

INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Natallia Vasilievič

STUDY OF BELARUSIAN ELITES:
BETWEEN ALGEBRA AND GEOGRAPHY

AFTER NINA ANTANOVIČ, THE STUDY OF ELITES IN BELARUS has become topical among political science experts in the context of the 1996 Referendum which led to the formation of administrative top-down command structure, restraint the possibilities of political competition and marked taking up more pronounced autocratic features by the Belarusian regime. As a consequence, political-science analysts turned to the analysis of the essence and patterns of democracy, local elites, problems of political regimes, democratic transit (in which counter-elites had to play a significant role), problems of interaction between intellectuals and authorities (Antanovič, 2004). This paper is an attempt to give an overview of historical account in the study of the Belarusian elite over the last 20 years.

Michael Urban and the Belarusian Soviet elite. The first advanced study of the Belarusian elite was the work by American researcher Michael Urban (Urban, 1989)² which was published in 1989. Using the corresponding mathematical tool (the researcher titled his work “algebra” for a reason), Urban investigates the examples of recruiting of elite to the BSSR party and administrative apparatus in the period from 1966 to 1986 (actually, in the times of Brezhnev “stagnation”). The author analyses a career ladder of 3127 individuals and 2034 current positions. He comes to the conclusion that the model of recruitment is very similar to Markov chain. This means that the rotation of vacancies actually does not depend on the influence of the center. Urban also shows that the Belarusian Soviet elite consisted of separate patronage groups which fought with each other for political influence: “partisans”, “Minsk city industrial group”, “Brezhnev’s protégés” describing the key features and tendencies of development of the Belarusian Soviet elite in 1960–1980.

Burst of dissertations (2001–2003). The early 2000s lay the foundation to the study of elites. In post-Referendum time Belarusian political science acquires its structure as well. The center of elite research is the BSU, where elite studies become a significant theme for dissertations of the first

¹ Passport spelling: Natalya Vasilevich, in Belarusian: Наталля Васілевіч

² At the beginning of 2010, its Belarusian translation was published.

graduates-researchers. As early as in 2001, two dissertations on close themes were upheld there. The first thesis “Theoretical Problems of Formation and Circulation of Elites in the US Political System” was written by Uladzimir Padkapajeŭ (Padkapajeŭ, 2001), the second, written by Natallia Liachovič-Pietrakova and titled “Transformation of Political Elite in Post-Socialist Countries” (Liachovič-Petrakova, 2001) was devoted namely to Belarusian society.

Two years later, Aksana Važhurava touched upon the subject of the party elite in her thesis “The Parties of Belarus in Their Struggle For Political Leadership at Present Time (Social-and-Political Analysis)” (Vožhurava, 2003). In total, the dissertations make 10% from all defended in 2000–2009, which demonstrates the significance of the topic for Belarusian researchers.

Analytics and non-official political science. However, the main issues regarding the political elite can be found in analytics and “non-official” political science. They are basically texts related to the analysis of timely political events. Among the analytical materials where this topic is reviewed, it’s worth to mention the following collected books: “Belarusian Political System and Presidential Elections” (2001), “Contemporary History of Belarusian Parliamentarism” (2005), “Local Elections in Contemporary Political History of Belarus” (2003) and the collected works “Belarusian Political Arena and the 2006 Presidential Elections” (2007). Apart from this, the problem of elite identity is touched on in the collected book “Belarus: Neither Europe Nor Russia” (2006). Special (Kazakievič, 2007) and analytical (Čavusaŭ, 2005) articles also contribute to the study of the theme. All these works for the most part can be referred to independent political science unrelated to official political science. The matter is that intensification of ideological constituent of political regime restricted the scope of topics for political investigations in official institutions. Firstly, it is for regime’s benefit to simulate the ruling elite’s integrity; secondly, it is inconceivable for the regime to name the opposition the elite even with the prefix “counter”. Furthermore, after 2003, the official political science re-orient itself to the problems of national ideology.

Analytics of the division of the elite. Piotra Natčyk is believed to be one of the most active researchers of Belarusian elites. In his texts, he focuses on the specific nature of Belarusian nomenclature class, branch elites, on various aspects of staffing policy and struggle of concrete “clans” (“silaviki” (power ministries officers), “Mahilioŭ grouping”, etc).

In 2001, when the second presidential elections took place and Lukašenka was elected to a second term of office, it was extremely topical to talk of “nomenclature upheaval” (even the strategy of election of a single candidate represented by the trade-union leader Uladzimir Hančaryk, was based on the logics of impact on the nomenclature).

It was the opinion that the ruling elite were variegated, with considerable contradictions and particular interests of which it was supposed to take advan-

tage during the election campaign. As it is well-known, their attempts failed: however, the interest to the elite structure resumed after the new appointments of personnel. The text by Natčyk is devoted namely to the examination of these issues. He writes: *“The specific character of attitude to changes and determination to defend these changes are the very things that build the foundation for the division of different trends in elite. And these trends, in their turn, are the results of previous development of the elite”* (Natčyk, 2001).

Among the factors which influenced formation of different trends in the structure of the Belarusian elite, the author singles out the following ones: industrial, agrarian and “bordering”. The industrial factor stimulated large enterprises functionaries to improve their relations with the authority center, to orient to central administration; the agrarian factor indicated interest in preservation of influence at the local level, whereas the bordering position of Belarus with Europe gave more weight to security forces; security service and border guards. Following M. Urban’s research, Natčyk traces the genealogy of Belarusian nomenclature starting from the post-war period. In the 1980s, industrial elite takes the place of the “partisan” elite. This is conditioned by the growth of large enterprises and their party committees. In Natčyk’s opinion, namely on the relationships of the “partisan” and industrial elites the confrontation in the system of redistribution of power in the country is based. Even in post-Soviet time two structural models arise: subordinations (the “partisan” elite) and clusters (the industrial elite). In the BSSR, the central elite was formed through the industrial model, and the regional elite was shaped through the agrarian model: the central elite had a possibility to move to the highest level but could not control regional level, whereas regional elites had poor chances to move to the republican center, but controlled the regions (Natčyk, 2001).

In the time of disintegration of the Soviet Union, the agrarian-industrial elite obtained an opportunity to move to political level of the Republic through the elections to the 12th Supreme Soviet which became the parliament of collective farm directors and other regional functionaries whereas the nomenclature of central organs started to lose control, retaining, however, prevailing positions in power bodies.

Apart from the two mentioned elites, Natčyk admits a strong organizational capacity of law-enforcement authorities’ and security officials’ elite which the central elite attempted to challenge. Another participant of the process, according to Natčyk, is the new national-democratic counter-elite which threatens the position of the nomenclature.

The researcher points out several stages of elite formation in Belarus after the first presidential elections. The first stage — parliamentary or pseudo-democratic — when Lukašenka appointed high officials through personal contacts and regional acquaintanceship (“Mahilioŭ group”, depu-

ties of the 12th Supreme Soviet as well as the representatives of the high-level nomenclature).

At the first stage, Natčyk singles out three main trends of the central elite: the old elite, security officials and parliamentarians. The old elite retained key positions in the economic sphere; considerable rotations among security officials took place; the parliamentarians are characterized as variegated and unstable group.

From 1996, industrial and economic elite were losing their former positions. The first reason for that was the policy of the Belarusian regime in the field of economy and the fact that the top of the pyramid was occupied by the old nomenclature elite which was needed by Lukašenka as an instrument to carry out the expansion to the east. The “Russian” factor took on significance in political field and the relations with Russia became an important resource for old nomenclature elite. Stepwise, regional, industrial and republican elites were losing their positions to the advantage of well-organized power ministries’ officers. These processes characterize the second stage of elite formation. The third stage is marked by changes in Belarusian domestic and foreign policy related to the coming 2001 presidential elections and to the fall of urgency of the eastern factor. The key priority becomes the need to tighten the control inside the country. The old nomenclature elite lose their influence and, on the contrary, power ministries officers gain their significance. The industrial-economic elite becomes more dependent on the center. At the end of the article the author expresses hope that, to the advantage of the democratic opposition, the discontented elite groupings will be able to unite.

Elite and revolution. The article by Jury Čavusaŭ (Čavusaŭ, 2005) continues the hot topic of nomenclature revolution, which the researcher himself relates to the “factor of oil”, able to cause confrontation within the elite. The author makes an attempt to single out possible versions of the course of events in this adversarial position: the first version – the nomenclature will acknowledge their own interests different from the interests of the dictatorship, however, they will not be able to be shaped as a political class; the second version – they will acknowledge their interests and will be shaped as a political class, and this will be the evidence of ripening of revolutionary situation; the third version – the nomenclature will remain an amorphous group.

During the 2006 presidential elections, the opposition changed their strategy: they stopped orienting to nomenclature upheaval. At the same time, civil society structures fell off owing to “mopping up” of ideological field after the 2001 presidential elections and the business-elite became the only hope for the opposition. In analytical collection devoted to the 2006 elections there are reflections of why the business elite remained inert in the political campaign.

Andrej Kamyševič (Kamyševič, 2007) notices that with the extension of private business, there can “*appear a sufficiently independent business-elite ... which creates more conditions for its [political control] derestriction and internal tension*”. Thus, the Belarusian authorities prevented the formation of consolidated business-elite through the domination of state-owned property which made it impossible for independent oligarch groups to appear, and, correspondingly, prevented decentralization of the ruling elite. Moreover, the corporate state was building the relations of patronage with these or those enterprises, thus giving the business-elite a vassal status, which was received in the process of competition and a lot of subjects in order to be included into the patronage-client relation were trying to be sincerely loyal.

In the same collected book devoted to the 2006 presidential elections, the paper by Andrej Liachovič (Liachovič, 2007) is worth mentioning in the contest of elite studies. The author focuses mainly on staff reshuffles and the existence of various “clans” within the ruling elite. The text in his work develops like in card solitaire, in which these or those cards are reshuffled in the same pack: we can see the familiar public figures – Škloŭ-Mahilioŭ clan which stands against the clan of power ministries officers headed by Viktor Šejman. The author proposes us to track staff reshuffles in which, in his opinion, there is a clue to understanding the standoff of various elites.

Elites and the results of the elections. In 2004, parliament elections took place in Belarus – therefore, the question of elites acquires a new relevance. First of all, a problem of analysis of various convocation parliament composition emerges. In the result of the 1990 elections, there appeared a “functionary” parliament with two basic platforms: democratic and the CPSU. The representatives of the latter in the 12th Supreme Soviet made a broad majority, and the mechanism of positions distribution, inherent to this elite functionary is characterized as “new clientism” (Natčyk, 2005). Basically, the researcher repeats his conclusions (Natčyk, 2001) in respect to Minsk nomenclature: they were not interested in using changes for extension of power in the Republic, since they oriented to advancement to all-Union level and the change gave more power to the non-party elite. As for the regional elite, in Natčyk’s opinion, they were hardly oriented to be part of central power. The regional elite was not interested in the struggle for central power so long as this power gave them very little in financial aspect. Thus, the central elite did not want to change the governance model, local elites were feeble and informal elites (BNF) were in the bud of their formation. The 1995 elections to the 13th Supreme Soviet took place at the background of centralization of executive power and formalization of the party system. To resist these forces, the administrative authorities encouraged the representatives of top-bottom command structure to stand for elections to the parliament, especially as their participation enabled to use the administrative resource at local level.

In the result of elections, the right wing (BNF, BSDG) failed to take seats in the parliament; the most seats were occupied by left wing (KPB and Agrarian Party) as well as the National Unity Party which consisted namely of functionaries. Now the elites were separated as “authorities vs opposition”. Natčyk points out that in the new parliament, 136 out of 198 deputies belonged to government functionaries and economic executives which carried on the tradition of functionary parliamentarism (Natčyk, 2005a). Natčyk defines such situation as provincialism: “*regional elites gain their significance not through social-economic development of their regions, not through their work to gain the trust of the population, but through the authorization of the center (nominations, personal or patron-client relations)*” (Natčyk, 2005, a).

In these conditions, personal responsibility, loyalty to the center, adjustment of regional administration policy to changeability of center’s policy become the criteria of efficiency of regional administration. In Natčyk’s opinion, provincialism can be opposed only by concernment of elite to remain in the region and use the resources of the region for its benefit as well as the growth of civil community. However, the policy of the state is directed to encouragement of provincialism which is a significant pre-condition for the top-down command structure. Analysing the results of local elections, Natčyk notes that in 1990, local councils were procommunist (functionaries of the CPSU and the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League made 67,4 % in them) (Natčyk, 2003a). In 1995, local communities were characterized with low activity and uncertainty which led to “nomenclature” nature of the deputy corps. Analysis of the elections to district (oblast) councils shows that the intelligentsia, business-elite, industrial and agricultural elite made a very small portion of deputies. The majority of council deputies were “status administrators” school directors, chief medical officers and heads of other state-financed organizations.

1999 marked the deficit of candidates — main composition is status, industrial and agricultural directorate. Natčyk believes that local elites in this case “*having chosen the role of the weak in policy and having agreed to perform secondary functions... became an important element in the chain of support of the central authorities. And they play this role against their own interests. Disorderliness and uncertainty of positions does not allow them to break this chain*” (Natčyk, 2003a).

Regional elites: review of empiric analysis. The results of local elections became the basis to study regional elites for Andrej Kazakievič as well. However, in his text (Kazakievič, 2007) he refers to a later period and tries to rest upon more detailed information. In his opinion, the analysis of deputy corps of district councils will help in understanding the specific features of regional elites. On the one hand, the author carries out the tradition of Natčyk (Natčyk 2003a; Natčyk, 2003b), however, on the other hand he refuses to ac-

knowledge the methodological approaches of the latter and develops his own idea related to elites as structures: “*regional elites and clan groups are stable structures. They are strongly linked with the representation of local interests and have a relatively high social (and economic) assets*” (Kazakievič, 2004). The author explains why namely compositions of local councils are chosen for the analysis of the regional elite – this is the only transparent source of staff appointments in the regions.

At the same time, he admits insufficiency of such information since councils take inferior position compared to executive committees in the structure of actual local government. Apart from the composition of deputy corps, in A. Kazakievič’s opinion, it is important to study the specific features of electoral “discipline” which has several criteria: how fully the council composition is formed (which percent of deputy corps was selected in the first round); the practice of the second round; availability of competition (multiple- or single-choice electoral districts). As the third additive, the author proposes to study parties and party representation. After Kazakievič, such information might be helpful to detect political tendencies at regional level. Using the available information, the author pays attention to the fact that in district councils party representation phenomenon can be observed, and this phenomenon needs a due explanation.

He also represents a table showing the party’s membership distribution data in the deputy corps. This data shows that in districts, there are territorial specific features of party representation. Fourthly, in Kazakievič’s opinion, age and gender structure can evidence certain tendencies. The author reasonably notices that demographic statistics enables – with a large degree of certainty – to speak about the level of modeling of councils’ composition in case the councils include a great number of women, young people and pensioners. The author gives this statistics about all regions and the article is the source in which this data is arranged in scales.

Apart from this, Kazakievič makes conclusions about the tendencies in projecting the councils: under this information, 2003 is the most manipulative, and 2007 sees the tendency of derestriction. The fifth aspect of study of regional elites is their territorial representation. The analysis of information on regional councils shows that deputies to a lesser degree belong to local councils; correspondingly, there is a process of centralization when the candidates (and deputies) are no longer representatives of their electoral district and belong to the capital of the region. Distribution of regional councils’ deputies by place of residence is illustrated in tables, and Viciebsk region is illustrated with a visual coloured map. It should be pointed out that the article was not aimed at detailed analysis of regional elites, on the first approximation, however, the author made interesting observations. Indeed, all abovementioned rates, including a demographic rate, illustrate rather stable

tendencies; nevertheless, these tendencies in the context of the article are illustrations to certain methodological approaches.

“*Who governs?*” Another approach to examine regional elites in the frames of study of Belarusian small towns is suggested by Andrej Jahoraŭ (Jahoraŭ, 2009). The study of small towns over the period of 2007-2008 was carried out by the Agency of Humanitarian Technologies which organized expeditions also trying to arrange local festivities in the same time. This research shows that behind the top-down command structure, there stands a different life, informal relations, different socio-economic indicators, unique conditions for this or that small town which leave their mark. And that makes it possible to speak about availability of various models of power and governance realization.

In his head notes, Jahoraŭ points out that Belarusian reality as a result of certain historical conditions is characterized by the estrangement of population from authority. It is accepted as standard. And realization of power in town is related to formal commanding positions. However, as it has been mentioned before, the author believes that power relations are not limited to the power of functionaries. The first division characteristic to power structure goes along the line “friends-or-foes”. “Friends” are those whose personal history is known for the locals, whereas “foes”, are mainly people who come from a different locality. This division acquires a special relevance in small towns where the population has a strong feeling of patriotism. The division “friends-or-foes” can also expand to the groups and structures related to town or its suburbs. Among “foes”, the following groups are singled out: governance of formal structure when town authorities belong to high government bodies; corporate structures – military, force, industrial commanding groups in central government bodies. Among “friends”, three types of groups are singled out: clans or families, quasi-community of those who “came up from the ranks”; church community.

Elite and culture. Now we move from structural aspects of elite studies to the ideological aspect. In one of his papers, Andrej Kazakievič makes an attempt to describe elite not as a structure but as a cultural phenomenon – in the context of geopolitical apprehension of Belarusian identity (Kazakievič, 2006). In this text, the author writes rather about subcultures (directions in thinking, strategies of apprehension of external context of Belarus) than age, gender or other compositions. In Kazakievič’s opinion, the main division in the structure of the Belarusian elite at present does not come in accordance with functional criteria, but through the axis “authorities – opposition”, which involves more fundamental division on the level of culture and values. The author believes that the availability of different subcultures is conditioned by the structure of biographies, education, social set-up, cultural background, position in political field, corporate relations and others. Thus,

Kazakievič singles out four groups of the Belarusian elite in accordance with the outlook they share. Firstly, this is the Belarusian post-Soviet elite that is grounded into the context of the Belarusian Soviet culture and the corresponding identity. For them, Europe and Russia have rather territorial than civilizational measurement. At all this, this type of elite has a positive attitude towards Europe. As the counterbalance, the national elite comes first. For them, Europe is the symbol of national renaissance, the image of true (not Soviet) Belarus and the concept of “coming back to Europe” is regarded as an alternative of Sovietness.

The next group, according to Kazakievič’s analysis of interviews with representatives of the Belarusian elite, is the so-called “new elite” (the present-day ruling elite that is characterized by an anti-West rhetoric and that in the 1990s partially kept to Russian nationalism).

Currently, the main conceptual frame of this type of elite is the ideology of the Belarusian state in which Europe regains geographical understanding, and Belarus is viewed as the geographical center of Europe. The last group, the young generation, is – in Kazakievič’s opinion – eclectic, fragmented. It comprehends the basic forms of identity of the existing groups. Such identity, in the opinion of another author Vitaľ Silicki (Silicki, 2006) is based on two questions: “who are we?”, the question to find out what makes Belarusian people Belarusians as well as the question “where are we?”, in the context of a civilized choice. The researcher points out that there is no unity in answering these questions in the Belarusian elite field. There exist different visions and concepts of Europe, Belarus, Slavic community which leads to disruptiveness of elites.

Elite in the system. Another type of research of the Belarusian elite is its study as a structural element of the whole political system (Antanovič, 2001, Kazakievič, 2004). Nina Antanovič shares the opinion that it is the study of the role of bureaucracy as an independent player in political system that will enable to define the reasons for slipping down to autocracy in 1996. The author singles out two main periods of state administration system development before the 1996 Referendum. The first stage (1991-1994) was carried out in the conditions of parliamentary system, when democratic leadership of the Supreme Soviet was only a “disguise” for nomenclature democracy, on the foundation of which state administration bodies of independent Belarus were established. They included the representatives of party and government machines, the former nomenclature which had a lot of privileges in the Soviet time and in their social status – to old “Komsomol members and young Party members”. At that period of time, the establishment of presidential-and-parliamentary system plays a significant role. It is characterized by the appearance of standoff between the president and the parliament. This led to the 1996 constitutional crisis and to the change of the local self-government system and establishment of the top-down command structure in which “Mahilioŭ group” gains its

weight. This grouping made their carriers through personal relations with the president (this is known as patronage-client relations).

According to Antanovič, the key element in the state structure with such a system of organization becomes the administrative-bureaucratic apparatus. This is a very stable and conservative component of the center to make political decisions. Analysing the state authority system, the author notes that it is necessary to proceed from division of bureaucracy into two levels: political (a narrow layer of the highest-level bureaucracy that carries out the political course) and professional (the basic mass of government officials). In this regard, the decision making system in Belarus does not agree with constitutional system. N. Antanovič singles out different levels of decision making: 1) President Administration (about a hundred officials who have up to 90% of state property at their disposal); 2) mid-level officials of the President Administration, Security Council, Committee of State Control, KGB; 3) Council of Ministers, Ministries, state committees; 4) administration bodies. Separately stands a group that is represented by directors of large industrial enterprises, directors of collective farms and deputies of the parliament. The structural distinction of Belarusian political system lies in domination of administrative-distributive relations which are characterized by the phenomenon of “power of property” in which the authority acts as primary, while property is its function. Thus, administrative-bureaucratic apparatus is oriented to centralized redistribution of benefits. This leads to domination of redistributing type of public policy. The state official’s ruling functions, including power, field of activity, duties – all these things become the functionary’s resource and using this resource he appropriately builds the systems of interaction with the economic and business sphere.

Quite a different approach to analysis of the Belarusian system is proposed by Kazakievič. He also singles out the period of transformation of political system in which the position and role of elites and counter-elites change. The period up to 1999 becomes the first period of development of the system with the revolution of Lukašenka which is marked with gradual distancing of Lukašenka from the nomenclature, expansion towards Russia. Significant importance in such self-description of the system belongs to enemies: up to 2000, it is the period of national renaissance; after 2000, it is liberal reforms carried out.

The second period is the “after revolution” time. This is the 1999-2000 crisis which is characterized with a new strategy of self-preservation instead of expansion. The main enemies for the system are external ones and the main discourse is the discourse of contextualization. The important process which takes place in this period affects the elites as well: it is colonization by the regime of the whole independent space. It is impossible to act beyond the system which leads either to the attempts of counter-elites to integrate into the existing system or to their marginalization. The basic concepts of this period are change of civilization rhetoric from “East-Slavic” to “East-European” and actualization

of Belarusian identity through the concept of “Belarusian way” and “stability” which become the basic foundation of the Belarusian statesmanship ideology. Describing the political system, Kazakievič singles out the following elements: president as the guarantor of preferences and political positions which were already formed; the state as a corporation in which the regime is concerned rather with discharging “functions” than with “consciousness”; process of concentration of different kinds of capital within the boundary of one “state” field in the result of which each social institution has to fulfill maximum of additional functions; this concerns concentration of the elite as well, which, in Kazakievič’s opinion is not differentiated (being political, economic and ideological at the same time).

On the one hand, fulfilling the functions is regarded by the system a significant criteria of efficiency, and on the other, relations of vassalage is of the same importance where loyalty is valued more than efficiency (at the same time, in the system of political discipline namely loyalty and functional efficiency are more valued than ideological commitment and conviction). In the system which functions under the above-described logics, there is no room for the opposition which is associated with such concepts as “disloyalty”, “instability”, “destructiveness”. The enclaves of oppositions still exist, however, for the regime they are not an organic element of the system.

Some conclusions. Thus, in Belarusian political science, the studies of elites are mostly done within the framework of non-official political science. This fact explains primarily analytical study of such research aimed to describe “distribution” of elites in a certain period of time. Most frequently such distribution is given without conceptualization of the word “elite” itself on the basis of intuitive acceptance for elite of those who take these or those positions in governance system (on central and regional levels, in economic sphere and party apparatus), as well as those who have certain economic resources.

Hence, the need to work out the theory of elites corresponding to Belarusian reality has become obvious; however, the conceptualization of elites is not so simple, especially in the conditions of data confidentiality. Kazakievič reasonably points out that “*knowledge about present-day... elites in Belarus is considerably limited because of unavailability of quantitative studies as well as absence of empiric systematized base [...]. Most conclusions ... have the nature of intuitive evaluations*” (Kazakievič, 2007). Moreover, the researchers focus mainly on examination of administrative elites whereas the studies of counter-elites including those belonging to different than political fields – cultural, religious, social, academic as well as economic – are beyond the scope of their interests. Power is not the only resource the elites fight for and different type of assets can convert into political capital. Thus, even non-political elites can play on the political pitch, be “forwards of opinions” and therefore the researchers should not ignore these processes.

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