



BELARUS BIWEEKLY NEWS DIGEST

Center for Strategic and International Studies ■ Washington, D.C.

JANUARY 16- JANUARY 31, 2006

JANUARY 16:

• **MORE HUMAN RIGHTS ARRESTS IN BELARUS**

11 members of the human rights group “We” were arrested for writing opposition graffiti in Minsk. If convicted, they can face up to five years in prison.

[BELARUS NEWS AND ANALYSIS: ARRESTS IN BELARUS](#)

JANUARY 17, 2006:

• **CONCERN OVER OPPRESSION IN BELARUS**

Swedish Foreign Minister, Laila Freivalds, has criticized the human rights situation in Belarus and has promised monthly rallies in downtown Stockholm in opposition to the current situation.

[BELARUS NEWS AND ANALYSIS: CONCERN OVER OPPRESSION IN BELARUS](#)

JANUARY 20:

• **LIAISON WITH CHINESE BUSINESSES**

Business forum on Belarusian-Chinese trade and economic co-operation took place in Beijing. Among topics discussed were joint projects in the field of construction materials, automobile engineering, tourism and education infrastructure development.

[PARTNERSHIP: BELARUSIAN-CHINESE FORUM COMPLETES ITS WORK IN BEIJING](#)

JANUARY 23:

• **MILINKEVICH ON RADIO FREE EUROPE**

In an online news conference, the united opposition forces' candidate voiced demands for a Belarus without fear. He emphasized the importance of the role of the united opposition movement stating that, “it is the first time during Belarus' independence that all healthy democratic forces, despite their [different] political views, have united to change the situation in Belarus for the better.”

[RFE/RL: BELARUS: MILINKEVICH SAYS HE WANTS A COUNTRY WITHOUT FEAR](#)

JANUARY 24:

• **OPPOSITION DEMANDS EU SUPPORT**

Although acknowledging a chance for defeat in the March elections, opposition warns the EU of negative geopolitical consequences if support is not administered to the democratic movement in Belarus.

[RFE/RL: BELARUS: OPPOSITION WANTS MORE FOCUSED SUPPORT FROM THE EU](#)

• **FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS ON RUSSIA-BELARUS AGREEMENT ON CITIZENS RIGHTS**

Citizens of either state are no longer required to fill out immigration cards or to comply with registration laws when traveling to either country.

[ITAR-TASS: LUKASHENKA HAILS RUSSIA-BELARUS AGREEMENT ON CITIZEN RIGHTS](#)

JANUARY 26:

- **MIDDLE-AGE DIPLOMACY?**

After a discussion of the human rights situation in Belarus, PACE adopts a resolution which calls for international isolation of Belarus.

[BELARUS NEWS AND ANALYSIS: PACE CALLS FOR BELARUSIAN REGIME TO BE ISOLATED](#)

- In response, a speaker of the Russian parliament called the international efforts to isolate Belarus an act that reminded him of the Middle Ages.

[REGNUM: SPEAKER OF RUSSIAN PARLIAMENT: CALLS FOR ISOLATION OF BYELORUSSIA ARE JUST THE MIDDLE AGES - BYELORUSSIA](#)

- **EU OFFERS TO PROVIDE INDEPENDENT MEDIA BROADCASTING TO BELARUS**

The European Commission (EC) has selected a German-Russian broadcasting consortium to launch a two-year news broadcasting project into Belarus starting in February. The other subcontractors will include staff from Polish and Lithuanian radio, independent Belarusian journalists as well as Belarusian and European NGOs. The program is expected to run from a German satellite station and it will reach a small but important audience.

[RFE/RL: EU BOLSTERS SUPPORT FOR BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION AHEAD OF ELECTIONS](#)

[EUOBSERVER: EU BELARUS RADIO DEAL GOES TO GERMAN-RUSSIAN DUO](#)

[BELARUS NEWS AND ANALYSIS: EC TO LAUNCH BROADCASTING PROJECT IN BELARUS](#)

JANUARY 27:

- **OSCE OBSERVERS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE ON FEBRUARY 6**

Nikolai Lozovik, secretary of the central election commission, expressed hope that the observation of the election would be carried out in an unbiased manner and monitors would refrain from direct involvement.

[CHARTER97: FIRST ODIHR OBSERVERS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN BELARUS ON FEBRUARY 6](#)

- **PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES SUBMIT BALLOT SIGNATURES**

Although the official count can be announced as late as mid February, four candidates are believed to be able to qualify to run in the March presidential elections. They are the current president Alyaksandr Lukashenka, united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Liberal Democratic Party leader Syarhey Hajdukevich, and Social Democratic leader Alyaksandr Kozulin.

[RFE/RL: BELARUS: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES SUBMIT BALLOT SIGNATURES](#)

- **LEADERSHIP BANS PROTESTS**

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka threatened his domestic opposition and western diplomats with a harsh government response to any kind of post-election protests.

[WASHINGTON POST: BELARUS LEADER ORDERS BAN AGAINST PROTESTS](#)

JANUARY 28:

- **RUSSIA-BELARUS UNION TO HAVE COMMON CURRENCY**

As of January 1, 2008, the Russian ruble will become the legal tender of the Russia-Belarus Union.

[BELARUS NEWS AND ANALYSIS: RUSSIA-BELARUS UNION TO HAVE COMMON CURRENCY STARTING FROM 2008](#)

JANUARY 30:

- **DIPLOMATIC TRIUMPH?**

Alyaksandr Milinkevich's visit to Brussels is seen as a triumph for Polish and Lithuanian diplomats. The opposition leader's agenda included a meeting with the foreign ministers of 12 member states as well as other EU dignitaries, including High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana.

[EUOBSERVER: BELARUS OPPOSITION LEADER FACES AWKWARD EU RECEPTION](#)

- **POSSIBLE HUNGER STRIKE OF 30 BELARUSIAN PRISONERS**

About 30 prisoners announced a hunger strike of protest against violations of their rights, and against unjustified penalties and provocations by workers and administration of the colony.

[CHARTER97: MASS HUNGER STRIKE OF PRISONERS IN BELARUS?](#)

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WILL THE EU COME TO BELARUS' RESCUE?

BY ALINA TOURKOVA

On January 24 the European Union announced that a German-led consortium will begin independent pre-election broadcasting into Belarus. The consortium includes Polish and Lithuanian radio, independent Belarusian journalists, and staff from Belarusian and European NGOs. The object of the two million-euro project is to provide an alternative to state controlled media that has been severely restricting the Belarusian electorate's access to information. Biased media, severe violations of human rights, and an increasingly authoritarian regime are not new themes for Lukashenka's government, neither are the pleas from Belarusian human rights activists for Western support. So why has the European community responded to this crisis only a month before the presidential election? Although this support is welcomed by Belarusian opposition parties, many fear that help has come too late. Only a month remains before the election, while the majority of Belarus' residents do not have access to satellite television and radio, and access to information outside larger cities is even more restrictive.

Given Alyaksandr Milinkevich's January 30 meeting with EU dignitaries in Brussels and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's recent statements, the Belarusian presidential elections seem to have found their way into the spotlight. Nevertheless, the European Union has been very careful in demonstrating open support for Belarus' democratic development. The EU Observer reported that diplomats under EU High Representative Javier Solana have referred to Milinkevich's meeting with dignitaries as nothing short of accidental and convenient, a meeting that "is not meant to interfere with the elections" but is rather aimed at discussing "the situation in Belarus." Whether this is a sign of the EU's reluctance to politically engage in Belarusian politics, or a precautionary step to ensure that Mr. Milinkevich will be allowed to return to Minsk after his Brussels trip, it is quite clear that the European Union is unlikely to be a key actor in the upcoming presidential elections this March. This scenario is unfortunate since the Belarusian democratic opposition not only lacks financial support to effectively spread its democratic message, but also lacks the moral support to empower those who are ready to renounce Lukashenka's authoritarian regime and protest in the streets if necessary, as was the case in Ukraine's presidential election in 2004.

While the opposition is unlikely to win in March, largely due to the popularity Lukashenka maintains by distorting or restricting information regarding other candidates, the EU must remain mindful of other negative consequences that could result from its lack of support. Recently, Jaroslav Romanchuk, a vice-chairman of the United Civic Party and a member of the opposition Coalition Five-Plus (5+), indicated to the European Parliament that the lack of European support for the opposition during the campaign season can in turn help to legitimize the Lukashenka regime, one which will further intensify human rights abuses and deepen Belarus' economic interdependence on Russia. "Endorsing" Lukashenka in this way could lead to further tensions between Belarus and the European states.

Although the exact outcome of the March elections still remains uncertain, chances are slim that the opposition will receive active political support from European governments. However, broad and official European support may not be a necessity after all. Independent broadcasts into Belarus may entice enough people to renounce the current government in support of transparent presidential elections. In either case, the Belarusian people cannot rely on outside forces to determine their historical trajectory, but must establish their own political future.