

The Current Situation in Belarus



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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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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1996

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC

The Commission met, pursuant to adjournment, at 2:02 p.m., in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, Sam Wise, International Policy Director of the Commission, moderating.

Mr. *Wise*. We will begin. My name is Sam Wise. I'm the International Policy Director for the Helsinki Commission, or the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

I welcome you all here today at this briefing of the Commission on behalf of our chairmen, Representative Christopher Smith from New Jersey and Senator Alfonse D'Amato from New York, and the other congressional commissioners, all of whom are busy with other things in these days preceding the election and could not be present. But we thought this was such an important and timely subject that we should have a briefing such as we are having today which we can do here on the staff level. We feel very fortunate that we have been able to assemble a distinguished group of panelists who I will introduce with more words in a few minutes.

Over the last few years now Belarus has shown signs of serious deterioration in the political and economic situation as growing authoritarianism and repression of human rights have become the subject of increasing concern both within and outside Belarus. Since the election of 1994 there has been ever greater centralization of power, especially at the expense of the Belarusian parliament and the Constitutional Court.

Basic rights and freedoms, freedom of expression, assembly, and association have all come under increasing assault in clear violation of Belarus' freely undertaken commitments under the OSCE. The government has virtually destroyed the ability of independent media to operate and has hampered opposition access to the press. Indeed, we see a chilling pattern of press intimidation, harassment and censorship. The president's draft constitution fails to provide any semblance of separation of powers and rule of law.

In short, Belarus is moving in a direction opposite that of virtually all its neighbors, a point which was recently noted by Congress when it urged that no U.S. assistance go directly to the current Government of Belarus.

Now I am very pleased to introduce our distinguished panelists who will examine the volatile political and human rights situation in Belarus and focus on the controversial upcoming November 24th constitutional referendum.

Our first speaker will be Zyanon Paznyak who has been chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front coalition of democratic groups in Belarus since 1988. From 1990 to 1995, he was a member of parliament and leader of the parliamentary opposition. An art historian-archeologist while a member of the Institute of History of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Paznyak discovered and investigated a series of mass graves dating from the 1930's in the Kuropaty Forest near Minsk. Under threat of arrest in Belarus, Dr. Paznyak

along with Siargey Navumchik, the Belarusian Popular Front press secretary, was granted asylum in the United States in August of this year.

Our next speaker will be Jack Segal, who is director of Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Moldovan Affairs at the State Department. Previously he has served as chief of staff to the Undersecretary of State, Lynn Davis. In December 1993, Mr. Segal opened the U.S. mission in Yekaterinburg, Russia. His other assignments have included Tel Aviv, Athens, Botswana, U.S. START delegation and, in the days when it existed, the Soviet Desk. Mr. Segal served two tours with the Army in Vietnam.

Next will be Mr. Jan Zaprudnik, the former correspondent, producer and editor at Radio Liberty's Belarusian service. Dr. Zaprudnik, who holds a Ph.D. in history from New York University, has taught at Queens College and at Columbia University's Harriman Institute. He is author of numerous publications on Belarus and has been the editor of several periodicals on Belarus.

Our final speaker will be Antti Korkeakivi, a native of Finland, who is a specialist on international human rights law and constitutional law in the former Soviet Union. He holds law degrees from Helsinki University and from Columbia University. He joined the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights in 1994 and since May 1996 has been the Committee's legal advisor on the CIS.

Before turning to our first speaker, I will give you an idea of our format if you haven't been at our briefings before. We will have the four presentations and then we will open up the floor to questions from the audience at which time I would ask you all to use that microphone in the middle because we are transcribing the proceedings today. We will have a written transcription to publish later. Also, after being recognized by me, please give your name and organizational affinity if any.

Now I turn the floor over to Mr. Paznyak whose words will be interpreted by Mr. Vitaut Kipel.

Mr. Paznyak. [Through interpreter] Ladies and gentleman, it is a real pleasure for me to greet you in the name of the Belarusian Popular Front and the Pen Center (Minsk) Helsinki Committee. Maybe translation will take a little bit longer than my original.

The lawless regime in Belarus began to be formed immediately after the former chairman of the collective farm and the former member of the KGB, Mr. Lukashenko, was elected president. The base for his government were mainly former KGB members, former military personnel and many, many retired military persons living in Belarus.

Immediately when he became the President of Belarus, he started the policy against everything which was Belarusian. Basically, Mr. Lukashenko started a campaign against the Belarusian administration, Belarusian language, Belarusian economy and, above all, people thinking Belarusian.

The former Communists of the USSR were carrying on a Russification policy in Belarus, but Mr. Lukashenko surpassed in the speed of the Russification. In Minsk there were 218 schools with the Belarusian language as the language of instruction in 1994. Right now, only about 100 remain open.

Also, what Mr. Lukashenko began to do immediately after he became the president was to replace the key positions in his administration with people who were imported to Belarus from Moscow.

In the year 1995-1996 Belarusian schools and Belarusian administration decreased

drastically, and practically there is no Belarusian spoken in the administration right now. People are persecuted because they speak Belarusian in the street. People are persecuted if they wear the white-red-white national flag. People are persecuted if they wear the national symbol, Pahonia, as well as other national ethnic ornaments.

Mr. Yuri Maroz from Vitebsk was beaten up in Vitebsk by special forces of the president only because he addressed them in the Belarusian language. The same thing happened to Mr. Mikola Valui from the Vileika region where his apartment was ransacked by special forces for the only reason that he decided to show the white-red-white flag.

During the demonstration last spring, people were arrested only because they were speaking Belarusian and special forces of AMON were trying to listen in subways, and other transportation systems, how people spoke. If they were speaking Belarusian, they were arrested.

This was noticed by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Pen Center as well as Belarusian Association of Journalists, and the results were published in the newspaper, *Nasha Slovo*, the issue of June 26th last summer.

These policies of President Lukashenko against the Belarusian language are well documented in many Belarusian-language newspapers which unfortunately are published outside of Belarus. Documentation is especially important in the newspaper, *Svoboda*, which is also published outside the Belarus in Vilna.

One of the contributors who writes in the newspaper *Svoboda* says, "Although I am Russian by nationality, I know the Belarusian language, I read many books about Belarus, I studied the Belarusian language, and I like it. I live in Belarus, and I feel that I have to be Belarusian speaking. It is really strange that President Lukashenko himself being born in Belarus began his actions against the Belarusian language. Apparently he is trying to have his models as Stalin and Hitler with their hate toward everything that was national."

It is very important to emphasize that the personnel which are being assembled right now within the presidential administration is mostly being imported from Russia and is of Russian nationality.

Human rights are totally ignored. People are kept in jails for months. They cannot see their lawyers, their depositions are falsified, and they are being detained for months and months without being allowed to get medical treatment.

Wiretapping is a normal occurrence of the present administration. Members of parliament, various high-ranking officials are wiretapped and telephones are installed by special forces. Censorship is flourishing. Presidential control is total over the newspapers and all communication media. Special forces of the president are threatening the journalists who are trying to publish objective reports about the situation in the country.

Lukashenko ignores totally all the laws which were written before him and Lukashenko acts as a dictator right now. An example which was cited in *Svoboda* newspaper last June: Mr. Mikola Vului, former worker of the Minsk subway system, died because of persecution by the administration. People don't receive their salary for 6 months.

All the environmental control laws are being violated and nobody pays any attention to the pollution. One of the latest directives of Mr. Lukashenko is to carry out war games in the Chernobyl zone.

To act the way Mr. Lukashenko acts against his own people proves nothing else but that the person is totally crazy and is a sick person—although we can understand that because he

wants to monopolize his power. Apparently Mr. Lukashenko gets support from Russia. This past June, vice chairman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Mr. Boris Pastukhov, directed an appeal to the Russian Duma not to analyze violations of human rights in Belarus because, according to Mr. Pastukhov, the Belarusian democratic opposition is working with the West and will punish the administration of Belarus which is nothing else but punishment for cooperation with Russia.

Further, the Russian Government support for the policies of Mr. Lukashenko is a violation of any international law, any law of the Republic of Belarus. There is no question that Mr. Lukashenko and his administration violated the following paragraphs of the constitution and the code of law 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 20, 23, 26, as well as Universal Declaration of Human Rights paragraphs 25, 26, 28 and so on and so on. All together about 2,000.

Unquestionably, this is proof that the lawless regime of Mr. Lukashenko certainly is a menace to the Belarusian people and the Belarusian state. However, violation of human rights shouldn't be a problem of one country. Belarusian democracy hopes and counts on understanding and support from people of good will in the entire world.

Thank you very much.

Mr. *Wise*. Thank you, Mr. Paznyak.

Mr. *Segal*.

Mr. *Segal*. Thank you very much. Before I begin if I could invite those who are jammed in the corner to come on in the room. There are a couple of places to sit. I'm sure our esteemed Commission members would not mind if we used their chairs. Come on in and have a seat. We have a long way to go and you don't look very comfortable there all squeezed together.

Thank you very much. I would like to thank the Commission for giving me the opportunity to describe how the U. S. Government views the situation in Belarus and to discuss some of the principles behind the relationship between the United States and the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Paznyak has already spoken, to some extent, about the human rights situation, and I'm sure others today will. My purpose is to put that issue into the broader context of our overall bilateral relationship and the role Belarus can and should play in Europe. As most of you know, Belarus, by virtue of its geographic location, has been an important crossroads for trade and commerce, a bridge between Russia and the lands to the west.

That geographic position has also, unfortunately, made Belarus a battlefield over the centuries. In World War II, Belarus suffered unspeakable destruction, and did not recover to its pre-war population until 1971. Before and after the war, the Stalinist secret police conducted purges that still defy comprehension. Mass graves discovered near Minsk in June 1988 by my colleague, may contain the remains of more than 250,000 victims.

In April 1986, the disaster at Chornobyl laid waste to nearly 20 percent of Belarus' agricultural land, and left a legacy of disease and hardship that will continue for the foreseeable future. Against this depressing background of war, terror and destruction, and after 70 years of Soviet mismanagement, it is hardly any wonder that Belarus lacks a sound foundation on which to build an entirely new and unfamiliar political and economic system.

With independence in 1991, Belarus undertook the challenge of building a new state that might provide a beginning for a country and a people that have known only hardship and tragedy. Results have been mixed. The majority of Belarusians remain largely apathetic to national politics, as Belarusian history has given most people little reason to believe they

could influence events in their own country. Today, the political character of Belarus as a nation hangs in the balance, with the issues of freedom of expression, human rights and separation of powers at the center of the debate.

The first principle that the United States uses in deciding the kind of relationship we want to have with any country is that country's approach to basic human freedoms. It is true that we have diplomatic relations with countries that do not respect human rights, but those relations generally are extremely limited and usually not fruitful. Some countries, such as Libya, pursue policies that are so inimical to our principles that we have virtually no relations with them.

With the new countries that emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union, our principles have included encouraging the development of democratic political systems, free market economies and the rule of law. We are convinced that these principles will help these new states create an environment that will take full advantage of the bountiful intellectual and natural resources that they possess. Central to the development of the human potential of any state is a respect for basic human rights and a legal system designed to protect those rights.

Since independence, Belarus has made some halting steps in the direction of building a democratic system, but the results have not been satisfactory. The United States made its views on this issue clear in the State Department's 1995 *Report on Human Rights Practises*, which stated, "The government's human rights record worsened markedly as Belarus turned back toward Soviet-era authoritarian practices."

Now, let us agree, for a moment, that Belarus has not yet pursued the kinds of policies that we believe will lead to successful integration into the new order evolving in Europe. Does this mean that we should turn our backs on Belarus? We think not. The United States seeks friendly, constructive relations with Belarus. We have no interest in isolating Belarus, and we very much want to assist Belarus' integration into the political and economic systems that are emerging in the post-Cold War era. We can not afford to ignore events in Belarus. Its strategic location was crucial over the centuries and remains so today.

We also do not seek to control events in Belarus; that is not an option for the United States or any other country. So we must work with the tools available to influence events by providing advice, comments and assistance, and by showing the way to a better future.

One area of cooperation between our two countries involves the Russian nuclear forces that were based in Belarus, and the few that have yet to be withdrawn. The United States began, immediately after independence, to work with the Government of Belarus to address this problem through a variety of assistance programs. We provide significant assistance for cooperative threat reduction under the program created by Senators Nunn and Lugar and generously supported by both houses and both parties. From 1992 to 1996, that program allocated \$114 million for a long list of programs in Belarus.

There have been important steps taken with respect to these weapons by the Government of Belarus, as well. The March 30, 1994 constitution declared Belarus a neutral non-nuclear state. Thereafter, Belarus agreed to join the START treaty regimen and to sign the nuclear non-proliferation pact. Today, Belarus is on schedule to remove the last Russian nuclear weapons from its soil by the end of this year. That will mean that the breakup of the Soviet Union produced not four, but one, nuclear armed state, a most significant achievement for all five states involved—the United States, Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Be-

larus.

Another basic principle I mentioned was to encourage the development of market-based economies. Belarus' economy has performed poorly since independence, and the decline has accelerated recently. The government has moved too slowly toward privatization and economic reform. This has placed Belarus outside the mainstream of economic activity in the new Europe and, if continued, will relegate Belarus to economic contraction, while its reforming neighbors begin to grow. The United States does what it can to persuade the government to reexamine its economic policies. We worked diligently with Belarusian Government officials to engineer a World Bank/IMF economic restructuring package in the fall of 1995, but within a few months, Belarus had reneged on that agreement, and it was suspended.

The Belarusian economy is in very precarious shape right now, and the government needs to act quickly to reverse the current trends. Earlier this month the U.S. Government told Belarusian leaders that we are ready to continue working with them, but only if Belarus returns to the economic measures called for in the suspended IMF/World Bank agreement.

Another principle in our relationship with Belarus has been to engage in a dialog on political reform. Since the July 1994 election that brought President Lukashenko to power, Belarus' political relations with the United States—and indeed with many other democracies—have become increasingly complex. President Lukashenko is a popular leader with a loyal following among many elements of society, particularly the elderly and the rural population. His popularity gives him an opportunity to take Belarus in a new direction if he so chooses.

At the moment, Belarus is at a crucial juncture. Nothing less than the future of democracy and the nature of Belarus' economy is at stake in the political events that presently dominate our view of Belarus. For the past few months, two competing visions of Belarus' future have come into play in the form of referenda questions on constitutional change. When this situation began to emerge, it became clear to us that a free and fair debate of the merits of the two alternative views was crucial to the validity of the outcome. Without such a debate, rifts in Belarusian society would worsen, and crucial questions of political and economic development would remain unresolved.

We sought, in many ways, to convince the government to open the debate and make the airwaves accessible to competing points of view. But the government had become increasingly intolerant of opposition and criticism and was exercising a virtual information blockade against its critics on the all-important national television and radio networks. The United States expressed its dissatisfaction with these policies repeatedly—privately at first, and when that failed to have any effect, publicly as well. We are not trying to dictate what form of government or economy the people of Belarus might choose, but a fair choice comes only when certain minimal standards are observed, including: access to communications for the opposition as well as the government; a tolerant political environment that permits real dialog and excludes politically motivated violence against anyone wishing to exercise their right to free expression.

It remains our view that any referendum conducted in a virtual news blackout would not be credible and would constitute a violation of human rights. This is not just the view of the U.S. Government; the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and many other governments have clearly and publicly expressed this same view.

Again, let me emphasize that the United States and the other democracies of the OSCE

want to see Belarus have good relations with all nations, east and west, north and south. We have serious concerns about the internal situation of Belarus, but we have learned over the years that isolation is the slowest, most painful way to convince another country to change its approach. Instead we seek dialog and movement toward genuine compromise in resolving Belarus' internal differences, especially now.

As you know, on October 19th, President Lukashenko spoke to an assembly of his supporters and discussed his proposals for changing the structure of government. He indicated that he intended to modify some of his earlier positions. We are observing this process with great interest. Although the body he was addressing, the All-Belarusian People's Congress, has no status in the Belarusian legal context, we will be interested to see whether and how he conveys his proposals to the Belarusian Parliament.

Let me be clear that the U. S. Government has not, and is not today, taking a position in opposition to or on the side of the president of Belarus or the Belarusian Parliament, nor is the United States attempting to dictate to Belarus. Rather, we are seeking Belarus' compliance with the democratic principles it undertook to uphold as a member of the OSCE. What we seek is an open and fair political process that meets the standards that any country that says it supports democracy and human rights must meet.

What we have called for is meaningful dialog between the president and parliament and what we have urged is conciliation and nation-building, rather than confrontation and division. We are not arguing that the current Belarusian Constitution cannot be changed, but we stand by the principle that adherence to the constitutional norms is essential to democracy. Constitutional changes must protect checks and balances, the separation of powers and the rule of law. The government's current proposal fails to do that. This is not just the view of the government of the United States, again, but of numerous legal scholars, international organizations and other governments.

Authoritarian government is a thing of the past in Europe. Any return to such government would isolate a country and would surely bring about that country's economic ruin. There is still time for the leaders of the Belarusian Government and Parliament to come together and find a course of action that does not exacerbate the divisions already plaguing Belarus. As a government, the United States has a stake in this and hopes that all parties will seize the opportunity that lies before them.

Thank you.

Mr. *Wise*. Thank you, Mr. Segal.

Mr. *Zaprudnik*.

Mr. *Zaprudnik*. I'm grateful to the Commission for this opportunity to talk to you about what's going on in Belarus. I'll give you a personal account. Since 1991 I've been visiting Belarus once or twice a year, participating in conferences and seminars, visiting relatives and friends. On three different occasions, I went to Minsk as a member of an American non-governmental team whose task was to enhance American-Belarusian understanding and cooperation. Each time I have gone to Minsk I have had the opportunity to meet high-ranking and mid-level officials as well as members of the intelligentsia and to discuss with them issues connected with Belarus' role to independence and democracy.

Such discussions were facilitated by my long-standing engagement in cultural and political activities of the Belarusian diaspora and by interest in these activities among those living in Belarus. With this 6-year retrospective in mind, I must say that the economic,

political and cultural reality in Belarus is growing more and more somber. During this year's stay in Minsk in September and October, for the first time in 6 years, I saw young mothers with a child on their lap begging for rubles. As the economy stagnates in the grip of governmental regulations and controls, the ruble itself is losing ground. The ratio to the dollar jumped from 11,500 rubles last year to 19,000 rubles this year, and I was told by my colleague from Cleveland, who has a reliable source from Belarus, that between last Friday and Monday it jumped to 23,000 rubles to a dollar. To patch up holes in the budget, the government sees no other way than to print more paper money.

True, stores in Minsk and other big cities are well-stocked with goods—mostly imported—but prices are prohibitive for the local shopper, and they keep rising by the day. It is impossible to maintain a family budget. At the flea market in Minsk I saw scores of women and old men, standing in silent rows, selling their belongings to make ends meet. Hospitals are bare of sheets, robes and blankets; prospective patients have to take with them their own items from home.

On the day of my arrival in Minsk, September 21st, a cold day, buildings were still unheated forcing residents to sleep in their street clothing. Of about a dozen people whom I called upon my arrival in Minsk, more than half had colds—some of them had no aspirin. According to the well-known economist Nikolai Bobritski, during the 2 years of the Lukashenko rule, the level of the population's standard of living had declined by 40 percent.

To stifle the growing opposition's criticism of the government for this rapid decline, the president's administration is using a wide range of pressure tactics—bribing with promotions and job offers, blackmailing, threatening with dismissal from work; implying harm to family members and so on. "Our country stands on the brink of a fascist dictatorship," this is an opening sentence of a lengthy appeal to the people of Belarus by the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus, Semen Sharetsky. Permission was not granted for the appeal to be aired over the National TV and radio channels. It was published in the opposition newspaper, *Narodnaya Volya*. The newspaper has been banished by the Lukashenko government from Belarus and is published in neighboring Lithuania. True, it's sold mostly by old women on the streets of Minsk.

Lukashenko has tried—purges are going on in colleges and editorial boards in order to consolidate the ideological control and political power. President Lukashenko's method of running the nation and succeeding to retain popularity is relatively simple: Blame the enemy—the parliament, the opposition parties, the liberal Russian media, the West, the CIA—through the monopolized media and press. Surrounded by colonels of the ex-Soviet and Russian intelligence services, Lukashenko has maintained his popularity by feeding the public his collaborators, castigating and firing ministers, department heads, blaming them, along with the parliament and the opposition, for disorder and the declining standard of living. As independent polls indicate, a large percentage of the population believes him. Folks in the country blame bad officials who get in the way of a good president for their misery.

On this occasion, the vice speaker of the parliament, Mr. Vasily Novikov, remarked, "In the mind of the president, a state official is like a throwaway syringe, to be used and discarded." But moral capital is a finite commodity, even with the patient Belarusian voter. Recently, the speaker of the parliament, Semen Sharetsky, took first place in popularity polls, with Lukashenko's popularity still hovering at 40 percent. Lukashenko has paid another price for buying off his popularity by firing officials and replacing them with those

trying to please him—the professionalism of his administration has been steadily declining. The competence level of the president's administration is sinking along with the economy.

The government's oppressive tactics has its psychological concomitant: fear. Fear has again begun to permeate the society where memories of the Stalinist times are painfully vivid. Mr. Vasily Novikov, again, first deputy speaker of the parliament—he is also chairman of the Communist Party of Belarus—describes the present executive branch of the Government of Belarus as a junta. “The size of the security forces of the Ministry of the Interior has sharply increased. The number of spies in the organs of state controls has grown greatly. New specialized militarized units of the Alpha type have been spawned. A secret security service 200 bayonets strong has emerged, and so on and so forth.”

Fear, as a repercussion of intimidation, has reached the top of the power pyramid. Eyewitnesses say, according to Novikov, that Lukashenko “not always decides to open himself his refrigerator.”

“Moreover,” Mr. Novikov continues, “within the strictly civil presidential structures, again and again one runs into former KGB, MVD and army men. Colonels are sitting throughout the peaceful managerial offices. Surreptitious filming of officials is practiced with impunity. Official and private telephones are monitored, including those of the chairman of the Constitutional Court. The local Watergate has intruded into the untouchable embassy buildings of major Western nations.”

And here is a sentence from the appeal to all Belarusian and foreign mass media of October, this year, signed by leaders of 21 parties and organizations: “Ideological brainwashing, the manipulation of public opinion and the art of provocation have been raised to the level of governmental policy.”

The majority of the intelligentsia, the urban population and the youth have given up hope that President Lukashenko will lead the nation out of the deepening abyss of misery. The only segment of the population where the populist president is holding his ground, are conservative deputies, as it was said here already, of the parliament and some local officials who support Lukashenko mainly for reasons of job security, and the rural population, whose views are shaped by the monopolized official media.

According to some experts, only 10 to 15 percent of the newspaper market belongs to the independent publications, and not a single radio or TV station. Quite recently, an independent youth radio station, 101.2, which used independent news sources, has been closed and obviously it stands very little chance to be reopened again. There are, of course, Radio Liberty's broadcasts into Belarus, but very unfortunately the Voice of America still balks at Belarusian language programs, which are very badly needed right now. One must say that Russia's TV and liberal newspapers cover some events that Lukashenko's censors would like to stifle.

When I went to Minsk, I hoped that the translation of my book, which was published here in 1993 by Westview Press, “Belarus at the Crossroads in History,” will be published; it had been translated into Belarusian language. Because the book was published in 1993, I wrote one more chapter, the so-called Lukashenko chapter. At the last moment the publication was blocked because the general manager of the huge printing plant refused. The general manager said, “Either you take off the last chapter, or I get a written permission from the appropriate authorities to run the book.” Naturally, we refused to remove the Lukashenko chapter—that is, my publishers and I refused—and now we are looking desperately for another plant that probably would run it off. There is a certain amount of freedom there to do

such things. But, anyhow, here is an example of how far the censorship has reached.

Many young people in Minsk display contempt for the regime and favor national rebirth, democracy and independence. Here is a quote from a letter, written to me by a young student in September. "I would like to note that a wave of political persecution in the spring of this year caused an unheard of growth in the ranks of the Belarusian Popular Front. For example, only during the BPF meeting on June 22nd—that's the anniversary of Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union—nearly 170 people formally joined the BPF. Almost the same number enrolled during the meeting on July 27th—that's the independence anniversary that Lukashenko would like to get rid of—besides, a considerable number of persons joined separately youth section of the BPF, Belarusian Popular Front." I am sure Mr. Paznyak would be happy to hear this news.

The speaker of parliament, Semen Sharetsky, resisting President Lukashenko's political course, called on the young people of Belarus, "to do everything to prevent turning our wonderful country into a concentration camp." Indeed, young people are increasingly active on behalf of democratization, freedom of speech, Belarusian nationhood and cultural rebirth. Herein lies the hope for Belarus' survival as a free, independent and democratic member of the international community.

The European Parliament, as you might have heard, recently appealed to President Lukashenko and the Belarusian Parliament to establish democratic and economic reform to ensure essential freedoms and rights. No further steps toward ratification of any European Union agreement with Belarus will be taken until Belarus does so.

I'd like to briefly describe to you my listening to a concert of bard songs—there was a 3-day festival of bard songs in Minsk, held in a huge labor union palace. I went only once there. The first day the master of ceremonies spoke in Belarusian and all the songs were in Belarusian, with a very strong political context. Each time Lukashenko was mentioned, sometimes even derogatively or by implication, young people—and the whole theater was full of them, with soldiers sitting at the stage, next to the stage—young people would wave red-white-red national flags that Lukashenko banned, and would applaud any critical reference to him.

On the third day, I was told that special forces entered the theater and there was some squabbling and maybe arrests—I don't know—but anyhow, this is a very hopeful indication that not entire Belarus is apathetic. There is a young generation growing who are more and more critical, and more and more willing to express their thoughts and act on them. So at least the press people should have it in mind that not everything has been lost in there.

I'd like to conclude with a quote from the appeal to all Belarusian and foreign mass media, meaning you, ladies and gentleman: "We appeal to all foreign mass media, all foreign journalists, with a request to provide more often and more detailed information on events taking place in the Republic of Belarus, thus informing the world community about the real situation in Belarus. We cannot exclude the possibility that the Lukashenko-proposed constitution might be declared as approved nationwide. As a result, President Lukashenko would acquire unlimited dictatorial powers."

So there is hope, and I think events like this one are a very sure way to enhance those hopes and to help those who fight in Belarus for the rights, human and national.

Thank you.

Mr. *Wise*. Thank you, Mr. Zaprudnik.

And now, Mr. Korkeakivi.

Mr. *Korkeakivi*. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, let me thank the Commission for holding this important event and for giving me and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights the opportunity to comment on the draft constitution of Belarus from the human rights perspective. I would like to keep my comments short and ask the audience to read our written report for a more detailed analysis of the draft constitution.

Three years ago I wrote a human rights analysis of the draft constitution of Russia, and I and many others were quite concerned about the powers of the president and thought that they presented a threat to the human rights provisions of that draft. Although the presidential powers have indeed since then produced a number of serious human rights violations in Russia, the presidential draft constitution of Belarus makes the Russian constitutional system look almost like a model of parliamentarism.

The draft constitution of Belarus puts forth a system that really undermines the other two branches of power so effectively that the president can interpret human rights provisions without any real checks. Now, this would be less disturbing if the executive power were known for its commitment to human rights, but within the context of Belarus, as the previous speakers have explained, this is not the case, and it is precisely the executive power that has repeatedly ignored both international and national human rights standards. The victims of these violations have been in particular the members of the opposition and representatives of the media and trade unions, but other segments of society have also been affected.

So far these violations have constituted violations of Belarus' Constitution, but the adoption of the draft constitution would mean that many of these violations could easily be justified with a biased reading of the constitution's human rights provisions. There would be nobody to counter the executive's interpretation of the constitution, because those forces that have so far been there to challenge, albeit with little results, the president's actions—most notably the Constitutional Court and the parliament—are under the draft, a) placed under direct control of the president in many ways, and b) given so few powers that they cannot take meaningful measures on many essential human rights questions. In short, the draft constitution would take Belarus toward what the chairman of the Constitutional Court described as the Chornobyl of law.

Many of the human rights problems of the draft derive from the fact that the president is granted the right to issue decrees that have the status of law. This, together with other provisions, means that the president can further limit the protection of constitutional rights, if he thinks—or pretends to think—that it is in the state's interest. For instance, Article 23 of the draft constitution states that all rights included in the constitution can be limited in the cases stipulated by laws—that is something that he can do now—in the interests of national security, public order, protection of citizens' morality and health, as well as the rights and freedoms of other persons. The fact that there is such a wide range of grounds that the president can invoke to justify limitations of individual rights is significant when one considers the creativeness of President Lukashenko in this field.

Even though he is not as of yet entitled to limit constitutional rights by himself, in July of this year, Lukashenko, for instance, explained that a ban on public meetings and demonstrations was necessary during the time peasants were in the field to support the harvest in the country. If the draft is adopted, he may argue that a similar ban is constitutional, as it

protects, for instance, citizens' health. It must be noted that all the rights in the draft are subject to such limitations, and that is in conflict with international human rights treaties Belarus has adopted, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which, for instance, does not allow limitations on the right to be free from torture, et cetera. These are so-called absolute rights, and in the draft constitution there is no such concept.

Of the potential checks on the president, the powers of the legislature have been amputated most severely. Parliament is denied most of the tools it can now try to use to control the president, and even the few tools it still would have under the draft would to a large extent belong to the upper house of parliament. But the upper house of the parliament is a new body, one third of the members of which would be appointed directly by the president. So much for the separation of powers there.

On the other hand, the draft constitution enables the president to dissolve parliament quite easily, while it makes it almost impossible for parliament to impeach the president for serious offenses. But in fact the adoption of the draft constitution would mean that the president would not have to bother to dissolve the parliament to have his way. This is due to the fact that the draft constitution turns the current norm-hierarchy upside down and makes the president in effect a supralegisature. It is not difficult to guess whether the current president, acting as a supralegisature, would be interested in pursuing such human rights-related law projects as the one on an independent human rights commissioner, or ombudsman, of Belarus, a project that has been discussed in the current parliament.

One of the most disturbing features of the draft constitution is its treatment of the judiciary. In particular, the draft seriously undercuts the independence and the powers of the Constitutional Court of Belarus. This is hardly surprising when one considers the fact that the Constitutional Court has found numerous presidential decrees and directives unconstitutional. True, the president has totally ignored these rulings, but at least they have created forceful further evidence of the president's disregard of the current constitution he once voted for and of his attitude toward the rule of law in general.

To create a court that is obedient to the president, the drafters of the constitution have changed relevant norms so that the current rule according to which judges of the Constitutional Court are elected by parliament has been discarded. Instead, the draft provides that the president will appoint the chairman and five judges of the Constitutional Court, and given that it is a 12-member court, it's easy to conclude that the presidential appointees will control the work of the court. Moreover, the additional six members of the court will be appointed by the upper house of the parliament, which again is a body that is at least partly controlled by the president.

The drafters have also deleted Article 126 of the current constitution, which prohibits direct or indirect pressure on the Constitutional Court or its members connected with activity pertaining to the exercise of constitutional supervision. At the same time, according to the draft, the president has the power to stipulate the basis for dismissal of judges—not only Constitutional Court judges, but all judges—through his power to issue decrees that have the status of law.

These provisions and such changes as the elimination of the immunity of the members of the Constitutional Court led me, at least, to conclude that the Constitutional Court, that is envisioned in the draft, would hardly be an effective watchdog of the government, but rather a rubberstamp of his decrees. I would like to stress that the future of the Constitutional

Court is very important, especially since it is, to a large extent, alone in its attempt to maintain judicial control over the executive. Most regular courts in Belarus are still influenced by the legacy of the Soviet era and find it difficult, and virtually impossible, to rule against the executive power, even when its actions clearly violate human rights.

And I would also like to point out it is not only the content of the draft constitution that deserves criticism; the whole referendum process can also be challenged as illegal. True, Lukashenko stepped back from his earlier totally unconstitutional plan to hold the referendum on November 7th, instead of November 24th as scheduled by the parliament, but other problems persist. Most important, as you've learned today from previous speakers, the media environment is so restrictive that the fairness of the referendum is far from obvious. Both print and electronic media are controlled by the government to the extent that the opposition finds it very much impossible to deliver its views to the electorate. It is telling that, according to a recent poll, more than half the people in Belarus have never heard of the alternative draft constitution prepared by the Agrarians and the Communists. This draft, which would abolish the presidency altogether, will also be presented in the November 24 referendum.

Another point that casts doubt upon the constitutionality of the referendum is that, according to the current constitution, a referendum can result only in additions and/or amendments to the constitution. The presidential draft introduces such a complete redesign of the constitutional structure that it can be seen as a completely new constitution. The Constitutional Court is planning to examine the constitutionality of the draft constitution from this point of view later this week.

I would like to end by noting that, although I'm very pleased that Belarus is now getting relatively wide attention from the international community, the current wave of attention emerged only after the president decided to crown his methods of governance, which he has practiced for 2 years, in the constitution. It seems that, as long as the norms were OK, there was no international outcry, although human rights norms were violated right and left. I would also like to note that governments were not the only ones that repeatedly ignored Belarus. We international non-governmental organizations have also to pay more attention to this country. I hope that, no matter what happens with the referendum in November, this at least will change and that, in the future, Belarus and its human rights situation will be followed more closely by the West.

Thank you very much.

Mr. *Wise*. Thank you, Mr. Korkeakivi. Thank you all for your opening statements. As I said earlier, we're now at the point where we will have questions from you in the audience. I ask that you raise your hand, and I'll recognize you. Then please go up to the microphone there so that we can have it recorded, give your name and any organizational affiliation, and confine your remarks to questions, and not statements.

First one. Yes, sir?

Questioner. I'll try my best. It's a great pleasure. My name is Paul Wasilewski. I'm from Cleveland, Ohio. If perhaps I could have a moment, the president of the Belarusian-American Association, John Chenenko, and myself worked with Dr. Paznyak and Mr. Navumchik and Congressman Hoke on getting them political asylum in this country, which was a very tedious process.

If we wanted to keep this to questions, then perhaps I should direct this to Mr. Segal. Since April 28, I've been working on this issue—when John called me and let me know. I've

got a degree from Cleveland State University in International Relations. I was born into a Belarusian-American family. I'm real proud of my heritage, I'm very active in politics back in Cleveland. Since April, I have been working on this issue with John in our community almost daily. Fortunately, or unfortunately from my point of view, if it weren't for Dr. Paznyak getting out of Poland and coming to the United States and setting up an itinerary with local congressional and Senate leaders in Cleveland, I just don't feel any action would have been taken. We've done mass mailings to the State Department, to the president, and we haven't heard anything back on any kind of policy that the United States and this administration has toward Belarus.

And in dealing with Dr. Paznyak's asylum case, we learned that there is a foreign policy toward Russia, there's a foreign policy toward the Ukraine, but there is no foreign policy toward Belarus. In your own words—you know, I heard you say earlier that this administration's objectives were the free market, the rule of law, the human rights and the dialog on political reform, and media openness. You stated that you don't want to control and you don't want to have a say, but you also don't want Russia to have a say in Belarus politics either. That's the paradox: it seems that we're kowtowing toward the Russians but really not paying any attention to Belarus. We've seen this situation—this situation didn't deteriorate overnight. This situation that we're here to talk about has been over months and days. If you're saying that the State Department's objectives were to free the market and to open the media, I would consider it a failure that we're at this step today.

Could you tell me—and I can take this back to Cleveland—how are you going to reverse this when we're at this point right now? I guess that's the question.

Mr. *Wise*. Nice full question. Mr. Segal.

Mr. *Segal*. A very rich field in which to work. Thank you very much. I would have to point out that the context toward Belarus is our policy in general toward all of the countries of the former Soviet Union. The first problem that any person in my position faces is one of gaining attention—that is a bureaucratic fact, that countries that are not in a particularly newsworthy mode, if you will, tend to be neglected at the policy level from time to time. So they fall into a category of countries that are in a group of countries and looked at as a group—the former Soviet Union, the approach to a decline and then a disappearance of an empire.

Belarus was the focus of American attention from time to time. There was an active assistance program in Belarus. In 1 year, 1992, we allocated over \$100 million in assistance to Belarus. Belarus had a very difficult transition to democracy, or to what it has today, and that process in itself made it difficult to deal with Belarus. There were several different versions of Belarus, there were several changes of government that were very significant in their changes of direction. Belarus itself has not clearly defined its desires or its policies. It was certainly clear in the 1994 election that President Lukashenko was extremely popular. He received a very resounding vote of confidence from a large majority of the people. I can't assess for you whether they were well-informed or whether they were duped into voting for him, but they voted for him in an election that, by the standards applied to the former Soviet Union, was a reasonable set of elections.

The situation that we face today is obviously a very difficult one. Lukashenko's power and his authority and his popularity are still debatable subjects. Although the people in this room may agree that President Lukashenko has, let's say, significant shortcomings, that

may not be what you would hear if you went outside of Minsk, and we have had people traveling outside of Minsk, and they have come back with very varied reports on President Lukashenko's popularity. Inside Minsk I think you can find a reasonable debate, and I think you can find lots of people who will speak up against him, lots of young people who are energized and—or let's say, a lot of young people are apathetic and a lot of young people who are anti-government. I think, if you said to them, do you prefer the parliament over the president, they would laugh in your face, that they would see very little difference, that what they are looking for is not the parliament nor the president. They are looking for something completely new, and that is going to be a long time coming.

So I think all that we can do at this moment is focus on the possibilities and try to get the word out as best we can to present our policy as—it could hardly have been clearer than I stated it today—and to make sure that message gets to the Government of Belarus, and that's what we're doing today.

Mr. *Wise*. The question seemed to imply, also, some failure in U.S. policy because of the low status of Belarus' economic development; that if this was a goal of U.S. policy, then it failed.

Mr. *Segal*. Certainly, Belarus is lagging behind in every economic respect. The government's policies today are absolutely contrary to the development of a market-based economy. They are supporting an artificial exchange rate, the government is purchasing output from government factories and storing it, the government is maintaining price controls on certain items, the artificial exchange rate has priced Belarusian goods out of the marketplace where it had a market.

Numerous policies that we have outlined for them and that were a part of the IMF/World Bank package last year as being essential that these policies be changed or not implemented as they had proposed, have in fact gone in the wrong direction, and the result is an economy that is significantly worse. I certainly agree with the statements about the state of the economy that I've heard. The economy is in extremely bad shape, and is going down very rapidly.

So, yes, Belarus' economy is failing, but I don't think it's a question of our policies not working. It's a question of our policy recommendations not being followed in any way at all.

Mr. *Wise*. OK, other questions?

Yes, the lady over here. Please come around to the microphone, thank you.

Orest, I'd ask you, since the eyes in the back of my head are not too sharp, to see if there are any questions back there and let me know.

Questioner. Joan Beecher, Voice of America. My question is primarily for Mr. Segal, but anyone else who wishes to comment, I would certainly love to hear what they have to say.

It has to do with the accusation made by Mr. Ilyukhin—I guess it was in August—to the effect that the CIA had this great, big plot that cost \$245,000. I'm interested in the accuracy of that figure. Was there a formal State Department response to that? And also, later, I guess it was in September, Lukashenko himself made some comments to the effect that Western diplomats are trying to undermine, to subvert shall we say, his government. There was a formal protest, I guess, from the embassy in Minsk. Just, how—is that continuing, that sort of, shall we say, sniping from the Belarusians, and how are you handling that?

Thank you.

Mr. *Segal*. The undiplomatic messages we have been receiving publicly from the Gov-

ernment of Belarus have been the subject of private diplomatic conversations, and so I cannot go into those in any specific way. It is improper for any government or any president to make accusations, to be disrespectful to the representatives of another president, and that is exactly what our Ambassador in Minsk is, is the personal representative of the president of the United States. So any insults against him are insults against our president and are taken as such. That's all I'd like to say about that.

Mr. *Wise*. Any other comments? Yes?

Mr. *Korkeakivi*. I would just like to say that, in Lukashenko's recent statement, one of the ways in which, according to him, the U.S. Government is undermining the Government of Belarus is the production of a human rights report on Belarus—and it might come to him as news that the U.S. Government is producing such a report on every single country in the world. So I guess this undermining claim would be applicable to all governments, then, if this were the case.

Mr. SEGAL. If I could comment on that: No government should fear a human rights report—and a member of the OSCE in particular—that we will be doing, shortly, the next year's report on Belarus and all other countries. And, as I say, if the government and the system in that country is meeting its OSCE standards, there is nothing to be concerned about.

Mr. *Wise*. I'll add, too, for those who may not know, there'll be an OSCE review, of human rights and other commitments, in Vienna beginning next week, and I'm sure the situation in Belarus will be one of the main focal points of the discussion.

In the back, there.

Questioner. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Aaron Rhodes. I'm the director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, which works with the Helsinki Committee of Belarus very successfully, and in fact in the next couple of weeks, we're taking a group of representatives of human rights organizations from around Europe to Minsk. We hope to have a meeting concerning the situation.

But I have a question for you, Mr. Paznyak, which is I think of interest to the human rights community and also probably to the Helsinki Commission here. That is, in a government formed by your party—this is a very hypothetical situation, of course—what would be your policy toward minority groups, including Russians living in Belarus? And I have another small question: what's the possibility for a citizen of Belarus today to leave the country? What kinds of bureaucratic obstacles exist to leaving Belarus? Is an exit visa required, and so on?

Mr. *Wise*. A question for you, Mr. Paznyak.

Mr. *Paznyak*. [Through interpreter] Our position was clearly stated in regard to nationalities of Belarus. All minorities of Belarus will have the same rights as a majority of the population. Nationalities will have rights to open their schools and societies in their own languages. We were one of the first to initiate such a law, which passed in the Congress. The Belarusian Popular Front is formed according to civil rights of the citizens of Belarus. Belarusian Popular Front has representatives of all nationalities of Belarus, and while I have been in the United States, I recommended that the chair will be assumed by a person of Russian background. We have no conflicts based on problems of nationalities. It's precisely the Belarusian Popular Front that played the most important role that such a situation exists, although the present administration of President Lukashenko favors conflicts be-

tween Belarusians and Russians.

The second question: Formally it is relatively easy to leave Belarus. Unfortunately if the administration doesn't want a person to leave, it always finds the tools to not allow people to leave. President Lukashenko was planning to introduce a decree or a regulation that nobody can leave without personal authorization of his administration. President Lukashenko seemingly gave up such a measure, but it is only temporarily.

Mr. *Wise*. Mr. Rhodes, we had a conversation this morning with the last questioner, and I thought one of your main concerns was the difficulties in getting into Belarus if you are a group of 15 human rights experts.

ZAPRUDNIK. I think you did. [Laughter.]

Mr. *Wise*. Next question? Yes, sir.

Questioner. My name is Charles Flickner, and I am the clerk and staff director of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations here in the House. I believe the moderators cited some language in the Conference Report on the Foreign Ops bill for 1997, and that is the language requesting that Mr. Segal and his colleagues not fund the Government of Belarus.

And my question is particularly for the two panelists on the right and Mr. Paznyak. Should the United States—I'm not going to put Mr. Segal on the spot because he doesn't make the policy—or what would your advice to us on the Hill and to Mr. Segal and his colleagues be in regard to aid to Belarus, other than to the government, particularly regarding other types of assistance such as the Nunn-Lugar money—and there have now been two Nunn-Lugar programs—which has been the bulk of our money to Belarus?

And my recollection is that one of our first programs in Belarus was to settle permanently in Belarus, Russian missile officers, rather than as we did in the Baltics, build housing for them back in the Russian Federation. In the case of Belarus, we paid for and financed and subsidized housing in Belarus for Russian military officers.

But in general, the two questions are, what type of assistance would be appropriate in Belarus at this time, particularly not to the government, and second, does it make sense to do the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program or the Anti-Terrorism Program which has just been passed by Congress. What is your advice to us?

Mr. *Wise*. The question is essentially to Mr. Paznyak?

Mr. *Paznyak*. [Through interpreter] My point of view is that the United States can effectively help nongovernmental institutions, nongovernmental bodies, as this was done in Poland. By no means is it interference with the internal policies of Belarus. One of the major problems right now in Belarus is lack of free information or media, and two: We need information in Belarus.

In order to know what's going on, what's being said about Belarus, people are listening mostly to Radio Liberty. Since this past spring, the number of listeners to Radio Liberty increased over 50 percent. Basically, Radio Liberty was broadcasting from Prague one hour of news and various items repeated four times a day.

A real help would be if the United States would increase broadcasting in the one Belarusian language. This would mean people would have access to information.

Mr. *Wise*. Do you have a comment, Dr. Zaprudnik?

Mr. *Zaprudnik*. Yes. I would like to say that any Russian missile on the Belarusian territory would make Belarus hostage to some dangerous situations. I think they should be

removed. In the Lukashenko draft of the constitution, he speaks of nuclear arms-free Belarus, nuclear arms-free zone, and neutral. I think this is the way to follow.

The government recently has been trying very hard to gain control over any humanitarian assistance to Belarus. For instance, the medication sent and the other hospital items sent to Belarus by private organizations or religious-front organizations are under increasing pressure from the government to send it through governmental channels. I am sure there would be a lot of it siphoned off and used to bribe, to influence, to pressure.

What should be helped in Belarus, I think, are the NGOs. There are a lot of them and they are growing in spite of difficulties. During my conference in Minsk last September on civil society, I met a very energetic, young lady, 33-year-old, who is a member of the National Council of Youth Organizations. There are about 18 of them belonging to that council, and she told me that they have great difficulties operating because there is no fax, no telephone, almost nothing. They are running on mere enthusiasm. The youth movement being especially important as a trend, as a social, political and cultural trend, I think, should be supported by all means.

Of course, we are far away here from the military aspect of it, but this is part and parcel of the entire situation. So help should be provided, but there should be safeguards that none of it goes uncontrolled and used by the Lukashenko government to reinforce its own control over the society.

Mr. *Wise*. Mr. Korkeakivi?

Mr. *Korkeakivi*. Yeah, I would like to echo the previous speakers and to stress the importance of aid to the nongovernmental sector. And, of course, independent media outlets are one clear example of a sector that needs help. But also, nongovernmental organizations working in the field of human rights are certainly an area that needs help. There aren't too many of them, and they are really working with hardly any resources. Still, they are doing important things like trying to hold on to some of the human rights related laws that are still in place.

Also, I've read some reports according to which in the field of education, in the past, the old governmental structures have actually received more aid from the U.S. Government than independent, more reform-minded institutions. If this is really the case (and I have no details as to whether this is actually the case), it certainly looks to me like the wrong emphasis.

Mr. *Wise*. Mr. Segal has one point to add as well.

Mr. *Segal*. I think there is another category of assistance that needs to be looked at, and that is what I would call the "Chornobyl Outcome," that there is a very devastated part of Belarus that is an humanitarian issue for us and is a issue of whether there is technology and information that we can use and provide to Belarusians, let's say, who live in that region and who have been most affected by it.

And the second point is that we do have a very difficult decision process with regard to counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and counter-nuclear smuggling efforts because Belarus, whether we like it or not, is a crossroads and is, in fact, very much involved in the processes that we are trying to control. Frankly, I don't see how we can do it by blocking the Belarusian border on the eastern side and blocking it on the western side, and not looking at what is going on between the two.

So I think there is an issue. It is a very difficult one from a policy point of view simply because we will have to deal with the government in place, which ever one that happens to be.

Mr. *Wise*. Mr. Paznyak, please.

Mr. *Paznyak*. [Through interpreter] I want to emphasize that Mr. Lukashenko controls, probably, very tightly the budget, and even right now he makes attempt to control nongovernmental organizations. Mr. Lukashenko issued the decree, which for the first time controlled all Chornobyl military aid. Of course, I will name for you organizations which are not controlled by the president: Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Belarusian Pen Center, Belarusian Society of Independent Journalists, free trade unions which basically are outlawed, and the Chornobyl organization, Sakavik.

This has to be done very carefully because Lukashenko's administration has established Mafia-type control over all kinds of aid which are coming to Belarus. Belarusian society is very much worried right now that Belarus is becoming an area of important drug trafficking. If Lukashenko's administration will join to form a cartel with a drug trafficking group, this would be really a disaster for Belarus as well as for the rest of the free countries.

Mr. *Wise*. Yes.

Questioner. I'm Robin Saipe with the National Conference on Soviet Jewry. I have a technical question and I need some guidance. A number of our Jewish communities in the United States have been involved in humanitarian aid sending two types of aid—containers full of clothing and medicines. We were approached by one community here in the United States that has medical organizations that are willing to donate massive amounts of medicine, very particular types of medicines, and in that community there is a commercial business that is willing to ship the humanitarian aid with the commercial products.

The question I have is, what types of problems might we find at customs? And the reason I am asking is because in the past, all our humanitarian aid shipments, many of them—it's a great expense to those who receive it, the NGOs and the countries receiving, and it is an expense to those donating here. So this was perhaps a way to pull together a commercial venture with voluntary organization and, will it all unravel at customs, I guess is the question?

Mr. *Wise*. Who would like to answer—

Mr. *Paznyak*. [Through interpreter] You'll have problems at the border and you will have to pay a high price for a commercial product. Then you will have a problem with that product, and who will be the consumer of that product? President Lukashenko has already established a whole network of administrators who are profiting on precisely such humanitarian aid as you mentioned.

Because the Belarusian Popular Front was involved in precisely such problems and distributing humanitarian aid, it is my duty right now to warn you, it's not easy. You will have difficulty. You cannot send a shipment right to Belarus and feel that everything was done. You have to act very carefully.

Mr. *Wise*. Dr. Zaprudnik.

Mr. *Zaprudnik*. I'd like to add something. During my stay in Minsk the beginning of October, I spoke with a lady whom I know personally, Mrs. Maria Mitskevich, who is chair-lady of one of the organizations that Mr. Paznyak mentioned, helping children. She went with Chornobyl zone children to Ireland and Great Britain. Over 2 years, I think she accompanied almost 1,000 children for brief periods.

Recently she has received a number of children's clothing and dishes and forks, things that are badly needed, and she told me that she was told by the custom service to go to the

minister of finance, minister of justice, minister of this, minister of that—she named five ministers! But she has to go and to have documents stamped and approved because the goods had commercial value although they were meant as humanitarian aid for children. This is an example of what you encounter if you send, especially with addition of commercial goods. Bureaucratic barriers are unbelievable.

Questioner. This is the first time it was proposed that the humanitarian products be sent with commercial. We've never done that before.

Mr. Zaprudnik. They'll pass them through scores of bureaucrats before they get to their destination. Then you won't be sure that it'll get where you send it.

Mr. Wise. We've got a little more time. Any more questions? The second row. No, you.

Questioner. My name is Mary Mullen. I was just curious. I thought Belarus had some ties to Russia. Our schools wanted to have ties to Russia, and it seemed that they have developed quite separately. What is Belarus' relationship with Russia right now?

Mr. Wise. Who would like to—

Mr. Zaprudnik. I'd like to say a few words.

Mr. Wise. Dr. Zaprudnik?

Mr. Zaprudnik. Belarus' relationship with Russia is a vast subject. It started 10 centuries ago. But currently, formally Belarus is independent. It is a member of the CIS. There have been, I think, over 700 multilateral treaties signed by the CIS members, and according to the Ukrainian foreign minister, Udovenko, none of them works.

Recently, Belarus has signed a couple of bilateral treaties with Russia. None of them worked, although there are Russian military forces in Belarus because there are strategic arms in Belarus. There are probably around 30,000 Russian military in Belarus. There are certainly secret military bases, and there is an agreement allowing Russia to have two military bases in Belarus as a way of payment for the energy sources that Belarus needs. Belarus is energy-resources hungry. About 90 percent of their energy resources comes from Russia, and about 70 percent of goods that are produced in the Republic goes to the Russian market. So there is a very tight economic connection.

There are certainly religious ties because in Belarus, there is very influential exarchate of the Russian Orthodox church. There is demographic many interchange. There are many factors that tie them together, and especially there is the will of President Lukashenko to tie closely Belarus to Russia with some secret hope, some say, that one day he will become president of the federated Russian-Belarusian state. That's what he said when the elections of President Yeltsin were conducted, he said that if Lukashenko were the candidate he would receive 75 percent and Yeltsin would receive 25 percent.

So it is a very vast area. Naturally, with the Baltic area going its own way and Ukraine going its own way, strategically Belarus becomes even more important because it is a corridor between Moscow and Berlin. When World War II broke out, the main thrust of Hitler's armies went through Belarus. If you look at the map, you draw the line, Minsk is on the direct line between Berlin and Moscow.

And now the Baltics went their own way. Ukraine is reluctant to associate itself with, politically and militarily, probably with Russia. You have Belarus as a very important strategic point.

Questioner. And Yeltsin will accept? You mean, Yeltsin wants this tie with Belarus now? Or—

Mr. *Zaprudnik*. Well, being a good Russian, he certainly would like to have it on his side.
Mr. *Wise*. You want to comment?

Mr. *Paznyak*. [Through interpreter] I want to narrow the field a little bit. Russia has its own strategic interests in Belarus. Never mind who rules the Kremlin, democrats or nondemocrats, they will all support this idea. It is a military, plus it's an economic corridor and it is very important point from which they can make influence in the Western Europe. Because Russia carried the past and will carry always the special policies in Belarus.

Lukashenko was elected as a president on the basis of economic crisis in Belarus, but he had wide support of Russians. Lukashenko, himself, is a member of the KGB. His first act of authority in 1994 when he was elected the president, he issued a decree not to fill out the pits where silos were held before. He kept them open. It was clear that his intention was not to remove the rockets. But he has his own interest.

I know Lukashenko quite well and it is my personal feeling that psychologically he is not normal. It was said by my colleague, Dr. Zaprudnik, this is true. He wants to be a president. He has the idea to be a president of Russia. It is precisely that conflict between his own interest and interest of Belarus as a strategic point for Russia that makes him have the feeling that he is important.

At a round table which was held recently in Moscow, all Russian politicians said that we have to support Lukashenko, although many of them personally don't like Lukashenko.

We, the democratic opposition in Minsk in the parliament, always felt that right now what's going on is an internal occupation of Belarus by the Russian administration, by Russian policy. Because I agree with Mr. Segal that our nation is in a critical state right now, and we would like to get out of this critical state by receiving assistance from Western countries, and the Western world.

The policies carried out by Lukashenko's administration are deliberately provocative and conflict is imminent. On October 19 it is just by luck that Lukashenko did not use the force against the demonstrations which were held in Minsk, although everything was ready to have a conflict. But the newspaper, *Svoboda*, received from military sources specific information what was going on and the preparations of military action against the demonstrations. *Svoboda* published them 2 days before the date when the events were supposed to take place. What happened, the government showed its force. The military vehicles, the tanks, were on the streets of Minsk, but there was no bloodshed.

I want to focus your attention and emphasize that in case this constitution will pass the planned referendum, this fact might disrupt the equilibrium in Europe and might be the nucleus of a rather dangerous situation. We have to keep in mind that the most adventurous forces in Russia will be able to work through Lukashenko and carry out their plans which they don't do right now. The administration of President Lukashenko, the regime of Mr. Lukashenko, is such a regime that hawks from Moscow can do their job and remain clean.

It was stated in newspapers that 18 missiles in Belarus is not that much. But it certainly is 18 missiles more than Saddam Hussein has right now.

Mr. *Wise*. Thank you, Dr. Paznyak.

Our time is up and I think we have had a very illuminating exploration of the scene in Belarus which has certainly increased my understanding of the problems and the situation of that poor, blighted country. I want to thank all of our panelists, our interpreter and you in the audience for your questions and participation. The briefing is closed.