

THE “FATALISM” OF BELARUSIAN POLITICS AND THE “SOCIAL CLIMATE” IN THE COUNTRY

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyse the socio-political situation in Belarus, which has changed dramatically after the presidential elections in 2020, the paradox of striving for real social transformation in Belarusian society against the background of a fall in confidence in the mechanisms of how it functions. The assumption about the historical specificity of the Belarusian society and the weakness of its social system is tested using socio-cultural methodology, a historical-analytical method, institutional analysis, statistical analysis. The fatalism of Belarusian politics the authors find lies in the history of the country and in the formation process of its social system.

Key words: *Social Trust, Institutional Trust, Election, Social System, Culture*

INTRODUCTION

Earlier, researchers were interested in Belarus as one of the states that emerged in the post-Soviet space; on the one hand, it inherited a number of post-Soviet phenomena similar to other post-Soviet states [Salnikova 2013, 2014a] but, on the other hand, it had some distinctive features and a specific trajectory of development. Today Belarus has attracted the attention of the world community in connection with the presidential elections in August 2020 and their consequences [Liga.News, 05.23.2021], and the understanding that Belarus does have its own special features.

The complexity of analysing the Belarusian space is associated with a lack of sociological research data, which would help explain a number of trends, and also requires the researcher to constantly engage thematically and understand the historical development of this country. The co-author therefore studied the value-normative systems of the post-Soviet countries within the framework of the project «Social Transformations in the Borderlands – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova» with the support of the Carnegie Corporation (New York) in 2012-2014 [Muradyan et al. 2014]. As part of this study, we will consider some of the conclusions obtained several years ago through the prism of the events that took place in Belarus, and also supplement them.

1. METHODOLOGY: PURPOSE, EMPIRICAL DATA AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The **purpose** of this article is to analyse the socio-political situation in Belarus, which has changed dramatically after the presidential elections in 2020, the paradox of striving for real social transformation in Belarusian society against the background of a fall in confidence in the mechanisms of its functioning. The authors suggest that the fatalism of Belarusian politics requires an explanation, which must be sought in the history of the country and the process of forming its social system. The historical specificity of Belarusian society and the weakness of its social system are tested with the use of sociocultural methodology, a historical-analytical method, institutional analysis, as well as statistical methods for analysing empirical data.

Analysts of the British Royal Institute of International Affairs [Chatham House 2021] conducted a survey of residents of Belarusian cities about the political crisis (N = 926, E = 3.22%, January 2021) using a computer web interview (CAWI). The survey is representative by gender and the age and size of the city, and its results can be extrapolated to the whole of Belarus, since, as the analysts note, there are no big differences in the views of rural residents and residents of small towns. The authors of the article used the primary data from this study, which are freely available. You can also see the secondary data [Astapenia 2021].

To compare some indicators, the authors used the primary data of the international projects World Values Survey (WVS) [World Values Survey] and European Values Study (EVS) [European Values Study] of different years.

Analysis of primary data was made using the SPSS program; descriptive statistics,

methods of univariate and bivariate analysis, and correlation analysis were used, in particular Pearson's Chi-square test and Cramer's coefficient. To temporarily compare data from different studies, the two coefficients of balance were constructed: trust-distrust balance coefficient (T-DT Coef. b.) and agreement-disagreement balance coefficient (A-DA Coef. b.). The coefficient of balance is calculated as follows: $(X\% - Y\%) / 100$, where X% is a group of those who trust / agree, Y% is a group of those who do not trust / disagree. The interpretation of the balance coefficient is as follows: a coefficient value close to 0 means a balance between both groups, the closer the coefficient value is to 1, the stronger the imbalance; the "+" sign denotes the dominance of the "trust / agreement" group, the "-" sign denotes the dominance of the "distrust / disagreement" group.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The desired goal of social transformations in the post-Soviet space is civil society as a driver for the development of various spheres of life. On the one hand, there are theoretical approaches to the study of civil society in sociology. For example, there is the theory of social capital and institutional theory, etc. On the other hand, every society has its own basic prerequisites for development. For example, G. Sheck substantiates why African countries, despite the colossal external influences of resources, cannot develop in accordance with the external expert view [Schoeck 1987]; other studies show that in matters of trust, the influence of institutions is stronger than the cultural code [Mishler, Rose 2001]. Based on these two factors, we will provide a theoretical framework for the study. It is also worth clarifying that we call the state of long-term unchanged political power established with the use of democratic instruments (elections) as the "fatalism" of Belarusian politics. The "social climate" in Belarus is interesting in terms of both the behavioural aspects of society during and after the elections, and the attitude to the socio-political situation in the country.

2.1. About the «social climate» and politics

Why is the presence of a civil society so important for the development of a country and the state? And how is it connected with the political sphere of life? These questions are not new scientific tasks, but we will focus our attention on them.

From the standpoint of politics, trust is a necessary condition for the development of democracy and civil society; from the standpoint of economists – it is necessary for the functioning of market relations; from the standpoint of sociology – trust serves as the foundation for the activities of public institutions [Sapsford et al. 2015].

«Civil society directly stimulates the development of social capital [...], which in turn facilitates political participation in society» [Salnikova 2014b: 148] and is also «a precondition for effective self-government» [Putnam 2000: 19]. As a public good, social capital at the individual level is measured as inclusion in the system of institutionalised social relations, the so-called social network, of mutual trust and recognition [Bourdieu 1985]. This network of relationships

is built by the individuals themselves – free, open, rational individuals [Portes 1998, Coleman 2000]; thus, the weight of the network depends on the number of such individuals, and the quality of the network depends on their quality, respectively; goals achievable by the network are determined by the personal goals of individuals; for social networks, their quality is more important, which sometimes determines the quantity. But trust has another important property – it diminishes the role of government coercion in relation to the observance of norms, both legal and conventional. Trusting relationships arise where the expectations of legal, honest, normalised behaviour of all participants in the process are justified.

F. Fukuyama says that social capital is a consequence of the presence of trust between members of society, or a part of them; thus, the formation of a social network is a long-term process, involving the change of at least one or two generations. But the most important thing that researchers point out is that social capital is created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms such as religion, tradition, custom [Fukuyama 1996], «*is a consequence of culture*» [Salnikova 2014b: 148] and is formed and based on historical tradition [Putnam 2000]. R. Putnam points to the historical determinism of social capital, while F. Fukuyama points to the spontaneity of its formation, but subject to a stable political system and the rule of law [Fukuyama 2000: 145]. In addition to trust, the peculiarities of the social network of relations should also include political, administrative, informational, economic, symbolic and other resources. They are common and structure the public space of society, they are a bridge between civil institutions and political and administrative ones, controlling and legitimising their work. Thus, the effectiveness of the country's socio-political development directly depends on the state of such resources, and on the availability of a sufficient number of non-state legitimate institutions.

2.2. About the current state: back to the past

Using the statements about the fundamental role of culture in the social, political, economic process (F. Fukuyama, R. Putnam, M. Weber, K. Jaspers, R. J. Collingwood, V. Stepin, A. Akhiezer, etc.) we will consider the cultural foundations of the functioning of the Belarusian society in the region of Eastern Europe.

Belarus became an independent sovereign state in 1990, and it had no prerequisites for a quick and painless adaptation to its new conditions of existence as a subject of the European political process. Belarusians were not ready for the drastic social, cultural, economic and ideological changes as well as changes in the structures of power, as long as we exclude the small group of the intelligentsia.

The Polish researcher of Belarusian history D. Michaluk notes the leading negative role of the geographical factor in the history of country, in the process of the formation of the Belarusian nation and the creation of an independent state. The existence of Belarusians between East and West, that is, two different civilisational projects, led to the state that «*the idea of a separate, independent state hardly made its way into the minds of Belarusians*» [Michaluk 2009: 63]. There were no examples of suc-

successful state building next to them. The Belarusians went through the same stages of political history that neighboring peoples (Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians) went through (from calls for cultural autonomy to political autonomy, and then to the proclamation of independence), but passed them with a tragic delay. They came to the moment of independence with the result, which V. Bulhakau defined, of «*an unfinished national project*» [Bulhakau 2001: 80].

The processes of statehood formation are faster and easier among historically “prepared” peoples with the spread of literacy, the assertion of individual rights, property rights to land, the presence of a middle class, urbanisation and social mobility, etc. Usually, such social achievements occur simultaneously with the expansion of consciousness, the formation of the ability to rise above the interests of their group, settlement and the traditions of their parish. In turn, these processes depend on the cultural context – linguistic and ethnic, especially in societies with an incomplete social structure or the absence / weakness of elites.

During the XX century, Belarusian society was at the core of large-scale European political processes, so it experienced internal transformations in crisis conditions, not bringing them to full completion and not having time to consolidate them in the public consciousness [Radzik 2007b].

What numbers and facts can illustrate the situation? At the end of the XIX century, 97.7% of the Belarusian-speaking population of country lived in rural areas, and in cities (poorly developed industrially) this population was 17%. In 1897, 86.5% of Belarusians were illiterate (for comparison, in neighboring Czech Republic in 1900, only 4.26% of the population could not read and write). Before the First World War, about 600 thousand people lived in Prague and its suburbs, and about 90% of them were ethnic Czechs. At the same time, in the capital of Belarusians, Minsk (100 thousand population), there were only about 8% of Belarusians themselves. The first Belarusian newspaper was published in 1906, when in 1905 there were already more than 750 of them in Czech Republic. The Czech press successfully conveyed the ideas of the elite and its cultural achievements to the population of different status, and the elite itself was formed in the era of enlightenment and romanticism in the context of a common European cultural project, which took place simultaneously with the development of industry and cities. The growth of the urban population in the Czech lands accelerated the growth of self-awareness and national identification of the Czechs. The elite on the Belarusian lands was in different conditions, they were inclined towards Polish culture, but after the partition of Poland they found themselves outside it [Radzik 2007b].

Polish sociologist R. Radzik, a well-known researcher of Belarusian ethnic culture and identity, notes that European peoples came to their present cultural and socio-political form in at least three ways. Most of them have formed over the past two centuries as modern societies around the idea of a nation, therefore national values determined their internal and external social processes. Some local ethno-cultural

groups, due to resource limitations, relied on ethnic culture and linguistic specifics to focus on maintaining their presence in the political field of Europe as subjects (Slovaks, Latvians, Estonians, etc.). It is also possible to single out, according to R. Radzik, “political” peoples with long-standing traditions of statehood and mechanisms for maintaining the loyalty of the population. The Belarusian people could not form a nation due to an external factor (the influence of the political regimes of Russia and Poland), there were no traditions of statehood, and internal social processes were not favourable either [Radzik 2007a: 101].

There was no leading ethnic group capable of becoming the main element of the ethno-social structure of society by the beginning of the XX century. Representatives of several European nations lived together within Belarus territory for a long time (Belarusians, Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians, Russians), but none of them were able to lead for a long time and become the centre of social processes [Yemelianova 2019].

According to R. Radzik, the text of the famous poem of the Belarusian poet and public figure Yakub Kolas «New land» very vividly conveys the situation on the Belarusian territory at the beginning of the 20th century, at the time of the revival of the Belarusian national “spirit”. The protagonist of the Belarusian world (local, rural) is a landless peasant (who later already has land), who positions himself as an aloof living outside the village. In the text of the poem, there is practically no characterisation of the rural peasant community, and the Belarusians emphasise their individualism, which distinguishes them from the Russians. The gentry and the small gentry represent in the poem an alien, unkind, strange world, on which at the same time the peasants depend. On the one hand, the peasants feel the lack of common values with this world; on the other hand, they blame it for all the troubles and injustices in their lives. Kolas emphasizes that the peasants feel a desire to transfer responsibility for their lives to the landlord class, and he condemns them for this irresponsibility.

It is important that the enmity towards the gentlemen / gentry in the poem is of an irrational nature, since under certain conditions the border between peasant poverty and a certain prosperity of a small gentry could be overcome. However, Kolas makes it clear that peasants do not feel they are part of a certain wholeness, large social group or social structure.

The city is also a foreign territory, where the hierarchy of status is incomprehensible and alien to the peasant.

R. Radzik also notes that Kolas shows how the social-class dimension of the Belarusian society dominates in the minds of Belarusians throughout the subsequent Soviet era. Kolas shows a Belarusian village, whose inhabitants think in terms of everyday life, class, and only then ethnocentric, but not national ones. Time in social groups, praised by Kolas, has a clear dimension of the 4 seasons, but it is not historical, not linear. The text of the poem lacks a clear historical plan.

It is noticeable that the concepts «Russia», «Russian», «Poland», «Pole», «Belarusian»,

«Belarus» do not have a symbolic, abstract character, they are generally found in the poem very rarely or are absent. The word «Belarus» is served only in the applied (culinary) aspect when it comes to the delicacies of the Belarusian cuisine. It is important that the famous poet writes about the absence of “national activity” and the historical and ideological corpus of texts and cultural practices among Belarusians, while they are fully formed among neighboring peoples striving for an independent state life [Radzik 2005].

There is an opinion that the success of building the Soviet type of the Belarusian socio-cultural and political system became possible precisely in such an immature (in the ethno-socio-cultural dimension) society; therefore, the Belarusians were relieved to accept the return to the Soviet type of system in the mid-90s already in independent Belarus [Salnikova 2014b: 138-139]. Researcher Je. Waszkiewicz describes the characteristic features of the Belarusian society of the Soviet period in the late 1930s: external stability hid the destruction of all social structures and the destruction of the traditional rural economy; high levels of internal migration due to industrialisation and urban growth; increasing the group of nomenclature bureaucrats; forced labour and the terror of the population in 1936-1938. The result of the actions of the new government in Belarus was the «atomisation of society» and a lack of trust between people, an atmosphere of fear and the impossibility of conducting joint social activities. The most dangerous for social development in the Belarusian territories was the phenomenon of «double consciousness», which eventually led to a schizophrenic perception of the social world: on the one hand, the world is artificial, “official”, imaginary, on the other hand, the normal human logic of individual perception of events and phenomena [Waszkiewicz 2011: 159-160].

During the Soviet period, Belarusians were mostly indifferent to actions directed against the flag as a national symbol or the Belarusian language. The Russian language was prestigious and had social support; Belarusian was considered a peasant, provincial and was not loved by the authorities [Waszczyńska 2008]. In present day Belarus, Russian has become the language of power, bureaucracy, education, popular culture, public events, and the language of city residents. The opposition speaks Belarusian; this is its political position in relation to the authorities. Rural residents often use the so-called “trasianka”.

According to many Belarusian and Polish researchers, language, mythology, historical memory, a pantheon of heroes, long-term social and cultural (including religious) practices as the main ethnic markers – all this and much more in modern Belarusian society are in a depressing / deplorable / destroyed state.

On the territory of Belarus, we observe the results of the unfinished [in the previous centuries] process of the formation of the Belarusian ethnos as the integrity / unity of various ethno-cultural groups. The most important factor is the lack of a stable ethnic identity, when tens of thousands of people, mainly residents of the Lithuanian-Polish-Belarusian and Ukrainian borderlands, cannot determine their belonging to a

certain cultural group, do not feel their connection with country, therefore they call themselves “tuteyshyya” (indigenous), i.e. living in the local area. The identity of the “tuteyshyya” has a weak connection with the ethnic group or civil society of country; it is the identity of the inhabitants of the territory and that of a territorial community. The word “tuteyshyya” has been known since pre-Soviet times, possibly from the era of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. There is an opinion that today the phenomenon of “tuteyshyya” characterises the entire Belarusian society, in which de-Sovietisation has not taken place, there is no clear definition of ethnic and national identity, and there is no understanding of the importance of identity at state level. An unstable identity becomes an obstacle to the decisive political changes that the country needs today, since the local thinking of many Belarusians excludes responsibility for events taking place throughout country, in society and the state. Despite the fact that no other people of the USSR gave the Soviet identity such a priority as the Belarusian, nevertheless, the Belarusian identity has a weak civic and ethnic connection [Titarenko 2006: 76].

An unstable identity is becoming a barrier to the decisive and rapid political changes that the country needs today, since the local thinking of many Belarusians excludes responsibility for events taking place throughout the country, in society and in the state. The absence of a stable identity can be replaced either by its reinterpretation, or by redefining the meaning of identity as a Belarusian, as suggested by the Polish ethnologist K. Waszczyńska. She argues that the identity of Belarusians is in the process of formation, and the concept of Belarusian identity is expanding from territorial to socio-political. In other words, the contextual, unstable Belarusian identity is filling with traditional and modern content [Waszczyńska 2008: 177]. This is important for our study, since the awareness of belonging to a large cultural group leads to the strengthening of trust. Participation in overall social and cultural actions, when the reactions to events and behaviour of group members are predictable and understandable to everyone, stimulates the growth of trust in the group [Yemelianova 2012]. It is known that every ethnic culture organises social solidarity in an original way, using models tested by time and history, by authoritative leaders of a cultural group; but this is not the case for Belarus: there is no “pantheon of historical leaders” respected by the whole society. It can be assumed that the current government is becoming a simulacrum that will not be accepted by the changing public consciousness of Belarusians.

As the Belarusian researcher notes, the complex process of building statehood in the post-Soviet territories is usually associated not only with the strengthening of government institutions, but also with the pursuit of a policy of “nationalisation” (formation of a nation - the authors’ note) by accelerating the ongoing ethnogenesis [Boridzenko 2020: 112]. In the Belarusian situation, this experience is especially valuable, as we have already noted, the unfinished process of the formation of the Belarusian ethnos as an integrity becomes an obstacle to the decisive political changes that the country needs today.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part of the article, we will try to argue theoretical theses with empirical data, and analyse them and reflect. We assume that some questions will remain open for discussion.

3.1. Social trust: has it really or reactively changed

Social trust in sociological research is measured as a characteristic of relationships - as trust in most people or caution in any relationship with them. The behavior of this indicator reflects many processes in society. For example, a high value of the indicator may indicate the following factors:

- the state's authoritarianism [Adam, Podmenik 2010], the Republic of Belarus is such a state;
- the stability, regardless of the quality of this stability, or lack of development; socio-political conditions in Belarus are defined as "unstable stability" (term by S. Salnikova [Salnikova 2014b: 185]);
- the ambivalence of the population due to the symbiosis of old and new values and norms in society, etc.

Strengthening these factors will contribute to an increase in the values of social trust indicators. But abrupt social changes will entail a decrease in the corresponding indicator because the desired stability will be disrupted ("albeit lives poorly, but it is known how") and disorientation in the double institutional space will increase.

Until 2008, Belarus showed the largest increase in confidence among European countries [Salnikova 2014b: 152-154], and we interpreted this trend as the relative protection of the population (in fact, the economic isolation of country) before the global financial crisis. A strong social upheaval in 2020 in conditions of unstable stability led to a sharp decline in trust and almost returned to the position existing at the beginning of the republic's state independence (Table 1).

Table 1. Social Trust Indicators, Belarus (EVS*, WVS, Chatham House)**

Survey, year	In general, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? %		T-DT Coef. b.
	Can trust	Need to be very careful	
EVS, 1990	25.5	74.5	-0.49
WVS, 1995	39.9	55.7	-0.16
EVS, 2000	41.9	58.1	-0.16
EVS, 2008	44.8	55.2	-0.10
Chatham House, 2021	30.4	69.6	-0.39

* *European Values Study*

** *World Values Survey*

Sources: Authors

The fall in trust is unambiguously associated with the 2020 elections. We have selected the most significant answers to the question of how the respondents voted in the presidential elections in Belarus (Table 2). The relationship between the variables of social trust and electoral certainty is statistically significant at the level $\text{Sig.} = 0.026$ (Pearson's Chi-square test). It turned out that those Belarusians who have decided on a political position (either A. Lukashenko or S. Tikhanovskaya) are more inclined to trust the majority of people, and vice versa. At the same time, only 11.2% of Belarusians agree with the statement «that people who share my political views are a minority» and 59.4% do not agree. Thus, belonging to a social group nourishes a sense of trust. It can be assumed that a certain decrease in trust preceded the elections because of the disunity of society, because «*distrust engenders disunity – disunity nourishes distrust*» [Salnikova 2014b: 154].

Table 2. Indicators of social trust in different electoral groups, Belarus, 2021 (Chatham House)

	In general, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? %		Total
	Can trust	Need to be very careful	
Alexander Lukashenko	37.1	62.9	100
	25.2	20.7	22.1
Svetlana Tikhanovskaya	35.1	64.9	100
	56.8	50.7	52.6
Against everyone	22.6	77.4	100
	9.5	15.7	13.6
I do not want to answer	24.1	75.9	100
	8.6	13.0	11.6
Total	32.6	67.4	100
	100	100	100

Sources: Authors

3.2. Institutional trust: what happened?

Great changes have taken place at the level of institutional trust. According to the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus in 2009, the ranking of institutes «clearly shows the order: the population of country trusts the state authorities according to their importance in the hierarchy of the power and does not trust all those institutions (there are no social institutions in the list), which are characterised by the “non-” particle in relation to statehood with a strong vertical of power» (see table 2.24 in [Salnikova 2014b: 162-163]). The institutions of the church and the army were removed from this list because they «have traditionally occupied high places in all previous monitoring studies» [Shavel 2011: 113].

Indeed, according to the international research WVS in 2011, Belarusians most trust-

ed the church (T-DT Coeff. b. = 0.70), the army (0.69) and universities (0.65), as well as the government (0.16) and equally the courts and the companies (0.11), the banks (0.01); all other institutions had a negative trust-distrust balance coefficient (see also data in [Bornukova et al. 2018: 4]).

According to the data of Chatham House in 2021, the trend has changed (see the univariate distributions in [Astapenia 2021: 24-25]): the key institutions of post-election confrontation with the people (the President, the Constitutional Court, state security agencies, the judiciary, state media, etc.) turned out in the second half of the rating, mostly non-state, neutral and newly created institutions in relation to the confrontation turned out in the first half of the ranking.

According to the trust-distrust balance coefficient, non-state media, the churches, independent trade unions, administrations of enterprises and the headquarters of the presidential candidate V. Babariko have a positive indicator, and three institutions (the Coordination Council, headquarters of the presidential candidate S. Tikhonovskaya, army) have balancing at zero level, the other institutions have negative indicator of varying value (table 3).

Table 3. Institutional trust indicators, Belarus, 2021 (Chatham House)

	Trust, %	Distrust, %	Difficult to answer, %	T-DT Coef. b.
Non-state media	49.50	30.30	20.20	0.192
Catholic Church	41.70	27.70	30.50	0.140
Orthodox Church	45.40	32.50	22.10	0.129
Victor Babariko's headquarters	42.70	31.50	25.80	0.112
Independent trade unions	39.10	32.30	28.50	0.068
Administration of your enterprise	40.00	34.20	25.90	0.058
Coordinating Council	38.20	37.60	24.10	0.006
Svetlana Tikhonovskaya's headquarters	38.80	41.20	20.10	-0.024
Army	36.50	46.70	16.80	-0.102
National Anti-Crisis Management	22.00	37.30	40.80	-0.153
Tax authorities	30.60	50.90	18.40	-0.203
Protestant Church	18.40	39.00	42.70	-0.206
President of the Republic of Belarus	24.10	59.90	16.10	-0.358
Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus	23.30	59.30	17.50	-0.360
Militia	25.30	63.20	11.50	-0.379
State Security Agencies	22.30	61.30	16.40	-0.390
Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus (government)	21.80	61.10	17.10	-0.393
Official trade unions	19.80	62.20	18.10	-0.424

Local authorities	20.90	63.70	15.30	-0.428
National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus (parliament)	18.30	62.40	19.30	-0.441
Judicial authorities	20.10	65.00	15.00	-0.449
State media	16.30	70.00	13.70	-0.537
Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus	14.90	69.30	15.70	-0.544

Sources: Authors

K. Bornukova and colleagues described institutional changes adopted at the state level (access to information and transparency, decentralisation, etc.) as mechanisms to increase trust in institutions, and assessed their implementation as promising with tangible results in 10-30 years [Bornukova et al. 2018: 14]). It is important to note that in the state regulation of institutions it is necessary to take into account the fact that the level of trust depends on the development of the legal system (the protection of property rights, the rule of law, the efficiency of public administration, the transparency of government actions and the low level of corruption, etc.). Thus, the most effective way to increase institutional trust is to build relations «institutions-society» in accordance with the needs of society, ensuring freedom, human rights, transparency and the accountability of the government [Mishler, Rose 2001]. On the contrary, the needs of society in 2020 were ignored, as were the rights of many people who either participated in peaceful protests or simply found themselves at a certain time in a certain place.

Significant changes in the structure of institutions, to which Belarusians express trust or distrust, against the background of a decline in trust in them and in society, also testifies to a certain stratification in the «state-society» relationship. If earlier the situation in Belarus was interpreted in terms of «domination of the state» and «authoritarian power», today in public discourse one can hear about «Lukashenka's regime» and «state terrorism», etc. regarding Belarus [Liga.News, 23.05.2021].

The state of Belarus has always controlled the actions of its citizens in all spheres of life, and Belarusians were satisfied with the development of democracy in the country (25.4% in 2000, 50.8% in 2008 (EVS)), it means they were satisfied with the development of institutions too.

But in 2020 the situation changed and Belarusians “saw” many institutions from a completely different perspective (Table 4). It is likely that they knew about the peculiarities of the institutional development of Belarus but maneuvering in a double institutional space was defined and known, and it was this “knowledge” that suited the Belarusians. The rationale that the dual institutional space of Belarus is a norm-regulating mechanism is well described [Salnikova 2014b: 127-165, 174-186]. During the presidential elections and especially after them, some institutions acted on the orders of the president and against the will of the people, so the attitude towards them changed.

After the 2020 elections, Belarusians realised the vulnerability of ordinary people to the arbitrariness of the authorities (73.6% of respondents said this A-DA Coeff. $b = 0.61$; hereinafter, in part 3.1, the data from Table 4 are given), and «the violence of the security forces» (71.5%, 0.56), and the fact that state bodies do not properly investigate this violence (69.2%, 0.58), and Lukashenka's competitors are in prison unreasonably and unfairly (62.7%, 0.47). There are decent managers in country (59.3%, 0.45), but the one «who publicly speaks out against A.G. Lukashenko will be persecuted by the authorities» (68.6%, 0.56), because the president personally controls all spheres of the state (73.8%, 0.65). «A. Lukashenko is incapable of reforming the political structure of Belarus to meet the wishes of the majority of Belarusians» (61.5%, 0.46), who know that «the president should not be in power for more than two consecutive terms» (74.1%, 0.61).

The majority of Belarusians assert that «the law in Belarus for the last six months (the period from the elections to the poll - the authors' note) has not worked» (61.3%, 0.43). The problem of understanding how laws work is not new for Belarusians. Back in 2011, A. Laurukhin wrote: «*The abundance of laws not only does not help to improve the situation, but, on the contrary, aggravates it, because the number of laws is inversely proportional to the severity of their implementation, and therefore, before following the law, [we] have to make additional efforts to clarify that an occasional situation (depending on the political situation, corporate and / or personal interests), which makes it possible to understand in relation to whom and how exactly the law should be interpreted*». This creates a «*vicious circle of incapacitated laws and illegal actions*» [Laurukhin, 2011: 89]. Unfortunately, the problem is extrapolated to the outside world: international law is established by international institutions, so it is not legitimate for the «main observer of the law» of the republic. The situation with the forced landing of a Ryanair plane at the Minsk airport and the arrest by the security forces of the founder of the Telegram channel NEXTA, Roman Protasevich is a clear example of this [Liga.News, 23.05.2021].

Agreeing that Belarus is a social state (40.0%, 0.02 in Table 4), practically the last socially oriented state in the post-Soviet space, whose social needs are covered mainly by loans from Russia, Belarusians understand a number of related problems. State domination has generated «too many officials and state structures» (80.3%, 0.74) - this is a key institutional problem in Belarus according to the Chatham House survey 2021. The centralisation of power deprives the regions of resources, in particular financial ones (63.9%, 0.53). Neighbouring Ukraine is successfully implementing its decentralisation reform, its experience and practical cases demonstrate not only the positive effect of the socio-economic development of the regions, but also the national and ethnic identity of Ukrainians [Salnikova et al. 2021]. Therefore, it can be assumed that the rigid top-down structure of power is one of the key factors of «*an unfinished national project*» (term by V. Bulhakau [Bulhakau 2001: 80]).

A surplus of officials negatively affects the quality of public administration, since «the

overwhelming majority of officials, including high-ranking officials, are incompetent and do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to govern the state» (62.2%, 0.46). Belarusians are not so optimistic about their healthcare and education systems in comparison with neighbouring countries, as is commonly believed, for example, in Ukraine. The balance coefficients for the corresponding statements are negative (-0.18 and -0.17 for healthcare and education systems, respectively), that is, there are more of those Belarusians who consider the working of these systems no better than in neighbouring countries (47.9% and 45.7%, respectively) than those who agree with the statement “better than in neighboring countries” (30.3% and 28.8%, respectively).

Table 4. Indicators of agreement with some statements, Belarus, 2021 (Chatham House)

	Agreement, %	Disagreement, %	Difficult to answer, %	A-DA Coef. b.
There are too many officials and state structures in Belarus	80.3	6.4	13.2	0.739
The President must not be in power for more than two consecutive terms	74.1	13.1	12.8	0.610
All spheres of the state are controlled personally by A. Lukashenko	73.8	9.1	17.1	0.647
An ordinary person in Belarus is not protected from the arbitrariness of the authorities	73.6	13.1	13.4	0.605
In August, after the elections, the security forces showed excessive violence	71.5	15.5	13.0	0.560
A lot of talented people left Belarus after the elections 2020	69.9	12.7	17.3	0.572
The facts of violence by security forces against protesters are not properly investigated by state bodies	69.2	11.5	19.3	0.577
I am often embarrassed and ashamed of some of the actions and expressions of A.G. Lukashenko	68.9	14.6	16.5	0.543
Anyone who publicly speaks out against A. Lukashenko will be persecuted by the authorities	68.6	12.5	18.9	0.561
In Belarus, most of the money goes to Minsk, and there is little money left for regional and, especially, district cities	63.9	10.9	25.2	0.530
Babariko, Znak, Kolesnikova, Tikhanovsky and a number of other people are in prison unreasonably and unfairly	62.7	15.3	22.0	0.474
The majority of officials, high-ranking ones too, are incompetent and don't have the necessary knowledge and skills to manage	62.2	16.4	21.4	0.458
Alexander Lukashenko is unable to reform the political structure of Belarus to meet the wishes of the majority of Belarusians	61.5	15.4	23.1	0.461

The law in Belarus has not worked for the last six months	61.3	18.8	19.8	0.425
In Belarus, there are people among officials and managers who are more worthy to become President than A. Lukashenko, but they are afraid to nominate their candidacy	59.3	14.6	26.1	0.447
Parades of combines, tractors, trucks are a shame for our country	45.6	34.1	20.2	0.115
The change of power is beneficial only to those who come to power. Ordinary people are likely to suffer	43.4	38.2	18.3	0.052
Unprofitable state-owned enterprises should be closed, even if this leads to an increase in unemployment for 3-6 months	40.8	33.2	25.9	0.076
In general, Belarus is a socially oriented state	40.0	38.4	21.5	0.016
In fact, I don't care what flag will be in our country	38.9	47.7	13.5	-0.088
In modern Belarus, everyone who wants to work can find a job	36.0	55.6	8.4	-0.196
It was A. Lukashenko saved industry and economy from collapse	31.9	48.6	19.5	-0.167
The healthcare system in Belarus works better than in neighboring countries	30.3	47.9	21.8	-0.176
The education system in Belarus works better than in neighboring countries	28.8	45.7	25.6	-0.169
Belarus successfully copes with the coronavirus epidemic	26.2	57.5	16.3	-0.313
A. Lukashenko makes good decisions on the whole, but they are poorly implemented locally	25.0	52.9	22.1	-0.279
The reaction of the authorities to the protest actions taking place now is absolutely justified	24.1	57.4	18.5	-0.333
White-red-white flag – fascist one; it should be banned	23.6	57.3	19.0	-0.337
A. Lukashenko is close to the people and expresses their interests	20.4	62.3	17.5	-0.419
In general, I support the forced, but not always popular, actions of the state, such as raising the retirement age, etc.	19.0	69.3	11.7	-0.503
Belarus copes with economic crisis better than neighboring countries	17.8	58.6	23.6	-0.408
Good conditions have been created in Belarus for business development and entrepreneurial initiative	17.8	62.7	19.4	-0.449

Sources: Authors

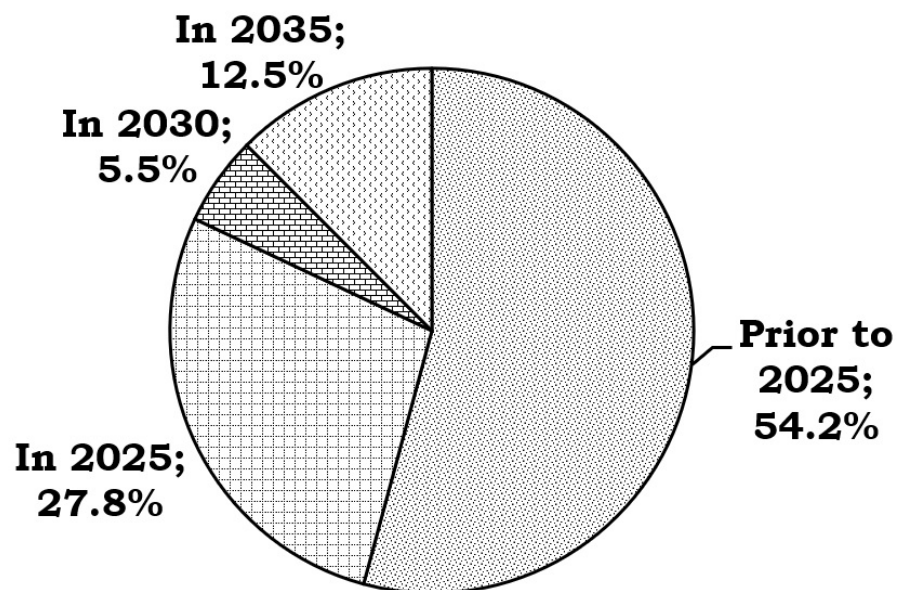
The situation with the understanding of how the state institutions of Belarus cope with the coronavirus epidemic and the economic crisis is similar (26.2% and 17.8% of Belarusians said «successfully and better than neighboring countries», respectively; 57.5% and 58.6% of Belarusians disagreed with this statement, respectively; the balance coefficients are -0.31 and -0.41 respectively). The largest negative imbalance (-0.45) was caused by the statement regarding good conditions for the development of business and entrepreneurial initiative (17.8% of Belarusians agreed with the statement, 62.7% of them disagreed).

3.3. Lukashenko vs change of power

Forecasts of the length of A. Lukashenko's presidential term can be determined by three options:

- “He will leave the post before the term of office” – this is the largest and most variable group (54.2%), in which 6.0% and 8.9% of Belarusians believed that Lukashenko will leave the presidency, or until March, or until June 2021, respectively; 22.0% of Belarusians are convinced that this will happen at the end of 2021, while 7.7% of them predict 2022 and 9.6% – 2023-2024.
- “He will leave the post after the expiration of his term of office”, here is without variation 27.8%.
- “He will not leave the post after the expiration of his term of office” and he will either go for another presidential term (5.5%), or at least two ones (12.5%) (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. «What do you think, when A.G. Lukashenko will cease to be the President of Belarus?», Belarus, 2021 (Chatham House)



Sources: Authors

Analysts at the Royal Institute of International Affairs segmented the audience into three variables:

- Attitude towards the protest (full or partial support, neutral attitude, against protest),
- Voting (Tikhanovskaya, Against all or Refused to answer, Lukashenko) and
- Perception of violence (excessive force was used, Akrestsin prison – torture, the actions of the authorities are not justified; Difficult to answer; the actions of the security forces are justified, not excessive force was used, Akrestsin prison – no torture or Difficult to answer) [Astapenia 2021: 8].

Thus, they selected the core of the protest (37.3%), citizens sympathetic to the protest (19.5%), skeptics (8.8%), citizens indifferent to the situation in the country (16.3%) and Lukashenko's bastion (18.1%) (Table 5). We assumed that the forecast of the length of A. Lukashenko's term depends on the political position of respondent or its absence, and we were not mistaken. The relationship between the variables is statistically significant at the level Sig. = 0.000, Cramer's V = 0.325.

Table 5. The relationship between the political position and the forecast of the duration of A. Lukashenko's term, Belarus, %, 2021 (Chatham House)

	The core of the protest	Sympathisers	Skeptics	Indifferent	Lukashenko's Bastion	Total
He will leave the post before the term of office	28.9	12.4	3.6	5.1	4.3	54.2
He will leave the post at the end of the term of office	5.1	3.0	3.3	7.0	9.4	27.8
He will not leave the post after the end of the term of office	3.3	4.1	1.9	4.2	4.4	18.0
Total	37.3	19.5	8.8	16.3	18.1	100

Sources: Authors

The perception of symbols, which was written about earlier, also depends on the political position: statistical significance at the level of Sig. = 0.000, Cramer's V = 0.517 (see descriptive statistics in Table 6). It is also statistically significant between electoral groups (see groups in Table 2) and the state symbols closest to the respondent (Sig. = 0.000, Cramer's V = 0.483).

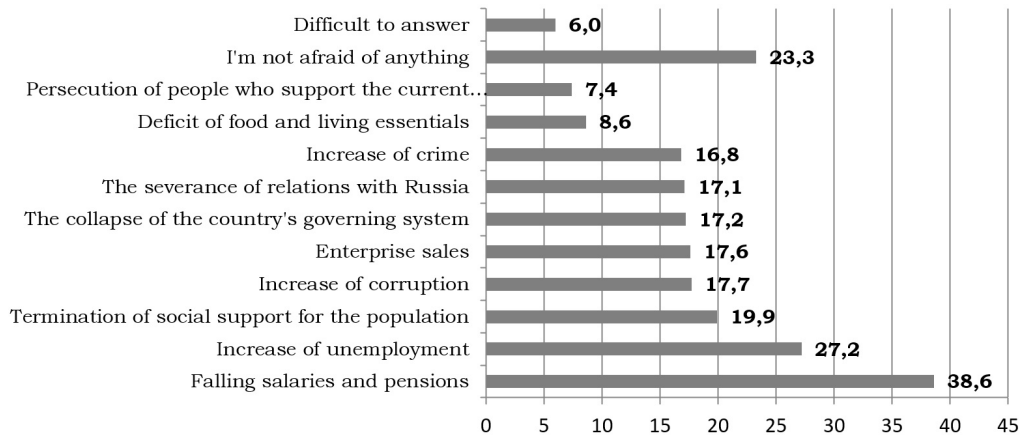
Table 6. Relationship between political position and acceptability of state symbols, Belarus, %, 2021 (Chatham House)

	The core of the protest	Sympathisers	Skeptics	Indifferent	Lukashenko's Bastion	Total
White-red-white flag, coat of arms "Pagonya"	24.2	6.9	0.6	0.6	0.1	32.5
Red-green flag, state emblem of Belarus	4.8	4.4	4.6	10.7	17.0	41.5
Neither symbols	8.4	8.3	3.6	4.9	0.9	26.0
Total	37.3	19.5	8.8	16.3	18.1	100

Sources: Authors

The intentions to shorten the illegitimate term of the current president are quite understandable (the illegitimate term can be determined by the fact that 74.1% of Belarusians believe that the president should not be in power for more than two consecutive terms (Table 4), and 61.3% of respondents are convinced that the election results were falsified; but the best evidence is the mass protests after the elections). According to Table 4, one can also "collect" the image of Lukashenka. 68.9% of Belarusians feel ashamed of some of the actions and expressions of the first person of the state, but the opinion of citizens does not prevent him from controlling all spheres of the state (73.8%) and punishing uncontrollable citizens (68.6%). The Belarusians rather disagree (48.6%) than agree (31.9%) with the fact that the preservation of the industry and economy from collapse is attributable to A. Lukashenko, because the balance coefficient is negative (-0.17). The situation is the same with the correctness of the president's decisions and the transfer of responsibility for his decisions to local authorities (52.9% of those respondents who disagree, 25.0% – agree, the balance coefficient is -0.28), and the president's closeness to the people and the expression of them interests (62.3% – disagree, 20.4% – agree, -0.42), etc.

Do Belarusians want changes? The statement «change of power is beneficial only to those who come to power» (43.4% of Belarusians agree, 38.2% – disagree) has no imbalance (0.05). They want change and are afraid of them. Belarusians are afraid of a fall in wages and pensions (38.6%), an increase in unemployment (27.2%) and the termination of social support for the population (19.9%) (Fig. 1). By the way, Belarusians are equally afraid of the increase of corruption (17.7%) and crime (16.8%), the sale of enterprises (17.6%), the collapse of the governing system (17.2%) and the severance of relations with Russia (17.1%); and these fears are stronger than the persecution of dissidents (7.4%) and the deficit (8.6%); the absence of the deficit is partly provided by loans to Russia.

Figure 2. «What probable consequences of the change of power do you personally fear?», Belarus, %, 2021 (Chatham House)

Sources: Authors

The main fears were the same before the economic crisis of 2008: the fear of inflation, unemployment and other troubles are firmly rooted in the mass consciousness and admit the possibility of their occurrence. This is not surprising, because the key position of the 2008 anti-crisis programme was a decrease in wages and social benefits (this was felt by 33.3% of the population), as well as a delay in these payments (16.2%) and the depreciation of ruble savings (30.6%) (the empirical data from [Shavel 2011: 99]). This means that with the stated social stability in Belarus, not a single generation of Belarusians lived in economically good conditions, so they did not have the experience of confidence in the future. Therefore, the paradoxical Belarusian (term by L. Titarenko [Titarenko 2003]), on the one hand, wants the economic development of the country with the obligatory preservation of social guarantees and, on the other hand, believes that this can be achieved with the “strong leader” [Salnikova 2014b: 141] while censoring civic activism. Belarusians are eclectic in their understanding of state governance: according to EVS 2008, “having a strong leader who does not have to worry about parliament and elections” is good for 61.6% of Belarusians and bad for 25.4% of them; and at the same time “having a democratic political system” is good for 63.0% of Belarusians and bad for 9.4% of them. Belarusians have a “wonderful” understanding of the mechanisms of civil society: according to the data of Chatham House in 2021, protest is a threat to the existence of the state (67.9%) and can develop into a civil war (49.7%), since they pass under fascist symbols (46.0%); and you cannot destroy everything that has been built in Belarus for the last 20-30 years (84.1%). «The protests are pointless» – say the Belarusians, – «you need to use the opportunities for dialogue» (80.8%). Is a protest not a democratic way for a large group of people to express their opinion to its representatives? Did they practice many peaceful protests? No, we did not practice, but we are sure that it does not work.

This “democratic political system with a strong leader” without a “civil society-power” dialogue contains all the fatalism of Belarusian politics, which is rooted in the country’s historical past. But there was a big peaceful protest after the elections. Yes, it was, since social networks are being formed in Belarus, but these networks do not have enough resources. There is no understanding of the mechanisms for achieving something and of how democracy works, and why authoritarianism and democracy are incompatible, nor understanding that leaders are born in the process of communication between civil society and the authorities and that they are a “product” of a resource social networks, etc. «The leaders do not represent the interests of people like me» (69.7%), because they are formal ones, and therefore «will not cope with the management of the state» (73.9%). A “strong personality” is needed here or not?

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the socio-political situation in Belarus after the presidential elections in 2020 focused on some of the most noticeable phenomena and processes, and it leads to the following conclusion: the desire for real social transformation in Belarusian society observed in opinion polls is in contradiction with a simultaneous decline in trust of the mechanisms of its functioning. We explain this state by the lack of experience of the Belarusian population in the formation and preservation of a sovereign state based on the developed social institutions of a traditional society. The lack of experience in institutionalised social relations can also explain the long existence of authoritarian power in the person of the current President of country and the fear of forming an alternative power in the form of a responsible civil society.

This state of public consciousness can be explained by the absence of a national historical model of governance: for several centuries the Belarusian lands were part of different civilisational and political states. This circumstance also explains the absence of important cultural elements of social life: a well-developed / complex mythology, a pantheon of national heroes, a stable practice of using a single language, confessional unity, etc. Under such conditions underpinning the functioning of the Belarusian society, centralisation of power and a “strong hand” are naturally perceived as a condition for maintaining social order. However, although authoritarianism does not destroy leaders, it does not support the institution of political leadership, individual rights and individual subjectivity.

Empirical studies note that an artificially structured social space has developed in Belarus, in which the ultimate dichotomies (power / not power; loyal to the country’s leadership / not loyal to one’s leader, etc.) organise all other structures. The artificial structure presupposes the non-subjectness and the absence of real leaders even in the formation of virtual social networks and their resource base (the name of the popular protest information network NEXTA - “Someone” confirms the authors thought). We consider the simplified formal social structure and the lack of historical experience of self-government as the main characteristics of modern Belarusian society.

The consequences are disbelief in the effectiveness of collective social action in the event of a transit of power and possible social (economic, financial) problems and fear of chaos (unemployment, poverty, increased crime rates, etc.). The resource of internal stability presupposes the long-term existence of non-state legitimate institutions, social and cultural practices of population, their “archiving” in the public consciousness, and the continuity of the historical tradition. Belarus does not have such a stable historical experience.

An important indicator of internal instability in Belarus is the paradox of the presence of national symbols and the absence of a national idea, ambition, and an active social group that would support the authorities in their desire to make the state a political subject. As part of the USSR, such actions were not possible, and after the collapse of the USSR, the de-Sovietisation of Belarus was a formal process.

The most noticeable and important factor in assessing the socio-political situation in Belarus is the phenomenon of the presence of a large group of people who have not decided on their identity – “tuteyshyya” as a marker of an unclear ethno-social structure of the Belarusian society. The phenomenon of the “tuteyshyya” indicates the absence of ethno-sociocultural dynamics, which contributes to the formation of a cohesive nation. The lack of a sense of belonging to a large ethno-cultural and national group leads to the emergence of mental discomfort, the growth of social distrust, fatalism in assessing the future and the search for a “fetish”.

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