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Publisher Routledge

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Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713635808>

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Online Publication Date: 01 June 2009

To cite this Article Korosteleva, Elena(2009)'Was There a Quiet Revolution? Belarus After the 2006 Presidential Election',Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics,25:2,324 — 346

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13523270902861038

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13523270902861038>

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Was There a Quiet Revolution? Belarus After the 2006 Presidential Election

ELENA KOROSTELEVA

The 2006 presidential election in Belarus mobilized a large cross-section of society to protest against the Lukashenko regime. Although unprecedented, the mass mobilization was short-lived, failing to develop into another kind of coloured revolution in the region. The key to our understanding of the endurance of Lukashenko's regime seems to lie in its internal environment, and notably, in the seemingly contradictory feature of the Belarusian electorate. Not only do they fully identify with the president, thus effectively legitimizing his politics and policies; they also do so knowingly, through their strategic learning of how to survive and even thrive under Lukashenko's regime. This type of learning, however, may not necessarily lead to a critical reflection of the regime's malpractice, and thus is unlikely to challenge its foundations.

'There will be no rose, orange, or banana revolution in Belarus'
— Aleksandr Lukashenko, 2005¹

Introduction

The Ordinary

On 19 March 2006 Belarus went through its third consecutive cycle of presidential elections. Despite some vigorous pledges in 2001 by the opposition to rebound² and the 'contagion effect' of various revolutions in the region, there was limited expectation that anything 'out-of-the-ordinary' might occur in Belarus.

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Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, Vol.25, Nos.2-3, June-September 2009, pp.324-346

ISSN 1352-3279 print/1743-9116 online

DOI: 10.1080/13523270902861038 © 2009 Taylor & Francis

Indeed, the 2006 presidential election went in accordance with its previous ‘rehearsals’ in 1994 and 2001, and formally legitimized Belarus’s sole leader, Aleksandr Lukashenko, in office again. There was, however, some technical novelty to the process:

1. Lukashenko’s electoral victory literally doubled in size: from 44.8 per cent (in the first round) in 1994 to 83 per cent in 2006;
2. Turnout also increased significantly: from 69.9 per cent in 1994 to 92.9 per cent in 2006;
3. The number of election observers grew from just over 20,000 in 2001 to over 30,000 in 2006;
4. The number of other presidential candidates (except for the constant presence of Gaidukevich³) doubled: instead of Vladimir Goncharick, a single opposition candidate in 2001, there were two presidential hopefuls, Alexandr Milinkevich and Alexandr Kozulin, in 2006;
5. Finally, support for the two opposition candidates literally halved in size: from 15.65 per cent for Goncharick in 2001 to a combined total of 8.3 per cent for Milinkevich and Kozulin in 2006.⁴

Despite these minor numerical changes, the outcome of the election proved to be an unvarying feature of the Belarus presidency, conveying enviable stability of electoral preferences towards the incumbent: arithmetically, nine out of ten of those who voted in 2001 and in 2006 chose to support Lukashenko.⁵

The Extraordinary

Post-election developments in 2006, however, made the third electoral cycle quite ‘extraordinary’. On the election night, despite bad weather, a crowd estimated at 10,000–35,000⁶ gathered in October Square in central Minsk to protest at falsified election results, to object to the intimidation campaign unleashed by the authorities prior to the event,⁷ and, more generally, to demonstrate their *discontentment* with the regime. The protest was allegedly ten times greater than that held in 2001, which gathered 2,000–3,000 demonstrators. Furthermore, the protest lasted for five days with an average of 150–200 participants continuously present on site until they were brutally removed by armed anti-riot police on 24 March 2006.⁸ The camp survived for five days in freezing weather, poor sanitary conditions and lack of food, blockaded by the police to prevent outsiders from delivering food and hot drinks or joining the protestors in moral support and admiration. Many observers noted a surprising generational unity among the protesters, comprising both young (and often ‘under-age’) and middle-aged participants. Describing the March demonstrations, a parent commented: ‘Our children led us on to the

streets'.⁹ The number of arrested during those five days ranged between 500 and 1,000 individuals, of whom 392 were subsequently sentenced. As the OSCE reported, in Minsk alone the number of individuals sentenced in a single day exceeded a record-breaking 200!¹⁰ Also, quite astounding were both the regional representation at the October Square, and the explicit non-party character of the protest.

This wave of public discontent was not knowingly orchestrated by the opposition, and by no means was it designed to overthrow the existing regime, so rendering invalid any adjectives describing it as a 'failed', 'non-colour', 'potato', 'jeans' or any other revolution. This was not initially conceived or fostered *a posteriori* as a revolution. Instead, the mass protest occurred spontaneously, under its own momentum, drawing on the *emotional discontentment* of ordinary people rather than the ideological convictions and organized activities of the opposition. The truly 'extraordinary' feature of the event was its self-mobilization, unprecedented in numbers and in generational and regional unity. It is asserted that 70 per cent of the population discussed the event with their close kin,¹¹ thereby amplifying its effect by a factor of 400. The question is whether the occurrence of the 'extraordinary' was a manifestation of wider changes within the society – perhaps even the weakening of the regime itself?

This essay investigates the aftermath of the 'extraordinary' – that is, whether the 'extraordinary' has engendered any possible spill-over effect on the political life of Belarusian society since 2006.

There follows a brief overview of civil society's activities since the occurrence of the 'extraordinary' in order to qualify its effect, and an examination of some existing explanations of the failure of the 'extraordinary' to broaden its scope. Our conclusion is that, in order to understand the workings of Lukashenko's regime, it is necessary to appreciate the complex dialectic of the regime's ability in learning to survive, and the capacity of the regime's environment – both external and internal – to challenge it. In particular, we emphasize the role of the internal environment: the electorate, which exhibits the seemingly contradictory feature of *knowingly supporting* the 'last dictator in Europe'.¹² The argument relates to the importance of differentiating between 'strategic learning' – as a more general form of knowledge that equips learners with some basic skills of survival – and 'deep learning' that leads to an 'enlightened understanding' of the workings of democracy¹³ – an element that the regime's internal environment lacks at present.

Assessing the Effect of the 'Extraordinary'

The immediate aftermath of the 2006 election witnessed a certain impermanent rise in civic activities including mass rallies (for example, Day of

Freedom, Chernobyl Path; Jeans Festival and Solidarity Actions with the Imprisoned), frequent flash-mobs, internet 'blogs', intellectual debates in non-state media outlets, and the expansion of opposition through a merger of all opposition parties (except the Christian-Conservative Party of the Belarus National Front) and youth organizations into the United Democratic Forces (UDF). It is worth noting that the majority of street activities and the emergent 'virtual communities' were non-party and youth-led – a spill-over effect of the 'extraordinary' mobilization of public discontent during March 2006. The effect of the 'extraordinary', however, seems to have declined significantly by 2007, so failing to capitalize on the unexpected flash of public dissatisfaction with regime and to produce any lasting impact on civil society in Belarus.¹⁴

Opposition

Relatively united during the electoral campaign, the opposition did not succeed in upholding the pledged unison thereafter. Soon after the election, the authority of Alexandr Milinkevich as the UDF's single leader began to erode, undermined by the cacophony of interests, tactics, ambitions and in-fighting for leadership. Consequently, the united front fissured yet again, resorting to the 'old-fashioned' and unpopular party politics of limited impact. As a result, the UDF failed to have any tangible impact on local elections in January 2007, having debated (yet again!) the wisdom of participation in government-orchestrated events. Those who did participate were more concerned with their canvassing for the forthcoming UDF congress rather than promoting unity and ideas among the voters.

The convening of the seventh UDF congress seemed to have temporarily united various factions within the opposition. Nevertheless, devoid of many new civic organizations, the democratic forum failed to maintain its integrated façade soon after its assembly in May 2007. In the light of increasing in-fighting, Milinkevich decided to step down, and his single leadership was replaced by a rotating chairmanship of ten participating organizations, with four party leaders co-chairing the coordinating committee.

There were even fewer signs of unity and joint undertaking for the parliamentary elections in autumn 2008. The UDF has been struggling with the lack of motivation to identify potential elections candidates, and it ran out of both spirit and time to organize a broad-based electoral campaign in order to break out of its self-inflicted 'ghetto'.¹⁵ On the eve of the 2008 parliamentary elections, the opposition was organized into three broad informal groupings: the UDF, Milinkevich's movement 'For Freedom', and Statkevich's European Coalition. Although all closely associated and organizationally interlinked, they nevertheless put forward their candidates independently – 110 from UDF and 'For Freedom', and 61 independently from the European

Coalition – reflecting further their inability to unite forces. A month before the election, the opposition was still deliberating whether or not to abandon the electoral platform, struggling to find representation in electoral commissions and to make themselves heard. The result was a predictable failure – this time in a ‘transparent manner’, as pledged by the president¹⁶ – of any opposition candidate to be elected to the National Assembly on a turnout of no fewer than 77 per cent of the voting population.¹⁷

In other words, the opposition failed to capture and develop the momentum generated by the ‘extraordinary’ mobilization of the population, not only because of their ill-coordinated actions and personal ambitions, but also because of what seems to have been a deliberate neglect of new non-party movements within the society. The short-lived unity of the opposition has thus somewhat forfeited the legacy of the ‘extraordinary’, confining ‘revolutionaries’ to their self-inflicted ‘ghetto’ of slogans that have limited appeal or reach to the wider society. Their precarious and ineffective fourteen-year ‘struggle for democracy’ has now come to be perceived as ‘the call of the West, rather than the voice of Belarusians themselves’,¹⁸ a situation that can be better depicted by a comment from the crowd:

In response to a politically shrewd slogan employed by the opposition during the 2006 protest, ‘the police are with the people’, a rank-and-file policeman wisely noted, ‘that’s right, we are with the people, not with you’.¹⁹

This appears to be in a stark contrast with increasingly united pro-government public associations. For example, *Belaya Rus*’, having emerged in the aftermath of the election, now allegedly boasts over 82,000 members and continues to grow. In October 2008 it convened its first congress, and aspires to become ‘the nation’s most numerous public force’, according to its chairman, the education minister, Alexander Rad’kov.²⁰

Other Forces

Youth movements, defiant of the regime and dissociated from the opposition, have become a new feature of Belarus’s politics. During the European and social marches in 2007, for example, young demonstrators formed a separate column, defying both state instructions and the opposition’s negotiators. Out of a thousand people arrested during the March protest, most were young (and often under the legal age), including many who were never politically active before. Not only did the ‘extraordinary’ mobilize some new youth structures, such as ‘Bunt’ (Revolt) and ‘Khopits!’ (Enough), it also reinvigorated the old ones, such as ‘Antifashyk’ (Anti-fascist), ‘Malady Front’ (Youth Front) and ‘Initsyatyva’ (Initiative). The *Initsyatyva*, for example, by working with young people face-to-face, succeeded in organizing more than

50 street actions without being arrested a single time.²¹ Malady Front recently celebrated its tenth anniversary by being denied registration five times. Its members continue to recruit new activists (many of whom are still under 18), to fight openly against the authorities despite a new law interpreting activities of unregistered organizations as a criminal offence.²² The year 2006 also saw a political merger of one of the most recognizable youth organizations 'Zubr' (Bison) which voluntarily joined the UDF to support Milinkevich.

The opposition failed, however, to capitalize on a new generation of politicized youth. Conversely, the youth showed little aspiration of joining 'traditional' political parties, having adopted direct and more 'radical' methods of combating the regime. Possessing limited financial and organizational resources, the youth is increasingly migrating to a 'virtual realm' of internet politics. For example, many flash-mob campaigns and virtual discussions and 'blogs' were launched through the internet. A lot of analytical and factual video materials about government atrocities became readily available online, thus counteracting the state propaganda aimed at discrediting civic activities: 'As kitchens were for their parents in Soviet times, the Internet has become a place where young Belarusians interact with others, discuss events, exchange opinions, and share ideas'.²³ This virtual dissent, however, has limited reach since it is available to only 6 per cent of the population²⁴ – mainly urban – and is now carefully censored by the state.²⁵ The authorities also have learnt to counteract activities organized through the internet effectively by suspending, interfering with or indeed arresting those who maintain dedicated websites.

The scale of youth activities declined considerably by 2007, surrendering to the sophisticated pressure of the government and lacking basic organizational and leadership skills. Instead, the government-sponsored youth organizations, dominated by the ambitious Belarusian Union of Youth (BPSM), modelled on the Soviet Komsomol and informally named as 'Luka-mol' after the president, have been aggressively expanding their ranks by vigorously mobilizing school-leavers and university students using various mechanisms of sticks and carrots. By autumn 2008 the organization boasted 90,000 members in Minsk alone and a total of 490,000 members nationwide, and was being actively promoted by all state-owned media.²⁶

To sum up, as the foot-soldiers of the protest, the youth movement, feeling disenfranchised, disenchanted or indeed confrontational, seems to have been somewhat alienated by the 'established' opposition. Youth organizations lack organizational resources and leadership, and thus find it difficult to sustain their recruitment. State persecution and government 'moral work' with families of youth further hinder their engagement with anti-regime struggle. Once again, traditional forces have failed to capitalize on the

effect of the ‘extraordinary’ and to accommodate the rising awareness of politicized youth.

Politically-motivated demonstrations of small business representatives and religious minority groups in Belarus added new dimensions to the non-party street struggle against the regime. Not numerous in their ranks (for example, the demonstration by businessmen in January 2008 involved only 2,000–10,000 participants),²⁷ they nevertheless bring disruption to the regime’s propaganda of apparent unity and public contentment. This leads us to an assessment of the situation regarding non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the aftermath of the ‘extraordinary’.

NGOs

On 1 January 2008 the total number of existing (and registered) NGOs allegedly remained similar to that of 2006, amounting to 2,255 organizations, according to the ministry of justice.²⁸ Both 2007 and 2008 were marked by a ‘certain departure from the authorities’ practice of destroying independent structures’.²⁹ This is because the bulk of ‘political NGOs’ were liquidated by the government during the 2003–5 ‘mopping-up’ campaign, and there is very little leeway left to register activities from scratch. Furthermore, political pressure on existing NGOs continues through increased taxation, censorship and procedural regulations, leading to their self-liquidation, which is not statistically recorded. At the same time, numerous pro-government civic organizations (government-organized non-governmental organizations: GONGOs) have been created to boost the statistics.³⁰ The government continues recruiting pro-regime supporters by organizing popular state-sponsored events: the May Day parade in 2007 supposedly brought out over 200,000 spectators; Liberation Day (3 July) with dedicated concerts and entertainment attracted over 450,000 viewers³¹ – which somewhat belittle the effect and the legacy of the extraordinary mobilization of March 2006.

The ‘extraordinary’ mobilization of public discontentment during the post-election period of March 2006 had indeed an awakening effect on civil society in Belarus. The event was widely discussed in Belarus and abroad, the protests gathered young and old, brought geographical unity to the demonstrations of protest and a spill-over effect on a number of activities in subsequent years. Nevertheless, its legacy was somewhat short-lived, resulting in the failure (i) of the opposition to unite (it resorted yet again to disparate and unpopular party politics); and (ii) of new societal groupings to integrate into a wider resistance movement and sustain themselves organizationally. The post-‘extraordinary’ situation remains quite the opposite of what a revolutionary situation would classically envisage, when ‘*the lower classes should not want to live in the old way*’ and ‘*the upper classes should be unable to rule and govern in the old way*’.³² Instead, the leadership has consolidated its

grip on power; and the masses remain economically stable in their self-assessment,³³ entertained, and supportive of their politically legitimate president, Aleksandr Lukashenko.

We now examine possible explanations of the failure of the ‘extraordinary’ to gain momentum, by briefly looking at theories of (i) pre-emptive authoritarianism; (ii) domestic coherence, coercion and scope and international linkage and leverage; and (iii) unfinished nation-building in Belarus.

Explaining the Failure of the ‘Extraordinary’

A number of theoretical explanations has been advanced in order to comprehend the failure of the ‘extraordinary’ to develop into another instance of a ‘coloured’ revolution rallying in Belarus on the ‘contagion effect’ of neighbours, the political backing of the international community and the sprouts of public discontent domestically. We will briefly focus on the three specific theories of regime change and survival, in order to generate a holistic explanation of the sustainability of Lukashenko’s regime in Belarus. The notion of *pre-emptive authoritarianism*, as developed by Vital Silitski,³⁴ presumes the regime’s ability to learn to survive by adopting preventative measures to combat democratic contagion. Over the decade and a half of its struggle for survival Lukashenko’s regime has perfected the policy of pre-emption, and, more importantly, is constantly learning to secure its position. There is a plethora of instruments that the regime can deploy in order to enhance its survival skills and to learn to strike first. These include (i) institutional pre-emption – the regime’s ability to consolidate its power by tailoring and then legitimizing institutional rules to meet the needs of an autocrat, as well as by eliminating any legal or institutional opportunities for opposition to develop; (ii) cultural pre-emption – the regime’s manipulation of public consciousness and collective memory to spread stereotypes and myths to counteract domestic opposition and international meddling in domestic affairs; (iii) ideological pre-emption – the regime’s conceptualization of itself in an attempt to inculcate and legitimize its ruling, and justify its measures of quelling dissent; (iv) tactical pre-emption – direct actions leading to attacking or destroying its opponents; and finally, (v) international pre-emption – by seeking international alliances to withstand the pressure of international society.

Silitski is absolutely correct in stating that Lukashenko’s regime has created an unlimited grip on power by actively utilizing principles and instruments of pre-emption. *Institutionally*, in order to ensure the legality, security and stability of his authority, Lukashenko (i) re-writes the Constitution, thereby acquiring unlimited powers (including legislative), and removing restrictions on his stay in office; (ii) eliminates non-compliant elements of

society; (iii) installs new structural pillars (the ‘presidential vertical’; police and armed forces); and (iv) alters the format of other institutions (parliament, educational establishments, civil society and so forth). *Culturally*, he (i) defeats the Belarusian Popular Front’s nationalism; (ii) removes any symbolic reminders of pre-soviet identity from circulation (replaces the national flag and coat-of-arms; places limitations on the use and teaching of the Belarusian language); (iii) promotes Soviet or state patriotism; and (iv) inculcates public awareness of Lukashenko’s Belarus, vividly embodied in the slogans of his election campaigns ‘For Belarus’ (2001) and ‘For Independent Belarus’ (2006). *Ideologically*, he (i) launches the concept of egalitarian state nationalism, drawing on ‘three essential pillars: Belarus uniqueness, unity and sovereignty’;³⁵ (ii) reintroduces ideological education and propaganda in workplaces; (iii) actively promotes the rise of the BPSM (Luka-mol) by making its membership a tacit requirement for entry into high education; and (iv) considers the launch of a ‘Party of Power’, with its prototype, Belaya Rus’, included in the formation. *Tactically*, not only did Lukashenko (i) literally and otherwise decapitate, discredit and demobilize the opposition by forcing them into their self-exile or indeed ghettoizing them into a manageable compound; he has now also (ii) learned to quell any public rebellion directly and fearlessly, as the pre-2006 intimidation campaign and post-election events indicated.³⁶ Finally, *international* pre-emption included Lukashenko’s joining the movement of non-aligned states in 2006 and continually seeking Russia’s political backing³⁷ in order to ensure the ‘international’ legitimacy of his regime.

The art of pre-emption, craftily mastered by Lukashenko, indeed renders his regime an enviable stability in troubled times of coloured revolutions drawing on the population’s perceived economic security and social order. There is, however, one caveat worth noting here: Lukashenko’s regime is learning to perfect its defences not *in advance* (independently of any other variables) but *in response to* exogenous and endogenous challenges, which necessitates discussion of both internal and external environment on which the regime is founded.

These dimensions of the regime’s environment have been theorized by Way and Levitsky in their studies of (i) *cohesion, coercion and scope* for regime maintenance,³⁸ and of (ii) international *leverage and linkage* in promoting democratization.³⁹

They contend that domestically Lukashenko’s regime survives on the moderate cohesion of state authority (the unity and compliance of the state apparatus) and extremely high scope of power (including security forces inherited from the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) to be able to penetrate and control large parts of society. As a result, internally the regime can utilize ‘low intensity coercion’ – including surveillance, infiltration of the

opposition, short-term detention or targeting of opponents on charges of tax irregularities or legal infringements and so forth – in order to maintain wide-scale control.⁴⁰ These ‘low-intensity coercion’ measures give the regime better chances of survival by preventing the occurrence of high-risk or conflict situations that might necessitate the open use of force and thus de-legitimize the regime completely.

With time, however, Lukashenko’s regime began to resort more frequently to the use of force and mixed-intensity coercion, which may in theory suggest a weakening of state control over emerging public discontent. This, however, contradicts persistent public contentment as revealed by opinion polls (see below), and rapid allayment of the effect of the ‘extraordinary’ amid the opposition, implying the regime’s further endurance, which again necessitates a deeper discussion of the internal environment that sustains and fosters the foundations of Lukashenko’s regime.

For their analysis of the international dimension of democratization, Levitsky and Way develop a framework of leverage – the government’s vulnerability to Western pressure – and linkage – the density of communication ties between participating parties.⁴¹ According to this analysis, various combinations of intensity of leverage and linkage may produce a desirable democratization effect in a given country: thus, high-intensity leverage and linkage may accelerate regime change, while a lower level may retard such a development.

Although it makes sense as an external conditioning factor of the regime’s environment, this framework – viewed from a predominately Western perspective – has specific limitations in application to Belarus. Not only does it presume a certain imposition (‘pressure’) by the West on a potential ‘partner state’, it also denies the right of negotiation and bargaining to a recipient over the recipient’s ‘contribution’ and revenues.⁴²

For example, in search of better leverage the EU’s position towards Belarus has evolved from the politics of isolation (1997), ‘a bench-mark’ approach (1999) and a ‘12-point’ *acquis* (2006) to arrive finally at a six-month ‘technical trial’ (2008)⁴³ to probe the grounds of leverage over the state. All four frameworks essentially embody the same ‘hard governance’ approach associated with limited incentives, little interest in the needs of a ‘partner state’ and practically impossible conditionality, the implementation of which would inevitably commit Lukashenko to undertaking his own political suicide.⁴⁴ Conversely, continued isolation, a strict visa regime and sanctions, which still remain the official line of the international community,⁴⁵ and more money-pampering of the opposition,⁴⁶ will not enhance either leverage or linkage with Belarus, but instead reinforce further wall-building against the ‘Western offenders’.

The fundamental shortcoming of the 'leverage and linkage' framework is its presumption of the right of the international community to act unilaterally in 'managing democratization', without taking account of the perspective of a recipient, who might have specific internal boundaries which would make it difficult, if not impossible, for the leverage or linkage to have an effect. In order for the latter to take root, a more practical and tactically appropriate dialogue needs to be established with Belarus, taking into account its internal environment and geo-political boundaries. As far as boundaries are concerned, Russia's neighbourhood and its economic and political backing, even following the dispute over gas and oil prices,⁴⁷ continues to play a far more important role in defining Lukashenko's survivability than any dialogue, sanctions and conditionality exercised by the EU and the US. Leverage and linkage in relations between Russia and Belarus has been fostered on the basis of mutual interest, which for Belarus primarily (but not exclusively) means flexible financial recourses that help maintain its economic 'miracle'.

This finally leads us to a theory of *unfinished nation-building*, as developed by Grigory Ioffe.⁴⁸ The premise for Ioffe's argument is Belarus's geopolitics: 'Belarus is not just a pariah; it is a geopolitical one', and 'there is only one way to rectify its geopolitical pariah status and that is to unhook it from Russia'.⁴⁹

Indeed, Russia's influence in Belarus is enormous, both economically and politically. As a former chairman of Belarusian central bank, Stanislav Bogdankevich, admitted,

Apart from total energy dependency [on] Russia, the country also exports 99–100 per cent of her agricultural produce and 50–90 per cent of her main industrial produce to Russia. This means, if Moscow were to introduce export tax on Belarusian produce, the whole home industry would collapse in an instant.⁵⁰

Continuing Russian subsidies and loans have fostered the so-called Belarusian miracle, in the form of an annual equivalent of 11–14 per cent growth of the country's gross domestic product,⁵¹ allowing Lukashenko to achieve sustained economic welfare (at a time when most Commonwealth of Independent States – CIS – countries had negative figures), low unemployment rates, and regular payment of pensions and wages. These policies help to maintain reasonably stable standards of living and thus largely account for Lukashenko's considerable popularity, especially among rural, less educated and elderly voters.⁵²

Besides, on its own conditions, Russia provides Belarus with international political backing, thereby further legitimizing Lukashenko's domestic authority. To quote the Russian ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov's response to the police crackdown on Freedom Day in March 2008: 'In all

countries people are imprisoned for political actions, when they violate the law of the country . . . Many people are trying to give political aspect to these issues, throwing away the criminal part'.⁵³

According to Ioffe,⁵⁴ the best way to 'untether' Belarus from Russia, and to undermine the foundations of Lukashenko's regime, is not by imposing 'democracy' externally, or pumping money into a selected or 'ghettoized' opposition, or indeed by conditioning any assistance that could 'free' the country economically – in other words, not by 'traditional' strategies that have been in place for over a decade wielding little or no result. Instead, it should be through the nation-building, 'imagining' or awakening of Belarus as a nation with all independent and sovereign 'paraphernalia', which may foster democratization from within, by raising national public awareness.

That is where a potential difficulty lies. According to Ioffe, Lukashenko is the embodiment of a large part of the population: 'he is the person of humble origin and peasant upbringing, as are many Belarusians'; 'most Belarusians . . . speak trasianka,⁵⁵ and so does Lukashenka'. More importantly, however, 'most Belarusians have found it problematic to see themselves as a community *apart from Russia*, and so has Lukashenka'.⁵⁶ Not only does Lukashenka's personality appeal to the people, but his policies too, 'particularly his emphasis on communalism, a social safety net, and on eschewing privatization, Russian or Ukrainian style'.⁵⁷ In other words, support for Lukashenko is not only stable and comprehensive, but genuine, and based on informed opinions about the issues that directly concern the population. That is to say, there is a healthy and legitimate consensus between the people of Belarus and their leadership. While agreeing with Ioffe's emphasis on the need to raise national awareness as part of the wider process of democratization, there must also be discussion of *what kind of nationalism* and *by what means* if one were to promote Belarus's independence from Russia: should it be one with or without Lukashenko? Contemplating the rise of nationalism without Lukashenko is too far-fetched and hypothetical; nationalism with Lukashenko seems to be a continuing process, as the events of the period since the gas and oil crisis indicate. The promotion of Belarus's independence and sovereignty is Lukashenko's *raison d'être*, which however is unlikely to affect the country's geopolitics (and geo-economics for that matter) *vis-à-vis* Russia.⁵⁸ Belarusians treasure the perceived stability, security and relative prosperity, achieved under Lukashenko, with the undeniable help of Russia. Can this be counteracted by the national idea alone, even if it is aided by respective external 'leverages or linkages'? This question will be addressed below, emphasizing the importance of differentiating between 'strategic learning' – commonsensical knowledge of survival skills – and 'deep learning', which is necessary in order to challenge the existing relationship between Lukashenko and the people so as to achieve democracy.

Discussing the Boundaries of the ‘Extraordinary’

‘Fifteen years ago, . . . Kebich had real power in the country. But did anybody use to refer to him as “our Slava”? No. But “our Sashka” they did say and keep on saying all the time. This is regularity: people have a gut feeling that [Lukashenko] is their man’.⁵⁹

The theoretical frameworks set out above for comparison have aided our understanding of the following three principles applicable to Belarus:

1. Its regime is learning to survive and endure not *in advance* but *in response* to respective challenges – internal and external – of the environment on which it is founded;
2. a decade and a half of *external* ‘democracy promotion’ has failed to yield any meaningful results, owing to
3. Belarus’s *internal* boundaries – cultural and geopolitical-cum-economic – fostered by the regime.

Hence, the focus of any intelligible discussion of regime change should primarily be on the internal environment and the factors that nurture the endurance and consolidation of an authoritarian regime. The specificity of Lukashenko’s regime lies with the electorate: it is the *contentment* of many Belarusians and their *identification* with the president that defines the regime’s most enduring feature – its genuine legitimacy: for, as Max Weber observed, ‘rule is legitimate when its subjects believe it to be so’.⁶⁰

In what follows, (i) we provide an analysis of the regime’s internal environment, focusing in particular on the bond between the president and his people; (ii) we then question the very nature of this relationship, in order (iii) to realize the importance of differentiating between various modes of learning that define the prospects of a regime’s survival or change.

(i) The Bond Between the People and Their President

Lukashenko will remain absolutely legitimate if people continue to identify with him and appreciate his social and economic policies directed at supporting communal well-being, security and stability. Positive perception of the economic situation in the country and popular belief that individual well-being will only improve under the incumbent authority, indeed, makes the regime unwaveringly stable.

For example, an absolute majority indicate that their material well-being has either remained stable or indeed improved in the past two years – even during the period of troubled relations with Russia, which resulted in higher prices, lower wages and even job losses (Table 1).⁶¹

TABLE 1
 'HOW HAS YOUR MATERIAL SITUATION CHANGED IN THE PAST THREE MONTHS?' (PERCENTAGES)

	June 2006	Oct. 2006	Jan. 2007	May 2007	Sept. 2007	Dec. 2007	Mar. 2008
Improved	23.4	21	21.3	14.6	16.6	10.8	15.7
Not changed	63	64.7	61	66.3	67.1	55.3	57.6
Declined	11.1	12.8	16.8	17.7	15.6	32.4	25
DS/DK*	2.1	1.5	1.3	0.8	1.1	0.3	0.6

Notes: *DS='no answer'; DK='don't know'.

A majority also believes that the country is developing in the right direction (Table 2).

Again, a majority (51.2 per cent) believes that their family life has considerably improved since 1994. A percentage of those who firmly relate their hopes with the president in solving economic problems have hardly altered in fourteen years (48.7 per cent in 1994; 44.4 per cent in 2008). In June 2006 an absolute majority (60.6 per cent) were confident that their life conditions would improve considerably under the present government.

When dealing with difficult political choices, the Belarusians tend to prioritize their material concerns (Table 3).

TABLE 2
 'IN YOUR OPINION, IS THE COUNTRY MOVING IN THE RIGHT OR WRONG DIRECTION?' (PERCENTAGES)

	June 2006	Oct. 2006	Jan. 2007	May 2007	Sept. 2007	Dec. 2007	Mar. 2008
Right direction	56.9	61.6	55.7	57.8	50.2	41.2	50.2
Wrong direction	31	24	29	30	34.2	39.3	34.5

TABLE 3
 'WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT – ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT OF THE COUNTRY OR ITS INDEPENDENCE?' (PERCENTAGES)

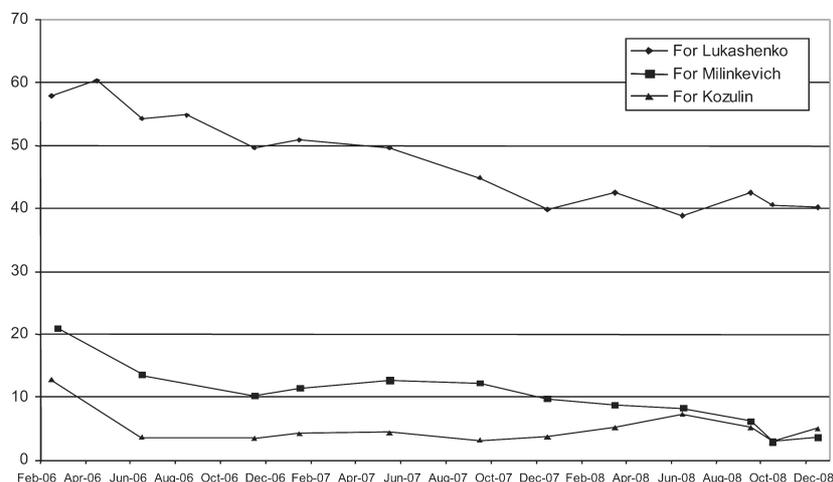
	June 2004	Aug. 2006	Sept. 2007	Mar. 2008
Economic improvement	73.7	48.5	59.4	64.5
National independence	19.2	41.9	32.2	24.1
DS/DK	7.1	9.6	8.4	11.4

Furthermore, if one were to choose between economic well-being and independence, well-being comes first: 65 per cent agreed compared with 24 per cent who disagreed. Clearly, the country is in a situation where personal security, associated with material well-being and overall stability, plays a far more significant role than regime's encroachment on democracy. To quote Ioffe: 'Nowhere in the world do leaders who accomplish this get ousted unless a well-established democratic system . . . is firmly in place'.⁶²

Therefore, the dynamics of people's positive preferences for Lukashenko in a future presidential election will not be surprising: he remains the sole realistic prospect on the Belarusian political landscape (Figure 1).

Why do people vote for Lukashenko? In 2008 they simply believed that he had been successful in restoring order in society (66.3 per cent), in building an independent and economically viable state (64.5 per cent), in promoting collaboration within the CIS (60.1 per cent), in not letting the 'oligarchs' rule the country (59.7 per cent), and in fighting crime (58.9 per cent) and corruption (49.6 per cent). In comparison with Soviet times, in August 2006 people also considered the incumbent authority 'close to the people' (30.4 per cent), less bureaucratic (25.5 per cent), strong and reliable (23.6 per cent) and lawful (23.2 per cent).

FIGURE 1.
'IF A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WERE HELD TOMORROW, WHOM WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?' (PERCENTAGES)



Source: IISEPS, <<http://www.iiseps.org/poll06.html>>; <<http://www.iiseps.org/poll07.html>>; <<http://www.iiseps.org/poll08.html>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.

If we tap into people's individual responses in focus groups, we find the same continuity in general allegiances as that revealed by national surveys.⁶³ Respondents of focus groups in 2001 and 2003 found the president equally decisive, purposeful, honest, caring, workaholic, and brave. They had also well absorbed the myths of (i) Lukashenko as the saviour of the USSR (he alone had voted against its dissolution); (ii) Lukashenko as 'one of us', the man of common people ('*nash kolkhoznik*' – 'our collective farmer'; 'he was publicly crying in sympathy with the people'); (iii) Lukashenko as the fighter overcoming all barriers and triumphing over the ruins of inherited chaos; (iv) Lukashenko as the catalyst of building brotherly relations with Russia ('we need him, in fact the whole Union needs him'). The 2005 focus groups captured similar attitudes although somewhat more critical and defensive: 'Everyone criticizes Lukashenko . . . But when an election is approaching, 2–3 months in advance everyone starts defending him. If somewhere one starts criticizing him there would be a scandal'.⁶⁴

Some observers also note that the regime seems to have broadened its social base in recent years. Lukashenko's support is allegedly growing among the young, not just the old, rural dwellers and those of limited education. As Matskevich observes, 'Belarusian youths now beginning to support the regime are proud that respect and [favourable] attitude were not just bestowed upon Belarus but have been earned or won in fight'.⁶⁵

These findings indeed corroborate Ioffe's remark about Belarusians as truly in tune with their president, with whom they not only identify personally, but also whose policies they support unequivocally.

However, do the people identify with the regime *knowingly*?

(ii) *Questioning the Nature of Perceived Knowledge*

According to IISEPS, in 2006 66.8 per cent of respondents knew about the post-election protest on October Square; 30 per cent were aware of the Chernobyl Path; 25 per cent knew of the Freedom Day; and 14.4 per cent of the Jeans Festival; 70.3 per cent discussed the post-election protest with their families, friends and colleagues. A majority (57.4 per cent) nevertheless completely disapproved of the protesters' actions, with one-fifth of the population remaining totally indifferent. An absolute majority (65 per cent) believed Lukashenko to be the legitimate president of Belarus. And the same absolute majority was concerned with rising prices (60.1 per cent) and unemployment prospects (37 per cent) more than with the state of democracy (human rights and arbitrary rule) in the country (22.1 per cent).

According to Novak's focus group findings, 'the fundamental problem is that everyone knows – but no one protests. This appears to be Belarusians' main specific feature'.⁶⁶ Indeed, the likelihood of protest is 18 per cent, which has remained relatively stable since 2005.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the level of

protest, as argued by IISEPS, 'is defined first and foremost by the state of society, featuring public attitudes (degree of discontent, expectation of change, etc.), rather than by organizational readiness and activity of party and other political structures'.⁶⁸ This suggests that the Belarusian electors, being indeed knowledgeable and discriminate about their choices, are either not ready or not willing to challenge Lukashenko's authority, by and large feeling secure and content about their material needs and moral choices under his regime:

There have been 14 years as our society has been moving along the new historical path. The economy has changed – it became market ... Our way of life, our clothes, our consumption have improved; our streets and architecture became more attractive ... More importantly people's psychology has changed: increased their patriotism, faith in their country and its future ... all these became possible thanks to the unique personality of the president, who united around himself the majority of society, showed simple and clear ways for our development.⁶⁹

This is where a 'specifically' Belarusian contradiction resides. It is difficult to reconcile with this overwhelming support the fact that people are fully aware of the regime's misgivings including fraudulent elections, corruption and abuse of law. They are also well informed about the disappearances of Lukashenko's political opponents and who is likely to have orchestrated them. The people also understand why Belarus is called the 'last dictatorship in Europe' by witnessing the regime's daily beatings, harassment, persecution and belittling of its own people. All these phenomena nevertheless do not prevent them from continuing to vote for the president – that is, in support of his politics and policies.

Why? How can Belarusians *knowingly* identify with and support Lukashenko's regime?

(iii) Different Modes of Learning in Belarus

Given the legacy of past instability and hardship, Belarusians seem to treasure personal security above all – specifically, above newly attained sovereignty and personal freedoms and rights. This is duly reflected in their 'strategic choice' of leadership. Belarusians have 'bread and butter' daily on their table; they are in full employment with regularly paid wages and pensions; they are lavishly entertained by the state, and cared for through various benefits available in the health and education sectors. They have made their choice because government does not abuse or harass them individually, and because they know that, in the absence of any eligible alternative, Lukashenko is the best bet.

Strategic learning precipitates basic awareness and declarative knowledge. It trains how to survive and overcome hurdles with minimal loss. The Belarusians are, no doubt, aware of how the system operates under the Lukashenko regime: how much corruption and arbitrary action there are, and what kind of informal and personal safety net is required to ensure individual security and stability. Strategic learning is a cumulative exercise. That is why younger generations feel less comfortable in Lukashenko's world of 'favours', for they have not yet attained the requisite level of security in order to live in austere comfort within the system.

Those who learn strategically are aware of the potential dangers of dissent and rebellion, and will try to bypass them cautiously and peacefully. Hence, over 70 per cent of the population would rather stay silent in their discontent than take to the streets in protest.

Contentment – economic and personal – is unlikely to breed dissent. That is why Svetlana Aleksievich, in her interview given to Ioffe, commented: 'The point is not that we have no Havel, we do, but that they are not called for by society'.⁷⁰

Strategic learning indeed yields informed choices, which are somewhat different from informed opinions that presume understanding and critical reflection. In Belarus informed choice is fostered predominately through regularly transmitted state propaganda, producing an effect of 'regurgitation' rather than understanding. There are no forums to enhance deeper learning – that is, a process of learning through debate and persuasion. It is not a specific feature of Belarusian society: the absence of deep learning is also common in advanced democracies, resulting in de-politicization and disfranchisement. In the case of Belarus, however, it is far more serious as it fosters further regime consolidation and suppression of dissent.

As Meszaros and Szabo argue, 'in Belarus, due to the restricted access to democratic forums and the internal support of the political elite, which stems from the relatively good economic results of the country, the force of social movements has been relatively weak'.⁷¹ Furthermore, sporadic manifestations of ad hoc discontent are unlikely to result in mass mobilization against the regime, in the circumstances of perceived well-being and security: 'The external and internal imbalances or structural problems, even if they are unsustainable in the long run, do not lead to social discontent until they have an effect on the perceived economy'.⁷²

Belarusians' 'informed choice' seems to be based on what one needs to know in order to survive and do well under Lukashenko's regime. Informed choice may lead to the betterment of one's conditions in all-around chaos, but it will not make communal living sustainable. That is because any further quest for knowledge or critical opinion becomes redundant once individual security in an autocratic society is achieved.

Conclusion: Forfeiting the ‘Extraordinary’?

In this essay we have examined the effect of the ‘extraordinary’ mobilization that occurred following the Belarusian presidential election in 2006. In its momentum it was unprecedented: un-orchestrated externally, it temporarily succeeded in uniting disparate opposition forces and drawing larger sections of society into discussion of the virtues and vices of Lukashenko’s regime. In its novelty and scale it almost suggested a possible weakening of the regime.

The spontaneous discontent, however, was short-lived, forfeiting the opportunity to develop into any kind of revolution. Although engendering the rise of new forces – a youth movement, business and clergy protestation – it has failed to have a lasting imprint on the livelihood of Belarusian civil society.

In the attempt to understand the reasons for its failure to unravel we looked at various explanatory theories ranging in their focus from the regime’s learning ability to various conditional external and internal forces that might challenge the regime. Our analysis led us to conclude that the regime is learning not *in advance* but *in response to* its external and internal environment. The external environment at present encounters internal boundaries that are too strong for its influence to be effective. Hence, the key to our understanding of the workings of Lukashenko’s regime lies predominantly in the internal environment, and notably in the seemingly contradictory features of the Belarusian electorate. The latter not only identify with the president and effectively legitimize his politics and policies; they also do so knowingly – that is, through or despite their awareness of gross violations of human rights and freedoms, and perpetual lies and crimes committed by the regime.

In the attempt to reconcile the seeming paradox, we recognized the importance of differentiating between *strategic learning* – basic commonsensical awareness that equips learners with skills to survive and even thrive under Lukashenko’s regime – and *deeper learning*: an ‘enlightened understanding’ that would lead to critical reflection of what could be done in order to improve the economic and political well-being of the nation.

The title of this essay posited a seemingly illogical – given our explicit conclusions – question: ‘Was there a quiet revolution?’ The answer is positive, in so far as a new learning experience has been gained not only by the regime itself but also by the electorate in their striving to live better.

NOTES

1. Lukashenko’s address to the clergy, ‘There will be peace, tranquillity and stability in Belarus’, available at <<http://www.president.gov.by/press16874.html#doc>>, accessed 1 May 2008.

2. This included the 'Winter 04–Spring 06' campaign and the 'Strategy 2006' document developed by the opposition. For more information on the Strategy and its criticism, see Vladimir Matskevich, 'Nekotorye razmyshleniya o strategii i o monitoringe sobytii svyazannykh s nei' [Some thoughts on the strategy and the monitoring of events related to its realisation] (2006) and respective links at <<http://worvik.com/news/2005/07/27/31>>, accessed 10 April 2008; also Yury Chavusau, 'Zdani i nadzei Kastrychnitskai Ploshchy' [Expectations and hopes of the October Square], *Arche*, 2006, No.6, available at <<http://arche.bymedia.net/2006-6/cavusau606.htm>>, accessed 1 May 2008.
3. Sergey Gaidukevich, as an official protégé, regularly runs for parliamentary and presidential elections. He is particularly encouraged by the authorities to participate in the presidential elections in order to imitate 'democratic' competition for power, without a 'risk' of being elected.
4. Central Electoral Commission website, <<http://www.rec.gov.by>>, accessed 28 March 2008.
5. This is calculated by dividing the percentage of Lukashenko's votes by the overall turnout at election: 75.76 per cent by 83.85 per cent in 2001, and 83 per cent by 92.9 per cent in 2006 respectively; the result equals 0.9 (nine out of ten) in both cases, as if the elections were devised on the basis of some mathematical formula.
6. Numerical estimations of the March protest vary: from over 10,000 as reported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, 2006) to 35,000 (Yury Zakharovich, 'V Belarusi – Revolutsiya?' [Revolution in Belarus?], *Time*, 22 March 2006, available at <www.charter97.org/bel/news/2006/03/22/time>, accessed 28 March 2008).
7. Prior to election every single mobile phone user in Minsk received an explicitly intimidating message warning against participation in meetings of protest and potential repercussions: Zakharovich, 'V Belarusi – Revolutsiya?'; Viktor Martinovich, 'Protokoly Chekistskikh Mudretsov' [Protocols of KGB wizards], *BelGazeta*, 12 Dec. 2005, available at <<http://www.belgazeta.by/20051212.49/010030141>>, accessed 10 April 2008.
8. Yury Drakohrust, 'The Algebra of Revolution', 20 Aug. 2007, available at <www.opendemocracy.net/article/democracy_power/politics_of_protest/colour_revolutions>, accessed 28 March 2008.
9. Roger Potocki and Iryna Vidanova, 'Belarus: Out with the Old', *Transitions Online*, 13 Dec. 2007, available at <www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=247&NrSection=2&NrArticle=19224>, accessed 28 March 2008.
10. OSCE/ODIHR, *Republic of Belarus: Presidential Election, 19 March 2006* (Warsaw, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, 2006), p.25.
11. Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies polls, April 2006, available at <<http://www.iiseps.org/poll06.html>>, accessed 10 April 2008.
12. 'Elections in "Europe's last dictatorship"', *Wall Street Journal Europe*, 7 Sept. 2001.
13. Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p.85.
14. Major events in 2007 and 2008 included Commemoration of Freedom Day (not sanctioned by authorities) and the Chernobyl Path (reportedly 10,000 participants). 'Flash-mobs' also became a rare feature of youth-led protest. Political canvassing preceding the 2008 parliamentary elections was relatively languid and fractional.
15. Vital Silitski, 'Pamyatats', shto Dyktatury Ruinyuttsa' [Remember the Dictatorships can Crumble], *Arche*, 2006, Nos.7–8(47–8), available at <<http://www.eurozine.com/journals/arche/issue/2006-07-28.html>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
16. For more details see Lukashenko's interview given to the *Financial Times*, 19 Sept. 2008, available at <<http://www.president.gov.by/press62570.html#doc>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
17. For a more detailed account of the election see the Central Electoral Commission's website, available at <<http://www.rec.gov.by>>, accessed 11 Nov. 2008.
18. Stephen White, 'Statements', in Uladzimir Bulhakau (ed.), *The Geopolitical Place of Belarus in Europe and the World* (Warsaw: Wyzsza Szkola Handlu i Prawa, 2006), pp.97–113 (p.105).

19. Drakohrust, 'The Algebra of Revolution'.
20. For more information visit the home page of Belaya Rus at <<http://www.belayarus.by/ru/?guid=10204>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
21. Potocki and Vidanava 'Belarus: Out with the Old', p.2.
22. For more details see an updated Law on Parties (No. 120/1324) and the Law 'On Counteraction of Extremism', both issued in 2007, available at <<http://www.pravo.by/webnpa/webnpa.asp>>, accessed 11 Nov. 2008.
23. Potocki and Vidanava 'Belarus: Out with the Old', p.5.
24. IISEPS polls, 2008, available at <<http://www.iiseps.org/poll08.html>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
25. A new and highly controversial law on internet media was approved by the Belarusian parliament and signed into effect by the president in August 2008 despite a number of domestic and international objections. The new law suspends all online media outlets that are not registered in Belarus. It also imposes self-censorship among journalists. Given that all opposition media now operate from abroad and mainly electronically, the law will implicitly limit their penetration to the Belarusian public. Furthermore, the list of violations on the basis of which a media outlet may be closed, and the list of legal enforcement agencies that may issue warnings, were considerably expanded and obfuscated, with the effect of making legal censorship much easier for the authorities.
26. For more information visit BPSM's own website at <<http://www.brsn.by/ru/about>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
27. For more details see <<http://www.charter97.org/en/news/2008/1/21/>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
28. See Ministry of Justice website for more details, available at <http://minjust.by/ru/site_menu/about/struktura/obschestv/registr>, accessed 11 Nov. 2008.
29. *Freedom of Association and the Legal Status of NGOs in Belarus*, report prepared by the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs in Belarus under the auspices of the Foundation for Legal Technologies Development (Minsk, 2007), p.5.
30. *Ibid.*, p.6.
31. David Marples, *The Lukashenko Phenomenon* (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2007), p.109.
32. Vladimir Lenin, 'May Day Action by the Revolutionary Proletariat', *Social-Democrat*, No.31, 15(28) June 1913, reprinted in *Lenin: Collected Works*, Vol.19 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), pp.218–27, available at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/jun/15.htm>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
33. IISEPS polls, 2008, available at <<http://www.iiseps.org/poll08.html>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
34. Vital Silitsky, 'Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.16, No.4 (2005), pp.83–97; Vital Silitsky, 'Belarus: Anatomy of Preemptive Authoritarianism', in Bulhakau (ed.), *The Geopolitical Place of Belarus*, pp.59–91.
35. Natalia Leshchenko, 'The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.8 (2008), pp.1419–33 (p.1422); see also David Marples, 'Color Revolutions: The Belarus Case', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.39, No.3 (2006), pp.351–64, on the importance of historical myths. Lukashenka is the Belarusian variant of the name, Russianized as Lukashenko.
36. This also includes legislative anti-revolution provisions (law on defamation of state officials; law on counteraction of extremism; law on some changes and amendments to the criminal code increasing responsibility for crime against individuals and state security; changes and amendments related to some issues of financing terrorism; decrees on responsibility of acting on behalf of unregistered organizations, or criminalizing training and other preparations that may lead to the violation of social order, etc.): see Pontis Foundation, 'Anti-Revolution Legislation in Belarus: State is Good, Non-state is Illegal', 22 Dec. 2005, available at <http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000014889/Legal%20Memo%20on%20Anti%20Revolution%20Legislation%20of%20Belarus.pdf>, accessed 28 March 2008. Furthermore, a detailed action plan was developed by the KGB (security police) and the ministry of the interior to counteract any rebellion during the 2006 election: for more details see Martinovich, 'Protokoly Chekistskikh Mudretsov'.

37. Sergey Bajmukhametov, 'Justification of Belarusian Regime's Cruelty by Russia Looks Simply Monstrous', *Russian Bazaar* (2008), available at <www.charter97.org/en/news/2008/4/11/5683>, accessed 10 April 2008.
38. Lucan Way and Steven Levitsky, 'The Dynamics of Autocratic Coercion After the Cold War', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.39, No.3 (2006), pp.387–410.
39. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, 'Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.38, No.4 (2006), pp.379–400.
40. Way and Levitsky, 'The Dynamics of Autocratic Coercion', pp.404–7.
41. Levitsky and Lucan Way, 'Linkage versus Leverage'.
42. For more detail see Elena Korosteleva, 'The Limits of the EU Governance: Belarus' Response to the European Neighbourhood Policy', *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.15, No.2 (2009), pp.229–45.
43. After the 2008 parliamentary elections, Belarus was conditionally invited to participate in the new associational framework 'Eastern Partnership', due to be launched in May 2009 in Brussels. For more detail see Elena Korosteleva, 'The Limits of the EU Governance'.
44. Giselle Bosse and Elena Korosteleva, 'Democratising Belarus: The Limits of EU Governance in Eastern Europe', *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol.44, No.2 (2009), pp.143–65.
45. To quote Bruce Jackson, founder and president of the project on transitional democracies: 'I think Belarus is entering a period of complete isolation wherein the primary agents for change will be economic sanctions imposed by the US and Europe in response to serial human rights violations': interview by Nathalie Vogel, World Security Network editor Eastern Europe, 11 April 2008, available at <http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=15733>, accessed 12 April 2008. After the 2008 parliamentary elections in Belarus, there seems to be some thawing in Belarus–EU relations, the effects of which are still too early to evaluate.
46. Hans-Georg Wick, 'Yak vyystsi z Belaruskaga tupika?' [How to Find a Way Out of the Belarusian Impasse] (reprint), *Arche*, 2007, No.1(53), available at <<http://arche.bymedia.net/2007-01/wieck.htm>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
47. After a prolonged series of disputes between Belarus and Gazprom, and suspension of gas supplies to Belarus in 2004 and 2006, Belarus–Russia relations finally shifted to a more market-based mode, which included new gas pricing and oil taxation for Belarus; for more information see George Dura, 'The EU's Limited Response to Belarus's Pseudo "New Foreign Policy"', CEPS Foreign Policy Brief, No. 151, February 2008, pp.1–10, available at <http://shop.ceps.eu/BookDetail.php?item_id=1598>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
48. Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Grigory Ioffe, 'Belarus: A State, Not Yet a Nation', in Bulhakau (ed.), *The Geopolitical Place of Belarus*, pp.151–67.
49. Ioffe, 'Belarus: A State, Not Yet a Nation', p.151.
50. Stanislav Bogdankevich quoted in Tat'yana Manenok, 'The Alternative Is Reform', *Belarusian Market*, 2007, No.4(739), 29 Jan. 2007, available at <<http://www.br.minsk.by/index.php?article=29431&year=2007>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
51. Julia Korosteleva, 'When Time Goes Backwards, or Overviewing Transition Progress in Belarus', paper presented at the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies annual conference, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge University, 30 March 2007.
52. Stephen White, Elena Korosteleva and John Löwenhardt (eds.), *Postcommunist Belarus* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
53. Bajmukhametov, 'Justification of Belarusian Regime's Cruelty'.
54. Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus*.
55. *Trasianka* is a blend of Russian and Belarusian, and is widely practised in Belarus, admittedly by the less-educated population, and the president; for more discussion see Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus*, pp.2–8.
56. Grigory Ioffe, 'Unfinished Nation-Building in Belarus and the 2006 Presidential Election', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol.48, No.1 (2007), pp.37–58 (p.49) (emphasis added).
57. Ibid.

58. See Lukashenko's speech during his meeting with Putin on 6 October 2008, where he explicitly stated that 'I firmly confirmed to the West and now say it to you: we will not trade our friendship with Russia under any circumstances. Russians are our people, with whom we will always keep warm brotherly relations capable of providing security for our nations and their dynamic progression'; available at <<http://www.president.gov.by/press63030.print.html>>, accessed 11 Nov. 2008.
59. Oleg Manaev, quoted in Ioffe, 'Belarus: A State, Not Yet a Nation', p.161. Vyacheslav Kebich was the first prime minister of the Republic of Belarus, 1991–94, and was also one of the defeated candidates in the first presidential elections in Belarus. 'Slava' is a friendly way to address Vyacheslav (Kebich), whereas 'Sashka' implies a far greater degree of familiarity and crudeness, when addressing Aleksandr (Lukashenko).
60. Max Weber, quoted in Ian Clark, 'Legitimacy in a Global Order', *Review of International Studies*, Vol.29, special supplement 1 (2003), pp.75–95 (p.79).
61. All cited data are based on IISEPS opinion polls (2006–8), unless otherwise stated.
62. Ioffe, 'Unfinished Nation-Building in Belarus', p.49.
63. Focus-groups were commissioned by the author in 2001 (EU-INTAS grant 99/0245) and in 2003 (BA SG-35130), in Minsk, Belarus (by the Centre for Social and Political Research, Belarus State University).
64. Olga, Minsk. Focus-Group Analysis prepared by the NOVAK Laboratories for Nadacia Pontis Foundation, March–April 2005, available at <http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/tmp/asset_cache/link/0000014931/Slovakia-Belarus%20Task%20Force_Focus%20Groups%20Analysis_Summary.pdf>, accessed 24 Feb. 2009.
65. Uladzimir Matskevich quoted in Ioffe, 'Unfinished Nation-Building in Belarus', p.47.
66. NOVAK Laboratories 2005, p.2.
67. *Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies News* (Vilnius) 2008, No.1(47), p.18.
68. *Ibid.*, p.19.
69. Anatoly Rubinov, 'Pedagogicheskii Zud Reformatorstva' [The pedagogical urge of reformism], *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 44 (22944), 6 March 2008, available at <<http://sb.by/post/64375>>, accessed 24 Feb. 2008.
70. Ioffe, 'Belarus: A State, Not Yet a Nation', p.161.
71. Adam Meszaros and Zsolt Szabo, 'Designed for Patience: The Significance of Internal Factors in the Ukrainian and Belarusian Transitions', *Transition Studies Review*, Vol.14, No.2 (2007), pp.313–30 (p.314).
72. *Ibid.*, p.317.