



According to Lukashenko, European (democratic) standards don't coincide with Belarusian context, and thus are irrelevant on Belarusian ground

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Myths which are believed in tend to become true. --George Orwell

It's being stated that the EU is based on respect of human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law, which make European democratic standards. Being a "soft power" directed by moral values the EU can't offer a third country any political or economic integration prior this country adheres to democratic standards and values (1). Still some state leaders practicing authoritarian rule are interested in challenging universal character of European democratic principles and standards, claiming that they will build their own democracy or any other type of political order which will answer local reality and people's interests. The author of the article doesn't want to draw an ideal picture of the EU and its institutions, including the sphere of European justice, which faces lots of challenges in its development. But the idea that human rights consist of political and social rights make the role of international and European organizations indispensable for Belarus, where social interests are considered by the State, but political rights are heavily violated and respect of political rights is not uttered in official rhetoric. That's why it's really important to see where the state myths about "European standards-free democracies" can lead to, especially in the case of state monopoly on national media, which deliver to the public the image of the EU and its institutions comfortable for the authorities of a national state.

Being able to manage social contract, which is based on the right to work and receive stable salaries, the president of Belarus doesn't want the issue of political rights to be ever raised in Belarusian society, and thus refers to critics and misinterpretation of examples of international

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democracies and justices, including the EU, which strives to offer Belarusian people and its administration alternative to authoritarian and centralized system model and way of life.

What makes A. Lukashenka successful among Belarusian people? First and far most he is unmistakably associated with *independent* Republic of Belarus, seen as an adversary of dispatching “Belarusian sons” abroad and contract-based army service. Secondly he is assessed as a people’s president, who criticizes the ministers on behalf of people and checks the quality of the bread-corn right in the field. In general A. Lukashenka is the president, who always criticizes these drawbacks, which are usually being criticized by the citizens: quality of medical service, salaries, retirement age, available and affordable housing and employment. Consequently he always introduces these issues of public concern in his daily speeches. His approaches are absolutely right as they are based on the psychology of an ordinary citizen, pocket needs and emotions, which is not so difficult to satisfy and to please: stable job, salary and Black Sea vacancies almost once in a year. As far as business sector is concerned, it’s deprived of flexibility in Belarus and thus prefers to reserve any critics and dissatisfaction. Nowadays the president almost at any occasion is ready to bring in as an argument the World Bank statistics, that Belarus mounted to 68 position as far as favourable for investment climate is concerned, when to compare it with 115 position in 2008, to emphasize that Belarus makes a leader in reformation of business sector, and to dwell on the support of SMEs (2). And it’s no wonder to speak and to think about it on the part of the president, for it’s high time to realize that Belarus is in the modern world, which functions on market economy rules. And it’s high time to introduce some changes in business in 10 years period, and when it will be done at once in 3 years time span, surely a country can become “a leader in reformation”.



In case of the EU, Belarusian citizens express concern just about the prices of Schengen visas and even dream about visa-free regime to be established between Belarus and the EU. And, accordingly the president introduces visa facilitation issue in his official rhetoric, when he addresses Brussels.

In general, Belarusian society, which didn't fight for independence of Belarus in 80-s, as Baltic States' nations had done, would not rush to the streets to demand respect of mentally non-feasible to them "political rights" and democratic transformations. Why, when the USSR had been dissolved, and soviet Belarusians were in despair, Lukashenka suggested them very close cooperation with Russia, including the perspective of the Union State; when their relatives in Russia were appalled by the "overall privatization-expropriation" (by the nomenclature), Lukashenka denounced any privatization, making no shocking deviations from "soviet social and managerial model". Then there has been no alternative for 16 years. Do Belarusian citizens know much about social and administrative alternative? So, do they want much?

But getting back to Belarus in 21st century and world market economy, no political, economic and social isolation can be possible. And the EU, including its offers and requirements, as well as European issues, is starting to be covered in national media, but in what a way, that's the question.

So what Mr. Lukashenka has at his hands to make Belarusians believe in "democratic chaos" and "our own "different democracy", and legitimize by this the regime built by him for 16 years?



A. Lukashenka always states that the countries, which claim to be “the role-models in democracy”, can be easily accused of violation of human rights. For instance, to violent protests in France evoked by a proposed bill raising retirement age from 60 to 62, he opposes absence of any discontent with his policy from Belarusian citizens; to the fact that the French youth threw stones at police which prompted police to use teargas, he opposes that Belarusian police would never use teargas against the citizens in Belarus (3).

Absence of unrests made by citizens in Belarus makes Lukashenka to strengthen his argument on the need of “strong president in the country” (4), who will subdue, reduce, control or even ban the application of alien democratic tradition of expressing public will and complaints by means of street protests. And that’s true, being under strong president for 16 years Belarusian people know few about the tradition of free assembly and free expression of mind.

Other trump card of the president is rhetoric on “State sovereignty and independence”. By referring to the conservative view on the problem of human rights and international relations, which is “national state is the best form of realization of human rights”, A. Lukashenka claims that “execution of the requirements of the West concerning optimization of electoral and other legislation would mean breaking of political order in Belarus and violation of the rights of Belarusian citizens, for Europe doesn’t need Belarusian people” (5). But “state sovereignty” and “human rights” are the categories, which are above any contraposition. What is more, world and regional mechanisms exist exactly with the goal to see that human rights are not left to be just internal problems of the state, but are monitored and taken care of by international community, for national government logically can be short sighted in human rights issues.



Still the president practices differentiated approach towards European standards: rejects political and legal standards, but accepts European standards as far as technology, architecture & construction or economic matters are concerned (for instance TAIEX, SIGMA). Interest in technological transfer, investments in Belarusian economy, materialization of presence of European standards in Belarus by restricting their notion and practical application exclusively to the spheres, which are not connected to reform in political and legal system and don't presuppose any systematical changes, explains the logic of engagement of Belarus into the EU technical and other initiatives of a kind.

As far as the EU critical statements towards Belarusian authorities are concerned Mr. Lukashenka says that «these proposals (12 conditions of the EU) contradict Belarusian Constitution” (6), which seems to be quite a serious argument for Belarusian grassroots, who in 1996 took part in referendum casting votes for the new document, which has been rewritten by the president with the aim to satisfy his power interests. But looking at 12 conditions for Belarus put by the EU, one could not but wonder in what a way “respect of human rights, freedom of speech and association, release of prisoners of consciousness, registration of the political parties and non-governmental organizations, respect of the rights of national minorities (Poles)” can contradict constitution of a non-authoritarian state and why these principles can't be treated as universal standards in general.

The answer is on the surface, these universal by nature democratic principles contradict Constitution of Lukashenka and threaten the status-quo established by him, which presupposes monopoly in policy-making and law making, and strong presidency with no real opposition in the parliament and suppressed Civil Society.



“I’m (the president) going to develop these laws, which Belarusian society needs” (6), states the president, and at the same time criticizes the conditions put by the EU, when these conditions make the needs of Belarusian Civil Society, those, who reflect on political, economic and social situation in the country, and care about present and future of Belarus as an European state. The president of Belarus challenges even the need to refer to any political and social reforms in the country assuring that "Belarusian people like the model of political and social order established in the country" (7). And he is right, Belarusian grassroots don't feel worse without political pluralism, transparency and publicity in the country, without developed and independent regional and local authorities being constantly engaged into social and regional projects, real educational and professional mobility and so on, why, they have bread and butter, and their pensions are being raised almost annually...

It happens that only NGOs representatives, opposition members, Media representatives and businessmen in Belarus, who face the shortages of the regime policy, human and civil rights violations, rise up to criticize and oppose current political system. Civil Society and opposition, which is doomed to be in underground, are those Belarusian people who contrary to the president's statement *don't like* the model of political and social order in the country.

Well, what does it mean that „political rights“ are not respected in Belarus? I'd rather say that political symbols and elements described in Political Science and adequately represented and practiced in other world are in a peculiar way misused and perverted in Belarus. Let's take the case of „underground“ opposition, its non-participation in politics, non-access to the instruments of power and fake elections.

The function of the elections is replaced in Belarus, because opposition, which is not represented in the parliament and is deprived of space in national mass media, objectively can't do with just you tube videos and internet sites, in order to establish communication

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channel with Belarusian society and be ready for any competition, though there will be none in any way.

In-between-elections activity of opposition, interpreted as a „destabilizing one“, is being suffocated by the regime in different ways. The society closes its eyes on Belarusian opposition. "Opposition", unfortunately, not only for the president but for the wide audience is associated with the “partisans”, who lack authority, prestige, any political weight and influence, don't know the mechanisms of state government, but who are „always ready“ to cause damages to the country or even bring it to pieces, who live on American and European dotations and can sell Belarus to the USA, for example, which means that they make a threat to *the sacred*, „independence of Belarusian state“ (8).

In fact Belarusian opposition neither can influence the sanctions to be taken or to be abolished. Outside the country it's not able to make Moscow be against Lukashenko, in the country it can't object or support state attacks directed towards Belarusian entrepreneurs, introduction of customs duties on automobiles, even any changes in the system of housing and households, nothing.

This inadequate understanding of “opposition” and its “peculiar treatment” in Belarus preconditions and “strengthens” its feeble nature. In the result Belarusian opposition lacks professionalism, interesting and effective programs (their programs are not real and deep enough, so to say “divided from Belarusian context”), strategic flexibility, unity (opposition members are united only in their rhetoric by the idea of democratic choice for Belarus, in reality the strategy of nominating a single candidate from “democratic forces” as a counterweight for current president is a “myth”), resources for its activity and, consequently, population support.

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The lack of population support and non respect of the rule of law in Belarus results in Belarusian citizens' indifference towards the reasons, explaining why opposition leaders and those who don't support current regime came to the "Square" on the day of elections and why they were seriously injured, deprived of medical treatment, put in to prisons, denied the right to meet with the lawyer or even disappeared (9). In 2010 A. Lukashenka had planned to feed the West with "democratic elections": the Central Elections Committee had registered all the candidates for the presidency, provided space on TV and radio, allowed pre-elections pickets, for he didn't expected 15 000... (? more) of critical to the authoritarian regime Belarusians to come to "Square" on December 19th. The import-oriented project (for Belarusian grassroots don't care) "Liberal status quo" collapsed, when OMON massacre started at Nezolezhnosti square at 23.00.

And here, when A. Lukashenka dishonestly came to his fourth term in presidential office (10), the question arises: whether the "declarative resistance" of the EU towards the crimes of "the regime" in Belarus is sufficient?

The study devoted to comparison of "political" and "civil" cultures of contemporary Belarusian society with moral standards and principles of the EU and "European values" conducted by BISS in 2010 showed that Belarusian people more eagerly accept "political" standards of the EU than "cultural" ones (11). Only 15.4% of Belarusians support official policy directed towards reduction of international contacts in academic sphere, 19% support restrictions in professional sphere for people not loyal to the official policy, when 48.8% are against such approach, more freedom in business support 60.7% of interviewed, just 18.4% are against. This very study in general visualizes the fact of political myths construction by Belarusian authorities; make the audience think about the consequences of such myths

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(political and social isolation of Belarus) and challenge to the myth about the EU described in this article.

In order to doubt the idea that European standards can be applied in post- soviet states, where political tradition of strong presidency or highly presents empirical centralized power has been practiced for many years and provided social order in the countries, according to the president of Belarus, Mr. Lukashenka often refers to the case of Ukraine: “The will of Ukraine to apply European standards in the country caused her political and social instability and it’s still not the EU member” (8).

The Ukrainian elites suffer from inconsistency as far as application of European standards in Ukraine is concerned, namely their introduction in legal system, harmonization with the EU acquis and further practical application in the country and international cooperation. Still the vision of Ukraine by Ukrainian political elites is clearly pronounced in international dialogue: “European democracy with a modern social market economy.” And the approach of giving priority to the process and development rather than mere goal concentration: “Today we are not speaking about EU membership, but rather about reforms. It is about Ukraine's Europeanisation, modernisation and adaptation to European standards” (12), makes Ukraine quite a reliable and serious party in a constructive dialogue with the EU.

As far as accusation in “double standards” (5) (the EU foreign policy towards Russia versus Belarus, Kosovo conflict of 1993) on the part of Lukashenka is concerned the EU can't mono laterally revise its geopolitical interests in favor of “common good”, when its partners practice pragmatic and values-flexible approach. What is more, European moral principles and standards are not the object of double interpretation, being set and legally envisaged they can't exhaust with each case and suspicion of democracy deficit in European institutions and



the EU member states. One should always remember that the EU is a political system with common universal democratic guidance and monitoring. That's why with regard to people, power asymmetries and overcoming the obstacles to justifiable political outcomes we should look at the EU first of all in terms of justice and assess its contribution to *transnational justice* (13).

I do see this very myth as foremost in Belarusian domestic and foreign policy, for it is meant to rebut the EU critics concerning violation of human rights and authoritarian practices in Belarus, providing protection for the president at home and abroad. In order to exist it must be shared. Here the president makes use of the arguments against the EU, usually referred to by other authoritarian leaders, and makes use of state monopoly on national mass media to spread the myth among Belarusian grassroots.

Current authorities strive to minimize participation of Belarus in development of international institutions, watching over respect of human rights, in coordination of cooperation with international HR monitoring bodies, meaning fair and responsible collecting, summarizing and transfer of relevant information and conducting of constructive dialogue with international community on human rights situation in Belarus.

That's why the words of Vital Silitski, BISS (Belarusian Institute For Strategic Studies, Vilnius) director appear very sensitive in this respect:

“Lukashenka has sent a challenge and we should respond to it or accept what he offers. Discussion of Belarus' role in Europe and its perspectives in terms of the EU membership would make no sense if we viewed the subject differently from other Europeans. *The Belarusians have a very limited political, intellectual and human contact with the rest of the*

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world and Europe in particular. And “the Other” (European Union) is not a fixed structure and can be confused and disoriented” (14).

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