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## GUEST EDITORIAL

### The Belarusian People: Between a Rock and Hard Place

By Ivonka J. Survilla

The recent publication in Poland of an open letter to the administration of President Obama signed by 22 foreign policy and national security elites from the newer NATO and EU member states of Central and Eastern Europe attracted considerable attention on both sides of the Atlantic. Most of the issues touched on in the letter deal one way or the other with Russia--its present and possible future relations with their countries--within the broader context of their places in the transatlantic community.

Unfortunately, the thrust of the elites' letter strongly suggested acceptance of a dynamic comprising the transatlantic community (NATO and/or EU members) on one side and Russia on the other. The letter, in particular, contains no input from elites of the other six Eastern European countries having status in neither "camp"--Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. The only reference to any of them pertains to the 2008 Russo-Georgia war. The six "Outsiders" include countries--Belarus and Ukraine--with the longest and most severe exposure to Soviet realities. Even today, nearly 18 years after the demise of the USSR, they remain severely crippled in key aspects of nation-building by those realities.

For them, in many important respects there is little objective difference between Soviet Russia and post-Soviet Russia. All six "Outsiders" are subject to Russian economic blackmail, for example Russia's "dairy war" with Belarus and its imposition of agricultural sanctions against Moldova, both politically motivated. Russia's use of energy blackmail against all six "Outsiders" is chronic. And Russia's strongly negative reaction to the EU's laudable Eastern Partnership initiative exemplifies the official position of Moscow that it is, in effect, the "Hegemon of the Outsiders."

Little known is the fact that in 1918 Belarus attained independence from Russia and national legitimacy. Forced out by overwhelming Soviet Russian forces in 1919, with its territory divided between Poland and the Soviet Union, the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic has existed continuously in exile ever since. I have the honor of serving as the sixth in an unbroken line of presidents of that government. When circumstances in Belarus permit, our government will return its authority to a legitimate, democratic government as did, in their turn, the Polish, Czech, Ukrainian, and other governments-in-exile.

The implied juxtaposition of Belarus between the now-happy and secure NATO and EU countries formerly under Soviet domination on the one hand and Russia on the other by the signers of the open letter mentioned above is most unfortunate and hopefully was not deliberately intended. Whether intended or not, this presumptive bipolarism is

fraught with the gravest danger for long-suffering Belarusians. Here is just one example: The proposed Russo-German "Nord Stream" gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea would, if constructed, deliver Russian gas to Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe, **bypassing** Belarus. This would mean, first, a loss in revenue to Belarus for the transit of Russian gas to Germany and beyond. This revenue has been used by Belarus throughout the post-Soviet period to help pay for its own gas imports from Russia. Worse, it will permit Russia to bludgeon Belarus politically at will with threats to cut off gas without fear of reaction in the West.

Through its long domination by Russia, the Soviet Union, and now both Russia and home-grown authoritarians, our homeland of Belarus is a special case and needs special attention. I discern that the present "constellation of forces"—economic, political, security—may be propitious for positive change in Belarus. One is the welcome EU Eastern Partnership initiative mentioned above. Another is the notably higher attention the U.S. is paying to Belarus. How the Belarus government reacts will be instructive. There are many signals it could give right now, if its intentions are sincere. For example, the absence of unfettered higher education in Belarus is a big problem area that could be eased through reasonable policy decisions and negotiations. There are many others.

I, my colleagues, and others in the Belarusian Diaspora on this side of the Atlantic look to the administration of President Obama for wise, prudent, and **beneficial** engagement with the government of Belarus—beneficial for the strengthening of civil society and for the attainment of a democratic, economically engaged Belarus that can thrive in its own neighborhood and beyond.

### From the Publisher

Recently a knowledgeable American political figure described our publication as the best English language source of current information on Belarus. This view is confirmed by a number of think tanks in Europe and North America, who have been subscribers for years. Gift subscriptions have been provided to major politicians and government officials worldwide. A few of our readers have been paying for subscriptions sent to the libraries of their alma maters.

In September, the Belarusian-American Association's DC Circle (a less formal entity than a Chapter) have committed to providing a number of subscriptions to the elected representatives in the neighboring states. It qualified for a substantial quantity discount.

**Many thanks to BAZA DC!** Who is next? It is an example worth following by other Belarusian organizations and groups.

## FEATURES

### The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

By Ilya Kunitski

On 1 September, 2009 the world marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the World War II. Many political leaders including Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel took part in the commemoration ceremony in the Polish city of Gdansk.

Mr. Putin in his *Gazeta Wyborcza* article wrote that Russia has already condemned the document popularly known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In the article he nonetheless continues to blame the Western powers for the need for such a pact. Polish President Lech Kaczynski in turn accused the Soviet Union of being a second aggressor having acted shortly after Nazi Germany. On 17 September, “when we were still defending Warsaw... that day Poland was knifed in the back”, he stated referring to the Soviet troops entry into the territory controlled by Poland which was “assigned” to the Soviet Union according to the Pact.

Below is the text of the agreement which became known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, together with its Secret Additional Protocol. In the next issue of the *Belarusian Review* we will examine the consequences of the Pact for Belarus, focusing on two main issues.

First, the resulting territorial changes will be evaluated.

Second, the issue of Vilnia (now Vilnius, the current capital of Lithuania) and the Vilnia region mentioned in the Secret Protocol will be scrutinized.

#### Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The Government of the German Reich and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April 1926 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., have reached the following agreement:

##### Article I

Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other either individually or jointly with other powers.

##### Article II

Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third power.

##### Article III

The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests.

##### Article IV

Neither of the two High Contracting Parties shall participate in any grouping of powers whatsoever that is directly or

indirectly aimed at the other party.

##### Article V

Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

##### Article VI

The present treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not denounce it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

##### Article VII

The present treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications shall be exchanged in Berlin. The agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

Done in duplicate, in the German and Russian languages.  
Moscow, August 23, 1939.

For the Government of the German Reich  
v. Ribbentrop

With full power of the Government of the U.S.S.R

#### Secret Additional Protocol

On the occasion of the signature of the Nonaggression Pact between the German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the undersigned plenipotentiaries of each of the two parties discussed in strictly confidential conversations the question of the boundary of their respective spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. These conversations led to the following conclusions:

1. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. (**Editor's note:** Later changed to include Lithuania in the USSR sphere of influence). In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna region is recognized by each party.

2. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

3. With regard to Southeastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterestedness in the areas.

4. This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

Moscow, August 23, 1939.

For the Government of the German Reich  
v. Ribbentrop

Plenipotentiary of the Government of the U.S.S.R  
V. Molotov

# An Open Letter to the Obama Administration

*From Non-NATO, Non-EU Eastern Europe*

On July 16, 2009, the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* published an open letter to the administration of President Obama raising crucial issues pertaining to the Euro-Atlantic partnership. It was signed by some 22 foreign policy and security elites from the newer NATO and EU members—self-styled Central and Eastern European (CEE) intellectuals. Whether implicitly or explicitly, all the matters they touched on concern the dynamics of current and likely future events in their region of Europe vis-a-vis Russia. Their call for a reengaged, collaborative United States as a true partner with Europe in addressing concerns of the region was eloquent, accurate and most timely.

Regrettably their letter omitted input, or at least signatures, of their counterparts from those Eastern European states which unfortunately do not at present enjoy the luxury (and security guarantees) of NATO and EU membership—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Not coincidentally, they are the ones closest to Russia and the ones, in the cases of Belarus and Ukraine, having had by far the longest experience with Soviet Russian communism. This experience is of particularly crucial value now in the context of evolving developments and trends.

All the issues raised by the authors of the Open Letter published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* -- and many, many more -- apply even more vitally to these countries. Last year's Russo-Georgian conflict is no doubt the most graphic demonstration, but hardly the only one. Moscow's economic blackmail, most recently, of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, to force them into the Kremlin's revisionist line of post-Soviet spheres of influence is a less publicized but no less real threat to their future. Periodic energy blackmail by Russia of all six of these countries became the norm in this first decade of the 21st century.

Through its long domination by, first, Russia and then the Soviet Union our homeland of Belarus is a special case and needs special attention. We discern that the present "constellation of forces" — economic, political, security—may be propitious for bringing about that "change we can believe in" which your administration has enunciated and which has captured the imagination of people everywhere.

With most welcome wisdom, the European Union has responded to evolving realities in Eastern Europe, notably through its Eastern Partnership initiative. Now we call on the United States to join in with equal vision and vigor. For all the reasons pointed out by the signers of the July 16 Open Letter from their vantage point in NATO and EU member countries, we too call on the United States to *carpe diem*. Please engage with us and with our NATO and EU friends from Central and Eastern Europe. We have much to offer from our perspective outside these organizations. And our needs are ever so great. We look to America, just as we look to Europe, for the wisdom and spirit these times demand.

Signed: Stanislau Shushkevich

Former Speaker, Belarus Parliament

First Head of State, Republic of Belarus

Ivonka Survilla

President of the Rada

Belarus Democratic Republic-in-Exile

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## CENTRAL and EAST EUROPEAN COALITION MEETS with U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY OFFICIALS

Washington, DC— Following two very important foreign policy trips by President Obama to Moscow and Vice President Biden to Ukraine and Georgia, the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC), an assembly of 18 ethnic organizations representing the communities of Central and East European descent, had an opportunity to meet with the principal architects for the Obama Administration's foreign policy agenda.

In an hour-long meeting at the National Security Council on Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, the CEEC met with Antony J. Blinken, Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor to the Vice President and Michael A. McFaul, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russia and Eurasia at the National Security Council. Also participating in the meeting was Leslie M. Hayden, Director for Russia at the NSC. The coalition members were briefed on the Moscow and Ukraine/Georgia trips and they

broached issues related to the missile defense shield; the strategic partnerships and the commissions established with Ukraine and Georgia; energy security; the Armenia/Turkey rapprochement; and defending human rights and liberties in the region.

Members of the CEEC also had an opportunity to meet with representatives of the Office of Public Engagement who will be responsible for interacting with the various ethnic communities.

The Belarusian-American Association is one of the organizations comprising the CEEC. Since Ms. Alice A. Kipel while representing the Belarusian-American Association was also the introductory spokesperson for the group, it was clear to the NSC officials that Belarus has an important role within CEEC.

Following the meeting, Ms. Kipel stated: "As the CEEC has done in the past, we hope to establish a productive dialogue with the Obama administration with respect to issues that are important to our communities, such as promotion of democracy and human rights, which are key issues for Belarusian-Americans."

## ECONOMY

### Belarus, Russia Solve Milk Row, Other Problems Loom

MINSK (Reuters) -- The end to a "milk war" bedeviling relations between Belarus and Russia could prove a mere truce masking strategic differences over trade, recurring gas disputes, and Belarus's drive to move closer to the West.

Analysts say the two ex-Soviet states, linked by a nebulous "union treaty" dating from the 1990s, are pursuing conflicting agendas -- with Russia trying to extract as much as it can from its smaller neighbor and objecting to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's rapprochement with the European Union.

Russia on June 17 ended its ban on Belarusian dairy products, prompting Belarus to suspend new customs controls within 24 hours of their imposition. The row was the latest in a long series between neighbors once committed to restoring a Soviet-era alliance between two Slavic nations.

But at the same time, Russian gas-export monopoly Gazprom demanded Belarus pays \$230 million in arrears for natural-gas supplies so far this year.

"This peace is clearly no more than a truce," said independent political analyst Alexander Klaskovsky.

"We can already hear the drums of a new gas war. Constant conflict is the basis of relations between two allies who, despite a formal alliance, have diametrically opposed interests."

Lukashenka, he said, would "gain new confidence and act more decisively after Moscow's quick retreat."

The Belarusian leader, long ostracized by the West over allegations that he mistreated opponents and ignored human rights concerns, has been seeking improved ties with the West since quarrelling with Russia two years ago over energy prices.

#### Belarusian Concessions To The West

Belarus made several concessions, releasing the last detainees considered political prisoners in the West and holding an election deemed to be an improvement over previous contests.

That culminated in an invitation for Belarus to attend the European Union's Eastern Partnership summit last month with former communist countries -- an initiative viewed with suspicion in Moscow.

Russia froze a \$500 million credit for Belarus and a top minister said Minsk was on the brink of insolvency. A furious Lukashenka stayed away from a security summit in Moscow.

Russia, in the meantime, said it would make its bid to join the World Trade Organization a joint effort with Belarus and Kazakhstan -- its partners in a new customs union.

"I think Lukashenka won the milk war on points. But there is a deeper problem in that the Belarusian state is seriously strapped for cash. It is surviving from hand to mouth," said Andrew Wilson of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"Both sides have got incompatible positions. Russia wants to scale down its subsidies or get more in return while Lukashenka clearly wants to survive as an independent player. So he will carry on maneuvering between East and West."

The issue of gas arrears and pricing remains the thorniest, with 20 percent of Russian shipments of gas to the West still passing through Belarus. Minsk says Russia's payment demand violated a gentlemen's agreement.

"In talks between the two presidents, an oral understanding was reached calling for payment over the course of the year at a rate calculated to be the average price," said Natalya Petkevich, Lukashenka's first deputy chief of staff.

Lukashenka, clearly taking no chances, asked top officials in the past week to draw up a list of actions that might be taken by Russia "liable to cause economic damage to Belarus."

"This conflict demonstrated that our partners are not always predictable and we must be ready for anything," Petkevich said. "Given that Russia is our main trading partner, we must take account of all possible consequences."

Russian actions may underscore the notion that Moscow may have lost patience with Lukashenka once and for all and that the notion of the "union state" may be all but buried.

"These contradictions are all about strategic issues," said Kirill Koktysh of the Association of Political Experts and Consultants in Moscow.

"The main problem is that Russia has at last concluded that it cannot come to any agreement with Lukashenka."

**Source:** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 21, 2009

### Quotes of Quarter

"We have perfect order in the treatment of investors and business people in our country which is called dictatorship by some states. Businessmen do not like so-called mock democracy,"

**PRESIDENT LUKASHENKA** told the visiting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia Miroslav Lajcak on September 7.

## Financial Resources and Loans Are Most Important for Us

Recently, the Belarusian ruler, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, announced that favorable conditions exist for entering into a partnership with the European Union. At a Minsk meeting with European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, he stated, "Our desire to establish good relations with you is sincere, though some do not like it." He suggested, "I think you won't regret your visit to Belarus," adding, "I'd like to have an absolutely sincere and honest dialogue," (reports Interfax)..

The Belarusian dictator defended his past relationship with Europe: "There are politicians who think Lukashenka is playing with Europe without planning to change anything in the country and in relations with Europe." He further stated, "I never meant to be mean during the years of my presidency. Perhaps I do not look like a diplomat in a white shirt, but I think politics must be honest. It's better to tell the truth even if it isn't profitable for you, because a lie will be revealed later and it will be difficult to settle the situation." He added, "I am ready to answer any inconvenient questions you might have"

"According to Lukashenka, "much depends on this meeting.... What do we want from Europe? We want you to understand that Belarus is not only a geographical center of the continent. It is a country of honest, fair, and hard-working people. It is a sovereign independent state." He stressed that "the European Union is our neighbor. Our trade with the EU amounts to 50 per cent in our total trade in volume, we have a positive trade balance...." He continued, "You are adaptable to streamlined production methods. This (the EU – Interfax) is the most productive center of the planet. Our economy is also efficient, yet we cannot develop it without cooperation with you," adding, "financial resources, loans and financing are also important for us."

"What can we add to the scale of our relations with Europe?" he asked. "Europe cannot exist without its heart (Belarus – Interfax). Moreover, we are a link, a bridge between such giants as the European Union and Russia," said Lukashenka. He expanded, the "main oil and gas pipes, as well as automobile and rail arteries, pass through Belarus....They are in good working order, far better than those of our neighbors," said Lukashenka. He then drew attention to Belarus' safety measures. "You have never complained about us failing to secure basic elements of the EU's safety. We combat illegal migration, drug trafficking, and trafficking of radioactive materials," said the ruler. Lukashenka also added that "the situation in our country is absolutely stable; we have no religious or ethnic conflicts."

The Belarusian ruler believes that he created "a basis suitable for our further relations". Ferrero-Waldner, said in turn, it was the first visit of a European commissioner to Minsk. Lukashenka responded, "and not the last, I hope." According to the European commissioner, the visit was symbolic. It symbolizes the potential of the EU-

Belarus relations, said Ferrero-Waldner. The European commissioner said the EU and Belarus stood at the crossroads of Europe, where cooperation should be two-way. If the Belarusian side shows movement, the potential of their relations will be realized.

European Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner reminded Lukashenka that the EU member states had addressed Belarus calling her to fulfill a number of conditions. She noted that some of the conditions had been fulfilled, allowing Europe to review its approaches toward Belarus. She added, however, that some of the requests had not been implemented. Ferrero-Waldner said the EU would be ready to establish cooperation with Belarus if it demonstrated a desire to implement the remaining requests.

The Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy noted that the EU respected the sovereignty of Belarus and its history, and understood its difficult role as a bridge between the East and West.

**Source:** Charter 97 Press Center, June. 22, 2009

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## Selling Belarus' Family Jewels

By Yury Drakakhrust

Will Belarus's famous tractors be up for sale?

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



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

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

## Belarus' Forum

### Fifth Congress of World's Belarusians

By our own correspondent

The fifth congress of world's Belarusians was held on July 18-19, 2009 in Minsk. Over 200 delegates from 17 countries attended.

Organizers encountered enormous difficulties preparing for the Congress. The leadership of the World Association of Belarusians, BATSKAUSHCHYNA (Fatherland), unsuccessfully applied to 22 sites in Minsk. Most of them justified their refusal by "sudden necessary" repairs.

Once BATSKAUSHCHYNA attempted to stage the Congress abroad, in neighboring Lithuania or Ukraine, Belarusian authorities managed to find two possible venues in Minsk. Eventually the event was held in the International Education Center in Minsk.

Surprisingly, the delegates and guests had the opportunity to meet representatives of the government: Minister of Culture Pavel Latushka, head of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Committee Leanid Huliaka, and officials from the ministries of Education and Economics. Most of these officials addressed the Congress in good Belarusian. In their long and often tedious speeches, they tried to reassure the public that the government is doing its best to preserve and develop the Belarusian culture and language.

However, they had trouble convincing most delegates, who came deeply concerned about the fate and current deplorable state of Belarusian culture and language in the nominally Belarusian state.

At the same time, Deputy Minister of Economics Andrei Tur appealed to businessmen from the Belarusian diaspora to actively engage in investing in Belarus' economy, as well as to help export Belarusian goods to their countries of residence.

Many delegates voiced their unhappiness with the lack of interest and support on the part of their mother country Belarus. For instance, Mr. Aleh Rudakou, delegate from the Baykal region of Russian Siberia, pointed out that the 50,000 strong Belarusian ethnic diaspora in that region is being completely neglected, in contrast with less numerous Polish and Lithuanian ethnic groups, whose interests are protected and promoted by local consulates of their countries.

Many were concerned about the absence of a Law on Belarusian Diaspora, similar to those adopted by other countries. For instance, introducing a "card of the Belarusian" (like the existing "card of the Pole") would make members of Belarusian diasporas feel that their homeland cares, and would help to slow their assimilation.

The delegate from Lithuania informed the Congress that in the Vilnia (Vilnius) region, which has a large Belarusian-speaking Catholic population, lack of interest

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

#### Oligarch Envy

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

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

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

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

Belarus' president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, long ago abandoned the populist people's avenger persona that brought him to power in 1994. He has long since exchanged that role for one of "leader of the bureaucrats." Privatization may lead to the further consolidation of this role -- in defending Lukashenka, the new Belarusian oligarchs will also be protecting their own wealth.

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

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

**Source:** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 2009

by the nominally Belarusian state and simultaneous strong interest and support by Poland is resulting in cultural Polonization of that population.\*

In the end, the Congress elected the new leadership of BATSKAUSHCHYNA. Ms. Alena Makouskaya, previously the chairperson of BATSKAUSHCHYNA's Council, was unanimously elected the new leader of the organization – with two delegates abstaining.



*Alena Makouskaya*

Ms. Nina Shydlouskaya, Ms. Makouskaya's former assistant, was elected to the chair of BATSKAUSHCHYNA's Council.

**\*Editor's note:** The Polish state has been historically attempting to divide Belarusians by religion, referring to Belarusian Catholics simply as Poles.

This explains Poland's strong interest in this region; today there are over 100 active Polish schools in this part of Lithuania.

For a detailed analysis of this issue, refer to the article **National Minority Policies in Lithuania**, on p. 22

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## Belarusian Should Be Belarus' Sole Official Language

"It is necessary to restore the status of Belarusian language as the sole official language in Belarus," said Ales Marachkin, the outgoing chairman of the World Association of Belarusians BATSKAUSHCHYNA, in his speech at the Fifth Congress of Belarusians of the World, which began in Minsk on Saturday, July 18..

According to Marachkin, the language is a cementing factor for a nation. "The collapse of the Polish-Litvanian commonwealth that existed between 1569 and 1795] gave the Russian Empire the opportunity to occupy our country and start a sweeping Russification campaign," he said. "A deplorable role in this process was played by the Russian Orthodox Church, which continues to regard our country as its age-long canonical territory."

"The Russification of Belarus has now reached its peak," noted Mr. Marachkin. "The Belarusian language currently exists as a souvenir," he said. "Belarus' governmental agencies fully ignore it. The Ministry of Culture, which has been headed by Belarusian-speaking Pavel Latushka since recently, may be the only exception."

Marachkin quoted Alyaksandr Lukashenka saying once, "Nothing great can be expressed in the Belarusian language." "If the president of Lithuania or Poland said

something like it, it would put an end to his political career," he noted. "I consider it necessary to state that the current government's language policy leads to an ethnocide of our nation and loss of its sovereignty. That is why it is necessary to restore for the Belarusian language the status of the country's sole official language, as it was formerly secured by the constitution of 1994."

According to Mr. Marachkin, "Belarusian still survives thanks to the effort of non-governmental organizations and, in the first instance, by the Francisak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society, which should be turned into a Committee for the Protection of the Native Tongue under the Aegis of the President, and not be suppressed by charging it exorbitant rent."



*Ales Marachkin*

Marachkin also proposed putting up in Minsk a monument to commemorate the victory in the 1410 Grunwald Battle, which would be dominated by a statue of Grand Duke Vitaut of the Grand Duchy of Litva, as well as "getting rid of Soviet-era toponyms and monuments of totalitarianism."

"Before becoming Europeans and citizens of the world, you should become Belarusians," said Stefan Eriksson, the Swedish ambassador to Belarus in his address at the Congress of Belarusians of the World

Ambassador Eriksson has been living in Belarus for more than three years and cannot help admiring its culture and the Belarusian language.

"Belarusians can bring their unique history, culture and language to Europe," said the ambassador, speaking in Belarusian. "This is what attracts us and the entire world to you."

**Sources:** Naviny. by / Office for Democratic Belarus, July 20, 2009

### Quotes of Quarter

"There is hope that the reforms will take place in Belarus. This country is full of wonderful potential, so I hope some day this potential will be used."

European Parliament Member **ROZA THUN** stated in Strasbourg on September 7.



## KGB Targets the Opposition

Humiliating treatment of Franak Vyachorka in the military unit has aggravated: he is being forced to speak Russian and constantly searched.

Recently officers of the military unit where Franak Vyachorka is now serving have threatened him with criminal prosecution for at least six times over the past few weeks.

The reasons for that included possessing a mobile phone, insubordination and malingering, writing a blog. According to the website charter97.org he is also being harassed for speaking Belarusian in service.

Vintsuk Vyachorka, Franak's father and deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front Party, says his son has been subjected to "deliberate psychological terror" by creating unbearable serving conditions. The father thinks that by doing this the officers are executing their orders

"The military psychologist of the unit, Senior Lieutenant Dzyanis Kazak, who is at the same time the investigating officer, started to demand that Franak repeat commands, and answer them, in Russian," said Vintsuk Vyachorka. "Both Kazak and Ensign Piskun, and other ensigns, started to use all sorts of insulting comments, like 'speak in a normal language,' or 'speak in a normal way.' This naturally is an insult to one's national dignity and a direct violation of the constitutional rights of my son, and of any Belarusian," said Franak's father.

Franak Vyachorka is ordered to answer in Russian. Senior lieutenant Kazak and deputy commander of the military unit Uladzimir Ihnatsik threaten the young activist with criminal prosecution for insubordination.



*Franak Vyachorka*

Vintsuk Vyachorka told of an unprecedented episode that took place in his son's military unit. On July 21 the commanding officers of the unit ordered a few dozens of soldiers to line up and to sing a Russian song, while Franak Vyachorka was ordered to stand at a distance of 20 meters alone and sing a song in Belarusian.

"I cannot call that anything but apartheid," the father said. "It is humiliation, a demonstration that only my son alone who is speaking Belarusian, emphasizing his 'inferiority.' Such things must be punished, in my opinion. I am surprised that the Belarusian Defense Ministry tolerates such humiliation of Belarusians and the Belarusian language in our army."

The father further said his son's state of health has recently deteriorated. Before he was drafted into the army, the doctors confirmed the diagnosis of a second degree of arterial hypertension. He was diagnosed with this condition at the age of 15. Despite this fact, the commanding officers of the military unit think that Franak is malingering.

In connection with this, a lieutenant colonel of the KGB counter intelligence service visited the military unit. He interviewed the unit's soldiers, asking whether Franak Vyachorka was simulating his high blood pressure. A search of Franak's bed-side table was recorded on a video camera. A copy of newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* and a few bags of instant coffee bags were found. They were confiscated as "forbidden" items.

A year ago, the medical board of the military enlistment office of the Savetski district of Minsk found Franak Vyachorka unfit for military service because of his poor health. A regional medical board challenged the decision. After a check up in a military hospital, he received a deferment until March 2009. However, on January 16, the military enlistment office of the Savetski district of Minsk found Franak Vyachorka fit for military service. The court of this district upheld the decision of the military enlistment office. The decision was reached behind the closed doors, without Franak's and his lawyer's presence. This was one of the early cases of **forcible enlistments** into the Belarusian military.

Currently, Franak Vyachorka is serving in the air defense military unit 48694 in Mazyr (Homel region)

**Source:** Charter 97 Press Center, July 24, 2009

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## The New Life Church Appeals to UN

The Protestant community is struggling to keep its prayer house, which the Minsk authorities have already declared as property of the city.

In its appeal, New Life Church describes as illegal all court rulings ordering the community to sell its prayer house and the adjacent land plot to the city authorities, the community's lawyer, Syarhey Lukanin, told BelaPAN.

The community says that it has exhausted all available domestic legal remedies to defend its rights specified in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and asks the UN body to interfere in the dispute.

If the UN Human Rights Committee takes sides with New Life Church, it will tell the Belarusian government to "restore" the community's rights, while the International Monetary Fund may halt its lending to Belarus, according to Mr. Lukanin.

On August 24, members of New Life Church began an open-ended prayer vigil inside their worship house on the outskirts of Minsk to prevent the city government from taking control of the building.

In mid-May, Dzmitry Shashok, head of the Maskouski district housing authority, ordered New Life Church to vacate its prayer house by June 1, 2009.

The community defied the order despite Mr. Shashok's warning that failure to obey would be dealt with in accordance with regulations currently in force.

In March, the Minsk government offered the community to consider applying for a 0.4-hectare (one-acre) plot at the intersection of the Minsk Beltway and Sharanhovicha Street instead of the plot that New Life Church had been ordered to vacate.

At their general meeting held on May 5, New Life Church members unanimously voted to reject the offer.

It would take the community between 18 and 24 months and at least \$100,000 to obtain the necessary permits for getting a new plot, Mr. Lukanin explained in an earlier interview with BelaPAN. The construction of a new building would cost from \$3 million to \$5 million, he added. "In addition, people said that the community's prayers and sufferings had made the disputed plot into holy land," Mr. Lukanin said.

According to him, the community actually asked the Minsk government to expand its current land plot to enable the construction of a new modern building, a Bible college, a student dormitory, a rehabilitation center for alcohol and drug addicts and victims of violence, a homeless shelter and other facilities to accommodate social services. New Life Church requested the Minsk government to provide funding for these projects out of its budget.

New Life Church, one of the largest communities of the Association of Full Gospel Christians, obtained state registration in December 1992 and is said to have more than 1000 members. In 2002, the community bought a former cowshed together with a four-acre land plot from a kolkhoz. It converted the building into a prayer house and some 500 to 700 people gathered there each Sunday for worship.

The area was later added to the territory of Minsk and the city government decided to confiscate the plot and ordered New Life Church to sell the former cowshed to the city for 37.6 million rubels, or some \$10 per square meter. Officials explained that this amount was what the building had been worth before New Life Church converted it into a prayer house without permission.

**Source:** naviny.by / Office for Democratic Belarus, September 11, 2009

## Quotes of Quarter

"The Constitution says Belarus is a neutral state. Neutral states can't join any military organizations and carry out military exercises on its territory if foreign armies take part in them,"

declared the leader of the United Civil Party **ANATOL LYABEDZKA** regarding the massive Russia – Belarus military exercises.

## Summer Solstice Festivity — Kupalle

In the very center of Minsk there is a place where the River Svislach makes a wide curve between the October and Victory squares. This meander nests an oasis of old moss-covered maples and trembling aspens. This park is named after a famous Belarusian poet and writer Yanka Kupala. It hosts the poet's museum, his statue, and a fountain that features two nude, yet innocent-looking, bronze-cast girls throwing garlands into the water. Unlike the Gorky Park, which is right across the main avenue and is always full of young families with clouds of candy floss in their hands, the Kupala Park is a quiet place, suitable for reflection and tranquillity.

The fountain is especially tempting on a hot summer day. It is also the key to the park's name. Yanka Kupala is the poet's pseudonym. His real name was Ivan Daminikavich Lutsevich. Kupala (or Kupalle) is an old folk festival celebrating the summer solstice. Despite the Soviet authorities' attempts to eradicate folk traditions, even today most Belarusians are at least able to sing the tune of "Kupalinka" song and recall such elements of Kupalle as jumping over fire and putting garlands into rivers.

As often happens in Belarus, the celebration of "Yan Kupala" combines both Christian and pagan traditions. This is even reflected in the holiday's name. When Christianity came to Belarusian lands, the solstice celebration (Kupalle) was timed to the birthday of John the Baptist (Yan or Ivan as he is called here). Eventually, the two holidays fused into a single Yan Kupala celebration – praising the man who "bathed", or baptised Jesus Christ (the root of the word "Kupalle" means "bathing"). No wonder the ideal Kupalle would begin with a visit to a traditional wooden sauna. People believed it would guarantee good health for the whole next year. If there were no sauna available, people would go to a spring and wash their faces with cold water. After that they would throw a small coin into a spring in order to "bail themselves out" of poor health.

During Kupalle one had to be especially careful not to give away, lend or sell anything. It was especially forbidden to take fire or bread out of the house – this could bring poverty to the family.

Belarusians believed that on a night of Kupalle witches and evil wizards celebrated their "shabash" on a Bald-Headed Mountain (a mountain that had no forest on its top). This night served as a planning meeting for the forces of darkness. They decided which troubles they would bring people in villages during the next year. That is why every family took special precautions in order to protect itself and its possessions on this night. A stinging nettle was laid at the house's threshold (so that witches would burn their feet), a young aspen tree was put up at the entrance to a cattleshed, and cows' horns were decorated with the garlands of herbs and birch-tree branches.

The threat of being enchanted required special vigilance on this night. The best option was not to sleep at all. Young people did so with pleasure. It gave them excuse to stay awake until morning at a fire near the river. The Kupalle fire was a very important element of the celebration.

Ideally, it would be made using a flint stone or by rubbing two wooden sticks together. It was also very important to put "Piarun's Arrow" into the fire – a branch of an oak-tree that was hit by lightning. "Piarun" was Belarusian Zeus, the pagan god of thunder.

When the Kupalle fire was big enough, people sang songs and jumped across the flames. It was supposed to "purify" people of all evil for the whole year. One could also make a wish while jumping over the fire.

Another element of the celebration was burning a straw doll and rafting it down the river. A very picturesque moment was when young men put a fire to the oil-covered wooden wheels and let them roll down the hill into water.

Girls made garlands and tried to tell their fortunes by putting them into water. If the garland swam a long distance, the girl's future husband would come from far away; if the garland stuck to the riverbank, the husband would be a local guy; the sinking garland was a bad omen.



When the night grew dark, the most daring participants of the fest went into the wood in order to search for a magic "Paparats-kvetka" (fern flower). The one who found this beautiful flower gleaming in the dark would become a visionary, able to understand the language of animals and birds, and would also be able to see treasures buried under ground. By all counts, Paparats-kvetka was the flower of happiness. The irony of the legend is that the fern does not produce flowers. However, this never prevented young people from looking for Paparats-kvetka. Or, perhaps, they were simply looking for a romance? It was not unusual for a young man who went to look for the flower to meet that girl from a nearby village he liked so much. Often, the search continued until morning... Perhaps, this is the reason why Belarusians say that storks bring children to parents. After all, storks return home from south around March, some nine months after Kupalle...

Watching the sun rise was also a very special part of the celebration. If one has been awake the whole night and watched the sun without blinking, he would be able to see it "playing", dancing in the morning air.

When Kupalle was over, the celebration of Yan Kupala, John the Baptist began with a prayer and a bath in a nearby lake or river.

In the multi-confessional Belarus the difference of church calendars resulted into Kupalle being celebrated two times – in the night of June 23 and 24 (according to the modern Gregorian calendar) and in the night of July 6 and 7, according to the Julian calendar, used by the Orthodox church.

One could think that the holiday is only alive at folklore

departments of the University of Culture, but Kupalle is still celebrated in Belarusian villages. However, there are some deviations from the tradition. For example, there are much less songs being sung and much more beer and vodka being consumed. The Kupalle fire remains an absolute must, although ever more often it is made of old tires. Girls still like to make garlands, but protecting the house from evil forces by symbolic items is not as effective as it used to be. When the morning comes, masters of village houses often see that their gates have been switched with those of their neighbours. The least lucky ones find their street benches gone, their horse carts hoisted on the rooftops of their houses, and their wooden garden toilets standing on a crossroads in the village centre. There are all reasons to believe that this is not the result of a witches' "shabash", but of the local village youth looking for fun. However, for the sake of justice one should admit that these jokes almost never turn nasty.

In 1958 the Soviet Belarusian periodical *LiM* published a letter written by the members of the Academy of Sciences. They suggested that Kupalle should be updated to "modern conditions" by introducing such elements as sport games, carnivals, and torch marches. "By combining the old and new forms of the Kupalle celebration, it would receive the shape of a merry holiday, celebrating socialist labour and the fight for peace". These efforts were never successful. However, this is not ideology, but urbanisation and mass culture, which threaten the tradition of Kupalle. Indeed, with more and more Belarusians moving into big cities, there is simply no place for them to make the traditional fire. And surely you are not allowed to do that in Yanka Kupala park.

**Source:** Office for Democratic Belarus, July 14, 2009

## Quotes of Quarter

"Belarusians can bring their unique history, culture and language to Europe,"

stated **STEFAN ERICSSON**, the Swedish Ambassador to Belarus, addressing in Belarusian the Congress of Belarusians of the World on July 19 in Minsk.

This is the first visit of a US delegation of such level to Belarus for the last ten years... We gave him (Lukashenka) to understand that Belarus should comply with international demands and observe the OSCE obligations,"

declared US Senator **BENJAMIN CARDIN** after the delegation's meeting with Lukashenka on June 30 in Minsk.

## 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 Khadkievic 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**.

## NEWS BRIEFS

**June 30, 2009**

**Belarus Leader Pardons U.S. Lawyer**

MINSK (Reuters) -- Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka has pardoned a U.S. lawyer jailed on charges of industrial espionage, and expressed the hope that the move would help strained relations with Washington.

A statement issued by Lukashenka's press service said Emmanuel Zeltser, imprisoned last year at the height of a diplomatic row, had been pardoned by presidential decree.



*Emmanuel Zeltser*

Zeltser was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison in August last year. The U.S. State Department has repeatedly called for his release on health grounds; he underwent hospital treatment last November for a back ailment.

**Source:** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

**July 16, 2009**

**Last Belarusian-language class in Zhodzina closed due to crisis**

The Zhodzina district executive committee decided to stop the education programme in Belarusian in the local gymnasium #1, the only Belarusian-language gymnasium class in the region, according to "Nasha Niva"

The local authorities justified their decision by the economic crisis and the need for financial savings.

Since Alyaksandr Lukashenka came to power, closing of Belarusian-language schools began. Special classes with education in Belarusian began to change the language of instruction to Russian. Experts connect this with the referendum held by Lukashenka in 1995 that gave the status of an official language to both Belarusian and Russian. The authorities have started Russification of the Belarusian school system.

In 2003, the well-known Yakub Kolas Belarusian Humanities Lyceum was closed.

**Source:** Charter 97 Press Center

**July 20, 2009**

**Congress for creating a "Belarusian's card"**

The 5th congress of Belarusians of the World has suggested that the authorities should create a certificate for Belarusians living abroad. It should be an analogue of the well-known "Pole's card".

Participants of the congress think that the certificate should help ethnic Belarusians visit their historical fatherland. In particular, the document is planned to provide benefits when

aplying for multiple-entry visas. Its owners should be exempt from the necessity to register when entering Belarus, have access to education and medical assistance like Belarusian citizens, etc.

Moreover, BelaPAN noted that the congress has adopted appeals to various state organs concerning the creation of institutions for the Belarusian diaspora, protection of cultural and historical monuments, support of Belarusian mass media, TV and radio programmes abroad and the support and maintenance of the Belarusian House – a cultural educational centre of the International Civic Association “Union of Belarusian of the World “Fatherland” (Batskaushchyna).

**Source:** European Radio for Belarus

**July 21, 2009**

#### **Autukhovich Charged with Plot to Kill Two Officials**

On June 23, the interior ministry’s preliminary investigation department charged Mr. Autukhovich and “other persons” with preparations for a terrorist act under the Criminal Code’s Articles 359 and 13, the statement reads. The press office did not specify the names of “other persons.”

Mr. Autukhovich, known for his criticism of Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s government, was arrested together with his two associates, Yury Lyavonau and Uladzimir Asipenka, in armed raids in their hometown of Vaukavysk, Hrodna region, on February 8. Police said that they were suspected of perpetrating a series of arsons and explosions targeting the property of local officials and of illegal possession of explosives and firearms.

Mr. Autukhovich insisted that he had been sent to prison because he had protested authorities’ arbitrary rule. Amnesty International declared him and Mr. Lyavonau prisoners of conscience.

**Source:** Naviny.by/Office for Democratic Belarus

**July 22, 2009**

#### **Registration of Belarusian Christian Democrats refused again**

The Supreme Court dismissed a complaint by the founder of the Belarusian Christian Democracy party and agreed with the position of the Ministry of Justice.

The BCD representatives told the court that the decision by the Ministry of Justice was politically motivated. Judge of the Supreme Court Valery Samalyuk heard witnesses, who submitted signatures for BCD registration. The witnesses told about the threats from administration and KGB officers. Yet the Supreme Court took the side of the Ministry of Justice on July 23.

The Belarusian Christian Democracy applied for registration to the Ministry of Justice first on March 12, 2009

The Ministry of Justice denied registration to the BCD several times. Representatives of the ministry said last time that the party founders had allegedly transferred the official registration fee (1.750.000 rubles) to a wrong account.

**Aug. 5, 2009**

#### **Workers of MAZ and MTZ to be sent to construction sites**

The Belarusian government invented a new means of struggling against unemployment and short hours on most enterprises in the country.

Labour resources on most industrial enterprises in Belarus working below capacity may be used on housing construction. This was stated by the first deputy minister of architecture and construction Mikhail Abramchuk, BelTA reports.

“There’s an order by the government to transfer people freed

on the enterprises working below capacity,” the first deputy minister said. “They can be involved in construction of dwelling houses at least for themselves.”

“For example, big industrial enterprises MAZ (Minsk Automobile Plant) and MTZ (Minsk Tractor Plant) with queues for housing can stop waiting and begin building with their own forces. Moreover, they have construction trusts that need only staff,” said Mikhail Abramchuk.

This is not the first measure by the Belarusian authorities to solve the problem of unemployment and short days on enterprises.

At the beginning of summer 2009, the local authorities started a campaign of sending plant workers to collective farms.

Many Belarusian enterprises have found themselves to be on the verge of closure: plants and factories work short weeks, salaries are being reduced, bonuses and additional payments are cut, workers are being laid off. Information about serious economic problems on enterprises comes from regions almost every day.

As of June 2009, about 200,000 people worked short weeks or had to take holidays.

**Source:** Charter 97 Press Center

**August 9, 2009**

#### **EU Urges Belarus to Abolish Death Penalty**

The European Union expressed serious anxiety at what has been the second death sentence to have been passed by a Belarusian court in the past few weeks, the European Commission's Delegation to Belarus said on Monday.

In a statement cited by the delegation in a report, the EU again urged Belarus and other countries that have not yet abolished the death penalty to do so and to declare a moratorium on it before abolishing it.

One of the death sentences was passed by the Minsk City Court on July 22. The other was passed a month before.

The delegation cited in its report promises to seriously limit the use of capital punishment and ultimately abolish it that the Belarusian government has made over the last few years.

The release also mentioned a June 23, 2009, resolution of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) in which PACE expresses willingness to return to the Belarusian parliament its currently suspended status of a special guest if Belarus declares a moratorium on the death penalty.

The statement's signatories include Turkey, Croatia and Macedonia, which are seeking to join the EU; Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, countries that are expected to seek EU membership in the future; member states of the European Free Trade Association; Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area; and Ukraine.

**Source:** Kyiv Post/ Office for Democratic Belarus

**August 14, 2009**

#### **US Assistant Secretary of State Meets with Opposition Leaders**

Philip H. Gordon, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, began his one-day visit to Minsk on Friday with a meeting with Belarusian opposition politicians and civil society activists.

The meeting was attended by former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin; Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party; Syarhey Kalyakin, chairman of the Belarusian Party of Communists; Anatol Lyaukovich, leader of the Belarusian

Social Democratic Party "Hramada;" Vintsuk Vyachorka, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front; Viktor Karnyayenka, deputy head of the Movement for Freedom; Vital Rymasheuski, a co-chairman of the founding committee for the Belarusian Christian Democracy party; human rights defender Valyantsin Stefanovich; and Mikhail Pashkevich of the Young Democrats organization.



*Philip H. Gordon*

In an interview with BelaPAN, Mr. Stefanovich said that the US official had been informed about the political situation in the country. "I spoke about the subject of freedom of association. I said that we hadn't seen progress in this sphere as of late, that both the BCD [Belarusian Christian Democracy] and the Party of Freedom and Progress and "Nasha Vyasna" had been denied registration," he said.

Dr. Gordon also was told about the situation regarding independent media outlets in Belarus. "The procedure of [media] registration has been simplified, but the matter of newspaper distribution has not been solved so far. Apart from this, there's the problem of foreign media accreditation and pressure on journalists who work for foreign media outlets," Mr. Stefanovich said.

The US Assistant Secretary of State was asked to devote particular attention to the imprisonment of young opposition activist Artsyom Dubski and the criminal case against business partners Mikalay Autukhovich and Yury Lyavonau and their associate Uladzimir Asipenka. "Belarusian human rights defenders and Amnesty International view Dubski as a political prisoner. As for the Autukhovich case, it has not been declared political so far, as there's no access to information about the case," the rights activist said.

According to Mr. Lyabedzka, the US official assured the politicians that Washington did not intend to engage in political bargaining with the Belarusian government. "He noted that the sanctions [introduced by the US] were connected with the democracy and human rights situation in Belarus from day one, that the US continues adhering to this approach and the sanctions would be removed only after true changes in the sphere of human rights," he said.

**Source:** Naviny.by/ Office for Democratic Belarus

**August 20, 2009**

**Christians In Belarus Refuse Orders To Vacate Church Building**

The pastor of an evangelical Christian group in Belarus called The New Life says his congregation will not comply with Minsk authorities' demand that they leave their church, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

City officials visited the church last week and told the congregation's leadership that the church building must be vacated by Wednesday, August 19.

Pastor Vyachaslau Hancharenka told RFE/RL that the members of the congregation will stay in the church no matter what.

The building is an old barn in the Minsk suburbs that held livestock in the Soviet era.

In the last three years the congregation has been fighting to preserve the building as their place of worship. Local authorities say the property was "illegally privatized by the church in the 1990s."

**Source:** Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty

**August 20, 2009**

**Belarusian-Venezuelan Company to Access Three More Oil Deposits**

Petrolera BeloVenezolana, a Belarusian-Venezuelan oil company, will be given access to three more oil deposits in Venezuela, reported Belarus' ONT television channel.

An agreement to this effect was reached at a meeting of the High-Level Belarusian-Venezuelan Joint Commission, which was held in Minsk on Friday, the channel said.

The company formerly produced up to 9,000 barrels a day, but the production will double in 2010 and the total output may reach one million barrels by September the report said.

The meeting also yielded agreements to jointly develop gas fields and cooperate in the iron and steel industry.

**Source:** Naviny.by/ Office for Democratic Belarus

**September 5, 2009**

**Aliaksei Yanukevich elected new leader of Belarusian Popular Front party**

Aliaksei Yanukevich, 33 was today elected a new chairman of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front. At a congress in Minsk, 174 delegated voted for his candidacy while 144 delegates voted for the former chairman Liavon Barshcheuski.



*Alyaksei Yanukevich*

Aliaksei Yanukevich is an economist. He graduated from the Belarusian State University of Economics in 1997, majoring in foreign economic relations management. He has been a member of the party for 13 years. He was a deputy chairman of the party since 2003

**Source:** European Radio for Belarus

**September 9, 2009**

**Joint Belarusian-Russian military maneuvers West 2009 have begun in Belarus**

The exercises are being held to train joint armed forces to provide security for the so-called Russian-Belarus Union State.

Belarusian opposition activists have called on Belarusians to protest the maneuvers, calling the event an "occupation."

Minsk-based military observer Alyaksandr Alesin told RFE/RL that the military exercises are very important for Russia, as it tries to preserve its presence on the territory of its traditional interests.

According to him, it is crucial for Russia to have Belarus not just as an ally, but an ally with very strong armed forces.

Alesin says Russia simply does not have enough military resources to be present in Belarus, which borders the EU, as the Caucasus and Chinese border are consuming its military resources enormously

**Source:** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

**September 10, 2009**

### **Belarusian Activists On Trial For Protesting Presence Of Russian Troops**

MINSK -- Over a dozen activists are facing trial at the Minsk Central District Court for participating in a protest against Russian troops' presence in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

The activists protested in Minsk on September 9, the same day that Russian troops started arriving in Belarus to take part in joint Belarusian-Russian military maneuvers called West 2009.

The exercises will be held later this month to train the joint armed forces to provide security for the so-called Russian-Belarus Union State.

The detainees informed their relatives on September 10 that they were held in a police station till 2:00 am, and then transferred to a detention center. The detainees said that they have been charged with hooliganism.

**Source:** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty



*NO to Russian military bases*

**September 14, 2009**

### **Minsk Officials Reject NGO Request For Demonstration**

Minsk city authorities have rejected a request by the Right Alliance to hold a public gathering, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

The movement planned to hold a rally called "Belarusian Schools for Belarus' Children!" on Bangalore Square in the Peoples' Friendship Park in Minsk on September 16. But city authorities say the gathering cannot be allowed because it might block public transportation.

The leader of the Right Alliance, Yuras Karetnikau, told RFE/RL that the authorities' explanation makes no sense as there is no public transportation in the park.

Russian is the predominant language in Belarus and the number of schools in Belarus teaching in Belarusian has decreased

dramatically under President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who has ruled the country since 1994.

**Source:** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

**September 17, 2009**

### **EU Calls For Reform After Belarus Crackdown**

STOCKHOLM (Reuters)-- European Union president Sweden has called on Belarusian authorities to take steps to improve democracy and human rights in the country after a crackdown by authorities on demonstrators this week.

"The Presidency urges the Belarusian authorities to refrain from the use of force in dealing with peaceful demonstrations and to ensure that representatives of independent media are able to perform their tasks without interference," Sweden, holder of the rotating presidency, said in a statement.

One day earlier, on September 16, police in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, broke up an unsanctioned opposition rally and arrested about 20 people.

About 40 activists had gathered on the city's main square to mark the anniversary of the 1999 disappearance of opposition activist Viktor Hanchar (Gonchar). Riot police broke up the protest, dragging activists into nearby vans and blocked journalists trying to cover the rally.

**Source:** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

**September 25, 2009**

### **Prosecutor General's Office Petitioned to Institute Criminal Proceedings over Lukashenka's Ballot-Rigging Revelations**

Prosecutor General's Office petitioned to institute criminal proceedings over Lukashenka's ballot-rigging revelations Anatol Lyabedzka, chairman of the United Civic Party, and Uladzimir Ukhnyalou, a leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists, on September 24 delivered a petition to the Prosecutor General's Office, which demanded instituting criminal proceedings over Alyaksandr Lukashenka's recent revelations of ballot-rigging in the 2006 presidential election.

The petition was signed by some 50 people, including former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin; former parliamentary speaker Mechyslau Hryb, Syarhey Kalyakin, chairman of the Belarusian Party of Communists, and other prominent opposition politicians.

"Ninety-three percent voted for me in the last election," Mr. Lukashenka said in an interview published by Russia's newspaper Izvestia on August 27. "I then admitted under pressure that we had falsified the election results. I said bluntly, 'Yes, we falsified them.' I ordered that the 93 percent should be replaced with something around 80 percent. I don't remember exactly how much. Because it is psychologically hard to accept a percentage higher than 90."

That was the second time Mr. Lukashenka had publicly revealed that elections in Belarus were rigged, the petition says. That is why his words cannot be ignored by law-enforcement agencies, the Belarusian people and the international public, the petition says.

"The constitution declares that all citizens are equal before the law," the petition says. "As prosecutor general, you have got a chance to prove this. In our opinion, it would not be difficult to establish whom Alyaksandr Lukashenka ordered to falsify the election results, who did that and how."

**Source:** naviny.by/ Office for Democratic Belarus

## Thoughts and Observations

### World Congress Reminiscent Of a Communist Party Conference

Ales Marachkin, the outgoing chairman of the World Association of Belarusians "BATSKAUSHCHYNA" (Fatherland) thinks that real-life problems of Belarusians should have been discussed at the congress.

In an interview with Charter 97 ([www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org)) Ales Marachkin shared his impressions of the first day of the 5th Congress of the Belarusians of the World held in Minsk on July 18-19.

"Conclusions are alarming. It is not for nothing that for the first time such a "bouquet" of officials was attending the congress. First, Culture Minister Pavel Latushka, and then the head of Religious and Ethnic Affairs Committee Leanid Hulyaka, officials of the Foreign Ministry. And speeches of officials were so long that their papers kept dropping to the floor. People were puzzled: are we at a Communist party conference? Have we gathered to listen to reports of bureaucrats?

I must repeat, it is alarming. Some underground intrigues that are taking place are worrisome. I wouldn't like to speak about that, but that is just the point. If renting premises for the congress suddenly ceased to be a problem, then it becomes obvious that the authorities want to make BATSKAUSHCHYNA a tamed organization. The deputy head of Lukashenka's administration Zametalin once dubbed us oppositional public organisation and recommended not to cooperate with us. And suddenly such a fuss is taking place. If Lukashenka wants to move in the direction of the civilized world, he could have welcomed participants of the congress. However, that hasn't happened. He was busy leading an international motorcycle festival, riding a Harley Davidson.

Certainly, we are glad that people have visited their homeland. However, a representative of the Belarusian expat community in Germany has addressed the congress, and read a message from political emigrants. One has to think about it. According to the message there are many political refugees who cannot come to Belarus, since they are banned from entering the country. And the representative of the expat community asked: then who are those who have attended the congress? Are they representing all Belarusians of the world? No, many are cut off from their motherland.

Actually, one sensed a desire to speak about the situation in Belarus in a keener, more direct fashion.

Our organisation certainly needs renewal, but we shouldn't sell ourselves surreptitiously; this sweet word "resources" makes people spineless. But one should always state one's position directly and clearly.

However, on the first day of the congress the political situation wasn't addressed clearly. Nobody spoke about political prisoners, not even Pavel Sevyarynets, who was a prisoner many times himself.

The announced topic of the congress, national identification, depends on politics. All problems of Belarusians are caused by fear, and the fear is created by one person. Lukashenka's power structures are punitive, like in Soviet times. That's our identity. Such things certainly must be discussed."

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, July 21, 2009

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### US Delegation Chastised By the Dictator

Representatives of the US Congress visited Belarus as a part of their visit to the Baltic and Balkan states. A meeting between the congressmen and the Belarusian dictator didn't bring a breakthrough in relations.

The delegation consisted of Helsinki Commission Chairman Senator Benjamin L. Cardin, Commission Ranking Minority Member Congressman Chris Smith, and Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka accepted the delegation in the first half of the day. At the meeting with the congressmen the Belarusian dictator expressed confidence in normalizing relations with the United States and said he was ready to return to full restoration of mutual diplomatic presence if the sanctions on Belarus were lifted.

"We are ready to return to a conversation on full restoration of mutual diplomatic presence if the sanctions on our country and their legal basis The Belarus Democracy Act are lifted on a legislative level," Lukashenka said.

"I hope the United States will sooner or later realize that a conversation based on sanctions and force has no prospects," the Belarusian dictator said.

According to him, the sanctions imposed by the US government damaged interests not so much of Belarusian manufacturers as their American partners. "We managed to re-orient our flows of commodities to other sales market in time, but many American businessmen, who had been flourishing due to imports and using Belarusian products in producing, were affected by the repressive bans," the ruler said.

Speaking about the public and political processes in the country, Lukashenka noted: "We are a young state, so there things that go wrong. But let's be sincere, you always have some things that go wrong." "We don't have the experience that the states of "old democracies" have. The measures we take to improve public and political processes serve to further strengthen the sovereignty and an independent position of Belarus in the international arena," Lukashenka noted.

The US Congress delegation also met with representatives of the Belarusian civil society. A press conference was held following the results of the meeting. It should be reminded that a diplomatic conflict between Belarus and the United States began after the US had imposed economic sanctions on the Belarusian regime due to its refusal to release political prisoners and stop repression against the opposition.



On March 7, after the official site of the US Treasury published explanations to the sanctions imposed against Belneftekhim concern, Belarusian Ambassador to the US Mikhail Khvastou was recalled from Washington. On March 12, US Ambassador Karen Stewart left Belarus on demand of the Belarusian authorities. The US embassy was recommended to cut its staff. 17 American diplomats left Belarus on March 27. On March 31, Belarus decided to further reduce its embassy staff in Washington and suggested the US do the same.

The representatives of the US Congress paid a visit to Belarus as a part of their visit to Baltic and Balkan states. The objective of the trip was strengthening security, promoting human rights, and international cooperation. The delegation took part in a session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Vilnius.

**A note:** The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the US Helsinki Commission) is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 56 countries. The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

**Source:** Charter 97 Press Center, June 30, 2009

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## Lukashenka's Gambit In Relations with Moscow

By David Marples

On July 31, the Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka participated in an informal summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) held in Cholpon Ata on the shore of Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan. However, he refused to sign any documents on the Russian proposal to create the Collective Operational Reaction Forces (CORF) and Belarus has yet to take up its scheduled term as the rotating chair of the CSTO, which embraces, along with Russia and Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The trip by Lukashenka was described in the official media in Minsk as a "working visit" to Kyrgyzstan (*SB-Belarus' Segodnya*, July 31). It appears once again that the Belarusian president is emphasizing his distance from Moscow, but it is a risky gambit.

Russia and Belarus have had serious differences since late 2002, and they were exacerbated in 2005-06 when the Russian company Gazprom expressed its wish to raise prices for exported gas to its neighbor to world levels. Lukashenka was outraged and made overtures to the E.U. that culminated in the country joining the Eastern Partnership in May of this year (EDM, May 18). The current dispute has a number of facets linked to gas prices, Russian loans, Moscow's desire to gain control over profitable Belarusian companies through their privatization, as well

as Lukashenka's reluctance to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In late May, when Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Minsk, he offered Belarus a "stability loan" but with the proviso that it be paid in Russian rubles. When Minsk refused this offer (the IMF agreed to add an additional \$1 billion to its earlier loan of \$2.5 billion), Putin then expressed an interest in the privatization of Belarusian companies producing dairy products. At present, 95 percent of Belarusian milk exports are sold to Russia. Belarus' retort was to hold talks with the E.U. about meeting its standards for milk imports, once again a brusque rebuff to Russia ([www.europeanvoice.com](http://www.europeanvoice.com), June 24).

Consequently, Russia deployed the head of its trade and sanitary inspection authority (Rospotrebnadzor), Gennady Onishchenko to inspect Belarusian dairy products. Onishchenko is well known for his outrageous public statements and recently advised the Russian soccer team's fans to boycott the September 9 World Cup qualifier in Cardiff, Wales, because of the dangers of contracting swine flu (BBC News, August 4). However, no one in Wales thus far has died of the disease.

Onishchenko maintained that about 1,200 of the dairy products that Belarus exports to Russia did not meet various standards, including proper labeling, and banned their import, depriving Minsk of exports yielding \$1 billion in annual revenue. Lukashenka reacted to that by failing to attend the CSTO meeting in Moscow in June, at which Belarus was due to assume the chairmanship (Russia had to serve as the "technical chair"). Moreover, he declared that in his absence, all decisions made, including those on the new CORF, were illegitimate. Russian president Dmitry Medvedev complained bitterly that Lukashenka had not even informed him about his prospective absence (*Moscow Times*, August 3).

Subsequently, Moscow ended the milk war promptly (Reuters, June 17) -thus indicating its irrational nature- but then raised the issue of gas prices and froze the final \$500 million of an agreed \$2 billion loan (*Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, July 31). According to the Russian side, Belarus could face bankruptcy as early as 2010 because of its lack of cash. Given this growing rift, the question arises as to why Lukashenka decided to attend the informal summit, having boycotted the official summit just a few weeks earlier.

The answer appears to be that Minsk cannot sever ties with Moscow completely because of its economic dependence in the energy sector, as well as its close military and security links, and its desperate need for current and future loans. Belarus has two bargaining chips left vis-à-vis the Russians: recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and signing the CSTO agreement on the CORF. At Choplon Ata, Lukashenka declared that the Belarusian people must decide on these issues. Nor was there any one-on-one official meeting between Medvedev and Lukashenka (*Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii*, August 4).

The presidents of the CSTO countries agreed to observe the active phase of the CORF exercises (seen by some

observers as a Russian-led NATO), which will take place on October 14. According to Russian sources, all countries other than Uzbekistan (i.e. including Belarus) have agreed in principle to sign the agreement (*RIA Novosti*, July 31). This fall, Russian and Belarusian forces are scheduled to hold large-scale military exercise -Operation Zapad (West) ([www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org), Aug 3), and an opportunity will thus arise for Medvedev and Lukashenka to meet.

However, once Belarus relents on the two issues, the authority of the president, as well as his country, will be weakened. South Ossetia and Abkhazia could conceivably apply to join the Russia-Belarus Union, rendering it less a partnership than a Russian-run body. Belarus has no strategic interest in the two Georgian republics and recognition would undermine the Eastern Partnership Project that also includes Georgia.

Moreover, if Belarus signs the CORF agreement and takes up its chairmanship of the CSTO, it is also approving implicitly at least, Moscow's leadership in a new military bloc. That might deal a serious blow to its new partnership with the E.U. Thus, Lukashenka's maneuvers represent a dangerous gambit, no matter how adroitly he has played the game to date.

**Source::** Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 152, August 7, 2009

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## The Joint Task Force Without Belarus?

By Nikolaus von Twickel

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka refused to sign an agreement Saturday that would create a rapid-reaction security force, casting doubt on Moscow's plans to form a post-Soviet military alliance and suggesting that a serious rift in relations with Minsk continues.

Lukashenka attended a Collective Security Treaty Organization summit in the Kyrgyz resort of Choplon-Ata with other heads of state from the seven-member body, but he made no public comments. He boycotted the last CSTO summit, held in Moscow in June, where Belarus was supposed to assume its rotating presidency.

In a sign that Minsk was unrepentant for the slight, Moscow said it would continue to act in lieu of Belarus. We will hold "the CSTO's technical presidency until Belarus is ready to take on this function fully," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Saturday, *Interfax* reported.

On a more positive note for the Kremlin, Kyrgyzstan agreed to let Russia bolster its troops in the country by opening a joint military training centre, according to a memorandum published on the Kremlin's web site.

Kyrgyzstan has said the facility will be located at an abandoned Soviet-era military base near the southern city of Osh, close to the Uzbek border.

The memorandum allows Russia to locate "up to a battalion" of new troops in the country and station them at

a training centre. By Nov. 1, the sides will sign an agreement on a "united Russian military base" that would include "all Russian military sites in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, including the Russian air base in Kant."

Kyrgyzstan had previously denied that it would allow for a second Russian base, which could be seen as disturbing the balance of foreign powers there. The United States operates an air base in Manas, which it won permission to keep in June after promising more money.

Lavrov suggested on Saturday that the terms of the deal — including the number of new Russian troops — could change by November.

"All questions regarding the geographic parameters of the new Russian military presence and the financial details will be discussed. ... The overall number will be determined by military specialists depending on the security needs of the region," he said, *Interfax* reported.

The Kyrgyz training centre was initially envisioned as a part of the CSTO rapid-response force, which was proposed in February to bolster military capability in energy-rich Central Asia, a Muslim region sensitive for Moscow's security interests. It has also been described as boosting the military dimension of the alliance, which has served primarily as a forum for security consultations.

The CSTO currently has a rapid-reaction force of about 3,000 but without a unified command. Belarus and Uzbekistan have refused to join, leaving remaining members Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the task.

Uzbekistan, which experts believe has the strongest military capacity in the area, has veered from the regional tradition of Kremlin-friendly policies after Russia refused in November to side with Uzbekistan in Central Asia's ongoing debate over water use.

Relations with Belarus, once Russia's closest ally, have deteriorated significantly in recent months.

Minsk initiated unprecedented steps to achieve better ties with the European Union earlier this year, winning membership in the 27-member bloc's Eastern Partnership program, which was duly criticized by Moscow.

When Lukashenka snubbed the CSTO summit in June, an angry President Dmitry Medvedev complained that he had not even called to explain why. Lukashenka also skipped an informal Commonwealth of Independent States gathering in Moscow last month.

Lukashenka's stance is seen as a delicate balancing act between Moscow and the West, as his country is on the verge of bankruptcy. Belarus this year received \$1.5 billion loans each from Russia and the International Monetary Fund.

Russia has delayed another \$500 million tranche, saying the country could go bankrupt as early as next year — a claim Lukashenka hotly denied.

Alexei Malashenko, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, said the summit showed that the Belarusian president was just interested in garnering more bargaining

power.

“He will sign only if he gets something for it, first and foremost loans. For now, he is just using it as a lever against Russia,” he said.

Malashenko argued that the rapid-reaction force was not worth much without Belarus.

“It is just Russia, some Central Asian republics plus Armenia. That is not Moscow’s vision for this,” he said.

He also warned that if Uzbekistan opted to leave the Collective Security Treaty Organization, it might view the Russian base in Kyrgyzstan in a different light. “This might then be a threat to Uzbekistan’s security,” he said.

Vladimir Zharikhin, deputy director of the Moscow-based CIS Institute, a think tank, said it was understandable that Belarus was not very interested in a rapid-reaction force in Central Asia.

“[Lukashenka] does not see any particular danger for his country, which lies in a totally different area,” he said.

Zharikhin added that the rapid-reaction force, which he described as “a security guarantee against terrorist actions in participating countries,” could probably do just as well without Belarusian participation.

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## Russian TV Crew Expelled

*A Russian TV crew’s visit to Minsk might be the Kremlin’s first move in a bid to undermine an uppity underling.*

By **Alyaksandr Yanusik**

MINSK — When they got the assignment to interview relatives of missing opposition figures in Minsk, journalists at the Russian TV channel NTV must have known it wouldn’t be easy; it touched on a subject particularly sensitive for the country’s authoritarian leader. Even so, they didn’t take enough precautions and were expelled from the country on 14 August.

But their visit sent a signal to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka that the Kremlin may back one of his rivals in the next presidential race, and it may be using the media to do it.

It was a working day as usual. On arrival in Minsk, correspondent Aleksei Malkov and cameraman Yury Babenko filmed a couple of interviews for a film about the 1999 and 2000 disappearances of two politicians, a businessman, and a journalist in Belarus, and returned to their hotel. The next morning they noticed that they were being followed.

Later the same day, in a scene chillingly reminiscent of the abductions that were the subject of their investigation, they say they were surrounded by police and plainclothes officers, forced into a minivan and taken to a wooded location for an interrogation. Afterward, they were taken to Orsha at the Belarusian-Russian border and put on a train bound for Moscow. Officers seized the videotapes they had filmed in Minsk and their cell phone SIM cards, they say.

The journalists were charged with working in Belarus without accreditation from the Foreign Ministry.

Belarus’ security services denied the fact of deportation, while the NTV office in Moscow would not officially comment.

The apparent expulsion sparked a controversy, with some observers speculating that the crew came on a reconnaissance mission ordered by the Kremlin, which plans a large-scale effort to replace disobedient Lukashenka with a more loyal politician.

Lukashenka fell out with the Russian leadership in 2007 over Moscow’s demand that Belarus pay market prices for energy. Tensions escalated this year after Belarus joined the EU’s Eastern Partnership program. Earlier this year, Russia imposed a ban on dairy imports from Belarus, prompting Lukashenka to boycott a security summit of ex-Soviet nations in protest.

Stanislav Belkovsky, a Moscow-based political analyst, says the Kremlin has been irked by the fact that its closest ally takes an independent position on most issues and often sides with Russia’s opponents in the post-Soviet space and in the West. The incident involving the NTV journalists could be evidence that the Kremlin plans a massive campaign to unseat the Belarusian ruler.

Interestingly, earlier the same month a journalist with Russia’s state-controlled *Golos Rossii* radio station invited Belarusian opposition politician Anatol Lyabedzka to appear on a talk show on the issue of disappearances.

Theoretically, the Kremlin can use NTV as its propaganda tool during the next presidential election, coming up in Belarus in late 2010 or early 2011. Like Russia’s ORT and Rossiya TV channels, NTV is received by aerial across much of Belarus.

NTV had a reputation as Russia’s most independent and free TV broadcaster before it was taken over by state-dominated Gazprom Media in 2003. Some of its journalists resigned in protest, while many others were fired by the newly installed management. Now the channel is widely regarded as the Kremlin’s mouthpiece.

NTV correspondent Malkov is known for his documentaries defending the Kremlin’s attacks on Yukos and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, as well as for smearing Kremlin foes like Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky, and Russian opposition leader Garry Kasparov. In 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded Malkov the Order of Service to the Fatherland.

### WHERE IT HURTS

The issue of high-profile disappearances is Lukashenka’s most vulnerable spot. Voters are quick to forget about their leader’s policy mistakes, but they take unaccounted-for abductions and murders of opponents seriously.

Former Interior Minister Yury Zakhanka, former Central Election Commission Chairman Viktor Hanchar, his friend, businessman Anatol Krasouski, and cameraman Dzmityr Zavadski vanished in 1999 and 2000.

Investigations appeared to make some progress at the start but later were put on hold after Lukashenka sacked Prosecutor General Aleh Bazhelka and KGB Chief Uladzimir Matskevich in late November 2000.

## Lukashenka Admits Rigging 2006 Presidential Election

By David Marples

In an interview that appeared in *Izvestiya* in Moscow on August 27, the Belarusian President, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, maintained that the results of the 2006 presidential elections were falsified. However, rather than raising his total, Lukashenka had allegedly demanded that it be lowered to appear more realistic to the public. He maintains that his real total was 93 percent, but it was replaced by "something around 80 percent" (the official figure was 83 percent).

The Belarusian president made a similar comment in November 2006 at a press conference with journalists from Ukraine. In response to the latest statement, Anatol Lyabedzka, the leader of the United Civic Party, commented that the results of the election were determined solely by the president. He called for a criminal investigation by the Prosecutor-General and the removal of Lidziya Yarmoshyna, the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission ([www.naviny.by](http://www.naviny.by), September 1).

Yarmoshyna, however, has denied that the election was rigged and informed Radio Free Europe's Belarusian Service that her office had received no orders "whatsoever" during the election. She also stated that the commission is willing to publish documents received from its regional branches to substantiate her denial (RFE/RL, September 1). Polls gathered before and during the 2006 campaign had indicated that Lukashenka's standing was between 50 and 60 percent, while that of his main challenger Alyaksandr Milinkevich, now the leader of the Movement for Freedom was around 15-17 percent. Thus, the official total of 82.6 percent for Lukashenka seemed inflated and that of 6 percent for the challenger considerably understated.

That election was also notable for the sustained protests that took place afterward in Kastychnitskaya Square in the center of Minsk. At a press conference following his meeting with the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in Sopot on September 1, Vladimir Putin was asked by a journalist from the Belarusian opposition movement Charter 97 how long Russia would continue to support a dictatorial regime in Minsk that "prolongs the suffering" of the people of Belarus. Putin replied that Lukashenka had been elected by direct, secret ballot of the people of Belarus, while noting the weakness of democracy in the post-Soviet countries ([www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org), *RIA Novosti*, September 1).

The irony of using Putin as an assessor of the state of democracy in Belarus aside, the question came at a particularly sensitive moment in Russian-Belarusian relations, as the pendulum appeared to swing once again from Minsk to Moscow, rather than Minsk to Brussels, as a result of two recent developments.

First, following a meeting in Sochi between Lukashenka and the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on August 27, Belarus finally agreed to take up the presidency of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and sign the long delayed agreement on the Collective Rapid

In 2002, a panel of judges sentenced ex-members of Belarus' elite Almaz police unit to life in prison for unrelated murders and the abduction of Zavadski, who had been Lukashenka's personal cameraman before he joined Russia's ORT television network in 1996. However, the trial failed to establish what happened to the journalist after his abduction, and his body has not been found. Human rights defenders say the convicted men are simply scapegoats.

Lukashenka told *The Financial Times* last year that the disappearance of Zavadski was the worst wound for him as president.

"He is an honest and decent person who had no relation to politics whatsoever," the newspaper quoted the Belarusian leader as saying. "The court passed its verdict in this criminal case and the person is serving a life sentence [for kidnapping]. But for me the most important matter is to find [Zavadski], or if he died, to find his body. If it turns out that our court was wrong and misjudged the [convicted] person, then I'll be on my knees begging forgiveness of relatives, friends, and Dzmitry Zavadski himself if he turns out to be alive."

In 2004, Cypriot MP Christos Pourgourides, who visited Belarus on a fact-finding mission for the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, charged that officials at the highest level of the Lukashenka government were involved and obstructed attempts to investigate the disappearances.

"As a criminal lawyer, I have no doubt in my mind that these disappearances were ordered at the highest possible level in the establishment of Belarus," Pourgourides told reporters in Strasbourg in 2004. "I cannot be certain that the order was given by the president himself, but I'm absolutely certain that the order for their abductions was given by people very, very close to the president."

In an interview published by the Russian newspaper *Zavtra* in June, the Belarusian leader denied any involvement in the disappearances of Zakharka, Hanchar, and Krasouski in 1999, linking what he called their killings to "conflicts of a commercial nature."

"Three people were killed and the media are still focused on [my possible involvement]," the Belarusian leader said. The murderers' trail has recently been found in Germany, he claimed, without explanation.

No matter who ordered the NTV investigation, the disappearances will be in the spotlight of media and human rights groups as long as no credible effort is made to solve them. That's a small comfort to those who still wait for justice, and, it turns out, a handy weapon for the Kremlin.

So bring on the film crews.

Source: TransitionsOnLine, 7 September 2009

### Quotes of Quarter

"I don't remember when I had an undamaged envelope. All letters are opened, checked, Scotch-taped, and stamped "Received damaged by the Minsk Post Office,"

MIKALAJ KHALEZIN, the Belarusian playwright and head of the Free Theatre, wrote in his [blog](#) that practically all mail from abroad is checked by the authorities.

## September 17 and the Roots Of Contemporary Belarus

By David Marples

The 70th anniversary of the start of the Second World War in 1939 has been commemorated worldwide. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has denounced revisionism and attempts to belittle the Soviet victory. In Belarus, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka commemorated September 17 as the pivotal date in the foundation of the modern state, and speakers at a conference at the House of Officers requested that it be added to the calendar of state days of remembrance.

The Lukashenka regime, like its Russian counterpart, is notable for its selective memory. Having remained in power as a result of manipulated referendums and elections, it has deployed the war as its foundation stone of legitimacy. The national holiday is July 3 (established in 1995), the date of Minsk's liberation from the Germans in 1944. May 9, the Soviet Victory Day, sees the largest parade of the year with the president in attendance. Monuments and museums commemorating the war dominate cities and towns, and the focus is on Belarusian suffering and contributions to the Allied victory.

In 2005, the historical complex "Liniya Stalina" opened to mark the 60th anniversary of the wartime victory and Belarusian resistance to the German onslaught ([www.stalin-line.museum.by](http://www.stalin-line.museum.by)). The president regularly watches the reenactments of wartime battles. That no such fortifications existed in the summer of 1941 is immaterial; the museum is simply another myth about the war perpetuated by the Belarusian authorities in order to link Soviet Belorussia to the modern state.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that in his address on September 17, Lukashenka referred to the "liberation drive" of the Red Army to protect native Belarusians and Ukrainians from the Germans by annexing the eastern territories of Poland, following Hitler's invasion sixteen days earlier. On the "freed lands," he added, were created conditions for a new life as a single territorial unit. The "sovereign and peace-loving state" of today originated on this date seventy years ago (*SB-Belarus' Segodnya*, Sept 17).

There was focus elsewhere on the cruelty of the Polish occupation of Western Belarus, 1921-39. Maksim Asipau noted in *Vecherniy Minsk* that although Belarusians and other national minorities of Poland had been guaranteed equal rights with Poles in political life and in the development of languages and culture, in practice these were not granted, and Belarusian Catholics were forcibly subsumed into Poland. Consequently, Belarusians welcomed the invading Red Army with flowers (*Vecherniy Minsk*, Sept 17).

Belarusian pro-governmental communist organizations and the Union of Officers held a conference entitled "September 17 -the Day of the Reunion of the Belarusian People," which included several well-known historians, but the interpretation differed little from that of Soviet times. The

Response Forces (CRRF). Evidently Belarus had played a major role in drafting the content of the CRRF document. In turn, Russia expressed understanding of Belarus' improved relations with the European Union because of its trading links and the geographical position of Belarus "in the center of Europe" (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, August 28).

However, the two countries have mutual but different priorities. For Belarus, the key element in the relationship with Russia is trade, and particularly energy imports; whereas for the Russian side, military-security aspects are of prime importance. On September 29, Medvedev will travel to Belarus where, together with Lukashenka, he will watch the bilateral military exercise "Zapad 2009," which will simulate a conflict between the armed forces of the Russia-Belarus Union and NATO (*Belorusy i Rynok*, Aug 24-29).

The war game represented another potential source of friction between the two neighbors. There had been reports that two full Russian armies would take part, a statement attributed to the Russian Chief of the General Staff Army-General Nikolai Makarov. The prospect of some 150,000 Russian troops on Belarusian soil alarmed not only Belarusians, but also the leaders of the EU and NATO. However, if indeed such a plan existed, it has now been shelved, and a more modest display is anticipated, as was evident from a meeting between Makarov and his Belarusian counterpart, Syarhey Huruleu, on August 14. The joint maneuvers were approved by Lukashenka on March 10 (*Svobodnye Novosti Plus*, August 19-26).

Zapad 2009 will take place from September 18 to 29. Its earlier exercises were held on Russian territory; hence this is a new phase. Some 12,000 troops will take part, including about 6,000 from Russia. The maneuvers will reportedly reflect the military scenario that arose during the fighting against "Georgian aggression" in Tskhinvali in August 2008, but it will also prepare to counter a NATO advance into Belarusian territory (*Svobodnye Novosti Plus*, August 19-26). In the event of such an action, Russian and Belarusian forces would combine according to the tenets of the Union agreement (*Belorusy i Rynok*, August 24-29).

Even on a reduced scale, however, and despite the recent dispute over Belarusian dairy exports to Russia, it is evident that Lukashenka has not renounced his partnership with Russia. His comments on the 2006 election results manifest contempt for his electorate that has not dispelled with time. Each rigged election has been approved first and foremost by Moscow.

Ironically, both for the E.U. and the Belarusian opposition, the main target seems to be Yarmoshyna. Still on the "banned" list for travel, the election commission chair vacationed in Kaliningrad this year while Lukashenka was in Rome, where Pope Benedict XVI "cried tears of joy" over his illegitimate son, Kolya (*RIA Novosti*, August 27).

**Source:** Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 166, September 11, 2009

conference drew up an appeal to the president to recognize September 17 as a national day of commemoration (*Vo Slavu Rodiny*, Sept 17).

In contrast, a conference held at the Johannes Rau International Educational Center (IBB, a joint German-Belarusian hotel and conference facility) in Minsk, noted the changing interpretations of September 17 over the years. In 1993, for example, in contrast to Soviet writings, textbooks noted the repressiveness of Stalinism. In 2002 there was focus on the Secret Protocols of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence between the two dictators, Hitler and Stalin, as well as the arrests and deportation of former Polish officers in February 1940, and Belarusian anger at the transfer of the Vilna region to Lithuania. Historians noted that although the invasion of the Red Army united Belarus, national development was severely retarded under Soviet rule. The conference's goal was to delineate the reasons for the tragedy in order that it is not repeated in the future (*Vechniy Brest*, Sept 17).

The IBB meeting indicates that President Lukashenka's perception of the start of the Second World War is far from universally accepted in Belarus. Why then does official Minsk echo Moscow in its simplistic interpretation of the start of the war, essentially ignoring the Nazi-Soviet Pact and even suggesting that the Western democracies "nudged" the Germans to attack Poland on September 1? (*Vechniy Brest*, Sept 17).

One reason is that the war period legitimizes the current government and allows it to pose as the natural successor to Soviet Belorussia, the republic that bore the brunt of the German attack and the occupation of 1941-44. The sacrifices of Belarusians, it is maintained, combined with the onslaught of the Red Army brought the defeat of Fascism, thus permitting the emergence of the modern state and also the liberation of Europe. Such an interpretation, with its emphasis on patriotism and partisans, endears Lukashenka to wartime veterans, their families and descendants. The war in this way is integrated into the president's unofficial movement "for an independent Belarus."

In one respect, such manipulation of the past is understandable: any modern nation requires historical myths and World War II was a major tragedy for Belarus (including the loss of its 800,000 Jews). On the other hand, Lukashenka's speech is tantamount to an exoneration of Stalinist crimes in his homeland. It serves to undo many of the revelations of the Perestroika era, such as the discovery of mass graves at Kurapaty, with up to 300,000 victims of NKVD executions in 1937-40, (<http://rzczech-pospolita.com/kuropaty0.php3>) including, many historians concur, Western Belarusians "liberated" on September 17.

Kurapaty is a more accurate symbol of the Soviet past than the Red Army's invasion of Eastern Poland, which led to the infamous parade with the Wehrmacht in Brest five days later.

**Source:** Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 173, September 22, 2009

## BELARUSICA

### NATIONAL MINORITIES POLICIES IN LITHUANIA: A SUCCESS STORY?

#### Part I of II

By Hanna Vasilevich

#### 1. Preface

This text deals with the analysis of the scope of national minority rights in Lithuania. The text will be based on the Lithuanian domestic legislation, international legal mechanisms which Lithuania is a part of as well as works of Lithuanian and international scholars on this issue. Time framework is defined as that from the declaration of the independence of the Republic of Lithuania until now.

#### 2. Introduction

Within 13 years of its independence from 1991 to 2004 the Republic of Lithuania progressed from being a part of the totalitarian Soviet Union to a member state of the EU which is viewed as a union of established European democracies. Lithuania declared itself an independent state from the Soviet Union when on March 11, 1990 "members of the Supreme Council - Reconstituent Seimas (Parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania signed the Act of Restoration of Independent Lithuania."<sup>1</sup> However, Lithuania had to go through the economic and military sanctions of the Soviet government which unsuccessfully attempted to restore its control over the republic.<sup>2</sup> Recognitions of Lithuanian independence came only in 1991. The most crucial moment was September 6, 1991 when the Soviet Supreme Council "formally acknowledged Lithuania's independence."<sup>3</sup> It was not only followed by the reaction of other states to do so but opened Lithuania doors to the accession to the major international organisations such as UN and OSCE.<sup>4</sup> On September 10, 1991 Lithuania became a party of the OSCE and one week later on September 17 the country joined the UN. Hence, from this moment on we may speak about Lithuania as a full-fledge independent player at the international arena which acts independently on its own behalf and in its own legal capacity. For further analysis it is important to note that on May 14, 1993 Lithuania became a full member of the Council of Europe<sup>5</sup>, an organisation under auspices of which the major European documents on the protection of the national minorities are concluded.

### 3. Portrait of the Lithuania's Society

#### 3.1. Ethnic division of Lithuania in numbers

First, we illustrate ethnic division of the Lithuania's society which will be made on the base of two tables. The first one contains numerical data on the total number of the Lithuania's population as well as on number of the four biggest ethnic groups: Lithuanians, Poles, Russians and Belarusians.<sup>6</sup> The second table will provide their percentage in the structure of the Lithuanian society. The data include results of the Soviet censuses of 1979 and 1989, Lithuania's census of 2001 and data of the Statistics Lithuania for 2009.

**Table 1: Lithuania's population distribution (in thous.):<sup>7</sup>**

Ethnicity	1979	1989	2001	2009
Lithuanians	2 712.2	2 924.3	2 907.3	2 815.7
Poles	247.0	258.0	235.0	205.5
Russians	303.5	344.5	219.8	165.1
Belarusians	57.6	63.2	42.9	36.1
Total	3 391.5	3 674.8	3 484.0	3 349.9

**Table 2: Lithuania's population ethnic distribution in per cent:**

Ethnicity	1979	1989	2001	2009
Lithuanians	80.0	79.6	83.5	84.0
Poles	7.3	7.0	6.7	6.1
Russians	8.9	9.4	6.3	4.9
Belarusians	1.7	1.7	1.2	1.1
All minorities	20.0	20.4	16.5	16.0

From these two tables we may underline the following tendencies that took place in Lithuania after getting its independence till now:

1. The total population of Lithuania decreased,
2. The population in each of the four biggest ethnic groups of Lithuania decreased,
3. The percentage of ethnic Lithuanians increased,
4. The percentage of each of the three biggest national minorities decreased.

Nevertheless, despite decreasing in absolute and relative numbers the minorities remain a significant part of the Lithuania's society.

#### 3.2. Uniqueness of the Lithuania's situation

In contrast with other Baltic nations – Estonia and Latvia – Lithuania's society was (and still is) "one of the more ethnically homogenous post-Soviet states."<sup>8</sup> Lithuania is an example of the "unipolar ethnic structure" in which "one ethnicity is over-whelmingly dominant."<sup>9</sup> **However, this unipolarity does not apply to the District of Vilnius (in Lithuanian: *Vilniaus apskritis*) with significant numbers of Poles, Russians and Belarusians. In Vilnia and Salechniki district municipalities as well as in the town of Visahinia (which has special status) Lithuanians are in**

**minority (22, 10 and 15 per cent respectively)<sup>10</sup>.** Therefore, South-Eastern Lithuania was the region where "aggravated tensions between various national groups and the majority Lithuanian population"<sup>11</sup> arose. During the attempts of Lithuania to obtain its independence from the Soviet Union and in first years after this goal had been achieved, these tensions drew close attention from official Minsk, Moscow and Warsaw and could potentially have cost Lithuania its territorial integrity<sup>12</sup>. However, "Lithuania has managed to hinder preclude the emergence of any considerable ethnopolitical conflict" and in Lopata's view, in contrast with other Baltic states "Lithuania does not suffer from ethnic problems of any considerable character."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, we may assume that Lopata<sup>14</sup> considers Lithuania's a "success story" on accommodation of minorities. In further chapters we will describe the situation with national minorities in Lithuania from the legal perspective and answer to the question whether Lithuania may be called a "success story". Additionally, we will try to figure out the scope of rights and privileges which minorities may enjoy as well as restrictions (if any) which are applicable to minorities.

### 4. Lithuanian Legal Framework with emphasis on national minorities

#### 4.1. Constitution of Lithuania on minorities' issue

The Constitution of Lithuania is the principal legal act of the country and "any law or other act, which contradicts the Constitution, shall be invalid" (art. 7). However, the Lithuanian Constitution does not have provisions which specifically applicable to country's national minorities<sup>15</sup>. Those articles which concern national minorities "are of mostly general, however imperative character."<sup>16</sup>

These general and imperative provisions mean that they apply to all citizens of Lithuania disregard of their ethnicity. In fact, being regarded as "an integral and directly applicable act" the Constitution guarantees equality of persons before the law (Art. 6). Human rights and freedoms are proclaimed "innate" (Art. 18) whereas "freedom of thought, conscience and religion shall not be restricted" (Art. 26). Equality of every person before the law, the court, and other State institutions and officials is secured by Article 29. The same article ensures that such factors as gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions, or views neither give privileges nor cause restrictions.

**Article 10 of the Constitution prescribes that the territory of Lithuania "shall be integral and shall not be divided into any State-like formation". First, it means**

**that Lithuania is a unitary state where all its parts enjoy the same rights and have the same obligations. Second, it legally excludes any possibility to establish national or territorial autonomous units on the country's territory. Therefore, areas where minorities constitute majority are not allowed any form of political autonomy.**

There are only two articles in the Lithuania's Constitution which directly refer to "ethnic communities" of the country. Art.37 secures that minorities shall "foster their language, culture and customs" as well as "independently manage the affairs of their ethnic culture, education, charity, and mutual assistance" (art. 45) which however shall be supported by the State.

Thus, despite the lack of the definition of "ethnic community" in the Constitution we obtain three distinctions for these groups: language, culture and customs. However, in order to enjoy these rights prescribed by the Constitution, Lithuanian citizenship is required. **Thus, only a citizen of Lithuania may be considered a part of any national minority and accordingly national minorities in Lithuania consist only of Lithuanian citizens**

#### **4.2 Council of Europe Minority Protection Framework and Lithuania**

Lithuania participates in most of international conventions which are related to human rights protection mechanism in general and national minorities' rights in particular. Here we will draw attention toward three conventions of the Council of Europe, i.e. the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Charter for Minority and Regional Languages, and the Charter for Local Governments.

Lithuania was one of the first countries to sign the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on February 1, 1995. However, it was ratified by Lithuania only on March 23, 2000 and entered into force on July 1 of the same year. Lithuania did not make any reservation, declaration or other communication which means that this document concerns all different ethnic groups on the whole territory of the country. In other words, any provision of this Framework Convention shall be applicable in Lithuania as well as Lithuanian legislation shall be brought into conformity with the provisions of this document.

The situation with the Charter for Minority and Regional Languages is completely different. Lithuania "for some reason" <sup>17</sup>neither signed it nor ratified this document. Lopata referred to the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which stated that in

Lithuania "the right to use national minority languages is legally secured, in accordance with the principles of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages."<sup>18</sup> However, since this document is not even signed we may assume that it is rather for national legislator to decide whether provisions of the domestic legislation should comply with the provisions of the Charter. Therefore, there is no protection for minority languages in Lithuania at the Council of Europe level and it is the domestic law which regulates the issue.

The European Charter for Local Governments, was signed by Lithuania on November 27, 1996 and ratified on June 22, 1999<sup>19</sup>. One of the main provisions of these documents guarantees national minorities in Lithuania the rights to use signs in their native language. On the one hand, this issue partly compensates the lack of ratification of the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages but on the other hand it contradicts Lithuanian Language Law which will be described below. Hence, we refer to the country's national legislation.

**Editor's Note:** *Will be continued in the Winter 2009 issue of BELARUSIAN REVIEW*

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3. Ibid.
4. At that time CSCE.
5. Council of Europe in Brief – Member states and map, at: <http://www.coe.int/aboutCoe/index.asp?page=47pays1europe&l=en>
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12. See for instance: Burant S. Belarus and the “Byelorussian irredenta” in Lithuania, *Nationalities Papers*. - 1997. Vol. 25. - No. 4. - P. 643.
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19. Chart of signatures and ratifications of European Charter of Local Self-Government CETS No.: 122 : <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=122&CM=8&DF=8/1/2006&CL=ENG>
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## ADDENDUM

### It represents the Editor’s view

Several points must be **emphasized**:

**1. In present Lithuania minority issues are limited to the Eastern and South-eastern part of the country.** - essentially the region of Vilnia ( Vilnius).

This region - where ethnic Lithuanians are in minority ( see p. 22 of this issue of *BELARUSIAN REVIEW* ) was acquired in 1939 and 1940 by obtaining it from Stalin’s Soviet Union in trade for Soviet military bases on Lithuanian territory. In September 1939 Vilnia region was incorporated into the Belarusian Soviet Republic (BSSR).

The reason for this trade:

Since the pioneers of the Lithuanian national renaissance have essentially built their national version of history on the belief that modern Lithuania is the sole and direct successor of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania , throughout the 20th century leaders of modern Lithuania exerted constant and purposeful efforts to regain the city of Vilnia (Vilnius), regarded by them as Lithuania’s historical capital. (Refer to article *BELARUSICA* by K. Kascian, *Belarusian Review* 21-1, Spring 2009 issue)).

In the period between 1920 and 1940 Vilnia region belonged to Poland.

**2. Exactly in this region A POLISH ENCLAVE is being formed, a geographic anomaly, separated from the Polish state by territory of Belarus.**

Official Lithuanian statistics show that country’s Polish minority is by far the most numerous - numbering 205 thousand.

**3. Let us examine the NATURE of this minority:**

Majority of its members are ethnic Belarusians of Roman Catholic faith. In their daily life they use the Belarusian language - its central dialect, practically identical with the Belarusian literary language.

For most of them, (especially for the older generation) Polish represents the language of the Catholic church. It is interesting to note, that, despite the common Catholic religion, older parishioners prefer Polish priests to “foreign” Lithuanians.

Some members of the younger, more pragmatic generation are attracted to Polishness due to its more Western, European image.

Others (fewer) are adapting to “geo-political realities”, and are attempting to join the official Lithuanian society.

**How did this partial cultural Polonization of this group come about:**

Ever since the waning days of the Polish-Litvanian Commonwealth (18th century) - and especially in the 1920s (when not only the city of Vilnia, but the entire western half of Belarus was occupied by Poland), Polish officials and Polish Roman Catholic clergy were treating the native Belarusian population not as a separate ethnic group but as an amorphous mass -to be eventually assimilated, i.e. Polonized.

A simplified approach was (and sometimes still is) being used to divide the population into two hostile camps: us Catholics, i.e. POLES, versus the others.

The Polish “hostile camps” approach did not succeed in most of Polish-occupied Western Belarus with its predominantly Orthodox population. However, it did work in Catholic regions - by pitting Belarusians against each other.

As a result the quoted Lithuanian statistics show the enormous numerical disparity between the “Polish”and Belarusian minorities, 6 to 1.

One should remember that in the period between 1920 and 1940 the city of Vilnia was an unofficial cultural capital of Western Belarus, thus attracting many from that entire region, who eventually settled there. These people are now officially listed as Belarusians.

4. Modern Belarusian nationalists consider their country a **multi-confessional space**, where Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants are considered equals. They consider the issues of native culture and language more important than that of religious confession. This is why they do care about the fate of the Belarusian-speaking minority in Lithuania, nominally “Polish” or not.

Unfortunately, today the nominally Belarusian state seems to intentionally ignore the problems of our countrymen in Lithuania. It is too preoccupied with russification of its own population, with dividing us into “us and the POLES.”

As a result of this neglect the absurd POLISH ENCLAVE in Lithuania is growing in strength..

The Belarusians of the Vilnia Region deserve our attention and thorough research of their problems.

## Quotes of Quarter

“With our native language, we preserve our culture. That greatly contributes to preserving our independence. If a nation loses its language, it loses its memory, its history and its identity.”

Ukraine’s pro-Western president, Viktor A. Yushchenko, told the German magazine *Spiegel*.

## MEDIA WATCH

### Press Review

### The Retreat of the Tongue of the Czars

By Clifford Levy

*In the Soviet era, 300 million people spoke Russian. Now, Moscow feels its power ebb each time Pushkin is read in Ukrainian.*

... The Kremlin has tried to halt the decline by setting up foundations to promote the study of Russian abroad and by castigating neighbors who shove the language from public life. In some nations, a backlash against Russian has stirred its own backlash in the language’s defense.

Still, the challenge is considerable. At stake is more than just words on a page.

Language imparts power and influence, binding the colonized to the colonizers and, for better or worse, altering how the native populations interact with the world. Long after they gave up their territories, Britain, France and Spain have retained certain authority in far-flung outposts because of the languages they seeded.

Czars and Soviet leaders spread Russian in the lands that they conquered, using it as a kind of glue to unite disparate nationalities, a so-called second mother tongue, and connect them to their rulers. That legacy endures today, as exemplified by the close relationship between Russia and Germany, which stems in part from Chancellor Angela Merkel’s ability to speak Russian. She learned it growing up in Communist East Germany.

But with the language in retreat, there are unlikely to be many future Angela Merckels. For the Kremlin, could there be a more bitter reminder of how history has turned than the sight of young Estonians or Georgians or Uzbeks (not to mention Czechs or Hungarians) flocking to classes in English instead of Russian?

“The drop in Russian language usage is a great blow to Moscow, in the economic and social spheres, and many other aspects,” said Aleksei V. Vorontsov, chairman of the sociology department at the Herzen State Pedagogical University in St. Petersburg. “It has severed links, and made Russia more isolated.”

... Ukraine’s pro-Western president, Viktor A. Yushchenko, indicated this month that that a deepening understanding of the Ukrainian language is one key to keeping Moscow at bay. “With our native language, we preserve our culture,” Mr. Yushchenko told the German magazine *Spiegel*. “That greatly contributes to preserving our independence. If a nation loses its language, it loses its memory, its history and its identity.”

...In former Soviet satellites in Europe, where Russian was essentially purged after Communism, there has been a small, but noticeable revival.

The language is obviously helpful in doing business in Russia’s sizable market, so interest in Russian language is rising. The lingua franca of Communism, it seems, is now an asset in the pursuit of capitalism.

#### Former Soviet republics:

**Hostile to Russian:** Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia.

**Mixed feelings:** Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan

**Friendly to Russian:** Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (second official language)

**Source:** Excerpts from *The New York Times*, September 13, 2009

## Belarusian Leader Pardons American Lawyer

By Ellen Barry

MOSCOW--The Belarusian president, Aleksandr Lukashenko, on Tuesday pardoned an American lawyer at the center of a 16-month dispute between Belarus and the United States, in a push to fully restore relations between the two countries.

During a meeting with members of the United States Congress, Mr. Lukashenko agreed to free Emanuel E. Zeltser, who was serving a three-year sentence for industrial espionage and forgery. American diplomats protested Mr. Zeltser's mysterious arrest and closed trial, and they pressed for his release on humanitarian grounds, saying he had fallen gravely ill in prison.

... Lukashenko cast the pardon as a conciliatory gesture, and he appealed to the United States delegation to respond by lifting three-year-old economic sanctions against Belarus. Mr. Lukashenko "could not have been more accommodating" toward his American visitors, something that has not been true in the past, said Senator Benjamin L. Cardin, Democrat of Maryland, a member of the delegation. Senator Cardin said the United States would lift the sanctions when Belarus showed progress in political reforms and human rights. The decision brings to an end a bizarre legal case. Mr. Zeltser and his personal assistant, Vladlena Funk, were arrested at the Minsk airport on an airplane belonging to a Russian oligarch, Boris A. Berezovsky. Mr. Berezovsky has accused Mr. Zeltser of using a forged will to steal the assets of his former partner, but he said he had no involvement in the arrest.

**Source:** Excerpts from an article in *The New York Times*, July 1, 2009

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## Belarusians Basking in — Not Hiding From The Spotlight's Glare

Monica Hesse, Washington Post Staff Writer

The Belarus Free Theatre has no official audience in Belarus, because officially the Belarus Free Theatre does not exist. Only state-run theaters exist in Belarus, which has been described as Europe's last dictatorship. Only approved plays exist, by approved, non-revolutionary playwrights. There are no revolutionary playwrights in Belarus. Officially.

So in Minsk, the company's home city, actors perform in tiny apartments, texting their location at the last minute to avoid harassment by government officials. They perform in bars and tell the authorities the gathering is a holiday party; they perform in the woods and say it's a wedding. Many of the actors have lost their day jobs, some of the audience members have been arrested.

Tuesday, the Belarus Free Theatre will begin a two-day, two-play performance run at Georgetown University's Davis Performing Arts Center. This evening's production is "Generation Jeans," a monologue about growing up behind the Iron Curtain, where denim and rock music were prohibited. Wednesday brings the U.S. debut of "Discover Love," based on the 1999 Belarus kidnapping and murder of a Washington resident's husband.

For the company, the visit means a normal performing experience, free from threats of violence. For the audience, it is a reminder that there are still places where going to the theater is an act of treason.

"Even Chekhov is very rarely produced [in Belarus], because he makes people think," says Natalia Kolyada, co-founder of the Free Theatre. "And when he is, it goes through censorship." Other works, too: When Nilo Cruz's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Anna in the Tropics" was staged in Minsk, a line suggesting that a cigar chairman should be democratically elected was struck. The government no doubt found the language incendiary: During Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's 15-year-rule, he has rigged elections, disbanded parliament and abolished the constitutional two-term limit that should have ended his presidency in 2004. As secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice called his country an "outpost of tyranny."

This history, this censorship, this daily oppression inspired Kolyada and her husband, Nikolai Khalezin -- who began writing plays while imprisoned for editing an independent newspaper -- to found the Free Theatre in 2005 as a voice for playwrights whose work had been banned. Their first selection was "4.48 Psychosis" by British writer Sarah Kane. "We tried everywhere to stage it but received rejection after rejection," Kolyada says. "We were told, 'There is no psychosis in Belarus. There is no suicide in Belarus. There are no sexual minorities in Belarus.' It's not possible to talk about any of the issues that worry people."

Finally, the owner of a cafe offered his space. The company performed there until the KGB -- a name Belarus still uses for its intelligence agency 18 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union -- threatened to take away the restaurant's license. They moved on to a private residence; that owner was threatened with eviction.

The Free Theatre instituted evasive tactics. The text-messaging system began after the troupe's e-mailed announcements were infiltrated. Kolyada began inviting foreign journalists and dignitaries to the performances, knowing that the government would be less likely to interfere with those shows. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't: In 2006, the owner of a nightclub that had hosted the company lost his license. "But what was important is that he called us the next day," Kolyada says. "He said, 'Don't feel guilty, because I understand where we live. The next street action we have, I'll be out there again, still fighting.'"

The theater company that does not exist in its home country has won support and acclaim from around the world. Tom Stoppard has written letters of support, the late Harold Pinter allowed his plays to be performed royalty-free, and the company has participated in theater festivals throughout Europe. To be judged on artistic merit, "we need to go outside of Belarus," Kolyada says. The audience back home is simply grateful that they perform at all. The waiting list to attend a show is 2,000 people long, and "everyone comes to our performances with their passports, because they know if they get arrested, they'll need them. The Belarusian audience is the bravest audience in the world."

No one knows that better than Irina Krasovskaya, whose story is the basis of "Discover Love," which will be performed Wednesday on the 10-year anniversary of her husband's death. Anatoly Krasovsky was a prominent pro-democracy businessman, and friend of one of Lukashenko's political rivals. The two had gone to a steam room -- a common location for anti-regime discussions, as the steam ruins recording devices -- just a few months after the disappearance of another Lukashenko foe. They were supposed to meet Krasovskaya later for drinks to celebrate her birthday. Neither ever came home.

Krasovskaya later emigrated to Washington, remarried and became a civil rights activist. She worked with Kolyada and Khalezin for several years to help them develop "Discover Love," and saw it when it premiered in the Netherlands. Though she'll host a reception for the Washington performance, she doesn't know if she'll be able to sit through the play again. "I saw it and remembered all my life," Krasovskaya says. "I saw my husband, I saw myself and I cried."

But she is happy for the attention to her story -- a story she says is often met with incredulity. "When I tell this story in normal surroundings, nobody believes me," she says. "For this to happen in a modern city," in a country bordering the European Union? It seems impossible. The disbelief is why Kolyada and Khalezin continue, despite the arrests, despite the threats. "We want people to know what is happening. We have two children, 10 and 15 years old," Kolyada says. "That means there are two girls who have never lived in a democratic country. We want our children to live in a free country." And if that's not possible? "We want our children to understand what it means to think freely."

**Source:** Excerpts from an article in *The Washington Post*, 15 September 2009

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## The Reset Button

By Anne Applebaum

"...Yes, it's a wonderful feeling, pressing that reset button. Unfortunately, it is also a deeply misleading, even vapid, metaphor for diplomatic relations. First deployed by the vice-president — Joe Biden told a security conference in February it was time to 'press the reset button' on U.S. relations with Russia — it was then repeated by the president, who spoke of the need to 'reboot' the relationship as well. Earlier this month, Hillary Clinton even presented her counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, with a red 'reset button' to place on his desk. ...

"It would be nice, of course, if U.S. Russia relations really had been frozen as a result of irrelevant technical complications and could begin afresh. Unfortunately, while America may have a new president, Russia does not. And while America may want to make the past vanish — as a nation, we've never been all that keen on foreigners' histories — alas, the past cannot be changed.

The profound differences in psychology, philosophy and policy that have been the central source of friction between the American and Russian governments for the past decade remain very much in place. Sooner or later, the Obama administration will have to grapple with them.

"Anyone who doubts the truth of this need only look at remarks Lavrov himself made last weekend in Brussels, where he presented a vision of the world utterly unchanged by the events of January 20. ...

"The transcript of his remarks, and those of other Russians attending the same conference, do not capture their snide tone, or the scorn with which they dismissed suggestions that Russia's neighbors might have wanted to join NATO because they were afraid of Russia. ..."

*Anne Applebaum is wife of Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski. She wrote some books, the first one, **Between East and West**, a travelogue for which she was awarded an Adolph Bentinck Prize in 1996. In this book she covered Belarus, where she visited many cities that had sizeable Jewish communities.*

*She is an eminent journalist that worked for many prominent newspapers in the U.S. and England.*

**Source:** excerpts from the article "For Russia, More Than A 'Reset,'" in *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2009

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