

## BELARUS: TRANSFORMATION FROM AUTHORITARIANISM TOWARDS SULTANISM

Uladzimir Rouda

### ABSTRACT

*The article consists of three parts. Firstly, the author considers the main concepts of the political regime in Belarus. Such an analysis includes the concepts of hybrid, authoritarian, and neo-patrimonial regimes. The second part deals with the reasons for Belarusian retreat from democratic standards, namely the Russian factor in Belarusian politics. President Vladimir Putin and Russian bureaucracy are afraid to lose Belarus in case Aliaksandr Lukashenka is removed from absolute power. The authoritarian regime in Russia has sponsored autocracies in the post-Soviet space, ensuring their dependence on Moscow. In the third part, the author analyses the transformation of the Belarusian regime, using the variables of the role of leadership, the state of pluralism, the role of ideology, the character of political mobilization, and the state of human rights. During a very short period of Lukashenka's rule, we have witnessed a constant tightening of dictatorship rule, which has led the Belarusian regime to the point of a hybrid authoritarian-sultanistic regime (2006) and almost classical sultanism (2010). Such regimes as Belarusian can only be changed through the mobilization of public protest from below. Besides, the Belarusian semi-sultanism is not sustainable.*

### SHORT THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that in political science there is no single opinion on the issue of political regime in Belarus. A considerable part of western experts continue to classify it as a hybrid regime (authoritarian-democratic), i.e. as a political system based on gross violations of human rights and restrictions of the opposition, however involving regular elections. Thus, authority here requires a regular expression of people's unconditional consent demonstrated through elections, though not free and fair.<sup>1</sup>

For example, according to the political scientists Steven Levitski and Lucan Way, the Belarusian regime under Lukashenka can be referred to as *competitive authoritarianism*. Despite considerable restrictions of the opposition rights, the present political system doesn't abandon all the elements of competitiveness and pluralism. The opponents of the regime are permitted to participate in non-free elections; the relative autonomy of the parliament and courts is

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Dr. ULADZIMIR ROUDA, European Humanities University in Vilnius, Department of Political Science, Tauro 12, LT-01114 Vilnius, Lithuania; tel: +370 526 39 650; e-mail: uladzimir.rouda@ehu.lt

In this article, the version of totalitarian regeneration of Lukashenka's regime is not analyzed due to the absence in Belarus of *ideocracy, partocracy, and mass repressions* – the distinctive features of totalitarianism as such; besides, the hypothesis about the formation of the liberal democratic system in Belarus is not formulated as there is no empirical evidence in its favour. See: *Freedom House* reports, beginning from 1996.

preserved, although their real power is reduced as compared with that of the executives; there are influential independent media, although the journalists that work there are subjected to a constant harsh persecution by the government (Levitski and Way 2002: 51–65).

According to Elena Korosteleva, the Belarusian regime can be named *demagogical democracy* in which people's leader ('demagog', as the ancient Athenians would call him – author's remark) dominates in the political sphere, as well as largely in the field of economics, using the methods of opposition persecution, favoritism, rent-seekers' support, control over the media and populist propaganda (Korosteleva 2003: 528, Korosteleva 2005: 139).

As we see, representatives of the hybrid regime theory rely mostly on the ideas of democracy formulated by the economist and political scientist Joseph Schumpeter, his minimalist approach to the understanding of the essence of democracy. He has claimed that elections play the main role in the democratic process, and political regimes should be differentiated according to the degree of their proximity to the criteria of free and fair elections on the one hand and the level of their competitiveness on the other hand. However, Schumpeter's approach has been subjected to cogent criticism, and it would be doubtful to take it as a research paradigm of hybrid regime theory for the present time (Schumpeter 1976).

Applying the theory of hybrid regimes in the form borrowed from Schumpeter to the analysis of the current political process in Belarus rather takes us away from its understanding than helps to reach the essence of things.<sup>2</sup> When the head of state first of all monopolizes the political resources, the electoral process cannot be defined as elections, even under reservations that they are far from criteria of being free and fair (such a situation has existed in Belarus since 1996). In the Republic of Belarus, the autonomies of the parliament, courts and local authorities were eliminated long ago. The main mass media are under the control of the government. The Internet influences the political choice of no more than 10% of all the citizens, according to the data from the Independent Institute for Social-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS 2010).

The competitiveness of political parties is exposed to a notable transformation. It is basically allowed, but on condition that the winner is known in advance. Except Lukashenka, nine alternative candidates stood for the presidency in the 2010 elections, eight of whom represented different opposition parties. But Lukashenka initially had a great advantage at the start, having at his disposal the state property (75–80%), budgetary funds, state broadcasting companies, a huge army of officials, militia, KGB, military forces, which had a great influence on the result.

Unlike other post-communist states, Belarus for more than ten years has been doing without in-depth market reforms. This situation has created unprecedented in contemporary Europe

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<sup>2</sup> As David Held pointed out, "Schumpeter's case for democracy can support, at best, only minimum political involvement: that involvement which could be considered sufficient to legitimate the right of competing political elites to rule". See: Held, David, 1996. *Models of Democracy*. Stanford: University Press, p.182. For more details about democratic elitism in Eastern Europe, see: Matonyte, Irmira, 2007 pp. 307–326. [http://www.lka.lt/EasyAdmin/sys/files/STRATEGINE\\_APZV\\_2007\\_anglu.pdf](http://www.lka.lt/EasyAdmin/sys/files/STRATEGINE_APZV_2007_anglu.pdf)

I share the rather skeptical point of view on the hybrid regime concept proposed by Leonardo Morlino who has stressed that "there is no good definition of such an institution arrangement", "there are no actually sets of stabilized political institutions that can be labeled in this way", most of concepts are not "disentangled between the cases of proper hybrid regimes and cases of transitional phases". See: Morlino, Leonardo, 2009. Are there Hybrid Regimes? Or are they just an Optical Illusion? *European Political Science Review*, 1(2), p. 273.

dependence of Belarusian people on the government: 55–60% of the employed population in 1995–2007 worked in state enterprises and institutions (World Bank 2005). The situation in this field has not changed over the last three years. In addition, a small private sector in the economy of Belarus has also been under tight state control. All this has an extremely negative effect on the development of non-governmental organizations, political parties and free mass media. The economic dependence of people on the government makes them quite restrained in their criticism of authorities and support of political opposition (Trantidis 2007).

However, even such concentration of resources in the hands of one person didn't prove to be sufficient. According to IISEPS, 58% of the voters (51% of the citizens) in the 2010 elections voted for Lukashenka. Thus, he won the presidential election again (which had been predicted by all the election polls of the institution) and basically could do without "redistribution" of almost 1,350,000 votes and mass repressions.<sup>3</sup> He had also to take strict measures to disperse a peaceful opposition protest rally on the election day and to arrest the most active opposition candidates so as to escape fair competition with some of them. The unique feature of this election campaign was not just the unprecedented "redistribution" of votes in favour of Lukashenka, committed by his orders, but also the harsh punishment inflicted upon the part of Belarusian opposition that participated most actively in the peaceful struggle for power. It wasn't instigated by the opponents of the regime and cannot be explained logically.

As the concept of hybrid regimes originating from Schumpeter's ideas allowed to carry out a typology of political systems based on only two criteria – elections and competitiveness – ignoring all the other as insignificant, Korosteleva decided to improve this model by adding monopolization in hands of one "national leader" of all the important political, economic, information, administrative resources as well as populist propaganda (Korosteleva 2005).

But in this case the question arises: what does it have to do with democracy? After all, the characteristics selected by the author are the attributes of an authoritarian regime. Then, how do they coexist with the concept of democracy, even if weak and vicious one (the power of a demagogue over the populace)? The transfer of this concept into the modern era is rather doubtful. The direct democracy of Athens and the contemporary representative governments are completely different types of political systems. But even if we admit the validity of such transfer, we will have to recognize the fact that for the past 17 years of Lukashenka's governance, the regime has transformed into a contemporary tyranny. After all, already Plato and Aristoteles noticed how quickly extreme democracy (populist, as we would say today) transforms into the power of tyrants. *Contemporary tyranny* is a known term in political science (Macridis and

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<sup>3</sup> IISEPS December 2010 Press-Release. Voice of the People – for the People. The major results of a national survey carried out by the above institution <<http://www.iiseps.org>>. In this case, Vitaly Silitski turned to be right. He has noticed in 2005 that the Belarusian authorities go ahead of the opposition all the time applying the so-called *preventive measures* that are designed to prevent the threat of democratic changes during elections. These measures include: "the removal from the political sphere even those of the opposition leaders who are unlikely to pose a major threat in the upcoming elections; pressure on the independent media, even if they are able to reach only small segments of the population; destruction of the civil society organisations, even if they represent the interests of only small urban subcultures; violations of electoral laws, even if the incumbent politician can win through fair elections". Silitski, Vitaly, 2005. Preempting democracy: The Case of Belarus. *Journal of Democracy*, 16(4), p. 84.

Burg, 1991: 126–130). Applying it as a characteristic of Lukashenka's regime is fully justified, at least on the ground that his power is based on anything but love of the people to the leader. Over the long years of Lukashenka's governance, a much more solid basis has formed – the basis expressed in the dependence of the vast majority of citizens on the state: from officials on the top of the pyramid of power to ordinary workers and employees tied by the terminable contract system with the management in its base.

Thus, the theory of hybrid regimes has lost all of its heuristic potential, if speaking about applying it to the analysis of political regime in Belarus. However, representatives of the classical authoritarian school cannot explain political processes going in Belarus any better. There are different typologies of authoritarian regimes. One of the most widespread approaches in comparative political studies is the classification of contemporary non-democratic political systems, based on the concept of the famous political scientist Adam Przeworski who suggested the use of two variables for the purpose: the rate of government's mobilization of support and the formal division of power. All the non-democratic regimes, therefore, can be classified into mobilizing and exclusive as well as into monolithic and divided (Przeworski 2000).

Totalitarian regimes (for instance, the former Soviet one) are distinguished by the high rate of mass mobilization and the monolithic nature of authority. Populist regimes are also targeted at the mobilization of the nation to provide government's support. The power structure here is more complicated than in the previous case: the executive organs dominate over the legislative, however, the latter being elected by citizens and having only a limited capacity to restrain the executive branch of power. Military regimes aren't oriented towards mobilization of mass support and represent structures with a high concentration of power in the hands of rulers. Finally, some nationalistic regimes are focused on creating privileged conditions for ethnic minorities and often have a fairly good separation of powers (for example, the former South Africa in apartheid times). According to one of reports of the Institute for Open Economy using Przeworski's approach for the analysis, the Belarusian regime should be characterized as populist, along with those of Brazil, Venezuela, and Ecuador. One can discover a formal separation of powers in them as well as government's orientation to getting support from people in exchange for promises of economic welfare and security (Institute for Open Economy 2004). We can in general agree with the Belarusian political regime being applied to the populist variety of authoritarian regimes. However, several important observations should be made.

Firstly, the political mobilization of totalitarian regimes and that of populist autocracies differ significantly in the degree of their intensity. The Belarusian regime, for example, is satisfied by just a passive support from the majority of people and doesn't require its active demonstration.

Secondly, Belarus is considerably behind the above-mentioned Latin American states in terms of the formal separation of powers. In Belarus, all the power is concentrated in the hands of the president; the parliament has no real possibilities to constrain the executive branch of power. As already mentioned above, in Belarus there is no independent judiciary. Here, the president has the right to appoint and dismiss the chairmen of Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, and Supreme Economic Court, appoint six judges of Constitutional Court (another six come from the Higher Chamber of Parliament) and other judges of the Republic.

It is worth reminding the whole debate on *electoral authoritarianism* (the term was proposed by Andreas Schedler in 2006). As Leonardo Morlino pointed out, “in fact, with this term Schedler refers to a specific model of authoritarianism – not to a hybrid regime – specifically characterized by electoral institutions and practice... Elections or the other forms of electoral participation that may exist, for instance, direct consultations through plebiscites, have no democratic significance and, above all, are not the expression of rights, freedom, and the genuine competition to be found in democratic regimes. They have a mainly symbolic, legitimating significance, an expression of consensus and support for the regime on the part of controlled, non-autonomous civil society” (Morlino 2009: 280).

The concept of *neo-patrimonialism* while studying the political regimes of post-Soviet countries, including Belarus, has proved to be much more productive. It is less abstract and focuses on the current political processes, real actors and relations among them, which specify the character and dynamics of political systems in the post-Soviet space. It is well known that this concept originates from the Max Weber theory and his distinguishing between the legal-rational bureaucratic power and the patrimonial power based on private appropriation of the most important state functions. Weber believed that the patrimonial way of exercising power could take place within a variety of political systems.

The contemporary political scientists Roth and Eisenstadt have adapted Weber’s ideas to the analysis of contemporary political and economic reality. Dieter Roth drew attention to the fact that in the new postcolonial states there are no important legal-rational elements inherent in a contemporary state and, even after the disappearance of traditional legitimacy, the reproduction of some earlier forms of administrative practices continues. Shmuel Eisenstadt connected neo-patrimonialism not only with personal governing and different forms of personalistic power, but also with the centre and periphery interaction within a political system.

Eisenstadt Shmuel concluded that neopatrimonial rule is based on three main principles: 1) the political centre is separated and independent of the political periphery, it concentrates political, economic and symbolic government resources making them inaccessible to other social groups; 2) the state is administered as a patrimony – of ruling groups – carriers of state power, which privatize various public functions and institutions, making them a source of their own private income; 3) ethnic, clan, regional and family relations do not disappear, but are reproduced in contemporary political and economic relationships (Eisenstadt 1978). Neopatrimonial systems are also very closely connected with the patron–client dependence pervading society.

The political scientist Alexander Fisun successfully applied neopatrimonial theory to the analysis of the post-Soviet political reality.

“Successful democratization...in Western Europe and Latin America generally took place only after the processes of rational bureaucracy and nation-building. Thus, the successful Third Wave transitions were preceded at first by the long period of oligarchic democracy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then – by the processes of authoritarian development in 1920–1930. Quite the contrary, in most of the post-Soviet states, democratization didn’t precede the complicated and dramatic processes of rational-bureaucratic state modernization and national consolidation... This led to the fact that after the Soviet Union disintegration, inverse trajectories

of the post-Soviet political development in most cases didn't result in democracy formation but in the establishment of a neopatrimonial rule system... The main characteristics of the neopatrimonial model in post-Soviet conditions are: the formation of a new class – *rent-seeking political businessmen* – who are using political opportunities of power and property fusion in order to achieve their economic goals; the private – to one degree or another – use of state administrative resources, force and fiscal functions of the state in the first place, which are mainly used to suppress political opposition and eliminate economic competitors; the key role of patron–client relationships in structuring the political-economic process.

In this connection, the processes of perestroika and the collapse of communism... should be regarded, on the one hand, as a special, completely new stage of rationalization related with transition to new, democratic methods of legitimization and formal establishment of legal-bureaucratic forms of power, on the other hand – as a process of direct patrimonial appropriation by ruling elites (nomenclature) of the second and the third echelons and by regional sub-elites of the state control machine. Democratization and economic reforms of the 1990s have modernized and strengthened the mechanisms of the administrative and political market, as well as client resources exchange among different segments of the centre and periphery, which transformed the elements of the patrimonial rule of semi-traditional type existing in the depths of the Soviet regime into a system of renewed, modernized neopatrimonialism... This transformation has become an important prerequisite to the formation of the 'political capitalism' system (according for Weber; according to modern terminology – '*crony capitalism*', based on a more or less patrimonial state, society and economy" (Fisun 2007).

What does this have to do with the political processes in the Republic of Belarus? The low level of national identity here resulted in serious problems with the national state formation. Provincialism prevailing in the centre of the nomenclature has led to its defeat in political confrontation with the populist leader, the regional elite representative, who quickly learned to use the state machine as his own property to make sure it meets the political and economic interests of the new ruling class under his control.

In this connection, Matsuzato made an interesting observation: "If Russian, Ukrainian and even Central Asian political regimes have demonstrated a certain level of pluralistic competitiveness between the clans, the Belarusian clan policy can be defined as monopolistic... Lukashenka facilitates the development of his own clan and his own electoral machine, preventing all the other competitive elite fractions from their rise to power. Lukashenka has succeeded in suppression of any significant development of all the elite clans – parliamentary, bureaucratic, financial-oligarchical, industrial or regional. For this purpose, Lukashenka has always appealed to masses, trying to cause anti-elite tendencies and attack elites both from above and from below. Lukashenka's monopolistic clan policy has been justified in creating a populist image of politics that involves only two actors: the leader and the people" (Matsuzato 2004: 237).

In Fisun's opinion, all the post-Soviet political systems can be classified according to the balance of power between neopatrimonial bureaucracy, political and rent-seeking businessmen and heads of states controlling the use of military forces. "In case when a head of state establishes personalistic control over the politics and business with the help of both semi-

traditional and contemporary incentives and rewards, we can speak about the formation of *sultanistic regimes* (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Belarus). In those countries, where a 'state capture' by rent-seeking economic players in alliance with neopatrimonial bureaucracy occurred, *oligarchic-patrimonial regimes* have formed (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia)" (Fisun 2007).

A. Fisun has also defined the most important tendencies of neopatrimonial development in the post-Soviet world. The first tendency is 'political rationalization'. It involves oligarchic systems and some of the most enlightened sultanistic states. Its essence is transformation aimed at an efficient response to the demands of different interest groups. In some countries, there is a need for a weak president; the role of parliaments in the political system increases and seeks to be transparent and neutral. The so-called colour revolutions in Georgia and the Ukraine are the culmination of this strategy.

In response to this, neopatrimonial bureaucracy, using force resources controlled by the head of a state, exercises 'power rationalization'. It is connected with an attempt to put under control or eliminate all the strengthening independent power centers: oligarchic interest groups, political parties, the mass media, the parliament, non-governmental organizations, cultural and regional elites. Almost everywhere in the post-Soviet space, the bureaucratic return to power of the 2000s replaced the oligarchic turn of the 1990s. Successful power rationalization is a form of bureaucratic revolution from above, which also leads to the political regime transformation in some kind of *bureaucratic neo-patrimonialism*. Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan develop in this direction (Fisun 2007).

## THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

The Presidential Elections 2010 have only aggravated the situation. All talks about the possible economic and political liberalization were empty promises of Belarusian authorities, addressed to the West. The Belarusian foreign policy vector has yet again spun in the direction of the Russian Federation while it provided economic, diplomatic and political support to the sultanistic regime in Belarus. The stability of the regime in the most western republic of the former Soviet Union can be explained solely by external factors. Neopatrimonial entrepreneurs, oriented to rent extraction, are closely related to A. Lukashenka's monopoly clan (the so-called family). This clan is used to ensure their excess profits thanks to the special relationships with Russia. Its members do not want and cannot change anything in this relationship for fear of competition. The Russian Federation, despite suffering enormous material losses, tolerates the Belarusian dictator and will support him as long as his 'force rationalization' won't be replaced by the 'political' one. Vladimir Putin and Russian bureaucracy are afraid to lose Belarus and Aliaksandr Lukashenka's removal from power. In addition, Russian rulers have invested tens of billions of dollars in the Belarusian regime and should, therefore, deal with no one but Lukashenka (Putin's meeting 2007).

It is well known that the Russian factor has played a significant role in all previous Belarusian elections. Except for the presidential election 1994, Russia has been giving political, economic, and financial support to only one candidate – Aliaxandr Lukashenka. This created a considerable



disbalance of power in Belarus in favour of one political figure who has used this support for building one of the most severe autocratic regimes in Europe. It seemed that the presidential elections last year had to be different. Indeed, since the last summer, a real propaganda war broke between the leaderships of the two countries. However, after negotiations between presidents Medvedev and Lukashenka in the Kremlin on December 9, 2010, everything returned back to normal, i.e. to the exclusive Russian support of the current Belarusian head of state (Kalinkina 2010, Suzdaltsev 2010).

That is why it is impossible to agree with the opinion of Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu and Andrey Sannikau that Russia will not deal with Lukashenka after the elections.<sup>4</sup> There is an authoritarian regime in Russia that has sponsored and continues sponsoring autocracies in the post-Soviet space, ensuring their dependence on Moscow. Certainly, the energy monopolies connected with the European and American capital and having at the moment a serious impact on the Russian presidential administration, are not interested in the further maintenance of the Belarusian economic model and keeping the power in the hands of the last Soviet dictator in one of the former USSR republics. But the course on 'marketization' of relationships between the two states is being tacitly disputed by the Russian military-industrial complex which would like to continue sponsoring the present Belarusian head of state. The point is that Lukashenka over the years of following the 'oil-for kisses' policy has formed himself an image of the only one reliable protector of Russian interests in the western part of the former Soviet Union. It turned out that the anti-Lukashenka trend in the official Kremlin position was of temporary nature, and in the end Putin decided to bet on the maintainance of Lukashenka's power in Belarus, imposing a number of unfavourable economic agreements.

The fourth Lukashenka's term – as the Russian leadership sees it – is an intermediate step that should lead not to the "third" level of integration (according to the political scientist Andrei Suzdaltsev – "single economic space" developed on the ground of the Customs Union between the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, and Belarus), but immediately to the "fourth" level of integration (incorporation of state). The Russian leadership in the person of Putin and Medvedev are the guarantors of "historic agreements" observance by the Belarusian president (Suzdaltsev 2010).

In general, thanks to the decision of Russian leaders, approximately USD 13 billions will be allocated to the dictatorial regime in Belarus. Of them, USD 6 bill will make loans for the nuclear power plant building, USD 2 bill of a possible loan through the EurAsEC Anti-crisis Fund, plus USD 1 bill – a loan from the Russian government. And finally, USD 4,3 bill are oil subsidies. This is how the Russian 'carrot' looks like in dollar terms. In addition to the economic 'carrot', we have to take the political one: the recognition of the elections 2010 in Belarus by president Medvedev as well as the diplomatic one: the Russian Foreign Ministry criticism of the EU sanctions imposed against the Belarusian leadership, under the pretext that they hinder the development of international relations and contacts of the sovereign Belarusian state (Kalinouski 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> See: <<http://nekliaev.org/>>; Sannikau, Andrey, 2010. I Believe in the Victory. *Narodnaya Volia*, 20 September.



However, Lukashenka is not interested in the reformation of the state socialism system and large-scale privatization with the participation of the Russian capital. In principle, the year of yet another aggravation of contradictions between Belarus and Russia will be most probably 2012. Not only because the next Russian presidential election (the outcome of which is very important to the Belarusian leader) will take place then, but also because Belarus will have to pay a considerable part of its debt. Only within a year the Baltic Pipeline System-2 and the South Stream System will be completed, through which the bypassing Belarus part of gas transit and oil transit will go to the West. In other words, Russia will have the real means of pressure. 'Carrots' will be replaced by 'sticks', if Lukashenka doesn't demonstrate compliance and doesn't voluntarily go to the "fourth" level of integration.

### TRANSITION TO SULTANISM

Finally, let's analyze the changes that have happened to the political regime in Belarus, using the concept of Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan as the starting point. To answer the question what is the nature of the political regime in Belarus, we will try to use for our analysis such variables as the nature of leadership, the state of pluralism, the role of ideology, the character of political mobilization, and the state of human rights. Linz and Stepan don't use the last variable, but it can be found when studying works of other researchers specializing on the problem (Macridis and Burg 1991: 14). These variables were introduced in the mid-1990s to describe all the contemporary political regimes, the most important independent types of them being authoritarianism, totalitarianism, post-totalitarianism, sultanism, and democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996: 44–45).

The defined regime characteristics are understood as ideal types (according to Weber), encouraging the scientists engaged in comparative researches or case studies to seek in political reality both the types close to ideal and those that move away from it. This allows us to develop further the concepts of hybrid regimes that arise not only between democracy and authoritarianism, but also between different versions of non-democratic systems.

In the article published in the *Working Paper* of CDDRL at Stanford University in 2005 I stated: "The contemporary political system in the Republic of Belarus belongs, as it did before, to authoritarian types of regimes. But some trends and recent developments made it possible to examine its evolution towards the so-called 'sultanistic regimes'. In other words, it would be more correct to understand Lukashenka's rule as a hybrid of authoritarianism and sultanism than authoritarianism and democracy" (Rouda 2005). After elections 2010, on which Lukashenka was declared the winner by the Chief Electoral Commission with 79.67% of the votes (the voting results were fabricated while Lukashenka's main opponents had been sent to prison), the process of political regime transformation in Belarus was completed, and now Lukashenka's rule looks more like sultanism rather than authoritarianism.

According to Linz and Stepan, a considerable group of states, such as Haiti under the Duvaliers, the Dominican Republic under Trujillo, the Central African Republic under Bokassa, the Philippines under Marcos, Iran under Shah, Romania under Ceausescu, North Korea under Kim Il Sung, all have had strong tendencies toward sultanism. Steven Eke and Taras Kuzio were

among the first Western researchers that attributed Lukashenka's regime in Belarus after 1996 to sultanistic dictatorships (Eke and Kuzio 2000).

A comparison of the ideal characteristics of authoritarianism and sultanism, suggested by Linz and Stepan, with the most important features of Belarusian political regime in the spheres of political leadership, pluralism, ideology, mobilization and human rights, allows us to agree with the opinion of Eke and Kusio. "Political regime in Belarus should be attributed to *personal authoritarian dictatorships* with some elements of *sultanism*, with all political functions monopolized by the president; the fusion of legislative, executive, and judicial powers has been established; there is a space for limited economic and social pluralism, but political pluralism and the competitive party system have almost totally disappeared. The regime is not interested in mass mobilization of support and ideological control of public life; instead, it stimulates the reproduction of antidemocratic and anti-western mentality in society. Besides, the prosecution of people for their political beliefs is widely practiced, but there is yet no mass campaign of political repression" (Eke and Kuzio 2000: 525).

There have been significant shifts to sultanism in Belarus in the past decade. It is well known that on October 17, 2004 Lukashenka conducted the so-called parliamentary elections and a referendum on eliminating the constitutional two-term limit on the presidency for one person. To win the referendum, Lukashenka needed at least 50% of Belarusian eligible voters to say 'yes' to his desire to ballot in 2006 when his second term ended. After the referendum, the Chief Electoral Commission reported that 89% of Belarusian voters took part in the plebiscite and some 86% of them, or 77% of eligible voters in the country, voted in favour of Lukashenka. At the same time, an exit poll held in Belarus by the Gallup Service during the early voting and on the day of the referendum found out that only about 48% of all eligible voters in the country said 'yes' at the referendum (Maksymiuk 2004: 3). Through the referendum 2004, Lukashenka bestowed upon himself the right to be president-for-life of Belarus.

Dynastic tendencies – one more important feature of sultanism – hadn't appeared in Belarus until year 2007, when unexpectedly for many, the president nominated his own elder son Victor for the post of the Council of Security member, not taking into account the fact that the latter had no formal grounds for entering this elite club of the country. He had worked as a regular president's advisor before that promotion.

According to Linz and Stepan, a sultanistic regime is characterized by "highly personalized and arbitrary leadership... A sultanistic leader simply demands unconditional administrative compliance, for the official loyalty to his office is not an impersonal commitment to impersonal tasks that define the extent and content of his office, but rather a servant's loyalty based on strictly personal relationships with the ruler and an obligation that in principle permits no limitation" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 45, 52–54).

The latter characteristics of sultanistic leadership were demonstrated strikingly by Belarusian bureaucrats during the December 2010 voting. Orders from the president's administration to forge the presidential elections were dutifully passed down the executive vertical. The officials realized that their performance in carrying out the orders would be closely monitored and severely judged, with terrible personal consequences. So, out of fear of losing their posts, the

officials were willing to take extreme measures to do what was expected by the leader. Many resorted to criminal acts in falsifying the election results. This statement applies not only to the members of election commissions at all levels, who have been violating the law for a long time by falsifying the election results, but also to the representatives of the judiciary, passing politically engaged judgments (Kazakevich 2009). The latest political events only confirmed the sultanistic style of relationships between the Belarusian leader and his officials: they could be characterized as relationships between a master and his servants.

Influential positions on top of the administrative pyramid are occupied by Lukashenka's acquaintances as well as by representatives of the KGB, MIA and Presidential Security Service. After the presidential elections 2010, security forces (the so-called 'siloviki') have moved to the forefront, pushing representatives of the technocratic elite aside. This may explain the brutal suppression of the peaceful opposition protest rally in Minsk. All these are the attributes of the sultanistic leadership which has only strengthened since December 19, 2010.

Repressive actions carried out in the late spring–summer 2011 by the Belarusian authorities are difficult to explain. For example, as the political analyst Valery Karbalevich notes, "the number of participants of the 'silent protest' held every Wednesday in the social network Vkontakte.ru, detained by militia and military forces, is now close to one hundred. How to explain such violent actions of the authorities that are illegal in terms of lawfulness? After all, people are being arrested simply for the fact of being found at a square or walking in a street". Answering this question, the journalist and political scientist Viktor Martitovich points out that "the brutal repression is the only strategy of the authorities. If the authorities would not do that, then last Wednesday Minsk would have been transformed into a new Tahrir (the square in Cairo, where the main opposition rallies were held), as in Egypt" (Karbalevich 2011).

According to Linz and Stepan, "economic and social pluralism does not disappear but is subjected to an unpredictable and despotic intervention. No group or individual in civil society, political society, or the state is free from the sultan's exercise of despotic power. No rule of law, low institutionalization, high fusion of private and public" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 44). In Belarus, we can now see that the leader does not distinguish between his private wealth and that of the state. The state budget is viewed as a reservoir from which almost unlimited resources can be drawn for ambitious projects of personal glory; 75–80% of the property belongs to the state, i.e. to its leader. Lukashenko in Belarus (just like Trujillo in the Dominican Republic) has established an overwhelming control over the economy of the country. Such policy splits the political and the economic elites. Its upper level is represented by a narrowing stratum of bureaucracy, government and executive leaders of the Mogilev region origin – classmates, colleagues, and friends of Lukashenko. They have formed the main body of the so-called 'Mogilev clan' headed by the president who rules the country as a monopoly. They receive huge state subsidies and benefits and are interested in the maintenance of the status-quo.

The fusion of public and private spheres is aggravated by an almost total liquidation of political society in contemporary Belarus. In contrast to Russia, Kazakhstan or pre-revolutionary Ukraine, there is no 'party of power' in Belarus. The parliament isn't structured in accordance with the party fractions principle. Some of the registered 15 parties look like interest groups

rather than real political organizations. Opposition parties are very weak and split into eight organizations having very limited possibilities to work with the electorate. Their combined rating has never been higher than 20–25% since 1996 (IISEPS 2010). In fact, political opposition in Belarus has transformed by 2010 into a number of cultural and human rights' non-governmental organizations not engaged in the real political struggle with the dictatorship.

Qualitative changes in this sphere took place after the presidential election 2010. In an effort to get the western acknowledgement of his yet another self-appointment, Lukashenko's Administration and the Chief Election Committee engaged the opposition in an active electoral process participation, but not in the vote counting procedure before the election day. Thus, western observers had an illusion that Belarus was moving in the right direction to political pluralism. It was not, as there can be no pluralism for three months only. A huge inequality in the access to the basic recourses has been already described above. But after the elections the situation for the opposition has become just unbearable. It is not only the question of completely illegal criminal charges against the seven former candidates for the presidency, but also of a constant people's persecution for political reasons. Political processes in Minsk reminded many of those that took place in the 1930s–1950s in times of Stalin's dictatorship. Political processes make the sultanism of Lukashenka similar to the totalitarianism of Stalin. If we consider these models as ideal types, we can find not only differences but also similarities. That is, after the presidential election 2010, in terms of pluralism Belarusian society is a rather sultanistic than an authoritarian regime.

Linz and Stepan have stressed that there is a sharp contrast in the function and consequences of ideology between totalitarian and sultanistic regimes. "In a totalitarian regime, not only an elaborate and guiding ideology exists, but the ideology has the function of legitimating the regime, and rulers are often somewhat constrained by their own value system and ideology... In contrast, a sultanistic ruler characteristically has no elaborate and guiding ideology. There may be highly personalistic statements with pretensions of being an ideology, often named after the sultan, but this ideology is elaborated after the ruler has assumed power, is subject to extreme manipulation, and, most importantly, is not believed to be constraining on the ruler and is relevant only as long as he practices it" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 53). It seems that the state ideology introduced in Belarus in 2003 goes in accordance with the sultanistic rather than totalitarian model. The Belarusian leader has formulated principles of 'pseudo-ideology' of a purely personalized type. It differs from the established totalitarian ideologies by its distinctly provincial character. Actually, it is "not believed by staff, subjects, and the outside world".

In this ideology, an attempt is being made to synthesize separate concepts of the Marxist–Leninist theory, liberalism and conservatism (!). At the same time, modern liberalism is being criticized and accused of global expansion and "terrorism", and the Belarusian civic nationalism is considered to be a destructive system of ideas responsible for the USSR disintegration, and as "rousing national hatred"; it was announced to be almost identical to Nazism (Lukashenka 2003: 18–20).

Lukashenka doesn't see state ideology as some principles rising above the leader's power. Quite the opposite, he wants to use ideology as an instrument to solve several pragmatic tasks important for him, trying to prolong his rule maximally. First of all, he was going to make purges

in the state apparatus, educational system and the mass media to prevent the sabotage of the authority order to falsify the referendum on the prolongation of Lukashenka's term. Assisting the further split of the opposition into national and liberal parts, he tried to bring some opposition politicians over his point of view for the sake of preserving the 'national unity' under the 'sharpening external threat'. There is also another, more global, task: strengthening Lukashenka's 'charismatic' legitimacy by the ideological legitimacy of the system created by him, but it is the weakest point the in suggested concept.

From time to time, sultanistic regimes practice the "manipulative mobilization of a ceremonial type". The leaders enjoy arranging festivals, ceremonial holidays, referendums and elections by engaging the top-down vertical ruling structure, personally dependent on them, called 'vertical' in Belarus. However, they never allow formation of truly political parties for such matters. In some countries, leaders used mass organizations for such kinds of activities. Despite some political analysts' predictions, no party of a Russian pattern has yet appeared in Belarus (Kalinkina 2007). But, together with the Belarusian Republican Youth Union consisting of young people devoted to the leader, there is now the public union *Belaya Rus*, members of which are 'patriotic' adult citizens.

Sultanism and authoritarianism differ significantly in the way they use elections. Classical autocrats conduct non-free elections in order to obtain greater legitimacy for the regime in people's eyes. In sultanism, elections become a ritual intended to demonstrate the nation's unity around the Adored Leader. The last elections and referendums in Belarus served to demonstrate to the world and to Belarusian people that a certain boundary has been crossed. Whereas the previous elections followed the well-known dictum that "it doesn't matter how they vote, it matters who counts the votes", after the referendum 2004 Belarus has become a country in which it not only doesn't matter how they vote, but no one needs to bother to count, since the result is determined in advance by the leader. He, thus, has a right to declare to the world how he has again overwhelmingly defeated the opposition. Since all the subsequent elections didn't differ from the ideal model, the Belarusian regime in terms of political mobilization should be defined as sultanistic.

Only in the field of *human rights* Belarus is still situated between sultanism and classical authoritarian regimes. Political repressions against the opposition are not comparable with mass repression campaigns of totalitarianism or a systematic use of paramilitary forces by the leaders of classical sultanistic dictatorships like Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes in Haiti. However, Lukashenka has his own guard which he used in 1999 and 2000 when the well-known politicians – opponents of the Belarusian dictator – disappeared. According to many foreign and Belarusian political analysts, the terrorist attack in the Minsk subway on 11 April 2011 was also arranged by the paramilitary structures that serve Lukashenka. At least he personally benefited from the event greatly (O'Kalagan 2011, Paznyak 2011).

	MORE AUTHORITARIAN	MORE SULTANISTIC
1. Leadership		x
2. Pluralism		x
3. Ideology		x
4. Mobilization		x
5. Human rights	x	

FIGURE 1. Comparison of Belarusian political system with classical models of authoritarian and sultanistic regimes 2010

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, for a short period of Lukashenka's rule, we have witnessed a constant tightening of the dictatorial rule which led the Belarusian regime to the point of a hybrid authoritarian-sultanistic regime (2006) and almost classical sultanism (2010). This fact has far-reaching theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, it is impossible to reform such a regime from above. No country in the world with such a political system has been transformed with the help of reforms initiated by part of the political elite. Such regimes, including the Belarusian one, can only be changed through the mobilization of public protest from below. This means that the reasoning of some EU politicians concerning the liberalization of Lukashenka's regime has no scientific basis. Secondly, the Belarusian sultanism is not sustainable. Its relatively long existence can be explained rather by the external than by internal factors. The level of social and economic development has gone beyond the boundaries of the political system; this is becoming more and more evident to Belarusian citizens.

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