



*Dmitry Linkov has obtained a degree in history at F. Skorina Gomel State University (Belarus) and has taught history at school. In 2008, he obtained a Master's Degree at the European Humanities University in Vilnius (Lithuania). Dmitry Linkov is a member of the Belarusian Christian Democratic Party.*

*Leonid Zaiko, Director of the Analytical Centre Strategy, Minsk.*

*The author is Associated Professor and leading Belarusian Economist. Leonid Zaiko has taught at universities in China, Germany, Russia, the Ukraine, USA and Uzbekistan. He has published numerous articles and several monographs.*

## DEMOCRACY ENDS WHERE ELECTIONS BEGIN

A brief flirt with democracy, a show-off by Alexander Lukashenka has ended spectacularly on December 19, 2010, the day of the Presidential elections. If there were any illusions about a democratic path of the current regime, brutal force on the October Square and subsequent victimisations of a free society have forced them to vanish. It is obvious, that the Belarusian developmental path and approach of the international society towards the regime will once again have to change. So what could be the mid-term scenarios for the development in Belarus? Are there any scenarios but one?

In the current issue of *Bell*, Leonid Zaiko, Director of the Analytical Centre *Strategy* in Minsk, addresses these questions. According to him, economic climate of the country is the key factor for further development. Not surprisingly, scenarios that are outlined in the Kremlin have the biggest chance of "success". Especially as the Russian economy levers on Belarus are steadily gaining complete dominance. The only alternative, the so called *European scenario*, for the time being is somewhat bifurcational.

The author outlines two possible paths: the "traditional European" of condemnation and isolation and the "counter-attack by the Kremlin". The later means keeping distance from the institutions of regime and intensifying co-operation and support to the society. In either case, before any of them becomes a reality, the EU will have to address its past mistakes to begin with.

In the second article, Dmitry Linkov develops a historian's approach. He makes a provocative statement that Lukashenka's regime is inevitably approaching a state of totalitarian dictatorship. The author then introduces several historical parallels with other regimes and dictators of the past. Finally, Dmitry Linkov reminds us of a historical truth – the increase of the repression apparatus always indicates no more, but a weakening position of the authoritarian leader or even the regime itself. In the light of this, brutal actions conducted in Belarus may be an indication of Lukashenka's weakness.

*Justinas Pimpè, Editor*

## CONTENTS

### DEMOCRACY ENDS WHERE ELECTIONS BEGIN

Justinas Pimpè, Editor

1

### BELARUS: WAY OUT OF THE "KREMLIN TRAP"

Leonid Zaiko, The Analytical Centre Strategy

1

### BELARUS: A "TOTALITARIAN TURN" AS REALITY?

Dmitry Linkov  
Historian, Gomel

5

## BELARUS: WAY OUT OF THE "KREMLIN TRAP"

*The beginning of 2011 reveals a new political and economic entity in the country. The engaging phase of democratic experiments involving internal and external actors has come to an end. At the same time, the country is exiting the active phase of the development of relations with the EU, and the process of moving along the European vector is coming to a halt. What will happen next?*

*Leonid Zaiko*

*The Analytical Centre Strategy*

### A brief assessment and reassessment of the situation in Belarus

The elections in Belarus essentially followed Vladimir Putin's scenario. Therein is the amazing formula of a small European country. External acceleratory scenarios turn out to be effective, while

immanent developments, particularly the oppositional ones, soon become flunked and remain unimplemented.

Since 2006 Russia has developed many scenarios that afterwards physically took place in Belarus. This has been accurately and covertly done in the political and economic sphere. The starting point may be attributed to the first conflict in the energy sphere, viz., the termination of gas deliveries to Belarus.

## Europe seems to gradually realize the fact that it has lost in the game of alternatives of activities with Lukashenka.

The main element of the scenario is gradual inclusion of Belarus into Russia's space. Detachment from Europe came naturally into this joint action plan regarding Belarus.

Europe's politicians had their scenario, too, focused on the geopolitical perspective, viz., introduction of Belarus to the democratic belt of states both within and beyond the framework of projects like the "Eastern Partnership". Europe seems to gradually realize the fact that it has lost in the game of alternatives of activities with Lukashenka.

The main mistake is in the reassessment of the situation. The Cold War ended over 25 years ago. The USSR no longer exists, yet the geopolitical and geo-economic determinants of the past are still in operation. In this light Belarus is an "experimental version", a preserved fragment of the USSR.

"The struggle of two systems" did not come to an end in 1991. It has acquired new forms in the competition for influence in the post-Soviet space. Having regained its strength in the new century, Russia, as never before, has started to increase its pressure and activity in the countries of the former USSR.

It is in November-December 2010 that the political situation became reflexive and the monocratic dominance vanished. Both the authorities and the opposition started to converge in targeting vectors of societal development. This has given impetus to the emergence of new and modification of traditional scenarios of the movement of the society.

Within the manifold "menu" of changes, a new entity of the country's political life has shaped. Targeting was primarily concerned with the phenomenon of "choice": (a) a formula of immanent choice; (b) geopolitical scenarios, exogenous causal and probability determinations.

### **The main scenario: a formula of immanent choice**

The first perspective is immanent. How will the very political and economic system of the country develop? The political pressure and suppression of the opponents became the first phase followed by balancing of instruments of power. The situation is notable in that scenarios of internal development are aimed at the enhancement of the authority of elite leaders.

A lot is already deducible in the mid-term perspective of political reality. "Surprise", "protest against harsh actions of the authorities" on behalf of the EU is the outcome of theoretical errors. Standard theses regarding the necessity of democratization were translated into the thesis of "governed democracy" in the Russia-Belarus space.

If for Putin this thesis had a substantive moment, viz., "democracy", for Belarus the situation was reminiscent of the times 30-40 years ago. As in the Soviet times and without any hesitation, Belarus' leadership insisted on the prevalence of democratic processes in Belarus.

Alexander Lukashenka as well as his (provisional) supporters and aides were taken aback when, during the election campaign, liberal statements were disseminated at national TV channels. Actually, there neither are, nor have been, any others.

Meanwhile democracy extended its limited framework in October-November 2010. The time was approaching for both practical results and political action aimed at changing the political situation in the country. Yet, although the authoritarian regime was by no means eliminated, the fundamental dictatorship cracked. Slowly and very carefully odious forms of administrative management began to level down, accompanied by a certain portion of doubt.

All this was swiftly superseded by a new phase of Belarus' political and economic development, which is very interesting in many respects. The power itself began to adapt to the dialogue situation, even though temporarily, awkwardly and inconsistently.

This is revealed by the formation of the new composition of the government, which does not show any sign of renewal. Prime Minister Mikhail Miasnikovich personifies a generation which has already become a thing of the past in Russia and Ukraine: the generation of the political establishment dating back to the times of the collapse of the USSR.

### **Economic determination**

All development scenarios of Belarus are apparently stuck on the economic climate of the country.

We now have to find out how the country started off in the beginning of 2011. In 2010 its GDP was estimated at about 54 bln. dollars with a growth of +7.6% of final sales of goods and services. The country was also characterized by negative net exports close to -9 bln dollars, while one month until the end of the year Belarus' export comprised as little as 22 bln. dollars.

Of course, discussions on the factors of growth in 2010 varied. Politicians sought good results; the end of the year was marked by the elections. Anticipating the elections, the government had to drive out the results, especially in the sphere of earnings gain of the population. As a consequence, in nominal terms, salaries increased by 21.7%, which was accompanied by substantial growth in money supply. Its M2 grew by 27.2%.

Is this much or little? The GDP growth was 4 times as slow; strictly speaking, money-supply rates were to be lower. But the public sector witnessed an intentional increase in salaries (up to +35%) and retirement benefits (up to 10%). As a necessity (?), an additional 25.2% of cash money (MO) alone was released for circulation.

Towards 2011, the scenario of devaluation of the Belarusian ruble emerged, which is natural given the GDP growth by 7 points and the amount of money in the hands of the population increasing by 25%. The country has reached the stage in which exports and imports need to be balanced. This is

Russia's scenario is constructed in such a way that, after the elections and condemnation of everything that has happened, Lukashenka has only one alternative for taking action, i.e., following Russia's course.

why the year 2011 has to become the year of balancing income and expenses across the country. The population will have to save more, which will not be an easy task many social groups. Virtually all social groups and strata have to consume less and save more. This is especially so given the fact that in 2011 there is no more political need for massive increase in earnings.

#### Sort-term scenarios with a geopolitical component

Considering all the ambivalence of the situation, there are no grounds to believe that external geopolitical factors have gained strategic importance for the economic and social system of the country. Depending on the phase, their influence may grow or weaken. Belarusian researchers and experts have always carefully weighed exogenous factors.

The predictability of the situation is complicated by the fact that the Kremlin and Brussels have never synchronized their positions with respect to Belarus.

In practical terms this means that further scenarios of the development of events have two formats: *Russian and European*. Joint action will not take place. Russia does not need Europeans in the sphere of influence and responsibility of the Kremlin.

#### "Russia's scenario"

Over the past 5 years the Russian version of deterring Belarus within the orbit of the Kremlin's policy has developed increasingly intensively.

Since 2006 Russia's real pressure on Belarus has grown significantly. The prices for the supply of gas and oil soared. Under time pressure Belarus' government made the decision about the construction of a nuclear power plant, which was perceived as an approach toward energy independence. Afterwards the Russian alternative of the project was accepted, which rendered the idea of the independent energy policy meaningless.<sup>1</sup>

The elections and related events both prior and following December 19 were in the focus of attention of the Kremlin's policy and constituted primarily Putin's concern. The alternative of Belarus' alienation from Europe was under serious development, but was implemented by Alexander Lukashenka himself, as a matter of fact, with the contribution of several oppositional politicians.

Besides, it should be noted in this respect that lingering election-related imprisonments and proceedings are to the advantage of "Eastern" scriptwriters and directors. The more protracted they are, the more the "beauty" of the political power of Belarus is demonstrated to the global community.

<sup>1</sup> After his meeting with Miasnikovich in Moscow, Putin declared that Russia's government was constructing a new nuclear power plant in Kaliningrad Oblast. An analogous construction would cost Belarus 6 bln.dollars. This is not expensive and will further prompt the Belarusian government to accept the Russian alternative.

Russia's scenario is constructed in such a way that, after the elections and condemnation of everything that has happened, Lukashenka has only one alternative for taking action, i.e., following Russia's course. The commentaries of as early as December 20 reveal the slang "the fraternal Russian people". Since then TV and mass media have been carrying on with the development of the pro-Russian theme.

The Russian scenario will be successfully implemented in the years to come, and it will be based on Russia's consistent integration in Belarus' economy and encroachment of large enterprises.

The other side of the Russian scenario is posing severe restrictions on Lukashenka himself. He no longer has the levers he used to resort to. The Nord Stream Pipeline is to be launched in 2011, and it may transfer up to 30% of gas to Germany, which is a usual share of Belarus in gas deliveries from Russia.

The third aspect is the official allocation of a subsidy of 4 billion 124 million dollars, which is assigned for Belarus on an annual basis. This was done by Putin at the meeting of Prime-Ministers of Russia and Belarus in Moscow on December 20. Putin emphasized that this was only an oil subsidy. There will be others, too.

According to the new Russian scenario, Belarus should become part of a common economic space and thus will not be able to conduct any independent negotiations or make decisions favouring the EU. This is the formula of the new customs union. Lukashenka will stay within these limits, whatever he says about sovereignty and independence.

This framework involves vertical integration, inclusion of Belarusian state corporations (with their privatization anticipated) in the network of Russian industrial corporations. Concurrently, the option of integrating dairy and meat industries in Russian holdings is under development and is largely ready for launch.

In this alternative Russia will have no competitors, even though Lukashenka has made certain promises to Chinese Communists. Nevertheless, just as in the case of Venezuela, this will move to the background. As regards Venezuelan oil and other versions of weird cooperation, such projects will be gradually fading out. Their relevance is approximating zero. Operations of the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy at the crude oil markets involving Azerbaijan and Venezuela are becoming vague.

However, it is unlikely that the Kremlin has already made its final decision regarding Lukashenka. Putin must have postponed the resolution of this issue, which since the times of the USSR and KGB has been traditionally referred to as the "personnel affairs". Recently personnel decisions have been made with respect to Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine. Meanwhile Belarus remains in the agenda of this issue.

One important comment should be made with respect to the implementation of the Russian scenario of Belarus' development. The Kremlin

In this way, we find ourselves in a peculiar field of decision-making when steps made by the West may and have already been leveled down by Russia's support.

will neither coordinate nor jointly make any of its own decisions or actions, whether it be Brussels or Washington.

Speaking the economic language, after December 19, 2010, the Kremlin has acquired a monopoly block of shares on Belarus and pays from 4 to 8 billion dollars annually to retain the country within the Kremlin's sphere of influence. This scenario will operate in the mid-term perspective with the subsequent prolongation.

#### **"The European scenario"**

For the time being one should point out that "the European scenario" is somewhat bifurcational. There is no agreed point of view, let alone a "single" viewpoint. Naturally, resolutions of the European Parliament have been adopted, as well as recommendations regarding doing business with Belarus.

In addition, let us pay attention to the fact that in Belarus those in power say nothing about the role Moscow played before and after the elections, although this is critically important. The countries that have "suffered" the most are Germany and Poland. They have been labeled by Lukashenka as the main "undermining structures" which produced the present opposition. They are the main culprits that financed the attempt to exercise coercive power in Belarus. Yet the official propaganda cannot provide any substantial evidence related to the financing of a coup d'état in Minsk, except for an abstract thesis about "money from Brussels".

Bearing in mind the adopted resolution of the European Parliament, one may envisage two main prospective scenarios:

Alternative One: **"Traditional European"**. Its essence is in the implementation of the principle "no hand-shaking", which is expressed in the condemnation of actions and the very personality of Alexander Lukashenka, as well as subjecting him and his team to ostracism. The travel ban (just as in the Soviet times), a well-known tradition for dissidents, is imposed on a fairly extensive list of Belarusian officials. Meanwhile the refusal to receive loan support loses sense given the essentially subsidiary support Belarus gets from Russia.

The economic aspect has both advantages and drawbacks. It should be pointed out that Belarus' trade relations with Germany are most sensitive given the strategically important import of machinery and equipment, as well as chemicals, from the latter. In 2010 Belarus' purchases in Germany comprised over 2 bln. dollars, which is more than in the previous year. Belarus purchases a broad spectrum of products ranging from pork and pharmaceuticals to internal combustion engines and "equipment for thermal processing of materials". Each of these import flows amounts to tens of millions of dollars. Notably, these machinery and equipment cannot be substituted for products from Russia or Venezuela.

Alternative Two: **"Kremlin's counter-attack"**. The EU opens up to Belarus even more. Visa-free

regime is introduced to all Belarusian citizens except state officials and representatives of the Belarusian regime (which is a unique practice). 4-5 thousand grants intended for study of Belarusian students in EU countries are established. Broad cooperation programs with civil society institutes are formed intensively. In comparison to the 4 bln. of Russia's assistance, Lukashenka will only need 500-600 million euros for the formation of the "new Belarus".

A few words should be mentioned with respect to the strongest alternative of the scenario of EU actions – the refusal to accept imports of Belarusian oil products. This strike is unacceptable for Belarus. Should the Kremlin stop oil deliveries, there will be nothing else to buy. Putin has verified this since 2006, which sowed panic among the Belarusian elites. By reducing oil deliveries at discount prices, Moscow has scaled down the EU share in Belarus' export to 29% from the previous 44%.

In this way, we find ourselves in a peculiar field of decision-making when steps made by the West may and have already been leveled down by Russia's support. The implementation of this Russian scenario was launched after the 2010 elections. Meanwhile there is a significant number of specific alternatives of the development of the situation in Belarus. It is the conceptual choice that matters the most. But before that let us inquire into some of the more important issues. Why has the EU lost Belarus to the Kremlin? Why have the political elites of the West frequently made "wrong steps" with respect to Belarus? Why has flirting with Belarusian authorities turned Germany and Poland into dummy figures personifying Belarus' enemies? Does the public opinion of these countries realize this as well as many other things?

Meanwhile the "Kremlin scenario" is on the agenda. If so, wouldn't it be better to say that it is not the "way out", but a way into the "Kremlin trap", for both Lukashenka and EU politicians?

Weak authorities entering the stage of agony and degeneration from within will surely resort to most extreme means of struggle.

## BELARUS: A “TOTALITARIAN TURN” AS REALITY?

*Dmitry Linkov  
Historian, Gomel*

Many readers are likely to disagree with this formulation of the issue: totalitarian regime cannot emerge in the present-day Europe, they will say. Totalitarianism dates back to the times of Stalin and Hitler, Mao and Pol Pot. I will agree: given contemporary conditions, totalitarianism cannot be rekindled in all its glory. One might try, however, particularly under the pressing circumstances.

### “The circumstances are pressing..”

The circumstances are indeed most pressing for Lukashenka. First, a remarkable reduction of the social basis of the regime has become apparent, while the president’s reaction to protest actions of the opposition only supports this fact. Strong and confident authorities enhanced with the real support of the people would not behave in this way. Weak authorities entering the stage of agony and degeneration from within will surely resort to most extreme means of struggle. There is a term: “psychological fatigue due to the long-term irremovability of the authorities”, which is exactly what we witness today. In folk terminology, one would say that they are “fed up!”

My mentioning of the “degeneration from within” is not accidental: state officials have accumulated too many illegal capitals and too much envy to their colleagues in the neighbouring countries, where the former could become regular bourgeoisie. After the “social degree” of the 90s had been beaten down and potential competitors (“lousy fleas”) pinned down, further support of Lukashenka is starting to lose sense.

Even according to the official data, the opposition received over 20% of votes – all those who had voted “against” Lukashenka may be attributed to the oppositional electorate. For the authorities the issue at stake is that for the first time the number of those “against” has become significantly great for this part of the society to begin to reproduce itself. **In other words, the struggle of the authorities with the opposition by coercive methods is nonsensical: should the present opposition be destroyed today, a new opposition will emerge tomorrow.** People who do not feel being represented in the political field are beginning to pose real threat to the regime. **Besides, there is a particular kind of people among them, viz., non-Soviet Belarusians.**

These are not content with what the present state can give them, which is understandable, for the present-day Republic of Belarus is but a “comple-

tion” of the “BSSR project”. This project has virtually exhausted its inventiveness, and what is offered to us now is but an abstraction of the “strong and prosperous Belarus”. Non-Soviet Belarusians are unwilling to take part in this construction, merely because this is “not their project”, and they do not want to be headed by the current leader. Meanwhile the “Soviets” are incapable of constructing the “strong and prosperous” Belarus, even considering their age and state of health. Their reproductive performance as a substantial part of the society is out of question. Change of generations will bring about a sharp decrease in labour capacity thus reducing the opportunities of the top authorities for enrichment by appropriating the “added value”. Therefore, the dynamism of the system as well as its ability to provide the upper crust with benefits and profits is under threat.

Finally, the system experiences increasing external pressure, both from Russia and from the West. Belarus is the last patch of the post-Soviet space between the Baltics and the Black Sea, which has not yet been divided into spheres of influence between the West and Russia. Belarus is trying to sit on two chairs. In theory, this is good, but in practice, sooner or later, the decision will have to be made. For Lukashenka the choice of either of these two sides is equally deadly, even if in the beginning he will not have to provide any political reforms. The external pressure may be stronger, or weaker; somebody of those exerting this pressure might appear as a “do-gooder” or a “bad guy”, they may have all sorts of disagreements, yet in the final analysis, they will decide: “this guy is no good, for he is incomprehensible!” In the best-case scenario, what will happen to him will be the same what happened to Moldova’s President Vladimir Voronin.

In this way, Lukashenka faces four threats. 1. Loss of public support (“We are fed up with him!”); 2. Discontent of the ruling elite (“We want to be millionaires!”); 3. External pressure “Decide who you are with!”; and the fourth, most dangerous, threat: **The unwillingness of the citizens to work well, which threatens the system with stagnation, and the elite with miserable life as compared to that of their foreign colleagues.** In other words, this is the threat of a reduction in the rate of profit, according to Grandpa Marx. Any capitalist gets richer primarily because his/her employees work well and willingly; otherwise he/she will soon go bust. If the place of the capitalist is taken by the state, as was in the USSR and has become in the Republic of Belarus, - the state goes bust. While the USSR had long been supported by oil and gas, Belarus does not have much to rely on...

Thus, there is no use in Lukashenka's reforms, regardless of how much he discusses them in public. At the same time, the current situation cannot be maintained for long either.

What can Lukashenka do in this situation? – both as an “individual politician”, for whom power has become as habitual as morning coffee for me, and as the mouthpiece of the interests of the Belarusian political establishment in general? Over the past century the society got exhausted and now feels devastated, while those who still can do something want to work for themselves, and not for “the guy from the vertical”. In 2008 in Gomel Oblast nearly 150 thousand employable citizens were not engaged in agriculture, i.e., did not work for the state. Let us assume that some of these people are housewives: the woman stays at home, and the husband earns a living. However, even if we halve the mentioned figure, we will still end up with 75 thousand citizens who earn money somewhere, but do not pay taxes and ignore the state.

Should one launch reforms, introduce normal market relations or, God forbid, democracy? This would have the same effect as if Kim Jong-il let all those willing out of the country: he would stay all by himself with his “Juche ideas”.

Lukashenka's system is reminiscent of a stone wall: excessive durability is its main drawback. Should at least one stone be knocked out, the whole wall will collapse. Meanwhile even if it is not touched at all, it will rot over time. Besides, the mere presence of the wall gives rise to those willing to knock it down, and the man is an obstinate creature; sooner or later one will succeed...

But let us return to our topic. Thus, there is no use in Lukashenka's reforms, regardless of how much he discusses them in public. At the same time, the current situation cannot be maintained for long either.

#### The only thing that is left is...

**What is left is violence!** To be more precise, a transition to a government system in which suppression of discontent will be implemented by resorting to overtly terroristic methods. This way is very likely due to the fact that it poses no problems to the authorities and does not require any significant intellectual input. As is known, bureaucracy always tends to look for simplest solutions, and the fact that, as a rule, these solutions are the most foolish, too, does not occur to it.

Given this state of affairs, the political opposition will be forced out of the limits of lawfulness, while its main leaders will be “isolated”, and regular activists will be deprived of the possibility to perform their activities due to the jawboning of the police. Oppositional organizations and mass media will simply be banned, which will be done in a most brutal way: all oppositionists will be declared enemies of the people and foreign service special agents. Several demonstration court proceedings with maximally severe sentences will be sufficient for the purpose. No regard will be given to the reaction of the world community. Besides, once selected, the repressive political course is very hard to be changed. Stalin might have been quite happy to stop back in 1937, but he was already led by the *logic of the process*. Upon subjecting the political

arena to thorough cleansing, Lukashenka will resolve another yet more important task than elimination of the potential leaders of the “rebellious masses”: he will drive these masses into bodily fear. This will be the fear of appearing in the line – for an interrogation, a house-check, arrest, or termination of employment. Articles like “Treason against the State”, “Discredit of the Republic of Belarus”, and “Conspiracy with the goal of usurping power” will be amply used. Dear reader, indeed they will! In this respect semi-measures are dangerous for the ruler himself.

Fear has to be constantly fed, and therefore enemies will be invented, while the repressive fist will come down on regular citizens. The “non-Soviet Belarusians”, those very 20 %, will be the first to suffer. After that the rest will be scrutinized. **At this moment the goal will be not so much to drive everybody into fear, but to make them work without any let-up.** They will be forced to construct the “strong and prosperous” republic, the one intended for “the people”. We even know what the name of this “people” is...

Meanwhile the logic of the process will require that further steps be made to “discipline” not only the “masses”, but the ruling elite as well, lest it hesitate or stop halfway through the selected path toward the bright future. At this stage the president will no longer appear as a representative of the political establishment, and will act “on his own”. Upon doing so, he will find himself in the same situation as Stalin back in the early 1950s.

Stalin was “alone at the top”, and turned out in utter solitude. He did not trust anyone and thus surrounded himself with people who indeed could not be trusted. He drove his confidants into such a fear that they preferred to get rid of him: to date, most historians believe that Stalin was murdered. Conversely, if he had stayed in power several years more, he would have witnessed the collapse of his system. For “human material” has its own damage threshold, while fear of power has its own limits. The USSR would have followed the same course of events as Hungary did in 1956, except for the fact that, at the time, there was no one to provide “fraternal assistance”.

Some people say that Lukashenka has the army, special services, and so on. However, Stalin had them, too, and yet they were of no use to him; on the contrary, they took part in Stalin's removal – for the sake of their own safety, for camps posed threat to them as well. Some say, Lukashenka is not Stalin. This is a mistake: if Lukashenka could, he would have things done just like the “Father of the Peoples”. He cannot *so far* merely afford himself to resort to camps and executions, but Stalin waited for 15 years to be able to do all this. Some say, “The West will not allow this to happen”. However, the West was tolerant to Hitler for a long time, too. What about Russia? According to public opinion surveys, 53% of the citizens positively view Stalin's activities. Should Lukashenka follow the same route, “dear Russian citizens” will just applaud him.

My opinion is as follows: a totalitarian attempt is virtually inevitable due to economic reasons.

**“What awaits us around the corner”?**

So will history repeat itself? My opinion is as follows: **a totalitarian attempt is virtually inevitable due to economic reasons: to force Belarusian people work “for free” in order to create the basis for the primary accumulation of the capital by the political establishment.** At the core of Stalin’s repressions was boring economics with an objective to suck the people dry and produce respectable gentlemen. Meanwhile the notorious murder of Kirov became but a pretext for “resolute measures”.

Therefore, I tend to believe that such an attempt will be made. In the light of history it is doomed, however: no people can be refrained in a besieged fortress for a long time. A country under the totalitarian regime condemns itself to chronic backwardness, which cannot be compensated by

any exploitation of the citizens by foolish and cruel rulers. Lukashenka overestimates the significance of the political will of the leadership as the determining factor of social development, a mistake typical of any dictator.

The agony of the regime may extend over several decades, but the finale is clear. After the ruler has died or has been removed by his own confidants, the latter will subject Belarus to the same procedure as shareholders of a bankrupt company: sell shares on the first come, first serve basis at a knockdown price. The sellers will be satisfied by the status of the privileged servants, and the country will be headed not by “Daddy” Lukashenka, but by an “external manager”, like at a bankrupt factory.

Some people say that the worst thieves of all are thieves of time. Lukashenka steals our country’s tomorrow...

**This newsletter represents the independent analysis of the authors of the articles. The views expressed within are not necessarily those of the Eastern Europe Studies Centre, its partners and supporters, nor of the persons consulted in producing this publication.**