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Sanction Suspensions Continue

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The application of tough sanctions in 2006 against the authoritative Belarus regime produced some immediate democratization results. Then three years of successive sanction suspensions followed. What did they produce?

Following the fraudulent presidential elections in March 2006 a variety of sanctions were introduced against the Lukashenka regime by the European Union and the United States. The EU and the United States denied entry visas to officials 'who formulate, implement, participate in or benefit from policies or actions including electoral fraud, human rights abuses or corruption that undermine and injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus.' The US Treasury Department blocked the assets of Belarusian officials, including Lukashenka found in the United States.

The US froze the assets of Belnaftakhim and its subsidiaries, a major foreign currency earner in the West, reportedly benefiting Lukashenka personally.

The sanctions worked to a degree. The Belarusian regime released the major political prisoners, eased the restrictions on two independent newspapers, and allowed the registration of two NGOs. Promises were made regarding improving the electoral process in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Anxious to maintain dialogue with the regime and to counteract Russia's influence, the European Union has suspended its broad visa ban limiting it to the officials implicated in political disappearances and the top electoral official until April 2009. The US Government maintained the visa ban but allowed two subsidiaries of Belnaftakhim to resume transactions with US entities for a 6-month period. After six months the suspension of sanctions was renewed and has now been extended until the fall of 2010. Contacts between EU ministers and their Belarusian counterparts have intensified as have the US Department of State contacts, even as the US Ambassador is still not welcome in Minsk, and the US Embassy there operates with a skeleton staff. How well did the Belarusian regime conform to the latest albeit weakened EU democratization requirements? Let us review them one by one:

- **There should be no more political prisoners.**

The letter of this requirement is being partially met, while the spirit is cleverly violated. Young people, in particular, are being arrested; detained without trial; politically active students are expelled from universities; male students forcibly conscripted. The latest punitive steps consist of kidnapping youth leaders by people in mufti, who without identifying themselves, drive them miles out of town, blindfold them, while threatening them with beatings or even execution, and finally dumping them in remote woods.

- **Some improvements should be made with regard to media access.**

Since the easing of restrictions on the two newspapers two years ago, no new improvements have been noted. New decrees are being prepared against Internet providers.

- **Dialogue with OSCE on reforming the electoral law should continue.**

The subservient parliament, to which not a single opposition candidate was elected in 2008, enacted some cosmetic changes. The head of the Electoral Commission refuses to confer with OSCE.

- **The conditions regarding the NGO status and activity should be improved.**

The opposite is taking place with the introduction of Article 193.1 which calls for criminal responsibility for "activities on behalf of unregistered organization."

- **Freedom of assembly and of the activities of political associations should be guaranteed.**

Peaceful gatherings are forcibly dispersed, its participants detained and beaten, the distribution of flyers prohibited, etc

What conclusion can be drawn regarding the progress of democratization in Belarus from the recent developments?

The imposition of strong sanctions has produced some concrete results, whereas continued suspensions of sanctions, viewed as a sign of weakness, have been disregarded by the inherently anti-Western Lukashenka regime.

So much for the democratization efforts. The attempt to wean Belarus from its dependence on Russia did not fare any better. Lukashenka has signed on to the Russian-led rapid reaction force, he has conducted the Zapad (West) 2009 joint military exercises with Russia in which NATO was the presumed enemy. On the economic front, privatization has started, however it is the Russian business as the obvious beneficiary. The pipelines are being bartered away to pay for Belarus' debts for gas and oil, banks are sold at bargain prices, with other big state enterprises readied to be sold, again to Russian interests. All this while repeated IMF loans keep the Belarusian economy from crashing.

To expect the authoritarian Lukashenka to become a born again democrat is a dangerous illusion. The needed

From the Publisher

The fastest growing media segment in Belarus is the Internet with its easy access to the world at large. Compared to radio transmission, and especially to television transmission, it is inexpensive. In the past, when representatives of the Belarusian-American community were seeking financial support for a satellite TV station which would transmit its programming into all of Belarus, they were told to focus on Internet, it being fast growing, relatively secure and much less expensive.

We have just learned of a proposed decree to institute control over the web sites in Belarus. A special service known as the Operational and Analytic Center of the Presidential Administration (OAC) will control the Internet providers in the country, who will be required to identify all of their Internet users. This service, created in 2008, is expected to be fully operational in 2010. How effective will it be is open to question but just its existence may cripple the Belarusian Internet.

Then the only sources of reliable information would be found outside of Belarus, and the most effective one may be a satellite television station, such as BelSat. Its adequate funding will then be crucial in order to provide some objective information to the Belarusian people.

FEATURES

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact continued from the 21-3 Fall issue Partition or Reunion?

By Ilya Kunitski

yPolish opinion on these events is well-known. As the current President of Poland Lech Kaczynski recently stated in his speech, “when we were still defending Warsaw [against Germans]... that day Poland was knifed in the back” (www.viewlondon.co.uk). On September 17 Poland unexpectedly discovered that Moscow sided with Germany. The Soviets justified the invasion as an action to “liberate their blood brothers [Ukrainians and Belarusians] from Polish national oppression” and, at the same time, “to protect the lives and property of the people of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine” from Germany (Vakar 1956, 155).

How can we assess Soviet decision to cross the 1921-1939 Polish border from the Belarusian viewpoint? As a prominent researcher of Belarusian history Nicholas Vakar noted “to the Belarusians it [the reunion of Western and Eastern parts] meant the restoration of their own territorial integrity long disrupted by wars and revolution. They could feel that their country was a full-sized nation at last” (1956, 156). Indeed, since 1918 when the independence of Belarusian National Republic (BNR) was proclaimed within Belarusian ethnographic boundaries, the territory of the country was repeatedly occupied and re-occupied by German, Polish, and Soviet armies.

Let’s follow the chronology of events. When at the end of 1918 German troops left Minsk, the Red Army occupied the city. BNR government had to flee first to Vilnia*, then to Germany and began to work as a government-in-exile. Meanwhile, Polish armies were moving eastward to check the advance of the Reds. They succeeded in their offensive. On April 22, 1919 the troops of General Pilsudski entered Vilnia and a month later – Minsk. The new occupational power declared that the future of the country would be decided “by the free will of the people whose rights to self-determination shall in no wise be restricted” (1956, 109). Supported by the Allies, Poles offered Belarusians protection and, it seemed, federal status within the Polish state. However, a different view soon prevailed. On May 2, 1919, the Polish Sejm (Parliament) declared that Belarus, “the homeland of Kosciuszko, Mickiewicz, and Traugutt, belongs to Poland and is an inalienable part of the Polish state” (1956, 110).

The eastern Polish frontier was also a front line since no peace treaty was signed between Poland and the Soviet state. In 1920 the Red Army again started its westward march and on July 11 re-entered Minsk. The Soviets advanced further and were stopped only at the very gates of Warsaw in mid-August. The Poles, in their turn, reversed the disposition, put the Soviets to rout, and reoccupied western Belarus. Both sides were exhausted and, finally, started peace talks in 1921. The negotiations went on without Belarusian participation on either the Polish or the Soviet side. As a result, the treaty, signed March 18, 1921 in Riga, divided the Belarusian territory, with one part going to the Poles,

and the other to the Soviets (1956, 116).

Eighteen years later, in September 1939, the territory of Belarus was reunited under the Soviet banner. It is a tragedy of history that the events that meant suffering and humiliation for some, marked realization of “the century-old dream,” as prominent Belarusian poet Janka Kupala called it, for others. Unfortunately, on the world stage great powers often act according to the principles of *realpolitik* and do not consider the interests of smaller nations. Throughout the 20th century the map of the world was substantially remade several times – after both World Wars and in the Decolonization period. For instance, in less than thirty years (1918-1945) Belarusian borders were altered by Germans, Soviets, Poles, and the Allies almost a dozen (!) times. The wishes and concerns of the ordinary people, of course, were not taken into consideration.

The case of Vilnia is an interesting example of how the great powers have used the city as a bargaining chip in their political games. Throughout the history Vilnia meant a lot to many peoples. Poles, Jews, Lithuanians, and Belarusians all had reasons to feel connected to the city. To Belarusians Vilnia was, first of all, the center of the national revival. *Nasha Niva* (Our Field) newspaper which played a significant role in the strengthening of the Belarusian national consciousness was edited and published in Vilnia from 1906 until 1917. The city was a meeting point for nationally-aware Belarusians. A Belarusian-language elementary school was opened in Vilnia in 1915.

According to the 1897 Imperial Russian census Jews, Poles, and Russians comprised 40, 31, and 20 percent respectively of the population of the city itself. However, if we consider Vilnia together with its surrounding district we encounter a different picture. According to the same census, Belarusians were first with 26.3 %, followed by Jews – 21.6%, Lithuanians – 21.3%, Poles – 20.4 %, and Russians and others – 10.4%.

In the turmoil of World War I and subsequent events Vilnia changed hands several times. From 1915 until 1918 the city was occupied by the German Empire. Lithuanians proclaimed their independence in Vilnia in 1918. Then Poles and the Soviets in turns controlled the city.. After the defeat in the battle of Warsaw the Soviets ceded the city (July 12, 1920) to officially neutral Lithuania in order to delay the Polish advance. However, in October 1920, Polish general Lucian Zeligowski and his troops seized the city and proclaimed it the capital of a new, albeit temporary, entity of Middle Lithuania. Soon after, Middle Lithuania joined the Polish state. The city of Vilnia remained under the Polish rule for eighteen more years.

The issue of Vilnia re-emerged again in 1939. There was a special provision regarding the city in the aforementioned Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. According to the agreement Vilnia together with its district was allotted to Lithuania, whereas the country itself was assigned to the German and later to the Soviet sphere of influence. In any case, on September 19, 1939 Vilnia was seized by the Soviet Union. At first, the city was incorporated into the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). The officials from Soviet Belarus moved into the city, Belarusian-language schools were opened, and a newspaper *Vilenskaja Prawda* (Vilnia Pravda) was established.

However, on October 10, 1939 Soviet government signed a treaty with then-independent Lithuania without consulting with Belarusian communists. According to the treaty, the USSR handed

over to Lithuania the city of Vilnia and the adjacent lands – 2,750 square miles with a population of 457,500 people. In return the Soviet Union got the right to establish army, navy, and air bases in Lithuania (1956, 159). One year later the Red Army used these bases to occupy Lithuania. Meanwhile, at the Extraordinary Fifth Session of the Supreme Soviet in accepting West Belarus into the BSSR, Vyacheslav Molotov explained the situation in the following way: “The Vilnia territory belongs to Lithuania not by reason of population. No, we know that the majority of population in that region is not Lithuanian. But the historical past and aspirations of the Lithuanian nation have been intimately connected with the city of Vilnia, and the Government of the USSR considered it necessary to honor these moral factors” (1956, 159).

In fact, both Soviet and Nazi regimes are widely known for dishonoring the moral factors they often appealed to. Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is just one of the historical documents that highlight the exceptionally cruel character of Nazi and Soviet governments. Millions of people were held hostage to their political games, millions were annihilated. It is due to an intricate chain of circumstances that the Belarusian nation was reunited when Stalin and Hitler were partitioning Europe.

* Vilnia, as it is spelled in Belarusian, Wilno in Polish, Vilna in Russian, Vilnius in Lithuanian. The spelling of the name of the city changed, depending on political circumstances.

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Quotes of Quarter

“Through the expansion of economic contacts the West aids in the transformation of the Belarusian society, including that of its government”,

stated the advisor to former presidential candidate Milinkevich – **ANDREI LAKHOVICH** on October 1, 2009 as reported by RFE/RL.

Lukashenka Makes Key Leadership Changes in Belarus

By David Marples

On December 4, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka made sweeping changes to the higher echelons of the leadership. The changes reflect both adverse news on the economic front and the installment of some hard-line personalities on the eve of a series of elections that will monopolize the next 12-15 months. The main opposition newspaper refers to the changes as “KGBization” and restoring ideological control over the media (*Narodnaya Volya*, December 5).

According to another opposition source, the mini-purge took place after the head of the Presidential Administration, Uladzimir Makei, was asked to prepare a proposal on potential changes to the government (*BG Delovaya Gazeta*, December 4). Lukashenka stated that he wanted a team in place that would remain after the presidential elections. He indicated that the changes would be finalized by the middle of 2010 (Belarusian Telegraph Agency [BELTA], December 4).

Among the officials dismissed are the following: Information Minister Uladzimir Rusakevich, Economy Minister Mikalay Zaychanka, and Mikalay Damashkevich as head of the Presidential Property Management Directorate. Two ministers – Defense Minister Leanid Maltsau and Secretary of the Security Council Yuri Zhadobin, exchanged places. Other changes occurred in the Ministry of Taxation and Duties, a post held formerly by Anna Deyko, and at the MAZ truck factory and Belenergo firm, which have been particularly hard hit by the recession (Belapan, December 4).

The incoming figures are: Information Minister Aleh Pralyaskousky, Economy Minister Mikalay Snapkou (the former deputy chairman of the presidential administration), head of the Presidential Property Management Directorate Mikalay Korbut, Labor and Social Protection Minister Mariana Shchotkina (a position vacant since June, following the departure of Uladzimir Patupchik to the post of Vice-Premier); and Minister of Tax and Duties Uladzimir Paluyan. Syarhey Hurulev, the former chief of staff of the army, is the new chairman of the State Military and Industrial Committee (BELTA, December 4).

Of all the changes, perhaps the most important is the transfer of Maltsau to the Security Council. A 60 year old native of Belarus, he received military education in Ukraine, and holds a candidate degree in Sociology. From 1994 he was head of the Chief Headquarters of the Armed Forces and First Deputy Minister of Defense. He was appointed as the defense minister in 2001 (SB-Belarus’ *Segodnya*, December 5). In October he was cited as stating that draftees into the Belarusian army –they have included several opposition figures forcibly conscripted– must cancel their membership in political parties (European Radio for Belarus, October 8).

Zhadobin is an equally controversial character. Born in 1954 in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, he joined the army in

1972 and attended a Tank Command institute in Kazan, Russia. Along with positions in Belarus' civil defense structure and the interior ministry, he is a former Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB) and became head of the Presidential Security Service in September 2003 (SB-Belarus' Segodnya, December 4). In 2004, when Belarus held the referendum that permitted President Lukashenka to remain in office beyond the constitutionally limited two terms, Zhadobin maintained that an assassination attempt on the Belarusian leader was being prepared "from the side of the European Union" (*Narodnaya Volya*, December 5).

Information Minister Pralyaskousky, a Russian-born, Minsk-educated lawyer who served with Soviet forces in East Germany, also has a checkered past. He has held a number of prominent positions in the presidential administration and in January 2008, became director of its information and analysis center. During the debates on the Law of the Mass Media, which the president approved on August 4, 2008, he called for increased control over information on the internet, including what he termed "content filtration," meaning the need to block the dissemination of information considered to be in conflict with the legal system (*Narodnaya Volya*, December 5, www.charter97.org,

Bad economic news can have an impact on elections

December 4).

The firing of Zaychanka, who was Economy Minister since 2003, can be linked directly to the alarming economic news that after several years of very high growth, Belarus' GDP fell by 1 percent over the first ten months of 2009. Lukashenka informed new minister Snapkou: "The economy ministry seems to have forgotten that it needs to think about strategy without abandoning earthly things. However, it should also think about the future, a real future and a real strategy that the state could use" (BELTA, December 4).

In late November, Belarus signed an agreement for a customs union with Russia and Kazakhstan that will allow 15 percent GDP growth by 2015, according to Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, through joint manufacturing projects and free trade (BELTA, November 27). Lukashenka noted the advantages of the new union for the ailing MAZ truck company, and maintained that the agreement could take effect within 18 months (BELTA, December 1).

Bad economic news can have an impact on election campaigns, which may explain the need to reassemble the leadership. Lukashenka is known for shuffling favored sa-traps between key posts. The new hierarchy suggests a reversal of the slight moderation in domestic policy over the past year. The new ministers are generally in the same age group as their predecessors—late 40's to 60's—and include people known for their hard-line approach, particularly toward the media and the opposition. Very little is being left to chance in Lukashenka's Belarus.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor,

Doing Business With Lukashenka's Regime

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Typically, one would not expect to find a "Special Report" on Belarus in *The Financial Times*. In recent years, most of the western business community has shown limited interest in the country. It wasn't so long ago, that some people joked about turning the country into an amusement park for people nostalgic over the break-up of the Soviet Union. While politics may have played a contributing role in this lack of interest, it was more likely the perception that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to undertake profitable activities in Belarus.

Concerns such as human rights certainly have not stopped multinational corporations (MNCs) from doing business in China, Equatorial Guinea, Russia, Saudi Arabia or Uzbekistan, so why should things be any different with respect to Belarus? To McDonald's, Patio Pizza, the Crown Plaza and other MNCs, Belarus represents just another market, albeit a small one. These service providers are normally not deterred by non-economic factors – after all, businesspersons, diplomats, and employees of international organizations need places to eat and sleep. In these difficult economic times, such corporate decision-making is easily understandable.

Data Alone is Not Sufficient to Understand the Belarusian Economy's Current State and Future Prospects

For more than a decade, Belarus has pariah status as "Europe's Last Dictatorship." If Mr. Lukashenka would never be invited to visit the world's major capitals and the country's senior officials subject to sanctions, why not sell weapons where the end users were separatist movements or terrorist groups, hold elections where the results are never in doubt or squelch political opponents and criticism of the Belarusian government? One could be happy attending state dinners in Caracas, Moscow, Teheran, and most recently Kyiv.

Indeed, times have changed (a bit). The Belarusian government has made it a high priority to establish or strengthen its ties to the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank to lessen its international isolation. This approach also gives the country leverage in its relationship with its closest "friend" Russia – even if accomplishing this change in policy requires minor changes in the way it acts both at home and abroad. In fact, in a significant change since the days of the Orange Revolution, Belarus have sought to establish cordial relations with Ukraine in recognition of the fact that maintaining good relations can have numerous benefits, particularly since Gaz-

prom pipelines on both territories must be utilized for its natural gas to reach their principal foreign market.

Despite the shift in Belarus' geopolitical approach, the government remains a stalwart of unaccountability. Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Kabiakou pithily explained the logic behind his country's new economic and foreign policies when he remarked, "I don't see a connection between business reforms and politics We'll change when it is convenient for our society."

Mr. Kabiakou did not feel incumbent to identify precisely who fell under the rubric "we." Belarus' population may be the size of a Chinese city, but so long as Belarus has some strategic significance and is careful not to alienate influential foreign businesses, Mr. Lukashenka and his principal supporters have gained some room in which to maneuver.

Does the Lukashenka Regime Face Tough Choices in Sustaining Economic Growth While Maintaining Political Control: Human Rights Violations and Political Suppression

On November 20, 2009, the FT contained a thorough and generally balanced analysis of Belarus' economy, foreign policy and politics (to the extent that the latter can be said to exist). Jan Cienski, the FT's Warsaw Bureau Chief, authored the Report. The Report recognizes that the Belarusian economy's ability to evolve depends on the success of its foreign policy and its ability to keep the domestic political scene relatively tranquil.

In the realm of international affairs, he characterized Belarus' "relations with Russia [as] testy and overtures to the west tentative." On the domestic front, Mr. Cienski does not make the mistake of assuming that the relative "tranquility" in Belarus can be equated with the population's complete support of Mr. Lukashenka, who even admits that his supporters engaged in a degree of falsification to ensure his re-election in 2006.

Mr. Cienski understands that Mr. Lukashenka's generally successful atomization of Belarusian society means that, in most cases, he does not have to rely on many of the more heavy-handed measures that were required in the past. He perceptively points out that "repression now consists *mainly* of the threat of losing your job or place at the university. People are completely dependent on the government."

It is important not to overlook the word "mainly"; the Belarusian government exacts various means to quiet its opposition. For example, at election time, demonstrations by opposition supporters frequently are dispersed by so-called "Special Purpose Police Forces" (i.e. OMON), plainclothesmen or skinheads acting on the government's behalf. There are also demonstrations in connection with certain anniversaries such as the Chernobyl Disaster. Individuals, who are arrested, detained and abused by the authorities while in custody, irrespective of the length of time or how severely they were mistreated have no recourse. The authorities can act with impunity and this operates as a significant deterrent against opposition supporters.

In addition, those persons who criticize the regime publicly or maintain unauthorized ties with Western governments and NGOs, particularly students, are sometimes

drafted into the military. A draftee who fails to report to the recruitment center without a "good reason" constitutes a criminal offense. Similarly, if individuals challenge Mr. Lukashenka's actions or state policies, they can face criminal charges as well. In the absence of an independent judiciary, such persons would place themselves in precarious circumstances and have no genuine recourse within Belarus.

Mr. Cienski reports that "over production and state aid have held off a recession, but could lead to problems ahead." When discussing the health of Belarusian state-owned enterprises engaged in heavy industry, he notes that "if the state withdrew from these companies, they would go bankrupt." While Belarusian industrial products are having a difficult time competing with the products of other countries, it is able to export software, potash and refined crude oil to the West.

The Role of International Investment: Does Economic Growth Lead to Political Reform and More Attention to Human Needs?

The World Bank ranked Belarus 58 of 183 countries with respect to ease of doing business. Economies are ranked on their ease of doing business, from 1 – 183, with first place being the best. A high ranking on the ease of doing business index means the regulatory environment is conducive to the operation of business. This index averages the country's percentile rankings on 10 topics, made up of a variety of indicators, giving equal weight to each topic. The rankings are from the *Doing Business 2010* report, covering the period June 2008 through May 2009.

Perhaps, it is easier to do business in Belarus than elsewhere since dictatorships can be more efficient than democracies, but at what price? In Transparency International's most recent Corruption Perception Index (CPI), it was ranked as 139 out of 180 in terms of degree of corruption. The CPI attempts to measure corruption on the part of governmental officials. Even if there are fundamental methodological problems in measuring corruption, it is difficult to explain why Belarus is viewed as a corrupt country, but is considered by the World Bank as being an easy place to do business. Perhaps, Belarus is less corrupt than other countries because Belarusian officials fear the consequences of being accused of corruption given the absence of the rule of law in the country, or perhaps it is a result of the corporations' selective application of the concept of "global social responsibility" that make them willing to do business in Belarus.

Similarly, the International Monetary Fund has been impressed by the performance of the Belarusian economy. According to Mr. Chris Jarvis, who led an IMF mission to Minsk in November 2009 as part of a review of Belarus' participation in the Fund's Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) program, pending approval by the IMF Executive Board, Belarus will be eligible to receive the equivalent of approximately \$700 million in disbursements. Mr. Jarvis stated that:

"[Belarusian] Performance under the economic program supported by the SBA has been good. All end-September performance criteria and structural

benchmarks were met. The agreement reached on the macroeconomic framework for 2010 would help in achieving program objectives. Prudent fiscal and monetary policies would narrow the current account deficit and bring inflation to single digits. Monetary policy would continue to support the credibility of the exchange rate regime. Disciplined wage policy would improve Belarus' competitiveness and prospects for economic growth, as the global economy returns to growth. Social policies aim at providing adequate social safety to the most vulnerable groups of population.

It is troublesome that the IMF continues to have tunnel vision. The world cannot be artificially divided into economics, foreign policy and domestic policy. All are interlinked. Belarus' stability has been obtained at a high human cost. Do the EU, IMF and the World Bank want to be the facilitators of the continuation of this process?

Apologists for Mr. Lukashenka claim the opposition does not offer a viable alternative: they are incapable of mounting an effective opposition, how can they manage an economy? Of course, they have not had the opportunity that the former collective farm director has had to gather his troops.

Indeed, it may be true that the quality of life in Belarus is better than in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, or Uzbekistan. Nor is anyone starving in Belarus as in other parts of the world. Perhaps the Belarusian economy is performing better than might be expected, but this will not last forever.

Economists frequently emphasize that the Belarusian economy is relatively healthy under the circumstances due to the education level of the population. However, one wonders if this will continue as the population ages and brain drain continues. Many educated Belarusians seek employment abroad, both in the West as well as in Russia.

The Belarusian economy cannot compete in this age of rapid technological innovation. Mr. Lukashenka has obtained a high degree of political stability, but at a high human cost. The question that the world community should ask itself is whether it wants to provide him the tools to maintain his power. Even if other countries and international organizations feel that it is beneficial to cooperate with Mr. Lukashenka as long as he is in power, he will not

Quotes of Quarter

"The joint exercises were conducted not with the Americans, not with NATO, but with our Russians. And only an idiot can then say that Lukashenka has turned to the West or somewhere else, and abandoned Russia "

declared **PRESIDENT LUKASHENKA**, as quoted by Interfax on October 2, 2009, reporting on the military exercises ZAPAD (West) 2009.

ECONOMY

Opinion Poll Reveals the Impact of The Global Recession on Belarus

By David Marples

A synopsis of the latest opinion poll (September 2009) conducted in Belarus by the Independent Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research has been published on the Institute's website (www.iiseps.org). The Charter 97 website issued a press release, which maintained that given a choice, Belarusians would join the European Union, but decline to join the Russia-Belarus Union (RBU). It further declared that based on the poll, a majority of Belarusians now wish to replace Alyaksandr Lukashenka as president (www.charter97.org, October 5). This analysis, however, over-simplifies the issues and obfuscates the attitude of the Belarusian population to the consequences of the economic crisis and current bilateral relations with Russia.

The poll is significant as it is widely regarded as the most objective survey conducted in Belarus. Though registered in Vilnius, the Institute operates in Minsk under the leadership of Dr. Oleg Manayev (Aleh Manayeu). Its survey was based on 1,505 respondents and the margin of error does not exceed 3 percent. Unsurprisingly, most people were concerned by the impact of the recession: 37 percent considered that their material situation had worsened over the past three months, and 40 percent professed "fear and shock" over rising prices for various products as well as in such sectors as housing, medicine, and education. Concerning who should be held responsible for "the worsening economic situation in the country," the targets were the following: the president (42.7 percent), government (40.7 percent), and local authorities (24.1 percent). However, almost a quarter of respondents laid the blame on "the West."

Most respondents maintained that the Lukashenka regime has brought stability as well as a plurality to the country (37 percent) and believe that the level of corruption is less than that of the early 1990's. Yet almost 40 percent thought that the gap between rich and poor had increased over the past 15 years and on a 10-point scale (where 1 constitutes full democracy and 10 a total dictatorship), the respondents ranked Belarus only at 6. And as noted on the Charter 97 website, in response to the question as to whether Lukashenka has performed well enough to stand for re-election or if an opportunity should be given to a new candidate, 50.2 percent opted for the latter. Does that mean that the Belarusian electorate today wants the removal of Lukashenka from power?

The answer is that for the moment, the president is quite secure. If he runs for a fourth term, according to the survey, 42.9 percent would support him against 25.2 percent for a candidate from the democratic opposition. More revealing, however, is the perennial question: if an election for the

presidency of Belarus were to be held tomorrow, for whom would you vote? A sizeable 39.4 percent declared that they would vote for Lukashenko, only 3.4 percent for Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the leader of the Movement for Freedom, and 2 percent for Alyaksandr Kazulin, the former Rector of the Belarusian State University. All three were candidates in the disputed 2006 presidential elections.

Concerning external links, given a choice between association with Russia and accession to the E.U., 38.3 percent favor the former and 42.7 percent the latter. Given the 3 percent margin of error, the results are too close to call. Furthermore, 63.6 percent maintained that Russia had no choice but to take action against Georgia in August 2008 and almost 50 percent of respondents laid the blame on Georgia for that conflict. Over 63 percent considered Russia correct to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and 46.8 percent thought that Belarus should follow Russia's example in recognizing these states. Around 80 percent of respondents did not consider Russia as a foreign country.

Such results make it difficult to discern exactly where Belarusians stand in the complex trilateral relationship with the E.U. and Russia. Also, while the recession is making life difficult, it has not yet had a critical impact on the population. In the first eight months of 2009, industrial output fell by 4.6 percent, and GDP dropped by around 1 percent. The biggest impact has been on the automobile industry, and particularly the export of heavy transport vehicles to Russia. Because of falling demand, the output of heavy vehicles—90 percent of which are manufactured at the Minsk automobile factory—has fallen by 55.3 percent over the first eight months of 2009 (*Belorusy i Rynok*, October 12-18).

Meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin at Novo-Ogarevo on October 6, Belarusian Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorsky commented on the dramatic drop in trade between the two countries of over 40 percent from January to August. However, Putin remained confident that the level would gradually rise again (www.government.by, October 6). Only in one area does the situation appear to be critical, namely Belarus' urgent need for foreign loans. While Russia is prepared to back further IMF aid to Belarus, it is unwilling to release the final \$500,000 of a \$2 billion loan agreed to last year, because it does not believe Belarus is financially stable enough to meet the conditions. A further \$1 billion is therefore being sought from the IMF, which approved a \$2.4 billion 15-month standby loan last January (*RIA Novosti*, October 5).

The poll reveals above all that the global recession has not had a major impact on Belarus. On the other hand, conditions are worsening and the government is quickly running out of options for further loans. Despite Charter 97's optimism, Belarusians still feel closer to Russia than to Europe. Moreover, Belarusians have yet to embrace a credible opposition leader and prefer to stumble on under an anti-democratic administration until such an alternative appears.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 193, October 21, 2009

Belarus' Forum

New Bloc's Cooperation With Regime

Lyavon Barshchewski, the former head of the Belarusian Popular Front says creation of the Belarusian Independent Bloc (BIB) is a "capitulatory project and treason".

It contains small-scale tactics that I can only support, but it has nothing in common with politics. The document says more efforts should be made to condemn fascism and communism (I support this), but says nothing about lukashism. It means that the document is a manifesto of collaborationism, small-scale cooperation with the regime," Lyavon Barshchewski said in an interview to RFE/RL.



Lyavon Barshchewski

"If you create a political bloc, you must have political aims. None such were set. The bloc was formed as an interest group. It should be noted that except for the BPF Party, there are no political subjects in the BIB in the full sense of the word. These are either NGOs or initiative groups. This is not a political bloc."

A number of political figures signed the declaration on creation of the Belarusian Independent Bloc (BIB) on October 27.

In addition to the former presidential candidate Milinkevich, who now leads the officially registered Movement for Freedom, the BIB declaration was signed by Alyaksei Yanukevich, the newly elected leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, Young Front's Zmitser Dashkevich, Vital Rymasheuski of Christian Democracy and Artur Finkevich, Vyachaslau Siuchyuk, Yury Karetnikau, Alyksandar Shumkevich, all representing various not officially registered NGOs.

Quotes of Quarter

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

"Our top priority is to preserve Belarus as an independent state on the map of Europe, and not as a province of some other country. She characterized the current situation in Belarus 'as a partially open window that may close at any moment.'

BIB Will Defend Belarus' National Interests

The chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front says the creation of the Belarusian Independent Bloc is a historic event.

Alyaksei Yanukevich stated this in an interview to RFE/RL.

"I am sure, this is a historic event. This initiative does not have short-term aims, it is a forward thinking approach to real political, economic, and energy independence. Only independence gives an opportunity for successful defence of the country's national interests. It unites the forces that can defend the national interests of Belarus. That's why we have called ourselves the Belarusian Independent Bloc.



Alyaksei Yanukevich

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, October 28, 2009

Minsk Forum: Belarus and EU Far Apart

By Andrei Liahovich

Introduction:

The Minsk Forum took place on November 4th to 6th in Minsk. A year ago at a similar representative assembly, Head of the Presidential Administration Uladzimir Makiej made a sensational announcement – that the independent newspapers *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Vola* would be included in the state system of distribution.

After the EU decision of October 2008 to suspend the travel ban to the European Union for several Belarusian top officials including Lukashenka, the authorities took this step toward political liberalization.

On the eve of the EU November decision, officials of lower rank spoke at the current Minsk Forum about planned changes in electoral legislation and certain political changes occurring in Belarus as evidence of the authorities' intention to develop relations with the West. However, the atmosphere of the Minsk Forum shows that even if these changes occur, they will be slow and ambiguous.

Summary:

Governments of several EU countries and the European Union as an entity have made a number of serious mistakes in the implementation of their Belarusian policy.

1. While their opinion about the lack of prospects for the policy of isolation of Lukashenka's regime was correct, they should have not publicly declared it, even to Belarusian officials.

2. They should not have stated that the European Union should repeal the travel ban for several Belarusian officials including Lukashenka (this point of view has been made public, for instance, by Italian officials).

3. They should have not presented the policy of engagement with Belarus so openly, nor spoken about the priority of trade and economic cooperation and participation in the Eastern Partnership.

4. Too much attention has been focused on the issue of whether Belarus will recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; Lukashenka's regime interpreted this attention to mean that recognition is a main condition for the development of cooperation with the West.

5. The European Union has not offered a "road map" to Lukashenka's regime. Without knowing what sequence of steps towards political liberalization will be demanded by the European Union, authorities prefer to assume a tough stance. The changes in the electoral legislation presented by the authorities do not change this situation.

The EU position on Belarus, which had been dictated to a large extent by geopolitical reasons, became too transparent to Lukashenka's regime. In no small measure, the EU's position created the situation in which authorities have scaled back the process of political liberalization and now are attempting to speak with the European Union from a position of strength.

Recommendations:

The European Union must react to the resumption of repression in Belarus.

1. The ban on travel of several Belarusian officials to EU countries should be suspended for no more than six months.

2. Heads of the state agencies that are directly involved in repressions and violations of political and civil rights in Belarus (Interior Minister, Chairman of the KGB, Prosecutor-General, and Minister of Justice) should be banned from entering EU countries.

3. The ban on Lukashenka's travel to EU countries should not be suspended again.

At the same time, the European Union should express its position to the authorities: what Lukashenka's regime is now offering to the European Union is not sufficient for Lukashenka to visit the EU.

In the first place, Belarus must be a country without political prisoners. Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code, which makes provision for the criminal responsibility for "activities on behalf of an unregistered organization" (many civil organizations and several political parties do not have the state registration or were deprived of it), must be repealed. The practice of politically motivated sackings or expulsions from universities must be stopped.

Political Liberalization – at the Discretion of the Authorities?

A year ago at the Minsk Forum, Head of the Presidential Administration Uladzimir Makiej answered rather tough questions from representatives of the opposition after his long statement. This year, authorities indicated from the very beginning of the Forum which topics they were willing to discuss and which they were not.

In his statement Makiej repeated Lukashenka's theses, in particular, those that were made public during the latter's visit to Vilnius on September 16th.

The Head of the Presidential Administration said that the European Union's investments and technologies were necessary to modernize the economy and to ensure the development of Belarus. He emphasized: "We welcome the delegation of the German business headed by my good friend Klaus Manhold. We count on the more active participation of German partners in privatization and investment.

... We are ready to take part in the Eastern Partnership without any reservations ... Simplification of the visa regime is a pressing issue".

According to Makiej, "now is happening what should have happened a long time ago" – intensification of cooperation between Belarus and the European Union. However, the European Union should take into account that "the policy of isolation was absolutely without future". "Belarus moves steadfastly on the path of evolutionary development". "We hope that the decisions on sanctions will be completely revoked at the next EU summit".

In conclusion Makiej led his European colleagues to the point that: "The existence of a stable and viable Belarus is of vital importance to Europe".

The topic of "stability" and "viability" of Belarus was developed in statements of lower-ranking representatives of the authorities who spoke at the Forum (in particular, in the statement of Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Varanicki). Stability is to be understood in two ways:

Firstly, the European Union should be interested in stability in Belarus because it is a transit country, a passage between the east and the west, the European Union and Russia. A considerable part of energy resources flow to the European Union through Belarus. Annually about one hundred million tons of freight are transported through the territory of Belarus.

Secondly, stability in Belarus is necessary for Europe's security. At Makiej's suggestion, representatives of the authorities said that Belarus was a reliable barrier to illegal migration and a "donor to European security". However, according to the logic of thoughts of Belarusian interlocutors, the Europeans should not take into account the illegal migration in the first place, but the threat to Belarus' sovereignty coming from Russia.

Head of the State Center for International Studies Uladzimir Ulakhovich pointed out that so far neither the Russian political elite nor Russian society perceive Belarus and Ukraine as independent States.

According to the logic of the authorities, the European Union would profit from providing investment and technology to Belarus because it improves the quality of infrastructure of the passage between the west and the east.

In addition, the European Union should provide investment and technology to Belarus in order to increase its economic presence here and to prevent Russia from extending its influence all the way to Bierascie.

Destabilization in Belarus threatens the European Union because Russia may take advantage of it. Russia sees the independence of Belarus as a misunderstanding and wants to correct this mistake of history.

Source: Andrei Liahovich, Office for Democratic Belarus, November 15, 2009

Quotes of Quarter

"I've always said that if NATO is to work well -- and the same goes for the EU -- then it has to know where it begins and ends and what its reach is. These organizations are defined above all by values, but also by geography. Judging by a look at the map, it seems to me that the line of these two entities leads along the border with Russia. That means Belarus belongs to that kind of Western civilization sphere -- regardless that there's a dictatorship there",

declared former Czech President

VACLAV HAVEL in a statement reported by RFE/RL on October 23, 2009.

"Climate change has an impact everywhere and on everyone,"

"Personally, I know what it means, when environmental disasters force people to leave their homes. My family as a result of the Chernobyl disaster was forced to leave Belarus – my birthplace."

said tennis ace **MARIA SHARAPOVA** in a statement carried by RFE/RL on October 6, 2009 (Two years ago, she donated \$100,000 to various Chernobyl projects in Belarus and Ukraine, and has been funding scholarships for students in the radiation affected areas.)

At a press conference in Minsk on December 18, 2009, **PAVEL BORODIN**, the Secretary of State of the moribund 'Russia-Belarus Union' and a close confidant of Putin, made the following statement, as reported by Interfax:

"The customs union between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan is an unprecedented step toward the restoration of the Soviet Union...you can write that in 2017 the Soviet space will be restored," noting that "year 2017 is symbolic, since the Soviet Union was formed in 1917."

HISTORICAL DATES

November 2 - Remembrance Day (Dziady)

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

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

November 1st through December 31, 1920 The Anti-Bolshevik Slucak Uprising

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

November 1830 through 1831

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

November 3, 1882

The birthdate of **Jakub Kolas** - an outstanding Belarusian poet of the national renaissance era.

November 26, 1930

The birthdate of **Uladzimier Karatkievic** - a noted Belarusian writer of the Soviet era. Most of his works dealt with Belarus' history. Deceased in 1984

December 15, 1850

The birthdate of **Mikalaj Sudzilouski-Russell**, known as an activist in 19th century liberation movements, a scientist and doctor of medicine. He helped to organize Bulgarians' 1876 uprising against the Turkish rule. Lived and worked in Western Europe, USA, Hawaii. In 1900 elected a senator, and in 1901 the president of the Hawaiian Senate.

January 28, 1588

Third and final edition of the **Statute** (Collection of Laws) of the Grand Duchy of Litva was published and ratified. The Statute is a unique monument of the medieval Belarusian judicial thinking and literature.

January 30, 1667

Truce of Andrusava concluded between Grand Duchy of Litva and Duchy of Moscow, terminating the bloodiest war in Belarus' history (1654-1667)

NEWS BRIEFS

October 20, 2009

Lukashenka Signs Belarus up to Post-Soviet Rapid Reaction Force

The president of Belarus has signed documents on joining a post-Soviet regional security bloc's rapid reaction force, the secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) said on Tuesday.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka had resisted signing the treaty establishing the Collective Rapid Reaction Force of the Collective Security Treaty Organization amid economic disputes with Moscow earlier this year.

The CSTO comprises Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Lukashenka did not attend the June summit in Moscow at which the agreement creating the force structure was signed, citing trade problems with Russia and Kazakhstan, while Uzbekistan has also held out against signing the pact, citing doubts over the force's purpose.

The joint force on Friday finished a two-week exercise at Kazakhstan's Matybulak training grounds, with over 7,000 personnel from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan taking part.

According to the CSTO Secretariat, the exercise was aimed at practicing the deployment of the collective rapid reaction force in crisis situations on the territory of CSTO member states.

Analysts say the creation of a powerful military contingent in Central Asia reflects Moscow's drive to make the CSTO a pro-Russian military bloc, rivaling NATO forces in Europe.

Russia's security strategy until 2020, recently approved by President Dmitry Medvedev, envisions the CSTO as "a key mechanism to counter regional military challenges and threats."

Source: RIA Novosti/ Office for Democratic Belarus

October 29, 2009

Sweden officially adopts a new word for "Belarusians"

The Swedish Academy has decided to change the Swedish adjective for "Belarusian" to make it closer to the original pronunciation.

At a meeting on September 25, the Academy directed that the adjective "vitryssar" be scrapped and replaced with "belarusier."

The decision is the first step to stop calling Belarus Vitryssland, which translates word for word as White Russia.

It was taken in response to a campaign that was organized by ethnic Belarusians living in Sweden, Dmitri Plax, a Belarusian artist based in Stockholm, told BelaPAN.

The Academy publishes two dictionaries, with one called Svenska Akademiens Ordlista (SAOL). It is a single volume that is considered the final arbiter of Swedish spelling.

Source: European Radio for Belarus, BelaPAN
November 10, 2009

Lukashenka: We need a little more time to accept EU's conditions

"We just need a little bit more time and we will accept EU's requirements", said Alexander Lukashenka on Tuesday at the meeting on the improvement of electoral laws. Movement for Freedom leader Alexander Milinkevich reckons the authorities should set a timetable for the implementation of EU's requirements. Political commentator Alexander Feduta believes that Lukashenka has found "the best guarantee" for himself.

The improvement of Belarus' electoral laws will not require amendments in the Constituion, Alexander Lukashenka said in statement.

He reckons that Belarus accepts Europe's criticism on this issue quietly. "We just need a little bit more time, and we will accept practically all the 12 requirements of Europe without any harm to our internal policy", Lukashenka is quoted by BELTA as saying.

At the same time, the head of the state noted that the liberalization of electoral laws should not lead to political instability.

Movement for Freedom leader Alexander Milinkevich today commented on Lukashenka's statement that the Belarusian authorities accept all requirements of the European Union.

Alexander Milinkevich: "This is a positive statement. It is very important that authorities understand that apart from the economic and cultural cooperation, political cooperation is very important. Political cooperation is impossible without the implementation of these conditions. But the authorities should set a clear timetable to show when concrete requirements will be met. I reckon this will build up trust of the European Union and will give a good chance for economic and financial cooperation...".

Source: European Radio for Belarus
November 10, 2009

European businessmen alarmed by Customs Union

During the 12th Minsk Forum, German politicians and businessmen maintained that there is another barrier -- a psychological one -- for European investments into the Belarusian economy after the creation of the Customs Union of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan.

German MP Georg Schimberg reckons it is indisputable that the Customs Union will bring benefits to Belarus in the trade with Russia and Kazakhstan. But the development of these markets threatens the investments from Europe which can be reduced since Europeans are not confident that this new interstate formation will be viable. He said:

"You are saying that you will have the Customs Union... This scares European countries away. As for the perspective of the cooperation with global corporations, the words of your president that the Customs Union becomes effective in the beginning of the year and something happens in the middle of the year mean death. All businessmen wish to have as much exact forecasts as possible".

Stefan von Kramon-Taubadel from the German consultative group of economic reforms in Belarus says that the economic development depends by 50 percent on psychological factors.

Therefore, a psychological barrier which deter German investors is a very bad sign. He said:

"I know businessmen from my constituency and I know what they think. Fears accumulate. We fear that Russia will dictate in the Customs Union and we will not be able to export to Russia... You are facing a huge task of destroying these huge psychological barriers!"

Belarus' finance minister Andrei Tur responded to German experts by maintaining that Europeans have nothing to fear!

"Some time back, no one in Belarus feared a psychological problem of how we would cooperate with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia when these countries were entering the European Union. It is a huge advantage for the European Union to cooperate with Belarus which is a member of the customs union with Russia and Kazakhstan.

If our investment opportunities meet your expectations, this opens new opportunities for your goods to penetrate a vast economic space from Brest to Vladivostok".

Andrei Tur has promised that Belarus will share information about the customs union with European investors as soon as it is created. Will it be sufficient for the cautious Europe? It seems that the economy ministry will soon have to hire psychologists in order to break psychological barriers.

Source: Zmitser Hlinski, European Radio for Belarus
November 13, 2009

WTO Welcomes Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia

The World Trade Organization welcomes the decision of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia to set up the Customs Union, Sergei Glazyev, of the Customs Union's customs commission, said at the Belarusian Investment and Economic Forum that began in Minsk on November 12.

The Union, which will remove barriers to trade between the three countries, is in the spirit of the WTO's principles, Mr. Glazyev said. "A big common market is good to both producers and consumers," he stressed.

In addition, the official said, the Union will allow "depoliticizing" issues concerning economic cooperation between the members and the European Union.

Ramunas Janusauskas, of the Delegation of the European Commission to Belarus, said that there are good prospects for the three states to remove barriers to free trade with the EU, but a number of technical matters should be settled beforehand.

Polish Ambassador Henryk Litwin said that the EU has more questions about the Customs Union project than answers.

Belarus will receive economic benefits from the EU's Eastern Partnership as well, but the country's integration with CIS countries surely does not conflict with its participation in the Partnership, the ambassador noted.

Source: Naviny.by, Office for Democratic Belarus
November 18, 2009

Independence and Democracy in Belarus Should Be Pursued Simultaneously, Says European Parliament President

One should remember that independence and democracy in Belarus should be pursued simultaneously, as there is no real in-

dependence without freedom, said Jerzy Buzek, president of the European Parliament, after meeting with a group of Belarusian opposition politicians in Brussels on November 17.

"Belarus is a European country and part of the European family," the European Parliament's press office quoted Dr. Buzek as saying. "Your history, culture and values speak volumes. Your right to live in an independent and democratic country has to be defended. That is also why the European Union has decided to embark on a path of dialogue with the authorities in Minsk. By doing so the European Union has extended its helping hand to Belarus, its people, and not only the authorities."

Dr. Buzek emphasized the importance of further pursuing conditional dialogue with Belarus, the press office said.

"I welcome today's decision of the Council [of the European Union] to extend the suspension on travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus for another year," he said. "While



Dr. Jerzy Buzek

a lack of significant progress in Belarus does not permit us to lift the sanctions altogether, the prolonged suspension of restrictions provides an opportunity to expect more genuine progress in Belarus in the field of democracy, human rights and rule of law."

Dr. Buzek welcomed the Council's decision to invite the European Commission to prepare recommendations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus.

"This is a very important development, since 20 years after the fall of Berlin Wall, we should not be erecting new walls further in the East," Dr. Buzek said. "Closer people-to-people contacts and easier travel to the EU would be the most effective way to promote a more open and democratic society in Belarus

Source: naviny.by, Office for Democratic Belarus

November 25, 2009

Lukashenka Says Medvedev's Journalist Meeting 'Senseless',

MINSK -- Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has called Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's meeting with members of the Belarusian media "senseless," RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

Medvedev met with the journalists at his residence in Barvikha, near Moscow, on November 23.

He said that Russia has never intended to get involved in Belarus's internal politics, but added that he would not rule out meeting with members of the Belarusian political opposition in the future.

Lukashenka told journalists in Minsk on November 24 that Russian officials have "invited Belarusian journalists that cannot stand the Russian spirit or Russians," adding that the Kremlin "should have at least gotten our advice" on whom to invite.

Independent Belarusian journalist Alyaksey Karol, who was at the meeting with Medvedev, told RFE/RL that state media as well as independent journalists were at the meeting.

He said many of the journalists -- including some of the independent ones -- have relatives in Russia and travel there on a regular basis, making Lukashenka's statement about some of them being unable to "stand the Russian spirit or Russians" inaccurate.

Karol said such a comment is "unexpected" from a man "who is running a country."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

November 28, 2009

Milinkevich: New Bloc will Not Compete with United Pro-Democracy Forces

Representatives of pro-democracy forces in Belarus have signed an agreement to found the Belarusian Pro-Independence Bloc.

The new political grouping includes eight political organizations: Party of Belarusian Popular Front, Movement for Freedom, Belarusian Christian Democracy, Youth Front, Young Democrats, Together Movement, Right Alliance. Alexander Milinkevich, the leader of Movement for Freedom, says the new bloc is not going to compete with UDF (United Pro-Democracy Forces).

"We are not going to compete with anyone. We have worked for the sake of democracy and human rights. Our goal is "pro", not "contra".

Commenting to Radio Svaboda, Liavon Barshcheuski said that BIB is a capitulation project without political goals and a program. Alexander Milinkevich vows to present a political program.

"We have a clear position. The program will also be there if we are to run for presidency. I think that the position of people like Dashkevich or Seviarynets can hardly be described as treason. They have deserved respect for their stance. I regret that Liavon degrades to labels. This is not a style of high politics".

Source: Pavel Hiba, European Radio for Belarus

November 30, 2009

Belarus Hopes for Closer West Ties in Berlusconi Visit

MINSK, Nov 30 (Reuters) - Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has paid a one-day visit to Minsk, hours after lawmakers eased restrictive electoral laws. The visit, the first by a Western leader in more than a decade, ended with a private dinner with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka who visited Italy earlier this year.

Ties between Belarus and Western countries turned frosty in the mid-1990s, when European and U.S. governments and rights groups made frequent criticisms of Minsk's approach to human

rights and democratic standards.

"We consider your visit ... as an eloquent gesture in support of Belarus in the international arena," Lukashenka said.

"Italy for us is a privileged partner in Europe," he told a news briefing after talks with Berlusconi.

Berlusconi stopped short of mentioning Belarus's ties with the



Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi

EU or human rights but still made a political quip.

"Thank you and thanks to your people who, I know, love you, as is demonstrated by the election results which everybody can see," Berlusconi told Lukashenka, in power since 1994 and once tagged "Europe's last dictator" by the George W. Bush administration.

The European Union accused Lukashenka of rigging his re-election in 2006 and imposed sanctions including a visa ban on dozens of top officials.

The EU suspended the visa ban a year ago to encourage reforms and extended the suspension for a year earlier this month. A freeze on Belarus government assets in the EU remains in place.

Source: Reuters, Office for Democratic Belarus
November 30, 2009

European Radio for Belarus gained accreditation

The European Radio for Belarus has been officially accredited in Belarus and allowed to open an office in Minsk. 12 of Radio's reporters have also been accredited for work on Belarus' territory.

This breakthrough decision by Belarus' authorities has been adopted several days before the European Union decided to extend the suspension of its sanctions imposed on certain Belarusian officials.

Source: Web-site Civic Belarus
December 4, 2009

Tatsiana Shaputska Expelled from University

Tatsiana Shaputska, Press-secretary of the Malady Front (Young Front) Organisation, has been expelled from the Department of Law of the Belarusian State University.

On December 3, Shaputska received a note, signed by the rector Syarhei Ablameika, stating that she was expelled for "violating the statute of the University". Tatsiana Shaputska represented her organisation at the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum that took place in Brussels in 16-17 November 2009. According to Belarusian legislation, students do not have the right to leave the country without permission of their university or the

Ministry of Education.

Tatsiana Shaputska was one of the most successful students of the university.

Earlier, during the Eastern Partnership Society Forum, the leader of pro-government trade unions Leanid Kozik promised he would stage a protest if Tatsiana Shaputska were expelled from the university for attending the conference.

The journalists tried to reach him but his secretary said Mr Kozik had departed to a Belarusian health farm to check on repair works after an accident.



The first meeting of the organizing committee in support of Tatsiana Shaputska, will take place today at the office of the Belarusian Popular Front, Malady Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich told the European Radio for Belarus

Zmitser Dashkevich: "We are holding the first meeting of the organizing committee to defend Tatsiana Shaputska. Milinkevich, Pahaniayla, Seviarynets, Bialiatski, Ina Kulei and other human rights activists and public figures have agreed to join the committee. Also, Siarhei Matskevich who attended the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and is the head of the political section there. We will discuss how to resolve this problem and help Tatsiana".

Zmitser Dashkevich hopes Tatsiana will be reinstated at the Belarus State University.

Source: European Radio for Belarus, // mfront.net

December 15, 2009

Belarusian Judge Rules: Opposition Activist's Case Will



Andrey Bandarenka

Be Reviewed

A Minsk city court ruled today that the case of a jailed opposition activist be sent back and reviewed in a lower court, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

Andrey Bandarenka, a member of the opposition United Civil Party (AHP), was found guilty of stealing property from his own company and sentenced to seven years in jail by Minsk's Pershamaysky District Court in October.

Human rights and AHP activists say the case against him is politically motivated.

The city court ruled today that not all the circumstances of his case were taken into consideration during the trial and therefore ruled to return the case to the district court for revision.

BELARUS ABROAD

CANADA

Fall of Berlin Wall Marked

The Canadian Government is known for its strong support of human rights throughout the world, including Belarus. The 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall was marked in a prestigious ceremony in Ottawa. Ivonka Survilla, President of the BNR Rada, the Belarusian government-in-exile, was invited to attend and was able to meet with top civic leaders and government officials.

Shown in the photo below: Ivonka Survilla with Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister of Canada.



PMO Photo by Jason Ransom

UNITED STATES

Khalip Gets Journalism Award

The prestigious Courage in Journalism Award of the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) was granted to the famous Belarusian journalist, Iryna Khalip, in New York on October 20, 2009. Khalip won the award together with Cameroonian reporter, Agnes Taile, and a journalist from Iran, Jila Baniyaghoob.

"These remarkable journalists have chosen to report the news in three countries where pursuit of the truth puts them at risk for arrest, physical attacks and even death," said Judy Woodruff, chair of the IWMF Courage in Journalism Awards. "Still, they have consistently, for many years, chosen to risk their lives and livelihoods in pursuing stories that illuminate the lives of people in their countries and enlighten us all."

The IWMF's press release states:

"Iryna Khalip, a reporter and editor in the Minsk bu-

reau of Novaya Gazeta, has been a journalist for more than 15 years in Belarus, one of the most oppressive countries toward journalists in the world. After working at a succession of newspapers, only to see them closed by the government, she now works for one of the most independent newspapers in the former Soviet Union."

Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist who received a 2002 IWMF Courage in Journalism Award, worked for the same newspaper as Khalip. Politkovskaya was murdered for her work in 2006.

Khalip, 41, has been a journalist in Belarus for more than 15 years. She is frequently detained and subjected to all-night interrogations by police. She has been arrested and beaten by police, who keep her under constant surveillance.

In 2003, Khalip's articles on corruption in the prosecutor's office were used as the reason the newspaper she was working for, *Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta* (Belarusian Business Newspaper), to be suspended for "insulting the honor and dignity of the president." The newspaper was forced to close permanently in 2006.

Khalip was among 35 journalists detained in connection with a March 2000 demonstration in Minsk. The protest was against the official banning of a march that was planned as part of opposition festivities commemorating the 1918 founding of the Belarusian National Republic. Khalip was forced into a police vehicle and taken to an Interior Ministry facility in Minsk. She was released later that day.

The Belarusian government issued a warning to the independent newspaper *Imya* (Name) in 1999 for an article written by Khalip about the Central Electoral Committee's activities. The newspaper's coverage of the coming presidential elections amounted to inciting the overthrow of the state, said the chair of the Belarusian Press Committee. According to Belarusian press law, a second warning would lead to the newspaper's closure.

Also in 1999, police went to Khalip's home and detained her for an entire day, interrogating and threatening her. They took the computer she used for work. During the time Khalip was in detention, police searched her apartment and confiscated her travel documents.

While reporting at a 1997 rally opposing unification with Russia, Khalip was clubbed by riot police and dragged by her hair. Her father, who was at the rally with Khalip, was beaten unconscious.

Asked to define courage, Khalip said, "I believe that courage is sort of a state of mind: When a person does fear but continues to do whatever he or she is doing because the motivation is stronger."

"About 10 years ago, I think I did some courageous things. I did feel the fear," she said. "But today it's a matter of habit, to live in conditions of underground struggle, especially when I bear in mind that my husband, Andrei Sannikau, is an opposition leader." This means that the two face twice the scrutiny from the government.

She wants to let reporters in democratic societies know that "a journalist who lives under a totalitarian regime cannot be objective. Objectivity is a privilege of a democratic

society. **Once you have been beaten, you become an activist, you become a fighter.**"

She now takes steps to protect herself. "I follow the principle of glasnost – of security," she said. After her office was ransacked and her computer and notes were confiscated, "I found myself completely helpless."

Now, she says, "I try not to keep any kind of notes on



Iryna Khalip

my voice recorder at home. ...I also work very quickly: I find out information and I publish it."

Anna Politkovskaya's murder made her rethink how she looks at death threats.

"I had thought that if they made threats, they'd never kill that person. They usually kill without warning. But there were threats against Anna, and she died. So obviously my logic was wrong," Khalip said.

Now, she says, "if there is a threat against your life, you need first and foremost to call all your friends and tell them.... Before Anna's death, I didn't take it very seriously. Now that this has happened, I realize they may really kill you."

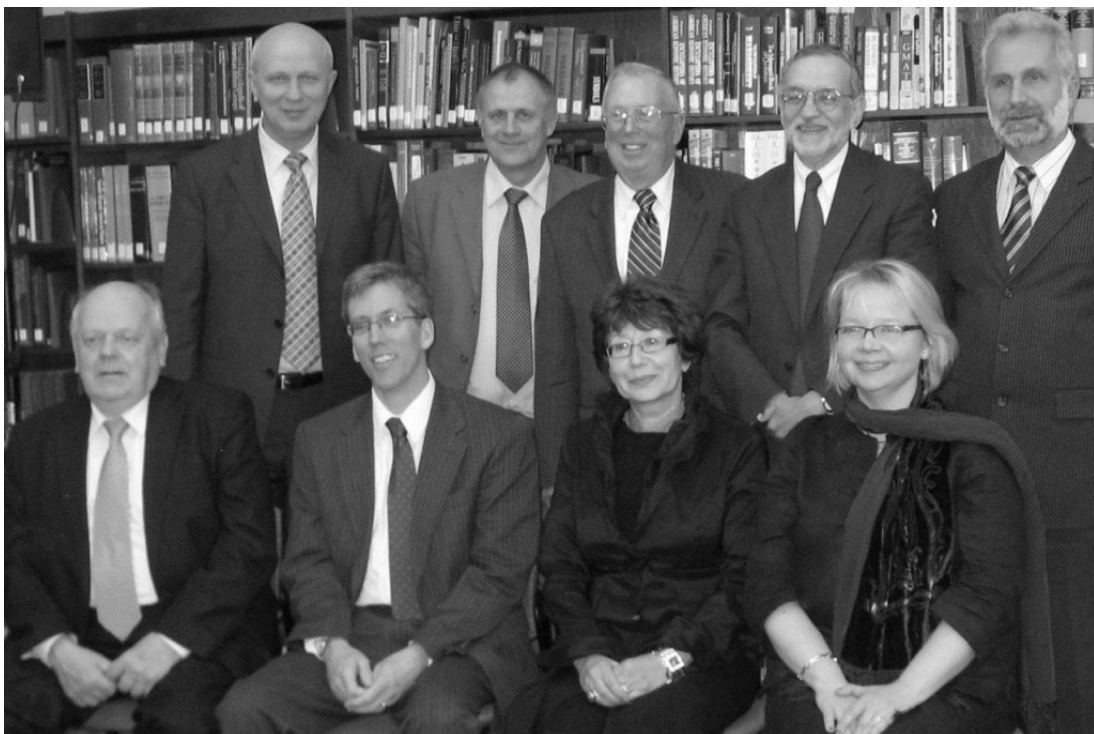
Created in 1990, the IWMF Courage in Journalism Awards honor women journalists who have shown extraordinary strength of character and integrity while reporting the news under dangerous or difficult circumstances. Including this year's award winners, 66 journalists have won Courage Awards and 18 journalists have been honored with Lifetime Achievement Awards.

The 2009 awards were presented at ceremonies in New York on October 20, 2009, and in Los Angeles on October 28, 2009.

Founded in 1990, the International Women's Media Foundation is a vibrant global network dedicated to strengthening the role of women in the news media world-

CBS Symposium at Southwestern College

The *Center for Belarusian Studies* at Southwestern College organized and held a major symposium **October 6 and 7, 2009**, on the topic "**Higher Education and Civil Society in Belarus.**" The conference - held on Southwestern's campus in Winfield, Kansas - brought together leading specialists in the subject area from Belarus, from the North America Belarusian Diaspora, and from the diplomatic arena.



Participants of the symposium

The symposium was chaired by **Dr. Maria Paula Survilla**, the Center's Executive Director and Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology at **Wartburg College** in Iowa. In addition to Professor Survilla, Associate Executive Directors **Dr. J. Andrew Sheppard** and Ambassador (retired) **David H. Swartz** also presented papers

Belarusians participating in the two-day meeting included:

Ales Antsipenka, Head, **Belarusian Collegium**, **Aliaksandr Kalbaska**, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, **European Humanities University**, **Aliaksandr Kazulin**, Former Rector, **Belarus State University**, **Stanislau Shushkevich**, Former Head of State, Republic of Belarus.

Other official participants in the symposium were:

Zina Gimpelevich, President, **Canadian Association of Slavists** and Professor of Slavic Literatures, **University of Waterloo**, **Kenneth Yalowitz**, Adjunct Professor and Director, **Dickey Center for International Understanding**, Dartmouth College, former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Belarus.

The Center extended an invitation to the government of Belarus to send an official delegation to participate in the symposium. Unfortunately, that invitation was declined.

Participants' papers and the lively exchanges they evoked revealed highly relevant yet often significantly divergent views on the prospects for the role of higher education in advancing democratic civil society in Belarus. A constructive synergy emerged over the two days of discussions, leading to a strong consensus around specific points pertaining to the current state of affairs in Belarus and the ageless question: "What is to be done?" The Center is now developing follow-up measures.

The Center for Belarusian Studies wishes to thank sincerely all participants in this symposium. Their dedication, unique perspectives, and common sense are all greatly appreciated. The Center is grateful to the **German Marshall Fund of the United States** for its financial support and also to the **Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellows program**.

Thoughts and Observations

Zapad 2009 Rehearses Countering NATO Attack on Belarus

By Roger McDermott

On September 29 the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and his Belarusian counterpart Alyaksandr Lukashenka attended the end of joint military exercises at the Obuz-Lesnovsky firing range in Belarus. The two stage "Zapad 2009" (West 2009) began on September 8, involving a total of 12,500 servicemen, including 6,000 from Russia, and 40 aircraft among 200 items of military hardware. Medvedev said that such exercises will be held every two years in order to promote Russian and Belarusian military interoperability and form a high-quality joint defense system. Army-General Nikolai Makarov, the Russian Chief of the General Staff noted the importance of the exercises: "We have not conducted anything like that in terms of composition and scale for a long time" (ITAR-TASS, September 8; Krasnaya Zvezda, September 25; Rossiya TV, September 28). Minsk invited observers from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine to attend the event. However, the exercise which was developed jointly between the Belarusian and Russian defense ministries was described by Medvedev as "purely defensive," though to many western observers it appeared to be a regressive step: the exercise scenario concentrated on repelling a NATO-led attack on Belarus (EDM, September 28).

A more plausible rationale was offered by Lieutenant-General Sergey Skokov, the Chief of the Main Staff of the Russian Ground Forces, who noted that the country faces "potential threats" from three strategic directions: the west, east and south. They each represent distinct type of threats ranging from facing a mass conventional force on its east-

ern border to combating insurgents or terrorism from the south, to facing a highly technologically advanced "enemy" from the west. In describing the type of threat Russian might face on its western flank, he essentially described network centric warfare which is the hallmark of United States and NATO operations. The enemy would not advance along a traditional frontline, but attempt to outflank Russian forces in order to minimize its losses, capitalizing on an information advantage, which Skokov observed was the pattern followed by U.S. armed forces in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Nonetheless, given the technology lag between Russian and western militaries, it is unlikely that Skokov or any other Russian general believes that their armed forces can currently conduct non-contact warfare. Skokov used the experience of Russian forces in recent exercises to suggest that they must prioritize the development of "mobile forces" (ITAR-TASS, September 23).



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (L) with his Belarusian counterpart, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, observe Zapad 2009 joint military exercises

He also said that it is in order to train command echelons and troops in these areas that the "Osen 2009" (Autumn 2009) strategic maneuvers were staged, which started in June (Kavkaz, Zapad and the Ladoga 2009 operational-strategic exercises). In other words, the aim of developing "mobile groups of forces" is internally promoted by staging such drills; the interpretation which the Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich derived from Zapad 2009, that it was in essence a political message to Poland from the Kremlin, is in this sense misleading (Interfax, September 23, www.charter97.org, September 25). This is a traditional threat perception being recast during an internal Russian military transformation, and it is primarily about forming the forces that the country will need in the future. What few Russian generals are saying publicly is that by abandoning the mass mobilization principle this year, and transferring to permanent readiness formations, it is harder to maintain the pretence that the military mainly exists to deter or repel a future attack from NATO.

According to General Skokov, recent Russian military exercises provide an opportunity for the "new look" armed forces to be evaluated and tested. More specifically, as the combat capability of the new brigades emerging within the military are assessed additional proposals are being developed to change guidelines and the legal regulatory documents, while minor adjustments are made at unit level to enhance overall lethality (ITAR-TASS, September 23). General Makarov was unequivocal about the objectives of Zapad 2009: "We have set a number of important objectives for these maneuvers. First of all, we must test the transition to the new armed forces command system, mostly based on the move to network centric warfare. We want to see the new air defense and air force command system in action and also test the command system of the coalition force of the Republic of Belarus and Russia" (Interfax, September 29).

Indeed, given the recent turbulence in bilateral relations including Lukashenka delaying signing the agreement of establishing the new Collective Operational Response Force (CORF) under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, as well as the differences relating to trade and energy issues, the exercise appeared partly aimed at strengthening the union state. The Belarusian Defense Minister Colonel-General Leonid Maltsev explained: "This exercise is a logical continuation of training during recent years. Its primary goal is to test the functioning of the joint defense system of the allied state and its capabilities of fulfilling the task of maintaining regional and national security" (www.belta.by, September 29).

Staging this joint exercise, attended by both presidents, given the recent bilateral tensions and an apparent lapse in military cooperation, served to symbolically unite Minsk and Moscow, even if only against a hypothetical "western threat." Vladimir Evseev from the Center for International Security of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow observed: "This joint exercise will enable us to become closer in such a sensitive area as security" (Russia Today, September 28).

Neither the rhetoric surrounding Zapad 2009 nor the

cautious response by the Russian government over U.S. missile defense plans has stressed too strongly an "anti-western" stance. Zapad 2009 appears to be part of an evolving and internal debate within the Russian defense and security establishment. As the structure of the armed forces was overhauled in 2009, progressing towards implementing the "new look" military, old thinking in relation to the Western threat is being adapted, but it is unclear whether this was intended to convey any aggressive foreign policy message to the West. Those arguing within the military that the West poses a possible threat to Russia, must now be gradually won over first to the view that the reformed military can be deployed against a NATO-led intervention in Belarus, while simultaneously the "Western threat" concept is being used as a means to maximize support for the reform and modernization of the Russian armed forces.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 179, September 30, 2009

The Wall That Didn't Come Down

When change comes to Belarus, its leaders will likely be today's youthful activists rather than the aging, fractious "opposition."

Eighty-five millimeters. For many Belarusians, that remains the symbolic distance between their country and the West. Every train running from Warsaw to Minsk that arrives at the border town of Brest takes a short detour to a depot on the Belarusian side. The passengers wait inside, trying to sleep, while the cars are elevated and the wheels changed for wider ones to fit the tracks in Belarus. A trip that should take five hours ends up taking closer to eight.

With all the events this week commemorating the fall of the Berlin Wall and the impact on the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, a country that democracy never reached shouldn't be forgotten. Two decades after 1989, the Minsk tourist bureau sign that still in the mid-1990s welcomed visitors to the USSR may be gone, but the Soviet past is everywhere: no political plurality, no free market economy, a powerful security force (still known as the KGB), and a state-dominated media flooded with government propaganda.

CHANGE IN THE AIR

Things are afoot, however, in Belarus, and the situation – so static and so depressing for so long – seems more in flux than in recent years. The long-time pariah of the West and devoted suitor of Russia, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, has miraculously turned himself into the Man Who Would Lead Belarus to Europe and, at the same time, the Father of an Independent Belarus.

Lukashenka's motivations are multiple and interconnected. At the beginning of his presidency (he is the longest serving European leader at 15 years), his pro-Russian slant and nostalgia for the Soviet era secured a following among that similarly inclined part of the Belarusian population. He also probably thought that unquestioned loyalty to Moscow would ensure a lifetime of cheap Russian gas and oil.

Flash forward a decade later, to around 2005, and the situation had started to change, with then-Russian President Vladimir Putin finally calling Lukashenka out on past pledges of real integration (the Russian ruble as a common currency, a union constitution, common border controls, and so on). Faced with the prospect of handing over control of state assets and ending up little more than a regional governor, Lukashenka began looking for alternatives to stay in power.

A downturn in the economy accelerated the search: As financial analyst Sergei Korol has written for TOL, the Belarusian “economic miracle,” already under pressure after Russia started to eliminate fuel discounts, started to collapse in 2007, with exports plummeting and the trade deficit skyrocketing. The world financial crisis meant the billions in short-term financing that had been available previously dried up, leading to the very real possibility of a financial meltdown.

In the end, the Belarusian government had no choice but to accept relief from Western financial institutions, including a \$2.5 billion IMF loan. That new dependency has meant agreeing to some measure of economic liberalization, a process that some experts now consider irreversible. Private businesses and local entrepreneurs have found themselves freer to operate than in the past. If Belarus now needed the West, anti-Western propaganda made less sense.

The change in public opinion has been dramatic. According to opinion polls conducted by IISEPS, an independent research agency now based across the border in Vilnius, for the first time this fall, more people favored integration into the EU than into Russia (42.7 percent versus 38.3 percent in September 2009, compared with 28.6 percent versus 59.2 percent in September 2005). And already by the end of 2008, over 63 percent of those questioned were against the restoration of the USSR, in contrast to around 51 percent five years ago. Favorable coverage from the state propaganda machine and Lukashenka’s change of heart have clearly had their effect.

At this stage, there are even signs of a state-sanctioned re-emergence of the Belarusian language, symbols, and history – other bogymen of the Lukashenka era. State television, for example, seems to feature more Belarusian-language programming than ever before during the president’s time in office. And the official attitude toward the Kurapaty monument – which commemorates Belarusians murdered by the Soviet secret police between 1937 and 1941 – appears to be changing. The day before a large, opposition-led visit to the monument, the state newspaper *Belarus Segodnya* wrote of the common importance of this memorial for the entire nation instead of largely ignoring Kurapaty as in the past.

DIVIDE AND RULE

All of the above doesn’t, however, mean the situation is rosy. Yes, “administrative” detentions – a common form of dealing with enemies of the regime – have dropped dramatically, and some independent newspapers have been allowed back into the official distribution system. The EU and European officials are no longer regularly mocked and condemned. But political liberalization has been spotty and

limited, without structural changes to the electoral or legal systems, such as a move to eliminate articles restricting the activities of NGOs. Activists may now be rarely detained, but they are regularly fined. Only two of 13 independent newspapers have actually been allowed back. The lack of progress, especially this year, will likely result in the EU later this month extending its suspension of the visa ban on top Belarusian officials rather than cancelling the ban outright.

All these points should be hammered home by Belarus’s beleaguered opposition in an attempt to counter the country’s supposed move West. But the political opposition has done a particularly poor job at that, and has, in fact, allowed Lukashenka’s remake to happen. Before 2006, serious attempts took place to consolidate the opposition and nominate a single candidate for the presidential elections. Today, fragmentation, in-fighting, and division are the dominant trends, with no single force able to counter Lukashenka’s monopolization of what should be the opposition’s main pro-independence, pro-West mantra. Of course, very limited access to the media hurts, but Belarusian pro-democracy activists and donors constantly complain of the political opposition’s inability to connect with voters, speak in sound bites, and present well internationally.

It took 16 days, for example, for the opposition just to issue a statement condemning the devaluation of the Belarusian ruble after Lukashenka flip-flopped and allowed that to happen earlier this year, harshly impacting normal Belarusians.

The general disgust with the political opposition should not be taken for a sign that all of the opposition is in a generally sorry state. The civic sector, buoyed by years of training and millions of dollars in foreign assistance and expertise, is dedicated, brave, and often innovative. Young leaders in the NGO crowd have been abroad and seen, first-hand, life beyond their borders. They – and not the older political party veterans who celebrated the crumbling of the Soviet bloc 20 years ago – will likely be the ones to bring real change to Belarus and not the superficial transformation now occurring.

And that’s the real benefit of the fall of the Wall for Belarusians so far. Even though their country has yet to join the wave, they can at least see the difference democracy and a free market economy can make, right next door. That is, just before the trip home and having to get the wheels changed again.

Source: TransitionsOnLine, 13 November 2009

Quotes of Quarter

“We are sending Minsk signals of support, in order to steer it toward an appropriate course of reforms,”

stated the Austrian Foreign Minister **MICHAEL SPIN-DELEGGER** after talks with his Belarusian counterpart in Vienna on December 17, 2009 as reported by *BelaPAN*. He named the local elections in Belarus scheduled for April 2010 as ‘an important litmus test in further development of relations.’

European Union Disappointed with Lack of Change in Belarus

By David Marples

A meeting of the European Union Council of foreign ministers in Brussels on November 16-17 opted to continue restrictions on travel by Belarusian government officials to its member states. However, to encourage the Belarusian side to improve its domestic situation, the ban was suspended for a further eleven months, expiring in October 2010.

The travel ban, which encompasses 36 Belarusian officials, was introduced after the flawed presidential elections and their violent aftermath in March 2006, and suspended in October 2008 following the freeing of some political prisoners by the Lukashenka regime. Since that time Belarus has joined the European Union's Eastern Partnership Project and EU leaders have made a series of visits to Belarus, while Lukashenka and others have visited Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and other states.

The Council's decision reflects the disappointment of the EU concerning the lack of real change in Belarus. Its official statement declared that it "deeply regrets" that its concerns regarding human rights and basic freedoms have not been addressed. It cited brutal dispersal of peaceful political demonstrations (most recently on October 16), failure to register political parties and NGO's, and the creation of an independent media. Also, it addressed Belarus' refusal to date to abolish the death penalty. The EU declared that Belarus' electoral laws needed to be brought in line with international standards (www.naviny.by, November 16; Office for a Democratic Belarus, November 17).

Two other recent events illustrate the conflicting attitudes and responses to EU initiatives. The first was the convocation of the Belarusian European Forum, held in the Palace of Culture in the Minsk Auto Factory on November 14, organized by Alyksandr Milinkevich of the Movement for Freedom and the Belarusian Independent Blocs and attended by 809 people, including deputies of the European Parliament and several ambassadors from EU countries. At the meeting, Milinkevich noted that the past policy of political isolation of the Lukashenka regime had proven unsuccessful and that he and his associates favored spreading contacts with Europe at all levels. They also support a political and economic dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, but only with firm conditions about democratization in Belarus and the provision of political, economic, and other "freedoms." Milinkevich also discussed the 2011 presidential election. While not directly declaring his candidacy, he commented that the uniting of "ideologically close political forces" might be a more successful strategy than the 2006 policy of uniting all political groups behind a single candidate (*Belorussiy i Rynok*, November 16-22).

The second event was a conference and discussion held by the largest daily newspaper *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (*Belarus' Segodnya*), which consisted of an open question and

answer session with the chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Lidziya Yarmoshyna, one of the leaders still banned from traveling to Europe. In general she was noncommittal on the most sensitive questions about reforms to the electoral process. She answered questions exclusively in Russian, even though about half were posed in the Belarusian language, and the questioners appeared to include quite a large contingent of students (*SB-Belarus' Segodnya*, November 18).

Among other issues, Yarmoshyna revealed her Russian and Ukrainian parentage, her support for then Prime Minister Vyacheslau Kebich in the 1994 election (won by Lukashenka), and the integrity of her commission, despite the president's claim that the results of the 2006 election were fabricated to reduce his margin of victory. Asked whether there would be changes to the electoral law on Europe's initiative or internally, she answered that the authorities would use those recommendations by European experts that they considered necessary. Moreover, she noted that changes to the electoral law would be in place before the current session of parliament ends, on December 18.

She also defended the anomaly of early voting, but agreed with one question concerning the procedural problems of collecting signatures for presidential candidates, stating that it will no longer be possible to add signatures from electors from various regions and districts on a single list. Foreign organizations will not be permitted to support candidates financially—the question referred to opposition figures—but the number of election observers may be extended (she did not specify whom this might include).

Astonishingly, in reply to a question about her opinion of the 12 conditions for improving democracy in Belarus advanced originally by the EU, she professed not to know about them, claiming that the document had not been circulated in the CEC.

On the one hand, the public forum with such a senior figure and the openness of the questions are positive signs. This is not the first such discussion on the pages of the presidential newspaper. On the other hand, there is little to indicate either that Yarmoshyna has mellowed or that any serious amendments to the electoral system are under consideration.

For the Europeans, there will be an opportunity to assess whether improvements will come during the local elections in spring 2010, a prequel to the anticipated presidential elections in 2011. Belarus intends to abolish tourist visas for EU citizens in the near future (www.news.tut.by, November 18) and some reciprocation may be anticipated. However, the decision to continue sanctions, albeit in suspended form, appears to be justified. The Belarusian side needs to do much more before it can be considered a viable partner.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 217
November 24, 2009

Decision to continue sanctions, albeit in suspended form, appears to be justified.

'Pragmatic' EU Keeps Belarus Sanctions In Suspension

By Ahto Lobjakas

Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, speaking for the current EU Presidency, said that "we are still in a period of engaging with authorities in Belarus to try to move them further in the direction of European values."

BRUSSELS -- EU foreign ministers have decided that the bloc will extend for another year its dual approach in dealing with Belarus, applying sanctions on the one hand but simultaneously suspending them on the other.

A draft EU declaration, seen by RFE/RL, said the bloc would maintain the sanctions -- mainly travel bans leveled against top Belarusian officials, which were first imposed in the wake of the country's flawed March 2006 presidential elections, and then suspended in large part in October 2008. The policy was made formal on the second day of a two-day foreign ministers meeting in Brussels.

But even as it maintains the status quo in its relationship with Minsk, the EU is prepared to offer some encouragement as well. Brussels is offering Belarus talks on easing EU visa rules, as well as the more distant prospect of negotiating a new bilateral cooperation accord.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, speaking for the current EU Presidency, announced the decision after the meeting in Brussels.

"We have prolonged the sanctions, but we have suspended their application. That is, we are still in a period of engaging with authorities in Belarus to try to move them further in the direction of European values," Bildt said.



Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt

He also indicated that the EU did not expect quick advances in Belarus's democratic record. "I can easily say we are disappointed with the pace of progress, but we have not given up yet." Bildt went on to quip that "Scandinavian-style democracy" was unlikely to be achieved by Belarus "by next Wednesday."

Little Improvement

The text of the EU decision paints a balanced picture of Belarus's progress -- and lack thereof -- since the bloc's stick-and-carrot policy was put in place a year ago.

The decision to relax EU sanctions on Belarus was made in October 2008, in the wake of the Russia-Georgia war. At the time, the EU feared Russia might attempt to bring other neighbors under its sway. EU overtures to Belarus followed, and the country was invited to join the EU's Eastern Partnership in April this year.

In recounting Belarus's recent advances, the EU welcomed the release of political prisoners and Minsk's agreement to participate in various kinds of dialogue with Brussels, including talks on the human rights situation in the country.

EU officials have also welcomed steps by Minsk to introduce a degree of media freedom and the willingness of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime to take international advice on electoral reform.

The new EU statement says there needs to be more progress in bringing Belarus's electoral laws in line with international standards. Freedom of expression, assembly, and political association must also be strengthened.

The declaration notes that there has been little "recent" progress, and "regrets" continued crackdowns on peaceful political protests and the continued refusal by the authorities to register "many political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and independent media."

Belarusian authorities refuse to register Belarusian Christian Democracy, an opposition political party created in February 2009.

On October 16 in Minsk, police cracked down on a demonstration of solidarity with the families of disappeared politicians in Belarus. All of the participants in the demonstration were herded by policemen onto a bus and detained; some of them were harshly beaten.

The EU statement also notes with regret recent death sentences imposed in Belarus. In the most recent case, the Belarusian Supreme Court in October rejected an appeal from Andrey Zhuk to commute the death sentence imposed on him earlier this year. It is estimated that since 1997, Belarus has executed more than 160 people sentenced to death.

Tentative Offer

The EU declaration also includes a promise that travel restrictions on top Belarusian officials could be lifted "at any time, in light of actions by the Belarusian authorities in the sphere of democracy and human rights." However, the statement also makes it clear the reverse also applies -- the continued suspension of the ban is conditional on Minsk's willingness to cooperate with the EU.

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said she strongly hoped the Belarusian authorities would accept the EU's gesture of "pragmatic" goodwill.

"I hope that Belarus will use that, will take it up, and I also hope that these reform plans indeed can provide good incentives for more moves toward democracy in Belarus and reflect [the] somewhat more pragmatic [EU] approach for which I myself particularly have always [pressed]," she said.

Ferrero-Waldner said "some" EU member states continue to feel Belarus has done too little to deserve more

EU concessions. This is a reference to behind-the-scenes discussions in Brussels over the past few weeks that accompanied the drafting of the new statement. During these discussions, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, and a few other countries arguing for a thaw in EU-Belarus relations lined up against Britain and the Netherlands.

The outcome is a compromise where the sanctions and their suspension are both extended for their maximum term and a highly tentative offer is held out to Minsk to begin talks on visa liberalization. Also, the EU for the first time is formally testing the waters with regard to negotiating a new cooperation treaty with Minsk.

Meanwhile, the EU is offering a "joint interim plan to set priorities for reforms, inspired by the action plans developed in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy."

This compromise appears to enjoy the tacit support of Poland, Belarus's closest EU neighbor. Jacek Protasiewicz, a European Parliament deputy, said on November 13 the parliament's delegation for EU-Belarus relations supports the ministers' two-pronged approach.

Protasiewicz said it was too early to lift the sanctions altogether, but also noted their suspension is necessary for further advances in EU-Belarusian relations.

"There is still a chance for some changes, for some reforms, as well as introducing a new area of cooperation between the European Union and the Belarusian people -- not only the Belarusian authorities -- particularly [when it comes to] the visa regime," Protasiewicz said.

"If the sanctions are, once again, imposed, there [will be] no chance of having a PCA [Partnership and Cooperation Agreement] or any kind of legal agreement between the European Union and Belarus on which basis we could build a new, more liberalized visa regime for Belarusian citizens."

Protasiewicz said that the current situation where Belarusians have to pay nearly twice as much for Schengen visas to the EU as Moldovans, Ukrainians, and Russians, is "very unfair."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, December 3,

the pro-government Federation of Trade Unions, was also present (www.charter97.org, December 7), who declared that he would personally instigate a protest in central Minsk if Shaputska had any problems from the Belarusian State University for her participation in the Forum (*European Radio for Belarus [ERB]*, December 7).

On December 3, Shaputska received a letter from the university administration, which informed her that she was expelled for violating the university statutes. Later the official reason given was that she had been expelled for excessive absences -- despite being an exemplary student (*Office for a Democratic Belarus [ODB]*, December 4). It also appears particularly perverse given that membership of the Eastern Partnership Project has official approval and has signaled the end of the isolation of Belarus by the European Union.

Meanwhile, Kozik reportedly left Minsk to inspect a sewage breakdown at the trade union's sanatorium on the day Shaputska was expelled, and his secretary, when phoned by an office in Brussels, would not divulge further details (ERB, Dec 7). Later, he commented on the trade union website that the expulsion was unrelated to the student's attendance at the forum (*Narodnaya Volya*, December 5). MF leader, 28-year old Zmitser Dashkevich, and several other opposition figures, including Alyaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the Movement for Freedom and Paval Seviarynets, chairman of the unregistered Christian Democratic Party, held a meeting of an organizing committee to defend Tatsiana Shaputska, on December 4 at the office of the Belarusian Popular Front (ODB, December 4).

The following day, Dashkevich was scheduled to take part in the convocation of a New Generation coalition, a program to unite several youth organizations. As he opened the door of his apartment, five men in civilian clothes abducted him, put him into a minibus and drove to a forest some 40 miles from Minsk. They took his mobile phone and informed him that they intended to dig a pit, but disappeared after putting a wooden pole into his jacket to prevent arm movement. Dashkevich phoned friends from a public telephone, to learn that his apartment had also been raided and his laptop taken (*Nasha Niva, Gazeta Wylborcza*, December 7).

On December 6, four men in plain clothes forced one of the European Belarus leaders, Yauhen Afnahel, into a car with darkened windows (only the special services may drive such vehicles), forced him to put his head to his knees and took him on a 20-minute drive. They confiscated his camera and cell phones, and returned them after taking out batteries of the former and one of the phones (*Radio Liberty*, December 7).

The most common practice has been for the KGB or police to abduct youth leaders and activists from the streets. On March 25, 2009, they forced Nasta Palazhanka and Dzianis Karnou into a car in Minsk before the rally for Independence Day took place. They were dropped in a forest several miles away, after the abductors, who have never been identified, beat and robbed Karnou (*Vyasna*, December 7). Earlier the police had raided the apartment of Karnou and several other activists (Belapan, March 25). These tactics have now been revived.

Belarus Cracks Down On Youth Activists

By David Marples

Since late November, the Belarusian authorities have targeted members of the Malady Front (Young Front, MF), an organization registered in the Czech Republic but not in Belarus, as well as Eurapeyskaya Belarus (European Belarus), the members of which overlap.

On November 16-17, the press secretary of the MF, 19-year old law student Tatsiana Shaputska, took part in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Brussels. She met Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt (Sweden holds the current EU Presidency), and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy. Leanid Kozik, chairman of

BELARUSICA

NATIONAL MINORITIES POLICIES IN LITHUANIA: A SUCCESS STORY?

Part II

By Hanna Vasilevich

Continued from the Fall 2009 issue of BELARUSIAN REVIEW

4.3 Lithuanian domestic law regarding national minorities

Lithuania was the first country in Central and East Europe which passed a Law on National (Ethnic) Minorities (1989 and amended in 1991).²⁰ This document declared the right to foster their language and guarantees that their language shall be respected, including the right to establish cultural and educational organizations. Additionally, the right of national minorities to receive state support for fostering of their national culture, education and access to information is guaranteed.

Lithuanian legislation, however, does not contain any definition of the concept of a national minority²¹ but country's domestic legislation defines "the number of population and their compact residence" as key factors when the group may be granted with the rights "to protect and promote the language, religion, culture and traditions" under the condition of possessing Lithuanian citizenship.²²

In fact, Lithuania legislation on national minorities may be described on the base of three factors:

1. Citizenship,
2. Educational policies,
3. Cultural and Language rights.

4.3.1 The citizenship factor

The citizenship issue is rather a question which existed in the early 1990s. The Law on Citizenship adopted by the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR on November 3, 1989 prescribed that those persons who possessed citizenship of the interwar Lithuania²³ as well as their descendants are considered as "the body of citizens". For all other permanent citizens of the Lithuanian SSR (with the exception of personnel in the Soviet army and security service) a "zero-option" was introduced which meant that "all people who lived in Lithuania at that moment could choose the citizenship freely without any restrictions and additional requirements"²⁴. This decision made Lithuania unique amongst other Baltic States – Estonia and Latvia – where citizenship issue remains acute even nowadays. The explanation of this uniqueness is probably explained by different policies of the Soviet authorities towards Lithuania on the one hand and Estonia, Latvia or even Belarus on

On November 27, before the commemoration of the Slutsk uprising of 1920 against the Bolsheviks in central Minsk – an event regularly marked by the opposition – two policemen seized Uladzimir Lemesh, a member of the European Belarus movement. They confiscated his passport and cell phones, and put him in a Volkswagen minibus with darkened windows, and drove him out of the city, before releasing him with a warning not to continue his political activities. Prominent MF activist Artur Finkevich suffered an identical fate on the same day (www.charter97.org, December 7).



NO to Political Terror!

Belarusian political activists, December 16, 2009

Though there have been dozens of individual acts of harassment by the KGB and police against youth activists over the past year, it is unusual to find so many related actions within such a short timescale. Expulsions of students, as well as pressure on them not to take part in protests or demonstrations, are also common. Several activist students have been expelled from university and forcibly recruited into the army, including Franak Vyachorka, leader of the youth wing of the Belarusian Popular Front, who has medical problems (www.udf.by, July 24). But the treatment of Shaputska seems illogical given the recent rapprochement with the EU. So how are these events explained?

First, the improved relations with Brussels, while adding some much-needed credibility to the Lukashenka regime, have also emboldened youth groups to test just how far liberalization in Belarus can be pushed. The regime is responding with petty harassment, abductions, death threats, and gross invasions of privacy and civil rights, confident that the EU will not reexamine its suspension of sanctions for another year.

Second, the government seeks to prevent any serious opposition coalition from emerging prior to the 2010 municipal and 2011 presidential elections. The Malady Front, with its emphasis on the Belarusian language and culture and its pro-European and anti-Russian direction, is an implacable foe and unlike the official opposition, it is particularly difficult to control.

Source: Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 6 Issue: 231, December, 16, 2009

the other hand – Soviet industrialisation meant for Tallinn, Riga or Minsk massive migration of the labour force from all over the Soviet Union whereas Vilnius faced migration of predominantly ethnic Lithuanians from other parts of the Lithuanian SSR.²⁵ The effectiveness of the zero-option may be proved by the fact that “about 90% of the permanent residents opted for citizenship during this time”²⁶

4.3.2 National minorities and education

As mentioned above, Art. 45 of the Constitution of Lithuania as well as the Law on National Minorities provide minorities with the right to independently manage their education. The Law of Education (1991, amended in 2003) prescribes that “if national minorities necessitate and request, they may have pre-schools, schools and classes in mother tongue in their densely populated districts” (Art. 12). However, Lithuanian language is a compulsory subject and if the language of instruction is other than Lithuanian, Lithuanian language and literature must be taught in Lithuanian. It is parents who decide on the language of instruction for their children in pre-schools and elementary schools. As of 2000 “total number of schools in the Republic of Lithuania reached 2246, the number of Polish schools - 74, Russian - 68, Belarusian - 1, and 72 combined schools”.²⁷

However, the situation is more complicated than it may seem. First, no school in Lithuania is considered as Polish, Russian or Belarusian. Any school where instruction is conducted in a minority language is considered a Lithuanian school. Secondly, no textbooks printed in Belarus, Poland or Russia are allowed in Lithuanian schools. It means that only those textbooks are allowed which are approved and published under the auspices of the Lithuanian authorities. In practice it means that the difference between educational programmes between schools of national minorities and ordinary schools in Lithuania is only language. Moreover, schools of national minorities use the same curricula which are used by ordinary Lithuanian schools, only issues related to minorities’ culture, language and traditions are added. Additionally, lack of specialists with the knowledge of minorities’ languages leads to the situation when more and more teachers without knowledge of respective language come to work into the minorities schools and pupils have to study in Lithuanian.²⁸ “Now there is an official project accordingly to which 70% of subjects in higher classes of the schools of national minorities would have to be taught in Lithuanian” but it could hardly be considered as a convincing argument as Lithuanian is a compulsory subject in schools and “all minority school graduates speak Lithuanian very well anyway”²⁹

4.3.3 Cultural and language rights in Lithuania

The Constitution of Lithuania and Law on National Minorities creates favourable conditions for the development of cultures of national minorities. On the other hand, Lithuanian authorities try to integrate minorities into the Lithuanian society. For instance, in 2004, the Government of Lithuania approved the *Programme of Integration of National Minorities into Society for the years 2005 – 2010 which is focused on three main objectives:*

5. integration of national minorities into Lithuanian social, cultural, economic life;
6. preservation of the ethnic identity of minorities; and
7. development of coherent relationships among minorities.³⁰

Different state institutions such as Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science state Departments and the National Radio and TV are participating in the implementation of the programme. Additionally, the Lithuanian state supports cultural institutions which play important role for the minorities’ culture.³¹

Hence, if minorities may be satisfied with the development of their culture the issue of the use of minorities’ language is the most controversial. Since Lithuania did not ratify the European Charter for Minority and Regional Languages the influence of international law in the language sphere may be considered limited and thus the language policy in Lithuania is the subject of the national law. The Constitution proclaims Lithuanian as the state language (Art. 14) and the according to the Law on State language all personal names, names of companies and organizations, names of goods and services provided in Lithuania must be in the state language. The Law on State language also provided the “the Law shall not regulate unofficial communication of the population and the language of events of religious communities as well as persons, belonging to ethnic communities.” It means that minority languages are used in the public life but their official use is strictly limited. These limits may be seen on the base of two examples:

1. writing of personal names
2. street signs in minority languages.

The Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania Resolution January 31, 1991 “On Writing of Names and Family Names in Passports of Citizens of the Republic of Lithuania” prescribes that “in passports the names and family names of citizens of the Republic of Lithuania who are of Lithuanian and non-Lithuanian nationality shall be written in Lithuanian letters”. It means that representatives of national minorities are not allowed to officially write their names as grammar rules of their mother tongue require (compare: Lithuanian *Valdemar Tomaševski* vs. Polish *Waldemar Tomaszewski*). The Constitutional Court of Lithuania in its ruling “On the compliance of the 31 January 1991 Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania Resolution “On Writing of Names and Family Names in Passports of Citizens of the Republic of Lithuania” with the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania” of October, 21 1999 decided that this Resolution “is in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania”³². Hence, representatives of ethnic minorities in Lithuania are deprived from the right to write their personal names according to the rights of their mother tongues, i.e. using the letters which do not exist in the Lithuanian alphabet.

Situation with street signs in the areas with significant number of national minorities is similar. In February 2009 the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania made a decision that that street signs in the Vilnius districts where

Poles constitute majority must be written only in Lithuanian. Similarly, to the Constitutional Court ruling on personal names writing this decision is final and absolute. Thus, despite the fact that the Law on National Minorities prescribes that in the regions which are densely populated by the minorities, a language other than Lithuanian (i.e. minority language) can be used in administration and different offices, minority languages have practically been thrown out of the public use and remained only in the private communication of people.

5. Conclusion

Officially Lithuania is considered a “success story” in handling the minority issues, a Baltic country without scandalous violation of minority rights and without conflicts on this issue. Nevertheless, as usually happens there are always some problems and issues to work out and to solve. And Lithuania still has space for improvement of the situation, starting with ratification of the Charter for Minority and Regional Languages which will ensure the protection of the rights of minorities on the Council of Europe level, along with bringing national legislation in conformity with the Council of Europe legal framework on this issue, as well as resolving the conflict issues with Polish (and but also Russian and Belarusian) minorities over name writing in official documents, topographic names in

Footnotes

20. Cultural minorities, groups and communities in Lithuania, Council of Europe/ERICarts, “Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe, 10th edition”, 2009, at : <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/lithuania.php?aid=421>.
21. Lithuania at the Euromosaic study, at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/languages/langmin/euromosaic/lith_en.pdf , p.4
22. Lopata R. National Question in Lithuania: Acculturation, Integration or Separateness?, p. 25.
23. This independent state existed between 1918 and 1940 and became a part of the Soviet Union on August 3, 1940.
24. Volovoj V. National Minorities in Lithuania: in Haraszti, Il-dikó – Petőcz, Kálmán ed.: Ethnic Stability – Ethnic Changes. Participation of minorities in the decision-making process. Series of international workshops on effective political, economic, social and cultural participation of minorities. Forum Minority Research Institute, Šamorín, 2008. WEBbook: www.foruminst.sk., p. 1.
25. See Snyder, T. The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Belarus 1569-1999 (New Haven and London, 2003). Part I The Contested Lithuanian-Belarusian Fatherland, Chapter 5. Epilogue: Soviet Lithuanian Vilnius (1945-1991), pp. 90-104.
26. Lopata R. National Question in Lithuania: Acculturation, Integration or Separateness?, p. 18.
27. Motuzas R. Education of National Minorities in Lithuania in: *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 7/2001, at: <http://www.lfpr.lt/uploads/File/2001-7/Motuzas.pdf>, pp. 10-11.
28. Volovoj, National Minorities in Lithuania, p.1.
29. Ibid.
30. Cultural minorities, groups and communities in Lithuania.

31. Among these institutions there are for instance: Russian Drama Theatre of Lithuania or the Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum of Lithuania

32. Unofficial English translation of this Ruling is available at:

http://www.minelres.lv/NationalLegislation/Lithuania/Lithuania_ConstCourt_Names_English.htm

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Belarus in World Rankings:

Last in Press Freedom,

Third in Suicides

This is the result of 15-year rule of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who came to power on June 10, 1994.

Blogger Rubon recorded the world ranking of our country. So Belarus is:

1st in the world in potato output per head.

2nd in the world in the number of doctors per 100,000 persons (after Cuba).

2nd in the world in annual consumption of strong alcoholic drinks per head (11 litres).

3rd in the world in the number of suicides.

5th in the world in the rate of population loss.

6th in the world in meteor observation.

6th in the world in the number of smokers (63.7% of male and 21.1% of female population).

7th in the world in the stock of anti-personal mines.

8th in the world in total potato output.

11th in the world in export of arms.

23rd in gender equality ranking

.29th in the world in the status of women.

30th in ranking of countries favorable for maternity.

53rd in the world in car fuel quality

54th in the world in the level of information technologies' development.

67th in the index of the human potential development.

67th in the world in number of abortions.

68th in the world in the number of illegal workers and people who left the country.

74th in the FIFA ranking.

76th in the world in the level of informatization.

78th in the world in the quality of life.

82nd in the global competitiveness index.

85th in the favorable business environment index.

106th in the property rights index.

139th in the lifetime index (68 years).

150th in the corruption perceptions index (107th in 2007).

151st in the free speech index.

167th in the index of economic freedom.

188th in the press freedom index.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, July 10, 2009

MEDIA WATCH

Press Re-

Gradual Movement toward Europe May be Possible

Alyaksandr Milinkevich interview by Tereza Supova

LN (Lidove Noviny): In May 2009 Belarus has been invited to participate in the European Union's Eastern Partnership project. Now six months have passed.

In your opinion, is the Belarus regime now willing and capable of cooperating with the European Union?

AM (Alyaksandar Milinkevich): The regime's way of cooperating with the European Union is very sly. It expects to receive Europe's financial help and investments while refusing to introduce the democratic way of life. It will try forcing the Union to cooperate only on the level of economy.

LN: How strong is support for the European Union in Belarus? How does it compare with support for Russia?

AM: First of all, it depends on free access to information. In our country, independent information simply does not exist... Some time ago there was a lot of anti-Western propaganda; lately it has calmed down somewhat... A month ago, the number of people supporting integration with Europe even exceeded the number of those supporting greater integration with Russia. Today, about 43 percent of people demand a greater degree of involvement in Europe. However, for us it is important to stop considering this issue as a confrontation - either with Europe, or with Russia. Accession to the European Union may take a long time. It is primarily a matter of accepting European values and freedoms

LN: Belarus was included in the Eastern Partnership program on basis of certain positive signals within the country. Has anything actually changed for the better?

AM: The government made a few important steps lately: it released some political prisoners, allowed the subscription and home delivery of 2 independent newspapers, and registered our movement "For Freedom." And now it believes that this should be sufficient forever. However, these steps were not followed by any additional important changes.

One must remember that no authoritarian power will voluntarily democratize itself, since it will mean its extinction. In connection with this I think that Europe's policies lack certain concrete demands that Belarus should fulfill, and an exact schedule for their fulfillment. Lately it seems that the EU undertakes some friendly steps, while Belarus only expects financial assistance. It should be a step-by-step process of gradual mutual rapprochement.

LN: Did President Lukashenka's behavior change somehow? Did he himself change?

AM: As a person he hasn't changed, just his behavior changed slightly. He is a very talented populist with good intuition.

He is defending Belarus' independence primarily in order to save his personal power. My position is as follows:

as long as Lukashenka undertakes measures useful for the country, we will approve. However, we will keep criticizing him for the lack of freedom and violations of human rights.

We think that even if Lukashenka remains in power, a gradual movement toward Europe may be possible. The opposition may then be faced with a complex and morally very unpleasant choice.

LN: In August the Russian president Medvedev again met with Lukashenka, after several months of rift. How



would you describe the current relationship of Belarus with
Alyaksandr Milinkevich

Russia?

AM: Our relations are defined by the project of Belarus-Russia union. However, each country is pursuing a different aim; this is why the union doesn't work. Russia would like to swallow Belarus, while Belarus wants cheap oil and gas. Neither Russia nor Belarus wants to admit that the project is not at all successful. Russia continues its policy of affecting life in Belarus by using economic levers. For instance, it is offering us loans so that we keep buying Russian oil and gas. This in turn results in the skyrocketing growth of our indebtedness to Russia.

LN: Is Belarus affected by the worldwide economic crisis?

AM: An economy that relies only on its own resources, falls into the crisis very slowly. On the other hand, it will be slow in getting out of it. The crisis is most likely to hit us next year, perhaps later. Now it is this crisis hidden.

The greatest problem lies in the fact that Belarus' unreformed economy is manufacturing products we are not capable of selling. Our warehouses are filled with unsold goods. Money and energy are being wasted; people's labor doesn't pay for itself. Also the conditions for conducting business are far from perfect. To a great extent we now live on credit, by using bank loans we are not able to pay off.

Belarus Will Remain Belorussia for Moscow Journalists and Scholars

By Paul Goble

Despite Minsk's official insistence that Belarus is "the uniquely correct form of the name of our state" and the willingness of at least some Moscow officials to agree to that practice, Russian journalists and academics say they will continue to identify their Western neighbor as Belorussia.

On Thursday, Belarusian Deputy Justice Minister Alla Bodak told a session of the Unified Collegium of Justice Ministries of

the two countries that “the uniquely correct form of the name of our state is ‘the Republic of Belarus’ and ‘Belarus’” and that any other formulation was incorrect (www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1281369).

Russian Justice Minister Aleksandr Kononov responded that his ministry uses the name Belarus and will continue to do so in official documents. Indeed, he said, to do otherwise would be “impermissible.” But he added that he was “not certain that all the media of Russia will use the official name” -- although he insisted the use of Belorussia was customary and not a slight.

... But if Russian officials are at least prepared to follow international practice and identify countries as they prefer to do, Russian journalists and Russian philologists have made it clear that they plan to continue calling Belarus Belorussia regardless of Moscow or Minsk says (forum-msk.org/material/news/1851332.html).

Mikhail Fedotov, secretary of the Union of Journalists of Russia and one of the authors of the Russian media law, said that despite the appeals of the Belarusians, the rules of the Russian language should determine what Russians call their neighbor. At the very least, he added, such questions were “the affair of philologists and not justice ministries.”

Meanwhile, Yasen Zaturky, the head of the journalism faculty at Moscow State University, agreed, adding that the use of the term Belorussia was “a definite tradition which should not be violated.” Any “search for a compromise” should involve “consultations between the two sides.”

And Vladimir Pykhov, academic secretary of the Institute of the Russian Language of the Russian Academy of Sciences, took a harder line. He said that “in the Russian language, there is only one norm for the neighboring country – Belorussia – and that should be followed,” apparently regardless of the desires of its residents and their government....

Source: Excerpts from an article in *Window on Eurasia*, November 28, 2009

A delicate Balance Between East and West

By Jan Cienski

Change is a dangerous thing for an autocrat, and Belarus’s Alexander Lukashenko is being buffeted by demands for just that as he tries to steer his country through the economic crisis and strained ties with Russia without losing control.

... But Mr Lukashenko is no ordinary leader, and the measures he has taken to minimise the impact of the global crisis this year, and will have to take to get the economy growing robustly again, could undermine his rule.

The push to change course comes not from Belarus’s 9.7m relatively quiescent people, but from a series of external shocks that have disrupted the post-Soviet system created by Mr Lukashenko. There are few democratic rights but in exchange Belarusians were spared the turmoil that shook Russia and Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR.

The first jolt was from Moscow, which finally became exasperated with the president’s on-off promises to unite his country

with Russia.

Two years ago, Moscow demanded that Belarus pay the same prices as the rest of the world for oil and gas – gas prices have since tripled. This damaged Belarus’s economic model, which was based on sourcing cheap energy from Russia and sending rugged but fairly inexpensive industrial equipment in the opposite direction, as well as refining Russian crude and selling it westwards.

Mr Lukashenko turned to the west, which had isolated him following accusations of a rigged 2006 presidential election. He let out his few remaining political prisoners, and undertook an economic liberalisation programme, which included reducing bureaucracy, ending the state imposition of retail prices for everything from cars to toothpaste, and promised to sell off some state companies.

... The outside world did step up to help Belarus, which ran into balance of payments problems due to its low level of currency reserves. The IMF lent \$3.6bn, while Russia and Venezuela stumped up additional help.

But as a price for taking IMF help, the country was forced to devalue by 20 per cent against the dollar, causing a run on the rouble in the first months of this year, and lowering per capita gross domestic product from \$6,230 to an estimated \$5,094 this year, according to Standard & Poor’s, the rating agency.

The gloomy international outlook and reduced risk appetite has scared off investors. An angry Mr Lukashenko recently complained that there was only a single lowball bid for the state-owned BPS Bank, one of the country’s four largest, from Russia’s Sberbank. The deal has still not gone through.

... Stymied on privatisation, the government has pressed business to keep producing despite the slowdown, as a way of keeping unemployment at its current 1 per cent.

State-owned banks have been funnelling low-interest loans to state industries, which have been running up enormous inventories, and to homeowners, and Mr Lukashenko has been buying tractors and heavy equipment for collective farms.

Belarus’s economic fix is also creating geopolitical problems for its leader.

Although the autocratic style of the Kremlin is closer to his own way of governing, Mr Lukashenko and the elites that help him rule realise that any union with Russia would leave them at an enormous disadvantage compared with the much wealthier oligarchs from the east.

... “I don’t see a connection between business reforms and politics,” says Andrei Kobayakov, the deputy prime minister. “We’ll change when it is convenient for our society.”

... But certain changes may be permanent. Russia is unlikely to go back to subsidising Belarus’s energy, and its markets are becoming more difficult for Belarusian companies.

Relying more on trade with the west also has its limits. Currently Belarus’s biggest exports in that direction are oil and potash – and its factories produce few goods that are in demand in western Europe.

That means Mr Lukashenko’s intricate balancing act is far from over.

Source: Excerpts from an article in *Financial Times*, November 19, 2009

Appeasement in our Time: Berlusconi Goes to Belarus

By Joerg Forbrig

BERLIN — This year has been full of celebrations of the peaceful revolutions of 1989, arguably the most important advance of freedom, democracy, and human rights in history. But this year has also seen rapid European rapprochement with (and some might say appeasement of) one of the world's worst autocrats: Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus. Europe's embrace reached a new level Monday when Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi paid an official visit to Minsk, the first by a Western head of government in over a decade.

... Last year, the regime in Minsk suddenly appeared to change track. The release of several political prisoners, a slightly freer parliamentary election, permits for a few independent newspapers, and government hints about possible liberalizations of the media and the electoral laws seemed to indicate that democratic change was in the air.

... For European leaders, the writing was on the wall: engage with Belarus and other former Soviet satellites now, or risk that these Eastern neighbors fall back into Russia's orbit for good.

... It was left to Berlusconi, however, to become the first European leader to board a plane to Minsk.

European leaders have been at pains over the last year to justify all this outreach, arguing that a decade-plus policy of isolation had arrived at a dead end. Not quite. It is true that Europe avoided any political contacts or cooperation with the Belarusian leadership; yet at the same time, trade with the country was thriving and last year the EU surpassed Russia as an importer of Belarusian goods. By filling the coffers of the Lukashenko regime, EU economic engagement effectively neutralized political isolation and helped to sustain the status quo in Belarus.

Unsurprisingly, liberalization in the country has reversed. There are accounts of new political prisoners and trials, police have brutally dispersed several protests over the last months, and the independent media as well as civil society remain under threat. If anything, Europe's unconditional engagement encourages Lukashenko, who recently (interviewed in Italy's *La Stampa*) asserted: "Belarus is not a beggar in European relations."

Absent tangible results or even prospects for change, Europe's rapprochement indeed begins to look a lot like appeasement. Yet that would send a fatal sign to Belarus and the world. To Lukashenko and his ilk, it would be tantamount to admitting that for the EU, state sovereignty, geopolitics, and economic gain trump universal values, democracy, and human rights. But the EU can still choose to do otherwise. That would truly honor the legacy of 1989.

Joerg Forbrig is Senior Program Officer for Central and Eastern Europe at the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Source: Excerpts from the publication of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, November 30, 2009

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