The authoritarian regime in Belarus: The evolution of political aggressiveness

In 2020, the authoritarian regime in Belarus faced one of the deepest and gravest political crises in its history. The massive rigging of presidential elections that occurred not only undermined the legitimacy of President Aleksandr Lukashenko, but also shook the whole system of the Republic.

The events in Belarus in 2020 were devastating for the authoritarian regime and it seemed that the Lukashenko regime would soon fall, yet it has managed to survive, strengthened its control and, for the time being, neutralized the biggest internal threat. This has also caused a sea change in its political structure and functioning and in the future, it is highly probable that the consequences of the crisis will impact both the internal situation in Belarus and its position abroad.

Political and cultural context of the authoritarian regime in Belarus

Belarus has been under a dictatorship for 27 years. The authoritarian regime is so effervescent, because of its cultural and political context and its specificity.

During all these years, Lukashenko's form of non-democratic rule has significantly transformed a number of times, from one hybrid in nature and to neo-totalitarian system. It is based on universal political terror. Because of a general loss of public support for the government, the objective is to destroy ideological, cultural, informational and organizational autonomy of the society. Lukashenko has always resorted to forged results and repressions, which is the case in any authoritarian regime. The rigging of presidential campaigns in 2006 and 2010 sparked protests that were violently suppressed. The difference is that during previous elections, the authoritarian Belarusian system did not lose its legitimacy and the leader was not generally rejected. By contrast, the most recent elections, on the one hand, caused a deep political crisis and on the other, resulted in the ruling class resorting to violent repressions and mass terror throughout the country. Lukashenko wants to completely root out any ability to oppose from political life in the country and make citizens completely obedient.

Aleksandr Lukashenko rose to power at a time when Belarusian society was on the path to democratic transformation. The first presidential elections took place in 1994, only three

years after the country's independence, in 1991. Before that, for hundreds of years, the territory of today's Belarus and its people were ruled by authoritarian-totalitarian regimes, without statehood or political tradition, with no political or economic freedoms.

In other words, historically speaking, the Belarusians have had no positive experience of their own civic independence and statehood. Belarusian society has mostly been a political object, not a subject.

This lack of empowerment made it easy to manipulate not just public opinion, but also public offices and state laws. Regulations were worthless for citizens, because citizens were merely political objects, devoid of their agency. Consequently, in the mid-1990s, rapid, negative changes swept through the country, towards authoritarianism.

Political processes in Belarus were of a hybrid nature, because political institutions were built in a strongly patriarchal, pro-Soviet, authoritarian political culture, which had shaped the awareness of the majority of Belarusian society. Such circumstances always cast doubt on the stability and effectiveness of democratic political institutions and legal provisions for civic freedoms. It should also be underlined that the institutional and social transformation was accompanied by extremely difficult economic changes, which is likely to have impacted on the expectations and attitudes of regular citizens for whom democracy and freedom, unfortunately, became tantamount to social chaos and anarchy.

Even today Lukashenko tries to manipulate public memory and evoke apocalyptic scenes of "the 1990s" in order to scare Belarusians:

"Victor Sheiman (Head of the Presidential Administration of Belarus) remembers the times when there was no bread and there was nothing to feed the nation with. I often think back at 1994 when we only had flour for bread for three days in Minsk. These were indeed terrible times".

The dictator uses such words as propaganda in order to maintain his strong, authoritarian rule, the only guarantee of stability and integrity of the state, whilst Belarusians are deprived of civil liberties.

During the elections of 1994, when the dictatorship was taking shape, Lukashenko's entire election programme was based on open populism, promises of a return to a socialist paradise and a wonderful vision of the future.

Lukashenko's key postulates were populism, and pro-Soviet and pro-Russian sentiments,

along with a clear anti-nationalistic angle and severe criticism of the old communist nomenklatura (key communist administrative positions). To some extent, his rise to power was the result of the patriarchal nature of Belarusian society which expected a strong state, order, and to be ruled with an iron fist. “The society expected the kind of order that you could find in the Soviet Union”. Order and justice were decoys which gradually led to Belarusians giving up their freedom and democracy to an authoritarian state that was supposed to guarantee order. Belarusian society became a fertile ground for the growth of a political dictatorship.

The consolidation of new authoritarianism in Belarus: practices and methods of the fight for power

After a landslide victory (80 per cent in the second round), Lukashenko lay down the populist foundations to dismantle democratic mechanisms in Belarus. People were in favour, but there were also a lot of former communists in state institutions, who very quickly changed their leanings and started to serve the interests of the President. During the first stage, the main instrument of taking over power in Belarus were two referenda: in 1995 and 1996, which changed the constitutional order of the state and granted President Lukashenko unlimited powers.

For him and those around him, the 1995 referendum was an experiment, a way to evaluate the political situation and test to what extent society, intellectual elites and other political institutions (Parliament, the Constitutional Court) would be able to notice the threat and defend against attempts to take over power. Lukashenko asked four questions in the referendum: should Russian become an official language, should state symbols be replaced (reinstate the eclectic symbolism of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic), should the country pursue economic integration with the Russian Federation, and whether to grant the President the right to dissolve the Parliament.

Soviet spirit, the lack of strong national elite and the political immaturity of Belarusian society opened the door to absolute power for Lukashenko. Most of the MPs in the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus (Parliament) backed the President’s initiative and the majority of citizens accepted all of his proposals. As a result, the country started down the slippery slope towards authoritarian rule.

Lukashenko’s desire for power is another important aspect of evolution of Belarusian dictatorship, playing a crucial role in the most critical moments of contemporary Belarusian history. From the very beginning of his presidency, power was the greatest value for Lukashenko, and he stopped at nothing to keep it. Violence and the extermination of

political opponents became an indispensable part his actions. As early as 1995, a group of MPs from the Belarusian Popular Front party, led by Zianon Pazniak, and the Belarusian Social Democratic Assembly (Hramada), with Aleh Trusaŭ as chairman, opposed the referendum and started a hunger strike, on the night of 11 April 1995, in the building of the Supreme Council. At the direct order from Lukashenko, security forces and special purpose militia, OMON, broke the law and infringed MPs' immunity, beating them and then forcibly removing them from the meeting room.

The Supreme Council and other constitutional bodies (such as the Prosecutor's Office), as well as wider society, remained passive, which gave Lukashenko a psychological boost and made him more confident. It also quickly transpired there were also people close to him who were ready to implement his orders, even those that breached the law.

This is when military units began to be formed, which Lukashenko started using for his own political purposes. These units (OMON, security forces) started barely year after Lukashenko seized power and so the brutality and a clearly terrorist nature of what the state organs did in 2020-2021 should not be a surprise; a repressive system has been operating in Belarus for years.

The referendum of 1996 was the second turning point on Belarus' path to authoritarian rule. Lukashenko made the decision to organise the second referendum because of a confrontation with the newly selected 13th Supreme Council, where MPs were quite critical of the President's initiatives. A constitutional change was put to a referendum, but in fact it was a draft of a new constitution, which granted the President unlimited powers. Lukashenko's actions led to a serious political crisis in the country and on 19 November 1996, MPs from the Supreme Council requested the Constitutional Court to initiate proceedings to dismiss Aleksandr Lukashenko from office for the systemic breach of the Constitution and legal norms of the Republic of Belarus. In 1995–1996, the Constitutional Court declared sixteen presidential decrees unconstitutional and incompliant with the law of the Republic of Belarus .

The situation was exacerbated because the President insisted that the referendum be binding and with immediate effect, that is that the new Constitution and hence the new political system entered into force immediately after the referendum. The Supreme Council and other political bodies did not agree.

This was a historic, breakthrough moment for the country and the society and the following factors played the key role in making it possible for Lukashenko to implement his plans:

1. Lukashenko's strong political will and determination;
2. weakness, lack of political will, lack of leadership, responsibility and understanding among his opponents, who did not present a unified camp. At the same time, protests swept through Minsk and part of society was ready to defend the Constitution. MPs from the Supreme Council should have fought for invalidating the referendum from the very beginning but instead, they posed alternative questions, and thus strengthened the constitutionality of Lukashenko's political project;
3. hopes that Moscow would help solve the political crisis.

It should be noted that, to some extent, the same processes and psychological traits of political players could be observed during the crisis in Belarus in 2020.

In 1996, the previously communist portions of the Supreme Council and other pro-government structures lacked the will and courage to stop Lukashenko. Myechyslaw Ivanavich Hryb, politician and MP at that time, explained: "We were on the brink of a civil war, never before or after have we been so close to each other. I am certain that Lukashenko would not have relinquished power. There would have been a military conflict." These words might be interpreted as an excuse for lack of action and weakness; at that time, Lukashenko did not have enough measures to remain in power. The Supreme Council's actions were, to some extent, a default reaction to Lukashenko's politics, it was instinctive self-defence. These politicians had never faced such a difficult challenge before and they hoped the problem would simply solve itself.

Hopes for Moscow's help were another political illusion. In November 1996, Minsk welcomed a delegation of high-ranking Russian politicians, led by the then Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. They came to solve a political crisis in Belarus. On 22 November 1996, the chairman of the Supreme Council, Syamyon Sharetski, and President Aleksandr Lukashenko, signed an agreement on the social-political situation and constitutional reform in the Republic of Belarus. Under the agreement, the MPs agreed to conclude the impeachment process and Lukashenko agreed to a purely consultative referendum.

Nevertheless, Lukashenko only used the negotiations and the agreement to ease the societal tension, bemuse his rivals and mobilise his resources. He managed to hold a referendum, which returned a favourable result (the presidential draft of the Constitution was supported by 70 per cent of the society) using direct forged ballot papers and manipulation in order to quickly implement the new Constitution.

A new system of power was introduced in the country, but in addition, the new Constitution set Lukashenko's presidential term of office anew and the next elections were set not for

1999, but 2001.

The entry into force of this “New Constitution” did not meet with much public opposition, the majority of whom were either favourable to the idea of a “strong fist” or distanced themselves from politics, and remained passive and focused on everyday survival.

The 1996 referendum can be seen as an anti-constitutional battering-ram, engineered by Lukashenko. From the formal point of view, after 1996, all his actions and decisions of political bodies are simply illegal.

The implementation of the referendum result completed the first stage of the introduction of an authoritarian system of rule in Belarus, with power consolidated in the hands of Lukashenko. The second stage encompassed the institutionalisation of the system. On the one hand, institutions which legitimized and stabilised the authoritarian system were either created and strengthened. On the other hand, political and societal institutions that could destabilise or challenge the rule of Lukashenko were destroyed. Political opponents of the regime were physically liquidated.

Institutionalisation of the authoritarian state and society

The institutionalisation of the authoritarian system lasted from 1996 to 2004. Direct presidential rule was introduced in the country; presidential decrees and edicts gained legal status and did not require the support of the National Assembly (formerly the Supreme Council), which became a purely formal body with no influence on political processes in the country. Lukashenko could nominate the heads of municipal and regional executive committees, thus limiting the autonomy of local governments. This is how a strong, centralised presidential pillar was created, which played a key role in the fight against the opposition and interference in elections so that they bring expected results. The institutionalisation of the authoritarian system was also ensured by the loyalty and mobilisation of the nomenklatura and was a key guarantee of the strength of the regime during times of crisis. This factor, along with the force used, played an important role in keeping Lukashenko in power in 2020.

Another element of authoritarian institutionalisation included the absolute subordination of the judiciary and its transformation into a mechanism facilitating political repression, as well as the creation of quasi-civic structures and organisations which are supposed to legitimise the power and exert ideological influence on specific groups of the society.

The following quasi-civic organisations are worthy of note:

- The Belarusian organisation of scouts. It functions in primary and high schools, membership is mandatory (currently approximately 400,000 members), responsible for ideological and patriotic education.
- The Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM). Equivalent of Komsomol (The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League). Until 2020, it had 500,000 members, membership is mandatory. The organisation handles the ideological indoctrination of its members, supports election processes;
- a quasi-partisan organisation Belaya Rus, until 2020 it had around 100,000 members;
- the State Federation of Trade Unions in Belarus represents almost all employees of the public sector. Any independent structures and organisations in state institutions and enterprises (universities, factories, etc.) are forbidden.

A further step on the way to consolidate the system and extend control was the development and introduction of the so called "ideology of the Belarusian state", starting in 2001. This is how the ruling classes reacted to the presidential elections of that year in Belarus which despite not causing a political crisis in the country, were a huge challenge for Lukashenko. He understood that he needed deep structures and the wider political and ideological subordination of the system in order maintain the authoritarian system. Lukashenko quickly and smoothly drew on the political experiences of the Soviet Union and whilst it is difficult to provide a scientific definition of the ideology of the Belarusian state. Officially, researchers explain the concept in the following way:

"The ideology of the Belarusian state is a set of ideas and ideals which reflect the nationalist-historic traditions and values of the Belarusian nation, and define the basic objectives of the development of contemporary Belarusian society. The state ideology was developed to support the stable social, economic and spiritual development of the Republic of Belarus and to foster social harmony."

Beyond a set of theories and historical references, the state ideology has one basic idea: a political system built by Lukashenko is the main condition for a stable existence of citizens. For almost 20 years, the ruling class has tried to convince Belarusians that without Lukashenko, their country would cease to exist.

The ideology of the Belarusian state was introduced to curricula at universities and other educational facilities, and the ideological pillar became yet another tool of political control, not only in administration and management, but in all state structures, including state enterprises. Of course, today it is quite difficult to force people to accept the ideological message uncritically, but the main objective of the "ideological practices" was to enforce absolute obedience and impeccable performance of even the most absurd tasks.

Despite the crisis in 2020, it cannot be said that the activity of pro-government, quasi-civic organisations, state ideology and propaganda have failed. Because of societal atomisation, lack of group and professional solidarity, and civic passivity, the protests and strikes of 2020 did not reach a national scale and the system did not collapse, despite strong political damage. Without the dedication and loyalty of the people who serve the regime in the capital city and other parts of the country (there are thousands of them), it would not be possible today for Lukashenko to conduct his politics of terror and purges as does.

Propaganda, ideological manipulation and administrative control have made systemic repression of the opposition possible. There is a broad apparatus of force (amounting to over 200,000 people) which makes it possible to conduct political repressions, including: the State Security Committee, Ministry of Internal Affairs, OMON – special militia forces, Main Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on Combating Organised Crime and Corruption (HUBAZiK), the Almas special anti-terrorist units, internal army and Security Forces of the President. The coercive apparatus is particularly involved in physical stifling of opponents, whilst the Investigative Committee, the Prosecutor's Office and courts provide a "legal basis" for these repressions. In 2020, the Ministry of Defence involved the special forces even more in its policy of terror. In the most difficult periods, Lukashenko used brutal political persecution methods, first homicides and now political processes.

In 1999, at Lukashenko's order, key opponents were murdered: Viktar Hanchar (in the past Lukashenko's ally, but as chairman of the central Electoral Committee from 1996, one of the initiators of impeachment), Anatol Krasouski (businessman, supporter of Hanchar), Yury Zakharanka (a former Lukashenko supporter, and from 1996 the Minister of Internal Affairs). The plan to capture and kill the politicians was directly implemented by the soldiers from the Special Rapid Response Unit (SOBR) and the anti-terror group Almaz, headed by SOBR's chief, Dmitri Pavlutschenko.

Mystery also surrounds the death of Hienadz Karpienka in 1999 (heart attack), a scientist, MP, and one of the main political opponents of Lukashenko at the time.

From the 1990s until the beginning of 2000, the Belarusian judiciary was dramatically transformed, becoming one of the main instruments of political repression in the country. In Belarus, the law does not protect the citizen against abuses of the state, especially in political matters. Indeed, the law and the whole judicial system have been incorporated into the authoritarian regime.

The first reforms started after presidential elections in 2001.

As a rule, repressions and the intensification of the authoritarian rule followed each election. The law and the judicial system were becoming more and more oppressive; those who turned their backs on Lukashenko and started acting against him had expect severe reprisals. For Lukashenko, it was treason from the people who supposedly owed their careers to him. Show trials of disobedient high-ranking representatives were supposed to force other officials to remain fully loyal and subordinate.

Mikhail Chigir, the former Prime Minister, who left the office and joined the opposition after the constitutional changes in 1996, was arrested in 1999 and convicted in 2001. On 16 May 1999, Chigir was on a list of presidential candidates (under the 1994 Constitution, elections should have taken place in 1999) and the elections were organised by Victar Hanchar.

In 1999, the trial of the former Minister of Agriculture, Sergei Lavonau, took place. He was accused of corruption and subsequently sentenced to four years in prison. This was a show trial against a political opponent, a previous member of the ruling class, in order to force people to remain loyal to Lukashenko. Similar activities became the bread and butter of Lukashenko's domestic policy. Whenever a person close to him (a politician or a businessperson) started working contrary to the interests or expectations of the head of the state, they would inevitably face retaliatory actions. One of the most telling examples is the businessman Yury Chyzh. For years, he was friendly with Lukashenko, but in 2016, he was arrested by KGB and his business was destroyed. One of the theories of why it happened is that he tried to divert capital out of Belarus. Chyzh was arrested again in October 2021.

At the turn of the millennium, the following political activists were caught in the judicial persecution machine: Andredi Klimau, Mikhail Marynich, Mikola Statkevich and Paval Sieviaryniec. In subsequent years, the number of political prisoners dramatically increased, in part because the Belarusian Criminal and Civil Code became more and more politicised. When there was social protest against the system, it not only led to more brutal repressions, but also resulted in a narrowed space of action and a further deterioration in the functioning of society

2006 marked a breakthrough when the presidential elections were taking place, which led to mass protests and fighting in the streets of Minsk. During the presidential campaign and events for the Day of Freedom (on 25 March 1918, independence was declared for the Belarusian Democratic Republic, the date not recognised by Lukashenko), around one thousand people were arrested and convicted, with many were beaten by the police. In addition, over 300 students were expelled from university.

Alyaksandr Kazulin, a former rector of the Belarusian State University, who was a candidate

in these elections, was also detained and later sentenced to five years in prison.

The same year, amendments were introduced to the Criminal Code with the aim of fully paralysing civic and political organisations which were a potential threat to the system, including the following articles:

- Art. 193.1 "Preparing the operation of a non-registered civic or religious organisation or foundation." Punishment for the breach of the article is 6 months to 3 years in prison.
- Art. 239 "Preparing people to participate in riots and financing such actions". Punishment for the breach of the article is between 6 months and 3 years in prison.
- Art. 361 "Calling to take over state power", punishment between 6 month and 3 years in prison.
- Art. 369.1 "Discrediting the Republic of Belarus, divulging untrue information about the political, economic, social, military and international situation of the Republic of Belarus, information compromising the Republic of Belarus or its bodies, to other states." Punishment is between 6 month and 2 years in prison.

All of these were intended to increase psychological and political pressure in the country, but were mainly targeted at the Belarusian opposition.

In 2006, a small number of people were sentenced under Art. 193 (1) ("Operations of unregistered organisations"), including the leader of the Young Front youth opposition movement, Dmitry Dashkevich, who was sentenced to 18 months in prison.

During presidential elections in 2010, the situation was the same. Attempts at democratic changes in the political system of Belarus resulted in mass repressions. On the day of the election and afterwards, over 700 people were arrested, including almost all opposition candidates, who were detained and beaten. Criminal investigations were initiated against 38 people, including 5 candidates. After this, Belarusian society entered a period of heightened political terror, which lasted until 2014, when events in Ukraine changed Aleksandr Lukashenko's attitude towards the West and modified the internal policy of the Belarusian authorities.

However, neither "dialogue with the West", nor the internal thaw changed the internal structure of the political system and nature of Lukashenko's politics. The system remained strict and repressive, and Lukashenko's actions brutal. This was visible during the crisis caused by the so-called Lukashenko's decree number three – the "Decree on preventing the abuse of social aid".

As a result of repressions and gradual erasure of public activity, the Belarusian opposition was no longer a threat for the authorities. The systemic crisis in political organisations and their dramatic degradation made it possible for the authorities to effectively use them for their own purposes. This is exactly what happened during presidential elections in 2015 and 2020, when opposition parties and organisations organised “primary elections”. This initiative was a show of a complete helplessness of the Belarusian opposition, and to some extent, its political death.

On the other hand, the illusion of democratisation and of broadening the space for civic activism led some part of society to believe that there was a chance for a political change. These expectations increased when, unexpectedly, new political players entered the scene: Viktar Babaryka, Sergei Tikhanovsky and Valery Tsepkalo.

Militarisation of the political system and introduction of (neo)totalitarian control mechanisms

In 2020, Belarusians’ enthusiasm and hopes clashed with a well organised and functional system, as well as the iron political will of a dictator who wanted to crush protests and the budding revolution at all costs.

Because of a political crisis, weakening support and lack of legitimacy, Lukashenko spread political terror and organised a large-scale purge of the state apparatus. Consequently, within a year, the political system has changed from neo-authoritarian to neo-totalitarian, based on force, wide-scale repressions, terror and strict political and ideological control of all spheres of public life, as well as almost complete liquidation of informational and political autonomy in the country. Typically, there is no targeted, physical extermination of ideological opponents and no political re-education of individuals, but such a system is now slowly taking root in Belarus.

It must be underlined that there are things that you can be done in Belarus. Belarusians can participate in selected cultural events, they have access to world films, literature and music. They can also move freely – as long as their choices are not political. Individualisation can be compared with societal atomisation, which means that an individual is only supposed to be engaged in their own matters, not politics. After many years, this policy has brought fruit.

The physical extermination of “hostile” elements has been replaced by enforced emigration due to repression towards those politically active in the protests in 2020. According to various estimates, during the year after the elections, over 100,000 people left the country.

And all that despite presidential restriction of travel abroad.

By the same token, Lukashenko's regime has been quite effective in eliminating the most active people who could destabilise the system even more. Emigration is thus a direct consequence of the political terror in the country.

During the six months after the elections in Belarus, 30,000 people were detained and in October 2021, there were over 880 political prisoners in Belarus. Hunts and arrests continue until today. Special forces continue to operate, and in September 2021, the KGB shot Andrey Zelcer, who opposed electoral fraud, during an assault on his apartment. One of the assailants died in the attack as well.

In all totalitarian systems, terror is directed against information and an ideology. It is not only protest participants who are subject to repressions, but also providers of alternative news sources, who spread information (especially information that the authorities consider extremist), or criticise the authorities and special forces on social media. For example, immediately after the killing of Adrey Zelcer, 136 people were detained for commenting the incident and criticising the KGB's activities. As of 28 October 2021, 218 Belarusian profiles and chats on Telegram were classified as extremist.

It is in this way that the authorities want to destroy the social communication network and paralyse the channels of rapid information flow in Belarus. At the same time, independent electronic media are blocked and, to a greater or lesser extent, access to news websites hosted abroad is also limited.

In the period since 2020, the structure and nature of the political order have transformed significantly. The role of commandos in key political and administrative decision-making processes has increased. Former heads of state power institutions were nominated to the leading positions in the Brest, Grodno and Minsk regions. The Supreme Council was granted supra-constitutional powers, and has, in fact, become the shadow cabinet. Senior positions at universities are also gradually being taken by security forces in order to neutralize any signs of discontent. For example, a former head of the "Alfa" KGB special unit, General Oleg Tchernyshev was appointed the deputy chairman of the Bureau of the National Science Academy. Such processes are indicative of the creation of a new ruling class.

It also needs to be noted that the Lukashenko regime, as a typical totalitarian system, has launched a broad attack on the public intellectual sphere. It is hard to say whether this is an attempt to wipe out any critical reflection or foster intellectual mediocrity in the society. What is certain, however, is that the authorities want to destroy any sources of alternative

views, and crush intellectual elites who might have the potential to build a strong spiritual foundation for any changes. This is why Belarusian intellectuals, writers, analysts and publicists continue to be forced abroad or else end up in prison (the analyst Valeria Kostyukova and philosopher Uladzimir Mackievič).

Because of the legitimacy crisis and lack of social support, Lukashenko cancelled local elections in 2021 and parliamentary elections in 2022, a manipulation that sanctions the existing political order. But in times of a crisis, even formal, pseudo democratic institutions have become dangerous for the system.

In 2020-2021, there were purges in all state offices, schools, and universities, as well as in the ruling apparatus. Anyone showing a lack of loyalty towards the system was dismissed. At the same time, political and ideological control was introduced, and requirements for people who want to work in state offices have been toughened. Detailed data is now collected in order to ascertain the political leanings of specific persons. Thus has the political surveillance of citizens been broadened, as the authorities try to secure obedience and loyalty for the future.

The final structure of the system must be formalised by amendments to the Constitution. For Lukashenko, it will be crucial to be able to exercise power without participating in the presidential campaign in 2025. This is supposed to be possible by introducing the All-Belarusian People's Assembly to the constitutional order. The institution can be convened by the President or the highest leader in the country. It cannot be excluded that the "New Constitution" might specify a mechanism for the transfer of power between family members.

The new political order which has been shaped in Belarus in 2020-21 will remain intact as long as Lukashenko remains in power. The ruling class is perfectly aware of the fact that neither a national agreement nor a solution to the crisis is possible. Any loosening of the terror could lead to a political revolution. This means that terror politics and totalitarian trends will continue, which will continue to negatively affect the economic, cultural and social development of Belarus.

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