



## Belarus

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| Last update:        | 8 December 2009  |
| Author:             |  |
| Population:         | 9,648,533 (July 2009 est.)                                 |
| Prime minister:     | Sergey Sidorskiy (since December 2003)                     |
| President:          | Aleksandr Lukashenko (since July 1994)                     |
| Governemental type: | De jure Republic, de facto dictatorship                    |
| Ruling coalition:   |  |
| Last election:      | Parliamentary September 28, 2008                           |
| Next election:      |  |
| Sister parties:     | Belarussian Social Democratic Party<br>(Narodnaya Hramada) |



The Parliamentary elections of 28 September 2008 have shown again that President Lukashenka holds firm control of the Belarusian politics despite his endangered relationship with Russia and the pressure from the West to liberalise. As no single opposition candidate was able to secure a seat in Parliament after the poll, the eyes were turned towards the Western countries and particularly, the EU to see what the reaction would be. However, the EU decided to go ahead with the freezing of the visa sanctions against high-ranking Belarus officials (including President Lukashenka) in a gesture of maintaining a dialogue.

### INTRODUCTION

Since 1994, President Lukashenka has put much effort in marginalising the opposition by creating an atmosphere of repression and intimidation. Before the last Parliamentary poll in 2008, the opposition was divided on the issue of whether or not to boycott these elections. The opposition is nowadays less united than it was even before the Presidential elections in 2006.

### ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Belarus is an increasingly authoritarian Presidential republic, where the President dominates political life and no real opposition is allowed. President Alyksandr Lukashenka, who is in power since 1994, managed to retain power at the end of his first Presidential term through re-organizing the highest bodies of state power and strengthening the highest organs of executive power. Legitimate institutions have lost the influence while illegitimate institutions gained more power.

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#### Divided opposition

According to Western advisors, one of the main difficulties contributing to the weakness of the opposition, is the inability to unite effectively. One of the main factors for this concerns personal conflicts between various opposition leaders. A good example is the controversial rift within the Belarus Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada (BSDP NH) as a result of which the party was divided into two wings under two different leaders: Alyksandr Kazulin and Mikola Statkevich. The division became very personal when Anatol Levkovich, vice-president of the split-off wing and acting leader after Kazulin's arrest in 2006, was accused by Statkevich of writing reports to the authorities. Due to this Statkevich was imprisoned for two and a half years. Statkevich also stepped out of the UDF



and eventually set up the European Coalition Free Belarus which included public associations Charter-97 and the Youth Front as well as Statkevich's BSDP NH.

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#### Presidential elections 2006

The Presidential elections are the most important elections in Belarus, as the state has turned into a strong authoritarian Presidential republic. Long before the actual election day on 19 March 2006 it was clear these elections would take place in a repressive climate, thus preventing a free and fair campaign for the opposition candidates. In order to be able to run for a third term, President Lukashenka called for a referendum to change the constitution in 2004. The referendum itself was widely contested; its result even more.

#### Candidates

A major step in the consolidation of the democratic forces was taken on 1–2 October, when Alyksandr Milinkevich was elected the opposition "single candidate". Milinkevich – coming from the NGO sector – was seen as the best possible candidate as he had clean hands in the political scene, and appeared to be able to unite a wide range of "political colours". Milinkevich's campaign team consisted of three opposition coalitions that included parties as the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada led by Stanislav Shushkevich and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Hramada" led by imprisoned Mikola Statkevich, who was imprisoned until May 2007. Besides Milinkevich and President Lukashenka, two other candidates were running for the post: pro-government lawmaker Syarhey Haydukevich and opposition figure Alyksandr Kazulin. The latter's candidacy was controversial within the opposition, which alleged Kazulin had connections with the Kremlin and Lukashenka's regime. These rumours could, however, not be proofed as Kazulin profiled himself as a left wing candidate, who besides was backed by a substantial amount of people.

#### Run up to the elections

As access to media for the opposition was limited the campaign focused on grassroots activities: such as door-to-door contact and public gatherings. While Milinkevich's support was zero in the beginning, he managed to get 18,1% support in December 2005. Observers noted a "psychological breakthrough" in March, when three to ten thousand people gathered for a meeting with Milinkevich. This was the first time a substantial amount of people openly showed their support for the opposition, which was courageous as people took the risk of being detained or to loose their jobs. Just before the elections, Stepan Sukhorenko, head of the KGB secret service, accused the opposition of planning to stage a coup, warning that anti-government actions could lead to imprisonment. In the days before the elections a wave of detentions, including leading activists and campaigners of the Milinkevich team, was reported. According to opposition sources around 300 activists were detained. In March, opposition candidate Kazulin was detained. These threats and restrictive measures created a climate of fear and intimidation.

#### Results of the elections

According to the OSCE 31 per cent of the voters casted their ballot during the five day early voting, which started on 14 March. Early voting is a problem because it is not transparent. Opposition members were not represented in the Central Election Committee (CEC), and international observers noted many problems during the vote counting. While the CEC presented its results, the opposition gathered for a demonstration on the main square in Minsk to protest the falsified poll, in which lots of people were detained.

#### Official results

Alyksandr Lukashenka 82,6%  
Alyksandr Milinkevich 6%  
Syarhey Haydukevich 3,5%  
Alyksandr Kazulin 2,3%

The OSCE reported that "the election failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections, despite the fact that voters were offered the potential for a genuine choice between four candidates". According to the CEC the turnout reached 92,6%.

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#### Local elections 14 January 2007

On 14 January 2007 local elections were held in Belarus. Like the preceding elections, these elections did not meet OSCE's standards. Belarusian authorities stated that approximately 79 per cent of the eligible voters went to the polling stations to vote. The elections were heavily condemned by the international community. In total, 22639 local deputies were elected, of which only 11 were from opposition parties.

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#### Parliamentary elections 2008

In the run-up to the Parliamentary elections in 2008, the main democratic opposition forces were more divided than ever before. The only issue that seemed to unite the opposition seemed to be the repressive policies of President Lukashenko. The UDF, which encompassed 11 political parties and was calling for a unification of the opposition, managed to put forward a unified list of 110 candidates from all constituencies, including Olga Kazulina (daughter of Alyksandr Kazulin). Former President Shushkevich runned with his own party list, namely the Belarus Social Democratic Hramada (BSDH).

One of the divisional issues concerned the question of whether or not to boycott the elections. As most opposition forces were in agreement concerning their low expectations from the elections, some argued not to legitimize the elections by taking part in them. Others suggested that it is only by participating in the elections that they can show the international community how repressive the regime really is. A suggested middle way was to actively participate in the entire campaigning period and convince as many people as possible to join the democratic opposition, and then withdraw from the race on the eve of the elections. The downfall would be that the situation could be 'spinned' by the authorities very easily in depicting the opposition's withdrawal as a realisation that they cannot win, and do not want to make a bad impression on their foreign investors (i.e. the West).

#### Results of the elections

After months of speculations concerning the apparent thaw in the Lukashenko regime, not a single oppositional candidate running in the elections made it into the Parliament.

According to official results based on 100 out of the 110 constituencies, not one of the opposition candidates managed to gain a seat in the Parliament. According to Lidziya Yarmoshyna, chairwoman of the Central Election Commission, these included the leader of the opposition United Civic Party Anatol Lyabedzka who received 9.7% of votes; Ihar Rynkevich from the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) – 15%; Siarhei Kalyakin, the leader of the Party of Communists – 15.6%; Volha Kozulina – 8.6%; Ales Mikhalevich – 14% etc. Instead, many current MPs were re-elected as deputies to the House of Representatives with the addition of many local officials who also won seats.

According to the OSCE "despite some minor improvements, the [...] parliamentary elections in Belarus ultimately fell short of OSCE commitments for democratic elections". The voting itself was relatively well conducted. OSCE monitors, however, were prevented from observing the vote count in 35 per cent of cases, which compromised the transparency of that fundamental element of the election process.

The elections were accompanied and followed by mass protests in the October Square in central Minsk. Several thousands gathered there in on 28 and 29 September to protest against the falsifications, while calling on new elections.

### LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

The situation in Belarus remains worrisome. Despite calls from human rights organisations, the EU and the OSCE, President Lukashenko's regime continues to disperse peaceful political actions and to refuse the registration of many political parties and human rights organisations such as the prominent 'Nasha Viasna'. One of the latest crackdowns performed by the regime was the rally of solidarity held in September 2009 by activists dedicated to the 10th anniversary of some opposition leaders' abduction. Following the crackdown, at that time EU's Presidency holder Sweden, called on the Belarusian authorities to "refrain from the use of force in dealing with peaceful demonstrations and to ensure that representatives of independent media are able to perform their tasks without



interference".

Meanwhile, the opposition remains even more divided than ever. End of November 2009, the UDF officially collapsed due to the withdrawal of the BPF party. Despite the fact that the coalition since 2008 had an irrelevant and inoperative existence, the only type of "unification within the opposition" is now definitely lost. Earlier, a new bloc called the Belarusian Independent Bloc was created, in which the BPF party and the "For Freedom Movement" are the main players. But this union is not so much based on the creation of a free and 'open' Belarus as it is focused on the defence of Belarus' national interests.

Transparency International in November 2009 again ranked Belarus as the most corrupt nations, placing the country on the 139th place out of 180 countries in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

Considering the minimal progress the country has made in working on democratisation and improving the human rights situation in the country, the EU decided on 17 November 2009 to extend its arms embargo against Belarus. However, the suspension of the travel embargo on Belarusian politicians and high officials was also extended, which means that political figures from Belarus will still be able to travel to the EU until October 2010.

## IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

### Human rights

Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the lack of pluralist democracy brought Belarus in an isolated position. According to several reports, including those of the Council of Europe and Amnesty International Belarus, human rights violations include lack of freedom of expression and freedom of association. Human rights defenders and opposition activists are subject to intimidation, harassment, and risk to be beaten up and/ or arrested by the police.

The most well known former political prisoner in Belarus is Alyksandr Kazulin, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada (BSDP H). A week after the Presidential elections, Kazulin was arrested for staging demonstrations against falsified election results on March 25, 2006 –Freedom Day. On 13 July, 2006 he was sentenced to five and a half years of imprisonment. Both the EU and the U.S. demanded his release. In October 2006 Kazulin went on a hunger strike to protest against "lawlessness in Belarus" caused by the illegitimate President. His health deteriorated and after 54 days he ended the hunger strike. In August, 2008, he was released from prison. His release coincided with the death of his father-in-law, and it was welcomed by the international community.

Another well known political prisoner, Mikola Statkevich, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada (BSDP NH) was released on 22 May 2007 after more than two years of imprisonment. On 1 May 2005 Statkevich was sentenced to three years of imprisonment for organising mass protest rallies against rigged results of the parliamentary election vote and referendum in 2004 (Article 342 of the Criminal Code – organizing of group actions violating public order, or active participation in them). He served his sentence, which was shortened with one year later, in a corrective labour camp. Statkevich was released together with the leader of the opposition youth, Paval Sevyarynets. In September 2007, Sevyarynets was sentenced again to 17 days in jail. This time Sevyarynets, who several days before had left the Brest remand prison after 15 nights arrest for his book presentation, was admitted guilty of resisting the militia, of organising unsanctioned actions and minor disorderly conduct.

In their report of 2007, Amnesty International reports that the civil society in Belarus deteriorates with great speed. Non-governmental organisations face high levels of state-control on their activities. Under the article 193 of the criminal code, organisations risk a sentence up to three years for "organising and running an unregistered organisation that infringes the rights of citizens."

In 2008 the situation did not improve. For instance, on 22 April 2008 10 young activists were tried for participating in a peaceful march on 10 January of the same year, in which thousands of entrepreneurs marched in protest of presidential decree 760 on regulation of entrepreneurial activities. As a result of the trials the leader of Vitebsk entrepreneurs Siarhei Parsiukevich was sentenced to 2.5 years imprisonment and youth activist Andrei Kim was



sentenced to 1.5 years of imprisonment under article 364: violence or threat of violence towards policemen. In addition, at least two others were fined and at least 7 other participants of the march were sentenced to two years of personal restraint without direction to open penitentiary institutions.

On March 23rd, about 20 people with white and red balloons walked around the places related to the life of Paluta Badunova, minister of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. The police videotaped the tour, and drew up reports against 8 people for violation of the order of organizing mass events. Many were detained by police, after which four received sentences varying from 7 to 15 days in jail, while others were fined.

On 2 May Mikola Statkevich was sentenced to 10 days imprisonment for a Labour Day action on the previous day. According to the police he was detained for 'waving a blue with yellow stars flag, [and calling] through a megaphone to join the European Union, thus violating article 23.34 of the Administrative Code' (i.e. violating the rules of organizing and holding mass actions). Along with Statkevich, approximately 30 activists were detained.

On 4 June the chairman of the Memorial branch of the Belarusian Voluntary Society of History and Culture Monuments Protection Viachaslau Siwchyk was sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest for violation of article 23.34 of the Administrative Code (violation of the order of staging and carrying out mass events or picketing) for announcing of the results of the competition held by the Belarusian service of RFE/RL (My picture – My Kurapaty) in Kurapaty forest on 3 June.

A bomb explosion on the 4th of July Independence Day celebrations that resulted in 54 injured, was followed by another wave of searches, interrogations and 13 arrests of opposition activists, while 79% of the Belarus population believed the authorities were behind the blast. In the aftermath of the explosion, Lukashenka sacked his chief of staff Gennady Nevyglas and Viktor Sheyman, the head of the security council after harshly criticising their handling of the situation. Former KGB chief Yury Zhadobin has been appointed as head of the Security Council and Uladzimir Matei was appointed chief of staff. Interestingly, both men are seen as confidants of president Lukashenka's son, Viktor Lukashenka. This could point towards the possibility of a gradual preparation of Viktor (currently member of the Security Council) to assume a bigger role in the government; perhaps even preparing him for presidential heirloom.

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#### Disappearances

In 1999, three of Lukashenka's most powerful opponents disappeared. The disappearance of former interior minister, Yuri Zakharenko, former vice-president Viktor Gonchar and his friend Anatoly Krasovsky was followed by that of television journalist Dmitry Zavadsky in 2000.

After much pressure from the opposition parties an investigation was finally initiated in 2001, but this did not lead to any official results. The responsible investigators, who had fled the country and received political asylum in the United States, concluded that a secret dead squad, orchestrated by government officials Viktor Sheyman and Yuri Sivakou, was behind the disappearances. Lukashenka reacted to these accusations by disdaining them as opposition slander in the campaign for the presidential elections.

In 2003 a new investigation was started after the wives of Gonchar and Krasovsky uttered their complaints to the Procurer General. However, this new investigation did not lead to further results.

In April 2005 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) issued a resolution on "disappearances" in Belarus calling for an impartial investigation into the disappearances in 1999–2000 and asking for prominent officials who were implicated to be suspended.

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#### State Ideology

Lukashenka started a new pro-independence rhetoric in 2003, instigated by the disappointing results in the process of unifications with Russia. The new 'state ideology' was first revealed in March 2003 and has the purpose to act as an 'immune system', protecting the state from internal and external subversion. The ideology seems contradicting



in the way it incorporates Marxism, liberalism and conservatism at once. Analysts have described it as a reactionary version of Soviet conservatism.

The project of implementing the state ideology has already had its influence on the educational system. Schools are now obliged to employ an official, full-time ideological worker.

Although the new ideology has a very nationalistic nature, Lukashenka has initiated a process of linguistic Russification. The issue of the Belarusian language has become highly politicised as most of the opposition parties are against Lukashenka's project of Russification and favour the Belarusian. In this political struggle, the Belarusian language has evolved into a symbol of opposition.

The president has therefore pressured state television to stop broadcasting in the Belarusian language and forced the last school that taught the Belarusian language to close down. How the Russification will continue now the gas-conflict of 2007 has affected the relationship between Russia and Belarus, remains to be seen.

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#### Economy

Official figures on the economy speak of economic growth in the last couple of years. According to the CIA Worldfactbook Belarus's economy grew in 2006 with 9,9% (2006 est.) The state employs over 90% of the people, providing practically full employment. Wages are low, but paid predictably and on time. Observers say that Lukashenka is able to keep this "market socialism" system running because of cheap Russian oil and gas, which he sells for market prices to EU countries.

However, living standards have not improved and poverty remains high, even by Belarus national standards. The CIA World Fact book states that 27,1% of the Belarusian population (2003 est.) lives below the poverty-line. High levels of social support have been a defining policy of the economic model and have been an important factor determining the government popularity. A large part of families' utility costs for example were paid by the state. However, this system has proven not to be as efficient as planned, with subsidies that did not reach the poorest layers of the population.

In 2002 the government implemented cutbacks on social subsidies. Paid services were introduced in health care and education, showing a trend towards cost-based prices. Some economists suggested that this is the first sign, which indicates that Lukashenka is unable to maintain his economic system.

Others say it was part of the strategy for presidential support. By keeping the living standards low, the Belarusian people respond well to small increases in wages. The president announces these increases like they are little presents to the people.

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#### Relations with the European Union

A good working relation between EU and Belarus has never developed, even though they are of large interest to one another, not the least because Belarus has important energy transport systems on its grounds. Since 2009, however, the relationship seems to have obtained a boost. On 7 May 2009, the EU launched a plan –the so-called Eastern Partnership– to "accelerate political association and further economic integration" with six former Soviet states in exchange for democratic reforms. Among the participating countries was also Belarus, but ahead of the launch much criticism toward the country's inclusion came from European politicians and human rights organisations. Opponents were against including 'Europe's last dictatorship' in the pact with a repressive human rights situation. Adherents, however, found that without Belarus the pact would not be 'credible' and that it was an important in stepping up the EU-Belarus dialogue concerning human rights.

EU-Belarus relations have been cool since Lukashenka took up his presidency in 1994. In 2002, the relations deteriorated as Belarus expelled all observers from the OSCE. In response to the expulsion, 14 European Union members decided to impose a travel ban on the president and seven top officials. Only after fruitful negotiations of OSCE-chairman Portugal, the OSCE was able to return with an adapted mandate and the presidents travel ban was



cancelled.

In February 2003, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly granted the National Assembly of Belarus a seat and the EU lifted its travel ban on Lukashenka in November. The 2006 presidential elections were also considered to be "severely flawed" by the EU and the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Report. Despite repeated calls for an observance of international standards by the European Council in the run up to the elections in March 2006, the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission reported an arbitrary use of state power, obviously designed to protect the incumbent president. The EU condemned both the elections that were not held in a free or fair manner, and the violence used by the Belarusian authorities against demonstrators and members of the opposition. To this end, restrictive measures have been adopted against President Lukashenka, the Belarusian leadership and officials responsible for the violations of international electoral standards. These individuals are subject to a visa ban and an asset freeze, however such measures are not intended to have a negative impact on the Belarusian population. The list of those affected by the ban is under constant review.

The European Commission's European Neighbourhood Policy envisions closer links with those neighbours willing to share the European values and respect its vital interests. As part of this strategy the EU will develop relations with Ukraine, Moldova and some Mediterranean countries. Belarus is not one of those countries. Although the EU has made clear that it would very much like to see a more developed relationship with Belarus, this relationship will be out of the question as long as there is no improvement in the human rights situation.

The EU is involved in several programmes supporting the opposition in Belarus. The most recent initiative is a EU-funded radio station, which started broadcasting February 2006 into Belarus to offer Belarusian independent news. This initiative is part of a wider two million Euro package of measures by the EU to support Belarusian journalists and promote an independent media in the country. Another, Polish-funded, radio station, Radio Racija, began broadcasting into Belarus also in February 2006.

November 2006 the European Commission presented a new strategy of relations with Belarus, offering that country's government significant economic incentives in exchange for fulfilling 12 conditions on the path toward democratisation. Opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich has welcomed the EU's offer of a new strategy toward Belarus. "[Official] propagandists are constantly telling Belarusians that they cannot count on the EU, as they say we're not welcome in Europe. And here we get a document that confirms that the EU is waiting for Belarus, is waiting for democratic changes in our country.... This strategy can prove very helpful for fighting the apathy that has gripped Belarusian society," Milinkevich said.

In September 2007, Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Voronetski visited the European Neighbourhood Policy meeting in Brussels. During this meeting, Voronetski criticised the European Neighbourhood Policy and the European sanctions against Belarus by stating: "What will not help these goals -- the consolidation and strengthening of a 'Great Europe' -- is measures aimed in the opposite direction, aimed at creating new artificial barriers: customs, visa, and other types of restrictions creating obstacles for the extension of contacts between governments, business circles, and the peoples of our countries."

In March 2008 the government of Belarus and the European Commission in Brussels signed an agreement on the opening, the privileges and the immunity of the European Commission's Representative Office in Minsk. However, despite the warming of relations between the EU and Belarus no real progress towards democracy can be observed after the already discussed recent political convictions.

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#### Relations with the United States

For a long time, the United States have chosen for a policy of isolation of Belarus. A major part of the American support has gone to nationalist opposition party BPF. When this party turned out to be unsuccessful in the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1998 and 2001, the US changed its policy and started focusing on a larger number of parties, just like the EU does.

In 2004 the United States Congress approved the 'Belarus Democracy act'. This act was designed to promote democratic development, human rights, and the rule of law in Belarus, as well as encourage the consolidation and



strengthening of Belarus' sovereignty and independence. The bill authorises necessary assistance for supporting Belarusian political parties and nongovernmental organisations, independent media, and international exchanges. The determination of the volume of this support is left to the U.S. president.

The document also prohibits all agencies of the U.S. government to provide loans and investment to the Belarusian government. Furthermore the act will make sure reports on weapon trade to and from Belarus and on the personal wealth of Lukashenka are made on a yearly basis.

In January 2005, Condoleezza Rice named the nations of Belarus, Cuba, Iran, Burma, North Korea, and Zimbabwe as "outposts of tyranny."

The relationship between the two countries could possibly improve a little when the Belarusian government decides in 2008 to link the Belarusian currency to the US dollar, unlinking it with the Russian ruble. The decision to link the currency with the US dollar is explained by Belarusian officials as a search for monetary stability. However, analysts state that Lukashenka's decision is fed by the Belarus' dissatisfaction about the Russia–Belarus gas–dispute (see below). The creation of a Belarus–Russia monetary–union is more unlikely than ever, anno 2007 (see below).

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#### Relations with Russia

The Belarusian culture and language hold strong ties with the Russian culture and in the short period of Belarus' independence, this has led to a more or less absence of a distinct Belarusian cultural identity. Under Lukashenka, the drive towards Russia has increased and several agreements on economic cooperation have been signed since April 1994. One of the first moves was to make a free trade agreement between the two countries in 1995.

Observers consider that former president Yeltsin went along to appease his nationalist and communist voters. Duma members regarded Belarus as a safe area between Russia and the "evil forces of the West" and had a vision of a restored "Russian empire". For the Russian investors the state–owned enterprises that may be privatised on a short–term basis are another interesting aspect of unification.

For Lukashenka the integration was a matter of personal political ambition to extend his influence. Unfortunately for Lukashenka, president Putin has taken a more pragmatic approach to the subject lately. He sees Belarus as the minor player in the union negotiations.

In 2002 Putin suggested a model for unification, with Belarus' six regions having the same rights as the 89 subjects of the Russian Federation. Lukashenka called Putin's unification plan unacceptable; the Belarusian voters would never vote to totally eliminate their country's sovereignty. A bilateral working group presented a draft constitution in 2003, but neither one of the countries has ratified this.

The official agreement was to create a monetary union between the two countries on 1 January 2005, leading to the creation of a single currency in 2008, but the countries were not ready for that. In August 2004, Putin announced a delay of at least one year, referring to the fact that both countries were 'politically unprepared'. The establishment of a constitution for the union continues to be problematic. Differences on tax policy, customs codes, foreign trade, and constitutional issues keep returning.

The main problem for the proposed union is however that Lukashenka is not planning to surrender any of his sovereignty to Russia. Realising this would be necessary; Lukashenka changed his position towards Russia and profiles himself as a defender of Belarusian independence from both its western and eastern neighbours.

There remains, however, an issue that has caused many problems between Lukashenka and Putin over the last few years: gas. Already in 2004, the first disputes over gas–prices started between Minsk and Moscow. Under a contract signed on 31 December 2006 between the Belarusian government and the Russian state–controlled gas monopolist Gazprom, Belarus has to pay 0 per 1,000 cubic meters of Russian gas in 2007, compared with .68 during the previous 2 1/2 years.

Gazprom allowed Minsk to pay 55% of the contract price in the first six months of 2007. Minsk promised to pay off



the accumulated gas debt by 23 July but failed to do so. Belarus's debt to Gazprom now stands at 6 million. Russia threatened to reduce its gas supply with 45%, reflecting the level of payment for Russian gas by Belarus this year.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

The Belarus party-apparatus is underdeveloped. Most parties are organised from the top down, having weak linkages to the society and a low membership base. The results of the parliamentary elections of 2000 and 2004 show a tendency of declining representation of political parties and an increasing number of non-partisan parliamentarians. Moreover, the parliament itself hardly has any power and mostly serves to mask the reality of dictatorship.

The oppositional parties, not represented in the parliament, are often internally divided and have to cope with all sorts of governmental hinder. Their bases of support are generally urban-oriented, while over 60 percent of the Belarus population lives on the countryside.

## SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada (BSDP NH)  
The BSDP NH calls itself the successor of the Belarusian Socialist Hramada, which was founded in 1903. The Belarusian Socialist Hramada played a crucial role in the formation of the short-lived Belarusian People's Republic in 1918. The party was re-established in March 1991. Since then it has been plagued by internal conflicts. Mikola Statkevich chairs the party since 1995 and has been arrested several times for his actions against the Lukashenka government.

The BSDP-NH demands a democratic, legal, and social state, and favours European Council and European Union membership for Belarus. One of the party's priorities traditionally is the defense and the revival of national values. Today, the BSDP NH programme wants to adapt 'classical values of European Social Democracy' to Belarusian standards. It wants a social market economy and privatisation of small and medium businesses, but wants to keep railways and utilities in government hands. According to the BSDP-NH, the medical care, the pension system, and education need to be reformed on a step-by-step basis.

The party used to be a member of the Consultative Council of Parties, but under the leadership of Mikola Statkevich left the council when it decided to participate in the 2000 elections, while other opposition parties organised a boycott. In 2003 the BDSP-NH became the leading party of the European Coalition "Free Belarus". General Frolov, one of the leading figures of the "Respublika" fraction, joined the BDSP NH in 2004.

The BSDP NH has gone through some major changes in 2005. Internal conflicts led to a split in the party. The vice-chairmen of the party - Vladimir Nistyuk, Vitaly Malashko and Yury Markovsky accused party leader Statkevich of acting in violation of the party's charter and holding separate talks on the creation of a united social democratic party. They went to the Ministry of Justice, to get support for their act and Mr. Nistyuk, was appointed as interim chairman of the party which also claims to be the one and only rightful BSDP.

Mikola Statkevich, considered the congress a provocation against the party. According to Statkevich, who was supported by leaders of regional committees of the BSDP as well as international partners, this is a move of Lukashenka and his allies to undermine the social democratic movement and democracy in general. In reaction to the decision of the Belarusian Ministry of Justice on the party chairmanship, the IX Congress of the BSDP NH took place on 26 February 2005.

The adopted resolution "On the European Political Course of the Party" says: "The main goal of the government's provocation is to change the pro-European course of the party and to prohibit from the presidential election participation a candidate, who is able to inspire and head mass actions of protest the regime is so afraid of". The Congress expressed its support to the actions of the party leadership directed at unification of all left-centric forces in Belarus into one social-democratic party. The Congress also re-elected Mikola Statkevich as the party chairman (97 for, 4 against) and as a candidate for the presidential election 2006. The following persons have been elected for the party leadership: Head of the Central Revision Commission: Mikola Kijko, First vice-chairman: Ales



Arestovich, Vice-chairmen: Oksana Bernazkaya and Sergej Romanko. The new international secretary of the party is Olga Stuzhinskaya.

On 22 March 2005 a formal charge has been brought against BSDP NH party leader Mikola Statkevich over the street protests that were sparked by the internationally criticized 2004 parliamentary elections and referendum. The criminal proceedings were instituted under the Criminal Code's Article 342 that carries punishment for "the organization of group actions disturbing public peace or active participation in them." Mr. Statkevich was sentenced to three years in corrective labour camp. Later, this was reduced to two years. Statkevich was released on 22 May 2007.

Since the split of the party, the party is without registration and office, which makes it hard to operate effectively. The party participated in the Congress of United Democratic Forces in October 2005 and supported the candidacy of Alyaksandr Milinkevich during the 2006 presidential election.

The BSDP-NH has a consultative status with the SI.

Leader: Mikola Statkevich  
[www.bsdpng.info/index.php](http://www.bsdpng.info/index.php)

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#### Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada (BSDP H)

The BSDP H was founded after the split of the BSDP NH (above). On 15 January 2005 this BSDP, at that time still claiming the name BSDP NH, appointed Anatol Levkovich as new leader of the party. The new six vice-chairmen are Nistyuk, Malashko, Markovski, Marina Azaryonok, Konstantin Moroz and Nikolaj Kanakh. The party claims to have unified with the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada (BSDH). This would only include the people around former BSDH prominent Aleksei Korol, because the leader of de BSDH, Stanislav Sushkevich, says the unification process was held to create an imitated social democratic party.

On 10 April the name of the party changed into Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada (BSDP H) and Alyaksandr Kazulin, a former rector of Belarusian State University, became the leader the party. Alyaksandr Kazulin ran as a candidate in the 2006 presidential election alongside united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich.

Kazulin's appearance aroused a wide range of reactions in opposition circles, from enthusiasm to suspicion. In his function as rector of the Berlarussian State University, until 2003, he was responsible for suspension of students for engaging in opposition activities, and he used to serve as a vice-minister in the government. However, in the run up to the 2006 presidential election he turned out to be an outspoken critic of President Lukashenka. He was beaten up by the police and briefly detained after attempting to enter the All Berlarussian People's Assembly.

On 25 March 2006, a week after the presidential election, Kazulin was arrested. He was charged with violation of the Belarusian Criminal Code: Part 2 of Article 339, hooliganism, and Article 342, the organisation of group actions, crudely breaking public order and disobedience to legal requirements of the authorities or causing a break out in functioning of the transport, any enterprise, institution or organisation, or active participation in such actions. Kazulin was found guilty and sentenced to five and a half years of imprisonment.

On 20 October Kazulin went on a hunger strike to protest against lawlessness in Belarus caused by the illegitimate president. His health deteriorated and after 54 days he ended the hunger strike.

In November 2006 the party signed a document declaring the intention to form an alliance of left-wing parties with the Belarusian Party of Communists led by Sergey Kaliakin, and the Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya" led by Yelena Yeskova. Anatol Levkovich, acting head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada (BSDP H), called on the parties to jointly struggle for the release of Aleksandr Kazulin. He said that the alliance was not being formed in opposition to the coalition of united pro-democratic forces. He said that it the alliance is open to all political groups sharing social democratic values.

In 2007, the acting head of the BSDP H, Anatol Leykovich, was elected as one of the four rotational leaders of the



Democratic Forces in Belarus.

The BSDP H actively seeks support of social democrats in Western Europe.

Leader: Alyksandr Kazulin (while Kazulin is imprisoned, Anatol Levkovich acts as party-leader)

[www.bsdp.org](http://www.bsdp.org)

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Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada (BSD H)

The party was founded in 1998 and is led by Stanislav Shushkevich, who is relatively well known as from 1991 to 1994 he was the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus. In this capacity, in 1991, together with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk he signed the declaration that officially dissolved the Soviet Union (Belavezha Agreement). In the first presidential election in 1994, Shushkevich stood as a candidate, but was defeated by current president Lukashenka.

The party was a member of the Five Plus coalition and supported the candidacy of united opposition candidate Alyksandr Milinkevich in the 2006 election. The social democratic faction led by Aleksei Korol left the party and joined the party led by Kazulin. The party is in favour of an independent Belarus that is no colony of Russia, but also not a member of NATO and the EU.

Leader: Stanislav Shushkevich

Other leftist parties that are often invited to international social democratic events are: Belarusian Party of Labour and Belarusian Party of Communists (see below).

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## OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

United Civil Party (UCP)

The party was established in 1995 as a result of a merger of two like-minded parties – United Democratic Party (formed in 1990) and Civil Party (formed in 1994). According to the party's statutes, it has a liberal conservative orientation that places the individual's rights above the interests of social groups, the state or the nation. The main pillars are human rights, an open society, a democratic form of government, the rule of law, the right of personal property and of free entrepreneurship. Belarus' membership of the EU is one of the party's goals. The party used to be part of the Five Plus coalition.

Party leader Anatal Lyabedzka narrowly lost the vote from Alyksandr Milinkevich during the congress of democratic forces in October 2005, when the united opposition candidate for the presidential elections was chosen. In May 2006 Anatol Lyabedzka was re-elected chairman. During his speech on this occasion, which appealed for another democratic congress, he declared that the supporters of jailed presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin should also be invited as well as participants from the October Square tent camp. His party's priorities for the future, he stated, would embrace a campaign to release political detainees as well as an international public tribunal for the Lukashenka regime.

In 2007, Anatol Lyabedzka became one of the four rotational leaders of the Democratic Forces in Belarus.

Leader: Anatol Lyabedzka

[www.ucpb.org](http://www.ucpb.org)

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Belarusian Popular Front 'Adradzhennie' (BPF)

The organisational committee of the BPF was established in October 1988 by a group of intellectuals and was the first alternative to the Communist Party in Belarus. The BPF has a nationalist conservative orientation and favours democracy and independence through national rebirth and rebirth of civil society, which was destroyed by



communism and foreign occupation. The BPF is fighting for the development of Belarus as an independent, democratic, neutral state, which has good relations with all nations. The party is against the unification with Russia.

In 1999 at the party congress internal divisions between then leader Zyanon Paznyak (currently living in Poland) and Valyantsin Vyachorka resulted in a split. Mr. Paznyak then advocated there should be two organizations: a public association under Mr. Vyachorka and a political party – the Conservative Christian Party of the BPF under his leadership. Mr. Vyachorka rejected this idea and Mr. Vyachorka was elected as the new leader.

The BPF was part of the Five Plus coalition and supported the united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich during the 2006 presidential election. Two weeks before the election party leader Vyachorka, who played a key role in the campaign, was jailed for two weeks for organising an unauthorised rally.

In 2007, the head of the BPF, Valyantsin Vyachorka, was elected as one of the four rotational leaders of the Democratic Forces in Belarus.

Leader: Valyantsin Vyachorka  
[www.pbnf.org](http://www.pbnf.org)

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#### Belarusian Party of Communists

The party was founded in 1991 as the successor of the Communist Part of Belarus (CPB), the ruling party in Belarus. The Belarusian Party of Communists is in opposition and co-exists with the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus.

BPC participated in negotiations between political opposition and authorities and joined the Consultation Council of Opposition. The party is in favour of eliminating the authoritarian regime. It does, however, agree with Lukashenka on the union of Belarus with Russia.

The party was part of the Five Plus coalition and supported united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich in the run up to the 2006 presidential election. Party leader Sergey Kalyakin was the campaign manager of Milinkevich. April 2006 Sergey Kalyakin was sentenced to 15 days imprisonment for taking part in a peaceful march to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on 26 April.

In July 2006 the BPC suffered again a blow from the repressive regime as the pro-government Communist Party of Belarus claimed unification of the two communist parties. The BPC leadership however said that only two BPC members, who were earlier removed from the ranks of the party, attended the so-called merger conference. Party leader Kalyakin described the congress as a government orchestrated move to liquidate the party.

In November 2006 the party signed a document declaring the intention to form an alliance of left-wing parties with the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada, led by Alyaksandr Kazulin, and the Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya" led by Yelena Yeskova. At the ceremony, Sergei Kalyakin said that talks about an inter-party alliance had begun after the 2006 presidential election. He said that the three parties shared basic social democratic values, such as freedom, equality, solidarity, and justice.

In 2007, the head of the Belarusian Party of Communists, Sergey Kalyakin, was elected as one of the four rotational leaders of the Democratic Forces in Belarus.

Leader: Sergey Kalyakin

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#### Belarusian Party of Labour (BPL)

BPL was registered in February 1994. It identifies itself as a social democratic party with a labour-based orientation. Its aim was to provide political support for trade unions and workers' movements. BPL opposes to Lukashenka's regime.



On 2 August 2004 the party was liquidated as the Belarusian Supreme Court found it guilty of repeated violations to the Law on Political Parties, the Civil Code and its own charters. The party did continue to support the election campaign of the Five Plus coalition and the party leader, Alyaksandar Bukhvostaw, played an important role in the campaign of united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich.

April 2006 Alyaksandar Bukhvostaw was sentenced to 15 days imprisonment for taking part in a peaceful march to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on 26 April.

Leader: Alyaksandar Bukhvostaw

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#### Conservative Christian Party BPF (CCP– BPF)

The party was registered in 2000, shortly after the split-up of BPF "Ardzhenie" (see above). The party calls itself the successor of the BPF. The CCP–BPF feels resistance to join supra-party bodies and the party co-ordinates its own activities. Paznyak made an attempt to run for president, which led to strong protest among all parties as he might have divided the protest votes.

Unlike the other oppositional parties, the CCP–BPF boycotted the 2004 parliamentary elections. The party does not take part in any coalition and has a radical nationalist conservative orientation. In May 2006 the exiled leader, Zyanon Paznyak, was re-elected as the leader of the party at the party's 7th congress, held at the Palace of Culture of the Minsk Tractor factory.

Leader: Zenon Paznyak

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#### Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya" (Hope)

The main aim of this party is to protect the right of women. A special convention in 2002 replaced its leader Valyantsina Palevikova with Valyantsina Matusevich. According to Matusevich, the convention was intended to reanimate the party and prevent it from disappearing from the political map of Belarus as a result of its announced merger with two social democratic parties. Palevikova responded that the convention was illegitimate and added that her dismissal was initiated by the new chairman of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, Leonid Kozik, who was allegedly exerting pressure on the party's "trade-union" wing.

The party has been part of the European Coalition and cooperated closely with the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada. In September 2006 Yelena Yeskova was elected leader at the party's 5th convention. Valyantsina Matusevich will remain involved as the deputy chairperson. Yelena Yeskova was an activist of the Belarusian Party of Labour until the Supreme Court of Belarus outlawed it in August 2004.

The newly elected leader noted that the party would continue its membership in inter-party bodies, including the Political Council of United Pro-democratic Forces.

In November 2006 the party signed a document declaring the intention to form an alliance of left-wing parties with the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada, led by Alyaksandr Kazulin, and the Belarusian Party of Communists led by Sergey Kaliakin. Yelena Yeskova emphasized the need for the alliance to combine efforts to democratize the country. She said that the alliance would make the parties stronger and their work easier.

Leader: Yelena Yeskova

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#### Pro-presidential parties

After the parliamentary elections of 2004 the number of parties represented in the National Assembly went down from six to three. The Republican Party of Labour and Justice (RPLJ), the Social-Democratic Party of Popular Accord (SDPPA) and the Belarusian Social Sporting Party (BSSP) lost their seats in parliament. The Communist Party of



Belarus (CPB), the Agrarian Party (AP) and the Liberal Democracy Party (LDP) remained. Together they hold 12 seats out of 110.

#### Communist Party of Belarus (CPB)

Although the Communist Party of Belarus was banned after the Moscow coup attempt of 1991, it has never lost importance as a political movement. Most members joined the new BPC in 1991, but after the 1996 referendum the CPB was re-installed and most the orthodox communist regrouped in the CPB. The party's support base exists mainly of pensioners and civil servants. Its programme models itself after that of the former USSR, opposing reforms and privatisation and having a clear preference for the Russian culture (while rejecting the Belarusian culture). The party supports the president.

Leader: Valery Zaharchanka

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#### Agrarian Party (AP)

In 1992 executives of agricultural enterprises founded the United Agrarian Democratic Party. The party changed its name to the Agrarian Party in 1994. It has a program titled 'democratic socialism'. In the beginning, during the presidential election campaign in 1994, the party was in favour of creating a confederation of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. It was one of the biggest parties. After the 1996 reform of the parliament, the AP split. Half of it went to the Lukashenka-created House of Representatives, the others refused. This paralysed the party. It was not until 2000 before the AP more or less returned into the political arena, this time as a fully pro-presidential party. In that year, Schimanski was elected chairman.

Leader: Mikhail Schimanski

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#### Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

The party was founded in February 1994, modelled on and with support of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party. The programme stated that the LDP was to counter national democrats responsible for the break-up of the union state. Initially the Russian LDP was enjoying huge popularity among (russified) citizens, however this waned, and Gaydukevich began to distance the party from its Russian counterpart.

The LDP is a party in which the personality of the leader plays a central role. Policies are totally determined by its leader. The ideology is skin-deep and the party profiles itself with popular slogans. In 2001 Gaydukevich announced his intension to run for president, contesting Lukashenka and democratic candidate Goncharik. The party has always supported Lukashenka's policies and observers saw the Gaydukevich candidacy as a secret pre-elections alliance with the president. According to LDP leaders, the party has the largest number of members; more than 20,000 Belarusians.

Leader: Sergey Gaydukevich

[www.ldpb.net](http://www.ldpb.net)

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## OPPOSITIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENTS

#### Young Front (Malady Front)

One of the first and most influential youth organisations in Belarus is Young Front (Malady Front). The organisation was established as the youth branch of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) in 1996. In that year, the BNF experienced a substantial rise of young party members who were concerned with the increasingly authoritarian rule of President Lukashenka. Malady Front was established for these new young political activists.

Like its mother party, the organisation took up an anti-regime stance, upholding conservative, nationalist and Christian-Democratic principles. Not all members felt direct connection with the organisations, but Malady Front



was the viable oppositionist youth organisation at that time.

Malady Front, although never officially registered and therefore an illegal organisation, was structured like a political party and thus was a rather hierarchical organisation. This is one of the reasons for the split in the organisation in 2000. In that year the members of Malady Front re-elected Pavel Seviarynets as President of the Organisation. In 1996 Seviarynets had been the main initiator of Malady Front and, being its leader since then, had formed the organisation to his own ideas. With Seviarynets re-election, a number of high placed Malady Front member decided to leave the organisation to start up a new, less hierarchical and less exclusive platform organisation. This would be the beginning of Zubr (see below).

The rest of Malady Front continued to stage protests and street actions. The movement aligned with Zubr and the European Coalition in the organisation of demonstrations after the elections and the referendum in 2004. The three were all proponents of non-violent demonstrations as a way to political change. However, instead of uniting into a single movement before the 2006 presidential elections, Malady Front initiated a new campaign.

In 2007, Young Front activists were increasingly charged with claims of membership of an illegal organisation etc.

(From: Schrama, Maartje (2007) *Movements in Motion. An assessment of youth movements in the wave of electoral revolutions in Eastern Europe.* Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam)

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#### Zubr

In 2001, the youth organisation Zubr was established. The name Zubr refers to a rare European buffalo that lives in the forest. The location of the first gathering was in a forest in the western parts of Belarus, the same location as were 1991 former Russian president Yeltsin and former-Belarusian President Shushkevich signed the dissolution of the USSR and the establishment of the CIS.

Zubr was established to act as an umbrella organisation, open for all opposition movements in Belarus. The initiative for the establishment of Zubr was taken by former-members of Youth Front who were unhappy with the rather hierarchical structure of the Youth Front. In the first months of its existence, Zubr grew substantially to approx. 4000 "members".

One of the main sources of inspiration for Zubr was the Serbian youth opposition-movement Otpor. They felt connected to the Serbs because, like in Serbia, the opposition parties decided to boycott the parliamentary elections in protest against the Presidents illegitimate dominance of the parliament. There also was close contact with Otpor's main activists.

The main goal of Zubr was bringing democracy to Belarus and the country's integration in the EU and NATO. The Zubr-activists based their actions on three elements: non-violence, solidarity and personal courage. Zubr communicated through an own newspaper, the internet (Zubr ceased updating its website in 2003) and by using graffiti to express their statements in the public spheres.

Between 2001 and 2004, Zubr organised some important opposition-campaigns, of which the Day of Solidarity-campaign was the most important. In this period, Zubr changed from an umbrella-organisation to an organisation that organised actions on its own. This development was sustained by the extensive training-program that was organised by Zubr. By training its members, the organisation strengthened itself. In 2005, Zubr got international attention when the Secretary of State of the U.S., Condoleezza Rice met the top of the activists of Zubr in Lithuania.

However, the increasing level of authoritarianism of President Lukashenka and increased power of the Belarusian secret-service caused an environment of fear in which it was hard for Zubr-activists to execute their actions and protests. For the presidential elections of 2006, Zubr supported the candidate of the united opposition, Aliaksandr Milinkevich. After these elections, when President Lukashenka as yet again able to prolong his stay in power, disregarding many protests of the opposition, the "brand" Zubr was disbanded.