

# Peculiarities of Belarusian Authoritarianism and Its Influence on the Regime Dynamics in Russia and Ukraine\*

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, authoritarianism, i.e. “political systems in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but quite predictable ones”<sup>1</sup> has emerged, disappeared, and been revived many times and in many places much like the mythical Phoenix. The story of resurgent authoritarian regimes is repeated dozens of times throughout history.

As *The Economist* stated in its Democracy Index 2012 entitled *Global Democracy at a Standstill* (while 2010 one entitled “Democracy in Retreat”) stressed there has been “a decline in democracy across the world since 2008. Now, democracy is in retreat. The dominant pattern in all regions over the past two years has been backsliding on previously attained progress in democratization.”

**Table 1: Democracy Index-2012, by regime type, %\***

Regime type	Number of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	25	15.0	11.3
Flawed democracies	54	32.3	37.2
Hybrid regimes	<b>37</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>14.4</b>
Authoritarian regimes	<b>51</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>37.1</b>
Total:	167	100	100

\*Economist Intelligence Unit

According to the report, “in recent years there has been backsliding on previously attained progress in democratization. A political malaise in east-central Europe has led to disappointment and questioning of the strength of the region’s democratic transition.”<sup>2</sup>

\* I would like to thank Dean Rice for his important help with improvement English language of this article.

1 Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 159.

2 “Democracy Index 2012: Global Democracy at a Standstill,” [http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy-Index-2012.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex12]

In this context, Francis Fukuyama's fundamental conclusion from his famous *The End of History and the Last Man* that "as mankind approaches the end of the millennium, the twin crises of authoritarianism and socialist-leaning central planning have left only one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity: liberal democracy, the doctrine of universal freedom and popular sovereignty"<sup>3</sup> does not seem so obvious anymore. Following the famous Huntington's *The Third Wave*, we could use a concept of waves but a reversed direction, of authoritarianism rather than democracy political system development.

So, what are the forces behind the ability of authoritarian states to endure despite the modern wave of political democratization? How is it that such governments continue to wield power and control the reins of the state? From the political-sociological perspective the question is: what are the foundations of modern authoritarianism? I will examine this question in the case of Belarus, with a special focus on Belarus' influence on Russian and Ukrainian political systems, as well as their similarities and differences. After Putin replaced Yeltsin in 2000 and Yanukovich replaced Yushchenko in 2010 both countries faced a rise of authoritarianism (in different forms and to different extent). Another important question is how this influence becomes mutual and transforms into authoritarian integration, as well as how it affects the entire region from the European Union to Japan.

The Republic of Belarus is a striking example of this kind of transformation. In Medieval Age it was part of the Great Duchy of Lithuania, one of the most advanced states in Europe at that time. In the 17th century, it de-facto became part of Poland, and in the 19th century part of the Russian Empire. After the Bolshevik revolt in 1917 Belarus became part of the USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 Belarus became an independent state that declared democracy and rule of law as its constitutional principles. Now it is recognized as the last dictatorship in Europe. Thus, the country has passed almost all of the stages of political development: from medieval "democracy" to authoritarianism and totalitarianism, to emerging democracy and today finds itself to be "competitive autocracy."

Most authors writing on the topic of authoritarianism, from Plutarch and Suetonius to Linz and Corrales, paid attention to either personal characteristics of authoritarian rulers or various methods they used to acquire and maintain power. Without a question both are very important factors for understanding of this phenomenon, I however place the emphasis of analysis on so-called social legitimacy, or social grounds of authoritarianism. Regardless of time and place, social demands for authoritarianism are a much more important factor than the personality of its rulers or the methods they use to govern and preserve power.

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3 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), p. 42.

## “COMPETITIVE AUTOCRACY”

One of the reasons for the new rise of authoritarianism mentioned above is its new face, the so-called competitive autocracy.<sup>4</sup> As William Dobson stressed, “although these regimes are much more tactically subtle and adaptive than the old-school communist regimes and military juntas of the past, at their core these systems are still about maintaining power through coercion. The regimes are smart enough to know that they cannot squelch all dissent and should not even try. Instead, they focus on what counts.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, analyzing recent changes of political regime in Russia, Bulgarian intellectual Ivan Krastev notes that

“development of making sense of the confusing nature of Putin’s authoritarianism may be more important for understanding where the world is going than is explaining the sources of popularity of China’s authoritarian success. Russia is an interesting case because it highlights the key features of the new competitive authoritarianism. While political repression exists and human-rights organizations have documented the persecution of journalists and other opponents of the regime, it is fair to say that most Russians today are freer than in any other period of their history. They can travel, they can freely surf the Web—unlike in China or Iran, the government is not trying to control the Internet—and they can do business if they pay their ‘corruption tax.’ Unlike the Soviet Union, which was a self-contained society with closed borders, Russia is an open economy with open borders. Almost ten-million Russians travel abroad annually. Putin’s regime is also a non-ideological one. Unlike the Chinese regime, which survives because both the elites and the people perceive it as successful, Putin’s regime survives even though elites and ordinary people alike view it as dysfunctional and uninspiring. Why are people ready to accept such ‘zombie authoritarianism’ rather than opt for democratic change? It is the contradictory nature of Russia’s authoritarianism that can best help us to understand why authoritarianism is surviving in the age of democratization, and why it is so difficult to resist contemporary authoritarian regimes. Thinking exclusively in terms of the opposition between democracy and authoritarianism threatens to trap democratic theorists within the two assumptions that this opposition implicitly contains: first, that when an authoritarian system collapses, democracy will naturally arise by default; and second, that if democracy fails to develop, authoritarian forces must be to blame. The weakness of the resistance to contemporary authoritarian regimes is less a fruit of effective repression—the fear factor—than it is of the very openness of these regimes. Contrary to the usual assumption of democratic theory, the opening of borders can actually stabilize rather than destabilize the new authoritarian regimes. The new authoritarian regimes’ lack of any real ideology explains their tendency to view themselves as corporations. In order to stay in power, they try to eradicate the very idea of the public inter-

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4 Steven Levitsky, Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13:2 (April 2002), p. 51.

5 William Dobson, *The Dictator’s Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), p. 5.

est. In this context, the glorification of the market does not undermine the new authoritarian capitalism; it can even strengthen it. If the public interest is nothing more than the unintended outcome of millions of individuals pursuing their private interests, then any sacrifice in the name of the public interest is a waste. As Hirschman points out, however, the easy availability of exit tends to diminish the use of voice, because exit requires less time and commitment. Russia's current national identity crisis has made exit a very natural option for those who are disappointed with the regime. The emergence of an exit-minded middle class in Russia is at the heart of the regime's survival capacity. Russian economist Leonid Grigoriev recently suggested that more than 'two million Russian democrats have left the country in the last decade.' Voting with one's feet to leave Russia because it is undemocratic is not the same as voting to make Russia democratic. The consequence is that there is no critical mass of people demanding change."<sup>6</sup>

When discussing competitive autocracy in the "Slavic triangle" (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) one should emphasize Krastev's point about relatively free (compared with China) Internet and new ICT in general. They, on the one hand, limit authoritarian regimes by providing more space for free information and communication to dissent, and on the other hand extends it. Virtual life replaces the real one, lessening the motivation to act outside the virtual world.

American political analyst Javier Corrales describes the mechanisms for the creation of the competitive autocracy used by Hugo Chávez regime in Venezuela:

*"Attack Political Parties."* After Chávez's attempt to take power by way of coup failed in 1992, he decided to try elections in 1998. His campaign strategy had one preeminent theme: the evil of political parties, and the theme was an instant hit with the electorate. As in most developing-country democracies, discontent with existing parties was profound and pervasive.

*Polarize Society.* Having secured office, the task of the competitive autocrat is to polarize the political system. The solution is to provoke one's opponents into extreme positions. Reducing the size of the political center is crucial for the competitive autocrat. The rise of two extreme poles splits the center: The moderate left becomes appalled by the right and gravitates toward the radical left, and vice versa. The center never disappears entirely, but it melts down to a manageable size.

*Spread the Wealth Selectively.* Chávez's populism is grandiose, but selective. His supporters will receive unimaginable favors, and detractors are paid in insults. Chávez has plenty of resources from which he can draw. He is, after all, one of the world's most powerful CEOs in one of the world's most profitable businesses: selling oil to the United States. He has steadily increased personal control over PDVSA (with an estimated \$84 billion in sales for 2005, PDVSA has the fifth-largest state-owned oil reserves in the world).

*Allow the Bureaucracy to Decay, Almost.* A competitive autocrat like Chávez doesn't require competent bureaucracy. He can allow the bureaucracy to de-

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6 Ivan Krastev, "Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 22:2 (April 2012), p. 7.

cline—with one exception: the offices that count the votes. Perhaps the best evidence that Chávez is fostering bureaucratic chaos is cabinet turnover.

*Antagonize the Superpower.* Chávez's attacks on the United States escalated noticeably at the end of 2004. All autocrats need international support. Many seek this support by cuddling up to superpowers. The Chávez way is to become a ballistic anti-imperialist.

*Controlled Chaos.* Ultimately, all authoritarian regimes seek power by following the same principle: they raise society's tolerance for state intervention. The more insecurity that citizens face—the closer they come to living in the brutish state of nature—the more they will welcome state power."<sup>7</sup>

These mechanisms help authoritarian leaders not just adapt their regimes to modern world challenges but to make them competitive and sustainable.

### BELARUS REGIME IN THE WORLD LANDSCAPE

Why the Republic of Belarus appeared on the world map after collapse of the USSR in December 1991 is a good case of resurgent authoritarianism.

**Table 2: Countries by regime type\***

Category scores							
Countries	Rank	Overall score	Electoral process and pluralism	Functioning of government	Political participation	Political culture	Civil liberties
<b>Full democracies</b>							
Norway	1	9.93	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	10.00
<b>Hybrid regimes</b>							
Ukraine	80	5.91	7.92	4.64	5.56	4.38	<b>7.06</b>
<b>Authoritarian regimes</b>							
Russia	122	3.74	3.92	2.86	5.00	2.50	<b>4.41</b>
<i>Belarus</i>	<b>141</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>4.38</b>	<b>2.35</b>
China	142	3.00	0.00	4.64	3.89	5.00	<b>1.47</b>
North Korea	167	1.08	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00

\**The Economist* Democracy Index 2012

After his victory in the relatively free and fair presidential election in 1994, Alexander Lukashenko ruled the country following a quite simple strategy: he rebuilt Soviet-style command economy, and isolated Belarus from economic chaos encompassed in the rest of the former USSR in mid 1990s. By reducing unemployment level below 1% and providing a moderate but stable economic growth, he satisfied public expectations. During the first years of his rule he also marginalized or eliminated any political alternatives. Concentration of economic and political power allowed him to rule the country under di-

7 Javier Corrales, "Hugo Boss," *Foreign Policy* (January-February 2006), pp. 4-7.

rect personal control. This is similar to how many other authoritarian regimes emerged on the political map of modern world, but it does not explain how Lukashenko succeeded to rule the country for two decades.

*The Economist's* Democracy Index 2012 defined Belarus as one of 51 authoritarian regimes with 141st rank among 167 countries, and stressed its negative trend (128th rank in 2007).

Belarus' neighbors in the Index are Yemen and China with rankings of 140 and 142.<sup>8</sup> If, for example, the placement of authoritarian Tajikistan between Bahrain and Afghanistan is not surprising because all countries are Asian (Afghanistan is a geographical neighbor), Belarus is not just hundreds of miles away from China, and it is in the heart of Europe.

As one could see from the Freedom House "Nations in Transit 2013" report entitled "Authoritarian Aggression and the Pressures of Austerity," Belarus keeps the lowest level of Democracy average scores among the Slavic triangle countries, and has the most stable rating during last decade<sup>9</sup>:

**Table 3: Ratings and Democracy Score Summary**

Country	EP	CS	IM	NGOV	LGOV	JFI	CO	DS
Belarus	7.00	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	6.25	6.71
Russia	6.75	5.50	6.25	6.50	6.00	6.00	6.50	6.21
Ukraine	4.00	2.75	4.00	5.75	5.50	6.00	6.00	4.86

Notes: The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The 2013 ratings reflect the period January 1 through December 31, 2012. The Democracy Score (DS) is an average of ratings for Electoral Process (EP); Civil Society (CS); Independent Media (IM); National Democratic Governance (NGOV); Local Democratic Governance (LGOV); Judicial Framework and Independence (JFI); and Corruption (CO)

**Table 4: Democracy Score, by ratings history**

Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Change
Belarus	6.54	6.64	6.71	6.68	6.71	6.57	6.50	6.57	6.68	6.71	▼
Russia	5.25	5.61	5.75	5.86	5.96	6.11	6.14	6.18	6.18	6.21	▼
Ukraine	4.88	4.50	4.21	4.25	4.25	4.39	4.39	4.61	4.82	4.86	▼

There are several features of the Belarusian authoritarianism that explain its vitality. I define them as a gradual farewell to the USSR, the value split of the society, and a quiet revolution in the social structure of the society, incomplete national identity, and a dual geo-political choice. I argue that these peculiarities are deeply rooted in history, culture and geography.<sup>10</sup> Most of the

<sup>8</sup> "Democracy Index 2012: Global Democracy at a Standstill."

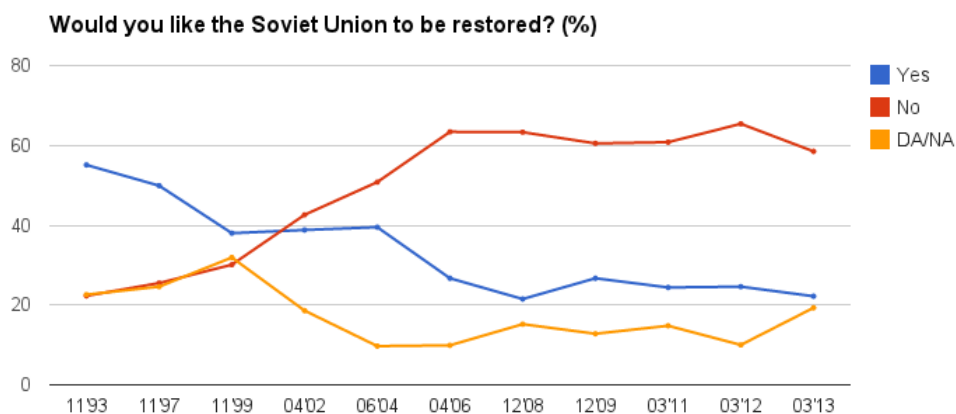
<sup>9</sup> [http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2013\\_Tables\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2013_Tables_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Oleg Manaev, Natalie Manayeva, Dzmitri Yuran, "More State than Nation: Lukashenko's Belarus," *Journal of International Affairs* 65:1 [Inside Authoritarian State] (2011), p. 94.

arguments are based on a series of nationwide public opinion polls conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS).

### GRADUAL FAREWELL TO THE USSR

Many experts and politicians inside and outside of Belarus used to define the existing regime as the “totalitarian system” or “return to the Past,” stressing that its basic mechanism are repression (from the top down) and fear (from the bottom up). To some extent it is true. On the other hand, however many new elements of the Belarusian social, economic and political system by definition could not exist in the Soviet (or any other totalitarian) model. And, what is more important, the Soviet heritage has gradually but steadily been overcome by the people:



**Figure 1.** Dynamics of public attitudes towards the restoration of the USSR (Here and after data is according to the nationwide public opinion polls conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (1,500 respondents of age 18+ were face-to-face interviewed, a sample error did not exceed 0.03). Dots on the graph represent dates of public opinion polls. See: [www.iiseps.org](http://www.iiseps.org)

As one can see, the number of respondents in favor of restoration of the USSR during last 20 years has decreased more than twice while opposition to its restoration increased 2.7 times. The number of the respondents uncertain about such a restoration decreased 1.5 times. Those numbers are indicative that the nature of Belarusian authoritarianism differs from that of its Soviet past, and the USSR cannot be used as the only point of reference.

### VALUE SPLIT OF THE SOCIETY

One of the most important foundations for any form of authoritarianism is a significant split of the society. “Winners get everything and losers nothing”—this old saying fits Belarus well.

And in the case of this country it means not just substitution of one ruling elite by another, but *substitution of one value system by another*. New values of national independence, political democracy, rule of law, market economy, the “return to European family” inspired Belarusian democrats of the perestroika wave and led to the emerging independence and democracy in early 1990s. Those values were substituted by the patriarchic values of rule of “father of the people,” “fair distribution of prosperity,” and “restoration of the historic and cultural Union/friendship with Russia.” Moreover, the latter values of the majority were consolidated while the values of the minority were marginalized via various political, legal, economic, information, educational and other means. Instead of a system of checks and balances, Belarus got a system of one force absolute domination. Therefore, analysts began to talk about “the revolt of the masses” referring to the famous book by Ortega y Gasset.<sup>11</sup>

Analysis proves that the split has not only been of a social-demographic nature, but also of a value nature in a way pre-determined by the Soviet and Russian Empire legacy. This includes lack of initiative, responsibilities, and trust as well as the tendency to rely on authorities. Thus, Lukashenko’s convinced supporters stand out against privatizing state property; they do not notice infringement of human rights or problems with the authoritarian political climate and the state of democracy. In addition, majority of his base supported Lukashenko’s candidates at the parliamentary and local elections which they considered free and fair. On the contrary, his convinced opponents support privatization, are seriously concerned with human right infringements, the political climate and the state of democracy in Belarus. Lukashenko’s opponents mostly supported alternative and independent candidates at the parliamentary and local elections which they did not consider free or fair. Ratio of those who believe the best type of government is democracy and those who chose “a strong hand” is 48 percent vs. 43 percent among those who trusted to Lukashenko, while it is 82 percent vs. 10 percent among those who distrust him. Responding to the question about the direction of political life in Belarus, 41 percent of those who trust Lukashenko said it was a developing democracy and only 17 percent said it was emerging authoritarianism, while only 5 percent of those who did not trust the Belarusian president gave the first answer and over 53 percent the latter.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the deciding voting cohort here” is the hands the hesitating majority, and consequently, Lukashenko’s support depends mainly on the degree to which his policies meet their expectations. He succeeded in forming a sort of coalition between his supporters most of the hesitating voters at the Presidential elections by offering a social contract in the form of financial preferences in exchange for political loyalty.

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11 Jose Ortega, Y. Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993).

12 Oleg Manaev, ed., *Presidential Elections in Belarus: From Limited Democracy to Unlimited Authoritarianism (1994–2006)* (Novosibirsk: Vodolei, 2006), p. 67.



As comparative analysis shows, in all elections Lukashenko received the necessary majority vote for the re-election (even despite a 20% discrepancy between IISEPS and Central Electoral Commission data):

**Table 5: Results of voting at the Presidential elections, %\***

Options	09'2001		03'2006		12'2010		X	
	CEC data	IISEPS data	CEC data	IISEPS data	CEC data	IISEPS data	CEC data	IISEPS data
For Lukashenko	75.7	57.9	83.0	63.1	79.7	58.1	<b>79.5</b>	<b>59.7</b>
For alternative candidates	18.2	31.3	11.8	30.3	12.9	32.6	<b>14.3</b>	<b>31.4</b>
Against all (+ invalid bulletins)	6.1	10.8	5.2	6.6	7.4	9.3	6.2	8.9

\* From those who voted

As a result, a majority of the electorate believes in the legitimacy of his victories despite the fact that all presidential elections after 1994 were not recognized by the international community and institutions, and the correlation of these groups with voting groups is very close:

**Table 6: Dynamics of Presidential elections public assessments ("On your opinion, were recent Presidential elections free and fair?"), %**

Options	08'2001	02'2006	10'2010	X
Yes	58.1	57.9	54.4	<b>56.8</b>
No	35.8	32.9	32.3	<b>33.7</b>
DA/NA	6.1	9.2	13.3	9.5

At the press conference the day after the December 19, 2010 presidential elections (which ended with brutal repression against thousands of street protesters and arrests of several presidential candidates), Lukashenko recognized a split in the Belarusian society for the first time, but assigned 80 percent to "the majority" and 20 percent to "the minority." In March, 2011 respondents were asked to determine on their own to which of those groups they belonged. The answers were distributed in the following way: "I belong to the majority of the Belarusian society"—60.9 percent, "I belong to the minority of the Belarusian society"—23.7 percent, 15.4 percent found it difficult to answer. It is not surprising that most of the people attributed themselves to the majority, since belonging to the majority provides the feeling of security. The self-identified majority proved to be larger than the electoral majority, while to and the minority—smaller.<sup>13</sup> Analysis shows a strong connection between public

13 Oleg Manaev, Natalie Manayeva, Dzmitri Yuran, "Spiral of Silence" in Election Campaigns in Post-Communist Society," *International Journal of Market Research* 52:3(2010), p. 331.

assessments of the general course in Belarus with trust of Lukashenko, and self-attributing to the majority/minority groups:

**Table 7: Correlation of public assessments of Belarus general course with trust to Lukashenko and attributing to the majority/minority groups, %\***

Options	All respondents	Including:			
		Trust Lukashenko	Distrust Lukashenko	Attribute themselves to the majority	Attribute themselves to the minority
In the right direction	45.3	77.9	9.5	54.0	24.9
In the wrong direction	40.0	9.5	79.5	31.0	63.2
DA/NA	14.7	12.6	11.0	15.0	11.9

\*According to IISEPS poll in September 2010.

As for dealing with the “disagreeing minority,” Belarusian authorities on behalf of majority via various mechanisms (from brutal repression and one-year renewal job contracts to passing legislation and reducing access to legislature, mainstream media, and freedom of associations) succeeded to marginalize it and, in fact, made it invisible. Hopes for a young generation to rise as an engine of changes have not been realized because of to the same sticks and carrots policy of Lukashenko, who succeeded in gaining loyalty from one part of the youth and marginalized the other.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, opposition is deeply deconsolidated, public protest potential is low (number of protestors decreased from tens of thousands in the 1990’s to just hundreds or thousands during recent years, except election/after election days):

**Table 8: Dynamics of actual and potential public protest activities, %**

Options	09’2001		03’2006		12’2010		X	
	Took part	Ready to take part	Took part	Ready to take part	Took part	Ready to take part	Took part	Ready to take part
Rallies, pickets	3.8	15.5	5.8	10.9	5.9	11.8	5.2	12.7
Strikes	0.8	14.5	1.1	10.0	1.2	8.6	1.0	11.0
Hunger strikes	0.1	4.1	0.3	4.7	0.5	4.2	0.3	4.3

The decrease of the public trust, defined by Robert Putnam as “an essential component of social capital... it strengthens cooperation”<sup>15</sup> is an inevitable consequence of a polarizing society, and it significantly reduces any protest

14 Oleg Manaev, ed., *Youth and Civil Society in Belarus: New Generation* (St.-Petersburg: Nevskii Prostor, 2011), p. 17.

15 Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 12.

potential. According to the IISEPS September 2010 poll only 23.6 percent of respondents said “most of people could be trusted” while 72.2 percent said “one should be very careful in relations with people.” Moreover, the level of public distrust is much higher among Lukashenko’s opponents than is among his supporters: 34.2 percent of his supporters trust most of people while only 10.6 percent of his opponents gave similar answer.

Due to the value split of the society strengthened by the stick and carrot politics, responding to the question: “On your opinion, how life will change after Lukashenko leaves the office?” only 22.4 percent of respondents expected “improving,” while 25.2 percent expected “worsening,” 34.8 percent said “life will remaining the same,” and 17.6 percent—DA/NA (September 2010). As a famous proverb says, “a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush.” Thus, the polarization of the Belarusian society by the ideological-political factors during time of Lukashenko’s rule has not been reduced but has been deepened, catastrophically jeopardizing the unity of Belarusians as a nation.

### “QUIET REVOLUTION”

Deepening of the societal split by the stick and carrot policies has much more fundamental consequences for revival of “the Spiteful Phoenix” of authoritarianism than promotion of one kind of values and marginalization of the others. It affects the very social structure of the society so significantly, that this process can be called a quiet social revolution: during the first decade of Lukashenko’s rule, some socio-professional groups have been taken down while others have been lifted up.

Analysis of the basic social-professional groups of the Belarusian society in respect to four most important criteria—welfare, correspondence of their position to services they perform to the society, moral authority and real influence—have revealed a rather striking situation. Under Lukashenko’s rule, status and role of some social groups, such as businessmen, directors of the state enterprises and journalists, have been taken down. At the same time, status and role of other groups have been lifted up, for example executive branch and law enforcement officers. Thus, according to IISEPS opinion poll, from 1996 through 2004 welfare of the executive branch has increased by 6 percent and of law agencies—by 12 percent, but today it corresponds less with their services to the society (the “they live better than they deserve” answer has been chosen by 5 percent more respondents as regards Presidential executives and by over 12 percent more respondents as regards law enforcement officers). Their moral prestige has decreased (“they are not respected in the society” alternative has been chosen by 12 percent more respondents) but their influence over lives of people, on the contrary, has increased (“great influence” of the Presidential executives has gone up by 10 percent and of law enforcement officers—by almost 13 percent). On the other hand, welfare of businessmen has dropped down by nearly 29 percent and of the state enterprises directors—almost by 18 percent.

They “live better than deserve” alternative was chosen by 28 percent and 25 percent respectively but respect of the society, on the contrary, has grown by 14 percent and 8.4 percent respectively. The military remained at the very bottom: one third of respondents said they “live worse than they deserve” and “don’t have any influence upon the society.” The president’s true “merit” is the appearance of the opposition as a particular socio-professional group that is no longer involved with MP’s, directors of state enterprises or businessmen.<sup>16</sup>

At present, Belarus has two policemen for every member of the military (1,441.6 militiamen per 100,000 people, which is two times more the average rate of 15 countries, even Russia is ranked second with 975.7 law-enforcement officers per 100,000 people).<sup>17</sup> The promise to reinforce the authorities has turned into the fact that the executive branch (over 100,000 people) have become the most influential group in the society that does not have the respect of citizens, and lives far beyond its means.

Fundamentally, a true social revolution has taken place in the Belarusian society over the first decade of Lukashenko’s rule. Unlike the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 it occurred without mass violence. However, this quiet revolution has already had serious consequences for the Belarusian society and the state because it means significant redistribution of power, re-allocation of property and access to social resources such as healthcare, education, in addition to the culture that stands behind redistribution of social statuses. The future of hundreds of thousands of people is inevitably changed following such a revolution. For example, children of the people in the executive branch and law enforcement officers have very different prospects than children of most businessmen and members of the military.

The common people, however, who celebrated a new historical victory over elites with Lukashenko’s presidency, began to understand that a quiet revolution is still going on, and the ultimate victory moved away from their hands.

Obviously, during just six years the social weight of the first strata significantly increased while of the second and third decreased. Another inevitable consequence of this quiet revolution is a significant reduction of public participation in the decision-making process. Responding to the question: “What is your influence on the ongoing processes?” at the family level only 5 percent said “no influence at all,” at job level—33.3 percent, at district level—51.8 percent, at village/town level—62.7 percent, and at the country level—72.7 percent.

Finally, Lukashenko turned from the president of the common people marginalized by elites to the president of his own elites,—a kind of new praetorians, a group of about million people (with family members) for 9.5 million country, led by their boss and ready to ensure their interests by any means. For example, 4 from 6 of his Chiefs of Staff were from various security services.

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16 [<http://iiseps.org/old/e6-04-4.html>]

17 [<http://charter97.org/en/news/2010/6/22/30018/>]

**Table 9: Dynamics of public assessments of President Lukashenko's social basis "In your opinion, whom President Lukashenko rely on the most?" (More than one answer possible), %**

Social groups	August 2006	Social strata	June 2012	Social strata
Military, police, state security service	48.6	Government and civil servants - 69.6%	56.6	Government and civil servants - 80.6%
Presidential executives	37.0		45.4	
State bureaucrats	20.5		33.2	
Pensioners	41.4	The people - 68.6%	39.7	The people - 58.8%
Villagers	30.0		24.0	
The common people	34.2		18.1	
Directors of the state enterprises	13.5	Professionals - 28.9%	14.1	Professionals - 24.3%
Specialists	9.9		5.1	
Cultural and scientific elite	8.3		3.5	
Businessmen	4.5		5.5	
DA/NA	3.8		3.4	

Some politicians and experts consider as prove that Lukashenko is approaches the end of him being in power, but it's a questionable conclusion. Indeed, his support by the common Belarusians has reduced. But on the other hand, his dependence on the people's love has been reduced as well. And instead of this fickle love he gets more reliable interests of new supporters who depend on his power more than common majority. Moreover, the latter does not completely substitute the first. More likely, he got hundreds of thousands of new helpers who are vitally interested in this regime existence. As US-Belarusian scholar Elena Gapova stressed, "Prospect of national anger and mass exit to streets—so mass that it would become 'revolution'—is improbable. Lukashenko slowed down the formation of social classes in part by constraining economic inequality. Therefore, any bourgeoisie (or middle class in the western sense) isn't present, and without the elite having reasonable hopes of coming to power, revolutions don't happen. Given that the elite lack the means to assure a successful power grab they remain relatively satisfied with the stability of the status quo."<sup>18</sup>

### INCOMPLETE NATIONAL IDENTITY

The fundamental problem of Belarus, directly correlated with its society split, is a problem of its national identity. To analyze this problem we use the same general criteria reflected in the psychological analysis of a personality: cognitive, emotional, and motivational or behavioral elements.

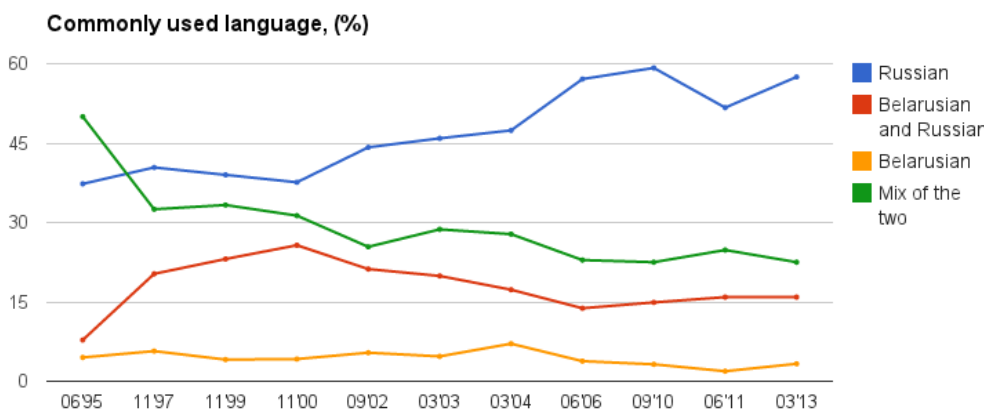
There are two important aspects of Belarus' national identity problem. First being its incomplete nature or national character. "Project Belarus" is a

18 [[http://old.gaidarfund.ru/projects.php?chapter=project\\_club\\_discuss&id=58](http://old.gaidarfund.ru/projects.php?chapter=project_club_discuss&id=58)]

system of institutional and cultural features that attempt to clearly differentiate the Belarusian nation, state and society from others. After a three centuries brake in its nation and state building, Belarusians faced a very serious challenge of self-identification: Who we are? What culture, or more broadly speaking, what civilization do we belong to? These questions sound strange to almost all neighbors—Poles, Balts, Russians, and even Ukrainians, but not for many if not most Belarusians. In the early 1960s while visiting Minsk, the USSR Communist leader Khrushchev stressed that Belarusians would be the first to fully enter true Communism because they had completely and successfully transformed themselves from being Belarusians to a true Soviet society.

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of Belarus' independence in August 2011 many actors stressed that, opposite to its national neighbors, Belarusian independence “appeared from nowhere” and that it lacked a passionate uprising and did not demonstrate even a genuine desire for change among the citizenry as a whole.<sup>19</sup> A lack of answers to the fundamental questions of identity made the country unstable, and will inevitably lead to a need for a unifying and fundamental acceptance of a national self. Lukashenko used this situation very effectively introducing himself as such the person and his presidency as the institution that can provide the needed unifying national identity. He shaped the national identity as a direct reflection of himself and his authority.

One of the basic behavioral elements of national identity is the use of language in everyday communications. According to last census (fall 2009) 83.7 percent of citizens identified themselves as Belarusians, 60.8 percent declared their native language Belarusian (73 percent at the previous census in 1999), while only 26 percent said they speak Belarusian at home (36.7 percent in 1999). According to public opinion polls, the number of Belarusian speaking citizens is significantly less, and in a general state of decline:



**Figure 2.** Dynamics of language use in everyday communication.

19 Vital Tsygankov, “What and Who Endangers Belarusian Independence?” *Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe* (August 11, 2011) [<http://www.svaboda.org/content/transcript/24290650.html>]

The additional important elements of national identity are awareness of affinity either with Russians or with Europeans, the degree to which one views his own identity as being connected to the national identity and the value one places on national independence. According to an ISEPS March 2010 poll, almost 75 percent of respondents identified themselves as closer to Russians while less than 20 percent to Europeans. Responding to the question: "Are Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians different nations or three branches of the same nation?" 66.5 percent said "three branches" while 30.6 percent—"different nations." Responding to the question: "What is more important—improving of Belarus economic standing or its independence?" 63.4 percent said "economic improvement" while only 28.2 percent said "independence."

The second aspect of the national identity problem is its correlation with political identification, i.e. support or opposition to the Belarusian regime and its leader. Correlation analysis demonstrates that the old generation not only speaks Belarusian, but feels proud for being Belarusian (emotional element), and at the same time has an awareness of closer affinity to Russian culture (cognitive element), and in a broad sense as a way of life and social order. The younger generation, in contrast, feels much less proud of being Belarusian and feels closer to the European culture. Aging pensioners and rural villagers also dominate in a group who would like to live in Belarus (behavioral element), while private sector employees and students dominate in a group with alternative attitudes. On average, a typical portrait of a Belarusian "nationalist" is seen as a rural pensioner with low education, while that of a Belarusian "cosmopolite" is of a young and well-educated private sector employee from an urban area. There is no significant difference in their actual welfare but their self-assessments differ significantly: the first type assesses their welfare as relatively stable, looks to the future with optimism, and is supportive of the authorities' economic policy, while the second believes its welfare is worsening, looks to the future with pessimism, and criticize the authorities' economic policy.

Political values of these types are much more contrasted. Obviously, "nationalists" at the same time are "loyalists" while "cosmopolites" are "critics" of Belarusian regime. Moreover, this contrast manifests itself both at the "operative" (assessments of youth career perspectives, activities of presidential executives, voting habits), and the "basic" (preference of democracy or "hard hand" politics, assessment of the country's general course etc.) levels of attitudes. The most obvious difference is in their attitude toward a major symbol of Belarusian politics—the presidency of Lukashenko (trust, real and hypothetical voting).

There are various reasons, mostly historical and cultural explaining incomplete character of Belarusian national identity i.e. disappearance of national memory about independent state since XVII century, massive Russification during XIX–XX centuries, strong similarities between Belarusian and Russian cultures, etc. This is becoming obvious, not only for experts, but for politicians as well. Lukashenko himself defined Belarusians as "Russians, but of better

quality” and confessed that “We have not found yet that national idea which would lead the people to the battle.”<sup>20</sup> For the moment, statehood is the main keystone of their national identity (not history, culture or language). Some experts say, as a result, there is much more state than nation in Belarus.<sup>21</sup>

### DUAL GEOPOLITICAL CHOICE

Another consequence of incomplete national identity has become a major foundation of Belarusian authoritarianism. According to the Samuel Huntington theory, over centuries Belarus, as well as Ukraine and Moldova, were, on a fault line of sorts between a Western European Catholic/Protestant civilization and an Eurasian Orthodox civilizations.<sup>22</sup> Due to different influences from the outside, its geopolitical and even national identities are still developing. After the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, this region, according to Timothy Ash, “became a battle ground between two empires—Russian and European.”<sup>23</sup>

Under these circumstances Belarus’ incomplete national identity turned out by a duality of its geopolitical choice: while “advanced minority” looks for Europe, “common majority” looks for Russia. This geo-political split is enlarged by pragmatic interests: Who offers more? Lukashenko used these internal and external contradictions masterfully. On the one hand, during almost two decades he demonstrated pro-Russian politics inside the country, by this way getting support from the majority. On the other hand, he played a game with both geo-political sides by demonstrating to Russia its readiness “to protect Slavic civilization from the NATO monsters,” and demonstrating to Europe its readiness to withstand Russian expansion Westwards, and thereby getting various measures of support from both sides albeit mostly from Russia.

Analysis shows that the main features of Belarusians’ geopolitical choice are its split and ambivalence. Thus, when given “either or” options—between accession with the EU or integration with Russia—each one gets today around 40%.

Noticeably, during the last decade the pro-Russian geopolitical choice is gradually decreasing while the pro-European one is on the rise. One should not, however, make far-reaching conclusions about the “Europeanization” of

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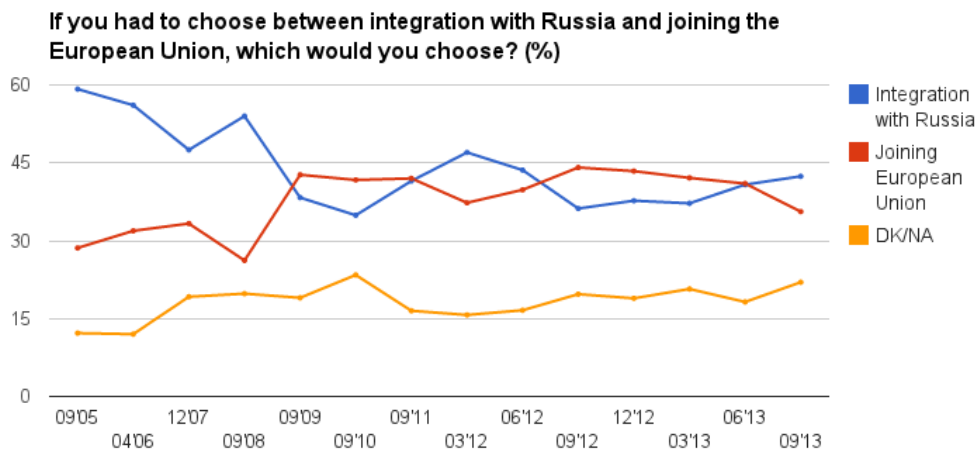
20 Vladimir Podgol, *Lukashenko’s Quotes from Podgol Collection* (Minsk: F. Skaryna Publishing, 2007), p. 75.

21 David R. Marples, *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (Newark: Harwood Academic, 1999); Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008); Ryszard Radzik, *Białorusini Miedzy Wschodem a Zachodem* (Lublin: UMCS, 2012).

22 Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (1993), pp. 218-241.

23 Timothy Ash, “Europe Needs to Forge a Strategy to Cope with a Shaken, Evolving Russia,” *The Guardian* (February 5, 2009).





**Figure 3.** Dynamics of public attitudes towards a geo-political choice

Belarus. First, because this dynamic is unstable and depends significantly on external factors, such as Russia's 1998 default, NATO's operations in Yugoslavia in 1999, the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, the Ukrainian-Russian conflicts in 2014. This means that the geo-political choice for millions of Belarusians is not a basic element of their national identity, but a derivative from other factors. It also means that in principle the country could shift in either direction.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, while analyzing geopolitical choices of Belarusians one should keep in mind the hierarchical structure of national identity and distinguish at least two levels: the operational level and the basic level. The operational level is largely determined by everyday life, i.e. current events, experiences, thoughts and feelings, or the so-called pragmatic factors. The geopolitical choice or the willingness to change the place of residence according to the tabulated data is most often motivated by these very pragmatic factors. The basic level is determined not by current events, experiences, thoughts and feelings, but rather by more general elements, including archetypical, cultural-psychological structures, which makes it possible for a person to identify himself or herself within the context of the cultural environment. That is the reason why, though willing to move to the Western countries, Belarusians emigrate to Russia far more frequently than to Europe.

It was demonstrated above how close most of Belarusians are to Russian culture and language. Moreover, responding to the question: "What is your attitude now towards Russia in general?" 70.1 percent of respondents said "very/mostly positive" while only 26.7 percent "very/mostly negative" (September 2009). Responding to the question: "Do you consider Russia as abroad?" 79.4 percent said "no" while only 17.4 percent "yes." Responding to the question: "Some people think Belarus should reduce its integration with Russia. What

<sup>24</sup> Oleg Manaev, ed., *Belarus and "Wider Europe": A Quest for Geo-political Self-identification* (Novosibirsk: Vodolei, 2007), p. 10.

is your opinion?" 30.9 percent said "integration should be strengthened," 39.6 percent—"better to remain the existing level of integration"; while only 13.9 percent said "integration should be reduced."

It should be emphasized that due to the promotion of the anti-Russian policy mentioned above, whoever should make it, would hardly find any serious support among the Belarusian majority, since its limits are determined by the 'basic' level of national identity. Even the majority of those who were going to vote for a candidate from the democratic opposition in the 2010 Presidential elections preferred such a candidate "who would equally improve the relationship of our country with both Europe and Russia": 41.5 percent vs. 14.2 percent of those who answered "for the candidate who would improve the relationship of our country with Europe." Not surprising, the nationalists mentioned above obviously have pro-Russian attitudes, while the "cosmopolites" are more pro-European. An amazing peculiarity of the Belarusian national identity is that those respondents who are proud to be Belarusians and want to live in Belarus, at the same time consider themselves closer to Russians than to Europeans. This demonstrates affinity to Russians in the Belarusian national identity with a basic foundation of this closeness being common history.

#### INFLUENCING THE REGIME DYNAMICS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

Comparative analysis of the authoritarian development in the Post-Communist "Slavic triangle," based on the "competitive autocracy" paradigm<sup>25</sup> reveals a lot of similarities.

**Table 10: Comparative data of strengthening authoritarianism in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine**

Features	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine
Changing the Constitution for strengthening President's power	In 1996 the fragile system of checks and balances was changed in favor of the executive branch, in 2004 the article limited the Presidency by maximum of two terms was abolished through national Constitutional referenda	Increase of term of the Presidency from 4 to 6 years in 2008 through the State Duma decision	In 2010 Constitutional Court de-facto abolished the political reform of 2004, and President Yanukovich got increased President's powers (President-Parliament Republic instead of Parliament-President one)

25 Kimitaka Matsuzato, "A Populist Island in an Ocean of Clan Politics: The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception among CIS Counties," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56:2 (2004); Corrales, "Hugo Boss"; Dmitri Fourman, "Problem-2008: Common and Peculiar in the Transition Processes in Post-Communists States) [<http://polit.ru/article/2007/10/19/furman/>]; Krastev, "Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism."

Subordinating the Legislature to the President's power	De-facto the Parliament was subordinated to the President through national referendum in <b>1996</b>	After turmoil of early 1990s the State Duma was separated from the Kremlin but <b>after</b> Putin came to power in <b>2000</b> the State Duma was subordinated to the Kremlin	Constitutional Court in <b>2010</b> made decision that coalitions in the Parliament could be created not only by factions but by separate MPs as well
Subordinating the Judiciary to the President's power	De-facto the Constitutional Court was subordinated to the President through national referendum in <b>1996</b>	The new Law on legal system passed in <b>2002</b> de-facto subordinated it to the executives (courts quantitative structure, convocation time, forms of voting). Since then judges are appointed by the federal authorities, the term limit of Courts Chairmen was changed from a lifetime to 6 years etc.	In <b>2010</b> a system of Special Courts was introduced while the Supreme Court lost significant part of its powers, and the judges began to be appointed by the Supreme Legal Soviet subordinated to the President's administration
Strengthening the President's control over elections (through various mechanisms)	Since <b>1996</b> (through national referendum and changes in the Electoral Code)	Since <b>2001</b> (through changes in the Electoral Code and various executive resolutions)	In <b>2011</b> proportional electoral system was replaced by the majority-proportional one
Creation of the "executive vertical" (including appointment of the local authorities—such as governors and mayors—instead of electing those public officials)	Since <b>1994</b> through national referenda and President's Decrees	Since <b>2004</b> through the State Duma, Soviet of Federation and President's decrees	Since <b>2011</b> local self-government in important regions (Kiev, Chernovtsy, Kherson) de-facto was substituted by the government (by election delay)
Criminal prosecution of political opponents by the government	Minister of agriculture V. Leonov was imprisoned on politically motivated charges in <b>1997</b> , and the same happened to ex-Prime-Minister M. Chigir in <b>1999</b>	Former prime-minister and vice prime-ministers M. Kasyanov, B. Nemtsov, A. Kudrin face growing pressures from the authorities, Y. Urlashov, YaroslavI' major and activist of the "Civic Platform" party arrested in <b>2013</b>	Ex-Prime-Minister Y. Timoshenko and Minister of Interior Y. Lutsenko were imprisoned on politically motivated charges in <b>2010</b>
Marginalization of the political opposition	Since <b>1996</b> (dismissal of the XIII Supreme Soviet, no opposition at the Parliament since 2008)	Since <b>2001</b> (no real opposition at the State Duma since 2012)	Since <b>2010</b> representation of the opposition at the Supreme Rada decreased

Strengthening state control over private business	President A. Lukashenko subordinated leading private businesses to his administration since <b>1994</b> and “crushed” the ones not supporting to him (A. Pupeiko, N. Shevko, V. Kudinov, A. Klimov and others were arrested or had to emigrate in <b>1997</b> )	President V. Putin oppressed leading oligarchs B. Berezovskii, D. Gysinskii, M. Hodorkovskii in <b>2000–2003</b> , and appointed his allies to leading state-run corporations (I. Sechin, A. Serdyukov etc.)	In <b>2011–2013</b> the state control institutions “inspected” oligarchs competed to the ruling Donetsk’ business groups (R. Akhmetov, K. Zhevago, I. Kolomoiskii and others)
Various limitations for the civil society	Since <b>late 1990s</b> authorities introduced various “regulations” limiting activity of civil society structures (like notorious Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code passed in <b>1999</b> ).	In the first year after enactment of a harsh <b>2006</b> civil society law, Russia’s Justice Ministry undertook more than 13,000 NGO inspections. Since then, the Kremlin has layered on other tax and regulatory measures to shackle various NGOs.	Growing pressure on human rights, ecologists and other civil society activists <b>after 2010</b> (D. Groysman persecution in <b>2011</b> , V. Goncharenko murder in <b>2012</b> etc.)
Reducing role of political parties	After <b>mid 1990s</b> activity of political parties (15 of them officially registered, including 5 oppositional), but their activity is limited by various obstacles, and they have no real impact on public life.	Variety of parties in early <b>1990s</b> ; however, <b>after mid 2000s</b> it has evolved into a system with one ruling party “United Russia,” three parliamentary parties controlled by the Kremlin, and some parties with very limited space. <b>Since 2007</b> none of new parties have been registered, and 9 were denied by formal reasons.	There are various parties with different level of political influence, but a new Law introduced in <b>2011</b> changed a proportion electoral system to the mixed one for a favor of ruling “Party of Regions.”
Various limitations for foreign aids	In <b>1997</b> authorities shut down Belarusian Soros Foundation, in <b>2003</b> IREX and Internes were shut down as well. President’s Decree № 23 of November 28, <b>2003</b> “On getting and using foreign aids” declared any foreign aid not registered by the President administration to be criminal. In <b>2011</b> the same article 369 (2) was added to the Criminal Code.	In <b>2012</b> facing growing pressure from the authorities USAID had to stop its activities in Russia (since <b>1992</b> it had spent over \$ 2.5 bln for social-economic development in Russia). Since <b>2012</b> new Law calls NGOs that receive funding from international donors “foreign agents.”	In <b>2011</b> the ruling “Party of Regions” started working out a draft law (instead of the <b>1992</b> Law on Public Associations) to control NGOs funding from abroad.

Strengthening state control over the mass media	Since <b>1994</b> through President's decrees and Government's resolutions (national TV, Radio and leading newspaper were subordinated directly to the President)	Since <b>2000</b> mostly through changing structures of ownership (ORT, NTV, RenTV and other cases).	Growing pressure on independent media since <b>2010</b> (TVi case in 2012)
Strengthening state control over science	According to the Law of <b>1998</b> on the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, its President that was previously elected by academicians was replaced by the Presidium Chairman appointed by President Lukashenko.	According to the Draft Law of <b>2013</b> Russian Academy of Sciences will lose the right to manage its property (it will be passed on to the government), and its President will be approved by the government as well.	According to Prof. Maxim Strikha "Destruction mechanism of Russian Academy of Sciences has been started. And Ukrainian scientists have little time left to convince authorities not to destroy our science by 'Russian scenario'." <sup>26</sup>
Repressions against independent research/analytic centers	Shutting down the II-SEPS (by the Supreme Court) in <b>2005</b>	General Prosecutor Office' warnings to the Levada Center in <b>2013</b>	In <b>2012</b> SSU called for questioning a group of famous researchers from the Institute of Sociology

As one can see, this process has one obvious feature: Belarus was the first country where these mechanisms were successfully introduced. As a rule, Russia and to a lesser extent Ukraine introduced them several years after. Of course, it does not necessarily mean that Putin and Yanukovich "studied" Lukashenko's experience before taking the same steps. It means that when faced with similar challenges and looking at how Lukashenko resolved these problems in Belarus, a significant part of the ruling elite in Russia and Ukraine decodes the message very simply: "it works." Dimensions of the influence is also proved by the fact that Belarusian authoritarianism is stronger than Russian, not speaking about Ukraine, and have remained stable over the last decade (see Tables 3-4). As *Freedom in the World-2013* noted:

"the return of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency ushered in a new period of accelerated repression. Since his inauguration in May, Putin has moved in a calculated way to stifle independent political and civic activity, pushing through a series of laws meant to restrict public protest, limit the work of NGOs, and inhibit free expression on the internet. Ukraine cracked the anti-record among Post-Soviet states. From 2008 through 2012 its cumulative indicators of freedom decreased for 16 points. This coincides to the speed of reducing democratic processes in African backward countries during last five years passed through military and ethnic conflicts."<sup>27</sup>

26 [<http://www.poisknews.ru/theme/ran/6610/>]

27 [<http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW%202013%20Booklet.pdf>]

On January 16, 2014, after two months of public protests on Maidan square in Kiev a set of draconian laws that would prohibit almost any protest, curtail freedom of speech, hobble the press, enable the government to ban citizens from using the Internet and classify advocacy groups as “foreign agents” if they receive money from abroad were passed by the majority of the ruling “Party of Regions” at the Supreme Rada and signed into law by President Yanukovich. These laws were repealed only 12 days later when some protesters were killed on Maidan.<sup>28</sup>

### SOCIAL-POLITICAL GROUNDS FOR THE BELARUS INFLUENCE

There are important foundations for the Belarus influence on the regime dynamics in Russia and Ukraine. The first one is a similar social foundation, i.e. similar social structure and political culture/mass conciseness.

According to Levada Center a 2012 poll responding to the question “What is more important for Russia now?” 56 percent said “order, even if for its achievement we have to limit several democratic principles and individual liberties,” and only 23 percent “democracy, even if following democratic principles gives some freedom for destructive and criminal elements” (DA/NA—21 percent).<sup>29</sup> According to its monitoring in 1989, only 12 percent of Russians surveyed named Stalin as one of the “most prominent people or social and cultural figures who have had the most significant influence on world history” in a list containing more than 100 different historical figures. And yet, twenty-three years later, in a 2012 poll 42 percent of respondents named Stalin the most influential taking the first place ranking for the first time. The astonishing resurgence of Stalin’s popularity in Russia tells us that public attitudes toward him are driven not by a change in awareness about his historical role but by the political climate of the time. Vladimir Putin’s Russia of 2012 needs symbols of authority and national strength, however controversial they may be, to validate the newly authoritarian political order. Stalin, while a despotic leader responsible for mass bloodshed was still identified with wartime victory and national unity.<sup>30</sup>

Not surprisingly Stratfor experts stress that “without a heavy-handed leader, Russia struggles to maintain stability. Instability is inherent to Russia given its massive, inhospitable territory, indefensible borders, hostile neighboring powers and diverse population. Only when it has had an autocratic

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28 [[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/ukraine-enacts-harsh-laws-against-protests/2014/01/17/365f377a-7fae-11e3-93c1-0e888170b723\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/ukraine-enacts-harsh-laws-against-protests/2014/01/17/365f377a-7fae-11e3-93c1-0e888170b723_story.html)]

29 [<http://www.levada.ru/>]

30 Maria Lipman, Lev Gudkov, Lasha Bakradze (Thomas de Waal, ed.) *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013) [[http://carnegieendowment.org/files/stalin\\_puzzle.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/stalin_puzzle.pdf)]

leader who sets up a system where competing factions are balanced against each other has Russia enjoyed prosperity and stability.”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, many Russians are dissatisfied with the various consequences of the strengthening authoritarianism. For example, in 2010 half of the respondents said “in general the country is going in right direction” and 29 percent said “wrong,” while in 2013 it was 41 percent and 43 percent respectively. But the level of political activism in Russia is quite low.

**Table 11: Levels of political activism in developed democracies and Russia in 2005–06 as shown in the World Values Survey, %\***

Political activism	UK	Canada	Australia	Germany	Russia
<b>Sign a petition</b>					
Have done	68.2	72.5	79.2	49.9	<b>8.3</b>
Would never	8.5	8.9	4.6	20.1	<b>69.0</b>
<b>Join in boycotts</b>					
Have done	17.2	23.5	15.4	9.4	<b>2.6</b>
Would never	44.9	40.6	35.5	50.2	<b>79.4</b>
<b>Attend lawful demonstration</b>					
Have done	16.6	26.3	20.1	30.8	<b>15.9</b>
Would never	38.6	31.9	33.2	30.2	<b>55.6</b>

\*[www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs.WVSAnalyzeQuestion.jsp](http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs.WVSAnalyzeQuestion.jsp)

Some experts argue that Ukraine’s turn to authoritarianism was determined by Yanukovich’s victory in 2010 Presidential election. Indeed, all authoritarian changes mentioned in the fourth column of Table 10 took place after this event. That election, however, was recognized by the international community as relatively free and fair. Where then is the answer to the resulting authoritarian shift? The answer can be seen in the results of opinion polling conducted by the Razumkov Center. According to polling in October 2006, two years after the Orange Revolution, 53.5 percent of respondents considered democracy “the most appropriate type of governing for Ukraine,” 20.8 percent—“under some circumstances authoritarian regime could be better than democratic,” and 10.9 percent—“for people like me type of political regime doesn’t matter.” In December 2009, just on the edge of the above presidential election, the first response decreased to 36.6 percent while the second increased to 30 percent and the third to 17 percent.<sup>32</sup> It means that the Yanukovich victory was predetermined by the public expectations and needs, and not vice versa.

31 [<http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russia-after-putin-inherent-leadership-struggles#ixzz2Y4BnMpwj>]

32 [[http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll\\_id=612](http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=612)]

Moreover, despite Ukraine being classified as hybrid and not authoritarian regime (see Table 2) in opposite to Russia and Belarus it is deeply divided by political and cultural values geographically. Thus, according to Kiev International Institute of Sociology, almost 95 percent of its Western regions population speaks Ukrainian while only 3.1 percent Russian, in Central regions this correlation is 61.2 percent vs. 24.2 percent, in Central-Eastern regions 31.9 percent vs. 46.4 percent, in South-Eastern regions 5 percent vs. 85 percent. While most part of population Western and Central regions prefers EU membership, in the South-Eastern regions correlation is the opposite: 25 percent vs. 47 percent, and in Donetsk oblast 9.4 percent vs. 72.5 percent. While most of population of Western and Central regions consider Maidan protests in winter 2013/2014 as “public protest against corruption and tyranny of Yanukovich’s dictatorship,” and only minor part as “coup d’état organized with Western assistance,” in the South-Eastern regions this correlation is 41.7 percent vs. 46 percent. While most of population of Western and Central regions consider Crimea events in March 2014 as “illegitimate annexation by Russia” and only minor part as “free self-determination of Crimea people,” in the South-Eastern regions this correlation is 44 percent vs. 43 percent. However, as KIIS Director Vladimir Paniotto stated with regret, most of new pro-Western government’s actions “in no way were guided by public opinion.”<sup>33</sup>

The problem, however, is that after authoritarianism comes to the scene and starts introducing its basic mechanisms (see Table 10), people start realizing the consequences but they cannot change the situation as they could under the democratic rule. Thus, after Presidential election of 1994 in Belarus were recognized as free and fair, none of next elections got the same recognition. In Ukraine comparing new authorities with the previous ones in May 2010 almost 50 percent of respondents said “new one is better than the previous one” and only 24 percent in May 2013, in 2010 41.3 percent said “in general the country is going in right direction” and 18.1 percent “wrong” while in 2013 32.2 percent and 62.9 percent respectively.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, all three Post-Soviet countries have quite a similar social-cultural ground that makes similar political development possible. Moreover, these Slavic nations have strong positive attitudes towards each other, and this strengthens the mutual influence. According to the Levada Center in Russia in 2013, 18 percent of the respondents said they have “very good attitudes towards Belarus now” and 67 percent “mostly good,” towards Ukraine—10 percent and 62 percent. According to Razumkov Center in Ukraine in 2009 70 percent of the respondents said they have “positive, kindly attitudes towards Belarusians,” in 2012 64.5 percent assessed Ukraine-Russia relations as “good.” According to IISEPS in Belarus in 2011 50.5 percent of the respondents said

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33 [<http://www.kiis.com.ua/index.php?lang=eng&id=4>;<http://inosmi.ru/world/20140510/220182042.html>]

34 Ibid.



they were ready “to intermarry with Russians,” 18.3 percent “to work together with Russians,” 13.7 percent “to collocate with Russians,” and with Ukrainians 26 percent, 26.3 percent and 24.4 percent respectively (to compare with Americans: 11.2 percent, 29.1 percent, and 18.9 percent).

Paradoxically but another foundation for the Belarusian influence on the regime dynamics in Russia and Ukraine is differences in their political regimes. National and foreign experts define Belarusian political regime as a “personalist” and “populist,” while Russian and Ukrainian as “clan” and “oligarch.”<sup>35</sup> Matsuzato defines Lukashenko regime as “a populist island in an ocean of clan politics” stressing that “the populist regimes are more vulnerable to economic difficulties than clan-based regimes.”<sup>36</sup> It means that Lukashenko’s regime has much wider and deeper social legitimacy than that of Putin or Yanukovich because “the population’s mentality and Lukashenko’s political philosophy and tactics reinforced each other.”<sup>37</sup> Despite the image of “the state for the people” is “getting dark” in the Belarusian public eyes (i.e. level of public trust to the state institutions is decreasing), Lukashenko’s personal rating still remains high, over 42 percent in September 2013. Neither Putin in Russia nor Yanukovich in Ukraine enjoy the same public support: in summer 2013 Putin had 29 percent and Yanukovich less than 18 percent. In this regard the case of Belarus seems closer to far away Venezuela or Zimbabwe rather than its neighbors. And this attracts significant part of the common people both in Russia and Ukraine.

These factors explain why Belarusian political regime is influencing Russia and Ukraine more seriously than the other way round.

### INTERNAL PROSPECTS FOR AUTHORITARIAN INTEGRATION

No doubts that Russia’s and Ukraine’s shift to authoritarianism after Putin replaced Yeltsin in 2000 and Yanukovich replaced Yushchenko in 2010 were determined by their own internal factors. However, Lukashenko’s authoritarianism in neighbor Belarus provided them quite an “experienced example” of this kind. Despite some differences in ideologies (Lukashenko as “the people’s President” vs. Putin as “CEO of the Russia Inc.” and Yanukovich as “Boss of the Donetsk clan”), the very social-political grounds and practices, such as the “strong executive vertical,” various preferences for the state-run economy, manipulation of the elections, marginalization of political opposition and civil society, limitations of civil liberties “proved by public needs”—facilitated Putin

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35 Matsuzato, “A Populist Island”; Philip Hanson, James Nixey, Lilia Shevtsova and Andrew Wood, *Putin Again: Implications for Russia and the West* (London: Chatham House, 2012); Vitaly Belovski, “About Differences between Belarus and Russia Political Regimes,” *Our Opinion* (March 5, 2013) [<http://nmnby.eu/news/analytics/5106.html>]

36 Matsuzato, “A Populist Island,” p. 256.

37 Matsuzato, “A Populist Island,” p. 257.

and Yanukovich in strengthening their power. Moreover, as social-economic stability in Belarus has become stronger since mid-1990s, Lukashenko's regime attracted millions of Russians and Ukrainians as a "model of real people's state" and by this way promoted authoritarian changes in both countries.<sup>38</sup>

However, comparing with Russia and Ukraine the Achilles' heel of the Belarusian "competitive authoritarianism" is lack of economic/natural resources. According to Vladimir Putin, during a decade Russia provided Belarus with more than \$50 bln gratis—by reducing prices for energy export, opening market for Belarusian goods, etc. Reducing of the Russia's funding inevitably leads to the collapse of the "Belarusian economic miracle" and its "attractiveness" in public eyes for the citizens of all three countries. But recently Lukashenko got new opportunities for strengthening "competitiveness" of his regime through various integration processes initiated by Russia.

The Custom Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (ECU) came into force in 2007, the Common Economic Space (CES) came into force in 2012, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) signed on May 29, 2014 and expected to come into force in 2015 create legal mechanisms and appropriate infrastructure for not only closer economic cooperation but political interaction as well. "Numerous unsuccessful attempts at political integration with Belarus have proven to Russia that its post-Soviet neighbors are very much afraid of too great a growth of Russian political influence, which undermines the power of the local authorities. At the same time, the neighboring countries are strongly attracted to deeper economic cooperation with the growing Russian market. In such conditions, emergence of the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan satisfies both sides: the Russian Federation is able to significantly increase its long-term economic and political influence in the Region and its partner-countries have the opportunity for greater access to the Russian market and certain political benefits. It is important to understand that the foundation of the ECU is not the economic motivation of its members, but rather a complex mix of political, international and economic reasons. One of President Putin's major international projects is the gradual extension of Russian economic and political power over the post-Soviet region."<sup>39</sup> According to "Eurasian Monitor" conducted in 2013 public approval of ECU and CES vary from two thirds to three quarters of respondents in Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, and 50 percent in Ukraine.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, all the countries' leaders stress mostly economic rather than political preferences of the integration processes. On the other hand "facts

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38 Oleg Manaev, ed., *Future of Belarus: Views of Independent Experts* (St.-Petersburg: Nevskii Prostor, 2012), p. 20.

39 Andrei Yeliseyev, "Will the Eurasian Union Determine the Future of Belarus?" *Bell: Belarus Info Letter* 5:35 (2013).

40 [[http://www.eabr.org/r/research/centre/projectsCII/integration\\_barometer/index.php?id\\_16=32343](http://www.eabr.org/r/research/centre/projectsCII/integration_barometer/index.php?id_16=32343)]

prove that membership in ECU does not provide real economic preferences (in opposite to geo-political loyalty). This can be seen when examining indicators of Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Belarusian trade. In 2012, both decreased (10.8 percent and 9.4 percent) and in the first quarter of 2013 at a rate of 20.4 percent and over 30 percent respectively. Will be further only worse because Russia's accession to WTO will lead to replacement of Belarusian goods in Russian market by more competitive Asian and Western ones."<sup>41</sup>

It means these integration processes could have more geo-political and political character than economic one. As Francis Fukuyama recently noted, "certainly, Russia is not interested in strengthening democracies in neighboring countries because it would send 'bad signal' to its citizens. Russia is more interested in having authoritarian neighbors. Therefore, we observe more and more obvious cooperation between Russia and other authoritarian states within uniform economic space, energy and transport policies."<sup>42</sup>

But this does not mean the Russian political regime determines its integration partner's regime development. As former Ukraine Ambassador to Belarus Roman Bessmertny stressed, "I have never considered that Lukashenko built his politics with Kiev just as Moscow' intermediary. He uses Moscow as well as Kiev for his own interests' realization. Taking in mind all measurements—from human to the state, Lukashenko regime is a real problem for Europe."<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to say to what extent this is clear to the Russian ruling elite but Russian intellectuals understand it very well. As a famous Russian intellectual Dmitri Bykov noted, "Obviously, the Russian regime has a lot of common with the Belarusian one. But to be on friendly terms with bad guys is dangerous. Sooner or later they can betray you. In my mind, Russia has no friends who would not betray it. And this is so bitter—you and can't imagine!"<sup>44</sup>

Thus, these integration processes do not necessarily lead these countries to "political unification." However, taking into mind the similar social and political grounds discussed above and the historical past they create, there is a potential for strengthening authoritarianism in the whole "Slavic triangle." And there is no need "to invent a bicycle" there—Lukashenko's two decades rule provides his integration partners the "reliable and up-dated experience." If this process deviates from "the axis," as it happened when Ukrainian government was preparing to sign the Association agreement with the EU in 2013—the authoritarian logic leads to coercive scenario.

Moreover, expectations of many experts that "Maidan revolution" will stimulate similar process in Belarus, Russia and other CIS countries have not

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41 [<http://www.belaruspartisan.org/politic/235619/>]

42 "Fukuyama Thinks on Belarus: People Are Fed up of Dictatorship" [<http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/25086696.html>]

43 Roman Bessmertny, "Region Is Losing because of Lukashenko Regime" [<http://www.charter97.org/ru/news/2013/6/18/70887/>]

44 Dmitri Bykov, "Lukashenko Went on Direct Blackmail of the Kremlin" [<http://www.belaruspartisan.org/politic/240831/>]

been realized. In opposite, this process stimulated public fears of instability and chaos. In Belarus it led to significant rise of Lukashenko's rating despite of economic deterioration, as well as increase of pro-Russian and decrease of pro-European attitudes.<sup>45</sup> In Russia it gave unprecedented rise of nationalistic, anti-Western and anti-democratic waves. While most of the world condemned annexation of Crimea peninsula by Russia in March 2014, 96 percent of Russians approved it, and President Putin's rating increased from 60.6 percent in January to 85.9 percent in May.<sup>46</sup>

### EXTERNAL PROSPECTS FOR AUTHORITARIAN INTEGRATION

Analyzing the external prospects of authoritarian integration in the "Slavic triangle," i.e. across river Bug in the West and the Sea of Japan in the East, one should consider another research question: is there a real correlation between the character of a political regime and its foreign policy? The thesis of this question may be that foreign policy is a continuation of domestic policy was a methodology key for the Soviet school in studying international relations. This is why Lenin liked quoting Clausewitz's thesis about war as a continuation of policy via other means. Most Western publications in this regard are focusing on democratic regimes interaction and do not examine this perspective.<sup>47</sup>

According to a well-known concept of the "Democratic world," democratic countries almost never are at war with each other. Rudolf Rummel's research indicated that the democratic states don't apply violence to each other. In fact it is showed that in all wars were fought by countries where one or both conflicting sides were authoritative regimes.<sup>48</sup> In regards to authoritative regimes, the application of them to the Bruce Russett's models projected their inner essence outwards inevitably leads to a conclusion on potential of aggression immanently inherent in their foreign policy.<sup>49</sup> Hybrid character of regimes in transit explains deviations of their foreign policy. Therefore, according to Michael McFaul and Nikolai Zlobin "a half-democratic Russia will always be a half-ally to the United States."<sup>50</sup>

Russian political analyst Dmitri Fourman when analyzing Russia-US relations after 09'11 tragedy wrote about what he termed the "friendship against"

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45 [<http://iiseps.org/analitica/lang/en>]

46 [<http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=114766>]; [<http://lenta.ru/news/2014/05/15/putinrating/>]

47 Vladimir Kulagin, "Political Regimes and Foreign Policy" [[http://uisrussia.msu.ru/docs/nov/pec/2003/1/ProEtContra\\_2003\\_1\\_09.pdf](http://uisrussia.msu.ru/docs/nov/pec/2003/1/ProEtContra_2003_1_09.pdf)]

48 R. J. Rummel, "Libertarianism and International Violence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27:1 (1983), pp. 27-71.

49 B. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 40.

50 Michael McFaul, Nikolai Zlobin, "A half-democratic Russia Will Always Be a Half-ally to the United States," *Obshchaia gazeta* (November 14, 2001) [[http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresrgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/09-4\\_McFaulZlobin.PDF](http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresrgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/09-4_McFaulZlobin.PDF)]

phenomenon. Using a case of an anti-Hitler coalition at WWII he argues that “this kind of coalition is built of different, non-Western foundations (basic impossibility of opposition to come to power) with its own logic that leads to different direction. Coalitions of this kind are inevitably changed by the Cold War. Our integration with the West is not a problem of geo-political choice. This is a problem of our internal development.”<sup>51</sup>

By analyzing external prospects of the authoritarian integration in the “Slavic triangle” based on this theoretical framework one could expect (if not predict) various tensions or even threats for neighbor countries.

One recent example in its Western borders is the military exercise Zapad-2013 that took place in September along the Russia-Belarus-Poland borders. President Putin and President Lukashenko watched how almost 9,000 troops trained to “prevent aggression from terrorist groups from outside.” According to Polish and Lithuanian officials however this scenario provided actual training for a military strike on Poland and/or Lithuania. Moreover, this military exercise, for the first time, embraced smaller military exercises held by the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Two years ago after a coup in Kyrgyzstan, Lukashenko said that *the CSTO should deploy its special forces to crush possible revolutions in the post-Soviet states*. While this idea has not yet been fully pursued, in this CSTO exercise, according to Belarusian Defense Ministry, “the joint forces will isolate and exterminate extremist forces which might have entered from a neighboring country to launch an internal conflict in Belarus.”<sup>52</sup> Most participating troops were from Russia not Belarus, however, it was Belarus that would clearly benefit from such action if needed. As Belarusian military expert Alexander Alesin noted, “Lukashenko is major military ally to Russia. Moreover, Belarus is sort of range. As soon as Russia made pressure on Minsk, in Ukraine voices began to sound: look what Russia is doing with its most faithful ally! If Moscow will make a serious pressure on Lukashenko, it will turn off other potential allies from Russia.”<sup>53</sup> As a result, Russia continues providing political and economic support to the Lukashenko regime.

A recent example along the eastern borders is a new wave of tension between Russia and Japan regarding the long-standing Northern territories dispute. On July 3, 2012 Russian Prime-Minister Dmitri Medvedev visited Kunashir Island, his second visit in two years (The first time he visited this island was on November 1, 2010 while serving as the Russian president). Russian media widely published the places he visited there including a military base and a new Orthodox cathedral built entirely with donated funds. Both locations precisely reflect Russia’ priorities in the region. Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba warned that “this visit would harmfully affect the bilateral relations.”

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51 Dmitri Fourman, “Friendship Against,” *Obshchaya gazeta* (December 6, 2001) [<http://www.pressarchive.ru/obschaya-gazeta/2001/12/06/260423.html>]

52 [[http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2013-04-05/10\\_zapad2-13.html](http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2013-04-05/10_zapad2-13.html)]

53 [<http://www.belaruspartisan.org/politic/242085/>]

In addition, Russia provided use of its mountain range near Chelyabinsk for the active phase of a Russian-Chinese military exercise named Peace Mission-2013. Russian military expert Igor Korotchenko paid attention to the fact that “China was presented there by the 39th army of the NOAK Shenyang military district—the only Chinese army that had a great military experience in Korean War and got intensive training in Russia, and its commander-in-chief graduated from the Russian General Staff Academy.”<sup>54</sup>

This example proves the above theory of a correlation between the character of a political regime and its resulting foreign policy i.e. the authoritarian regime in China garnered support while the democratic regime in Japan garnered only escalating tension from their “big neighbor.”

And Lukashenko follows his “big brother” by Eurasian integration. Thus, during President Bashar al-Assad’s visit to Belarus in 2010, Lukashenko called for creating an alliance between Belarus, Syria and Venezuela.<sup>55</sup> The reality of authoritarian threats coming from the “Slavic triangle” was recognized clearly by its neighbors and the international community the following the dramatic events in Ukraine in 2014. The world watched the heavy hand against protesters in Maidan square and the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia, as well as, the subsequent separatist’s movement in South-Eastern Ukraine against central pro-Western democratic government supported by Russia. The West, including Japan, reduced G-8 to G-7 and introduced significant sanctions against Russia.<sup>56</sup> NATO Deputy Secretary Alexander Vershbow who was the American ambassador in Moscow said “Clearly the Russians have declared NATO as an adversary, so we have to begin to view Russia no longer as a partner but as more of an adversary than a partner,” and “We need to step up our support for defense reforms and military modernization of Russia’s neighbors, and not just of Ukraine, but also Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan.”<sup>57</sup> Many experts start speaking about revival of the “Cold War” and even gloomy prospects for WW-III.

## CONCLUSIONS

The central argument of the article is that the resurgence of authoritarianism in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine cannot be explained only by Presidents Lukashenko’, Putin’ or Yanukovich’ and their administrations’ “evil will” so to speak. The main factor is the peculiarities of their respective societies’ deeply rooted social fabric including both their broad and often intertwined but unique histories and cultures that have given rise to a social legitimacy of

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54 [[http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2013-07/30/content\\_29571621.htm](http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2013-07/30/content_29571621.htm)]

55 [<http://nv-online.info/by/93/20/17954/>]

56 [<http://file-rf.ru/news/18500>]

57 [[http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2014\\_05\\_02/NATO-decides-to-treat-Russia-as-an-enemy-Deputy-NATO-chief-8231/](http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2014_05_02/NATO-decides-to-treat-Russia-as-an-enemy-Deputy-NATO-chief-8231/)]; [<http://real-agenda.com/2014/05/02/the-gloves-are-off-nato-declares-russia-the-enemy/>]

and foundation for sustained authoritarianism. The Republic of Belarus is a striking example a rise of authoritarianism or “competitive autocracy” in the Post-Communist space. The country not only keeps the lowest rating on a scale of democratic measurements but also remains the the most stable rating during the last decade.

The vitality of Belarusian authoritarianism is explained by five fundamental factors: gradual farewell to the USSR, a value split within the society, “a quiet revolution” in the social structure of the society, incomplete national identity, and a dual geo-political choice. Compared to Russia and Ukraine, Belarus has historically possessed a less evolved and less pervasive national identity and therefore needed the stability of a stronger state and leadership.

Comparative analysis of authoritarian development in the post-communist “Slavic triangle” based on the “competitive autocracy” paradigm reveals similarities in social, economic, political, and legal mechanisms. This process, however, has one obvious feature: Belarus was the first country where authoritarian mechanisms were successfully introduced. As a rule, Russia and to a lesser extent Ukraine introduced them several years after. Facing same challenges and looking on how Lukashenko resolves these problems, significant part of the ruling elite in Russia and Ukraine decodes this message very simply: “it works!”

The most important foundation for the Belarus influence on the regime dynamics seen in Russia and Ukraine is a similar social structure and political culture/mass conciseness that make similar political developments possible. It means their authoritarian course was predetermined by dominate public expectations and needs, not the opposite. Moreover, these Slavic nations have strong positive attitudes towards each other, and this strengthens the mutual influence. After authoritarianism comes to the stage and starts introducing its basic mechanisms, people start realizing the consequences but they cannot change the political dynamic as they could under democratic rule. Another important foundation for Belarusian influence is a significant difference in these countries’ political regimes. National and foreign experts define the Belarusian political regime as “personalist” and “populist,” while Russian and Ukrainian as “clan” and “oligarch.” Matsuzato defines Lukashenko regime as “a populist island in an ocean of clan politics” stressing that “the populist regimes are more vulnerable to economic difficulties than clan-based regimes.” It means that Lukashenko’s regime has much wider and deeper social legitimacy than that of Putin or Yanukovich because “the population’s mentality and Lukashenko’s political philosophy and tactics reinforced each other.” These factors explain why Belarusian political regime is influencing Russia and Ukraine more seriously than the other way round.

In the course of time this influence becomes mutual and transforms into authoritarian integration that provides new internal prospects for strengthening political regimes. President Lukashenko got new opportunities for strengthening “competitiveness” of his regime through various integration processes ini-

tiated by Russia. The Custom Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (ECU) came into force in 2007, the Common Economic Space (CES) came into force in 2012, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) expected to come into force in 2015 create legal mechanisms and appropriate infrastructure for not only closer economic cooperation but political interaction as well. Lukashenko's two decades rule provides his integration partners the reliable and up-dated experience. Moreover, expectations of many experts that "Maidan revolution" will stimulate similar process in Belarus, Russia and other CIS countries have not been realized. In opposite, this process stimulated public fears of instability and chaos.

The application of the Bruce Russett' models to the authoritative regimes of Belarus and Russia show they tend to project their inner essence outwards leading one to conclude that the potential for aggression is immanently inherent in their foreign policy. Various examples, including the most recent and dramatic Ukrainian-Russian conflict, prove a theory that there exists a correlation between the character of political regime and its foreign policy. In this way authoritarian regimes get external prospects for further integration. It means that resurgence of authoritarianism potentially threatens the peoples not only inside but also outside the countries that have similar social-cultural grounds.

Finally, there is however the optimistic conclusion that despite the sobering picture laid out above, countries like Belarus, Russia and Ukraine still possess favorable social-cultural grounds for democratization. As the polling data discussed in this article suggests millions of people in these countries are eager for freedom and democracy, market economy and the rule of law. For the moment they are in minority and marginalized from the decision making process, but under favorable circumstances they could become the majority and lead their countries to another direction. One need look no further than the Maidan square to see the result of this potential.