

# What to Expect from the 2015 Presidential Elections in Belarus?

The year 2015 will herald a new presidential election in Belarus, certainly by the fall, and perhaps as early as March. It will be the fifth presidential election since the introduction of a national Constitution in 1994, and will mark Alexander Lukashenka's 21st year in power.

## Perceived Weaknesses of Lukashenka

Traditionally, elections are times when there are opportunities for the opposition to attract public attention, to use short spans on national TV and radio, and to make appearances at public venues. On paper at least for several reasons opposition leaders appear to have greater opportunities for support than in the past. They can be listed as follows, and not necessarily in order of significance.

First, as the president indicated in his meeting with journalists on 29 January, he is growing old—in fact he seems to have aged much faster physically than his equally seasoned counterparts such as Anatol Liabedzka of the United Civic Party or the still jailed Mikalai Statkevich of the Social Democrats. That fact seems to lead the president to talk about the possibility of retiring from office.

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Second, the country appears somewhat directionless. The president has no plan for the future, no clearly laid out scheme for economic reforms, or vision of where his state lies in the European and Eurasian geostrategic picture. The

question would seem critically important in view of the events taking place in neighbouring Ukraine, which have polarised much of the continent.

Third and related to the above is the increasingly gloomy economic picture brought about in part by the sharp decline of the currency and falling world oil prices. Though the president has not devalued the ruble officially, it has reached unprecedentedly low levels against the dollar and Euro. He has suggested refinancing the country's growing debt. But the usual escape route of foreign loans from Russia, or aid from the International Monetary Fund is no longer available, forcing the president to seek new partners who are unlikely to offer very favourable terms. China at the head.

Fourth, the opposition has had opportunities to learn from past mistakes. In 2001 campaigns to come up with a unified candidate took place too late to have a major impact (2001). In 2006, they were diluted by divisions that resulted in two competing candidates (Aleksandr Kazulin and Aleksandr Milinkevich in 2000). And, if one wishes to go back further, this also happened in 1994. In the 2010 campaign the plethora of candidates stymied any real possibilities of convincing the electorate that valid alternatives existed.

today the rift between President Vladimir Putin and Lukashenka seems even wider

Fifth, in 2010 at least three of the candidates made direct overtures for Russian support for their campaigns, and attained some success until a rapprochement between Lukashenka and President Dmitry Medvedev a little over a week before the vote took place in Belarus ended these hopes. Such moves presupposed that Russia was getting weary of Lukashenka. And today the rift between President Vladimir Putin and Lukashenka seems even wider. Some Russian leaders have expressed open frustration with the apparent lack of support from Minsk for

Russia's response to Ukraine's Euromaidan.

Despite these obstacles, which might daunt a president in a more democratic environment, Lukashenka is actually more popular today than he was in 2010. The ostensible dilemmas for the incumbent president are actually beneficial in terms of his reelection—admittedly, one is not speaking here of an open election on an equal platform. At the same time they weaken his rivals, who have struggled to find viable policies on which to mount a concerted and united campaign.

### **Lukashenka's Advantages**

Let us take the five above "problems" in turn.

First, Lukashenka's age and time in office is translated in official parlance into valuable experience. Who else, he asks, could be entrusted with office at such a critical time in the state's short history? Of course, he might step aside, but only if he is critically ill or suffering from dementia? Besides, he adds, it is even necessary to raise the pensionable age because of the fall in numbers of the working age population. Moreover, to resign at a difficult time would lead, he states, to accusations of cowardice. Therefore Lukashenka must stay and fight on. What else could be expected?

Second, the directionlessness is actually advantageous. What could be more dangerous at the current time than a radical reform platform that would likely entail wage cuts, closure of unprofitable factories, and opening national industries to foreign control? Why must Belarus commit itself to the Eurasian Economic Union or European Union when it can remain on decent terms with both entities, its membership of the former merely token compliance to the wishes of Putin? Hasn't the policy of vacillation and flip-flops worked so far? Who can tell where Lukashenka will move next?

Lukashenka even suggests that Belarusians themselves are to blame for the crisis

Third, the country's economic plight can be blamed on world events and problems. It is simple to argue that they are external to Belarus. Though to some extent this attitude is partially offset by the recent firing of Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich and other officials, it remains in place. Lukashenka evades responsibility. He even suggests that Belarusians themselves are to blame for the crisis by abandoning their own currency and attempting to purchase dollars, a cowardly action deserving of scorn and condemnation.

Fourth, the opposition is neither united nor rejuvenated, despite repeated attempts to come up with a formula for unity. One reason for this is the thoroughness with which the state repressed opposition leaders—less directly after the 2010 presidential elections, which solicited international attention, than in 2011 and 2012 when it took extreme steps to ensure the eradication of its “enemies,” particularly among the young.

Fifth, there is no Russian route available today for the opposition, a time when a state-fostered national sentiment has come to the fore. Belarusians are unclear whether in the Donbas conflict they support the Ukrainian side or the Russian, but they are much more certain when it comes to the survival of their own country. The 23 years of the Republic of Belarus have come to mean something, however national identity might be defined. And like Ukraine's Leonid Kravchuk in 1991, to some extent, the president has purloined the opposition's insistence on the national integrity of Belarus, albeit alongside nebulous statements about the “sacredness” of the Russian people and their “oneness” with Belarusians.

### **Another Five Years?**

The claim that under Lukashenka, Belarus has attained a form

of national integrity is false, but it has had some impact. At its height it has persuaded even some western observers to identify the nation directly with Lukashenka. It is a tunnel vision that overlooks his failings and ignores other aspects of Belarusian political and cultural life. It also conveys the image that he alone is standing, defiant, against imperialist and predatory Russia while the EU dithers.

The people see what they are meant to see, however narrow and distorted that vision may be. And it is why we have not seen the last of Alexander Lukashenka.

*David Marples, special to Belarus Digest*

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## **The Belarusian University in Exile Needs More Than a New Rector**

On 30 September, Professor Anatoli Mikhailov left his post as rector and became the president of the European Humanities University (EHU) – a Belarusian university in exile.

Rather than resigning from working for the university, Professor Mikhailov switched over to working full-time as the new president of EHU, a position created especially for him.

Now the [EHU is looking](#) for a replacement for Professor Mikhailov who has been running the institution since it was founded in 1992.

The next rector will largely determine whether the institution will retain its mission as a Belarus-focused institution or will completely transform and become an regular higher education institution in Lithuania which differs only for targeting Russian-speakers. Some say that it will even determine whether EHU will survive or not.

The new rector will also need to repair EHU's reputation and make it more transparent not in the least because most of its funding comes from EU taxpayers. The institution has recently dismissed several [opposition-minded lecturers](#), closed a number of Belarus-related programmes, faces a downturn in applications and its finances are looking a little hazy.

### **Belarusian Mission Lost in Transition?**

The new rector will need to work closely with its founding rector [Anatoli Mikhailov](#). He explained the establishment of the new position of President at EHU as a means of supporting the gradual transition of the university's leadership.

The new post appeared only after the EHU approved a new charter earlier this year. One novelty of this new charter was that it dropped the university's mission statement. The very first sentence of the [2011 charter](#) provided that the university was

*a non-state institution of higher education based on European values, where university studies prevail, research is performed and the activity of applied science and art is developed for the benefit of Belarusian society and its relationship to the global community. (emphasis added)*

The [2014 version](#) simply states that EHU "is a non-state Lithuanian institution of higher education". The revised 2011 charter which mentions the word "Belarus" only three times, a notable reduction when compared to the 11 times of its previous incarnation.

As a [special report of Belarus Digest](#) demonstrated, over the last several years EHU has either closed, suspended or downgraded its Belarus-focused or human rights programmes while simultaneously presenting the institution as important for Belarus and the development of human rights within the country. Although [EHU representatives have claimed](#) that more than one-third of EHU courses focus on Belarus, it is difficult to verify this information.

### **New Provost: Hired from Overseas to Oversee Transition**

On 1 October, Anatoli Mikhailov, in an interview with Radio Liberty, said that the arrival of David Pollick from North America sped up his own resignation. Some sources interviewed by Belarus Digest who wished to remain anonymous believe that the current management of the university wants him to become the next rector.

Pollick's grandparents hail from Belarus, but he does not speak either Belarusian or Russian. He appears to have the support of the Governing Board, but many fear that should he be appointed, the university would drift even further from its original Belarus-centred mission.

Since March 2014, Pollick has served as EHU's provost. Previously he ran several small universities in the United States. According to Forbes, he was among the best paid rectors in the United States in 2010. The New York Times wrote that his current salary at EHU is [\\$150,000 per year](#). Sources close to the EHU administration suggest that Pollick's total compensation package is double this sum.

When asked about the provost's salary by Lithuanian journalists from [15min.lt](#) the university's refusal to give any details about remuneration puzzled them:

*This kind of answer from the institution is puzzling because EHU lives almost solely on donor funding and it should therefore not be such a secretive post. Not only can the*

*university, that moved to Vilnius in 2004, use its premises free of charge, but it has up until now been almost totally propped up on funds from different Western countries.*

The EHU already has a significant gap in its budget, which begs the question of whether or not the university can really afford it. In the least, this puts the provost under a considerable amount of pressure to deliver results, in particular to bring in new funding.

Belarus Digest asked David Pollick whether he was proud of any of particular achievements as provost at EHU, whether he managed to bring in new funding and why EHU's budget and why his own salary were not transparent. Pollick explained that he has spent over half a year at EHU primarily becoming acquainted with the university. He added that:

*The salaries paid to senior administrators must be competitive, and the committee recruited from a pool of leaders who have worked at similar institutions in other parts of the world. EHU's faculty salaries are also competitive now for the region from which they are drawn.*

## **Pool of Candidates**

After Mikhailov's resignation, discussions about alternative candidates began to circulate.

A community of EHU students on the VK.com, a Russian-language analogue of Facebook, organised a poll on who should become the next rector of EHU. 160 people took part in the poll. Andrej Laŭruchin, one of the leaders of the opposition-minded EHU Senate, came first with 15.6% of the votes, followed by Grigory Minenkov, an associate of Anatoli Mikhailov, who received 13.1%. Finally, David Pollick and EHU Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs Aliaksandr Kaŭbaska both received 9.4% of the votes, placing them both in the top 5.

**Who should be the next rector of EHU?**

A. Kaubaska

A. Kazulin

A. Lauruhin

U. Mackievich

A. Milinkevich

G. Minenkov

D. Pollick

Other (please add in comments)

[pollcode.com free polls](https://pollcode.com/free-polls)

Conceivable candidates from outside EHU could include [Aliaksadr Milinkevich](#) and [Aliaksandr Kazulin](#) – former presidential candidates with backgrounds in higher education. Both are known in Europe which could help them raise funds.

Belarusians also have a large number of academics who teach at leading Western universities. Several people in Belarus run smaller educational initiatives, like Uladzimir Mackievich from the Flying University or [Paviel Daniejka](#) of the IPM Business School.

### **The Selection Process**

The real selection process will be far less transparent than an online vote.

According to EHU's charter the body that will actually select the rector is the General Assembly of the Part-Owners. It includes the Institute for International Education (Lithuania), the Open Society Foundations (United States), and the Eurasia Foundation (United States). Insiders say that the EHU Governing Board, which consists primarily of Western academics, unofficially has a major stake in making a decision on who will be the next rector.

To clarify the selection process, Belarus Digest asked the EHU administration several questions: does the General Assembly of the Part-Owners include only these three organisations; what is the Institute for International Education; and how will the assembly take into account the interests of civil society organisations and donors?

EHU's communications manager Gintare Kavaliunaite-Amelyushkina responded to these questions without really responding directly to them:

*The EHU Governing Board has set up a Search Committee to be responsible for the open competition for the position of Rector. Very shortly, a description of the post and requisite qualifications will be published internationally and on the university's website together with details of the process and timetable for the open competition. Interviews will be held in Vilnius in mid-December 2014. The Governing Board hopes to be in a position to recommend selected candidates to the General Assembly of the Part-Owners for a final decision by March 1, 2015.*

### **Who Could Secure the Future of EHU?**

An ideal candidate should have a good understanding of Belarus, be an experienced manager and someone whom academics, students and the university's supporters would respect. He would need to motivate EHU's staff to be more diligent and responsible in their work.

Most urgently, they will need to deal with the serious financial problems facing the university. Even today sources close to the EHU administration say that the EHU's budget gap is almost a million EUR this year – that is around 15% of the current budget.

According to its founding rector Anatoli Mikhailov, student fees cover only 14% of EHU's expenses, which speaks to the fact that the university badly needs Western support. It appears to be rather obvious that if EHU continues to move away from its Belarus-focused mission, donors will be less willing to support it. They would rather fund a Belarusian university in exile than simply an ordinary private Lithuanian university.

From the time that its exile in Lithuania began, EHU has been an important symbol, concrete evidence that the West can support and sustain an institution which provides a liberal education tailored to Belarusian students – something which is difficult, if not impossible, for them to gain at home.

All engaged stakeholders should realise that this symbol may soon disappear if the current issues continue and a major donor pulls out. As a first step, for the university to survive and prosper, it needs to have an open and transparent process for selecting its rector.

The decision-makers should seriously take into account not only the views of EHU's private owners but also of its donors, most of whom are funded by EU taxpayers.

Finally, the selection process needs to take into consideration the interests of Belarusian civil society, which, at least in the previous version of EHU's charter, was supposed to be the main beneficiary of the Belarusian university in exile.

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# 20 Years of Lukashenka: The Perfect Dictatorship?

Hailed by [Belarusian state TV for bringing independence and sovereignty to Belarus](#), media outside Belarus have offered somewhat different opinions of Lukashenka on his 20th anniversary as Belarus' leader. Here are three of the main narratives used on this occasion.

## **Narrative 1: Lukashenka Climbs the Greasy Pole**

[Conditions in which Lukashenka came to power](#). In *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, a Polish daily, Michał Potocki argues that in a society still nostalgic for the USSR, Lukashenko's chief opponents in 1994 – [Zianon Pazniak](#) (Belarusian Popular Front) and [Stanislau Shuskevich](#), speaker of Parliament, stood little chance of winning.

He describes how Lukashenka came to build his political stature around the issue of corruption, and later how he essentially eliminated Shushkevich with a scandal concerning the embezzlement of eight kilogrammes of nails.

As his popularity grew, Lukashenka survived state TV attacks, an attempted assassination, and accusations of planting a bomb, and eventually went on to win the elections with 80% of votes.

Potocki notes that, once in power, Lukashenka swiftly dealt with the media, government, and courts, silencing the voices of other politicians in the game (many of whom were later 'removed' from the scene) who said that he would be a puppet leader.

## Narrative 2: The Perfect Dictatorship?

[The secret behind Lukashenka's longevity and what the future holds](#). In short, according to Deutsche Welle: his political dominance has emerged from populism, low demands of voters, financial support from Moscow, oppression of regime critics, a monopoly of the media and the abolition of self-administration – all of which have helped to create an atmosphere of fear.

It concludes that with the current Ukraine crisis, Lukashenka is himself afraid about what may happen but is also looking for ways to help consolidate his power. The article draws on interviews with Aleksandr Klaskouski (Belapan), Valery Karbalevich (Strategia), and Stanislau Shushkevich.

Meanwhile, Argemino Barro, writing for *El Confidencial*, [wonders if Belarus can be called the “perfect dictatorship”](#), pointing to the low level of demonstrations and the relative economic stability. He contrasts the clean, Soviet-like appearance of modern-day Minsk with the opinions of experts such as Andrei Aliaksandrau and Yauheni Preiherman who reject the idea of the “perfect dictatorship” and explain Belarus’ dependence on Russia and the nature of the Vertical.

Finally, he reflects on why Lukashenka looks more relaxed with the West, concluding that it is due to what he describes as the theory of the “pendulum” in which Lukashenka simply oscillates between the EU and Russia to get as much as he can from both sides.

Anna Maria-Dyner, a political analyst, also [highlights Lukashenka's apparent 'success' in creating a system that gives him the feeling of control](#), in the Polish daily *Rzeczpospolita*. Her main emphasis, though, is on the future. Events in Ukraine have proven to be a double-edged sword for Lukashenka – while his popularity received a much-needed boost, he also needs to demonstrate his loyalty to Russia.

Interestingly, Dyner questions if a 'Belarusianised' Belarus

with European aspirations could be Lukashenka's only guarantee of independence, noting that a great deal of effort would be needed. In particular, this would require Belarus to create a new historical narrative which would reconcile Belarus' origins in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the myths connected to the Great Patriotic War.

She ends by asking what Belarusian reforms might look like, and how a political system of a country in which all of the authorities are beholden to one person can change.

### **Narrative 3: Can the EU Do More?**

[20 years of dictatorship in Belarus: "Europe is to blame"](#). A short piece by Polskie Radio chiefly focuses on an interview with Belarusian political analyst Pavel Usov. Usov describes Lukashenka's rule as a 'classic regime' that has destroyed any and all democratic institutions and opposition, but has kept people's support by providing 'food and stability'.

He criticises the EU for being uninterested in Belarus prior to 2004, when a swathe of countries from Central and Eastern Europe either joined or became closer with the EU. By then, in his opinion, Lukashenka had strengthened his position too much for the EU to be able to influence events.

Meanwhile, BBC Russia analyses [EU-Belarus-Russia relations](#) in greater depth. Observing that Belarus has found itself in the same boat as the EU in recent months (e.g. over Crimea), they ruminate on the cyclical nature of EU-Belarus relations and attitudes within Belarusian society, measured by the latest IISEPS public polls.

Towards the end, it notes that Brussels has started a 'technical dialogue' with Belarus on modernisation. By not including the opposition, Brussels hopes to convince Belarus of the need for modernisation and to prepare the groundwork needed for eventual democratic reforms.

It concludes by quoting Andrew Wilson (European Council on Foreign Relations), who says the time for radical changes in Brussels' policy towards Belarus has not come, and that there are many other countries in the European Partnership who have already made the "European choice". They also draw on an interview with Maryna Rakhlei of the German Marshall Fund.

### **And Finally... Attempts to Quantify the 20 Year Reign**

[40 facts about Lukashenka's presidency](#). BBC Russia attempts to quantify Lukashenka's regime in terms of its impact: Lukashenka's 10 best-known projects, 10 most famous hostages, 10 most popular statements, and 10 of Belarus' biggest losses.

...while *The Moscow Times* and Radio Free Europe prefer to emphasise the more ridiculous, and absurd aspects: [Homophobia, Vote Rigging and Posturing – 20 years of Lukashenko](#) and [Lukashenka Unplugged: Two Decades Of Memorable Quotes](#).

*Alexandra Kirby, Solidarity with Belarus Information Office*

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## **Belarus Embarks on A Corruption Sweep**

Following the unrest in Ukraine, the Belarusian government has reinvigorated its anti-corruption offensive.

On June 17, former deputy prosecutor-general, Alyaksandr Arkhipau, was sentenced to six years in prison for abuse of office and bribe-taking.

The court found his co-defendant [Uladzimer Kanapliou](#), former Chairman of the House of Representatives, guilty of not reporting the crime. Many others, including directors and

deputy directors of major enterprises, received corruption charges earlier this year.

The corruption crackdown may help Lukashenka's 2015 presidential campaign at a time when economic growth, a staple of some of his previous campaigns, lags. However, it will hardly eliminate corruption. In the absence of political and economic competition in Belarus, the potential gains to be made against corruption remain limited.

### **Turning Against Former Friends and Allies**

Kanapliou, one of the defendants in the case, has been close to Lukashenka since the early 1990s. He helped collect signatures for Lukashenka's presidential candidacy and engineered the presidential hopeful's first anti-corruption campaign in 1994.

When Lukashenka won the presidency, Kanapliou rode his coattails. He first served as an assistant to the President of Belarus and later as Chairman of the House of Representatives as well as Chairman of the Belarusian Handball Federation. In 2010, pundits speculated that Kanapliou would head Lukashenka's electoral team in yet another presidential campaign. Indeed, Kanapliou's name may help Lukashenka's anti-corruption drive ahead of the 2015 election, albeit in an unanticipated way.

This is not the first time the populist leader has turned against his former friends and allies. Even though the president has ruled for the last twenty years, considerable turnover and uncertainty prevail in many other politically important offices in Belarus.

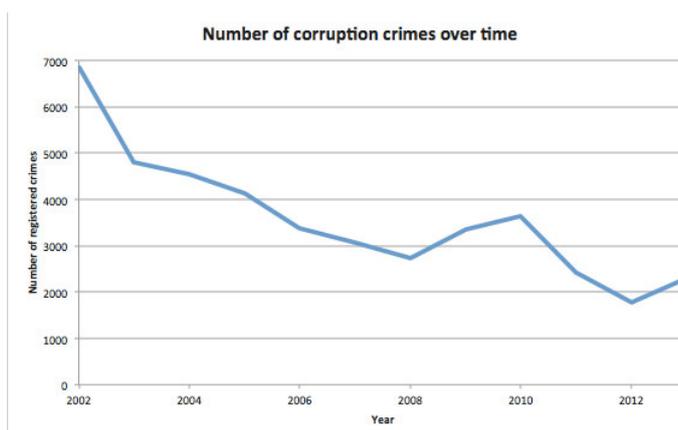
Corruption provides one of many possible excuses for rotating and dismissing high officials.

Corruption provides one of many possible excuses for rotating

and dismissing high officials. In 2013, minister of energy was fired; in 2012, the top echelons Belarusian KGB were purged and the minister of foreign affairs was dismissed; in 2011, the minister of justice was removed; 2010 saw a wave of dismissals in the defence branch following the “teddy-bead affair”; ministers of economics and minister of taxes and duties were dismissed in 2009. If initially analysts optimistically interpreted such high-level purges as signals of change, today they increasingly signal stability and Lukashenka’s power.

Corruption sweeps keep Lukashenka’s allies loyal and also show the electorate who is to blame for the nation's endless string of economic problems. When Lukashenka’s friends go astray, their corrupt behaviour is exposed. Some, however, have been brought back into the fold upon surrendering stolen property and apologising. For example, the chairman of "Belneftekhim" Alyaksandr Barouski was charged with abuse of office in 2007, pardoned a year later, and then appointed to be the general director of a major state-controlled company BelavtoMAZ.

### **Summing up Two Decades of Anti-Corruption Battles**



In 1994 Lukashenka, then a relatively unknown parliamentarian, was elected on a populist anti-corruption platform.

He stood out as an outsider, untarnished by any having any direct involvement in the system, whose only prior political engagement was managing a parliamentary committee tasked with

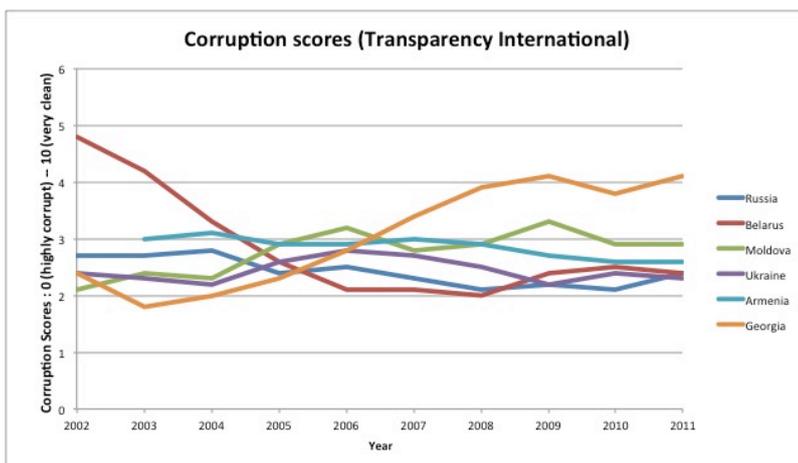
investigating governmental corruption.

Corruption has remained on the top of Lukashenka's agenda to this day. There is surprisingly little progress in reducing it, however.

According to official statistics, the number of corruption cases has steadily decreased over time, from 6,840 in 2002 to a mere 2,301 in 2013, as shown in the figure above.

However, the corruption perception index provided by Transparency International suggests the opposite is true. The index, constructed on the basis of expert and business surveys, shows that Belarus is doing poorly in dealing with corruption, even compared to its neighbours in the post-Soviet space.

In 2013, Belarus was ranked 123rd (out of 177 countries) by Berlin-based Transparency International – better than Ukraine (144th) and Russia (127th) but much worse than its EU neighbours Poland (38th), Latvia (49th) and Lithuania (43rd).



Why such a drastic discrepancy? Changes in the type of crimes classified as corruption in the Belarusian Criminal Code can explain the drop in corruption crimes observed between

2010-2011.

In 2011, the list of 14 crimes was reduced to 10, with forgery, receipt of illegal remuneration, smuggling, and financing of terrorist activities no longer being classified as corruption-related crimes.

## **Do Anti-Corruption Initiatives Affect Public Opinion?**

There is no doubt that the top-level officials that have incurred Lukashenka's ire are indeed corrupt. But will they help Lukashenka's public image? According to a survey conducted by NISEPI, an independent source of public opinion in Belarus, in June 2013, only 30% of respondents agreed that the president would succeed in his anti-corruption campaign.

Another 37.5% believed that Lukashenka himself had dealings with corrupted ministers and was interested in keeping corruption up, while 28% believed he would fail because corruption is deep-rooted in Belarus.

In a 2014 survey on the effects of his long-term presidential rule, over a fifth of respondents said that prolonged presidency contributes to the growth of corruption and abuse of office. While twenty years ago Lukashenka was still an outsider, now he is deeply implicated in the system, and his arguments about eliminating corruption may have lost credibility.

## **How Political Competition Undermines Corruption**

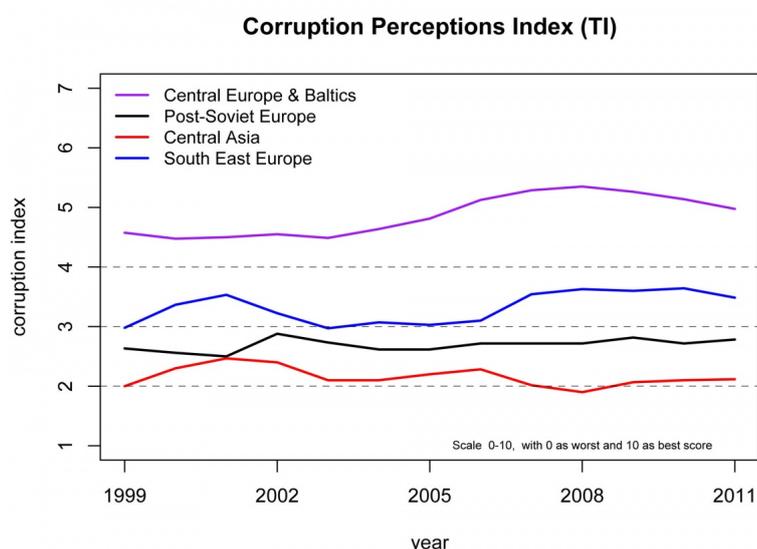
Thus, at least a fifth of the Belarusian public seems to have diagnosed the problem correctly. Among the most important factors linked to corruption is the absence of economic and political competition.

Political competition can reduce corruption in a number of ways: on the one hand, the need to get re-elected and the risk of being replaced lowers the appetite for bribes of the politicians in power; on the other hand, frequent turnover among the political leadership diminishes the brazenness with which economic actors can rely on corruption under the protection of any one leader.

Additionally, freedom of information and association permits society to monitor public officials, thus limiting

opportunities for corruption. The lack of economic competition may also contribute to higher corruption levels, as it allows businesses to seek higher rents, which increases incentives to control public entities to seek bribes.

Therefore the prospects for eliminating corruption in Belarus remain dim. The authoritarian nature of the system and the large share of public ownership of enterprises in the economy (about 70% of country's GDP) make the problem worse. Thus, all of the president's efforts to reduce corruption can have only limited results.



Corruption is an ever-present problem in the post-Soviet region. Comparing corruption averages for the post-Soviet and Central European states shows that they are moving in the different developmental trajectories.

Therefore, the rampant corruption in Belarus can be seen as a legacy of its economic and political development in the 20th century.

Expert debate about the extent of corruption-induced harm remains unresolved. However, studies suggest that when compared to democracies, non-democratic states are much more likely to suffer substantial economic harm from corruption.

The true scale of corruption and its economic consequences in Belarus remain unknown, but it is clear that the new anti-corruption drive will fail to address the root of the problem.

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# Belarusian Opposition in Local Elections: Will It Learn from Old Mistakes?

On 2 October, Belarus' Central Elections Commission (CEC) revealed that local elections will take place in March 2014. In the past, the CEC had a history of scheduling elections earlier than they should be according to the law. That is why the opposition started its preparations in advance.□

For now, two opposition blocs have emerged: People's Referendum and For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka". During these elections one camp will focus on bread and butter issues, the second on the demand to hold free elections.

Unlike in previous years, political organisations are united on [approaches of how to change](#) Lukashenka's regime rather than on a particular ideological affinity. However, both camps see this campaign only as a preparation for presidential elections. Therefore, the opposition will try to enlarge its structures, but will do it rather carefully to avoid repression.

## Coalition Building

Belarusian political organisations have created two main alliances.

People`s Referendum	For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka"
Party of the Belarusian Popular Front, Tell the Truth campaign, Movement for Freedom, Belarusian Liberal Party of Freedom and Progress, Belarus Social Democratic Party (Hramada)	Belarusian Labour Party, Belarusian Left Party "A Just World", United Civic Party, Belarusian Women`s Party "Nadzeya, Belarusian Movement, For Free Elections public association, Young Belarus

People`s Referendum unites five organisations, but at the core it consists of a consensus between the Movement for Freedom and the Tell the Truth campaign. This alliance will also take part in the elections and collect signatures for a referendum in Belarus. These structures also plan to work out a procedure for the selection of its own candidate for the presidency.

The selection of a future presidential candidate, who will challenge Lukashenka, may undermine the future of the coalition. Today this coalition has two main leaders – Alexander Milinkievich and Uladzimir Niakliajeu – and it remains difficult to choose one leader between these two. After all, the person who is chosen will receive significant influence, and Western donors will pool their resources to him.

The main forces of the coalition, the Movement for Freedom and the Tell the Truth campaign, remain aware of an urgent need to identify Lukashenka's future competitor. However, so far they failed to agree on the concessions they are willing to make. Currently, this camp prefers to hold a Congress of Democratic Forces, which will choose a future presidential candidate.

Another coalition with a rather long title – For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka" – combines seven political structures. They are still considering their tactics and may eventually boycott the elections, or withdraw their candidates the day before. As the title implies, this coalition will talk to voters primarily on the need to have a

free election rather than on other issues.

The camp also plans to have its own candidate for the presidency and they view primaries as the preferable procedure to reach the largest possible number of people.

### **Who Remains Overboard?**

Several organisations have decided not to join either of these two blocks.

The leaders of the Belarusian Christian Democracy, Pavel Sieviarynets, and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (People`s Assembly), Mikalaj Statkievich, [remain in custody](#), which hinders their active participation. Nearly all leaders of the European Belarus group, led by former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau, remain in exile, which limits their ability to participate in the campaign in one form or another.

Young Front did not join any coalition and has already announced its own independent participation in the local elections. Young Front will campaign primarily in Salihorsk, a town in central Belarus. The organisation plans to put up 40 candidates to cover all polling stations in the town. The Belarusian opposition has never used this tactic, so political organisations will closely monitor how successful this approach will turn out to be.

### **From Local Elections to the Next Presidential Campaign**

[Local elections](#) in Belarus fail to politicise society. This remains a reason why the opposition will have a hard time winning them. Moreover, Minsk-based general of the opposition have few warriors in the regions. Each organisation lacks local activists to conduct a major campaign throughout Belarus.

The opposition views local elections as a preparatory stage

for the presidential elections. These political organisations will enlarge their structures and build coalitions to make them bigger. The number of organisations in the alliance also plays a significant role, especially for Western donors. As a result, both camps include structures that exist on paper rather than in reality.

Noteworthy for its work on the eve of the 2010 presidential elections, the opposition united on the basis of ideological reasons. In 2009, eight centre-right organisations created the pro-European Belarusian Independent Block. This alliance fell apart when a number of its member organisations refused to support Alexander Milinkievich as a presidential election. Today, this consolidation is based on a specific approach to the elections themselves or to the means of bringing change to Belarus. Personal relations between the leaders of organisations also play a big role.

The two blocs will have different messages for people. While the People's Referendum will be talking to voters about bread and butter issues, For Free and Fair Elections for a Better Life "Talaka" will talk about the need for political reform. Both camps have rather sensible messages, however, there remains a threat that they will get caught up with defining whose strategy is better and pay less attention to the fight for the hearts and minds of Belarusians.

### **Any Lessons From the Previous Elections?**

The regime's special services have always worked to split the opposition and today they can be satisfied with the outcome of their work. To break this pattern the opposition must agree on a cease fire between each other and concentrate on addressing the people.

During the last local elections in 2010, the opposition failed to mobilise itself and had no candidates in most of the districts throughout the whole country. Throughout Belarus the average competition for one seat in local councils was only 1.2 persons. Democratic forces received less than 10 mandates

from 21,000 possible.

Obviously in 2010 the authorities falsified the results. But the democratic opposition can learn lessons from previous elections. People remain more interested in social and economic problems rather than in discussing democracy and human rights. Even the pro-Lukashenka electorate can support the opposition on a local level if they show competence and political skills during local elections.

If the opposition fails to use its opportunities to work with people, they should not expect that Belarusian society will become politicised. If the opposition ignores holding an election campaign, Belarusians may continue to ignore the opposition.

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# **Belarusian Revolutionists vs. Evolutionists**

## **Opposition:**

On 15 July Alexander Milinkevich and Andrei Sannikau participated in a round-table discussion on Belarus in Warsaw. Although they both belong to the Belarusian opposition, their views on how to improve the situation in Belarus are not the same.

The leader of European Belarus Andrei Sannikau and the leader of the Movement for Freedom Alexander Milinkevich advocate different approaches when it comes to sanctions, participation in the elections and dialogue with the authorities. Milinkevich often says that if there is no dialogue between the regime and the EU, Belarus will lose its

independence. Sannikau strongly argues in favour of the imposition of sanctions and accuses the EU of being too soft.

The first camp (“revolutionists”) believes that the international pressure on the government can change the regime. Therefore, the West should necessarily impose sanctions on Belarus and limit all contacts with the officials. According to the second camp (“evolutionists”), changes in Belarus will come from the bottom upwards, a more evolutionary approach and focus on the grassroots work with society. Instead of sanctions, this camp believes in Belarus’ engagement with Europe, including its officials on various levels.

	<b>Sanctions</b>	<b>Participation in the elections</b>	<b>Dialogue with the authorities</b>
<b>Revolutionists</b>	Sanctions put pressure and punish the Belarusian leadership	Participation in elections remains a complicity in crime	The EU should limit contacts with the authorities not to legitimise them
<b>Evolutionists</b>	Sanctions hurt regular people and push Belarus towards Russia	The opposition should participate in elections to reach a wider audience of Belarusians	The EU should talk to the regime after the release of political prisoners

## **Sanctions, Boycott, No Dialogue**

The “revolutionists” camp supports the imposition of sanctions against Belarusian companies and individuals. the Charter97 web site remains the main media instrument of this camp.

This camp believes that the sanctions put pressure on the regime in Minsk and is the only language which the regime understands well. By terminating the trade of oil products and potash fertilisers with Belarus, as well as the freezing of bank accounts and cutting off communication will create the necessary pressure to release political prisoners and the eventual fall of the regime.

This camp believes that in today’s Belarus, there is no need to participate in elections, and the opposition taking part in them have become partners in crime. In 2012 this opposition camp boycotted [the parliamentary elections](#). Also, this group boycotted the previous parliamentary elections in 2008, but took part in the presidential campaign in 2010.

The revolutionists see no sense in holding a [dialogue with the regime](#) of Lukashenka. In their view, the dialogue only strengthens and legitimises the regime in Minsk and is immoral.

## **Engagement of Belarus and Grassroots Work**

The evolutionists argue against economic

sanctions towards Belarus. The For Freedom movement of Milinkevich, the Tell the Truth campaign and Party of the Belarusian Popular Front belong to the “evolutionist” camp. These organisations also support the recent “People’s Referendum”.

According to this camp, economic sanctions can be imposed only if the Belarusian opposition gains broad support in society. Otherwise, the sanctions would only increase Russia’s political and economic grip on the country without strengthening the opposition.

This camp believes that economic sanctions could not bring about any real benefits for Belarus, and dialogue remains more efficient. Consequently, EU economic sanctions against Belarus will lead to the isolation of the country: the authorities will not release political prisoners and the general level of fear in society towards the regime will increase, while support for the opposition and any pro-European mood will itself decline.

The “evolutionists” support the opposition’s participation in the elections. In their opinion, in today’s Belarus the opposition should use all available legal means at its disposal to communicate with Belarusians. If the opposition fails to participate, then, as their logic has it, it will simply become invisible to most Belarusians.

Alexander Milinkevich was the single candidate from the opposition who ran in 2006, but refused to participate in the 2010 elections because of the lack of strategy within the opposition. However, he took part in the parliamentary election of 2012, but the authorities did not register him as a candidate.

### **How to Find Common Ground**

While these ways of thinking remain dominant in the Belarusian opposition today, some politicians may have a position that

coincides with the opinion of one camp at one point, and with the opinion of the other camp at the other. For example, a political prisoner and former presidential candidate Mikalai Statkevich opposes any dialogue with the regime, but at the same time feels that it would be good for the opposition should take part in the elections.

Both opposition camps agree that the EU should simplify the visa regime, introduce scholarships and the release of political prisoners. However, their tactics on certain issues remain mutually exclusive.

It is normal that political forces disagree on certain things. But if the opposition cannot work out a common strategy, it should at least reach a mutual understanding to avoid public attacks against each other. The self-destruction of the opposition is part of the Belarusian authorities' plan for remaining in control. If the opposition reaches such an agreement, it would break the authorities' stranglehold on politics.

Instead of focusing on how to appear more intelligent and principled by criticising other opponents of Lukashenka, the opposition should think how to garner wider support from Belarusian society and achieve practical goals. The West should also contribute to improving the culture of respecting the views of others within the opposition. This can become a long-lasting contribution to democracy building in Belarus.

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## **Election Campaign, Opposition**

# and the Struggling Economy – Digest of Polish Analytics

Polish analysts focus on the results of the recent parliamentary elections and their consequences for Belarus. Experts also take a closer look at the opposition and its performance before and during the elections.

Since the economic indicators provide some worrisome trends, analysts also examine Belarus's economic position in the aftermath of Russia's entry into the WTO.

In *New Eastern Europe* Kamil Klysinski describes negative tendencies that appeared recently in the Belarusian financial market. At the same time, the analyst argues that Minsk does not respond to these increasing difficulties with adequate reforms. He indicates an increase in the amount of money in the market turnover of 21 per cent.

Another factor relates to a significant increase in demand for foreign currency when compared to supply. According to the analyst, the increasing rates of income in the state sector explains the present tendencies. The analyst notes that it is related to the September parliamentary elections. Moreover, the possible dissatisfaction of the state-owned company workers might lead to protests.

In another text for the [Centre for Eastern Studies](#) Kamil Klysinski elaborates on the current economic situation of Belarus. He comments on the loss of an important source of income from exports. This is caused by Moscow, which decided to block the re-export of Russian oil products to the EU countries without export duties. The author argues that because of such practices Minsk could have earned \$2.5bn.

The expert notes that Russia has tolerated these duty free

exports since the beginning of 2011. However, due to the lack of proper concessions for the privatisation of strategic Belarusian companies, Moscow decided to sharpen its stance and cut Minsk practises. In conclusion, Klysinski suggests that the economic situation of Belarus is going to deteriorate within the next few months. The Belarusian authorities can decide to devalue the Belarusian ruble and at the same time, seek more subsidies from Moscow.

### **Failed Elections Campaigning?**

In a [Bulletin](#) issued by the Polish Institute of International Affairs Anna Maria Dyer analyses the pre-election situation in Belarus. According to her, the whole campaign had only marginal importance. She notes that because of the repressive regime imposed by the state, a dialogue between the authorities and society did not happen. Thus, the limited airtime given to the candidates, but also lack of interest in the issue among the state media, determined the pre-election mood in the society. Moreover, the analyst argues that no serious discussion concerning the situation of Belarus was carried out in public.

Dyer takes a closer look at the opposition's problems. Among the most burning issues she raises is a lack of united action, but also limited financial resources to run a campaign. The analyst critically evaluates internal divisions within the opposition and their inability to reach out to the Belarusian electorate. At the same time, the opposition parties did not manage to prepare a comprehensive political programme.

She recommends that Poland and the EU prepare a consistent and long-term programme of support for Belarus. So far temporary and short-term actions undertaken by Brussels have failed to bring about any changes. At the same time, she underlines that support for Belarusian society should remain on the EU's agenda.

The opposition's performance in the elections often appears in other comments. In a commentary prepared for the [Centre for Eastern Studies](#) Kamil Klysinski argues that the elections proved not the opposition's only weakness, but also its inability to work out a unified position had a detrimental effect as well. Moreover, the analyst concludes that since the election results have not been recognized internationally, it might lead to further isolation of Belarus and its closer cooperation with Russia.

### **Fragmented Opposition**

In the [Korespondent Wschodni](#) Wojciech Borodzicz-Smolinski analyses the Belarusian opposition. He notes that one of the factors that helps Lukashenka stay in power is the lack of a political alternatives for society. According to him, the divisions within the opposition have two sides.

First of all, they are due to ideological factors. Nonetheless, more important are the apparent private animosities which hinder the integration process of the opposition. Borodzicz-Smolinski highlights the particular moments when the Belarusian opposition attempted to unite. One of the most crucial moments was before the December 2010 presidential elections. The analyst notes that the EU and the West still have to wait for a serious partner from those among the opposition with whom to discuss the future of Belarus.

### **WTO, Russia and Belarus**

Kamil Klysinski also discusses, for the [Centre for Eastern Studies](#), the consequences of Russia's entry into the WTO in August 2012. Minsk will have to decrease the level of import tariffs which in consequence may require a larger opening for foreign goods. At the same time, the Russian market will have to be more open for imports from the WTO member states. Thus it will become more competitive for the Belarusian companies. The analyst notes that all of that does not make Belarus an

attractive country for investment and may delay Belarus's entry into the WTO.

The author concludes that Lukashenka argues that there have been high costs from Russia's entry into the WTO for the Belarusian economy, in order to gain more financial aid from Moscow. Minsk can also aim to export more to non-European markets, which appears as the short-term and temporary solution. Klysinki emphasises that the Belarusian regime has to urgently implement economic reforms.

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## **What to Expect in EU-Belarus Relations – Digest of Belarusian Analytics**

Analysts focus on the effect of recent elections on the politic landscape of Belarus and whether the European Union can do anything to improve the situation in Belarus.

[The EU and Belarus: Perpetual Tango All Over Again?](#) Giselle Bosse, European Policy Centre, analyses EU-Belarus relations to identify where next for EU policy towards Belarus. The expert makes some recommendations for the situation's improving.

In particular, the EU could be more specific about the goals of its policy and respectively knows the answers on some key questions, for instance, what is the EU longer term goal: to push Lukashenka to introduce reforms, or regime change?

[Belarus Plays Cat and Mouse with EU](#) – EUobserver fixes the fact of the recent releasing of two Belarusian political

prisons – Siarhei Kavalenka and Pavel Syromolotov – and considers about the reasons of the authorities' step. The edition quotes Belarusian Tribunal, a Dutch-based NGO, which claims that Kavalenka's release is an attempt to bargain with the EU to ease the sanctions.

[Powerless Over Belarus](#) – Euronews tries to find an answer whether Brussels will toughen its stance against Minsk following the latest result of the parliamentary elections. To get more insight on the political state of affairs in Belarus, the reporter spoke to Olga Stuzhinskaya, the Director of the Office for Democratic Belarus based in Brussels.

[EU Poised to Extend Sanctions Against Belarus After Elections](#) (for subscribers only) – The European Voice reports that the EU will be watching parliamentary elections in Belarus on Sunday (23 September) with a sense of uncertainty about how to adjust its policy towards its eastern neighbour after another year of clashes with the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The EV also gives reference to the think-tanks Carnegie Europe, IISEPS, and BISS quoting their vision of the current situation, as well as, mentions the Brussels-based Office for Democratic Belarus burglary.

[Europe does Not Want a Revolution, but a Soft Transformation in Belarus](#) – Kamil Klysinski, analyst of the Center for Eastern Studies (Warsaw), a specialist in Belarus, shares his reflections on the political situation in Belarus. In particular, the expert sees a strong authority and a weak opposition, which can not even properly communicate with the public and force the ruling class to the negotiations. At the same time, both for the European Union and Belarus the most appropriate scenario is soft reforms (dialogue), the only way to prevent chaos.

[Belarus' Foreign Policy Index, #9, July-August 2012](#) – Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies presents a new issue of the Belarus' Foreign Policy Index, covering the developments of July and August 2012. This period is marked by

a serious drop in the intensity of relations. In the Russian sector the experts point a nearly two-fold drop in the Index; the development of relations with the European Union is again in the negative part of the chart.

[Diary of Dale Cooper, or How I spent the Last Month Watching ONT](#) – Yanina Melnikava, [mediakritika.by](http://mediakritika.by), during the month daily watched programs of the state TV channel ONT with a purpose to understand its specifics. The expert analyzes separately entertainment dwell, advertising, news and concludes that the modern Belarusian television journalism is "a dangerous mix of "news parquet dance" and the burning state propaganda".

[Belarus. Accents. #56](#) – Liberal club released its weekly information-analytical monitoring of Belarusian and foreign electronic media during the period September 10-16. Monitoring covers the main topics of cultural, economic, legal, business spheres as well as public administration. In particular, the authors note that inflationary potential of the country remains at a high level. In the case of a new round of economic crisis, inflation can quickly outstrip the planned 19%.

[Bulletin PISM No 87, September 20, 2012](#) – The monthly bulletin of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) is dedicated to Belarus, specifically to pre-election situation and named "Election without choice". The experts note that the campaign in the run up to the parliamentary elections highlighted the lack of dialogue between the authorities and society. It also underlined the problems of the Belarusian opposition, i.e., the internal divisions and the lack of resources required to conduct political agitation.

[It is high time to replace selfish and short-sighted opposition leaders](#) – Vladimir Matskevich, Chair of the EuroBelarus Consortium Board, argues that the main reason for the continuing feud between supporters of the boycott and the parliamentary elections' participation is the low political

culture of the Belarusian opposition.

[Will Belarusian NGOs' leaders go to the polls?](#) – On the eve of the parliamentary elections, EuroBelarus Information Service addressed to a number of NGOs' representatives to know whether they are going to go to the polls for the upcoming parliamentary elections and what do they justify their actions with. Among respondents there are Andrei Kazakevich, "Palitychnaya sfera"; Dzianis Melyantsou, BISS, Enira Bronitskaya, the Office on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Sergey Mackiewicz, the Assembly of NGOs, etc.

[Working Papers of the First International Congress](#). Working materials of the First International Congress of Belarusian researchers were published at the website of Political Sphere. Remind the Congress took place on September 23-25, 2011 in Kaunas (Lithuania) and was attended by about 200 scientists from different countries. This year, [II Congress of Belarusian researchers](#) which was held on September 28-30, in Kaunas and was attended by over 300 people.

*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.*

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## **Opposition Groups Call Not to Vote – Parliamentary Elections Digest**

As early voting continues police targets both opposition groups which actively take part in elections and those who call to boycott the elections. A number of opposition parties

withdraw their candidates and urge not to participate in elections.

**Opposition groups call not to vote.** Several major opposition political groups called on people not to vote in parliamentary elections. They include the United Civic Party, Belarusian Popular Front, Young Front, Belarusian Christian Democrats and Independent Trade Union of the Radioelectronic Industry. They stated as a **reason** for their decision the presence of political prisoners in Belarus, a lack of legislative framework for fair elections, an absence of control over vote counting and persistent repression against opposition groups.

**Two opposition parties withdraw their candidates.** The Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and the United Civic Party (UCP) decided to withdraw their parliamentary candidates (31 and 38 representatives respectively), explaining that the election process was not transparent and democratic, and authorities were ignoring their demands to release political prisoners.

**Early voting begins in House of Representatives elections.** Polling stations opened in Belarus on September 18 for early voting in the elections for the House of Representatives. The main voting day in the elections is September 23.

**Police seize printed material from office of «Tell the Truth!» movement.** Police seized a large amount of printed material from the office of the "Tell the Truth!" movement in Minsk on September 6. The officers raided the office, located in an apartment building, when many members of the opposition movement were staying there to watch a television address by a parliamentary candidate.

**Minsk court convicts Zmena activists.** Minsk Frunzenski District Court has considered the administrative charges brought against activists of the Zmena movement (youth wing of

the Tell the Truth campaign), who were brutally detained during an election picket on September 18. Hanna Kurlovich was sentenced to a fine of 2 million rubles; Yahor Viniatski to 7 days of arrest; Aliaksandr Artsybashau to 10 days of arrest; Pavel Vinahradau to 12 days of arrest.

**Police break up demonstration for election boycott in Minsk.** Police in civilian clothes broke up a demonstration for an election boycott in Minsk on September 18, violently grabbing opposition activists and journalists who were covering the event.

**Election contest of #electby.** Resource of the people election monitoring #electby jointly with the project "Election Observation: Theory and Practice" announce a contest for the best photos and videos for the parliamentary elections in Belarus. Among the nominations there are best photo, dedicated to the campaign; best video of/about the candidate. The competition prizes – camera, smartphone, e-book – will go those who will collect the largest number of "likes" in social media and at the website [electby.org](http://electby.org).

Analytics

**Report of Early Voting Observation Results.** 200 short-term and 95 long-term observers of the "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" campaign carry out everyday monitoring of the early voting at 150 polling stations all over Belarus. They note the number of early voters, evidence of compulsion to vote early and obstacles created for observers to count the number of early voters. The recent diagrams reflects information from over 120 polling stations, the reports from which were processed as of September 19, 10 p.m.

**Typical young candidate.** Alternative Youth Platform has examined all the young people registered as candidates to the parliamentary elections, and compiled a portrait of a typical candidate. There are 38 candidates at the age of 18 to 31 years. A typical candidate is a resident of Minsk. 89 percent

of them are male. Most of them do not belong to any party, the second and the third largest group are representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party and Belarusian Popular Front.

[EU Poised to Extend Sanctions Against Belarus After Elections](#) (for subscribers only) – The European Voice reports that the EU will be watching parliamentary elections in Belarus on Sunday (23 September) with a sense of uncertainty about how to adjust its policy towards its eastern neighbour after another year of clashes with the regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka. The EV also gives reference to the think-tanks Carnegie Europe, IISEPS and BISS quoting their vision of the current situation, as well as, mentions the Brussels-based ODB burglary.

[The Belarusian Opposition on the Eve of the Election Day](#) – the Analytical Belarusian Centre presents an analytical overview which is described the Belarusian opposition on the eve of the election day. The issue is dedicated to the existing situation among opposition parties on the eve of the main polling day. The experts predict the results of the parliamentary elections and possible alliances among the opposition.

[Elections from Belarus: a view from Poland](#). The monthly bulletin of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) is dedicated to Belarus, specifically to pre-election situation and named "Election without choices". The experts note that the campaign running up to the parliamentary elections highlighted the lack of dialogue between the authorities and society. It also underlined the problems of the Belarusian opposition, i.e., the internal divisions and the lack of resources required to conduct political agitation.

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## **Solidarity Day, Election Observers, New Media Watchdog – Civil Society Digest**

The most notable events of the last two weeks include the launch of the first Belarusian online media watchdog. Civil society organisations funding from the state budget becomes possible through amendments to Law on Social Services. A weekly election monitoring report notes the high rate of rejections of registration of opposition candidates initiative groups.

**Day of Solidarity with Civil Society of Belarus.** August 4, the day of arrest of Ales Bialiatsky, was chosen in 2012 by [the Committee of International Control](#) over the Human Rights Situation in Belarus as [the international Day of Solidarity with Civil Society of Belarus](#). Activists in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany, the UK, and other countries held public events, discussions, film screenings, and other activities. [Ales Bialiatski](#), head of the Human Rights Center “Viasna” was arrested on August 4, 2011 and later sentenced to four and a half years of imprisonment for his human rights activities.

**Belarusian Association of Journalists demands release of Anton Surapin.** A petition with the demand was sent to the chairperson of the Belarusian KGB on July 25. BAJ member,

[Anton Surapin](#) is staying on the detention center of the KGB. He has been detained in connection with the investigation into the criminal case of border trespass, so called "the teddy bears landing". The statements to release "teddy bear" free speech activist were also adopted by [Amnesty International](#) and [Human rights Centre "Viasna"](#).

**Joint appeal of human rights NGOs.** Representatives of human rights organizations – [Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Centre "Viasna", Committee "Solidarity", Legal Transformation Centre and the Centre for Human Rights](#) – appealed to the General Prosecutor and Chairman of the Supreme Court requesting a meeting to discuss the situation with illegal preventive detention of civil activists and youth opposition groups. As examples human rights defenders mention detentions of more than 15 people in May-July 2012.

### *Elections*

**Report on monitoring election results: July 23rd-29th.** The campaign "[Human rights defenders for free elections](#)" released its weekly report on monitoring election results. In particular, the report notes that 85 initiative groups were rejected registration which almost 4 times higher than during the previous parliamentary election. At the same time the overwhelming majority of the initiative groups in support of the oppositional candidates were registered.

**EOTP invites observers.** The project "[Election Observation: Theory and Practice Project](#)" (EOTP) invites active Belarusians to monitor the parliamentary elections to be held in September 2012. EOTP was launched in 2007 at the initiative of the students of European Humanities University (EHU) and Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC). EOTP is jointly implemented by the Belarus Watch, EHU and Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius.

### *Other Topics*

**Mediakritika.by: Truth Loves Criticism.** A new analytical media project has been launched – [Mediakritika.by](http://Mediakritika.by). Created by [a team of Belarusian journalists](#), it is aimed at comprehensive critical analysis of the media in Belarus. The new project sets the task to improve the quality of the Belarusian journalism by monitoring the quality of news as it is presented in all Belarusian media.

**OEEC workshop for small and medium business.** On July 20, [the Office of European Expertise and Communication](#) in the framework of the project "Clearing House" conducted a thematic workshop for representatives of associations and organizations working in small and medium business. The participants shared their actual issues and needs, as well as delivered the priorities of this sector in the European context.

**The new edition of the Law "On social services".** On July 13, the national legal base has introduced a new version of the law "On Social Services" which means that the law has been approved at all levels and entered into force. For the first time the law establishes the possibility of [the social services](#), which provides funding for non-profit organizations from the state budget.

**SYMPA's workshop.** On July 30-August 1, the School of Young Managers in Public Administration organizes the workshop "Human resource management in modern organizations: International experience and practical implementation". The focus of the workshop is HR for public administration. The workshop will take place at the conference hall of the Ministry of Trade. *According to the [SYMPA](#) newsletter.*

**Photo exhibition and the book "No stereotypes".** On August 1, Minsk hosted a photo exhibition and presentation of a book about the people with mental illness. The event was held under the project "[No stereotypes](#)" aimed at preventing prejudice against people with mental and intellectual illness. The project was launched in October 2011 and implemented by the international charity NGO "UniHelp" with financial support of the EU.

**APB BirdLife invites volunteers.** From July 30 to August 21, the NGO "[APB BirdLife Belarus](#)" holds a series of summer camps for the maintenance of the hydrological regime of the marsh Yelnya. This year the examination of hydrological structures and their maintenance will be made by about 50 volunteers as well as local residents of Miory and Sharkovshchina districts, Vitebsk region.

**Art works of prisoners.** On August 1, Gomel Picture Gallery opened an exhibition of works of women serving a sentence in a local penal colony. The event is organized by the Gomel Regional NGO "[Social Projects](#)" with the support of Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband eV (Germany). The aim of the project is promoting the social rehabilitation of prisoners through improving their educational and professional level.

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## **Belarus Detains Teddy Bear Photographer – Civil Society Digest**

Young Belarusian photographer faces criminal charges over the teddy bear stunt. Belarus arrests and charges anti-nuclear activists while Dmitry Medvedev was visiting Minsk to finalise \$10 billion nuclear power plant deal. The 2012 Eurovision song contest winner Loreen meets human rights defenders in Belarus.

**Photographer facing criminal charges over teddy bear stunt.** Belarus KGB has extended detention of [Anton Surapin](#), who is formally suspected of helping foreigners illegally enter Belarus. The 20-year-old student at Belarusian State University's Journalism Institute, was detained on July 13 over pictures of “pro-free speech” teddy bears that were allegedly [dropped on Belarus](#) from a plane piloted by representatives of Swedish public relations firm Studio Total on July 4.

On July 18, Studio Total co-founder Per Cromwell sent an [open letter](#) to Alyaksandr Lukashenka to reiterate that the Swedish PR agency had not had any contacts with Belarusian citizens before performing its flight to Belarus and express readiness to meet with investigators in the country.

**Loreen met human rights defenders in Belarus.** On July 13, in Minsk, Loreen, the winner of Eurovision Song Contest 2012 from Sweden, met with human rights defenders in Belarus. The meeting was attended by Ales Bialiatski's wife, Natalia Pinchuk, human rights defender Valiantsin Stefanovich, journalists Iryna Vidanova (34 Multimedia Magazine), Ales Zaleuski (Belsat), Marina Koktysh (Narodnaya Volya), etc.

**New criminal case opened against Dashkevich.** Imprisoned opposition activist [Zmitser Dashkevich](#) has been charged with persistently disobeying the prison administration's orders, an offense for which he may have his prison sentence extended by one year.

**Minsk court convicts anti-nuclear campaigners.** On July 18, Minsk Tsentralny District Court [sentenced](#) Irina Sukhiy, the NGO "Ecodom", to a fine of BYR 1,500,000 (about \$180) on charges of disorderly conduct. Mikhail Matskevich, the Centre of Legal Transformation, was arrested for three days on the same charges. Minsk Maskowski District Court [sentenced](#) an environmentalist Tatsyana Novikava and Andrei Ozharovsky, a

Russian citizen, to 5 days and 10 days in jail respectively. The activists planned to deliver [an open petition](#) against the construction of a nuclear power plant in Belarus to the Russian embassy on the occasion of Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Minsk. On July 19, [Greenpeace](#) called on the Belarusian government to do everything in its possibilities to come to an immediate release and a reversal of charges given to all four citizens.

**Legal Transformation Center appealed to Special Rapporteur.** On July 20, [Legal Transformation Center has appealed](#) to Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders with an Allegation Letter. The Letter informs about the persecution of Belarusian human rights activists [Tatiana Novikova](#), [Andrey Ozharovsky](#), [Michael Mackievich](#), [Irina Sukhiy](#), [Kasya Halitskaya](#), [Varvara Krasutskaya](#), and [Andrei Bondarenko](#) and calls for action to end the practice of prosecutions for human rights activities in Belarus.

**Weekly report on election monitoring:** The [Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections](#) campaign released two weekly election monitoring reports. During the reported period the experts note that "currently the society does not notice the beginning of the election process" and observe intensification of targeted repression against the opposition structures and the civic society. One of the general conclusions is that "election legislation fails to ensure the transparency of the process of forming the district election commissions... Civil society structures are unable to influence the activity of these bodies."

## Civil Society Activities

**Belarusian civil society at OSCE meeting.** [Yuliya Slutskaya](#), director of Solidarity with Belarus Information Office, took part at an OSCE Human Dimension Meeting on July 12-13, in Vienna. Slutskaya was invited by the U.S. delegation when it became known that Viktor Kornienko, coordinator of the Free

Elections campaign, was not allowed to leave the country. As a voice of Belarusian civil society Slutskaya delivered the main message that Belarusian society calls for vote-counting during elections to be transparent.

**EHU Class of 2012 graduation.** Two hundred and twelve students – 189 undergraduate and 23 graduate students – were awarded diplomas by [the European Humanities University](#) (EHU) at a graduation ceremony held in historic Vilnius Town Hall. EHU Founding Rector Anatoli Mikhailov congratulated students and encouraged them to stay in touch with each another and their alma mater.

**The National Platform conference.** On June 29-30, [the Conference of the Belarusian National Platform for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum](#) took place in Minsk. The Conference elected the NP Steering Committee and Uladzimir Matskevich as its head for the coming year, and adopted several [final resolutions](#): "On the release of political prisoners", "On the European dialogue on modernization with Belarusian society" and "On ensuring the freedom of the electoral process". Because of disagreements, the adoption of the Concept of the NP Development was postponed until the next Conference which is scheduled to hold this autumn. [Full video recording](#)

**Meeting in Grodno Euroclub.** Grodno Euroclub, supported by the movement For Freedom [met with Olga Stuzhinskaya](#), head of the Office for Democratic Belarus. Stuzhinskaya told about the mechanisms of cooperation of EU institutions and civil society in Belarus, as well as answered numerous questions. The meeting was attended by members of the movement For Freedom, UCP, the campaign "Tell the Truth, students, and journalists.

**AD.NAK! awarded winners.** On July 5, [the 3rd Festival of Belarusian-language advertising and communications AD.NAK!](#) ended with a solemn ceremony of awarding the winners. In particular, among the winners are posters and T-shirts for

Liapis Trubetskoy's song "Hray" (section "Belarusian-oriented advertising and communication project"), "Bulboks" (section "Social significant projects»), etc. The Festival was organized by the culture campaign [Budzma](#) and web portal [marketing.by](#).

**Green map.** New interactive [Green map](#) informs about 170 places in Minsk where it's possible to give for recycling paper, glass, plastic, metal, batteries, etc. Soon the map will cover all over Belarus. Map has been developed by the Center for Environmental Solutions (Minsk). The idea belongs to Greenpeace Russia.

**Study visit to Tallinn.** On August 12-18, a study visit "[Information and communication technologies for education sector of Belarus](#)" will take place in Tallinn, Estonia. Representatives of Belarusian profit and non-profit education sector are invited to participation. The organizers of the visit are E-Governance Academy (Tallinn) and Pact, Inc.

*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.*

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## **Moscow Behind Us And Before Us – Digest of Belarusian Analytics**

The fresh conflict between the EU and Belarus kept the analytical community busy and organised civil society. Experts

also analysed why Belarusian authorities prefer to be pro-Russian and whether the EU has any leverage against Belarusian authorities.

[Moscow Behind Us! And Before Us](#) – political analyst Andrei Fedorov talks about the possible actions of Russia towards Belarus after the recent Russian presidential elections. Expert notes that the Belarusian government chooses economic subordination to Moscow as a lesser evil compared to the highly probable collapse of the economy. Fedorov warns that the officials in Minsk should take into account that this option certainly will lead to further significant limitations of its political power.

[We have Already Passed The Point of No Return in the Relationship with the EU](#) – Piotr Martsau, editor-in-chief of Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta, answers on questions of European Radio for Belarus: Why the West trusts neither the Belarusian government nor the opposition, Why EU's position does not satisfy him, and What Lukashenka is waiting for.

[Discussion](#) – responding to the recent diplomatic conflict between Belarus and the EU, TUT.by initiated a debate on the causes of conflict and its further development. The debate participants are Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Savinykh, political observer Alexander Klaskovsky, political analyst Vadim Gigin, and BISS academic director Alexei Pikulik.

[Conflict with the EU: Lost in Translation](#) – BISS analysts Alexei Pikulik and Dzianis Melyantsou analyse the causes of the diplomatic crisis and the possible steps and the limits of the escalation of the political EU-Belarus conflict. In their opinion, the parties must refrain from further actions that could result in conflict escalation, and to develop a clear and understandable road map for resolving the conflict.

Isolation and Engagement

[For the Country or Against Lukashenka](#) Yury Zisser publishes a short opinion, in which he suggests that notions “for the country” and “against Lukashenka” are mixed. He further elaborates that those against Lukashenko view events from the position of whether they are beneficial for Lukashenko, as they only care about vengeance against him disregarding the country and the people. The author opines that it would be more appropriate to assess events in terms of their benefit for the country, the people, the economy etc. The opinion resulted in the a range of comments from readers available in the corresponding section.

[Alexei Pikulik: Opportunities of EU Influence on the Situation in Belarus are Limited](#) BISS Academic Director Alexei Pikulik in his interview to n-europe tells about EU sanctions against Belarus, and future strategies of electoral campaigns. In particular, the expert considers the ineffective policy of EU sanctions with regards to Belarus and offers to return to the «Realpolitik» – "to recreate the missing arm through the expansion of contacts, creating strong links both within civil society and opposition, and among the bureaucracy."

Elections and opposition

[Emergency Election Commission](#) – Alexei Medvetsky notes that the September parliamentary elections will be much more democratic than any of the three previous campaigns. The intrigue of the elections-2012 lies in the fact that only part of the existing MPs will be able to pass into the narrow framework articulated by the president of the 25 percent quota. The intrigue is complicated by the fact that this time the elections will be under a particularly close scrutiny of the KGB.

[Waiting for the Thaw: Prospects for the Consolidation of Opposition](#) – political analyst Yuri Chausov notes that the current political system in Belarus reserves for the political opposition only a role of a media construct. Aware of this

situation, the political opposition should build their tactics based on achievable goals within the big game of real political actors. These goals can be either increased the survival of oppositional structures, or perhaps their transformation from a policy object into a subject, going beyond what is usually called "oppositional ghetto."

## Unions and Media

[Are the Independent Democratic Trade Unions of Belarus the Engine of Social Reforms?](#) Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC) presents its newest study on the present situation in the democratic trade union movement of Belarus. It outlines the ways to achieve the most efficient use of the potential of trade unions in the formation of public opinion of the country. The target group of the given public opinion survey are the members and leaders of the independent democratic trade unions of Belarus as well as the members of other NGO's created under them.

[ByNet: Everyone Plays for Themselves](#) – Blogger Ales Gorskiy discusses the situation in Belarusian independent online media, and suggests that some of the most popular independent media resources lack objectivity, practise censorship and engage in propaganda similar to government media. He concludes that current opposition media would lose popularity if a new resource, free from censorship and propaganda, appeared in Belarus. [First reaction to the article](#) is already available from Svetlana Kalinkina.

[Hymns of Hate](#) – journalist Svetlana Kalinkina tries to answer the question why the Belarusian propaganda persistently attacks Poland. She comes to the conclusion that Poland is the only country in Europe which is trying to engage Belarus in the European Union, which contradicts the current geopolitical priorities of the Belarusian authorities.

[No answers. Why I hate the Internet](#) – In the TUT.BY

studio Viktor Martinovich and Victor Malishevskiy reflect on the issues, if the Internet is an area of freedom or a "zombie box", a tool of unification or separation of people, and how to make the Internet "smarter" and "kinder".

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## **Russian Elections: Déjà Vu for Belarusians?**

In Russia's recent elections to the State Duma the ruling United Russia party won. The Russian opposition claims that the authorities falsified the results in favour of Putin's party. Similar to Belarusian authorities, the Kremlin put pressure on independent observers, falsified the results to a certain degree and temporarily blocked independent sources of information. But overall the Russian elections and handling of post-election protests were much more democratic than in Belarus.

What kind of changes will these elections bring to Russian politics and what consequences will they have for Belarus? Although the elections and post-election protests were an important political development for Russia itself, they will not be a game changer for Belarus-Russia relations. However, Russia's policy towards Belarus may change following presidential elections in 2012.

**Political Spectrum of the New Duma**

Various observers note that despite quite convincing victory as provided by Western standards, United Russia lost a big percentage of support among the population as well as the absolute majority needed to adopt federal constitutional laws. According only to official data, the United Russia's vote share decreased by 15% in comparison with previous elections. United Russia enjoys the widest popularity in the North Caucasian republics – for example, in Chechnya it was supported by 99.51% of voters. Such facts pave the way for public speculation about massive electoral fraud, as it is hardly possible to achieve such a result without falsifications.

Russian president Dmitry Medvedev headed the ruling party's list during the elections and it seems that this helped United Russia to obtain 238 out of 450 seats. At the same time the Russian communist party won 92 seats (19.2% of votes), Just Russia – 64 seats (13.25% of votes) and the Liberal Democratic Party with its irremovable leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy – 56 seats (12% of votes).

### **A Right-Wing Failure**

It should be mentioned that there is still no sufficiently large right-centrist party in Russia, where the middle class represents a big part of the population and there is a growing demand for changes among the people. The so-called Liberal-Democratic Party actually tends to favor nationalist positions. An attempt to create the Right Cause party with aluminum and nickel tycoon Mikhail Prokhorov as its head came to a grievous end for its leader who was forced to resign amidst scandal in September. The party suffered a crushing defeat subsequently in the elections, and nowadays its new leader Andrey Dunaev is seriously considering the option of emigration.

Therefore, the State Duma will not represent a huge part of the Russian population with liberal views and it undermines

the legitimacy of the legislative body. The main ideologist of United Russia, deputy head of the presidential administration Vladislav Surkov paid attention to this fact just after the elections, stating that Russia needs a new party of "irritated urban communities".

The election results clearly demonstrate that United Russia should move to make compromises and become more liberal although they will not significantly change the political spectrum represented in the Duma. If it does not change, it will increase the gap between the ruling elite and ordinary people. Citizens of big cities, especially Moscow and Saint Petersburg, are tired of the same faces in power for such extended periods of time and they actively expressed their voiced their opinions in the most recent elections.

### **Similarities and Differences with Belarus**

Russian elections were similar to Belarusian electoral campaigns in many ways: the same pressure on independent observers ("Golos" organization), the same means of electoral falsifications (frauds with absentee ballots, fabricating results, throwing additional ballots in ballot boxes), preventive detentions (Sergey Udaltsov), mass protest actions followed by the arrests of opposition leaders (Ilya Yashin, Alexey Navalny, Sergey Mitrokhin) and the blocking of independent sources of information (Ekho Moskvyy radiostation site, "Big City" journal and Livejournal).

Nevertheless, elections were more democratic than in Belarus. There was no pressure on independent observers in the majority of voting stations, and opposition leaders could openly express their opinion in mass media and Parliament without any intervention from state authorities. This included well-known debates between Vladimir Zhirinovskyy and Alexander Khinshtein, when Zhirinovskyy harshly criticized United Russia, not troubling himself to be too careful with his choice of words.

## **What are the Implications for Belarus?**

The Communist Party has strengthened its positions as a result of the elections. It traditionally [advocates](#) the interests of the Belarusian regime in Russia and personally Alyaksander Lukashenka. In its election program the party promises to defend Belarus from “Russian oligarchs”. It could mean a potential increase in the influence of the Belarusian lobby in Moscow.

However, this election is incapable of considerably altering the state of relations between Belarus and Russia. At the same time the importance of the Eurasian Union project may rise in importance in order to show the effectiveness of the Russian authorities' foreign policy, given a sharp fall in public trust in the ruling elite.

It creates favourable conditions for Belarus in the framework of cooperation with Russia and it means that Russia will close its eyes to various controversial events that take place in its neighbouring state. Particularly, one should not wait for new video appeals of the Russian president to revive the investigation of notorious political disappearances in Belarus.

## **Elections and Belarusian-Russian Relations**

Russian presidential elections will have crucial importance for the future of this country with prime minister Vladimir Putin as the main candidate. It is hard to define what will be his level of support given mass demonstrations in Moscow and his native town of Saint-Petersburg. Today there are proposals in mass media to nominate a single opposition candidate – communist leader Gennady Zyuganov or blogger Alexey Navalny.

One will be able to define Putin's true intentions towards the Eurasian Union and the level of Russia's willingness to pay for further integration only after the 2012 presidential elections in Russia. Then the Russian authorities will

finalize their domestic and foreign policy for a middle-term perspective (5-6 years). The dynamics of Belarusian-Russian relations depends exactly on these two issues that can either promote or undermine the European ambitions of Belarus.

It may be that following the presidential elections, the Russian authorities will increase the pressure on Belarus again to obtain its remaining [assets](#) in the absence of any competition from the West.

George Plaschinsky

*The text originally appeared in Russian on [n-europe.eu](http://n-europe.eu)*

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# Appeal to the Members of the European Parliament by Belarusian Civic Leaders



Appeal by representatives of the Belarusian civil society, prepared for the recent session of the European Parliament.

## **APPEAL to the Members of the European Parliament on the Situation in Belarus**

Dear representatives of the nations of democratic Europe,

A dictatorial regime has been ruling in Belarus for 16 years already.

The so-called presidential elections took place in Belarus on the 19 December 2010. The number of representatives from the opposition parties, allowed to join the polling station electoral commissions, amounted to 0.25% of the overall number those commission members. Independent observers were disallowed to monitor the vote count. At those few polling stations where independent observers were able to prevent the substitution or slipping in of the ballots cast on the voting day, and to secure their public count, A. Lukashenka's electoral support on the 19 December election day was from 32% to 45% .

Similar results were obtained also through independent exit-polls.

Therefore there are good grounds to doubt that A. Lukashenka received an amount of votes exceeding 50% as required to win the elections in the first round.

Yet before the voting ended and prior to the vote count, the state authorities' security services started physical reprisals against A. Lukashenka's political opponents.

The peaceful protests by dozens of thousands of citizens in Miensk against the rigging of election results on the 19 December were brutally suppressed by the police special forces.

Hundreds of people were beaten up to blood and maimed. Seven of the presidential candidates were thrown into the KGB prison even before the election results were officially announced. Over 600 peaceful demonstrators were subjected to administrative arrests. In response to the peaceful protests against the election result falsification the state authorities unleashed a campaign of mass intimidation.

People continue to suffer dismissals from work and expulsion from education. Every day the KGB interrogates political and civil activists, journalists, human rights activists, conducts searches in offices and private flats, as well as equipment confiscations. The country is in the grip of political terror. Lukashenka strives by force to remain in power yet again, for which he has lost either legal or moral right.

According to the figures of the Central Electoral Commission, which is completely under Lukashenka's control, he allegedly obtained 79.65% of the votes. But the final protocol of the OSCE observer mission recorded the fact that the election process failed to correspond to democratic principles and norms, and recognised the elections as unfree and undemocratic. The independent Belarusian observers came to the same conclusion.

We, the voters who nominated the democratic candidates, being also the candidates' initiative group members, election observers, political prisoners and their relatives, are calling on the European Parliament, as well as on all the national and international institutions of the democratic states of Europe, to demonstrate their will to stand for the values on which the community of Europe is based, to stand up for the inalienable democratic rights and freedoms of the Belarusian people, as of one of the European nations. It has been confirmed to all of us yet again that the anti-democratic regime in Belarus is capable of undergoing neither re-education nor evolution, nor changing its substance.

The dictatorial regime in Belarus is a menace to the independence of Belarus, as well as to the European stability.

We propose:

1. Not to recognise the presidential elections in Belarus as free, fair, democratic, or corresponding the OSCE standards, and accordingly, not to recognise their declared outcome as a

legitimate expression of the will of the Belarusian people. We support the appeal by the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (a historical successor in the free world of the Belarusian democratic statehood) and the Belarusian diaspora organisations to the democratic governments to refrain from using the definition of "President of Belarus" in relation to the initiator of the repressions Mr A. Lukashenka.

2. Strongly to demand the immediate release of all the de facto political prisoners, as well as a stop to the wave of political terror in the country. Not to allow A. Lukashenka a possibility to use the prisoners as political hostages in a trade for solving the problems of his foreign relations.

3. To initiate the creation of an international commission made of the European Union parliamentarians to investigate the facts of the mass beating and repressions in Belarus both on the 19 December 2010 and during the period thereafter.

4. To stop any political contacts with the authorities in Minsk until the release of all the political prisoners and a complete stop to political persecutions.

5. To limit the necessary contacts with Belarus authorities to the technical level. To stop all contacts with those ministries and security agencies of the government whose representatives were and remain directly involved in the election rigging and political repressions.

6. To restore and expand the practice of denying entrance to the democratic countries of Europe to all those officials directly or indirectly involved in the election rigging and political repressions. Taking into consideration the previous experience of securing the release of political prisoners, to use all possibilities of targeted sanctions against such persons, as well as against entities under their control.

7. To reconsider the issue of Belarus's participation in the Euronest inter-parliamentary programme not before fair

elections take place in Belarus.

8. To bar Belarus from participating in inter-governmental programmes supported in the framework of the "Eastern Partnership", until the fulfilment of the four EU democratisation conditions for Belarus.

9. To compensate the restriction of contacts with the anti-democratic state authorities by a substantial expansion of assistance to the people and civil society of Belarus:

- to abolish Schengen visas for the citizens of Belarus;
- to provide institutional support, including within the Eastern Partnership framework, to the independent mass media of Belarus and to those mass media broadcasting for the Belarusian audience from other European countries (Belsat TV, Radyjo Racyja, European Radio for Belarus etc.), as well as to the activity of democratic non-governmental organisations;
- to provide political support to those parties, movements and civic initiatives that stand on the principles of democracy and human rights and are in opposition to the regime;
- to include Belarusian citizens in the EU programmes of higher education support;
- to devise a scheme of support for small business in Belarus, in a way as to exclude the state authorities' involvement and influence;
- to bolster all other forms of assistance directly to the society of Belarus, and to the political repression victims in the country.

**Belarus has changed after the 19 December 2010. A victory for democracy in Belarus is a task for Belarusians themselves: no one will bring us freedom except ourselves. Your solidarity and support in these difficult times will hasten our people's advance to democracy and freedom.**

Bahdanava, Iryna – sister of political prisoner Andrej Sannikau

Bakur, Jurka – participant of the Dec 19 protest action, victim of political repression

Bandarenka, Zinaida – actress, People's Artist of Belarus

Barodka, Zmicier – presidential candidate A.Sannikau's election agent

Bialacki, Ales – human rights defender

Chadyka, Jury – Prof. Dr. (Physics)

Chalezin, Mikalaj – Free Theatre art director

Chalip, Uladzimir – film director, father of a political prisoner, journalist Iryna Chalip

Dabravolski, Alaksandar – fmr. MP, member of the United Civil Party National Council

Ivaškovic, Viktor – head of Belarusian Popular Front Party, Minsk City Organisation

Kalada, Natalla – Free Theatre director, victim of political repression

Kanius, Hanna – presidential candidate U. Niaklajeu's election agent

Laurouskaja, Iryna – Dr. (Architecture), member of the Public Council on Historical Heritage

Marholin, Leu – deputy chairman of the United Civil Party

Maslouski, Ihar – head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, Bierascie Region Organisation

Michniuk, Zinaida – leader of Trade Union of Radio Electronics Industry Workers, Bierascie region

Miech, Ales – parliamentary candidate in the 2008 parliamentary elections

Panasiuk-Šarenda, Palina – member of the presidential candidate A.Sannikau initiative group

Pietrusievic, Fiodar – member of the presidential candidate A.Sannikau initiative group

Placko, Zmicier – member of the presidential candidate V.Rymaševski initiative group, participant of the Dec 19 protest action

Puk, Nadzieja – mother of a political prisoner, journalist

Natalla Radzina

Puk, Valancin – father of a political prisoner, journalist

Natalla Radzina

Sadouski, Piotra – fmr MP, Ambassador

Šarenda, Andrej – member of the presidential candidate V.Rymašauski initiative group, victim of political repression

Siamdzianava, Halina – fmr. MP, member of the Minsk City Electoral Commission

Šurchaj, Zmicier – member of the presidential candidate V.Rymašauski initiative group, participant of the Dec 19 protest action, a victim of political repression

Sviackaja, Valancina – election monitor in the Minsk City Electoral Commission

Viacorka, Vincuk – co-chairman of the United Democratic Forces, election monitor

11th January 2011