



BELARUS

Bi-weekly News Digest

October 16-30, 2005

October 17: Another Victim of the Regime?

Vasil Garodnikau, a freelancer writer for the opposition newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*, was found dead in his apartment outside of Minsk with a head wound. The Ministry of Interior reported that Garodnikau had died of a stroke. According to the Minsk regional prosecutor's office, the cause of death is under investigation.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/10/21/dead>
<http://www.data.minsk.by/belarusnews/102005/67.html>

October 18: Orange Diplomat

Ukrainian prime minister Yuri Yekhanurov met with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his Belarusian counterpart Syarhei Sidorski in Minsk. Yekhanurov and Sidorski agreed to increase bilateral trade turnover to \$2 billion annually by the end of 2005, a 50% increase over 2004 levels.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/52C7B79B-895D-40BA-BD98-D62215A4D0AE.html>

October 18: Legal Harassment Continues

Belarusian taxation agencies appealed an earlier court ruling canceling their claim against the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC). Courts at different levels ruled in favor of the BHC and found the organization's activities in compliance with the law. The court decision confirmed an international treaty that exempts the BHC and other TACIS programs from tax payments.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/52C7B79B-895D-40BA-BD98-D62215A4D0AE.html>

October 20: Visa-Free Travel for Eurasec Countries

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka adopted a protocol on visa free travel for member-states of the Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec) originally signed in Astana in March 2005. A list of current Eurasec members includes: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan.

<http://president.gov.by/rus/president/news/archive/october2005/17-21/>

October 21: Russian Gas for Belarus

Belarus is holding negotiations with Russia's Gazprom on the delivery of 21.5 billion cubic meters of gas for the 2006 year. According to the Belarusian Ministry of Energy, a new agreement with Russia will be signed as soon as Russia approves its fuel and energy balance program for 2006. According to President Lukashenka gas prices will go up, but the increase will not be large for Belarus. The current price for Russian gas is \$46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters.

<http://www.charter97.org/bel/news/2005/10/21/gas>

October 21: Another Candidate for the Presidential Election 2006

Syarhei Gaidukevich, a Liberal Democratic Party leader, was nominated to be the presidential candidate for the New Belarus-Unity political bloc. The group represents 34 organizations. The decision was made during a session of the bloc's national organizing committee.

http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/1-ya_gruppa/politika/25-10-05-1/

October 22: Belarus and Venezuela Friendship Ties

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka met with Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez Araque in Minsk. President Lukashenka discussed a number of international issues with the foreign minister as well as promotion of Belarusian exports to Latin America.

<http://president.gov.by/eng/president/news/archive/october2005/17-21/>

October 24: Brave Heart from Belarus

A well-known Belarusian journalist and an activist, Iryna Khalip, was named a “Hero of Europe.” European Heroes is an online poll founded by Time magazine in London. Iryna Khalip has been repeatedly harassed by the Belarusian authorities because of her critique of the current regime. She recently received a warning from the Prosecutor General Office for writing articles calling for violent overthrow of the regime.

<http://www.time.com/time/europe/hero2005/khalip.html>

October 27: KGB Warning

A top Belarusian security chief, Vasil Dzemyantsei, accused the United States of destabilizing Belarus “up to the point of intervention.” At his address to the National Assembly he stated that Western security services were trying to establish surveillance points in Latvia and Poland to monitor Belarusian communications. The U.S. Embassy in Minsk rejected the official's allegations.

<http://www.belarustoday.info/?pid=22926>

http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/2-ya_gruppa/inter/28-10-05-1

October 29: Police Watch

Police detained 70 activists of the civic initiative *Partnership* while the organization's delegates were developing a monitoring campaign for the 2006 presidential election. Three activists were eventually arrested and fined for organizing and conducting an unauthorized meeting.

<http://partnerstva.org/eng/article7466.html>

October 30: Victims of Stalin's Repressions Remembered

A rally of more than 300 people gathered in the Kurapaty woodland on the northeastern outskirts of Minsk to commemorate victims of Stalin's repressions. In 1988, historians and archaeologists confirmed that thousands of people were executed and buried in Kurapaty during the 1930s and 1940s.

http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/2-ya_gruppa/inter/31-10-05-1/

Compiled by Natalia Moustafina

Belarus and Ukraine: warmed relations can freeze again

Natalia Moustafina

Ukrainian prime minister Yuri Yekhanurov has finally visited Minsk, meeting with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his Belarusian counterpart Syarhey Sidorski. The visit was postponed due to President Lukashenka's unplanned holiday in the Russian resort city of Sochi in early October. The relations between Belarus and Ukraine have soured in the past, but this visit suggested that they are warming although not for long. For President Lukashenka (not burdened by a large number of official delegations) it is important to maintain good neighborly relations not only with Russia but with Ukraine as well. From the Belarusian point of view, recent diplomatic rows with Poland and Lithuania have suggested that Belarus is surrounded by vicious enemies plotting a revolution to overthrow Lukashenka's regime. All the more reason to keep Russia and Ukraine close. President Lukashenka welcomed the newly appointed Ukrainian prime minister who, unlike his predecessor Yulia Tymoshenko, has not sharply criticized the regime in Belarus. Another consideration in Lukashenka's decision to meet Yekhanurov could be the considerable economic relationship between Kyiv and Minsk. Ukraine is one of the Belarus' largest trading partners and in 2003, the two governments signed an agreement to settle Ukraine's outstanding debt owed for Belarusian commodities. Prime Minister Yekhanurov also took the opportunity to invite President Lukashenka to meet the Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko in Kyiv.

Shortly after the visit Belarus-Ukraine relations cooled again due to remarks made by Ukrainian prime minister Yekhanurov while visiting the United States. The cold wind blew in from Washington D.C. where two weeks after his visit to Minsk, Yekhanurov in a speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace noted that Lukashenka is a talented propagandist who knows how to handle the public. The Ukrainian prime minister added that: "Now I understand why in the 1930s German women yelled 'I want a baby from the Fuehrer!'" The Belarusian Foreign Ministry reacted immediately, demanding an explanation. Ukrainian foreign minister Borys Tarasyuk was quick to respond and stated that some media outlets simply misinterpreted Prime Minister Yekhanurov's statement regarding the Belarusian president. This hasn't been the first case of media "misinterpretation" causing friction between Belarusian and other countries.

Prime Minister Yekhanurov is not the first to offend President Lukashenka. In the past, almost-ambassador Dmitry Ayatskov made a very controversial remark regarding Lukashenka's regime and, as a result, the office of the Russian ambassador to Belarus remains unoccupied.

There is an increasing amount of backtracking by officials in Europe regarding characterizations of the Belarusian president. Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus in an interview with the German newspaper *Die Welt* suggested that it is not impossible for Lukashenka's army to attack the small Baltic state. Such careless misinterpretation, however, could do much more to damage relations between the two states than simply souring diplomatic channels.

Meanwhile, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka met with Venezuelan foreign minister Ali Rodriguez Araque in Minsk and discussed a possible meeting with President Hugo Chavez. Lukashenka stated that Venezuela and Belarus "have much in common in international affairs." Sadly, not only the two states have much in common. Both presidents have survived protests, strikes, and referendums on their leadership, yet continue to pursue populist policies and abuse human rights. Indeed, there will be much to discuss and share.