



BELARUS

Bi-weekly News Digest

June 24 – July 8, 2005

June 29: New Victims of a New Law

Medical centre “Nordin,” one of Belarus largest private medical institutions, was deprived of a license due to serious violations of health care services standards. This is the second time the Belarusian Ministry of Health has withdrawn a license since the passage of a new licensing law.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/29/nordin>

June 30: “Stalin Line” Memorial: a Memory or Ideology?

The memorial “Stalin Line,” a replica of fortification line built during World War II, was opened in Zaslavl. The construction began in February 2005 and was finished in record time. President Lukashenko visited the opening ceremony.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/30/sistema>

June 30: New Ways to “Encourage” Tourism

A new fee for crossing the state border of Belarus by foreign and Belarusian citizens has been introduced. The regional councils and Minsk city council are allowed to collect this charge that should not exceed US 3.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/30/plata>

July 1: Re-registration Campaign is in Gear

President Lukashenko signed a new decree that regulates the activity of foundations. The foundations should be re-registered until February 1, 2006 otherwise they will be dissolved.

<http://president.gov.by/rus/president/news/archive/july2005/1-8/#nn0207-1>

July 1: Meeting with the Russian Ally

President Lukashenko met with Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Russian Communist party and a member of the Duma Council. Lukashenko thanked him for his continuing support of the policies conducted in Belarus that reflect the ideas and values of the Communist Party.

<http://president.gov.by/rus/president/news/archive/july2005/1-8/#nn0107-3>

July 2: Exclusive Interview

Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko was interviewed by Oleg Poptsov from the Russian media company “TV Center.” In a three-hour interview president Lukashenko talked about Belarusian-Russian relations and the need for the two states to unite against a common danger, that of a “color revolution” sponsored by outside forces.

<http://www.tvc.ru/cached/079800001930000-0000-00-00.html>

July 3: Independence Day

Belarusians celebrated the 61st anniversary of Minsk's liberation from the Nazi troops as Independence Day on the 3rd of July. President Lukashenko met veterans at Victory Square and danced at a concert organized on the Oktyabrskaya (October) Square.

<http://www.sb.by/article.php?articleID=44532>

July 5: Debate on Belarus took place in Washington

Although Belarus was not on the agenda at the 14th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE members and parliamentarians from the USA discussed the worsening political situation in Belarus during the round table.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/07/05/usa>

July 6: Resignation or Condemnation?

Yuri Sivakov¹ resigned from his post as Minister of Sports and Tourism. President Lukashenko appointed in his place Aleksander Grigor'ev, a former deputy minister, who promised not to let the government down.

http://mst.by/index_2.htm

<http://www.charter97.org/rus/news/2005/07/06/silstrukt>

July 7: Resolution on Belarus

The European Parliament has adopted a resolution on the political situation and the independence of the media in Belarus. The document calls on the Council and Commission to create a complex, long-term program of support for the independent media in Belarus.

<http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/sipade2?L=EN&OBJID=97761&LEVEL=3&MODE=SIP&NAV=X&LSTDOC=N>

July 7: Fifth Anniversary of the Disappearance of Dmitri Zavadsky²

Journalist Dmitri Zavadsky disappeared on July 7th, 2000 when he went to the airport to meet his colleague Pavel Sheremet. Since that time there has been no information about Zavadsky's fate. Zavadsky's body has still not been found and the circumstances of his disappearance have still not been clarified. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=14334

July 7: Small Victory

Aleksander Vasilev, a businessman and deputy chair of the national committee of entrepreneurs, was released from prison after serving only one third of his term. He was accused of publicly insulting the president and sentenced to two years.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/07/08/turma>

Compiled by Natalia Moustafina

¹ Yuri Sivakov, former Interior Minister, is on the list of Belarusian officials to whom entry to the EU countries and the USA is banned. He is suspected in involvement of abductions of Belarusian opposition leaders and a journalist Zavadsky.

² Dmitri Zavadsky, once President Alexander Lukashenko's personal cameraman, had resigned from the government TV station in 1996 to join the Russian station ORT and was later briefly imprisoned for his reporting.

Is Belarus on the Agenda?

Natalia Moustafina

On the 3rd of July, Belarus celebrated its Independence Day, which coincides with the 61st anniversary of Minsk liberation from fascist troops. Independence Day was traditionally celebrated on the 27th of July but was changed after referendum in 1996. The day before, President Lukashenko, in an interview to a Russian media company once again declared that in Belarus there were no grounds for revolution. As he put it, “there are no foundations” and “the core of opposition is being nurtured in Poland, in the Baltic states, in Ukraine and also in Russia.” At an Independence Day concert organized in Minsk President Lukashenko appealed to the young generation to make the Oktyabrskaya Square “a place of joyfulness, happiness and not a place for calamities and revolutions.”

While Minsk was celebrating, Brussels was busy drafting a new resolution on Belarus. The European Parliament adopted its fourth resolution on the country in the space of one year. The Parliament called for more support from the Council and Commission for Independent Media and NGOs in Belarus, and to support the initiative of independent radio broadcast from abroad. In addition, the European Commission began a process to expel Belarus from the EU's General System of Preferences (GSP). The commission asked the GSP committee to launch a monitoring process on Minsk's compliance with International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions on trade unions. Under the GSP process, Belarus now has six to eight months to begin implementing ILO standards or face suspension of GSP privileges. Given the timing Belarus could be expelled as early as late 2006.

The more severe economic pressure on Belarus could be a sign of a changing EU approach toward regime that has relied neither on sticks nor on carrots. The EU's official policy towards Belarus was formulated back in 1999 as a "step-by-step approach." However, this approach reacts only to the current political situation and does not have a well-formulated long-term strategy aimed at the democratization of the country. Only a few concrete actions have been taken, such as the extension of a visa ban to two high Belarusian officials who were responsible for an illegal referendum and parliamentary elections in December 2004.

Despite the fact that Belarus is politically and socially isolated from the rest of Europe the regime has learned how to survive without much cooperation and has also been able to establish economic ties with the EU. The EU accounts for almost 40 percent of Belarus's exports such as oil products, textile and potash fertilizers. However, even with the desire by some members of the European parliament to bolster assistance to civil society and independent media in Belarus, the EU commission is restricted by their own legislation. On July 5 at the parliamentary hearing Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the Commissioner for External and European Neighborhood Policy, admitted that rules and financial regulations bind the Commission from engaging in more effective support of the Belarusian media and civil society. These barriers reflect both difficulties in democracy promotion in Belarus and the EU's own ineffectiveness or possible unwillingness to work in restrictive political environments.

