

ISSN 2029-8684 (online)  
ISSN 2029-8676

BELARUSIAN  
POLITICAL SCIENCE  
REVIEW



Vol. 4, 2019

KAUNAS, LITHUANIA, 2019

# BELARUSIAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POLITICAL STUDIES

*Lithuania, Belarus*

VOLUME 4, 2019

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BELARUSIAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW is a peer-reviewed political science periodical that serves as an interdisciplinary publication for research papers from various subfields of political science. The publication aims to meet the needs of a broader academic community in scientific enquiry on Belarusian politics and the politics of Eastern and Central Europe.

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THE ISSUE WAS PUBLISHED WITH THE SUPPORT OF ORSA ROMANO CULTURAL  
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ISSN 2029-8684 (online)

ISSN 2029-8676



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## ABSTRACTS

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### POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

***Anastasiya Jurkevits. Contemporary Official Discourse on Pension Reform in Belarus***

The research puzzle of the article consists in analyzing how official Belarusian policy discourse on pension reform has influenced domestic policy change and adjustment. This research is conducted within the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism: a distinct theoretical approach developed to research not only ideas, but also the context of the policy processes accompanying policy adjustments. Discourse analysis showed the absolute homogeneity and integrity of the official discourse on pension reform, its persistence and permanence. The official discourse of the pension reform, being extremely communicative, is an instrument of legitimizing populist policies and promoting the idea of raising the retirement age.

**Keywords:** official discourse, pension reform, discourse analysis, social policy changes, Belarusian social policies.

***Andrei Kazakevich. In the Twilight of Internationalist Politics: Means of Political Activity of Pro-Soviet Organizations in Western Republics of USSR, 1988–1991***

The central question of this article is simple but at the same time important: why, for all the ideological affinity, common organisational basis, standardised relations with the Union centre, the pro-Soviet organisations of the western USSR republics were so different in their political activities and achievements. While some of them were extremely active at the all-Union level creating organisations and actively fighting against “reforms” and “for the USSR,” others in every way avoided expressing their public political position and offered virtually no resistance to reforms and disintegration of the Soviet state. Some were determined to mobilise their supporters to participate in political activities; others suppressed such practices and preferred to stay in an amorphous and uncertain political field. And, finally, some were prone to open acts of disobedience and violence, while others tried to avoid it.

**Keywords:** Perestroika, Pro-Soviet organizations, Dissolution of USSR, separatism, Communist Party.

#### POLITICAL THINKING

***Piotr Rudkouski. Deliberative Democracy: A Chance for Belarus's Transformation?***

The idea of deliberative democracy is scarcely known in Belarus humanities academia, let alone Belarus political circles. This paper is meant to be an introductory presentation of the idea of deliberative democracy. First, I will tell something about the sources and fountains wherefrom this idea springs up. Next, I will outline two paths along which a deliberative democracy can march: a path indicated by Habermas and taken by some continental theoreticians, and a path made by Gutmann and Thompson and followed by theoreticians of analytic mindset, both paths being hinted at by Aristotle. I will then try to construct the disciplinary, or rather interdisciplinary profile of the ‚analytical‘ concept of deliberative democracy. Finally, I will share some thoughts about the relevance of the idea in question to Belarus.

**Keywords:** official discourse, pension reform, discourse analysis, social policy changes, Belarusian social policies.

## АНАТАЦЫІ

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### Інстытуты

#### *Анастасія Юркевіч. Сучасны афіцыйны дыскурс рэформы пенсійнае сістэмы ў Беларусі*

Даследчая задача артыкула – аналіз уплыву беларускага палітычнага дыскурсу пра персійную рэформу ўплывае на змены і ўзгадненне ўнутранай палітыкі. Даследаванне праведзенае ў тэарэтычных рамках дыскурсіўнага інстытуцыяналізму. Гэты асобны тэарэтычны падыход распрацаваны для даследавання не толькі ідэй, але таксама кантэксту таго, якім чынам палітычныя працэсы суправаджаюць ўзгадненне палітыкі. Дыскурсіўны аналіз паказвае абсалютную гамагеннасць і цэласнасць афіцыйнага дыскурсу пра пенсійную рэформу, яго настойлівасць і ўстойлівасць. Афіцыйны дыскурс пенсійнае рэформы з’яўляючыся надзвычай камунікатыўным і выступае інструментам легітымацыі папулісцкае палітыкі і прасоўвання ідэі павышэння ўзросту выхаду на пенсію.

**Ключавыя словы:** афіцыйны дыскурс, дыскурс-аналіз, змены сацыяльнай палітыкі, сацыяльная палітыка Беларусі.

#### *Андрэй Казакевіч. Прыцемкі інтэрнацыянальнай палітыкі: набор сродкаў для палітычнай дзейнасці прасавецкіх арганізацый у заходніх рэспубліках СССР, 1988–1991*

Цэнтральнае пытанне артыкула простае, але ў той самы час важнае: чаму нягледзячы на ідэалагічную блізкасць, агульную арганізацыйную аснову, падобныя адносіны з саюзным цэнтрам, прасавецкія арганізацыі ў заходніх рэспубліках СССР былі настолькі рознымі ў сваёй палітычнай дзейнасці і дасягненнях. У той час як некаторыя з іх былі надзвычай актыўнымі на агульнасаюзным узроўні, ствараючы арганізацыі і актыўна змагаючыся супраць “рэформаў” і “за савецкі саюз”, іншыя любымі сродкамі пазбягалі выказаць сваёй палітычнай пазіцыі і не прадэманстравалі практычна ніякага супраціўлення рэформам і распаду Савецкага саюзу. Некаторыя намагаліся мабілізаваць сваіх прыхільнікаў для ўдзелу ў палітыцы, іншыя падаўлялі такія практыкі і схіляліся заставацца ў аморфным

і нявызначаным палітычным стане. І, нарэшце, некаторыя былі гатовыя да адкрытых дзеянняў непадпарадкавання і гвалту, у той час як іншыя імкнуліся гэтага пазбегнуць.

**Ключавыя словы:** перабудова, прасавецкія арганізацыі, распад СССР, сепаратызм, Камуністычная партыя СССР.

## Гісторыя ідэй

### *Пётр Рудкоўскі. Дылібератыўна дэмакратыя: шанс для трансфармацыі Беларусі?*

Ідэя дэлібератыўна дэмакратыі ледзь вядомы ў гуманітарнай супольнасці Беларусі, не кажучы ўжо пра палітычныя колы. Гэты тэкст ставіць за тэму стаць увадзінамі ў ідэю дэлібератыўнай дэмакратыі. Па-першае, я распавяду пра крыніцы і каналы пра якія ўзнікала гэта ідэя. Пасля, я вылучу два шляхі па якім дэлібератыўная дэмакратыя можа рухацца. Абодва шляхі былі намацаны Арыстоцелем. Шлях вызначаны Габермарсам і пераняты некаторымі кантынентальнымі тэарэтыкамі і шлях абраны Гутманам і Томпсанам і па якім пайшлі тэарэтыкі аналітычнага складу. Нарэшце, я падзялюся некаторымі думкамі пра адпаведнасць гэтай ідэі Беларусі.

**Ключавыя словы:** дэмакратыя, дэлібератыўная дэмакратыя, палітычная філасофія, дэмакратыя ў Беларусі.

*Anastasiya Jurkevits*

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## CONTEMPORARY OFFICIAL DISCOURSE ON PENSION REFORM IN BELARUS

THE RESEARCH PUZZLE OF THE ARTICLE consists in analyzing how official Belarusian policy discourse on pension reform has influenced domestic policy change and adjustment. This research is conducted within the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism: a distinct theoretical approach developed to research not only ideas, but also the context of the policy processes accompanying policy adjustments. Discourse analysis showed the absolute homogeneity and integrity of the official discourse on pension reform, its persistence and permanence. The official discourse of the pension reform, being extremely communicative, is an instrument of legitimizing populist policies and promoting the idea of raising the retirement age.

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of reforming the social security system of elderly people today is very acute in many regions. All around Europe, this is a very popular topic in the media and in the public debate of representatives of various political forces. These demographic calls are accepted by mankind during an era of post-modernism, which is characterized by essential changes in the system of social relations in general. Among main problems welfare states are faced with are: huge shortage of funding for social benefits, huge loans of States, population ageing, unemployment, poverty, critical level of taxes, etc. Paul Pierson identifies four reasons, one of which is the demographic problem related to population ageing and low fertility rates (Pierson, 2001, 83).

Complex global and local demographic and economic issues have actualized the question of pension reform in Belarus. When economic problems and crisis create problems and obstacles for the implementa-

tion of social policies, the demographic challenge becomes a new issue. According to the UN estimate in 2015 in Belarus around 63.6 percent of people is in the ages 15-59, and according to the UN projections this share will decrease to 53.5 percent in 2050, the proportion of people in the age +60, which amounts 23.9 percent in 2015 will rise to 35.7 percent by 2050 (UN World Population Prospects 2015). To sustain the pension costs of Belarus on a meaningful level, structural changes are perceived as necessary by distinct political and social actors.

The first mention of the possibility and the need for pension reform in the country does not belong to the year 2007, but exactly back on this year, the President Aliaksandr Lukashenka initiated the change in the order of granting social benefits. This attempt to reform the social security system did not have a systemic nature and was restricted to specific steps in order to reduce the budget spendings, but it has helped to raise the interest towards the issue of pension reform, and since then interest in the issue persists, as the number of issues and problem areas discussed regarding ageing population have only increased. The 11th of April 2016 President A. Lukashenka has signed a decree "On the improvement of pension", which implies a gradual annual increase in the retirement age by three years.

There are distinct explanations for changes and development processes in social policies, which are based on the analysis of the institutional features of pension systems or social actors and interest groups or politicians (e.g. Pierson 2001; Myles and Pierson 2001; Korpi 2006; Tsebelis 1995; 2000, 2002; Immergut 1998) Many theoretical approaches focus on the ideas as the main driver fostering the development and transformation of social policies throughout the globe (e.g. studies of Beland and Cox 2011; Blyth 2001, 2002; Hall 1993; Jacobs 2008). Each of these approaches is useful and important (still quite actual as evidence in support of them are found in the world's different regions), but it is assumed of having serious limitations especially in the Belarusian case. Welfare state classifications give only an understanding of the structure or the basis, but they are of little use for the analysis of changes and identifying factors that influenced certain decisions. Historical institutionalism pays little attention to the political and ideological component, which is extremely important in the study of the Belarusian social policies. Power resources theory explains many of the reforms and innovations in social policy of Belarus, but not fully

explain the long-term postponement of the pension reform in difficult economic and demographic conditions. The absence of a strong de-facto veto-player in the Belarusian context doesn't explain the irrational delay in the decision and the pension system reform.

The role of ideas, especially in the agenda setting processes of policy changes is difficult to overestimate. For non-democratic states it is not less important, because ideas often dominate the real objective factors and serve as the motion vector. However, without an understanding of the context the acceptance or denial of any policy steps, the popularity of ideas or ignoring them by social actors cannot be explained. That is why the discursive institutionalism framework was selected as the most appropriate theoretical framework to achieve the objective of this study, as it summarizes and utilizes the achievements of previous approaches exploring not only the role of institutions and ideas, but adds discourse as the vehicle of ideas (Schmidt 2002, 2006, 2008, 2010; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004; Roe 1994).

Schmidt, who together with Radaelli (2004) felt the need to refine and supplement the theoretical framework (Schmidt 2002, 2006, 2008, 2010; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004), calls this approach is the fourth new institutionalism or discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2008: 304). This conceptual framework summarizes and utilizes the achievements of previous complements, exploring not only the role of institutions and ideas, but adds discourse as the vehicle of ideas (Schmidt 2008: 309).

This approach uses discourse analysis to identify ways in which certain ideas are delivered from social actors to other policymaking entities, how discourse is formed and articulated in a specific institutional context (formal and informal rules, laws, social and political norms). It determines the structure and dynamics of the policy change process, and both ideas and discourse are considered within an institutional context (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004: 197, Schmidt 2010: 1).

The idea that the government uses political discourse to assert their legitimacy and seek consensus, especially at critical moments in the reform of social policies is very relevant to the Belarusian socio-political situation. And it is discourse institutionalism that focuses on the previously neglected "role of ideas in constituting political action, the power of persuasion in political debate, the centrality of deliberation for democratic legitimation, the construction and reconstruction of political interests and values, and the dynamics of change in history

and culture" (Schmidt 2008: 305). Just for this reason it is necessary to pay attention not only to the ideas themselves, but to whom, in what circumstances and to whom these ideas are delivered, demonstrating the transformative power of ideas and discourse, "a causal influence in political reality and, thereby, engender institutional change (or continuously)" (Schmidt 2008: 306).

It is also important to understand why and how certain discourses become dominant, while others are just 'rhetorical smoke' (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004: 193). This allows you to make an analysis of discourses and ideas that are heard by different actors to the target audience. Discourses accommodate different forms of ideas: narratives, myths, frames, collective memories, stories, scenarios, images and more (Schmidt 2008: 309). At the same time discourses can not be analyzed in isolation from the social actors and the communication process of ideas exchange between them. Therefore discursive interactions entail a difference in the discourses in different public domains: coordinative discourse is characteristic among social actors engaged in creating, developing, bargaining about policies. Communicative discourses occur between social and political actors and the public "engaged in presenting, contesting, deliberation, and legitimating those policy ideas" (Schmidt 2010: 11).

Thus, following non-linguistic factors are analyzed: economic, socio-political, historical (historical path which may be relevant to nowadays development), but at the same time, the linguistic aspect is present in the analyzes of discourse, which was common for pioneers of discourse research (Van Dijk 1989, 1993). This makes it possible to overcome the limitations of other institutionalists approaches.

Although the theoretical framework guided the research, discursive institutionalism have no pre-judge it, but only helped to keep in mind the importance of the context and content to achieve the goals and answer the research question.

Many of the ideas about pension reform and developments of pension policies are manifested in the modern Belarusian socio-political discourse in the period from 2007 to date. Analysis of pension discourse is quite popular and developed research area of foreign social studies, but the originality of the Belarusian political and socio-economic context requires special attention. A systematic multilevel analysis will be carried out of the Belarusian discourse practices on the

topic of “pension reform” within the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism.

The aim of this article is to analyze official discourse on pension reform from 2007 to April 2016, taking into account its potential impact on welfare state restructuring in specific Belarusian context. What does the contemporary official Belarusian discourse on pension reform look like and do (how) it has influence on welfare state restructuring? Answering this question is of great added value, since social outcomes are shaped through discourses. If we can understand what discourses are about, we could find the cause-and-effect relationships and identify “leverages”, and probably see in what direction pension reform is moving and why.

The importance of this issue has increased, especially after the 2015 presidential election. Of course, such unpopular decisions are usually postponed to afterwards of the election campaigns, therefore society had time to read a variety of alternative approaches and form an opinion on one of the most important issues. After the elections, and in the situation of a constant fall of the Belarusian currency, it became clear that further delays in the resolution of this issue are impossible.

Descriptive institutional analysis is among the main methods of this study, as well as the qualitative discourse analysis and secondary analysis of statistical and sociological data. This choice is dictated by the specifics of the selected object of study and previous research on the issue, which requires a rather comprehensive approach. (+ discourse definition and data?)

The article is divided into 2 parts. The first part examines the context of the Belarusian discourses on pension reform: history and contemporary development of the Belarusian pension system, features of the political context, challenges and issues, the attitude of the population to pension reform. The second part presents the analysis of the findings of the research. Finally, conclusions discusses the findings and present the conclusions and research agendas for the future.

#### CONTEXT OF OLD-AGE-PENSION-SYSTEM IN BELARUS

Choice of qualitative discourse analysis is made not only due to the specificity of the tasks, but also features the Belarusian context: official government statistics use other different from worldwide accepted methodology of calculation of quantitative indicators. Moreover, much

statistical data do not reflect the reality, being ideologically colored. The qualitative discourse analysis allows to analyze social and political processes through value discourses, through ideas and contexts of development.

As already noted, discourse is not only determined by the existing social construct, but also creates new (Philips and Hardy 2002). Considering this responsive character of discourse, to analyze it, you must have an idea of the pension system and the institutional structure of the welfare state habits and the historical background, which affects discourses today. Understanding the context is pivotal for the analysis of modern Belarusian discourses on pension reform.

After the collapse of the USSR, many countries began the process of social security reform. Restoration of independence of the Republic of Belarus marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of old-age-pension-system, although fundamental changes did not happen immediately. National legislative framework began to form. The Law "On Pension Security" was adopted in 1992, the Ministry of Social Welfare was renamed into the Ministry of Social Protection in 1994, which in 2001 became part of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.

In the sphere of social protection Belarus remained out of the liberalizing trend until the 2000s., which was characteristic for the neighboring countries. (Yarskaya-Smirnova 2005: 501-504). The slightly modified Soviet system continued to exist. Changes in social policy had a disparate non-systemic nature and obeyed the logic of political business cycle (Chubrik 2008; Autushka-Sikorski 2012). One of the factors of influence in the Belarusian social policy in 2000s were the international financial institutions (IMF, WB), promoting neo-liberal reforms.

Since 2007, the reform of the system of social insurance began to wear larger scale, which was manifested not only in the reduction of categories of citizens eligible for benefits (except for benefits of military and law enforcement officials), but also in raising the relevance of the issue of pension reform in the official rhetoric, which was due to the political crisis in the relations between Belarus and the Russian Federation.

Currently, Ministry of Labor and Social Security deals with issues of old age pension. The Ministry is guided by the Law of the Republic

of Belarus of 17 April, 1992 "On Pension Security", as well as by the decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus of December 31, 2015 nr. 534 "On Issues of Social Insurance" and by other legal acts (Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus. (n.d.) Основные нормативные правовые акты по вопросам пенсионного обеспечения).

The pay-as-you-go system is preserved from the times of the Soviet Union and there is still no obligatory or voluntary funded schemes available for Belarusian citizens in the pension scheme. Social insurance schemes consist old-age, disability, survivors and unemployment benefits. The social insurance system guarantees old-age, disability and survivors benefits for all employed residents of Belarus. The right of every citizen to social pension regardless of length of service is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus.

These benefits are provided conditionally upon the contributions to the Social Security Fund. Employers pay to the Fund 35 percent of total wage fund, while insured workers donate 1 percent in addition. Self-employed taxpayers contribute 1 percent of their income tax deducted for that purpose. Provision of benefits for self-employed and undeclared workers is limited (only basis).

In order to fully identify the main challenges that have arisen in front of the pension system in Belarus today, it is necessary to analyze many of the economic, political, demographic indicators and data. First of all, demographic indicators, because they need more time to change, and their consequences (negative or positive impact) are essential to the social system.

Approaches to reform in the European Union are very different, as well as current models of social security for pensioners. For Belarus, which is not part of the EU, and barely fits into well-known models of the welfare state, the issue of pension reform is no less (if not more) relevant. Since the return of independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the retirement age has remained permanently low: 55 years for women and 60 for men, along with the explicit tendency of increasing proportion of older people in the community, signs of aging nation and further increasing of the economic burden on working people.

Presently every fourth citizen of the republic is above working age, whereas in 2000 only every fifth was a pensioner. According to the Na-

tional Statistics Committee, the decline in the quantity of working age population is expected of more than 0.5 million from the level of early 2012, and the reduction of its share from 60.7 percent to 55.6 percent (Civic dialogue 2015).

Whereas long-term and medium-term negative trends in socio-demographic dynamics persist, the situation with the economic indicators is also complex, and even counting methodologies used by the Belarusian government for statistics can not hide or to improve the country's position in international rankings. According to the results of a survey conducted in Belarus in 2007, nearly a quarter of respondents (23,2%) are able to afford quite decent life, but without very expensive purchases – real estate, expensive cars and so forth, and 26,9% consider their financial position as “difficult” – there is enough money for food, but purchase of other really necessary things (clothes, drugs and so forth) causes difficulties (Filinskaya 2008). Of course, these data are changeable, especially in connection with the regular devaluations of Belarusian ruble and a rate of inflation in the country.

The first mention of the possibility and the need for pension reform in the country does not belong to the year 2007, but exactly back in this year, the President initiated the change in the order of granting social benefits (universal principle of social security was abolished and the state targeted social support was expanded). As a result, the number of categories of citizens who are entitled to social benefits has decreased from 50 to 27 (World Bank 2011: 71). While in the short term, budget expenditures were reduced, about 40% of people in Belarus continued to get social benefits. Low targeting and the imbalance in the distribution may be seen in the fact that the 20% of the least wealthy population accounts for only 40% of social assistance (World Bank 2011: 75). This attempt to reform the social security system did not have a systemic nature and was restricted to specific steps in order to reduce the budget, but it has helped to raise the interest toward the issue of pension reform, and since then interest in the issue persists, as the number of issues and problem areas discuss regarding ageing population have only increased.

According to World Bank “Belarus operates one of the most extensive social assistance systems in the region, with total spending equal to 2.7 percent of GDP and reaching about half of the population” (World Bank 2011). There is no provision to increase the share of spending on pensions in Belarus. As a result of changes to the budget

of the social protection of the population, a structural deficit may form in the upcoming years. For taxpayers, this could mean that they will have to pay more into the fund, or that their retirement will be postponed and/or benefits will be lower.

Due to the depreciation of local currency during the 2014 – 2015 years, the economic crisis has worsened and many Belarusians, even working persons, have closed to the poverty line. The above mentioned amounts and in particular the level of the social pension, which is less than 20 EUR, suggest the insufficiency of retirement benefits for pensioners and the presence of vulnerable groups.

According to Gini coefficient, Belarus has quite favorable data on inequality in the country. While the other Post-Soviet countries worsened indicators of a social inequality after dissolution of the USSR, the statistics concerning Belarus seems an exception. Perhaps, the answer may be found in the Soviet period practices, when the serious problems were present with regards to measuring poverty and inequality. These problems existed, but were hidden for the ideological reasons. The problem is also that each of methods measuring the level of inequality in different spheres of social and economic life has strengths and weaknesses. National methods and instruments of measurements are often useless for the comparative analysis of the countries as they may contradict each other.

Another important factor of pension system sustainability is migration issue. In Belarusian case its significance is difficult to analyze because of lack of reliable migration data. The UN population projections are based on the figure of the net emigration of 5,000 per annum, which hardly affects the sustainability of the system (UN World Population Prospects 2015).

Key figures, reflecting the state of the pension system in the current economic situation, were presented in the last section. However, to understand the context it is also necessary to know how deteriorated is the overall economic condition of the state.

However, while analyzing the sociological indicators mentioned above, we should not forget the political aspect of sociological data, which is of particular importance in the case of Belarus. The political factor determines the kind of system of counting statistics utilized in Belarus, which is quite different from those used in EU countries. Detailed information on this topic may be found in the report *“Global Assessment of the National Statistical System of the Republic of Belarus”* (Laux

et al 2013) and analytical reports of WB consultants (Korns 2007, Olen-ski, Tamashevich 2007).

In this paper, it is important to note the main features of the Belarussian statistics (including a rationale for the choice of qualitative discourse analysis as a methodology): national statistical system uses outdated methods for measuring many indicators; international and national parameters and scales of evaluation of socio-economic development are different; some politically important measures are “adjusted” to the officially declared; there is “an imitation of the national statistical system changes under the pressure of external actors” (Chulitskaya 2012).

In addition, execution of supervising functions by statistical bodies contradicts with the principle of the confidentiality of the information. In the opinion of World Bank experts, this actually leads to partial invalidity of national statistics (Olen-ski, Tamashevich 2007: 40-41). What matters is the fact that since 2008, the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus has been withdrawn from the control of the government, and since that is in the direct subordination of the President (Presidential Decree nr. 445 from August 28, 2008). Thus, the use of national statistical data is limited to the lack of reliable information about their quality, and an additional problem is the ideological orientation of the use of statistics at the national level.

The political context of Belarus, which falls into the undemocratic category by Linz (Linz 2000: 54), is closely related to the processes of social policymaking. This feature implies a paternalistic rule of a single leader over the long term, the absence of political pluralism and the ruling party, the presence of the pro-authorities organizations striving to limit the activities of disloyal ones, restrictions on freedom of speech and other civil rights, obstruction of political activities by opponents.

Particularly important for the analysis of socioeconomic processes, in particular the policymaking process, is a violation of the principle of separation of powers and the replacement legislative by the executive power (the President). It is usual in Belarus, that all the institutions of society are nationalized and society is homogenous (as cited in Chulickaya 2012).

Following the Hanson, the Belarussian political discourse can be divided into the official and opposition (Hansen 2006: 121-122), in which the first is homogeneous in the semantic aspect, but duplicated using

a variety of means and sources (media, books, magazines). Researcher Kazakevich defines official discourse as being in the mode of self-description and being in the structure of “we-they” power relations (Kazakevich 2004).

The years of the Soviet regime did not contribute to the formation and consolidation of practices of participation of various social actors in the formation of the social agenda and policymaking processes. Traditionally powerful actors in societal bargaining, such as trade unions and youth organizations in Belarus are virtually indistinguishable from the state and are the instruments of implementation of the state policy. Their role in defending the interests of citizens is minimal.

The Parliament, which is officially the legislative body, is not perceived as such and performs functions assigned by the Constitution only formally and partially. The legislative initiative of the President (i.e. decrees having the force of law) gives extremely wide powers and set the presidential position in the socio-political arena of the country. De facto there is **no** veto player, which would limit or reject legislative initiatives of the head of the state. The Presidential Administration is accountable only to the President, its operations and structure is non-transparent to the public. This organization supports A. Lukashenka in full as the main speaker, determining the content of the official political and social narrative.

Experts estimate the government’s role in the political system of Belarus as a nominal (BISS 2012; Astapenia, 2014). Ministers and the Prime Minister are appointed by the President and according to a Rouda’s assessment, the Council of Ministers is just the object to which the president shifts the responsibility for mistakes made (Rouda 2011: 137).

The political system of Belarus is hierarchical in structure and characterized by a clear vertical functional subordination to a single subject of political communication. That is why the study of political discourses of the Belarusian legislative power seems impractical, and the official discourse can be regarded as largely homogeneous.

A. Lukashenka, President of Belarus, by exploiting the executive power is actively involved in the legislative process by making proposals for consideration for the parliament, and issuing decrees and decisions of the President of the Republic of Belarus. His position on this or that issue is key and sets the vector of development of the country.

For a more complete presentation of the Belarusian context, it is necessary to pay attention to the public opinion on the state pension and the possibility of the pension system reform. By many indicators Belarusian society is not homogeneous, therefore there is enough field work of public opinion researchers. As of today, there are about 8 central public opinion pollsters in Belarus. The most known of which are the following: IISEPS registered in Lithuania<sup>1</sup>, laboratory of axiometrical studies NOVAK<sup>2</sup>, Institute of Sociology at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus<sup>3</sup>, Center for Sociological and Political Studies at the Belarusian State University (BSU CSPA)<sup>4</sup>, Information and Analytical Center at the Presidential Administration of Republic of Belarus<sup>5</sup>.

The understanding of these features of the Belarusian context is the foundation for the analysis of discourses on pension reform, which will be presented in the next section.

#### DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Neither the government nor the National Assembly or officials from the state apparatus are considered as full social actors in this research due to reasons discussed above. Subjectivity in the discourse is absent, it actually duplicates ideas voiced by the President, assisting him, explaining and repeating the desired accents of the President. The absence of publicly available minutes of meetings further complicates the study of parliamentary discourse on pension reform, as well as low activity of deputies in the mass media.

The main functions of this discourse were propaganda of the ideas of the President and clarification of certain theses. The significance of

<sup>1</sup> Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies/ Независимый институт социально-экономических и политических исследований. Homepage: <http://www.iiseps.org/>

<sup>2</sup> NOVAK axiometric laboratory (Belarusian Analytical Workroom)/ Лаборатория аксиометрических исследований НОВАК (Белорусская Аналитическая Мастерская). Homepage: <http://www.novak.by/>

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Sociology of NAS of Belarus/ Институт социологии НАН Беларуси. Homepage: <http://socio.bas-net.by/>

<sup>4</sup> Center for Sociological and Political Studies/ Центр социологических и политических исследований. Homepage: <http://www.cspr.bsu.by/Main%20Page.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Information and Analytical Center under the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Belarus /Информационно-аналитический центр при администрации Президента Республики Беларусь. Homepage: <http://iac.gov.by/>

these “echoing” discourse is reduced only to the popularization of the main discourse and meaningful differences with the rhetoric of A. Lukashenka were insignificant. That is why in the course of the study, it was decided not to go into the details of these duplicating “abstracts” of presidential discourse and count the official discourse on the pension reform is almost homogeneous.

Public statements of Aleksandr A. Lukashenka from 2007 to April 2016 are utilized for the analysis of pensions and pension reform. As it was mentioned previously, A. Lukashenka, President of Belarus, by exploiting the executive power, has been also actively involved in the legislative process by making proposals for consideration for the parliament, and issuing decrees and decisions of the President of the Republic of Belarus. His position on this or that issue is key and sets the vector of development of the country, therefore, examining the official political discourse, it is first necessary to analyze the statements of President A. Lukashenka on the research issue. For the analysis the statements of the head of the state were used, which were devoted to the issue of pension reform, made in 2014-2015, i.e., on the eve of the presidential election.

The position of the president on the issue of pension reform is not unambiguous. Over the past ten years, the head of the state raised the issue of problems in the sphere of pension provision, as well as the need for reform it more than once, however, no clear decision has been submitted.

To analyze presidential narrative of discourse on pension reform, it is necessary to start with the annual President’s addresses to the Belarusian people and Parliament. In 2007 in his annual address to the people and Parliament, A. Lukashenka spoke of the need to cancel social benefits: “Today we need a new approach to solve issues of social development. <...> State strategy must be built in the direction from the social protection toward the social development. This means that the parasitism is unacceptable” (naviny. by 24.04.2007). “They say it’s unpopular, that our electorate will suffer. Popularity should not be confused with populism” A. Lukashenka underlined, “I have always conducted honest and open policy and have never and under any circumstances bought popularity.”

On 25th May 2007, A. Lukashenka gave an interview in Brest, during which he was asked questions about the reform of the social se-

curity system, since there was a significant reduction of categories of citizens who were entitled to social benefits. The President is convinced that the pensioners and elderly people will understand this change: "The thing is not the benefits today. The older generation has a negative attitude to an increase in the retirement age: that is, they all want to retire as in Soviet times. I promised since people want it and today we do not have a compulsory situation to raise the retirement age, so let be it. But we must admit that receiving all other benefits as previously, that is quite impossible", said the President (25.05.2007, sb.by). In this quotation and further in this research, one of the most important features of the President discourse over pensions manifests itself: the personification and accentuation of achievements through the excessive usage of the first person pronoun. Moreover, the President addresses all ideas and concepts about the reform of the pension system and the social security system as a whole to the nationwide electorate, which constitutes the expressive communicative component of his discourse.

Oftentimes President is positioned as a defender of the interests of pensioners and other social and political actors (depending on the context): "In addition, earlier we had offered that the working pensioner had to choose between pension or salary. I said no, he earned the retirement. Thus we made a consensus on retirement: live, work and get pension" (a transcript of the press conference to Russian journalists on October 12, 2007 on president.gov.by).

Thus, in this address economic pressure was noted, which required attention and reaction as well as other social actors, offering solutions and reforms. However, this discourse is dominated by the political will of the president. Back in 2007, the increasing of retirement age was proposed as an opportunity of pension reform, but was rejected because of the unpopularity among Citizens. The address emphasized the adequacy of pension provision, the stability of the pension system, which in spite of the economic pressures remained stable thanks to the efforts of the president. It can be also noted the discourse presented with the address was liberal: it proposed liberation of the State from the extra burden through the introduction of targeted assistance and benefits system.

In 2008, the President returned to the question of the need to reform the pension system, however, the emphasis was not only on econom-

ic factors, but also on the demographic: "The most important, catastrophically terrible problem for our country is a too small population we have today. (...) only if there are three children in a family, we will solve all the problems. If we continue "tumbling" with one child in the family, there will be no country" (12.02.2008, at a meeting with students of BSU).

In here the idea of reforming the pension system by increasing the retirement age is once again repeated, however, the imperative of avoiding this step by the president is specifically emphasized: "Today Belarus and Russia have not yet increased the retirement age. It has been an override problem for a while. But I promise that I won't do it. Pensioners do not care anymore. But those who will retire tomorrow (and all of us retire, some sooner and some later), they don't want the retirement age to be 65 instead of 60 years for men, and they don't want 60 instead of 55 for women. They do not want. Well, you don't want and I understand you. But do not rankle the government that the free travel was canceled in Minsk" (12.02.2008, at a meeting with students of BSU).

In his annual address to the Belarusian people and the Parliament in 2009, President, after the devaluation of the Belarusian ruble by 20%, utilized the traditional reference to the stability of Belarusian state as a whole and the stability of the pension system in particular: "The state will take all necessary measures to prevent the reduction of pensions amount achieved in the country, will save it to a level acceptable to the living standards of society in the framework of a stable and financially sustainable pension system" (19.06.2009, Address to the Belarusian people and the Parliament). In various interviews of the president, the adequacy and generosity of the existing pension system was highlighted throughout 2009, comparing it with the systems of neighboring countries always in favor of Belarus.

On December 30th, President, speaking about the negative consequences of the economic crisis on the world at the press conference with representatives of the Belarusian media, pointed to new challenges and even threats. The global crisis and in particular the crisis in the neighboring Russian Federation was called as the main cause of economic problems, while efforts to maintain the stability of the social security system and the increase of pensions were underlined.

Recognizing their small size, the President emphasizes the timeli-

ness of payments: "What about pensions, they are small these pensions, benefits and scholarships, but we were paying on time, weren't we? We gave up what we have, that have earned." (30.12.2009, press-conference). Option of introducing second pillar was also sounded as one of the reforming alternatives, however, the President insisted on the lack of support for such a scenario among citizens.

On April 2010, in the annual address to the Belarusian people and the Parliament, the presidential discourse is again dominated by the idea of stability of the pension system, emphasizing payment warranty: "The country has achieved a stable operation of the pension system. Pension provision covers about two and a half million people, which is more than 26 percent of the population. About 10 percent of our gross domestic product is consumed by pensions annually (21.04.2010).

On September 16, 2010 at the Congress of Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, A. Lukashenka paid attention to the topic of pensions and possible pension reform. The president sounded a promise to increase the benefits for the needy, as well he announced the idea of providing more assistance to pensioners by the enterprises in which they worked. The President drew attention to the incorrect comparison of Belarusian and 'Western' pensions and referred in this connection to the possibility of additional voluntary pension insurance for Belarusians, "there is a corporate pension which is a large part of retirement income, so if possible, include the relevant provision in the collective agreements, participate in supplemental insurance programs". Thus, the question of introducing an additional third pillar (or voluntary savings) was put outside of the pension reform discourse, as President regarded it as an additional optional component, the implementation of which does not require the intervention of the state and which is a personal choice of each.

At the same congress, President updated the discourse of the pension reform. The president has designated the issue of retirement age as "sick" and the age of retirement as "unacceptably low" especially in terms of economics ("huge contributions"). Emphasizing his efforts to prevent the raising of the retirement age and support pensioners, A. Lukashenka mentions "rich" Western countries which "dynamically increase the retirement age."

Thus, citizens are given one of the ways of reforming and general reasoning behind it as well people are offered examples of other coun-

tries, however, the strong-willed decision is provided for the delay of reform made for the sake of public opinion: "Therefore, any conversations about the fact that today it is necessary to increase the retirement age, it is necessary to forget these talks once and forever. And of course, people, first of all people, do not want the retirement age to be increased today. They are so far right in this respect." (16.09.2010, speech at the congress of the Federation of Trade Unions).

President stresses the egalitarian nature of the pension provision, its sufficiency and availability: "If somewhere, it's invalid - let them report it to me. We'll put things in order! But there are no abandoned old people." (01.10.2010, Press Conference of President A. Lukashenka to Russian media).

In the election campaign of 2010, A. Lukashenka declared social policy as the main priority, specifically "social orientation" and "well-being" was included as the key provisions (2010 election program of A. Lukashenka). At the same time, the efforts of the President to maintain stability and favorable differences from the country's neighbors were highlighted once more in the context of growing financial crisis. The anti-crisis rhetoric typical of the president already at the beginning of 2010 has intensified towards December 2010 and resumed the discourse of pension reform.

As in the past, A. Lukashenka avoids specifics without naming the authors of various proposals or rumor sources and emphasizes the people and himself as the head of the state, the executor of the people's will. The President once again elaborated on the idea of introducing a second pillar of pension as an option for pension reform in a rather negative way: "With regard to the talks about the transition to the alternative pension savings system, oftentimes there is a lie behind this attempt to mislead people, to deceive them. We will not do that. Memories of the pension funds at the beginning of the 90s are still fresh, which turned into pyramid schemes and enriched their creators. This topic should be approached very cautiously, carefully, to avoid cheating our citizens." (06.12.2010, report President A. Lukashenka at the Fourth All-Belarus People's Assembly).

On April 21, 2011 in his annual address to the Belarusian people and the Parliament, the President only emphasized the adequacy of government spending on pensions and said that though Belarus is among the countries with the lowest retirement age, there should be no talks

about its increase and all sorts of speculation on this subject should be stopped.” The small size of pensions is recognized, but while talking about the continuation of labor activity, the President doesn’t bound it to the lack of material support, but stresses the usefulness of this practice for the production: “and if the pensioner works, thanks to him, so he is needed in this production” (21.04.2011).

Many times during the year the president focuses on increasing pension payments, on efforts to maintain the pension system, promises to increase pensions are sounded multiple times. The discourse of the pension reform is temporarily giving way to a narrative of comparative stability and well-being: “Unfortunately, there are those who love to complain, whine, and assure everyone that nothing good will and prospects are dark. But it is possible to remember that in the mid-90s the country was on the bottom of the abyss, and no one thought that we would get outside. There were times when even the meager pension payment was considered a great asset (09.12.2011, speech at the 41 Congress of Public Association “Belarusian Republican Youth Union”).

The low threshold of retirement is sounded as the main justification of “small” size of pension payments in the speeches of the President in 2011 sound, however, it stressed that it is the people’s choice. In this discourse, there is a third party of additional participants in the process of social policy adjustment, urging the President to increase the retirement age. They are mentioned, but not named.

On March 16, 2012 The President held a meeting on measures to improve the pension provision of citizens. The content of the meeting, which was broadcast to the citizens, shows the efforts of the President to maintain his usual pension system, the success of this system in comparison with other countries, its stability, however, it shows certain economic problems that officials report to the President. Once again, the idea of raising the retirement age sounds as an effective and proven way of Western countries to reform the pension system, as well as the resource to increase pension payments. In addition, proposal announced for the introduction of incentive programs for senior citizens to retire later as an alternative to change the retirement age.

At a meeting with students of the Belarusian State Economic University, the idea of securing the social and economic achievements of Belarus differentiating from other countries was in focus once again.

Low retirement age is positioned among the main achievements of A. Lukashenka's rule, it is presented as a concession of the President to the people: "If people do not want to raise the retirement age, I cannot ignore it. I position myself as the People's President" (12.11.2012, meeting with students and professors of the Belarusian State Economic University).

In the conditions of growing economic crisis and the fall of the national currency, A. Lukashenka denies the insufficiency of pension payments and the failure of the pension system in early 2013: "Another 500 dollars to pay someone to help. For what? In order to go to the currency exchange shop, to buy the currency and create tensions in the market?!" (15.01.2013, Press Conference to Belarusian and Western media).

In the annual address of the President to the Belarusian people and the Parliament, the issue of pension reform was not sounded, although the title of address "Updating the country – the path to success and prosperity" and its central ideas were related to the modernization and upgrading of the economy. In his speech, the president swept aside the question of insufficiency of pension and other benefits, once again pension is presented as coming from the resources of the President: "Therefore I want to tell those who, forgive me, is blathering: if the President said something, then so be it. Sooner and later, but it will. It depends not only on Myasnikovich, but also on each person at every workplace! So harness and pull! Only then you will be rich. And every night, going to bed, every citizen of the country and its guests, residing here at least temporarily, have to think: "What I did that day to demand from A. Lukashenka a higher salary, pension or benefit?" (19.04.2013, annual address to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly).

Thus, the emphasis is made in the liberal understanding of the role of the state as an institution that creates conditions for workers and channels for activity, and economics dominates the discourse of the pension reform once again as a single pressure, namely the severity of the economic burden of pension payments to the state.

Every year, the adequacy and reasonableness of the current pension system and social security as a whole is highlighted: "Our Belarusians are little spoiled, spoiled by the state" (11.10.2013, transcript of the President's press conference for representatives of Russian regional

mass media), "The pension system is running steadily" (14.01.2014, congratulations on the Day of employees of social protection). Nevertheless, in 2014, in his annual address to the people and parliament of the Republic of Belarus A. Lukashenka said that "it is not possible to avoid addressing pension problems." Among the possible solutions the following was noted: increasing the interest in continuing work after reaching the retirement age, the differentiation of pensions, the development of voluntary pension insurance (Naviny. by, 22.04.2014).

In 2015, the President declares the importance of reducing the demographic problem ("we were able to substantially compress the demographic scissors") and calls to "consolidate the positive demographic trends" (Naviny.by, 29.04.2015). Nevertheless, the issue of pension reform is presented amongst relevant, as the share of pensioners is high, and also in connection with the economic problems affecting the country as a result of the general crisis in the region. An additional cause of economic difficulty was found: "Sanctions against our main partner, the fall in oil prices, the devaluation of the Russian ruble, the narrowing of the Russian market - all this has led to a natural and a sharp drop in sales of products in the markets of our key partners. Problems of neighbors immediately become our own, and it is the objective side of the crisis." (Naviny.by, 29.04.2015).

"None of the old man in the country should be abandoned. Even if he has its children living on Kolyma (a river in far-East Siberia), and they forgot about him. Children and the elderly are the face of any state. If we properly treat children and the elderly, then we are the normal state. No one can reproach us neither in democracy nor in totalitarianism, because we care about the future and those who created our country" (Naviny.by, 29.04.2015). However, no concrete solutions were made by the president.

If in August 2015 A. Lukashenka denies the possibility of raising the retirement age, by the end of the same year the discourse of pension reform is permanently present on the agenda of the various meetings and public speeches of the President. In January 2016, this discourse includes confident statements about the need to reform the pension system by changing the retirement age.

"I'm between the two streams of views: proposals of the Government, based on the economy (and I'm absolutely in agreement with them) and opinion of the people, to which I have to listen", noted

A. Lukashenka, emphasizing the priority of political solutions over economic factors: "I will proceed from the same principle, which I use always: not the processes taking place in society or the economy should drive us, and we have to manage these processes" (10.03.2016, belta.by). But even returning to the idea of reforming the pension system, the President shifts the responsibility to the government, which offers, and sometimes requires unpopular decisions to change the retirement age. At the same time, the role of Parliament as the legislative power is not voiced at all, quite on the contrary, the leading role of the head of the state is highlighted, while the role of government is "assisting", offering or demanding reforms.

"While waiting for the" final solution of the citizens on the changes in the retirement age, A. Lukashenka says in various interviews that according to sociological research, the working population now perceives normally the increase in the retirement age, and in one speech, he even thanked the people for their support of the decision on the reform. Today, in contrast to the options proposed by the Government, when women were supposed to retire at 60 and men at 65, the President insists on a more "gentle" reform: 58 years for women and 63 for men. The optimal rate is called a gradual change in the retirement age in increments of six months. The gradual change in increments of six months is called an optimal pace of increase of the retirement age.

Since the theoretical approach of discursive institutionalism requires analysis not only of the ideas that defend certain social actors, but also as how they are delivered, whom they are addressed to, it is necessary to pay attention to linguistic features of discourse. Going into the analysis of the linguistic characteristics of official political discourse on the pension reform released through the speeches of the President, the ultimate populist character should first be noted, which is expressed in deliberately lowering the stylistic of addresses, using colloquial language and jokes, rich in metaphors and highly emotional statements.

The argumentative strategies of presidential discourse on pension reform were analyzed within the following parameters:

- 1) Argumentative field. The head of the state uses both cooperative and confrontational strategy of self-presentation while introducing their thoughts and ideas on pension provision and pension reform issue. In the first case, one of the most common strategies is the identi-

fication, whereby the addresser can identify itself, its main goals with the position of the recipient.

A. Lukashenka repeatedly uses the pronoun “we”, “our”, tokens with a value of common political interests (“Yes, a little bit somewhere we spoiled people. But this is to our credit, we have to put yourself in the merit that we support our people”, “all these nuts, bolts, shafts, plows, potatoes, etc., we create for the sake of people. We will all be retired and live on a pension tomorrow”), as well as attributive field of positive characteristics, such as “people”, “social”, and “fair”.

For the purpose of defamation of political opponents’ ideas A. Lukashenka in his speeches uses an attribute field of negative characteristics, such as “some”, “opposition” (“some opposition”), “the fifth column”. The head of the state uses different expressions, underlining its position in the absence of overt confrontation, because he does not regard opponents as a serious political force, doesn’t see their competitiveness (disrespectful language): “Well, where to get away from them?”; “I must say, they are not all bad, not all nasty, not everyone wants to harm our country”; “They recently appeared like mushrooms after the rain.”

2) Visionary formulas express the strategic objectives, positions and intentions of the speaker, as a rule in the long term. The political self-concept of the President and its vision of the future of Belarus regarding the pension reform on the visionary level is represented in the following basic formulas: “The goal of our state – is the people”, “ We will all be retired and live on a pension tomorrow. There will be no black briefcase, black cars, and so on. We must remember, we will be just normal, ordinary people. Therefore, it is necessary to remember it personally and create a normal state for the people”; “The confrontation within the country is absolutely unnecessary”; “Anyone who nominates itself must take responsibility for the country, so that tomorrow it does not turn into that unknown”; “To what extent? That’s life should show “; “Nowhere in the world, there’ve been found the best way to solve this problem. And it is not necessary to run ahead of the engine.” Taking strategic decisions A. Lukashenka strives to “advance from the life itself.”

3) Accentuation formulas within the discourse of pension reform are primarily expressing the intention of the speaker, emphasize his position and intentions. An example of this can be confirmed by the

accentuation of social orientation of the state in spite of the difficult economic situation: "Some began saying, let the people themselves be responsible for it, let people sink or swim out there, let it do what it wants. Therefore, our policy – our ways part with such ideologues. The purpose of our state and of any government of any state – a nation"; "We have taken our seniors from the poverty line" (A. Lukashenka).

These statements are formulated for the first person in the plural, therefore they are pronounced in a more concrete and emotional manner. The following formulas are used: "I should," "We should," "It's necessary." President actively uses rhetorical questions as accentuation: "I ask parliamentarians, never give up from discussions with the opposition, the fifth column, as we call them. Well, where to get away from them?" (A. Lukashenka).

4) Identification formulas represent some language momentums when the recipient is urged to identify speaking with him, with his political group. A. Lukashenka by using the pronoun "we", "our" appeals to groups of different size and structure, i.e. different groups depending on the context and situation. Most often, a "we" meant "Belarusians", "people" or "government", but found a clear contrast between himself and the government: "It is you (MPs) will be decided with the government... My word will be the last, but I think if you agree, I won't intermeddle in this problem at all." (A. Lukashenka).

Although A. Lukashenka has repeatedly said in his speeches that he is not a populist, and populism is not applicable in relation to his policies, linguistics and discourse analysis suggests the contrary. The discourse of the President on the pension issue is exclusively communicative: he never appeals to experts or political opponents but only to people. To convey his ideas and beliefs to recipients, the President uses a large number of rhetorical devices and techniques, his speech is full of metaphors and comparisons, it is alive and as simple as possible, i.e. it is accessible to mean (average) citizen.

Understanding of the context, historical preferences of the electorate, the political situation in the country (real absence of veto players and the strong position of any other social actors), all these facilitates the understanding of this discourse. This discourse aims at self-presentation in the most favorable light, as well as the gradual "preparation of the ground", i.e. making the citizens aware of the unpopular

decisions in the future. It emphasizes the adequacy and generosity of existing pension system, compares it with the systems of neighboring countries always in favor of Belarus. The support and the very existence of the pension system is charged with credit to the head of the state, which through personal efforts and willful decisions achieved support for pensioners in the country.

It is possible to trace two semantic lines in the official discourse on social benefits: the neo-liberal, with emphasis on the need to reform the system of social benefits and the pension system aiming to increase the efficiency of government spending, as well as the need to introduce the principle of targeted social assistance. The second semantic line is close to a conservative one and it is in contrast to the neo-liberal notions of efficiency. Despite the necessity of neoliberal cuts of state spending on pension needs, the President's rhetoric has remained close to the populist paternalism with an emphasis on social-oriented state.

At the same time, the liberal narrative of the responsibility of citizens to the state for social security remains quite stable. There was repeatedly voiced the idea of values stored since the Soviet times practically without changes in the pension system, as well as the paternalistic narrative criticizing dependency, the ingratitude of the people which are protected by the President. The head of the state voiced liberal ideas of better targeted assistance to pensioners, however, the only option for reforms, which was sounded from year to year by the head of the state, was to increase the retirement age. Caring for the elderly was voiced within the conservative-oriented family policy, where children are considered as guarantees to ensure their parents' old age, enabling the State to absolve itself of responsibility in this matter (Matonytė, Chulitskaya 2012).

The standard of living of pensioners and the size of pension payments in the presidential discourse pension reform is not connected with the idea of reforming directly, as continuous fulfillment of the State's obligations to pensioners is emphasized. At the same time, discourse focuses on the enhancements and timeliness of payments, on the personal responsibility of each of their lives, on the opportunities to work in parallel to obtaining a pension, as well as participation in supplemental insurance programs (without any specifics).

Direct dependence can be traced only with regards demographic and economic pressures, which forced to change the stable the pension

system in order to ease the burden on the budget and not to reduce pension payments. In this discourse, there are practically no other options for reforming the pension system, the only conflicts that arise due to the lack of reform is inter-generational conflict between a relatively small group of young generation just starting to work and pensioners. Conflict about inequality of women and intra-generational conflict are not mentioned in the presidential discourse.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The descriptive institutional analysis Belarusian context revealed features of official discourses on pension reform, their effectiveness in the process of policy changes. Research of the features of the Belarusian context confirmed the correctness of the choice made and verified the research design. Unreliability of Belarusian statistics and problems in the methodology used by the official statistical agencies has strengthened author in the decision for a qualitative case study and the use of methods such as descriptive institutional analysis, qualitative discourse analysis and secondary analysis of statistical and sociological data.

Also in the course of the study of the Belarusian historical path, sources and modern structure of the social system, its legislature, problems and challenges important features of the Belarusian context of the discourse of the pension reform were revealed. These features make the Belarusian case unique and influence the processes of policy changes and adjustments.

First, the Soviet PAYG<sup>6</sup> pension system practically has not undergone significant qualitative changes throughout years of independence of the Republic of Belarus and this have not contributed to the emergence of various social actors' habits or practices in the active participation in the formation of the social agenda and policymaking processes. Changed the formal structure of subordination of the Social Welfare Fund, which is now in the direct responsibility of the President's Administration. Expenses on payment of old age pensions (except for the representatives of law enforcement agencies and officials) were displayed outside of the consolidated state budget and now

<sup>6</sup> PAY-AS-YOU-GO Plan is financed directly from contributions from the plan sponsor or provider and/or the plan participant (OECD Glossary)

distinguished by non-transparency, which also doesn't promote the active participation of citizens in the discussion of pension issues.

Second, undemocratic and paternalistic political regime of the incumbent President negates the role of parliament and the government, placing opposition political forces outside of the political arena and media space, depriving the Belarusian social system of the real veto-player, which would limit or reject legislative initiatives of the head of the state. Lack of independent print media on the shelves of the kiosks and the absolute dominance of the state-owned press, in particular the newspaper of the Presidential Administration "Sovetskaya Belorussia", put in unequal conditions those social actors that go beyond the official discourse on pension reform. The only resource for the promotion and development of oppositional discourses are electronic media. These features define and clearly delineate the official opposition and political discourses, the first of which is duplicated using a variety of means and sources (media, books, magazines).

Third, an important aspect that influences the processes in the social policy changes is formed by the economic crisis and demography persistently presented for ten years under study in the Belarusian context, some of which are hidden for the ideological reasons.

Fourth, general lack of democracy and the ideological orientation of social policy leads to another important feature of the Belarusian context, which does not allow to focus on quantitative data in full: lack of reliable information from statistics at the national level and the limitations of the data, provided by independent research centers. Including a lack of data on the assessment of pension system by citizens. Thus, the Belarusian context determines not only the differences between official and opposition discourses on pension reform, but also conditioned their features.

According to the second task, discourse analysis of contemporary Belarusian discourses on pension reform was conducted. The analysis showed the absolute homogeneity and integrity of the official discourse on pension reform. Basic statements of representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, speeches by officials related to the topic of pensions and pension reform, illustrated the implementation of the policy defined by the President and its administration. In discursive terms their statements are consistent with or completely reproduce meanings articulate in the presidential discourse. The main functions of the dis-

course of the pension reform in the public media are the propaganda of the ideas of the President and clarification of certain theses.

Regardless of its addressees (the President, government officials, experts and journalists), the official discourse is virtually unchanged in content, it is exclusively communicative (aimed at convincing citizens of the electorate), persistent and permanent. The narrative of the official discourse is metaphorical, full of colloquial language as much as possible accessible to the broad public, and complementary to the official authorities and personally to the President. Rhetoric is close to paternalism with populist emphasis on social-oriented state. This narrative is based on rhetoric of comparison of high Belarusian indicators with negative manifestations of the crisis and the instability in other pension schemes abroad.

At the same time, the liberal narrative of the responsibility of citizens to the state for social security remains stable. The idea of value of practically unchanged pension system stored since the Soviet times is repeatedly voiced, as well as narrative criticizing paternalistic dependency, ingratitude of the ordinary people, that President takes care of. Caring for the elderly was voiced within the conservative-oriented family policy, where children are considered as guarantees to ensure their parents' old age, enabling the State to absolve themselves of responsibility in this matter. In general, no inclinations to any particular welfare model were observed.

Based on economic and demographic pressures for the state, the only solution actualized every year was to increase the retirement age. In this discourse, there are practically no other options for reforming the pension system, the only conflicts that arise due to the lack of reform is the inter-generational conflict between a relatively small group of young people entering the labor market and working generation of pensioners. Conflicts about inequality of women and intra-generational conflict are rarely mentioned in the presidential decree.

In terms of content discourse has not changed much in the diachrony, changing only its intensity, frequency of presence in the media and political space, expressiveness and the frequency of the articulation of ideas, which actually remain unchanged. The official discourse of the pension reform, being extremely communicative, is an instrument of legitimizing populist policies and promoting the idea of raising the retirement age.

Despite the pressure from international organizations that helped to shift the policymaking process in many post-Soviet countries to the neo-liberal reforms, the Belarusian government is still not ready for full-scale implementation of the reform in whatever scenario. Also, it is not ready for involving various social and political actors in policy formulation and active participation in the process of reform of social policy. The Belarusian political regime is not ready for the social dialogue.

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IN THE TWILIGHT  
OF INTERNATIONALIST POLITICS:  
MEANS OF POLITICAL  
ACTIVITY OF PRO-SOVIET  
ORGANIZATIONS IN WESTERN  
REPUBLICS OF USSR, 1988–1991<sup>1</sup>

THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF THIS ARTICLE IS SIMPLE but at the same time important: why, for all the ideological affinity, common organisational basis, standardised relations with the Union centre, the pro-Soviet organisations of the western USSR republics were so different in their political activities and achievements.

While some of them were extremely active at the all-Union level creating organisations and actively fighting against “reforms” and “for the USSR,” others in every way avoided expressing their public political position and offered virtually no resistance to reforms and disintegration of the Soviet state. Some were determined to mobilise their supporters to participate in political activities; others suppressed such practices and preferred to stay in an amorphous and uncertain political field. And, finally, some were prone to open acts of disobedience and violence, while others tried to avoid it.

An answer to this question is important for a deeper understanding of the circumstances that made the collapse of the USSR possible and opened the way for the creation of new independent states. It is also important for understanding the nature of numerous political conflicts across the post-Soviet space, as well as the configuration of interstate relations in the region (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

We will try to answer the question posed by comparing the tactics and basic political means used by pro-Soviet organisations in 1988–1991,

<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by a grant (No. MOD-17034) from the Research Council of Lithuania

as well as the reasons that determined the choice of such means. In the course of the study, we will try to focus on several of the most important manifestations of political activity, which can be divided into conventional and non-conventional ones.

By *conventional* we shall mean activities within the established legal norms and rules of the political game. For the purposes of this article, these would be elections, rallies and demonstrations, factions' activities in the parliament, participation in the formation of the government, as well as activities within the framework of all-Union organisations.

By *non-conventional* means we understand various forms of direct pressure on the government (strikes, for instance), civil disobedience, actions aimed at undermining the legitimacy of government bodies, and various acts of violence. In the present case, we will consider attempts to create parallel power structures, large-scale strikes, demands for autonomy, separatism, territorial claims to neighbours, seizure of power, numerous acts of violence, armed clashes, and terrorism.

In 1988–1991, in the western republics, just as in all other parts of the USSR, a political diversification of the previously uniform political field and forming of organisations different in their political orientation took place (Plokhly, 2014; Walker, 2003). Consolidation and structuring occurred both in the pro-Soviet and pro-communist spectrum, which led to establishment of a whole bloc of political and public organisations although the process was not completed in all the republics by 1991 (Brown, 2004; Roberts, 2004). Describing the activities of pro-Soviet organisations, we will consider the most significant of them, the ones that have had a noticeable impact on political processes: Internationalist movements/fronts, pro-Soviet groups in communist parties, and joint councils of work collectives.

We will further examine the role of each conventional and non-conventional form of political struggle in the activities of the pro-Soviet organisations of the region, and try to indicate the reasons influencing the choice of political means and the consequences it has led to. After reviewing the basic means, our task will be to compare the pro-Soviet organisations across the republics and find out the reasons for such significant differences in the choice of tactics and the results of political activity.

## ELECTIONS, PARLIAMENTARY FACTIONS, GOVERNMENT FORMATION

From 1989 to 1990, as a result of elections in the USSR, all elective authorities were renewed. The first important campaign was the election of People's Deputies of the USSR in March 1989; the following year elections were held to the republics' Supreme Councils which were destined to become the first parliaments of independent states. Also, in 1989–1990, all the republics had their local elections.

The 1989 elections were the first election campaign in the USSR to allow a political competition. In and of themselves, the election and the campaign of agitation had a decisive influence on the structuring of political trends in the CPSU and political forces in all western republics, except for Belarus, where political structuring developed slower and was noticeably formed only in 1990.

By the 1989 elections in Latvia, Estonia and Moldova, the political process was fully determined by a confrontation between the national and internationalist fronts, as well as the reformist (“national”) and conservative (“internationalist”) trends in local communist parties. The case of Lithuania was peculiar in a way that the positions of pro-Soviet organisations in this country were initially extremely weak and could not seriously compete with their opponents (*Балтийский путь к свободе*, 2006).

In Belarus, a political structuring was only starting in 1989, and the campaign was characterised by a rather inexplicit and not really obvious competition between the conservative and reformist forces within the Communist Party of Belarus (. For this reason, an accurate analysis of the political results of elections in the Belarusian SSR is hindered. The Belarussian Popular Front, as an alternative political force, was only at the stage of formation and did not participate in the elections independently, limiting itself only to a support of reformist-minded candidates (*Навумчык*, 2006).

The campaign results for pro-Soviet organisations were mixed. On the one hand, people's fronts took an advantage in Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia; the campaign was also quite successful for the national forces of Moldova. At the same time, many active representatives of pro-Soviet organisations were able to become deputies who later were quite active not only at the national level, but also throughout the entire USSR. It is more difficult to make a clear political division among

the elected deputies from Ukraine and Belarus, but on the whole it can be constituted that pro-Soviet forces won that campaign.

The most important campaign of the period was the elections to the Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics in 1990 wherein the formation of new political forces was fully manifested and in which pro-Soviet forces of all the republics took an active part. Given that the election campaign took place in the context of conclusive formation of new political forces, the election results were much more unambiguous than the 1989 campaign. In Lithuania, the campaign ended with a complete defeat of the pro-Soviet forces while in Belarus they totally won. In Latvia, Estonia and Moldova, pro-Soviet organisations appeared to be a prominent parliamentary minority; in Ukraine they received an unstable majority of votes.

As noted above, pro-Soviet political forces were completely defeated in Lithuania. Out of a hundred deputies' seats, only 6 were received by Communist Party of Lithuania representatives on the platform of the CPSU, which amounted to only about 5% of the deputies' corps. At the same time, the leadership of internationalist "Unity" was not elected to parliament, which once again demonstrates the weakness of this organisation in the republic. All the victories of the pro-Soviet forces took place in regions densely inhabited by local Poles and Belarusians, as well as in Sniečkus (now Visaginas), a city built to support the operation of the Ignalina nuclear power plant. At the same time, the total share of representatives of national minorities among the deputies' corps was about 14%, meaning that minorities' representatives got their seats being supported also by the parties advocating for independence.

The situation in Belarus was the opposite. Differentiation of the political field in the country was not clear and the division within the Communist Party of Belarus into various branches is difficult to reliably record. At least such a division was institutionalised neither in a form of separate political organisations, nor as parliamentary factions. However, there is no doubt that a stable majority of deputies can be referred to the pro-Soviet political spectrum based on their political positions and voting on fundamental issues. Representatives of the Belarusian Popular Front received 17-25 seats (15%), another nearly 80 deputies participated in meetings of a politically amorphous *Democratic Club* which in the end could not become a full-fledged parliamentary faction (Апазіцыя, 2015; Роўда, 2011; ).

In Latvia and Estonia, pro-Soviet organisations received 55 and 25 seats respectively against 131 and 70 gained by the supporters of independence. The pro-Soviet forces in Estonia had the greatest success in Tallinn and in the Northeast of the country, while in Latvia they were most popular in Riga and Latgale. In Moldova, pro-Soviet organisations got 54 seats, mainly in Transnistria, Gagauzia and some major cities. All these republics did not have enough votes to block such critical decisions as the appointment of the government and proclamation of independence, so they generally found themselves in political isolation. Nevertheless, the factions of deputies could formulate their position and mobilise supporters at the parliamentary level (История Латвии, 2005; Граф, 2007; Misiunas and Taagepera, 2006; Блейере, 2015; Розенфельд, 2009; Plakans, 2008).

In all the republics these factions united Russian-speaking deputies in the first place. When considering the most fundamental issues such as independence, representatives of these fractions did not participate in the vote. In Estonia and Latvia, the factions existed until 1992 and the following elections to parliaments. In Moldova, it virtually ceased its work after deputies beating in 1990. After those events, the faction canceled its full-fledged activities and many deputies actively joined the creation of the separatist Pridnestrovian Moldavian SSR and the Gagauz Republic.

Differentiation of political forces in Ukraine after the 1990 elections was not clear and as related to the pro-Soviet segment, in general terms it resembled the situation in Belarus. Deputies from the Popular Front and allies received 130 seats, while the democratic platform got 41. Two poles were formed among the supporters of the Communist Party – the ones standing for greater independence and sovereignty and the orthodox pro-Soviet forces. However, it is difficult to draw the exact political boundary between the two currents considering that a large part of the deputies, in a similar way to the case of Belarus, avoided or did not have a clear political position (Касьянов, 2008; Україна, 2007; Тертичний, 2014).

After the elections, the parliamentary majority was organised into the Moroz faction. Although the political stances of this parliamentary group were changeable, it can be stated that, following the results of the 1990 elections, pro-Soviet forces in Ukraine gained an unstable majority.

ACTIVITY AT THE USSR LEVEL, PARTICIPATION  
IN THE WORK OF ALL-UNION ORGANISATIONS

A separate field of struggle for pro-Soviet organisations was activity at the Union level, which they rightly considered important or even crucial for the situation development. Many organisation leaders were increasingly critical of the activities of the Union leadership, above all of Gorbachev's reformist policy.

Representatives of pro-Soviet organisations did not always voice their attitude publicly, especially in the early years of perestroika, but the split of the CPSU Central Committee into a "reformist" and "conservative" courses became increasingly evident culminating in the institutionalisation and creation of several opposing branches within the CPSU in 1989. The branches, in turn, fall into numerous ideological, national and regional groups. All this was a logical, albeit not fully calculated result of the political reform announced at the 19th CPSU Conference and was politically manifested during the election campaign of People's Deputies of the USSR, the work of the Congress of Deputies of the USSR (1989–1991), the Supreme Council of the USSR and the creation of various platforms and mass organisations within the CPSU framework.

The publication of a famous article by N. Andreeva in March 1988 in the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* newspaper, with a program of criticising perestroika, can be considered a starting point for crystallisation of the CPSU conservative wing. The idea of creating "people's fronts" in support of perestroika, as a means of consolidating the "reformist" forces, was publicly announced in early April 1988.

The most important period in the formation of the "conservative" political wing within the USSR was 1989. At the all-Union level, the institutionalisation of both pro-Soviet and reformist forces took place during the election of People's Deputies of the USSR, and then the work of the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Within the framework of the Congress of People's Deputies, *Soyuz (Union)* deputy group was created uniting 549 deputy members. In April, the United Front of Workers was founded.

The process of consolidating pro-Soviet forces was also happening at the national level. In Estonia, this activity took place earlier than at the Union centre (in summer 1988); the process went somewhat

slower in Latvia and Moldova (January 1989), and even slower and with problems in Lithuania (June 1989). In Ukraine, such organisations were established during 1989, mostly administratively, although some local initiatives took place – in particular the Donbass Internationalist Front – but they were small-scale and not greatly active. In Belarus, with all its pro-Soviet orientation, the party elite in every possible way shied away from differentiation of the political field and from engaging in a clear and public political position; no new organisations were created.

Participation of the western republics' pro-Soviet organisations in the activities of all-Union political formations was also different. Some of them were in fact driving all-Union processes and actively participating in the creation of a pro-Soviet bloc in the USSR – the most important role was played by the Estonian, Latvian and Moldovan Internationalist fronts, as well as communists of Estonia and Latvia. When creating the United Front of Workers, representatives of Moldova, Estonia and Latvia joined the leadership of the organisation; they were also among the organisers of the *Soyuz (Union)* deputy group. Other organisations joined the process somewhat later and were less active (the ones from Ukraine and Lithuania).

Representatives of Belarus almost completely avoided a political struggle at the Union level, including any actions aimed at preserving the USSR, and adopted a wait-and-see approach. Perhaps the only act of visible support of conservative forces by Belarus was the permission to hold a Constituent Conference of the CPSU Bolshevik platform in Minsk in 1991. At the same time, the conference had no official support, the Belarusian delegation was not significant and only one representative of Belarus took a place in the governing bodies. The very permission to hold the conference was most likely a fulfillment of a request from the Union centre.

Such a varied activity of the pro-Soviet forces of the western republics at the all-Union level should be related with their different political stances in the first place, as well as with the institutional potential and experience of political activity. Since 1988, the pro-Soviet forces of Estonia, Latvia and Moldova have been acting in an obvious confrontation with both the Popular Fronts and local Communist parties. Political events in these republics have in general outstripped the all-Union ones, and the leaders and activists of pro-Soviet organisations

had more political experience and were way better prepared for a vigorous public political activity. Political competition was an important incentive for organisational development.

In this regard, it should also be noted that one of the most important centres for the formation of the "conservative" wing of the CPSU in Russia was in Leningrad, where positions of the reformists united by the Popular Front were also strong.

A relatively low activity of the pro-Soviet forces of Ukraine at the Union level can be mainly explained by the fact that these forces were in power and did not have a desire to go into a public conflict with the reformists of the Union centre and Gorbachev (Горань, 1993). It was also important for the Communists of Belarus to maintain good relations with the Union centre regardless of its policy; besides, the political development and organisations' structuring in the Belarusian SSR took place extremely slowly – and so was obtaining a real political experience for acting in the new conditions of political competition.

#### STRIKES AS A FORM OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE

Strikes as a method of political pressure on the authorities became specifically popular in the USSR in 1989, after large-scale mining walk-outs. In April, strikes broke out in Vorkuta and by summer they had spread to the Kuzbass and then Donetsk coal basins. As a result, in one way or another the strike movement affected 494 enterprises in 54 cities. The strikes' detonators were workers' everyday problems but by June, certain political demands were put forward, including demands for the abolition of the CPSU monopoly on power in the USSR. The pressure on the authorities was quite successful, and miners gained significant concessions from the government.

Since then, strikes have become a common means of political struggle in various regions of the USSR, especially for those organisations that relied on the "working class." In 1989, calls for mass strikes were heard in all western republics of the USSR but were able to turn into a big-scale movement only in Ukraine, Estonia and Moldova.

That said, only in Estonia and Moldova the strike movement was under the control of pro-Soviet organisations. By its scale, the movement can not be compared to the one of miners', but in certain moments it had a noticeable influence on the political process.

The strike movement in Estonia and Moldova was quite similar throughout the organisation. The main reason that mobilised part of the population for radical action was a change in the language policy and adoption of new language laws, followed by additional political and social demands. In both cases, the main driving force was the leadership of large enterprises, mainly of Union subordination, whose position was reinforced by fears of “nationalism,” the conductors of which were People’s Fronts and the Communist Parties of the republics.

Strikes in Estonia were first and became a certain standard and example for other pro-Soviet movements and organisations. The strikes broke out in August, covered 7 cities and 14 enterprises and ended with a partial compromise and interference of the Union centre.

In Moldova, the strike movement started in the summer of 1989 having the language issue as the main reason, just like in Estonia. A large number of rumors circulated around the draft law on language. In the Russian-speaking environment, information about possible criminal liability for ignorance of the Moldovan language and forced translations of all documentation into Moldovan, backed with the rumors of mass layoffs, had an especially active circulation.

It should be specifically emphasised that the conflict in this case was unfolding not that much with the People’s Front of Moldova, which had no real power at that moment, but with the leadership of the Communist Party of Moldova, which supported the adoption of the new law.

The reaction of the party structures to the strike was sufficiently tough and the party leadership tried first to prevent, and then to stop it. Despite the fact that pro-Soviet organisations, apparently, had their supporters in the Central Committee, most of the Central Committee was extremely negative towards the case.

The strike started on August 14 and in the beginning covered 34 companies in 7 cities. In a few weeks, the geography of the protests expanded even further and included 43 enterprises in 8 cities of the country. The authorities’ response made it possible to significantly reduce the scope of the strike movement, but it was at that moment when a significant territorial differentiation became truly noticeable. While in Chişinău and other cities the party structures managed to take control over the situation, strikes in Transnistria and Gagauzia only intensified.

The outbreak of strikes provoked intense discussions about their political and economic significance. They caused considerable damage primarily to the economies of the regions which they took place in. Financial losses were borne by the workers too, as they did not receive their salaries. As in the case with Estonia, an all-Union fund-raising was organised, but that solved the problem only partially. Moreover, the distribution of funds was the reason for multiple accusations of abuse. In turn, representatives of the People's Front of Moldova often stressed that enterprises were of federal importance and their main income was not related to the national budget, and that strikes in Transnistria had no significant impact in particular on Moldova.

Unexpectedly strange is the weakness of the pro-Soviet strike movement in Latvia. Latvian SSR had all the conditions for strike activities: a high concentration of industrial enterprises (including the ones of Union subordination), a large number of Russian-speakers in major cities, an influential directorate corps. But strikes did not unfold, although threats of their conduct were voiced as an "extreme measure." This can only be explained by a much greater influence of the party nomenclature in the pro-Soviet movement of Latvia, which restrained strikes and independent activities of factory managers. The major mobilising factor as in Estonia and Moldova – a sharp conflict between the pro-Soviet forces and the directors' corps with the local Communist Party – was missing.

In Lithuania, on the contrary, the absence of pro-Soviet strikes can be explained by the weakness of pro-Soviet organisations and the consolidation of virtually all political forces based on the ideas of sovereignty, and, later, of withdrawal from the USSR. In addition, the concentration of industry in Lithuania was not high. Compared to all other republics of the western part of the USSR, the number of large enterprises of Union subordination was lower in Lithuania. In addition, they were very scattered geographically, which hindered concentration of the pro-Soviet political forces potential.

In Ukraine, there was no sharp conflict between the directors' corps and pro-Soviet forces with the local Communist Party either. On the contrary, a number of industries and regions had conflict relations with the Union centre and sought to increase their independence through establishing closer relations with the authorities of the republic and replacing the Union subordination with the national one (Литвин, 1994).

Strikes in Ukraine had the opposite political direction and were aimed at expanding the republican autonomy. The coal industry was in the Union subordination and the Union centre acted as the basic opponent for the miners of Donetsk and Lugansk areas. Among the political demands was a withdrawal from Moscow's subordination and transfer to the jurisdiction of Kyiv. In such conditions, even a limited cooperation between miners and the People's Movement of Ukraine took place.

No conflict between the leadership of the Union enterprises and the Communist Party took place in Belarus, but rather the Communist Party was under the control of the directors' corps. Since 1985, virtually all the leading posts in the Communist Party of Belarus were occupied by representatives of industrial sector, the so-called Minsk industrial group (Urban, 1989). As a result, there were no mass strikes in support or against the USSR until April 1991. But even the uprising in the spring of 1991 was very short, and the strikers did not formulate a clear position on important political issues (Гісторыя беларускай дзяржаўнасці, 2012).

#### REQUIREMENTS OF AUTONOMY, SEPARATISM, TERRITORIAL CLAIMS

Separatism in the western republics of the USSR in the late 1980s and early 1990s was quite a contradictory phenomenon which can be considered as a case of creating power structures aimed at weakening the republican centre. The reasons for separatism were complex and consisted of both existing political (national) contradictions and attempts to use separatism by the Union authorities to exert pressure on the leadership of the Union republics. One way or another, all western republics of the USSR were included in this process, although only in Moldova the situation ended in military clashes and split of the country.

Pro-Soviet organisations in one form or another were included in attempts of power reorganisation in their republics, which was manifested in supporting the idea of various forms of national and territorial autonomy, and in extreme cases in open separatism.

A certain exception in this case is Belarus where only a small association *Yetvyz* publicly advocated for the autonomy of the western Polesia region. Politically, the association quickly changed the support of the Belarusian Popular Front to pro-Soviet positions (later to the

positions of Slavophilism and Russian nationalism). But in general, the movement's activity was of a cultural nature and it can not be attributed to an autonomist and, especially, a separatist movement in a political sense. Ideas of autonomy of the western Polesia were not fixed in the documents of political organisations, local or regional authorities, as it was in all other western republics of the USSR (Цацко, 2016).

In a similar way, autonomist tendencies in Latvia were rather weak. Immediately after its creation, Interfront of the Latvian SSR included an item on the autonomy of Latgale in its programme. A separate emphasis was placed on the development and preservation of Latgalian culture and language, although the importance of this region for the Internationalist Front was in the domination of the Russian language among the population. Nevertheless, this idea's development did not have a serious continuation. The topic of autonomy was repeatedly posed by some pro-Soviet forces, but it was not supported by Latvian communists. Apart from being formulated in the program documents of the Internationalist Front, at rallies and in speeches of individual politicians at the regional and national level, the idea of autonomy has not received any political development.

A rather specific situation with autonomies and separatism developed in Ukraine where in the late 1980s various autonomy advocating organisations were created. The most famous is the case of the Donbass Interfront. The organisation advocated for the autonomy of Donbass, preservation of the USSR and support for the "conservative" wing in the CPSU. The influence and organisational potential of this formation was insignificant, and its activity did not go further than some minor local actions.

A more complicated case took place in the Crimea. An aspiration to autonomy from Kyiv had two dimensions. The first one was related to the movement of the Crimean Tatars, which was rather anti-Soviet in its core. The second one was generally of a pro-Soviet nature and was associated with the desire of local Russian-speaking elites to expand their control over the region and also to remain as part of the USSR. The position of Kyiv on the Crimean issue was ambiguous: on the one hand, the Ukrainian authorities recognised the right to autonomy, on the other hand they tried to maintain control over the region and prevent separatism (Україна, 2001).

In Lithuania, the idea of creating autonomies in places of compact residence of non-Lithuanian population was expressed and fixed in the

documents of various pro-Soviet organisations (Internationalist movement "Unity", Communist party of Lithuania. CPSU). In the complete version, the autonomies should have included Klaipėda, Sniečkus and Vilnius region. The first two regions were mainly Russian-speaking while in the third one Poles predominated. The movement for a Polish autonomy was strong enough to be supported not only by public and political organisations, but also by local authorities. But the interference of the Parliament and the Government of Lithuania in the autonomists' activity in 1989 actually stopped their operations.

Much more radical were the separatist trends in Estonia. The idea of Estonian Northeast autonomy was supported by the Internationalist Front and other pro-Soviet organisations. Moreover, the local authorities actually established a real control over the territory and announced the preservation of the USSR laws. The consistency of the local "autonomists'" position was reflected in the fact that in 1991 a referendum on preservation of the USSR was held in the Northeast regions, while it was canceled in other parts of Estonia (Юшкин, 2016).

The situation with autonomy demands and separatism in Moldova developed in the most dramatic way. In this country, pro-Soviet organisations were initially radical, demanding the creation of an upper chamber of the parliament (chamber of nationalities), autonomy in Gagauzia and Transnistria; they supported local authorities which established substantial control over their territory. As a result, pro-Soviet forces became the main driving force in the self-proclamation of sovereign and later independent republics of Gagauzia and Transnistria (Republica Moldova, 2011).

The Union centre took direct participation in the formulation of questions on autonomy and separatism, as well as the advancement of territorial claims, but it is difficult to accurately assess the degree of Moscow authorities' influence on these processes and there remains an open question of existence of a holistic strategy to aggravate the problem of separatism and territorial claims. In general, there is no direct correlation between the level of separatism and the severity of the conflict with the Union centre. Most likely, the movement for autonomy and separatism was used by the Union centre to put pressure on the republican authorities, but the real political development of these trends was determined by internal conditions and authorities' policies in each of the republics.

The Baltic republics were at the forefront of confrontation with the Union centre, unequivocally taking the course to expand sovereignty, and later to withdraw from the USSR, but at the same time separatists and autonomists received no autonomies in any of the republics. The confrontation between Moscow and Moldova was much less acute. At least the Union centre did not abolish the decisions of the Moldavian SSR Parliament and did not introduce an economic blockade. But as a result of the pro-Soviet organisations' activities, two separatist republics emerged.

SEIZURE OF POWER, CREATION OF FORCE-BASED ORGANISATIONS,  
VIOLENT ACTIONS AND ARMED CLASHES

The weakening of central authority and the control of law enforcement agencies over public order led to the growth of civil disobedience, organised violence, and the creation of voluntary armed formations in various parts of the USSR. Also, increasing was the frequency of various power actions to put pressure on the authorities, government buildings' blocking and storming, and regular violence in the clash of political forces.

From the law and order point of view, the situation in the western part of the USSR was much better than in the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, the number of acts and threats of violence was growing, and various political organisations, including pro-Soviet ones, started establishing force-based organisations and turning to direct action.

As pro-Soviet forces completely controlled the political situation in Belarus and almost all activity was carried out within the CPSU and other power structures, there was no need to form force-based organisations. The level of violence in the political process was limited to minor incidents. There were only two most notable episodes, and in both cases it was a confrontation between supporters of the Belarusian Popular Front and the police. These were an attack by the law enforcement units on a procession in the memory of the political repression victims (November 1989) and an attempt of Belarusian Popular Front supporters to break through to a Lenin's monument with a wreath of barbed wire on November 7, 1990. There were no facts of direct clashes between supporters and opponents of the USSR preservation (Хрышчэнные нацыі, 2011; Кебич, 2008).

If in Belarus the absence of direct actions on the part of pro-Soviet organisations was due to their complete control over the political situation, in Lithuania, on the contrary, it was a consequence of independence supporters' dominance. A confrontation developed between the Lithuanian authorities and the Union force and political structures, with no direct participation of pro-Soviet political organisations.

More active were the pro-Soviet organisations of Latvia. Acts of violence were not frequent but they still took place. The most significant episode occurred after the signing of a decree on non-conformance of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia's declarations of independence to the laws and constitution and of the USSR by Mikhail Gorbachev on May 14, 1990. On May 15, Interfront supporters tried to break into the Supreme Council building and clashed with People's Front volunteers and the police. As a result, the attackers were stopped at the entrance by OMON special task force units guarding the parliament. Representatives of pro-Soviet organisations were also accused of organising a series of explosions (no human victims involved) and desecration of monuments in 1990 and 1991.

In Estonia, pro-Soviet organisations were even more active in the use of force. "Workers' brigades" were created in large factories of Soviet subordination and together with "workers' detachments for the protection of law and order" from the North-Eastern regions they confronted the supporters of independence.

Among the most significant direct actions of pro-Soviet organisations, there were explosions with no human victims as in Latvia (March 1991), as well as an attempted assault of the government building and the Supreme Council in Tallinn on May 15, 1990. On that day, a group of 2-3 thousand active supporters of the USSR held a rally in front of the parliament building, which turned into an assault. As a result, about 200-300 people entered the parliament yard, but after staying there for 3 hours, the attackers were forced to retreat. The police guarding the building had firearms, and thousands of supporters of independence began to gather at the invitation of Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar outside the parliament building, but they managed to avoid a direct clash of the parties (Baxrep, 2012).

The most tense situation was in Moldova where the political process as a whole was much more connected with violence. Mass fights between Russian speakers and Moldovans in Chişinău have been noted

since 1988. Acts and threats of violence periodically broke out during mass protests; volunteer campaigns into rebel regions were organised. In turn, pro-Soviet organisations, primarily in Gagauzia and Transnistria, created various volunteer formations that participated in the seizure of power, actions of disobedience, clashes with law enforcement forces and volunteers, and in hostilities in 1992. The activities of volunteer and paramilitary groups in the separatist regions were of regular nature from late 1989 to August 1991 (Taranu and Gribincea 2012; Костащ, 2010; ЯКОВЛЕВ, 1993).

#### POLITICAL ACTIVITY FORMS COMPARISON

If we compare the conventional and unconventional political activity forms of pro-Soviet organisations in 1988-1991 in all the republics, a summary table will look like the following (see Table below). Cases of an obvious use of a certain form of activity are marked with a *plus* (adds one point to the rating); a *minus* indicates an absence or very little activity (zero points in the rating).

A *plus/minus* marking displays intermediate options and adds 0,5 points. The case of separatism in Estonia was considered as intermediate since the confrontation did not eventually lead to the formation of a self-declared autonomy or, even more, to that of an independent republic – although Estonia's North-Eastern regions authorities were close to this. Autonomy demands in Ukraine are also assessed as an intermediate case due to the fact that in the eastern regions, such requirements were weak in the described period while Crimea's autonomy was recognised by Kiev, and the discussion was only about the degree and the form of autonomy.

We have also assessed the case of territorial claims to Lithuania from the communist authorities of Belarus as a *plus/minus*: the issue statement was made rather as a formality and the BSSR authorities did not dare to implement any practical steps and soon the problem was withdrawn. The last intermediate case is the use of weapons in Estonia and Latvia. Despite a series of bombings, allegedly carried out by activists of pro-Soviet organisations, they did not lead to human casualties and had no significant political consequences.

TABLE 1

	<i>Belarus</i>	<i>Lithuania</i>	<i>Latvia</i>	<i>Estonia</i>	<i>Moldova</i>	<i>Ukraine</i>
<i>Conventional activities</i>						
Elections in 1989, 1990	+	+	+	+	+	+
Rallies and demonstrations	+ -	+	+	+	+	+
Parliamentary factions	-	-	+	+	+	+
Participation in government formation	+	-	-	-	-	+
High level of activity at the all-Union level	-	-	+	+	+	-
	2,5	2	4	4	4	4
<i>Unconventional activities</i>						
Parallel power structures	-	+	+	+	+	
Big-scale strikes	-	-	-	+	+	-
Demands for autonomy	-	+	+	+	+	+ -
Separatism	-	-	-	+ -	+	-
Territorial claims to neighbours	+ -	-	-	-	-	-
Direct actions	-	-	+	+	+	-
Numerous facts of violence	-	-	-	-	+	-
Armed clashes, terrorism	-	-	+ -	+ -	+	-
	0,5	2	3,5	5	7	0,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7,5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4,5</b>

Thus, the smallest number of political activity forms was used by the pro-Soviet forces in Belarus. Given their dominant position in the power structures, the BSSR pro-Soviet forces did not use all the conventional forms of political activity. They did not seek to mobilise the population, delayed political structuring in every possible way, and did not create their organisations or even factions in the Supreme Council. Fearing to confront the political forces in Moscow, the communist authorities of Belarus virtually did not express themselves in the activities of pro-Soviet and USSR organisations. There was no need in the use of unconventional means of political activity. The BSSR

authorities only posed a threat of putting forward territorial claims to Lithuania on the Vilnius region, which was not followed by practical actions. In general, the political strategy of the pro-Soviet forces in Belarus was in the conservation of the then-current situation in the country, preservation of the unstructured and diluted political field, avoidance of clear political positions and the desire to avoid conflicts with the centre.

The opposite of the pro-Soviet forces of Belarus were the pro-Soviet forces of Lithuania whose set of political means was also very limited. Almost no conventional methods were used which was due to their overall low organisational potential and narrow social base. The set of unconventional means was also extremely limited and boiled down only to supporting the idea of autonomy in places of compact residence of national minorities' representatives (primarily the Poles of the Vilnius region).

Unlike the pro-Soviet forces in Belarus, same forces in Ukraine did not have such stable positions and therefore were forced to use a wider toolkit of conventional means including regular mass actions and formation of factions in the parliament. At the same time they, just like their Belarusian counterparts, were virtually unnoticeable on the all-Union level (specifically considering the size of the republic). Out of unconventional means, only demands for autonomy were used.

The activities of the pro-Soviet organisations of Latvia, Estonia and Moldova were similar within the conventional policy framework. All these formations were in opposition to the republican authorities, which required certain internal mobilisation. Having limited opportunities to influence the government, they sought to make the maximum use of all other means including the all-Union political scene.

As for the use of unconventional means, the situation in Latvia and Estonia was very similar. Pro-Soviet organisations put forward demands for autonomy; in Estonia, open separatist actions were arranged, there were several cases of street violence and attempts to assault government buildings, as well as a series of explosions with no human victims.

In Moldova, the pro-Soviet organisations used virtually the entire possible set of tools very actively. That included domestic violence, seizure of power, self-proclamation of sovereignty, and armed clashes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The development of pro-Soviet organisations was determined in the first place by a republic's internal conditions. The influence of the centre on the events was significant, but it can not explain such a large variety of the means and forms of struggle used. The Union centre did not have a political unity, and, most likely, there was no clear strategy for supporting pro-Soviet organisations. In such conditions, the greatest development was experienced by organisations which were active by themselves, could draw their own resources, including human and financial ones, and then lobby for support from the centre.

Thus, the differences in the forms of political activity were the result of a combination of several political factors. The first key moment was the existence of a social base for the pro-Soviet movement. Such a base existed in all the republics, except for Lithuania. Such a social base was primarily formed by the Russian and Russian-speaking population.

The social base for pro-Soviet organisations was also made up of national minorities who feared discrimination by titular nations. In the Western republics, only two communities – the Poles of Lithuania and the Gagauzians of Moldova – had a significant political importance. Gagauzians were consolidated and their national movement had a distinct pro-Soviet orientation. The Polish community in Lithuania was not so unified politically. Some of the Poles were pro-Soviet, as evidenced by the results of the 1990 elections, but many were loyal to the idea of independence. Moreover, the position of Poland, whose new authorities expressed support for the reforms and the desire for greater autonomy in Lithuania, did not contribute to the development of pro-Soviet sentiments and aspirations. Thus, the phenomenon of weakness and low activity of the pro-Soviet forces in Lithuania can be explained, first of all, by a narrow social base.

Other republics had a significant social base for the development of pro-Soviet organisations. In two of the republics, pro-Soviet forces were in power, while in other three they were in opposition. The political consequence of pro-Soviet forces' presence in power in the Ukrainian SSR and the BSSR was the desire to avoid conflicts with the Union centre, and a low (in the case of Ukraine) and extremely low (in the case of Belarus) activity on the all-Union political scene.

In Latvia, Estonia and Moldova, pro-Soviet organisations were in opposition to and in acute conflict with the republican authorities and, to a large extent, with local communist parties. This led to their greater consolidation, utilisation of all possible conventional means and high activity on the all-Union level.

The sharp conflict between pro-Soviet organisations and the authorities of national republics also stimulated an active use of unconventional means, from demands for autonomy and strikes to acts of violence and clashes. The difference between Latvia, Estonia and Moldova in using unconventional means can be explained by two main factors.

First, it was the degree of severity of the conflict with the republican authorities and the national movement. In Estonia and Latvia, acts of violence by supporters of various political forces were rather an exception. The main political conflict took place along the line of confrontation between the Union and republican authorities and was largely formalised and bureaucratised. In Moldova, the development of political events was initially associated with a large number of acts of violence against political opponents. The conflict was not only a confrontation between the authorities, but also between communities represented by various volunteer formations, self-defense units, participants in spontaneous rallies, etc. All this made the conflict between pro-Soviet organisations and the Moldovan authorities much more acute.

The second important factor that determined the difference between Estonia, Latvia and Moldova was the ability to mobilise a social base for action. Unlike national movements whose mobilisation was of a grassroots nature and strongly associated with the intelligentsia, the main means of mobilising the Russian speaking population were communities around large-scale industries, and the main actors were directors' corps and management personnel of large enterprises. In Moldova, directorate was more active and independent of the republican party structures and, accordingly, was inclined to greater radicalism. This also led to an increase in the political influence of the structures created by directors (Joint Council of Work Collectives) as opposed to the Intermovement and the Communist Party. In Estonia, the UWCC was a notable political force, but less influential and radical than in Moldova. In Latvia, pro-Soviet organisations were under much greater control of party structures and the UWCC did not play a significant political role.

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*Piotr Rudkouski*

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DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY:  
A CHANCE FOR BELARUS'S  
TRANSFORMATION?

THE IDEA OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY is scarcely known in Belarus humanities academia, let alone Belarus political circles. My persistent attempts at seeking out any Belarusian authors dealing with deliberative democracy gave rather dismal results. It is possible to count on one's fingers the number of texts touching on this issue. For example, Jaŭhen Fursiejeŭ in one of his papers discussed the potential of electronic media for democratic processes (Fursiejeu, 2008), which was not exactly about deliberative democracy but very close to the subject. A few years ago, Natallia Liahovič-Pietrakova published a paper that was devoted entirely to deliberative democracy (Liahovič-Pietrakova, 2011). However, the paper turned out a motley collection of different views expressed by different theoreticians on deliberative democracy. There was neither analysis of these views in the paper nor even any attempt at classifying them. Barely, too, was in the paper any attempt at showing what relevance the idea of deliberative democracy might have to Belarus (unless several vague remarks about the 'increase of civic expertise in the post-Soviet space' are to be counted as showing such a relevance).

Perhaps, starting with such a critical introduction was not a prudent idea as I now risk having my audience trace every fault I may commit in my own paper, and I therefore expose myself to being told something like 'physician, heal yourself!' But I wittingly put aside cautions and prudent advices concerning the wise opening of a paper. I do so in order to fulfil one of the main 'commandments' of deliberative democracy: *Do not abstain from criticizing others only to avoid being criticized*. So, I did not abstain from criticizing others and let the reader not abstain from critical evaluation of what I am presenting in this paper.

This paper is meant to be an introductory presentation of the idea of deliberative democracy. First, I will tell something about the sources and fountains wherefrom this idea springs up. Next, I will outline two paths along which a deliberative democracy can march: a path indicated by Habermas and taken by some continental theoreticians, and a path made by Gutmann and Thompson and followed by theoreticians of analytic mindset, both paths being hinted at by Aristotle. I will then try to construct the disciplinary, or rather interdisciplinary profile of the 'analytical' concept of deliberative democracy. Finally, I will share some thoughts about the relevance of the idea in question to Belarus.

### 1. THE SOURCES OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND ITS BASIC MESSAGE

Aristotle the Stagirite wrote:

*For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses; that is a figure of their mind and disposition. Hence the many are better judges than a single man of music and poetry; for some understand one part, and some another, and among them they understand the whole (Aristotle, 1999: 1281b-82).*

Aristotle expressed here no less and no more than a commonsensical idea that 'two heads are better than one'. So, behind the idea of deliberation lies a very simple pragmatic calculation: there is more probability of arriving at a prudent decision if the matter has been discussed by many people than if only one person has pondered it on his/her own.

However, there have also been more sophisticated and perhaps 'deeper' justifications of public deliberation. In this connection, let me quote an interesting passage from Graham Good, a Canadian intellectual:

*Since Socrates, the principal motor of Western philosophy has been a certain type of productive disagreement. The open expression of dissent is politically essential in an open society, but it is also intellectually essential to advance and clarify individual thought through the process of challenge and qualification,*

*argument and counterargument. Without this, we have dogmatism, where authority stifles innovation and intellectual life ossifies.* (Good, 2001: 48).

There is a 'humanizing force' in critical discussion, one might say. By engaging in a discussion we actualize a potential which is specific to human beings. Throughout history, the idea of interconnection between intellectual progress and the improvement in socio-political ethics has been permanently celebrated by many a prominent thinker. One may invoke David Hume's saying that 'industry, knowledge and humanity are linked together by an indissoluble chain' (Hume, 1987: II.II.5).

The prominent twentieth-century philosopher Karl Popper described the transition from a closed society to an open one in a somewhat solemn way as the 'Great Spiritual Revolution.' What made this 'revolution' possible was, according to Popper, 'the invention of critical discussion' (cf. Popper, 1945: 153-154). For him, such personages like Democritus, Socrates, or Xenophanes were the 'friends of the open society' not so much because of their commitment to the democratic cause but rather because of their being the teachers of critical thinking. Similarly, Heraclitus, Plato, Hegel, Marx, and the like were, according to Popper, the 'enemies of the open society' not so much because they opposed democratization but rather because they either opposed people's engagement in critical discussion or spread irrational attitudes towards existing states of affairs.

It is the belief in the key importance of critical thinking and argumentative discussion that lies behind the idea of deliberative democracy. And there is a long row of thinkers, ancient and modern alike, who, by extolling the value of public debates, paved way to what is called 'deliberative democracy' nowadays. Pericles, Socrates, Aristotle, Hume, Mill, Popper, Berlin, Rawls, and the early John Gray can be numbered among the precursors of the idea of deliberative democracy.

There are authors who claim that the rise of deliberative democracy was a reaction to the crisis of liberal democracy (e.g. Fontana et al. 2004: 5). I am not an enthusiast of such an explanation. First, I do not quite understand statements like 'there is (or was) a crisis of X,' where 'X' is a complex and internally differentiated socio-cultural phenomenon. It is extremely difficult, if possible at all, to come to terms on what are the truth conditions of such statements. I am inclined to think that the emersion of deliberative democracy was rather a result

of growing awareness of the fact that the traditional understanding of democracy as the 'rule of the people' was not very fortunate. None other than Popper, a great champion of democracy, once came up with a strange – at least at the first glance – assertion: '*Democracy has never been people's rule, nor can or should it be*' (Popper, 1997: 68f.). In his *Open Society* he was even more provocative: '*[D]emocracy cannot be exhausted by the meaningless principle that "the people should rule"*' (Popper, 1945: 163). Not far from such a view, though couched in a moderate way, was John Dryzek when he distanced himself from what he called 'democratic traditionalism,' which is simply the traditional conviction that democracy is merely the 'rule of the people', according to the etymology of the word (Dryzek, 2006: 158).

The main problem with the traditional understanding of democracy is that statements like 'the people rules' or 'the people does not rule'<sup>1</sup> hardly describe anything. Perhaps, in the ancient Athenian polis, consisting of 30 thousand citizens at most, such statements made some sense, but even in that case they were problematic. In modern states consisting of millions and millions of citizens, the idea of the 'rule of the people' raises qualms about its having any sense. If casting ballots once every few years is what the word 'rule' means, then one must admit it is a very peculiar usage of the word. But even if we agree on such a usage, there emerges a question of axiological nature: is the 'rule of the people' taken as the rule of a majority an unconditionally good thing? I think I will not be too arrogant if I answer this question shortly and simply: no. As a matter of fact, it is important that decisions of a majority are examined, tested, and sometimes contested.

Many a thinker tried to find another foundation for a good political system. A philosopher king, God's Messiah, enlightened monarch, working class... there have been many propositions as to what could replace the word 'people' in 'the people should rule' postulate. The concept of deliberative democracy does not seek a new replacement of the 'people;' it just attempts at redefining, and perhaps specifying the role of citizens in social and political life. Deliberative democracy tends to unite in one conception two convictions that (a) all adult

<sup>1</sup> I wittingly use the singular forms 'rules,' 'does not rule,' though English speakers might feel that plural forms would be more appropriate here. As a matter of fact, the traditional understanding of democracy presupposes a holistic notion of 'demos,' which makes it specifically problematic.

humans must have equal opportunity of providing their inputs to organization of social and political life; (b) not all inputs to organization of social and political life are equally valuable. In connection with (b), there is a need for evaluating 'inputs' and selecting 'better proposals.'

Deliberative democracy says there are no absolutely reliable ways of doing such a selection but it claims that there are ways that *increase probability* of eliminating worse proposals. What increases such probability is public deliberation. The probability is the higher the more rational is the public deliberation. To invoke Karl Popper once more, democracy must be based on faith in reason, and on humanitarianism (Popper, 1945: 161 and 163). This can be taken as the basic message of deliberative democracy.

## 2. TWO PATHS DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY CAN MARCH

Nowadays the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas is often invoked as a theoretician of deliberative democracy. In fact, he was rather a contributor to the concept of the Public Sphere, which can, however, be easily translated into the idea of deliberative democracy. The Habermasian Public Sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*),<sup>2</sup> taken ideally, is the forum of free debate, characterized most of all by the exclusion of any other authority save rational argument (Habermas, 1989: 55). The Public Sphere – explains Mark Warren – is the '*arena where people participate in discussions about matters of common concerns in an atmosphere free of coercion or dependencies*' (Warren, 1995: 171).

Habermas was also eager to construe the Public Sphere as an *emancipatory force*. For him, it was the defining feature of the Public Sphere that it is a space where the voice is given primarily to the 'voiceless.' Moreover, '[t]he very existence [of the Public Sphere] depends on its capacity to promote civic engagement in communicative processes of opinion and will formation,' as explains Simon Susen on behalf of Habermas (Susen, 2011: 45).

Habermas's intuitions concerning the Public Sphere are undoubtedly noteworthy but it is difficult to envisage founding a conception of deliberative democracy on his philosophy. Even John Dryzek, one who is generally very friendly to the German philosophy, notices that

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the problem of rendering of this German word in English (analogous problems occur in translations to other languages, too), see: Susen, 2011: 44

Habermas's writing is too abstract and it is often hard to find 'real-world exemplars' of what he is saying (Dryzek, 1995: 110). Besides, it is unclear in Habermas what is the role of individuals in shaping the Public Sphere. As is often the case with continental philosophers, Habermas is inclined to methodological collectivism, that is giving priority to collective entities in social change rather than to individual humans.

The idea of deliberative democracy has also found its champions among theoreticians working within the analytic (Anglo-American) tradition. John Dryzek,<sup>3</sup> Amy Gutmann, and Dennis Thompson are most prominent in this respect. In their seminal work *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Gutmann and Thompson define deliberative democracy as

*a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives) justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim at reaching conclusion that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future (Gutmann and Thompson 2004: 7).*

I have some minor reservations concerning this definition (which I will not be discussing here) but I wholly subscribe to its core message, namely that (i) critical discussion is essential to democracy and (ii) rational argumentation is essential to critical discussion. It is also important that the Anglo-American strand of deliberative democracy provides a lot of room for individual humans in deliberation process. For these two reasons – prioritizing of critical discussion and prioritizing of human individuals – I favour Anglo-American conceptions of deliberative democracy more than their continental counterparts, and the rest of my paper will deal with the topic from an 'analytical' perspective.

### 3. THE DISCIPLINARY PROFILE OF THE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME

Here, I am going to look at deliberative democracy as a research programme that is an academic undertaking with its own assumptions,

<sup>3</sup> To be exact, in his approach, Dryzek tries to accommodate the continental tradition and the analytical one.

core beliefs, theories, hypotheses and ethical propositions. Deliberative democracy as a separate research programme is still in *statu nascendi*, but one can already notice that it is growing as an interdisciplinary endeavour at the crossroad of political science, discourse analysis, and argumentation theory.

The relatedness of the deliberative democracy programme and political science seems obvious as the sociopolitical realm is the primary subject matter of this programme. The programme tends to explore sociopolitical reality from a particular angle: that of deliberative practices. It presumes that such practices are essential to society, especially one aspiring to being a democratic society, and the success in prudent organizing deliberative practices is convertible into a goodness of a society.

At the bottom of deliberative democracy is the postulate that decisions having any public significance should be justified publicly (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004: 3). At once the question arises: what does it mean to 'justify a decision' or 'provide a reason for one's decision?' Gutmann and Thompson tell us that the reasons in question are neither merely procedural (e.g. *'because the majority favors the war'*) nor purely substantive (*'because the war promotes the national interest or world peace'*). Instead – the authors explain – *'[t]hey are reasons that should be accepted by free and equal persons seeking fair terms of cooperation'* (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004: 3). Such expressions as *'be accepted by free and equal persons'* or *'seek fair terms of cooperation'* are still in the need of clarification, which can hardly be provided by means of political science alone. Thus, in its attempt at advancing a deliberative democracy research programme, political science needs some help from argumentation theory.

Happily, during the last quarter-century argumentation theory (aka 'critical thinking,' 'informal logic,' or 'applied logic') has been vigorously developing. There are three contemporary schools that are especially worthy mentioning with regard to our topic: the Dialectic School led by Douglas Neil Walton; the School of Informal Logic led by Ralph Henry Johnson; the Pragma-Dialectic School led by Frans Hendrik van Eemeren. Each school can in its own way prove helpful to the deliberative democracy programme. Among the three, however, the Walton approach deserves a special attention since his research agenda remarkably resonates with the agenda of the deliberative democracy programme.

In a number of his investigations, Walton deals with the so called *argumentum ad populum*, that is the 'appeal to the people.' For a very long time logicians had been dismissing as fallacious this kind of argument. Walton thinks an appeal to the people is not necessarily irrational or that at least it requires a more nuanced consideration, and in many of his texts he tries to provide in-depth and nuanced analyses of the *argumentum ad populum* (see Walton, 1980: 270; 1999a: 84f; 1999b). Taking into account that deliberative democracy (i) presupposes that public opinion is an important reference point in shaping social and political life; (ii) postulates critical evaluation of a public opinion and opposes any dogmatization of what a majority claims to be right, it becomes clear that a competent analysis of the *argumentum ad populum* is of high importance.

Deliberative democracy is first of all about public debates. However, they are not debates for the sake of debates but they are supposed to be means of '*producing a decision that is binding for some period of time*' (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004: 5). The debates which are postulated in the deliberative democracy programme differ from, for example, talk shows or academic discussions. Democratic deliberation is *practically* oriented; it cannot last for ever, and there is a moment when citizens are, so to speak, 'summoned to action.' And here once again argumentation theory may prove helpful. In part, one may benefit from consulting Walton's classification of different types of dialogue as developed in his *What is Reasoning? What is Argumentation?* (Walton, 1990). The classification (and concomitant analyses) may help (a) better understand the nature of democratic deliberation as opposed to other types of dialogue: academic discussion, talk shows, negotiations, etc. (Walton, 1990: 413); (b) see what is in common between the democratic deliberation and other types of dialogue.

Since democratic deliberation is practically oriented, it is important not only to be rational in such a deliberation but also effective. Thus, at some stage of inquiries into deliberative democracy, two questions come to fore: (i) How to be effective in deliberation? (ii) How to be rational (intellectually honest) in it? There is an obvious tension between the 'efficacy postulate' and 'rationality postulate,' but it is the task of a deliberative democracy theoretician to come up with workable ideas of harmonizing the two postulates. At this juncture, one may notice significance of another discipline: rhetoric. Argumentation theory and

rhetoric, both begotten by Aristotle, had for a long time drifted apart. But during the past half-century there has been a strong tendency to reconciliation of the two 'sisters,' which seems quite a welcome trend. Rhetoric can especially be helpful in the process of interpretation of one's argumentation as well as in revealing sources and recognizing potential of such or another persuasive strategies employed in an argumentation.

It is difficult to envisage the deliberative democracy research programme without its collaboration with communication theory, another discipline vigorously developing contemporarily. Thanks to John L. Austin, John Searle, and H. Paul Grice the theory of communication has become a powerful and influential research undertaking and found its applications in many provinces of the social science. For example, Quentin Skinner, a prominent historian of political ideas, put at the bottom of his approach the postulate that ideas should be studied through the prism of how they were *used*, what their advocates tended to *do* with them, or what political or ideological purposes they were tied to. By doing so, Skinner consciously was drawing on Austin's theory of speech acts, especially his notion of 'illocutionary force.' The deliberative democracy programme is even more in the need of a good framework for analysing various speech acts, and so Austin's theory, both in its original version and in its updated versions, may prove very helpful here.

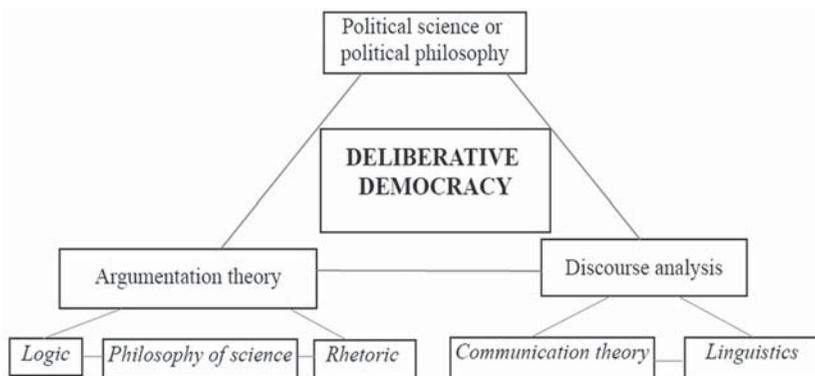
One more discipline that can be put in service to the deliberative democracy programme is discourse analysis. The term 'discourse' is currently understood in many ways, but in whatever usage, one of the most important functions of discourse is *persuasion*. Within a discourse take place such speech acts like persuading someone to something, verbal attempts at changing one's attitude, or stimulating someone to a certain action. There are different approaches to discourse analysis; one may distinguish two major approaches: the explorative approach and the critical-theoretic approach, the latter known as 'critical discourse analysis.'

Some theoreticians of deliberative democracy tend to link their undertaking with the *critical* discourse analysis, John Dryzek being the most remarkable example. But even if someone abstains from being involved in critical discourse analysis, he/she will probably admit that many categories developed within discourse analysis can be useful and

sometimes indispensable in the framework of deliberative democracy studies. How do people refer to one another during the deliberation process? What traits, characteristics and qualities do they attribute to one another? From what perspective do they characterize one another or characterize one another's arguments? Such questions are important for the deliberative democracy theorist but to deal with them competently one needs discourse analysis tools like the ones suggested by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak in their *Discourse and Discrimination* (see Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: xiii).

Finally, three more disciplines should be mentioned as potentially important in the interdisciplinary framework of deliberative democracy: logic, the philosophy of science, and linguistics. Logic can especially be helpful in analysing persuasion strategies employed in the process of deliberative argumentation. Anyone who dealt with Popper's 'open society' and credits it with some normative value will probably agree with me that philosophy-of-science analytical tools can be very helpful in a philosophy-of-politics framework. Holistic thinking, essentialism, historical determinism and the like appear in political deliberation quite often, but they are best analysed with the help of the philosophy of science, and, by the way, it was what Popper did in his *Open Society and Its Enemies*. The deliberative democracy programme needs also be in touch with linguistics as it constantly deals with speech acts. To be exact, speech acts are the proper subject matter of communication theory, as was stated above, but one may observe that the theory of communication itself must resort to linguistics toolkit in order to analyse speech acts properly.

To sum up, the deliberative democracy research programme can be seen as a programme developing within the triangle of political science, argumentation theory, and discourse analysis. Logic, the philosophy of science, rhetoric, communication theory, and linguistics are its main auxiliaries. Schematically, the disciplinary profile of the programme can be presented the following way:



Sch. 1. The disciplinary profile of the deliberative democracy research programme

Let me remind that the disciplinary characteristics provided above are meant to be relevant to the *analytical* version of the deliberative democracy programme. Developing the disciplinary profile of its 'continental' counterpart would require additional analyses which I am not going to carry out here.

#### 4. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

In their voluminous book *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*, one of the recent major researches in the field, John Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer made as their central message the thesis that deliberative democracy has a real potential of transforming societies governed in an authoritarian manner. I support this thesis. In the following paragraphs, I will try to present my own explanation of the transformative nature of deliberative democracy.

In order for a society to exist, human beings must have at their disposal means of self-organization. This in turn presupposes some ways of persuasion. There are various ways of persuading. One can, for example, inflict physical pain on another person to force him/her to do what one wants. You can also try to persuade somebody by means of certain speech acts, for example by asking, ordering, threatening, flattering etc. So, it makes sense to draw a basic distinction between *violent ways of persuasion* and *nonviolent ways of persuasion*, the latter be-

ing instances of *verbal persuasion*. (In order to avoid complicating the picture overly, I omit here other possible means of nonviolent persuasion, such as audiovisual ones).

Violent ways of persuasion take place when physical pain or deprivation of liberty is employed. Verbal persuasion is a persuasion by means of words. The realm of verbal persuasion, taken separately, is very differentiated. One can persuade verbally by slandering or exploiting negative stereotypes; but it is also possible to persuade by employing rational argumentation. The transition from a nondemocratic society to a democratic one (or, in Popper's wording, from a closed society to an open one) can be conceived of as a dynamic process determined by the coincidence of four factors: (a) minimization of the area of persuasion-by-violence; (b) maximization of the area of verbal persuasion; (c) within the area of verbal persuasion: (c<sup>1</sup>) expansion of rational argumentation and (c<sup>2</sup>) decrease in various forms of verbal manipulation or verbal assault.

My main point here is that there exists an inverse relationship between the degree of 'noble persuasion' and the degree of authoritarianism. Therefore, deliberative democracy, insofar as it seeks to maximize the realm of 'noble persuasion,' is a transformative factor.

A few clarifications are in order here, however. It is possible to understand deliberative democracy in three ways. One may perceive it as a new form of government, something that could replace existing forms of government, either democratic or nondemocratic. It is also possible to view deliberative democracy as a government-driven process aimed at creating new forums of public discussion. In this case, the main goal is institutionalization of democratic deliberation, creation of what some theoreticians call 'minipublics' or 'chambers of discourses.' Finally, deliberative democracy can be understood as a conception whose main task is to make sense of the *deliberative dimension* of sociopolitical life within political systems that exist *already*.

I am skeptical about the first construal of deliberative democracy, that is envisioning it as a separate political system. I doubt that it is possible to create such a system, in any rate I do not think there is a need for it. The second idea seems more realistic and worthy of closer consideration but still it is not what I see as the principal merit of the deliberative democracy project. Its principal merit is, in my view, that it promises to offer a comprehensive framework for conceptualizing

and normativizing the *deliberative dimension* of social life within *actual* political systems. And it is in this sense that I see the usefulness of this conception to Belarus.

An in-depth analysis of the deliberative dimension of Belarusian society through the prism of deliberative democracy is a big task which I do not venture to perform right now. But it is possible to point to some notable problems of the Belarus Public Sphere, which seem to be best approached by the deliberative democracy framework. In Belarusian deliberative forums, there is a striking tendency to substitute some 'oughts' for facts. Many politicians and some humanities scholars are happy to flout sociological or historical data and to replace them with 'truths' that followed from a vision of what *ought to be*. This peculiarity has also been noticed by Ryszard Radzik, a prominent Polish historian and sociologist (Radzik 2007: 110) and has been discussed as a sore point of Belarus social reality by the Belarusian sociologist Alieh Manajeŭ (see Manajeŭ 2004).

Apart from the notorious tendency to ignore the realm of facts in favour of the realm of a desired state of affairs there are many other problems lurking in the deliberative dimension of Belarusian social life. Let me name them without going into detail: *the tendency to thinking in terms of historical determinism; uncritical methodological holism; prevalence of debunking strategies in debates; building up one's argumentation with statements that are very difficult to verify or falsify*. What is, however, the main plague of Belarus deliberation forums is the *obscurity of language*. This plague owes much to the Belarus humanities academia which is largely marked by the tendency to produce murky, Hegel-like or Heidegger-like texts. Obscurity paralyzes critical discussion and is a hotbed of unfair persuasion strategies which in their turn perpetuate the discourse of Belarusian authoritarianism.

The deliberative democracy framework, allied with argumentation theory, might be very helpful both in conceptualization and overcoming of various problems of the Belarus Public Sphere, some of which were pointed out above.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Deliberative democracy is an interesting sociopolitical proposal and a promising research programme. It takes up the idea, which can be

traced to ancient Greece, that critical discussion is the main feature of social life and credits it with a transformative force.

It is difficult to measure the impact of critical discussion on political realm, but it does not seem accidental that many prominent theoreticians, modern (e.g. Popper, Habermas, Dryzek) and ancient (e.g. Pericles, Plato, Aristotle) alike, agree upon the claim that such discussion *is* a mighty transformative factor. An indirect confirmation of this claim is the fact that many politicians and ideologues who ardently oppose democratic transformations are very frightened by any prospects of 'ideological infiltration,' that is critical reevaluation of a dominant discourse.

Deliberative democracy in its 'analytical' version, on which I focused in my presentation chiefly, is to a great extent a continuation of the liberal strand of democratic thought, one that runs from ancient Greek 'democrats' like Pericles through David Hume and John S. Mill to Karl R. Popper, Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, and the early John Gray. There are also attempts at modelling deliberative democracy on Habermas's idea of the Public Sphere or Michel Foucault's concept of 'discourse,' but in these cases the deliberative democracy project seems to be reduced to being just another name for critical discourse analysis, an already existing academico-emancipatory programme. Reducing the deliberative democracy project to something that already exists is not, of course, a fault in itself, but I am not happy with this particular reduction because of critical theorists' permanent tendency to giving priority to collective, superindividual entities (like 'discourses') and belittling the role of individual human beings. This is the main reason why I centred rather on the 'analytical' version of deliberative democracy in the paper. An additional reason was that this version is more elaborated as compared to its 'continental' counterpart.

I hope what my labelling deliberative democracy with the phrase 'a chance for Belarus's transformation' will not be taken as an expression of the naïve belief that once Belarusians start discussing publicly, the authoritarian regime would imminently fall down. It is not my specialty to produce scenarios of toppling of such or another political system. What I meant in the paper was rather pointing to an important factor of cultural change and the change of mentality. I am perfectly aware that authoritarian systems have a great capacity of adaptation and can even absorb some elements of democratic deliberation, at least for a definite

period of time. Deliberative democracy will certainly be disappointing to those who would like to find an ideological instrument of overthrowing an authoritarian system instantly. To those, however, who seek ways of contributing to a long-term and deeply-run transformation, deliberative democracy can be quite an interesting proposition.

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## EDITORIAL LANGUAGE POLICY AND TRANSLITERATION PRINCIPLES

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*There is no fixed tradition of reproducing Belarusian personal names and place names in the English-language literature. This is due to a complex of historical and cultural reasons, but the growth of publications about Belarus and the further development of Belarusian studies requires a more accurate standardisation. Belarusian Political Studies Review adheres to the following rules:*

### BELARUS AND BELARUSIAN

The English texts contain different spelling options – Byelorussian, Belorussian, Belarusian etc. We only use the official name and the corresponding derivatives: Belarus, Belarusian. This rule also applies to the institutions and objects that used the words “Belarus”, “Belarusian” in the past. Thus, we use Belarusian SSR, not Byelorussian SSR.

### PLACE NAMES

BPSReview adheres to the standard of the corresponding instruction approved by the Government in 2007 (transliteration from Belarusian according to the rules of the national Latin alphabet, see below). The standard was also recommended for the use by the international community.

The proposed system is very close to the traditional Belarusian Latin alphabet developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and is thus the most legitimate one from the legal, cultural and historical point of view.

Other place names are usually transliterated from the language of the country in which the designated places are currently located, taking into account, where possible, the national transliteration rules and the symbols of national alphabets.

### PERSONAL NAMES

Personal names follow the same rules as place names.

It should be noted that in the English-language literature, transliteration from the Russian language or passport writing (with no diacritical marks) are also used.

Given the large number of existing systems and their contradictory nature, in our opinion, the use of a single standard both for personal

names and place names is the only correct way out. In the most significant cases, double writing is provided.

The names of Belarusian authors in the contents and in the beginning of the articles are provided both according to the national Latin and passport spelling. Belarusian Cyrillic writing is also available.

In the list of references, the names of Belarusian authors are provided in the national Latin writing. If a source was published in Russian, then transliteration from the Russian language is provided in brackets “[ ]” (only ASCII characters).

#### NEWSPAPER NAMES

The names of newspapers are given in accordance with the rules of the original language. Belarusian Latin alphabet is used for the Belarusian names, while transliteration from the Russian language is used for the Russian ones.

#### ORGANISATION AND PARTY NAMES

The names of Belarusian organisations (organisations that are registered in Belarus or for which Belarus is the main country of activities) are provided from the Belarusian language.

Abbreviations for organisations are also derived from the Belarusian language: BNF (Bielaruski Narodny Front), but not BPF (Belarusian Popular Front).

The names of other organisations are provided in the language of the country of main activities.

#### SOME HISTORICAL CASES

We use:

1) *Rus’ Rusian, Old Rusian* (not Russian) for Eastern Europe history of 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries;

2) *Ruthenia, Ruthenian* are used for Eastern Slavic Lands as a part of Great Duchy of Lithuania and Polish Kingdom, 13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries;

3) *Litva, Litvins* are used as equivalents to *historical Lithuania* in 13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries (contemporary Belarus and Lithuania).

#### OTHER CASES

Specific concepts or words that have no English analogues (e.g. “Kryvija”) are provided with the help of the Belarusian Latin alphabet.

RESOLUTION OF THE STATE COMMITTEE  
FOR PROPERTY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS  
June 11, 2007 No.38

8/16668  
(18.06.2007)

**On Amendments to the Instruction for Transliteration  
of the Place Names of the Republic of Belarus with the  
Letters of the Latin Alphabet**

*Appendix to the Instruction for  
Transliteration of the Place Names  
of the Republic of Belarus with the  
Letters of the Latin Alphabet*

*Table for the Belarusian alphabet letters transliteration  
with the letters of the Latin alphabet*

<i>Belarusian alphabet letter</i>		<i>Corresponding Latin alphabet letter</i>		<i>Examples of Belarusian place names transliteration</i>
А	а	A	a	Аршанскі – Aršanski
Б	б	B	b	Бешанковічы – Biešankovičy
В	в	V	v	Віцебск – Viciebsk
Г	г	H	h	Гомель – Homieĺ, Гаўя – Haŭja
Д	д	D	d	Добруш – Dobruš
Е	е	Je	je*	Ельск – Jeĺsk
				Бабаедава – Babajedava
			ie**	Венцавічы – Viencavičy
Ё	ё	Jo	jo*	Ёды – Jody, Вераб’ёвічы – Vierabjovičy
			io**	Мёры – Mioŭy
Ж	ж	Ž	ž	Жодзішкі – Žodziški
З	з	Z	z	Зэльва – Zeĺva
І	і	I	i	Іванава – Ivanava, Іўе – Iŭje
Й	й	J	j	Лагойск – Lahojsk
К	к	K	k	Круглае – Kruhlae
Л	л	L	l	Лошыца – Lošyca
				Любань – Liubań
М	м	M	m	Магілёў – Mahilioŭ
Н	н	N	n	Нясвіж – Niasviž

1		2		3
О	о	О	о	Орша – Orša
П	п	Р	р	Паставы – Pastavy
С	с	S	s	Светлагорск – Svetlahorsk
Т	т	T	t	Талачын – Talačyn
У	у	U	u	Узда – Uzda
Ў	ў	Ŭ	ŭ	Шаркаўшчына – Šarkaŭščyna
Ф	ф	F	f	Фаніпаль – Fanipał
Х	х	Ch	ch	Хоцімск – Chocimsk
Ц	ц	C	c	Цёмны Лес – Ciomny Lies
Ч	ч	Č	č	Чавусы – Čavusy
Ш	ш	Š	š	Шуміліна – Šumilina
Ы	ы	Y	y	Чыгірынка – Čyhirynka
Ь	ь			Чэрвень – Červień, Друць – Druć
Э	э	E	e	Чачэрск – Čačersk
Ю	ю	Ju	ju*	Юхнаўка – Juchnaŭka
				Гаюціна – Hajucina
			iu**	Цюрлі – Ciurli, Любонічы – Liuboničy
Я	я	Ja	ja*	Ямнае – Jamnae, Баяры – Bajary
			ia**	Валяр’яны – Valiarjany
				Вязынка – Viazynka

\* At the beginning of the word, after vowels, apostrophe, separating soft sign and ŷ

\*\* After consonants

## *AUTHORS OF THE ISSUE*

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*Anastasija Jurkevič (Anastasiya Jurkevits)*, MA in sociology, PhD student at Lithuanian Institute for Social Studies. E-mail: anastasiya.jurkevits@gmail.com.

*Andrej Kazakievič (Andrei Kazakevich)*, PhD in Political Science, director of the Institute of Political Studies “Political Sphere” (Vilnius–Minsk, Lithuania–Belarus). Email: kazakevich@palityka.org.

*Piotr Rudkoŭski (Piotr Rudkouski)*, PhD in philosophy (Warsaw University), director of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (Minsk, Vilnius). E-mail: rudkouski@belinstitute.com.



**INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL STUDIES  
POLITICAL SPHERE**

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**INSTYTUT PALITYČNYCH DASLIEDAVANNIAŨ  
PALITYČNAJA SFIERA**

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*Institute of Political Studies Political Sphere is an independent professional community of Belarusian scientists who study politics and related social fields. The Institute is rooted in the community that arose around the Journal of Political Studies Political Sphere founded in 2001. By the beginning of 2009, the activities of the community (in studies, publishing and other spheres) resulted in establishing of an independent and professional Political Studies Institute.*

**THE INSTITUTE'S MISSION**

1. Systematic studies of politics at national, regional and international levels.
2. Development of a professional community of political scientists and analysts in Belarus; improvement of essential infrastructure for professional activities.
3. Integration of Belarusian scientists and analysts into regional, European and international context.

**PRINCIPLES**

The Institute's priorities are academic studies, empirical research and publications. Community-building, by way of academic and analytical conferences, seminars and peer-review, is also important.

The Institute is a Belarusian research institution, thus we feel obliged to contribute to the development of Belarusian science and culture.

The Institute is open for cooperation with all individual researchers and institutions regardless of their political views and ideological standpoints. The Institute is also aimed at international cooperation and regards itself as a part of the international community of political scientists.

#### THE MAIN PROJECTS

***Political Sphere Journal.*** The Institute is a founder and publisher of “Political Sphere” Journal – the leading specialised periodical in the field of political science in Belarus (founded in 2001). The Journal publishes research materials on all key topics and on all approaches of political science and related disciplines. **Web:** [www.journal.palityka.org](http://www.journal.palityka.org)

***Belarusian Political Science Review.*** The Institute is the founder and the main publishing institution of Belarusian Political Science Review, a peer-reviewed political science periodical in English that serves as an interdisciplinary publication for research papers from various sub-fields of political science. The publication aims to meet the needs of a broader academic community in scientific enquiry on Belarusian politics and politics of Eastern and Central Europe. **Web:** [www.bpsreview.palityka.org](http://www.bpsreview.palityka.org)

***International Congress of Belarusian Studies.*** The Institute is the initiator and core organiser of the International Congress of Belarusian Studies. The Congress’ mission is to promote a deeper understanding of Belarus in the academic and civil communities. The Congress is a place for the presentation of the outcomes of scholarly and expert activities throughout the year. In addition, the Congress is an excellent opportunity to develop new research and community projects, to exchange views and ideas and to establish informal contacts. The Congress provides an opportunity to make public presentations to 350–400 specialists annually. **Web:** [www.icbs.lt](http://www.icbs.lt) / [www.icbs.by](http://www.icbs.by)

## CONTACTS

*220044 P.O. Box 72 Minsk Belarus*  
*LT-46326 Saulėgražų g. 24, Kaunas, Lithuania*  
**Phone:** + 375 29 6733296  
**E-mail:** [info@palityka.org](mailto:info@palityka.org)  
**Web:** [www.palityka.org](http://www.palityka.org)

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POLITICAL STUDIES  
*BELARUSIAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW*

VOLUME 4, 2019

*LT-46326 Saulėgrąžų g. 24, Kaunas, Lithuania*

*e-mail: [info@palityka.org](mailto:info@palityka.org)*

ISSN 2029-8684 (online)  
ISSN 2029-8676

