

...AND NOW, THE END IS NEAR?

PERSPECTIVES OF LUKASHENKA'S POLITICAL SURVIVAL AND BEYOND

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Resume

After more than a decade and a half of being deadlocked in a combination of autocracy and command-style economy, Belarus stands on the verge of change. Whether because of the contagious wishful thinking of liberal-minded Belarusians or largely due to the real threats coming from Russia, domestic and international experts began to take seriously the possibility that Lukashenka may not stand in power for much longer. Even if the social situation is rather stable and approval ratings are rather favorable, Lukashenka's political survival is neither pre-determined nor anymore granted: it will rather depend on the outcome of strategic actors' choices, compromises, conflicts and various willed and unwilled events. BISS analyst Alexei Pikulik analyses possible scenarios for the election and post-election period through the prism of four factors: a) *Russia's recognition (or its lack thereof) of the elections*; b) *Western (European Union and the United States') recognition (or its lack therefore) of the elections*; c) *the ability of the democratic opposition to effectively mobilize public protest on 19-th of December*, d) *(in) coherence and (dis)loyalty of the ruling elite*. The right 'alignment of stars' (protest mobilization, elite defection, and Russia's (and EU's) failure to recognize the legitimacy of election results) can lock Belarusian situation out of its autocratic trap and guide it to the unknown something else, whilst the 'wrong alignment of stars' may preserve the status quo -- rather than not making Belarusian regime more repressive.

On the basis of the paper, BISS issues recommendations to various actors as to how make the best use of the situation to achieve their goals in the elections that is: a) for the European Union: to ensure that the vote would be conducted in a relatively free and fair manner; b) for President Lukashenka: to ensure legitimacy of the election; c) for the opposition: to provide a credible evidence to its case that Lukashenka might not have won as much as he would insist (or may not have won at all). Given the unexpected set of circumstances surrounding the elections, BISS comes up with paradoxical set of recommendations to key actors running contrary to their customary modes of behavior: the EU needs to talk to Russia and vice versa; Lukashenka will survive problem-free if he plays by the civilized rules and 'drag's the opposition to the process instead of pushing it to the square, and the opposition may actually not want that real improvements in conduct of the election happen in order to prevent the ultimate loss of face.

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Introduction

Based on the time and sequence-sensitive conjunctural analysis, this paper concludes that the preservation of status-quo is hardly possible in Belarus. To be more specific, firstly, it argues that the previous equilibrium: 'the winner takes it all' is likely to deteriorate, and Lukashenka will most probably be destined to loose the grip on his power throughout either a '**pacted transition**' or a '**successor**' scenario. Which one will settle is pending on the consensus between the EU and Russia, which, in the given circumstances can be only achieved with the help of the United States as the guarantor. The presence of consensus (neither the West, nor Russia recognize the elections) will favor the former, while the lack of consensus (only Russia does not recognize the outcome of the elections) will favor the latter.

Secondly, 'appointing the successor scenario' is likely to happen after Lukashenka tries out either to embrace a facade 'Georgea-nize' the country (to fake modernization, democratization, liberalization, and Europeanization) which he will eventually fail, OR increase the degree and the scope of repressions in order to maintain control. Yet, both scenarios will appear as 'Cronicle of the Announced Death' and lead to the loss of the office in the nearest 2 years.

Thirdly, the paper offers policy-advice to all the parties involved, including Lukashenka. Given that the crystal ball in which the future is reflected is missing as of the time of writing (November, 2010) in BISS (sic!), this chapter employs a modest methodology of analysis which needs to be mentioned. It is composite, assuming that the key-actors will strategize based on the strategies adopted by their foes and allies in a situation of growing uncertainty. That very uncertainty increases the chances that *virtu* and *fortuna*, the willed or the chanced events, actor's miscalculations and the irony of the angel of history writ large, may set Belarusian development on an unexpected rail. The analysis is also sensitive to the temporal dimension, since it is based on the assumption that Belarus is entering the stage of 'extraordinary politics', in which the **timing** and the **sequence** of strategic choices/events may determine, whether or not Lukashenka will retain his power position.

This paper proceeds as follows. I start with i) describing the status-quo of the Belarus-Russian relations, dwelling on Russia's leverage over Lukashenka's political career. I continue with ii) mapping the key stakeholders, or those strategic actors whose choices will determine Lukashenka's survival in power, paying close attention to their expected patterns of behavior during the next rounds of the game. Having done this, I iii) establish four variables which are likely to determine the outcome of the 'game' and in the final chapter I iv) dwell on the potential pathways that will be started by the alignment of variables in a conjuncture and v) concludes with the policy-advice to the key stakeholders involved.

Russia-Belarus Relations: 'Bad Romance'

Since 1996, Belarus has been locked in a combination of autocracy and a socialist-mixed economy. This unusual co-existence of political and economic domains was supported by the flows of rents coming from Russia. Broadly, I identify three broad areas where Belarus was receiving the rent-flows: (i) multilateral and bilateral integration projects (e.g. common Customs Union with Russia; Monetary Union; etc.); (ii) discounts on energy resources imported from Russia (including the tariffs on transition of Russia's gas to Europe and the export of oil to the EU); and (iii) administratively secured demand for the finished Belarusian goods on Russia's market (including trade preferences, barter deals and simply smuggling).

Adding to the figures of gas and oil rents, what Belarus earned as rents via the administratively stimulated demand for the domestic goods on Russia's market, the

profits from barter dealings (exchanging overpriced finished goods, due to the fixed exchange rate for the underpriced energy) and the rents from the loopholes existing in the border, due to the imperfect design of the first Customs Union, we may actually approach a shocking figure of 40% rents in the GDP. Herein, Belarus is the neighbour of Qatar (Pikulik, 2010).

These 'free money' coming out of the imperfectly designed interstate institutions were used by Lukashenka for populist ends: a) upholding generous social spending (Table 2) via employment and the bail-outs of the inefficient enterprises; b) supporting the quasi-socialist system of cross-subsidies, price controls and productive targets for the enterprises; c) limiting the development of the private sector in order to foreclose the 'exit' strategy for the state-dependent electorates and d) growing the autocratic muscles of the illiberal state.

Table 1. Revenue and expenditure composition Belarus, 1993-2004 (in % of GDP)

Belarus	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
General gov. revenue	54.3	47.5	42.7	40.8	44.9	45.1	46.1	45.8	44.9	44.6	45.8	46.2
Expenditures	56.2	50	44.6	42.7	46.1	45.6	47.9	45.9	46.8	46.4	47.2	46.2
Social protection	11.9	11.2	12.9	13	13.3	13	12.7	-	13.2	13.4	12.6	12.3
Education and Health	10.5	11.1	10.4	11.2	13	11.9	11.3	11.2	11.6	11.5	11.3	11.3
Defence	1.2	2.3	1.6	1.2	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Public order	-	-	-	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.9

Adopted from Verena Fritz (2007)

The status-quo started to deteriorate with Putin's second term in power. Whereas before, Yeltsin's entourage subsidized Belarus largely because the latter had big 'sentimental value' for the nostalgic Russian elites, dreaming of re-integration, or simply capitalizing on this rhetoric politically (not to mention, that oil oligarchs which used Belarus as offshore due to the export tariffs disparity), Putin's approach was much more pragmatic. Political loyalty and access to Belarusian transit infrastructure in exchange for subsidies was the new contract which Kremlin tried to offer to Lukashenka. The contract failed grossly, due to Lukashenka's incredible ability to maneuver and disregard the agreements.

Summer 2010 became the climax of the conflict, which brought about the infighting between the leaders onto an interstate level. Lukashenka and Medvedev exchanged a series of hits: Russians showed four chapters of "Krestnyi Batka" on NTV channel, in which Lukashenka was depicted as criminal, blood-hungry, corrupted nutcase. Lukashenka reacted with bitter irony about Russia's leadership. Overall, it resulted in the introduction of tariffs on Russian oil, the raise of gas-price and...the conflict went into the stand-by mood. Regardless of the political causes of that conflict (it can be equally argued that Russian leadership provoked the conflict, trying to push Lukashenka inside/outside the Customs Union, the in-fight went too far, passing the point of no return). Experts started to speak about Russia's preparations and will to finally remove Lukashenka. Yet, now, at time of writing, the pendulum of choice is not swinging and Russia's leadership is holding the cards too close to be able to predict their next move.

Key actors: regime's stakeholders, status-quo groups and the Knights of Armageddon.

The pathways that Belarus will take in the following years are subject to what will happen at a critical juncture (next 6 months), namely, the conjuncture of the following variables: a) Russia decision to (non)recognize the outcome of December 2010 elections; b) EU's decision to (non)recognize the outcome of December 2010 elections; c) opposition's (in)ability to mobilize protests (hereinafter, 'Square'); d) elite (lack of)unity. Therefore, the key-actors are Russian leadership, the EU, Belarusian opposition, and members of Lukashenka's political elite.

Foreseeing a legitimate question - why is the Belarusian society and Lukashenka himself are missing in the list of strategic questions, while the weak, disorganized and incapable opposition is in - a few remarks need to be made.

Firstly, Lukashenka's strategy is declared and will most likely hold constant: allow literally everyone run for the office, avoid unnecessary repressions and make elections look free and fair. Thus, only the last component, namely the vote count will be forged. Although Lukashenka is capable of impressively winning the first round, the bureaucratic apparatus will surely add a few dozens of per cents to the final results of the elections. This point requires further clarifications: it is very common for autocratic leaders to win the elections with the overwhelming percent of votes. Why do they then forge the votes and take high risks of being accused by the observers? Firstly, Lukashenka's strategy is path-dependent: having won the previous elections with more than 75% each time, getting less mean to admit that his support is declining. Secondly, this would mean more votes for the opposition, and herein Lukashenka would not be able to maintain his monopoly of representing the public interest. Yet, here lies an important miscalculation of Lukashenka. Having registered nine oppositional candidates, Lukashenka limited his own chances for a legitimate claim that he won the elections in the first round. Given that 25% of votes (in case, he decides to win with 75%) will be divided between 11 positions (10 candidates + 1 candidate 'against all') many will doubt the fairness of vote-counting. Especially, in case when the candidates receive a chance to gain popularity during the campaign. A logical solution in this case would be to win with 55-58 per cent of votes, yet that would mean that since 2006, Lukashenka has lost many votes.

Secondly, the Belarusian society has also made its choice. There is no intrigue in the distribution of sympathies: Lukashenka is predestined to win with high support, and almost nothing can diminish his popular rating.

Thirdly, despite the deficit of popular, organizational and human resources behind the Belarusian opposition (not to mention its inability to propose one candidate instead of ten), it might receive a unique chance to use and abuse the uncertainty and to play its important intermediary role in the regime-change in Belarus (to be discussed below).

Fourthly, the variable 'EU's choice' can rather than not, be held constant in our analysis. During their November visit to Minsk, German Foreign Minister Guido Westervelle, and Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski sent Lukashenka a simple message: 'the EU will recognize Lukashenka and provide Belarus with 3bln Euro aid in case of free and fair elections'. Reading between the lines, it means that Lukashenka has to try really hard not to pass the low thresholds set by Europe. Moreover, on November 11-th, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite motivated the EU's decision, implicitly stating that Lukashenka is now the last superhero, who, a la silver surfer can save Belarus from Russia's hostile takeover. Despite this brutal honesty on the Belarusian matter, there is a minor chance that the EU can take another stand towards Belarus.

Now, let us come to the most important player, namely Russia.

Actor 1, Russia

Before analyzing the question whether Russia will attempt to change Lukashenka in the forthcoming elections, it is correct to re-adopt Kissinger's question: 'who to call, if I want to call Russia?' Under 'Russia', below I understand a dense network of political-business elites, headed by President Medvedev, prime-minister Putin, and the core state-corporations: *VTB*, *VEB*, *Rosnano*, *Rostehnologii*, *Rosatom* and *Sberbank*. The sublime role in taking strategic decisions belongs to Medvedev and Putin, and business interests are, despite the common perception, secondary.

The second group in Russia could be seen as Lukashenka's lobby: representatives of military-industrial complexes, politically represented by the Communist Party. This network is unlikely to contradict Kremlin's team directly.

The third group is Russian businesses, willing to invest in Belarus and perceiving it as a culturally close neighboring market, which could be a safe haven for the spare liquidity and which could help to diversify the domestic risks in Russia. What these businesses lack in Belarus systemically in order to invest, are the two chief factors: the lack of the independent judicial system, and the lack of the arbiter, who could guarantee zero political risks and zero risks of unlawful expropriation of their assets whether by businesses or by the predatory Belarusian state. In the nearest future, especially this group might become the key investor in Belarus.

Russia's primarily political dream is to see Belarus as a credible geopolitical partner, eager to engage into further integration processes in the post-Soviet space ('common economic space'), having rather cool but respectful relations with the EU. Furthermore, ideally Belarus should be transformed into a well-functioning market-economy, which would spare Russia of its moral obligation for subsidies and which would be open for Russia's private capital. For that dream to come true, unpredictable Lukashenka needs to be either fully domesticated or better changed. The second seems to be a much better option, given that Belarusian president went too far insulting Russia's leadership.

What stops Russia from openly engaging into the Belarusian political game now with 'heavy weapons' (under heavy weapons I imply 'non-recognitions of the elections, political isolation and economic blockade) are the four main factors:

- a) Contradictions between Medvedev and Putin. If Medvedev decides to openly move against Lukashenka, it could be interpreted by Putin as the dangerous manifestation of political will of the President in the light of the Russia's elections of Russia's 2012 elections. In other words, the change of powers in Belarus could alter in an uncontrolled manner the shaky balance of powers between the president and prime-minister. Moreover, the non-recognition of the results of the elections in Belarus on the basis of their democratic deficit will put more obligations on Russian leadership to hold free and fair elections in 2010. Last but not the least, the precedent of getting rid of the 'brother in arms' on the basis of deviation from democratic procedures could become the worst nightmare for the post-Soviet pack of presidents. Or a mixture of Kafka and Alice in Wonderland. On the other hand, Russia might think of a new geopolitical role in the region, as the guard for the minimal level of democracy in the neighboring countries and start expanding its influence with Belarus.
- b) Belarusian ruling-elite unity and c) the lack of the viable opposition. Russia is very unlikely to head-hunt the successor of Lukashenka among the ruling elite, unless some parties of the ruling elite start defecting and act independently. The consequences of a wrong recruitment may push Belarusian society away from Russia, and bring the accusations of the direct interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign country by the international community. What holds Russia from supporting the oppositional candidate is not so much the lack of an acceptable new figure - both Nialkhaeu or Sannikau could pass the face-control of Kremlin - but their underdeveloped political

capital and public support make Russians doubt, since they will not even talk to an ex-ante leader. Therefore, it is likely to wait for an organized political force with sufficient political capital to emerge within the Belarusian society in order to through their informal support behind their backs. This force should be predictable, with good organizational capacities, clear political program and significant popular support. Furthermore, the political agenda of this new force does not to be utterly pro-Russian: declaring the commitment not to join NATO and staying loyal to Russia is more than enough.

d) Unpredictable choice of the EU. Russia, in theory, is unlikely to make its choice without checking with the EU and the US. The costs of non-recognizing the elections whence the EU decides to legitimize Lukashenka's 4-th term in power may indeed be high. Thus, this will raise problems between EU and Russia, and may push Belarus and Belarusian society westwards. Yet, one additional dimension needs to be considered. President Grybauskaite's openly anti-Russian rhetoric as the pretext of EU's involvement in the process of 'saving private Lukashenka' might trigger Russia's decision on Belarus. The EU showed that Belarus might actually have the room to go westwards, and as Minsk will be getting closer to Brussels, Russia's influence on the post-Soviet space will diminish. Therefore, winning Belarus by removing Lukashenka may be seen by President Medvedev (in the light of EU's surprising behavior) as something worth paying any price and fighting till the end, given that Russia's authority around the post-Soviet space is being openly challenged.

Actor 2. The EU

As it was previously mentioned, the EU is unlikely to engage into the regime-change in Belarus in December 2010 elections. The previous strategies of the EU towards Belarus: a) isolation, and b) dragging Lukashenka in the debate, largely failed. The EU has neither the significant leverage to change the status-quo, nor linkage, nor even the market-influence. Indeed, the EU is one of the major trade-partners of Belarus, yet the exports to the EU are almost fully determined by the imports of raw-materials and energy from Russia. Therefore, the EU is likely to deepen the dialogue with Lukashenka, since in the end of the day, the case of softening his regime and extending some political, civic and economic rights to citizens would seem as a win-win case scenario. Firstly, he is unlikely to create extra headache for Brussels and apply for ownership in the EU, likewise, he will not sacrifice Belarusian sovereignty to Russia. Last but not least, under Lukashenka Belarus has always been a stable country. Therefore, keeping Lukashenka in the office (especially, realizing that his chances to re-establish perfect relations with Russia are doomed), appears to be a wise and pragmatic strategy. What the EU has yet to acknowledge, is that Lukashenka will attempt to change the geopolitical supplier of rents: Russia is unwilling anymore, Venezuela is incapable, and the EU...might get entrapped with the 'moral obligation', if Lukashenka articulates his: 'you, the Europeans gravitated us from Russia, now you have to bear responsibility for those, who you have domesticated'.

Actor 3. The Belarusian elite

The Belarusian elite is conceptualized throughout the text as the representatives of: state-owned enterprises, crony businessmen, heads of security institutions and members of Lukashenka's entourage: including his son, the prime-minister, the head of the administration and other old friends. Since Belarusian governance system is the one with neo-patrimonialist features: bureaucracy is not only embedded in a strict hierarchy, appointed based on loyalty, not on meritocracy and is accountable not to the electorate, but to the patron Lukashenka. There are little hopes that the mid-rank power vertical representatives will betray Lukashenka. However, given that the elite's loyalty to Lukashenka is not only based on rewards (the 'license' to loot and to self-enrich through

the unequal distribution of property rights to themselves and their crony-businessmen), but also on fear, they will betray Lukashenka only in case that an external guarantor will promise them to honor and to uphold their access to rents, while will shield them from repressions. The only force which is capable to diminish the risks in case of elites' defection is Russia, given its extraordinary leverage on Belarus. Furthermore, the elites will take their decisions whether to choose loyalty/voice not only pending on Russia's guarantees, but also in case of oppositional successes.

Actor 4. The Belarusian opposition

As of time of writing, there are nine oppositional candidates running for presidency. It is very likely that each and every candidate will be registered and will be spared of direct state's intimidation at least before the elections. Surprisingly, there are no pro-Russian candidates (by pro-Russian, I imply having 'political integration with Russia' in their agenda), and the strongest ones: Vladimir Niakliaeu and Andrei Sannikau represent very similar political stances. The opposition is unlikely to unite and propose one candidate. This would have given solid grounds for organizing mass-protests after the voicing of the official results of the elections, and in this case scenarios, the square would have jointly called for the second round. The opposition is incapable of uniting as for now, given that: a) the 'united' candidate will take all responsibility for the square (most likely, it will have small attendance); b) will be politically eliminated after the elections by the state; c) pave the road to the other candidates who would survive the square being on the 'secondary roles'. Therefore, each and every candidate chooses a rational strategy of competing amongst each other, i.e. the pool of the candidates, but not against Lukashenka. The elections are for the time being perceived as a legal way to boost ratings, gain popular support and monopolizing the niche of the 'new opposition', or, perhaps realistically put--pouring old wine into the new vessels. Yet, as my analysis will show, the opposition may be able to 'cheat' the structural factors, to make up a strategic alliance with Russia, capitalize on its resources and serve as transmission belt for letting the nomenklatura candidate, 'the successor' come to power.

Thus, we could summarize the strategies of the key-actors in the **Table 2**.

Table 2

		+ Square		-Square	
		+Elite defection	-Elite defection	+Elite defection	-Elite defection
+ Russia's recognition	+EU recognition	X(1)	X(2)	X(3)	<i>status quo</i>
	-EU recognition	X	X	X	X
-Russia's recognition	+EU recognition	<i>pacted transition or 'successor'</i>	<i>repressive conservation or 'Georgianization'</i>	X	X
	-EU recognition	<i>pacted transition</i>	X	X	X

'X' denotes that this combination is unlikely.

'-' and '+' for the variable 'Square' denotes opposition's (in)ability to mobilize more than 50 000² supporters on the square.

² I believe, that 50 000 could be set as a threshold of real success, recognized by all the parties involved.

Before we actually proceed with analyzing the conjunctures, and the resulting scenarios, and hence, the pathways that are likely to be taken by Belarus, let us briefly discuss the importance of sequence and timing.

Chronologically, the upcoming events are likely to have the following sequence: a) the EU declaring the final verdict on the matter of December elections (the intention to recognize the results was already declared); b) the opposition trying as hard as possible to bring more than 50 000 people on the square; c) Russia taking the final decision, based on a) and b), and finally, c) the members of the elites make the choices: loyalty or voice. This sequence assumes the following:

- Members of the elite will not risk moving against the patron without having political backing from Russia (the EU will not be trusted as a credible partner in this game), and without seeing a potential in an oppositional force, which they could lead. One should understand that any renegade coming from the elite will lack the time and the resources to create political structures, he will be imprisoned way too fast for this, and the only option is privatizing the existing oppositional structure/party/movement.
- Russia will not move against Lukashenka (regardless of the EU) unless it sees either a viable political force that could be made an irresistible offer, or a potential candidate coming from nomenklatura, but preferably both.

Let us now deal with those conjunctures, marked by X, which I argue are hardly possible, hence, negligible in this very analysis.

The combinations marked as X1 and X3 is next to impossible, given that there can hardly be elite defection in the context of Lukashenka's regaining the legitimacy both from the EU and Russia.

X2 is unlikely, given that Russia will not recognize the results of the elections in case the successful square.

The rest of X's are considered impossible, given that the EU is very likely to recognize the outcomes of Presidential elections. However, leaving the place for maneuver (or falling into wishful thinking), I argue that there could be a chance in which the EU will refuse to recognize the elections, namely: significant violations of the electoral principles, the successful square, Russia's commitment to remove Lukashenka in a civilized manner and finally, the elite-defection.

Let us start with dwelling on the scenarios.

1) Pacted transitions or the appearance of a successor (a) (up to 2 years)

The opposition succeeds in mobilizing the 'square', and demonstrates that it grew into a real solid social and political force. Whether united or not, the leaders of the opposition channel the public disappointment with the results of the elections, and the crowd holds on for a few days. Meanwhile, Russia decides to engage into the game, and the CIS monitors openly claim that the elections were false. This creates a crisis of legitimacy, followed by an economic pressure. Russia forecloses the market for Belarusian finished goods (it's easy to come up with a plausible legend, i.e. sanitary standards, etc.), and meanwhile it throws methodological, financial, administrative and media-support behind the shoulders of the newly-established Belarusian opposition. Although, as world's history shows, autocratic regimes are rather resilient to the economic crises, and can topple as the result of the negative growth only in the long run, in Belarus the mass-protests increase. The opposition is now working hard on mobilizing the protests of the labor, given that the economic well-being of commoners is worsening steeply. The EU's non-recognition of the elections makes the regime-change easier, given that Lukashenka ends up trapped. The opposite case-scenario is likely to significantly prolong the regime's agony. Foreseeing the elite's defection, Lukashenka increases the degree of the

repressions in the country. Meanwhile, Russia a) negotiates with the prime-minister of Belarus, and sends a message to the Belarusian society: 'we will remove the blockade (which is, by the way, costly for Russia itself) if Belarus calls for the next round of the presidential elections. The message sent to the elites and Lukashenka would then be: 'appoint the successor, and we will give all the guarantees that Lukashenka will stay in the Belarusian politics, but not as a president for the time being'.

Now, in this light, Lukashenka has 2 choices. He can: a) denounce all the previous agreements with Russia (bringing the clocks to zero), and appoint the technocratic successor. Yet, given his personal peculiarities, he will b) stick to power till the end, and will refuse to name the successor. In this case, the successor will appear with the help of Russia's recruitment, will join the opposition and will end up winning the elections which Lukashenka will be forced to announce, when Russia's pressure will become overwhelming. All these could require up to 2 years.

If the opposition stays strong and actively participates in Russia's game, as a coalition partner, then it receives an impressive chance to obtain power having backed the new 'successor'. If not, then it is likely that it will remain on the margins of history and politics of Belarus forever.

2 Repressive conservation or Georgian-ization.

In any case scenario, Lukashenka might increase the usage of repression right after the elections, in order to intimidate the opposition and steer the elites. Given that the economic hardships will reach the shore of Belarus (price increase for energy, etc.) in the next months, and due to the fact that in the previous years the regime was rather exploiting the opportunities of purchasing loyalty with the side payments, now it will have to increase the repressions to balance the system.

With Russia not recognizing the elections, Lukashenka might attempt to turn the country westwards and try to pursue declarative 'Georgian-ization'. However, given that structural conditions in Georgia were different before their breakthrough towards Europe (strong private sector, strong civil-society and low repressions) Lukashenka will fail, and will again choose repressions as the main tool.

The last case scenario is maintaining the '**status-quo**'. This will happen if a) the opposition fails; b) the EU and Russia will recognize the elections. Yet, this would be a non-trivial situation by all means. Neither Medvedev (who needs to appear as a 'big bad wolf, of which at least someone should be afraid') nor Putin will forgive Lukashenka's public statements. Russia will deprive Belarus of rents, will block Lukashenka's attempts to use Odessa-Brody for delivering Venezuelan oil, will keep the degree of political and economic pressure on the Belarus...until the first convenient moment to backstab Lukashenka.

The analysis shows that, in the given circumstances, it is impossible to predict the course of Russia-Belarus relations, given that we can not be certain that Lukashenka will retain his power position for long. Potential improvements of the interstate relations can happen only with the new political leader of Belarus, while for as long as Lukashenka is in power a cold war between the countries is the most obvious option.

Let us sum up with what we have started. Sinatra's doctrine 'I did it my way' fits Lukashenka very well, and, being a genius in tactics, he might surprise everyone one more time slipping from the hands of his foes; and instead of the final curtain, Lukashenka might face a bright long-lasting political future in Belarus, becoming the modernizer and western-izer of the county.

Strategic recommendations for the key-actors.

The following paragraph suggests various strategies for the key-actors in an unorthodox way. This means, that the direct advice to opposition on how to capitalize on the square politically, or to Russians--how to make the square successful, lies outside both the scope of this analysis, and of legal framework of the Republic of Belarus.

First, we can identify an important **coordination problem** between Russia and the EU on the matter of Belarus which needs to be resolved.

On the one hand, Russia's involvement in Belarus pushes the EU to respond adequately, and to attempt to shield the country from Russia's 'intervention' by choosing Lukashenka as the lesser evil. Likewise, the EU's implicit desire to drag Belarus closer to Brussels (further from Moscow) provokes Kremlin to start reacting. In both cases, this dramatically increases both Lukashenka's chances and the costs of exit from office. This situation is caused by a dramatic mistrust between Russia and the EU, and both parties face a prisoner's dilemma. Our first suggestion, is to lower the distrust between the two parties with the help of the USA serving the role of the arbiter. Paradoxically, neither the EU nor Russia need Belarus a la grande. The former has no intention of offering Belarus a place in the happy family of the EU-members, the latter has better things to do, than planning territorial takeover and joining Belarus into Russian Federation. At the end of the day, both parties want the same: minimal level of democracy in Belarus, the ability to influence the country's politics through making linkages to specific groups (i.e. factions in the Parliament) and the economic reforms.

The first (and the most abstract) recommendation is to replace the sets of bilateral dialogues: Brussels-Minsk and Moscow-Minsk with a polilogue: Washington-Brussels-Moscow on the matter of Belarus. By no means I am suggesting here to create a hidden conspirological Politburo, it should rather be a) an international conference involving the representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, which will result in b) the creation of a tripartite institution, involving the representatives of the EU, Washington and Moscow. Brussels and Moscow (Washington playing the role of the guarantor) should mix positive and negative conditionality demanding from Lukashenka one and one thing only: constitutional change in Belarus, leading to the stronger Legislature. For that, Lukashenka can be offered 3 bln euro from the EU side (not for holding free Presidential elections as of now). This situation will allow both Russia and the EU to grow their political lobbies in Belarus and after the referendum and the 2012 elections, Belarus will receive a credible and strong Parliament with the pro-Lukashenka force (*Lukashenka's Belaya Rus*), pro-EU force and a pro-Russian force.

If this consensus of the external actors on Belarus is achieved, we are likely to see a 'pacted transition' in Belarus. If not, Russia will press Lukashenka to name the successor offering him some guarantees.

The second recommendation is designed specifically for Lukashenka. In the given circumstances, declaring the desired 75-80 per cent of votes instead of the real 57-60 becomes too dangerous. Given that realistically, Lukashenka will not run for another term in 2014, it is much cheaper for him to accept the real results now. This will surely be a panacea against the 'square': what will the opposition have left to say on December 19-th, if the observers will be allowed to count the votes? Thus, the wisest thing he could do now is not to risk where it is really unnecessary and to try to appear more saint than the Pope. Moreover, it is in the best interests of Lukashenka to change the constitutional design in Belarus: there is life after death (Presidency), sometimes the ex-Presidents come back to power, Russia's machinery of a managed democracy is there and is lucrative, given that everything is at stake for Lukashenka, and, what is even more important....the Presidents love their children too.

The third, most paradoxical, recommendation (or rather a statement) is for the opposition. We believe the opposition is being 'dragged' into the scenario in which it stands no chance of winning at all. Improvements in the electoral practices by the authorities will not only help to 'discharge' the international criticism and secure acquiescence, if not recognition, of the results in the West and, under a certain scenario, in Russia, but will also serve to decrease the already minimal mobilizing potential of the opposition. To put it straight: the opposition is the least interested player in the improvement in the electoral practices and a fair conduct of the vote. If it cannot build a solid case proving the falsification in the elections, the 19 December will unmask all the structural weaknesses currently hidden behind picturesque and PR-savvy campaign. If this is a case, nothing will impede the formation of the token opposition under aegis of some sort of 'managed democracy.'

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