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Belarus – the Unfulfilled Phenomena: The Prospects of Social Mobilization

For more than ten years Belarus has been under authoritarian rule and it has been difficult to explain this phenomenon. The rhetoric of the Belarusian elites – governing and oppositional – is analyzed as the main tool of the struggle to mobilize society for collective action in the political fight. The rhetoric of the ruling elite, and also the opposition, is analyzed in three dimensions: how competing elites are talking about the glorious past; the degraded present; and the utopian future. Through collective action, the nation will reverse the conditions that have caused its present degradation and recover its original harmonious essence. The main aim of this study is to demonstrate that in short- and perhaps even in the medium-run – the Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko will remain in power due to the successful employment of the trinomial rhetorical structure. The conclusions can be shocking meaning that the ruling elite has been able to persuade society that the glorious past has been realized in the times of Soviet Union and at the moment Belarus is living in the conditions of utopian future, i.e. future is a reality, nonetheless the short period of the opposition rule in the nineties and negative actions of opposition in nowadays. While the utopian reality is based at least on the ideas of economical survival and believes that all the aims of society have been reached already, the opposition has no chance to mobilize a critical part of society to ensure the support to its own ideas and get in to power.

Introduction

In 1994 the well-known European film director Emir Kusturica started to film his masterpiece, “The Underground,” which won the Golden Palm in the Cannes Film Festival in 1995. The same year (1994) Belarus elected their first and so far the only president. Nobody would have believed at that time that the two events had a connection. The action of the Kusturica film begins in 1941 when fascists start to attack Belgrade. A group of people trying to resist, and waiting for the Allies to liberate them, moved underground. Their life is in full swing there – weapons are being manufactured, people are dying and being born. The underground people never go out. But there is one of them – Marko – he is the only one who knows what is happening in the real world above them. On that ground he maintains an illusion that the war is not over for another 50 years. Children who have been grown up underground are not

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familiar with the real world and therefore come back beneath it. Adults who get out of their underground shelter continue waging their imaginary war refusing to recognize the changes. Only a madman manages in his own way to adapt himself to the world outside the underground. This is the grotesque utopia.

This grotesque utopia was crucial in Yugoslavia when it was at war in 1992. It became crucial in Belarus as well in 1994. No social and political scientist either from the West or from neighbouring countries can explain what is happening in Belarus any longer. There is a reserved and self-contained space shaping up in this country. Myths are being created to justify this space. The "war" against enemies inside and outside the country is shaping the identity of its people. Everyone who does not believe it is a kind of madman. However, the system is able to adapt him as well.

"The last dictatorship in Europe," "the unfulfilled democracy," "the soft authoritarianism," etc. – these are the headings that dominate the World mass media. Western politicians shrug their shoulders unable to understand why Belarusian's do not follow the example of Georgians or Ukrainians when loosing their freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. Their inability to understand strengthens even more bearing in mind that Belarus declares itself to be situated in the geographical centre of Europe. Finally, it is a country, which has a history inseparable from the history of Central and Western Europe.

Belarus is "a denationalized nation"¹ for Western commentators. It is the state, which combines "weak or divided national consciousness with an insignificant experience of independent statehood."² There is no unanimous national identity in Belarus.³ Belarusian national identity is fragmentized and its roots lead in different directions.⁴ These analyses are based on famous Western theories discussing the processes of nation and state-building, and nationalism studies. The emergency of the modern nation-state is the consequences of historical evolution (Karl Deutsch, Charles Tilly, and Reinhard Bendix). Considering the Belarusian case, analysts try to answer the questions why there is no process of nation and nation-state formation in today's Belarusian territory, why the national identity is so fragmentized, and how this influences the political regime. Modernization and transition theories are based on assumption that the key factors for the survival of a new state in the post-colonial period are socio-economical and political developments. Integration of society is based on civil values, but not on national, due to the historical circumstances (there has never been institutionalized state at certain territory, the borders of a certain state have been moving too often, the borders has been drawn without considering the ethnic background of inhabitants). After the fall of Soviet Union, European scientists focused on the transformation from

¹ Marples, R. David, *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation*, Amsterdam: Harwood, 1999.

² Sanford, George, "Nation, State and Independence in Belarus", *Contemporary Politics* 3, no. 3 (1997), p. 225-245.

³ Ioffe, Grigory, "Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity", *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 8 (2005), p. 1241-1272.

⁴ Joselyn, Ed, "Nationalism, Identity and the Belarusian State" in *National Identity and Ethnic Minorities in Eastern Europe*, ed. R. Taras, UK: Macmillan, 1998, p. 73-83.

authoritative rule to a democracy. So they have been talking, not about creation of the nation-state, but about the transformation of the political regime and strategy of the economic development. Transition theories are comfortable for the Belarusian case study in order to avoid the problematic topic on national identity, but they are losing the point that there is not any great transition of political regime or economical system in Belarus.

Scientists and commentators, who look from the “inside perspective” are comfortable with using the background of Western state-building and nationalism theories. But they are stressing that the Belarusian case study should be developed in the context of the general national politics, which had been implemented in the USSR. Borisova and Oleskin describe it very briefly: (1) it was mandatory (ethnic discrimination, isolation, and genocide); (2) it used manipulation (de-ethnification, assimilation, and deculturalization); (3) it was only illusion of the dialog among the ethnic units.⁵ The phenomenon of “the Soviet nation” (an attempt to create a anti-national state) or hierarchical federalism (the preferential system of administration and ethnic units) are still considerably influential factors in the post-soviet space.

But these inside observations can only partly explain the phenomena of Belarus, which despite of the pressure of the second wave of democratization, the regime is irremovable and unexplainable as it has been since Lukashenko came to power. For some authors, such durability of the authoritarian regime is part of the state-building process, but the aim of the consolidation of the state is built not on nationalizing or democratizing rhetoric, but on a quite openly declared strive for political power.⁶

(a) Internal political actors can use the state-building process for reinforcing their powers or can strive to integrate opposing groups into an existing or a potential nation. In this situation the statecraft in an action led by political elites, who is using nationalistic rhetoric only to legitimize their power and strengthen the state.⁷ The Russian scientists are using this point of view for explaining the situation in post-soviet space. They believe that while the disintegration of the power of the Communist party was under the way in 1989-91, the vacuum of power appeared in the Soviet Union. This vacuum reinforced the struggle between the establishment of the Communist party and anti-establishment groups. The struggle for power took place all around former Soviet Union, but ethnic, religious, social, and economical differences framed the situation where both sides could try to influence the result (to establish in power).⁸

(b) External actors can use the state-building process for their own

⁵ Борисова О.В., А.В. Олескин, “Этническая группа и государство как субъекты социального взаимодействия: социопсихологический и биополитический аспекты”, *Общественные науки и современность*, 2004, № 3, с.136-142.

⁶ Hippler, Jochen, *Ethnicity, State, and Nation-Building - Experiences, Policies and Conceptualization*. <http://www.jochen-hippler.de/Aufsatz/Nation-Building/nation-building.html>, 2006-04-19.

⁷ Tolipov, Farkhod. “Nationalism as a Geopolitical Phenomenon: the Central Asian Case”, *Central Asian Survey* (2001), 20(2), p. 185.

⁸ Moses, Joel C., “Soviet Provincial Politics in an Era of Transition and Revolution, 1989-91”. *Soviet Studies*, 1992, Vol. 44, Issue 3. www.ebsco.com, 2006-02-19.

interests. Those actors are aiming to create an influence or to reinforce it in foreign country or society in order to link the state-building process with the determination of the loyal regime, institution and staff. In this case we are talking not about the creation of a common identity or the state formation process, but about “organizing” the state (institutions), which is able to administer its territory and guarantee that different groups can coexist despite their differences.⁹ The essence of this view is the idea that nationality does not guarantee stability and survival of the state as such. This way of state building is suitable for the realizing short-term aims.¹⁰

When the case of Belarus is discussed, we then have to have in mind that the struggle for independence never took place in the late eighties in Belarus. Belarus has become an independent state because of the concatenation of circumstances. The political elites did not even accumulate their efforts. But the activities, which were taken after the Belovezho agreement, when Belarusian sovereignty was recognized *de jure*, could be called only as the struggle for the political power. In modern times in the race for power, the most effective tool is information. This means that the capability of the groups of political elites to guarantee the support of the society by presenting corresponding information, to offer such kind of information, which could help to formulation the certain opinion of the society, to create and recreate society it-self. This purposeful information usually is wrapped in rhetoric or even propaganda in order to make it more understandable for the broad public and enables political elites to diminish their disadvantages and underline their advantages.

The analysis of Belarusian rhetoric of the governing regime and the opposition, manifest their fatalistic fight against each other, which started almost as soon as Lukashenko came into power (or more precisely – since the referendum on national state symbols and bilingualism). On the one hand it is a conflict of values in which different interpretations of history compete and various myths are being created. It is a struggle of the opposite conceptions of political and economic systems and at a deeper glance – of different approaches to the questions of relationship between an individual and the state and between and individual and the nation.

On the other hand, it is a struggle of political interests, the main target of which is an overwhelming victory. To the governing regime, gaining victory means holding power. The victory of opposition would mean the alteration of authorities. Thus, both sides, and particularly their elites, have their own selfish goals. Moreover, this struggle is fatal, because the loss of it would probably lead any side to complete destruction. It does not matter whether the means of destruction would be legal or quasi-legal.

This fatal fight has already lasted in Belarus for ten years. The opposi-

⁹ Ottaway, Marina, “Think Again: Nation Building”, *Foreign Policy*, Sept/Oct 2002. www.ebsco.com, 2006-02-19.

¹⁰ Talentino, Andrea Kathryn, “The Two Faces of Nation-Building: Developing Functions and Identity”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 3, October 2004, p. 558. www.ebsco.com, 2006-04-21.

tion though loosing the battles one after another still does not believe that the whole war is lost. The winner of the battle is the one who is capable to rally the support of the spectators (the passive part of society) at a critical point such as the elections or mass actions. In other words, the objective is to make them active and convince to declare their will supporting one of the sides. The only difference is that one of the sides sets the rules of the game. Moreover, though both sides appeal to democratic values, however it is in reality that they only seek to create the illusion of it. In the long-run perspective, this mortal fight where there can be only one winner is more likely to be won by the opposition which at least declares their acknowledgement of democratic values. The victory of the opposition is more probable because of several reasons. Firstly, there has not yet been invented the form of government better than democracy. Secondly, the snowball effect should occur, as the second wave of democratization swept Eastern Europe (the examples of Georgia and Ukraine should be inspiring). Finally, foreign influence is possible as a result of the clash of democratic values and Russia's great ambitions in Belarus.

However in the short or even medium-term perspective the governing regime has more potential to endure, bearing in mind its experience of soviet authoritarian rule and the unique Belarusian model of state government developed and consolidated within 15 years. Firstly, there are a number of obvious examples indicating that in the short or medium-term various non-democratic regimes endure in developing countries such as: the USSR, Cuba, North Korea, and China. Secondly, society adapts to the existing situation so much that it forgets or even does not know the alternatives. Finally, there are examples (such as of Central and Eastern European countries in the interwar period) indicating that in the short-run, undemocratic regimes are able to attain rapid economic development¹¹ gaining the support of society in this way.

Thus, in principle, as the moments when society has to make its crucial decisions are getting closer, the question should not be raised "Whether democracy will win?" in Belarus. Instead, the question that should be brought up is "When will democracy win?" or more precisely, "Whether Belarus society is able to decide on democracy?" and "Why have not they done that before?" and also "Whether it will be able to do that soon?"

The answers of these questions namely allow one to pursue the main aim of this study, i.e. to demonstrate that in the short and perhaps even medium-run the opposition professing democratic values has no chance to win the fatal duel. It has no possibility to gain the power and consolidate its values in society.

The rhetoric of the Belarusian elites is analyzed as the main tool of the struggle for power. Political scientists and politicians employ the term "mobilization" when preparing for the political fight. The social mobilization refers to the attempts of elite to gain the support of some social group (such as voters, teachers, etc.) in order to achieve their own goals. In this paper the term

¹¹ Карбалевиц, Валерий, «Белорусская модель» по-своему живучая, но обречена на исторический тупик», Аналитический бюллетень "БЕЛОРУССКАЯ НЕДЕЛЯ", No. 512, 2004-11-24, www.belapan.com/ru/analit/512-3.html, 2006-04-19.

is used in reference with the attempts of any member of the policy process to stimulate the collective action of the society or its part.

While talking about mobilization in national level, Levinger and Lytle suggest combining instrumental and constructivist approaches to the identity and self-definition of various groups using the triadic scheme. This scheme could be useful for methodological analysis of the rhetoric, which helps elite mobilize society.¹² According to the authors, it is usually possible to identify three characteristic elements of the rhetoric of the mobilisation of nation. These are the following:

- The glorious past. The original nation once existed as a pure, unified and harmonious community.
- The degraded present. The shattering of this corporate unity through some agency or traumatic series of events undermined the integrity of the national community. A key dimension of this rhetoric is the identification of the sources of the nation's decay.
- The utopian future. Through collective action, the nation will reverse the conditions that have caused its present degradation and recover its original harmonious essence.

This scheme enables one to avoid the division of rhetoric into the good and the bad one. It allows estimating them as competitors. Then again, methodologically this scheme helps to reveal the ways of constructing new cultural, political, social, and even economic identities, in the process of social mobilization and the stimulation of either activity or passiveness through these identities.

The first part of this article provides a comparison of the efforts of the governing regime and the opposition, to create historical myths and to lay a kind of foundation of social consciousness appealing to which allows identifying potential supporters later on. This part of the paper seeks to evaluate the achievements and the potential of employing the above-mentioned foundation of both sides.

The second part of the paper attempts to introduce the present definitions employed by both sides and to explain the influence of those definitions upon the motivation of society either to strive for changes or not.

Finally, in the third part the future visions of the governing regime and the opposition are presented and the ability for the governing regime to maintain the groups mobilized as well as the opposition's hopes of cardinal changes, these are both discussed.

The analysis is based on the examples of Belarusian elections and referenda, public actions, and also public speeches of the members of the political process.

The terms "governing regime" and "opposition," which are used in this paper have no normative implications. They are employed in an attempt

¹² Levinger, Matthew, Paula Franklin Lytle, "Myth and mobilization: the triadic structure of nationalist rhetoric", *Nations and Nationalism*, 7 (2), 2001, p. 178.

to make a distinction between the two groups of actors in the policy process. Other political actors include state-owned mass media and independent mass media, having in mind that it has no connection, either ideological or financial, with the present government of Belarus. The distinction of non-governmental organizations and civil initiatives will be made analogically.

1. The Glorious Past of Belarus

1.1. A Long, but Intangible Past

The myths of an honourable past and the golden era of a country or nation were extremely popular in states re-emergence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lithuania emphasizes its long-lasting statehood in the Preamble to the Constitution basing it on the Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In Ukraine the myth of the state deriving from Kievan Rus predominates. Graham Smith, when analyzing the connection between historiography and nation as an "imagined community," mostly pays attention for the most part to the mythological structure of national historiography as a head stone of national identity. He treats myths as narratives, which are neither true nor false.¹³ In Belarus the prevailing narrative is of the glorious Soviet Union and mortal but honourably lost World War II. The other narrative seeks to make an opposition to the first one. It attempts to reinforce the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and to emphasize the significance of independence (though conditional) during the interwar period and the prospect of the cultural renaissance of Belarus.

The interpretation of the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the foundation of Belarus statehood, has the strongest links to the Belarus opposition and first of all the right-wing parties such as the Belarusian People's Front and United Civil Party of Belarus. However it should be noticed that the present Belarusian government cannot reject it as well. This stage of the Belarusian statehood history is not disregarded in the websites of the Belarusian President and Parliament. The other important aspects are the attempts to infuse the society with these historical myths through the system of education and how much attention is paid to history in the public sphere.

Let us now recall some examples. Probably one of the best kept, the Radzivil family monument of history dating back to the times of Grand Duchy of Lithuania, is the Mir castle, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Moreover the view of that castle is being used as one of the images representing contemporary Belarus. And contemporary Belarus is the Belarus of A. Lukashenko. It is worthy of note that the Belarusian Academy of Science (which has a very strong connection with the President administration) has in recent years been holding various academic conferences and public events on subjects of the history of

¹³ Smith, Graham, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Allworth, *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: the Politics of National Identity*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 23.

Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Minsk as well as in other places of large historical importance such as Navahradak and Hal'shany. The other important castle of the Radzivil family in Niasviz is being restored (although not very efficiently) and the government reminds their people of the achievements there constantly. Of course, the government does not miss the propitious moments to remind the public about which language was used in the Great Duchy of Lithuania as the official language. The main avenue in Minsk, previously called the Avenue of Francysk Skarina, has been renamed to the Avenue of Independence. However the monument to the above-mentioned publisher of the first book in the Belarusian language was built close to the new library.

Though the historical illiteracy of Lukashenko is often noticed in the public sphere, however the government does not allow the opposition to monopolize the interpretation of history according to which the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is considered as a head stone of the statehood of Belarus. Moreover it is somewhat of an attempt not to disregard the part of a society for which an ancient history of the Belarus nation is of great significance. According to the data provided by NISEPI (Independent Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research) the above-mentioned part of society is not small. When asked what was the first Belarusian state even 35 percent of respondents answered that it was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. 15 and 17 percent accordingly answered that it was the national state of Belarus which originated in the interwar period and the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.¹⁴

The only stage of Belarusian statehood incompatible with the ideology of governing regime is the establishment of Belarusian People's Republic in 1918. According to some Belarusian historians, despite the fact that Belarusian People's Republic had rather puppet government, however this very fact put a stop to the incorporation of Belarusian provinces into the Russian SSR.¹⁵ In other words, if the Belarusian People's Republic of 1918 did not exist there would have also been no Belarusian SSR, which the governing regime considers as starting point of Belarusian statehood.

It does not seem that the opposition is capable of making an advantage of the normative content of the history of Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The appeal of the opposition's leaders to the tradition of professing European democratic values in Belarus hardly ever appears in the independent mass media. The rhetoric of the Presidential Election of 2006 gives enough evidence that the opposition's candidates declared neither their value orientation nor interpretation of history. These can only be apprehended through their pronouncements of other topics such as democracy. The latest however is referred to as an alternative form of government but not emphasized as a value by itself. Though Lukashenko is constantly criticized for human rights violations, nevertheless

¹⁴ Свирко, Юрий, «Белорусы разлюбили Россию и объединятся с ней не хотят», 2004-04-23 www.charter97.org

¹⁵ Ровдо, Владимир, «При нынешней власти общество становится менее белорусским, но все более серым и безликим», Аналитический бюллетень «БЕЛОРУССКАЯ НЕДЕЛЯ», No. 435, www.belapan.com/ru/analit/435-7.html, 2006-11-19.

the opposition is not stressing that human rights and freedoms are integral part of the civilized world. Finally, it is possible to get the picture of the field of values of the opposition either via the attempt of integration into the West they declare or (and even more often) through the emphasized expectancy of help from the West. Probably the supporters of neither Alexander Milinkevich nor Alexander Kazulin have neglected the idea of nourishing the myth of the long-lasting and glorious history of Belarus. However it should be noticed that though not emphasized in public speeches the concepts like national or cultural renewal are present in their programs.¹⁶ It is not a part of the narrative of the governing regime. This very aspect corresponds to the selected scheme of social mobilization rhetoric. In the Great Duchy of Lithuania, the Belarusian language was flourishing and the society was harmonious. Nowadays the Russian language and culture prevail therefore the situation should be changed.

Then again, as some historians aptly remark, although the history interpretations of the governing regime are amateur and limited, there is nobody to discuss them anymore. At least five generations back have never been told anything about the period of history starting from lawmaker Leu Sapega and ending in 1918. The patriotic intelligentsia who could remind the masses of this bright stage of history suffered at least four total “cultural disasters” during the last two centuries. The authors like Bykov, Korotkevich, and Alekseev, who do not surrender to the pressure of the government are also unfavourable. They appeal to conscience and the opposition remembers them during times of crisis. In this sense even Belarusian People’s Front could not avoid teaching about the “revolutionary situations.”¹⁷

There are only several examples, in an independent Belarus, of history demythologizing facts or historical myths helping the opposition to mobilize society.

On April 26th, 1986 the disaster took place in Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. Although Chernobyl was a Ukrainian city; Belarus was the country most affected by the disaster. The consequences of the Chernobyl disaster were belittled by the Soviet government. Despite the extremely high and harmful level of radiation, the May Day demonstrations were held and even children participated in them. The independent researchers and foreign mass media managed to bring out the real degree of the outcomes of Chernobyl disaster. What disappointed Belarusians’ most of all was the fact that the government they treated as being on their side could have dealt with them in such manner. Belarusians’ expressed their disappointment and indignation through a demonstration on the streets of Minsk in 1987. Thousands of people took part in those first demonstrations.

Approximately five thousand people participated in the mass demon-

¹⁶ Александр КОЗУЛИН: «За страну! За народ! За тебя!», www.kozylin.com/programma, 2007-07-01; «Свобода, Правда, Справедливость: основные положения предвыборной программы Александра Милинкевича», <http://ru.milinkevich.org/about/mymention/prahrama>, 2007-07-01.

¹⁷ Грицанов, Александр, Константин Скуратович, Моделируя прошлое. *Белорусы и рынок*, 2006-10-09, No. 39, ст. C22. Note that A. Milinkevich when answering the questions of Polish journalist long after the election has not mentioned any famous Belarusian public man or cultural worker of not polish origin. Bykov, Korotkevich and Alekseev were also not mentioned.

stration named "Chernobyl Road" (Černobyľskij šliach) in 2001. According to the internet news media of that time, a significant amount of Special Forces were drawn up to Minsk.¹⁸ The same actions attracted about three thousand participants in 2002 and 2003 and only 1.5 thousand in 2004 and 2005. In 2006 "The Chernobyl Road" took place just a month after the presidential election. In theory, the indignation of society caused by the illegitimate election, or at least the doubt of its legitimacy, should have stimulated a much higher participation in this activity. However the number of participants did not exceed three thousand in 2006. It is worth noticing that the amount of militia and the interior forces drawn up to Minsk was almost the same as the number of demonstrators. These actions have been politicized right since 1996 and are somewhat an expression of disobedience to the regime. However the Independent Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research (NISEPI) carried out research in April of 2006. The aim of the research was to find out whether the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster are still an important topic for Belarusian society and whether this problem is still on the political agenda. The research showed that 41 percent of the respondents feel anxiety for the consequences of Chernobyl disaster and as much of respondents again are afraid of them. Only 16 percent respondents answered that they are not particularly worried about this question.¹⁹ More than 85 percent are convinced that the health of their relatives has become worse because of the Chernobyl disaster. The above-mentioned answers were compared with the answers to other questions concerning the satisfaction of respondents with the present political situation. The results of the comparison indicate obviously that the majority of opponents of current regime are unfavourable to the measures the government takes to liquidate the consequences of disaster as well as to various social programs. For instance, 68 percent of those who voted for Lukashenko in 2001 are satisfied with the means of liquidation of consequences. Accordingly, only 2.8 percent of supporters, out of those who voted for Milinkevič, are satisfied with the current "Chernobyl policy."

In June, 1988 the article named "Kurapaty: The Road of Death" was published in "Literature and Art," a Belarusian magazine. The authors of this article were an archaeologist Zenon Pozdniak, who lately became a significant political actor, and Auhien Smyhalou, an engineer. The article presented information about the mass burial place, which had been found in the Kurapaty area on the outskirts of Minsk. There were about two hundred and fifty thousand people who resisted the Soviet regime and were murdered by the NKVD from 1937 to 1940 and buried in this burying ground. After the investigation, the Soviet government was constrained to confess that the remains found there belonged to the victims of NKVD. On November 1st, 1998 the Belarusian People's Front held a large-scale demonstration near Kurapaty. The exact number of the participants of this demonstration is unknown. However, there is no doubt that a

¹⁸ „Незадолго до окончания акции можно с уверенностью сказать, что Чернобыльский Шлях удался“, <http://www.charter97.org/rus/news/2001/04/26/30>, 2006-04-19

¹⁹ „Долгое эхо Чернобыля“ <http://www.iiseps.org/4-06-6.html>, 2006-08-08

part of this society was already prepared to recognize the negative aspects of the government of the Soviet Union at that time.

In recent years the events in honour to remember the tragedy of Kurapaty pass off almost unnoticed in Belarus. The society was reminded of Kurapaty in 2002, as according to the project of the Minsk Ring Road widening plan the above-mentioned road should have stretched along the Kurapaty site. In fact, the indignant members of non-governmental organizations managed to stop the lay of the road at that time. However, their success was not a result of resistance of mobilized society. Rather the government found it was not useful to create favourable conditions for the opposition to argue that the history was disrespected. A new memorial was built in 2004. From 2005 to 2006 Kurapaty was mostly mentioned in the press as foreign diplomatic representatives would come to visit it. The number of participants in the commemoration events held by Belarusian People's Front in Kurapaty never exceeds 60 people.

1.2. A Short, but Painful Past

"The huge merit of our nation (and Belarusians' most of all) is the rescuing of humanity from the brown plague,"²⁰ states Lukashenko. This is a brief but highly expressive example of the way a governing regime treats the Belarus nation and its history.

On the other hand, in 2002 Lukashenko encouraged the authors of school textbooks to make the training appliances which correspond to the "emotional – historic level of society development."²¹ A concept, the teaching of Belarus history, was prepared to meet this object. It suggests studying Belarus as a part of Eastern Slavic civilization.²² Although the concept had never been approved, the preference is nevertheless given to the history of World War II at schools. One of the extra subjects available for schoolchildren is expressively called "An Introduction to the Orthodox Culture." In 2005 even a new textbook was published, and a new subject, named "The Great Fatherland War in the context of World War II," was introduced. There had been only two subjects devoted to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the faculty of history at the Belarus State University during the last five years. One of them deals with the period before the Union of Lublin and the other covers the history following it. Students can also choose one of the three courses related to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The opposition has clearly no administrative resources of spreading its own interpretations of history and all the more, is it also unable to compete with the governing regime in spreading them within educational institutions. The outcome of the "historical free-thinking" of the

²⁰ Интервью Александра Лукашенко журналисту программы «Панорама» Белорусского телевидения Юрию Кзиятко. Но. 317 (2001-01-08), www.belapan.com/ru/analit/317-1.html, 2006-11-19.

²¹ Позняк, Кирилл «История Беларуси трещит по швам» http://www.naviny.by/rubrics/society/2003/02/04/ic_articles_116_144681/, 2006-11-19.

²² «В Могилеве представлена новая концепция изучения истории Беларуси» <http://www.belapan.com/ru/news/32818.html>, 2006-11-19.

European Humanities University is well known to Lithuanians who gave this University a shelter in their country.

In general, the point of view towards history and its significance adopted by the governing regime is probably best reflected by the name of the subject taught at Belarusian schools which is "An Introduction to Belarus State Ideology." The history of Belarus is only one of the measures helping the governing regime to mobilize the majority of Belarusian society. In other words, history is only a part of state ideology. Baring in mind his contradictions as well as the controversial statements and decisions Lukashenko still managed to create the myth which though eclectic has its clear boundaries. The kernel of this myth is the history of World War II and the Belarusian SSR. The history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as well as the one of independent Belarus before the election of Lukashenko, though not denied still play only a secondary role in this myth. The present regime succeeded in connecting the history of the country with its prosperity and modernization of economy. The history of the state begins in the 20th century. The state has always been the victim of accidents and the policy of foreign states. The state has many enemies inside and outside its frontiers. But despite all that, it remains independent and stable. The life in Belarus is much better in comparison with the worst cases. And the golden era of Belarus was the very beginning of its history – the Soviet time.

Meanwhile, the opposition emphasizes the co-operation with the West and its politics is retrospective - no radical statements and no attempts to create either an alternative historical myth or the vision of the politics of culture. The opposition is afraid to announce that if they come to power the life will get worse but the prospects of future will arise instead. The ideas of independence and neutrality are strongly supported in Belarus nowadays. Therefore, an intense stress on relations with the West would be as disastrous as are the attempts to prove that the contribution of Belarusians was not crucial in World War II. There is a wide range of opposition parties able to form an alternative agenda of public debates including Conservatives and Christian Democrats on the right wing and the Communists on the left. Therefore, it is hard to believe that politicians and intellectuals of so different political attitudes could reach an agreement on some common interpretation of history. On the other hand, the opposition avoids raising historical questions and discussing them not only because of the monopoly of information, but rather because of its political interest. Firstly, the opposition is afraid of losing even more of their supporters. Secondly, it is worried about providing the governing regime with a pretext to stereotype the opposition by epithets like "fascists," "the instigators of nation," and "the despisers of history," etc. That is why the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is romanticized but not discussed.

Lukashenko succeeded in consolidating his conception of state ideology. In other words, he managed to establish the thinking of history as of a process of ensuring economical wellbeing and to thrust the public opinion on this thought. The Belarusian SSR was the starting point of Belarusian Statehood, because then Belarusians "obtained" their republic. Moreover at that very time Belarus "became the most internationalist country" (the total consolidation of

Russian language) and “was the bravest republic” (World War II). It was also “the most educated nation as being an assemblage department of the whole Soviet Union” as well as “the most diligent and therefore the richest nation in the USSR.”²³ Two out of four historical myths are purely economical. They implicate clearly that the state is able to arise and remain solely if it ensures a certain living-wage. The relations between citizens and the government are based on rationalist arguments exclusively.

2. Here and Now

2.1. The Degraded Present

Belarus stands completely out of the context in relation to new European democracies. All the attempts to change the current situation are in vain. The governing regime strengthens its position more and more, through the permanent use of propaganda. All the new technologies and mass media are subordinate to the propaganda mechanism. The stereotypes are created to maintain the fears of society. Thus, in the opposition’s point of view, the present Belarus is degraded. The signs of degradation are a planned economy as well as restricted human rights, social, economic, and political freedoms.

As an example, the rhetoric of presidential election of 2006 directed at the audiences both inside the county and abroad can be analyzed. The rhetoric of the opposition before any election or referenda can be described in seven words, which are “united opposition, single candidate, and single program.” Let us begin from the end. Avoiding the possibility of raising historical questions for public discussion as well as to give an argumentative answer to the challenges of the Lukashenko state, ideology are by themselves an evidence that the single program of opposition is none but an illusion as it needs a normative ground to rest upon. There are certain groups having their own political attitudes. They interact with one another but have no contact with the government. There is no dialogue between the government and the opposition. A kind of sand box exists in which those who disagree with the governing regime can play democracy among themselves. In principle, the only thing uniting various political movements, parties, non-governmental organizations, and even the independent mass media is that they all find themselves in the same sand box.

Let us now introduce some examples. The Congress of Democratic Forces took place from October 1st – 2nd in 2005 and the main purpose of this congress was the election of single candidate. It is obvious, that when Liberals, Social Democrats, Communists, Conservatives, and Christian Democrats negotiate, the person elected is not the one who fits the role best but the one on whom the compromise is reached. Milinkevich was elected to lead the opposition with the

²³ Владимир Подгол, «Современная история Беларуси в архетипах и символически – функциональных фигурах» *gengiama spaudai*

majority of eight votes only. Three hundred and ninety nine delegates voted for him and three hundred and ninety one delegates supported Anatoliy Lebedka who remained the second. In spite of the attempts to rally a united block of democratic forces, two “democrats” took part in the election. These two were Milinkevich and Kozulin, the former rector of Belarus State University. Kozulin was relatively successful in mobilizing a certain part of society.

On March 2nd, 2006 an unsanctioned gathering of opposition took place in the Independence (Svobody) square. People were not allowed in the square. They did not know where to go for a long time. Later on, the demonstrators made their way towards Minsk Sport Palace accompanied by the Special Forces and the officers of KGB in civilian dress. Although the amount of security forces and the number of demonstrators were approximately equal, people were frightened psychologically. Milinkevich was the only leader of opposition who, though late enough, appeared in this gathering. Kozulin had not shown himself. Independent activists opposing the governing regime affirm that when the tent town arose in the October (Oktiabrskaja) square on the day of presidential election they had to ask the single candidate to come and express his support although the weather was really bad and the demonstrators were constantly threatened to be treated harshly. As if it were not enough, when Milinkevich finally showed up he urged demonstrators to break up and indicated the date of the next meeting. On March 25th, another unsanctioned gathering took place in the square of Kupala. People were pouring into the square from all directions although all the entrances were closed. Even those who did not have an intention to join the meeting did so. However, when at the end of his speech Milinkevich suggested the crowd to break up it was obvious that he had lost not only the election which was almost impossible to win. Kozulin also defeated him as the latter had felt that the crowd needs action as well as the leader. The emotional stress was enormous. The election was counterfeit, the tent town had been dispersed the day before and more than five hundred people were arrested. Therefore as Kozulin called the crowd to go and support (the term used in his rhetoric actually was “to liberate”) those arrested in (out of the) pre-trial detention centre on Okrestin street; the government could not stand it anymore. If this measure had succeeded, it would have been obvious that the governing regime loses their overall control. The overall system of fear and distrust endures only owing to this control. Hence even the smallest victory of the opposition would mean the loss of the governing regime as the regime has never experienced any loss before.

The last example refers to the situation after election. As a result of the above-mentioned escapade and due to his will to become the leader of a crowd, which was treated as a large-scale hooliganism, A. Kozulin of course was sentenced to five and a half years of imprisonment. According to the press of that time, it looks as if the united opposition had not been surprised. It did neither fall upon protests, nor it began participating in the meetings or organizing them. It seems that “the necessity to safeguard the freedom of the rest leaders of opposition” became the main goal. However the reason for this goal is not quite clear. The ambitions of Lebedka to become the single leader of

opposition are not realized. The Sergey Kaliakins party is by a hair of downfall. The main trouble of Vincuk Viachorka is to help the young generation of his party escape the imprisonment that threatens them. And finally, Milinkevich wanders across Europe as an ambassador of goodwill informing others of how bad the situation in Belarus is. Besides, though the idea of the Congress of Democratic Forces was to rally the opposition, however the situation after election demonstrates otherwise. Besides travelling abroad, Milinkevich is taking the initiative of creating a universal movement which should unify people in spite of their political attitudes. Sure enough, one more political movement will certainly not create an atmosphere of trust in the opposition, which is split enough already. It will rather give the government one more pretext to jeer at the opposition due to its inability to make arrangements.

Several cases can be indicated in which the Belarusian opposition, however divided, managed to show a consolidated response. It is agreed on the fact that the election was unequal, unfair and not clear. However, as mentioned above, it is not clear what should be done to respond the situation except of making declarations. The strategy has never existed neither before nor after the election. The Tent Town arose almost suddenly and it probably should have not to. The march to Okrestin was spontaneous and did not gain any support from the huge bureaucracy, even at least a low-ranking or indirect one. The private enterprise left aside. The support for those who were arrested, paid fines, lost their jobs, or were expelled from their studies during the election was provided by the Western funds via local registered and unregistered non-governmental organizations. The number of university scholarships offered by single European countries, increased the number of Belarusian students expelled from the Universities. Generally, there would have probably been enough scholarships to provide them to anyone who had spent at least several hours at October Square.

Moreover, the Belarus opposition has a principal agreement on the question of why there is and can in the near future be no democracy in the country. The reasons are as follows:

- The first reason is the creation of a legal basis, which put further restrictions on the activities of the regime adversaries. A wide discussion was inspired by the alteration of the Penal Code in 2005. The aforementioned alteration increased the penalties for gaining unregistered foreign support (i.e. the support for which the permission of government has not been received), and organizing any public events or training activities with foreign participants. The new Code also introduced the penalties for the spread of incorrect or false information about the country inside it as well as abroad. The dissemination of any unsigned information was forbidden. Although it made independent press indignant, however this indignation lasted no longer than since the first consideration of this alteration and till the moment President had signed it.

- The second reason is the mass media monopoly. The circulation of "The Soviet Belarus – Belarus Today" ("Sovetskaja Belarus – Belarus Segodnia"), the biggest daily of the country, reaches 550 thousand copies. The budget

expenses for all public means of mass information totalled almost 50 million dollars in 2006.²⁴ Meanwhile, according to the independent Belarus Association of Journalists, there are only 16 registered independent newspapers writing on social or political topics left in the country. The joint circulation of them all is less than 250 thousand copies. Moreover, the majority of the above-mentioned newspapers are not inscribed on the list of subscription publications. Therefore in practice, they have no chances to gain an audience. Some of these newspapers are even not recommended to sell in the state shops, news-stands, etc. On the other hand, such working conditions should be familiar to any country of former Soviet block. For instance, the activity of "Samizdat" was quite a success in Lithuania. Nevertheless, as an example of 2006 has shown, this way of information transmission is not well-developed. Neither the supposed network of readers nor the potential list of distributors exists. The project of European Union named "Two million" was also completely ineffective. A few hours a week devoted to Belarus topic on German radio "Deutsche Welle" is not enough to inform the society. The audience of "Radio Liberty" ("Radio Svaboda") broadcast for a long time in Belarus does not increase 5 percent. All the more it is not worth expecting any results of a completely new project which, besides, has already managed to disunite the so scanty independent news media. The RTVi channel broadcasts the only program named "Window to the Europe" ("Okno v Evropu") to Belarus once a week. Obviously, this program has its own steady audience. As Lukashenko likes to put it, "there is the only man who watches that program and his name is A. Lukashenko."²⁵ It is likely, that the planned broadcasts of satellite channel from Poland will be more effective at least because neither Germans nor Russians but Belarusians themselves will take part in creating the programs on this channel.

• The third reason is the involvement of the security forces such as the KGB, the internal troops, Militsiya, and the rest units of Special Forces into the political struggle. It was necessary in order to achieve two strongly interconnected goals. Firstly, to frighten the society so that it felt as being spied upon. And secondly, to completely control the actions of the opposition if not to totally cope with them. Two days before the election Sucharenka, the chief of the KGB of Belarus, announced that this institution succeeded in blocking up the way to the attempt upon the security of the whole society. The opposition sought to destabilize the situation in Belarus by poisoning the water. They intended to ferment a rat in a bucket of water and later to pour this leaven in to a reservoir.²⁶ The Western countries, of course gave a helping hand to the opposition not only by financing the activities of such kind but also by

²⁴ «На какую прессу уходят государственные деньги?», <http://www.charter97.org/bel/news/2006/05/23/pressa>, 2006-05-23.

²⁵ Откровенный разговор: Стенограмма пресс-конференции Президента А.Г.Лукашенко для представителей российских региональных СМИ «Советская Белоруссия» №185 (22595), <http://www.sb.by/?date=2006-09-30> 2006-09-30.

²⁶ The press-conference of Stepan Sucharenka and the reportage shown during it were broadcasted on Belarus National Television program "Panorama" on March 16, 2006. For more information see the statement of the chief of KGB: Выступление Председателя КГБ в Национальном пресс-центре Республики Беларусь, 2006-03-16 <http://www.kgb.by/press/inform/10.html>

organizing coups d'état. Sucharenka denoted that information as well.²⁷ The above-mentioned institution, together with customs officers and frontier guards also stopped the attempts to bring into the country a significant amount of literature published in Russia and the Ukraine. Moreover it was announced that the Belarusian KGB obstructed the preparation of bigger or smaller gatherings of non-governmental organizations and civic initiatives before the election as well as after it.

• And finally, as an independent Belarusian journalist Piotr Marcev aptly remarks, "The unrealizable task of making a single program for liberals, national democrats, communists, social democrats, human rights defenders and ordinary members of civil society – has been fulfilled very easily. All the ideas and ideologies, which, in principle, are the main points of divergence among the political parties, were put aside. What had been left were the objectives such as the struggle against dictatorship, "the criminal regime of Lukashenko" and Lukashenko himself. <...> The aim of "overthrowing Lukashenko" corresponded to the program of "overthrowing Lukashenko." No other program had ever been discussed seriously even inside the coalition."²⁸

The abandoning of these ideas and ideologies has by no doubt abolished the necessity of running the election. The fact that the members of Communist party campaigned together with the members of Belarusian People's Front can only be seen as a campaign against Lukashenko and for anyone else but not him. This single program turned against the consolidated opposition itself. It blocked the way to proposing any positive decisions and new ideas.

2.2. Two in One: The Present Which has Already Existed or the Fulfilled Utopia

The fact that the opposition suggests voting against Lukashenko, was more or less clear to the voters whereas the reasons of this suggestion were not. A granny and a graybeard watching Belarus television only, and believing that they will live to witness the prosperous country every day seen on TV, would undoubtedly not understand the reasons of above-mentioned agitation.

In the governments' point of view, the degraded present is already over. It started as Belarus gained its independence after the collapse of Soviet Union and ended when Lukashenko came to power. The remainder of this past is the current opposition. The alternate future will never come because the current President takes all measures to ensure that "whoever comes to power after him would never intend to change the course of the state and therefore the state would never step out its current way."²⁹ The culmination of the election cam-

27 № 6(226) КГБ раскрыт план силового захвата власти в Беларуси <http://www.kgb.by/press/inform/8.html>, 2006-03-02; Выступление Председателя КГБ в Национальном пресс-центре Республики Беларусь, <http://www.kgb.by/press/inform/10.html>, 2006-03-16.

28 Марцев, Петр, «Как стать оппозицией?» <http://nmbny.org/pub/0610/16m.html>, 2006-10-16

²⁹ Четыре взгляда на будущее страны, <http://ru.belaruselctions.info/archive/2006/compare/>, 2006-03-13

paign of Lukashenko was the All Belarusian People's Assembly. Two thousand five hundred delegates appointed by regional executives, labour associations and loyal non-governmental organizations from all over the country took part in it. The delegates had to approve a set of guidelines for state development and the chief tasks in all policy fields, the so-called five-year plan. Therefore, the governing regime considered this event as one of the ways of executing direct democracy. The speech of Lukashenko in this Assembly was indeed telling a tale.

Firstly, the President understands that there is no opponent as strong as himself so far. As it turns out of his speech, that is the very reason why there is some space left for the activities of opposition. The opposition is an indispensable condition of legitimating the governing regime and thus creating an illusion of democracy. Lukashenko confesses being blamed for letting the opposition appear on TV (which means a right to two half-an-hour long election campaign translations both on national radio and television accompanied by plenty of negative information about them during the news broadcasts). However, the answer from Lukashenko to this "criticism" is straightforward. He says, "My dear fellows, if I did not allow them to talk on TV, you would never know them being morons."³⁰

Secondly, the stability is presented as the highest virtue in the rhetoric of a Belarus leader. "The confusion derives not from the greatness of intellect," he says. "They (members of opposition – author's remark) do not wish to understand how feeble is the boundary distinguishing peaceful life from bloodshed and meaningless cruelty as well as stability from chaos and anarchy."³¹ It should from there be understood that the stability is already ensured in Belarus and any changes neither should nor would take place.

Thirdly, an agrarian life should be made as comfortable as city life is. However, this program is being already accomplished.

Fourthly, Belarus has already outrun the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States in sense of provision with lodging. What is left to do in that field is to introduce price regulation and ensure the opportunities for all young families to get lodging in no longer than three years, as well as for large families to receive credit discounts.

Fifthly, the health care is and will always remain free of charge and generally available. All the hospitals function at the moment. It remains only to raise them to a qualitatively new level."³² The state capital will further be spent on building sport centres.

(In this part of his speech A. Lukashenko digressed from the text prepared in advance. Therefore, these very parts of the speech are not published in official sources)

³⁰ Государство для народа: Доклад Президента Республики Беларусь А.Г.Лукашенко на третьем Всебелорусском народном собрании, «Советская Беларусь», №42 (22452), <http://www.sb.by/article.php?articleID=50217>, 2006-03-02.

³¹ Четыре взгляда на будущее страны, 2006-03-13 <http://ru.belarusselections.info/archive/2006/compare/>
(In this part of his speech A. Lukashenko digressed from the text prepared in advance. Therefore, these very parts of the speech are not published in official sources)

³² Ibid

Sixthly, the education system will not be changed in principle. Simply more attention will be paid to pre-school education and the improvement of secondary education during the next five years. In 2010 the share of assignations to the system of education will make 10 percent of GDP.³³

Seventhly, the pensions and wages, which are the highest all over the post-soviet area as it is, will be further raised. In five years they should double and bearing the inflation in mind the purchasing power of Belarusians should increase 1.5 times.

And finally, despite the opposition, which is not worth to fight within the public sphere, Lukashenko has more constant enemies or more precisely, obstacles, which trouble his future a bit. These are bureaucratization and corruption. The fight against them is of course already declared, but not yet won. Lukashenko names the measures used to ensure the loyalty of civil servants and high executive especially quite openly. It is the renewal of personnel, which is referred to as the prophylaxis of bureaucracy and the maintenance of the activity of state system.³⁴

This standard rhetoric of Lukashenko is an expressive example of how and why the ratings of this leader if not growing then at least ever go lower than 50 percent. The state leader seeks to create an image that all the main goals either normative (such as stability) or economic and social are already achieved. Only the means must be permanently perfected so that those permanent goals would permanently be achieved. It can be stated that the implementation of this pun let Lukashenko achieve his goal. According to independent surveys, 70 percent of respondents supporting the regime gave a positive answer to the question, whether Lukashenko, as a president, succeeded in coping with the problems such as maintenance of stability. Merely 24.8 percent of the opponents of the regime answered the same question negatively.³⁵ When asked whether they believe that the five-year plan named at the All Belarusian People's Assembly will be put into practice, 63.8 percent of respondents answered that they believe in the fulfilment of the promises related with agriculture. 60.5 percent of respondents accepted the plans of raising wages and pensions as true. More than half respondents believed that favourable conditions to develop small and medium enterprise would be given in the nearest future. Slightly less than half of respondents are confident that the government will create auspicious conditions to work and get a good pay for it.

Thus while in the Soviet Union, only the attempts were made to create a bright future, in Belarus this future has already come. And, as public surveys show, it seems that the greater part of the society is already entrusted that (at

³³ Государство для народа: Доклад Президента Республики Беларусь А.Г.Лукашенко на третьем Всебелорусском народном собрании, «Советская Беларусь», №42 (22452), <http://www.sb.by/article.php?articleID=50217>, 2006-03-02.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Тимошевич, Маринна, «Лукашенко для большинства электората – прежде всего гарант стабильности» Аналитический бюллетень «БЕЛОРУССКАЯ НЕДЕЛЯ», No. 598, 2006-08-08. <http://www.belapan.com/ru/analit/598-9.html>, 2006-11-19

least the part supporting Lukashenko at the election).³⁶

The distribution of the answers to the question: “How do you think will socio-economic situation in Belarus change in the near future?” shows that in June 2006 number of believers in better future increased by almost one third (46%) comparing with 29.7% in 2005.³⁷ It is clear, that this change of the opinion is related to the very active governing regime rhetoric during the election period. The main thesis of this period was “the life is getting better”. The analysis of the answers to the question “How has your welfare changed over the past three months?” demonstrates that the respondents just believe in what they are told. While analyzing their own welfare respondents are not so positive: number of those who feel the improvement slightly decreased (02’06 – 23.5%; 04’06 – 24.7%; 06’06 – 23.4%; 10’06 – 21.0%).³⁸

Belarus can indeed be treated as phenomena in Europe (it is likely that the bright future has also already come in North Korea, Cuba, and some other less-developed countries). Belarusians believe that they live in a stable, prosperous country where anyone having minimal requirements can survive. They live in a country inscrutable to anyone outside it – in the “Underground” of E. Kusturica. In this case the opposition finds itself playing the role of the weak-minded. It has to adapt to the rules of game set by the government and is being exploited by the later as a mean of maintaining an illusion of democracy.

3. Unwelcome Future

So the situation of Belarus is quite curious. On the one hand, having forgot itself while playing democracy in its sand box, the opposition has, in principle, no response to the president. While the later performs almost all possible functions in the state – from the raising of idea to its implementation, and from the presenting of bill to the parliament to the control of the implementation of law, and also from the decision where the public toilet should be set up to the representation of the state abroad. On the other hand, the greater part of society trusts the present regime because it keeps society constantly mobilized – in the struggle for economic well-being. While the opposition raises political questions, the government raises economical ones. That is, the discussion between the government and opposition characteristic to democratic countries

³⁶ Naturally, analyzing the case of Belarus the public surveys are not very reliable source of information, because the activities of the independent polling institutions are limited and are walking a tightrope of legality. But the results of public surveys could be considered as showing the trends of society.

³⁷ Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question: “How do you think will socio-economic situation in Belarus change in the near future?”, % Fourth Quarter 2006: October, <http://www.iiseps.org/e10-06-2.html>, 2006-11-19.

Variant of answer	06’04	03’05	06’06	08’06	10’06
Will improve	21.8	29.7	46.0	40.8	42.5
Will not change	46.2	40.8	35.8	36.3	37.7
Will aggravate	21.5	16.8	11.0	12.0	10.7

³⁸ Fourth Quarter 2006: October, <http://www.iiseps.org/e10-06-2.html>, 2006-11-19.

does not take place in Belarus. And there are several reasons, why:

Firstly, the comparative analysis of behaviour shows that for Belarus society economical questions (i.e. simply the survival) are of the highest importance. While 59.33 percent of Ukrainians and 54.55 percent of Russians consider the aim to success as being the motive of economic activity, only 54.55 percent of Belarusians share this point of view. However in the latter the share of society motivating itself with the aim of avoiding the failure is biggest (37.91 percent). By comparison in Russia and Ukraine only 18.18 percent and 3.33 percent of respondents accordingly motivate themselves in the above-mentioned way.³⁹ L. Zaiko suggests calling such persons *homo economicus*, the ones who do not care about anything but survival. Therefore, the attempts of social mobilization using political arguments are condemned to failure.

On the other hand, there is no accurate data about the standard of living in Belarus. Only the indexes of some other countries and international organizations can be referred to. On the issue of conditions of establishing and developing a private enterprise Belarus is ranked 129th out of 155 countries,⁴⁰ the inflation rate reached about 10.3 percent in 2005,⁴¹ and in the index of Economic Freedom Belarus was ranked 151st out of 157 countries.⁴² Now more than ever, politics is most urgent to those people. As if it were not enough, the activity of the biggest state enterprises is maintained by government subsidies. If the subsidization stopped because of the alteration of political power, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians would lose their jobs. Now it is clear enough why those people do not struggle for their political rights.

Good relations with Russia helped Belarus to keep the price of gas low and hence to ensure the competitiveness of Belarusian goods (though not always corresponding to European standards) and the budget returns from the resale of Russian oil. Therefore the pro-western arguments of the opposition frighten not only the employees of state enterprises but the businessmen as well.

It is difficult to answer the question whether the expression of social discontent can be expected in Belarus. People do not feel that they live badly not because they live well, but because there is no evidence that they could live better in the same conditions.⁴³ Therefore, those who claim that the reason why the "Belarusian model" holds out is the oil prices in global market are only partly right. Nonetheless, whatever the changes in oil prices, the governing regime would win because according to their rhetoric, the objective of the state is to survive. The same is the objective of the common Belarusian. Quite illustrative in this regard are answers to the question if people can provide their families with their current incomes. Thus, 50.7 percent of respondents said their incomes cannot or can hardly ensure normal nutrition, 73.5 percent said their

³⁹ Заико, Леонид, «Белорус как *homo economicus* – фундамент страны и власти?», <http://nmnby/pub/0606/09m.html>, 2006-06-09.

⁴⁰ Economy Rankings, <http://www.doingbusiness.org/EconomyRankings/>, 2006-11-19.

⁴¹ The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bo.html>, 2006-11-19.

⁴² Index of Economic Freedom, <http://www.heritage.org/research/features/index/about.cfm>, 2006-11-19.

⁴³ Лихутина, Софья, Янов Полесский, «Белорусизация Беларуси» <http://nmnby.org/pub/051104/infocus.html>, 2004-11-05.

incomes are not enough or are hardly sufficient to buy footwear and clothes. Only three citizens out of a hundred (!) can presently afford more expensive purchases like furniture, a car, or an apartment.⁴⁴ Therefore, the survival in the market, world policy, or anywhere else is the main trump of current regime in social mobilization. For if the state survives its citizens will survive as well. In comparison with this argument the reflections on the reforms, though necessary but not so urgent and as painless as possible, to keep “working places,” “friendly relations with Russia,” “stability,” “peace,” etc., are nothing more but the echoing of the government arguments.

People are accustomed to the current government, which has refused any national-historical identification through economic or social aspects in its ideology. The Belarusians who allow the “underground” to remain alive identify themselves as members of certain socio-economic system. They are the ones who live better than their neighbours (the economy and social system are stable, prices are relatively low, and average wages and pensions are higher). Russians are the ones who break agreements, set higher prices and thus can ruin the stability of “underground.” The West is the place where instability, high prices, and the aspirations to “seize” Belarus predominate. In addition, the monopoly of information assured that the majority of Belarusians simply do not know that the situation may be different. And if they know, they refuse to acknowledge that, for if they do it will imply the necessity to acknowledge that they have been fooled for eleven years.

In 2005 after the annual state address the question was asked: “In his recent address to the Parliament, A. Lukashenko said that we chose the right course in Belarus and it won’t change. Do you agree with him?” 21.3 percent of respondents answered “definitely yes”, 27.1 percent answered “rather yes”, and only 15.1 percent of respondents answered “definitely no”, and 22.9 percent answered “rather no”. The difference between an affirmative reaction to the question, in comparison with a negative reaction for the answers is more than 10 percent.⁴⁵ Only 22 percent of respondents think that there is a need to reform economics and almost half of them are keen on changing the political situation.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the Belarusians’ hardly believe that the change of regime or the victory of the alternative candidate but A. Lukashenko may influence situation in general. The dispersing of the answers to the question “Imagine that this is not A. Lukashenko but some other candidate who wins the next presidential election. In your opinion, what will change in this case?” shows that only a quarter of respondents expect improvement in the future (especially what concerns relations with Europe, democratization and prospects of the youth and active citizens), one third expects no considerable changes and an overwhelming minority expects deterioration of the situation in the future. This means the president will not be able to pin the hopes of the Belarusians

⁴⁴ Analytics by the Fourth Quarter 2005, December, <http://www.iiseps.org/e12-05-04.html>, 2006-11-19.

⁴⁵ Analytics by the Second Quarter 2005: May, <http://www.iiseps.org/e5-05-4.html>, 2006-11-19.

⁴⁶ Analytics by the Second Quarter 2005, April, <http://www.iiseps.org/e4-05-1.html>, 2006-11-19.

for better future on his governance.⁴⁷

Secondly, the means, which have been left to the activities of opposition, are ineffective. There is no governing party in Belarus. The parties loyal to the governing regime are rather nominal. In principle, it is not the parties who participate in the election but single individuals loyal to the regime. On the other hand, namely oppositional parties are left ostensibly as an instrument of social mobilization. Although various active non-governmental organizations are liquidated all the time, the opposition parties are reregistered. With their party structures not being regenerated, and their regional network destroyed, the opposition parties do not threaten the regime. But on the other side, their existence is somewhat an evidence of the existence of democracy in Belarus.

Thus the opposition is everlasting and invariable just like “underground” itself. The researches, no matter governmental or independent, show that the opposition is supported by no more than 25-35 percent of Belarusians. However, it is likely that the opposition neither wants nor is able to believe that, as it does not try to mobilize any new groups. The opposition does not offer any alternatives – neither for pensioners nor for employees of the state enterprise and bureaucracy. As some experts of Eastern Europe notice, the situation in Belarus before the election of 2006 was quite different from that of pre-election Ukraine in 2005. It has not been managed in Belarus to divide the bureaucracy and thus to ensure the support of at least some of its part or at least the neutrality of armed forces and the rest of security institutions.⁴⁸ Businessmen are only allowed to act as long as they do not interfere with politics (some of the missing people were well-known businessmen and S. Skrebec, who had certain political ambitions was imprisoned for his business). The Belarusian opposition did not manage to find the weak spot of the regime.

Meanwhile the governing regime was strengthening quite successfully. It started to apply new mechanisms of getting rid of potentially dangerous social groups. These were the groups, which had a well-known and understandable ideology and thus could have seemed attractive to the society. Some of the examples of such groups are the Party of Communists of Belarus, Belarusian Union of Youth and Children’s Pubic Associations (RADA), and The Union of Belarusian Writers. In the case of all the three organizations, there were their duplicates loyal to the government established. The duplicates were given the names very similar to those of the original organizations ensuring that at least several people would move from the initial institution to the new one. And that’s it! Isn’t it a democracy? The unsatisfied members leave the old party and create a new one. The old party starts to languish gradually, unable to carry out its activities, and if any legal cavil is found the activities of the party are suspended or even prohibited. The youth were forced to move to the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) rehabilitated on the basis of the Komsomol like this. The Union of Writers of Belarus is run by M. Charhinets, the chairman

⁴⁷ Analytics by the Second Quarter 2005: *May*, <http://www.iiseps.org/e5-05-4.html> , 2006-11-19.

⁴⁸ Simon, Gerhard, “An Orange-Tinged Revolution: The Ukrainian Path to Democracy”, *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 44, no. 2, March–April 2006. P. 12 (5–27)

of the Committee on International Affairs and National Security of the Belarus Parliament. That is how the government attempts to strengthen the illusion of democracy even more.

This trick did not gain the response in society, because the civil society including its attribute, the critical public opinion, has not been developing for more than fifty years in the USSR. Now it continues not to develop for more than ten years further. Such a society is used to believe and approve.⁴⁹ The role of a leader becomes extremely important in such a society. There is no belief in various mediators – parties, non-governmental organizations, governmental institutions, and even religious institutions are not quite important. The trust is particularly personalized, i.e. Belarusians trust Lukashenko himself but not the Presidential institution. The opposition has not yet managed to offer an appropriate alternative, having at least similar charismatic features as Lukashenko does.

Thirdly, the fear of changes exists within the society. The destiny of the opposition activists presented in the news reports, daily pressure at educational institutions and at work, the increase of ideology staff (up to 25 thousand), responsible for loyalties of different social groups – all these factors contribute to the creation of the atmosphere of fear and distrust. Because of that the society keeps off the participation in public dialogue or moreover participation in public actions. This situation can be described as “kali nebyla voyny” (“everything is acceptable if there is no war”). The latest surveys show that Belarusian citizens concerned most about rise in prices (60.1% in June comparing with 73.2% June 2004). Without any rational explanation around 18% respondents were concerned by threats of the West (in June 2004 this number was only 7.7%)⁵⁰.

Finally, as for the identification of Belarus from abroad - the way other countries define Belarus encourages it to become even more utopian. The policy of the EU and the USA is unambiguous - the opposition fighting against the undemocratic regime is supported. Any government, of course, seeks to survive. Therefore it is not surprising that Belarus looks for allies in the East. The culmination of strategic partnership with Russia – the signing of the Constitution of the Union Republic – has never come true. The conflict of the gas prices in December 2005 as well as the silent war of gas and oil prices, starting right next to the election, the taxation of transit of some Russian goods in Belarus and finally the abstain of buying Belarusian goods for the state money in Russia tell about a clash between the interests of the two states and the business inside of them. Lukashenko has been maintaining quasi-diplomatic relations with the regions of Russia and visiting them constantly. Now however, he is forced to search for new partners, necessary to ensure the survival of the country economy. These are Venezuela, Tajikistan, and Cuba, the so-called non-allied countries. Belarus is in need of cheap energetic resources and the returns of

⁴⁹ Николок, Сергей, «Мобильность мнений и социальная мобилизация», <http://nmbny.org/pub/280205/mobility.html>, 2005-03-03.

⁵⁰ Analytics by the Second Quarter 2006: June II, <http://www.iiseps.org/e6-061-3.html>, 2006-11-19.

illegal weapons market (which undoubtedly is almost impossible to prove).⁵¹

If the viewpoint of the international politics actors towards Belarus does not change and Putin however raises the prices of gas and oil under the pressure of “Gazprom,” the threat of complete self-isolation will emerge to Belarus. The politics of this country is a “defence policy” already. It is implemented as somewhat a resistance to any actions of the East as well as the West. It seems like the governing regime has not left itself the possibility to adapt to the sudden changes that may occur in the political reality (in this sense Belarus is not similar even to China).⁵² The unfamiliar regime and the turn of Russia into the newest enemy will stimulate the even more active withdrawal of the society towards “underground.” Having a monopoly of information Lukashenko will be the only “Marko” who “knows what is going on up there” and is able to create an illusion of permanent war. He will bring Belarus to the situation, which political scientists refer to as *albanization*. In the middle-term perspective, if the solid governing regime remains, the generation will raise in the existing social medium. This generation will always feel sentiments to that very medium and they will be likely to come back to it – just as it happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The institutions of special purpose will remain an influential power always willing to fight even after the war is over.

Conclusions

“Mobilisation” is the term used in military and strategic context. Political scientists and politicians employ the term “mobilization” when preparing for the fight as well – for the political fight. The term is employed while observing the attempts of elite to gain the support of some social group in order to achieve its own goals. The main tool for social mobilisation is the rhetoric. With the help of the rhetoric political elites are fighting for power.

Both governing regimes and oppositions are stressing that the values frame their competition, but on the rhetorical level the values declared by both sides are the same. The Belarusian regime and opposition are playing the “one goal game” meaning, governing regime is declaring its fondness for democracy therefore it leaves a certain space for activities of the opposition, which legitimize this illusory democracy.

On one hand, the governing regime has succeeded to intrude its historical myths upon the society, the roots of which lead to World War II and Soviet time industrialization. On the other hand, regime’s considerable tolerant approach to the myths of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and pragmatic use of them for state representation has ensured that opposition has no any monopoly of long

⁵¹ Douglas, Mark, “Choke off Belarus’s deadly arms trade”, *International Herald Tribune*, <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/10/09/opinion/eddouglas.php>, 2006-10-09.

⁵² Карбалевиц, Валерий, «Белорусская модель» по-своему живучая, но обречена на исторический тупик», Аналитический бюллетень “БЕЛОРУССКАЯ НЕДЕЛЯ”, No. 512, www.belapan.com/ru/analit/512-3.html, 2004-11-24.

and glorious past. There is no strict dividing line between “government” and “opposition.”

Because of the power and media monopoly, the governing regime has succeeded to intrude the pattern of reasoning, which is based on the principle of the satisfaction with the minimum standards. The rhetoric of Mr. Lukashenko and his ideology ensured that interests and needs of the society are minimized to biological ones. The needs of social participation are limited to participation in “labour communities,” sport and health actions, organized by governmental institutions. There is no effective mediator between the government and society such as political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and independent trade unions. This prevents the formation of the social and political interests. The surveys show that Belarusians are less self-reliant than neighbours in Ukraine or Russia, less keen on taking the initiative.

The society where minimal standards are reached, there is no unemployment, although the salaries are low, there is a creaky but free health system, and also the pensions and all social welfare are paid on time. In this kind of the society there is no need for personal initiative. In this kind of the society, an illusion “all goals are reached” exists. Negative comparisons “our neighbours live worse” help for governing regime go further than Soviet Union. Mr. Lukashenko succeeded to convince the citizens of Belarus, that the bright future has already come. There is no need to change anything, because the changes are chaos and uncertainty. All Belarus needs is some insignificant upgrade of the situation and if the president works unhindered, Belarusians will live within the perfection of the here and now.

Political discussions do not in principle take place in public sphere. The activities of the president and the entire government are reduced to the decision-making of communal level. Since the opposition has no means to solve communal problems, it is not worth awaiting the fight for power in Belarus grounded on political and democratic values at least in the near future. There is no knowledge within the society that it can live better not only than close neighbours live, but much better than the distant West.

If the opposition, eternally the same and so convenient to the governing regime, decides however to try to attain its objectives and fight in a fatal fight of values and political ambitions it should prepare itself to appeal not to its own supporters but the ones of Lukashenko. It should not raise the political, cultural, or historical questions but rather debate with the government on the questions like where and when the public toilet should be built. The opposition should demythologize the present using concrete examples. It should strive to inform the society without the help from West or East. And what is the most important, that all those attempts should be made on public grounds because otherwise the opposition will be blamed of representing the interests of someone else. There is an annihilation of the atmosphere of fear only by presenting and spreading positive developmental programs and walking a tightrope between realistic promises and populism.

As the last decade showed, the opposition is not capable to go beyond its political ambitions and find the compromise. So there are two possible ways:

firstly, the optimistic scenario and secondly, the pessimistic scenario. According to the optimistic one, the Belarusian opposition has to acknowledge that it won't win the political fight until the opposition itself is depersonalized, if there is no a person who is not associated neither with a regime or opposition. This person should be a certain charismatic character and who avows democratic values. The Baltic States has chosen ethnic emigrants, who were elected to high-ranking positions. But in Belarus these examples are not taken in to account. In Ukraine, the representatives of democratic groups managed to fragmentize the governing elite. And the leader of the opposition had become a man, who just little time ago was a part of governing regime. In all these cases international pressure has done its work, but the task of the opposition itself is to ensure the international support.

According to the pessimistic scenario, the opposition can prolong its surviving waiting when the Belarusian economical miracle collapses.

The optimistic scenario opens up the possibility for some "weak minded persons" to lead the Belarusian people from the Kusturica's "underground" and to acclimatize for the majority of the nation to new environment at least in a long-term perspective. Whereas the implementation of the pessimistic scenario does not guarantee that the "underground" will disappear, nor that the causes which ensure stability of the nowadays situation will vanish. Then the situation in Belarus will be as in the last scene of Kusturica's movie – some characters are not able to adapt to the new circumstances, and the majority decide to come back to their own "underground."