Civil society in Belarus 2000–2015

COLLECTION OF TEXTS

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East European Democratic Centre
Warsaw 2015

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From Editors

The publication is a collection of texts dedicated to the development of civil society during the last 15 years that in a critical-minded way sum up the efforts of Belarusian non-governmental organisations. It deals with various dimensions of civil activity, including cultural activity, gender issues, political solidarity, local self-government, civil education, relationships among religious groups, youth subcultures, environmentalist movement, and the process of (de)consolidation and (de)politicisation of civic sector. The publication also sheds light on different understandings of civil society in Belarusian mass-media and the practice of substitution of civil society for state-run non-governmental organizations. Daily life of civic sector is described, as well as the peculiarities of the provision of social services by NGOs.

We hope that the publication will be used as an argument in discussions about the significance of civil society for the post-Communist transformation.

The publication opens with an analytical article by a sociologist and publication's co-editor Aliaksei Lastouski "Solidarity test: reaction of Belarusian civil society to events in Ukraine in 2013–2014".

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A researcher from the same institute Vadzim Bylina writes about "Football fans as an example of a community beyond the government's control in the conditions of the authoritarian regime".

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Aliaksei Lastouski

Solidarity test: reaction of Belarusian civil society to events in Ukraine in 2013–2014

Civil society in post-Communist countries is often viewed as the main actor for democratic changes; this view is usually combined with a lack of trust in institutional policy potential. Conservation of political life in Belarus, combined with the lack of any significant moves towards democratisation in the last twenty years, puts even more hope on civil society as one of the surviving environments of positive activities. We hope that this collection of articles that sum up the achievements of Belarusian non-governmental organisations in the last 15 years, will be used as an argument in discussions about the significance of civil society for the post-Communist transformation.

In addition to asking ourselves what has been done, we would like to pose another question: "Is it possible to do anything?" We do not want to repeat old mantras about the Soviet mentality, lack of social capital, political barriers and a multi-level dependence of Belarus on Russia in order to prove the limitations for the development of civil society in Belarus. Our interest lies in the internal condition of civil society. Does it have a potential for united and consolidation action?

Unlike other texts, this one will search for answers to this question via analysing recent political events rather than long-term trends. Hidden capabilities are best revealed in the moment of crises; a situation that demands rapid reaction becomes a litmus test for the presence of certain qualities allowing the quick re-formatting of actions.

Naturally, one of the necessary characteristics for joint collective action is solidarity. One should note that a wide research of Belarusian civil society took place in 2014, the main goal of which was to measure the potential of solidarity, and ability to act jointly in the name of common interests and objectives.[1] Conclusions in that research were quite pessimistic. Belarusian civil society is divided across several lines, has different strategies

[1] *Tsentr evropeiskoi transformatsii, Belorusskii institut strategigicheskikh issledovanii. Issledovanie potentsiala solidarnosti v belarusskom organizovannom grazhdanskom obshchestve*. // Study on potential of solidarity in the organised Belarusian civil society. 2014. URL: http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2014_Solidarity_NGOs_Belarus.pdf.

and cannot agree on basic values; therefore, one cannot hope for solidarity or plan to mobilise the existing potential of civic activists.

The approach taken by us is different. We analyse the solidarity potential not via learning the values and opinions of subject of civil society (usually collected by questionnaires) but via analysing a case study (event and reactions to it) of solidarity in the situation where one could not stay indifferent.

Things that bring sorrow and grief to people can bring happiness to a researcher. Recent events in Ukraine have drastically changed the focus of social and humanistic sciences. The world (or at least our part of it) has changed. Ukraine became the focus that changes the tone of any conversation, forces us to re-evaluate things, to view ourselves critically, and ask difficult and painful questions. At the same time, this situation allows us to unravel hidden and not evident information about ourselves and the outside world, which would stay hidden in a stable "ivory tower" situation.

Let us analyse how the reaction to events in Ukraine uncovered the ability of civil society in Belarus to act in critical situations.

By the explicitly neutral definition "events in Ukraine" we mean a series of events that can be split into two main cycles: 1) Euromaidan (21 November 2013–February 2014) – mass protest actions, first of all in Kiev, that as a result brought regime change in Ukraine; and 2) the crisis of the territorial legitimacy of the Ukrainian state that demonstrated itself in the annexation of Crimea by Russia (March 2014) and growth of the separatist mood that resulted in the creation of the pseudo-states: Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Stimulated by Russia separatism led to the bloody war, which is far from finished at the moment of writing this article (January–February 2015). These events were closely followed in the media and were well known to any indifferent reader. Therefore, there is no sense in describing them in detail.

However, the "solidarity test" mentioned in the headline deserves a special mention. Why, with whom and how should Belarusian civil society show its solidarity?

The division of the Ukrainian crisis into two interrelated, but different in nature cycles, defines two types of attitude to Ukrainian events:

1) Euromaidan used slogans of democratic values, European integration of Ukraine, fight corruption – these slogans were common to the programme statements of Belarusian civil society as well.
2) The annexation by Russia of part of Ukraine's territory created a dangerous precedent for international law violation; support of separatist movements led to fully-fledged military action in the territory of the neighbouring states. These threats to international order and a violation of norms of intergovernmental relationships in the proximity of Belarus demanded and demand a reaction from the Belarusian side.

One should also take into account that Belarusian and Ukrainian civil society representatives have an extensive experience of cooperation, exchanges and contacts. For instance, many Belarusian activists participated in the first Maidan protests in 2004. Obviously, the crisis in Ukraine had to cause some reaction in Belarus. The first expectation was that in that situation the ability of Belarusian civil society to show solidarity, both external and internal, would present itself. In other words, Belarusians were expected to show solidarity to close ones who got into trouble and united themselves for consolidated action. In this research, we are interested mostly in the "external" solidarity: the public and collective action of Belarusian civil society supporting Euromaidan and the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

We would like to underline that the public and collective nature of this action is key to this analysis, since these factors should be the defining ones for civil society as such. Without public sphere and ability to form associations, there is no civil society. Therefore, we were interested in the way the European choice of Ukraine was supported in the public sphere. The nature and degree of visibility of such support can demonstrate opportunities for collective action for Belarusian civil society as such.

General context

Understanding the general context of the civic and political situation in Belarus is important for this analysis. This context defines the structural opportunities for the realisation of action. Naturally, conditions in which freedom and the possibilities for civic and political activities are heavily limited, impose certain limits on the various forms of activities as well.[2] Naturally, with Belarusian conditions, it is quite difficult to perform collective actions that would directly contradict state policy. However, if there is no confrontation, that creates totally different structural conditions that allow them to act publicly and legally. Therefore, let's see first how the Belarusian government and, in particular, Alyaksandar Lukashenka reacted to events in Ukraine since his reactions are defining for the whole system of Belarusian politics.

Belarusian authorities that are mainly concentrated on personal succession and overall stability, are wary of political protests and revolutions in Ukraine that have brought success, at least in changing the government. This is a symbolic threat for the authorities in Belarus. The government of Belarus was especially worried about the Orange revolution in 2004 when the victorious spirit of the "colour" revolution was in the air.

However, in 2014, the reaction of Lukashenka to the protests in Ukraine was drastically different. This change in attitude can be explained by the changed configuration of the relationship between the Ukrainian and Belarusian political elites. Back in 2004, after

[2] See details on indices of sustainability of civil society.

the victory of the Orange revolution, Lukashenka managed to establish friendly relations with the then-president of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, despite their ideological contradictions. At the same time, the relationship between Lukashenka and the next president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, was not that good. The best evidence of that are Lukashenka's words in 2011 about the "lousiness" of the Ukrainian ruling elite.[3] Therefore, despite the restrained and guarded reaction of Belarusian authorities to Euromaidan, they did not offer Yanukovych any support, even a formal one. The meeting of Alyaksandr Lukashenka with the interim President, Oleksandr Turchynov on 29 March 2014, was a confirmation of that policy. As soon as a new government was formed in Kiev, even before it was considered by Moscow to be a legitimate one, the officials in Minsk declared their willingness to cooperate. Belarusian authorities also accepted as legitimate the results of the election of the new president of Ukraine. Lukashenka was present at the inauguration of Petro Poroshenko on 5 June 2014.

The issues of the territorial integrity of Ukraine became an issue of principle for Belarusian-Ukrainian relations at the highest level. The Invasion of Russian troops into the territory of Ukraine and Russia's active role in the destabilization of the situation in a neighbouring country, have changed the balance of power in the region. Lukashenka, even before the active phase of the conflict (on 23 February 2014) openly stated that the territorial integrity of Ukraine was in Belarus's interests. He confirmed that position several times. At the same time, the symbolic support for its Southern neighbour went side by side with traditional rhetoric about the brotherhood of Russian and Belarusian peoples, and about the necessity to come up with a joint position of both Russia and Belarus on the situation in Ukraine etc.

Belarus keeps strong ties with Russia via several institutionalised union agreements. One can see a reflection of those ties in the public rhetoric of Belarusian authorities that is based on the following principles: ambivalence, ambiguity, contradiction, avoiding concrete and irreversible steps. An example of this approach can be seen in the infamous interview of Alyaksandar Lukashenka on 23 March 2014, after which Ukraine recalled its Ambassador from Belarus. Being pushed by journalists, Lukashenka formulated his position in the following way:

> *Ukraine should stay united, undivided and integral, but de facto Crimea is part of Russia today.*

[3] On dynamics of Belarusian-Ukrainian relations in 2010–13 see: Maksak G. *Istoriya dvukhstoronnikh otnoshenii Ukrainy i Respubliki Belarus' 1991–2013 gg. // History of bilateral relations of Ukraine and the Republic of Belarus in 1991–2013 // Sotrudnichestvo Respubliki Belarus' i Ukrainy v novykh geopoliticheskikh usloviyakh. // Cooperation of the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine in new political conditions*. Kiev: Fridrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014.

In the same interview, Lukashenka repeated his old words about the historical brotherhood with their Eastern neighbour, saying that Belarus would be on Russia's side in any conflict situation.[4]

The inability to solve the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in a military way, gave Belarus a new opportunity: to become a platform for the negotiations of the conflicting sides. Here, in Belarus, the most significant peace agreements were signed and were given the informal titles Minsk-1 (5 September 2014) and Minsk-2 (11 February 2015).

In common with the usual Belarus situation of total control by the state of the state-owned and the majority of the private media, the cautious attitude of the media to the Ukrainian crisis is quite understandable. State media continued to present Belarusians and Russians as brothers and published slogans supporting Russia "in a difficult situation". At the same time, they were being extremely cautious in the evaluation of Ukrainian events, but also avoiding straightforward language in order to not to "slip" into the information war.

Coverage of Euromaidan by the Belarusian media was deprived of emotional acuteness. Political and media analyst Paulyuk Bykowski, in his research on the coverage of Ukrainian events by Belarusian informational agencies, came to the conclusion that the Belarusian media, from different side of the political "barricade", were able to stay neutral and disseminate fakes or exaggerations.[5] One of the main spokesmen of state ideology, editor-in-chief of the *Belaruskaya Dumka* magazine Vadzim Gigin, referred to the overall coverage in the following way:

> *Not so many of the world media managed to remain neutral in their coverage of Ukrainian events. To our credit, both official and non-official Belarusian media managed to keep that neutrality.*[6]

The cautious behaviour of the official media, who do not manifest their unconditional support of Moscow, and avoid radical assessments, is based on the official position of the Belarusian government. Media "neutrality" mirrors the Belarusian authorities' wish to keep a balanced position between different "alien" interests and avoid supporting any of the sides as much as possible.

However, audience opinion polls demonstrate that the attitude of the majority of Belarusians to events in Ukraine is formed by the Russian media. Russian newspapers and TV channels waged a hysterical campaign of defamation of the Euromaidan participants, the new Ukrainian authorities and the Ukrainian nation as a whole:

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[4] http://belapan.com/archive/2014/03/23/689822_689823/.

[5] http://www.ibb.by/educational-program/news/rukovoditeli-pechatnyh-i-elektronnyh-smi-belarusi-obsudili-voprosy-osveshcheniya-ukrainskih-sobytiy-v-belorusskoy-presse.

[6] http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=124145.

> *In a short – from a historical perspective – period of the acute stage of the Ukrainian political crisis of 2013–14, public rhetoric in the Russian information space has significantly changed. In essence, the hate speech made a jump from marginal to everyday language.*[7]

Moreover,

> *after the annexation of Crimea, Russian propaganda went further than even the Soviet era, using the pre-Revolution Russian Empire's practice of full denial of national identity and political sovereignty of Ukraine and Ukrainians.*[8]

Taking into account that three of the four most popular TV channels in Belarus are rebroadcasting Russian content and around 80–85% of the population believe in the news they receive from those channels[9], Belarusians are de facto massively "bombed" by the hate speech propaganda. Therefore, one should not be surprised that in May 2014 two third of Belarusians supported the annexation of Crimea by Russia[10], even though later (in November 2014) sociologists noticed a shift in the media behaviour of Belarusians caused by a decrease of trust in the information broadcast by these TV channels.[11]

In conclusion of this section, let us sum up the general framework, in which Belarusian civil society was able to show its support to Ukraine:

– Pronounced neutrality of Belarusian authorities and state media;
– Continued authoritarian practices aimed at regulation of political and civil space
– The significant influence of Russian propaganda on the minds of Belarusians.

Belarusian support to Ukraine: collective and individual dimensions

To analyse specific forms of support to Ukraine, one should divide collective and individual actions. We are interested in the peculiarities of collective, public action as a specific feature of civil society.

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[7] Skorkin K. *Obshchii yazyk nenavisti* // *Common language of hate* // Otechestvennye zapiski. 014. № 6. URL: http://www.strana-oz.ru/2014/6/obshchiy-yazyk-nenavisti.

[8] Guseinov G. *Fashizatsiya antifashizma, ili Kak Rossiiskaya Federatsiya legitimiruet zakhvat Ukrainy* // *Fascisation of anti-fascism, or how Russian Federation legitimises the invasion into Ukraine* // Gefter.ru (23.03.2015). URL: http://gefter.ru/archive/14620.

[9] *Mediasfera Belarusi. Sotsiologicheskii aspekt.* // *Mediasphere of Belarus: Sociological aspect.* // Minsk: Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr pri Administratsii prezidenta RB., 2014. Pp. 28–29.

[10] Vardomatski: *2/3 Belarusians support Crimea annexation* // European Radio for Belarus (11.07.2014). URL: http://euroradio.fm/vardamacki-za-padzeyami-va-ukraine-sochac-40-belarusau.

[11] *Belarusians started to "filter" Russian propaganda against Ukranie* // Belsat TV (18.12.2014). URL: http://www.belsat.eu/be/programs/garachy-kamientar/belarusy-pachali-filtravac-rasejskuyu-prapagandu-suprac-ukrainy/.

Collective action can quite often be personalised: in this case civic movement is represented by a single person who is the living bearer of its values and speaker of its demands – in other words, its symbol. For example, Mahatma Gandhi became the spiritual leader of India and led Indian people in their struggle for independence from Great Britain. Therefore, we associate the victory in this struggle with his personality. In other words, collective action can focus on one person who is not just a leader of this action but also a mythological symbol that unites the collective identity of supporters of a civic movement and allows them to feel their mutual support and commonality of goals. At the same time, this person represents values and objectives of this movement to external observers.

This distinction between "personal individual" and "collective individual" is important to evaluate in the organisation of Belarusian support to Ukraine. Mikhas Zhyzneuski, a Belarusian, who moved to Ukraine, became one of the first victims during the protests of Euromaidan, and, therefore, one of its symbols. On 22 January 2014 he was shot by a sniper. Later he was included in the Heavenly Hundred martyrs list. The Belarusian origin of Zhyzneuski provided the Belarusian national-democrats with a reason to define him as "their own" and as a "heroic symbol" that demonstrated the support to the Ukrainian revolution from Belarusians.

But was the tragic death of Mikhas Zhyzneuski related to some joint collective action of Belarusians in support of Ukraine? In his young years, Zhyzneuski participated in the mass protests organised by the Belarusian opposition, but he left Belarus at the age of 17 and joined the ranks of the radical right wing organisation UNA-UNSO. In some way, this life path can be explained by the forms of cooperation that existed between Belarusian radical nationalist organisations (White Legion, Belarusian Freedom Party, Kray) with their Ukrainian partners in the second half of the 1990s. In 1996, UNA-UNSO participated in the mass rally Chernobyl Way in Belarus; Belarusian nationalists participated in training camps in the territory of Ukraine. However, all these cooperation schemes developed outside the borders of "civil society" in its traditional definition; most of them ceded after the end of the 1990s.[12] Therefore, the emigration of Zhyzneuski to Ukraine and his participation in Euromaidan were related first of all to his personal motives and not to cooperation between Belarusian and Ukrainian organisations.

Still, the tragic death of Zhyzneuski brought about extraordinary consequences. Mikhas Zhyzneuski became a much-needed symbol for the Belarusian democratic community; commemoration of his life allowed to focus, the collective action of Belarusian

[12] The exception is the emigration to Kiev of Siarzhuk Vysotski, the leader of unregistered Belarusian Freedom Party who created in Ukraine "Pahonia" Centre for Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation. It is difficult to estimate in what condition this party is now, since it underwent a series of serious organisational crises. There is no publicly available information about the activities of the newly opened Centre, either.

civil society, and give it specific goals and sense (commemorate the hero, help his family etc.). An individual act became a powerful impulse for solidarity.

Another type of individual action that manifested themselves in the collective dimension, is the participation of Belarusian volunteers in the so-called "Anti-terrorist operation" on the side of the Ukrainian military command. There is still not enough information to confirm the existence of the organised structure of Belarusian volunteers – "Pahonia" unit that was announced by the deputy head of the Volyn regional council Ihar Guz in July 2014.[13] Facts that would prove the existence of this special unit are too scarce to make the proper analysis. However, there is evidence of the participation of Belarusians in military operations in Ukraine in the *Donbas* and *Azov* battalions. The most valid data seems to be coming from the survey organised by the *Tizhden.ua* website in Ukraine that indicated the participation of 80 to 100 volunteers from Belarus in all Ukrainian battalions.[14]

Participation of Belarusians in military units in Ukraine is promoted via social media, websites and newspapers, which add to its publicity. Belarusian volunteers participating in military conflicts became frequent guests of the media: their interviews served as a means of consolidation of support to Ukraine (albeit virtual) via reading and commenting on media texts. Volunteers realised the importance of this publicity and therefore eagerly give interviews and spread their own media messages. For instance, in early February 2015 three Belarusian volunteers recorded and placed online, a video appeal in which they commemorated the date of birth of the Belarusian resistance hero Kastus Kalinouski:

> *We, Belarusians who fight in the East of Ukraine side by side with Ukrainians for our and their freedom, want to remind you about the significance of today's date. Today, on February 2, Kastus Kalinouski was born: a fighter and a revolutionary who died for our freedom and yours. On this day, we want to wish you the strength of spirit, aspiration for freedom and – Respect to our Motherland Belarus! Long lives Belarus! Live forever!*[15]

The reality, however, introduces changes into such idealised relationships between volunteers, media and a grateful audience. The first Belarusian, who received the award from President Petr Poroshenko, was Siarhei Karotkikh (nickname Maluta) who was infamous in Belarus for his ties with the Russian National Unity movement.[16] That

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[13] *Creation of "Pahonia" Belarusian Unit Announced in Volyn Region* // European Radio for Belarus (07.07.2014). http://euroradio.fm/na-valyni-zayavili-pra-farmavanne-belaruskaga-atrada-pagonya.

[14] Butkevich Bogdan. *Fighters. How Belarusians Fight for Ukraine* // Tizhden.ua (15.05.2015). URL: http://tyzhden.ua/World/136344.

[15] *Belarusian volunteers from Ukraine congratulate Belarus with Kastus Kalinouski birthday* // Nasha Niva (03.02.2015). http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=143638.

[16] *Petr Poroshenko Handed Ukrainian Passport to the Former RNE Activist from Belarus* // Belsat (05.12.2014) http://www.belsat.eu/be/articles/pyatro-parashenka-ruchy-ukrainski-pashpart-vyvedniku-z-belarusi/.

unveiled an important trend that is often ignored by the Belarusian independent media: a significant part of the Russian far right nationalists (who are traditionally perceived as "Russian fascists") quite surprisingly decided to support the Ukrainian side in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The stereotype of support is also blurred because Belarusians are also present on the side of separatists, although their numbers (despite the difficulties in counting them) are significantly lower than of those who took the Ukrainian side.

The individual nature of volunteer participation in military action is quite understandable. According to the Belarusian law, participation in military action on the territory of another country outside the structure of the Belarusian army is regarded as mercenary activities and is punishable by three to seven years in prison. A much less dangerous type of action is the organisation of humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian troops in Belarus. The position of the Belarusian leadership, who officially recognised the new Ukrainian government, makes such assistance legitimate, especially if it is organised via individual donations. The only sustainable and public initiative in this field is the initiative of a group of volunteers led by the Homel activist Andrei Stryzhak. He started from, organising assistance to parents of Mikhas Zhyzneuski and by the end of 2014 switched to a regular supply of medical and humanitarian assistance to military hospitals.[17]

Assistance to refugees from Ukraine is provided in a much broader way. Such assistance goes in line with state policy, since on 30 August 2014 Alyaksandar Lukashenka signed Decree No 420 that introduces numerous benefits for Ukrainians who resettle in Belarus after leaving the military conflict zone. Some non-governmental organisations (first of all, the Belarusian Red Cross Society) have actively engaged in collection of money and goods for such displaced people.

However, it is important to underline that Belarusian civil society (in its organised form of the community of non-governmental organisation) never fully mobilised for significant support to Ukrainians: neither during Euromaidan events, nor during military operation. Several initiatives listed above are private and individually led. This presents a striking contrast to processes in Ukraine itself, as well as in Poland or Lithuania where NGOs became the most active organisers of humanitarian and volunteer assistance.

It seems that the main reason for the "deviation" of Belarusian non-governmental organisations was the identification of the Ukrainian crisis as a "political" issue. Traditionally, only a small segment of Belarusian civil society is engaged in political activity, since such activities inevitably lead to repressive measures from the side of the state. This thesis is supported by the fact that only previously politically active civil society organisations dared to express their support openly for Euromaidan and the new

[17] *Усё пачалося з Жызьнеўскага* // Радыё «Свабода» (26.03.2015). http://www.svaboda.mobi/a/26921553.html.

Ukrainian government. Showing support for the Ukrainian side is the business of politics or individual activists in Belarus.

The issue of Ukraine: declarations and statements

Based on the conclusions above, we have to expand the definition of civil society, which in other parts of this collection of texts is understood as non-governmental organisations or the "third sector". We will include into it other actors, and first of all – political parties and movements.

The main division of the Belarusian political scene is related to the attitude of political organisations to the policies of President Alyaksandar Lukashenka. Organisations are divided into opposition and pro-governmental movements and parties.[18] Our main interest concerns the statements of the political opposition that supports national and democratic values.

Before we analyse their statements, one should note that there is no unified assessment of Ukrainian events in the "pro-governmental" camp. Some of the pro-governmental organisations support the cautious and ambivalent position of the country's leadership, denounce violence and support the territorial integrity of Ukraine. For instance, the chairman of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Belarus Siarhei Haidukevich on 27 January 2014 did not express support to either authorities or protesters in Ukraine, but supported the idea of the territorial integrity of Ukraine: "I am against dividing Ukraine – and that's my main message. I wish the Ukrainian people unity." The same pro-peace rhetoric was present in the statement of the Supreme Council and the Central Committee of LDPB made on 24 March 2014.[19]

The National Labour Party of Belarus took a radically pro-Russian stance. The political committee of this party "vigorously condemned the genocide of the Kiev authorities against the Ukrainian people in the East of Ukraine."[20] The Communist Party of Belarus consistently supports Ukrainian communists, catching their military jargon about "usurpatory unlawful government", "igniting nationalism and Russophobia in the Ukrainian society", "Bacchanalia and mockery of joint historical memory by Bandera supporters" etc.[21]

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[18] *Political parties of Belarus – necessary part of civil society. Materials of the seminar.* Minsk: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003. P. 20.

[19] Official webpage of the Liberal-Democratic Party of the Republic of Belarus. URL: http://www.ldpb.net/index.php.

[20] Official webpage of the National Labour and Justice Party. URL: http://rpts.by/447/sostoyalsya-ix-vneocherednoj-sezd-respublikanskoj-partii-truda-i-spravedlivosti/.

[21] Appeal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus to Communists of Ukraine. URL: http://www.comparty.by/obrashchenie-centralnogo-komiteta-kommunisticheskoy-partii-belarusi-k-kommunistam-ukrainy.

Interestingly, the majority of political parties that usually eagerly support the authorities (Republican Party, Belarusian Agrarians Party, Belarusian Social-Sportive Party, or Belarusian Patriotic Party) did not publicly express any assessment of the situation in Ukraine. Taking into account that these parties de facto ignored local election in March 2014, they can be regarded as "political corpses" that are waiting for "resurrection" under some hypothetical extreme circumstances.

The majority of opposition parties and movements openly and clearly declared their support to Euromaidan and condemnation of Russia's aggression. As Yury Chavusau wrote at the very beginning of the Ukrainian events (November-December 2013),

> *practically all opposition forces regularly made statements about the development of the crisis; many political leaders personally visited the Ukrainian protests (leaders of "For Freedom" Movement, Belarusian Popular Front, "Tell the Truth" and United Civil Party campaign spoke from Euromaidan's podium).*[22]

Let us find answers to the two most important questions. Firstly, how coordinated were statements supporting Ukraine and did they reflect the closeness of political views and the possibility for joint activities? Secondly, did any practical steps follow the statements, did solidarity transform into something material?

The main form of support from the side of the political parties and movements were public statements by their leaders or numerous declarations adopted at party meetings.

We will quote here, as an example, public statements by BPF in support of Ukraine. The leader of BPF, Aliaksei Yanukevich, spoke on 6 December 2013 in the following way: "Today Kiev decides not only about the future of Ukraine but about the future of Eastern Europe as a whole. The BPF Party sincerely wishes success to all supporters of the European path for Ukraine and expresses solidarity and support to their struggle."[23] The Deputy head of the party, Ihar Lalkou, on 31 Match 2014 made the same statement:

> *In the name of the BPF Party I would like to assure Ukrainians that many Belarusians support Ukraine and condemn Russia's aggression.*[24]

During the tensest period of Euromaidan the congress of BPF adopted a statement that openly expressed their support to the pro-European choice of Kiev protesters:

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[22] Chavusau Yu. *Two party coalitions – new configuration of opposition*. // Belarusian Yearbook 2013. Minsk: I.P. Logvinov, 2014. P. 142.

[23] Webpage of BPF Party. Yanukevich: Today Kiev decides not only about the future of Ukraine but about the future of Eastern Europe as a whole. URL: http://narodny.org/?p=4780.

[24] Webpage of BPF Party. BPF Party condemns shameful actions of Belarus' representative in the UN and calls for solidarity with Ukraine. URL: http://narodny.org/?p=5716.

A Free, independent of Russian imperialism and able to fulfil its people's pro-European aspirations, Ukraine is in the best interests of the Belarusian nation.[25]

Official statements of the same kind were made by other national democratic political parties (communique of the Congress of Conservative-Christian BPF Party; declaration "Hands off Ukraine!" by the Belarusian Socio-Democratic Party (Hramada) and others).

On 20 March 2014 Belarusian opposition parties signed a collective statement that condemned Russia's military aggression in Crimea and supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine. This joint action demonstrated the potential for alliance, despite of and within existing divisions in the Belarusian political sphere. The document was signed by the United Civil Party, Belarusian Socio-Democratic Party (Hramada), Belarusian Christian Democracy organising committee, "Tell the Truth!" campaign, "For Freedom" movement and BPF Party.

However, in general, it would be difficult to state that Ukrainian events strengthened consolidation of the Belarusian political sphere since joint declarations reflect only short-term coalitional agreements. Quite significantly, among those who refused to sign the joint letter were both right wing and left wing parties. I.e. the crisis did not inspire consolidation of Belarusian political parties, but rather strengthened the existing divide.

Conservative-Christian BPF Party did not sign the statement because it considers all other parties "pseudo opposition" and "political opportunists" and, therefore, refuses any forms of cooperation (although vigorously supports the Ukrainian side).

Left wing parties chose not to sign the statement as well, despite the fact that they belong to the opposition camp. They tried to come up with a collective statement at the anti-war conference on June 7–8 near Minsk. The main request from the Left wing parties and movements from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia was "to stop civil war". Events in Ukraine got the following assessment: "The military conflict that took place after the actions of neo-Liberals and nationalists on Kiev "Euromaidan" took the lives of hundreds of people and inspired the unprecedented growth of chauvinism and xenophobia in the Ukrainian and Russian societies. The war allows the ruling elites of Ukraine to consolidate society around their political regime, distracting workers from the West and the East of the country from the struggle for their social and political life and putting them off one against another in the interests of the bourgeoisie."[26] That document was signed by the leaders of the "Just World" leftist party that usually enters coalitions with the national democrats.

In public speeches the chairman of the party, Siarhei Kalyakin at first tended to align with parties from right spectrum by showing his support to Euromaidan protesters:

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[25] Radio Liberty: The Congress of BPF Party accuses Ukrainian authorities in the political conflict. (25.01.2014): http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/25242226.html.

[26] http://scepsis.net/library/id_3584.html.

> *The spontaneous people's revolution in Ukraine who removed from power the anti-national oligarchic clan ruled by Yanukovych.*

Still, he names the far right nationalists and their anti-Russian rhetoric as the main "guilty" in the "civil war" in the East of Ukraine.[27] Moreover, in February 2015 Kalyakin publicly distanced himself from "inappropriate speculations" from the side of "Belarusian politicians who call themselves democrats" and fully supported the Belarusian authorities' policy towards resolution of the Ukrainian crisis.[28]

One more leftist party, the Belarusian Green Party, decided to withhold its judgement of Ukrainian events and did not make any public statement on that issue. At the same time, this party is quite active and supports many political initiatives. So, its silence about the Ukrainian issue is speaking for itself.

Some commentators claim that "Just World" and the Green Party have split internally due to the Ukrainian issue.

Two things are important here:

– Even though pro-Russian moods have spread quite actively in Belarusian society, there are not many political forces that would have the organisational capacity to mobilise those moods;
– There is no unity in the Belarusian political sphere; even closeness of political orientation does not allow it to overcome conflicts in relationships.

Unlike political parties, non-governmental organisations managed to consolidate in their support to Ukraine in public statements and declarations. These NGOs are united in the two biggest platforms: The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs and the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. Already in January 2014, NGOs published a collective Appeal of civil society and civic activists in Belarus, regarding the Ukrainian situation, in which they asked all sides of the conflict to stop violence and find a peaceful solution to the conflict via negotiations.[29] After the victory of the Euromaidan supporters, on 24 February 2014, the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum that unites more than 60 organisations, published its own appeal. The appeal started with the following phrase:

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[27] Kalyakin: *Force is the least perspective way of solving the Ukrainian problem* // Naviny.by (07.03.2014). URL: http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2014/03/07/ic_news_112_433095/.

[28] *"Just World": Minsk agreements give hope that the "fratricidal war" in the East of Ukraine will be stopped.* // Belaruskaya Prauda (15.02.2015). URL: http://belprauda.org/spravedlivyj-mir-minskie-soglasheniya-dayut-nadezhdu-na-to-chto-bratoubijstvennaya-vojna-na-vostoke-ukrainy-budet-ostanovlena/.

[29] *Appeal of civil society leader and civic activitsts regarding the situation in Ukraine* // Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs (24.04.2014). http://belngo.info/2014.zvarot-arganizatsy-j-gramadzyanskaj-supol-nastsi-i-gramadskih-akty-vistau-belarusi-z-nagody-situatsy-i-va-ukraine.html.

> *In these days, filled both with grief and hope, when Ukraine is experiencing a turning point in their recent history, we appeal to the whole Ukrainian nation for solidarity and hope.*[30]

Belarusian civil society made collective appeals at the beginning of the second stage of the Ukrainian crisis as well, with the condemnation of Russian aggression:

> *We, citizens and representatives of civil society organizations of the Republic of Belarus, condemn Russian military intervention in sovereign Ukraine, accompanied by the introduction of Russian military forces in the territory of the Crimea and the armed seizure of strategic and communications facilities, by the Russian military, as well as the blockading of Ukrainian military bases.*[31]

In early April 2014, representatives of civil society organisations that are members of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, as well as BPF Party members, supported the UN resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine.[32] In addition to collective appeals and statements, several civil society leaders (especially those related to the EuroBelarus consortium) supported Ukraine publicly as well: Uladzimir Matskevich, Ulad Vialichka, Andrei Yahorau and others.

One can see that civil society organisations that had a joint platform for coordination of activities (National Platform), made timely coordinated statements supporting Ukraine. Obviously, the National Platform and the Assembly of NGOs managed to consolidate their efforts in this sphere – unlike the political opposition.

At the same time, one should keep in mind that these two, the National Platform and the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, unite only a tiny, although probably the most active, part of non-governmental organisations in Belarus. This potential for collective action that developed over the years was used to express public support for Ukraine. Still, the vast majority of Belarusian non-governmental organisations that are in fact, not part of these structures, did not demonstrate any solidarity.

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[30] *On Solidarity with the Ukrainian People. Appeal of the Belarusian National Platform.* // Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs (24.02.2014). http://belngo.info/2014.ab-salidarnas-tsi-z-narodam-ukrainy-zvarot-belaruskaj-natsy-yanal-naj-plyatformy.html.

[31] *Appeal of the National Platform: On Russia's Military Invasion into Independent Ukraine.* // Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs (03.03.2014). http://belngo.info/2014.zvarot-natsplatformy-ab-vaennaj-interventsy-i-rasii-u-nezalezhnuyu-ukrainu.html#more-1876.

[32] *BPF supports the appeal of civil society for territorial integrity of Ukraine* // BPF official webpage (10.04.2015). http://narodny.org/?p=5780.

Support for Ukraine: protest actions

Organisation of public actions (pickets, marches, demonstrations) are another form of solidarity with Ukraine in Belarus. Alongside specific actions dedicated to Ukraine, we will review the presence of the Ukrainian topic in traditional mass actions that take place on a specific calendar date (Dziady, Freedom Day etc.).

Ukraine became the leading topic of public political activities in Belarus in 2014. Out of 52 protest actions of a political nature, 17 were dedicated to Ukraine and 14 were anti-Russian (growth of anti-Russian moods is also related to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict).[33] It is important to underline that Ukrainian events did not enliven political life in Belarus. Several public discussions on possibilities of the transfer of Euromaidan to Belarus "hot on the heels" came to extremely sceptical conclusions. The overall number of public protest actions grew only insignificantly: from 103 in 2013 to 127 in 2014. This growth was related to the legal opportunities to organise election-related pickets during local elections in 2014.

The crisis in Ukraine did not lead to an increase of protest and opposition activities in Belarus but set up its thematic framework. There is nothing strange in the fact that Belarusian political life (not only the life of the opposition) in 2014 was focused on Ukrainian events. What is interesting however, is that this issue was not used by the Belarusian opposition for the political mobilisation of the pro-Ukrainian part of the population. According to the audience research data, this part is a minority but could still form a significant resource for marginalised and bled white opposition that needs people with clearly stated views and active civic position.

The above-mentioned trend can be explained by the ambivalent position of the Belarusian authorities, which prevented the opposition from using the pro-Ukrainian mood of a part of the population. On the other hand, one can also notice the decrease of the mobilisation potential of political structures in Belarus, and their inability to attract people to street actions. In 2014, only two public protests gathered more than 1000 participants. One of them (the most large-scale) had nothing in common with institutionalised political structures.

The two most noticeable Ukraine support actions were organised by "exogenous" actors: The Belarusian football fans who were politically indifferent before. The First of them was a collective photo of Belarusian football club BATE fans who posed with white-red-white flags and banners saying "Hold on, Ukraine! We are with you!" and "Glory to

[33] Chyzhova Tatsiana. *Pratestnaya aktyunasc u Belarusi u 2014 hodzie (vulichnyya aktshyi, vybarchyya pikyetym satsyyalnyya kanflikty)* // Protest activities in Belarus in 2014 (street actions, election pickets and social conflicts) // Political sphere (23.03.2015). URL: http://palityka.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Chyzhova_Pratesty-2104.pdf.

Heroes!" This picture was posted online on 26 January 2014 and caused lively discussions as well as a wave of repressions against fans, who got administrative arrests. The arrests caused the next protest action: the leaders of Belarusian culture photographed themselves with the same slogans and added one more banner: "BATE fans are great guys."[34]

The most noticeable action, however, took place during the Belarus-Ukraine football match that took place on 9 October 2014 on Barysau-Arena stadium. Before the match, Belarusian and Ukrainian football fans agreed on this joint performance (despite historical grievances).[35] The stadium was filled with 10,000 fans, who were joined by thousands of TV viewers, since the match went live on-air. This is how the eyewitness Paval Belavus described what happened at the stadium:

> *From the very first minute Belarusian and Ukrainian fans, that were sitting opposite to each other behind the gates, started signing jointly: the song was Warriors of Light by Lyapis Trubetskoy. After that the Ukrainian fans shouted "Long Live Belarus!" while Belarusians replied with "Glory to Ukraine!" Ukrainians, in turn, replied with "Glory to heroes!" All fans together sang "Putin is a d**khead" and "Those who are not jumping are Muscovites"... Despite quite serious security checks at the entrance of the stadium, it was great to see so many people with national symbols in the sectors. During the second half of the match, Belarusians took out blue-yellow and white-red-white flags. This unity, instead of confrontation, at the stadium, showed real brotherhood between the Ukrainians and Belarusians, their solidarity and mutual respect.*[36]

The size of that event was bigger than of any action organised by the opposition that year. It was also important that the performance was co-organised with the Ukrainians. This is one of the very few Ukraine support actions in Belarus that got noticed and was discussed in the Ukrainian online media. The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs gave Belarusian football fans the Champions of Civil Society award in the special category of "Creativity."[37]

Summing up, attempts of several political groups to use the Ukrainian events for political mobilisation did not bring about any significant success. This suggests that the condition of Belarusian institutional policy is quite dire and is characterised by apathy and fragmentation. At the same time, the relative freedom allowed some previously non-engaged actors, such as the football fans, to become more active. Despite all limitations

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[34] *Cultural actors expressed their support to arrested BATE fans* // Nasha Niva (06.02.2014). URL: http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=122169.

[35] *Belarusian fans will support Ukrainian ones* // Radio Liberty (29.09.2014). http://www.svaboda.mobi/a/26611602.html.

[36] *Belarusians shouted "Glory to Ukraine!", Ukrainians – "Long Live Belarus!"* // Radio Liberty (10.10.2014). http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/26630373.html.

[37] That was the only category where solidarity with Ukraine was mentioned.

and potential consequences, they managed to organise the only mass public, solidarity with Ukraine, action.

Public statements and political pickets, were indeed focused on Ukrainian issues, but those forms of activities were mostly aimed at increasing the political capital of their organisers. They allowed political organisations to show up in public spaces and appear in the media, but it is questionable whether such manifestation of solidarity were important for those who needed support.

Beyond politics: alternative forms of support to Ukraine

The final question regarding public support for Ukraine is the following: "How much did Ukrainian events (and the growing demand for solidarity) influence the emergence of new forms of activism?"

Let us briefly list here the new forms of activities, although there were not many of them:

Trips of Belarusian activists to Kiev with the aim of participation in Euromaidan. Due to the strict control from the side of the secret services those trips could not be publicised. However, the presence of Belarusian political activists at Euromaidan was confirmed by the media;

Fundraising for the relatives of the Belarusian Mikhas Zhyzneuski, who was killed during the protests in Kiev on 22 January 2014. For instance, on 25 January 2014 the BPF Party organised a Solidarity Marathon in its office The "marathon" in fact was a concert of the singer Kasia Kamotskaya during which funds were raised for relatives of Mikhas Zhyzneuski.[38]

In late 2014 – early 2015 a fundraising campaign for Zhyzneuski's memorial started, that aimed at instaling a memorial at the cemetery close to Homel where he was buried. Activists and political organisations joined that action that was coordinated in Minsk by the BPF Party.

Several civic and cultural educational events were organised by political parties and movements (Ukraine Day on 28 February 2014, organized by Art Siadziba initiative in cooperation with "For Freedom" Movement, evening of solidarity with Nadezhda Savchenko organised by the Belarusian Christian Democracy etc.);

Organisation of cultural events with the participation of Ukrainian artists: such as Okean Elzy band's concert or the ethnic festival Kamianica with Banderband. Although these events were commercial and entertainment by nature, they became a suitable

[38] Radio Liberty: Marathon of solidarity with Euromaidan organised in the office of BPF party (24.01.2014): http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/25241387.html.

platform for mass solidarity actions with Ukraine, especially when listeners and viewers waved Ukrainian flags.

Organisation of various discussions, seminars and conferences with discussions on Ukraine. The biggest academic event of that year, the International Congress of Belarusian Studies in Kaunas, Lithuania (3–5 October 2014) had the Ukrainian topic as its priority.

Finally, one cannot overlook the phenomenon of Sergey Mikhalok, who used to be the frontman of the Lyapis Trubetskoy band (before the band split in 2014). This very popular in the post-Soviet region singer's active support for Ukraine was an act of civic courage. His song Warriors of Light (Voiny Sveta) became the unofficial anthem of Euromaidan.

Conclusions

Coming back to the initial question posed in this article, i.e. how much the reaction to Ukrainian events allowed civil society to show solidarity, the answer will be disappointing. Only those organisations of the third sector that were engaged in political activities and "umbrella" networking structures before, managed to show their support. However, their solidarity acts never crossed the border of rhetoric and therefore never transformed into practical actions. Unfortunately, NGOs almost never engaged in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. Part of the reason for that could be that some of these organisations are focused on external funds and writing projects, i.e. their activity cycle is the following: *writing grant application – receiving grant funds – implementing the project – report writing.* This approach does not give space for flexibility and quick reaction to new challenges.

At the same time, "exogenous" actors took the stage: Mikhas Zhyzneuski, the football fans at Barysau-Arena and Sergey Mikhalok with his Warriors of Light song and volunteers fighting on the side of Ukrainian army, became symbols of Belarusian support to Ukraine. Real acts of support came from those who took the Ukrainian troubles close to their hearts and rushed to help. The individual, personal nature of this support raises bitter questions about the potential of NGOs in organising collective actions outside their traditional mode of activities.

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Vadzim Smok

How Cultural NGOs Struggle for the Right to Be Belarusian

Cultural Movements in 1980s and 1990s

As a result of the policy of forced homogenisation of cultural identity based on Russian culture applied by the Soviet rulers, anti-Communist movements arose in Soviet republics during *perestroika*. Belarus was not an exception: activists in BSSR fought for national revival and state independence, alongside their struggle for democratisation and economic reforms.

However, unlike its Baltic neighbours or Ukraine, Belarus entered *perestroika* as the most Russified and denationalised Soviet republic, and the idea of national revival had no backers among local Communist party elites.[1] Those factors prevented the formation of a nationwide national movement and fully-fledged development of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Despite low levels of support from the Belarusian population and ruling elites, activists of the national revival movement succeeded in making the Belarusian language the only state language (1990) and replacing the Communist flag and coat of arms with the historical white-red-white flat and Pahonia ('Pursuer') national emblem (1991). Nationally-oriented political forces gained some influence in the spheres of education and culture where they had the biggest support base. That brought about a brief period of Belarusianisation in the above mentioned spheres in the first half of the 1990s. However, those initiatives never had solid public support. The dissatisfaction with Belarusianisation was especially strong among Russian-speaking intellectuals and officials. Pro-national forces did not have enough political resources and popular support to have their leader, Zianon Pazniak, elected as president at the first presidential election in 1994.

In 1994, the first elected Belarusian president Alyaksandar Lukashenka reversed the national and cultural policies. Those who supported national revival were labelled as opponents of the new rule. New state policy was based on the ideology of pan-Slavism and

[1] Yekadumau Andrei. *Razvitstsio natsyyanalna-demakratychnaha rukhu i pazitsyi savietskay elity // The Development of National Democratic Movements and Soviet Elite's Attitude to Them*. Bialystok–Vilnius, 2011. P. 32–33.

Russo-centrism that imposed closed connection with Russia and denied the importance of national distinctiveness of Belarusians and even, in the early stages, the value of Belarus' state independence. The biggest step in that direction was the constitutional referendum in 1995 that resulted in the change to the state flag and national emblem, brought back Russian as the second official language and was followed by the state integration of Belarus and Russia combined with a heated confrontation with the West.

However, the majority of the population supported the idea of state independence, and therefore by the beginning of the 2000s, the government had to switch to protection of state independence of Belarus and leave aside the Russo-centric ideology for the sake of the so-called Belarusian state ideology. That new ideology was centred on the notion of state as a territory rather than a cultural and linguistic community and ignored the historical dimension. The goal of the new state ideology was to provide grounds for the zigzags of economic and political decisions taken by Alyaksandr Lukashenka and inspire loyalty to Lukashenka without the linguistic and cultural components.[2]

Current Situation

The state policy of the last twenty-five years in the sphere of the Belarusian language, culture and national identity has brought about the following situation.

*Language***.** Curtailing Belarusianisation and the constitutional reinforcement of bilingualism caused the domination of the Russian language in all spheres of life. The Belarusian language dominates only in unique cases (for example, this is the language of road signs) and has retained some influence in the sphere of culture, sciences (for instance, philology and history) and state media (on TV channel, three radio stations and one daily national newspaper).

As a result of this language policy, the percentage of ethnic Belarusians who name Belarusian as their mother tongue has decreased from 85.6% in 1999 to 60.8% in 2009.[3]

The share of ethnic Belarusians who speak Belarusian at home fell from 41% to 26%. In this sphere, even ethnic Poles are ahead of ethnic Belarusians.[4]

In the 1990s, the Belarusian language was a vital political issue in the struggle of the opposition with the new regime. The radical statement of the question by those who demanded using only the Belarusian language in all spheres of public life was not approved

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[2] Kazakevich Andrei. *Kulturny fon belaruskay palityki // Palitychnaya historya nezalezhnay Belarusi. // Cultural Background of the Belarusian Politics // Political History of the Independent Belarus*. Vilnius, 2011. P. 881–889.

[3] Source: National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. Population Census 2009. Ethnic composition of the population of the Republic of Belarus (Volume 3).

[4] Source: National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. Population Census 2009. Ethnic composition of the population of the Republic of Belarus (Volume 3).

by those members of civil society which supported the official bilingualism. Gradually, alongwith the stabilisation of the regime and exclusion of the Belarusian language from all spheres of life, the Russophile part of civil society started realising the importance of the Belarusian language for the formation of the nation. Belarussophiles, on the other hand, became more tolerant of the Russian language due to its strong support in society; they decided to focus on the positive image of the Belarusian language. Thus, nowadays, one can observe rapprochement among diverse groups in their attitude to the Belarusian language. Both determined opponents (such as intellectualists who regard Belarus a part of Western Russia) and determined Belarussophiles being marginalised.

Education and culture. This is the sphere where the de-Belarusianisation trends in the state policy are the most vivid. If in 1994/95 academic year 75% Belarusian schoolchildren were receiving their education in the Belarusian language (58% in Minsk),[5] in 2013/14 this share dropped to 15% nationally and 2% in Minsk. In the 2013/14 academic year, only 0.9% students of colleges and universities and only 1% students of technical colleges studied in Belarusian.[6]

According to publicly available statistical data, in 2001, 8.5% of books and 27% of registered media in Belarus were in Belarusian. One should note that the majority of Belarusian-language newspapers in Belarus are local state-owned bilingual newspapers. There is only one Belarusian-language national state newspaper: *Zviazda*.

As for national TV channels, the percentage of Belarusian-language TV programmes in 2011 was the following: 4.7% on Belarus 1, 4.8% on Belarus 2, 0% on NTV-Belarus, ONT, STV and RTR-Belarus. Two channels of Belarusian state radio, are the only state media that broadcast in the Belarusian language (100% of programmes on Piershy Natsyyanalny/First National and 93% of programmes on Stalitsa).[7]

The rebroadcasting/redistribution of Russia's cultural products, first of all television, films, music, show business and literature, significantly influences the identity of Belarusians. The Belarusian authorities apparently do not regard it as a serious problem and do not take this factor into account in developing their policies. Moreover, the underdevelopment of the local show business market does not allow local Belarusian actors to compete with Russian ones. Cultural products from all over the worlds come to Belarus via Russia, since the Belarusian state does not provide funding for dubbing of

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[5] *Khto kak khatsits, toy tak i havaryts. Yak ulady mianiali staulennie da movy aposhniya 25 hadou. // They speak the way the want to. How authorities changed their attitude to the language in the last 25 years*. URL: http://news.tut.by/society/435461.html.

[6] *Russifikatsyya narastaye: pa belarusku navuchaetstsa kozhny simoy shkolnik i tolki 1 z 670 studentau // Russification increases: every seventh school student and only 1 in 670 university students study in Belarusian language*. URL: http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=122637.

[7] *National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. Culture of the Republic of Belarus. Statistical data*. Minsk, 2012.

films or translation of literature into the Belarusian language.[8] This cultural colonialism continues to influence the Belarusian cultural identity negatively.

One should not regard the culture in Belarus as a purely colonial culture. Celebrating local ethnic holidays, as well as the reconstruction of castles and other architectural monuments of the pre-Russian period, demonstrate certain efforts of the Belarusian authorities in developing the Belarusian culture. However, the cultural policy is not a priority and does not attract attention at the higher decision-making level. Therefore, the cultural niche is filled with foreign, mostly Russian product.

Historical narrative. The teaching of the History of Belarus continues to be ideology-based and censored. This is related to the function of history as a means of justification of the current policies of the authorities. One can observe a certain evolution here. If in the beginning of Alyaksandar Lukashenka's rule history was re-written in a way to support the ideological unity with Russia as part of its Russian (or Slavic) civilisation, in more recent years the official and alternative (revivalist) projects of historic memory have moved closer to each other. The topics of rapprochement include the significance of, ancient duchies that existed on Belarusian lands and the Great Duchy of Lithuania, for the statehood and nation formation in Belarus. For instance, textbooks on history refer to the Medieval Age as the cradle of Belarusian statehood; at the same time, elements of Medieval culture are promoted in the media (festivals of knights etc.) and memorials.[9] Also at the same time, the historical significance of the Russian Empire that presumably liberated Belarusians from the serfdom imposed by Polish or Lithuanian masters is not accepted.

Still, the history of the independent Belarus is presented in a biassed way and is ideologically overloaded. The role of Alyaksandar Lukashenka in the nation and state-creation processes are exaggerated while other important figures and organisations are ignored. The following, significant for Belarusian independence, events or phenomena are either ignored or scarcely described in history textbooks: discovery of the Kurapaty burial site; national and cultural revival; activities of the Belarusian Popular Front and other political parties; the work of the first independent parliament.[10] The Lukashenka's regime gets only positive assessments without any attempts at critical analysis.

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[8] Yekadumau Andrei. *Unutranaya kulturnaya palityka. Russifikatsyya u kantekstsie savetskay mifalogii // Palitychnaya historyya nezalezhnay Belarusi. // Internal cultural policy. Russification in the context of Soviet mythology. // Political History of the Independent Belarus*. Bialystok–Vilnius, 2011. P. 335–348.

[9] For instance, on 27 June 2014 city authorities of Vitsebsk unveiled the monument to the Great Duke Alhierd.

[10] Fomin V.M., Panov S.V. and Ganushchenko N.N. *Historyya Belarusi, 1945–2005. // History of Belarus, 1945–2005. Textbook for the 10th grade*. Minsk: BSU, 2006.

The Evolution of Cultural NGOs in the Period of Independence

The establishment of Alyaksandar Lukashenka's rule resulted in the politicisation of NGOs, including cultural ones. The new government deliberately destroyed even the smallest achievements of the brief national revival period, including achievements that were possible only due to the efforts of those NGOs. Often members of the opposition were also members of cultural NGOs. Political parties performed some cultural functions, such as commemorating anniversaries of significant events, taking care of grave sites, celebrating national holidays, organisation of cultural events, distribution of culture-related products. This multi-specialty of the NGO sector, where only a few organisations were 'purely' cultural, makes the analysis of cultural activities of that period complicated.

Politicisation of NGOs made them look dangerous in the eyes of the authorities, who in turn decided to impose on them restrictions and repressions. The majority of organisations founded in the late 1980s – early 1990s had disappeared by the beginning of the 2000s. Only those that were purely cultural, and did not confront the authorities publicly, managed to retain their registration: The Society of the Belarusian Language, the Society of the Belarusian School, Youth Public Association "Historyka", the Student Ethnographic Society, the Voluntary Society for the Protection of Monuments of History and Culture (founded back in 1965), "Talaka" in Homel city and some others. All of them experienced some pressure but they were not liquidated. This is, for instance, how authorities treated the Society of the Belarusian Language (TBM): in 1991, the Council of Ministers obliged state institutions to assist TBM in creating new units, while in 1998 the organisation nearly lost its premises due to higher rental rates.

Starting from the mid-2000s, a new trend is observed: de-politicisation of cultural activities by separating them from the opposition's political activities. This trend manifested itself especially well during the liberalisation of the political regime in Belarus in 2007–2010. Despite the sad ending of that liberalisation (dispersal of peaceful protests on Kastrychnitskaya square in Minsk and increased pressure on all civil society organisations) the cultural liberalisation continued.

Seemingly, from the late 2000s the authorities reviewed their policy related to organisations that did not aim at gaining political power and were not involved in related activities. However, that policy was not a strategic one; it was not a "top to bottom Belarusianisation". It can be described as "closing eyes" on some types of non-state cultural activities. This approach is combined with continued repressions against some cultural projects via pressure on their land-lords or other tools. For instance, the Art-Siadziba NGO had to change premises three times in 2011–2013 because the land-lords were not willing to prolong rental contracts.

Another peculiarity of recent years is the creation of a range of non-governmental centres for cultural activities, as a result of numerous problems that civic initiatives had with access to platforms for public speeches and actions in the big cities. The independent centres such as Y Gallery, Tsekh, Ard-Siadziba, DK La Mora and some others are among recently created platforms.

According to Maksim Zhbankou, this trend leads to the formation of a "third culture", which is complementary to the "state" and "anti-state" culture and is more entertaining and mass audience-oriented.[11] By the middle of the 2010s, Belarusian culture that used to be the sphere for "fighters for Belarus" and intellectuals, has become more interesting for students and the "creative class" of society as well as other citizens. Belarusian language courses Mova Ci Kava and Mova Nanova attract hundreds of students;[12] the celebration of Belarusian national symbols "Vyshyvanka Day" was attended by thousands of Belarusians.[13]

Now, let's analyse in more detail the main actors and trends among modern cultural NGOs.

Main Actors in the Cultural Sphere

To analyse the impact of civil society on the linguistic and cultural situation in Belarus, one should accept a broad definition of civil society. This means that it includes not only NGOs that have cultural activities as part of their Statute activities, but also any actors that may have or do have any influence on this situation: media, Internet communities, social media, societies that promote and protect architectural heritage; scientific and research centres; informal associations and ad-hoc civic campaigns.

Specialised Cultural NGOs and Initiatives

In this part, we analyse the two most significant types of initiatives with a specialisation in culture: TBM (which is registered as a public association, or an NGO) and "Budzma Belarusami" civic campaign. They represent two different types of initiatives and, therefore, perform their activities in different ways: TBM is rather traditional in its approach while Budzma is more modern.

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[11] Zhbankov Maksim. *Prostye dvizheniya: belkult v poiskakh naroda / Simple movements: Belarusian culture is looking for Belarusian people* // Belorusskiy Ezhegodnik 2013. Minsk: Lohvinau, 2013.

[12] *Mova ci Kava vs Mova Nanova: na abiedzvyukh platsoukakh anshlag / Mova ci Kava vs Mova Nanova: both courses attract plenty of students* URL: http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/25229337.html.

[13] *Yak prayshou Dzien Vyshyvanki: ahlyad SMI. / How did Vyshyvanka Day go?* Media review URL: http://artsiadziba.by/news/2014/12/16/dzv2014-smi/.

Founded in 1989, *TBM* is one of the oldest cultural NGOs in Belarus. The organisation declares that it has a record membership comparing to other Belarusian NGOs, around 7000[14], and a record number of local offices: 450.[15] (In 1991, the Council of Ministers obliged executive authorities in Belarus to assist TBM in creating local offices.) TBM also declares that it is financed exclusively through membership fees of its members and the donations of citizens.

The main activity of TBM is engagement with the state in the sphere of Belarussification of education, official paperwork, etc. This NGO files petitions to the state institutions, meets with state officials, collects signatures and organises lectures. In some spheres, it had one-off success stories. For example, it persuaded authorities to open a school class using the Belarusian language for teaching, in one of the Belarusian cities or agreed with the post office to issue products using the Belarusian language. However, under current conditions, the strategy of engagement with the state will be unlikely to bring a serious breakthrough. Belarusian bureaucracy is not favourable to local activism and does not support interaction with NGOs. As long as the political elite fail to have a positive attitude to Belarusianisation, attempts to impose it from the top will be unlikely to have any success. Therefore, the large number of formal members of the organisation and its offices, will not reflect on the successful implementation of its statutory goals.

Moreover, in its work with the media and society, TBM lacks modern methods and tools. As Aleh Trusau, the chairman of the organisation, said at the TBM's 12th Congress in 2014, the newspaper *Nasha Slova* published by TBM has less than 1000 subscribers. Although, obviously, the printed media has become less attractive in the digital age, the content of the newspaper, most probably, is not too exciting for the population, either.

Budzma Belarusami civic campaign is an organisation of a new type, which, it seems, has been created because of the inability of other actors to organise cultural campaigns effectively. Founded in 2008, it has become the biggest campaign for the popularisation of the Belarusian culture in recent years. The campaign has a small number of managers and activists and focuses on creativity, new technologies, cooperation with various projects and actors and creation of a special type of cultural communication network. Unlike TBM, its main target group is not the state but Belarusian society as such, including the culture-related community.

Budzma's work has many formats: it produces cultural media content, organises events with the participation of musicians, sportsmen and cultural actors, creates and popularises symbols related to the Belarusian culture. It also organises "AD.NAK!" festival of advertising in the Belarusian language; the partners of the festival are several

[14] *Report at the 12th Congress of TBM on Three Years of Activities of the organisation by its Chairman Aleh Trusau* // Nasha Slova. Nr 43. 2014.

[15] *Official webpage of TBM* URL: http://tbm-mova.by/about_us.html.

big companies such as phone operator Velcom or car dealer Atlant-M as well as media (TUT.BY, Naviny.by, KP.by, NN.by, citydog.by). An important aspect of Budzma's work is its work in the regions: since 2008, it has organised more than 4000 events across the country.

Independent Media and Internet Communities

The second group of actors, i.e. the independent media, are an important factor in the development of national identity, since they provide audiences with news and long format reporting in the Belarusian language, as well as distribute alternative cultural products and spread alternative historic narrative. Due to political pressure, these media outlets have limited access to traditional channels of distribution inside Belarus and, therefore, must heavily rely on the Internet.

One has to admit that the majority of non-state media choose the Russian language as their main language and only rarely provide some content in Belarusian. However, there are several media providing Belarusian-language content. Some of them, such as BelaPAN, Nasha Niva, European Radio for Belarus (Euroradio) and Belsat TV, have both Russian and Belarusian versions of their websites. The printed version of Nasha Niva is published exclusively in Belarusian. Radio Free Europe and Radio Racja produce only Belarusian-language content.

The above mentioned media are not leaders amongst all the independent media in Belarus. According to the December 2014 statistics provided by Akavita.by ranking website,[16] Charter97 was the leader among online media, while Naviny.by were in third place, Belorusskiy Partisan in fifth place, Nasha Niva in 8th place, Euroradio in 11th place and BelaPAN – in 15th place. The average daily audience of these media outlets was around 30,000 people while the audience of the top-3 Russian-language media was 236,000. Interestingly, the daily audience of the three leading state Russian-language media sites (state news agency BelTA, daily newspaper *Sovetskaya Belorussia* and STV TV channel) was around 50,000 people, i.e. five time less than the audience of the leading independent Russian-language media.

Even if we extend the list of Belarusian-language media to include those media that are not listed by Akavita ranking, we can still see that daily audiences of these media outlets are not more than 50,000 people or 0.5% of Belarusians. This shows that Belarusian language media have not become widely popular, and the size of their audience is close to the size of the active users of the Belarusian language (or so-called "conscious Belarusians").

[16] The ranking lists only those websites that are based in the .BY domain zone and therefore does not rank Radio Racja, Radio Free Europe or Belsat TV.

Unlike media, the social networks (or social media) can boast a much higher popularity. While there is no national social network in Belarus that could be competitive with major global or Russian social media, Russian Vkontakte holds the leadership among Belarusian audiences. In this Russian social network, the number of communities dedicated to the Belarusian culture or actively using the Belarusian language is steadily growing. The Lit. bel community, or as it calls itself, the Buffer Zone of Belarusian Language and Culture, is one of the most popular in the Belarusian Vkontakte segment: in December 2014 it had 147,000 subscribers. The Community "Maja kraina Bielaruś" (My Country Is Belarus) listed 56,000 subscribers while a more politicised community "My za niezaliežnuju Bielaruś" (We Are for Independent Belarus) listed 68,000 subscribers.[17]

The Belarusian segment of Wikipedia grows on pure enthusiasm and without any state support. Since 2007, more than 75,000 articles have been posted there.[18] This is more than in the Latvian or the Irish (Gaelic) versions of Wikipedia. However, the problem is that the Belarusian version of Wikipedia is not popular among Belarusians. Only 1.7% Belarusians in Belarus look up articles in Belarusian Wikipedia while 79.2% read Russian Wikipedia and 15.2% read English Wiki.

Protection of Architectural Heritage

The protection of architectural heritage was one of the main spheres of activities for the first Belarusian cultural organisations in the 1980s. Architecture was one of those identity factors that allowed us to keep memories about the pre-Soviet past of Belarus. Although the independent Belarusian state is committed to the preservation and protection of architectural heritage, it can still quite often break the rules of that protection or provide far from ideal control of those norms.[19] Therefore, the activities of NGOs in this sphere are still relevant.

The problem of reconstruction of the historical centres of the cities is one of the most relevant for Belarus after it gained independence. Local city authorities, unfortunately, are most often ruled by economic reasoning and do not pay enough attention to the preservation of the architectural heritage. They may violate the law on protection of heritage sites or follow it partially or incorrectly. There were cases when institutions that were obliged to control that sphere, such as prosecutor's office, the Ministry of Architecture, or the Ministry of Culture did not prevent or stop that from happening, sometimes for political reasons.

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[17] As of December 2014.

[18] *List of Wikipedias*, http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wikipedias.

[19] Гл. напрыклад: Вантух Іван. *Чаму ні ў кога «няма часу на рэстаўрацыю»? і іншыя артыкулы* // ARCHE. № 4. 2014.

Private business is interested, first of all, in income and profitability. It is more profitable for private companies to destroy, rather than restore the old architecture and build in its place new objects based on modern technologies. Authorities do not counteract this since they are interested in investments and are not worried about the preservation of heritage; probably, they are also involved in corruption schemes. The role of society in the process of reconstruction of cities and towns, as recent history has demonstrated, stays minimal. Public discussions are formalised and do not bring real impact; authorities prevent activists from engagement with the reconstruction processes and do not agree to take into account opinions of independent experts: architects, historians and archaeologists.

Vivid examples of the above mentioned practices are the reconstruction projects for Brest and Hrodna that took place in the second half of the 2000s. Civic activists attempted to prevent the wrongful reconstruction but their actions were too spontaneous, as there were no professional organisations in those cities that could deal with this sphere of, the protection of architectural heritage. As a rule, civic activists attempted to preserve the heritage by filing protests to the executive branches of authorities, by informing citizens and international structures as well as by working with the media. In Hrodna, activists were brave enough to organise non-allowed protest actions and to disturb the work of construction site builders. Therefore the situation there was better covered by the media. However, in both cases, the authorities continued with their plans, even if with seemingly greater attention to the problem of the preservation of the architecture.[20]

The architectural heritage that is located outside the borders of the big cities received different treatment. Here we mean, first of all, castles, palaces and other pre-Soviet objects. The state ideology and the government as such do not consider the pre-Soviet period as an extremely important part of the national history (unlike in Lithuania, where the state builds the whole national identity on the heritage of the Great Duchy of Lithuania). Therefore, there is no complex approach to the protection of the old architecture. Some more significant objects, such as Mir and Niasviž castles, are included into the state programmes of national development and, therefore, are regularly restored while other architectural monuments remain neglected.

In such cases, as the practice shows, civic activity has a huge potential. An example is the charity foundation "Lubčanski zamak" (Lubča Castle), established in 2003 by a local enthusiast Ivan Piachynski. The Foundation cooperates with a wide circle of actors, including youth organisations, private companies, research institutes that joined forces in research and restoration of this castle's complex. Overall, in cases where the authorities do not have significant interest in the situation (like architectural monuments outside big

[20] Сямён Шапіра: *Я бачу, як гродзенцы перажываюць за гістарычныя каштоўнасці* // Наша Ніва. 24.06.2010. URL: http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=40198.

cities that are not included in the national development programmes) there's a huge space for the development of the civic activeness potential.

The oldest and the best-known organisation in this sphere is the Belarusian Volunteer Society for Protection of the Historical and Cultural Monuments. According to the chairman of the Society, Anton Astapovich, his organisation cooperates first of all with the state institutions and officials, the decision-makers and those who can influence state policies. The Society became renowned for its activities both within the society and among state officials, especially on the issue of historic buildings in the centre of Minsk and restoration of buildings that are of cultural and historical heritage. Such an approach has its advantages but can effectively work only in the capital city, where there is a much bigger potential for civic activeness and public articulation of problems, than in the regions. Nearly all cultural organisations declare that the protection of the heritage of their regions (see: Cultural NGOs in the Regions) is one of their statutory activities, but the possibilities in this sphere are severely limited.

Independent Publishers

One more group of actors are the independent publishers that participate in the development of culture via publishing Belarusian-language fiction, scientific and research literature, including books on history, thus assisting the spread of alternative cultural narratives and models of historic memory. The situation in this sphere is complicated, since the majority of publishers are not interested in publishing literature in the Belarusian language: it is not popular among mass audiences (according to the NOVAK laboratory survey conducted in 2014, only five percent of adult Belarusians read books in Belarusian language[21]). Moreover, the government does not support the publishing of Belarusian language books by private publishing houses. Belarus is one of the very few countries in the world where the state licences, not only the publishing, but the selling of books, as well. Moreover, the tax on book publishing is much higher than in the neighbouring countries. Thus, Russian book publishing is in better condition, has bigger taxes and better quality and comes to the Belarusian market in huge quantities. If a publishing house touches upon civic and political issues, the state exerts a direct pressure onto it.

The most renowned publisher of Belarusian language literature is the publishing house and book trader Lohvinaŭ that has been on the market for the last 15 years. Lohvinaŭ is a popular cultural platform that not only publishes independent books but also serves as a place of cultural activities. It publishes different genres of literature, from fiction to science, but mostly popularises books of the great Belarusian writers. The publishing

[21] *Belarusian language literature loses its reader.* URL: http://naviny.by/rubrics/culture/2014/11/06/ic_articles_117_187483/.

house used to publish books that were later labelled by the government as "extremist". This led to repression: in 2013, the publishing house's license was revoked under a contrived pretext; in 2015, the court decided to give the publisher a fine amounting to almost 1 billion Belarusian rubles (around 65 thousand dollars) for selling books without a license. The story behind that was that Lohvinaŭ applied for such a licence to the Ministry of Information several times and was refusaled. Due to the civic campaign, the money has been collected: this demonstrated a high level of civic solidarity with that publishing house.

In 2012, the secret service confiscated nearly 6,000 copies of books and magazines issued by the ARCHE magazine's special publishing project. This is one more example of the pressure on independent publishers that engage in publishing alternative cultural and socio-political texts. Authorities treat such publishing houses differently from the above mentioned cultural NGOs since publishing "undesired" literature means for them political animosity. However, this does not apply to the whole sphere of independent publishing. Those publishing houses that do not issue anything about Belarusian politics are usually relieved from this pressure. Here is a brief description of these publishers.

International public association Knihasbor, founded in 1996, aims at publishing all the best works of Belarusian literature, as well as books written by people whose origin is Belarusian. By now, the association has published more than 50 volumes of literary classics and dozens of other books.

Publishing house Tekhnalohiya has existed for more than 20 years and has published several hundred books. It specialises in books about Belarus in foreign languages as well as on translations of academic and scientific literature on social science and humanities. It publishes books in Russian, as well, but its contribution to the production of the Belarusian-language scientific literature is significant.

Haliyafy publishing house had formed from the literary and art movement Boom Bam Lit back in 2007. It publishes prose, poetry, essays, critical reviews, experimental research of the underground subculture and texts by young Belarusian writers.

Nasha Niva newspaper and Radio Free Europe also have their publishing projects. The Radio Free Europe's Library publishes books with journalistic essays, as well as books on recent history, literature, collection of scripts of radio programmes, etc. Kniharnia Nasha Niva series publishes books on political sciences, history, journalism, literature and philosophy, i.e. those spheres of knowledge where the alternative understanding of the path of the development of the Belarusian society is being developed.

In addition to the publishers mentioned above, some smaller publishing houses exist that deal with the Belarusian language: publishing house of Zmitser Kolas, Limaryus, the publishing house of Viktar Khursik and others.

Educational and Research Projects

As mentioned before, there are no higher educational establishments in Belarus that would fully incorporate the Belarusian language as their language of teaching. To fill that gap, and also to create an environment for free thinking and creativity, several educational projects were set up for students and graduates of Belarusian universities. The oldest institution of this type is the Bielaruski Kalehijum (Belarusian Collegium). Founded in 1997, it specialises in the humanities. Leading experts who are teaching at Kalehijum brought up a new generation of cultural and scientific elite in Belarus.

Another similar project is Liatučy Universitet (Flying University) that claims to be creating a full-fledged university for Belarus and about Belarus. According to its founders, Flying University should become "the place for the formation and strengthening of the Belarusian nation and Belarus, a place where people *think Belarus*".

Both projects organise study courses, public discussions, conferences and public lectures. Both are not trying to reach the masses: they are raising up a new elite for social sciences in humanities who would speak (mostly) Belarusian.

As a rule, non-state research institutions do not deal with linguistic and cultural issues. However, there are several exceptions such as the Palitychnaya Sfera (Political Sphere) Institute of Political Studies that publishes a journal under the same title (*Palitychnaya Sfera)* with mostly Belarusian-language texts about politics. The Institute's publishing projects include translations of works of many well-known Western policy researchers as well as the history of political sciences in the region. Since 2011, the Institute has been organising the International Congress of Belarusian Studies in Kaunas, Lithuania. The Congress gathers hundreds of Belarusian scientists specialising in different spheres of social and humanitarian sciences who can discuss their research issues free of censorship. One of the goals of the Congress is to form an autonomous national academic community that is focused on the issue of Belarus as an independent state. The Congress is a unique discussion platform for scientists whose research is usually underfunded: historians, philologists, culture analysts and linguists.

The European Humanities University (EHU) takes a special place in educational and research projects. Before its licence in Belarus was reworked, EHU was a liberal but not a national-orientated university. After the university had moved to Vilnius, there were hopes for its transformation into a "source of manpower" for the national elite. In its first years in Lithuania, the EHU indeed hired many Belarusian scientists who were able to contribute to strengthening of the national-orientated elites. However, the administration of the university never shared the vision of a nation-orientated university and, therefore, the role of the EHU in the formation of the cultural identity of Belarusians has never become significant.

Informal Associations and Civic Campaigns

In addition to organisations that specialise in culture or have regular culture-related activities, there are other initiatives where the Belarusian national identity manifests itself quite unexpectedly. For instance, the movement of football fans actively use the Belarusian language, and Belarusian historic figures in their branded production and events. In this case being Belarusian means pride and being different from "others". Such "herdlike" nationalism is common to many football fans around the world, but it is still quite a recent phenomenon for Belarus. This trend has strengthened after Russia's aggression against Ukraine: many Belarusian football fans support Ukraine's territorial integrity, and, therefore, their hatred towards the Russian government has transformed into hatred towards Russian culture.

Sometimes, the Belarusian spirit manifests spontaneously as a reaction to anti-Belarusian measures taken by authorities. For instance, when Minsk city authorities decided to introduce Russian-language public transportation tickets in 2012, citizens wrote numerous appeals and protests demanding a return to the use of the Belarusian language. Their demands were met. This case shows that when citizens are ready to stand for markers that are important for their identity the government is ready to listen to their opinion. However, such campaigns happen only as a reaction to the open Russification. Citizens do not collectively promote Belarusian national values as something unique and positive.

Cultural NGOs in the Belarusian Regions

Most of Belarusian cultural NGOs and other actors work in Minsk, which is the capital and biggest city in Belarus. This trend reflects the same trend in the political and economic life in Belarus. Regions are treated as periphery: they either passively accept some form of the activities that started in the capital or do not participate in the process, i.e. continue being cultural "black holes".

Indeed, the level of activity of civil society in the region is very small. We can observe some isles of activities in the bigger regional centres but in smaller towns and villages cultural NGOs and other civic initiatives are almost nonexistent. Only the Society of the Belarusian Language (TBM) and the Society of Belarusian School have offices in numerous smaller towns in Belarus.

Still, there are some regional organisations that declare that culture is one of their statutory priorities. Homel-based Talaka[22] is one of the oldest Belarusian NGOs; it was founded in the late Soviet period in 1986. Talaka protects historic, cultural and

[22] http://nashkraj.info/.

ethnographic heritage of the Homel region, organising cultural events that include concerts of Belarusian musicians. Brest-based Dzedzich[23] is not a purely cultural organisation but it deals with culture when it organises meetings with cultural activists, educational events that popularise the Belarusian language and culture and when it advocates for the preservation of the historic and cultural heritage. An NGO from Hrodna, Treci Sektar (The Third Sector)[24], like Dzedzich, has a separate culture-related statutory activity called "Culture and Heritage". This activity aims at the preservation of historic and cultural heritage of the Hrodna region and the Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian border region. Treci Sektar conducts publishing and international cultural projects as well as projects aimed at popularisation and preservation of the historic and cultural heritage in the region. One more Hrodna-based organisation is Haradzienskaja Biblijateka (Hrodna Library) the publishing initiative that publishes books by independent historians, writers, journalists and essayists and aims at forming a local self-consciousness that would be democracy-oriented and consider Hrodna part of the European civilisation.

The most active cultural initiative in Mahilou is the local office of TBM that organises trips and tours, meetings with cultural actors and scientists and supervises the Belarusian language study circle. In Viciebsk, the informal association "Vitebsk4me"[25] is active in the sphere of Belarusian culture. Even though this initiative does not call itself a "Belarusianisation" project, it has a lot of thematic events that popularise the history of Viciebsk and region, gather representatives of arts and culture, etc.

All cities mentioned above have several hundred thousand inhabitants and yet only one or two small communities dealing with culture. This is a very small ratio comparing to the capital with its dozens of projects and initiatives. However, on the level of smaller district centres the situation is even worse: usually, the alternative cultural life there is represented by a few individuals and very rarely – by associations. Local authorities maintain the monopoly on cultural activities while non-state events happen only if someone from Minsk or a regional centre brings guests to a local town. As we already wrote, the Budzma Belarusami campaign has conducted numerous events in the regions. Mova Nanova language courses and Flying Universities also organise their meetings in the regions.

[23] http://dzedzich.org/wp/about/bel/.

[24] http://3sektar.by/dzeynasts.

[25] http://vitebsk4.me/.

Russian Aggression in Ukraine as a Challenge to Civil Society in Belarus

Ukrainian events of 2014 have put the issue of the national and cultural identity in Eastern Europe high on the agenda. Therefore, it is important to analyse some effects and challenges of those events for Belarusian civil society.

Both the government and civil society in Belarus perceive the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, where the ethnicity and the language were used as a pretext for the military invasion, as a threat. Several top officials, including president Alyaksandar Lukashenka, publicly admitted the importance of the Belarusian language for the existence of the Belarusian state – something that had never happened before. However, there are now systematic actions that demonstrate that the state would want to take measures that would support the Belarusian language. It seems that the authorities are confused: they finally realised the danger of suffocating Belarusian culture, i.e. of the policy that they have led all this time. Meanwhile, Russian-speaking Belarusians who do not have a firm national basis, become easy victims of the Russian media propaganda and can be used by Russia to interfere in the internal affairs of Belarus.[26]

Belarusian civil society treats Russia's behaviour as a threat. It has not yet come up with a joint counteraction strategy; however, such attempts are being made. On 18 September 2014, the round table "How can civil society defend the civilizational and cultural identity of Belarus: from 'Let's Do Better' to 'Protect Yours'" took place in Minsk.[27] Participants came to the joint conclusion that to neutralise the Russian threat more effort should be placed on developing the Belarusian national identity, culture and language. The society should exert pressure on the government via legal mechanisms: the Constitution, legislature, collection of signatures, and so on.

The collective appeal signed by participants states that:

> *Nowadays, Belarus and the Belarusian society are facing the most dangerous challenge of all since independence began. The geopolitical situation that is caused by the revival of the aggressive imperial ambitions of its Eastern neighbour, threatens the future of Belarus as an independent state and questions the civilizational choice and the very existence of the Belarusian people.*

We will see in the next couple of years if Belarusian civil society can achieve progress in this sphere.

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[26] See results of the September 2014 survey by IISEPS "Ukrainian compass for the geopolitical poles of Belarus", URL: http://www.iiseps.org/analitica/808.

[27] See more here: http://belngo.info/2014.yak-baranits-svayo.html.

Conclusions

Long years of totalitarian rule that were mostly unfavourable for nation-building, followed by the pro-Russian political course of Alyaksandar Lukashenka and his confrontation with the opposition on the issues of language and culture, have brought about this situation, in which only the minority of Belarusians have a mature national identity. Many cultural NGOs were treated by the authorities as oppositional organisations and, therefore, their activities were limited or stopped. However, the formation of the Belarusian state, as well as the geopolitical clashes in the post-Soviet region forced the Belarusian ruling elite to review their cultural policies and extend the boundaries of allowed activities for cultural NGOs.

Since late 2000s, the government has been reviewing its policy towards organisations that do not aim at coming to power and do not engage in political activities. However, this new policy is not a "top to bottom Belarusianisation". It can be described rather as a "closing of eyes" on some non-official cultural activities. By leaving aside the political struggle and re-orienting themselves to the mass audience and entertainment, NGOs have achieved some success in the popularisation of Belarusian culture in the society. However, these are very recent trends and one should not make premature conclusions regarding their success.

At the same time, the authorities continue applying a differentiated approach to the cultural projects conducted by civil society. More "safe" projects that visibly deny any attempts to change the political regime and do not criticise internal or external policies of the authorities, including their attitude to democracy and human rights, or state ideology, can work quite freely. At the same time, the actors that pay attention to these problems get the attention of the authorities and institutions that handle political control and repression. Different types of actors that influence Belarusian culture have, specific to them, problems and achievements.

As the case studies of the two biggest specialised cultural NGOs show, attempts of Belarusianisation via engagement with the state hardly ever bring significant outcomes. Belarusian officials do not support local initiatives and do not encourage cooperation between state institutions and civil society organisations. Influencing the ruling elite will bring success only if they engage in Belarusianisation on a new level. The Budzma Belarusami campaign demonstrates that success under current conditions can be achieved if organisations focus on Belarusian society and build the capacity of its cultural community via applying the newest management approaches, new technologies and cooperating with many projects and personalities. In this way, the network of cultural communication is created.

Independent Belarusian-language media have not become hugely popular in Belarus and have a rather small reach compared to the reach of their Russian-language

counterparts. Their audience usually consists of people who already support national values. The growth in membership of social media communities dedicated to Belarusian language and culture demonstrated the increased interest of young people to national values and symbols. However, it is yet to be seen how this trend will influence the identity-building of the new generation.

In the sphere of the protection of architectural heritage, the success of civil society depends on the level of engagement of authorities on the issue of preservation of a specific monument or object. Civil society has little to no chances to influence the reconstruction of historical centres of towns and cities since it cannot compete with businesses and lobbyists who block alternative plans of reconstruction. On the other hand, in cases where authorities do not have a huge vested interest (such as architectural objects outside big cities that are not included in the national development programmes), the potential for civic activeness is high and it can bring success.

The situation in publishing is complicated since the majority of publishers are not interested in the Belarusian language literature as it is unpopular with mass audiences. Moreover, the tax policies applied by the state place Belarusian publishers at an unfair and unequal economic disadvantage compared to Russian publishers. When publishing houses publish texts about politics, the state exerts pressure on them. This can take various forms. At the same time, this pressure is not exerted on the whole spectrum of independent publishers. Those who avoid issues related to politics can work relatively freely. Both types of publishers are not fully commercial enterprises: they operate rather as cultural organisations that are supported by enthusiasts.

Informal educational projects, as well as research organisations, attempt to compensate for the lack of free thought in the higher educational establishments in Belarus by organising courses in social sciences and humanities. However, despite moderate success in that sphere, there is no broad interest among young people for informal education or even to these sciences as a whole (the latter can be described as a global trend). Attempts to create a national university on the basis of the European Humanities University in Lithuania failed, and that can be considered as a defeat for the nation-oriented civil society in Belarus.

Most of the activities of Belarusian cultural NGOs and other cultural actors, happens in Minsk. Regional cultural centres with their identity formed only on the level of the big regional centres. In this situation, smaller regional towns and villages are treated as a periphery that either receives some cultural events coming from Minsk or ignores cultural activities, being a cultural "black hole". Regional centres with several hundred thousand inhabitants, as a rule, have only one small community each that is active in the sphere of culture. On a district level, the alternative cultural life there is represented by some individuals and very rarely – by associations. The continued state policy that limits NGO activities has led to the shrinkage of regional activities; restoring these activities will be an uneasy task for Belarusian civil society.

Overall, the conditions for cultural actors in Belarus are difficult and their achievements are rather modest. Taking into account the state policy towards the civil society and cultural policy, in general, it would be unattainable to achieve much more. Despite these policies, many important projects took place in Belarus that assisted the formation of the national culture. Recent trends demonstrate that the situation can gradually change for the better. One can observe the growth of activity in cultural NGOs and the growth of popularity of national values in society; this can also be seen in the new rhetoric of the government.

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Vadzim Bylina

Football fans as an example of a community beyond the government's control in the conditions of the authoritarian regime

In Belarus, the term "civil society" became used extensively in the 1990s, and since then has been traditionally used in its narrow meaning in the media and official documents to describe public associations and initiatives. However, a broader understanding of civil society as associations which are characterised by the ability to self-organise, define their goals without a push from the state, and assume certain social responsibilities (preservation of peace and good in society), allows us to include a wider circle of actors into this concept. This article focuses on informal associations of football fans, which are an element of civil society in Belarus.

Unlike established NGOs, associations of football supporters are not institutionalised organisations. They can be described as informal groups of young people that share a passion for a football club and the values and style of the fans subculture. This article studies associations of fans in the context of the theory of new social movements.[1] Fans movements – like "classical" new social movements (animals' rights defenders, hackers, LGBT-movement and others) – are characterised by mistrust of centralisation, subordination and controls from the above. They are creative in using less institutionalised forms of protest. In the case of Belarusian sports fans, this boils down to the boycott of fans' sectors during conflict situations with the police or the administration of a club, banners, graffiti, fire shows. Although fans movements are capable of uniting for the sake of a specific demand, they usually do not have a long-term strategy and they do not strive to influence the policy of the authorities. All they seem to be interested in is creating an autonomous control-free space.

At the same time, football fans do not limit themselves only to chanting to encourage their teams at the stadiums. Fans organise concerts, sports tournaments, and charity events. In 2014, under the influence of mass protests and war in Ukraine, they started to

[1] Neveux Eric. *Satsyalogia satsyalnykh rukhau.* // Sociology of social movements. Vilnius 2010. Pp. 81–90.

express publically their citizenship attitude to the events there. The flash-mob during the Belarus-Ukraine match at the stadium in Barysau can be recalled as the largest protest action in Belarus in 2014.[2]

Fans movements are significantly more independent than classical public associations. In recent years, NGOs have functioned in conditions of constant pressure from the state. Having introduced legal, bureaucratic, fiscal and ideological barriers, the authorities create preconditions for marginalisation of public associations. Operating in the current legal environment, NGOs have very limited opportunities for manoeuvring and are often forced to reduce or suspend their activities in response to fresh restrictions from the authorities. Communities, existing outside of the system and, hence, not following the logic of the system, function differently. Football fans groups are exactly these types of communities. Unlike registered NGOs, fans subculture followers cannot be fully controlled by the authorities. These communities do not take part in formal associations, do not seek state registration and cannot be liquidated by a ruling of the executive power body.

What is the difference between football fans and ordinary supporters? There are several criteria in scientific literature, which allow adding usual ordinary supporters to the ranks of fans. Firstly, they regularly attend all home matches of their football club. Secondly, several times a year they follow their favourite team travelling to other cities to attend away fixtures. Thirdly, they accept the subculture of football fans.[3]

This article looks at the evolution of the football fans' subculture in Belarus, the ideas they share, and their relationship with the authorities. Further on, the terms "football fans" and "fans movement" will be used to refer to both subculture followers and the public movement. Besides, the term "fans movement" is used to refer to both the movement supported by a club and the nation-wide fans movement. The term "football fans" is broader; it is used to refer to all subculture followers.

This article is based on the sources that include online fans' communities and forums, media stories, and several academic papers describing this subculture.

Football fans in USSR

Football fans have existed in Belarus for more than 30 years. It is assumed that this subculture emerged in Belarus at the end of 1981. The then-fans recall, in interviews

[2] Chyzhova Tatsiana. *Pratestnaya aktyunasts u Belarusi u 2014 hodzie (vulichnyya aktsyi, vybarchyya pikyety, satsyyalnyya kanflikty)* // *Protest activities in Belarus in 2014 (street actions, election pickets, social conflicts)* // http://palityka.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Chyzhova_Pratesty-2104.pdf.

[3] Ille A. *Futbol'nyi fanatizm v Rossii: Fan-dvizhenie i subkul'tura futbol'nykh fanatov* // *Football fan movement in Russia: movement and subculture of football fans* // http://subculture.narod.ru/texts/book2/ille.htm.

and memoires lately, that an organised and active support by fans of FC Dynamo Minsk, Belarus' best football side back then, began after visits to Minsk by supporters of Moscow and Leningrad (now St Petersburg) clubs. Impressed by the visitors' organised support-base and the fact that Russian fans possessed scarves, badges, banners and other accessories in their clubs' colours, Minsk supporters spontaneously organised themselves into groups supporting the local team.

The history of the fans subculture in USSR can be conditionally divided into two periods: 1) from the moment the fans movement emerged in the 1970s until 1987, and 2) afterwards. In the first period, organised cheering at the stands was not allowed, and the police and KGB routinely harassed fans. At the stadium entrance, police officers would take away flags, badges and scarves. Supporters were allowed to cheer only when seated. Security agencies also tried to prevent fans from attending the away games of their team. During the perestroika period, security forces significantly relaxed controls over fans movements, thus creating space for a remarkable growth of the fans subculture across USSR towards the end of the 1980s. That is when Dynamo Minsk's supporters lived in the heydays of their fans movement. Although one can find mentions on the Internet that fans movements in the late 1980s also existed in Homel, Mahilou and Hrodna, it is worth noting that Dynamo Minsk was the only Belarusian club in USSR Championship's elite league. No wonder so many young people from the Belarusian provinces were among fans of the Minsk club and were active supporters of Dynamo during both home and away games.[4]

The way the former members of the Belarusian fans movement recall those times suggest that they were sceptical about the Soviet government. For example, a former Dynamo supporter recalled in a media interview that once, on a train to Kutaisi in Georgia, he and his fellow fans marked the death of the Soviet Union Communist Party's Secretary General Chernenko by drinking alcohol and singing songs.[5] Moreover, the fans' appearance differed greatly from how Soviet citizens were supposed to look. Apart from having accessories in club's colours, some of them had long hair and torn jeans, hence often triggering clashes with the so called "street toughs" or thugs – urban youths with a notoriously aggressive behaviour.

It can be argued that in the first half of the 1980s Dynamo Minsk fans differed from the stereotypical image of football hooligans in Western Europe (young blue-collars with a low social status and prone to unmotivated violence), imposed by Soviet propaganda. As a rule, Minsk fans avoided getting into fights with the fans of other teams. They valued their life style: lively cheering at the stadium, long-distance trips to follow their beloved

[4] *History of "Dynamo" fans (Soviet period)* // http://www.lads83.ru.

[5] Maslovski, Andrei. *Prinimaya v fanaty, bili* // *When they initiated me into becoming a fan, they beat me* // http://goals.by/football/articles/174804.

team to away fixtures and non-conformist appearance – largely, they strived to overcome the boundaries of the grey Soviet reality.

However, in the second half of the 1980s, conflicts with the fans of other clubs became increasingly common. Vilnius was traditionally a difficult ground for away matches. Clashes between fans of the local club Zalgiris and Minsk supporters, several hundred attending the matches in Vilnius, were not rare. Hostility could also be observed later in relations with Ukrainian fans from Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk. Anyway, when the last USSR championship ended in November 1991, the Soviet period of the Belarusian fans movement was also over.

Fans movement in independent Belarus

By the early 1990s, the fans movement in Belarus – just like elsewhere in the former Soviet states – was in decline. A new wave of the fans movement arrived in the second half of 1990s when relatively large groups of fans (20–100 people) began to appear at the stadiums of the teams playing in the elite division of the Belarus Championship. The largest in numbers were the fan groups of Dynamo Minsk and Dnepr Mahilou. Torpedo Minsk, Dynamo Brest, FC Homel, Shakhtsior Salihorsk, Belshina Babruisk and others also had a relatively strong support-base. The new fan groups had their titles written on their banners displayed during matches. For example, the Dynamo Minsk grouping was called "Blue-White Gang". Dnepr fans called themselves "River Lions". Torpedo Minsk fans were "Black-White Tornado". Some groups began to produce scarves and print self-published newsletters devoted to the fans culture (The Hooligans (Dynamo Minsk), Torpedo Fan Courier and others). By that time, the biggest hostility in Belarus had been between the fans of Dynamo Minsk and Dnepr Mahilou football clubs. Other fans supported either of these two groupings based on their geographical proximity. For example, Belshina Babruisk fans were natural allies of Dnepr Mahilou, because Babruisk is a city in the Mahilou region. Dynamo Minsk fans were backed during third-party fixtures by fans of another capital-based club, Torpedo.

The split between "ultras" and "hooligans" was yet to be known in the Belarusian fans movement in the second half of 1990s – early 2000s. In the fans subculture, ultras groups are fans who use choreography (colourful shows during the match, including banners, serpentines and flares) and vocal support in large numbers to encourage their team. "Hooligans" are fans who attend matches seeking clashes with hooligans amongst the supporters of other teams. In the 1990s, both cheering the team at the stadium, and fighting with supporters of other teams was a must for all fans. Scheduled fights between fans were not yet in existence back then. Clashes would take place before or after matches in direct proximity to the stadium or near transport terminals. Fights were possible due to the relatively relaxed attitude of the police. In the second half of 1990s, riot police was

not deployed to stadiums where regular police force officers were usually small in number. Outside the stadium, officers did not pay attention to the fans that were not violating public order. There was no strict discipline in the ranks of fans, either. To do or nor not to do sports was a matter of personal choice. It was considered a norm to consume alcohol prior to home and even away fixtures.

In the same period of time, attempts, in some cities of Belarus, to create and spearhead fans movements on "orders from above" could be observed. For example, in 1998 in Hrodna, the local branch of the Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth tried to create a fans club of FC Neman. The union started to issue fans-club membership IDs and provided several coaches for fans to travel to away games. Some football clubs also attempted to create their own fans clubs. MPKC Mazyr, Naftan Navapolatsk, and BATE Barysau provided buses for their fans to attend away games. Participating in those trips were ordinary supporters who did not share the values of the fans youth subculture. Eventually, those attempts would just die out.

In the late 1990s – early 2000s, the booming Russian fans movement was the primary role model for fans groups in Belarus. Along with the fashion trends (bomber coats, army boots, and number-one haircuts), they also borrowed from Russia, radical right-wing ideas, which were growing increasingly popular with Belarusian fans. One could notice that even judging by the accessories used by fans at the time. For example, scarves and banners often depicted Celtic crosses – a solar symbol used extensively by the neo-Nazis. Sociologist Aliaksei Lastouski argues in his article on the skinhead culture in Belarus, that football fans circles gave birth to numerous "skinhead" groups, while Dynamo Minsk fans played a significant role in the subculture of neo-Nazi "shaven heads". The article also points to the popularity among skinheads of pan-Slavism ideas borrowed from Russia in the late 1990s – early 2000s.[6]

According to Russian sociologist and subculture researcher Alexander Tarasov, the penetration of neo-Nazism into the subculture of Russian football fans occurred, because this subculture was not complete. Lacking even a primitive philosophy and ideology, it was vulnerable to external influences. Since the subculture of football fans is a priori xenophobic (there is a clear division between foes and friends) and the intellectual level of its members is low, fans turned out to be receptive to the skinheads' ideology. This influence is manifested via slang diffusion and appearance (common for both subcultures, clothing, fashion and haircuts). A high level of xenophobia in the Russian society fuelled by the systematic work of some neo-Nazi organisations to spread their ideas among football fans

[6] Lastovskii Aleksei. *Idei i praktiki molodezhnoi kontrkul'tury skinkhedov v Belarusi // Ideas and practices of the skinhead youth counterculture in Belarus. Palitychnaya sfera*. No 10. 2008. Pp. 17–25.

was also a powerful contributing factor.[7] By having shared the extreme right wing views of its eastern neighbours, Belarusian fans either distanced themselves from the ideas of Belarusian nationalism or treated it – symbolised by the Belarusian Popular Front back then – with a negative attitude.

In 1999, Belarusian and Russian fans were involved in a fight at the stadium during a friendly match between the Belarus and Russian national teams. Mostly probably, none of the existing Belarusian fans groups participated in the clashes. At the same time, rumours among fans suggested that the clashes were provoked by "Belarusian Popular Front activists".[8] A FC Lida fans group was the only exception, as it was in contact with the local community of the Young Front (the youth wing of the Belarusian Popular Front). However, that group did not exist for a long time.[9]

It is also known that some Belarusian right-wing radical nationalist organisations attempted to spread their ideas among football fans. For example, the *Nacyja* (Nation) magazine, published by the Belarusian Freedom Party, ran several articles devoted to football fans. However, those attempts, eventually, were not successful.

When the authoritarian rule in Belarus grew stronger in late 1990s – early 2000s, security forces began to pay more attention to the fans subculture. It was also so, because the number of clashes between fans and the quantity of participants in those clashes was increasing, both at home and away matches. In 1999, the fan sector of FC Dynamo Minsk at the stadium (on average between 300 to 400 fans per match) was under permanent video surveillance by security officials. It became routine for fans to be removed from the stadium on various pretexts. In the final game of the matchday between BATE and Dynamo Minsk at the Barysau stadium, Dynamo fans were involved in serious clashes with the local police. The match was eventually stopped, and 72 Minsk fans were detained. Three of them faced criminal proceedings.[10] Largely, the police provoked the fight but the situation grabbed huge media attention, and criminal proceedings did not end with prison terms for the detained fans. However, about a year after, the police started to film, check personal data and interview fans at stadiums across Belarus.

It is worth noting that the fight against violence and increased presence of the security forces at stadiums was not an isolated trend in Belarus only. In the UK, authorities started

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[7] Tarasov Aleksandr. *Subkul'tura futbol'nykh fanatov v Rossii i pravyi radikalizm* // *Football fans' subculture in Russia and right-wing radicalism* // http://scepsis.net/library/id_2965.html.

[8] *Minsk-1999. Vyezd za sbornuyu* // *Minsk 1999. Trip with national team* // http://belultras.by/stati/minsk-1999-vyezd-za-sbornuyu.

[9] Maslovskii Andrei. *Poyavlenie levykh sektorov – moda* // *Emergence of left-wing sectors is a fashion trend* // http://goals.by/football/articles/128916.

[10] *History of fan movements: Dynamo Minsk* // http://belultras.by/stati/istorii-fan-dvizhenij-dinamo-minsk.

fighting against football hooligans no later than in the 1980s. In the 2000s, the problem of football violence was relevant in almost all the countries of Eastern Europe.

The reaction of Belarusian football fans to police persecution was the same as elsewhere in the region. The "casual wear" style replaced bomber coats and heavy-duty boots. This way, a football fan had the same appearance as an ordinary supporter and was able to avoid additional attention from security agents before the game. As was mentioned above, there was a split inside the subculture between "hooligans" and "ultras". The term *Ultras,* used for the first time in Italy, refers to ultra-fanatical supporters using vocal support and elaborate display at stands to encourage their team during matches. Ultras groups also popularise their movement by publishing stickers and painting graffiti. Radical supporters or *hooligans* are united into groups or "firms", in fans' slang, of 15–30 persons with the primary objective of fighting similar hooligans from other teams. For them, attending games and cheering their team is secondary.

In the 2000s, the number of fights between football fans in the streets of Belarusian cities dropped significantly. Disturbed by increased police attention, it became common practice for "firms" to schedule fights in advance in a city's remote areas or parks, or in the suburbs and "sort thing out" away from ordinary by-passers and the police. In other words, "radical supporters" of the 2000s differed greatly from fan-movement followers of the 1990s. They were no longer drunken debauchers that openly terrorise citizens on a matchday. Rather, they became invisible and well-organised fight clubs.

The article "Avant-garde of football hooliganism", posted on the website of Dynamo Minsk's fans group Lads82 in 2004, describes the rules of behaviour for "hooligans". To be able to defend the honour of the club outside the stadium, members of a "firm" must restrict alcohol consumption, not smoke or use drugs, not curse but do sports and develop intellectually by reading books.[11]

In the 2000s, extreme right-wing political views remained widespread among Belarusian fans. It was in line with the general trend within the fans movement in Eastern Europe. For example, the above-mentioned article suggests that one of the reasons why a "hooligan" is not supposed to use drugs is because "churki" (a derogatory slang term to describe non-Slavic (Asian or Caucasian) people) profit from drug sales. The most notorious case when neo-Nazi views were openly expressed at a stadium in Belarus was the display of a Nazi leader, Rudolf Hess, on a banner in the Dynamo Minsk's fans sector in 2010. Despite an apology from the leaders of the Dynamo Minsk's fans movement, that incident has been widely used in media to create a negative image of football fans. However, unlike elsewhere in Eastern Europe,[12] in the second half of the 2000s and in

[11] *Avant-garde of football hooliganism* // http://lads83.ru/avangard.htm.

[12] Legkov Timur. *Radical clubs try to rule football teams. FARE prepared the report on racism in Russian football* // http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/782093; Kornak

the 2010s, radical left-wing views grew in popularity among Belarusian fans. This trend singles out Belarusian fans in the region and puts them closer to the Western European context, where football fans with left-wing views are a relatively widespread phenomenon.

The left-wing fans got united around the Minsk-based FC MTZ-RIPO, founded in 2002 (renamed Partyzan in 2010). Already at the very beginning, supporters of the newly founded team positioned themselves as a youth movement, which is wider than the limited subculture of fans. For that reason, the fans sector attracted not only football supporters as such but also representatives of "leftist" youth subcultures – punks, anarchists, etc. Probably the most famous supporter of the club – political prisoner Ihar Alinevich, was sentenced to 8 years in prison under the so called "Anarchists case" in 2011. In his book "On my way to Magadan", written in a KGB pre-trial jail, the political prisoner recalled supporting MTZ-RIPO during away matches.[13]

The number one enemy of MTZ-RIPO's fans outside the stadium were fans of Dynamo Minsk, while the matches between these two teams were rightfully considered Minsk derbies. Despite being isolated inside the country, the "left-wing" fans movement was gaining strength quickly – not only due to the attractiveness of their ideas but also due to the club's success in football. In 2005 and 2008, MTZ-RIPO finished third in the Belarus championship. The club also won the Belarus Cup several times. Fans had many allies outside Belarus, for example, "left-wing" groups of Arsenal Kiev and Babelsberg Potsdam. With time, other fans groups with similar views appeared in Belarus (Ivatsevichy, Orsha, Haradzeya and others). When FC Partyzan owner and Lithuanian businessman Vladimir Romanov refused to fund the team in 2011, fans revived the club and even signed it in to play in the Belarus championship – the first ever precedent in the country where the team was resurrected by fans.

The reason why *Antifa* ideas became popular among Belarusian fans may be that unlike in Russia, Poland, Serbia and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, ethnic nationalism was never a dominant ideology in Belarus.[14] Another factor is the myth about the Great Patriotic War, which became the primary historical myth of the state. In the minds of the youth, socialised in Belarusian society, there is a stable opinion that during

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Marcin. *Brunatna księga 2011–2012* // http://www.nigdywiecej.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=261&Itemid=20; Atanasov Vitaly. *Ultra-silencing. Racism on football fields of Ukraine is common.* // http://www.ukrrudprom.com/digest/Ultrazamalchivanie_Rasizm_na_futbolnih_stadionah_Ukraini_stal_ob.html.

[13] Olinevich Igor. *Yedu v Magadan.* // *I am going to Magadan.* P. 30.

[14] Akudovich Valiantsin. *Kod adustnastsi.* // *Code of Absence ntelligentsia expressed support to arrested BATE fansder 193-1 articlesociology. ism in Russian footballs satsyyalnyya kanflikt.* Minsk, 2007 ntelligentsia expressed support to arrested BATE fansder 193-1 articlesociology. ism in Russian footballs satsyyalnyya kanflikt ntelligentsia expressed support to arrested BATE fansder 193-1 articlesociology. ism in Russian footballs satsyyalnyya kanflikt.

the World War II almost all residents of Belarus fought against Nazis.[15] For that reason, radical right-wing views did not become dominant among fans and triggered a negative reaction of a huge part of this subculture's representatives.

Throughout the 2000s, relations between fans and the police remained tense. The police sought gradually to strengthen crowd controls at stadiums. Their reaction to flares and pyrotechnics was ruthless. Personal checks became stricter, making it sometimes impossible to get to the stadium before kick-off. Tipsy fans are banned from the stadium. The police also increasingly make sure that fans do not leave their sector during half time. When fans travel to attend away fixtures, they are routinely accompanied on a train or a bus by riot police officers who escort them within a town prior to and after the match. A beat officer can also summon fans prior to the start of the season. Video recording and copying personal details at the stadium entrance became routine. Already in early 2010s, banners in English were not allowed inside stadium because police officers did not speak foreign languages. To be displayed at the stands, every banner had to be cleared by the police prior to the game.

Match attendance dropped significantly in comparison with the 1990s, making fans engaged in vocal and visual cheering easily spottable by the police. However, the increased number of supporters at fans sectors created a good atmosphere during Belarus championship matches – something that clubs' managers and the Belarusian Football Federation had to respect. Boycott of matches became the only legitimate and relatively effective form of struggle against police's arbitrariness. On 26 September 2010, fans of almost all clubs playing the elite league refused to watch matches from fans sectors. The home fans sector of FC BATE remained empty for almost one year – from 14 August 2010 until 19 June 2011. A Boycott was also announced by the fans of Dynamo Minsk, Neman Hrodna, Dynamo Brest and others. Protests were usually over quickly after negotiations with the management of the clubs, promising to solve the problems with the police.

In the same period of time, fans movements began to hold mini-football and wrestling tournaments, collected clothes for orphanages and organized rock concerts. The media also changed its attitude towards the fans throughout the 2000s. In the early 2000s, sports journalists were mainly interested in sports but by the end of the 2000s – early 2010s sports media started to pay more attention to the fans subculture, covering conflicts with the police and publishing stories about fans. For example, the country's leading Internet portal TUT.BY highlighted the charitable work of FC Homel fans by running a story about a visit to the orphanage in Navabelitsa on New Year's Eve in 2013.[16] Media also reported about charitable actions by fans of Dynamo Minsk, Dynamo Brest, BATE, Partyzan and others.

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[15] Kotlyarov I.V. *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voina v zerkale sotsiologii* // *Great Patriotic War in the mirror of sociology* // http://socio.bas-net.by/be/artdetailed.php?id=8.

[16] *Football fans visit an orphanage* // http://news.tut.by/society/380709.html.

Contacts with supporters in other countries were also strengthened. In 2012, several Belarusian fans groups supported the campaign launched by the Dynamo Kiev ultras for the release of Siarhei Paulyuchenka, a Dynamo Kiev fan, convicted of murder. Support was manifested through banners and performance displays at the stadiums and through graffiti. Apart from the foreign contacts of the Partyzan fans mentioned above, it is worth noting the friendship between BATE fans with supporters of the Polish club Piast Gliwice, that began in early 2010s. With the fans movement in Poland being one of the strongest in Europe, the fact of this alliance with a Polish fans movement speaks for a certain status of Belarusian fans abroad.

As it was mentioned above, fans distanced themselves from Belarusian nationalism in the 1990s and the first half of 2000s under strong influence from the Russian fans culture, associated with Russian nationalism and neo-Nazi ideas. However, by the mid-2000s, the situation began to change. Torpedo Minsk fans were the first to start using the Belarusian language in the mid-2000s. Their website was in Belarusian. They also made the first Belarusian-language stadium banners. One of the factors that triggered "Belarusisation" of the fans movement was the emergence in 2007 of a Belarus national team's fans club B-12, which organised vocal support for the team in Belarusian. Accessories and banners were also made in the titular tongue. On the website, the fans club positions itself as a non-politicised group, which strives to unite the followers of both the red-green and white-red-white flags of Belarus. Its primary goal is to raise the level of fans support in Belarus to European standards.[17] B-12 also made it clear that its role model were fans movements in the West. It demonstrated its strength in the autumn of 2012, when fans announced a boycott to the World Cup qualifier against Spain. The boycott was caused by a surge in ticket prices. As a result, in order to fill the stadium, authorities used the so-called administrative resource, forcing schoolteachers to sell tickets among students. However, it did not help fill the stands, so the match was played almost in silence. The success of the boycott forced the Belarusian Football Federation to make concessions and reduce the costs of tickets.

Beginning in the 2000s, Belarusian fans often use white-red-white flags – the de facto banned national symbol and the official flag in 1991–1995 – to support the Belarus national team and clubs during away matches abroad. In the first half of the 2010s, almost all fan movements in Belarus started to use the Belarusian language on banners, stickers and their websites. From time to time, some ultras groups (for example, Neman Hrodna and FC Minsk) organise vocal support in Belarusian.

The Belarusian-language popularity trend can be explained by several factors. In comparison with the 1990s, Belarusian youths became more mobile in the second half of 2000s. Growth in wages and living standards of the Belarusian population created

[17] http://b-12.by/index/0-10.

the situation where fans had more opportunities for foreign travel and contacts with other representatives of the fan subculture, not only in Russia, but also cross the western borders. This way, they could naturally get to know the latest trends in the subculture directly – not via Russia as before. Affordable travel combined with internet penetration led to a drop in influence of the Russian fans movement and a wider spread of the more relevant for the local context, ideas of Belarusian nationalism. Another factor is almost total annihilation of the pro-independence opposition youth organisations (Young Front and others), capable of staging street protests.[18] As a result, stadiums became one of few venues where cultural beliefs dissenting with the state ideology could still be manifested. It is logical to admit that the youth previously recruited by pro-independence organisations, could see the fans subculture as a good platform for expressing their views.

It is not common for the Belarusian fans movement to manifest its attitude towards the current political situation in the country, at stadiums. The huge presence of the riot police at stadiums as well as ruthless suppression of any opposition activity does not create conducive conditions for that. However, spontaneous protests against the government do happen sometimes. In the summer of 2011 in Babruisk, the riot police used tear gas against Dynamo Minsk fans that, in the views of the police, went too far to celebrate a goal by their favourite team. A 5-year-old child and a Dynamo player were affected. In response, fans chanted "We Hate the Regime" and used abusive words against the police for several minutes. Fans have more freedom to express their political views at away matches of the Belarusian teams abroad. Again in the summer of 2011, in the midst of the financial crisis and the so called "silent protests" that swept across the country, BATE fans chanted «ШОС» (an ambiguous anti-government abbreviation which usually stands for "let him die" or "let him go to jail") during an away match in Lithuania against Ekranas Panevezys.

In late 2013 and early 2014, Ukrainian fans actively supported the protests in Kiev and were part of the group of demonstrators that participated in clashes with the riot police. The fans movements of some Belarusian football clubs supported their Ukrainian friends by posting on the Internet the pictures of fans holding banners in support of Euromaidan with the words "Hold on, Ukraine! We are with you!" and "Glory to Heroes" – a nationalist slogan used by Ukrainian protesters. Two fans were even arrested for five days. The case grabbed huge media attention; rights defenders and Belarusian intellectuals stepped in against the repressions. 20 prominent musicians, writers and culture figures posted a photo on the Internet showing them holding banners with the same content.[19] It

[18] Zaitsev Alexander. *Opponents of regime get punished under 193-1 article* // http://news.tut.by/politics/76679.html; Fedorovich Viktor. *Dashkevich case. Lobov's case. Political hooliganism with two unknown factors* // http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2011/03/23/ic_articles_116_172949/.

[19] *Intelligentsia expressed support to arrested BATE fans* // http://news.tut.by/politics/385602.html.

was for the first time that Belarusian intellectuals publicly spoke out in support of the fans movement that had just recently used neo-Nazi symbols at stadiums.

The Belarusian security agencies carried out an all-out special operation against fans ahead of the World Ice Hockey Championship in Minsk. Several weeks before the tournament, many fans were summoned to the police station for "preventive conversations". On the eve of the championship, the authorities launched what can only be described as a real hunt for football fans that, together with pro-democracy young activists and prostitutes, got onto the list of security risks and could be subjected to arrest.

The most prominent politically coloured conflict between fans and the authorities occurred on 9 October 2014 during the 2016 Euro Cup qualifier between Belarus and Ukraine, played at the stadium in Barysau. The Belarus fans sector supported the visiting fans and shouted abusive chants against the Russian president Putin. In response, the police detained over 40 fans that later stood trial, and got fines or administrative arrests for 15 days.

These cases prove the increased politicization of the Belarusian fans movements in the 2010s compared to the previous years. First, fans' political activism increased during the 2011 "silent protests", which followed the brutal crackdown on protesters during the peaceful manifestation on 19 December 2010. When it was later repeated during the political crisis in Ukraine in 2014, it took the form of the actions of solidarity with the Ukrainian ultras that participated in clashes with the police and pro-Russian security forces. When suppressing the political activism of football fans, security agencies use the same tactics which, beginning from the early 2000s, have been successfully employed against pro-democracy activists: preventive detentions, intimidation, fines and administrative arrests.

Some conclusions

The study of the fans movement's development in Belarus showed that over the past 30 years, followers of the fans subculture have accepted mutually contradicting political ideologies. In the late 1990s, fans communities supported pan-Slavic ideas but in the early 2010s the fans movement started to express interest in Belarusian nationalism. Both right- and left-wing fans movements are existent. One can make a conclusion, from the history of the relationship between the fans subculture and the security agencies, about the ability to resist repressions and a high degree of adaptability to external challenges. The fans movement continued to exist even during the Andropov times in the Soviet Union. Increased controls by the police led to a stronger consolidation of fans movements. Spontaneous clashes gave way to scheduled fights. The fans wear fashion, also changed. As a matter of protest against the police arbitrariness, fans started to use the boycott of matches. In recent years, fans organise their leisure activities (sports tournaments, concerts), and get involved in charitable work and publicly manifest their political views.

Due to its protest potential, football fans in Belarus today feel the biggest pressure from the police and security forces compared to followers of other informal groups. After the 2011 crackdown, no opposition youth organisations capable of organising mass street protests can be found in Belarus. Criminal prosecution of Young Front activists after the 2006 and 2010 presidential elections destroyed a large-scale nationalist youth movement. The so-called anarchist's cases of 2011 weakened significantly the left-wing youth groups. In these conditions, "radical football supporters" remain one of the small groups capable of mobilising the youth critical of the authorities. This fact, combined with the increased interest of fans in politics due to the developments in Ukraine, remains a concern for the Belarusian authorities.

It does not matter that the number of Belarusian fans at stadiums is much smaller than in Ukraine or in its other neighbours, Poland and Russia, and that the age seems very young at first glance (many underage supporters can be observed in fans sectors). Football clubs, the Belarusian Football Federation and the police are forced to take into account the opinion of fans groups. This is proved by the concessions made to fans by the management of clubs as well as annual meetings between fans movement leaders and security apparatus officials and football clubs, hosted by the Belarusian Football Federation, prior to the start of the season.

Unlike the registered NGOs in Belarus, the authorities are not able to control football fans groups. For example, it is impossible to imagine that, similar to the Belarusian Association of Journalists and the Union of Belarusian writers, the authorities will move to create an official fans club of the Belarus national team, whose representatives can attend away matches, use flares and take part in clashes with fans of other teams. Security bodies can put pressure on some fans using repressions. However, they are not able to control fans groups fully, let alone to fight the subculture and its internal trends. Despite the restrictions at stadiums, football fans movement remains a popular subculture with the youth in Belarus, the political emancipation of which the Belarusian regime is not yet able to counteract.

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Ihar Rasolka

Politicisation of civil society in an apolitical society: paternalism, deconsolidation and action strategies of social agents

Since there are many definitions and approached to civil society, it is important to note that civil society is not just a combination of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but a structure that in democratic societies provides the basis for the interaction of civic and state institutions. Civil society in its interaction with the state has several social functions. Firstly, they allow the solving of private problems and conflicts between social agents without the state's interference, thus lowering the bureaucratic pressure on the country. This principle nowadays is used in business and research in the form of crowdsourcing and citizen science. Secondly, in the framework of cooperation between the state and civil society, two subsystems are able to control each other. The state legal system provides the legislative framework for the coexistence of the state and the society while civil society controls the adherence of the state to democratic principles. Thirdly, civil society has a diagnostic function not only as an instrument of modernisation but as an indicator of the development of the democratic state governed by the rule of law.

The ideal mechanism of interaction between the state and civil society can be described, using Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, as functional interaction of the "system" (sphere of state and economy) and "lifeworld" (sphere of private and social relations).[1] The state, as a conservative structure, reacts to social changes quite slowly. The "lifeworld" is a much more flexible but less structured subsystem. Thus, the relationship between two subsystems, based on communicative action, increases the adaptivity of the state. However, in practice, the interaction between the state and civil society may not have such a functional nature. In the period of establishment of relations, the dominating view could be that the civil sector and the state, instead of engaging in competitive and partnership relations, have to be on different political sides. Sometimes, civil society may

[1] Habermas J. *Moral'noe soznanie i kommunikativnoe deistvie.* // *Moral conscience and communicative action* // SPb.: Nauka, 2000. // Habermas J. *Otnosheniya mezhdu sistemoi i zhiznennym mirom v usloviyakh pozdnego kapitalizma* // *Relations between system and lifeworld in conditions of late capitalism*. // Thesis. 1993. Volume 1. No 2. 1993.

wish to replace the state, especially if by civil society we mean the community of political parties and movements.

There are pre-conditions and opinions demonstrating that the situation described above is present in Belarus. For instance, Ulad Vialichka, the chairman of the international consortium EuroBelarus said, one of the specific features of civil society is its excessive political nature combined with stigmatisation of civil practices by the state.[2] The politicisation of Belarusian civil society was also mentioned by the sociologist Aliaksei Lastouski.[3]

We view politicisation not in its aspect of the mass participation of civil society in the political struggle but as a trend to perceive civic activities as political. Since one and the same event can be perceived differently by different social agents, such an approach to analysis will be more heuristic. The current situation should be assessed via the concept of the social frame as a "perspective of perception that creates a formal definition of the situation."[4]

There have been cases of framing of civic action as political both by representatives of state organs and representatives of civil society. Thus, we have to analyse the spectrum of possible reasons, forms and consequences of framing of the activities of agents of civil society as political by different social agents in current social conditions. By these agents, we mean representatives of state institutions, NGOs, as well as the population, as it is the only potential basis for the formation of civil society.

At the beginning of this analysis, let us review specific political attitudes of Belarusians. Belarusian society is not politicised. Politics does not interest Belarusians much and stays on the periphery of their "lifeworld". According to IISEPS data for 2013–14, only 5.4% of the adult population takes an active part in political activities.[5] Interest in politics usually shows in participation in elections, and watching and discussing news with closes friends and relatives.[6] This demonstrates that the political activity of Belarusians is quite passive and manifests mostly in electoral activities.

The results of the international European Values Survey research (EVS) confirm this trend. In their analysis of data from this research A. Ivaniuta and U. Praudzivets state that interest in politics rises during significant political events, which are usually political

[2] Which features of civil society are typically Belarusian? – http://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2012/12/02/priznaki-grazhdanskogo-obschestva.html.

[3] Lastouski A. *Civil society in Belarus: on the way to active democracy* // http://www.arche.by/by/page/ideas/9701.

[4] Goffman I. *Analiz freimov: Esse ob organizatsii povsednevnogo opyta*. // *Frame analysis: an essay on organisation of everyday experience*. // Moskva: Institut sotsiologii RAN, 2004.

[5] IISEPS surveys archive. June 2013. // http://old.iiseps.org/data13-6.html.

[6] IISEPS surveys archive. June 2014. // http://old.iiseps.org/data14-6.html.

electoral campaigns. Other significant regional and international events can also bring attention to politics.[7] Among such events nowadays one can name the war in Ukraine.

Alongside the rise of interest of the population in the political process, is the increased activity of civil society actors who work in the same field and encourage actors that had no experience in politics to enter the political field. Political competition intensifies, also due to the attraction of new resources. Examples of such political competition are the Zubr movement created in 2001 and dissolved after the 2006 presidential election or the "Tell the Truth!" campaign organised before the presidential campaign in 2010.

Another specific feature of the political consciousness of the Belarusian society is persistent reproduction of paternalist paradigm that includes: unwillingness to take responsibility for solving social problems on their own; avoiding risks, caused by a lack of willingness of the people to accept the entirety of their subjectiveness; transfer of functions of civic control to the state and, finally, adherence to the narrative that describes society as a patriarchal society chaired by the Father.

According to EVS research, the share of people who positively assess the political system with a "strong leader who does not have to worry about parliament or elections" has almost doubled from 2000 to 2008: from 33.5% to 61.6%.[8] Quite strikingly, alongside this trend, the share of people with a positive attitude to the democratic political system has grown as well: from 67.3% in 2000 to 73% in 2008.[9] These two indicators combined give grounds for a statement about the diffusion of paternalist views with the perception of democracy and the infiltration of the "democracy" concept by paternalism.

The September 2013 data of IISEPS, shows the preservation of the paternalist paradigm. The share of those who think that "the state should care about people" was 62.7%, while 10.3% more said that "people should sacrifice something for the state". 22.7% stated that "people should show initiative and take care of themselves."[10]

The prevalence of political paternalism creates grounds for framing civic activities as political ones. Paternalism creates the illusion of necessity, effectiveness and justifiability of governmental control over all spheres of civic life. In these conditions, representatives of state institutions may perceive various civic activities as political acts. In the cultural field, the catalyser of this process is competition between two national projects: post-Soviet that appeals to the symbols and statehood of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic

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[7] *Tsennostnyi mir sovremennogo cheloveka: Belarus' i ee sosedi v mezhdunarodnykh proektakh po izucheniyu tsennostei. // The world of values of a modern person: Belarus and its neighbours in international projects that study values.* // Minsk: BGU, 2013. P. 103.

[8] *Tsennostnyi mir sovremennogo cheloveka: Belarus' i ee sosedi v mezhdunarodnykh proektakh po izucheniyu tsennostei. // The world of values of a modern person: Belarus and its neighbours in international projects that study values.* // Minsk: BGU, 2013. P. 130.

[9] Ibid.

[10] IISEPS surveys archive. September 2013. // http://old.iiseps.org/data13-9.html.

(BSSR), and national that is symbolically related to the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR). These projects have a different symbolic basis and cultural codes, and, as a result, different vision of historical narratives and different directions of identity construction. This confrontation of two main national projects manifests in its reduced version in the political field, as well, as a confrontation between "authorities" and "opposition".

This factor, alongside with the imperative presence of the cultural field in other social fields, influences the genesis of the state's political framing of civic activities. The state defines a desirable spectrum of manifestation of civic activities that are relevant to the cultural code of the dominating national project. Based on this, state institutions are able to frame civic activities as political ones and thus undesirable. That, in turn, causes confrontation in the cultural field.

Paternalism establishes a limited framework for the effective realisation of the concept of civil society. Civil society demands social actors to be active, competent and independent. In the paternalist model, initiative is secondary. The basis for the apologia of paternalism as a governing principle is the perception of the secondary role of subordinates compared to the leader. Activities and initiatives that are not in line with the dominant doctrine are labelled undesirable.

Taking into account the above described scheme of realisation of civic activities in conditions of paternalism, one should admit that these conditions still envisage some spheres for civic activities. The following strategies of involvement into civic interaction with the state can be envisaged:

– *Passive strategy.* The easiest, for realisation strategy does not envisage the involvement of social agents in civic activities. This is the strongest manifestation of the paternalism paradigm.

– *Adaptive strategy.* This strategy is based on participation in activities that do not manifest in the political field or in politically sanctioned activities. Examples of the successful realisation of this strategy, are work of consultative centres or organisations that search for missing persons. According to "Angel" search unit coordinator Yuliya Kouhan, her unit brings added value, not only because it serves as an additional resource in missing persons' cases, but also because it allows to increase the speed of the search at a time, when "the law enforcement agencies cannot act as quickly due to red tape, such as the necessity to receive written permission from their bosses."[11] This means that it is possible to have functional interaction between "system" and "lifeworld" outside of the political field.

– *Confrontational strategy.* This strategy envisages entering the political field and is common to political organisations whose overarching goal is to achieve a certain

[11] Coordinator of "Angel" unit: "The main thing in our work is not to waste any time!" // http://budzma.by/news/yuliya-kowhan-u-nashay-pracy-samaye-halownaye-nye-wpuscic-chas.html.

recognition in politics. The confrontational strategy can also be adopted by NGOs in cases when their activities are related to politics. The idea of the ineffectiveness of civic activities in current political conditions and urge to change these conditions may also draw organisations into the political field. In this case, civil society actors themselves frame civic activities as political ones.

Politicisation is closely connected to the latter strategy. Therefore, it is important to look at conditions that facilitate a strengthening of the political framing of NGO work.

Firstly, the dependence of NGOs on external, international funding, give grounds for framing civic activities as political ones by the state institutions. Secondly, an important factor are the legal constraints on the activities of civic initiatives. One of the constraints is Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code that introduces criminal responsibility for acting in the name of a non-registered organisation. In this way, the system of state registration of NGOs becomes a filter that allows it to select "desirable" organisations, and pushes "undesirable" ones into the political field.

In these conditions, the trend of two-side political framing of civil activities is strengthening. The side effects of this trend are the emergence of additional contradictions inside the society that disrupt civic consolidation and prevent civil society from developing conflict solution tools. Civil society, which by its definition should be various and diverse, becomes even more de-consolidated in the political field. The example of such a lack of consolidation is the process of selection of a single candidate for the presidential election.

Another example of the deconsolidating role of politicisation, was the scandal related to the Belarusian language courses *Mova ci Kava.* At first, the organiser of the courses, journalist Katsiaryna Kibalchych, made several statements about Belarusian football fans and the war in Ukraine, and in the end, the courses ceased to exist. Those courses, initially planned as 'apolitical', demonstrate very well the consequences of a sudden interference of political factors into the cultural field.

On the other hand, politicisation can stimulate the population's activities; however, this concerns only a narrow group of politically engaged social agents and can bring effect only if political goals of this group envisage the establishment of a system that allows the functioning of civil society.

Thus, politicisation of civic initiatives is not the universal approach to their operations, but one of the options of the manifestation of civic activities that is caused both by external factors and by internal specifics of organisations that choose this path of interaction with the state.

Politicisation of civil society is ambiguous by nature and causes a range of side effects. On the one hand, this process is the result of a low level of effective communication between the state and civil society; on the other, it strengthens this frame. Politicisation

can cause deconsolidation and have a lower effectiveness, narrowing down the wide range of civic activities to political activities.

Political transformation serves as a source of increasing the functionality of interaction. Currently, the government is the only agent that can show initiative in this sphere, and has the most effective tools for that. This transformation, in theory, can manifest itself in the liberalisation of economy or legislation that will make the environment for NGOs more favourable. However, the state is not able to create civil society; moreover, expecting that from the state would reveal paternalistic views.

The most promising perspective is to strengthen civil society at the grass root level via setting up a wide range of smaller initiatives. As we stated above, civil society is not a sum of organisations but rather a principle of self-organisation. The problem of low efficiency in the mechanisms of civil society can be described with the help of the classical concept of "middle class": a social group of competent professional who are economically independent from the state. Such types of relations forms a basis for taking one's own responsibility for social dynamics and, as a result, the overcoming of paternalism. Growth of this group can weaken the basis for the framing of the activities of an organisation, as ones of agents of external political influence, with the help of the creation of a local economic platform for socially responsible businesses.

In this way, a solution to this strategic problem lays in the necessity to overcome paternalist social predominance. Inter-influence of social structure and social agents makes the search for effective instruments of stimulation of civic activities relevant. Taking into account the profoundly diverse nature of civil society, social agents can put their mark on lowering the level of interaction with the political field or on different levels of depth of engagement in the political process, but under the condition that their activities will be directed at creation of a basis for the development of civil society.

Significant success of civil society in the near future is unlikely. It is unlikely that the system of effective civic control will be built or that civil society will cause rapid de-bureaucratisation of the state apparatus. Taking into account a certain level of autonomy of social agents that is always in place, but is limited by certain features of a social system, one should underline that every social agent has an opportunity to influence the development of civil society. This is a key issue of social dynamics, since, by choosing goals, tools and spheres of activities, social agents on the one hand contribute to the search for a possible spectrum of tools of development of civil society, and on the other, give an example of democratic relations with the state.

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Vitali Silitski

Civic sector in Belarus: its daily life and organisational processes

General Comments

The author of this article was asked to analyse the data received from the research on Belarusian non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The goal of the research was to find ways of raising the effectiveness of the civic sector as a pre-condition for the democratisation of Belarus. Initiators of that research, conducted a thorough analytical work that resulted in a national poll of more than 400 Belarusian NGOs combined with several dozen in-depth interviews with the leaders of the non-governmental sector. The factual material collected during the research gives grounds for solid conclusions. However, it should be admitted that the author, as an analyst, was not involved in designing this research and does not always share that vision and hypothesis. Therefore, one should pay attention to two substantial limitations that were placed on this study by its initiators and that limit the spectrum of answers that can be produced by the author of this article.

First of all, to understand how to increase the effectiveness of civil society as a democratisation factor, one has to have a serious theoretical basis. This basis would allow to develop, a vision of the way in which civil society influences democratisation as such. This should not be confused with the less controversial issue of the role of civil society in the consolidation of already existing democracy. There is no consensus on that issue between theorists (political scientists, analysts, sociologists, philosophers etc.) and "practitioners" (politicians, civic activists, NGO managers etc.). For instance, several "processual" theories of democracy, state that democratic transit is the issue of "elite games"[1], according to which civil society is a result rather than the cause of political changes. Belarusian analyst Yury Drakahrust formulated that approach very well at the conference "To the New Vision of Belarus" that took place in September 2007:

> *No technological or ideological suggestions of those intellectuals, even if they are put into practice in the best possible way, wouldn change the weight of opposition, or the situation in*

[1] See the classic example of the "elitist" theory of democratisation: Guillermo O'Donnel, Philippe S. Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.

society as such, in the short term... For now, it is enough for the opposition to demonstrate their activeness somehow, to stay afloat and create a visual image for an alternative. This is both a necessary minimum and a maximum. The quality of opposition does not impact on the probability of regime change. The quality of the opposition influences only the form that this change will take (the lower the quality is, the greater is the probability of violent transition). Moreover, the quality of the opposition will decide on what will happen after the transition (even if the current opposition will not be playing a big role in this process).[2]

In other words, this view suggests that one cannot hope for the increase of the effectiveness of civil society in conditions of strict authoritarianism. One can only decide to support its existence till the moment when the regime collapses. Its existence is already an achievement.

Another viewpoint suggests that civil society itself is the main factor, the main "organiser and motivator" of change. This approach has become especially popular after "velvet" and "colour" revolutions, where civil movements presumably played the defining role.[3] Freedom House's study "How Freedom Is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy" demonstrated that indeed, the majority of democratic transformations was "non-cooperative", i.e. provoked by powerful civil movements that challenge the authoritarian governments, and are not caused by "elite" games and pacts.[4] However, the phenomenon of a "civil movement" is quite loose, since in such a movement a lot of actors (NGOs, political parties, private businesses, churches) are interrelated (and sometimes confused). Civil society as an engine of changes is not an avant-garde of the NGO sector as such; it is rather a representative of the whole nation. Such condition is met only when civil society and its aspirations are legitimised by other, often hierarchical, structures. In Poland, the Solidarity movement received support from the, symbolic, capital and moral authority of the, authoritative Catholic Church. Without such support coming from a wider spectrum of institutions, without appealing to wider and more diverse set of values and symbols, civil society is reduced to the subculture of a political minority, which is the case for Belarus. Such a subculture can be a very powerful factor of change if extrinsic to its factors, (such as external pressure or internal erosion of the regime) open the window of opportunity for change. However, it is unlikely that civil society will be able to open such a window on its own, the way Polish Solidarity did.

One should also note that many researchers tend to exaggerate the role of the NGO sector in the democratisation process. Such research is often prepared by civic activists and (or) donors and serves as a tool of self-promotion. Relatively "neutral" observers show

[2] This quote is based on the manuscript that was sent to the author.

[3] See: Pavol Demeš, Joerg Forbrig, Robin Shepherd. *Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava: German Marshall Fund, 2007.

[4] http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/29.pdf.

more complex relationships between the dynamics of the democratic transformation and its role in civil society. In the framework of this approach civil society has self-sufficient value for the democratic future, but at the same time, there are some demands to its strategy, tactics, organisational capacity etc.

At the time of the rule of the authoritarian regime, civic sector and its common rank participants are under the "cover of obscurity". They are forced to listen to lengthy reflections on why their country could be "not ready" for democracy. They feel the pressure from the state's repressive machine and at the same time meet disappointment and conformism, even from the side of socially active people. The process of exit from authoritarianism, its length and dynamics, context and prerequisites, are covered with the same level of obscurity, as well. Therefore any answer to the question on what should be done to assist the regime change and democratisation in the best way, will be quite ungrounded and unsubstantiated. The author of this article thinks that in the short term, the main concern for civic activists in Belarus will be survival and "keeping the flame on". Preserving the principles of civic consciousness in this community gives hope that when the window of opportunity opens, it will be used in the most relevant way.

Thus, the author is trying to answer how Belarusian civil society could influence the democratic changes *in the context of the idea of the inherent value of civil society as "fire keeper", bearer of a special spirit, experience, values and capital that, in favourable conditions, will become the catalyst for change*. The rationale for choosing such an approach is the following:

Democratic change in the short-term perspective is not possible.

Independent civic activeness in modern Belarus is a clearly subcultural phenomenon in a society that has a solid contract with the state.

Processes of erosion of the old authoritarian system started in Belarus, give grounds for expectations for some changes in politics and the economy. However, in conditions of social apathy and tough political control, the potential for these changes are quite limited; it will stop at introducing some changes to the Belarusian society and at some degree of disorganisation of the governmental apparatus.

In the long-term perspective, the processes of erosion can open the window of opportunity described above. However, the same processes in the short-term perspective can cause a counter-reaction in the form of attempts to "fix" the cranky system with the help of repressions and political persecutions.

In these conditions, civil society's main priorities are *survival and expansion of the "freedom zone" in a non-free society, increase of its influence in the frameworks of the hierarchized "mainstream", as well as well-thought preparation of changes, creation of intellectual alternatives and generation of new visions*. Unfortunately, this range of questions is not reviewed in the given study.

Some more methodological comments should be made before the analysis of the data can be provided. In the thematic literature there is a clear divide between "civil society 1" (or "herbivorous" NGO sector that focuses on self-organisation of citizens in order to address their issues and provide them with services) and "civil society 2" ('carnivorous" NGO sector focused on political and moral confrontation with the authoritarian government).[5] It is quite easy to distinguish the border between them. Should one expect that feline societies will provoke a democratic revolution? Although it may sound paradoxical, a positive answer to this question has the right to exist. Depending on the answer to this question, one can suggest totally opposite recommendations. If civil society works exclusively for the long term perspective then everything that develops certain habits of civic activeness and makes citizens less indifferent and more responsible works for the sake of the democratic future. However, if one expects civil society to be more "carnivorous", not just active, then it has to make steps that "herbivorous" NGOs should avoid. "Herbivorous" civil society supports the "modernisation-oriented" and "evolutional" transition to democracy. This route envisages a graduate increase in the quality of life and increase of the social capital, necessary for the functioning of the democracy. However, such civic activity risks transforming into an annexe of the national state system of social security. On the other hand, if "carnivorous" NGOs cannot cause political change, they, as practice shows, quickly lose the momentum and become disoriented.

These theoretical deliberations cause methodological comments. The author has been asked to describe the effectiveness of the whole civic sector where organisational missions, strategies, etc. are built on the level of a single organisation. To analyse the effectiveness of a sector through the prism of an organisation is the same as to analyse the effectiveness of the market via the business strategies of companies. The latter may behave rationally, but the market itself can still be imperfect. At the very least, it is impossible to analyse a sector in isolation from institutions and the rules of the game. However, there is a hypothesis intrinsic to this methodological individualism: the problems of civil society in Belarus are first of all organisational. This vision, in part, is the answer to the criticism of the civic sector from numerous observers including donors, who increasingly blame this sector for being too sub-culture oriented, lacking clear organisational strategies, being too politicised and being unable to define its mission and concentrating only on selected target groups; being too much focused on "regime change" instead of "change in consciousness" of citizens.

An organisation can successfully implement its projects. However, will these projects bring with them a change in reality that will be relevant to the organisation's values? This is not an issue of management. Getting ahead of ourselves, we should state that this is the main conclusion coming out from the polling of the Belarusian NGOs, which, despite

[5] Foley, Michael W. Edwards, Bob. *The Paradox of Civil Society Journal of Democracy* // Volume 7. Number 3. July 1996. Pp. 38–52.

their orientation, institutionalisation or financial sources, apply approximately the same criteria to measure the effectiveness of their work: they place the achievement of the goals set by their organisation higher than serving the needs of their target audiences.

On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the democratisation in Belarus will start from several NGOs that will successful implement their strategies; the main factor for democratisation is the new quality of civil society and the society as a whole. Therefore, in this analysis, the author will try to separate the organisational effectiveness of a given organisation, from the performance of the whole sector. By analysing the self-assessment of organisations, their self-evaluation, we will try to analyse whether this self-assessment is related to the organisation's focus on democratic change and on activities that foster that change.

Finally, one should mention one more limitation, even if this limitation makes the work of the author of this study easier. The initiators and developers of the research quite specifically focused on the NGO sector as one of the dimensions of civil society. This narrows the object of the analysis, but at the same time makes it difficult to lead any serious conversation on civil society, since structured NGOs form only a part of it.[6] The focus on organisational capacity does not always take into account that organisations are made up of people. These people's personal growth, personal development, their victories and disappointments take place not just in parallel with their daily private life but also as a part of this life. If one ignores people's daily life as a factor, that person will have to study civil society separately from citizens as such. The rich fact-based material inclines us towards that route of analysis. Finally, one cannot imagine organisational effectiveness without the strong internal motivation of people to engage in civic activities, especially if these people fight for democracy against the authoritarian rule.

Analysis of the In-Depth Interviews

The analysis of the in-depth interviews is of interest since these interviews allowed us to study in detail the context and some peculiarity of civic activeness in Belarus that are not always accurately reflected by statistics. Moreover, these interviews provide "decrypting" of some dilemmas that arise in the work and daily life of activists and suggest some hypothesis that can later be tested on a larger set of data. In this analysis, the author has focused on the following topics:

- Motivation to engage in civic activity.
- Combining civic activity with daily life.
- Self-assessment of own activities.

[6] See: Thomas Carothers. *Think Again: Civil Society* // Foreign Policy Magazine. Winter 1999–2000. http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/civsoc.htm.

Where do NGO activists come from?

The survey, as well as the interviews with the leaders of civil society, demonstrate that a significant part of civil society organisations in Belarus, emerged in two distinct time periods: 1989–91 (the climax of the *perestroika*) and in 1996–97 (during the events that ended up in reversion to the authoritarian system). In both cases, the emergence of the NGOs was the response of the active part of society to the processes that were taking place in Belarus.

People coming to the civic sector had quite a defined motivation. The first wave of activists in the 1980s was "awoken" by the *perestroika* and wanted to use new opportunities offered to them by the new political openness, such as "getting to know the outside world". It was also a form of protest against the Soviet reality. At that time, many "amusement organisers" or "community workers" from the Soviet system tried to unleash their potential and increase social capital via new forms of activities. Self-realisation was secondary as a motivational factor for those people, since at that time (in both time periods) the participation in NGOs opened new horizons, opportunities and perspectives and looked more attractive than keeping shaky and non-durable relationships with the state.

The analysis of trajectories of "inflows" in active public work allows us to make two important conclusions. Firstly, civil society initially genetically formed in Belarus as a distinct subculture of passionate and ambitious people in the patriarchal and subjective political culture. The subcultural nature of civil society and opposition in particular often are regarded by this community as a disadvantage ("they are too far from common people"). However, applying such an approach is the same as accusing healthy body cells of not being able to conquer the cancer tumour. Healthy cells lose because their are not enough of them, not because they are not trying to become immune! Secondly, the analysis of the genesis of the Belarusian third sector coming from in-depth interviews with its leaders runs against the widespread stereotype that NGOs have transformed into a "way of surviving" and just another source of income for the political opposition. Quite to the contrary, as the interviews have demonstrated, the undergoing process of politicisation of the Belarusian third sector was often due to the "sucking up" into the political activities of initially "herbivorous" civic initiatives. Only later did the civic activity that was initially regarded as a "calling" turn into a professional activity for many.

If engaging in civic activity was a matter of choice, staying in that sector became a necessity or, sometimes, even a forced step. This status quo is often called "path dependency": at some critical juncture a person or a group make a choice, the consequences of which "lock" them onto a certain stage. For instance, at the age of 18 a person can make a career choice, which will be impossible to change at the age of 30, after investing time and resources. What is important, at this "critical juncture" in the personal lives of the activists coincides with the "critical juncture" in the country's development as a whole.

Based on the answers to these questions, one can make the following conclusions related to the overlapping of NGO activities with the wider context of everyday life.

Activities in the civic sector gradually became synonymous with the confrontation with the official society. Some degree of "time sharing", i.e. combining work in the state and civic sectors, was possible, approximately, up to the beginning of the 2000s. However, choosing activities in the third sector often meant that there would be no return into "official society". Contacts with that society remain only at the level of interaction with passport issuing authorities or shop assistants. Therefore, in activists' perception, NGOs gradually transformed from being just a workplace to a means of existence.

The same factors lead to certain human resource problems in the third sectors; those problems were quoted by many polled. The core of the problem is not in the unwillingness of civic activists to learn or get new skills or to change their attitude to work. Based on the "path dependency" hypothesis, the NGO sector attracts mostly idealists. Pragmatic managers have either entered into contractual relations with the state or emigrated. An NGO in Belarus cannot approach a hiring agency asking it to provide candidates with the selected set of competencies. Therefore, finding a good NGO manager is a complicated task. Many NGOs are forced to work with those who stayed in the sector and who are not good managers by definition since their idealism is not compatible with rational thinking.

The response to the deficit of competencies is, as paradoxical as it may sound, the hyper-professionalism of Belarusian NGOs. In theory, independent civic activity can take different forms. A person is not obliged to devote all her or his time to that activity; several hours per week can be enough. She or he is not obliged to deal with legal or financial issues since not every organisation will be huge: one can be civically active by training a street football team. However, in Belarus, the independent civic activities are nearly always performed in the format of a formalised NGO. Since the form defines the content, keeping this form in good shape requires quite a varied set of skills under quite serious political pressure.

Hyper-professionalism might be a necessary condition for the survival of the civic sector in modern Belarus. However, this factor narrows down (or is the result of the narrowing down) the field of independent civic activity to "professional NGOs" and "locks in" those who would have left the third sector under different circumstances.

The majority of those polled regard themselves as accomplished leaders, although some respondents were quite self-critical. At the same time, leaders heavily criticise the condition of the third sector as such. The general point of view is that there are not more than 10 per cent of effective organisations in Belarus. The criteria for this effectiveness are predictably blurred.

What makes the civil society effective?

Leaders of the civic sector's organisations almost unanimously agree with the statement that, even under current political conditions, the issue of the effectiveness of Belarusian NGOs is relevant. However, the criteria for this effectiveness are often quite blurred. There are two main interpretations of effectiveness. According to the first one, an organisation is effective when it has reached all its goals. According to the second one, to be effective, an organisation needs to fulfil its mission. Moreover, here is the paradox. In the current political environment, the NGO leaders are not satisfied with their personal achievements, even if they are satisfied with the results of the activities of their organisation. They are not trying to fool themselves when they see the strengthening of repressions directed at them. In general, it is not quite clear whether a "limited" mission of an organisation can be reached at all in conditions which lack political freedom. Both leaders of NGOs and "theorists" of democracy do not have a clear understanding of whether "quite limited in time and scope" projects and campaigns, lead to the envisaged goal (and if yes, then how?). One cannot say that we see light at the end of the tunnel, not even a weak flashlight. There's no point on the horizon that could be seen by all activists: both partisan and non-partisan, organised and non-organised, offline and online, Minsk-based and rural, Belarus-based and exiled. There's no sign of even the smallest and least realistic hope.

The analysis of the in-depth interviews allows us to set the following hypotheses:

Increasing the effectiveness of a separate organisation cannot be a dominant motivator of civic activity in the conditions of political pressure. Even self-preservation as a more powerful motivator will lead to a certain degree to self-limitation in tools and means. Moreover, self-preservation leads to actions that go against organisational capacity building and against spreading the activities of an organisation to wider target groups. For instance, some respondents said that their organisations did not want to engage in "self PR".

If NGOs make self-preservation the main priority, this not only limits their capacity, but also destroys their social capital. Under constant pressure and constraints the main feature of self-organised society disappears: mutual trust.

Civic activity in its "herbivorous" format obviously brings bigger satisfaction and higher self-esteem. However, this type of activity is focused mostly on non-conflict formats and goals for its activities.

Traditional assessments of the organisational effectiveness do not take into account all aspects of work of the civic sector. Maybe the quantity of those who are affected by activities of an NGO are not as important as the impact that those activities have on the psychology and aspirations of a given person.

Results of the Audience Poll

To answer questions raised by the initiators of the survey, we needed to determine regularities in organisational practices and self-assessment among different types of Belarusian NGOs (first of all, based on their self-assessment of their own effectiveness). We tried to learn about the peculiarities of the "herbivorous" and "carnivorous" NGO sector, by analysing their replies to the following questions: 1) whether they are registered, 2) whether they think it is important for their organisation to strive for democracy in Belarus.

Moreover, practices and moods in the NGO sector were analysed depending on whether organisations were grant recipients or whether they received funding from the state's budget. If we are to extend the nature-related metaphor to this analysis, we can say that these two groups of organisations can be classified as "birds" (grant recipients) and "snakes" (governmental NGOs, or GoNGOs).

In the second part of the analysis, the author observes the same trends (practices, moods) depending on the assessment of the effectiveness of the organisation as such and the NGO sector as a whole. Also to that, to refine the data, we defined two types of organisations that appear to be the most interesting for this study. Both types of organisations consider their activities effective. The difference is that the first ones consider democratic change an important goal to reach, while the second ones do not think so.

Slightly more than a half of NGO representatives work in the sector "full time" or close to full time. This percentage is slightly higher among "democrats" but not significantly. The main factor for professionalisation is access to the sustainable source of external funding, whether for "birds" or for "snakes". One can also observe that professionalisation positively influences the self-esteem of an organisation and its evaluation of the effectiveness of the whole sector (the latter is especially true for pro-democracy organisations). However, this could be, in part, explained by the emergence of some corporate spirit with low criticism of its "own breed".

Table 1. *Is civic activity your main activity?*

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes or rather yes	53	44,8	55,7	38,6	67	36,5	64,3	48,5	51,0

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes or rather yes	**54,7**	44,1	**56,6**	44	**58,8**	43,6	**51,0**

The same trend can be observed in the analysis of dedicated human resources. "Snakes" and registered organisations usually have full-time staffers; the absence of full-time staffers negatively impacts the assessment of the effectiveness of an NGO's work and sector as a whole.

Table 2. Organisation's full-time staff

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
No	41	**61**	45	50	45	46	**20**	51	**46**
Yes	**58**	38	54	50	54	54	**78**	48	**54**

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
No	41	63	40	53	40	47	46
Yes	57	36	60	47	59	53	54

A slightly different trend can be observed in the analysis of the dedication of activists to their work. On one hand, only in the group of "snakes" the percentage of members who actively participate in the activities of the organisation was significantly higher than average. However, the share of "free-loaders" is minimal in the non-registered organisations, as well. The absenteeism is more wide-spread among registered organisations and among "birds". Interestingly, the number of active members of an organisation has almost no influence on the self-esteem of an organisation itself or the sector as a whole.

Table 3. The share of active members of an organisation

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes 25%	**33**	**15**	28	32	**33**	28	**16**	32	29
Yes 50%	31	41	34	32	37	33	27	35	34
Yes 75%	12	15	12	13	10	13	13	12	12
Yes 100%	24	**30**	27	22	**20**	27	**44**	22	25

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes 25%	29	29	32	28	28	33	29
Yes 50%	32	39	29	37	32	30	34
Yes 75%	13	12	15	10	12	13	12
Yes100%	26	20	24	26	28	24	25

Taking into account the process of liquidation of NGOs that took place in Belarus in 2004–09, one can consider as encouraging the fact that only 20 per cent of NGOs claim that the number of their members has decreased. This is not controversial: those who managed to survive, did so only because they were able to keep their active members. Quite predictably, the non-registered organisations have the biggest human resources problems; this is because now pressure is on the level of applying the articles of the Criminal Code against activists. Otherwise, such factors as the political focus of an organisation, its relations with authorities or with grant-giving organisations influence the loyalty of members to their NGOs only minimally. At the same time, the link between loyalty and the assessment of the effectiveness of work is more than evident.

Table 4. Recently, the number of members of your organisation has:

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Increased	36	26	32	34	30	33	36	32	32
Decreased	20	29	22	20	25	22	11	24	22
Stayed on the same level	41	46	42	44	43	42	50	41	42

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Increased	37	15	38	27	37	38	32
Decreased	18	31	21	25	17	17	22
Stayed on the same level	43	40	39	44	43	44	42

2. Motivation for civic activities

The following motivating factors are intrinsic to pro-democracy organisations, grant recipients and non-registered organisations: a) "individual" such as self-realisation and b) "global" such as a wish to change the situation in Belarus "in general". The indifference to the second group of factors is quite obvious among those who do not regard their civic

activity as a means to foster democratic changes. At the same time, democrats and apolitical civic activists are almost equally motivated by a willingness to solve a particular problem or help other people. Interestingly, those who were motivated by "individual" or "global" factors, first of all, got disappointed with civic activity the most. Probably, those people were initially more politicised and therefore fostering political change for them was the criterion for the realisation of their potential. However, there can be another explanation for this phenomenon, which is partially supported by in-depth interviews. Those who entered the civic sector for self-realisation are people with extremely high ambitions and expectations. They usually achieve a lot in their lives and therefore they are dissatisfied when they compare their achievements with what could have been achieved under other circumstances. One should notice that dissatisfaction is often the best stimulus for any activity.

Table 5. Motives that led to the creation of the organisation

	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Self-realisation	22	33	28	13	28	23	20	25	24
Willingness to help members of the NGO	39	31	37	35	37	37	37	37	37
Wish to influence changes in Belarus	32	51	49	12	45	34	20	40	37
Wish to solve a particular problem	44	51	47	41	59	42	41	47	46
Wish to help other people	55	47	52	52	58	51	54	52	53

	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Self-realisation	23	35	18	32	26	13	24
Willingness to help members of the NGO	37	38	40	33	37	38	37
Wish to influence changes in Belarus	34	47	30	48	45	10	37
Wish to solve a particular problem	43	48	47	45	47	40	46
Wish to help other people	53	41	58	45	52	57	53

What is the main problem for organisational activity? The majority of respondents mentioned the problem of access to financial resources (in its different aspect, such as receiving financial support, possibility to rent premises, etc.). This problem is the least

crucial for "democrats", and not by chance. The question was mostly aimed at learning how important is this problem for them in comparison to other problems. At the same time, those most lacking of financial support are organisations that are... supported by the state. It is quite interesting that the majority of NGOs do not regard internal organisational problems as the most important, although this problem is slightly more important for organisations that receive grants. One should also note that the deterioration of relations with the government negatively influences the assessment of the effectiveness of organisational activities, although pro-democracy organisations that managed to become effective have more conflicts with authorities than an average NGO.

Table 6. The biggest problem in an organisation's activity is:

	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Related to finances	**44**	**29**	**37**	**47**	**29**	**44**	**52**	**38**	**40**
Related to the government	**26**	**47**	**39**	**14**	**42**	**28**	**20**	**34**	**31**
Internal organisational problems	**6**	**6**	**7**	**6**	**9**	**6**	**1**	**8**	**7**
Other	**22**	**16**	**17**	**32**	**20**	**21**	**26**	**20**	**21**

	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Related to finances	43	32	48	32	39	50	40
Related to the government	30	36	25	38	36	16	31
Internal organisational problems	6	12	5	10	6	5	7
Other	21	19	21	19	19	28	21

The overwhelming majority of respondents are confident that their organisations will not disappear and will continue their work. Around one fourth of them thinks that they will be able to expand their activities. In this aspect, "interclass" differences are minimal, although one interesting observation is that there are more of both pessimists and optimists among members of non-registered NGOs, while the share of those who expect to expand their activities is the same for non-registered NGOs and NGOs that are supported by the state. Low self-esteem correlates with the pessimism regarding the expansion of an organisation's activities. What is interesting, is the aspiration to expand the activities is not a criterion for higher self-assessment in civic activities. If this self-esteem is relevant to reality, then effective NGOs are winning due to quality, not quantity.

Table 7. In three years, your organisation will...

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
Stop its activity	6	15	7	4	5	9	2	10	8
Reduce its activity	5	7	6	5	5	5	6	5	5
Leave the activity on the same level	39	34	38	36	39	38	43	37	38
Expand its activity	24	29	26	26	24	26	29	25	25

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Stop its activity	7	14	9	9	7	9	8
Reduce its activity	4	13	8	6	3	5	5
Leave the activity on the same level	40	33	39	38	39	39	38
Expand its activity	28	19	26	23	28	28	25

We can mention as a positive point the fact that the overwhelming majority of members of the civic sector are confident that they will continue their civic activities. The absence of "interclass" difference here leads us to the conclusion that the civic sector has managed to become not only a place for different types of activities, but also a lifestyle (or a "cross" that activists have to carry throughout all of their lives).

Table 8. Do you plan to continue participating in the civic sector?

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes or rather yes	92	95	94	92	98	91	92	94	90

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes or rather yes	92	88	91	89	92	92	90

Practices of civic activities – how?

Belarusian NGOs are divided into two major categories of activities. The first one involves mostly politicised and non-registered organisations. This category includes protection of national cultural heritage, history and local history, education, self-organisation of the local population and human rights defence. The second one is for those who prefer not being involved in politics and/or are enjoying the protection by the state. This category is dominated by various types of recreational activities such as sports, tourism, amateur performance, social programmes and charity. This seems to be the border between "herbivorous" and "carnivorous" paradigms although there are some types of activities that are favoured by everyone if they have the means for that. For example, social projects are most often realised by those who gets money from grants or the state. Of course, one can say that non-politicised organisations choose types of activities that have more chances to reach the maximum number of beneficiaries. However, on the other hand, one cannot say that democrats do not want to be engaged in such activities since there was no question of what democrats want to do. Generally speaking, pro-democracy organisations are trying to reach their audiences via intellectual challenge (i.e. by developing forms of activities that encourage people to think critically, educate themselves and take decisions), while non-politicised organisations, on the contrary, allow people to get a proper rest from thinking. It is not rocket science to guess which organisations will be more popular. However, it is quite difficult to define, which of the strategies will be more helpful in the democratisation of Belarus.

"Democratic" forms of civic activities most often go hand in hand with low self-assessment of effectiveness. Only those "democrats" who closely work with people in human rights or educational spheres can feel some satisfaction from their work. As for non-politicised NGO activists, it seems that their route to a positive mood is quite clear: sports, tourism, charity, amateur groups and social projects. Of course, it does not mean that culture, for instance, is not socially significant. The whole layer of the national culture is preserved only with the help of dedicated activists. The fact that they are dissatisfied with their activities illustrates their powerlessness in the face of repressive actions of the state, including the destructive policy in the sphere of national culture. The low effectiveness of their actions does not mean there's no need for them; in such spheres one could apply a huge effort to achieve minimal results. However, "democrats" should consider seriously whether the sphere of entertainment, leisure time and daily life is sufficiently covered by their activities. Maybe, even the most dedicated fighters for freedom could think about finding broader, more effective (and sometimes simpler) ways to reach people who could understand and support them?

Table 9. Spheres of activities of your organisation

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
National culture	24	38	30	18	31	26	26	28	27
Self-organisation of citizens	7	13	11	4	8	9	0	10	9
Local self-government	3	6	5	0	2	4	1	4	4
Military and patriotic activities	5	3	4	6	2	6	9	4	5
Artistic activities	6	8	6	11	5	7	11	6	7
Membership based club	10	15	9	18	10	12	9	12	11
Professional association	12	3	10	10	6	11	7	10	10
Labour rights	5	5	6	2	2	6	6	5	5
Sports, tourism	9	8	5	20	6	9	16	7	9
Religion	1	5	2	3	2	2	1	2	2
History, local history	9	19	13	8	14	10	4	12	11
Human rights	11	23	18	6	17	13	9	14	13
Social protection/ services	29	10	26	19	30	23	33	23	25
Consumer rights	2	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	6
Protection of environment	5	9	7	4	10	4	7	5	2
Education	25	30	31	19	42	22	21	28	27
Charity	21	4	13	26	20	16	17	17	17
Assisting other NGOs	5	8	7	3	14	4	0	7	6

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
National culture	26	36	25	29	28	18	27
Self-organisation of citizens	8	10	8	10	10	5	9
Local self-government	4	1	4	4	6	0	4
Military and patriotic activities	6	1	6	4	6	6	5
Artistic activities	7	3	7	5	6	13	7
Membership based club	11	15	9	14	9	17	11
Professional association	10	7	8	12	10	13	10
Labour rights	5	4	6	4	6	1	5
Sports, tourism	10	3	7	10	6	23	9
Religion	2	1	3	1	2	3	2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
History, local history	9	21	9	13	11	3	11
Human rights	13	11	12	16	18	5	13
Social protection/ services	25	18	28	22	25	21	25
Consumer rights	1	1	2	2	2	1	6
Protection of the environment	5	10	5	8	7	1	2
Education	27	28	26	30	31	20	27
Charity	19	8	20	10	16	28	17
Assisting other NGOs	6	8	5	8	7	3	6

As for the type of activities of Belarusian NGOs, the diversity of these NGOs directly depends on the funding received, whether it is internal or external funding. However, here one can again define characteristics for the "democrats" spheres of activities. Politicised NGOs focus mostly on civic campaigns and seminars while pro-governmental organisations are mostly represented in such spheres as social projects, charity and organisation of leisure time (festivals, contests). One more interesting peculiarity is the misbalance of non-registered organisations in the research and analysis sphere. If we are to find a link between the assessment of its own effectiveness and types of activities, one can observe that the more focused on charity the activity is, the higher its self-assessment of effectiveness is.

Table 10. Types of NGO activities

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Conducting training, seminars	64	75	70	61	81	63	59	68	67
International exchange and study visits	34	33	37	25	54	28	21	36	34
Consultations and expert support	35	35	40	26	55	29	24	37	35
Research and analysis	34	45	45	20	52	33	26	39	37
Organising festivals, fairs, etc.	37	32	34	40	35	36	47	34	36

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Publishing info materials	40	51	47	33	64	36	30	45	42
Collecting donations, organising humanitarian and charity actions	42	20	34	44	40	36	53	34	37
Actions and campaigns promoting civic interests	25	31	32	12	45	21	17	28	26

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Conducting training, seminars	68	64	59	72	70	59	67
International exchange and internships	35	24	33	35	39	25	34
Consultations and expert support	36	32	33	37	42	24	35
Research and analysis	36	42	33	44	45	16	37
Organising festivals, fairs, etc.	40	18	38	31	39	39	36
Publishing info materials	42	40	39	47	47	26	42
Collecting donations, organising humanitarian and charity actions	41	19	44	26	36	50	37
Actions and campaigns promoting civic interests	27	24	27	26	33	12	26
Development of partnership and/or networking	27	31	23	35	32	14	28

In the analysis of target groups, one can observe that non-politicised or pro-governmental NGOs are also the ones that have the most "charity"-type audiences: children, retired people, and handicapped people. They also have the biggest chance to get satisfaction from their activities. Among those who are least satisfied with their effectiveness, the majority work for rather politicised target groups: youth, media, other NGOs.

Speaking of target groups of Belarusian NGOs, which of them can become real agents of change? Other research (such as that of audience survey company NOVAK's and Belarusian

Institute of Strategic Studies research) show that currently the "intergroup" differences in worldview and political preferences are disappearing. Pro-democratic orientation and the fight for democracy are now related to values, while the bearers of the values of freedom and morality can be found in any social group. The focus of NGOs on young people is totally understandable, not only because this group has the biggest concentration of socially active people who are the basis of the civic sector, but also because the youth are considered to be the main "actor" of possible political change in Belarus. However, it seems that this latter statement does not totally correspond to reality anymore.

Table 11. NGO's target groups

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state
Children	38	23	31	42	35	34	44	33
Youth	57	69	63	54	66	58	50	62
Trade unions	24	23	26	19	27	23	23	24
Media	14	18	17	11	16	14	6	16
Consumers	5	5	5	5	6	4	3	5
Other NGOs	14	24	21	5	29	12	4	18
Women	25	19	26	19	24	23	17	25
Local population	36	43	39	35	38	38	46	36
State institutions employees	13	5	13	6	10	11	13	11
Members of organisation	36	33	40	26	44	32	21	38
People with limited abilities	23	9	18	24	24	19	24	19
National minorities	9	4	8	7	10	7	13	7
Retired people	21	9	19	16	21	17	17	18

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Children	38	23	31	42	35	34	35
Youth	57	69	63	54	66	58	60
Trade unions	24	23	26	19	27	23	23
Media	14	18	17	11	16	14	15
Consumers	5	5	5	5	6	4	5
Other NGOs	14	24	21	5	29	12	16
Women	25	19	26	19	24	23	23
Local population	36	43	39	35	38	38	37
State institutions employees	13	5	13	6	10	11	10

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Members of organisation	36	33	40	26	44	32	35
People with limited abilities	23	9	18	24	24	19	19
National minorities	9	4	8	7	10	7	8
Retired people	21	9	19	16	21	17	18

4. Practices of civic activities – with whom?

Non-governmental organisations in Belarus are mostly "mingling" with themselves and with international partners; to a lesser extent – with media, even less – with state organs and minimally – with political parties. Non-registration of such organisations cardinally decreases their social capital, making them "locked" in the political subculture of the opposition. Quite predictably, non-politicised or pro-governmental organisations have more chances to communicate with the state institutions, local authorities and media. What strikes most, is the high percentage of pro-democratic NGOs that never communicate with political structures. This might be caused by the fact that, for many, the civic sector is a means to "exit" party policy or avoid it. The general and the most evident trend is the almost total absence of regular connections between NGOs and businesses, which is true both for "democratic" and "apolitical", or pro-governmental NGOs. The correlation between the frequency of contacts and self-assessment of civil society is quite strong. "Democratic" organisations that consider themselves effective are mostly focused on contacts with other civil society actors while "apolitical" organisations prefer contact with state institutions and media.

Table 12. Interactions with other actors

Frequency of interaction with other NGOs									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	40	40	46	26	62	34	44	28	40
No	11	9	9	18	4	13	10	11	11
Frequency of interaction with foreign and international organisations									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	32	23	33	24	47	25	27	30	30
No	33	40	25	39	8	36	29	30	35

Frequency of interaction with local authorities									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	33	8	23	32	22	28	44	24	27
No	47	43	26	23	52	45	50	46	24
Frequency of interaction with commercial organisations									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	9	3	9	3	9	8	11	7	8
No	43	61	49	48	49	48	26	52	48
Frequency of interaction with state media									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	24	6	18	26	23	19	26	19	20
No	23	60	38	19	30	32	7	36	32
Frequency of interaction with non-state media									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	19	27	26	11	31	18	13	22	20
No	34	27	25	48	22	36	29	33	41
Frequency of interaction with central authorities									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	23	5	18	22	19	19	30	17	19
No	33	69	44	39	38	42	7	48	42
Frequency of interaction with political parties									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Regularly	9	23	17	1	20	10	7	13	12
No	67	40	51	83	53	62	60	60	60

Frequency of interaction with іншымі НДА							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	44	28	43	39	50	29	40
No	10	20	9	14	7	18	11

Frequency of interaction with foreign and international organisations							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	33	8	35	23	37	29	30
No	28	19	29	28	23	37	35
Frequency of interaction with local authorities							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	32	8	33	20	28	36	27
No	22	37	20	29	46	43	24
Frequency of interaction with commercial organisations							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	9	3	8	7	10	3	8
No	44	68	47	49	44	44	48
Frequency of interaction with state media							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	23	4	21	18	20	30	20
No	29	29	26	38	39	52	32
Frequency of interaction with non-state media							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	29	17	21	23	29	12	21
No	33	32	35	29	41	30	40
Frequency of interaction with central authorities							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	21	14	21	14	20	23	19
No	39	57	38	48	42	37	42

Frequency of interaction with political parties							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Regularly	12	8	10	14	18	1	12
No	63	54	62	55	23	85	60

5. Criteria and means of achieving effectiveness

The ideal formula for maximising "beneficiaries" is to have access to financial resources and be registered by the state. This is not possible for every organisation, especially if their activities are related to politics. On the other hand, the absence of registration substantially decreases the capability of an organisation to provide any services.

The survey has demonstrated a strong correlation between the level of "pro-democracy" orientation of Belarusian NGOs and their willingness to improve organisational practices and get new work skills. Obviously, such willingness does not necessarily transform into the improvement of practices. However, if one compares "democrats" and "grant recipients" to "apolitical", or pro-governmental NGOs, it is obvious that the first groups are more ambitious in the sphere of organisational capacity. For instance, "democrats" usually have a mission statement, a strategic plan and short-term plans. Also, pro-democracy NGOs pay more attention to capacity building, learning and research. Of course, some of that can be explained by the requirement of donors to have all the above documents and strategies in place. It is not a coincidence that the "best" organisational practices usually take place among organisations that receive grants. Another explanation of this phenomenon is that grant recipients have been provided with a good theoretical and practical introduction into capacity building from donors as a bonus, and this helps them in planning project activities, running the projects and developing their organisations. If this is true, then it is possible to say that mostly external actors have traditionally taken responsibility for developing the NGO sector in Belarus. What is essential, is that all capacity building activities (development of strategic plans and mission, trainings and research on target groups etc.) positively influence the self-assessment of effectiveness. At the same time, organisations that consider themselves non-effective, admit to a lack of training and a lack of high-quality analysis of the civic sector. At the same time, and this is yet another repetition of the same regularity, effective organisations that have no democratic aspirations pay much less attention to internal organisational issues than pro-democracy NGOs. Probably, in the case of pro-governmental NGOs, they do not have to worry about their organisational capacity or professionalism because it is being taken care of by their real creators.

The second general trend demonstrated by the study, is inertia in the organisational development. This trend is strong, first of all, among non-registered organisations, not the

"democratic" NGO sector as such. The survey has confirmed that "democrats" and "grant recipients" spend relatively more time researching their impact on their target groups and the society as a whole. The problem of the independent NGO sector, it seems, is not in the fact that its leaders and activists are focused exclusively on regime change and do not want to work on society's daily issues. Quite the contrary, we observe in the pro-democracy NGO sector the willingness to become a "normal" civil society, as much as the Belarusian political situation allows.

Table 13. Capacity building in the Belarusian civic sector.

How many people used the services of your organisation?									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Up to 50	6	5	6	5	4	20	9	5	6
Up to 100	16	15	17	18	19	16	23	15	16
Up to 1000	31	17	29	27	33	26	27	28	28
More	13	4	10	13	15	10	10	10	11
We do not provide services	16	26	18	22	16	20	16	19	19
We have a written mission statement									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	62	48	57	65	64	56	54	59	58
We have a strategic plan									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	62	45	59	54	66	56	57	58	58
No	35	49	37	43	33	40	39	38	38
We have short-term planning procedures									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	85	69	81	83	89	79	66	84	81
No	12	27	16	16	11	17	26	14	15
We organise training sessions to improve our organisational skills									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Never	26	26	26	27	23	27	34	25	27
Rarely	41	33	40	40	48	37	31	41	40
All the time	29	36	31	30	28	32	31	31	31

We initiated processes of capacity building									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	46	47	52	33	64	41	42	47	46
No	51	46	44	64	35	54	55	49	50
Our organisation needs changes									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	32	38	41	17	35	33	26	35	34
No	58	57	51	72	58	57	62	57	58
We need training in capacity building									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	41	50	49	27	49	41	24	46	42
No	51	44	42	65	46	50	54	48	49
We collect information about our target groups									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	49	43	52	37	66	43	43	49	48
No	47	50	43	60	33	52	51	47	48
We collect information about the impact of our activities in solving issues of target groups									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	38	31	41	26	58	30	32	37	37
No	55	62	52	69	39	61	55	56	57
We organised civic campaigns to promote interests of target groups									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	32	40	40	20	43	32	26	36	34
No	63	55	55	76	53	63	69	60	60
There's a lack of analysis of the third sector									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Total Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	45	43	48	32	42	45	29	48	45
No	47	44	42	61	50	46	56	45	47
We researched our organisation's or other NGOs" activities									
	Registered	**Non-Registered**	**Democrats**	**"Apolitical"**	**Receive grants**	**Don't receive grants**	**Supported by the state**	**Not supported by the state**	**Total**
Yes	31	30	31	33	39	27	23	32	31
No	68	64	65	67	60	69	73	66	57

	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Up to 50	5	8	5	6	6	4	6

Up to 100	16	16	20	13	16	18	16
Up to 1000	31	13	26	30	31	30	28
More	12	7	10	10	12	14	11
We do not provide services	16	30	18	20	16	18	19
We have a written mission statement							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	61	51	61	56	58	67	58
We have a strategic plan							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	64	33	65	30	66	55	58
No	33	63	32	46	31	43	38
We have short-term planning procedures							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	85	71	82	80	84	89	81
No	13	26	15	18	13	10	15
We organise training sessions to improve our organisational skills							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Never	23	35	29	24	23	27	27
Rarely	43	28	42	39	43	42	40
All the time	30	33	27	34	31	27	31
We initiated the processes of capacity building							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	50	36	44	52	55	34	46
No	48	60	53	44	41	64	50
Our organisation needs changes							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	30	47	29	42	37	15	34
No	63	43	63	49	56	77	58

We need training in capacity building							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	40	51	42	45	47	24	42
No	51	43	50	49	46	66	49
We collect information about our target groups							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	52	29	52	44	59	37	48
No	43	66	44	52	38	60	48
We collect information about the impact of our activities in solving issues of target groups							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	40	22	38	36	44	28	37
No	60	69	62	60	53	76	60
We organised civic campaigns to promote the interests of target groups							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	37	27	34	34	44	20	34
No	60	69	62	60	53	76	60
There's a lack of analysis of the third sector							
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	44	48	46	46	48	30	45
No	49	42	48	41	44	65	47
	Consider their organisation effective	**Do not consider their organisation effective**	**Consider the civic sector effective**	**Do not consider the civic sector effective**	**Pro-democracy and considers itself effective**	**Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective**	**On average**
Yes	32	26	33	29	32	36	31
No	66	72	66	67	64	64	67

Conclusions and recommendations

Veterans of the NGO sector know civil society better than the author of this text. Therefore, instead of imposing some algorithm of actions, I will limit myself to several general remarks and statements. Philosophical and theoretical question about which forms of civic activities are the most conducive for the democratisation of a society remains unanswered. The most correct answer, perhaps, is that this goal is achieved best through the variety of species, in the same way as biodiversity assists in achieving environmental

balance. The main problem of the Belarusian civic sector is that civil society is still a subculture. However, this sub-culturality is caused by the *very fact of the emergence of civil society in Belarus*. Being indifferent in Belarus means to live an "alien life". Thus, the very fact of the existence of civil society in Belarus is a huge benefit for the future of this country. One cannot even imagine what this huge potential gained by the years of civic activities, combined with life experience and knowledge, can bring. Therefore it is vitally important to preserve this experience inside Belarus. And therefore forms of support for civil society should encourage people to stay and work in their homeland.

If we come back to our starting point, the statement that the amount of politically active people, or dissidents, or "others" directly influences the democratic future of a country, we can see that our survey allows us to elaborate further on what will enable Belarusian civic sector to become an effective democratisation factor in the future. It makes no sense to challenge some standard NGO procedures such as capacity building and sustainable development. This is needed; but this is not enough. We observe that many pro-democracy NGOs that successfully apply capacity building practices do not consider the sector, as such, effective. This brings us to the conclusion that either the NGO capacity building has become too formalised, or critics demand the unachievable from NGOs. If democracy is based on people, the main focus of attention for civil society organisations should be people, not organisations. Then NGOs should, each in their own sphere, look for answers to the questions: what motivates people to engage into civic activities? What makes them become involved and responsible? What forms of activities attract new people to the civic sector? In which way and why do people stay in that sector? The issue of motivation in civic activity is worth a separate study. Such a formulation of the question is cardinally different from those tasks that numerous pro-democracy, and first of all, "grant-oriented" NGOs, whose activity is focused on the widening the circle of the "beneficiaries" of their services. One should not question this standard request to organisations, which is sound and reasonable on its own. But we should be aware that the democratic future of Belarus requires not only popularisation of NGOs in the society (via beneficiaries) but the increase in "benefit-givers" i.e. all socially and civically active Belarusians.

How can one attract, to the civic sector, new people if old members are rapidly leaving it? In the current situation, two distinct forms of civic activities indicate the effectiveness of an NGO. The first one is focused on democratic change, and the second one is aimed at getting maximum satisfaction from the results of their own activities. In order to feel useful to society and effective, the non-politicised pro-governmental organisations do not have to worry about things that are core to the survival and development of the pro-democracy civil society. The turn away from politics makes life much easier and creates a more positive and attractive social attitude to the organisation. However, it does not mean that when the NGO sector engages in more popular and attractive activities (social projects, charity actions, festivals etc.) it will make Belarusian society more "civil", not

benefit-oriented (when the services of the NGOs will be treated in the same way as the services of social protection services).

This brings us to a broader point: does the activity of non-politicised NGOs foster democratisation? We don't mean support for the established democracy, where the activities of a bird watching society are as important as the work of other NGOs. Obviously, in some way (and this has been proved by the research) non-politicised NGOs can be a way out for those who are hiding from real social problems and challenges. On the other side, many "non-politicised" organisations, whether consciously or not, focus on a different strategy for the change in mentality of Belarusian citizens: via gradual, non-violent influence on their lifestyle. This can bring unpredictable effects: improving the "lifestyle" in the short-term perspective makes NGOs allies of the state, supporting the regime's stability. The population views such NGOs as part of the state system. At the same time, representatives of "carnivorous" NGOs should not forget that tea clubs, feline societies and other like organisations can play a role in civic education if someone purposefully works with them. Moreover, it would be even better if such spheres of activities get to be the focus of attention of pro-democratic activists.

Probably, the only way for the reconciliation of the "herbivorous" and "carnivorous" paradigms is to support engagement of pro-democracy activists into non-politicised forms of activities. The evident disadvantage of the independent civic sector is its weak connection to daily life. Civic life generally starts from a positive motivation to get out of the house and communicate with others. Maybe, this is done more easily via leisure activities, sports, entertainment and other kinds of activities that don't require huge effort? At the same time, NGOs should not be afraid of being selfish up to an extent. Yes, it is good to dedicate yourself to a greater goal, but no one will blame those who start their civic activities from sports clubs or singing clubs, as the national liberation movements actually did in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Vitali Silitski (1972–2011) was one of the leading Belarusian political scientists who, for many years, chaired the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies. He prepared this article for the study "Belarusian NGO Sector: Potential for Changes" that took place in 2005–2009, at the request of several Belarusian non-governmental organisations.

Natallia Vasilevich

Unequal by default: Church and state in Belarus in the period of consolidated authoritarianism

General context. Religiousness and confessions

In early 2000s, a sociologist of religion Larysa Novikava, who analysed the dynamics of the religiousness of Belarusians in the second half of 1990s, came to two conclusions. Firstly, the "religious boom" of 1990s was mostly "external" by nature since faith was weakly institutionalised and quasi-religious. Secondly, the trend of religiousness is decreasing. The ideological "pendulum" that caused an increase in faith has passed its maximum point of swing and, starting from 2000, is going in the reverse direction.[1]

As numerous opinion polls have demonstrated, that forecast was not accurate. During 2000s, the number of assumed "believers" with confessional identity continued to grow. Evidence for that can be found in polls with an identical structure of questions, that take place regularly.[2] These polls not only demonstrate what is happening at a given moment of time, but also allow us to see the dynamics of the processe and compare the situation in Belarus with other countries. The analysis of data allows us to observe the following trends:

Steady increase in numbers of those who say they believe in God accompanied by a decrease in numbers of non-believers (see Table 1);

[1] Novikova L.G. *Religioznost v Belarusi na rubezhe vekov: tendentsii i osobennosti proyavleniya (sotsiologicheskiy aspekt) // Religiousness in Belarus on the Verge of the 21st Century: Main Trends and Peculiarities (sociological aspect).* Minsk, 2001. Pp. 83–86.

[2] There were two such surveys for the Belarusian society: World Value Survey in 1996 and 2011 and European Value Survey in 1999 and 2008. Data quoted in this article are taken from officially published results of those surveys according to Asep / JDS, Madrid, Spain i GESIS Data Archive, Cologne.

Table 1.

Faith in God	**1996 WVS**	**1999 EVS**	**2008 EVS**	**2011 WVS**
Yes	67,9%	82,9%	85,9%	84,9%
No	19,4%	17,1%	14,1%	13,8%
No answer	12,7%			1,3%

Growing number of those who say God plays an important role in their lives (see Table 2);

Table 2.

Importance of God	1996 WVS	1999 EVS	2008 EVS	2011 WVS
Very important	18,7%	20,3%	16,6%	19,3%
Rather important (6–9)	29,0%	29,8%	46,5%	44,8%
Not too important (2–5)	34,7%	40,6%	29,7%	29,4%
Totally unimportant	12,1%	9,2%	7,4%	5,8%

Growing number of respondents who, with at least some regularity, attend worship services (see Table 3);

Table 3.

Attending worship	**1996 WVS**	**1999 EVS**	**2008 EVS**	**2011 WVS**
More often than weekly	1,6%	1,7%	1,2%	1,7%
Weekly	4,2%	3,9%	5,6%	6,8%
Monthly	8,2%	8,9%	12,5%	13,0%
Christmas/Easter	27,4%	28,3%	36,2%	40,8%
Other special holidays		6,2%		
Annually	13,4%	12,3%	11,3%	8,5%
Less often than annually	12,2%	10,9%	10,5%	8,4%
Never or almost never	30,4%	27,8%	22,8%	20,2%

Decrease in numbers of "devout atheists" and increase in numbers of those who consider themselves religious (See Table 4);

Table 4.

Religiousness	1996 WVS	1999 EVS	2008 EVS	2011 WVS
A religious person	58,7%	27.5%	31,8%	62,2%
A non-religious person	22,1%	63.1%	60,8%	32,2%
Devout atheist	3,4%	9.3%	7,4%	5,1%
No answer	15,8%			0,5%

If in 1995–99 the number of those who did not have a confessional identity was growing and one could see a recyprical trend of decreasing numbers of Orthodox and Catholic believers, in 2000s that trend reversed. The number of those who identify themselves either with Orthodox or with Catholic churches grew while the number of confessional non-identified decreased (See Table 5,[3] Figure 1).

Table 5.

Denomination	1996 WVS	1998 Novikava	1999 EVS	2008 EVS	2010 IAC	2010 IISEPS	2011 WVS
None	34,2%	20,4%	47,8%	28,5%	8%	8,8%	13,5%
Orthodox	54,7%	62,8%	44,3%	61,6%	78%	78,8%	72,9%
Roman Catholic	7,7%	10%	6,6%	8,7%	12%	11,1%	10,5%
Protestant	0,1%	0,5%	0,5%	0,9%	1%	0,7%	2,0%
Islam	0,1%		0,2%	0,2%	0,5%	0,1%	0,3%
Judaism			0,1%	0,1%	0,5%	0,1%	0,2%

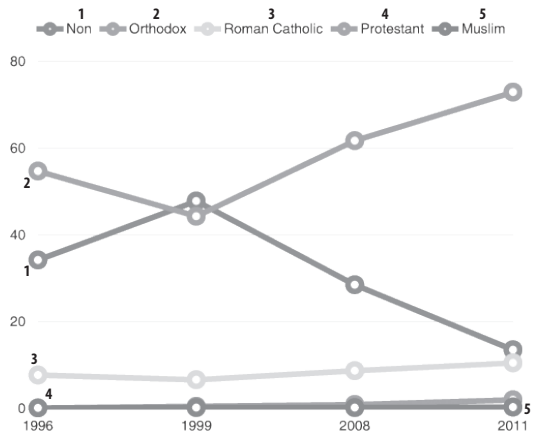

Figure 1. Dynamics of self-assessment of denomination

[3] As an illustration, the data presented include: 1) 1998 – according to Novikova L.G. *Religioznost v Belarusi...* Annex 1. P. 89; 2) *2010 – according to Informaitonal and Analytical Centre at the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus. Respublika Belarus v zerkale sotsiologii // The Republic of Belarus in the Mirror of Sociology* // Collection of materials of opinion polls in 2010. Minsk, 2011. P. 73; 3) *Religiousness and Moral of Belarusians. IISEPS survey*. 09.2010 // http://www.iiseps.org/analitica/143.

Despite the growth of religiousness, Belarusians admit a relatively low influence of religion on their daily life. According to the results of a specialised Gallup poll in 2009,[4] among 114 countries Belarus is in 11th place among the least religious ones, and there is a steady trend towards a reduction of this parameter (See Table 6).

Table 6.

Importance of religion	1996	1999	2008	2011
Very important	20,0%	12,2%	13,6%	15,9%
Rather important	31,0%	33,5%	41%	32,1%
Not too important	25,2%	32%	30,9%	33,4%
Totally unimportant	15,4%	22,3%	14,5%	17,4%

While Belarus is an extreme example of the low level trends of religiousness taking place, they are typical for Europe as a whole. These are two contradicting yet interrelated processes, in which Jose Casanova sees traits of desecularisation: 1) spread of confessional identity without religious belief (belonging without believing), 2) growing individualization of faith, which becomes less and less related to any forms of churchism or communalism (believing without belonging).[5]

Nevertheless, the researcher of (de)secularisation, Peter Berger, claims that the loss of influence and impact of religious institutions of power, which is often understood as secularisation, does not necessarily bring along a decrease in faith and religious practices in daily life. Moreover, religious institutions that lose believers can still play an important social and political role.[6] Therefore, the low level of religiousness is not enough to make a statement about the low level of impact of church institutions and religion on society. Both mentioned trends are present, first of all, in traditional majority churches and demonstrate themselves differently depending on the denominational congregation.

Religion can influence society, its cultural patterns and political culture indirectly, via identity. This role of religion was described by Samuel Huntington, who included religious identity into his division of the world into civilisations. On his map of civilisations, Huntington first places Belarus into the array of "divided" countries taking into account the dominating role of the Orthodox Church alongside the importance of Catholicism,[7]

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[4] Crabtree, Pelham. *What Alabamians and Iranians Have in Common* // http://www.gallup.com/poll/114211/Alabamians-Iranians-Common.aspx.

[5] Casanova J. *Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective* // The Hedgehog Review. Spring/Summer 2006. Vol. 8. P. 7–22.

[6] Berger P.L. *Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview* // *Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* / Ed. P.L.Berger. The Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C, 1999. P. 3.

[7] Huntington S. *The Clash of Civilizations?* // Foreign Affairs. Summer 1993. № 72 (3). P. 30.

but then adds it to the Orthodox civilisation which is centred on Russia (and even to Russia itself).[8] However, is the role of the Orthodox Church in Belarus big enough to define some forms of social life?

In the 1990s, some authors wrote about a "confessional revolution" that may transform Belarus into a "protestant country."[9] In 1999, the number of registered communities of only one protestant sect, evangelical Protestants adhering to Pentecostalism, became higher than the number of Catholic communities: it grew from 357 to 414,[10] while the Catholics grew from 387 to 399.[11] Protestant believers were more active than Orthodox believers.[12] The latter, while keeping their position of a leading denomination, showed the weakest link with their religious community, both in their worship behavior[13] and based on the socio-cultural strategy related to religious belief[14] (See Table 7).

Table 7.

Denomination	Attend worship more often than monthly (IISEPS, 2010)	Percentage of the whole population (based on denomination IISEPS, 2010)	Socio-cultural strategy (Katsuk, 2008)	Percentage of the whole population (based on denomination IISEPS, 2010)
Orthodox	22,2%	17,4%	21,1%	16,6%
Catholic	55%	6,1%	38,1%	4,2%
Protestant	90,9%	0,6%	79,6%	0,6%

Such statements are not unfounded but they do not reflect the reality in full. Religious protestant groups, especially in the local context, can indeed dominate in quality and even generate new types of activities that have an impact, including an economic impact, on the local community. For instance, in the small town of Alšany in the South of Belarus more

[8] Huntington S. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996, P. 163–164.

[9] Shevtsov Yu. *Belarus: strana bazirovaniya. Geopoliticheskiye tendentsii, v sfere deistviya kotorykh nakhoditsya Belarus'. / Belarus: base country. Geopolitical trends that influence Belarus.* // Shevtsov Yu Minsk, 2001. Glava 6. Ob'edinennaya natsiya: fenomen Belarusi. // Chapter 6 United Nation. Belarus Phenomenon. Moskva, 2005. Pp. 46–48.

[10] Pastukhova E. *Sovremennoe sostoyanie pyatidesyatnicheskogo dvizheniya v Belarusi. Postkommunisticheskaya Belarus' v protsesse religioznykh transformatsii. // Current condition of Pentecostal movement in Belarus. Post-Communist Belarus in the process of religious transformation. // Sbornik statei* / Pod. red. A.V. Danilova. Minsk, Adukartsyya i vykhavanne, 2002. P. 67.

[11] Serdyuk V. *Rimo-katoliki Belarusi 1991–2001* // Catholics in Belarus // Ibid. P. 29.

[12] Tsyhankou V. *Relihiynaya palityka tsi palitychnaya relihiya? // Religious policy or political religion?* // Svaboda. 10 January 1997. No 2. Pp. 4.

[13] Novikova L. *Religioznost belorusov...*

[14] Katsuk N. *K metodologii empiricheskogo issledovaniya sotsiokul'turnykh strategii veruyushchikh razlichnykh konfessii // On the methodology of research of socio-cultural strategies of believers of different denominations //* Sotsiologiya. 2008. № 3. P. 118.

than half of the 7500 inhabitants are members of the Pentecostal community.[15] However, if we look at the average size of a community as such, in 2001 the average number of believers in a given Pentecostal community was 112 people (including children) or 64 full-fledged church members.[16] The average size of a Baptist community was even smaller: 50 church members.[17] The "membership" principle is important specifically for protestants since members have special rights and obligations and take certain responsibility.

Catholics have a lower influence of their religious identity on social positions and behaviour, than protestants,[18] but their identity is stronger than that of Orthodox church-goers. The indirect evidence for that can be found in the fact that in the regions where Roman Catholicism dominated in the 1990s, there was a very insignificant growth of Protestant communities.[19]

Many researchers rightly point out that one should not use general polls to measure the real impact of religion on society,[20] while the sample for the surveys should be selected not on the basis of subjective self-assessment but on the basis of the real participation of a person in a given institution's activities.[21] For mainstream churches that unite people with quite weak denominational identity and low level of religious practices, the influence on society and the public presence is provided by their historical status; on the public level the Church is perceived as a referent group of a high order. This reflects in "trust in the Church" parameter.[22]

Minor church denominations, as a rule, have a sect-like structure and the main mode of affiliation there is membership in a community, especially if the community is under the influence of the personality of its leader and founder and conversion happens under the influence of personal contacts with members of the community. In such cases, the community is rather a private and family organisation than a public organisation. It is characterised by horizontal ties, mutual help and solidarity but discourages social ties

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[15] Yegorov A. *Malye goroda: who governs?* // *Small cities: who governs?* // Palitychnaya sfera. 2009. No 12. P. 50.

[16] Calculated on the basis of the data in: Pastukhova Ye. *Sovremennoye sostoyaniye...* // Modern condition... Pp. 67–68.

[17] Calculated on the basis of the data in: Mandryk S. *Soyuz Evangelskich christian-baptistov v Belarusi* // *Union of Evangelical Christians – Baptists in Belarus* // Postkommunisticheskaya Belarus..., p. 74.

[18] Katsuk N. *K metodologiyi...*

[19] Ozem G.Z. *Territori* Озем Г.З. *Territorial'naya struktura religioznoi sfery i konfessional'noe raionirovanie Belarusi. Avtoreferat dissertatsii.* // *Territorial structure of the religious sphere and confessional development of Belarus. Abstract of a thesis.* Minsk, BSU. 2010.

[20] Mitrokhin N. *Tserkov', Etnonatsionalizm i gosudarstvo* // *Ethnic National and State* // Pro et Contra, September–October 2013, № 5 (60), pp. 6–16.

[21] Breskaya O. *Rol' Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v protsesse sotsializatsii v period transformatsii: na materialakh Respubliki Belarus'. Avtoreferat dissertatsii.* // Abstract of a thesis. Moscow 2004. P. 188.

[22] *Orthodox Church traditionally has one of the highest trust rankings. See for instance: Trust as a borrowed resource*. IISEPS survey on 01.12.2010 // http://www.iiseps.org/analitica/159.

with people from other communities. Membership in such communities, according to Berger, is a "school of democracy and social mobility".[23]

As for "membership" in religious organisations, the above mentioned audience polls show that around 10 percent of Belarusians declared their active or passive membership in such organisations. The dynamic shows the growth of "membership" (See Table 8). Only trade unions have more members than religious communities; the rest, including political parties and NGOs, have even fewer members.

Table 8.

Membership in religious organisations	1996 WVS	1999 EVS	2008 EVS	2011 WVS
Active member	2,3%	2,1%	1,2%	5,1%
Passive members	5,5%			5,6%
Not a member	92,2%	97,9%	98,8%	89,3%

Politicisation of Protestants: phase one

At the beggining of the period 1990–2000s, the increase in the number of neo-Protestant sects resulted in the fact that just one Protestant community, the Pentecostals, had more registered parishes than the Catholics. That process naturally brought a sense of discomfort to traditional churches which became wary of a new, dynamically growing, competitor. The growth of neo-Protestant churches was happening outside the control area of the political regime, that at that time was consolidating and increasing its pressure on the political opposition and civil society. As a result, the state-owned media started a campaign of defamation of Protestant communities describing them as "destructive sects".[24] "Anti-sectarian" paradigm ruled the research of Protestants both by scientists[25] and Orthodox scholars.[26]

[23] Berger P. *Desecularisation...*, p. 14.

[24] Yanovich N. *Belarusi ugrozhaet perspektiva prevratit'sya v protestantskuyu respubliku, ili Nas nastoichivo tolkayut k predatel'stvu very nashikh predkov* // *Belarus is under threat of turning into a protestant republic, or We are pushed to betraying our ancestors* // Narodnaya gazeta. 19 April 2000; 20 April 2000. P. 2; On 26 October and 2 November 2000 Belarusian state TV showed the documentary "Expansion" by an anonymous author.

[25] D'yachenko O.V. *Missionerskaya deyatel'nost' pyatidesyatnicheskoi tserkvi v Belarusi.* // *Missionary activities of the Pentecostal Church in Belarus.* Mogilev: A.A. Kuleshov's MSU Publishing House, 1999. P. 113.

[26] Martinovish V.A. *Bibliopgraphy* // http://minds.by/persons/martinovich#.VSWxV0aczDk. In 1997, the Belarusian Orthodox Church created the Information and Consultative Center in the name of Iosif Volatski that aimed at fighting sects.

According to Aleh Dzyachenka, the catalyst for the politicisation of the Pentecostal movement[27] was

> *incorrect ideological propaganda against the Pentecostals, combined with the insult to the religious feelings of the believers by the mass media... publishing of a school textbook on the "Man. Society. State" subject where Pentecostals were described as "Christian sect" believers.*

In 2000, several Evangelical churches filed a suit against a journalist called Nina Yanovich.[28] On 16 November 2000, 1907 believers from the Pentecostal Union filed a petition to the President Alyaksandar Lukashenka asking him to become the guarantor of their rights.[29]

Besides the intensive growth in the number of Pentecostal churches, the late 1990s brought the growth in the number of Charismatic (Full Gospel) churches that attracted big numbers of believers. For instance, the Church of Jesus Christ by 1998 had 90 in-house groups counting 949 members; a year later – 115 in-house groups counting 1053 members.[30] Other Charismatic churches also had quite a big number of believers. That growth was caused by the big number of evangelization attempts, including missionary activity in the streets.

The weakness of all those religious communities was the lack of premises for worship (none of the 54 communities had their own chapel). Therefore, they had to rent for prayer, halls with a big capacity in cultural centres, etc. The pressure on those communities started after the introduction of the Decree No 36 "On Certain Measures to Prevent Accidents During Mass Meetings" dated 9 September 1999, which prescribed getting permission for all mass gatherings that happened not in "specifically assigned for that purpose" places, or in the open air. Starting from 2000, the state started cancelling the rental contract with churches: that complicated worship and increased the potential for churches' politicisation, which, in turn, created grounds for increased pressure against them.

The political pressure that started in 1999–2000 led to the growth of a mood of opposition in Protestant communities. That pressure led the highest ranking Protestant in

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[27] D'yachenko O.V. *Politizatsiya pyatidesyatnichestva v Belarusi: prichiny, genezis, sledstvie. // Politicisation of the Pentecostal movement in Belarus: causes, genesis, consequences. // Religiya i obshchestvo – 3: aktual'nye problemy sovremennogo religiovedeniya: sb. nauch. trudov.* / Pod obshch. red. V.V. Starostenko, O.V. D'yachenko. Mogilev: UO "MGU im. A.A. Kuleshova", 2008. P. 18.

[28] Gorevoy M. *Protestant Communities of Full Gospel Christians Demand an Administrative Case against Narodnaya Gazeta newspaper and its Journalist Nina Yanovich* // BelaPAN. 06/12/2000 // http://dossier.bymedia.net/index.php?option=com_apressdb&view=publications&layout=entry&id=7331.

[29] Pastukhova Ye. *Sovremennoye sostoyaniye...*, p. 67.

[30] Church of Jesus Christ Full Gospel Religious Community website // http://jesuschurch.by/cjc2.html.

the Presidential Administration, deputy head of the Administration Ivan Pashkevich, to leave the ruling elite. His attempt to soften the state's policies towards Protestant churches were not supported by Lukashenka.[31] Pashkevich became the head of the initiative group that collected signatures for the nomination of Mikhail Marynich to the presidency in 2001.

At the same time, youth opposition, especially nation-oriented, became more prone to Christian ideas. In 1999, one of the biggest opposition youth movements, Young Front, became evangelised. The Second Congress of Young Front in 1999, that gathered around 450 delegates, was clearly pro-Christian with speeches rich in religious references. In October 1999, Young Front helped to create the "Christian Initiative" organisation that united believers of different denominations, including the ones from the Kanstantsin Astrozhsky youth Orthodox group (affiliated with the St. Petr and Pavel Church) and St. Roch Catholic Church community. In the early 2000s, the leader of Young Front, Paval Sieviaryniets, came up with the new slogan: "Christian content for the Belarusian form".[32] That slogan reflected two important processes: "Belarusianisation of Christianity" and "Christianisation of Belarusians" (i.e. nationally conscious, politically active youth). As Paval Sieviarynetsh recalls:

> *Then, in 2000, a cardinal split happened that determined the future path of Belarusian contemporary history. Christians quickly gained strength and joined the national movement and opposition, strategically uniting against the "Orthodox atheism" of the dictatorship and [Russian] empire.*[33]

Although the Christianisation of Young Front was supported by the majority of 1 July 2000 3rd Congress delegates, some youth leaders left the organisation. Former political prisoner Aliaksei Shydlouski called Young Front a "sect"[34] and linked the religious turn of the organisation to the John the Baptist Evangelical Church community.

The John the Baptist community in Minsk, indeed, influenced the youth political movement in Belarus in the early 2000s. Many political and civic youth activists continue attending this church, including former political prisoners Zmitser and Nasta Palazhanka, Zmitser Khvedaruk (Young Front leaders), leaders of the Belarusian Christian Democracy, Aliaskei Shein and Dzianis Sadouski, and civic activists Andrei Kim and Barys Haretski. The Catholic community affiliated with St. Roch Holy Trinity cathedral in Minsk left the Catholic Church in 1999-2000 and created their own Protestant Church led by the pastor

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[31] Galko N. *Ivan Pashkevich: "Radicals Rule in the Lukashenka's Circles Now"* // Nezavisimaya Gazeta. 27 March 2001 // http://www.ng.ru/cis/2001-03-27/5_pashkevich.html.

[32] Sieviarynets P. *Pakalennie Maladoha Frontu* // *Young Front Generation* // http://knihi.com/Paval_Sieviaryniec/Pakalennie_Maladoha_Frontu.html.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Shydlouski A. *Dawn of the Young Front* // Nasha Niva. 31 July–7 August 2000.

Jarosław Łukasik. Thus, the statement that "Belarusian Protestants do not cooperate with the Belarusian national movement"[35] is not true anymore. Since 2000, following the example of the John the Baptist community, Protestant communities in Belarus have gradually become more "national". The official history of the Jesus Christ Church tells us that in 2000 "God brought the revelation about the Evangelical History of Belarus to the national level". The John the Baptist Church played a significant role in that: while state media labelled neo-Protestants "non-traditional", "alien" and "sectist", the church suggested its own vision of Protestants as successors of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. In 2002, one of the Church's leaders, Antoni Bokun, suggested that the flourishing of this statehood was possible only due to the spread of Evangelistic, reformist Christianity:

> *The Golden Age of Belarus, the 16th century, show us the good path that Belarus has to take in order to claim its rightful place among other nations.*[36]

Pastors spread the Golden Age ideas and interests and the influence of the Reformation on the history of Belarus in the scientific environment, too.[37] 11,000 copies of the book of Antoni Bokun were distributed in Belarus. In 2001 and the first half of 2002, around 200 Congresses and seminars took place in Protestant churches all across the country; in 2002, a big conference "The Reformation and Golden Age of Belarus" took place. In 2003, John the Baptist Church inspired a celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in Belarus in churches all across Belarus. That celebration included an international conference "The Reformation and Society. 16th Century" and mass worship in the Bangalore square in Minsk.[38] Before that worship Sergey Khomich, the Bishop of the Pentecostal Union of Belarus, said:

> *For Evangelical Christians, the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in Belarus is important because it shows our historical basis, it shows that the roots of Protestantism are deeply bedded in the history of our country. This is especially important today where we are often portrayed as "alien" to Belarus.*[39]

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[35] Latyszonak A. *Belarusian Nationalism and Clash of Civilisations* // ARCHE. 2007. No 7–8. P. 111.

[36] Akinchyts S. *Zalaty viek Belarusi.* // *Golden Age of Belarus.* Khabarovsk: Novyi Vzglyad, 2001. P. 128; Minsk: Unipak 2002 and other editions.

[37] Special ARCHE issue No 1–2 in 2012 "Under the Gospel Flag" was published with the participation of John the Baptist Church; special issue of Spadchyna magazine No 1 in 2003 published Stanislau Akinchyts article City, Where the Tradition Has Preserved, p. 50–54.

[38] *Under the Gospel Flag. Foreword* // ARCHE. 2012. No 1–2. P. 8–17.

[39] Protestants will celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in Belarus by mass worship. BDG-Online, 15 August 2003 // http://www.bdg.by/news/news.htm%3F49703,1.

After the amended Law "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations" was signed, in 2000–01, the new movement "New Reformation" was formed[40] by John the Baptist Church and Church of Jesus Christ.[41] One of the Movement's main projects is the East European Leadership Forum, the directorate of which is based in Ukraine. This Forum has taken place in Kiev since 2011 and gathers thousands of Christian activists,[42] including many participants from Belarus. The Forum has created the Eastern European network of Christian leaders with the goal of promoting values, exchanging experience and influencing public life in Eastern European countries.

The new 2002 amendments of the Law "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations" were adopted with a background of growth in the activeness of Protestant communities and growth of their protest potential.

"Statutory" freedom of conscience

Before the amended Law was signed, the new National Security Concept was adopted in 2001.[43] According to that Concept, one of the main threats to the Republic of Belarus in the sphere of humanities is "activisation of foreign religious organisations and missionaries who attempt to monopolise the spiritual life of society" (paragraph 7.2.6), while

> *counteracting the negative influence of foreign religious organisations and missionaries*

and "monitoring of ethnical and confessional sphere" were named a security priority (paragraph 7.3.7).

The "security" rhetoric was present in the official Orthodox Church discourse, as well. Metropolitan Philaret at the Second All-Belarusian People's Assembly demanded that the state ensure "spiritual security" and limit activities of

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[40] Reformation in Belarus website // http://www.belreform.org/.

[41] History of the Jesus Christ Church // http://jesuschurch.by/cjc2.html; Malukha M. *Khozhdenie vo vlast'. Osobennosti vzaimootnoshenii vlasti i protestantskikh tserkvei v Rossii i Belarusi* // *Visiting the Government: Peculiarities of Relations between Authorities and Protestant Churches in Russia and Belarus* // http://religo.ru/journal/10334. The "New Reformation" movement has several research and scientific projects aimed at the popularisation and legitimisation of Protestantism as a traditional Belarusian denomination, as well as the popularisation of Protestant historic figures from 16th and 20th centuries. This is done via organization of and participation in conferences, screening films, organising concerts, publishing articles, organising tours in Belarus, meetings of "Licvinski" Club. The ideas of the "New Reformation" are spread among other Protestant communities via educational events and projects, including the School of New Reformation.

[42] East European Leadership Forum official webpage. // http://www.forumeast.eu.

[43] Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No 390 dated 17 July 2001 "On the Concept of National Security of the Republic of Belarus".

destructive and pseudo-Christian communities that destroy the spiritual, social and cultural unity of the Belarusian people.[44]

Most probably, he was referring to the Protestant churches.

The first draft of amendments, were made public in the autumn of 2000 and evoked a wide response. Human rights defenders were alerted to several new repressive norms and inequalities within the law for majority and minority religious organisations.[45] Protestants were the main target of the new law, but, since before the presidential election of 2001, as authorities did not want to cause politicisation of Protestant believers, the process of adopting the amended law stalled for some time. New attempts to pass amendments took place in 2002. On May 31, without consultation with other denominations, the amended law that was supported by the Orthodox Church, passed on first reading.

In response to that, religious communities mobilised themselves by creating the civic initiative "For Religious Freedom" and organising public consultations with more than 150 participants: experts, diplomats, politicians, human rights defenders and believers themselves. Participants signed the appeal to the President and the Parliament, where they stated that passing the new law would mean declaring a war against religious minorities.[46] One of the members of the initiative, a member of parliament Ivan Pashkevich, called the bill "igniting religious war" against the three big denominations: Catholics, Protestants and Jews. According to him, those denominations became influential in society and, therefore, were more dangerous to the political regime than political parties.[47] Another MP, Volha Abramava, spoke against the Law, as well.[48] One more MP, speaking at the House of Representatives session, warned that passing the law may bring about the

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[44] Philaret (Vakhromeev). Speech at the II All-Belarusian People Assembly on 18 May 2001.

[45] *V Respublike Belarus' podgotovlena novaya redaktsiya Zakona "O svobode veroispovedanii i religioznykh organizatsiyakh // New amendment of the Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations has been prepared in the Republic of Belarus* // Religiya i pravo. 2001. No 1; *Zaklyuchenie Slavyanskogo pravovogo tsentra na proekt Zakona Respubliki Belarus' "O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v Zakon Respubliki Belarus' "O svobode sovesti i religioznykh organizatsiyakh" // Conclusino of the Slavic Legal Centre regarding the draft Law of the Republic of Belarus on Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Belarus On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations.* // Religiya i pravo. 2001. No 4; *Later the Institute of Human Rights also conducted its own expertise and found numerous non-conformities with the international freedom of conscience standards. // Belaya Kniga. Issue 2. Materials of the Monitoring of religious situation in Belarus (August 2002–December 2003).* Minsk: Civic Initiative "For Religious Freedom", January 2004.P. 62.

[46] *Appeal of participants of public consultations // Belaya kniga. Materialy po proektu zakona „O svobode sovesti i religioznykh organizatsiyakh".* Minsk: Civic Initiative "For Religious Freedom", 2002. Pp. 120–121.

[47] Gorevoy M. *Is the Government Planning a New Crusade?* // Belorusskiye Novosti. 26 June 2002 // http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2002/06/26/ic_articles_116_146910/print/.

[48] *Belarusian Parliament Adopts Bill On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations on Second Reading* // Blagovest-info. 28 June 2002.

destabilisation of society.[49] As a result, the majority of MPs voted for postponing the review of this Law until the autumn. But the government reacted rapidly, and next day the bill was adopted on second reading with only two votes against.[50] Thus, the new stage of the confessional policy started: favourisation of the Belarusian Orthodox Church and pressure on all other religious communities.

The lawmakers deleted from the text articles about allowed limitations of the freedom of faith that were originally present in the Law's version of 1992 and almost word-for-word quoted paragraph 3 of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. That paragraph limited interference of authorities into the activities of religious organisations. By ratifying the Covenant, the Belarusian state assumed the responsibility to fulfil it; however, after passing the amended Law it de facto refused to follow through on its commitments on the national level.

Article 16 of the new Law obliged religious organisations to receive state registration for religious activities. Until 2009, acting in the name of a non-registered religious organisation was regarded as an administrative offence (part 1 of the Article 9.9 of the Administrative Code) and there were cases when people were held liable for that.[51] In addition to that, starting from 2005, criminal liability is envisaged by the Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code for acting in the name of the non-registered religious organisation. As of now, there have been no cases of criminal liability for religious activities; however, criminal cases were started and the prosecutor's office issued warnings.[52] Authorities exerted pressure by threatening to persecute an organisation on the basis of that article.

The new Law limited foreign citizens and people with no citizenship, including those who permanently reside in Belarus, from the right to become founders of religious organisations (Articles 13, 14). Only citizens of the Republic of Belarus got the right to be the head of a religious organisation (Article 13). Foreign citizens were allowed to

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[49] Alekseyev V. *KGB Warned the Parliament about Religious Protest Actions* // Narodnaya Volya. 17 June 2001. № 127.

[50] For materials on the history of the initiative "For Religious Freedom" and events surrounding adopting the Law See: *Belaya kniga. Materialy po proektu zakona „O svobode sovesti i religioznykh organizatsiyakh"*. Minsk: Civic Initiative "For Religious Freedom, August 2002; *Belaya Kniga. Issue 2. Materials of the Monitoring of religious situation in Belarus (August 2002–December 2003).* Minsk: Civic Initiative "For Religious Freedom", January 2004.

[51] For instance, administrative fines were used against pastor Valiantsin Baravik and churchgoer Ludmila Batsiuk (See: http://forb.by/node/280 , http://forb.by/node/291).

[52] Forum has counted 7 such cases since 2010: Gleys O. *BELARUS: Obozreniye religioznoy svobody. Sentyabr 2014* // BELARUS: Review of Religious Freedoms. September 2014 // http://forb.by/node/468; cases were started against the representative of Mun Church Yauhen Volkau: http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2009/07/02/ic_news_116_313903/print/, Catholic believer Aliaksei Shchadrou: http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2013/07/22/ic_articles_116_182423/; in 2007, warning was issued even to the head of the Orthodox brotherhood Siarhei Niestsiarovich in Homel: http://churchby.info/rus/134/.

participate in religious activities only after they get special permission, by following the Procedure of invitation established by the Council of Ministers[53] and by the agreement of the Commissioner on Religious and Ethnic Affairs. The decision on the extension of stay of foreign citizens engaged in religious activities is taken by the office of the Commissioner. Lack of permission or violation of the rules for religious activities is liable under the Administrative Code. This legal status is used most often against Protestants[54] and Catholics.[55]

The new Law limits the list of religious organisations: religious communities, religious associations, monasteries and monastic communities, religious brotherhoods and sisterhoods, religious missions and religious educational establishments. Some types of activities can be performed only by a religious association: for instance, the creation of other religious organisations, founding mass media or publishing religious literature (Articles 15, 19). In this way, the government imposes greater confessional centralisation of religious communities. A single church, according to the Law, cannot have its own newspaper or create a brotherhood, since only big national or local associations can do so.

The Law limits mass gatherings in, not assigned for these purposes, open-air places and in premises. They can be carried out only after the appropriate decision by the head of the local executive and administrative body, or there assistant, in the order established by the Law On Mass Gatherings of the Republic of Belarus. Other articles of the Administrative Code are used for persecution of believers, as well:

a) Article 23.34 of the Belarusian Administrative Code, provides punishment for the violation of the procedure for "organising or conducting a mass event or demonstration".[56]

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[53] Procedure of Invitation of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons to the Republic of Belarus for the Purpose of Carrying out Religious Activity, and on Repealing of Certain Resolutions of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus // Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No 123 dated 30 January 2008.

[54] Pastor Jarosław Łukasik was deported in 2007 for, as it was stated in the motivational part of his deportation decision, "activities aimed at damaging the national security of the Republic of Belarus in the sphere of interdenominational relations", including his participation in post-election protests in 2006: Trigubovich V. *Gosudarstvo i tserkov' v 2007 godu: "Vy sol' zemli"* // *State and Church in 2007: You Are the Salt of the Earth* // http://forb.by/node/207. In 2008 pastor Veniamin Brukh, who was also deported, named his participation in protests as a the reason for deportation, as well: Veniamin Brukh Explains Why He Was Departed from Belarus // http://www.jesuschurch.by/cjc273.html.

[55] The government decided to decrease the number of foreign Roman Catholic priests in Belarus; their number decreases every year, indeed. See: Vasilevich N. *Belarus: Visa Ban List for Catholic Priests* // FORB Initiative // http://forb.by/node/255; Vasilevich N. *Belorusskoe gosudarstvo, Rimsko-Katolicheskaya Tserkov' v Belarusi, Vatikan i pol'skie svyashchenniki* // *Belarusian state, Roman Catholic Church in Belarus*, Vatican and Polish priests // FORB Initiative // http://forb.by/node/499.

[56] In 2006, the pastor of the Redemption Church was fined for baptising: http://charter97.org/rus/news/2006/09/04/shtraf; the pastor of non-registered Baptist community Heorgi Viazouski was fined for

Even though in 2011 the text of the Article was changed to exclude "other" events from the list of mass events (including religious events), courts continue punishing believers;[57]

b) Article 21.16 of the Administrative Code ("Not using living premises for their purpose").[58] This Article gave grounds to the state to accuse the New Life Pentecostal Church of using the land at Kavaliova Str. 72 in Minsk for different from stated purposes. This conflict between the state and believers lasted for many years and was described by the political scientist Andrei Yahorau as "core, the centre of civic life".[59]

Politicisation of Protestants: new phase, New Life Church

The protest potential of Protestant churches remained high despite the new Law. Therefore, the government continued its pressure on them. The anti-Protestant propaganda in state-owned media forced representatives of Evangelical churches to organise a protest action on 13 July 2003: around five thousand believers gathered for public worship.[60] Participants of the action demonstrated two distinct trends: firstly, they were unhappy with the anti-Protestant propaganda and pressure from authorities that was compared by the deputy bishop of the Union of Evangelical Christians Sergey Tsvor to "1937" (the year of the peak of Stalin's repressions); secondly, they confirmed their loyalty to the Republic of Belarus ("We love Belarus, we are patriots of our country", "We abide by the laws", "We prayed, we pray and we will continue to pray for the flourishing of our country and its leaders") and therefore signed an appeal to president Lukashenka as a guarantor of their Constitutional rights. Believers claimed that they would stand for their civic dignity and Constitutional rights with "legal methods and tools" and hoping for "comprehensive support and assistance from the President".[61]

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organising worship: http://spring96.org/ru/news/9477; in 2007, pastor of John the Baptist Church Antoni Bokun was put under administrative arrest: http://news.tut.by/society/88917.html.

[57] Shavtsova D. *Praktika privlecheniya k administrativnoi otvetstvennosti za narushenie poryadka provedeniya massovykh meropriyatii v otnoshenii religioznykh obshchin // Practice of adminisdtrative punishment for breaking the rules of mass events organisation applied to religious communities* / Initiative FORB // http://forb.by/node/400. In 2013, based on that Article, Baptists Piotr Yashchanka, Valiantsin Shchadranok, Mikalai Varushyn were fined: http://forb.by/node/389; in 2014 – Baptists Aliaksandar Zalararou, Aleh Danileuski, Dzmitry Sidarenka: http://forb.by/node/416, Yehova witness Andrei Kuzin: http://forb.by/node/505.

[58] Baptist Andrei Tupalski was arrested in 2014: http://forb.by/node/416.

[59] Yegorov A. *"Fasting Hunger Strike" system* // http://worvik.org/news/2006/10/10/254.

[60] Around 5000 Christians gathered in Minsk on Bangalore square on July 13 // http://spring96.org/ru/news/7525.

[61] Appeal of the participants of the Joint Worship of Christians of Protestant Denomination on Bangalore square to the President of the Republic of Belarus Aliaksandar Lukashenka. // http://forb.by/node/524.

In 2003–04, leaders of Protestant religious communities appealed to authorities to stop "the defamation and insult to believers of Evangelical churches" in school textbooks.[62] The New Life Church (NLC) that appeared at the centre of the conflict was trying to solve that conflict peacefully. Before the conflict, the pastor of that church claimed that

> *officials have no moral right to tell us that we did not use all peaceful means available to solve the problem.*[63]

In 2002, NLC bought a disused collective farm cow shed on the outskirts of Minsk, rebuilt it and then attempted numerous times to convert it into a place of worship. However, authorities kept issuing denials. Moreover, they created hurdles in re-registration and issued fines for worship in the building; threatened to destroy the building, or confiscate it or its land, or liquidate the NLC itself by withdrawing its licence.

Finally, believers realised that the "peaceful" strategy of solving the issue was not effective, since,

> *all the correspondence that our churches have in defence of their Constitutional rights leads only to one thing: authorities openly claiming that either Protestants will fully obey their unlawful decisions or their churches will be liquidated.*[64]

The open letter of the leaders of the Full Gospel churches, that demanded the state to take firm action finished with an unambiguous threat:

> *Let us remind you: in 1989, cruel and not well-thought out actions of the Romanian authorities against Protestant Churches led to the change of the political regime.*[65]

After the amendments to the Law On Freedom of Conscience, some politicians decided to initiate the creation of a Christian political force. In 2005, Uladzimir Matskevich created the Rushennie movement that tried to utilise the protest potential of Protestant churches. Then, the Organising Committee for the creation of the Belarusian Christian Democratic party was formed, and included believers of various denominations. The core of that committee consists of former Young Front activists close to Protestant communities.[66] Leaders of the Evangelical churches, inspired by the Ukrainian Protestant

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[62] The Letter from the heads of the Protestant churches in Belarus regarding the distribution by the Ministry of Education through school textbooks (supplementary materials) defamation and insult of believers of Evangelical churches // http://forb.by/node/122; Letter of the Bishop of the Religious community of Full Gospel Christians in the Republic of Belarus A.V.Sakovich about the Religiovedeniye textbook // http://forb.by/node/136.

[63] http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=656.

[64] Open appeal of the religious association of Full Gospel Christians in the Republic of Belarus // http://forb.by/node/152.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Belarusian Christian Democracy. History // http://bchd.info/history.html.

Church "The Embassy of God" that supported the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, showed their solidarity with protesters during street actions in 2006, by "raising their voice for truth, freedom and justice".[67]

After the presidential election of 2006 the government strengthened repressions against the New Life Church. On 13 July 2006, the Economic Court of Minsk City refused the church's demand, that Minsk City Executive Committee allocate the plot of land where the disused cowshed is situated, for it to be build as a house of worship.[68] A week later, the Court ruled that the Church had to sell the cowshed at a low price. When the money reached the account, the believers were given 10 days to leave the building, after which it would be demolished.[69] In response, on 5 October 2006 NLC started a massive hunger strike in the form of fasting that lasted for 23 days and involved 132 protesters across the country. As a result, all court judgements were reversed.[70] That was a victory for NLC, although, as pastor Barys Charnaglaz rightfully claimed, treatment of NLC was not the only case of "unjust attitude to Evangelist believers, which became rather a regularity."[71]

Despite the reversal of the court judgement, authorities up to 2013 tried either to evict the church or to hold this religious organisation and its members liable for trumped up charges.[72] Still, the 2006 protest brought about several important effects.

Firstly, the protest became a referent case for other believers in their struggle with authorities. Right after NLC, Catholics in Hrodna started their own hunger strike that brought success: authorities allowed them to build a new church. Hunger strikes of Catholics in Yuratsishki and Lazduny village, however, did not bring positive results.[73]

Secondly, after the hunger strike, Protestants established a closer link with the BChD organising committee. Together, they started a joint signature collection campaign to inspire changes in the legislation on religion, coordinated by New Life Church lawyer Sergey Lukanin. 50 thousand signatures collected during that campaign could be used as a database of those who were ready to support Christian political force.

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[67] Veniamin Brukh Explained... by default. On en the Orthodox Church and the state in Belarus are unequal and disfunctional ses the simulation of partnershipew

[68] Decision of Minsk Economic Court to compel the repurposing of title documentation on belonging to New Life Religious Organisation, building in Minsk at Kovaleva Str. 72 as place of worship // http://forb.by/node/91.

[69] Minotoring of violations of Christians' rights in Belarus in 2006 // http://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/27169?download=true.

[70] Also: For Religious Freedom. Special issue in 2006 // http://forb.by/bulletin/13.

[71] Pastor Barys Charnahlaz speaking at the street action in support of the Church at Bangalore square in Minsk on 21 October 2006. Quoted as in: Trigubovich V. *Gosudarstvo i Tserkov' v 2006 godu: "Stoite v svobode, kotoruyu daroval nam Khristos»* // *State and Church in 2006: "Stand in freedom that was given us by Jesus Christ"* // http://forb.by/node/182.

[72] Gleys, O. *BELARUS: Raid and fines are back, but eviction is postponed* // Forum 18 // http://forb.by/node/389.

[73] Trigubovich V. *Gosudarstco i Tserkov...*

Thirdly, NLC became a symbol of religious persecution in Belarus. The European Parliament in its 2009 Resolution on Belarus appealed to Belarusian authorities to safeguard "freedom of religion for religious denominations other than the Orthodox Church, in particular, to let New Life Church operate freely".[74]

Orthodox Church: partnership or dancing to the whistle?

The Law on Freedom of Conscience in its preamble admits the superiority of the Orthodox Church over others, mentioning its determining role

> *in the historical formation and development of spiritual, cultural and state traditions of the Belarusian people.*

The law also mentioned the "spiritual, cultural and historic role [of the Catholic Church]... on the territory of Belarus" and the "inseparability [of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Judaism and Islam]... from the general history of the people of the Republic of Belarus." However, the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus in its 1996 revision establishes that

> *relations between the State and religious organisations shall be regulated by law with regard to their influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural and state traditions of the Belarusian people (Article 16).*

The preamble to the Law, thus, de facto determines the level of that influence, giving dominance to the Orthodox Church.

President Lukashenka, addressing Orthodox believers after the amended Law was signed, stated that in Belarus "secular authorities and the Church are united", that the Orthodox Church "struggles with destructive forces", "fruitfully cooperates with the state authorities", is "not divided from the state" and moreover, plays "the most significant role", being a "cement" that unites society.[75] In fact, the Law became the political investment of the government into the Orthodox Church in order to guarantee its loyalty. The "unity" mentioned in the speech does not reflect the real influence of the Orthodox Church on state policy; quite to the contrary, the government does not view it as an independent actor of social life. Assigning to the Church greater autonomy brings the risk of transforming

[74] European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2009 on Belarus P7_TA(2009)0117 // http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2009-0117&language=EN&ring=P7-RC-2009-0248.

[75] Speech of the President of the Republic of Belarus in Holy Spirit Cathedral in Minsk at the Christmas worship on 7 January 2003. // Official website of the president // http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vystuplenie-prezidenta-respubliki-belarus-aleksandra-lukashenko-v-svjato-duxovom-kafedralnom-sobore-minska-na-5816/.

it into the antagonist, a competitor of the state. As Lukashenka's advisor Anatol Rubinau said,

> *the increase of influence of the religion means the weakening of the influence of the state, of state ideology... it will be difficult for the state to get on its side those who are under the influence and control of the church.*[76]

Therefore, if Protestants are kept under control via repressions, the Orthodox Church is controlled via "cooperation" and "diplomatic agreements", i.e. elements of the paternalist policy. Volha Brestskaya, for instance, says that the paternalist policy caused the situation in which "in the years of independence, the Church could not become the autonomous participant of public life in Belarus."[77]

In other words, although the state gives the Orthodox Church priority in the institutional sphere and in public discourse, this does not mean that the Orthodox Church can influence state policies; this form of cooperation puts the Church under the "shadow of the state".[78]

Nevertheless, unlike other religious organisations, the Orthodox Church is a formal partner of that state. This is possible due to, and envisaged by the law, according to which "the state can establish relations with religious associations by signing agreements according to the civil legislation of the Republic of Belarus" (Article 8). As one of the major official researchers pointed out,

> *the Belarusian model of state-church relations is based on the principle of 'selectiveness', i.e. the state selects partners among religious organisations in order to solve selected issues.*[79]

Agreements of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) with state institutions existed before the amended Law. However, only after the Law entered into force, i.e. since 2003, did they become widespread.[80] Cooperation between the Church and state bodies can

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[76] Rubinov A. *Nauka i Obshchestvo* // Sovetskaya Belorussiya. 2006.12.12.

[77] Breskaya O. *Model relacji między Cerkwią a państwem na Białorusi w kontekście postsekularyzacji społeczeństw europejskich.* // Politeja. 2012. № 9 (22/1). P. 152.

[78] Vasilevich N. *Belorusskaya pravoslavnaya tserkov' v teni gosudarstva* // *Belarusian Orthodox Church in the shadow of the state* // Pro et Contra (Cerkov', gosudarstvo i obshhestvo v stranah vostochnogo hristianstva, ch. II). Sentjabr'–oktjabr' 2013. № 5 (60). P. 80–96.

[79] Beznjuk D. *Gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nye otnoshenija v Respublike Belarus' (sociologicheskij aspekt).* // *Relations between the state and denominations in the Republic of Belarus* // Minsk: RIVSh, 2006. P. 131.

[80] See more for institutional partnership: Vasilevich N., Kutuzova N. *Partnerstvo religioznykh organizatsii Belarusi s organami vlasti.* // *Partnership of Belarusain religious organisations with authorities.* Kutuzova N., Karaseva S., Vasilevich N. i dr. *Religioznye organizatsii v obshchestvennom prostranstve Belarusi i Ukrainy: formirovanie mekhanizmov partnerstva.* // *Religious organisations in the public space in Belarus and Ukraine: development of mechanisms of partnership* // Vilnius, EHU 2004. Pp. 53–68.

take the form of formal agreements or programmes of cooperation on either national or local level; they can be either framework or sectoral (See Table 9). These agreements and programs with state bodies and organizations do not have a unified form or structure: they can be either formulated in the form of "declaration of purposes" or a strict calendar plan of events with assigned responsible persons and organisations. A Framework agreement on cooperation between Belarus and the BOC signed in 2003[81] is of an abstract nature. According to it, the government provides the BOC with

> *autonomy in its internal affairs, freedom to perform religious rites and other activities, and the right for church jurisdiction on its canonical territory within the framework of the Constitution and Legislation of the Republic of Belarus (Article 1.4).*

Table 9.

	Framework agreements	Sectoral agreements
National level	Framework agreement between the BOC and the Republic of Belarus, 2003	Ministry of Internal Affairs Correction department of the MIA Internal forces of the MIA Border guard forces State Committee Ministry of Defence Ministry of Education Ministry of Culture Health Ministry Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Ministry of Information Ministry for Emergency Situations Ministry of Natural Resources and Protection of Environment Committee on the Problems of the Consequences of the Catastrophe at the Chernobyl NPP Ministry of Sports and Tourism State Aviation Committee National Academy of Sciences Belarusian State TV and Radio Company
Local level	Framework agreements between separate dioceses in the regions and regional administrations	Programmes in the following spheres: Social protection, charity, strengthening family, motherhood and childhood; Cultural and creative activities; protection, restoration and development of historical and cultural heritage

The Agreement also defines the priority spheres of cooperation:

> *public morals, education, culture and creative activities, health, social welfare, charity, support for the family, maternity and childhood, spiritual guidance of the imprisoned,*

[81] Framework agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church dated 12 June 2003 // http://exarchate.by/resource/Dir0009/Dir0015/.

> *educational, social and psychological work with the military, environmental protection (Article 3).*

Generally, the research of religious organisation became quite popular in Belarus before and after the amended Law was signed. However, researchers mostly focus on providing grounds for existing denominational policy in Belarus and do not write about institutional mechanisms of interactions.[82] This is caused, first of all, by the lack of clearly formulated relations that, in turn, causes the simulation of partnership.[83]

Relations between the Orthodox Church and the state in Belarus are unequal and dysfunctional by default. On the one hand, the authoritarian centralised power strives to gain maximum control as much as resources will allow, and, therefore, it regards any alternative autonomous institutions as a political threat. On the other hand, the weak church tries to keep its dominant status. The church has no real influence on public discourse or political decision-making even in the most publicly lobbied issues, such as the ban or limitations on abortion, usage of some reproductive technologies or introduction of facultative religious education in schools. Tension is eased with the help of small compromises: "weeks without abortions", the abolition of some social factors for abortion in the late stages of pregnancy, etc. In the sphere of education, the government has signed a formal agreement with the Orthodox Church on coordination of actions in educating schoolchildren, which formally opens a possibility for facultative teaching of religion at schools but in reality puts up barriers for its realisation.

Declarative recognition of the Church's status compensates actual inability to influence society but at the same time demands from the Church loyalty to authorities, since loyalty is the most precious resource for the government. This requires from Church's leadership control over activities of groups and believers that represent the Church.

A telling example of tensions in the Orthodox community is the online forum Besedka.[84] Active participants of that forum once organised an event for the Orthodox youth in the name of the forum and without any politics involved. However, the very fact of this spontaneous initiative put pressure on the administration of the forum, which resulted in the following changes introduced into the Forum's Statute:

> *By its nature, this Forum cannot be an organisation, an association or a group and therefore it cannot perform the functions of such in its relations with state, public, commercial, religious and other organisations. Therefore any referrals to the Forum as*

[82] Vasilevich N. *Satsyalogiya religii yak pradukt palitychnay idealogii.* // *Sociology of religion as a product of political ideology* // Palitchnaya Sfera. 2006. No 7. Pp. 88–97.

[83] In this way partnership between the National Academy of Sciences and the Belarusian Orthodox Church was evaluated by experts working in humanistic institutes of the National Academy of Sciences in their open interview for Vasilevich N., Kutuzova N. *Partnerstvo religioznykh organizatsii...*, p. 67.

[84] Besedka – Forum of Belarusian Orthodox Youth // http://besedka.info.

> *such an organisation, a public association, etc. are not rightful or legitimate... any events organised by a group of Forum participants cannot be regarded as the Forum's events and are an exclusively private initiative of the Forum's users.*

This is how one of the Forum's managers explained the leadership's official position on interaction with the church:

> *Everything that is done in the name of the Church should get the blessing of the Church first... The word "Orthodox" already means that the noun following this word is blessed by the Bishop... If some people or organisations that call themselves "Orthodox" behave in a way that is contrary to the Church's rules, the Church is forced to separate its image from them... The actions of such "Orthodox" people puts them into opposition to the Church and, as a result, turns them into a sect.*[85]

The Orthodox Church is not the only church that aims to control private "grass root" initiatives. When in 2009 a group of Catholic youth tried to organise a trip to the Ecumenical meeting of the Teze community and to some other events, the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Belarus issued the Resolution "On Non-Sanctioned Activities of Youth Catholic Organisations". In that Resolution, the leadership of the Catholic Church requested from

> *all participants of unofficial organisations and groups who call themselves or consider themselves Catholics to stop non-sanctioned activities, since they harm the discipline in the local Church in Belarus and hurt its unity.*

The Catholic Church's leadership also paid attention to

> *illegitimacy, according to the Canonical Legal Code and overall norms of the international law, of using the title "Catholic" without permission of the competent Church authorities". Thus, the Church regarded that it was "morally irrelevant to use the words "Catholic, Catholics" in the titles of groups that were not approved by those authorities.*

To ensure its right on a monopoly on Orthodox religious tradition, the Belarusian Orthodox Church registered its exclusive right to the "Orthodox Christian" trademark.[86] This trademark is used for organisation of colloquiums and conferences, guided tours, book publishing, film production, activities of cultural and educational clubs as well as social services.

[85] What Is Going On? // Ibid. // http://besedka.info/viewtopic.php?t=2293.

[86] National Centre for Intellectual Property, No 16557 dated 14 February 2003.

Parish: a community of care or the factory of religious services?

The basic unit of Christian religious organisations is a community (a parish), which is defined in the Belarusian legislation on religion as a voluntary

> *association of a group of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, being adherents of a uniform creed and satisfaction of other religious needs, within the limits of the territory of one or several settlements.*[87]

The total number of registered religious organisations in Belarus reached 3,280 religious communities as of January 1, 2014, of which 1,615 were of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (49.24%), 488 – of the Roman Catholic Church (14.88%), 907 – of the Protestant parishes (27.65%), 520 (15.85%) being of Pentecostals and 287 (8.75%) – of Baptists.[88]

In the ideal world, religious communities should serve as "communities of care"[89], providing material and emotional support to their members. For instance, Volha Breskaya compared three referent groups (a university, church and private company) and came to the conclusion that the Orthodox parish in Brest city showed the highest level of internal solidarity. In that parish participants of the community showed the highest level of individuality, independence and responsibility within their social group.[90] However, such parishes are rather an exception than a rule.

Another exception is self-assessment of believers as members of a religious organisation. This is especially visible when one compares data on those who say that they belong to some confession and on those who say that they are members of a religious organisation (See Tables 5 and 9) (from one to ten percent of the population claim their membership). At the same time, as stated above, the membership in other types of organisations (political parties, public associations) are lower in all categories, except for trade unions. One should take into account that membership of a religious organisation does not always mean that a person belongs to a parish. Membership can be the way a person describes her or his confession.

Several parishes of the BOC do not limit their activities to worship and spontaneous small-scale social activities, cultural events or joint trips. Among them:

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[87] Law of the Republic of Belarus On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations dated 17 December 1992 No2054-XII as amended on 22 December 2011, Article 14.

[88] Refernce material about ethnic and confessional situation in the Republic of Belarus and cooperateion with compatriots abroad in 2013 // http://forb.by/node/406.

[89] Wuthnow R. *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Civil Society*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.

[90] Breskaya O. *O vozmozhnosti sotsial'noi etiki v Vostochnoi Evrope* // *On possibilities fore social ethics in Eastern Europe* // Perekrestki. 2011, № 1–2. P. 37–55.

Parish in the name of Joy of All Who Sorrow icon,[91] where worship is translated into the sign language and workshops are organised for people with physical and mental disabilities. These workshops allow people with disabilities to participate in social life and get much needed professional skills. The parish hosts the correspondent bureau of Soyuz Russian TV channel. It also hosts several other organisations of the BOC. Cossacks (Public Association "Belarusian Cossacks") play an important role in the life of the parish, and the pastor of that parish is also a chaplain of the Cossacks association;[92]

St. Peter and Pavel Cathedral's parish[93] hosts several Orthodox youth brotherhoods, a sports and history club,[94] and a scout unit. It regularly organises worship in the Belarusian language, has a special commission on the translation of Bible and liturgical texts into the Belarusian language. The parish also organises discussions, video lectures and hosts several organisations of the BOC such as The Union of Youth of BOC, *Tsarkounaye Slova* weekly, the brotherhood in honour of Vilnia martyrs Anthony, John and Eustaphy of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (that promotes the Belarusian language and culture), as well as serves as a "base" to attract civic activists and Belarusian-speakers to the Church life;

Saint Elisabeth monastery's[95] parish that is active in publishing literature, producing audio- and video materials, as well as producing church-related goods, food, etc. The Parish implements several social projects and seriously influences the local community in the Navinki settlement. The status of the parish is strengthened by its charismatic leader, archpriest Andrey Lemiashonak.

One should also mention mass celebrations: long queues for consecrated water, blessing willow branches, mass ice-cold water washes on Epiphany, etc. Such practices are spontaneous and emotional and do not require institutional interaction but they can demand huge effort from believers. For instance, in January 2014, several hundred thousand people came to bow to "Magi gifts", standing in a street queue for hours while the outside temperature was -15–20C.

Religious organisations and movements: inside and outside the Church's ring-fence

The Law of the Republic of Belarus On Freedom of Conscience defines religious activity in the following way:

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[91] Informational portal Sobor.by // http://sobor.by.

[92] Webpage of the Public Association "Belarusian Cossacks" // http://belkazak.by/org/rukovodyashhijj-sostav.html.

[93] Webpage of St. Peter and Paul's Cathedral // http://sppsobor.by.

[94] Website of the sports and history club of St. Daumantas of Pskov // http://www.dovmont.by/ Comment: in the header of the webpage the club is called "military and patriotic".

[95] Webpage of St. Elisabeth's Convent // http://obitel.by.

> *The activity directed to satisfaction of religious needs of believers, expansion of religions, religious education, conducting divine services, prayerful assemblies, training of clergymen, and also other activity directed at organizational and material maintenance of the cult practice of the religious organisation (publishing and distribution of the religious literature, manufacturing and distribution of subjects of cult, manufacture of vestments for clergymen and other activities.*

The main, although not the only type of the religious activity is the religious cult:

> *consisting of a certain behaviour and specific actions expressing the religious worship of the supernatural.*

In reality, the activities of religious organisations are often non-religious by nature and fulfil other goals than the Law envisages: social, research, educational, value-based, etc. Certain activities can be motivated by religion but that does not automatically make them religious: such as translation of religious texts into the Belarusian language, theological research, restoration and reconstruction of heritage that is related to religious tradition, etc.

An example of the state's confusion about religious activities is the Ministry of Justice's reply to the complaint of Dzina Shautsova. Ms. Shautsova complained about the refusal of the Justice department of Minsk City Council to allow a non-profit organisation to have such titles as "Centre for Religious Freedom", "For Freedom of Faith" or "Centre for Legal Research of the Freedom of Faith"; the profile of the NGO was related to research, education, information and human rights. The reply of the Ministry states that such titles for "external consumers (clients that receive services) have exclusively religious connotation because they use such words as "religious", "faith", etc."[96] The Justice department of the Minsk City Council explained their refusal to register the title by the fact that "it is assumed that such an organisation would have a religious profile" and therefore suggested the applicant create a legal person in the framework of the Law of the Republic of Belarus On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations.[97]

Since acting in the name of non-registered organisations is punished by the Criminal Code, all religious activities, according to the legislation, should be registered, the status of informal communities of believers who are members of already registered religious communities is not clear. This relates, first of all, to such forms of Protestant organizations as "home groups": weekly meetings of rather small groups of believers that take place usually at the place of residence of the group's leader and have regular participants. If

[96] Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus. Reply to D.M. Shautsova "On Consideration of the Appeal" No 10–15/Ш-339-341 dated 13 December 2012 // Author's archive.

[97] Main Department of the Minsk City Council. Document confirming the denial to allow the title of the legal person, given to D.M. Shautsova No2/27/vkh-76/468 dated 12 December 2012. Author's archive.

believers are not members of religious communities, they can be persecuted for non-registered religious activities: this is true for all denominations, including the Orthodox.[98]

The majority of religious organisations in Belarus focus on a limited number values and issues: pro-life agenda, family values and social and charitable activities.

A traditional, and even archetypical type of activity of religious organisations is social activity, which is reflected in the concept of charity or "mercy", i.e. assisting people in need. This type of activity is implemented by parishes (communities of care) as well as by specialised organisations.[99] A typical Orthodox charity organisation is "charitable sisterhood". These sisterhoods pay visits to different type of social institutions: hospitals, orphanages, houses for people with special needs. They help the elderly, large families, etc. Currently, there are more than 100 sisterhoods in Belarus with at least a thousand members – mostly, women. This is the most numerous and developed religious structure of civil society.

If in the 1990s social activity of religious organisations was mostly related to receiving and redistributing foreign humanitarian assistance and organising health improvement trips, by the mid-2000s focus had shifted to in-country activities. The work of volunteers plays a crucial role (according to the data of the Union of Sisterhoods in Belarus, around 80 percent of sisters have education or a profession that is not related to medicine or professional social services). However, these organisations are not widespread or professional due to a lack of professional human resources, organisational capacity and financial problems; it is also impossible to organise "a grass root" professional structure without the support of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. In 2000, in order to coordinate the activities of sisterhoods as well as provide them with methodological and other kinds of assistance, a network organisation Union of Charitable Sisterhoods of Belarus was created,[100] chaired by Alena Ziankevich. This organisation has a professional team of staffers and experience of inter-denominational cooperation; it undertakes analysis and monitoring of social activities, organises campaigns, project activities, including the ones that are financed by church and inter-church foreign organisations and UNFPA, and cooperates with state institutions and organisations.

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[98] Warning was issued to the head of the informal Orthodox brotherhood in Homel, Siarhei Nestsiarovich, in 2007. The brotherhood consists of believers of the registered religious organisation Belarusian Orthodox Church // http://churchby.info/rus/134/.

[99] More details: Vasilevich N. *Satsyyalnaya rabota tserkvau* // *Social work performed by churches* // Assambleya. Chasopis hramadskikh aktyvistau. 2009. No 1. Pp. 13–16; Vasilevich N., Kutuzova N. *Blagotvoritel'naya i sotsial'naya deyatel'nost' religioznykh organizatsii v Belarusi* // *Charitable and social activities of religious organisations in Belarus* // Kutuzova N., Karaseva S., Vasilevich N. i dr. *Religious organisations in the public space*..., pp. 101–116.

[100] Webpage of the Union of Sisterhoods in Belarus // http://sestra.by.

In the Catholic Church, the traditional organisation of diaconal work is the Caritas international network that unites more than 120 independent national units worldwide. Departments of Caritas are present at the Conference of Catholic Bishops and in each episcopate of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Caritas's principles, national organisations from more developed countries give donor support to poorer countries. Belarusian Caritas organises summer camps for children in Belarus and abroad, provides humanitarian, material and technical support to physical persons and social organisations, assists in integration of people with disabilities (Betel Centre in Viciebsk), organises social workshops, hairdresser salons for people with low income; runs the social school of preparation of handicapped people for social activities.

There are also special women's orders in Belarus (such as the Mother Teresa order) that are Catholic analogues of charitable sisters. These organisations cooperate with social welfare organs in Belarus.

Protestant churches have a network of rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, such as the religious mission of the United Church of Evangelical Christians Charitable Religious Mission "Return"[101] that has branches in several Belarusian cities; Public Association "Life" founded by believers of the Religious association of Full Gospel Christians with the rehabilitation centre in Piatryshki village in Minsk region; International Public Association "TOS-Weissrussland" in Astroŭčycy village in Svietlahorsk region and others.

Church Youth organisations, youth brotherhoods engage in volunteer social activities rather irregularly. They visit orphanages, assist elderly people, people with disabilities, large families, in their household duties. The most systematic social activity is performed by the John the Evangelist Brotherhood,[102] St. Nicholas's Greek Catholic Christian Volunteer Movement,[103] Protestant Christian Labour Teams[104] as well as the religious mission of Full Gospel Christians Association "Youth With a Mission".

In 2011–12, the discussion on the draft Law on Assisted Reproductive Technologies in Belarus (signed on 7 January 2012)[105] and the discussion on the amendments to the Law On Healthcare[106] inspired the pro-life movement in Belarus. The main criticism from the churches, concerned articles that allowed in vitro, germinated cell donating, surrogate motherhood and experiments with embryos. The Orthodox Church, officially, harshly criticised those bills. According to the press secretary of the Minsk Diocese, the

[101] Webpage of Charitable Mission "Return" // http://tcb.by/.

[102] Webpage of John the Evangelist Brotherhood // http://bratstvo.by/.

[103] Webpage of St. Nicholas's Christian Volunteer Movement // http://valancer.by/about/.

[104] Webpage of Protestant Christian Labour Teams // http://xto.by.

[105] Law On Assisted Reproductive Technologies No 343-3 dated 7 January 2012 http://etalonline.by/?type=text&regnum=H11200341#load_text_none_1_.

[106] Law on Healthcare No 2435-XII dated 17 June 1993 http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=v19302435&p2={NRPA}.

bill on Assisted Reproductive Technologies was "in sharp contradiction with the point of view and teachings of the Orthodox church."[107] The bill underwent moral and ethical expertise;[108] the Orthodox pro-life community filed appeals to the state institutions and, as a result, some cosmetic changes to the law were made.[109]

In 2012, the Belarusian Orthodox Church joined consultations on the amendments to the Law on Healthcare. It was inspired to do so both by the legislative process and by the campaign of the Belarusian Christian Democracy organising committee "For Family Values", coordinated by Volha Kavalkova. BChD organising committee, on the one hand, appeals to believers and tries to articulate church values; but on the other, since it is independent of the Church leadership, becomes a competitor to churches on their thematic field, thus stimulating church leaders to support more neutral initiatives.

Until mid-2014, the largest organisation in this sphere that united several smaller initiatives was the Pro-Life Belarus Movement.[110] The Movement translated and published online articles dedicated to pro-life themes, organised conferences, filed petitions, lobbied the officials and members of the parliament measures against destruction of the traditional family via abortions, reproductive technologies, juvenile justice, LGBT-lobby, gender equality programmes and programmes preventing domestic violence. Pro-Life Belarus distanced itself from the BChD organising committee.[111] After the key leader of the Movement Tatsiana Tarasevich died, the activities of the Movement dropped; other pro-life initiatives took over some of its projects, including the ones in association with parishes: Centre for Defence of Family and Motherhood "Mother",[112] Youth Team Eleysan[113] and others.

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[107] Press-secretary of the Minsk Diocese, archpriest Sergiy Lepin: "National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus signed the law that contradicts Christian values " // http://churchby.info/bel/news/2011/05/01-2/.

[108] Religious and ethical expertise of the draft Law of the Republic of Belarus On Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Guarantees of their Application for Citizens // http://www.church.by/resource/Dir0301/Dir0302/2011/Page3440.html.

[109] Suggestions of the Belarusian Orthodox Church related to the public consultation on the draft Law of the Republic of Belarus On Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Guarantees of their Application for Citizens // http://churchby.info/rus/756/.

[110] Webpage of Pro-Life Belarus campaign // http://pro-life.by.

[111] Pro-Life Belarus Movements's official statement // http://www.pro-life.by/life-protection/ofitsial-noe-zayavlenie-dvizheniya-prolajf-belarus/; See also: Vasilevich N. *Tserkvy u Belarusi: Staryya prablemy i novyya lidary* // *Churches in Belarus: old problems and new leaders* // Belarusian Yearbook 2013. Analysis of the situation in the major segments of the Belarusian state and society in 2013 // Pod red. Pan'kovskogo A., Kostyugovoi V. *Nashe mnenie*, ASPE, Minsk, 2014. Pp. 188–198.; "Ban Abortions in Belarus": campaign. Pro-Life Belarus. // http://www.pro-life.by/life-protection/kampaniya-za-zapret-abortov-v-belarusi-podpishis/.

[112] Webpage of the Centre for Defence of Family and Motherhood "Mother" // http://matylia.by/.

[113] Webpage of Volunteer Youth Team Eleysan // http://www.sobor.by/volonterskij_otriad_eleison.htm.

The initiators of the anti-abortion campaign achieved substantial results. Firstly, lawmakers included into Article 27 of the Law On Healthcare,[114] wording that allowed the doctor to refuse an abortion if some conditions would be met. Secondly, the Health Ministry narrowed the list of medical indications for abortion.[115] Thirdly, the government introduced cosmetic changes into the document regulating the abortion procedures and deleted a significant amount of so-called "social" abortion indications.[116]

Mahilou local charity fund "Open Hearts"[117] is one of the major pro-life Catholic organisations in Belarus. It is chaired by Władysław Wołochowicz. In addition to anti-abortion activities (including their participation in the campaign "Ban Abortion in Belarus"), this organisation conducts seminars on struggling with infertility for spouses. One of the most notable pro-life initiatives is the Inter-Church Protestant "Creative Laboratory". Led by Dzmitry Zialenski, this laboratory organises on Children's Day every year, several cultural events: concerts, contests of childrens' drawings, etc. Since 2010, it stages the musical "My Heart is Beating".

Religious organisations and active believers have reached a certain consensus on basic pro-life values. However, organisations divide into pro-governmental (that often use anti-Western rhetoric, criticise UNFPA and other international organisation and appeal to the state as the chief arbiter[118]) and oppositional (more critical towards the government and its policies).

The Belarusian Orthodox Church never hid its pro-Russian position. In the late 2000s, the pro-Russian discourse had developed into the intellectual and political Western Rus' project[119] which opposes Belarusian nationalism and its interpretations of Belarusian history. Orthodox intellectuals and priests play a significant role in the promotion of this concept via teaching it at the BOC's educational institutions, presenting at scientific conferences and publishing research and other publications on the history of Belarus. In this way, they influence the formation of the identity of broad circles of Orthodox priests and believers.

Another way of conducting pro-Russian activities is an endorsement of Cossack organisations that often use Orthodox rhetoric and work in the "military and patriotic" sphere. Although Cossack organisations of pro-Orthodox profile have existed in Belarus

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114 Law of the Republic of Belarus On Healthcare...

115 Resolution of the Ministry of Health No 88 dated 10 December 2014.

116 Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 23 dated 11 January 2013.

117 Weboage of "Open Hearts" Charitable Foundation // http://www.prolife-belarus.org/.

118 Category "Threats" on the webpage of the Spiritual and Enlightening Movement "Family, Unity, Motherland" // http://edinenie.by/category/negativ-ugrozyi-institutu-semi-i-demograficheskoy-bezopasnosti-belarusi The following threats are mentioned: abortions, postmodernism, sexual education, gender ideology, counteraction to "domestic violence", juvenile justice, "childfree" etc.

119 Webpage of Western Rus'project // http://zapadrus.su.

since the early 1990s, their cooperation with the BOC intensified in 2011 when the Church created the Synodal department on interaction with Cossacks.[120] Cossacks organise events in Church parishes; their activities are regularly covered in the Church's mass media. They attempt to indoctrinate youth with their ideology via the creation of satellite organisations, cooperation with martial arts clubs and state educational establishments. They also organise military training.[121]

The Nationally oriented wing of the Belarusian Orthodox Church is represented by several organisations. The Brotherhood, in honour of Vilnia martyrs Anthony, John and Eustaphy of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, supports Belarusian national values in the most systematic and traditional way, i.e. avoiding politicisation and supporting Belarusian traditions in their popular, not political dimension.[122] Founded in 1992 in the St. Peter and Paul's Cathedral in Minsk, it invites the Belarusian intellectual elite to participate in social and church projects, liaises with the Belarusian diaspora, including NGOs in the Podlasie region in Poland, coordinates the research on the Belarusian Orthodox culture and history of Orthodox Church in Belarus, promotes worship in the Belarusian language etc. The Brotherhood is de facto the only official organisation inside the BOC that systematically undertakes such activities.

Another nationally oriented community of the BOC believers is Kanstancin Astrožski's Brotherhood. Founded in the early 2000s on the basis of the Vilnia martyrs Brotherhood, it had among its members politically active Orthodox believers from various political parties and non-governmental organisations. Since the very beginning, the Brotherhood was independent of the Belarusian Orthodox Church and organised catechesis for civic activists. Since the mid-2000s, its activists participate within the organising committee of the Belarusian Christian Democracy. Pro-Belarusian groups exist in other parishes and organisations, as well.

Conclusions

Churches and religious organisations in Belarus are underdeveloped as civil society actors. This can be explained by several factors.

Firstly, the low level of Belarusian society's religiousness, which causes the insignificant relations between religious organisations and the population, in general, gives little possibilities to influence the population's values, behaviour and level of solidarity. Denominational communities with a higher level of religiousness are minority churches,

[120] Sobolvevskaya I.A *Cossack without Faith is not a real Cossac*k. Interview with Georgi Arbuzov. Official webpage of the BOC // http://church.by/news/kazak-bez-very-ne-kazak.

[121] See more on this issue at the webpage of the Cossack movement http://kazak.by.

[122] Webpage of the Brotherhood in honour of Vilnia martyrs Anthony, John and Eustaphy // http://sppsobor.by/bractva/vilna.

i.e. more isolated and limited in their possibilities to influence public and social processes. Protestant communities that are focused on closer interaction and social activities in several cases (Young Front, Belarusian Christian Democracy) have caused an intensive but not a sustainable trend of closer relations between Christian activists and the political opposition.

Secondly, since the middle of the 2000s, a state policy of regulation of activities of religious organisations has become increasingly repressive. The brief period of greater religious freedom was not enough for the institutionalisation of religious revival and creation of a sustainable, independent of political power, infrastructure that could provide organisational and ideological autonomy for religious organisations.

Thirdly, church structures, especially in majority churches, had an imbalanced development with the domination of centralised corporate and bureaucratic apparatus. Influence centres are not equally distributed at different levels of church communities; they are concentrated on the management level. On the one hand, this helped to preserve the mechanical corporate solidarity of grass-root initiatives, but on the other, determined the orientation of religious organisations in social processes not on the network of autonomous structures of civil society but on the institutes of power. As a result, the subjectness of church communities is under-developed and lacks feedback. This, in turn, influences the cooperation between the churches and the state, which is often hypocritical, and causes a gap between churches' leaders and common believers.

Nevertheless, despite the underdevelopment of the religious sector of civil society and unfavourable legal basis for its activities, combined with lack of organisational and human resources and narrow focus of activities, voluntary grass-root religious organisations possess motivation and potential for joint participation in civil processes. They do it independently of church corporations, state institutions or civil society organisations.

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Tatsiana Chulitskaya

Social organisations in Belarus: between the state and society

Introduction

Since 2006, the size of the social welfare state in Belarus has been on the decrease under the influence of various factors, the growth of external debt amongst them.[1] The current financial and economic conditions put a question mark on the possibility of continueing the "generous" Soviet-type social policy that was common in the first ten years of Lukashenka's term in the office of president. At the same time, the existing internal situation in the country, characterised in the first place by the increasing share of an aging population, demands some changes, in particular an increase in the number and quality of social services, which the state is no longer able to deliver in the previous volumes.

This factor makes very relevant the inclusion of non-state entities into the sphere of social services and the transfer of a part of social responsibilities. One way to do it, as Belarusian authorities see it, is to bring in private businesses that should take on their shoulders part of the social role. At the level of rhetoric by the head of state (for example, during the State of the Nation address to the people and the National Assembly), one could hear the statements regarding social responsibilities of businesses. The government also took some measures to ensure, through various means, that private companies carry out additional social functions.[2]

Another way is to draw the third sector into the social sphere. In democratic countries, *civil society organisations* (CSOs) are routinely recognised as public policy agents, which perform an important social and humanitarian function. They are believed to accumulate *public concern* over significant social problems, to run debates and to define political rhetoric. They also identify *who* will (the choice of agents) and *how to* (the selection of

[1] According to the estimates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), two financial crises (2008–2009 and 2011) led to a twofold growth of external debt up to 61.1% percent of GDP and an even greater financial dependence from Russia.

[2] For example, the president's edict No 40 dated 16.01.2009 obliging self-employed entrepreneurs to make payments to the Social Security Fund came into force on 1.01.2014.

tools) implement a chosen policy. (Bryce H.J. *Players in the Public Policy Process*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Pp. 1)

As of writing, CSOs in Belarus are yet to become fully-fledged actors in public policy. Nevertheless, some changes in the field of social policy are taking place. Under the state's social contracting mechanism, effective from 2014, non-governmental organisations can compete for public budget money and win projects to render social services. Besides, in some cases, state institutions – particularly at local level – cooperate with the CSOs, which work with various categories of the socially vulnerable population. However, the latter type of interaction is rather sporadic; it definitely cannot be described as a steady trend. Despite the availability of a developed system of social services, the question of interaction by its main actor – the state – with other entities remains open.

The Belarusian state is simultaneously the decision-making entity in the social sphere and the main implementer. The state (represented by various agencies and institutions) remains the main subject of social services. At the same time, although both theoretical and practical studies have recognised an enormous potential possessed by non-governmental organisations, CSOs rarely become a partner in social policy in practice.

Hypothesis, goal and methodology

This article focuses on the problem of interaction between social CSOs and the state. It also includes a comprehensive and chronological presentation of this type of organisation. The hypothesis is based on the following assumption: Belarusian social CSOs have a real potential both in terms of providing social services and participating in social policy. However, due to numerous formal obstacles (common also for other types of CSOs), their internal problems and special relationship with the state, this potential is not fully realised. Their involvement is limited mainly to the phase of implementation and policy monitoring as well as actual work with their target groups.

Social CSOs have very limited possibilities for the promotion of their initiatives and the interests of the groups they provide their services to. Meanwhile, just like in the Soviet times, the *state* and *state institutions*[3] play the leading role in rendering social services.

Therefore, the *goal* of this article is to analyse the situation, in which social CSOs used to operate and are currently working, as well as some structural and functional characteristics of their existence. For that purpose, the article is divided into several parts. The *first* part deals with the problems of defining the notion of "social organisation" and

[3] Based on the previously conducted research, it can be argued that Territorial Social Service Centres (TSSC) are currently the primary and dominant type of entities, which provide social services to the population. The territorial centres are the largest type of social service organisations in terms of quantity (148 TSSCs with various structural units). They are funded from the state budget. At the same time, the volume of their services and the number of target groups they can serve are quite limited.

offers several justifications for the classification of social CSOs and identification of their quantity. The *second* part offers a brief overview of the timeline – how these organisations emerged and developed beginning from 1991. The *third* part looks into the contemporary condition and structural and functional features of social CSOs. The *fourth* part analyses their interaction with the state and participation in public policy.

The main *methods,* utilised to collect and analyse the data used in this article, include: descriptive analysis, secondary data analysis, semi-structured interviews, and the questionnaire survey data gathered during the SYMPA/BIPART research project titled "Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus"[4] from May until July 2014.

The problem of defining the term "social organisation", classification and quantity in Belarus

The term "social CSO" is hard to define. If based on the formal approach, this definition can apply to all organisations, which work to assist socially vulnerable groups, or the organisations which work in the social service sphere. However, the use of the second criteria seems to be rather problematic because the term *"social services"* in Belarus has a broad interpretation and is defined as "activities with the purpose of organising and rendering social services, helping people activate their own efforts to prevent or overcome a difficult life experience and/or adapt to it (Article 1 of the Law on Social Services)."

Also another problematic and too broadly used term, used as a criterion to include a person into the sphere covered by social services – is *"a difficult life situation."* It is defined as "circumstances (or a set of circumstances), which objectively disrupt the normal life of a citizen, the consequences of which he or she is unable to overcome with his/her own means and available possibilities (Article 1 of the Law on Social Services)."

As one can see from the definitions, when interpreted literally, both the first and second terms allow virtually any citizen of Belarus to qualify as a beneficiary of social services.

However, this literal interpretation of the Belarusian law pushes some social groups outside of the social service sphere. For example, Article 28 of the Law on Social Services sets out a limited list of target groups.[5] In particular, it excludes people with addiction,

[4] *Analysis of the social service sector in the Republic of Belarus* (Kavalkin and others) is available at http://oeec.by/story/analiz-sektora-socialnogo-obsluzhivaniia-naseleniia-respubliki-belarus (checked on 27.03.2015).

[5] Under the law, a difficult life situation can be proved by the following features: low income; orphanhood; the lack of a place of residence; unemployment; disability; inability of a person to take care of her/himself and the loss of motor activity; poor family situation; conflicts; domestic violence; the lack of employable relatives who are legally obliged to support such a person; the loss of social ties during imprisonment in the correctional facilities of the Interior Ministry; simultaneous birth

psychiatric disorders, and those who suffer from socially conditioned diseases (alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.) or those who potentially get into the risk groups (e.g. homosexual men, etc.). Rights defenders describe it as a restriction of human rights. They note that the law restricts access to social assistance and education by people whose disability was the result of illegal actions, alcoholic and narcotic intoxication or self-harm. (Equal Rights Trust in partnership with the Belarusian Helsinki Committee). Half an Hour to Spring: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Belarus // ERT Country Report Series: 3. London, November 2013. P. 150.

Therefore, when defining the so-called "social organisations" it makes sense to apply not the formal but the *functional approach*. The latter embraces all organisations with the aim of rendering social services to various social groups as well as people who, on their own and without additional assistance, are unable to secure the decent livelihood and the function in society they deserve.

At the same time, such a broad interpretation creates additional problems for defining the specific cohort of social CSOs in Belarus. Firstly, as of today, there is no list of the registered organisations of this kind available on the website of the Ministry of Justice or any other information platforms of the institutions responsible for registration. The existing, general list of public associations at the Ministry of Justice is, in the view of experts, incomplete and outdated. (Kavalkin and others, Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus // OEEC, SYMPA/BIPART, 2014. P. 35 http://oeec.by/story/analiz-sektora-socialnogo-obsluzhivaniia-naseleniia-respubliki-belarus).

The Social Belarus database[6], created by the Social Information Bureau at the Belarusian Association of Social Workers (BASW) can be used as an alternative to the analysis of social CSOs. Although not without defects[7], it is quite sufficient for the classification of social organisations by target group (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of social CSOs according to the Social Belarus database

No	Target group	Organisation (examples)	Remarks
	Refugees and migrants	Afghan Community, International Charitable Non-Governmental Organisation for Afghan Refugees	

of three or more people; presence in the family of a child with special physical and mental needs, including a child with disability; death of a close relative or a family member; damage caused by fire or other natural disasters, the affects of which a person is unable to overcome autonomously.

[6] Social Belarus database (in Russian) http://ru.belbsi.by/rights/social_belarus/organizations/.

[7] See "Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus for more details about the problems of classification and identification of social CSOs and the Social Belarus database (pp. 35–36).

No	Target group	Organisation (examples)	Remarks
	Homeless	Christian Mission Serving Prisoners "Sophia"	One of the least represented categories in the social services sector. A possible explanation for this situation can be that the state treats the homeless as potential criminals who are subject to the Interior Ministry's area of responsibility.
	Jobless	League of Youth's Voluntary Labour, Belarusian Youth Association "New Faces"	In the light of the particular situation with the registration of unemployed people in the official statistics in Belarus, organisations in this group mainly focus on young people (helping get a job without prior work experience)
	Former concentration camp prisoners and repressed	Belarusian Public Association of Veterans	National-level and regional-level organisations, some of them connected with the Belarusian Public Association of Veterans. The number of organisations in this category is quite big. It is most likely because the practice and the focus on assisting WWII participants has remained since the Soviet times.
	HIV-positive	Belarusian Public Association "Positive Movement", National Youth Public Association "Sustrecha" (Rendez-Vous)	
	Former military personnel	Afghan War Veterans Association, Belarusian Public Association of Soldiers' Mothers	This group follows the Soviet tradition to preserve numerous organisations, which unite veterans of various wars, army branches as well as the soldiers' mothers.
	Children under difficult circumstances/ children-at-risk	SOS - Children's Village Belarusian Fund, Belarusian Children Fund, Future for Children – Belarusian Charitable Association, International NGO "Ponimanie" (Understanding), "We are for Children" Belarusian Foundation for Supporting Children and Teenagers, Mothers against Drugs	One of the most numerous of categories
	Children with disabilities	Belarusian Association of Assistance to Children and Young People with Disabilities, Belarusian Children's Hospice, "Children of Chernobyl" Belarusian Committee	

No	Target group	Organisation (examples)	Remarks
	People with various diseases	Belarusian Association of Haemophilia Patients, Multiple Sclerosis Patients Association of the Belarusian Society of Disabled People	Sports organisations for people with disabilities belong to this category, too: Belarusian Physical Training and Sports Federation for Disabled People and Belarusian Movement of Medical Personnel (uniting those who work in state-run healthcare institutions)
	Rape victims	Gender Perspectives International Public Association	Various organisations, including those supported by the state and enjoying the preferences of the regime (Belarusian Women's Union)
	Convicted and released prisoners	Mercy – Non-Governmental Charitable Organisation, Christian Service to Moral Revival of Convicts	It unites the organisations, which are the primary part of the database compiled by the Centre for Social Rehabilitation of Former Convicts
	People with addictions	Belarusian Psychiatric Association of Registered Nurses, Belarusian Youth Social Association "Different-Equal", Belarusian Public Association "Positive Movement", Charitable religious mission "Return" (Anonymous Alcoholics)	This group also includes professional, youth, charitable and religious associations.
	People with disabilities	Belarusian Society of Disabled People, Belarusian Society of People with Impaired Vision, Belarusian Deaf Peoples' Society, Belarusian Association of Disabled People in Wheelchairs, Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities	This category aggregates about 100 actors, including the organisations which have remained since the Soviet times.
	People with psychiatric disabilities	Belarusian Association of Psychotherapists, Belarusian Psychiatric Association	It is one of the least represented categories.
	People with low income	"Mercy" Kobryn Town Charitable Society, "Byarestse" Charitable Society, Mogilev City Society of Social Support and Universal Dialogue	These organisations are mainly regional, including various religious organisations.
	Victims of the Chernobyl disaster and catastrophe victims	Disabled of Chernobyl, "EcoHome" Non-Governmental Organisation	This category also includes organisations with a low public profile. For example, the Belarusian Committee of High-Risk Detachment Veterans, the Belarusian branch of International Public Foundation for Liquidation of the Consequences of Accidents and Emergencies.

No	Target group	Organisation (examples)	Remarks
	Families with many children	Belarusian Large Family Parents Association	This association has many regional units. This category also includes various regional and local-level organisations of large families.
	Single-parent families, single parents	Yes to Life - International Charitable Non-Governmental Organisation, Inter-confessional Mission "Social Christian Service"	There are few organisations in this category, which partially overlaps the Families with Many Children group as well as with several international charitable organisations

Source: Kavalkin and others. *Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus*, pp. 36–43.

Disaggregation of third-sector organisations by the *type of activity* (e.g. sports, youth, ecological, charitable organisations, etc.) is yet another classification used by the Justice Ministry officials. However, this approach also appears to be problematic when defining social CSOs, because in this case the organisations, which deal with social problems or render social services, are disaggregated by different categories (charitable, women's youth, religious organisations, etc). In this way, this approach does not allow defining them within one group.

It is interesting how members of *social organisations* define themselves when they use the term 'social organisation' to describe their activities. According to one of the existing classifications of the third sector, such types of organisation, creates an alternative to the state-run social services, accumulating and redistributing resources for the implementation of socially significant projects. (Kuzmiankova T. *Third sector in Belarus: Problems of Formation and Development*. Mozyr: Bely Vieter Publishing House, 2004. p. 27).

It is hard to say without additional analysis why this particular category gained popularity with CSO members. One can admit that it is related to the separation of those who deal with social problems of certain target groups from those groups (for example, separation of members of the organisations, which work against AIDS, from those who suffer from HIV/AIDS). It means that members of an organisation position themselves as those who provide services to socially vulnerable groups and people.

As may be seen, there are certain problems with defining the notion of a social/socially-oriented CSO without using such a formal criterion. At the same time, it is obvious that defining these organisations by target groups only, has flaws. Therefore, using the functional approach, or defining organisations by goals and practical work, seems to be the most reasonable option.

A brief review of the formation of social organisations after gaining independence

During the first years of Belarus' independence, when the former system of social benefits distribution was breaking up, along with the economic crisis, "restoring social justice became one of the most popular ideas in the mass post-Soviet consciousness." (*Belarus. Reform Scenarios*. Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2004. P. 205).

This motive was present in the rhetoric of Aliaksandr Lukashenka, who – apart from the fight against corruption – exploited, for political purposes, the economically-rooted population's nostalgia about 'stability'. The latter was linked with the restoration of the Soviet (or similar to the Soviet) model of the state-controlled distribution of resources. At the same time, "transition from the idea of social justice to the concept of social solidarity" was never realised in the country. (*Belarus. Reform Scenarios*. Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2004. P. 205).

Beginnig in the mid-1990s, this idea was promoted by some independent experts as an alternative to the neo-Soviet social policy model.

Nevertheless, political, economic and social changes in the country required an additional effort to deal with the problems arising. It was obvious that in the 1990s and 2000s the Belarusian state was incapable of resolving both the existing social issues (e.g. assisting disabled persons or families with many children) and new problems (poverty, new vulnerable groups) autonomously or with the help from the Soviet-type pseudo-social organisations (trade unions, various associations of disabled persons, veterans' organisations etc). Apart from the social pains and hardships of the transitional period common for all post-Soviet states (decline in living standards, growth in inequality, unemployment, etc.), Belarus was facing the challenge of tackling the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

In conditions of political changes and economic difficulties in the 1990s–2000s, new players began to emerge alongside the governmental and traditional Soviet-time entities in the social services sphere – international organisations (United National Development Programme, in the first place) and national socially-oriented CSOs. The former's area of work primarily included the fight against poverty, prevention of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, promotion of gender equality, and environmental issues. National socially-oriented CSOs focused on charitable work and the provision of social services to various social groups.

To analyse the chronology of the development and formation of Belarusian NGOs, one can refer to the periodization used by some Belarusian researchers (Chavusau, Rouda[8]) and follow them in talking about the following periods:

[8] Uladzimir Rouda singles out two more periods of NGOs in Belarus: 1960s–1980s – creation of preconditions for the development of organisations, the emergence of informal youth movements; and 1985–1991 – the emergence of informal organisations that promoted culture.

Late 1980s – mid-1990s. Legalisation of informal movements, the emergence of various new NGOs, the beginning of their *de-politicisation* and *specialisation* by different types of activities (including the social work done by, for example, the Children of Chernobyl Foundation)

Middle-late 1990s. A further *quantitative growth* of organisations (from 24 registered in 1990s up to 2191 in 1998).[9] (Chavusau Yu. *Civil society: long-standing traditions, lack of strategy* // Henrich Boll Stiftung, Warsaw, 2009. http://pl.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/hramadz_supolnasc_by.pdf.)

In parallel, a new wave of *politicisation* was taking place, i.e. the emergence of organisations, which focused their work on the achievement of political goals, such as democratisation (for example, the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres). The same period also saw a spike in the activities of *unregistered associations*.

In the same period there occurred a further *specialisation* of organisations, which dissociated themselves from political agendas and prioritised the defence of the interests of their target groups.

The period from the late 1990s to 2003 saw the increased *suppression* of NGOs by the state. The number of NGOs dropped due to the loss of legal status (down to 1537 organisations after re-registration in 1999) (Chernov V. *Third sector in Belarus: evolution, current status and development prospects*. Wider Europe Review. Volume 4. No 4 (14). Autumn 2007. http://review.w-europe.org/14/2.html).

2003–2009: *increasing pressure* on NGOs by the state: the reduction of possibilities for foreign and internal funding, criminal responsibility for acting on behalf of unregistered organisations, difficulties with registration, etc. In parallel, the state created conducive conditions for the formation of the so-called government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs),[10] which aimed to substitute for the civil society organisations that had emerged outside of the state's controls.

The *current period* can be characterised by the following features: continued pressure on NGOs via legal mechanisms, a small number of new organisations,[11] a further division of the third sector between "politicised" and "de-politicised" organisations, continued operation of pseudo non-governmental organisations like the Belarusian Republic

[9] Despite the re-registration in 1995.

[10] The so-called GONGOs appeared in Belarus in 2003. Their work is regulated by a separate piece of legislation.

[11] According to the data of the Assembly of NGOs, 70 new organisations were registered in 2013, 111 in 2012, 118 in 2011, 134 in 2010, and 94 in 2009. See: *Belarus Civil Society Organizations in Cross-Sectoral Dialoque. Summary of Legal Environment Research and Expert Survey*. Minsk: The Assembly of pro-democratic non-governmental organizations of Belarus (Assembly of NGOs), International educational non-governmental organization ACT (ACT), Belarusian Analytical Workroom (BAW). 2014. P. 25.

Youth Union, the Belarusian Union of Women, etc. The question of periodization and consideration of the current conditions of the third sector in Belarus requires a deeper analysis than this article, which presents only general tendencies.

Concerning the processes of creation and evolution of Belarusian socially-oriented organisations, they are related to general periodization common for the whole third sector. It is also necessary to note that these organisations face the same totality of structural limitations in their work, just like the organisations of other types of activity.

At the same time, the number of social organisations, as a percentage of the total quantity of all organisations, was increasing, in fact. Beginning from late 2000s, "social services" were defined as the second most popular area of operation for NGOs. In 2011, out of 2325 organisations registered in Belarus over 600 focused on social protection and rehabilitation (nearly 200 organisations for disabled persons and over 400 charitable organisations can be added to them).[12] In other words, organisations, which dealt with the problems of socially vulnerable groups, accounted for almost half of the total number of registered organisations. Only one group of social CSOs, linked to Chernobyl accident-related issues, was significantly reduced during re-registration. (Kuzmiankova T. *Third sector in Belarus: Problems of Formation and Development*. Mozyr: Bely Vieter Publishing House, 2004. P. 14).

Just like in other spheres of social activity, many of the socially-oriented organisations, which are well known today, were created during the *first years of independence* (early – mid-1990s), including:

- Those *aimed at working with children in difficult social or life situations:* Belarusian Children's Fund (1988), Belarus – SOS Children's Villages (1991), Belarusian Children's Hospice (1994), Children in Need (1990);
- Various *religious and minorities organisations*, which assumed social obligations. For example, Caritas Belarus – religious mission and charitable Catholic society (1990), Jewish Charitable Fund "Hesed-Rahamim" (began operation in 1989, registered in 1994);
- *specialised professional organisations* – Belarusian Association of Social Workers[13] (1996).

Also in this period of time, numerous organisations were registered and became very active.

Many of them were founded with the objective of providing assistance to *victims of Chernobyl* (for example, Disabled People of Chernobyl – 1991), *charitable* (Hope-Express – 1993, Tree of Life – 1998), *people with disability* (Republic Association of Disabled People

[12] For more details, see article *What do Belarusian public associations do?* // Yekaterina Siniuk, 28.10.2011 http://news.tut.by/society/256321.html.

[13] Prior to re-registration in 1999 – Belarusian Union of Social Pedagogs and Social Workers.

in Wheelchairs – 1997, Belarusian Association of Assistance to Children and Young People with Disabilities – 1994). Besides this, organisations were created in order to adapt those who lost their social positions after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in particular, former servicemen (Belarusian Foundation for Social Support of Ex-Servicemen – 1991).

A certain number of socially-oriented organisations failed to undergo re-registration in 1991. However, given the share of this kind of organisations in the future as well as because of the state's need for supplementary entities to work with socially vulnerable groups, one can admit that they did not suffer significant losses in comparison with others (youth, educational, human rights organisations, etc.). After 1999, more organisations important for the social sphere, were registered. They worked with various groups and covered a range of areas: *work with children who suffered violence* (International NGO "Ponimanie" (Understanding) 2000); *charities* (NGO World without Frontiers 2000); fight against violence (Charitable Organisation "Radzislava" 2002); *assistance to children and people with disabilities* (Republican Association of Parents of Children with Impaired Vision – 2002[14]); *work with elderly people* (International NGO "Mutual Understanding" – 2007).

The registration of the *Association "Belarusian AIDS Network"*, uniting 17 prominent NGOs working in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, in 2007 stands out as a "special event". It was an unusual case for the Belarusian third sector, where the majority of organisations dealing with similar issues can interact with each other but, as a rule, prefer not to enter into associations.

Although several more new socially-oriented SCOs were registered after 2008, most of the established and well-known organisations had emerged before that.

Summing up, one can say that social organisations passed through the same stages in their development as other third-sector entities. These include the heydays of the early 1990s and their transformation into what they appear to be now, towards the end of 2000s. Probably, they felt less pressure from the state – yet, one cannot say they were under no pressure at all.

Current status and structural and functional characteristics of socially-oriented organisations

To analyse the current state of Belarusian socially-oriented organisations, it is important to refer to the point about *de-politicisation* of their activities, which, according to the periodization above, began as early as in mid-1990s. In fact, those organisations work primarily with their target groups without taking part in political initiatives. One

[14] According to some sources, the Republican Association of Parents of Children with Impaired Vision was founded in 1995.

can assume that this position can be explained, in the first place, by the fact that the "Big State" maintains its status as the primary provider of social services with corresponding practices of management and interaction with other entities, which are regarded not as partners but as the entities that must obey state-run social institutions.

The assumption about *deliberate de-politicisation,* is indirectly backed up by the results of the Research into the Belarusian Organised Civil Society's Solidarity Potential. The research report underlines that "more than a third of organised civil society representatives" are similar in their orientation to *de-politicisation*, and in their acceptance of the existing circumstances of the Belarusian situation... This group may be able to manifest solidarity, but not "protest solidarity; it is ready to display solidarity 'yes'. Its sphere is primarily social services and assistance." (Centre for European Transformation (CET), Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS): Research into organised civil society's solidarity potential // http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2014_Solidarity_NGOs_Belarus-EN.pdf, 2014. P. 73).

Social services have become some kind of *compromise zone*, where Belarusian CSOs organisations can operate. This type of activity is recognised as a legitimate (yet a non-partnership) area of work not only for the state but also for other entities. According to research carried out by the Assembly of NGOs in 2014, social services were one of the key activities of Belarusian CSOs. Social services were mentioned by 36.7% of respondents representing both registered and unregistered organisations during a survey in the frame of that research. (Belarus Civil Society Organizations In Cross-Sectoral Dialogue..., p. 38).

One can admit that the number of those organisations could be higher, if we add here philanthropy and charitable organisations (7.3%) (Belarus Civil Society Organizations In Cross-Sectoral Dialogue..., p. 39).

One of the results of this de-politicised, relatively loyal and non-autonomous stance with regard to the existing power in the country, has been an increase in the number of social organisations in the period when other NGOs, not loyal to the state, faced significant difficulties in their operation. According to United Way's data, in the period from 1998 to 2004, the number of organisations primarily dealing with "social protection and rehabilitation" increased from 5.8 up to 22.9% (Kuzmiankova 2004).

Furthermore, social organisations have recently been recognised as the most successful in terms of securing funding locally – something that is totally impossible for other CSO activities in fields such as advocacy or human rights. According to the 2013 CSO Sustainability Index,

Faith-based and social CSOs such as Chance International Children's Charity Foundation, UniHelp International Charity Public Association, and the Belarusian Children's Hospice NGO are the most successful local fundraisers (2013 CSO Sustainability Index – Belarus, USAID. P. 36) http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1863/E&E%202013%20CSOSI%20Final%2010-29-14.pdf.

When looking at the structure of the social CSO field, it is necessary to note that the organisations, which existed during the Soviet times and performed social redistribution functions, have maintained strong positions. Here we are talking about trade unions, in the first place. According to IISEPS data, among all types of public associations Belarusians mostly trust official trade unions (44.3% in 2014; 37.1% in 2013 and 38.1% in 2012) and disability-oriented organisations (41.3% in 2014; 32.1% in 2013 and 33.9% in 2012).

However, this article does not focus on trade unions. They stand rather as a corporate pro-government structure, which, on one hand, re-distributes certain social benefits, and, on the other hand, are designed to absorb protest sentiments among workers. Furthermore, trade unions do not set the objective of directly assisting socially vulnerable groups.

In the context of analysing the social services field, associations of disabled people, youth, women's, veterans and WWII prisoners' organisations that have remained since the Soviet times, appear to be a more interesting object under study. By and large, they can be characterised as "former Soviet corporate structures, the majority of which directly or indirectly are subordinate to the state."[15]

Apart from symbolic positions, the organisations above kept some material resources and assets after the breakup of the USSR: enterprises, cultural institutions, and discount rental rates. On a political level, their representatives are invited to make public manifestations of their loyalty to the authorities (e.g., ahead of presidential elections during All-Belarusian People's Congress meetings, where their representatives take part in making speeches[16]. At the same time, such a public position did not prevent the respondents representing disability-oriented organisations from making relevantly critical assessment of the state policy in this field during an interview carried out in the framework of the research titled "Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus." Their criticism was primarily related to the cuts in funding from the state and insufficient attention by the authorities to the problems of their target groups.

The Belarusian Red Cross Society (Red Cross) can be singled out as a separate entity in the field of socially oriented CSOs. This organisation is often described as the most well-known – recognition that is even formally embedded in legislation. The Red Cross's work is regulated by a separate law[17]. Additional financial benefits simply underline the

[15] At the same time, it is worth noting that in conditions of a changed political environment, these organisations may qualify for another category, which Kazanecki characterises as "post-Soviet public associations, which are gradually transformed into autonomous associations and strive to represent their interests independently." (Kuzmiankova T. *Third sector in Belarus: Problems of Formation and Development*. Mozyr: Bely Vieter Publishing House, 2004. P. 27). Some similar organisations in Lithuania and Poland went through such a transition.

[16] For example, speech by the chair of Belarusian Society of People with Impaired Vision during the IV All-Belarusian People's Congress in 2010 http://ont.by/news/our_news/0063097?page=6432.

[17] Law on Belarusia Red Cross Society dated 24 October 2000 (revised).

special nature of relations between this organisation and the state. For example, the state pays, out of the national budget, membership fees to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (Article 13 of the law). Moreover, the Law (Chapter 4) has a separate provision that deals with the issues of interaction with the state, including the possibility of receiving a social contract. These and other circumstances give grounds to the conclusion that the Red Cross holds an *exclusive* and, to some degree, *dominant* position in the social services field. Special status in this sector is also attributed to the so-called *exclusive social CSOs*, which work with a very specific target group and have no competitors – like, for example, the *Belarusian Children's Hospice*.

Moreover, *faith-based, gender and specialised CSOs* can also be defined as a separate category of organisations, which also provide specific social services. The former are recognised as legitimate entities for cooperation by state agencies, for example: Christian Social Service, Caritas Belarus – religious mission and the charitable Catholic Society, Union of Charity Sisterhoods of Belarusian Orthodox Church, a parish of The Minsk Icon of the Mother of God Church "Joy for All Sad People." Gender organisations, as a rule, also render some specific social services to various target groups. In particular, they provide psychological or other assistance to single parents in situations of domestic violence or helping to resolve other family problems. Among them are such organisations as Gender Perspectives, Mogilev's Women's Centre for Support and Self-education (Mogilev). Concerning professional organisations in the social services field, one can single out the Belarusian Association of Social Workers (BASW), which unites members by profession as well as other people who are involved in providing social services. This organisation is also noteworthy for its informational activities (compilation of databases, a specialised library of social work, etc).

Concerning the composition of *target groups* of socially oriented organisations, they currently work with a wide circle of socially vulnerable population categories. A certain evolution can be noticed compared to the period of the early and mid-1990s, when CSOs began to work with the categories of people, already covered by the organisations that had existed since the Soviet times (for example, people with disabilities, veterans). Moreover, some of the new organisations with the objective of working with these traditional target groups, were founded with the participation of the organisations that existed during the Soviet times. For example, the *Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* was established in 2011 with the involvement of one of the oldest organisations in this field – *Belarusian Society of Disabled People*. At the same time, new organisations emerged and began to work with a variety of target groups.

A 2014 survey revealed the following most popular *types of activity* among social CSOs (Kovalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Services Sector in the Republic of Belarus* // p. 46):

– Social and household services (69.8%);

– Humanitarian assistance (61.1%);
– Informational support (60.3%);
– Socialisation of socially vulnerable groups (60.3%).

If we compare the work of socially oriented CSOs with the activities of state institutions in the social services field, it appears that both provide approximately similar services. At the same time, *advocacy* can be singled out as a particular type of activity for CSOs (29.7%) (Kovalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Services Sector in the Republic of Belarus* // p. 52).

Thus, deliberate *de-politicisation* and positioning outside of the political agenda is one of the key characteristics of social CSOs. In terms of existing entities in this field, one should note the *preservation of pro-corporatist organisations*, which have been there since the Soviet times, and the entity that enjoys special treatment, namely the Red Cross. Special mention can be also made for CSOs, which provide exclusive services, as well as for the organisations, which focus on activities in other fields (gender, religion) but which are also involved in working with socially vulnerable groups.

Interaction between social CSOs and the state

Interaction with the state is the key issue for social organisations. It can be argued that this is the determining factor for their operation and work with target groups. Although it is true for all types of Belarusian CSOs that the effectiveness of their work heavily depends on interaction with or at least no interference from the state, this relationship is crucial for socially oriented organisations.

Numerous organisations demonstrate their cooperation with the state even at the level of their rhetoric. For example, one of the biggest and most outstanding CSOs in the field, Belarusian Children's Hospice, points to cooperation with the Ministry of Healthcare of Belarus when describing its activity (from 2014 Social Forum presentations).

In return, Belarusian authorities *symbolically recognise* the work of (at least some) social organisations as socially important. For example, the website of the Ministry of Justice posted positive descriptions of activities carried out by several social CSOs (*Belarusian Association of Assistance to Children and Young People with Disabilities*, *Belarusian Charitable Association "Hope for the Future"* and others).[18] Similar positive positioning and recognition can be observed at the level of the Humanitarian Activities Department of the Presidential Administration, which published information about the

[18] Section "Work of Publis Association on Ministry of Justice's website" (2013) http://www.minjust.by/ru/site_menu/activities_of_public_associati/deyatel.

awards for some charitable and social organisations.[19] In terms of material benefits, this recognition is manifested through *easing* by the state when it comes to, for example, discount rental rates. The list of organisations entitled to office rental benefits contains many social organisations, including: *Belarusian Children's Hospice, Disabled People of Chernobyl, Children in Need, Belarusian Large Family Parents Association, Association of Disabled People in Wheelchairs*, etc.[20] However, this easing is quite unpredictable. Social organisations can be included or excluded from this list without any explanation whatsoever.

Playing on the field where state is the primary actor,[21] social organisations try to find various forms, models and ways of such interaction with the authorities, even when the latter do not make any specific steps forward. At the same time, international experts regard social CSOs as organisations that have the best chances for cooperation with the government. The USAID report underlines that "CSOs generally have to take the initiative in approaching authorities to establish cooperation. Authorities prefer to cooperate only with trusted partners on non-controversial social issues." (2013 CSO Sustainability Index – Belarus, p. 37).

However, CSO representatives assess the opportunities for their participation in the social services sector as *unequal (with the state)* but tend to characterise this inequality as *"natural"*, because CSOs, by their status, do not qualify for the same position. (Kavalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus...*, p. 81).

Nevertheless, both the authorities and social organisations describe the latter from time to time as *mediators between the state and society*, or as the entities, which can supplement the state in the social sphere when state institutions are too slow or, due to existing limitations, are unable to provide social services to the population. (Kavalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus...*, p. 83).

Requirement by *international donors and programmes* to cooperate with the CSOs is the key external factor that occasionally ensures the presence of CSO in various social (and other) programmes run by the state. At the same time, "the government... continues

[19] Information about the meeting at the Office of the President, where an award ceremony for social and charitable organisations took place, on the official website http://www.pmrb.gov.by/?id=36&news_org_id=90&news_id=928&page=1.

[20] Resolution No 327 of the Council of Minister of the Republic of Belarus dated 30.04.2013 "On approving the list of public organisations (associations) and their organisational structures, foundations, unions of legal persons and/or self-employed entrepreneurs, which are entitled to the decreasing coefficient 0.1 to be applied to the baserates of real estate rentals."

[21] According to the survey results, 70.6% of respondents mentioned the state as the primary provider of social services. At the same time, less than 1.0% of respondents recognised the leading role of CSOs. 25.4% acknowledged that the state and CSOs provided services on a parity basis. (Kavalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus...*, p. 61).

to be highly suspicious and mistrustful towards CSOs." (USAID's 2013 CSO Sustainability Index – *Belarus report*, p. 40).

Concerning the intensity of cooperation between CSOs and state institutions, it is probably higher at the *local* than at the national level. This tendency is common for all Belarusian organisations. CSO representatives note that only some organisations may have an influence on the decision-making of the authorities. At the local level, 46.0% of organisations have "at least some influence". At the level of national executive bodies, this figure is 31.3% and 13.3% at the level of the Parliament and Presidential Administration (*Belarus Civil Society Organizations in Cross-Sectoral Dialogue...*, p. 5–6).

Some representatives of social organisations said they have possibilities for lobbying for changes in legislation at the national level. However, this may be a one-off development rather than a positive trend. (Kavalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus...*, p. 84).

Experts assess cooperation between CSOs and the authorities in the social sphere at the local level (also the development of local communities) quite positively. (2013 CSO Sustainability Index – *Belarus*, p. 37).

At the same time, CSO representatives noted a certain degree of distrust but also some understanding of the importance of the civil society sector by the local authorities. (Kavalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus...*, p. 84).

Concerning the quality and forms of social CSO's presence in the public policy of Belarus and given the specifics of the political cycle and the dominant role of the "Grand State", participation of CSOs is most likely at the stage of *monitoring the social policy or implementation* of various social projects or programs (especially when required by international donors). For example, CSO representatives were invited to take part in monitoring and evaluation of projects in the field of HIV/AIDS. (2013 CSO Sustainability Index – *Belarus*, p. 37).

It is noteworthy that even such a limited participation in the public policy is often assessed by CSO representatives quite positively. For instance, when describing inequality and the policy of Belarusian authorities towards people with disability, human rights defenders note "an important and constructive role of civil society, which performs monitoring and gives recommendations to the authorities about solutions for accessibility problems." (*Half an Hour to Spring: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Belarus...*, pp. 163–164).

However, at a practical level, the organisations' "monitoring data" often remains simply a piece of information, which gets to an officials' desk but has no further dissemination or influence on policy implementation.

State social contract mechanism (SSC) is a separate topic, which requires a deeper and thorough analysis. According to the research results, although the majority of organisations,

in general, assessed it in a positive way, many of them voiced numerous doubts over the mechanisms and practices of its implementation, in particular, (problematic bidding process, requirement to possess 50.0% of own means for the implementation of a state social contract, insufficient awareness of the procedures and many others). The majority of respondents (60.3%) agreed with the statement that SSC is "a good idea but it remains unclear how it will work in practice." (Kavalkin and others: *Analysis of the Social Service Sector in the Republic of Belarus...*, pp. 67, 85–86).

Thus, the relationships between Belarusian social/socially-oriented CSOs and the state can be described as twofold. On one hand, they seek to interact with the state and its institutions because their area of activity remains vertically subordinate to the state. The state maintains its status as the primary provider of social benefits. The state also seems to recognise CSOs as entities, which provide some social services. This recognition occurs both at the symbolic and material levels. On the other hand, social organisations face a number of problems, which are common to other types of CSOs, and have limited opportunities in the advocacy field, taking part in the public policy, rather at the level of implementation and monitoring. These organisations find themselves outside of the political agenda due to their own strategy of escapism and the state's perception of them as loyal implementers of certain social responsibilities.

Conclusions

The situation in the field of social CSOs can be described as both typical and atypical for the third sector in Belarus. The state needs these organisations in situations when, due to some circumstances, it is no longer able to deliver on its expanded social obligations. At the same time, given the specifics of the political regime, the state cannot afford to let the social sphere go out of its vertical control. In return, socially oriented organisations deliberately take a de-politicised stance, which allows them to be present in the field of public and social policy; their role, however, remains largely limited (although these organisations could bring in some positive innovations into legislation). At the same time, as a reward from the state for this position, it is the possibility for CSOs to work with their target groups; it also goes along with some material support and reduced risk levels. In other words, this exchange (de-politicisation for presence in the social sphere) resembles a game with the winner gaining a zero amount when the area of social CSOs technically exists and even develops to some extent. However, these organisations remain hostages of the state as subordinate and dependent entities. (The level of dependency is not the same for all and may vary from organisation to organisation).

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Tatsiana Shchurko

Gender sector and civil society in post-Soviet Belarus

The breakup of the Soviet Union fostered the development of civic activism. What can be conditionally referred to as the Gender Sector represented by women's non-governmental organisations or feminists, LGBT and queer initiatives gradually took shape.

This article aims to retrospectively analyse the activity of the Gender Sector, over the past decades, to track progress in promoting gender-related issues in civil society. It is based on national reports, articles written by experts, as well as the materials published by the organisations and initiatives dealing with gender issues, the conditions of women and the defence of their rights.

In this article, we will attempt answering the following questions: what are the development dynamics of the Gender Sector? What factors and contexts determine the configuration of the "gender equality" discourse in Belarus? What are the viewpoints, thoughts and attitudes of the Gender Sector participants (activists, gender researchers) concerning such notions as *gender equality, women's rights*?

Institutional frame and context

The context of the post-Soviet space is to a large extent predetermined by attitudes and institutions, which were formed during the Soviet period, and have continued to function till today.

The Soviet gender order was characterised on one hand by the declared equality, which recognised every human being regardless of sex as a citizen. On the other hand, the Soviet ideology revived biological determinism, attaching specific physical and psychological qualities to femininity and giving women the status of a special type of citizens. It declared the cultivation of some traditions (the values of maternity, separation of duties in a family) and the destruction of others (economic dependency of a wife from a husband).[1]

[1] Rotkirkh, A.; Tiomkina, A. *Sovetskiye gendernye kontrakty i ikh transformatsiya v sovremennoi Rossii // Soviet gender contracts and their transformations in modern Russia. Into Russian gender order: sociological approach: Collective monograph*. Edited by E. Zdravomyslova, A. Tiomkina. St. Petersburg: European University in St Petersburg Publish House, 2007. P. 169–201.

In post-Soviet Belarus, one can observe the preservation of the same tendencies: while equal rights and opportunities[2] are declared, restrictions and amendments to the possibility to utilize social services[3] are gradually introduced. For instance, on one hand, increased interaction with the international community and ratification of several international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Additional Protocol to CEDAW (2004); Beijing Declaration at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) set out standards, which national legislation should be in line with. On the other hand, conservative traditions in the way the role of a woman is understood along with the formation of the "dual employment" practice predetermined by the Soviet contract of a "working mother" continue to dominate the official politics and rhetoric.[4]

This is demonstrated by official interpretation of the gender equality notion. For instance, Article 18 of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus, defines gender education as education "aimed at forming pupils" views about the role and life purpose of men and women in a modern society'. These perceptions are confined to the promotion of the "traditional" assumption about the destiny of sexes, simultaneously declaring, however, their formal equality.

This approach can be described as "limited emancipation": despite the guarantees of equality and the freedom of choice, promotion of a "traditional family" is declared. The need for respect and protection of women's rights is rhetorically legitimised by the woman's role of the mother as her "main destiny." For example, the National Action Plan on Ensuring Gender Equality in the Republic of Belarus for 2011–2015 notes:[5]

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[2] Articles 22, 32 in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (1994).

[3] Ananyeu Dzmitry, Asanovich Ahnia, Darafeyeva Nastassia, Palevikova Valiantsina, Slavinskaya Volha, Yahorava Hanna. *Analytical report – Participation of women in public and political life*. Minsk: East European School of Political Studies, 2013. http://www.coe.int/t/DEMOCRACY/ELECTORAL-ASSISTANCE/publications/Women-Belarus_bel.pdf.

Solomatina, I. *Systemic gender inequalities in Belarus or women are discriminated by sex* // Office for European Expertise and Communication, 3 December 2011. http://eurocenter.by/studies/sistemnyy-gendernyy-perekos-v-belarusi-ili-kak-proishodit-diskriminaciya-po-priznaku-pola-v.

Shchurko, T. *Regulation of woman's reproductive body: factors, policies, effects* // Nashe Mneniye (Our Opinion), 16 October http://nmnby.eu/news/analytics/5613.html.

Petina, L. *Condition of Gender Policy in Belarus* // Nashe Mneniye (Our Opinion), 29 July 2011. http://nmnby.eu/news/analytics/3236.html.

[4] Chikalova I.R. *Gendernaya sistema (post)sovetskoi Belarusi: vosproizvodstvo i transformatsiya sotsial'nykh rolei v publichnoi i privatnoi sfere* // Rossiiskie i slavyanskie issledovaniya. Vypusk 4, 2009. / Chikalova I.R. *Gender system of the (post) Soviet Belarus: reproduction and transformation of the social roles in the public and private spheres* http://www.rsijournal.net/gendernaya-sistema-postsovetskoj-belarusi-vosproizvodstvo-i-transformaciya-socialnyx-rolej-v-publichnoj-i-privatnoj-sfere/.

[5] Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus Resolution No 1101 dated 16 August 2011.

> *Fostering the achievement of equal representation of men and women at all levels of governance and shaping in the public consciousness the need for social equality between men and women in all spheres of public life.*

However, it also notes the need for:

> *Strengthening the institution of the family and marital relations; promoting the values of marriage and family.*

This is already the 4th National Action Plan, but the rhetoric of its contents remain virtually unchanged. In many ways, it remains exclusively declarative because no separate budget to finance the activity under the plan is envisaged. Since 2000, the recommendation to pass the Law on Gender Equality is present in the Action Plan. However, as of today, this law has yet to be passed.

As a result, the Gender Sector finds itself to be "under-double-pressure": on one hand, it perceives the same problems as civil society, on the whole, is facing in the current social and political situation. On the other hand, the domination of conservative values inside civil society causes marginalization and ghettoization of this sector. Despite the presence of "women's/gender/feminist" movement in Belarus for more than 20 years, many people within civil society regard gender as something artificial and insignificant.

For example, Alena Minchenya and Volha Sasunkevich, researchers from the Center for Gender Studies at the European Humanities University (EHU), note that the majority of pro-democracy movements and initiatives in Belarus have failed to accept feminist ideas:

> *Entrenchment of gender initiatives is rather largely the result of long-time personal work in a party or any other political organisation, by some female activists, than the manifestation of sensitivity to feminist ideas by our political scene. The proof for this thesis can be found in how the pro-democracy majority reacts to the emergence of "others". For example, when LGBT activists, with their symbols, joined the opposition-staged Chernobyl March, the presumably "pro-freedom" activists forcefully seized their flags. One can also refer to the level of debates on the right of women to abortion (suffice it to read the comments under an article which outlines the feminist perception of abortion).In the majority of cases, feminism is ignored due to its secondary nature in comparison with the most important cause – the fight against the regime.*[6]

[6] Minchenya E., Sasunkevich O. *Belorusskii feminizm v postmarksistskoi perspektive* // Prasvet, 2012. / Minchenya E., Sasunkevich O. *Belarusian Feminism in post-Marxist Perspective* // Prasvet, 2012. See the link: http://fem.fm/mir-vokrug/belorusskiy-feminism-v-postmarksistskoy-perspektive.

During the 2010 presidential elections, the deputy chairman of the United Civil Party was the only candidate who, not only mentioned in his manifesto the existing problems related with gender inequality, but also suggested ways of addressing them.

Various actions/factors (state, civil society, international community) legitimise the gender policy model in Belarus, as it is based on the huge gap between the decorative rhetoric and conservative practice – a combination of "emancipation" and "traditional values" concerning the roles of a woman. We will later proceed to study the positions and perceptions of participants – female and male – involved in gender activism in the public sphere.

Gender Sector dynamics

As of today, the Gender Sector is a community represented inter alia by women's NGOs and initiatives, feminist initiatives, LGBT projects and initiatives, thematic media outlets and online platforms.

One can single out several main stages in the formation of the Gender Sector. The first stage covers the period of 1990s and can be conditionally referred to as the "NGO institutionalization of gender-related issues". In 1993, the first national programs on women's rights were developed. For example, on 26 November 1993, the Council of Ministers issued Resolution No 804 titled "On measures to improve the condition of women."

Two tendencies could be observed in the country – the restructuring of Soviet public associations (e.g. the Belarusian Committee of Soviet Women transformed into the Belarusian Women's Council) and the emergence of a new type of "independent" NGOs, which mostly paid attention to the condition of women in labour and political spheres.[7] The number of NGOs dealing with women's issues grew rapidly from just two in 1991 up to 23 in 1999.[8]

[7] *Na puti k demokratii i gendernomu ravenstvu*. Minsk: Zhenskoe nezavisimoe demokraticheskoe dvizhenie, 2009. *On the Way to Democracy and Gender Equality*. Minsk: Women's Independent Democratic Movement, pp. 372–374. *K genderno sbalansirovannomu obshchestvu. Analiticheskii otchet o polozhenii zhenshchin v Respublike Belarus'*. Minsk: Propilei, 2004. Razdel 5. / *On the Way to Gender Balanced Society. Analytical Report on the Condition for Women in the Republic of Belarus*. Minsk: Propilei, 2004. Chapter 5.

[8] *Source of information: Statistical annual reports of the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus in 1998–1999*. Also: *Zhenshchiny Belarusi v zerkale epokhi: Natsional'nyi otchet*. Minsk: YUNIPAK, 1997. / *Women of Belarus in the Mirror of the Epoch*. Minsk: YUNIPAK, 1997.

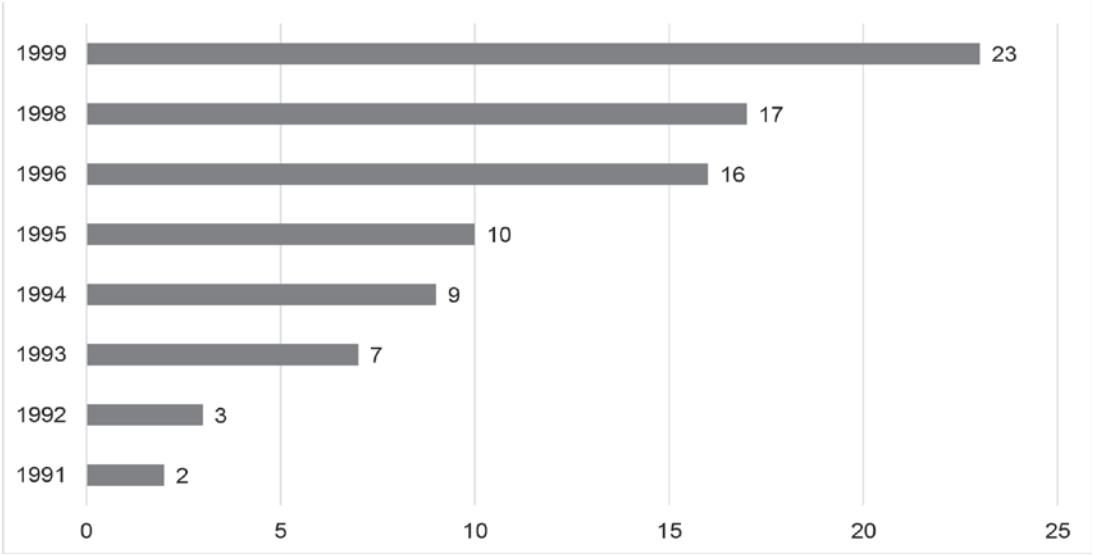

Figure 1 – Women's non-governmental organisations in Belarus

The Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzieja" was founded in 1994. Based on trade union organisations, the party declared as its main goals the implementation of reforms necessary for the establishment of acceptable labour conditions, and for the economic interests of women, social security in the light of the demonization of the poor and gender discrimination on the labour market.

In late 1990s, three centres dealing with gender research were based in Minsk: The Centre for Gender Studies at the European Humanities University (since 1997), The Centre for Gender Research at ENVILA Women's Institute (since 1998) and The Belarusian Centre for Gender Studies at the Institute of Management (since 2000). In 1995, UNDP started to implement the program titled "Women in Development Process", which resulted in the establishment of the Gender Information and Policy Centre at the Ministry of Social Protection. The centre focuses on research and educational projects and, since then, has published numerous articles, monographs, magazines, newspapers and textbooks on gender-related topics. From 1997 to 2012, ENVILA Women's Institute regularly organised the largest conference, at that period, on gender studies.

LGBT initiatives started to emerge also in the late 1990s. In 1998, the Belarusian League of Sexual Equality "Lambda" made the first attempt to register but it failed. In 2001, the first gay parade in Minsk titled "Love Parade" gathered up according to some estimates up to 1500 people.

Iryna Chykalava, who back then headed the Centre for Gender Studies, describes that period in the following way:

> *At that stage (late 1990s – early 00s)... women's organisations in Belarus started to expand their focus beyond just social and charitable work. Active female leaders got a chance to claim their right to participate effectively in political life; they got an opportunity to learn political socialization in various organisations. This way, female leadership was preserved as a phenomenon of politics. Public life in the country became more diverse than before.*[9]

The second stage (beginning from early 00s) is associated with the strengthened controls of the state over the civil society sector. The number of women's non-governmental organisations decreased by half compared to 1995. The Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzieja" decided to close in 2007.[10] In 2004, authorities closed down the European Humanities University in Minsk; it had to move in exile to Vilnius together with its Centre for Gender Studies, which hence lost the opportunity to be active in Belarus.[11] In the same period, ENVILA Women's Institute closed its Centre for Gender Research, before ceasing to exist in 2012 due to economic constraints.

The share of women's NGOs in the structure of civil society organisations continues to decrease. The number of publications and regularly active platforms like conferences, seminars, and media is decreasing as well. LGBT activists have failed to register their organisation. As of today, some three to four LGBT initiatives remain active but they rarely go public and mostly work with limited groups.

Although the number of women's organisations somewhat increased after 2006, their proportion in the civil society sector is decreasing. It means that while the civil society sector is growing, the number of women's NGO is not increasing proportionally to this growth.[12]

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[9] Chykalava I.R. *Gendernaya sistema postsovetskoi Belarusi: Vosproizvodstvo i transformatsiya sotsial'nykh rolei v publichnoi i privatnoi sfere.* / Chykalava I.R. *The Gender System of the Post-Soviet Belarus: Reproduction and Transformation of the Social Roles in the Public and Private spheres.* // *Rossiiskie i slavyanskie issledovaniya: nauch. sb.* Vyp. 4 / redkol.: A.P. Sal'kov, O.A. Yanovskii (otv. redaktory) [i dr.]. Minsk: BGU, 2009. P. 61.

[10] Eskova E. *The Hope is for "The Hope": Women's Organisations in Belarus* // http://www.pl.boell.org/downloads/zhenskie_ngo_rus.pdf.

[11] See the official website of the Center for Gender Studies: After EHU moved abroad, the CGS mostly exists online. Its staffers, researchers and graduates work all over the world. CGS continues to serve as a professional network, a platform for theoretical discussions and gives us the space for expressing our opinions publicly and an opportunity for civic action. // http://www.gender-ehu.org/ (retrieved on 02.04.2015).

[12] Sources: Statistical annual reports of the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus in 1998–2014.

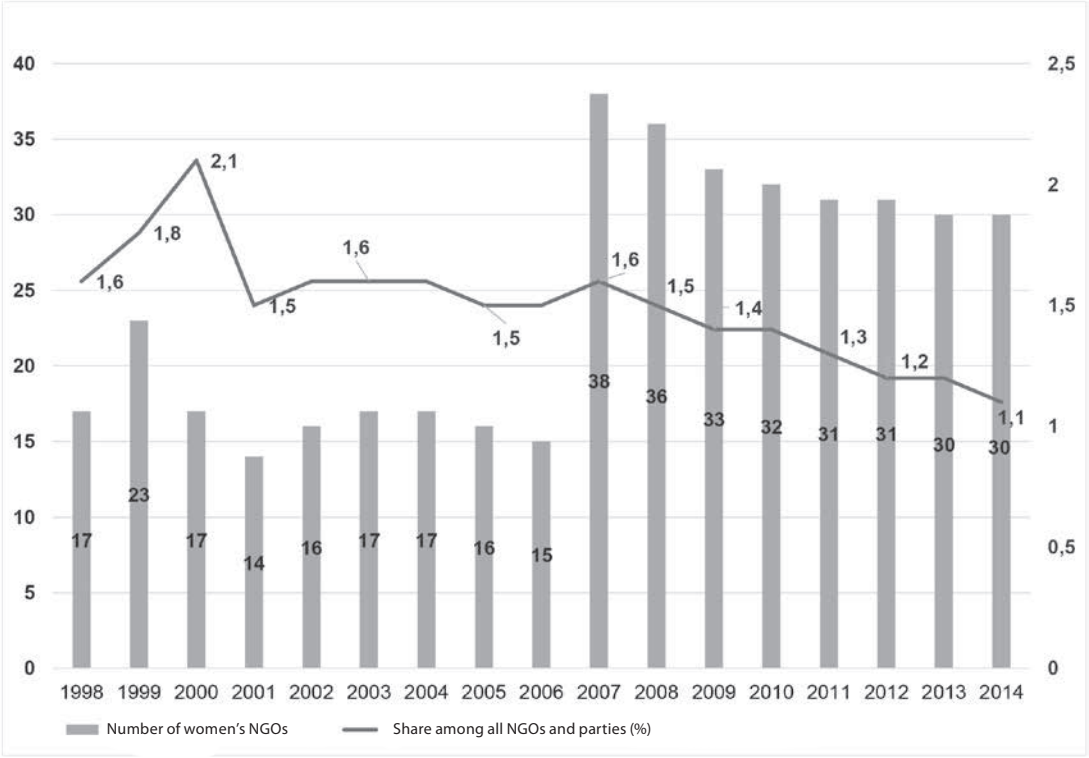

Figure 2 – Number of women's non-governmental organisations in Belarus

The number of women's organisations is low for several reasons. Firstly, many women's organisations exist only on paper. Secondly, it is difficult to work in Belarus for all NGOs – not just women's organisations. Official statistics do not take into account unregistered initiatives and projects. In fact, the emergence of unregistered initiatives allows us to single out the third stage in the development of the gender sector.

The third stage (beginning from 2010s) is characterised by the presence of a new type of initiative, which aim to promote gender-related topics but are not institutionalised, for example: MakeOut, Gender Route, Agenda Magazine, 34mag magazine's project Norma (Norm), LGBT Journalists for Tolerance, To Be Queer, Molodaya.by (an initiative of active women). Some LGBT, queer and feminist initiatives and projects have no possibilities and resources for formal legalization through registration – something they do not always intend to do, preferring non-formalised situational activity. They are very low in number and based mainly in Minsk.

The emergence of initiatives of this kind is not only due to specifics of the social and political situation, but also due to changes in how activism is understood. Activism is expressed in the form of initiatives that are not oriented towards formalization, hierarchy and structure building, and execution of bureaucratic procedures. "Classical" public

associations with a rigid structure, documentation and procedures, are not always capable of reacting in a flexible way to the whole diversity of challenges that civil society faces.

Alena Hapava, the founder of the Centre for Gender Studies at EHU, notes that post-Soviet gender activism emerged, with support from international donors, mainly as an urban phenomenon, focusing on violence, including sexual violence, and trafficking in women.[13]

The internet portal devoted to civil society sector NGO.by[14] lists 84 women's public associations. This list includes local branches of some organisations in the regions – hence their number is greater than shown by official statistics. The analysis of this database shows that the 'women's movement' is mainly present in Minsk and to a lesser degree in the regions.

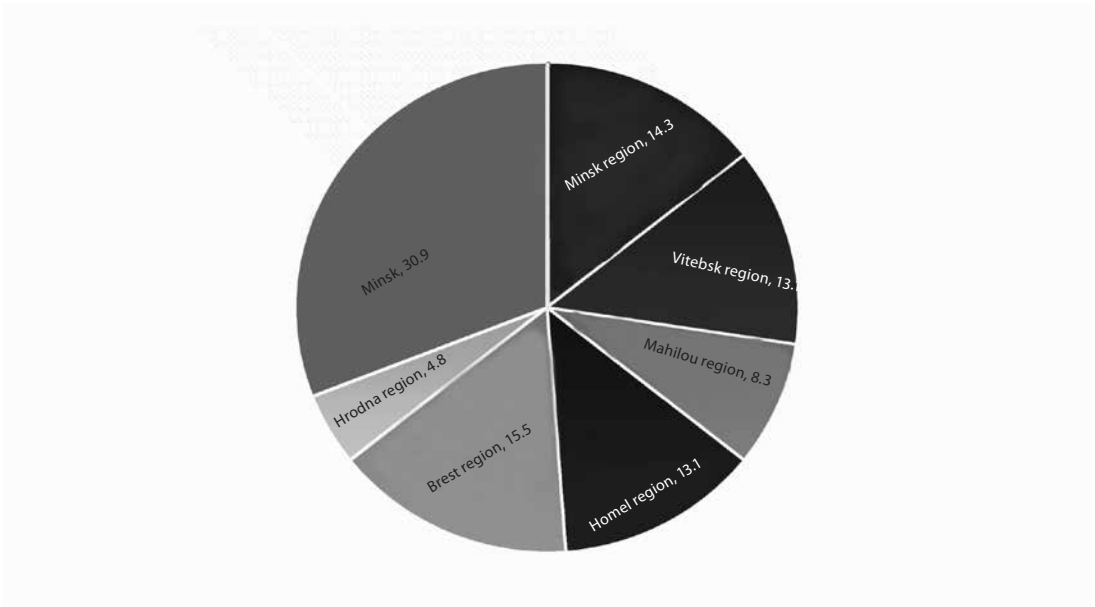

Figure 3 – Number of women's public associations according to ngo.by (by region, %)

The complex social and political conditions set the tendency towards unification between groups and initiatives in order to reinforce their influence. The organisations that used to deal with domestic violence and provided assistance and services have mostly retained their positions. Support from the international community along with economic incentives led the start of a big national programme on domestic violence prevention. In

[13] Gapova, Elena. *Feminism in Post-Soviet Belarus* // http://www.pl.boell.org/downloads/Feminism_in_Belarus.pdf.

[14] http://ngo.by/database/ngo/tag/women/.

the frame of the programme, a network of non-commercial organisations working in the field of domestic violence prevention was created to unite 19 organisations. Out of them, only 4 were advocacy-oriented. The rest only worked to provide assistance and services.

Besides, in 2012 the Women's Independent Democratic Movement initiated the creation of the National Gender Platform (NGP), which united 28 organisations – women's and general human rights organisations, political parties, pro-democracy trade unions. The platform was designed to act at the level of legislation drafting and influence on decision-making. However, its practical work currently leaves doubts. Iryna Salamatsina, the founder of Gender Route, sums up her experience of participation in the roundtable organised by the National Gender Platform on 24 May 2013, in the following way:

> *In Belarus, the majority of women's NGOs do not publicly voice their political stance. Their system of ideas, used to shape ideology, set goals and vision of the future at this given stage, remains unclear. Many female representatives of NGOs invited to the round table did not express willingness to communicate and reach agreements at the horizontal level, thus demonstrating their disinterest and, perhaps, incompetence in women's rights protection. With this approach, joint efforts and statements on combating gender discrimination are hardly possible*.[15]

This dynamic of the gender sector leads to divisions between women's NGOs and feminist/LGBT/queer initiatives. Many women's NGOs publicly distance themselves from being identified as feminist organisations; they treat narrowly the notion of gender equality as the equality between a man and a woman without doubting those categories. (The latter are not homogeneous and monolithic – hence, not all women and men face discrimination to the same degree). The conclusion about women's NGOs ignoring LGBT organisations can also be found in the results of the research of gender sector actors, commissioned by the Office for European Expertise and Communication in 2014.[16] In return, non-formalised initiatives and groups are not always interested in cooperating with women's/gender NGOs; they do not include them in the target groups for their activities.

It is also worth noting the tendency of a transition from social lobbying to social services, exclusively educational and cultural activities. These are areas where it is easy to work with the state because it does not have sufficient resources in order to deliver various services to different categories of the population.

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[15] Solomatina I. *Vazhnyi neprioritet* / Solomatina I. *An Important Non-Priority* // Nashe mnenie, 25.06.2013. http://nmnby.eu/news/analytics/5207.html.

[16] *Analiz sektora Respubliki Belarus, sub'ekty kotorogo zanimayutsya voprosami gendernogo ravenstva. / The Analysis of the Sector of the Republic of Belarus Subjects of Which Deal with Gender Equality* // Minsk: Obrazovatel'noe uchrezhdenie Ofis evropeiskoi ekspertizy i kommunikatsii, 2014. P. 71–72. http://oeec.by/sites/default/files/Full-Text-2014-09-02.pdf.

Conditionally, the gender sector's main areas of work can be defined as follows:

– *enlightening and education* (Belarusian Association of Young Christian Women, Women's Independent Pro-Democracy Movement, Gender Perspectives, Businesswomen's Club, Lion's Club, Province, Women's Alliance, Gender Route, To Be.Queer, MakeOut, GayBelarus, Gay Alliance, LGBT Journalists for Tolerance, Center for Gender Studies at European Humanities University, Belarusian Center for Gender Studies at the Minsk-based Institute of Management, Belarusian Women's Union;

– *social and legal assistance* (Radzislava and Gender Perspectives – domestic violence, Belarusian Organisation of Working Women, Belarusian Women's League – breast cancer, Women;s Liberal Association, Women's Alliance, Province, Mahilou Women's Centre for Assistance and Self-Education, Businesswomen's Club, Belarusian Association of Young Christian Women, Sustrecha (Rendez-Vous);

research and analysis (Belarusian Association of Young Christian Women, Gender Perspectives, Women's Independent Pro-Democracy Movement, Gender Route, MakeOut, GayBelarus, LGBT Journalists for Tolerance, Centre for Gender Studies at European Humanities University);

advocacy and lobbying (Women's Independent Pro-Democracy Movement, Businesswomen's Club, Belarusian Association of Young Christian Women, Belarusian Women's Union).

On one hand, the social and political conditions in the country cause a decrease in the number and proportion of women's public associations. On the other hand, the sector's development dynamics is characterised by the emergence of non-formalised initiatives, controversial processes of consolidation and deconsolidation of the sector. At the same time, gender issues remain mostly as an urban phenomenon.

Key peculiarities of the gender sector

A few research projects on women's/feminist/gender movement were carried out in the country. Some of them are worth noting: *Women of Belarus in the mirror of the epoch* (1997[17]), *On the path to democracy and gender equality* (2009[18]), *Feminism in post-Soviet Belarus* (2010[19]), *Belarusian feminism in post-Marxist perspective* (2012[20]), *Important non-priority* (2013[21]), *Analysis of gender equality sector in the Republic of Belarus* (2014[22]). The conclusion to follow below was also based on the analysis of academic materials on gender

[17] http://un.by/ru/publications/thema/belwomen/19-02-04-4.html.

[18] http://www.widm.by/portals/0/books/Book_Gender/Gender_Equality_book.pdf.

[19] http://gender-route.org/articles/feminism/feminism_v_postsovetskoj_belarusi/.

[20] http://fem.fm/mir-vokrug/belorusskiy-feminism-v-postmarksistskoy-perspektive.

[21] http://nmnby.eu/news/analytics/5207.html.

[22] http://oeec.by/sites/default/files/Full-Text-2014-09-02.pdf.

equality in Belarus, outlined in the minutes of the "gender conference" titled "Gender and Problems of Communicational Behaviour" (31 October–1 November 2013, Polack).[23] The research also analysed the materials of the National Gender Platform (2012), relating to the rhetoric of public associations.[24] In this chapter, attention will be directed to the aspects, which induce certain "tensions" within the sector.

Firstly, the dominant perception of gender equality is to understand it as equality in the public space – that is what is regarded to be the main direction of emancipation of women. The question is raised about including women on an equal footing with men into the public space – not about the need for reformatting the institutions, which do not change and remain androcentric, i.e. created by men to maintain "conservative" values. At the same time, the issues related to privacy such as corporality, sexuality and reproductive rights are often left outside the gender sector.

For example, the main activities of the National Gender Platform focus on achieving gender equality in the decision-making field, in social and political life, and in the field of economy; improving the reproductive health of women and men; developing a gender-sensitive public consciousness; domestic violence prevention. All these fields of action deal with the issues, which are related to social institutions and gender representations in the public sphere. It is already obvious from the definition of *gender equality* highlighted in the introductory chapter of the National Gender Platform document.

> *Gender equality means an equal access by women and men to economic resources, equality of "women's" and "men's" professions and their roles in society; equal treatment by society of the contributions of both into economic and demographic development (p. 2).*

The level of micro-practices of everyday life disappears in this definition; it does not raise the questions of sexuality, diverse gender identities, homophobia, sexism and other alike. Even social guarantees and support for maternity/paternity are not part of the Platform, most likely because women's NGOs rarely support the initiatives, which work to protect the rights of mothers and fathers.

The proceedings of the conference "Gender and Problems of Communicational Behaviours" reveal a similar situation. The conference was organised for the last time at ENVILA Women's Institute in 2011. The majority of speeches were devoted to gender analysis of language practices in the public space (media, textbooks, literature). At the same time, the issues related to the analysis of everyday language and production of stereotypes and hierarchy in everyday life were overlooked.

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[23] *Gender i problemy kommunikativnogo povedeniya: sbornik materialov pyatoi mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii. / Gender and Problems of the Communicational Behaviour: Proceedings of the Fifth International Scientific Conference* // Novopolotsk: PGU, 2013. P. 284.

[24] http://www.widm.by/Portals/0/Documents/NGP.pdf.

Secondly, women as a target audience are often perceived not as autonomous entities but as passive recipients of services provided by organisations and initiatives. Civic activism of women is often viewed in the institutional context only – rather than as an ability to become an agent of action to defend their rights and interests outside of "movements" and "organisations."

For example, the new law on state allowances for families expanded the list of categories of parents who saw their childcare benefits cut by half. Previously, the cuts had been envisaged only for those who, being on maternity/fraternity leave returned to work (full-time or part-time) or studied in an educational institution, receiving a stipend. The new law also applied to some professions, in particular, self-employed entrepreneurs, notaries, lawyers as well as craftspeople or those who create intellectual property working under service contracts. The new cuts triggered a public outcry, with over 9000 people having signed a petition against the provisions.[25] As a result, the state returned full benefits to those categories of parents. Quite interestingly, none of the women's NGOs or any other organisation expressed a viewpoint on that situation.

Thirdly, one can observe a tendency in Belarus when target groups are defined as "universal and homogenous". The notion of a woman is often used not only to refer to a person but also to carry a universal meaning designed to reflect the experience of all women. Such generalization obscures the fact that not all women feel discriminated against or suppressed to the same degree. Such "gender order" can ignore the "voices" of, for example, female migrants, refugees, transgender persons, bisexual women, lesbians, women with low income, women from provinces, young women.

Correspondingly, the notion of gender equality itself is often used in a rather simplistic form, which takes for granted two "population categories" – men and women. Many gender issues by definition are treated from the position of a specific "female subject", an urban, educated heterosexual woman.

For example, the problem of domestic violence is reflected upon mainly as the problem of heterosexual married couples. Even at the level of rhetoric, there is no debate that this problem can affect various types of relationship, including same-sex marriages. In February 2014, MakeOut published on its website an article titled "Domestic violence in LGBT families", pointing to the need for revising this notion in a broader sense:

> *Many of us associate domestic violence with patriarchal structure and heterosexual relations. The Media often tend to cover the problem of domestic violence using stereotypical and grotesque images of drunken husbands, pathologically jealous men, or masculine domestic aggressors. Even the project "Developing National Capacity to*

[25] Petition: Change the Law on State Allowances to Families Raising Children: Bring Back Childcare Benefits! http://www.change.org/petitions/измените-закон-рб-о-гос-пособиях-семьям-воспитывающим-детей-верните-детские-пособия.

> *Counteract Domestic Violence in Belarus (2012-2015) posted on the website of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Belarus (in Gender Equality section) sets as its goal "building national capacity to prevent and counteract domestic violence, especially against girls and women."*[26]

This issue is of special importance, because people in same-sex partnerships find themselves in the situation of a double pressure: they cannot talk openly about their partnership; correspondingly, they cannot go public about violence in their relationships, either. Furthermore, the available social services are not sensitive to the needs of users with this kind if problems.

Finally, the analysis of documents and materials shows that appeals to the state as the key agent empowered to solve gender problems reinforce paternalism. In that case, women are perceived as a group, which requires protection and support, and the powers of a "protector" are delegated to the state. The possibility for other actors, including the civil society sector, to participate in addressing various gender-related problems is blocked at the level of discourse.

In 2011, a working group was set up to develop a draft of the Concept on Ensuring Gender Equality in the Republic of Belarus.[27] It was comprised of 19 people, including only two representing public associations and two from international organisations (UN agencies). The majority of the working group members were state officials. No wonder, women's organisations in their documents often appeal to the state as the main actor. For example, in 2014, the Office for European Expertise commissioned a monitoring of gender sector entities but the recommendations based on the results of the research targeted the state as the main recipient. At the same time, the gender sector or civil society do not get treatment as actors also in need of recommendations.

The National Gender Platform, on the contrary, highlighted in its manifesto the recommendations for both the state and civil society sector: 63 recommendations for the government and 35 for civil society, despite the fact that civil society remains non-sensitive to gender as I noted above.

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[26] Levitskaya M. *Domashnee nasilie v LGBT-sem'yakh* / Levitskaya M. *Domestic Violence in LGBT Families* // http://makeout.by/2014/02/06/domashnee-nasilie-v-lgbt-semyah.html.

[27] The order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus Nr 90 dated 01 September 2011 "On Approving Members of the Working Group to Develop the Draft Concept on Ensuring Gender Equality in the Republic of Belarus". http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/new_url_990726694.

Conclusions

The public rhetoric about gender has virtually remained unchanged over the past 15 years. Gender equality is defined as gender balance between men and women in social institutions and the public sphere. The practices of everyday life produce discrimination, but they are so complex that they are not always visible, and therefore escape attention. The emergence of new initiatives, positioning themselves as feminist, LGBT or queer, add new challenges, because they expand the meaning or framework of the *gender equality* notion. At the same time, the state remains the main actor responsible for addressing gender-related problems.

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Iryna Clark

Mediation of "civil society" in the Belarusian press 2000–2010: between "heteroglossia" and "monologism"

Abstract

The article is primarily concerned with evaluating existing discourses on "civil society" as mediated in the Belarusian press. Drawing on the notion of "dialogue" derived from Bakhtin's studies, it aims to report on the multiplicity of voices that formed and informed "civil society" discourse. It also attempts to investigate how the conceptualisation of "civil society" shifted over time and in response to contextual conditions. By highlighting the differing semantics attributed to the concept of "civil society" when used in the Belarusian press, my article aims to emphasise the polysemic nature of the term, which allows it to be used by forces from opposite sides of an ideological spectrum. Therefore, while the use of the concept can engender ideas that foster the promotion of democracy, it can also provide an ideological basis for non-democratic regimes.

Introduction

The contemporary articulation of the idea of "civil society" is predominantly associated with a liberal-democratic position on the nature of society and its relationship with the individual and the state. The position emphasises "society as a self-regulating realm, the ultimate repository of individual rights and liberties, and a body that must be protected against incursions of the State" (Seligman, 1992:11). "Civil society" is seen as the key to fostering democracy, good governance, and a better society (Diamond, 1994; Robinson & White, 1998; Edwards, 2005). However, what this perspective misses is that while the use of the concept underpins ideas that facilitate the establishment and development of democracy, it can also serve as a tool for non-liberal regimes. Drawing on this perspective, I am going to demonstrate that "civil society" can be appropriated for various purposes not only in Western-European democracies, but also in non-liberal environments, such as Belarus. I will place emphasise on the role of the media in such appropriation. The media will be understood as a powerful domain in the production of societal meanings, resulting from the mediation between various actors, under the influence of socio-political events.

The media's ability to reinforce the political agenda by re-articulating specific viewpoints will be highlighted in this article. This perspective is useful in demonstrating that the term "civil society" is not an objective, ready-made category, but is subject to processes of interpretation and contextual use. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1981:401) stated,

> *[w]hen we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions – this is the false front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested use to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker's position (profession, social class, etc.) and by a concrete situation. Who speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word's actual meaning.*

In view of this, this article will address the following questions. What contextual factors influenced the chosen use of the term "civil society" in the Belarusian press between the years 2000 and 2010 and the underlying purposes behind these choices? What mediating practices were involved in this use? What impact did these contextual factors and practices have on the meaning of the term "civil society"? To answer these questions, I will employ a number of theoretical tools briefly outlined in the following subsection.

A brief note on the method: the notion of Dialogism

The Belarusian public space is frequently described through the binary categories of "official" and "alternative" public spheres (Manaev, 2003; Bekus, 2010), thus emphasising the polarised environment in which the media and society function. Whilst it is crucial to acknowledge the conflicting and polarised nature of the Belarusian public sphere, in which publics are presented with two separate (or, indeed, multiple) realities, such a perspective fails to provide in-depth analysis of the interactions between the spheres. The two realities do overlap and it is important to consider the complex diversity of voices and relations present within the media space. Therefore, assuming that media text is a complex mixture of voices, I find it useful to approach the media space through a number of notions originating from Bakhtin's writing. Drawing on the dialogic theory of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and Valentin Vološinov (1973), in my analysis of media discourse I engage with complex metalinguistic mechanisms, such as "heteroglossia" and, "centrifugal" and "centripetal" tendencies, style and "voicing" that allow me to approach media text as internally dialogical[1] (Bakhtin, 1981; also see Lee, 1992; Fairclough, 1995).

[1] Bakhtin (1981) and Vološinov (1973) approached dialogue in a broad sense, as "not only direct and viva voce verbal communication between two persons" (Vološinov, 1973:113). The authors recognised the property of a discourse to contain many voices, or view-points, one's own and voices of others, referring to it as a "double-voiced" (Bakhtin, 1981:429) discourse. It is a "potential dialogue" (Bakhtin,

Discursively, the public space is represented by a multiplicity of specialised languages, accents and viewpoints, the discursive practice referred to as "heteroglossia" (*raznorečie*) by Bakhtin (1981). Such a multiplicity of voices and points of view engage with each other in a dialogic way sometimes producing tensions and contestations, and thus generating shifts in meanings. Acknowledging the power relations embedded in media is crucial to comprehending these dialogic processes. I suggest that power is embedded in Belarusian media in a less naturalised way, when compared to Western media. This straightforward presence of power, represented by "centripetal" forces (producing "centralising", "unitary", "official" discourses) and "centrifugal" forces (producing "decentralising", diverse discourses associated with different genres, social groups, views and evaluations), produces a more explicit struggle over the production and reproduction of forms and meanings. The latter constantly evolve and are context specific. Accordingly, I assume, there is no single "civil society" discourse or point of view, rather there are several overlapping discourses[2] loosely described as democratic, nationalist, neo-liberal and official, that engage and often struggle with each other in a dialogic manner, thus impacting the term's meaning. In each case the re-articulation of the term "civil society" can be regarded as an "index of social change" (Vološinov, 1973) constituting a dynamic in social, political and cultural life.

Because of its multi-accentuality and multiplicity of voices, "heteroglossia" is frequently described as an ideal speech situation due to its potential for diversifying social life and, potentially, for facilitating its democratisation (Hirschkop, 1999; Clark & Holquist, 1984). Drawing on Bakhtin's notions of "style" and seeing the distinction between monologism and dialogism, Ken Hirschkop (1986; 1999) made a further claim that the style and structure of language is of relevance in a discussion on democracy and culture. According to the author, cultural forms are democratic not only when discourse is unconstrained by overt political control or when they see mass participation but "by virtue of the specific kind of 'communicative action' they enjoin" (Hirschkop, 1986:111). Accordingly, "heteroglossia" represents a dialogic style of communication that is juxtaposed to the ruling "monologism" of the official sphere, which enacts centralising tendencies and domination. "Heteroglossia" is "aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages", against "a unitary language" imposed from above to ensuring the "maximum of understanding" in social life, and acting as "a force for overcoming heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, 1981: 272–273). In this view, "heteroglossia" constitutes a discursive domain of

1981:325) within a single utterance in which speakers may reproduce the voices of others through an act of appropriation, the property termed 'intertextuality' by Julia Kristeva (1986).

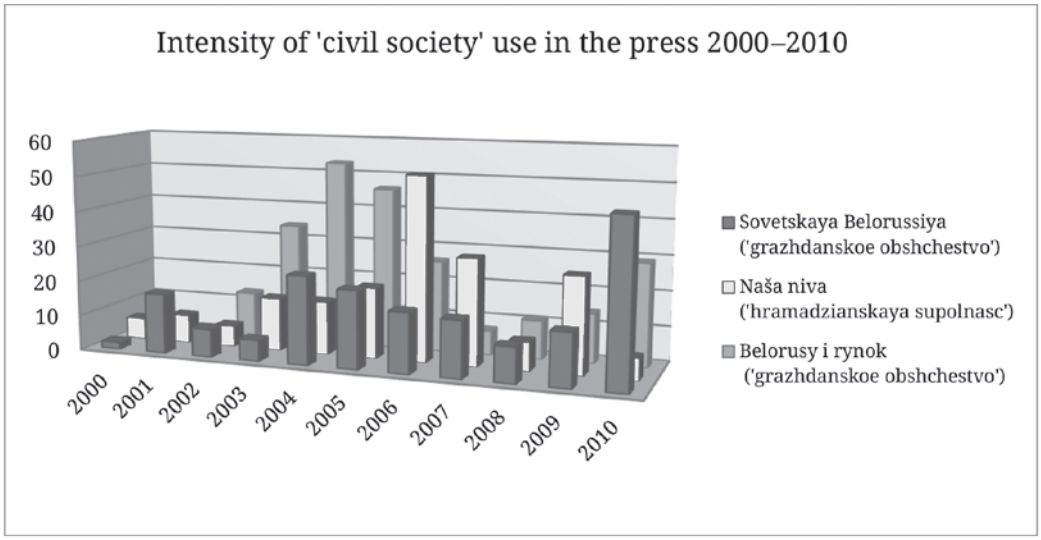
[2] Discourse is understood here firstly, in general terms as defined by John Dryzek (2006:1), "a shared set of concepts, categories, and ideas that provide its adherents with a framework for making sense of situations, embodying judgements, assumptions, capabilities, dispositions, and intentions". Secondly, a more narrow understanding is utilised, that is the ability of discourse to provide legitimacy to particular forms of knowledge and political practices (Jackson, 2008).

civil society. One of the ways to explore this domain involves invoking different "voices", i.e. positions, evaluations, and views, and the way in which these viewpoints are reported. The exploration of reported speech is pertinent to such analysis.

Adhering to this methodological framework, I will aim to investigate the dialogism within the Belarusian media space of relevance to the term "civil society". Dialogism in media discourse is understood as the argument in utterances which occurs on an ideational and discursive level across multiple sources of the press, over time and space, and between persons, who are not necessarily present at a particular discursive event. I will compare the press reports of "civil society" with the original sources where possible and with other reports on the same issue from different sources while anchoring it in a broader socio-political context. I will examine the style and discursive practices employed in the mediation of "civil society". This framework will be useful in demonstrating how the terminology of "civil society" became appropriated by various actors in the legitimation of political projects and practices in Belarus and how this appropriation was re-articulated in the press. To address these issues, I chose a diverse representative selection of Belarusian print media, because for most ordinary Belarusians the press represents the most accessible source of differing views on Belarusian society (see an opinion poll conducted in May 2011 atests).[3] I have selected the state-run periodical *Sovetskaya Belorussiya – Belarus segodnya* (Soviet Belarus – Belarus Today), and a number of leading "independent" or "alternative" periodicals *Naša niva* (literally Our Soil), *Narodnaya volya* (People's Will), and *Belorusy i rynok* (Belarusians and the Market). I also included data from *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta* (Belarusian Business Paper) from 2000–2004 to replace *Narodnaya volya,* due to the former's limited online availability. The periodicals represent a diverse ideological spectrum of views – from national-democratic to neo-liberal. The term "independent" is used here to emphasise non-state ownership as the media's real independence is questionable. The alternative press operates in a restrictive environment with the state exercising wide mechanisms of censorship (Richter, 2008; Aliaksandrau & Bastunets, 2014) even though the constitution prohibits this. Yet, the alternative press contributes to de-centralising tendencies within the bounds of an environment that attempts to marginalise and silence it.

A corpus of data comprising of articles containing the term "civil society" was created allowing me to process and analyse a vast amount of data, both qualitatively and quantitatively, by employing a combination of Content Analysis, Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. By grouping and categorising my data with computer assisted tools, I quantify and assess the relationship between coding categories as well as analysing the intensity (proportional to the number of references) and frequency (the number of articles or issues) of "civil societies" use in the periodicals over an extended period. My

[3] http://www.iiseps.org/data11-151.html.



quantitative data analysis revealed a proportional dependency in the use of the term "civil society" with periods that witnessed significant socio-political developments, as the following graph[4] attests:

> *The years 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2010 proved to be important "milestones" in social and political life in Belarus, being associated with the presidential and parliamentary elections and the social activism linked to these political events. Therefore, in this article I will build my empirical evidence using data from the periods associated with vibrant electoral politics. The following sections will demonstrate how the term "civil society" was appropriated by the press in the early 2000s.*

The appropriation of the term "civil society" in the press in the early 2000s

Official discourse: establishing "a practical consensus"

Evidence from the periodical *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* suggests that frequent references to the term by the periodical began in the early 2000s when "civil society" entered the vocabulary of the Belarusian government. Subsequently, its use saw significant increase,

[4] Only three periodicals are represented in this graph, they were chosen because they allowed access to contiguous data over the period. The Sovetskaya Belorussiya dataset encompasses only those articles containing the term "civil society" with more than 50% relevance, as categorised by the periodical's website. Data for Naša niva was generated from the Belarusian online library Kamunikat (http://kamunikat.org/). Belorusy i rynok provided a deep electronic archive allowing me to create the dataset from 2002 to 2010.

as the graph illustrates. "Civil society" entered the official rhetoric as a constituent of democratic discourse and as a normative ideal despite an environment that witnessed a general trend towards the curtailment of democracy and the regime's growing control over the media, the persecution of civic activists and human rights violations[5]. During this period, however, the authoritarian regime was not fully consolidated and was described as employing a populist style of politics (Goujon, 1999; Dryzek & Holmes, 2002), "demagogical democracy" (Korosteleva, 2003), "façade democracy" (Gill, 2006); "defective democracy" (Beichelt, 2004). All of the terms can be associated with a framework of literature on hybrid regimes that emphasise the "selective use of liberalism" (Richter & Hatch, 2013) by non-liberal regimes. Initially, the term "civil society" was used in a context that presupposed the presence of intensive processes of state building, which at the official level was frequently claimed as democratic. As an example, in his address at the conference "On measures for solving problems of culture and arts development" on 10.02.2001, President Lukashenko stated:

> *Belarus is joining the new century as an established sovereign European state. [...] The essence of this moment is that we create our own statehood, statehood of a higher level. [...] The development of democratic institutions, the creation of civic organisations and associations – all this defines the contemporary image of Belarus. [...] The essence of civil society is not of confrontation, but of joint constructive work by public associations, movements, political parties and all branches of governance.*

Governmental policy and rhetoric found resonance in the media's content proving the periodical's dependence on a central political agenda.[6] The journalists' adjustment to the official line was particularly noticeable during 2001, which saw the increasing use of the term in the periodical *Sovetskaya Belorussiya – Belarus Today*, as the graph attests, and an association can be drawn with the presidential election campaign culminating in Aleksandr Lukashenko's re-election to a second term on September 9, 2001. The Belarusian officialdom claimed "a decisive victory, with 78 percent of the vote."[7] The official message was appropriated and circulated in the official press. In his article "Candid opinion" the journalist Maximov (13.09.2001) from *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* reported the following:

> *The past elections, which ended in the triumphal victory of the current President Aleksandr Lukashenko, marked a new stage in the development of our country's civil society. The Presidential elections of 2001 entered the history of not only domestic democracy but also global democracy due to the fact that it was witnessed by an unprecedentedly large number*

[5] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2001/belarus.

[6] Refer to the article by Akimov, A. (15.11.2001) *The steps towards democracy* [*По ступенькам демократии*]. Sovetskaya Belorussia – Belarus Today. Available at: http://www.sb.by/post/10870/.

[7] http://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2003/belarus#.U0ajzFVdX40.

> *of observers monitoring the transparency and fairness of the electoral process. [...] [One of the observers,] Prof Zakhariev, the chair of the fund "Slavs", commented, "I was happy to see people taking the elections to heart. They clearly demonstrated their understanding that they are the real factor driving future political processes in the country".*

The journalist conveys a peculiar vision of "civil society", in the sense of an electorate choosing and voting for the government. The indexical point "new stage of civil society development" indicates a divergence from normative models of civil society. Similarly to the notion of "democracy", "civil society" was attributed a particular meaning and function. The functional aspect of the use of the term was particularly salient in the context of electoral politics – it was a new "civil society" where the regime sought to gain legitimacy. The participation of people in elections and referendums was seen by officialdom as part of a processes contributing to the formation of civil society (see Pashkovskii & Parechina, 2003). The reporter internalised the official point of view, speaking with one voice with officialdom, that approaches "civil society" in terms of active voters and supporters of the regime. Together with assigning a positive stance towards the event, this position was further extolled by a third party – the journalist quotes directly one of the observers from Russia, Professor Zakhariev, to add authority and trustworthiness to the report as well as to create a counterbalance to the Western observers' reports of election falsification. According to the OSCE, the elections failed to meet democratic standards with falsification of voting results, repression of political opponents, and restricted access to most media for opposition candidates.[8]

Without providing a concrete definition and at times demonstrating an uncertainty towards the meaning of "civil society", officialdom clearly came to recognise the term's pragmatic value; it became a source of legitimacy for the government both in the eyes of the Belarusian voters and the international community. Having adopted the non-coercive practice of the selective use of democratic rhetoric, the aim behind the strategy was to generate a constituency for the regime. As Andrew Wilson (2011) observed, Lukashenko's support by the general populace was essential during this period. He still faced a credible opposition with dissent present even at higher levels of authority. The opinion of the international community also proved to be significant for the regime. Officialdom therefore employed the strategy best described as the appropriation of discursive capital to gain legitimacy, derived from Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) framework. As Bourdieu stated,

> *[r]ecourse to a neutralised language is obligatory whenever it is a matter of establishing a practical consensus between agents or groups of agents having particularly or totally different interests. This is the case, of course, first and foremost in the field of legitimate*

[8] http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1066125.html.

> *political struggle, but also in the transactions and interactions of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1991:40).*

Accordingly, the officials supported by the press made use of discourse that emphasised democratic governance, human rights and emerging civil society, a language associated more with the pro-democratic opposition and civil society, whist placing the alternative voices beyond the boundaries of consensus. Such a discourse model, based on the rhetoric of civic and legal rights with intertextual links to the Constitution,[9] frequently invoked by official voices in the press, is difficult to challenge and is hard to reframe. If establishing "a practical consensus" proved ineffective, then coercive practices were used, ensuring the dominance of centralising tendencies, as will be further demonstrated.

Alternative uses of "civil society": politicisation of the discourse

References to the term "civil society" were equally prevalent in the content of the alternative press during this period. At the turn of the century numerous NGOs sided with the political opposition, demonstrating the rise of civic resistance and the politicisation of civil society against the centralising, undemocratic, tendencies that had began to be manifest in the second part of 1990s as Lukashenko's government re-introduced authoritarian order (Čavusau, 2007). The politicisation of civil society was frequently acknowledged in the alternative press, as an extract from the article by Valer Bulhakau (2001, in *Naša Niva*) illustrates:

> *A serious reserve for the opposition, and this distinguishes it within the CIS area, is a wide spreading network of non-governmental organisations, in which many oppositional politicians find refuge. The consequences of the Belarusian authorities' policies, concerned with ensuring their monopolising status in all spheres of social life, became the oppositional nature of the Belarusian "third sector".*

In such an approach to the idea of "civil society", the boundaries between the notions of "opposition", understood as a "political society" of "parties, political organisations and political publics" by Andrew Arato (Arato, 1993:314), and "associational life", of civil society in Alexis de Tocqueville's[10] terms, were blurred. Indeed, some other examples from my dataset showed, the term "opposition" was frequently used interchangeably with

[9] Refer to the article by Antonina Malivuk *Belarusian democracy: reality and hopes* [*Белорусская демократия: реалии и надежды*]. Belorusy i rynok, № 39 (368), 4–11 October 1999. Available at: http://br.minsk.by/index.php?article=2053&year=1999.

[10] The notion stresses that autonomous voluntary organizations and associational activities are at the core of civil society, originating from the writing of Alexis de Tocqueville (for further reference see Cohen & Arato (1997)).

the terms "civil society", "third sector" and even "*nezależnae gramadztva*" (independent society in Belarusian), the term was predominantly found within the content of *Naša Niva* commencing from early 2000 until the present.[11] Often used alongside "*gramadzianskaja supolnasc"* (civil society in Belarusian), the notion *nezależnae gramadztva* was anchored in the ideas of the National Revival Movement (*Adradženne*) of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the discourse emphasised the struggle for democracy and national self-determination, or *nezależnasc* (independence in Belarusian). Use of the term "independent society" provided new ways of imagining community and societal interests, articulating a desire to have one's own traditions and language within a democratic nation. Within this discourse, the Belarusian language and culture faced discrimination by the state, and as a consequence the survival and development of the Belarusian language became of concern to "independent society" (*nezależnae hramadztva*)[12]. Whilst internalising nationalist rhetoric, this perspective was also rooted in the dissidents' language of freedom. Sometimes used alongside "free society" (*volnae gramadztva*), "independent society" (*nezależnae gramadztva)*, echoed the ideas of "alternative society", to act freely in a repressive environment, "creating zones of increasing freedom,"[13] this idea is rooted in the works of Polish intellectuals and activists associated with the *Solidarnosc* movement.[14] Whilst emphasising national revival and at times producing tension with the Euro-centric principle of universality, this nationalising approach had a common vector with liberal discourse, where by both appear to represent a counterweight against the abuse of state power and a non-liberal regime.

The politicisation of civil society discourse was subject to transnational flows of information. The periodicals quoted intensively the voices of representatives from international organisations such as the UN, PACE, and OSCE. During this period, the voice of the former Chair of the OSCE Advisory-Monitoring Group in Belarus, Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck was particularly prominent (as an example, his name appeared 55 times in 143 articles containing references to the term "civil society" in *Belorusskaya*

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[11] The term was introduced and utilised by Andrej Dynko, who became Naša Niva's Editor in Chief from 2000. In my online interview (04/10/2014), Andrej Dynko explained that he sought a clear term, understandable by the readership, because the term "gramadzianskaya supolnasc" (civil society) was "too scientific" for the average reader. The original meaning of the term "independent society" implied a part of society independent from the regime. The term "nezależnae hramadztva" was well-received and therefore became established and developed. Used by both, journalists and readers, it acquired new connotations and overtones.

[12] Pečanko, S. (2010) *Ten Years since speaking Belarusian* [*Дзесяць гадоў як беларускамоўныя*] Naša Niva (4) January, 2010 Accessed at http://kamunikat.org/nn.html?pub_start=720&pubid=19034.

[13] "Nezależnae hramadztva" aimed at "non-political democratic struggle, the search for ways to freedom and the enlargement of space for free society in an un-free country" (Yankevič, in Naša Niva, 2006).

[14] It was presented in Adam Michnik's work, "The New Evolutionism" (cited in Goldfarb, 1998).

delovaya gazeta over the period 2000–2004). On the brink of the 2001 elections, Wieck made attempts to consolidate the opposition, which was divided on numerous issues in respect to the country's future course, or as stated in a report by the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission, (2001:3) "to develop a political culture of cooperation and a capacity to compromise."[15] As a result of this initiative, a cross party civic coalition[16] emerged which included the Belarusian National Front (led by Viačorka), Belarusian Social-Democratic *Hramada* (union), United Civil Party, the Belarusian Women's Party *Nadzeja* (Hope), supported by the Assembly of Pro-Democracy NGOs in the Coordinating Rada (Council) of Pro-Democracy Forces, together with a democratic initiative Charter-97. In his reports, often quoted in the alternative press, Wieck welcomed and acknowledged the emergence of a coalition within civil society, and saw it as a political force striving for democracy, as Extract 4 from the article by Dziadok (2002, in *Naša Niva*) attests:

> *As H.G. Wieck outlined in one of his interviews with Naša niva The coalition of national and democratic forces that act in opposition to the president is a new phenomenon for Belarusian political culture. [...] Political parties, independent from Lukashenko, non-governmental organisations and independent media play a great role in fighting for democracy in Belarus'.*

The extracts demonstrated, the OSCE Chair approached the politicised civil society as an essential part of democratic development and this position was internalized by multiple sources in the alternative press. Great effort was placed in galvanising political forces during the parliamentary and presidential elections. Sometimes, this mobilisation invoked a "war" metaphor ("fighting for democracy"; "democratic forces"), which is the very nature of political struggle. Other examples found within my database, however, revealed tensions with the OSCE Chair's position. As an example, in her article Olga Abramova (05.03.2004, in *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*), a political scientists and a member of Belarusian House of Representatives took a critical stance with regards Wieck's position, referring to it as "Dr. Wieck's Doctrine". The phrase embraced in quotation marks, ceases to be a semantically neutral phrase, as it acquires a critical connotation that distances the author from the initial point of view. The author expresses direct criticism of the "top down" approach and conditionality attached to the policy of civil society's development proposed by the international community. She appeared to represent a sceptical view towards the approach proposed by the OSCE Chair, convinced

[15] OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission (2001:3) Republic of Belarus. Presidential Election, 9 September 2001. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: Warsaw. Available at: www.osce.org/odihr/elections/belarus/14459.

[16] See Čavusau (2007) for further references.

that "the change of the regime" is only possible via the consolidation of the country's oppositional forces.

The response by officialdom to this politicised rhetoric was rather predictable, becoming a pivotal point in the confrontation between officialdom on one side and the OSCE and the Belarusian opposition on the other. Stylised in the traditions of Cold War propaganda, the article "Operation 'White Stork': Foreign Intelligence Forces against Belarus", was published in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (05.09.2001) on the brink of the Presidential elections. In the best tradition of the spy genre, the periodical provided a report portraying H.G. Wieck as a conspiring enemy, with the Belarusian opposition supporting this conspiracy. Such a framing strategy, which aimed to deconstruct pro-democratic civil society and the opposition, contributed to the centralising tendencies in the country. Despite the efforts to mobilise civic society, the pro-democracy NGOs and opposition groups failed to achieve their goal of delivering democratic change. Around 3.000 people gathered in October Square in Minsk to protest against the allegedly unfair elections, however, the protest was brutally dispersed.[17] The government announced its intention to close the Minsk mission of the OSCE unless it showed greater respect.[18] Mission Chair Hans-Georg Wieck left the country in December 2001 and the OSCE's rhetoric appeared to become less confrontational thereafter.[19] After the elections, the government changed its discursive strategy, ensuring that the "democratic façade" would not place the stability of the regime at risk, as the next section will demonstrate.

"Civil society" and the "Public Square" in the context of the electoral politics 2004–2006

The (re-)construction of official "civil society": "pillars of the state"

Commensurate with the president's second term, the government launched a mechanism aimed at consolidating presidential power. This included governmental attempts to impose stricter control over civil society and to restructure the Belarusian "third sector" by launching a further round of a re-registration campaign; the aim being to transform the

[17] The Human Rights Centre Viasna (2001) Review-Chronicle of Human Rights Violations in Belarus in 2001. Minsk. Accessed on 17/05/2014 at https://spring96.org/files/reviews/ru/2001_review_ru.pdf.

[18] http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1101158.html.

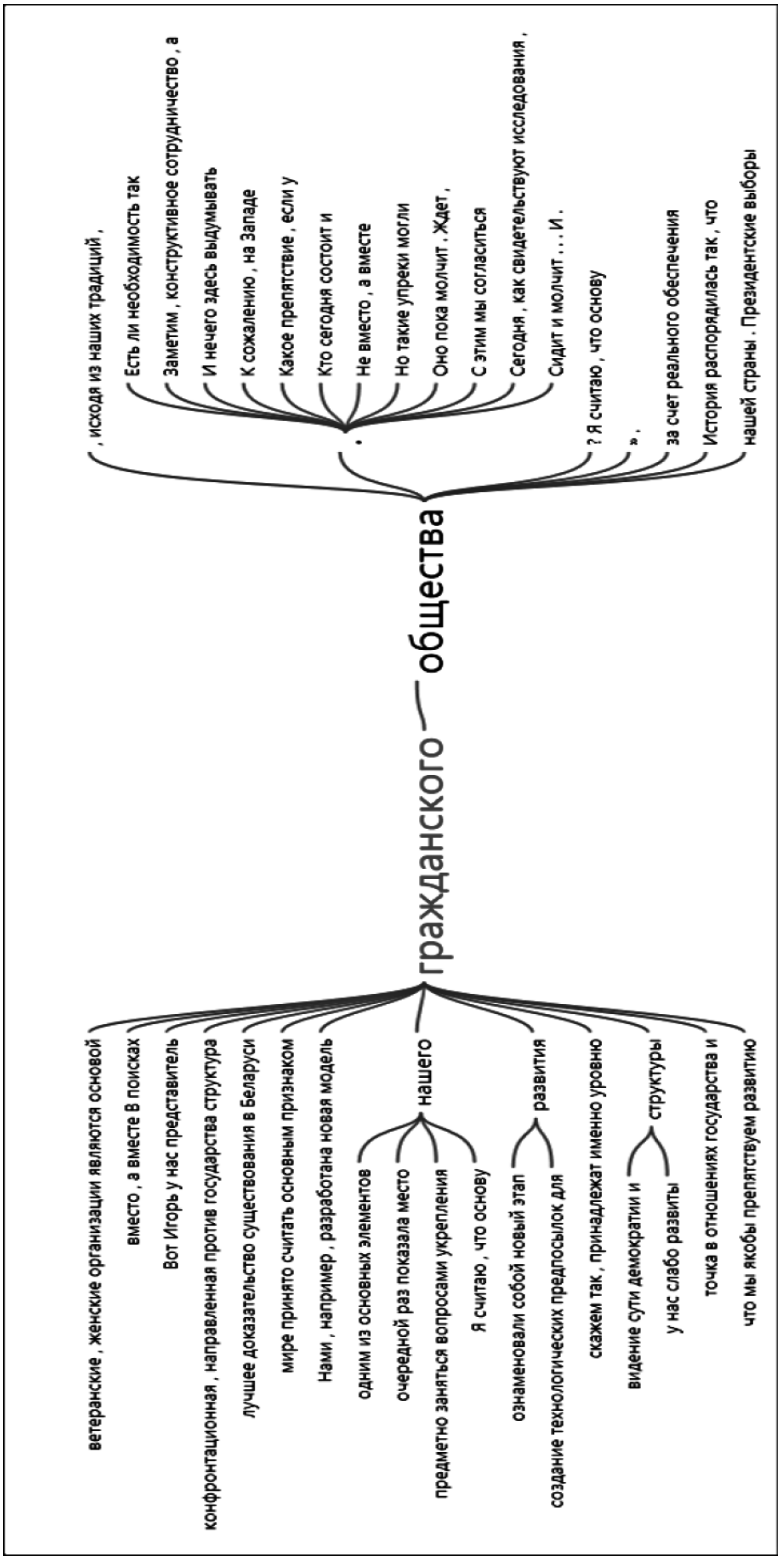
[19] See, for example, Belarusians and the Market (2003) "Haiken: *Belarus will not remain outside common development tendencies*" [Хайкен: «Беларусь не останется вне общих тенденций развития»] № 24 (557) 23–30 June. Available at: http://br.minsk.by/index.php?article=18933&year=2003.

nature of the Belarusian civic sector.[20] The overall goal was to create an alternative to pro-democratic civil society that would act as a legitimising force for Aleksandr Lukashenko's political regime whilst eliminating the most viable and organised oppositional NGOs. Following a period of ambiguity in the use of "civil society", officialdom was becoming more assertive in its own vision of "civil society", as the following word tree demonstrates.

This is only an extract of a diagram representing concordances of the term in official discourse over the period. I will summarise the most important presented segments. Firstly, the content present in the tree diagram emphasises "the new model" which is context-specific ("based on our traditions"). It acknowledges a "new phase in development" that presupposes "constructive cooperation" between the state and society. It provides a robust definition of the term ("...war veterans", women's organisations are the foundation of "civil society"). The possessive pronoun "our", the node containing four links, accentuates on one hand, the "uniqueness" of the Belarusian concept and, on the other hand, contrasts it to other models.

The rigid definition of "councils, labour unions, youth, veterans and women's organisations" seen as "pillars of the state", a phrase attributed to the president (see Extract 5), saw increasing use in the content of *Sovietskaya Belorussiya*. It appeared six times in my search within five sources as a direct quote (variants were excluded from the count). Officialdom persistently saw "civil society" as a partner in a state-building project, the rhetoric also internalised elements of Soviet discourse. "Civil society" in this context was attributed particular values and ideals that demonstrated explicit divergence from earlier democratic discourse and Western models of "civil society". The idea of "civil society" in the Belarusian official media discourse, was understood as public associations cooperating with the government in the implementation of official policy rather than encouraging the diverse development of free and autonomous civic associations that function with the purpose of limiting, legitimising and controlling political power (Wood, 1990) together with solving social and economic problems. The regime saw public associations as a constituent component of the regime, rather than a domain separate from the state, whilst denying them autonomy and political agency, making them materially and strategically dependent. Notably, the term "non-governmental organisation" rooted in Western discourse, that intrinsically encompasses the idea of autonomy from the state, is predominantly used to refer to international or western-funded pro-democracy

[20] Andrew Wilson (2011:216) provided a comprehensive summary of this campaign. The crucial points are as follows: following President Lukashenko's rise to power in 1994–1995, the authorities made their first attempt at reducing the influence of the third sector. However, after this first wave of reforms the sector was still large in number. A second and third campaign against civil society began in 1999 and in 2001 when the sector saw its greatest reduction, as many of the NGOs had openly supported the opposition. A fourth wave of reforms forced the re-registration of the NGO sector in 2003–2005 and with it, the closure of 347 organizations.



Word Tree: collocations of "civil society" in Sovetskaya Belorussiya-Belarus Today

organisations in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*[21]. The significantly more frequently used term "*obshchestvennye organizacii"* (public associations), taking roots in the Soviet tradition[22], had a tendency to be used to refer to the institutions loyal to the regime (such as the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, the successor of the Soviet *Komsomol*, the Belarusian Republican Pioneer Organisation and pro-governmental Trade Unions) as well as politically "neutral" associations and initiatives involved in welfare. Such a model is reminiscent of the Soviet "administered mass organisations"[23] rather than "associational life"[24] in the Western sense.

The repetitive use of the phrase "the pillars of the state" became widespread in the content of *Sovietskaya Belorussiya* during this period. Such a direct, monotonous use of authoritative speech was aimed at insuring "a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life" (Baktin, 1981:272), a practice that I refer to as "monologisation" of discourse which is indivisible from the wider processes of socio-political and cultural centralisation. The periodical reproduced the official point of view on "civil society" by quoting official policymakers and scientists. To ensure the unity of such ideological communication, there are some discursive practices that a reporter can deploy. The article by Lepeshko (in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* 29.09.2005) presents an example of a reporter's assigned "active orientation" (Vološinov, 1973) towards the "other person's speech":

> *The idea announced by A. Lukashenko of the "pillars of the state", represented by the strong labour union and youth movements (plus, of course, veterans and women's organisations) is very attractive and is likely to find wide support within society.*

The utterance internalises the quotation, which is partly demarcated by quotation marks. The reporter assigns a positive evaluative accent to the reported speech ("the idea... is very attractive"). The reporter further aligns the official point of view with wider society's position ("the idea... is likely to find wide support within society") contributing to the establishment of a centralised language.

The "monologisation" of civil society discourse was particularly pronounced during the mid-decade of the 2000s, associated with a number of security concerns triggered by the events known as the "colour" revolutions that took place in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgystan (2005), inspired by controversial presidential elections. Officialdom

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[21] The searches of term "NGO" (НГО in Russian) revealed 7 instances in 3 sources within 102 articles dated from 2000–2010 in my dataset; "non-governmental organisations" (неправительственные организации) – 21 instances in 7 sources respectively; "public associations" (общественные организации) – 80 instances within 27 sources.

[22] On the notion "obshchestvennyi" refer to Kharkhordin (2005: 87–89). Also see Kasza (1995) with regards to *Soviet public organisations*.

[23] See Kasza (1995).

[24] Tocqueville, for further reference see Cohen & Arato (1997).

recognised the "pre-emptive"[25] and homogenising property of the term "civil society" in uniting the nation in the context of the threat of revolution. The media provided a clear-cut line between real "civil society" and "uncivil" society. In his interview with the chief editor of *Rossijskaya Gazeta*, Vladislav Fronin, which was also reproduced in *Sovetskaya Belarussiya* (29.12.2005), Aleksandr Lukashenko stated:

> *As for "revolutions", they are not revolution. They are banal banditism, craftily implemented using Western money. [...] I reply to my opponents: "we see civil society differently". We create it based on the main civic institutions. These are the largest youth organisations, labour unions, war veteran organisations and women's organisations. I underline the largest and therefore mass organisations.*

The authoritative word of the president is reported in a linear style (directly). It is a "double-voiced" (Bakhtin, 1981) discourse in which the alternative point of view ("revolutions" embraced in quotation marks) is confronted, negated and marginalised by invoking a criminalising discourse ("banal banditism"). The alternative idea of "civil society" is substituted by a subordinate of the regime, mass organisations. The juxtaposition of Us (pro-governmental organisations) and Them (opposition and pro-democracy NGOs), is intensified by the conspiratorial discourse used in portraying the West as an enemy supported by the opposition, a common practice in the official media to stigmatize pro-democratic civil society. By trying to monopolise the public sphere, the government endeavoured to preempt and, later, destroy the civic protests and activism associated with the "colour revolutions", to secure support from the wider population and also from the Russian government. Putin's regime similarly saw the revolutions as threat and was committed to preventing such a scenario both at home and in the CIS countries by providing financial and strategic support.[26] Interestingly, this period saw a rapid increase in the inclusion of Russian "official" sources reflecting on the idea of "civil society". The Belarusian official media welcomed publications criticising pro-democratic civil society, colour revolutions and American interference in domestic politics. Notoriously, a number of articles by Aleksandr Dugin, a Russian political scientist and advocate of anti-Western views contributed to anti-globalisation discourse styled in the tradition of Cold War rhetoric, portraying pro-democracy NGOs as a conspiring "other". To quote one such reference (Dugin, in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* 13.06.2006):

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[25] On the notion of "pre-emptive" authoritarian practices see Silitski (2007), Korosteleva (2012).

[26] Andrew Wilson, (2011:210) stated: "Lukashenka sold himself to the Kremlin as a bulwark against the fear the Kremlin had sold itself of US-inspired colour revolution and as a testing ground for 'counter-revolutionary technology'. Russia was happy to loan money, media support and the services of its 'political technologists' to stop the virus spreading".

> *In the contemporary context, it is NGOs, public associations and funds that become the main conductors of globalisation and Americanisation. [...] In reality, we deal here with the intelligence activity in the era of the information society. Contrary to the traditional forms of espionage, their activity is carried out almost openly. We have seen the role non-governmental organisations played in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine.*

By making these allegiances with Russian sources the periodical *Sovietskaya Belorussiya* aimed to increase its capacity for influence, ensuring the centralisation and unification of the public space.

In response to the monologic practices aimed at the monopolisation of the term "civil society" described above, a number of de-centralising, "centrifugal" (Bakhtin, 1981), discursive practices were used to confront the semantic unity imposed by officialdom. As an example, instances of the re-articulation of official definitions in an ironic manner were identified, as demonstrated in the utterance taken from the article *The Fourth Rome* by Sergey Nikoliuk (2003, in *Belorusy i rynok*):

> *It is the XXI century outside, but without any obvious reason and direct orders, civil society forms. Yes, yes, the civil society that 'relies on the recently elected Council of Deputies, labour unions and the mighty youth organisations'.*

Irony in this extract is based on repetition (re-quoting) with slight variation, or "re-accentuation" in Bakhtin's terms (Bakhtin, 1981:419). The reporter "re-accentuates" the official voice by assigning an ironical stance to it through such linguistic mechanisms as hyperbola, "mighty youth organisation" and the repetition of the particle "Yes, yes" functioning as discursive markers allowing the reader to recognise that the meaning in the reproduced utterance is not the meaning implied in the original source. Therefore irony can be seen as an important means of de-centralisation and is constitutive of a discursive battle over the term and thus "open[ing] up a discursive space for new meanings to emerge dialogically" (Baxter, 2007:119).

"Public Square" and the new idea of "civil society"

Coincident with the third electoral campaign of the spring of 2006, a new idea of "civil society" became evident in the alternative press emphasising the importance of self-organising citizens and their ability to direct the country's future development. The Presidential campaign resulted in Lukashenko's re-elected for a third term. As a result, mass social protests took place in Minsk's October Square expressing discontent and demanding change. As a result of the protests and increasing public activism, a number of journalists and intellectuals reported the emergence of a "new society". There was a feeling that "something had changed in Belarusian society or in some part of it", "something

had moved from the dead end" (Dynko, 2006 in *Naša Niva*). Through social networks, independent media, pro-democracy NGOs and youth movements, the public at large were able to assemble and demonstrate new ways of civic resistance. As Chief Editor of *Naša Niva,* Andrey Dynko (2006, in *Naša Niva*), stated, whilst reflecting on the events of 2006:

> *Spring 2006 impressed us with the high level of self-organisation seen in independent society (nezalezhnae gramadztva) in the capital. This was manifest by the establishment of the camp site, the organising of flash mobs, the spreading of information via the Internet and the organised mass support of political prisoners. Not only was this self-organisation the best ever [...], it also took some processes totally away from the control of the authorities. Surprising was the energy and re-generation of the protests.*

In particular, the voices of a younger generation who embraced European values and supported democratisation lead to new "civil society" rhetoric, emphasising the idea of a self-organised society. The voices of young protesters and camp dwellers at the Square were quoted in the press, as the following example by Aliaksandr Klaskouski, (2006 in *Naša Niva*) illustrates:

> *Bi-polar scheme – political opposition against the regime – is too simplistic. October Square showed that civil society is emerging. As Stas Pachobut, pointed out, "it is not the parties" representatives or activists who are gathered here, but real European people.*

"Civil society" as a term in this utterance focuses on the themes of the wider community in contrast to a rather "closed", over politicised and at times monologic discourse of the political opposition. The slightly colloquial phrase "real European people" invokes the voice of a young person, representative of a new generation that enjoy European values. Such a polyphonic style of reporting contributed to the "dialogisation" and diversification, of "civil society" discourse, implying the emergence of a communitarian, "bottom up" model of "civil society" during the protests in the Square.

Framed within a narrative of "revolution", the idea of "civil society" appeared to presuppose a rapid "extra-institutional mobilisation" (Arato, 1993:314), and the overthrow of the illiberal regime by non-violent means. It became a framework used by the political opposition and civil society to catalyse change in society during the electoral periods. This idea of a self-organising "civil society" was used by Aleksandr Milinkevich, a Presidential candidate and the Leader of the United Democratic Coalition who was widely cited in the alternative periodicals. The idea was used to mobilise civil society or as Milinkevich stated, the "most active part of society" (in Sadovskaya, 2006, in *Belorusy i rynok*) and to galvanise civic resistance. However, the forms of a nascent civil society represented by societal self-organisation together with the apparent lack of a clear vision of the alternative political elite of how to use this spontaneous citizen activism in order to deliver democratic change,

proved ineffective against the overt coercion and "pre-emptive" measures employed by the regime.

Limited liberalisation: dialogic politics in the Belarusian press (2008–2010)

The elections of 2010 took place in a markedly different environment to those previous. The period of so-called "liberalisation" (Wilson, 2011) between 2008 and 2010 saw changes in foreign policy aimed at rebalancing the relationship between Russia and the West. The political environment was also influenced by the Eastern Partnership framework launched by the European Union, resulting in the establishment of a new platform for dialogue between the Belarusian government, civil society and Western institutions, who also attached some conditions on democracy and human rights (Korosteleva, 2009). This change in the socio-political context was reflected on a discursive level. A new emphasis was placed on the relationship between the state and "civil society". The notions of "dialogue" and "partnership" between the government and the West and between the state and civil society, appeared frequently in the content of the periodical. The dialogisation was also manifest in the "style" of the discourse. In the Address to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly published in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, President Lukashenko (in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* 24.04.2009) proclaimed:

> *We need to encourage partnership between the state and public institutions. The more diverse the spectrum of these institutions, the more opportunities there are for the manifestation of the social activity of citizens.*

The extract constitutes a shift towards a more "normative" understanding of "civil society", which recognises the diversity of civic institutions and the need for citizen participation. The use of a more empowering reference, "citizen" as opposed to "people" (*narod*), frequently appropriated before, articulates new forms of relations between the state and society. The clearly confrontational manner observed in the earlier speeches of the president, now appear to have been replaced by a more dialogic style. The president's point of view was appropriated by other officials whose voices were widely reported in *Sovietskaya Belarussia*. As Elena Kirichenko, the head of the NGO department at the Ministry of Justice, said in an interview, "citizens can voluntarily form public associations, [...] independent of the state's authority" (Rud, in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* 16.12.2010). The vocabulary of democracy, human rights and civic participation once again became an important part of official discourse. As Sergey Martynov, the Minister of International Affairs, announced to the foreign media and *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (31.07.2009):

> *Belarus will be working on reforms towards democracy, the development of civil society, freedoms for NGOs, supremacy of law and compliance of human rights, but according to those aspects that we consider important for ourselves.*

The message is clearly addressed firstly, to the international actors and secondly, to a domestic audience. The demonstration of the willingness of the state to adopt changes towards democratisation can be interpreted as an attempt to appear more legitimate both in the eyes of the EU policymakers and the Belarusian citizens. The appropriation and circulation of forms and meanings originating from liberal democracies in the West, with the focus on the notion of "civil society", serves as a signal for the promotion of partnerships with the international community. The use of "civil society" in universal terms of democracy and human rights, however, appear to be contested by the national framework, revealing tensions between normative and local ("empirical") perspectives. The use of the pronoun "we" in an "exclusive" sense, exacerbated by "ourselves", clearly indicates the intention of the Belarusian authorities to define "civil society" and its role in the country's development in their own terms. Therefore, by reducing the room for the normative point of view, the authorities revealed tensions with the decentralising centrifugal forces associated with the Eastern Partnership's agenda.

Similarly to *Sovetskaya Belorussiya,* the responses found within the alternative press demonstrate a shift from earlier radical interpretations of the term as a counterweight to the regime, now, to a variety of differing meanings and tones, as the article, "The Assembly took 'a second breath'" by Barbarich (2009, *Belorusy i rynok*) demonstrates:

> *The Assembly*[27] *passed a number of documents. In its Resolution it is pointed out that the third sector 'with hope and moderate optimism welcomes the steps of the Belarusian authorities towards the rapprochement between civil society and the state, as well as Belarus's aspiration to move closer to European standards.*

As the extract demonstrates, the relationship between the state and civil society grew more amicable, with the two actors being portrayed on an equal footing. Anchored in the European Union's agenda, the liberal-democratic perspective encouraged cooperation with the state and implied a less politicised, NGO-centric, version of "civil society", echoing the EU definition of "civil society" (see European Commission, Concept paper, 2009:4))[28] and thus further distancing it from the political notion of "opposition". However an air of strong scepticism remained with regards to the liberalisation of the regime (as an example, see Dynko (2010, in *Naša Niva*)). The limitations of this EU-centric model

[27] The Assembly of NGOs is one of the structures (together with the consortium "EuroBelarus") who became representatives at the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

[28] European Commission (16/11/2009) "Civil Society Forum strengthens the Eastern Partnership", IP/09/1715 Available: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-1715_en.htm?locale=en.

were partly acknowledged in the press, primarily due to it dismissing the communitarian (cultural) idea of "civil society" (see Yakavenka, 2010 in *Narodnaya Volya).*

On the brink of the Presidential election of 2010 the diversity of voices that formed the discourses on "civil society" were far from unified and represented a high degree of polemics – the discursive practice described by Bakhtin's notion "heteroglossia" (*raznorečie*). There were multiple references to the terms "civil society", *"nezaležnae gramadztva",* "third sector", "opposition", and even to the neo-liberal ideas of "big society"[29] originally embraced by the UK Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties. By citing differing voices and constructing an array of identities and definitions, such as "the community of civic-minded *[neabyjakavyh in Belarusian]* people" (see Byanko & Sivets, 2010, in *Narodnaya Volya*); together with producing vibrant electoral campaigns such as "Tell the Truth!" or "For Free Belarus!" Belarusian journalists, intellectuals and the oppositional political elite contributed to the diversification and pluralisation of the public sphere. However, whilst such a diversity of social languages and points of view may constitute a plurality of opinions and a democratic culture, such a multi-accentuality may also reinforce the creation of multiple disunited publics, and consequently, lead to the fragmentation of civil society. Indeed, it is frequently acknowledged that Belarusian civil society is fragmented and divided. During the elections, the opposition and civil society failed to mobilise efforts to nominate a single leader and to provide a viable alternative to President Lukashenko. To quote *Naša Niva*'s Editor-in-Chief Andrei Dynko, "the opposition [was] going to the elections divided" (Dynko, in *Naša Niva*, 2010) as nine alternative candidates to the presidency, participated in the elections. Furthermore, such mediation may also bring difficulties resulting in an ambiguous and uncertain meaning of the notion of "civil society"[30] allowing it to be used by various actors for differing purposes. As a consequence it may have a detrimental effect on political culture and the development of civil society.

Furthermore, the alternative discourses proved not to be without bias. The well integrated culturally and politically minded community may be at risk of creating a non-inclusive, "monologic", public space that is inclined to exclude those who do not share its political and cultural aspirations. The use of the term "*sviadomyja*" in the press demonstrates this well and may be representative of a divide in society. It also serves as a good example of how discursive tensions and struggles emerge over the understanding of what constitutes

[29] The idea of "big society" was a central point in the programme of the Candidate to Presidency Yaroslav Romanchuk in 2010, published in Sovetskaya Belorussiya on 01.12.2010. Accessed on 18.09.2012 at http://www.sb.by/politika/article/postroim-novoe-sokhranim-luchshee.html.

[30] This assumption is partly acknowledged by (Yahorau & Vadalazhskaya, 2011:21). In their report the authors demonstrated that "the category of "civil society" remains rather vague and insignificant both at the level of public consciousness within the country and as a possibility of self-identification for the actors".

"civil" society. In the alternative national-democratic discourse, the actors of civil society are frequently referred to as "civic-minded citizens" (*sviadomyja hramadziane*); a "civic-minded community" (*sviadomaja hramada*) (Klaskouski 2006, in *Naša Niva*). It is also used in collocation with other adjectives, such as "all free and civic-minded people of the country" (*svabodnyja i sviadomyja*); "civic-minded and educated Belarusians" (*sviadomyja i adukavanyja*) (Prof. Sakavik, 2009 in *Narodnaya Volya*), "intelligent people – civic-minded Belarusians" (reader Kozlova, 2010 in *Narodnaya Volya*). In other contexts, the term became associated with "nationally-minded", "national-patriotic" people, the "nationally-conscious" part of Belarusian society. "Non civic-minded" (*ne sviadomyja*) are those who "believe the contemporary official propaganda", (reader Zhukau 2008, in *Narodnaya Volya*). The construction of the notion is based around the opposition of two categories Us (politically- and culturally-minded Belarusians) and Them (an apolitical, nationally-indifferent populace), the categories contain an element of social stratum. As demonstrated, journalists, public intellectuals and scholars applauded the young, smart, IT-literate and well-educated protesters, who internalised national and democratic values, and portrayed them in heroic terms. Those who were not able to embrace liberal or national values were attributed negative qualities. Claiming this identity and constructing this social division creates a risk of alienating some Belarusian intellectual groups from "the people", portraying them as Sovietised, denationalised and lacking strong political and cultural aspirations. The officialdom did not miss the opportunity to exacerbate this alienation. The Belarusian word "*sviadomyja*" can be frequently found in the official media where it is used to refer to the nationalist and democratic opposition in an ironic manner. Irony is achieved through the use of a Belarusian word in Russian text constituting a mocking repetition of someone's speech. Quotation marks are always applied in such cases: "our very 'intelligent' and 'civic minded' (наших очень «грамотных» и «свядомых»)" (Lukashenko 2008, in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*). It is a strategy that Mary Talbot called "ironic double-voicing" (Talbot, 2007:65) drawing on Bakhtin's dialogic principle. In this case, it is the use of the Belarusian language by Russian-speaking officials, quoted by the media, which becomes a means of expressing the hostility of the Belarusian-minded "minority" towards the rest of society. Such portrayal is used to distance the reader from a Belarusian national identity and helps to sustain this status quo of "otherness", ensuring popular support for Lukashenko. It is not necessarily the language or culture that is ridiculed, rather the rhetoric is reminiscent of a "class struggle"[31] between groups possessing different cultural and social capital. The alienation of the alternative "civil society" from "the people" (*narod*) is highlighted in *Sovietskaya Belorussiya:* "[t]heir real problem is that they are

[31] On the "class" issue in Belarus refer to Elena Gapova (2010): Anxious Intellectuals. In Bradatan, C. & Oushakine, S. In Marx's Shadow: *Knowledge, Power and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia*. Lexington Books: Lanham.

too distant from the people (*narod*) and from real people's problems!" (Lukashenko, in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* 24.04.2009).

To conclude the subsection, hopes for change were unrealised following the presidential elections, as centripetal tendencies and coercive powers ensured that it was practically impossible for the opposition and civil society to challenge the regime of President Lukashenko.[32] Having demonstrated a double standard in mediating "civil society" by embracing liberal-democratic rhetoric rooted in the ideas of a viable civic sector and good governance, such "dialogisation" once again appeared to be a pragmatic strategy used by officialdom to secure the space for manoeuvre between Russia and the West, which further provided viability for the regime.[33] After the protests in October Square in December 2010, the country's domestic and foreign politics remained strongly influenced by these events[34]. The official media continued to extol the official point of view on "civil society". As an example, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* quoted widely Anatoly Rubinov (in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* 22.12.2010), a well-known Belarusian ideologist, academician and Chair of the Republican Council, who called the protesters "destructive political forces" and "evil extremists". The alternative media responded in a dialogic manner by circulating counter-discourses and citing the voices of human rights activists and the cultural and pro-democratic community who embraced the ideas of solidarity with the victims of repression. This suggested that the battle for the ownership of "civil society" would continue in the contested Belarusian media landscape.

Conclusion

In summary, from the early 2000s Belarusian political elites set an intrinsically controversial goal of constructing "civil society" from above. Officialdom persistently saw civil society as a partner in a state-building project, metaphorically referring to pro-government civic organisations as "pillars of the state" with the aim of replacing the "politicised" structures of civil society. It was demonstrated that the official discourse of "civil society" was not so uniform, rather it was a hybridised discursive construct that internalised a mixture of discourses, from Soviet to democratic, circumscribed by a specific social and political context. The discourse manifested itself in deploying various forms of manipulation

[32] http://n-europe.eu/article/2012/12/20/zneshnepalitychnyya_vyniki_2012_i_spadchyna_19_snezhnya.

[33] In Andrew Wilson's (2011) view, the "liberalisation" was an attempt to rebalance the regime's relationship with Russia and the West, the period is known for deteriorating relations with Russia. Lukashenko required just enough of the West in the political landscape to ensure Russia continued to subsidise his social model whilst ensuring the survival of the authoritarian regime.

[34] http://n-europe.eu/article/2012/12/20/zneshnepalitychnyya_vyniki_2012_i_spadchyna_19_snezhnya.

– from overt coercion to more consensual forms, with the aim of maintaining civic activism within official bounds. Framed as a part of democratic discourse, the term "civil society" either appeared to serve as a façade for policy or political project or it acquired context-specific meanings and connotations, at times almost contrasting its democratic origins. At the heart of these discursive transformations were strategies aimed at the monopolisation of the concept of "civil society" and the unification of "civil society" discourse. The way the term "civil society" was mediated in the official press during the period of investigation showed a high correlation between official policy and media coverage, highlighting the official press's strong dependency on the government's political agenda. The familiar Soviet approach of using the media as an instrument of ideological manipulation was reinforced, particularly during electoral campaigns, with journalists adjusting to the agenda and policy of government officials. Alternative voices were counteracted and marginalised, and thus disenfranchised from the production of "civil society" discourse in the official press. Such a close correlation between official policy and the discursive practice of the press contributed to the legitimation of Lukashenko's rule and the justification for the strengthening of the state, whist effectively counteracting de-centralising, democratising, tendencies.

These official practices further provoked radicalisation in the non-governmental civic sector, which aligned with political parties in their struggle against the regime. In this context the concept was understood as a counterweight against the expansion and abuse of state power. Such "politicisation" of the term "civil society" occurred as a result of transnational influences in its mediation in the alternative press, which showed a strong tendency towards the inclusion of a political agenda in their content. Retaining an impartial attitude and balanced coverage towards the issue at times proved equally challenging. These re-articulations, were often shaped to form counter-strategies in an attempt to shape discourses and discursively struggle over the term "civil society" – a "struggle among social-linguistic points of view" (Bakhtin, 1981:273). Such a struggle can be further understood as the battle for social and discursive capital (Bourdieu, 1991). The heteroglossic nature of the alternative discourses was juxtaposed against the monologic style of the statist discourse. The diversification and pluralisation of the public sphere observed in the middle and at the end of the decade can be seen as indicative of an emergent civil society, understood as a self-organising realm of Belarusian citizens reinforced by the dynamic multiplicity of voices, accents, points of views present within the discourse. There was no uniform agreement regarding the concept of "civil society" and a certain level of polemics could be observed between the sources and even within a single source. However, it was also acknowledged that the alternative discourses should not be idealised. Over-politicising or over-nationalising "civil society" may lead to the monologisation of discourse. "Excessive" "heteroglossia" may create a "divided" civil society and ambiguity in the meaning of the term, which may have detrimental effects on civic activity and political culture.

The article also attempts to demonstrate the transnational influences mediating the concept of "civil society". The construction of the notion was shown not to be an exclusively traditional process, nor was it entirely shaped by Western influences, as some may suggest. It was a process involving a complex set of discursive practices in which meaning was constantly negotiated and constructed by various actors in a dialogic manner within the space provided by the media. The dialogic practices, by their mere nature, overcome any binaries (e.g. official and alternative; western and local) in such a way, to paraphrase Ken Hirschkop (1999:262), that if considered separately, each discourse or point of view on "civil society" would constitute "its necessary unfinished character". Therefore, it is possible to characterise the mediation of the term "civil society" as a transnational, continuous, and contextual negotiation and re-articulation between multiple voices. Importantly, the analysis of a number of reported utterances showed that by placing the term "civil society" in a new context and by infiltrating it with his or her own comments and interpretations, a reporter had the potential to generate the term's polysemy. As Bourdieu (1991:40) pointed out,

> *Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us that, in revolutionary situations, common words take on opposite meanings. In fact, there are no neutral words. [...] [A]t the cost of the re-interpretation implied in the production and reception of the common language by speakers occupying different positions in the social space, and therefore endowed with different intentions and interests, it manages to speak to all groups and all groups speak it.*

As a result, "civil society" became a term used by different actors for different purposes.

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Substitution of Civil Society in Belarus: Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisations*

The available scholarly work on the weak state of civil society in Belarus gives credence to this argument. Authentic, pro-democratic non-governmental organisations appear to be small in number, marginalised and with limited influence inside the country. At the same time, state administrative resources have witnessed substantial growth. The stronger position of the state (when compared to civil society) is due, in part, to its success in developing various levers of control to authentic civil society and the established pro-government "non-governmental organisations" (NGOs) loyal to the state. These operate without obstacles. This alignment allows NGOs to benefit from doing their work unhindered and extend the reach and type of activities they are able to carry out. As a result, civil society is divided, or polarised, with their relation to the state serving as the decisive dividing line between them.

This paper endeavours to provide a closer look at the extent to which the activities of pro-democratic organisations are copied by government-backed entities and to what extent the substitution of authentic civil society with government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) takes place. While membership in GONGOs is impressive, the extent to which the efforts to present themselves as civil society organisations can partly facilitate their popularity and supplant the work of real NGOs. Instances of imitating the activity of pro-democratic NGOs by organisations created by the government will be discussed and analysed. This paper is mainly based on statements and interviews from practitioners and experts in the field. This provides an additional practical dimension to the research conducted. The analysis identifies substitution in three dimensions (internal, external and mixed) and considers them separately in greater detail.

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The Operation of GONGOs in Belarus

The existence of a significant number of GONGOs in Belarus is one of most important factors in understanding how Belarusian civil society operates and is an issue that has long been overlooked. GONGOs are organisations that require a certain degree of dependency on the state and often are created by it. Interestingly enough, a set of organisations defined as "state associations" or "state NGOs" exists in Belarusian law, but these are distinct. GONGOs receive substantial benefits from the state and, as such, they represent the GONGOs described here.

If one takes a closer look at GONGOs, naturally, they do not appear to be independent, as they are initiated from above, rather than from below. Apart from being created by the government, the organisations continuously align their work with that of the state. Therefore, they do not act in the name of protecting the public's interests, but often embody a mechanism for additional governmental control over society. The Belarusian authorities reciprocate the loyalty of GONGOs through lifting obstacles which the organisations would otherwise face. Financial dependence also plays an important role, although some GONGOs are guided by the desire to receive financial support from sources other than the state.

Therefore, the main characteristics of a GONGO are the dependent mode of their creation, operation and decision-making, privileges of extended rights in comparison to other similar organisations, maintaining the role of an implementing agent of the state, rather than as an actor for civil society. The existence of this phenomenon echoes a common practice found during Soviet times when any volunteer state association that existed was, in fact, a body in support of the Communist Party.

The existence of pro-government organisations ensures greater control and better rule over society by the authoritarian state. These organisations can be established in different civil sectors and for different civil society groups to ensure state control. In these cases, space for authentic NGOs to function is significantly limited and can be further reduced by instituting legal regulations that make it harder for NGOs to operate. In Belarus the mandatory registration of organisations, in conjunction with the criminal liability one faces for acting in the name of an unregistered organisation, serves as mechanisms that hamper the work of NGOs.

Vitali Silitski made an important distinction between pro-democratic and pro-government organisations and argued that the 'democratic' NGOs specialise in public campaigns and seminars, while pro-government organisations are mostly represented in areas such as social projects, charity and leisure activities (e.g. festivals, contests). This is confirmed by a quick survey of the websites of two of the best known pro-government organisations – the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM in Belarusian) and Belaya Rus'. Although the total number of their members is remarkable for Belarus (they claim

to have 500,000 and 138,000 members respectively),[1] their websites are not particularly informative and mostly list leisure activities as their specialisation (e.g. organising cultural events, concerts, sporting events). These two organisations will be analysed further as the most obvious examples of GONGOs.

The Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) is the most well-known GONGO in Belarus. Its overall structure is comprised of other organisations, but no detailed information is publicly available. The creation of BRSM in 2002 was the result of a merger of two organisations, the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union and the Belarusian Union of Youth. Today BRSM brings together about 500,000 young people, ranging in age from 14 to 31 years old, and represents about 19% of the number of young people in Belarus.

The organisation attracts youth using financial incentives. Card-carrying members get discounts on products and services in more than one hundred retail outlets and service centres in Minsk alone. Outside Minsk, a system of discounts for BRSM members can be found at sport clubs and swimming pools as well as beauty salons, cosmetics shops, and printing and other services that are certainly appealing to most young people. It does not create equal conditions with other organisations which do not have the financial benefits to incentivise membership. In 2011 the BRSM received 20.5 billion Belarusian roubles (about $6.6 million). This constituted 98% of the total of all the finance provided to implement youth policies in Belarus. In reality, the BRSM gets even more. On 13 January 2003, Lukashenka signed a decree which required that local BRSM branches were financed by the local authorities' budget. The government was also responsible for repairing the organisation's main office.

However, information about how exactly the money is being spent remains outside the realm of public discourse as it is not disclosed. Although the website of the Ministry of Education of Belarus lists 16 organisations that receive support from the government for their activities the aim of this support and the extent to which other organisations are supported remains unclear. BRSM is a vivid example of an organisation that receives money from the state budget, though formally it has the status of a public organisation and should be on equal footing with all other public youth organisations.

Much less is known about another recognised GONGO, Belaya Rus'. Their emergence followed the pattern established by the BRSM. It includes former ministers, including the ex-Minister of Education and the current Vice Chairman of the Presidential Administration, Alyaksandar Radzkou, members of Parliament, the rector of the Belarusian State Pedagogical University, Pyotr Kukharchyk and the rector of the Belarusian State Economic University, Uladzimir Shymau in addition to numerous other governmental officials. Almost all the senior management of the organisation (3 out of

[1] See more at the official web site of Belarusian Republican Youth Union at http://brsm.by/ and Belaya Rus' at http://www.belayarus.by/ [accessed 17 December 2013].

4 vice-chairmen) have worked in the House of Representatives (i.e. the lower chamber of Belarusian Parliament between 2008 and 2012). The website of the organisation specifies a membership of 148,000 people (as of 1 Nov 2014) and lists several organisational activities. However, its real function is similar to that of the BRSM.

To sum up, GONGOs were created to complement government activities and function as state actors, enjoying extended rights in comparison to other organisations in Belarus, rather than as representatives of authentic civil society.

State Corporatism in Belarus

In theoretical conceptualisations of authoritarianism studies the use of officially sanctioned public organisations to restrict people's participation in political processes is referred to as state corporatism where corporatism is defined as a:

> *System of interest representation, in which the constituent units are organised into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports Schmitter Philippe. Still the country of Corporatism. Review of politics Vol. 36.1, p. 93.*

Originally elaborated to describe the interaction between the state and economic interest groups, the model almost immediately began to be used to analyse other interested groups, such as NGOs. Under this model, the state sets strict conditions for granting organisations permission to operate. The authorities also suppress authentic civil society groups. Such dependency reduces the number of such organisations, allowing the state to monitor their activities and supervise their members. This practice is evident in Belarus through its official state policy towards NGOs and democratic civil society. Restrictions on the representation of real interests in Belarus and its various limitations can be traced along two veins of thought for maintaining state control. Firstly, the neutralisation, or limitation of opportunities for public activities of independent NGOs, with the most advanced NGOs being excluded entirely from operating. This is made possible through impediments to registration and limited possibilities inside the country to advocate civil society causes (due to restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly). Secondly, the creation of GONGOs and other public society organisations by the government that replace authentic NGOs and promote state policies in their respective segments of society.

A considerable number of public organisations in Belarus do not just work closely with government agencies, but are incorporated into them and depend almost entirely on the will of the political elite. As a result, the sector of society originally meant to be an arena

for civil society is being intensely incorporated into the state, creating a "hybrid state-public sector". One of the consequences of this blend of the state and civil society is seen in data from two opinion polls from 2005 and 2010, which give light to society's eroding perception of NGOs. Three important trends can be outlined:

> *A lack of understanding of NGOs role and function and an absence of knowledge about the problems faced by civil society. The public does not see the need to protect public interests through participating in NGOs and supports the introduction of stricter controls over the activity of NGOs.*[2]

There is a lack of knowledge about NGOs. In 2005 only 30.7% had a formed an attitude (either positive or negative) towards NGOs, while the rest (69.3%) did not explicitly relate to the role of civic, or non-governmental organisations in Belarus.[3] Another study from 2010 shows that 44% of respondents said they did not know what an NGO is.[4] In the 2010 survey most respondents to the openended questions named only the BRSM, Belaya Rus' and the Consumer Rights Protection Society, whilst references to names of pro-democratic NGOs were negligible.[5]

The poll shows the "voluntary" sector is either not viewed as part of "civil society" (the "voluntary" sector is understood as organisations loyal to the state), or "civil society" is only viewed as "democratic civil society" (with progovernment organisations excluded from it). The mixture of "democratic" and "pro-government" factions in a single civil community is confusing for the public. Another example from the 2010 study shows that about 40% of people surveyed said that NGOs should be of assistance to the state and act as a state agent. It is fair to state that this is typical of people's understanding of NGOs in Belarus.

The data illustrates in Belarus is reviving the old corporatist system of state-civil society relations.

State Relations with GONGOs and NGOs

Civil society as a public sphere of citizens engagement, and a way for individuals to organise themselves to voice their interests in different areas, is often considered to be an agent of society that is independent of the state. The current classical understanding

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[2] Chavusau, Yury, 2005. *Ilramadskija abjadnanni: ich rolia II sucasnym hramadstvie', Analitycnaja zapiska pa vynikach nacyjanalnacha sacyjalagicnacha apytannia*, Minsk, September.

[3] Ibidem.

[4] *Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs and Eastern Europe Studies Centre, Non-governmental organisations: their role in the modern Belarusian society, Briefing note on the results of a national poll'*, 2010, Minsk.

[5] Ibid.

of civil society assigns it to a "third sector", as opposed to the state or market. However, in Belarus the rules of the game for civil society are drawn up almost exclusively by the state. Thus the state indirectly influences civil society while depriving the latter of such an opportunity. As closer ties with the government can bring tangible benefits for organisations, the extent to which they are tied to, or dependent on the government, is important. A variety of patterns of relations between the state and GONGOs and NGOs should be reviewed emphasised.

The relations between civil society and government can be characterised in different ways: non-interventionist, active encouragement, partnership, co-option or control. For individual NGOs the most favourable policy setting is when legal restrictions are minimised and they have complete freedom to receive funds from whomsoever they choose, to speak out and to associate freely. Belarus' NGOs do not enjoy these rights, as the state has a control-based relationship with society. The state executes control through a pervasive ideology, the dominance of media, repression of political activists, non-acceptance and suppression of any form of civil discontent. Numerous obstacles for the operation of NGOs, including the infamous article 193.1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus, exist. Simply put, this article stipulates that activities of unregistered organisations are subject to criminal liability.

The creation of GONGOs extends possibilities for their government-controlled operators and, in particular, provides access to these external funds. There has been a steady increase in donor assistance to civil society in Belarus. The EU and the United States have increased financial assistance for the "Governance and Civil Society" sector after the 2010 presidential election. The EU increased its aid by a magnitude of 1.5 and the United States by 12%. This trend was clearly observable already in 2010, when donors such as the United States, Germany, Sweden and France significantly reduced the distribution of aid through government institutions and appealed to civil society instead. In 2006, for example, twice the amount given in 2010 was allocated to the public administration than was provided to civil society. In 2011 eleven times more funding was allocated to civil society compared to the amount of funding for the government.[6]

The state has more favourable attitude towards GONGOs, as opposed to NGOs, is that it gives the state a chance to shift some of its own workload from the state level to their sponsored organisations. In the same time it would undoubtedly be wrong to think that every act of cooperation with the state makes an organisation pro-government. The extent of independence that an organisation is ready to maintain in exchange for said cooperation is pivotal. For some organisations state cooperation, and even support from

[6] Shylo, Karina and Egorov, Andrei, 2013. *Rol' i mesto grazhdanskogo obshchestva v sisteme donorskoi pomoshi ES dlia Belarusi*, Rabochyi document.

the state, appears to be a leading principle when they are considering the work they wish to conduct working with the disabled or socially marginalised groups.[7]

The state allows for some topics to be open to real cooperation (e.g. the environment), but also denies others that encroach on its own mandate such as, for example, electoral reform. At the same time this cooperation is fragile and does not eliminate the same problems organisations had prior. Nor does it ease the burden of operating under unfriendly conditions. Thus, the same organisation may successfully cooperate with the state on one issue and have the completely opposite result on another matter. A vivid example can be drawn from ecological NGOs when a successful campaign on draining swamps was followed by a campaign against a nuclear power plant which encountered serious pushback from the authorities and zero state cooperation.[8]

Is There a Substitution?

As described, Belarus employs control-based relations with civil society and has revived a state corporatist model. In this section we will consider the most recent evidence in Belarus when GONGOs were acting as representatives of pro-democratic NGOs or had the intention to be perceived as such, which will be analysed as a tool to identify instances of substitution. These cases are grouped into three categories. These include instances of the creation of official organisations and structures that are counterbalancing the activity of independent pro-democratic NGOs; cases when GONGOs, or their representatives participate in providing evaluations of civil society in Belarus; and reports on instances when GONGOs received funding intended for pro-democratic NGOs, all of which will be presented below.

Creation of "Official" Organisations to Counterbalance Democratically Oriented NGOs

Often authoritarian states create organisations to counterbalance and "mirror" the activity of pro-democratic NGOs. Formal NGOs that exist only on paper were also created during the Soviet Union, so the phenomenon is not totally new. One of the earliest examples of simulative organisations in the history of independent Belarus occurred back in the early 1990s, when GONGOs were established to take the money devoted to fighting the consequences of Chernobyl and aid programmes were "governmentalised". The same followed with programmes involving the competence of structures of (e.g. border guard

[7] Tatsiana Pashevalava, Interview #1, 2013 and Yury Chavusau, Interview #6, 2013.

[8] Tatsiana Pashevalava, Interview #1, 2013.

equipment, fighting trafficking in people and drugs). The government created sham organisations which existed only on paper and were composed of state officials.[9]

Such examples have also occurred in other countries. In Slovakia, for example, during the Meciar times in the mid-1990s, civil society was seen as a threat and GONGOs were commonly used to ensure better governmental control over civil society. Such was the case with youth organisations, where the independent Youth Council of Slovakia was confronted by the Slovak Youth Congress, which was comprised of representatives of the youth structures of the ruling coalition under Meciar. A similar situation involved the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists and the Association of Slovak Journalists. One of the most significant examples of organisations that mirror the activity of NGOs are those organisations devoted to young people, including the BRSM, the National Council of Youth and the children's organisation "Rada".

The national Council of Youth and children's organisation "Rada" served as an umbrella organisation, uniting both registered and unregistered associations under a platform for dialogue with a good balance of representation from various groups. The BRSM, after its creation in 2002, aspired for membership in Rada. Due to a vote during one of its meetings, Rada rejected the application to avoid the monopolisation and "governmentalisation" of activities pertaining to the nation's youth. Following that decision, Rada and its members encountered pressure and criticism. The President himself, during his annual address in 2003, spoke on the growing importance of the nation's youth and the importance of the state in developing the potential of young people:

> *A significant role has to be played by the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. It should reveal itself as a genuine organiser, leader of the youth movement in the country. Instead, BRYU, right after its creation fell under the umbrella of the so-called Rada. A huge organisation went under some kind of worn-through umbrella...*

Prior to that, Rada had some cooperation and dialogue with the state, however since 2003 communication has stopped. From 2003 until 2006 the state actively exerted pressure on the members of Rada until they were either abolished or had withdrawn their membership. Of the 30 organisations comprising Rada, around only seven members were left by 2006. A lawsuit against Rada was then filed. Its accounts were frozen, and the organisation was officially closed in 2006 after its registration was recalled.

After the elimination of Rada, the BRSM under the close patronage of the state, began establishing itself as the leading organisation in the youth sector domestically and abroad. Its efforts abroad included filing an application for membership with the European Youth Forum three times, along with several attempts to deprive Rada of its membership status.

[9] Matskevich, Vladimir, 2012. *Obshestvennii dialog v Belarusi: ot narodovlastija k grazhdanskomy ychastiju*, Minsk: Logvinov I.P., p. 54.

As of now the BRSM participates in all state programmes for youth and educational policy, and enjoys considerable state support with Presidential decrees issued to formalise their position.

In 2003 the Belarusian Committee of Youth Organisations (BCYO) was created which, (along with the BRSM), was supposed to copy the activities of Rada and other organisations working in the youth sphere. Currently, BCYO consists of 39 youth and children's organisations, with the task of "improving relations between public organisations and the government". However, BCYO exists only on paper. It does not have a website, and available information about its activities is limited. The committee members do not know its structure nor its activities. They were only invited to the first congress. Some of them did not give consent to their membership.[10]

Another example of the existence of two sets of organisations is the Union of Writers. The democratic aspirations and intractability of its leadership deprived the organisation of property. The authorities initiated a split in the Union and supported the creation of a new Union of Writers of Belarus (UWB) in 2005, which was loyal to the state.[11] UWB was intended to fulfil the states needs in the artistic and literary sphere and enjoys considerable state support. The same is true with the Union of Polish minority, where two unions exist, one supported by the government and the other one in opposition.

Other cases include the Belarusian Journalist Association (pro-democratic) and its governmental counterparts – the Belarusian Union of Journalists, the Belarusian Union of Women (pro-government) and the Belarusian organisation of Working Women (pro-democratic), "Green Network" (pro-democratic) and the pro-government organisation "Ecological Initiative", as well as official and pro-democratic (i.e. independent) trade unions. These are some of the most well-known and commonly referred to examples, but the list is not exhaustive. The existence of such GONGOs creates an imitation of public dialogue in the country.

The support that GONGOs enjoy from the state often comes at the expense of real NGOs. This becomes evident, for example, during election campaigns when GONGOs play a leading role. The widespread practice of nominating electoral commission members and observers from such structures lends credence to this claim. As the report on the campaigns leading up to elections "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections" from 2010 shows, the vast majority of domestic observers were representatives of pro-government associations and political parties loyal to the authorities:

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[10] *Alternatyunaja maladziovaja platforma, Bielaruski Kamitet Moladziovych Arhanizacyj – miortvaja struktura* <http://ampby.org/2011/04/05/4385/> [accessed 28 December 2013.

[11] Matskevich, Vladimir, 2012. *Obshestvennii dialog v Belarusi: ot narodovlastija k grazhdanskomy ychastiju*, Minsk: Logvinov I.P., p. 46.

> *The majority of observers (20,715 out of 39,619) represented the five largest GONGOs: Belaya Rus', the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, the Belarusian Women's Union, the Belarusian Public Association of Veterans and the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus... their aim was to confront observers from pro-democratic organisations and journalists.*[12]

The BYCO, along with conducting election observations and providing nominees for election committees, holds opinion polls the results of which usually mirror official election results. Interestingly enough, only two Belarusian organisations were allowed to conduct exit polls during the latest Presidential elections (2010) – the BCYO and the analytical centre EcooM.

Structures Built to Imitate a Dialogue with Civil Society

In addition to creating organisations which mirror the activity of non-governmental organisation, instances of civil society structures providing a facade of cooperation between the state and civil society also are known to occur.

In 2009, the Public Advisory Council (PAC) in the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus was created with the objective to:

> *... discuss issues of current importance on the development of the state and society, develop proposals for the active involvement of Belarus in global processes, improvement of the directions of socio-economic and political development of the country.*[13]

PAC was supposed to regularly meet and discuss issues that were then to be communicated to decision-makers. It was established by the initiative of Uladzimir Makei, The Head of the Presidential Administration. All of its representatives were personally selected by Makei, without any public discussion. The agenda was also formed mostly by the Head of the Presidential Administration.[14] The creation of the Council coincided with the announcement of the Eastern Partnership programme, where Belarusian civil society was to have a voice at an international level in the framework of the established Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership. In 2010 Uladzimir Makei expressed the readiness of the PAC of the Presidential Administration to represent Belarus at the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership. Interestingly enough, Makei expressed his intention to do precisely this and pursued it vigorously despite that the fact that the National Platform of the Civil Society Forum had already been created. The selection

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[12] http://belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/2011/Final_HRD_Monitoring_report_on_presidentialelection_in_Belarus_ru.pdf> [visited on 28 DEC 2013].

[13] *TUT.by*, 2009a. *Obshchestvenno-konsultativnyi sovet pri Administracyi prezidenta provel pervoe zasedanie* <http://news.tut.by/politics/128616.html> [accessed 4 January 2013].

[14] Yaraslau Bekish, Interview #7, 2013.

procedure was done, the delegation members were selected, and as such PAC formally could not aspire to participate.

It was an attempt to control civil society not only "from inside" the country, but also from the outside, through its aspirations to represent civil society externally. The statement of PAC on its participation in the Civil Society Forum preceded the creation of civil society platforms in the framework of the OSCE project "Development of the capacities for cooperation between government and civil society organisations". Yury Zahumienau and his organisation, the Support Centre for Associations and Foundations (SCAF) initiated the creation of twelve platforms (e.g. education, culture, human rights, social security and business). The completion of this process was set to be confirmed through the creation of a nationwide NGO platform under the patronage of PAC.[15]

Yet, pro-democratic NGOs had already created a nationwide NGO platform uniting various organisations in the framework of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (NP CSF). Thus, the structure proposed by Zahumienau could not be distinguished from the one already created. This had resembled an attempt to create a national platform of organisations to counterbalance the existing state line, with the only distinction between them being that it was composed of non-government controlled entities. The members of the NP CSF stated there are not "enough reasons to believe that the above [...] structures established in recent months are truly focused on an equal dialogue with civil society" (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2010). The process was also characterised by a "lack of publicity and transparent procedures on the side of the new platform organisers with regard to the selection of participants, [and] certain public statements do not correspond with real activities".

All three processes (the creation of PAC, alternative platforms and aspirations to take part in the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership), confirmed the state's attempt to replaced civil society structures with identical ones tailored to this aim. After this process raised public condemnation inside and outside the country, the structures were deactivated. PAC was dissolved in 2011, following a lack of meetings for over a year. The NP SCF in the Eastern Partnership continued without other organisations joining it.

Yury Zahimienau and his organisation SCAF is associated with yet another case involving GONGOs. This case involves the preparation of a report based on the CIVICUS index on civil society methodology that was done within the framework of a project supported by the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe. CIVICUS is an international alliance and represents an influential network of organisations at the local, national, regional and international levels, thus spanning a broad spectrum of civil society groups and organisations worldwide. The CIVICUS index is a valuable tool in helping to

[15] Egorov, 2010a. *Politicheskaya situacija nakanune Vtorogo Foryma, Grazhdanskogo Obshchestva*. Centr evropeiskoi transformacii, November.

evaluate civil society in over 75 countries. Its findings are disseminated to country experts and stakeholders, who use it for assessing the situation in a country. The preparation of the stability index report on Belarus under the auspices of CIVICUS was coordinated by Zahumenau, though since its creation, several flaws have been identified in the process of its preparation.

First of all, it is not clear why the choice was made to use SCAF The Belarusian public has rarely mentioned this organisation, nor does it appear to have much knowledge about it. The official website of the organisation looks modest and does not provide clear information about the organisation: No information could be found on the staff and concrete activities, some web pages are outdated referring to the fifteen year old news. It can be understood from the English version of the website that the scope of their activities range from facilitating the removal of anti-personnel mines to strengthening civil society. Secondly, during the course of the research project, the NGOs which participated in it withdrew from the process as the methodology used did not prove to be accurately designed for assessing the reality in Belarus. An analysis of what the appropriate methodology should have been was assessed by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Centre for European Transformation. They concluded that the findings did not reflect the results from the measurements of the index.

Funding of GONGOs Through the Programmes Tailored for Support of NGOs

Many international organisations working with the Belarusian regime do not operate openly. The information available about their activities is limited. This stems from the requirement to register international projects inside the country, which is the only legal way for international aid organisations to operate, irrespective of its purpose. In the same time certain donors deal with the state and its actors. Lukashenka publicly motivated BRYU to reach self-sufficiency and obtain financial resources from sources other than the state budget. As a result, BRYU stated their plans to receive European funds and has confirmed cooperation with such organisations as the Council of Europe, European Youth Forum, as well as various Youth Unions in Russia and the CIS.

On the other hand, some donors consciously grant money to pro-government organisations. The reason for this behaviour is an apparent attempt by donors to normalise relations with the Belarusian government and try different approaches towards cooperation.[16] The idea is that by cooperating with the government, and by at least partially playing by its rules, their work will bring future dividends and help influence the situation to the benefit of the people. One such example of foreign aid being allocated to pro-government organisations is the European Union Non-State Actors and Local Authorities

[16] Anna Herasimava, Interview #4, 2013.

in Development (NSA LA) programme. The programme, introduced in 2007, is oriented towards strengthening capacity of civil society organisations and local authorities.

A new tendency has emerged with regards to the funding mechanism under this programme since 2013 – namely, the competition requirements have changed. Now there is a demand that all partners in the project must be registered. If the applicant acts as an international organisation, it must have at least one registered partner in Belarus. Yet now, since there are problems with registration, many of NGOs do not fit these requirements. It has become increasingly difficult for projects of "undesirable" organisations to be supported by the European Commission programme for non-state actors.

UN programmes have also reportedly shifted their focus from real NGOs to GONGOs. Thus, the decision-making of the Global Economic Fund is tied to the ministries, as some of the ministerial representatives are included in the Council. In this way these members of the Belarusian government give grants to GONGOs.[17] The Council of Europe supports GONGOs engaged in ecological activity, even allocating grants to an organisation which has existed for only one month. Despite this organisation being almost completely unknown, it received funding to the detriment of the pro-democratic alliance of ecological NGOs "Green Network".[18] While more research is needed to investigate the cases mentioned, one can state the existence of a tendency on the part of international donors to support organisations considered to be GONGOs.

Conclusion

The uncontested realm of politics in Belarus excludes civil society actors from taking part in the decision-making process. In this way the state monopolises politics and diminishes the space available for the presentation of alternative views. The conditions necessary for the formation of a robust civil society significantly deteriorate as freedom of expression and assembly remain under constant challenge. The shrinking space for NGOs to work legally is alarming. The difficulty and selective nature of registering an NGO, the criminalisation of the activities of unregistered organisations, the marginalisation of strong NGOs, fundraising obstacles and the creation of government controlled GONGOs have all diminish the legal space for the existence of alternative civil society organisations.

The conditions under which civil society must operate are shaped by a control-based approach of the state towards these organisations. Control manifests itself in the incorporation of civil society by the establishment of GONGOs, whose membership exceeds the membership of any pro-democratic NGOs. The number of GONGOs

[17] Yaraslau Bekish, Interview #7, 2013.

[18] Andrei Egorov, Interview #5, 2013.

operating in Belarus, organisations which often mirror or mimic the activity of existing NGOs, is growing.

The grounds for substitution exist. However, in the cases mentioned, such attempts were characterised by their essentially restrained nature. The third aspect analysed a mix of the states attempts at external and internal substitutions, which involved funding GONGOs for programmes that are tailored to support civil society and NGOs. A clear tendency of providing grants to GONGOs is outlined in this article. One can state that the formation of an environment conducive for the substitution of pro-democratic NGOs has been established.

Under the conditions of a repressive and consolidated authoritarian regime, reinforced by a weak civil society, substitution leads to distorted perceptions of civil society and NGOs. Existing sociological research shows that GONGOs are better known than authentic democratic NGOs. Apathy and a lack of interest in the activities of NGOs reinforce this argument. Coupled with the restrictive environment for the operation of civil society by the government, GONGOs are perceived as "authentic" NGOs. Appropriate grounds for a comprehensive understanding of the role of civil society and NGOs needs to be laid down. Authentic civil society organisations should continue to monitor substitution attempts and react quickly to these.

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Alena Artsiomenka

(De)-consolidation of civil society in Belarus: decreased potential for solidarity action, de-politicisation, disagreements about values

The projects to consolidate civil society actors are part of the history of the civil society formation in Belarus. It is necessary to analyse these processes in order to understand their place in the system of civil society, assess the effectiveness of their operation, set strategic goals and identify factors, which facilitate or, on the contrary, hinder their achievement.

Types of consolidation initiatives

In terms of the outreach, one should distinguish between the general and sectoral consolidation projects. One can also disaggregate the initiatives with a larger or lesser degree of institutionalisation, ranging from mass public movements to umbrella networks with a well-developed far-reaching structure and bureaucratic apparatus.

The association of ecological organisations "Green Network", the coalition projects of human rights organisations (Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections – a joint campaign by the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Centre "Viasna" (2010), the Belarusian Human Rights Forum), etc. can be described as examples of sectoral consolidation initiatives. Sectorial associations distinguish themselves by uniting the organisations, which share a common goal and common interests. This shared interest in collaboration allows coalitions to function despite even the lowest level of institutionalisation.

Over the past 15–20 years, one can single out four major 'overall' consolidation projects, namely: Belarusian Association of Resource Centres, Assembly of NGOs, Movement for Freedom, and the National Platform of Eastern Partnership's Civil Society Forum.

Preconditions for civil society consolidation projects in Belarus began to take shape in the second half of the 1990s, the period of strengthening authoritarianism and pressure by the authorities. On the other hand, third-sector activists assessed enthusiastically the potential of their influence on society and believed in imminent democratic changes.

Emerged in 1998, the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres (BARC) united regional resource centres.[1]

BARC's application for official registration was rejected in 2001. Nevertheless, by 2003, it had united over 60 public associations across Belarus. The second attempt to register was in 2003 and was not successful, either. Fines and confiscation of property were common for resource centres in the Belarusian regions. BARC member organisations faced increased pressure in the periods of electoral campaigns – the presidential elections in 2001, the referendum in 2004. Pushed out of legal status, BARC eventually ceased operations.

The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs was founded in 1997.[2] Initially, one of the Assembly's service functions was to assist non-governmental organisations with official registration. Ironically, the Ministry of Justice officials would even advise the organisations seeking registration to approach the Assembly for assistance.

In 2001, the year of presidential elections, the Assembly launched the *Vybiray!* Campaign (in Belarusian and Russian alike, it means both Elect! and Choose!), in which nearly 200 NGOs participated. The campaign was organised separately from the political agitation campaign, aiming to increase electoral participation. The three tasks of the campaign were:

> *To deliver objective information about the situation, before the election and the general situation in the country, to the target groups by using various media; to create an optimistic message and confidence in, the possibility of changes for the better, which challenged how to cope with the fear of repression, being in a minority, and disbelief in change; a call to*

[1] In the 2000s, the list of key resource centres in the regions included: Hrodna Regional Public Association "Ratusha" (Town Hall), Homel Regional Public Association "Civic Initiatives", Agency of Regional Development "Varuta" (Baranavichy), Brest Regional Centre for Civic Society "Vezha" and others.

- The resource centres performed the following functions, among others:
- Providing physical infrastructure and facilities (houses were built for many of them);
- Providing computer and printing equipment;
- Offering legal support, including assistance with registration;
- Assisting with fund-raising;
- Providing a platform for inter-organisational collaboration;
- Institutional development.

[2] The Assembly was established with the objective of implementing the following activities:

- Promoting the interests of NGOs in Belarus through solidary actions;
- Assisting in improving the work of NGOs;
- Supporting communication between member organisations;
- Providing information to and about member organisations;
- Supporting and developing initiative groups;
- Monitoring, analysis and evaluation of conditions of civil society and legal conditions.

come to vote on the last day of election – 9 September – (instead of early voting) in order to minimise the opportunities for rigging the election.[3]

The Assembly ran civil campaigns "Let's do better" (2002–2003), "Our Solidarity" (2003–2005), "For Freedom" (2005–2007). In the period of 1999–2012, the Assembly held seven congresses. Since 2009, it has organised annually, the Civil Society Champions award ceremonies. The Assembly also runs initiatives dealing with the change of the legal framework for the operation of non-commercial organisations.

The Assembly was denied registration three times. The lack of clear priorities and common goals of member organisations determined the crisis of self-identification of this structure. Beginning from the mid-2000s, the Assembly's significance for member organisations deteriorated but it preserved its bureaucratic structure. The Assembly lost its consolidating potential, despite keeping the administration apparatus and membership of nearly 300 NGOs.

The Movement for Freedom can be considered as an example of a consolidation project. The brand "For Freedom" was created during the large-scale campaign of the Assembly of NGOs, aimed at "encouraging more active political participation of people who seek change via promotion of freedom as a fundamental value."[4] Later the "For Freedom" slogan "became very popular and was picked up by the political forces,"[5] thus creating the "For Freedom" movement. The movement was founded on the wave of protests against the rigging of the presidential election results in 2006, and in December 2008 registered as a human rights and education public.[6] Later the movement moved closer to the political party and participated in the political campaign; this decreased its consolidating potential for civil society.

The Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is one of the biggest projects set up recently. The, inaugurated by the European Union in 2009, Eastern Partnership policy envisages creating, in participating countries, Civil Society Forums. In Belarus, the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was established in July 2010. At the beginning, it was not considered an independent actor with a centralised decision-making structure. Some participants of the Platform (first of all, representatives of EuroBelarus consortium) advocated for the expansion of functions and goals of that union beyond the borders of the Eastern Partnership. That would allow using the Platform's potential for the consolidation of civil society and democratic reforms.

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[3] "Vybiray" campaign led by Assembly of Pro-democratic NGOs starts in Belarus // http://naviny.by/rubrics/elections/2001/07/06/ic_news_623_348511/ 06 July 2007.

[4] Webpage of NGO Assembly. "About us" // http://belngo.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/leaflet_output.pdf.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Movement 'For Freedom'" official webpage// http://pyx.by/rus/dvizhenie.

Due to the aggravation of contradictions regarding the vision of the future of the National Platform, several organisations left the project.

The National Platform did not contribute to the consolidation of civil society and did not apply the potential of its actors for the joint realisation of specific programmes. Its goals appeared to be too general for specific NGOs. No working groups have been created that could involve relevant NGOs into projects that would focus on reforms in the social sphere.

Barriers to consolidation

Starting from the middle of the 1990s, Belarusian authorities increasingly suppressed civil society due to its focus on political participation and democratic reforms. Presidential Decree No 2 of 26 January 1999 On Some Measures for Regulation of Activities of Political Parties, Trade Unions, and Other Public Associations stiffened conditions for the registration of NGOs and induced all registered NGOs (public associations) to re-register. The European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) in its Opinion stated the following:

> *The number of Belarusian NGOs losing their official registrations has since the introduction of the above mentioned Presidential Decree, dramatically risen, and new organisations have had difficulties getting registered. HRC "Viasna", the biggest human rights group in Belarus, was closed down by the authorities in 2003 along with other human rights organisations. The unregistered NGOs have had difficulties to register for reportedly ungrounded reasons, even against the opinion of international organisations in which Belarus holds membership.*[7]

In December 2005, just before the presidential election that took place in March 2006, the Criminal Code of Belarus was amended with Article 193-1 criminalising the conduct of non-registered NGOs and envisaging punishment by a fine or imprisonment for up to two years for participation in the activities of non-registered political parties, other public associations, religious organizations or funds. Although the prosecution under that article was rather rarely applied to activists, Article 193-1 became an essential mechanism of pressure on civil society and the democratic community as a whole.

An additional barrier for legal activities of NGOs is state control of donor funding introduced by the Presidential Edict No 404 of 24 July 1997. The Edict, On Establishment

[7] European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commision). Opinion On Compatibility with Universal Human Rights Standards of Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code on the Rights of Non-Registered Associations // www.belhelcom.org/sites/default/files/Belarus%20Venice%20Commission%20Article%20193-1%20RUS_(1)(1).pdf.

of Department on Humanitarian Aid under the President of the Republic of Belarus, created a special institution responsible for

> *developing a unified system of registration and distribution of humanitarian and other charitable assistance, creation of a centralised database of state, public and religious organisations, funds (including foreign organisations) and physical persons providing charitable assistance, including those who implement children's health improvement programmes.*[8]

Aside from the pressure from the authorities, a significant barrier for consolidation is the low level of civic consciousness. Authors of "Civicus Index" name the following obstacles to the development and consolidation of civil society:

- weak national consciousness;
- an underdeveloped private sector;
- the absence of a middle class;
- mass apathetic attitudes towards public issues.[9]

At the beginning of the 2000s, third sector representatives were not satisfied with the evaluation of their activities by the society. The "Civicus index" survey evaluated the perceptions of the third sector in the business environment. 38% of NGO leaders stated that businessmen did not support the participation of their hired workers in the NGO activities; 25% said that entrepreneurs were not involved in charitable support to the third sector organisations. The main reasons for that, according to NGO leaders, were the absence of favourable tax legislation and lack of charity traditions. Distrust of businessmen and authorities to the third sector was strengthened by the fact that some NGOs did not have fully transparent sources of funding.

According to a 2005 survey of perception in the society of NGOs the issue of NGOs was not in the focus of public attention:

> *The majority of people do not know about NGOs, are not involved in their activities and do not want to know more about them. One can say that the issue of NGOs in Belarus does not interest or engage Belarusians who just do not think about it. This attitude is supported by the ambiguous function of the state public associations (GoNGOs), identification of NGO activities as political activities, overall passiveness and the atomised nature of the*

[8] Presidential Edict No 404 of 24 July 1997. The Edict On Establishment of Department on Humanitarian Aid under the President of the Republic of Belarus // http://pravo.newsby.org/belarus/ukaz4/uk133.htm.

[9] Zagoumennov Y. *Belarus Civil Society: In Need of a Dialogue. A preliminary report on the Civicus Index on civil society project in Belarus* // http://www.civicus.org/new/media/belarus.pdf.

> *Belarusian population, its lack of involvement in the NGO activities as well as by overall unpopularity of joint action with the goal of solving social problems.*[10]

A 2010 survey brought similar results:

> *Perception of the non-governmental sector's functions, citizens' involvement in civic activities and the position of the state has changed insignificantly: citizens prefer to stay uninvolved in the activities of NGOs, despite evaluating such activities slightly more positively than before.*[11]

A separate group of barriers for the successful consolidation of NGOs is the group of values and attitudes inside the NGO sector. According to the "Civicus Index", the level of trust and tolerance among civil society representatives differs only slightly from the level of trust and tolerance of those who are not NGO members. 27% of CSO activists shared the opinion that people can be trusted while among non-members 24% shared that view. The aggregate index of tolerance (aggregate indicator of tolerance to people of another race, faith, country of origin or sexual orientation) among civil society representatives was not higher than among average Belarusians: 3.3 points out of 5. The authors of the report come to a pessimistic conclusion. According to them the low level of trust in civil society reflects the low level of social capital in that community, which prevents the level of tolerance and trust from growth.[12]

Another negative factor is that work in the third sector has become less prestigious than before. While the income of the population grew, wages of NGO workers often lagged behind.

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[10] Chavusau Yu. *Hramadskiya abyadnanni: ikh rola u suchasnym belaruskim hramadstve. Analitychnaya zapiska pa vynikakh dasledvannia. // NGOs: their role in contemporary Belarusian society. Anaoytical note based on the results of the research*. Minsk, 2005. P. 3.

[11] *Obshchestvennye ob'edineniya: ikh rol' v sovremennom belorusskom obshchestve: Analiticheskaya zapiska po rezul'tatam issledovaniya // NGOs: their role in contemporary Belarusian society. Anaoytical note based on the results of the research.* // Minsk 2010. // http://3sektar.by/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/NGO-2010.pdf.

[12] Zagoumennov Y. *Belarus Civil Society: In Need of a Dialogue. A preliminary report on the civicus Index on civil society project in Belarus* // http://www.civicus.org/new/media/belarus.pdf In the 2000s, the majority of respondents from the third sector mentioned the authoritarian style of NGO management, while 67% stated that free discussion was not taking place in their organisations.

Conclusions

Research on potential for solidarity in the organised Belarusian civil society by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) and the Centre for European Transformation[13] shows that currently the potential for solidarity that could serve as a factor of successful consolidation is limited. The research has shown that the third sector representatives are not unconditional bearers of global values, beliefs or action orientations that would lead to democratic change in Belarus. The "third sector" is not some special place in the Belarusian society that would gather people who are united in their views and beliefs and have the same goals in political and social life. Social beliefs of its representatives do not fit in the same value framework, while the "third sector" itself is not a "self-evident source of democratic transformation in Belarus."[14] According to the authors of the document, there is no unity and common opinion in the third sector in Belarus regarding basic principles and values; that unity could provide the potential for consolidation.

Analysis of the potential for solidarity has also proven that one should not expect that NGOs will form a social basis for solidary actions:

> *There is no ground for an expectation that NGOs can form a basis for the mass solidarity that, in turn, could become the basis for political and social transformations. One can expect only partial involvement, taking into account that it will be closely related to topics and content of actions that demand support and will involve only a certain part of this or that social group.*[15]

Thus, the very fact of an affiliation with the third sector does not automatically create the ability to act in a solidary way.

Authors of the research come to the conclusion that NGOs are losing their transformational potential and, to the contrary, are becoming a stabilising factor for the existing social system:

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[13] Vodolazhskaya T., Shelest O., Egorov A., Artemenko E. *Issledovanie potentsiala solidarnosti v belarusskom organizovannom grazhdanskom obshchestve. Otchet po rezul'tatam issledovaniya* // *Research on potential for solidarity in the organised Belarusian civil society* // http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2014_Solidarity_NGOs_Belarus.pdf.

[14] Vodolazhskaya T., Shelest O., Egorov A., Artemenko E. *Issledovanie potentsiala solidarnosti v belarusskom organizovannom grazhdanskom obshchestve. Otchet po rezul'tatam issledovaniya* // *Research on potential for solidarity in the organised Belarusian civil society* // http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/userfiles/5/CET/2014_Solidarity_NGOs_Belarus.pdf.

[15] Ibid.

> *Change in function of the organised civil society is not a purely local, Belarusian phenomenon. The high professionalisation of that sector, its integration into the overall system of the society has become a general trend and strategy of the development of European civil society. NGOs increasingly support the sustainability of the system in which they operate and decreasingly serve as a factor of transformation.*[16]

Civil society in Belarus does not have among its goals participation in a democratic transition or political struggle. In this case, the low level of consolidation or potential for solidarity is a mere reflection of the overall condition of civil society.

If we were to view civil society as a source of democratic transformation and evaluate the potential of its participation in the political processes, we would not be able to name any of the projects of consolidation of civil society that exist now or existed in the past as a successful one. Moreover, as a result of the evolution of the civic sector, its potential for solidary, consolidated action decreases.

[16] Ibid.

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Mikhas Pliska

Local self-government: fifth wheel in the wagon of central power

During the Soviet rule, people perceived the state as an apparatus of total power that governed the society on all levels, from top to bottom. There was no space for an independent, separate from the state, form of public power in the form of local self-government. That vision was shared by the common people and by the ruling elite. After the Soviet Union had collapsed, many officials continued to believe that local self-government was an unnecessary institution and that national authorities should continue deciding on all social and economic issues at all levels.

At the very end of the Soviet era, on 20 February 1991, a Law "On Basics of Local Self-Government and Local Economic Management in BSSR" was adopted by the Supreme Council that createdthe right pre-conditions for local self-government. However, by the beginning of 1995 the central authorities had destroyed the first sprouts of self-government by introducing a "vertical" of administrative-executive bodies that took control over local Councils of Deputies, thus returning to the old Soviet model.

This article provides an insight into the policies of the state on local self-government in Belarus starting from the end of the 1990s, with a particular focus on the reaction to these policies from the side of non-governmental organisations (further referred to as NGOs). This topic is still quite understudied, and we hope to shed more light on it.

Legislative practice: local self-government as a continuation of an authoritarian state

The amended Law "On Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus" entered into force on 10 January 2000. This amendment summed up all centralisation measures that the State undertook starting from 1991. The Same year, president Alyaksandr Lukashenka initiated the Congress of Councils of Deputies of the Republic of Belarus that took place on 20 September 2009 (referred as Congress further on).

Before the Congress, experts prepared at least five projects for the reform of local government and self-government in Belarus. The Administration of the President prepared one of them while the Institute of Economy at the National Academy of Sciences

prepared the second project. Two more projects were drafted by the Economy Research Institute of the Ministry of Economy by Anatoly Bahdankevich and Marharyta Yahorava. Finally, there was the fifth project prepared by Vasil Shynkarou, who at that time worked in the Presidential Administration. It 's hard to assess the impact of those projects on the script of the Congress, but probably it was minimal.

At the Congress, the President informed delegates that he had assigned the government with the task of preparing an Edict on "Measures to Increase the Role of the Local Government and Self-Government in Tackling Economic and Social Issues[1]. The Speaker of the House of Representatives Anatoly Malofeyev called delegates to "develop the concept of the work of local self-government and a clear mechanism for the coordination of activities between the Councils and executive power."[2]

Some speakers suggested the adoption of a long-term National Programme of state support to the local self-government, to create a single national organism that would coordinate activities of the Councils of Deputies and regional administration branches, as well as to develop the Local Self-Government Code. The Congress adopted a Declaration and a Resolution.[3]

After the Congress, on 11 December 2000, the president signed the Instruction No 412rp that introduced Measures on the implementation of decisions of the Congress of Councils of Deputies. Point 37 of these Measures obliged the House of Representatives and the Council of the Republic together with the National Centre for Legislation and Legal Research to develop and introduce to the House of Representatives, up to the end of 2002, the draft Code of the Republic of Belarus on Local Government and Self-Government.

The real work on that document started only in October 2001, after the presidential election that took place on 9 September 2001. Belarusian members of parliament were supposed to participate in that work. For example, paragraph 6 of the Work Plan that was established by the Resolution Nr 9 of the Presidium of the Council of the Republic of Belarus dated 12.01.2001 envisaged that, in 2001 the draft would be developed in cooperation with the Permanent Commission of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly in charge of government-sponsored construction, local government and rules of procedure, and presented to the President for review.

In January 2002, the then Speaker of the Council of the Republic of Belarus, Alyaksandr Vaitovich, gave an interview to the local press about the results of the five years of activity of the Council of the Republic of Belarus. He said that the Council together with the National Centre for Legislation and Legal Research wrote the draft of the Concept of Local Self-Government and that this document was delivered to the Administration

[1] See: *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 30 September 2000. However, the Decree was never signed.

[2] See: Vecherniy Minsk. 03 October 2000.

[3] See: Respublika. 30 September 2000.

of the President in late December 2001. After the document had been discussed by all interested parties and all the corrections introduced, the Concept was supposed to land on the table of the president. Vaitovich claimed that due to its "young age" the Council of the Republic of Belarus paid too little attention to local self-government; one of the reasons for that in, his view, was that there was no institution inside the parliament that "could gather expertise from the work of local authorities and develop suggestions for improvement of this work."[4]

Although the draft Concept had already been presented to the Administration of the President, it continued to be rewritten in 2002. For example, on 22–23 January 2002, the Commission of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly in charge of government-sponsored construction, local government and rules of procedure, chaired by Mikhail Sasonka, held an extended meeting. All presidents of regional (oblast) Councils of Deputies, as well as Minsk City Council of Deputies, were present at the meeting; as well as representatives of the Council of the Republic of Belarus, the Chief State Legislative Department of the Academy of the President, the National Centre of Legislation and Legal Research affiliated with the president, the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Justice and the Presidential Academy of Management. Representatives of the Lev Sapieha Foundation Miraslau Kobasa and Alyaksandr Karamyshau spoke at that meeting, as well. In the late 2001 – early 2002 the parliamentary draft of the Concept was reviewed by the Economy Research Institute of the Ministry of Economy and at the Institute of Economy of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) of the Republic of Belarus; both sent their amendments to the Administration of the President.

The parliamentary draft of the Concept did not have specific authors; it was discussed and corrected in various institutions simultaneously, and therefore was quite eclectic. Probably, that was the reason why president Lukashenka on the 18th November 2002 created a special expert group consisting of 25 members at the Institute of Economics of the National Academy of Sciences under the chairmanship of the President of the Academy Mikhail Myasnikovich. This group had to prepare one more draft of the Concept of Reform of Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus. The real chairman of that group was the director of the Institute of Economy of the NAS Piotr Nikitsenka. The draft Concept was prepared by August 2003, signed by Mikhail Myasnikovich and sent to all interested parties, including the Lev Sapieha Foundation, with the suggestion to send any feedback to the Presidium of the NAS by 1 September 2003. According to Uladzimir Fatseyev the draft prepared by the NAS was more concise and better structured; that project offered a deeper insight into the methodology and

[4] See: *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 16 January 2002.

proposed ways for the further development of reforming the system of local power in Belarus.[5]

Until 2003–04, the state allowed representatives of local executive authorities and so-called local self-government to participate in trips to other countries, including ones with the participation of NGOs. For instance, in February 2002, local authorities participated in the study visit to Sweden that took place in the framework of a Belarusian-Sweden project "Support to Democratisation and Local Self-Government in Belarus". Out of 18 participants, 14 were presidents of regional (oblast) and District Councils of Deputies.[6] In the following years, the participants of such projects were mostly members of the Councils of Deputies and rank-and-file local executive officials. The latter also withdrew from the participation in abroad study visits and also in in-country seminars on local self-government, as well. De facto it was an unspoken ban for participation in events that were organised by NGOs that were in opposition to the government.

The policy of donors who supported training and seminars, study visits and other events with the participation of local authorities, also changed. For example, in 2006–2011, 54 percent of all donor support to Belarus from EU members was disbursed via state institutions while only 13% was distributed via civil society organisations.[7] As a result, events dedicated to local self-government were conducted by civil society activists and local authorities as parts of separate projects.

After the draft Concept prepared by the National Academy of Sciences in Belarus failed to be accepted by the government, the process of reform of self-government in Belarus stalled. The state did not want to proceed with any political reform, including local self-government reform that would redistribute power for the benefit of local Councils of Deputies among others. At the same time, Belarus entered a period of economic growth that continued until mid-2008 and created an illusion of effectiveness of local authorities.

After some time, the government has come up with the idea of creating a special structure that would represent the Council of the Republic within international structures and that would include not only members of the Council and its Secretariat but local deputies, as well. This idea got high-level support. Paragraph 5 of the Presidential Edict dated 12 January 2007 "On Increasing the Role of Local Government Institutions in Decision Making about Basic Public Needs of the Population" obliged the Council of the Republic to cooperate with local self-government bodies. On 2 April 2007 the Council of the Republic issued Resolution No 390-SR3/VII that declared the creation of the Council for Cooperation of Local Authorities. The Decision for the creation of the Council was

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[5] See: *Local Self-Government in Belarus* // *Mestnoye samoupravleniye v Belarusi* / V.N. Kivel (i dr) pod nauch red I.P. Sidorchuk – Minsk, Tonpik, 2007. P. 381.

[6] See: Kobasa M.V. *Study Visit to Sweden* / *Uchebnyi Vizit v Shvetsiuyu* // Vestnik Samoupravleniya. 2002. P. 1.

[7] See: http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/26793761.html. – Last accessed: 14 January 2015.

confirmed and delegates appointed. On 3 December 2008 the Standing Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities at the Council of Europe decided to give the Belarusian Council, based on its request, observers' status.[8]

Alyaksandar Lukashenka's annual address to the nation and parliament on 23 May 2006 played a crucial role in understanding the government's approach to reform in local self-government. The president admitted that he was advised to axe or even dissolve the local Councils of Deputies. Even if he exaggerated, his words reflected quite well the moods and attitudes of the ruling circles to such institutions of power as the local Councils of Deputies. From the point of view of central authorities, those Councils were as needless as the fifth wheel on a wagon. Even the way Lukashenka defended the Councils was far from the standards and principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. He treated local Councils not as a separate institute of public authority but as a means to solve issues of "basic public needs of the population on local level."[9]

On 18 May 2006 the briefing "On Increasing the Role of Local Government and Self-Government Authorities of the Primary Level in Solving Issues of Basic Public Needs of the Population" took place at the presidential administration. At that meeting, it was decided to start drafting an amendment to the Law on Local Government and Self-Government.

Part 2 of paragraph 2 of the Protocol of Instructions of the President No 12 dated 17 July 2006, the National Centre of Legislation was assigned to develop draft amendments to the Law on Local Government and Self-Government. The Centre had to prepare the amendments based on the practice of application of legislation in local government and consult with the Council of Ministers, Council of the Republic, local Councils of Deputies and local executive committees.

By the beginning of 2008, the draft of Law on Local Government and Self-Government was ready.[10] That bill contained 8 sections and 66 articles, and did not differ significantly from the law that was signed on 4 January 2010. The main difference was that the bill did not envisage giving Local Councils a right to create associations. That issue was only raised during the meeting of the Chairman of the Council of the Republic Barys Batura with president Lukashenka that took place on 10 March 2009.[11]

On 10 April 2009 the new draft Law On Local Government and Self-Government was presented to the House of Representatives. On 11 June 2009 the bill passed on first reading, and on 11 December 2009 it passed on second reading. Members of parliament didn't debate the law, since, as the Chairman of the House of Representatives Uladzimir

[8] See: http://mfa.gov.by/mulateral/organization/list/a025a26a6670b494.html. – Last accessed: 18 December 2014.

[9] See: *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 24 May 2006.

[10] See: http://center.gov.by/article84.html. Last accessed on 18 December 2014.

[11] See: Kobasa M.V. *Ob assotsiatsiyakh mestnykh samoupravleniy* / *On Associations of Local Self-Government* // Vestnik Samoupravleniya. 2011. No 2 (23). P. 3.

Andreichanka told the media, they didn't consider it a priority. He recalled about the bill only before the start of the autumn session of the House of Representatives when the draft was supposed to be considered in second reading. The Council of the Republic approved the bill on 17 December 2009. The President signed it into law on 4 January 2010.

Since the Law on Local Government and Self-Government was signed, it has been amended five times, but none of the amendments was significant. Currently, the law is applied as amended on 4 January 2014.

The government has never started the real reform of local self-government. Local self-government for them is an impersonal form of "organisation of activities of people living in a given territory" rather than the right and real competencies of the territorial community of citizens to solve important local issues within the law, under their own responsibility and in their own interests.

Local self-governing bodies have not transformed into an independent form of public authority; they continue being part of the state machine, and its continuation at local level. That means that relations between different levels of Councils are built not on the division of spheres of competence but on the basis of the hierarchical structure that is natural for the executive authorities. The government never dared to conduct the reform of the administrative and territorial division of Belarus that would allow the adoption of a two-tier approach instead of a three-tier, while the process of the liquidation of village councils is chaotically ongoing anyway.

While reading the law, the order of articles on local self-governing and governing is quite striking. The earlier version of the Law presented the local self-governing bodies in first place, i.e. executive councils, and only then – Councils of Deputies. The new law presents Councils of Deputies first, followed by executive councils.

The biggest innovation of the Law, that was adopted due to the appeals and demands of civil society, is allowing local Councils to form associations. However, this right, mentioned in Article 7 of the Law, has never been used by any of Councils in the last five years.

The new Law on Local Government and Self-Government was adopted in the favourable atmosphere of political liberalisation and the improvement of relations with the West (2009–2010). After the presidential election on 19 December 2010, the government lost interest in the issue of local self-government. It is unlikely to change its attitude before the presidential election in 2015.

Useless partners: civil society and local authorities

Many NGOs strive to become partners of local authorities in decision-making and implementation, as well as the evaluation of their activities. However, the state is not interested in real cooperation, even in the sphere of public procurement of services. The

government prefers to solve local problems exclusively via executive councils, which, instead of being the executive branch of local Councils of Deputies, serve the function of the vertical hierarchical power.

Several NGOs demand the reform of local self-government: the Lev Sapieha Foundation (that became an observer at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 2001), Our House Civic Campaign, Public Association "Civic Initiatives" (its registration was cancelled in 2003 by the Supreme Court), Public Association "Ecohome", BIPART, The School of Young Managers in Public Administration SYMPA and others.

In the summer of 2009, the Lev Sapieha Foundation prepared, and presented to the House of Representatives, numerous article-specific commentaries and notes to the bill On Local Government and Self-Government that was passed in the first reading. Unfortunately, most of them did not appear in the final text of the Law.

The Our House Civil Campaign focuses on informing citizens about the activities of local authorities in non-traditional ways: for example, with the help of comic pictures (Our House published their bulletin in this way in January 2012). It also organises action demanding local deputies to be responsible for their constituencies. For instance, in 2010, Our House launched the ongoing campaign "Make Deputies Accountable!" in order to force deputies of local Councils to meet their constituents regularly and report to them. Another noteworthy campaign is "Make Housing Authorities Accountable!" aimed at solving the housing problems of citizens.

Civil society has limited levers of influence on local authorities, even though legislation allows more than ten forms of participation of citizens in the realisation of public authorities at a local level. Let us review some of them, such as local Congress and public consultations.

Before the amended Law On National and Local Congresses was signed on 4 November 2013 (the law itself was signed on 12 July 2000), civil society activists used to conduct local congresses in the open air, discussing relevant local problems. For instance, in October 2011 activists Viktar Ivashkevich and Henadz Fiadynich organised a national action "Narodny Skhod" (People's Congress), attempting to conduct congresses in 24 cities simultaneously. The legislation at that time applied the principle of declaration in the organisation of such congresses, therefore local authorities did not have legal grounds for banning them. However, after the campaign was over, a new text was introduced to the amended version of the Law prescribing that all open air events should be governed by the Law on Mass Gatherings. Since then, local congresses can take place only in closed premises. The procedure for a local congress has become more complicated: now, one needs to get a permit from authorities to organise such a congress, which means that even if all formalities are in place the local authorities may ban the meeting. Moreover, decisions on a provincial congress, no matter who initiates

it, (local authorities or a group of citizens) are not obligatory for executive councils or the population.

Recently, citizens have become more active in public consultations. Upto 1 April 2014, civil society activists had a chance to discuss issues of planning and construction works without the necessity to call a local congress. According to paragraph 3 of Article 4 of the Law On, Architectural, Urban Planning and Building Activity in the Republic of Belarus (amended on 4 January 2014), local executive authorities were responsible for that. Even though the opinions that were voiced during the meeting were not necessarily taken into account, those consultations gave civil society activists an opportunity to talk to the local population and look for socially active people. Those consultations were a good school of civic education for the population. In order to decrease civic activeness of citizens the Council of Ministers on 10 February 2014 adopted a new Resolution On Order of Public Consultations on Architectural, Urban Planning and Building Activity, which de facto reduced to zero the right of citizens to discuss urban planning at local congresses.

According to paragraph 4 of that Resolutions, public consultations can take only two forms: 1) informing physical and legal persons, and analysis of public opinion; 2) work of the public consultations commission.[12] According to provision 6 of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters[13] and paragraph 19 of the Council of Ministers' Resolution On the Order of Evaluation of the Impact on the Environment (amended on 13 October 2011),[14] local executive authorities are obliged to call local congresses of citizens only to discuss construction projects that are potentially most dangerous for the environment and for public health.

Conclusions

The reform of local self-government will take place despite all the delays imposed by the authorities. Local self-government is more efficient in solving issues on local level than central authorities, just the way private businessmen are more competent managers than

[12] Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 109 On Order of Public Consultations on Architectural, Urban Planning and Building Activity (10 February 2014) // Electronic database Consultant Plus: Belarus. Tekhnologiya 3000 / Yurspektr, National Centre of Legal Information. Belarus. Minsk, 2015.

[13] Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Enviromental Matters [Electronic version]. 2005. See: http://www.minpriroda.gov.by/ru/konvencia-ru/#131. Accessed on 14 January 2015.

[14] Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Enviromental Matters [Electronic version]. 2005. See: http://www.minpriroda.gov.by/ru/konvencia-ru/#131. Accessed on 14 January 2015.

directors of state enterprises. Otherwise, European countries would not leave aside the state model of local self-government.

Unfortunately, politicians who control favour vertical hierarchy as an effective means of the preservation of the status quo and the instrument of achieving good results during elections. Even the brief period of political liberalisation (2009–10) did not bring any progress in the reform of local self-government. The amended Law on Local Government and Self-Government, as the one before it, did not question the idea of centralisation of power in the hands of the state. The government never dared to sign the European Charter on Local Self-Government or create the association of local Councils.

One should not expect the reform of local self-government before regime change. Primary figures in the state will continue talking about the necessity of strengthening the authority of local authorities, will accept foreign guests, and make promises. However, they will not introduce any serious institutional changes in the sphere of public authority.

Mikhas Pliska – expert from Lev Sapieha Foundation Public Association.

Viachaslau Babrovich

Civic education in Belarus: concepts, standards and lack of demand from the society

Civic education in Belarus developed in conditions of growing authoritarianism and the refusal of the government to conduct democratic reforms. It was influenced by difficulties in the formation of civil society and civic consciences, complicated nation-building processes and problems in seeking financial resources to support civic activities.

There is no consensus on the definition of "civic education" in Belarus. One can find in official literature texts about successes in bringing up civic consciousness – however, by that authors mean loyalty to authorities and the imposed from the top, state ideology.[1] At the same time, the non-governmental (NGO) sector promotes civic education in its European meaning. Its representatives sometimes refer to *non-formal* civic education to distance themselves from *formal* state-led civic education. In this article, we will refer to these two main segments of civic education as to *state* (SCE) and *non-state* (NSCE).

Formation of civic education sphere in Belarus

After Belarus became an independent state, the new government created favourable conditions for non-governmental programmes. The declarative principle of NGO registration encouraged the development of the third sector in Belarus, this was also true for educational programmes. Until 1996, civil society organisations (CSOs) dealing with civic education had no problems in relations with the authorities. Moreover, they engaged in partnership with the state. For instance, representatives and even leaders of state institutions (media, schools, institutes) took part in Soros Foundation's projects.[2]

[1] The state system of "civic education" created in Belarus is relevant to the nature of the political regime. Political leadership of Belarus is interested in growing dependent, passive individuals who would hope that the state would provide her or him with everything. This type of work by its form and methods reminds us about Soviet "ideological work". The only difference is that in contemporary Belarus instead of Marxism and Leninism the government uses the so-called "ideology of the Belarusian state".

[2] The Belarusian Soros Foundation (BSF) was founded in 1992. Although civic education was not mentioned in its programme activities, it was present in all the Foundation's activities, especially in

Starting from 1996, the year of the Constitutional coup d'etat in Belarus, the conditions for civic education in Belarus began to deteriorate. Government pressure took many different forms: from licensing educational activities to declaring that educational seminars aimed to overthrow the government. These difficulties, combined with the closure of BSF, in February 1997 led to the creation of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. In 1998, the Assembly launched the national programme "Civic education" with the participation of 20 NGOs. Those NGOs came up with the idea of creating a network of organisations specialising in different segments of civic education that would complement each other. That led to the creation of the Association of Civic Education (ACE).

In 1999, during the II Congress of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, political scientist Viktor Chernov presented his concept of civic education in Belarus. He suggested introducing a three-stage system that would allow it to bring up not only sovereign citizens but also professionals ready to work in civic education.[3]

Experts doubted the feasibility of these suggestions, since, at the very least, the Ministry of Education would block participation of "broad circles of the Belarusian population" in the People's University without a discontinuing of their work. Thus, the concept suggested by Viktor Chernov could be successful only for one, quite narrow target group: activists of political parties and civil society organisations.

One of the biggest projects of civic education in Belarus was the People's University built on the example of undercover educational programmes ("flying universities") that

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the programme "Transformation of humanistic education". That program allowed publishing of a new generation of textbooks on social sciences and humanities and brought to light many talented scientists and educators who were able to work in the new conditions of transitional society. By supporting the development of civil society and reform of the education system, BSF played an important role in the formation of the new type of civic consciousness. The Foundation invested around 13 million dollars in support of education, independent media, development of civil society and access to the Internet. However, in 1997, it received a huge fine and stopped its activities inside Belarus.

[3] The first stage would consist of short-term training or study circles that would encourage the search for knowledge, create conditions for discussions, etc. On the second stage, the main educational institution would be a People's University and (or) a School of Civic Education. In those institutions, students would gain systematic knowledge on all ranges of relevant sciences: political sciences, economy, and law. The practice of thematic schools was initiated by the Belarusian Soros Foundation and continued by the Lev Sapieha Foundation and the Open Society Foundation (for instance, school of political sciences for journalists, Schools of political education for young politicians, Schools of civic education for professors of social sciences and humanities). (See: Chernov V. *Nekotorye aspekty strategiyi razvitiya grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v deyatelnosti tretyego sektora v Belarusi.* // *Selected aspects of the strategy of the development of civic education in activities of the third sector in Belarus* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine, 2005. No 1 (4). Pp. 7–14). Finally, the third, advanced level would be dedicated to intensive professional education and secondary training of multipliers of civic education (lecturers, trainers, schoolteachers, university professors and journalists). In addition to subject knowledge, those courses would provide special knowledge on methods of teaching.

were widespread in Eastern Europe before the fall of Berlin Wall. Unlike the Polish "Flying University" that attracted pro-democracy students, the People's University of Belarus aimed at changing mass consciousness. It had a formalised curriculum with obligatory and facultative courses. The curriculum consisted of extensive courses mostly in social sciences (120 and more academic hours) that lasted from 3 months to one year and included philosophy, political sciences, economy, history and culture of Belarus, human rights, theory of trade unions etc. After finishing a course, students passed tests and received symbolic diplomas.

At that time, the People's University was the biggest educational project in the third sector. There was no comparable initiative with as many courses, the number of academic hours and as diverse and big a group of students or as highly qualified professors. After graduation, the best graduates had an opportunity to continue studies in Poland.

Over time, conditions for the People's University got increasingly difficult since no owners wanted to take the risk of allowing it to rent their premises. Since 2005 and until the end of its activities, the People's University gathered students from Belarus for visiting sessions in Lithuania.

Although experts positively evaluate the activities of the People's University and its contribution to civic education, this initiative was not able to fulfil all of its goals. It had a limited audience consisting of political and CSO activists. Its evident weakness was dependence on such factors as state policy in the non-formal education of adults, the level of development of civil society structures as well as on the sustainability of financial support to educational programmes.

The Association of Civic Education (ACE) was set-up in 2000. It united 15 organisations working in the sphere of non-formal education and education of adults. Association educated specialists, prepared methodological texts and supplementary material, promoted ideas of civic education in the society and among potential clients, partners and donors.

ACE network implemented joint civic education projects with partners from Sweden (Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan) and Germany (Institut für Internationale Zusammenarbeit des Deutschen Volkshochschul-Verbandes). It promoted civic education via weeks of non-formal education, the festival of non-formal education, presentations, workshops and exhibitions. Since 2004, ACE is publishing *Adukatar* (Educator) a non-formal education magazine, as well as manuals, brochures and books. The Annual NGO publishing contest allows an increase in the quality of publishing in the sector of non-formal education and attracts many talented authors. Educational services are being promoted with the help of the newest marketing technologies.[4]

[4] Ryabova, N. *Issledovanie osvedomlennosti i predpochtenii potrebitelei uslug neformal'nogo obrazovaniya // Research of awareness and preferences in services of non-formal education.* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 3 (9).

Since 2005, Resource Programme of Study Circles became one of the priorities for ACE. Study circles are one of the forms of adult education.[5]

ACE was not always successful in attracting, to its activities, representatives of state institutions, political parties and civil society. Moreover, there was no unity among Association's member in understanding strategic issues. By mid-2000s, the Belarusian NGOs came up with several approaches to defining objectives and goals of civic education. Members of ACE mostly supported the vision of citizens who

> *are able to make a wise and rational choice and to think critically; understand the meaning of laws; have a moderate attitude to their political adversaries; are able to critically assess information presented by the mass media; show their interest in civic, political and economic spheres of life.*[6]

According to this approach, civic education should enrich citizens with "everyday democratic practices" that will help them in

> *interaction, public speaking, solving conflicts, planning their lives and activities, managing family budgets, choosing quality goods, defending their views and respecting the views of others, standing up for their rights etc.*[7]

Nationally oriented pro-democracy CSOs have a different approach to civic education. Their main objective is building an independent state on the basis of national culture:

> *We have to take as a basis our historical heritage, its time-proven values and traditions that are relevant to the Belarusian national character.*[8]

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5 In 2001–2007, more than 300 study circles were conducted all over Belarus, with the participation of more than 2500 people. One of the advantages of study circles compared to traditional formats of work of the third sector is that they do not require registration, and their organisation does not require huge financial resources.
The process of setting up study circles in Belarus revealed several problems. Belarusian society lost the tradition of joint study, discussion and solving problems. Potential participants perceive a circle as a group for children's education, as a psychotherapeutic group or sometimes as a religious sect. According to experts, one of the main problems of study circles is their unwillingness to touch upon "political" topics and a preference of topics related to professional education and personal development. According to Resource Programme of Study Circles coordinators Aliona Velichko and Inna Hubarevich, study circles were often a goal in themselves and were not perceived as a tool for changing social life. See: Velichko A., Hubarevich I. *One Circle, Two Circles...* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 1 (11).

6 Zhurakovskii, V. *O zadachakh grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v Belarusi* // *On objectives of civic education in Belarus* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 5.

7 Ibid.

8 Kuzminich I. *Natsyyanalnaya sviadomasc i hramadzianskaya adukatsyya.* // *National identity and civic education* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 2 (12). P. 16.

The main goal of civic education in this approach is national identity, which is understood as

> *the complex of historical facts, feelings, attitudes, values, types of activities united by the national language, culture and history, that are recognized by the people as national and create spiritual ties between their bearers, thus uniting and solidarising with them.*[9]

Uniting around national values creates the basis for support for democratic changes in society. In modern Belarus, recognition of one's national (Belarusian) identity, as a rule, equates to the active civic position. The key point of the "revivalist" programme is the issue of the Belarusian language. The meaning of the Belarusian language for civic education is so significant that it got a special title "More than just a language." One of the Belarusian activists, Vitaut Rudnik, promotes the development of civic education in the Belarusian language, since language can serve as a powerful integrational platform.[10] Switching to the Belarusian language is perceived as an act of civil courage that can change the political situation in Belarus:

> *Learning new values is, in a way, a revolution in the consciousness of a person. Switching to the Belarusian language is a double Revolution. Switching to the Belarusian language means acceptance of, adopted by the Belarusian-speaking environment, values, ideals and methods of action. Switching to the Belarusian language is not just learning new values but a daily manifestation of those values in one's environment (society, family, colleagues). This is a quality change in a person and her/his behaviour. Switching to the Belarusian language means that a person chooses a difficult path with a specific civic position as her or his way of life.*[11]

Proficiency in the Belarusian language, as well as "cultural self-identification", should be viewed as key civic competencies of Belarusians. They allow Belarusians to get out of the Russian language information space, which in current conditions does not offer either freedom or democracy. From Russian-language sources, people receive, distorted by spin doctors, information and images of the world.[12]

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[9] Ibid, p. 17.

[10] Rudnik V. *Bolsh chym prosta "mova"*. Руднік, В. *Больш, чым проста «мова»* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 2 (12). P. 21–22.

[11] Kuzminich I. *Natsyyanalnaya sviadomasc i hramadzianskaya adukatsyya. // National identity and civic education* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 2 (12). P. 20.

[12] Matskevich T. *Hramadzianskiya kampetentsyi: shto treba belarusu, kab stats hramadzianinam. // Civic competencies: what a Belarusian needs to become a citizen* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2012. No 1 (22). P. 19.

"Revivalists" accuse their ideological opponents of creating programmes that are based on

> *borrowing and accepting as ones own, someone else's language and traditions and building new cultural traditions on the basis of borrowed language and values.*[13]

Opponents accuse critics of authoritarianism, disrespect to human rights, witch hunting, etc.[14]

Discussions on conceptual basis of civic education in Belarus

The failure of democratic forces in the presidential election in March 2006 demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the system of civic education that existed at that moment. The most critical in their assessment of the 15 years of development of civic education in Belarus were AHT-CSI representatives:

> *The misunderstanding of the sense and procedure of activities led to the inability of the opposition and third sector to adequately assess the situation and set relevant goals. It led to the inability to consolidate and cooperate, negotiate or sign agreements. On the one hand, all actors declare principles of democracy, freedom of expression and responsibility. On the other, in their actions one can see egalitarianism, subordination, anarchy, egocentrism, lack of acceptance of dissent, inability to listen to and hear opponents, have business communication, etc. Personal opinions and feelings become more important*

[13] Ibid, p. 17.

[14] Since 2006, an influential member of ACE and the CSO sector as a whole is the "Agency of Humanistic Technologies – Center for Social Innovations" (AHT – CSI), which are led by Uladzimir Matskevich. This organisation adamantly criticises the described above approach: "The declared principles of democracy and national rebirth are mere words — the reality is all about comfortable jobs, ambition and narrow interests. The inability to see any home-grown sources of development in Belarus, and the constant use of foreign rather than Belarusian conceptual models, is becoming ingrained though it runs counter to the principles of Belarusification and democratisation. It is unacceptable that educators in civic education should live in Belarus and yet not see or think Belarus." (See: Matskevich S. *Istoriya i aktualiyi grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v Belarusi. Pragmatika, paradigmatika, sintagmatika. // History and actual trends in civic education in Belarus. Pragmaticism, paradigmaticism and sintagmaticism.* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 12).
This group quite quickly showed their aspiration for the leading role in the Association quoting the effectiveness of their own approach to the reform of Belarusian education (for school and professional education), to concept of the renovation of education in humanities and functional literacy.
Suggested by Matskevich's group, ideas on civic education were not met with enthusiasm. Participants of the group explained that by the unwillingness of "traditional" educators to refrain from using outdated schemes of thinking and activities.

> *than logical well-grounded views, or joining forces in the action that defines the destiny of the whole country... In this regard, the third sector, and opposition in their way of thinking and behaviour, are not different from the authorities who continue to apply the Soviet approach to ruling the country.*[15]

The third sector was unable to confront the powerful system of state ideology set up in 2003.[16]

Since the state blocked almost all NGO initiatives in the sphere of civic education, the number of participants of civic education projects from such target groups as school teachers, university professors, school and college students has decreased. Another reason for the failure of civic education was the lack of a well-thought out strategy of interaction with the Western partners:

> *Lack of clarity in goals and structures of Belarusian CSOs in the beginning of the 1990s led to the situation where Western partners started to offer not only financial resources but values and goals that should be promoted by Belarusian partners. The Belarusian side did not offer any changes in the goals of the projects; instead, it suggested human resources to implement the objectives and goals set by the Western side. In this way, Belarus became a platform for the entrenchment of democracy but it lacked internal Belarusian actors; this contradicts the very principle of partnership. During the last 15 years, the cultural norms of democratic society have not formed in the third sector. The trend of being totally inferior to the Western partners has strengthened: organisations were created before they even thought about their goals; they followed democratic norms that were developed for conditions of European, American but not Belarusian territories.*[17]

In February 2006, the round table "What Should Civic Education in Belarus Look Like Now?" took place in Minsk. The main problem articulated there was a lack of demand for civic education in the Belarusian society. The majority of the population did not need real knowledge about democracy and its related skills and practices since they could not apply them in real life. They needed much more knowledge and skills that would allow them to

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[15] Ibid, p. 8.

[16] Strengthening of the control on civic education was reflected in many legal and institutional acts of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus. Over time, the government came up with a process of validation of projects run by NGOs in the sphere of civic education. That process has many stages: expertises by the Ministry of Education and National Institute of Eduction; registration of programes and projects in the Humanitarian Aid Department or Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus; receiving permissions for activities in state institutions or entities from ideological departments of all levels; validation of programmes of educational seminars, conferences, schools etc.

[17] Ibid, p. 10.

adapt to the authoritarian rule. In addition to that, Belarusian NGOs had limited access to broad target groups or to promoting their educational services via the media.[18]

Another problem is related to the absence of actors of the democratic civic education. In European countries these actors would be the government, political parties, trade unions, civic movements, church and others. In Belarus, they either do not exist or show no interest in the topic. Relations with the government are a special case in Belarus. The government not only refrains from assisting NGOs in their activities; it also introduced its own "ideological" education to pursue its own goals. Naturally, CSOs that treat civic education as teaching democracy are not well perceived in that system. The most interested in the development of civic education in Belarus are those who had to be mere executors of "procurement". These actors cannot replace the main client, at the very least, because they are not able to create conditions for application of received civic knowledge and experience.[19]

Participants of the discussion on strategy and tactics identified one more problem: the difference between "urgent" and "long-term" approaches to civic education (as defined by U. Vialichka). The "long-term" approach set as priorities, deep changes in the mentality and culture of the Belarusian society, directing it to new democratic values, and learning new behaviour models on the level of daily communication. That would require quite a lot of time, therefore influence on politics and politically motivated acts were treated as secondary:

> *Supporters of that approach are ready to continue working in unfavourable conditions; they are sure that the society should first prepare itself well for transition to democracy in order to avoid one more disillusionment and socio-economic crisis.*[20]

Supporters of the other, "urgent" approach were confident that in conditions of the total ideological pressure of the government on the Belarusian society it would be naïve to expect that isolated efforts of organisation promoting civic education could influence public life. According to them, the only valid goal of civic education was encouraging civic and political activeness that would bring Belarus back to the path of democratic development. This approach explains the notions of a citizen and civic consciousness taking into account the specifics of the society, in which democracy is yet to be created:

> *In the absence of democracy a citizen is a person who can build democracy, build a democratic type and system of interpersonal relations, identify and foresee threats to*

[18] Vialichka U. *Na suchasnykh rostaniakh belaruskay hramadzianskay adukatsyi* // *On the contemporary crossroads of Belarusian civic education* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 16.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid, p. 14.

> *democracy, find ways of confronting those threats. Citizen's qualities can manifest only specific situations requiring action and in historical moments – election, public forums, courts, human rights defence, communication, etc.*[21]

However, unlike in market conditions, Matskevich's group claimed, the demand for civic education does not form "from below". It has to be formed by elites based on national cultural values. Any technology of education includes goals, subject and object of education, methods of teaching, content, step-by-step organisation of the process, and results. At that time, non-state civic education organisations did not have any of that. The main subject (actor) of civic education, the educator, did not perform her/his function because of an inability to

> *deeply and in a reflective manner define goals of civic education based on the analysis of the Belarusian situation.*

Following the fashion of implementing modern methods of teaching, the educator follows his student, to follow his wishes and provide him with the most comfortable conditions for the learning process:

> *What gives a teacher a right to become an educator in civic education? Only personal, civic position, actively though thorough and resultative action in the current political situation in Belarus. The right to be an educator should be at all the times tested and confirmed. Only a democrat can teach democracy, only a literate and experienced teacher can teach civic literacy. Only those people who were part of learning activities, who experienced them and who know what should be the next step can prepare people to such a next step and organise teaching activity.*[22]

In 2006, *Adukatar* published the article "Standards and standardisation in non-formal education: approaches and definitions" by Uladzimir Matskevich, Sviatlana Matskevich and Tatsiana Vadalazhskaya. Although that text was defined as an introduction to the topic, it was quite a difficult read. During the thematic round table, it became clear that the majority of educators treated standards based on their own experience and on traditions, i.e. in the way those standards were introduced into school education in the 1990s. Such standartisation focuses on the preservation of existing norms of educational activities. In schools it resulted in typological forms of school curriculum and curricula of separate courses; in the sphere of civic education it reduced to the implementation of a simple rule:

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[21] See: Matskevich S. *Istoriya i aktualiyi grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v Belarusi. Pragmatika, paradigmatika, sintagmatika. // History and actual trends in civic education in Belarus. Pragmaticism, paradigmaticism and sintagmaticism.* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 11.

[22] Ibid, p. 12.

"The best practice used today is a standard in itself."[23] The approach, suggested in the article, was based on another paradigm:

> *Demand for the educational system comes from external systems of activities: trends in socium, development of culture, humanitarisation.*

It meant that standartisation had to "stimulate and regulate the development of the system of education" rather than preserve the existing stereotype.[24]

In March 2007, AHT-CSI organised a role game titled "Civic education in Belarus: a continuation or beginning." The results of the game were controversial. Already in the process of the game, some participants expressed their disagreement with techniques and methods used. In their views, they contradicted the pro-democracy spirit of civic education and could not be acceptable by intellectuals.

The results of the game provided the grounds for the development of the Concept of Civic Education along with a set of learning aids. It was discussed throughout 2008 but eventually not approved as the basis for the operation of ACE (several years later, the association was registered as the Association of Lifelong Learning and Enlightenment – it shifted its focus from civic education).[25]

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[23] Poshevalova T. Пошевалова, T. *Kriterii kachestva i standarty v grazhdanskom obrazovanii / Kruglyi stol v ramkakh Festivalya neformal'nogo obrazovaniya. Zametki moderatora // Criteria of quality and standards in civic education / Round table held at the Festival of non-formal education / Notes of the moderator //* Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 3 (9). P. 23.

[24] Two reviews of "Standards and standardisation in non-formal education: approaches and definitions" were published in *Adukatar.* In one of them, authors expressed their surprise at the lack of a "clear and fixed definition of civic education that would be used throughout the whole text." (See: Kirilyuk L., Naumova S. *Retsenzii na rabotu "Standarty i standartizatsiya w neformalnom obrazovaniyi: podkhody i opredeleniya"* (Matskevich V.V., Matskevich S.A., Vodolazhskaya T.V.) // Adukatar non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 4 (10). P. 30). According to reviewers, while paying heightened attention to the methodology of education, authors of the article did not say anything new about the real state of affairs in civic education in Belarus, its trends, the subject of standardisation or steps that were undertaken in that sphere. While presenting to the reader the whole spectrum of objects of standardisation, authors "ignored standards of the content" and did not attempt to "characterise its value basis, principles or ideals." (Ibid, p. 34).

[25] In the same spirit, the conference titled "De-Sovietization and Mass Consciousness Shield in contemporary Belarus" was organized in August 2007 in Silute, Lithuania. The proceedings of the conference were compiled and published under the title "On de-Sovietization. Belarus: the beginning of the 21st century (Silute, Lithuania, 20–24 August 2007 // Minsk, 2008. A new compiltation of articles on this topic was published shortly after in "De-Sovietisation in the context of Belarusian society transformation" / Edited by V. Matskevich. Vilnius, 2012). A similar conference titled "Belarusisation: can one complete the process of institutionalized independent nation-building?" was held on 22 November 2013 in Minsk. The proceedings of the conference were also published.

After the 2010 presidential elections, a need emerged to adapt civic education actors to the new social and political realities. With that objective in mind, the Association of Lifelong Learning and Enlightenment organised in November 2011 the conference titled "Belarusian civic education and relevant civic competencies." It focused on the context of civic education in the country:

> *the contemporary authoritarian regimes do not produce civic education. Rather, they produce the upbringing of the population in line with the obedient and paternalistic behaviour patterns, which can be counteracted only by united efforts of all pro-democracy oriented civic society and media actors.*[26]

The Association of Lifelong Learning and Enlightenment in partnership with EuroBelarus launched the Citizenship.BY campaign, which was designed to try to influence the formation of demand for civic competencies in society. The second phase of the campaign began in 2013 and was devoted to the promotion of active citizenship in masses. The first event of this phase was the roundtable meeting titled "Citizenship and relevant art", which took place in May 2013.[27]

In June 2013 there was a contest "Contemporary Belarusian Citizenship", while in March 2014 there was a photo contest "I Am a Citizen!"[28]

A collection of educational and methodological materials "12 Steps to Citizenship for Educators" is one of the most significant outputs of this project. It includes a set of learning materials and art products aimed at helping teachers, trainers and civic activists in organising educational events. The collection contains e-versions of publications about citizenship and civic education, as well as an annex with graphics, music and video.[29]

The Flying University's programmes, the Thinking Loudly media project, Citizenship.BY campaign and others became the most significant initiatives of AHT-CSI in recent years.

[26] Final statement of the seminar-conference "Belarusian civic education and relevant civic competences" held on 4–5 November 2011 in Minsk.

[27] Based on the results of the event, the following conclusion was made: "one has to act in the context of contemporary post-modern society, in which assessment of the processes is ambiguous; authority is not obvious; demands are shaped spontaneously; resources are diversified; the boundaries of subjectness are blurred." Kalitenia L., Antashkevich S. *Our country and Citizenship.BY* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine, 2015. No 1 (24).

[28] Citizenship.BY campaign has its own PR programme. Its press releases are published in the independent Belarusian media. It is present in online media and in the most popular social media, such as Facebook or Vkontakte, where its accounts are regularly updated.

[29] Ibid.

3. Conclusions

In 2013, the Office for European Expertise and Communication (OEEC) in partnership with the Office for a Democratic Belarus, prepared the Overview of the Civic Education Sector in Belarus. It aimed to assess the effectiveness of the work by CSOs in this field, establish development trends and present possible ways for improving their operation. The overview was drafted using the desk research of documents (regulatory acts, curricula, and publications in the domain of civic education) as well as qualitative methods, which included in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with CSO practitioners.

One of the findings of this overview was that

> *the Belarusian civic education by the third sector is stagnating.*[30]

There is no actor in the civic education in Belarus "who could mobilise CSOs' efforts and resources for the sake of civic education." The overview pointed at the unfavorable political framework created by the state and the lack of coordination among the sectoral actors was found to be the determining factors hindering the progress in civic education in Belarus.

The cases where CSOs are included as co-implementers into the state programmes are rare, with very few of them trying to build cooperation with the state-run education system.

The existing programmes often focus on the needs of target groups, without taking into account a more general prospect of changing the political culture in society. Belarusian CSOs working in the field of civic education focus on cultivating the competencies of civic participation. At the same time, their programmes lack proper focus on civic knowledge, the knowledge of the mechanisms and universal democratic principles. Another weakness of the civic education programmes implemented by Belarusian CSOs is that they are conditioned by their assumption that

> *in the authoritarian Belarusian state a full-fledged civic education is not possible, and a lot of knowledge and skills of democratic behavior are not applicable.*

The differences in the approaches of CSOs to civic education suggest a "lack of communication and cooperation within the sector."

The civic education sector needs to improve the outreach of its educational programmes. Experts assess that the overall outreach by civic education programmes does not exceed 100 000 participants in 5 years, which makes about 1.2% of the population aged 14 and older. At the same time, the ideological and upbringing work of the state – mass media

[30] http://www.actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/overview_2013_05_kor.pdf.

not included – covers about 3.6 million people or 45% of the population aged 14 and older. Internet usage by civic education programmes is very low.

The short-term nature of these programmes (1–2 years) is yet another factor affecting their effectiveness; programs lasting for 3–5 years and more have better results.

The number of civic education CSOs and experts has decreased in recent years, leading to the loss of best practices. There are regions in Belarus, where not a single CSO provides services in civic education.

Based on the results of the study, the overview proposed several recommendations. For example, it recommends organizing the process of communication between the main providers of civic education services; taking into account the interests of various target groups without losing common values when developing the programmes; sharing the most effective programmes with the potential of the mass audience outreach between a wide range of CSOs. The cultivation of civic participation competences

> *should be complemented with a basic knowledge of the legal mechanisms and structure of Belarus; principles, documents, ideas, and confrontations meaningful for the constitutional democracy of Belarus; of the political mechanisms for representing public opinion and bringing about political change...*

Education programmes should be combined with civic campaigns including innovation-based forms such as animated cartoons and videos for children and other age groups using the Internet and social media, having in mind the high Internet penetration (from 26% in 2007 up to 54% in 2013). Monitoring the outcomes and impacts of civic education programmes should become a standard for NGOs. New civic education programmes should be designed and supported, subject to thorough cost benefit analysis and evaluation of previously achieved results. The overview also recommends ensuring broad outreach of civic education by means of involving a wide range of providers into the field – NGOs, trade unions, faith-based organizations, initiatives, businesses – everybody who can purposefully integrate civic education into their educational programmes and activities.

It would be naïve to believe that the CSOs alone can cope with the tasks facing civic education in Belarus. However, their coordinated and well thought-out activities could become an important contribution in shaping demand for civic competencies in Belarusian society, thus bringing a change for the better closer.

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Uladzimir Rouda

Assessment of the state of civil society in Belarus in Freedom House and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reports in 1999–2013

Freedom House is a respected international organisation that, since 1997, measures indices of democracy for post-communist countries, including Belarus. Relevant reports are published annually under the title "Nations in Transit. Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia". The checklist of questions for the index covers seven categories: electoral process; civil society; independent media; national democratic governance; local democratic governance; judicial framework and independence; and corruption.[1] As one can see, the state of the institutes of civil society is only one of seven categories; however, it plays a rather significant role. Numeric ratings accompanying the reports are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest level of democratic progress. Table 1 below shows the numeric ratings that Belarus received for the development of its civil society in 1999–2013.

Table 1. *The level of development of civil society institutions in Belarus according to Freedom House research*[2]

Year:	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	6.00	6.50	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.50	6.50	6.25	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50

As the table shows, the state of civil society institutions is consistently bad. This places the Republic of Belarus into the group of consolidated authoritarian regimes alongside countries of Central Asia and, after Vladimir Putin's third re-election in 2012, the Russian Federation.

[1] See: *Nations in Transit 2014. Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia*. New York, Washington, Budapest: Freedom House, 2014. http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/belarus.

[2] "Freedom House" reports are published with one year delay. Data for 2014 will be published in the first half of 2015. Data for 2000 are absent, therefore we took 1999 as the starting point – see *Nations in Transit 2005. Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. P. 120.

What about the state of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), independent trade unions, associations of entrepreneurs and religious organisations, which are the main structural elements of civil society in any country, including Belarus?

The score in 2001 worsened, since in January 1999 president Alyaksandar Lukashenka signed the Decree No 2 that required re-registration of NGOs, political parties and trade unions. This document de facto introduced the permission-based principle of registration of association, rather than application-based, which is quite natural for authoritarian regimes. As a result of that re-registration and failure of many NGOs to re-register due to the severe political pressure, the number of NGOs in Belarus decreased from 2500 to 1300.[3]

According to the report of Freedom House, there were three main events in the life of civil society in Belarus in 2002:

– forced unification of two leading youth NGOs into one (Belarusian Republican Union of Youth, or BRSM);
– change in leadership in official trade unions: they were headed by the ex-deputy head of the Presidential Administration, Leanid Kozik;
– changes in the Law on Religions that provided the Christian Orthodox church with a more privileged treatment than other churches and caused outrage among followers of other confessions.[4]

The year 2003 was rich in events that negatively influenced the sustainability and durability of civil society structures in Belarus. This led to an even lower score in the ranking compared to 2002 (see Table 1). There was a new wave of repression against certain NGOs that could have disturbed the preparations for the referendum that extended the number of re-elections for Alyaksandar Lukashenka, enabling him to become a lifelong president. First of all, several regional resource centres were shut down (in Baranavičy, Homel, Brest and Hrodna). The second target of the repressions were human rights organisations, such as "Legal support to the population" and "Viasna" human rights centre. The pressure was exerted on some youth organisations such as Young Front or Youth Christian and Social Union "Young Democrats". Authorities shut down the Independent Society of Legal Studies, the lawyers of which actively expressed their solidarity with the third sector in Belarus. Around 40 NGOs had to stop their activities.[5] Also in 2003, the government announced that it would develop the so-called 'state ideology' that would be introduced as an obligatory course in universities. The only Belarusian-language lyceum in Belarus – Yakub Kolas lyceum – was liquidated. The government also introduced

[3] See.: U. Rouda. *Palitychnaya Sistema Rrespubliki Belarus*, Vilnius: EHU, 2011. P. 240.

[4] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2003/belarus.

[5] See.: U. Rouda. *Palitychnaya Sistema Rrespubliki Belarus*, Vilnius... P. 241.

stricter punishment for political parties and NGOs for organisation and participation in non-sanctioned demonstrations and street protests/meetings.[6]

A referendum in Belarus removed all legal boundaries preventing the president to be re-elected multiple times. That complicated even more the conditions for the work of NGOs, independent trade unions, associations of entrepreneurs and religious organisations. The law "On Public Associations" was amended on 30 June 2004, allowing it to postpone the activities of an organisation for 6 months or liquidate it, if it breaks the rules of receiving and usage of foreign humanitarian aid. Repressions against NGOs now included pressure against independent research centres (think tanks). In 2004, the Ministry of Justice shut down 42 NGOs including "Centre for Constitutionalism and Comparative Legal Research". After six months of struggle, the European Humanities University (EHU) lost its licence and had to look for a new home in exile. All above mentioned factors explain why the score for civil society institutions in Belarus, in that year, was the lowest: 6.75.[7]

That sad record repeated in 2005. The main reason for that, was that in November 2005, changes were introduced into the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus that envisaged criminal responsibility for activities in the name of unregistered organisations. This article paved the way for the imprisonment of "Partnerstva" unregistered initiative activists who planned to organise independent monitoring of the presidential election, as well as Young Front activists.[8] Also in 2005, authorities did not recognise the election of Andżelika Borys as the head of the Union of Poles in Belarus (that story attracted plenty of international attention); Protestant church "New Life" was accused of misuse of property. On top of all that, the Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) was deprived of its license and forced to move into exile.[9]

There were not many changes for civil society structures in Belarus in 2006. On the one hand, repressions against NGOs that were perceived by the state to be 'politicized' continued and 10 quite well-known organisations were shut down (such as the Renaissance of Homeland Women's Movement, Union of Belarusian Scouts, Belarusian Union of Children's and Youth Organisations "Rada"). On the other hand, amendments to the Criminal Code went into force that envisaged criminal responsibility for actions in the name of an organisation liquidated in court or for the discreditation of Belarus and its leader abroad. Authorities continued to fight with the new leadership of the Union of Poles. On the other hand, Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC) won a court case in the Supreme Economic Court and was able to continue its work in Belarus. After a three-week long hunger strike, 200 parishioners of the "New Life" church got their unlawfully

[6] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2004/belarus.

[7] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2005/belarus.

[8] See.: U. Rouda. *Palitychnaya Sistema Rrespubliki Belarus*, Vilnius... P. 241.

[9] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2006/belarus.

confiscated premises back. Still, since the government were not able to provide civil society with minimal freedom from arbitrary interference into their activities, Freedom House gave the civil society in Belarus the same score as in 2005: 6.75.[10]

In 2007, several politically active NGOs demanded state registration, such as For Freedom Movement, Viasna, Chernobyl Union of Liquidators and Young Front. Those attempts failed, while seven members of Young Front were criminally convicted for activity in the name of the unregistered organisation. One of the activists, Artur Finkevich, who was already in prison for patriotic graffiti on a building in Minsk, received an extra 1.5 years of imprisonment on top of the original 2 years, for "breaking the prison regime." At the same time, some organisations were able to continue their work legally, such as the "Supolnasc Centre" or the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. In November 2007, the deputy head of the Presidential Administration met the leaders of the popular Belarusian language rock bands and persuaded them that the state wouldn't ban their concerts for political reasons if they would distance themselves from politics. Freedom House gave Belarusian civil society the score of 6.50 – that score meant a relative ease of conditions for the activities of the civil society in Belarus.[11]

The release of two well-known political prisoners, the Young Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich and ex-presidential candidate Alyaksandar Kazulin marked the beginning of a relative thaw that included more tolerant treatment of NGOs, trade unions and associations of entrepreneurs. No one was imprisoned based on 193-1 Criminal Code article (actions in the name of the unregistered organisation). The authorities seemed to open up cautiously to dialogue with the opposition. Uladzimir Makei, who at that time headed the Administration of the President, spoke at the Minsk Forum, organised by German elites that were interested in cooperation with Belarus. However, that political 'thaw' didn't influence the score that Freedom House gave to civil society in Belarus: 6.50.[12]

In 2009, the score of civil society in Belarus got slightly higher: 6.25. Due to the dialogue with the European Union, Belarusian authorities slightly improved administrative procedures, making registration or liquidation of NGOs easier. There were no "loud" court cases involving NGO activists or political leaders. At the same time, leaders of some organisations such as the, non-recognised by authorities, Union of Poles were warned that they could become the next targets of 193-1 Article of the Criminal Code. Presidential Administration created consultative councils, inviting representatives of the opposition to them. However, meetings of those councils stopped in November 2009 after Uladzimir

[10] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2007/belarus.

[11] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2008/belarus.

[12] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2009/belarus.

Makei got offended by the speech of an opposition politician, who called those councils "regime's cover-ups".[13]

Until the presidential election that took place on 19 December 2010, authorities quite routinely persecuted NGOs, trade unions, associations of entrepreneurs and religious communities. The only exception was the criminal case against the head of Ivianiec branch of the Union of Poles in Belarus, Tereza Sobol, who was accused of official misconduct. Some organisations were not registered, among them: the Association of Civic Education, the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, and "Viasna" human rights centre. At the same time, new initiatives got an opportunity to register themselves as so-called "establishments". This was the form of registration of the group that supported the "Tell the Truth" civil campaign.

The Ministry of Justice suggested to the House of Representatives (lower chamber of the Belarusian parliament) to review the infamous 193-1 Article of the Criminal Code. In order to retain a seat in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Uladzimir Makei extended the mandate of so-called civil consultative councils. Despite the radical reversion of the situation after 19 December 2010, Freedom House gave Belarusian civil society one of the highest scores in this period, 6.00.[14]

In 2011, the conditions for the work of civil society organisations have drastically worsened due to repressions against participants of the protests on Independence Square in Minsk. Administrative and/or criminal action were brought against more than 800 people. Despite repressions, civil society found a new form of protest: so-called "silent protest" actions that took place from May to July in Minsk and other big cities in Belarus. When those spontaneous and non-violent gatherings started, the unprepared police were not able to disperse them efficiently.

To prepare for the participation in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Belarusian NGOs developed a joint National Platform. All these development led to the repetition of the last year's score: 6.0.[15]

In 2012, the conditions for non-governmental organisations, independent trade unions and association of employers remained complicated. Criminal and administrative action was taken against those who supported so-called "teddy bear landing" action that was classified as illegal crossing of the Belarus' border. In June, the government prohibited audience opinion polls by the companies that do not have permits from the relevant state commission. Several foreign politicians were banned from entering the country to observe parliamentary elections. At the same time, two well-known political prisoners were set free: Andrei Sannikau and Zmitser Bandarenka. Authorities allowed peaceful march on

[13] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2010/belarus.

[14] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2011/belarus.

[15] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2012/belarus.

the Freedom Day on 25 March. The overall conditions for the operations of civil society worsened and received the score of 6.25.[16]

According to Freedom House experts, in 2013 the conditions for the activities of civil society worsened even more (score of 6.5). Despite the substantial decrease in the rate of administrative arrests, 11 political prisoners stayed imprisoned, among them Ales Bialatski, Mikalai Statkievich, Eduard Lobau and Mikalai Autukhovich.[17]

The Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index by the United States Agency on International Development (USAID) is one more indicator that allows us to study the condition of the civic sector in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Eurasia. The sustainability of each country's CSO sector is defined by the following factors: legal environment, organisational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, infrastructure, and public image. As in Freedom House rankings, each of these dimensions gets a score between 1 and 7, where 1 is the highest and 7 is the lowest.[18]

Let's start from the legal environment that plays a key role in studying the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Table 2 shows how the score for this dimension changed for Belarus in 2000–2013.

Table 2. *Legal environment*

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	7.0	7.0	6.5	6.8	6.9	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	6.9	6.9	6.9	6.8	6.8

The legal environment, in which institutions of civil society work in Belarus, has been extremely unfavourable since the very beginning of the consolidated authoritarian rule in Belarus. The relative exception was in 2002, when the Law on Public Associations was signed. However, as stated above, the Decree No 2 signed in 1999 by president Lukashenka introduced the permission-based principle of registration of NGOs instead of the application-based. This has not changed to this day. Moreover, starting from 2001, civil society organisations (CSOs) are obliged to register funding received from abroad either with the Council of Ministers or in the Humanitarian Aid Department at the Administration of the President.[19]

Both Freedom House and USAID's experts paid attention to the amendments to the Law on Public Associations adopted in June 2004 that envisaged liquidation or postponement of activities of an organisation for six months, if an organisation fails to comply with above listed requirements. Also in 2004, the referendum approved the

[16] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2013/belarus

[17] http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/belarus.

[18] See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus*. P. 12 http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2013.pdf.

[19] Ibid. P. 3.

lifting of a constitutional ban on a third, or subsequent terms for president Lukashenka. In 2005, changes in the Criminal Code introduced criminal responsibility for actions in the name of unregistered organisations. Those changes came into force in 2006 (the famous 193-1 Criminal Code Article that allows imprisonment for activities in the name of the organisation that was liquidated by the decision of the court and for spreading abroad information that discredits the state and its leadership). This article has not been abolished, despite the suggestion that the Minister of Justice made to the MPs back in 2010.

In 2009, authorities introduced cosmetic changes in some administrative procedures of the application of the Law on Public Associations: on the one hand, they made registering an NGO easier, on the other, it became easier to shut down an NGO, as well. In January 2013, Presidential Decree No 2 introduced restrictions on persons who are under the KGB's or prosecutor's office supervision: they cannot become directors of institutions/establishments or head the unions of legal persons.[20]

Thus, the legal environment prevents subjects of civil society from fulfilling their statute goals.

Table 3. *Organisational capacity*[21]

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	5.0	4.8	4.7	4.8	4.6	4.8	4.9	5.0	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1

According to indices, the organisational capacity of civil society in Belarus is slightly higher than the conditions set by the legal environment:

Civil society organisations (CSOs) regularly assess the needs of their target audiences and develop services based on the defined needs. At the same time, limited resources do not allow organisations to increase the volume of requested services. Cases of involvement by CSOs of the significant number of people into their activities are quite a rarity.[22]

Common problems that existed both in 2000 and 2013 and hindered the organisational capacity were:

- a significant number of CSOs continues to stay in the illegal field;
- the majority of organisations do not provide the division of power between ruling and executive organs inside their organisations;
- strategic planning is present only in big CSOs and international networks;

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus* – 2013. P. 4. // http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2013.pdf.

- decision-making is happening inside the closest circle of an organisation's leadership;
- registered organisations are obliged to provide annual reports to the state but they do not publicise these reports in the society.

At the same time, Belarusian CSOs employ highly qualified experts able to provide high-quality services to the wide circles of the population. Many organisations regularly use the services of lawyers, accountants and IT specialists. Nearly all organisations have access to the Internet. The organisational capacity of civil society in Belarus reaches the level of that in countries with hybrid regimes where elements of authoritarianism and democracy coexist. This can be explained by strong links with European countries and the European history of Belarus that has lasted for many centuries.

Table 4. *Financial viability*

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	6.0	6.0	5.7	6.2	6.2	6.4	6.5	6.6	6.6	6.6	6.6	6.5	6.5	6.4

The low level of financial viability of Belarusian CSOs can be explained by the draconian legislation. For instance, in 2008, the president issued two edicts that introduced the obligation to get permission from the relevant ministry before applying for the registration of a grant in the Department on humanitarian aid[23]. In 2013, the Department denied registration of any projects that were selected as winners in the small grants programme run by the US Embassy in Belarus[24].

Despite hurdles created by the Belarusian authorities, grants from abroad are the main source of financing of Belarusian CSOs, especially those dealing with human rights or dealing with issues that are close to politics. At the same time, the Department on humanitarian aid sometimes approves foreign funds for social projects. Such projects are also able to get support from business, which however, has not significantly developed over the last 10 years. Independent trade unions are able to collect membership fees. Still, the above mentioned sources of funding are not enough to ensure stable and durable development of CSOs.

Table 5. *Advocacy*

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	6.0	5.5	5.4	5.7	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.8	5.7	5.5

[23] See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus* – 2008. P. 5. // http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2008.pdf.

[24] See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus* – 2013. P. 5. // http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2013.pdf.

During the last 15 years, CSOs have had limited opportunities to lobby for changes in the legislation that would improve their situation or the situations of the social groups they were created to serve. Examples of successful advocacy are usually related to the activities of particular organisations or their leaders that had informal access or relationships with those in power.

When the re-registration of NGOs started in Belarus in 1999, the Assembly of pro-democratic non-governmental organisations that was the biggest coalition of NGOs in Belarus, conducted the "SOS campaign". The title of that campaign was borrowed from Slovak activists. The campaign focused on providing legal support to the third sector organisations and on informing foreign human rights organisations and governments about rude violations of the freedom of association in Belarus. The overall number of NGOs in Belarus after the re-registration fell from 2500 to 1300. At the same time, the most active members of the Assembly were re-registered. The overall number of members of the Assembly grew from 250 to 700 organisation (one-third of them were unregistered).[25] This is an example of the successful advocacy of a coalition of Belarusian CSOs.

In 2008, Belarusian businesses lobbied for the abolishment of the so-called "golden share" rule that allowed the government to nationalise any joint stock company.[26] In 2013, the association of entrepreneurs "Perspektyva" succeeded in persuading the government to postpone the realisation of the technical regulations of the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. "Green Network" environmental NGO, successfully lobbied for changes in Water and Forestry Codes[27]. As one can see, the examples of successful advocacy campaigns are solitary and deserve detailed examination.

Table 6. *Service provision*[28]

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	5.0	5.0	4.9	5.1	4.9	5.1	5.4	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.3

Civil society organisations provide services in the sphere of civic education, human rights (including minority rights), protection of the environment, healthcare, culture, sports and recreation. The number of organisations that focus their services on current needs of the society is growing every year.

However, organisations that provide such services as a rule have limited financial sources; that creates the problem of projects that do not outlive the grant period and

[25] See.: U. Rouda. *Palitychnaya Sistema Respubliki Belarus*, Vilnius, EHU. P. 241.

[26] See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus* – 2008. P. 6. // http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2008.pdf.

[27] See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus* – 2013. P. 6. // http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2013.pdf.

[28] Ibid, p. 7.

disappear after the grant is finished. Many such organisations, except for social organisations, are too afraid to advertise their activities since that can bring persecution from the authorities. Therefore many potential clients of CSOs never learn about the opportunities they have.

Table 7. *Infrastructure*[29]

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	5.0	4.5	4.5	4.8	5.0	5.3	5.5	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.2

There is no infrastructure that could allow the population to have unrestricted access to the services provided by the Belarusian civil society organisations. At the same time, there are some positive changes in this sphere. The Assembly of pro-democratic NGOs created in the late 1990s, despite the huge decrease in membership, remains the biggest coalition of NGOs in Belarus. In 2013, it united 327 organisations. The Assembly provides informational and legal services, organises cultural campaigns and researches the non-governmental sector.

In recent years, the Lev Sapieha Foundation strengthened its capacity in developing local communities in Belarus. CSO networks, such as "Green Network", the Belarusian AIDS Network, the Belarusian National Youth Council "Rada", as well as the Belarusian Association of Lifelong Learning and Enlightening, provide informational, educational and advocacy support to their members.[30] The main problem in this field is that CSOs only occasionally cooperate with the authorities and with business.

Table 8. *Public image*[31]

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	6.0	5.5	5.2	5.6	5.6	5.8	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.9

The public image of the civil society organisations has been consistently negative for almost 15 years. Only for a short period, in 2002, when the Law on Public Associations was signed, the attitude of the population to CSOs improved. At all other times that attitude stayed negative, including in 2011, when due to the devaluation of the Belarusian ruble and other economic problems, the electoral rating of the president fell to 20%. In 2013, according to the IISEPS opinion poll, only 32.8% Belarusians claimed they trusted CSOs, while 18.2% did not trust them. At the same time, the majority of Belarusians do

[29] Ibid, p. 9.
See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus* – 2013. P. 9 // http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2013.pdf.

[31] Ibid, p. 9.

not understand the term "civil society" and do not know what role civil society plays in their lives.[32]

The negative image of CSOs is caused by the defamation of these organisations by the authorities that has been in place for years. Civil society leaders and activists have limited access to broadcasting media and do not have enough resources to employ PR specialists. The transparency of their activities is limited, since many organisations are more concerned with the persecution by the authorities than with their own image.

Finally, let's analyse the overall sustainability of civil society organisations in Belarus in 2000–2013. Table 9 presents this summarising score.

Table 9. *CSO sustainability*[33]

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Score:	5.7	5.5	5.3	5.6	5.6	5.8	5.9	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.7

Political liberalisation has not been on the agenda in Belarus for many years. Attempts of civil society organisations to participate in public policy were constantly met with the hostility of authorities. Disappearance of famous politicians in 1999–2000 and persecution of participants of presidential campaigns in 2006 and 2010 that made them political prisoners, made sustainable dialogue with the West impossible for the Belarusian authorities. Only in 2013 one could see first examples of successful advocacy campaigns led by CSOs. The legal environment in 2003–2013 was unfavourable to the civil society. That forced many organisations to register abroad or risk criminal persecution for actions on behalf of an unregistered organisation. As of 31 December 2013, there were 2521 registered public associations in Belarus; still, a significant amount of civic initiatives remained unregistered.[34] The CSO Sustainability index in 2000–2013 stayed in the 'Sustainability Impeded' category, which is intrinsic for consolidated authoritarian regimes.

We note finally that indices of the level of the development of civil society by Freedom House and by the United States Agency for International Development use the similar methodology and, therefore, complement each other well. Reports on these indices allow politicians and researchers to understand better the processes in civil society in Belarus and political decisions that, according to the government, support the stability of the existing political regime in Belarus.

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[32] Ibid, p. 10.

[33] See: *Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Belarus* – 2013. P. 1. // http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/report_belarus_csosi_2013.pdf.

[34] Ibid, p. 2. This shows that only by 2013 the number of registered NGOs reached the level of 1999 before the re-registration of political parties, trade unions and NGOs that de facto led to the liguidation of all non-loyal NGOs.

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Prepared by Aliaksei Lastouski

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