
THE OFFICIAL STATE NARRATIVE ON THE BELARUSIAN PROTESTS OF 2020 AND ITS CORRELATIONS TO NON-OFFICIAL UNCREDITED BELARUSIAN MEDIA WITH FOREIGN REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract

With the beginning of the protests against the presidential election fraud in August 2020, A. Lukashenka and the Belarusian state media attempted to create and promote their interpretation of the nature of the protests, which took place in many cities and towns across Belarus. These protests were the largest, both in terms of sheer size and duration, in the history of independent Belarus. Our critical analysis of the events and the way they were depicted through media channels consists of the following elements: (a) how Belarus' state narrative about the protests developed in August-September 2020, (b) the rhetoric used by the Belarusian state to describe the protests, (c) the protesters, and (d) the use of force against the protesters. Using a short contextualisation, the paper aims to bring and highlight parallel rhetoric of non-accredited Belarusian media with its representations in the Russian and Ukrainian media.

Key words: *Belarusian Protests, Belarusian Media, Russian Media, Non-Official Narrative(s)*

INTRODUCTION

The Belarusian presidential election of 2020 was held in August when A. G. Lukashenko was declared as the winner. According to the official statement from Lidziya Yarmoshyna, the head of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus (CEC Belarus), he got more than 80 % of the votes over Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the other opponents [TUT.BY, 14.08.2020]. However, the results of independent exit polls demonstrated the falsification of the election and showed S. H. Tsikhanouskaya was the rightful winner. A series of political imprisonments prior and after the election, followed by violent repressions in Belarusian cities and towns after the official end of the election, stimulated an increase of protest activities that were a public expression of disapproval. The fraud seen during the Belarusian presidential election of 2020 resulted in one of the largest protests in the history of independent Belarus, leading to sanctions against the entourage of A. G. Lukashenko, who was allegedly involved in the falsification of the election results and political repressions [Deutsche Welle, 17.12.2020]. Similar protests also took place after the presidential elections in the 1990s and 2000s, but the size of the 2020 protests exceeded the others. The protesters' dissatisfaction with the official results of the presidential election and unprecedented cruelty from the law enforcement agencies, such as police, Special Purpose Police Detachment (AMAP-bel. *Atrad militsyi asobaha pryznachennia*) and other special forces against protesters and their demonstrations resulted in the emergence of two separate parallel narratives (the “official” state one and “non-official”). In one narrative, Belarusian state media and official state channels attempted to discredit the protests and downplay their scale. In the second narrative, independent ‘unaccredited Belarusian journalists’¹ and foreign news media tried to cover the protests and demonstrate the sheer scale and size, and uncover parts and events that were often dismissed by the state media. This analysis emphasises the parallel presence of an official state media narrative that contradicts the unofficial one from independent media.

Fig. 1. The Belsat video “AMAP throw bombs at people” from 10.8.2020.



Source: Belsat TV

¹ The ‘non-official’ Belarusian journalists are the majority of the Belarusian and foreign journalists. They do not work in state media, they either lost their accreditations because of their outputs or did not get it at all because of political reasons. It also includes those journalists who experienced significant obstacles in their work after the Belarusian presidential election of 2020.

PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED BOOKS ON THE BELARUSIAN PROTESTS OF 2020

Although this text is a result of our observations during the summer and autumn of 2020, the first draft was completed and submitted during the end of autumn and winter of 2020-2021 for the *European Journal of Transformation Studies*. After that, numerous books on the past protests were published and others are still being planned to help establish a corpus of scientific and non-scientific sources on the topic.

Two distinguished publications were written on the involvement of women in the protests. One of them was written by Alice Bota, who presented them with her German book *Die Frauen von Belarus: von Revolution, Mut und dem Drang nach Freiheit* [A. Bota, 2021]. Another one by Olga Shparaga is titled *Die Revolution hat ein weibliches Gesicht: Der Fall Belarus*, which Volker Weichsel translated from Russian [O. Shparaga, 2021]. In 2021, Maria Stepanova published her *Brev till en lycklig tid [Pis'ma v schastlivoye vremya]* in Swedish after the translation by Ola Wallin. This publication was based on Svetlana Alexievich's — a Belarusian Nobel Prize laureate — open letter to the Russian intelligentsia titled, “Why are you silent?” that was published on the PEN Center website. Meanwhile, Svetlana Alexievich planned a book on that Belarusian past, where she intended to write about “the human in the mask”, and to reflect on the unanswered questions: “Why were some people hiding protesters, while others were leading the riot of AMAP there? ... Where did these beautiful people who took to the streets come from? How were they formed, who were their parents?” And she plans to include the words of “provocateur G. Azarenok” who is known for his numerous hate speeches, discreditations of protesters and praises for A. G. Lukashenka on the Belarusian state TV. Her goal is to show the provocateurs (propagandists) and what they do to their societies.

Edyta Banaszekiewicz edited the selection of texts by Belarusians in the book *Marsz Białorusi: sierpień-grudzień 2020* in Polish [E. Banaszekiewicz, 2021]. Moreover, the book-essay *The Art of Popular Disobedience* by Dmitry Strotsev, who participated in the protests in Minsk and was detained for 13 days, appeared under “Radio Svaboda” in 2022 [D. Strotsev, 2022]. Different contrasting narration is under the title *Belarus. From the protest to the people's unity* and *The Nazi coup of 2020 in Belarus: Hold on, Batska!* by Ivan Turlay that represents Belarusian pro-government rhetoric [I. Turlay, 2021].

The new corpus of publications about the protests does not cover the complexity of the parallel and contrasting narratives of the tragic events of summer and autumn of 2020. It is still an open question when S. Alexievich's planned book would appear and what the text will look like. In the workings of future researchers, relations to the Belarusian authorities and political views of I. Turlay also deserve a separate interest and analysis as a contextualisation of his books on the recent Belarusian past during the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

This paper comprises a critical analysis of the 2020 Belarusian protests representation from state and independent non-governmental media of Belarus and other countries to a lesser extent; our observations and content analysis address the development of their parallel narratives. The hypothesis of this paper is that the emerging narratives conflict with each other. To gain a detailed understanding of media representations of the protests and the resulting narratives, we examined state and non-state media rhetoric. The following discourse analysis focuses on the 'official' and 'non-official' narratives and rhetoric on the images of the protests, the protesters, and the violence used against these protestors by law enforcement agencies. The critical analysis covers the protests in August and the beginning of September after the election in 2020. This period was crucial for emerging representations of the protests in Belarus and abroad. In addition, this critical analysis briefly parallels the rhetoric of A. G. Lukashenka, which often is a simplification of the situation, and Belarusian state media with the representations of the protests in Russia and Ukraine and in the unaccredited Belarusian media. We trace the division of the narratives on the available state and non-state materials with their relations to the online sources. Our text does not aim at tracing the whole emerging development and polarisation of all opposing narratives. It requires more extensive complex studies, due to its historical complexity and its significant role in understanding the Belarusian politics and its history in the 21st century.

The materials of our research are composed of the following criteria:

- the state and non-state visual and written materials of Belarusian media that illustrated the Belarusian protests after the presidential election in August 2020
- the news broadcasts from local and foreign television networks that were available online
- materials on the events after the election (9 August 2020) and prior to the visit of the detention centre (SIZA - bel.: *Sledchy izaliatar*) by Lukashenka, when dialogue between the authorities and opposition emerged on a declarative level
- video and written materials from Russian and Ukrainian media outlets, which can be correlated and contrasted with the narratives of the 'official' and 'non-official' Belarusian rhetoric on the protests

The main focuses of the critical analysis are on A. G. Lukashenka's statements and media representation of the protests and protesters after the presidential election of 2020. We contrast them with media reports from non-accredited Belarusian media and proceed further to analyse and compare these reports with the Russian and Ukrainian media. The official analysed Belarusian materials were retrieved from news programmes of the Belarusian Telegraph Agency (BelTA), as found on the Belarusian state television channels and the official websites. As the state media broadcasted and repeated A. G. Lukashenka's words often, his original statements shift

the mainstream state and dominant official interpretations of protests, protesters, violence, and the people who suppress the protests.

In addition, we traced and analysed how this part of Belarusian history in 2020 is covered in the Russian and Ukrainian media, and this is based on the Russian First Channel and Ukrainian NASH TV channel, which take a pro-Russian stance. Their rhetoric contradicts the Belarusian channel, Belsat, which is based in Poland in exile but had numerous journalists, who work in Belarus and maintained streams to keep Belarusian citizens in Belarus and abroad up to date on past and current news. Additionally, Belsat is not officially accredited in Belarus and is recognised as extremist on the official level [BBC, 27.07.2021] as the telegram channel NEXTA due to political reasons and available only online. Similar analytical materials regarding the protests were used from the Russian Rain channel and other Ukrainian media that did not have the same official Russian position. We will further analyse the multi-faceted rhetoric from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine on the protests captured in the way it was illustrated during August and September 2020. There are three main elements that are analysed and addressed in our paper (1) the protests of 2020, (2) protesters, and (3) the violence used during the protests.

1. PROTESTS

The Belarusian authorities were preparing for the demonstrations before and after the presidential election of 2020. At the same time, A. G. Lukashenka frequently drew parallels with the protests in Ukraine in late 2013 and early 2014 in public statements. During the meeting with the head of the Belarusian Committee for State Security (KDB - bel.: *Kamitet dzjarzhaunaj bjaspeki*), on the 1st of June 2020, Lukashenka mentioned that the Maidan (“*maidanchik*”) would not happen in Belarus and that they were aware of “separate wind turbines” (“*otdel’nye vetrodui*”) referring to opposition leaders of Belarus. One of them, Mikola Statkevich, had been arrested a day before [Deutsche Welle, 01.06.2020]. Also, Lukashenka warned all possible protesters about it and called them “*maydanuty*”² during that meeting, which appeared in the rhetoric of the Belarusian authorities and their media channels before the protests of 2020 started [BelTA, 01.06.2020]. The derogatory and diminutive epithet was used to describe the parallels with the Ukrainian Maidan in 2013-14 to discredit possible future protests in Belarus. It was not a unique case of attempts to discredit the protestors by the state media and high-level authorities before they started and after.

The strikes were scarcely shown in the state media, and when the strikers were mentioned, they were illustrated in a small size. However, the comments of Lukashenka mentioned that there were about 150 or 200 people when he was at the Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant (MZKT - bel.: *Minski zavod kolavykh tsjahachou*) [BelTA, 17.08.2020],

² The nickname with the negative connotation, which Lukashenka expressed as an impromptu or purposely, was for the possible future protesters of Belarus, who are considered as Maidan-obsessed.

unlike the materials on Belsat, TUT.BY, the Rain channel and other online media, which showed higher numbers of people and presented interviews from the strikers. During the strikes at Belarusian factories in mid-August, there was a moment when the workers of the MZKT shouted to A. G. Lukashenka to “go away”, which showed clear evidence of the lack of support for A. G. Lukashenka among the employees of the MZKT [Dozhd, 17.08.2020]. The video of that moment is not on the official website of BelTA, but it was shown on STV briefly, which was cut down by the state journalists [STV, 17.08.2020].

The Russian news programme *Vremia* (Time) on the Russian First Channel used excerpts from Belarusian state channels and quotes from A. G. Lukashenka about the protests. An example of this is the news broadcast from the 16th of August, where they used the quotation of Lukashenka that he restarted the factories and “fed” the hungry people in the 1990s. Moreover, the journalists drew comparisons with other revolutions in post-soviet countries and called them “colourful revolutions”. Thus, claiming that everything is organised by “external forces” (rus. *vneshniie sily*) and the revolution in Belarus was done according to “textbook methodologies of colourful revolutions” (rus. *metodichki tsvietnykh revolutsyi*). The appearance of news about external influences coincides entirely with statements of the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, and the Press Secretary for the President of Russia, Dmitry Peskov [Novosti na pervom kanale, 19.08.2020].

The Russian media repeatedly emphasised V. V. Putin’s and S. V. Lavrov’s statements. During his press conference, Lavrov spoke about the events in Belarus as follows, “[We] consider it fundamentally important to let the Belarusian people figure out what is happening on their own and consider the initiative of President Lukashenka to carry out a constitutional reform very promising” [RT na russkom, 02.09.2020]. According to official rhetoric, the reform was initiated by A. G. Lukashenka, but it seems as it was inspired by the Russian constitutional reform, which was implemented after the Russian referendum in June 2020. Also, V. V. Putin spoke of “the unacceptability of any outside interference in the affairs of the republic [of Belarus]” [Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia, 21.08.2020].

With the representation of the protests as an internal affair of Belarus, it was claimed that the foreign countries that recognise S. H. Tsikhanouskaya officially as the president and support protests were interfering in Belarus’ internal affairs. After E. Macron’s call on 17 August to support Belarus’ protests, A. G. Lukashenka, followed by Russian state channels, recalled the yellow vest protests in France and E. Macron’s refusal to cooperate with its protestors [Novosti na pervom kanale, 21.08.2020]. A few Ukrainian media outlets used rhetoric similar to that used by the Russian and Belarusian state channels to represent protests in Belarus. Ukrainian television channels owned by Ukrainian oligarchs promoting pro-Russian narratives of interpretation of the Ukrainian protests of 2013-2014 tried to transfer the narrative they used to describe the Revolution of Dignity to the protests in Belarus in 2020. After

the beginning of the protests, NASH TV channel (the then owner Yevhen Muraev, a former member of the Party of Regions) aired several broadcasts dedicated to Belarusian protests. During this broadcast, the hosts repeatedly supported the idea that A. G. Lukashenka had won the election because it was announced in the CEC. They particularly described the protests as “street democracy” rather than ordinary democracy. Thus, despite the presence of invited speakers who expressed opposition to A. G. Lukashenka such as Valery Tsapkala (who was denied registration as a candidate in the presidential election in Belarus and who was forced to leave the country due to an open criminal case against him), the manner the hosts tended to interview their guests aimed at instilling doubts about the fairness and legitimacy of the protests and the nature of the influence of Western countries over the protests [NASH, 15.08.2020].

The Belarusian and Russian state media, as well as pro-Russian Ukrainian media, actively used comparisons with other revolutions against election fraud and state violence in post-Soviet countries. They justified their emergence by so-called “external forces”, referring to EU and NATO countries. In addition to that, there were attempts to reduce the protests’ scale and show that these would be short-lived. Russia’s position on the protests as an internal affair matter and its emphasis on the non-interference in the conflict is particularly notable.

2. PROTESTERS

After the protests began, A. G. Lukashenka and state media did not address the protests and their participants much, in an attempt to discredit them, pointing out the aggressive actions initiated by protesters. In one of his first statements, A. G. Lukashenka referred to the leaders of the post-election period and demonstrations as “the puppeteers who managed the protests” [BelTA, 10.08.2020]. This information was transmitted by BelTA and other official media. Further, A. G. Lukashenka characterised the protesters as “stoned, drunk and with drugs”, in an attempt to discredit their credibility. On 12 August, he referred to the core of the protesters as “unemployed people and people with a criminal past” [BelTA, 12.08.2020]. Later he stated that “the puppeteers” were “from Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, and acted as the satellites of the USA” while using the textbook methodology of “colourful revolutions” [BelTA, 16.09.2020]. Lukashenka referred to the united headquarters of the opposition as “sheep that were led by foreign puppeteers.”

One of the Russian propagandists, Evgeny Popov, in a state-sponsored Russian programme “60 minutes”, aired a video of A. G. Lukashenka flying in a personal helicopter with his youngest son, saying about the protesters that “[They] scattered like rats.” The Russian propagandist portrayed the protests as “having reached their peak” and reinforced the Russian position on the Belarusian protests as “Russia does not interfere but is ready to help the fraternal people” [60 minut, 24.08.2020].

High-ranking Russian officials made similar statements. In a speech by Lavrov, he explicitly stated that the opposition was guided by Western partners [Novosti na pervom kanale, 25.08.2020]. The focus on the Russian state channels was on the alleged 'fact' that protesters were paid for their participation in the protests [Novosti na pervom, 19.08.2020]. This Russian rhetoric was similar to the ideas of the Belarusian authorities and their media, while the Russian oppositional channel Rain presented videos of the protests showing their larger scale like the telegram channel NEXTA and Belsat. Independent media broadcasted videos of the large scale of the protests, while also capturing the violence against the protesters by law enforcement agencies, as well as interviews including personal stories of the participants and their leaders. They were also providing analyses on the symbolism of the protests [Dozhd, 10.09.2020]. On the Rain and Belsat channels, the opposition leaders and protesters were portrayed as humane, courageous and resolute, and the channels included numerous their interviews. Also, Rain news demonstrated that the opposition and Belarus did not plan to break off relations with Russia and are not anti-Russian [Dozhd, 10.09.2020]. Also, the Belsat channel counted the number of the protests' days from their news broadcasts.

In the official narrative, protesters were portrayed as having received funds for their activities and controlled by "external forces". In addition, the state taxonomy regarding protesters rendered them as people coming from low social status and with low social responsibility, as opposed to the views presented by the Belsat and Rain channels. The emphases of the two narratives contrasted significantly.

3. LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND VIOLENCE

Prior to the election, the Belarusian state media demonstrated how the KDB arrested the provocateurs during the presidential election, who were depicted as the Russian fighters of the Wagner group, which is a Russian paramilitary or private military organisation that use the motto "Our business is death". The story about the Wagner group fighters appeared in the Russian [Dozhd, 29.07.2020] and Ukrainian media as well. Further, after the election, the state news started to circulate an idea that people wanted to storm various administrative buildings, but these allegations which were meant to eliminate provocations against the police were not apparent in the video fragments [ATN: news of Belarus and world, 12.08.2020].

During the first days of the protests, law enforcement agencies dispersed demonstrators and brutally detained them at police stations. The state Belarussian media supported AMAP and other law enforcement agencies from the first days of the protesters rather than protesters themselves.

On 9 September, in the conversation with Russian journalists, Lukashenka denied having offered support to security forces in their brutal interventions against the protesters. Non-denial at the highest level confirms the presence of violence on the Belarusian streets and in the Criminal Detention Centre of the Minsk Executive Com-

mittee's Main Internal Affairs Directorate ("Akrestsina") after the election. However, A. G. Lukashenka and the Belarusian and Russian state media claimed that the protesters were the initiators of violence and had already been convicted many times prior [RT na russkom, 08.09.2020]. This statement completely contradicts the information disseminated by Belsat and other independent Belarusian online media, which, together with their guests, spoke about the peaceful nature of the protests and placed the blame of the violence on the side of authorities. Speaking about violence and AMAP, A. G. Lukashenka stated, "everyone gasped at the disproportional use of force by our riot police, and their alleged beatings of people in 'Akrestina' and on the streets". He completely denied any violent acts of AMAP in the pre-trial detention centres and "Akrestina", and on the streets, without stating that violent offences were done by others, who work there. As for AMAP, Lukashenka affirmed that "They saved the country and thwarted the blitzkrieg" and that "Under these 'white-red-white flags' the blitzkrieg was unsuccessful" [BelTA, 17.09.2020]. In general, comparisons to the Second World War played an essential role in the rhetoric of A. G. Lukashenka and protesters. The strong emphasis on the historical essence of the Second World War in the official Belarusian policy had its outcomes in 'official' and 'non-official' narratives of the protests. The pro-government media categorized the protesters' semiotics - the white-red-white flag and the emblem of *Pahonia* (eng.: pursuit) - as Nazi or fascist to cast a shadow over the opposition's credibility and their protests (this has been already happening from the 1990s). Protesters, on the other hand, called the authorities' methods to disperse the protests as fascist or Stalinist (or compared to the methods of the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs - NKVD) sometimes drawing on the same historical parallels.

Fig. 2. The Belsat video "The Nationwide strike, beginning. 17 August" from 16.8.2020.



Source: Belsat TV

On 9 August, the Russian journalists were arrested, and on 11 August S. V. Lavrov demanded they should be released. This act played the role of influencing the agenda of Russian news outlets. The news broadcast of 14 August took a different turn from the previous one. Thus, the news acknowledged that Belarusian law enforcement officers used force against protesters. However, the news showed that the detainees had been released and that the Belarusian authorities acknowledged the fact that they had exceeded their authority. From A. G. Lukashenka's interview with Russian journalists, it can be inferred that he knew about their Russian journalists and other detainees who were arrested without trial and were kept in "Akrestina" without food or water for several days. Belsat, NEXTA and other non-state media reported about the abuses that took place there. This information took the form of an official apology from the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Yuryj Karaeu, which appeared on 13 August [STV, 13.08.2020] and meant only for those who were "simple passers-by" caught in the crossfire.

Fig. 3. The Belsat video "The Fifteenth day of protests, August 23" from 23.8.2020. The protests in Minsk Near the Museum of the Great Patriotic War with the AMAP on the left.



Source: Belsat TV

Lukashenka attempted to discredit the violence used against the protesters in an interview with Russian journalists, where he stated that the beatings of women were due to, "some girls painted their bottoms with blue paint, [...] but some really had a blue [beaten] back". He tried to divert the attention from the violence against the Russian journalists and protestors by mentioning about 39 or 40 AMAP members, whose spines were broken [RT na russkom, 08.09.2020]. None of them was mentioned by name, and none of their photos were released in the media. Belsat and TUT.BY, as well as other Belarusian independent unaccredited media, have repeatedly reported information regarding the violence against protesters [Belsat, 10.08.2020; PC "Vyasna", 11.10.2020; TUT.BY, 11.11.2020].

Fig. 4. The Belsat video “Belarusians: ‘Happy birthday, cockroach!’ ” from 30.8.2020. The protests in Maladzyechna.



Source: Belsat TV

Many Ukrainian TV channels and state officials highlighted the violence against protesters and compared it with the Ukrainian maidan, such as Ukrainian president, Zelensky did in his speech following Lukashenka’s self-proclaimed inauguration [TSN, 24.09.2020]. In contrast to that, pro-Russian channels in Ukraine often portrayed protesters as offenders who used force against law enforcement agencies. They broadcasted videos depicting AMAP being knocked down by cars or how protesters tried to hit law enforcement officers [NASH, 12.08.2020], while the opposite situation was not shown. They also promoted the message that any deaths that occurred during the protests were strictly accidental [NASH, 15.08.2020].

The Belarusian and Russian state media and some of the pro-Russian Ukrainian media outlets did not acknowledge the scale of the violence used against the protesters and tried to discredit all attempts to acknowledge their existence. The only exception is their reporting of this violence in relation to the arrests of Russian journalists.

CONCLUSION

In Belarus, the state policy and official orientations, and the words of A. G. Lukashenka, created commonality in the representations of the protests in the news, which formed the central ‘official’ narrative. Meanwhile, a parallel ‘non-official’ narrative emerged from unaccredited journalists and media in Belarus. Before and after the presidential election, the words of A. G. Lukashenka in the state media were often reinforced with a negative connotation toward the protests, protesters, and leaders of the opposition. A. G. Lukashenka’s official speeches, together with the interpretations and nuances added by the Belarusian state media, dominated the main official state narrative on the Belarusian protests from the summer of 2020. The state media’s written and visual materials were presented to a different extent in the state-funded Russian media and were conflicting with the information transpiring from the unoffi-

cial media outlets in Belarus. The Russian state media's broadcasts and their official line of interpretation on the Belarusian protests were very similar to those of the Belarusian authorities. Russian media helped shape the Belarusian narrative as the interviews sustained with Russian journalists enlightened some of the aspects of the protests, which can be found in the materials of BelTA. Due to various journalists' investigative work, both Belarusian and foreign, two different informational spaces were developed regarding the Belarusian protests, and these two spaces did not converge, due to their opposite approach.

Comparisons with the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries' revolutions were used in the rhetoric of the official narrative. The protest and the protesters were represented as being guided by "external forces" and receiving foreign funds for their protests. Any support for the protests in Belarus by EU countries was seen as evidence that these countries were trying to interfere in the internal affairs of Belarus. In addition, they did not acknowledge the violence against the protesters at the official state level. Official statements by high-ranking Belarusian officials and media coverage of events on Belarusian state channels attempted to reduce the protests' scale and discredit the protesters. In contrast, unaccredited Belarusian media and some Russian and Ukrainian media widely broadcasted the protests' scale, law enforcement agencies' violence, and interviews with protestors and opposition leaders.

The development of the state narrative on the protests in 2020 did not only occur in the months before and after the elections. Some of the above-mentioned rhetoric was present during the presidential election campaigns of the 1990s and 2000s, such as claiming the opposition was 'fascist'. On the other side, Russian state propaganda had a considerable influence, following the patterns of which the Belarusian authorities' official narrative on the protests was formed and developed. In the future research on the history of independent Belarus, and broader Eastern Europe, the interconnections of common and conflicting narratives should be covered and analysed in detail as this part of knowledge relevant for understanding the present and recent past, and it includes similar and distinguished patterns in the history of other post-Soviet countries.

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