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Report on Visit to Minsk on 28 December 2010

Meeting with independent journalists

In order to protect the journalists, I shall not attribute any of the questions and views to any individual. At present, 26 journalists are under arrest and some have already been sentenced in brief trials. 21 journalists have been subjected to very rough treatment. The manifest intention is to intimidate and to try to suppress any critical reporting. Lukashenko's aim is to drive Belarus into **isolation from information**.

No-one can understand the **passivity of the OSCE**. The representative of *Narodnaya Volya* said with some bitterness that he now needed to leave the meeting since his **interrogation by the KGB** would begin in 50 minutes' time.

Irina Khalip, the wife of opposition candidate Andrei Sannikov, who has worked for example for *Novaya Gazeta* in Moscow, is still in the hands of the KGB. There is no contact with her. It was said that the **arrests are continuing** at present on a grand scale. It was recalled that there is still **no information about the four disappeared persons from 1999 and 2000**, amongst whom was a journalist. The question arises as to whether the West wishes to keep these presumed murders taboo and to refrain from calling for an international investigation into these crimes of 1999 and 2000.

The meeting was dominated by the great sense of **disappointment** that the **West** is accepting the incredible brutality and the almost total destruction of all opposition with such **equanimity**. I had to ask myself how long the West intends to pretend that one can continue as though nothing has happened and whether they truly can expect **no protection** at all.

Added on 29 December 2010: One day after my departure, the editorial office of the newspaper *Nasha Niva* was searched by the KGB, the technical equipment was seized and the office closed. With immediate effect, the newspaper will have to cease publication. Alongside *Narodnaya Volya*, *Nasha Niva* was the only independent daily newspaper distributed by the state newspaper distribution service. Furthermore, its website was one of the country's most important independent news sites. The attack on *Nasha Niva* marks a further massive restriction on independent reporting from Belarus, with the aim of isolating the country from information.

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