U.S. sanctions against Lukashenka regime extended

U.S. President Barack Obama extended for another year sanctions imposed against certain Belarusian high-ranking officials on June 16, 2006. “The actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus and other persons continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. Accordingly, the national emergency declared on June 16, 2006, and the measures adopted on that date to deal with that emergency, must continue in effect beyond June 16, 2010.

Therefore, in accordance with [...] the National Emergencies Act [...] I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency,” says the Notice* from Barack Obama to the U.S. Congress released on June 8. According to the U.S. president, despite the release of internationally recognized political prisoners in 2008 and the U.S.’s continuing efforts to press for democratic reforms in Belarus, serious challenges remain.

According to RFE/RL's Belarus Service*, Belarus has called continued U.S. sanctions against it "pointless" and "confrontational." Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Savinnykh said the extension signaled the United States’ lack of political readiness to normalize relations with Belarus. "The abolition of all types of sanctions is a fundamental precondition for the renewal of dialogue," Savinnykh said. But David Kramer, a former U.S. State Department official, said any improvement in ties was in Minsk's hands. Kramer served during the George W. Bush administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, responsible for a region that included Belarus.

"Belarus and the Lukashenka regime know what they need to do if they want to improve relations with the United States and
with the West," Kramer told RFE/RL. "And that is to stop cracking down on people's rights [and] liberalize their society. But I fear the situation is only going to get worse as Belarus approaches a presidential election [in 2011]."

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