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The Role of Migration in the Political System of Belarus

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The pluralism of political parties emerged in Belarus in 1991. However, in the experts' opinion currently its proper functioning is in question. Thus, V.A. Bozhanov writes: "today in the political environment of Belarus we see a complete lack of political system, because we do not have any actual ruling parties, no Parliamentary groups" (Bozhanov, 2010, p. 164).

It has been observed that the number of political parties decreased significantly: from 40 in 1990 to 15 in 2012. As the number of parties decreased, so did their representation in the Parliament which is responsible for adopting the laws. In general there were 4 sessions of the two houses of Parliament convened in the work of the National Assembly of Belarus since 1996. Speaking of the House of Representatives which is in charge of considering and discussing the bills, most of the party representatives were there based on the results of the first convocation, formed of the Supreme Council: half of all the deputies were representatives of 9 political parties, including 24 members of agrarian party, 20 from the two Communist parties, 6 from several social-democratic parties. There were only 16 deputies affiliated with political parties in the second National Assembly, 12 in the third one, 7 in the fourth one (1 from the Belarusian Agrarian party, 6 from the Communist parties, the rest 103 of them were not affiliated with any parties). One may also note the lack of parliamentary groups in the 2nd-4th Assembly due to the small number of political party representatives.

The upper house is the Council of the Republic (64 members) which is a regionally represented house. Eight members of the Council of the Republic are elected from each region at the deputy sessions of local Councils. In their turn, as a result of the latest elections in the local councils of deputies in 2010 out of 21288 places 322 were occupied by the representatives of the parties supporting the President's policy (Agrarian Party, Belarusian Socialist Sporting Party, Communist Party of Belarus, Liberal-Democratic Party, Republican Party of Labor and Justice, Belarusian Patriotic Party, Republican Party), and 3 representatives of the opposition (2 from the Belarusian United Left Party "A Just World" and 1 from the Belarusian Social Democratic Party ("Gromada")).

Such a detailed description is important for the understanding of the fact that even if there is a certain statement with regards to the migration of the population in the parties' program, the proposals set forth by the parties were hardly ever discussed due to the low number of the parties' representatives.

Nevertheless it is important to note the Parliament's activity as a whole. For the 10 years over 30 bills on labor and employment were adopted, among which "Law on external labor migration", over 300 laws on ratification of the international agreements, as well as such important laws on human right protection of Belarusians abroad as Law on citizenship, Law on legal status of the foreign citizens and stateless persons etc.

Currently there are 15 active political parties in Belarus. All the parties, depending on their orientation, can be conditionally divided into five groups (Romanovskiy, 2009). The first group includes left-wing parties, which promote socialist values – social justice, welfare and decent labor conditions for the citizens, as well as free education and health care. These include: Agrarian Party, Communist Party of Belarus, Republican Party of Labor and Justice, Belarusian Patriotic Party, Belarusian United Left Party "A Just World" (former *Belarusian Communist Party*). The second group includes Social Democratic party ("Narodnaya Gramada"), Social Democratic Party People's Assembly, Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gromada" which adhere to the socially oriented market economy. They opt for the combination of reforms and social protection of the population. The third one includes representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party and United Civic Party, the main values of which are free market relations and democracy. The fourth group includes two National Democratic Parties, Belarusian Popular Front Party and Conservative Christian Party - Belarusian Popular Front. According to the expert "division of the party into two independent organizations was caused by a sharp decrease of its authority in the public political life of the country, as well as contradictory views of the leaders on the processes in place in the society and in the party» (Romanovskiy, 2009). The fifth group includes the remaining 3 parties, Belarusian Party "The Greens"

and Belarusian Socialist Sporting Party, which have narrow spheres of interest and therefore do not have an important political impact in the society. The political party system of sovereign Belarus is formed in a complex way. One obstacle on the way to development is also a weak background of political programs. In the expert's opinion "program documents of many parties do not include a clear concept of political, social economic, and spiritual development, and are characterized by some eclectic ideological conclusions, having some vague, inconclusive ideas about the future of the society" (Romanovski, 2009).

Speaking of the migration issues, the focus is entirely on the fact that several parties indicate in their political programs adherence to human right protection, respect for cultural diversity, as well as private property for land. Thus, the Communist Party of Belarus promotes "equality of all the citizens of the country regardless of their ethnicity, language and religion, respect for culture, customs and traditions of every ethnical group" (Feduta et al, 2003, P. 102). Among the top priorities of the Republican Party are "natural voluntary revival of cultural uniqueness of the Belarusians and national minorities residing in Belarus" (Feduta et al, 2003, P. 105). This party also promotes "rigorous compliance with human rights in the Republic of Belarus" (Feduta et al, 2003, P. 104).

It is also worth mentioning some concern of political parties about the internal movements, in particular support of the rural areas. Thus Agrarian Party opts for "reforming "kolkhoz's" and "sovkhoz's" into market structures, and transmitting their assets into the shared collective property or private property of the workers; for private and public property for land which at the same time should not become an object for sale; for reinstatement of multilateral connections with Russia, Ukraine, and CIS countries, creation of favorable conditions for reunification of these countries into a single confederation" (Feduta et al, 2003, P. 89-90).

According to the political program of the Republican Party of Labor and Justice, land also should be transferred to those who work on it. Development of the agricultural sector is what Republican Party is generally promoting, too. Conservative Christian Party Belarusian Popular Front strives "to protect the Belarusian culture and language, priority of Belarusian language in the government and public life, the right of each national minority for its national and cultural autonomy, private property for means of production and land" (Feduta et al, 2003, P. 93). Through its political program Belarusian Popular Front strives to achieve "a fair land reform through recognition of the private property right for land and acknowledgement of land as a commodity" (Feduta et al, 2003, P. 95).

Poor representation of migration regulation issues in the political programs of the existent parties can be explained as follows.

Firstly, the Department of Citizenship and Migration at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus is in charge of regulation of migration processes. As a matter of fact, the responsibilities of this department include an entire range of migration issues: migration statistics, control over migration situation, countering illegal migration, improving legislative acts, migration policy, informing the population about migration issues. Anything concerning changes or suggestions in any of the migration issues has to be coordinated with the Department.

Secondly, despite the fact that migration flows become more and more important in the social and economic development of the country, the issues of social security of the population, labor relations, wage increase are still relevant for a great part of the population. Therefore, those who draft the activity programs do not find it feasible to include migration in them.

Thirdly, even in the absence of the factors listed above, there were no significant changes in the migration situation and policy due to the specific nature of the electoral system in Belarus and weak participation of the political parties in the public life. (Feduta et al, 2003).

According to the experts "political parties in Belarus do not have a solid base, and moreover, the negative rating of some of them overrides the positive one" (Feduta et al, 2003, p. 28). This is why it is more convenient for the candidates to position themselves as not being affiliated with any political party.

On the other hand there are some problems with organization of activities inside the parties. Independent Institute of Social and Economic Research performed an opinion poll of the public leaders and experts in November 2001, and according to the results "the leaders claim that the most important reason for defeat of the opposition at the presidential elections was its internal problems. These include bad organization, lack of unity, confusion about the unique candidate, etc. The second most important reason is lack of outstanding leaders. And the third one is that the opposition is distant from the people, it does not benefit from the support of the Belarusian society, as it does not have an attractive political program" (Romanovskiy, 2007, p.188). The situation hardly changed over time. The results of public opinion poll in 2011 presented by the director of the Institute of Sociology by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus Igor Kotlyarov, show that political parties have an extremely low rating among the population: - "In case of Parliamentary elections based on party lists in Belarus only 0.1 per cent of the population of the country stated they were ready to vote for certain parties¹».

Another important factor slowing down the development of political parties in Belarus can be the fact that "today the parties are not represented at actual government authorities" (Romanovskiy, 2007, p.187). Executive power in the country is represented by the Council of Ministers of Belarus which is not elected but appointed by the supreme authorities.

Poor political culture suppresses the political development in the country. Currently there are few stable social groups recognizing their interests and able to protect them through political activity.

¹ Belta// Accessed electronically:
http://www.vybory.ej.by/scandals/2011/11/29/politicheskie_partii_belarusi_ne_sposobny_reshat__problemy_obschestva.html
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