

BELARUS OPPOSITION LEADERS



June 16, 1998

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION (OSCE)

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki process, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. Since then, its membership has expanded to 55, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. (The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, has been suspended since 1992, leaving the number of countries fully participating at 54.) As of January 1, 1995, the formal name of the Helsinki process was changed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The OSCE is engaged in standard setting in fields including military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns. In addition, it undertakes a variety of preventive diplomacy initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States.

The OSCE has its main office in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations and periodic consultations among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government are held.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION (CSCE)

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the agreements of the OSCE.

The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members from the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports reflecting the views of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing information about the activities of the Helsinki process and events in OSCE participating States.

At the same time, the Commission contributes its views to the general formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings as well as on certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from OSCE participating States.

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FRIDAY, JUNE 19, 1998

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC

The briefing convened in room 2255, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., at 10:07 a.m., E. Wayne Merry, Staff Member, moderating.

Mr. **Merry**. Good morning. I'd like to welcome you to this public briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. My name is Wayne Merry, Senior Advisor to the Commission.

The topic of our session today is the current situation in Belarus, which is topical for those of you who heard this morning's news because you will know that President Lukashenka has locked the diplomatic corps out of their residences, an unusual move in international relations and one which is certainly in violation of Belarus' obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Activity.

For those of you who are not familiar with public briefings by the Helsinki Commission, the format of this session will be as follows. Our distinguished visitors will give presentations which will be interpreted into English, and then there will be a question and answer period. In fact, our guests have so organized their presentations that I think the bulk of our session will be devoted to questions and answers which hopefully will lead to the most useful exchange of information for people in the audience.

I would like to acknowledge the valuable, in fact essential, support of the International League for Human Rights to this session who are the sponsors of our two guests and to Cathy Fitzpatrick and Victor Kolpashikov who are serving as our interpreters today.

I will not myself make any remarks about the situation in Belarus because I think our two visitors today are so eminently qualified and can speak with such better authority. We're fortunate in that we have two individuals who represent very distinguished backgrounds, one in the physical sciences, the other in economics and finance, but both gentlemen who have played a very active role in the political and social developments of Belarusian society since the end of the Soviet Union.

Our first speaker will be Professor Yury Khadyka whose own academic background is in physics and mathematics and is a specialist in the field of optics. Since 1960, he has worked at the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences. He was particularly prominent in the late Gorbachev period in trying to draw attention to and introduce openness and transparency into public discussions of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

He was a founder in 1997 of the Belarusian Charter 97 movement which is patterned on the Czech Charter 77 and, as many of you will remember, Charter 77 was a direct

response in the then-Czechoslovakia to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act and to the human rights commitments which all the participating States to the Helsinki process undertook, and we regard Charter 97 in Belarus as politically important because it also has a focus on the fulfillment of the obligations which each of the participating States to the OSCE have undertaken.

In 1995, Professor Khadyka helped organize the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, and he is a member of the Belarusian Association for Victims of Political Oppression. In 1996, on the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, he helped organize a rally to mark that event and was imprisoned with demonstrators who clashed with the security forces. After a hunger strike lasting some 25 days, he was released from incarceration as a result of both domestic and international protests.

Our second speaker is Professor Stanislav Bogdankevich who comes from a background in economics and in finance. He was the first head of the Central Bank of independent Belarus in 1991 and played a key central role in organizing and in leading the economic reform policies which Belarus undertook in its first years as an independent state. However, in 1995 he resigned his post in protest against the policies, both economic and political, of President Lukashenka. He has taught economics at the State University of Belarus for many years but was dismissed from the faculty there in 1996 on the orders of President Lukashenka.

In October 1995, he helped found the United Civic Party which is a leading opposition organization, and he was elected a Deputy in the last legitimate legislature of Belarus, the 13th Supreme Soviet, which was disbanded by President Lukashenka in 1996. He is currently a Deputy Chairman of the National Executive Committee which essentially is the shadow cabinet of the opposition, and he is responsible in that body for economic policy.

I would like to first turn to Professor Khadyka to present some remarks which, in the interest of time and efficiency, he will begin in Belarusian and our interpreter, Ms. Fitzpatrick, will read the bulk of in English.

Professor **Khadyka**. Ladies and gentlemen, as a representative of the Belarusian National Front, Adradzhen'ne, the first and largest democratic organization of Belarus, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to speak before the U.S. Congress and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. America is a great country, the beacon of democracy, and I acknowledge the immense responsibility I must take for my speech here today.

Belarus, a land with a thousand year history and a unique culture, is little known in the democratic countries of the West. The reason for this is that over the last few centuries Belarus was a more or less independent part of one or another of the large nations in its proximity. Only in 1918 did the Belarusian people reinstate their sovereignty. However, the democratic Belarusian People's Republic was destroyed by the joint efforts of Poland and Russia, and the Bolsheviks created the puppet Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. In August 1991, Belarus gained real independence in the aftermath of the breakdown of the Soviet Union.

Ms. **Fitzpatrick**. We have a copy of his text in Belarusian. We'd like to make that available afterwards in English but, just for the interest of brevity, I'll finish reading his paper in English.

As a physicist, I have worked for over 25 years in the field of military science. I know very well that the reason for the breakdown of the Soviet Union was the ridiculous economy of the totalitarian system. The Soviet Union was unable to take on the United States in the next round of the arms race challenge proposed by the Reagan Administration. That challenge sabotaged the Soviet Union's political and military strength, in turn inciting *perestroika* and a *de facto* cancellation of the Warsaw Pact in the USSR.

The fall of the Soviet Empire is often spoke about in the West. The turn of phrase is a synthesis of two well known terms: the Soviet regime and the Russian empire. The soviet, a primitive version of representative democracy, was but a screen behind which the Russian empire hid, the nature of which has not changed since the times of czarist autocracy. Its nature is the constant craving for expansion and de-nationalization of its conquered peoples.

The Soviet Russian Empire had three layers of defense. The first was the satellite countries where Soviet troops were stationed and ruled by regimes wholly dependent on Moscow. The second layer of its armor was comprised of the Soviet Republics falling somewhere between dominion and colony, settled by migrants from Russia but retaining a semblance of national independence. And finally, the third layer, the national autonomies within the Russian Federation itself, denied the right even to such a semblance. All three types of these nations underwent intensive russification.

Therefore, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought about an explosion of national freedom movements, the success of which depended on the level of the enslaved peoples' feeling of national identity. In Belarus, there was particularly strong russification and the economic crisis resulted in a wave of anti-communism. Personal freedom and the newly acquired sovereignty did not become popular national values.

Having overcome the fears of 1991, the Communist nomenclature was able to secure power. Under their leadership, the economy plummeted even further, unloosing a general nostalgia for the relatively secure standard of living in the Soviet era. Starting in 1994, the government took a turn in its policies toward restoring the old order.

Aleksandr Lukashenka, the current president, became the spokesperson for such reactionary policies. As a representative from the lower levels of the Communist nomenclature, through deceit and demagoguery, he was able to win the support of the population which expected him, in turn, to reestablish social justice. However, Lukashenka used his newly acquired power toward the creation of a dictatorship. The deciding factor became the 1996 referendum, upon which rode the new constitution under which all branches of the government would fall under the personal control of the president. Lukashenka callously falsified poll results and used force to disband the lawfully elected Supreme Soviet (or parliament) and replaced it with his personally chosen National Assembly. This coup was directly supported by the Government of the Russian Federation.

Now the legal system in Belarus is in a state of anarchy because the president's decrees are above the law and he can change the law every other day if he likes. Economic reforms and the process of privatization of state property have come to a halt. There are two national budgets in the country, the government budget and the president's personal budget, and there are three currency exchange rates. The government has full control of electronic mass media and 90 percent of the newspapers, as well. The opposition's protests are suppressed by force.

Belarus' foreign policy is aggressively anti-Western. On the other hand, in relations with Russia the regime makes a point of being loyal, even to the extent of disregarding the Belarusian national interest. Instead of seeking better economic ties with Russia, which is impossible on account of the fact that Russia is further along in its economic reforms, Lukashenka's "integrationist" initiatives are directed at political and military union and the creation of a supra government structure. In 1996, President Lukashenka presented a government initiative for legislation on dual citizenship. This reveals evidence of his interest in stepping into the battle for presidential power in Russia.

This ambitious anti-national policy results in great material losses for Belarus. The Russian Federation does not pay to keep military bases in Belarus, nor does it pay for transporting its cargo through Belarus. Russia does not pay compensation for the nuclear pollution of one quarter of Belarusian territory. This policy is on orders from Moscow, although the Russian Federation, which is the legal successor of the USSR, is obliged to fill the international responsibilities of the preceding government.

Lukashenka's imperial and openly pro-Moscow politics go hand-in-hand with Eastern Orthodox chauvinistic propaganda in full swing. Government-controlled mass media broadcasts such propaganda about brotherhood between Russia and Belarus and the special place in history chosen for Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, and supports political groups with names that first appeared during the Russian monarchy era. At the same time, Belarusian culture, Belarusian secular education and book publishing are being suppressed.

Lukashenka has brought Soviet textbooks on history and literature back into the classrooms. There's not one institute of higher education where the native population can get an education in their mother tongue.

Thanks to all this, Lukashenka has become an idol for the neo-fascist and Communist forces in Russia, the so-called red-browns. He has transformed Belarus into a model for rebuilding totalitarianism on post-Soviet territory. Taking into the particularities of Lukashenka's persona and the dependency of his regime on Moscow, it would be wrong to rule out the possibility that he could liquidate Belarusian sovereignty if it were in the Russian Government's interest to do so.

For instance, we could imagine that such a move could make Lukashenka a runner in the Presidential elections against Aleksandr Lebed. This would be in the forthcoming Russian elections in the year 2000. I hope that I'm not wrong in supposing that the U.S. would not recognize Russia's incorporation of Belarus brought about by the current illegitimate regime of Lukashenka. Such an act would not only prompt the rebirth of Russian imperialism but would also be an outright conflict of the Helsinki Accords regarding the stability of the post-war orders in Europe.

In spite of all that's been mentioned above, Lukashenka's regime is probably the weakest of the eight dictatorial regimes in the former republics of the Soviet Union. Not only is Lukashenka unable to cope with economic difficulties, he's unable to squash the opposition, although he's reverting to police repression to do so and persecuting those who are oppositionists in their places of work or study.

But the regime made a blatant error when it accomplished the coup, it left untouched the legitimately elected Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation. The opposition parties and the deputies who refused to serve the illegitimate regime have gathered around this Presidium. A unique situation has arisen in Belarus in which every-

one from liberals to Communists speaks out for the reinstatement of the constitutional order for human rights and for national independence as established under the constitution of 1994.

The existence of a legitimate governing body with international recognition, that is the 13th Supreme Soviet, opens up a peaceful way out of the present crisis. First, this must be done by reinstalling the 1994 Constitution, returning authority to the 13th Supreme Soviet and proceeding with elections and the impeachment process which was halted in November '96. Following presidential elections, which should be held in 1999 according to the 1994 Constitution, there would then be the conditions to ensure that the government would be free and democratic.

Naturally, this dictatorship will resist every action of that nature. However, Lukashenka is not invulnerable. When the West ceased providing financial assistance to Belarus, within half a year a financial crisis resulted, prices rose and so did the level of the dissatisfaction among the populace. Representatives of the Lukashenka government are already discussing the possibility of holding elections just in order to soften the OSCE's position. Under such conditions, however, talk of concessions to the regime as heard in the European Parliament, sound premature.

The simplest and most legitimate solution seems clear: return to the situation as it had been up to November '96. Even the previous constitutional referendum was really mainly a consultative, informative sort of referendum. After that referendum, the president issued an anti-constitutional decree and bestowed himself with further executive powers, thus abolishing the additional Supreme Soviet elections in the 61st district.

So here's the step-by-step strategy to deal with the dictatorship. Free the systems of mass media from government control and stop political repression, reinstate the rights of the abolished Supreme Soviet, create a constitutional commission in order to amend the 1994 Constitution lawfully, resume the process of impeachment which was cut short by Lukashenka's coup in '96, form a new Cabinet of Ministers and hold presidential elections under the '94 Constitution.

Diversions as well as any sort of concessions to the present regime will only heighten the people's suffering and the realization of this plan depends on the West as well as on the unity of the opposition forces. Currently, the Supreme Soviet functions as a civic organization, a kind of NGO. Like any other opposition party, it's persecuted. Some of its members have undergone a great deal of suffering. People's Deputies, holding the highest qualifications such as Professor Stanislav Bogdankevich, who's here with us today, former head of the National State Bank, can not find work. Two deputies from the old Supreme Soviet who were also involved in private enterprise have been thrown in jail unlawfully. One person, unable to feed his family and find a job, committed suicide in despair. Another was simply bought out by the regime and sent to Japan as an ambassador. But in spite of all these efforts to disintegrate the 13th Supreme Soviet, the opposition members continue to fulfill their responsibilities to the people.

I ask the congressman and their aides here today to find ways and means to support your colleagues in Belarus in this 13th Supreme Soviet. Of course, such a varied opposition could lose its unity after the dictatorial regime is pushed aside. But while such a regime exists, the Belarusian Popular Front will keep supporting and strengthening the unity of those forces opposed to the regime to defend the independence of our homeland.

This opportunity has been removed from our people, not because they're unable to or don't wish to work, but because of their naivete, trustfulness and lack of reliable information.

Thank you for the opportunity to make the presentation to you today.

Professor **Khadyka**. As a conclusion, I would like to thank you for the help which I personally received from the Congress of the United States of America. I'd like to thank Christopher Smith, Alfonse D'Amato, Tom Campbell, Bob Grahamm, Steny Hoyer, Frank Wolf, and David Funderburk. I'd like to thank all of them for their support which they provided me with when I was in jail. It is evident that their letters did help to free me. Thank you very much. I also would like to pass a statement of the Belarusian Popular Front to the Chairman of this briefing. [See page 17.]

Mr. **Merry**. Thank you very much, Mr. Khadyka.

I would like now to give the floor to Professor Bogdankevich.

Professor **Bogdankevich**. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

My assessment of the political situation is written in detail in all written materials which you can take from the table and I hope you will be able to read them. In addition, I just would like to stress some of the most important things.

Belarus is a rather small country with 10 million people so, according to the European standards, it's a middle-sized country. Belarus separates the civilized Europe and the huge Russian Federation. Seventy percent of all cargo delivery from Russia to Europe passes through Belarus and that's the peculiarity of our location. In the socialist camp, Belarus was one of the most flourishing republics. Belarus had a gross national product compared in size and per capita to the Czech Republic and German Democratic Republic. It was higher than the gross national product of the Baltic States, Ukraine and Russia but today the industrial potential of Belarus is completely destroyed.

Unfortunately, Western Europe and the United States pay their main attention to the official statistics which claim that there is major development of the Belarusian economy. I'd like to mention a few official statistics and then you will judge yourself what kind of stabilization it is.

The average salary last year was \$74 a month and that was 25 percent lower than in the previous year. It is five times lower than Poland. The average salary is twice lower than in Russia. It's 30 percent lower than Ukraine, three times lower than Lithuania. The average pensions are about \$30 a month. Savings last year were about 1.8 percent compared to the gross national product which is absolutely the lowest figure in recent memory. The investments into the Belarusian economy last year were about 10 percent of the gross national product whereas, according to the economic theory for such a country as Belarus, it should be at least 30 percent of the gross national product.

Moreover, we should keep in mind another 8 percent of the gross national product was spent for populist programs. Money was invested into the construction of apartment buildings, *et cetera*. All this economic chaos is a result of a policy of the democratically elected President Lukashenka who then turned into a dictator. Lukashenka is a man of the past. He is diligently working to restore the semblance of the Soviet Union with Belarus. He's diligently working to recreate the centralized administrative control over the economy.

Even though the private sector comprises only 9 percent of gross national product, even despite this low figure, the president is trying to nationalize this private sector

again. The presidential administration is consistently trying to destroy non-governmental universities, non-governmental foundations and organizations. The independent bar and the notary service were recently banned by presidential decree. The National Olympic Committee and the Federation of Sports lost their independence recently. Lukashenka and his clique have monopolized radio and television.

As a legitimately elected deputy of the legitimate parliament of Belarus and also as the chairman of an officially registered political party, for the last 3 years I have been unable to get access to radio, television or to any other mass media, while at the same time every day Belarusian people are being brainwashed, and the policy of so-called in-gathering of all the Slavic people is being proclaimed on radio and television.

At the same time, it's not the end of the world. The legitimate 13th Parliament still functions. We are not arrested, we are not in jail, at least now. There are some opposition newspapers, although their circulation is quite low, about 30,000 copies. Of course, most of our opposition leaders were somehow persecuted. Some of us were arrested and then released, some of us were not released, some are still in jail, some of us were fined.

I'd like to say that there is no independence of the judiciary in Belarus. The courts are dependent upon the presidential administration. In Belarus, with a population of 10 million people, there are about 130,000 policemen. Meanwhile, in Denmark, for example, for five million people, twice as less, there are about 10,000 policemen, that is, 13 times less.

Not only did the KGB keep its name in Belarus, the only country of the former Soviet Union to do so, it also kept all the KGB's functions of surveillance, imposing persecution, bugging the phones, etcetera. The dictatorship is trying to promote myths that the populace, the majority of the people, support Lukashenka. But as a matter of fact, only two sectors of the populace support Lukashenka. These two sectors are veterans and retirees who have a nostalgia for the Soviet past. These two groups comprise about 25 percent of the Belarusian population. They still remember a certain prosperity, not very much according to the Western standards, but still a better life than they lead now.

So as you can see, the president doesn't enjoy the support of the majority. In the case of free and democratic elections, he will definitely lose. That's why he's afraid of holding the Presidential elections in 1999, as he is supposed to do according to the constitution under which he was elected in 1994. In order to protect himself, and because of his weakness, he disbanded the Central Electoral Commission which was headed by a chair who had been appointed by the Parliament. Because of his weakness, he has faced opposition from the mass media.

He is trying to solve economic problems in Belarus by dealing with Russia, by getting the energy supply with Russian support and, unfortunately, it works. Belarus doesn't have its own energy resources and last year, Belarus was only able to pay 6 percent of the cost for Russian supplies of oil and gas. This year, however, Russia has required Belarus to pay 26 percent for Russian supplies of oil and gas.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Russia, which receives enormous financial support from Western Europe and particularly from the United States, is able to channel some of this financial support to Minsk, and that aid supports the dictatorial regime in trying to preserve Russian political interests.

Thank you very much.

Mr. **Merry**. Thank you, sir.

In keeping with the tradition of Helsinki Commission public briefings, these proceedings are being transcribed and will be published as part of our regular series of public sessions which are available both in hard copy and on our Internet website. I propose also to include the statement given to us by Professor Khadyka on behalf of the Belarusian Popular Front.

I would like now to invite members of the audience to pose questions to our two speakers. In sympathy to our transcribers and to our interpreters, I would ask each questioner to please use the central microphone and to identify yourself, please.

Mr. **Kostravich**. Yvor Kostravich from the Department of State. I'm wondering if each of our panelists could say a few words about your party's activities to reach out to young voters in Belarus and to what extent are they involved in your party's activities. Thank you.

Professor **Khadyka**. The Belarusian Popular Front has a special youth section called the Youth Front. This is the most active in terms of carrying out mass actions. They have a status of affiliation so they have their own leadership. The Belarusian Popular Front covers at least 80 percent of the rural areas and all cities of Belarus. Since this youth section of the Belarus Popular Front was only started a year ago, now they're working to cover all these territories and to establish the youth sections in all those areas where our branches have been in existence at these branches. They have their own bulletin but, of course, they have lots of problems in cooperation between the Popular Front and the youth section, as well as within the youth section.

Professor **Bogdankevich**. The United Civic Party is the liberal party, the liberal conservative party. This is first and foremost a party of the intelligentsia, the intellectuals. We have more than 100 members who have Ph.D.s and other honors. We have six ex-ministers. We have three generals. We have entrepreneurs, cultural leaders. We have a faction of the 13th Supreme Soviet which is called Civic Action. The members of our party, the members of our faction were chairmen of the most important commissions in the Supreme Soviet. For example, they were chairmen of the Commission on Economic Reforms, the Budget Commission, and the Commission on International Relations.

Together with the Social Democrats, we formed the basis of the National Executive Committee which is formed within the Supreme Soviet. As I said, we cooperate quite closely with the Social Democrats but we have also very good relations with the Belarusian Popular Front and we recently established the Coordinating Council which consists of representatives of five major parties. We try to coordinate every major action with all the representatives of all major parties.

I'd like also to add that all members of my faction signed the impeachment petition and, because of that, all members of the faction are under great pressure from the authorities and two members are now in jail. As a semi-independent youth organization, we also have the so-called Civic Forum at our party. The Civic Forum is headed by the youngest deputy in our faction, Mr. Novaset. The Civic Forum has associated status at the major youth parties of Europe. For example, Demos.

Professor **Khadyka**. I just answered the question regarding the youth enrollment in our party. I'd like to stress that the Belarusian Popular Front has, in fact, inspired the creation of many other youth organizations, political and nonpolitical, such as the Belarusian

Scouts which was a member of the Belarusian Popular Front, the Belarusian students' organization, the Association of Young Politicians. So I would like to stress that we have quite a wide spectrum of supporters among the youth.

Mr. **Merry**. Thank you.

Next question, please.

Mr. **Deychakiwsky**. Orest Deychakiwsky with the Helsinki Commission. This question is to both of you. Have you had an opportunity yet to interact with the OSCE mission which has been operating in Belarus since March and how would you assess its effectiveness to date?

Mr. **Kolpashikov**. Professor Bogdankevich will start because he met Mr. Wieck, who is the head of the mission, more often than I did.

Professor **Bogdankevich**. We quite closely cooperate with the OSCE mission headed by Ambassador Wieck. We had hoped that with the help of the OSCE mission, we would be able to organize a round table, a dialogue with the authorities in order to create a common mutual agreement on the legal reformation of the constitution of 1994 and the election to the local Soviets. But unfortunately I must say that even though the mission has been present in Minsk, the conditions under which we operate, the opposition parties and NGOs, have not become better.

In principle, we find their activities useful. The mission is preparing the draft of the law on elections, the draft on the law of central electoral and local electoral commissions. Although I must say that the majority of deputies of the 13th parliament assess the work of the mission ambivalently because they think that they are too ambient, they're too soft on the regime. I would consider the work of the mission effective and useful if we could get at least a couple of hours on national television, if the parliament and the opposition could get us at least a couple of hours on the National television to express our own views and how we see the situation in Belarus.

Ms. **Fitzpatrick**. I just had a follow-up question on Orest's question about the OSCE mission. We understood that one of the things that Ambassador Wieck had done was form a working group to examine draft legislation—the Commission for Legislative Development or a similar title. Amb. Wieck has had at least one meeting and perhaps more with Antanovich, the foreign minister.

I guess we're trying to clarify what this commission is, will members of the opposition be allowed to participate, and have the leading experts on constitutional legal matters from the independent perspective been present. For example, Mikhail Pastukhov has been invited to give comments to this commission?

Mr. **Merry**. For the record, this question is from Cathy Fitzpatrick of the International League for Human Rights.

Professor **Bogdankevich**. I must say that unfortunately the mission works without inviting, or at least without proper representation of, opposition experts in its working groups. There are a couple of working groups at the mission. We did, however, we did submit our proposal on how we see the possibility of holding the election, which should be fair and democratic. We submitted this proposal to Ambassador Wieck. The Belarusian regime fails to respect not only its own laws, but its international treaties and obligations. I must say that Ambassador Wieck had made this agreement, or at least he declared and he told me personally that they were going to organize a round table with the authorities

and opposition, but then he took back his words.

Professor **Khadyka**. I, as a representative of the Belarusian Popular Front, meet Ambassador Wieck even less often. However, I must say that we quite closely watch how the mission has been working and it has been open for 4 months already. I must say that it seems to me that Ambassador Wieck and his mission are even more tolerant than the Belarusian people. Our neighbors, Poles and Russians, tease Belarusians for being very soft and tolerant. However, you must understand, this trait of the Belarusian character was a great way for us to get along with our neighbors during all those hundreds of years of oppression.

But I'd like to make some very quick concrete remarks about how I see the inefficiency of the mission's work. Despite numerous declarations that the OSCE mission would like to see the Belarusian opposition united, Ambassador Wieck meets different members of the opposition separately. He hadn't held any joint meeting with all members of the opposition and this way of meeting with the opposition creates an ambience of animosity. For example, when Ambassador Wieck declared his intention to support the idea of holding the election in 1999, it seems to me that he was subconsciously ready to support any initiative, any opposition initiative which would lead to the holding of the election in 1999.

For example, he's now considering the proposal of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee to monitor the election, but I must stress that the Belarusian Helsinki Committee has nothing to do with politics in Belarus. It's an NGO and it's a human rights NGO. And when Professor Bogdankevich and I learned about this initiative of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, which we learned here in the United States, we decided that we should urgently go to Ambassador Wieck and tell him that actually five opposition parties have already formed a non-government, non-partisan organization which has called for fair elections. The mission of this organization will be to teach and to prepare 21,000 monitors for the next elections, three monitors for each electoral precinct. And, I must stress that the Belarusian Helsinki Committee is not capable of preparing 21,000 monitors.

Stepping back to the question of OSCE mission efficiency, I think that in 3 or 4 months time, if the mission doesn't produce any concrete results, any round tables or anything else, our critiques of the mission will be much more severe. The thing is that the resultless, aimless presence in Belarus will help the regime claim that there is no international isolation of Belarus. We have the OSCE mission working in Minsk and this hurts the opposition instead of helping it.

Mr. **Finerty**. John Finerty, also from the CSCE staff. Professor Bogdankevich, you mentioned your belief that money from the West that goes to Moscow partially assists Lukashenka in maintaining his regime. I would like to ask our guests, how do you feel about independent investment in Belarus? Is business presence from the West good, bad, or doesn't it have that much effect on opposing oppressive regimes?

Professor **Bogdankevich**. By all means, I am a staunch supporter of direct investments to the private sector of the Belarusian economy. At the same time, I am against any investments into the state-owned enterprises and into the state sector to support the regime. It would be an enormous help for us, for all democratic forces of Belarus if the West and the United States in particular could qualify its support to Moscow by demanding the Kremlin not support Lukashenka and his regime in Belarus. As a result of the

presidential decree on registration of private enterprises, more than 54 percent of private enterprises were closed down last year in Belarus.

I'd like to stress that after the authorities closed all those enterprises and businesses, without any public or court hearings, the authorities published the names of the businessmen in the state-owned newspaper, published their names as if they were rogues. Once again I'd like to stress that Russia, which has an enormous budget deficit, supplies Belarus with oil and gas almost for free. While it would be good if Belarus meanwhile were going toward the reformation of the economy, as a matter of fact, Russian subsidies go to support the present dictatorial regime.

Despite all those myths that the Belarusian Government is spreading around the globe that the Belarusian economy is growing and booming, we have five or six different currency exchange rates in Belarus. For example, the Belarusian ruble was devalued twice last year and again in the first 5 months of this year has already been devaluated twice again. We have 90 percent inflation in the industry.

Professor **Khadyka**. Generally I support the statement of Professor Bogdankevich where he's saying that the private investments into the private sector are useful for Belarus. However, there are very few people who are risky enough to invest money into such a country. And then our president introduced the practice of issuing the special guarantees as he did with the Ford Motor Company. We understand that he can change his mind quite fast and the next decree will revoke all those guarantees issued by the previous decree. It's evident that any support directed to the state sector or state institutions, all this in essence will only support the present regime.

And again, I would like to reiterate that it would be of enormous help for democracy in Belarus if you could demand from Moscow and forbid Moscow to channel any support to Minsk when you provide your help to Moscow.

Mr. **Killian**. I am Mark Killian, with the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade. Besides asking Moscow not to support the current Lukashenka government, is there anything else that you can see the United States Government doing to help support the opposition movement in Belarus?

Professor **Bogdankevich**. I will start answering the question and Professor Khadyka can finish. First of all, I would like to ask the U.S. Congress to be adamant in non-recognition of the legitimacy of the Lukashenka regime. And this means being adamantly in non-recognition of the National Assembly, this hand-picked parliament. But after 1999, I'd like to ask you not to recognize the legitimacy of President Lukashenka. I also would ask you to find opportunities to support the effort to restore the political and economic rights of Belarusian citizens.

First and foremost, will you try to help us solve our main problem? Problem No. 1 is to restore the freedom of Belarusian people to receive information freely. Belarusian people should get full access to true information, to know all the political opinions existing in Belarus. All the political opinions. We would ask that such a great country as America recommend to American allies in Western Europe and also recommend to Russia that they be adamant in their support of democratic values, not to succumb to the dictator.

I would also ask you for financial support for monitoring the fairness of the election. We need the election to be monitored, that all the candidates will have equal access to the mass media, equal access to the public. We also need central and local electoral commis-

sions to be formed, not only of presidential supporters but from the members of the opposition as well. For that, we need money. Thank you.

Professor **Khadyka**. I actually put all my requests in my speech so I will not repeat them. But I'd like to reiterate one thing. You have colleagues in Belarus and these colleagues are the 13th Parliament and they need help. They need support because now they are under terrible psychological, economic, and physical oppression. They can't fulfill their duties to the people for whom they are legitimate representatives, and I beg you to help to support them. They need moral support, they need political support and, of course, they need financial support.

It would be great and helpful if you could invite the official delegation of the 13th Parliament to address Congress, or at least you can send them official greetings on 27th July of this year, the seventh anniversary of the declaration of Belarusian independence on July 27th this year. They need financial support to pay rent, to pay per diem, to pay for travel expenses so that deputies can come to Minsk for the meetings. Don't think that it's not important business. It's very important because the existence of the 13th Parliament is a thorn in the side of the regime. It's the body around which all the democratic forces unite now.

I must say that I think the work of the 13th Parliament is the most legal and civilized way out of this constitutional crisis unless you want to have what you had in Djakarta—the revolution of Indonesia.

Mr. **Merry**. As the Chair, let me pose a specific question to our two guests. The United States and other Western governments are now considering how to respond to the action of President Lukashenka in locking our Ambassadors out of their official residences. I would note that this is not just a question of real estate because Ambassadors' residences are protected facilities, just as are Embassy chanceries, under international conventions.

The problem the United States faces with Belarus is how do we engage and stay involved with the Belarusian nation, the Belarusian people, without giving, as you have asked, legitimacy and support to the government of its elected president? This is not a new problem. We have faced it in other situations with other countries in the past. I personally have never found a magic solution to how one stays engaged with a country without thereby somehow remaining engaged with its regime.

Specifically, I would ask our guests their view as to whether the United States and the other Western countries should now withdraw their Ambassadors from Minsk, keeping in mind that Ambassadors, under international law, are accredited to the head of state of a country which, in this case, is to President Lukashenka, and do our guests believe that that should be a temporary measure or a permanent measure?

Professor **Bogdankevich**. As far as the expulsion of the Western Ambassadors from their residence in Drazdy which is the section of Minsk where these houses are located, our own party, the United Civic party, has condemned this action as an arbitrary action by the Lukashenka regime. But maybe this action by President Lukashenka actually has some use and some value because now other countries and heads of other states will see what we have to deal with when we are trying to deal with President Lukashenka, when we're trying to come to agreement with him. Now they'll understand what we experience.

As far as the position of my own party, we consider that the United States Government must preserve its presence in Belarus, must keep its embassy or a representation in

Belarus going but meanwhile, while maintaining your presence, to also preserve your hard, strict line with regard to the regime. My point of view again, I would underscore that *de jure*, the president, is only legitimate until July 1999 so, by saying that, I've indicated my position regarding this illegitimacy after that date. I think the proper response to these events would be to lower the level of your contacts with the president and with the presidential entourage and the administration. I think by keeping the contacts only lowering those level of contacts, you will have made the adequate response.

As for the question of economic aid, I think there should be linkage and the conditions for granting aid chiefly should be that the long overdue economic reforms must take place. There has to be a transformation of the central command administrative system of the old Soviet style economy, and there must be more competition within the economy before you should have any aid to Belarus.

The IMF has now closed its office and gone home. There's no longer an IMF presence in Belarus and that's helped, it's actually, ironically, a help to us. The reason they left was no agreement that had ever been established between the IMF and the Belarusian Government was ever implemented. The lack of implementation was largely through the fault of the Lukashenka government and that is good that they refuse to deal with the regime which wasn't following these agreements.

Professor **Khadyka**. If you can accept my suggestion, I would say the following. By no means can we let Lukashenka hurt the country. They're not supposed to let him humiliate all those countries. We have not let him humiliate all those countries, all those Western countries and the United States which he is now trying to do. That's why I think that all the Ambassadors should be recalled their respective countries without providing him with any conditions. They should be recalled indefinitely.

At the same time, you have to go to the Russian Government and demand that the Russian Government put Lukashenka in his place. The Russian Government has to make Lukashenka follow and fulfill the international treaties. At the same time, the embassies and the consulates should remain open, enabling all those people who will travel and make some business to continue their normal lives.

As for your question of how we can support the Belarusian people without supporting the regime, as far as I know, the Congress of the United States allocates funds for Radio Liberty. Three times a day Radio Liberty broadcasts over the Belarusian territory. I would recommend that you give them more money to have more than three times, 3 hours a day. But unfortunately, I must say for the last 40 years when I've been listening to Radio Liberty, I never heard any statements of the American Government or American Congress on the Belarusian situation.

If Radio Liberty could broadcast some statement of the American Government or American Congress on Belarus—because there is not much difference—that would be helpful. I can't see much difference between, say, Iraq or Belarus. We also have a dictator who flaunts not only his own laws but also international treaties and obligations and what should we do? We should wait until he starts shooting down not only hot air balloons but also the civilian aircraft?

Again I think the U.S. Congress should support the 13th Parliament and that will be a help to the Belarusian people.

Ms. **Fitzpatrick**. Could I ask a question? I wanted to ask Mr. Merry or perhaps Orest.

There was a draft resolution or a letter sent to Congress about Belarus recently.

Mr. **Kolpashikov**. It wasn't a draft. It was a real resolution.

Ms. **Fitzpatrick**. It was a resolution. Wouldn't Radio Liberty have covered that? Do you know how that works?

Mr. **Deychakiwsky**. There was a resolution introduced in the House of Representatives in March initiated by Representative Smith, who's the Co-Chairman of the Helsinki Commission. At that time I do recall that Radio Liberty did actually cover it, but they may not have read the text of the resolution. That I don't know. But I do recall that they did cover its introduction.

Professor **Khadyka**. This is very important.

Mr. **Merry**. I would also note that there are from time to time statements made on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate by individual members about the situation in Belarus, most of which are very critical of the regime of President Lukashenka. I certainly can not say whether or not Radio Liberty reports on each of those or on any of those, but it is certainly the case that Members of Congress are aware in general terms of conditions in Belarus, and that statements are made into the record of the U.S. Congress from time to time.

Questioner. Eva—from the Heritage Foundation. I was wondering if you, as the representatives of the Belarusian opposition, have been working with the opposition movements in other former Soviet Republics or the central and eastern European countries, and if you see any role for these countries or for opposition leaders from these countries to help you in your struggle against dictatorship.

Professor **Khadyka**. The Belarusian Popular Front has an extensive and very useful fraternization with counterparts in Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, especially with Poland. Unfortunately, we don't have any contacts or any supporters in Russia and that's quite understandable because even Russian democrats are very imperialistic in their spirit and they can't live without this notion of Great Russia with all its satellites and all those countries.

As far as I know, colleagues in the Social Democratic Party, not colleagues in the United Civic Party, do have contacts with their Russian counterparts. They do have Russian counterparts and we are satisfied with that.

Professor **Bogdankevich**. As far as the United Civic Party, we do consider that there are democratic forces in Russia with whom it's useful for us to cooperate. For example, there's the party Democratic Choice, there's Yabloko, which is Yavlinsky's party, there are figures like Galina Starovoitova—other democratic parties with whom we cooperate. All of these political forces have made very strong statements about the situation in Belarus. We also cooperate with the Conservative Party in Great Britain, with the moderates in Sweden, with conservatives in Lithuania, with the National Democratic Party in Ukraine, with some of the conservative and democratic parties in other neighboring countries.

Professor **Khadyka**. And if the international contacts are concerned, the Belarusian Popular Front also is an associate member of the International Social Democratic International. It's Christian Democratic International.

Mr. **Merry**. Are there any other questions or comments from members of the audience? As we have just a few moments remaining, may I ask if either of our distinguished

guests would like to make any concluding comments for the benefit of the audience and for the record?

Professor **Bogdankevich**. I want to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity you've provided us today to outline our positions in the U.S. Congress. I hope that the American people understand that the Belarusian people, like any other nation, have their flaws and their virtues. I hope that you'll express your solidarity with the people of Belarus. Sometimes a whole nation, just like an individual, can make mistakes but I think that our people are capable of rectifying their mistakes. And I think our people have nurtured certain illusions and myths regarding Lukashenka, and they viewed him as an authentic expression of the popular will. I think it was as if they were asleep and they had a vision, a vision of the unification of Belarus and Russia. But I think only complete idiots now could contemplate this integration with Russia and this joining and merging with Russia. Why? Because we see on TV today Russia is an enormous country that has its own very grave problems with strikes of the miners, with people going on hunger strike, and the war in Chechnya. If we were to join Russia, we would also have these enormous problems, too.

But I think you're experienced enough to know that when a dictator is empowered, he falsifies the results of elections and he claims that 90 percent of the people—and 99 percent of the people—are behind him. So you're smart enough to understand what's behind that.

Professor **Khadyka**. I would like to add my words of sincere gratitude that you invited us and listened to us so attentively. Professor Bogdankevich and I also hope that something will become clear for you, that you will now better understand what's going on in Belarus. Sometimes I myself cannot really understand, and I understand that what's going on in Belarus can be regarded as a fantastic situation and can not really be understood by the normal mind, sane minds. But you should know that, as a matter of fact, power was seized by a very small bureaucrat from the lowest level of the nomenklatura who was a major in the KGB. And all the people are following his orders and fulfilling his orders.

That's why the Belarusian Popular Front now keeps itself outside in the streets enables you to see us, at least, on the foreign TV channel CNN, and we show you that not all Belarusian people are idiots and not all Belarusian people are insane.

But the most serious problem now for us is the problem of sustaining our independence. If we lose our independence, it will mean that Russian aggressive imperialism will again be in the arena. It will echo in Central Asia, in the Caucasus and even in Eastern Europe. We should keep, by all means, the inviolability of the post-war boundaries in Europe. In order to illustrate my words about the importance of Russia in Belarusian affairs, I use the following example. The economic blockade which was announced by some Western countries resembles to me the pumping of a balloon which has a hole in it.

Mr. **Kolpashikov**. What he's saying is that you're pumping a balloon with a hole. He alludes to pumping democracy, Belarusian democracy, but if you have a hole, which is Russia, all your support and all your efforts are in vain because this Russian hole somehow sucks out the support for the democratic forces.

I don't know whether I was able to translate. I understand what he means: the economic blockade of Belarus which was supposed to support democracy, against the regime,

is undercut by Russian support of Lukashenka.

Professor **Khadyka**. And I think that it's very important to close this hole, to make Russia be with the West, to join Western policies.

Thank you very much again. Thank you.

Mr. **Merry**. On behalf of the Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Senator Alfonse D'Amato, and Co-Chairman Congressman Christopher Smith, I would like to thank both of our distinguished guests, Professor Yury Khadyka and Professor Stanislav Bogdankevich, for spending their time with us today. The Commission exists solely to give support to the kinds of work that you two gentlemen are conducting in Belarus, but certainly our efforts are easy compared to the difficult and always challenging things that you have already done in the past and which we know you will continue to do in the future. So it has been an honor for us to be able to be your hosts here today in the U.S. Congress and we wish you all the best for the future. Thank you.

Ms. **Fitzpatrick**. Wayne, if I could make one final comment about the Ambassador's debacle. The unfortunate signal that's sent by recalling the Ambassadors over this particular spat is that for the last 3 or 4 years there've been a whole series of terrible things that have happened: expelling journalists, shutting down radio stations, arresting young people, disbanding the parliament, disbanding the Constitutional Court. None of those severe attacks on civil society were enough to make any country withdraw their ambassador. So the fact that now, some ambassadors can't take showers in the summer is enough to get them withdrawn. It sends a kind of message of triviality that I don't think they want to send.

It's important in withdrawing them that they also make mention, not only of the Vienna Convention and this debacle, but of the attack on civil society that happened in the last 3 years and that when they withdraw their Ambassadors that they still maintain some ties to the people through lower level contact. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the briefing was concluded at 11:57 a.m.)

BELARUSAN POPULAR FRONT “ADRADZHENNIE”

8, vul. VarvsAE0eni, 220005 Minsk, BELARUS

TEL/FAX (375 17) 284 50 12, TEL. 213 30 08

JUNE 12, 1998

THE STATEMENT

After the coup d'etat in 1996 the regime of President Lukashenka turned into an open dictatorship. The legally elected Parliament (Supreme Council) is dismissed. All the branches of state power are under direct control of the President. The President appoints all ministers, local officials and judges at all levels. He appointed the deputies of the so-called National Assembly, which replaced the legally elected Parliament. Presidential decrees have more power than the laws of Belarus. All economic and social reforms in the country have been stopped. Even the banking sphere is under state control, that is why there are three currency exchange rates. The state controls also electronic and 90 published mass media. All opposition parties and organizations are persecuted. Peaceful actions of protest are suppressed by force and the participants of these actions are often arrested and put into prison. More than 1000 people have become the victims of political repression.

The foreign policy of Lukashenka's regime is the greatest danger to the existence of the independent Belarusian state. This policy is characterized by aggressive anti-Western orientation. The steps are taken to incorporate Belarus into Russia. The transit of Russian oil and gas through the territory of Belarus is free of charge. Belarus also keeps Russian military bases free of charge and doesn't demand any compensation for pollution of a quarter of Belarusian terrain that is contaminated with harmful substances. President Lukashenka doesn't hide intentions of his participation in the presidential election of renewed Russian empire after incorporating Belarus into it.

This policy that betrays national interests is accompanied by demagogical propaganda. It repeats ideological cliches of Russian autocracy about “Orthodox-Slavonic brotherhood” and about the special historical way of east-Slavonic peoples alien to Western culture. Professing Slavonic chauvinism and imperial revanchism, the regime suppresses Belarusian education and culture. There is a single high school in the capital where the local population can obtain the education in the native language and there are not higher educational establishments with instruction in Belarusian. Lukashenka's regime put the national symbols—the flag and the coat of arms beyond the law and changed them on the old Communist symbols.

All the mentioned facts prove the puppet nature of Belarusian regime. It's supported by all chauvinistic and pro-imperialistic Russian movements. The coup d'etat in 1996 was carried out with the direct help of Moscow government that acknowledged its results at once.

The leadership of BPF greets the consequent position of the US Government and Congress to the illegitimate regime in Belarus. We are deeply convinced that it was US position that influenced the decision to stop financial aid to Belarusian Government as well as the OSCE's decision to send in Minsk a consultant-observing group.

The measures taken gave necessary effect. The economic situation of the regime has deteriorated and its representatives started talking about the possibility of election. It's that any elections are unacceptable if they contribute to international recognition of Lukashenka's regime and his Constitution.

According to the Constitution of 1994 in 1999 the president election must be held. They will promote democratization of political situation provided they are held in conditions, that can guarantee free and conscious choice of people. It's necessary to stop political repression, to free mass media from state control and to create election commissions with representatives of opposition parties. It's unacceptable to carry out referendum and election in joint Russian-Belarusan organs.

We hope that the position of Congress and US Government will not change whatever tricks Lukashenka's puppet regime and his Moscow patrons would resort to. We also hope, that the USA will not recognize de-iure incorporation of Belarus into Russia carried out by the present regime.

The Belarusan Popular Front is the first and the most numerous democratic organization in Belarus in the conditions of growing threat to the independence of our country. It is trying to unite all forces that are in opposition to Lukashenka's regime and that all humane moral values—those of liberty and the right of a human and of a nation to exist as an independent state. We will defend these principals with all legal methods available to us.

Lavon Barsceuski
Executive Chairman
Yury Khadyka
Vice Chairman