



# *BELARUS*

## *Bi-weekly News Digest*

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**May 30 – June 10, 2005**

### **May 31: Zhirinovsky in Belarus**

Vladimir Zhirinovsky, vice speaker of the State Duma and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) visited Belarus. Mr. Zhirinovsky met with president Lukashenko and said “Belarus is a model of development for all the other CIS member countries.”

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/01/vizit>

### **May 31: Two Presidential Candidates out of Race**

Two opposition leaders Nikolay Statkevich and Pavel Severinets, probable presidential candidates in 2006 elections, are convicted and sentenced to 3 years of hard labor. The Embassy of the United States of America expressed its grave concern over the conviction. Both individuals were already convicted and served jail terms for their participation in the protests that followed last October’s flawed election and referendum.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/01/zayva>

### **June 1: State Monopoly on Words**

Aleksandr Lukashenko signed decree number 247 aimed at regulating the use of words “national” and “Belarusian” in the names of the commercial and non-profit organizations of the country. According to this decree, non-state mass media do not have a right to use the words “Belarusian” and “national” in their names.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/01/luka>

### **June 1: Wiping out the Belarusian Identity**

Protest rallies with demands to return names of Frantsysk Skaryna<sup>1</sup> and Pyotr Masherov<sup>2</sup> streets had started in the center of Minsk. The protests were faced by harsh reaction of police. People with portraits of famous Belarusians were driven away from the streets of the city. A few protesters were arrested but not charged.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/01/borba>

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<sup>1</sup> **Frantsysk Skaryna** (1490-1551) was the first printer in the Eastern Slavic language. He printed his first book in the Belarusian language in 1517 in Prague. Skaryna also printed 23 books of the Bible in Belarusian.

<sup>2</sup> **Pyotr Masherov** (1918-1980) was the secretary of Belarusian Communist Party from 1965 to 1980. He was truly beloved by people for advocating *glasnost* and did a lot for Belarus. Many were considering him the possible successor of Leonid Brezhnev. He died in the automobile accident but many still think that it was staged by KGB.

### **June 1: Party Structure Liquidation**

The term of re-registration of party structures from living quarters (apartment buildings) has ended. Viktor Galavanov, Justice Minister, stated at a press conference that all branches of parties and public associations that failed to transfer their offices from living quarters to commercial and industrial premises would be liquidated. As a result of this decree, three parties reduced their regional representation by 25-30 percent.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/01/likvid>

### **June 7: EU's Favor**

“Belaruskaliy” together with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs brought a proposition to cancel the antidumping sanctions introduced by the EU in 1994, which actually blocked export of many chemical products. The EU agreed on the quotas for potash fertilizers from Belarus. The Belarusian chemical industry is one of the most important domestic export industries.

[http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/0-ya\\_gruppa/novosti/ekonomika/06-06-05-18/](http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/0-ya_gruppa/novosti/ekonomika/06-06-05-18/)

### **June 6: Conquering Russian Markets**

A delegation of heads of 100 state owned enterprises visited Moscow with the aim of promoting Belarusian goods in Russia. The ultimate goal is to expand representation of the Belarusian goods on the Russian market up to 10 percent.

[http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/0-ya\\_gruppa/novosti/ekonomika/06-06-05-16/](http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/0-ya_gruppa/novosti/ekonomika/06-06-05-16/)

### **June 6: In Support for Opposition**

The international association Civil Belarus was established in Prague. The association is created for support to Belarusian NGOs that are pressured by the authorities or were liquidated by them. Among the founders are Vaclav Havel and many other well-known Czech politicians.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/06/09/havel>

### **June 7: Shadows of the 30s - Anticorruption Law May Pass**

There is a fear that a new anticorruption law proposed by president Lukashenko will be adopted in its first hearing. The draft of this legislation was first introduced in 2003 but was rejected by the Parliament twice and sent back with 60 amendments. None of the amendments were accepted, and now the law might be adopted in the first hearing because of pressure on the MPs. If the law is adopted, it gives a lot of discretion to the office of the Attorney General on the interpretation of corrupt behavior of civil servants.

[http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/1-ya\\_gruppa/politika/07-06-05-1/](http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/1-ya_gruppa/politika/07-06-05-1/)

### **June 8: Lukashenko's Popularity Rate Drops**

An independent survey conducted by a team of independent Belarusian sociologists in cooperation with a Bratislava-based foundation and the Independent Institute for Social, Economic and Political Research (IISEPR), found that Lukashenko's popularity rate has dropped on 6 percent. In November 2004, 47,7 % were ready to support Lukashenko, in March 2005 – 46,7 %, and now - only 41,7 %. However, the popularity rate of the opposition leaders has not grown. The most popular opposition leaders are Anatoliy Lebedko and Valeriy Frolov who gained 2 %. Other opposition leaders get even less: 1,6

percent for Statkevich, 0,9 % - Kozulin, Kalyakin and Milinkevich – 0,8 %, Voitovich – 0,5%.

[http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/0-ya\\_gruppa/tema/09-06-05-1/](http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/0-ya_gruppa/tema/09-06-05-1/)

*Compiled by Natalia Moustafina*

## **Lessons Learned: How to Prevent a Revolution**

*Natalia Moustafina*

The wave of recent “colored revolutions” has a minimal chance of reaching Belarus. Several recent actions of president Lukashenko are clearly aimed not only at outlawing the opposition forces, but also at minimizing any attempt to challenge his power formally or informally.

The presidential campaign of the 2006 elections has been launched with a well-crafted strategy. The destruction of local party structures in the regions caused by the re-registration is clearly aimed at closing down some of the weak opposition political party representations that could have become stronger. There is a fear that some of them will be closed due to the financial difficulties connected with the re-registration. The decree No 247 that might seem absurd and unnecessary may actually be an open demonstration of ultimate power. For many people in Belarus it might be *deja vu* of the times when Belarus was russified and all reminders of Belarusian culture were wiped out. Again Skaryna and Masherov – two symbols of Belarus – have vanished. Maybe it is preparation for a closer union with Russia, as Belarus will resemble more of a province with more neutral names of the streets that do not have national appeal (Victory and Independence Avenue). Or maybe it is just a reminder for some that the current administration is very powerful. It may be a clear hint for Natalya Masherova (an MP and a daughter of Pyotr Masherov) not to run for the presidency – Lukashenko can get rid of her as easily as the name of the avenue named after her father.

Another recent decree that regulates the use of the words “Belarusian” and “national” in the names of the commercial and nonprofit organizations is a clear blow to the independent mass media. Such independent newspapers as “Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta,” “Belaruskii rynek,” “Belaruskaya gazeta” and others must change their names. It will be a great expense for most of organizations to comply with this new regulation, and some of them will not be able to afford re-registration. It also makes it harder to recognize a newspaper and subscribe to it. Over the past decade, most non-governmental newspapers have been shut down or forced to close as a result of heavy fines. Not long ago, the word “president” was banned from the usage except for “president of Belarus.” Now “Belarusian” and “national,” what comes next?

Attacks on opposition leaders have intensified this week. Statkevich, leader of the unregistered branch of the Social Democratic Party, and Severinets, leader of the unregistered Youth Front (formerly affiliated with the Belarusian Popular Front) received sentences of three years of hard labor for organization of group activities that violated civic order.

Step by step Lukashenko is getting everything in order for his re-election in 2006 by closing all possible loopholes that have permitted an opposition movement to survive. For the past two weeks there were a few attempts to attract more attention to Belarus in

Europe; however, it seems that the EU does not pay much attention except for economic incentives for themselves. The EU did not discuss Belarus at the EU parliament session in June but Polish politicians along with Lithuanian and Czech try to attract as much attention as possible.

However, the recent agreements with Russia make the current regime more sustainable. Putin's confirmation that prices for gas will remain on the same level in the next two years might be a political guarantee for the regime's support<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://president.gov.by/rus/president/speeches/inter/2005/#0>