

MODERN SOCIOPOLITICAL REVOLUTIONS: BELARUSIAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the analysis of the political crisis in the Republic of Belarus concurrent with the election campaign of 2020. It is considered in terms of internal and external factors. The author draws attention to the fact that the Belarusian case is specific firstly, due to a sharp increase in the political activity of the public while maintaining the exclusively peaceful nature of the protest movements; secondly, because of the turmoil in a socially-oriented state; thirdly, with the role of telegram channels in domestic crises; and finally by the «lack of leadership» phenomenon, which requires the development of new mechanisms for political crises resolution. The overall understanding of the situation was reflected in the formation of the «Belarusian issue», which triggered regional processes aimed at changing the balance of power. The political system of Belarus has passed into a new quality that will require modernization. However, its elements have not been identified and the crisis is likely to become long-standing.

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KEY WORDS

Republic of Belarus, election campaign 2020, political crisis, internal reasons, external factors, «lack of leadership» phenomenon, «Belarusian issue», EU, USA, Russian Federation.

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Introduction

The pre-election campaign and elections in the Republic of Belarus in the past two decades had been under close scrutiny by almost all states in the region. This was due, first of all, to the figure of the head of the Belarusian state A. Lukashenko, who was persistently moving towards the status of a political long-lived person. In addition, the position of the Belarusian society, which seemed to be in hibernation all this time has also

taken up the interest of the scientific and expert community. There was no consensus on this aspect and in fact it remained a mystery for the neighbouring countries. Separate bursts of civic activism that accompanied the election campaigns of previous years did not lead to qualitative changes either in the system of government or in the society. But that was the only thing that could be blamed on the Belarusians. Therefore, the European

Union and even the United States did not forget about Belarus. It did not become an outcast country. Moreover, a controversial country that had every chance to take its proper place in the region over time.

The geopolitical position of the Republic of Belarus had always been extremely important. In other terms, Belarus has derived from a buffer state to a connecting bridge between Europe and Asia. Vast Russia, on the one hand, and a powerful military bloc of NATO, on the other, were the determining factors in the state's foreign policy. By 2020, the Republic of Belarus became stronger in regional status and weaker in terms of its economic dependence. But all the partners of Belarus were absolutely sure that the country should preserve its sovereignty and had the capacity to do so.

The beginning of the internal political crisis

The beginning of 2020 could hardly foreshadow an impending storm. Despite the difficult relations with the Russian Federation, which entered a phase of aggravation for a number of reasons, Belarus reaped the fruits of success in the international arena in 2019. For the first time in many years, it was possible to reach a fairly stable and predictable relationship with Poland. Other European states enthusiastically supported Belarus's policy of maintaining sovereignty, despite the significant difficulties in the country's economy associated with energy dependence on Russia. The United States joined the general European chorus. Before long, it was possible to conclude an agreement on oil supplies from the United States with the mediation of Poland.

Furthermore, the coronavirus that reached the European continent also had drastic impact. Fear and confusion of the world community in front of a new invisible enemy divided the countries into a camp of commanders who quickly assessed the combat situation and made adequate decisions and soldiers left without commanders. There were still others, whose actions did not reveal any clear strategy, but also could not be identified as fear. The position of Belarus, or rather the head of the Belarusian state, first caused surprise and irony, then incomprehension and, finally, sharp rejection and criticism. However, external assessment in this case played a secondary role. The reaction of the country's citizens is more important in a crisis. The coronavirus had a surprising effect. The Belarusians rallied. They provided each other with all possible assistance, organized a volunteer movement to help doctors, wrote appeals and claims, collected money for medical staff. The Belarusians hadn't realized they became the public. They felt the taste of the opportunity to express their opinion and grasped the importance of correlation between the state and people in the situation of crisis.

Thus, the upcoming election campaign and elections faded into the background. The announcement of the date aroused interest only among the expert community. But nothing in their assessment predicted anything exceptional. This opinion was entirely shared by the current government. Even the appearance of new presidential candidates, absolutely unfamiliar to the general public, did not attract much attention. The Belarusian leadership reacted to the candidates surprisingly calm and even ironically. They were the former director of Belgazprombank V. Babariko and the head of the Hi-Tech

Park V. Tsepkalo. They were treated in a classical way – absence of political weight means they can only be viewed as political adventurers. As subsequent events showed, it was a big strategic mistake. The same situation occurred to S. Tikhonovskaya, who unexpectedly for everyone announced her candidacy. A. Lukashenko explained to the Belarusians that the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus was not meant for a woman-president, and the Belarusian society was not mature enough for this¹.

The wrong evaluation of the current government opponents led to the fact that in practice the election campaign was not carried out by the incumbent President. On the contrary, everything was performed to prove that the elections had already been practically won and that August 9 would be just a formality. At one of the meetings on May 25 A. Lukashenko said that he had somehow kept his distance from the election campaign and it would be difficult for him to get involved in the election process. In addition, it was ordered to outline a new composition of the Government before the elections. The reason for this decision was explained by the idea that people should understand who they will work with after the elections. The head of state stressed that this was already a kind of tradition, not an innovation. At the same time, there were some claims about absence of pressure on people's choice². Such statements were more likely to disorient the population

than generate trust. In July, during his working trips around the country and at the meetings, A. Lukashenko chose the tactics of a confident leader of the country who does not even consider any alternative election result. All his speeches concerned the country's future development plans³. Simultaneously, the use of the word «Maidan», which Belarus might face as well, added alarming notes to his speeches⁴. In his opinion, the main task was to save the country, and the presidential election was a collateral issue⁵. The President summarized his positions in the Address to the Belarusian people, which had been postponed since spring. The essence of his speech was that the country had achieved tremendous success over the years, Belarus was a tasty morsel for many neighbouring countries, any reforms would lead the country to disaster, the power in Belarus is in the hands of ordinary people and it reflects their opinion. The climax of the political crisis, which had been concealed, was reflected in the final phrase: «One doesn't betray the beloved one»⁶.

The Belarusian public, hardened by the coronavirus, were just biding the time. By the beginning of the election campaign,

¹ Посещение Минского тракторного завода, 29 May 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poseschenie-minskogo-traktornogo-zavoda-23712/ (accessed: 19.9.2020).

² Совещание по актуальным социально-экономическим и политическим вопросам, 25 May 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/soveshanie-po-aktualnym-sotsialno-ekonomicheskim-i-politicheskim-voprosam-23668/ (accessed: 13.9.2020).

³ Встреча с педагогическим активом Беларуси. 29 June 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-pedagogicheskim-aktivom-belarusi-23915/ (accessed: 10.10.2020).

⁴ Рабочая поездка в Пуховичский район, 24 July 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/rabochaja-poezdka-v-puhovichskij-rajon-24101/ (accessed: 4.9.2020).

⁵ Посещение войсковой части 3214 внутренних войск МВД в Минске, 28 July 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poseschenie-vojskovoju-chasti-3214-vnutrennix-vojsk-mvd-v-minske-24124/ (accessed: 1.10.2020).

⁶ Послание белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию, 4 August 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poslanie-beloruskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-24168/ (accessed: 17.10.2020).

the formation of a parallel world, which began to take shape with the onset of the pandemic was completed. Therefore, the events developed in two directions and constituted two parts of the same election campaign. Their presence clearly manifested itself with the turned obvious since the beginning of the campaign. The discontent of the population with the actions of the authorities and the worsening economic situation led to the fact that the little-known blogger S. Tikhonovsky started to draw numerous audiences by May. His message was plain, he realized that his task was to let people express their views on painful things. He introduced neither pre-election strategy, nor complicated programs. He offered the Belarusians a discussion and provided a platform for it⁷. So the intellectuals entered the struggle. They could not but attracted the attention of the other part of the Belarusians, who were more sophisticated and demanding. The representative of the pride of the Belarusian economy, the IT sector⁸, and the banker with 20 years' experience in one of the leading banks in the country presented a striking contrast to both systemic and traditional opposition⁹. It was their lack of political experience that played a crucial role in gaining public confidence. A political campaign contrary to all the classical canons began.

The reaction of the current government was quite predictable. The tactics, as in previous years, was focused on dis-

crediting opponents and cleaning up the political field. S. Tikhonovsky and V. Babariko were ranked as the accused and dropped out of the election race already in June. The campaign entered the second phase, which was called «female». S. Tikhonovsky's wife Svetlana nominated her candidacy for the President of the Republic of Belarus¹⁰. The headquarters were united and as a result so-called «triumvirate» was formed – Tihanovskaya, Kolesnikova and Tsepalo. The Belarusian public experienced another shock. The three women actually challenged not only the current government, but also the men of Belarus in general. They gathered thousands of rallies across the country and did the main thing – gave birth to hope for change. As a result, S. Tikhonovskaya was registered as a candidate and received a formal opportunity to compete for the post of the head of the Belarusian state.

Internal reasons

The expert community and the media inside the country and abroad unanimously noted the main feature of the presidential campaign this year – the unprecedented activity of the electorate. At the same time, it would be wrong to assert that the Belarusians hadn't been active at all in such periods so far. They have just achieved a new quality level. In this regard, it is important to understand the reasons for the change in the behavior of the electorate.

In general, the reasons for any crisis can be divided into direct and indirect one. The difficulties in their classification for the Republic of Belarus lies in the absence of sociological studies that can

⁷ «Меня сравнивали с Дудем, Навальным и Зеленским, но я – Тихановский, какой есть». Интервью главного оппозиционера Беларуси, 26 May 2020, RTVI, <https://rtvi.com/broadcast/ya-tikhonovskiy-kakoy-est-intervyu-glavnogo-oppozitsionera-belarusi/> (accessed: 7.9.2020).

⁸ Валерий Цепало. 8 May 2020, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/tsepalo/posts/3168936513156859> (accessed: 11.9.2020).

⁹ Виктор Бабарико. 12 May 2020, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/vdbabariko/posts/10217277415430295> (accessed: 11.9.2020).

¹⁰ Жена Сергея Тихановского подает документы в ЦИК на регистрацию своей группы, 15 May 2020, Tut.by, <https://news.tut.by/elections/684787.html?c> (accessed: 13.10.2020).

give at least approximate answers to the issues raised. In this regard, these reasons should be assessed conventionally. The direct reasons that had a noticeable impact on the election campaign are as follows:

- there was a generation change. The average age of the population according to statistics as of January 1, 2019 is 40.5 years. Moreover, in Minsk this figure is 38.8 years. This is the age of maturity while remaining active. The category from 18 to 44 years old includes 3,509,753 people. Among them there are 675 253 people aged from 18 to 24 years old, who were born in 1996-2002 and grew up in a completely different information space. The age group from 25 to 34 years old includes 1,454,079 people. They were born during the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the 1990s, the most difficult period in the entire post-Soviet space simply could not remain in their memory due to their age. The group that in reality observed and could analyze the achievements of Belarus over the past 26 years, while being at the peak of working activity (35-44 years) amounted to 1,380,421 people¹¹. Older persons, A. Lukashenko's traditional electorate, could not change their views. All in all, 5,818,955 people took part in the elections. The turnout was 84.3 percent¹²;
- the ruling elite has passed into the stage of degeneration, which is characterized in the Belarusian case by

lop-sided government, the formation of persistent beliefs leading to political miscalculations. In this regard, an effective response to crisis conditions did not correspond to the situation. The combination of strength and persuasion has exhausted itself and gradually transformed into a model based on power as a method of control¹³;

- the nature of the social outlook in the country has changed. The public was under tremendous pressure of many sources of information. Belarus is not a closed country. The shifts that have taken place in the consciousness of the public have become so evident that it is simply impossible to ignore them. Today we can state the birth of a new type Belarusian – a specific socio-historical actor who has shifted the solution of social problems from the sphere of civil relations to the sphere of state-political ones;
- the open political rivalry game in Belarus has always been minimized, but there was a fairly free expression of the citizens' opinions. The liberalization of the information field became especially noticeable during the pandemic. The current government simply ignored the growing activity of Belarusians in terms of expressing opinions. Moreover, the rhetoric of the authorities has not undergone any significant changes. In this regard, the correct communication style never chosen. As a result, the public misinterpreted most of the messages. Its expectations were not only met, but in most cases were rejected as unnecessary.

Collateral reasons are no less important, as they frequently trigger changes. First of all, it is necessary to name the

¹¹ Половозрастная структура населения Республики Беларусь на 1 января 2019 г. и среднегодовая численность населения за 2018 год, 23 April 2020, БЕЛСТАТ, https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_bulletin/index_13474/ (accessed: 30.9.2020).

¹² Обитогах выборов Президента Республики Беларусь в 2020 году, 14 August, Центризбирком, <http://rec.gov.by/sites/default/files/pdf/2020/inf9.pdf> (accessed: 29.9.2020).

¹³ Femia J. Pareto and Political Theory. Routledge, London, 2006. p. 70.

COVID-19 pandemic. Fear was the natural reaction of people to something that is outside and absolutely imperceptible, which causes death. It laid a brick in the building of discipline and synergy that were extremely essential during the election campaign. In addition, the economic factor played a significant role. The Belarusian economy was not ready for quick restructure. Neither was business. The small proportion of Internet services played a fatal role in the first month of the pandemic. Trade came to a standstill and, as a result, many retail facilities were forced to curtail their activities, which led to an unvoiced protest of the Belarusian entrepreneurs against the background of messages from the EU and the USA about multimillion-dollar aid from the state to business. And the assistance program that was finally adopted did not have such an effect. The business community looked at it with distrust.

Thus, the Belarusian state faced the whole complex of challenges which slowly consolidated into a single stream and developed without interference of the state. Afterwards they laid the foundation to future changes.

External factors

The topic of external interference had become practically the main one since the beginning of the election campaign. Actually, no innovations in the approaches of the Belarusian authorities were proposed to the public. However, the Russian Federation, a key partner country over the past 20 years, was named as a candidate state for destabilizing the situation in Belarus. This choice was not entirely unexpected, since bilateral relations by the spring of 2020 entered the phase of «cold confrontation». The multi-vector principle had never been implemented to

such an extent. Belarus received full and unconditional support from the European community in preserving its sovereignty. The visit of the US Secretary of State M. Pompeo to Minsk consolidated this success¹⁴. The final step was the agreement on oil supplies from the United States and with Poland's consent to reverse deliveries via the Druzhba pipeline¹⁵.

The topic of Russian interference in the election campaign was greatly facilitated by the fact that one of the opponents of the incumbent President headed the Gazprombank branch in Belarus. By the way, this seemed real against the background of the growing complications in the relations with Russia. Part of the Belarusian society felt offended by repeated reproaches for financial support from Russia. A. Lukashenko's rhetoric, especially statements about the decline in the level of relations from fraternal to partnership, found support among a certain part of the population. In this regard, the emergence of the «Wagner Group» in Belarus was the logical conclusion of the story of Russian intervention¹⁶. The demonstrative detention, disclosure of all names and negotiations with Ukraine on the possible extradition of some of them should have shown the iron resolution of A. Lukashenko's to retain not only his power, but also the country's sovereignty. In fact, it was the pre-election campaign of A. Lukashenko, who focused his efforts on the issue of sovereignty. And the

¹⁴ Госсекретарь США Майкл Помпео прибыл с визитом в Минск, 1 February 2020, БЕЛТА, <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/gossekreterar-ssha-majkl-pompeo-pribyl-s-vizitom-v-minsk-378012-2020/> (accessed: 17.10.2020).

¹⁵ Польский PERN сообщил о планах запуска «Дружбы» в реверс, 28 February 2020, Интерфакс-Запад. URL.: https://interfax.by/news/biznes/novosti__kompaniy/1272157/ (accessed: 20.10.2020).

¹⁶ Под Минском задержаны 32 боевика иностранной частной военной компании, 29 July 2020, БЕЛТА, <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/pod-minsk-om-zaderzhany-32-boevika-inostranno-vojnoj-vojnoj-kompanii-400470-2020/> (accessed: 25.10.2020).

theme of Russian intervention enhanced its scale.

The situation was changed dramatically on the election day. The scale of the protests in the very first days after the elections could no longer be explained by Russian interference. Official news reports emphasized that predominantly young people took part in the protests. And the selection of such target audience required a change of coordinators. The traditional players in this field were the European Union and the United States. On August 10, A. Lukashenko named specific countries that were standing behind the swinging of the situation in Belarus. They were Poland, Great Britain and the Czech Republic¹⁷. The arrow was pointed at Poland to a greater extent, since there was concrete evidence – a considerable activity of the telegram-channel «NEXTA», whose headquarters were located in Warsaw. This channel had become the subject matter among the Belarusian authorities.

The reaction of the European Union countries to the tough actions of the security forces in the first days after the elections grew like a snowball. It couldn't have been otherwise. The EU believed that it was no use evaluating hastily and making null and void all the achievements of the election campaign. But after the elections, the issue entered the sphere of values, primarily democratic rights and freedoms. And yet European political «heavyweights» were in no hurry to make harsh assessments. However, the neighboring countries of Belarus

acted practically as a united front¹⁸. Their opinion about the actions of the Belarusian authorities and the elections in general was unambiguous and categorical.

In these circumstances, A. Lukashenko took a sharp political turn. On August 14, he handed over 32 so-called militants from the «Wagner Group» to the Russian side¹⁹, and on August 15 he announced the need to call the President of Russia V. Putin²⁰. On August 21, A. Lukashenko directly accused the United States of planning and implementing the protests in Belarus²¹. Thus, he logically completed the second line in the external factor of the political crisis in Belarus.

For more than two months now, the confrontation between Belarus and the EU and periodically with the United States has been developing. Belarusian and foreign experts put forward many conspiracy theories regarding the external factor. Most of them agree that a key role was played by outside interference. At the same time, it should be noted that the actions of the Belarusian authorities intensified the role of the external factor. Today the «Belarusian issue» is being discussed only in relation to Russia. And

¹⁷ Встреча с председателем Исполнительного комитета – исполнительным секретарем СНГ Сергеем Лебедевым, 10 August 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-predsdatelem-ispolnitelnogo-komiteta-ispolnitelnym-sekretaremsng-sergeem-lebedevym-24220/ (accessed: 22.9.2020).

¹⁸ Presidents of Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Poland call for action on Belarus, 13 August 2020, President. ee, <https://www.president.ee/en/meedia/press-releases/16115-presidents-of-lithuania-estonia-latvia-and-poland-call-for-action-on-belarus/index.html> (accessed: 27.09.2020).

¹⁹ По ходатайству Генерального прокурора Российской Федерации задержанные ранее на территории Республики Беларусь российские граждане возвращены в РФ, 14 August 2020, Генеральная прокуратура Российской Федерации, <https://genproc.gov.ru/smi/news/genproc/news-1886440/> (accessed: 18.10.2020).

²⁰ Совещание во Дворце Независимости, 15 August 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/soveschanie-vo-dvortse-nezavisimosti-24300/ (accessed: 23.9.2020).

²¹ Лукашенко: нам готовили эту заварушку, планируют это и направляют США, 21 August 2020, БЕЛТА, <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-nam-gotovili-etu-zavarushku-planirujut-eto-i-napravljajut-ssha-403655-2020/> (accessed: 14.9.2020).

it is very complicated to judge whether the Russian Federation itself benefits from this.

Election campaign after the vote

The situation that developed in Belarus after the elections didn't fit any previously known scenarios. The foreign media could not find a suitable word to identify it. The Belarusian protests in Belarus and Russia were immediately dubbed the «Maidan». However, it is clear that there are very few similarities. The absence of a clear leader, the extremely peaceful nature of the protest movement, and revolutionary romanticism have become hallmarks of the protest movement. This set of characteristics had caused a lot of expert comments. Particular attention was paid to the absence of the leader of the protest movement. The opinion was almost unanimous – the Belarusian protests were doomed to failure. There was no candidate for negotiations. Experts rarely mentioned that the political field had been cleaned before the elections. Actually, everyone wanted the leader just to appear out of nowhere, and more important, it was to be such a person that A. Lukashenko would immediately agree to negotiate with. This utopia has been circulating for a long time. Former presidential candidate S. Tikhanovskaya was not suitable for this role, although only she had formal grounds for starting negotiations. Her expulsion from the country did not cause public excitement. This was primarily due to the peculiarities of the political situation in Belarus. For 26 years, the country has been led by one man who is generally said to be a strong leader. In 2020, part of the Belarusian society voted for changes in political life. And it did not simply mean to replace

one strong leader with another. That was why they were less interested in leaders in general. They just wanted to bring changes to the political game. This was the effect of the romanticism of the situation as a whole. Since the classical political science did not leave any chances for Belarusians.

Understanding of political and other processes was simplified for a long time, which had an impact on the formation of such an approach of the Belarusian opposition-minded part of society. Active propaganda in the media eventually convinced people that there was a common desire to deceive the public behind complex approaches. The pseudo-scientific style of expert publications made it possible to think that politics and economics can and should be explained plainly. Therefore, the election programs of the candidates also did not attract the interest of the general public. The main thing was the changes, which included A. Lukashenko's resignation. Clear programs for the country's future development have not yet been worked out and weren't in demand among the public.

The political crisis in Belarus was developing in spite of all theories and practices. Special attention should be paid to the actions of the authorities. The statement about the support of A. Lukashenko by 80% of the voters which was officially made by the Central Election Commission led to the fact that he went out to the square to meet with his own voters. In fact, the post-election campaign began. The Belarusian experts recalled that the last time when A. Lukashenko carried out such actions was in the 90-s. At a meeting on August 16, he said that he did not support gatherings of the squares, but he had to call citizens for help so that they would protect him and the country.

Furthermore, in his speech A. Lukashenko again voiced the achievements of Belarus during his presidency, outlined the threats and challenges, mainly external ones, and urged to think about the future. This kind of set elements clichés in the speech of the head of state seemed exactly the same as in the pre-election speech²². Meanwhile, the CEC announced the election results on August 14. On August 17, A. Lukashenko paid a visit to the MZKT plant²³. Experts and the public named it a failure. The number of protesters grew. A. Lukashenko worked with the electorate for whole month of August. Rallies and marches in support of A. Lukashenko were organized. National symbols have gained incredible popularity until now. The citizens of Belarus got the opportunity to wear the official Belarusian flag as they like, even to hide behind it, to place them on cars and etc. Previously, this was not welcomed at all. The authorities were forced to create slogans and mottos that were posted on social networks. Belarusian composers wrote songs on purpose. A. Lukashenko held meetings with working communities²⁴. Official news channels also operated in the same way as during the election campaign. They increased the number of analytical programs, invited experts who saw their main task as the need to convince the audience that the only cor-

rect choice today was the newly elected head of state, as a guarantor of peace and stability. The election campaign was in full swing.

Political impasse

The events in Belarus after the elections developed so rapidly, that inside and outside the country, that everyone expected a quick resolution of the crisis situation. However, a solution was not found yet. Neither external pressure nor internal protests forced the security forces to retreat. The situation began to fluctuate — with the tides. At the same time, after A. Lukashenko's visit to Sochi and a meeting with President V. Putin, it became obvious that some step should be made forward. V. Putin announced his support for Belarus, which was experiencing unprecedented pressure from the West and a loan of about US \$ 1.5 billion²⁵. Since the meeting was held in a closed format, it caused a heated discussion within the country and loud statements by opposition leader S. Tikhanovskaya that any agreements that could be signed during the meeting will not be recognized as legitimate. On September 23, A. Lukashenko took an unprecedented step in the opinion of most experts, including Russian ones. He held the inauguration without an official broadcast, which actually meant a violation of the procedure and the Law «On the President of the Republic of Belarus»²⁶. Foreign ambassadors, including those of the Russian Federation, were not invited to the inauguration. The subsequent refusal of the Russian delegation headed by the Chair-

²² Участие в митинге на площади Независимости, 16 August 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/uchastie-v-mitinge-na-ploschadinezavisimosti-24312/ (accessed: 11.10.2020).

²³ «Уходи» – Рабочие МЗКТ криками потребовали от Лукашенко уйти в отставку во время его выступления, 17 August 2020, <https://telegraf.by/obshchestvo/lukashenko-priletel-na-mzkt-na-vertolet-k-zavodu-idut-kolonny-protestujushhih-drugih-zavodov/> (accessed: 1.11.2020).

²⁴ Участие в митинге в Гродно, 22 August 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/uchastie-v-mitinge-v-grodno-24373/ (accessed: 1.11.2020).

²⁵ Путин дал обещание Лукашенко по кредиту на \$1,5 млрд, 14 September 2020, РБК, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/14/09/2020/5f5f69029a7947e22d77a2e3> (accessed: 26.9.2020).

²⁶ ЗАКОН РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ № 3602-XII «О Президенте Республики Беларусь», 21.02.1995, [Pravo.by, https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=V19503602](https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=V19503602) (accessed: 17.10.2020).

man of the Federation Council V. Matvienko to visit Minsk to participate in the Forum of Regions showed that V. Putin's statements about the need for constitutional reform in Belarus and the secret inauguration are incompatible with the Russian position.

The inauguration was the starting point for the next phase. The EU condemned A. Lukashenko's action and admitted that such actions can only indicate the weakness and uncertainty of the authorities²⁷. Extensive discussion of the issue of sanctions against the current government in Belarus went on along with a series of high-level meetings with ex-presidential candidate S. Tikhonovskaya. Within a month she managed to do what A. Lukashenko could not do in 26 years. Though the meetings with the leaders of Lithuania and Poland were viewed only as hostile steps from neighbours, who had accumulated many problems, the meetings with the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany changed the situation efficiently. S. Tikhonovskaya assumed the role of the nation's leader. Her statements became tangible and confident, the housewife gradually faded into the background. In early October, the EU and the USA adopted personal sanctions against the Belarusian authorities²⁸. Economic sanctions have not been considered to date. In response, the current government recalled the ambassadors from Poland and Lithuania and demanded that the staff of the diplomatic

missions of these countries must be reduced²⁹. In addition, Belarusian officials said that the sanctions were not new to them and had no decisive significance for the country. The ball game continued with the departure of the EU ambassadors in solidarity. On October 10, the Belarusian and foreign public was shocked by the news about A. Lukashenko's visit to the KGB pre-trial detention center and meeting the opposition leaders who have been in prison for several months³⁰. The round table, flowers and the main subject of the conversation stirred up the world media. A. Lukashenko discussed constitutional reforms with prisoners. The verdict of almost all the experts was unambiguous – that was the newest political technology.

Thus, the current stage can be called political chaos, when the public is offered a set of illogical and vague actions. Obviously, most of them are intended to tire ordinary citizens and force them to abandon protests. These steps can only be considered tactical. The lack of a clear strategy has already led the situation to a political deadlock, the ways out of which are narrowing down every day. Two options are clearly visible – a military solution or a guerrilla war.

Conclusions

Any crisis situation must be resolved one way or another. Today the forecasts regarding the Belarusian political crisis

²⁷ Belarus: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the so-called «inauguration» of Aleksandr Lukashenko, 24 September 2020, European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/24/belarus-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-so-called-inauguration-of-aleksandr-lukashenko/> (accessed: 9.10.2020).

²⁸ Евросоюз и США ввели санкции против Беларуси, 1 October 2020, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-54381677> (accessed: 3.11.2020).

²⁹ Беларусь предложила Литве и Польше привести к паритету с белорусскими численность их дип-представительств, 2 October 2020, БЕЛТА, https://www.belta.by/politics/view/belarus-predlozhit-litve-i-polshe-privesti-k-paritetu-s-belorusskimi-chislennost-ih-dippredstavitelstv-409265-2020/?utm_source=belta&utm_medium=news&utm_campaign=accent (accessed: 19.10.2020).

³⁰ Встреча с представителями оппозиционных политических движений, 10 October 2020, Официальный интернет-портал Президента Республики Беларусь, http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrechas-predstaviteljami-oppozitsionnyx-politicheskix-dvizhenij-24690/ (accessed: 11.10.2020).

are very different. And they depend on the questions that the experts ask themselves. One thing is certain – that within a few months the Belarusians made a big step forward. The political culture in the country is being actively formed and will only improve in the future. Romanticism and high expectations are natural attributes of the first stage, which are transformed into a realistic view and sober assessments of what is happening now and about the future.

As for the duration of the crisis, it will depend on the development of the revolutionary situation. At present, we can only talk about two of its signs – the lower classes cannot live in the old way, and the upper classes cannot govern as before, and they realize this. The third, in fact the most important sign is the ability to take massive action, which is at the stage of formation. Workers' strikes are sporadic. Namely, the turning point of the situation towards the opposition-minded public depends on them. The situation is complicated by the absence of political parties to a large extent. All candidates who applied for the post of President of Belarus were non-partisan. And the opposition during the campaign realized its importance. V. Babariko in his address on August 31 announced the creation of the party «Together». A. Lukashenko also said on September 15 that the society needs political parties and a new law on political parties is being worked out. However, intention is not yet realization. Even the adoption of the law will not mean that parties will be quickly organized and gain influence among the population being able to influence the political situation. This will also be a deterrent.

The political crisis in Belarus was marked by a lack of understanding between the actors. The rhetoric of the

current government was in constant discordance with the expectations of the part of the public who were in favor of changes. The existence of such political conflict was not recognized. Meanwhile, the conflict, which began as a regime conflict, aimed at overthrowing the existing political system smoothly turned into a role and status conflict. It assumes an increase in political rights and freedoms, the possibility of participating in political life and influencing it. Although it was difficult to talk about an increase in the level of understanding the participants, they independently came to the same result. This may explain the peaceful nature of the protests. The Belarusians managed to immediately move to a higher level of realizing the essence of political processes. They refused to overthrow, i.e. violent methods in exchange for organic and evolutionary development.

The fashion for foreign interference in the internal affairs of others appeared long ago. Belarus entered this mainstream on its own initiative. The campaign and elections were supposed to reveal the consent or opposition of the internal players. At the same time, almost immediately the circle of participants went beyond the state. The political crisis in Belarus began to develop horizontally. The internal conflict was transformed into the «Belarusian issue» and entered the regional agenda. The declared solidarity could not hide the interests of the actors, which had been in a state of confrontation for a long time. Thus, painful regional issues were brought to the surface. The relations with the Russian Federation were top-priority. The most sensitive topics were interference in the elections and the construction of «Nord Stream 2». At these two points the interests of most of the EU countries and the USA converged.

And Belarus got the opportunity to maneuver. As the development of the situation has shown, external players have a special attitude towards Belarus. And we are talking not only about the important geopolitical position of the country, but to a greater extent about the Belarusians, who are respected in the European environment and in Russia. External pressure on the current government in Belarus cannot be regarded as one of the key factors in resolving the crisis situation. The country's sovereignty will acquire a new content with any option for the conflict resolution.

The political crisis in Belarus has raised one more wave of discussion about the new quality of social networks, namely telegram-channels, in the development and escalation of internal conflicts. The Belarusian authorities took the path of exposing dirty technologies, generously described in the manuals for organizing «color» revolutions. A. Lukashenko actually admitted that the war in the information space had been lost. As the development of the situation in Belarus had shown, in the presence of common features, intervention through telegram-channels and tactics of action had a specific national connotation. In fact, in the Belarusian case, the behavior of the authorities and, in particular, A. Lukashenko has been scrutinized. And since the previous election campaigns were carried out according to the same scenario, it was not difficult to develop a strategy for social networks. The technologists of the «NEXTA» channel simply analyzed the events and mistakes that were made in abundance by the Belarusian authorities. The situation in Belarus has shown that today it isn't enough to realize the technologies of «color» revolutions. This can only be regarded as weakness. It is

necessary to be ready to respond to the challenges in the information space by developing anti-crisis programs at the state level.

The originality of the Belarusian case is reflected by the fact that the explosion took place in a socially oriented state. No matter how we assess the actions of the Belarusian authorities today, the internal situation in the country before the start of the pandemic was stable. Programs aimed at social support of vulnerable groups of the population were in place. Industries worked steadily. The uncertain position of the workers in the protest movement is a vivid confirmation of this. The strategic mistake was the introduction of the term stability into circulation, which mainly meant peace and tranquility. The crisis showed that the long existence of a political system did not make it stable by default. Obviously insufficient circulation in the segment of staff went against the natural need for the desire for power and influence among the educated and financially secured category of citizens. The Belarusians model proved that even inactivity in politics can facilitate specific political culture. But authorities missed this crucial changes. The existence of a long period of so-called strong power has created the phenomenon «lack of leadership» in Belarus, which will remain in the political scope and will receive its further development. Under the influence of internal and external factors, the political system in Belarus has entered a phase of unstable equilibrium, which does not imply restoration of balance. At the same time, it is possible that an intermediate phase of short-term equilibrium is possible. But it has no potential to transform into stability.

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