

New national identity, Fort Putin, sofa troops – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Analyst Valery Karbalevich observes that no one from the Belarusian opposition is going to fight for the victory in the upcoming 2020 presidential elections. Minsk attempts to avoid confrontation between Russia and the West over the establishment of an American military base in Poland. Belarus tries to weave a new national identity.

Belarus still has hopes for an IMF loan. New Prime Minister Siarhei Rumas outlines activities for the next five years. The IPM Research Centre finds out that Belarusian state benefits for children lead to 'delayed poverty'.

Belarus struggles to restyle itself as an Eastern European Silicon Valley. The survey shows that the civic position of Belarusians online is much more active than offline. Makron invites Lukashenka to Paris.

This and more in the new digest of Belarusian analytics.

Politics

[Belarus Caught in Diplomatic Spat With France, Row Over Oil Duties With Russia](#) – Grigory Ioffe reminds that the vagaries of a transit country and contributor to regional stability – as Belarus increasingly seeks to present itself – are versatile. While inadequate compensation for oil duties may outweigh the fallout from diplomatic spats with former Western European heads of state, both problems clearly cause headaches for Minsk and warrant a prompt reaction.

[Sparks and Format Difficulties of Russian-Belarusian](#)

[Relations](#) – Yauheni Preiherman analyzes the results of the meeting of the presidents in Sochi on September 21. The expert notes that the meeting demonstrated two format difficulties in relations between Belarus and Russia. The first is that almost always the personal involvement of the presidents is required to solve problems. The second is a lack of predictability.

[Belarus Is Trying to Weave a New National Identity](#) – Thomas Dolzall, the *National Interest*, presents a rather optimistic view of the new Belarusian identity. In the emerging coalescence of many historical narratives of Belarus's past into a singular articulation of Belarusian national values in the present, one sees the outlines of a maturing society. This new society is appreciative of its distinctive features and increasingly equipped with a common language with which to navigate the world well into the future.

[Gloomy Landscape Before the Presidential Election](#) – Analyst Valery Karbalevich observes some signs that the country can expect sad presidential elections unless a 'black swan' suddenly comes. Analyzing the current political field, he notes that the situation is similar to 2010 when 10 candidates appeared at the finish of the campaign. The prevailing mood among the opposition is that no one is going to fight for victory.

Economics

[Belarus is at the bottom of Economic Freedom 2018](#). Economic Freedom of the World: 2018 Annual [Report](#) ranks Belarus 123rd among 162 countries. The worst indicators of Belarus are demonstrated in a firm monetary policy and regulation of loans, and employment and business.



Siarhei Rumas, the new Prime-Minister of Belarus. Source: sputnik.by

Prime Minister Sergei Rumas outlines activities for the next two years. On October 5, the Belarusian parliament approved a new prime minister. The recently **upgraded government** intends to focus on creating a favourable environment for small and medium-sized businesses, development of services, the transition to digitalization of all sectors of the economy, and so on.

Belarus still hopes for IMF loan. The official Minsk plans to start negotiations on a loan with the International Monetary Fund in two years. The recent negotiations with the IMF were interrupted because the Belarusian authorities **believe** that the structural reforms would be a painful shock for the population.

Reforms as a common good, or How Belarusians fall in love with a market economy. Alexander Chubrik, IPM Research Center, analyzes sociological studies over the past 10 years and makes a breakthrough conclusion: Belarusian society has changed a lot – the number of people who share the principles of a market economy has doubled during this time; now half of the population stand for partial or full market economy.

Social issues

[Generations and Gender: Studying Child Poverty](#) – The IPM Research Center examines the factors of child poverty in Belarus and finds out that state benefits for children lead to ‘delayed poverty’: the birth of children and the receipt of tangible benefits become important in fighting poverty, but when children leave the age of state support, the risk of poverty increases dramatically. The study was presented at [KEF regional conferences](#).

[Poverty and Vulnerable Groups in Belarus. Support for Families with Children and its Effects](#) – IPM Research Center’s fresh study shows that the current support system for families with children has contributed to reducing the risk of poverty and has had a significant positive effect on fertility, especially in rural areas. This has also led to the fact that many families “integrate” the birth of children into their survival strategies.

National security

[‘Fort Trump’ vs ‘Fort Putin’](#) – Belarus in Focus experts believe that Minsk is unlikely to change its position regarding the expansion of the Russian military presence in Belarus due to the possible establishment of an American military base in Poland. Minsk’s strategic goal in the current regional security crisis is to avoid being dragged in a confrontation.

[Sofa Troops Go On the Attack](#) – Panel discussion [Civic activism and Internet](#), held as part of the Internet Governance Forum, showed that the civic position of Belarusians online is much more active than offline. Thus, 27,500 people donate via *Ulej* crowdfunding platform. The *Imena* magazine attracted over \$600K for its own activities and social projects. Over

200K Belarusians sign online petitions through a dedicated platform.

Information technology

[For the first time in 12-year history. Belarus HTP registers 200 new companies.](#) Over the past nine months, over 200 new companies have become the residents of the Hi-Tech Park (HTP) in Belarus. In the first half of 2018, the HTP export grew by 40% – this is even more than in 2017 when the exports exceeded the \$1 billion mark.



Minsk's High-Tech Park. Source: park.by

[Inside Belarus as Europe's Last Dictatorship Struggles to Restyle Itself as a Silicon Valley Rival](#) – Mansur Mirovalev, *Wired* magazine, states that Belarus has plenty of clever software developers. But is that enough for an autocratic nation to reinvent itself as a startup success? Lukashenka seems to understand the need to diversify his country's economy. Success, though, is not guaranteed – not least as he is trying to run the IT sector in his trademark iron-fisted way.

Other

[Belarus takes 53rd place in UN Human Development Index](#). This position allows Belarus to get to the category of countries with 'very high human development'. The Index covers 189 countries. The average life expectancy in Belarus is 73.1 years, the average duration of education 12.3 years, and per capita, GNI is over \$16,000.

[Macron invites Lukashenka to Paris](#). French president Emmanuel Macron has invited Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenka to take part in the festivities dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the World War I end. Remind that Lukashenka met with the French president unofficially after the 2018 FIFA World Cup final in Moscow.

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.

Belarus in Global Ratings 2014: Low on Freedom, Higher on Prosperity

The iconographic prepared by Pact compares Belarus to its neighbours in various international ratings.

Compared to Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, Belarus scores very low on various freedoms, including press

and Internet freedoms.

When it comes to human development and prosperity, however, Belarus outperforms Ukraine and Russia but lags behind its EU neighbours.

The Myth of Belarusian Tolerance

If you ask a Belarusian about the most important national feature of Belarus, he will most probably mention tolerance.

This opinion seems to be deeply rooted in mass consciousness. Lukashenka's regime often uses it in ideological discourse to prove that Belarusians have been peaceful throughout their history and cannot stir up any conflicts, internal or external.

However, in 2012 the Institute for Economics and Peace ranked Belarus at the bottom of its Global Peace Index (109 among 158 countries), suggesting that Belarus actually belongs to the group of the least peaceful nations.

Belarusian think tanks researched public opinion to understand this issue. The research showed that the Belarusian people can, in fact, be quite hostile to "otherness" in terms of cultural and identity matters. At the same time they are much closer to European norms when it comes to political and civic values.

The Tolerance Narrative in Belarus

Many in Belarus like to refer to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) as an example when they speak about tolerance. Indeed, in the GDL many religions and ethnic groups coexisted peacefully for centuries. No religious wars ever occurred throughout its history. The local population tolerated other religions and ethnic groups. Plenty of [Jews and Muslims](#) lived in peace with their Christian neighbours.

Belarus had four official languages - Belarusian, Polish, Russian and Yiddish

After the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed in 1919, Belarus had four official languages – Belarusian, Polish, Russian and Yiddish. But this multicultural society vanished after the Second World War, which dramatically changed not only state borders but also the ethnic composition of Belarus.

Today, Belarusian officials employ the history of tolerance to prove the good nature of the Belarusian people: these people have never attempted to occupy or destroy other cultures, all they want is to leave peacefully on their land, work hard and raise children. The problem, according to state ideologists, is that Belarus is surrounded by enemies, such as the EU member states and NATO. They pose threats to tolerant Belarusians, who need to unite around a strong leader and resist the aggressors.

Tolerance has already become an important element of Belarusian social consciousness. If you ask a Belarusian what national features seem typical for his countryman, he would most probably name tolerance amongst a few others. However, regular people hardly try to critically analyse this concept and how it actually plays out in Belarusian society.

Independent experts try to prove the opposite, but they rarely

do empirical research to support their claims. However, one such research project was conducted a couple of years ago and yielded truly interesting results.

Belarusians have Strong Social and Cultural Phobias

The Novak laboratory and the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies conducted research on this topic in 2010. The research aimed to compare current Belarusian political culture with European values. Contrary to widespread opinion, the results showed that Belarusians are more prone to accept the political standards of the EU rather than its cultural norms.

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Polls showed that Belarusians remain very homophobic. More than 60 per cent of Belarusians support criminal prosecution of homosexuals. Only 6 per cent said that gay people should exercise equal rights with the rest of society. No wonder that the Belarusian authorities [put pressure on gay activists](#).

The famous myth of religious tolerance was also completely debunked. According to 57 per cent of respondents, the state should restrict the spread of non-traditional religions, like Hare Krishnas or Buddhists.

Tolerance for other nationalities also received weak support. 46 per cent of Belarusians think that the state should restrict incoming immigrant labour. Moreover, 20 per cent are ready to do their best to prevent their children from marrying representatives of another race.

However, Belarusians Remain Politically Liberal

On the other hand, Belarusians demonstrated a more European approach to political freedom and citizens' relations with the state. 65 per cent of respondents believe that the state

should promote international contacts between students and teachers to raise the quality of education, while only seven per cent spoke in favour of restricting such contacts.

40 per cent think that the state should respect rights and freedoms of citizens even when citizens abuse their rights. Only 25 per cent believe that the state's primary duty is to maintain order even where it involves the violation of citizens' rights.

60 per cent think that the state should provide business with more freedom

Economic freedom appeared to be of great value to Belarusians: 60 per cent think that the state should provide businesses with more freedom, while only about 20 per cent believe the state should control business.

Freedom of consciousness also appeared important: 50 per cent of Belarusians believe that disagreements on government actions should not be an obstacle to professional development and education, while less than 20 per cent gave an opposite answer.

Belarusians are slightly less liberal with regard to organised opposition to the government and censorship. The number of opponents and supporters of restricting organised opposition activities are almost equal – around 25 per cent. More than 40 per cent think that the media should be censored in order to prevent the spread of extremist and anti-government ideas, while the share of opponents of censorship is smaller – 27 per cent.

What Does it all Mean?

This shows that Belarusians are not who they think they are, and what the regime wants them to be.

In fact, they resemble their historical and geographical

neighbours from the EU – Poland and Lithuania. These countries remain rather conservative in cultural and identity matters, be it gay rights, immigrant labour or religion. On the other hand, they share European political values of democracy, respect for human rights and the free market. Europeanisation of new member states, however, develops these values further, while the Belarusian regime hinders such development.

Indeed, how can real tolerance emerge in Belarus, when no public discussions ever appear in the mass media? It looks like such problems do not exist in Belarus, so it is not worth speaking about them. The Belarusian regime aims to conceal any controversies that contradict the official ideology. It often refers to other countries in this context, where there are numerous ongoing conflicts and then points to Belarus; a model of total tranquillity with no social cleavages.

Such a policy only enhances conservativeness and prejudice amongst Belarusians. They can hardly formulate any pros and cons of a problem based on scientific facts or research, and usually employ narrow-minded phrases and myths in discussions. As a result, it is quite difficult to be “different” in Belarus.

The other part of the research, however, leaves some hope for a brighter future. Politically, Belarusians are ready for democratisation and change. This fact is most important, as it creates grounds for dialogue. Political pluralism and freedom of media will contribute to the emergence of public discussion, which will subsequently lead to the tolerance of other cultures and identities. No one knows, unfortunately, when this brighter future will come to Belarus.

Vadzim Smok

Belarus by World Standards

An overview of the position of Belarus in various international rankings suggests that the human potential of the country is relatively good, with high education standards.

Belarus is also business-friendly in some important respects.

However, political and personal freedoms are extremely constrained by international standards. Belarus ranks among some of the worst offenders in the world for non-respect freedom of expression in particular. Crucially, its ranking in these areas has only been in decline over the last few years.

Political Climate

[Freedom House's Freedom in the World](#) is an annual publication which includes a review of political and civil liberties in 193 countries. In 2012, Belarus is placed in the category of "not free" countries: that is, one where basic civil liberties and political freedoms are denied (the categories are free, partly free and not free). In the category of "political rights" Belarus receives the worst ranking of 7 points, and in the category "civil liberties" only 6 points.

Only 15 of 193 countries surveyed have such poor rankings, and Belarus' score puts it in the company of Burma, Chad, Cuba and South Ossetia. Other post-Soviet countries' scores include: Ukraine, 3.5 (partly free); Turkmenistan, 7 (not free); Moldova, 3 (partly free), Georgia, 3.5 (partly free) and Lithuania, 1 (free). Belarus' ranking has remained the same for several years.

[Transparency International's Corruption Index \(143 of 182\)](#) measures a population's perception of levels of corruption in their country's public sector. It draws on independent surveys about bribery, kickbacks, and embezzlement, among other factors. Belarus ranks 143 out of 182 countries in the 2011

review. Its ranking is tied with Russia, among others, while Ukraine and all of Central Asia (except Kazakhstan) score worse. Belarus' score in 2011 is down four places on its 2009 placing.

Freedom of Expression

According to [Freedom House's Press Freedom Index 2012 \(193 of 197\)](#), Belarus is one of the five worst press abusers out of those 197 surveyed, and comes just below Iran at #193 from the top. This is a decline of several places compared with its rating of 188 in 2009. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are the only post-Soviet nations with a worse ranking, while Russia takes place 172, Kyrgyzstan 155 and Ukraine 130. The ranking covers print, broadcast and internet media, and examines the legal media environment, political influences on reporting, and economic pressures on dissemination of news.

[Reporters Without Borders' \(168 of 179\)](#) press freedom index 2011-2012 lists Belarus as one of the countries that have become "much more repressive", and it drops 14 places on the previous year (due largely to the post 2010 election crackdown).

[Freedom House's 2012 Freedom on the Net](#) ranking rate Belarus' internet as "not free". Only 12 other countries receive this lowest category rating. While acknowledging the government's encouragement of greater internet use among Belarusians for commercial purposes, Freedom House notes the increasing use of internet surveillance technologies. The ratings are based on examination of the following three broad categories: obstacles to access, limits on content, and violation of user rights. Georgia enjoys "free" internet status, while Azerbaijan and Russia are rated "partly free". Estonia, the USA and Germany take the top three places for freest internet environments.

Economic Climate

[Economic Freedom \(153 of 179\)](#) The Heritage Foundation and The

Wall Street Journal have published an annual overview of economic freedoms across the world for over 10 years. For 2012, Belarus received an overall assessment of 49 points and occupies 153rd place from the top out of a total of 179 countries surveyed.

It comes second lowest out of all European countries, and is one of only two European countries to be labelled economically “repressed” by the index (the other is Ukraine, at #163). The ranking is based on measures such as labour freedom, corruption, and property rights and open markets. Russia comes 144th. Switzerland and Ireland are the only European countries to make it into the top ten freest.

Sovereign Credit Rating For the first time in its history, Belarus received its credit rating in 2007. Sovereign credit rating is considered by foreign investors as an assessment of investing in economy of a particular state. On 1 July 2009, international rating agency Standard & Poor's announced the sovereign credit rating of Belarus and the future outlook of the country was pronounced ‘negative’. In April 2012, however, Belarus gained ‘stable’ outlook status.

Doing Business (69 of 183) According to the World Bank’s Doing Business rankings, Belarus places 69th out of 183 countries. Notably, this is a jump of 22 places compared with Belarus’s 2010 result. The ease of starting a business is rated particularly well (placing Belarus on a par with Singapore and Saudi Arabia). Although still very low scoring by international standards, Belarus’ ranking when it comes to protecting investors and paying taxes has improved considerably on the previous year.

Holistic Measures

Human Development (68 of 182) The United Nations Development Program ranks countries according to a Human Development Index

which measures such things as educational attainment, GDP life expectancy. In 2011, Belarus was ranked in the category of "High Human Development" and occupied 68th position out of 182. Norway has the highest Human Development Index and Niger the lowest.

[Global Peace Index \(109 of 158\)](#) The Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Peace Index 2012 rates Belarus 109 out of 158 countries. The analysis goes beyond a standard definition of peace, and uses 23 wide-ranging indicators to reach its scores, and these include such things as military expenditure, relationships with neighbours and respect for human rights. Ukraine ranks 71, Moldova – 66, and Poland – 24, while Russia comes behind Belarus at 153.

[The Legatum Prosperity Index \(50 of 110\)](#) measures eight categories of prosperity, which include health, the economy, personal freedom and security. In the 2011 rankings, Belarus falls in the medium range overall, alongside all other former Soviet states. It comes 50th out of 110 in total, but scores 'strongly' in the education and social capital categories.

While it has an average rating for most of the other categories, it receives the worst rating of 'weak' (100 points) in the governance category. Latvia and Lithuania have similar overall scores, with Russia and Ukraine coming in lower. Scandinavian countries top the table.

EOC

The Heritage and the WSJ:

Belarus economic freedom is the worst in Europe



WASHINGTON – In the annual ranking of economic freedom in the world of the Wall Street Journal and the Washington-based Heritage Foundation Belarus [ranked](#) as the worst economy in Europe. Being 43 of 43 in Europe, Belarus is number 167 in the world, just behind the Republic of Congo, but ahead of Iran. Belarusian authorities recently vowed to liberalize its economy. But it remains to be seen whether this time the promises will translate into real reforms needed to improve the country's image in the world.

Belarus's economic freedom score is 45, making its economy the 167th freest in the 2009 Index. The persistence of Soviet-era policies and practices continues to deny Belarus the benefits of economic freedom now enjoyed in most other former Soviet republics. Its already low score underwent another deterioration of 0.4 point due to reckless and inefficient government spending that overshadowed gains in trade and business freedom. Belarus is ranked last among the 43 countries in the Europe region.

The majority of Belarus's 10 economic freedom scores are significantly worse than the world average, though moderate tax rates and low tax revenues put its fiscal freedom score in the top half. Weak economic institutions create major barriers to development. Financial freedom, investment freedom, property rights, and freedom from corruption are 20'40 points below the world average. The government controls many financial institutions, either directly or partially. Foreign investment in all sectors faces hurdles ranging from outright restrictions to bureaucratic incompetence. Weak rule of law allows for significant corruption and insecure property rights. Large state-owned enterprises still generate considerable output, and privatization lags well behind other

countries in the region.

Read full report at [heritage.org](https://www.heritage.org).