



# ***BELARUS***

## ***Bi-weekly News Digest***

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**August 19 – September 2, 2005**

### **August 19: Sentences Reduced for Political Prisoners**

The term of imprisonment for the ex-minister and former Ambassador Mikhail Marynich has been reduced by one year through the terms of his amnesty. In addition, the sentences of Egor Rybakov, former head of the Belarusian State TV and Radio Company, and Mikhail Leonov, former director general of Minsk tractor factory, were also reduced by one year.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/08/19/srok>

### **August 22: Another Victim of a New Law**

The reformed Evangelical Church, which has been present in Belarus for more than 400 years, has been banned. The authorities banned the church because it did not have a legal address which is required for proper registration.

<http://www.spring96.org/viewn.php?id=2370&pagelang=en>

### **August 23: Light in the Tunnel?**

President Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree on a contract-based employment system which aims to limit the subjectivism of employers with respect to the contracts agreements.

Representatives of independent trade unions, however, believe that these changes are insignificant and insist on abolition of the present contract system.

<http://www.spring96.org/viewn.php?id=2380&pagelang=en>

<http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/0/8AAB370EF53EB879C2257067002869BD?>

### **August 23: US Diplomat Detained in Gomel**

While meeting with representatives of non-governmental organizations in Gomel U.S. diplomat, Lyle McMillan, was detained by police under a pretext to check his identification. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry strongly disagrees with this claim and denies the fact that a U.S. diplomat has been detained.

<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/08/26/to>

<http://www.belarusembassy.org>

### **August 24: Kmara Members Detained**

The Belarusian police detained Vladimir Kobiets, Zubr movement coordinator, and two activists of the Georgian youth organization "Khmara," Georgi Kandelaki and Luka Tsuladze. The Belarusian police claimed undisclosed irregularities in the official documents of the two Georgian activists. Later, they were charged with public disturbance (minor hooliganism) and sentenced to 15 days in custody. The Belarusian authorities deported Georgi Kandelaki and Luka Tsuladze from the country on September 2.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/9/C328FAA4-15BC-4A11-9DEA-57E79D1A0863.html>

### **August 26-27: President Lukashenko at the CIS summit in Kazan, Russia**

During the CIS leaders' summit President Alexander Lukashenko stressed that Belarus, more than any other country, is interested in the formation of the Single Economic Space. Presidents of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan have adopted a resolution as the initial step toward a package of documents that will create the Single Economic Space.

<http://president.gov.by/eng/president/news/archive/august2005/22-26/>

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/8/77F0FAAB-FFCB-453A-9DE4-BA5E7D88D635.html>

### **August 27: Union of Poles in Belarus**

The Union of Poles in Belarus elected Iosef Luchnik as its new head during the Union's congress in Volkovysk. Anzhelika Borys, who is considered an illegitimate chair by the Belarusian authorities, did not participate in the congress. Neither Borys nor the Polish authorities recognize the newly elected leaders of the organization.

<http://www.spring96.org/viewn.php?id=2400&pagelang=en>

### **August 29: Pension Rise**

President Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree to raise the retirement pension. On September 1, 2005 pensions will be re-calculated taking into account the average wage of workers and employees in the second quarter of 2005. The last increase in pensions was in April, 2005.

<http://law.by/work/EnglPortal.nsf/NewsBelForInt/B440FF81992C050CC225706C004D72D8?OpenDocument>

### **September 2: Presidential Election in Belarus Scheduled for July 20, 2006**

According to Lidia Yermoshina, chairman of the central election commission, the forthcoming presidential election in Belarus will take place no later than July 20, 2005. The timeline is set by the Constitution, which states that the election campaign should take place no later than two months prior to the expiry of the incumbent president's term in office, which will be September 20, 2006. The Chamber of Representatives in Belarus will set the final date for the election during the spring session. [http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/2-ya\\_gruppa/inter/02-09-05-01/](http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/2-ya_gruppa/inter/02-09-05-01/)

### **September 2: *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* Finally Re-registered**

After the presidential decree requiring the elimination of the words "national" and "Belarusian" from titles, *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, one of the most popular independent newspapers in Belarus, was finally re-registered under a new name, *BDG. Delovaya Gazeta*.

[http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/1-ya\\_gruppa/obschestvo/02-09-05-2/](http://www.naviny.by/ru/content/rubriki/1-ya_gruppa/obschestvo/02-09-05-2/)

*Compiled by Natalia Moustafina*

## **Russia-Belarus Union State: when is the final political merger?**

*Natalia Moustafina*

On August 26-27 Kazan hosted the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) leaders' summit. It was the fifth time this year President Lukashenko has met with President Putin. The meeting was an opportunity to end the "diplomatic saga" revolving around the appointment of Dmitry Ayatskov, former Saratov governor, as Russian Ambassador in Minsk. President Putin and President Lukashenko agreed that Mr. Ayatskov would not represent Russia in the Belarusian capital. Although Mr. Ayatskov was appointed by the Russian President with the consent of his Belarusian counterpart, the situation changed drastically after Ayatskov's statements were widely cited in the press, advising Alexander Lukashenko to "stop blowing out his cheeks" and not to think that "Russia is Russia, and Belarus is Belarus."

At the summit President Lukashenko also stressed that Belarus is interested in the formation of the Single Economic Space more than any other country. The process of economic integration between Belarus and Russia, however, has been an uneven one. Proposals and plans to unite the two states under a common economic area began as early as 1993, though the rhetoric of integration primarily belongs to Lukashenko. Reunification with Russia was one of his office-winning policy proposals in the 1994 presidential campaign. The Union campaign was relaunched with the treaties of 1996 and 1997 and took center stage in 1999 when President Lukashenko and President Yeltsin signed a declaration of intent to implement a monetary union. In 1999, eleven documents were signed including customs union between the two states, the Union's budget, and a draft agreement on establishing a formal unification. A year later, in 2000, President Lukashenko and President Putin signed a more concrete agreement on the economic union with a more tangible result: the Russian rouble would be introduced as the sole currency starting January 2005 for all transactions within Belarus in preparation for a monetary union. However, the introduction of a single currency unit has since been postponed, and President Putin and his Belarusian counterpart have set January 1, 2006, as the new target date. It seems this will not happen either, as the chairman of the National Bank of Belarus Pyotr Prokopovich has recently indicated that Belarus will not introduce the Russian rouble January, 2006.

Some analysts believe that delays in monetary union are related to President Lukashenko's concerns about losing control over the country's purse strings before next year's election. Until 2000, the central point of disagreement between the two states has been the position and control over the monetary emission center for the Union. While Belarus has insisted on two emission centers (in Minsk and Moscow), Russia has argued for a 'one state-one center formula.' Losing the instrument of physical control of monetary emission would ultimately deprive Belarus of a major policy tool. Therefore, in the past, President Lukashenko chose Belarus's economic needs over the political goal of monetary union. Today, however, it seems that President Lukashenko is ready for concessions.

One of the legal requirements necessary for unification is the adoption and finalization of the Constitutional Act of the Union State. At a recent meeting with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, President Lukashenko indicated that there was a strong possibility of adopting such a constitutional act very soon. The meeting between two presidents at the Supreme State Council in Moscow this upcoming November will show how feasible monetary union is and whether President Lukashenko is ready to proceed onto the final stage of a political merger with Russia.