance with and supported by leaders of the Belarusian Diaspora in North America, and with the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile. Most recently (BR, Summer 2008), the Center held its ceremonial opening in Wichita, Kansas, with a day-long series of seminars, speeches, and cultural presentations. Guest of honor was Mr. Stanislau S. Shushkevich, first head of state of again-independent Belarus from 1991 to 1994.

The Center is headed by Executive Director M. Paula Survilla. Dr. Survilla is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology and Musicology at Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa. She is one of the leading academic specialists on Belarus in North America. Her specialization is Belarusian contemporary music and culture.

Together with Professor Survilla, CBS management also comprises Dr. J. Andrew Sheppard and Ambassador (retired) David H. Swartz. Professor Sheppard is Vice President for Academic Affairs at Southwestern and provides institutional linkage and accountability interface between CBS and the College. Ambassador Swartz served 29 years in the U.S. Foreign Service, specializing in East European and Soviet Affairs; he was United States Ambassador to Belarus from 1992 to 1994.

CBS' structure also includes an Advisory Board comprising distinguished individuals from the Belarusian Diaspora, academia, business, and government.

The Center for Belarusian Studies--now well established and active--strives to promote Belarus' revival in a number of ways, including publishing and supporting promising young Belarusians through a Visiting Scholar program. The fourth individual in this latter program, Ms. Nadzeya Sychuhova, will arrive in Kansas within the next days for her one-year program of lecturing, research, academic networking, and visiting Diaspora communities. She is working on completion of a PhD. thesis on the history of the Belarus national movement. As resources permit, the Center intends also to introduce academic courses on Belarus and the Belarusian language, both at the Center itself and virtually via the Internet.

Central to CBS's aspirations are preservation and promotion of Belarus' rich national heritage. The Center actively solicits books on all subjects in Belarusian and about Belarus in English and other languages. Especially valuable are documents, letters, memorabilia, memoirs, and artifacts (for example, typical Belarusian clothing and crafts). Ultimately, the Center intends to house and display all this--and more--in its own building, becoming the comprehensive repository for Belarusian culture, nationhood, and belles-lettres in the United States. Numerous donations of books and other items have already been gratefully received at the Center; others are currently under active discussion.

The Center will, over time, become a library, a research center, a museum, a site for cultural presentations and academic seminars--in short, the permanent home for Belarusian heritage, in all its rich and dynamic aspects, in North America.

Readers are invited to visit the Center's web site, www.sckans.edu/belarus for program details and frequently updated information about current Center developments.

The Center will achieve its ambitious goal of promoting Belarus' revival back home and preserving its national heritage here--far away and safe from the caprices of dictatorial whims and neighboring hegemonic power plays--only through the generous and sustained support of those who wish it well and want the project to succeed. First and foremost, this means the Belarusian Diaspora in North America.

The Center was created through a modest initial gift. This gift has served as an endowment to commence program activities. It has enabled three, soon four, young Belarusians to benefit from the Visiting Scholar program. The first three are now back home in Belarus--making a difference there in promoting CBS' central mission. It has enabled publication of the Center's first book at Southwestern College Press. It has facilitated shipment of the first book donations to the library collection. It has enabled groundwork to be laid for a wide variety of academic initiatives, including on-line courses. But while the initial endowment grew through prudent investments, its corpus has also been heavily drawn down for these programmatic activities.

The Center actively seeks grants from government, foundations, and other grant-making organizations. Several proposals are pending. However, nearly all such grants -- when awarded -- are for specific programs. None will rebuild the initial endowment, much less increase it.

It is here that the Center seeks financial support from its Friends, whether of Belarusian origin or not. Every dollar counts. The Center's IRS 501(c)(3) status derives from its association with Southwestern College. Donations are tax-deductible to the full extent permitted by the IRS. Donations may be made on-line at the Center's web site (click "Make a gift!") or by mail to:

The Center for Belarusian Studies
at Southwestern College
100 College Street
Winfield, Kansas 67156

All donors become Friends of the Center for Belarusian Studies and are kept apprised of its activities through periodic newsletters and other publicity.

Authored by: David Swartz
September 16, 2008

Prague, Czech Republic

Belarusian Expat Community Staged a Rally Supporting the Boycott of "Parliamentary Elections" in Belarus.

More than 60 persons have taken part in the rally. Beside the Belarusians, representatives of the Czech organization "Young Conservatives", Georgian community and Ukrainians have taken part in the event. Representatives of the civil initiative "Free Belarus" (Svobodne Belorusko), association "Pahonia" and the youth movement "Young Revival" have also supported the Georgian citizens who protested against Russian aggression against their country.

Belarusian activists have handed out about a thousand leaflets with a statement explaining the reasons for the boycott of the illegal "parliamentary elections" in Belarus and condemning the Russian policy towards Georgia.

Belarusians were wearing T-shirts with crossed out pictures of Lukashenka shaking hands with the Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. The words "Boycott-2008" were placed over the crossed picture. Georgian community representatives were holding a poster "Today in Georgia, tomorrow again in Prague?"



The rally evoked great interest among numerous visitors of Prague from many parts of the world, who approached the participants of the rally to ask about the real situation in Belarus.

Reporters of the Czech public television and of the Czech national information agency CTK were present at the rally.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, August 30, 2008.

Ban On Belarusian Children's Trips

Britain is very much concerned about the Belarusian authorities' ban on the travel of children abroad for health breaks, British Ambassador Nigel Gould-Davies told reporters in Minsk on Wednesday.

"The ban was put into effect without any prior warning," the ambassador said.

He said that he had discussed the matter with representatives of competent agencies in Belarus, with the latter promising to give a reply in writing. "We are waiting for it," he said. "I hope that the problem will be soon resolved because the recuperation trips of children are affected."

Mr. Gould-Davies said that the British embassy had not received from Belarus' authorities any draft intergovernmental agreement on the travel of children.

He said that more than 3,500 Belarusian children had visited Britain in summer annually for a health break, with the embassy launching recently a special service allowing children to get visas without the need to visit Minsk.

Source: naviny.by, Office for Democratic Belarus, Sept. 18, 2008

MEDIA WATCH

Press Review

"Last Dictator" Caught Between East and West

Excerpts from an article in The Financial Times.

By Stefan Wagstyl

Alexander Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, revels in his notoriety. Lucky are those, he says with a smile, who get to meet and sit down at a table with "the last dictator in Europe".

... He relishes his hold on domestic power. "I will be happy if you communicate the straightforward message to people in Europe that I have no dictatorial aspirations to stay in power but a tremendous dependence on the will of the people," said Mr Lukashenko on Thursday in an interview with the Financial Times and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

The Belarusian president spoke for two hours on everything from the forthcoming England-Belarus World Cup football match to energy and his political credo.

... Well before the Georgian crisis, Mr Lukashenko put out feelers to the west in an effort to ease the isolation (including a visa ban on senior officials) imposed by the European Union after international observers condemned as unfair the 2006 presidential elections.

Brussels indicated it would be ready for a moderate rapprochement, as long as Mr Lukashenko eased his regime's severity, starting with the release of political prisoners and efforts to improve democratic standards in the parliamentary polls.

... Mr Lukashenko has delivered on the prisoners, as the EU has confirmed, and is now concentrating on the elections. He says he is breaking Belarusian laws to ensure the polls meet EU norms, for example in pushing electoral commissions to include more opposition representatives. He also welcomes international observers, saying: "We have opened the country for all."

But he warns the EU and the US to be objective in their post-election assessments, accusing the west of "double standards". He complains important countries with similar political shortcomings escape punishment, notably Russia.

"Whether the West likes it or not, parliament will be elected in accordance with our constitution," he says. "I will not go begging for visas to the EU."

... Belarus is changing but at its own pace, he says. "If you want to change us to your standards, you can think about it but you don't need to push us to it. Maybe we can come to realise we can be 80 per cent like Germany or Great Britain. It must be our choice"....

Having kept state enterprises in place much longer than other former communist states, Mr Lukashenko says privatisation is on the agenda, with up to 100 per cent stakes for sale. But he warns the price must be "fair". Greenfield investors are also welcome. "Decent" business people will even be given free land for their houses "so they can live not on the edge of Europe, as in London, but in the centre of Europe".

The Belarusian president acknowledges he has irritated Russia by not recognising the breakaway Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. But he does not rule out doing so in future, saying the new parliament should have a say. He rejects as “absolutely stupid” suggestions that Russia’s action set a dangerous precedent for Belarus. “God forbid Russia should try and do the same against Belarus. In that unimaginable case Europe would have the full right to resist Russia with no compromise on any methods or leverage,” he says.

... Mr Lukashenko wants the West to be more engaged in the former Soviet Union, saying western influence was the main reason why former Soviet states declined to follow Russia in recognising Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

But what is the guarantee that, in the future, the west will be a strong enough counterweight to “the ever-increasing might of Russia and the growing influence of Russia in these countries”? A fair question but one that is not easy for the West to discuss with Mr Lukashenko.

Source: *The Financial Times*, September 2008.

Looking Both Ways, as they Watch Georgia Floundering, Belarus and Ukraine are Playing their Cards Very Carefully

Comments by William Harrison, Guardian, London, August 17, 2008
(excerpts from an article)

Western politicians and commentators have been quick to seize on the conflict in South Ossetia as a defining moment in world history, or their careers. Some have been clambering to play peacemaker (Sarkozy, Kouchner), others want to boost their reputations for taking a strong line with Moscow (McCain, Miliband). But closer to Russia, in the neighbouring countries of Ukraine and Belarus, some politicians have been conspicuous by their silence.

In Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenko has stunned the Russians with his lack of overt support. In an outburst on Tuesday, Russia’s ambassador to Belarus said he was “perplexed by the modest silence on the Belarusian side. You need to express yourself more clearly on such issues.”

.... But in the isolation from the West that followed his re-election in 2006, including travel bans and economic sanctions, Lukashenko also started to find that money from Russia was beginning to dry up as Moscow hiked the price of gas.

Since then, the Belarusian leader has taken a series of steps to persuade the west that he is opening things up, notably by releasing a number of political prisoners. His reaction to the July bombing of a concert he was attending can be viewed as a further attempt to give his regime a better image in the West.

The EU and the US have responded, but made it clear that any concessions are dependent on a greater degree of openness in the parliamentary elections in September.

Coming out in support of Russia’s war in Georgia could have caused irreparable damage to his plan, given the predominantly anti-Russian mood in western political circles. Lukashenko’s silence, therefore, should be understood as consistent with a gradual shift in his policy towards appeasement with the EU and the US.

He is, of course, playing each side off against the other. He has no desire to open politics in Belarus up any more than is necessary

to get what he wants. Furthermore, the opposition in Belarus is divided and weak.

But any opening up in Belarus must be welcomed: it shows that the west’s soft power is in a position to have a positive effect in the region and may give the opposition a chance to put forward their views in a less hostile environment. Before making any concessions, however, the EU and the US need to ensure that Lukashenko is not just window-dressing.

BELARUSIAN REVIEW (ISSN 1064-7716)

Published by Belarusian-American Association, Inc.
a fraternal non-profit association

Founder and Editor/Publisher (1989-2001): Joe Arciuch

Editor: George Stankevich

Deputy Editor: Jan Maksymiuk

Assistant Editor: Hanna Vasilevich

Editor-At-Large: Joe Arciuch

Contributing Editors Ethan Burger, Paul Goble, Andrej Katlarcuk, Taras Kuzio, David Marples, Mikalaj Packajeu, Joe Price, Andrew Ryder, Vera Rich, Uladzimir Rouda, Vital Silitski, Alesya Semukha, Jan Zaprudnik

Copy Editors: Steve Stankievich, Natalia Rusak

Production: George Stankevich

Web site Administrator: Andrej Ramaszeuski

Publisher: Walter Stankievich

Circulation: Serge Tryhubovich

Treasurer: Kacia Reznikova

U.S.A. : BELARUSIAN REVIEW

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

E-mail: belarusianreview@hotmail.com

Tel/fax: 732 222 1951

Europe : BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Malesicka ul. 553/65

108 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic

E-mail: georgestankevich@gmail.com

Tel/fax: (420) 274 771 338

BELARUSIAN REVIEW is registered in Europe
with Czech Ministry of Culture
Registration No. MK ČR E 13311

Publication Date: September 30, 2008

Printed by: Tiskárna OFF Studio, Hyacintová 3222/10

101 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic

Annual subscription rate in 2008:

\$45 for individuals, \$65 for institutions

payable by check or money order in US funds

to: BELARUSIAN REVIEW or BR

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

ON-LINE: www.belarusianreview.org

Opinions expressed in signed articles do not necessarily represent views of the editors.

Except for signed articles, reproduction or republication of texts from BELARUSIAN REVIEW is permissible. However, the editors request that source credit be given to BELARUSIAN REVIEW.

There are no restrictions for reproduction or republication in Belarus.

PLEASE NOTE

**that annual subscription has remained unchanged for 2008:
\$45 for individuals, \$65 for institutions.**