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European Choice for Belarus

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## After the presidential elections in Belarus

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**SESSION I:** What happened during the election –  
evaluation

- **Grzegorz Gromadzki (Batory Foundation):** The situation in Minsk at the moment comes down to the fact there is no longer a tent camp in the October Square in the center of the city. There was a pacification, which should have been anticipated. Yesterday the Russian ambassador in Minsk said that order must be restored. The speaker of the Belarusian quasi-parliament said the same thing. However, this does not mean that the protests ended. A demonstration planned for Saturday, 25 March is going to be held. Ayaksandr Milinkevich calls the inhabitants of Minsk to come to the Square. He wants to gather even more people than there were on the Sunday evening of 19 March. This is why our meeting is so unique. We know that several hundreds of people were arrested. The pacification of the tent camp itself was carried out without any incidents, the protesters did not resist, and nevertheless they were beaten after having been arrested, in the trucks. This is what we know. They are kept in some strange places, where temperature is below zero; one of them was able to call radio Svoboda. It is difficult to say what will happen to them next.

The protest in Minsk in the night after the election was real. A dozen or so thousand of people came to the October Square, some claim there were even 20 thousand people there. A journalist of the Russian daily 'Kommersant' asked an officer of the Belarusian militia: 'According to you, how many people are there in the Square?' The answer was: 'In our opinion there is nobody there, the Square is empty'. This phrase shows how different the languages we use are and how different our opinions are on what is going on in Belarus.

We already know, at least to some degree, how the foreign countries are going to react. The USA does not recognize the election and announces that sanctions would be introduced. The position of the EU is more lenient, but it also announces sanctions, which will be adopted in the next weeks. It is important that the EU started to act not after the election, but just before the election. That the tent camp managed to last until March 23 results partly from the fact that both Javier Solana

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and the Austrian presidency explicitly stated that using force would meet with a firm reaction of the EU. This was important not only for the regime itself, but also for Russia. Kremlin does not want to deteriorate its relations with the EU.

Today we would like to discuss several matters. In the first part of our discussion we would like to analyze and assess what happened in Minsk in the last two weeks: before the election, during the voting and just after the election. We would like to discuss the actions of both the opposition and the government. In the second part we would like to think about what could happen in the future: whether or not the opposition will remain united and what the relations between the two opposition's candidates, who rivaled Lukashenka, will be. We are also going to talk about what should be the international response to the events in Belarus. And obviously, we are going to discuss the future policy of the Belarusian regime.

There are five panelists in the first part. Four of them were in Belarus during the election. It was our intention to allow you to hear people who were there, who saw it and who have an opinion on the events accompanying the presidential election in Belarus. Two of them are Belarusians: Mr. Syarhiei Alfer and Ms. Olga Karach. Mr. Alfer is a lawyer from the Center for Constitutionalism and Comparative Legal Studies in Minsk. Ms. Olga Karach is an independent local deputy in Vitebsk. Thus, we have an opportunity to talk about what happened in Minsk, and at the same time we shall learn the course of events in the regions, like for instance in Vitebsk. By the way, it is worth noting that community works were announced for Saturday, March 25, among others in Vitebsk. I believe the purpose of this action is to make impossible any demonstrations in the city. Apart from the guests from Belarus, two OSCE observers, who were in Belarus to assess the presidential elections, are taking part in the panel. The first of them is Andres Herkel, a member of the Estonian Parliament and head of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly's Commission on Belarus; the second one is Wojciech Stanisławski from the Center for Eastern Research, political scientist and a feature writer. The fifth panelist is Ales Dhikavitski from radio Svoboda, who has been dealing with the Belarusian issues for many

years. First we are going to listen to short presentations of the panelists, to be followed later by a discussion and a Q&A session. Let us start with our guests from Belarus. I shall ask Mr. Siarhiey Alfier to take the floor first.

- **Syarhey Alfer (Center for Constitutionalism and Comparative Legal Studies, Minsk' member of Alaksandr Milinkevich staff):** Due to the fact that I am a member of Ayaksandr Milinkevich's electoral staff, my account of the situation is not only an opinion by an external observer. It is also a report of a direct participant of the events who co-organized the electoral campaign and knows how it developed and what difficulties we came across. We hoped that the elections would take place in the summer and that we would have much more time to build the image of the opposition's candidate and to inform the people about him. The authorities decided, however, that the elections would be held five months earlier. We had to start a campaign quickly. The government deliberated to the very last moment whether to enter the Haydukevich as a candidate, in case the democratic candidates withdrew from the elections. If such had been the case, the elections would have been deemed pluralistic, and the propaganda would argue: 'See, we have as many as two candidates!'

The electoral campaign started with pressure against the members of initiative groups. This pressure was relatively moderate in Minsk, but in regions there was direct pressure against them. They were threatened to be fired from work, which is particularly distressing in small towns, where it is difficult to find a new job. Nevertheless, we were able to gather over 200 thousand signatures of support for Milinkevich within a month. Kazulin's staff gathered nearly 200 thousand signatures. It was then that we understood that the government is going to register both contenders as candidates. If only one of them had been allowed to participate in the election, there would have been a common candidate of the opposition. This is something the authorities didn't want to happen, which is why both Milinkevich and Kazulin were registered. There occurred no serious violations in this part of the campaign. However, after the candidates were registered, enormous pressure against the initia-

tive groups started. We had no possibility to disseminate our materials. Even all that was printed for the state's funds was confiscated and only partially returned later.

More or less in the middle of the electoral campaign the government started to use sanctions against the heads of electoral staffs and their trusted collaborators. In the beginning of March the head of the Mogilev district electoral staff was arrested and sentenced to 15 days for organizing an allegedly illegal electoral rally. Later, almost mass arrests started. The authorities chose quite a clear tactics: to detain not the most prominent activists, but those, who were directly responsible for the campaign. Most of them were arrested till the end of the election, and the volunteers were left leaderless. The government used all means and methods to make it difficult to organize meetings with the voters: rooms were made available to us, but it was difficult to gather people there. In many districts people were threatened not to come to the rallies. Despite this, many voters came to the meetings with our candidate, and his popularity increased. Before the election 90% of the Belarusians recognized Milinkevich and knew his electoral platform. Before the election we lost all of our returning officers – at that time 60 activists from Minsk and the same number of campaigners from other regions of the country were behind the bars.

It was impossible to scrutinize the earlier voting, but we tried to scrutinize them in some of the electoral commissions on the day of the elections. We understood of course that the government set a goal for the administration to make Lukashenko win with 80% of votes. We tried to conduct exit polls, but it was not entirely possible. Most of the voters did not want to answer the question who they had voted for after leaving the polling station. Taking into consideration the fact that the majority of people who voted for Lukashenko admitted it openly, the sociologists came to believe that Lukashenko received about 50% of votes (taking into consideration the 'fear factor'), but not more than that. We can be absolutely certain it was not 82%. It was impossible to determine how many voters supported Kazulin and how many of them voted for Milinkevich on the basis of the official results. One should not forget the brutality of the campaign and

the fact that the candidates could not present their electoral platforms to the voters. The contenders had no access to electronic media, with the exception of two half-hour appearances in the public television. The media time given to them was obviously not sufficient to get to the society with information on the opposition's candidates. Despite this, 15–20 thousand of people came to the October Square in Minsk after the Milinkevich's and Kazulin's appeal. According to my estimations, there could have been about 25 thousand people in the Square around 10 PM. Unfortunately, the weather was unfavorable and most people dispersed due to a blizzard.

I must admit that the staff of both opposition's candidates failed to prepare any actions for the evening of 19 March, because we believed we would not be allowed to enter the Square. Neither Milinkevich, nor Kazulin were ready to answer the people's question what to do next. It was not until 20 of March that it was proposed to put up tents like in the Ukrainian Maydan. It is very important for Belarus that this Maydan-like tent camp was created, although there were not many people there. When I visited the university, some of the professors told me that they would go there to give the protesters blankets and food. They were not afraid to lose their jobs. The people were no longer afraid. We have not seen something like this in many years. In spite of the fact that we didn't really win, there was an enormous change in the way people were thinking. Many of them will collaborate with us to make the regime disappear from Belarus, so that we will be able to build a normal country.

I hope that the already existing coalition will grow. Directly after the election we started to discuss possible variants of further collaboration. It is very likely that those who did not participate in the political life and did not come to the Square, will join us. Unfortunately, we did not receive considerable support from the Belarusian business circles. They are controlled by the regime to such an extent that businessmen encounter difficulties when trying to give us funds. I hope, however, that the Belarusian businessmen will understand that their business will be impossible to conduct without their engagement in the politics and that we will be able to work together.

• Olga Karach (local deputy from Vitebsk, Social Committee 'Our Home'): I would like to tell you about the last two weeks. It would take too much time to discuss the whole campaign. During the 2001 elections I thought the situation couldn't be any worse, that a more intensive pressure from the government was not possible. Now I came to understand it could be worse. Before the elections all the opposition's activists felt enormous pressure of the authorities, they started to be arrested. People were arrested for 'swearing' the moment they left their houses, before they had a chance to do anything. It turned out that the whole Belarus started to swear and to act like hooligans. As far as our organization is concerned, it started at 4 AM. They said, 'Come out, somebody stole your car'. They wanted us to open the door. But we knew our car was being repaired and we barricaded the door. The situation in other organizations was similar. On Wednesday and Thursday in the electoral week there were pickets posted at our leader's apartments and there was militia. We didn't want to sit in our flats – to quote Lukashenka's own words – quiet as mice. We didn't want to stay in a home arrest, because there is no great difference between a home arrest and a normal one. On the other hand, we knew that if we had started to do something, we would have been sentenced to the 'standard' 7 days arrest. On Friday we all left for Minsk. Actually, it was the government that forced us to go to Minsk. We didn't want to go all to the capital till Sunday – we wanted to vote, get in our cars, and then go there. However, already on Wednesday the cars of the organization's members were broken, their windows were smashed, there was a hunt for people who have a driving license. When all the 16 of us came from Vitebsk to Minsk, we tried to engage in the opposition's activity. At the same time Stsyapan Sukharenka, the chief of the KGB, was on TV 24 hours a day and threatened that all those who would go to the Square would be sentenced to death penalty. We lived in a rented flat till Sunday. We were able to meet Milinkevich. I wanted to see him, because he said that all those who come from the regions to Minsk have an important task to accomplish. On Saturday, after talking to somebody from Milinkevich's staff, our peo-

ple from Vitebsk were told to 'come to the Square'. Nobody believed that there would be no militia, everybody knew there would be a militia's cordon. On 19 March in the evening many people did indeed come to the Square. The other thing is that nobody was ready for the fact that there would be no militia. We are very thankful to Europe for exerting pressure on Putin. Lukashenka complained that Europe exerted pressure on Moscow to influence Minsk not to use force against the protesters. The opposition's candidates did not arrive till 9 PM, and people were standing in the Square from 7 PM. Nobody knew what was going on, there were no loudspeakers.

People came to the Square to protest against what happened in the last few days. It was not to express support for Kazulin or Milinkevich. The loudest shouted slogans were 'Shame on you', 'Long live Belarus' and 'Freedom'. People came, because in their opinion Lukashenka is a criminal and definitely not their president. Many of demonstrations' participants had the impression that it was 'almost a revolution', 'almost like in the Maydan', 'almost Yushchenka'. Nevertheless, everybody knows that an 'almost pregnant' woman cannot have a child. My friends and I also had an impression there was 'almost a revolution'. I don't know whether you saw the movie 'Matrix', we were in such a matrix ourselves. We were a small group of people and at times it felt like we were in a different world. It was enough to wander as much as 300 meters from the Square, and everything was different. There were people, who cared only about their own business. It was a completely different reality. It was a terrible impression. A revolution cannot arise from the actions of such a small group of people. The whole society must want a revolution to happen. It was cold, everybody wanted to get warm and there was also this feeling that we could get arrested anytime. My first impression of the Square after coming from Vitebsk was that everybody there looked like a pathetic bunch of lunatics. There was no strength, no unity, and no passion. I received text messages from Poland and from Ukraine: 'go to the Square', 'defend your freedom', but neither I, nor any of my friends got any messages from Belarus. Can you understand it? This duality was so strange.

It is very good that there was a tent camp. Many ordinary people, who brought tea, coffee and food to the Square, were arrested. It didn't happen because they were anti-Lukashenko. My mother brought tea and she was put in jail for 10 days. Families, who had had no interest for politics, suddenly learned that their political views locate them among the opposition. Pickets at the jails started. Something new is starting to happen in our society. It was also a positive effect of the events in the Square that people started to talk to each other. Until that time, most of them simply tried to ignore politics. Before I came to Warsaw, I was in the Square. A mother with two children helped me to get out of the Square. She collects her children from a kindergarten and goes with them to the Square in order to help to get out those, who have to go to the toilet or to wash themselves. She gives one child to hold to the person whom she is trying to help to get out, she takes the second child herself and so she goes to and fro.

In the Square there was this ambience of a desperate, crazy joy. Everybody understood that we cannot defend the revolution, but I have never before met such idealists like there. It's a pity the opposition's leaders were not there. Nevertheless, it is important that people organize themselves, not waiting for Milinkevich or Kazulin. It's a pity the tent camp no longer exists. On 25 March many people intend to come to Minsk to participate in demonstrations. During these few days after the election something happened in the Belarusian society. I came to understand that I am proud of the Belarusians. People came to the Square and stood there, knowing that somebody might start to shoot at them. They came there to demonstrate their dignity as human beings.

- **Grzegorz Gromadzki:** Thank you. It is worth noting, however, that Ayaksandr Milinkevich was in the Square in the two nights and he did not leave the people who gathered there. This was a very important testimony. I would now like to ask Mr. Adres Herkel to take the floor. Mr. Herkel was in Belarus as an observer and he can analyze calmly what happened there.

- **Andres Herkel (Riigikogu, the Estonian Parliament):** I appear here in a triple role: as a deputy of the Estonian Parliament, as a representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and as an observer of the last elections in Belarus. I received a Belarusian visa in the very last moment, but many of those who intended to observe the elections in Belarus were not able to obtain one. The whole Georgian delegation, as well as some people from Lithuania, Poland and Germany did not receive visas.

The Council of Europe followed the events in Belarus carefully pursuant to the country's membership application. There was a chance for Belarus to obtain membership in 1992. In 1997, due to violations of human rights, Belarus lost its special guest's status in the Council of Europe. Minsk tried to regain the status in 2004, but the motion was dismissed. After the referendum on Lukashenka's third term, the relations between the Council of Europe and Belarus became even more complicated. As a result, we weren't even invited to observe the elections (particular representatives of the Council of Europe joined the OSCE mission).

When assessing the election we took into consideration three factors. These were: the situation before the election, the atmosphere and situation development on the election day in the polling stations and the vote count. The situation in the polling stations was good only seemingly. There was absolutely no transparency during the earlier voting. We wonder why this several days' voting was introduced at all. Representatives of various groups, and particularly students, were forced to cast their votes earlier. We also noticed that there was absolutely no transparency during the vote count. The observers, who stood in corners of the rooms, could not follow what was happening. The chairman of the Central Electoral Commission said: 'You can ask how many people are there on the list of voters and how many people participated in the earlier voting, but no one has the duty to answer your questions'. In the small town of Zhodino one of the OSCE observers noted down every vote cast. During the count he knew how many votes there were in the ballot box. His knowledge proved, however, completely useless, as all the votes were counted together. There was

no way to determine how many people voted on the election day, or how many people voted earlier and how many people voted at home, due to an illness. It is difficult to assess how many electoral frauds there were. My experience tells me that if a voting lasts too long, there are many possibilities for frauds to be committed.

The Belarusian election statute imposes many constraints on foreign and national observers. There weren't, however, many national observers. There were almost no representatives of the opposition in electoral commissions. The way of electing members of local and central electoral commissions is also an important issue. Ballot boxes were nontransparent, there was no access to copies of records and the access to the media was not equal. So what should we do? The European Union adopted many documents concerning the situation in Belarus through the European Parliament. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also adopted many recommendations, but there are no other ways to influence the situation in Belarus, apart from political sanctions. The number of people responsible for electoral frauds, who will be deemed persona non grata by the EU, should be increased. Assets of Lukashenka and his collaborators could be frozen. The next possibility, i.e. economic sanctions, is a very delicate matter. Even Milinkevich said he was not going to support them, as they would affect mainly ordinary citizens. The Belarusian regime will not collapse as a result of economic sanctions, because it can rely on Russian help. It is Russia that has the biggest influence on the situation in Belarus. Moscow plays a strange game, aimed at keeping Lukashenka at power. No one knows why Moscow believes that it would be positive for Russia.

One of the positive actions that could be undertaken by EU is, above all, the creation of free media. In Belarus I saw the worst television I have ever seen. It was even worse than in the Soviet times. The first attempt in this regard (a daily 15 minutes program in Russian in Deutsche Welle) wasn't very successful.

I don't agree with the opinions which recommend some form of collaboration with Lukashenka. I believe that all the analyses concerning seeking a possible agreement with the

regime are naïve. It is outrageous that such a possibility is even taken into consideration. The policy of the Council of Europe and the EU so far has come down to reducing the relations with the regime to minimum. It also has included high-level officials. The last elections in Belarus showed without doubt how elections should not be conducted.

- **Wojciech Stanisławski (OSCE election observer, Center for Eastern Studies):** I would like to focus on limitations and ambiguity of an observer's role, especially in a situation as complicated as the one during the Belarusian elections. I would like to compare it with the experiences gathered in Ukraine in 2004, as well as with the experience from two previous OSCE missions. Due to a post-election OSCE report it was possible to describe the electoral campaign, the course and results of the elections in the most complete way. A month before the elections several dozens of so called long-term observers were sent to Belarus. Then, 440 short-term OSCE observers and over 100 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly observers came to monitor the elections. It was an enormous organizational and financial effort. The results should be assessed bearing in mind that the OSCE functions within a framework of diplomatic formulas and a compromise must always be reached within the organization. The OSCE report of 20 March describes precisely all the factors that made the elections undemocratic: the campaign, censorship, opposition's limited access to the media, and intimidating the opposition. We have also a description of what happened during the bizarre 5 days of earlier elections and on the main election day – March 19. We can prove that 11% of observers encountered difficulties when participating in the works of lower-level electoral commissions, as did 40% of observers in subregional electoral commissions. In some cases physical force was used against the observers.

The observers, accompanied by an interpreter and a driver, had to fill in forms indicating how many representatives of local workers' collectives visited a polling station, whether there were any disturbances, whether portable ballot boxes were appropriately sealed. These are important questions, but do we

really know what is more important in the given circumstances? Is it the sex of the chairman of a local electoral commission or the number of policemen within the 100 meters radius from the polling station? Allow me to make a digression. In 1954, during the election to the people's councils in the then communist Poland, the Polish Press Agency reported that 92–96% of eligible voters participated in the election. However, in eleven of the smallest administrative units in West Pomerania less than half of the people eligible to vote took part in the election. If an OSCE form for Belarus had been used in a village in Pomerania in 1954, it would have also showed that generally everything was OK, there are the local collectives, there are no disturbances. Such questions make it difficult to establish what really happens under such an electoral statute as the Belarusian one. As a result, we had a feeling that when trying to remain objective we participated in creating a positive image of the elections. We had an impression we were cordially welcome as observers, because we could only confirm that everything was OK and pose for a photograph.

Electoral commissions reacted in many different ways to the presence of the observers. Most frequently they showed great concern and confusion, which bordered on fear. Often they informed higher level authorities that we were present. They realized that we understood what they were talking about. A few times they emphasized that they knew that we knew. All this with a smile, which seemed half tired and half cynical. We simply participated in some theater of absurd. I believe our presence there was necessary, however, despite all of my good will, I cannot sanction with my presence something we could not really influence anyway. The limitations imposed on the observers were severe. We were not present during the earlier voting, we were often not allowed to stand by a table during the vote count (and we were often pushed away from the tables), the votes were counted in silence, the results were noted on small slips of paper. We could not prevent electoral frauds which happened right in front of our eyes.

We learned more about what was happening in Minsk from text messages sent by our friends

from Poland and from the Internet than from direct observations. We also watched the local media. The central motive of media programs was that there was stabilization in Belarus, which was endangered by a possible collapse. I believe it was one of Belarusian opera singers, who enthused about the economic success of Belarus, but also warned that it is very probable that Belarusian mothers will cry and Belarusian wives will look for their husbands in vain. A vision of the Belarusian state was presented, according to which Belarus had to defend itself against everything and everybody. Israel was presented as a positive example: it was emphasized that Israeli special forces develop rapidly and that they contribute to saving the country. Text message voting was used in very innovative way. 28 thousand people responded to a question in a TV quiz 'Who wants most to spread false information about the alleged electoral frauds?' The answers were: a) international organizations b) candidates who lose support c) the authorities. 52% deemed the international organizations responsible, while 47% believed the opposition's candidates were to blame.

I agree with Olga that two Minsk could be observed. The first rushed to the Square, while the second, a few blocks away, was a completely different city, minding only its own business. I am very curious, which will prevail: this historical experience or indifference, and whether it will be possible to mobilize this 'second' Minsk.

- **Grzegorz Gromadzki:** Thank you. We have learned about two important things. The first one concerns the OSCE mission. In fact, a long term mission and a report showing the whole election mechanism were necessary. Short term observers' possibilities were limited. In my opinion, it is important that a mission was sent. These two Minsk are the second thing. Also in Poland there were manifestations, while everywhere around life went on like nothing was happening. I remember when the striking left the Gdańsk Shipyard in the end of the 80's. They were on strike, not knowing whether and to what extent the society supports their actions. Perhaps we should wait for the demonstration on 25 March to see what happens.

• **Ales Dzikavitski (Radio Svaboda):** Just a few remarks. I am happy that some time has passed since the events in the morning, because otherwise I would say something incorrect. The current election cannot be compared to the one which took place five years ago. A few days ago I called to Pinsk, my home city. It turned out that also my colleagues engaged in the opposition's activity were arrested within half an hour. One of them walked a dog. The dog came back home alone. Something like that has never before happened in the history of independent Belarus. I am scared by the fact that it is all done by our countrymen, boys with whom I used to drink beer together. These people arrested my colleagues not even looking into their eyes. A judge, a man whom we also know, sentenced them for hooliganism. I have never heard them swear. The Belarusian society is now very intimidated. A friend from Pinsk has visited me recently in Warsaw. I asked him, 'Whom are you going to vote for?', he answered, 'For Lukashenka. Yes, I hate him, but I heard that they are going to lift prints from voting cards of people who voted for Milinkevich'. This is how an educated, well-off businessman thinks, a man who has traveled abroad. If he thinks so, what about other voters? Seven years ago, when my father came to a post office to subscribe an independent newspaper, he was warned that he could fall victim to repressions. It seemed a joke then, it doesn't seem a joke now. Before the 2001 elections I did terrible things with my friends – we printed anti-Lukashenka articles. Compared to the current situation, there was then democracy in Belarus. People were arrested only occasionally. Representatives of the authorities bowed to us, when no one saw it, because no one knew who would win and we might become members of the city council. Nowadays everything changed, the regime is self-assured. There is an old Soviet method – to bring soldiers from a different Soviet republic to pacify strikes. However, when people from the same town participate in the pacification, it proves that they are really intimidated. A law exists now, which allows to arrest every Belarusian who gives unfavorable commentaries about Belarus to foreign press. 'It is already the second day of spring and snow has not been cleared from the streets yet' – this

banal statement may be ground for arresting somebody.

No one of the preceding speakers talked about how Poland supports the changes in Belarus. I have lived here since the last presidential elections in Belarus and I remember how difficult it was to find something concerning Belarus in the Polish media only three years ago. It was difficult to find any analyst interested in the subject, they all had many topics to choose from for their publications. I am proud to live in this country and to know these people. Nobody has been so engaged in the Belarusian matters as Poland. I remember an exhibition about Belarus in the European Parliament in Brussels, which was organized by Polish deputies. I asked other deputies for a commentary. I asked some Frenchman, and he answered me, surprised, 'Where is this Belarus situated?' This dialogue reflects the Old Europe's attitude to what happens in my country.

I have often heard about the so called 'independent polls', according to which '60% of Belarusians nevertheless support Lukashenka'. One may conduct a poll only if respondents are aware of two options. If they are afraid that their fingerprints will be checked, what will their answers in such a poll be? These polls are pointless as far as Belarus is concerned.

People often ask me whether the Belarusians need freedom? Maybe they feel well in this kolkhoz? I can only say that I am sure the Belarusians don't want to be beaten, humiliated and cheated on. Lack of access to true information is a principal question – the media repeat the same messages 24 hours a day. If you repeat so many times to somebody that he or she is stupid, he or she is finally going to think this might really be true. I believe that if the Belarusians had free media, they would make a right choice. In Belarus an independent journalist is usually a supporter of the opposition. Some of my friends, the so called hardliners, ask me a question: 'Well, if there were these free media of yours and the people would elect Lukashenka once again?' I would get used to it. Perhaps I would then stay in Poland permanently, but I would like my nation to have a possibility to make a free choice anyway. I would like to thank the Poles once again for their engagement and for making a debate on this subject possible.



- **Grzegorz Gromadzki:** Thank you. You may know ask questions.

- **Zbigniew Pełczyński (School of Leaders, Oxford University):** I have a basic question, which refers to what the last speaker said. What is the rationale of the authorities' actions? According to one of the theories used in the modern political science we assume that people who are engaged in politics act rationally. According to the theory we can create a model of rational activity. If they don't behave according to the model, we try to explain the deviation. An error? Ignorance? Emotional factors? In the light of this theory, I would like to ask what was the rationale of this terror and using force against the opposition? If there had been a chance for Lukashenka to win the elections without terror, what would have been the point of using all of these repressive measures and increasing pressure against the society and the opposition? From a rational point of view, the policy of the authorities was equal to sawing off the branch they are sitting on.

- **A voice from the audience:** I would like to continue the topic presented in professor Pełczyński's question about the irrationality of the authorities' actions. On one hand, mass repressive measures provoke Western reaction and consolidate the opposition. Are arrests now perceived as less dangerous, and if so, to what extent are they no longer dangerous repressive measures? Will the signs of solidarity with the tent camp continue? I know it is pure guesswork, although we might receive the first answer tomorrow, but what are your opinions?

- **Jacek Cichocki (Center for Eastern Studies):** I decided to raise my hand after hearing the last question, because I have an impression that we tend to misperceive things when thinking about Belarus. A week ago we started to compare the Square with Maydan, which is completely unjustified. It was a long process in Ukraine, which started several years ago, and in Belarus it started suddenly. It is unjust for the Belarusians to compare Maydan to the October Square. The authorities will strive to make as few people as possible come to the Square and then will say 'Those Belarusians,

they are so passive'. We must remember what instruments the government has to make an election rally impossible. There is this famous argument that Lukashenka would win even a democratic election. It is completely pointless, we don't know how many voters support him. If there had been a normal democratic plebiscite for three months, there would have been no telling what the result of the election would have been. I have an impression that we tend to misperceive things, which is unjust for the Belarusians. They showed great courage coming to the Square.

- **Grzegorz Gromadzki:** Thank you very much, I would now like the panelists to take the floor. As far as the Saturday demonstration is concerned, it seems no one from us thinks it is going to change Belarus. The question remains, whether there will still be two Minsk, or maybe something has changed in the Belarusian society.

- **Ales Dzikavitski:** I will answer the professor's question. These actions are very rational. This is a demonstration of force addressed to the society, and also to the part of the society which is a part of the regime. It is about showing that every action, every deviation will be severely punished according to the rule 'Execute them, if they make a step right or left'. 'I am strong enough to disperse 20 thousand, 30 thousand, 100 thousand protesters' – it is a message intended also for authorities' representatives in the regions.

In a situation, where the desired state is complete uniformity, a protest against the regime is extremely loud and even a gathering of several hundreds of people gives huge support to the latent supporters of the opposition and is a huge challenge for the regime. This can partially explain why there was such a massive campaign. Uniformity is the aim, and every form of opposition is undesired. The campaign was intended also to reach the Belarusian regions, kolkhozes, where even a potential three months' democratic plebiscite would suffice to make the current situation collapse. Allow me to remind you of Polish experiences from about a dozen or so years ago. It was often a surprise for people in Warsaw to learn what had happened in Pszczółczyn or Krotoszyn.

Ostashki near Mir, where I have been recently, is an example of a town for which the opposition's campaign is intended.

- **Andres Herkel:** National identity has driven many Central and Eastern European countries. An underdeveloped national identity may cause problems. Freedom may be important for both Russian-speaking and Belarusian-speaking citizens of Belarus. The question about rationalism is really of philosophical character, sometimes a democracy does not seem to be rational, and sometimes dictators try to make their actions rational. This is a different case: if someone commits a crime and knows he can be punished for it, the only way out is to commit new and new crimes. Situation becomes more difficult when people forming the authorities are afraid of punishment or sanctions. Then they start to use more brutal methods.

- **Olga Karach:** Can we rely on people's solidarity? Why did they bring tea and food to the Square? There must be a reason for it. In the Soviet times solidarity not only was not supported, but also it was punished. Lukashenka tries to break people's solidarity. We must give people information. 'I, an ordinary citizen, don't know anything about the opposition, but I want to do something'. I once read in a newspaper about how they had expelled students from a university. They didn't know what to do. Nevertheless, there is an algorithm on what to do in such a situation. It is different when you are on your own against the university authorities and you act on your instincts, and it is different when there is a step-by-step well-tried method, which tells you what to do in such a situation. Let me give you a simple example. My organization had 29 cases in court. Out of these, we won 14 and 3 are still pending. We won, because we have an algorithm. It is important to use past experiences – what to do when you are taken to a police station? We must gather pieces of information. It is important for people to have a symbol of solidarity – for example lighting a candle in the window ledge. The people were told 'bring vacuum bottles' and so they did. If someone had printed leaflets 'people, come to the Square', they would have come

there. But how could they learn about it otherwise – from the Internet?

- **Syarhey Alfer:** I wouldn't like to argue here with Olga. I hope her organization will organize lectures on how to act when dealing with the militia. I won only 2 cases, by accident. When you get arrested, you usually are stressed out and you don't know what to do. What kind of a defense can we talk about here?

The second thing is the question of the Belarusian and Russian languages. When abroad, I could of course speak here Belarusian, Polish or English. In the twenties, when the Soviet Belarusian Republic was being organized, there were four official languages: Belarusian, Russian, Yiddish and Polish. At present, majority of Belarusian-speaking, rural population supports Lukashenka. Let's build a democratic state and then we can decide on the question of language.

I was asked how the Ukrainian revolution influenced Belarus. My answer is there was no positive influence. Maydan is not a good example for Belarus and it even helps Lukashenka.

Will the opposition remain united? There may be conflicts and problems ahead of us, but there are currently no people, who would argue against further unification and consolidation of the opposition. We must keep working together.

## SESSION II: Prognosis of situation development after the election

- **Jakub Boratyński (Batory Foundation):** The next session will be devoted to prognoses of situation development. I agree with the remark of one of the discussants that it would be a mistake to focus excessively on the question how many people will come tomorrow to the Square. It will not determine everything. We really hoped that Vincuk Viacorka would join us, as he was released from prison yesterday. Unfortunately, he could not come. I talked to him over the phone. He estimated that around 400 people had been arrested, but he also told us to remember that nothing ends and everything has just started. In his opinion repressions show that Lukashenka is really

afraid. There are four panelists at the table. I would like Mr. Yaroslav Romanchuk, an analyst, economist and opposition politician, to take the floor first. What is your opinion as to what will happen in the nearest and in more distant future? Will this miracle of appointing a common opposition's presidential candidate be lasting? I am an optimist here, but... I am curious whether you share this optimism.

- **Yaroslav Romanchuk (Analytical Center 'Strategy', Minsk):** Poland is a leader as far as understanding Belarusian matters is concerned. We would like the European policy towards Belarus to be the policy which is conducted by Warsaw.

That the coalition was created is not a miracle, but an effect of good work of political parties and NGOs, which really required a great deal of courage. Politicians and party activists without doubt want the coalition to survive, to become stronger and to be the center of democratic changes. All the credit for gathering 30 thousand people in the October Square on 19 March goes to the political parties, to the coalition and to their leaders. It will be a principal task of the coalition to make the only party, which is not yet a member of the coalition, join it. I am talking here about the Social Democratic Party and its leader, Mr. Kazulin, who also was an opposition's presidential candidate. Indeed, there are some different opinions on what Milinkevich's and Kazulin's function should be now. Creating one more coalition is an alternative solution.

During a meeting between Kazulin and Milinkevich yesterday, the latter's closest collaborator Mr. Karniyenka was beaten in front of his own house. The regime does a lot to make such a coalition impossible. Milinkevich and Kazulin must rise above party differences. There are tactical problems between the two staffs, but I have not noticed any ideological differences. Our Western colleagues could help us now by mediating in the dialogue, as unity is the key to the victory of democracy in Belarus. Every other political configuration would be a step backwards. This is why it is also an appeal to Polish diplomats – they should participate in the dialogue and help the Belarusian democratic opposition to work out a strategy, so that it could become the only

center of the country's democratization. We must make Lukashenka believe that we are a significant force and that we can take over the power in the country.

There is a dilemma – should Milinkevich and the coalition act within the boundaries of law? Should we take more radical steps on 25 March or 26 April, when many people will gather in the Chernobyl Square? After all, we cannot say that Milinkevich won the election. Our task now is to reach the people and tell them what happened, to explain to them that the opposition does not want destabilization and that it does not propose to follow the Ukrainian scenario. As a matter of fact, Ukraine is not a good example for Belarus. Despite of the fact that we reached far more people than in the previous elections, we still have to organize an informational campaign. Perhaps we will be able to force the authorities to organize presidential elections earlier than in five years.

Lukashenka stole our electoral platform; he wants to appeal to business and businessmen, although there are only 180 thousand of them in Belarus. The coalition has a great potential and Lukashenka loses public support. He has new opponents. One more factor is important – Lukashenka's cheating on Russia. He publicly offended Russia for a third time, because he promised to sell Beltransgaz and promised to allow Russian capital into Belarus. However, no agreement has been signed so far. There are people in Russia who earn a lot of money in Belarus, and as long as Lukashenka's lobbying in Russia remains strong, Putin will not criticize him in public. I doubt, however, that Russia will agree to any fundamental changes.

Russia now chairs the G8 Group. If it has an ambition to be a European country, it should be confronted with the Belarusian problem. The human rights question should be raised. There are instruments the West could use to influence Russia and to influence Belarus. I would like to remind you that the previous Polish government wanted to conduct a policy towards Belarus that would be similar to the German one and now it has different, stronger arguments when discussing with the West. Which policy will be effective? Sanctions could be effective, but not those directed against 7 people, but against 7 thousand people – all those who make orders to arrest opposition's

activists and who harass them. We should also make Ukraine and Turkey introduce a ban of entry for this group of people. About 200–300 students will be expelled from universities and we must help them. We must also aid those who will lose their jobs due to an engagement in the opposition's activity. If the opposition offered jobs to these people, it would be realpolitik, and not Deutsche Welle.

We will also need support for information agencies and political parties. We cannot rule out the possibility that they will have to go underground. The EU must make its policy towards Belarus more concrete. Poland has something to say in this matter, because Polish opposition also was once an underground movement. You can make the EU partners aware of what implications it has. Polish political parties have partners in Belarus and if the government cannot help, cooperation between parties should be established, as well as between NGOs. Polish NGOs have wide experience in this field. The Western money should not, however, be used to create new groups, which would have nothing in common with the rest of the opposition, because it would hurt the opposition's unity and prolong the longevity of the regime. We, the opposition, are against economic sanctions. We would not be able to explain to the citizens why sanctions were introduced. Time is on our side – Lukashenka's policy has hurt the economy so much that in 12 months it will be in such a disastrous state that far more people will come to share our views. Situation, where 13–14% of our GDP is created due to Russian help is impossible to maintain. Russia wants Belarus to become a part of Russia, which is why it is going to invest in its Yanukovich. We must understand that unity on NGOs' and political parties' level will be the basis for a victory in Belarus not five years from now, but much sooner.

- **Jakub Boratyński:** Thank you. I would like to comment on what you said in the beginning and in the end. A very important test lies now ahead of Poland, because for the first time it seems that we possess funds big enough to coordinate the activity so that the unification process of the Belarusian opposition will not be hurt.

- **Adam Eberhardt (Polish Institute of International Affairs):** It was the principal aim of the opposition to become known to the Belarusian society, to shatter the impression that there is no alternative for the rule of Lukashenka. The Belarusian democratic forces must build foundations, which will be the basis for future democratic changes. It requires an evolution in two domains – mobilizing the adamantly anti-presidential electorate and winning the society's favor. The first of these two goals is easier for the opposition to be achieved. A demonstration of 15 thousand people in the October Square constitutes a considerable progress, if compared to the demonstrations in the last year. This is, however, not enough to upset the regime. It is more difficult to achieve the second goal. Due to macroeconomic stability social discontent is low, and in result the support for Lukashenka is stable. An opposition which comes to a square to convince people that it was supported not by 6% of voters, like the authorities informed, but by around 30–35%, fights a lost battle. I believe the biggest success of the opposition during this election was promoting its leader, Ayaksandr Milinkevich. The opposition has to have a face that people recognize, as it is then easier to shatter the impression that there is no alternative for the rule of Lukashenka. I would like to turn your attention to analogies between the Belarusian opposition and Serbian opposition during the rule of Milosevic. Appointing a common presidential candidate (Vojislav Kostunica, who was not a very well known figure at that time) was the beginning of the opposition's march towards victory.

The march will probably last long in Belarus. It seems that the authorities are strong, and contrary to the popular belief, increasing the scale of repressions before the elections was not a sign of panic. It was rather a sign of caution. Lukashenka knows that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Professor Pełczyński asked whether the authorities' activity was rational. I say that it was rational. If the election had been more democratic, Lukashenka would have won anyway, but the long-term consequences could have been disastrous for him. If the opposition had strengthened its position, it could have brought problems for Lukashenka five years later. This is why the

Belarusian president will do anything to, as he announced during the campaign, annihilate the opposition completely. I turn your attention to the fact that the authorities' principal way of fighting the opposition is to negate its existence. This is a very effective method. It is no accident that the opposition's candidate received officially 6% of votes in this election, while five years ago it was as much as 15% and the elections five years ago were objectively a defeat for the opposition. This is an attempt to convince the society that there might have been an opposition once, but it no longer exists at present.

As far as the international factor is concerned, our capability to influence the situation in Belarus is very limited. Economic sanctions against Belarus are out of question, because they would affect mainly the society. This could strengthen the regime, like it happened in Cuba. Refusing to give European visas to the regime's representatives is a most welcome solution, although it has a purely symbolic meaning. The desirable activity of the West should be focused on long-term actions, aimed at strengthening civil society in Belarus. The flagship project at the moment is to create a radio station. I remain quite skeptical in this matter. We live in the times of an omnipotent television. You must be a convinced follower of the opposition to make the effort to find in the short waves an opposition's radio station among a dozen other radio stations and to listen to it. It is of course not difficult to prepare a list of desirable actions the West could undertake. I would include here financing anti-regime organizations, organizing a system of scholarships for students, introducing visa facilitations and facilitations for seasonal workers. The problem is that Lukashenka is going to counter all the initiatives aimed at intensifying the relations of the Belarusian society with Europe.

I believe that Russia is the main threat for the longevity of the regime. It is true that Kremlin supports Lukashenka, who is not able to turn to the West, and that the Russian support for him arises from geopolitical calculations. However, it seems that the Russian policy of giving Lukashenka unconditional support in exchange for his void declarations comes to an end. I expect Russia will exert much more consistent pressure, as far as energy industry is concerned.

It could for example demand more intensively for Beltransgaz to be privatized. Russian's accession to the World Trade Organization will also be an important factor here. Consequently, Belarus will lose its position in the Russian market. Belarusian exports will be driven out from the Russian market by Chinese, American and European goods. This will constitute a danger for economic stability of Belarus and will make the society's standard of living deteriorate. An increase of the natural gas's price, already announced by Russia, could also have a disastrous impact on the Belarusian economy. If the price of the natural gas rises from \$50 to \$200 for a thousand cubic meters, it will result in 3 billion dollars of additional expenses in the Belarusian budget. Political concessions and allowing Russian enterprises to participate in privatization of Belarusian companies may be an alternative solution for Lukashenka. Nevertheless, in the long term it could upset the stability of the Belarusian regime.

If there are changes to be expected in Belarus, they will be driven by external factors, mainly those that have to do with Russia. Sooner or later they will undermine Belarusian economic stability. Consequently, it will mobilize the society and cause a decrease of the president's popularity. At that moment it will be important for the opposition to remain united around one leader. Only all of these factors combined together can cause significant changes.

I would also like to refer to what Yaroslav Romanchuk said. I disagree with the opinion that Russia can be an instrument of the policy towards Belarus. Moscow has categorically rejected such a possibility and has shown a consistency in this matter, which the West lacks. I believe rather that Belarus could be an instrument in the Western democracies' policy towards Russia. We should convince our Western partners that president's Putin attitude towards a possible democratization of Belarus is the touchstone of his intentions to build the Common European Home.

- **Robert Tyszkiewicz (leader of the Parliamentary Group for Solidarity with Belarus):** I would like to focus on what we were able to do for Belarus. We have really wanted to create permanent, not temporary institutions. The institutions would consistently work to support

democratization of our eastern neighbor. I am convinced that such an activity will require a lot of persistence, but – firstly – there is a consensus between PO and PiS as far as eastern policy is concerned and – secondly – Belarus is currently a cool subject. Just look how many leaders of political parties deal with Belarusian issues.

Let me now present Polish institutions that deal with Belarus. Firstly, there is the Parliamentary Group for Solidarity with Belarus. Secondly, there also is an Interdepartmental Group appointed in the Prime Minister's Office. It is a kind of an equivalent of the Parliamentary Group. In my opinion it is still in its initial phase. The Interdepartmental Group will coordinate and assess the government's activity aimed at supporting democratization processes not only in the East. Collaboration between the Parliamentary Group and the Interdepartmental Group is good. The Interdepartmental Group has a program; we are working on our program, although we have been active only since a month. Finally, at last there are funds – 85 million zloties were assigned in the budget and they are to be spent after consulting the Interdepartmental Group. NGOs can apply for the money, but it can also be spent by the Polish government, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is not much, but it constitutes a foundation for further actions. Various experiences show that using this funds and appropriate procedures must be regulated.

In my opinion Polish policy towards Belarus should be active in three domains: information, education and direct help. It seems we can conduct a policy in all the three dimensions, which will be in harmony with the EU and with the Polish national interest. I believe it was a characteristic feature of the Polish policy towards Belarus so far that it was merely reacting to the development of situation in Belarus. There was no concrete vision of this policy. As far as information projects are concerned, it is necessary to support free media, and as far as educational projects are concerned, scholarships are needed. There is also another slowly emerging project. It is what I call an 'eastern Viadrina', i.e. a European University on the eastern borders of the EU. It could be a place where the youth from Poland, Lithuania, candidate countries and the youth from Belarus could study together. It seems to be an interesting idea. There should

also be direct help, something like a shadow action. The Belarusian opposition may be forced to go underground and we must know how to help them. We want the Polish Sejm to be a leader among the European countries as far as Belarusian issues are concerned. We are planning to organize a parliamentary conference within the next month. We would like to invite groups from other countries, which are similar to our Group. We would like to work out a kind of a roadmap, so that we could have several common domains of activity.

As we start to work on this very difficult issue, we have an impression that the whole help program will require a special law. As I observe the difficulties in spending money, I have serious doubts whether these 85 million will be well used due to limitations concerning the procedures themselves. Because of the problems with the procedures a special law, a Polish 'democracy act', seems to be really necessary. We should talk about it simply to be efficient. These are the two most important projects we are currently working on. I would not like, however, to bore you with stories about the Parliament's problems; the Parliament is rather disintegrated at the moment.

- **Jakub Boratyński:** Thank you, I would like to use to privilege to give floor to panelists and I would like to speak myself. In my opinion it was very interesting to hear about the initiatives the Sejm undertakes. Allow me to supplement what has just been said with what the NGOs know. A sum of 85 million zloties is an enormous step forward, but we must remember that this is the whole Polish help program, which includes also the members of CIS and non-European countries. We are really talking about a dozen or so million zloties for Belarus. Anyway, it will be considerable funds. At the moment the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working on general guidelines, which will determine how the money will be spent. About 40 Polish NGOs, which work primarily in the East and which form the Foreign Countries Group, prepared their commentary. We all have a common task. Not a penny has been spent from the money so far, although three months have already passed. Many procedures must be initiated, in fact we must invent them. I would like to ask the last speaker, Mr. Paweł Kazanecki, to take the floor.

• **Paweł Kazanecki (Eastern European Democratic Centre):** I would like to start by issuing a denial. Contrary to what was written in yesterday's 'Sovetskaya Belarus', I am not and I am not indenting, as for now, to be an employee of the Batory Foundation. As I was accused of corrupting the opposition, I would like to focus on the subject of supporting the Belarusian opposition. It seems to me that the situation in Belarus has changed. For the first time in the last ten years the situation in Belarus was unpredictable. The opposition was able to take over initiative for the first time and it had always been the government that had the initiative since 1996. I would like to remind you that in the last several years 2 thousand people were arrested: former factories' directors, officials. They were the main enemy, while the opposition was on the sidelines. Currently, the situation has changed. It was changed by the Congress of Democratic Forces in October last year. I believe the authorities no longer know how to react since the Congress. The easiest method is to remain silent and it has been noted that the authorities try to pass over the fact that a new leader of the opposition – Mr. Milinkevich – has emerged. Nevertheless, this silence was broken.

I would also like to turn your attention to the fact that the Belarusian society expressed its opinions openly for the first time, in spite of the fact that the authorities introduced very severe restrictions, e.g. 5 years of prison for contacting foreign media, 3 years of prison for participating in activity of an unregistered organization. One should not forget the speech of the chief of the Belarusian special forces. He threatened that people calling Belarusians to participate in mass demonstrations will be sentenced to more than ten years of prison. He also threatened that such appeals will be treated like terrorist activity. Despite this unfavorable atmosphere and an increased control within enterprises, lots of Belarusians nevertheless came to the streets. It was group of about 20–30 thousand people. Yet another unpredictable element.

On the election day I had an opportunity to meet with analysts from many countries, who observed the situation in Belarus. We estimated that there would be from 3 to 50 thousand demonstrators. It is a success that so many

people came to the Square. We mustn't forget that many voters also came to meetings with Milinkevich. Several hundred people came to a meeting in Liga, and there are no organizations of the opposition in the city. 6 thousand people came to rally in Gomel, and there have been no mass gathering in the city for 10 years or maybe even since 1991. It all means that something is starting to change. The opinion that the Belarusian society supports Lukashenka is no longer current. Of course, I don't want to say that the support for the opposition is so strong that Lukashenka will disappear within a week or so. Nevertheless, it is sure that a long term process started with the elections. We will watch its finale not in a month, but in two or three years.

A very difficult process of strengthening its organization lies ahead of the opposition after the election, but it now has a new face, which is recognized throughout Europe. It is a remarkable asset. President Lukashenka has been so far the only widely recognizable Belarusian politician. It must be said clearly: the current Belarusian regulations force the opposition to go underground. There are political parties, which are still legal, but they all have already received documents warning them not to undertake some actions, because otherwise they will be dissolved. NGOs are in a similar position, they are paralyzed with fear after the December decrees were introduced. Only a unified and united opposition, which will have the courage to go underground, will remain. Only courageous people, who will not be afraid to be arrested or to be punished for every word and every deed, will remain. They may be treated by the Belarusian society as a worse part of the society. In Poland it was prestigious to be a member of the opposition, it is not like that in Belarus. In Belarus it is prestigious to belong to the militia – those, who beat the others. People, who were in the Square, decided to do so, despite the fact that they were not accepted by the inhabitants of Minsk.

I would like now to discuss what should the European Community do and, above all, what we, the Poles, should do. I believe the Polish government cannot act alone, it cannot assume that it will send some kind of romantic missionaries to overthrow Lukashenka.

Poland must consider a long-term policy towards the Lukashenka regime. It is important to arrange this policy together with countries like Germany. Germany has a different vision of the situation development in the region, but we are not able to coordinate and conduct a long term eastern policy without them. France should also join this group, because it starts to understand that Russia is not necessarily a fan of the European Union and its long-term partner. As far as choosing the right kind of help is concerned, I agree with Mr. Robert Tyszkiewicz. I believe that access to free information is most important for Belarus at the moment. We know faster what happened in a square in Minsk than the Belarusian society. This is why we have to support independent media, and above all newspapers, which are often published illegally. Secondly, we have to help radio stations – radio stations broadcasting their programs to Belarus in Russian and Belarusian are really a priority. It is easy to deliver an information through radio. It is much harder to prepare a TV program in Belarus, because cameras is almost immediately confiscated by the militia.

The Belarusian opposition operates in very difficult conditions, which is why it is essential that we support it. We should provide funds for those who fall victim to repressions and to those who must pay fines for their political activity. We should organize scholarships for students who are and will be expelled from universities. This is the kind of help we can really offer them. We must also show that we will not cooperate with those who collaborate with the authorities. It is important that organizations like Belarusian Patriotic Youth Alliance are not financed with European money, as it often happens. In fact sometimes our money is used to put ideological pressure against the Belarusian society.

- **Konrad Szymański (European Parliament):** I am sorry, I promised not to speak in this panel, but I changed my mind. We missed one thing, which by the way often escapes our attention. I believe that we, the Poles and the Europeans, agree as to the things that must be done as soon as possible. It is financial and organizational help for political parties, NGOs and media that is needed. The only problem is

to determine the scale of this help. It is most important, however, to show the Belarusians a place they can head to as a country. It was obvious for us that we belong to the West. It is not so obvious for them. Many people in the West believe that there is no place for Belarus among the Western countries. We must promote the possibility of a new EU enlargement, we must show the Belarusians a way they could go, mentally and politically. The most important question is to create an impression that someone in Europe waits for them. Their road to freedom will not end quickly, if there is no such a perspective. Pardon my pessimism, but this is a very urgent question.

- **Jakub Boratyński:** Thank you very much for your statement. I would like to remind you that the Batory Foundation has been promoting the concept of a unilateral action plan. The plan would show what the EU could do, if there was a change in Belarus.

- **Ryszard Bobrowski (Central European Review):** I have a question concerning collaboration of opposition's politicians. In a similar discussion two weeks ago two accusations were formed and none of them was really explained. They both concern Kazulin – he is allegedly a puppet of Moscow or of Lukashenka. Has it been explained? Will it have an impact on the further unification of the opposition?

- **Dmitry Solovev:** I believe mass media are most important for Belarus at present, and this statement specially concerns television. Only television can quickly transfer information to the whole society. I doubt the efficiency of radio-based projects. I believe they don't have the desired effect.

- **Zbigniew Pełczyński:** I must admit the tone of this debate is really depressive. A rather strange vision of Belarus emerges from what we say. On one hand there are the authorities, which controls the society brutally, on the second hand there is the opposition... Well, what about those in the middle? Shouldn't we think about all those ordinary people, who have lots of problems, including financial difficulties? We should also think about them because there is a lot of indifference among the ordinary peo-



ple and helplessness among the opposition. Is there a way to mobilize the civic activity, but not in the form of activity within opposition? I am sure there are many people who would like to help the drug addicts or the disabled. It seems that there is no 'third way' for them.

- **Elżbieta Smułkowa (the first ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Belarus):** We heard here today that Belarus has changed, but also our level of knowledge about Belarus changed. It's been a long time since the last debate where I could accept statements of all panelists. I believe it is optimistic that we start to understand the country. It was very difficult for us to express our opinions concerning the Belarusian issues. Professor Pełczyński provoked my reaction. A 'third way' is not possible in such conditions, because it will be either subdued to the authorities or it will be treated as an element of opposition. I believe potential help should centre around providing information and financial help, but not necessarily through official channels. I decided to speak due to one fundamental reason. My former students were arrested in the Square. I have a letter from them from 22 March. They declare what their political stance is, and they quote how the mass media treat them. I am going to read it, although there are some personal tones in the letter.

'We would like to ask you a request. We address you not as a former ambassador in Belarus, but as an enthusiastic person, who loves our country. We would like to ask you for help. We are not 'drunken dissenters', as the Russian mass media present us. We came to the streets together with our parents and children. We are normal Belarusians, who cannot keep living in terror and oppression. Yesterday our colleague, Dmitry Hurnevich, was arrested. He was a fifth year student of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, a Belarusian from Nalibocka Forest with Polish roots. Polish deputy Jarosław Jagiełła, Belarusian student Tatyana Khoma and people from Ayaksandr Milinkevich's staff, Mr. Dobrovolsky and Mr. Lebedzka, were arrested. Hundreds of other Belarusians were arrested for participating in an illegal meeting. This is why we ask you today to mobilize your friends, who can do something for those people to be released.

Don't let us strangle to death. We believe in you and we await your help. Yours sincerely, your Belarusians'.

I did what I could. I believe even the fact that you heard about it matters. I received a confirmation from the vice-chancellor's office of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University that a resolution was adopted to enroll students who had been expelled. If a student is not released soon, they will try to do something about it, maybe through the Polish embassy, although he is not a Polish citizen. Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz said that there will be funds available to educate in Poland students expelled from Belarusian universities. The Warsaw University also starts to enroll these students.

- **A voice from the audience:** In my opinion it is an exaggeration to say that there are more demonstrators in Minsk. Perhaps there are more of them, which would be heart-warming, but if you take under consideration that Minsk has 2 million inhabitants, then Lukashenka can remain calm as long as 100 thousand people don't come to the streets. We must open the boundary, not only for the students, but also for those who want to work in Poland. If somebody comes here, he will never again become an enthusiastic follower of Lukashenka.

- **Jakub Boratyński:** I would like to ask the panelists to take floor.

- **Paweł Kazanecki:** The most important thing is that today in the night a new ethos of the Belarusian opposition was born. It is based on the fact that there was a tent camp like Maydan in the October Square and that many followers of the opposition remained there to the very end. As far as the EU policy is concerned, my organization received last year a 'Belarusian' grant from a new EU financial project. We also received a letter that our project should be registered by the Belarusian authorities, because otherwise we will not be able to spend this money in Belarus. So much for the uniformity of the EU policy.

- **Robert Tyszkiewicz:** Polish Sejm adopted three resolutions concerning Belarus since the Parliamentary Group was founded. There was only one resolution in the whole previous term

of the Sejm. Today a resolution was adopted on the violation of human and citizen rights, which concerns using force against the participants of the protest in Minsk, as well as a resolution on assessment of the elections. Sejm explicitly deemed the Belarusian elections' results falsified. We can also see the unbelievable energy of the Polish youth, which also becomes engaged in the Belarusian matters. I believe that this is a new Polish-Belarusian neighborhood, which emerges due to this common fight for freedom.

- **Adam Eberhardt:** I am an optimist as far as long-term trends are concerned. A process of changes has started, although there is a long road ahead of the Belarusian democratic forces. Allow me one sentence of commentary to what Mr. Konrad Szymański said. I believe that we cannot expect bold declarations from the EU, if one takes into consideration its current internal situation. However, Ukraine could contribute to strengthening pro-European tendencies in Belarus. A possible success of the Ukrainian transformation would be a considerable element influencing the views of the Belarusian society.

As to what Mr. Yaroslav Romanchuk said: if the EU says that Belarus is an issue that should be decided upon only together with Russia, it proves that the Union does not want to have a common policy towards Belarus.

As to Kazulin's role: there were various rumors, but his own statements are most important here. I think that Lukashenko would never allow statements that attacked his government so strongly. Kazulin's campaign was weak, much weaker than Milinkevich, but the fact that he was beaten by OMON proves that he

is an independent player. Kazulin is a bit similar to Lukashenka, because he also thinks he is a Messiah. He kept repeating: 'Lukashenka did something for Belarus, but the opposition is not capable to do anything new and I am a new face'. He may have an image, but he has no political platform. We managed to build a coalition of not only political parties, but also of experts who can elaborate a program of changes for Belarus. In July last year we prepared a book 'Belarus, the Road to the Future' to be published, but printing houses refused to print it. The book was written by many Belarusian scientists. When I talk to ministers over coffee or beer, they agree with our proposals, but officially they would never admit we are right. Indeed, Belarus is already a different country, but there is a long road ahead of us.

- **Jakub Boratyński:** There is one thing I would like to say in the end. We should exploit the fact that Belarus is fashionable to do something concrete. I feel we suffered a considerable defeat. It is true that we were able to show important gestures of solidarity in the last weeks, but Poland unfortunately was not able to create a radio, which would be heard in the Square in Minsk. I hope that we will be able to cooperate with NGOs, with the government, and that we will be able to achieve something together. A big thank you to all our guests from Belarus, who had problems to come here, but nevertheless they made it. Some didn't make it; representatives of the Kazulin's staff were simply arrested and there wasn't anyone else whom they could send here, their organization is smaller. Thank you very much.

*Edited by: Wojciech Konończuk*

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES OF THE PANELISTS

### • SYARHEY ALFER

Lawyer, human rights activist. Member of Ayaksander Milinkevich's electoral staff. Member of the United Civic Party since 1996; in 2002 he was chosen its deputy chairman. In the years 1990–1995 he was a member of the Belarusian National Front. He co-founded the Lev Sapieha Foundation. Since 1998 he has been a member of the civic organization Belarusian Center for Constitutionalism and Comparative Legal Studies. He specializes in electoral law.

### • ALES DZIKAVITSKY

Journalist. Since 1998 he has worked in the Radio 'Svaboda' Belarusian service. He has been a correspondent in Poland for 4 years. Previously he was a social activist and editor-in-chief of a local newspaper "Pravintsyalka". He founded a newspaper in Polish about Belarus, 'Belarusian Accent'.

### • ADAM EBERHARDT

Political scientist. Program coordinator in the Polish Institute of International Affairs. He specializes in Eastern European issues. In the years 2001–2002 he was a permanent correspondent of the Polish Press Agency in Moscow; he participated in many OSCE missions in Central and Eastern Europe.

### • ANDRES HERKEL

Estonian politician. Since 1999 he has been a member of the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu) from the Pro Patria Union party. He is the head of a special parliamentary commission 'Defending the democratic development of Belarus'. Chairperson of the Council of Europe Sub-Committee on Belarus. Previously he was a lecturer of the Estonian Institute of Humanities, as well as an editor of 'Eesti Elu'/'Kultuur ja Elu' and 'Vikerkaar'. He studied psychology. He is the author of, among others: 'Myth and Thinking', 'History is Rich' and many articles published in both Estonian and international press.

### • PAWEŁ KAZANECKI

Chairman of the Eastern European Democratic Centre. Previously he coordinated the Belarusian program in the IDEE Foundation (Warsaw) and was an expert of the OSI Belarusian program (Paris). Since the middle of the 1990s he has cooperated with non-governmental organizations and oppositional media from Belarus. Author of many publications about Belarus and Belarusian third sector.

### • YAROSLAV ROMANCHUK

Political scientist. Deputy chairman of the United Civic Party. He participated in working out of Ayaksander Milinkevich's electoral platform. Head of the Analytical Centre 'Strategy'. In the years 1997–2002 he was executive director and deputy editor-in-chief of the 'Byelaruskaya Gazeta' weekly. In the years 1995–1997 he worked for the Center of Strategic Initiatives 'East-West'.

### • ROBERT TYSZKIEWICZ

Member of the Polish Parliament (Sejm) from the Civic Platform party. Since January 2003 he has been the chairman of Civic Platform city board in Białystok. Chairman of the Parliamentary Group for Solidarity with Belarus. In the years 1990–1992 he was an editor in the 'Białystok Weekly' and of a documentary monthly 'Plus'. Since 1992 he has a founder and director of 'Publikator' publishing house.

### • WOJCIECH STANISŁAWSKI

Analyst, specialist in Russian history. He works in the Center for Eastern Studies. He has recently published a book 'The Orange Ribbon. A Calendar of the political crisis in Ukraine autumn 2004'. In December 2004 he was one of the coordinators of the Polish Observatory Mission in Ukraine during the last round of the presidential elections. He also was an OSCE observer of the elections in Belarus.