

The Generation Gap, or Belarusian Differences in Goals, Values and Strategy

The Generation Gap, or Belarusian Differences in Goals, Values and Strategy

Edited by
Andrej Dynko

**WYŻSZA
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Andrzej Sulima-Kamiński, Valer Bulhakau, Andrej Dynko, Eulalia Łazarska, Amanda Murphy.

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Oficyna Wydawnicza Wyższej Szkoły Handlu i Prawa im. Ryszarda Łazarskiego

02-662 Warszawa ul. Świeradowska 43

tel. 022 54-35-450

e-mail: wydawnictwo@lazarski.edu.pl

www.lazarski.edu.pl

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tel./fax 022 635 03 01, 022 635 17 85,

e-mail: elipsa@elipsa.pl, www.elipsa.pl

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Prof. Andrzej Sulima Kaminski

A FEW WORDS OF INTRODUCTION

The fight for civic rights, for the respect of law, for a democratic government and for the precedence of public interest over that of the executive has a long and edifying history marked by victories and defeats, as well as more or less functional compromises. This book offers an insight into just such an ongoing struggle in Belarus. To those involved in the conflict only the current moment tends to really matter. Activists tend to measure achievements and setbacks in days and months, and rarely in years. Not surprisingly, petty personal quarrels are given too much attention, while structural changes in civic values that are crucial for the future and are measured in decades escape notice. This is the reason why we thought to bring together the activists of this political struggle along with observers and analysts for a moment of reflection, for a look at the past and for a look to the future. While its focus is on Belarus, this book also deals with matters of global importance, central to the political life of many countries. There is a striking similarity apparent when one compares the fate of Belarus with that of other former Soviet republics. It is a fact that the provincial, patriarchic and sultanist regime of Belarus makes it the European nation most similar to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries. This is especially obvious in comparison with Lithuania, with which Belarusians share – more and more eagerly – a history spanning several centuries. A comparative analysis of those crisis points, which led to either the defeat or the sustainable triumph of democratic principles (entry into NATO and the European Union), and which “exploded” in Russia as well as in all the other former captive nations, carries not only a cognitive value but also a very immediate strategic meaning for the future, of great significance for Ukraine at the moment. Although civic forces have suffered de-

feat and democracy is on the decline in most of the former republics of the Soviet Union, it is necessary to remember that the same happened in the West European countries in the 1920's. They managed, at great cost, to reverse the backslide into autocracy and totalitarianism, and restore democracy. Yet the struggle continues and we all are, in Manichean terms, involved, supporting the forces of either good or evil.

One can draw parallels between the fates of contemporary Belarus and those of East European nations during the period between the two World Wars. The Treaty of Versailles guaranteed all new states international recognition of their sovereignty, democratic systems and constitutions. But the new order was shaky. Throughout the region, from the Adriatic to Baltic Sea, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, parliamentary democracies were bogged down in inter-party strife and paralyzed by inner fighting in coalition governments and subsequently were taken over by autocrats capable of suppressing radicals both right and left. In neighboring Lithuania, and also in Estonia for instance, dictators legalized their rule through general referenda which were not rigged. Modern parliamentary majority governments in the post-Communist countries, in which a party leader's position or antipathy plays a greater role than voters who have no influence whatsoever on their representatives, are not much more effective. Parliamentary democracy does not have many ideological opponents at present and, what's more, there is little effort being made to push for reasonable reform programs. Moreover, membership of the European Union guarantees its survival. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe found itself in a situation reminiscent of the post-Versailles status. Some states (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia) disintegrated; new independent states sprang up, new parties; platforms and leaders took the stage. A combination of anti-Communism, historical traditions and the opposition *credos* helped restore democracy and parliamentary systems in these states.

This was also the case in Belarus. But its parliamentary democracy there was quickly overrun by an autocracy, whose "stability" is not only attributable to the nation's apathy, but also to an insufficient sense of the need for the changes advocated by the opposition. Belarusians are more nostalgic for the Soviet Union than people in other European republics of the former Soviet Union, and many associate the opposition's democratic rhetoric with the economic and political turmoil of the early 1990's. Textbooks written from a Russian viewpoint of Belarusian history discourage young people from looking westward.

Unlike people in Western Europe, East Europeans clearly realize that membership in NATO and the EU is a choice made against Russia. Kremlin politicians

have certainly always interpreted pro-EU aspirations this way. Clearly, it is a difficult choice for Belarusians who used to perceive Peter the Great and Catherine the Great as heroes in their own history. NATO tempts Belarus with its guarantees of independence and the EU with its high living standards. Membership of NATO would anger the Kremlin, while the EU has put forward political, social and economic conditions, insisting on the proper functioning of a democratic system. Interestingly, opposition leaders and the Lukashenka government elite share the common goal of prosperity.

There is always the need for a rational, long-term plan for the welfare of a country in terms of the economy, healthcare, etc., and for accompanying budget proposals. Goals need to be presented in a clear and persuasive way so that voters will understand them, but at the same time so that experts from across the political spectrum will take them seriously. Winning parliamentary seats and the presidency is considered a top priority but it is unfeasible short of a miracle. There are however certain crucial issues that can be addressed at present: competing for seats on local self-government agencies of all levels, campaigning for meaningful powers for local-self-government agencies and fighting the overwhelming provincialism.

Western Belarus was a remote rural backwater mainly referred to as “Poland B” in the period between the two World Wars. Eastern Belarus remained a similarly provincial kolkhoz-dominated country under Soviet rule after the Stalinist purges. Present-day Belarus is still a Soviet holdover, but, on the other hand, more people now speak English, more travel to the West and the spirit of modern globalization is more palpable (even when one travels only as far as Moscow or Vilnius.) The Europeanization, or globalization of Belarus’ heterogeneous opposition is striking as the population at large plunges deeper into Russian-speaking provincialism led by an autocratic *Bat’ka* seeking to preserve the *status quo*. This is not good for the country’s future: neither for the ruling elite (and their children) nor for the opposition. Fighting provincial ignorance is an enormous task that demands a great vision (Lukashenka’s purported friendship with Chavez and Mugabe, and a brief flirtation with the European Union cannot exactly be called a vision) that would unite all those who deep in their hearts love the phrase *Zhyvie Belarus!* [Long Live Belarus!] no matter what they do or which party they support.

Throughout history, periods of struggle, uprising and disturbance have been followed by conscious nation-wide projects aimed at education, spiritual rebirth, economic development and “going to the people” (in the course of which young

intellectuals canvassed rural regions). Although these strategies are often ridiculed, their advocates should be given credit for having the good will to serve not only themselves but also the people around them. People do stand up for causes that they identify with. A rise in the number of independent-thinking and well-educated people in Belarus means a greater chance of success with every new attempt to bring change.

Our conference entitled *The Generation Gap, or Belarusian Differences in Goals, Values and Strategy*, co-organized by the Institute for Civic Space and Public Policy and the Belarusian Center, under the auspices of the Lazarski School of Commerce and Law, and the *Nasha Niva* weekly, brought together prominent Belarusian and foreign scientists, politicians, writers and journalists. The conference attracted members of the younger generation of Belarus' opposition, including a number of Belarusian students studying in Poland. Lively, intellectual roundtable discussions engaged the audience. Participants repeatedly broke out chanting "Zhyvie Belarus!" in outbursts of national pride and solidarity. Throughout, young civic and political activists recalled how they became involved in opposition and civic activities and why their friends did not follow suit. Sharing their experiences were Mikhas Pashkevich, Volha Karach, Ales Zarambiuk, Vital Brouka, Ales Chyhir, Juras Melashkevich and Darka Slabchanka. These diverse presentations by members of the younger generation brought authenticity to the more academic lectures given by prominent sociologists and political scientists.

**THE GENERATION GAP:
THE MOTOR OR THE BRAKES?**

By Jan Maksymiuk

IS THE BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LOSING THE BATTLE FOR YOUNG MINDS?

Heading For Opposition Gerontocracy?

I can hardly remember a leading figure from the current Belarusian opposition who did not possess notable political, social or cultural standing in Belarus prior to July 1994, when President Alaksandr Lukashenka came to power.

Stanislau Shushkevich was the chairman of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet in which Lukashenka started his political career, and Shushkevich's signature is under the dissolution act of the Soviet Union. Lavon Barshcheuski, from the Belarusian Popular Front, was a people's deputy from 1991 to 1995, along with his then comrades-in-arms Zianon Pazniak and Juras Bielenki. Anatol Labiedzka, from the United Civic Party, was a people's deputy in the same legislature. Social democrat Alaksandr Kazulin was a deputy education minister in Prime Minister Viachaslau Kebich's cabinet. Another social democrat, Mikola Statkevich, founded the Belarusian Association of Servicemen. Perhaps only Alaksandr Milinkevich kept a low profile in the pre-Lukashenka era, serving as a provincial university professor and a deputy head of the city administration in Hrodna.

Fourteen years later, after a series of disappointing political failures, we have virtually the same people in the first ranks of the Belarusian opposition. However, although 14 years earlier it was possible for these politicians to mobilize 50,000 people for a street protest in Minsk against the ruling regime, today 2,000 people at an opposition rally is deemed a huge success. Without a doubt, to a significant degree, an objective generation gap between the veteran leaders of the op-

position and younger Belarusians is responsible for the dramatically weakened public appeal of opposition parties in Belarus. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the opposition's lack of an adequate political strategy and the regime's ability to respond to some of the essential needs and expectations of the younger generation are no less important in marginalizing the opposition movement or even reducing it to a replica of the Soviet-era dissent.

Belief in Showdown

In a recent online news conference with RFE/RL, Mikola Statkevich spoke for many Belarusian opposition leaders when he asserted that change in today's Belarus is possible only through a political showdown during presidential elections:

«Decisive action by some 1,500 demonstrators under circumstances in which the authorities keep everything under tight control is impossible,» Statkevich said. «But there is one night in five years when the authorities' control, so to say, wavers. This is the night of political miracles. This is the night of presidential elections.»

Past tactical moves of the Belarusian opposition — as well as those of its Western sponsors — followed this strategic guideline. The Belarusian opposition spent targeted financial, organizational and propaganda resources on three major campaigns of the Lukashenka-era: the presidential ballots in 2001 and 2006 and the constitutional referendum in 2004, when Lukashenka removed the two-term limit on the presidency. The parliamentary-election campaigns in Belarus in 2000 and 2004 were of significantly less importance to the opposition and its sponsors. Indeed, nobody even seems to remember that Belarus also held local elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007.

It is not surprising that during the above-mentioned presidential campaigns the role of younger opposition activists was confined to collecting signatures, distributing campaign materials, and, primarily, participating in street protests. Their older colleagues made decisions about the allocation of campaign resources and represented the Belarusian opposition abroad. There was hardly any space for young members of the opposition to develop or test their own political ambitions. On the other hand, parliamentary and local elections presented much better opportunities for young activists, who could potentially run for the seats of people's deputies and local councilors, to demonstrate political initiative and gain political experi-

ence. However, their older colleagues were interested in showing just symbolic electoral activities during parliamentary campaigns in major cities, arguing that participation in parliamentary elections, let alone in local ones, is a waste of time and energy. Thus, the generation gap in the Belarusian opposition politics has become wider and wider, primarily due to an arguably mistaken political strategy that favors political change from the top over a grassroots approach.

Carrots and Sticks from the Regime

In speaking about the repressive nature of President Lukashenka's regime, we need to clearly realize that its control apparatus is aimed almost exclusively at potentially effective antigovernment activities during major political campaigns, as well as at those citizens who try to pass the «opposition virus» to a wider social stratum. Otherwise, cultural and intellectual life is relatively free in Belarus. At least, state control over «apolitical» cultural and intellectual activities in the non-state sector is lax. In other words, life in today's Belarus is a far cry from the stale and depressing atmosphere of the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union.

There is a curious analogy between the political climate in today's Belarus and Poland in the early 1980s, after the introduction of martial law and the ban on Solidarity. The Polish communist authorities significantly relaxed the cultural and social policies in the country, while keeping a watchful eye on members and followers of Solidarity. Presumably, the main objective of this two-pronged policy was to prevent the Polish youth from engaging in politics and to separate it from the influence of the political opposition. Suddenly, in the 1980s, native rock music and drug experimentation flourished in Poland. It became much easier for Poles to get a foreign-travel passport and go abroad. At the time, common wisdom maintained that Polish communists deliberately steered young people to indulge in vodka, sex, drugs, and rock music — or to emigrate — instead of getting involved in politics or public life.

The current Belarusian regime seems to be replicating this approach. Young Belarusians who want to organize an election monitoring network are tried under the articles of the Criminal Code relating to terrorism, while those who join the state-sponsored Belarusian Republican Youth Union are promoted during their university studies and in their post-university careers. Major Belarusian rock musicians, who were previously banned from appearing on radio and television, are

unexpectedly invited to the presidential administration and offered clemency in exchange for refusing to perform at opposition events.

How successful is this selective carrot-and-stick policy? Some sociological data indirectly suggest that this policy may have been quite successful. According to a survey conducted by the Vilnius-registered Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies (NISEPD) in March, 64 percent of Belarusians believe that improving the economic situation of their country is more important than keeping the country independent; 24 percent think otherwise. Among those aged 18-29 years, the ratio of respondents opting for a better economic situation rather than the country's independence is 71 percent to 22 percent. NISEPD, which holds comprehensive surveys of public opinion in Belarus twice each year, concludes that the data attest to a growing «mercantilism» and «pragmatism» of Belarusian society at the expense of «patriotism.»

The Belarusian opposition continually asserts that Lukashenka's policies will lead to the economic and, consequently, political annexation of Belarus by Russia, but the NISEPD results suggest that the overwhelming majority of Belarusians are not worried about this possibility. What is more, the youngest generations, more socially mobile and better educated than the others, seem to be even less concerned about the country's independence than their older compatriots. Why is this?

An immediate answer is that Lukashenka has actually succeeded in bringing up young pragmatists who care more about their stomachs than they do about national pride. On second thought, one is also prompted to suppose that the younger generations of Belarusians may not believe, as the opposition asserts, that the loss of independence under Lukashenka is a real threat to their country or to them personally. They are primarily worried about an economic downturn, which is a common concern today in many societies, democratic and autocratic alike. In either case, the NISEPD results are bad news for the opposition and its prospects of mobilizing support among young people.

The Opposition Needs a New Language (At the Very Least)

Why may Lukashenka be perceived among young Belarusians as a benefactor rather than a tormentor?

First and foremost, Lukashenka has something essential and desirable to offer to the younger generations in exchange for the measure of political conformism

he expects from them. The regime's major «gifts» to young people are free education, freedom of movement (including foreign travel), and increasingly attractive prospects for pursuing professional careers within the country, in an economy that is undergoing a slow, but inevitable, «authoritarian» modernization.

When two-thirds of Belarusians believe the current political situation is safe and stable, the Belarusian opposition needs to reappraise its political objectives, or at least its language, if it wants to survive as a significant political group, let alone attain some leverage within the power structure.

I think that, as the main prerequisite for such a reappraisal, the opposition should acknowledge that Lukashenka, despite his erratic and uncivilized political behavior and language, may also be building something significant that will outlast his political rule. In fact, this significant something may form the foundation for the political and economic institutions of an independent nation, one that no longer needs to be reassured that today's Republic of Belarus is at least as good as yesterday's Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

If such a reappraisal takes place, it will be easier for opposition parties in Belarus to reconcile with the fact that winning seats on local councils and in the national legislature is no less important than campaigning for the presidency. The Belarusian opposition may eventually shed its political frustration and make use of the energy and talents of the increasingly pragmatic younger generations, who want a better life for themselves now, rather than for their children and grandchildren in a hazy future.

By Dzianis Mieljancou

THE CHANGE OF GENERATIONS WITHIN THE BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION: IS THERE A CONFLICT?

In the last two years, the national conventions of Belarus's largest opposition parties, the United Civic Party (UCP) and the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), concerning the 2006 post-election protests and the formation of the Movement for Freedom, highlighted a possible generational conflict within the opposition movement. Some analysts say that young members of political parties seek stronger positions and greater representation in the governing bodies, while the older, more conservative politicians are reluctant to step aside.

In order to prove that there is a generational conflict within the Belarusian opposition, it is necessary to find out how wide the generation gap is and how many generations are represented within the parties. This survey was conducted to determine the age configuration of the largest and most influential opposition parties: the BPF, the UCP and the Belarusian Communist Party (PKB).

Table 1. Average Age of Leaders.

	BPF	UCP	PKB
Average age of leaders (chairperson, deputy chairpersons, leaders of regional chapters)	40.7	50.3	56.8
Average age of governing body members (Council, Political Council or Central Committee)	44.7	50.4	54

Table 2. Age Groups in Political Party Leadership Positions (%).

	BPF	UCP	PKB
Percentage of members under 35 in leadership positions (chairperson, deputy chairperson, leaders of regional chapters)	38.5	14.3	7.7
Percentage of governing body members under 35	28.3	15.4	11.8
Percentage of members between 35 and 45 in leadership positions	15.4	15.4	0
Percentage of governing body members between 35 and 45	18.9	15.4	7.8
Percentage of members over 45 in leadership positions	46.1	70.3	92.3
Percentage of governing body members over 45	52.8	69.2	80.4

The study reveals that most of the opposition party leaders are quite old. The average age goes up from the right wing of the political spectrum to the left (the Belarusian Social Democratic Party “Hramada” fits into this pattern, with an average age of 53.3 years). The PKB’s older leadership may lend support to the argument that the left ideology is unpopular with young people. It may also be interpreted as a sign of greater democracy in right-center parties.

In all the three parties, the proportion of leaders between the ages of 35 and 45 is very small. The under-representation of a very important age category, made up of the most independent, professional and purpose-oriented people at the peak of their creative ability may indicate a lack of continuity in party traditions. Upon completing a “socialization course” and reaching certain positions, members quit politics to pursue other careers. They do so for various reasons, including: the lack of chances for the opposition to win power and opportunities for self-realization within the party (because of their age and other reasons), a change of life priorities, a fear of persecution, or a lack of effective youth policies in the party. The same problem is observed in all the opposition parties in Belarus.

Thus, in fact there is a generation gap within the Belarusian opposition. The problem is particularly pressing in the PKB, where more than 80 percent of the leadership is over 45.

On the other hand, a generation gap does not always result in a generational conflict. A clash is more likely in a party where the older and younger members are roughly equal in number, but younger members are under-represented in the governing bodies. Differences may emerge if the political agendas advocated by the older and younger members conflict with each other. Such configurations were not found in the three parties reviewed in this study.

The younger generation is more or less proportionally represented in the governing bodies (which does not give us a good idea the role it plays in the decision-

Figure 1. Age Groups in the BPF

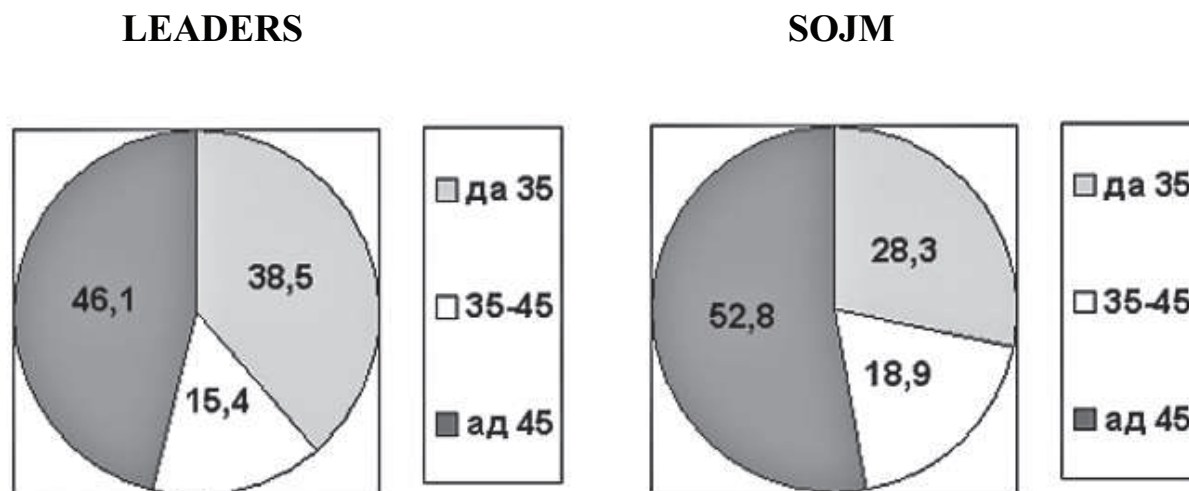


Figure 2. Age Groups in the UCP

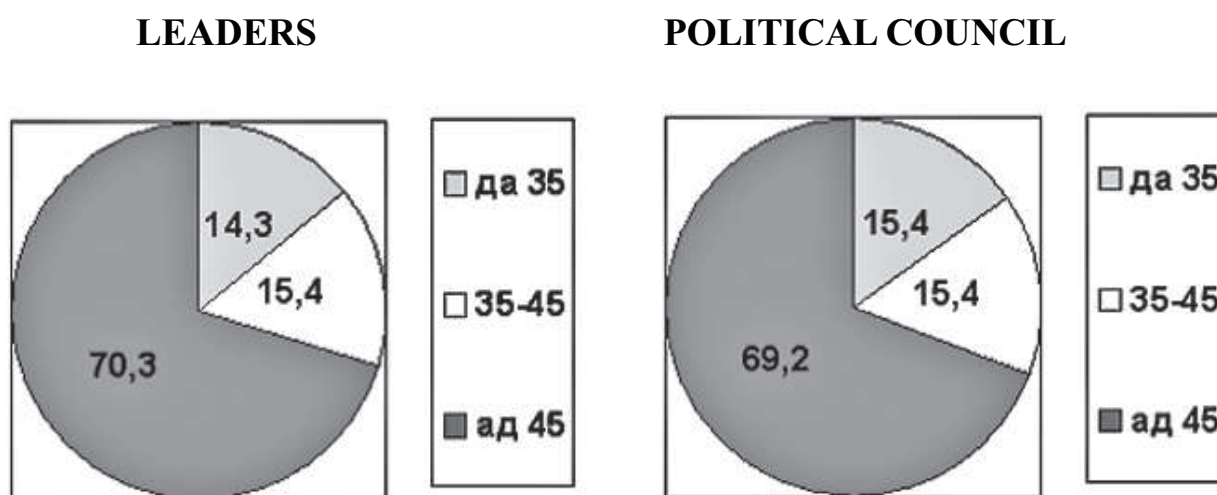
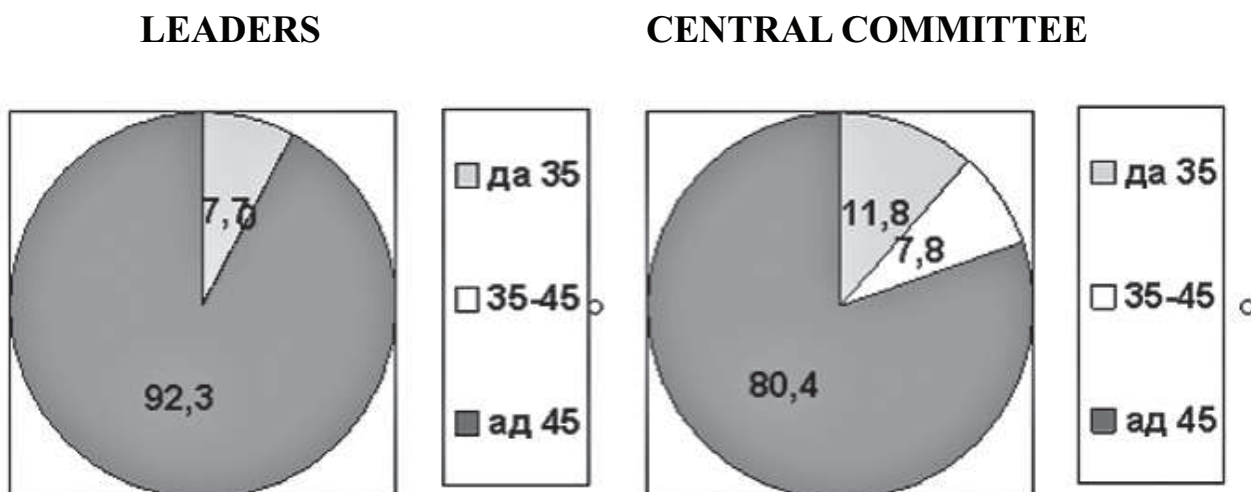


Figure 3. Age Groups in the PKB



making process, but that would be the subject for a broader and deeper study). In addition, there are no fundamental differences between the younger and older generations regarding strategy and views on the country's development. Besides, after socialization within their parties, younger members are unlikely to offer radically differing views on their party's methods and tactics.

The accusations voiced against the party leadership at recent BPF and UCP conventions should not be attributed to a conflict of generations. Instead, they are a result of the infighting among groups and individuals and reveal the general discontent with party leaders who have held their positions for too long. This is evidenced by the fact that the young wing of the BPF backed former Chairman Vincuk Viachorka during the last convention.

A real clash of generations manifested itself during the protests against Alaksandr Lukashenka's controversial reelection in 2006. In response to the use of strong-arm tactics by the authorities, young people formed resistance groups that distanced themselves from the old guard, whom they held responsible for their past failures and their inability to form a strong resistance. The protesters represented a new generation of non-mainstream opposition who challenged the opposition parties' strategies and principles.¹ Since the younger generation was seen as a threat by the mainstream opposition, the opposition movement has failed to take advantage of the outbreak of youth activism. If the old parties had developed a proper strategy to integrate these spontaneous resistance groups, pro-democratic forces could have established a much more powerful organization than the Movement for Freedom formed later.

Thus, the study proves that there is a generation gap within Belarus's mainstream opposition, but it has found no hard evidence of a conflict between generations.

¹ For detail read an article by Mieljancou — Спонтанныя групы ў паслявыбарчы перыяд// Палітычная сфера. № 7. P. 32—41.

Walter Stankevich

A NEW WAVE OF EMIGRANTS: VARIED GOALS AND VALUES

The waves of emigration from Belarus generally occurred after major historical events, accompanied by their economic consequences. These were the two world wars, and more recently, the break-up of the Soviet Union. In this talk I will briefly introduce the earliest wave, while focusing on the comparison between the new emigration and the wave preceding it. In concluding, I will offer some suggestions on how the transition in leadership could have been - or still can be — smoother.

While Belarusian emigrants entered a number of countries of Europe and North America, this paper will focus on those entering the United States of America. They are the ones with whose circumstances I am more familiar.

The Early Emigrants

The first emigrants reached the New World as early as the 17th century. They were, however, mainly individuals, rather than groups or waves of immigrants. Larger numbers started arriving in the second half of the 19th century, peaking at the beginning of the 20th. Since the territory that currently forms the Republic of Belarus was fully absorbed by the Russian Empire in 1795, and remained a part of that multinational empire until World War I, these immigrants were generally listed in the immigration documents as Russians, or as coming from Russia. According to their religious affiliation, they were mainly Eastern Orthodox, labeled as Russian Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. At the turn of the 20th century,

there was a major influx of Jewish immigrants from the Belarusian lands within the Pale of Settlement.

This sizable wave of Belarusian immigrants tended to cluster in the major cities of the Eastern seaboard, as well as in the big cities of the Midwest. They organized themselves around already existing religious institutions as well as social and trade organizations. Many Orthodox churches were founded under the auspices of the Russian Tsarist government and the parishioners were considered as being of the Russian faith. The Belarusian Catholics joined the existing, predominantly Polish, Roman Catholic parishes. The social organizations, known as *ziamlactvas*, formed according to the region of origin, helped the new immigrants to get settled. These organizations gradually ceased to exist as the later generations were assimilated into American society.

Various estimates have been made regarding the size of this first large wave of immigrants from the Belarusian territories. It is generally estimated to be in excess of one million. By background they were predominantly peasants, but some were tradesmen and artisans. Having come from long subjugated territories, and being generally poorly educated, their national consciousness was weakly defined. According to their religious affiliation, as mentioned before, they increased the populations of either the Russian or the Polish ethnic communities. Jewish immigrants from the Belarusian territories gathered around the synagogues and formed their own *ziamlactvas*.

The Post World War II Wave

Unlike the previous immigrants, who came to the United States to escape economic hardship or religious oppression, the post World War II wave consisted of those fleeing from the advancing Red Army, as well as former forced laborers and the survivors of German concentration camps. Having experienced Communist tyranny, they did not want to be repatriated to the Soviet Union. For a number of years after the war, they stayed in the Displaced Persons camps in West Germany and Austria. Their political and national awareness was relatively high, as was their educational level. In the D.P. camps they were organized by nationality, which enabled them to form their own religious, educational and political, anti-communist institutions. Since Belarusian immigrants had this organizationally developed background and were generally made up of younger families with children, they

were encouraged to found their own institutions upon arriving in North America. These institutions included: churches belonging to the Belarusian Orthodox Church, newly established social and cultural institutions, their own press, and part-time educational facilities. Like the first wave, they tended to settle in the East and the Midwest, later spreading to the warmer climates of Florida and California.

Members of the post World War II wave formed a limited number of relatively well functioning organizations with branches in a number of states. A lively press and numerous publications attested to their vitality and to their commitment to the struggle for freedom and democracy in their homeland. The annual commemorations of the 1918 declaration of independence, and of other important dates of Belarusian history and culture became their key civic events. They tried to inform the American public about Belarus by persistently lobbying for their cause and through sponsoring a variety of political and cultural activities. (Compared to the latest wave, they exhibited greater homogeneity in values and goals.) Over the years, they were joined by other post-war Belarusian emigrants who had at first settled in Great Britain, France, Belgium, and South America. However, after nearly two generations, lacking an influx of new immigrants from Belarus, where the people were held captive in the Soviet empire behind the Iron Curtain, their numbers and vitality diminished. Their cemeteries were filling up, while gradual assimilation strongly affected the younger generation.

The Variety within the Latest Wave

In the early 1990s after the break up of the Soviet Union, the next wave of immigrants started to trickle into the United States. Some joined the existing Belarusian-American institutions; others disappeared in wider ex-Soviet communities. Eventually, after the introduction of the immigration lottery in the United States, and the worsening economic situation in Belarus, their numbers grew to form the new wave of emigration.

Europe also became a magnet for those who feared prosecution for their involvement in anti-government political activities, pro-democracy demonstrations or unregistered NGOs. Many applied for political asylum in order to be able to live and work in their adopted countries. Students, who were dismissed from institutions of higher learning for their involvement in political or human rights activities, joined the influx in order to continue their studies abroad. The largest

group was made up of those who were leaving Belarus for economic reasons, either temporarily or permanently.

Over the last decade, economic emigrants have formed a sizable Belarusian diaspora worldwide. They have occasionally found the need to reach out to the earlier immigrants on holidays and other special occasions. Otherwise, they appeared more comfortable in the wider ex-Soviet, Russian-speaking environment, such as the Brighton Beach area in New York, and similar areas elsewhere. This was mainly due to the long process of russification, whereby most of their education was conducted in the Russian language. In addition, the long term exposure to the atheistic Communist ideology left many of them either non-believers, or infrequent church goers. Since many of the diaspora activities took place at church centers, they tended to stay away. As a result, predominantly economic immigrants did not join the existing Belarusian institutions in large numbers. Instead, their lives became essentially family-centered. Some maintain close ties with their relatives and friends in Belarus, while others only return for occasional visits. This large segment of the émigré community remains outside of the scope of the organized diaspora, and thus outside of this paper's focus.

The Joiners and Others

The remaining immigrants and/or refugees fall into two main categories: those who tend to join the existing institutions and those who prefer to form their own. Compared to the economic immigrants, they remain interested in the situation in Belarus and act in support of freedom and democracy in their homeland.

Some have become members of the existing civic, cultural, academic and political organizations, and have joined the various Belarusian congregations. In many instances, their computer and Internet skills have helped to modernize the old 'brick and mortar' institutions and to augment or replace the printed paper press with eye catching, up-to-date Internet versions. A number of them have assumed leadership positions, replacing the older leadership. This transition occasionally causes a change in the character and operational methods of these organizations and institutions. In comparison with the old timers, who tend to forget their past internal conflicts, the newcomers are less able to work cooperatively or harmoniously as a group and to seek compromise solutions for the good of the whole. Some observers believe that this is the result of being raised in the author-

itarian, non-democratic and materially oriented environment of the Marxist society of the Soviet Union. However, there is reason to believe that, guided by more liberal Western values, in the future, the civic minded among them will positively impact Belarusian-American civic and religious organizations.

Others, who are younger and possibly more action oriented, view the existing Belarusian institutions as outdated and not sufficiently dynamic. To quote one young activist: "the existing diaspora tends to focus on organizing parties, dances and other such events. We have a new model for diaspora activity, which includes organizing the needed (human rights or political) campaigns and communicating via Internet, whether we are in Washington, DC, Florida or California. While living in the United States, it is not essential to join the local organizations. We can choose to join those in Brussels or Paris (via Internet), or wherever it is more interesting for us. I can not say that I am an American Belarusian, rather I am a Belarusian of the global diaspora." However, one can question, thinking more traditionally, whether such a dependence on virtual contacts can long survive without some physical connections and interaction.

Following this type of thinking regarding virtual organizations, these groups are setting up many websites, blogs and chat rooms. Some of them go to the trouble of securing adequate financing to continue and expand; others do it on a wave of enthusiasm that, unfortunately, soon fades. Still others, having applied for grants and secured financial support for establishing a web site, fail to maintain it properly. Once this support is exhausted, the site eventually disappears. (While preparing this paper, I scanned some of these sites. I came across one offer to sell the domain name. Another website, while still being located under the original name, is now promoting pornography, instead of democracy.)

Some enterprising new arrivals go beyond establishing web sites. They found, and sometimes register, whole organizations with minimal membership, but with deceptively grand names, such as: *Zviaz Bielaruskich Palityčnych Uciekačou* (the Union of Belarusian Political Refugees), *Bielaruska-Eurapiejaskaje Zadzinočannie* (the Belarusian-European Association), *Bielaruski Moladzievy Ruch Ameryki* (the Belarusian Youth Movement of America), and *Zviaz Bielarusau Zamiežža* (the Union of Belarusians Abroad). Under these names they are able to win grants for specific projects, or collect contributions for their various activities. In a number of instances, they not only compete with other, more established organizations and institutions, but often take credit for practically all the Belarusian activity in a given area in their promotional materials. This is particularly true of their on-line materials.

Finally, some of the new arrivals have a darker agenda. They readily join the existing organizations, volunteering their energy and skills in order to become valuable members of the group. Their apparent dedication to Belarusian democratic causes allows them to win the trust of the aging leadership and to reach leadership positions. When they become leaders, their masks are removed, their support for the dictatorship becomes apparent, and they attempt to take over the organization. One such attempt almost succeeded in the New York community.

One of the outspoken newcomers views the main distinction between the old and the new diaspora in the newcomers' desire to eventually return to Belarus. Interestingly enough, that was exactly the aim of the members of the old diaspora a half a century ago. The longevity of the totalitarian Communist rule prevented that aim from being realized. One wonders, whether the prolonged, present dictatorial rule will repeat the same scenario for the younger emigrants of today.

Conclusion

What could be done to make the leadership transition from the post World War II immigrants to the recent wave smoother, if not seamless? Perhaps the lengthy duration of the Soviet rule in Belarus is the major handicap against achieving a smooth transition. It lasted nearly fifty years after the war, a span of two generations. The leadership of the earlier wave is long gone. Their successors are now senior citizens, which creates a major generational gap between the new and the old. It is difficult to overcome such a generational gap and to achieve a smooth transition. Yet there are some examples of success. Generally, a smooth transition can be accomplished by searching for conscientious leadership among the new arrivals and then mentoring the budding leaders along democratic guidelines, without prematurely giving up the key positions. As in the neighboring Baltic countries, over time such guidance might produce valued professionals and responsible political leaders, who will return to Belarus at the right time, to help educate and guide the society toward true independence, based on democracy, human rights, and the respect for law.

By Ales Mikhalevich

GENERATIONS IN THE BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT

Many internal factors impact the development of political parties. Generations are one of them.

The BPF party's origins go back to the formation of the Belarusian Popular Front for the Perestroika organization committee in 1988.

Since the dissident movement was weak in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, in the late 1980s, there were no established opposition political figures in the country's pro-independence movements. The soviet state-controlled media played a key role in promoting new opposition leaders, including those associated with the BPF. Before Zianon Pazniak took charge of the organizing committee, the Soviet media launched a major assault on non-establishment groups. The most cited were Talaka and Tutejshyja. In the late 1980s, more people knew Talaka leaders Vincuk Viachorka and Siarhiej Vitushka than Zianon Pazniak. The Talaka generation emerged in the public mentality earlier than the Pazniak generation.

Before the formation of the BPF organization committee, two rival currents sought to establish a Popular Front. One represented the intelligentsia — professors, performers, members of non-establishment groups, and artists (the *Na paddashku* group, named after a studio in downtown Minsk, was particularly prominent). The other included the Russian-speaking liberal intelligentsia, who centered around the Sovremennik club.

Young activists voted to name Pazniak, who was 20 years older and had a reputation for his adherence to Belarusian and his efforts in defense of Minsk's historical center, as leader of the BPF organizing committee.

The Tutejshyja and Talaka leaders had no leadership ambitions, although many people knew them by name, thanks to Soviet newspapers. The Talaka generation

leaders — people born in the late 1950s and the early 1960s — backed Pazniak, who was older and advocated similar ideals. In doing so, they lost the opportunity to take control of the new political force.

Participants in the founding convention of the BPF held in Vilnius elected Pazniak, Yury Khadyka and Mikhas Tkachou chairman and deputy chairmen of the BPF “Adradzhennie.” These three were born shortly before or during World War II and hereafter will be referred to as the 1940s generation. Young leaders were given key technical, rather than public positions. Their names no longer appeared in the press, even in a negative light. The Talaka leaders were ignored by newspapers, especially after no representatives of that generation were elected to the Supreme Soviet (although Juras Bielenki and Siarhiej Navumchyk were close to the Talaka generation).

Vasil Jakavienka, the first chairman of the BPF organization committee, recalls instrumental role of the Talaka members in the early rise of the BPF: “No one assembled the whole organization committee in the beginning. Self-motivated people from the Talaka association were the only ones to get it together. They began posting leaflets on buildings on behalf of the Popular Front.”¹

Talaka, whose members created an image of the BPF as a pro-independence anti-Communist movement, played a decisive role in the BPF’s transformation into a nationalist force, rather than simply a pro-democracy movement.

For quite a long time, the media attention was focused on members of the Supreme Soviet, while former Talaka leaders performed technical jobs. For instance, Viktor Ivashkevich and Vincuk Viachorka served as secretaries on the BPF Board, and Ales Bialacki headed a district chapter in Minsk. After the Talaka leaders joined the BPF, the group actually dissolved itself, disrupting the inflow of young people into the BPF.

The former Talaka leaders found themselves in a new situation, acting as party functionaries, while hundreds of young activists were left out. After yesterday’s leaders turned into non-public functionaries, the BPF recruited new activists only among Pazniak supporters.

In 1995, Ivashkevich stepped down as BFP executive secretary in protest against Pazniak’s policies. Other members of the Talaka generation kept working for the BPF. Viachorka, for instance, was elected deputy chairman in 1997.

Pazniak’s departure made it easier for former Talaka members to take up the reigns in the BPF. They advocated cooperation with other pro-democracy groups

¹ Васіль Якавенка. Крушэнне на ростанях. С. 256.

as an opportunity to change the conditions in the country. Interestingly, members of the same generation in various opposition parties eventually agreed to work together.

On 31 August 1999, Zmicier Bandarenka, Ales Bialacki, Vincuk Viachorka, Paval Danejka, Viktor Ivashkevich, Anatol Labiedzka and Mikalaj Statkevich announced their intention to work together closely and to stage the first Freedom March, among other things. Journalists labeled them “a new wave of politicians” in contrast to older leaders, such as Pazniak and Stanislau Bahdankevich.

Among the BPF leaders, the deal was endorsed by Viachorka, Ivashkevich and Bialacki, who were elected as chairman and deputy chairmen of the BPF a few months later. Two other signatories, Labiedzka and Danejka, ended up leading the United Civic Party (UCP). Statkevich negotiated the agreement as the head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party “Narodnaja Hramada.” The 2001 presidential election proved, however, that older politicians such as Vasil Lavonau and Siamion Domash still guided the opposition. As the new wave failed to provide a common challenger to Lukashenka, older politicians were selected for the role in 2001 and 2006.

At the 1999 BPF convention, Viachorka, the former Talaka leader, ran against Pazniak for chairman. His allies included former Talaka members Ivashkevich, Bialacki and Viachaslau Siuchy, as well as Khadyka of the 1940s generation. Pazniak teamed up with Juras Bielenki, a former Talaka member and a former member of the Supreme Soviet.

The Talaka generation took the upper hand at the 1999 convention, having gained support from various generations. Since most Malady Front members sided with the opposition to Pazniak, the youth group’s leader Paval Sieviaryniec was elected as deputy chairman. Unlike Pazniak, who, for the second time, tried to prevent younger members from entering public politics, Viachorka did not deny young people that opportunity.

Still, former Talaka members viewed their younger colleagues from the Malady Front generation as rivals, offering most of them technical jobs (Pazniak treated the Talaka generation in the same way). It should be noted that the BPF leaders were taken aback by Ales Janukevich’s decision to stand for deputy chairman in 2001. It was not until 2003 that Viachorka dropped his opposition to Janukevich, but most delegates cast their votes for another Malady Front generation representative, Ales Mikhalevich. The two aspiring leaders stepped out from behind the shadow of the charismatic Sieviaryniec, proving that they, too, had support among young people.

The Malady Front generation gained considerable political experience before 2007. Juras Hubarevich, former deputy chairman of the group, and his team won a majority of seats in the Bielaaziorsk City Soviet (elected council) in the 2003 local elections. Siarhiej Antusievich was elected to the City Soviet in Hrodna and advanced to a leading position in a local independent trade union. Siarhei Salash rose to prominence in Barysau. Dozens of Malady Front members formed successful NGOs and held key posts in Alaksandr Milinkevich's 2006 presidential campaign.

The 2007 BPF conference exposed rifts between the Talaka and Malady Front generations. Some Malady Front members held leadership positions, while Janukevich unexpectedly announced his bid for chairmanship in an effort to step out of the Talaka shadow and become an influential player.

The Malady Front generation is not only represented in the BPF. Its members lead the unregistered Belarusian Christian Democratic movement and Aleh Novikau's Green Party.

The Talaka generation failed to take power in the Belarus. The new-wave politicians rose to leadership positions in their parties, but failed to substantially change the conditions in the country. They still pull the political strings in the opposition camp, but face a challenge from the Malady Front. Some compete with younger politicians inside the BPF, while others struggle with rivals outside their party. For instance, UCP leader Anatol Labiedzka was due to face off against Ales Lahviniec, a young and aggressive politician, in the 2008 parliamentary election.

By Andrej Kazakievic

THE AGES AND CAREERS OF TOP JUDGES IN BELARUS

The purpose of this article is to determine the link between age and the nomination of Belarusian judges, based on the biographies available to the public.

The basic method used for writing this article is statistical analysis of the biographies of Belarus's top judges. The results presented hereafter are part of a broader study of Belarus's judiciary, performed by the author between 2003 and 2008.

The research techniques and strategy for studying the judiciary as a branch of power were developed using established political science research methods. The research is based on similar studies regarding the political role and the social structure of judicial institutions (Abel-Smith, Stevens 1967, 1969),¹ (Neubauer, 1991),² (Hall, 1999: 97-138),³ (Tarr, 2003),⁴ (Songer & Sheehan, 1993),⁵ (Baum, 2001),⁶ and the political aspects of judicial appointments: (Segal, 1987: 998-1015),⁷ (Cam-

¹ Abel-Smith, E., and R. Stevens. *Lawyers and the Courts: A Sociological Study of the English Legal System, 1750-1965*. Heinemann, (1967) Abel-Smith, E., and R. Stevens. *In Search of Justice: Society and the Legal System*. Heinemann (1968).

² Neubauer, David W. (1991) *Judicial Process: Law, Courts and Politics in the United States*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole

³ Hall, M. G. (1999). "State judicial politics: Rules, structures, and the political game." In P. Brace & R. Weber (Eds.), *American state and local politics: Directions for the 21st century* (pp. 97-138). New York: Chatham House

⁴ Tarr, G. Alan (2003) *Judicial Process and Judicial Policymaking*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

⁵ Songer, D. R., & Sheehan, R. S. (1993). "Interest group success in the courts: Amicus participation in the Supreme Court." *Political Research Quarterly*, 46, 339-354.

⁶ Baum, L. (2001). *American courts: Process and policy* (5th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

⁷ Segal, J. (1987). "Senate confirmation of Supreme Court justices: Partisan and institutional politics." *The Journal of Politics*, 49(4), 998-1015

eron, Cover & Segal, 1990: 525-534),⁸ (Abraham, 1999),⁹ (Bratton and Spill, 2004).¹⁰ While conducting this research, we did not strictly follow the above-mentioned research and theoretical methods, but used the texts as grounds for selecting a research strategy.

Composition of Belarus's Judicial Elite

The study of the composition of Belarus's judicial elite was complicated by certain problems, most notably by the poor access to biographical data. This is characteristic of the country's non-transparent political and judicial system. As a result, we had limited opportunities for collecting information about judges. While gathering data, we relied on open sources, which formed the empirical base of our research. Since it was difficult to arrange interviews with judges in Belarus, after several failures, we gave up on our attempts to obtain data in this way.

Due to the inadequate access to information, we could only analyze a representative sample based on a limited number of biographical facts concerning age and nomination.

Judges' biographies were found on the official websites of the local courts, the Supreme Economic Court, the Supreme Court, and the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus, as well as in specialized legal publications such as *Sudovy vesnik* (published by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus), *Vestnik vysshego khozyaistvennogo suda Respubliki Belarus*, and *Yustitsiya Belarusi* (published by the Ministry of Justice). Biographical data were found in interviews, acknowledgements, congratulations and other articles in these publications. The Doska Pocheta [the Board of Honor] section in *Yustitsiya Belarusi* was an especially good source of information about judges of various ranks. Some data were found in national newspapers such as *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, *Narodnaja Gazeta*, and *Zviazda*.

⁸ Cameron, C. M., Cover, A. D., & Segal, J. A. (1990). "Senate voting on Supreme Court nominees: A neo-institutional model." *American Political Science Review*, 84, 525-534.

⁹ Abraham, H. J. (1999). *Justices, presidents, and senators: A history of the U.S. Supreme Court appointments from Washington to Clinton* (4th ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

¹⁰ Kathleen A. Bratton and Rorie L. "Spill Moving Up the Judicial Ladder: The Nomination of State Supreme Court Justices to the Federal Courts." *American Politics Research* Vol. 32 No. 2, March 2004 198-218.

In all, the research regarding the composition and structure of the judicial elite is based on information about 80 judges. This sample size is sufficient for drawing preliminary conclusions.

Biographical Facts Used for Analysis of Judicial Elite

We will use the following biographical facts for this study: the current age and the age in which judges were appointed to top posts, years spent moving up the judicial ladder, and earlier career-related jobs.

The current age and the age in which judges were appointed to top posts is determined for the heads of regional and national courts and for Constitutional Court judges in order to get a general idea of the generations in the judicial elite and the age at which judges are usually appointed to top positions.

Years spent moving up the judicial ladder is the time that it takes a judge to move up to the top position, calculated using the formula: $N - M = V$, where N is the age of promotion to the top position and M is the age of appointment as a judge. V is the time that it takes a judge to move to the top position. This factor helps to assess vertical mobility and to identify the role of personal connections.

Earlier career-related jobs are jobs held by a person before his or her appointment as a judge. These jobs are an important factor for describing the professional subculture and for assessing the level of possible professional solidarity. The top judges come from the following five areas of professional activity: lawyers, notaries public, employees in the judiciary, prosecutors' offices, or the military. The latter is characteristic of military court judges only. Most constitutional judges have an academic and scholarly background.

District (City) Courts

30 biographies of the chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of district and city courts were analyzed for this research. The group includes representatives of all local administrative divisions.

40 percent of district court chairpersons and deputy chairpersons made brilliant careers for themselves, securing the top jobs within two to four years. This means that would-be chairpersons come from other areas and have the necessary

qualifications. In addition, they have possibly made some deals concerning their future promotions. About 20 percent spent six or seven years moving up the ladder. 23 percent achieved the top position within 10 to 13 years and 10 percent within 15 to 19 years.

District and city judges began their careers in the judiciary (23 percent), as legal advisers for enterprises and organizations (23 percent), in prosecutors' offices (20 percent), as notaries public or defense lawyers (17 percent), as judges in military courts (10 percent) and in other spheres (3 percent).

Regional Courts

The biographies of 20 judges were analyzed. It took half of the persons in question four to six years of service in the judiciary to be promoted to the position of regional judge. One in five judges served for 9 or 10 years before receiving this nomination and another 20 percent spent 12 to 19 years.

The career trajectories of regional judges and the chairpersons (deputy chairpersons) of district (city) courts differ considerably. 40 percent of regional judges started their career in the judiciary, while 40 percent made a career in one of two different areas (courts and military service or courts and prosecutors' offices). 15 percent started out as prosecutors and five percent worked as legal advisors. More judges serving in regional courts began their careers in the judiciary and fewer served as legal advisers. A high percentage had mixed careers. Apart from that, taking into account their mixed careers, 40-45 percent of them had judicial backgrounds, while 20-25 percent had experience with prosecutors' offices.

Supreme Court

The biographies of six judges were analyzed: the chairman, the first deputy chairman and the four deputy chairpersons. These people represent the top segment of the judicial hierarchy. Apart from their professional functions, their jobs have a political aspect.

The average age of the top Supreme Court judges is 54, whereas the average nomination age is 48. Belarus's top judges are younger than their western counterparts. In addition, nearly all top Supreme Court judges were appointed at the most

professionally and politically active age for Belarus (between 40 and 50 years). All the top judges were nominated between the ages of 46 and 49. Moreover, Jauhien Kalinkou, the chairman of the panel for criminal cases, was appointed as the deputy chairman of the Supreme Court when he was 38 years old.

As for professional experience, all these judges, except for members of the military panel, began their career as judges in the judicial system of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). Some of them served as chairpersons for the district and regional courts. Military panel judges served on military courts from the beginning of their careers. Valancin Sukala, the chairman of the Supreme Court, is the only one with political experience beyond the judiciary, having served as a minister and held other posts. It took most judges quite a long time to make it to the top. It took three of the top judges between 21 and 22 years to climb to the top and it took two others between 17 and 18 years. Kalinkou was the only one to advance up the career ladder more quickly. He served as a district judge from 1993 to 1995, was nominated to serve on the Minsk City Court, and was promoted to the Supreme Court four years later (1999). Kalinkou was appointed as a deputy chairman of the Supreme Court in 2005. Thus, it took him just 12 years to make it to the top of the judicial ladder.

Economic Courts

Biographies of 17 judges were analyzed for this article, including the chairman and deputy chairpersons of the Supreme Economic Court, all regional courts, and the Minsk City Economic Court.

The average age of the top economic court judges is 48. The average nomination age is 41. Seven judges (41 percent) were promoted to the top positions at between 35 and 39 years of age, which is quite young. Those appointed when they were between 40 and 44 years of age make up 24 percent of the group, and those nominated between the ages of 45 and 49 account for 18 percent of the group. Only two top judges were appointed when they were over 50 years old. Siarhiej Kalodka was named deputy chairman of the Hrodna Regional Economic Court at 34 years of age.

It took 24 percent of the judges less than a year of service in the court to be promoted to a top post. 24 percent served for four to five years and 18 percent for six to seven years before they were promoted. Only 29 percent had more expe-

rience in the economic courts (between 11 and 14 years). One person served for 18 years as a judge before he was promoted to a leadership position.

For some reason, most of the top economic court judges began their careers as prosecutors (35 percent) followed by legal consultants (18 percent), police officers (12 percent), judges (12 percent) and defense lawyers (12 percent). The rest had mixed experiences. It should be noted that former prosecutors and police officers account for more than half of the top economic court judges.

A general analysis of the careers of top economic court judges exposes chaotic and less balanced nomination policies. The selection criteria are less rigorous in terms of professional requirements. The administrative elite of the economic courts differs from the courts of general jurisdiction in almost all aspects.

Constitutional Court

This analysis is based on 13 biographies of judges in the Constitutional Court between 1997 and early 2008.

The average nomination age is 55. The average age of constitutional judges is far higher than that of other top judges. There is a clear age gap between the two groups of constitutional judges. Seven were between 35 and 45 years old when they were appointed to the Constitutional Court between 1994 and 1997. The other nominees were more experienced judges, who were between 61 and 66 years of age when they were appointed. They are responsible for the higher average age among constitutional judges. After 1997, two judges were nominated at the ages of 51 and 52.

Most of these judges have an academic background. 38 percent of Constitutional Court judges had only academic experience before their appointments. 23 percent had both academic and political experience, having served on the Supreme Soviet, the Presidential Administration, and the Council of Ministers. One judge began her career serving in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, one served as a prosecutor, and another worked as a legal adviser. Thus, as in many other countries, the academic sector is the major source of nominations for the Constitutional Court in Belarus. Of these 13 constitutional judges, seven held a scholarly degree in law, including three Ph. D. holders (23 percent).

Some Conclusions

The top economic court judges have the youngest average nomination age: 41 for the regional economic courts and 44 for the Supreme Economic Court.

48 is the average age of nomination for chairs or deputy chairs of the Supreme Court.

Constitutional judges are appointed at 55 years of age on the average, although there was an age gap between the younger judges and the older judges nominated between 1997 and 2008. In general, the numbers suggest that, upon turning 40 (or sometimes even at a younger age), judges can hope to attain top judiciary positions.

There is a difference in the time that it takes various groups of the judiciary's administrative elite to move up the career ladder. The most "open" are the leading positions in economic courts. It takes many judges less than a year of service in the court to be promoted to a top post. Positions in the administrative elite of district courts of general jurisdiction are also quite open (up to 40 percent of the chairpersons and deputy chairpersons were nominated to their positions after two to four years of service as a judge). Nearly half of the top regional court judges served in the judiciary for four to six years before promotion. It takes between 17 and 22 years to move up to the top of the Supreme Court ladder.

Various groups of the judicial elite have different professional backgrounds. Nearly equal numbers of district and city court judges began their careers in the judiciary, with prosecutors' offices or as legal advisers. A higher percentage (40 to 50 percent) of regional judges began their careers by serving in courts. 20 to 25 percent had early career experience in prosecutors' offices. Fewer regional judges served as legal advisers. All Supreme Court judges began their careers by service in the judiciary.

The administrative elite of the economic courts have an absolutely different career pattern. Most of the top economic court judges began their careers as prosecutors (35 percent), followed by legal advisers (18 percent). Only 12 percent began their careers as judges. The economic courts are characterized by greater career mobility and weaker professional links.

Constitutional judges also showed a peculiar career pattern. Most of them (more than 60 percent) came from an academic background. Only two of the judges began their careers by serving in courts.

**CONFLICTING PERCEPTIONS
OF CHANGES IN
AND AROUND BELARUS AFTER 2006**

Lucan Way

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CONTEMPORARY AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

In order to understand why some contemporary authoritarian regimes have fallen at the hands of oppositional protests while others have remained intact, it is useful to consider the story of the three little pigs. Setting normative preferences aside, imagine that the pigs are autocratic incumbents, their houses are their regimes, and the wolf represents pro-democratic movements. The wolf huffs and puffs at all three houses, but the impact of his huffing and puffing varies across cases: whereas houses of straw and sticks quickly collapse, the brick house remains intact. The key to explaining these outcomes lies not in the wolf's abilities or strategies, but in the differences in the strength of the houses.

Much of the recent literature on the change of regimes has focused on democratic huffing and puffing, while paying insufficient attention to variations in the strengths of the authoritarian houses. In some countries, bankrupt states, weak, underpaid, and disorganized security services, and fragmented elites left regimes vulnerable to collapse in the face of minimal protest. Thus it was 'the weakness of African states rather than the strength of democratic opposition' that drove the many regime transitions in that region. Many African democratic movements confronted states that were rotting from within. With a mere push, many would collapse. One finds a similar dynamic in parts of the former Soviet Union. For example, in Georgia, where the police had not been paid in three months, Eduard Shevardnadze abandoned the presidency in the face of 'undersized' crowds, largely because he 'no longer controlled the military and security forces' and was thus 'too politically weak' to order repression. In Kyrgyzstan, it took only 5,000-10,000 protesters to overthrow President Askar Akayev. Finally, in Haiti,

the Aristide government was ‘toppled by a rag-tag army of as few as 200 rebels.’ The rebels ‘did not fight a single battle. The police simply changed out of their uniforms, grabbed bottles of rum, and headed for the hills.’

In other cases, the story played out differently. Where state and/or governing party institutions were strong, autocrats often thwarted serious challenges from the opposition. For example, in Armenia, following the rigged presidential election in 1996, the government faced down crowds of up to 200,000 protesters, backed by army veterans who had recently returned from a successful war with Azerbaijan. In Zimbabwe, the opposition’s plans for ‘mass action’ to protest the flawed 2000 elections were ‘deferred indefinitely’ in the face of brutal police repression. Two years later, opposition leaders were ‘unwilling to consider’ mass protest ‘given the vast repressive machinery that would confront them.’ In Malaysia, although the 1998 arrest of Anwar Ibrahim gave rise to an unprecedented Reformasi movement, regime opponents confronted a highly effective and repressive police force. Protest was met forcefully by riot police and ultimately ‘posed no threat to the government’s stability.’ Finally, in Serbia, the opposition to Milošević was highly mobilized throughout the 1990s, but autocratic breakdown occurred only after four military defeats and a severe economic crisis had eroded the power of the state and the governing party. Opposition movements in Armenia, Zimbabwe, and Malaysia were arguably stronger than those in Haiti, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. The fact that regime change occurred in the latter cases (or in Serbia, only after the state was battered by successive military defeats) suggests that the fate of authoritarian regimes rests not only on oppositional forces, but also on the robustness of the regime that they are up against.

Weak and Strong Authoritarian Houses

For this reason, a central question in the study of contemporary authoritarianism is how strong the authoritarian house is in a particular country. Of course, it is quite easy to identify a ‘weak’ house after a regime has fallen, but the really important question is whether we can identify such a house prior to regime change. I argue that we can.

To understand the relative vulnerability of autocrats in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere, we need to examine the state and party capacity that help autocrats to preserve the loyalty of allies and to defuse, co-opt, or crush protest. The capac-

ity for authoritarian rule can be identified a priori by the presence of (1) a single, highly institutionalized ruling party; (2) an extensive and well-funded coercive apparatus that has won a major violent conflict; and/or (3) state discretionary control over the economy. Regimes that are strong in one or more of these key dimensions are far more secure than those that lack capacity in any of these areas.

Political Parties and Autocratic Strength

First, Barbara Geddes and others have argued that well-established ruling parties are paramount in preventing regime allies from defecting to the opposition when times get tough. We argue that party strength may also be measured in terms of scope and cohesion. Scope refers to the size of a party's infrastructure, or the degree to which it penetrates the national territory and society. Where scope is high, as in Taiwan, Malaysia, Nicaragua, and Tanzania, parties possess extensive organizations, 'frequently with mass memberships and large activist bases,' that have an active presence throughout the national territory. Party branches operate in virtually every population center, including those in the countryside, and they remain active in between elections. For example, UMNO's 16,500 branch organizations allowed it to penetrate every village in the country and assign a party agent to monitor every 10 households. Similarly, the CCM's extensive apparatus and two million members enabled it to operate a ten-house cell structure in villages throughout the country. Where scope is low, as in Benin, Peru, Ukraine, and Russia under Yeltsin, parties lack any real organization, membership, or activist base. Party operations are confined to major urban centers, the president's home region, and in some cases, the presidential palace.

Cohesion refers to the incumbent's ability to secure the cooperation of partisan allies within the government, in the legislature, and at the local or regional level. Cohesion is crucial to preventing elite defection, particularly during periods of crisis, when the incumbent's grip on power is threatened. Where cohesion is high, as in Malaysia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Serbia, and Zimbabwe, allied ministers, legislators, and governors routinely support the government, implement presidential directives, and vote along the party line. Where cohesion is low, as in Benin, Georgia, Ukraine, Zambia, and Russia under Yeltsin, parties are little more than loose coalitions of relatively autonomous actors, many of whom derive their power and status from outside the party. Incumbents routinely confront insubor-

dination, rebellion, or defection from within the cabinet, in the legislative bloc, and among regional bosses. Consequently, regimes are vulnerable to internal crisis triggered by splits within the governing coalition, which give rise to oppositional takeovers of the legislature or strong electoral challengers from erstwhile regime insiders. Indeed, in several cases, crises emerged even in the absence of a significant external challenge.

Sources of cohesion vary. Patronage is a relatively weak source of cohesion. Although patronage may help to hold elites together during normal times, parties that are based exclusively on ties of patronage become vulnerable during periods of crisis. When economic crisis threatens the incumbent's capacity to distribute patronage, or when incumbents appear vulnerable to defeat, patronage-based parties often suffer large-scale defection. Cohesion tends to be greater in what might be called consolidated political machines, or highly institutionalized patronage-based parties with an established track record of surviving crises and winning multiparty elections. High levels of cohesion may also be rooted in shared ethnicity (e.g., Guyana) or ideology (e.g., Nicaragua, Moldova). Perhaps the most robust source of cohesion, however, is bonds of solidarity forged out of periods of violent struggle. Parties that emerge out of successful revolutionary or liberation movements (e.g., Mozambique, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe) tend to be highly cohesive, at least while the founding generation survives.

Efforts to measure cohesion must be careful to avoid tautology. We do not use levels of internal discipline during the period of study as evidence of cohesion. Instead, it is important to look at evidence of non-material bases of cohesion. Newly-formed parties whose internal glue is clearly nothing more than short-term political or patronage deals (e.g., new governing parties in Benin and Ukraine during the 1990s) are scored as having a low level of cohesion. Charismatic parties (e.g., Peru) and established patronage-based parties without proven track records in winning multiparty elections (e.g., Kenya, Zambia) are scored as having a medium level of cohesion. Parties that exhibit strong ideological (Moldova) or ethnic (Guyana) ties, parties that emerged out of revolutionary or liberation movements (Mozambique, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe), and consolidated machines with proven track records in winning multiparty elections (Malaysia, Mexico, Taiwan) are scored as having a high level of cohesion.

Generally, in the former Soviet Union, the widespread banning of the Communist Party after the failed August 1991 hard-liners' coup, coupled with the absence of revolutionary struggle, deprived most autocrats of any cohesive organizational base. In cases such as Kyrgyzstan under Akayev, Ukraine under Kuch-

ma, or Moldova in the 1990s, leaders either had no party organization or relied on a loose coalition of competing parties. The only thing holding these alliances together was short-term patronage. As a result, opposition groups were formed almost wholesale from the old regime.

Coercive State Strength

Next, the key to authoritarian stability is the autocrat's command over an extensive, cohesive, well-funded, and experienced coercive apparatus that can reliably harass the opposition and put down protest. Again, coercive capacity may be measured along two dimensions: scope and cohesion. Scope refers to the effective reach of the state's coercive apparatus. Specifically, we focus on the size and quality of the 'internal security sector,' or the 'cluster of organizations with direct responsibility for internal security and domestic order.' This includes army and police forces, presidential guards, gendarmes and riot police, secret police and other specialized internal security units, and the domestic intelligence apparatus, but it may also include informal or paramilitary organizations such as death squads, militias, and armed 'youth wings.' It may also include a variety of other state agents, 'local prefects, tax officials, [and] state enterprise directors,' who are mobilized to harass the opposition. Where scope is high, as in Belarus, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Russia, Taiwan, and Zimbabwe, states possess a developed and effective internal security sector, usually equipped with extensive intelligence networks and specialized police and paramilitary units, that can 'act on' society throughout the national territory. Security forces are thus well-funded, well-trained, and well-equipped. They have a proven capacity to monitor oppositional activities and to put down protests in all parts of the country.

Where scope is low, as in Albania, Georgia, Haiti, and Macedonia, armed forces are small, poorly-equipped, and often lacking in specialized internal security agencies. Security forces do not effectively penetrate the national territory. Law enforcement agents are non-existent, or maintain only a token presence, in much of the country, or alternatively are underpaid to the extent that they largely ineffective and refuse to obey orders. Such cases are frequently characterized by what Guillermo O'Donnell calls 'brown areas,' or territories that lack even a minimal state presence. In Georgia, for example, police often went unpaid for months and large parts of the country were outside of central state control.

Scope is particularly important for low intensity coercion. Systematic surveillance, harassment, and intimidation of opponents require an infrastructure capable of directing, coordinating, and supplying agents across the national territory. Where such an infrastructure is absent or ineffective, the incumbent's ability to monitor and check grassroots oppositional activities will be limited. This (often *de facto*) space for mobilization makes it easier for opposition groups to organize electoral campaigns or protest movements.

Cohesion refers to the level of compliance within the state apparatus. For coercion to be effective, subordinates within the state must reliably follow their superiors' commands. Where cohesion is high, incumbents can be confident that even highly controversial or illegal orders (such as firing on crowds of protesters, killing opposition leaders, or falsifying elections) will be carried out, both by high-level security officials and by rank-and-file soldiers and bureaucrats. Where cohesion is low, leaders cannot be confident that such orders will be complied with, either by high level security officials or by the rank-and-file.

Cohesion is often critical to the success of high intensity coercion. Acts of high intensity coercion 'such as firing on large crowds or stealing elections that would otherwise have been won by opposition' are high risk ventures. Because they are likely to trigger strong negative reactions both at home and abroad, such acts often exacerbate regime crises and may even contribute to the regime's collapse. State officials responsible for ordering or carrying out the repression thus run considerable risks, for if it fails and the regime collapses, they will be vulnerable to retribution. Hence, acts of high intensity coercion pose a particular threat to the chain of command, increasing the likelihood of internal disobedience. Breakdown in the coercive command structures undermined incumbents' capacity to engage in high intensity coercion in Benin in 1990, Georgia in 1991 and 2003, Russia in 1993, Ukraine in 1994 and 2004, and Madagascar in 2001-02. Only where the state apparatus is cohesive (e.g., Armenia, Malaysia, Zimbabwe) can incumbents confidently order acts of large-scale repression or abuse.

State cohesion is rooted in several factors. One is fiscal health. Unpaid state officials are less likely to follow orders, especially high-risk orders such as repression or vote-stealing. Thus, in much of Africa and the former Soviet Union, deep fiscal crises eroded discipline within states during the immediate post-Cold War period. In extreme cases, such as Benin, Malawi, Georgia, and Serbia in 1999-2000, the non-compliance of unpaid security forces left incumbents without means to crack down on protests by the opposition. However, material resources are neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure cohesion. In Armenia, Mozambique, Nica-

ragua, and Zimbabwe, state apparatuses remained intact despite severe fiscal constraints. Indeed, incumbents who rely exclusively on material payoffs are often most vulnerable to insubordination during crises.

The highest levels of cohesion are usually found where material payments are complemented by alternative sources of cohesion, including personal ties, shared ethnicity, and/or ideology. The most robust source of cohesion may be rooted in ties of solidarity that are forged during periods of violent struggle, such as war, revolution, or liberation movements. Where top state positions are controlled by a generation of elites that won a war (Armenia) or led a successful insurgency (Mozambique, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe), state actors are more likely to possess the cohesion, self-confidence and ‘stomach’ to use force.

In the former Soviet Union, the clearest example of a strong coercive state is Armenia, which successfully captured 20 percent of neighboring Azerbaijan in 1994 in a war over the Nagorno-Karabagh region. That war has directly facilitated authoritarian stability by providing leaders with a force that has the experience, the stomach, and the cohesion to put down one of the most mobilized oppositions in the post communist world. Thus, in 1996, after a rigged presidential election triggered demonstrations by more than a hundred thousand protesters, the military, the police, and the Yerkrapah Union of Karabagh War Veterans effectively sealed off the capital, shut down the offices of anti-regime parties, and arrested 250 opposition leaders, thereby successfully suppressing the resistance. Since then, forces partly consisting of war veterans have put down major protests of up to 35,000 demonstrators following fraudulent elections in 2003 and 2004, and most recently in March 2008, when security forces killed seven civilians and imposed martial law in the capital. Another important example is Zimbabwe. Despite a severe economic crisis and nearly total international isolation, Mugabe has so far been able to hold his regime together and to mostly prevent elite defection because bonds within the ruling state and party were forged during the civil war against Rhodesia. Thus, conflicts today have been successfully framed in terms of the battle for independence fought in the late 1970s.

By contrast, regimes with little coercive capacity ‘owing to small or underequipped security forces, substantial wage arrears, or loss in a major war’ have had far more difficulty coping with even modest protests. The coercive state was weak in Georgia, which lost territories to secessionist forces before descending into civil war in the early 1990s. Throughout the 1990s and the first few years of the 21st century, the Georgian state faced constant regional rebellion and owed massive amounts in back pay. This made the regime distinctly unprepared to stem the sporadic protests

that broke out in 2003, following fraudulent parliamentary elections. Thus, as tens of thousands demonstrated on November 22, Saakashvili and his allies faced almost no resistance from police when they stormed parliament. The opposition leader, rose in hand, forced President Shevardnadze to flee, before resigning on the next day. As the minister of the interior later admitted, the police ‘had not been paid at that point for three months. So why should they have obeyed Shevardnadze?’

Control over the Economy

Finally, the strength of the authoritarian house is shaped by the extent to which state leaders have discretionary control over the wealth in society, either through direct state control over the economy or through reliance on energy revenues that are relatively easy for even weak autocrats to capture. A leader with complete or near-complete control over wealth can bribe or withhold resources from opponents, in extreme cases even denying any stable livelihood to activists of the opposition. Post communist autocrats in Belarus, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have maintained state economic control by refraining from large-scale privatization. The absence of economic liberalization in these cases has made it easier for autocrats to prevent opposition movements from receiving private funding. In Belarus, for example, where the state controls about 80 percent of the economy and has much of the populace on short-term work contracts, the opposition has had virtually no access to domestic financing. Most of the activists whom I met during my research were jobless, or made money through small trade. In other words, when the government controls the economy, only those prepared to make extraordinary personal sacrifices can take part in the activities of the opposition. At the same time, Russia’s generous gas subsidies to Belarus have helped to prevent the kind of severe economic crisis witnessed in other post-Soviet countries.

However, in countries where there had been extensive privatization ‘Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, for example,’ the opposition was able either to draw on support from domestic business or to benefit from the business community’s neutrality. Most notably, in Ukraine, the business oligarchs provided major financial backing to Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine movement beginning with the 2002 parliamentary elections.

Apart from avoiding privatization, leaders have also been able to keep control over wealth when a large share of the national income comes from mineral rents,

such as oil or gas. Even weak autocrats have easily captured and monopolized large rents from energy exports. Securing control over a more diverse industrial economy has generally been more difficult and economically costly. In this sense, reliance on resource rents and non-privatization promote authoritarianism in the same way by making it easier for incumbents to use a greater part of a country's wealth to prop up their regime while starving opponents of necessary resources. Thus, in Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and to a lesser degree Uzbekistan, autocrats have been able to use *de facto* or *de jure* control over gas and oil rents to pay friends, starve foes, and fund large, well-paid, and well-trained coercive agencies to intimidate anti-regime forces. Partly as a result, the opposition in each of these countries has remained extraordinarily weak and marginalized.

Dimensions of Autocratic Strength and Weakness:

The model laid out here not only allows us to recognize which regimes are weak or strong, but also enables us to identify the types of strength or weakness. On the one hand, we have regimes, such as those in Zimbabwe or Armenia, which were born in violent conflict. In these cases, state coercive apparatuses have the skills, 'stomach' and cohesion to withstand severe economic crises and/or large scale mass mobilization. On the other hand, regimes such as that in Belarus are rooted to a much greater degree in a high scope, 'large coercive apparatus and discretionary control over large portions of the economy. Such regimes survive primarily by preemption,' or starving and suppressing the opposition before it can become strong. However, according to this theory, the Lukashenka regime is unlikely to survive a severe economic crisis and/or large scale mobilization. The regime lacks a ruling party as well as the kind of ideology or common experience with large-scale violent struggle that could facilitate the suppression of mass unrest or dissuade allies from turning on Lukashenka in the event of a crisis. The relatively weak cohesion within the security apparatus was demonstrated when, in the fall of 2004 following fraudulent parliamentary elections, Leonid Ieryn, the head of the KGB, met with protestors in an apparent show of sympathy. Although Ieryn was subsequently dismissed, this could be a sign of broader disloyalty within the security forces that may haunt Lukashenka in the future. Moreover, Russia's reduction of gas subsidies to Belarus in 2007 further increases the likelihood of a crisis in Belarus.

Alaksandr Chubryk

WHAT REFORMS DO BELARUSIANS EXPECT?

1. Introduction

For quite a while, various researchers have viewed the Belarusian economy as a mystery or even a miracle. Economists have been puzzled by the country's robust economic growth despite its lack of market-oriented reform. Nevertheless, Belarus failed to prove to the rest of the world that the economic model chosen by the authorities could sustain economic growth. In 2007, the first steep rise in the price of gas that Russia supplies to Belarus prompted the government to put market-oriented reform on the agenda (Chubryk (2007)).

Aside from economic factors, the people's views on the economy may also influence decision makers. On the one hand, pro-market proposals may meet with strong opposition because economic incentives have been distorted for many years and entities have become used to operating under government protection. On the other hand, many people may be encouraged to embrace reform by a simple comparison of the living standards in Belarus with those in neighboring countries that have completed their transitions to a market economy, or even by a comparison of the efficiency of private and state-run enterprises (Kazarzheuski, Chubryk (2007)).

In late 2007, the IPM Research Center conducted a national survey to study the attitudes of Belarusians towards market-oriented reforms. This paper presents detailed results of the survey. Section 2 focuses on the methods used for identifying the attitudes towards reforms and identifies the main outcomes of this analysis. It is followed by a detailed analysis of people's views on economic and so-

cial issues, as well as their priorities for integration, depending on their attitudes towards reform. Brief conclusions complete the paper.

2. People's attitudes towards a market economy

2.1. Methodology

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development developed a methodology for assessing the progress of countries in their transition to a market economy. Nine transition indicators are rated on the scale from 1 (a centrally-planned economy) to 4+ (4.33) (a developed industrial economy). These assessment criteria are used for calculating transition indices in each category.¹

The IPM Research Center modified EBRD criteria for its survey of attitudes towards a market economy.² Interviewers asked people to choose between two opposite statements, one describing a centrally-planned economy (corresponding to one on the EBRD scale) and the other characterizing a free market economy (corresponding to 4+). To the EBRD's nine transition indices, the IPM added two additional indices: land reform and labor market reform. Possible answers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria for Assessing Attitudes towards Market Reform: Replies Offered to Interviewees

Replies corresponding to a planned economy	Replies corresponding to a market economy
1. The government's permission is needed for takeovers of small enterprises. Some small enterprises should be owned by the state.	Small enterprises must be in private hands and owners should be free to buy and sell them.
2. Most prices should be set and controlled by the state.	Most prices should be set on the basis of supply and demand, without state intervention.
3. Most big enterprises should be owned by the state.	Most big enterprises should be in private hands.
4. The top banks should be owned by the state and finance state programs.	Banking sector regulation should be in line with international standards.
5. The state should subsidize unprofitable and non-competitive enterprises.	The viability of enterprises should be determined by their ability to manufacture competitive products.
6. Exports, imports and the trade of foreign currency should be tightly controlled by the government.	The state should exercise minimum control over exports, imports and the trade of foreign currency, in line with international standards.

¹ For more information on EBRD transition assessment criteria see, for instance, EBRD (2007).

² For details, read Shymanovich, Rakava, Chubryk (2007) (survey of the population) and Kazarzheuski, Chubryk (2007) (business survey).

Replies corresponding to a planned economy	Replies corresponding to a market economy
7. The state should offer preferential treatment to some enterprises and sectors, and should support domestic manufacturers.	All enterprises, including foreign ones, should play by the same transparent rules.
8. The state should decide which shares may be sold or may not be sold on the stock market.	Buying and selling shares on the stock market should be free, based on international standards.
9. The energy, telecommunications, housing, utilities, and road maintenance sectors should be owned by the state.	Private companies should have access to the energy, telecommunications, housing, utilities, and road maintenance markets.
10. Employment and wages should be subject to tight state control, even in private enterprises.	Employment and wages should be subject to bargaining, which involves employees, employers and trade unions.
11. Land should be owned by the state, except for small plots. Restrictions are needed regarding the purchase and sale of these plots.	With some exceptions, people, including foreigners, should be free to buy and sell land.

Note. Item numbers correspond to the following areas of reform: 1 — small business privatization, 2 — price liberalization, 3 — large-scale privatization, 4 — banking sector reform, 5 — the restructuring of enterprises, 6 — foreign trade liberalization, 7 — encouragement of competition, 8 — the stock market, 9 — infrastructural reform, 10 — labor market reform, 11 — land reform.

Source: The IPM Research Center (<http://research.by/pdf/Surveys/survey2007q3.pdf>)

Respondents' answers were graded on a five-point scale, where 1 equals "fully agree with the first (planned economy) statement; 2 — somewhat agree with the first statement; 3 — disagree with both statements; 4 — somewhat agree with the second (market economy) statement; 5 — fully agree with the second statement.

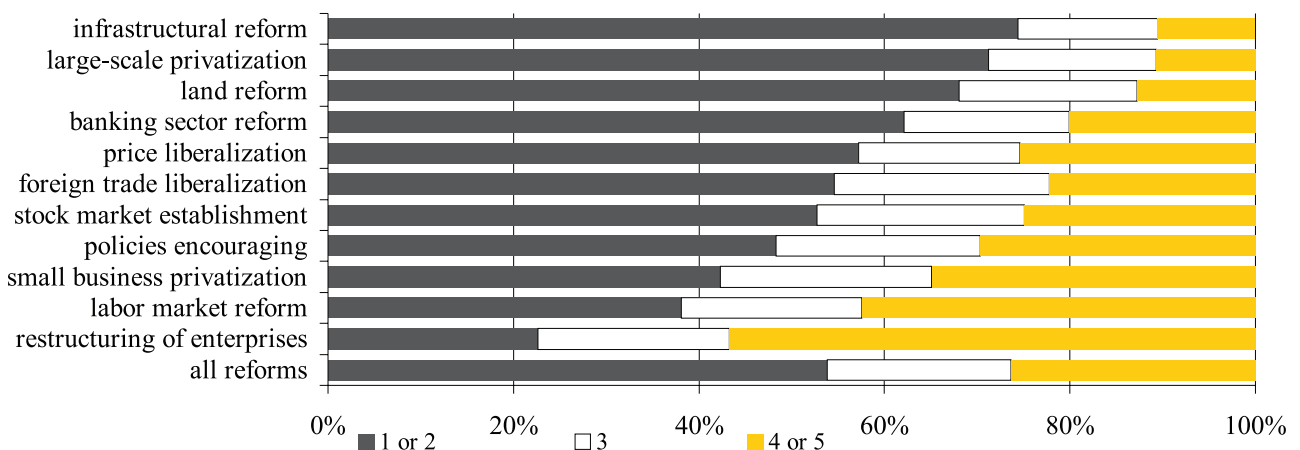
2.2. Attitudes towards Various Areas of Reform

When asked to choose between two alternatives for these 11 areas of reform, more Belarusians picked statements describing a centrally planned economy (Figure 1). At the same time, an overwhelming majority favors the restructuring of enterprises. Labor market reform has more supporters than opponents. However, advocates for small business privatization do not outnumber those who said that the state should intervene in the small business sector.

The least popular are infrastructural reform and large-scale privatization (these two areas are interlinked because infrastructural reform introduces the possibility for private ownership of energy and telecommunications companies). In this category, free market advocates make up just about 10 percent, whereas 70 percent are opposed to the privatization of big enterprises and infrastructural facili-

ties. The negative attitude towards privatization can be partially attributed to the propaganda that the government has disseminated for many years. These attitudes have had a considerable effect on the decisions and rhetoric of the government with regard to the sale of Belarusian enterprises to foreigners. This aspect will be examined in more detail in Section 3.4.

Two aspects of a market economy — price and banking sector liberalization — are worthy of notice. In comparison to other areas, with the exception of infrastructural reform, respondents found it easier to choose between a planned and market economy in this area. A very low percentage of respondents were undecided. In these two categories, the proportion of market advocates to planned economy supporters is unusually high. Although most respondents regard the state as security against price hikes and dishonest bankers (Baturchyk, Chubryk (2008)), a relatively high percentage questioned the state's ability to address these problems.



Note. All reforms are the simple mean of the 11 indices. Calculations do not include those who replied "I do not know/difficult to answer."

Source: The IPM Research Center.

Figure 1. Attitudes towards Various Areas of Reform

On the average, 26.4 percent of those surveyed support a market economy and 53.8 percent favor a planned economy or an economy dominated by the state. About 20 percent are undecided. However, these numbers do not reflect people's personal attitudes towards a market economy in general and do not show the inconsistent views on the economic system held by many Belarusians.

2.3. Reform Support Patterns: Cluster Analysis

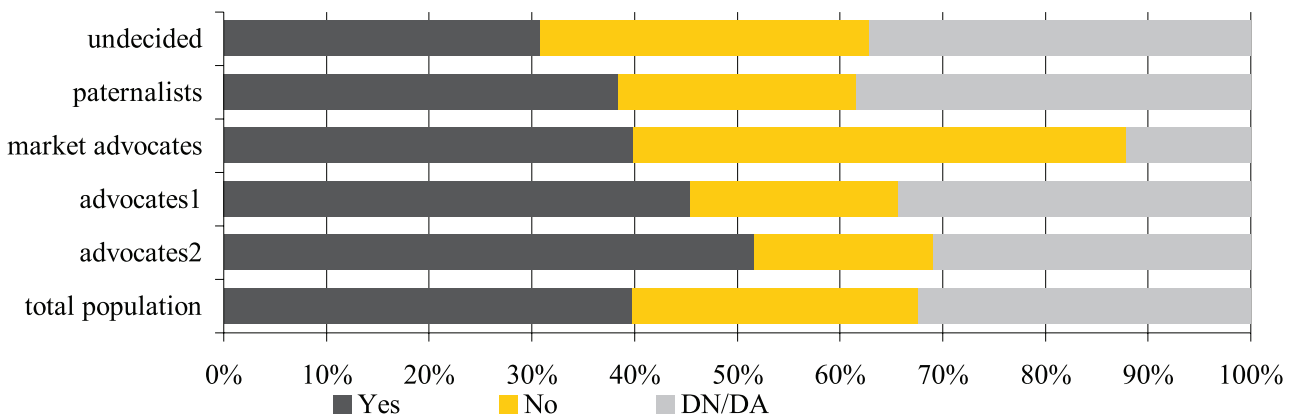
A cluster analysis helps to identify true supporters of reform. The analysis (Baturchyk, Chubryk (2008)) identified five clusters (Appendix A):

- those undecided about reform (scored three points for all the replies);
- paternalists (scored 1.5 points on the average, between one and two points for all replies);
- market economy advocates (scored four points and higher in all categories except for large scale privatization, infrastructural reform and land reform);
- advocates of controlled competition (scored more than four points for restructuring and encouragement of competition, but questioned the need for a unregulated stock market);
- advocates of restructuring without privatization (scored about four points for restructuring and labor market reform, but questioned the need for small business privatization).³

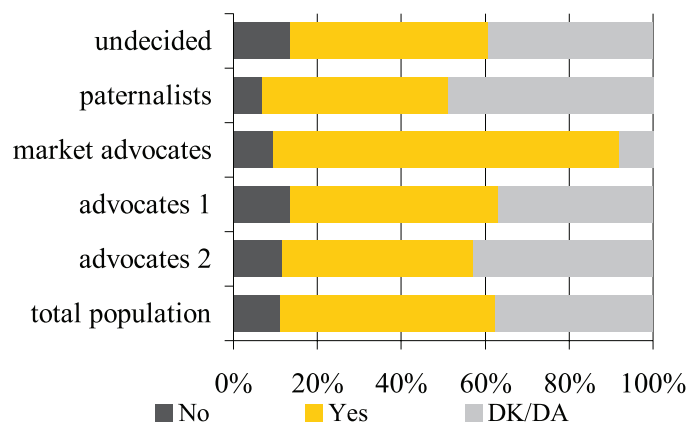
Let us compare the methodology used in the survey with a simple direct question like “What is your attitude towards market reform?” The questionnaire included two similar questions: “Is market-oriented reform under way in Belarus?” and “Does Belarus need market-oriented reform?” The former helps determine how people understand the term “market-oriented reform,” while the latter helps find out their opinion about the need for reform in the country (we will not take into consideration various aspects of their assessment).

Figure 2 shows that about 40 percent of those surveyed believe that market-oriented reform is under way in Belarus, contrary to the conclusions drawn by EBRD experts, who found that Belarus is one of the least reformed former Soviet republics and that reform has stalled in the country. In the last five years, the EBRD only noted progress in the reform of the banking sector, raising its rating from 2- to 2 (see EBRD (2007)). Importantly, nearly one third of Belarusians are uncertain about the progress of reforms. Free market advocates revealed that they better understand the situation; nearly half of them noted the lack of reform. Nevertheless, 40 percent of free market advocates said that reform has been carried out in Belarus.

³ The confidence of the latter two clusters in the need for restructuring and competition is probably based on their first-hand experience. For instance, advocates for restructuring are usually people, who are close to the age of retirement with a moderate income and a secondary education. They have worked at state enterprises, whose financial positions worsened last year. They realize that state enterprises are ineffective and hope that restructuring can help boost their performance without changing the form of ownership.



(a) Understanding of Reform and Attitude towards It



(b) Need for Reform and Attitude towards It

Note. Figures (a) and (b) show a link between answers to the question, “Is market-oriented reform under way in Belarus?” and “Does Belarus need market-oriented reform?” and attitudes toward reform. Henceforth, advocates 1 means supporters of controlled competition; advocates 2 means supporters of restructuring without privatization.

Source: The IPM Research Center.

Figure 2. People’s Perception of Market Reform

Figure 2 shows that more than half of the Belarusians surveyed reported that the country needs market-oriented reform. Nearly 40 are undecided about whether reform is required. Interestingly, nearly half of paternalists responded that market-oriented reform is needed, despite the fact that they advocate a centrally-planned economy.

3. Personal views of respondents within clusters

3.1. Primary Concerns

In this section we compare the perceptions of the problems in contemporary Belarus among the various clusters. All respondents are concerned about the same top eight problems (see Table 2). They are increasingly worried about inflation and its manifestations, such as high housing, oil and gas prices, rising utility bills, low incomes, and poverty affecting a considerable part of the population. Only two of the top worries are not linked to inflation directly or indirectly: unemployment (although the government claims that the country's unemployment rate is just about one percent) and alcohol abuse.

Free market advocates differ in opinion from the other clusters. They do not consider economic problems to be as important as the other groups. After inflation, they view alcohol abuse as the second most important problem, followed by unemployment and low incomes. The latter three worries among free market advocates were not even among the top five issues marked off by other respondents. Their replies prove that free market advocates can cope better with personal economic challenges and can better prioritize general social issues.

Table 2. Most Pressing Problems According to Belarusians

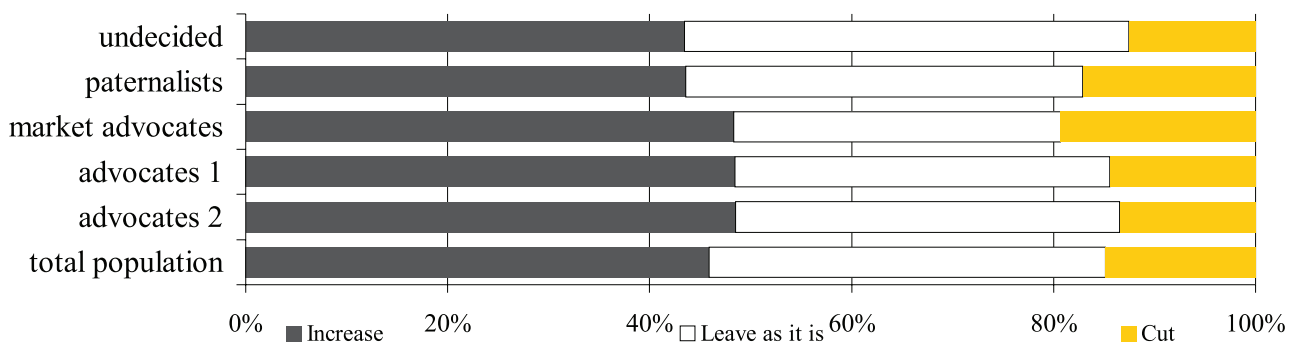
Problems:	Undecided Paternalists		Market advocates	Advocates 1	Advocates 2	Total population
Rising prices	63.5	62.6	59.8	76.0	69.8	65.3
Rising prices of gas and oil	40.7	42.1	34.1	43.8	52.5	43.5
High housing prices	40.0	46.8	30.2	41.2	48.8	42.1
Poverty of considerable part of population	45.6	42.3	30.2	42.6	44.4	41.8
High utility bills	43.6	38.1	33.5	21.5	25.3	41.6
Alcohol abuse	32.7	43.6	41.7	40.5	37.9	38.0
Low incomes	28.3	33.2	36.8	36.8	48.2	36.3
Unemployment	43.6	37.2	37.5	46.7	38.8	33.6

Note. Respondents were asked to mark off no more than five of the 19 proposed options (or the option “Belarus does not have these problems”). The top five concerns are marked in grey.

Source: The PMI Research Center.

3.2. Perceptions of Social Security and State Finances

The analysis of state finances and social security concerns taxes, spending and the government's care for various social groups. Despite the fact that only 15.6 percent (the ninth spot in the ranking) responded that they are worried about high taxes, indirect evidence suggests that people are concerned about it (Baturchyk, Chubryk (2008)).⁴ In particular, respondents were asked to choose between two possible answers to the question, "What is the better way of spending money on the development of the economy and manufacturing sector?": (a) the state should take a considerable portion of the income from enterprises in taxes and channel it into sectors that need support; and (b) enterprises should be free to use their revenues because they know better how the money should be spent. More respondents selected answer (b) in all groups, except for paternalists. Note that statement b sounds like a political slogan.



Note. All expenditures are a simple mean of 15 indices. The calculation does not include those who answered "Do not know/difficult to answer."

Source: The IPM Research Center.

Figure 3. What Should be Done with Budget Expenditures

Many people are inconsistent in their views regarding public spending. Despite the fact that most respondents consider taxes too high and oppose a tax increase, respondents in all clusters and in the total population noted the need for increased spending (Figure 3). All respondents pointed to excessive expenditures on the maintenance of governmental agencies. They considered funding for the other 14 purposes to be just adequate or insufficient. Respondents in all clusters, except for paternalists, said that the government does not provide enough funds for healthcare, social security, science and technology, environmental protection, and agriculture (except for free market advocates).

⁴ The percentage is higher, 26.4 percent and 20 percent, respectively, among free market advocates and those undecided about reform.

Calls for increased expenditures in certain areas may be interpreted as the desire to see improvements in these areas. If this interpretation is correct, then the assumption that people are inconsistent in their economic views is not absolutely true. It would be more accurate to say that they are dissatisfied with the government's performance in these areas and suggest increased spending as a way out.

Incidentally, respondents in all clusters are quite skeptical about the government's socially-oriented policies, judging by their assessments of the government's care for 14 groups (Appendix B). Of the 14 groups, most respondents indicated that the government takes adequate care of civil servants, the military, the police and athletes. Respondents are almost equally divided on other groups. Three of the groups (pensioners, large families and children) are widely believed to enjoy sufficient protection, while respondents felt that the unemployed, young families, young specialists, students, workers, employees funded by the state budget, and rural residents are not adequately protected. Excluding the four well protected groups, half of those who expressed an opinion on the social security system said that the government does not take enough care of the other groups. The other half responded that the government gives these other groups enough attention.

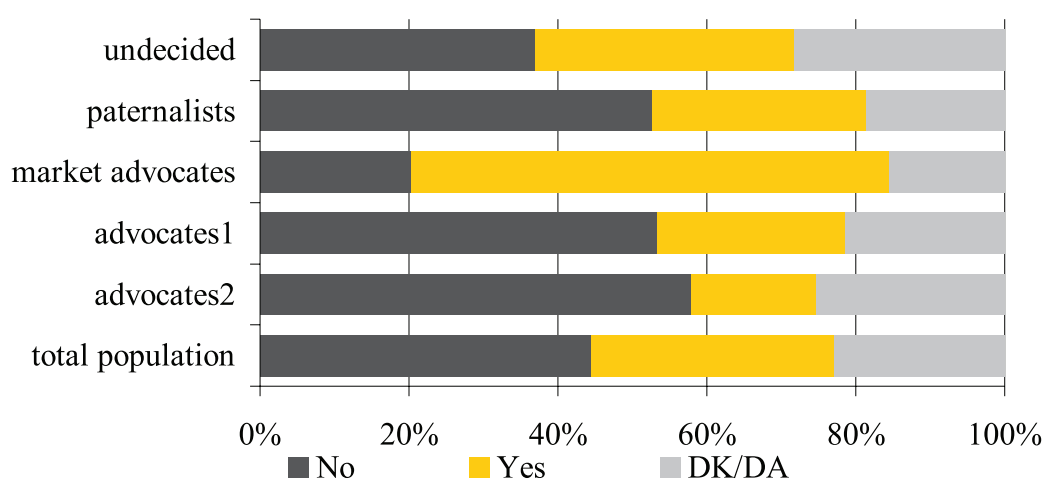
3.3. Attitudes Regarding the Sale of Belarusian Enterprises to Foreigners

The clusters are especially divided in their attitudes regarding the sale of Belarusian enterprises to foreigners. They were asked the following questions:

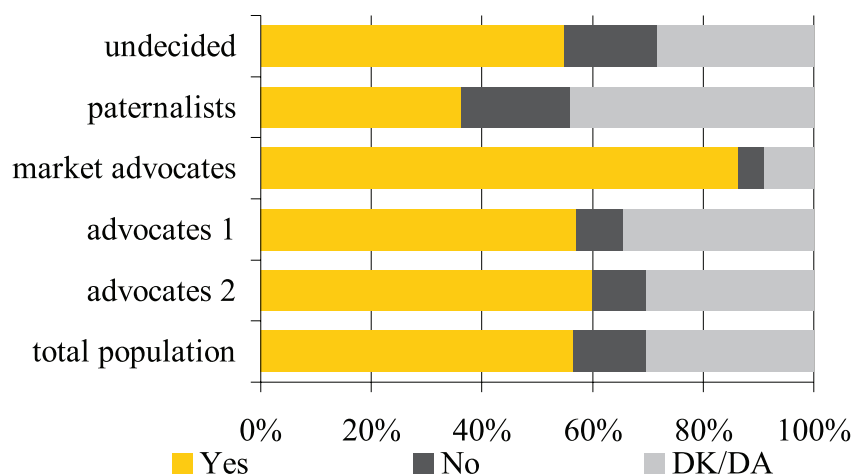
- Is the sale of enterprises to foreigners acceptable?
- Does the Belarusian economy need foreign investment?
- If state enterprises were privatized, which countries would you give priority in purchasing these enterprises?

Naturally, most free market advocates indicated that the sale of enterprises to foreigners is acceptable (Figure 4a). Other groups took a more cautious approach. The undecided split into three nearly equal subgroups — acceptable, unacceptable and do not know. Unexpectedly, paternalists were not totally opposed to privatization by foreigners: 30 percent of them said that it is acceptable. The strongest opposition was among proponents of restructuring and controlled competition. According to these results, this group believes that establishing proper order within Belarusian enterprises and creating better operational conditions would solve all the problems in these enterprises. This position is very similar to the declarations made by the Belarusian leader that profitable enterprises will not be sold to private and foreign hands. The statements appear to have resonated with a considerable number of voters.

Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of respondents, 26.7 percent, do not associate foreign investment with the sale of enterprises to foreigners (they oppose the sale of enterprises to foreigners, but say the country needs foreign investment). Advocates of controlled competition and of restructuring without privatization take a consistent approach. They recognize the need for foreign investment, but they are opposed to a change in ownership patterns. Most free market advocates say that the country needs foreign investment, while most paternalists doubt it (Figure 4b).



a) Attitudes Regarding Sale of Enterprises to Foreigners



(b) Understanding of "Investment"

Note. Figure (a): "Is the sale of enterprises to foreigners acceptable?"; Figure (b): "Does the Belarusian economy need foreign investment?"

Source: The IPM Research Center.

Figure 5. Attitudes towards Foreign Investment

In the context of the government's recent privatization deals, the question about preferred owners of Belarusian enterprises was quite topical. It exposed a wide gap among the clusters. Proponents of restructuring and competition (without a free market) consider the sale of Belarusian enterprises to Belarusian owners to be the best solution (Table 3). Most proponents of competition favor owners from the EU, but Belarus and Russia are backed by an equal minority. Undecided respondents put their preferences in the following order: Belarus, the EU and Russia. There is a difference of about 10 percent between the three options.

Table 3. Which Countries Should Be Given Preference During Privatization?

	Undecided	Paternalists	Market advocates	Advocates 1	Advocates 2	Total population
Belarus	52.0	79.3	35.1	73.0	76.6	63.6
EU	43.4	8.6	89.9	25.2	15.6	33.8
Russia	32.5	18.1	35.8	15.3	18.8	24.5
Ukraine	12.1	6.0	6.8	4.9	2.3	6.9
USA	8.3	1.7	16.2	2.5	0.5	5.5
China	4.6	0.0	4.7	1.8	1.8	2.6
Israel	1.7	0.0	4.1	1.2	0.0	1.2
Iran, Venezuela, etc.	1.4	0.4	0.7	1.2	0.0	0.8
DK/DA	8.0	11.6	6.8	9.2	9.2	9.3

Note. The question: "If state enterprises were privatized, which countries would you give priority in purchasing these enterprises?" (Respondents were asked to pick no more than three countries). The bold type indicates the top choices. EU countries were divided into the four categories: the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania); Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Poland, etc.); Western Europe (France, Germany, etc.); and Scandinavian countries (Finland, Norway, and Sweden).

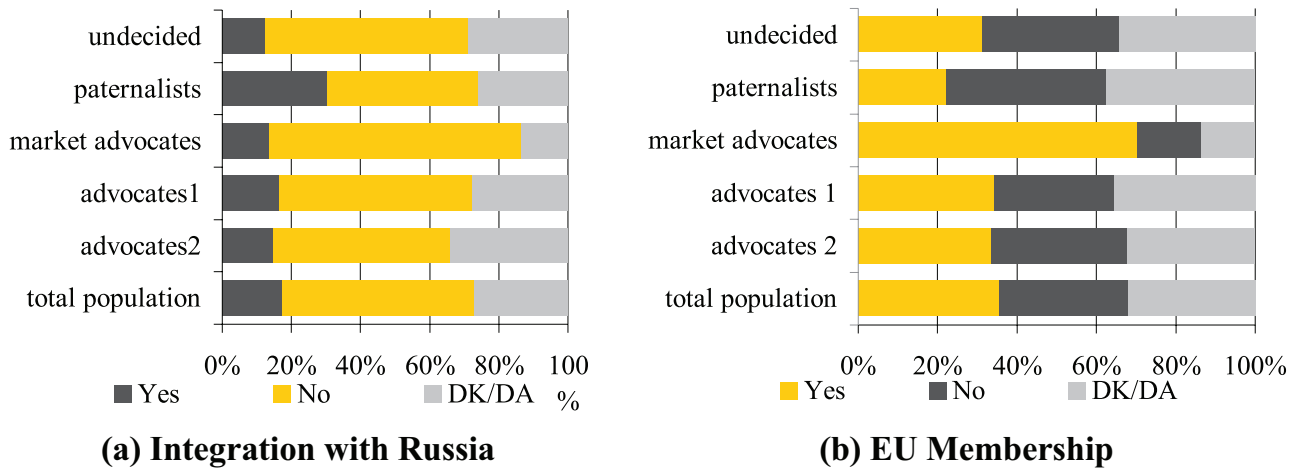
Source: The IPM Research Center.

3.4 Choice of Integration Partner

Respondents' views on integration had an effect on their choice of investors. Those who would like their country to be a member of the EU in the future give priority to investment from the EU (and from Belarus). Those who want Belarus to form a union state with Russia with one president, parliament, and currency prefer Russian owners. Nevertheless, the fact that the champions of EU membership significantly outnumber the apologists of reliance on Russia⁵ may support

⁵ 35.5 and 17.4 percent, respectively. Most Belarusians (55.6 %) oppose the formation of a union state by Belarus and Russia, while only 32.6 % of respondents reject the idea of EU membership.

the conclusion that integration mindsets are not closely connected with choices of foreign investors.



Note. Figure (a): “Do you agree that Belarus and Russia should form a union state with one currency, president, and parliament?”; Figure (b): “Do you agree that Belarus should join the European Union?”

Source: The IPM Research Center.

Figure 5. Choice of Integration Partner

The link between attitudes towards reform and integration priorities turned out to be very strong (Figure 5). In particular, 70.3 percent of free market advocates say that Belarus should seek EU membership and 73 percent oppose the formation of a union state with Russia. Among paternalists, supporters of closer ties with Russia lead proponents of EU membership 30.2 to 22 percent, respectively. Most respondents in other clusters are opposed to a union with Russia, but about one third of them speak in favor of EU membership. Thus, attitudes towards reform may be determined by the same factors as integration priorities. Values are particularly important.

4. Conclusions

Most Belarusians are uncertain about their attitude towards a market economy and reform. The undecided, who make up more than 30 percent, believe that Belarus should be somewhere between a centrally-planned economy and a free market. Thirty-five percent believe that the current economic system is quite good and needs minor changes such as a freer labor market, greater competition and

an end to state subsidies for ailing enterprises. The survey found fewer steadfast market advocates (13.3 percent) than champions of a planned economy (21 percent). Even staunch market advocates have doubts about large-scale privatization and land reform.

Similar problems worry representatives of all the clusters. In particular these are economic issues directly or indirectly linked to rising prices. What distinguishes market advocates from other clusters is that they are more concerned about social issues like unemployment and alcohol abuse than they are about the economy.

Belarusians have little confidence in state finances. However, large proportions in all clusters call for increased spending for various purposes, especially for social programs. Except for the privileged groups (civil servants, athletes, the police and the military), who, in the respondents' opinions, enjoy the favor of the government, the public is sharply divided about the government's ability to address social issues. About half say that the government provides little care for vulnerable groups. The other half defends the current social security system.

Most respondents, except for free market advocates, are opposed to the sale of Belarusian enterprises to foreigners. At the same time, a majority said that Belarus needs foreign investment. In other words, respondents do not see any link between investment and privatization (free market advocates are more consistent on the matter). If privatization eventually gets under way, respondents would like state assets to end up in the hands of Belarusians. Most favored foreign owners are investors from the EU (33.8 percent) and Russia (24.5 percent). Only free market advocates prefer EU owners to Belarusian ones.

Market advocates are leaning towards closer ties with the EU, while many paternalists are in favor of a union with Russia. However, the latter idea does not even win over a majority of paternalists. It is not very appealing to the population in general, with a popularity of 17.4 percent compared with the 35.5 percent support for EU membership.

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Appendix A. Basic description of clusters, %

	Undecided	Paternalists	Market advocates	Advocates 1*	Advocates 2**
Total population:	31.4	21.0	13.3	14.7	19.6
City population:					
> 1 mln residents (Minsk)	26.6	15.9	15.4	15.0	27.1
100,000—500,000	43.1	19.1	11.1	13.5	13.2
50,000—100,000	25.3	11.5	34.5	12.6	16.1
10,000—50,000	26.1	19.3	12.4	18.0	24.2
5,000—10,000	29.6	33.3	0.0	11.1	25.9
< 5,000	25.5	30.3	9.5	15.3	19.3
Age:					
18—24	42.0	13.8	20.1	13.2	10.9
25—34	35.3	14.0	19.9	12.7	18.1
35—44	31.4	18.6	12.7	17.6	19.6
45—54	26.8	22.7	14.5	12.7	23.2
55—64	26.6	28.7	7.7	14.7	22.4
65—75	23.3	32.9	0.7	18.5	24.7
Education:					
Primary, incomplete secondary	14.1	52.6	1.3	12.8	19.2
Secondary	24.6	24.3	8.6	18.9	23.6
Vocational, technical school	36.1	20.7	11.2	15.7	16.4
Higher, incomplete higher	35.8	10.4	23.8	9.4	20.5
Sector:					
Public	31.9	19.6	11.5	15.4	22.0
Private	45.8	6.5	23.9	10.3	13.5
Unemployed	26.9	28.2	11.4	15.2	18.4
Income per family member:					
Less than 200,000 rubles	26.3	23.0	12.5	18.4	19.7
200,000 — 500,000 rubles	32.2	20.7	12.1	14.5	20.5
500,000 — 750,000 rubles	34.3	15.7	19.4	7.5	23.1
More than 750,000 rubles	34.5	17.2	13.8	17.2	17.2
Change in family financial situation last year:					
Worse	23.6	22.9	16.9	14.6	22.0
Unchanged	34.1	21.4	10.6	15.5	18.4
Better	34.3	16.3	18.0	10.7	20.8

Source: Baturchyk, Chubryk (2008).

Appendix b. Perceptions of the government's social policies

	Undecided	Paternalists	Market advocates	Advocates 1	Advocates 2	Total population
Unemployed						
Adequate	24.2	24.1	16.9	20.9	19.3	21.8
Inadequate	63.1	57.8	78.4	63.8	62.4	64.0
Pensioners						
Adequate	52.0	53.2	42.2	43.6	47.9	48.9
Inadequate	42.5	43.3	56.5	50.9	47.0	46.7
Families with many children						
Adequate	61.5	58.4	49.3	62.0	56.2	58.3
Inadequate	26.4	23.6	43.2	24.5	30.4	28.6
Children						
Adequate	59.8	60.3	49.7	55.8	62.7	58.5
Inadequate	31.9	25.0	45.6	33.7	31.8	32.6
Young specialists						
Adequate	38.0	50.9	33.3	35.2	39.2	39.9
Inadequate	53.9	31.9	59.2	44.4	46.1	47.1
Young families						
Adequate	34.0	43.5	30.4	29.6	36.9	35.4
Inadequate	58.2	42.7	66.2	59.9	51.6	55.0
Students and graduates						
Adequate	37.2	42.9	28.4	42.0	41.9	38.8
Inadequate	53.9	34.3	64.2	40.7	45.2	47.5
Military						
Adequate	72.6	78.0	79.7	73.6	67.4	73.8
Inadequate	13.5	5.2	7.4	11.7	14.2	10.8
Police, security services						
Adequate	76.7	86.6	91.2	81.5	78.9	81.8
Inadequate	8.1	3.4	1.4	4.3	6.0	5.2
Workers						
Adequate	34.6	34.1	33.1	27.6	22.9	31.0
Inadequate	50.4	56.9	62.2	63.8	68.8	58.9
Rural residents						
Adequate	39.5	32.3	25.9	26.4	30.7	32.5
Inadequate	44.7	57.8	69.4	69.3	60.6	57.5
Lecturers, teachers, doctors						
Adequate	35.2	60.8	26.5	40.5	42.4	41.6
Inadequate	51.9	29.7	71.4	49.1	50.2	49.1
Civil servants						
Adequate	73.5	90.1	89.2	85.3	87.1	83.5
Inadequate	11.5	2.6	6.8	8.0	5.5	7.3

	Undecided	Paternalists	Market advocates	Advocates 1	Advocates 2	Total population
Athletes						
Adequate	72.3	72.1	75.8	77.8	77.5	74.6
Inadequate	9.8	7.3	12.1	10.5	11.0	9.9
All mentioned groups						
Adequate	54.0	58.3	51.1	52.7	53.7	54.3
Inadequate	34.8	28.9	43.1	36.5	36.1	35.2
All mentioned groups, except for military, police, civil servants and athletes						
Adequate	46.1	48.9	37.8	41.9	44.0	44.6
Inadequate	44.4	38.7	57.6	47.6	46.9	45.9

*Note. The question: “Does the government provide adequate care for the following groups?”
The aggregate of “adequate” and “inadequate” responses is less than 100 percent by the
number of “Do not know/difficult to answer” responses.*

Source: The IPM Research Center.

Dzmitry Kruk

HAS REFORM BEGUN? INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC REFORM IN BELARUS

1. Introduction

While reviewing the progress of economic reform in Belarus, most Belarusian analysts focus primarily on privatization. They analyze the government's privatization plans regarding specific enterprises, changes in the privatization laws and the effects of specific privatization decisions on the structure of the real sector of the economy. This approach is justified because of the state sector's predominant role in the economy,¹ which is different from other countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The real sector ownership structure may be viewed as the foundation of the economic system. It has an effect on institutional conditions and is one of the key factors influencing long-term economic development. Privatization and the private sector's expansion would bring Belarus closer to a "standard" economic system. Therefore, the proportions of the state and private sectors² are the key indicator of economic reform.

The probability of privatization in Belarus and its possible pace have not been thoroughly analyzed. The government has taken a range of structural economic

¹ 75 %, according to the EBRD

² It should be noted that a discussion of privatization and correlation between the private and state sectors often drifts away from an economic analysis into the sphere of ideology and does not always reflect real progress of economic reform.

policy measures to maintain the economy through mechanisms that considerably differ from standard transition economic tools. These policy measures (“rules of the game,” “institutions,” and “institutional conditions”)³ were introduced gradually during the last decade and, essentially, are based on and follow the pattern of an economic system⁴ built around a predominant state sector. Despite the fact that institutional conditions are secondary to forms of ownership in the economic system, they have the greatest impact on the economy in the short term. The Belarusian government is unlikely to launch a fast and mass privatization, even to forestall external economic or political shocks. This paper focuses on the institutional conditions of economic entities in Belarus, in particular on those that considerably influence their operation patterns. Thus, the purpose of this work is to assess the progress of economic reform in Belarus on the basis of clear criteria and also to examine the likelihood of reform.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the methods that were used for selecting economic reform indicators. Section 3 specifies economic policy measures that affect the behavioral patterns of economic agents and specific macroeconomic markets. Section 4 focuses on institutional conditions that have a considerable impact on the economic system. The conditions are listed, depending on their role. Conclusions regarding the progress and likelihood of economic reform in the near future are based on the selected indicators.

2. Methods and Algorithm Used for Selecting Reform Indicators

Several approaches can be used to determine the indicators, processes and institutional conditions essential for the economic system as a whole. First, one could examine economic policy measures in various industries, concentrating on sectors that account for a large portion of GDP, budget revenues, export revenues and other financial flows. Identifying constraints in the key industries, in that case, would make it possible to categorize them as basic indicators of economic reform. Another approach would be to look at constraints through the prism of various policies such as general economic (institutional), monetary, financial, trade and other measures. Identifying specific steps in these areas and assessing their impact on the economic system could help to achieve the goal of this study.

³ Institutions mean regulations and unwritten rules that determine economic entities' behavior.

⁴ For detail, read Kruk (2006a) for instance.

Along with advantages, however, these approaches have considerable flaws — (I) an incomplete study of the economic system and its agents; and (II) difficulties in assessing the relative impact of one indicator or another on the economic system in general.

Based on these considerations, it would be better to build the analysis around a theoretical structure of the economic system. As a rule, economic theories identify the following groups of economic agents: households, non-financial enterprises, financial enterprises and the state. These agents constitute the household, real, financial and state sectors. They interact with each other and also with the external sector. These agents interact in the goods and services, labor, monetary and capital markets. Every agent and market performs a number of functions that impacts the whole economic system.

Households consume goods and services, create the demand for money, offer production factors and receive factor payments, make investments (in housing development), and create supply and demand for credit.

The real sector has the following functions: supplying goods and services, creating the demand for production factors, investing in fixed capital and stock-piles, creating the demand for money, offering credit, and creating the demand for credit.

The financial sector's functions include the following: creating supply and demand in the money market, creating supply and demand in the capital market, appraising the real sector's financial potential, and exercising control over companies.

The state sector redistributes income in the economy, consumes goods and services, makes investment in fixed capital, and creates supply and demand in the credit market.

Markets play a balancing role in the economy and have different functions.

The goods and services market determines the prices for goods and services, as well as average weighted prices.

The labor market sets the average weighted wage rate.

The money market determines the average weighted interest rate.

The capital market balances out financial flows and effectively distributes economic resources.

The first step will be to identify the distinctive features in the operation of economic agents and markets that distort their basic (theoretical) functions. Afterwards, it will be necessary to identify the economic policy measures that distinguish Belarus from other economies. Clearly, reform and transformation of these

measures would change the economic system. Therefore, economic policy decisions (measures) can be regarded as economic reform indicators. This approach makes it possible to draw comparisons and to list the indicators depending on their impact on the economic system. The selected economic policy indicators are categorized by policy areas such as institutional (general economic), monetary, fiscal, financial,⁵ and trade policies.

3. Distinctions of Economic Agents in Belarus

A research paper released by Kruk, Pielipas and Chubryk in 2006 includes a detailed analysis of the distinctive behavior of economic agents in Belarus and its effects on economic indicators. The work identifies only the features that influence the macro level (see Table 1 for the real sector).

Table 1: Distinctions of the Belarusian Real Sector

№	Description and implementation mechanism	Implementation instrument	Policy type
1	State sector domination	Privatization decrees and law, unwritten rules	Institutional policy
2	Output controls	Edicts setting out economic targets for industries	Institutional policy
3	Budget allocations, loans and subsidies for specific industries	Budget law	Fiscal policy
4	Unemployment controls	Unwritten rules, Uniform Qualifications Directory	Institutional policy

Among the above-mentioned distinctions, in the given context (leaving out state and private sector proportions), financial policy measures have the greatest impact on the real sector. First, it is necessary to stress the significance of the state budget as a source of fixed capital expenditures (it accounted for 26 percent in 2007, and its proportion rose to more than 40 percent in the first quarter of 2008) from an economic viewpoint. Second, budgetary investments and subsidies and subventions to real sector agents made up about ten and nine percent of gross budgetary expenditures, respectively. A considerable portion of these financial flows leads

⁵ The term is used in Belarusian and Russian economic practice as a rule. It means a broad spectrum of decisions to control financial flows in the economy and is broader than fiscal policies in their traditional meaning.

to deeper soft budget constraints and laxer financial discipline among enterprises.⁶ It is difficult, however, to determine the point beyond which budget financial flows can cause unwelcome trends in the real sector as a whole.⁷

The Belarusian financial sector has the following distinctions (see Table 2):

Table 2. Distinctions of the Belarusian Financial Sector

№	Description and implementation mechanism	Implementation instrument	Policy type
1	Domination of one type of financial agents, banks (lack of institutional conditions for indirect financial flows through stock market)	Banking sector development program for 2006-2010, stock market regulations	Institutional policy
2	State sector domination in banking sector	Banking sector development program for 2006-2010, unwritten rules	Institutional policy
3	Restrictions on presence of foreign banks or foreign capital share in banking sector	Banking Code, edicts, unwritten rules	Institutional policy
4	Government ensures that state banks have competitive edge (equity capital injections, deposit guarantees etc) ¹	Budget Law, edicts, National Bank regulations	Institutional policy, financial policy

These financial sector distinctions have a considerable impact on the economic system. First, the real sector has almost no other borrowing option besides bank loans. Since the financial sector's main economic function is to redistribute resources through the capital market, its positive impact on economic growth decreases.⁸ Artificial restrictions on competition in the banking sector make things worse (Items 3 and 4). In this situation, from the point of view of economic system proportions, reforms in the financial sector are particularly essential.

The state sector has some of the above-mentioned distinctions, but it also has unique features (see Table 3).

A peculiarity of the Belarusian economy is the use of the state budget as a source of investment and subsidies for specific industries, rather than only for enterprises. The budgets of most countries perform this function to a certain extent, but it is difficult to draw the line between reasonable and hypertrophic redistributions.

Households represent the only sector whose functions cannot be affected by individual policy measures. Notable in this context are distinctions of consum-

⁶ Details can be found in Kornai, Maskin, Roland (2002).

⁷ See details in the research paper by Kruk, Danejka (2005).

⁸ See Крук (2008) и Kruk (2006b) for more detail.

er demand that are attributable to a high proportion of unearned (redistributed) income. Dissimilarities are also observed in investment patterns (housing construction), which result from the institutional policy measures in the sector (laws, edicts and sub-laws).

Table 3. Distinctions of the Belarusian State Sector

№	Description and implementation mechanism	Implementation instrument	Policy type
1	Using state budget to finance investment and give competitive edge to specific sectors	Budget Law	Institutional policy, financial policy
2	Using state budget for additional transfers to households (housing construction)	Budget Law	Institutional policy, financial policy
3	Channeling additional financial flows into state budget (export duties and National Development Fund)	Budget Law	Institutional policy, fiscal policy

Other factors that have effects on the Belarusian economy include the direct regulation of the goods and services, money, capital, and labor markets (see Table 4).

Table 4. Distinctions of Market Regulation in Belarus

№	Description and implementation mechanism	Implementation instrument	Policy type
Goods and services market			
1	Price controls	Edicts, directives	Institutional policy
2	Import substitution	Directives, unwritten rules	Trade policy
Money market			
3	Market regulation by means of money supply, not by its value, as measured by interest rates ⁹	Monetary policy practices	Monetary policy
4	Artificial limits on interest rates (upper credit margin limits)	National Bank directive	Institutional policy
Capital market			
5	Direct control of banking system credit flows ¹⁰	Edicts and directives	Institutional policy
Labor market			
6	Direct adjustment of wages depending on cycles ¹¹	Directives, unwritten rules	Institutional policy
7	Use of single wage rate system to narrow pay gap (lack of opportunities for collective bargaining), tying wage rates to Subsistence Minimum Budget (SMB) (or to profits)	Decrees, directives	Institutional policy

⁹ See Крук (2008) for more detail.

¹⁰ See Kruk, Cramon-Taubadel (2004) for more detail.

¹¹ See Крук, Пелипасъ, Чубрик (2006) for more detail.

Direct market regulation affects the fundamental variables (prices, interest rates and wages) that maintain balance within the economic system. It indirectly influences economic agents, forcing them to adapt to indicators that are imposed by directives.

It should be noted that the economic reality is distorted mainly by institutional policy measures. These efforts were deliberate and comprehensive; their reversal will require most governmental agencies to coordinate their work in order to change the legal and regulatory framework.

4. Economic Reform Indicators

Now that the basic distinctive features of the Belarusian economy have been identified, it is possible to determine the economic policy measures that can be viewed as comprehensive economic reform indicators. At the same time, it is necessary to measure the relative importance of these indicators. The latter task requires both additional theoretical tools and empirical studies. This work offers largely subjective conclusions based on the analysis described above.

First, it is necessary to identify the distinctions of the Belarusian financial sector, which plays the key role in distributing resources in the economy and significantly affects the behavioral patterns of agents in the other sectors. Moreover, reform of the financial sector is often seen as a precondition for reform in other sectors.¹² In Belarus in particular, the development of a stock market would have the greatest effect on the whole system. First, economic agents would have access to a new credit instrument. Second, the stock market essentially requires economic agents to meet higher transparency standards, while, on the other hand, they would be less open to influence from current policy measures than is the case with banks.

The second group includes banking sector reform indicators that reflect the state sector's role and the level of competition. These characteristics also affect the behavior of other economic entities because banks will remain the major economic intermediaries in the mid term.

Another group includes market regulation measures. Economic agents use the system of relative prices as a basis for making decisions. Between 45 and 90 per cent (by various assessments) of prices¹³ are controlled by the government. Wag-

¹² See Kruk (2006a) for more detail.

¹³ See Готовский, Василега, Бурдыко, Гуцал, Пятинкин (2006) for more detail.

es are another key indicator that normally depends on labor productivity, although this is not the case in Belarus.¹⁴ The government uses a uniform rate system and a first-class worker rate system to adjust wages, weakening the economic function performed by this category. Interest rate adjustment measures have similar effects on the economic system.

All other specific economic policy measures in Belarus mentioned in Section 3 constitute another group of economic reform indicators. Therefore, indicators of economic reform are the following:

1. The stock market's share of financial flows and regulatory changes in the area.
2. The proportions of the state and private sectors in the banking sector.
3. Budgetary funds channeled into the authorized capital of state-owned banks.
4. Indirect subsidies to state-owned banks (deposit guarantees, money of state enterprises, etc.)
5. Foreign capital share in the Belarusian banking system and legal limits on it.
6. The legal opportunity for foreign banks to set up branches in Belarus.
7. The percentage of prices subject to controls.
8. The correlation between productivity and wages.
9. Wage adjustment through a uniform rate system and a first-class worker rate system.
10. Liquidity maintenance measures and the role of interest rates. The monetary policy regime.
11. Upper limits on credit margins for banks.
12. The proportion of loans made under presidential edicts and government directives.
13. Changes in regulations regarding import substitution and investment import growth rates.
14. Changes in laws and regulations governing housing construction.
15. The ratio of budget revenues and expenditures in the GDP.
16. The ratio of budget investment in gross investment.
17. Expenditures on budget loans and subsidies to specific industries and households.
18. National Development Fund spending priorities.

¹⁴ See Чубрик (2005) for more detail.

5. Conclusions

The afore-mentioned indicators were used to assess the progress of economic reform in Belarus. The results of the assessment differ depending on the indicators. Considerable progress has been made in the last 18 months on Indicators 1 to 5. Welcome trends have been observed in the development of the stock market. Last year, the government allowed banks to float mortgage bonds in a move that gave a certain boost to the stock market. Early this year, the government approved a securities market development program. In general, the program may be very effective if all the declared measures are taken. Under this program, the government abolished the “golden share” rule, announced a timeline for gradually lifting the moratorium on trade in shares acquired on a preferential basis, cut a tax on income from transactions in securities, and offered new financial instruments to enterprises and banks. Similar trends have been observed in the banking sector. The government sold several banks to private owners and the proportion of private and foreign capital has been on the rise (although its pace has been quite slow). Progress has been made on Indicator 10, linked to monetary policy mechanisms. The monetary authority announced a plan to change the monetary policy regime before 2010 and uses interest rates as their main policy tool.

On the one hand the measures taken and planned by the government are a real step forward for the Belarusian economy. Moreover, changes have been taking place in the key area — the financial sector. On the other hand, steps have not been far-reaching and comprehensive enough to impact the economy as a whole. The lack of progress on Indicators 6 to 9, which are also instrumental to economic reform, and on Indicators 11 to 18 is indicative of the reservations in the reform process. It would be premature to say that economic reform is under way in Belarus. It would be more accurate to say that the government is preparing to launch economic reform within the next three years.

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Juraj Marušiak

THE VISEGRAD GROUP AND BELARUS — THE POTENTIAL FOR COOPERATION WITHIN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Although the Visegrad countries were among the first to recognize Belarus as an independent state after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the diplomatic relations between the two began to develop very slowly, mainly due to the initial weakness of Belarusian statehood, the indistinctiveness of Belarusian foreign policy, and Belarus's proclaimed aims to reintegrate with Russia. Unlike Ukraine, which was the neighbor of the Visegrad member states at the time of its proclamation of independence, there was no practical need for member states to formulate a special policy towards Belarus, with the exception of Poland. Belarus and Poland are linked by historical ties as well. Thus, for a long time, Belarus has not been a major foreign policy concern for the other Visegrad states.

Currently, Visegrad policies towards Belarus have developed on four levels:

1. Citizens — mostly cooperation between particular NGOs;
2. Individual countries;
3. The Visegrad group;
4. The EU.

From a conceptual point of view, the oldest Visegrad policies concern citizens. The main impetus for change came from non-governmental organizations that reacted to the violation of human rights in Belarus, especially after the presidential elections in 2001. These NGOs were mainly in Poland, the Czech Republic, and, later, Slovakia. Such civic policies provided the first impulse to awaken an interest in the "Belarusian issue" among the general public and political elites. They also persuaded the V4 countries to take a more active approach towards Belarus.

The policy of the Visegrad states towards Belarus has become primarily concerned with human rights issues and the support of democratic forces.

Level of Citizens

Non-governmental organizations from the Visegrad Four countries have a long tradition of cooperation with Belarusian organizations. Although this is especially true in the case of Poland, NGOs from the Czech Republic and Slovakia also started to promote joint activities with their Belarusian partners prior to their integration into the EU. Financial assistance for their activities was usually provided by foreign donors.

More recently, the governments of the V4 countries have begun to provide financial assistance to promote democratic activities. This assistance is a challenge for the EU, since it introduces a new element into the EU's foreign policy, with the possible exceptions of Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Germany. Specifically, the V4 countries' programs to promote democracy reveal their interest in democratizing Belarus and bringing it closer to the EU. This forms an important part of the foreign policy agenda of the new EU Member States, which are pushing for increasing EU involvement in the former Soviet region. In this respect, the Visegrad Four countries are charting new territory in the context of the EU.

Level of Countries

At the same time, the Visegrad Four countries differ in the level of priority which they give to the European Neighborhood Policy and to programs to promote democracy, which influences the degree to which they support Belarusian NGOs. This is reflected by the absence of Hungarian organizations that support the non-governmental sector in Belarus, even though, for the other V4 countries and Lithuania, Belarus is a priority country for democracy assistance in the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, the individual V4 member states have various motivations for providing democracy assistance to Belarus.

For Poland, Belarus is a neighboring country. Poland's Eastern policy, especially concerning Ukraine and Belarus, was conceptualized by Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski before 1989. Poland has consistently supported the in-

dependence of these countries in order to promote its own security. On the other hand, for the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the democracy assistance that they provide to Belarus is mainly based on a moral commitment to offer help to people suffering under a non-democratic regime and/or a way of reinforcing their new identities as recognized democracies and new members of the EU. Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland considers Belarus to be a potential future participant in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Hungarian foreign policy focuses on the West Balkan region, especially Serbia and the neighboring states, and concentrates particularly on minority issues or on regions inhabited by Hungarian minorities, which explains Hungary's lack of democracy assistance to Belarus. For a long period of time, Hungary's lack of interest in the political developments in Belarus was confirmed by the absence of a Hungarian embassy in Minsk.

The V4 countries' differing motivations for providing democracy assistance to Belarus, as well as their different cultural backgrounds and historical experiences, play important roles in determining the types of activities that they support. Although the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has supported the "dissemination of objective information about present day Belarus, Belarusian history, and Belarusian cultural identity, especially in the Belarusian language," issues of cultural identity have not played such an important role in the policies of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The MFA of the Czech Republic has predominantly focused on human rights issues and, between 2006 and 2007, on providing help for Belarusian students. In contrast, Slovak NGOs and the Slovak MFA have been mainly involved in third-sector capacity-building projects, particularly training NGO activists and independent analysts in Belarus. Nevertheless, in recent years, partner organizations from the Czech Republic and Slovakia also have realized the need to support to culturally-oriented projects in Belarus.

Level of the EU

At times Lukashenka's regime shows an interest in improving its contacts with the European Union in order to decrease its unilateral dependence on Russia. Democratization is an important factor contributing to the rapprochement between the EU and Belarus as well as to Belarus's accession to the European Council. At the same time, the Lukashenka administration has been using the conflicts be-

tween the EU and Russia (the West and Russia) as well as those between the EU and the USA and within the EU itself. As in the case of Russia, where Lukashenka prefers to interact with regional representatives and certain politicians from the opposition, he would rather speak to representatives from particular European countries than interact with the EU as a whole. At the same time, the EU is faced with the problem of choosing between promoting its own values more thoroughly and maintaining more or less stable relations with its eastern neighbor. Such a dilemma will continue and will be persistent until the end of the present regime in Belarus.

Besides this dilemma, among the individual member states and politicians in the EU, there is little consistency in policies regarding Belarus. The prioritization of the Belarusian issue varies greatly among the various member states. Thus, in spite of the relatively good institutional base of the EU policy towards Belarus, we are faced with the policy's partial realization. For example, this led the EU to miss its opportunity to send a clear message to Belarus and Belarusian citizens at the opening of the Delegation of the European Commission (EC) in Minsk. Another example is the lack of a more Belarus-centered approach in EU human rights policy. Belarus is the only European country that is not a member of the European Council due to its lack of democratic institutions. Each year, the EU issues only general declarations for Human Rights Day and Freedom of the Press Day, although a regime on its eastern borders openly violates human rights and the freedom of the press. Thus, the opening of the Delegation of EC in Minsk should be used as an opportunity for the development of a special Belarus-focused human rights policy. It should create a forum for dialogue, not only with the Belarusian government and with Belarusian citizens, but also with Belarusian civil society.

Another reason why the special Belarus-focused policies of the EU are only in their earliest stages is the fact that the EU is still not accustomed to acting as an international body. The EU faces the problem that it lacks experience in working with civil society on the European level. This creates difficulties in building a "European network" of NGOs, research institutions and other establishments that would help to develop its "soft power" under the current conditions in Belarus, where officials, and probably even the majority of citizens, are not open to the promotion of European values.

The overall impact of the V4 countries' policy towards Belarus has been considerable, mainly in terms of the change in how the "Belarusian issue" is perceived in the European Union. The accession of some post-communist countries to the EU (particularly Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia and the Czech Re-

public) in 2004 contributed to substantial changes in EU policies towards Belarus.¹ Since then, the interest of EU institutions in Belarus has increased, although the presence of the EU in Belarus is still not largely visible. Poor public relations were evident not only in the case of the EU incentives to Belarus, presented in the “non-paper,” published in November 2006 and entitled “What the European Union could bring to Belarus” (which mentioned the benefits that could be offered to Belarus if human rights conditions were to improve), but also in the presence of the EU as a donor for Belarusian civil society. The objections to the European Commission related especially to the high degree of bureaucracy and the unwillingness to support projects that could become a subject of political confrontation with the current Belarusian state authorities.

On the other hand, Visegrad countries and NGOs are filling the gaps in the EU programs related to Belarus. The Visegrad countries have focused their work on Belarusian civil society. Thus, they are contributing to the creation of a Belarusian counter-elite.

The Visegrad countries have made important contributions in developing EU policies towards Belarus by establishing direct contacts not only on the governmental level, but also on the level of individual citizens by granting scholarships, financing the European Humanitarian University, and supporting radio and TV broadcasting. In addition, the Visegrad countries have launched a direct dialogue with representatives of Belarusian civil society. This dialogue is one of the crucial contributions of the Visegrad countries to changing European policies towards Belarus, especially in that it introduced Belarus’s civil society and opposition to European institutions, mainly the European Parliament. Such a dialogue should be continued in order to establish a standing consultative platform with the EU. Now this is all the more true, given that a Russian-Belarusian human rights commission was established in 2005 at the Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights Council, under the President of the Russian Federation. Paradoxically, by the creation of this commission, representatives of Belarusian civil society received a higher level of official recognition from Russia than they have from the European Union. Of course, it is up to Russia alone whether and when it will utilize the creation of this commission as a tool in its policy towards Belarus.

In addition, state institutions and NGOs in the Visegrad Group (and Lithuania) can contribute their experience with how funding for democracy building pro-

¹ Lalkou, Ihar: Európske perspektívy Bieloruska. In: Poláčková, Zuzana — Marušiak, Juraj (eds.): Európske výzvy pre Slovensko. Bratislava, Veda, s. 208.

grams functions in the conditions of the authoritarian Belarusian regime in order to make the grant mechanisms of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and “Decentralized Cooperation” more effective and more accessible to civil society in Belarus.

Visegrad Level

At the V4 level, the coordination of a policy towards Belarus is only just beginning. The V4 countries have mainly developed programs to promote democracy at the national level. The first major joint activity was the inclusion of representatives from Belarusian NGOs in the 15th meeting of Ministers of Culture from the V4 in Krakow (3-5 September 2006). At this meeting, ministers spoke in favor of Belarusian partners participating more actively at events financed by the International Visegrad Fund. The promotion of joint activities to benefit Belarus was also an objective of the Slovak presidium of the V4 (July 2006 — June 2007). In terms of joint multilateral V4 activities to aid Belarus, we can speak only about the International Visegrad Fund’s scholarship program (In-Coming Scholarships). In the 2007/2008 school-year, scholarships were granted to 12 Belarusian students to study in one of the V4 countries (three in the Czech Republic, three in Hungary, two in Poland, and four in Slovakia).²

There are several reasons, however, why the Visegrad group should increase its cooperation in promoting democracy in Belarus. In particular, these reasons include the history of the Visegrad group itself and the group’s goals to reconstruct the region of Central and Eastern Europe, to establish democratic societies and to join Euro-Atlantic structures. Visegrad is an intellectual project based on the historical experience of former dissidents. Visegrad was built upon the understanding that Central and Eastern European nations share a common fate. Currently, the key message of the Visegrad experience is the relatively successful model of transition that these countries have established. On the other hand, there are also practical reasons why the Visegrad group should help Belarus, which include the desire of all Visegrad members to have a stable and predictable partner with common political values on its eastern borders. The experiences with Ukraine form another reason why the Visegrad countries want to further develop their coopera-

² Visegrad Scholarship Program. Approved in-coming scholars 2007. Bratislava, International Visegrad Fund 2007. http://www.visegradfund.org/approved/VSP_2007_INCOMING.pdf

tion with Belarus. The developments after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine particularly reveal the need to build extensive alliances, especially in terms of promoting a country's EU-membership. Although Visegrad countries are not highly influential in the EU, with the exception of Poland, they can provide a useful background for Poland as long as Poland will consider them as potential partners. The recent changes in Hungarian policy also provide an impetus for enhancing the cooperation among the Visegrad countries, especially after Hungary opened an embassy in Minsk and decided to provide support for the European Humanities University.³ At the same time, Hungary is only now drafting its priorities regarding Belarus and looking to create its own Belarusian policy. According to the first statements of the new Hungarian ambassador in Minsk, economic interests mainly contributed to the decision to open an embassy in Minsk. Nonetheless, Hungarian priorities in Belarus include strengthening cooperation in academics, culture and student exchanges.⁴ If there is a need to build a pro-Belarusian alliance within the framework of the EU, then there is a need to integrate Hungary in such alliance. The Visegrad structure is the best framework for Hungarian involvement.

Recommendations for a Common Visegrad Policy towards Belarus

1. Continue the push for democratization in Belarus at the bilateral and multilateral level, including the EU, the OSCE and the European Council. This push should be accompanied by providing Belarus with positive incentives, including the prospect of EU membership, under the conditions that Belarus must fulfill particular criteria and that it must be the wish of the Belarusian people. Cooperation with the Belarusian authorities of today can only be developed if human rights conditions are significantly improved.

2. Increase the cooperation among the V4 states regarding policies towards Belarus, the exchange of information, and coordination of donor policies. On the political level, the V4's natural partners are Lithuania, Latvia and the Scandinavian states. At the very least, the V4 should try to establish a consultative forum on donor policy with donors and German representatives. Such an approach would

³ Jarábik, Balázs — Silicki, Vitali: Is the EU serious about democracy and human rights? The case of Belarus. Unpublished manuscript, written for eCFR and FRIDE.

⁴ Posol Vengrii vyvesit v Minske samyj bol'shoj flag Evrosojuza. Naviny.by, 2. 6. 2008

increase the “European” dimension of the V4 policy towards Belarus and would increase the EU presence in Belarus.

3. Engage the representatives of Belarusian NGOs in discussions of the V4 countries’ assistance priorities. On the level of the V4, these discussions will help to better match policy priorities to local societal needs in Belarus and to improve the knowledge of domestic political developments in Belarus within the V4.

4. V4 countries should make use of their similar historical roots to help Belarus. NGOs in the V4 have a comparative advantage because their countries are undergoing transitions and, therefore, they can better appreciate the conditions of working in a country like Belarus, especially because the autocratic regime in Belarus is similar in many ways to the communist regimes in central Europe in the 1980s. In particular, the ‘negotiated transitions’ to democracy in 1989 could provide the lessons and offer the inspiration necessary for democratic change in Belarus.

5. A counter-elite should be cultivated in Belarus. Towards this goal, scholarship programs should be made an even greater priority for V4 democracy assistance. Where possible, these scholarships should include study in Belarus. These programs could be financed either by a dedicated V4 Fund for Belarus or through the International Visegrad Fund, as is currently the case in Ukraine. Scholarship programs in the following areas should be prioritized: law, sociology, political science, EU studies, international relations, public administration, law, economics, and public policy. In addition, the V4 should support long-term internships at NGOs.

6. Increase the transparency of donors’ policies towards Belarus by promoting consultations among the V4 officers responsible for policies regarding democracy assistance as well as among the representatives of V4 and Belarusian NGOs.

7. V4 countries should coordinate their policies and pool resources by setting up a special fund for Belarus in order to avoid duplication and inadvertent competition. In effect, the activities of such a fund could be less politically controversial in Belarus than the activities of national governments, especially that of Poland. Thus, this group would be less vulnerable to the Lukashenka regime’s propaganda attacks. This should not replace national priorities or national funding by individual V4 governments, but should supplement them and provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and for the coordination of policies and events.

8. Establish a more systematic approach among Visegrad state and non-state donors in order to provide for the successful development of Visegrad NGOs as well as to enable particular projects to continue. Visegrad countries should real-

ize that promoting democracy in Belarus is an investment for the long run. For example, there was a lack of a conceptual approach in the cases of some regional and local newspaper projects, as well as in the recently developed Belsat TV project, which was set up to broadcast via the Astra satellite, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the satellite antennas in Belarus are set to broadcast from the Sirius satellite.

Challenges Facing Visegrad Policies towards Belarus

Recently, the Visegrad countries have faced several challenges regarding their policies towards Belarus. Within the Visegrad group, the EU, and Belarusian society itself a new consensus has arisen in terms of an Eastern policy and national interests.

Within the EU, this consensus is represented by the rapprochement between Poland and France,⁵ the representatives of the two opposing concept of the EU's Eastern policy. Thanks to the changes in Hungary's policy towards Belarus, it is possible to seek a joint policy on Belarus among Visegrad countries. At the same time, within Belarusian society, there are signals that a consensus on foreign policy priorities is being sought. Lukashenka has adopted many of the foreign political concepts of the opposition,⁶ at least on the declarative level, which has formed the grounds for the implementation of the EU policy of democratic conditionality and for the development of closer relations between the EU and Belarus.

Should there be Sanctions? The first challenge is the European dilemma of whether or not to join American in implementing economic sanctions against Belarus. Visegrad countries, above all Poland, share the opinion that sanctions are ineffective and that, in fact, these sanctions will make Belarus increasingly dependent on Russia.⁷ In many cases, it is rather difficult to distinguish whether the sanctions are affecting the ruling elites or even ordinary citizens. One example is the issue of the price of Schengen visas for citizens of Belarus. The liberalization of the visa regime between Belarus and the EU is not a priority among Belaru-

⁵ Pawlicki, Jacek - Pszczółkowska, Dominika: Francuskie otwarcie. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28. 5. 2008. Saryusz-Wolski, Jacek: Jeszcze nie czas na euforię. *Dziennik*, 2. 6. 2008.

⁶ How the West continues to lose Belarus. Belarus Brief. Bratislava, Pontis Foundation, December 21, 2006.

⁷ Jarábik, Balázs — Silicki, Vitali: Is the EU serious about democracy and human rights? The case of Belarus. Unpublished manuscript, written for eCFR and FRIDE.

sian ruling elites because the visa ban will continue for representatives of the Lukashenka regime who are most actively involved in political persecution. Thus, for Belarusian citizens it would be better if there were a cheaper Schengen visa for all Belarusians, under the condition that the policy of refusing to grant visas to the highest representatives of the regime would be continued or even strengthened. In addition, the former presidential candidate of the opposition, Alaksander Milinkevich, rejected the idea of tight economic sanctions.⁸

Nonetheless, we are facing with the fact that political incentives, such as the cheaper Schengen visa, are not effective because they do not act to change the official policy. All the same, it seems that economic incentives, such as the possible involvement of Belarus in the ENP investment instrument, are not as effective as they could be, since the EU cannot provide Belarus with a cheap source of energy. Moreover, investments from Russia and the Third World compensate for the lack of Western investments into the Belarusian economy. Thus, even recent European investments could contribute to strengthening the ties between Europe and Belarus. The example of Poland in the 1980s shows that economic integration with the West can open the door for political integration, as long as further changes take place within the political regime. As the most active Visegrad country in conceptualizing the European policy towards Belarus, Poland realized that until the current Belarusian regime is stable enough, the government will continue its present policy of making “no compromise in areas where meeting the EU requirements can weaken its grip on power.”⁹ Therefore, Belarus’s neighboring countries are most in favor of “soft” approaches, based on policies for promoting democracy and a limited dialogue with officials in Minsk, mainly on the lower and middle levels of the current administration.

Reform of the European Neighborhood Policy. Initially announced by the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, in the proclamation of the Mediterranean Union and later by the Polish — Swedish Eastern Partnership project,¹⁰ which was approved by the European Council on 19 — 20 June 2008,¹¹ the reform of the ENP was not a surprise. In November 2007, the EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner indicated this direction in his speech by noting that the ENP involves

⁸ Milinkevich against sanctions. Charter 97.org, 30. 5. 2008.

⁹ Chavusau, Yury: One Year After the European Message: Reaction of the Official Minsk to the EU Twelve Demands. Belarussian Institute for the Strategic Studies. BISS Blitz #13/2007, 5 December 2007. <http://www.belinstitute.eu/images/stories/documents/blitz20071205eumessageen.pdf>

¹⁰ Eastern Partnership. Polish-Swedish proposal. Euractiv.com, 23 May 2008.

¹¹ Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council (19 — 20 June 2008), nr. 11018/08. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/101346.pdf

very different countries.¹² Pressure from the new member states led to the differentiation between the Southern and Eastern dimensions.

The most important facts in the new initiative are:

The specific EU's Eastern policy, including the Belarusian issue, ceased to be purely the forte of the EU's "new members." The EU's "old members" became actively involved in this project;

The EU's Eastern policy differs from the policy towards its Southern neighbors.

The Visegrad states first had the opportunity to take part in conceptualizing the EU's Eastern policy, since the ENP was adopted without their participation.

Although the EU's recognition of the Eastern dimension as a separate part of its external policy is a crucial change in the conceptual thinking of the EU, there still remain a number of questions, which are not answered in this short document:

The crucial issue will be choosing the mechanisms for the decision-making process. Although the Eastern Partnership should be an integrated policy of the EU, it is clear that some countries, particularly the countries of Southern Europe, are less interested in it, whereas Germany and the member states from Central Europe are more actively involved. The Eastern Partnership increases the financial responsibility of the interested member states. Thus, the tensions between the joint EU and national approaches will cause problems for implementing the Eastern Partnership.

The relation of this partnership to the Mediterranean Union is a persistent dilemma, as the EC stated that the initiatives should be equal. The Eastern Partnership does not give new institutional incentives for the participants, especially in the terms of the prospects for future accession.

The relations between the regional and country approaches and the future of the European Neighborhood Policy itself will continue to be topics of discussion. At the present stage, the Eastern Partnership does not exceed the institutional framework of the ENP, nor does it presume that the countries involved are eligible to join the EU. This raises concerns for Ukraine.¹³ Thus, discussions regarding the content of the Eastern Partnership will continue. Even if the member

¹² Ferrero-Waldner, Benita: „Die EU und ihre östlichen Nachbarn — Sicherheit und Wohlstand durch Vernetzung.“ Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft. Berlin, 15 November 2007. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/718&format=HTML&aged=0&language=DE&guiLanguage=en>

¹³ Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine regarding the development of the Eastern dimension of the European Union foreign policy. Embassy News. Brussels, Mission of Ukraine to European Communities, May 26, 2008. <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/eu/en/news/detail/13105.htm>

states directly interested in the Eastern Partnership achieve the platform for developing new initiatives, the final decision will be up to the EU as a whole. Therefore, countries applying as prospective members of the EU as well as the democratic opposition in Belarus, should not only address members states that are actively involved in the EU Eastern policy, such as Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia or Germany. They should also be more active in forming contacts other EU states, such as France, Spain or Greece, in order to convince them that the EU needs to be more actively engaged on its eastern borders.

The certain conflict could emerge after the Party of European Socialists (PES) initiative to develop the project of the Union of Black Sea, which includes Russia and Turkey. However such a concept now seems to be a replica of Central European Initiative, not a model for a systematic EU policy.¹⁴ At the same time if the relations of EU with Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova or Southern Caucasus are developed within the same framework as the EU-Russia relations, it will threaten the chances to transfer the “Eastern dimension” to the part of the EU-enlargement policy.

Belarus will have the opportunity to become involved in some EU policies, according to the proposal by experts. This would make it possible to launch dialogues with lower and mid-level officials in the current Belarusian regime.

The Eastern Partnership should provide the opportunity to enhance the current dialogue with representatives from the Belarusian democratic opposition and from Belarusian civil society, in order to go beyond the framework of the present programs for promoting democracy in the framework of EU, such as those implemented by the ENPI. Representatives from civil society could be involved in Eastern Partnership activities, either as equal partners or on as observers (as in the meeting of the V4 Ministers of Culture in Kraków on 3 — 4 September, 2006).¹⁵

Conclusions

Since the Visegrad group states were among the main critics of the European Neighborhood Policy and the promoters of the Eastern dimension of the EU

¹⁴ Socialists propose „A Union of Black Sea“. European Parliament, The Socialist Group in the European Parliament, 29. 5. 2008.

¹⁵ Meeting of the Ministers of Culture of the V4 in Kraków, Poland. 03-04/09/2006. <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?ctag=download&docID=52>

in the past,¹⁶ after the European Council's decision of 19 — 20 June, 2008, they have gained the opportunity to contribute to the new Eastern policy of the EU. The Eastern Partnership will increase their role and responsibility in conceptualizing and implementing the EU's future Eastern policy. Along with the Baltic States, the Scandinavian states, and Romania, they will be responsible for the success of the Eastern Partnership model. For this reason, they should launch a discussion on a model for their multilateral cooperation and on the content of the Eastern Partnership.

The willingness of the Visegrad countries to take on the increased responsibility (financial and otherwise) for the development of this prospective EU policy is another issue. For example, the lack of willingness of Visegrad countries and other new EU-member states to support the Neighborhood Investment Fund suggests that there are limits to the support that they are willing to offer. Currently, only the Czech Republic and Hungary have announced their financial contributions to the Neighborhood Investment fund.¹⁷ Poland and Lithuania have not, even though they are the most active in promoting the EU's Eastern policy and the EU's engagement in Belarus.

In the framework of the Eastern Partnership, the Visegrad countries could find a common platform for coordinating their policies towards Belarus on the political level, as well as on the level of citizens through the Visegrad Fund.

Besides taking on the main responsibility for the Eastern Partnership, the main task of the Visegrad group in drafting the EU's policy towards Belarus will be to utilize their experience in establishing direct dialogues with civil society and to establish a direct partnership between the EU and Belarusian civil society.

¹⁶ Pelczynska-Nalecz, Katarzyna — Culena, Alexander — Póti, László — Votápek, Vladimír: *Eastern Policy of the EU: the Visegrad Countries' Perspective. Thinking about an Eastern Dimension*. Warsaw, Center for Eastern studies 2003.

¹⁷ More funds for vital investment in EU's neighbourhood. Reference: IP/08/709. Brussels, European Commission, 5 May 2008. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/709&format=HTML&aged=0&la>

Yury Chavusau

THE ARRANGEMENTS OF THE OPPOSITION FORCES IN 2007 AND 2008

In a brief, it would be difficult to cover all the recent political developments, reactions, conflicts, and reconciliations involving the Belarusian opposition. Isolated from all the instruments of power and without any real tools to influence the public, the Belarusian opposition generates sufficient interest to warrant press coverage and leads a relatively vigorous life, which is similar on the surface to the functioning of oppositional organizations in democratic countries. Incidentally, politicians from the opposition make waves in broadcast news and on the Internet. Despite the limited number of independent periodicals and the lack of representation in political institutions, the opposition produces material that keeps broadcast and online analysts busy. The attention given to the opposition by observers is out of proportion with its real influence on society. This substantially distorts the real picture and can be explained by the fact that nearly all independent media outlets have limited access to information from official sources and operate in the same “parallel world.”

In this overview, I will not drift away from the point into reflections on specific political developments. Instead, I will focus on major trends that shaped the political landscape in the last two years. I will try to determine the status of key opposition figures in the period under review.

The Opposition in the Intervals between Major Political Campaigns

In 2007 and 2008, the processes of institutional development within Belarusian opposition groups were influenced by a number of internal and external factors. This may be described as an interwar period, or an interval between two major opposition political campaigns. This was the time for assessing the results of the 2006 presidential election, drawing conclusions, and preparing for a new political cycle that includes the 2008 parliamentary election and the next presidential election.

Although the local election held in 2007 was not a significant political event for the opposition or the authorities, it alarmed those who pinned hopes on the opposition's political potential. The authorities reverted to dirty tricks and intimidation when there was no apparent need for it. The usual vote-rigging tools would have been enough to assure the election of malleable pro-presidential candidates. The opposition had no coherent tactics; some politicians from the opposition withdrew from the race in protest against these irregularities, while others played a losing game until the end. Moreover, the opposition's candidate selection process was marred by internal strife that undercut its competitiveness for votes and seats on local elected councils. Therefore, the opposition's campaign was, to a lesser degree, a part of preparations for the next presidential election and, to a greater degree, a realignment of forces within the opposition. Unlike the previous political cycle, however, various opposition groups failed to coalesce into one coalition.

Distribution of Benefits Gained during the 2006 Campaign

The large-scale presidential campaign in 2006 had a great impact on the opposition. Various groups differ in their assessments of that campaign; they have not come to a common view. As a result, many lessons still have not been learned from the campaign.

The political benefits during the campaign were distributed unevenly. Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the single candidate from the pro-democratic forces, was the face of the campaign. Although his hands were tied by coalition rules and the fact that the overall campaign management was beyond his control, he was held responsible for the defeat. At the same time, Milinkevich personified the hopes of

the pro-democratic electorate. The election raised him to prominence and he was associated with the opposition and a democratic alternative in general.

The opposition's network, however, remained under the control of the decision-making center formed by the leaders of the major political parties of the opposition. Embodied by the coalition known as the United Democratic Forces (UDF), the center was perceived as separate from the politician who personified the pro-democratic forces.

The uneven distribution of the campaign gains led to a power struggle between the UDF decision-making center and Milinkevich. The politician sought to take over control of the decision-making center and the opposition network, while UDF leaders sought to slow his momentum. The strife had a significant impact on the political landscape in 2007 and 2008.

External Factors:

Détente, Blackmail and What Else the EU Could Offer Belarus

In relation to democratic forces, other factors can be categorized as external, since they are determined by perceivable socioeconomic, political, and foreign policy trends as well as current government policies in Belarus. Naturally, these factors affected the electoral process to a different degree, and had different origins, natures, and durations in time. What they had in common is that they did not depend or almost did not depend on the decisions of opposition figures.

Against the backdrop of economic differences with Vladimir Putin's Russia, the West's decision to impose economic and political sanctions on the Belarusian authorities seem to have created favorable conditions for the opposition in the atmosphere of competing pressure on the Lukashenka regime from the West and the East. The opposition partly took advantage of this opportunity to influence the relations between Belarus and the West. Still, the opposition was not invited to sit at the negotiating table with Lukashenka and the West. Since the authorities ignored the opposition, the latter offered the West background information for a dialogue. The opposition unsuccessfully attempted to offer the authorities its assistance in improving ties with the West. So far, the dialogue has been conducted without the participation of opposition figures.

The pro-democratic forces were taken by surprise by the decrease in the level of intimidation, the adjustments to the government's repressive machine, and the

employment of more subtle methods to control the situation. Instead of bringing clearly politically-motivated charges against opposition activists, the authorities accused them of crimes that could hardly be labeled as political. The authorities gave permission for mass demonstrations, but employed dirty tricks and arrested leaflet distributors to ensure low attendance. In addition, the regime always reserved the right to revert to old-fashioned repressive methods that would upset the dialogue with the West, but would give the authorities a free hand in internal politics.

These inconsistent tactics of tightening and loosening the screws should not be seen as the regime's steps along the path of democratization. Instead, they are reminiscent of a *détente* in the relations between the West and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, which was attributable to external factors. The regime's decision to drop the most repressive tools against dissidents was not motivated by its willingness to admit opponents to political institutions, but was a message intended to notify the external addressee of the removal of obstacles to a dialogue. Symbolically, Lukashenka offered the West to free the number one political prisoner, Alaksandr Kazulin, on the condition that he would leave the country. His offer was very similar to the Soviet Union's tactics of releasing and expatriating dissidents. However, the authorities can always end a *détente* or limit the number of participants in a dialogue. For instance, tensions with the United States have not frustrated the government's negotiations with the EU.

A gas price hike and the need to tighten belts prompted the government to abolish social benefits for millions of Belarusians. The move weighed heavily on the government's political credentials and seemed to give the opposition the chance to win over voters through the use of social rhetoric. Indeed, most opposition groups shifted their focus from values such as democracy and human rights to sociopolitical issues. In the grand scheme of things, the success of their rhetoric was questionable because the opposition is not represented in political institutions and has almost no tools to reach out to voters.

Speaking about external factors, it is important to note the role of the EU's non-paper entitled "What the European Union could bring to Belarus," which is often referred to as the EU's 12 conditions. Paradoxically, the UDF and other pro-democratic forces used the offer of cooperation declared by the EU in the fall of 2006 as their political platform. Even political groups skeptical about prospects of EU membership had to correlate their actions with the EU's proposals. The non-paper set out criteria for assessing political changes in Belarus and, in a broader sense, any internal political developments. In fact, the EU conditions and the

benefits offered in exchange for meeting them served as the platform for a broad range of opposition forces.

United Democratic Forces: A Tactical Alliance and Possible Disagreements

Established in the late 1990s by parties with different ideologies that are working to put Belarus back on a democratic path, the UDF remains the structural nucleus of the opposition. Its formation began in 1999, with the signing of an accord by the leaders of major political parties, including: the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), the United Civic Party (UCP), the Belarusian Communist Party (PKB), the Belarusian Social Democratic Party “Narodnaja Hramada,” the Belarusian Labor Party, the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada (BSDH), and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The signatories formed the Coordinating Council of the Democratic Forces and later set up the Coordinating Council of Opposition Political Parties, which named the single opposition challenger to Lukashenka in the 2001 presidential race. In the lead-up to the 2004 parliamentary election, five political parties and several NGOs formed a coalition called Five Plus. This alliance adopted a platform, entitled “Five Steps to Better Life.” After the 2004 parliamentary election, ten leaders struck a deal to revive the Coordinating Council of the Democratic Forces. A Congress of the Democratic Forces in 2005 reaffirmed the unity of the opposition’s goals and values in preparation for the 2006 presidential election and approved Alaksandr Milinkevich, whose candidacy was proposed by the Green Party and backed by the BPF, as the common presidential nominee.

After the presidential election, the UDF included nearly all registered and non-registered opposition groups, except the Conservative Christian Party (CChP). Later, Milinkevich formed a Movement for Freedom, which cut into the membership base of the other opposition parties. In fact, many of its members have dual loyalty. The coalition’s decisions and tactics often came into conflict with the tactics of Milinkevich’s movement. Divisions manifested themselves during the 7th Congress of the United Democratic Forces, which was held in Minsk on May 26 and 27, 2007. At the congress, delegates voted out Milinkevich as coalition leader and elected four co-chairpersons, who would serve on a rotating basis. This move boosted the influence of major political parties, such as the BPF,

the UCP, the BSDP “Narodnaja Hramada,” and the PKB, at the expense of the smaller groups. This coalition set up the top decision-making body, the UDF Political Council Presidium, which consists of ten representatives from the major coalition parties.

As before, ideological differences made it difficult for the coalition to agree on a common platform. The coalition’s internal rules do not require parties to give up their own ideological doctrines. The UDF members rallied around their common goal to change the political system and return to the realm of competitive politics, rather than around similar ideologies. Repeated attempts to draft a common strategy had limited success; the Small Constitution and the UDF Economic Platform adopted in 2007 remained on paper, failing to trigger public debate. In fact, the UDF members are able to agree on a common doctrine only for an election period.

The UDF Planning and Analysis Group is a special body for drawing up keynote documents, made up of the representatives from various parties. Its members discuss various ideas and submit proposals to the UDF decision-makers, which suit all the parties. The Group formulated the coalition’s message for the 2008 parliamentary election and compiled the list of parliamentary nominees (the selection process was open to candidates unaffiliated with the coalition.)

Milinkevich’s Movement for Freedom (MfF)

The MfF began to recruit members in spring 2006, during the mass protests against Lukashenka’s controversial re-election for a third term as president. The organization was shaped in late 2006, when the divisions deepened between the former presidential candidate of the opposition and the other coalition leaders. The MfF made three unsuccessful attempts to register with the Ministry of Justice as a human rights association.

The movement was built around several small center-right groups and acts as an autonomous faction within the UDF. Its leader, Alaksandr Milinkevich, plans to take advantage of his solid name recognition to challenge Lukashenka in the 2011 presidential race. Despite his declared intention to enlist new supporters, the movement is formed mainly of other opposition group members. Unsurprisingly, it has been hit with accusations of proselytism. Some pro-democratic activists question the transparency of MfF decision-making. In contrast to the UPF, the movement has no clear decision-making rules; most of its decisions are made

behind the scenes. Milinkevich's personal reputation has helped the MfF to forestall attacks regarding its undemocratic internal organization.

If the MfF had succeeded in its attempt to absorb the BFP during the party's annual convention in late 2007, Milinkevich would be heading a strong right wing coalition that could compete with the rest of the pro-democratic forces, have a coalition of his own, and hold a controlling stake in the pro-democratic opposition. Paradoxically, the BPF plays the role of "the golden share," which currently belongs to the UDF.

The MfF decided against fielding candidates in the 2008 parliamentary election, although some of its activists were included in the UDF list. The MfF joined the coalition in conducting a large-scale Campaign for Free Elections in order to force the authorities to hold a free and fair election, which would be in line with Belarusian law and international democratic standards.

The MfF's tactical objective is to bolster Milinkevich's image as the generally-recognized opposition leader, contrary to the views of the other leading politicians in the UDF. Milinkevich's presidential bid may eventually meet with opposition from the UDF, which is formally in charge of selecting the opposition's candidate.

The European Coalition

The coalition has a looser structure than the UDF or the MfF. Formed before the 2004 parliamentary elections, the alliance includes several unregistered groups that push for Belarus's entry into the EU. Most of these groups are affiliated with the UDF, but they are critical of the UDF election strategy. They accuse the UDF of anti-EU sentiments, despite the fact that the UDF platform has a strong plank in favor of EU membership.

The European Coalition proposed about 70 parliamentary nominees, many of whom were rejected by the UDF. Two members of the European Coalition, the Charter 97 human rights group and the Malady Front, called for a boycott of the election and planned to stage mass protests against election fraud. Nevertheless, some members of the Malady Front have sought registration in the race on the UDF's list.

Mikola Statkevich, a former political prisoner, acts as the spokesman for the coalition. Most observers note that Statkevich behaves as an outsider, trying to

diverge from the other opposition players and find his own niche. The Statkevich-led group refused to align itself with the rest of opposition forces during the boycotts of the 1999-2000 parliamentary election and by-election, and acted independently during the 2004 parliamentary race.

In Opposition to Mainstream Opposition

The Belarusian opposition has been sidelined for about a decade. Its occasional infiltrations into political institutions (rare victories in local elections and the emergence of the small opposition group Respublika in the parliament) have not given it a chance to influence government policies and decisions, but have made the authorities more wary of opponents. The isolation from established politics has given rise to a non-establishment opposition that employs both conventional and unconventional methods.

Attempts to form an opposition to the mainstream opposition are not new in Belarusian politics. In fact, it has become a tradition for politicians to use this seemingly effective tool. For instance, Alaksandr Kazulin did so with his odd movement, the People's Will. Other politicians also explored that path. Alaksandr Milinkevich took a more technical approach to the matter, effectively using the mainstream opposition and its grass-root cells, while rejecting the old opposition system. Attitudes to the mainstream opposition within his Movement for Freedom differ.

So far, all attempts to rely on the non-mainstream opposition have failed. Even such an uncompromising candidate as Kazulin dropped the idea of forming a broad civic movement and took over as the chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) "Hramada." He was offered a seat on the UDF Presidium. Likewise, even after his ouster as leader of the UDF, Milinkevich and his movement would not quit the coalition.

Pro-Russian politicians are the only ones who have consistently positioned themselves as "opponents of the mainstream opposition," but they do not represent any particular force or group. Demonstrations in support of a union between Belarus and Russia, and the notorious statement by Leanid Sinicyn and Uladzimir Parfianovich, calling for Belarus's incorporation into Russia, have proved their ideas to be absolutely non-competitive.

Some young politicians have attempted to mobilize opponents of the regime, who are disappointed with the mainstream opposition. The non-mainstream op-

position played an instrumental role during the post-election protests in Minsk in March 2006. The non-mainstream opposition currently includes Inicyjatyva, a group formed by the participants in the landmark tent-camp protest on Kastrych-nitskaya Square, and Bunt, an organization dominated by former members of the self-disbanded Zubr resistance movement. In spring 2007, the two groups issued a manifesto entitled "It Is Time to Win," which gave no indication of their strategy. These groups should not be viewed as part of the political opposition. They employ methods of non-violent resistance, but have no clear goal or political agenda. In the future, some of their members may resort to violent methods in order to fight the regime, but for the time being they function as a civic protest sewer. Groups like these usually act as satellites of national opposition movements. Fighting the dictatorship like "a samurai without a master," these movements are notable for their romantic spirit and grim prospects.

* * *

This analysis of Belarus's political spectrum, from well-structured and institutionally strong organizations to small and hardly influential groups, suggests that the opposition's declared unity is far from reality. Organizations that have a well-defined purpose and assess their strengths realistically tend to work together closely. In particular, the UDF and the MfF are doing real work despite their differences. They can reach understandings and short-term agreements, such as their coordinated efforts in the run-up to the 2008 parliamentary election. A mutually agreed format of action may help them to avoid a separation after the election.

The UDF seems to be the only political force that has clear goals for the parliamentary election. All the other groups take part in or boycott the election in order to regroup and get an advantage before the next presidential race, rather than to gain access to the competition for parliamentary seats.

By Vital Silicki

CATCH UP WITH AND OVERTAKE EUROPE: THE NEW LOGIC FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF LUKASHENKA'S REGIME

Participants in the conference “Towards a New Vision of Belarus,”¹ held in September 2007 by the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS), concluded that the country’s “reformless” period, associated with President Alexander Lukashenka’s rule following the break-up of the Soviet Union, was nearly over and that the government was about to embark on the path of “authoritarian transformation.” This opinion drew severe criticism from Belarusian experts. On the one hand, critics argued that certain changes that were taking place in the country did not signal the beginning of liberalization of the Lukashenka regime. Indeed, the authorities did not show any sign that they were willing to revise their *raison d’être* (other than clinging to power indefinitely for the sake of power). Skeptics of the transformation theory of the Lukashenka regime also say that the changes observed within the government system or in its relations with society and the outside world are not at all qualitative, but are similar to the process of hair growth rather than that of a surgical operation. Speculations about a possible government reshuffle that could trigger certain changes were also unfounded. President Lukashenka’s appearance in public with his alleged younger son in April 2008 was a clear signal that he did not plan to step down in the foreseeable future or transfer power to his older son Viktor Lukashenka. Moreover, the government’s effort to improve the country’s poor human rights record was followed by a fresh wave of oppression.

¹ http://www.belinstitute.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=19&Itemid=51

Even a superficial analysis of trends and developments in Belarus in the last two years would not yield proof for any of the aforementioned points of view (see Table 1). However, steps for government-planned economic liberalization are not merely cosmetic measures, since they expose a new face and also reflect a new quality of Lukashenka-style authoritarianism.

Table 1. Political, Economic and Social developments in Belarus in 2007 and 2008: Liberalization or Tightening of the Screw?

Political Developments	
Release of political prisoners	Harsh sentences doled out to 14 demonstrators, crackdown on protesters on March 25
Promises to conduct a transparent and legitimate parliamentary election, declaration that the opposition may win seats in the new parliament	Government-orchestrated formation of Bielaja Rus as a future "party of power"
Engagement with some members of the cultural and civic opposition, attempts by officials to pull the nationalist rug from under the Belarusian opposition	Demolition of national shrines under the pretext of reconstruction, persecution of civic activists and cultural figures, removal of Belarusian History from the school curriculum
Lenient sentences for violating some repressive political laws	New forms of intimidation of activists, such as orders to submit tax statements, threats to sever parental rights, etc.
Foreign Policy Developments	
Permission to establish a European Commission delegation in Minsk, Authorities toned down anti-EU rhetoric	Minsk's demand that the US embassy reduce its staff, more aggressive tone toward the United States
Relationship between Government and Society	
Steps to ease travel regulations, abolition of the <i>propiska</i> system and foreign travel permits	New travel restrictions for opposition figures
Abolition of social benefits	Reintroduction of some social benefits in early 2008
Economic Developments	
Privatization deals, declaration of efforts to attract foreign investment, lifting of the moratorium on trade in securities, some steps to liberalize the labor market, tax reform plan	Education reform designed to service the Soviet-style economy
Liberalization of business regulations	Measures to tighten conditions for entrepreneurs

At the same time, the combination of liberal and repressive steps by the government may indicate the authorities' erratic behavior, the possible chaos within

the power structure, and/or the lack of a consensus within the government regarding the future development of the country and the evolution of the regime.

This short article is an attempt to reflect on the causes, trends and consequences of the recent changes in Belarus. It is based on three premises. First, conflicting trends are not a manifestation of erratic behavior, but a logical result of the processes of social and economic modernization that the Belarusian authorities were forced to accept in order to retain a fundamental “social contract” with the public. Second, the government’s alternation between liberal and repressive measures produces a certain pluralism of practices that may eventually eat away at the Belarusian political system. Third, attempts to manage the erosion of the political system will push the Lukashenka regime toward transformation in the near future.

The Logic behind the Transformation of the Lukashenka Regime: the First Attempt towards an Explanation

The spat between Belarus and Russia over oil and gas prices in late 2006 and early 2007 is widely believed to be the starting point after which the Lukashenka regime began to change. As a result of the dispute, Belarus and Russia reached an agreement about the gradual rise in the price of gas in Belarus to the average European level. In addition, Russian big businesses began to expand in Belarus. Many observers noted that Belarus found itself in a situation where it could no longer sustain robust economic growth and develop within the framework of its modified, but generally unreformed Soviet-style economy. The oil and gas feud had two important consequences. On the one hand, it prompted the Lukashenka government to make some changes that may eventually upset the system in the way that the partial reform launched by Gorbachev caused an internal crisis within the Soviet system. On the other hand, the realization that further sustainable development is impossible within the old economic model created an opportunity for public discussion of possible alternative paths for the country’s development.

Indeed, throughout 2007 the Belarusian government’s internal and foreign policies were affected by the oil and gas row. Short-term Belarusian-Russian relations were uncertain, since Russia seemed determined to build their relations on pragmatic principles.² For this reason, the authorities decreased their intimidat-

² See BISS Blitz, *In the Shadow of Kremlin Stars*

tion tactics against political opponents, offered several state enterprises for privatization and tried to improve Belarus's ties with the European Union. However, in late 2007, relations with Russia dramatically improved. The Kremlin offered new subsidies to Belarus in the form of loans. Hopes for transformation and liberalization waned. In early 2008, the gap between the Belarusian price of gas and the average European price widened to \$200. Moreover, the government found a way to restore the refineries, which rely on Russia for crude oil, and to make them profitable. The government regained the confidence that had been shaken by the previous year's disputes over oil and gas prices. Nevertheless, the government's actions in the first half of 2008 were not as consistent as they could have been if they were driven solely by the relationship with Russia and by energy prices. Around the same time, the authorities freed several figures seen as political prisoners by the West and jailed a few more people on what appeared to be politically motivated charges. In addition, the government allowed the European Commission to establish a delegation in Minsk and quarreled with the United States. Most importantly, in early 2008, the government took serious steps to liberalize the economy. The move was out of tune with the usual cycles in Belarusian-Russian relations, whereby liberal steps followed cuts in Russian subsidies. The uncertainty about Russia's long-term strategy with regard to Belarus could not explain Lukashenka's behavior because Moscow's policies in relation to Minsk were quite clear and transparent. Thus, the transformation of the Lukashenka regime was prompted by a number of challenges unrelated to fuel prices.

Beyond the Russian Context: Factors in the Transformation

The year 2000 was the starting point for the transformation of the Lukashenka regime. The government banked on consumption, using it as a tool to legitimize itself and win continued public support for the status quo. At the time, in an effort to achieve self-legitimization, the authorities shifted their focus from sustaining a normal way of life to stimulating increased consumption (which resulted in the government translating its obligations to the population into dollars and in a rise in the average salary to \$100 and later to \$250, with \$500-\$600 set as a new target salary).

Another marked trend observed in that period was a transformation of the social base of the system, which consolidated the elite elements within the foundation of the Lukashenka government. The leadership appeared to have understood

that permanent conflict between the bureaucracy and top managers will eventually lead to organizational disunity and the erosion of the power structure. Contrary to the opposition's expectations, the nomenklatura failed to support an opposition challenger in the 2001 presidential election. After 2001, the authorities gradually stopped using the anti-corruption drive as a PR tool. Lukashenka's cronies relied on criminal cases for sorting out their relationships with each other. This became obvious even to outsiders. Lukashenka struck a new "social deal" with the elite by signing presidential edicts that prohibited the courts to criminally prosecute certain officials without his consent. In addition, Lukashenka rewrote his contract with bureaucrats, as evidenced by the officially reported higher salaries in the state sector, the higher corruption levels noted by international experts, and ordinary people's ostentatious manifestations of consumption.

The trend of consumption that began years earlier made the 2006-2007 oil and gas dispute even worse. Sociologists noted that the Belarusian authorities were caught in the long-term trap of pursuing approval ratings. By banking on raising consumer standards as a means of self-legitimization, the government heightened the public's expectations for higher living standards. In other words, consumers like John Rockefeller constantly needed just a little more money, material comfort, and opportunity for advancement. The government managed to win that race for a while by exploiting the potential of the old system. But as soon as the economic clouds darkened (in the oil and gas spat with Russia), the authorities frantically tried to lower social expectations. At the time, Lukashenka turned to the topic of looming economic hardships more often than did opposition figures or independent economists.

The changes in the social structure of the government's support base coincided with robust economic growth, which helped the authorities to make good on old promises to voters and on both old and new promises to the elite. In the face of bad economic news, however, the authorities immediately revealed who they intended to rely on and who they would sacrifice. The government's first move was to abolish social benefits for society's most vulnerable groups, but it later seized the opportunity to reinstate some of these benefits. Thus, coddling the strong rather than relying on the stable, tacit support of the weak has become a conspicuous trend in the management of the system's political base. At the same time, the not-very-transparent process of transforming the actual stockholders of the Belarusian state into its real owners began.

In the 21st century, the government's ability to fulfill several social contracts at the same time has given rise to "the ideology of the Belarusian state": an indus-

try of conceptualization, justification, and glorification of “the Belarusian development model.” Although the ideology was quite powerful in practical terms, it failed to identify a national ideal, focusing instead on justifying the political and social practices of the Lukashenka regime and of earlier governments. When it became clear that it may be difficult for the government to keep on fulfilling these social contracts, the authorities sacrificed the advertised practices rather than the ideals. In 2007, within a matter of several months, the public discourse cast off most of the “scares” about the outside world, market-oriented reform, privatization, and investment that dominated Lukashenka’s presidential campaign in 2006. These trends might have been linked to the change in relations between the president and the elite, since it was time to legalize the establishment of a new class of state capitalists. Thus, the government brushed aside its specific purposes or ideals immediately after the inception of its state ideology (that is why Belarus has not become another Cuba), and later ceased to justify its means and practices, with the exception of those critical to its existence, such as the harassment and intimidation of opponents.

The Civilization Gap: Why it is Dangerous for the Belarusian System

After replacing efforts to create an alternative ideology with attempts to build an alternative consumer society, the Belarusian authorities unwillingly began to legitimize institutions and practices characteristic of the civilized world they used to fear. By doing so, they not only found themselves in a “rating trap,” but they also exposed the fact that the unique “Belarusian model” lags far behind other countries. There is a wide gap not only between wages and living standards within Belarus, but the government is also unable to offer Belarusians the same quality of life that people enjoy in neighboring countries (including access to technology, opportunities for self-realization, etc.). In Belarus, the demand for access to a better quality of life is on the rise because of “the rating trap” phenomenon. The civilization gap was not a result of poor governance; it was encoded within the sub-standard “Belarusian model.”

This gap widens not only because some opposition politicians predict a collapse of the Belarusian economy, but also because of factors that propelled the country’s economic growth at the turn of the 21st century. Given such a gap, economic growth only whets consumers’ appetites, driving up the demand for mod-

ifications to the social contract, which are aimed at higher living standards as well as improved governance and a better treatment of the citizens by the government. Greater freedom in various areas has become an essential condition for maintaining concord and ensuring that the public accepts the political rules imposed by the authorities.

Why is the civilization gap a problem for the Lukashenka government?

The government's blockade of information and dissemination of propaganda does little to reduce the demand for higher living standards and better quality governance in Belarus. The Schengen zone's eastward expansion is the only factor that helps perpetuate the myth about Belarus's "economic miracle," but Schengen only delays the Belarusian system's legitimacy crisis.

The gap is a real challenge, which threatens to undermine Belarus' economic competitiveness. Along with poor competitiveness of Belarusian products, its possible implications include an outflow of investment and human resources.

Lukashenka and his cronies cannot fail understand that Belarus falls far behind other countries. The high rates of economic growth reported by the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis did not impress Belarusians because of the strong growth and more reliable statistical data available in neighboring countries such as Lithuania and Poland. The gap in wages has been widening between Belarus and East European countries and between Belarus and Russia. As soon as you cross the border into a neighboring country, you see a boom in investment. Investors there do not have to queue up outside the Presidential Administration. They can simply invest money. Even Ukraine has nearly caught up with Belarus in wages. Against the backdrop of the growth of the commercial real estate market in Kyiv or Vilnius, huge projects like Minsk City do not appear to be so impressive. The gap in social capital is even wider. Officials do not mention the mass emigration of the talented and highly-skilled labor force (they prefer to talk about shortages of skilled labor in Lithuania and Poland), but the lack of skilled labor becomes obvious when one needs to carry out a serious project in Belarus. Incidentally, the opening up of labor markets in neighboring countries is one more factor that may soon add to pressure on the "Belarusian model." The government has to react to these trends, at least at the level of rhetoric, by presenting the public with higher goals and new and better prospects. In the past, the government sought to provide the people with the minimal standards necessary for survival so that, as Lukashenka put it: "when a man works and receives a salary, [he should be able to] buy bread, milk, sour cream, cottage cheese, and sometimes a piece of meat to feed his children and family. But let us not eat so much meat this summer."

Now the government's new message is: "We must do our utmost to ensure that Belarus leaves the group of followers and becomes a member of the group of leaders." Belarus needs a new quality of life, as Lukashenka said in his annual address in 2008.

Even if the objective is unrealistic, the aim to become a leading nation has paid off in the sense that it put pressure on the regime's old model, which began to change. The government, for instance, is no longer self-reliant in its effort to support the brewing industry. It has finally allowed foreign investors to enter the market. Sooner or later, the same will happen to other huge government-backed projects, such as the High Technology Park. On the other hand, the construction boom encouraged by the government resulted in the revision of rates and in liberalization of the building market.

Qualitative changes in the economy and in living standards are impossible without larger-scale market-oriented reforms. The mobilization economy format is not adequate to accomplish this task. The government managed to build the colossal National Library, but failed to establish an effective national fast-food chain, which is something that it considered almost a national priority 10 years ago. Recognizing the need for improvement, the government declared that it will work to make Belarus one of the top 30 most favorable nations for investment (this task is thanks to the policies of neighboring countries rather than to the "Belarusian model"). In 2008, Belarus jumped up 11 spots in the ranking of countries where it is attractive to do business. That being said, Belarus moved up from the 121st to the 110th spot and its further rise will be more problematic. The top 30 most favorable nations for business include only a few authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states: Singapore (by the way, number 1), Saudi Arabia, and Thailand (which reached one of the top spots during a period of democracy). Other high-ranking nations are developed, liberal democracies, including Belarus's neighbors Estonia and Latvia. The government may try to build a liberal autocracy like Singapore, but that country's economic miracle was based on openness, which, until recently, the Belarusian authorities viewed as a deadly sin.

Another long-term problem for the survival of the Lukashenka-established system is that, in its attempt to sustain economic growth and narrow the civilization gap, the government makes investment and other key decisions based on the logic of the existing economic model and the conditions essential for maintaining stability now, not in the future. Examples of such decisions include the government's hasty effort to build a nuclear power plant without researching what lies ahead in energy prices and technology or the education reform aimed to sat-

isfy the demand for blue-collar workers. On the one hand, the education reform is intended to address the pressing social problem of the shortage of workers and the overproduction of people with university degrees. At the same time, this reform may be shortsighted because the shortage emerged under the current distorted economic conditions and it is unclear what the labor market will be like in 10 years. If the education reform works as projected, Belarus may have set itself up to function as an exporter of cheap surplus labor for decades.

Compensatory Repression and New Forms of Control

The transformation of the Lukashenka regime is not motivated by striving for liberalization, but by the desire to maintain the status quo by any means. Partial reform of the system is what is needed towards this. Since reform can weaken Lukashenka's grip on power, the government seeks to limit self-initiated changes by curtailing reform or by increasing pressure in other areas to offset liberalization. In this way, the average level of intimidation in the country has not changed. In this process, it is impossible to avoid unexpected, unusual, or strange situations.

The rewriting of the social contract poses no direct political threat to the authorities. On the contrary, it helps to reduce discontentment, in particular among the social groups that used to be especially stern in criticizing the government. At the same time, liberalization in some areas, especially in the economy, gives society additional freedom and opportunities for various political and civic activities. For instance, the authorities have acknowledged that quite soon they will not be able to fully control the flow of information. Under these conditions of greater public activity and economic freedom, the possibility for rising discontent can potentially translate into something more substantial and better structured. For this reason, economic changes and improvements in relations between the government and civic society (portrayed as steps toward democracy) are offset by targeted persecution of the most active opponents and the employment of new repressive methods (targeting property or relatives), which are the most likely to discourage critics from taking part in civic or political activities or joining resistance movements.

Incidentally, the same pattern of behavior can be observed in the government's foreign policies. It has allowed the European Commission to establish a delegation in Minsk, but has ordered the US embassy to drastically cut its staff. In a broader sense, repression at the time of liberalization sends signals to society that the

authorities have no intention of radically changing the rules of the game and that the old rules have basically remained in effect.

The increased intimidation of key opponents tells little about the methods of political control (under the conditions of economic liberalization) and ideological control (after the Belarusian state ideology de-facto ceased to exist) employed on a day-to-day basis. The establishment of state institutions is high on the government's agenda. Above all, the government needs a civic and political organization of adults. The association Bielaja Rus has been groomed for the role of a new pro-presidential party. This tendency has been observed in the educational sector as well. Admission to a number of academic programs, which provide knowledge that can be used either to defend or to fight against the regime (such as law and journalism), has been made contingent upon loyalty towards the government. As part of the same trend, the authorities have given foreign investors access to state assets, but at the same time have purged local, independent businesses of potentially hostile elements.

Compensatory measures open up opportunities for individual and factional games within the ruling elite. For instance, efforts to establish Bielaja Rus were accompanied by political intrigues in the framework of the regime's "internal pluralism." The players did not seek to change the rules of the game, but tried to win individual and factional benefits within the system. Naturally, internal games will continue throughout Lukashenka's presidency. But the stakes have changed. Whereas previously the rivalry was mainly about administrative rents, now the stakes include political influence and assets.

Conclusions

On the one hand, the future social contract will call for greater openness in the economy and society. On the other hand, to keep his grip on power, Lukashenka will take measures to isolate Belarus. The combination of openness and isolation, liberalization and tight control will dominate the logic for the transformation of the Lukashenka regime as long as there are no political conditions for radical change. The regime will seek to maintain the status quo, but it will not be able to avoid clashes of conflicting practices, institutions and ideologies. These extremes will cause the erosion of the Lukashenka regime, but they will not necessarily lead to its collapse. This is part of the natural process of ageing and decay

of a solid and durable structure. The political system is like a human body that has avoided cancer and accidents. It ages despite a healthy lifestyle, especially if it lacks a self-rejuvenation mechanism functioning independently of the top leader. The communist system in Cuba has eroded for the last two decades, but that process has not made the lives of Cuban dissidents much easier.

What distinguishes the transformation of the Lukashenka regime is that, as it tries to integrate into the economic and informational space of a more liberal world (a new social contract calls for such integration and its consequences will be offset by repressive measures), it finds it more difficult to manage the possibly unwelcome political consequences of the authoritarian system's erosion. Perhaps Lukashenka will manage to adjust the system by establishing liberalized (or market-style) autocratic institutions and adapting the system's ideology. This is possible, but it will be difficult. Attempts to find a balance by "tightening the screw" may prompt the parties in the social contract (which are currently in harmony with the state) to become the actors of change.

By Kiryl Haiduk

IDENTIFYING AND DEFINING ‘SOCIAL CONTRACTS’ IN CONTEMPORARY BELARUS

The Puzzle of Stability

What is the basis of socio-political stability in contemporary Belarus? Many analysts and observers are puzzled by the absence of overt, large-scale protests against the authoritarian polity’s increasingly heavier pressure upon society. Does this mean that the state’s coercive machinery leaves no other choice but to passively adjust to the current conditions? Independent opinion polls have not revealed substantial public dissatisfaction with the current authorities. In order to address the puzzle of social and political stability in Belarus, the BISS, Novak Laboratory, and the Institute for Privatization Management’s Research Center have launched a project to investigate the profile of state-society relationships in contemporary Belarus.

The project is to some extent inspired by the outcomes of the inaugural BISS conference held in September 2007.¹ In particular, many conference participants made reference to a ‘social contract’ in order to describe the relationships between state and society. These relationships do not only include the authorities’ commitment to maintain a continuous growth in incomes,² but also contain ‘moral aspects,’³ which inform the actual behavior and expectations of the parties in-

¹ The report (in Belarusian) is available at: <http://www.belinstitute.eu/images/stories/documents/report-bel.pdf>, p. 4.

² See, for instance, the paper by Chubrik and Haiduk (2007) on poverty reduction in Belarus, available at: <http://www.research.by/pdf/wp2007r02.pdf>.

³ See the BISS conference report, <http://www.belinstitute.eu/images/stories/documents/reportbel.pdf>. P. 8.

volved. The profile of the contract has changed over time because of the shift from charismatic to rational support of the political regime. Since certain expectations are recurrently met by the authorities, it is rather plausible to suggest that the authoritarian polity is not only based on coercion, but also on consent. Therefore, the research and policy task at hand is to unveil the characteristics of the 'consensual side' of state-society relationships. The latter are to be studied as a 'social contract,' defined as the commonly accepted social practices and norms that the parties (the state and major social groups) consciously follow in order to maintain social and political stability. The contract is not static, but subject to revision by both parties, although the distribution of power is uneven.

Core Hypotheses and Research Design

The project's major hypothesis is that socio-political stability in Belarus is based upon the existence of a 'social contract,' which is a vertical agreement between the state and society. The parties are capable of consciously assessing the costs and benefits of their behavior within the framework of this tacit agreement. These contractual relationships are partially sustained by a collective action problem: while the costs of protests are very clear, its benefits are far from certain for all the social groups involved. An important hypothesis is that there is not one social contract for the society as a whole, but the contract is differentiated across major social groups depending on their status (pensioners, wage laborers, young workers, students, entrepreneurs, and public sector employees) and location (urban versus rural). Commonalities among the groups lead to the formation of a social contract for society as a whole.

The social contract(s) hypothesis provides an explanation for the conscious, rational support of the current political regime and the socio-political system it builds. Nevertheless, this hypothesis is yet to be rejected or supported by thorough empirical investigation. It might be the case that, instead of rationally-calculated behavior, one can observe (as in the case of contemporary Russia)⁴ the strategy of adaptation to life in a repressive state, due to the lack of bonds of solidarity among groups and to the reliance on relationships within close-knit communities, such as family, friends, business networks, and so on. In other words, this alternative hypothesis suggests

⁴ See, for instance, the results of Levada-Center investigation of the state of development of Russian (civil) society. Brief information is available at: http://community.livejournal.com/levada_center/56396.html.

that the underdevelopment of institutions of civil society and the omnipresence of state institutions reduce the need to enter into contractual relationships.

These hypotheses are to be tested by a multi-disciplinary approach that combines methodologies used in economics, sociology, and political science. While quantitative economic analysis sheds light onto the well-being of the major social groups and of society as a whole, the tools of sociological analysis (such as studies of focus-groups and national surveys) are invoked to uncover the major provisions of the social contract as they are perceived by various social groups. The study also uses legal analysis (i.e. legislation establishing the framework for collective action and for a group's formal activities) and media content analysis (to trace the messages sent to social actors by the authorities) in the course of the project's implementation.

Suggested Elements of Social Contracts

Essentially, the logic of the social contracts is microeconomic. Fulfillment of these contracts is based on the expression of the state by major social groups and vice versa. Such a commitment⁵ can be labeled as 'loyalty.' It can also be defined as a non-expression of overt protest, recently evidenced by the (arguable) shift from the charismatic to rational support of the political regime. However, loyalty can not be acquired by coercion, since there are certain limits to it. Instead, certain policies are required (e.g. the provision of certain benefits or stimulation of wage/income growth) in order to gain public consent and, thus, to establish control over the public 'voice', or various forms of protest. At the same time, there is still a space left for alternative action, as well as an outlet for the expression of discontent in the case of disloyalty. The most typical example is the escape to an informal sector, such as temporary labor migration.⁶ This outlet can be labeled as an 'exit' that weakens the magnitude of the 'voice'.

Strikingly enough, the 'contract system of employment' (which in Belarus means the spread of fixed-term employment contracts instead of normal, indefinite-length contracts)⁷ contains some essential features of the social contract in Belarus. In particular, there are (i) heavy dependence on employer's will (state),

⁵ Following the conceptual scheme developed by Albert O. Hirschman in 'Exit, Voice, and Loyalty' (1970, Harvard University Press).

⁶ Different estimates suggest various figures, ranging from 350,000 to even 800,000 people.

⁷ According to the official data, 78 % of the real sector workers and nearly 100 % of public sector workers are employed on fixed-term contracts.

creating (ii) a feeling of uncertainty about the future; (iii) speedy application of sanctions against disloyalty (threat of or actual job loss) and (iv) benefits for loyalty (bonuses, preservation of employment). Still, this is a very simplified and partial account, although it provides an illustration of the broader circumstances.

Some Early Results of Empirical Investigation

By now, some focus-groups studies have been conducted (by Novak Laboratory) among urban citizens representing a number of social groups (pensioners, wage laborers, young workers, students, entrepreneurs, and public sector employees). Although a thorough analysis has not yet been completed, some basic outcomes can be briefly summarized, in order to sketch out the profile of the inter-group social contract. At the moment, differentiated, group-specific features are left for further investigation.

To begin with, when asked about likes and dislikes, the participants tend to immediately deliver ideological clichés regarding beautiful cities and towns, a lovely natural setting, and a convenient geographical or geopolitical location (i.e. 'at the heart of Europe', a convenient transit route). As for human-made features, some public goods are usually mentioned, such as free education and the ability to earn or to obtain an income that will satisfy one's basic needs. In addition, socio-political stability is valued. The majority of respondents expressed that regardless of who will hold power in the future, the country's development would be continued, albeit at a different tempo.

Questions about respondents' dislikes proved more informative. First, across groups, constitutional amendments (i.e. increasing the maximum number of presidential terms) have not been welcomed. Second, policy decisions have been criticized for a lack of professionalism (although particular decisions were not always named), giving some clue that Belarusians prefer a technocratic approach. Third, participants emphasized that barriers to the activity of small, medium, and large business are a negative feature of the Belarusian economy. As for socio-economic aspects, respondents worry about the abolition of transportation benefits and (as typical in other countries) about inflation overcoming real incomes. Last but not least, the participants said that the state-owned media (especially TV) are not to be trusted. Instead, they noted that unbiased information can be obtained from web-based sources or satellite TV.

The most interesting results of the sociological inquiry thus far are the respondents' preferences regarding protests. Exploring behavioral attitudes and expectations has shown that people are clearly averse to taking on risks and that they rationally assess the risks associated with taking part in open protests. Essentially, they tend to avoid overt protests because they do not believe that individual action can be successful. Many respondents gave answers, such as, "My voice or effort is nothing. Only a mass protest by the whole population can be successful, but such a protest would not happen in Belarus because of the national character and our inborn or historically-determined tolerance." Next, participants clearly expressed a fear of sanctions against them for participating in a protest. At the same time, they fear repercussions against their relatives and those who might support them, more than they fear for themselves. Since there is a high threat of job and income loss is rather strong, the fear factor is enhanced. At the same time, the people surveyed tend to obey the law, so the legal framework maintains their consent. Although the respondents are conscious that laws are often adopted against their will, in a kind of 'secret' fashion, they know that they need to respect these laws *ipso facto*.

One interesting (albeit preliminary) finding is that protest would not be fed by material factors alone. In the words of one participant (a wage laborer), "wages are not a reason here." People are more sensitive to unfairness and deception. At the same time, they seek to establish controls over those 'above them.' Ideas about protest are not connected to the activities of alternative political forces. Instead, participants were very strongly interested in organizations protecting group interest, such as trade unions (independent, rather than 'state-controlled' unions), pensioners' movements, groups for young mothers, and so on. Despite these feelings, this result does not mean that the respondents are ready to create such organizations (most likely, because of the collective action problem).

Further, participants recognize and, to some extent, value the protests of the opposition in Belarus, although protest participants are regarded as 'risk-prone' and even short-sighted. The solution to everyday problems (such as the quality of one's home or apartment, road maintenance near one's home, and so on) can be found through a public plea to the newspaper (media are thus given the functions of authority) or by an executive body, rather than through a collective effort. At the same time, as soon as people are given the opportunity to compare the quality of life in Belarus with that in other countries, they prefer the 'exit' option (making statements such as: "there is no future for my child in this country" and "our education is not so good in terms of its quality and curricula.")

It has to be stressed that the existing social contract is open for change (although only some of its essential features seem to be identified and applicable to Minsk only). Specifically, participants have expressed a growing demand for a better quality of life (such as the preference to travel abroad). Yet, people do not make unrealistic material demands of the authorities. In particular, although they do not foresee their incomes increasing substantially in the future, they expect that the quality of life would not be improved and/or would stay unchanged. Participants expressed these expectations for the next year, which is a very limited planning horizon.

Some Conclusions

The preliminary results of policy-oriented research regarding social contracts in contemporary Belarus uncover some elements of rationality, which are embedded in the evolving state-society relationships. These relationships contain a combination of coercion and consent. The intersection between the two is shaped by the interaction of the central elements of the social contract, which involve loyalty, voice, and exit. This interplay suggests a range of areas for protest, gravitating towards the protection of group interests. Participants have shown no preference for open, mass protests, due to their disbelief in the effectiveness of collective action.

**A LANGUID NATION?
PUBLIC ACTIVITY OR PASSIVITY:
AGE FACTOR**

Taciana Chulickaja

THE NOTION OF A “DEMOCRATIC OUTLOOK” AS UNDERSTOOD BY BELARUSIAN STUDENTS

Students and young people in general are considered to be one of the most important target groups in political theory and practice, as well as in any government's internal policy. The conditions in Belarus and young Belarusians are not an exception. One should note the specific internal and foreign policy conditions that shape the outlooks of Belarusian students. This research paper is an attempt to point out the distinctions in the student community's outlook by analyzing interpretations of the term “democratic outlook” in the discourse practices of each discourse current and group identified in this paper.

Belarusian researchers see two mainstream discourses (official and opposition) on Belarus's political and public landscape.¹ The former seeks to justify and formalize the pro-authoritarian communication practices of the current regime and the distorted interpretations of the value-oriented notions of “freedom” and “democracy.” The parallel opposition discourse interprets these ideas in a broader European context, relying on pro-European connotations, complimented by a new dimension that is oriented toward nationalism.

Based on the above-mentioned classification, one can determine two mainstream trends in interpreting the notion of a “democratic outlook” among students. Students, traditionally seen as the most attractive target audience and a human pool for various ideological currents, find themselves in the spotlight of both the current regime and opposition groups.

Despite their stark differences in ideologies and values, the two above-mentioned discourses follow similar developmental patterns, seeking to prove that

¹ А. Казакевіч, І. Гансэп

they have “ideologically correct” ideas that justify their actions rather than to revise values. Currently, their discourses about “democratic outlooks” should be viewed as political techniques within the development of the Belarusian political system rather than as genuine changes in the outlook of the student community. An indirect proof of this assumption is the fact that the young people who are involved in both of these discourses do not so much act as subjects who are developing their outlooks, but as objects that embrace the meanings offered to them by other political subjects. Young Belarusians usually accept and adhere to the values and behavioral patterns that are offered by others rather than creating their own.

An important distinction between the official and the oppositional discourse is that young people calculatantly (but not necessarily earnestly) accept and use the behavioral patterns that are offered by the state ideology in return for material benefits, such as tuition discounts and low-interest student loans. The government’s practices of compulsion are another motive that causes students to buy into the official discourse. It does not make much sense to reflect on new meanings or interpretations. Indeed, to do so may even be dangerous. Politically motivated expulsions from universities persuade students, who do not want their convictions to take precedence over their right to education, to tow the official line.

In the framework of the opposition’s discourse, young people are much more earnest in their willingness to follow the patterns proposed by the opposition. They are more sincere and serious in embracing the opposition’s discourse. This type of mobilization can be attributed to the limited financial, organizational, indoctrination and repressive tools that are available to the opposition (since these tools are largely controlled by the government). The meanings of various ideas, including “democracy,” which are offered by various currents within the opposition, are more attractive because they have nothing to do with the ideological practices of the former Soviet Union, while pro-European and pro-Belarusian ideas of democracy appeal to many students. This offers additional evidence for the claim that the young people who choose the oppositional discourse make a more genuine choice.

Apart from young people who are split along the lines of ideology and politics, there are many students who do not care about politics or democratic values. To them, ideology and understanding democracy do not matter; they have little effect on their perception of the world. These students see the two dominant discourses either as a waste of time or a formal duty. Some of them view democracy and its

values as a free pass to the West or to life in another country. Such people simply swap the “freedom to be different” for the “freedom to be nobody.”²

Methods

The material used for analysis included textbooks, media articles, Internet postings, and polls of European Humanities University (EHU) students in Vilnius. A comparative study of quality and quantity indicators was conducted in the following areas:

- general discourse description
- dissemination area and institutions
- tools used to implant ideas
- discourse penetration

Official Discourse

General Description

This discourse understands the notion of “democracy” as:

- “a unique path” for Belarus;
- “a model for Belarusian development;”
- “a search for independent, value-related justifications” for developing the Belarusian state.³

These connotations reflect the official authorities’ attitude towards democracy and its values as something important, but not as a top priority. The notion of “democracy” receives only a casual mention somewhere halfway through the chapter “The Basics of the Ideological Worldview in the Belarusian State” in the state ideology textbook. “Thus, the rule of law, the plurality of opinions, the competition among political parties, diverse forms of ownership, and values that determine the priorities for Belarusian citizens... give us grounds to attest to the for-

² Ігар Бабкоў. Чатыры вэрсіі ідэі свабоды. <http://frahmenty.knihi.com/8babkow.htm>

³ Основы идеологии белорусского государства: Учебное пособие для вузов. Под ред. С. Князева, С. Решетникова. — Минск: Академия управления при президенте РБ, 2004. — С. 327--341.

mation of democratic values in the public mentality, political maturity and a high level of legal awareness...”⁴

In the last two years, the notion of a “democratic outlook” has often been complemented by the idea of “patriotic education,” which is designed to end “political extremism” and guide young citizens along the path towards implementing “positive youth initiatives.”⁵ Incidentally, “positive initiatives” are understood as undertakings that are “in line with state ideology.”⁶

This new shade of meaning may be seen as an attempt to replace financial and compulsion-related motives for supporting the official rhetoric with symbolic ones, whereby students perceive official messages as part of their outlooks. There may be several reasons for this replacement. First of all, since economic clouds are darkening the government has limited funds and opportunities to offer discounts and other benefits to students who support them. Second, the relatively long term (since 2002) dissemination of official ideology at all educational levels through the media could have caused changes in student mentality. This is quite possible because most of them have not had the opportunity to compare the state’s model other examples because of their young age and short socialization period. The appeal of the “opposition’s” values to this group is questionable.

The government relies on various political institutions spread the discourse and its notions. This phenomenon will be further discussed in the section focusing on discourse dissemination and the institutions of actualization. In order to impose its perception of democracy, the government employs all the institutions available, including educational establishments, the military, the media, and so on, and sets up and underwrites new institutions, such as the Belarusian Republican Union of Youth (BRUY) and the ideological offices.

Within the framework of this discourse, in their public lives, young people use the patterns of world perception that are imposed by the authorities, replicating loyalty. Targeted by the government’s youth policies, students loyal to the current government are ready to promote the values preprogrammed by the authorities in return for a guarantee of educational and socioeconomic rights. For example, some students attend BRUY events only because the BRUY can gain them a tuition discount, or because the university administration recommends loyal students to future employers.

⁴ Ibid P. 355.

⁵ The national program "Youths of Belarus" for 2006-2010. <http://www.president.gov.by/press28323.html#doc>

⁶ Ibid.

Official Discourse Dissemination and Institutions

The official interpretation of a “democratic outlook” is disseminated by all means available, including through educational and civic institutions such as:

1. Education: mandatory ideological instruction.
 - 1.1. Higher educational establishments: loyalty verification, direct orders from authorities to university administrations, and repressive practices (expulsion and conscription of students who are expelled for political reasons).⁷
2. Legislative initiatives to codify ideology. The program “Youths of Belarus” and the measures to put it into practice form one of the most illustrative examples.
3. Ideological courses and ideological education of youth groups.
4. A media that conveys and replicates basic meanings.
5. Fake civic organizations that loyal to the authorities, such as the BRUY.

Tools Used to Implant Discourse

The government uses ideological and institutional tools to implant this discourse within the public’s mentality. These tools include the following:

- An image of young people as “the nation’s future,” which is promulgated by the official authorities. For example, in the paper entitled “Priorities of the Youths of Belarus National Program,” the government declares its attitude towards young people as follows: “Putting the provisions of this program into practice will improve the health of young people and make them physically fitter, restore the value and significance of the family in public perception, strengthen families, boost the birth rate, and consolidate the state’s youth movement for building a strong and prosperous Belarus.”⁸
- Representing young people in the opposition in stark contrast to the official youths, who are loyal to the authorities. For instance, wire services quoted Lukashenka as saying, “I want to clearly say that the Western-funded opposition is not a real opposition, but a set of militant groups for the advancement of

⁷ It should be noted that the authorities usually cite poor performance or internal rule violations as the formal grounds for these expulsions. Expelled students are drafted into the Armed Forces on the basis of Article 32 of the conscription law.

⁸ <http://www.president.gov.by/press28321.html#doc>

foreign interests and policies in our country.”⁹ It is symbolic that he made this statement while addressing students at Belarusian State University (BDU).

- Encouraging young people and students to think in friend-or-foe categories, wherein foes are internal or external opponents. Alternative interpretations of the notions of “democracy” and “democratic development” are likewise enemy ideologies. After his government closed down EHU in Minsk, Lukashenka accused the university instructors of attempting to train a “new Belarusian elite that will lead Belarus to the West in the future. It turned out that pro-Western instructors are training future leaders, the elite, in the center of Minsk... They were warned that the university should train students the same way as [universities] in Brest and Minsk do. Since they said ‘No,’ we do not need such an institution of higher education.”¹⁰ In fact, Lukashenka drew a line between “good guys” and “bad guys,” who were trained, respectively, at “good” state universities and the “bad” Western-leaning EHU based on the contrasting views that they implant in young people.

The government uses a broad range of institutional tools to fix the discourse firmly in the minds of young people. It provides financial and technical support for pro-governmental youth organizations, such as the BRUY. Similarly, the state finances periodicals targeting young people, such as *Perekhodny Vozrast*, *Zorka*, *Znamya Yunosti*, the *Pilot-FM* radio station, and websites like *Molodezh Belarusi*. It also advertises its values and interpretations using billboards, posters and leaflets.¹¹ The government employs the state-controlled media to smear the opposition’s discourse and the young people that use or support it. For instance, Belarusian Television broadcasted mudslinging reports about students trained in Poland under the Kalinouski program, while the BelTA news agency made attempts to discredit EHU students.¹²

Discourse Penetration

This discourse is widespread, since it is present, in one form or another, in all establishments that train youth and in the media. The number of young people in-

⁹ <http://news.belta.by/ru/news/president?id=199569>

¹⁰ The state-controlled newspaper *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* № 183 (22093), September 28, 2004

¹¹ Measures to carry out the national program "Youth of Belarus" for 2006-2010 <http://www.president.gov.by/press28325.html#doc>

¹² www.belta.by/ru/print?id=159907 В. Ловгач “Политпромысловый вуз”. Unfortunately, the link may not work. State-controlled media often remove their discrediting postings from their websites after a while.

volved in this discourse roughly equals BRSM’s membership. Interestingly, the BRUY website does not provide exact membership numbers.

The Opposition’s Discourse: A General Description

The opposition’s interpretations have a smaller effect on the public mentality in general and on young people in particular in terms of the quantity of people affected. The opposition has limited tools for disseminating information through educational establishments, associations and the media, and these institutions have little influence on the public. The opposition’s discourse is ideologically non-homogenous because of its variety of currents and actors, which can hardly coalesce. The most influential and definite are the liberal, nationalistic and leftist (protest) discourses that will be examined below. It should be noted that these discourses can be regarded as one group only tentatively because their interpretations of the notion “democracy” diverge significantly and have different dimensions. A separate study should be conducted to analyze these varying interpretations. They have been categorized as one class for the purpose of this study because they all oppose the official discourse. Among them, the nationalistic discourse, whose interpretation of “democracy” has neo-conservative and neo-liberal connotations, is the most influential among. The study of some of these currents may be complicated by the difficulty in identifying actors.

The opposition’s discourse is based on values that come from different sources and distribution areas. Liberal discourse is characterized by the dissemination of European democratic ideas in a country that is not a member of the European Union. Its influence on students is not attributable to institutional tools, but rather to the perception of European democratic ideas as an outlook that may eventually help Belarus to achieve high economic living standards. Young people are viewed as an active social group that can bring about change in Belarus in the future by promoting generally-accepted democratic values. Students are expected to embrace democratic ideas and to relay them to others. Examples where this approach and this interpretation of “democracy” were used include statements by European politicians at a meeting with EHU students.¹³

Conservative nationalistic discourse (also known as nationalistic discourse) is also based on understanding democracy as a European value, but this discourse

¹³ One example is a meeting of EHU students with the President of the European Parliament (EP), Hans-Gert Pöttering. <http://en.ehu.lt/news/news/0010122/>

also emphasizes the importance of Christian and nationalistic values. These values are represented and offered as the most essential for young people of today. For instance, the platform of the Malady Front provides, “The national idea [national self-determination] is a basic value. The objectives: to build an independent, democratic European state, educate new generations, and bring about the spiritual rebirth of society. The essence of the nationalist movement’s outlook is the best, most modern Belarus based on Christian values...”¹⁴

Leftist discourse includes socialists (social democrats), anti-globalists, anarchists, and so on. Although these ideas do not have many advocates, the adherents are strongly motivated, value oriented, and confident of importance of their mission. Their understanding of democracy depends on the ideology to which they adhere. For instance, Belarusian anarchists, the group called Autonomous Action,¹⁵ protest against consumerism and “any form of government.” The group does not refer to a “democratic outlook” on its official website. If it did, it would surely cast democracy in a negative light. Social democrats, the youth wing of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) “Hramada,” accentuate the socioeconomic dimension of democracy. At the same time they defend political rights, in contrast to Western European political parties with similar ideologies.

Areas and Institutions for Dissemination

The opposition’s approach has a much more limited coverage than the official one. It is limited to the opposition media, the Internet, groups of students at state higher educational institutions, and students who have no access to education in Belarus for political reasons and, therefore, receive instruction abroad (such as participants in the Kalinowski program). EHU is an exception because its students do not have courses in ideology and study in an environment where various political discourses can compete with each other. EHU students take a great interest in politics and political developments,¹⁶ and consider “the defense of civil rights and liberties” and “participation in political decision-making” to be of great importance. At the same time, at least two currents of the opposition’s discourse differ in their perception of democracy: one interprets democracy as “a

¹⁴ <http://mfront.net/content.php?content.2>

¹⁵ <http://belarus.avtonom.org/?cat=5>

¹⁶ More than 60 percent take an interest in politics, according to a poll of 133 students.

European value,” while the other sees democracy as “Belarus’s national path.” It would be incorrect to limit “the clash of ideas” to these two currents because the EHU debate on democracy has some other dimensions, which in some cases are artificial.

Tools Used to Implant Discourse

Several symbolic and ideological tools have been used to implant the opposition’s understanding of democracy. The friend-or-foe contrast is employed for in several areas, primarily to counter the official interpretation of “democracy,” as well as interpretations offered by actors within the discourse. In this sense, one should note the better quality of communication among the opposition, as compared to the official discourse. Issues of national identity and language are both tools and values in this discourse. The induced use of illustrious symbols can be, to a point, a more effective tool for swaying students towards taking the unavailability of other instruments into consideration.

Discourse Penetration

The opposition’s discourse has fewer supporters, mainly because there are fewer institutions where it can exist. Nevertheless, its external manifestations (such as the tent-camp protest against Lukashenka’s re-election on Minsk’s Kastychnickaja Square in 2006) are more vivid, in comparison to the official discourse. Still, the opposition’s discourse receives strong financial and organizational backing from external political actors and the meanings that they promote. In particular, the Polish government finances Belsat satellite television channel broadcasting in Belarusian and targets audiences in Belarus, while European organizations sponsor EHU.

The Alternative to Mainstream Discourses: A General Description

The alternative, or “indifferent,” discourse is the most difficult to study because it is almost impossible to determine its qualitative or quantitative characteristics. At

the same time, indirect evidence suggests that this group includes both students of Belarusian state educational institutions and those receiving their instruction abroad (at EHU, for instance). One of the key principles of this discourse is education free from ideology. On the one hand, this discourse recognizes democracy, freedom, and civic activism as essential values, but, on the other, it does not call for action. The indifferent discourse reflects apathy and a lack of interest in politics.

Areas and Institutions for Dissemination

This discourse involves those who are reluctant to participate in any civic activity. To assess its scope, one should count the number of students who stay away from both official and opposition events. This discourse exists in any institution that specializes in education or youth affairs.

Symbolic Tools that Help to Implant Ideas

One symbolic tool is to assume an air of skepticism regarding the mainstream discourses and, therefore, to detach oneself from the interpretations of “democracy” that are offered by them.

Penetration

It is difficult to assess the level of this discourse’s penetration in the student community. At the same time, the frequent disengagement from civic affairs and politics among students proves that the scope of this discourse requires examination.

Conclusions

In terms of interpreting the notion of a “democratic outlook” among Belarusian students, a number of conclusions can be made. First, the student community is

heavily politicized as a result of a) the inclusion of state ideological instruction in the educational system, and b) the efforts to disseminate the opposition’s views on democracy. Second, the main discourses surrounding the notion a “democratic outlook” are based primarily on the binary oppositions of “friends” versus “foes” and “correct” versus “incorrect.” The idea of “democracy” is built into both discourses around the opposition of one to the other. These discourse divisions led to the emergence of a special discourse that recognizes the importance of democratic values, but does not call for political action to assert these values. Moreover, regardless of their views, students are more likely to embrace ideas that have been disseminated than to offer their own meanings and connotations.

Siarhej Bohdan

BELARUS RELOADED. EVOLUTION OF BELARUSIAN CULTURE AND DIFFERENT PROJECTS OF BELARUS

0. Political developments of the 1990s suggest that when Belarus gained independence the nation had no elite ready and willing to govern the independent country. This time of high emotion failed to translate into the establishment of appropriate political institutions. Strikes by workers and mass rallies did not result in the formation of powerful political organizations capable of influencing decision-makers. The institutions that did crop up in the new independent state have not contributed to a democratic political process.

Demoralized and confused, the nomenklatura tolerated the imitation of pluralism on the political scene in the early 1990s. After the country opened up following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relative freedom in the areas of education and culture, along with the influx of new ideas, contributed to the formation of a new generation and to the rise of a new culture, as well as inspired hopes for democratization and cultural rebirth.

In the first years of the twenty first century, the organizations of both the government and the opposition regressed. In fact, the society's organizational structures broke up and were degraded because of the socioeconomic conditions in the country and also as a result of the government's repressive policy of closing down organizations and denying registration to new ones (as was the case with media outlets).

Currently, one may note two dueling visions of the future of Belarus, one advocated by the national-democratic movement and the other promoted by Alaksandr Lukashenka's regime. Obviously, there are more than two projects, but this article will highlight only those features that are instrumental for the nation's de-

velopment. This study will not holistically describe the ideas of various political forces, but, rather will focus on the trends associated with these forces.

1. The Official Project

The official project means a strategically substantiated vision of how to build the country. The Lukashenka regime began working on this project early in 2000. The regime's policies were based on the requirements of the moment before, or on ideas borrowed from other (more or less) articulate projects that were not designed for other countries, but which might have included Belarus as a more or less essential element. The projects were quite diverse; some called for restoring the utopia of the Soviet Union, while others championed the more realistic idea of Belarusian-Russian integration.

The regime formulated its project before 2003. By this time, it had a team of intellectuals that was capable of generating ideas, ranging from Soviet hardliners such as Anatol Rubinau, deputy head of the Presidential Administration, to young leaders who entered politics during Belarusian independence or Lukashenka's rule, such as Usevalad Yancheuski, the administration's ideology chief, and Vadzim Hihin, the editor-in-chief of *Belaruskaya Dumka* magazine. The regime found itself in a favorable position in terms of internal politics, as the scarred and battle-worn opposition was unable to blunt its momentum.

After the official project "Belarus" was launched, ideological courses and departments were introduced in educational and other public institutions. This move was aimed to prolong the regime's viability and to sustain its internal unity. The authorities came under fire for spending public funds on what was seen as the reconstruction of the Soviet-era system of indoctrination.

Later, the government took a number of steps to tighten its grip on society, to bring the governmental structure into line with the country's needs, and to abandon the unnecessary prejudices of the Soviet era. Measures in the sphere of culture were particularly notable for their lack of coherence with short-term political actions (taken almost instinctively by Belarusian leaders who were ill-prepared for independence), and were indicative of the regime's strategic line of thought. Similarly important the actions taken by the Lukashenka government in related areas, such as the media, communications, and education.

The government tightened its control in all these spheres and curtailed institutions and projects, which it deemed to be unnecessary and costly. Many of these institutions and projects emerged before the collapse of the Soviet Union or in the wave of euphoria during the early years of independence. Represented as a matter of national pride, these projects and institutions were initially able to secure the necessary funding. For these reasons, the government moved to close down academic institutions, especially those specializing in humanities.

The regime made drastic changes to the educational system. Despite a multitude of governmental initiatives in the area, the regime showed a clear tendency to restrict and prohibit. Despite its declarations that the nation was making efforts to achieve new scholarly and technological heights, the Belarusian regime was unable to go against its nature. In reality, the official project “Belarus” was actually aimed at tightening its grip on power, rather than promoting the nation’s educational and technological development.

In the realm of education the most notable steps in the last few years have included cutting the curricula and instructional time at universities, as well as introducing a special application screening process for master’s degree and postgraduate courses, and admissions interviews for university applicants who may hold key government jobs in the future. In contrast to their declared goal of furthering the nation’s technological development, officials reiterated that they were making these changes because Belarus has a surplus of people with university degrees and a shortage of blue-collar workers.

Similarly, the government reversed the secondary school reform, which was to result in the introduction of a 12-year school system in Belarus. School students often find themselves the targets of indoctrination, which is sponsored by the government, by specific ministries (for instance, the Ministry for Emergency Management or the Ministry of Internal Affairs), and by associations (such as the Cossacks). In fact, the regime has made consistent efforts to transform the Soviet-style school system in Belarus into a system typical of a Third World country with an authoritarian regime.

In addition, the government uses the communications industry for its political ends. Regular problems with GSM network services and the Internet during mass opposition protests have cast suspicion on the authorities, while the government’s refusal to investigate and prevent such incidents is indicative of its willingness to use this tool again and again. Underdeveloped Internet services and high access cost, probably the highest in Europe, prove that, in the government’s policies, the special interests of the moment take precedence over the country’s long-term development.

2. Projects of the Opposition

In the early 1990s, the opposition's national democratic movement took advantage of the hard-line bureaucracy's confusion in order to carry out cultural and educational reforms. In the short-term, these reforms were one of the reasons for the movement's defeat, although they did succeed in creating the basic conditions for its future development. At the time, national democratic intellectuals kept replicating simple nationalistic ideas and had difficulties in proposing viable projects for the development of the nation and its culture. For example, Siarhei Dubaviec came up with the 'language-village-Vilnius' formula, which reflected his romanticized view on national development, but did not take into account the nature of modern society in relation to culture, the role of the rural population in society, and the limited opportunities for support of national development from another country, which has a powerful apparatus working toward building its own nation.

The opposition's projects "Belarus" put forward by the national democratic movement had a hard time in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. First, after Lukashenka dropped his plans for integration with Russia, the project's top goal of independence lost its significance and could no longer mobilize the supporters of independence as it did in the 1990s. Moreover, supporters of the opposition seem to have run out of steam. Advocates of the national democratic movement (such as groups like Kraj and Bely Lehion) were ready to take radical and violent actions to defend independence in the 1990s. Recall, for instance, the violent clashes with the police during the Freedom March. Demonstrations by supporters of nominally the same opposition, which has lost its monopoly on pro-independence rhetoric, have attracted fewer participants and have had almost no repercussions.

Second, the opposition has shifted the focus of its rhetoric from independence to much more complicated principles, such as the rule of law, democracy and human rights, but has failed to substantiate this shift with a relevant intellectual or methodological base. Attempts to correct that mistake with the help from the West have ended in failures, such as Uladzimir Hancharyk's defeat in the 2001 presidential election.

Christianity: Prospects and Constraints

The 2001 campaign was followed by a crisis that lasted until the 2006 presidential election, which was remarkable for the tent-camp protest at Kastychnitskaya Square in Minsk. At the same time, the standstill gave rise to the Belarusian Christian Democratic (BChD) party, which has an attractive ideology and stalwart supporters who can mount a stronger challenge to the regime than nationalists. Religious people imbued with moral principles have succeeded in Belarus on several occasions (such as the hunger strike in Minsk) in battling the authorities' attempts to expand and tighten their control.

However, the failure of political parties to influence governmental policies provides evidence that no party, as seen by liberal democracy, can function effectively under the current circumstances in Belarus.

It should be noted, however, that although the Christian Democrats have the potential to grow into a powerful movement, this party alone is hardly capable of taking power because the nation has eclectic religious traditions and does not give priority to any religion. If fact, the BChD would need to carry out a cultural revolution in order to have the people embrace Christian Democracy.

After Lukashenka pulled the nationalist rug out from under the Belarusian nationalist opposition, the national democratic movement assumed a pro-EU mantle. Not only did it change its rhetoric, but it also started to use EU symbols. The opposition welcomed the EU's conditional offer of cooperation to the Belarusian authorities in a move that was indicative of its shortage of intellectual resources and lack of an independent position, which had been replaced by the EU's initiatives.

Results of the National Revival Campaign

a) In general, the national democratic movement succeeded in building the foundation for a protracted battle and a victory over Lukashenka's Creole regime.

The nationalists' vigorous attempts to enforce the use of the Belarusian language in the early 1990s are widely blamed for the 1995 referendum that gave Russian the same official language status. The government suspended the "positive discrimination" campaign encouraging people to speak and learn Belarusian and cut the subsidies for the publication of Belarusian-language books, while

most newspapers were printed in Russian. Nevertheless, the benefits of the national revival campaign still outweigh its failures.

It removed the stigma of provinciality and ignorance associated with the Belarusian language, which has been modernized and urbanized. This departure from provincialism provided Belarusian literature and language with a new force and made them more attractive to urban youths. The role of village life and villagers in works of art and literature had previously been out of proportion with their real impact on political, economic and cultural developments. Villagers play a minor role in any modern nation, including Belarus.

The movement helped to elevate the social status of Belarusian. Educated young people became more interested in Belarusian culture, while those in the lower classes became more Russified. Today, Belarusian is associated with success and education, rather than with losers. Naturally, the language has changed as well.

b) De-Russification and the change in the Belarusian and other literary canons made the language suitable for use in all spheres of life. Reformed *narkamauka* still rules at schools and public establishments, but loses its position in literature and electronic communication. The classical version has been successfully revived, after being outlawed for decades. Discrepancies in classical spelling should not be perceived as abnormal because scholars have worked on this problem for only a short period of time. Besides, spelling differences do not affect understanding.

Belarusian culture is hampered by the urge to impose uniform standards once and for all, which has been inherited from the uniformity-leaning Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Obviously, the language needs to be governed by certain principles, which should be introduced as a result of scientific debate, but well-substantiated deviations from these principles should not be outlawed. Some languages thrive, despite their lack of rigorous standards or the use of different spellings in literature.

c) Belarusian language and culture have found conscientious masters, or to put it more accurately, masters began to claim their right. In the early 20th century, many establishments, organizations and periodicals, regarded as formal attributes of any nation, were set up in Belarus because the Soviet government issued directives to that effect (and not because the Belarusian nation had achieved a high point in its development). For instance, the variety of books and periodicals that came out in Belarusian during the Soviet period created the impression of a developed cultural landscape, but, in fact, the regime used them as a tool to achieve its goals; they could not be used differently, counter to the nature of totalitarian-

ism. When the Soviet government fell, those imitation national institutions faltered and some of them, including a number of literary magazines, collapsed. In simplistic terms, one may draw parallels with the break-up of state institutions in underdeveloped countries after the end of colonial rule.

This comparison is quite relevant, taking into consideration the slow progress of Belarusian modernization and its old-fashioned society. A few years ago, ordinary Belarusians did not quite understand why they might need an independent state (because the state they had lived in was associated with violence or profanity), let alone government accountability, elections and a Belarusian-language university. Today they understand this need because nation-building and political processes have been making steady progress.

Belarusians have yet to establish many institutions, which are characteristic of a modern nation because the institutions left from the Soviet Union are, in the grand scheme of things, the remains of the colonial and Soviet epoch. For examples, universities in Belarus have little to do with Belarusian culture and radically differ from the academic standards and freedoms associated with universities elsewhere.

Over time, the colonial and Soviet legacy is being eroded bit by bit, partially with the help of the Lukashenka regime's new policies. Meanwhile, what has been offered by the regime to replace Soviet institutions is not based on competitive solid ideals, finance or organization (compare for instance the Young Leninist Communist League (VLKSM) with the Creole patriotic Belarusian National Union of Youth (BRUY)). Despite the Lukashenka regime's hostile attitude towards manifestations of Belarusian, non-Soviet culture, the decay of Soviet and colonial foundations, and Creole patriotism that uses state resources and Soviet-era ideology in a parasitic way, new opportunities will open up for a modern, Belarusian, non-Soviet culture. Specific movements and developments do not matter for Belarusian culture because any change would improve its standing.

The public's attitude towards Belarusian culture changed for the better after Belarus gained independence. For instance, during the 1999 census, 37 percent of Belarusians said they spoke Belarusian on a day-to-day basis. Many of those interviewed deliberately declared their allegiance to Belarusian to express their condemnation of the government's language policy after 1995. This is an area where the nationalist movement should take credit.

Establishing the national language and encouraging the nation to speak that language are integral parts of the nation-building process. The fact that more than one third of the Belarusian population used Belarusian in 1999 is indicative of progress

towards creating a sense of national identity. Naturally, more people spoke Belarusian before. People spoke dialects of Belarusian that they called either “the Ruthenian, or Ruski” or “local” language, but they did not see themselves as part of the Belarusian nation. In contrast, those who declared their use of Belarusian in 1999 made a conscious choice in favor of the Belarusian nation.

d) The written Belarusian language has come to play a much greater role than the oral one. In fact, Belarusian is predominantly used for reading and writing, while few people speak it. Naturally, the need has arisen to introduce standards for the written language. To counter scholars’ efforts to develop standards for the classical version of Belarusian (known as *Tarashkevica*), the regime passed a restrictive law aimed to promote the use of Russified spelling and to ban other versions.

e) In the long term, this restrictive law will benefit *Tarashkevica*. The ban on classical spelling may undermine the confidence in the official version and prove it unsuitable for educational and practical use. Works written in *Tarashkevica* will be distributed via the Internet and digital data storage devices. In fact, the law makes *Tarashkevica* and its users more reliant on high technologies by giving the government total control over old-fashioned tools for cultural dissemination and cultural institutions, such as print publications and writers’ associations. But these tools are not essential for the future of culture. Despite the fact that the old-fashioned tools still dominate, their role will diminish over time; they are doomed to extinction. At the same time, *Tarashkevica* is widely used on the Internet, mainly by supporters of the national democratic movement. As the number of Internet users is growing rapidly, it becomes continually more important for the nation’s future development. It is impossible to banish *Tarashkevica* from the Internet. The national democratic movement and its supporters have been using the Internet much more effectively than the regime, as can be shown by comparing the websites of the independent and state-controlled media.

For example, the Wikipedia entries written in the official spelling are said to outnumber those written in *Tarashkevica*, but the latter are much better in terms of content and quality. Unrestricted access to uncensored information in Belarusian will be crucial for the nation’s development. The Internet provides this opportunity. Paradoxically, the language of Wikipedia and blogs is no less important than the language of the Belarusian Encyclopedia and the state-controlled newspaper *Zviazda*.

f) A new generation of writers and Belarusian speakers has cropped up. The official Belarusian language and cultural standards are based on Soviet-style insti-

tutions and the nepotism of writers loyal to the current regime (the official Writers' Union and its head Mikalai Charhiniec). Writers are divided into two camps. The pro-government camp is wary of young authors. It is difficult to assess the state of Belarusian culture based on the conditions for writers and book publishing in Belarus. At the same time, it is necessary to mention examples of successes that were achieved without financial assistance from the government, such as the literary journals *Dziejaslou* and *Arche*, and Wikipedia in Belarusian.

g) Belarusian culture and language have started to evolve in a natural way, without government subsidies. Financing and independence are closely linked. The older generation's major problem is its reliance on the state. Culture that does not depend on government subsidies is free from the distortions that would result from its existence within the limits set by the authoritarian state. The state has been and remains a mechanism for exercising coercive violence, no matter who rules Belarus: Russians, Poles, Germans, Soviets, or the post-Soviet regime. This will not change in the next few decades because the mentality of the people is unlikely to change soon.

h) Thousands of Belarusians currently study outside the former empire. Belarusian culture has opened itself to the world and opens the world beyond the traditional village environment and imperial limits. More Belarusian authors have been translated into foreign languages. Confined to the imperial borders and constrained by the rule, whereby all international relations are impossible without the mediation of the imperial nation and its language, Belarusian culture has not experienced such good fortune for centuries.

i) Still, there are unwelcome trends toward nihilism and isolationism within the national revival campaign. Institutions are underdeveloped and there are few moral leaders. Nihilism with regard to works of Belarusian culture is aggravated by the inclination of every individual and every community to work separately. As a result, the nation has not reached a consensus on cultural issues and some fundamental principles (such as spelling) have been unfoundedly revised due to pressure from the authorities.

* * *

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the cultural development of Belarus was affected by the clash of two visions. Despite certain similarities, the official

vision of how Belarusian culture should develop prevents a new, different vision from emerging through a national consensus on cultural issues, which could be reached through tolerance. The conflict between these two visions continues and is aggravated by the government's policy of silencing the opponents of the official cultural vision. If the standoff continues for a long time, national culture may divide into two warring camps. In any event, it will take a long time to iron out these differences in opinion. At the same time, there are cultures, both in small countries like Ireland and in large nations such as India or China, which have not been seriously affected by a similar conflict of visions and have even drawn inspiration from such "polyphony."

Iryna Vidanova

THE “NEW MEDIA” AS A FORM OF YOUTH RESISTANCE

The two most positive and powerful trends in the opposition over the last few years have been the emergence of “new media” and the rise in youth activism. There are several key links between these trends and it is important to understand them. I will make four main points in this presentation. First, the “new media,” or Internet-based media is one of the very few areas in which the democratic opposition is decisively beating the regime. Second, the “new media” is a field dominated and driven by young people. Third, the “new media” is not only a growing and influential provider of independent information but also an important form of activism and resistance against the regime. Finally, the “new media” is the most effective tool being used by young people to involve more and more young people in the democratic opposition.

New Media Rocks

Due to the regime’s repression, traditional print media that represents the opposition’s point of view has declined precipitously. While the print runs of independent newspapers have stopped, are flat, or continue to fall, the audiences of online publications, including the Internet versions of independent newspapers, such as *Nasha Niva*, are steadily increasing. Launched less than two years ago, the PDF electronic daily newspaper *Ejednievnik*, delivered to readers by email, today has more than 46,000 subscribers. Forced online by the regime, many media outlets have responded impressively.

In fact, they have become more innovative and impressive than their state counterparts.

One only has to look at the Internet statistics to see the dominance of the opposition’s “new media.” Of the top 30 most popular media websites (<http://top.akavita.com>), fifteen are associated with the democratic opposition. Naviny.BY, Charter 97, and Belarus Partisan each are ranked more highly than any state-supported media site. Of the government sites, only *Sovetskaya Belorussija*, BELTA and *Vechernij Minsk* make it into the top 30. The only regional news website on the list — Narodnyja Naviny Viciebska (<http://news.vitebsk.cc/>) — is run by a group of democratic activists and journalists. While Charter 97 and Naviny.BY make the top 100 most popular websites in Belarus (<http://www.e-belarus.org/news/200805201.html>), only one state site, the Weather Channel (pogoda.by), can be found there.

Dozens of local NGOs and independent newspapers have their own websites. Some of them are more popular sources of information than local state newspapers and websites. While the regime has succeeded in controlling television and radio, independent Belarusian TV and radio stations have begun broadcasting from abroad. The informational websites for two of them, Radio Liberty and European Radio for Belarus, are also in the top 30. None of state broadcast media’s news sites made the list.

Young People at the Forefront

It should come as no surprise that young people are the force behind the opposition’s “new media.” While the chief editors of many of the opposition’s leading websites came of age in the 1990s or earlier, young people make up the core group of techies and journalists responsible for writing and producing most of the Internet-based independent media. The webmasters, designers, programmers, photographers, bloggers, and editors of the “new media” are from the younger generation.

The average age of journalists and DJs at European Radio for Belarus, for example, is 21-22. Similarly, every member of ERB’s technical staff is under 26. Most regional websites, including the popular Narodnyja Naviny Viciebska, Horki.info and Zhodzina.info, are run by activists under 30.

The regime knows that it is losing the online war. For this reason, they are drafting a new law designed to control the Internet. Moreover, the regime understands the connection between the “new media” and young people. The first le-

gal action taken against a “new media” outlet was the 2005 case against the Third Way youth group regarding cartoons on its website that “insulted” Lukashenka. This case was used as a pretext for the recent March raids against independent media outlets in Belarus.

On the Cutting Edge

Young people are also the driving force of innovation in the media field, where they are creating unique projects and adjusting the latest technologies to meet the needs of Cyrillic Internet users. Unlike their older colleagues, most young Belarusian journalists have impressive multimedia skills — they are able to report using audio, video and Internet technology. Two years ago, the first issue of a Belarusian-language multimedia youth magazine, produced on compact disc, was released by the team of a print magazine that had been shut down by the authorities. The transformation from a print to a multimedia edition has allowed the magazine to become even more popular and attractive to young people, who are drawn to computer-friendly technology. In addition to text and pictures, the CD format allows the use of video, sound, music and flash animation. The size of each CD issue is also much bigger; it is no longer limited to 40 printed pages. Since the compact discs can easily be read, replicated or disseminated from any computer, an almost limitless number of copies can be burned and distributed.

Last year, a group of young bloggers and programmers created 101blog.net, which automatically analyzes about 11,000 of the most popular Belarusian blogs. The site allows readers to monitor the most discussed news, people and issues in Belarus’s thriving blogosphere. One of Belarus’ first internet radio stations — *Tvoj Styl* (<http://t-styl.info>) — was launched by young activists from the Third Sector Center for Informational Support of Public Initiatives, an NGO in Grodno.

Young and Virtual

Virtual activism has become an inseparable part of Belarusian reality, especially when it comes to our generation of digital natives. According to statistics from December 2006, 32 percent of the working population in Belarus regularly uses the Internet. Of that figure, half are people younger than 30 years of age. As

reported by the Belarusian Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, whereas in 2000 there were only two computers per 100 families, in 2007 the number of computers per 100 families increased to 26. For families with children younger than 18, the figure is even higher, reaching 40 computers per 100 households. The number of Internet users 16 or older has increased from 16.2 % in 2006 to 20.7 % in 2007. The number of mobile phone users topped seven million last year.

Clearly the majority of the users of these high tech tools are young people. In a recent survey, students cite virtual activities as second in popularity only to going to discos, clubs and movies. While most young Internet users in Belarus consider the Net to be primarily a source of entertainment, those online can hardly avoid the news and other serious information posted on Belarusian web portals. In a state survey of students at two universities in Homiel, more than a third of respondents listed the Internet as their primary source of information.

Young Internet users form a vibrant, influential community that spreads independent information to tens of thousands and often influences public opinion. Young Belarusians make up the world's 13th largest LiveJournal community, including more than 24,000 blogs. While many experts claim that the Belarusian blogosphere is only about entertainment, it can hardly be called apolitical or passive. Some of the most popular Belarusian LiveJournal communities include *by_politics* (890 members); *by_mova*, for those who promote the Belarusian language on the Internet (850 members); *by_trash*, which is famous for its visual images and posts making fun of Belarusian reality under Lukashenka (631 members); *minsk_news* (556 members); and *minsk1067*, which unites amateur historians of Minsk (410 members). The personal blogs of some young politicians, such as Ales Mihalevich (<http://michalevic.livejournal.com>) and Franak Viacorka (<http://koziel.livejournal.com>), are read by almost one thousand readers each.

From the Information Highway to the Streets

Young people are not only the creative force behind the opposition Internet; they are also its important purveyors and users. Virtual activism has gone offline. Youth leaders are utilizing the Web to improve their organization and increase the impact of their real world activism. After the “tent city” was demolished in 2006, young activists took refuge in various online communities. The Internet became a virtual Ploshcha, where young activists camped out, held fireside chats

and cooked up new forms of resistance. The Web initially helped young activists to avoid police cordons and expanded the audience for their actions.

After the March crackdown, one of the largest LiveJournal communities — *minsk_by* — played a major role in organizing numerous flash mobs. In 2006, *minsk_by* had a clearly defined pro-democratic profile. It has grown even more popular since then, having more than 4,000 members today. Nevertheless, it can hardly be called a platform for media activism anymore. It is now regarded by many experts, activists and bloggers as a battleground for endless online clashes between fans of different web browsers, Pazniak's followers and Milinkevich's supporters, liberals and conservatives, and so on. The leading role in online activism seems to have devolved to smaller communities, which unite people sharing similar interests and values.

One of the most popular youth resources of this type is Generation.BY (www.generation.by). It targets young people with a strong sense of their own personal freedom, who are enthusiastic about new technologies and well-educated, and have a practical attitude towards life. Instead of wasting time on pointless debates with opponents, the Belarusian language Generation.BY promotes a positive attitude towards life, produces original youth-focused content that is often cited by other media and online resources, popularizes contemporary Belarusian youth culture, and stimulates various forms of youth activism. Some of Generation.BY's products, such as its collection of emoticons with national white-red-white flags or its 2007 flash Christmas card, which its creators call "positive internet provocations," have become big hits among youth, not only in Belarus, but also in Ukraine and Russia.

Bridging Virtual and Real Activism

Generation.BY is one of a growing number of groups positioning themselves as "new media" forms that not only exist on the Internet, but actually tries to influence the content on the Internet. The creators of the website, who are graduate students and young professionals, say that they consciously avoid writing about every political and social event in Belarus, but chose only the most important ones or raise topics not covered by other media, focusing on youth and cultural life. When Zmicier Zhaliznichenka was illegally expelled from his university and drafted into the army in September 2007, Generation.BY took the "new me-

dia” lead in running a series of exclusive materials about his case. Unlike most of the opposition’s media sites, Generation.BY depicted him, not as a victim of the regime, but as a successful young person with strong, moral beliefs — an image that greatly appealed to young people. The website portrayed him as a positive role model — an active young man and an excellent student who refused to give up his rights, including the right to speak and be addressed in Belarusian while in the army, despite the violations of his human and civic rights.

Two years ago, when Taciana Khoma was expelled from Belarusian State Economic University after being elected to the Board of the European Students’ Union, Generation.BY initiated a solidarity campaign in her support. It was not the first expulsion on political grounds in Belarus, but it was the first broad informational campaign, on both the national and international level, carried out for a student who had been unjustly expelled. This was carried out by the youth-led “new media.” Thanks to the efforts of student-volunteers, who were writing about Taciana in their blogs and translating information about her case into foreign languages, her case became headline news in Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian, and a number of European countries.

Generation.BY’s virtual information campaign had a very real impact. Students in Belarus collected signatures in support of Taciana. International organizations sent hundreds of letters to the University’s rector. Although Taciana was not reinstated and the wave of repressions against active students continued, the university was excluded from the European University Association, subservient bureaucrats learned that violations of the laws would not go unnoticed, and Belarusian students were encouraged to keep fighting the good fight. In April 2006, the university’s students refused to participate in the public repentance demanded by the rector for their classmates who had taken part in the March 2006 demonstrations. In March 2008, Austrian students picketed a conference in which the school’s rector took part (<http://generation.by/news2267.html>). Dr. Shymau was forced to publicly explain why he had expelled Tatsiana Khoma before he could move on to his presentation about economic cooperation and the political dialogue between Belarus and Europe. The video with his speech appeared in various places, including Radio Liberty’s website. In April 2008, Rector Shymau changed his mind and did not expel Mauluda Atakulava, a third-year student and Young Front activist, after 150 students signed a petition in her support. Today Taciana Khoma continues her studies abroad, acts as a prominent international student advocate, and contributes to Generation.BY.

In March 2007, Belarusian bloggers successfully launched an Internet campaign to collect bail money for Dzianis Dzianisau, a young activist and one of the “tent city” leaders, who was imprisoned for his political activities. In Hrodna, blogs became the focal point of efforts to mobilize citizens to defend the city’s historical monuments, which are being destroyed under the pretext of reconstructing the Old Town. A group of popular Hrodna bloggers collected news about the most recent developments regarding the “reconstruction,” posted them online, and promptly organized peaceful protests at the threatened places as a part of the “Let’s Save Hrodna!” civic campaign (<http://blog.grodno.net/categorias/istorija/spasem-grodno/>).

Just a few days after Andrej Kim was arrested during a peaceful demonstration of small entrepreneurs in January 2008, an online community was launched to support him (http://community.livejournal.com/andrei_kim/). In addition to information about the youth leader, who was sentenced to one and a half year in prison, and photos and videos from rallies demanding the release of political prisoners in Belarus, the site also offers a series of cartoons, wherein Andrej is the main character. A creator of this blog and friend of his explained that: “We want as many people as possible to learn that Andrej was imprisoned illegally. Through the materials, we want to portray Andrej as a noble, intelligent and strong-hearted person, which he truly is.” The community, uniting more than 150 members, provides up-to-date information about Andrej’s life in his Babrujsk prison, initiates public campaigns in his support, organizes street protests and performances, and draws public attention to other political prisoners.

Thanks to young activists, the Internet in Belarus is no longer just a parallel reality, detached from everyday life. Generation.BY, for example, is famous for its “Tuesday Meetings of Good People”. Every other Tuesday, those who meet on the site in cyberspace physically come together. “This tradition is already three years old,” one of the creators explains, “it’s a chance for very different people to meet in an informal atmosphere, discuss the latest news, and share interesting ideas. Often the discussions develop into new projects.” One of the last “Tuesday Meeting” took place simultaneously in Belarus, Austria, Italy and the Netherlands. Young Belarusians are well-connected offline and online, utilizing blogs, skype, social networks, cell phones and other means of communication. The Internet serves as a unique bridge between virtual and real activism.

Out of Town but Still Online

While the “new media” is an urban movement and is led by the capital, youth activists outside of Minsk have not been idle. They have also been going high tech in order to reach out to as many citizens as possible and leaving local authorities far behind in this battle for people’s hearts and bytes. Unlike the Minsk-based national “new media,” local Internet-based programs are usually started and run by democratic activists, instead of media professionals.

A couple of months ago, the Horki local government started an official website to compete with the independent horki.info, which has been operating since June 2007. Created by young NGO activists, horki.info has already become a dynamic and popular resource that is playing a key role in local civil society. Top posts during the last few months included materials about the democratic leader Alaksandr Milinkevich’s visit to Horki, which was organized by the website’s team, and an article about a meeting of the district’s Member of Parliament with constituents, which was forced upon her through a special petition initiated by the site’s youth activists. At the meeting, the MP was asked about the regime’s decision to build a nuclear power plant near the town. Horki.info helped to initiate a civic campaign against the construction of the power plant, which has gathered more than 1,500 signatures. The site also serves as a mouthpiece for a young candidate from the democratic opposition who will run in the fall parliamentary elections. Horki.info is not just another source of information in cyberspace, but is part of a real network of local NGOs, political parties and independent media that is carrying out a broad range of grassroots activism.

The most popular regional website — the interactive online newspaper *Narodnyja Naviny Viciebska* — was launched by a group of youth activists who came from the environmental movement. The site now has several thousand readers, including more than a hundred RSS subscribers, and is often cited in the national independent media. It has a special deal with Viciebsk’s largest regional newspaper, *Inform-Bank*, which is published three times a week with a print run of 40,000 copies and reprints materials from *Narodnyja Naviny* on the regular basis.

A group of young activists in Zhodzina has created a cutting edge, interactive website that has a clearly defined pro-democratic profile and promotes civic journalism for their city. But more importantly, they have made it an integral part of their Independent Republic of Zhodzina NGO, which was already well-known for its civic campaigns (<http://www.zhodzina.info/>). Young NGO activists from Ba-

rysau are also linking the “new media” with civic campaigns. In May 2008, volunteers of the Initiative For a Clean Barysau distributed thousands of questionnaires, surveying the citizen’s views on the infrastructure (roads, playgrounds, and so on) in two of city’s largest districts. Petitions to improve conditions, timed to coincide with the fall elections, will then be submitted to the city administration. At the same time as the petition campaigns, a series of pictures and articles depicting the poor state of the two districts will be posted on the Initiative’s website (http://barysau.belarda.org/local_news/data/ic_87/1667/).

The Barysau website is a part of a unique network of local websites — www.belarda.org — created by a team of regional activists, who are mostly under 35, from the Belarusian Regional Development Association. The network links together nineteen regional Internet pages, which all contain, along with news sections, practical information, such as contact information for the local authorities, lists of gas stations, updates about local transportation systems, and so on. This makes the sites a handy reference source for citizens and attracts those who are not interested in politics and know little about the democratic movement.

21st Century Samizdat

Despite the increasing popularity of the Internet and new technologies, the virtual world is not easily accessible for everyone in Belarus. Therefore, to be effective, the “new media” must be combined with some of the old ways of doing things. For example, the independent newspaper *Salidarnasc*, which went online after being excluded from the state-controlled distribution system, is a pioneer of 21st century samizdat in Belarus. Its transformation from a print newspaper to one of the most popular news websites (<http://www.gazetaby.com/>) led to a dramatic change in the publication’s audience. Now attracting mainly young and urban Internet users, *Salidarnasc* continues to be a leader in “new media” innovation; it will soon launch a PDA format that will allow its readers to receive news updates on their cell phones. In order to continue reaching the newspaper’s original readers — Salihorsk miners and workers — the website produces a weekly PDF version that is downloaded in a leaflet format, photocopied, and distributed in workplaces.

While many local youth initiatives still prefer publishing small bulletins and others have moved completely online, some are taking the best from the old and

the new. The team that produces the popular Zabej.info website (<http://www.zabej.info/>) was brought together by their love for soccer. These young people have used the web to organize their independent street soccer tournaments, first in Minsk and now in the regions. As their popularity and the number of teams participating increased (last summer Zabej.info organized the first female soccer tournament in Belarus), the youth NGO started publishing its own PDF newsletter. Today it is one of the most catchy and interesting youth publications in the entire country. While preferring sports over politics, Zabej.info openly opposes the state’s obligatory work placement system and regularly publishes articles critical of other aspects of the state’s youth policy.

Why It All Matters

The nexus of the “new media” and young people is important for several reasons.

- The “new media” is the wave of the future, and only young people really understand it. They are the leaders in this field already. The older generation of democratic activists and regime ideologues are barely active in the virtual world.
- Thanks to its core group of creative and talented young people, the “new media” is winning the online information war. So far, the regime has done little to hinder the “new media.”
- At a time when “fathers” of the democratic opposition hardly appeal to the “sons” in Belarus, the “new media” is attractive to young people. If politics is a turn-off, the Internet tends to fascinate young Belarusians. Unlike Belarus’s perpetually fragmented opposition, the “new media” is one of the few things in Belarus that can bring young people together and inspires them. The creators of Generation.BY report that only a few members of their community, which now includes several hundred young people, belong to any political movement. The majority of their members are musicians, photographers, designers, PR specialists, and ordinary students who want to do something creative, meet interesting people, and believe that what they are doing is helping society to develop.
- The “new media” is drawing “the best and brightest” from the Belarusian opposition and non-conformist youth. Belarusian cyberspace is full of creativity and cutting edge ideas.

- Online communities are a 21st century form of networking and self-organization. They are bringing together Belarusians from different locations and various backgrounds.
- The “new media” is a cost-effective way for the opposition to reach a large audience of young people, who would not be reading independent print newspapers.
- Finally, online pro-democratic initiatives, even the smallest ones, have a chance to inspire the thousands of young people who are surfing the Net. Some of the established youth media have already sparked dozens of similar projects at the regional level.

For these reasons, it is absolutely crucial for the current leaders of the Belarusian political opposition to better understand what is happening with the “new media,” to be more present online, and to grasp the impact the Internet is having on the future leaders of the country. Together, the “new media” and young people are at the forefront of creating a modern Belarusian urban culture that strengthens Belarusian identity and promotes the ideals of freedom, independence, and democracy.

Yury Drakakhrust

CULTURAL TYPES AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

While on the 2006 presidential campaign trail, in one of his interviews, Alaksandr Milinkevich said that he considered the discovery of a Polish king's grave in the Brest region one of his greatest achievements. In the same interview, the politician recalled that he mentioned the grave at one of his campaign rallies and a woman asked, "What does the Polish king have to do with us?"

The story indicates how a cultural division or barrier exacerbates political divides in Belarus. The overlapping political and cultural barriers can hardly be the only factor behind the lack of change in Belarus, but, in my opinion, this phenomenon already plays a considerable role.

Currently, it is generally believed that the passive majority's opinion does not matter because any changes are carried out by the minority. This is true — any changes are made by the minority. Nevertheless, not just "any minority" is able to make changes. For every example of a minority's success there are a great number of instances where minorities' efforts went unnoticed in history and life took a different path.

Many factors can influence an outcome, but, certainly, the relationship between the majority and the minority is essential for success. If resolution is the only point of difference between the minority and the majority and they have more in common than they do differences, then it is realistic to expect changes. If the majority views the minority as strange at best or as aliens in the worst case, all efforts will end in failure as usual.

It is hard to find correct terms for cultural types that differ so much as to make political barriers higher. People who support change could be referred to as "politically conscious," "Belarusian," "European," or "Polish" types, but the former would be contemptuous, while the rest are not very accurate.

The same is true for labels for those on the other side, such as “Creole,” “Russian,” or “eastern.” Some terms are insulting, while others are inaccurate.

The types will be hereafter referred to as Type I and Type II, in order to avoid offending anyone.

It is not incidental that it is so difficult to find the right labels for the different categories, since it is not easy to determine a criterion that makes it possible to categorize people as Type I or Type II.

The language that a person uses every day is not a good criterion, since an old, poorly-educated Belarusian speaker from a rural area is likely to fall into Type II, while a young, educated Russian speaker is quite likely to be categorized as Type I. If the study were limited to educated people, the criterion of language would work only for educated Belarusian speakers living in cities — most of those who spoke Belarusian would fall into Type I.

Faith is not a more precise gauge for determining who will support change. A Roman Catholic is more likely to fall into Type I, but this is not a hard and fast rule. A few years ago, Piotra Rudkouski, in his article, entitled “*Панская Польща і бяспанская Беларусь*,” proved that Type II people are well represented among Belarusian Catholics and ethnic Belarusians in Poland.

Attitudes toward Russian culture could be used as criterion to identify cultural types, but it would be very difficult to apply in practice. For instance, how can one determine how many books a person should read in Belarusian to qualify as Type I person?

In addition, attitudes towards Russia are a one-sided criterion. People of Type I have attitudes towards Russia that may be described using expressions like “keep your hands off!” Type II individuals, on the other hand, differ in their attitudes, often substantially.

Attitudes towards the European Union would also be a flawed criterion. Most Type I individuals are in favor of close ties with the European Union, but many Type II representatives are also pro-EU.

In this sense it is interesting to compare attitudes towards EU membership in Belarus and Russia.

“Should Belarus become a member of the European Union?” %

Answer	12/02	3/03	3/05	5/07
Yes	61	56	53	34
No	11	12	44	49

Source: IISEPS, www.iiseps.org

“Russia is not a member of the European Union. Should Russia seek membership of the EU?” %

	03/2001	05/2002	06/2003	11/2003	02/2005	06/2005	03/2007
Yes	59	52	73	55	51	48	36
No	19	18	10	15	23	26	26

Source: Foundation “Obschestvennoe mnenie” (Public opinion) www.fom.ru

Levels of pro-EU and anti-EU sentiments are similar in the two countries and have changed in a parallel manner over time.

In this light, one can conclude that the mechanism that shapes pro-EU sentiments among Type II Belarusians is similar to the mechanism that influences their Russian counterparts.

Let us consider possible criteria. Take for instance attitudes regarding history, in particular towards the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) and the Belarusian People’s Republic (BNR). This could be an effective criterion, as is suggested in the above-mentioned incident at Milinkevich’s campaign rally. However, considering recent changes in the government’s attitude towards history (its attitude towards the GDL changed a few years ago and towards BNR changed more recently), this difference boils down to emotion. March 25 is a sacred date for Type I individuals and an acceptable holiday for their Type II counterparts.

Attitudes towards World War II are a good, but also flawed criterion.

Thus, there is not a single accurate and simple criterion by which one can divide Belarusians into cultural types. Nevertheless, there are quite accurate signs that people use to identify a friend or a foe.

For example, Milinkevich recorded most of his campaign speeches for television and radio in the Russian language. This is not to say that his choice of language was wrong. I will try to explain why he did so. Almost every person in Belarus understands Belarusian. Even if a handful of people do not, his language choice cannot be explained by the need to reach them. The choice of language in this context (not the language itself, but a language selected by an educated person for an important political speech) makes it easier for voters identify the speaker’s cultural type. Clearly, Milinkevich chose Russian because he did not want to be unequivocally associated with Type I voters alone.

Since the topic of our conference is the generation gap, I would like to cite the results of opinion polls, which show how various generations are represented in these two categories. In particular, I am referring to some of the above-mentioned criteria for identifying cultural types.

What language do you mainly use in everyday communication?

	Belarusian (8%)	Russian (52%)	Russian and Belarusian (16%)	Crude mixture (23%)	Russian & I speak this language from my childhood (38%)
18-29	3	73	12	10	56
30-39	7	64	14	14	46
40-49	3	58	17	20	44
50-59	6	47	17	29	29
+60	14	27	19	39	18

Source: IISEPS poll, October-November, 2006, 1,527 persons interviewed

Based on the language of choice, young people are the age group most distanced from Type I. The older a person is, the more likely he or she is to speak Belarusian. The numbers in the right column — the percentage of those who have used mostly Russian in everyday communication since childhood — are particularly astonishing. More than half of respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 have spoken mostly Russian from an early age.

Attitudes towards historical figures, or more broadly, towards history in general, are quite mixed and contradictory. The table below contains data for the youngest and the two oldest age groups.

Of the following figures, who is the most attractive and best corresponds to your ideal politician? (choose no more than three), %

	All respondents	18-29	Rank	Over 49	Rank
Vladimir Putin	39	42	1	35	3
Piotr Masherau	33	22	3	38	1
Peter the Great	31	41	2	23	4
Alaksandr Lukashenka	21	6	12	36	2
Catherine II	15	21	4	11	7
Leonid Brezhnev	13	5	13	18	5
Kastus Kalinouski	11	14	5	8	9
Josef Stalin	9	8	8	13	6
Mikhail Gorbachev	9	7	9-10	11	8
Vladimir Lenin	9	7	9-10	4	11
Duke Vitaut	7	12	6	3	13
Leon Sapieha	7	11	7	4	12
Nikita Khrushchev	7	6	11	5	10

Source: IISEPS poll, June 2004, 1,508 persons interviewed

A greater proportion of youths admire Belarusian heroes like Kalinouski, Sapieha and Vitaut than the population in general, especially older people. Nevertheless, Russian heroes, including those responsible for the GDL's subjection also appeal to more young respondents than to people over 49 and respondents in general.

Finally, regarding Belarus's fundamental dilemma of Europe or Russia, the younger respondents are the more they favor the EU and want their country to distance itself from Russia.

“Should Belarus become a member of the European Union?” by age, %

Answer	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	+60
Yes (35%)	55	40	38	29	16
No (35%)	20	29	39	44	47

“If a referendum on the unification of Belarus and Russia were held today, how would you vote?” by age, %

Answer	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	+60
For unification (36%)	26	28	40	36	48
Against unification (42%)	50	45	42	42	32

“If you had to choose between unification with Russia and EU membership, what would you prefer?” by age, %

Answer	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	+60
Unification with Russia (45%)	28	41	48	54	58
EU membership (33%)	55	39	33	24	16

Source: IISEPS poll, May 2008, 1,531 persons interviewed
www.iiseps.org

The data in these three tables do not give us reason to assume that more respondents in the 18-29 age bracket can be categorized as Type I than in other age groups. This presumption holds true for one question, but is not confirmed by their replies to other questions.

Practical politics offers one persuasive argument to counter my ideas regarding the predominant cultural type: the groups and politicians who have tried to capture the Type II masses have always received very limited support. For instance, consider “the democratic reform movement” of the early 1990s, Alaksandr Kazulin (who gained fewer votes than Milinkevich in the 2006 presidential race, ac-

ording to both official results and independent polls), or Siarhiey Skrabiec and Valer Fralou (whose pro-Russian rallies attracted a small number of participants). Type II politicians have been less successful than political forces that have targeted the Type I electorate.

This proves that, apart from the lack of cultural divides and the association with the predominant type, it takes a certain political talent to achieve success. One politician we all know by name had the aptitude to win the presidency in 1994. If Type II individuals remain his support base, he will be able to take advantage of his popularity for quite a long time, in part because the cultural types are, by default, split among his opponents.

Naturally, one may only hope that persistent cultural and political work can help to shift the balance away from Type II and towards Type I as generations change so that Type I political representatives will eventually overcome. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned poll results give little evidence that this hope can ever be fulfilled.

David R. Marples and Uladzimir Padhol

CREATING NEW NATIONAL HISTORY FROM OLD: THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY AND WORLD WAR II IN CONTEMPORARY BELARUS

Introduction

This paper examines the importance of historical memory and specifically that of the Second World War in policymaking in contemporary Belarus. It offers an analysis of the government's integration of the wartime events into state philosophy and national history, as well as the use of popular culture to perpetuate the image of the war as the pivotal event in the Belarusian past. In the same way, it also looks at Belarus's current relationship with Russia, as well as the links forged between the war and a new generation in Belarus, i.e. young people in their twenties, who are being encouraged to serve as a new contingent of 'patriotic youth,' incorporating into their mindset quasi-Soviet propaganda and myths rather than a realistic conception of wartime events. It is postulated that the Lukashenka regime, in propagating a new state policy "For an independent Belarus" has taken steps to use the war as an instrument of control. In contrast to the Soviet period, the Great Patriotic War, as it is commonly known, is now being used as an event in which Belarusians distinguished themselves rather than an example of fraternal or common efforts against an unscrupulous invader.

Today there are many manifestations of wartime memories: monuments, museums, outdoor exhibits, grave-sites of heroes, public commemorations on Victory or Army Day, as well as documentary films, popular writings, television programs, and

academic works. The president has issued a number of major speeches on the war, including speeches at the Brest Fortress, one of the main commemorative sites today. This paper is part of a new project that intends to encompass all these areas in order to offer an assessment of the role of the war in contemporary society in Belarus. The project particularly focuses on popular culture since it is unlikely that most residents of the republic regularly read the plethora of new academic works on the subject that frequently arrive in the National Library. This paper will limit itself to one major topic, namely the forging of links between the war and Belarusian youth.

Victory Day 2008

On 8 May 2008, the day on which most of Europe marks the defeat of Hitler's forces, Belarusian president Alaksandr Hryhorevich Lukashenka published a statement on the occasion of the 63rd anniversary marking the end of the 'Great Patriotic War.'¹ In contrast to past years, the speech was notable for its brevity. The published version contained the title "My pobedili" (We were victorious).² In some respects the comments might be termed ritualistic in that the audience would have heard similar sentiments expressed year after year for several decades, for example: "This is the most memorable and triumphal date in the history of our people, which symbolizes its heroism, courage, and self-sacrifice in the struggle with the Fascist barbarians for the freedom of our country." In other instances, however, the statement was significant for the perceived links with the present:

New generations of Belarusians highly esteem the feat of their grandfathers and fathers and are constructing a peace-loving sovereign state that shows fidelity to those who shed their blood for the right of the Motherland to exist.

There is no mention here of a common struggle or of regret for the demise of the Soviet Union. Lukashenka refers specifically to Chatyn, the village that was allegedly destroyed by the Germans. All the residents were lost, with the exception of an old man and one child. Today the residents are commemorated by a large statue at the entrance to a memorial site.

On 9 May, the day usually commemorated in Russia and Belarus (and formerly by the USSR as "Victory Day"), Lukashenka attended the official celebrations in

¹ "My pobedili!" *SB Belarus' Segodnya*, 8 May 2008, p. 1, and ff.

² The same slogan was used in the Soviet period and can be found on many of the propaganda posters contained in the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Minsk.

Minsk. About 6,000 people took part in the official parade, and every district of the country sent 500 delegates to the capital. In his speech, the president focused on the isolation of Belarus by the countries of the West. Huge arsenals of mass destruction have accumulated on the planet, he commented, and “certain countries,” considering themselves “Super Powers,” allow themselves to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. He added that the activity of the NATO bloc was increasing and that the Americans were setting up elements of their strategic defense in the center of Europe. Belarusians, said Lukashenka, never sought to divide the achievement of the victory in 1945 and are grateful to those who fought with them, but “everyone should remember the leading role of the Soviet Union in the rout of fascism.” Yet “some people” have tried to revise the results of the war and reconstruct the map of Europe. Belarus itself is being subjected to economic blackmail.³

The link between the war and Belarus’ present dilemmas is thus made plain, with the proviso that the 9 May speech did make reference to the Soviet Union. The president concluded by stating that the armed forces of Belarus stood on guard “at the borders of the Motherland,” i.e. they are implicitly protecting Russia as well as Belarus. However, it is not Russia that is under immediate threat. Travel bans on Belarusian leaders by the United States and the EU, and the US ban on trade with the Belarusian company Belneftekhim are obviously the point of reference. At the time of the speech, Belarus had initiated a series of cutbacks on staff at the US Embassy in Minsk that had resulted in the departure of the ambassador and a reduction in its contingent from thirty-five to five staff members. In earlier years, the Belarusian leader has emphasized the close partnership with Russia both as a source of victory in the war years and as a necessity in the face of perceived Western hostility. However, that relationship has increasingly come under question. The issue of the Russia-Belarus Union in particular sparks frequent debates among representatives of the Belarusian government and of the opposition.

In April 2008, two observers highlighted the issue of relations with Russia. Aleksandr Fadeev, head of the Belarus section at the Institute of CIS Countries, pointed out that the elites of the two countries have yet to come up with a single realistic conception of how the two countries might be integrated. Belarus in fact faces a problem of two opposing trends: on the one hand, a love for Russia and hope that it might continue to assist Belarus; and on the other a fear of losing national independence and falling under Russia’s influence and power. Hienadz Davydzka,

³ Cited in Taciana Kalinouskaja, “Pobeda dlya otveta Zapadu,” *Belorusy i rynek*, 12-19 May 2008 [<http://www.br.minsk.by/index.php?article=32771>]

a deputy of the National Assembly of Belarus's Palace of Representatives seems more optimistic about the issue of a partnership with Russia and more concerned with the attitudes of Belarusian young people. Thus he remarks, with scant respect for the discipline of history, that in all the wars that Russia has experienced—with the Swedes, French, and Turks—the Belarusian people stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the Russians on the field of battle. In the Great Patriotic War, “Belarus was a Partisan, heroic land.” Military brotherhood was, in his view, an essential element in the overall victory and, according to Davydzka, “we need to instill in young people an understanding of these values.” Davydzka makes reference to some key issues that currently face the country. First, he feels that it is a tragedy that Belarusians are gradually forgetting their cultural achievements and historical victories, of which neighbors and political opponents are quick to take advantage. Second, the chief questions are how to secure independence, resist various intrusions and threats, and preserve “our own culture” as well as the “moral health” of young people.⁴

Monuments and Museums

The government of Lukashenka inherited most commemorative sites from the Soviet regime as the interim government led by parliamentary chair Stanislau Shushkevich paid little attention to the issue of historical memory. Though the recognition of Minsk in particular as a “Hero City” took almost thirty years, mainly for political reasons,⁵ the late Soviet period saw the rapid erection of mon-

⁴ Both comments are contained in the newspaper of the Russia-Belarus Union: “Na global’nye vyzovy my dolzhny dat’ global’nyi otvet,” *Soyuznoe Veche*, No. 10, 10-16 April 2008, p. II and III.

⁵ In May 1945, it appeared that Minsk would be awarded the status of a “hero city” alongside Leningrad, Stalingrad, Sevastopol, and Odessa. The idea received support from several “heroes of the Soviet Union” as well as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, P.K. Ponomarenko. However, the proposal was blocked by the NKVD under L.P. Beria and a number of citizens and underground activists were accused, falsely, of collaborating with the enemy. In September 1959, the same goal was resurrected by then party leader and former Partisan hero, K.T. Mazurau, but once again without fruition. The third attempt was made in the spring of 1965, this time on the initiative of Moscow, now under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev. Evidently this attempt was thwarted by M.V. Pidhirny, Second Secretary of the CC CPSU, who felt that were Minsk to receive such an award, Belarus would then surpass his native Ukraine in terms of wartime honors. Only during preparations for the 30th anniversary of the ending of war in Europe, on 26 June 1974, did Minsk receive the honorary title of “hero city” to denote the heroism of its citizens in the face of enemy attacks and the formation of the Partisan movement. At the start of 1978, the leadership of Belarus and the city of Minsk were awarded the “Golden Star” medal and Order of Lenin. See Yauhen Baranouski, “Minsk moh stats’ horadam-heroem amal’ na 30-hadou ranei — jashche u peramozhnym 1945-m?” *Zviazda*, 8 September 2007.

uments and sites. Recently, as part of the campaign “For an independent Belarus” and the forging of a new patriotism based on wartime achievements, the current authoritarian regime has expanded the Soviet efforts with several new initiatives. In this way, Lukashenka and his advisors seek to ensure that the war remains in place indefinitely as the major event in national history and popular memory. The focus generally is on suffering and heroism, with examples of the latter generally concentrating on the activities of the Partisans, acts of resistance at the very start of the war (particularly that of the Brest Fortress on the western border), and the liberation of Belarus by the Soviet army. We will look briefly at the various examples of commemoration, but for reasons of space, the question of monuments will be limited to the northern oblast of Viciebsk (Vitebsk).⁶

In the 1980s, a number of new monuments were established in Viciebsk region, and they were formalized by a resolution of the Viciebsk Oblast Council on 27 December 1990. Divided among the various rayons, the vast majority of these monuments or graves pertained to the German-Soviet war. In general, they consisted of memorial signs at locations where Soviet soldiers died fighting, graves of “Nazi victims,” and sites where villages were razed to the ground by the occupants. In the city center of Viciebsk there is also a large commemorative monument with the traditional three towers, marking the activities of the Red Army, the underground, and the Belarusian partisans. As in many other cities, the monument dominates the landscape and stands over a vast paved area at one of the highest points on the city landscape. Two rectangular pools with fountains are located in front of the edifice, behind which is the valley of the Dvina River. The Germans occupied Viciebsk on 11 July 1941, after six days of fighting with the 19th, 20th, and 22nd armies of the Western Front. It was liberated on 28 June 1944.

Other regions of the province have important and new commemorative sites. In April 1966, for example, the Memorial Park of Heroes containing a “Hill of Immortality” was founded in the city of Orsha, with six passageways emanating from it named after Heroes of the Soviet Union (including K.S. Zaslonov and Yu. V. Smirnov). The Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union was placed high on the hill, with a text dedicated to those who perished in the “fight for freedom.” In 2004-05, the Memorial Park of Heroes was renovated.⁷ In late 2007, the Belarusian authorities announced the building of a new historical site in the form

⁶ <http://dubrovno.vitebsk-region.gov.by/en/region/history> (Zaslonov)

⁷ http://www.orsha.by/index.php-mode=cat_browse&cat_id=10.htm

of a Partisan village located in the Sianno Rayon of Viciebsk Oblast, reportedly in the area in which Hero of the Soviet Union Konstantin Zaslonov operated with his brigade. Trenches and shelters were to be built to re-create daily life in a typical Partisan zone. Zaslonov, who was a native Russian, was killed in a conflict with a German punitive detachment on 13 November 1942. His grave is located on the platform of the Orsha railway station, and there is a large statue of him by the rail tracks. He was commander of a legendary Partisan brigade under his pseudonym, Dyadya Kostya. In his lifetime he received two Orders of Lenin and posthumously the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. There are streets named after him in St. Petersburg, Tver', Belgorod, and Kramatorsk, but, as he worked at Orsha railway station from 1939, he has some claims to being a national hero of Belarus.⁸

In 2005, Lukashenka was present at the inauguration of the Stalin Line historical and cultural complex near the town of Zaslauje, occupying some forty hectares of territory on the highway between Minsk and Maladechna. On its opening, military veterans were invited to attend, and they were greeted with copies of a collection of articles entitled "Europe, Bow to Stalin" by the Belarusian Republican Union of Youth (BRUY).⁹ Though theoretically self-supporting, the complex was constructed by government ministries, internal and border troops, and civic organizations,¹⁰ and the president uses the site as a visiting point for foreign dignitaries who come to Minsk. The site contains pillboxes (some of which contain machine guns), tanks, and a variety of weapons not only from the Second World War period, but also from the later Cold War period, including quite modern armaments. Mock battles are depicted there between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. The Stalin Line is significant for two reasons. First, as the above example with the veterans illustrates, it can be seen as an attempt by the organizers of the complex and implicitly by the Lukashenka regime to rehabilitate Stalin: a large bust of the former Soviet dictator stands at the entrance to the site. On the occasion of my visit it was covered in wreaths. Second, and more important for the purposes of this paper, it is based on a longstanding myth that fits in well with the official conception of the Great Patriotic War today, namely that the Nazi advance was both delayed and seriously hindered by a strong line of fortifications extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, including four such zones in Belarus, with the central part in the area of the Stalin Line complex.

⁸ For background information on Zaslonov, see <http://www.peoples.ru/military/hero/zaslonov/>

⁹ *Viasna*, 30 June 2005.

¹⁰ Andrei Lankevich, "The Stalin Line Museum," <http://www.anzenberger.com/en/article/58838.html>

However, no such line existed at the time of the German invasion of the USSR. Stalin, in fact, had ordered the fortifications to be dismantled. In Belarus, they made little sense because in September 1939, with the annexation of Eastern Poland by the Soviet Union, the Belarusian border was moved westward and the area around Zaslauje was then located in the center of the country. The pillboxes marked the original border, and a number of them can be found in various states of disrepair some distance from the complex. However, they represented at best token points of resistance. In some of them outside the complex, writing in blood on the walls suggests that their defenders died fighting the Germans, but it was not possible to determine whether these were written in 1941. So what is the purpose of the Stalin Line complex? It is a new example of mythmaking about the German-Soviet war with the direct collusion of the Lukashenka regime. In contrast to the defense of the Brest Fortress on the western border, where a heroic resistance has been verified even in German reports, the Stalin Line represents an image of the war in tune with the government's interests. Equally important, the site is visited by both young and old. It is manned partly by students in military regalia, and in this way forges a link between the veterans of the Great Patriotic War and Belarusian youth in an attractive setting and spacious territory that is clearly visible from the highway.

The Belarusian Republican Union of Youth

As noted above, the government is anxious that young people should embrace the well-worn ideals of the past as well as those of the sovereign Belarus that is being constructed in the president's image. One of the main vehicles for what might be termed the 'new patriotism' is the Belarusian Republican Union of Youth (BRUY),¹¹ which was created from the former Belarusian Young Communist League (Komsomol). The continuation of the former Komsomol is symbolized by the fact that the BRUY occupies the same building as its former Soviet counterpart, close to the center of Minsk and opposite the presidential palace. For a time there were two large youth organizations—the Belarusian Youth Union and the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union, but they were officially merged in September 2002 under the BRUY title. In January 2003, Lukashenka issued a decree formalizing state support for the BRUY, which includes people between the

¹¹ All the following information is derived from the official website of the BRUY at: <http://www.brsu.by/ru>

ages of 14 and 31. Currently, the BRUY, under its First Secretary Leanid Kavalou, is fulfilling a three-year program (2007-2010) called “The Future of Our Native Land.” This project includes remedial projects and public works, *subbotniki* and, not least, a series of patriotic actions. Within the BRUY there is also the club “Pamyat”. The declared goals of the club are to instill in young people a sense of citizenship, patriotism, and love for the Motherland (*rodina*), to focus attention on the heroic and historical past of the people, and to attract Belarusian youth to participate actively in helping the veterans of the Great Patriotic War. The website and indeed all publicity about the activities of the BRUY is written exclusively in the Russian language. There is also a much abbreviated version of the same documents in English. Thus, the patriotic youth union clearly does not embrace the native language of the country it purports to represent.

In February 2008, the BRUY announced a campaign entitled “We serve Belarus” that also came with a second slogan “We are the grandsons of the soldiers of the Great Victory.” The campaign was scheduled to last until 28 May and, in this way, could mark four official occasions: 23 February—the Day of the Protectors of the Motherland and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus; 4 March—the Day of the Militia; 18 March—the Day of the Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus; and 28 May—the Day of the Border Troops of Belarus. The events scheduled included participation in a program of the Council of Veterans, called “Our memory is eternal.” From 30 April to 11 May—thus still within the confines of the “We serve Belarus” campaign, the BRUY and the Belarusian Pioneer organization began an all-Belarusian project entitled “Thank you for life!” linked to the Day of Victory on 9 May. A single slogan was adopted to cover all the activities on this day: “We were victorious.” The words were said to symbolize the most important values of the BRUY, namely the unity of the nation, the “indissolubility” of history, and the firm links between the generations. Young people were to learn about the great history of Belarus and be educated as “patriotic citizens” of their native land. On Victory Day, young people wearing the uniform of the BRUY mixed freely with veterans and appeared in official photographs of the events in Minsk.

Several comments seem pertinent. First, the disaffection of the younger generation with the Lukashenka regime has been evident for some time. Many of the demonstrations that have taken place against the government, including the 15,000-strong tent city that emerged in Kastychnitskaya Square after the flawed presidential elections of 19 March 2006, were dominated by Belarusian youth. Movements such as the former Zubr organization and the Young Front have ap-

peared to unnerve the president and his advisors. Young people have made up a very high proportion of those jailed for “petty hooliganism” and other anti-government actions in various cities and towns of Belarus. The rift between generations is evident as is the fact that the most enduring support of the president rests on the older generation. Thus the BRUY, though it has been around in some form for many years, has been appropriated as the most convenient vehicle to attract young people not only to the present government, but for the principles on which it stands. Both the Pioneer organization and the BRUY are reminiscent of Communist times: the difference is that they are now limited to a single republic rather than a Union of fraternal peoples. The achievements and self-sacrifice of Belarusians is thus being acknowledged by the youth movement, which in turn is controlled closely by agencies of the government.

Historical Memory and the Lukashenka Regime

The commitment to historical memory itself is taking place in a singularly narrow perspective: that of the Great Patriotic War.¹² It is no longer of critical significance what occurred during this tumultuous event; rather, the young people—and all residents of Belarus—are being indoctrinated in the official myths about the war. The presence of that event in daily life is practically overwhelming. Every city and town contains numerous monuments and statues. Minsk, the capital, not only has Victory Square. It has the largest war museum in the former Soviet Union, the so-called Mound of Glory just outside the city on the Moscow road, and it has the Khatyn Memorial complex some 50 kilometers away, in addition to new sites like the Stalin Line. Alternative sites do exist. Monuments to Jewish ghettos are becoming more commonplace, but they are funded by outsiders. It is the heroic depiction of the German-Soviet war that has been adopted by the authorities as the pivotal event in the founding of a sovereign Belarus. Further, although no date is allocated generally to the official campaign “For an independent Belarus,” it is clearly not identified either with the date of declared sovereignty (27 July 1990) or with the date on which Belarus declared its independence from the Soviet Union (25 August 1991). In fact, today there is no clear dividing

¹² Concerning the debates over historical memory in Belarus and earlier state formations, see, for example, Andrej Kotljarchuk, “The Tradition of Belarusian Statehood: Conflicts About the Past of Belarus,” in Egle Rindzeviciute, ed. *Contemporary Change in Belarus* (Huddinge, Sweden: Baltic and East European Graduate School, 2004), pp. 41-72.

line between Soviet Belarus (BSSR) and the Republic of Belarus in the form it attained by 1995, following the referendum that changed the state's symbols and national flag. The years 1991-94 are generally depicted by the Lukashenka administration as an unfortunate interlude when the state lost its way under the tutelage of adventurers at the behest of the West.¹³ Therefore, the links to 1941-45 are not severed by the emergence of the independent state.

Logically the deployment of the German-Soviet war as a political and propaganda tool cannot last long. Veterans are rapidly dying out and the wartime generation will soon be lost. However, logic has never been the strongpoint of Lukashenka. His policies are implemented through a combination of brute force and propaganda. Although he has made some concessions to other important events and individual figures of the past—the statue of Skaryna outside the National Library — the large majority of his initiatives in the area of historical memory are linked to the war with the Germans. At the same time, the role of Russia is now downplayed or else the media focus is on the failure of the Russians to live up to expectations: they have not honored the ‘equal nation’ principle of the Russia-Belarus Union; they have betrayed longtime friendship by raising gas prices and threatening Belarusian sovereignty; they are involved in petty wars in contrast to the peace-loving society of Belarus. Russians are still perceived as the brothers and closest friends of Belarusians. Lukashenka often remarks that he does not regard Russians as foreigners. However, the leadership of Russia—particularly under Vladimir Putin—has not always behaved in a rational fashion. Therefore, a second Russian-speaking state must survive on its own, albeit alongside the larger neighbor with a common past. Therefore, the story of the war must be retold from a Belarusian perspective.

Not only is the Belarusian past largely obliterated by the regime's focus on the German-Soviet war, but popular depictions of the war are limited, too. There is, for example, very little objective writing on anti-Soviet opposition in Belarus during the period of German occupation¹⁴; Stalin's crimes against Belarusians are rarely cited; the Holocaust in Belarus and the subsequent disappearance of Jewish life is under-represented (until outsiders began initiatives to construct me-

¹³ For a more rational analysis of the economic problems of these years, see I.I. Kovkel' and Ye.S. Yarmusik, *Istoriya Belarusi s drevneishikh vremen do nashego vremeni* (Minsk: Abersev, 1998), pp. 572-573.

¹⁴ Recently a memorial cross was erected in the village Drazhna (Minsk voblast) to commemorate villagers killed by local Partisans on 15 April 1943. Reportedly the Partisans destroyed 37 homes and killed 25 “peaceful residents.” The monument has been destroyed by the authorities soon. *Belapan*, 19 April 2008.

monials to Belarusian Jews during the war it was absent altogether). The emphasis on youth movements, military glory, and self-sacrifice is also rather sinister and is reminiscent of the 1930s rather than the 21st century. The memory of foreign occupation is also used to evoke new and disturbing images of potential aggression against Belarus on the part of NATO and the United States in particular. There is no significant change in the portrayal of the Western menace from the Cold War period, although periodically the Belarusian government has made a distinction between the European Union—potentially benign—and the United States, which is interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states of which it disapproves. Therefore, the German-Soviet war is a convenient tool for the Lukashenka regime because it can be compared to the present situation, when Belarus is once again threatened by powerful states and neglected by its friends, despite the fact that its troops are still guarding the border of the former Soviet Union. It is a simplistic, but not necessarily ineffective, connection between the past and the present.

**THE VOICE OF THE YOUTH:
MOTIVATIONS FOR RESISTANCE**

Michas Paskevic

WHY I BECAME A CIVIC ACTIVIST AND MY SCHOOLMATES DID NOT (OR WHY I NEED IT MORE THAN OTHERS)

I meet former schoolmates nearly every day in the city, on the subway or while conducting day-to-day business. I have many schoolmates. In my native city of Bialystok alone, I studied in two of the three schools. Later, I received instruction at Belarusian State University's Lyceum and at the university's History Faculty and took admission exams at European Humanities University. I made many friends during academic competitions, athletic classes and courses. Social networks also added friends. I am constantly hearing: "hi, howdy, still fighting?" What I do and what I have been doing since I was 13 is not a secret to anyone. I have been doing it for nearly half of my life.

I am an activist. I have been active for all of my teenage and adult life. I have always protested and stirred up trouble. Even when I was in daycare, caregivers complained to my mother. For instance, one time half of the kids in the group escaped through a hole in the fence and went to town to buy ice cream. Guess who was the instigator? It was me.

Teachers called me a naughty boy because I talked back. Few kids could start a heated debate with the teacher and upset a lesson as skillfully as I could. At PTA meetings, my classmates' parents could not understand why the teachers always invited my mother for a serious private talk since I was one of the best performing students. But year after year, teachers advised my mother to tell her husband to be tougher on "the disobedient child." All the same, they did not expel me from school because I participated in academic competitions and was an excellent student.

At the age of 13, I went to another school, where I was especially good at English. At my new school, I made friends and was among the first boys in town to join the Malady Front. There were three of us in the beginning. The eldest was 15. We heard about persecution and politically-motivated disappearances. Some of them had very unfamiliar names. I will always remember one name — Skochka. My mother's friend cited this member of the Malady Front as an example of the trouble in which I might end up. To make a long story short, we were very much afraid, but we printed leaflets, spray-painted political graffiti, and did other not-so-legal things. Life carried me forward toward changes and problems.

Why did I do it? It is Karatkevich's fault. Indeed, *The Wild Hunt of King Stach*, *the Dark Castle of Alsany*, *the Boat of Despair*, and *Danuta* by Alaksiej Karpiuk, *Shlyakhtich Zavalnia* by Barshcheuski, and *Kupala* and *Kolas* motivated me as well. Belarusian literature in all its richness was one of my favorite subjects at school. Youthful radicalism slowly found a path toward self-realization. I also read Russian and foreign works of literature. Naturally, I read much more of it than Belarusian authors. The influence of literature shaped my outlook as a Belarusian boy, an activist, and a young person, who yearned to be active. While school teachers said, "at your age we were inspired by book characters," books encouraged me to act. At thirteen, I was too young for real politics, but I thought at the time that if the "legendary" Gaidar was in command of a regiment at 16, then I could lead a Malady Front cell at 14. Thus, works of literature were the first reason why I became an activist. The Bible says, "In the beginning there was the Word." This is true.

I was also inspired by the free media, television, radio and periodicals. I still have vivid memories of the early 1990s. My father subscribed to more papers than all the other tenants in the apartment bloc combined: *Belorusskij Rynok*, *Naviny*, *Chastnaya Sobstvennost*, *Svaboda*, *Pahonia*, other Russian- and Belarusian-language newspapers I do not remember the names of, and other state and regional periodicals. My father spent quite a bit of money on information from various sources. I liked to watch news on TV and to listen to various points of view. I vividly remember the newspaper *Naviny*. It contained a story about arrests that was illustrated by pictures. I was strongly affected by this single story, as well as by the concept of the periodical.

I spent days in the library reading books, magazines, and newspapers — mostly Russian and Ukrainian periodicals focusing on politics. Other teens my age hardly took interest in anything other than sports. That is why they argued bitterly when I talked. We began to live in different countries at the same time. After

our discussions, however, they no longer took a one-sided approach to developments in the world. The free press is worth its weight in gold.

In 1994, I heard Lukashenka speak for the first time. He labeled business owners “lousy fleas,” “profiteers” and “thieves.” My father had his own business. He had stopped working as a doctor because our young growing family needed money. I rarely saw him at home. He came late at night and immediately went to bed. When I woke up to go to school he was already gone. Hardworking and purpose-driven, my father succeeded in business. He was an example of an industrious man. Belarusian television branded him “a profiteer.”

My friends in the neighborhood said that their parents voted for “a laborer” from “the common people.” My parents voted for Shushkevich and Pazniak. Defending their choice in conversations with my friends, I ended up a stauncher advocate for democracy than my folks. My parents’ choice had an effect on my views. When someone at school or in the neighborhood called entrepreneurs “profiteers,” I took it as an insult. So, I stopped respecting a government that does not respect its citizens. My parents did not care about these insulting statements, but I did. I protested against them.

History was my favorite subject from the time I was a schoolboy to my sixth year in the university. It was another driving force. I knew world and Belarusian history quite well. To my surprise, however, some teachers and students regarded history of Belarus with contempt. They asked, “History of Belarus? What are you talking about?” Now I am convinced that teaching the humanities, especially history, in school is essential for nation building. People look at the world around through the prism of history. It does not mean that history is all that they have. In this country, where reading history books by Mikola Jermalovich is seen as a crime, knowledge of history is a litmus test that helps to determine a person’s attitude towards politics and his or her sense of national identity. The study of history spurred me to act. I drew inspiration from historical figures. I admired history. The romanticism ingrained in works of literature was substantiated with facts. Not only could I criticize someone, but I could also scientifically prove to skeptics that my country had a great future.

Many of my friends helped me as an activist. Perhaps my early successes in team building gave me hope for new achievements. It was not easy, of course. I led a group of twenty teens, which is a large group by small town standards. We painted graffiti, distributed newspapers and stirred up schools, without being caught and punished. Many of them have now distanced themselves from activism. At that time they believed in me. When I meet them now, they drop their eyes

to avoid my gaze, ashamed of being different people than they were before. What can I say? I am grateful to them for those years. I still view my first team as an example of successful teambuilding. I was encouraged by our early victories.

Police lowered their eyes in shame when they saw me. Among friends and relatives, I enjoyed almost unanimous, but silent support. Half of the students in my school knew about my activities. Senior students often approached me, asked about the organization, and expressed support. The latent backing from my community energized me.

This is how it all started. These were my primary and most genuine motives.

I have been a professional activist for the last few years. Certainly, my motivations have changed, but not significantly. On the contrary, additional incentives of a different nature have emerged. In the near and more distant future I will be a politician, a manager and a leader. I have a strong spirit. May God grant everyone the same grit. I am 100 percent certain of success. I believe in change. It may come slowly and gradually, but it is inevitable.

Even if I quit politics, I am convinced that my day-to-day activities will benefit me in the future: experience in leading a youth group, motivating other activists, working under combat-like conditions, writing stories, and defending human rights and the development of rapid responsiveness.

A week ago I bought a book about human resource management. It was not the first textbook I have read on the subject. I do whatever I can to educate myself. If I worked as a businessman for a successful corporation, I would not work nearly so hard. That is a fact.

I am convinced that if I do a good job, the alignment of forces will change. I am certain that every leader and coordinator needs perfectionism like he needs air. Each person must realize that his job is of great importance. A properly planned, detailed strategy can make all the difference. This is another one of my motives.

Striving for success also plays a big role in motivating me to be an activist. Many people are ashamed to admit it, but why should they be? It is a natural desire. The hope for success is a major driving force of progress. Someone may consider this to be vain, but that is not a very good word, in my opinion.

I do not know why my schoolmate and university colleagues have not become activists. Each of us was brought up in a different environment. Maybe it is because we have different ancestors. My grandfather was a political prisoner. In central Biaroza, one can find the ruins of the concentration camp, where he was held. The ruins are left there from the time when the area was part of Poland. Few locals were imprisoned there. Most of the residents were despised prison-

ers brought from other places to pave the local streets. My grandfather was less lucky. He was a soldier and a guerilla fighter during World War II. Afterwards, he served another term in a Soviet labor camp. This is in my genes, which may be why I always looked at things differently than my schoolmates. We have different purposes in life. It is only natural.

I do not know why many of my university colleagues have not become activists. Many of them were with me during the post-election protests on the Square. We were Alaksandr Milinkevich's security guards. We cheered each other up by chanting slogans and we endured hardships until the end. Later on, however, the spring spirit was gone, which is only natural. Many of them now avoid politics. In March 2006, they gave their due to the Motherland and formally promised not to take part in protests again. That is also natural. Many of them still believe that politics is the leaders' private game. Many of them also still believe that they were used. They have not developed a personal interest in activism. It happens — canvassers are not to blame.

Each person takes his or her own path and makes his or her own choices. Consider what would happen if at least half of your classmates became activists. I think that the world would go nuts. Someone has to be an ordinary person on the street, don't you think?

By Juras Mielashkevich

WHY I BECAME A CIVIC ACTIVIST, BUT MY FRIENDS DID NOT

In order to answer this question, one has to look not so much at the individual path of a teenage activist as focus on the conditions in which my generation found itself after Belarus gained independence and all the necessary attributes of an independent state, including its own national language and symbols.

These factors shaped the main traits of a new generation of Belarusians, who associated themselves with their newly independent country. Unlike previous generations of sovietized Belarusians or later generations brainwashed by the Lukashenka regime, Members of this generation felt that they were citizens of Belarus.

A number of large, national, non-governmental youth organizations encouraged youths to engage in civic activities. Most of these organizations, such as Malady Front and the Alliance of Belarusian Students, had a pro-independence spirit and were involved in politics. These organizations did a great deal to promote Belarusian language and culture and to create an alternative youth culture. For instance, the Revival DJ's course reached out to hundreds all over Belarus.

There were also small groups that dealt with civic matters, culture, and the environment. Many teenagers helped these groups, offered their support to political parties at crucial times, and functioned as a pool of volunteers and activists during elections. The groups helped to improve the mobility of young activists and ensured a constant flow of new members into political parties. The process was, to a point, part of the personnel management policies of various political parties.

Noteably, many party bosses began their careers in youth organizations, which reveals how effective youth groups are in enlisting new party members. Political parties also help to keep young people involved in civic and political affairs, since

teenagers tend to lose interest after several years of work for NGOs as their priorities change. Membership in political parties, on the other hand, opens up new opportunities for self-realization and helps teens to find a new purpose in life.

Family upbringing also plays an important role in shaping the behavioral patterns at a later age. As a rule, children of civically active parents join civic organizations more often, take a more responsible approach to what is going on in the country, and are more ready to sacrifice themselves to attain positive goals. Regretfully, such behavioral patterns are not common for most Belarusians. Most parents teach their children to live according to the principle of conformity and to be satisfied with very little. Although people often speak critically of the world around them, this rarely results in an “active phase,” where words are followed by actions. Representatives of the young generation who have greater needs and are ready to work more energetically to satisfy these needs often join the business world. The business rules are clear in Belarus — any civic activity is not welcome and involvement in politics is viewed as a risk. In order to do business, you must show complete loyalty for the authorities. Those who choose politics face persecution. For this reason, I am not surprised that none of my classmates chose to become politicians or civic activists.

The issue of responsibility is an important one as well. Few people are willing to take responsibility and lead others, offer new paths towards the country’s development, and be held accountable to those who voted for them. This is a consequence of the government’s policies, which are aimed at depriving people of the opportunity to make independent decisions. Thus, people in Belarus often regard the need to make a decision as a tough task and are afraid to take the responsibility for possible repercussions.

Nevertheless, I see a great modernizing force in the young people of today, who orchestrated the most remarkable and memorable events of the last few years. I believe that the young people who pitched the tent camp on the Square in 2006 and braved oppression and pressure will soon assure the triumph of democracy in Belarus and make our country free.

By Volha Karach

WHY I AM INVOLVED IN POLITICS AND MY CLASSMATES KEEP AWAY FROM IT, OR MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT BELARUSIAN VOLUNTEERS...

“Look, dear,” a farmer says to his wife, our white hen is looking a bit sadder than usual, isn’t it? Maybe we should cook the poor thing?” “Do you really think it will make the hen more cheerful?” the wife asks.

A popular joke in Belarus.

Pharmacies in the city of Vitebsk are making really high profits, or rather, high turnovers. The best-selling product is not Viagra, or even flu pills. The hit is sold in small bottles with alcohol-based hawthorn tincture, which people affectionately call ‘funfiriks.’ Very often, the pharmacies have to order more of these bottles twice a day. One daily supply is not enough for the eager and thirsty crowds. The local alcoholics are very pleased that this product is cheaper than traditional vodka. Besides, there is a popular belief that ‘funfiriks’ are good for your heart, since hawthorn is used to cure some heart disease. Actually, the drunkards hardly care about their heart functions, but they need a pretext, mainly for themselves, to solicit petty cash and exchange it for a ‘funfirik.’ Booze in the morning—no problems for the whole day. They have no problems and no cares...

Why do Belarusians choose to drink ‘funfiriks’ in the morning, instead of fighting for such a noble cause as a democratic and prosperous future Be-

larus? Why is the number of those involved in politics going down, rather than up?

These questions are rhetorical. Besides problems, what can political activities bring an average Belarusian?

13 years ago, Alaksandr Lukashenka came to power, and the power structures have gradually evolved into the Belarusian governmental system. This unique situation produced a number of myths and stereotypes about Belarusians. Many Belarusians believe these myths, which greatly discourage them from taking part in political activities.

Myth #1. I am the cleverest. All the others are stupid.

In Belarus today, there is a notorious tradition to regard all others as idiots.

There is a popular belief that somewhere in Belarus a whole crowd of strange people is lurking around. They are called volunteers are just dream of taking part in political protests, being hit with police clubs, getting a huge fines, and having their possessions confiscated. They cannot live without being sentenced to a 25 day prison term every now and again. Actually, they would prefer to be put away for three years or so on criminal charges. They are eager to endure all of this, just for the opportunity to listen to speculations about the destiny of Belarus and the Belarusian people.

Why are there only a few thousand people involved in politics in Belarus, when there is a population of 10 million? Why do my classmates keep away from politics? The answer is simple. Can political activism at least ensure them a basic standard of living after the authorities repeal their employment contracts? Can it help raise their children? Can it make their lives better? In a very general sense it can and it will, but only in a very general sense. What about everyday life? On this basic level any political activism means living with the constant threat of abominable fines, starvation, prison terms, and repression. An activist has to deal with all of this alone, without any help from outside, not even moral solidarity. Taking into account Myth #1, the absence of solidarity is quite understandable. Why should I support the person who plans to become the next President of Belarus, when I plan to become the next President of Belarus myself?

Sooner or later, every novice in politics asks himself or herself the question: "Why am I doing this?" The answer is always personal. If no answer is produced, then person stops being politically active.

Myth #2. Only I know the correct strategy, but nobody wants to listen to me. That is why democracy in Belarus fails again and again.

There are two very well-fixed stereotypes in Belarus. The first is that anyone can be a teacher. The second is that anyone can be a politician. The idea is that these are not real professions - they do not require real brains. I am personally twice unlucky, because I am both a teacher and a politician. I am all too aware of the consequences of these stereotypes. As soon as people learn that you are a novice in such a special sphere as politics, they immediately start instructing you on what to do (while they themselves do not follow their own instructions). You listen to these instructions and keep wondering why the instructor is not the President yet, since it looks as though he knows the answers to all the questions and all the ways to reach universal happiness. There is only one little reservation: it all remains purely theoretical... This person has organized nothing, taken part in no real protest, and is not going to. But he has all the answers ready-made. One politician once complained to me, "It is really hard to live in the country of 10 million presidents." This is probably Lukashenka's worst (unwilling, of course) offence —his victory looks so easy to achieve, that for the last 13 years several generations of political leaders have striven to repeat it, but none of them agrees to take a position lower than the President's. They think, "Look, even Lukashenka can do it, why not me? Am I not better?" They take it lightly, which greatly interferes with normal organizational work. They forget to ask themselves, "What ideas do I want to realize?"

A politician has to create and realize ideas, rather than just take on a high position and participate in exquisite ceremonies. Politics means working hard for results, which are often delayed. They may take a decade or more. This work cannot be based on speculations about 'universal happiness' and the 'equal division of available resources.' By the way, this is exactly why I do not like to attend extended family events. I go to relax among my relatives, but instead, these same relatives are eager to launch political debates with me. It is just like the joke about woodcutters: in the forest they talk about women, but with women they talk about timber.

This is a serious problem, a kind of vicious circle. Every novice in politics immediately envisions himself or herself as the future President, no less. Nobody wants to consider the most evident, that there are plenty such candidates, but until now none of them has managed to replace Alaksandr Lukashenka. It is not as simple as it may seem.

This is why we have to analyze our mistakes and study all our experiences, both positive and negative, in order to devise strategies to correct our mistakes. Until we do this, our organizations will not attract new members. Or new members may come, but they will leave us soon, because they will not be horses in the circus show. They will not gallop with us the same way again and again.

Myth #3. I need to obtain permission.

Belarusians really like self-limitation and self-censoring. They are sure that they must receive special permissions for every step they take, be it gathering signatures, organizing public meetings, or participating in civic campaigns. In Belarus, the general public and political analysts often accuse politicians of acting from one election campaign to another. Again, the answer is simple—Belarusian politicians are simply part and parcel of Belarusian society. They limit themselves just like other Belarusians. The most common limitation is election campaigns, since politicians think that, in order to work with the general public outside those campaigns, they have to obtain special permission from someone. For example, there is a politician in Vitebsk from the opposition who is sure that he needs permission from the authorities to lay flowers on war monuments on Victory Day. He constantly complains, because the authorities refuse to grant him permission to do so. This reminds me of a popular joke in Belarus, about a farmer and a priest. The farmer goes to the priest during the Lenten fast and asks if he can eat meat during the fast. “Of course not,” answers the priest. “But, Holy Father, why do you get to eat meat during the Lenten fast?” protests the farmer. “Because, my son, I asked no one about it,” answers the priest.

If you want to take power, you do not ask for permission. This is an axiom. Unfortunately, in Belarus, the urge to obtain permission is implanted deep in our brains and blocks all our initiative.

If a person still seeks permission, who is able to issue it? Can a prominent figure grant permission? These days Belarusians do not have any prominent figures because no one in Belarusian politics can allow another person to be higher than them. Can the prominent figure be a foreigner, at least in theory? Well, a foreigner can grant permission, but it will always be dependent upon his or her cultural background and personal experience, which of little use for Belarusian politics, as a rule. This is exactly why there are so many snobs among Belarusian politi-

cians who are fond of boasting about whom they have met, who told them what, and how high the summit level was. These politicians measure their political influence in this way. In real political life, however, these ‘high-level summits’ are not so important. Instead, they are just part of the routine work in politics, which is very often a kind of a ritual, wherein two people shake hands and exchange beautiful phrases about democracy and human rights. I know such meetings very well. At best, such a meeting can result in one more international resolution or declaration on Belarus, which leads to no practical results whatsoever. At worst, after a week or so, neither of the parties even remembers the meeting. Nevertheless, some Belarusian politicians pay a lot of attention to such events, just because they think such meetings legitimize their leadership.

Everyone forgets that in Belarus, politics is not even being formulated in private kitchens during long discussions. No, instead, Belarusian politics is being formed in the entrance halls of numerous apartment blocks in Belarus. The entrance halls are dim, dirty and stinky, the walls are ragged, and the staircases are stained. Nonetheless, this is the very scene where the destinies of every political campaign are being decided. The politician who is able to conquer the entrance halls will be able to conquer the whole country. Modern conference rooms, veneered furniture, business suits, and haut couture. These are just curtains for the scene or a nice poster on the wall. The poster can cover a stain or a hole, but it cannot fix the wall.

Myth #4. I am the most brilliant politician of all times and nations.

If a person has reached a certain level in some other sphere, it is very hard for him or her to go into politics, since the high social status obtained does not allow the person to get hands-on political experience and to discard everyday stereotypes regarding politics. Besides, regardless of social status, the public notices every mistake of such a person and does not forgive them.

Why is Lukashenka’s regime so long-lasting? Why have other politicians been so unsuccessful thus far? They enter political life having already made achievements in other spheres. When they try to apply their skills to politics, it does not work. Politics is a very strange field, somewhat like Alice’s Wonderland. It looks familiar, but this familiarity is an illusion. In politics, different laws are to be applied, the rabbits and Queens are different, and habitual actions produce unexpect-

ed outcomes. There is a similar difference between commercial business and governmental administration—the decision-making models differ, the pace differs, and everything is not quite the same. The higher the person was in the previous hierarchy, the more difficult it is for him or her to adapt. It is even more difficult to decide to start all over again from scratch. This is not to say that the person is stupid, not at all. In politics, he or she gets more public attention and less time to analyze the mistakes that have been made. From a high level in some other sphere, the person goes directly into high-level politics, which is an international level competition. The person is expected to break records in running, when he or she has hardly learned to walk, having poor experience in team-building, undeveloped strategic thinking, and difficulty formulating goals and objectives. Plentiful ill-wishers are watching as a new politician makes mistakes. Shallow talkers are difficult to distinguish from those who can really act and manage people; papers with colorful diagrams and flowcharts look impressive and persuasive. For this reason, the usual chain of events is as follows: everybody runs to the newly found leader, clutches the new white gown, the leader goes down or even plummets under the heavy load of commonly made mistakes, and then the followers express their sincere grief: “Again this was not the one we were waiting for!”

If, for example, the chief executive of a big plant goes into politics, it is next to impossible for him or her to start from the bottom. The executive refuses to distribute leaflets, gather signatures, make telephone calls, or do any other routine political work. High executives are not supposed to go to the people. On the contrary, people are supposed to go to the executives. An executive is not able to go from door to door and persuade people who no longer his or her subordinates. This would require breaking all the habits and stereotypes that he or she holds dear. Nonetheless, without grassroots work and personal experience, you cannot really plan your own political campaigns or even evaluate someone else’s planning. Hence, on the political stage, the typical development of events is as follows: a newly born politician without any lower-level political experience declares that he is the new king on this chessboard who will save the nation from the evil tyrant. Very soon, the new king is checkmated and leaves the political arena, blaming his former companions for being ‘unsuitable’ and ‘outdated.’ Then he sniffs at another king, calling him crazy, and makes hints that now he would do it much better if he were given another chance. But, his train has left forever, and the society has rushed to another king.

We have to wait until our new leaders develop from the grassroots level, all by themselves, without any artificial assistance. They must go through all the steps

of the political ladder in order to be effective leaders. Only then will people will go into politics. Volunteers and leaders view the things differently. Since the ability to accommodate different points of view is a very rare talent, in most cases it has to be backed by the leader's personal, hands-on experience.

Myth #5. The situation would have changed, if only everyone had joined in the protest.

At first glance, Alaksandr Lukashenka's victory in 1994 looks very easy. This leads to the conclusion that it is very easy to change the government in Belarus, and every year someone attempts to quickly do so. Just imagine how difficult a politician's life is in a country where there are attempts at revolution every year! A person comes into politics, meets someone who ardently persuades everyone that "it is now or never." The person begins working, has some problems, and must solve them alone because no one wants to help him or her. How can they help? Since a new revolution is coming, there is just not enough time to help! This cycle repeats every year. This leaves no time to stop and think, to analyze, or to review the mistakes of the past. The concept of permanent revolution is in action... The constant sense of revolution means that NGOs and parties cannot regain their breath, develop, or work out their strategies. This is because revolutions are not about strategies. Instead, they are about passionate speeches, strong barricades, revolutionary songs, and heroes who throw themselves on tanks. A revolution is about today, and so you do not have to think about tomorrow, or to do routine work for tomorrow. As a result, sooner or later a regular person begins to experience a kind of *déjà vu*, a strong feeling that all this has already happened and I was a part of it. Still, every year a new group of people appears in Belarus with the goal to overthrow Lukashenka in one day. They forget that many Belarusians have already participated in such actions and have faced painful consequences for their participation. These Belarusians look at the political novices with pity. Often, new politicians boast about how regular people, especially elderly women, feel sorry for them, saying, "Oh, poor you! Why did you get involved? You will have a lot of troubles!" Political novices really like these sentiments, but they forget that normal people always feel sorry for village idiots.

In addition, Belarusian politicians have another very strange belief. They think that the main thing is to draw the people out into the streets, and then it will all be

different. No one really knows what will happen when everyone gets out into the streets. Belarusians were out in the streets, marching and standing, in 1996, 1999, 2001, and 2006, but it did not change much. During the public holidays, huge crowds of people come out, but there was no revolution. The number of people in a protest is of secondary importance. Something else is more important.

My classmates will not get involved in politics until they see a serious political organization with long-term goals, instead of another vain attempt by naïve idealists.

Myth #6. Young people, especially students, can change the situation in Belarus.

Young people of today have been brought up by the post-war generation, with slogans such as, “Whatever if only not war.” In the conditions of Belarusian regime, young people are very susceptible to revolutionary ideas; they like political games and ‘playing politician.’ They take this game very seriously and give it all their energy, but it is still just a game. Unfortunately, young people and students in particular cannot lead the democratic movement. This is not because they are stupid, but because they have no political experience, positive or negative. They need time to gather this experience, devise strategies, and analyze outcomes. In order to understand time, they have to live for a while. Very few of those who are 20 plan their lives 20 years ahead. Even 3-year plans are very rare. When you are 20, three years seems to be such a long time. A politician needs time to learn not to repeat old mistakes; there are no absolute geniuses with absolute knowledge. For quite a few people, even age does not mean good political experience, because most contemporary politicians came into politics at approximately the same time, which means that some of them are older, while some are younger.

Only the citizens of Belarus as a whole can change the situation. Changes have to be made across a number of different groups, rather than by a single social group. The Belarusian desire for change has to be backed with material factors; citizens must know what changes each political group brings, in order to be sure that the changes will not make their lives worse. If a political group manages to persuade the people as a whole, then this group will come to power.

When people enter into politics, they must be prepared for the following:

1. Many advisors will appear to give *‘very valuable’ consultations for free*. However, you personally will be responsible for your actions, your ideas, and their realization. It is not uncommon for ‘advisors’ to blame you if something goes wrong. Let your own logic and common sense guide you.

2. *Most Belarusians are dreamers*. They are not ready for everyday routine work. Even more, they often like living in an imagined world and believe in the illusions that they have created themselves. They hate anyone who breaks those illusions, especially when the illusions are regarding politics. You must be prepared to meet with such negative feelings, even hatred.

3. *Your mental health and stability will be tested*. You should remember the fact that the average person is unprepared to communicate with huge numbers of people, and that every political campaign involves talking with multitudes of people every day and persuading them that your strategy is right. Even part-time volunteers meet and talk with the number of people their great-grandparents used to meet in one year. This massive load of human communication falls upon the newcomer, and not everybody is able to withstand it. It is extremely hard to do, and these difficulties are very hard to foresee. Only those who have experienced it can be psychologically prepared. It is as difficult to explain as explaining the concept of redness to a blind person. You do not know until you lived through it.

4. *Belarusian politicians have to develop their own infrastructures*. Belarus is very different from other European countries because of its lack of material and social infrastructures. This means that a person can obtain a high position, work at it, and achieve a lot, but then find that he or she cannot go any further. The job cannot contribute to the person’s development anymore, nor does the person have anything left to give to the job. Since it is impossible to change one’s sphere of activity due to the lack of infrastructure, the person clings to the job rather than changing spheres of activity and passing opportunities on to new people.

In Europe, if someone wants to become a movie star, there are agencies to go to and producers to address. However, if someone from Belarus wants to become a movie star, he or she faces many technical difficulties. This person has to develop the necessary infrastructure, such as finding a good scriptwriter or even becoming a good scriptwriter. Then the person has to raise money for the production. Next, he or she must find other actors, make-up artists, composers, stunts, secretaries,

and so on to do these jobs. After the production, the person has to arrange shows in movie theaters. Is this not too much for one person, who, in fact, just wanted to act? Moreover, if this person fails at just one of these tasks, no one will recognize him or her as a good actor. In politics it is even worse. People have very vague ideas about what politicians are supposed to be and to do. In public opinion, a good politician must know the ideological sphere very well, and must be an excellent manager, a good public speaker, a qualified psychologist, an experienced financial officer and accountant, a philosopher, a make-up artist, a writer, a lawyer, a journalist, a translator, a business analyst, an advertising agent, a historian, a secretary, a designer, a sociologist, a programmer, and much more. Moreover, society expects that this politician will do all of this flawlessly and for free. What we require is an altruistic person, capable of juggling dozens of businesses simultaneously. After trying all this, is it still a surprise that poor Belarusian politicians look a bit insane?

5. Thus, if a politician wants to step up into the political structure, he or she ***has to build that step first***. But politics is a team sport, so the politician has to prepare enough building materials to build steps for every team member and care for their developments and their future spheres of activities. Otherwise, crowd onto one small step, interfere with each other, get into conflicts, and push each other off.

6. ***According to public opinion, a politician is like the Terminator***. There are very few politicians now in Belarus, so regular Belarusians have practically no political experience. They think that a politician must be somewhat like a Knight in Shining Armor, who fights against the absolute evil. Naturally, this Knight does not need any associates or even comrades-in-arms and must fight in majestic solitude. This is why my classmates are sitting at home waiting for the Knight in Shining Armor, the Noble Hero, the Prince on the White Horse, God, or E.T. (circle whichever suits you) to come and save the day.

7. ***People in Belarus demand all or nothing***. They refuse to give a politician the right to make mistakes. A politician can be either excellent or a complete failure. The excellent (Knight) does not need any help. If he does, then he is not the true Knight and, therefore, does not deserve any help. Someone who is a complete failure is not even worth talking about. This is a very convenient theory, because it justifies passivity and apathy.

8. ***Obsession with scales***. Every Belarusian with some previous experience in politics in some form has failed in some way. The most probable reason for their failure is that they wanted too much and they wanted it all right away: either a million dollars or nothing. People in politics are not used to every day work and

reaching the desired result step-by-step. They are similar to a young woman who dreams about an ideal husband so much so that she will not put up with the slightest flaw, but who refuses to improve herself in any way. This woman assumes by default that she is already the best and deserves no less than Prince Charming, who would place the whole kingdom at her feet. A person who comes into politics often has nothing yet to offer, but has great self-confidence and lacks the ability to critically analyze his or her own actions. Hence, there are many people who could not stay on in politics and ended up disappointed. This obsession blocks the development of many worthy people in Belarus and prevents them from becoming experienced politicians.

If the situation is so sad, why am I still part of politics in Belarus?

1. *I need to have power, to influence people, and to be in control of my own life (at least).*

I really hate when someone tries to run my life for me. I dislike when someone imposes a vision of universal happiness upon me. I am in politics because I want to prevent any ‘models of universal happiness’ from being implemented against my will. At the same time, I like seeing my ideas becoming reality and seeing life around me changed for the better as a result of my actions. I will stand up for everyone’s right to decide what to do with their own lives.

2. *Today we lay the basis for our country’s future.*

However, I do not like Lukashenka’s model of the future of Belarus. I cannot say that I am delighted by some democrats’ models either. I will not let them decide for me, without my opinions and my participation, because I am sure that I will not like the outcome. They want me to passively wait for an outcome that will not take my interests into account.

3. *Somebody has to be the first,* just to show that it is possible and that things can look different. The right to be different is a very important right, which is too often neglected in our post-Soviet society. We have to fight for this right. Even if citizens choose ‘funfiriks’ instead of my political platform, I feel obliged to fight to provide them with the right to make such a choice.

By Alaksandr Chyhir

WHY I BECAME A CIVIC ACTIVIST AND MY SCHOOLMATES DID NOT

I often recall the last few years of the Soviet Union's existence.

In 1989, I graduated from school and got a job at the Rechyca-based Rytm factory as an apprentice to an electronic equipment adjuster. I knew for sure that I would be making 300 Soviet rubles every three months. Soon I would be drafted in the Soviet army. After I returned from my stint in the army, I would get back to the factory and enroll in an evening course at a technical school or, if I was lucky, at a university. Within two years, I would be promoted to foreman. Within five years, I could get an apartment and be promoted to shop superintendent. Soviet schoolchildren could easily visualize their futures. We did not need to think about tomorrow. We were guided by the principle that we were not doing any worse than other people.

In the summer of 1992, I had finished my stint in the army and was going home on a train bound for Homiel. I soon found that I was returning to a different, unfamiliar world that did not correspond to what the Soviet education system had implanted in me. I found myself in a world where I had to think about tomorrow every day.

My generation was taught to be concerned about Cambodian children and the residents of the New York ghetto. We were taught to derive and solve integral equations and to summarize classics of Marxism-Leninism, but we were not trained to think about our place in this world or to analyze what was going on in the world around us. The early years of Belarus' independence were especially difficult, but very interesting. Some of my classmates discovered *Nasha Niva*, while others found opportunities to make easy money. Some found God, while others found cheap liquor.

In 1994, my classmates and I did not vote for Lukashenka. Most of us did not want to go back to the USSR. We had just started to think and we enjoyed it. Nevertheless, most people still needed the truisms of the old system rather than abstract ideas. They wanted to look to the future with confidence.

We could not believe that after *the Gulag Archipelago*, the *Vzglyad* television show and *perestroika*-era films the country could go back to the past and restore the old, rotten system.

Fourteen years later my life and the lives of my classmates have changed radically. We were 22 years old when Lukashenka took office and few of us were thinking of starting a family. Fourteen years later, we are 36 years old. Some of my classmates are gone because of cheap vodka or domestic violence. Others have a job or a business. Most have families. Everyone has his or her own life. A large majority of us has stopped searching and has lived according to the principle that one more day is over, and that is good. My classmates have drawn a line between themselves and the country. They have lost confidence in themselves.

“Why should we swim against the tide if everything has already been decided and I am a small man? What can I change? I had better do my job well. Changing the world is none of my business.” Most representatives of my generation reason in this way.

Should I be surprised? I probably should not be. The regime has used state-controlled media for 14 years to create a false reality. The government has disunited people for 14 years. As a result, we have a community without a soul.

The Lukashenka regime is not static. Like shagreen leather it constantly limits the range of choices people can make.

In the 1990’s, people hoped that things would get better and ridiculed every new stupid decision made by the authorities. In the last few years, people have retired into their shells. People have accepted the conditions imposed by the regime. You play by the rules or else you are an enemy.

Playing by the rules does not mean supporting the regime. As during Josef Stalin’s rule, the first standing, bottoms-up toast to “the leader of all nations” is not taken as a manifestation of loyalty. Keeping away from politics, never openly criticizing bosses, and participating in official events in return for a day off or a bonus make it much easier to show loyalty than to be in the opposition.

Being in the opposition means thinking and living by your own wits and principles. It means being different. In the society of Belarus today, one pays for this individualism with isolation.

I will give a simple answer to the question of “Why I became a civic activist and my friends did not?” I was fortunate enough to study at the History Faculty because I liked history, and not because I needed a diploma. Since my early years, I had to think for myself because there was no one to think for me. I was lucky to meet a woman who loves me, understands me, and accepts my values and principles. Many of my classmates did not have these things in their lives. Others were unable to keep their chins up under pressure from life’s circumstances.

Ales Zarembiuk

WHY I BECAME A CIVIC ACTIVIST AND MY SCHOOLMATES DID NOT

I became involved with the opposition to the Alaksandr Lukashenka government when I was an upperclassman in secondary school. This was after the infamous May 1995 referendum, which endorsed the replacement of Belarusian national symbols with Soviet-style ones. At the time, I started looking for alternative sources of information, so that I could read different points of view regarding developments in the country. I bought independent newspapers at a Belsajuzdruk kiosk. Every week, I read *Nasha Niva*, *Pahonia* and *Imya*. During my teenage years, my outlook was shaped by these newspapers, as well as by lessons in Belarusian history and Belarusian literature at school. I saw the situation in the country through the prism of the information I read on the pages of newspapers. I was proud of the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and admired Ales Zahorski, a character in Karatkevich's book, *Spikes under Your Sickle*.

At the time, my parents saw their financial situation worsen as a result of the duties imposed by Lukashenka on vehicles imported into Belarus from the European Union. My family made a living selling second-hand cars. This was our main source of income. A decline in my family's standard of living reinforced my feeling of opposition to the authorities.

Most of my father's friends, who were also small business owners, were also discontent with Lukashenka because his policies made it more difficult for them to make money. In every conversation they had during fishing trips and at the table, I heard them criticizing Lukashenka. My opposition spirit strengthened and I asked myself questions, such as: "What can I do to change the situation?" and "How can I help the opposition movement and organizations within it?" I red

about the opposition movement in independent newspapers. During the lead-up to the second anti-Belarusian referendum, my school was involved in a campaign to support the constitutional changes proposed by Lukashenka. Posters advertising his proposals were all over the notice boards and walls of the school. Wallet-sized calendars were distributed among students, featuring images of Lukashenka and the message “I ask for your support.” The campaign was intended to persuade our parents to vote for the constitutional changes proposed by the country’s first president. We were children at the time and did not quite understand what was going on. We did not even realize that our futures depended on our parents’ position on the referendum. In fact, our futures depended on their position, because it was not enough for them to cast ballots. They should have taken an active stance and converged on the capital to defend their position on Independence Square because the leaders of the 13th Supreme Soviet counted on their support and determination.

Many of our parents did not realize that they needed to take an active stance. They were misled by Lukashenka’s populist speeches. My parents voted for Stanislau Shushkevich during the 1994 presidential election, supported the white-red-white flag and the Pahonya national symbol at the 1995 referendum, and endorsed proposals by the Supreme Soviet in the fall of 1996. Naturally, I took an interest in elections because the rivalry among candidates, as well as the signs and leaflets, made them different from the predictable, Soviet-era polls. They were competitions between two branches of power, with uncertain outcomes.

My parents’ position firmed up my oppositional views.

The formation of the Malady Front youth movement made independent news headlines in 1997. The Hrodna chapter of Malady Front was particularly active and received much coverage in the *Pahonia* newspaper. In my town, there was not a single opposition youth group, which encouraged me to set up a Malady Front cell in Masty. I supported and admired protests staged by youth activists all over Belarus and considered myself a member of Malady Front.

One day, in the summer of 1998, I met a young member of Malady Front on a train bound for Hrodna. He was sitting not far from me and attracted everyone’s attention with the big round badge he was wearing on his shirt, which had a six-pointed cross and the words “Malady Front,” against a white-red-white background.

I hesitated for a while, thinking about going over and introducing myself to him, but my provincial inferiority complex kept me seated. Finally, I plucked up the courage to talk to him. His name was Siarhiey. He was from Vaukavysk, a town

in the Hrodna region that was just a little bigger than Masty. We exchanged contacts and talked about Malady Front. He invited me and my friends to Vaukavysk and gave me the contact information for the Malady Front chapter in Hrodna. After this meeting, I formed a Malady Front cell in Masty, along with a friend from my neighborhood and a straight-A classmate from school.

Within a short period of time, our cell contacted the Malady Front in Minsk. We brought leaflets from Hrodna and Vaukavysk and distributed them in Masty. We were afraid of being arrested, but, at the same time, we enjoyed it — our young bodies needed adrenaline and adventures. We wore Malady Front badges and invited classmates and other young people to join the group.

My classmates had mixed feelings about my civic and political activities. Some teenagers looked at what we were doing as Malady Front members with irony and fear. We started to speak Belarusian, which was considered by many teenagers to be a redneck language. Other teens wondered why we were speaking Belarusian and were distributing Belarusian-language opposition materials. My arguments about patriotism and love for the Motherland did not persuade them.

At the same time, they could not call me a redneck because I did not look like one. I had many friends in town and behaved like other teenagers.

Some people said that I got paid for my oppositional activities. Others thought that I might be crazy. Most of my classmates in the 10th and 11th grade were concerned with future entrance exams at technical schools, colleges and universities, rather than with the political situation in Belarus.

Besides university admission, I took interest in any activity that could speed up change in my country. I followed the developments in neighboring Poland by watching the Polish news on TV with my father. I worried about the lack of prospects for me in Belarus. After graduation from the university, I wanted to engage in politics and to make a career in local self-government. I wanted to improve the way of life in my community and to see the residents' smiling faces.

My classmates stayed away from the opposition because it was a tough and non-prestigious way. They did not want to deliver leaflets to mailboxes, collect signatures, observe searches of their parents' homes, and have problems at work or with university admission. Fear was the main reason why they stayed away. Mostly, they were afraid of arrest or of losing everything. I found that people are adaptive. They harshly criticize the authorities in their kitchens, but are afraid to stand up to defend their rights or their businesses. Likewise, my classmates accommodated themselves to their circumstances. They want a normal life. Opposition activity seems abnormal to them because they have been brainwashed. "Op-

position” is a strong word in Belarus. For example, teachers and doctors do risk their jobs if they oppose parties.

My classmates have remained on good terms with me, but not without a backward glance. One is a tacit partner. One of the cofounders of the Masty cell of Malady Front has been living in America for the last six years.

One of the reasons why my classmates did not become activists in the opposition is that most Belarusians lack a sense of Belarusian identity. Many of them still have the same mentality as their parents had during the Soviet occupation. These *Homo sovieticus* do not know the history and heroes of their country. Since they were never taught to think independently, they wait for a tsar or a secretary general to make choices for them. An overwhelming majority of the students at School Number 5 in Masty were encouraged by their parents to complete university studies or extra space technical training solely in order to avoid working at the Masty-based woodworking factory, called Mastoudreu. Those who leave this provincial town are considered the lucky ones. Still, many of my classmates ended up working at Mastoudreu or at another factory.

Nevertheless, despite a weak sense of national identity and the fear of persecution, most of my classmates back the local opposition now. They say so in private conversations and vote for candidates from the opposition during elections. There are two opposition members in the local soviets (elected councils) in the Masty area.

While studying in the university, many of my classmates traveled to other countries and saw a big difference in their standards of living. Some have worked in Western countries and understand that Belarus’ illegitimate leadership pursues ineffective policies.

Young Belarusians cannot start businesses using the money they earned abroad because tomorrow these businesses may be closed or confiscated. All these reasons prompt people to think about politics, which will eventually lead Belarusians to embrace change and to perceive “opposition” as a positive word. I believe that Belarus will become a normal European nation and I will work to make it happen. Today, my main motive is to fight for an independent Belarus, which will be a part of the trans-Atlantic civilization.

Darka Slabchanka

WHY I BECAME A CIVIC ACTIVIST AND MY SCHOOLMATES DID NOT

“Sweet confrontation
The failures and troubles we experience
do not matter because every generation
starts everything from scratch.”
Vasil Bykau. *Pachadzhane* [*Wanderers*]

1. Why me?

The question of “Why I became a civic activist and my classmates did not” made me think, “Really, why did I?”

I am among those young people whose passport name differs from the one he or she uses to sign documents. When I applied for an ID, it did not occur to me to write my name in *lacinka*, a Belarusian writing system based on the Latin alphabet. Thus, I have to wait until it is time to change my passport.

I represent the generation of Belarusians who were sitting on their parents’ shoulders during their first protest rallies and who hailed the influx of jeans, Barbie dolls and chewing gum in colorful wrappers. The white-red-white flag was the first national flag for my generation. I learned the ABCs with the letter “ŷ.”

We did not understand what was happening, but it was something important. Our parents were young and inspired.

(I do not mean to generalize. Others may remember poverty and waiting in long queues.)

Later, something bad happened in Belarus. Standing under the *Pahonia* state symbol, my favorite Belarusian language teacher told us, “Your parents have sold the Motherland for a slice of sausage, and cheap sausage at that.” This was after the 1995 referendum.

There were 30 pupils in our class. I do not know how many of them can be labeled activists, let alone civic activists or people with independent outlooks. I would hope that I am not the only one to regard myself as a civic activist.

Why do only some seeds sprout and bear fruit?

I believe that, in order to be a civic activist, one needs to be active in general and to have specific personality traits that are underdeveloped and inhibited in many Belarusians. These necessary qualities include persistence, inquisitiveness and the courage to say “Yes” or “No” when everyone else says the opposite. “Your girl asks too many questions,” a primary school teacher complained to my Mother. Most children ask questions, especially little ones, but many of them are not persistent enough to get answers. As they grow older, they become less curious.

In other words, as far as my own experience is concerned, I was always active, but I was not always involved in civic matters.

My generation has learned to respond to requests and proposals with the question, “What will I get out of it?” Regretfully, in Belarus today, we have a situation where one can benefit only from compromising one’s conscience. I consider those representatives of my generation who refused to do so to be civic activists. Refusal to compromise one’s self is an important action in our society.

Activists can show their worth in various areas. Some students join the Belarusian National Youth Union (BRYU), not only because of pressure from the dean’s office, but also in order to attain their ambitions. Others side with the Malady Front. Still others stay away from parties and organizations, but do not bury their heads in the sand.

As an Olympiad participant, a gold medalist and a bright person, I could have been the pride of my university’s BRYU cell, but I was not even offered entrance into the organization.

Later on, I went abroad to another continent where people drink Starbucks, buy stylish clothes on the cheap, rent apartments and get paid as much per day as people in Belarus earn per month.

Life abroad is a big temptation that most people cannot resist. They live in the West and try to convince themselves that they are happy. They speak with an accent and listen to R&B. I also intended to stay away. One day, I was riding in a comfortable bus to work listening to “*Byvaj, moj rodny kraj*” [*Goodbye, my na-*

tive country] and weeping. At that moment, I realized what my Motherland, language, and people meant to me. I was happy to buy a ticket back to Minsk.

I did not want to return in order to make just enough money to buy food, to relax in front of the TV and to gossip about Russian pop-stars with my friends. If I had, then it would have been better for me to stay in a country where I could have purchased a car in a year or two and could have gotten a mortgage.

In 2006, I went to Ploshcha with my friend. I was scared, but I had hope. I did not know any activists at the time and, in general, I was unfamiliar with the situation in Belarus. Nevertheless, I had a familiar feeling from my childhood that something important was happening. In my opinion, the protests at Kalinowski Square brought together the best people of my generation, whom I will respect and love forever. To many of them, the protest had just started, but it ended so quickly. Some people believe that it was a defeat. As Soviet dissident Sergei Dovlatov put it, "Under our conditions, a defeat is a more decent option than a victory."

At that point, I came to realize that I needed to speak Belarusian. To my regret, I did not have a grandmother in the village to teach me Belarusian words. All the same, these words were deep in my genetic memory and in my blood. The Belarusian language began to determine my life. The language has always been with me. It expresses my position, regardless of what I am talking about, even if I am discussing a film with my friends. Unlike elections, where the victory can be stolen, the language is something that they will never be able to take away from me.

The person who speaks Belarusian, reads Belarusian writers and listens to Belarusian songs cannot be indifferent. He cannot hide in his hole and ask, "What will I get out of it?"

The strength of a nation is in the things that parents pass on to their children, such as language, culture, religion and spirituality. As people get older, they rely on these roots for support. No one gave these roots to my generation, so it takes an effort to get them. I made the sign of the cross for the first time when I was a first-year university student. I started speaking Belarusian two years later. I was the one who taught the beauty of Belarusian culture to my mother, and not the other way around.

Those who obtained these treasures on their own and did not give up are very strong. They are stronger than other people their age. This is why they often have difficulty finding a common ground with their peers. Nonetheless, the civic minded should not turn their back on the others. They should not demand from others more than they are able to do. Each of us was influenced by a moment of revelation or a person who showed us an alternative option, which caused us to choose our paths.

If you can, you should try to be the person who inspires others. My friends and I visit orphanages, where we play with children and teach them to draw. We speak Belarusian to them. These children will have a hard life, where they will be struggling to survive. They may not have the opportunity to think of spiritual values. With our help, some of them, when at a crossroads, may make the right choice because they will know that they have options.

My generation needs to develop a sense of unity and support instead of having feelings of hostility. A single person's will to be a civic activist may fade forever because of despair and the absence of the demand for activism. Therefore, it is essential to create centers where activism is concentrated. These centers of activism can be of various types.

Personally, I was very happy to find out about the website Studenty.by, which was renamed Generation.by a year later. The website is an independent, non-political project. Although I am a contributor and editor of the website, people are my top priority. My friends inspire me and give me strength.

The founders of the website describe the project in the following way:

“Generation.by is a site for activists and a platform for putting creative ideas into practice. We draw inspiration from our student years because we will remember these days for our whole lives.... We want to get everything we can out of life. Although not every young Belarusian today has an ipod or an Apple notebook, and many of us were born in the USSR, we are the first generation that grew up in independent Belarus. This fact makes us somehow different. We are a generation that wants to reach the highest heights and does not want to even miss a centimeter. We realize that we have to get there by ourselves.”

The project comprises both on-line and off-line elements — a web site and a community. The latter is a place for real discussions. It brings together various people in a relaxed atmosphere, including: students, journalists, musicians, politicians, lawyers, economists, and computer geeks. Communication with my friends in this forum gives me a sense of generational unity.

2. Why not others?

Now I will answer the question about why my classmates have not become activists.

One of the reasons why young Belarusians do not become activists is our “world class” education system. The main purpose of our education system is not to fill students’ heads with knowledge, but to fill their schedule. Knowledge is not as important as attendance. The system leaves little room for activity outside of the classroom. Even those who play for a university hockey or basketball team, participate in clubs for the light-headed and quick-witted, or contribute to other student events need to obtain permission from the dean’s office. A group leader can arrange a delay in their final exams.

Some ask the dean’s office for permission, while others ask their consciences.

There are many examples of possible negative consequences for being an activist. Most often activists get expelled, but it can be worse. In one recent incident, Zmicier Zhalezniczenka was expelled from a university in Homiel. The authorities sent this clever and conscientious young man to a boot camp to prevent him from participating in civic activities. Zmicier and his family provided an example of courage and commitment to their convictions and principles. Even though he is in the army, Zmicier does not complain about his cruel fate. Incidentally, in one of his letters he asks why his former classmates behave differently after school.

Another reason is that young people are afraid to be persecuted for their activism. The authorities have found a new way to punish male activists by drafting them in the army. Therefore, young women have to play an important role in the youth opposition movement.

While searching for the answer to the question of why some people become civic activists and some people do not, I turned to my friends, who have diverse views and convictions, for help. I asked them to define “civic activism” and to say why more young Belarusians do not become activists. Below are three of their answers:

Civic activism is teaming up with others to work together toward a common goal. This goal may as diverse as defending student benefits or building a sandbox in one’s yard. For young people to be activists it is necessary to allow those who want to become involved to be activists, to show people that this is good to be involved, and to teach people self-organization through local self-government.

Alaksandr Papko, a student at Warsaw University, does not consider himself an activist, but takes part in demonstrations and campaigns

Civic activism is work for the benefit of society. Young people do not become activists because they do not like the options that the state offers them, while

non-establishment activism is inaccessible, seems inaccessible, or does not make sense to them.

Vola an employee at Belsat TV channel, considers herself a civic activist

Civic activism is constant and consistent activity that benefits society, or more accurately, certain groups of society. In my opinion, young people have various interests. Most subcultures (especially EMO) are represented in present-day Belarus. The general lack of prospects and hopes for the future contribute to apathy in the rural areas and small towns because young people there feel that they are unable to influence the future. Some young people do not get involved in protests because they are disappointed. Others avoid activism because they are pragmatic — they do not get paid for it. Generally, young people do not make a big impact because they are scattered among numerous groups.

Stefa a student in Warsaw, does not consider herself a civic activist

To my regret, my best friend Ira is not a civic activist. I asked her what could be done to engage her in civic activity. She replied that it would take an individual approach to turn her into an activist. She blamed apathy, the lack of unbiased information, the poor coordination of the opposition movement and insufficient motivation among young people. She said that most representatives of our generation are guided by the principle that what is going on in the country is not their concern.

I do not consider my generation to be a lost generation, but each person is different and has a different path. Therefore, an individual approach is necessary. Civic activism will attract people when it is not about hatred for any particular person or group, but about love for Belarus. All of us are students because we are learning, each at his own pace, to live in an independent Belarus, which will be one day be free as long as we learn to be free of apathy.

By Vital Brouka

WHY I BECAME A CIVIC ACTIVIST AND MY FRIENDS DID NOT

Contrary to the title, many of my classmates actually were civic activists. The backbone of my lyceum's class was on the school's self-administration board. For a long time we won the regional intellectual competitions. In general, we felt quite free, but there was little room for us in the local cultural environment. Therefore, it is only logical that most of my friends joined student organizations and artistic groups in various towns in Belarus after we graduated from our school in 1998.

It is another matter that only two or three former classmates were still active when we completed our university education in 2003.

Why did so many of them stop being activists? It is necessary to find out what inspires young people to engage in civic activities, and, more importantly, to find out what factors keep them active in NGOs and political parties for a long period of time.

What traits are the most important and necessary for civic activism? What attributes can help a person to withstand pressure from the establishment and disapproval from their relatives? Is courage, altruism or motivation the most important?

In my opinion, all of these traits are important. All the same, I think that motivation, the need for self-realization and the striving for a certain social status are the major driving forces of activism. One needs courage to join a street protest, but persistence over a long period of time is more essential.

Ambitious young people seek self-realization and success. By this I do not mean money and power, which are widely believed to be the key elements of success. Rather, what I mean to say is that, above all, they seek respect from people their

age, friends, and relatives, influence and importance in the community, and the opportunity to boast about their success stories to their former classmates.

In Viciebsk, there are more Belarusian-language users among young people between the ages of 16 and 19 than among other groups because it is considered “cool.” At the same time, there are few civic activists because it is not considered to be prestigious. A civic activist can hardly boast of success in advocating democracy. At times, it is impossible to convince your best friend that your organization or party did something that matters. Moreover, being a political activist does not make a guy more attractive to girls of his age.

Certainly, the difficulties in achieving success and the imbalance between efforts and results are not the only obstacles that discourage young people from being activists.

I consider conformism to be a major impediment. Conformity plagues Belarusian society, not only affecting relations among employees funded by the state budget and students, but also penetrating into other spheres.

My parents named me Vital as a tribute to Vitaly Bonivur, a revolutionary and one of anti-Japanese underground leaders in Vladivostok during the Civil War in Russia. Bonivur was a role model in the USSR in the early 1980s. Many people named their children after famous fighters, heroes and non-conformists. In fact, just like many other Soviet citizens, my parents acted in the spirit of conformism and Soviet mainstream culture when they named me after Bonivur. Moreover, it was hypocritical for people to name children in the honor of heroes and altruists, to declare high ideals and to call for activism, because, in reality, they taught children “to blend in with the others,” to keep their heads down and to look for a warmer place.

Today’s 20-year olds have lived under a dictatorship for all of their conscious lives. They have never witnessed successful examples of non-conformism or alternative ways of life. From childhood on, they saw other people striving to improve their material conditions. Many young people are quite indifferent or even positive about what is going on in the country. They see the government-declared goals of achieving “food security” and “stability” as top values. General apathy is the widest-spread pattern of behavior. The path of least resistance attracts even the smartest and the coolest guys. Neither the mimicry of democracy by the regime, nor the overt and concealed trends toward capitalism in the country can trigger protests among young people or prompt them to join the opposition movement.

Early on, reading books inspired me to become a civic activist. Only later did I read Karatkievic, Uladzimier Arlou and other writers who are usually credit-

ed with inciting people to action and with helping to create the sense of national identity. Between the ages of nine and twelve, I was captured by Janka Maur (an author often accused of endorsing Stalinism) and other Soviet writers. Soviet books that propagandized freedom, equality, activism, altruism, self-realization, and work for the benefit of society also shaped my personality. Songs by Vysotsky and texts by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky developed my outlook and inspired me to stand up for ideals.

Currently, music, films, theater productions and the non-establishment, alternative culture play a large role in my life. It seems to me that the images of non-conformists, outstanding personalities and fighters expressing themselves in the non-establishment arts energize new activists in Belarus. These images do not let the weary lose heart and turn their faces to the wall.

Interestingly, Yegor Letov, the late singer of Grazhdanskaya Oborona, used to be the role model for protest-minded young people in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Now, young people are inspired by Lumen from Ufa, Russia. Strange, but thousands of fans in Belarus cheer the Russian band, chanting “Long Live Belarus!” Young people transfer their condemnation of the ruling regime to state institutions in general. Lumens’s lyrics, “I love my country so much, but I hate the state!” resonates with young fans.

I am happy to have been an activist for ten years and to have been able to achieve self-realization. Despite the fact that I, like others, took part in a number of unsuccessful projects, I can boast to my old friends and former classmates about achievements that are measured not only by my personal values, but by those of society in general, including: social status, popularity in town, progress, and persistence in advancing the cause. In my opinion, if there were more extraordinary speakers of the Belarusian language present in various environments across the country, to serve as examples, it would greatly contribute to an increase in the number of young civic activists and in Belarus.

AUTHORS

Siarhej Bohdan, an Orientalist, holds a degree in international relations from Belarusian State University, and studies ideas. Mr. Bohdan speaks Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Farsi and several European languages. He translates from these languages into Belarusian. His articles have been published in the *Nasha Niva* weekly and *ARCHE*. He worked as cultural project manager at Robert Bosch Foundation, Bonn, in 2007 and 2008.

Vital Brouka, a Viciebsk-based opposition activist, an alternative culture figure.

Jury Chavusau is a political scientist and a human rights activist, specializing in freedom of association and rights of non-governmental organizations. Mr. Chavusau is a member of Sojm of the Belarusian Popular Front.

Alaksandr Chubryk, an economist with the Research Center of the privately-funded Privatization and Management Institute (IPM) based in Minsk. Mr. Chubryk edited the book *Рост для ўсіх* (Логвінаў, 2007).

Taciana Chulickaja is a political science lecturer with European Humanities University.

Ales Chyhir, an opposition activist based in Babrujsk, Mahilou region, candidated in the 2008 parliamentary race from the UDF opposition list. He served as a deputy on the Babruisk City Council from 2003 to 2007. A history teacher with 13-years experience, Mr. Chyhir was sacked from school for his political activities.

Jury Drakakhrust is a political commentator with the RFE/RL Belarus Service and the author of the Prague Accent weekly radio program.

Kiryla Hajduk, an economist with the IPM Research Center, worked for the International Labor Organization (ILO) in the past. Mr. Hajduk won a scholarship from Trento University in 2008.

Andrzej S. Kaminski is a history professor at Georgetown University, Washington and Lazarski School of Commerce and Law, Warsaw. Dr. Kaminski lectured at Columbia University from 1970 to 1982. His numerous publications include the monographs, *Historia Rzeczypospolitej wielu narodow* (Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 2000) and *Republic vs. Autocracy: Poland-Lithuania and Russia, 1686–1697* (Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1993). Dr. Kaminski is a foreign member of the Polish Academy of Sciences since 1997.

Volha Karach, publisher of the independent newspaper *Vitebsky Kurier*, served as elected official on the Viciebsk City Council from 2003 to 2007. She leads the Viciebsk chapter of the United Civic Party.

Andrej Kazakevich is a political scientist, editor-in-chief of the journal *Palitychnaja Sfera*, and director of the Bachelor's Program of Political Sciences and European Studies, European Humanities University in Vilnius (since March 2006). He is soon to defend his dissertation thesis, *Theoretical Aspects of a Political Analysis of Belarus' Judiciary*.

Zmicer Kruk is an economist with the IPM Research Center, a banking and finance lecturer at Belarusian State University.

Jan Maksymiuk is an analyst with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

David R. Marples, Ph.D., is a history professor at Alberta University in Edmonton; director of the Stasiuk Program for the Study of Contemporary Ukraine at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. His publications include the monographs, *The Lukashenka Phenomenon: Elections, Propaganda, and the Foundations of Political Authority in Belarus* (Trondheim, Norway, 2007), *Historia ZSRR: Od rewolucji do rozpadu* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2006), *The Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985–1991* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education-Longman, 2004), *Motherland: Russia in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 2002), *Lenin's Revolution: Russia 1917–1921*, (London: Wesley, Addison, and Longman, 2000) and *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999).

Juraj Marusiak, PhD, is a political scientist at the Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Author of the thesis "Slovak writers and power in the second half of 1950s".

Juras Mielashkevich, chairman of the BPF Chernobyl Commission, acted as campaign manager for parliamentary candidate Ales Mikhalevich from the UDF list during the 2008 elections for the House of Representatives. He was a member of Alaksandr Milinkevich's security team during the opposition politician's 2006 presidential campaign.

Dzianis Mieljancou is a political science lecturer at European Humanities University and an analyst with the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS).

Ales Mikhalevich started his political activities founding the Association of Belarusian Students in the 1990s. He was elected as deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front in December 2005 and expelled from the party in mid June 2008. He candidate to the parliament in 2008 from the UDF list.

Mikhal Pashkevich, leader of the youth wing of the United Civic Party (UCP), was given a suspended sentence for taking part in an unsanctioned protest by small business owners in January 2008. Mr. Pashkevich managed UCP Chairman Anatol Labiedzka's from the UDF list 2008 parliamentary campaign.

Vital Silicki, is a political scientist; Ph.D. Rutgers University; 1998–2003 Associate Professor at European Humanities University in Minsk. Dr. Silicki was dismissed for public criticism of the Alaksandr Lukashenka regime. He co-edited *Historical Dictionary of Belarus* (Scarecrow Press, 2007). Dr. Silitski has been the director of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies since 2007.

Darka Slabchanka holds a degree from Belarusian State Economic University. She created the youth Web site, Generation.BY. Ms. Slabchanka enrolled on a study course in EU, in 2008.

Viachka Stankevich is the chairman of the board of the Belarusian-American Association and publisher of *The Belarusian Review*. He is a former head of the Belarus Service of Radio Liberty.

Lucan Alan Way, assistant professor of political science at Temple University. He studies transformations of political regimes, hybrid regimes and makes comparative studies of post-Soviet regimes. His articles featured in *Journal of Democracy*, *Politics and Society*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *World Politics* and other periodicals.

Iryna Vidanava is a historian and Belarus civic society researcher. She earned a master's degree in non-profit organization management and international politics from the John Hopkins University. Ms. Vidanava taught history at Belarusian State University. She is an editor of CDMag, a multimedia publication targeting young audiences.

Ales Zarambiuk, an opposition leader in Masty, Hrodna region, served as elected official on the district council from 2003 to 2007.