

Date Printed: 10/28/2008

JTS Box Number: IFES_1
Tab Number: 30
Document Title: Pre-Election Technical Assessment of
the Parliamentary Elections in
Document Date: 1994
Document Country: Belarus
IFES ID: R01529



* 7 C 1 3 E E 2 0 - A A F 2 - 4 4 D 7 - 9 E 7 C - 9 9 E 0 1 3 5 C F F F 7 *

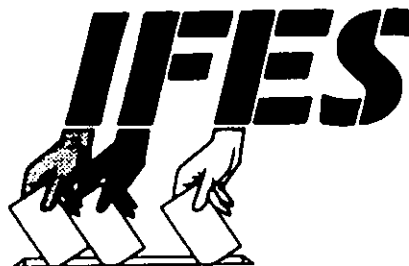
**PRE-ELECTION
TECHNICAL ASSESMENT**

BELARUS

Linda Edgeworth Richard Messick

Jan Zaprudnik, Ph.D.

1994



INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

***DO NOT REMOVE FROM
IFES RESOURCE CENTER!***

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. CONTEXT OF DEMOCRATIZATION

- A. General Overview: Geography and Demographics**
- B. Historic Setting**
- C. Cultural and Ethnic Features**
- D. Belarus Under Soviet Rule**
- E. Recent Events Prompting Current Trends**
- F. Nationalism and Language**
- G. Belarus and Status of Neutrality**
- H. Current Economic Climate and Infrastructure**
- I. Relationships with Neighboring Countries**
- J. The West: Expectations and Disappointments**

II. OVERVIEW OF EXISTING POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

- A. The Supreme Soviet**
- B. Political Make Up of the Supreme Soviet**
- C. Prime Minister and the Ministries**
- D. Local Administration**
- E. Influence of Work Collectives and Labor Unions**

III. EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

- A. Registration of Parties**
- B. Newly Emerging Parties**

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ELECTIONS

- A. The Referendum**
- B. Status of the Constitution**
 - Human Rights**
 - Areas of Concern**
 - Elections & Referendum**
 - Issues of Controversy**
- C. Debate Over the Election Law**
 - System of Representation**
 - Nomination of Candidates and Campaign Financing**
 - General Issues**

V. CIVIC EDUCATION AND THE MEDIA

- A. Lag in Public Awareness**
- B. Media Access**

VI. ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS

- A. Role of the Central Election Commission**

- Technical and Legal Compliance**
 - Election Commodities and Supplies**
 - Delimitation of Electoral Districts**
 - Adjudication of Grievances**

- B. Independence of the Central Election Commission**
- C. Temporary vs. Permanent Nature of the CEC**
- D. Duties of the District Election Commissions**

- Preparation of Printed Materials**
 - Registration of Candidates**
 - Election Observers**

- E. Duties of Polling Site Commissions**

- Registration of Voters**
 - Acquisition of Commodities and Supplies**
 - Process of Voting and Ballot Counting**
 - Mobile Voting**

VII. OPPORTUNITIES FOR DONOR ASSISTANCE

(Note to Readers: Throughout this report names of people and places are frequently provided in two spellings. Where appropriate, the authors have chosen to use the Belarusian variant spelling of names according to Belarusian Latin rules. Following in the parenthesis are the spellings as they would appear in their English version.)

This report was made possible by a grant from the U. S. Agency for International Development. Any person or organization is welcome to quote information from this report if it is attributed to IFES.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A three-member delegation sponsored by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems visited the Republic of Belarus from December 11, 1993 through December 21, 1993 to assess that country's developing electoral process in preparation for the nationwide parliamentary elections which were tentatively scheduled for March of 1994. The trip was prompted by Secretary of State Warren Christopher's October 26, 1993, meeting in Miensk (Minsk) with Stanislav Shushkevich, the former Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. During that meeting the two agreed that the United States would provide assistance for the elections. USAID asked that IFES review preparations for the elections and make recommendations on election assistance.

In the course of the delegation's 10-day visit to Miensk (Minsk), team members met with deputies of parliament, representatives of political parties and public organizations, election officials, members of the press and broadcast media, labor leaders, educators, students, and local administrators in order to gain the broadest perspective possible. In addition, the team had the opportunity to make a trip outside the capital to visit with local officials in a constituency where a by-election to fill a vacancy in the Supreme Soviet had just been held a week earlier.

The delegation left Belarus impressed by the opportunity for democratic change, but sobered by the obstacles that slow its progress. Though democratic forces had been able to gather almost 442,000 signatures within a two-month period on a petition for a referendum calling for early elections, within Belarus there is an entrenched, pro-communist elite reluctant to move toward democratic changes which could potentially strip them of their power. The early elections set for March were offered as a concession when the referendum was rejected by the Supreme Soviet without legal justification. After delays in formalizing a new constitution and enacting a new election law, Belarus announced a newly adopted constitution in March 1994 and presidential and parliamentary elections for the first and second halves of 1994, respectively. Though presidential elections will be held on June 23, 1994, there is little to suggest that these will be much different in character from past Soviet multi-candidate elections.

Based on its findings the IFES team concludes that the international community could assist Belarus in preparing for the next parliamentary elections and supporting the country's progress toward democratic reforms in several ways. Above all, the international community's interest in free and fair elections should be made absolutely clear to government officials, opposition leaders and the people of Belarus whose perception is that such interests take a back seat to concern over the disposition of nuclear weapons on Belarusan soil. Sponsorship of programs of governmental and nongovernmental organizations can help build a democratic infrastructure in Belarus. An independent media should be supported and nonpartisan civic and voter education programs should be funded. It is discouraging that one major private donor has decided to reduce funding to Belarus due to the government's unwillingness to allow the emergence of free institutions. Training in grassroots organizing and communications skills should be offered to political parties. There may also be opportunities to provide technical assistance to the Central Election Commission in developing training programs and procedural guidelines.

These recommendations and their rationale are discussed in detail in this assessment report. The report may also be useful to international observers who may be monitoring political developments and preparations for upcoming elections in Belarus.

I. CONTEXT OF DEMOCRATIZATION

A. Geography

Belarus occupies an area of 80,154 square miles (207,600 square kilometers). In the past the country has been known by a number of other names including Byelorussia, Belorussia and White Russia.

Russia borders the country to the east and north. Its other neighbors are Latvia to the north, Lithuania to the northwest, Poland to the west, and Ukraine to the south. Belarus is a flat country with no natural borders. About a third of the republic's territory in the south is taken up by the low-lying swampy plain of Palesie (Polesye). Because of the proximity of the Baltic Sea, the climate is temperate continental: winters in Belarus last between 105 and 145 days, and summers up to 150 days.

Three major rivers cross Belarus, the south-flowing Dnieper and the west-flowing Dvina and Nieman. A network of over 20,000 tributaries, 48 of them 100 or more kilometers long, cover Belarus's inland. The country has 10,000 lakes. Nearly a third of the territory is covered with mixed forests which consist predominantly of coniferous varieties. Forested areas are of importance to the military, camouflaging much of the Russian (CIS) forces, including underground depots and airfields.

Compared with the other republics of the former Soviet Union, Belarus has a well-developed network of railroads and highways with the exception of the more remote rural areas.

B. Demographics

Belarusians belong to the East Slavic group as do the Russians and the Ukrainians. Eighty percent of the 10.3 million Belarusians in the territory of the former USSR live in the Republic of Belarus. The remainder live in states of the former Soviet Union, the Baltics and in Poland: 1,200,000 in Russia, 470,000 in Ukraine, 180,000 in Kazakhstan, 120,000 in Latvia, nearly 70,000 in Lithuania, and 25,000 in Estonia. About 65,000 Belarusians live in other ex-Soviet republics, and up to 300,000 live in Poland. The Belarusian diaspora in England, Germany, France, Belgium, United States, Canada, and Argentina comprises over one million people.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
Pre-election Assessment
Republic of Belarus
Page 2

According to the 1989 census, the ethnic composition within the Belarusian republic was as follows:

Belarusians	7,900,000	(77.8%)
Russians	1,300,000	(13.2%)
Poles	417,000	(4.1%)
Ukrainians	290,000	(2.9%)
Jews	112,000	(1.1%)
Other nationalities	71,000	(0.9%)

Of the total population in 1993, 68 percent lived in cities, and 32 percent in rural areas. Belarus's largest city and its capital is Miensk (Minsk), with a population of 1.8 million. In descending order of population are Homiel (Gomel) with 506,000 people, Mahilou (Mogilev) with 363,000, Viciebsk (Vitebsk) with 356,000, Brest with 269,000 and Hrodna (Grodno) with 255,000 people.

Statistics of religious groups in Belarus keep changing as the importance of religion grows. According to a recent private survey published in The Catholic World Report (January 1993), religious allegiance in Belarus broke down as follows:

<u>Religion</u>	<u>Nationwide</u>	<u>Miensk</u>
Orthodox	72.2%	66.7%
Roman Catholic	6.0%	9.5%
Uniate	1.1%	1.5%
Protestants (various)	1.1%	1.3%
Jewish	0.2%	0.5%
Uncommitted	19.4%	10.5%

B. Historical Setting

The idea of the modern Belarusian state evolved during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the two Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. It was rooted in the Belarusian people's political and cultural past and in the role that the Belarusian language played in the large medieval state, Litva, or the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus', and Samogitia which is often called simply Lithuania. The reason for the cultural ascendancy of the Slavic element in the

Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) was the early Christianization of Kievan Rus' in 988, which included the Belarusian territories. In contrast Lithuania remained a heathen territory until 1387. Thus, early (Old) Belarusian became the official language of the GDL and maintained that position until 1697 when it was replaced by Polish.

When the Russia of Catherine II (1762-1796), together with Prussia and Austria, partitioned the Commonwealth of Poland in the three consecutive operations of 1772, 1793, and 1795, the entire territory of Belarus found itself in the Russian Empire. Belarusians were not recognized by the tsarist government as a separate nationality. They were considered to be another "branch" of Russians, as were the Ukrainians. Nevertheless, their language was registered in the first systematic census of the Russian Empire in 1897.

The political movement that culminated in 1918 in the proclamation of the Belarusian Republic began in 1903. The democratic revolution of March 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution of November of that year gave Belarusians an opportunity to advance their political cause. At the time, Bolshevism did not have many followers among the natives of Belarus. Local political life was dominated by the Socialist Revolutionary, Mensheviks, the Jewish Bund, and various Christian movements; both the Russian Orthodox and Polish Catholic clergy were also very active. The Belarusian political cause was represented by the Belarusian Socialist Party, Socialist Revolutionaries, Leninist Social Democrats, and various groups of nationalists advocating moderate forms of socialism.

In December 1917, 1,905 delegates of the First All-Belarusian Congress met in Minsk and decided to establish a democratic republican government in Belarus. The Executive Council of the First All-Belarusian Congress proclaimed the independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic on March 25, 1918. This move forced the Bolshevik leadership, which originally had opposed the creation of a Belarusian republic, to agree to the establishment of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Its independence was proclaimed on January 1, 1919.

For the next two years Belarus became a prize in the Russo-Polish war. The conflict was settled by the Riga Treaty in the spring of 1921. Belarus found itself divided into three parts: the western territories being incorporated into the Polish state, central Belarus forming the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) within the Soviet Union, and the eastern territories becoming part of the Russian Federation. In September 1939, when World War II broke out, West Belarus was also incorporated into the BSSR.

C. Cultural and Ethnic Features

The cultural development of Belarus was influenced by early ties with both Byzantium and Western Europe. Since the Christianization of Belarus in the Eastern-Orthodox rite toward the end of the tenth century, the country's literacy, literature, architecture, painting, and morality developed under the impact of Christianity, but pagan beliefs and customs were not fully eradicated. Polacak and Turau (Turov) became important centers of education. St. Euphrosyne of Polacak (1120-1173) whose main activity was book copying, was the first woman among the Eastern Slavs to be canonized. She has been one of the most revered Belarusian saints and became the Patroness of Belarus. Beginnings of Belarusian literary activities are also closely connected with the sermons and writings of Bishop Cyril (Kiryla) of Turau (1130 ca. 1182) who was canonized soon after his death.

The traditions of St. Euphrosyne and St. Cyril continued in the sixteenth century with Francis (Francisak) Skaryna (1485?-1552?), the first among the East Slavs to translate the Bible (1517-1519) into the vernacular (Old Belarusian). In the pre-perestroika years Skaryna's lifework had been almost totally ignored. Now he has become a major source of national pride for Belarusians and an inspiration for emerging cultural identity. In the capital of Miensk, Lenin Boulevard has been renamed for Francisak Skaryna.

An important impact on the Belarusian culture and its Western connections was exercised by the so-called Magdeburg Statutes named for the system of municipal self-rule of German cities and their laws on which the statutes were modeled. The tradition of self-government not only facilitated contacts with Western Europe, but also nurtured self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and a sense of civic responsibility.

Belarusian literature of the late Middle Ages is rich in historical chronicles and heroic novels, mostly translations of classical works about the Trojan War, Alexander the Great, and other medieval heroes, extolling their deeds and civic virtues. Belarusian iconography of the period, unlike that of Muscovy, is marked by realism and representation of the cultural identity of the people.

Some Renaissance poetry in Belarus was written in Latin. Ideas of humanism, the Renaissance, and the Reformation were widely received, debated and implemented in Belarus because of trade relations with Western Europe and the exposure to Western culture as a result of Belarusian nobility and burghers attending Western universities. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation contributed greatly to the flourishing of polemical writings as well as to the spread of printing

houses and schools established to upgrade the education of the clergy and the general public.

As a result of developments during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Poland and Russia made deep political and cultural inroads into Belarus, especially by winning the nobility to their respective sides, the term "Belarusan culture" was associated primarily with peasant ways, folklore, dress, and ethnographic customs steeped in Christian morality and esthetics. This was the point of departure for some enthusiasts among the emerging Belarusan intelligentsia around the 1880s, who embarked on the restoration of statehood to their nation.

To some outsiders Belarusans still remain an essentially peasant people with a culture marked by rural ethos. But such a view has become obsolete in view of demographic changes over the last half-century. Thus, in 1993, 68 percent of Belarus's population lived in urban areas and 73 percent of the city-dwellers were ethnic Belarusans. True, modern Belarusan literature rural themes are widely treated and the morality of rural people is held up for emulation. This literary phenomenon is explained by the fact that most modern Belarusan writers are of peasant origin and maintain close familial ties with the village. Cities, on the other hand, have been heavily Russified. But in other fields of culture (painting, sculpture, music, cinema, theater) urban reality, universal concerns, and values are very much in the center of creativity.

D. Belarus Under Soviet Rule

Life in Soviet Belarus during the 1920s was characterized by the fostering of a sense of Belarusan socialist nationhood. This was achieved by mixing Belarusan patriotic and internationalist slogans with the presence in the republic of many old-time Russian nationalists occupying various administrative positions in the Communist Party and government. Under the official policy of the republican authorities, called "Belarusization," Belarusan language and culture were institutionalized and promoted as the official medium both in the Party and government as well as in scientific and educational establishments.

After the forced farm collectivization started in 1928, resistance to this policy became particularly strong and the severity of the oppressive measures were justified in part by the republic's geo-strategic position as the "western gate of the Soviet Union."

The forced collectivization and confiscatory approach to agriculture enabled the state to channel resources into the development of new industries in Belarus: machine-tool engineering, motor industry, farm machinery, radio engineering, cement, etc. During the first five-year plans,

1,700 industrial enterprises were commissioned.

Industrialization also spelled Russification. The 1933 language reform of Belarusan orthography and vocabulary was designed to force Belarusan closer to Russian. Books of history were rewritten, and the past was altered to fit the myth that the Belarusan people throughout their history strived to be united with Russia. The persecutions of the so-called National Democrats who were labelled "enemies of the people" in the 1930s reached genocidal proportions, causing losses equal to those of World War II -- over two million people.

In June 1941 the German tanks swept through Belarus toward Moscow. The country remained under Nazi control until July 1944. It was Belarus's major role in combatting the Germans and, as some analysts claim, the upsurge of Belarusan nationalism that prompted Stalin to press the United States and Britain to accept Belarus along with Ukraine as founding members of the United Nations.

One of the devices to fortify the Soviet Union's "Western Gate" against possible Western influences was the program of intensive Russification, and the creation of a cordon sanitaire along the Belarusan/Polish border. Consequently, most key positions in Miensk, as well as in the western provincial cities of Hrodna (Grodno) and Brest were occupied by Russians sent from other places in the empire. The Belarusan language was informally banned from official places, educational and cultural institutions, and from the mass media. This cultural "cleansing" intensified greatly after 1959 when the Ukrainian Nikita Khrushchev, the Communist Party leader at the time, pronounced in Miensk, "The sooner we all start speaking Russian, the faster we shall build Communism."

The economy of Belarus fared better than its culture. Development of the industrial potential was facilitated by the availability of an educated labor force. In the Soviet division of economic effort, the republic was assigned the role of provider of meat and dairy products from its collective farms while its machine and instrument building industry was geared toward military and agricultural needs. The overall Soviet industrial organization, set up with an eye on preserving the empire by intertwining the economies of its regions without regard to rationality, became painfully evident in Belarus when the republic gained its independence in 1990--1991 and found itself lacking many essential industries as, for example, meat processing capabilities or pharmaceutical plants, so badly needed for the thousands of the Chernobyl radiation victims.

E. Recent Events in Belarus Prompting Early Elections

The beginning of Gorbachev's Perestroika in Belarus was highlighted by two major events: the Chernobyl disaster of April 26, 1986, resulting in the absorption by Belarus of 70 percent of the radioactive contaminants, and a petition by 28 intellectuals to Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev of December 1986 expressing the Belarusian people's fundamental grievances in the field of culture which was referred to as the "spiritual Chernobyl."

Whereas the physical impact of Chernobyl was kept secret for more than three years, the cultural Chernobyl became a subject of hot discussions and a source of much political activity. The signatories of the petition to Gorbachev pleaded with the Soviet leader to prevent the "spiritual extinction" of the Belarusian nation and, stating that discrimination against the Belarusian language had evoked "a noticeable growth of national awareness," laid out a series of measures for immediate implementation. The measures included the introduction of Belarusian as a working language in Party, state, and local government bodies as well as at all levels of education, and a radical improvement of the position of the Belarusian language in book publishing, mass media, and other fields. The document embodied the aspirations of a considerable part of the national intelligentsia who, having no positive answer from the Party leadership either in Moscow or in Minsk, took to the streets to wring concessions from the authorities. A number of independent youth groups sprang up, many of which embraced the national cause.

In June 1988, the sensational discovery of mass graves of Stalin's victims in Kurapaty near Minsk (where up to 250,000 bodies of civilians are alleged to have been buried) added fuel to the denunciations of the old regime and demands for reforms. The man responsible for the unearthing of the Kurapaty graves, Zianon Pazniak (Zenon Poznyak), has become the spokesman for the reform movement and nationalist aspirations, and eventually emerged as the chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), member of the Supreme Soviet, and leader of the democratic opposition in the parliament.

The BPF was formally established in June 1989. In the same month, the Belarusian Language Society was founded with the poet-scholar Nil Hilevic (Gilevich) as president. One of major achievements of this patriotic upsurge was the passing in January 1990 of the law which made Belarusian the sole official language of the republic. The law became effective in September 1990 and ever since has served as a touchstone of the government's record in the field of culture.

On July 27, 1990, the Supreme Council of Belarus adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty

of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Following the August 1991 putsch in Moscow, the parliament in Miensk declared the independence of Belarus on August 25, 1991. One day before the Supreme Soviet of the USSR imposed its ban on the Communist Party, on August 28, 1991, Prime Minister Kebich declared in a statement that he and his entire cabinet had "suspended" their CP membership.

On September 18, the parliament dismissed its Speaker, Mikalaj Dziemianciej (Nikolai Dementei) for siding with the putsch. He was replaced by his Deputy, Stanislau Shushkevich (Stanislav Shushkevich). The following day, pressed by the small but vocal democratic opposition, the parliament changed the name of the state from the Belarusian (Byelorussian) Soviet Socialist Republic to the Republic of Belarus. The new national flag with three, white-red-white horizontal stripes was adopted. In addition, a new coat-of-arms was adopted similar to the nation's ancient emblem showing a mounted knight with a drawn sword similar to the emblem of ancient times of the Grand Duchy of Litva (Lithuania).

The process of self-determination continued. Chairman of the parliament Stanislav Shushkevich was instrumental in abolishing the Soviet Union by inviting Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk to Miensk and to the Bielaviezha Forest in West Belarus where the agreement was reached on December 8, 1991, to establish the Commonwealth of Independent States. The ex-Communist majority in the parliament holds a deep grudge against Shushkevich, and this is one of the reasons why they fully succeeded in deposing him as the Supreme Soviet's chairman in January 1994 after President Clinton's visit to Miensk.

The democratic opposition in the parliament, led by the 27-member Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) faction and some of its allies, kept pressing for a referendum on the dissolution of the Supreme Council and new elections. The electorate seemed to be responsive. By mid-April 1992, within two months, over 442,000 signatures in support of the move were collected. However, the parliament decidedly rejected the demand for a referendum. Two hundred and two (202) deputies voted against the referendum, whereas only 35 votes were cast in favor. Another 35 deputies abstained.

In view of the fact that in May 1992 the Central Election Commission validated 384,318 signatures of the 442,000 collected which well exceeded the 350,000 signatures required by law to hold a referendum, the BPF opposition has accused the Supreme Council's conservative majority of open violation of the Constitution and attempting "to retain power by illegal means." A small victory was won by the opposition in this tug-of-war: the parliament agreed to shorten its five-year term by one year, and scheduled the next elections for the spring of 1994. At the

time of this visit, the legal infrastructure was far from being in place; the parliament's agenda was laden with many extraneous issues, and the main tactic of the conservative majority in the Supreme Soviet seemed to be procrastination on electoral matters. It seemed obvious to the IFES team, during its visit in December 1993, that there were few signs that the republic was getting ready for the spring 1994 elections. However, as noted earlier, Belarus has announced the scheduling of presidential and parliamentary elections in the first and second halves of 1994, respectively.

The results of the December 12, 1993 elections in Russia have activated both pro-imperial and Communist elements in the republic and, undoubtedly, reinforced their expectations for similar results in Belarus when the elections are held. Democrats and nationalists believe that the outside world is beginning to see a "true" Russia, inimical to democracy, which could trigger more vigorous Western support for pluralism and Belarusan independence.

Recent events in the presidential nomination process have added to the confusion and uncertainty in the political landscape in Belarus. The Supreme Soviet, elected under a Soviet-era constitution, adopted the new constitution on March 15, 1994 by the majority vote of 236 to 6, with 8 absentees. A constitution adopted in its entirety replaced the old Soviet-era constitution after the two-years article-by-article adoption process. According to the new constitution, Belarus will have an elected President who will oversee primary executive power. The system of local councils will be preserved and the number of Parliamentary Deputies will be reduced to 260. The first article declares that Belarus is an indivisible, democratic, socially-orientated and law-governed state. It is also declared that Belarus intends to become a nuclear-free and neutral country. It was criticized by the opposition leader Zyanon Paznyak for lacking provisions for a genuine balance of powers. According to Paznyak, the new constitution was primarily designed to help Prime Minister Kebich become a presidential candidate.

On March 12, 1994 the bill on presidential elections was submitted to the parliament for approval. On March 29, 1994 the law on election of the Belarusan president was approved on its second reading by 215 deputies, to be introduced on March 30, 1994. Under the law, "a citizen over 35 years old, enjoying the electoral right and Belarusan resident for no less than ten years can be elected president for five years and no more than two terms." It goes on to state that "the presidential elections shall be universal, equal and direct [and] the president shall be elected by Belarusan citizens over 18 years of age."

The right to nominate a presidential candidate will be enjoyed by those who manage to collect signatures of no less than 70 parliamentary deputies or no less than 100,000 signatures of

Belarusan citizens within 15 days. The nomination of candidates shall start 75 days before the elections and end 40 days before the voting.

According to the law, all registered candidates shall have equal possibilities of material-technical and financial provision of their election campaign. They shall equally participate in the election campaign from the time of their registration by the Central Commission for Presidential Elections (CC) and enjoy equal rights to the use of mass media.

After lengthy debates on March 30, 1994, the 13th session of the Supreme Soviet scheduled the presidential election for Thursday, June 23, 1994, proclaiming this day a holiday. This is a break with the Soviet tradition of conducting elections on a Sunday.

The adopted law on presidential elections could be described as a remnant of the Soviet-era because of a deliberately difficult procedure envisaged for a possible repeat elections scenario and a high threshold for candidate nomination. The collecting of the required amount of signatures must be conducted in a very short term. An initiative group for a nomination of a presidential candidate must be formed by no less than 30 eligible voters and should submit the lists of its members to the CC no later than 65 days before the elections for registration. The CC should register a group and provide lists for collecting signatures in the 5-day term. It leaves only 10 days for the collecting of signatures. Under the law, the right to collect signatures belong only to members of the registered group and, making the process even more difficult, the lists must contain the signatures of the candidate's supporters living in the same territorial unit - village, town or rayon of the city. The lists with signatures should be submitted to the local soviet of peoples' deputies for verification by its officials of the signature and mandate of the initiative group's member, who collected the signatures on the list. All the lists must be presented to the local level election commission no later than 50 days before the election. The commission may verify the voters' signatures in a 10-day term. The protocol with the numbers of the supporters of a presidential candidate should be submitted to the higher level commission for review by oblasts and then finally to the CC.

According to the new law, "if the ballot sheet includes no less than two presidential candidates and neither of them is elected, there will be second round elections." The new law stipulates that "the Belarusan president shall be considered elected if his candidature was supported by over 50% of participants in the elections." Elections are considered "to have taken place" if more than half of the registered voters participate. The second round of the elections is also conducted according to the same rules, with the two candidates receiving the greatest number of votes in the first round (Article 36). Taking into consideration the apathy of the electorate in general and

the extremely low turnout experienced in the Russian local elections in recent months, it is safe to say that reaching a 50% majority for any candidate may be difficult.

The law envisions the possibility of holding repeat elections for the president if none of the candidates is elected on the first or second round of the voting, or in the event of the elections being recognized as "not having taken place or invalid". (Article 37) The repeat elections, with repeated nomination and voting procedures, must take place in three months after the first elections in the same electoral districts and with the same registered voters. According to Article 37, the CC could decide to conduct repeat elections with new territorial and polling-site commissions. With difficult procedures for nominating candidates, repeat elections may produce an even lower turnout. In any case, the likely beneficiaries of such an election law should be the incumbents, mostly former communist elites.

The presidential election campaign began with at least four top-ranking officials declaring their readiness to run. Among them were Stanislav Shushkevich, the former Chairman of the Parliament who was ousted by conservatives in the parliament on January 26, 1994, nominated by the Belarusian Socialist Party and the Association of Democratic parties, and Aleksander Sanchukausky, leader of the Belarusian Scientific Production Congress Party, nominated by the largest parliamentary faction, conservative "Belarus," if V. Kebich will not run for the post. Aleh Trusau, the head of the Social-Democratic Hramada, said that his party might support Shushkevich as presidential candidate if Shushkevich were to appoint leader of the Party of People's Accord as Prime Minister in the event of his elections. The Belarusian Communist Party has decided to nominate its head, Vasil Navikou.

The CC has registered six candidates for the Belarus presidential election. According to the CC, thirteen candidates failed to collect the required amount of signatures. The leading candidates are, as it was anticipated, the Prime Minister V. Kebich and A. Lukashenko, chairman of parliament's anti-corruption commission. Others registered candidates are S. Shushkevich, Z. Poznyak, V. Novikow, and A. Dubko, an Agrarian Party activist.

On June 12, Belarusian TV reported that CC is to decide whether to A. Lukashenko is to be disqualified as a presidential candidate on the ground of accepting campaign materials for Lukashenko, printed in Germany. According to the law, candidates are not allowed to accept any help from outside countries for their election campaigns, including any printed materials.

The new Constitution stipulates that all laws mentioned in the document, including the law on parliamentary elections, should be enacted in two years after the adoption of a new constitution.

This parliament however, has been reluctant even to discuss parliamentary election law and it is unclear at this time whether elections will take place in 1994. Several opposition parties repeatedly tried to force the question of early elections, with public participation in the February 1994 strike and demonstrations in front of the parliamentary building without success. The organizers of the strike were detained and the strike was proclaimed illegal.

F. Nationalism and Language

According to the last census of 1989, the following major ethnic groups in Belarus indicated that they maintained the language of their nationality as their native language: Belarusians 80.2%, Russians 97.7%, Poles 13.3%, Ukrainians 45.3%, Jews 7.6%, and Lithuanians 57.8%. Most of the non-Russians who did not maintain the language of their nationality had adopted Russian as their "mother tongue." This observation does not include the Polish group. Of the Polish Belarusians, 77.4% in rural areas and 49.2% in cities named Belarusian as their native tongue.

Bilingualism is wide spread in the republic, where 63.8% of the population was said to be fluent in two languages in 1989. Bilingual speakers in the republic were 70% Belarusians, 68.5% Ukrainians, 62.8% Poles, 63.6% Tatars, 79.1% Gypsies, 44.8% Jews, and 27.9% Russians.

The ratio of urban/rural population in Belarus in 1992 stood at 68 to 32. In 1989, 72.9% of city dwellers were Belarusian, however, only 69.9% of them considered Belarusian their native tongue. On the other hand, in the rural areas 96.9% of Belarusians had preserved their language.

Language has always been the central element of the Belarusian national identity. With the advent of Perestroika, the activists of national renewal launched a campaign of restoring Belarusian to the place it had enjoyed during the years of NEP in Soviet Belarus. A poll conducted in the spring of 1989 by the Russian-language newspaper Sovetskaya Belorussiya (April 26, 1989) indicated that 65.6% of the respondents favored declaring Belarusian the official language of the republic. After months of meetings, rallies, conferences, and heated debates in the press, on January 26, 1990, the Supreme Soviet voted to make Belarusian the official language of the state effective September 1, 1990.

The law specifically took under its protection the languages of the minorities. The official status of Belarusian, it said, "does not affect the constitutional rights of citizens of other nationalities to use Russian or other languages." Because of the sensitivity of the issue, ample time was given to comply. In some cases the deadline for full implementation was set as far away as the

year 2000.

Since the summer of 1991, the legal ground for securing the primacy of the native language in the life of the Belarusian nation has been widened and made more concrete. Two laws were adopted. The first was the law "On Culture" passed on June 4, 1991. This law stipulated that the language policy is determined by the 1990 law "On Languages." The second law "On Education" was passed on October 1991.

The implementation of the law on languages has run into active and passive resistance. Since the latter part of 1992 an increasingly harsh controversy has been growing around the demand by some elements in society that the Russian language be given the same official status as Belarusian. The debates went on in the press and in the parliament. Strong voices opposed the idea in the Belarusian language press, as did a relatively small group of deputies in the parliament. Among them was then-Speaker Stanislav Shushkevich, a son of a Belarusian writer who had been exiled in the Stalinist period. It is hoped that the language issue may be put to rest by the inclusion within the March 15, 1994 adopted Constitution, that states, "The state language of the Republic of Belarus is Belarusian. The Republic of Belarus guarantees the right of free exercise of the Russian language as a means of inter-ethnic contacts."

G. Belarus and Status of Neutrality

In its declaration on State Sovereignty, Belarus adopted a position of military neutrality. Accordingly, in January 1992 the parliament voted to subordinate all armed forces, with the exception of the nuclear strike units which are under CIS command, to the Government of the Republic. The program of transforming the current army inherited from the Soviet Union, estimated to be 180,000 to 240,000 strong, into a national defense force of about 60,000 to 90,000 soldiers was started in March 1992.

Belarus has been in the international news in connection with nuclear disarmament (the Republic has 81 intercontinental ballistic missiles) that became an object of controversy. In May 1992, along with Ukraine and Kazakhstan, Belarus agreed to destroy or turn over all strategic nuclear warheads on its territory to Russia. To achieve this, the START-I Treaty had to be ratified. For some time, however, the Supreme Soviet of the Republic stalled on ratification while seeking international guarantees for the Republic's security.

One of the most ardent supporters of the ratification was former Chairman Shushkevich who has

been urging that Belarus rid itself of nuclear missiles as soon as possible. Only in the absence of nuclear weapons would Belarus stand a chance of freeing itself of Russian "strategic" troops located on the Belarusian territory. How soon will it happen? "We planned to do it in seven years," said Shushkevich, "then changed it to five, now we are thinking of doing it in two and a half years." (FBIS, January 29, 1993, p. 52.)

On February 4, 1993, the START-I Treaty was ratified and adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty was approved. The ratification brought immediate results in the sphere of Belarusian-American relations. On February 9, 1993, U.S. President Bill Clinton made a telephone call to then Chairman of the Belarusian parliament Stanislav Shushkevich to congratulate the Republic's Supreme Council on the ratification of START-I and "assured the Belarusian leader that the U. S. will provide Belarus with security guarantees." (FBIS, February 11, 1993, p. 39.) A week later, Belarus was rewarded with the grant from Washington of Most Favored Nation status in trade relations with the United States. (FBIS, February 19, 1993, p.50.) On March 26, 1993, the U.S. State Department notified Belarus of an increase in American aid from \$8.3 million to \$65 million, citing its "bold and positive" steps in approving the START-I and Non-Proliferation Treaties. (Newsday, March 27, 1993.)

The fact that Belarus is anxious to disarm is understandable in view of the structure of its armed forces: at the end of 1992, 47 percent of the Belarusian army consisted of men from the Russian Federation, and almost 80 percent of its officer corps included Russian natives, while over 40,000 Belarusian natives served in the armed forces of other ex-Soviet republics.

Belarus's geographic location, often mentioned by Western analysts as an important asset favoring the republic's integration into the European economy, is at the same time an obstacle in the creation of a Belarusian sovereign state because of Russia's military interests and concerns. The preoccupation of Moscow with the outward orientation of Belarus stems not only from Russia's ambitions, but also from its historical experience with the West. One must consider the "Belarusian" route to Moscow used by Poland's pretender, the False Dmitri at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Napoleon's march in 1812, and Hitler's in 1941. It was not without reason that the Belarusian SSR was described as the "Western Gate" of the Soviet Union in the pre-perestroika years. With the empire half collapsed, the "Western Gate" has become even more important because of the weakened position of Russia vis-a-vis the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Moldova.

The ratio of troops to the civilian population in Belarus today is still dramatically higher than in any other CIS state. Belarusian Premier Viachaslau Kebich cited the following figures in

February 1992. In Belarus, he said, for every 43 inhabitants there is one military person. By comparison, in Ukraine there is one for every 98 people, in Kazakhstan, one in 118, and in Russia, one in 634.

Danger to the sovereignty of Belarus comes not only from the "strategic forces" serving outside interests, but also the "national" army, whose officer corps does not at all reflect the ethnic makeup of the republic's population, and whose pro-Russian ideological outlook is an inhibiting factor in the development of Belarusian national consciousness. This was one of the reasons for the recent public outcry against joining the CIS collective defense treaty proposed by the Kebich government. The most outspoken critic of the plan was Stanislav Shushkevich, Chairman of Parliament at the time. His main objection to a military alliance with Russia has been the status of Belarus as "a nuclear-free and neutral state," which is embedded in the Declaration of State Sovereignty. Arguing in favor of a referendum on the issue of the treaty, Shushkevich appealed to the sense of national identity of Belarusians which, in his mind, implies such basic national interests as neutrality.

The vote held at the March-April extraordinary session (which was barred by the rules from deciding on a referendum) was not supportive of Shushkevich's views. By a majority of 188 votes to 34, the Supreme Soviet expressed endorsement for the collective defense treaty and instructed Speaker Shushkevich to sign it with some reservations. Two such reservations exclude Belarus from sending its troops abroad or receiving foreign troops on its own territory.

Some observers in Belarus are of the opinion that a majority of the voters will reject this collective defense treaty if and when it comes to a referendum. Polling, however, indicates a divided public posture. The concept of neutrality itself has become a subject of varying interpretations. On the opposite ends of the semantic spectrum one found Chairman Shushkevich and Defense Minister Pavel Kazlouski (Kozlovski). While Shushkevich steadfastly argued against a military alliance because it contradicts neutrality, the latter, speaking on the eve of the vote in parliament, predicted that "the policy of neutrality, recognized by no one and conducted at a time of an economic crisis, is doomed to fail."

H. Current Economic Outlook

Belarus is a graphic example of economic problems created by what could be called industrial colonialism when a "colony" becomes independent. The republic's economy, which had been integrated into the All-Union mechanism assigned to mold a new "historic commonwealth," the

Soviet People, found itself deprived of most essential components for further independent functioning after the collapse of empire. The republic had to rely on imports of the bulk of its raw materials, component parts and energy, and exported about eighty percent of what it produced. Much of its production was for the military-industrial complex. Belarus now faces great difficulty asserting its political independence vis-a-vis its main economic partner, Russia.

At the outset of perestroika in 1985, Belarus, with its 9,942,000 inhabitants, was specializing mainly in machine and instrument building industries and agricultural production. Industry in Belarus accounted for sixty percent of its GNP. Representing only 3.6% of the population of the Soviet Union, the republic contributed 11.2% of lathes, 14.2% of tractors, 22.5% of motorcycles, 11.3% of refrigerators, 11.6% of TV sets, 14.6% of watches and clocks, 7.8% of knitwear, 5.6% of footwear, 26.8% of synthetic fiber, and 18.2% of mineral fertilizers to the All-Union industrial output in 1987.

As an agricultural area, Belarus cultivates wheat, barley, oats, buckwheat, potato, flax, and sugar beets, and specializes in animal husbandry, specifically cattle, pigs, sheep, and poultry. Its productive potential, however, was severely undercut by the Chernobyl nuclear accident in April 1986, when 70% of the contaminants landed on Belarusian territory due to the prevailing winds.

Former Chairman of the Belarusian parliament Stanislav Shushkevich called attention to the extremely high cost of Chernobyl for his republic in comparison to Ukraine and Russia. Whereas the per-capita cost of the Chernobyl-related activities amounts to 1 kopeck in Russia and 3 kopecks in Ukraine, in Belarus it amounts to 1 ruble, or 100 kopecks. During its visit, the IFES team was told that the cost of the Chernobyl decontamination program absorbed 20% of the national budget.

In November 1991, the Belarusian Supreme Soviet passed a law about foreign investments specifying that "objects of foreign investments" can be "any enterprises and organizations engaged in activities not forbidden on the territory of the republic; buildings and construction; property of Belarusian juridical and physical persons; stock, bank deposits, insurance policies and other valuable papers and means; products of science and technology; rights to intellectual property." The Supreme Soviet directed the republican Council of Ministers to "secure revision of normative acts" which contradict this law by February 1, 1992.

One of the advantages that Belarus enjoys in becoming involved in business ventures was discussed at an international conference held in Miensk on May 17-19, 1991. According to the

Belorusskiy delevoy vestnik (Belarusan Business Herald) participants at the conference noted that among the most important conditions for the dynamic development of entrepreneurship in Belarus, including joint ventures, was "a relatively stable politico-economic situation, not aggravated by any serious demonstrations of a nationalist nature, high qualifications and low (relative to other parts of the USSR) price of the labor force, and the convenient geographical location of the republic."

The climate for trade is apparently improving judging from an increased number of Belarusan-American joint venture businesses. By the time of President Clinton's visit to Miensk on January 15, 1994, there were already 93 Belarusan-American joint ventures.

For 1993, the Belarusan government set the following priorities: development of market relations between producers, the normalization of the monetary circulation, and the introduction of certain measures to lower the dependence of the republic upon the monopolist suppliers from other CIS countries.

Belarus has a food-production problem. Its annual grain requirement amounts to about ten million tons, but it produces only about eight million tons. The government hopes that in about three years the republic will be able to cultivate enough grain to satisfy its internal needs.

Prospects for the future, however, are troubling. Prime Minister Kebich in October 1992 spoke of 15,000 unemployed (0.3% of the labor force), and he said that his government is prepared for an increase, although he did not offer any prediction as to what the increase would be. According to non-governmental sources, however, the estimates could be substantial, up to 400,000 or 500,000 unemployed.

Oil and gas remain the basic commodities that Belarus lacks. This makes the republic dependent on Russia. Belarus pays for its oil with goods, but has to accept conditions imposed by its oil-rich neighbor. Shushkevich has stated that "we cannot dictate our terms" to Russia, acknowledging that Russia can buy these goods somewhere else. The heavy economic dependency on Russia has serious political consequences. The opposition is concerned that the conservative Kebich government, using economic difficulties as justification, may again annex Belarus to Russia, not only economically but militarily. At a seminar with local administration executives on March 18, 1993, Kebich expressed his personal belief and his government's unanimous view that "collective security arrangement (within the CIS) can safely guarantee our independence." This is one of the basic disagreements between the Prime Minister Kebich and the former Chairman of the parliament Shushkevich.

I. Relationships with Neighboring Countries

The fact that more than 80 percent of the republic's commodity turnover is with Russia weighs heavily on the foreign policy of the Belarusian government. In his speech to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic in October 1992, Prime Minister Kebich admitted: "Without normal and friendly ties with our eastern neighbor it is unrealistic and impossible to build an independent Belarusian state." (*Zviazda*, October 23, 1992.) Many of his listeners in the parliament, the Party comrades of yesterday, agree with the Prime Minister not only for economic, but even more for ideological and cultural reasons. Kebich also knows that public sentiment is largely on his side as, among other indicators, the March 1991 referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union demonstrated. Over 83 percent of the Belarusian people voted in favor of the preservation of the USSR.

The theme of Belarusian-Russian economic cooperation and of ties with other CIS republics runs like a thread through repetitive pronouncements of Prime Minister Kebich, former Speaker of the parliament Shushkevich, Foreign Minister Piotr Krauchanka, as well as those of other officials.

The closeness of relations with Russia maintained for economic reasons has its political dangers, however, primarily from the military side. And that is the major division between former Chairman Shushkevich on one hand, who adheres to a strict neutrality, and Prime Minister Kebich on the other, whose idea of a relationship with Russia includes a close military alliance. Despite Shushkevich's recent ouster from power, both men are widely viewed as potential contenders for the presidential post.

Another foreign relations issue that has been increasingly discussed and debated is related to Poland. There is a sizeable Polish minority in Belarus, especially along the Belarusian-Polish and Belarusian-Lithuanian border. Poland has become a major trading partner of Belarus. On the western side of the Belarusian-Polish frontier, in the Bielastok region, live tens of thousands of Belarusians. Poland was one of the first foreign countries to recognize Belarus's independence. There was an exchange of state visits in 1992. However, there are also knotty problems with the pro-Polish Catholic Church in Belarus, harassments of the Belarusian minority in Poland by local chauvinists, and a measure of Polish irredentism among some regarding the so-called "Eastern Region" that was part of the Polish state in the 1921-1939 period.

Relations with Lithuania have had some rough spots concerning territorial matters brought up by Foreign Minister Krauchanka in February 1992, but soon they were settled and the general

atmosphere seems to have improved since the November 1992 victory in Lithuania's parliamentary elections by the Democratic Labor Party of Algirdas Brazauskas.

Belarus's relations with the other two neighbors, Ukraine and Latvia, present no special problems beyond general economic and human traffic disruptions common to the entire ex-Soviet area.

The Miensk authorities, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are trying to promote the widest possible contacts with the Belarusian diaspora in the West, particularly in the United States, with an eye to developing economic and cultural cooperation. The First World Reunion of Belarusians took place in Miensk in July 1993 and was largely financed by the Belarusian government. Not everybody in the republic concurs with these developments. From the ultra-conservatives come denunciations of the emigres for their alleged collaboration with the Germans during World War II and their being on the payroll of foreign intelligence agencies, couched in the current expression, "agents of influence". On the other hand, the democratic opposition groups, including the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), have been engaged in their own cooperative efforts with Belarusian emigre organizations through which they reach out for contacts with Western politicians and governments.

J. The West: Expectations and Disappointments

Belarus's national security is an area of conflicting interests. On the one hand, there is Moscow, with its traditional apprehensions vis-a-vis the West, contradicted with the fledgling independence of the republic itself. The presence on Belarusian territory of the strategic nuclear arms of the CIS which, for all practical purposes, are Russia's arms, and of tens of thousands of Russian soldiers, makes removal of both of them as important a task as it is delicate. Geo-strategically, Belarus remains as important an area to Moscow as it was in the times of Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Hitler. Therefore, repeated invitations have been extended to the Belarusians from the CIS headquarters to join in a military alliance. There are powerful forces in the republic, including Prime Minister Vyacheslav Kebich, who would like to see this happen. Kebich's stance is dictated primarily by economic reasoning: the more successful he is in securing oil, gas, and raw material from Russia thereby keeping unemployment low, the stronger he will be politically. Others, like the former Speaker of the parliament Stanislav Shushkevich, argue against too close a political rapprochement with the eastern giant, but acknowledge the dire need for economic ties with Russia. Unfortunately for Shushkevich, economy and politics go hand in hand.

Some national leaders, such as Zianon Paznyak, the president of the BPF and the head of the democratic opposition in the parliament, or Vasil Bykau, the most prominent Belarusian writer and forceful spokesman on behalf of national independence, look to the West for signs of interest in Belarus's independence, but find little reason for hope. Foreign investment in Belarus has been sporadic and insignificant.

The perception in Belarus among both government officials and the democratic opposition is that the West's only interest in Belarus is nuclear weapons. Indeed, even overt efforts to attract Western attention to the strained political environment which threatens to halt the progress toward democratization appear to have fallen on deaf ears according to a number of individuals who expressed their frustration to the IFES team. They pointed specifically to events that followed the rejection of the referendum calling for early elections.

At the time of IFES team's visit, government officials also candidly admitted that they feel no pressure from Western democracies to hold early elections or indeed to make any progress on democratization. At the same time, any statement from a Western leader supportive of the government's policies is played up in the government controlled media and used to answer the government's domestic critics. The United States and other Western democracies should take definitive steps to overcome the negative effects of such false perceptions.

II. OVERVIEW OF EXISTING POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

A. The Supreme Soviet

Under the previous Soviet constitution, the Supreme Soviet of Belarus allowed for a full complement of 360 deputies. (According to the new constitution, adopted on March 15, 1994 the number of parliamentary deputies will be reduced to 260.) Only 310 of the seats were subject to election. They represented the 310 single-member constituencies into which the Republic was divided. Those who were elected had served since their election in 1990 when Belarus was still a part of the Soviet Union. The Supreme Soviet also consisted of 50 seats set aside for appointed members drawn from Communist Party-approved veterans associations, groups representing the handicapped, and similar public organizations. At the time of the team's visit only 345 deputies were serving in their posts. Fifteen seats remained unfilled because elections in their districts failed to garner a sufficient voter turnout to validate the election.

The 1990 elections were far from democratic. Not only did the 50 deputies from the public

organizations gain their seats without standing for election but very few of those who stood for election in 1990 faced any real competition. Eighty-six percent of the deputies are former members of the Communist Party. However, the predominance of conservatives in the legislature has deeper roots than just the lack of means for free expression and the strictures of the electoral procedure.

There is wide-spread skepticism that the new political process offers an alternative to the current order. There is also much frustration with what many see as a misuse of freedom whose benefits are measured predominantly in material terms. A widely heard rhetorical question is "What is more useful, sausage or freedom?" Due to the general cynicism and apathy of the electorate, political parties are small and ineffective. The conservative majority in parliament who are largely managers and administrators of work collectives, and representatives of such groups as war veterans and society of the blind, has successfully slowed down the pace of reforms. The government skillfully uses to its advantage the argument that the situation in Belarus is better than the other republics. Indeed, although industrial production has declined, the rate is less drastic than in Russia and Ukraine. Also, inflation in Belarus until recently has been less rampant than in these two neighboring republics. Prices are somewhat lower and goods more readily available.

B. Political Composition of the Supreme Soviet

In 1992, of the 345 members of the Supreme Soviet, a block of about 120 conservative deputies of so-called "pragmatic Communists" calling itself "Belarus" united under the leadership of Guennadi Kozlov. This is the largest parliamentary faction, aptly described as the "Council-of-Ministers" Party. Its members are leaders of local soviets (councils), collective and state farms, industrial enterprises and law-enforcement bodies.

Next largest is the Communist faction of 58 deputies formed in 1993, led by Mikhail Kachan. It consists mainly of deputies representing veteran and disabled organizations.

The parliament has a democratic opposition of about 35 legislators led by the leader of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), Zianon Pazniak (Zenon Poznyak). The opposition manages to garner up to 100 votes on less controversial issues. The opposition's impact on the legislative process, however, is much stronger than its numbers would indicate. Through their resourcefulness and energy, assisted by events in Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states, the opposition managed to steer the legislation toward assertion of national independence and the

renewal of Belarusian culture.

Asked about the single most important development in 1992 that brought him "the biggest joy," former Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Stanislav Shushkevich said: "I am proud of the changes in the mentality and consciousness of the Belarusian people that have taken place during 1992. Under such conditions, the legislature and the government will be able to carry out their policy." (FBIS, 29 January, 1993, p. 54.)

Since January 1993, Shushkevich may have changed his sanguine view of the conditions under which the legislature conducts its work. Twice, in June and in December, the conservative majority in the Supreme Soviet made attempts to depose the Chairman for his conduct of political affairs and was short only a few votes of the required number. The attempt finally succeeded in January 1994, shortly after U.S. President Clinton's visit to Minsk.

C. Prime Minister and Ministries

The Belarusian government has been headed since June 1990 by Prime Minister Vyacheslav Kebich, a man of action, previously in charge of the Heavy Industry Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. His government consists of former Party functionaries and takes a very conservative approach to economic and political reforms. Kebich himself, born in 1936, spent twenty-nine years in the Party. He has couched his approach to reforms in philosophical terms of "traditionalism." Commenting on the Russian government's political and economic course, he warned about taking extreme positions. He advocated as "far more effective" a "model of the constructive combination of reform and traditionalism based on national and regional agreement." (FBIS, January 22, 1993, p.17.)

Kebich's "traditionalism" looks to critics like "an alliance between shadow structures and communist party apparatchiks." Condemning this tendency the Council of the United Democratic Party of Belarus warned of "a crawling coup d'etat," "the establishment of authoritarian rule," and "a setback on the road toward democratic reforms." (FBIS, January 1994, p. 52.)

The members of the democratic opposition in the parliament take a much grimmer view of the government's recent actions. They accuse the Kebich team and the conservative majority in the Supreme Soviet of "national treason" leading to the restoration of the old Russo-centric empire.

D. Local Administration

Administratively, the territory of the republic is divided into six oblasts (provinces): Brest, Homiel (Gomel), Hrodna (Grodno), Minsk, Mahilou (Mogilev), and Vitebsk. Each oblast is subdivided into about twenty raions (regions). The total number of regions is 117. In the rural areas, regions are subdivided further into districts. Each oblast, region, and district is run by a soviet (council) elected locally. Many of the local bosses are carryovers from the pre-perestroika times with connections and a style of administering going back to Communist rule.

People in the provinces, having no other experience on which to draw, are generally unable to differentiate between the "Power of the State" and their local municipal rights and competence. With a few very striking exceptions, local administrators continue to wait for directions from above, and obey any directive from central authorities.

A program aimed at developing a sense of local prerogatives and municipal, regional, and provincial autonomy would be beneficial to the overall democratic process in Belarus. An enhanced sense of freedom on a lower administrative level will energize economic activity and invigorate local politics.

E. Influence of Work Collectives and Trade Unions

It would be difficult to overstate the influence of the work collective and state enterprises on the political process in Belarus. First, most of the members of the conservative majority were candidates nominated by these groups, and under current laws they retain their professional posts while serving in the Supreme Soviet. The same is true of many of the members elected to the local soviets. In addition, members of the various election commissions carrying out the elections at the regional and local levels are also nominated from work collectives and state enterprises.

The strength of their influence comes from the fact that these are the same individuals who hold an extraordinary amount of power over the daily lives and welfare of the people in their constituencies. Not only are they employers and bosses of most of the working voters in their territories, but they also hold control over pensioners who still rely on them for their stipends and benefits.

Traditionally, the nomination of candidates from the various collectives resulted in their nearly

unanimous election. Failure to vote, or a dissenting vote, could lead to serious and very personal consequences. Such traditions will be hard to alter and old apprehensions will be difficult to erase.

The labor union movement in Belarus is fragmented. Besides the official Federation of Labor Unions of Belarus headed by Uladzimir Hancharyk (Vladimir Goncharik), there are smaller groups. Among the most active is the Independent Labor Union led by Hienadz Bykau (Guennadi Bykov). The team had the opportunity to meet with its representative Siarhiej Antochyk (Serguei Antonchik) who is also a member of the Supreme Soviet. Another organization is the Confederation of Labor of Belarus headed by Mikhail Sobol. There are also several strike committees throughout the country, loosely connected to the Independent Labor Union in Miensk, representing various plants and mines.

All the labor unions, including the official Federation of Labor Unions of Belarus, have favored early parliamentary elections.

III. EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

At the beginning of 1992, in the midst of a petition drive for a referendum on the dissolution of the Republic's Supreme Soviet and the holding of new elections, there were at least twenty parties or political movements in Belarus. Most of them are still rather small and insular. Stanislav Shushkevich observed at the beginning of 1993 that almost 60 percent of Belarusians do not identify with or support any political party. The Communist Party, he said, has the support of 3.9 percent of the electorate, and the Belarusian Popular Front has virtually the same level of support at 3.8%. The influence of other parties is much weaker. Recent surveys suggest that the number of unaffiliated voters is significantly higher.

A. Registration of Parties

At the time of the team's visit there were 15 officially registered parties in Belarus. Interestingly, legal support for accommodation of political parties is only generally set out in terms of existing laws on associations and public organizations. Political parties are lumped together under provisions which guide the registration and activities of any other public or social organizations. They have not yet been given any special status in spite of their very unique purpose and potential influence on the future of Belarus. To register as a party an organization

meeting must be held with at least 100 members present. Those present must sign protocol authenticating their meeting and demonstrating their consent regarding the minutes of that meeting.

Under the law, parties are registered with the Ministry of Justice where some latitude is enjoyed in accepting or rejecting party applications. Of critical importance in the registration process is the preparation of the party's by-laws which come under intense scrutiny from the Ministry. A number of parties indicated that they had to rely on guidance from attorneys to ensure that their by-laws would be in compliance with the laws. In addition, the team was told that if the by-laws were rejected by the Ministry a fee was charged each time they were resubmitted for additional review. Once registered, parties are subject to continuing monitoring by the Ministry of Justice. At any time, the Ministry can enforce a complete audit of a party's records and activities. The yard stick by which the findings are measured often involves a comprehensive review of a party's activities to see if they stay within the confines of the by-laws approved by the Ministry. Irregularities or activities which stretch outside those confines can result in suspension of the party's registration.

Parties may be registered at the national or local level. Nationally registered parties must have branches in several oblasts. To operate at the local level, registration with local officials is required. In each case registration involves institutionalizing their infrastructure by such activities as establishing a bank account, and acquiring their official stamp.

As the strength and influence of political parties grow, it will be important that a specialized law be enacted to deal with the complexities of a more mature political life. Ideally, such a law would prescribe not only the rules for organization and registration, but also delineate the rules for nomination of candidates, campaign funding and campaign ethics.

B. Newly Emerging Parties

Listed here are the major new parties:

The Party of Communists of Belarus

After the prohibition of the Communist Party of Belarus (CPB) in the wake of the August 1991 putsch, Belarusian Communists regrouped and renamed themselves the Party of Communists of Belarus (PCB). Their "new" organization was formally registered on December 7, 1991.

However, the PCB was left without any assets. The funds were confiscated by the state, or as some people allege, they were pilfered by individuals for their personal use.

In view of the tremendous economic difficulties that have accompanied the post-Soviet period, organized Communists could again become a serious factor in the political arena now that the ban on the CPB was lifted by the parliament on February 4, 1993. According to some surveys taken in the latter part of 1992, more than 15,000 individuals were waiting for the repeal of the ban in order to join the resuscitated Communist Party.

The Belarusian Popular Front

The most active political group in Belarus is the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) which was founded on June 25, 1989 with Zianon Pazniak (Zenon Poznyak) as president. The BPF has claimed to be not a party but a movement open to any individual or party, including Communists, if those who join share the Front's basic goal of a fully independent and democratic Belarus. However, in May 1993, in view of a pending law allowing only registered parties to participate in the upcoming elections, the BPF was also registered as a party, thus assuming a dual character of a movement and a party.

The United Democratic Party of Belarus

Founded in November 4, 1990, the UDPB is the earliest existing political party. The party, led by A. Dabravolski, claims a formal membership of about 1,500 core members including technical intelligentsia, professionals, workers, and peasants. Some also belong to the BPF.

The Belarusian Social-Democratic Union (Oleg Trusov)

Founded on March 4, 1991, the party has sixteen chapters throughout the Republic. According to their information their members include workers, peasants, students, military personnel, and both urban and rural intelligentsia. Led by Supreme Soviet Deputy Aleh Trusau, the party has a twelve-member faction in the Supreme Council of Belarus.

The Belarusian Peasant Party

Founded on February 23, 1991, the party claims to have "hundreds of members" and branches in a majority of regions. Its leader is Jauhien Luhn (Yevgeni Lugin). The party has members among deputies of local councils and several deputies in the Supreme Soviet of the Republic.

The Party of People's Accord

Founded in April 1992, the PPA is closely associated with other democratic parties, presses for early elections, formation of a coalition government, and acceleration of reforms. Its leader Guennadi Karpenko is also a member of the Supreme Soviet.

The Belarusian Scientific Industrial Congress

The Congress began its activities in October of 1992. The party is engaged in the construction of a civilized lawful state through democratic and radical economic reforms that would create normal living conditions for everyone and is led by Alexander Sanchukovski.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ELECTIONS

Major difficulties affecting Belarus's transition to a democratic multiparty system are underscored by the fact that Belarus has not yet formalized its legal identity. Although the new constitution was adopted on March 15, 1994 and a Law on Elections of the Belarusian president was approved in the second reading on March 29, 1994 and introduced on March 30, 1994, major portions of the existing laws guiding the functions of government and its administrative structures still rely heavily on old laws adopted under the former Soviet Union under the influence of the old Communist Party. The path to formalizing a new constitution and development of a new parliamentary election law had been fraught with controversies and delays which, at the time of the team's visit, were still a long way from being overcome.

The growing democratic movement in Belarus confronts a government left over from the Soviet period. The democratic forces are led by the Belarusian Popular Front, a mass movement founded in 1989 and dedicated to the transformation of Belarusian society and the renewal of the Belarusian nation according to principles of democracy and humanism. Only some 10% of the 345 sitting members of the Supreme Soviet, the Republic's one chamber legislature, campaigned under the Front's banner in the 1990 elections. The Front's leaders advised the team that, depending on the issue being debated and voted upon, they can now count on as many as 70 to 100 deputies to vote with them.

Political power in Belarus, however, remains in the hands of a clique of former members of the Communist Party, senior bureaucrats, managers of state-owned enterprises, and chairmen of collective farms. Prime Minister Vychesheslav Kebich and all members of his cabinet were key

members of the Communist Party, and the majority of deputies to the Supreme Soviet are either themselves managers of state-owned companies or collective farms or are their hand-picked representatives. Supreme Soviet Chairman Shushkevich was the only high ranking official in the Supreme Soviet who had not been a member of the nomenklatura. The majority in the Supreme Soviet tried to unseat him right before he left for Washington in the summer of 1993, and he has now been ousted. It is in this environment that the new constitution had been forged and that the new election law will be adopted.

A. The Referendum

Under normal circumstances, new parliamentary elections would not be scheduled until the spring of 1995 at which time the current 5-year terms which began with the elections in 1990 would expire. However, within the span of just two months during the spring of 1992 the Belarusian Popular Front gathered the signatures of almost 450,000 voters on a petition for a referendum calling for dissolution of parliament and calling for new elections to be held in the fall of that same year. The number of signatures represented about 8% of the entire electorate. During the same period the BPF also formalized a comprehensive draft of an election law which was publicized and offered in the Supreme Soviet.

The actual language of the referendum posed in a single question three separate but related issues. Not only did it call for new elections and early dissolution of parliament, it also called for the early elections to be held under the new election law BPF had proposed. According to an English translation provided to the IFES team the question which would have appeared on the ballot would have been as follows:

Do you consider it necessary to hold an autumn 1992 election of the Supreme Body of Power of the Republic of Belarus, on the basis of "Law on Elections of Peoples' Deputies of Belarus", the draft of which was presented by the opposition Belarus Popular Front in the Supreme Soviet, which would result in the premature [early] dissolution of the current Supreme Soviet?

Following a thorough review of the petition and the signatures which were submitted, the Central Election Commission certified the results finding that approximately 380,000 signatures were valid exceeding the legal requirement by nearly 30,000. In view of the broad scope and complexity of the ballot question being put forward, the Commission also reviewed the petition's legality under the constitution.

The team was advised that several members including the Chairman of the CEC are attorneys. After thorough review, the CEC found that in spite of the complications posed, there were no legal grounds for rejecting the petition. Its certification of the petition was formalized and submitted to the Supreme Soviet.

In what many critics consider a clear violation of Belarusian law, the Supreme Soviet refused to call the referendum election. In spite of open criticism, the Supreme Soviet offered no substantive legal justification for rejecting the petition, although unsubstantiated suggestions were proffered by some parliamentary members that technical violations may have occurred during the process of gathering signatures. However, in view of the public outcry, the issue which had been raised could not be ignored. The Supreme Soviet was forced to make an overture. As a result, the majority pledged to move the date for the elections up by one year, to March 1994.

In addition to assurances that early elections would be held was the promise that a new constitution would be adopted in time for that event. As late as October 29, 1993, Supreme Soviet passed a resolution which would have required amendments to the existing election law, and passage of a constitution by the end of the year. That deadline was not met, and with the adoption of a new constitution and a presidential election law in March 1994 the question of an early election is still not resolved. Various political figures periodically return to the idea of holding the parliamentary elections several months after the presidential elections. (The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet M. Hryb said on February 12, 1994 in the interview outlining his political program that if the results of presidential elections are positive, the Supreme Soviet elections could be held three months later. According to the Nezavisimaya Gazeta of 25 February, a draft Supreme Soviet decree on calling parliamentary elections on 20 November 1994 had been handed to the deputies. S. Shushkevich, the former Chairman of the Supreme Soviet supported the demands for calling early parliamentary elections in the spring of 1994, made during a rally and strike started on February 15 at the initiative of the republican strike committee, the independent trade union and the BPF.) But so far the Supreme Soviet is reluctant to discuss new legislation on Supreme Soviet elections. On February 24, 1994 the 13th session of the Supreme Soviet failed to adopt an electoral law, after clashes erupted over the document, and it was submitted for further consideration.

B. Status of the Constitution

A new Belarusian constitution was finally adopted on March 15, 1994. One should not minimize the magnitude of the challenges which were facing the Supreme Soviet in creating a new constitution and restructuring the government of Belarus. Throughout this report the team has commented on difficulties and deficiencies which may stand in the way of a swift and sure transition to democratization. However, these observations should not be taken outside a broader perspective. There is no question that strides have been made to initiate the process and to define the general path. Work on a more democratic constitution had certainly not been at a standstill. On the contrary, at the time of the team's visit nearly 70% of all the articles of the new constitution had been approved by the required 2/3 majority of Parliament.

The Constitutional Commission was established in July of 1990 while the country was still the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. Originally 74 deputies and legal experts were assigned to the project. The complement of members represented two factions, conservatives and liberals. Following the attempted coup in 1991, the Declaration of State Sovereignty was officially given the status of a law on the constitution to serve until a new constitution could be ratified.

The text of a first joint proposal of the liberal and conservative membership of the commission was submitted to the Supreme Soviet in November of 1991. This draft was subsequently approved by the parliament for publication and public review the following December. At that time, the draft was also provided to experts throughout the international community and to academic institutions. Literally thousands of suggestions were forthcoming, although according to information given to the team, most related to refinements of the technicalities in the wording. However, parliament was also presented with criticisms and detailed suggestions for substantive changes on such complex issues as civil rights, local self government, the composition of the legislative body and the presidency.

By August of 1992, 100 of the original 165 articles had been amended, and a new draft was published. The work accomplished on the Constitution has resulted in significant progress toward promoting human rights, introducing a separation of powers and an independent court, and declaration of Belarus as a civil society ruled by law.

It should be noted that the process of ratification involved review and approval of one article at a time. Approval of an article requires a 2/3 majority vote of members of the legislative body. Some deputies meeting with the team in December acknowledged that modifications of one

article may cause conflicts with other articles which have already been approved.

Human Rights:

The guiding light for the constitutional reforms on human rights was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its significant features include guarantees of presumed innocence until guilt is proven, and the rights of individuals to refrain from having to provide evidence against themselves or their family members. (Article 26, 27) The rights to appeal are also guaranteed. (Article 25) Under a new constitution, citizens are guaranteed freedom of movement and free choice of residence. (Article 30) The rights to privacy and the inviolability of the individual and the home are also affirmed. (Article 29) Article 10 provides that a person cannot be stripped of citizenship. Nor can a person be denied the right to change it. The exile of a citizen is also prohibited. Citizens' freedom to leave the country and to return freely are guaranteed, and extradition is limited to the extent that such action is bound by international agreements to which Belarus is a party. (Article 10)

Another significant change gives citizens freedom to access information. According to Article 34, not only are people free to pursue, receive and impart information, officials with whom the team met pointed to the fact that government agencies and public organizations are required to provide full disclosure of information that a person might request. The confidentiality of personal communication is also guaranteed. (Article 28) The constitution guarantees the rights of access by public associations and organizations, including political parties, to the state-owned media. In addition, officials pointed to provisions that prohibit any monopoly of the media by the state, or a public organization or private individual. (Article 33)

Admittedly, socialist themes also pervade the document. Included are "rights" to free health care and education, as well as to housing. (Article 45, 49, 48) Paradoxically, the "right to work" has been sustained alongside the right to subsidy for the unemployed. (Article 41) In addition, the right to vacation still finds a place in the legal scheme. (Article 43)

One of the most significant features of the new constitution guarantees the rights to free expression and protection from having any ideology imposed on citizens by any public, religious or social organization. Citizens may not be forced to expose their personal beliefs nor be forced to change them. (Article 33) The document also speaks to rights related to mass meetings and demonstrations. (Article 35) It was pointed out to the IFES team that under a recent version of this article, wording which would have allowed such meetings to be prohibited on ambiguous grounds of "national security" has been eliminated although it appears that such wording has

been retained in contexts related to other guarantees.

Areas of Concern:

One of the areas of concern is that many of the adopted provisions, while seemingly characteristic of democratic principles, may leave loopholes or qualifications which could ultimately leave them devoid of the guarantees they promise. For example, a number of articles provide that a law will have to be enacted before the meaning and manner of the guarantee will have any real consequence. If the interpretation of the constitutional provisions and the way in which they will be enforced is up to lawmakers to decide at their discretion, the potential for abuse is considerable. In addition, the wording of the articles themselves provide for the limitations of rights based on certain ambiguously defined conditions. For example, some of the rights guaranteed can be curtailed if they pose a threat to the national security, civil order, or "moral security" of the country, or if they intrude on the rights and freedoms of others. (Article 23) A commentator noted that at least one version of the constitution included restrictions on certain activities of public organizations, religious groups and political parties including disseminating "social, national, religious and racial propaganda, or activities which are injurious to health and morals." In the adopted version, restricted activities include "propaganda of war, national, religious and racial enmity" and violent change of the constitutional system for political parties and public organizations. (Article 5) For religious organizations, forbidden activities also include actions "aimed against the Republic of Belarus's sovereignty and civic accord or involving violation of civil rights and freedoms". (Article 16) But without clear terms under which these conditions are defined, conflicts are bound to occur.

When the team asked how lawmakers would respond to criticism that such loopholes could potentially compromise the integrity of citizens' rights, one legal expert who participated in the legal drafting pointed to the fact that the introduction of the Constitutional Court provides the necessary protection. If the Constitutional Court proves to be an effective legal body, it could certainly provide an avenue for testing the integrity of the constitution. The team did not have sufficient time or opportunity to learn how individuals or groups who believe their fundamental rights have been violated would bring challenges or appeals before this court. The creation of an effective independent court system will take time. But, just as important, a new level of public education will also be required. Under the vast umbrella of communist party control and a Soviet structure where all directives came from central authorities, the legal system has traditionally been designed to serve the interests of the state. Introduction of an independent court represents a significant step in cultivating a legal system which represents the interests of the citizens rather than the government that serves them. The effectiveness of these initial steps

will ultimately be measured by the level of public confidence which can be nurtured by the new institutions being introduced.

Elections and Referenda:

At the time of the team's visit, most of the articles in the draft constitution related to elections and referenda had already been approved by the Supreme Soviet. In the adopted document the chapter related to elections is rather laconic. The provisions are only generally profiled with fuller details to be governed by law.

In general, the constitution provides for universal suffrage for all citizens 18 years of age or older. Elections are to be free, direct and by secret ballot. In addition, the voter's right not to vote or participate in the election is specifically protected. (Article 66) Any attempt to exert influence on a voter while casting a ballot is prohibited. (Article 69) It is interesting to find in the new document a reminder of an old Soviet tradition - a subsection which disenfranchises any person who is in prison or under detention. (Article 64) This subsection had been approved, despite the fact that during the previous article by article approval process this restriction failed to pass.

The draft also sustains the existing system of election management through the established hierarchy of electoral commissions. The procedures for the conduct of elections are to be determined by law. One key provision requires that the preparation and conduct of elections be open to public scrutiny and that all activities related to the process be publicly accountable. The constitution stipulates that expenses for preparation of the elections be borne by the state. Interestingly, the Belarusian CEC has interpreted this to mean that no outside assistance can be accepted by the commission from the international donor community.

Article 70 relates to the nomination of candidates. In this article the rights to nomination of candidates for the Supreme Soviet belong to public associations, work collectives, and independent citizens in accordance with laws still to be enacted by the legislature. While this provision has been approved, related provisions remain unresolved. One such subsection deals with the method of representation which, as written, would call for elections based on the "one voter - one vote" principle with each constituency representing an approximately equal number of voters. (Article 67) The article defining the age of candidates for deputies to the Supreme Soviet refers for fuller details to law, which is not yet approved. (Article 65) As discussed in more detail later in this report, debate continues over the kind of representation.

The most significant change in the articles of the constitution relating to referenda is that the number of signatures required in a petition has been raised from 350,000 to 450,000. (Article 74) Considering that the Popular Front's referendum petition which contained over 400,000 signatures was ultimately rejected by the Supreme Soviet, the increase leaves room for legitimate questions about the majority's motivations in creating the increasingly burdensome requirement. Another article stipulates that a law of the Republic of Belarus will define the list of issues which will not be eligible subjects for referenda. (Article 78)

Issues of Controversy:

Resolution of complex and controversial issues has been difficult and some crucial issues are still being hotly debated. Controversy has certainly surrounded the issues related to the separation of powers. Authorities of the presidency and the parliament are still being debated. Privatization and the restructuring of local powers are still subject to deliberation and dispute, as is the disposition of the military.

Perhaps one of the most serious issues being debated relates specifically to the system of representation and the structure of the Supreme Soviet itself. At the center of the debate was whether the parliament should be a professional body, or whether members should continue to serve on a part-time basis and retain their regular employment and career posts. The Belarusian Popular Front insisted that the deputies should be full-time professional legislators ineligible to hold other posts. The majority in the Supreme Soviet was demanding a continued role for managers of work collectives and state enterprises. They proposed that these individuals not be required to quit their current jobs to serve as full time parliamentarians. They argued that because of their positions within society, they should be involved in governing the nation. In addition, they argued that if they were required to give up their posts, they would lose touch with their constituencies and the conditions of real life.

Opponents seeking a professional legislature believed that limiting an elected official to hold only one post will contribute greatly to loosening the grip of the nomenklatura's power. Further, opponents believed that depoliticizing the workplace, thereby neutralizing the power of local bosses over the daily lives of their constituents, would result in an electorate free to express its political will without fear of repercussions.

At the time of the team's visit, debate on this issue resulted in a virtual standstill. One compromise being discussed by the majority is a two-chamber legislature with one house made up of professionals and the other house modeled after a British House of Lords, where the

nomenklatura could serve on a part-time basis. In the adopted version of a constitution the decision whether to serve on a professional basis or to combine parliamentary work with their career is left to deputies themselves. (Article 92)

The fact is that fundamental issues such as the choice between a majority or proportional representation system, a professional or non-professional parliament, and decisions regarding the status of political parties as legal entities, are also far from being etched in stone. However, the very fact that heated debates are still continuing over such fundamental policy questions in spite of the obvious strength of the conservative majority of Soviet period hold-overs indicates that inroads are being made by democratic forces. It is significant that even with the weight of its numbers, the majority has not been able to automatically garner a sufficient numbers of votes to support important provisions of its own proposals in critical issues. The fact that even among the majority there are those willing to disagree means that there is room for debate and compromise as long as application of pressure from divergent sides can be sustained.

Unfortunately, however, the conservative majority, through its rejection of the referendum, delays and failure to come to resolution on major issues has left itself vulnerable to allegations that its commitment to democratization is half-hearted. Critics suggest that even the scheduling of early elections has allowed the majority sufficient time to draft election laws and a constitution to its own liking that protects the elite and privileged status to which its membership has become accustomed.

C. The Debate Over the Election Law

The IFES team heard conflicting views on whether the majority in the Supreme Soviet would keep its promise to hold elections in the time-frame stipulated. Elections would require the Supreme Soviet to pass a new election law. At the time of the team's visit, although the initial deadline for March elections was just over 90 days away, parliament had yet to offer its final version of election legislation for open debate.

Since the Front's proposal for a new election law was published, several alternatives have also been put forward, including one by the Party of Communists of Belarus, the reconstituted communist party. The majority in the Supreme Soviet also published a draft bill in 1992 but has apparently decided to abandon it in favor of still another version which, at the time of the team's visit, was uncirculated.

Interestingly, there seemed to be some confusion in the minds of many as to who was actually participating in refining the final draft. On several occasions references were made to joint participation by both the Legal Committee of the Supreme Soviet, and the Commission on State Building. However, during the team's meeting with members of this commission, the team was advised that they had not been privy to any of the work being done on the new version of the law and had not even seen the draft. The team did not encounter anyone who had seen the bill. Indeed, the current working draft appeared to be shrouded in secrecy. In fact, the Chairman of the Legal Committee responsible for finalizing the new version of the bill declined to speak to the IFES team, either about what the bill might contain or when it might be tabled for discussion.

It is also significant that the Central Election Commission is not directly involved in the drafting of the law either, even though a number of their members are attorneys. The CEC has submitted its own proposals but there was nothing to indicate that their suggestions were being incorporated in the official draft either.

The team also heard seemingly conflicting reports as to whether the draft election law was even officially on the agenda for the session of Parliament which was underway at the time of its visit. This technicality is significant in that if the election law was formally slated on the agenda, the committee would have been legally bound to publish and distribute copies of the draft law up for discussion. In roundabout terms, the Chairman of the Legal Committee implied that since it was not formally on the agenda he was not technically obligated to make the draft available to anyone. The team could only assume that references it heard about the law being on the agenda were meant only in some general, symbolic sense.

System of Representation:

In view of the controversial issues yet to be resolved, the draft election law proposed by the Belarusan People's Front as part of its referendum efforts remains the most comprehensive revisions published at the time of the team's visit. The team was informed that the draft law being prepared by the Supreme Soviet will more than likely call for a pure majority system for deputies elected in a reduced number of constituencies. The Front's bill would also reduce the number of deputies, but would provide for a combination of majoritarian and proportional representation and comprehensively regulate all phases of the campaign and election process. The bill would cut the number of seats in the Supreme Soviet to 160 and do away with the 50 appointed seats. Under the Front's legislation each district would consist of roughly 80,000 voters, about four times the size of the average district today. Although only political parties

and blocks of parties could nominate candidates, an independent candidate could run if the person seeking office gathered 1,000 voter signatures on a nominating petition.

According to the Front's proposal, half of the 160 seats in the new legislature would have been elected from single member districts and half from party lists. As in several West European democracies, each voter would cast two ballots, one for a candidate running to represent his district, and a second for a party. Candidates and parties would receive public funds for the campaign which would be supplemented by private contributions, and all expenditures and receipts would have to be disclosed. The bill would ensure that at least one representative from each party was a member of local and district commissions administering the election. Their proposal would retain existing provisions which give citizens the right to observe the conduct of the election.

The Front's version would provide any citizen dissatisfied with election procedures a judicial remedy. Under the existing election law, election commissions have broad discretion in suspending voting or invalidating the results of an election in a constituency or precinct at any time they determine that an impropriety may have occurred. Such consequences can result even in instances where the violations are insufficient to alter the outcome. The existing laws are less than definitive in their guidance for adjudication of grievances and violations, resulting in rulings by election officials which can be arbitrary, inconsistent and, in extreme circumstances, manipulative. The Front's bill would spell out in detail the procedures for administering the elections and would significantly reduce the power of election commissions to invalidate an election.

With the possible exception of the provision eliminating appointed seats for former communist party, leaders of the Popular Front are not sanguine that any bill approved by the Supreme Soviet will contain their proposals. Reducing the total number of seats by enlarging the constituencies would weaken the nomenklatura's grip on power. The smaller the electorate, the greater the influence wielded by heads of local collective farms or state enterprises, a point that even the Deputy Chairman of the Party of Communists of Belarus was willing to concede. The collective farms and state enterprises are a powerful force in local communities, and many residents, particularly pensioners, are said to be afraid to risk the ire of the boss by any show of political independence.

Those who favor preserving the power of the collective farm and state enterprise managers also oppose the Popular Front's plan to elect deputies from lists put forth by political parties. When the Communist Party of Belarus was outlawed in 1991, most of these individuals chose not to

join the new Party of Communists but to remain independent. Although the Popular Front's proposal to elect half the deputies from party lists and half from single member districts strikes a balance between the need to strengthen political parties and the need to represent the electorate directly, the team was told that the draft being prepared by the majority in the Supreme Soviet is not likely to include any provision for election from party lists.

Nomination of Candidates and Campaign Financing:

The delegation was advised that the majority's draft election law would probably reject any provision limiting the power to nominate candidates to political parties alone. Under present law work collectives, which are organizations consisting of the employees of a particular enterprise, can nominate candidates to the Supreme Soviet. The Popular Front argues that the workplace should be depoliticized and that the provision in its bill allowing nomination by petition is sufficient to ensure that the political system remains open to change. The issue would again seem to involve a question of power: enterprise managers often exercise tight control over the collectives, and the collectives are thus one more avenue by which the nomenklatura can maintain its hold.

Present law bans private donations to candidates. Campaigns are publicly funded, even to the extent that the law provides for the payment of a candidate's salary if he or she takes a leave of absence from his job in order to campaign. The funds are limited, however, and in a recent by-election for a seat to the Supreme Soviet only enough money was available to print some black and white posters with a brief biographical sketch and short statement of the candidates' views. In spite of the emergence of a multi-party system, state funding of campaigns still focusses only on financing candidates. Funds are not provided to the parties themselves and allowances are passed directly to the candidates. It was not clear, however, that the actual funds were actually transferred. Rather, the team was led to understand that officials pay for the printing of basic flyers and posters on behalf of the candidate, and provide basic commodities such as public address systems as necessary.

The Popular Front's bill would substitute a mix of private and public funding for the current system. All candidates would be guaranteed a certain minimum of public funds and could raise additional money from individuals and commercial entities, and the parties would receive public funds both for campaign expenses and for ongoing activities. Several deputies told the delegation that the ban on private donations had not been effectively policed during the 1990 elections and suggested the same might well hold in the future. Allowing private contributions so long as they are disclosed appears to be the Front's answer to this problem.

The legislation proposed by the Front would permit contributions from foreign sources as well. A number of individuals told the team that this might help to correct the current imbalance in funding between democratic forces and the nomenklatura. However, this provision may appear to be quite self-serving to those who do not expect foreign support. The democratic deputies all said that their opponents had outspent them significantly, thanks to their access to resources of state enterprises and collective farms, and were afraid the same would happen at the next election. A representative of the newly constituted communist party admitted that at a recent by-election for the Supreme Soviet his party had spent 200,000 rubles promoting its candidates and charged that another candidate, who held a position in the present government, had spent some six million rubles to win. According to the communist party representative, money was used to provide voters with beer and sausage on election day.

Although the delegation was unable to learn how the majority's draft might treat campaign finance issues, deputies from the Popular Front were sure it would ban the receipt of any funds from abroad for any purpose, even for nonpartisan civic and voter education programs. These deputies explained that the nomenklatura feared that any foreign support would favor those of a democratic orientation.

General Issues:

The Popular Front's proposed election law recommends a number of changes in the manner in which elections are to be administered. Under present law, a constituency election commission in each of the constituencies is responsible for conducting the election and counting ballots. The Front's bill ensures that representatives of political parties would serve on each commission.

Under the old election law, which is still in effect, observers are allowed to register with constituency commissions and be present to observe virtually all phases of the process including election day activity. These observers may be representatives of work collectives, state enterprises, or representatives of a candidate. There is little to suggest that observers will be restricted under the new draft. However, it remains to be seen whether observer groups must be registered in individual constituencies or even polling stations. Such a requirement would severely limit their freedom of movement.

The Front's bill would also severely limit the circumstances under which an election could be nullified. Under present law, regional and local election commissions as well as the Central Election Commission enjoy broad discretion to invalidate an election if there are improprieties, even, the team was told, if the alleged improprieties would not affect the outcome. Indeed,

according to Front representatives, during the 1990 elections the counting of ballots in several districts where democratic candidates were leading was suspended, and then on the basis of this suspension the election was voided. Under the Front's proposal, only if it were absolutely clear that improprieties had affected the outcome would the Central Election Commission have the power to void an election. In many countries only the court has the power to overturn an election.

The current Supreme Soviet consists of 360 members, although 15 seats remain unfilled due to the double-threshold standards required for validation of election results. Under the existing soviet law, results in any race are valid only if an absolute majority of voters in the constituency actually participate, and if the winning candidate achieves an absolute majority of the votes cast. Even by-elections have failed to garner results sufficient to satisfy the statutory requirements, leaving 15 constituencies without representation. The lower turnout seemed to be due mainly to the public's confusion, lack of confidence and general apathy. Most deputies as well as representatives of the Front and various political parties shared a view that these requirements need to be modified. However, no one suggested that the requirement for a majority turnout be abandoned. Rather, the general consensus was that the turnout requirement should be reduced to about 25-30%. With regard to the second requirement that the candidate receive an absolute majority of the votes cast, with more candidates potentially appearing on the ballot in each race it will be less and less likely that a single candidate will garner the required majority. Unlike the parties in Ukraine and several other countries of the former Soviet Union, no one has proposed lowering or eliminating that threshold. On the contrary, it is assumed that provisions would be included in the law calling for run-off elections between the two candidates garnering the most votes.

V. CIVIC EDUCATION AND THE MEDIA

A. Elections: a Discredited Concept

Despite the strides Belarus has made towards democracy, the obstacles to further progress should not be underestimated. Although elections have been held at regular intervals since 1938, the 1990 elections were the first that were at all competitive, and even then only a few districts, mostly around Miensk, saw anything approaching a genuine race. Citing this history of sham elections, a number of those with whom the team spoke contended that the great majority of the electorate had become so cynical about elections and their impact that it would take years to convince citizens that their vote did indeed count. It also seems that historically, once a voter

dropped the ballot in the ballot box, the relationship between the elected official and his or her constituency came virtually to an end as did the electorate's opportunity to exert any influence on the workings or decisions of the Supreme Soviet.

B. Lag in Public Awareness

In relation to democratic reforms, the team was advised on numerous occasions that an estimated 80% of the population had inadequate information or experience on which to draw concerning ways to promote their interests through a democratic process. On the contrary, the general population may still see reforms in legislation and economics as a possible threat. In fact, one commentator noted that the mass media has generally had a policy to discredit such reforms. In the public's mind, communist philosophies provide social protection and popular equity, an ideal that remains attractive particularly in view of current social and economic difficulties. A number of democratic activists expressed their concern that they simply did not have adequate access to the media to explain their proposals.

The team was told of several other factors that aggravated public apathy. For one thing, so far the campaigns have been extremely dull. Campaign materials have been limited to black-and-white generic posters and one or two short pamphlets, and campaigning has primarily consisted of a few appearances where candidates give set speeches. Because many of the candidates' lack campaign communications skills, they have not been able to generate the kind of enthusiasm among the electorate that would overcome voter apathy and cynicism.

Another factor cited to the team was the lack of any significant nonpartisan voter education or civic education program. A civil society is just beginning to form in Belarus, and the rich variety of nongovernmental organizations that contribute to a democratic culture in established democracies has yet to form. On the other hand, it is clear that the citizens of Belarus appreciate the need to start such organizations, and the team met with one nascent civic organization whose leadership recognized the importance of educating the electorate about political participation and had even begun, with very limited resources, a program aimed at reforming local government.

But the team was told repeatedly that the greatest obstacle to nurturing democracy in Belarus was the attitude of those now in power. The most striking example was their refusal to honor the petition for the referendum, but this not the only example of conservative thinking. The new constitution and election law are clearly key to building a democratic Belarus. Yet all signs are that the election law which will be presented by the majority is being written with an eye to

short-term political advantage and not to the long-term development of a competitive multi-party system. The apparently serious proposal to create a House of Lords-type upper chamber of the legislature demonstrates just how far those in power are willing to go to maintain control.

C. Media Access

In the view of many, the most damage the government is doing to the cause of democratic development is through its continued refusal to open up the media to new voices. The team heard repeatedly that only those whose message conforms to government thinking have access to state radio and television. The director of state media tried to assure the delegation to the contrary, insisting that the media was objective and nonpartisan and that although the editorial content of broadcasts was subject to direct control by the Ministry of Information, there had never been a conflict with the Ministry over coverage of political events. In a way, this is even more damning than if the charges of bias were true, for it shows a complete failure to appreciate the role of the media in a democratic society. The economy is in upheaval as it moves away from central planning and dependence on Moscow, and it is impossible to imagine that the government's management of economic changes has not provoked at least some criticism. How could objective coverage of the economy not call government policy into question?

The philosophy guiding the approach of state television and radio to politics was inadvertently revealed by a staff member when explaining why state television was refusing to give the Popular Front an hour a week for a public affairs program. "If we granted the Front's request," the staffer said, "we would have to give time to the communist party, and if we did this, others might want time, and soon we would lose all control." Control, it would appear, is the paramount consideration in all programming decisions.

This conclusion was reinforced by the approach the government has taken to private radio and television channels where it has used its licensing power to control what these outlets broadcast. First, a law is in place that all transmitters on Belarusian soil are under the ownership of the state. Private broadcasters may then be licensed to broadcast time and usage of the transmitter. The most notorious case involves Channel 8. Allegedly because of its program quality and technical problems with its broadcast signal, it was taken off the air and a lengthy bureaucratic review was undertaken. In the end, the channel was allowed back on the air, but only on condition that it not broadcast any political news and not criticize the government. More recently, the team was told that a student group was denied a license for a radio station altogether without any explanation or justification.

Control over the print press is exercised indirectly. The mass circulation papers not owned outright by the government are subsidized, and the prices of continued subsidies is adherence to the government line. Thus, when "Banner of Youth," a paper founded by a work collective, adopted an independent editorial line after the fall of the Soviet Union, its subsidy was stopped. To make up for the unexpected budget shortfall, the paper raised its prices. The subsidized press then undercut it and the paper's circulation plummeted from over 500,000 to less than 23,000. Unable to continue this way, the team was told that a new editor was hired who convinced the government to resume subsidizing the paper. It did, and circulation is climbing again, but the paper is now generally considered the most pro-government of any in the country.

The subsidies undermine the growth of independent media because the independents cannot sell their papers at the same low prices as the subsidized press. One paper has been able to survive on a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy but only precariously. Generally, printing presses are government-owned, and the paper has found it difficult to get its press run scheduled.

But although the political environment in Belarus makes continued progress toward democracy difficult to achieve, the changes that have taken place cannot be ignored. New freedoms are being exercised everywhere: articles questioning government policy are starting to appear, and new textbooks, without Marxist-Leninist cant, are being commissioned. Indeed, the fact that political decisions about such fundamental issues as choice between majoritarian and proportional representation electoral systems and a professional versus non-professional legislature are being openly debated is in itself one sign that the political environment has considerably improved since Soviet days.

VI. ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS

While the character of the election process in Belarus is facing dramatic changes as the country seeks a path toward democracy and a full-fledged multi-party system, there already exists an administrative structure capable of carrying out with relative efficiency the fundamental exercises required by a democratic election system. Elections, per se, are certainly not new to Belarus and the logistics and practical aspects of the process have been adequately resolved over the years so that there is a relatively sound administrative foundation on which to build. However, as the philosophy of elections changes, as true competition among parties and candidates is heightened, and as the political awareness of the people increases, new demands on the CC and

constituency election commissions will require significant modifications in their mandate and the scope of their authority.

In Belarus responsibility for administrative management, coordination and supervision of elections rests with a three-tiered structure of appointed electoral commissions. As is the case in most post-Soviet countries, there is no permanent government agency responsible for the conduct of elections. Rather, commissions are appointed for specific terms of limited duration. At the top of the hierarchy is the former Central Election Commission (CEC). The CEC's name was changed on March 30, 1994 as part of the "Decree on Conducting the Elections of the Republic of Belarus" to "Central Commission (CC) on Election of the President of Belarus and the Conduct of Republican Referenda."

The CC's entire membership is appointed to serve for a five-year term which virtually coincides with that of Parliament. District Election Commissions (DEC) and Polling Site Commissions (PSC) are, in turn, appointed to serve only for the period surrounding a specific election. The efforts of the CC are supported by an administrative staff, while the lower commissions receive their administrative support from local government officials and councils at the constituency level.

Following typical Soviet-style structures, members of the CC are appointed by the Supreme Soviet and are ultimately answerable to that body. District Election Commissions serve their specific constituencies and are nominated by the local councils based on recommendations from work collectives and sanctioned public organizations. According to one election official with whom the team spoke, prior to their being disbanded, appointments to the commissions had been approved by appropriate committees of the former Communist Party correspondent to each commission's level of competency. With regard to payment for their services most of the members of various committees, specifically at the local levels, are not paid, but are sometimes allowed certain privileges, such as access to hard-to-find consumer goods. At the regional level accommodations are made to allow them to receive their normal pay from their regular employment. In addition, chairpersons may also receive a fee or honorarium. At the polling-site level only the chairperson is paid, while all others serving at the polling place are volunteers.

The roles of the various commissions are clearly delineated. The CC is the overseer and is organized to ensure overall compliance with the election law, provide technical and procedural guidance, and to supervise the activities of the lower commissions carrying out the administrative responsibilities in each of the electoral districts. Notwithstanding the role of the Supreme Soviet

in such decisions which will be discussed later in this section, the CC is the final level of administrative authority in rulings regarding election violations and adjudication of grievances.

Election administration is quite decentralized. District Election Commissions are responsible for the registration of candidates nominated by authorized groups within their respective electoral districts, the preparation and printing of ballots whose design has been approved by the CC, and acquisition of commodities needed for election activities prior to and on election day. In cooperation with local authorities, DEC's also appoint, train and supervise the activities of Polling Site Commissions. It is the PSC's who compile voter lists, set up polling sites, process voters at the polls and complete the ballot count on election day.

While the actual conduct of nationwide elections relies heavily on the district level commissions, authorities at the oblast (territorial) level also play a significant role. While there was insufficient time to meet with officials at the oblast level, the team was given the impression that during major elections oblast officials provide a significant degree of administrative support with regard to budgetary functions as well as transport, security and communication needs. For local elections, a CC is not formed and the oblast commissions serve as the coordinating authorities for districts and polling sites in their territories.

It is relatively certain that the existing electoral commission structure will be maintained since the adopted constitution provides for election commissions in Article 72, without specifying their hierarchy. However, the constitution provides that the procedures for their conduct of elections will be stipulated in law.

A. Role of the Central Commission

The CC is the central policy-making body of the electoral administrative structure and the highest election authority in referendum and parliamentary elections. The CC also performs a number of specific functions relative to election preparation. Its major responsibilities includes:

1. monitoring nationwide compliance with the election law, seeking guidance from the Supreme Soviet as questions to interpretation of law arise;
2. directing the work of lower commissions;
3. defining election districts;

4. identifying all election expenses and formulating them into a comprehensive budget;
5. designing the format for forms, ballots, protocols and other documents related to the election;
6. approving transport and communication plans and coordinating with various ministries regarding resource allocations;
7. nationwide summarization, validation and reporting of election results, and registering elected deputies' authority to take office;
8. arbitrating disputes or complaints about election violations including overturning or suspending decisions or actions of subordinate election committees; and,
9. declaring vacancies and calling for by-elections.

There is little to suggest that the new parliamentary election law will significantly change these fundamental responsibilities. However, there will be room for some substantive expansion of duties as lawmakers continue to wrestle with the election issues yet to be resolved. Some of the key issues which will most likely affect the role of the CC relate to parliamentary decisions regarding the potential reduction in the number of constituencies, the status of political parties, and campaign funding and ethics laws. Members of the CC with whom the team met expressed their expectation that their responsibility in monitoring campaign funding and ethics compliance will be significantly expanded. They recognize the increased importance of these matters as party politics strengthen and as political races become more genuinely competitive. They also expressed their hope that lawmakers will create a separate law for political parties rather than retaining what appears to be parliament's current preference to continue to include political parties in laws governing public associations in general.

A few comments are warranted with regard to some of the CC's basic functions that will most likely remain unchanged.

Technical and Legal Compliance:

The CC is responsible for providing legal and technical guidance to all levels of election committees. For example, for nationwide elections the CC provides a comprehensive

administrative calendar to electoral committees which delineates legal and functional deadlines. Procedural and regulatory documents are also prepared by the CC and distributed to election officials at the district levels. They also provide legal advice regarding the interpretation and technicalities of the law, relying on counsel from the legal department of the Supreme Soviet when necessary.

Election Commodities and Supplies:

As is the case in other post-Soviet countries such as Ukraine and Russia, the acquisition process with regard to ballots, forms, and election-related commodities is completely decentralized. The role of the CC is to provide procedural guidelines and samples of the forms which they have designed, but actual printing and distribution is the responsibility of District Commissions. For example, samples of the form of ballot style and wording to be included is provided to each local commission by the CC. The Election Commission in the electoral district must arrange for printing and local distribution of ballots and all forms which will be necessary for the election within its boundaries. In addition, the CC plays virtually no role in the acquisition, or centralized distribution of materials. Nor does it appear that there is a uniform master list of supplies needed to carry out the election. Rather, it appears that the purchase and acquisition of most election-day supplies may be decentralized further, with each polling station committee responsible for determining its own needs and arranging to purchase what they think they will require.

Delimitation of Electoral Districts:

The CC is the key authority regarding the formation of electoral districts. At the time of the team's visit there had been no decision made with regard to the number of electoral districts into which a new election law would divide the country. In addition, while the current mood of parliament appeared to be leaning decidedly toward a majority system for its elected members, the possibility of some sort of mixed majority/proportional representation system was still being debated. An alternative system was also being considered that would provide for a combination of elected seats from single member districts and set-aside seats which would be appointed. Regardless of the final outcome and based on perceptions garnered during its very short stay, the team believes that the CC's authority in defining district boundaries will remain intact.

Under the existing law there are 310 constituencies. Until recently there were also 10 constituencies outside Belarus to accommodate men and women serving in the military and stationed on foreign soil. However, a decision was made to eliminate these constituencies

following Belarus's independence.

Based on the existing procedures, delimitation is to be accomplished utilizing administrative unit boundaries as a fundamental parameter. Districts are also to represent an approximately equal number of voters. The provision for relatively equal representation based on numbers of voters rather than population has been maintained in one of the articles which has already been approved in the new draft constitution, Article 66.

The CC relies on data provided by local authorities regarding the numbers of voters within the administrative units. As the primary administrators of government at the local level these officials appear to have the best access to the most current statistical and demographic information related to the citizens in their areas. For example, detailed civil records are maintained at the local level relative to housing and issuance of identification documents. From these types of sources, the statistical data should be sufficient in providing a foundation for a reasonable delimitation plan. Based on the information provided by local authorities, the Chairman of the CC and his administrative team develop a plan which must then be approved by a 2/3 vote of the Commission with at least a majority of its members present. The Chairman plays a significant role in bringing about consensus among the members.

The approved article of the draft constitution covering delimitation is limited and offers no guidance as to the frequency with which a new apportionment plan is to be adopted, although it appears that the delimitation plan is renewed by the CC prior to each parliamentary election. Nor does it provide any additional parameters which are to be complied with in developing the delimitation plan. For example, maximum allowable variances in equal representation targets are not stipulated. Nor are there specific stipulations such as, for example, a requirement that administrative units making up a constituency be contiguous. There is no way to tell how these issues might be dealt with in a new election law, should lawmakers choose to include more detailed provisions.

Another important consideration which deserves attention relates to providing access to an appeal mechanism in case individuals or groups believe they are aggrieved by the plan approved by the CC. The potential effects of delimitation decisions on the election process and the concepts of "gerrymandering" may not have been contemplated in the past since, as one official put it, "100% of the population turned out and cast 100% of their votes for a single candidate." In the years to come, if democratization takes hold, party politics will gain strength and competition for elected posts will become more intense. Attention will have to be paid to provide a legal framework which will safeguard the delimitation process and provide adequate oversight, review

and appeal provisions.

Adjudication of Grievances:

Of key importance in any democratic election system is the process whereby grievances and allegations of election violations may be adjudicated fairly and uniformly. The team noted weaknesses in the current system which deserve consideration as lawmakers pursue new options. It was also obvious that the members of the CC with whom the team met were interested in information and suggestions in this area.

Under the current scheme, grievances or alleged election violations are intended to be resolved within the framework and jurisdiction of the electoral commissions themselves. Violations are brought to the attention of the individual election committee responsible for the specific element of the election process involved. Each higher level of electoral commission authority may subsequently be called upon to review actions taken by a lower commission and uphold, overturn or suspend their actions. In nationwide elections, an appeal of the decisions of a District Committee may be made to the CC. The CC's ruling is supposed to be final.

One of the main issues of concern is that there are insufficient guidelines to ensure that election committees deliberating alleged violations treat them fairly, consistently and uniformly throughout the country. Additionally, the individual commissions are given a fairly wide latitude to determine what form of relief they decide is appropriate.

Of major concern is the fact that the commissions even have the option to invalidate an election altogether at least in a specific precinct or district. Under some circumstances an election commission can even cancel an election or suspend election activities at a given precinct. These are options that the team believes should be curtailed.

Typically, in established democracies, no election can be invalidated without a formal and binding decision by an independent court. Even under the strictest judicial review, courts are reluctant to overturn or invalidate an election if any other relief or remedy is possible. One of the key questions always considered is whether or not the alleged or proven violations were sufficient to alter the outcome of the election. Often the answer to this question relates to the margin of victory by which a certain candidate won. If the magnitude of the violation potentially affected 30 voters, for example, but the winning candidate won by a margin of 100 votes, it is unlikely that a court would rule that the election was invalid, even if penalties were imposed on the person or persons committing the violation. Courts generally recognize that

elections exist at a moment in time. They cannot be duplicated and if a new election is called the playing field is inalterably changed.

Members of the CC acknowledged that while existing laws provide for declaring an election invalid, they fail to provide adequate guidelines as to how severe or widespread the violations must be before such drastic measures may be taken. For example, there is no requirement that such violations be determined to be so severe that they actually alter the outcome.

Lawmakers have an opportunity to reconsider the direction new legislation will take in this regard. At the very least, administrative guidelines should be prepared which formalize the manner in which allegations of improprieties should be handled. More specifically, they should define the remedies which will be authorized. In addition, there should be a distinction between administrative remedies necessary to safeguarding the integrity of the election process and preserving the accountability of election results on the one hand, from the legal remedies by which perpetrators are punished on the other. Remedies should be developed in lieu of invalidating an election for those cases in which, despite acknowledged violations, the intent of the voters can still be determined. Of utmost importance is ensuring that the absolute neutrality of CC and its subordinate committees is sustained and protected. It is critical that they not be embroiled in the exercise of decisions which disenfranchise legitimate voters and candidates, and which could potentially alter the outcome of an election altogether.

It is important to mention that in the new presidential election law adopted in March 1994, the right to invalidate an election altogether or in a specific precinct or district belongs to only the Central Commission, and only in the case of grave violations of the law on elections which affected outcome of the elections. The right to appeal to the Supreme Court the CC's decision invalidating elections belongs to only presidential candidates. The appeal must be made within 10 days.

B. Level of Independence of the Central Commission

In attempting to assess the readiness of national institutions to make a successful transition to multiparty democracy, one must analyze the degree of independence with which those vested with the responsibility for conduct of the election may operate. Unfortunately, there is little to suggest that in Belarus the CC is afforded the independence which is usually accepted as fundamental. On the contrary, the team found that it is the Supreme Soviet who holds ultimate authority over the activities as well as the decisions of the CC. From statements made by some

Deputies with whom the team met as well as those made by members of the CC, it was clear that decisions of the CC will be invalidated or overturned by parliament any time lawmakers do not approve of their actions.

Two specific examples certainly illustrate the point. The most significant, of course, relates to parliament's rejection of the referendum calling for new elections which had been certified by the CC. Even though current Chairman of the CC is widely regarded as a very experienced lawyer. In addition, several of the other members of the CC are also lawyers, according to information which was given to the IFES team. According to CC officials, they acknowledged that the subject question of the referendum which contained three distinct issues in the same question was problematic. However, the CC found the referendum fulfilled all the requirements of law. After careful and thorough review, the CC believed that in spite of the difficulties with the text of the question, certification was mandatory under the law. However, their decision was submitted to the Supreme Soviet who voted to overturn the CC's decision by an 80% majority vote, and in the process came very close to completely disbanding the CC itself. Speculators suggest that ultimately the decision to maintain the CC's current membership was based on a full recognition that the referendum, after all, had been signed by about 8% of the entire electorate. What is even more significant is that, as far as the team could determine, there has never been any official statement or legal justification offered to explain the Supreme Soviet's decision. Even in more routine matters, decisions of the CC or District Election Commissions are subject to review by the Supreme Soviet. As a standard practice, for example, formal decisions of the CC are submitted to the Mandate Commission of the Supreme Soviet which analyzes the findings or results. If the Mandate Commission is dissatisfied with the CC's decisions, they can appeal to the Supreme Soviet where CC actions can be invalidated.

The authority of the Supreme Soviet to directly intervene in election decisions is also mirrored at the local level where local soviets are also able to invalidate rulings by District Commissions. For example, the team was advised that in a recent election involving a Miensk deputy election, the District Electoral Commission had certified the election of a candidate. In that particular instance the Commission's registration of the election of the candidate was rejected by the City Soviet because in one precinct there had been reports that one or more voters had tried to put more than one ballot in the ballot box. The Polling Site Commission was able to halt the violations. While the DEC had determined that the problems were insufficient to alter the outcome and had sustained the overall results in the election, the local soviet invalidated the election and rejected the winning candidate citing the alleged violations as grounds. In this particular case, the candidate appealed to the Supreme Soviet where his election was ultimately upheld.

In this instance, it is most likely that a just outcome was sustained. However, the real issues at stake relate to two problematic and vulnerable aspects of the system. The first is the dangerous option that allows officials to invalidate elections altogether, even when violations are insufficient to alter the outcome or make the intentions of the voters unclear. The second is the obvious lack of independence of election officials to carry out their mandate without undue influence from elected officials in power who usually have a significant vested interest in the outcome of the election in question.

Elections are a unique function of government for it is not one through which any partisan interests or influence of government is appropriately exerted. Rather, elections are the process through which the citizens make their will known. The preservation of absolute neutrality and independence of the entity responsible for the conduct of elections should transcend any potential for manipulation or partisan control a government agency or elected body may choose to exercise.

Certainly, the importance of access to a formal appeal process cannot be overstated. However, ideally the ultimate authority is the law itself. The question for appeal should be whether an autonomous and independent CC's actions or decisions were in full and most reasonable compliance with the law. Perhaps lawmakers should consider diverting the appeal process regarding certain kinds of decisions related to elections from its own scope of authority to that of the courts, especially those related to the validity of an election and certification of election results. Such rulings may be an appropriate venue for the new constitutional court.

C. Temporary vs. Permanent Nature of the CC

In addition to these crucial areas of concern, other factors affect the independence and potential professionalism of the CC. The CC is not organized until approximately 90 days prior to the parliamentary election. While the full complement of members convene in the weeks prior to the election, when the election is over most members disband and go back to their regular endeavors. As the team understands it, only the Chairman, the Secretary and the administrative staff are full-time members. After the election the full commission is only reconvened occasionally when specific issues arise which require the attention of the full membership. In view of their five-year terms, barring unusual circumstances, virtually every major regularly scheduled parliamentary election will be conducted by a new Central Commission. The temporary nature of the CC means that there is little opportunity for continuity and institutional memory to develop upon which future commissions can continue to build. For each new

parliamentary election the wheel must be reinvented with regard to policy issues and administrative difficulties, without the benefit of prior experience on which to draw.

The creation of a permanent, politically neutral civil service division may be worthy of consideration. There are several viable alternatives such as a small full-time depoliticized staff augmented by temporary political appointments during peak election cycles. Another option would be a commission made up of political appointees representing the different political parties. Both CC and local election officials with whom the team met appreciated the value of such an option suggesting that through their diversified interests they could monitor and control each other to ensure fair and neutrally applied rules and standards throughout the process. Some officials also saw value in such an approach as a way to promote public confidence in the fairness of the election.

Regardless of what alternative lawmakers ultimately embrace, and even if the current type of temporarily appointed commission is maintained, consideration should be given to at least staggering their members' terms. The rotation of terms would provide a basis for continuity in the Commission which would span transitions in government. At any given time only some Commissioners would be subject to appointment while remaining members would be available to carry forward the institutional memory and experience contributing to the efficiency of election administration.

D. Duties of District Electoral Commissions

District Election Commissions and the Polling Site Commissions under their supervision are the key players carrying out the technical processes of the elections themselves. It is at the district level that precinct boundaries are delineated. According to officials with whom the team met, the presidium of the local Executive Committee defines the precinct boundaries using housing records and natural physical borders to define subdivisions promoting the greatest convenience to relatively equal numbers of voters. They also select the location of the polling site which will be used in each precinct. Once the decisions are made, the DEC sends each voter a polling place card letting them know where they will go to vote. In cooperation with local authorities and based on recommendations of work collectives and public organizations, DEC's also appoint, train and supervise the activities of Polling Site Commissions.

The DEC is responsible for conducting elections within a budget allotted for expenses incurred for the election. One concern expressed was that the DEC's have virtually no voice in

establishing what the budgetary needs will be. The allotment of funds comes from above and sometimes officials struggle with funding insufficient to meet actual expenses. For example, in one recent by-election the budget allotted for printing ballots and posters was 45,000 rubles. However, the actual money required for these commodities came to 159,000 rubles. In addition to basic shortfalls, inflation is making it difficult for officials to predict what actual budgetary needs will be.

Preparation of Ballots and Printed Materials:

With the administrative support of the local officials, the DEC's carry out the process of preparing and printing all administrative forms, posters, notices, protocols and ballots for the election which will be necessary to accommodate the number of polling sites and voters in their jurisdictions. The design for printed materials, especially the ballots, comes directly from the CC which provides a printed sample. The DEC is also the centralized distribution source for the packets of printed materials to each polling site. As a complete package, the paper trail made possible by the full complement of administrative forms should be totally sufficient to provide for a well documented and fully accountable election.

A few comments are warranted about the ballot. Ballots are printed in sufficient quantity to provide a ballot to every registered voter plus an overage of 10% to make up for printing irregularities, damage or other circumstances. The candidates' names are listed in alphabetical order. The ballots are printed on an average quality paper and are not bound but printed and trimmed so that the ballot papers are loose. Nor are they sequentially numbered in any way. According to one district level official with whom the team met, the DEC manually counts out the appropriate quantity to be supplied to each polling site. The exact number sent to each site is maintained on a master accountability record by the DEC. Each polling site is also required to record the number of ballots received on a protocol which will be later utilized for accountability purposes at the end of the polling day. While the ballots contain all the necessary ingredients for orderly casting of votes, they do not include some of the security features which are commonly expected. For example, the average quality paper currently being used leaves room for fraudulent reproduction. Even if watermarked paper were to prove too expensive, it may be possible to print the ballots with a very faint screened background which would also make fraudulent reproduction difficult.

The lack of any kind of controlled sequential numbering system limits audit control only to quantities of ballots issued to polling sites. Sequential numbering would also allow a more comprehensive audit trail by adding a record of the exact sequence of numbers issued to the

polling site. These kinds of accountability assurances make misuse of ballots more difficult. In addition, if the ballots were bound in set quantities prior to leaving the printing facilities, officials would be afforded greater ease of packaging and distribution. Standard packaging would also give precinct officials better control over the ballots under their supervision.

Registration of Candidates:

District Election Commissions are responsible for the registration of candidates nominated by authorized groups within their respective electoral districts. Traditionally, the nominating period for candidates has been between 70 and 40 days prior to the election. Within 3 days after receiving the nomination of a candidate, the DEC must review the documents and qualifications of the candidate, notify the candidate of his or her acceptance, and publish notification in the press. The information is also forwarded to the CC who ultimately approves the slate of candidates for each constituency.

According to the new constitution and under the election law, elections costs are to be borne by the state. Under current campaign requirements and finance restrictions, the DEC also plays a significant role in the campaign process. With regard to media access, the team was told that the DEC plays a lesser role than that played by government authorities. However, they are charged with the responsibility for producing state-approved fundamental campaign materials for the candidates such as generic posters and flyers. They are also responsible for scheduling the public meetings where candidates may formally present themselves and their views before the voters. According to one DEC chairperson with whom the team spoke, the scheduling of the public meetings was coordinated around times convenient to all candidates in the race. At the time the candidates are registered, they were asked to provide their preferential schedule. In their particular by-election, all 3 candidates deferred to the DEC to set up the schedule. Eventually 11 public meetings were held at times mutually agreed upon by all three candidates. At the meetings each candidate was introduced in turn and was allowed to give a speech. At no meeting was a debate format utilized.

In the past these functions may have been fairly cut and dried in view of the relatively non-competitive nature of past elections. However, as the transition to a multi-party system gains momentum, these responsibilities are likely to become an uncomfortable burden on local officials and potentially place them in a vulnerable position as they try to maintain total neutrality while having to accommodate candidates' interests in promoting their campaigns.

Election Observers:

The District Commissions are also responsible for registering election observers who may be at the polling stations on election day. Three days prior to the election, observers representing work collectives, state enterprises, public and social organizations, and candidates must submit their applications to the DEC for registration. Once certified by the DEC, each polling site commission is provided the official list of observers who will be present at their location on election day. Under the current parliamentary election law, unless an individual has an officially stamped form from the DEC, he or she will be denied entrance and can be turned away.

Media representatives are also allowed access to the polling sites, but the team was not able to clarify if the same registration requirements applied to them as well. Such requirements could be cumbersome since it is unlikely that any media staff would want to be limited to stay at any single polling site throughout the entire day.

Since political parties are treated like other public associations or social organizations as legal entities, it seems likely that they would also be allowed to register their observers for election day. However, as the strength of political parties grows and genuine competition heats up the political races, election officials will be subject to a greater level of scrutiny and accountability. In time, they will find that their work, their rulings on challenges and questions, and their responsiveness to observer interests will take on new importance to candidates and parties, as well as the electorate generally as voters begin to align themselves behind political parties. Such considerations will require special attention in the training of election officials.

E. Duties of Polling Site Commissions

It is the Polling Site Commissions who compile voter lists, set up polling sites, process voters at the polls and complete the ballot count on election day.

Registration of Voters:

The local administrative authorities play a significant part in the compilation of the voter registration lists using housing and other civil records at their disposal. From this information, each PSC prepares a master list of voters for their polling site and posts the lists in central locations within the precincts not later than 15 days prior to the election. The posted list allows

voters who have been omitted to have their names added to supplemental lists prior to election day. Each person on the preliminary list is sent an "invitation to vote" 12 days before the election. According to one election official with whom the team met, there is no door to door canvass accomplished during the process. However, any individual may be added to a supplemental list maintained at the polling site on the day of the election as long as he or she has appropriate identification documents as proof of eligibility to vote. Due to the comprehensive civil records maintained at the local level, the minimal transiency of the general population, and the allowance for election day additions to the register, it is unlikely that any significant number of eligible voters are disenfranchised because of the voter registration process.

Acquisition of Commodities and Supplies:

It is interesting that given a history of a totally centralized system of authority, the acquisition of election supplies needed at polling sites for election day is totally decentralized. Each polling site chairperson is responsible to decide the type and quantity of supplies needed, and make his or her own arrangements for their acquisition. They receive their funds for purchase of pens, pencils, paper, packaging materials, fasteners, etc. from the District Election Commission. The team was assured that fundamental commodities such as ballot boxes are in adequate supply and readily available as they are stored between elections and reused as needed.

It appears that there is not even a uniform list provided which would standardize the commodities used at all polling sites throughout the country. Such standardization would be helpful in the budgeting process. It would also be particularly helpful to set uniform requirements for packaging materials used to transport and store of voted ballots, protocols and other election-related documents. As it is, it appears that each polling site makes due with packaging materials decided upon at its own discretion. Standard packaging could be designed in a way to ensure that once it is closed, the integrity of the package would remain secure. Uniform packaging would also offer workers greater control of the ballots and documents under their supervision and provide for more efficient storing.

Process of Voting and Ballot Counting:

The administration of election day activity at the polls is carried out by the Polling Site Commissions. The mechanics of processing voters, facilitating voting and counting of ballots is well established and sufficient to carry Belarus forward as it makes its transition to a multiparty democratic system. The basic components of election day activities are adequate to

meet most international standards in established democracy. Fundamentally, they provide a basis for full participation by all eligible voters, a method of accountability and documentation and reasonable security to authenticate election results.

The IFES team was told that the polls are open from 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. providing ample time for voters to make their way to the polls. Additionally, it appears that election days are usually scheduled for Sundays providing greater convenience. Since most people are not working, access to the polls is maximized.

Basic documents available at the polls include a protocol on which accountability for all ballots is maintained. The protocol provides room for election officials to enter the number of ballots received from the DEC, the number which are damaged or contain printing irregularities rendering them unusable, the number of ballots issued to voters, and the number of ballots left unused. These entries will be balanced against the total number of voters on the register and the number of voters participating. At the end of the day the total number of votes cast will also include identification of the number of voted ballots which are ultimately invalidated because of the voter has mis-marked or made identifying marks on the ballots. Invalidated ballots also include those on which the intent of the voter cannot be determined.

The documentation also includes the actual voter register which had been prepared by the Polling Site Commission. Each voter must provide election officials his or her ID card prior to being issued a ballot. The voter's name is found on the registration list. The voter then writes the word "yes" next to his or her name and signs the register acknowledging that a ballot was issued. Voters whose names are not on the list may be added to a supplemental register as long as they have the proper ID establishing their eligibility.

Polling locations are equipped with isolated voting areas where the voter can mark the ballot in secret. The ballot is marked by crossing off the names of all candidates being rejected, leaving exposed the name of the candidate for which the vote is being cast. Upon leaving the voting booth, the voter drops the voted ballot into the ballot box which stands in full view of the officials and observers present.

At the end of the voting day, the ballot box is officially opened and ballots are counted by the Polling Site Commission at the polling site. Observers who are registered for presence at the polling site are also allowed to be present at the count. Ballots are counted using a simple "Stack method". As each ballot is pulled from the ballot box the vote is read and the ballot is placed on an appropriate stack identified for each of the candidates appearing on the ballot. Any

ballot withdrawn from the box for which the voter's intent cannot be determined or on which more than one candidate's name is left exposed is put aside. Once all ballots have been read, the poll workers set about hand counting the number of ballots in each stack. The resulting totals are entered on the protocol recording the number of votes cast for each candidate. After additional review, the number of voted ballots which cannot be counted because of mis-markings are also entered on the protocol.

At the end of the process, the documents and ballots are packaged and transported to the District Commission's headquarters where election results for the constituency are summarized. When all precincts are accounted for, district-wide results are summarized on a district protocol which is then sent to the CC where nationwide results are compiled. The registration of winners of parliamentary elections is completed by the CC and submitted to the Supreme Soviet.

There is little to suggest that the fundamental voting procedures will be altered under a new election law. However, should any form of a mixed system be enacted which includes party list or a proportional representation system, adjustments will have to be made which will require special attention during the training of election officials.

Mobile Voting:

Each Polling Site Commission also has a mobile ballot box which can be used to allow persons who are ill or incapacitated and homebound to vote at their homes. Two members of the commission take ballots and the mobile ballot box to the residences of homebound voters and assist them in voting. These voters are identified on the register as having received the benefit of mobile voting and are noted on the accountability record.

This is one area where the strict accountability standards must be maintained. It was not clear to the team how officials are made aware of the voters who might need this special service, or what kind of application process might be required. Any time that ballots leave the polling site there is room for concern that improprieties may occur. In view of the lower and lower turnout being experienced, there may also be a need to establish stringent guidelines which eliminate possibilities of the mobile boxes being used to solicit voters who are not incapacitated but are simply choosing not to participate.

VII. OPPORTUNITIES FOR DONOR SUPPORT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The stumbling blocks that threaten to slow progress toward true democratization should not overshadow the promising elements. The IFES delegation was encouraged by the general sense among those they met that, the electoral system will be improved and the elections will result in a significant step in the right direction, regardless of the final decisions of the Supreme Soviet in preparing the legal framework for the next elections. As a representative of one independent group commented, "what is important right now is not so much taking and keeping power, but supporting and nurturing the reform of a civil society." And the growth of a civil society is palpable.

Although the political environment in Belarus makes continued progress towards democracy difficult to achieve, the changes that have taken place cannot be ignored. New freedoms are being exercised. Articles questioning government policy are beginning to appear even in the official press. An independent press is emerging despite difficult odds. Fifteen separate political parties have managed to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles and win official legal recognition. Throughout the social fabric independent institutes and commercial enterprises have achieved official status. Independent labor unions are now competing with government-controlled unions for members, and local government officials, after years of day-to-day control from Minsk, are beginning to show some initiative.

These trends have just begun and they remain hesitant and unsteady. But if they are nurtured, they will provide the foundations upon which a genuine democracy can develop.

The IFES delegation believes there are a number of avenues by which the United States and other interested members of the international community can provide meaningful assistance to Belarus in support of democratization efforts and in preparation for the next elections.

1. Voter and Civic Education: An integral component of a democratic infrastructure are nonpartisan civic and voter education groups. Besides purely educational activities, such groups can serve in a watchdog capacity during campaigns and elections, monitoring state-run media for bias and organizing independent poll watchers. One organization the IFES team met has already begun an ambitious effort to extend assistance to provincial press where civic education is weakest. They have also initiated an ambitious effort to reform local government. A second organization has started gathering and publishing the kind of information on public opinion essential to any civic or voter education program. Public opinion surveys have been conducted to measure the public's level of

political awareness as well its attitudes regarding parties and candidates. They have also published a number of non-partisan reports analyzing the political environment.

Those in Belarus committed to a democratic nation are not waiting for Western help before trying to change society, but Western aid could hasten their efforts. Organizations like IFES, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), NED grantees, and others should seek out those in Belarus who have already begun such work and provide them with both technical and financial assistance. Care would have to be exercised in determining the most suitable targets for such aid. With proper technical assistance from qualified experts in such programs however, the return could be significant in fostering public awareness of democratic values.

2. Media and Broadcast Support: An independent media is also a crucial part of any democratic state. Currently, NED does support one paper. However, in a country of 6.5 million voters this is simply not enough. There are plenty of opportunities for other international public and private organizations to do more. Alternative sources of equipment and commodities are needed by the independent press frequently frustrated in their efforts to secure press time and materials. The existing and expanding need exceeds the current capacity. Donor efforts should be coordinated with those of the Miensk office of the Soros Foundation. The Soros Foundation has already initiated a program to provide technical support for both print and broadcast media. The IFES delegation was impressed with the quality of its work and the seriousness of its purpose. Recently, however, Soros announced it would be cutting funding to Belarus due to lack of cooperation from the Government of Belarus.

Technical assistance and training might also prove fruitful in assisting state-controlled media in developing formal and consistent guidelines with regard to media access by candidates and parties, as well as policies regarding political coverage. At this point requests for access appear to be dealt with on a case by case basis, providing fuel for allegations of inequities and bias. Established guidelines and rules formalized in advance of the election period could go a long way in ensuring that standards are applied equally to all factions.

3. Party Development: Political parties are new in Belarus, and thus party activists have little experience in how to communicate their ideas for change to the electorate or how to organize and campaign. As fledgling parties struggle to assert themselves, establish meaningful platforms, and develop outreach programs to draw public support, it is clear

that there is much room for technical assistance from qualified and experienced experts. Organizations such as the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute and the German party foundations have valuable experience in providing training on basic political skills, party building and campaign strategies on a non-partisan basis. The conduct of training programs in which all parties could participate equally could help invigorate what so far has been rather lackluster and ineffective campaigning. Such efforts would help to energize meaningful political competition and stimulate voter interest.

4. Technical Assistance to the CC: Although work continues on the drafting of the election law, it may be impossible to provide additional technical assistance to lawmakers at this point. However, there may be opportunities to provide technical assistance to the Central Commission as it responds to new developments which are likely to emerge and which will require new administrative policies. Members of the CC believe that a new election law may well include provisions related to campaign finance and ethics. Responsibility for policing compliance will most likely fall on the shoulders of the CC. Officials expressed interest in receiving assistance in drawing up procedures for enforcing these provisions.

Another area in which the CC expressed interest relates to formalizing procedures for adjudicating grievances and responding to allegations of election violations. Technical advisors could work with the CC to develop uniform and consistent guidelines and training materials for district and polling site commissions to ensure that standards and practices are applied uniformly, consistently and fairly, while still maintaining accountability and authenticity of election results.

5. Privatization of State Owned Enterprises and Encouragement for the Development of a Free Market: Encouraging privatization is always an essential component of democracy-building. In addition to private sector investments by Western entrepreneurs, foundations such as the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and others should offer management training, education, and organizational assistance in free market ideas and practices. Exchanges and fellowships involving U.S. business and universities could also be helpful.
6. Demonstration of Western Support for Democratization: Belarusans of all political persuasions told the IFES delegation that international pressure in support of democratic reform in Belarus is nonexistent. Western nations, and in particular the United States,

should take definitive steps to reverse this perception. At every opportunity American officials should stress to Belarusian government officials, the democratic opposition and the public at large, that the United States government and the American people support a democratic Belarus. The effect of diplomatic pressure on the government and the moral support this kind of pressure provides for democratic reformers within the country should not be underestimated.

IFES Interviews in Belarus

In pursuing its objectives, the IFES team met with deputies of parliament, government officials, representatives of political parties and public associations, election officials, members of the press and broadcast media, labor leaders, local administrators, educators and students. In every instance the individuals with whom the team met gave generously of their time. The team was most gratified by the degree of candor with which they provided information and shared their views. Their open cooperation contributed greatly to the team's efforts. For their invaluable assistance, the IFES team is most grateful to the following individuals.

Abramovich, Alexander M.

Chairman, Central Committee on Election of People Deputies of the Republic of Belarus; Doctor of Law, Professor.

Alampiev, Viktor P.

Supreme Soviet Member; Deputy Chairman, Committee on Economic Reform, Attainment of Self-Dependence and Sovereignty of the Republic.

Antonchik, Siarhiey.

Supreme Soviet Member; Spokesman, Council of the Independent Labor Union.

Borovtsov, Valentin A.

Supreme Soviet; Director, Institute of State Development and Legislation.

Chikin, Viktor

Secretary of the Central Committee, Party of Communists of Belarus; Editor-in-Chief of My i vremya (We and the Times).

Dobrovolsky, Alexander A.

Chairman, United Democratic Party of Belarus.

Germianchuk, Ihar I.

Supreme Soviet Member; Editor-in-Chief of Svaboda (Liberty).

Gilevich, Nil S., Supreme Soviet Member; Presidium Member; Chairman, Committee on Education, Culture, and Historic Legacy.

Grygarovich, Yadviga D.
Rector, Belarusian University of Culture

Kunevich, Georgi
Minsk City Council Member; Chairman, Leu Sapieha Foundation for Municipal Reforms.

Manaev, Oleg
Professor, Head of Group for Mass Communication Research, Department of Sociology, Belarusian State University; Chairman, Board of Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies.

Novik, Vladimir V.
Supreme Soviet Member; Secretary, Committee on Industry, Energy, Transportation, Communication, and Informatics.

Pazniak, Zianon
Supreme Soviet Member, Leader of the Democratic Opposition; Chairman, Belarusian Popular Front.

Pechen, Lidia
Mayor of Zhodino.

Smedley, Elizabeth
Executive Director, Soros Foundation-Belarus.

Sokol, Stephen F.
President, Belarusian Law Society; Rector, Belarusian Law School; Professor.

Stolyarov, Alexander G.
Chairman, National TV and Radio Company.

Tarazevich, Georgiy
First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Trusau, Aleh (Oleg)
Supreme Soviet Member; Deputy Chairman, Committee on Education, Culture, and Historical Legacy; Chairman, Belarusian Social Democratic Party.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
Pre-election Assessment
Republic of Belarus
Page 66

Vasilevich, Gregory A.
Supreme Soviet, Chief of the Legal Department.

Viartsinski, Anatol I.
Supreme Soviet Member; Deputy Chairman, Committee on Glasnost, Mass Media, and Human Rights.

Zhook, Paul Z.
General Manager, Belarusan TV Company "MM4."

INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

1620 I Street NW • Suite 611 • Washington, DC 20006 USA • 202-828-8507 • Fax 202-452-0804