

Destiny of Lukashenka's Previous Challengers

Every presidential election was followed by negative consequences for those challengers of Lukashenka who tried to continue their political involvement after the elections. This happened regardless of whether these challengers took part in the elections or withdrew at earlier stages. The presidential campaign provided some possibility of public relations for alternative candidates, therefore the challengers, active after elections, carried a high potential of danger for Lukashenka. Moreover, a number of Lukashenka's opponents have already been sentenced to several years in prison even before the upcoming 2006 presidential elections.

In summary, among Lukashenka's former challengers, one is currently in exile, three are currently in prison, one is serving 15-days of detention (arrested prior to the 2006 presidential elections), and one is living in Belarus with ailing health. Except Sergei Kaliakin, who is currently heading the Milinkevich campaign team, only those ex-presidential candidates who chose to retire from active politics are living as freely as their fellow citizens in Belarus.

- **Antonchik, Sergej**

He was a member of the 12th Supreme Council who in 1994 published a report on corruption in Lukashenka's circles. He was fined approximately \$20,000 for the report. In the 2001 elections he withdrew his candidacy in favor of Mikhail Marynich. After the elections he was persecuted by the regime: in 2004 he was detained for the organization of an unsanctioned meeting at the office of Free Trade Unions. In 2005 he was the first person to be fined for "the organization of an unsanctioned meeting" at his private apartment. On March 10, 2006 he was detained by SWAT officers during a walk in the residential area where he lives, and sentenced to 15 days of imprisonment – a common political sentence before elections to prevent democratic activists from participating in campaigns and street protests following the presidential elections on March 19.

- **Chigir, Mikhail**

He was the first prime minister of Belarus under Lukashenka (1994-1996). He left the position in protest after the fraudulent referendum in 1996. In 1999, when Lukashenka's first mandate was supposed to be over, he was running as a candidate at the alternative presidential elections organized by the opposition, namely by Viktor Gonchar, a prominent politician who disappeared. Shortly after, he was arrested and charged with exceeding official powers while being a prime minister. The charges were eventually dismissed by the Supreme Court. During the 2001 elections he withdrew in favor of Vladimir Goncharik before presenting his signatures to be registered, and participated in Goncharik's campaign. After the elections, he was charged with official negligence and tax evasion, and finally sentenced to a fine of over a million US dollars. Chigir currently lives in Belarus.

- **Domash, Semen**

He was registered as a presidential candidate in 2001 after collecting 160,000 signatures, however withdrew his candidacy in favor of Vladimir Goncharik. Presumably, he was poisoned during the campaign and hospitalized with a stroke. After the elections he left politics and accepted the position of director of a leather factory in Grodno.

- **Goncharik, Vladimir**

He was the main opposition candidate in the 2001 elections. He left the trade union movement he headed and left active politics, although in 2004 he ran almost unnoticed for a parliamentary seat. Currently he supports Alexander Kazulin.

- **Jaroshuk, Alexander**

In 2001 he was the chairman of the National Committee of Belarusian Agricultural and Industrial Trade Union. In the 2001 elections he did not manage to collect the necessary 100,000 signatures to be registered as a candidate in the presidential race. After 2002 he became the president of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions. He was among the candidates with the potential to become the single candidate chosen by the combined democratic forces for the 2006 presidential elections. He was arrested several times in the past. Jaroshuk currently lives in Minsk.

- **Kaliakin, Sergej**

He is the chairman of the Communist Party of Belarus. In the run-off during the 2001 elections, he collected 93,562 signatures, thus failing to be registered. Nevertheless, he and his party became an important part of the larger democratic coalition during the 2004 parliamentary elections. Currently, he is the campaign manager of the single candidate of the democratic forces, Alexander Milinkevich.

- **Kalugin, Leonid**

He was the director of a refrigerator factory, Atlant, and former friend of Lukashenka. In 2001 he collected 91,345 signatures, thus failing to be registered. Shortly after the elections he was arrested – this was one of the biggest “directorates” cases. He was accused of illegal entrepreneurial activity, receiving finances from abroad, and theft of finances, but charges against him against were later dropped.

- **Kebich, Viacheslav.**

He served as prime minister of Belarus from 1991-1994. He was expected to win the first presidential elections in 1994, but was surprisingly defeated by Alexander Lukashenka. After the 1994 presidential elections, he was twice elected to parliament. Currently he is a pensioner, lives in Minsk quietly, and running his own business.

- **Levonevskij, Valerij**

He is the leader of the Entrepreneur Protest Committee. Since 1998, he has organized multiple protests by entrepreneurs. He faced multiple forms of oppression from the administration (detentions and house searches). The administration blocked his nomination to the Belarusian parliament in 2000. In 2001 he withdrew from the presidential campaign in favor of Goncharik. In 2004 he was arrested and sentenced based on charges of offending the president. He is currently serving his prison sentence.

- **Marynich, Mikhail**

One of the most prominent prisoners of conscience, he was the mayor of Minsk, member of the 12th Supreme Council, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1991-1992), and Ambassador to Latvia (1998-2001). According to data provided by the Central Electoral Commission during the 2001

elections, he collected less than the 100,000 signatures needed for registration. After 2001 he created his NGO “Business Initiatives,” and prepared to participate in the 2006 presidential elections. His activity was reportedly supported by high-level officials in Russia as well. In April 2004 he was sentenced to five years in prison and confiscation of property for stealing the property of the US Embassy (the computers given by the US Embassy). In prison he suffered from a stroke; medical assistance was not provided in time.

- **Pozniak, Zenon**

He was the most well-known politician of Belarus in the first half of the 1990s, one of the main organizers of the dissident movement, and the co-founder of the Belarusian Popular Front. After the 1994 elections, he was granted political asylum in the United States. He still remained the chairman of the Christian Democratic Party/Belarusian Popular Front in exile, basically a spin-off of the Belarus Popular Front. In 2001 he withdrew his candidacy after failing to collect the 100,000 signatures necessary to be registered as a candidate. In 2006 he repeated the same. He currently lives in Poland.

- **Skrebets, Sergej**

He was a member of the Belarusian Parliament beginning in 2000. During the 2001 elections he did not manage to collect the necessary 100,000 signatures required to be registered. He was a member of the democratic fraction "Respublika" in parliament until 2004. In 2003 he was charged with the organization of a criminal group. In 2005 he was arrested, accused of fraud relating to state loans and sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison.

- **Sinitsyn, Leonid**

He was a member of 12th Supreme Council, and head of Lukashenka's initiative group during the 1994 elections. After a referendum in 2004, he retired from the position of Deputy Prime-Minister in protest against Lukashenka's economic and social policies. In 2001 he ran for elections but did not manage to collect enough signatures to be registered as candidate. He is not involved in politics anymore.