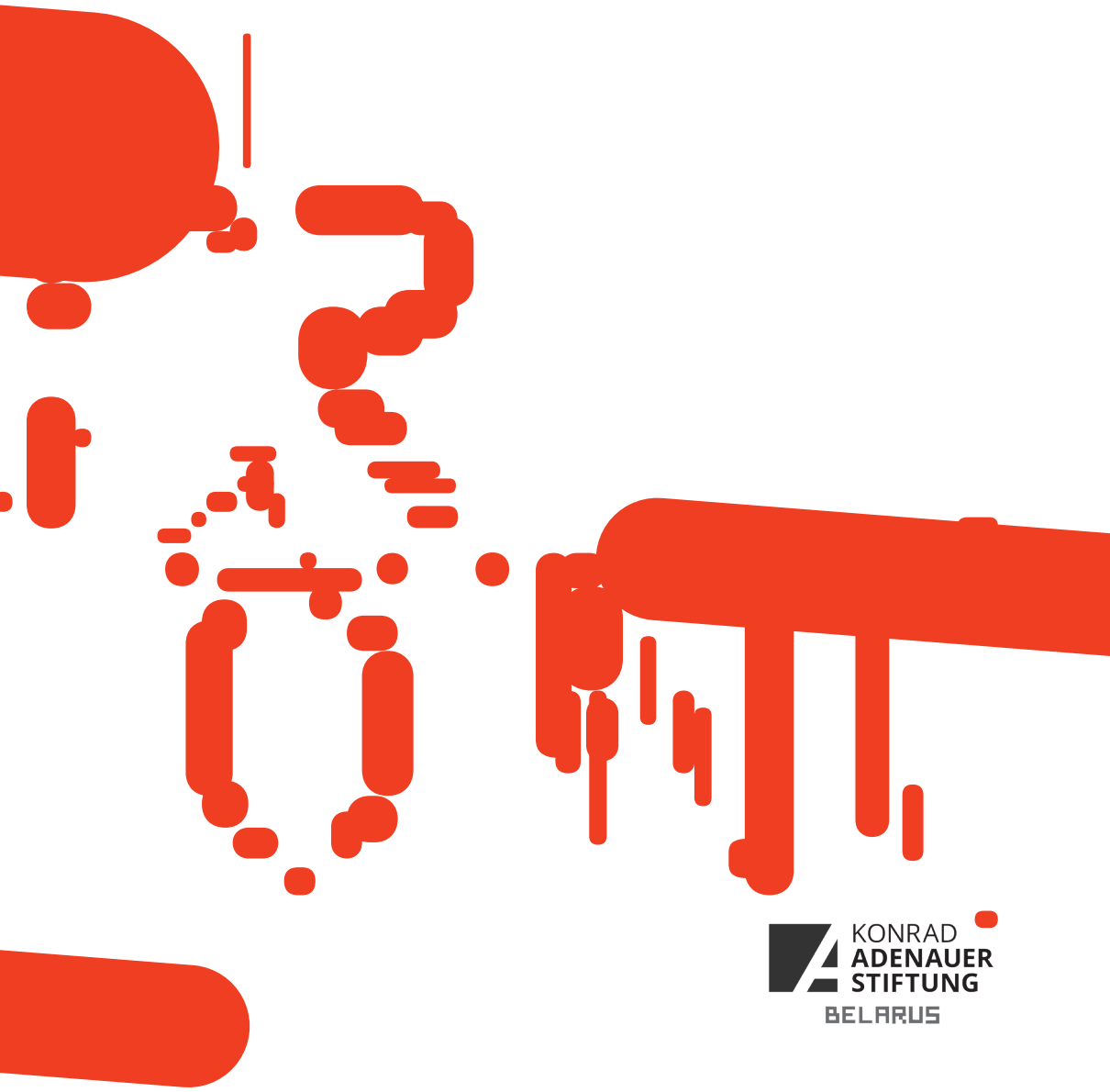
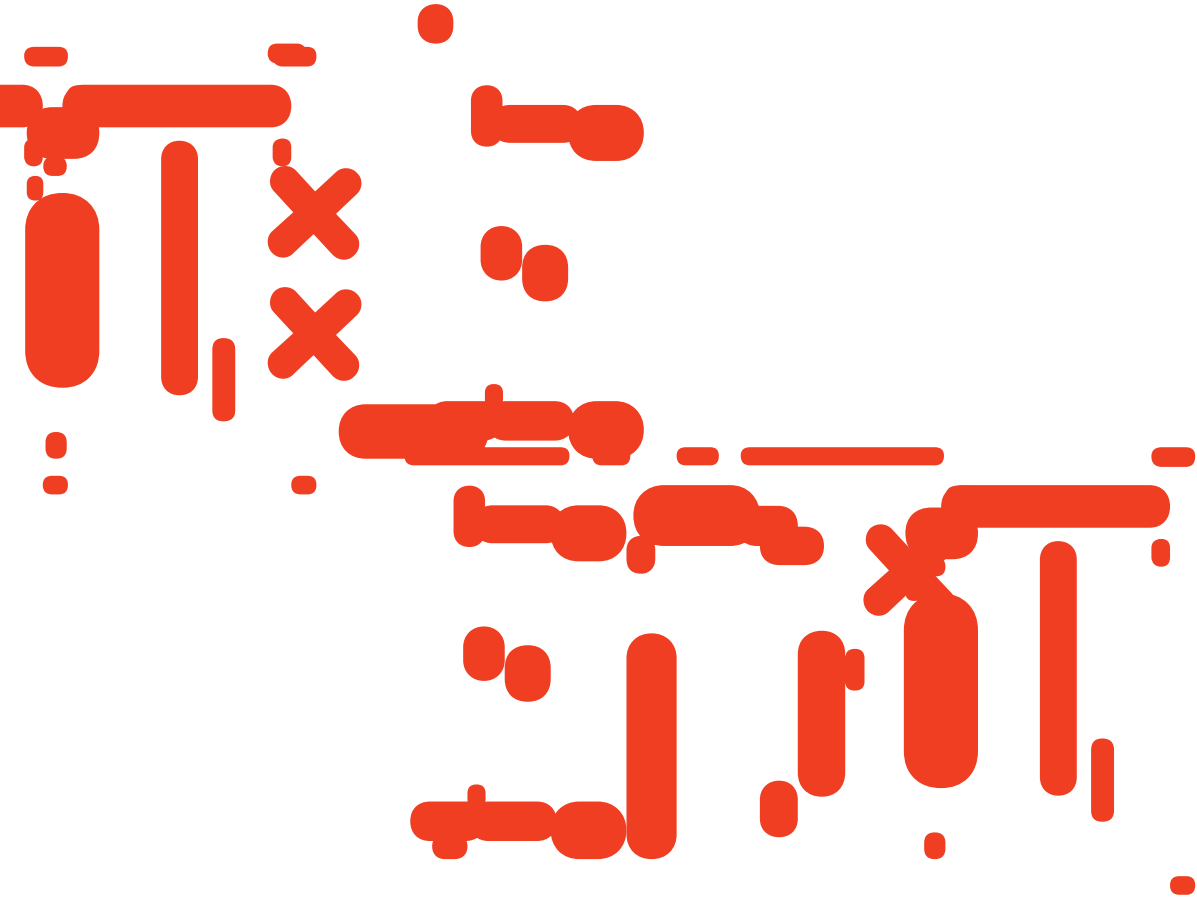
At the Origins of Belarusian Political Science



KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG
BELARUS

At the Origins of Belarusian Political Science



Edited by Dr. Andrei Stsiapanau, Dr. Uladzislaŭ Ivanoŭ

At the Origins of Belarusian Political Science

Editors:
Dr. Andrei Stsiapanau, Dr. Uladzislaŭ Ivanoŭ

Translation from Belarusian into English:
Alena Yalovenko

Style editing and proofreading:
Kevin Reiling

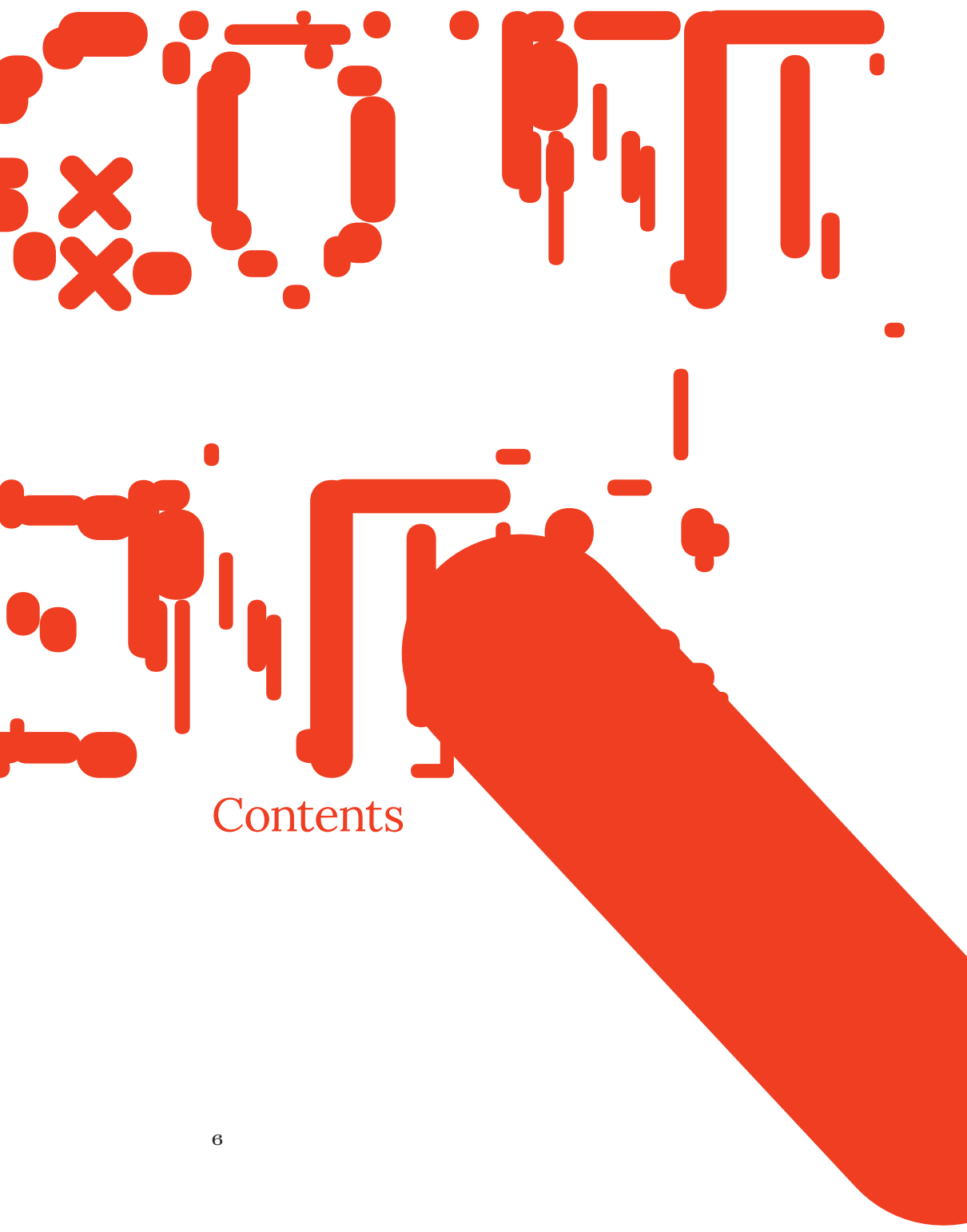
Design and layout:
Gailė Pranckūnaitė and Mislav Žugaj

Andrei Stsiapanau and Uladzislaŭ Ivanoŭ, editors. At the Origins of Belarusian Political Science. Vilnius, EHU, 2021.

This is a joint publication of the Department of Social Sciences of the European Humanities University and Belarus Country Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. This publication has been made possible thanks to the financial support of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Sole responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication lies with the authors. The European Humanities University and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung assume no responsibility either for the information contained in the publication or any subsequent use of it.

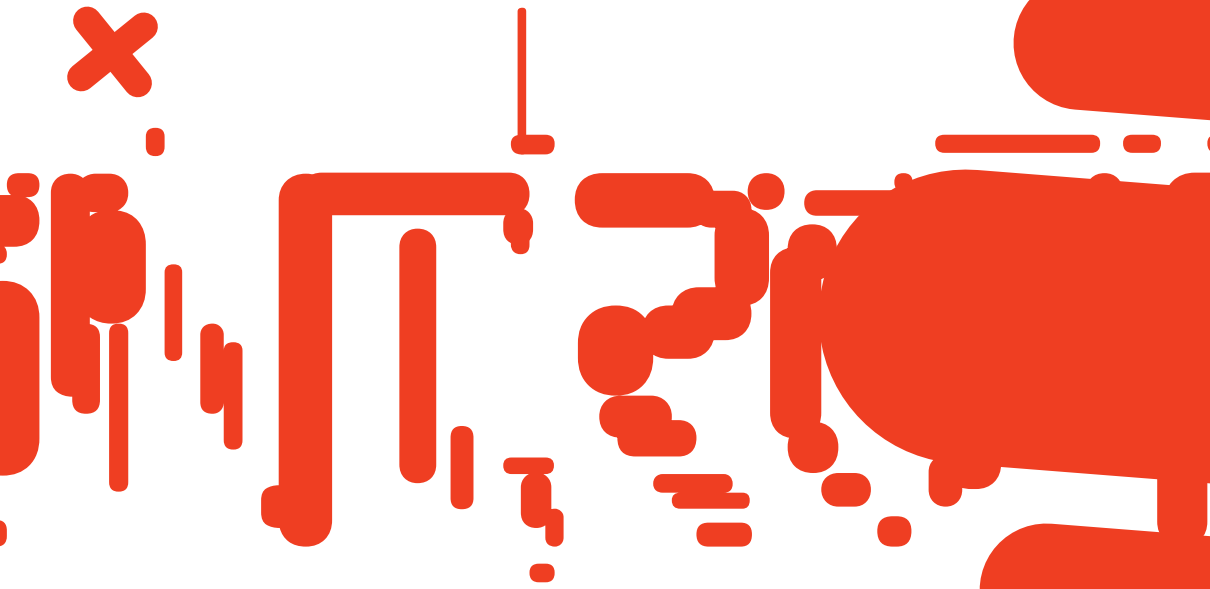
KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG BELARUS

ISBN 978-609-8220-11-7 (print version)
ISBN 978-609-8220-12-4 (electronic version)



Contents

Preface



They Were Pioneers

To understand the greatness of the intellectual achievements of the authors of this collection of articles, one needs to be aware of the context of the period in which they started their careers. The breakdown of the Soviet system resulted in a concomitant collapse of the system of humanities and education in the humanities. A new system had to be built on these ruins from scratch.

A new state, the Republic of Belarus, also emerged at that time. The humanities faced the challenge of theoretically substantiating Belarusian statehood, national identity, as well as the economic, political, and axiological prospects of the young country and its domestic and foreign policy.

Political science as a science and as an academic discipline needed to be established and adapted to Belarusian realities. In Soviet times, political science was not studied as it was considered "bourgeois pseudoscience."

The authors of the collection were pioneers who had to master a young science based on Western sources, to develop textbooks and lectures, and to teach students a new subject. Iryna Buhrova, Śviatlana Navumava, Siarhiej Pańkoŭski, Uladzimir Roŭda, and Viktar Čarnoŭ laid the groundwork for Belarusian political science, while establishing traditions on which continue to guide the younger generation of Belarusian political scientists.

They also faced another challenge – to offer a political analysis of the social model, the political system, or the regime that emerged in Belarus after the coming to power of Aliaksandr Łukašenka. The

social processes and mass consciousness that shaped events in the country needed to be assessed as well.

The researchers above sought to respond to this challenge to the best of their knowledge and ability. It can be said that they were the first political scientists of an independent Belarus, standing at the beginning of the revival of political science in the young country and producing quality scientific content on Belarus.

The texts in the collection vividly reflect the time in which they were drafted, while serving the authors' creative portraits. Attention should be paid to the thoughtfulness and scope of their analysis of Belarusian society, including political discourse, national identity, and various aspects of Belarus's social model and political regime.

The relevance and contemporaneousness of the conclusions reached by the authors above are particularly noteworthy. They addressed some important questions that Belarus faces in the present-day dramatic period of its development.

For example, the article "Contemporary Belarusian Political Discourse (What and How We Talk About Politics)" by Śviatlana Navumava says that political terms are given differing meanings under the conditions of a major split within society. What is more alarming is how this applies even to basic concepts. Discussion is impossible in this context, since political opponents use differing clichés and have different narratives (views of the world). "A conversation of people belonging to different discourses is a conversation between the deaf and the blind," says the author. This refers

precisely to today's Belarus, which is now involved in a cold civil war. Śviatlana Navumava draws a conclusion that is extremely topical now, "today it is not the alchemical search for the golden formula of consent that should be discussed, but the gradual, thoughtful, and hard work should be done to clarify the meaning of words, rationally search for understanding, and finally in the end restore the fabric of common discourse."

Another big topic is addressed by Iryna Buhrova in her article "Belarusian Identity: Insights from 'Interpretive' Political Science." Identity has become one of the main subjects of global political science. It is of special importance for a young Belarus that seeks to take, as the Belarusian poet Janka Kupała put it, its "place of honor and fame among nations."

Iryna Buhrova tracked the historical roots of Belarusian identity, mindset, and features of Belarusian cultural code. She concludes that being on the boundary between civilizations objectively leads to "meandering between the West and the East." Synthesis of these must become a way out.

The author pays much attention to Belarusian intellectuals' efforts in searching for identity in the transition period. A passionate explosion in 2020 has accelerated the forming of Belarusian society's identity many times over. In this regard, Iryna Buhrova's reflections are extremely relevant to today's issues.

The article by Siarhiej Pańkoŭski "Belarusian Political Model" elaborates on the topic of the Belarusian political model and its

attributes. Here he attempts to explore how this system works. The answer to this question is extremely relevant today when the Łukašenka regime conducts itself above the law with a distasteful reputation that leaves many experts to wonder why the elites did not split when pressured by mass public outrage and why the government apparatus did not side with the protesters.

The author writes, "Belarusian reality indeed shows very specific features and practices that make Belarus in large part 'mysterious' in terms of political science and political philosophy in the 20th and 21st centuries." The most important feature of this reality, in his opinion, is that it is a regime of personal power and of personal dictatorship. That is why "Belarusian public institutions have naturally been repeating the 'psychophysiology' of their leader" and the so-called "state ideology" "has trivial content and is implemented ineffectively unless there is a powerful state machine of violent coercion." Recent events showed what function this coercion fulfills.

"Parallel society" was another important topic raised by Siarhiej Pańkoŭski as one of his favorite subjects. It refers to the infrastructure of civil society that exists in parallel with official political structures. Having realized the relevance and significance of this process, the Belarusian authorities today are purposefully destroying public organizations and digital platform communities.

In Uladzimir Roŭda's article "Is Belarus a Classic Post-Communist Mafia State?," the Belarusian political system is referred to as a "post-communist mafia state" with "elements of patron-client ties and relationships" that disregards the rule of law. Attention should

be paid to the author's essential conclusion that perfectly explains the current Belarusian realities: "To begin with, there is a marked contradiction between an economically developed society and the most primitive political system in Europe based on personal dictatorship, or a complete domination of the political family." This means that society has outgrown the archaic state, and this fundamental contradiction was the main reason for the protest surge in 2020.

In the article "The Economic Basis of Belarusian Neo-Soviet Authoritarianism (2008-2011)," Viktar Čarnoŭ described how the ruling regime managed the national economy more than 10 years ago. Essentially, it is not about the economy. The Belarusian authorities have always managed the economy only from a political perspective. Attempting to answer why the regime so stubbornly sabotages market reforms, the author concludes that the social model with a dominant public sector is optimal for retaining power. This vision was confirmed by the happenings of 2020 as the principal moving force of Belarus protests were people working in the private sector.

To conclude, although the researchers above are no longer with us, their works remain very topical and are in sync with present-day algorithms of political and academic life in Belarus. Herein lies their greatness.

It should be added that Iryna Buhrova, Śviatlana Navumava, Siarhiej Pańkoŭski, Uladzimir Roŭda, and Viktar Čarnoŭ were excellent teachers and educators in humanities. In the memory of the many

students and participants in their courses, they remain bright and original individuals with unique creative approaches.

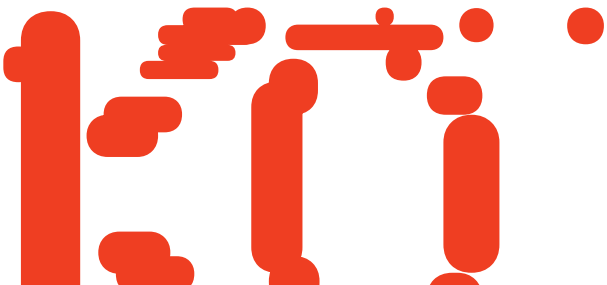
They died an early death, at the peak of their creative powers. I had the honor to know well, cooperate, and be friends with each of them.

Let us remember them as they were.

Valeryj Karbalevič

Siarhiej Pańkoŭski

Belarusian Political Model



Abstract

This article focuses on the consolidation of the authoritarian political regime in Belarus in the early 2000s. This period saw another 5-year electoral cycle following the second election in 2001 where Aliaksandr Łukašenka defeated Uladzimir Hančaryk. Numerous electoral fraud cases and pressure on politicians and civil activists resulted in non-recognition of the rigged election outcome by international observation missions and subsequently by EU countries and the U.S. For the reelected president, this meant the 2001-2006 presidency should be devoted to strengthening the administrative vertical, developing an international policy and bilateral relations with Russia based on trade in economic and energy preferences, and creating a state ideology at all levels of authority, including the education system and the system for recruiting the administrative elite. The 2006 presidential election followed by civic protest and a wave of social mobilization have shown both the readiness of Belarusian authorities to use the tool of violence and the protest potential of Belarusian society. The texts of Siarhiej Pańkoŭski, published between 2003 and 2006 and compiled in this article, reflect the main components of Łukašenka's regime consolidation, including an irreversible turning away from democracy, the development of state ideology to legitimize the authorities, and vote rigging.

Introduction

Belarus is essentially a country that has abandoned democratic choice and is living under special laws. Belarusian political and economic reality has its own mechanisms of self-generation. Confident forecasts that Aliaksandr Łukašenka, who swiftly and

virtually single-handedly had climbed to the top of state authority, would not hold out longer than several months turned out to be 'excessively optimistic.' They underestimated the underlying self-organization of the 'administrative-economic' system that was still entirely preserved, having accumulated experience and capital. To understand this system, we should clarify substantive mechanisms of organizing access to power, ensuring its legitimacy, fulfilling guarantees of universal equality before the law, and ultimately implementing individual economic interests that are not always visible or obvious. Carefully cloaked in ideological twaddle, these mechanisms are what really matters, as they are designed to justify the seizure or retention of power in the eyes of a population under totalitarian rule. All propaganda regarding what is happening in Belarus is nothing but nonsensical interpretations of the latest presidential speeches and discussions about terms like 'authoritarianism' and 'totalitarianism,' which also need to be specified and clarified. So, a basic question remains unanswered: how does this system work?

1. Year 2001: disregard for democracy

If Belarus is not a representative democracy that fulfills its procedural requirements, what is it? The 2001 presidential election showed that there is no political choice without its prerequisites, such as a multi-party system, freedom of speech, equal access to all points of view, ideological neutrality of the state, etc.

It is easily noted that, while steadily dismantling the elements of a democratic system, Belarusian authorities inevitably eliminate prerequisites for their own legitimacy. The Belarusian leadership

appears to seek to change the foundations of the constitutional and state system that once enabled it to take power. Increasingly depriving itself of universal features of a representative democracy, Belarus has been looking more and more like a dictatorship according to its classic 'by-the-book' definition.

In the 1990s, the authorities of Central and Eastern European countries, unlike those in Belarus, sought to strengthen their legitimacy by developing democratic institutions. The more democracy there is, the more the authorities are entitled to call themselves legitimate and claim that they represent the people's will. The less democracy there is, the more powers are usurped and the more the people whose interests those in power 'represent' are deceived. The people of a country are not a group of individuals who are selected by the authorities like the delegates of the 'All-Belarusian People's Assemblies.' The authorities are secondary to the people of a country, at least in democracies. If that is not the case, there is no democracy, and acting under the guise of 'democracy,' the authorities retain power with violence and vote rigging, but not with law. Other legal provisions that shape a full-fledged state, including national sovereignty, are similarly undermined.

Abandoning democracy and the obstruction of civilian control can result (as they always have) in dramatic economic abuse, especially in a collectivized and non-market economy. As early as the age of monarchies, it was the agreement on financial (fiscal) relations between the authorities and the people that gave rise to the first forms of parliaments known as the Estates General (in France in the 14th century). Control over national treasuries is one of the

main parliamentary functions and a prerequisite for separation of powers. Of all countries in the world that formally identify themselves as 'democracies,' only in Belarus is the Chief Executive empowered to concentrate the funds from state assets not channeled through the national budget. This national characteristic spices up corruption dramas at the highest levels of the Belarusian economic elite (such as the sensational Žuraŭkova affair in 2004).

The dominance of executive bodies that is seen in many countries is nowhere considered natural and is interpreted as a (temporary) anomaly due to some extraordinary circumstances that normally highlights the need for forming and strengthening democratic institutions. This anomaly is bearable to the extent where it turns into a killer of democratic principles. Starting from a certain point, concepts such as 'executive power,' 'legislative power,' 'judicial power,' 'parliament,' 'president,' etc. lose their meaning. Belarusian leadership always fails to logically justify the uniqueness of the 'Belarusian political model' without contradicting itself. The international community's claims against Belarus are not driven either by an estimate of the 'Belarusian economic model' (which the international community does not care about) or by large-scale geopolitical projects of a small, economically unconvincing and little-known country. They are due to the fact that, having called themselves president, parliament and court, the Belarusian authorities have agreed to play by general democratic rules.

Democracy is certainly not the only possible form of sovereignty recognized by international law. That is why the Belarusian authorities and ideologists occasionally hint at some enigmatic exceptional

kinds of statehood which are unique to 'Eastern European civilization.' But those who look for other forms of legitimacy in Belarus need to rewrite Belarusian history.

The assumption that Belarus should not be a representative democracy immediately raises tough and dramatic questions. Which form of government do we have – a medieval veche that gives potential 'princes' a chance to be chosen, or a system of ancient tribal chieftains, or the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants, or something else? What people are now in power and, most importantly, why? The new legitimacy is a struggle for power that is no longer constrained by any democratic principles. In political terms, it is a political revolution and a definitive collapse of the Belarusian constitutional order, with all its ensuing consequences.

All the most visible authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in Europe in the 20th century were formed by forces that used traditional means of political and ideological struggle, including extraordinary ones, such as revolution or coup d'état. In almost all cases, the dictators' personal power was justified by ideological arguments and resulted from victory of one of the opposing party factions. The cult of the leader was set up with an almost religious exaltation of a standard set of hypertrophied personal qualities ('genius,' exceptional management skills, 'embodiment of national spirit,' etc.). The status of an autocratic ruler was justified through having a great purpose that surpassed his personal importance. This 'mission' was described with value-based terms and was generally fixed in a number of 'canonical' texts which ultimately demonstrated an internally coherent legitimization of the authorities' power and their efforts to fulfill the 'mission.' In many cases, it was autocratic

leaders who authored the texts presenting a certain 'philosophy' of power. In all cases, the rhetoric and logic of autocracies have not deviated much from the 'political discourse' of their time. Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes were not only competing and struggling with their own and neighbouring environments, but also claimed 'victory' of their 'ideas' and 'values' which they interpreted in a specific way.

In this sense, Belarusian reality shows specific features and practices that make Belarus largely an 'enigma' in terms of political science and political philosophy in the 20th and 21st centuries.

With one rush, the first Belarusian president leapfrogged from a little-known, but aggressive member of parliament to the highest public position taking advantage of the lack of full-fledged political discussion and an amorphous political life. It was not because Belarusians chose one of several competing holistic strategies, but mostly due to his dominance and the almost total fulfillment of his charisma and slogans with people's expectations. Aliaksandr Łukašenka did not use the vast power he had obtained to ensure proper functioning of the political machine but to take all power and material resources into his hands.

With changes over time, Belarusian public institutions have naturally been repeating the 'psychophysiology' of their leader. Essentially, Aliaksandr Łukašenka is the only real theorist and designer of a unique government system. However, unlike the autocratic political phenomena of the past century that have sunk into oblivion, Aliaksandr Łukašenka had no significant political experience, was not forged in long-term struggles against his ideological

opponents, and did not write papers and articles to justify his and his associates' claims to power.

It is no wonder then that it is Aliaksandr Łukašenka who is the main, and so far only, thing of undeniable political value to the Belarusian regime. This is partly why the authorities do their best to crush the nascent public political space in society. For lack of a more or less coherent and well-grounded value system, the Belarusian president does not debate any real political opponents and ideas. He basically has nothing to counter them but his 'charisma' and prefers debating with himself, convincing himself that his economic tactics are the best.

The fact that the president formed the 'Belarusian political and economic model' based on his personal experience also results in its functioning as a kind of single economic system – a kind of 'large sovkhoz' rather than as a traditional type of state organization. There is no place for 'policy' in this self-contained model, its only criterion for success being relative economic efficiency. Instead of behaving as president of a country and as a political leader of society, Aliaksandr Łukašenka much more often behaves, naturally, as 'managing director' (but also 'owner') – an economic executive who is involved in all details of the production process and is committed to his 'dear enterprise.' The image of a president holding a 'conference call' on harvesting or emotionally dressing down a high-ranking official differs from any conception of state policy in the history of political institutions, save those in the period of disintegration of primitive societies and appearance of the first states when tsars 'plowed and sowed' alongside 'their' people who were few at that time.

However, democracy is impossible if there is no freedom, if political debates are replaced with 'workplace discipline.' In this case, internal social life is essentially deprived of political activities and political engagement and the procedures of power transfer from the sovereign (all the people) to the authorities are not specified in public debates. And it does not matter how often 'elections' and 'referendums' are held, since they remain an abuse and an instrument of a basic personal dictatorship. Another issue is that this order of things certainly has many temptations for those who have managed to fit in and find a convenient and profitable niche in the Belarusian system.

2. State ideology, legitimacy and domination

The Belarusian political model offers fewer and fewer external signs of legitimacy, earning the status of a quasi-democratic space where internationally accepted procedures are fulfilled in accordance with standards and criteria that have high internal value. The authorities could easily give up on elections if they found an alternative form of ideological and legal justification for the governance mechanisms that have been implemented in Belarus.

When real democracy is dismantled, it is 'state ideology' that plays the key role in preserving its illusory cover. Substitution of non-functioning 'rational legal' legitimacy of power for an 'irrational ideological' one was described back in 1929 in the classic book Ideology and Utopia by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim, who was later forced to immigrate to Great Britain. It is the only function of 'common state ideologies' that are prohibited under the classical postulate of state doctrinal neutrality by the constitutions

of many countries, including Belarus. Everything a country needs is already enshrined in its constitution and national legislation, unless they are not adopted or they are rewritten every week.

In other words, the inclination towards using the collocation 'interests of the people' in any country, in any society is wasted breath unless democratic procedures which identify and implement the interests of the people are clearly explained, justified and followed. The same applies to any statements 'on behalf of' all the people instead of oneself or a group (of parties representing differing points of view). If the procedures do not work, this means that 'grass-roots democracy' is nothing but a demagogic figure of speech that veils appropriation of power and economic resources by a group of individuals who have good reasons to hide the reality with 'ideologies' and repression.

This continues until, having gained power, a political group decides to become the only one eliminating fair competition and removing rivals – at least politically, at most physically. The political group becomes a clique, democracy is replaced by an authoritarian or totalitarian dictatorship, belief pluralism and the right of each person to their opinion and to independent search for truth are replaced by compulsory state ideology. This ideology is usually trivial in content and is implemented ineffectively unless there is a powerful state machine of violent coercion. Monopolized by the state, the media transforms from a tool for information dissemination into a propaganda tool that deceives citizens. As for culture, it is valued insofar as it politically serves the dictator and his circle.

For the Belarusian political elite, the issue is that they do not have a clearly articulated system of values. There is the head of state's personality and an administrative and bureaucratic machine left over from the previous era, but the collapse of the USSR left a vacuum in place of the former ideological monolith. On the one hand, the intellectual and cultural resources of the authorities are extremely poor; on the other hand, they solve real problems that cannot be integrated into any sustainable ideological platform.

This is because Belarusian authorities do not operate with concepts such as liberty, equality, and brotherhood and do not refer to any 'bright tomorrow.' Compounded by international political and economic isolation, the ineffective economic strategy can never provide the population with decent living conditions now or even in the distant future. Remaining are just the pragmatic interests of the authorities that are free from 'foreign matters.' Power is not an abstract category, but individuals who hold specific posts in the governance system, bearing both specific risks and offering specific advantages and opportunities.

Belarus today can be considered a 'proto-state.' Having adopted some external democratic forms – such as a constitution, institutions of the presidency and the parliament, the electoral system, etc. – it has not yet agreed to adopt the entire democratic system. Elections, however, are meaningless without other elements of democracy. It is politically illiterate to equate rule of the people only with elections and voting (despite the undeniable importance of these procedures). Free expression of the views of all citizens

should be a must for elections, otherwise their outcomes would be like 'evidence obtained under duress.' Power should not be 'privatized' by any one political group (whose number does not really matter) that identify itself with the state. There must be a real separation of powers and ideological pluralism, i.e. differing theoretical and ideological positions (for example, because of differing levels of education).

The 'proto-statehood' of Belarus is reflected in the unclear political and legal basis for institutional relations that have developed in the country. Represented by its political leader who repudiated the rational structure of democracy that had brought him victory in 1994, Belarus is drifting towards the estate-oligarchic principle of domination.

3. Year 2006: electoral stagnation and parallel society

The most important discovery that surprised the Belarusian 'democratic community' during the 2006 presidential elections was in becoming aware of the truism that real political elections are impossible in an authoritarian country that is not facing a major internal crisis. The reason for this lies in the very nature of an authoritarian rule and its typical methods and forms of retaining power. We use the word 'discovery' ironically, as the essence of the Belarusian political regime did not change from 2001 to 2006. An 'elegant'[1] implementation of the above-mentioned principle in

1 'I find my victory in the presidential election elegant, brilliant and beautiful,' said Aliaksandr Łukašenka in 2001.

2001 prevented democratic states from recognizing the outcome of the presidential election *de jure*. But it was not until 2006 that the formula of 'elections without elections' (which had earlier been rhetorical) became one of the banalities that describe real political life in Belarus.

In the absence of fair competition, political freedoms are suppressed, political investigations and persecution for political views are widespread, the government maintains an ideological monopoly, there is a massive propaganda assault underway based on deception and provocations, fundamental equal opportunities for disseminating information and presenting candidates' positions to voters are excluded, etc. Under these kinds of conditions, the election results reflect the current political system rather than the true potential of contenders who seek to act within a 'legal' framework.

The recent understanding that elections (except the presidential elections, which are limited to pretense and propaganda events) have been turned into a routine and are totally controlled by the authoritarian center is worth something. And it has the power to change much, at least in theory.

The legal and political institutions and practices of authoritarianism (and totalitarianism) of the 20th and now 21st centuries invariably seek to distance the supreme power rotation mechanism from citizens who formally have civil rights. (Such rotation can result only from a clash and distribution of interests in the thin upper

layer of political and economic oligarchs.) It was these tendencies that found their logical conclusion in political reformation under Aliaksandr Łukašenka.

Under such conditions, the authorities' stability and legitimacy (quasi-legitimacy) are not determined by citizens' expression of public political will through 'elections', but by the degree of readiness/lack of readiness of the general public for some forms of protest or revolutionary action. This is because citizens simply do not have other direct ways of transition of power in 'stable' authoritarian regimes.

However, the readiness mentioned above depends on several factors, among which subjective qualities and political talents are not necessarily critical. March 2006 made clear what had been expressed only as a hypothesis: that there is significant – dynamic and passive – protest potential in Belarus. Indeed, this is quite natural for any country as a prerequisite for democracy (and is unlikely under repressive totalitarianism).

For a long time, it was the opposition that was assigned the symbolic role of the main 'political actor' that is responsible for implementing change. The rest of society that was unhappy about the status quo believed that their place in the 'democratic process' was in the 'waiting room.' This understanding was essentially supported by the political opposition. In 2006, the idea that decisive 'supporters of change' should be sought outside party structures became common knowledge. The problem is that even the most active

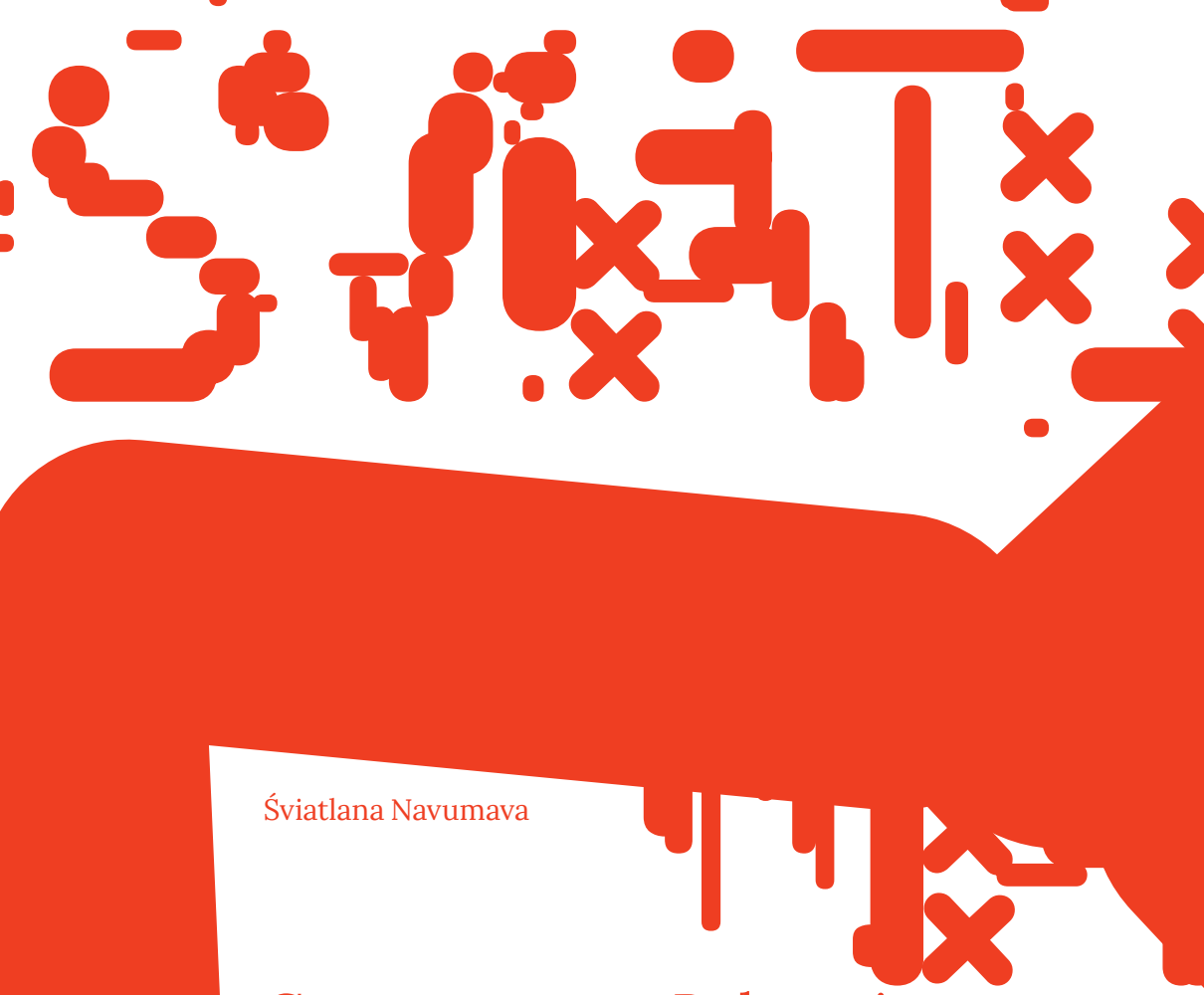
eventual 'shadow' protesters are, first, often out of sight and influence of the structured opposition, and second, fundamentally reluctant to share its standards of political behavior.

Repeated proclamations of joining forces and bringing together all civic movements under single (even if collective) leadership with common slogans and goals have not yet resulted in any visible changes. The time may have come to shift the focus from subordination to coordination and diversification, while stimulating the development of other forms of democratic experience rather than a direct power struggle for which political parties are normally created in democratic systems. That said, a fully functioning democratic system was liquidated before its completion in Belarus. Democratic society, however, does exist there. It is 'parallel' to the official one and based on other moral principles; its values differ from those that hectically come and go and are regularly interpreted by Belarusian state television to preserve a regime of one-man power.

The Belarusian 'parallel' society that exists both in the country and abroad is mostly in the background rather than on the television screen. However, it actively communicates internally and externally thanks to essentially irresistible modern technologies and relatively open borders. It can develop not only for achieving immediate political objectives. Unlike totalitarianism, authoritarian systems that are ideologically and organizationally grounded in the ruler's personality almost always degrade and disintegrate following changes in the balance of power, the removal of those

autocrats from power, or through their 'natural' end. Therefore, it is crucial for the present and future of the country to gain experience of sovereign existence, independent thinking, and that freedom that is inseparable from personal responsibility.

All independent organizations and communities – formal and informal; environmental, historical, cultural, etc.; those created temporarily through the internet, and so on – are participants and agents of change. Expansion of this autocracy-free 'parallel' space that has been going on (though at times through trial and error) is no less important than political activities.



Śviatlana Navumava

Contemporary Belarusian Political Discourse (What and How We Talk About Politics)☆

☆ The text was first published in the magazine "Грамадзянская альтэрнатыва" (Civil Alternative), No. 2, 1999. In this collection the text is printed with the kind permission of the editor of "Civil Alternative" V. Karbalevič.

Abstract

This article focuses on the concept of Belarusian political discourse and discourse-related researches that have become part of active methods used in Belarusian political science since the 1990s. The author analyzes Belarusian political discourse in the late 20th century, or what Belarusian politicians said about politics and how they did it. It is essential to identify and to understand linguistic interactions in political life that clarify principles, standards, and rules of coexistence of people within society. In democracies, politicians usually develop and apply universal compromise concepts so that everyone can understand them. In nondemocracies, especially in times of crisis, political terms develop different and vague meanings and numerous connotations that undermine society's stability. The analysis of political discourse over a specific period is instrumental to identifying problematic areas of communication and articulating differing levels, languages, and idiolects of political rivals in Belarus. They speak different languages without understanding each other, as a result of which debates and the development of the country are impossible since communication as the key condition of that development is broken.

Recently, there has been great interest in discourse studies in Belarusian political science. The term "discourse" is novel in modern political language, but it has already become a so-called buzzword. It should probably be welcomed, on the one hand, because new concepts and approaches contribute to expanding our knowledge about the object of study and help us to re-establish some links missed in the causation of different processes. On the other hand, discourse studies cannot provide and should not claim to provide any universal and full explanation of complex political realities. The

last fact forces us to clarify the term "discourse" when applied to the political sphere.

Discourse is a type of verbal communication focused on the discussion on actions, events, facts, and statements about the main aspects of social reality. The German philosopher and sociologist J. Habermas was one of the first who used the term "discourse" in the early 1970s within the context of communication theory. He assumed that through verbal explanation and therefore through language anything important for a person can be discussed, including, we point out, the very structures of language. This sort of linguistic interaction makes the standards, principles, and rules of individuals' coexistence explicit and records the difference between what is and what is supposed to be.

Since J. Habermas a number of researchers have worked on discourse studies. American sociologist A.W. Gouldner, for example, in his studies dedicated to intellectuals as a "new class" mentioned that one of the main features of this class is a culture of critical discourse. This is not just a specific linguistic community, but also a part of cultural assets, not less significant than ownership of capital goods or money. Discourse is not just everyday speech, although it can be the object of research and a source of information. Discourse is a speech made in accordance with specific rules, using reflected concepts and set lexical units. Intellectual discourse is rational, standardized, built on common logical rules and, according to A.W. Gouldner, it leads to autonomy of the new class that able to change our modern society. Current social research demonstrates the significant popularity of discourse studies. Some time ago, discourse analysis in a way revolutionized the research practices of humanities, combining

such fields as the world of iconic content (reflection) and the world of social action (behavior). Today, a variety of areas and conceptual approaches can be distinguished in discourse studies: from purely linguistic through the cultural in a very broad sense.[1]

In this paper, we assume that the term "discourse" marks the content coherence of text and social context. Discourse means not just the words, but the words that are being spoken here and now, at a certain time and in a particular social context. Not only the text then becomes the object of discourse analysis, but also non-linguistic factors: speakers' knowledge of the world, views, attitudes, goals, social experience, and lifestyles. These factors are the ones that provide the understanding of a particular text.[2] The discourse researcher does not merely deconstruct the text into parts, but attempts to ascertain why one text is easily understood while the other is beyond comprehension; why sometimes speakers listen to one another and hear one another, and sometimes it seems like they speak different languages.

As we know, personal views of the world organized in certain conceptual schemes have been called "frames." Frames are kinds of borders where we put, according to a certain order, new information about the world. As an example, we can look at some concept through which a person attributes new information. In such a way, the information about the expansion of NATO to the East can be seen by some post-Soviet people as a form of imperialistic aggression, by others as

1 See more in: Методология исследования политического дискурса. Актуальные проблемы содержательного анализа общественно-политических текстов. Выпуск 1. Minsk, 1998. Сс. 7–9.

2 Ван Дэйк Т.А. Язык. Познание. Коммуникация. М. 1989. Сс. 121–122.

evidence of a worldwide conspiracy, and still by others as a victory of democratic values, etc.

Frames are of conventional origin, and if frames or concepts, at least, have the same meaning for two or more speakers there is a chance of rapport.

Discourse studies are especially important in political science. It is no exaggeration to call language one of the main tools in politics. Referring to this sphere of human life, we can discuss not only the language of authority, but the authority of language. Sometimes this side of politics is especially highlighted by researchers. According to German political scientist M. Hättich, what people mean is called politics. Politics exists only in the form of a mind-set, conversation, or behavior.[3] Obviously, the term "politics" shouldn't be understood as a merely verbal fad, but the role of language in it should also not be underestimated.

* * *

What is the reason for conducting discourse studies today? Obviously, one may respond that any study is useful in some way. However, we would like to underscore here that such studies are not only of theoretical, but also of practical political usage. Studying today's Belarusian political discourse is at the same time, I believe, studying the chances of transformation and how it could be achieved. We will provide at least three arguments for this statement.

3 See: Политология. 70-80-е годы. Сборник рефератов. М. 1993. С. 57.

First, every word spoken aloud is not only movement of air, but it is also the constructing of some alternate reality positioned to affect the primary reality. Perhaps, we should remember, that the typical contrast between words and actions is conditional. Words are also action (which is why it is said that words can hurt or even kill), especially in politics, where large social groups are the objects of communication. Social transformations inevitably affect language, especially political language. The transformations of the previous decade have brought new words into our lives ("pluralism," "consensus," "speaker," "rating," etc.), as well as new meanings of old words. For example, democracy is no longer "socialistic" or "bourgeois," and human rights have shed the qualifier "so-called." We are not only marking these transformations, but also noticing that when speaking about politics with the transformed language we imagine and, as a result, create a kind of new political reality.

Unfortunately, the last idea is supported also with proof by contradiction. For instance, the word "parliament" can hardly be classified as frequent in our everyday political vocabulary. Moreover, according to studies[4], much of the population explain its meaning with a rather significant flaw: they understand parliament not as a representative body, but as an expensive amusement, an assembly of people who talk (not work!) a lot. The propaganda campaign launched in this context before the 1996 Referendum supported media audiences in the idea that parliamentarism is something optional and, in some cases, even damaging. It would be enough to mention that most articles and statements in official media criticized not only the 13th Supreme

4 Here the author refers to research undertaken together with Hieorhij Maksiuta within the project "The transformation of psychological mechanisms of social-political choice" in 1996.

Soviet but parliamentarism itself. All this moved our society away from the awareness of the value of parliamentarism and, as a result, from the active defense of it. It is easy to predict that during the next election campaigns, candidates will have to answer time and again the question "What is this parliament for?" The word then is once more turning into action and ignoring this aspect would be a mistake.

Second, studying discourse is studying whether understanding, dialogue, and consensus could be possible as a social contract, not as a forced unity. We have to realize that rapport is not built by default even in some simple everyday cases. The more complex objects, processes, and stories are discussed by people, the more difficult it is to find common ground. This is even more true about politics, where the speaker interlocutors are sometimes very large social groups using highly abstract, polysemic terms. Political discourse is a discourse largely of publicly significant problems, and such problems are always complex and multifold. Therefore, it refers not to understanding itself, but to a certain level of understanding.

The main problem here can be defined as a contradiction between using the same language (Russian, Belarusian or other) and using political terms that are filled with different (occasionally opposite) senses for the speakers. Obviously, each political term has its so-called standard meaning – the one that is registered in dictionaries as a form of documentation of collective social experience. But in the process of communication, this standard meaning acquires individual senses and connotations. They arise from individual social experience, from actual political practice, and sometimes from a kind of random set of circumstances or unwitting images and associations. Perhaps, the best example here would be the story of the

word “democracy” having so many semantic layers that it seems like it does not have any meaning at all or that its meaning has been changed to the opposite.

We should notice, too, that this issue exists not only in political discourse, but also in discourse of political studies. The lexicon of political studies is quite similar to the one of politics. Such instances of the coming together of everyday and scientific languages, obviously, are rather hard to be found. For instance, the language of philology is different from the language of fiction, while politics and political studies deal with the same terms, making the problem of understanding significant in the community of researchers.

In general, finding common ground in politics is not just a desire or moral imperative. It becomes crucial, for it is a necessary condition for the continual existence and sustainable development of society. It is even more important in the context of democracy, whose spirit and character are defined by pluralism and competition. Lack of common ground here leads to contradictions and confrontation and, as a result, to the destruction of democracy. In this case, the problem of discourse also moves from theoretical argument to actual political practice.

Finally, in speaking about political discourse we speak about the arrangements and the quality of political choice. It is not only about an algorithmic and legalized procedure of delegation of authority from the people to their representatives, but also about making choice in the broadest sense. Essentially, people are constantly making political choices. Transformational society increases the

number of cases of political choice and extends its range considerably. A person gets the opportunity to choose "their" newspapers, party, leader, candidate, and behavioral patterns. After totalitarianism and autocracy, there is an opportunity to choose whether to participate in politics or not. And eventually to choose a strategy for country development.

How is the choice itself being made? If deconstructed, this process could be represented as the subsequence of several actions: a person considers options (candidates) and connects them to the idea of "good and evil," meaning to models that assist in the evaluating of possible results of different choices for the purpose of personal and public advantages. This kind of evaluating is done by everyone many times during one's life and does not require any instruction. However, that kind of scheme can be useful. It shows the importance of models for making political choice. In politics the models are the concepts, the terms, of some deeply rooted images and explanatory schemes. These are the components of political discourse. If someone's models have been formed defectively, political choice will also be flawed. This can be easily illustrated with an example from everyday life. If looking to purchase something we consider only the low price on the surface, there is a great chance of failure. This exact situation played out when many post-Soviet people were seduced by the many cheap, disposable, but nicely packed goods flooded the market. Everyday life differs from politics in the way that the former teaches how to choose properly and corrects models significantly faster. When it comes to politics, the awareness of the link between the flawed choice and its results is harder to comprehend, although the price of the mistake is higher.

Today, the creation of certain models through education, knowledge or practice is high on the agenda. But before starting this necessary work we must run a special analysis. And here again we cannot do without discourse analysis.

* * *

The initial question in discourse analysis is usually one of spoken political language, which may seem naive. Should we consider this question while every day, perhaps every hour, we listen to conversations about politics, taking part or staying outside of the discussion but while completely understanding the topic? But that is merely the first impression. Looking more carefully, it should be understood that the reason for political disputes (from arguments in a bus or in subway to politicians' public debates) is a misunderstanding of basic terms and definitions. It should be mentioned that the habit of using inappropriate words for some processes and phenomena is one of the significant features of post-Soviet political practice. For example, the word "democrats" is used for people who organize a reinstatement of "constitutional order" (?) in Chechnya, "communists" for consistent fighters for the revitalization of Belarusian parliamentarism, and "liberal-democratic" for a party whose ideas and actions are neither liberal nor democratic. Historical reasons could also be found for this. It is hard to find a more ambiguous system of naming and definitions than the Soviet one. All it takes is to recognize the well-known phrase "in a response to popular workers' demand" that appeared in the beginning of some party and government resolution and made millions of hearts skip, because what followed was bound to be wholly unpleasant and useless. These double (triple, etc.) meanings cannot be eradicated quickly, especially if no specific efforts are made. Moreover, this word game adds some charm to post-Soviet

intellectual life, especially in the conversations of middle-aged intellectuals who in their days became proficient in studying the culture of political overtones.

Today, the clarification of the meanings of political terms used by different social groups should be made, or some "uncultivated" political compendia that are prevalent in current Belarusian society should be compiled. The goal is both relevant and complex. To achieve it, specific methods are required that would enable defining properly the meanings used while at the same time avoiding making the respondent feel like someone being tested. Otherwise, there is a risk of either receiving socially standardized answers or getting no answers at all. Likely, such methods could be found within the sphere of psychology or social studies.

For example, the author of this paper was involved in research in which a group of Minsk university students were studied during an experiment.[5] The research involved the study of individual cases using a method of free association. The research problem was to demonstrate which features of various political objects are highlighted by participants, whether those characteristics named by different participants (members of the same social group) would correspond, and whether some common definition of objects could be provided for this group. Several basic political terms were selected to solve the problem: "politics," "elections," "authority," "protest,"

5 See more in: Максюта Г., Наумова С. Слово как раздражитель аудитории: к вопросу об исследовании семантических пространств политических понятий // Методология исследования политического дискурса. Актуальные проблемы содержательного анализа общественно-политических текстов. Вып. 1. Мн., 1998.

"deputy," "dictator," "establishment," "civic responsibility," "democrat," "party," and "anarchy." The words were read aloud to respondents who then needed to write the first association that came to their mind. The time was limited, so those who were late in reacting put a dash in their response. The results were offered to independent experts for classification, who then marked the responses as essential, not specifically situational or infrequent, or as a metaphor or cliché. Clearly, the experiment was local and cannot claim to provide final or indisputable results. Several inferences for reflection, however, are given below without outlining the entire process and results.

First, respondents mostly mentioned meanings that were not standard (i.e., not recorded in dictionaries). The number of respondents whose associations matched with standard definitions varied between 12% and 33%. For instance, the term "authority" was often associated with violence, obedience, and dictatorship. In most respondents' minds, authority is dictatorship and dictatorship is authority. Therefore, authority is linked not to the process of discussion and coordination of interests, but to violence and suppression.

Second, most participants applied specific situational meanings, not general meanings. That means that abstract political concepts are realized merely in their specific, perceived, and familiar form. For example, to the word "authority" more than 70% of respondents provided associations like "throne," "money," "king," "riot police," "crime," "madhouse," etc. The word "politics" is associated by more than half of participants with words like "newspaper," "money," "people," "dirt," and "babble." However, it is the term "politics" that is often a key to people's awareness of all political processes.

Third, most terms evoked negative associations in participants. For example, the word "politics" had negative associations from 60% of respondents, the word "protest" from 32%, "elections" from 26%, and "authority" from 22%. Accordingly, one may conclude that for many people politics in general evoke more negative than positive emotions. The famous cliché "politics is a dirty business" is deeply ingrained in their psyche.

Such conclusions lead us to the conclusion that further research in this field are essential. Any political communication could claim to be effective only if the speakers have an awareness and understanding of each another's lexicons. It is possible even that there could be more than one lexicon that correspond to lifestyle, social experience, demographic, and other characteristics.

* * *

According to established political vocabulary it is possible to have multiple discourse circles in society. In general, this phenomenon could be viewed as normal, but only if those circles are not separated and are able to communicate. This can otherwise lead to a problem of fragmentation and enclosing of discourses where members of different discourse groups seem to speak different languages without understanding one another. Their dialogue appears senseless, as in the case when after someone's question "What time is it?" another person would answer "Thanks, I'm not hungry." In the political sphere such fragmentation can cause damage. As mentioned, the issue of misinterpreting in politics can lead to exclusion, tension, conflicts, and confrontation in society.

Today, it can be said with regret that the signs of such fragmentation have become apparent in Belarusian society as well. The crisis point chiefly runs along the authority's line of "discourse – counter-discourse."[6] This can be observed through looking at official and independent media. It should also be noted that media play a special role in Belarusian society. They become points where political positions are articulated. The media do not just inform, educate, and entertain, but also perform the function of, according to a famous phrase, a collective facilitator. It should be emphasized the discussion here is not about a party's media, which would be natural, but about the national media. Most Belarusian citizens today who care for politics are not divided into adherents of a communist, liberal, social democratic, or national idea, but are readers of the newspapers *Naviny* or *Narodnaja gazeta*, *Sovetskaya Belorussia*, *Narodnaja Volya*, etc. That is why the media are becoming a proper source for analyzing Belarusian political discourse generally.

According to our research, there is something special and specific in the political discourse of newspapers, depending on their linguistic affiliation. Belarusian and Russian are not just different languages of communication. Belarusian always bears the imprint of opposition, while Russian can be used both in official discourse and in counter-discourse. Generally, the language of political discourse in Belarus is primarily Russian. At the same time, the so-called bilingual discourse is becoming more and more prevalent. Its specifics can be observed in the example of bilingual (Belarusian-Russian and Russian-Belarusian) newspapers. Bilingualism is a distinctive, perhaps unique feature of Belarusian media. Some experts consider

6 Counter-discourse is an oppositional discourse or a discourse that criticizes the authorities.

this a disadvantage. According to A. Dzirvanovič, for example, bilingualism leads "to a decrease in the professional publishing level of periodicals. Periodicals published only in Belarusian or only in Russian appear much more complete."[7] Others, the author of this article among them, believe that bilingualism follows from the natural affinity of the languages and cannot be a manifestation of the democratic nature of the media themselves. In real experience, actual bilingualism expands the circle of consumers of a particular media and contributes much to the consolidation of readers with different ideological opinions around a given periodical.

However, the bilingualism of newspapers in and of itself does not solve the problem of dividing discourses into Russian and Belarusian. The similarities between Russian and Belarusian makes it possible to switch between them, even within the same texts. A similar technique is used not only to make the text more expressive, but also to determine the political position of the author. Significant in this regard is the use of the words *otechestvo* and *baćkaŭščyna* ("fatherland" in Russian and Belarusian, respectively), which, though they are synonymous, are perceived in Belarusian political discourse as opposite terms. The Russian word often is put in the same semantic row with the terms "USSR," "integration," and "Slavic idea." On the contrary, the Belarusian word is directly connected to a designation of Belarusian patriotism and opposition. That makes possible an ironical use of the two terms (while preserving the original spelling) in ideologically different texts.

We also made an attempt to define the view of politics provided to readers by official and independent media. The research was based

7 Белорусская деловая газета. 1998. No. 34.

on materials from Belarusian periodicals of 1997–1998 (content-analysis, discourse analysis, and rhetorical analysis).[8]

The results are offered in Table 1 (in % of materials devoted to political topics).

Table 1

Topics	Total average	Official printed media	Independent printed media
Official documents	6.0	9.7	2.3
Official histories	9.4	14.7	4.2
Analysis of domestic policies	17.8	18.3	17.6
Analysis of foreign policies	10.5	8.8	12.2
Integration in the CIS	11.5	14.3	8.9
Legislation	8.9	5.3	12.4
Human rights	12.5	12.6	12.3
Opposition	6.7	4.6	8.7
Political parties and social movements	7.1	4.8	9.3
Media	6.1	4.6	7.5
Elections	3.5	2.3	4.6

8 Materials reviewed were taken from the Belarusian newspapers *Советская Белоруссия*, *Народная газета*, *Рэспубліка*, *Звязда*, *Народная воля*, *Свабода (Навіны)*, *Белорусская деловая газета* of June, 1997 and May, 1998 (50 issues in total).

The second column of the table (average numbers) is shown here only to demonstrate the fundamental lack of information. Giving average numbers of topic priorities of the media in general is similar to calculating the average patients' temperature in a hospital. The image of politics in official and independent periodicals differ significantly. In official newspapers, the content of politics is primarily the activity of the state: almost 66% of stories write about it. These are put together with official documents, official chronicles, reviews on domestic and foreign policy, and stories on integration. Politics through the eyes of the state press is basically non-party and devoid of opposition. At the same time, it rarely draws a line between the opposition and political parties (all parties are the opposition, and the opposition are those who create political parties). In the few articles devoted to these topics, an overall skeptical tone dominates. Statements include "armchair parties," "a bunch of ambitious politicians," "politicians who represent only themselves," etc. This means that the official press establishes the idea that the political norm is the absence of a non-governmental sector of politics and that stability is the absence of political pluralism. It should be noted that this approach accompanied by inadequate information about political parties in general enhances "the absence effect" of parties in the real political life of Belarus.

The independent press mostly portrays politics as a pluralistic sphere, however these are stories that comment on and analyze the activities of official authorities. At the same time, there are a more or less equal number of stories on the activities of parties, opposition, and the media. Regarding foreign policy, both official and independent press pay much attention to the problem of relations between Belarus and the CIS, mainly to relations between Belarus and Russia.

However, the content and the tone of the stories are fundamentally different. In the first case, the keywords and key associations include "common history," "common destinies," "gradual unification," "historical justice," "holiday," "two fraternal peoples," "mutual benefit," "parity," "Belarus will not be a burden," etc. In the other case we have "concern," "threat to sovereignty," "harm to national interests," "dubious benefit," "Belarus is a hostage (in relations between Russia and the West)," etc.

The numbers indicating the share of stories devoted to the issue of human rights (12.6% in official and 12.3% in independent media) also need special comment. It should be noted that the bulk of articles in this category in the official press were those related to the social and economic rights of citizens (the right to live, to work, to social security, to health protection, etc.). Moreover, most of the stories were devoted to specific cases in particular people's lives. In this sense, the most popular story is that which starts with some violations (indifference) in the actions of the local authorities which are harshly criticized by the newspaper. Most independent press focuses on political rights, devoting their stories to such topics (in descending order) as the fate of political prisoners, illegal actions of the police and law-enforcement bodies against certain citizens, and persecution of the opposition and political parties.

* * *

Official and independent media provide not only different impressions of politics, but also of fundamentally different explanatory schemes of events taking place. The explanatory scheme is a kind of frame which somehow organizes the reflection of reality in a person's

mind. These schemes take the form of standard, sometimes stereotyped explanations of what is happening, through which a person perceives new information and new knowledge about the object (in our case, political reality).

In looking at stories for 1996-1999 of the newspapers mentioned,[9] we tried to sort out keywords uncovered during the analysis of some important problems. Among them were the problem of the collapse of the Soviet Union, that of integration with Russia, the problem of reform, and the issue of NATO expansion. They are assumed to be dividing lines in Belarusian society, reflecting an attitude to the past (USSR), vision of the future (reform and integration), and foreign policy trends. We have also added to this list two more specific problems that have come up recently – food shortages and attitudes towards the problem of RNE (the Russian National Unity, RNU) and modern fascism in general, which appear as illustrations of more general conclusions. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

9 Five more issues of each newspaper of January–March 1999 were studied in addition to those mentioned above.

Table 2

Problem	Official media	Independent media
Collapse of the USSR	"collapse of the USSR is a result of betrayal and of the plot of former communist leaders" "collapse of the USSR is one of the most dramatic pages of the 20th century" "collapse of the USSR is a result of the victory of the West in the Cold War"	"collapse of the USSR is a natural result of the crisis of social system, the proof of a bankrupt state economy" "collapse of the USSR is a dramatic, but entirely logical event" "the USSR lost the competition with the West"
Integration with Russia	"integration with Russia is renewal of historical justice" "integration with Russia is based on Slavic nations' historical brotherhood" "the opponents of integration include Russian leaders, while the nations are seeking to be united" "both states will profit from the integration of economic systems because no one needs us in the West"	"real integration of different economic systems is impossible" "integration rhetoric is not accompanied by real steps to unification" "Russia has its own interests in Belarus, for which the idea of integration is being supported" "the integration projects should be calculated and mutual benefits determined"

Reform	"Belarus has its own way of reforming" "all the best from socialism should be kept" "Belarus has avoided the mistakes of its neighbors and is being changed gradually and carefully"	"reforms have essentially not been taken up" "the Soviet system is being preserved in Belarus" "the economic crisis is a result of the absence of reforms" "historical experience proved the credibility of the market model of management, so market-friendly reforms are necessary"
Expansion of NATO	"expansion of NATO is a real threat for Belarus" "expansion of NATO is accompanied by inserting Western standards and values" "NATO is the real enemy of Belarus and Russia" "Belarus is an outpost in confrontation with NATO"	"expansion of NATO is a result of collapse of the USSR" "in this process, Belarus may become a hostage in relations between the East and the West" "former socialistic states' pursuit of NATO is absolutely natural, because they view this as an assurance that Soviet regime wouldn't be reconstructed"

Food shortage	"food shortage is a result of increased demand (people have begun to purchase more than usual)" "some food is exported to Russia, because the prices there are higher" "food shortage is a result of some managers' irresponsibility and lack of discipline" "food shortage is connected with faults in the pricing system"	"food shortage is a direct result of socialist system of agriculture" "there is more profit in exporting food abroad" "food shortage appeared as a result of general stagnation of the economy, especially agricultural sector" "authoritarian methods are no longer effective"
RNE and modern fascism	"the rise of a community connected to the RNE is a result of anti-Russian politics of some institutions" "the actions of teenagers from RNE are typical hooliganism, which is exaggerated" "the actions of RNE members are worth shaming, but then other nationalist groups should be punished, for instance, BPF"	"the actions of RNE youths are demonstrating fascism and are a real 'brown danger'" "the activity of RNE members and other fascist groups is taking place with the silent encouragement of the authorities"

The dominance of rigid explanatory schemes in the media's political discourse imbues political communication with a kind of ritual nature. In this communication a person operates with a certain set of clichés, expressing phrases and arguments that make a person recognizable both among supporters and among opponents. In this context, the meaning of the text is upstaged, and the very fact of its appearance in a newspaper of a particular political side is brought to the fore. Being part of a ritual is in some way similar to an oath of loyalty. Here we are not talking about official censorship, but about "the internal censorship" of editors and authors who determine what can and what can not be published, for example, in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* or *Naviny*.

In the framework of ritual communication, effective debate is impossible, because here the corresponding opponent is unable get any specific arguments – just clichés that serve as identifying markers. Let us take, for example, one of the central concepts of modern political discourse – "the people." To define it, official newspapers use the following phrases: "let the people judge," "for the first time in history the Belarusian people have the opportunity to decide on their own what kind of government we should have in our country," "the people should be allowed to express their opinion," "the people should decide who is right and who is guilty," "the people means ordinary people," "the Belarusian people gave an order to the head of state," "democracy is mainly the will of the people, and the best manifestation of it is the national assembly and referendum."

In independent media, the term "the people" is used differently: "the people are those who do not understand political issues and form most of our society," "the obedient people," "the deceived people,"

"the long-suffering people," "the people, who have no idea of politics and mechanisms of the political system," "the majority of the people is ready to support only an attractive leader's image," "not citizens but subjects," "nationality is the main political trick of authorities," and "the people do not need political leaders, they need democratic institutions."

In both cases it is not about content analysis, but about symbols that are difficult to be debated on a rational level.

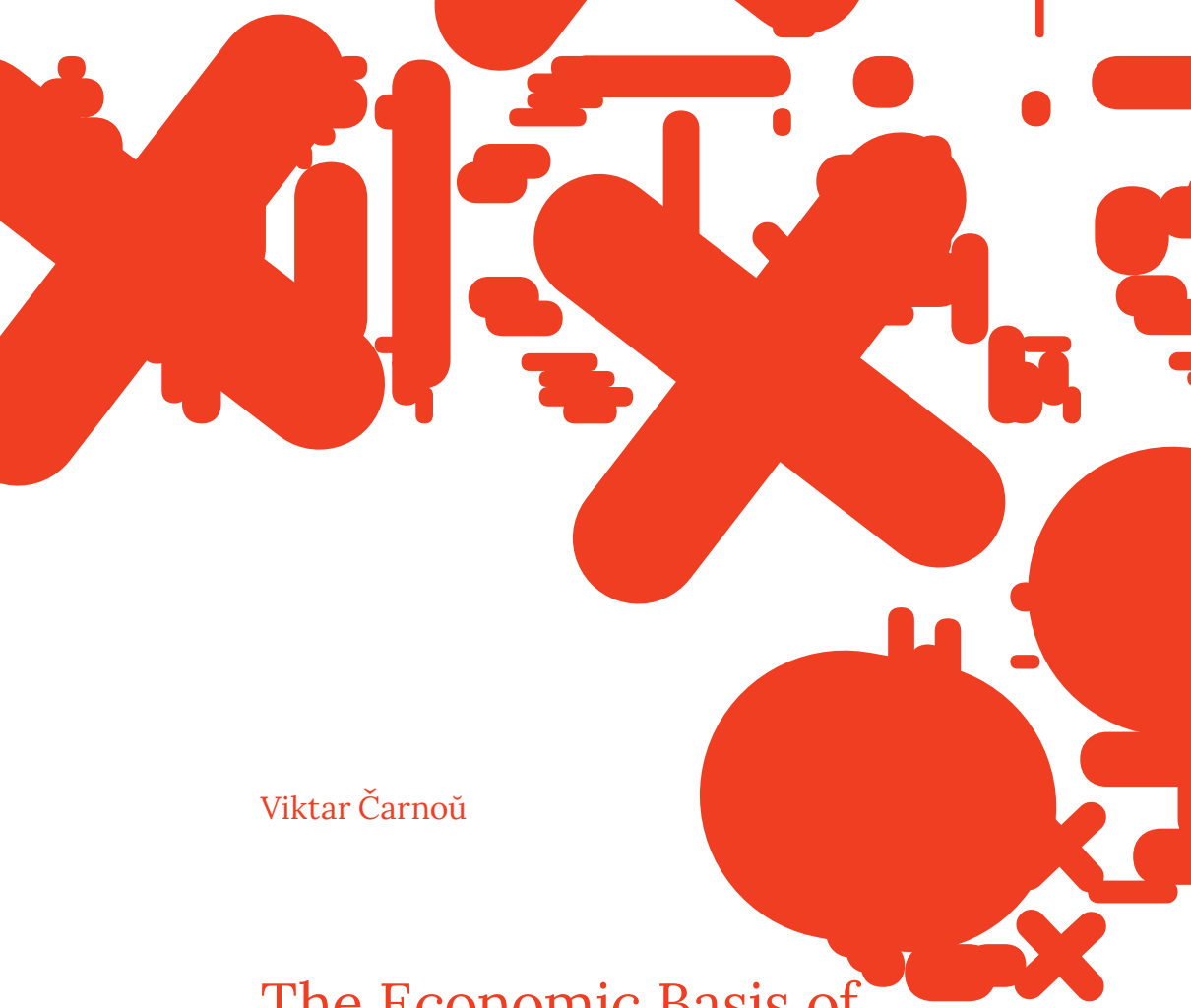
It is worth noting also that the explanatory schemes of official and independent press might be lined up in a single logical chain. In the first case, we are dealing with a more or less consistently stated leftist idea in its post-socialist iteration. It is not pure socialism or communism with the sacralization of Marx and Lenin or the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and class struggle; rather, it is a combination of nostalgia for the socialist practices of the 1970s, the pursuit of the state economy, and an apology for discipline and anti-Western ideology.

In the second case, it may be post-Soviet liberalism, mixing the values of democracy, human rights, calls for reform, and a cautious orientation to the West. The discourse of the independent press also differs in its absence of a single reform project and is mostly limited to criticism of the official course. This is understandable. The independent press (and therefore its readers) is today perhaps the strongest intellectual opposition to the current regime. It does not reflect and project the situation in the state, but criticizes and demonstrates other examples of social practices. The independent press does not

just perform a function, but, not to shy away from the word, carries out a political mission, whose importance can not be overestimated. Its moral authority (and the level of trust in the independent press exceeds the level of trust in opposition parties) can play a significant role in promoting certain projects of the non-socialist future of Belarus. The latter, it should be noted, is still a very difficult task for Belarusian society.

Regarding the difference between the images of politics and explanatory schemes provided by official and independent press, we should remember that we are not talking about the internal working of the newspapers themselves, but about their impact on their audiences. These images are replicated and set in the readers' minds, locking them in their groups. That is why the readers of some newspapers can not understand the readers of others, and their arguments look like conversations between the deaf and the blind.

The stating of such a split is not a new idea. Almost all sociological surveys conducted in the country confirm this again and again. However, the bifurcation of discourses shows the depth and preserving of this split. That means that neither the shift of power nor the implementation of any reform model will be able to overcome it quickly and painlessly. Here the search for a "miraculous" national idea capable of uniting the nation can result in a sad irony. Apparently, today it is not the alchemical search for the golden formula of consent that should be discussed, but gradual, thoughtful, and hard work should be done to clarify the meaning of words, rationally search for understanding, and in the end restore the fabric of common discourse.



Viktar Čarnoŭ

The Economic Basis of Belarusian Neo-Soviet Authoritarianism (2008-2011)

Abstract

This article contains research notes from Viktar Čarnoŭ on the economic dynamic of the Belarusian regime referred to as neo-Soviet authoritarianism. The author focuses on the analysis of processes of liberalization in the Belarusian economy and the subsequent backsliding following the 2010 presidential elections. This policy has barely affected Belarus's international ratings or has resulted in any obvious internal political and economic change. On the contrary, it drew Belarus even closer to Russia, which led in 2011 to the sale of Beltransgaz by Aliaksandr Łukašenka in return for anticipated tariffs for natural gas, as well as to a new round of debt financing on the Belarusian economic model. The author analyzes short-term and long-term consequences of this Belarusian policy regarding the consolidation of the Belarusian neo-Soviet authoritarianism.

1. Elusive effects of economic liberalization in Belarus in 2008-2009

November 2009 marked two years since the beginning of Belarusian economic liberalization. Among independent Belarusian analysts, opinions are divided on the point of whether the Belarusian reforms are irreversible or not. Many consider them to be purely declarative and predict that everything will change back as soon as the global economic crisis comes to end. As several analysts have maintained, this is confirmed by the absence of a real demand for reforms in society. The market messages of a handful of representatives of opposition political parties and independent economists are certainly not taken into account, having always been a kind of background noise without any influence on the behavior of the political elite. In our opinion, the economic reforms are starting to

cross the point of no return in many aspects. The main question is whether the Belarusian leadership is willing to pursue its policy of economic liberalization. In other words, what the internal limits of this policy are. The 2008 economic crisis in Belarus to a great extent heralded the global crisis. The former resulted from the very nature of economic development in Belarus, whereas the global crisis only exacerbated the internal issues that have built up in recent years.

The experience of belated modernization, which can be traced back to the mid-19th century, confirms the irreversibility of Belarusian reforms. Historically, illiberal regimes have often decided to carry out liberal reforms under external pressure (for example, a military threat), rather than due to pressure from society (from the bottom up). Today, the Belarusian ruling elite do not perceive military threats. However, an open economy made Belarus face stiff competition from outside, especially in the labor market. It is no coincidence that the country has been engaged in the international salary race since the beginning of 2007. As President Łukašenka said regarding this, "Low salaries can destroy even the largest state." [1] The global crisis has merely put the salary race on hold.

Whatever the reasons for the economic growth in recent years, the efforts made to reform the Belarusian economy have taken effect. In the World Bank report "Doing Business 2010" published in October 2009,[2] Belarus climbed 24 positions in one year and ranked 58th among 183 countries (82nd and 115th in 2008 and 2007,

1 From the President's speech on the National Television on May 18, 2001.

2 The study is dated 2010 because it is in the following year that businesses will face the business regulation change discussed.

respectively). It also ranked among the Top 5 most dynamic world countries by reinvigorating its business climate.

In their ranking, World Bank experts noted improvements in six business areas in Belarus: company registration procedures, people's employment, dealing with construction permits, registering property, paying taxes, and trading across borders. However, the main contribution in Belarus's progress was made through the simplification of company registration that lifted Belarus up to the 7th position, above almost all European countries.[3] Experts predict that a radical simplification of this procedure will allow economic entities to save 21.5 million USD a year. As for protecting investors, which determines inflow of capital, there has been a slight regression instead of the expected progress, as Belarus was ranked 109th in 2009 vs 105th in 2008.[4] This is confirmed through data from *Belstat* (the National Statistical Committee): in January-September 2009, the share of foreign investments in Belarusian economy (apart from loans from foreign banks) made up 1.5% of the total of fixed capital expenditures (vs. 1.4% in 2008). This means that Belarus investment forums, held both domestically and abroad in recent years, have not yielded any tangible results, which is not surprising if investors do not have guarantees for protection of their assets, property rights, and distributing their profits at their own discretion.

3 World Bank experts note that the process of starting a business in Belarus has been considerably simplified with the joining of the four stages and canceling mandatory notarial certification and minimal statutory funds. Starting one's own business takes less time now. Today, the entire process consists of only 5 steps taking 6 days (vs. an average of 6.7 steps and 17.4 days in Europe and Central Asia).

4 World Bank experts have estimated the investor protection index at 4.7 out of 10.

Independent experts say that it is easier in Belarus to have a company registered than to operate it since there is no progress regarding the key factors of the business climate. And if active entrepreneurs are not sources of positive information about the business climate, it would be quixotic to expect either a significant increase in foreign investment or the development of entrepreneurial potential in Belarus.

Both official and independent experts draw attention to the weak ranking positions of Belarus regarding taxation (for 4 years in a row). Including new countries in the World Bank rating has not changed the situation. According to World Bank experts, each year entrepreneurs in Belarus must spend 900 hours to pay 107 tax contributions (the figures for 2008 were 1188 and 112, respectively). The tax burden of Belarusian companies remains high, taking 20.1% of profits, which is twice as much as in Europe and in Central Asia. Taxes and salaries command 40% of business profits.

Despite the obvious progress in creating favorable conditions for doing business in Belarus, the business community has demonstrated a reserved reaction to it. According to a nationwide survey conducted in the summer of 2009 by the non-government sociological company "NOVAK," among the heads of 516 small and medium-sized enterprises and 112 individual entrepreneurs (business people operating without forming legal entities),[5] opinions on regulatory changes in the business environment in comparison with 2007 were split 50/50. 32% of respondents noted some improvement and the same number said the business environment had worsened. 29% of respondents noticed no changes and 7% were

5 http://naviny.by/rubrics/.../ic_news_113_319006/.

undecided. Interestingly, almost half of individual entrepreneurs (47%) noted a deterioration in business conditions. The two groups (heads of SMEs and individual entrepreneurs) also assessed differently specific aspects of the business environment, notably administrative procedures, the attitude of government bodies and officials towards entrepreneurial business, and opportunities for renting new premises. As for the changes in credit conditions and the auditing of financial and economic activities, the opinions of the two groups of respondents were roughly the same.

2. Liberalization crisis

The current Belarusian type of economic management is characterized, among others, by a nonstandard distribution of resources. A policy of credit financing through state-controlled banks is an important mechanism for the unplanned allocation of resources. In Belarus, government-owned banks operate differently from private businesses, serving as a state treasury for aid to the secondary sector. While credit financing is falling globally due to increased risks, it is growing rapidly in Belarus. As of August 1, 2009, outstanding loans totaled 55.6 billion BYN, which is 47.8% more than a year earlier. Simultaneously, outstanding or prolonged loan payments have increased 2.9 times. As of July 1, 2009, troubled loans by Belarusian banks totalled 1.5 trillion BYN, having increased 1.8 times.

What is the result of this financial generosity? For 9 months, GDP of Belarus has decreased by 0.3%, industrial production by 4.5%,

movement of goods by 12.5%, and exports of goods has grown by 44.5% over 8 months. The loans provided to Belarusian enterprises have obviously not been used to modernize and restructure production, but to keep these potential bankruptcies afloat. Meanwhile, economic issues have been getting worse, which is evidenced by the goods stuck in warehouses in the amount of 6.3 billion BYN, the non-completed real estate program (15,300 BYN as of September 1, 2009), a drop in revenues by 1.8% and an increase in sales costs by 3% in the first half of 2009. Consequently, there is a sharp decrease in price competitiveness of Belarusian goods, including low-technology goods. For the past 7 months, the total sales profit of all Belarusian enterprises has amounted 9.5 billion BYN, which will not even be enough to pay off debts, let alone new production without foreign investors. The worsening financial standing of national businesses is also evidenced by a sudden increase in deadweight loss of 1.1 billion BYN as of August 1, 2009, which is 4.4 times more than in August 2008. Unsurprisingly, retirement benefits (pensions) have not increased since August 2008, which resulted in a decrease in their real size (adjusted with CPIs for goods and services) by 9.7% in September 2009 compared to September 2008. Nevertheless, it is retired Belarusians who are President Łukašenka's base. Real salaries also began to drop, having fallen by 1.3% in August 2009 compared to August 2008.

The impact of negative economic indicators forced the government to implement legislative initiatives. In September 2009, the president signed Decree No. 477 providing individual entrepreneurs with significant preferences for export production. Now they

must pay only one sales tax of 35,000 BYN (less than 9 EUR) per month. Individual entrepreneurs are even exempt from depositing foreign currency earned abroad into bank accounts.

As of July 1, 2009, industrial goods worth more than 7.3 trillion BYN were being stored in warehouses. In the first half of 2009, finished goods made up 94.6% of the total average monthly production capacity (vs. 49.9% in the first half of 2008). All these additional products in warehouses have obviously been included in the calculating of GDP.

Although the Belarusian president called for reorganizing the activities of the Council of Ministers into a kind of "Ministry of Commerce" (so that all ministries were engaged only in trade), it did not bring tangible results. First, entrepreneurship is considered an "assistant" rather than the main engine for economic development (a role played by bureaucracy). Second, we again see that the bureaucracy is not only unable to make independent decisions, but is also unable to listen to its leader.

Pricing is one of the pillars of the Belarusian type of economic development. Since the early 1990s, Belarusian entrepreneurs have been battling with the state for the right to set prices for their goods on their own and it is the state that has always won this battle. On September 22, the Ministry of Justice registered Decree No. 141, which liberalized pricing for many fast-moving consumer goods, as well as other retail goods, except for 50 items (some food, medications, and children's products). However, this decision applies only to markups and the 1999 Presidential Decree No. 285 *Regarding certain measures aimed at ensuring price (tariff) stability in the*

Republic of Belarus is still in force. Manufacturers then are still obliged to provide financial explanations for increases in prices for their products through intensive calculations instead of setting them based on market pull.

Price deregulation is one of the IMF's recommendations to Belarusian authorities within a stand-by agreement aimed at providing credit funds to support the Belarusian economy. However, there is little evidence of further price liberalization. In September 2008, Belarusian Minister of Economy Mikalaj Zajčanka stated that free pricing would be established completely when small and medium-sized enterprises "reach a critical mass," increasing their contribution to GDP by 40-45% (today this figure is 8-10%).

Within the liberalization policy, a system of state control was approved in October 2009. Decree No. 510 *Regarding improving control (supervisory) activities in the Republic of Belarus* established a common procedure for control and supervision activities which looks quite unusual. For the first time ever, an exhaustive list of control and supervisory bodies and their control (supervision) scope have been set. Bodies which are not included in the list are not allowed to supervise business entities.

Now, new economic entities cannot be controlled for two years following the date of their state registration (a two-year moratorium). Unscheduled inspections cannot be carried out there unless there is exhaustive justification including reasons listed in the decree mentioned above. The rule of scheduled audits, which used to be conducted periodically (no more frequently than once a year) regardless of business integrity of those under audit, has

been replaced by a new planning procedure based on a risk group classification.

All business entities are classified into risk groups based on threats of legal violations in their business area relative to the state and society. The relevant criteria are exhaustively described in Decree No. 510. High-risk business entities will be monitored no more frequently than once a week; average-risk ones, every 3 years; and low-risk ones, every 5 years. If audits of high- and average-risk entities do not reveal breaches of law, the next audit will be carried out only after 2 and 5 years, respectively.

Interestingly, officials of control bodies have been held more liable now for violating rules of the procedures for control, including unscheduled audits. The liability can be administrative, disciplinary (up to dismissals), and even criminal (for unscheduled biased audits carried out for personal gain and for causing damage to auditees, such as violation of rights and harming legal, public, and state interests). Audits conducted with any violations above will be considered illegal.

The consequences of Decree No. 510 can hardly be predicted, but they will most likely be negative. The effectiveness of economic development under Belarusian management is largely determined by control. Historical experience shows that economic systems that are based on centralized allocation of resources are doomed to degradation when that control is loosened. The *perestroika* experiment under Gorbachev is a good case in point that shows

what happens if there are no civil society and independent media to perform a significant part of control functions.

3. The end of balancing between Russia and the West (2010-2011)

Backsliding on liberalization policy after the 2010 presidential election, the Belarusian regime continues to establish closer and closer economic and energy ties with Russia. Following the signing of a set of Russian-Belarusian economic documents in Moscow on November 25, 2011, foreign currency and gold reserves of the National Bank of Belarus increased by 2.74 billion USD. This rapid growth was in part due to the sale of *Beltransgaz* for 2.5 billion USD. After the collapse of the USSR, it is the first strategic success of *Gazprom*, which has been seeking to purchase gas transmission systems of European countries for many years. Bringing into operation the first stage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline on November 8, 2011, will not decrease the amount of natural gas transported through Belarus into Europe. On the contrary, this volume is planned to grow in 2012 by 4%, from the current 42.8 billion m^3 to 44.5 billion m^3. It must be admitted that in having bought out the Belarusian gas transit system, Russia essentially acquired the "Western Stream," which was much cheaper than the Nord Stream, let alone the "South Stream" which Russia still cannot start building.

The sale of *Beltransgaz OJSC* largely took place according to Belarus's rules of the game which Minsk had seen from the very beginning as linking the agreement on the sale of *Beltransgaz* to the agreement on prices and tariffs, the 2012-2015 gas supply contract,

and the 2012-2015 gas transit contract. Belarusian Prime Minister Michaïl Miaśnikovič called this deal unique. Indeed, this is the first time in the history of Europe when a sovereign state handed over its gas transportation system to a partner in the Customs Union.

Belarus did not only lose the right to control its gas valve. Belarusian authorities were used to seeing control over *Beltransgaz* as one of incarnations of the Belarusian "national idea" (Belarus as a kind of "bridge" between the East and the West) and a guarantee of the demand for Belarus in international politics, since it was Minsk that used to control a substantial part of Russian gas transportation into the EU. This was a good reason to reckon with Aliaksandr Łukašenka. The sale then of the "bridge" also means devaluation of the concept of "Belarus as the center of Europe," which can neither be swallowed nor gotten around.

Having sold *Beltransgaz* to Russia, Łukašenka undoubtedly lost an important tool in his policy of maneuvering between Russia and the West. First, apart from its own gas pipeline system, *Beltransgaz* operated the Belarusian section of the *Yamal-Europe* gas pipeline. Minsk then is unable now to influence this gas artery. Second, Belarus lost the opportunity to dispose of natural gas stock in underground gas storage facilities. Able to provide full energy supply to all Belarusian consumers for at least a month, these facilities are on the books of Beltransgaz. Third, an increase in energy dependence on Russia has gone hand in hand with a growth of debt dependence. Meanwhile, Belarus has already crossed the threshold of economic security. According to the Ministry of Finance, the external public debt amounted to 12.01 billion USD as of November 1, 2011, having increased by 24% since the beginning

of the year. According to financial analysts, the external public debt will reach 25 billion USD when Belarus is granted a loan from the EurAsEC and a loan for the construction of a nuclear power plant from Russia. Belarus may then become a country whose external debts are rapidly approaching GDP. In 2010, Belarus's GDP was 53.4 billion USD, and independent economists forecast its drop to 33-35 billion USD by the end of 2011 due to two devaluations of the Belarusian ruble.[6]

Tough loan conditions imposed by Russia was an important factor in Belarusian-Russian relations in 2011. Now, loans are granted either through a pledge of industrial assets or under conditions of the stabilization of macroeconomic indicators. According to the loan agreement between the EurAsEC Anti-Crisis Fund and Belarus, Belarusian authorities expected to receive the second tranche of a 440 million USD loan no later than October 31, 2011. However, the fund's experts have still been assessing to what extent Belarus have complied with the terms of the loan agreement regarding implementation of economic reforms.

Although Belarusian authorities have failed to fully implement the economic stabilization program (as evidenced, for example, by keeping high rates of loan issuance to the national economy), the second tranche of the loan from the EurAsEC Anti-Crisis Fund will undoubtedly go to Belarus shortly. This is witnessed by a general growth in integration sentiments which were at their peak at the

6 It should be noted that this is only regarding external public debt. The gross external debt of Belarus (including the debt of government bodies, monetary management, banks, and other economic sectors) already reached 33.1 billion USD as of July 1, 2011.

signing of the Declaration on Eurasian Economic Integration by the presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia in the Kremlin in November 2011. Today, politics impose conditions on the economy, and political actors who would be willing to change the status quo are unlikely to emerge until the end of the presidential election campaign in Russia in March 2012.

It can be safely said that having received substantial financial support from the Kremlin, Łukašenka has lost interest in restoring good relations with the West. His indifference to it increased even more when it became clear that the West would unlikely grant significant financial aid to Belarus both for economic and political reasons. It is not a coincidence that shortly after a meeting on 10 November, at which the Belarusian leader revised the government's economic reform plans, it was learned of the cancellation of the visit of the IMF mission to Minsk scheduled for early December. Essentially, Minsk refused to closely cooperate with the IMF in favor of financial assistance from Russia, which once again confirms a break in Łukašenka's policy of long-term balancing between Russia and the West for an indefinite period. This break will likely last until the next significant increase in tensions between Łukašenka and Putin when the latter returns to the office of president.

Whatever harsh conditions Russian banks may impose, Minsk concludes real credit agreements with Russian financial entities rather than with the IMF. However, the benefits of cooperation with the IMF are not only low-interest rates, for it provides loans for reform programs and, no less important, credit cooperation sends positive signals to investors from civilized states. As for Russia, its interest in structural reforming in Belarus is highly doubtful.

Essentially a raw material appendage of Europe and China, Russia itself needs comprehensive modernization, but all attempts to start reform processes are blocked by the raw material lobby there.

4. Tactical benefits in exchange for strategic degradation

Russia grants new preferences to Belarus to prevent Łukašenka from feeling "cornered." This tactic is efficient, which is evidenced by the enthusiasm with which he welcomed the prospect of accession of Belarus into the WTO following the completion of the accession process by Russia.

Meanwhile, the integration process is gaining momentum. On 19 December, the Presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan signed another set of integration documents in Moscow. "We have created the first real supranational integration body. We have created the Eurasian Commission. This is the most considerable step in the formation of the Eurasian Economic Space and subsequently the Eurasian Economic Union,"[7] said Russian President Dmitry Medvedev at the signing ceremony. During Yeltsin's time, Łukašenka began to harbor aspirations of creating supranational bodies within the Union State Russia-Belarus. It has been 12 years since Yeltsin's resignation. On January 1, 2012, the first supranational body will go from the *de jure* stage to the de facto stage, but contrary to original plans this will not expand, but limit Łukašenka's powers.

7 http://naviny.by/pda/material/?type=news&id=383085.

The Belarusian economy may benefit on the whole from the agreements with Russia on the energy supply, saving 11.6 billion USD in 2012-2015 (based on the government's expectations to save 2.9 billion USD a year). This amount (or slightly less) may be the price that the Kremlin will pay for the entrance ticket of Belarus to its global project, the Eurasian Economic Union. And this seems to be the main relatively positive (for the Łukašenka regime rather than for the country) outcome of the talks on gas and oil, which is, however, purely tactical.

Strategically, integration discounts and other tactical benefits from receiving another round of Russian subsidies that are so vital for the current regime could prove to be a disastrous loss for Belarus. They strengthen its self-isolation from the West and energy and debt dependence on Russia and postpone market reforms in Belarus indefinitely (at least for 4 years under the current government), perennializing the "Belarus-type economic development model" while freezing processes of self-organization in an archaic Belarusian society. History shows that the Soviet and pre-Soviet ruling elites undertook significant reforms only when faced with the threat of complete economic disorganization. Belarusian neo-Soviet authoritarianism will hardly fall out of this pattern to become a historical exception. It is also possible that the tactical benefits obtained in exchange for participation in Russian integration initiatives may turn into a strategic defeat for Łukašenka's regime itself.

Iryna Buhrova

Belarusian Identity: Insights from “Interpretive” Political Science☆

☆ The text was first published in the magazine “Грамадзянская альтэрнатыва” (Civil Alternative), No. 1, 1999. In this collection the text is printed with the kind permission of the editor of “Civil Alternative” V. Karbalevič.

"The West: unique, not universal"
(Samuel P. Huntington)

"The universal is the local without walls"
(Miguel Torga)

Abstract

Institutional traditions, values, and codes of conduct that are passed down from generation to generation frequently play a key role in political transformation processes. Based on this idea, this study examines the forms of statehood that have been found in Belarus since the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Analyzing the structure of cities and the history of religion in the country, the author also attempts to reveal how the major features of Belarusian mentality were established and what changes they have undergone over the centuries. According to Iryna Buhrova, the development of Belarusian national identity has had the following main specific features: first, a predominantly local notion of self-identification due primarily to the isolated way of life in rural communities and insufficient guarantees of national security; second, avoidance of conflict as the dominant value resulting from numerous wars and collective experience of repressions; and third, dominance of unified or federal forms of government due to frequent change in national identification.

The synthesis and competition of Western European and Eastern European interests have been shown as dominant in Poland or Russia, respectively, and especially in the relationship between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the creation of the

Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church. Although this competition was ultimately won by the Russian (Orthodox) type of patriarchal-subject type of political culture, the Western (Roman Catholic or Greek Catholic) type of active bourgeois culture has always been latently present. Due to this, Belarusian political culture is ambivalent, characterized equally by dualistic confrontation of competing cultural projects and a distinct desire for harmony.

1. Limits of the problem discourse

Gaining vital importance in the late 80s – early 90s,[1] the identity problem reflected many changes taking place in the world. The most radical changes resulted from the deconstruction of the bipolar world, the collapse of one of the superpowers, followed by the destruction of the existing system of international communications. The clear boundary set at the Yalta conference dividing the world into two systems disappeared. For almost half a century, it had simplified the identification process, ensuring socio-political consolidation and the ideological resource of official power on both sides of the line.

Today, building new communications is a very complicated process. It requires from political actors, on the one hand, the search for a new identity, self-assessment, self-understanding, and, on the other hand, self-identification among new neighbors in the transformed

1 Bayart J.-F. L'illusion identitaire: Fayard, Paris, 1996; Grosser A. Les identités difficiles. Paris, 1996; Linz J. and Stepan A. Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe. Baltimore, 1996; Разуваев В.В. Национальная идентичность и внешняя политика России // Кентавр, 1993, No. 5. С. 3–15.

region, continent, and world. In this regard, it looks like an experiment in "political ufology" where actors deal with new states or their allies as "UFOs." This clearly makes the communication even more unpredictable, with occasional conflicts that bring with it mistrust and tension.

In a range of methods of solving identity problems and optimizing communications, it is the method of political culture as an "explanatory category" that is attracting more and more attention (Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba). "This notion enables the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics to act as explanatory factors,"[2] and is a practical tool for "understanding" current processes. It can be considered functionally essential when it comes to "understanding" or searching for the identity of a country or people, in our case Belarus. Reconstructing the Belarusian political culture can serve as a certain "hermeneutic key" to the political "text" of modern Belarus that can unlock its potential in the new communicative space.

2. Historical retrospective

2.1. Statehood of Belarus: traditions and image

The solution to any national identity problem requires an overview of the people's historical memory, their traditional ideas about their statehood, and its origins. Some researchers are doubtful whether Belarusians have significant historical experience of statehood; however, an unbiased view of history suggests it would be unfair to

2 Almond G., Verba S. The Civic Culture Revisited. Boston, 1980. P. 19.

completely deny it to Belarus, which seems to have a rather specific form of such experience.

There have been several attempts to create statehood in the history of Belarus. The first was through the emergence of the first principalities on Belarusian lands. Although they were quite developed state forms for that time, they did not become the centers of Belarusian states but rather parts of more powerful unions, such as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

It is in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that the model of Belarusians' state identification began seeing a dual nature. On the one hand, the compact living of Belarusians initiated mechanisms of national self-identification sufficient to distinguish themselves from other nations. On the other hand, the Belarusian ethnic community was always formed within their union with other peoples (in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, I Rzeczpospolita, the Russian Empire, the USSR), which shaped a stable idea of the need to unite with others in the Belarusian political culture. The Hungarian researcher István Bibó called this syndrome "bad fortune" and referred to the "helplessness of the peoples of small Eastern European countries,"[3] meaning the inability of these peoples to independently create their own nation states in the period when they emerged throughout Europe (in the 16th–18th centuries). The only difference is that many of these peoples (Hungarians, Slovaks) succeeded in solving this problem in the 19th – early 20th century, whereas it has taken Belarusians longer. The idea of the need to unite with someone else significantly reveals itself in the post-Soviet experience of Belarus, too, which will be shown below.

3 Szucs J. Les trois Europes: L'Harmattan, Paris. 1985. P. 108.

It is worth noting that in the Belarusian historical tradition, there is no image of a strong state, an independent geopolitical center that "gathers the lands" and that would unite the scattered authentic ethnic elements into one nation. By contrast, since geographically Belarus is on the border of two rival centers – Western Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Byzantine – it has been partitioned for most of its history. Historically, the lands of ethnic Belarusians either were passing from state to state (Poland, Russia, Germany, Lithuania) or their administrative structure was redrawn.[4] The main administrative center of the country constantly changed, with different cities (Polack, Navahrudak, Vilnius, Minsk) coming and going as its capital. This can probably explain the fact that self-identification of Belarusians had a predominantly local nature, based on their belonging to a certain territory, locality, region (*tutejšyja*), faith (Orthodox, Catholic, etc.) or kinship group, such as a clan or family without rising to the level of nation and state.

Research conducted in 1995–1996 within the international project Fatalism and its Impact on Economic Reforms and Democratic Processes (INTAS)[5] reconfirmed the priority of local identification over national. The hierarchy of interests that drove the citizens in the 1995 elections for the Supreme Soviet of Belarus looked as follows: the top three places were taken by personal (75.4%), regional (49.1%), and territorial (46.1%) interests, followed by party and group interests. National and state interests were the least

4 The New York Times made a very harsh statement regarding this referring to Belarus as "a country cursed by geography and history" (see: Гапова Е. Беларусь: от советского правлення до ядерной катастрофы // Свабода. 1997. 2 верасня).

5 The author of the article was the project coordinator in Belarus.

popular (31.1% and 30.5%, respectively). Given this, the process of national consolidation looks like a challenge.

It is common knowledge that the process of state consolidation is influenced both externally and internally. External factors result in the need to protect oneself against potential aggression from outside. Internal factors arise from the development of internal processes like the forming of a common economic infrastructure, a common cultural and linguistic space, and the unification of the political/legal system. The psychological mechanism of state consolidation is based on feelings of security and predictability of communication among members. In the case of Belarus' statehood, the interaction of internal and external factors has often led to conflicts and external aggression is not always considered a security threat by all members of society. This has been due to the instability of the legal status of social associations and groups (e.g., faith-based groups) that have not always associated personal security with the state, as well as weak consolidation of differently oriented groups of local elites when external conformism has outweighed more dangerous activities for nation consolidation.

Nevertheless, in the Belarusian public consciousness there are two images of the state that correspond to different projective models of Belarusian statehood. These are the "intellectual elite" model of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the "mass" model of the Soviet Union and, accordingly, the BSSR. They reflect two conceptually opposite versions of the role of the state in society and communication between the state and society. The first version is based on the idea of a rule-of-law state in which the authorities' powers are restricted by society. The second version goes back to the idea of a social

justice state that implies significant control over society, a distribution system, and paternalistic expectations. Each version has a symbolic incarnation (a national hero) considered by Belarusians to be an ideal statesman. For advocates of the "intellectual elite" model, it is Leŭ Sapieha (Lew Sapieha, Leonas Sapiega) who was one of the developers of the 1588 Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania when being its Vice-Chancellor. For the advocates of the "mass" model, it is Piotr Mašeraŭ, one of the most popular party leaders of the BSSR in the 1970–80s.

Owing to the contradictory history of Belarusian statehood, Belarusians have undefined ideas regarding the state. They do not have a strong national or national liberation idea that reflect people's desire for independence and historical ambitions based on their destiny. Their orientations can be viewed through the lenses of suffering ("long-suffering Belarusian people") and vital expediency ("lest life should worsen"). Accordingly, citizens abstract themselves from a state that is hostile and beyond control, seeking not to be drawn under its eye. The citizen feels, however, a subject's gratitude to the state that provides them with the minimum necessary conditions for survival.

2.2. The establishment of political power: reverse cultural codes

Comparing the two main periods in the establishment of political power in Belarus suggests a kind of "mixed tradition." The question arises as to which kind of political power is more authentic for Belarusians and to which they have contributed more.

The initial process of power organization on the territory of Belarus was little different from those in other European regions. The evolution of the Belarusian political system succeeded early feudal institutions of state power and strengthening foundations of the feudal state. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania (14th–16th centuries) had all the signs of a limited feudal monarchy headed by a grand duke (king, ruler). As in the early feudal states, a significant role was played by the *Rada* (state council) that consisted of the state's most prominent people. The *Rada* increasingly strengthened its position and participated in the adopting of all major state decisions.

The growing social role of the serving class (noblemen) led to the emergence of the *Sejm*, a representative authority institution which had met regularly since the 14th century. Initially, it was organized as a large meeting of the ruling class held to obtain information and discuss decisions made by the ruler and *Rada*; later, its legislative functions were expanded. Gradually, the *Sejm* became the highest legislative body in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and then in I Rzeczpospolita (the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth), granted the right to elect a king bound by a treaty with the highest representatives of the nobility[6] on whom the king's election depended.

I Rzeczpospolita was often called a "republic of nobility and gentry" based on many "liberties of the gentry." The "social pluralism" that "gave rise to the relatively early emergence of estates, parliaments and other institutions representing the interests of the aristocracy,

6 Ігнатоўскі У.М. Кароткі нарыс гісторыі Беларусі. 5-е выд. Мінск, 1991. С. 126–128.

the clergy, the merchants, and other groups"[7] was a feature of the development of Belarusian society like other Western and Central European countries in the 14th–17th centuries.

The three partitions of I Rzeczpospolita resulted in the incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Empire, which not only determined a new geopolitical situation, but also spurred radical socio-cultural transformations in Belarus. Belarus was integrated into a powerful, bureaucratic, highly centralized Russian state system that was an absolute monarchy and an empire whose laws they followed. Belarus faced a "reverse motion" – a vice versa situation – finding itself in the space of reverse cultural codes. Recognition of the autonomy of various actors of society changed to recognition of a strong state power. "There are no other mechanisms of integration and institutionalization of society or restrictions on privileges and prerogatives for boyars and noblemen, but only a strong state authority here (in Russia – I. B.)."[8] For Belarus, the new reality manifested itself in

- the transition from a limited monarchy and republican elements of power (in the form of a republic of nobility and gentry) to an absolute monarchy (autocracy);
- degrading existing institutions of political activity (primarily, the institution of elections) and replacing them with institutions of appointments and vertical subordination;

7 Хантингтон С. Запад уникален, но не универсален // Мировая экономика и международные отношения. 1997. No. 8. С. 86.

8 Гаджиев Д.А. Размышления о политической культуре современной России // Мировая экономика и международные отношения. 1996. No. 2. С. 28.

- a sharp decrease in horizontal communication space through pulling together dispersed power (autonomous local feudal nobility, federal relations between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, independent cities under Magdeburg law) and its gradual monopolization and imperial centralization; and
- the gradual provincialization of Belarusian territories that were given the status of "imperial periphery."

The clash of two political discourses has led to the emergence of a long-term cultural confrontation in Belarus. It has reflected the conflict of socio-centric (eastern) and person-centric (western) historical types of political organization,[9] or subject and participant types of political culture (Almond, Verba) that coexisted in Belarus, determining the ambivalence of its sociocultural context. This conflict was partially overcome in favor of the socio-centric discourse under the USSR.

2.3. Belarusian mentality: specifics of the cultural code

The mentality (mindset) is considered here as a special means or mechanism of perception and initial processing of social information based on the collective unconscious. Mapping to stable structures of a person's socio-psychological activity, the phenomenon of mentality includes program information that is essential for the identity of people or a country. It determines to a large extent the dominant type of political culture and its dynamics and direction of change. Research into the specifics of the mentality of people allows

9 Оболонский А.В. Драма российской политической истории: система против личности. М.: Институт государства и права РАН, 1994.

for the prediction with certain accuracy the algorithm of their behavior in specific situations. It should be noted that the less some processes are institutionalized, the more rules and procedures are replaced by psychological mechanisms of social orientation, not least of which are stable structures of the relevant people's and the social groups' mentality.

Geographical and geopolitical forming factors of Belarusian mentality are determined by Belarus' unique location. It has always been, both literally and figuratively, at the intersection of international roads, impacts, interests, and cultures. On the one hand, this has furthered the development of trade, crafts, and education, making Belarus open to contact. On the other hand, it has always been threatened with attacks from outside.

Belarus has almost always been a theater of operations[10] becoming – often against its will – a buffer zone or collateral damage in disputes between stronger rivals, e.g., in the war between the Tsardom of Muscovy and the Kingdom of Poland followed by I Rzeczpospolita (in the 16th–17th centuries) and the Great Northern War (in the early 18th century). Belarus was hit the hardest by the wars of the 20th century that determined its anti-war orientation and the particular symbolic significance of the Second World War (known also as the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945)) in today's Belarusian political culture.

10 There were periods when wars on the territory of Belarus lasted dozens of years with brief intervals. It is practically impossible to find in the country's history a period of 30–40 years when there was no war (except for the last 50 years).

The permanent threat of another warfare situation, the arrival of invaders or even a new government has shaped an archetype of effective psychological mobilization and adaptation. Its features are restraint, patience, practice in overcoming life obstacles, a sort of reticence, a tendency to hide one's feelings, and apathy. According to a Russian encyclopedia published in the early 20th century, "Belarusians are too apathetic by nature, but this is probably due to historical conditions rather than lack of talent."[11] The need to survive in a dangerous environment has led to the rather isolated private life of Belarusians, their ability to live autonomously and "to distance themselves from neighbors, even to their detriment."[12] Researchers of Belarusian mentality and character also note that shaping the "isolationism" of Belarusians was facilitated by the specific geographical environment covering much of Belarus, specifically swampy, wooded, or sandy areas. Rare settlements, scattered as if on islands, could not make contact for a long time.[13] This background determined a type of culture with self-sufficient communication that relies on its own experience and local traditions.

The archetypal Belarusians never claimed a huge living space. They have been content with their private living space while maintaining and protecting their independence in it. Many facts in different wartime periods show the behavior of Belarusians towards occupying authorities and enemy troops as being largely indifferent.[14] They

11 Русская энциклопедия. СПб., 1907. Т. 3. С. 401.

12 Ibid.

13 Коялович М.О. Чтения по истории Западной России. Изд. 4-е. СПб., 1884.

14 Гісторыя Беларусі. Пад рэд. А.Г. Каханоўскага і інш. Мн., 1996. С. 195, 399.

resisted only in the event of direct violence, killing, or desecration of common shrines and values by the occupying regime.

The restrained conformist reaction to the arrival of foreigners is latently motivated primarily with loyalty for the sake of security. Its origins relate to the habit of isolated life mentioned above and the precedence of local identification over the national as the only possible guarantee of security under conditions of government uncertainty.[15] It is known that in all the major wars of the 19th–20th centuries, national governments were formed in occupied Belarus to proclaim its independence.[16] These attempts were stillborn not only because the new government structures were in most cases formed by narrow groups and were obligated to petition to the occupying regimes, but also, paradoxically, because a national union was unpredictable and threatening for local (or settlement) security.

An exception is probably the liberation struggle of Belarusian people in the Second World War that showed examples of large scale heroism, patriotism, and the partisan movement. But even

15 Witnesses cite an episode from the 1812 war when Napoleon allegedly stopped a Belarusian woman on the road and asked her whom she wanted to win the war. The woman replied: "You know, I'd like the French to push on and on and on and never to come back..." (Гісторыя Беларусі. Мн., 1996. С. 195). Apparently, the woman meant to say that she wanted the French to fight the Russians (Moscow) by themselves and leave the Belarusian people alone.

16 Белоруссия в эпоху феодализма: Сб. документов и материалов: В 4-х т. Мн., 1961. Т. 3; 1979. Т. 4; Мазинг Г.Ю., Ерусалимчик Л.Ф., Березина, год 1812-ый. Мн., 1991; Доўнар-Запольскі М.В. Асновы дзяржаўнасці Беларусі. Мн., 1994; Долготович Б.Д. Беларусь в годы Великой Отечественной войны в вопросах и ответах. Мн., 1994; Туронак Ю. Беларусь пад нямецкай акупацыяй. Мн., 1993.

then, the whole range of behavioral reactions rather confirmed than refuted the archetypal structures of Belarusian mentality,

since active resistance to Nazi troops was a reaction to the mass genocide of the Wehrmacht on occupied territories.

Ethno-confessional and cultural factors always play a significant role in the processes of some people's self-identification and in the shaping of their type of political culture. For centuries, Belarusian society has forged its own relationship with religion, which has become a part of their socio-cultural organization. It has essentially been defined by a multi-religious environment based on the coexistence and rivalry of two major religious denominations – Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic.

Initially, Christianity came to Belarus in its Eastern Orthodox variant, which had its greatest influence in Kyivan Rus' and was subordinate to Constantinople as its sole center. Many researchers believe that Christianization was non-violent in Belarus, as opposed to in Kyiv and Novgorod.[17] This suggests that the later religious loyalty of Belarusians runs deep.

The Roman Catholic Church increased its power in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 13th and especially in the 14th century, facilitated by the Union of Krewo between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland in 1385. In the late 14th

17 Тарасаў С. Адкуль прыйшло хрысціянства ў Беларусь? // Полацк, 1991, No. 10; Анціпенка А. Еўрапейскасць і хрысціянская ідэя беларускасці // Беларусіка – Albaruthenica: Кн. 2. Мн., 1992. С. 260–261; Зайкоўскі І. Роля канфесійнага фактару ў нацыянальнай свядомасці беларусаў // Беларусіка – Albaruthenica: Кн. 2. Мн., 1992. С. 263–264 і інш.

century, Catholicism became the dominant religion in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and held a privileged position over Orthodox Christianity, receiving state support. The partition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between the two denominations determined the difference in religious orientations of the population, providing also grounds for struggle between Moscovia and Poland. Both states wanted to expand their influence in the neighboring country and Poland for a time won out. As the historian Andrej Kištymaŭ noted, "for several centuries, Belarusians lived on the boundary of two opposing Slavic centers – the Polish Crown and the Tsardom of Moscow" and, consequently, "there has always been more politics than religion in the religious life of Belarus."[18] Apparently, it was the strong connection of religion and foreign policy that determined the unique ethno-confessional atmosphere in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that was based on socio-cultural dualism and a culture of consensus.

The rivalry between the two denominations contributed to the shaping of a kind of religious balance between them and the search for a compromise in preserving a certain independence for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Aware that any religious conflict could turn into a military confrontation between the states, each of the clerical groups avoided extreme violent methods. As a result, the Orthodox denomination was given equal rights with the Roman Catholic, followed by the settling of a union between the two churches in 1596 (the Union of Brest) marking the beginning of a new Christian denomination – the Uniate (Greek Catholic or Eastern Catholic) Church. The Uniate Church was not aimed at

18 Кіштымаў А. Менталітэт беларусаў вачамі рускага // Беларусіка – Albaruthenica: Мн., 1992. С. 203–204.

combining denominations, but was a kind of compromise between "the Catholic papocaesarism" and "the Orthodox caesaropapism."[19] According to the Union of Brest, the Orthodox customs, rites and holidays and worship in Church Slavonic language were preserved in the Belarusian territories and the supremacy of the pope of Rome and the Roman Catholic faith were recognized and accepted. In the late 18th century, 70% (about 80% in villages) of the population of Belarus were Eastern Catholic.[20] The new church was able to resist both the dogmatized Orthodox faith and the expansionist policy of Catholicization and Polonization pursued by the Rzeczpospolita.

The ethno-confessional situation in Belarus contributed to the emergence of a special type of socio-cultural interaction reflected in the Belarusian mentality. Its core is comprised of the naturally shaped elements of duality and harmony. Researchers often explain the Belarusian mentality using "The Eternal Way" by the Belarusian poet–philosopher Ihnat Kančeŭski (also known by the pseudonym "Ihnat Abdziralovič"). In this work, he wrote: "Since the 10th century, Belarus has been a battlefield for two European... cultural directions, Western and Eastern. Decades of our wandering show that, like Ukrainians and Balkan Slavs, Belarusians have not been able to genuinely integrate into either direction... Meandering between the West and the East and genuine not belonging to either of them seems to be the main feature of the Belarusian people's history... Life necessitated synthesis and the harmonization of both directions, but this, apparently, became impossible."[21]

19 Бердяев Н.А. Философия свободы. М., 1989. С. 167.

20 Этнаграфія Беларусі: Энцыклапедыя. Мн., 1989. С. 66.

21 Абдзіраловіч І. Адвечным шляхам. Мн., 1993. С. 9, 15.

Indeed, the dual position of Belarus, on the one hand, and pursuit of a balance, on the other, shaped the relevant archetype of consciousness – a code of life that was reflected in a specific version of the Eastern Orthodox faith in Belarus.

The regional variant of the East Slavic mentality and the Belarusian version of Eastern Orthodox faith differed from the Great Russian and classical Byzantine ones. Belarusians did not tend to go to extremes unlike Russians, who can abruptly swing, e.g., from despotism to anarchy, from melancholic contemplation to cruelty, from violence to sacrifice and selfless acts of kindness, from slavery to rebellion, etc.[22]

The basis of the world order for Belarusians, like for all Orthodox Slavs, was not the individual but the community; society coupled with ideals of fraternal affection and solidarity. Also, like Russians and Ukrainians, Belarusians "...perceived any situation when a person demands more personal rights of society... as something immoral."[23]

Still, the Belarusian mentality has never taken a self-sufficient global form as the Russian mentality in which private life merges with the social and in which the individuals devote themselves totally to civic causes that determine their rights.[24] As already noted, the feeling of their own independence and autonomy is more typical for Belarusians. In their mentality, the individuals do not

22 Бердяев Н. Русская идея: Основные проблемы русской мысли XIX и нач. XX в. Париж, 1946. С. 5–7.

23 Люкс Л. Евразийство // Вопросы философии. 1993. No. 6. С. 202.

24 Евразийство. Декларация. Формулировка. Тезис. Берлин. 1926, С. 3.

claim rights. Their microcosm is, however, independent and does not connect with the macrocosm, and going beyond the microcosm is normally locally bounded (by village, city, or region).

It is also important that, according to the Christian tradition, Belarusians "perceive the universe as an ordained system in which everything has its place determined by the divine will"[25] and that no one can infringe. Their obedience to destiny is reflected in a kind of conservatism and passivity and are not disposed to explore in "a Russian revolt, senseless and merciless" (Alexander Pushkin). Belarusians hide their discontent, sublimating it into external politeness and hospitality. The Belarusian researcher Eduard Dubianiecki referred to this characteristic as "ambivalence of feeling."[26]

It is in the structures of the subconscious that Belarusian tolerance, elasticity (Volha Abramava), and plasticity (Andrej Kištymaŭ) originate. It is certainly not the result of conscious choices, but only a conscious aspiration for comfort and balance in a dual reality.

The Belarusian mentality is dissimilar in another important way from the Russian. In the system of the Russian mentality, a prominent place is taken up by a so-called "life purpose" component. Gaining insight into the meaning of life, reflection, and the development of an ideal are integral parts of the conception of the "Russian idea" and a must-have of Russians' earthly life. "Aspiring to

25 Трубецкой Н. Наследие Чингисхана // Вестник МГУ. Сер. «Социально-политические исследования». 1991, No. 4. С. 40.

26 Дубянецкі Э. Мэнталітэт беларусаў: спроба гісторыка-псіхалагічнага аналізу // Беларусіка – Albaruthenica: Кн. 2. Мн., 1992. С. 195.

a transcendent reality that is either the eternity in the other world or the future of this world,"[27] the Russian does not seem to live in this world. In losing sight of this, the Russian loses interest in life. The Russians philosopher Lev Karsavin wrote the following about this feature of the Russians: "They are ready to give up everything, to sacrifice everything for the sake of the ideal; when having doubts about the ideal or its quick realization, they personify insensitive savageness or mythical indifference to everything."[28]

The mentality of Belarusians is expressed in a different paradigm. They are not inclined towards making an ideal absolute and their projections and future are not distant. Russians think a great deal about life in the future, whereas Belarusians value life in the present, in the "here and now." That is why their ideas of spirituality do not become an ascetic absolute but are expressed in concrete standards of behavior. Looking forward further, we can say that the truisms about global social projects aimed at restructuring the world have always been quite foreign to Belarusians.

This may be also because, unlike the Byzantine messianic tradition, the Belarusian Orthodox faith does not have expansionist claims. Neither geopolitical nor confessional expansionism features in the Belarusian mentality. As noted earlier, Belarusians aspire to harmony in a localized space of life. It can be said that the Belarusian mentality includes components of Western and Eastern European cultures, but, unlike with Russians, not a Eurasian one. "Eurasianism," emphasize Russian researchers Anatoly Butenko and Yuliya Kolesnichenko, "is an objective quality that features only

27 Бердяев Н. Истоки и смысл русского коммунизма. М., 1990. С. 9.

28 Русская идея. М., 1992. С. 322.

the Russian state and its people since the state is located on two continents, in Europe and Asia, and which has made citizens and leaders consider... this geopolitical and racial and ethnic reality..."[29]

The integration of Belarusians into Eurasian culture began in the late 18th century when Belarus became part of the Russian Empire. Before then, efforts to establish an autocephalous church and the signing the Union of Brest agreement showed the will to organize the local space to strengthen Belarusian culture.

According to many researchers, the Eastern Catholic denomination as precursor of the national Belarusian church could allow for the preserving of ethnic integrity and the national identity of the Belarusian people.[30] Politically, the Eastern Catholic Church was oriented to the West; psychologically it maintained an earlier East Slavic Orthodox position. Therefore, it was able to self-reform balancing the ambivalent mentality of Belarusians without harming their basic values. However, unlike Protestantism in Western Europe, it did not play a revolutionary role. Violent and purposeful efforts at catholicization and then Russification determined the short duration of its historical life.

The dominance of the imperial Orthodox culture preconditioned not only the political subordination of Belarus to the Russian crown,

29 Бутенко А.П., Колесниченко Ю.В. Менталитет россиян и евразийство: их сущность и общественно-политический смысл // Социологические исследования. 1996. No. 5. С. 98.

30 Ігнатоўскі В. Кароткі нарыс гісторыі Беларусі. Мн., 1991; Станкевіч А. Хрысціянства і беларускі народ. Вільня, 1940; Лыч Л. Рэлігія і нацыянальная самасвядомасць беларусаў. Беларусіка – Albaruthenica: Кн. 2. Мн., 1992. С. 59–68.

but also its national and cultural assimilation. This was achieved in various ways. Since the late 18th century, Eastern Catholic Belarusians were forcibly converted to Eastern Orthodoxy with violence and repressions by the state and the Russian Church that subordinated it.[31] The Eastern Catholic Church was completely abolished in 1839. According to the 1897 census, a majority of Belarusians (81.2%) were Orthodox, and 18.8% were Catholic.[32] The tsarist government actively pursued a resettlement policy and Russification. The use of Belarusian language was forbidden at schools, in state institutions, or in the press (except for ethnographic publications),[33] which led to an almost complete shift of Belarusian into the sphere of colloquial speech used mainly by the peasantry.

Gradually, Belarusian society was fundamentally reoriented to the Russian Orthodox faith. The Russian Empire sought to merge the state and religion as its ideological supporter while creating conditions of gradual evolution from local community to imperial values[34] ("autocracy, Orthodoxy, and nationalism") that would not impact fundamental communitarian orientations.

A consensus type of culture was shaped in Belarus. It is based on a double cultural code and has a flexible mechanism of psychological

31 Since 1797, the Russian Emperor has been officially considered the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. See also: Хаўстовіч М. Скасаванне уніі // З гісторыяй на «Вы». Мн., 1994. С. 107–117.

32 Минская старина. Мн., 1911. Вып. 11. С. 4–9.

33 Нарысы гісторыі Беларусі. У 2-х частках. Ч. 1. Мн., 1994. С. 334.

34 Оболонский А.В. Драма российской политической истории: система против личности. М., 1994. С. 15–16.

adaptation. Developed under dual cultural influences and the uncertainty of choice, this mechanism consisted of efforts to achieve and maintain public consent. Public consent is seen as an inherent value, a sacred symbol that must not be damaged. The main features of this type of culture are the unacceptability of conflict and contradictions, hidden discontent, and psychological tension (because of unresolved contradictions). A commitment to stability and rejection of radicalism and open opposition are also key elements. A culture of consensus generally means conserving the traditional foundations of society that all the members know and understand and distrusting innovations that destroy the customary social fabric.

The religious situation in Belarus under the Russian Empire was not favorable to the development of self-determination of Belarusians as an independent ethnic group. The imperial policy of Russification was focused on the ethnic reorientation of the Belarusian population. Theories of "Pan-Slavism" and "Westernrussism" claimed that Belarusians are nothing but Russians. The state supported self-identification of Belarusians based on religion: all Orthodox Belarusians (practicing the "Russian religion") were automatically called "Russians," whereas Catholic Belarusians (practicing the "Polish religion") were considered "Poles." As a result, the term "Belarusians" fell into disuse and, therefore, out of awareness.

As part of the Russian Empire, Belarus found itself under rigid state attitudes towards religion and freedom of conscience. The Orthodoxy that served the state was an ideology more than a religion, facilitating communication between citizens and the state (consolidation of autocracy) rather than interpersonal

communication (autonomy of society). This has impacted the shaping of Belarusian civic culture and Belarusians' ideas about the place of religion in politics and society. Other religions outside the state formula of "autocracy, Orthodoxy, and nationalism" were more open to social evolution. Catholicism specifically became one of the "islands" of Belarusian language and the center of the Belarusian national revival (esp. in the early 20th century).[35]

The division of Belarusians into two main denominations with different social statuses later determined not only national and cultural priorities and the mechanism of Belarusians' self-identification (as "Russians" or "Poles") but also social group (class) differentiation and regional subcultural features. It was in this period that the Belarusian national elite and majority of people definitively distanced themselves from each other, both culturally and communicatively. Most Belarusians, mainly peasants, practiced Orthodoxy, whereas the Belarusian elite (intellectuals, public and spiritual figures, nobility and gentry) was largely oriented to the Roman Catholic Church. Since I Rzeczpospolita, their co-existence in different cultural contexts had often caused misunderstandings and hindered communication.

The Soviet period is of no interest in the matter of impact analysis of religion in the political culture of Belarus, as the church did not play a significant role in its life.

35 Грыгор'ева В. Каталіцкае духавенства ля вытокаў беларускага адраджэння // Беларусіка – Albaruthenica: Кн. 2. Мн., 1992. С. 293–297.

Soviet government religion policy was formally based on the principles of freedom of conscience and separation of church and state. It led, however, to a near-complete exclusion of the church from public life. The church was replaced with the Communist Party that, having modernized Christian values in Marxism–Leninism, assumed the rights of chief ideological creator and could not accept an ideological competitor. The church first lost its status as the sole and absolute owner of truth and mediator of faith and was then severely repressed.

Freedom of conscience in the USSR was nothing other than freedom of choice between faith in God and denial of his existence. In Soviet society, faith in God became a kind of dissent or a reflection of doubt in the communist idea.

2.4. Aspects of the political culture in Soviet Belarus

Belarus had a specific discourse in the Soviet socio-cultural space. Its further post-Soviet destiny was a natural outgrowth of it, though there were other scenarios. Under communism, Belarus "polished" the most complete and, as it were, harmonious model of Soviet political culture.

Thanks to increased adaptability, susceptibility, and patience, the Belarusian people did not only adapt to the Bolshevik regime, but even benefited from its socio-economic model. Belarus had a specific representation in the Soviet system in the post-WWII period, largely due to the socio-demographic situation. Several flows of migrants were sent to help the disadvantaged population

of Belarus, such as former military servants who settled in Belarus after its liberation or who were demobilized after Khrushchev's military reform, as well as blue-collar workers and technicians who restored Belarusian economy. These migrations resulted in the increase in Russians by 103% and in Ukrainians by 120% in Belarus in 1945–1975. The number of Belarusians increased only by 21%, which led to their reduction from 81.1% to 77.9% of the population of Belarus.[36] Most of the post-war immigrants settled in cities. As a result of the pro-Russian policy of Moscow, linguistic similarity of Russian and Belarusian, and minor impact of the Belarusian-speaking intellectuals on social and cultural processes, Belarusian language was almost completely eliminated from spoken communication.

Rural people "mobilized" to Belarusian cities and towns to "build industrialization" (especially beginning in the late 1950s until the 1970s), representing a new type of urban culture that emerged at that time. "The 'peasant nation' rushed to cities to meet urban Russian-Soviet culture."[37] Yet that culture could hardly be called "Russian-Soviet" as it had no ethnic features at all apart from Russian language. It was not Belarusian culture, however, but rather a post-WWII industrial culture that destroyed many ethnic features. Rural migrants brought to cities and towns their habits, stereotypes, and mentality, adopting the trappings of urban life (including Russian language).

36 Марцуль Г.С., Сташкевіч М.С. Гісторыя Беларусі: Насельніцтва. Фармаванне і вызначэнне этнічных і дзяржаўна-адміністрацыйных межаў. Беларускае замежжа. Мінск, 1997. С. 51, 55.

37 Дубовец С. Белорусы уходят... // Неман. 1991. No. 10. С. 189.

This complex "mix" tended to blend rather than be separated into subcultures, which led to the formation of a holistic education based on ethnosocial marginality. "...Belarus is quite monolithic ethnically... The general tone of culture here is determined by the culture of Belarusians," says the researcher Jury Šaŭcoŭ,[38] referring to the fact that Belarusians make up 78% of the total population. This can be accepted only in part, as the "culture of Belarusians" being replaced with Soviet culture means here a "refined version" of marginality. There is good reason why in the wake of the Belarusian renaissance some academic circles saw the idea of restoring national identity by cultivating folklore forms that had kept their cultural origins and therefore authentic "Belarusianness."

It is understandable why this particularly notable version of Soviet culture gained ground in Belarus. Its national intelligentsia (as well as Jewish and Polish) had been nearly eradicated during the Stalinist repressions and the war. A new intelligentsia with Soviet symbols devoid of historical traditions emerged in the urban space which a distinctive architecture had been ruined during WWII. Paradoxically, it was the "national Soviet policy itself"[39] that essentially saved Belarusians from the complete destruction of their roots, as it was obligated to demonstrate external signs of the equality of nations and their "prosperity."

38 Шевцов Ю.В. Особенности социально-политической структуры и геополитического положення Беларуси // Belarus-Monitor. Специальный выпуск. 1997, февраль. С. 57.

39 Sahm A., Belarus: Eigenstaatlichkeit auf Widerruf, Beitrag zur Konferenz "Die zweite nationale Wiedergeburt", Mannheim, 23–25.9.1997; Clem Ralph S., Belorussians, in: Graham Smith (Ed.), The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union, New York–London, 1990. P. 109–122.

In the socio-cultural context of Belarus, a special place has been held by the Great Patriotic War which became a kind of "historical compass" for Belarusians. It provided the basis for a new style in the cultural space. The style of this space was impacted by the sincere feelings of Belarusians, official propaganda interests, memorialization of war events, and talented works of the best Belarusian prose writers, including Vasil Bykaŭ, Aleś Adamovič, Śviatłana Aleksijevič, etc. Consequently, the topic of the Great Patriotic War was sanctified, shaping a significant part of Belarusian culture, including political culture. It compensated for a muted national history of Belarus in Soviet historiography and gave Belarusians the chance to be identified with guerrilla warfare and war heroism. This gave double benefits to official ideology and propaganda, as Belarusian people identified themselves in accordance with Soviet history and their national feelings (national pride) were detached from ethnic roots. It is quite appropriate in this case to use the term "guerrilla nationalism." The image of Belarus as a "guerrilla" or "WWII veteran" country was more than just a metaphor, as it matched a set of standardized personal qualities and model behavior. Non-compliance with an external enemy, fearlessness, courage, and discipline were at the heart of it. The symbolic role model was the image of a guerrilla commander who is like a "father" – a people's vigilante, defender, and head of a large guerrilla household. Military discourse gradually became part of the political ideology – a must-have for social policy and a factor of socialization of several generations in Belarus.

A peculiar type of communication established itself in the political culture of post-war Belarus between society and the government seemed to complete the homeostasis of this state system. New

leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviets most often came from WWII guerrilla or military units, which provided them additional legitimacy. The patterns of behavior demonstrated by the new elite met the standards described above. Most of the population of Belarus positively perceived their people management approach, including soft paternalism, "parental" care (at times severe), and presentations of vigilance towards employees' complaints and requests. Interestingly, this communication style reflected not only the Soviet experience of interaction between the people and government, but also an old peasant tradition.

It is important that the Belarusian political leaders were not so demonstratively separated from the people by the "bastions of the Kremlin" as their colleagues in Moscow; neither were they really corrupt compared with other Soviet republics. It was a kind of "decent cohabitation" between the people and the government that was supported by the relatively prosperous and stable financial situation in Belarus.[40] This alliance received its most typical features in 1965-1980 under Piotr Mašeraŭ who attempted to pursue a slightly more independent policy towards Moscow. He was killed in a car accident, which established his image as a "national hero."

Due to this, as well as the above-mentioned features of the mentality of Belarusians, no significant dissident movement was formed

40 A certain rise in material welfare was observed in the latter half of the 1960s to mid-'70s. By that time the national revenue of the BSSR had almost doubled, explaining a considerable increase in the wages growth rate. In 1976, the BSSR reached the Soviet Union's average industrial per capita production level (in agriculture the index for Belarus was 50% higher). Despite the fall of all industrial indices by the end of the 1970s, until 1985 the real per capita income in Belarus was higher than that of the whole USSR.

in the BSSR. Its fragmentary manifestations were the result of the influences of the Russian and Moscow realities, rather than of martyrdom itself. As isolated latent elements, they appeared among the intelligentsia, mainly the creative, who lived in the capital.

3. Search for identity at the post-Soviet transition stage

Like other countries of the former Soviet Union, Belarus was at a crossroads between the mid-80s and 90s. In this period, it experienced three cultural challenges related to different cultural projects.

3.1. The first cultural project: Belarus as a national democratic country

The first project arose within the framework of the main conflict of this period, which can be described as a conflict between the national and imperial. As paradoxical as it may seem, for Belarus it was "only to a small extent born of national motives."[41] To a much greater extent, it contained a protest against imperial centralism, the secrecy of power, and the rebirth of the communist-Soviet bureaucracy, than a claim to one's own statehood and the embodiment of the national idea.

Belarus, along with other republics, found itself in a space of an anomie conflict especially characteristic of transit countries. For the first time, its people were faced with the questions "what is Belarus?" and "how do we continue on?" At that time, only two

41 Тиммерманн Х. На пути к авторитаризму? // Мировая экономика и международные отношения. 1997. No. 7. С. 82.

political forces competed in the struggle to formulate an "idea for Belarus" – the Communist Party and the Belarusian People's Front (BPF).[42] The Communist Party had limited resources for maneuvering and its ideological set was quite transparent despite external innovations. That is why Zianon Paźniak, the leader of the Belarusian People's Front, became the new maker, as Uładzimir Mackievič[43] called him, of the post-Soviet cultural space and the first post-Soviet project for Belarus. The project envisaged a radical solution to the main conflict of this period – the complete independence of Belarus, the "Belarusianization" of society, and the country's revival. The key words of the national doctrine of the BPF were "independence," "revival," "freedom," "language," and "culture," and the main symbolic image was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. For a long time, this was popular. Under its direct influence, many important pieces of legislation were passed, such as the Law on Languages (1990), the Law on Public Associations (1990), and the Declaration of State Sovereignty (June 27, 1990). After the famous events of August 1991,[44] this trend culminated in the approval by the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR of a package of resolutions on the independence and autonomy of Belarus and giving the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Belarus the status of a constitutional law.

42 The Belarusian Popular Front is a broad popular movement that was launched in 1988 thanks to *perestroika*. This movement has greatly contributed to the exposure of Stalin's repressions and the propagation of the truth regarding the Chernobyl catastrophe. The Belarusian Popular Front is headed by Zianon Paźniak, a well-known leader of the national renaissance.

43 Мацкевич В.В. Белорусская демократия: вопреки очевидности. Минск, 1996. С. 114.

44 In August 1991, the so-called State Committee for Emergency Situations (ГКЧП) was established in the upper echelons of Soviet power with the aim of removing M. Gorbachev from office and pursuing an anti-reform course.

The sovereignty of Belarus did not certainly result solely from the activities of the BPF. It is widely believed that Belarus faced stern external circumstances. It was forced to declare independence within the "parade of sovereignties" because of the activities of "national fronts" in former Soviet republics and because of the situation following the August military coup and the Belavezha Accords. Contrary to a popular belief, only on the surface did Belarusian society seem indifferent to the problem of the country's independence and sovereignty. Essentially, it looked at the problem in a specific way. The news of the proposed changes raised some expectations that were reflected controversially in the Belarusian public consciousness. This controversy was shown in public opinion polls of that time.

In December 1991, the independence of Belarus and the Agreement on the Establishment of the CIS (consisting of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine) were supported by 69% of Belarusian respondents and rejected by 10%. In December 1992, these figures were only 42% approving with 34% opposed. In the summer of 1992, only 30.7% were positive regarding the withdrawal of the Republic of Belarus from the USSR, and 52.6% were against, with 69% approving Belarus' declaration of independence.[45] Taking into account the results of the March 1991 referendum, in which 82.7% of the population of Belarus voted for keeping the USSR (the largest percentage of support among non-Asian republics), it became clear that the dominant public consciousness of Belarusians leaned towards union while maintaining some autonomy within the USSR.

45 Какой мы видим нашу Беларусь. Мн., 1993. С. 30, 37.

This situation was the result of the many historical conflicts discussed in the previous sections. The underdevelopment of national and unionist thinking significantly limited the possibilities of carrying out the project of independent development of Belarus in Paźniak's nationalist version. It is important to note, however, that the BPF, which at one point had a high political rating, possessed an historical opportunity. They needed only to more moderately and carefully predict the nature of change at the outset without abusing the public confidence.

But the BPF opted for radicalizing the nationalist side of the project, making absolute its ethnic and cultural aspects, which deterred many potential supporters. A population that was facing pragmatic socio-economic problems could not perceive positively a violent Kulturträger policy imposed by the BPF. Unlike, for example, Lithuanians, Belarusians were not ready to endure economic hardship in the name of freedom or sovereignty of their country. Moreover, the liquidation of the USSR and the establishment of a *de jure* independent Belarusian state and the CIS defused the most acute form of conflict between national and imperial values. Paźniak's version of the concept of national development gradually lost its relevance.

In the late 1992, the hazard of becoming "hostages of USSR chaos" was replaced by the unusual (for Belarus) danger of being "alone" with their problems in the public consciousness of Belarusians.[46]

Belarus remained in a state of cultural anomie. However, its focus had already shifted from destructive protest forms to the need for choice and a constructive transformation of the cultural space.

3.2. The second cultural project: Belarus as parliamentary democracy

Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič, Chairman of the Presidium of the 12th Supreme Soviet of Belarus, and Viačasłaŭ Kiebič, Prime Minister, were two rival leaders who sought to build a new political space, which was the second cultural project for Belarus. By a stroke of luck, Šuškievič, elected after the August military coup in Moscow, was at the beginning of a "new entry" of parliamentarism to Belarus. Even though Belarus was one of just two countries (with Armenia) that did not hold early elections for the Supreme Soviet following the collapse of the Soviet Union, that Supreme Soviet transformed from a Soviet power structure to a parliamentary institution in a few years. Šuškievič was directly involved in this process not least because he happened to be the head of state.

46 The public opinion poll, conducted by the Belarusian service 'Public Opinion' in October 1992, showed that 55.5% of people saw the development of Belarus in the form of some or other union (25.5% wanted the CIS to be transformed into a new union, 21.5% wanted to form a union with Russia, and 8.4% of those polled were for establishing the Black Sea-Baltic Sea Union). Only 24.0% of respondents preferred to see the country remain neutral (with remaining respondents finding it difficult to answer).

His project was based on national "consent," i.e. uniting all forces to overcome the crisis and enact national-democratic reforms. In March 1992, various political forces were indeed united thanks to an Anti-Crisis Committee based on broad public representation. However, the goals of its members were too incompatible, so it essentially never got off the ground.

The conflict between the market and democracy that was the main conflict at that time[47] turned into a clash between stated reforms and their disruption in Belarus as in many other post-Soviet countries. There was a favorable public atmosphere for market transformations within a general modernization at the very beginning of the 1990s. In December 1988, 56% of respondents to the survey company *Public Opinion* supported the establishment of private property in the country (with 25% who opposed). In May 1991, 34% of respondents considered privatization "the only possible way out of the crisis" and 25% did not oppose to privatization but feared its negative effects. In the spring of 1992, 54.2% of the population supported the transition to a market economy (with 17.9% opposed). 48.6% of respondents, however, preferred "a longer but socially balanced transition to the market" (with 24.9% supporting a radical and quick transition).[48]

Šuškievič's project, which did not become a proven concept, but only spontaneous newmaking, was to support the principles of reform, to prevent the polarization of society, to develop pluralism and the

47 Вайнштейн Г. Посткоммунистическое развитие глазами западной политологии // Мировая экономика и международные отношения. 1997. No. 8. С. 140.

48 Какой мы видим нашу Беларусь. Минск, 1993. С. 5, 7, 15.

foundations of democracy while preserving the independence of Belarus. The key words of this period were "reforms," "market economy," "liberalization," "consent," and "pamiarkoŭnaść" (Belarusian word that means "a kind of tolerance, moderate opinions or beliefs" – *Translator*). However, in the process of project implementation, the priority was not elements of reform, but elements of "consent." The fear of reform and the desire to reach an agreement as an indulgence to justify possible negative results of reforms became not only a direct manifestation of the legacy of Soviet collective irresponsibility, but also a hallmark of the Belarusian mentality with its propensity for conservatism and indecision as characteristic of the people.

In addition, the construction of a new democratic space in the spirit of parliamentarism with long-term harmonization of rules and procedures and legally formalized market transformations ran up against time during the crisis, as well as the competing project of Prime Minister Viačasłaŭ Kiebič. Unlike Šuškievič, Kiebič was a typical representative of the classical "Communist party state nomenklatura," promoted its interests, and had significant support in the parliament from the "Belarus" (agrarian–industrial–communist majority) faction.

His project was more in line with Soviet traditionalism. It was based on limited pluralism (including in the media); on nomenklatura's capitalist evolution and, consequently, on the limited participation of society in the redistribution of resources; on moderate

authoritarianism enshrined in the institution of the presidency;[49] and with a focus on supporting relevant Russian lobbying groups. Using the rhetoric of reforms, certain forces carried out "nomenklatura privatization." At the same time, the parliament blocked the adoption of laws aimed at creating a legal basis for a market economy.

The lack of real reforms, the lack of a unified national development strategy, and inconsistency in the conduct of anti-crisis policy led to a sharp deterioration of socio-economic indicators and falling living standards in the country.[50] At the same time, the first clear signs of differentiation of society emerged with a fine layer of private owners and entrepreneurs, whose well-being contrasted sharply with the disadvantaged majority.

Opinion polls noted an exacerbation of anomie conflict. The destruction of social ties, values, and change of status for most of the population were not accompanied by the proposal of new areas of participation, and choice as a social action was not yet

49 Prior to the adoption of the new Constitution, there was a heated discussion regarding the national political system. Most people supported the institution of the presidency (53.4%), 28.4% supported a presidency with certain reservations, and 17.7% of those polled supported some or other aspects of this kind of political system. (See: Какой мы видим нашу Беларусь. Минск, 1993. С. 37–39.)

50 In 1994, the volume of industrial output amounted to 67% of that in 1990; real wages decreased in 1994 by 41% compared to 1990 (see: Линг С. Стратегия государства – достойная жизнь народа // Рэспубліка. 1997. 10 июля. No. 127. С. 1).

established in public practice. As a result, symptoms of anomie such as apathy, insecurity, feelings of depression, hopelessness, anxiety, suspicion, distrust, and aggression intensified. In the spring and summer of 1993, the existing living conditions were described as "intolerable" and "completely intolerable" by 50.2% of respondents, and an expectation of change for the worse was expressed by 47.9% of respondents. In 1993–94, a significant part of the population was concerned about the deterioration of material conditions (53.4%), rising prices (87.0%), crime (40.1%), and incompetence of the authorities (31.6%). 65.5% believed that corruption was widespread among public authorities.[51]

The situation on the eve of the presidential election[52] was the result of the interaction of two cultural projects – Šuškievič's and Kiebič's. Both projects, neutralizing and distorting each other, were adjusted to varying degrees, but they were unable to unite, playing – each in their own way – in the field of democracy. As a result, the new values that defined the cultural discourse of the period turned out to be largely discredited in the public consciousness. The market became associated with robbery, enrichment of the few, corruption, *grabitization*, and the mafia. Democracy was synonymous with dysfunctional government, empty talk, and anarchy. In addition, its failures were more associated with the parliament, whose functions few people understood at all, than with the government.

51 Какой мы видим нашу Беларусь. Мн., 1993. С. 60, 62, 65; Цэнтральная газета. 1994, 6 мая. No. 52, С. 4.

52 The post of president was envisaged in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus adopted on March 15, 1994.

The American researcher Sarah M. Terry explains the situation that arose in the context of the conflict between democracy and the market as follows: "The hardships of life caused by radical economic transformations reinforce political instability. This, in turn, hinders the creation of a legal and institutional infrastructure for privatization and slows down the inflow of foreign investment, which in turn contributes to the continuation of the post-communist recession and further political polarization."[53] This was the general situation in Belarus, with the only difference being that it did not undergo radical economic reforms, and the difficulties of life were caused not by active processes of modernization, but by painful inaction and the waste of resources. Therefore, on the one hand, this led to a sharp rejection of power, and, on the other, did not create the critical mass of owners who could protect the democratic transformation in a time of crisis.

With weak democratic institutions (the parliament, the multiparty system, freedom of speech, etc.), the continuing post-communist recession led to a crisis of expectations and nostalgia for a stable life shared by the majority of the population. According to a poll in March 1993, 48.2% of respondents would have liked to have again the lifestyle just before 1985[54] and about 30% supported the restoration of the USSR. The retrospective dynamics on the scale of values threatened to conserve the most enduring Soviet stereotypes and to narrow potential resources for reform.

53 Sarah M. Terry. Thinking about Post-Communist Transitions: How Different Are They? // Slavic Review. Vol. 52. No. 2. 1993. P. 334.

54 Какой мы видим нашу Беларусь. С. 65.

It would be wrong, however, to consider this outcome strictly pessimistic. In the study of transitions, it represents a typical case for post-authoritarian transition periods.[55] The most important thing in such situations is not the degree of inertia, but the degree of mobility of society. From this perspective, opinion polls showed considerable potential for Belarusian society, despite a longing for the past. According to socio-economic monitoring conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS), in 1994, 51.0% of respondents supported a market economy as opposed to 46.3% who supported a command economy.[56] In other national surveys, 37.2% of respondents believed that "economic progress is possible with the development of local self-government" (with 26.6% not supporting),[57] even considering poor efficiency of local government dating back to the Soviet era. This means that fragments of a new civic culture gradually emerged in society as civic initiatives and organizations (parties, NGOs, independent unions, mass media, research centers, etc.).

It is important to note that the intensification of civic participation was tied to the development of a new historical and symbolic space that was supported by both the BPF and Šuškievič. In 1991, the Belarusian parliament officially adopted new national symbols, including the white–red–white flag and the "Pahonia" emblem that date back to the first principalities in Belarus and the Grand

55 Brzezinski Z. The Great Transformation // The National Interest. No. 33. Fall 1993. P. 4.

56 Абрамова О. Менталитет народа Республики Беларусь и итоги парламентских выборов 1995 года // Belarus-Monitor. 1995, май–июнь. С. 22.

57 Эбертс П., Кларк П., Эверт М., Касьяненко А. Перспективы создания гражданского общества в Беларуси: развитие плюрализма на местах в бывшем Советском Союзе. Гомель, 1995.

Duchy of Lithuania. They contributed to the establishment of a new cultural context of Belarusian society influenced by renewed history, the development of national ethnology, ethnopsychology, linguistics, and other areas of knowledge.

The policy of state and national independence that made up a part of Šuškievič's cultural project was in constant conflict with Kiebič's policy that promoted the political expediency of a close union between Belarus and Russia. The new symbols and message of independence were not clear to everyone, as most of the population felt quite comfortable in the Soviet Union. In addition, many people linked the deterioration of the socio-economic situation to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the excessive isolation of the former Soviet republics from each other. That was how "independence" and "sovereignty" were added to the list of questionable values such as "market" and "democracy."

It was in this period that a line of demarcation split Belarusian society into two camps with the identifying markers of "market, democracy, and sovereignty" (advocates of reform, modernizers) versus "command economy, strong power, and a restored USSR" (advocates of Soviet restoration, traditionalists). Ironically, at some point these two sides with diametrically opposed systems of values converged, making a bid for change. "Time, the people, the situation – everything at that time required change in Belarus," wrote the Belarusian publicist and political scientist Anatolij Majsienia. "The people were tired and they wanted to hear new names that would give them new hope and support."[58]

58 Майсеня А. Дурной пример – другим наука // Народная газета. 1994, 14 июля.

It was Aliaksandr Łukašenka who became a symbol of these changes. Each side believed he was one of their own. This explains largely why he won by a landslide the presidential election in July 1994, having defeated his main rival Viačasłaŭ Kiebič (81% to 14.1%).

This first presidential election followed the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus on March 15, 1994. According to the Constitution, the Belarus state system is based on the model of a presidential republic that was a compromise between the supporters of parliamentary and presidential republics, in line with "a parade of presidentialism" in the former Soviet countries.[59]

Under the 1994 Constitution, the President had significant powers as the head of state and the executive branch, yet the Parliament (Supreme Soviet) also had considerable power. This state system usually implies (as exemplified by the U.S.) consensus communication between Parliament and the President and a high degree of independence and responsibility of both branches of power.

The adoption of the Constitution of Belarus was undoubtedly a symbolic event in the political and cultural discourse of that period.

59 During discussions on the form of government in Belarus, there was no strong public opinion in favor of a presidency. Numerous public-opinion polls conducted at the time showed 60% of the people in 1991 and 40–56% of the people in 1992–93 were in favor of a presidency with 30–35% against. Again, most people did not pin any hopes on a better economic situation with the introduction of a president. Only 28.5% of the people engaged in industry, 41.6% of university and college students, and 23.9% of the chairpersons of rural Soviets hoped a presidential republic would improve the economic situation. (See: Бабосов М. Кто станет президентом? // Цэнтральная газета. 1994, 6 мая. С. 3.)

This itself was an act of political culture that reflected the historical traditions of the Belarusian people, their being part of Europe, and a commitment to democracy. With this act (announcing the primary democratic institutions), Belarusian democracy graduated from "kindergarten" and moved forward on a new stage (towards their consolidation).

3.3. The third cultural project: the "emperor's presidency"

Recent conceptual insights in studies of transition have added two key research notions: *transition* and *consolidation*. The first can be expanded to mean "transition to democracy," whereas the second roughly means "consolidation or establishment of democracy."[60] Essentially, the "establishment of democracy" means long-term activities of all branches of power, formed under a Constitution, in building a new constitutional space with society's willingness to abide by established rules. Since the population of Belarus did not have a law-abiding culture but rather a power-abiding culture coupled with a tendency towards conformism, they put the primary responsibility on the people in power.

The first presidential election in Belarus produced President Aliaksandr Łukašenka, who won a kind of cultural project competition along with considerable powers for the implementation of his project. He proclaimed himself ready to become the President in advance, when presenting an anti-corruption report at the session

60 Вайнштейн Г. Посткоммунистическое развитие глазами западной политологии // Мировая экономика и международные отношения. 1997. No. 8. С. 145.

of the 12th Supreme Soviet. This report resulted in the dismissal of Šuškievič from the post of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, benefiting both Łukašenka, who was gaining power, and Šuškievič's long-time rival Kiebič.

This act had a much bigger symbolic significance than just changes in senior leadership positions and Šuškievič's personal drama. Discrediting Šuškievič also threatened to discredit and liquidate the cultural space that he had been co-authoring. Later events showed that these fears were justified. Šuškievič's policy was, in the end, interpreted as "criminal nationalism" and Šuškievič (as one of the three "Bisons of Belavezha") was blamed for the break-up of the USSR. The words symbolizing that policy – "*pamiarkoŭnaść*" (see above), "consent," and "independence" – were later used by Łukašenka in an exclusively ironical, nasty, and disapproving manner.

As we can see, Šuškievič's concept, based on independence, national symbols, Belarusian language, and ultimately Parliament, became the antithesis of Łukašenka's cultural project. On the other hand, it borrowed some elements from Kiebič's project on integration with Russia, restoration of former Soviet relations, and some statements on equal "conditions for the public and private sectors of the economy." Łukašenka's construct was more eclectic and populist, with its essence, however, grounded in formulas of "fight against corruption," "return the spoils," "restore order," and "re-establish Soviet relations." As is clear, the rhetoric of the project was based on struggle, restoration, and order.

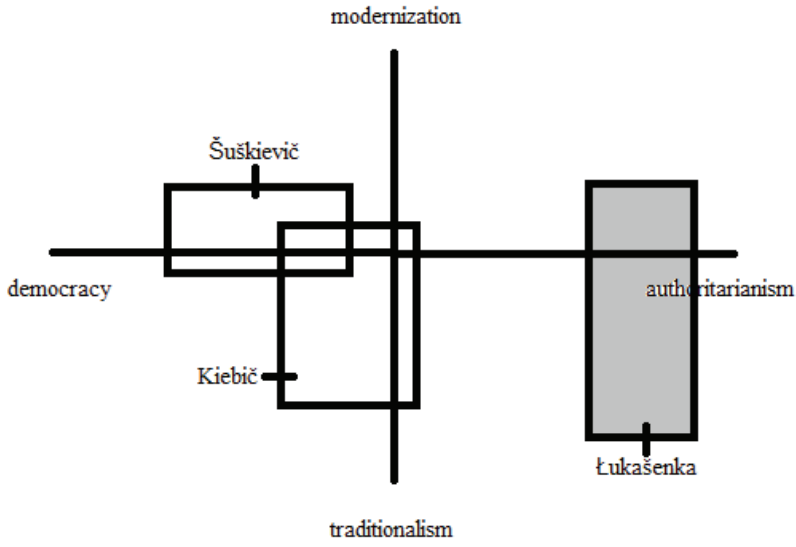
Amid an economic crisis and with a disenchanted society, Łukašenka's project matched not only the public sentiment but also the author's performance skills. First, it met the feelings of the majority, who wanted to go back to the times of relative Soviet prosperity. Second, it did not require complex modernization projects and reform efforts, which absolved the President of all responsibility for reform. Third, its implementation did not need much work as it was mainly based on well-known norms and stereotypes of Soviet behavior (as opposed to, for example, the "Shock Therapy" of Leszek Balcerowicz or liberalization of Yegor Gaidar). Fourth, the project was flexible ideologically and politically since it let Łukašenka find more and more objects to fight, shifting the blame for political failures on them while strengthening control over society and expanding his power on the pretext of having to restore order and strengthen stability in the country.

In summary, Łukašenka's restoration project sought to revive Soviet traditionalism and use its resource of mobilization. It is important to note that Belarus was one of the most prosperous and perhaps the most modernized country of the former USSR (as regards the level of urbanization, education, industrialization, etc.). In addition, Belarusian features of Soviet traditions were impacted by post-WWII modernization. But like in many other post-socialist countries, the process of modernization in Belarus was only partial neither having cut to the core of civic society or having encouraged private initiatives. In short, it was "modernization without modernism" (Dahrendorf).[61]

61 Пантич Д. Конфликты ценностей в странах транзита // Социологические исследования. 1997. No. 6. С. 29.

Going back to Soviet traditionalism meant reviving the values of Soviet modernization and its management schemes. Restoring the former system of communication, based mainly on non-economic coercion, abuse of administrative authority, and consolidation of the role of the state, eliminated the need for democratic institutions. Indeed, their certainty regarding social and political pluralism prevented the restoration of a single center of power and of bringing the whole social organism under its control. That is why the implementation of this cultural project continually expressed willingness to reduce the democratic space.

Existing in different cultural discourses, democracy and Łukašenka's retro-project could not help but clash, which could be defined as a conflict between democracy and authoritarianism prone to totalitarian acts (see the diagram below). It is important



to note that this conflict tends to develop towards a radicalization and that the shift of authoritarianism to the extreme point of this reference frame goes beyond the project concept, not responding to democratic pressure but only reflecting the personal ambitions of its author. As purely authoritarian, Łukašenka's project did not fit the Constitution under which he was elected President and a commitment to which the other branches of power (the Parliament and the Constitutional Court) expected from him. They could not succeed in their attempts to get the President back to the constitutional framework as he labored under the paradigm of his own project, the style of which did not suggest approvals or compromise. Moreover, the "purity of style" called for eliminating these procedures as foreign democratic attributes. The conflict between democracy and authoritarianism was resolved in a quite radical way. The President proposed a new version of the Constitution in which, despite external democratic hallmarks, there was neither separation of powers nor hierarchy of jurisdiction nor guarantee of civic rights and liberties. It gave Łukašenka unlimited space to maneuver, freeing him from considerable checks and balances.

Many international experts who assessed the constitution proposed by the President unanimously found that this version could give "the President virtually unlimited and uncontrollable rights to create, abolish and transform state bodies," that "the constitutional mechanisms are open to manipulation by the President," that this draft could set up an "the autocratic regime" and "the constitutional framework for dictatorship."[62]

62 Основа для диктатуры // Свабода. 1996. No. 86. С. 3.

In the context of violent struggle between the branches of power, the new Constitution was, however, adopted in a referendum with minor "improvements" that gave it a more "respectable" appearance. It completely changed the political system in Belarus. If the previous model was identified as presidential republic, the new key parameters were closer to presidentialism with a strong bias towards personalized authoritarianism that "generally facilitates the disappearance of the republic, i.e. institutional power that is subject to impersonality and universality of principles of law."[63]

The French political scientist and legal expert Jean-Luc Chabot called the presidential rule in the United States "the emperor's presidency,"[64] referring to the considerable power and pronounced symbolism of the president as a political player in the U.S. We can accept this imaginative phrase, considering that the keyword in it is "presidency" that reflects the specifics of a democratic institution with all its attributes. We can also use this formula to define the political regime in Belarus, but in this case the stress has to be shifted on the word "emperor" to emphasize the disappearance of institutional features of democracy and the personal will of the head of state.

In summary, Belarus has failed to *consolidate* democratically elected institutions of power. The country was taken back by "the ebbing tide" of its earlier authoritarian state.[65] It happened not

63 Шабо Ж.Л. Государственная власть: конституционные пределы и порядок осуществления // Полис. 1993. No. 3. С. 163.

64 Ibid. P. 160.

65 Huntington S. The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. Norman. P. 25.

only because the chief architect of the cultural space was most interested in restoring authoritarianism and knew no other way to solve immediate socio-economic problems. It was also because this way was the most acceptable for most of the population and because there was neither a worthy alternative project nor a worthy alternative leader at that time.

As a result of constitutional modifications, the political authorities supposedly approved a corresponding model of political culture and personality type it projected. It is a traditionalist authoritarian culture focused on maintaining the state system; a culture of strong power in the traditions of Soviet statism and collectivism. The authoritarian personality type who is the mainstay of the regime is well described in the literature.[66] Its main structural elements are seeking strong power, subordination, and commitment to this power, expecting patronage, mobilization in response to calls from power structures, daily conformism and a laissez-faire political attitude, doublethink, and hidden aggression.

The implementation of Łukašenka's project of "the emperor's presidency" depends both on the internal resources of the system he is creating and its legitimization in society, as the victory of authoritarianism in the conflict between democracy and authoritarianism could be achieved simply from a single demand for it by society.

66 See, e.g., Adorno T. et al. The Authoritarian Personality: Harper, N.Y., 1950; Greensten F. Personality and Politics. Princeton, 1987; Гозман Л.Я., Эткинд А.М. От культа власти к власти людей // Нева. 1989. No. 7.

4. Doomed by the past or facing conflicts in the future?

Which world will Belarus be part of? Will Belarusian society start inching from authoritarianism towards democracy? What identity will be decisive in the consolidation of Belarusian society? These questions are complex but not gloomily rhetorical. The answers to them will be determined by the transformations that are taking place in the system of values and orientations of Belarusian society.

According to one of the largest studies of the value systems in 43 countries covering 70% of their population by Professor Ronald Inglehart at the University of Michigan, culturally and geographically, Belarus is near the bottom of the square bounded by the axes of "values of the poor" (pre-industrial societies) and "rational and legal orientations." It is important that at the time of the survey (1990–1991), Belarus held a position close to Russia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Latvia.[67] Recent changes are facilitating the differentiation of values within Belarusian society that has determined a relevant general picture of different types of political culture that coexist.

With a general idea of possible courses of social change and possible conflict lines and based on various data from recent sociological research, we can define with some certainty the distribution areas of existing types of political culture. The most detailed axiometric cross-section of Belarusian society and the fragmentation of

67 Inglehart R. Modification des valeurs, développement économique et évolution politique // Revue internationale des sciences sociales. 1995, septembre. No. 145. P. 449.

Belarusian culture was gained through a study by IISEPS. Their results provide a relevant picture of the lines of value demarcation.

For example, statist, anti-market, egalitarian conservative values ("values of the poor"), orientation to all kinds of integration, and the restoration of the "mighty state" are mostly shared by so-called "weak" social groups. These are people aged 50 and over who have low and very low incomes, a poor or below average financial situation, who graduated only from the primary or secondary school. They are mostly elderly pensioners, unskilled workers, and housewives who live in the countryside, primarily in the Mahilioŭ, Homiel, and Viciebsk regions. They tend to be intolerant, prone to blame their failures on external circumstances or "the work of enemies," expect a great deal of government support, put little value upon freedom, human rights, democracy, freedom of opinion and behavior, and deferring to others.[68] These groups support Łukašenka's cultural project, making up his main voter base. They personify the patriarchal-subject type of political culture.

The second social arrangement is a relatively large intermediate group determined by a type of citizen culture. The orientations of this group are mostly mixed and often contradictory. For example, they can support both market economy and strong state control, advocate for human rights and do not accept the opposition whose actions should be limited. This group is mainly composed of people between 40 and 50 with average incomes or who are living "on the edge of poverty." They are workers in middle-skilled jobs, those forming a part of the intelligentsia, largely state employees, and

68 Манаев О.Т. По тонкому льду // Белорусская ассоциация фабрик мысли. 1997. Вып. 2. С. 45–50.

those who are unemployed. The main orientations of this group include loyalty to the state system, conformism, survival, and rejection of radical changes.

Dissimilar values are shown by representatives of so-called "active" or leadership groups.[69] Their orientations are identified within the participant political culture and they tend to create another civic culture that is defined by the institutionalization of free choice and responsibility (including the responsibility of authorities), as well as the importance of the rule of law and human rights. This group is more committed to the ideas of a market economy and independent state development.

The American researchers Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba, authors of the conception of civic culture that delivers the stability of democracy, emphasized that there are no universal approaches for its emergence. As a "culture of *pamiarkoŭnaść*" (see above), it suggests further opportunities for individual participation in the political process that does not destroy citizen orientations. It stems from "the simultaneous development of the national identity, the competences of both a citizen and a participant, as well as social trust and civic cooperation."[70]

In this regard, Łukašenka's leadership is a landmark in the development of the identity of Belarus. On the one hand, pursuing the goals of his project, he restricts the range of autonomy of society

69 Злотников Л. Интересы директоров и власти расходятся // Новости НИСЭПИ. 1997. Вып. 2, июнь. С. 26–28.

70 Алмонд Г., Верба С. Гражданская культура и стабильность демократии // Полис. 1992. No. 4. С. 134.

in every possible way, imposing "the majority stake" of the state in social initiatives to avoid the risk of open competition with society. That is why the individual's participation in the political process is limited mainly to the functions as a citizen, which means that the space for civic cooperation disappears. On the other hand, Łukašenka constantly incites "emotional commitment to the state system" (or rather to him and the system he embodies) and symbolic "unity" shared by citizens. The active transmission and assimilation of propagated symbols and the incontestability of their value shape the first level of the national and state identity, irrespective of whether it is based on acceptance or denial of these symbols. For the first time in many decades, Łukašenka is effecting Belarusians' self-identification at the level of their own state. With a personified and largely negative image of Belarus in the world and its psychological confrontation with many countries, Belarusians are beginning to realize that they have their own public face. The results of the latest IISEPS poll within the project "Dealing with Anti-Market Stereotypes in Post-Communist Belarus" showed that 85.4% of respondents believe that Belarus must be a sovereign state.[71] This is even though union expectations (the Union State of Russia and Belarus) still impact the choice that is being made. A significant part of the population (from 53.6% to 57.4% according to different surveys[72]) still hopes for a better life in the Union State of Russia and Belarus. Today, however, it is more a mechanism of psychological comfort and a result of manipulative political practices

71 Злотников Л. Кентавры массового сознания // Белорусский рынок. 1997. No. 37. С. 21.

72 Злотников Л. Кентавры массового сознання // Белорусский рынок. 1997. No. 37, 22–28 сентября. С. 21; Какой мы видим нашу Беларусь? // 7 дней. 1997. No. 42, 18 октября. С. 3.

than evidence of real helplessness. This is confirmed by citizens' opinions regarding the necessary degree of integration within the Union State. They are more limited now to economic integration, a common currency and common border control. On the other hand, 39.0% of respondents emphasize the low effectiveness of the Union State, and 23.0% maintain it does not exist at all.[73]

The initial experience of state self-identification deserves attention, as it lays the groundwork for democracy as a grouping of people(s) (*demos*).[74] It is in an independent state with daily plebiscite practices (Ernest Renan) that the value competition (outlined above) can develop, which can result in a transition from the "values of the poor" to the "values of modernization and wealth." From this point of view, we can agree with "the presumption of innocence" of Łukašenka as a leader who uses "available resources to develop the social sector," "suppresses subversive movements," and "does not foster democratic tendencies."[75] Nevertheless, messianic ideology and practices and expansionist aspirations of the Belarusian leader (unification of Slavs, Orthodox Slavic unions, pretensions to domination in Russia, and active efforts to move in an Eastern political direction) threaten to erode the elements of Belarus state identity and maintain its status quo as a "nonestablished democracy" or "hybrid (semi-authoritarian, semi-democratic) state" for years to

73 Ibid.

74 Ян Э. Исследования проблем мира в период и после конфликта «Восток–Запад». М., 1997. С. 268–271.

75 Алмонд Г., Верба С. Гражданская культура и стабильность демократии // Полис. 1992. No. 4. С. 134.

come.[76] Such a scenario is likely to be due to the absence of essential democratic traditions, "apathy" of civil society, and the growing institutionalization of *a procedural minimum* of democracy as a safeguard tool of the regime against the international community and the most active civic groups.

Those researching the transformation of values in transition countries have found that similar processes of change are taking place at different speeds in political and cultural paradigms of public consciousness in almost all countries of Central and Eastern Europe.[77] In this regard, the story of Belarus could hardly be considered hopelessly tragic.

76 Ванштейн Г. Посткоммунистическое развитие глазами западной политологии // МЭМО. 1997. No. 9. С. 152–153.

77 Пантич Д. Конфликты ценностей в странах транзита // Социологические исследования. 1997. No. 6. С. 29–31.

Uladzimir Roŭda

Is Belarus a Classic Post-Communist Mafia State?☆

☆ The article was first published in English in a book edited by Bálint Magyar, Stubborn Structures: Reconceptualizing Postcommunist Regimes, which appeared in 2019 at the Central European University Press. The text is reprinted with the kind permission of Bálint Magyar. The text was translated earlier by Radmila Roŭda, Uladzimir Roŭda's daughter.

Abstract

This article highlights the idea of present-day Belarus's taking shape as a mafia state with a typical mafia structure, which the author explains with both external and internal reasons. According to Uladzimir Roŭda, a key role has been played by external factors, such as disregard for the rule of law exported from Russia and a strong authoritarian influence of Belarus's eastern neighbor over the last few centuries generally. A weak national movement (notably national communism in Soviet times) is, as the author states, one is the internal factors of emergence of the Belarusian mafia state. All factors combined determined the specifics of Belarus's type of mafia state: the predominance of state property, the absence of a dominant party, and the insignificant role of national populism that has been replaced with social populism. Even the common features of a classic mafia state have a local flavor, such as the development of patron-client ties and the use of state ideology to perpetuate Łukašenka's power and ensure its continuity. Despite this, however, the Belarusian mafia state is unlikely to develop as a separate state, doomed to be incorporated into the Russian polyarchy.

1. Introduction. The political system Belarus lives under

The Belarusian SSR at the communist stage of its development was characterized by the weakness of national-communism. It resulted in the complexity of formation and development of the Republic of Belarus as an independent democratic state, yet the project was not entirely doomed. A favorable geographical position of the country in Europe, a relatively developed industrial economy, a largely urbanized society and a unique (neither Russian nor Soviet) history – all

these factors assisted to its democratization. Ever since the emergence of statehood on the territory of Belarus and up to the end of the XVIII century, the country belonged rather to the western than eastern Christian civilizations. This was reflected in the dominance of the Uniate Church in the Belarusian lands up to the XIX century; tolerance; separation of religious and secular authorities; rule of law, established in the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1588; the development of local self-government based on the Magdeburg Law; the formation of representative government at the end of the XV century, as well as the gentry democracy institutions in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The European legacy of the Belarusian history did not fall into oblivion. Today, it is reflected in the system of values of the Belarusian citizens. The data of various sociological studies collected by the American political scientist Knut attest to it. In particular, he questioned the attitude of respondents to the view that the "democratic system is not perfect, but still superior to all other forms of government" and analyzed the replies. Only 58.9% of Russian respondents shared this view, while it was supported by 80.8% of the Belarusian citizens and 76.3% of the Ukrainian ones. "This means that the Russian political culture is less democratic than that of Belarus and Ukraine."[1]

Soviet traditions, despite their powerful effect, were not exclusive and in no case uncontested. According to the British scientists White and McAllister, who made a substantial comparative analysis of attitudes towards the political system among the citizens of

1 Magen Knuth, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus: A Comparative Study on Political Culture and Democratization Success. (Chicago: Midwest Political Science Association Conference 2004), 24-27.

Belarus, Ukraine, Russia and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the overwhelming majority of the Belarusian citizens were far from having a pro-Soviet orientation. For the purposes of their study, they used the respondents' assessment of former (communist) political devices, the current political regime and its likely status in five years. In 2003, the researchers asked respondents to evaluate these parameters on a scale from minus 100 (the worst estimate) to plus 100 (the best estimate). The Soviet system scored lower in Belarus (65) than in Ukraine and Russia (75), contrary to the popular opinion of some researchers that the benefits of the communist system were implemented in their fullest in the Soviet Belarus.[2]

All this means that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Belarus had two options: the first would take it back to Europe, implying at the same time the democratization of the current political system and the liberalization of the economy. The second was carrying a threat of loss of its still fragile independence, immediately followed by the dissolution in the vast Russian imperial world. The elites have played a decisive role in the choice of future ways of development.

Viačasłaŭ Kiebič, who held office in 1990–1994 as Chairman of the Council of Ministers (the highest public post) had a difficult and controversial attitude towards the state's sovereignty. Despite the fact that he put his signature under the agreement on the dissolution of the Soviet Union, concluded in Viskuli on December 8,

2 Steven White and Ian McAllister. "Patterns of Political Culture" in Post-communist Belarus in Search of Direction ed. by S. White and E. Korosteleva (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 21-22.

1991, this politician focused mainly on the restoration of economic ties with the former Soviet republics, primarily with Russia. In a situation of severe economic crisis, caused by the withdrawal of the Russian ruble from circulation in the CIS countries since the summer of 1993, the premiere saw the only solution in the accession of the Republic of Belarus to the Russian ruble zone. This measure, however dangerous for the state independence, has never been implemented, since Kiebič lost the presidential election of 1994 to his main opponent – a former director of the state farm Aliaksandr Łukašenka, who stood for election under the openly social-populist slogans in a situation of complete *elite atomization*, when both the "party of power" and opposition experienced a deep rift.

Belarus considerably lagged behind its neighboring countries in terms of economic reforms, its ruling elite was not ready for the transformation of power into property. Instead, just as in the Soviet times, the Belarusian officials were using state property for personal gain. The problem of *ordinary corruption* came to the fore. In an emergency situation, when public opinion polls revealed that "among the most important challenges faced by the country, the population placed the fight against corruption and mafia first, followed by the fight against inflation and price increase, and finally – the restoration of order," an extremely active former head of the Parliamentary Commission for the Fight against Power Abuse easily claimed a victory over his rivals.[3]

3 *Pervye prezidentskie vybory v Respublike Belarus: osnovnye itogi* [The first presidential elections in Belarus: basic results] (Minsk: NCSI "Vostok-Zapad," 1994), 50.

The so-called *defective democracy* – to use the terminology of a political scientist Munch[4] – was a certain political achievement of Kiebič. The presidential election of 1994 was held with no or minimum deviation from the standards of *free and fair* will expression by the citizens, which was marked by all observation missions, including the OSCE. Unlike his main opponent in the first presidential election, after 1996, Łukašenka considered it unnecessary to look up to the opinion of the European observers. Since then, no electoral competition in our country has been recognized free and fair. This fact alone gives reason to believe that the nature of the Belarusian political regime is far from being democratic, even in a *defective* way.

The Belarusian president, who has ruled the country individually for the past twenty-two years, could not confine himself to hybrid models of political systems, combining elements of democracy and authoritarianism. Since the constitutional revolution of 1996, Łukašenka set a course for the transformation of Belarus – using Max Weber's term - into a *sultanistic system*, similar to some in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia. He almost succeeded in the elections 2010, when the majority of the opposition candidates ended behind the bars. After the release of the opposition leaders (the last of them – Mikalaj Statkievič – was released from prison in 2015), there was a minimum regime liberalization. It affected only the state of human rights, but had nothing to do with the nature of power, the degree of pluralism, the role of ideology and the degree of political mobilization. The causes of sultanistic transformation

4 Gerardo Munck. *Measuring Democracy: A Bridge between Scholarship and Politics*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 158.

and the characteristics of the Belarusian political system are described in detail in an article by the author of this text.[5]

The sultanistic character of the political regime does not allow us to classify Belarus as a "main stream" *mafia state*. The most important feature of sultanism, in accordance with the well-known American political scientists Linz and Stepan, is "a highly personalistic nature of power."[6] This feature is no different from the one, pertaining to a mafia state, namely that the power in it belongs to an adopted *political family*. In this case – to the family of Aliaksandr Łukašenka, but his power is rooted deeply in the state bureaucracy and is not interwoven to such a great extant with oligarchs. Łukašenka began to rule the state using autocratic methods earlier than the incumbent Russian President Vladimir Putin. He defeated Kiebič, building on the importance that the problem of *ordinary corruption* had in minds of the Belarusian citizens. However, he immediately turned the fight against this evil into a force at the very top of the pyramid of power. In reality, Łukašenka's political family used the fight against corruption to remove all potential competitors from the political and economic arena. Ultimately, it weakened the professional ethos of bureaucracy and led to a decrease in the competitiveness of the senior officials both in the center and at the local level. In the long term, this fight, which has acquired a different meaning, may lead to the complete disintegration of the ruling elite, resulting in the fall of the current regime.

5 Uladzimir Roŭda "Belarus: Transformation from Authoritarianism towards Sultanism" in Baltic Journal of Political Science (Vilnius, 2012, no. 2), 64-79.

6 Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 45.

Surely, there are some specific features, distinguishing our country from classic mafia states, and they are deserved to be analyzed in detail in a separate section.

2. Internal and external causes of the transformation of the Republic of Belarus into a post-communist autocracy

As is clear from the introduction, the system of values that guided the Belarusian citizens in the mid '90s was of a contradictory nature. It opened up two ways of further development. On the one hand, the young country could go the European way. To achieve this, liberal economic reforms and democratization of the political system were necessary. On the other hand, a threat of loss of statehood followed by complete incorporation into Russia was looming. These alternatives were backed by the definite political forces. In the elections 1994, the European way of development was most consistently defended by the BPF Party and its leader – Zianon Pazniak. A similar scenario was chosen by the forces, supporting the former Speaker of the Parliament – Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič. The Russian card was openly played by the former Prime Minister Viačasłaŭ Kiebič. However, it was the little-known populist politician Aliaksandr Łukašenka who won the election in 1994. A well-known Polish journalist Michnik justly nicknamed him "not a Moscow puppet, but the Soviet one."[7]

So, the Soviet values in Belarus beat the European ones at that time, resulting in a major back turn. The victory of this scenario in Belarus had certain internal reasons. First, a clear anti-democratic trend had formed in public consciousness by 1993, nourished by

7 Gazeta Wyborcza, No. 279, 1996.

the frustration of the majority of the population in the Russian liberal reforms and their reformers. This trend had nothing to do with the objective difficulties of the initial stage of transition to a market economy, as was the case in Russia or Ukraine, for instance. In Belarus, the economic crisis resulted from the inadequate reconstruction of the socialist model. However, ordinary people understood things differently. The power in our country was never democratic, but Pazniak, and Šuškievič failed to explain it to their electorate. The simple fact that they belonged to the democratic camp made them unpopular, if not responsible for the hardships that millions of ordinary people had to face. Slander against them on the part of the media controlled by the government of Kiebič was yet another important factor.

Second, Belarus belonged to the countries of the so-called *late modernization*, where industrialization, urbanization and the associated well-being had come relatively recently: in the 60-70 years of the XX century, under the Communists. In other words, Soviet values were still popular among a large part of the population. This fact, however, was not taken into account by the National Democrats in their election platforms. Therefore, we should agree with the American researcher Mihalisko, who said: "The same moral force that made Zianon Pazniak the most fearless opponent of the communist regime turned him into a very harsh and extreme one for the Belarusian taste."[8] As of Šuškievič, in our opinion, he lost the moral right to lead the democratic forces of Belarus in 1992, when, as Speaker of the Parliament, he refused to endorse the initiative

8 Kateline Mihalisko. "Retreat to Authoritarianism" in Dawisha K. and Parrott K. eds. *Democratic Change and Authoritarianism Reaction in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova* (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 240.

of a referendum on the dissolution of the Supreme Council and an early election. More than 500 thousand signatures of citizens were collected to support this initiative. All this led to an inevitable split of the democratic forces.

Third, the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) – the main opposition force – had underestimated the political significance of the fight against corruption propaganda. It allowed a little-known official Aliaksandr Łukašenka to take the lead in criticizing the Council of Ministers in a most sensitive matter. Thus, Łukašenka used an anti-corruption report as a formidable weapon in the fight against both the government and the opposition. The BPF report on power abuse in the structures of the presidential administration delivered by S. Antončyk was behind schedule (December 1994), when the question of power had already been solved, and therefore, did not have the expected political effect. It is likely that the timely initiative of the Front could have prevented the rapid transformation of the anti-communist and populist sentiment into the anti-establishment and anti-democratic populism – the mental base of Łukašenka's power.

Thus, none of the internal causes of the Belarusian return to the Soviet times had an objectively natural character, nor was it an "adamant necessity, impossible to get around," as is the view of the Belarusian political analyst Karbalevič.[9] This set of reasons was rather subjective and situational (they only worked in a certain situation that had arisen by chance).

9 Valerij Karbalevich. "Put' Lukashenko k vlasti" [Łukašenka's Way to Power] in *Belorussia i Rossia: Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo* (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 1998), 246-251.

External factors played a much more important role in Aliaksandr Łukašenka's accession to power and its consolidation. On the one hand, there was a lack of interest in the problems of Belarus on the part of the United States and the countries now commonly known as the "founding states of the EU."[10] For them, Belarus was a new post-Soviet state, despite its European history until the end of the XVIII century, a favorable geopolitical position and a certain nuclear-missile potential. The democratic West was concerned only with the latter circumstance and insisted on the withdrawal of missiles from the territory of the Republic of Belarus to the Russian Federation under the Russian, British and American guarantees of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Belarus, as well as Ukraine and Kazakhstan, fulfilled these conditions. However, the incorporation of the Crimea by Russia and the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine indicates that Russian guarantees are idle promises, and it is difficult to predict Russian behavior in the crisis, as far as the relations between Belarus and Russia go. In any case, in the mid '90s, the democratic West failed to suggest any alternative of the Belarusian development.

The lack of the western influence on the Belarusian situation was immediately compensated by Russia. The Russian leadership was not frightened by the fact that Łukašenka tried to position himself as a Soviet leader. It sought to expand its territory in the mid '90s, and therefore welcomed the promising idea of the Belarusian

10 The importance of the influence of democratic countries for general democratization was stressed by Levitsky and Way. They also mentioned its absence in Belarus and other countries of the former Soviet Union, with the sole exception of the Baltics. – Levitsky, Steven and Way, Lukan *Competitive Authoritarianism: The Emergence and Dynamics of Hybrid Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era*. (Cambridge: University Press, 2010).

president to establish the Union State of the two countries as the first stage of the USSR restoration. Łukašenka expressed these ideas even before he was elected president of Belarus.[11]

The Russian leadership used the idea of integration to impose on Belarus a joint defense agreement. As a result, military bases of the neighboring state were positioned on the territory of Belarus. In 1996, the two countries signed an agreement on the establishment of the so-called Union State, which created a system of economic preferences for the Belarusian partner. According to the Belarusian political analyst Vital Silicki, "The total amount of the Russian annual subsidies to the Belarusian economy in the period 1997–1998 can be estimated at 1.5–2 billion dollars... The different transversal aspects of the Belarusian and Russian integration turned it into a one-goal game, where the economic growth of Belarus was only possible at the cost of the Russian slowdown. On the one hand, the unreformed Belarusian economy was able to demonstrate a rapid growth due to the Russian sacrifice with its large government borrowings, budget deficit, written-off debts and waive of customs duties. On the other hand, while the Belarusian authorities actively subsidized its industry, the Russian enterprises, producing similar products, experienced a painful restructuring."[12]

11 Łukašenka reminded about it in his speech at the All-Belarusian People's Assembly on June 22, 2016 – Łukašenka, Aliaksandr "Sila v dvizhenii!" [The force is in the movement] in *Sovetskaja Belarus – Belarus' Segodnia*, No. 118, 23.06.2016.

12 Vital Silicki. "Ekanamichnaja palityka Lukashenki" [Economic Policy of Łukašenka] in *Belaruska-rasijskaja integracyja Analitychnyja artykuly* (Minsk: Encyclopedics, 2002), 65.

The unprecedented Russian economic support resulted in the consolidation of the authoritarian regime in Belarus. In November 1996, Aliaksandr Łukašenka held a constitutional referendum, allowing him to replace the presidential republic with the super-presidential one. This plebiscite riddled the legal norms and was recognized only by the Russian leadership, who shared the responsibility for the concentration of all power in the hands of Łukašenka's political family. An equally important target of the Kremlin's policy was the governance of Russia itself. The Belarusian president began to challenge the leadership potential of Boris Yeltsin. In the late '90s, he undertook regular trips to the regions of Russia, seeking to create an impression of a more reliable leader of the *Russian polyarchy* than the sick Russian President. Such attempts ceased only in 1999, when Vladimir Putin was appointed president by Boris Yeltsin.

The rise of Vladimir Putin to power resulted in the rationalization of the Russian-Belarusian economic relations. However, liberalization did not follow, since it was clear for the Russian leader that it would inevitably lead to the weakening of the Russian influence on Belarus. Instead, he chose a strategy of slow but sure moves against his Belarusian partner, aimed at strangling Belarus in the Russian friendly embrace. Realizing that Łukašenka will not turn towards the West (which would have been a salvation for Belarus), Putin tried to ensure the advantages of Russian amity in our country, fencing Belarus off from other economic resources, other than the Russian ones. The so-called Eurasian Economic Union was created to serve these purposes. Putin aimed at establishing in Belarus a strong local model of the Russian *polyarchy* – a model so dependent on Russia that it would leave no room even for the *autonomous Belarusian*

polyarchy headed by Łukašenka. All in all, the special preferences enjoyed by Belarus cost the Russian taxpayers at least 14 billion US dollars in 2007. They have been increasing until 2015.[13]

However, the implementation of the above-described plan was suspended in 2015–2016, due to the deep crisis that hit the Russian economy. It provided some opportunities for Łukašenka to act independently. However, he failed to seize them: instead of strengthening relations with the distant China and Pakistan, it would have been more forward-looking to turn to the EU countries and Ukraine. In this matter, the dependence of the Belarusian leader on the almost sultanistic Russian political regime is clearly manifested, and the head of the Belarusian political family is unable to weaken it.

Thus, it were not the internal contradictions of formation and development of the post-Soviet Belarusian state but the external factors that led to the domination in the mid-90s of Łukašenka's political family. The absence of the democratic influence of the West was used by the Russian leadership to create and gradually consolidate the sultanistic political regime, fully dependent on the Russian polyarchy.

3. Property rights in the mafia state of Belarus

To begin with, the relations of property in Belarus are very different from the ones in classic mafia states. As it was mentioned above,

13 Vstrecha Putina s chlenami pravitel'stva Rossijskoj Federacii (stenograficheskij otchet) [Putin's meeting with the members of the Russian government (verbatim record)] in *Belaruskija Naviny*, 15.01.2007, http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2007/01/15/ic_articles_112_149358.

the absence of radical socio-economic reforms led to the collapse of the government of Viačasłaŭ Kiebič. When Aliaksandr Łukašenka came to power, he took a course on the implementation of the social-populist economic program, based on the preservation of state ownership of the means of production.

According to Stanisłaŭ Bahdankievič, a former Chairman of the National Bank of Belarus, "the Belarusian achievements have been ensured without any serious social upheaval, by means of return to the proven Soviet practice of centralized management as part of the pronounced social and economic policies (of *social populism* – author's remark). Unlike other countries with transition economies, the Belarusian government managed to retain a direct control of about 75–80% of its economy."[14] According to Łukašenka's speech given at the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in June 2016, "there are currently 1005 companies under the operational control of ministries and state corporate groups, that make up almost half (50% – author's remark) of the Belarusian net assets."[15] The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development estimated the number of privately owned operating Belarusian businesses at 25–30% in 2015, which is a very low indicator for European states. Thus, the structural changes were not of a fundamental nature, and the public sector remains the basis of the national economy. So because of the absence of large-scale privatization it could not

14 Stanisłaŭ Bahdankievič. "Transformacija politicheskoj i ekonomicheskoj sistemy" [Transformation of political and economic system] in *Presidentskie vybory v Belarusi: ot ogranichennoj demokratii k neogranichennomu avtoritarizmu* [Presidential Election in Belarus: from Restricted Democracy to Unlimited Authoritarianism] (Novosibirsk: Vodolei, 2006), 28.

15 Aliaksandr Łukašenka. "Sila v dvizhenii!"

be witnessed an evolution of a wide oligarchic social stratum later to be surrendered to a single chief patron.

Despite the pessimistic forecasts of many Belarusian and European experts, Łukašenka has made some progress in implementing his program. Since 1996, the Belarusian economy has demonstrated positive dynamics. According to the World Bank, the growth of the Belarusian economy can be divided into *two periods*: 1996–2000 and 2001–2011. They differ significantly in their internal and external conditions, as well as the basic characteristics. In the period 1996–2004, the Belarusian GDP grew by 77.4%, or by 6.6% on an annual basis. In 2006, the GDP (in comparable prices) increased immediately by 10%, and in 2007 – by 8.2%.[16] "The Belarusian experience in some sense is contrary to the standard paradigm of the transition period, and the relative stability of the Belarusian economy has been called a *paradox*. Today Belarus has a portfolio of nine years (fourteen – author's remark) of continuous economic growth behind it, an impressive poverty reduction, a rapid growth of real wages and pensions and a low unemployment rate. At the same time, the economic growth was not supported by consistent macroeconomic strategy, decisive structural and institutional reforms or any progress in the private sector. Despite some liberalization in the course of reforms, the Belarusian economy is still characterized by a considerable regulation and a strong state control."[17]

16 Elena Novozhilova. Skol'ko vesit belarusskaja ekonomika? [How much does the Belarusian economy weigh?] // *Belarusskie novosti*. http://news.tut.by/economics/105797.html.

17 *The Country Economic Memorandum for the Republic of Belarus* (New York: World Bank, 2005), 25.

At the same time, the World Bank noted that "in terms of the pace of structural reforms, Belarus lags behind the majority of countries with economies in transition. Of the nine major reformed areas (privatization of large and small businesses, management and structural reforms in the enterprises, liberalization of prices, foreign trade and foreign exchange system, competition policy, banking reform, stock market, infrastructure), the greatest success has been achieved in the liberalization of prices and trade. However, it is revealing that in this particular area Belarus has the worst performance among the countries with economies in transition, sharing the last place with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Small-scale privatization has not yet been finished, while large-scale privatization of the state-owned facilities is extremely limited. In Belarus, there are the least favorable business conditions for small private companies and individual entrepreneurs."[18]

Since no significant changes in the area of structural reforms followed, in 2011 the leadership of the country had to carry out an extremely ineffectual currency devaluation, and in 2015–2016 Belarus entered in a period of systemic crisis. Thus, all talk about the economy's growth is invalid. In our opinion, the *Belarusian paradox* ceased to exist in 2011. "On May 23, 2011, Łukašenka let the Belarusian ruble collapse by 56%. This single event took away more than half of people's monthly salaries. Because of the devaluation, the average pension amount in dollar terms declined from 193 USD to 115 USD in May. The retired became poorer by 40% in an instant. Meanwhile, the inflation in Belarus reached 36.2%. In reality, most of the essential goods experienced a twofold to fourfold price increase. In these conditions, even the government admitted

18 *The Country Economic Memorandum for the Republic of Belarus*, 21–23.

that prices would continue to rise. In early May, household deposits in national currency amounted to 10.1 trillion rubles, or 3.3 billion dollars. However, the amount of deposits decreased to 2 billion dollars, due to the devaluation. This means that the depositors lost 1.3 billion dollars at once. By the end of 2011, the level of salaries in Belarus was on the penultimate place among the CIS – only Kyrgyzstan had a lower average indicator."[19]

The devaluation of the Belarusian ruble was bound to reflect negatively on the president's credibility, as well as on his projective electoral rating. Both figures fell to an unprecedentedly low level. According to the survey conducted by IISEPS in September 2011, "87.6% of the Belarusians believed that the Belarusian economy was in crisis, the vast majority of the population (61.2%) indicated that the responsibility for it lied with the president, almost 70% believed that the country was moving in the wrong direction. The difficult economic situation caused the collapse of confidence in Łukašenka. In September 2011, only 24.5% of the Belarusians stated that they trusted the president. In December 2010 (pre-election period), the number was 55%. Only 20.5% said they would vote for him then, which was a record in itself: these indicators were even lower than in 2003, when the projective electoral rating fell 'below the knee,' to quote the head of state."[20]

19 http://charter97.org/ru/news/2011/7/29/41066/; Gennady Fedynich. "Vlast' delaet vsio, chtoby narod pomog ey ujti" [Authorities do their best for people to make them go] in *Belaruski Partyzan*. 17.09.2011.

20 Oleg Manaev. "Hmuraja osen" [Cloudy Autumn] in *Narodnaja Volya*, No. 149-150, 30.09.2011.

The author of this text wrote at the time that the regime of personal power could collapse in the near future "as a result of confidence and legitimacy challenges, as well as the lack of trust in basic institutions of power."[21] However, it did not happen for one important reason: Putin came to Łukašenka's rescue to prevent the weakening of Russia's influence in such an important region of the Eastern Europe. Putin came up with a plan to create the Eurasian Economic Union under the Russian patronage, which was supposed to guarantee a slight economic growth and political stability (preservation of power in the hands of political families) of the signatory countries. The latter suited Łukašenka perfectly. As for the growth, he had to pay for it by refusing to cooperate with the countries unfavorable to Putin's Russia. Łukašenka's loyalty allowed Belarus to get out of the economic disaster of 2011 and ensured an insignificant GDP growth in 2012.

In 2013, the Belarusian focus on the Russian market played a very negative role in its economic development, since Russia faced a deep recession, resulting from the fall of prices for oil and gas on the world market. This fall had been predicted by foreign and independent Russian experts, for example, Yavlinsky, who called Putin's model the "economy of the pipe." However, this and similar opinions were ignored by the head of the Belarusian political family. For Łukašenka, the strengthening of personal power had always been more important than any rational economic considerations. In 2014–2016, Belarus was hit by two crises at once. On the one hand, it was due to the Russian crisis, resulting from the sanctions against Russia, lawfully imposed by the European Union after the

21 Uladzimir Roŭda. *Palityčnaja sistema Respubliki Belarus'* [Political system of the Republic of Belarus] (Vilnius: EHU, 2011), 187-188.

Russian annexation of the Crimea and the undeclared war against Ukraine. On the other hand, the internal crisis was of the structural nature, similar to the crisis of the socialist economy that ruined the government of Kiebič in 1994. It was only possible to overcome it by means of reorientation of foreign economic relations, refusal from Russia as an exceptional market for Belarusian producers and radical structural reforms.

Despite the acknowledgment of this way at the Belarusian National Assembly in June 2016, the process did not move forward in October. This failure was not only the result of the force of inertia of the Belarusian political family, represented by the leader's environment. The leader himself had fears about Vladimir Putin's opinion, who kept important levers of influence on his authority.

Thus, a long existence in Belarus of a somewhat modernized *state socialism* should not be understood as domination of social equity and social justice. Even in the era of economic growth this system failed to surpass the developed capitalist countries of Europe. State-owned property was beneficial only to one person – the head of the political family, who used it to establish full control over more or less active members of society, the media, non-governmental organizations and political parties, regardless of their orientation.

4. Non-economic features of a mafia state in Belarus

The most important political feature of the mafia state of Belarus was its development in the framework of a non-party system. Since the time of Kiebič, no government has been formed on a party basis, which means that ever since the Republic of Belarus gained its

independence, it has been widely recognized as a non-party system, in accordance with the criteria of the famous French sociologist Duverger.[22] Łukašenka strictly followed his main opponent of 1994. The head of the political family chose not to go Putin's way and did not create the so-called *party of power* in Belarus, despite the fact he was pushed to it by many influential people from his entourage.

The former Minister of Education Aliaksandr Radzkoŭ was the first to make such an attempt in 2007. Just before the next parliamentary election, he held a founding congress, establishing the party of power – *Belaja Rus*, which was to unite in its ranks all adult supporters of Łukašenka's policy. Then, a year before the election to the House of Representatives in 2012, a similar initiative was put forward by then-incumbent Speaker of the Upper House of Parliament A. Rubinaŭ. However, both attempts failed. The head of the political family Łukašenka harshly criticized the initiators, stating that he would "find additional work for them, if they don't have any."[23] Thus, *Belaja Rus* exists not as a political party, but as a public association. Łukašenka criticized the political parties operating in the country at the Belarusian National Assembly in 2016.[24] It can be concluded that the current non-partisan status of Belarus is fully consistent with his strategic objectives. So, why even the parties loyal to the head of state failed to satisfy him?

22 Moris Duverger. *Politicheskie partii* [Political Parties] (Moscow: Academic project, 2000). In 2008, the author of the text was among the first Belarusian political analysts to come to a conclusion of a non-partisan nature of the Belarusian political system. – Vladimir Rovdo. *Sravnitel'naja Politologia* [Comparative Politics] T. 3. (Vilnius: EHU, 2009), 327–332.

23 Uladzimir Roŭda. *Palityčnaja sistema Respubliki Belarus'*, 245.

24 Aliaksandr Łukašenka. "Sila v dvizhenii!"

There are two possible answers to this question. The first can be traced in Łukašenka's speech given in 2008, dedicated to the formation of the party of power. Amongst other things, it was mentioned that "the attitude of the head of state towards all parties helping us to build our lives is positive. No matter if they are in opposition and critical to what the authorities are doing, but they tend to help the authorities."[25] Remarkably, the head of the political family places parties and authorities on the opposite sides. The system of power, in his opinion, shall not be partisan, and some parties (in opposition) are only meant to criticize the government. As a result, power struggle – the most important function of any political organization – is banned. In this issue, Belarus lags behind Russia and other mafia states. But the head of the political family adheres to this position, as is clear from the results of the last elections to the House of Representatives, when two representatives of opposition parties were appointed to criticize the government, not to fight it on equal terms. The fact that the leadership of some political organizations in opposition agreed with the choice of the president, attests to the moral degradation of the Belarusian opposition.

The second response was given by Łukašenka, when he established the *vertical power structure* – a replacement for the party of power in classic mafia states. While Russia – in this respect – has a *dominant-party system*, Belarus could be described as a non-party system. Two Presidential Decrees (Decree No. 476 "*On the Approval of the Statement on the Chairman of the Regional and Minsk City Executive Committee*" dated November 20, 1995 and Decree No.

25 "A. Lukashenko otvetil na voprosy predstavitelej belorusskih i rossijskih SMI" [A. Łukašenka replied to the questions of Belarusian and Russian Media representatives] 26.04.2008. http://www.president.gov.by.

519 "*On Some Issues to Ensure the Activity of Local Councils of Deputies in the Republic of Belarus*" dated December 26, 1995) led to the actual appointment of local heads of executive committees by leaders of higher executive committees.[26] Łukašenka does not need a presidential party even in the role of a transmission-belt. He relies wholly on the state bureaucracy.

Thus, a famous presidential *vertical of executive power* was established with the Head of State in the lead. He appointed Chairman of Minsk City Executive Committee as well as chairmans of executive committees in all regions of the country. Heads of the regions chose heads of district executive committees, and those, in their turn, heads of local administrations. Additionally, the Decree eliminated a number of lower-level councils. As a result, executive committees were no longer accountable to the local representative bodies elected by the citizens, which was legalized in the Constitution of 1996. According to the Article 119, "Heads of local executive and administrative bodies shall be appointed and dismissed by the President of the Republic of Belarus or in the manner prescribed by him while their position shall be approved by local Councils of Deputies."[27]

The vertical of power is subordinated to the political head of the family and is a much more disciplined and efficient tool than any

26 *Narodnaja gazeta*. 25 lipenja 1996. Mihail Smiahovič. "Stanaŭlenne i razvicce instytuta presidenckaj ulady" [Presidential Power Formation and Development] in *Historyja Belaruskaj dziaržaŭnasci*. V. 2 (Minsk: Belaruskaja navuka, 2012), 471-472.

27 *Stat'ja 119 Konstitucii Respubliki Belarus* [Article 119 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus] (Minsk: Nacionalnyj centr pravovoj informacii, 2007), 36.

party of power in classic mafia states, since it places in danger not only the official position of those involved, but also their freedom and even life. Therefore, in our opinion, the creation of the Belarusian partyism, similar to the Russian or the Hungarian ones, is only possible after the collapse of the current political regime or the replacement of the head of the political family.

According to American political scientists Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, the weakness of the ruling party and especially its absence creates problems for an authoritarian system.[28] We can only partially agree with this opinion. Undoubtedly, this situation negatively affects the development of political institutions, making them highly personalistic. However, the Belarusian example suggests that it can drag on for years and even decades.

However the clear predominance of the social populism over the national populism as methods of power exercise is really dangerous for the political family of Łukašenka. In this regard, Belarus also lags behind almost all other countries employing a similar tool. All the attempts of the Belarusian ideologists to claim that the Republic of Belarus stands for the values prevailing in the Soviet Union, and therefore nationalism here is identical to sovietism, are ridiculous and unconvincing. Neither the flag of the BSSR, nor the Soviet emblem or the Independence Day (coinciding with the Day of Liberation of Minsk by the Red Army in 1944) are considered sacred by the intellectual elite.

28 Steven Leviyski and Lukan Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: The Emergence and Dynamics of Hybrid Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era*, 59.

One can fully grasp the reasons that pushed Łukašenka to replace the national symbols with the Soviet ones and identify the history of Belarus with the BSSR history. They are associated with a low cultural level of the farm director, destined to become the head of state. Yet it is impossible to understand why after twenty-two years in power his cultural level remained unchanged. After all, his power is now threatened by the above-described imbalance of populism. National populism works great in crisis, as is evidenced by the experience of Russia, Hungary and many other countries with mafia state systems. Social populism in the current economic crisis, however, cannot bring anything but disappointment and frustration.

Thus, if the head of the Belarusian political family does not find the strength to replace social populism with national populism, and if the crisis lasts any longer, his power could be questioned in the near historical perspective.

5. "Law of rule" in place of "rule of law" in contemporary Belarus

Today's Belarus abides by the Constitution of 1996, adopted in a referendum, whose results were outrageously falsified, allowing us to speak about the *constitutional coup* of the head of state. According to the Fundamental Law, institutions of the so-called presidential-parliamentary republic with a bicameral legislature were formally introduced in Belarus. However, they are almost completely dependent on the head of the political family. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to speak of the super-presidential republic, similar to those operating in Central Asia, with the peculiar

concentration of all powers in the "body" and an atrophy of the other two branches of government.

There exists in Belarus a *two-headed executive body*, characteristic of any democratic state, where the presidential power is balanced by the powers conferred on the Prime Minister. In our country, however, the Prime Minister plays a role of an economic manager, subordinated to the President, rather than an independent politician. The President of Belarus determines the legislation of the country, depriving the deputies of the right to perform their primary *legislative* function. In the years, following the referendum, only few laws were drafted within the walls of the Parliament. In fact, it is the head of the political family, who carries out the *recruiting*: selection and appointment of the leading cadres. He shares this responsibility with the Upper House of the Parliament, directly or indirectly appointed by him. Additionally, the President enjoys the right of appointment and removal of all major judges in the country, which makes courts highly dependent on the head of state. The change of the jurisdiction of the Main Chamber of Parliament in 1996, making it accountable to the Presidential Administration, turned Łukašenka into an "all-controlling and unruly political actor."[29] A non-legal nature of the Belarusian Fundamental Law affected the functioning of central and local power institutions.

The time that has passed since the constitutional coup, was characterized not just by a "freezing of political institutions at the level of 1996," as the Russian expert Gelman pointed out, but their further

29 Uladzimir, Roŭda. *Palityčnaja sistema Respubliki Belarus*, 135.

setback to complete personalization of power.[30] The Constitution, as well as the Government and the Parliament all served one person – Aliaksandr Łukašenka, by adapting to all his whims and oddities. For example, in 2004, another referendum was held to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. According to its official results, 79.42% of citizens that took part in it, agreed that the incumbent president had the right to run for presidency as much as he liked.[31] The announcement of results, perceived by many Belarusians as a crude falsification, provoked spontaneous protests in Minsk.

The powers of the Government of the Republic of Belarus, as well as the Parliament, are inferior to such structures as the Presidential Administration and the Security Council. They got a constitutional recognition in the Fundamental Law of 1996. The Presidential Administration is the most important reservoir of cadres for central and local higher public administration units. Its numerous departments copy the work of the ministries and departments of the Council of Ministers, defining their vector of development, just as it was done by the departments of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus in relation to the Soviet government. Additionally, the Administration combines all forces, ensuring a "leading and guiding" function of the president in his interaction with the legislative and judicial branches. In particular, it is

30 Vladimir Gelman. "Iz ognia da v polymia. Dinamika postsovetskih rezhimov v sravnitelnoj perspektive" [From the Frying Pan and into the Flame. Dynamics of Post-Soviet Regimes in Comparison] in *Polis* No. 2, 2007, 11. http://csis.org/images/stories/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/061207_ruseura_acgelman.pdf.

31 Jury Čavusaŭ. "Manipuliacyji ŭ infarmacyjnaj prastory i pagroza referendumu" [Manipulation of Infomedia and Referendum Threat] in *Palityčnaja historyja nezaležnaj Belarusi* (Vilnius: Instytut belarusistyki 2006), 466.

reflected in the development within the walls of the Administration of all major bills descending later to the deputies of the Parliament for approval.[32]

Bureaucracy in central and local institutions is numerous. The contradictory principles were laid at its foundation from the very beginning. On the one hand, the political head of the family constructed a "vertical of power" that influenced the entire state from top to bottom. On the other hand, Łukašenka did not abandon social populism – the most important legitimizing principle of the Belarusian political regime – even after power consolidation. The belief of ordinary people in the national character of the supreme power came at a price: a series of public campaigns and scandalous disclosures of certain corrupt officials. No official in Belarus, apart from the president, has ever received guarantees of inviolability. This is negatively reflected on the integration of the ruling elite. Not only it does not own the means of production, as is the case in both Russia and Hungary, but it is also poorly protected from arbitrary action of the first official in the state. However, bureaucrats do not protest and generally support the authorities, because the Belarusian officials operate in the artificially destroyed competitive environment, just as in Brezhnev's era, characterized by a rapid degradation of the elites.

Thus, an unlawful character of the autocracy formed in Belarus earlier than in Russia and Hungary, which has a most negative effect on the political institutions, as well as the degree of integration of

32 *Polozhenie ob Administraccii presidenta Respubliki Belarus* [Regulation on the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus], http://president.gov.by; *Glava 4 Konstituccii Respubliki Belarus*'.

the bureaucracy and the elite in general. Unlike Belarus, they do not suffer from the discrepancies brought about by the unlawful state or the president's unpredictable behavior, which is only getting stronger in times of crisis.

6. Liquidation of social autonomy in Belarusian society

The Belarusian authorities headed by Aliaksandr Łukašenka started to eliminate the autonomy of the Belarusian culture, which they perceived as a threat to the Russification policy that found a new lease of life and the Kremlin's financial support after a referendum, dedicated to the state of language and symbolism, held in 1995. The Belarusian language was pressed out into a niche generally occupied by ethnic minorities in the least democratic countries of the world. However, it survived as the language of the Belarusian intellectual elite. Literary works are created in the Belarusian language, superior in quality to the works of Russian authors.[33] The Independent Writers' Union has no state support. The Belarusian education system obediently works on the assimilation of the Belarusian society into the Russian culture. In this regard, higher education is beyond competition – there are no universities teaching all subjects in the Belarusian language. Scientists in academic establishments have never had the autonomy, enjoyed by their colleagues in Europe.

The Belarusian media is controlled by the government. Radio and television are completely monopolized by the state. The recently

33 For further information on Łukašenka's fight with the Belarusian culture and its consequences, see the interview with Śviatlana Aleksijevič – the Russian-speaking Nobel Prize laureate in Literature in 2015 on www.svoboda.org/.

established independent company *Belsat*, broadcasting from abroad, is not yet able to compete with BT, ONT, STV or the Third Channel for a number of reasons. For instance, it is more difficult for *Belsat* to respond to the latest news and events immediately. It is impossible to protect journalists and experts from detentions by the Belarusian police. *Belsat* is a pay-cable, and common Belarusians are not used to it (a cheap cable TV package is imposed to them by the Housing Maintenance Service). Many people choose to watch programs online, which is anonymous and secure. In our opinion, *Belsat* needs a quality advertising campaign. In 2010, the Internet influenced the political position of only 10% of voters. It is also subject to government control, but remains the most free media in Belarus, the number of its users exceeded 4.8 million in 2013. As for March 2016, this figure rose to more than 5 million people.[34]

Non-governmental organizations suffer from retaliatory measures at the stage of registration; the declarative principle is replaced by the permissive one. This led to a significant quantitative reduction of genuine NGOs, freezing of their growth. After the re-registration campaign held in 1999, the sector was only able to repair itself in 2009, when there were about 2500 authentic organizations, but they experienced pressure as well.[35] A measure of criminal responsibility for activities on behalf of an unregistered organization is in place since 2006. It suppresses the most active and talented people. At the same time, the government supports the so-called GONGO,

34 *ByNet-2013: pervye itogi goda* [First results of the year], http://dw.de/p/1A1SK; in *Media research*, March 2016.

35 Victor Chernov. "Tretij Sektor v Belarusi" [The Third Sector in Belarus] in *Nashe mnenie* No. 4, 26.03.2008.

who seek to monopolize the representation of important societal sectors. Well-known examples are the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) and public association *Belaja Rus*.

Political pluralism in Belarus faced severe restrictions in the past twenty years. Belarusian political parties, deprived of the possibility to compete in Parliament and local authorities and agitate their voters via the media, including electronic, were isolated from society. Most of them are not so different from political clubs and non-governmental organizations. The so-called "street politicians" were also isolated from parties and political organizations due to draconian laws against the initiators of unauthorized protests.

Elections in Belarus do not strengthen political parties, regardless of their ideology or political orientation – no matter if they are "for" or "against" Łukašenka. Over the past twenty years we lived through nine national parliamentary campaigns (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016) and presidential elections (2001, 2006, 2010 and 2015). All were officially won by people from the president's list, or by Łukašenka himself. None of the elections were recognized free and fair by the OSCE observers, resulting in a low *Freedom House* rating of Belarus. Meanwhile, the government set a course for further *depoliticization* and *departization* of the Belarusian parliament and the general public, releasing it from the influence of any political organizations whatsoever. The election campaigns, as well as fraudulence and falsification helped them attain these goals.

The last elections to the House of Representatives did not differ much from the previous campaigns. They resulted in the election of 8 deputies from the Communist Party of Belarus, 3 members of

the Patriotic Party and 2 opposition representatives (one from the United Civil Party of Belarus, another – from the social organization "Belarusian Language Society"). All in all, 13 deputies represented different parties.[36] In 2012, there were 5 party members in the House of Representatives, which is a ridiculously small number for a European country. All this confirms the conclusion about the ongoing struggle of the head of the political family against all parties, whose reasons we discussed above.

Thus, the elimination of the autonomy of important social institutions took place in Belarus, just as in other classic mafia states. This process led to the formation of the so-called "strong power," quite controversial in its nature. To begin with, there is a blazing contradiction between the economically developed society and the most primitive political system in Europe based on personalistic dictatorship, or a complete domination of the political family in terms of a mafia state theory. The vulnerability of the Belarusian regime is manifested in the fact that essential modern political and social institutions do not develop here, and twenty years later, it remains the cultural "kolkhoz" in the geographical center of Europe.

7. Patron–client relations in Belarus

The development of patron-client relations in Belarus was influenced by the events of recent history. Belarusian SSR was one of those Soviet formations, where industrialization and urbanization came relatively late: in the 60's and 70's. Until 1960, agriculture played a key role in the structure of the Belarusian economy.

36 *Novosti* ONT 11.09.2016.

The reasons for this economic policy lied in the desire of the Soviet Union to turn Belarus into some kind of an analogue of the Eastern Ukraine. Both regions were to cover for up to ¼ of all military-industrial complex of the USSR. This fact also helps explain such a rapid development of energy-intensive heavy industry in the country. The structure of the industrial sector was mainly represented by the mechanical engineering and metal processing, chemical industry, optics and electronics. Belarusian enterprises depended on the supply of raw materials and components. Little by little, Belarus became an assembly shop for the entire Soviet Union.

Industrialization was accompanied by rapid urbanization. The urban population increased significantly. Arriving in the city, former residents of Belarusian villages fell into a different cultural environment. Most of them were forced to adapt to the Russian language and culture, dominant in all cities. The Belarusian language was edged out to the periphery of cultural life, spoken mostly by villagers and citizens of small towns. At the same time, while it was a symbol of intellectuals after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became a symbol of opposition after Łukašenka's accession to power.

The processes of assimilation into the Russian culture were difficult and controversial, despite the lexical proximity of the two languages. The head of the political family himself has never learnt to speak proper Russian or Belarusian. He can also be qualified as a citizen in the first generation, who have a slightly different value system, as compared to the urban residents of European countries. They are far more authoritarian and committed to paternalism and patron-client ties and relationships. Unfortunately,

the value orientation of our president coincided with the value orientations of the majority of the Belarusian population at the time he came to power. According to the Belarusian political analyst Lysiuk, "the Belarusian president's ambition to represent a father of a patriarchal family is apparent. The image of the father generally covers the entire state, including all citizens, even those who do not consider themselves akin. Consequently, the Father skillfully applies the concept of "people," careful not to refer to "social groups" or "classes." Generally, the image of the father is the personification of truth, embodying the wisdom of previous generations, knowing all about the past, present and future. The imperious image of the father, protecting his children from all dangers, is bound to possess a heroic aura of victories over hordes of enemies. The Father of the nation is an image containing the image of the Patriot, having a salutary influence on the fate of the Fatherland, the Motherland and all the Belarusian people."[37]

In our opinion, the choice of authoritarian values by the Belarusian citizens in the mid '90s was some form of "revenge" of the late industrialization and urbanization. Later, however, people were not asked anymore, since every election failed to meet the basic democratic criteria. It was taken for granted that people share the political values of the head of the political family, enjoying the privileges of being their "backa" ("father" in Belarusian).

37 Anatol' Lysiuk. "President i narod: specyfika politicheskoj kommunikacii" [President and the People: Specific Features of Political Communication] in *Predidentskie vybory v Belarusi: ot ogranichennoj demokratii k neogranichennomu avtoritarismu* [Presidential Election in Belarus: from Restricted Democracy to Unlimited Authoritarianism] (Novosibirsk: Vodolei, 2006), 156–157.

However, the processes of industrial development and urban growth brought the inevitable change. With every year, the percentage of people who are citizens in the second and third generation (hence, with a different value system) increases. While there were no significant changes in attitudes, ideals and orientations of the political head of the family, we can imagine a quiet but constant change of valuable orientations of the majority of the Belarusians. They do not fit into the Procrustean bed of the ruling regime anymore. This process is intensified in times of crisis, shedding light on weaknesses of the regime.

Thus, elements and ideological panels of patronism have formed in Belarus, similar to those in classic mafia states. Nevertheless, their timeframes are limited, as they are constantly eroded by the processes of socio-economic development.

8. Ideological justification of a mafia state in the state ideology text

To strengthen the established system of power handover to future generations and increase the degree of the regime legitimacy, the Belarusian head of the political family came up with the so-called *state ideology* in 2003. The regime of personal power in our country is not rigidly ideological, which makes it different from the totalitarian ones. At the same time, anti-Western and anti-democratic ideas are openly instilled in the public consciousness. Panslavism is widely promoted. The Republic of Belarus is portrayed as an important outpost, preventing the spread of pernicious liberal values and attitudes, while its president positions himself as the leader of those forces of the former Soviet Union, that actively oppose the imperialist Western conspiracy against the bygone USSR. The

so-called state ideology presented by Aliaksandr Łukašenka in his speech at the permanent seminar of executives in March 2003 was no different.

The development of a state ideology allowed some political analysts and opposition politicians to talk about the totalitarian transformation of Łukašenka's political regime. In our opinion, such a transformation had a pronounced sultanistic character. Sultanistic leadership generally does not have a well-developed dominant ideology, but it can use the statements of leaders having an ideological status, as "it has an extremely manipulative character and, more importantly, can hardly be perceived as something restraining the head of state, while it remains relevant as long as it is used by the leader."[38] Thus, the so-called *pseudo ideology* is formed. We believe that the developers of the Belarusian state ideology have come very close to this model. It is superficial. The worldview is represented by an eclectic combination of some Marxist-Leninist, liberal and conservative positions. According to Aliaksandr Łukašenka's report, "thus, the Marxist-Leninist, conservative and liberal ideology can all be attributed to us in different degrees, say, quantities. And in some sense, this is exactly the case. Some characteristics are more pronounced, others are less evident... The Belarusian ideology shall focus on the traditional values of our civilization: the ability to work not only for profit, but for the good of society, the respect for collective values... In fact, in the East Slavic world (given the fact that our territory was inhabited by other nations), we are the only country that openly promotes our loyalty to the traditional civilization values. All this suggests that time, destiny, and circumstances served as a combination of factors for Belarusian advancement,

38 Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. Ibid, 53.

perhaps, to a position of a great spiritual leader of the Eastern European civilization."[39]

In 2016, before the visit to China, the head of the political family considered it appropriate to recall his devotion to communist ideas. In his speech at the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, he said: "We have to understand one thing: today we do not have the Communist Party, which was once bearing an enormous responsibility of education, including ideological education of our society, thus, today this burden is placed on us – the vertical power structure. Since we do not have appropriate, real parties at the moment – they have not been established yet – it is necessary to rely on what we have: our youth organizations and our veteran organizations, our Women's Union and our trade unions. We must use them to solve the problems once solved by the Communist Party, which was doing a lot for the country's development. Well, since there are none, it is necessary to replace them, until a party market has formed, if I may say so, it is necessary to replace them with the existing organizations that stand up for the sovereignty and development of our country."[40]

It is clear from the practice of ideological work that this system of ideas and opinions in no way limits the current government. On the contrary, it serves to ensure the achievement of pragmatic goals set out by Łukašenka: to strengthen his personal control over the

39 Aleksandr Lukashenko. "O sostojanii ideologicheskoj raboty i merah po ee sovershenstvovaniju" [On the State of Ideological Work and Means of its Improvement] in *Materialy postojanno dejstvujushcego seminara rukovodiashchih rabotnikov* (Minsk: Akademia upravlenia pri presidente RB, 2003), 17–21.

40 Aleksandr Lukashenko. "Sila v dvizhenii!"

state apparatus, the education system and the media. Finally, this ideology is despised by "the leader's entourage, the citizens and the outside world," which, according to Linz and Stepan, is peculiar to sultanism. It is also one of the distinctive features of such a mafia state what is relying heavily on state bureaucracy.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to dwell on all the features bringing Belarus closer to an ideal model of a mafia state. It consists primarily in disregard for the rule of law, exported from Russia, affecting not only the society, but the ruling elite as well. The country was ahead of other mafia states in eliminating the autonomy of the most important social institutions, from the Academy of Sciences to political parties. The head of the political family used some vestiges of paternalism in people's minds that became the basis for the development of patronalism. Finally, the Belarusian state ideology was introduced, serving to perpetuate the power of Aliaksandr Łukašenka and ensure its continuity.

However, there exist some features, distinguishing the Belarusian model from classic mafia states: the predominance of state ownership, the absence of the party of power and the weak role of national populism, replaced by social populism. However, the above should not be understood as insurmountable obstacles for Belarusian transformation into a classic mafia state. The head of the political family have learnt to gain personal profit from state ownership, removing with its help all the dangerous economic and political rivals, including the Russian ones. He has a rich experience in using his own vertical (instead of the party in power) as a means

of strengthening personal power. The most serious problem is a marked imbalance between social and national populism, with the predominance of the former. President Łukašenka refuses to make even minimal steps to solve it, for fear of extremely negative Russian reaction – after all, Russia invested a lot of money to support the current head of the political family. At the same time, Belarus is hardly doomed for a polyarchy, similar to the Russian one. Łukašenka fully understands all the weaknesses of this model, as well as the possible risks of losing personal power. Most likely, a unique model of a not fully developed mafia state will be established in Belarus, somewhat rustic and provincial. It is characterized by the following features:

- there is a large share of state property, so the weight of oligarchs is somewhat less, than in the countries of "classic" mafia states;

- there is a miner role of centrally led governmental corporate raiding - as a means of property redistribution - than in the genuine mafia states;

- the power is much more bureaucratic, and tied closer to formal bureaucratic positions than in Hungary or Russia, where the political actor is the adopted political family with some members even not having any formal position;

- the rewards for the clients of Łukašenka are provided mainly in positions of state bureaucracy and state enterprises, and not necessarily in property;

- the "grand corruption" therefore is more restricted than in Russia; the value of the single corruption actions is smaller; the social differences are much smaller, than in other post-communist regimes;

- there is no dominant party as a transmission belt of the adopted political family; the unique character of the regime is, that it is based on bureaucratic positions much more than the "classic" mafia states;

- as a consequence of all of this Belarus is closer to a bureaucratic, sultanistic autocracy, than to a "classic" mafia state; but it has also some signs resembling to that (e.g. the emerging dynastic element with the positions of Łukašenka's sons).

About the Authors

Iryna Buhrova (1954-2011)

Iryna Buhrova was a Belarusian political scientist, social psychologist, NGO expert, publicist, and lecturer at the European Humanities University (1997-2004). While EHU was in Minsk, she taught political culture in the French-Belarusian Department (Faculty) of Political and Administrative Sciences. Together with Siarhiej Pańkoŭski, Śviatlana Navumava, and Aliaksandr Fiaduta, Iryna Buhrova co-founded the news and analysis website *Naša dumka* (*Nashe mnenie*) (http://nmnby.eu). She organized many workshops and trainings that facilitated the forming of civil society in Belarus. She worked as an associate professor at the Department (Sub-faculty) of Political Science and Sociology of the National Institute for Higher Education at Belarus State University (BSU) and directed the International Institute for Political Studies in Minsk. Her main research area was Belarusian political culture. In 1998, Iryna Buhrova published in German *Politische Kultur in Belarus: Eine Rekonstruktion der Entwicklung vom Großfürstentum Litauen zum Lukaschenko-Regime* (Political Culture in Belarus: From the Reconstruction of the Development of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Łukašenka Regime). She was one of the first Belarusian political scientists to draw attention to Belarusians' institutional traditions, values, and codes of conduct that are passed down from generation to generation and which frequently play a key role in political transformation processes.

Śviatlana Navumava (1956-2011)

Śviatlana Navumava was a Belarusian researcher in political science and political technologies and a professor at EHU. In 1987-1994,

she taught at Minsk State Pedagogical Institute (since 1993, Belarusian State Pedagogical University). From 1994 to 2001 she worked at the National Institute for Higher Education at BSU, sat on the President's Commission on Education and worked at the International Institute for Political Studies in Minsk. In 2001-2004, she headed the Department (Sub-faculty) of Political and Social Sciences at EHU. When EHU was forced to cease its activities in Minsk, she was actively involved in restarting university operations in exile. In 2005-2009, she worked as a professor at the Department (Faculty) of Philosophy and Political Science of the relocated EHU in Vilnius. She co-directed a regional center for the latest studies and education and co-edited *Perekrestki. Zhurnal issledovaniy Vostochno-yevropeyskogo pogranichya* (Crossroads. The Scientific Journal of Eastern European Borderland Studies). At EHU, she taught introduction to political science, fundamentals of political theory, modern civil society theories, as a course called *Belarus as a Political Project*. A founder and activist for the civic campaign *Tell the Truth*, Śviatlana Navumava worked on the campaign staff of presidential candidate Uładzimir Niaklajeŭ. *Tell the Truth* initiated the establishment of the Śviatlana Navumava Prize that has been awarded annually since 2012 to support the activities of independent journalists, analysts, and public figures in Belarus. The award is aimed at acknowledging creativity and significant research contributions on the country's political life and social activities and concern for public welfare.

Uladzimir Roŭda (1955-2021)

A Belarusian political scientist and professor at EHU, Uladzimir Roŭda lectured within the Master's program in public policy at EHU

until October 2014. He headed the Analytical Belarusian Center, authored several research papers and educational materials, including the in-depth course books *Palityčnaja sistema Respubliki Belarus* (The Political System in the Republic of Belarus) and the three-volume work *Paraŭnalnaja palitalohija* (*Comparative Political Science*), that looked at key theoretical concepts in the field. Along with Viktar Čarnoŭ and Valeryj Karbalevič, Uladzimir Roŭda was actively involved in the activities of educational civil society since the 1990s. He co-published the journal *Hramadzianskaja alternatyva* (Civic alternative) together with Valeryj Karbalevič. Uladzimir Roŭda collaborated with the extended education platform *Belarusian Collegium* (Minsk) and served as a lectured there. His political analyses and editorials frequently appeared in print media and on the news and analysis website *Naša dumka* (*Nashe mnenie*) (http://nmnby.eu) and devoted much of his research to comparative politics and theories of democracy and nationalism.

Siarhiej Pańkoŭski (1956-2009)

Siarhiej Pańkoŭski was a Belarusian political scientist, philosopher, and historian. In 1992-1993, he was an adviser to Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus. He was a dean of the French-Belarusian Department (Faculty) of Political and Administrative Sciences at EHU (1994-2001), an adviser to the Rector of EHU (2001-2004), a Vice Director and Head of the Department for Political Studies of the NGO Social Technologies (2002-2005). He co-created and co-managed the Belarusian news and analysis website *Naša dumka* (*Nashe mnenie*) (http://nmnby.eu), as well as co-founded and was the first chairman of the board of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS). Siarhiej

Pańkoŭski authored several works on the history of philosophical and political thought in Western Europe. He initiated and managed various regional and international academic research and educational projects as the chairman of the board of the East European School of Political Studies and Knight (Chevalier) of the French Order of Academic Palms (2005).

Viktar Čarnoŭ (1956-2013)

Viktar Čarnoŭ was a Belarusian political scientist and executive director of the Open Society Foundation office in Belarus. He taught political science at the Belarusian National Technical University, the Institute of Parliamentarism and Entrepreneurship, and Belarus State Economic University. At EHU, he worked in the French-Belarusian Department (Faculty) of Political and Administrative Science (in Minsk) and within the Master's program in public policy (in Vilnius). As a researcher, he explored political ideologies, theories of civil society, and comparative analysis of post-Soviet political and economic transformations. Viktar Čarnoŭ authored and co-authored several political science textbooks and course books (specifically on political ideologies). He was a sought-after political analyst for media platforms and notably one of the most published authors on the website *Naša dumka* (*Nashe mnenie*) (http://nmnby.eu). He was actively involved in non-formal education as an expert in the East European school of thought in political science and a founder of democratic education for school teachers. As political activist, Viktar Čarnoŭ was a member of the United Civic Party since its founding and was directly involved in its activities and the development of sociopolitical programs.