

# The Political System of Belarus: Current State and Agenda for Future Political Reforms

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The name of the author is changed due to the security situation in Belarus

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## Introduction

A major challenge facing the political science in the 21st century is that the autocracy phenomenon still remains less than fully explored. The 1974 through 1991 third democratisation wave (the term introduced by Huntington) was succeeded by an attenuation process. Many of the political systems that enjoyed all chances for democratic transformations against the USSR disintegration backdrop have followed, eventually, a different path.

This study outlines the nature, contents and transformation stages of the political system in Belarus. It puts a focus on the process of a gradual power accroachment in the country and on changing power branch authority and potentiality relationships within the framework of the process.

An additional point is that some determinant facts have been identified allowing the post-Soviet society in Belarus to permit a non-democratic regime being installed, which required a deeper look into the political culture issue in the country.

Following the 2020 presidential elections, a harsh face-off between the civil society and the state authorities has begun, the authorities using therein pro-actively some repressive practices to suppress the public discontent. Lukashenka has already been ruling the country for 29 years, and his regime can be reliably called a senescent one, which, in its turn, determines both a greater brutality and a lacking concept of the future. As things stand, the confrontation is ever deepening, the opposite party and a civil society representative being rendered by the democratic forces. These are represented by several political associations, such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office, the United Transition Cabinet (also headed by Tsikhanouskaya) and the Coordination Council, a proto-parliament in exile.

As a candidate who has in fact won over Lukashenka at the presidential election that became a tipping point, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is a leader of a free Belarus recognised as a legitimate one in many countries of the globe and received at the highest level by heads of the leading nations. The Coordination Council is an alternative representation mechanism for the Belarusians who oppose the regime. Its objective is to set up and expand the horizontal interaction structure among the political actors and the civil society. The activities pursued by the democratic forces as a basis for would-be state reforms are likewise a serious focus for the purposes of this article.

# An Analysis into Belarus' Political System: Authoritarian Transition Stages

When in 1994 Alexander Lukashenka became a president of Belarus, the country had a parliamentary form of government. The Supreme Soviet, a unicameral parliament, acted as the highest state authority.

The point of departure for an analysis conducted into the regime transformation is the constitution text last revised or amended in 1994. In conformance with it, the Supreme Soviet had enjoyed an exclusive right to adopt laws and could amend the constitution, propose national referenda, elect judges, primarily for the constitutional court, or determine the domestic or foreign politics, a military doctrine and so on.

The Constitutional Court had acted as an independent supervisory body entrusted with monitoring the constitutionality of any regulatory legal acts. Its judges had been elected for an 11-year term in office and they could also be removed from their office by the Supreme Soviet, only [1].

The president had performed his representative functions, been in charge of the executive power, appointed, under the monitoring from and with permission by the Supreme Soviet, ministers so on. It deserves a special emphasis that, under the constitution as last revised or amended in 1994, the president had enjoyed no legislative functions and, what is of a huge significance, if committing a crime, could be deprived of his position by the Supreme Soviet with a consent granted by the Constitutional Court. In other words, the fundamental law had included a clear and intelligible framework for bringing a president down [1].

Under Alexander Lukashenka's rule, Belarus conducted constitutional referenda four times: in 1995, 1996, 2004 and 2022.

Lukashenka needed the first three referenda to reinforce his own authority. The latest one was to diversify risks in terms of having his powers lost.

The 1995 plebiscite featured several questions, like replacing the state symbols adopted by independent Belarus – the white-red-and-white flag and the Chase national emblem with a flag and emblem surprisingly similar to the Soviet ones. A few days before the referendum, an ill-reputed battery had taken place against the deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus opposing the questions put on national vote, particularly as far as the state symbol replacement was concerned. They declared a hunger strike, while remaining inside the Supreme Soviet building. On the night between April 11 and 12 unknown persons wearing military fatigues broke inside it, dragged the deputies out and beat them. To all

intents and purposes, a coup d'état took place. Besides, two more questions were put on vote, which were to ensue some serious consequences for the check and balance system:

1. "Do you support the actions by President of the Republic of Belarus aimed at an economic integration with the Russian Federation?" This is how Lukashenka directly interfered with the foreign politics line of the country by contesting the constitutional right of the Supreme Soviet.
2. "Do you agree with the need for amending the current Constitution of the Republic of Belarus so as to provide for a possible early cessation of the Supreme Soviet powers by President of the Republic of Belarus in cases of a systematic or blatant infringement upon the Constitution?" The amendment has seriously extended the presidential powers by jeopardising the institution of parliamentarism in Belarus.

The deputies' beating in 1995 represented, to all intents and purposes, a coup d'état as it was a takeover of power in the country by force. Nonetheless, the process was ultimately over after the next 1996 referendum, when the parliamentary form of government was transformed into a super-presidential republic [2].

The events were accompanied by a grave political crisis, a confrontation between Lukashenka, on the one hand, and the Supreme Soviet and the constitutional court, on the other hand. The defence and law enforcement agencies controlled by the president ensured that the resolutions he needed took the upper hand, while the referendum itself took place without taking into account the opinion of the Constitutional Court, according to which the executive power's actions were acclaimed as illegitimate. Within the referendum preparation process, Lukashenka had issued several edicts, in particular, by removing from office Viktor Hanchar, chairperson of the Central Electoral Board (also with the involvement of the defence and law enforcement structures), although, under the basic law, the president lacked any such authorities. It is crucial to keep in mind that in the late 90's the main political opponents of Lukashenka, such as Viktor Hanchar, former Interior minister Yury Zakharanka, journalist Dzmitry Zavadzki and businessman Anatol Krasouski went missing. The investigation conducted by the government expectedly produced no results whatsoever. The crimes are linked to the so-called death squadrons acting on the president's orders to eliminate Lukashenka's most dangerous rivals.

One way or another, as a result, the Supreme Soviet was dissolved and replaced in the country, under a new version of the constitution, by a bicameral parliament (the Council of the Republic and the Chamber of Representatives) enjoying considerably diminished powers and, to all intents and purposes, completely controllable by the president. Thus, the coup d'état was ultimately consummated.

In order to explain how the power usurpation took place, we should, in the first place, compare the 1994 and 1996 constitution versions. We shall be interested in the alterations concerning the functions of the president and parliament or interactions among the branches of power. Let us consider the key modifications.

The president has received the right to set referenda, to appoint the electoral board members or to dissolve the parliament.

However, the way we see it, the major amendments had exactly to do with the devaluation of the check-and-balance system among the branches of power. Firstly, Lukashenka was granted the right to nominate, albeit subject to approval by the Council of the Republic, both the court of justice chairpersons and a part of judges, for instance, to the Constitutional Court. The approval provision is vital; yet, there is an issue concerning, specifically, the dismissal mechanism: “[The President] shall remove from office the Chairperson and judges of the Constitutional Court, the Chairperson and judges of the Supreme Court, the Chairperson and judges of the Supreme Economic Court, the Chairperson and judges of the Central Committee for Elections and National Referenda, Attorney General, and the Chairperson and members of the National Bank Board under any reasons as provided for in the laws in effect, while notifying thereupon the Council of the Republic” [3].

Secondly, Lukashenka received the right to engage in legislative activities. It is guaranteed in Article 85: “Based on and in conformance with the Constitution, the President shall issue any decrees and instructions binding on the entire territory of the Republic of Belarus. In the cases as provided for in the Constitution, the President shall issue decrees that have the force of a law. Whether directly or via any functional bodies, the President shall ensure that the instructions issued by him should be executed” [3], or Article 101, which includes, among other things, the following: “As dictated by special considerations, the President, under his own initiative or as proposed by the government may issue temporary decrees that have the force of a law. If any such decrees are issued on the proposition of the Government, these shall bear the Prime Minister’s signature. The temporary decrees should be submitted within three days for a subsequent consideration by the Chamber of Representatives and then by the Council of the Republic. The decrees shall remain in effect, unless overturned by at least two-thirds of the full complement of each of the chambers. The chambers may regulate by laws any relations arising on the basis of the decrees, which have been revoked.” [3].

As far as the two parliamentary chambers’ empowerments are concerned, they both enjoy *de iure* their rights to legislative initiative and are entitled to participate in assessments or approvals of presidential edicts; however, as said above, they can be dissolved by Lukashenka. An additional point is that the 1996 constitution

includes some mechanisms allowing the head of state to exercise an additional monitoring over the law adoption process and is entitled to amend the laws even after these have been approved by both the chambers.

Likewise, the tools related to evicting a president out of his post have been substantially complicated. The matter had been addressed previously at the level of the unicameral Supreme Soviet on the proposition of 70 deputies following its consideration by an independent constitutional court. After the 1996 referendum, the process was to engage both the Chamber of Representatives and the Council of the Republic, with no involvement on behalf of the Constitutional Court.

A serious blow against the implementation of democratic principles was delivered by an amendment pertaining to the arrangements linked to the activities by the local self-government authorities, which point blank rejects the very self-government concept. The 1996 constitution (just like its current 2022 version) does not refer to building any horizontal connections or delegation of powers. Its Article 119 reads: “Leaders of any local executive and administrative bodies shall be appointed to their positions and removed therefrom by President of the Republic of Belarus or under the procedure as set by him, and approved for their positions by the relevant local Councils of Deputies.” In the opinion of Belarusian political pundit Uladzimir Rouda, “the norm has enshrined the existence of an executive vertical structure appointed by the president and accountable to the head of state, which permeates the entire public administration system in the centre and locally, while leaving simply no place for a local community self-government.” [8].

In 2004 Belarus held one more constitutional referendum with a simplistic objective: to remove any restrictions specified in the fundamental law and meant to impose any limitations on the number of presidential terms in office. The alteration referred to Article 81. The 1996 version used to read as follows: “President shall be elected for five years directly by the people of the Republic of Belarus based on the universal free, equal and direct right to vote under a secret ballot procedure. The same person may act as a President not more than two terms in office.”

After 2004 the two-term phrase has vanished from the text. The matter of the fact is that typically such fundamental amendments do not cover an incumbent. This is exactly why one more question was put: “To allow A.G. Lukashenka, the first President of the Republic of Belarus to participate as a candidate ... in the presidential election.” [4].

In such a manner, by 2004 the country’s political system had been transformed into an apparent personalistic autocracy with a super-presidential form of rule, the head of state having at his disposal widest possible powers and control

mechanisms over the other branches of power; he also has a permission to run for presidency an unlimited number of times. The Belarusian constitution had survived in this shape for 28 years up to February 2022.

## **The 2022 Referendum. The All-Belarusian Popular Assembly**

The 2022 constitutional referendum was held against the background of a political crisis triggered in 2020 following the presidential elections. The main purpose behind the referendum was to create inside the national government structures some conditions to imitate in a legitimate way a process of power transition, while using the Kazakhstan experience. It should be noted that following the Kazakhstan January 2022 events, this way set for a gradual power transition must be seen as inefficient and a dangerous one for an acting leader. One way or another, we should look into the alterations introduced into the constitution in February 2022.

The first and fundamental change is specified in Article 4 of the basic law. It features a new term “ideology of the Belarusian state,” whereas its 1996 version used to mention “a multitude of political institutions, ideologies and opinions.” [5]

The amendment hit a serious blow on top of everything else to the feeble and ceremonial partisan system (which we are going to cover in the next section). The matter of the fact is that both the old and current wordings of Article 4 include the following provision: “The ideologies of any political parties, religious or other public associations and social groups may not be installed as mandatory ones for the citizens.” [5] As it happens, the partisan activities pertaining to these or those political grouping claiming power and relying on a party ideology, according to the new version of Article 4, is brought into antagonism with the some kind of a super-structure that is referred to as the “ideology of the Belarusian state.”

The cardinal and largest-scale alteration to the constitution is that it now includes a new section entitled: “The All-Belarusian Popular Assembly (referred to hereinafter as the “ABPA”) [5].

The body in itself, which is compared by Lukashenka to a medieval Slavic parliamentary body *veche*, appeared in Belarus as far back as in 1996, although its real functions were not quite clear until recently. Initially, the ABPA was conceived as a political technology project needed to demonstrate a popular support to Lukashenka during the constitutional crisis and the clash between the Supreme Soviet and the president.

The procedure related to the ABPA formation is described in the constitution and in the electoral code in a deliberately complicated way and does not represent a direct electoral act for the public.

The thousands of persons assembled in a sports palace as “representatives of the Belarusian people” were supposed to prove to the Belarusian *politicum* and to the world by their very presence the legitimacy of the changes Lukashenka was trying to put through for the sake of his power consolidation; moreover, not just simply to prove, but also to overcome the fact of the referendum lacking constitutionality. To all intents and purposes, it was a propaganda move expected to paint his grab of power by force in democratic colours. The ABPA failed to enjoy for a long time any real powers and remained an advisory and consultative body. Against the backdrop of the 2022 political crisis, the assembly was endowed with the status of a constitutional formation and enjoying, on top of that, very broad powers, some of these having been alienated from the head of state authority.

Notably, the new fundamental law version includes an intentional or inadvertent contraposition of the ABPA to the democratic institutions. Belarus, in line with Article 1, is acclaimed as a democratic state, whereas the ABPA is referred to as a “supreme representative body of people’s power,” being positioned, in this way, above the parliament [5].

Firstly, from now on it is only the all-Belarusian popular assembly, which is entitled to depose a president. That being said, both the current head of state and the former one (when he becomes an ex) are delegates to the ABPA. Besides, representatives of other branches of power may sit in the assembly, which implies some kind of a secondary co-optation form.

The functions pertinent to appointing or dismissing judges in the constitutional or supreme courts, as well as the central electoral board members have moved from the presidential power list onto that of the ABPA authorities. The Chamber of Representatives and the Council of the Republic alike have been deprived of their right to present any charges to the president; now the opportunity is enshrined with the popular assembly. The parliament has no more any relation to arranging the electoral board operations whatsoever. To all intents and purposes, none of the chambers, according to the current constitution version, enjoys any real possibilities to exercise monitoring or supervision – the supreme powers in the country are enjoyed by the president and the ABPA, while functions and authorities between the two institutions mutually permeate. To all intents and purposes, we may state that parliamentarism in Belarus has been reduced. The ABPA is not a representative body, whereas the Chamber of Representatives and Council of the Republic have been deprived of a real political influence on the electoral process or the executive authorities.



We should make a focus on the fundamental law modification dealing with “the president’s destiny”: “A President, who has ceased performing his duties, may not be kept accountable for any acts conducted, when exercising presidential powers.” [5]. An additional point is that the document features again a limitation on the number of terms in office for a head of state.

Obviously, the above fundamental changes incorporated into the constitution are marked by some external factors. After Lukashenka lost the 2020 elections to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, he needed to legitimise his power in a certain way. In 1996 he applied for the purpose both the law enforcement authorities and the ABPA; he has used the same strategy once more, but with a due regard to the more profound political crisis. The problem has proved to be so challenging that some “escape routes“ had to be described in the constitution on Lukashenka’s orders. In case he is forced to abandon his presidential post under the “controlled transition” conditions, now, under the newly introduced institutional pattern, he will be able to move to the ABPA presidium to control therefrom the judicial system, the legislative process and, mainly, any acts performed by a new president. The head of state deposing mechanism has been enshrined with the all-Belarusian assembly, too.

That being said, the president retains a sufficient scope of powers in order to feel self-confident, unless he has to perform a transit, and particularly so, if we take into account that the ABPA is based on the same old political technology vintage 1996. An additional point is that the ABPA is not a *sensu stricto* elected body. As we can see, the parliament’s authorities have been additionally curtailed, which reflects an understandable mistrust on behalf of the political system of the real electoral procedures.

Nonetheless, the immunity article introduced into the fundamental law provides an evidence that the transition idea is not an ephemeral one.

## **The Political Parties in Belarus**

In spite of the fact that Lukashenka’s regime represents a personalist autocracy relying primarily on the *nomenklatura*’s loyalty and the law enforcement structures, we should heed the fact that prior to 2020 the country had a legal partisan activity *à la* imitational practices applied by similar regimes in the 21st century. We have already mentioned the contradiction related to the ideology of the Belarusian state reflected in Article 4 of the constitution. It is not the only one. The 1994 version of the fundamental law had Article 5, which stipulated: “The political parties and other public associations, while acting within the framework of the Constitution and laws in effect in the Republic of Belarus, shall promote the

identification and expression of the citizens' will and participate in elections." The 1996 and subsequent versions had the phrase "and participate in elections" deleted from the sentence. That being said, the public associations inclusive of the political parties may field their candidates; yet, only on the basis of the majoritarian system: no party list voting is provided for. The provision simply excluded the classical parties from the real political process, while most deputies go to the polls as self-nominees.

Nonetheless, between 1991 and 2023 Belarus had in place about a dozen parties acting on a legal basis and representing a broad political spectrum: the Greens, the Conservative Christian Party (Belarusian National Front), the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada (BSDH) and many more. That being said, all through Lukashenka's rule, the legislation dealing with the parties was consistently stiffened. Similar to the ABPA creation, the state was coming up with ever newer alternative and imitational forms, like the "national public and state associations." These are in existence as the so-called GONGOs, or "the government-organised non-governmental organisations," the sense behind their operation, in case of Belarus, being to create an illusion of democracy.

One way or another, in course of 2023, the Supreme Court of the Republic wound up, in practical terms, all the parties, by leaving just 4 of them:

1. White Rus;
2. Communist Party of Belarus;
3. Liberal Democratic Party; and
4. Republic's Party for Labour and Justice.

They all display loyalty to the current authorities. They also rally around the dominance of pro-Russian positions, whereas the European wing is not represented in any way at all.

Their existence and activity provide an imitation of political engagement: none of these parties has ever experienced an electoral campaign as a political entity.

The non-partisan president is successful in achieving that the political parties should not be represented in the parliament.

## Transformation of the Belarusian Political Culture. The Reasons for Power Usurpation

The political culture of Belarus in the early 90's was authoritarian and subservient in line with the USSR heritage taken over.

In the second half of the 1990's Lukashenka subordinated by force the central electoral board to himself and ever since elections have been held as a kind of a plebiscite with an *a priori* known outcome. It is supported by the percentages announced by the board chairperson: most frequently above 80%. In case of an honest ballot count we would name such an outcome as an electoral anomaly. What we mean to imply is that Lukashenka relies on a combination of two legitimacy types under the same classification: the traditional and charismatic ones.

At the very beginning of his rule, the political technologists introduced into the political information *milieu* Lukashenka's nickname "bats'ka," or "father, if translated from Belarusian. He has failed to become a father of the nations. Nonetheless, such an approach refers us to the charismatic legitimacy type.

The traditional type is characterised by a belief in custom and tradition. Lukashenka's dictatorship ideal is an absolutist monarchy and a quasi-traditionalist society based on patriarchy, paternalism, chauvinism and xenophobia.

The current repressive practices applied by the state and targeting the civil society trigger a discussion, whether Lukashenka's regime has turned towards totalitarianism. The challenge faced is that the classification is imperfect and obsolete. The borderline between totalitarianism and authoritarianism was drawn by the political sciences a long time ago in the 20th century and it falls back, primarily, on the last century's materials. Thus, for example, one of the criteria is the nature of repressions. As things stand, they have a massive scale in Belarus and, really and truly, a gradual shift towards totalitarianism is taking place.

A grave value-based and narrative cleavage has been formed between the state, which has acquired during almost 30 years the features of gerontocracy, and the civil society. Today, the regime is not in a position to talk with the *socium* in the same language, while the autocrat makes his decisions, when being ever more and more isolated from the real public opinion.

The profound value-related transformations of the Belarusian society, the political system obsolescence, new actors appearing and the social explosion that followed the 2020 elections – all of these served as a basis for the rise of a

new formation of the democratic forces, the ones that now oppose Lukashenka's regime pro-actively and visibly.

## The Democratic Forces

The democratic forces as they are in existence now, have begun their formation, in practical terms, right after the 2020 elections. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's status as a president elect is, as things stand, key to legitimacy of all the institutions set up within the framework of the democratic forces. Tsikhanouskaya's Office and the Coordination Council (referred to hereinafter as "the CC") have been operating since 2020, while the United Transition Cabinet has been active since August 2022. The democratic forces use a broad international support to influence decision-making on strengthening the sanction pressure against the regime, as well as to lobby the interests of the Belarusians staying inside the country and émigrés alike. Lukashenka's co-participation in the war against Ukraine has put the Belarusian nationals, most of whom do not support the regime, under the threat of some serious restrictions imposed by foreign governments. A constant outreach work carried out at a high level among the foreign partners allows moderating the adverse effects.

A democratic statehood is an impossibility without a structure based on separation of powers, broad representation and the check-and-balance system.

By now, the Belarusian government in exile has succeeded in putting in place a model, which is unprecedented for the conditions it operates in. It can be defined as a proto-state developing towards democracy. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office acts as the like of a presidential administration.

The consistent international activity pursued by the democratic forces enables addressing at least a few vital tasks. Firstly, participating in the creation of alternative state governance structures by laying foundations under the would-be systemic reforms in Belarus. Secondly, as far as possible, providing an assistance to the political prisoners and their relatives, and to the persons who had to leave their country. It is not just the matter of ear-marked assistance, but, first and foremost, setting up frameworks to collaborate with the foreign governments for the purpose of expanding and systematising such aid. Thirdly, the Belarusians' work towards their subjective identity on the international political agenda, which is a must, particularly, if we take into account Lukashenka's criminal involvement in the Russian war on Ukraine.

The United Transition Cabinet is a *sui generis* cabinet of ministers formed by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya for the co-optation of political actors within the

framework of the democratic forces, as well as for the sake of a functional division of tasks by sectors or to address some current issues.

The Coordination Council serves as a basis for the revival and development of the parliamentarism culture in Belarus. Its status and activities are specified in the CC charter [6].

The current CC convocation commenced its proceedings in February 2023 and is to remain in operation for 12 months since its first session date. Almost any Belarusian may be a CC delegate among those residing both outside and inside the country (subject to a correct evaluation of the risks related to persecution on behalf of the regime). The CC membership core is provided, in a loose sense, by the civil society representatives, such as members of organisations, parties, political associations or NGOs. For the purpose of their election, there is in place a transparent and competitive electoral procedure in place, where the outcome is not known beforehand, just unlike all the electoral campaigns under Lukashenka. The Council's international legitimacy relies upon several sources. Firstly, it is about the legitimacy of Tsikhanouskaya herself, which is recognised at the highest level in many countries of Europe and in the world. Secondly, it is about the resolution passed by the European Parliament in September 2020, which stipulates: "The European Parliament welcomes the Coordination Council as an interim representation of the people demanding democratic change in Belarus that is open to all political and social stakeholders. Supports a peaceful and democratic transition of power as a result of a national dialogue in full respect of the Belarusian people's democratic and fundamental rights." [7].

From the functional perspective, the Coordination Council has been designed to address a wide scope of issues. Firstly, it represents a public platform for a peer-to-peer dialogue between the democratic forces' various blocs or factions. Secondly, following the election of its current convocation, the CC has assumed a function to monitor and supervise the operations carried out by the Office and Cabinet. August 2023 saw a round of reporting hearings on the activities conducted by Tsikhanouskaya's representatives, which resulted in some Cabinet composition changes. Thirdly, it develops a documentation package to regulate interactions among the democratic forces' major bodies – in the spirit of an uncodified constitution, – so as to set the check-and-balance system. Fourthly, it extends its interactions with other countries' parliaments, ranging from the USA to Belgium. Fifthly, it forms its *ad hoc* committees to develop strategies and concepts to address some sector-specific matters ranging from international activities to education. A separate operational area refers to the CC activity linked to a deeper collaboration with the Ukrainian parliament, Verkhovna Rada, within the international cooperation format.

Make no mistake, the democratic forces' possibilities are greatly restrained; however, we should admit that their structure as a government in exile is unparalleled in the world. And, most importantly, relying on the structure will enable reviving and reinforcing the democratic model in Belarus following Lukashenka's departure, who risks leaving behind him "scorched earth."

## Reforms

It would be erroneous to believe that Lukashenka's demise could allow the democratic forces to tackle fast all the outstanding issues left behind by him. Nearly 30 years of authoritarian voluntarist rule is too long a period. Nonetheless, it can clearly be seen now that no civilised and independent future will ever be a possibility without large-scale reforms. As we earlier described it, today's structure of the democratic forces with their development vector towards more sophisticated mechanisms or broader representation will enable launching later on down the line reforms in Belarus based on the alternative institutions created.

In our opinion, the transformation should start with changing the constitution with the goal in mind to curtail drastically the presidential powers, to restore parliamentarism based on a wide popular representation and to balance up all the branches of power.

The rigid vertical power structure created for dozens of years during Lukashenka's rule should be transformed and, which goes without saying, the ABPA must be disestablished merely because the body is only needed to preserve the current reins of power. Belarus has to restore a unicameral parliament as a supreme and representative body. The fact that the representative body should revert to its unicameral nature proceeds from the situation that Belarus is a unitarian and monoethnic state, within the framework of which no federalist trends are manifested. Such countries as South Korea, Czechia, Armenia, etc. may be quoted as an example. In this respect Belarus considerably differs from, for instance, Ukraine.

The local self-government system must likewise be reinvented, separated from the executive authorities and empowered with direct action mechanisms: any democracy begins with an implementation of people's power at the grass-roots horizontal level. Uladzimir Rouda, a renowned Belarusian political scientist, used to stress that the local self-government authorities in Belarus, to all intents and purposes, are subordinated to the state executive authorities, which is not the case in the democracies, where they, vice versa, are "formed by the representative bodies (there are models with a mayor, burgher master or town president being elected by popular vote) and act within the jurisdiction areas of the self-

government units by enjoying their powers specified in the local self-government laws.” [8].

The electoral system should be reformed in a sufficiently careful manner by pushing up gradually the role played by the political parties as a representation tool. As things stand, the Belarusian partisan culture is at a rather low level. The public feels mistrust to the parties, while the ideological poles have failed to be formed, since a pluralism of positions and interests is deemed dangerous to the Lukashenka regime. Nonetheless, a transition from the majoritarian electoral system to the mixed one will be needed in the future.

The judicial power must be pulled out from its subordination to the other branches. The Supreme Court should act as its highest body to exercise both the constitutional monitoring and a supervision over the courts of lower jurisdiction. The Supreme Court judges will have to be elected under a competitive voting process by the entire parliament. A possible judge abdication should be limited to the criminal code or constitutional provisions. Probably, we could resort the USA experience, where its chief justices are elected for the term of good behaviour.

An additional point is that the fundamental law clause on admissibility of capital punishment should be taken out.

The law-enforcement system is in need of a forthwith re-configuration, too. The numbers of the defence and law-enforcement agency personnel have to be substantially reduced, as Belarus occupies the leading places in this respect and quite fits into the “police state” model.

Likewise, a national dialogue must be held to provide a basis, while taking into account the world practice studies, for decision-making about a lustration vis-à-vis those persons, who, one way or another, were involved in the repressions (ranging from harsh verdicts or tortures to politically motivated dismissals from work).

The mechanism related to compensation and assistance to the numerous political prisoners has already been developed within the framework of the operations carried out by the expert community and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s Office.

A public control toolkit to monitor the activities by the law-enforcement authorities also has to be put in place.

It is a common fact that mass media play a vital role in the autocracies to reinforce and impose dictatorship. The notion of “state-owned media” simply has no place to exist in a democratic nation. Their activity must be withdrawn from the political system power and put under a consensus-based public monitoring.

The reforms within the foreign policies and the ministry of foreign affairs deserve a special focus. Firstly, all the decrees preventing the foreign missions from engaging in one of their major functions, viz.: representing and protecting the rights and interests of their country's nationals abroad and providing the whole scope of consular services, must be abrogated. Besides, the Republic of Belarus must also leave such military and economic unions or alliances, like the Union State, the Euro-Asian Economic Community, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

It is already the case that the democratic forces of Belarus openly declare their new course towards the European integration; reinforcement of the regional co-operation in the area of security, economy or social interaction with the Central and Eastern Europe countries; a possible enlargement of the Lublin triangle; as well as the necessity of a drastic revision of relations with the Russian Federation. A special role in our foreign politics relations is played by Ukraine, which, jointly with Belarus, has to return into the family of the European political nations, whereas the myth of the fraternal Slavic peoples must be busted. Instead, a concept of a reliable Belarusian-Ukrainian mutual neighbourly co-operation should be elaborated.

## **Bottomline**

Today, Lukashenka's Belarus is a rigid personalistic autocracy that is based on a voluntarist uninformed decision-making process and that is clinging to power for nearly 30 years using some extra-judicial brutal intimidation methods. Parliamentarism de-construction and reduction of the political system to a trenchant vertical structure are the tasks addressed by Lukashenka throughout all the years he stayed in power.

At this moment in time, the principal task and about the only one the regime is in a position to handle is preservation of power, i.e. an efficient control of its territory.

Nonetheless, the observed trend towards changing the political culture for the one, which implies a more pro-active public involvement in the political life can be, in its own right, considered a positive phenomenon. There are no reasons to believe that "the entire Belarusian society was asleep" for long years prior to 2020.

The democratic forces today have created and are developing their structures outside the country, which would enable an immediate reform of the Belarusian state administration system, when it becomes a possibility, within the framework of professional approaches. The Coordination Council in place since August 2020 serves as an example that the Belarusian society is prepared to come back to the



parliamentarism development track. Albeit now it exists in a virtual format, but it provides a legitimate and really active alternative to the obsolete authoritarianism, and represents a force that is now unparalleled in the world.

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