

Faces of Belarusian Politics: Viktar Lukashenka

Viktar Lukashenka is a big enigma. The 36 year-old lieutenant-colonel and the oldest son of the current ruler is rumoured to be the next leader of Belarus.

Although Lukashenka has three sons, only Viktar acts as a political figure. Since Viktar became National Security Aide to his father, many analysts have come to explain every move inside the regime in terms of Viktar's influence.

On his trips to Arab countries Viktar Lukashenka meets future successors of Arab leaders as his counterparts. But his father does not intend to step down anytime soon. He is just 57 and has no evident health problems. Viktar may have to bide his time.

Grooming the Next President?

Viktar Lukashenka has been a successor in the making for many years. In the 1990s, he studied at the International Relations Department of the Belarus State University, the most prestigious school in Belarus. Already at that time, Viktar displayed his ambitions in a documentary made by NTV channel. When he and his younger brother Dzmitry were asked whether they could imagine replacing their father as president, Viktar said, "Why not?" Dzmitry replied with a firm "no."

After completing his studies, Viktar first served in the Border Guards. Viktar claims that he belonged to the special forces unit, but it is rumoured that he was assigned to the regular staff in Minsk. In a rare interview, he hinted at his participation in operations planning.

From the Border Guards, he switched to the Foreign Ministry,

where he worked in 2001-03 in the Western Europe Department. From there, Viktor jumped into a new role as chief of the foreign department at Agat, a state-owned corporation that handles defence contracts for automated control systems.

In 2005, President Lukashenka appointed his 29 year-old son as his National Security Aide, a position created just for him. In 2007, Viktor joined the Security Council, a high-level organ of the regime. By that time he became involved in sensitive dealings. He regularly visited Libya, Oman, and some other Middle Eastern nations, meeting mostly top leadership and security officials.

Although Viktor kept a low profile, opponents of the regime started to publicly discuss Viktor as a prospective president after he became National Security Aide. Speaking to *Le Monde* in 2007, Lukashenka explained, "When I appointed my son to be my assistant, I wanted to open additional channels to get information. No head of state can have absolute trust in his followers, so my son helps me."



Rise to Power

Political analyst Andrei Liakhovich believes that Viktor shaped major reshuffles among Lukashenka's top officials in 2007-08. Some important regime figures lost their influence and offices. Among them was regime grey eminence Viktor Sheiman, Secretary of the Security Council. Viktor's friends gained influential offices, first of all Uladzimir Makiej, the current chief of the Presidential Administration.

Viktor consolidated his power and promoted his confidants from

the Border Guards and KGB Brest Section to influential positions. Lukashenka junior also played different government organs off against one another. He allied with the Internal Ministry against the KGB, which resulted in the appointment of Vadzim Zaytsau, Viktor's close friend, as new chief of the KGB.

Viktor then relied on the KGB while trying to overtake other agencies. In 2009, a former ally, Interior minister Uladzimir Naumau, was dismissed. Even so, the Interior remained beyond Viktor's control. Only in late 2011, after the [arrest](#) of the Deputy Internal Minister Yauhien Poludzien and dismissal of another Deputy Minister, one of them was replaced by a former KGB member and confidant of Viktor's. By that time, Viktor had already formed his own security agency – the Operative-Analytical Centre of the President.

Accused of Political Suppression

The Operative-Analytical Centre focuses on surveillance in IT sphere but is also dealing with corruption and political dissent. It soon took measures to enforce control over the Internet. For instance, in 2010, the government adopted changes in Internet regulation prepared by the Centre. They caused negative reaction in the society. But the situation with Internet did not change significantly and repressive intentions of the new structure of Viktor Lukashenka have been largely exaggerated.

In September 2011, Lukashenka created the Investigative Committee – a new agency to take over the investigative functions of the Internal Ministry, the Public Prosecution Office, and the Committee of State Control. The move provoked a new wave of speculation that the president was looking to strengthen Viktor's position. But as political analyst Alyaksey Myadvietski has pointed out, there is little evidence of this, and indeed, “almost every significant change of officials in security agencies is explained now by Viktor's

influence.



Is Viktor demonised? The *Charter 97* web site believes that he was engaged in a crackdown on protests after the last presidential elections. Opposition activist Uladzimir Baradach has said that Viktor's "personal team" might be behind the terrorist attack in the Minsk subway. But again there are no facts to back up these claims.

Indeed, according to cables published by Wikileaks, US diplomat Jonathan Moore has characterised Viktor as adamant but attentive and polite after meeting him in 2008. In public, Viktor has been courteous and allowed the public to freely take pictures of him. In a 2008 document on the Border Guards, Viktor seemed to feel uneasy about all the attention he was getting.

Dynastic Rule

For the time being, Lukashenka's oldest son seems too weak politically to run the country. He lacks his father's charisma, and has yet to prove his administrative abilities. However, in the post-Soviet space, the Azerbaijani precedent of power succession within one family suggests that Viktor's chances as successor should not be underestimated.

Hardly anyone believed that the current president of Azerbaijan would last even one year – Ilham Aliyev was known more for his casino exploits and embezzlement than for political achievements. But he succeeded.

Of course, Belarus is not Azerbaijan and has different traditions. Viktor also has one major weakness compared to Ilham – his lack of international recognition. Ilham served as Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe before assuming office as president. Viktor's biggest international achievement so far was to land on the EU

travel ban list.

Most probably, there is no succession plan at this point. Lukashenka is eager to retain power for as long as possible. He even jokes that his youngest son Mikalai – now seven years old – will be the president. Unlike Mikalai, however, Viktor grew up at a time when his father was not yet president. That makes him different from those dictators' children who have never seen the world without bodyguards.

Belarus KGB Attempts to Recruit Informants – Digest of Belarusian Politics

Belarusian authorities have not changed their ways in 2012. The former presidential candidate Mikola Statkevich will be transferred to a detention facility with harsher conditions, the KGB is trying to recruit new informants and more democratic activists are under pressure.

Statkevich to be moved to cell-type prison. On January 12, in a trial that took place in Correctional Institution #17 in Shklow, Mahilyow region. The convicted former presidential candidate Mikalay Statkevich was [found guilty](#) of violating prison rules and must be moved from the facility to a higher-security prison for three years. The charge was brought against Mr. Statkevich because of his missing number tag and failure to mention handkerchiefs among his personal items. In May 2011, a district judge in Minsk sentenced Mr. Statkevich to six years in a medium-security prison, finding him guilty of organizing "mass disorder" in connection with the December 19, 2010 post-election protest.

Opposition youths say that KGB attempted to recruit them as informants. Five members of an opposition youth group called Malady Front (Young Front) [revealed](#) to reporters on January 9 that officers of the Committee for State Security (KGB) had attempted to recruit them as informants. The young men were contacted by KGB officers while they were serving jail sentences in the detention center on Akrestsina Street following their arrest in Minsk on December 19, 2011.

Two jailed over protest in front of KGB office. An opposition activist Mikita Kavalenka who demonstrated in front of the headquarters of the Committee for State Security (KGB) in Minsk on January 8 and a Belsat TV reporter Alyaksandr Barazanka who filmed the protest were [sentenced](#) to jail terms on January 09. Kavalenka was sentenced to 15 days in jail, Barazanka was handed an 11-day jail term. Both were found guilty of participation in an unauthorized demonstration under Article 23.34 of the Civil Offenses Code. Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, [condemned](#) on January 11 the sentencing of Belarusian journalist Alyaksandr Barazanka.

Seven Russian urban explorers left Belarus after serving out jail terms. On January 12, seven Russian urban explorers [served](#) out their 10-day jail sentences and boarded a train for Moscow. They were part of a group of 13 young people from Russia who were arrested at a hotel in Minsk on January 2 following complaints about their rowdy behavior and sentenced to jail on charges of disorderly conduct. The Russians have been banned from traveling to Belarus in the next five years.

Vitsebsk opposition activist Siarhei Kavalenka faces three years of prison. Vitsebsk activist of the Conservative Christian Party “Belarusian Popular Front” Siarhei Kavalenka may be [imprisoned](#) for up to three years for alleged violation of suspended sentence restrictions. The activist is currently held in a local

detention center and has gone on a hunger strike in protests against the criminal prosecution.

Siarhei Kavalenka refuses to stop his hunger-strike. Siarhei Kavalenka, a Vitebsk member of the Conservative-Christian Party "Belarusian Popular Front", has been placed in a [detention](#) facility. He has been on hunger strike from December 19 protesting against criminal prosecution. He is charged with violating article 415 (avoidance of serving sentence) for violations of the rules of serving suspended sentence. The activist may face up to three years in prison.

Sviatlana Chornaya continues hunger strike against death sentence for Kanavalau and Kavaljou. A disabled woman in Minsk continues her [hunger strike](#) in protest against the death sentence passed on Dmitri Konovalov and Vladislav Kovalyov in the subway bombing trial in Minsk. Svyatlana Chornaya, who has a second-degree disability, began the strike on November 30.

The new Belarusian calendar for the next 8 years. Advertising consultant Julia Lyashkevich and designer Baba-Zhaba have created "[Prison Calendar](#)" to help understand the feeling of time in custody. The Calendar is to remind people of political prisoners and all unjustly imprisoned in Belarus.

Law Enforcement Officers Have Access to Restricted Sites in Byenet. The amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences and the Procedural-Executive Code of Administrative Offenses have taken [effect](#) on January 6. Now Internet providers, still making access to the restricted information in the government offices and educational institutions available, will be subject to a fine. Law enforcement agencies are the only open-shelf representatives of state structures. As Euroradio [reports](#), about 60 online resources are included in the list of restricted access in Belarus. Most of the "blacklisted" resources are pornographic, but as well as some prominent opposition websites such as charter97.org, belaruspartisan.org, spring96.org, prokopovich.net,

prokopovi.ch, Lipkovichea.livejournal.com.

BHC is under threat of liquidation. The Ministry of Taxation requests the Ministry of Justice to initiate a process of [liquidation](#) of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. Under the law, NGO activities can be suspended or liquidated if an NGO has received two warnings over a one year span of time. BHC has received two warnings for violating tax laws. BHC is the single registered human rights organization of the national level in Belarus.

Justice ministry suspends consideration of Belarusian Christian Democracy's registration application. The Belarusian justice ministry has notified Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD) that consideration of the party's application for registration has [suspended](#) for a month, without explaining the reason, BCD Executive Secretary Dzyanis Sadowski said. The party filed its registration application on December 20, 2011, after holding another, fourth founding conference.

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.

Who Rules Belarus?

Last summer over half of Belarusians polled by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies said that Alyaksandr Lukashenka based his authority primarily on the police, the military and the KGB. A closer look at who actually runs the security services and other governmental agencies in Belarus reveals interesting facts and trends.

It appears that those who were born outside of Belarus and educated in Russia heavily dominate the leadership of the police, the military and the KGB, while most 'technocrats' were born and educated within Belarus. Another notable fact is that most Belarusian officials are old and age is an important indicator in predicting their views. Younger ministers tend to be more liberal and less hawkish than their older colleagues.

Mercenaries in Charge of Security Services?

Nearly all top officials of the Belarusian security services were born outside of Belarus and came to the country following their studies in Moscow. In this respect Belarus is a unique country.

Yury Zhadobin, the current Minister of Defense and a former KGB chief, was born in Ukraine. In 2004, he obtained his most recent degree at the Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Federation. According to his official biography he has never studied in Belarus. The current KGB chief Vadim Zaitsev was also born in Ukraine. He has three degrees from various Russian military institutions and none from Belarus.

Anatol Kulyashou, the Minister of Interior who is also in charge of the police, was born in Azerbaijan. Although he has lived most of his life in Belarus, his most recent degree is also from a Moscow-based institution – the Russian Academy of the Interior. The head of the Presidential Security Service Andrei Vtiurin was born and educated in Russia and has never studied elsewhere.

Belarus is an ethnically homogenous country where Belarusians constitute over 85% of the population. An even larger majority of the current population was born in Belarus. This majority is clearly underrepresented among the leadership of the security services.

Many in the opposition call those who lead the security services in Belarus Lukashenka's mercenaries. It is not surprising – all officials mentioned above are on the EU travel ban list because of their active involvement in human rights violations and political repression.

According to a popular theory, the Russian/Belarusian security services manipulated Lukashenka and provoked the post-election [crackdown](#) on 19 December 2010. Many think that Moscow was the main beneficiary of last year's crackdown and subsequent imprisonment of hundreds, including nearly all opposition presidential candidates. As a result of the crackdown Belarus has become more internationally isolated and dependent upon Russia.

But the influence of the Moscow loyalists may soon diminish. Although Lukashenka granted additional powers to the KGB recently, he also established a new security agency – the Investigations Committee of the Republic of Belarus, which is supposed to keep an eye on all other security services. Belarusian-born and educated Valery Vakulchyk was appointed as its head last month.

Lukashenka's son Viktor was sitting next to Vakulchyk as his father announced the appointment. The influence of Viktor, who acts as Lukashenka's senior security advisor, is growing, often at the expense of other players.

'Technocrats'

Belarusian ministries not in charge of security are a mixed bag. Ministers of emergency situations, architecture, labour and information were born in Russia. Sergei Martynov – the Foreign Affairs Minister – was born in Armenia and completed his university education in Russia.

It is interesting to note that the ministries of information and foreign affairs – the most ideologically charged agencies – are under control of those who were born outside Belarus.

But the Prime Minister Mikhail Miasnikovich and sixteen other ministers were born and educated in Belarus. These include the "technocrat" ministers of economy, finance, tax and industry.

In stark contrast with the Belarusian security services and those in charge of ideology, all seven regional governors were born and educated only in Belarus. The governor of Mahiliou region also has a degree from Dresden Technical University. All regional governors except one are in their 50s and 60s.

The other notable Belarus-born and Western-educated official is the head of the Presidential Administration Uladzimir Makey. He studied at the Diplomatic Academy of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the early 1990s.

Belarusian-Style Gerontocracy

According to independent public opinion polls, older people are the main support base of Lukashenka. Not surprisingly, they are overrepresented in the country's leadership.

According to the Belarusian independent weekly Nasha Niva which surveyed the top 60 Belarusian officials, their average age is 54.4 years. Belarus can lay claim to having the oldest leadership of any country in the region. According to Nasha Niva, the average age in Russia is 45 years and in Estonia many ministers are younger than 40.

Belarus has only one minister under 40 – the Minister of Culture Pavel Latushka. He is also the only minister who uses primarily Belarusian in his official speeches. Other younger officials are concentrated in the Government – Deputy Prime Minister Siarhei Rumas and Minister of Economy Mikalai Snapkouski were born in Belarus and are in their early 40s. They all have a reputation as [liberals](#).

At the other end of the spectrum is the head of the upper chamber of the Belarusian Parliament Anatol Rubinov. The 72

year old is known to have almost Stalinist political views.

The Bigger Picture

When earlier this month British historian Norman Davies presented his new book "Vanished Kingdoms," he used Belarus as an example of a nation without a mature elite. According to him, a fragile Belarusian state emerged after World War I, but Stalin [purged](#) nearly all its national elite in late 1930s. In his opinion this is the main reason why today Belarusians cannot govern themselves other than by a "teapot dictator" such as Lukashenka. Norman Davies added that it usually takes time to form a demos and a self-sufficient political entity.

Today the new Belarusian-born elite is almost absent in the leadership of the security services. In terms of its age, the governing elite looks more like a Soviet Politburo. But this may change soon. Despite obstacles which the Belarusian government and Western visa barriers [create](#), many Belarusians can travel abroad and get uncensored information on the Internet. And the current level of political repression is incomparable with Stalin's purges.

It means that in the future the Belarusian authorities may not have enough properly Sovietized people to run the country. The younger Belarus-born bureaucrats tend to be more liberal and market-oriented. Some even openly speak Belarusian. They are gradually replacing the older generation who still have sentimental feelings about the Soviet past.

Those who want to see Belarus respect the rule of law and human rights need to think about how to influence and engage the new and future generations of the Belarusian elite. Sometimes Western governments and donors focus solely on how to punish or change the current political regime and forget about the bigger picture. Putting pressure on the regime is important but so is implementing concrete [measures](#) to integrate Belarusians into the rest of Europe.

Long Live Stalin?

Last Sunday, a thousand Belarusians carrying national flags and wooden crosses marched from central Minsk to the Kurapaty forest. Nearly 100,000 people were shot dead during the Stalin era in Kurapaty. On just one day 74 years ago, more than a hundred representatives of the intellectual elite of Soviet Belarus were also shot dead in the cellars of the Minsk KGB (then known as NKVD) internal prison "Amerikanka".

The archive of the President of the Russian Federation still keeps the list with the names of the 103 residents of Soviet Belarus who were sentenced to death by Joseph Stalin on 15 September 1937 and shot on the night of 29 October 1937. According to some historians, this was the way Stalin's assassins celebrated the day of Lenin's Komsomol – The Communist Union of Youth's anniversary. The victims were Belarusian writers (as many as 22 people), government officials, labor leaders, prominent doctors, teachers, priests, military officers, students and others.

The Tunnel of Death

Leanid Marakou, who is a researcher of Stalin's repressions in Belarus and an author of the multivolume encyclopedia with biographies of thousands of persecuted intellectuals, has documentary evidence that Soviet authorities repressed more than 600 public and cultural figures of Soviet Belarus in the three autumn months of 1937. In the period from August 1937 to

December 1938, known as the "bloody tunnel of death", over 10,000 Belarusian people were killed.

Marakou estimates that the NKVD killed or exiled to concentration camps up to 90 percent of Belarusian writers (over 500), 100 percent of priests (around 3000), one in three teachers (around 4,000), around five thousand state officials (engineers, economists, and almost all directors of factories then in Belarus). According to Marakou, "the secret NKVD institutions worked for Stalin in the 1930s. They had already foreseen the huge potential in the geographic location of Belarus by that time".

He points out that Bolshevik authorities in Moscow were primarily concerned about the possible independence of Belarus and its separation from the Soviet Union. To avoid this, they destroyed the nation's intellectual elite and gene pool that had been accumulated over the centuries. Marakou explains that "the characteristic fear, indifference and passivity in Belarusian people today is a result of that genocide."

Once a successful businessman, Marakou left his lucrative job to start researching Stalin's terror 10 years ago when he learned that his uncle – talented Belarusian poet Valery Marakou – died on that terrible night on October 30, 1937.

According to the data of another Soviet totalitarianism researcher Ihar Kuznyatsou, between 600,000 and 1,500,000 residents of Soviet Belarus became the victims of Stalin's repressions and terror: almost every tenth person, every third or fourth family. By official figures, 152,399 criminal cases and 235,552 people were revisited after Stalin's death. 175,914 of the repressed Belarusians were rehabilitated, but 59,638 of the victims were denied rehabilitation.

However, it is impossible to count the exact number of repressed people in Soviet Belarus. In today's Belarus, KGB archives are still closed to researchers.

Back in the 1930s

Four years ago, prominent scholars and former political prisoners in Minsk organized a public tribunal to deal with the crimes of Stalinism in Belarus. They stated that it was not impossible for the country to become a rule-of-law state without having a fair trial over the communist crimes and criminals. Belarus has commemorated 20 years of its sovereignty this year, but the state under 17-years of Alexander Lukashenka's rule has not even tried to revisit the Soviet past. We witness attempts to rehabilitate Stalin and to level crimes of the Soviet regime in the country that has suffered so much from Stalinism.

New high school history textbooks downplay the scale of crimes of the communists. They stress the positive role of Stalin in the historical process. Official propaganda has the same attitude. For instance, in the biographical reference book "The Generals of the State Security of Belarus" (Minsk, 2008), compiled by KGB Major-General Ivan Yurkin, it is claimed that the KGB simply maintained "social order" and "implemented the leading party guidance". The growth in repressions was explained by the battle within the intelligentsia for whom it was a "quick and effective way to get rid of competitors."

In the summer of 2005, the historical and cultural complex "Stalin Line" was opened not far from Zaslavye town near Minsk. On official holidays visitors can observe spectacular combat reconstructions between Soviet and Nazi soldiers. Official ceremonies usually take place next to the monument of Joseph Stalin which was erected there several years ago. Another bloody dictator's monument was installed in 2000 by the Belarusian authorities in the town of Svislach in Hrodna voblast. It happened almost four decades after a huge Stalin monument was removed from Minsk Central Square as a part of the Khrushchev Thaw.

In 2006, a three-meter monument to the founder of the KGB,

"the initiator of mass terror, provocation, and the institution of hostages" Felix Dzerzhinsky was raised on the territory of the Minsk Military Academy. The initiator of that memorial was the Chairman of the State Border Guard Service Alexander Paulovski, for whom Dzerzhinsky was a "positive figure in our history." Another monument to Dzerzhinsky has been standing in front of the KGB headquarter in the center of Minsk since the Soviet era.

There are more similar stories to tell. Belarus remains the only post-Soviet republic which has kept the ominous name of the KGB without any changes and celebrates officially the day of the October Bolshevik Revolution.

In this context, all the events that have taken place after the brutal crackdown of opposition protests on the day of presidential elections on 19 December 2010 in Minsk seem very symptomatic. Lukashenka's special riot forces arrested dozens of opposition figures, journalists and civic activists, including five presidential candidates. They were thrown into the same "Amerikanka" prison – nowadays the Minsk KGB detention center.

If someone thinks that Stalinism is impossible in the 21st century right at the center of Europe, the Belarusian authorities are trying to prove the opposite. The recent amendments to the Belarusian law related to financing of parties and NGOs from abroad, holding mass rallies and expanding powers of the KGB that were [introduced](#) in October, are another step in this direction.

Kanstantsin Lashkevich

The Paper-Based Eurasian Union – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Belarusian analysts discuss new integration initiatives in the post-Soviet Space and the promise of Europe's Eastern Partnership. Other topics include Minsk Gay Pride 2011, the profile of an average internet user in Belarus and the effect of proposed legislation amendments targeting NGOs and foreign aid.

[The paper-based Eurasian Union.](#) Andrei Fyodarau analyzes Vladimir Putin and Alyaksandr Lukashenka's recent articles on the creation of the Eurasian Union. Fyodarau thinks that at the basis of the Eurasian Union initiative is the Russian imperial idea of "collecting the lands." Alexander Lukashenka also understands it. In his publication Lukashenka keeps returning to the idea that "only equality of partners, including the equality of economic conditions with equal access to a common energy and transport system, will create a solid foundation for our union". Fyodarau questions the economic viability of the Eurasian Union idea.

[Summit of the Eastern Partnership and Belarus: Nothing for Nothing](#) Analyst Dzianis Melyantsou thinks that the Eastern Partnership fails to offer the stimuli necessary for the Belarusian authorities to embark upon reforms. The financial and other possibilities of the EaP remain very much limited. He thinks that there is little chance Belarus will withdraw from the Eastern Partnership because of the potential significance of Minsk's engagement in the partnership program with the European Union and the need to counterweigh pressures from Moscow.

[Belarusian opposition is to be cooked like a frog.](#) Political columnist Pavlyuk Bykovsky and human rights defender Vladimir Labkovich comment on the recent amendments to the legislation.

Bykovsky is inclined to not overstate the real effect of the "anti-revolutionary package", since much of the amendment follows the existing rules. According to Labkovich, the situation is fraught as it marks the final reduction of political alternatives and the transition of civil society structures into an underground dissident movement.

[Olga Smolianko: freedom of association depends on the will of state.](#) A lawyer and expert in the field of freedom of association, Director of the Legal Transformation Center Olga Smolianko reflects on the problems existing in the registration system for public associations. The process of establishment and registration is very difficult in practice and often differs from the law in the books. Belarusian legislation imposes criminal liability for organizing and participating in the activities of unregistered organizations. Although the authorities rarely invoke this article, many activists and initiatives are under constant threat of criminal prosecution. Even registration of an organization abroad is not an absolute defense against it.

[Who uses the Internet in Belarus?](#) The European Radio for Belarus along with Mikhail Doroshevich, Head of Gemius-Belarus, have composed a portrait of a Belarusian internet user. 33% of Belarusian internet users live in Minsk. The most active group are users of 25-34 years (28%), who make up 34% of all views and spend 33% of their time on the web. The most popular websites in Belarus include portal tut.by and social networks vkontakte.ru and odnoklassniki.ru.

[Vyacheslav Bortnik: Will Belarusian authorities love gays?](#) Human rights activist Vyacheslav Bortnik analyzes recent remarks by Lukashenka and the political situation, and concludes that the authorities will not ban the scheduled "Minsk Gay Pride 2011" march on 22 October. Bortnik thinks that the Belarusian authorities are less homophobic than the Belarusian opposition and that allowing a gay parade in Minsk would be the best present for German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle.

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Hit by the Crisis Lukashenka Looks for Money and Strengthens the KGB

Unable to deal with the economic crisis by economic means and fearing a revolution, Belarusian ruler Alyaksandr Lukashenka strengthens the KGB.

Last Thursday the Belarusian rouble fell sharply against the US dollar. Now the rate is 9,000 Belarusian rubles for one dollar. In September, the rate was less than 8,000 rubles. The new fall clearly breached Lukashenka's promise that the Belarusian national currency would be strengthened.

Because of high inflation, wages and salaries are stagnating. Most Belarusians today earn two or three times less than they did a year ago. The situation with pensions is even worse as many retired people have to survive on less than 100 dollars per month.

The Belarus National Bank is trying to convince people to keep their Belarusian rubles. But no one trusts the national currency anymore. The Government cannot do much to strengthen the national currency because it has no money. On Thursday, Belarus asked Russia to postpone payments for natural gas and suggested paying for 2011 deliveries in 2012.

Earlier this week the Belarusian government asked five of the most profitable national companies, including Belaruskali or

Druzhba Oil Pipeline, to quickly transfer a part of their profits to the so-called National Development Fund. Under normal circumstances, such payments would be due only after the end of the year.

The government also ordered Belarusbank, the largest financial institution in the country, to suspend offering loans for residential developers who plan to complete construction after this year. As a result, a lot of people are struggling to either find a huge sum to pay developers or give up building their own housing.

Although Lukashenka's rule seems today very vulnerable and fragile today, the opposition is still much weaker. No significant protests are taking place in Belarus today. The 'People's rallies,' called for by some opposition activists, took place on the 8th of October. But they [looked](#) more like a farce and were characterized by extremely poor attendance. However, it is difficult to blame the opposition. Opposition activists have had to deal with intimidation and outright violence for years. They were finally crushed after the last year presidential elections and the pressure is increasing.

As the economic clouds get darker, the Belarusian rubber-stamp parliament has almost secretly adopted new amendments to give more rights to the Belarusian KGB, which still keeps its Soviet name. The proposed amendments allow KGB officers to enter any private or public places whenever they wish and to use force almost without restrictions.

In addition, the new legislation puts an absolute ban on foreign grants and financial aid. That will certainly be a hard blow for media, political organizations or civil society which have virtually no resources inside the country. Last but not least, the new amendments introduce harsher punishments for organization of and participation in public protests, as well as broadening the definitions of 'spying' and treason.

Although there is no strong opposition, the Belarusian regime has serious reasons to be afraid. Lukashenka is probably running out of money. The Belarusian authorities were never able to generate or attract serious money. The regime's [arms trade](#) was more akin to a casino game than a sustainable business. Trade in petroleum products was more lucrative but sufficient only to satisfy regime insiders rather than the country as a whole.

The regime's poverty may turn even its employees against Lukashenka. And a tiny spark of discontent may turn into a real revolution. To avoid it, the Belarusian strongman needs to tighten the screws and find money as soon as possible. And that proves increasingly difficult. Neither Russia nor the West are ready to inject significant amounts into the Belarusian economy. Other solutions include [selling](#) the most valuable national assets such as potash deposits to the Russians and seeking help from China. Iran cannot help much.

So the Belarusian opposition will hardly be able to benefit. Parallels between Belarus and late Communist Poland and calls for a "Round Table" with the regime would not be accurate because Belarusian civil society is weak. The situation in Belarus looks more like late Ceausescu's Romania and their dubious revolution.

The Polish and Romanian regime changes in 1989 were worlds apart. In Poland, strong opposition and civil society forced a military ruler into negotiations which eventually led to establishing democracy and dismantling all essential institutions of the old regime. In Romania, with its non-existent opposition and civil society, the regime insiders just dragged Ceausescu out of the palace and killed him after a kangaroo trial. The old Romanian regime was able to delay a democratic transition for many years.

As many times before in the world history, the sultanistic regime in Belarus is evolving towards full-blown

authoritarianism. But how long this authoritarianism will last depends in the first place on the opposition that badly needs to reorganize, and only then on external support.

SB

Authorities Target Recipients of Foreign Aid – Politics and Civil Society Digest

Belarusian authorities increasingly target those who receive financial support from international and foreign donors. Years ago they cut off virtually all sources of domestic financial support of civil society. Now they have stepped up their efforts to punish those who manage to find external funding and fail to comply with the draconian domestic regulation of foreign aid. Even after the arrest of Ales Byaliatski on tax fraud charges, representatives of donors fail to take the necessary measures not to worsen the risks which Belarusian activists have to deal with.

POLITICS

Investigations on relationships with foreign funds. On 22 September, Aliaksandr Silkou, Mahiliou regional coordinator of the movement “For Freedom”, was [interrogated](#) by a local customs department over smuggling charges. According to the activist, Brest police detained a Polish citizen Mr. Jaskowicki and seized a grant application with Mr. Silkou’s name on it as the stated applicant. On 22 September, Head of Hrodna branch of Belarusian Popular Front Vadzim Saranchukou was [interrogated](#) by

the KGB about the relationship he has with foreign funds. Officials also mentioned a Polish citizen detained at the border who was carrying financial information, but with a different name.

Arrests for leaflets about silent protests. On 19 September, District Court in Homel [sentenced](#) activists Dmitry Shevchenko and Dmitry Karashkov to administrative detention respectively to 15 days and 3 days (violation of procedures for organization and conduct of mass events). The activists were arrested for distribution of information materials for the planned 21 September, actions of silent protest. Immediately after the trial, Shevchenko went on hunger strike.

Arrests for white-red-white flags. On 19 September, Tsentralny District Court in Minsk [sentenced](#) Uladzimer Yaromenak and Nasta Palazhanka respectively to 12 and 11 days of administrative arrest for alleged violating Art. 23.34 of the Administrative Code (violation of procedures for organization and conduct of mass events). The activists were detained in downtown Minsk as they were trying to hang out white-red-white flags of the pre-Lukashenka Belarus. This way they tried to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the white-red-white flag as the state symbols back in 1991.

Arrest and fine for leaflets about People Assembly. On 21 September, Homel District Court [sentenced](#) two local activists Andrei Tsianiuta (10 days of arrest) and Vasil Takarenka (Br 350,000 fine or \$50) for distributing leaflets the day before. Leaflets were devoted to the upcoming [People Assembly](#) on 8 October.

Activist arrested right at police department. On 21 September, a United Civic Party activist Olga Paderina has been [sentenced](#) to 10 days' administrative arrest by the court of Leninski district of Minsk under Article 21.14 of the Administrative Code (violation of municipal improvement and maintenance rules

in centers of population). Olga Paderina was detained on 18 September late at night for pasting up stickers for the "Revolution through social networks" campaign.

Homel activist sentenced to 15 days of arrest.

On 22 September, Homel Tsentralny District Court [sentenced](#) local opposition activist Kanstantsin Zhukouski to 15 days of administrative arrest for alleged usage of foul language and resisting arrest. Zhukouski was detained in downtown Homel before silent protests, and was reportedly beaten and later taken to the hospital.

Uladzimir Kobets: How I was recruited by KGB. Uladzimir Kobets, Andrei Sannikov's campaign chief, has told how he had been [forced](#) to sign a collaboration agreement at the KGB.

Silent protest on 21 September. After a two-month break, the organizers of silent protests called again people to the streets. On 21 September, [participants](#) should have been just walking down along the main avenues/streets of their cities. A small number of people were noticed at the action: dozens of regions, up to 300 people in Minsk. Despite the presence of police there were no detentions.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Forum of cyclists in Hrodna. On 17-18 September, the first Forum of cyclists was [held](#) in Hrodna. The Forum aimed at gathering of cyclists to fight for the development of a cycling movement. There were 12 participants, representatives of regional centers of Belarus.

Independent Student Conference. On 18 September, Minsk hosted the conference "Higher Education in Belarus through the eyes of students". The organizer is "Center for Development of student initiatives". The conference [adopted](#) a resolution in which the participants, noting the absence in the public sphere students' position in relation to higher education in Belarus, presented their vision to improve its elements.

Public Advisory Council dismissed. On 23 September, Head of Presidential Administration Vladimir Makey [dismissed](#) the Public Advisory Council due to its members desire not to be accused of collaboration with the authorities. Makey notes that "the personal experience and constructivism of former Council's members could be useful in the future in the context of the great dialog, announced by the government".

Group of reaction. National platform of Civil Society Forum of EaP is [establishing](#) a "Group of reaction" empowered to conduct dialogue and negotiation with different actors of the political process. Ulad Velichko (EuroBelarus), Ales Belyatsky (Viasna), Vladimir Mackievich (AHT/CSI) and Sergei Mackievich (the NGO Assembly) are nominated to the Group. The final decision on the composition and functions of the Group should be taken at the Conference of the National Platform in October.

Tournament of *Zabej*. On September 24, the 2nd tournament of community *Zabej* will [bring](#) together more than 30 teams from various amateur football championships and towns in Belarus. Conducting the mass game *Zabej* demonstrates to young people possibility of self-organizing and contributes to the development of initiatives at the grassroots level.

Week of Informal Education. On 24 September-2 October, the 6th Week of Informal Education will be [held](#) in Belarus. This year the main topic of the Week is "Informal education and regional development". Seminars, trainings, round tables, master classes will be held in Grodno, Gomel, Mogilev, Brest, as well as in Smalyavichi, Hodosy, Krychau, Barysau, Zhodzina, Svetlahorsk, Shchuchin, Maladechna.

Republican Social Forum. On 24-25 October, the Republican Social Forum will be [held](#) in Homel. The purpose of the Forum is a demonstration, development and promotion of mechanisms and practices of social partnership between public

authorities, NGOs and business for sustainable social development. Among the organizers there are Homel regional executive committee, International Education Center (IBB), NGO ACT, etc.

Belarusian House in Warsaw. In Warsaw, Belarusian political emigrants [establish](#) an organization that aims to unite local Belarusians through counseling, organization of joint events, cultural activities and lobbying of the Belarusian minority in Polish society. One of the Belarusian House founders is a member of movement "For Freedom" Ales Zarembyuk.

Stable dynamics of registration. During the eight months of this year the Ministry of Justice has [registered](#) 55 NGOs, 11 foundations, one trade union and one association. Compared to the previous five years, the dynamics of registration has not changed significantly.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. Politics & Civil Society Digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. The digests often go beyond the hot stories already available in other English-language media.



Choking the Social Networks Revolution

Western media often spread myths about the extent of Internet censorship in Belarus. Many have the impression that all or many social media sites have been shut down or blocked by

Belarusian KGB. The truth is that unlike television or FM radio, Internet access remains largely unrestricted in Belarus.

Because only a small fraction of Belarusians use Internet to get political information, authorities are rather relaxed about Internet censorship. They usually intervene to temporarily block certain Internet web sites around the dates of scheduled protests. In addition, they effectively use traditional methods against pro-democracy activists such as arrests and pressure on protestors' universities and employers.

Vkontakte is the most popular social network in Belarus which Belarus authorities actively target. The network headquartered in Russia looks very similar to Facebook. Vkontakte is hosting the "Movement for the Future – Revolution Through Social Network" group, where citizen actions are announced, commented and reported on. Instead of blocking the whole network, Belarusian authorities deploy more creative approaches.

For instance, around 22 June a fake page appeared for Belarusian users, informing them that the group page was infected by a virus, and trying to collect information about their accounts from them. On 4 July, the group's main page was closed for all visitors globally by the administration of Vkontakte, supposedly for violations of the rules by the group. The group's page was then reopened with 10 times less members than it used to have (was around 200,000 and is now around 20,000). Around 13 July, access to the whole Vkontakte site was blocked inside Belarus for several hours before and during the action of that day.

Security services also visit pro-democracy activists who can be easily identified on social networks. In addition, the authorities increasingly harass bloggers. The most notable criminal cases for defamation were initiated against Andrei

Poczobut and Evgeny Lipkovich. Security service agents also conduct "preemptive talks" with pro-democracy activists and detain the most active for short periods of time. Authorities can put pressure on virtually every employer or university in Belarus. The economy is still in state hands in Belarus and most people work on the basis of short-term employment contracts. With rising unemployment the prospect of losing a job is enough to deter many from active protests.

Finally, around the dates of protests opposition and independent web sites are routinely subjected to denial of service attacks. That involves saturating the target web site with an overwhelming number of external requests. The web site then cannot respond to legitimate traffic, or responds so slowly as to be rendered effectively unavailable. Charter97, Nasha Niva and Euroradio web sites are the main targets of attackers.

The Western media often overestimate penetration of Internet and social networks in Belarus. Although the role of Internet in Belarus is steadily increasing, it is far from being the dominant source of information. According to a May survey of the Independent Institute for Sociological and Political Studies, 33% of the adult population in Belarus received information from the Internet and only 2.2% – from social networks. This 33% include hard line supporters of the authorities and those who never read any political news on Internet.

Only around 2% of the Belarusians use Facebook. Twitter is even less popular. According to various estimates, there are less than 50 thousand Twitter users in all regions of Belarus. However, the authorities take no chances and actively use trolling and jamming on the days of street actions. Security services use nicknames very similar to those of pro-democracy activists and independent media to spread false news and negative comments. That makes it very difficult for pro-democracy activists to rely on Twitter.

Because of the small numbers and chaotic character of social networks protests security services can crack down on them with relative ease.

Most analysts agree that only when "ordinary" Belarusians begin to protest the situation may pose a serious threat to authorities. The vast majority of Belarusians relies almost exclusively on television and FM radio to receive information. These media are strictly controlled in Belarus and wide-scale crossborder broadcasts from neighbouring Poland and Lithuania remain possible only in theory.

YK

Revolution through Social Networks: Trends and Figures

Yesterday Belarus security services detained over 100 participants of the "Revolution through Social Networks". Authorities undertake unprecedented measures to prevent the actions relying on men in plain clothes and transporting detainees in vehicles without any license plates. Many are severely beaten by the security service agents. The number of detainees and prisoners is clearly increasing. Respectively number of "silent protests" participants decreasing in comparison with previous weeks. The average person sentenced for 'silent protests' is a 22-24 year-old male.

In total, across the country for all silent protests around 2000 people (roughly half of them in Minsk) were detained, including around 80 journalists. Belarus authorities block access to social networking web sites and conduct preventive arrests and "preventative talks" with the activists of the

action. Those who repeatedly take part in protests face tougher punishment. For example, Ruslan Ustimenko from Gomel is now spending 30 days of administrative arrest in solitary confinement for participating in several "silent actions".

Table 1. Brief statistics on the actions "Revolution through a social network" (according [Human rights Center Viasna](#), [BAJ](#) and independent media; there is no official statistics)

Date	Engaged cities	Number of participants	Number of detained	Judicial punishment
June 01	Minsk some regional centers	No data	No data	–
June 08	Minsk some regional centers	400 ppl in Minsk 50 ppl in each regional center	No detained	–
June 15	Minsk all regional centers: Brest, Grodno, Gomel, Vitebsk, Mogilev 10 district cities	1-2 thsd ppl in Minsk several hundred ppl in regional centers, dozens of ppl in cities	more than 240 ppl , including 9 journalists	1 person in Gomel a fine of Br770 000 (\$150) charged under the administrative Article 17.1 "disorderly conduct" and Article 23.4 "disobeying to police"
June 22	Minsk all regional centers: Brest, Grodno, Gomel, Vitebsk, Mogilev 40 district cities	up to 4 thsd ppl in Minsk several hundred ppl in each regional center dozens-hundreds of ppl	more than 460 ppl , including 8 journalists	33 persons fines from Br70 thsd to Br1.05 million (from \$14 to \$200) all charged under the administrative Article 17.1 "disorderly conduct"

<p>June 29</p>	<p>Minsk (heavy rain) all regional centers: Brest, Grodno, Gomel, Vitebsk (heavy rain), Mogilev approx. 20 district cities (according to independent media)</p>	<p>Minsk – up to 1.5 thsd ppl Grodno – 1.5 thsd Gomel – 600-800 ppl Brest – 600 ppl Vitebsk – 300-350 ppl Mogilev – 500 pp</p>	<p>269 ppl including 12 journalists</p>	<p>130 persons fines from Br105 thsd to Br875 thsd (from \$20 to \$175) administrative arrests from 5 to 15 days charged under administrative articles “disorderly conduct”, “disobeying to police”, “participation in an unsanctioned action”</p>
<p>July 03 Independence Day</p>	<p>Minsk all regional centers: Brest, Grodno, Gomel, Vitebsk, Mogilev 50 district cities</p>	<p>at 7pm: Minsk – 500 ppl Grodno – 1000 ppl Mogilev – 1000 ppl Gomel – 300-500 ppl Brest – 100 ppl Vitebsk – 100 ppl</p>	<p>Total – 390 ppl including 20 journalists Minsk – 210 ppl Grodno – 120 ppl Gomel – 30 ppl Mogilev – 20 ppl</p>	<p>Up to 150 persons, including 11 journalists Most ppl are charged to administrative arrests from 3 to 15 days, others are fined up to Br1.05 million (\$200) under the administrative Article 17.1 “disorderly conduct”</p>
<p>July 06</p>	<p>9 Minsk districts all regional centers: Brest, Grodno, Gomel, Vitebsk, Mogilev 30 district cities</p>	<p>Minsk – 1000 ppl Grodno – 200-300 ppl Gomel – 150-200 ppl Brest – 400-600 ppl Vitebsk – 150 ppl</p>	<p>Total – 400 ppl including 28 journalists Minsk – 190 ppl</p>	<p>193 persons (92 in Minsk), including 7 journalists More than 90% are charged to administrative arrests from 5 to 15 days, others are fined from Br350 thsd to Br1.05 million (from \$70 to \$200) under the administrative Article 17.1 “disorderly conduct”</p>

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact.

Policy Towards Belarus: Russia is Pressing, Europe is Watching

While Russia is increasing its efforts to push Belarus in its geostrategic orbit even further, Europe appears to have taken the "wait and see approach". As a result, those who wish to see changes in Belarus are losing the momentum.

Russia is pressing Belarus to obtain its most lucrative assets. The most profitable Belarusian state enterprise Belaruskali may end up in the hands of the Russian tycoon Kerimov. Russia intends to keep higher prices for energy supplies, undermining the main cornerstone of the Belarus "economic miracle" which was based on cheap Russian oil and gas. They also warned that if Belarus further restricts Russia's media outlets it would have difficulties with securing Russian loans in the future. Kremlin is in the process of getting nearly everything it wants.

Europe is loosing on nearly all fronts because of its passivity. Symbolic [sanctions](#) or traditional condemnations have little effect on official Minsk. Some in the European Union think that the relations with Belarus have reached their lowest point and can only grow from there. This may not be the case because the human rights situation may further deteriorate as Lukashenka is trying to resist growing public unrest. The EU's involvement rarely goes beyond declarations, and modest support for NGOs which is far lower than in any other region of Europe.

Although Moscow is likely to wait until the Belarusian leader is on his knees and then bail him out, keeping Lukashenka on its balance sheet may become expensive for Russia. Oil prices are high these days because of the unrest in the Arab world,

but Kremlin needs money before the next election cycle. Moreover, Russia has to feed not only its impoverished South with separatism and Muslim extremists, but also other regions such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This is why Belarus will have to keep looking for money elsewhere. It was Russia's Finance Minister Kudrin who recommended Belarus to apply for an IMF loan a few months ago. Belarus has done so, but the chances of getting more money from the IMF look uncertain.

Given the role of Russia in Belarus, it is important to keep talking to the Russians and help them understand that if Belarus has another president, it will not be the end of the world for Belarus-Russia relations. The fear that Russian-speakers will be prosecuted if Lukashenka goes have little substantiation. Unlike in Ukraine or the Baltic States the vast majority of Belarusians in cities speak Russian as their first language and it will not change any time soon. If Belarus becomes a market economy, joins the World Trade Organization, and freely trades with both Russia and the European Union this will only help Russia's own economy.

However, talking to Russia should not be main policy tool of the West because there are nearly 10 million people in Belarus who need to be reached. With reduction in economic subsidies from Russia, many Belarusians for the first time have seen that their king is naked. Public dissatisfaction grows and there appears to be no quick fix for the Belarusian economy.

The West needs to make sure that Belarusians understand why this is happening and have access to uncensored information. It is not enough to allocate funds for Belsat or radio stations based in Poland. It is important to monitor whether what they produce actually reaches an average Belarusian.

If media only reaches opposition activists, the effect will remain limited. With some of the most prominent Belarusian opposition leaders in prisons, frequent blockades of Internet

web sites and traditional media on the brink of survival, cross-border broadcasting, as in the Soviet times remain the only way to spread uncensored information. Given that Belarus is a relatively small country, signals from neighbouring Poland and Lithuania can reach many people and help them understand what is going on.

Second, the West needs to continue [supporting](#) nation building in Belarus. One of the reasons why Ukraine is more independent now is because at some point of its history the Austria-Hungarian Empire actively supported nation building in Western Ukraine. Many historians agree that this helped mature the nation.

In Belarus the situation was different. Over the last three centuries Belarusians were regarded as Poles by the Polish and as Russians by the Russians. Now it is in Europe's interests to help Belarus people to mature from Soviets to Belarusians. Helping them mature as a European nation would serve the long-term goal of the country's independence. On practical level, the West should set up programs to facilitate translation of movies and books into Belarusian and encourage teaching in Belarusian language – both in Belarus and at the institutions such as the European Humanities University. If the Belarusian government is not doing that, there are good reasons for the West to take this role.

Finally, Europe should simplify and make less expensive visa procedures for Belarusians. It is unacceptable that Belarusians have to pay 60 euro for a Schengen visa, while Russians and Ukrainians pay merely 35 Euros. Rapid impoverishment of the Belarusian population creates an insurmountable travel barrier for many Belarusians. Moreover, it is easier to get a multiple entry Schengen visa for a citizen of Russia with a population of over 140 million people fighting against Islamic terrorists than a relatively small and safe Belarus.

Facilitation of free movement of persons would help Belarusians appreciate advantages of democracy and market economy. Coupled with ensuring better access to uncensored media, this could achieve more than yet another round of declarations from Brussels.

YK

Timothy Snyder on Belarusian History and the KGB



New York Review of books published a book review of Timothy Snyder, a Yale professor of history. He reviewed *Paranoia*, a book of Belarusian writer Victor Martinovich. The review is accurate in almost all respects other than one. It is too paranoiac about the role of KGB in Belarus. KGB is presented as the almighty organisation similar to that which was in the Soviet Union.

The reality is different. When people in Belarus try to be optimistic about political situation in their country they say – it is much better than in the Soviet Union in any event. Indeed, the state is no longer totalitarian. It has turned into a milder authoritarian regime. Although Belarusians are deprived of political freedoms they can freely travel abroad, use internet without any major restrictions, watch satellite TV and even buy opposition newspapers in kiosks.

According to the book review, KGB agents are checking passports of all those arriving to Belarus without even introducing themselves. Those who travel to Belarus do not

usually encounter anybody other than the border control and the customs officials. If there are any KGB agents at the Minsk airport – they are very good in hiding themselves. Perhaps the reason why Western scholars are so keen to demonise the powerless Belarusian secret service is because it is using the KGB brand. In reality, it is a weak and inefficient organisation more interested in doing business with loyal businessmen than in uncovering foreign plots.

Otherwise, Professor Snyder's review does justice to the Belarusian history, its relations with Russia and other neighbours and the nature of Lukashenka's regime. The summary of key events of the Belarusian history demonstrates that the author is knowledgeable about the subject:

Until the modern period, Belarusian history was quite distinct from Russian... A heartland for half a millennium of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, it became a borderland of the Russian Empire in the late eighteenth century. Because all of what is now Belarus was under the rule of the tsars in the nineteenth century, it was difficult for a national movement to emerge. The major local religion had been the Uniate Church, Eastern in rite but subordinate to the Vatican. It was merged with Russian Orthodoxy. The local language, Belarusian, was close enough to both Russian and Polish that local elites seeking social advancement tended to choose one or the other. The Belarusian movement began to gain supporters in the early twentieth century, but a short-lived Belarusian National Republic was absorbed by Bolshevik Russia. The Soviet leadership at first encouraged Belarusian culture, until Stalin had almost all of the significant Belarusian writers murdered during the Great Terror of 1937–1938.

Also, Timothy Snyder's description of Lukashenka's propaganda is straight on point:

Lukashenko's propaganda presents his own people, the Belarusians, as something less than a mature political nation. They are rather an ethnic group, dressed in Soviet-era folk costumes, somewhere amidst the livestock and the crops, mindful chiefly of food and shelter.

Perhaps the author's exaggeration of the role of KGB in Belarus can also be explained by the title of the book under review. Fair enough, those dealing with Paranoia may find it difficult to distinguish real from illusory threats.

Read full the full text of review at NYbooks.com.

YK

How Much Having an Embassy in Minsk Costs

It is hardly a secret that establishing diplomatic relations with an authoritarian state is a gamble. One never knows what one's embassy in Minsk may suffer if it crosses swords with the Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

On the night of August 30, two Molotov cocktails were thrown into the compound of the Russian Embassy in Minsk. Three days later, an obscure anarchist group said the attack was a reaction to Russia's crackdown on activists protesting the plans for a new highway around Moscow. But the uproar caused by the bombing is unlikely to end so simply and so quickly.

In fact, it is unclear whether the attack was an act of hooliganism or a premeditated political move. Political or not, once it happened, the incident has become a part of the

whirlpool of politics. It is interesting to observe of what Russia and Belarus make of the attack to advance their political goals.

The initial rumor that the embassy was attacked by the Belarusian hooligans in response to the Russian movie "Godfather" seems to have already played out in Lukashenka's favor. Whether or not they are true, the rumors of this sort will undoubtedly help Lukashenka gain additional support in the upcoming presidential elections.

Incidentally, a high percentage of the Belarusian population choose not to believe the movie and continued to stand by Lukashenka. Instead, these people are likely to believe Lukashenka's claim that the embassy attack was the work of Russian agents. The Belarusian police has been seriously considering the possibility that Russia bombed its own embassy to escalate the so-called "media war" with Belarus. According to Lukashenka, as quoted by Interfax, the Russian "thugs and scoundrels" needed the attack to say, "Look at the [Belarusian] government, at Lukashenka, who almost himself masterminded this terrorist act, as they call it, and torched the Russian embassy car."

More careful with language, the Russian Foreign Ministry somewhat vaguely accused "certain forces" of trying to "bring distrust and tensions to [Russia-Belarus] bilateral relations." Moscow seems to be viewing Lukashenka's claim as yet one more sign that its former strategic partner cannot be trusted, is unreliable, and even, at times, irrational.

This view will unlikely result in Moscow's throwing its weight behind the Belarusian opposition all of a sudden. The Kremlin knows that Lukashenka will remain in power for the indefinite future and has to learn to work with him, foreseeing and mitigating the consequences of his vagaries. To make such vagaries less frequent, Moscow is already becoming less shy about applying economic and political pressure. Of course, the

Belarusian leader has so far excelled at turning even this pressure to his benefit, increasing his popularity by claiming that Moscow “wanted the [Belarusian] president to bend [to their will] – but they got just the opposite.”

This is not the first attack on a foreign embassy in the Belarusian capital. The previous embassy accidents had either happened in the midst of a diplomatic crisis between the Belarus and that embassy’s home country, or were suspiciously close to presidential elections in Belarus.

In 2001, a few months before Lukashenka’s reelection, a grenade blew a 17-centimeter hole in the Russian embassy grounds as leaders of former Soviet republics, including Russian leader Vladimir Putin, were flocking to Minsk for a summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Belarusian regime was able to turn the 2001 incident to its advantage. Minsk upped the pressure on the opposition by having the KGB interrogate the leader of the “Youth Front,” Paval Sevyarynets, as a suspect.

Interestingly, the embassies of the democratic countries in Minsk seem to have much more civilized incidents with the Belarusian government (although with far greater consequences). In 2008, angered by the continuation of US sanctions against Belnaftakhim and by US criticism of Belarus’ human rights violations, Belarusian authorities gave US ambassador Karen Stewart 24 hours to leave the country before she would be declared persona non grata. Shortly afterward, Washington was accused of organizing a spy ring in Belarus and was [asked](#) to cut the staff of its 35-employee embassy in Minsk by half. A month later, ten more US diplomats were ordered to leave.

In 2006, as Belarusian-Polish relations reached a yet another low, Belarus’ state-controlled media accused the Polish embassy in Minsk of mediating between the Belarusian opposition and the West. Throughout the last decade, Poland

was accused of spying in Minsk just as often as the human rights abuses and repressions in Belarus were denounced by Warsaw.

Avigdor Lieberman's Murky Dealings in Belarus Unveiled



A loud scandal involving the foreign Minister of Israel and money laundering via Belarusian banks is unfolding. Ze'ev Ben-Aryeh, the former Ambassador of Israel to Belarus, provided Avigdor Lieberman, the Foreign Minister of Israel, classified information when they met in Belarus in 2008.

That information suggested that Lieberman had accepted bribes and evaded taxes using Belarusian banks. Israeli authorities were hoping to cooperate secretly with the Belarusian authorities, but their ambassador kept a copy of the confidential files for himself, and later shared it with his boss Liberman.

The Jerusalem Post reports:

According to the statement released by police, Israel's former ambassador to Belarus, Ze'ev Ben-Aryeh, allegedly showed Lieberman classified information regarding his investigation by police on allegations that he had accepted bribes and failed to report income to the tax authorities.

The documents had been sent to Ben-Aryeh by the Foreign Ministry to hand over to the Belarus government, whose help Israel required in tracing money transfers from a local bank.

According to the police statement, "the ambassador, who was supposed to pass the request on discretely and directly to the authorities in Belarus, kept one copy for himself. When Lieberman arrived in Belarus on a visit (during October 2008), [Ben-Aryeh] copied classified information from the request, [and] handed it over to Lieberman illegally when they met. The investigation also deals with Lieberman's involvement in the advancement and job appointments of Ben-Aryeh in the Foreign Ministry in recent months."

It is interesting that a few years ago the Israeli Embassy in Belarus was closed down completely, but later re-opened. According to Israeli Haaretz newspaper, Avigdor Lieberman became excessively interested in relations between Israel and Belarus long before he was appointed Foreign Minister. As a minister in Ariel Sharon's government, Lieberman actively lobbied for Israel to reopen its Minsk embassy, closed following budget cuts in 2003.

Although this scandal is an internal matter of Israel, Belarus is becoming internationally infamous for its dealings with all kinds of murky "investors". The countries of origin vary from Syria and other Arab countries, Russia, Israel, Iraq, Libya and North Korea. It is often unclear what Belarus has to offer to such investors.

Take an example of [Emanuel Zeltser](#), a US lawyer involved in battle over the legacy of a Georgian-Russian businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili who died in London under mysterious circumstances in 2008. Zeltser spent more than a year in Belarusian KGB prison under bogus charges. It is still a mystery what the whole dispute has to do with Belarus.

Despite its ever changing pro-Russian or pro-Western rhetoric, the only aspiration of the Belarus regime is to remain in power for as long as possible. “Money does not smell” seems to be the prevailing ideology in Belarus today.

Read more about Liberman’s story in [Jerusalem Post](#).

YK

Viktor Yanukovich, an ethnic Belarusian, Elected as President of Ukraine



While Belarus itself has been stuck with its authoritarian ruler since 1994, an ethnic Belarusian in neighboring Ukraine has secured the highest position in the country.

Father of the newly-elected Ukrainian President Fiodar Uladzimiravich Yanukovich was born in 1923 in Yanuki in northern Belarus. Fiodar Yanukovich was very young when his father Uladzimir Yaraslavavich Yanukovich moved to Ukraine in 1920-s to work in coal mines. Uladzimir went there with his brother, who subsequently returned to Yanuki in Belarus.

There has been rumors that Fiodar Yanukovich was collaborating with Nazis while in Belarus. Reportedly, Baranovich regional

branch of NKVD, the predecessor of KGB [requested](#) in 1945 to “extradite” Fiodor Yanukovich back to Belarus on charges of collaboration with Nazis. However, the genuineness of this story is questionable.

In Ukraine, Fiodar worked as locomotive driver in Donbas, the region of Ukraine rich in coal. His first wife Olga died in 1952, when Viktor was just two years old. Fiodar later remarried and Viktor Yanukovich was brought up by grandmother. Being born in and having grown up in Ukraine, it is not surprising, that Viktor Yanukovich regards himself Ukrainian.

However, Viktor Yanukovich has not forgotten his Belarusian roots. He visited Yanuki, the birthplace of his father, at least twice. Once he went there on an official visit as Prime Minister of Ukraine with accompanied by his Belarusian counterpart Siarhei Sidorski and later paid a private visit. On both occasions, he met the local Yanukovichs and visited the local cemetery, where his grandfather’s brother and other distant relatives are buried.

During his official visit to Yanuki in December 2006, Viktor Yanukovich even vowed to rejuvenate his family nest by building a new road and a dairy factory. According to media reports, he thought of inviting all people named Yanukovich from Belarus and Ukraine to resettle in Yanuki. Currently there are only two families live in Yanuki. Both of them are Yanukovichs.

Viktor Yanukovich certainly has sentimental feelings towards his historic motherland, which may facilitate closer ties between Ukraine and Belarus. Hopefully, these closer ties will not lead Viktor Yanukovich to emulate the methods of another ethnic Belarusian president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who has been refusing to give up power for more than fifteen years.

Read more about visits of Viktor Yanukovich to Yanuki in Belarusian at [tut.by](#).

The Wall Street Journal: Europe's Last Dictatorship

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. The Wall Street Journal published an article of Jeffrey Gedmin, president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, who recently visited Belarus. He urges the U.S. to consider lifting sanctions only on the basis of strict conditionality. He also suggests that the EU insists that any economic assistance be closely tied to political reforms and respect for human rights. Here is the text:

Minsk, Belarus – One of the questions I was repeatedly asked during a recent trip to the capital of Belarus was whether the Obama administration would opt for greater pragmatism at the expense of idealism in foreign policy. Both the government and opposition in this country have a vested interest in the answer. As early as next week, the U.S. will decide whether or not to continue sanctions against the country known as “Europe’s last dictatorship.” The European Union faces fresh choices as well.

NATO sees Belarus as a potential threat to neighboring Lithuania. Russian tanks stationed in Belarus can be in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, in about 90 minutes. This small nation of 10 million can threaten in other ways: 20% of EU gas imports from Russia pass through the former Soviet state.

Belarus also remains a notorious human-rights abuser. In its press-freedom index, Freedom House ranks Belarus 188th out of 195 countries. Transparency International rates Minsk as more

corrupt than Moscow. Minsk can feel like a time warp: Main avenues in the capital are still named after Lenin, Marx and Engels.

On my trip, I attended a dinner with leading oppositionists in a private room at a local restaurant. It was private except for the two minders who were stationed about five feet away from us. At a meeting of former political prisoners at the U.S. embassy to celebrate the 55th anniversary of Radio Liberty broadcasts to Belarus, I met a former trade minister who had served two years for breaking with the regime. Another young, charismatic businessman had spent six years behind bars for his pro-opposition views.

The man who rules Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, is severe. In 1995 he had his air force shoot down a hot air balloon that had strayed into his air space, killing two Americans.

The U.S. and the EU need to consider two issues in their relations with Belarus. It's only through a coordinated approach that we'll make progress towards reform.

The first issue has to do with democratic development. The heady days of the 1990s, when it appeared that freedom was on the march around the world, have given way to a decade of democracy recession. The most troubling developments have taken place in Russia and its periphery.

Democratization in countries such as Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine will almost certainly help to curb Russia's imperial appetite. Faced with neighboring democracies, Russia would be forced to take greater stock of its affairs at home. Garry Kasparov, the chess champion turned Putin opponent, thinks of an inside and an outside game if you want to support Russian democracy today. Mr. Kasparov argues that the outside game – what happens in Russia's neighborhood – may be as important as what's happening inside Russia.

Let's encircle Russia with states that provide a powerful

model for democratization. It has been 20 years since George H.W. Bush gave his "Europe, Whole and Free" speech in Mainz, Germany, and the project is only half complete.

Second, the prospects for political change in Belarus may not be as bleak as some believe. True, the opposition is weak. For his part, Mr. Lukashenko never fails to disappoint. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the regime calls into question the fact that the mass graves on the outskirts of Minsk are the work of Stalin's henchmen. And Mr. Lukashenko is the only ex-Soviet leader to have proudly retained the name "KGB" for his security services.

Yet every dictator has his Achilles' heel. For the authorities in Belarus, theirs may be the economy. The Russians, with whom Mr. Lukashenko has a "close but dysfunctional relationship," as one EU diplomat puts it, have reduced their economic support for Belarus in the last couple of years. Moreover, Belarus has not managed to remain immune from the global financial crisis. According to that same diplomat, some 25% of state-enterprise employees are now working on reduced hours. Mr. Lukashenko is in trouble if his social pact begins to seriously fray.

What to do? The civil-society leaders I met were in agreement that the recent release of political prisoners was the result of U.S. and EU pressure. That pressure must be sustained. The U.S. should consider lifting sanctions only on the basis of strict conditionality. Washington should not give in to the temptation to accept the return of the American ambassador, who was expelled last March over U.S. sanctions, as sufficient. Belarus must be pressured to have more independent media, to investigate the cases of missing dissidents, and to end the practice of jailing oppositionists. For its part, the EU should insist that any economic assistance be closely tied to political reforms and respect for human rights.

This will be slow, tough going to be sure. But now is exactly the wrong time for a short-sighted realpolitik approach.

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