The Representation of Ukraine in Belarusian State News in the Context of War: An Analysis of Lexical Patterns in BelTA Articles (November 2024 – October 2025)

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Introduction

Propaganda is impossible without words. It may seem odd to begin an article with such a truism, but it is precisely words that we intend to examine in this material. The shape of Belarusian propaganda, familiar to many today, took form two years before the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine. As a co-aggressor in the war — a somewhat indirect participant — the Belarusian regime began actively inserting military and paramilitary narratives into the daily output of state media. The entire core pool of propagandists engaged in shaping public opinion about Russia's invasion. Television channels, newspapers, and YouTube projects routinely invite Russian "experts" as commentators. It cannot be said that Moscow's rhetoric and the discourse of the Belarusian "agitbrigades" have merged completely: they still preserve some room for maneuver. Nevertheless, militaristic patterns are evident.

In this article, we analyze news stories about Ukraine published over the past year — from November 2024 to October 2025 — on the state news portal BelTA, the Belarusian Telegraph Agency.

The dataset consists of more than 5,500 articles. Later we will describe in detail the mechanics of working with such a large volume of text, but first it is necessary to formulate several general points essential for understanding the Belarusian state-controlled information environment, as well as the hypothesis and the central question we attempt to answer here.

The first thing to keep in mind is that there is a watershed moment in the history of Lukashenka's political system: August 2020. Anyone even vaguely familiar with European politics knows about the protests, so there is little point in recounting those events in detail. What matters for us at this stage is the transformation of the propaganda machine — a transformation that emerged as a response to the peaceful marches of those who rejected the official election results.

It is notable that Russian aggression against Kyiv has repeatedly helped the Belarusian autocracy stay afloat. And we are not even speaking about the hot phase of the war, but about

the period beginning in 2014 — the annexation of Crimea. Against the background of Moscow's intensifying militarist foreign policy in 2015, Lukashenka managed to hold the calmest presidential election of his rule. The term that ended with the events of 2020 was characterized by a noticeable warming of relations with Europe and even, to some extent, with the United States. During those five years, a kind of informal social contract existed between a dynamically developing civil society and the state, enabling more or less peaceful coexistence between the two institutions.

Without question, the concessions made to civil society during this period created the foundation for the organized protests of 2020. And yet the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in Donbas gave Lukashenka breathing room. He actively marketed himself to external actors as "not as bad as Putin." Additionally, relations with China gained momentum, allowing him to balance between Moscow, Beijing, and Western states. The domestic political discourse, to an extent, also relied on the idea that Lukashenka personally was the guarantor of Belarusian independence — primarily from Russia. It was no coincidence that every key element of interaction with the Kremlin was kept under the control of the Presidential Administration, bypassing the foreign ministry, which would normally be responsible for such matters.

State media functioned, but relatively passively. Independent portals such as Tut.by and Nasha Niva were not yet outlawed. That informal social contract essentially amounted to a silent agreement to "ignore" one another. And, of course, there was no intense state propaganda. Later, many current employees of state media — the main propagandists of Lukashenka's pool — would admit that this earlier restraint had been a strategic mistake that almost cost them power.

August 2020 ended for the political system with what can be described as "overturning elections." We will not discuss the extent to which Lukashenka lost or Tsikhanouskaya truly won. From a standpoint of pure legal clarity, the election was effectively sabotaged by the regime itself. The refusal to publish precinct protocols, the pre-emptive destruction of ballots, the obvious fabrication of results — all this renders moot any discussion of the legality of Lukashenka's continued presidency.

One way or another, with a delay of several years and with assistance from Russia Today, the Belarusian state propaganda machine began operating at full capacity. This is the first crucial point we consider necessary to emphasize. Lukashenka's post-2020 propaganda, in terms of regime survival, can be described as "posthumous." The quotation marks are intentional: the term is not strictly scientific. But its meaning becomes clearer once unpacked. The discourse and rhetoric promoted by the constellation of state media outlets are purely reactionary. What we are dealing with is not the result of a consistent, thoughtful, years-long effort to shape and control public opinion; in fact, that task was never accomplished. The active and aggressive output of often rather odious speakers has been, and remains, aimed at extinguishing a social fire. And the high level of repression — a "fight fire with fire" approach — appears to be, from their perspective, more effective than constant speeches on television or in newspapers.
 Between 2020 and 2022, despite all attempts, propagandists were far from successful. But then came the tragic 24 February, and the regime received a new chance to pacify society — once again thanks to Moscow. Russia's war against Ukraine became a winning lottery ticket for Lukashenka. For "therapeutic purposes," he can surround himself as much as he wishes with a loyal nomenklatura — both at official meetings and during carefully staged "walkabouts," when he gives speeches against the backdrop of cowsheds or newly built stadiums.

The political system likely understands that Lukashenka's level of support has been far below desirable for a long time. We do not know — and cannot know — to what extent he was informed in advance about the Kremlin's plans. But at this stage, in the fourth year of the war, that is no longer important. What matters is how — and how effectively — the regime managed to incorporate the fact of the war into its propaganda framework. This was precisely our starting point when examining the BelTA corpus. Our goal, of course, was not to identify every possible propaganda pattern. Instead, we aimed to focus on how the tragedy in Ukraine is used as a propaganda asset.

It is important to understand that Belarusian propaganda is not simply directed in two opposite directions simultaneously — it is, in some sense, recursive. Many narratives are reproduced and duplicated after Lukashenka himself launches them into the information space. Propagandists then pick them up, refine them, and repeat them endlessly until they become, to use Medvedev's phrase, "cast in granite." But the form is dictated largely by the need to channel propaganda back toward Lukashenka himself. His many meetings with Belarusian propagandists reveal that the style of someone like Ryhor Azarenok — outrageous, blunt, inherently insulting, often bordering on profanity, frequently shouted, and regularly slipping into personal attacks — is something Lukashenka finds highly appealing.

Despite often boasting about his many degrees and his experience in various fields, Lukashenka demonstrably struggles with "higher matters." This is clear from indirect evidence, even if he would never admit it openly. Consider his dialogue with Aleksandr Dugin, who performs a deliberately obscure intellectualism at the lexical level (the content of which we will not analyze here). Lukashenka's own comments during that meeting are telling: "When I said that the time would come when Putin and I would have to stand back to back and shoot our way out… some in Russia, I'll say it crudely, the 'liberasts,' they giggled… My favorite subject at university was philosophy, and meeting with you made me, in some sense, return to this philosophy… and remember the Marxist-Leninist philosophy I studied. Time has passed, but nothing better has been created… Today we don't have this, and you were right somewhere there when you spoke about state ideology, ideology in general, that we don't have one… — this is also true. People offered me oceans of ideas, and I rejected them all because they don't fit the soul, don't fit the human heart…"

Or take another example that clearly demonstrates his attitude toward intellectuals: "And we slowly approached these blockchains, cryptocurrencies, and finally reached them. And then we stopped. I invited the IT specialists: they're always whining somewhere in the media, even in the opposition ones — something is missing for them. I gathered them and asked: well, you're the eggheads, all smart, why are you whining, what did you bring? They look at me. So I tell them: I give you six months, write down everything you want, everything that today prevents you from working in Belarus." "Eggheads" — straight out of courtyard slang.

In this we see both a recognition of merit and a degree of disdain. In this sense, Belarusian propaganda is distinctly verbose. Again, there are grounds to see a link with Lukashenka's style of free-form speeches; he can hold a press conference for eight hours without a break.
Despite its attempts to prove otherwise, the Belarusian political system does not rely on any coherent ideology. The absence of a clear doctrine is characteristic of post-Soviet autocracies. Instead of a coherent doctrine, people are usually offered a collage of ideas and symbols — something that can be left-wing or right-wing depending on the immediate purpose of the message.

If we take the Soviet Union as an example, we can see that at different stages the political system represented ideologically and typologically different regimes. The pre-Stalin period required conceptualizing and popularizing a leftward tilt. The cult of Stalin himself demanded a shift to the right — his autocracy was maximally personalist. The Khrushchev era, however, was characterized neither by the same degree of power centralization nor by a pronounced inclination to formulate doctrinal rigidity.

Belarusian autocracy has inherited certain features from all these models. While the degree of power concentration in a single pair of hands is extraordinarily high (as reflected in various articles of the constitution), it lacks any tangible ideological foundation. The type of consensus the authorities seek between state and society is also different. Instead of mobilization, we see a deconstruction of social ties. Add voluntarism, and as a consequence, a gradual institutional disintegration of the economy. The groups designated by the authorities as dangerous — such as, for instance, the entrepreneurial middle class — are targeted not on the basis of a coherent ideological superstructure. Lukashenka's hostility toward business is twofold: first, it is a subjective matter; second, at the systemic level, actors understand that an independent group will eventually use its independence.

Theory

Before turning directly to the study itself, we must say a few words about how propaganda actually works. Our theoretical framework relies on Jacques Ellul's classic work "Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes." Of course, a book from 1962 cannot fully meet the needs of a researcher in 2025. However, we should not assume that public consciousness transforms easily or rapidly. We should not overestimate the impact of technology on the dynamics of the information sphere. The means of delivering information are certainly important. The "Radio of a Thousand Hills" has many faces today and employs a diverse set of tools — incomparable to what propaganda possessed in the past. And here another thought must be added. Yes, Lukashenka's propaganda may appear primitive, overly aggressive, even somewhat infantile. But in practice — it works. When we mentioned the two-directionality of this information flow, we were referring to the popular observation that "television in Belarus works for only one viewer." It does indeed work for him — that much is true. But this by no means implies that everyone else is safe.

We do not have — and cannot have — adequate sociology. There are some surveys, and they do allow for certain conclusions, at least from indirect data. Nevertheless, this is, in my view, insufficient. But where sociology is powerless, anthropology can help: it reveals not frequency but phenomenon. A simple, informal conversation with people yields priceless information. Let us offer an example and refer readers to a very valuable study conducted by PSLAB (Public Sociology Laboratory, 2023).

Even without statistical measurements, a series of in-depth interviews can help us understand what public opinion might look like. Our own observations of a similar nature will likely be less representative, but the point is this: among people who are not politically active, who are not aggressive supporters of Lukashenka, one often encounters statements that fully reproduce the propaganda patterns we analyze below. Ellul's monograph allows us to explain how this happens — why people repeat state-media narratives while simultaneously insisting that Lukashenka is a dictator and that dictatorship is bad; that they "don't watch TV and are generally outside politics." Why conversations reveal constructions like "repression is bad, but…", "war is bad, but…"

First and foremost, it is essential to understand that propaganda cannot be captured by a single definitive definition. Most often we speak of criteria, continually adding new features. Ellul's monograph, old by today's standards, primarily examines propaganda in twentieth-century regimes inclined toward totalitarianism and, accordingly, social mobilization. Ellul writes that the main task of the propagandist is to explain world events in a clear, simple way, thereby provoking a person into taking action. In 2025, the goals have changed somewhat. Instead of offering a coherent and populist worldview, propagandists provide chaotic answers, frequently unrelated to one another. Their aim is not to prompt a person toward a political act but, on the contrary, to push them toward escapism. And yet Ellul is not mistaken when he speaks of action. Only today, instead of "action," a more fitting term would be "choice."

According to Ellul, such mythologized propaganda (and it functions primarily through myth) — when consistent and continuous — activates certain psychological defense mechanisms in a person, a social being, as we see in people who say "yes, but…". This "but" is psychologically protective: it allows the target of propaganda to occupy a comfortable ambivalent position.

"I'm against the war, but sometimes…" To illustrate this point with a non-Belarusian example, consider a formulation Putin used in one of his May 9 speeches after the war began: "a preemptive response." Semantically, the phrase is dubious, but it encapsulates the entire symbolic essence of contemporary propaganda. "Preemptive" implies "they were about to attack us." "Response" implies "they already attacked," although they did not — because the attack was supposedly prevented. In other words, this is "an answer to a question nobody asked, but one that had to be asked, so we answered it in advance."

It is also significant that propaganda aims to make people "perform rituals without thinking about their meaning." Rituals in an autocracy require no belief — only mindlessness. It is useful to mention the temporal dimension as well. Time in propaganda is always "ritualized." It is not divided into the familiar categories of "yesterday, today, tomorrow," because in propaganda there can be no "today." This allows the system to transmit contradictory messages sequentially, relying on the fact that "tomorrow" yesterday's message will be forgotten.

Ellul eventually gives a definition we can use here: "propaganda is a set of methods employed by certain actors with the aim of pushing a mass of psychologically similar individuals, who belong to a given group, toward active or passive behavior through psychological manipulation."
 From Ellul's detailed description we will need several more formulations.
First, it is important to remember that propaganda deals not with thoughts but with feelings. This is logical: the symbolic construction of information affects the recipient through recognition and sensation, not rationality. Propaganda is a flow — and one of its key attributes is a constant shortage of time. You read, you watch, you listen, but you do not reflect on each passage; you absorb the sensations embedded in the words.

This is why we consider it appropriate to use "verbal series" as an analytical tool for propaganda. Consciousness registers them regardless of context — and constant repetition solidifies both the symbol and the reaction to it. For this very reason, propaganda does not require ideology — since ideology creates context and a framework, a link between "yesterday" and "today." The propagandist's work is almost always an answer to the question "how," not "what."
 This is where the duality of the tool reveals itself: verbal series — which unquestionably appear in texts on BelTA — carry a certain superimposed meaning that does not change

regardless of the article's content. And this constancy shifts the series from the category of "what" into the category of "how."

For example, we might read an interview with some economist on the Belarusian Telegraph Agency website. Formally, he is speaking within his area of expertise, yet throughout the text he periodically inserts evaluative, personalized attacks: "Zelensky fell flat on his face," "the Ukrainian junta," "the illegitimate Kyiv regime," and so on.

Now we should explain in more detail what a "verbal series" is and how it works. Propaganda is impossible without the word. This is precisely why the word is what we intend to analyze — specifically, so-called "verbal series." By definition, these are sequences of words, phrases, or other linguistic units united by some form of commonality (grammatical, semantic, compositional, etc.). This may be a chain of homogeneous words in a sentence, a sequence of metaphors in a text, or an intertextual series that forms a symbolic image.
A verbal series does not necessarily consist of words that appear consecutively. It is originally a literary-studies term, and here it is necessary to quote Ellul to justify the applicability of this paradigm:
 "In the end propaganda appropriates literature — both the actual, and the past, and history itself, which is rewritten to meet the needs of propaganda… And let no one claim that this is unique to authoritarian governments, totalitarian regimes, or tyranny. No, this state of affairs is inherent to any propaganda. By its nature it takes possession of everything that can serve its purposes."

To demonstrate clearly how a verbal series works, let us turn to Gorshkov's textbook *Russian Text Stylistics*.

Let us now cite a fairly large passage from that textbook in full: "*To become acquainted with other properties of the verbal series, let us turn to examples. Consider a short excerpt from Y. Nosov's novella* The Usvyaty Helmet-Bearers*: '"Looks like it's really flaring up," Kasyan said to himself, guessing that these heavy, multi-engined monsters were being ferried to the front from somewhere deep inside the country. He had never seen such enormous aircraft before. Somewhere they had been lurking, just as black, horned beetles hide who knows where before their mass flight begins — beetles he used to swat with his cap. And he was tormented by the thought that if even a force like this could not defeat the enemy who had swallowed so much of Russia in these few days, then the German must have an even greater power prepared. Which meant they would have to go. All of them. Down to the last man…'*
Here, the colloquial–vernacular verbal series stands out first of all: *looks like, really flaring up, who knows where, if so, to swallow up, the German* (singular used with the meaning of the plural: in the verbal series it is not the word itself but its morphological form that matters), *to the last man.*
 We can also distinguish a series stylistically opposite to it — let us call it "bookish": *multi-engined monsters, deep inside the country, enormous, mass flight, tormented, defeat the enemy.* These observations allow us to add two more properties to the ones already mentioned. We see that the elements of a verbal series do not have to be arranged consecutively, one after another, or "in contact," as it is sometimes said. On the contrary, they are most often separated from one another by elements of other verbal series — that is, arranged distantly. Elements of a verbal series may be separated by entire pages and still form a single verbal series within the text, performing specific compositional functions. Thus, a third property of the verbal series is that it does not have to be a continuous sequence of linguistic units." [Gorshkov, 2006]

Methodology

 The final and very important part of the theoretical section must be a description of the methodology — from the search query on the BelTA website to the actual analysis of the data obtained. We must also describe the limitations that we inevitably could not avoid.

To begin, we collected from the BelTA website a dataset of news articles related to Ukraine over the past eleven months. Using AI, we wrote a script that made it possible to export the key fields of each article into a spreadsheet: publication date, headline, link. After that, we introduced a differentiation system that allowed us to filter out false positives and irrelevant material. Thus, of roughly 5,000 items, 1,200 were removed because they did not relate to the subject of the study. This includes, for example, articles where Ukraine is mentioned in passing, without context, as part of a list of countries — such as a news item about the opening of the Listapad film festival, where Ukraine appears only as one of many participants over the years.

Since our study focuses primarily on bilateral relations between Ukraine and Belarus, articles in which Kyiv was mentioned in contexts pertaining, for example, to relations with the United States or the EU were also removed and placed in a separate dataset for future research. We also removed articles dealing with domestic politics or events within Ukraine. Here we noticed a particular feature: among the relevant news items, the majority were presented as direct quotations from various speakers — a feature we took into account later, at the practical stage.

At this point we encountered a small problem: the same commentators often speak both on issues of bilateral relations and on general geopolitical developments. BelTA frequently invites someone, labels them an expert, and records a long interview that is released on YouTube in full — and later broken into multiple articles published over several days. In these interviews, participants answer a range of questions not always connected by a single theme. Among the regular guests of BelTA's video projects, many are not Belarusian at all. A portion of the articles featuring such external speakers was also moved into a separate table, based on one simple criterion: does the person speak about Belarus–Ukraine relations?

At the next stage we introduced a system of tags in order to categorize the remaining relevant articles. Here we encountered another nuance — a category that turned out to be the largest and the most complex: the tag "Belarusian propaganda." The way formally relevant "experts" are presented revealed several things at once. First, most "specialized experts" speak on any topic, diluting the very notion of expertise. Second, even articles that appear narrowly focused often rest on an underlying propagandist narrative. We initially assumed that the "economy" category would be fairly large. In practice, nearly all articles positioned as economic — whether by headline or by the speaker's profession — simply reproduced a predetermined agitational pattern. The boundaries between thematic categories are rather blurred — and this constitutes one of our limitations, since the choice of category remains a matter of interpretation. Against this background, we decided to focus in this article specifically on the materials assigned the tag "Belarusian propaganda." This category contained 156 items. We then used another script that allowed us to compile all articles from this category into a single sub-corpus of texts in the form of an HTML file.

This made it possible to quickly and efficiently perform the next task: searching for verbal series within the text corpus. A careful reading of the export made it possible to identify patterns associated with characteristic words. We then needed to compile dictionaries that would allow us to extract these patterns from the corpus. To do this, we again turned to

ChatGPT, which provided code for generating a table of all words in the corpus with their frequency counts.

The resulting table was uploaded into Google Colab for further processing. We needed to remove "background noise": conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliary words, particles. In addition, it was necessary to standardize all cognate words. To achieve this, we requested AI-generated code that could interface with a dictionary and perform lemmatization — the process of reducing a word form to its lemma, its dictionary (normal) form. In this way we formed a dataset of lexemes that could be used to construct sub-dictionaries corresponding to our patterns — the verbal series.

The next step was to run a machine analysis of the "Belarusian propaganda" sub-corpus to determine the frequency of words from the selected verbal series derived from the full list of stems. During this process, several thematic groups were removed because they were either irrelevant to the research question or too infrequent.

We will discuss the conclusions later, in the analysis section. Before moving on to that, it is necessary to list the limitations of our approach. First, we must clarify that the AI did not participate in the direct analytical process. This decision was driven by the high probability of errors that the tool might introduce. AI involvement was deliberately limited to code generation, which was executed in a separate environment. Moreover, all AI-generated code was reviewed by an experienced developer. Ultimately, we identified the following limitations which, although present, do not invalidate the research. Many of them are mitigated by the sheer volume of the dataset under examination. Nonetheless, they must be explicitly acknowledged:

1. Dependence on the completeness of dictionaries. The results depend directly on how fully and accurately the lists of trigger words and phrases are compiled. If propaganda employs new or unexpected formulations, they may remain undetected. This does not render the method useless, but it does require regular dictionary updates.

2. Manual development of categories. The main patterns and their dictionaries were created manually based on a sample of texts. This stage is subjective: other researchers might highlight slightly different aspects. But manual work provides flexibility and makes the method expandable — it can be refined as new information emerges.

3. Automatic search does not interpret context. The code detects word and phrase matches but cannot determine whether a term is being used sincerely, ironically, or in a critical/oppositional way. Therefore, manual review is always required following automatic selection (which we treat as an essential step).

4. Tied to a specific corpus. The method was developed and calibrated on a one-year corpus of BelTA state-media articles. It can be applied to other state outlets (e.g. SB—Belarus Today), but doing so would require additional validation and likely some dictionary adjustments.

5. Lemmatization errors. Automatic lemmatization (pymorphy2 — a library for morphological analysis and normalization of Russian and partially Ukrainian words) occasionally mishandles homonyms, surnames, or anglicisms. This may produce false positives or omissions, though the effect is moderate in large samples.

6. Limitations of regular expressions. RegEx captures standard constructions well, but complex syntax, unusual word order, or playful citation structures may be missed. This necessitates occasional manual recalibration.

7. Quantitative data represent only the first layer. Word frequency does not equate to the strength or impact of a narrative. We use quantitative data to narrow the corpus and identify trends, while final interpretation relies on qualitative analysis.

8. No automatic assessment of influence. The method identifies the presence of propagandist constructs but does not measure their actual effect on the audience. This is not our goal — and in an autocracy such measurement is generally difficult.
9. Temporal dynamics not yet implemented. The method could be extended to track changes in patterns month by month or in response to events, but in its current form it primarily detects the presence of narratives, not their evolution over time.

Analysis of BelTA Verbal Series and Identification of Patterns

In the course of our work, as noted earlier, we identified seven groups of verbal series that function as recurring patterns. To begin, they can be listed as follows:

1. Legitimizing status
2. Opposing politicians and the population
3. The hidden hand of the West
4. Comparing Ukraine and Belarus
5. "We did everything right"
6. Ritualized time
7. Insulting the opponent
8.

This part of the work was conducted manually on a representative sample of news items (approximately 30% of the total corpus), after which the script we developed made it possible to mechanically expand these series once each had been formalized. The most numerous group proved to be the cluster of verbal series loosely titled "legitimizing status" — the way BelTA presents the protagonists of its materials. Across 250 news items and roughly 60,000 words, the script identified 390 objects belonging to this category. The most frequent were terms such as "expert," "political analyst," "commentator" — sometimes appearing two or three times in a single article, plus in the headline. BelTA's authors strive to highlight the supposed competence of these commentators. Yet, in no case does the text show a consistent match between the assigned expertise and the speaker's actual commentary: military experts answer questions about foreign policy; economists reflect on developments at the front, and so on.

A second important component of this verbal series is political status or nationality. These often appear together — for example, "retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel Daniel Davis said…" This phrasing is repeated several times, presumably to give additional weight to the statement — the speaker is American, therefore "there are reasonable voices in the Collective West." Particular attention is paid to speakers connected to Ukraine: journalists, bloggers, and, notably, ordinary citizens (we address them more fully in the next group). A significant figure for BelTA is former Ukrainian prime minister Mykola Azarov. Also frequent are various "opposition politicians" from the Verkhovna Rada. But perhaps the most expressive device is simply "ordinary people." A Ukrainian woman who moved to Belarus "reveals the true state of affairs." This element of the series closely overlaps with the next one — "Opposing politicians and the population." The idea is simple: there are elites detached from the people, and there are citizens who cannot make themselves heard.

This pattern was reinforced heavily by Lukashenko himself. One of the most illustrative headlines reads:
 "President of Belarus congratulates the people of Ukraine on Independence Day."
Here is the full text of the greeting — it is highly significant for understanding the nature of this pattern:

"Living side by side in peace and harmony has long been the destiny of the Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples. Our close coexistence has forged unbreakable blood ties, reinforced by our shared historical fate, common Christian values, and sincere friendship," the congratulatory message reads.

"No matter how external forces try to pull us apart, Belarus remains open to Ukrainians," Alexander Lukashenko noted. "We are committed to mutually beneficial cooperation and constructive dialogue with our southern neighbors.
"From the bottom of my heart, I wish the citizens of Ukraine to find their own answer to today's challenges, and your multinational country — peaceful skies, solidarity, and truly independent development," the head of state emphasized.

It is important to note that this is an address specifically to the *people*, where the speaker uses formulations such as "external forces pulling you in different directions" and "truly independent development." In the Belarusian propagandistic discourse, political life is sacralized when it concerns the Lukashenko regime and its allies, and demonized when it concerns opponents.

For example, in the article "A Ukrainian woman describes how ordinary people's lives changed after Euromaidan," several phrases recur repeatedly: "I'm a person outside politics," "I'm outside politics, I stand for faith," "Right now people in Ukraine are merely surviving," "Ukrainians want peace, Zelensky is just profiting from the war." Similar semantic elements appear in other articles, especially those featuring Ukrainian speakers. There is also a European variation of this pattern: several figures identified as German, Polish, or Hungarian experts contribute to the "legitimizing status" group. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the division of verbal series into thematic groups is to some degree conditional.
The next category concerns the theme of the *"hidden hand of the West"* — the myth of the Collective West and the claim that the Ukrainian authorities lack agency, as do all other European governments. There are "puppet-masters" who control their "vassals" from the outside. These forces are simultaneously the "global evil" and an invincible external enemy — a clearly conspiratorial model.
 The notion of an external enemy is among the oldest tropes of the Belarusian state. Lukashenko has been using this "card" since at least the mid-1990s. Accordingly, in the selected corpus such constructions appear more than 400 times.

Closely connected to this is another group: a verbal series whose purpose is to maintain a high level of tension — "we are surrounded by enemies," "the situation on the border is difficult," and similar tropes. These appear more than 300 times in various contexts.

In addition, two more groups were identified: — comparisons of Belarus with Ukraine; — and the group conditionally labeled "We did everything right."

In this narrative, Belarus has lower utility payments, it "has an economy" (while, according to the authors, Ukraine's economy is completely destroyed), "Minsk was celebrating a festival of sports while the flame of war was already igniting in eastern Ukraine." The "We did everything right" group overlaps with this comparison, but also serves to further legitimize Lukashenko — portraying him as a "wise leader with strategic foresight who predicted everything, which is why Ukraine is at war while we have peace and quiet."
Examples include quotes such as: "…in Belarus we made less noise about independence and therefore preserved it," says "Ukrainian journalist Diana Panchenko." "I understood where

everything was coming from," "I knew what we might be heading toward," "But we held on. We developed because we did not discard what our ancestors built." — These are only a few examples of Lukashenko's statements.

The final two groups — "ritualized time" and "insulting the opponent." The first represents an attempt to conceptualize current events through the category of *time* — which becomes ritualized deliberately. From the slogan "Time has chosen us," which accompanies many speeches by officials and propagandists, to phrases such as "Be patient, don't rush," and "Time will rebuild everything. Time will judge everyone. But we must endure." A closer analysis of this category drew our attention to another key feature: the ritualization of time goes hand in hand with constant references to God — something that, at first glance, seems uncharacteristic for a regime whose leader has openly identified himself as an atheist.

"We may not withstand this as a state. That is why I do everything patiently and persistently, as the Lord and the Church teach us," "This is the time to do your utmost. Everyone can do much. And the Lord will see it." This turn toward irrational arguments may, on the one hand, suggest fear; on the other, it is an effective tool that forms the concept: "Time is God, time will judge all, time has chosen us." In many ways this echoes Kremlin narratives in which "the Russian people" and "the Russian army" are portrayed as divinely chosen. It is manipulative irrationalism in pure form.

As for the "insulting the opponent" category, its purpose is fully transparent. Among the terms that appear in these verbal series are phrases such as: "Zelensky is a louse," "Amerikosy" (a derogatory slur for Americans), "Nazi criminals," "Volodya Zelensky," and so on.

Conclusion.

Belarusian propaganda, which has become markedly more aggressive since 2020 and now operates through a wide array of speakers, actively employs repetitive narratives designed to subtly shape a worldview grounded not in facts but in the irrational and emotional. The verbal series focused on religion and time contribute to this, as do the increasingly alarmist formulae that saturate the discourse. Equating "God" with "time" is formally intended to solve yet another problem: to neutralize fear surrounding the finite nature of the regime (since any autocracy is by definition finite). This fear is especially acute in the period from 2020 to 2025, marked by the accelerated deconstruction of institutions and the economy.

Anti-Ukrainian rhetoric primarily targets the institution of the Ukrainian state and rests on the desacralization of power "there" and the simultaneous sacralization of power "here." In addition, the pattern centered on the Collective West and the "puppet-masters" remains one of the most fundamental and fits into the broader concept of sacred and wise authority in Belarus — aligned with the people — contrasted with the "demonic" authority outside Belarus, which "wants the war to continue to the last Ukrainian."

This article appears useful precisely because, as practice sadly shows, despite the crudeness, occasional primitiveness, and shrillness of Belarusian propaganda, it systematically imposes certain ideas and exerts a negative influence on Belarusian citizens — including those who opposed Lukashenko in 2020. Working through fear and the irrational, and recognizing that genuine popularity cannot be restored, propagandists nevertheless find pathways to a new "social contract" — one far less advantageous than the previous one. This does not mean that support for the war is growing in Belarus — but such support is not required. As always, the regime needs people to remain silent. And the constant background of demonstrative repressions reinforces and saturates the propagandistic flow that Belarusians must withstand while remaining supporters of peace — and supporters of Ukraine, which continues to resist the Kremlin.

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