

Statement by Prof. Manaev's Group

On June 8, 2006 Prof. Oleg Manaev, Director of the Independent Institute of Social-Economic & Political Studies (IISEPS), shut down by the Belarusian authorities in April 2005 and re-registered in Vilnius (Lithuania), was invited to the General Prosecutor Office again. There he got another "Official warning on impermissibility of law violation" (the first one he got on December 30, 2005) signed by Deputy General Public Prosecutor Nikolay Kupriyanov. The reason for this warning was a public opinion poll conducted with the assistance of Prof. Manaev's Group after the Presidential elections, and dissemination of its results, in particular, through Internet and briefing at the British Embassy in Minsk in April. The warning states that "information about the results of recent Presidential elections in the Republic of Belarus, disseminated by you, is confirmed by nothing and contradicts to the information received according to the legal procedure and published by the Central Electoral Commission". Prof. Manaev "is suggested to stop dissemination of unreliable information about results of the Presidential elections in 2006, as well as conducting social-political surveys violated the legal demands". The warning concludes that "in case of continuing of dissemination of unconfirmed information you will be accused according to the Law right up to Article 369-1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus".

Handing over this warning Stanislav Novikov, Senior Investigator of the General Prosecutor Office, stressed that while the first warning issued in December was "quite light", and its potential punishment was based on the appropriate Article of the Administrative Code, the second one is "very strict", and a new Article of the Criminal Code "Discrediting of the Republic of Belarus" came into force since January 1, 2006, stipulates imprisonment up to two years. Prof. Manaev's counter-arguments that research and analytical activities of private persons are regulated neither by the well-known Resolutions of the Soviet of Ministers nor by any other legal acts of the country, - were not taken into consideration.

It shows that Belarusian authorities try to introduce a total control over not only public opinion in the country, but the Constitutional rights of the citizens for free speech, believes, and their free expression. Instead of a principle "everything that is not forbidden is allowed", which was at least formally observed up to now, they come back to the notorious Soviet principle "everything that is not allowed is forbidden".

Minsk, June 9, 2006