

Spontaneous Political Groups after the 2006 elections¹

Abstract

The subject of this article is to reveal the phenomenon of spontaneous groups which arose during the protests caused by the 2006 Presidential elections. The author tries to give a definition of the notion «spontaneous groups», to classify the groups according to their origin and internal structure and to specify the causes of their formation. There is also an attempt to outline near-term perspectives of spontaneous groups.

Key words: the 2006 elections, opposition, spontaneous groups, protests, resistance, network movement.

Introduction

Despite the fact that the 2006 Presidential campaign ended up with the opposition's overwhelming defeat, it became a certain starting point for the appearance of a number of new phenomena in Belarusian society. Firstly, the authorities successfully broke the psychological barrier, i.e. the President Alexander Lukashenka crossed the line determined by the «before-the-referendum» Constitution under which no person shall be **elected** to the **office** of the **President** more than twice. After March 19 2006, Belarus' political system began its new stage of development whose nature is still blurred. Secondly, the political opposition who failed to organize and control the protest actions after the election, once

more demonstrated their insufficient self-discipline and found themselves in the deepest crisis which is still going on. To find a due reference from the society, the oppositional parties must seek for new leaders and new methods of work, without which they may turn into dissident groups similar to those of the 1970's.

Owing to the 2006 electoral campaign Belarus has become known to the world. The representatives of democratic forces have been received on the highest level in Europe and the USA, which means the West is interested in our country's democratization. «The Belarusian question» has been discussed in the EU structures, Council of Europe, White House and even in the NATO Headquarters, which has never happened before. The 2006 election

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have become a milestone in the Russia-Belarus relations. Having finally understood the fruitlessness of the support of the Belarusian ruler and Belarusian economy in exchange for the integration rhetoric, the Russian officials resorted to more resolute actions against its western ally. According to the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, A. Lukashenko was delivered an ultimatum, i.e. either he speeds up real integration with Russia, or he loses his power in the country (Ultimatum... 2006). And later, the *Kommersant* wrote about V. Putin's decree to stop all financial sponsorship of Belarusian economy while the Russian monopolist Gazprom announced its increase of gas costs for Belarus in 2007 up to 200 USD for 1,000 cubic meters (Aleksandra Lukoshenko gotoviat... 2006). Analysts explain such behavior of Russia towards Belarus in different ways. However it is obvious that Russia has changed its policy toward Belarus.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned presidential campaign and its consequences have paved the way to a most interesting phenomenon: the appearance of a new generation of social activists who, if properly organized, have a real chance to turn into a powerful political force. This new phenomenon is quite unique because, unlike the previous campaigns aimed at mobilizing society, the new generation of activists was independent and did not join any center of Belarusian politics.

Viewing this new wave of social activists (spontaneous groups shaped on this wave) as one-of-a-kind of the latest political campaign, the author of this article puts the following objectives: to specify the reasons of spontaneous

groups' formation, to characterize their nature, to define their organizational forms and activities, to examine their evolution and to trace the impact of this phenomenon on the situation in Belarus in the future.

In the present paper «spontaneous groups» are understood as more or less stable associations of participants of the protest actions of March 19—25 2006 aimed at struggling against the present regime and who did not join any political party or organization. Of course, this definition does not pretend to be complete or absolute. Nevertheless, it reflects the essence of this phenomenon implicitly enough and therefore it can be used as a working definition which would be specified and expanded later. In his article, the author also uses such definitions as «self-organized groups», «communities of the new wave», «network communities», etc. However, all of them render the same phenomenon.

The main questions to be answered in this article are as follows: What were the reasons to the formation of the spontaneous groups? In what way can they influence the situation in the country?

«Maidan», «Freedom Day».

One of the reasons of the spontaneous groups' formation was the mobilization of the society on the Presidential elections eve. Here, a debt must be paid to the oppositional parties. They managed to form a coalition, to choose their joint presidential candidate and to carry out his campaign successfully. It took only a few months for Alexander Milinkevich to increase his rating from

1,5% to 26% (IISEPS, 2006). The Jeans Solidarity campaign also contributed to the mobilization, attracting the attention of part of the society to the Belarusian matters. At the same time, without any campaigns, society was not content with the present regime. A lot of people were waiting for changes (according to polls carried out by the IISEPS before the election, 40% expected changes in Belarus (IISEPS, 2006).) Under such conditions, the majority of those who were discontent with the political situation in the country supported Milinkevich as a representative of the democratic forces. However, some part of population refused to support both the President's course and the opposition's joint candidate.

Together with the electoral campaign of the two oppositional candidates, there was a wide campaign for Ukrainian-type non-violent «revolution» which was to take place after the elections as a protest against massive falsifications during of the Presidential election. Such ads succeeded among the most radical youth who, during several months before it had discussed its most appropriate name and color. White, orange and blue, as well as a combination of the national flag (white-red-white), were discussed. The proposed names included the Bluets', Jeans' and even Smart Phones' revolution. Numerous trips of the joint opposition's representatives to the West held out a hope for the democratic countries' help at the crucial moment and created an impression that there would be a real surprise for A. Lukashenko during the elections. The more the impression grew, the more disappointment people felt

because of the opposition's idleness in the crunch. Thus, the oppositional forces carried out a successful mobilizing campaign before the presidential election. However, they failed to organize protest actions against the election's falsifications and to contest their power rights. There was no situation of legitimacies' confrontation, without which no revolution is possible, i.e. the oppositional candidate did not declare his victory, but only demanded to re-count the votes (later, there was a question of repeat elections). The reasons for the opposition's inactivity which lead to their political impotence is not the issue of this article. It should be just said that the majority of the supporters of democratic changes were upset with the actions of the opposition and the joint candidate. This feeling was in the air as early as on March 19h, when in the evening they came to Kastychnickaja (rus. Oktyabrskaya = October) Square and heard neither clear-cut tasks of protest nor plans of actions; they saw that the oppositional leaders did not know what to do. This moment can be considered as the beginning of the first stage of the spontaneous groups' formation.

The Common people, who did not belong to any political or non-governmental structures, faced a dilemma: they came to the Square to support Milinkevich. However, the latter failed to organize them and to get into the saddle. Thus, the whole opposition lost its credibility. On the other hand, the situation demanded actions. The dilemma could be solved in several ways: a) people could get back to their usual way of life and watch the contour of things with the help of mass media; b)

they could leave the Square and help the democratic forces by participating in the Internet forums, distributing information among their relatives and friends; c) they could stay on the Square and keep fighting for their own rights under their own flag, but not the flag of Milinkevich or the opposition. In those conditions most people naturally chose the first two options. Nevertheless, there were those who stayed with the opposition, but with their own tasks. It was them who built the Belarusian «maidan».

From the very beginning, the so-called Tent Camp which appeared on Kastyrynickaja Square in Minsk, contradicted the opposition's plans. It was initiated by young people, some of whom belonged to parties, some of whom were non-partisan. The democratic opposition leaders (even though the majority of them were already in prison) did not expect this «maidan» to appear. They could not control it, but on the other hand, the «maidan» could be seemed as «an action» initiated by the political opposition. For a certain period of time, the Tent Camp became a concentrated area of protest in Belarus, a certain forge of new leaders. There was a paradoxical situation: the Tent Camp's defenders did not hope to force the authorities to make any concessions or to satisfy their demands. It was a manifestation of protest for the sake of protest itself, aimed at inspiring other Belarusians to struggle for their rights. The «maidan» was a result of disappointment in the politicians and protest against the regime. Nevertheless, there was the essence in the seemingly senseless «maidan»: a small group of brave

people on the Square became a symbol of the resistance and an example of valor and commitment which the oppositional leaders failed to demonstrate.

The Tent Camp's turning point was a quarrel of the two democratic leaders, Milinkevich and

Kazulin, and a final break of relations between their headquarters. There is no need to say that one can find a sane politician who would openly conflict with a partner at such a crucial moment. What happened on March 21st, cannot be explained rationally. The two oppositional candidates' quarrel at the maidan's high tide became the point of no return, when pro-opposition oriented part of the population stopped to regard the two politicians as the rebel leaders, and their actions on March 25th proved that these leaders did not work for the benefit of Belarus.

This fact had a massive impact on the «maidan» participants. After that they decided to stay on the Square for their own persuasions and ideals, not for the sake of Milinkevich or Kazulin. From that moment, the Tent Camp's participants acted autonomously, without any political structures and former political leaders, thus turning into a separate political force which the joint democrats must reckon with. The maidan's defenders and their adherents created the first «spontaneous group» with its inner organization and the leaders. This group included several components: a) unengaged students and users of the Live Journal (www.livejournal.com), the most numerous; b) members of youth organizations (Young Front, Enough!, Free Youth, Youth of the Belarusian People's Front); c) adults,

some of whom were members of oppositional parties; In total they made a group of 400-500 people who defended the «maidan». Around this first group, there also was a circle of its supporters, including friends, colleagues, fellow students, relatives and simple sympathizers, who took an active part in the life of the Tent Camp bringing food and warm clothes, distributing information about this protest action, etc. This group includes 1,000-1,500 people. Later, this group will turn into «revolutionaries» because of the authorities' harsh actions on March 24th, when the police started to eliminate the Tent Camp.

More than 300 defenders of Minsk «maidan» became political prisoners at once, while their relatives and colleagues, even if they had been against this action before, began to support them. At such moments, the family and friendly links are stronger than political opinions and social passiveness. The parents and friends of the arrested picketed Akrestsina (a Minsk-based jail) and brought parcels. They became the source of information about the events on the Square.

Finally, they got acquainted and created a community with the same mission i.e. to help the arrested and to tell the truth about the protest actions which was not known to the majority of the population.

The Tent Camp's liquidation had a number of positive results for the democratic movement and a further formation of new activists' wave. **Firstly**, the actions of the authorities prevented the «maidan» from turning into a farce, because as early as in the middle of the week it was obvious that the protest

wave was becoming lower and fewer and fewer people were taking part in it. **Secondly**, the crackdown scandalized the the proponents of the action including all pro-democracy oriented citizens, thus spurring their union and active behavior. **Thirdly**, there was a certain time gap between the actions on Kastyrynickaja Square and Freedom Day, which allowed to get ready to the following massive action. Fourthly, the Tent Camp's participants who were arrested for 15 days, had a chance to get know each other better and to plan their further joint activities.

However, the spontaneous groups' formation was spurred most of all by the events of March

On 25th, when the massive protest actions were ended up with a harsh crackdown and numerous trials. Belarusian society, which had already become disaccustomed to large-scale street actions, was not ready to such brutal actions of the police and the use of special means against weaponless people. Therefore, the independent Belarusian mass media literally bridled with anger. The most important communication medium for the events' eyewitnesses and the democratic forces' supporters became the Internet and the Live Journal network which unites 11,266 Belarusian users, not including blogs of the Diaspora representatives who also discuss the Belarusian topics.

The crackdown of the rally on Freedom Day had several very important consequences:

1. The authorities' unprecedentedly harsh actions spurred the process of an even larger-scale radicalization of pro-opposition oriented youth. After the

events of March 25th, a fear of repressions cut off a part of youth from participation in the opposition's actions, but at the same time it embittered even more some of those who were radicalized during the protest actions.

2. Massive arrests and tough sentence for the participants of street actions' became the Rubicon. The number of people arrested during 19-25 March 2006 varies. The Viasna (Spring) Human Rights Center says there were 686 persons arrested (A list of the arrested..., 2006). However, there are lots of those who were not counted. Other sources say there were 1,000 people, and this figure seems trustworthy. The absolute majority of these people had not participated actively before the Presidential elections in any political or social organizations, but after they had found out what the Belarusian penitentiary system was like, they became even more grounded in their desire to change the current regime in the country. Having gone through the trials and jails, the people youth got rid of fear and hardened. In this respect, the authorities presented a valuable gift to the opposition by raising «professional revolutionaries» who could have become «the gold fund» of political parties if the latter had known how to use it.

3. The events of the Freedom Day helped a lot of people to escape from some illusions and spurred them on to active actions. If before the Tent Camp's liquidation and the rally's crackdown, the participants of the actions had believed in «the authorities' weakness», «the regime's crisis» and «the inevitability of peaceful revolution », than after March 25th they had no longer any

illusions. The activists realized that they had to be ready for a long and serious work in order to attain their goals.

4. People lost trust in A. Milinkevich since he had failed to feel the people's mood during the rally on March 25th and asked everybody to go home. *Au contraire*, A. Kazulin demonstrated better leadership qualities and organized people for the actions which, however, were considered to be provocative.

5. The arrests on March 25th created an even wider circle of those who do not support the current regime, including relatives and friends of the arrested and political prisoners. During the events of March 19-25, there was a snowball effect which, provided that the opposition had organized well planned further actions, would have grown the critical mass and forced the authorities to start negotiations. However, as it had never happened, the protest mass remained alone and had to find their own forms of self-organization.

The beginning of the spontaneous groups' formation

After the force structures had dispersed the oppositional rally on March 25th, all independent mass media entered an active discussion of these events with the analysis of what had happened. The Belarusian Internet atmosphere could be described by two words — astonishment and indignation. Astonishment – because nobody could expect such harsh actions from the authorities, especially after the opposition was allowed to have a meeting on the capital's main square. Also no-

body could expect that police would use special means against the protesters. Astonishment was so powerful that for a certain period of time the Belarusian Internet was even silent, as if trying to digest this fact. After that, there was a reaction – the activists who escaped the prison, began to spread their information about the Freedom Day, organizing help to the arrested and discussing the strategy and tactics of their further struggle against the present regime in the country.

During the first week after the Freedom Day, the Internet was full of leaflets and manifestos, asking everybody to unite, go down to earth and fight against the regime, thus breaking the information blockade. It is necessary to note that during this presidential campaign, it was the first time when the Internet played such an important role in promoting the oppositional candidate and mobilizing voters, as well as in organizing the protest actions and informing about the events. In this respect a crucial part was played by Live Journal some communities of which functioned as www.maidan.org.ua during the Orange Revolution in Kyiv. After the events of March 19th–25th and during the spontaneous groups' formation, the Internet became still more important means of communication between activists (closed communities to share ideas, coordinate flash-mobs, etc).

At the same time, considering all pluses of the Internet communication, there is one big minus – low information security. Therefore, there were proposals to get united rather in real life than in the virtual space. The more so, as the protest participants began to

radicalize fast after the events of March 25th and their action-plans and their discussions were not supposed to be available to public. In the closed communities of Live Journal's, there were appeals to trace through the judges who condemned the participants and to beat them, to threaten the official mass media journalists who commented on the protest actions after the election, to use the black PR technologies, etc. At the same time, the Internet was full of rumors of the possible victims of the crackdown on the Freedom Day and Russia's *anschluss* of Belarus. All these things and the President Lukashenko's disappearance from TV screens for a rather long period of time created a very dangerous and unstable situation in the society which could explode due to any thoughtless action of the authorities or the opposition. Under such conditions, the first spontaneous groups were formed. During the first stage of their formation the group included a union of the Internet users. This category consisted of the participants of the opposition's actions, both those who had escaped from arrests and simple observers who had been inactive before, but who took part in the Internet forums and communities. The fact that they met in real life and realized that they were an alternative force capable of efficient actions was a very important factor stimulating the formation of new groups.

It is difficult to specify the number of such groups because some of them were temporal, others consolidated, still others were quite amorphous. As a rule, such groups participated in certain forums and Internet communities

and had a closed email distribution database, with the help of which they shared their encrypted messages. These groups aimed to work out a plan of actions, to fight against the existing regime and to distribute the information about the protest actions during March 19th-25th. At the same time, there was a process of forming a series of closed communities in the Live Journal oriented on discussing the situation in the country. Some open communities became «closed». Everybody's craze was to study the principles and means of conspiracy and ways of encrypting information. It is thought that this fact could be an obstacle in creating a mass alternative movement. It is clear why it was the Internet users who were first to be active — they communicated more often and therefore they were the first to form the network structures in reality. As a rule, their activity was to spread information (email distribution, leaflets, bulletins' edition) and to develop plans of actions of spontaneous groups and political parties. The after-election events did not touch them much, so they did not resort to more active and radical actions. It was the end of March – the first decade of April when the Internet users' spontaneous groups were formed, and it coincided with the period of the opposition's abashment and supineness, which spurred the alternative groups' formation.

Another way of spontaneous groups' formation was a creation of the so-called «territorial groups». The territorial groups included the members of protest actions of the opposition by territorial principle. They embraced the people who lived in one district or even

in one house, who had known each other before and who went to the actions together in order to be safe. Such groups included 3—5 persons, and their formation took a bit more time because they communicated less intensively.

Finally, the most popular way of the formation of spontaneous groups was a union of former political prisoners who were grimly determined to continue their participation in the struggle (we shall conditionally call them «revolutionary groups»). This is the most radical, dedicated and active category of the opposition of the new generation which appeared in the after-election period. The activists who went through trials and jails, became leaders and centers of attraction of pro-opposition oriented youth. Such groups demonstrated the biggest stability and purposefulness. They had already been shaped in jail. The authorities' mistake was to put political prisoners together, thus allowing them to work out plans of their further fight. After their discharge from prison, they became a hardened force which realized its unity and readiness to work actively. If this new wave of activists had joined the organizational matrix of the system opposition, then the political parties would have constituted a much bigger number of their proponents. However, under the conditions of the extreme weakness of the opposition's structures and unavailability of whole-national leaders, this protest mass went the path of an accidental self-organization.

The «revolutionary» groups started shaping right after the release of the defenders of the Tent Camp and partakers of other actions in the second decade of April. These oppositionists

of a new wave expressed their strong desire to form an alternative and independent oppositional movement without joining the «old» opposition. This idea was accepted by other spontaneous groups which had appeared a bit earlier and which joined the «revolutionary» groups or coordinated their actions with them. Having created more or less stable communities, the members of spontaneous groups came in touch with other groups and separate activists, and to add them to their actions. Unlike the territorial and Internet groups, the «revolutionary» groups resorted to massive and energetic actions, e.g. organization and implementation of political flash mobs. All groups had several stages of their development: creation and development of their tasks and goals; building of their structures and communications; scheduling of their actions; searching for contacts with other groups; implementation of the plans of actions.

The typology of spontaneous groups based on the principles of organization and activity, can be described as follows:

- Ad Hoc Group is temporal, has limited tasks, e.g. to edit a bulletin or to prepare a large flash mob;

- Closed Group includes a limited number of close people, has concrete, sometimes rather radical tasks, is characterized with a high level of conspiracy and it is reluctant to join other spontaneous groups' network structures;

- Open Group is a spontaneous association, plans to carry out legal non-violent activity and therefore does not resort to deep conspiracy, but au contraire — cooperates actively with

other groups, organizations and separate activists. Such groups often join the network structures of a new type (those which are formed by spontaneous groups), or enter the structure of already existing organizations and movements;

- Network movement, or a super-group consists of several spontaneous groups which joined into the network structure on the base of certain principles. Such communities are the nuclei to form the whole-national oppositional movement.

This classification mentions «clear» types which are actually mixed, combining elements of different groups, and which can turn into one another. More detailed evolution and prospects of spontaneous groups will be regarded below.

Now, we shall try to picture a collective portrait of the oppositionists of a new generation as they are now called by journalists and observers.

Firstly, this generation is beyond the system and has no strong and famous leaders who could be able to unite all «new opposition».

Secondly, in general, these people do not belong to any political or social organizations and are not experienced in political and social activities, which is both their advantage and disadvantage.

Thirdly, the majority of the «new opposition» is the participants of the «maidan» and other protest actions, while the rest is their relatives, friends and colleagues who became part of the «new opposition» after the events of March 25th.

Fourthly, the «new opposition» are not nationalists. In their everyday life and during their oppositional activity, they speak Russian, even though they use the nationalistic set of symbols (the White-Red-White Flag, Pahonia Coat of Arms, Belarusian language music, etc.) Still, the question of the language and symbols is not central in their activity. The ideological direction of the representatives of the new oppositional generation is liberal, not conservative. They are united, first of all, by their protest against the regime, and in the second turn by the West democratic ideals, free market and questions of a geopolitical choice.

Fifthly, the «new opposition» is not «silly youngsters» as they are presented by the official Belarusian propaganda, but totally shaped individuals with a stable system of values. Their typical age is 22—27 y.o., sometimes older. Most of them are university students; the others are often employees of private companies, tutors, teachers and freelancers.

However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the conditional term «new generation of opposition» does not mean something integral, monolithic and shaped. It is merely a union of segmental, accidentally formed groups, communities and separate activists who are consolidated by the unity of purposes and their participation in the protest actions. It can be called «a raw material» which, under certain conditions and if there is a desire, can be turned into a useful tool to change the political situation in Belarus.

The question is what force will have enough will and possibilities to influence the «new opposition». It is obvi-

ous that it will not be the current oppositional parties.

Reasons for the phenomenon of “spontaneous groups”

The spontaneous groups' phenomenon is new for Belarus. Never before during the political campaigns did one see a process of an accidental self-organization of the mobilized population in such a scale; therefore we cannot compare it to anything. Something similar was observed in 1996, but then the street activists joined quickly the organized opposition and did not create their own unions. The first questions which come to mind while studying this problem, are, «Where did all this mass of active unengaged people come from?» and «Why was it not «washed out» by political and quasipolitical oppositional organizations?»

The first question has been already partly answered above — the united democratic forces carried out an effective campaign to popularize the joint candidate Alexander Milinkevich and managed to prove the population in the necessity of changes; but regardless the high percentage of those who are against President Lukashenko, the number of people (even among the so-called «kitchen opposition») who belong to political parties and organizations, is still very low (why? — another question) — that's why there are so many «independent» activists. The number of the «new opposition» grew after the arrests on March 25th, which also led to a deeper radicalization and polarization of the population. The an-

swer to the second question is to be found in the actions of the political opposition itself. It had been planned that the majority of the participants of the action on March 19th would join Milinkevich at the head of the movement, the joint candidate's headquarters and the United Democrats' Political Council, but it did not happen owing to several reasons.

Firstly, the participants of the meeting on October Square on March 19th heard neither concrete demands nor plan of actions from the oppositionists. They did not see any organization at all, but the oppositional leaders' discomfiture. It is natural that the opposition's image was ruined and a lot of people understood that the democratic coalition is not able to contest the election's official results and to organize the people's protest. Therefore, it was needed to look for another force which would be able to do it, or to become this force themselves.

Secondly, people lost their trust in Milinkevich and Kazulin as national leaders who express the nation's interests as they were not able to lead the people. When the partakers of the meeting's lost their last illusions concerning the capacity of united democrats to organize, they did hope that the leader(s) could fix the situation or, at least, would become the standard-bearer of the struggle. Nevertheless, this last hope died when the two democrats openly broke their relations. The Tent Camp defenders and adherents had to re-consider their tasks and ideals. From that moment, they fought not for the sake of the leaders and organizations, but for their own freedom and rights.

Thirdly, the joint candidate's headquarters did not work out a clear and intelligible concept of the movement which would unite all unengaged activists who appeared during the protest actions. Milinkevich announced several times the creation of the movement «For Freedom!» but it was still unknown what this initiative would be like and what principles it would have. The thing is that last year's autumn a group of social organizations developed a detailed concept of the movement «For Freedom!» and started to promote this brand which became very popular during the after-election's protest actions. However, having accepted the brand itself, Milinkevich's headquarters did not accept the elaborated idea of the movement and did not carry it out. Still, it never created its own concept either. Thus, time was lost, and new activists started to self-organize. They no longer needed Milinkevich and his help. Even the Political Council had to reckon with the new force and coordinate its activity with it. It is ironic that the united democrats, with the help of their own forces and resources, created a competitor, while they could have grown their own potential if they had acted more professionally. It is true that if the opposition had united all the unengaged activists and spontaneous groups, the authorities would have had a very strong opponent. If the Belarusian opposition does not want to lose the rest of its popularity among the population, it must learn this bitter experience. Besides, there were no organizations or movements like the Serbian "Otpor" or Ukrainian "Pora" in Belarus which could «eat» this protest mass and coordinate its actions.

Therefore, the «new opposition» was left alone with no desire to join anyone. Thus, it is possible to specify three basic reasons for spontaneous groups' appearance. A fairly effective political mobilization which the opposition failed to control and use for its own benefit.

Mistakes of the democratic forces and the opposition leaders during the protest actions, which repelled the new activists. The absence of a young street organization which could unite the «new opposition» who did not want to work for the «old» opposition.

The prospects of “spontaneous groups”

Talking about the spontaneous groups' evolution, there are at least three directions:

1. The enlargement of the groups and creation of their network structures. This process began in the second-third decade of April when the recently created groups started contacting with each other, building channels of communication and coordinating their activity. E.g. the groups which first included some defenders of the «maidan», but later began to come in touch with other groups and separate activists, as well as formed a coordination council. Nevertheless, this group did not become a nucleus of a whole-national oppositional movement, but began to evolve in a different direction.

2. Formation of organizational and hierarchic structures. Apart from the advantages of network structures, there are also some disadvantages, such as bad management owing to low concen-

tration of power; problems with reaching a consensus, etc. Therefore, some spontaneous groups, including the above-mentioned group of D. Dzianisau, decide to build a more centralized organization. D. Dzianisau and his adherents reformed their network structure into a more conventional and understandable movement like Zubr («Bison») which presented itself on June 17th under the name of Bunt («Revolt») (A page of the Bunt...). Thus, the 2001 situation was almost repeated in 2006, with the only difference that Zubr was initiated externally, while Bunt, flash mobbers and similar movements were created independently and only then obtained the present form which is similar to that of Zubr. The behavior of the authorities, the opposition and the West structures are the same. Nothing new was invented.

3. Separate activists and small groups may join political and quasi-political organizations and movements (political parties, Young Front, Enough!, Free Youth, etc.) All these processes are developing when the protest moods of the population are decreasing. Today, there are only a few groups left the activity of which is noticeable. Among these are Bunt, flash mobbers and a number of spontaneous groups which print bulletins and leaflets. Of course, there are some conspiracy groups, but they do not carry out any serious actions. There is still a hope that after the summer vacations, the youth movement will recover. However, this hope is slim since before the summer the spontaneous groups failed to unite, to develop their common view of the situation and methods of activity and to work out a

plan of actions and coordination principles. The united opposition did not help this process either. The coalition had been busy with the solution of their own problems for a long time; the strategy of democratic forces was accepted too late, and it has no concrete tactical plan which could be used by the spontaneous groups. The period of summer torpidity and a total emotional decrease will lead to the attenuation and decay of spontaneous groups. This prognosis is backed up by the fact that about 400

students, who participated in the protest actions and later belonged to the spontaneous groups, are threatened by expulsion. Some of them are offered seats in European universities, some of them have already left Belarus. It means this autumn the democratic movement will lose its most active and promising participants. After that, the Belarusian opposition will have to start its work on activation of Belarusian society from a scratch.

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