



# *BELARUS*

## *Bi-weekly News Digest*

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**August 5 - 19, 2005**

### **August 5: Selective Imprisonment**

The police detained five members of the political party Young Front for organizing a picket in support of the Union of Poles in Belarus at the Polish Embassy in Minsk. However, members of the pro-presidential youth organization Belarusian National Youth Union (BRSM) were permitted to picket in front of the Polish Embassy expressing their support of the Belarusian authorities.

<http://www.spring96.org/viewn.php?id=2333&pagelang=en>

### **August 7: Prisoner of Conscience is Free**

Yuri Bandazhevsky, a prominent Belarusian nuclear scientist, was released on parole. In 2001 Bandazhevsky was sentenced to eight years on accusations of bribery. Mr. Bandazhevsky in turn accused the government of concealing the effects of radiation from the Chernobyl disaster. Amnesty International declared the scientist a prisoner of conscience.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/8/AE4A4DB7-ADCE-4A6B-AFB9-E9733D91601B.html>

### **August 8: Entry Denied**

Belarus refused entry to four Polish members of the European Parliament who intended to visit the Union of Poles in Grodno. The group was headed by the parliament's vice president Jacek Saryusz-Wolski and was turned away although they had diplomatic passports and invitations.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/8/824CC5DD-C8EE-4DD0-B932-7408B3A74498.html>

### **August 12: New Head of OSCE in Minsk**

Åke Peterson, the former Swedish Ambassador to Ukraine, has been appointed Head of the OSCE in Minsk. Ambassador Peterson's diplomatic experience includes missions to Russia and Eastern Europe, the United States, Africa and Southeastern Europe.

[http://www.osce.org/belarus/item\\_1\\_15986.html](http://www.osce.org/belarus/item_1_15986.html)

### **August 11: False Allegations?**

Alexander Tatarintsev, director of the private Djem Bank, was arrested on charges that he misused the authority of his office. The State Control Committee (SCC) for financial investigations accused the bank's management of depositing much of its resources in foreign banks and lending over 16 million USD, an amount that exceeds the bank's ownership capital to foreign-based companies in doubtful loans.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/08/15/bank>

**August 13: Belarus Joins Kyoto Protocol**

Belarus has acceded to the Kyoto Protocol and has adopted the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Joining the treaty will enable Belarus to sell 60 million tons of greenhouse gas quotas, receiving an income of between 325 million and 1.75 billion US dollars a year. Currently Belarus's emissions of greenhouse gases are below the quota stipulated by the international community.

<http://www.bdg.by/news/news.htm?75296>

**August 13: No Media Presence**

A Polish photo correspondent Adam Tuchlinksi was deported from Belarus for alleged absence of accreditation and banned from the country for five years. The Belarusian authorities also refused to admit Marcin Smialowski, another independent Polish journalist.

<http://www.bdg.by/news/news.htm?75296>

**August 17: Virtual Attack**

The Belarusian KGB searched the apartments of web developers for their role in the creation of the website [www.mult.3dway.org](http://www.mult.3dway.org) which features short animated films about prominent Belarusian politicians. The website was blocked and several computers were confiscated. The websites of the United Civil Party and the Young Front have also been blocked several times recently.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/08/17/dopros>

**August 18: Control over International Aid**

President Alexander Lukashenko amended his decree regulating foreign aid, initially enacted in October 2003. The president has extended the list of objectives for which external aid cannot be accepted. It is now forbidden to accept and use international aid for anti-constitutional purposes such as preparation for elections and referendums, the organization of meetings, rallies, strikes and dissemination of propaganda materials. According to the decree, student and post-graduate exchanges, seminars, conferences, research, exchange of expertise and money are considered international technical aid.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/08/18/control>

<http://president.gov.by/eng/president/news/archive/august2005/15-19/#nn1708-6>

*Compiled by Natalia Moustafina*

## Democratic Opposition: A Viable Force in Belarus?

*Natalia Moustafina*

Following the political lessons of the events in Ukraine and Georgia, the Lukashenko government continues to carefully monitor and control the opposition. Taming the opposition has resulted in various official decrees, laws and prosecutions. The case of the Union of Poles in Belarus has already become symbolic. The methods applied have been transferred to other “disobedient” NGOs and private enterprises. The head of the private Djem Bank was arrested and the bank’s assets have been frozen. The creators of the website that hosts animated films about President Lukashenko were interrogated and could face up to five years of in prison. Journalists as well as diplomats are politely denied entry to the country. The new decree on international assistance undermines potential official financial aid for any political party or civic initiative. It seems that authorities are doing their best to thwart “destructive forces” from within and outside the country. For the past two years more than 20 newspapers have been closed and journalists have been either arrested or harassed. The recurrent registration campaigns have already rendered most of the NGOs, political parties, and newspapers as unofficial and have forced them underground. But how vibrant is civil society in Belarus?

For the past few months Belarusian democratic opposition has attempted to unify once again. The Five Plus coalition and the "Ten" - the unregistered Congress of Democratic Forces – are two major political democratic initiatives in Belarus. The Five Plus that was formed mainly on the initiative of Anatoly Lebedko includes the United Civic Party (UCP), the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), the Social Democratic Party led by Stanislav Shushkevich, the Party of Labor, and the Party of Communists. The National Congress of Democratic Forces is headed by Alexander Bukhvostov, leader of the Labor Party (dissolved in August 2004). Recently more than 1500 people took part in regional conferences in order to nominate delegates to the National Congress of Democratic Forces. The Congress is now trying to find a suitable forum for opposition activists to name the agreed candidate for the 2006 presidential election. The board of the National Congress of Democratic Forces even appealed to President Alexander Lukashenko to help provide room for delegates after all local administrations refused to allow use of their facilities. However, the Congress will most likely hold the forum in one of the neighboring countries.

Despite recurrent registration, difficulties in paying rent, finding an office, and tax inspections, many youth activists are now looking for alternative methods in their work. Organizations are moving toward a broadening of practices employed and increasingly looking toward consolidation with other NGOs visible in Belarus. In July, the civil society coalition “For Our People!” conducted a campaign to attract public attention to the renaming of Minsk’s streets. Activists from numerous initiatives such as Partnership, The Third Way, *Chas* (It’s Time), and *Voca* (The Eye) conducted opinion polls regarding this issue as a coalition. Similarly, *Zubr* (Bison), a youth movement founded in 2001 exists primarily underground and its activists are spread throughout the country, although its activities are perhaps better known outside Belarus than within.

While the strategy of the democratic opposition is centered around nomination of a single candidate, it will not necessarily lead to victory over Lukashenko given that elections are controlled by a docile Central Election Commission, compliant courts, and obedient media. Perhaps now is the best time for Belarus’ democratic opposition to look more closely at how activists responded to fraudulent elections in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.