

Minsk Journalist Arrested for Mohammed Cartoons

January 18, 2008 Alyaksandr Zdvizhkou, the deputy editor of closed newspaper Zhoda, was sentenced to 3 years in a colony with a reinforced regime for allegedly "igniting religious conflicts" after the newspaper re-printed the Mohammed cartoons in February 2006.

Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka denounced the publication of the cartoon as "a provocation against the state". At the same time, Belarusian Islamic leader Ismail Voronovich considers the sentence against the journalist excessively harsh. In Vienna, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe denounced the sentence and called for the release of Zdvizhkou.

(Charter97, Office for a Democratic Belarus)

Malady Front Activist to Stay in Labor Camp

The youngest political prisoner in current Belarus, 22-years old Artur Finkevich, "Young Front" organization activist was sentenced to another 1.5 years in minimal security colony for violation of discipline during serving his first term in prison.

Two years ago, before the presidential elections in March, Finkevich was found guilty of "malicious hooliganism" for the political graffiti saying "*We've had enough!*" and "*We want a new one!*".

Originally, he was to be released on December 10, 2007.

The Amnesty International recognized Artur Finkevich a prisoner of conscience.

(Charter97, Nasha Niva, www.naviny.by)

Police break up the protest of entrepreneurs in Belarus

Starting from January 1, 2008, according to the presidential decree N^o760 from December 29, 2006, Belarusian sole proprietors are supposed to employ only their close relatives and family members. If not so, they have to change their legal entity and thus pay higher taxes.

Expressing their disagreement, on January 10, entrepreneurs organized a protest rally where around 3.000 people gathered requesting the cancellation of the presidential decree.

Within few days after the rally, more than 40 people were detained and imprisoned for 10-15 days, including Anatol Liabedzka, chairman of the opposition United Civic Party, Anatol Shumchanka chairman of the Association of Entrepreneurs "Perspektyva" and others.

Another rally was organized on January 21, 2008. Approximately 2000 people assembled in the streets of Minsk and tens in other regional centers, including Mahylau, Babriusk, Saligorsk, Zhodzina.

During the meeting, sole entrepreneurs agreed to continue their protests and refuse to pay taxes if the authorities don't take any steps on canceling or imposing a moratorium on the decree 760 within a week.

At least 21 were detained and later convicted to up to 15 days of arrests or fines up to 800 USD.

The European Union has condemned the January arrests and the EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner characterized the detentions as the latest in a long line of politically motivated arrests.

Another protest meeting is planned on February 1, 2008.

According to research of The Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal, Belarus has one of the lowest levels of economic freedom in the world.

(Spring96, www.naviny.by, Office for a Democratic Belarus)

BELTA: Positive developments in EU-Belarus relations in 2007

In mid January 2008 Belarusian State Press Agency (Belta) published the press release of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs where it expressed satisfaction with the positive developments in the EU – Belarus relations.

As for the last year, exchange visits of European and Belarusian officials, consultations, negotiations, and conferences were appreciated. The Ministry considers the initialization of the agreement between Belarus and European Commission on the establishment of the representative office of the Delegation of the European Commission in Belarus, which the EU initiated almost 2 years ago.

The European Union, however, continues to be concerned about political developments in the country and remains coherent in the two-track approach towards Belarus, keeping limited contacts with official authorities and bolstering the support for civil society.

In the November 2006, in its non-paper [What the EU could bring to Belarus](#) the EU regrets that it cannot offer any deepening of the relations with Belarus due to the regime which denies its citizens their fundamental democratic rights and specifies concrete conditions under which Belarus could benefit from closer cooperation and support of the EU.

(Belta, Office for a Democratic Belarus)