



Belarus

Last update:	14 March 2011
Author:	
Population:	9,612,632 (July 2010 est.)
Prime minister:	Mikhail Myasnikovich (since December 2010)
President:	Aleksandr Lukashenko (since July 1994)
Governemental type:	De jure Republic, de facto dictatorship
Ruling coalition:	-
Last election:	Presidential 19 December 2010
Next election:	-
Sister parties:	Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Hramada), BSDP (consultative)



The presidential elections of 19 December 2010 have shown again that President Lukashenko holds firm control of the Belarusian politics despite pressure from the West to liberalise. Lukashenko won re-election to a fourth term with a landslide victory of 79.67% of the vote. The opposition has accused Lukashenko of massive fraud. On the eve of the election opposition protests broke out in which demonstrators clashed with the police and several presidential candidates were detained. According to international observers the election "failed to give Belarus the new start it needed".

INTRODUCTION

In 1994 the first presidential elections were held in Belarus after the country attained independence in 1991. The election in 1994 was won by the independent candidate Alyaksandr Lukashenko with 81.7% of the votes. Ever since he has remained president and Belarus has become an increasingly authoritarian presidential republic where the president dominates political life and no real political opposition is allowed. For this reason, Lukashenko is often referred to as Europe's last dictator. Lukashenko was able to retain power at the end of his first term with the help of the 1996 referendum. This referendum increased the president's power at the expense of the parliament. It also extended Lukashenko's term by two years. In 2001, the presidential elections won him a further five years in office. Another referendum in October 2004 supported lifting the two-term limit on Lukashenko's rule, allowing him to run for president again in 2006 and 2010. The third Presidential elections of the country were held on the 19 March 2006 in which, Lukashenko received 82.6% of the votes. 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". All elections and referenda held under the rule of Lukashenko have actually been condemned as undemocratic and rigged by Western observers and Belarus oppositional forces. Throughout his time as president, Lukashenko has put much effort in marginalising the latter by creating an atmosphere of repression and intimidation. Besides the problem of repression, the opposition in Belarus also has to deal with the difficulties surrounding their inability to unite effectively. One of the main factors for this concerns personal conflicts between various oppositional leaders.



ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

The presidential elections are the most important in Belarus, as the state has turned into a strong authoritarian Presidential republic. For presidential elections to be valid, a turnout of 50% of the registered voters is required. For a candidate to be elected as president, he or she must receive more than half of all the votes casted. If no candidate achieves this, a second election round has to be held within two weeks. The President is elected for a five year term. Elections in Belarus are primarily regulated by the constitution, the election code and the Central Election Committee (CEC). Besides presidential elections there are also elections of deputies of the house of representatives and elections for local councils of deputies. In both elections, candidates are elected for a period of four years.

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 Lukashenka. The opposition movement United Democratic Forces (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 ran 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, 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 'spun' 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).

Election results

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

According to Lidziya Yarmoshyna, chairwoman of the Central Election Commission, the opposition leaders that failed to get into parliament 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%; Olga 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% 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 on 28 and 29 September to protest against the falsifications, while calling for new elections.



Presidential elections 2010

On 19 December presidential elections were held in Belarus. Incumbent Lukashenka has won re-election to a fourth term with a landslide victory of 79.67 per cent.

Preliminary results

Candidate	% of votes
Alyaksandr Lukashenka	79.67%
Andrei Sannikov	2.41%
Yaroslav Romanchuk	1.97%
Grigory Kostusev	1.97%
Vladimir Nekliaev	1.77%
Vitaly Rymashevsky	1.1%
Viktor Tereshchenko	1.08%
Nikolai Statkevich	1.04%
Aleksei Mikhalevich	1.02%
Dmitry Uss	0.48%
Voted against all candidates	6.47%

Turnout 90.66% (CEC)

International observers

According to OSCE observers this election showed that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting OSCE commitments, although some specific improvements were made. While voting on election day was overall assessed positively, the process deteriorated significantly during the vote count, with observers assessing almost half of vote counts monitored as bad or very bad. This undermined the steps that had been taken to improve the election. "This election failed to give Belarus the new start it needed [...]", said Tony Lloyd, who leads the short-term OSCE observer mission and heads the delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. According to a preliminary report of the Initiative Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections, the campaign environment was considerably freer than during previous elections, allowing candidates to freely meet with voters, produce and distribute materials and appear live on television during special election programming. However, the dominance of state broadcast media by the incumbent, especially during the last two weeks of the campaign period, disadvantaged opposition candidates who were either not mentioned, or portrayed in an overwhelmingly negative light.

Protests

The opposition has accused Lukashenka of massive fraud. On the eve of the election opposition protests broke out with demonstrators clashing with the police. The opposition protest briefly grew to several tens of thousands of people, some of whom tried to storm the main government building, breaking windows and glass doors. Anti-riot police repelled the protesters, and dozens of people were reported injured in violent clashes including opposition presidential candidate Uladzimer Nyaklyaeu. In the evening, police had cleared Independence Square in central Minsk of all protesters. According to Belarusian authorities, more than 600 activists, journalists and civil society representatives were detained during the protests and given sentences from between five to 15 days. Furthermore, some opposition presidential candidates were beaten, and seven were arrested. Five of them – Ales Mikhalevich, Uladzimer Nyaklyaeu, Vital Rymashevski, Mikalay Statkevich, and Andrey Sannikau – have been charged with organizing mass riots during the elections and are facing between 5 and 15 years in prison.



IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Human rights

Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the lack of pluralist democracy put Belarus in an isolated position. According to several reports, including those of the Council of Europe and Amnesty International Belarus, human rights violations include a lack of freedom of expression and freedom of association. Human rights defenders and opposition activists are subject to intimidation, harassment, and being beaten and/or arrested. Belarus has a long history of political prisoners of whom one of the most famous is Alyaksandr Kazulin, former leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada (BSDP H) who was imprisoned from 2006 to 2008.

The human rights situation in Belarus has come to a new low after the election of December 2010. The brutal crackdown on the protests after the elections in the form of violent attacks and arrests of activists, journalists, civil society representatives and most of the opposition presidential candidates is a severe setback for the human rights situation in the country. As a reaction the international community and human right organisations urged Belarus to free those unlawfully in custody. As Human Right Watch declared "Belarusian authorities have a duty to ensure public order, but that duty needs to be carried out with respect for human rights and the rule of law. It cannot be a pretext for arbitrary arrests and punitive measures against the opposition." The OSCE representative also condemned the detentions and assaults as "unacceptable. Shortly after Belarus ordered the closure of operations by the OSCE. This act has further deteriorated the international position of the country.

Disappearances

In 1999, four of Lukashenka's most important 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 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. However, to this point it still remains unclear what really happened to the four individuals.

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 all at once. Analysts have described it as a reactionary version of Soviet conservatism.

President Lukashenka announced he was determined to impose this "official Belarusian ideology" on the people of



Belarus. The official ideology is to be taught in schools, universities and workplaces; through the media and the Orthodox Church. 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.

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 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 relation between Russia and Belarus is deteriorating remains to be seen.

Economy

Belarus has seen limited structural reform since 1995, when President Lukashenka put the country on the path of "market socialism." In keeping with this policy, the administrative controls over prices and currency exchange rates were re-imposed the state's right to intervene in the management of private enterprises was extended. Since 2005, the government has also re-nationalized a number of private companies. The state employs over 90% of the country's labour force, 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 from 2006 onwards, Russia began a process of rolling back its subsidies on oil and gas to Belarus.

According to the CIA World Fact book Belarus' economy grew for many years. However, the global crisis in 2009 pushed the country into recession and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew only 0.2% that year. Due to this recession, Minsk became dependent on a stand-by agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 2010 the GDP grew again with 4.8%, partially due to the strength of renewed export growth.

Although the economy is still growing, 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.

Relations with the EU

A good working relation between EU and Belarus has never developed, even though they are of large interest to one another, not in the least because Belarus has important energy transport systems on its territory. Although the relationship has warmed over the years, the fact that no real progress towards democracy can be observed in Belarus makes a genuine good working relation almost impossible. Throughout the years the EU has been involved in several programmes supporting the opposition in Belarus. In 2009 the relationship seemed to have had a boost. In May 2009, the EU launched the Eastern Partnership to "accelerate political association and further economic integration" with six former Soviet states in exchange for democratic reforms. Belarus was among the participating countries. 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' with a repressive human rights situation. Adherents, however, found that without Belarus the pact would not be 'credible' and that it was important in stepping up the EU-Belarus dialogue on human rights.

The relation between the EU and Belarus deteriorated after the elections of December 2010. The elections were condemned as unfair by the OSCE. Furthermore European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek called the crackdown on the opposition "unacceptable in 21st-century Europe." Buzek also called on Belarus authorities to free all opposition candidates and all demonstrators still in prison. The EU foreign-policy chief, Catherine Ashton, stated that as a



result of the severe setback for democracy in Belarus, the EU will review its relations with the country. In addition, the EU threatened that it is preparing a travel ban on Belarus officials. This will not be the first time that the EU sanctions Belarus with a travel ban. After the regime's violent response to protests over the rigged re-election of Lukashenka in 2006, the EU imposed visa bans on the president and other Belarusian leaders. However, this ban was lifted two years later. The EU threatens to impose a far wider travel ban following the latest election. The ban is said to apply to a considerably higher number of top Belarusian officials than previously.

The closure of the OSCE office in Minsk further worsened the relations between the EU and Belarus. Several European countries condemned it and called on Belarus to revise their choice in order not to isolate itself further from the international community.

Relations with the U.S.

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Belarus were established after the U.S. recognised Belarusian independence in 1991. While the relationship between the two countries was good in the first years, this changed after the election of Lukashenka in July 1994. The relationship between the countries deteriorated even further after the internationally unrecognized constitutional referendum which resulted in the dissolution of Belarus' legitimate parliament and the centralization of power in the executive branch.

Since 1997, despite growing U.S. engagement with Belarusian society, official bilateral relations remained at a low level. In 2003, the United States, in collaboration with the European Union, proposed a step-by-step, gradual approach to improve bilateral relations: the United States would respond positively to genuine efforts by Belarusian authorities to improve Belarus' human rights and electoral practices. Belarusian authorities failed to take the steps that warranted a positive response. In October 2004, the U.S. Congress passed, and President George W. Bush signed, the Belarus Democracy Act, which was designed to promote democratization. In signing the act, President Bush noted that the authorities were turning Belarus into "a regime of repression in the heart of Europe," and set out the U.S. policy of working "with our allies and partners to assist those seeking to return Belarus to its rightful place among the Euro-Atlantic community of democracies." In January 2005, the U.S. Secretary of States, Condoleezza Rice, named the nations of Belarus, Cuba, Iran, Burma, North Korea, and Zimbabwe as "outposts of tyranny."

After the flawed presidential election in March 2006, the U.S. imposed travel restrictions and targeted financial sanctions against Belarusian officials implicated in human rights abuses and election fraud. The sanctions prohibited U.S. persons from engaging in financial transactions with named persons. Furthermore, on January 12, 2007, President Bush signed the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act, which repeated the call for targeted sanctions against Belarusian officials and continued assistance for democracy building activities. In August 2007, the U.S. extended the application of travel restrictions to other prominent Belarusians. After the 2010 elections and the following government's crackdown on opposition members, the United States said they would review their relations with Belarus. In the statement the U.S. called for the immediate release of the protesters and strongly condemned what they termed a "disproportionate" use of force against demonstrators. They continued by stating that the election and its aftermath represent an "unfortunate step backwards" in the development of democratic governance and respect for human rights in Belarus, and that the people of the country "deserve better."

Relations with Russia

Russia is the single largest partner for Belarus in the economic and political fields. In terms of trade, one-third of Belarusian exports go to Russia. Due to the structure of Belarusian industry, Belarus relies heavily on other CIS countries, and Russia in particular, both for export markets and for the supply of raw materials, subsidized energy, and components.

The Belarusian culture and language have strong ties with the Russian culture and in the short period of Belarus'



independence, this has led to an absence – more or less – 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 believe that former Russian president Boris 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, the next Russian President Vladimir Putin took on a more pragmatic approach to the subject. He saw Belarus as the junior 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 it unacceptable; the Belarusian voters would never vote to totally eliminate their country’s sovereignty. A bilateral working group presented a draft constitution for the Russia–Belarusian ‘union state’ in 2003, but neither of the countries has ratified this. They have also established a range of institutions modelled after the EU. With the exception of isolated progress, such as unification of the two countries’ customs duties in March 2001, the Union State has not moved forward.

There remained another issue that caused many problems between Lukashenka and Putin: gas. Russia’s role as a major energy supplier to the rest of Europe and Belarus’s position as a key transit country have come under the spotlight several times since 2006, when tensions arose between Moscow and Minsk over the price of Russian gas and Belarus’s privileged access to duty-free oil. In 2007 for example, Gazprom (Russia’s state owned gas company) almost cut the supply to Belarus in half because of unpaid bills. In the summer of 2010 Russia again decreased supply for similar reasons.

Relations with Russia further deteriorated in the summer of 2010, due to disputes over energy pricing, customs union terms and the presence in Belarus of ousted Kyrgyz president Bakiyev. The problems provoked speculation that Moscow might switch support from Lukashenko to another leadership candidate. However, in the first months of 2011 nearly all the bilateral problems between the countries seemed to have been resolved. Russia, resumed duty free oil exports to Belarus, within a common economic space between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and on top of this approved the outcome of Belarus’ presidential elections of December, 2010.

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. In addition, in 2005 a new law was approved which envisaged new registration requirements for political parties. In order to register, the party needs to have a head office in Minsk and regional organisations in more than three regions of the country and there now is a strict prohibition of foreign aid. This new law has made it more difficult for new parties to emerge and has severely narrowed the number of political parties in the country. Presently, there are 15 formally registered political parties in Belarus.

The results of the 2008 parliamentary elections show a tendency of declining representation of political parties and an increasing number of non-partisan parliamentarians.

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% of the Belarus population lives in the countryside. In general it can be said that there are two main opposition loose groupings of political parties in Belarus. Firstly, the European Coalition Free Belarus which emerged in 2003 and secondly the United Democratic Forces which emerged in 1999.



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 has chaired 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 defence 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 were elected for party leadership: Head of the Central Revision Commission: Mikola Kijko, First vice-chairman: Ales Arestovich, Vice-chairmen: Oksana Bernazkaya and Sergej Romanko.

On 22 March 2005 a formal charge was brought against 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 Alyksandr Milinkevich during the 2006 presidential election.



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

Leader: Mikola Statkevich

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 Shushkevich, 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 Alyksandr Kazulin, a former rector of Belarusian State University, became the party leader. Kazulin ran as a candidate in the 2006 presidential election alongside united opposition candidate Alyksandr Milinkevich.

Kazulin's appearance aroused a wide range of reactions in opposition circles, from enthusiasm to suspicion. In his function as rector of the Belarussian 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 by the police and briefly detained after attempting to enter the All Belarussian 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. He was released in August 2008, however. Around the same time the party decided to replace Kazulin with former deputy head, Anatol Levkovich.

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

Leader: Anatol Levkovich

www.bsdp.org

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).

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 Anatol Lyabedzka narrowly lost the vote from Alyaksandr 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. 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. Lyabedzka is one of the oppositional leaders that were jailed as a result of the protests following the December 2010 parliamentary elections. Currently, he remains in custody.

Leader: Anatol Lyabedzka

www.ucpb.org

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 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 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 Vyachorka, was elected as one of the four rotational leaders of the Democratic Forces in Belarus.

In February 2011, more than 80 members left BPF accusing the party's leadership of de facto cooperation with Lukashenka's regime.

Leader: Valyantsin Vyachorka



Belarusian Party of United Leftists (former Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC))

The party was founded in 1991 as the successor of the ruling Communist Party of Belarus (CPB). The Belarusian Party of Communists was in opposition and co-existed 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 was in favour of eliminating the authoritarian regime. It did, 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 Milinkevich's campaign manager. On 26 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.

In July 2006 the BPC again suffered 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 eliminate 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, BPC leader Sergey Kalyakin, was elected as one of the four rotational leaders of the Democratic Forces.

In 2009, BPC members agreed at a party congress to change the party's name to the Belarusian Party of United Leftists – A just world.

Leader: Sergey Kalyakin

Conservative Christian Party BPF (CCP– BPF)

The party was registered in 2000, shortly after the split of BPF "Adradzhennie" (see above). The party calls itself the successor of the BPF. The CCP-BPF feels resistance to join supra-party bodies and the party runs 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.

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 its 7th congress, at the Palace of Culture of the Minsk Tractor factory.

Leader: Zenon Paznyak

Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya" (Hope)

The main aim of this party is to protect the right of women, family, motherhood, and childhood. Nadzeya is a party



of civil progress and democratic reforms, a party of social justice and global human values, a party of economic and political freedom.

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. Former leader Valyantsina Matusevich remained 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 at the time by Alyaksandr Kazulin, and the Belarusian Party of Communists led by Sergey Kaliakin. 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

Pro-presidential parties

After the parliamentary elections of 2008 the number of parties represented in the National Assembly went further down from three to two. The pro-government Communist Party of Belarus attained 6 seats while the Agrarian Party of Belarus attained 1 seat. All other elected candidates were not aligned to political parties and included managers of state-owned companies and institutions and state officials.

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 orthodox communist regrouped in it. The party's support base consists 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: Tatyana Holubeva

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 entitled '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 that the AP more or less returned into the political arena, this time as a fully pro-presidential party. In that year, Mikhail Schimanski was elected chairman.

Leader: Mikhail Schimanski

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)



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 entitled '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 that the AP more or less returned into the political arena, this time as a fully pro-presidential party. In that year, Mikhail Schimanski was elected chairman.

Leader: Mikhail Schimanski

OPPOSITIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Young Front (Malady Front)

One of the first and most influential youth organisations in Belarus is the 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 a direct connection with the organisation, but Malady Front was the most viable oppositionist youth organisation at that time.

Malady Front, although never officially registered and therefore formally an illegal organisation, was structured like a political party and thus was a rather hierarchical organisation. This is one of the reasons for its split 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. 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 organising 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 membership of an illegal organisation etc. During the protests following the presidential elections in 2010, various members of Young Front were arrested.

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 were in 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 its establishment was taken by former members of Youth Front who were unhappy with its rather hierarchical structure. 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 President's illegitimate dominance of the parliament. There was also 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 its own newspaper, the internet (Zubr ceased updating its website in 2003) and by using graffiti to express their statements in the public arena.

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 U.S. Secretary of State 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.

BIOGRAPHIES

Alyaksandr Lukashenka
President of Belarus

Alexander Grigoryevich Lukashenka was born on 31 Augustus, 1954 in small village in eastern Belarus where he was brought up by his single mother. Lukashenka graduated from Mogilev Pedagogical Institute in 1975 and the Belarussian Agricultural Academy in 1985. After serving in the Soviet army between 1980 and 1982, Lukashenka started a career in collective farming in the mid-1980's. At the end of this decade, he started to move into politics and in 1990 he became a deputy in the Supreme Council of Belarus. He was the only deputy to vote against the agreement that dissolved the Soviet Union. In 1993, Lukashenka was elected chairman of the anti-corruption committee of the Belarusian parliament and in this function he accused a number of senior government officials of corruption.

In 1994 Lukashenka was able to defeat four other candidates and became the President of Belarus. In 2001, he was elected for a second term and due to a 2004 referendum which abolished the two-term presidential limit he was able to seek re-election for a third term in 2006. In December 2010, he was re-elected for a fourth term.

Lukashenka has been controversial for his authoritarian instincts and is often referred to as 'the last dictator of Europe'.

Lukashenka is married to Galina Lukashenka and they have two adult sons. Lukashenka also has an illegitimate younger son.

Mikola Statkevich



Leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada

Mikola Viktorovich Statkevich was born on 12 August 1956, in the village Lyadno, of the Slutski rayon in the Minsk region, to a family of teachers. In 1978 he graduated from the Minsk Higher Engineering zenith-rocket academy where he later worked as a teacher, and in 1986 he obtained a PhD.

In February 1991 he left the Communist Party out of protest against the suppression of protesters Vilnius, Lithuania, with tanks, and became member of the Central Rada and Executive Committee of the Belarus Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Hramada). In 1996 he became its chairman. In the same period (1991–1995), as a former military officer he founded and headed the Belarus Union of Military, which had as its goal the creation of a Belarus army, the defence of independence and historic-patriotic education of society.

In 2000 he participated in the elections for the Chamber of Deputies, and in 2003 he became the leader of the European Coalition, which included a number of parties, trade unions, women's and youth organisations. The Coalition was in favour of a European direction of development. In 2005 he was sentenced to three years of freedom limitation for organising a street action on 18–19 October 2004 in Minsk, against the (falsification of the) official results of the parliamentary elections and the referendum. After an amnesty his sentenced was shortened by a year.

In 2009 the congress of the European Coalition nominated him to be its Presidential candidate for the 2010 elections.

Statkevich has two adult daughters.

Alyaksandr Kazulin
Opposition politician

Alyaksandr Kazulin was born on 25 November, 1955 in the capital of Belarus, Minsk. Kazulin holds a PhD in mathematics and pedagogy and from 1996 to 2003, he served as rector of the Belarusian State University. During this period he also acted as a government minister under President Lukashenka. However, over time Kazulin fell out of favour with Lukashenka.

As leader of the oppositional Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada he was one of the candidates in the 2006 presidential elections. Several weeks before the elections Kazulin was beaten and detained by police. In July 2006 he was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for hooliganism and inciting mass disorder. Internationally however, he was recognized as a prisoner of conscience. Kazulin was released from prison in 2008.

Kazulin is married and has two daughters.

Anatol Levkovich
Leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party Hramada

Anatoli Levkovich was born on 9 June 1953 in a Gomel village, to a family of agriculturalists. He served in the Soviet Army and then graduated from the philosophy department of the Belarus State University in Minsk, where he also defended his PhD. For 25 years he was a teacher at the Brest State University.

In the years of Perestrojka he joined the democratic forces and was one of the founders of the Belarus Helsinki Committee and the Belarusski free trade union.

He became member of the Belarus Social Democratic Party (Hramada) on the day of its establishment (2 March 1991) and over 10 years headed its Brest regional chapter. Levkovich was fired from his university because of his



political activity.

On 15 January 2005 he was elected chairman of BSDP-H, and remained its chairman until 2007 with a brief interval (between 24 July and 26 December 2005) when he was first deputy of the chair. He was first deputy again from 4 March 2007, and was interim chairman after the arrest of chairman Aleksandr Kazulin. He became chairman for the third time on 3 August 2008.

Stanislav Shushkevich
Leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada

Stanislav Shuskevich was born in 1934 in Minsk. He graduated from the Belarus State University with a degree in physics in 1956. In 1969 he became a member of staff at the same university and in 1986 he was appointed pro-rector. He also became politically active in this period.

Shuskevich is relatively well known due to his position as chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus from 1991 to 1994. He was dismissed from his position in 1994 as a result of his liberal political and economic policies, and was one of the signatories – along with Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuk – of the Belavezhdha agreement which effectively dissolved the Soviet Union and established the CIS.

In the first Belarus presidential election in 1994, Shushkevich stood as a candidate, but was defeated by current president Lukashenka.

In 1998, Shuskevich founded the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada.