

We Need to Destroy 'Moscow' in Belarusian Minds – Digest of Belarusian Analytics

Belarusian scholars devoted significant attention to the structure and of the Belarusian society and what drives local democracy and motivation of Belarusians.

[New edition of Belarus Headlines.](#) The VIII issue of Belarus Headlines commemorates the one year anniversary of prominent Belarusian political scholar Vitali Silitski's passing. Dr Silitski served as academic director of BISS and left a profound legacy for Belarusian political science. In this issue Belarusian and Western experts share their memories of Vitali as a person and reflect on the relevance of his works today.

[We Need to Destroy 'Moscow' in Belarusians' Minds](#) – Uladzimir Matskevich, philosopher and methodologist, specified the terms used under his Cultured Politics program, and summed up some results of the program's activity during a public lecture under the "Urbi et Orbi" series. He reminded about the main thesis – "To think Belarus", as well as about the key categories, which are to use within the framework of the Cultured Politics: "politics", "culture", "to think / to conceive", "Belarus".

[Sociological Study on the Composition of the Belarusian Society](#) – a new policy study by Dr. Anaïs Marin was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs. Building on the results of independent sociological surveys, this study tries to assess the worldviews, social needs and dividing lines among Belarusian society ahead of the 2012 legislative elections. It critically reviews the EU's 'dual track' policy and instruments and calls for adopting a new

strategy to draw the country closer to the EU while circumventing its authoritarian leadership. The study advocates a more inclusive approach of neighbourhood relations, allowing for mutually beneficial cooperation for the sake of modernising and hopefully democratising Belarus.

[Civil Sector in Belarus – Everyday Life and Organizational Processes](#)

– Vital Silicki wrote this article as part of the integrated study “Belarus’ NGO Sector: Potential for Change,” conducted by a research team at the commission of several Belarusian NGOs from 2005 through 2009. The author is looking for answers to the question how the civil community in Belarus is capable of promoting democratic changes in society in the context of the idea of civil society’s self-value as the “fire keeper” and bearer of social spirit, whose experience, values and capital will catalyse transformations in Belarus under the right circumstances.

[Is There Any Future For the Idea of “Local Democracy”?](#)

– Ulad Vialichka, the chairman of the international consortium “EuroBelarus”, considers about the prospect of the idea of “local democracy” based on his participation in the General Assembly of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (June 7-8, Italy). In particular, the expert notes that “Belarus is now very far from implementing the idea of “local democracy. But if we want to change our life for the better, we need to think and act”.

[In Belarus We Have Something To Fight For](#)

– Alexander Stelmakh, the director of Onliner.by, talks about his life philosophy and political views. Among his most bright quotations are the following: “Lukashenka is not the reason, but a result”; “If you don’t like your salary – work more”; “People must understand that before the fight for European values and human rights starts, they need to figure out what they want, how they make money, what they are doing; and get rid of the feeling that someone owes them a job, a salary, an

apartment and a loan”.

[Special Issue on the Future of Belarus](#) – the Pan-European Institute publishes a quarterly discussion forum, Baltic Rim Economies, which focuses on the development of the Baltic Sea Region. The Special Issue on the Future of Belarus, published on June 19, includes a number of articles by Belarusian and foreign analysts: David R. Marples, Alexander Brakel, Sergey Kizima, Torbjörn Becker, Alexander Chubrik, etc.

[Review-Chronicle of Human Rights Violations in Belarus in May 2012](#) (in English) – Human Rights Centre *Viasna* has issued its monthly review of human rights violations in Belarus. The experts note that May did not bring any positive changes in the human rights situation in general and the situation of political prisoners in particular.

[How the Belarusians Treat the Trade Unions](#) – in May 2012, Zerkalo Nedeli polling agency conducted a trade union survey. In particular, 50% of Belarusians are not members of any trade union, while 43% are members of the official Federation. Only 3% of respondents said they were members of an independent union. Only 7% of members of independent trade unions are unsatisfied, more or less, with how the union is protecting their interests; the share of unsatisfied Federation members is 46%.

[Economic Development of Belarus in January-May 2012](#) (audio) – Yaroslav Romanchuk, Analytical Center "Strategy", and Anton Boltochko, the Liberal Club (the CASE Program on PRIMUS) sum up the results the economic development of Belarus for the first five months of 2012. In particular, experts note the trends of the inflationary failure with insufficiently tight monetary policy, as well as growth in retail trade by 7.7% with falling of real disposable per capita income by 0.1%.

[Belarus: Scenarios of a Common Future](#) – the Cytadel project presents the verbatim and audio report of the round table

which took place on May 24, in Minsk. Participants come from different ideological positions (Eurasian, West-Rusizm, Liberal), but trying to find common points for the successful development of Belarus.

[Belarus is Interested in Development of Legislation on Charity](#)

– Olga Smolianko, the director of the Legal Transformation Center, comments the National program for international technical cooperation in 2012-2016, approved on May 4, 2012. The National program contains 114 project suggestions, characteristics of international technical assistance projects, submitted by republican state bodies and other interested actors for 411,5 million USD.

[Analytical Paper. May 2012](#) – Belarusian Security Blog released its monthly analytical paper which states the weakening of the stability of Belarusian state. The experts believe that it is connected with increase of systemic problems in public administration, defence, and foreign politics in the absence of clear leadership plan to correct the situation.

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.

Belarusian “Terrorists” On Trial: Any Hope for Justice?

On November 30, a Belarusian court is likely to issue the death sentence to the alleged perpetrators of the April terrorist act in the Minsk metro. Many in Belarus remain

unconvinced that the suspects, two young men from the northern province of Vitebsk, are guilty of such serious crimes.

The premature verdict could have major repercussions for the legitimacy of the Lukashenka regime. Contrary to official claims, there remains considerable uncertainty about the identity and the aims of the masterminds of the multiple bombings in Vitebsk and Minsk in 2005-2011. Admitting this uncertainty would undermine the official narrative of national security and stability that underpins the 'social contract' between the authoritarian government and the people.

Since 2005, a series of attacks has shattered confidence in public security. The 2005 Vitebsk terror attacks were downplayed by the authorities at the time as acts of hooliganism. The bombing on a national holiday in 2008, which resulted in scores of wounded casualties, already had a more detrimental impact. The attack on the central station of the Minsk subway last April, which killed 15 people and wounding 387 others, dealt a final blow to public confidence.

The public prosecution office has charged one of the defendants, Dmitry Konovalov, as the perpetrator of the Minsk bombing. He is also accused of illegally acquiring and storing explosives as well as producing at least twelve improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The prosecutors accuse the second defendant, Vladislav Kovalev, of being Konovalov's accomplice in the 2011 Minsk bombing.

“Confession of the accused is the queen of evidence”

In total, the accused face 23 charges. According to the prosecution, Konovalov and Kovalev have committed a total of ten crimes over the past decade, including four major bombings. A criminal dossier presented in the courtroom even refers to crimes committed when the suspects were just 14 years old. Many among the Belarusian public find these allegations dubious.

The popular blogger Budimir voiced the thoughts of many Belarusians when he asked how Konovalov, a silent and passive blue-collar worker, managed to lead a ten-year terror campaign and succeeded in detonating a bomb some 100 meters from the president at a 2008 public event. The defendant himself has literally cited a paragraph in the Criminal Code to define his motives: "To destabilize the situation in the Republic of Belarus." The investigators failed to identify any affiliation of either of the suspects with a political party or ideology.

Notably, some victims of the 2011 terrorist attack testified that they did not consider the suspects proven guilty. A dissident and former investigator, Zmicier Petrushkevich, stressed that the only evidence is found in the defendants' confessions. Apparently, the Belarusian system of justice, like its Soviet predecessor, operates according to the principle of Stalin's hangman Vyshinsky: taking confessions from the accused as its best evidence. In most developed countries, the reliability of such evidence would be questionable. In fact, Konovalov claims he was tortured and endured psychological pressure.

Petrushkevich points out numerous contradictions in the prosecutor's claims. For instance, investigators have found no traces of explosives in the defendant's flat despite allegations that Konovalov had produced them at home. The bag in which the accused allegedly brought the bomb to the site has also mysteriously disappeared. Oddly, the investigators did not consider the possibility that the bomb might already have been brought to the site by someone else prior to Konovalov's arrival.

Perhaps most astounding is the fact that the bomb used in Minsk on Liberation Day in 2008 was most certainly produced under professional laboratory conditions. The cellar identified by investigators as Konovalov's 'lab' certainly does not live up to these standards. Other details are also dubious. Konovalov's attorney has stated that the videotape

showing the defendant before and during the explosion was edited. But the court denied the request to use this videotape. For unexplained reasons, the court also refused to summon the police officers who had arrested the alleged terrorists.

Who trusts the Belarusian judiciary?

The court case raises the acute issue of capital punishment. President Lukashenka likes to refer his foreign critics to the 1996 referendum, in which 80.44% of Belarusians voted against abolition of the death penalty. Although the vote was denounced as fraudulent by international observers, Lukashenka stresses his respect for the will of the Belarusian people and points out that the decisions adopted by referendum are above the constitution.

This time, however, the doubts about the guilt of the accused are simply too great. This past Saturday, Lukashenka seemed to partially acknowledge this reality. Though once again demanding the harshest punishment for 'terrorists', the president suggested for the first time that capital punishment for Konovalov and Kovalev might be substituted with life imprisonment.

Lukashenka may be reacting to public discontent. In April, more than 60 percent of respondents at tut.by, the most popular Belarusian web-portal, [said](#) the explosions were organized by the government. The court proceedings only increased public skepticism about the defendants' guilt. The doubts are not so much caused by the minutiae of the investigation or the allegations of torture as by lack of public trust in the police and security agencies.

Yet Another Vitebsk Case?

This lack of trust can be led back to the many known [cases](#) of violent interrogation in Belarus. One of the most spectacular is the so-called 'Vitebsk case'. In 1971-85, 36 women in

Vitebsk region were murdered, and the local courts sentenced 14 men for the crimes that, as later turned out, were committed by one man. One of the 14 suspects was executed, another became blind in prison, and the rest endured years of incarceration. Their admission of guilt was an inevitable outcome of the unfair system of justice. The analogy with today's terror case is evident.

While there is concern that innocent men may be executed, the continuing uncertainty about who actually committed the Minsk bombings has raised concerns about public safety as well. This strikes at the very heart of the legitimacy of the Lukashenka regime – security is a basic concern for every human being, and the regime knows it needs to provide this public good.

To be fair, the stories about the Russian involvement or provocation by the Belarusian security agencies seem implausible. But the public prosecutor's claim put forward in court is no more convincing. This suggests a more problematic reality: the government exerts less control over Belarus than it often claims.

The New Grand Army of Lukashenka

Following military manoeuvres in the south of Belarus last Friday, the Belarusian ruler put forth a completely new idea for developing public administration. He ordered the formation of a new army called the territorial defence troops.

The idea is reminiscent of what Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein once tried to do in their countries: effectively undermining national armies through the creation of parallel

paramilitary and military units. Sounding oddly similar to the deceased Libyan colonel, Lukashenka said, "Territorial defence shall encompass the entire state and people. If necessary, we are going to spend huge sums on it." At the same time the Belarusian leader gave generals' insignia to previously civilian governors of all six Belarusian regions.

"It is a fact that you are becoming general-governors, yet I emphasize it is not for demonstration or prestige – the human resources policy will be changed towards giving the people command of the territorial defense troops. We are creating, if you want, a new army in Belarus which will be commanded by you". According to Lukashenka, the new army will have 120,000 troops. This is big number, as today the regular national army of Belarus has only 65,000 active personnel.

In the new circumstances regional administrators shall solve not only economic and social problems but are also responsible for the military component, said the Belarusian leader. "Our governors are military and responsible people, therefore starting today the second part of your life is military security. You should organize territorial defense maneuvers... There shall be concrete persons assigned to every automatic rifle, pistols, RPG, to every weapon."

According to Lukashenka, territorial defence forces should cooperate with the conventional army. The experience of other countries (like Libya, Iraq or Iran), however, shows that such co-existence is both counterproductive and inefficient.

It is hard to find a plausible rationale behind the decision, yet in highly seclusive and person-oriented Belarusian politics, such a decision might indeed be taken by Lukashenka personally. He admits, "It is me who has taken the decision. If we do not learn today, then we will suffer the consequences tomorrow. For that aim no money can be withheld."

Apparently security issues seriously worry the Belarusian

regime ever since a new wave of popular movements struck at Middle Eastern regimes befriended by Minsk. Last summer, Belarus held manoeuvres explicitly aimed at training counter-insurgency and riot control. Meanwhile, Lukashenka openly discussed the possibility of creating an anti-revolutionary bloc of dictatorships which should have the right to intervene if a protest movement threatens to topple the government in any country of the alliance. With Russian support it would be a guarantee against regime change.

Lukashenka also strengthened the KGB and urged police and security services to strike at the opposition. And now the Belarusian regime is obsessed with restructuring the national security system through the so-called territorial defence.

It is quite innovative in these activities. For instance, earlier this week, Lukashenka talked of engaging businessmen in territorial defence, where they presumably could play the role of grassroots leaders. Such an approach may prove attractive for some entrepreneurs which are actually engaged with local authorities. The regime will have to rely on regional elites – a mix of businesses and state bureaucrats – to create their own little armies. That would create more opportunities for exploitation of their power, now also in the military sphere.

In the early 2000s the government allowed the local authorities down to rather low, district levels to ban the sale of products from other regions of the country, if such commodities were produced in the district. Despite being a serious violation of Belarusian law, such a prohibition has been effective for years in probably all regions of Belarus.

In any event, such an erratic move will ultimately be one more blow to the institution of the Belarusian state. The Belarusian national army will now probably get even less funding. Clearly the bankrupt government has no money for two armies and will now redirect the scarce resources to finance

the new idea of Lukashenka. The whole country will turn into a field for egotistic local elites which have already for years disrupted the single economic space of Belarus. Now they will have even more means at their disposal to preserve their power while continuing mismanagement.

Businessmen are increasingly fusing together with the nomenclature, as only so can both survive in Lukashenka's regime. Now local rulers – and all of them are appointed by the president without consulting local residents – will have even more means at their disposal to preserve their power and continue mismanagement. They will not only arm themselves, they will also have more opportunities to handle local residents as they wish. Now male residents will become 'soldiers' and a local administrator may easily draft them anytime.

Lukashenka probably hoped to mobilize new forces supporting regime through this militarisation move. Yet there are sufficient reasons to think that even if such reasoning was a factor it may ultimately backfire. The local nomenclature clings to the regime only because they need resources and there is a lack of any alternatives. If there is an alternative, they may quickly abandon their boss together with their little armies.

No matter, who comes after Lukashenka, because of Friday's decision, the new authorities will have two more problems to fix – a destroyed military and rampant 'feudal' elites in the regions. The longer Lukashenka stays in power, the weaker the state institutions become.

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