

Civil Society in Focus, Belarusian Opposition, Internet Users – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

According to a recently released report, in 2011- 2015 the civil society sector has seen certain improvements although civic engagement in civil society initiatives remains weak.

Another recently-released study concludes that it is impossible to speak of an improvement in the status of CSOs as the state intentionally drives many of them to the periphery of public life.

Other studies analysed the Internet usage in Belarus showing that now over 70% of Belarusians aged 15 to 74 use Internet. A report produced by Warsaw-based OSW concludes that the Belarusian opposition is currently experiencing its deepest crisis since Alexander Lukashenka took power in 1994. This and more in this edition of Digest of Belarusian analytics.

Society

[2015 Future Search Report.](#) Pact has released 2015 Future Search Report, based on a working meeting of representatives of Belarus' civil society. The report notes that despite the post-2010 crackdown on Belarusian civil society and wave of repressions, the period of 2011- 2015 has seen certain improvements. However, the low level of trust towards CSOs amongst the citizenry results in weak civic activeness and participation in CSO initiatives. There is still no regular interaction between think tanks and other civil society agents

directly contacting the people.

In spite of the impression of an advanced dialogue culture emerging inside Belarus' civil society (compared to 2011), civil society organisations still find it difficult to agree even on issues of no principal significance. Some view the government (especially local authorities) as a partner or, at least, a stakeholder whose engagement is a necessary factor of fostering social change. Others continue seeing it as an "enemy" or the "evil necessity", while real interaction is either impossible or immoral.

The authors argue that preservation of Belarus' independence and further upturn of demand for national identity and Belarusian and European values should become the answer to the geopolitical situation in the region. The report urges to tie capacity building to the efficiency of CSOs and their ability to better meet the needs of respective target groups and fulfil their missions, i.e. improving the quality of work and outreach.

Belarus Civil Society Organisations In Cross-Sectoral Dialogue: Experts Survey – a major study funded by the European Commission, analysed the current state of interaction between CSOs and government agencies. It shows that CSOs in Belarus must contend with with constant challenges threatening their existence. More politicised organisations have little chance of being registered in Belarus and are accordingly outside the law in terms of the Belarusian legislation. Legal complexities lead to the marginalisation of many CSOs and CSO membership is associated with a number of risks (job loss, expulsion from university, etc.), thus reducing the attractiveness of CSOs for many people.

The report concludes that it is impossible to speak of an improvement in the status of CSOs as the state intentionally drives many of them to the periphery of public life. But despite the hostile environment, Belarusian CSOs demonstrate a

high degree of application of different tools for influencing policies, seeking to initiate a cross-sectoral dialogue and managing co-operation with the authorities to achieve their goals.

[Internet: Infrastructure, Users, Regulation](#) – Mikhail Doroshevich and Marina Sokolova sum up the key developments in Internet field for the last year. Namely, by the end of 2014, Belarus totaled over 5 million Internet users, which constitutes 70% of the population aged 15 to 74. The Internet is still not available to all, which poses a serious problem when it comes to the offered e-government services. Only half of households have access to the Internet from home computers.

[Analytical paper on Belarus' HR situation for April-June 2015 is published](#). The report analyses the dynamics of the situation with human rights in Belarus. The analytical report was prepared by Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Belarusian Association of Journalists, Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus, Legal Transformation Centre, Human Rights Centre "Viasna", and Committee "Salidarnasc". English version of the report [here](#).

Politics

[A Game Played According to Lukashenka's Rules: the Political Opposition in Belarus](#) – Tomasz Bakunowicz from Warsaw-based OSW believes that the Belarusian opposition is currently experiencing its deepest crisis since Alexander Lukashenka took power in 1994. The report analyses the inability of opposition leaders to develop a long-term political and social strategy which would be adapted to the situation, which does not reflect well on their political maturity.

Furthermore, Bakunowicz notes, the opposition leaders rarely establish genuine co-operation with experts in Belarus. Many of their demands are confined to formulas which have been repeated for 20 years. The failure to select a joint

oppositional candidate for the presidential election has proven that not only is the opposition unlikely to threaten Lukashenka's rule; it will not even be able to demonstrate to society that it could provide a genuine alternative to the present government.

[Beyond Politics: Advocacy Opportunities in Today's Belarus](#) –

Political scientist Alesya Rudnik argues that there are external political and legal obstacles for advocacy campaigns in Belarus as well as subjective factors of mistrust or disbelief of activists to achieve success. But the key barrier remains the authorities' preferences in selection of advocacy topics and issues – problems of social sphere or infrastructure are more secure and promising. Among analysed campaigns are Budzma, Against the death penalty, In defence of the Belarusian swamps, Public Bologna Committee, etc.

[Environmental problems worry 78% of Belarusians](#). Green Network

publishes results of a nation-wide survey performed by SATIO in March – April this year. According to the survey results, most Belarusians (95%) are concerned about price hikes, while low salaries and inflation are among top three issues. At the same time, 78% of Belarusians consider environmental issues to be more pressing than crime and unemployment. Top five environmental issues that worry Belarusians include air and water pollution, consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, illegal dumps and deforestation.

Foreign Policy

[Real Assistance from the EU Can Come in a Few years, Debt Restructuring is More Realistic](#) –

True motives of the release of political prisoners are impossible to guess. It is naive to expect the lifting of sanctions against Belarus but even their temporary freeze will allow resuming contacts at the highest level. The most tangible support for Belarus from the West could become a restructuring of debt. These issues are

discussed in Amplituda TUT.by program by political analyst Yury Chavusau, BISS analyst Dzianis Melyantsou and CET director Andrei Yegorov.

[Belarus-West: "Love" Does Not Come Out](#) – Andrei Porotnikov, Belarus Security Blog, considers Foreign Minister's visit to Ukraine, Vladimir Makei as one of the most important events of August. The significance of this trip "overrides" the current presidential campaign, as the unofficial purpose of the trip is to enlist the support of Mikheil Saakashvili in terms of the restoration of relations between Belarus and Washington.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.