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# THE NEO-AUTHORITARIAN REGIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

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## *Abstract*

The political history of independent Belarus is almost entirely relatable to the rule of Alexander Lukashenko and to the political regime that formed in the mid-90s. This regime was formed by rapidly wrapping up democratic processes and returning to authoritarian methods of political ruling of the state and the society.

The Belarusian political regime is the only non-democratic regime in Central and Eastern Europe. Widely supported by the Belarusian population, it has been able to successfully withstand internal and external attempts at democratisation. The hopes and forecasts that the Lukashenko regime would fall under the pressure of the Belarusian and international community have not proven true. Furthermore, it turns out that the regime has political and economic stability and is able to effectively deal with economic crises. It is quite clear that no major political changes will take place in Belarus in the near future.

The stability and effectiveness of the regime, as well as its ability to successfully withstand external and internal threats, allows to state that a particular type of political regime has formed in Belarus, which may be defined as a neo-authoritarian regime.

## **1. The problem of definition of the Belarusian regime in political science**

The Belarusian political regime is a political phenomenon based on Soviet traditions, elements as well as institutions which are characteristic for democratic states and also on traditional Belarusian political culture and consciousness.

For that reason, there are a number of sometimes contradictory political concepts and theories attempting to define and explain the peculiarities of this regime.

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### **1.1. Characterisation of the Belarusian political regime in official political science**

When analysing the political regime in modern-day Belarus, we should take into account how this regime is characterised in Belarus' official science.

In the country's official political science, the current political regime on the whole is viewed as a democratic regime. It goes without saying that we may not ignore the fact that in recent years Belarusian academic science has been heavily politicised and ideologised. When issues related to the current political situation in the country are dealt with, the boundaries between ideology and science tend to disappear. It can be stated that science has become an ideological tool, and that the "official intellectuals" themselves are ensuring the legitimacy of the current authorities and protecting the interests of the authorities,<sup>1</sup> rather than those of the society.

Nevertheless, a certain type of pluralism in the definitions of the Belarusian political regime can be found even in official political science. The key difference between the proposed definitions lies in understanding the level which Belarusian democracy has reached.

Thus, one group of political scientists, who may be called advocates of the concept of "a political regime of a restricted democracy", state that the Belarusian regime is a transitory one,<sup>2</sup> that it is not sufficiently democratic, and that it is still undergoing the inner transformation process. N. Antonovich, taking into consideration the presence of both democratic and authoritarian methods in the Belarusian regime, calls it a hybrid regime.<sup>3</sup> V. Bobrovich and E. Soslovskaya write in their political science textbook that progressive (new) authoritarianism is a typical phenomenon in some Eastern European states (although the authors do not specifically name Belarus).<sup>4</sup> The essence of this model lies in the "preservation of a virtually unlimited executive power and active use of onward methods (as opposed to liberalism) in the process of transition

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<sup>1</sup> Антонович Н. «Политическая наука в республике Беларусь: проблемы становления и развития» (Antonovich, N. "Political science in the Republic of Belarus: the problems of formation and development"), *Політычная сфера*. No. 3 2004, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Бондарь П. Бондарь Ю. *Политология* (Bondar, P., Bondar, Y. "Political science"), Минск: Аверс, 2003, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> Антонович (Antonovich), (note 1) p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Бобрович В. Сословская Е.Л. *Политология* (Bobrovich, V., Soslovskaya, E.L. "Political science"), Минск: БГЭУ, 2006, p. 63.

to a market economy.”<sup>5</sup> According to the named authors, preservation of authoritarian governing methods helps to successfully solve social and economic problems in the transitional period, which closely corresponds to the interest of a society that is not used to living in the conditions of a real democracy.<sup>6</sup>

The view that the Belarusian regime is characterised by an ideal combination of authoritarianism and democracy is supported by some Russian observers as well, who state that authoritarianism and democracy in Belarus co-exist harmoniously. For instance, A. Karatkevich states the following: “When evaluating the political system in the Republic of Belarus, we should point out that today it is not based on authoritarianism or parliamentarianism but rather on a combination of elements of authoritarianism in leadership, elitism in the governing of the state, and a special role of the plebiscitary element. The authoritarian foundation is found in the institution of the presidency. The elite foundation is represented in the institution of the parliament and administration of the head of state. The democratic element manifests itself by the principle of majority, by electivity, and by the authorities’ readiness to listen to criticism. The institution of the presidency lies on the democratic foundations, because the president’s powers are restricted in terms of term and scope of office. The president is granted power for a set term. The authoritarian and democratic principles in the political system of the Republic of Belarus compete against and restrain each other.”<sup>7</sup>

However, it still remains unclear in what direction this transition and transformation is going – from democracy to autocracy or vice versa – and when this transitional stage will end.

Another group of official Belarusian political scientists (Y. Yaskevich, E. Luchenkova, V. Melnik, L. Vonsovich, etc.) state that the period of transition in Belarus has come to an end. The final stage of this transition saw the comple-

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Рубинов А. «Тупики крестового похода за демократию» (Rubinov, A. “The dead ends of the crusade for democracy”), *Советская Белоруссия*, No. 204 (22614), October 27, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Караткевич А. «Государство в политической системе Республики Беларусь в переходный период: Автореферат диссертации на соискание учёной степени кандидата политических наук» (Karatkevich, A. “The state in the political system of the Republic of Belarus in the transitional period: the author’s summary of the PhD in Political Science candidate dissertation”), Moscow, 1999, <<http://dissertation1.narod.ru/avtoreferats/avtoref155.htm>>, May 10, 2008.

tion of “the process of creation of the Belarusian state”,<sup>8</sup> as well as of the process of creation of a political system in which the dominant role is played by the Belarusian president.<sup>9</sup> According to the authors, the democratic nature of the Belarusian political regime is manifested in the following: direct participation of the population in governing the state,<sup>10</sup> which is manifested by holding elections, political pluralism, functioning of the election system, and separation of the institutions of public authority.<sup>11</sup>

For Belarusian analysts, the presence of election mechanisms and of the mechanical election process (which, as is well known, have a fairly formal significance) is a sufficient basis for stating that the Belarusian regime is democratic. This is how political scientist L. Vonsovich describes the Belarusian political regime: “By the form of its political regime, the Republic of Belarus is a democratic state. The regime is based on the principle of participation of citizens in the formation of institutions of public authority, local governance and self-governance, recognition of the legitimacy of the institutions, and formation of the policies implemented by the state as well as control of implementation of such policies.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, according to official Belarusian political analysts, the Belarusian political regime has characteristics of a democratic regime. The manifestation of centralisation and authoritarianism, which have only positive characteristics, takes place only in accordance with constitutional norms and thanks to the support of the population.

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<sup>8</sup> Яскевич Я. *Основы идеологии белорусского государства. Курс интенсивной подготовки* (Yaskevich, Y. “The foundations of ideology of the Belarusian state. An intensive course”), Минск: Terra-Системс, 2007, p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> Лученкова Е. *Основы идеологии белорусского государства* (Luchenkova, E. “The foundations of ideology of the Belarusian state”), Минск: Вышэйшая школа, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Паречина С. *Концептуальные основы идеологии белорусского государства* (Parechina, S. “Conceptual foundations of ideology of the Belarusian state”), Минск: Академия Управления при президенте Республики Беларусь (Minsk, Academy of Management under the President of the Republic of Belarus), 2006, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Вонсович Л.В. *Политология* (Vonsovich, L.V. “Political science”). Минск: Terra-Системс, 2007, p. 87.

## **1.2. Opinions, methods and definitions of the Belarusian regime in independent science**

A totally different point of view is expressed by independent Belarusian and foreign political analysts. Some of the independent researchers of the current political regime in Belarus include V. Karbalevich, V. Bulgakov, V. Silitsky, V. Chernov, A. Kazakevich, V. Rovdo, and others.

Studies of the Belarusian regime have also been undertaken by a number of former politicians, analysts and journalists, including S. Shushkevich, A. Liakhovich, Y. Drakakhrust, A. Feduta, S. Bogdankevich, and others.

It should be noted that the evaluations of the current political regime expressed by independent scholars and researchers are also contradictory. Independent Belarusian political thinkers, just as the “official” political analysts, have not managed to avoid some sort of ideologically-biased attitude to the evaluation of the current political regime. Usually definitions and characterisations of the Belarusian regime are not a result of in-depth analysis, but rather constitute reflections on the topic of the processes taking place in the country and on the personality of Alexander Lukashenko. The attitude towards Lukashenko himself is fairly negative.

Such reflections led to the “demonization” of the Lukashenko regime and creation of general definitions and concepts such as “kolkhoz dictatorship”, “kolkhoz Bonapartism”, “red-brown style of governing”, and others. However, such definitions reveal the authors’ striving to show that the Lukashenko regime is bad just because it is bad, rather than their wish to analyse it from a scientific point of view. That is why very often the Belarusian regime is analysed by considering certain psychological aspects of the personality of Lukashenko, whereas the remaining elements and functions of the regime as a whole are not taken into account. One of the most popular definitions of the regime among independent Belarusian analysts is the concept of “Lukashism”.

This attitude towards the study of the regime may be called a psycho-political attitude. This means that the regime is nothing but a reflection of the psychological attributes and political will of Alexander Lukashenko. The supporters of this concept emphasise the fact that the Belarusian regime is a “per-

sonality-based regime of the 'left-wing' conservative-populist orientation,<sup>13</sup> built by Lukashenko himself and reflecting his "maniacal thirst for power."<sup>14</sup> As a rule, conclusions of this type of analyses include making parallels between the Belarusian regime, fascism, and Stalinism. For instance, former Belarusian Parliament speaker S. Sharetsky states the following: "Lukashism is a relapse of dictatorship in modern European conditions; it is a mix of fascism and Stalinism overloaded with populism."<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, some Western political scientists believe that the grounds for the formation of the current Belarusian regime were the strong patrimonial and personalistic traditions in policy implementation. Taking that into account, analysts S. Eke and T. Kuzio, using the terminology of J. Linz, define the Belarusian political regime as a sultanistic regime. The authors list the following seven characteristics typical of sultanism, which in their opinion are distinct in the Belarusian regime: 1) extreme patrimonialism, where the destiny of the state is closely related to the destiny of the leader, which manifests itself in the active promotion of the cult of the leader in Belarus; 2) fusion of private and public property, which in its turn leads to corruption in Belarus; 3) lack of any ruling ideology; although Pan-Slavism was defined as the state ideology in Belarus; 4) a low level of institutionalisation and lawmaking, which enables the leader to act at his own discretion; 5) political plurality being frowned upon; 6) access to power, political and social benefits is ensured exclusively by the regime; and 7) sultanistic regimes are weak and can be destroyed by overthrowing the regime, because they are unable to accept any political change in a peaceful way. In the current situation the Belarusian regime will be overthrown by force.<sup>16</sup>

It's hard to deny the fact that Lukashenko played a major role in the creation of the current political regime in Belarus. However, we should also remember

<sup>13</sup> Чернов, В. «Трансформация или консервация»? (Chernov, V. "Transformation or conservation?"), *Наше мнение*, <<http://www.nmnbby.org/pub/0709/21m.html>>, May 14, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Potupa, A. "Lukashism has the potential to spread beyond Belarus", *The Jamestown Foundation Prism, a Biweekly on the Post-Soviet States*, volume III, No. 6, part 2, May 2, 1997, <<http://potupa.iatp.by/articles/1997/e/lukashismpotential.htm>>, May 5, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Кишиани В. «Оппозиционеры на чужбине. Зенон Позняк и Семен Шарецкий о лукашизме и российском шовинизме» (Kipiani, V. "Oppositionists abroad. Zenon Pozniak and Semyon Sharetsky on Lukashism and Russian chauvinism"), *Киевские Ведомости*, <<http://kipiani.org/plain.cgi?311>>, August 5, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Eke M. Steven, Kuzio Taras, "Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 52, No. 3, March 2000, p. 543.

the objective socio-economic and political factors, which provided favourable conditions for the formation and consolidation of the regime. Moreover, in the functioning of the Belarusian regime we can easily find aspects which enable us to apply the concept of sultanism, which is above all demonstrated by the concentration of power in the hands of the president and his decisive vote on a number of issues. Nevertheless, some of the statements bring some doubts, such as the statements that the political regime is unstable and can be easily overthrown.<sup>17</sup> When analysing the aforementioned opinion and the concept of sultanism, it should be borne in mind that the article was written by Eke and Kuzio in 2000, shortly before the Belarusian presidential election. The election inspired some hopes that the political situation was going to change, first of all by means of a revolution, as the opposition believed that the Lukashenko regime was weak. However, the events and the 2001 election demonstrated that the regime had quite successfully managed the potential inner threats and had become even more consolidated and started an attack on civil rights and freedoms.

Furthermore, the supporters of the concept of sultanism fail to consider one significant aspect, which distinguishes the Belarusian regime from a purely sultanistic one. The inefficiency of socio-economic policies of the sultanistic regime leads to the regime losing its popularity with the population. Linz viewed this fact as one of the key aspects in the formation and functioning of sultanistic regimes. "Very often sultanistic rulers come to power with the support of a significant part of the population. As the regime becomes sultanistic, however, they lose much of their initial social support and begin to rely increasingly on a mixture of fear and rewards."<sup>18</sup> In other words, when starting to lose their legitimacy in the eyes of the population as a result of their inefficient policies and usurpation of power, sultanistic regimes start relying only on force aimed at the preservation of power.

If we consider the Lukashenko regime, its social foundation has remained unchanged for many years and now is more or less stable. Furthermore, a considerable portion of the population has a positive attitude not only towards the figure of the president, but also towards the political regime and its internal

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543.

<sup>18</sup> Chechabi H. Juan J. Linz., eds., *Sultanistic regimes: A Theory of Sultanism Sultanistic Regimes*, Baltimore and London (3): The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 17.

socio-economic policies as a whole. According to the data of sociological surveys conducted by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS), as of May 2007, 56.9 percent of the population trusted the president, 50.9 percent trusted the government, 60.4 percent trusted the army, and 45.5 percent trusted the courts.<sup>19</sup> In the beginning of 2008, 50.2 percent of the Belarusian population believed that the country was developing in the right direction, whereas 34.5 percent expressed the opposite opinion.<sup>20</sup> If we compare the situation to that of the previous years based on the data provided by the Institute, we can see that any negative dynamics of change in the population's attitude towards the regime was basically absent, regardless of certain unpopular decisions taken by the country's authorities. For instance, as of September 2005, 53.3 percent of the population considered the country's direction as the right one, whereas 30.2 percent – as the wrong one.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, the regime has considerable social support, allowing it to function in a stable manner, whereas the ability to maintain social support demonstrates its mobility opportunities, which is what guarantees the maintaining of this support and, consequently, the legitimacy of the regime.

It should also be noted that inner structure and mechanisms of functioning of the Belarusian political regime are undergoing serious internal changes, which also impact its stability. A number of new elements have been introduced in the regime over the past eight years. We can see rapid drawing up and implementation of state ideology, active mobilisation and politicisation of the society, expansion of political control, and increasing pressure on the civil society. Political opposition has lost any opportunities to counteract the authorities and to have any impact in the society, and they have few chances to hold large-scale social protest actions.

Some Belarusian authors, considering the new condition of the political regime and the specific functioning of the Belarusian political system, have started using concepts such as “totalitarian dictatorship”,<sup>22</sup> “totalitarianism”, and “neo-

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<sup>19</sup> *НИСЭПИ* (IISEPS), «Национальный опрос, май 2007 г.» (“National survey, May 2007”), <<http://www.iiseps.org/data07-02.html>>, May 11, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> *НИСЭПИ* (IISEPS), «Национальный опрос, в марте 2008 г.» (“National survey, March 2008”), <<http://www.iiseps.org/data07-03-91.html>>, May 11, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> *НИСЭПИ* (IISEPS), «Национальный опрос, в сентябре 2005 г.» (“National survey, September 2005”), <<http://www.iiseps.org/data05-03-9.html>>, May 11, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Потупа, (note 14).

communism”. For instance, A. Sannikov, analysing changes in the structure of the regime and its strengthening pressure on the society in his article “The Belarusian regime: the reality”, states as follows: “If we analyse the situation in Belarus considering the form of rulership, we can note that it demonstrates virtually all widely-named signs of totalitarianism, except for the presence of one large political party... However, the trends visible in recent years, which lead to stringent control of the society on the part of the authorities, allow us to conclude that a transition from authoritarianism to totalitarianism has taken place in Belarus... Lukashenko has successfully used the ‘grey zone’ that appeared as a result of the dissolution of the USSR in the entire post-soviet zone to recreate a totalitarian system in Belarus.”<sup>23</sup>

This point of view is also supported by S. Shushkevich, who defines the Belarusian regime as “neo-communist”. Regardless of the fact that the communist ideology and total control over the society do not exist in Belarus, Shushkevich states that “Belarus has once again taken the road of communist dictatorship.”<sup>24</sup>

However, when discussing totalitarianism or neo-communism in Belarus, we should not forget about one key attribute typical of this type of regime – that is, mass terror directed not only towards adversaries of the regime, but also towards the population, as well as the overall control and ideologisation of the society. If we consider the Belarusian political regime, regardless of the repressions and large-scope state control over the society, it still allows the existence of the opposition and even some public actions of it, whereas in totalitarianism “there is no space for organised democratic opposition and for intermediaries of the regime.”<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the Belarusian regime is quite far away from what can be classified as a totalitarian or communist regime, even though one might want to use these names by adding “neo-” to them.

Although, on the one hand, consideration and identification of the regime with extreme forms of non-democratic rule is an exaggeration, on the other

<sup>23</sup> Санников А. «Белорусский тоталитаризм – реальность» (Sannikov, A. “Belarusian totalitarianism: the reality”), <<http://www.charter97.org/rus/news/2003/07/25/sannikov>>, May 1, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Шушкевич С. *Нео-коммунизм в Беларуси* (Shushkevich, S. “Neo-communism in Belarus”), Смоленск: СКИФ, 2002, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Linz J., Stefan A. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University press, 1996, p. 56.

hand it underlies the need to study the current political situation in depth, and to look for new methods and concepts in the analysis thereof.

## **2. Authoritarianism, sultanism and neo-authoritarianism: the essence of the Belarusian non-democratic regime**

The formation and functioning of the Belarusian political regime is unique, thus allowing the application of any political science theory or concept from sultanism to totalitarianism. However, theoretical consideration of the regimes and comparison of the characteristics thereof to the Belarusian regime allows stating that a different type of regime has formed in this country.

This regime is considerably “softer” compared to totalitarianism, at the same time differing from political regimes that might be classified as sultanistic. Compared to sultanistic regimes, the Belarusian regime is more consolidated, more bureaucratic, and has wide social support. The Belarusian regime lies in the area between sultanism and (neo-) totalitarianism. This “area” belongs to the authoritarian regime.

Unfortunately, the concept of authoritarianism became a universal and generalised characteristic of all non-democratic regimes. A number of political scientists consider sultanism as a type of authoritarianism, which is characterised by the dominant role of the personal power,<sup>26</sup> or simply equate the two concepts.<sup>27</sup> However, regardless of certain similarities of authoritarianism and sultanism, which can be identified due to the non-democratic nature of both types of regimes and due to the fact that they use the same political tools in order to maintain political power,<sup>28</sup> certain differences between the two types of regimes do exist.

Linz, who developed the concept of sultanism in order to define some of the non-democratic regimes in Latin America and South-East Asia which in his opinion differ from authoritarian regimes, distinguished the following four

<sup>26</sup>Цыганков А. *Современные политические режимы: структура, типология, динамика* (Tsygankov, A. “Modern political regimes: structure, typology, and dynamics”), Москва: Интерпракс, 1995, p. 174.

<sup>27</sup>Роўда Ў. “Слабасць сучасных аўтакратый (параўнальны аналіз палітычных рэжымаў Кучмы і Лукашэнкі”, *Палітолагічны та сацыялагічны студыі*. Том V. Чернівці-Вільнус: Выдавничій дім “Букрек”, 2007, p. 190.

<sup>28</sup>Chechabi, Linz, (note 18) p. 5.

types of non-democratic regimes: authoritarianism, totalitarianism, post-totalitarianism, and sultanism.<sup>29</sup> “The ideal type of sultanistic regime can be identified as follows. It relies on personal rule, yet loyalty to the ruler is not motivated by the fact that he expresses or articulates some ideology or that he represents a certain mission, or by his charismatic characteristics, but rather by means of varied use of fear and rewards on those who cooperate with the ruler.”<sup>30</sup>

Unlike sultanistic regimes, authoritarian regimes are characterised by the presence of legal norms, more or less developed state institutions of governing, a bureaucratic system, and restricted functioning of a political opposition. “An authoritarian regime is a political system with a restricted, unreliable political pluralism, without any developed leading ideology yet with distinguishable mentality, without any intensive or extensive political mobilisation, except in certain moments in the process of development thereof, in which the leader or a small political group realises power within insufficiently clearly defined formal boundaries, which are nevertheless more or less predictable.”<sup>31</sup>

The fact that an authoritarian state has formed in Belarus<sup>32</sup> was pointed out by Belarusian political scientists in the 90s. For instance, V. Chernov wrote: “The current political regime in Belarus is authoritarian, which underwent a rapid evolution from the oligarch system of ruling to an open presidential dictatorship with highly restricted opportunities for any reform.”<sup>33</sup>

It is clear that the ideal definition of authoritarianism does not suit the existing Belarusian political model either, especially when we consider the appearance of new elements in the structure of the regime, the state ideology, politicisation of the social sphere, the increasing state control over political and social processes, etc. Furthermore, the Belarusian political regime is actively applying democratic mechanisms and methods for the purposes of ruling the society and self-legitimation.

<sup>29</sup> Linz, Stefan, (note 25) p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> Chechabi, Linz, (note 18) p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Linz J. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, in the Handbook of Political Science, vol. 3, ed. Nelson Polsby and Fred: Greenstein, 1975, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Карбалевиц В. «Приватизированное государство» (Karbalevich, V. “A privatised state”), *Открытое общество*, 1998, N5(107) <<http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/107/2.html>>, May 12, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Чернов В. «Авторитарный режим в Беларуси: характер, запас прочности, варианты трансформации» (Chernov, V. “Authoritarian regime in Belarus: nature, durability, and variants of transformation”), *Открытое общество*, 1998, No.4(106), <<http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/106/2.html>> May 12, 2008.

Analysing the Belarusian political regime we should take into account the overall historical and political factors and conditions, in which the regime has formed. The Belarusian regime has managed to quickly adapt to the new political and economic, external and internal conditions and challenges, and has successfully used the authoritarian mechanisms of domination in order to form a stable system of power. Undoubtedly, a qualitatively new model of a non-democratic political regime has formed in Belarus. We can consider it a sort of *modernised non-democratic authoritarian* regime, because in present-day political and economic conditions a conservative non-democratic regime would not be able to function effectively.

In order to classify the Belarusian regime, we will carry out an overall comparative analysis of the structural characteristics and mechanisms of functioning of non-democratic regimes based on studies conducted by Linz and Stefan:<sup>3434</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Linz, Stefan, (note 25) pp. – 43, 44, 57 – 60.

Table 1. A comparative analysis of the structural characteristics and mechanisms of functioning of non-democratic regimes

Structural characteristics and mechanisms of functioning of political regimes	Totalitarian regime	Authoritarian regime	Sultanistic regime	Belarusian regime
Ideology	Well-developed and all-covering in nature.	The ideology is not developed, yet a certain mentality is expressed clearly.	Active manipulations with symbols and glorification of the leader. There is no developed ideology.	There is a state ideology targeted at a rational explanation of the processes taking place in the country.
Mobilisation and politicisation	Extensive mobilisation thanks to the mass organisations created by the state.	There is no extensive and intensive mobilisation, except at certain moments in the course of development.	Low level of mobilisation, which is of accidental nature of the ceremonial type and does not have any constant organisation.	Organised and constant mobilisation, including mobilisation by the pro-state organisations.
Social support	Universal and unconditional support for the regime.	The population on the whole is apolitical, which enables the regime to ensure the required social basis for itself.	The social basis of the regime is very narrow, and support is ensured thanks to “fear and rewards” policies and activity of paramilitary groups.	The regime manages to maintain a stable social basis and support on the part of the society thanks to mobilisation and effective socio-economic policies.
State control	Complete, total state control over all spheres of life of the society.	Strong political control with the society being autonomous from the social and economic interference.	State control is unstable, the regime is unable to control all aspects of social and political life	State control is stable in both the political and economic spheres; where needed, the state can expand or narrow the limits of the society’s autonomy.
Political pluralism and opposition	There is no opposition.	Opposition functions in the formal boundaries set by the regime.	The regime is unable to suppress protest expressions in the society. There is a strong oppositional resistance, including armed resistance.	Opposition exists within the boundaries set by the regime, and is unable to organise any mass resistance.

Political leadership	Activity of the totalitarian leader is not limited by any formal boundaries.	The leader acts within poorly defined yet fairly stable formal boundaries.	Highly personalised; there are no rational or legal checks. Strong dynastical traditions.	The leader has a major role in the life of the society. The leader relies on the administrative and bureaucratic structures.
Social and economic policies	Planned economy with state-performed distribution of social benefits.	Economical and competitive economy, with a weak social welfare system.	An egoistic regime aiming at satisfaction of tangible-asset related interests of the ruling group and their supporters.	Use of mixed economy mechanisms, with stable assurance of the necessary social guarantee and benefits for the population.

Unlike other non-democratic regimes, the structure and functions of the Belarusian regime are multidimensional. Its stability and effectiveness are ensured by the use of a number of various resources, including ideological, socio-political, economic, and administrative-bureaucratic resources, as well as by the application of a long-term strategy of political development aimed at the establishment and elimination of potential threats to the regime.

We should consider in detail some of the key elements of the Belarusian political regime, which make it unique among the present-day non-democratic regimes.

*State ideology.* Since 2003, elaboration and implementation of the so-called “state ideology of the Republic of Belarus” was started in the country. The Belarusian ideology does not constitute an integral value-based philosophical system of belief, which is typical of totalitarian ideologies constituting “secular socio-political religions”<sup>35</sup> that attract faithful admirers and believers<sup>36</sup> and are aimed at the creation of “like-mindedness” in the society. It is not a “creation” of the leader as is the case with pseudo-ideologies of sultanistic regimes whose leaders are engaged in self-praising. It may be defined as an ideology of the “own way”, one of the objectives of which is a rational explanation of the advantages of the Belarusian political and economic model. For the purposes of creation of this doctrine, representatives of academic science, political scientists, historians, philosophers from the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, Belarusian State Uni-

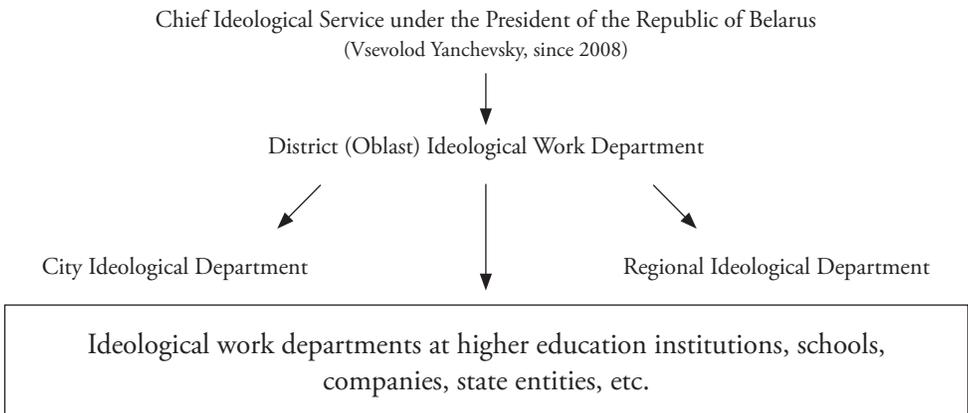
<sup>35</sup> Gurian W. *Totalitarianism as Political Religion*, in C. Friedrich, ed. *Totalitarianism*, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 164, p. 122.

<sup>36</sup> Piekalkiewicz J., Wayne Penn A. *Politics of Ideocracy*, New York: New York Press, 1995, p. 22.

versity, Academy of Management under the Administration of the Republic of Belarus President, etc. were invited.

Their task was to comprehensively substantiate the need to develop and analyse the Belarusian ideology, and to create some sort of academic and scientific course to be introduced into the educational process in Belarus from the year 2003. The development and implementation of the state ideology is functional rather than visionary in nature. Its functionalism lies in the objective of making intellectuals work for the benefit of the regime, making them serve the regime and strengthen it. “Absence of any clear and content-rich ideas and the eclectic and contradictory nature are evidence that the main reason for the current ideological campaign is not the “ideology” itself, but some sort of “ideological work.”<sup>37</sup> In addition to the creation of the ideology, the creation of the so-called “ideological vertical” was implemented, which today permeates not only the state and administration framework, but all state institutions.

Picture 1. **The structure of the Belarusian ideological framework**



<sup>37</sup> Бобрович В. «Государственная идеология: pro et contra» (Bobrovich, V. “State ideology: pro et contra”), *Наше Мнение*, September 22, 2003, <<http://www.nmnb.org/articles/220903/procontra.html>>, May 15, 2008.

The servicing of the ideology involves a number of full-time employees who attend special training at the Academy of Management under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus. The key functions of ideological workers include ideological substantiation of elections, establishment of dissenters in companies and educational establishments, and holding of “preventive” discussions with those who do not approve of the authorities’ position.<sup>38</sup>

State ideology also constitutes an important mechanism used in the process of mobilisation and politicisation of the society, although the main load in the implementation of these tasks lies on the pro-state mass organisations such as the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union (355 thousand members), the Pioneer Organisation (482 thousand members, mainly school-age youth), and – in perspective – the pseudo-party organisation White Rus’. The creation of such organisations is evidence of systematic long-term political work with the population and individual social groups.

Today, the structures of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union are found in all state institutions. They perform ideological, control, and mobilisation functions. Although membership in organisations of this type is not obligatory, the authorities seek maximum involvement, especially of young people. The key objective of activity of pro-state youth organisations is the ideological and political conditioning of youth, “diminished political extremism among youth, increased electoral activity of youth, and consolidation of the social youth movement aimed at the creation of a strong and prosperous Belarus.”<sup>39</sup>

Among other things, one of the significant tools of the Belarusian regime used for political mobilisation and politicisation of the society is the Orthodox Church. This aspect is fairly important, yet usually it is not considered when analysing the Belarusian regime. In the Lukashenko regime, the Orthodox Church occupies a privileged position,<sup>40</sup> which is not the case with other types of non-democratic regimes when we consider the relationship between the state and the church. In totalitarian regimes, the church is completely excluded from the social system, whereas in sultanistic regimes the church usually constitutes

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<sup>38</sup> Usau P. “Ideology of Belarusian State. Propaganda Mechanisms”, *Belarusian society 2007, hopes, illusions, perspectives*, Warsaw- Minsk: EEDC, p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> *Республиканская программа «Молодежь Беларуси» на 2006–2010 гг* (Republican programme “Belarusian Youth” for 2006-2010). <<http://www.president.gov.by/press28322.print.html>>, May 16, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Uladamirski A. “Religious diversity in Belarus”, *Belarusian society 2007, hopes, illusions, perspectives*, Warsaw- Minsk: EEDC, p. 24.

one of the forces opposing the regime. The Orthodox Church in Belarus is one of the institutions on which state authorities not only rely upon but also which they use as a mechanism for self-establishment in the mind of the population. According to the data of the IISEPS, as of December 2007, 68.1 percent of the population trusted the Orthodox Church.<sup>41</sup> In 2003, state authorities and the Orthodox Church signed an Agreement on Cooperation Between the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church,<sup>42</sup> which strengthened the position of the church in the country and the position of the political regime in the society. The importance of the Orthodox Church in the structure of the state system and politics was more than once emphasised by Lukashenko. For instance, during the Christmas service at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Minsk he said: “Yet the most important feature of our Church is its patriotism. The Church has always been patriotic. The Church is the most patriotic structure in our country. This above all concerns the Orthodox Church, because it has always been with the people and defended the Homeland. That’s why I would like to, once again, at the end of another year after which we became wiser, thank you Lord and all churchmen of our country serving at the smallest wooden churches and in large cathedrals for their loyalty to our Homeland.”<sup>43</sup>

***State control and repressions.*** Unlike sultanistic and classic authoritarian regimes, the Belarusian non-democratic regime is implementing extensive control over all areas of social life. The essence of this control lies in the fact that the state controls not only the political sphere, but also regulates the citizens’ economic activity.

If we consider the economy, state control expands not only to the large state-owned companies by means of the so-called “golden share” (abolished in 2008) but also to medium and small private businesses. However, the aim of control over private businesses is not the liquidation thereof as an economic phenomenon, which was done in the times of the totalitarian communist regime (as

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<sup>41</sup> ИИС.ЭПС (IISEPS), «Национальный опрос, декабрь 2007 года» (National survey, December 2007). <<http://www.iiseps.org/data07-04-12.html>>, May 15, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Соглашение о сотрудничестве между Республикой Беларусь и Белорусской Православной Церковью (Agreement on Cooperation Between the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church), *Официальный сайт Белорусской Православной Церкви* (Official website of the Belarusian Orthodox Church), <<http://www.church.by/resource/Dir0009/Dir0015/index.html>>, May 16, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

of 2006, there were 37,660 private companies in Belarus),<sup>44</sup> but rather supplementation of the national budget with additional financial resources by imposing various types of fines. Control is exercised thanks to various state control services (such as the State Control Committee, fire brigades, sanitary and epidemiological services, etc.). The presence of an entire system of requirements, rules, and orders on how to conduct business enables the control institutions to impose fines on virtually any entrepreneur. “Excessive powers of inspectors and the absence of any clear checks procedure are the major problems for businesses in the case of checks. It’s easier for the entrepreneur to pay a fine than to comply with the requirements, because the compliance therewith often leads to losses.”<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, recent years have seen repressions on the representatives of the democratic opposition movement become more active. However, the regime does not aim at complete elimination of the opposition but strives to weaken it to the maximum possible extent in order to prevent any potential threats to the power stability. For that purpose, various methods of pressure on the opposition activists are applied, including long-term imprisonment. Yet the regime has moved away from the practice of physical elimination of the opposition leaders, as was the case in the late 1990s, which was probable dependant on the perceived potential threats to the then-weak power of Lukashenko.<sup>46</sup> The present-day regime is fairly stable, whereas the opposition does not constitute any serious threat and continues to exist because the regime allows so, rather than due to the regime’s weakness. Moreover, the factor of international pressure on the Belarusian authorities which they are bound to consider must be taken into account as well. We may assume that in the absence of the aforementioned factor the Belarusian opposition as a political phenomenon would cease to exist.

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<sup>44</sup> Алексеев Б. «На пути от торговли к производству» (Alekseev, B. “From trade to production”), *Республика*, No. 43 (4466), March 5, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Ермак Д. «Малый и средний бизнес Беларуси — под тотальным контролем государства» (Ermaк, D. “Small and medium businesses in Belarus are under total control of the state”), *Белорусские новости*, April 11, 2008, <[http://naviny.by/rubrics/economic/2008/04/11/ic\\_articles\\_113\\_156539/](http://naviny.by/rubrics/economic/2008/04/11/ic_articles_113_156539/)>, May 16, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Коктыш М. «Олег Алкаев: существует видеозапись убийств Захаренко, Гончара и Красовского» (Koktysh, M. “Oleg Alkaev: video recordings of the murder of Zakharenko, Gonchar and Krasovsky do exist”), January 21, 2003, *Народная воля*, <<http://www.charter97.org/rus/news/2003/01/21/nv>>, May 16, 2008.

At the present stage of development, the authorities apply preventive measures for the elimination of any potential threats on the part of the opposition, especially during elections. The main task of the repression services (mainly the KGB) is the destruction of the oppositional structures, and discrediting representatives of the opposition and maximum isolation from the population. In addition, the regime uses the legal basis for persecution of the opposition.

For instance, on the eve of the 2006 presidential elections, amendments to the Republic of Belarus Criminal Proceedings Code were passed in an urgent manner. For instance, article 193-1 “Illegal organisation of activity of a public union, fund, or participation in the activity thereof” provides for imprisonment for a term of up to two years, whereas article 369-1 “Discrediting of the Republic of Belarus”, i.e. provision to a foreign state, foreign or international organisation of knowingly false information on the political, economic, social, military or international status of the Republic of Belarus, legal status of citizens in the Republic of Belarus, which discredits the Republic of Belarus or its authorities, provides for imprisonment for a term of up to five years.<sup>47</sup>

Thus the regime, with the help of well-organised repressive mechanisms, is implementing systematic and extended control over the spheres of life of the society, which might pose potential threats to the regime in the future.

However, it would be wrong to believe that the stability of the Belarusian political regime is ensured only by repressions, suppression of civil protests, and ideological and propagandistic “brainwashing”. The Lukashenko regime could not have survived for such a long period of time had it relied only on repressions. The stability of the entire political system is ensured by the activity of all institutions of the state bureaucratic apparatus and by effective state policies guaranteeing a fairly high standard of living of the population. Some Belarusian political scientists and analysts already in the period of formation of the Belarusian regime mistakenly stated that “the socio-economic model of the country

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<sup>47</sup> Комиссия по национальной Безопасности Палаты Представителей Республики Беларусь, *О внесении дополнений и изменений в некоторые законодательные акты Республики Беларусь по вопросу усиления ответственности за деяния, направленные против человека и общественной безопасности*, официальный сайт Палаты Представителей РБ (State Security Commission of the Republic of Belarus House of Representatives. “Regarding introduction of supplements and amendments to some legal acts of the Republic of Belarus on the raising of liability for acts directed against the person and public security”. Official website of the Republic of Belarus House of Representative), <<http://house.gov.by/preview.php?fn=http://house.gov.by/index.php/4489,10427,5,,0,0,0.html>>, July 16, 2008.

is unable to function in a normal regime, i.e. it is unable to self-develop and self-regulate in a natural manner,”<sup>48</sup> and that “the present-day political regime is an unviable regime from the historical point of view, which has no future. The changing of this regime is just a question of time.”<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the Lukashenko regime has not only lasted but also demonstrated certain success in its socio-economic policies.

The standard of living in Belarus, although considerably lower than that in the democratic states, is much higher than in most post-soviet states. According to the UN Development Programme report, by the human development index for 2007 Belarus was 64<sup>th</sup> among 177 states of the world, whereas Kazakhstan was 73<sup>rd</sup>, Ukraine – 76<sup>th</sup>, Armenia – 83<sup>rd</sup>, Georgia – 96<sup>th</sup>, Azerbaijan – 98<sup>th</sup>, Turkmenistan – 109<sup>th</sup>, Moldova – 111<sup>th</sup>, Uzbekistan – 113<sup>th</sup>, Kyrgyzstan – 116<sup>th</sup>, and Tajikistan – 122<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>50</sup>

If we consider economic indicators, according to the data of the Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Belarus is the first among all CIS countries as regards growth of industrial production, which is 13.6 percent higher than in January-March of the prior year. Azerbaijan is second with 12.9 percent, whereas Ukraine is third with 7.8 percent. The growth of industrial production in Moldova equalled 7.7 percent, and in Russia – 6.2 percent. They are followed by Kyrgyzstan (4.1 percent), Kazakhstan (3.7 percent), and Armenia (0.2 percent). Tajikistan documented a 10.1 percent decrease of industrial production in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, as mentioned before, the Belarusian regime is able to quickly react to certain economic threats, and to concentrate and distribute the re-

<sup>48</sup> Карбалевич В. «Приватизированное государство» (Karbalevich V. “A privatised state”), *Открытое общество*, 1998, No.5(107), <<http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/107/2.html>>, May 16, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Чернов В. «Авторитарный режим в Беларуси: характер, запас прочности, варианты трансформации» (Chernov, V. “Authoritarian regime in Belarus: nature, durability, and variants of transformation”), *Гражданское общество*, 1998, No.4(106), <<http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/106/2.html>>, May 13, 2008.

<sup>50</sup> «Беларусь признана экспертами ООН страной с высоким уровнем индекса развития человеческого потенциала», *официальный Интернет портал президент Республики Беларусь* (“Belarus was acknowledged by UN experts as a country with a high index of human potential development”, official website of the President of the Republic of Belarus), <<http://www.president.gov.by/press10662.html>>, May 17, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> «Беларусь лидирует в СНГ по производству» (“Belarus is the leader of industrial production among the CIS countries”), *БЕЛТА* (Belarusian Telegraph Agency BELTA), <[http://www.belta.by/ru/main\\_news\\_other?id=218037](http://www.belta.by/ru/main_news_other?id=218037)>, May 7, 2008.

quired resources in order to ensure stability of the entire socio-economic system, which is also typical of authoritarian regimes. An example of these policies is the reaction of the Belarusian authorities to the rising energy resource prices, which impacted the entire Belarusian economy. Many independent and foreign observers forecasted a collapse of the socio-economic system, which in their opinion developed thanks to low prices for gas and oil.<sup>52</sup> However, this was not the case, and the regime started looking for new forms of economic management such as privatisation of some state-owned companies, while at the same time maintaining the monopoly over the companies which had strategic importance for Belarus.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, considering the structure and functioning of the political regime in Belarus, and taking into account specific characteristics of the Belarusian regime, we may identify it as a *neo-authoritarian regime*.

On the one hand, neo-authoritarianism is a type of a non-democratic regime, which formed in present-day conditions and is therefore different from the classic authoritarian regimes, yet, on the other hand, neo-authoritarianism is a result of certain historical and political processes that were taking place in Belarus in the 90s. Neo-authoritarianism may be viewed as a natural stage in the process of development of non-democratic regimes, the origins of which come from the soviet authoritarianism that provoked certain political trends which some nations were unable to overcome (the Belarusians are not an exception here). L. Zaiko calls this phenomenon the waves of authoritarianism opposing the waves of democratisation. When describing the events that took place in the post-soviet zone, he states the following: “The process of formation of new authoritarian systems in the territory of the former USSR has started. This process does not have the same scope everywhere and is not happening everywhere, yet it has started. By 1996, authoritarianism had become a political structure in Belarus as well. Authoritarian systems of various levels of intensity

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<sup>52</sup> «Приватизация в Беларуси: законодательные и реальные контуры» (“Privatisation in Belarus: legal and actual contours”), *BISS*, <<http://www.belinstitute.eu/images/stories/documents/priv1ru.pdf> - 30.04.2008>, May 11, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

were forming in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Ukraine, and other countries.”<sup>54</sup>

Thus neo-authoritarianism can form as a result of certain historical or political evolution of an authoritarian regime, or as a result of winding-up of democratic processes and establishment of authoritarian methods of ruling applying new methods of power among other things combined with democratic ones.

If we consider the process of formation of the Belarusian neo-authoritarian regime, we can state that it combines a return to the previous model of authoritarianism and the refusal to follow a democratic road of development.

The historical foundation and example for the appearance and development of a neo-authoritarian regime in Belarus was the soviet political model. The authorities’ striving to revive the soviet political system in Belarus is so obvious that it allowed some political observers to characterise the regime as a “reactionary, militant soviet conservatism,”<sup>55</sup> and “an authoritarianism of neo-soviet modification.”<sup>56</sup>

The Belarusian neo-authoritarian system first of all took from the old system the administrative-commandment elements of ruling of the society, political sphere and economy, the levers of which are concentrated in the central state apparatus, thus enabling the authorities to unilaterally administer and distribute social and economic benefits within the society. This type of system does not provide for any social self-organisation and political pluralism. However, the Belarusian model is not just a copy of the soviet system. The political, economic and social tradition enrooted in the socialist past were considerably modified and adapted to present-day conditions. This was facilitated by the process of transformation and liberalisation of the soviet system itself in the 80s and 90s, as well as by the formation of democratic institutions in the independent Belarusian state.

For that reason, Belarusian neo-authoritarianism is closely related to the process of democratisation which took place in Belarus in 1991-1994. It was due to the de-transformation and winding-up of democratic process and return

<sup>54</sup> Заико Л. «Девятый вал социализма, тоталитаризма и авторитаризма» (Zaiko, L. “The tenth wave of socialism, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism”), *Наше мнение*, December 30, 2005 <<http://www.nmnbby.org/pub/261205/cycle.html>>, May 15, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Чернов (Chernov), (note 48).

<sup>56</sup> Недокус И. «Еволюція політичного режиму в Республіці Білорусь» (Nedokus, I. “Evolution of the political regime in the Republic of Belarus”). The author’s abstract, Чернівці: «Рута», 2007, p. 16.

to authoritarian methods of ruling that the neo-authoritarian political regime formed.<sup>57</sup>

The process of political de-transformation and revival of some elements of the soviet system occurred after two referendums held on the initiative of the president in 1995 and 1996. The 1996 referendum was the key event in the formation of the neo-authoritarian regime, because it granted the executive authorities led by the president to extend its power, and to submit of other powers to them, due to which a new non-democratic regime was established. Consolidation and institutionalisation of the neo-authoritarian regime took place in 1997-2001, round up by the presidential election won by Lukashenko, which demonstrated the inability of the civil society to withstand the regime.

In addition to that, the short period of democratisation impacted the institutional structure of the Belarusian neo-authoritarian regime. In the course of democratic transformations, new elements in the system of political rule were established in Belarus: adoption of the Constitution, introduction of the principle of separation of judicial, executive and legislative powers, starting of activity of the Constitutional Court, political parties and non-governmental organisations, etc. Virtually all of the named institutions and democratic elements were later included in the new political system, thus granting it an external pseudo-democratic form.

One of the key elements effectively used by the neo-authoritarian regime is political elections. Regardless of the formal meaning of elections in general, due to the absence of any democratic procedure of elections, the authorities pay great attention to the organisation and implementation of elections. This happens for the following reasons:

1. In the situation where there are no other forms of legitimisation of the political regime (e.g. ideology or tradition), political elections become the only mechanism that legitimise one group or another being in power. By means of elections, the Belarusian elite led by Lukashenko demonstrate that the existing regime is supported by the majority of Belarusians.

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<sup>57</sup> Ровдо В., Чернов В. *Введение в общую теорию политики* (Rovdo, V., Chernov V. "An introduction to the general political theory"), Грамадская адукацыя для настаўнікаў, <<http://www.cetbel.info/?orgID=main&catID=theory&langID=BEL>>, May 14, 2008.

2. Elections constitute a key element of political mobilisation. The regime seeks to make people not only vote in large numbers but also to persuade them to vote *for* the current president or *for* a pro-president candidate during parliamentary elections.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, regardless of the fact that all elections are characterised by falsifications, according to sociological surveys, the actual percentage of votes cast for the president always exceeds 50 percent. For instance, according to the studies conducted by the IISEPS in 2006 prior to and after the elections, the respondents' answers were as follows: a) 52 percent voted *for* amendment of the Constitution during the 2004 referendum, which enabled Lukashenko to run for subsequent terms of office; b) during the elections of March 19, 2006, 55.4 percent voted *for* Lukashenko; c) during the subsequent elections, 54.3 percent were ready to vote Lukashenko.<sup>59</sup>

The need to persuade the population to voluntarily support the current regime is also a reflection of the seeking to narrow the potential protest group among the population, which might protest against the regime.

3. By means of elections, the political opposition is marginalised and eliminated from the political arena. By participating in elections, the opposition formally confirms the legitimacy and democratic nature of elections,<sup>60</sup> yet by losing elections it shows itself as an outsider unable to oppose the authorities.

Thus, elections become an important instrument not only for legitimisation of the regime, but also for ruling the society, which also reflects the nature of neo-authoritarianism.

The neo-authoritarian regime in Belarus is an example of how democratic instruments are used not only for the purpose of winding-up democracy but also for the purpose of consolidation of the regime in the situation of universal democratisation in the neighbouring countries.

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<sup>58</sup> ИИСЭПС (IISEPS) «НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ОПРОС, 12 – 22 ИЮНЯ 2006 Г.» (National survey, June 12-22, 2006), <<http://www.iiseps.org/data06-03-8.html>>, May 14, 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

In other words, neo-authoritarianism is a political regime which is a result of the process of political de-transformation while maintaining democratic institutions and mechanisms in the structure of the state which perform formal functions, including the process of recruitment of political elites which are also used for the purpose to control the society.

Thus, the Belarusian neo-authoritarian regime is a special form of organisation of state authority characterised by extended mobilisation opportunities, widely supported by the population, and aiming at ensuring control over the society by using various means and mechanisms of influence (informational, ideological, and repressive in nature), while at the same time maintaining political and social institutions typical of democratic states.

### **Conclusions**

The neo-authoritarian regime that is established in Belarus is an example of a successful de-transformation, moving away from democratic changes, and establishment of a consolidated non-democratic regime. Unlike other non-democratic regimes that formed in the post-soviet zone, the Belarusian regime has wide mobilisation potential and is supported by the majority of the population. This is also dependant on the implementation of successful socio-economic policies in the country, which ensured stabilisation of social and economic relations and improved the feeling of security and safety among the population. At the same time, thanks to state ideology and propaganda, the population is persuaded that any radical changes in the system and authorities might lead to the loss of stability and economic well-being. However, the regime is not static and maintains the right to implement certain socio-economic reforms and state-managed transformation of the economic sector. One of the indicators of the dynamics of the political regime is partial liberalisation. In March 2008, the “golden share” was abolished by a presidential decree, which earlier enabled the state to control virtually all industrial sectors of the Belarusian economy. These actions of the ruling elite were the result of a worsened economic condition, which was first of all dependent on Russia’s raising the prices for energy resources. However, liberalisation has not impacted the political processes in the

country, and has not become a basis for democratisation. Quite the contrary, the pressure of the state on the society has increased.

The Belarusian neo-authoritarian regime is highly consolidated, which allows stating that today it does not have any real political threats coming from within the society which might lead to changes in the regime in Belarus and to democratic transformations.