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THE NATIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF POSTCOMMUNIST TRANSITIONS

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the divergence of postcommunist transitions in terms of political regime types. The literature on democratisation proposes three principal factors as determining the unveiling of developmental paths in transition states: elite power configurations, economic policies, and international relations. While these factors indeed explain the success of some postcommunist democratisations, they cannot account for the array of political trajectories across the region. The thesis proposes nationalism as the principal factor behind such divergence. It suggests that the forms of nationalism available to and adopted by political elites were behind the variation in postcommunist regime development. The thesis reveals a specific postcommunist type of nationalism, egalitarian nationalism, which is ethnically inclusive but anti-liberal. It proposes that the prevalence of pro-European liberal or collectivist egalitarian nationalism determined the evolution of postcommunist transition types towards democracy or authoritarianism respectively.

The argument is developed through the analysis of the historically longest and the most stable case of postcommunist transition reverted from a democratic to an authoritarian path: the post-soviet development of Belarus. The country's elites' effectiveness in formulating policies in national ideological terms proved consistent with their political success or failure, and thus determined the direction of Belarusian development. During the democratisation period, liberal nationalism was pursued in a way that had little resonance with inherited identities and was inconsistent with the European developmental model that its protagonists purported to profess. As such, it discredited and undermined the democratic development of Belarus. The more egalitarian national ideology, on the contrary, was upheld in a socially resonant way, and was consistent with the policies advanced in other spheres of social development. As such, egalitarian nationalism underpinned the construction and consolidation of an authoritarian regime.

The main contention of the thesis is that political ideologies, and national ideologies in particular, remain a key determinant of social development in the present day world.

Table of Contents

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Preface

On a sunny summer day in 1995, my friends and I skipped a university lecture to watch the replacement of the state emblem on the facade of the Belarusian President's residence. The symbol we saw being removed from the top of the building was the 'historic' Belarusian crest, the auspice of democratic change in the country since 1991; the emblem going up into its place was that of the soviet era in Belarus. To watch the change felt like a bad dream, with the signs changing in a reverse order. We were eighteen, naïve and ambitious children of perestroika and democratisation; we studied diplomacy and assumed we would lead Belarus as a new European democracy. The presidential election in 1994 and a referendum on state symbols in 1995, however, showed that the majority of Belarusians did not share our confidence. The reinstallation of the soviet emblem on the presidential residence on that summer day seemed to seal our dreams and our future. To watch the process almost hurt physically; I saw tears in my friends' eyes. I realised that the vision of a democratic, European Belarus we had grown up with was a mere construction of symbols, ideas and myths, which could be easily dismantled. National identity suddenly seemed something very artificial, and yet hugely significant for the lives of my friends and myself. Instinctively, I had no doubt that nationalism mattered for postcommunist transitions. After four years of research for this thesis, I am able to explain why and how.

Introduction

Postcommunist transitions have yielded divergent results, from consolidated democracies in Central Eastern Europe to consolidated authoritarian regimes in Belarus and Central Asia. This thesis addresses the divergence of postcommunist political trajectories and contends that nationalism is the principal explanation for it. Contrary to the assumption of much of the democratisation literature: that ethnically inclusive nationalism is inherently beneficial for democratic development, we contend that in the postcommunist setting, ethnically inclusive nationalism took two shapes - with divergent outcomes for transitions. Ethnically inclusive and liberal nationalism sustained democratic consolidation, whereas ethnically inclusive and collectivist egalitarian nationalism underpinned the entrenchment of authoritarian rule.

The argument proceeds in seven chapters. We begin with setting the theoretical and methodological framework, develop the argument in five empirical chapters, and conclude with a theoretical proposition.

We open the thesis by showing how transition paths in postcommunist area have diverged and by reviewing the key explanations proposed in the democratisation literature: elite power configurations, economic policies and international relations. We argue that while these factors could indeed account for the success of some postcommunist transitions, they are problematic in application to stalled and reverted democratic transitions, and so cannot explain in a satisfactory way the variety of developmental paths after communism. We contend that nationalism is the factor that accounts for this divergence best. We further argue that an analysis of one critical case of stalled democratic transition that has led to authoritarian consolidation is the most adequate way to test our hypothesis. The case study we take is Belarus, the historically longest and most stable example of a postcommunist transition that began as democratic, but got stalled and reverted to the establishment of a consolidated authoritarian regime. We explain our choice by characterising the Belarusian post-soviet development in terms of regime change, as pro-democratic during 1990 to 1994, and increasingly authoritarian during 1994 to 2004.

The second chapter takes us to the empirical core of the thesis. We consider configurations of power between political elites in Belarus. Two groups of political actors held authority in the country during the democratisation period of 1990 to 1994: the former soviet leaders (the soviet elite) and the former democratic opposition from the circles of cultural intelligentsia

(the cultural elite). We characterise both groups in terms of their background, strengths and weaknesses and show how they arrived at a pact, according to which the cultural elite advanced their nation-building agenda on the state level, and the soviet elite administered other spheres of state development. This division of responsibilities reflected the spheres of interest and expertise of these rival elites. The pact proved detrimental to the popular legitimacy of both elite groups; in the free and fair presidential election of 1994, the position consequently went to an elite outsider, Aliaksandr Lukashenka. We demonstrate how the Belarusian President managed to overhaul the Belarusian political elites in a way that established him, to an extraordinary extent, as the principal decision-maker in the country. The chapter thus explains why elite pacts can be precarious for democratic development: by limiting the ability of the pact's parties to implement their developmental visions to a meaningful extent, they may discredit all elite groups involved in the pact; and this may open the door to the political arena for new leaders who are not committed to democracy. The following chapters analyse economic and international policies pursued by Belarusian political elites to demonstrate that the impact of such policies on the elites' political authority has depended on their effective formulation in national ideological terms.

Chapter 3 considers the economic aspect of the Belarusian post-soviet transition. After a brief introduction to the soviet economic legacy in the country, we analyse the economic policies of the changing Belarusian leadership. We demonstrate that both the soviet elite, who ran the economy during the democratisation period, and the authoritarian leader, who took them over, pursued essentially similar goals in their economic policies, but with opposite outcomes for their political legitimacy. Both sought to avoid radical economic restructuring and preserve state dominance in the economy. Both had problems of low economic performance. The soviet elite dealt with these problems by offering material incentives to the population, which proved counter-productive and unsustainable, whereas the authoritarian President increasingly resorted to ideology as a means of promoting his economic policies, and never faced significant popular discontent with them.

Chapter 4 analyses the international dimension of the Belarusian transition. We demonstrate that the soviet elite did not see participation in the European integration processes as essential for national development, in strong contrast to the leaders in successful postcommunist democratisers. The soviet elite thus failed strengthen the democratisation process in the country with the external support of the European Union in the form of policy assistance and reform conditionality. The subsequent authoritarian leadership presented

foreign authority as a threat to national development, and in so doing, eliminated any capacities for foreign institutional actors to influence the Belarusian government and induce it to adopt their desired policies. By relying on defensive nationalist messages, the authoritarian Belarusian President has managed to withstand political and economic pressure from both the Russian Federation and democratic countries and organisations of the West.

Chapter 5 considers nation-building in greater detail. After an introduction examining the soviet impact on Belarusian national identity, we reveal that the post-soviet Belarus has experienced two different types of national mobilisation. During 1990 to 1994, the cultural elite advanced liberal nationalism, based in the vision of Belarusians as a European nation. The way in which the cultural elite promoted 'European' identity for the Belarusian society, however, was based more on the denial of soviet experience and links with Russia than on a positive promotion of European liberal values as such. Neither could the cultural elite promote the economic and international elements of the European developmental model, because these were beyond their jurisdiction according to the elite pact. The way in which the cultural elite advanced pro-European nationalism ultimately discredited them in the eyes of the society, and they failed to get their mandate renewed in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 1994 and 1995. Given that the cultural elite were the main proponents of democratisation in Belarus, their ideological and, consequently, electoral failure put an end to democratic development of the country. The Belarusian authoritarian leader has subsequently employed egalitarian nationalism that recombined the collectivist soviet values with the appreciation of Belarusian sovereignty. This egalitarian ideology has clearly resonated with the soviet experience and underpinned the President's economic and international policies. Egalitarian nationalism, we argue, became the principal means for the emergence and consolidation of an authoritarian regime in Belarus.

Chapter 6 concludes the empirical part of the thesis by analysing what could provide a critical push towards the end of authoritarian rule and rejuvenation of democratic processes in Belarus. We argue that any such rejuvenation depends on the successful advancement of a liberal national ideology, and consider its possible protagonists. We show, however, that the largest social organisations and major power-holders have all been co-opted into the authoritarian regime and are unlikely to undermine it. The Belarusian democratic opposition, moreover, have had little success in challenging the authoritarian President, because they have proven unable to propose any alternative vision of national development to the one advanced by President Lukashenka. Liberal nationalism is likely to emerge among the self-

employed, small business owners and civic activists, we suggest; however, its advancement, and the ejuvenation of democracy in Belarus remains a matter of the distant future, due to the unfavourable domestic and international context.

The final chapter summarises our theoretical proposition, that nationalism is a crucial causal factor explaining the divergence of postcommunist transitions. It suggests that political elites achieve legitimacy in postcommunist societies and the ability to shape transitions towards their desired outcomes through 'capturing' the idea of the nation. We name two conditions for the successful popular mobilisation of a national ideology: the ideology has to be socially resonant and consistent with the policies pursued in other spheres of social development. We apply our theory to three different cases of postcommunist transitions in the post-soviet space: successful democratisation (Lithuania), stalled and rejuvenated democratisation (Ukraine), and consolidated authoritarian development (Uzbekistan) to argue that the nationalist strategy adapted explains all these divergent transition outcomes. The second part of the final chapter summarises the findings of the empirical part of the thesis, and juxtaposes the democratic and authoritarian periods in the post-soviet development of Belarus through the lenses of national mobilisation.

1. Theoretical deficiencies and the research agenda

When communist regimes went tumbling down in the former Soviet bloc, the social disdain for what were seen as oppressive political systems and the aspiration for democracy appeared to rule out the resurrection of the old regimes. Indeed, communism *per se* has not returned. Yet, while the Central Eastern European states have become democratic enough to have entered the European Union or be en route to it, the majority of former constituent republics of the USSR are 'heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction', according to the widely referenced source on democratisation, the Nations in Transit survey by Freedom House (Freedom House May 24, 2004, online). The 2004 survey registered a sustained slowing down or reversal of democratic transitions in post-soviet states and the consequent emergence and consolidation of authoritarian regimes[1]. Why have these democratisations stalled? Why did the social energy, sufficient to sweep away communist regimes, dissipate, and authoritarian edifices resurface, if in a slightly amended form? Why have the societies of Central and Eastern Europe stood by democracy, while the former soviet republics have acquiesced to new authoritarianism?

Ten years after 27 formerly communist regimes proclaimed democratization, only one third of them were ranked fully free (Bunce 2003, 173), the rest consolidating under the name, but

[1] Freedom House' Nations in Transit' survey. 1 represents the highest, and 7 the lowest possible score in democratic development. Karatnycky, A., A. J. Motyl, et al. (2004). Nations in transit 2004 : democratization in East Central Europe and Eurasia. New York, Freedom House.

Country/Score	1997	1998	1999/00	2001	2002	2003	2004	Dynamics
Armenia	4.70	4.80	4.50	4.56	4.56	4.69	5.00	↓
Azerbaijan	5.60	5.55	5.50	5.56	5.44	5.31	5.63	↓
Belarus	5.90	6.20	6.44	6.56	6.56	6.63	6.54	↓
Georgia	4.70	4.55	4.00	4.19	4.44	4.69	4.83	↓
Kazakhstan	5.30	5.35	5.38	5.56	5.88	6.13	6.25	↓
Kyrgyzstan	4.65	4.70	4.88	5.13	5.38	5.63	5.67	↓
Moldova	3.90	4.00	3.88	3.94	4.19	4.38	4.88	↓
Russia	3.80	4.10	4.25	4.63	4.81	4.88	5.25	↓
Tajikistan	6.20	5.95	5.69	5.44	5.50	5.50	5.71	↓
Turkmenistan	6.94	6.94	6.94	6.94	6.94	6.94	6.88	↑
Ukraine	4.00	4.25	4.31	4.44	4.69	4.50	4.88	↓
Uzbekistan	6.35	6.45	6.44	6.50	6.56	6.56	6.50	↓

not essence, of democracy. This thesis sets out to explore the divergent character of regime development in the postcommunist states, to understand what allowed democratic consolidation in some of them, and prevented it in others. We use the term 'postcommunist' to describe all states of the former Soviet bloc, and the term 'post-soviet' to refer to the republics of the former USSR.

All postcommunist regimes claim to be democratic, this is most likely because democracy is 'the only legitimate political regime' the present day world (Nodia 2002, 15). However, the formal proclamation of democratic principles and institutional imitation is often the farthest they travel along the democratic path. The most widely used definition of democracy is procedural, describing it as 'a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realms by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives' (Schmitter and Karl 1996, 40). However, the classics of democratic theory have also emphasised that procedural definition of democracy may be insufficient for understanding the essence of political regimes. Linz (2000, 20) argues that liberal freedoms are as important gauge in that respect as democratic procedures. Dahl (quoted in Plattner and Diamond 1996, xi) combines institutional pre-requisites and political and social freedoms in his concept of polyarchy, an alternative conceptualisation of democracy. It is in these areas where many postcommunist states demonstrate significant 'democratic deficits' as listed by Carothers (2002, 9-10):

'poor representation of citizens' interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuse of law by governmental officials, elections of uncertain legitimacy, very low levels of public confidence in state institutions, and persistently poor democratic performance by the state'.

A more integrated institutional definition of democracy, as:

'an ensemble of institutions aimed at giving legitimacy to the exercise of political power by providing coherent response to three key questions: 'how can we achieve change in our society without violence?', 'how can we control those who are in power in a way that gives us assurance that they will not abuse it?', and 'how can the people-all the citizens-have a voice in the exercise of power? (Dahrendorf 2003, 103).

also problematic in postcommunist space, since some regimes offer the answer to the third of these questions at best.

While it was becoming increasingly obvious that 'the exterior of formal commitments to democracy often obscures an increasingly non-democratic interior' (Korosteleva 2003, 31) in postcommunist space, the transition literature has for a long time assumed that the postcommunist countries would eventually become democratic, and hence characterised them through adding a qualifying adjective to the term 'democracy'. Thus, postcommunist states have been described as 'authoritarian democracy', 'neopatrimonial democracy', 'protodemocracy' (Collier and Levitsky 1996, 430); 'fledging democracy' (Schmitter 1995, 16), or 'electoral democracy' (Diamond 2002, 26). As Shevtsova (2004, 70) noted, 'the vocabulary of 'democracy with adjectives' amounts to a mere mental game called 'classify the hybrid', which can lead to oversimplified and even dangerously wrong practical conclusions'. Carothers contested the 'democratic teleology' of the 'transition paradigm', arguing instead that 'political patterns to date among the 'transitional countries' should be understood as alternative directions, not way stations to liberal democracy' (Carothers 2002, 14). Ottoway (2003, 3) took this argument further and suggested to qualify as 'semi-authoritarian' the 'ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions, and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits'. Although Ottaway has contributed to understanding the essence and functioning of these regimes, both she and Carothers are primarily concerned with finding the ways in which international institutional actors can encourage further democratisation of such regimes around the globe, rather than seeking to understand the reasons and context in which they emerged and became consolidated, the question that would pertain a study of the divergence of postcommunist transformations.

The classical studies of authoritarianism are also of little help in this regard. Authoritarianism is described as:

> political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones (Linz 2000, 159).

> a repressive form of government from above which rules without regard for popular consent, infringes individual rights and tolerates no opposition (Coxall and Robins 1998, 12)

These definitions can be upheld in a number of countries under consideration, but there is little to help understand the sources of such regimes in postcommunist context. Linz' (1978) explanation of the emergence of authoritarian regimes focuses breakdown of democracies, and as such is not relevant for understanding the creation of regimes with authoritarian features on the footsteps of communism. Linz or Chehabi's (1998) study of sultanistic regimes addresses only one postcommunist country, Belarus, and in the way that describes President Lukashenka's rise to power rather than explains what made this rise possible). The general postulates about the emergence of authoritarian regimes, are hence scarce or problematic in the postcommunist context. The studies of authoritarianism and semi-authoritarianism do not offer any theory that would explain the divergence of postcommunist transitions and the emergence of non-democratic regimes among them in any consistent way. It is precisely the lack of literature on postcommunist authoritarian regimes, and the legacy of regarding postcommunist transitions from the vintage point of democratic teleology, that we need to address primarily democratisation literature, to show its weaknesses with regard to the explanation of postcommunist transitions' divergence and the emergence of undemocratic regimes in the postcommunist space.

Although the literature has already departed from 'democratic teleology' (Carothers 2002, 7), which presumed that democratisation by default led to the establishment of democracy as it is known in the West, 'it is still not always clear why democracy succeeds is some cases and not in others. Theory has not yet quite caught up with this changing research agenda' (Grugel 2002, 64). This is most likely because the literature has so far focused predominantly on those postcommunist transitions which resulted in democratic consolidation. However, the factors that elucidate the embedding of democracy in the cases of successful transitions, do not account in a straightforward manner for the failure of democracy to take root elsewhere, as we shall see next. Therefore, they prove frustrating explanations for the divergence of postcommunist transitions. Unlike the bulk of democratisation studies, we seek to account for such a divergence by analysing 'stalled democracies', or transitions to democracy that have not resulted in the consolidation of democratic systems.

The aim of this first chapter is to set the theoretical and methodological foundation for the thesis. The chapter's first part shows that the existing theories of democratisation run into significant difficulties in their application to stalled democracies. The second part suggests an alternative explanatory thesis: that national mobilisation plays a decisive role in determining the direction of systemic transformations. The third part lays out the framework

for the empirical investigation of the argument, and the fourth part presents Belarus as the critical case of a stalled democracy leading to authoritarian consolidation.

I. Stalled democracies: problems with the literature

Despite there being many explanations offered as to what determines the success of democratisations, three broad categories of factors tend to be identified as causally critical: political elites, economic policies and international influence. All of them, however, are problematic in application to stalled democratisations, as we shall see.

1.1. Political elites

'The critical role of political leadership and practice in producing democracy' (Plattner and Diamond 1996, xi) is often noted. This is because 'the design of democratic institutions in a transition country always eventually falls into the hands of political elites' (Bermeo 1992, 276). Thus, 'research on democratisation, particularly on the founding and performance of new democracies, is largely a literature about the choices political leaders have made and the consequences of those choices' (Bunce 2003, 181). While there is no reason to disagree, nevertheless, the question of how the elites choose to legitimise themselves and the impact this has on regime development has hardly been taken up in the substantial literature on the role of political elites in the democratic transitions.

On the footprints of Linz' theory of the 'perils of presidentialism', Fish (2001) offers one of the few explanations of stalled democracies is a rather straightforward argument that democratisations are thwarted by a high concentration of power in the executive. This argument can be (Fish 2001). Fish's (2001, 75) observation that the President is most often 'the main agent of degradation' is surely accurate, but unfortunately it provides little insight as to why and how such a concentration becomes possible. The three conditions for 'democratic reversal' that Fish (2001, 75) names--the institutional environment that creates few hard constraints on presidential highhandedness, a weak domestic opposition, and the presence of a powerful external patron--all beg explanations about their origins. Fish, however, chooses to treat them as exogenous factors, something to be taken for granted rather than investigated. Further, he offers little insight as to what sustains a high concentration of power in the executive or allows the executive to ever widen its mandate. Consequently, one can ask, if the former communist societies were able to topple decades-old authoritarian regimes, why did they suddenly conform to new authoritarian leaders? Fish's (2001, 82) argument that 'the chief executive bears the bulk of the blame for de-

democratisation' indeed fits the evidence, but leaves some important questions unanswered, such as: a) what makes high concentration of power within the executive possible in the first place; and b) how does such a concentration acquire popular legitimacy.

Yet another theory deriving from the argument about the importance of institutional arrangements for regime outcomes is put forward by Easter (1997). He differentiates three types of old regime elites: consolidated, dispersed, and reformed, and argues that they have led to presidential or parliamentarian, or any of the two, respectively (Easter 1997, 188). Easter's main contribution is to develop the institutionalist argument by highlighting that institutional choices are not made on a 'blank slate', but are outcomes of elite's attempts to secure access to the power resources of the state or deny it to others (Easter 1997, 210). While it is reasonably clear that the degree of elite unity may explain their ability or otherwise to control power, Easter does not clearly elucidate that process with regard to 'reformed elites', which neither stay consolidated nor disperse completely. Despite such context being the most numerous across the postcommunist region and having diverse institutional and regime outcomes, Easter lists these outcomes without explaining them.

Another angle on institutional approach, blaming the difficulties of transitions in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union (fSU) on the former communist elites, is also problematic. Roeder (2001, 12) argues that if the former elites were able to influence the formation of legislatures and constitutions, then transformations developed in an authoritarian fashion. Such reasoning presumes that the institutional framework set up at the start of democratisation is the single factor that determines its unravelling, and also that the fact of communists in power is by definition bad news for democratisation. The phenomenon of *stalled* democracies is, however, in itself proof that institutional arrangements for democracy, however perfect, can be overridden. Also, there are cases, as in Bulgaria and Russia, in which the communist elite secured a parliamentary majority, but could not prevent the dissolution and re-election of the Parliament in the course of one or two years. Finally, in the otherwise contrasting cases of transition in Belarus and Ukraine, the soviet elite-dominated Parliaments both adopted pro-democratic legislation in the early 1990s, thus suggesting at least a subset of cases which do not fit Roeder's theory.

Another angle on the role of the former communist elites in postcommunist transitions, and a further challenge to Roeder, is that they may actually have a positive effect up on them, and namely, if the communist successor parties can reform themselves and constitute a healthy

democratic competition to the former democratic opposition. Grzymala-Busse (2002, 5-9) argues that communist parties were positively transformative and pro-democratic if they comprised technocrats rather than ideologists, had an established record of legitimising themselves to the society, and if they had disavowed the communist past. This argument, moreover, has plenty of compelling evidence in the consolidated democracies of CEE, but, again, it runs into a whole series of contradictions and complexities in application to the stalled democracies in the post-soviet states. For a start, the communist parties in the post-soviet states were obliged to dissolve following the coup d'état in 1991 and could not operate legitimately during the crucial years of transition. Although many former communist leaders stayed in power, they did so in their personal capacity, and the development dynamics of the party as a whole were arguably secondary to personality politics in the region. A second problem with stretching Grzymala-Busse's theory further East is the paradox that, in contrast to Polish and Hungarian technocrats from the 1980s, for example, the most successful (and technocratic) communist elites in the former soviet republics rarely had experience of negotiating with the society so as to legitimise themselves. Finally, the ability to relate their regimes to the communist past in fact benefited some post-soviet leaders rather than undermined them, as we shall argue in the concluding chapter. To sum up here, however, we note only that in the post-soviet states, a technocratic background, a successful performance under the communist regime, and a break with the past did not guarantee success of the former communist elites - or of the democratic transition.

Elite-based explanations have been rich and varied, looking not just at individual categories of elites, but also at the competition between them. The interaction between the previously ruling elites in the government and their challengers in the opposition informs the apparently largest and most prolonged debate within the elite-based approach. The transition school, based in democratisations in Southern Europe and Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s argues that the elites' ability to conclude agreements, or pacts, is the lynchpin of a successful transformation. In the situation of a stalemate, when competing elite groups have relatively equal resources, they conclude a 'pact', or an 'explicit, but not always publicly explicated or justified, agreement among a select set of actors which sought to define rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the 'vital interests' of those entering into it' (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 37). Pacts are thus supposed to furnish the rival elite groups the 'second best' solution (DiPalma 1996, 261,O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 37), as neither group can win ultimately, but neither loses ultimately either; democracy, consequently, is established as a matter of elite consensus. The southern-based

transition school thus favours compromise, consent and agreements (Di Palma 1990, 40) and postulates that 'political democracy is produced by [elite] stalemate' (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 72). Rustow (1970, 357) has also named compromise among all major parties involved an essential element of any democratic transition, in the absence of which the transition cannot proceed.

The evidence of postcommunist transformations has nevertheless challenged the premise that democratisation is most successful when rival elite groups find themselves in a stalemate and conclude a pact. Grugel (2002, 59) argues that pacts are not essentially democratic mechanisms, as the terms of transition they shape may create new forms of political and economic exclusion and thus be harmful to democratisation in the long term. McFaul (2002, 214, 223) notes:

'The situations of relatively equal distribution of power between the soviet elites and the democratic opposition [have] yielded unconsolidated, unstable partial democracies and autocracies, rather than producing compromise and pacted transitions.... Elite limbo has led to uncertain and divergent outcomes in the postcommunist context, from unstable democracy at best (Moldova, Russia, Ukraine) to civil war at worst (Tajikistan)'.

Bunce (2000, 717), similarly, finds that:

'where the electoral strength of the communists versus the opposition forces was roughly equal...the costs for both democracy and economic reform were high, [leading to] at best many detours on the road to democracy and at worst either dedemocratization or the continuation of authoritarian rule'.

McFaul and Bunce, however, end their arguments at stating the precarious character of postcommunist elite stalemates and pacts. They do not go on to investigate which factors and elite actions determine the dynamics and outcomes of such stalemates; neither do they offer even a cursory attempt to explain how the tension between the communist and pro-democratic elites can open the door to a third political force, as happened in Belarus. What allows one group to eventually break the pact and dominate? Can both competing groups lose to a third party, and why? The argument of this thesis tries to pick up where McFaul and Bunce have concluded.

Despite the substantial literature it has generated, the elite-based approach has some important deficiencies in its application to stalled democracies, as the evidence either contradicts or does not fit the postulated theories. Also, this literature often ignores the arrival of authoritarian leaders from outside the circles of the former communist elites and the democratic opposition. Thus, some important questions remain unasked, namely: What

explains a change of leadership in the postcommunist states? How and why do leaders with authoritarian traits overcome other leaders, ensure their legitimacy and consolidate their power? What makes strong executive possible? The literature tells us little about the dynamics of elite pacts, the ability of elites to concentrate power and the conditions of state capture by elite outsiders. Elite-centred theories convince us that political leadership is crucial for transition, but do not satisfactorily explain why some leaders become popular, powerful and able to shape the transformations towards their desired outcomes, and others do not, the key question that this thesis pursues.

1.2. Political economy theories

A second strand in the democratisation literature is premised on the interdependence of political and economic reform. 'There are no democracies which are not market economies', states Diamond (1995, 109), while the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) proclaims that 'democracy and market are mutually reinforcing'(Transition report 1999 quoted in Khakee 1999, 600). The argument that political democratisation must be matched by the creation of a market economy is the cornerstone of the political economy literature on postcommunist transitions. The literature's debate, therefore, has developed around the content, sequencing and outcomes of the economic reform policies, rather than investigating the relationship between political and economic transitions in detail.

In the early transition years, the policy-making as well as theoretical field were dominated by strongly neo-liberal theory, as set out by Anders Aslund, David Lipton, Stanley Fisher and Yegor Gaidar, to name but a few. This theory lists a set of economic reforms deemed essential for the introduction of a market economy: a change of property relations (privatisation of state property), the introduction of market mechanisms of price regulation and goods distribution, the opening of markets to external agents and the liberalisation of trade and of financial systems (Hausner, Jessop et al. 1995, 10). This neo-liberal transition paradigm: liberalisation, privatisation and democratisation - is also known as the Washington consensus. It only briefly touches upon the political aspects of transition, however, when considering conditions for reform.

The neo-liberal discourse names two political conditions for market reforms: a presence of 'technopols', or politicians with sufficient will and knowledge to implement reform, and the popular mandate for reform (Kloten 1992, 39-43). Both these political conditions of reform are, again, of dubious explanatory value for the divergence of postcommunist transitions.

The first condition presumes that technopols necessarily embrace the neo-liberal reform package. Yet, most post-soviet leaders, despite being similar in many respects to reforming technopols elsewhere, have preferred to eschew radical economic restructuring. Intriguingly, to some of them, such as Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine or Viacheslau Kebich in Belarus, this avoidance cost them the governmental office; yet others, such as Nursultan Nazarbaev in Kazakhstan or Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, turned the avoidance of reform into a pillar of their regimes.

The second condition for reform, a popular mandate, generated a debate about the degree of political openness favourable for economic transition. Since reforms take a 'heavy toll on the social conditions of the population' (Przeworski 1991, 137; Kloten 1992, 35), it has been implicitly suggested that a lesser degree of democracy might actually be conducive to economic restructuring, since it limits the opportunities for the reform losers to oust the reformers from office. Hellman (1998, 232, 204) challenged this view and argued that it is the winners of reform who are most likely to stall them:

'in the conditions of limited electoral competition, actors who enjoyed extraordinary gains from the distortions of a partially reformed economy have fought to stall the reform in partial equilibrium that generated concentrated rents for themselves, while imposing high costs on the society'.

Consequently, Hellman (1998, 232) holds that democratic openness sustains the legitimacy of market reforms: 'systems with a higher level of political participation and competition sustain more comprehensive economic reforms than states where the losers of reform are insulated from electoral politics'.

Yet, the debate as to what degree of democratic openness is conducive to reform does not directly answer the question of how the popular commitment for reform is generated altogether. In successful democratisers, such as Poland or Estonia, the first pro-market reformists were voted out of power, but the overall direction of reform was maintained. In stalled democracies, much more timid attempts at reform led to a social rejection of Western reform recipes. The contrast clearly needs explaining. Why some societies stick to market economy despite the hardship of transition and others choose to opt out of it remains an open question, which this thesis purports to answer.

The neo-liberal approach has attracted much criticism for its one-size-fits-all stance, and blindness to the diversity of structural conditions within the transition states. It was accused of ignoring 'the pertinent comparative lesson of the post-socialist states, that the failure of

socialism rested precisely in an attempt to organise all economic processes according to a grand design' (Nesvetailova 2004, 20). The institutional approach, advocated by Stark and Bruszt (Stark 1995; Stark and Bruszt 1998; Stark and Bruszt 2001), and Bunce (Bunce 1999), in a more sociological perspective, emphasises that the elites are constrained in their reform policies by the economic and institutional legacies of the previous regime. Stark (1995, 70) thus writes that 'organisational forms, habituated practices, and social ties, whether official or informal, influenced the choices of elite during transition and thus led to diverse and unique varieties of capitalism'. Bunce (1999, 146-147) observes that 'the new institutions were rather built by the old ones and represented the melding of new and old structures'. Clearly, from across the former Soviet republics we can find plenty of evidence to support this argument. However, there is also sufficient grounds to suggest that, rather than being hostages to institutional legacies, the elites in authoritarian post-soviet states deliberately chose to preserve those legacies to a full or a substantial extent, so as to avoid the dispersal of economic power and maintain their own control over the economy. This begs further elaboration to explain how politicians can use the existing structures to legitimise themselves and augment their powers, without inducing a second revolutionary backlash or competitive reaction.

In the light of these questions, the third strand in the political economy of transition, the social structural theory, is also weak. The theory, advocated by King and Sznajder (2004), disregards the popular acceptance of reform altogether and places the reforms' outcomes solely in the hands of political elites. The social structural theory argues that the outcome of economic transition depends on the configuration of forces between the dominant bureaucratic elite (the *nomenklatura*), the technocracy, and the intelligentsia (the dissidents). King and Sznajder (2004, 17) hold that an alliance of the old *nomenklatura* with the upper reaches of the technocracy produces an illiberal state with an inefficient and non-dynamic economy, while an alliance of the technocracy and intelligentsia results in some variety of liberal capitalism. The explanatory power of this theory still does not cover stalled democracies. The theory presumes that the alliances struck in the early years of transition are not amenable to further change. Nevertheless, a characteristic feature of stalled transitions has been precisely the highjacking of economic power by the chief executive in his sole realm of authority. The social structural approach, consequently, offers little to explain how post-communist presidents can intervene in the emerging economic and property arrangements and install themselves as sole decision-makers on the matters of economy and economic policy.

For all the diversity of debate, the political economy literature is still primarily concerned with the economy 'end' of the political-economic reform relationship. In other words, it studies how progress in democratisation has affected the process of economic restructuring. While this may be a realistic reflection of the fact that no democratic progress was likely in the absence of economic growth, it also indicates the dominance of economists in the political economy debate. Little, as a result, is explored in the reverse direction, in the sense of how the conduct of economic reforms may have influenced the political actors, and whether the progress towards, let alone the consequences of, radical economic reform can be a key reason for the early abandonment of the democratisation project. This analytical lacuna probably emerged because the political economy literature still concentrates chiefly on Central and Eastern European transformations, where the necessity of economic restructuring remains largely unquestioned. In stalled democracies, however, the imperatives of democracy and market economy were clearly doubted and overridden; the causes and dynamics of these developments merit further explanation.

1.3. International influence

The third strand of the democratisation literature, the international dimension, is not as readily summarised as the other approaches since theoretically it is less transparent. Unlike theories on political or economic aspects of transition, which tend to gravitate towards certain explanatory camps, the majority of the literature on what Whitehead (1996) called 'the international dimension of democratisation' seems to be 'not theories, but rather conceptual frameworks, within which we can develop a model of explanation for the particular cases at hand' (Yilmaz 2002, 69). One reason for this is clearly because the 'complex dynamic process of interaction between the international security, economic, political and cultural environments and the internal politics, economics and culture of individual nation states' (Almond 1989, 257) does not yield itself to an easy general analysis. There is in a sense a justified theoretical 'opt-out' in the observation that 'the impact of domestic and external factors varies over time in different countries without any clear logic or patterns ... and therefore calls for a careful empirical examination of each case' (Zielonka 2001, 520, 532). Whitehead (2001, 23) cautions that analysing the international dimension necessitates one 'to work with intricate and elusive patterns of strategic interactions, which differ subtly from one case to the next'. Grabbe (2002, 252) again argues for an 'examination of the multiple points of contact' between the external and internal actors. While the guidelines are thus very broad (and there are sound reasons for that) there is a danger that an

open invitation for purely descriptive history writing stops us from theorising where we might actually manage it.

The international dimension of transitions needs to be addressed systematically, as it implicitly claims a solution to the puzzle of the divergence between the CEE and post-soviet transitions, albeit in more '*realpolitik*' than theoretical terms. This claim is that the Western influence, and in particular the EU conditionality[3] towards its aspirant members, has underpinned the success of democratic transitions. Conditionality is defined as:

a) 'a deliberate use of coercion by attaching specific conditions to the distribution of benefits to recipient countries on the part of multilateral institutions' (Schmitter 1996, 30);
b) 'specifying conditions or even pre-conditions for support, involving either promise of material aid or political opportunities' (Pridham and Ágh 2001, 69); and
c) 'the linking of perceived benefits (e.g. political support, economic aid, membership in an organization) to the fulfilment of a certain programme' (Kubicek 2003, 7).

It has been argued in several quarters that the instrument of conditionality has allowed Western institutional actors to shape state-building and influence policies in the transition countries, through the transposition of their legislative and templates, provision of aid and technical assistance, policy advice, monitoring, demarches, and public criticism (Grabbe 2002, 256), observation of elections as well as multilateral and bilateral programmes (Smith 2001, 36, 49-51). By implication, this suggests that without Western external conditionality democratic transitions are more likely to go astray.

At first sight, the application of this conditionality factor actually seems to solve the puzzle of the divergence of transition paths. The new and incoming members of the EU in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are consolidating democracies, whereas the post-soviet countries beyond the EU new frontier are mostly stalled democracies. The argument that Western interest and support determined the success or failure of democratisation in postcommunist states has nevertheless several flaws. First, it implies that CEE countries owe their democracy to the West, and primarily to the EU. Hughes (2003, 17) demonstrates convincingly that 'EU political conditionality was so generic in its scope and so tangential to the assistance effort in the CEEC that it largely can be subsumed under the heading

[3] Whitehead (1996, 8) distinguished between contagion, control and consent as forms of international influence over transitions. The most salient method of international influence in the postcommunist settings, both in terms of the character of international pressure frequency of application and established impact, has been, however, conditionality.

'declaratory policy'. His (Hughes 2003, 17) conclusion, that 'rather than being 'foreign-made' by the EU, democracy in Eastern Europe was largely self-made' - certainly strikes a chord in the CEE societies. Second, even a fairly obvious effort by the West to uproot undemocratic postcommunist rulers has not always delivered the desired result, as the failure to dislodge President Lukashenka of Belarus during the election in 2001, exemplifies. Hence, the role of Western institutional actors in postcommunist democratisations has been significantly exaggerated. Although undoubtedly important for the transitions, Western interest and conditionality are arguably not the primary explanation of the transitions' divergence, but an indication of some more profound factor at work. After all, Western influence has been most pronounced in the countries that embraced European values, and was rather wasted on the societies for which it was not the obvious, or only, developmental choice.

The literature has argued that the West and its liberal-democratic paradigm were the 'main reference point' (Zielonka 2001, 513) and a 'pole of attraction' (Pravda 2001, 2) for the postcommunist states. In Grabbe's (2002, 249) words, 'the EU political and economic agenda for the transition states constituted the 'motherhood and apple pie' criteria, to which no self-respecting European could object'. Yet, for the former soviet republics, the West was not a unique external authority, a fact which the literature almost completely ignores. As the locus of decision-making in the USSR, the hub of economic and production links, the cultural centre, the Russian Federation unavoidably retained authority among the post-soviet societies. Although the social impetus for democratisation emerged largely from the popular wish to 'live as they do in the West', the European values and ways of life were less familiar to the newly emergent post-soviet states than the soviet ones, which Russia embodied. The number of integration treaties and unions between the former soviet republics (Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Union of Russia and Belarus) testified to their perceived need for cooperation. The Russian government was also keen to preserve its influence in the former soviet republics, for reasons spanning from economic to ideological. However, to blame the stalling of democratisation on Russia would be another oversimplification and exaggeration, for the Russian government has not been able to establish unequivocal patron-client relationships with any of the leaders of post-soviet states. Rather, we must realise that the international influence over postcommunist transitions has not been limited to the Western actors only, and that it has been more diverse and less straightforward than the literature has suggested so far. Ultimately, the choice of pro-European or pro-soviet ways of development rested with the transitions societies, and the

question to pursue, therefore, is why some external actors received more room to exert influence over transition states than others.

To conclude this review of the literature, the arguments and theories explaining the success of democratic transitions are of limited utility for understanding stalled democratisations. They either do not correspond to the evidence (for example, the former communist elites have not necessarily been the main advocates of democracy's stalling), or, even if they do fit the evidence (as with the importance of economic restructuring), these theories cannot explain how the authoritarian leaders managed to pursue their agenda. Finally, the factors which were irrelevant to the CEE transitions, but were of tangible importance to the post-soviet ones (such as Russia's authority), have been plainly ignored. The existing theories of democratisation, consequently, cannot fully grasp the causes and dynamics of the divergence of postcommunist transitions. Next, we offer a competing theory, derived from an analysis of stalled transitions, which we hope to show can withstand application across the full range of postcommunist transition cases.

II. Nationalism as strategic tool in postcommunist transformations

The consolidated and stalled postcommunist democracies certainly differ in terms of the configuration of their political elites, the conduct of their economic reforms and their international standing. Yet, the theoretical postulates derived from these differences do not explain in a consistent or convincing way the divergence of postcommunist transformations. At the same time, the literature seems to have overlooked one common feature in postcommunist transitions, the variation in which is concurrent with the variation in their outcomes. Throughout the postcommunist area, political elites set their political programmes within overall visions of national development for their societies. The leaders of authoritarian states claimed to have found nation-specific transition paths[4]. The leaders of the successful democratisers, on the contrary, consistently placed their countries within the European developmental framework and the system of values[5]. The successful democratic

[4] The evidence follows further in the section.

[5] President Adamkus of Lithuania has claimed that 'Europe of Christian values, democracy, freedom and brotherhood is our fate' Pavlovaite, I. (2003). "Being European by Joining Europe: Accession and idnetity politics in Lithuania." Cambrdige Review of International Affairs **16**(2): 239-255.

President Havel called Czechs to vote for membership in the EU by arguing that: 'either we shall assume an equal share in our continent's common cultivation of its spiritual and material values, or we shall become self-contained ...self-absorbed, somewhat decaying relic' Havel, V. (01.01.2002). New Year's Address by Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic. Czech Television, Czech Radio. http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/2002/0101_uk.html.

and successful authoritarian postcommunist leaders thus shared a common characteristic: they have been able to anchor themselves in the idea of the nation. Can the way in which political actors relate to the nation, or build the national foundation for their policies, explain their political fortunes and the unveiling of the transition paths?

The democratisation literature seems to ignore the significance of possible causality between the conceptualisation of national identity and the outcomes of postcommunist transitions. At most, it approaches the role of nationalism in democratisation from a rather different angle, which can be summarised as follows. Democratisation requires a stable state, which, in turn, rests on the popular consensus derived from the feeling of unity among the members of a nation. In other words, the nation sustains the state, and the presence of a state makes democratic reform possible. To give a taste of the literature, Rustow's seminal article on democratisation postulates that democratic transition requires 'national borders and consequent absence of mental reservations as to which political community the people belong to' (Rustow 1970, 350); Diamond and Plattner (1994, xi) argue: 'Democracy has always found its home in particular communities, which in modern times have been generated principally by nationalism'; Linz and Stepan's (1996a, 22) prescription is also well-known: 'Democracy requires statehood; without a sovereign state, there can be no secure democracy'; similarly, Grugel (2002, 206) names the legitimacy of the nation state a '*sine qua non*' of democratisation.

Based on that view, to which most authors on transitions tend to gravitate,the democratisation literature has often remained inconclusive on role of nationalism, or popular mobilisation on the basis of shared national values and identity, in democratisation. At most, it appears, it is interpreted in two ways depending on the relationship between national mobilisation and statehood. Rustow (1970, 350) gives little or no importance 'grand political purpose pursued by the citizenry as a whole'. Some works have borrowed the 'civic' versus 'ethnic' typology of national mobilisation from nationalism studies, with civic nationalism being 'based on the values of individual liberty and rational cosmopolitanism' (Kohn 1955, 330) and thus being ethnically inclusive; and ethnic nationalism 'leading to over-emphasis on belonging to the ethnic group' (Kohn 1955, 330) and thus being ethnically exclusive. The inventor of the East-West distinction in the discussion of nationalism (which revolves around

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Similarly, president Kwasniewski stated that 'Poland 's entry to the European Union...will be a *sui generis* return to our own centuries-old cultural and state traditions' Kwasniewski, A. (2001). Our home Poland. http://www.president.pl/x.download?id=2003266.

ethnic and civic criteria), Hans Kohn (1955, 329), associated civic nationalism with mobilisation *after* the formation of the nation state, as happened in Western Europe in the eighteenth century, whereas he described ethnic nationalism as 'an attempt to redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands', or disrupt the existing states and create new ones, as was typical of Eastern Europe in the ninetienth century. The renowned expert on nationalism in Eastern Europe, Miroslav Hroch (2000, 4) also argues that the creation of the nation state was the end purpose, rather than the starting point, of national mobilisation in the region.

Drawing on these views, some authors presumed that inclusive, or civic, nationalism strengthens the state, by virtue of its inclusive character, and hence assists democratisation, while exclusive, or ethnic, nationalism disrupts the state, due to its ethnically exclusive nature, and thus impedes democratisation. Canovan (1996, 2) thus writes that 'to make sense, democracy requires a 'people', and social justice a political community within which redistribution can take place, while the liberal discourse of rights and the rule of law demands a strong and impartial polity'. 'Persons in a nation firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties towards each other in virtue of their shared membership of it', argues Gellner (1983, 7). Kuzio (2001c, 174) names civic nationalism as essential for democratisation and affirms that 'it is precisely the weakness of civic nationalism which is proving to be a negative influence upon the post-soviet transitions process'. Pridham (2000, 283), similarly, praises an inclusive national identity for 'offering possibilities for new democracies to resolve outstanding difficulties and harness additional forms of consensus that obviously point towards the eventual achievement of democratic consolidation'. There are also plenty of arguments about ethnic nationalism as a principal threat to democratisation. Roeder (1999, 855-860) writes that 'democracy is unlikely to survive in ethnically plural societies...stable democracy falls off with greater ethnic diversity'. Offe (1996, 31) (1996, 31-34) points to 'ethnic and other minority confluences and corresponding secessionist longings' as a major challenge to transition. Vachudova and Snyder (1997, 3) observe that anti-democratic communist elites have been able to preserve their power in the countries with national minorities by mobilising the population against these minorities, thus pointing to ethnic nationalism as the principal method for legitimation by anti-democratic elites. Rustow (1970, 360) also sees issues of 'community', by which he essentially refers to nationality, one of the perils for democratic transition in the habituation phase.

Within the nationalism studies, many authors have recognised the increasing irrelevance of the civic versus ethnic typology of nationalism and have tried to depart from it. In particular, Brubaker (1996) has suggested acknowledging that states seek to indoctrinate their population into one particular national form. He introduces the concept of 'nationalising state' to describe ethnically heterogeneous states whose dominant elites promote the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the formally state-bearing nation (1996, 57). Brubaker's writing, therefore, focuses on what otherwise qualify as ethnic nationalism. The significance of Brubaker's contribution, nevertheless, is in the argument that the continuation of inclusive national mobilisation is possible – and typical – in countries with resolved statehood issues. Brubaker himself acknowledges that he does not account for a possible differentiation of national discourse as formulated by political elites, and the consequences of such differentiation for regime development in transition countries (Brubaker 2006, n.p.) Kuzio argues that 'nationalising (i.e. nation-building) policies may bring positive and negative results'(Kuzio 2001a, 143). The thrust of his argument, however, is to provide an alternative to civic/ethnic and Brubaker's typology of postcommunist states; as such, it is concerned with interpreting the results rather than explaining the causes of postcommunist transformations. Thus, even the authors arguing about the possibility of national mobilisation within already well-functioning states, or polities with resolved issues of statehood, pay little attention to the varieties in the content of nationalising policies, and the impact of such variation has had within postcommunist transition states.

If a view on nationalism has been presented in the democratisation literature, it has often been reduced to the plainly dichotomist approach: inclusive equals pro-democratic, and exclusive equals anti-democratic. Following this logic, the literature has ignored the possibility that inclusive national mobilisation in support of an already existing state may be anti-democratic, because this contradicted the historical examples of civic nationalism. The postcommunist cases where democratic transitions had stalled, but the state did not fall because of ethnic conflicts, were dismissed as having no national identity at all, rather than explored for other forms of national mobilisation and its implications:

'Areas with weak identities (e.g. eastern Ukraine, Belarus, Central Asia) have been bastions of support for sovietophile political parties. In contrast, areas that have robust national identities (e.g. western Ukraine and three Baltic states) ... removed communists at an earlier stage and endorsed political and economic reform' (Kuzio 2001, 172).

The possibility that inclusive national mobilisation may work towards anti-democratic purposes has been hardly entertained in the democratisation literature[6]. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly obvious in practice.

Following the view that exclusive nationalism is most precarious for democratisation, we would expect that the transition countries with the largest record of ethnic disputes would be the least democratic. The evidence of post-soviet states negates this expectation. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Moldova, ethnic mobilisation has caused military conflicts and threatened the integrity of the state. In Latvia and Estonia, government policies towards Russian minorities have been so exclusionary that they attracted international concern. Yet, none of these states is among the most consolidated authoritarian post-soviet regimes, while Latvia and Estonia have become democratic enough to be able to join the EU. Furthermore, none of the countries on Freedom House's list of consolidated autocracies (Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan) has caused concerns comparable to those above with regard to ethnic mobilisation, despite having a potential for it: not only are these states ethnically heterogeneous, but they also have ethnic minority groups of sizeable proportions, which, if mobilised, could undermine the state (even in the most ethnically homogenised country of these, Turkmenistan, minorities constitute 15 per cent of the population) (CIA 2006, n.p.) Yet, these groups have never challenged the state; crucially, the minorities' political complacency cannot clearly be attributed to physical coercion or oppression by the dominant nation, as there is no common trend to such end among the post-soviet authoritarian regimes. Instead, these regimes share a substantial record of nation-building that is nationalising into the values and characteristics of the titular nation but is at the same time ethnically open and inclusive.

A close look at the post-soviet authoritarian states moreover reveals an active nation-building effort within them, with very peculiar characteristics. This effort has been certainly focused on the titular nation, with the advancement of national symbols and claims to national glory and uniqueness, new interpretation of the nation's history and promotion of the national languages instead of Russian, the soviet lingua franca. In Turkmenistan, a research institute was established to study Turkmens' 'cultural heritage'. In Uzbekistan, the statue of Lenin in the centre of the capital in 1994 was replaced with a monument to Tamerlane, an influential

[6] Brubaker (1996, 63) is one of few academics to argue about the dynamic nature of state nationalism. Brubaker, R. (1996). Nationalism reframed : nationhood and the national question in the New Europe. Cambridge England ; New York, Cambridge University Press.

Central Asian military leader of the Middle Ages. In Kazakhstan, geographical names have been amended to make them sound more 'authentic', no matter how minute the difference was: Alma-Ata was renamed into Almatu, Koustanai into Kostanai and Kzul-Orda into Kuzulorda (Aybakirov June 25,1997, [Segodnia]). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan even changed their alphabets from Cyrillic to Latin.

It is remarkable, however, that despite being nation-focused in content, the style and thrust of popular ideological mobilisation has been unmistakenly typical of the soviet era: 'the iconography and layout of newspapers, the style and ritual of speeches, the repetitive enumeration of titles, all follow soviet forms, but their content is now national', observes Roy (2000, 162). The post-soviet authoritarian regimes have even pursued grand projects, as in the soviet times: Kazakhs were given the new national capital, Turkmens were promised an artificial lake in the middle of the Karakum desert, while Belarusians were mobilised for the construction of the new premises for the National Library, officially hailed as the physical embodiment of the civilised and educated Belarus. Most importantly, their national mobilisation policies retained two crucial elements of the soviet ideology: the prevalence of the collective over the individual, and the membership in the collective on the basis of ideological conformity, rather than ethnic belonging. In other words, national mobilisation in the post-soviet authoritarian states has praised the characteristics of the dominant nation, but promoted them as a set of values to which all members of the polity could conform irrespective of their ethnic origin.

The evidence of post-soviet states thus suggests that the postcommunist context has bred a distinct variation of nationalism, one that combines the features of both liberal and illiberal types; we will call it 'egalitarian nationalism'. Like liberal nationalism, egalitarian nationalism seeks to unite all the members of a particular polity on the basis of shared values rather than on common blood; it professes membership of the citizenry rather than of an ethnic group; and it allows for national mobilisation within an already existing state. Like ethnic nationalism, however, egalitarian nationalism prizes the collective, and places individual liberties and choices well below the ostensible interests and values of the community and thus justifies their oppression. Egalitarian nationalism is thus inclusive and anti-democratic.

The post-soviet authoritarian regimes in Belarus and Central Asia demonstrate that egalitarian national mobilisation is a political tool and strategy in the hand of political elites,

and can work towards legitimating authoritarian regimes in at least three respects. In the first place, it has allowed authoritarian leaders to bypass the institutionalised democratic procedures under the pretext of a popular will and without refuting democracy in principle. Under the pretext of securing national stability, President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan dissolved the Parliament twice and organised two referenda to prolong his rule; President Lukashenka of Belarus expanded his powers in the course of three referenda; President Karimov of Uzbekistan had the presidential term of office extended from 5 to 7 years by a constitutional amendment in 2002.

Second, authoritarian leaders have used egalitarian nationalism to frame democratic freedoms and rights as threats to national stability and unity, and also portrayed democratic opposition as traitors and enemies of the nation. On that basis, they have justified the suppression of democracy as dangerous for national development. At the same time, the claims to national uniqueness have allowed authoritarian presidents to disregard international opinion and dismiss inconvenient Western reform recipes. 'The Kazakh way is not a blind copy-cat [of the West], but a search for our own path ...We are not going to experiment on our own people for the sake of getting applause from other countries', wrote the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev (quoted in Kozlov October 28, 1989, [Nezavisimaia Gazeta]). Similarly, the President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov claimed: 'We decided not to copy foreign experience mechanically...We are following our unique path, based on our historical experience, national values, and cultural legacies (quoted in Shandybin October 25, 2002, [Zavtra])

Third, authoritarian leaders of post-soviet states have established themselves as embodiments of the nation. Thus, Nursultan Nazarbaev had a Law on the First President adopted in 2000, which granted him political powers even after his retirement. The first ever title 'Hero of Uzbekistan' went to President Islam Karimov. With an implicit claim of '*la nation, c'est moi*', authoritarian presidents have claimed themselves to be indispensable for national development and thus ensured their personal security and unlimited authority.

The evidence from stalled democracies suggests that we should reconsider, or at least qualify, the literature's assumption that inclusive nationalism is conducive to democratisation. Such an assumption, in fact, blinds us to the understanding of how the diversity of postcommunist transitions became possible. Contrary to the argument that the absence of inclusive nationalism makes democracy improbable, we argue that the usage of

inclusive, egalitarian national mobilisation by political elites can stall democratisation. Inclusive nationalism emerged as civic and liberal in the West, but that does not mean it should be inherently or invariably pro-democratic elsewhere. Also, if a regime includes people into a particular polity regardless of their ethnic background, it does not automatically imply that it respects other individual rights and democratic principles as well. The post-soviet authoritarian states are cases of failed liberal nationalism, but they are clear examples of so far successful inclusive national mobilisation for authoritarian purposes. Egalitarian nationalism is not liberal nationalism, and the inclusive egalitarian national mobilisation is anti-democratic. To be clear, egalitarian nationalism has not been the only type of national mobilisation in the postcommunist area: there were cases of clearly ethnic nationalism in the former Yugoslav republics of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, and weaker strains of it elsewhere, as in the former Czechoslovakia. We also saw examples of national mobilisation on the basis of liberal values, as in Poland or Hungary. We must, however, acknowledge the existence of yet another, specifically postcommunist type of nationalism: the egalitarian national mobilisation that utilises ethnic elements, but employs the soviet principle principles of ethical, rather than ethnic, unity, as well as collectivism and anti-liberalism.

Hence, the usage of nationalism by political elites can be investigated as a key explanation for the divergence of postcommunist transitions. We suggest that the transitions' outcomes depended on the national foundations they were given by political leaders. In particular, the construction of the nation around the European liberal set of values has underpinned the effort of pro-democratic leaders in Central and Eastern Europe, the former soviet Baltic republics, and most recently, in Georgia and Ukraine, whereas egalitarian nationalism has allowed authoritarian leaders to establish and consolidate their regimes in Belarus and in Central Asia (a similar process is arguably under way in Russia); while the resort to ethnic nationalism has delivered little state-wide legitimacy to political actors in Moldova, Armenia and Azerbajan and led to uncertain transition outcomes. To summarise, we propose that postcommunist political actors directed the transition paths towards their preferred choice by 'capturing' the nation. We suggest the conditions for such 'capturing', or the prevalence of a particular type of national mobilisation in the concluding chapter.

III. Methodological framework

What is the most effective method to explain the divergence of postcommunist transformations? Yin (1994, 9) suggests that 'when a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control - which is our situation - case study research is the best strategy'. Eckstein (2000, 120) concurs: 'the argument for case studies as a means for building theories seems strongest in regard to precisely those phenomena with which the subfield of 'comparative' politics is most associated: macropolitical phenomena, that is, units of political study of considerable magnitude or complexity such as nation-states'.

Next, what number of cases is appropriate given our research question? Comparative politics favours two- to multiple case studies. We contemplated comparing a successful against a failed case of democratic transition; however, this would suggest a comparison between a Central Eastern European and a post-soviet country, the differences in history and levels of development of which are too wide to provide a solid ground for analysis. A comparison of two stalled democratisations would mean a search for two different countries that arrived at the same transition outcomes despite a profound difference in the starting conditions. Yet, the initial conditions for transitions were arguably too similar among the post-soviet states for to make for a valid study. Instead of establishing differences and similarities between several cases, a deep and detailed scrutiny of one critical case, which has included both an impetus to democratisation and authoritarian consolidation, is arguably better suited to reveal the factors and dynamics of stalled democracies. This opinion is supported in the literature: Landman (2000, 32) allows for a single-country study to be considered comparative if it develops concepts applicable to other countries and/or seeks to make larger inferences, all of which is the purpose of this research. He also assures us that single country studies are useful for generating hypotheses for theories that have yet to be specified fully, which is, again, our case (Landman 2000, 32). A single case study is not an easier option for the researcher; Eckstein (2000, 120) notes that it is in fact more demanding: 'If we conduct crucial case studies, we are far more likely to develop theories logically and imaginatively, rather than relying on mechanical processing to reveal them. We are more constrained to state theories tightly and in proper form... crucial case-study involves far more compelling practical demands for the proper statement of theories, or else exposes far more manifestly when theories are not property stated'.

3.1. The choice of case study

We are looking to choose a country which has experienced both democratisation and the installation of an authoritarian regime. The country that best fits the criteria of a critical case study of stalled democracy is Belarus. It is both the most stable and historically the longest example of a more widespread trend. The country experienced all the main 'symptoms' of democratisation in the late 1980s: the emergence of a mass popular movement for national revival and democracy, the introduction of democratic institutions and procedures, the observance of democratic freedoms. Its experience of democratisation was much more substantial than that of the Central Asian republics. Fifteen years into transition, however, Belarus is not a consolidating or even an aspiring democratiser. Freedom House rated Belarus as 'not free', with a rating of 6.54 in 2004 (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 2004, 18). Western governments and organisations have not recognised the results of elections and referenda in the country since 1996. The country is widely dubbed 'the last dictatorship in Europe'. The reversal of democratisation started in Belarus as early as in 1995, making it the first and the longest case of stalled democratisation in the region[7]. Unlike the regimes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, the authoritarian regime in Belarus had not yielded to internal and external pressure by mid 2005, and thus has also proved to be the most stable. We will come back to comparison of the Belarusian case against the similar and contrasting cases in the thesis conclusion.

To add more suspense for the reader, post-soviet development in Belarus poses puzzles with respect to virtually all suggested factors of democratisation, as they all predicted a successful democratic transition for the country. According to the theory which names elite pacts as the principal requirement of democratisation, Belarus should have undergone a safe transition, as the major political actors observed a pact in the early post-soviet years. Both parties to the pact, however, lost power to an outsider political actor. From the economic point of view, the presence of technocrats in the government, and the launch of reforms promised Belarus good chances of transition, but they were not used. As for the international dimension, the welcome of Belarus onto the international arena did not safeguard it from departing from democratisation.

The Belarusian transition features yet further enticements for a researcher's attention. The Belarusian leader claims to have produced an alternative to the Western path of development, which made the Belarusian nation no less than the 'saviour of the Eastern

[7] Central Asian republics are rather cases of continued authoritarianism than stalled democracies.

European civilization' (Lukashenka July 1, 2003). The potency of this claim for political science cannot be ignored. Furthermore, there is no noticeable ethnic discontent, which might be expected in the country with national minorities as sizeable as 13 per cent (Russian) and 6 per cent (Polish) (Statistical Yearbook 2005, 25) Therefore, the Belarusian regime is an example of an apparently sustainable postcommunist authoritarian system. Also, as the tendency towards authoritarianism has become increasingly widespread throughout the post-soviet area, as we argued in the beginning of the chapter, the perception of Belarus as 'a singular exception to the trend to democracy' (Mihalisko 1997, 223) in 1997 is giving place to the realisation that 'the Belarusian story seems to be the typical path, at least in the former Soviet Union' (King 2000, 153). Last but not least, the country has seen two attempts at national mobilisation during the post-soviet years, which is particularly intriguing in light of our hypothesis about the importance of nationalism for the definition of transition paths.

For all these reasons, the post-soviet transformation of Belarus can serve as the most adequate critical case for the study of the national foundations of postcommunist transformations. The empirical part of the thesis applies the conventional factors suggested in the literature to the Belarusian transition, to demonstrate that national mobilisation has played a key role in the way they operated. The chronological frame of the analysis covers 15 years: it starts in 1989, when a popular movement for democracy was formally organised, and ends in 2004, when a national referendum endorsed the possibility of a state presidency for life. Personal and geographical names are transliterated from Belarusian according to the Library of Congress rules.

3.2. Data Sources

The study relies predominantly on primary data due to the innovative nature of the question researched and the originality criteria for a doctoral thesis. Secondary sources on Belarus are scarce and are utilised where relevant.

Primary sources

The analysis of Belarusian transition is built prevailingly on the primary sources. The thesis originated as a study of civil society in Belarus, and the field work conducted in autumn 2002 reflected that focus. The author interviewed 96 leaders of non-governmental organisations in 6 regional centres of Belarus, 8 each, as well as several academics and experts in the area of politics and civil society. The interviews were semi-structured, conducted predominantly in the organisations' offices; they lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.

In the course of the field work, however, it became apparent that the emergence of civil society in Belarus, and its impact over development of the country could only be unequivocally elucidated. Furthermore, it also became clear that the ideational aspect of transition, and in particular, national ideology and national mobilisation, had played a significant role in shaping post-soviet developments. A study of the transition through nationalism lenses promised to yield a more comprehensive and valid understanding of the country's development. Therefore, the focus of the thesis was widened after the analysis of fieldwork and geared more towards the study of national mobilisation by political elites. The interviews relevant to the current analysis are used throughout the thesis for background and illustration purposes.

In the course of writing the thesis, there emerged the need for clarification of the international aspect of the Belarusian transition, in particular, by US policy-makers promoting democracy in the former Soviet Union. During a trip to Washington DC in February 2004, the author interviewed the former US Ambassador to Belarus (Michael Kozak), the head of the Department of State division dealing with Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova (Mark Taplin), as well as senior officers with the National Endowment for Democracy (Roger Potocki) and US Helsinki Commission dealing with Belarus (Orest Deychakiwsky), and vice-president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Thomas Carothers). Further, a telephone interview with Piotr Kravchenko, Minister of Foreign Affairs during 1990 to 1994, provided a clearer picture of the imperatives of Belarusian foreign policy during that period.

Apart from the interviews, the study utilises Belarusian periodicals extensively. With regard to developments in the early 1990s, it relies predominantly on the newspaper *Narodnaia Hazeta*. This print media had the widest circulation in the country at the time (400,000 copies), and was the official publication of the Belarusian Parliament, carrying all the legislative acts, as well as covering major decisions by the executive (which did not have an official print media), and giving voice to representatives of all sides of the political debate. That *Narodnaia Hazeta* was an influential and independent newspaper is confirmed by the fact that it became one of the first targets of the authoritarian President in his drive to subsume the media. (He first replaced the editor of the newspaper, and later abolished it altogether). Any objective account of Belarusian development under President Lukashenka needs to draw from two sources: from the government-sponsored media and the media of the presidential opponents. The former include the state-run newspaper *Sovetskaia Belorussia* (circulation 300, 000, the largest in the country), the state TV channel ATN, and in particular

its news broadcasts, and the extensive internet site of President Lukashenka containing transcripts of all his speeches, as well as official data pertaining all aspects of state development. All these sources, as well as other publications by state bodies and ministries, are extensively referred to in the thesis. With regard to publications of the opposition, or sources which present themselves as 'independent', although would be more adequately characterised as anti-presidential, the most notable and reliable in terms of the consistency of their data are the newspapers *Belorusskaia Gazeta, Belorusskii Rynok, Belorusskaia Delovaia Gazeta.* In the conditions of severely limited freedom of speech, which we demonstrate later, these print media have small circulation, and often struggle for existence (*Belorusskaia Delovaia Gazeta* in particular), yet, they provide thoughtful and detailed coverage of Belarusian development different from that of the government. Another source of news and data within the country is the internet site of the civic initiative Charter 97. Analytical papers by Belarusian experts are represented at the internet site *Nashe Mnenie.* We strived to include the perspectives from both these ostensibly independent sources and from governmental outlets with respect to any development considered in the thesis.

To further ensure reliability of our findings, we have drawn on analytical and media sources outside of Belarus. Where available, we referred to publications and reports of international organisations with reputation for quality of their research, such as the United Nations (and United Nations Developmental Programme in particular), World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Red Cross and the like. We also included print and internet periodicals from the West and Russia, as well as reports of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Institute of War and Peace Research. We sought to triangulate governmental, independent, foreign primary sources, as well as data from the literature with respect to any information presented in the thesis.

Belarusian studies

Belarus is an unusual suspect in democratization studies. For a long time, Belarus was sidelined in postcommunist literature as it could not yield much insight into the factors success of democratic transitions. Once the concept of 'democratic teleology' (Carothers 2002, 9) waned, and the authoritarian regime in Belarus showed more tendencies to consolidation rather than crumbing, more interest in the country emerged. This interest, however, has not yet resulted in a satisfactory explanation or understanding of Belarusian transition. The circle of Western students of Belarus is limited to academics or policy practitioners, linked to Belarus through their professional or personal ties. This circle is fairly

small and has produced few studies so far. As no truly open academic discussion of the Lukashenka regime is allowed within the country, Belarusian academics have not been able to contribute in a significant way to understanding the country's transition. Overall, the Western and domestic literature on Belarus share two characteristics. One is a strong descriptive element to most of the works [8], which is understandable, and, perhaps, indispensable for field-breaking studies. Another peculiarity is the virtual absence of multi-aspect research and prevalence of essays on particular topics, such as integration with Russia, economic policies, or oppression of democratic freedoms (see Korosteleva 2002, Lewis 2002). This literature proved most useful as a source of data, since it rarely departs from description to analysis and puts forward very few arguments; while the arguments proposed can be challenged empirically and analytically.

The literature's prevailing explanation of the stalling of democratization and advancement of the authoritarian rule in Belarus can be summarized as 'inability to cope with sovereignty'. The thrust of the argument is that Belarus enjoyed the life under the soviet system, in terms of well-developed economy and standard of living, that national identity of the population was weak, and that sovereignty was imposed on the people rather than claimed by them; consequently, the Belarusian population opted out of democratization and preferred the re-installation of the rule resembling the soviet one, being ready to pay the price of sovereignty altogether if required. The thesis challenges this tired cliché by pointing to significant popular mobilization for political and economic reform of the soviet system in the early 1990s, and offers more detailed and nuanced explanation of the unveiling of the Belarusian transition on the basis of national ideology conceptualization.

Following Marples' (1999) pithy term 'denationalised nation', Belarus has been often seen as the country where the 'dog of nationalism did not bark' (Kolsto 2000, 152). This weak sense of national identity is named as a primary explanation for the authoritarian rule in Belarus: 'It is the absence of nationalism – in its primary definition of devotion to the interests of a nation- that makes Lukashenka possible'(Mihalisko 1997, 224); 'the establishment of a sultanistic rule in Belarus was directly facilitated by weak national identity' (Eke and Kuzio 2000, 528). The argument about weak national identity in Belarus is based on two facts: the rare usage of the Belarusian language (and prevalence of Russian) in everyday communication, and the apparent social indifference to national-democratic

[8] In the so far largest monograph on Belarusian transition, the author David Marples (1999, xi) pursues the intention 'to provide a useful guide to the contemporary situation in Belarus'

opposition, contrasting the consistent social support of the Russian-speaking president Lukashenka. The prevalence of the Russian language in Belarus, however, may be explained by historical reasons (see chapter 5), and by itself arguably is not sufficient to rule out the existence of the Belarusian identity, or a nation altogether, as Joselyn (1998) does[9].

Few students of nationalism, however, have noticed the presence of a common identity among the Belarusian population, which is not based on the Belarusian language. 'In Belarus, it is possible to see not so much two competing concepts of Belarusian nationhood but rather two national identities, one Belarusian and the other 'soviet', notes Szporluk (1998, 317). Goujon (1999, 673) demonstrates how the language issues have been politicized and used as instrument of power in political conflicts between the president and the opposition. Wilson (1998, 23-47) distinguishes and compares Belarusian and Russophile national historiography and mythology; while Lindner (1999) follows the development and formulation of two rival interpretations of the Belarusian history. The most recent pensive account of the duality of identities in Belarus is offered by Ioffe (2003). Ioffe demonstrates how the powerful Belarusian neighbours (and principals), Poland and Russia, attempted to exert their cultural dominance upon the Belarusian lands and people, resulting in two competing sets of national symbols and two different mythologies to back them (Ioffe 2003b, 1266). Consequently, Ioffe (2003b, 166-67) concludes that 'there is no single Belarusian identity, and Belarusians suffer from a collective split identity disorder'.

While the literature recognizes the existence of two, rather than one, sources of identity for Belarusians, and explains their roots, little has been explored by the way of the political implications of such a duality. The only suggestion is the afore-mentioned link between the weak Belarusian identity and the failure of democratization, implying such a weak identity as a sort of social malaise that has blinded Belarusians to the virtues of a democratic order. There has been surprisingly little analysis of why and how Belarusian political actors actually employed identity issues. The arguments about nation-building in Belarus refer almost exclusively to the nationalizing policies during 1990-1994, while references to the Russian-language-based identity of 'soviet vintage' (Ioffe 2003b) are invariably linked to the imminent loss of Belarusian independence to Russia altogether. The possibility of Belarusian national ideology based on soviet values as a pillar of sovereignty is thus dismissed and not even discussed. Yet, the thesis argues that precisely that ideology has been the principle

[9] 'I would go almost so far as to say that the Belarusian nation does not exist' (Joselyn 1998, 76).

instrument of Aliaksandr Lukashenka in establishing and consolidating authoritarian regime in Belarus.

To summarize, Belarusian studies have so far been largely confined to descriptive and introductory works. These are certainly justifiable and possibly needed, but, in the words of Ioffe (2003a, 1011), 'scholarly analysis of how and why the present state of affairs evolved in Belarus is long overdue'. Ioffe's own work, certainly, helps to 'understand Belarus' from the point of view of national and social history. Yet, there has been no multi-faceted account of Belarusian post-soviet transition, encompassing various aspects of the process[10]. Such an analysis, however, is expedient to understand why democratization reverted in Belarus, how authoritarian regime came in place, what sustains it, and how long it is likely to exist. The thesis purports to provide an answer to these questions.

Another point to be made with respect to sources on Belarusian post-soviet transition is their paucity. Two subject that proved particularly difficult to obtain information about are the inner workings of the top of the Lukashenka elite (which none of the current members wishes to share), and the elite relations in the early 1990s, especially with respect to the cultural elite, for the lack of relevant memoirs and publications. We have drawn on first-hand evidence where possible (a collection of articles and interviews of the opposition leader Zianon Pazniak, a novel 'Duraki' ('Fools') by opposition leader and script writer Evgenii Budzinas, memoirs and articles of the former Lukashenka aide Aliaksandr Feduta), and on newspaper reports of the day where available. With the progression of time, more works can be expected to resurface, providing further ground for clarification and elaboration of our analysis.

Before embarking upon the empirical investigation, however, we must characterise the Belarusian post-soviet transition in terms of regime type, and prove that it does, indeed, qualify as a case of stalled democracy.

IV. Belarus: a critical case of stalled democracy

The definition of regime type in post-soviet Belarus is disputed. The Belarusian government insists that the country is a genuine democracy, whereas the Belarusian political opposition, international organisations and Western states define it as an authoritarian dictatorship. Both

[10] Marples (1999) study is closest any academic came to such an account, but its primary question is whether the Belarusian state will survive, not why the transition took the path it did. Also, new evidence has accumulated over the 5 years since the book was published.

of these definitions, however, presume that the post-soviet development of Belarus has been unidirectional, either as a democracy or an authoritarian regime. This assumption is arguably erroneous and glosses over the key to understanding the outcomes of Belarusian transformation. We argue instead that Belarus has experienced two directions of transition: first, towards democracy, and subsequently, towards authoritarianism, thus making for an exemplary case of a democratic transition that stalled and developed towards authoritarian consolidation.

4.1. Democratic caesura

Between 1990 and 1994, Belarus made a tangible, if not fast, progress towards democracy. This interpretation is justified by the emergence of a democratic opposition and by the curtailing of power of the former communist rulers, which resulted in an introduction and observance of democratic institutions and procedures, as well as democratic rights and freedoms.

The evidence for the introduction and observance of democratic institutions, procedures and freedoms in Belarus during the first post-soviet years is substantial. The dominant role of the Communist Party (and the Party altogether) was abolished in 1991. In 1992, Belarus signed the first Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights and implemented its provisions in a series of national acts, such as the Law on Freedom of Faith and Religious Organisations[11] (1992) and the Law on Civic Associations[12] (1994). The Belarusian Constitution (1994) also guaranteed citizens' rights to assembly, association, religion, opinion and information.

Following the freedom of opinion and expression, popular rallies were permitted, and some symbolic opposition rallies became an annual fixture.[13] Given the freedom of association, about 10 parties and unions had emerged and been registered by the summer of 1991[14]; they united tens of thousands of people (Manaev 2000, 382). Civil society organisations

[11] Zakon Respubliki Belarus N 2054-XII (1992). O svobode sovesti i religioznykh organizatsiiakh. http://www.ncpi.gov.by/Etalon-online/text.asp?RN=V19202054, enacted December 17, 1992.

[12] Zakon Respubliki Belarus N 3254-XII (1994). Ob obshchestvennykh ob'edineniiakh. http://www.ncpi.gov.by/Etalon-online/text.asp?RN=V19403254, enacted October 4, 1994.

[13] Such as 'Chernobyl path' on April 26th, to venerate the victims of the explosion at Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986.

[14] Belarusian Popular Front, United Democratic Party, Workers' Party, Agrarian Party, Social-Democratic union, National-Democratic Party, Christian-Democratic Party, Council of strikers' committees, Union of entrepreneurs.

mushroomed. A civic activist since the late 1980s, Elena Kasko (personal communication, November 6, 2002) recalls the early 1990s as the most favourable and encouraging period for civil society development in the country. The 1992 Law on Freedom of Religion (1992) allowed for the pursuit of religious beliefs and for the conduct of religious services (Zakon Respubliki Belarus N 2054-XII 1992, art 1, 2); religious organisations resurfaced and proliferated[15]. Non-state sources of information emerged, and the amount of periodicals had grown three-fold during 1990-1992, with about 550 officially registered publications by April 1, 1992 (Manaev 2000, 397). The citizens' right to information was also upheld with live TV and radio transmissions of parliamentary sessions. The democratic credentials of Belarus were endorsed by its acceptance as a member of the OSCE and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Democratic freedoms were introduced and upheld in Belarus in the early 1990s and the same was also true for the institutional and procedural requirements of democracy.

The democratic principle of a separation of powers between the branches of government was evidently at work. During the early 1990s, the Belarusian Parliament became the locus of contests and debates with undetermined outcomes, characteristic of democratic procedures. Despite the fact that members of the former soviet administrative apparatus constituted the executive and held more than 85 per cent of the parliamentary seats (Zaprudnik 1993, 154), the government could not and did not command the Parliament. In the first place, this was because the opposition was very active, so that even the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Belarus, Anatol Malafeeu, admitted that 'the influence of the opposition in the Parliament was more felt than the influence of its 86 per cent communist members' (quoted in Zaprudnik 1993, 154). Second, the soviet elite in the Parliament did not necessarily tow the government's line. Thus, in September 1991, the Parliament elected a member of the opposition, Professor Stanislau Shushkevich, as its Chairman. In 1992, the Parliament ordered the government to halt privatisation following reports that it had embezzled state resources. The winter of 1993 was marked by a protracted dispute over the ratification of the Collective Defence Treaty of the Commonwealth of Independent States. While the government insisted that the treaty should be ratified as it was, the Parliament adopted it with a proviso prohibiting the deployment of Belarusian armed forces abroad.

[15] In 1993, the numbers of religious communities was reported as follows: Orthodox, 787; Roman Catholic, 305; Pentecostal, 170; Baptist, 141; Old Believer, twenty-six; Seventh-Day Adventist, seventeen; Apostolic Christian, nine; Uniate, eight; New Apostolic, eight; Muslim, eight; Jewish, seven; and other, fifteen. Belarus. US Library of Congress Country Studies. http://countrystudies.us/belarus/20.htm

When the government sought to remove the Parliamentary Chairman[16], they observed democratic formalities, with the instigation of an anti-corruption commission and a consequent vote of distrust to the chairman in January 1994. These disputes between the executive and the legislature testify that democratic procedures and the principle of separation of powers were duly observed in Belarus in the early transition years.

It was, ironically, the head of the anti-corruption commission, MP Aliaksandr Lukashenka, who provided ultimate proof of the early democratic development of the country. Aliaksandr Lukashenka did not belong to the circle of soviet elites, and had engaged only briefly with the opposition. (Chapter 2 considers his background and arrival into the political arena.) Yet, in the first presidential election in 1994, which were recognised as free and fair, he received more popular support than the candidates of the government and the opposition[17]. Such a rise to power was only possible in the conditions of democratic openness. Silitski (2002c, 38) concurs that 'it was precisely the opportunities opened with the liberalisation of Belarusian society that allowed an outsider to enter the race for the presidency'. Neither the government nor the opposition tried to reverse their fortunes; instead, the government duly and peacefully gave up their authority up to the newly elected president. The Belarusian transformation in the early 1990s thus clearly developed along the track of democratisation.

4.2. Authoritarian consolidation

From the onset of his presidency, Aliaksandr Lukashenka made no secret of his desire to have an unrestrained rule. It took him two years, 1995 and 1996, to overturn the democratic institutional arrangements which had been established since 1990. From 1997 to 2001, he strengthened his hold over political, economic and social life in Belarus, so that since 2001, President Lukashenka has consolidated his authoritarian regime and set himself up for presidency for life.

President Lukashenka felt constrained by the Parliament several months into his first term of office. When the term of the 1990 Parliament came to an end in 1995, he suggested it be dispensed with altogether. The Parliament ignored his proposal and announced a

[16] The reasons are explained in chapter 2.

[17] In the first round of elections Aliaksandr Lukashenka received 45.1 per cent of the vote, compared to 17.3 per cent of the incumbent Prime Minister Viacheslau Kebich, and 12.9 per cent of the Popular Front leader, Zianon Pazniak. *Narodnaja Gazeta, June 25,1994.* In the second round, with a turnout of around 70 per cent, Aliaksandr Lukashenka received 81 per cent of the votes, and Viacheslau Kebich only 14 per cent (Marples 1999, 70).

parliamentary election for May 14, 1995. In return, the President suggested holding a referendum on the same day on the issues of nation-building and international policies. The Parliament declined again, and several MPs went on hunger strike to emphasise their disagreement with the president. Under the pretext of a security alert, they were forced off the Parliament's premises and beaten up. New voting was arranged, and the majority of the deputies approved the presidential proposal for a referendum. This was the President's first victory over other branches of the government. The Parliamentary election and the referendum were held in May 1995 and were recognised as free and fair. The referendum yielded an overwhelming popular endorsement of the President's policies[18]. The popular mandate gave the President the encouragement for further encroachment upon the separation of powers and the strengthening of executive's authority in 1996.

Apart from assaulting democratic institutional arrangements, President Lukashenka started limiting the freedom of information. Some independent broadcasters were closed, such as the Minsk TV '8th channel' (in 1995), Minsk radio stations 'Belarusskaia maladzezhnaia' (in 1994) and 'Radio 101,2' (in 1996) Hrodna radio station 'NBK' (in 1996); while other broadcast media in Belarus were put under direct presidential control (Pastoukhov, 1998,17). The largest printing company 'Belarusian printing house' was also placed under command of the Presidential Administration in 1994. A presidential ruling classified editors of state-owned newspapers as civil servants, and thus made them accountable to the executive (Presidential ruling on No 3 of January 4, 1996 quoted in Pastoukhov 1998, 18).

The limitation of the freedom of the media aided the President in his further confrontation with the Parliament and the Constitutional Court. During 1995, the Constitutional Court overturned five presidential decrees on the grounds of an exceeded mandate (Mihalisko 1997, 266). In August 1996, the President proposed a referendum on several issues, including a new Constitution with significantly enhanced presidential powers. In response, 75 MPs initiated impeachment proceedings against the President (Marples 1999, 95). The Constitutional Court ruled that the referendum on the constitutional amendments could only be of an advisory character. President Lukashenka responded with a decree annulling this Court's decision and declared that the referendum would be binding. The conflict between

[18] We will discuss the questions of the referendum in chapter 5. Here, we note only that, with a turnout of 64.8 per cent, 83.3 per cent of those who voted supported that Russian should be the official language of the country on a par with Belarusian, 75.1 per cent backed exchanging the Belarusian flag and emblem, adopted as national symbols in 1991, for their slightly modified soviet versions; 83.3 per cent voted for economic integration with Russia, and 77.7 per cent agreed to give the president the right to dissolve Parliament in emergency (Marples 1999,75; Mihalishko 1997, 262)

the executive, the legislature and the judiciary escalated, leading to what was called the 'most dramatic period in the republic since the Second World War '(Marples 1999, 93). A deal was brokered, in which the referendum results would be non-binding, but a new Constitutional Assembly would be held to act upon them.

The result of popular voting on November 24, 1996 was in support of the President's amendments to the Constitution[19], and marked the stalling of democratisation in Belarus. The OSCE and the Western governments did not qualify the voting procedures as free and fair, and refused to recognise the referendum results. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe suspended Belarus's associated status with the organisation. President Lukashenka ignored their protests and went ahead with implementing the amended Constitution. As part of the process, he formed the new Parliament by literally handpicking the loyal members of the 1995 Parliament.

A comparison of the original (1994) and amended (1996) versions of the Constitution demonstrates how power balance had shifted from the Parliament to the President in this short space of time:

Functions	Executing Authority	
	Constitution 1994	Amendments 1996
Calling referenda	Parliament	President
Calling Parliamentary election	Parliament	President
Authority to change decisions of local councils	Not specified	President
Grounds for presidential impeachment	Breach of the Constitution Major crime	Poor health High Treason
Overruling presidential veto	2/3 Parliamentary majority	2/3 majority in both chambers within 20 days
Length and number of Parliamentary sessions	Not specified	2 sessions per year, max 90 days
Declaring amnesty	Parliament	President

The amendments to the Constitution adopted in 1996 drastically increased the authority of the President at the expense of the Parliament and of the Constitutional Court. The President gained the right to appoint and dismiss Deputy Prime Ministers, the Chief Prosecutor, and

[19] 70.5 per cent of the vote, with the turnout figure at 84 per cent Zviazda (November 29,1996). Zviazda. Minsk.

Chairpersons of the Constitutional Court, Central Electoral Commission (CEC), National Bank and State Controlling Committee. He received the sole right to dismiss any member of the government and to dissolve the legislature (Korosteleva 2003, 32). The impeachment of the President required a swift and concerted action by three state bodies (two Parliamentary chambers and the Constitutional Court), members of which were, to a varying extent, dependent upon the President for their positions. The Constitutional Court lost the authority to rule on the presidential acts. The amended Constitution of 1996, therefore, fixed a clear predominance of the executive over other branches of state government. In a symbolic gesture, President Lukashenka declared that his term only started with the adoption of the amended Constitution. The change of the Constitution, indeed, marked the end of the democratic development of Belarus.

Having weakened the legislature and the judiciary, President Lukashenka turned to silence popular protests against these actions. The spring of 1996 and of 1997 saw mass rallies against the consolidation of political power in the hands of Aliaksandr Lukashenka. In response, he issued a decree[20], which the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression classified as 'preventing the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of assembly' (UN Commission on Human Rights 1997, E/CN.4/1998/40/add.1, 18). The police crushed the demonstrations. Marples (1999, 84) estimated that about 300 arrests and detentions were made during the spring of 1996, and Human Rights Watch claimed that about 500 arrests were made during the spring of 1997 (Human Rights Watch 2003, appendix A, online).

During 1997 to 1999, President Lukashenka took further steps to reassert his control over the society and, in particular, silence his opponents. In the conditions of oppression of freedoms of assembly and information, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) became the major locus of popular discontent, as well as the channels of foreign funding in support of democracy (Rouda, personal communication, November 22, 2002). President Lukashenka's next step, therefore, was to constrain their activity. The presidential decree ruled that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could operate only with state permission (Dekret

[20] Dekret Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 5 (March 5, 1997). " O sobraniiakh mitingakh ulichnykh shestviiakh demostratsiiakh i piketirovanii v Respublike Belarus." http://www.ncpi.gov.by/Etalon-online/text.asp?RN=PD9700005.

[22] For example, Gentleman, A. (July 20,2001). 'Rivals of Belarus leader have been killed'. The Guardian. http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,524532,00.html. Belarus Update (July 2001). "Belarus Updates." International League for Human Rights 4(29): http://www.ilhr.org/ilhr/regional/belarus/updates/2001/29.htm.

Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 2 January 26, 1999). It also obliged NGOs to maintain a formal office, an insurmountable obstacle to many organisations (Kasko, personal communication, November 6, 2002).

In 1999, several prominent opponents of the President disappeared, among them the deputy speaker of the dissolved 1995 Parliament, Viktar Hanchar, and a former Minister of the Interior under the Lukashenka presidency, Yury Zakharanka. Criminal investigations into the disappearances have remained inconclusive, while a series of non-governmental national and international publications [22] linked these, and other similar [23] disappearances with the activities of a death squad under the command of high-level state officials. The government refused to investigate these allegations, despite calls to do so by a wide range of international governmental and nongovernmental fora[24]. The disappearances of the President's opponents constitute the most serious allegation against the Belarusian regime to date.

In 2000, a new Parliament was elected and came into operation, despite the opposition's boycott of the Parliamentary election, and the international organisations' refusal to recognise their results[25]. The most crucial election for the determination of the Belarusian transition, however, was the presidential election of 2001.

During the election campaign of 2001, President Lukashenka relied on his powers to hinder the campaign of his opponents. His decree No 8[26] put all foreign donations under state control, thus making support of the opposition candidates from abroad extremely cumbersome. Decree No 11[27] restricted procedures for holding meetings and mass rallies

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[23] Such as the disappearance of the journalist Dmitri Zavadski in the summer of 2000.

[24] PACE Recommendation 1441, 2000; PA of OSCE resolution on Belarus, July 2002, UN Committee against Torture and the UN working group on enforced of involuntary disappearances third periodic report, 2001; InterParliamentary Union IPU report 2000, Committee to Protect Journalists CPJ, 2002.

[25] The OSCE ruled that 'the practices and procedures during the Parliamentary elections in 2000 did not fit the standard of free, fair and open elections' (OSCE ODIHR 2001, 1). The Coordinating council of election observers (non-governmental body) reported 5,000 infringements of the electoral code, including: voter intimidation, campaigning for pro-governmental candidates on the election day, ballot box staffing, early compulsory voting in military units and institutions of higher education, and shortening of election lists to obtain the necessary turnout figures Karatnycky, A., A. J. Motyl, et al. (2002). Nations in transit, 2002 : civil society, democracy, and markets in East Central Europe and the newly independent states. New Brunswick, N.J., Transaction Publishers. P. 103

[26] Dekret Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 8 (March 12, 2001). O nekotorykh merakh po sovershenstvovaniiu poriadka polucheniia i ispolzovaniia inostrannoi bezvozdmeznoi pomoshchi. http://www.ncpi.gov.by/Etalon-online/text.asp?RN=PD0100008.

[27] Dekret Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 11 (May 7, 2001). O nekotorykh merakh po sovershenstvovaniiu poriadka provedeniia sobranii, mitingov, ulichnykh shestvii, demonstratsii, inykh massovykh meropriiatii i piketirovaii v Respublike Belarus. http://www.ncpi.gov.by/Etalon-online/text.asp?RN=PD0100011.

before the election, and the decree No 20[28] obliged presidential candidates to declare their income and property, as well as the income and property of their close relatives[29] (Yekadymay 2001, 176). The state media also overwhelmingly endorsed the President[30]. The official results of the election, declaring the turnout of 83.86 per cent with the 75.65 per cent vote for the incumbent President (Tsentralnaia Komissiia po vyboram i provedeniiu respublikanskikh referendumov September 14, 2001, online), were challenged by the opposition who claimed that their exit polls yielded a much closer voting result, about 46 per cent to 40 per cent in favour of the incumbent (Potocki 2002, 152; Kuzio 2002b, 98). The volume of infringements upon the electoral code during the election, prepared by the civic initiative 'Independent observation' took up 260 pages in B5 format[31].

After his re-election as the Belarusian President in 2001, Aliaksandr Lukashenka started to consolidate his authoritarian regime by further limiting democratic freedoms in the country, especially with respect to the freedom of association, expression, information and religious faith. Formally, the Belarusian state did not revoke its commitment to the principal democratic rights and freedoms. In practice, however, a series of legislative acts and policy decisions passed in the early 2000s significantly limited the opportunities for the population to enjoy these rights.

Soon after the election of 2001, the government liquidated several NGOs that had taken a leading part in the opposition campaign[32]. The Law on Civic Associations was amended in June 2003 to create a gruelling legislative environment for civic activity; it permitted the closure of an NGO or a political party for a single breach of public events regulations or for three breaches of documentation processing rules, such as wording differences in the

[28] Dekret Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 20 (June 26,1001). Ob obiazatelnom declarirovanii dokhodov i imushchestva kandidata v Presidenty Respubliki Belarus. http://www.ncpi.gov.by/Etalon-online/text.asp?RN=PD0100020.

[29] None of the candidates was disqualified on the basis of Decree No 20, though.

[30] The Limited Observation Mission of OSCE ODHIR estimated that the incumbent president had received 68% of coverage on the Belarusian TV, in an overwhelmingly positive tone, whereas the coverage of the single democratic candidate Hancharyk (20%) was overwhelmingly negative OSCE ODIHR (October 4, 2001). Presidential Election in the Republic of Belarus. Final report. OSCE ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission. Warsaw, OSCE ODIHR LEOM: http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2001/10/1237_en.pdf.

[31] Review of breaches of the electoral law during the presidential elections in the republic of Belarus in 2001. Minsk: Independent Observation, 2002.

[32] Among them Vezha (Brest), Ratusha (Hrodna), Hramadziankiia Initsyiatyvy (Homel).

organisation's headed paper and stamps[33], imprecise or incomplete use of the organisation's registration details, and even the usage of non-standard fonts (Koliada and Rodina October 13,2003, [Charter97]). Between 2003 and 2004, 56 NGOs were closed in the country on such grounds (Charter97 September 15, 2004, online). To cut financial support to civic activism, all foreign donor organisations that had established their offices in Belarus, such as the Eurasia Fund, IREX-ProMedia and the Counterpart, were gradually ousted from the country by 2004. The Nations in Transit survey of Freedom House rated civil society freedom in Belarus in 2004 with the score of 6.75, the same score it gave the country for electoral process, close to the lowest possible of 7 (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 2004, online).

The government also tightened the rules pertaining to freedom of expression. The Law on Meetings, Rallies, Street Processions, Demonstrations and Pickets, adopted in 2003, obliged the organisers of public events to apply for permission only 15 days beforehand, and prohibited any publicity prior to obtaining permission. Only state-approved flags, banners and pennants are allowed[34]. Offenders of the Law are liable to fines of 20 to 150 minimum wages or detention for 3 to 15 days. The organisation which initiated the event can be liquidated for causing 'large-scale loss' or 'considerable damage'. 'Large-scale loss' is defined as 10 000 minimal wages, or around USD 42 000, and 'considerable damage' is qualified as the creation of obstacles to traffic or severe bodily injury (Zakon Respubliki Belarus N 114-3). Such provisions made public event organisers vulnerable to provocations, thus a decision to hold a mass event risks the closure of the organisation. These rather drastic and obvious encroachments on the right of expression and assembly testify that the government has not allowed expressions of discontent and form firm evidence of the authoritarian character of the Belarusian regime by 2004.

Another point of international attention was the decline of freedom of religion in Belarus. The Belarusian government regarded some religious organisations, mostly originating in the USA, as a channel of Western influence, and took measures to keep them away from the country. The Law on Religion and Religious Associations was amended in 2002 to demand compulsory registration of all religious organisations and to stipulate that only citizens of Belarus could lead them. The official rationale for such requirements was 'to place barriers to religious organisations which contradict the Belarusian mentality, break the climate of

[33] For example, the use of an abbreviation *OO* (NGO) instead of the fully spelled out *Obshestvenoe Objedinenie* (non-governmental organisation) on the office door of the The Sapega Foundation was qualified by state inspectors as a breach of law (Zhuchkou, personal communication, November 28 2002).

[34] This provision was aimed at banning the usage of symbolic associated with pro-democratic national mobilisation, as shall be explained in chapter 5.

religious harmony, make a destructive impact upon the citizens and thus constitute a threat to the national security of Belarus' (MFA 2004, online). Without passing a moral or political judgment on placing barriers to new religious teachings, it is evident that the Belarusian legislation practically discriminated against religions organisations not belonging to denominations long established in the country, and as such did not observe freedom of faith and religion.

While no specific legislation had been adopted with respect to the media after 2001, non-state newspapers still faced effective economic and legal pressure. The state monopoly on printing and distribution translated into 2 to 3 times higher costs for printing and up to 5 times higher distribution costs for the non-state media compared with governmental publications (Tamkovich, personal communication, November 6, 2002). Income from advertising for non-state media was also problematic, as state enterprises were prohibited from advertising in the independent media, while private companies were allowed to spend a maximum of 5 per cent of the products' cost on advertising (Tamkovitch, personal, November 6, 2002). The lack of funding led to the closure of several non-state newspapers (Den, Rabochy, Solidarnosc in 2002, and Belorusskaia Delovaia Gazeta in 2003).

The non-state media has encountered more than economic pressure. Some journalists have faced physical coercion[35] and/or lost the right to work or the right to freedom altogether. Three newspaper journalists (Mikola Markevich, Pavel Mazheiko, Victar Ivashkevich) were each sentenced to at least two years of forced labour on a charge of libelling the President (Human Rights Watch 2003, online). Correspondents of foreign TV channels whose reports displeased the government have been deported (for example Aliaksandr Stupnikau (NTV) in February 1997, Pavel Sheremet (ORT) in July 1997, Pavel Selin (NTV) in June 2003).

The situation with the freedom of information has been the subject of considerable criticism on the part of the international community. In the resolution 'Freedom of the Press in Belarus' (July 2002), the European Parliament expressed 'its deep concern at the persistent lack of freedom' and urged Belarus authorities 'to stop their harassment of independent newspapers' (Council of Europe 2002, Doc. 9543). The organisation Reporters Sans Frontiers denounced Lukashenka among 'thirty-nine predators threatening the freedom of the press'(UN Commission on Human Rights 2002, E/CN.4/2002/NGO/135). The International Federation of Human Rights Leagues argued that a complete liquidation of the freedom of

[35] Some cases are recorded in Bastounets, 2002. 10 years of independent press in Belarus, Minsk: BAZH

the press was a real possibility in Belarus (UN Commission on Human Rights 2003, E/CN.4/2003/NGO/232). Freedom House survey placed Belarus 182 out of 193 in its 'Freedom of the Press' ranking (Freedom House 2004, online). Freedom of information in Belarus, as well as other democratic freedoms, therefore, has remained a rhetorical goal rather than reality under President Lukashenka's rule.

The Parliamentary election and another referendum on October 17, 2004, confirmed the capacity of the President to shape and control the popular will. With respect to the Parliamentary election, although some of the opposition candidates were registered, many were taken off ballot lists on election day (Pazniak October 18, 2004, [BelaPAN]). Not a single member of the opposition received a seat. Out of 108 MPs elected, 32 were women, coinciding with the President's wish that women constitute one third of the new Parliament (Pazniak October 18, 2004, [BelaPAN]). The booklet 'Referendum and Parliamentary election of 2004: facts and comments', comprising testimonies of independent observers, registered 1,700 breaches of Election Law between July 1 and November 1, 2004.

President Lukashenka focused most of his effort not on the election, but on the referendum, the purpose of which was to dispense with the constitutional limitation of two presidential terms. The referendum of 2004 confirmed the fact that democratic procedures are observed in Belarus in declarations rather than in reality. The OSCE International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) registered that, during the month preceding the vote, the President and government received more than 90 per cent of the time dedicated to political and election-related issues in news coverage, and 75 per cent of the overall time in current affairs programmes (IEOM October 17, 2004, 7). The official results announced 90.2 per cent turnout, with 79.4 per cent of the registered voters supporting the President (Tsentralnaia Komissiia po vyboram i provedeniiu respublikanskikh referendumov October 18, 2004, online). The Gallup Organization exit polls challenged these results; their research suggested that 66 per cent of all registered voters took part in the referendum, of which 48.8 per cent of the voting-age population approved the President's proposals (Gallup Organization October 17, 2004, 1). IEOM gave a negative assessment of vote counting in 60 per cent of the polling stations observed (IEOM October 17, 2004, 10). As previously, Aliaksandr Lukashenka ignored international and domestic[36] protests and declared the referendum results binding.

[36] Several hundred people demonstrated against the referendum results in the central square of Minsk. Demonstrators were beaten up by the police, and two organisers of the protests, Nikola Statkevich and Pavel

This brief overview suffices to demonstrate that the Belarusian government under President Lukashenka has consistently overturned democratic institutional arrangements, abused democratic procedures and has not complied with democratic freedoms. This record rules out the qualification of the Belarusian regime from 1995 to 2004 as genuinely democratic. The dynamics of regime development have been clearly authoritarian since 1996, leading to a consolidation of an authoritarian regime between 2001 and 2004.

4.3. The character of the Belarusian transformation

Of the three possible interpretations of the Belarusian transformation: continued authoritarianism, uninterrupted democratisation, or stalled democratisation degenerating into a consolidated authoritarian regime – the latter reflects its essence most accurately.

The purveyors of the view of Belarus as a continued authoritarian regime would point to the fact that the former communist leaders retained power in the country during the initial, crucial years after the break-up of the USSR and that the democratic opposition had never formed the government. Yet, this apparent majority of the soviet bureaucracy in the legislature and executive did not translate into a clear dominance in practice. Their room for manoeuvre and authority were significantly curtailed by the democratic opposition, and they were forced to adopt some of the most far-reaching demands on the opposition's agenda, including the abolition of the Communist Party and ideology. The former communist bureaucrats did observe democratic rules, procedures and freedoms, however reluctantly. Moreover, as we shall see, it was not the former soviet elites who stalled democratisation in Belarus.

The regime installed in Belarus since 1994 has been quite different from the former soviet system, as we shall explore throughout the thesis. At both the start (1989) and end (2004) points of our analysis, Belarus, indeed, had authoritarian political systems, but they were the products of different political regimes. In-between the demise of the soviet system and the consolidation of a personal authoritarian rule, democratic institutions were installed in the country, a democratic Constitution adopted, and genuinely free and fair election were held (presidential in 1994 and parliamentary in 1995), followed by a peaceful transfer of power. Thus for at least some time in its transition, Belarus did qualify as a democratising state, and

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Seviarynets, were later jailed for two years BelaPAN (June 28, 2005). "Prigovor Statkevichy i Severintsy ostaetsia preznim." http://naviny.by/ru/content/index/47673/41267_0.html.

it is too great a use of hindsight to define the Belarusian post-soviet development as continued authoritarianism.

The Belarusian government, not surprisingly, insists that Belarus's development is still democratic, because the President and the government have consistently received 'popular' endorsement for its positions at the national referenda and election. 'We have our own ways [of running the country]. There are authorities, and people support them. It is democracy', explains President Lukashenka (quoted in Izvestia July 21, 2004). Korosteleva (2003, 529-530) characterises such a political system, based in an 'instantaneous partnership between the ruler and the ruled', could be characterised as a 'demagogical democracy'. In other words, Belarus is said to be a democracy by popular will; it is not its procedures or institutions which make it democratic, but rather the popular support for the ruler's policies. Yet, such a definition of Belarus as a democracy is problematic even if democracy is understood not in terms of procedure, but by a popular source of power. As we have argued above, the Lukashenka government has severely limited popular access to information and the room for civic activity or political expression of discontent. At the same time, the consistent and substantial evidence of the abuse of democratic procedures during the election and referenda also casts doubt over any strong claims of homogeneity or a majoritarian popular will being at work. Finally, the institutional arrangements in Belarus since 1996, which stipulate the heavy dominance of the executive, do not ensure the due democratic separation of powers between the three branches of government. These features reflect Carother's list of 'democratic deficiencies' given in the discussion of postcommunist regime types early in the chapter. Thus, any definition of democracy would need to be significantly skewed to substantiate to the claim that Belarus has been democratic since 1996.

The Belarusian post-soviet transition, we argue, is best characterised as a case of democratisation that stalled and then reverted in an authoritarian direction. From 1990 to 1994, the country's democratic progress was obvious in the spheres of institutional development, decision-making procedures and respect for human rights and freedoms. The establishment of presidential power in 1994, however, did not lead to further democratic consolidation. On the contrary, the Belarusian President launched an assault on the separation of powers and on the other branches of government. These structures resisted his drive during 1995 and 1996, until he managed to weaken them constitutionally. Between 1996 and 2001, the Belarusian President encroached upon democratic procedures and freedoms, and after his re-election in 2001, he consolidated an authoritarian regime in the

country. The post-soviet transformation of Belarus has thus gone through both the democratic and authoritarian phases, with the latter proving more stable and sustainable.

Now that the regime type has been categorised, we can explain what has made this reverted development possible.

Conclusions

The diversity of postcommunist transition paths has not received a satisfactory explanation in the democratisation literature. The shaping of elite power configurations, economic policies, and international relations - the factors that this literature proposes as decisive for the transition states' development - have clearly depended on some further factor. In what follows, we suggest that nationalism has been a primary policy foundation, and as such a key causal factor in the unveiling of postcommunist transition paths. The historically longest and the most stable case of postcommunist democratisation reverted to an authoritarian path, the post-soviet development of Belarus, provides the most suitable basis for testing our hypothesis.

2. Reconfigurations of Elites

It is widely acknowledged that political leadership plays a crucial role during democratic transformations. Little is established, however, as to how exactly elite power configurations affect democratisation. The situation of elite power stalemate is particularly contentious. The transition literature based on the Southern European and Latin American experience (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 72; DiPalma 1990, 40) holds that agreements between competing elite groups are highly conducive to democratisation. McFaul (2002, 214) and Bunce (2000, 717) have observed that for postcommunist transitions, elite pacts are precarious, their outcomes being uncertain, and rarely beneficial for the cause of democracy. These authors have not established, however, why it is so. We suggest here that elite pacts may be detrimental to democratisation in the postcommunist settings, because the collapse of communist required systemic developmental changes, not just political and constitutionally, but also socially and economically. Consequently, elite pacts may be detrimental to democratisation in these circumstances because they give each participating elite group access to state power but not the sufficient capacity to fully implement their programmes. This leads to the discrediting of all parties to the pact as incapable of running the country and opens the door to political actors who may not subscribe to democracy at all.

The function of this chapter is to define the elite groups that directed the post-soviet transition of Belarus, so as to build up an analysis of their policies in the consequent chapters. The Belarusian post-soviet political arena saw competition between three elite groups: the technocratic managers, who had run the republic in the soviet period, who we term the 'soviet elite'; the cultural intelligentsia, who had founded the democratic movement in the late 1980s, the 'cultural elite'; and the Belarusian President and his cadres, the 'administrative elite'. The first group were reluctant supporters of democracy; the second group advocated democratisation but could not accumulate sufficient support for it and waned, and the third group had no commitment to democracy whatsoever, as we shall see.

First, we follow the evolution of the leadership of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) during the 1980s to explain the Belarusian soviet leaderships' reluctance to embrace *perestroika.* Second, we analyse a pact between the soviet and cultural elites in the early transition years and suggest why it has proven detrimental to the democratisation process. Finally, we demonstrate how President Lukashenka has managed to anchor his regime by a systematic reorganisation of Belarusian elites. The chapter thus demonstrates how the

relations between political elites contributed to the stalling of democratic transition and the establishment of an authoritarian regime in Belarus.

Before proceeding with the analysis of elite power configurations, we require a definition of elites, and explanation of the link between the elites' characteristics and political regimes. 'Political elites' have been described as 'senior governmental, economic, military, professional, media, religious, and other leaders, who participate in or directly influence decision making' (Higley et al 1996, 133). In another apt definition, 'political elites consist of all those who are capable of making substantial political trouble without being promptly repressed' (Higley and Burton, 1997, 154). Dahrendorf (1968, 219) argues that the political regimes the elites sustain depend on two elite characteristics: social position and political interests. With regard to social position, elites may be *established,* that is, sharing common experiences and knowledge, 'speaking a common language', or *abstract,* that is, having no sense of belonging together, no common biographies, or subjects of conversation (Dahrendorf 1968, 219). As for political interests, elites may be *uniform,* in that they profess unitary political ideologies, represent common interests, and display little internal conflict; and *multiform,* having internal diversity of opinions and interests, and not being motivated by the will to submit to one ruling group and opinion. Dahrendorf (1968, 219) explains that socially established and politically uniform elites sustain authoritarian regimes; socially abstract and politically uniform elites create totalitarian regimes; and socially established and politically multiform elites support liberal political regimes. These definitions help us distinguish and characterise elite groups in Belarus, and so uncover the nature of the political regime they advanced.

I. Elite stalemate

By the late 1980s, pro-democratic movements began to shatter the soviet system throughout the USSR. In the BSSR, the cultural intelligentsia challenged the soviet leadership, and by 1990, the soviet and cultural elites dominated the Belarusian political arena. The origins, leaders, interests, strengths and weaknesses of these elite groups were very different but seemed, at first, to complement each other.

1.1. The power holders: the soviet elite

In 1985, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a series of profound reforms of the soviet system, which later became

known as *perestroika* (restructuring). To ensure the implementation of the reforms, Mikhail Gorbachev brought to the fore a new generation of political leaders, who embraced *perestroika*, in the administration of the USSR and of its constituent republics. The Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was an exception to the process, however. The Belarusian soviet leaders did not owe their positions or prominence to *perestroika*, and this proved crucial for the unravelling of transition in the republic.

The significant leadership turnover in the BSSR had occurred not due to *perestroika*, but some two years before its start. The elite change was driven internally in the republic, by competition between three groupings within the soviet administration of the republic. Urban (1989, 14-16) defines these groupings as 'partisans', 'Brezhnevites' and 'technocrats'. The Partisans comprised leaders of the anti-Nazi resistance movement during World War II ('partisan' is Russian for 'guerrilla'), and they had dominated the administration of the republic during 1956-1980. To keep the partisans in check, the USSR government placed appointees from outside the partisans' circle into the regional and coercive forces administrations, eventually creating the 'Brezhnevite' group. The technocrats, in turn, rose from skilled workers and engineers at numerous industrial enterprises in the BSSR. In 1980, the partisan leader and the First Secretary[37] of the Belarusian Communist Party (BCP), Piotr Masherau, died in a road accident. A Brezhnevite, Tsikhan Kisialeu, replaced him as the BSSR leader until he himself passed away in 1983. The technocrats took over. In 1983, their leader, Nikolai Sliunkou, became the First Secretary of the BCP, and initiated a sweeping cadre change to ensure the prevalence of technocrats throughout the administration of the republic. During 1983 to 1987, 51 out of 108 (46.2 per cent) republic level jobs and 41 out of 48 (85.3 per cent) positions in the regional administrations changed hands (Urban 1989,119). By 1987, 98 per cent of the First Secretaries of the district and town Party Committees and 94 per cent of heads of district and city Executive Committees[38] were individuals with an industrial background; more than 65 per cent of secretaries of district and town Partycommittees were industrial and agricultural professionals (Smirnov and Platonov, 1989, 65). Thus, in contrast to the soviet republics and the USSR government itself, the elite change in the BSSR did not follow *perestroika* reforms, but had occurred before and during

[37] The Communist party hierarchy in the BSSR run from the Central Party Committee to regional (obkom), town (gorkom) and district (raikom) committees. The head of each committee was First secretary, followed by Second and Third secretaries. The position of the First secretary of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist party was equal to the head of the republic.

[38] Executive committees (ispolkomy) operated as administrative bodies in the BSSR, as opposed to the ideology-oriented party organs. The structure of executive committees mirrored that of the party organisations.

its early years. Consequently, the already renewed BSSR soviet elite had no ownership of or commitment to *perestroika*.

The group of soviet technocrats that acquired the BSSR leadership in the mid-1980s was, in Dahrendorf's sense, socially *established* (i.e. sharing common background) and politically *uniform* (displaying little divergence of opinion). The Belarusian Communist Party prioritised managerial professionalism over ideological devotion in their cadres. The Party organs watched for young professionals displaying managerial qualities, who were then sent to the High Party School, and allocated positions within the Party apparatus. In 1987, 8 out of 10 secretaries of district and town Party committees had studied at the High School (Smirnov and Platonov 1989, 68), which means that they had previously succeeded in other professions. Those managers who stayed in industry were obliged to attend courses at Party schools. Such a system of 'cross-fertilisation', in which technocrats were the source of the party's cadres, and the Party indoctrinated technocrats, ensured the ideological unity of the Belarusian soviet elite, and made it politically *uniform*. It also sustained dense professional and personal networks of the soviet technocrats, enhanced by their common experiences at various industrial enterprises and their education at the Minsk Polytechnic Institute, and defined the socially *established* character of this elite.

The soviet technocratic elite in the BSSR was thus a well-functioning and coherent group. For them, the second half of the 1980s was a time of strengthening and consolidation, not restructuring and transformation, as was the case for elites elsewhere in the USSR. By the time of *perestroika*, the group had been in office for only a short time, and as such did not develop any schisms between the hard- or soft-liners, or between the conservatives or reformists. This distinguished the Belarusian soviet elite from their counterparts in other communist states to the west of Belarus, such as Poland and Hungary, and even in the Soviet Union government itself. The Belarusian soviet elite owed nothing to *perestroika* and did not have a stake in its advancement. This indifference to deeper reform made them overlook and ignore one very important aspect of change, which communist leaders in increasingly unstable circumstances promptly embraced elsewhere: nationalism.

The unexpected at the time, but logical, consequence of *perestroika*, was the rise of nationalism throughout the Soviet bloc. Although the signs of social disagreement with the soviet system became palpable throughout the Brezhnev era, the *perestroika* reforms openly questioned the validity of 'really existing' socialism and communism, so that eventually, the

systems were recognised as erroneous and harmful to the societies they ruled. Nationhood emerged as a source of political leverage, if not the alternative source of social values and political legitimacy. The communist leaders of most of the Soviet bloc states swiftly took on the agenda of national sovereignty and independence, as an opportunity to get rid of the top layer of authority, in the form of the USSR government, and so as to maintain internal legitimacy in their countries. The Belarusian soviet leaders, however, did not embrace nationalism; partly because they had little idea of how to handle national mobilisation.

The Belarusian soviet elite had had no experience of taking a nationally characterised stance in the soviet times. This was for two reasons. First, the soviet leaders in the BSSR had never dealt with popular discontent against the communist system, and thus did not have to present themselves as defenders of national interests, in distinction to the necessary and repeated claims of, for example, Polish communists. Second, Belarusian soviet leaders were often promoted to positions in the USSR government and thus regarded their work in the BSSR as a stepping-stone to the all-union career; hence they did not seek national legitimation in particular. 'The BSSR was a true cadre nursery for the Soviet system...in distinction to the Baltic states, where the leaders always sought to win respect of the population, or the Caucasus and Central Asia, where the family clan systems took root, the Belarusian leaders perceived themselves as a transitional and denationalised group, and thus did not aspire to establish and preserve a state for themselves' (Feduta January 19, 1996). Therefore, USSR-level career aspirations, combined with the lack of societal pressure to legitimate the soviet system in national terms, meant that the Belarusian soviet elite did not develop a political identity which would portray them as representing the Belarusian nation (Urban 1989, 133).

When the soviet system started to crumble and national sentiments surfaced in the BSSR in the late 1980s, the Belarusian soviet elites perceived national and pro-democratic mobilisation in the republic as a threat to their own authority rather than an opportunity to strengthen their popular legitimacy. This unwillingness and inability to embrace national ideology proved to be the major weakness of the Belarusian soviet elite, and it eventually cost them their power, as we shall see throughout the thesis.

1.2. The power contenders: cultural elite

The group that had the ideas and resources to exploit the opportunity for national mobilisation, when it came, were the Belarusian cultural intelligentsia, which formed the basis of the Belarusian national democratic opposition. Due to their rigorous national

mobilisation effort, which we analyse in chapter 5, this group came to be described as the 'national opposition', 'national elite' or, plainly, 'nationalists'. This is a misleading description, however, as it presumes only one national mobilisation in the country between 1989-2004, which is contrary to the evidence, as we argue in chapter 5. Therefore, we choose the term 'cultural elite' to describe this elite group, referring to their professional origins. The Belarusian cultural elite took the leadership of anti-soviet mobilisation in the BSSR.

By the late 1980s, a proportion of the population in the republic was evidently discontent with the soviet system and demanded change. One trigger for this mobilisation was the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on April 26, 1986. Winds carried 70 per cent of the radioactive fallout onto Belarus, contaminating one third of its territory, on which 2.2 million people (more than a fifth of the country's population) lived (UN General Assembly September 26, 1991, 64). Radioactivity immediately became an everyday concern for the Belarusian population, but the soviet authorities offered little guidance in the ways of dealing with radiation and the spread of contamination. Moreover, the BSSR government did not cancel the May Day celebrations and thus they put hundreds of thousands of people under exposure at the peak of contamination. Also, the leaders of the USSR were rumoured to have ordered the dissipation of the radioactive cloud over Belarus to prevent it from reaching Moscow (Marples 1999, 28).

Another blow to Belarusians' allegiance to the soviet system came from the discovery of mass graves in the Kurapaty forest within Minsk. In an article 'Kurapaty: the death road', published in June 1989, archaeologists Zianon Pazniak and Vasil Shmyhaleu presented persuasive evidence that some 300, 000 people had been shot and buried in Kurapaty by the soviet security forces in the late 1930s (Zaprudnik 1993, 152). The government investigation of the Kurapaty case confirmed the mass killings but remained inconclusive as to their perpetrators. If the Chernobyl accident demonstrated the schism between the interests of the USSR and Belarus, the Kurapaty discovery questioned the merit of the soviet system altogether. The Chernobyl explosion and the Kurapaty discoveries thus planted the thought in Belarusian society that the soviet system was not necessarily the most appropriate or relevant way of life. The demands for the alleviation of the Chernobyl disaster's consequences and the commemoration of victims of Kurapaty became the rallying point of the popular democratic opposition, which the cultural elite headed.

In October 1988, 350 representatives of the academic and literary circles established a 'historical-educational society for commemoration of the victims of Stalinism '*Martyrolag Belarusi*'; the same meeting also initiated the creation of a Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) for support of perestroika '*Adradzenne*' (Revival). The BPF was established on June 24-25, 1989 when 400 people travelled from Minsk to in Vilnius in Lithuania, because the BSSR authorities prohibited holding the Front's founding congress in the republic. The BPF blamed the BSSR leadership for 'the ecological, economic and cultural cataclysm in the republic' (Pazniak 1992, 55), and demanded that the soviet elite accepted the responsibility for the Chernobyl explosion and Stalinist repressions (Zaprudnik 1993, 136) A principal demand of the BPF was national revival, meaning the advancement of the Belarusian language and culture to put an end to the dominance of Russian in the political and social life in the country[39].

To characterise the Belarusian cultural elite in the light of Dahrendorf's criteria, we can say that it was socially *established*, as it originated in the academic and literary circles of the republic, and its members shared an educational background and professional links. The first executive committee of the BPF comprised a university professor, Mikhas Tkachou, and associates of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, Yuras Khaduko and Zianon Pazniak. Prominent Belarusian cultural figures, such as Belarusian writers Vasil Bukau, Rygor Baradulin, historian Uladzimir Arlou, Uladzimir Yermalovich, film director Yuri Shchekoshchikhin came forward as BPF leading activists, to name but few. The ranks of BPF also included high and secondary school lecturers, technical intelligentsia and were later joined by nascent private entrepreneurs (Budzinas 2001, 52). Politically, the cultural elite was more open and diverse than the soviet elite. Its umbrella organisation, the BPF, had the loose organisational form of a popular movement, and as such accumulated all the spectrum of popular discontent with the communist regime. It did represent, however, an effective organisation in terms that it held regular annual congresses, advanced a clear and wholesome programme of political, economic and national development, and achieved parliamentary representation.

The BPF leader Zianon Pazniak, had impeccable oppositional credentials and public charisma. Zianon Pazniak had devoted his professional life to the studies of Belarusian art history, in which he held a PhD. He had never been a member of the Communist Party; moreover, Zianon Pazniak had openly challenged the authorities on matters concerning

[39] We elaborate on this in chapter 5.

national culture and had even managed to overturn the state authorities' plan to redevelop the Old Town area in Minsk (Marples 1999, 48). As a relentless critic of the communist regime, Zianon Pazniak was aided by his exceptional public speaking skills. A witness describes Pazniak's addressing a popular rally:

'...tall, solemn, upright, wearing a dark close-fitting overcoat, he comes up to the microphone. He is surrounded by a crowd of forty thousand, who may boo an orator, but may also be rapt. Pazniak bends to the microphone, as if he is about to start speaking, then straightens, steps back... takes off his hat, baring a high open forehead, keeps silent for another second and only then utters quietly, but in such a way that sends shivers into the whole huge crowd, which suddenly became one single body: 'Brothers...' The crowd explodes in ovation, and then subsides. Silence falls, such a thick silence that is utterly unimaginable at a rally' (Budzinas 2001, 80).

Pazniak was described as 'a fighter, a moralist, daring, uncompromising, and forever challenging the authorities because his independent spirit will not be quelled' (Smith quoted in Zaprudnik 1993, 168). Pazniak's unsurpassed public charisma and undoubted personal aversion to communism legitimised him in the eyes of the part of Belarusian society that increasingly dissociated with the soviet system, and delivered the BPF its main asset, public support.

The cultural elite commanded significant popular support. The BPF rallies gathered up to 100, 000 people (Zaprudnik 1993, 148). During a rally in February 1990, participants blocked the Minsk TV tower and forced the soviet authorities to allow the BPF leaders to speak on air. During the winter of 1991-92, 442, 000 people put their signatures under the BPF demand to dissolve and re-elect the Belarusian Parliament (Marples 1999, 61). The university textbook published in 1995 refers to BPF in 1993 as 'the largest and the most influential political organisation in the country' (Kastsuk 1995, 452). The organisation claimed full membership of 18,000 people in 1999 (Khaduka 1999, 15). The most convincing evidence to the potency of the cultural elite and popular support for it was the ability of its members to obtain seats in the BSSR legislature despite a highly prohibitive environment, further leading to an elite pact, as we shall see in the next section.

The ability to mobilise popular support was the major strength of the cultural elite in 1989 and the early 1990s. The fact that the cultural elite did not have access to the material and administrative resources of the country seemed to have played in its favour, for it allowed them to criticise the soviet elite and demand change. Indirectly, however, this was a source

of the cultural elite's major weakness: they had little managerial expertise and experience. Even the BPF leader, Zianon Pazniak, for all his other merits, was not a good manager. He was known to put up his electoral posters himself as he admitted he could not organise others to do it (Budzinas 2001, 369).

Following Dahrendorf (1968, 219), socially established and politically multiform elites sustain liberal political regimes. The Belarusian cultural elite, however, did not manage to direct the post-soviet development of Belarus. The most it could manage, as we shall see, was to partake in the process.

The soviet and cultural elites in Belarus seemed to mirror each other's weaknesses and strengths. The soviet elite were professional managers, weak on precisely the national ideological ground that the soviet collapse raised to the fore, whereas the cultural elite were not skilled at management, but at ease with ideas, and had advanced an agenda for national revival. Despite their opposition to one another, it seemed that only by working together could they produce an adequate team for the transition: the technocratic elite would run the economy, and the cultural elite would oversee national development. This is exactly how the elites divided their responsibilities. Their pact, however, proved detrimental to both parties, and to the cause of democracy in Belarus altogether.

II. The elite pact: divide and rule

By 1990, neither the former soviet elite, nor the cultural elite commanded an overwhelming authority in the BSSR. They came to observe a tacit pact, which was a concession on the part of the soviet elite, and a victory on the part of the cultural elite. The pact combined the competencies of the elites, and gave each group an opportunity to formulate policy in the area of their particular interest and strength. Yet, after 4 years of near co-governance in the framework of a pact, neither the soviet nor the cultural elite managed to win popular support for their candidates in the first presidential elections in Belarus in 1994. We analyse the pact and suggest an explanation as to why, despite appearing to be conducive to development, it eventually diluted the popular legitimacy of its parties and popular support for democracy

2.1. Forced pact

By the early 1990s, the pro-democratic mobilisation in BSSR had gathered a popular momentum that brought the cultural elite into the republic's legislature, that the soviet leadership of the republic could no longer ignore.

In March 1990, scheduled elections into the BSSR Parliament, Supreme Soviet, took place. The soviet elite fully benefited from the soviet election law to place hurdles to the cultural elite's aspiration for parliamentary seats. First, they had not registered BPF and thus did not allow the organisation to compete in the elections. The cultural elite activists had to stand in their personal capacity rather than as the Front's members. Second, the government ruled that 50 places (approximately $1/7^{th}$) in the Parliament were not elected, but assigned to four organizations under governmental control (the Belarusian Republican Organization of Veterans of War and Labour, the Belarusian Society of the Disabled, the Belarusian Society of the Blind, and the Belarusian Society of the Deaf) (Kastsuk 1995, 455). Desptie these measures, 33 independent deputies were elected (26 of them were members of the BPF). They formed the democratic opposition. While it constituted less then 10 per cent of the total number of parliamentarians (345), 'the influence of the opposition was considerably more pronounced than its numbers might suggest (Zaprudnik 1993, 151)'. The opposition put forward more legislative proposals than any other faction; with such a record, even the former first secretary of the Communist party of Belarus Anatol Malafeeu admitted that 'the influence of the opposition in the parliament was more felt than the influence of its 86% communist members' (quoted in Zaprudnik 1993, 154). This influence became reinforced by the events outside Belarus, and namely the 'parade of sovereignties' and the eventual the break-up of the USSR.

The elites in soviet republics around the BSSR adopted some identification with the pro-democratic agenda and endorsed declarations of sovereignty (Lithuania, May 11,1989; Latvia May 4, 1990; Russia, June 12, 1990; Ukraine, July 16, 1990). The Belarusian soviet leaders cautiously followed suit by adopting a Declaration of Sovereignty on July 27, 1990. The declaration, however, was not given legislative force, and the BPF leader characterised it as 'a mere piece of paper' (Pazniak 1992, 153). The Belarusian soviet elite must have hoped for the success of the coup d'état by hard-liners in the USSR government in August 1991[40], and its failure left them at a complete loss. The failed coup signified the ultimate collapse of

[40] All the opposition activists were put under surveillance and medical emergency services were mobilised to deal with potential outcomes of massive repressions (report of the parliamentary ad hoc commission quoted in Zaprudnik 1993, 161).

the soviet system, and the Belarusian soviet leaders had no alternative plan of development. They found themselves 'hostage to their own power', as Karbalevich (1999, 11) put it. In that state of bewilderment, the soviet elite decided to embrace some of the cultural elite's agenda, in a very particular manner: rather than adopt or mimic the cultural elite's policies, the soviet elite let the cultural elite instigate their agenda at the state level. Within a month of the August 1991 coup, the soviet elite-dominated Parliament enforced the Declaration of Sovereignty as a constitutional act, changed the name and symbols of the state from the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Republic of Belarus, abolished the Communist Party and conceded Parliamentary Chairmanship to a BPF-supported MP, Stanislau Shushkevich[41].

The change of national symbols and the name of the state were part of the nation-building policy advocated by the cultural elite. In adopting them, the baffled soviet elite gave the green light to the further implementation of the cultural elite's national agenda. Thus the soviet elite conceded to the cultural elite's discretion the sphere with which they were least familiar – nation-building – and the cultural elite took the opportunity to influence what it considered the most pertinent issue of development. Hence the elite pact emerged: its essence was that the soviet elite would run the government, but would accept and implement the policies of the cultural elite in the nation-building sphere. In contrast to the transitions agreed elsewhere between the Communist Party and oppositionists (e.g. in Hungary and Poland), the pact between the soviet and the cultural elites in Belarus was not a result of round tables or formal talks. Neither was it a written or public document. However, we can plausibly infer about the presence of such a pact as an unwritten deal, a mutual understanding based on the elites' awareness of the social and political context and their own capacities given the evidence of the eventual separation of policy authorship [42].

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[41] Shushkevich commented later that he was able to become chairman only because the 'communist majority in the Parliament were immensely scared' Drakokhrust, G., U. Drakokhrust, et al. (1998). Transformatsia partinoi sistemy Belarusi. Belorussia i Rossia: Obshchestva i gosudarstva. D. Furman. Moscow, Prava Cheloveka. 149, n. 48

[42] The elite pact was reflected in the official leadership of Belarus. The head of government, Prime Minister Viacheslau Kebich, represented the soviet elite, and the head of state, Parliamentary Chairman Stanislau Shushkevich, was a member of the cultural elite. The men were typical representatives of their corresponding elite circles. Viacheslau Kebich was a classic example of a soviet technocrat. Born into a peasant family, he studied engineering at the Polytechnic Institute in Minsk, and advanced from a technologist to a plant director. He was then sent to the High Party School, and became a Second Secretary at the Minsk regional Party committee. In 1985, he headed the State Planning Committee of the BSSR, from where he landed the premiership in April, 1990 (Marples 1999, 61). Stanislau Shushkevich, in contrast, was a typical representative of the cultural elite. The son of a Belarusian poet who had perished in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, he studied physics, to become a full professor, a doctor of sciences and a corresponding member of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences. Stanislau Shushkevich had embraced politics in the late 1980s as he disagreed with the

The pact between the Belarusian elites was thus, essentially, a concession of one group (the soviet elite) to another (the cultural elite) under international and domestic pressures. The soviet elite could not fully control the society, whereas the cultural elite were wary to contaminate their reputation by too close association with the soviet leadership. However, they could not miss the opportunity to advance their democratic and nation-building agenda through influencing the soviet elite. This tension produced a pact, under which the soviet elite run the government, but followed the proposals of the cultural elite in the state- and nation-building sphere. We elucidate these latter policies in greater detail in chapter 5. Although the parties to the pact did obey the rules of a democratic system, and never openly tried to breach democratic procedures, the pact did little to entrench democracy in Belarus, as the literature on Southern Europe and Latin America would have led us to expect (as outlined in chapter 1). Instead, this pact led to the discrediting of both Belarusian elite groups, that were committed, at least formally, to democracy, and consequently, to discrediting the democratic system as such.

2.2. The pact undermines democratisation

In the course of the early transition years, until 1994, the cultural elite weakened and split, and the soviet elite believed they were close to regaining the dominant authority in the country. They proposed a presidential form of rule for Belarus, and were confident their leader could win the first presidential election in the country in summer 1994 (Maisenia 1997, 160). Yet, the representatives of both of the soviet and cultural elites: Viacheslau Kebich, Zianon Pazniak and Stanislau Shushkevich lost in the presidential election. Why did they all fail? Why did neither soviet, nor cultural elites, reap the benefits of the transition that they had a stake in directing?

The cultural elite began to disintegrate after 1992, due to its inability to bring change beyond the nation-building sphere, and growing disputes between its leaders. The first public split within the cultural elite emerged during the parliamentary debate on the ratification of the Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) agreement, which dissolved the USSR on December 8, 1991. The Parliamentary Chairman Stanislau Shushkevich was one of the signatories of the agreement, and advocated its ratification. The BPF leader Zianon Pazniak argued fervently against them. Later, in the spring of 1992, Stanislau Shushkevich opposed

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governmental policy on the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which he had investigated as a nuclear physicist (Zaprudnik 1993, 166). Prime Minister Kebich occupied himself with the administration of the republic. Parliamentary Chairman Shushkevich used his position to promote a nation-building agenda and, in particular, advance the Belarusian language, which he spoke fluently and always used in office.

Zianon Pazniak's demand for a referendum on re-election of the Parliament (although it is not clear whether these two were linked). Gradually, the BPF started dissolving into factions and parties. Moderates in the BPF formed the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (1991), and Russian-speaking liberals established the United Democratic Party (1990). What was left of the BPF restructured itself in 1993 into a party of a right-wing character. The dissolution of a wide oppositional movement into several political parties and groups eventually took place elsewhere in CEE countries. However, in Belarus, the national-democratic movement split before its leaders had had the chance to fully implement their agenda (in contrast to, for example, Solidarity and Civic Forum, that only started to factionalise when they were wholly in government, with the communists thoroughly in opposition). The division caused the wave of the BPF popularity to peak at the end of 1992 (Drakokhrust et al 1998, 114). The conflict within the cultural intelligentsia also split the 'national democratic' vote in the presidential 1994 election, when both Zianon Pazniak and Stanislau Shushkevich stood for presidency.

In contrast to the cultural elite, the soviet elite in Parliament did not lose their coherence, but they never re-established a connection with society. Strikingly, the abolition of the Communist Party did not have a significant impact on the unity of the soviet elite. They were held together not so much by ideology, as by shared professional experiences and personal links. As one MP argued, 'Kebich's team bonded at picnics and in saunas' (Hanchar quoted in Drakokhrust et al, 1998, 123). Another MP testified that "Kebich has not believed the Communist idea for some time... But besides ideas, there are life, people, relationships, and specific individuals, which tie him to the past" (Hrybanau quoted in Zaprudnik 1993, 168). Stanislau Shushkevich concurred: "Many of the people from the soviet elite have abandoned communist ideas. But their personal unity is stout and unbreakable" (quoted in Drakokhrust et al 1998, 149, n. 48). In January 1994, the soviet elite managed to force the Parliamentary Chairman Stanislau Shushkevich to resign, and in March 1994, the Parliament endorsed the government-sponsored draft of the Constitution establishing presidential rule in Belarus. The soviet elite believed they had restored their authority and power in the country: in early 1994, the atmosphere in the government was reported to be that of 'confidence based on power, with matter-of-fact style of argument, the wish to rule - and complete detachment from reality' (Maisenia 1997, 150). Indeed, the weakening of the cultural elite and the strengthening of the soviet elite by the mid-1990s did not mean a growth of popular support for the soviet elite, as the failure of its leader, Viacheslau Kebich at the presidential election in 1994, would demonstrate.

While they had the brief illusion of regaining power at the elite level, the soviet elite failed to reconnect with Belarusian society because they did not offer the society any clear developmental model or a well-defined ideological alternative to the opposition. The soviet technocrats had shed the Communist ideology like an old skin when it became a hindrance, and did not consider it expedient to subscribe to, or formulate, another ideology. The numerous organisations they formed [43] appeared primarily concerned with the advancement of the interests of the groupings within the soviet elite. Moreover, the soviet elite apparently did not even realise their ideological legitimacy deficit. Although the Communist Party was rejuvenated in 1991, the government did not subscribe to it. Neither did the soviet technocrats revamp themselves as social democrats, like their counterparts in the successful democratises of Central and Eastern Europe, such as in Poland or Hungary.

The soviet elite in Belarus equally refrained from embracing nationalist or authoritarian ideologies, in contrast to communist elites in the less successful democratises, as in Serbia or Romania. The Belarusian soviet elites simply did not seek to offer the society any coherent and viable programme of national development. 'In distinction to Russia, where Boris Yeltsin promoted capitalist democracy, or Ukraine, where Leonid Kravchuk preoccupied himself with the strengthening of state sovereignty, the Belarusian soviet elite had no ideas and no clear position whatsoever. They were mere opportunists' (Drakakhrust et al 1998, 123). 'The government compensated for their lack of ideas with a self-preservation instinct', argues (Karbalevich 1999, 11). This instinct led the soviet technocrat elite to 'swing with the times' and follow whatever ideas appeared safe and appealing, as long as they advanced their own interests. As a result, the soviet elites' opponents could convincingly argue that the soviet elite was merely corrupt and contented 'haves', concerned with their own interests and ignorant of society, rather than a viable team, capable of leading the country.

From the point of view of the southern-based transition theories (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986 (4th edition 1993), 37; Di Palma 1990, 261), a pact between the elites should have been conducive to democracy, because it would have given each competing group a chance to lead the country. The Belarusian elites did embrace democracy, but their power-sharing pact

[43] Reformist administrators and academics established the Party of popular consent, industry directors founded the Belarusian scientific-industrial congress; middle-level regional administrators created the All-Belarusian party of unity and consent. Reformists among administrative nomenclature formed the Civic party. The Socialist party of Belarus united top nomenclature, including the largest, pro-governmental, parliamentary faction 'Belarus' (Karbalevitch 1999, 12).

also resulted in a simultaneous implementation of two clashing developmental programmes. The soviet and cultural elites had profound disagreements on how Belarus should transform itself. The programme of the BPF, the locus of the cultural elite, comprised rigorous market reform, including the privatisation of land, akin to reforms in the Baltic neighbouring states. The BPF' demanded the severance of links with Russia and the reorientation of foreign policy towards the West instead. In sum, the cultural elite professed a 'European' identity for Belarus and Belarusian development.

The soviet elite, however, had little interest in large-scale economic restructuring, because they were wary of potential popular discontent, as argued at greater length in the following chapter. The soviet elite, for their part, preferred familiar methods of management, which demanded a soviet-type infrastructure, and, in turn, implied the rejuvenation of economic and political links with Russia. In other words, they attempted to maintain the elements of the soviet economic system within the Belarusian borders. Yet, the soviet elite never shaped their preferences as a particular model of national development. The soviet elite professed no national ideology but controlled the economy, while the cultural elite were not allowed to complement their national ideology with other elements of the 'European' developmental model, most obviously, one of economic liberalisation. Instead of a competition between two different programmes of development, there emerged in Belarus an awkward amalgamation of a 'European' identity stitched to soviet-type economic relations. The Belarusian elite pact was a union of two one-legged men. The pact weakened both elite groups that were its parties. Neither could implement their agenda comprehensively, but both were perceived as having had a chance to rule the country, and having failed.

As we know from chapter 1, neither the representative of the soviet elite, Viacheslau Kebich, nor one of the representatives of the cultural elite, Zianon Pazniak and Stanislau Shushkevich, managed to win the presidential position in the election of 1994. In their programmes, these presidential candidates by large reiterated their stance since 1990s, thus indirectly confirming their inability to achieve goals they put to themselves at the end of the soviet era. Viacheslau Kebich, thus, admitted that his government had not been able to create a 'new socio-economic system or create the basis for structural changes', he claimed as credit to his premiership the fact that his government 'has ensured the preservation of social security achievements of the soviet era, and has provided for the essential subsistence of the population' (Kebich June 10, 1994 [Narodnaia Hazeta]). In the light of the dramatic fall in living standards during Kebich's premiership, which we illustrate in detail in chapter 3, these

assurances proved unconvincing at most, and Kebich's promise to continue holding to his policies in the future thus had insufficient appeal to the voters, yielding Viacheslau Kebich 17.3 per cent of the vote (Narodnaia Hazeta June 25, 1994). Zianon Pazniak, in his typical manner, spent a substantial portion of his electoral programme on criticising the soviet elite as incapable leaders, and reiterated demands for radical economic reform, including the introduction of private property to land (Pazniak June 10, 1994 [Narodnaia Hazeta]). While Pazniak's critique of the soviet authorities in the early 1990 was formidable, his reiteration of the argument four years later after having headed the opposition in the parliament had a much weaker credibility. At the same time, the Kebich's team and the soviet elite spared little effort to create a doom scenario for radical market economy reforms a-la Pazniak, pointing to the hardship of economic transition in the neighbouring Poland, Russia and the Baltic states, which were experiencing the most taxing on the population stages of reform. Furthermore, the only state policy Zianon Pazniak could be associated with – nationalising – had gained little popular support, because the highly illiberal manner of its implementation contradicted the ostensible liberal content (the argument is elaborated in chapter 5). Pazniak received 12.9 per cent of the vote (Narodnaia Hazeta June 25, 1994). The programme of the former Parliamentary Chairman Stanislau Shushkevich had more social-democratic notes than that of Pazniak, but echoed his the nation-building agenda (Shushkevich June 10, 1994 [Narodnaia Hazeta]). Yet, while seeking to present a 'milder' alternative to Pazniak's programme, Shushkevich had not managed to get sufficient independent or organisational cloud since his resignation in January 1994, which was reflected in his electoral result of 9.9 per cent of the vote (Narodnaia Hazeta June 25, 1994). (Two other presidential candidates from the Communist party with a strong anti-reform gathered even less vote). The failure of the Communist candidates confirmed the social impetus for transition from the soviet system, while the loss of the both soviet and cultural elite members at the presidential election, while gathering comparable shares of vote, suggested that the population doubted the ability of both elite groups to choose the right reform direction and implement their declared policies. As we shall see in the next section, independent candidate Aliaksandr Lukashenka proved more credible to the voters.

The formal observance of democratic procedures by the parties of the pact did not ensure democratic consolidation in Belarus. Instead, the sharing of power between the competing elite groups, which the pact allowed for, prevented a comprehensive pursuit of any particular vision of national development. It also put the responsibility for the social and economic costs of transition on both parties to the pact, and consequently discredited them both.

Crucially for the Belarusian transition, the pact undermined the legitimacy of the elite groups, who subscribed to democracy, and opened the door to the political actor who did not profess any democratic commitment, as it will transpire.

III. An authoritarian leader and the administrative elite

Unlike the soviet or cultural elites, Aliaksandr Lukashenka managed to win and maintain the trust of the Belarusian population; 10 years after he became the Belarusian President, Aliaksandr Lukashenka had no apparent challenger and appeared highly likely to rule the country for years to come. This part of the chapter analyses, first, how MP Lukashenka prevailed over both the soviet and cultural elites during the 1994 presidential election, and, second, how he, while not a member of any elite group himself, organised the administration of the country in such a way that he subjugated the existing elites and created a group of cadres that became the backbone of his regime.

3.1. Aliaksandr Lukashenka's 1994 electoral strategy: l'ami du peuple

Among the presidential candidates in the 1994 election, Aliaksandr Lukashenka stood out by virtue of his non-affiliation with any circle of the Belarusian political establishment. A member of the Belarusian Parliament since 1990, he achieved nation-wide publicity as the Chairman of the Parliamentary Anti-Corruption Commission, which brought allegations against both the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Chairman, and forced the latter to resign in January 1994. Criticism of both the soviet and the cultural elite formed the basis of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's presidential election campaign (Karbalevich 1998, 242; Silitski 2002c, 41). Importantly, that was not a criticism of particular policies or decisions; rather, Aliaksandr Lukashenka disparaged both elites as groups aloof from society, and presented himself, in contrast to them, as a defender of the people's interests.

"Those in power will never support me... I count on the votes of workers, peasants, and intelligentsia – the people who do not wield power" – was Aliaksandr Lukashenka's electoral leitmotiv (quoted in Karbalevich 1998, 232). Indeed, the Belarusian administrative establishment had never been home for Lukashenka, although it was not for the want of trying. A history graduate, Lukashenka had attempted to penetrate the power structures through the army (as a propaganda officer), Komsomol (secretary of a school committee), ideological organs (secretary of the 'society for knowledge'), and industry (deputy director of a building materials factory). By the end of the soviet era, Lukashenka was the head of a

sovkhoz, ('soviet farm'); although a managerial position within the nomenclature, it was too low to be of any significance on the regional or national level. In none of the careers that Aliaksandr Lukashenka had embarked upon, however, would the soviet elite, who were running the country, accept and promote him; most likely, he indeed did not conform, as he claimed later.

In 1989, Aliaksandr Lukashenka used an alternative route to advancement which *perestroika* had opened, and balloted for a seat in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies. Viacheslau Kebich, then the head of State planning committee, happened to be on the ballot in the same electoral district. Despite Aliaksandr Lukashenka's remarkable effort (he was said to have held 166 election meetings within a month, that is, 5 to 6 a day (Karbalevich 1998, 229), he could not overcome the influence and resources of a top soviet official. Viacheslau Kebich won the seat, and Aliaksandr Lukashenka held yet more grievances against the soviet elite.

It was the soviet elite, whom presidential candidate Lukashenka blamed for the country's falling economic performance. 'Lukashenka simply blamed the corrupt officials, and won hearts' (Karbalevich 1998, 256). The main message of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's programme was that stronger discipline and a crackdown on corruption would revive the economy. While criticising the soviet elite, Aliaksandr Lukashenka also distanced himself from the cultural elite. He condemned the 'forced and imposed' nation-building policies of the cultural elite (we discuss them in chapter 5), and accused the opposition of being demagogical and self-centred, and, as such, as aloof of the people as the corrupt soviet elite. By criticising both elite groups, Lukashenka presented himself as a 'third force', 'the only candidate able to shake off the old system and thus clear the way for normal civilised politics' (Maisenia 1997, 164).

A crucial part of candidate Lukashenka's 'third force' strategy was to portray himself as a sincere and honest man, utterly devoted to the life of the people. He played into the image of *'batska'* (Belarusian for 'father'); the name for partisan chiefs during the Second World War, thus creating the image of a defender, loving and stern, an ultimate arbiter on all matters. Thus Aliaksandr Lukashenka skilfully associated with a widespread positive image in the living social memory. He also genuinely and actively sought popular support. 'He wanted to be liked by everyone', testifies Maisenia (1997, 186). "Lukashenka is the only modern-day politician in Belarus, in that he went around knocking on doors, kissing babies and doing all the routine which the Western politicians go through"- says a former US ambassador to

Belarus Michael Kozak (personal communication, January 13, 2004). Add to that candidate Lukashenka's claim to have had his car shelled while on an electoral round, and thus we have a successful image of a martyr to a failing system.

This image proved to matter more than policy proposals, as Lukashenka's manifesto for the 1994 election was both brief and vague. Its three declared goals were: to stop the growth of prices, to fight corruption and to 'restore the disrupted economic links' between the soviet republics. The proposed means to achieve all those goals was stronger discipline, but not 'of the command-administrative kind' (Lukashenka June 16, 1994, [Narodnaia Hazeta]). His promise to 're-ignite the plans and factories' became a catch-phrase. Thus, Aliaksandr Lukashenka promised a restoration of the soviet-era stability without a rejuvenation of the soviet system as such. The largest part of his programme document was, however, again devoted to proving candidate Lukashenka's popular credentials: 'He is neither with the left, nor with the right – but only with the people and against those who deceive and cheat them' (Lukashenka June 16, 1994, [Narodnaia Hazeta]).

This claim to personal connection with the society and its concerns proved to be a winning strategy for Aliaksandr Lukashenka, underpinning his popularity and the eventual ability to establish and enjoy an increasingly unlimited rule.

3.2. The creation of the administrative elite

Having won the popular mandate as a President, Aliaksandr Lukashenka needed a reliable executive corpus. To create one was a formidable task for somebody who was not a member of any elite group himself. The newly elected President needed to subjugate the existing bureaucracy, remove potential rivals, and bring in loyal supporters. He managed all these tasks in a highly skilful manner.

During the first three years in office, President Lukashenka was estimated to have changed the careers of almost 10 000 executives (Feduta 1999, [Belarus Today]), that is, around one-fifth of the body of administrators in the country. All the top national and regional executive offices changed hands. In the local executive bodies, 8 to 14 officials were replaced in each of the six Belarusian regions (Karbalevich, 1999, 14). One the first administrative decisions of President Lukashenka was to render all positions of local government executives from

elected into appointed (Ukaz Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 222 November 28, 1994)[44]. He thus made the lower administrative echelons dependent on himself rather than the local population, and in this way ensured their obedience.

At the higher administrative level, President Lukashenka decapitated the soviet elite, in a very strategic manner. Initially, the President incorporated some influential members of Viacheslau Kebich's team (such as the First Deputy and Deputy Prime Minister Mikhail Miasnikovich and Siarhei Linh, respectively) by offering them important positions in his government, and they duly delivered the early cooperation of the soviet elite. As soon as the President consolidated his power, however, he limited the authority and influence of the soviet elite leaders and downgraded them to less influential positions. (Mikhail Miasnikovich, once the head of the Presidential Administration, was moved to chair the Academy of Sciences; while Siarhei Linh exchanged the Prime Minister's seat for that of the Belarusian ambassador to the UN). At the same time, the former soviet elite leader Viacheslau Kebich left the active political arena, exhausted by the burden of leadership. With Viacheslau Kebich gone and his strongest aids incorporated, President Lukashenka prevented the rise of an opponent from the circles of the soviet elite in his early years of office, when he was most vulnerable to challenges from them. Gradually, he replaced the top soviet executives with his own appointees. The replacements were often less professional, but more loyal.

President Lukashenka primarily drew his top executives from two sources. The first was from the middle-level of administration, especially from the periphery. Uladzimir Rysakevich, Uladzimir Garkun and Vasil Dalgaleu, for example, leapt into Deputy Prime Ministers' chairs from the positions of, respectively, a Deputy Chairman of a regional executive, a First Secretary of a city Party committee, and a deputy manager of a small town factory (Belova-Gille 2002, 60). The Chairwoman of the Central Commission for Elections, Lidiia Iarmoshina, had previously worked as an advisor at a branch of local government, and the Minister for Health, Liudmila Pastaialka, had been a chief doctor of a regional paediatric hospital. The most notorious example of a cross-career change is that of Piotr Prakapovich, a construction engineer and a building company director, who became the Chairman of the National Bank. The appointment of individuals with little professional experience into top governmental positions thus ensured the newcomers' loyalty to the President, for they owed their prominence exclusively to his leadership.

[44] Russian President Putin followed suit in autumn 2004.

The security services have been the second main source of President Lukashenka's appointees. The President entrusted some top decision-making positions to military officers: the Head of the Presidential Administration from 2001 to 2004, Ural Latupau, is a professor of law and a KGB colonel; the former Prosecutor-General and the Head of Presidential Administration since December 2004, Victar Sheiman, is a colonel-major; the head of the Security Council, Gennady Nevyglas, is a general-lieutenant; the head of the State Control Committee, Anatol Tozik, is a colonel, not to mention all the 'security' (internal affairs, defence, KGB, border guard) ministers (FPNP 2003, online). Army officers occupied even those positions which required a non-military professional background, such as the head of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences (Aliaksandr Kniazeu, general-major), or the director of the Institute for Social and Political Studies of the Presidential Administration (Leu Kryshtapovich, KGB colonel). The prominence of military officers in Lukashenka's elite clearly sustains his strong involvement and connection with the security services. Notably, many of President Lukashenka's 'military' appointees were non-Belarusian by origin, but came from other parts of the former Soviet Union, mostly from Russia; this arguably 'diluted' networks in the security services and thus provided an additional guarantee of their obedience to the president.

Having created a corpus of loyal executives, President Lukashenka's principal method of managing them was sustaining their job insecurity. One means to that end was constant reshuffling: during the period from 1994 to 2004, the Belarusian President had dismissed four prime ministers and only few key officials had kept any position for more than 2 years. This rotation of administrators prevented their consolidation in any one particular level of bureaucracy.[45] The President's manner of firing ministers out of the blue also contributed to the insecurity of the officials. Some of the sacked officials had been promptly given new positions within the government, so that several of them (Yury Sivakou, Uladzimir Rusakevich) had occupied up to five posts. (Given the complexity of modern ministries, this sustains a functional incompetence of the top officials.) Other officials, however, faced more than a loss of position.

Imprisonment was another method by which the President held his administrators in check. Sixteen controlling bodies in the country kept a close eye on their activities, and criminal

[45] It has an additional benefit of redirecting responsibility for poor governmental performance from the President to the officials; public sacking of ministers by the President is one of the methods of boosting his popularity.

charges were brought against officials at all levels. Among them were the head of the National Bank, Tamara Vinnikava (1997); the Minister of Agriculture, Vasil Leonau[46](1997); and, most recently, the Chief of the Presidential Staff, Halina Zhuraukova; and the Chief of the National TV company, Ehor Rubakov (2004). Several directors of large plants (Minsk Tractor Plant, Minsk Refrigerator Plant, Belarusian Metallurgic Plant) were imprisoned on corruption charges. In 2001 alone, criminal cases were instigated against 400 factory directors (Charter97 May 27, 2003). It is said (Ablava, personal communication, October 1, 2003) that the President entrusted top administrative positions only to those individuals against whom he had enough compromising materials to keep them in check. Thus, 'a state official is one of the most insecure position in today's Belarus', one analyst (Karbalevich, 1999, 17) argued.

By breaking up elite networks and maintaining the insecurity of state officials, Lukashenka had rendered the administrators of the country from a powerful social strata as they were in the soviet times, into a mere corpus of obedient and loyal executives apparently fully under his command. We shall argue that President's ability to relate to the electorate, and the soviet elite's weakness in this regard, has been key to such development. Before that, however, we need to finish our analysis of the administrative elite President Lukashenka has created.

3.3. The authoritarian character of the administrative elite

It is universally acknowledged that President Lukashenka is the main decision-maker in Belarus, in the sense that he is unlimited and unchallenged in his policies and actions. The President obviously enjoys involvement in all aspects of state governance. President Lukashenka visits farms and factories, directs military manoeuvres and even heads the National Olympic Committee[47]. He maintains a constant public presence, supported by the state media, which reports on the President's actions in virtually every broadcast or issue. Notably, Lukashenka prevailingly speaks in the first person, thus attributing any governmental policies to his own actions, and endorsing his image as the chief, and only, decision-maker in the country. This image apparently fits the reality.

President Lukashenka clearly dominates the executive in Belarus, with little role ascribed to the Prime Minister or the cabinet of ministers as such. The structure of the Presidential

[46] who was also a former First Secretary of the Mahiley regional party committee and patron of Lukashenka

[47] to continue the list - 'The President gives export licenses, controls large commercial deals, permits privatisation of state enterprises, oversees the development of historical science, and creation of school books, approves film scenarios and briefs the national hockey team before matches, etc (Karbalevich, 1999, 15).

Administration resembles a full government administration, with its departments of socio-political information, foreign policy, economy and legal affairs. A special department processes private appeals to the President, which is another indirect indication that the administration is effectively perceived as the government. The head of the administration is known to have a closer access to the President than the Prime Minister. The heads of the 'coercive ministries': the Security Council, the Committee for State control and the KGB - also report directly to the President, and not the Prime Minister. The resulting structure of power appears to ensure an unbroken chain of command from the top to the local levels, with decision-making discretion sharply diminishing down the chain of authority.

In the situation when the President himself takes all decisions of importance, state administrators cannot expect a meaningful debate on the imperatives of state development, as any initiative is hardly expected or welcome on their part. They either have to support the President's policies, or leave. The members of Lukashenka's 1994 election team who disagreed with his policies had left within the first years of his rule. Victar Hanchar, Deputy Prime Minister, resigned in November 1994, followed by Aliaksandr Feduta, the Head of the department of social and political information at the Presidential Administration. On the eve of the 1996 referendum, the Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir and deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Sannikau resigned. The sacked and imprisoned members of the elite, when released, have either kept a low profile or entered the opposition, especially its liberal wing (centred around the United Civic Party). The remaining and new members of Lukashenka's elite submit to the President's opinion and his policies. Thus the elite created by Lukashenka is *uniform* in Dahrendorf's (1968, 219) sense, in that they 'profess unitary political ideologies and display little internal conflict'.

Political uniformity is one characteristic of non-liberal elites, according to Dahrendorf (1968, 214). Their other characteristic is social position: authoritarian elites are *established*, or share backgrounds and 'speak the common language', while totalitarian elites are *abstract*, with no sense of belonging together, no common experiences, biographies, or subjects of conversation (Dahrendorf 1968, 219).

The social characteristics of Lukashenka's elite fall between authoritarian and totalitarian by Dahrendorf's criteria. In the sense of social background, this elite is more abstract than the soviet and cultural elites, but not entirely abstract. President Lukashenka's appointees at the top administrative level are indeed an abstract cluster. They have little in common by way of

educational background, and come from different geographical areas of the former Soviet Union, not only from Belarus. As many had been previously mid-level administrators, they had little experience of working together, and their personal networks were unlikely to overlap (except top officials and their protégés). At the lower administrative levels, however, the elite turnover has not been significant. (As argued above, instead of replacing the lower echelons of bureaucracy, President Lukashenka ensured their loyalty by changing their positions from elected to appointed.) Many local officials preserved the positions they had held since the administrations of the soviet and Viacheslau Kebich times. In 1998, 113 heads of town and district administrations had more than five years' experience of state administrative work, while more than half of them, 67, had been in the administration for more than 10 years (Karbalevich 1999,14). Thus the lower level elites preserved their established character, as opposed to the abstract character of the top elites.

The form that Lukashenka's elite will eventually take, abstract or established, depends on his future policy with respect to the cadres. Some analysts argue that Lukashenka's purely personalistic approach to appointments (Karbalevich 1999, 15, Belova-Gille 2002, 59) reinforces the *abstract* character of the new Belarusian elite. The abstract quality of Lukashenka's top elites, however, may be attributed to his lack of resources and the wish to avoid re-employing the members of the soviet elite unless expedient. It is equally plausible, however, to see a way for Lukashenka's elite to become established, as there are certainly trends pointing in that direction.

One institution favouring the established character of the new elite is the Academy of Public Administration. Since its foundation in 1991, it has provided second higher education and advanced courses to 40 000 executives (Akademiia Upravlenia 2004, online). There are 58, 000 state administrators in the country (ATN November 20, 2003), and even with allowance for repeated attendance and three years of the Academy's operation before Lukashenka's presidency, we may estimate that at least a half of them have passed through the Academy's doors. As such, it replicates the soviet-time High Party School, and serves as a source of common experience and amalgamation to Lukashenka's elite. Another potential source of common background for the elites was established in November 2003, when the state seminar on cadres policy named the Belarusian National Union of Youth[48] as a primary resource for the inflow of young administrators (ATN November 20, 2003). Given, in addition, the fairly small size of the Belarusian population (below 10 million), Lukashenka's

[48] Chapter 6 explains why this organization is a stakeholder in Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime.

increasing detachment from Russia, (as explained in chapters 4 and 5, which prevents him from drawing cadres from that country), and the importance of personal networks in the conditions of legal and economic insecurity in Belarus, it is plausible to expect Lukashenka's elite to grow into an *established* elite, typical of authoritarian regimes.

Thus the new Belarusian administrative elite, formed by President Lukashenka, is uniform and abstract, with a tendency to be increasingly established. Dahrendorf's correlation between these characteristics and non-liberal regime type is, clearly, valid for Belarus under the Lukashenka presidency.

3.4. Administrative elite: neither communist-type nor populist

Despite some apparent similarities with the Belarusian elite during the communist era, which was also non-liberal, the operation and characteristics of the administrative elite of President Lukashenka are different from those of the communist times. True, Aliaksandr Lukashenka's cadre contains many of the former soviet officials, especially at the middle and lower level. The absence of a separation of powers and the predominance of one branch of government is typical for both the soviet and Lukashenka's regimes. However, the decision-making process, recruitment, and social position of members differ significantly between these two elites.

The soviet elite was embedded in the Communist Party, which was a collegiate organ. As Smith (1988, 324) demonstrates, the General Secretary of the Party could only enunciate a policy agenda if he had gathered political support within various powerful Party and state bodies. Similarly, advancement within the Communist Party elite required collective conformity and relevant professional experience, and a powerful patron (Smith 1988, 85). Consequently, positions in the state and Party apparatus were meaningful and endowed with relevant decision-making powers. In the soviet times, the elite also secured substantial material rewards for their service, including relatively high pay, and decent living quarters (Armstrong 1967, 84). In other words, in the soviet system, the elite ruled the country as a collective body, and enjoyed high security and living standards.

In Lukashenka's Belarus, however, the elite is not a ruler, but more directly an executor of the President's will, as we argued earlier in the section. Lukashenka's elite has a rigid top-down structure, in which officials depend on the President personally. Although executing orders is the nature of bureaucratic work everywhere, the Belarusian bureaucrats are, in

addition, often expected to deliver beyond their realistic capacities[49] and are vulnerable to the President's whims. Neither do they enjoy a high standard of living, as the soviet bureaucrats did. The salaries of the state administrators (averaging below 150 USD monthly in January 2004) are reported to be 10 to 15 times lower than in the neighbouring Ukraine and Russia (Zhbanov January 26, 2004, [Belorusskaia Gazeta]). Another sign that the social prestige of state administration has waned is the relatively old average age of state officials, 50 years (ATN November 20, 2003), in comparison to 40.8 years age of Party secretaries in 1989 (Smirnov and Platonov 1989, 71). President Lukashenka's cadre policy has therefore had little in common with the soviet one.

Neither is it purely populist, despite the President's obvious resorts to populist tactics. President Lukashenka has indeed achieved much of his legitimacy by presenting himself as a 'man of the people'. The confidence of having popular support was a powerful instrument in Aliaksandr Lukashenka's hands in his effort to subsume the soviet elite, who, on the contrary, had little popular acclaim or connection with the society. According to Karbalevich (1999, 17) the electorate 'distrust "the bosses" and often perceive the maltreatment of officials as 'just'; in 1996, 64.8 per cent of respondents in a nation-wide poll believed that state administrators lived better than they deserved (NISEPI 1996, 17). Thus, in the first two years of being in power, President Lukashenka lured the soviet elite leaders into believing that they could maintain their authority under his regime. By the time the soviet elite realised that that was an illusion, they had lost any of the ties with the society which they had before 1994; such ties were arguably very weak even at that time, as illustrated earlier. Aliaksandr Lukashenka, in the meantime, had managed to maintain the image of the bureaucracy as one of the chief causes of people's problems, while still presenting himself as the defender of people's interests against the bureaucrats. The soviet elite thus had little confidence in popular support for any of their action that could challenge the President, moreover, they could be well expect popular protest against it. The elite outsider's ability to relate to the people thus proved essential not to his winning the presidential position, but also to subjugating the elite corpus that had ruled the country previously.

[49] in January 2004, Lukashenka issued a reprimand to the deputy Prime Minister and the heads of regional executives for failing to implement his order to construct 5 houses in each agricultural organisation Ukaz Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 49 (January 29, 2004). O privlechenii k otvestvennosti dolzhnostkykh lits, ne obespechivshikh vypolneniie porucheniia Presidenta Pespubliki Belarus, http://pravo.by/webnpa/card.asp?RN=P30400049.

Yet, populism alone would not have allowed Aliaksandr Lukashenka to accomplish as profound an overhaul of the political and administrative system as the one he has managed. Populism is one of the most evasive concepts in political science. Depending on 'the academic axe [the author] grinds' (Wiles 1969, 166), it has been described as a movement, a phenomenon, or an ideology. His understanding, though, is that populism is a 'political syndrome' (Wiles 1969, 166) rather than an all-encompassing model of state governance or a political doctrine. After all, institutionalisation is detrimental for populism, as it defeats its anti-elitist appeal and spontaneity (Taggart 2000, 99). Indeed, the most notorious case of a populist regime in the postcommunist Europe, that of Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia, was rather short-lived.

An eager purveyor of populism, Vladimir Meciar did not manage an elite overhaul. First, despite some trying, Prime Minister Meciar never fully subjugated all branches of power, and his premiership was restrained by the Constitutional Court and the President (Innes 2001, 266). Second, Meciar's premiership was predicated on party alliances, and he, consequently, had to appease his coalition partners, an indirect sign of which was the a high level of cronyism in the privatisation process (Innes 2001, 264; Krause 2003, 67). Thus, throughout the years of his rule, the Slovak Prime Minister Meciar had to face the existence of political actors beyond his command. Populism helped Vladimir Meciar win electoral votes and gain political leadership in Slovakia, but it was certainly not enough to bring about a structural and qualitative change in the administration of the country so as to fully subjugate it, something that Aliaksandr Lukashenka's has accomplished in Belarus. A much more sophisticated national ideology, which gave a meaning and explanation of the collective, prescribed the functions of the ordinary people, of the elites and of the president and described the direction of social development, was arguably essential for achieving this goal.

Over 10 years of rule, President Lukashenka put his former opponents from the soviet and cultural elite firmly into his grip. He cast the cultural elite out, and subdued, reshuffled, intimidated and humiliated the soviet elite, and eventually transformed state administrators from a dominant social stratum into a corpus of obedient servants, the backbone of the new authoritarian regime in Belarus.

Conclusions

The Belarusian political arena has seen a variety of elite configurations during the post-soviet period. The soviet elite initially dominated the republic with such confidence that they believed they did not need to establish national legitimacy. When the soviet system was discredited beyond rejuvenation, they shared some of their authority with the cultural elite, by allowing them to implement their nation-building agenda. The ensuing elite pact, however, resulted in an incoherent pursuit of elements of two programmes of development, based on European and soviet models, as we shall see in greater detail in the three following chapters. Eventually, both parties to the pact were discredited as incapable leaders, and the door to political leadership was opened to an elite outsider, who had not participated in the pact, and, crucially for the transition path, did not have to commit to democracy.

The lesson for our study so far is that a political actors' ability to make their programmes resonant with the society and win national credibility is crucial for their political authority. The soviet elite did not attempt to capture the society in national terms. The cultural elite succeeded initially, but could not implement their professed developmental programme. Yet, the combined vote for the cultural elite representatives Pazniak and Shushkevich at the 1994 presidential election, 22.8 per cent, exceeded the result of the soviet elite leader Kebich, 17.3 per cent (Narodnaia Hazeta June 25, 1994). The political actor, who campaigned on little more than the claim to defend popular interests, however, won the election by a high margin. The ability to credibly relate to the nation also enabled the aspiring authoritarian Belarusian leader, Lukashenka, to oppress the rival elite groups and create the administrative pillar of his regime.

Having established the reconfiguration of the political elites in post-soviet Belarus, we now consider their policies and strategies in greater detail to investigate how and why they have contributed to the stalling of democracy and the consolidation of an authoritarian regime in the country.

3. From soviet to national ownership of the economy

Based on the observation that 'there are no democracies which are not market economies' (Diamond 1995, 109), it has been argued in some academic and policy quarters that the committed restructuring of the economy from central planned to market is causally linked to the political transformation from communist to democratic systems – a necessary, but not sufficient condition for that transformation. What allowed for committed reform in some countries and prevented it in others, however, is less clearly understood. Given that the popular dissatisfaction with economic performance and the desire 'to live like they do in the West' was a major social impetus behind the breakdown of the communist system right across the former Soviet bloc, it is rather unclear why market reforms were eventually implemented, and socially sustained, only in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, whereas the population in many former soviet republics rejected reforms after a brief taste of them. Also, bearing in mind the fact that the economies of the Soviet bloc countries were strongly interdependent, it is rather surprising that any *authoritarian* postcommunist leaders have managed to render their own economies stable in the absence of the soviet economic system and without a sustained programme of liberalisation, and yet, such a stabilisation seems to have been managed in the case of Belarus. These tensions, we argue, can be resolved if we consider how economic policies in the transition countries were themselves a product of yet another, more profound factor – nationalism, and, to be precise, the available forms of national ideology.

We suggest that economic policies – in all their varied forms - in postcommunist states were sustained by the means of national ideology: the vision of a nation within the European developmental framework underpinned successful market reforms (as we argue in the concluding chapter), while the notion of collective, national ownership of the economy, based on the ostensible national traditions, was used to preserve a state-centred economy by postcommunist governments that eschewed market reform. The eventual choice of the governments and societies in the transition countries to implement market economy reforms or to avoid them was consistently justified with the, respectively, liberal or egalitarian national ideology. Further, an inconsistency between ideological and economic messages of the ruling elites, such as a declared pursuit of economic reforms without actual adherence to the reform programme, proved detrimental to their political legitimacy and led to uncertain transition outcomes.

The importance of this ideological underpinning for economic policies in national terms is particularly clear in the case of the Belarusian post-soviet transition. The principle economic policy-makers during the transition period: the soviet elite and President Lukashenka - pursued the essentially similar goals of avoiding radical economic restructuring and maintaining the state-centred economy, but with different outcomes for their political fortunes. The soviet elite lost office, whereas President Lukashenka has managed to construct the economy to suit his authoritarian rule. We explain this difference by the fact that Aliaksandr Lukashenka framed his economic policies in terms of a specifically national, and nationally-owned, developmental model, whereas the soviet elite simply attempted to steer away from market reforms without either formally denouncing them, or, more importantly, giving their new policies any national ideological explanation.

After a brief characterisation of the Belarusian economy in the soviet era, we analyse (in the first and second parts of the chapter respectively) the economic policies of the soviet elite during the democratisation period, 1990 to 1994, and those of President Lukashenka during the decade of authoritarian consolidation, 1994 to 2004.

This chapter is not an economic analysis of the Belarusian transition. Such an analysis would require a different type of research question, methods and expertise. Rather, within the overall argument of the thesis about the importance of the national foundations underpinning transition policies, the purpose here is to demonstrate the mutual consistency or otherwise of the economic and nationalist messages of the political elites in Belarus, and to relate them to the political dynamics of the country's transition. Our argument is that the presentation of economic policies in terms of a relevant national interest and ideology is strongly explanatory to their relative political success.

I. Reforms without restructuring

Managing the Belarusian economy in the early transition years was the prerogative of the soviet elite, following the elite pact, discussed in chapter 2 (to remind the reader, the soviet elite were the senior administrators of the republic in the soviet period, they gained a majority in the 1990 Parliament and thus had the Prime Minister and the government appointed from their ranks; however, being strongly challenged by the cultural elite in the parliamentary opposition, the soviet elite rendered the lead in nation-building policies to the

cultural elite). The soviet elite subscribed to market reforms and enabled the development of private business, but they also avoided radical economic restructuring for the fear of losing popular legitimacy. This resulted in a combination of market reform rhetoric with de-facto maintenance of the centralised economy. The soviet elite believed that a satisfactory economic performance was the key to political success, and thus ruled out the need to develop any elaborate ideological grounding for their economic policies. As we shall see, the combination of an economically poor performance and extremely weak ideological justification for these policies would cost this elite dear in 1994. But to understand why they had thought some market reforms were necessary in the first place, we need to turn back to the Soviet period.

1.1. The soviet 'success story' needs a new plot

One of the most stable images of Belarus is that it was 'a very happy member of the Soviet Union' (Nesvetailova 2002, 216), or 'the shop-window of the soviet system' (Eke and Kuzio 2000, 537). The Belarusian economy became one of the major soviet claims to success; soviet propaganda argued that the BSSR had increased its industrial potential by 192 times during the soviet era, illustrating it vividly, thus:

> 'every 4 minutes, a tractor is produced in the country, every 2 minutes – a motorbike, every 11 minutes – a metal working machine, and every 30 seconds, a new TV set, a refrigerator, or a radio set leave a conveyor belt...more than 400 items of industrial production are exported to 86 countries around the world' (Drozd and Tsimoshak 1978, 2).

The soviet system indeed modernised Belarus. Industrialisation was commenced in the interwar period, but due to the devastation of the country in the Second World War[50], industrial development started anew in the mid 1940s, with an emphasis on the development of large-scale industries. Consequently, by 1986, Belarus was home to 1490 enterprises in the spheres of energy production, machine-building, tool-building, electronics and radio electronics, chemical, petrochemical, and mineral fertilisers production (Famin 1993, 215). These highly skilled industries produced 60 per cent of GNP in 1985 (Zaprudnik 1993, 185). By the 1980s, the BSSR figures for industrial output and labour productivity growth

[50] 2.2 million people perished, and about 380 thousand taken into forced labour Kastsiuk, M. (1995). Narusy Historii Belarusi. Dapamozhnik dlia VNY. Minsk, Universitetskae. . 200 towns and 9200 villages were ruined. Minsk was 80 per cent destroyed and Vitebsk 95 per cent Vakar, N. (1956). Belorussia : the making of a nation : a case study. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. Industrial production in 1945 constituted only 20.4 per cent of the 1940 level Kastsiuk, M. (1995). Narusy Historii Belarusi. Dapamozhnik dlia VNY. Minsk, Universitetskae.

outstripped those of all the other soviet republics, sometimes by a considerable margin (Marples 1999, 20). Occupying less than 1 per cent of the USSR territory, it produced more than 4 per cent of its GNP (UNDP 1995, Human Development Report, online). Aslund (2002, 174) found Belarus the best-functioning and most orderly part of the soviet economy. Ioffe (2004, 86) called Belarus a 'major soviet success story'[51].

The soviet system's impact on the quality of life for the Belarusian population is not that straightforward, however, although Belarusian authors cannot agree on this. Novik and Tsiaplova (1996, vol. II: 371) argue that the BSSR population enjoyed the highest living standards in the USSR. Demidkina (1999, 55) too draws figures to suggest that by 1991, GDP per capita in Belarus was the highest in the USSR, at USD 5,729, compared to the second highest, Latvia, at USD 5,689, and third, Russia at USD 5, 396. Famin (1993, 230), however, writes that the soviet statistics put the BSSR on the forth level of national income in the Soviet Union at that time. Kastsiuk (1995, 400), meanwhile, argues that living standards in Belarus by the end of 1980s were lower than average in the Soviet Union.

Indeed, there is evidence to see that the rapid industrial development of the BSSR did not directly translate into a high quality of life. By 1989, 30 per cent of families were eligible for improved housing conditions, the highest figure in the Soviet Union (Kastsiuk 1995, 398). In the social sphere, daily child care provision met only 67 per cent of the known demand in 1985 (Kastsiuk 1995, 401). Although the gross industrial output had increased by 8.9 times between 1960 and 1985, the production of customer goods increased only 2.1 times between 1970 and 1985, resulting in shortages of such goods and food stuffs and the 6-fold growth of money deposits, due to the shortage of products to spend the money on (Kastsiuk 1995, 397). In addition to these socio-economic indicators, the literature and cinematography of the 1970s and 1980s document how people were increasingly in search of material goods; cars, furniture, even clothing items became signs of social position and prestige, and were duly sought through networking and bribery. The higher affluence of Central European societies right across the USSR/BSSR western border was a known fact for the Belarusian population, and this too undermined the government's rhetoric about the BSSR as the zenith of economic

[51] Some of the evidence that Ioffe (2004, 87) draws to support his claim is of perplexing quality: 'Belarus was second to none in egg production per laying hen' and 'Belarus's milk production was 30per cent of that in Ukraine, while Belarus had only one-fifth of Ukraine's population', the causal link in the last case being dubious.

success. By the end of the 1980s, therefore, Belarusian society was rather enthused by the prospect of economic reform.

The BSSR population in the late 1980s appeared to look forward to economic reforms rather than to be wary of them. The emergence and growth of the Belarusian Popular Front for Perestroika (BPF) attested to people's dissatisfaction with the soviet system. Opinion polls established an increasing public confidence in economic restructuring. In the early 1990, 46 per cent of the population supported market reform, and in one year that number had increased to 62 per cent (Marchanka 1995, 421). The proportion of supporters for the privatisation of state property and its transfer to working collectives grew over the same period from 44 per cent to 74,5 per cent (Marchanka 1995, 422). Another poll, in autumn 1990, registered 75 per cent support for the transfer of industrial enterprises to the working collectives (Zaprudnik 1993, 195). The popular momentum for economic change also stemmed from the donor position of the BSSR in the USSR economy, which obliged the republic to export a considerable proportion of its production to the 'sister' soviet republics. Zlotnikov (2002b, 252), with hindsight, established that, in fact, such a system benefited the BSSR, as the imports of materials were cheap, and exports were unrealistically expensive. At the time, however, people believed they would be better off if the republic were allowed to utilise its assets on its own.

Economic reforms in the BSSR were warranted not only by popular will, but also, objectively, by the republic's economic structure and by its interdependence within the soviet economic system. The BSSR was widely dubbed as 'the assembly line of the Soviet Union', in the sense that its principal industries produced final goods out of parts and components that came from elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The BSSR also depended on other soviet republics for markets, as 65 to 70 per cent of Belarusian industrial products were exported within the soviet block (Zlotnikov 2002a, 129). The agriculture of the republic was similarly integrated into the soviet system, so that Belarusian cattle, for example, were processed at meat plants in the Baltic states (Zaprudnik 1993, 115). Thus the BSSR economy had never functioned as a closed market (Romanchuk 2002, 155). The strong integration of the BSSR economy within the soviet system meant that the economic crisis in the USSR had the potential to render the BSSR from the most affluent into the poorest republic of the Soviet Union (Zlotnikov 2002b, 268).

Another imperative for reform was derived from the heavy militarisation of the republic, in terms of its industrial structure, but also from the now obsolete system of military deployment and equipment. Alongside their declared specialisation, many Belarusian factories produced military hardware[52]. In 1992, 120 large Belarusian enterprises depended on the orders from the military (Demidkina 1999, 61). The end of the Cold War drastically diminished demand for military production, which, consequently, necessitated the conversion of factories. In addition to the pressure for industrial restructuring, the BSSR government had to deal with the social and physical legacy of soviet military deployment. As the USSR western frontier, military objects took up 10 per cent of the territory of the republic (Mikalaeu 2002, 373). The BSSR had 'more heavy artillery, than France, more military planes, than Germany, and twice as many tanks as the UK', according to the deputy Defence Minister (Gurulev 2002, online). Of the Soviet Union's 44 missile launch bases, 23 were stationed in BSSR (Pazniak January 24, 1991, [Narodnaia Hazeta]). The ratio of military personnel to civilians in BSSR stood at 1: 43, one of the largest concentrations of servicemen in the world (by comparison, the corresponding ratio in Ukraine was 1: 98, and in Russia 1: 634) (Zaprudnik 1993, 207). The demobilisation of military personnel and re-orientation of the industrial production thus posed a major social and economic challenge.

Finally, the impact of the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986 remained a major economic predicament, still pressing in the early 1990s. With 18 per cent of the arable land and 20 per cent of forestry rendered unusable, and one fifth of the population living the radioactively contaminated zones (UN General Assembly September 26, 1991), the direct economic loss of the catastrophe averaged 16 annual BSSR budgets by modest estimates (Marchanka 1995, 435). The BSSR not only, in effect, lost a considerable proportion of its useable land and natural resources; also, a large amount of the population had to be resettled, and required health rehabilitation, which all entailed significant economic costs.

In sum, the collapse of the soviet economic system, the end of the Cold War and the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion changed the political and economic context, so that by the end of 1980s, there was both a need for reform of the Belarusian economic and a popular momentum for it.

[52] For example, Vavilov factory manufactured optics for photo cameras and for satellite spying equipment and MZVT factory produced computer processors for both civic and military needs.

1.2. Reforms without restructuring

By 1990, the Belarusian economy could not continue to operate in the usual way for the reasons we outlined above, and needed reform. The government formally subscribed to the market economy, but in practice avoided dramatic reforms for the fear that the concurrent significant social changes would dissipate the government's popular legitimacy. The maintenance of a state-centred economy, however, did not allow the soviet elite to cater for people's material needs, and since such catering was the government's self-appointed principal criteria for economic success, they lost popular legitimacy at the first testing point, the presidential election of 1994.

In 1990 and 1991, following the lead of the USSR government and on the wave of popular demands for economic improvement, the Belarusian government (with the soviet elite in charge of economic management) had committed to the market economy and adopted a package of reform acts with the ostensible purpose of introducing capitalist economic relations. Among these acts were the programme on the transfer of the economy to the market system (October 1990), the Law on the Conceptual Principles of Privatisation (1990), a code of laws on land (December 1990), the Law on Farming (March 1991), the Law on entrepreneurship (May, 1991), the Law on Employment (May, 1991), the Law on Bankruptcy (May, 1991), and the Law on Investment Activity (October, 1991). All these acts were in principle favourable to the market economy[53]. The government claimed to have heeded the advice of the Western financial institutions, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the International Monetary Fund (Kebich May 23, 1991, [Narodnaia Hazeta]). The Prime Minister, Viacheslau Kebich, spoke in support of foreign investment, entrepreneurship, meritocracy and privatisation, and especially of small and medium enterprises (Kebich May 23, 1991, [Narodnaia Hazeta]).

Yet it quickly became apparent that the market economy was a forced choice for the soviet elite, made in the absence of other viable or socially acceptable models for development, rather than due to a genuine belief in the market's virtues and commitment to it (as opposed to the pro-market governments of Leszek Baltcerovicz in Poland or of Yegor Gaidar in Russia). Rather, the soviet elite did not have an alternative reform agenda, and were concerned by the prospects of social unrest. The fact that popular support was more important to the soviet elite than the reforms per se became obvious in April 1991, when the

[53] the adequacy of these and other laws to the pursuit of market economy are characterised in greater detail several pages below.

government retreated on price liberalisation, an essential feature of market economy reforms, at the first signs of popular disapproval.

Following a decree of the USSR government, the Belarusian government had liberalised prices on April 2, 1991. Prices rose sharply overnight, and on the next day, some 50 000 of Minsk factory workers went on strike. On April 4, 10 and 11, the number of strikers reached 200 000 people. The strike committee controlled 90 per cent of large factories in the capital, and united around 70 local strike groups throughout the country (Narodnaia Hazeta April 11, 1991). The workers advanced both political and economic demands. They called for the re-election of the Parliament on a multi-party basis, for the de-partisation of state enterprises, for the liquidation of nomenclature privileges and cutting the state administrative apparatus by one third (Narodnaia Hazeta April 5, 1991); and essentially, all these demands were aimed against the soviet elite. The strikers' economic agenda included a rise in wages and financial compensations, and elimination of the 5 per cent purchase tax, which had been introduced earlier[54]. As soon as on April 5, the parliamentary board (Presidium of the Supreme Soviet) issued the 'Ruling about serious flaws in the administration of liberalisation of prices and measures for alleviation of their impact', in which it acknowledged the 'legitimate indignation' of the population with the growth of prices and so fixed housing and communal tariffs, abolished the purchase tax for certain categories of goods, and gave tax breaks to enterprises in exchange for maintaining low prices in their canteens (Narodnaia Hazeta April 6, 1991). The soviet elite thus retreated on their own policies as soon as they proved unpopular, and literally within a matter of days. That retreat demonstrated that the soviet elite was primarily concerned with the maintenance of popular legitimacy, rather than the pursuit of reforms as such. The fact that the strikers blamed all their economic troubles on the soviet elite and demanded their removal from power set the soviet elite after the pursuit of popular appeasement; and they tried to silence the people's political demands by satisfying their immediate economic needs.

The government obviously had an assumption that the key to popular legitimacy was basic (short term) economic satisfaction. Prime Minister Viacheslau Kebich (May 23, 1991,

[54] It is important to note that the strike of April 1991 was not against reforms; rather, the strikers protested against their administration by soviet bureaucracy: "the government is a puppet of the Communist party; when they say they will take us to the market, they are deceiving us", asserted the head of the strike committee Narodnaia Hazeta (April 5, 1991). Narodnaia Hazeta. Minsk. The strikers' vision of the market might have been rose-tinted (as across the region at the time), but nevertheless it refutes the proposition that economic reforms per se were not welcome by the Belarusian population.

[Narodnaia Hazeta]) argued that 'the economy is the lynchpin [of all other state policies]'[55]. Consequently, the soviet elite attempted to keep people content by providing them with material benefits and eschewing dramatic change in their lives. That imperative meant that the soviet elite never fully restructured the economy or actually relinquished the regulatory role of the state in favour of market mechanisms, because they believed that they could only satisfy the society if they retained control over the economy, an assumption predicated on the state managing the economy successfully.

The soviet elite sought to keep society content by providing them with money, in the form of subsidies, and also with jobs and goods. The government's economic policies in the first post-soviet years were highly redistributive, with a strong emphasis on social security support. Even before the failed attempt at price liberalisation, the government pledged to increase all types of pensions and subsidies, and to provide a full compensation for the growth of prices on social services (Narodnaia Hazeta March 22, 1991). The government also undertook very extensive obligations with respect to those affected by the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. They were provided with higher salaries, preference in the allocation of housing and goods, free travel, free medical and recreational support and many other social benefits (Narodnaia Hazeta March 13,1991). The government was also generous with the allocation of these benefits – they were eventually given to 100, 000 people, or one in a hundred residents of the country (Narodnaia Hazeta October 10,1992). All these obligations placed a burden on the state budget: in 1991, a staggering 74 per cent of it was constituted by social security and other social payments (Narodnaia Hazeta October 10,1992).

Alongside direct social security provisions, the government also supported those state economic structures and organisations that provided mass employment and produced essential goods. Thus, in 1993, agricultural subsidies almost equalled the state budget income[56]. With the aim of preserving jobs and to ensure production of essential goods, the government endowed state enterprises with cheap credits, lax export/import regulations and other forms of preferential treatment (Savchenko 2000, 134). All of which, of course, was a hostage to economic fortune.

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[55] President Lukashenka later proved him erroneous: ideology, and in particular, national ideology, was the lynchpin, not the economy, as well shall see.

[56] 850 billion rubles; by comparison, the health system was allocated 23 billion, educational system 33 billion, while housing and transport altogether received 49 billion (Zlotnikov 2002b, 27)

The government's effort to keep the economic processes under their control in reality hindered the implementation of the market reform measures undertaken in 1990 and 1991. The process of privatisation started de-facto in 1991 by the government, while the Parliament was still debating the privatisation law. The absence of transparency and concerns about appropriation of state funds became so salient, that in 1992 the Parliament ruled to stall the process of privatisation altogether until a clear legal framework was adopted (the reasons and consequences of stalling of privatisation are discussed further in this section). By that time, the change of property relations had not been significant, with only 200 state enterprises employing 1.4 of the work force privatised (Jeffreies 1996, 252). The Law on Privatisation was adopted in January 1993; although it was fairly liberal in its principal permission for the privatisation of all state property (of which 50 per cent was to be granted to the population, and the remainder sold with the help of a voucher scheme to start in July 1994), the actual realisation of its provisions was placed firmly into the hands of state administrators, with a minimal input allowed from market mechanisms and commercial companies in the process. The evaluation of enterprises rested with governmental officials, not with auditing firms, as elsewhere in many marketising economies. Also, the shares of privatised companies were distributed for a nominal value, rather than for their potential profitability (Daineko 1991, [Belorusskii Rynok]) Such a system, aided by the absence of any unified system of evaluation of state assets (Mikhailova-Stanuta 1991, [Belorusskii Rynok]) made the executive the single and unchallenged authority on the matters of state property privatisation, and rendered the process of privatisation highly non-transparent and unaccountable. Moreover, as we mentioned earlier in the section, the managers of state enterprises preferred to enjoy state benefits, donations, and tax breaks that they could yield from the government, and thus did not hurry to privatise. By 1994, only 3 per cent of state enterprises in industry and agriculture had been privatised (EBRD quoted in Jeffries 1996, 252). As a result, the change of property relations in Belarus was not as dramatic as to challenge the central role of the state, in contrast to those postcommunist countries, such as Poland and Hungary, that pursued the liberal market reform more assiduously and used mixed strategies of privatisation.

The government's effort to support the state sector also constrained the development of the private economy in other powerful ways. The Deputy Prime Minister (Miasnikovich May 25, 1991, [Narodnaia Hazeta]) named the private sector as a means to increase budget income, rather than as the nursery for the market economy in Belarus in the future and so, unlike state enterprises, private companies did not receive tax breaks or governmental subsidies. On the

contrary, the government set a high fiscal pressure on them: it proscribed a general level of profitability for the private enterprises, and taxed any profits above it by 60 per cent; in addition, all companies had to pay the 5 per cent Chernobyl tax on profit (Belorusskii Rynok February 1991, No 8), all of which created incentives for the private companies to hide revenues. Among other difficulties for the operation of private business in the country, the head of the Belarusian union of entrepreneurs, Uladzimir Karahin, named the absence of anti-monopoly legislation and the introduction of a suffocatingly high number of import-export licenses (quoted in Belorusskii Rynok March 1991, No 12). The major media voice for private business in the country, the newspaper Belorusskii Rynok, argued that 'the conditions for private business activity in Belarus are very unfavourable, due to the reactionary stance of the government, which in fact has not taken any meaningful steps towards the introduction of the market economy'(Belorusskii Rynok February 1991, No 8). The erstwhile head of the Commission for the economic reform in the Soviet Union Parliament Nikolai Bobritskii concurred: 'the Belarusian government is taking every measure to support the state sector of the economy' (Belorusskii Rynok March 1991, No 12). Thus, private businesses surfaced in Belarus[57]; but the fact that by 1994, private companies produced only 15 per cent of GDP in Belarus, as compared to the 50 per cent in the more committed Baltic states (Savchenko 2002, 238) served as further proof that the development of a truly private economy was not the priority of the Belarusian government.

Neither did the soviet elite willingly abide by another essential part of the 'standard' market reform package as promoted by the West, the introduction of sovereign financial and monetary systems. Prime Minister Kebich argued in May 1991 that it would be more effective to create 'a new currency for a new economic entity, which would encompass the USSR republics' (Kebich May 23, 1991, [Narodnaia Hazeta]), rather than introduce Belarus' own currency. Thus, he kept the republic in the 'ruble zone', using the Russian currency. Only its shortage, which became acute in April 1992 and continued until the autumn (Conway 1994, 5), made the government introduce 'exchange coupons' as replacements for the Russian ruble and to start preparatory investigation of the possibility of launching a Belarusian currency, the *taler* (Skuratovich 2001, 10). Despite the fact that the IMF gave a preliminary consent for a loan to support the *taler* (Krauchanka, personal communication, March 25, 2004), the soviet elite eventually opted out of it, and in July 1992 agreed with the

[57] By the end of 1993, some 16 thousand small businesses, some 12 thousand Ltd companies, and more than 4 thousand cooperative companies were created, as well as 23 banks, 13 stock exchanges and 60 insurance firms Marchanka, I. (1995). Tsiazhki shliax radykalnukh perautvarennniau. Narysy historyi Belarusi. Dapamozhnik dlia VNU. vol. II. Kastsiuk M. Minsk, Belarus.

Russian government to launch talks on a common currency. As states around Belarus had introduced their own currencies, pushing spare ruble supply into the country, the government eventually acquiesced to giving the exchange coupon, the Belarusian ruble, the status of the Belarusian currency, but emphasised that it saw it as a temporary and enforced measure (Narodnaia Hazeta November 11, 1992). Thus the soviet elite eventually fulfilled the market reform imperative of establishing control over the monetary system, but admitted to doing it against their will and not as a part of a clear strategy or plan.

The formal commitment of the soviet elite to the market economy and their actual economic policies were thus worlds apart. As one expert noted: 'In declaration, we are building a market economy, but in practice, we are trying to prolong the life of the planned economy by administrative measures' (Khodosovskii 1991, [Belorusskii Rynok]) The shadow Prime Minister, Uladzimir Zablotski, similarly argued: 'we are experiencing not an economic reform, but an economic confusion. The government says it is committed to the market, but does not explain how it is going to create it. [To take one example,] it agrees in principle that the prices should be liberalised, but simultaneously argues that they should be regulated by the state' (Belorusskii Rynok March 1991, No 12). Therefore, the soviet elite had endeavoured to preserve state regulation of the economy, while officially pursing its reform. These policies increasingly failed on both economic and political fronts.

Despite (and because of) the attempts to cater for people's short term material needs, the government produced a hybrid economy that looked unlikely to satisfy the population in the present or in the future. By November 1993, many large enterprises switched to 4 and 3-day working week for the lack of orders, and some (e.g. Gomselmash) were preparing to stop production altogether (Skuratovich 2001, 18). While the official unemployment figure was relatively low at 1.4 per cent, in 1993, the ratio of unemployed to the available work places grew from 13: 10 in 1992 to 53: 10 in 1993 (Narodnaia Hazeta February 8, 1994). The policy on maintaining low prices generated high consumption of products for re-sale in the neighbouring states (Zlotnikov 2002a, 133), and, consequently, to chronic shortages of essential goods within the country; in 1992, rationing was introduced. Inflation grew and passed the threshold of hyperinflation (50 per cent a month) by December 1993 (Skuratovich 2001, 19). Indeed, during the period of 1991-1994 prices grew nearly by 18,000 times (Zlotnikov 2002a, 135), the real value of the stocks of deposits of the population decreased from 13.3 billion to 2.2 billion rubles (Conway 1995, 19), industrial production dropped by 39 per cent, investment by 54 per cent, and sales by 67 per cent within 1992 to 1994 (UNDP

1995, online). External debt grew from zero to USD 1.27 billion (Zlotnikov 2002a, 135). During 1991 to 1993, living standards fell by 45-50 per cent, and the proportion of expenditure on food in family budgets rose from 30 per cent in 1992 to 46-49 per cent in 1993 (UNPD 1995, online). The fall in living standards was particularly dramatic against the backdrop of increasing social inequality. In 1994, the income difference between the richest and the poorest 10 per cent of the population was estimated in 1994 as 13-fold (Zlotnikov 2002a, 136), and the only beneficiaries of the economic policies were duly perceived to be those who administered them.

With economic hardship rising, the soviet elite had no ideological policies to explain or justify it. Instead, their chosen weapon of defence was to dislodge their principal opponents, the cultural elite, and their still more determined programme of market reform, that included, among others, the imperative of private ownership of land and minimising the state sector to 49 per cent of the economy (Basic principles of the transition to market economy, a report by the opposition quoted in Narodnaia Hazeta October 10, 1990). To differentiate themselves from their opponents, the soviet elite praised themselves for 'having managed to ensure the supplies of the essential goods, to prevent a chaos in the industry and agriculture, and to maintain the soviet social security achievements' (Kebich June 11, 1994, [Narodnaia Hazeta]) – hinting that chaos could be the results if the cultural elite were allowed to run the economy according to their agenda. Yet, the cultural elite had grounds to criticise the government for being unable to legislate and conduct economic reforms properly. The cultural elite exposed the soviet elite's de-facto avoidance of market reform and pressed for more radical economic restructuring, including the introduction of private property to land. They argued that the soviet elite were 'incapable of ensuring sustained economic development' (Pazniak 1992, 149).

By pledging to provide for the people, the soviet elite had effectively taken the ownership of economic policies and their results into their own hands. Given the nature of their strategy, it increasingly looked as though the administrators of the economic policies were their only stakeholders, and the main beneficiaries of economic change during the first transition years. The Belarusian population, moreover, had evidence of economic misdeeds by those in power. Major national newspapers exposed the misappropriation of state resources by

individuals in key managerial positions[58]. In November, 1992, the acting Chief State Prosecutor reported that during 1991-1992, state companies had transferred production funds for the value of 271 million rubles into private ownership without any payment, while 32.6 per cent of all privatised state property was never paid for (Marchanka 1995, 429). Following the report, the Parliament halted all privatisation programmes until a further improvement of privatisation legislation. The widespread popular misnomer for privatisation, *'prikhvatisation'*, meaning 'grabbing', testified to the popular distrust of the process and its administrators. This not only discredited the soviet elite as a corrupt clique, but also negatively affected the popular understanding of market economy reforms, which the soviet elite in government had, ostensibly, pursued. A national poll registered a more than a half drop of popular support for the market economy between 1991 and 1994, from 62.6 per cent to 30.3 per cent (Zlotnikov 2002a, 137). Thus although the principal elite groups in the Belarusian political arena professed market reform, their mutual accusations about the inadequacy of the opponents' programmes and the decidedly ambiguous character of the last years of supposedly 'market reforms' ultimately worked towards discrediting the notion of market economy as such.

One of the candidates in 1994 presidential election, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, heeded the social message and eschewed any promise of market reforms. The economic part of Lukashenka's election programme was very short, and entirely vague as to method. He put forward three goals: to end the growth of prices and poverty, to fight corruption, and to rejuvenate 'imprudently disrupted economic links'(Lukashenka June 16, 1994, [Narodnaia Hazeta]). Aliaksandr Lukashenka said nothing about economic restructuring, but also emphasised that he would not bring back the command economy; rather, he promised to 'restore effective economic management' (Lukashenka June 16, 1994, [Narodnaia Hazeta]). In an early indication of his later ideological approach to the economy, Lukashenka insisted that the responsibility for economic development would be shared with the society: 'We face a heavy toil to bring the economy back on track, but nobody except ourselves will do it for us'(Lukashenka June 16, 1994, [Narodnaia Hazeta]). Thus, Aliaksandr Lukashenka promised to ensure a smooth running of the already familiar system by a joint social effort, a message which proved to be a winning combination.

[58] For example, a national newspaper with 400 000 circulation, Narodnaia Hazeta, run a series of articles in 1992 revealing the usage of state resources for personal purposes by the top managers in the industry and agriculture.

To summarise Belarusian economic development during the democratisation period: while formally subscribing to the market reform, the soviet elite in government seemed to believe that they could achieve popular legitimacy by merely economic means, and hence sought to provide for the people with a purely short term strategy, just as in the stagnant last years of many 'really existing socialist' regime and by similar, increasingly pragmatic, state-centred economic methods. They forgot, however, that the economic policies under the soviet system were supported by a complex and relatively robust ideological framework – as were the committed, marketisting economic reforms occurring, for example, in Poland. Yet, when communism was discredited, the soviet elite half-heartedly adhered to the economic model that was predominant at the time, the market, but did not attempt to create any ideological basis that would give a reason and a vision for their economic policies in terms of a general national interest in the medium to long term and a justification for experiencing short term pain in this new market for a brighter national future[59]. In practice the government had reneged on market ideas and increasingly shifted back to statist logic, but again, without any clear acknowledgement of their systematic shifts. As a consequence, poor economic performance and the dramatic fall in living standards during 1990 to 1994 not only cost the soviet elite office, but also, by association, helped discredit the market economy and democracy as such, though the first of these had hardly been seriously attempted.

II. Economic policy based on ideology

In 1994, the new Belarusian Constitution changed the political system of the country from parliamentarian to presidential. As we demonstrated in chapter 1, within two years since his election in 1994, President Lukashenka managed to dominate not only the executive, but also subdue the legislative and judicial branches of government. Since 1996, he was clearly in charge of determining Belarusian economic development. For the purposes of consolidating his authority, President Lukashenka sought to keep the population dependent on the state and so politically in check. This was a formidable twofold task. First, the President had to maintain the state-owned economy. Second, with the state ultimately responsible for sustaining the livelihood of the population, the President had to keep people economically content. His predecessors, the soviet elite, had pursued similar goals. Unlike them, however, President Lukashenka approached the task from an ideological perspective, and created an

[59] They also effectively delegated all ideological work to the cultural elite, which led to an inconsistent pursuit of the European national identity in combination with a state-centred economy run under market economy slogans. The national identity construction by the cultural elite is analysed in chapter 5.

increasingly robust yet flexible national foundation for his economic policies. While the economic aims of Aliaksandr Lukashenka had remained essentially the same throughout the years of his rule, he adjusted their ideological underpinnings in at least three stages: in the initial years of his rule, the President invoked socially familiar soviet references so as to stall economic reforms; during 1996 to 1999, he developed a rhetoric of Slavic unity so as to receive substantial economic support from Russia, and since the early 2000s, he constructed a 'national socio-economic model' in order to present state-run economy as the truly national, Belarusian developmental choice.

2.1. The reforms are rewound

Aliaksandr Lukashenka framed his economic policies in the early years in office in terms of the pursuit of a 'socially oriented market economy', which implied an ostensible following of market reform, but underpinned by social concerns. In practice, this meant that the President reversed some of the reform measures taken by his predecessors, forced out the Chairman of the National Bank, who had proved keen to pursue liberal monetary policies, and increased the dependence of private banks and businesses on the state. The President rationalised his policies by ideological considerations of social justice and equality, which were familiar to the Belarusian population from the soviet times.

President Lukashenka advocated the preservation of the state ownership of economic assets and retreated on voucher privatisation that his predecessors had started[60]. In March 1995, he annulled the results of the first voucher auction and put a moratorium on voucher funds activities for a year (Silitski 2002a, 47), eventually bringing it to naught (Manenok 2001, 169). In so doing, the President effectively prevented the emergence of a social stratum of small property owners, and the deepening of social stratification on an economic basis. At the same time, the President gave himself the option to screen potential large investors by issuing a decree in 1995, according to which all enterprises employing 4,000 and above members of staff were to be privatised only with a permission by the President (Manenok 2001, 169; Silitski 2002a, 48). The end of voucher privatisation and the establishment of presidential control over the privatisation process effectively destroyed the dynamics of privatisation: if in 1993, 140 state companies were privatised, and in 1994 –184; in 1995, only 53 companies changed the form of ownership, while the state kept the controlling

[60] Voucher privatisation was widely used in the postcommunist countries, (such as Poland, Czech republic, Russia) as a means to give the population an economic stake in the market reforms and thus safeguard against a reform backlash. Although in Belarus this policy took long to develop, for the reasons outlined in the previous section, by 1994, the government had distributed vouchers among the population.

portfolio of shares in 52 of them (Silitski 2002a, 48). Further, during 1995 to 1997, not a single company of national economic significance [61] was privatised (Silitski 2002a, 48). The President explained his reluctance to see state enterprises change hands by arguing that their effectiveness does not depend on the form of ownership: 'a state-owned company can work as well as a private company if it is managed by a good director' (quoted in Zlotnikov 2002c, 343). Privatisation, therefore, did not acquire any economically or socially significant momentum in Belarus, and the state retained ownership of the majority of the country's assets.

Aliaksandr Lukashenka also found ways to put an end to pro-market policies in the financial sphere, which had progressed substantially during 1995, despite the clear turn in this new administration's policies. The National Bank, responsible for the financial regulation, was independent from the government, and the Bank's Chairman, Stanislau Bahdankevich, pursued liberal economic policies in the regulation of monetary mass and the Belarusian ruble currency exchange (Dashkevich 2001, 145). By mid-1995, the currency reserve of the National bank had grown by 20 times, private savings in rubles had grown ten-fold; inflation had fallen from 2,100 per cent in 1994 to 344 per cent in 1995 (Dashkevich 2001, 146). Silitski (2002a, 45) believes that the policies of the National Bank had by late 1995 created a solid foundation for a further pursuit of market economy reform, but this was not in the interest of the new President. The economic improvements that the National Bank had achieved were based on a strong fiscal discipline (Silitski 2002a, 44), and they had exposed the economic vulnerability and ineffectiveness of state companies. In 1995, state enterprises started experiencing wage arrears and growth of unsold stock (Silitski 2002a, 45); hidden unemployment grew and constituted, according to various estimations, between 15 per cent (Silitski 2002a, 45) to 27 per cent (Zlotnikov 2002c, 355) of the work force. This development clearly jeopardised President Lukashenka's aim of the maintenance of social stability. Using the soviet rhetoric of the primacy of workers and peasants' concerns, therefore, he argued that 'our task is to support workers and peasants, but not throw them behind the gates of state companies...we must fire those managers who plan to cut workforce to stimulate the remaining employees' (quoted in Silitski 2002a, 49). The President accused the Chairman of the National Bank, Stanislau Bahdankevich, of 'wild monetarism' for treating state and private companies on an equal basis (Silitski 2002a, 45).

[61] Enterprises in state property were divided into the categories of national and communal ownership Privatizasiia (2004). President of the Republic of Belarus. Official webpage: www.president.gov.by/rus/map2/econ/ec3./html.

The President did not have the constitutional power to formally dismiss the National Bank Chairman. (This was the prerogative of the Parliament, and in 1995, the President did not control the Parliament, as we demonstrated in chapter 1.) President Lukashenka instead took every measure to sabotage the work and policies of Stanislau Bahdankevich, from issuing decrees and rulings that demanded significant subsidies to state enterprises and thus contradicted the Chairman's policies of maintaining a strong fiscal discipline, to personal disparaging. This eventually forced him to resign in November 1995[62]. Since the autumn of 1995, the National Bank has turned to non-market methods of regulation of currency markets (Dashkevich 2001, 146).

Having subdued the National Bank, the President moved to private commercial banks. Echoing soviet ideological truths again, he said it was immoral that the shares in banks belonged to bankers rather than peasants (Silitski 2002a, 46), and argued that the commercial banks should give preferential loans to the state sector. In May 1996, the presidential decree No 209 ordered a re-evaluation of private banks' assets, in the footsteps of which the state gained control over 6 largest commercial banks in the country, which owned 85 per cent of assets and 85 per cent of loans of the whole private banking sector (Silitski 2002a, 47). While gaining control over commercial banks, the President also established a mechanism for keeping private companies in check. His decree No 208 in May 1996 commanded a re-registration of all private companies, intended, according to one of his advisors, as a mechanism to 'weed out' any private company which could finance the opposition (Feduta quoted in Silitski 2002a, 48).

President Lukashenka effectively tried to put all economic processes in the country under his control from the very earliest days in office. While doing so, he recalled the postulates of social justice and equality, which were familiar to people from the soviet times. In 1996, the Lukashenka government even came up with a clear reminder of the economic policy of the soviet era; a five-year plan of economic development for 1996 to 2000. The two basic principles of the 1996-2000 economic plan: the preservation of the state's role in the economy and the maintenance of economic links with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and, in particular, Russia (Silitski 2002a, 50), effectively replicated the economic realities of the soviet period. Cooperation with Russia, indeed, became the main impetus of economic development in Belarus in the second half of the 1990s.

[62] The President ensured that one of the amendments to the Constitution in 1996 gave him the authority to dismiss the Chairman of the National Bank, as shown in chapter 1.

2.2. Russian support for Belarusian economic growth

After two years of President Lukashenka's rule, the Belarusian economy seemed to perform impressively well. In 1997, the Belarusian GDP grew by 10 per cent, while industrial production increased by 18 per cent, and housing construction by 26.6 percent; unemployment fell by a third, the state budget was deficit-free, taxes were fully collected, the internal debt was insignificant and the external debt hardly existed (Selivanova 1998, 322). These results are even more surprising given that the government had neither pursued any significant economic restructuring and nor ensured large-scale investment and modernisation of enterprises. The head of the World Bank office in Belarus, Christopher Willoby, argued in January 1997 that 'Belarus does not to anything to adapt is companies to the new economic environment' (Skuratovich 2001, 32), and a Russian economist, Irina Selivanova (1998, 311) found that the 'industrial growth took place on the basis of old industrial assets, without a structural reform and modernisation'. Whence the 1997-1998 economic growth?

The growth of the Belarusian economy in during 1996-1998 originated from an external source, and was a consequence of the integration policies pursued by the Belarusian President towards the Russian Federation. During 1995 to 1997, Belarus and Russia concluded a customs union (January 6, 1995), a Treaty on friendship, good neighbourhood and cooperation (February 21, 1995), and two major integration treaties, a Treaty on creation of a Community (April 2, 1996) and a Union Treaty (April 2, 1997)[63]. Also, in February 1996, the governments of the two countries concluded a so-called 'zero option' agreement, in which Russia waved Belarusian energy debts totalling USD 1.3 billion in exchange for the Belarus' agreement to refrain from demanding compensation for the decommissioning of nuclear missiles (Sahm and Westphal 2002, 274) and the maintenance of two Russian military objects on the Belarusian territory (Marples 1999, 111). These agreements, and integration policies taken together, created three sources of substantial income for the Belarusian economy: customs payments collection, cheap energy resources, and propitious export markets.

The customs union between Belarus and Russia and the geographical position of Belarus between Russia and Europe effectively made Belarus a collector of Russia's import taxes. In

[63] The following chapter considers these treaties and Belarusian foreign policy orientation towards Russia in the late 1990s.

the 1995-1997, 70 to 80 per cent of Russia's trade volume with the West went through Belarus (Selivanova 1998, 326), and the Belarusian government collected taxes for the imported goods by virtue of the country's being the first point of entry into the united customs zone. The collected money, however, never reached Russia in its full amount. The deputy head of the Russian state customs committee, Vladimir Novikov argued in 1997 that Russia failed to get 11 per cent of the import budget (Zlotnikov 2002c, 384). The Moscow-based Institute For The Study of Transition Economies estimated that in 1996 the Russian budget failed to get USD 400 million due to the customs union with Belarus (Zlotnikov 2002c, 384). Other experts estimate the figure of Russia's losses at USD 1 billion in 1996 and USD 600 million in 1997 (Selivanova 1998, 325) [64]. This money, effectively, stayed in the hands of the Belarusian government, the experts imply.

Belarus derived its second source of income from the cheap prices for natural energy resources. During 1996 to 1998, Belarus paid about USD 50 per thousand cubic meters (TCM) of imported gas, well below world market price[65]. For oil, Belarus paid USD 107 per ton, still below the market price of USD 116 per ton (Zlotnikov 2002c, 385). The acquisition of Russian oil and gas to Belarus for prices below the market level was estimated to have saved Belarus annually from USD 400 million (Marples 1999, 111) to USD 500 million (Balmaceda 2002, 164).

The form of payment for Russian energy exports: barter, benefited Belarusian production. In 1998, Belarus paid for 74 per cent of the oil and gas in goods and services (Selivanova 1998, 324). Not did only the barter system create export markets for the Belarusian goods, but also allowed them to be sold at a price above the market level. The mechanism of barter payment provided that each side, Belarus and Russia, established prices for their goods in a US dollar equivalent. The Belarusian government's official exchange rate was higher than the market

[64] Apart from not returning full amounts of taxes to Russian, the Belarusian government also undermined the import income by granting unilateral import tax breaks to particular companies. The most notorious example of that was the import of spirits into Belarus for the sum of USD 500 million by a Torgexpo company in, it was proven that the spirits were eventually sold in Russia, not Belarus The Belarusian President had acknowledged to have given about 200 import tax breaks to individual companies of such kind (Selivanova 1998, 325) The Belarusian President had been implicated, but not proven of, deriving substantial personal income from such deals Sheremet, P. and S. Kalinkina (2003). Sluchainui president. St. Petersburg, Limbus Press, Electronic version:Charter97.org/r/actions/sluch/book retrieved November 24, 2003.

[65] Converted into the international pricing standards, Belarus paid $1.37 per MBtu (million British thermal units). The US-based International Energy Agency reports that in 1996 Poland paid the price equivalent of $3.49 per MBtu, and Germany $5.08 per MBtu (www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/ngasprii.html) .The prices for natural gas listed by Bloomberg in December, 1996 varied between $8.45 and $9.00 per MBtu (http://web.archive.org/web/20001206193300/www.bloomberg.com/energy/index.html).

rate, which meant that the Belarusian goods were effectively overpriced against the market level. Silitski (2002a, 64) estimates that the Russian buyers effectively overpaid by 30 per cent for the Belarusian goods they received through barter, and for some products, such as sugar and chemical fibre, by 60 per cent. The Belarusian President actively promoted Belarusian products in Russia. Between 1997 and 1999, he personally visited 8 Russian federal regions; and during 1995 to 2000, the subjects of the Russian Federation and territorial units of Belarus concluded more than 100 agreements and contracts (Ekadumava 2002, 318). The number of Russian regions engaged in direct economic links with Belarusian companies grew from 37 in 1996 to 79 in 2001 (Kozik 2001, 8). The Russian share in the Belarusian export increased from 46.1 per cent in 1994 to 64.7 per cent in 1997; while imports from Russia fell from 61.1 per cent to in 1994 to 53.6 per cent in 1997 (Silitski 2002a, 53). Zlotnikov (2002c, 385) calculated that Russia's choice to buy from Belarus cost the country about USD 200 to 300 million annually. Furthermore, in 1996, Russia provided loans of USD 500 million to Belarusian enterprises for imports from the Russian Federation, and granted a loan of USD 400 million for purchase of Russian machinery in 1998 (Rontoyanni 2000, 14).

The combined effect of the customs union, cheap energy imports and expensive goods exports meant that Russia became an economic donor to Belarus. Selivanova (1998, 325) estimated that between April 1995 and April 1997, Russia contributed USD 4 billion to the Belarusian economy. The director of Institute For Economic Analysis and a well-known Russian economist, Andrei Illarionov, argued that Russia subsidised Belarus by USD 1.5 to 2 billion annually until 1998 (Selivanova 1998, 324). Zlotnikov's (2002c, 285) estimations are slightly lower, at USD 1 to 1.3 billion annually during 1995 to 1997; however, adding the benefits of the 'zero option' agreement, which wrote off Belarusian energy debts, Zlotnikov (2002c, 386) argues that the Russian subsidy to Belarus since the spring 1996 to autumn 1997 equalled USD 2.5 to 2.7 billion (Zlotnikov 2002, 386). This was comparable to the country' annual budget of USD 2.5 to 3 billion (Zlotnikov 2002, 386).

Integration with Russia indeed appears to be the main explanation for the surprisingly high performance of the Belarusian economy during this period, with a 10 per cent growth rate in the 1997 and 8.4 per cent per cent in 1998 (Silitski 2002a, 34). These policies allowed for the maintenance of a state-dominated economy without major restructuring. In 1997, the state-owned companies produced 61 per cent of GDP, as opposed to 10 per cent in Russia (Selivanova 1998, 328). The government followed re-distributive policies, taking income

from highly profitable companies to those industries that could not exist without state support (Silitski 2002a, 62). Vitally, this strategy guarded against social stratification; Zlotnikov (2002c. 409) estimates that the income difference between the 10 per cent of the richest and 10 per cent of the poorest social groups in Belarus in 1998 was half of that in Russia. These are grounds to agree to with Furman and Drakokhrust (1998, 365) that 'paradoxically, the economic integration with Russia has allowed Belarus to preserve a very different economic system from Russia', and with Illarionov that 'the Belarusian economic miracle is paid for from the pockets of Russian taxpayers' (Selivanova 1998, 324). As Silitski (2002a, 65) put it, 'Lukashenka has to thank the Russian liberal reformers, who could gain loans from the IMF, the Russian Central bank, which refused to devaluate the ruble, the Russian Duma, who approved high state budget deficits, and international financial institutions, who gave Russia free loans and did not control the pace of reform, for the 'Belarusian miracle'.

Remarkably, given the substantial economic benefits President Lukashenka derived for his regime from integration with Russia, he never advocated it on purely economic grounds. Instead, he approached the integration from an ideological perspective and presented it as a way of reunifying these brotherly Slavic nations, as we demonstrate in more detail in chapters 4 and 5. Thus, the ostensible pursuit of national interest through integration with Russia effectively enabled President Lukashenka to derive economic means to sustain his regime in the first 5 years of his rule. The Russian economic support, however, proved unsustainable in 1998 and it has drastically diminished since 2000, which has caused a new turn in President Lukashenka's ideology - but not in the essential principles of his economic policy.

2.3. National foundation for the economy

The 'Belarusian economic miracle' of the 1997 and 1998 period dissipated overnight with the Russian ruble crisis of August 18th, 1998. In the two weeks following the default of the Russian ruble, the rate of the Belarusian ruble against the US dollar dropped from 44, 000 to 57, 800 (Silitski 2002a, 66). Real incomes started to fall rapidly; in September 1998 the average salary dropped from USD 70 to USD 45, and in December it was lower than USD 30 (Silitski 2002a, 64). Exports to Russia fell, and in 1999, 85 per cent of the state companies' production was not sold (Silitski 2002a, 67). GDP growth diminished from 8.4 per cent in 1998 to 3.4 per cent in 1999 (Silitski 2002a, 34).The Russian government eventually stabilised the Russian ruble, and the Belarusian President obtained yet another

contract for cheap gas deliveries in 1999, with the price dropped from USD 50 to USD 30 per thousand cubic meters (Zlotnikov 2002c, 489). Yet, since then, the Belarusian President has never seen the same level of economic support from Russia as he did between 1996 and 1998. Russian President Putin insisted on the unification of tax codes, which put an end to uncontrolled import to Russia (Silitski 2002a, 74). The Russian government also increasingly replaced barter with cash in mutual trade, so that the share of barter in the Belarusian export and import (18 and 13 per cent respectively) was half of the 1997 level by 2001 (Silitski 2002a, 74). Finally, the competitiveness of Russian goods has grown and driven down the prices for Belarusian goods on the Russian market, so that in 2001, despite the fact that Belarusian exports grew by 9.5 per cent, the export income actually fell by 7.5 per cent (Silitski 2002a, 74). In other words, Russia stopped sustaining the Belarusian economy, and by the early 2000s President Lukashenka had to find other ways to keep the economy afloat. This means has been the creation of a national framework for the economy.

The economic policies of President Lukashenka since 2001 have been given elaborate and profound explanations in terms of collective, national interest and security that defined economic development in an egalitarian and state-centred way. As the Belarusian President explained: 'We decided to rule out the IMF [reform] recipe, their ultimate market theory, mainly because our society was not ready to embrace harsh market reforms. Instead, we chose the way of development best suited to our citizens' (Lukashenka July 1, 2003, online). President Lukashenka's ideological alternative to the Western model has been the Belarusian national model of socio-economic development.

The Belarusian socio-economic model, advanced in 2001 as part of the programme of socio-economic development for 2001-2005 (SEP), is premised on collective, national ownership of the economy and also on clear national traditions. It defines Belarusian national characteristics and thus constructs the idea of the nation in such a way that President Lukashenka's economic polices are made to look not just congruent with but a consequence of the Belarusian national way:

'[T]he Belarusian model of socio-economic development reflects the history of the country and people's traditions, and the national character, distinguished by an acute sense of human solidarity, collectivism and mutual help, and it excludes such elements of the market economy as egocentrism, unemployment and the substantial material stratification of the population' (SEP 2001, part 3).

The 'unique Belarusian model of development' (SEP, part 3), as described by the President, comprises five following elements:

- a strong and effective state, which ensures the security of citizens,
- development of the private sector of the economy alongside the state sector, on the condition that private business does not negatively affect state interests,
- privatisation, with the purpose of finding a committed investor,
- integration processes with Russia and CIS, and
- a strong social policy of the state (NTV September 16, 2003).

All five main features of the Belarusian economic model are rationalised in national terms.

The first principle, a 'strong state', has been sustained by the concept of national ownership of the Belarusian economy. The professed national value of collectivism means that the country's economic assets should belong to the nation as a whole, rather than individuals or their groups, as typical of market economies. Hence, the state has remained the principal economic actor in Belarus, owing more than 70 per cent of the production funds in the country in 2001 (SEP 2001, part 4.6.1). The state has also stayed the principal employer, engaging from 63.6 per cent (Ioffe 2004, 91) to 80 per cent (Karbalevich, personal communication, December 5 2002) of the working population according to various estimations.

The reference to national traditions has also ensured the implementation of the second principle of the national economic model which postulates that the development of a private sector should not challenge the state. The model describes 'egocentrism' and the pursuit of individual interest as alien to the Belarusian people; the postulated national virtue of collectivism prescribes that individuals should attain a 'decent way of life' through 'conscientious and hard work for the society' (SEP 2001, part 3). Hence, the main motive for an entrepreneur, according to the model, has to be not the desire for profit but the desire to benefit the nation (SEP 2001, part 3). The President endorsed this message by referring to businessmen as 'lousy fleas on the body of the nation' (Zalesskii 2001, 329) and has further stifled the development of private business in the country. The American Heritage Foundation rated Belarus 141 out of 161 countries in its index of economic freedom in 2000 (Zlotnikov 2002a, 146), and the rating dropped to 145 in 2004 (Heritage Foundation 2004, online). The World Bank 2003 report 'Doing Business' established that it took 118 days to register a company in Belarus, which involved 19 procedures, while the bankruptcy process took on average 2.2 years (Belorusskaia Gazeta November 03, 2003), all indicating a

complicated environment for business. 'The Belarusian small and medium enterprises do not enjoy tax breaks, clearance of fines, or state credit guarantees... they pay ten times more the rent of premises than the state enterprises, while having to observe state induced limits on cost efficiency, sales margins, and prices', testifies a Belarusian liberal economist (Romanchuk 2002, 164). Taxes in Belarus in the early 2000s were said to be probably the highest in the region and close to confiscatory (Aslund 2002, 176). Romanchuk (2002, 158) counted 39 national, regional and local taxes in 2002. The Tax Code adopted in 2003 established the primacy of the state versus the taxpayer in case of contention (Balukhin December 26, 2003, [Charter97]). Licenses have formed another hurdle to business development. In 2002, about 180 categories of commercial activity were subject to licensing (Romanchuk 2002, 159), which was four times higher than in the notoriously bureaucratic Ukraine (Zlotnikov 2002a, 146).

Apart from taxes and licenses, private companies must observe numerous other regulations. In 2001, there were over 3000 state regulations for private businesses, six times as many as there were in 1991 (Romanchuk 2002, 167). The head of the Belarusian customs office admitted in December 2001 that to abide by the law, any company involved in international trade needed to be familiar with some 10,000 documents (Romanchuk 2002, 165). The large number of regulations has made book-keeping extremely complicated and put private companies at constant risk of breaching the law. In 2000, only 0.5 per cent of enterprises managed not to commit book-keeping violations (Zlotnikov 2002a, 145). In the first half of 2004, the tax inspection fined 72.5 per cent of companies and 55.9 per cent of individual businesses it reviewed (Charter97 August 8, 2004). Over the same period, the Department for Financial Investigations of the State Controlling Committee brought administrative and criminal charges against 98.7 per cent of the companies it checked (Satsuk July 23, 2004, [Charter97]). The omnipotence of the state as the regulator of economic activity as well as being a major economic actor itself thus virtually eliminated any chances for private business to challenge the state economic sector in any significant way. The Belarusian President thus achieved his goal of keeping the economy under his control, without the official refutation of the possibility of private business in principle. He legitimated this policy by constructing the nation in a way that deplored the pursuit of individual interest and thus necessitated a harsh legal and economic environment for private business.

The defence of national interest also stipulated a very particular interpretation of the third principle of the Belarusian socio-economic model, privatisation; in reality it has meant the

avoidance of any significant restructuring and the thwarting of foreign investors, who would obviously pursue their own, rather than the governmental, interest. The Belarusian socio-economic model envisages privatisation primarily as a means for relieving the state of some of its burdensome assets. "We should only privatise those factories which we cannot manage successfully, and we do manage most of our factories rather well"- explained the President (Lukashenka July 1, 2003, online). Consequently, the 'Concept of state property management' focuses on privatisation of predominantly small companies, with up to 200 employees (Privatizasiia 2004, online). President Lukashenka has repeatedly portrayed privatisation as a major national risk, 'a principal channel for embezzling the nation's resources' (Lukashenka July 20, 2004, online). Ostensibly to preserve the nation's assets, in 2003 the government published a list of companies which were not allowed to be privatised on the basis that they were 'structural' for the Belarusian economy; needless to say, the list comprised all the major industrial enterprises in the country.

The purported need to trust the national resources only to a 'committed investor' effectively allowed interpreting privatisation and economic restructuring in Belarus in such a way that the President actually sustained the economy under state control. Belarus has become one of the least welcoming countries for foreign investment; in 2001, it came 135th out of 156 states in terms of an attractive investment climate (Romanchuk 2002, 168). Those companies who had managed to invest in the country faced cavalier treatment from the government. In one example, the government revoked the land lease it had signed with the McDonalds corporation and forced it to conserve its purpose-built premises at the Minsk railway station square[66]. Such an unwelcome treatment of foreign investors was explained in terms of national defence. The President often called foreign investors 'vultures', whose principle goal, he explained, was to 'debilitate, partition and subjugate Belarus' (Lukashenka March 14, 2003, online).

The 'integration processes' between Belarus and the CIS and Russia, the fourth element of the national model, is important for the Belarusian regime since these countries form the primary export markets for Belarusian produce. Hence, despite the slowing down of Belarus-Russia integration since the early 2000s for the reasons described earlier in this chapter and in the following chapter, President Lukashenka has not completely withdrawn his integration rhetoric. He maintained the justification of integration policies within the national

[66] Examples of the Lukashenka government avoiding or revoking commitments to Russian investors are given in the following chapter.

ideological realm: in the address to the Parliament in 2004, President Lukashenka reiterated that 'We, Belarusians, treat Russians, Russia, as close relatives. They are our closest brothers. And we will do our best to live in a brotherly concord. Fate itself has led us to be together' (Lukashenka April 14, 2004, part 1).

Finally, the strong social policy of the state, the fifth principle of the Belarusian socio-economic model, is essential for social order in the conditions when all non-state means of social support and sustenance are virtually unavailable. Its ideological imperative is derived from collectivist national values. In 2002, the level of social expenditure, 14.2 per cent, was high even by Western standards, in the opinion of Kozhuro (March 8, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]). Silitski (December 16, 2003, [RFE/RL]) agrees: 'Belarus has reached a level of redistribution comparable to West European welfare democracies'. However, he warns, it does not possess a strong economy that can sustain 'gigantic social spending' (Silitski December 16, 2003, [RFE/RL]). Indeed, one of the obvious sources of sustainability for the Belarusian socio-economic model is clearly its socially embedded ideological basis.

In 2004, the Belarusian government trumped another 'Belarusian economic miracle'. In the first quarter of 2004, the Prime Minister, Siarhei Sidorski, reported GDP growth of 9.3 per cent (MFA April 16, 2004, online) with the increase of profitability of enterprises by 15.8 per cent, and real wages by 10 per cent (Zhbanov March 29, 2004, [Belorusskaia Gazeta]); and of agricultural production by 4.5 per cent (Zaiko April 12, 2004, [Belorusskaia Gazeta]). Investment grew by 31.5 per cent in the first two months of 2004, and foreign trade increased in 2003 by 125.5 per cent to 2002 (Lukashenka April 14, 2004, part 2). The President, as always, has related the alleged economic success to national characteristics: 'some nations are associated with precision, accuracy and good organisation, and they have achieved great success because of these national characteristics. These features are also typical to the Belarusian character, we merely need to harness them well' (Lukashenka April 14, 2004, part 4). President Lukashenka has thus used national terms not only to ground his Belarusian socio-economic model, but also to celebrate its performance.

The quality and character of Belarusian economic growth in the early 2000s is not clear. Western and independent domestic experts are suspicious of the government's claims to economic success, arguing that the Belarusian economy is 'highly vulnerable'(Barbone quoted in Biriukova August 15, 2004, [BelaPAN]) 'unsustainable' (Aslund 2002, 173) or 'running on empty' (Silitski August 19, 2004, [RFE/RL]). The main suggested weakness of

the Belarusian economy is the lack of investment and thus the absence of potential for development (BelaPAN June 07, 2004). Indeed, the government itself admitted in the first quarter of 2003 that nearly 50 per cent of Belarusian companies were making a loss (Zaiko May 19, 2003, [Nashe Mnenie])[67].Yet, the World Bank acknowledged GDP growth in Belarus, and estimated it at 6.8 per cent in 2004 (World Bank 2004, online), thus at a lower rate than the government claimed, but still high by regional standards. There is, therefore, no definite view possible on the actual performance and sustainability of the Belarusian economy in the first half of the 2000s.

Of more immediate political interest, however, is that the apparently high economic performance has clearly failed to improve the economic well being of the majority of Belarusian society. Although the nominal wage grew from August 2001 to January 2002 by 8.2 per cent, prices grew by 23.8 per cent over the same period, thus denoting a fall in real income after 2001 of 12.7 per cent (Zlotnikov 2002c, 485). Real income in 2003 grew in Belarus only by 3.1 per cent, and wages by 2.9 per cent, while the communal services tariffs increased by 51.9 per cent, public transport costs by 66.7 per cent (Kozhuro March 8, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]). In 2003, the United Nations Development Programme estimated that more than a third of the Belarusian population lived below the poverty line (UNDP Human Development Report quoted in Biriukova March 1, 2004, [Belorusskii Rynok]). The reason that the fall in living standards has not caused any socially significant protests against President Lukashenka's economic policies cannot be explained purely by the coercive atmosphere of the authoritarian regime, although it certainly helps keep popular discontent at bay. We would suggest that popular discontent itself has been at least forestalled by the national basis in which economic development has been framed.

The national foundation of the Belarusian economy in the early 2000s has comprehensively provided for ideological justification of a state-run economy, and even the actual fall in the living standards in the early 2000s. In the light of the purported aim to cater for the collective, national interests, macro-economic indicators, and also egalitarianism among the population became the principal criteria for measuring the economy's success. The government made sure that the macro indicators were impressively high even by

[67] There is evidence that high economic performance indicators have been achieved in Belarus by the means that are unsustainable and economically harmful in the long term. Thus, to fulfil Aliaksandr Lukashenka's pledge to achieve the average monthly salary of USD 100 on the eve of the 2001 presidential election, state company managers were known to sell or mortgage company's assets. (Silitski, V. (2002a). Ekanaichnaia Palityka Lukashenki. Belaruska-Rasiiskaia intehratsyia. V. Bulhakau. Minsk, Entsyklapedyks).

international standards. The concept of national ownership of the economy and the presentation of egalitarianism as a reflection of the national character ensured that the significant social homogenisation among the population bequeathed by communism was not eroded, thus removing a vital catalyst of social discontent. The Belarus' Gini coefficient, reflecting the degree of social inequality, was one of the lowest in the world at 0.272 in 2002 (Kozhuro March 22, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]), which in a sense compensated for the lowering of living standards. The stalled privatisation and the government's hostility to private business has prevented the rise of the 'nouveau riche' in a socially significant way; while the President's vigilance against potential rivals among managers of state enterprises (often resulting in their imprisonment[68]), has ensured that any expressions of wealth are kept well under cover. There are no clear individual beneficiaries of the President's economic policies, and consequently, no culprits to focus popular grievances, with the exception of those private entrepreneurs and foreign companies named by the President. The notion of national ownership also gives people an illusive share in the state's assets: 'the Belarusian citizens do not feel separated from the products of their labour, because these products cannot be seen as belonging to some external force. Everybody thinks of Belarusian tractors and fridges as 'our' tractors and fridges' (Kostugova March 29, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]). Therefore, it is plausible to argue that the ideology of national ownership and the national identity constructed in collectivist terms has yielded a solid ideological foundation to the consolidation of the state-run economy for a sizeable proportion of the Belarusian population, an essential element of President Lukashenka's authoritarian regime during the second term of his presidency.

The economic imperatives of Aliaksandr Lukashenka remained unchanged throughout his presidency: to maintain state control over the country's assets and the economic dependence of the population on the state. The Belarusian President has managed to accomplish these aims by giving his economic policies a flexible ideological foundation that refutes the goals and ideals of market reform and rallies the society behind what is supposedly their 'own' developmental path, which praises collective, rather than individual, well-being and prefers socio-economic equality to individual economic self-advancement. In the early years of his presidency, Aliaksandr Lukashenka reversed market economy reform measures by the reiteration of socially familiar ideological references to social equality and the primacy of workers' interests. During 1996 to 1998, he emphasised the rhetoric of Slavic unity to derive

[68] According to the head of the Belarusian union of businessmen Uladzimir Karagin, more that 10 per cent of people jailed in the country are managers and businessmen. Karagin, U. (03.06.2002). Bolee 10% belorusskikh zakliuchennukh - predprinimateli i rukovoditeli predpriiatii. http://charter97.org/bel/news/2002/06/03/15.

subsidies from the Russian Federation, comparable to the size of the state budget, which not only sustained the economy, but also allowed for claims of significant economic growth. When the policies of integration became a burden rather than an asset, President Lukashenka actively constructed a national identity in such a way as to make his economic policies appear as nationally expedient. While the economic sustainability and long-term economic effects of the 'Belarusian socio-economic model' advanced by President Lukashenka are yet to be seen, the fact that the economic aspect of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian regime in Belarus has been grounded in a national ideological foundation, and has benefited from it, is beyond doubt.

Conclusions

At the end of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, people in Belarus demanded economic change just as elsewhere across the Soviet bloc. Profound market reforms, however, did not take place, and the economy stayed in the hands of the state, which led to the deterioration, rather than the improvement, of living standards. In 2003, a net salary was estimated at 130 per cent of the level of 1990, while its purchasing power was only 50 per cent of the 1990 level (Zlotnikov 2004, [Belorusskii Rynok]). In 1990, the ratio of the minimal wage to the minimal consumer budget was 56 per cent, while in 2002 it was only 12 per cent (Kozhuro March 22, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]). The International Red Cross estimated that 20 times more people lived below the poverty line in 2003 than in the soviet period (Biriukova March 1, 2004, [Belorusskii Rynok]). Yet, the lack of growth in living standards had different implications for the country's leaders: while the soviet elite during 1990 to 1994 fell prey to popular dissatisfaction with economic performance, the Belarusian President during 1994 to 2004 has never faced any large-scale expressions of popular discontent with the economic situation, nor demands for more market reforms. The authoritarian nature of the political regime that had consolidated in Belarus by the 2000s serves at best as a partial explanation for the apparent popular complacency in such absence. A more profound reason for the sustainability of the Belarusian economy is the fact that the Belarusian authoritarian leader has found the means of giving people a sense of economic success based on criteria other than their own material well being. This means has been nationalism.

While we do not dislodge the argument that associates economic reforms with political regime outcomes in the postcommunist settings, it should be considered that the sustainability and political implications of economic policies of particular leaders, depended on whether these policies were embedded within an adequate national ideological framework. In other words, we suggest that political leaders were able to achieve their

economic and political objectives not by the means of ensuring a satisfying economic performance per se, but by presenting their policies as being of positive national interest. In particular, the collectivist ideological approach of placing the nation above the individual and utilising socially resonant elements of the soviet past has proved crucial for the preservation and sustenance of a the state-centred economy in post-communist authoritarian regimes.

The importance of an ideological foundation for economic policies is particularly apparent in the Belarusian case. The principal difference between the economic approaches of the Belarusian leadership of 1990 to 1994 and of 1994 to 2004 was, paradoxically, their ideological component. Both the soviet elite and President Lukashenka actively sought to preserve the central role of the state in the economy, but approached this task from different perspectives. The soviet elite believed that good economic performance, and in particular a significant amount of state support to the population, was the key to political success. As a result, the soviet elite helplessly and unsuccessfully tried to please the population and became hostage to popular demands, which they could never satisfy in a sustainable way. The pursuit of popular legitimacy by purely economic means proved to be a mistake: by taking on the responsibility for the provision for the population, the soviet elite simultaneously assumed the ownership of the economy, became perceived as the only owner of the state assets and inevitably got the blame for the poor economic performance, and eventually lost office. President Lukashenka, on the contrary, adopted a more ideologically crafted stance: he shared the ownership of the economy with the nation and framed all his economic policies as stemming from the national interests and national identity. In so doing he was able to achieve the economic imperatives of his regime: the maintenance of state control over the economy and material conditions of the population, in a way that not only never made him a direct point of blame for economic difficulties, but also made individual economic concerns and interests secondary for more far-reaching national ideals.

It is certainly problematic to propose that economic performance in Belarus under the management of the soviet elite and President Lukashenka depended solely on their national message, and we do not put forward such an argument. Nevertheless, we can see the parallels between the consistency of the elites' economic and ideological stances and the dynamics of Belarusian post-soviet transformation. The soviet elite did not actually follow their purported choice to pursue market reforms, which would be consistent with a pro-European national ideology of a classical liberal kind, nor did they offer any clear ideological ground for their actual steering away from market reforms. This discredited not only the soviet elite as

political leaders, but also the market economy and the democratisation project as such. The outcomes of President Lukashenka's economic policy were always fully consistent with the national identity he constructed, and thus contributed to the consolidation of an authoritarian regime in Belarus.

An imperative of the Belarusian national economic model advanced by President Lukashenka was to disregard Western advice and aid and find alternative sources of sustenance for the state-centred economy. In the following chapter, we analyse how Belarusian political actors approached the international dimension of transition.

4. National ideology as a framework for international engagement

The literature on postcommunist transitions often associates the success of postcommunist democratizations with a strong support from democratic Western states and organizations, the European Union in particular. It has been argued that the EU was able to shape domestic policies in the transition states, by virtue of being an unequivocal 'pole of attraction' for them (Pravda 2001, 2), and because its accession criteria constituted the 'motherhood and apple pie' of necessary reforms for postcommunist states (Grabbe 2002, 249). On closer inspection, however, it is clear that the actual scope of the EU influence over postcommunist development has depended on the degree of willingness of the transition societies themselves to be a part of the European developmental framework. It is important to note that the successful democratisers in Central Eastern Europe had embarked upon democratic institution-building and market economy reforms without any official indication from the EU about the possibility of their joining the Union. Moreover, the vague indication that eventually came, in the form of the Copenhagen Declaration of 1993, was as an acknowledgement of the CEE states' reform effort, rather than an incentive to it. Thus even in those CEE states that became new EU members in 2004, it seems fair to say that the international dimension of transition was essentially internally driven. As for post-soviet states, most of them (with the exception of the former soviet Baltic republics) never even aspired to EU membership, and the EU has exerted no significant impact over their transition paths. Hence, although postcommunist democratisations undoubtedly benefited from the association with the EU and other Western democratic institutions, this association was primarily the result of the national ideological choice within the transition countries themselves: the postcommunist societies that saw themselves as a part of the Western political and cultural space, anchored with the EU, and they duly submitted to the transition reform guidance of the Western institutions; the societies that chose to seek their own developmental path refused association with the West, however, and rebuffed foreign guidance to their transition process.

The claim proposed in this chapter is that nationalism determined the scope and limits of the international influence over postcommunist development. As we argued in the opening chapter, political elites in postcommunist states achieved legitimacy primarily by the means of inclusive national mobilisation. This mobilization was either liberal, aspiring to the European developmental model, or egalitarian, combining elements of the soviet system with new authoritarian features. The aspiration to be part of European socio-political space, and

the tenacity to stick to the democratic and market economy reform path was part and parcel of Europe–oriented nationalism. The rejection of the European developmental model and the refusal to prioritise engagement with the democratic West formed a core element of egalitarian nationalism. We argue that the consistency between the foreign policy and the professed national ideology was essential for the ability of postcommunist political elites to lead their countries along their preferred developmental path. The inconsistency between the type of national mobilization and foreign policy, and vice versa, proved detrimental to the legitimacy of political elites; and when such inconsistency derived from the power deadlock and a pact between competing elite groups, it was also harmful to the cause of democracy, under which such a pact became possible.

Belarus is a particularly vivid case to illustrate our claim that the form of the international dimension of postcommunist transitions was intrinsically linked to the national mobilisation in the transition states, and that the consistency or otherwise between foreign policy and national ideology in them proved crucial for the developmental trajectories in the region. During the democratization period in the early 1990s, the foreign policy of the Belarusian government did not have any clear European orientation, thus contradicting the national identity pursued in the country at the time; such inconsistency between the foreign and national identity policies stemmed from an elite pact that allocated responsibilities for the formulation of these policies to competing elite groups. The absence of a clear EU orientation deprived the pro-European national identity and democratization in Belarus of both a powerful mobilizing aspiration and an external safeguard to democratic development. The foreign policy of the ensuring authoritarian regime in Belarus, in contrast, was laid squarely within a national identity framework, although that of an egalitarian type. It first led the country away from the Western democratic standards on the basis of a pan-Slavist orientation, and later emphasized national independence and uniqueness to rebuff pressure from any external actors, Europe, the United States and Russia included.

The chapter analyses the international dimension of the Belarusian post-soviet transition in three parts. The first shows why the democratic West, and the EU in particular, did not become a dominant external authority for Belarus during the democratization period. The second exposes how the egalitarian national ideology had allowed for Belarusian integration with Russia to the extent that was desired by the Belarusian leadership, and at the same time placed firm limits Russian influence over Belarus. The third part demonstrates how the

country's authoritarian leader used national ideology to withstand the attempts of the democratic West to induce him to act in democratic ways or undermine his regime.

I. The Belarusian state seeks the world (and no partner in particular)

The foreign policy of the Belarusian state during the early post-soviet years aimed to enhance the international prestige of the country in general and sought international assistance in dealing with the soviet legacies of heavy militarization and the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion. Belarus thus pursued relations with the countries both to the East and West of its borders, and was also active in the United Nations Organization. This strategy precluded orientation towards any single external partner, and ruled out the pursuit of EU membership as the primary foreign policy goal. The government's unwillingness to prioritise relations with the West, and the EU in particular, undermined the cultural elite's attempts at national mobilisation, based in the European developmental model, and contributed to the stalling of democratisation in the mid-1990s.

To remind the reader, the Belarusian state was run during 1990 to 1994 through an arrangement between two elite groups: the country's administrators since the soviet times, the soviet elite, and the cultural intelligentsia, the cultural elite. The soviet elite formed the government and decided on all matters, except national identity and nation-building, which was the prerogative of the cultural elite. With respect to foreign policy, neither of these elite groups professed the imperative of a consistent EU orientation. While the cultural elite pursued pro-European nationalism (described in greater detail in chapter 5), it argued for the creation of a 'Baltic-Black sea integration zone' to include Belarus, Ukraine, and the former soviet Baltic republics as a counterweight to Russia (Snapkouski 1999, n.p.), whereas the soviet elite eschewed making any one single international alliance altogether, believing that the widest possible international outreach was the best way to meet the needs of the new Belarusian state.

The Belarusian government of 1990-1994, with the soviet elite determining foreign policy, effectively adopted a pragmatic approach towards the conduct of the country's international relations. The key issues they defined for the newly independent Belarus with respect to the international arena were the alleviation of the consequences of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant explosion, the disposal of the soviet military legacy, and the establishment of the country as a subject of international cooperation. Given such aims, the foreign policy of

independent Belarus was built on the principles of *ravnoydalennost* ('equal distance') and *mnogovectornost* ('multi-dimensionality') (Snapkouski 1999, n.p.). These concepts implied that the Belarusian state was eager to develop partnerships with a multitude of states, of which none would be prioritised and all would be treated with equal consideration, irrespective of their size and geographical proximity to Belarus (Snapkouski 1999, n.p.). These goals and principles were reflected in the strategic priorities of the Belarusian foreign policy that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Piotr Krauchanka, named at the 46th session of the UN General Assembly in September 1991. They comprised:

- genuine independence and sovereignty;
- cooperation with the republics of the Soviet Union to create a single economic area;
- participation in the European process;
- creation of favourable conditions for market economy;
- neutrality and a nuclear-free status;
- international mobilization in solving the Chernobyl problem;
- ecological security and cultural exchange (UN General Assembly September 26, 1991, 65).

The priorities and principles advanced by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry allowed it to by and large achieve its stated pragmatic goals. However, the cooperation with the West that the foreign policy of the soviet elite engendered was primarily material. This proved insufficient to place the Belarusian transition decisively into the European developmental framework and prevented the acquisition of an external pillar for the course of democratisation in Belarus.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry managed to stage a visible debut for Belarus in the international arena. The list of official visitors to Belarus during 1990-1994 included the presidents of Finland, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, USA; the secretary-generals of the UN, NATO, and the Council of Europe; the director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), as well as considerable numbers of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and chief policy-makers of other states (Fedorov 2001, 311); all of what contributed to the country's international recognition. Such recognition was also enhanced by the acceptance of Belarus into some major international organisations. The CSCE Council of Foreign Ministers invited Belarus to join the organization on January 30, 1992. On March 10, 1992, Belarus became a member of the NATO North-Atlantic Co-operation Council. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) endowed Belarus with the status of associated member on September 16, 1992. Belarus also received assistance from international financial institutions. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a systemic transformation facility loan for the sum of about USD 103 million on July 28, 1993 (IMF 1995, online). The

country became a member of the EBRD on February 19, 1993, and in December of 1993, the EBRD approved two loans for a total value of ECU 45.85 million (EBRD December 17, 1993, online). Although the foreign policy goal to establish the country's international presence was thus achieved, it was not sufficient, or even intended, to place Belarus within the European developmental framework.

In distinction to the successful democratisers of Central Eastern Europe, who sought EU membership as essential for their national development, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry saw Belarusian membership in the EU as a possibility, but not a foreign policy priority or a goal. 'We expected the enlargement of the EU, and supposed that it would start after the introduction of the EURO in 1999, and would occur in several phases, with the Czech republic, Poland, Hungary in the first, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia in the second, the Baltic states to follow, so that Belarus could potentially join the organization around 2005 or 2007, perhaps in conjunction with Russia', testified the Belarusian Foreign Minister (Krauchanka, personal communication, March 26, 2004). Belarus-EU relations during 1991-1994 thus focused on the preparation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, which the EU concluded with most post-soviet states, and issues of trade and technical assistance. Belarus received ECU 56.6 million during 1991 to 1995 from the EU in the framework of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme (EU 2000, online). None of the aspects of the EU assistance carried on any form of political conditionality, however, according to the Foreign Minister Krauchanka (personal communication, March 26, 2004). Neither did Belarus officially request, nor the EU officially offer Belarus a membership in the EU, and thus the whole opportunity for acquiring a powerful external stimulus for democratic development was effectively sidelined.

If the soviet elite's policy to establish its international presence did little to anchor Belarus with the European Union, the international cooperation on the resolution of the Chernobyl and military issues (which were two other foreign policy goals of the soviet elite) yielded virtually no democracy-promoting consequences. The UN General Assembly issued five resolutions on international cooperation and coordination in overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster (MFA 2004, online), and separate countries and organizations rendered Belarus assistance – all of which, due to the nature of the issue, was predominantly material.

The soviet military legacy could potentially induce international actors to seek and affect Belarusian domestic developments, but the actual resolution of the problem was put onto a purely material track by the government's policy choices. The demise of the USSR left Belarus a heavily militarized republic with nuclear arms. Apart from a large concentration of military equipment and arguably the highest ratio of military to civilian personnel in the world (1:43) (Snapkouski 1999, n.p.), Belarus possessed 81 SS-25 missiles with nuclear warheads, according to the Deputy Defence Minister (Gurulev 2002, online). As such, Belarus posed an international security concern, and one that the US was particularly keen to alleviate. Yet, the US did not have to induce nuclear weapons withdrawal and demilitarization on the Belarusian domestic agenda. In September 1991, Belarus proclaimed its aspiration to nuclear-free status at the UN General Assembly in (UN General Assembly September 26, 1991, 65), and in so doing became the first state ever to voluntarily relinquish its nuclear arms.

This decision to abandon nuclear weapons was domestically driven, and had several rationales. First, it served as a means towards strengthening Belarusian independence. The 'nuclear-free' initiative was announced in September 1991, after Belarus had declared its sovereignty in August 1991, but before the Soviet Union officially dissolved in December 1991. As long as the Soviet Union formally existed, other states were wary of recognising Belarus as an independent state. Thus, during Prime Minister Viacheslau Kebich's first official foreign visit to East Asian countries in September 1991, the government of South Korea stated explicitly that they would only recognize Belarusian sovereignty after the USSR government had acquiesced to it (Snapkouski 1999, n.p). The Belarusian Foreign Minister, however, believed that the concept of a 'nuclear-arms free Belarus in the nuclear Soviet Union' would give the BSSR a separate voice and dissociate the republic from the rest of the USSR (Krauchanka, personal communication, March 26, 2004). Second, the high level of militarization of the BSSR, expedient for the USSR during the Cold War, was simply far more than was needed by independent Belarus, and placed a heavy burden on the economy of the republic. Third, Foreign Minister Krauchanka had hoped that the voluntary abandonment of nuclear weapons would enhance the international prestige of Belarus and yield further foreign policy benefits, and in particular, the election of Belarus as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (Kozhuro April 19, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]).

On May 23, 1992, Belarus, together with Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine, signed the Lisbon protocol to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1), in which they undertook to withdraw nuclear weapons from their territories to Russia by 1999 and to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Belarusian parliament ratified START-1 and the Lisbon protocol, and joined the NPT on February 3, 1993 (Snapkouski 1999, n.p.). Over 1992-1997, the USA provided USD 55,373,472 (NTI 1997, online) in the framework of the Cooperative Threat Reduction programme (known also as the Nunn-Lugar agreement), which assisted the dismantling of nuclear weapons in the former USSR states. Within a week after Belarus had ratified the START-1 Treaty, the USA extended to Belarus their Generalized System of Preferences in trade cooperation. The Belarusian Parliamentary Chairman Stanislau Shushkevich went on an official visit to Washington in July 1993, and the US President Bill Clinton reciprocated with a visit to Minsk in January, 1994.

The USA, therefore, paid for Belarusian nuclear disarmament, but never acquired any specific influence over Belarus. In fact, when the USA Secretary of State Warren Christopher came to Belarus on an official visit in 1993, the Belarusian Foreign Minister Piotr Krauchanka did not meet him at the airport, as diplomatic protocol required, so eager he was to assert Belarus'. independence (Snapkouski 1999, n.p.). Thus, cooperation between Belarus and the USA on the matters of nuclear disarmament did not establish the USA as a key foreign partner for the Belarusian state. This, it may be noted, is in strong contrast to Poland, for example, which has clearly tempered its relationship to the EU with a strong and popular alliance with the United States, a dual-track foreign policy which has, on occasions, most notably over Iraq, brought tensions with other EU member states.

In another distinction to Central Eastern European democracies, and in clear deviation from a clearly pro-European national identity policy in successful democratisers, the soviet elite never departed from a strong association with Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. In December 1991, Belarus hosted the summit of the Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian heads of states that proclaimed the dissolution of the USSR and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the purpose of which was to preserve cooperation between the former USSR republics. The soviet elite pursued such cooperation primarily for economic reasons. As explained in chapter 3, the Belarusian government adopted some market economy reform measures in 1990 and 1991, but quickly retreated on them for the fear of popular discontent. As the Belarusian economy remained by and large non-restructured, it became increasingly vulnerable to the disruption of economic links with

the former soviet republics, and primarily the Russian Federation, which in the soviet period, had provided export markets for Belarusian produce and delivered cheap energy resources. If in 1990, Belarus had to spend 1.7 percent of GDP on energy supplies, by 1992, this expenditure rose to 25 per cent of GDP (Sahm and Westphal 2002, 272). In 1993, the Belarusian gas debt to Russia exceeded USD 100 million, and Gazprom (Russian principal gas supplier) cut off gas supplies to the country (Sahm and Westphal 2002, 272). Economic difficulties consequently pushed the Belarusian soviet elite to seek ways to receive preferential treatment from the Russian Federation, to the extent that they were even ready to concede some Belarusian independence in return. In April 1994, the Belarusian and Russian governments concluded an agreement on a currency union. Prime Minister Viacheslau Kebich (quoted in Narodnaia Hazeta January 1,1994) explained: 'A union with Russia is a harsh necessity. I cannot see any other way to save the Belarusian economy', thus clearly is aware that it constituted a potential breach of Belarusian sovereignty, an act that was negative, but apparently impossible to avoid. The soviet elite thus was unable to shine a positive light upon their integration agreements with Russia nor place clear limits to such a breach. Both these tasks were successfully accomplished only by the successor of the soviet elite in government, President Lukashenka, who gained authority in the country several months after the signing of the currency union agreement in 1994 and advanced a national ideology based on the values of pan-Slavism combined with an appreciation of Belarusian independence.

During 1990 to 1994, the soviet elite pursued a pragmatic and rational foreign policy oriented towards the resolution of the immediate problems of the newly independent country. However, this policy was not set within any particular ideology of Belarusian national development, and furthermore, contradicted the vision posited at the time at the state level by the cultural elite (more on that in the following chapter). The refusal to seek European Union membership deprived Belarus both of the external orientation point and of the disciplining conditionality that kept the Central Eastern European governments under pressure to hold to their chosen reform paths. At the same time, the soviet elite did not represent cooperation with the Russian Federation as an alternative to cooperation with the West[70], and justified their partnership with Russia in increasingly subservient and negative economic, rather than positive national terms. Despite the fact that soviet elite accomplished their purported goals of international cooperation on the Chernobyl and on military issues, and enhanced the

[70] The Foreign Minister's acknowledgement that 'the expectation to join the EU together with Russia was probably a miscalculation' (Krauchanka, personal communication, March 26, 20004) testifies that the minister certainly did not see these two foreign partners in either/or terms.

international prestige of the country, these proved insufficient to externally sustain the democratic character of Belarusian transition.

The electoral defeat of the soviet and cultural elites in 1994, which is discussed throughout the thesis, with the argument summarised in the second part of the concluding chapter, is partially attributable to the inconsistency between the national identity of the cultural elite, which required a clear anchoring of Belarusian future with its European neighbours, and the foreign policy of the soviet elite, that officially refuted any such anchoring. The exact value of this factor is hard to gauge; the importance of it, however, can be elucidated from the fact that the presidential office in 1994 went to the candidate who formulated foreign policy in terms of a positively constructed national identity choice.

II. Eastern Slavs, unite!.. but not quite

The Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka, elected in 1994, distinguished himself from the soviet and cultural elites by advancing an egalitarian vision of national development that incorporated some socially resonant elements of the soviet past (we scrutinise the development of this egalitarian nationalism in the following chapter). An essential element of the soviet ideology was hostility towards the West and praise of the cooperation between the 'brotherly' nations of the Soviet Union, with Russia at its head. Having sensed the social vitality of this soviet ideological premise, President Lukashenka advanced integration with Russia as his foreign policy priority. The integration yielded far-fetching economic and political benefits for President Lukashenka's regime. He never submitted Belarus to full integration with Russia, however, nor allowed the Russian government to dictate their will. The major pretext for rebuffing attempts at Russian influence that the Belarusian President employed was, as in many other spheres, national ideology and interest.

The ambiguity of the integration process between Belarus and Russia is well illustrated by contrasting opinions of two prominent opponents of President Lukashenka. The leader of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) during 1989-1999, Zianon Pazniak, averred that 'Lukashenka will give Belarusian sovereignty up to the Russian imperialists' (quoted in Kniaz'kov and Kovalev March 26, 1996, [Krasnaia Zvezda]); while the head of the Belarusian Language society, Aleh Trusau, contemplated: "Who knows, one day we might put up a monument to Lukashenka for saving Belarusian statehood" (Trusau, personal communication, July 17, 2001).

After a brief description of the integration process, we point to the benefits it delivered to Aliaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian rule and demonstrate that the Belarusian President justified his Russian orientation in national ideological, rather than political or economic terms. Following that, we name Russia's interests in Belarus and demonstrate that the Russian political and economic elites secured such interests only in the early integration years of 1995 and 1996 and in the spheres that did not directly challenge President Lukashenka's domestic authority. Russia's attempts at influencing the Belarusian regime, which increased after the changeover of the Russian leadership in 2000, were successfully curtailed by the Belarusian President by means of national ideology.

2.1. To Russia with love

Since his early days in office, President Lukashenka unequivocally committed Belarus to a 'special relationship' with the Russian Federation. On January 6, 1995, the governments of Belarus and Russia concluded a customs union. On February 21, 1995, they signed a Treaty on friendship, good neighbourhood and cooperation. On May 26, 1995, the border between Belarus and Russia was abolished; as a symbolic statement, the Belarusian President and the Russian Prime Minister dug out a border pole between the two countries with their own hands (Skuratovich 2001, 25). On April 2, 1996, the Russian and Belarusian Presidents signed a Treaty on the creation of a Community, aimed at 'uniting the material and intellectual assets of both countries to advance the economy and create equal conditions to improve the quality of life for their people' (Kozik 2001, 7). A year later, on April 2, 1997, they signed a Union treaty, followed by yet another major treaty on December 25, 1999.

This integration has yielded some tangible social and economic results. The citizens of Belarus and Russia have the rights to free health care, work and education in both countries (Kozik 2001, 10), as a result of about 60 cooperation agreements (Kozik 2001, 13). Russia has been the primary foreign trade partner of Belarus[71], while Belarus became the second largest foreign trade partner of Russia in 2001[72] and remained as such in 2004 (Putin quoted in Kolesnikov May 24, 2004, [Kommersant-daily]). We have demonstrated in the previous chapter that the integration policies with Russia sustained export markets for the Belarusian

[71] with a share of 59.9 per cent in foreign trade in 2000 (Kozik 2001, 13)

[72] 6.5 per cent share of foreign trade after Germany with 10.5 per cent (Kozik, L., Ed. (2001). Belarus i Rossiia: organizatsionno-pravovye aspekty integratsii. Minsk, Polymia, AFN (January 17, 2003). Rossija javliaetsia osnovnum ekonomicheskim i torgovum partnerom Belarusi. Agenstvo finansovux novostej. http://www.afn.by/news/view.asp?id=25599.

goods, and provided natural energy resources at low rates, while also yielding other means of income to the Belarusian government, such as the retaining of Russian export taxes due to the customs union.

The formal political outcomes of integration have been less profound, however. A multitude of joint bodies have been created, including the Supreme State Council, the Council of Ministers, a Standing Executive Committee, and a Parliamentary Council. These joint organs bear a consultative character and their decisions need ratification by the corresponding bodies in both countries (Furman 1998, 350). Nevertheless, in the shape of the Russian Federation, the Belarusian President acquired a foreign supporter and advocate for his authoritarian regime. It was the Russian governmental delegation who in November 1996 brokered a deal between the Belarusian President, and the Parliament and the Constitutional Court, which became the major stepping stone towards the creation of authoritarian regime in Belarus (as we demonstrated in chapter 1). Unlike the Western institutional actors, the Russian Federation consistently recognized the results of Belarusian referenda and elections, thus endowing them some external legitimacy.

Despite having obvious an economic and political rationale for seeking close links with Russia, the Belarusian President, however, never clearly elucidated them, and advocated integration with Russia in national terms instead, and it is important to realise that the strategy towards Russia as an idealistic, rather than pragmatic, union, proved thoroughly effective. The Belarusian President explained his integration policies as the fulfilment of his electoral pledge to 'rectify the historic mistake of the dissolution of the USSR' (Lukashenka quoted in Furman and Drakokhrust 1998, 346). Indeed, orientation towards Russia continued the policy pattern typical of the soviet time and was popular with the Belarusian society. In 1995, a nation-wide poll registered 55.1 per cent support for the rejuvenation of the Soviet Union (NISEPI 2004b, 61). President Lukashenka, therefore, set the rationale for integration with Russia within an egalitarian national ideology, which had a strong pan-Slavic element during 1995 to 2000. The ultimate ostensible goal integration was the reunification of the East Slavic nations. After the conclusion of the Commonwealth treaty between Russia and Belarus on April 2, 1996, the Belarusian President explained the treaty 'would allow both nations to enter the 21st century as one thriving family', and that he signed the it 'because this was the will of the Belarusian electorate, which I supported wholeheartedly'

(Lukashenka quoted in Karapetian April 3, 1996, [Krasnaia Zvezda]) [73]. President Lukashenka thus portrayed his choice of Russia as the principal foreign partner a national, and nation-wide, choice, a strategy which uniquely took the relatively positive national history of Belarus within the Soviet Union, and more to the point, the population's lived experience of that history, seriously .

While praising integration with Russia, the Belarusian President has also reiterated that he would never relinquish Belarusian sovereignty, 'the most precious asset of the Belarusian nation' (Lukashenka January 1, 2003, n.p.), and this stance became increasingly pronounced as the Russian government attempted to encroach upon President Lukashenka's authority.

2.2. The national barriers to Russia's influence

Egalitarian nationalism not only provided President Lukashenka with the grounds for cooperating with Russia, but also served him the means to withstand Russia's attempts to influence Belarusian domestic policies. The more the Russian political and economic elites pressed on the Belarusian President to attend to their interests, the more he invoked the national sovereignty message and in so doing, successfully rebuffed Russian pressure.

The Russian government under President Boris Yeltsin had diverse reasons for engaging with Belarus; these reasons fairly obviously included economic, security and politico-ideological considerations. From the economic point of view, Russia's interest in Belarus was to ensure a secure, smooth and cheap transit of its main export commodities, gas and oil, to Europe. Russia exported annually about 90 million tons of oil through Belarus (Sahm and Westphal 2002, 274), which amounted to about a half of Russia's oil exports (Balmaceda 2002, 170). Also, two Belarusian oil refineries, in Navapolatsk and Mazyr, could deliver cheaper products to the Western Russian regions than the major Russian refineries in Siberia or the Volga (Balmaceda 2002, 173). The principal Russian gas exporter, Gazprom, had chosen Belarus as a route for its gigantic Yamal-Western Europe pipeline, intended to double Russian gas exports to Europe. The Belarusian route was the shortest of the available options, and it also allowed Gazprom break up the Ukrainian monopoly as the gatekeeper of Russian gas exports to Europe (Sahm and Westphal 2002, 285). The construction of the Belarusian section of the Yamal pipeline began in late 1996, and concluded in early 2003

[73] At the ceremony following the singing of the treaty, the Belarusian President toasted to a success of the union and crushed his glass against the floor, a widespread Slavic wedding tradition (Furman and Drakokhrust 1998, 346).

(VGTRK February 7, 2003). The Russian government thus diversified its gas and oil export transit routes and prevented their sole dependence on Ukraine.

From the security angle, Russia was interested in maintaining good relations with Belarus because of the latter's dense and diverse military infrastructure, including the means of communication, command and intelligence and several military airports (Mikalaeu 2002, 373). Of particular importance to Russia's defence were also the radiolocation station 'Volga' and the naval communication unit on Belarusian territory. Apart from the utilization of Belarusian military resources, cooperation was important to Russia 'as an additional means to strengthen Russia's position against Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states' (analytical report of the Russian foreign and defence committee to the President of the Russian Federation, 1997 quoted in Mikalaeu 2002, 372). The two military objects of Russia's interest were transferred under Russian command on January 6, 1995 (Mikalaeu 2002, 373), the same day that the customs union was signed.

From the political angle, integration with Belarus served as a case of foreign policy achievement to Russian leadership; in 1996, it became one of the saving graces to the Russian President Boris Yeltsin. President Yeltsin's popularity ratings by the end of his first presidential term (1991-1996) were alarmingly low for him (4.6 per cent in August 1995, and 6.8 per cent in January 1996 (Novoe Vremia July 15, 2001)). The ratings were undermined by Boris Yeltsin's ailing health, the hardship of economic reform, and the protracted and costly military operation in the autonomous republic of Chechnya. Against this domestic background, the initiative of NATO enlargement to include the Central and Eastern European members of the former Warsaw pact (security pact between the USSR and its CEE allies), despite Russia's rigorous protest, seemed to end Russia's status as a superpower. How significant that power status was for the Russian population is evident from the fact that in March 1996, the Russian parliament, the Duma, ruled to annul the Russian Parliament's 1991 decision to denunciate the treaty on the formation of the Soviet Union (Tsikhamirau 2002, 322). President Yeltsin overruled that Duma's resolution, but could not afford to ignore the popular longing for international prestige it denoted. In such circumstances, integration with Belarus was offered to the Russian electorate as a counterbalance to the loss of influence and a way to restore Russia's grandeur. The integration agreements with Belarus were one of the few foreign policy achievements Boris Yeltsin could claim on the eve of Russia's second presidential election in 1996, and they arguably contributed to his victory.

The Russian leadership fulfilled their agenda with respect to Belarus only in the first two integration years, 1995 and 1996, however. While some may argue that Russia's interest in integration with Belarus has fluctuated over the post-soviet period, not in the least because of the unwillingness of the Russian leadership to be closely associated with, or perceived as supporting, the Belarusian authoritarian regime, there is nevertheless sufficient evidence to argue that the Russian leadership had clear military, economic and political interests in Belarus. The attempts of the Russian government, especially under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, to incorporate Belarus into Russia, or ensure compliance and docility of its President, however, fell through. The few cases, when the Russian government publicly put pressure on the Belarusian President, have never yet been settled as desired by Russia, and even their partial resolution has been protracted. The Belarusian President has always justified his resistance to Russian pressure in national terms.

The Russian government has proved unable to yield compliance from the Belarusian President, despite some attempts. Under Boris Yeltsin's presidency, Russia once openly objected to President Lukashenka's domestic political doings: the so-called 'Sheremet case'. In July 1997, Belarusian journalists working for a Russian TV channel ORT, shot a report arguing that the Belarus-Russia customs union allowed the smuggling of goods into Russia because of the poor guarding of the Belarus-Lithuania border. The TV crew headed by the ORT correspondent, Pavel Sheremet, were promptly apprehended by the Belarusian authorities on the charges of illegal border crossing. The Russian authorities and the media interpreted the imprisonment of Sheremet and his crew as a violation of the right to information, and urged the Belarusian authorities to drop charges against the journalists (Efanov August 1, 1997, [Rossiiskaia Gazeta]). It took the Russian government two cancellations of Lukashenka's regional visits (to Kaliningrad in July and Yaroslavl and Lipetsk in October), a harsh statement from President Yeltsin, a personal meeting between Yeltsin and Lukashenka, and a public threat to cut off gas supplies (Furman and Drakokhrust 1998, 354) over the period of three months to merely get Sheremet and his crew released on bail. Several months later, and after a visit by President Yeltsin's aide Boris Berezovski, the journalists were freed, yet on suspended sentences. The 'Sheremet case' remains the only instance when Russia publicly objected to violations of democratic freedoms by President Lukashenka. The case was relatively small-scale (only few individuals were the subject of concern), and yet it took Russia a large amount of pressure over a considerable period of time to get its claim fulfilled to a satisfactory, but yet not full degree. (The journalists were eventually freed on suspended sentences, rather than having had their charges dropped.)

Russian President Putin attempted a more far-fetching political assault against the Belarusian President in summer 2002, when he suggested that the integration process between Belarus and Russia would only make sense if Belarus were incorporated into the Russian Federation (Sokolov August 29, 2002, [Izvestia]). The Belarusian President indignantly dismissed President Putin's suggestion as an assault on Belarusian independence, which, as he repeatedly argued, was the 'most sacred treasure of the Belarusian nation'(Lukashenka January 1, 2003, n.p.). The Belarusian government also promptly amplified its nation-building message and, in particular, the emphasis on public appreciation of Belarusian sovereignty, as we shall see in chapter 5.

In the economic sphere, Russian companies have not established a dominant presence in Belarus, despite an apparent desire to do so. President Lukashenka has managed to avoid a large-scale expansion of Russian capital in the country under the pretext of securing national assets. As argued in chapter 3, the Belarusian President has been wary of the emergence of powerful economic actors beyond his direct control. Consequently, Russian entrepreneurs have not received much room for action in Belarus; 40 to 78 per cent of Russian direct investment in Belarus over 1996-2000 was directed towards the construction of the Yamal pipeline section (Melnikava 2001, 155)[74]. Even a conclusion of an investment contract with the Belarusian government did not guarantee Russian investors the ability to establish their companies in the country, as the experience of the Russian brewery Baltika proved. In April 2001, Baltika and the Belarusian government concluded a contract, according to which Baltika would invest USD 50 million into the modernisation of the largest Belarusian brewery, Krynitsa, in exchange for a controlling portfolio of Krynitsa's shares. After USD 10.5 million had been invested, the Belarusian government ruled that the privatisation was to be taken in several steps, that 'Baltika' could receive only up to 38 per cent of 'Krynitsa's shares, and that 'Baltika' were to build an ice rink and donate it to the Belarusian state (Grib and Dobrov March 21, 2002, [Kommersant-Daily]). Baltika refused to cooperate on amended terms and withdrew from the country, and the Russian government was not able to convince its Belarusian partner to abide by its initial promises. When the Belarusian government revoked its terms of agreement with the Baltika brewery, the President justified it with national security considerations and also in blunt nation-building terms:

[74] Russian accumulated investments in Belarus were estimated at USD 550 million in 2002 Biriukova, O. (November 28, 2002). Bez eiforii. Belorusskii Rynok No 42 (524). Minsk http://www.belmarket.by/index.php?article=10911&year=2002&PHPSESSID=6205af3165023738d50f810571b6f49a.

'I am defending the interests of my nation. The nation elected me to do so. And I want you to know that nobody who has money, and especially private money, would share it with us. Nobody will. We, Belarusians, are kind and yielding people, more kind than Ukrainians and even Russians; this is our national peculiarity. And if we do not stay alert, we will be ripped off' (Lukashenka March 14, 2003, part 2).

In addition, the largest Russian gas company, Gazprom, has been unable to make the Belarusian President fulfil its demands, despite trying hard. Gazprom has sought to acquire control of the Belarusian gas monopolist, the Beltransgaz company. In 1994, Gazprom demanded the privatisation of Beltransgaz to settle Belarusian energy debts, but the Belarusian government avoided it (Sahm and Westphal 2002, 286). The 1996 agreement on building the Belarusian section of the Yamal-Western Europe pipeline stipulated that it be both constructed and owned by Beltransgaz; Gazprom would finance the construction with USD 2.5 billion, and in response, the Belarusian government would privatize Beltransgaz and sell Gazprom the control portfolio of its shares (Sahm and Westphal 2002, 286). When the pipeline section was completed in early 2003, however, the Belarusian government protracted its privatization. After a series of inconclusive negotiations, Gazprom cut off gas supplies to Belarus on February 18, 2004 [75] on the grounds that the previous contract for gas deliveries had expired, and the new one had not been signed (Ratnikova June 14, 2004, [Politkom]) . For a new contract, Gazprom demanded the controlling portfolio of Beltransgaz shares, and raised the tariff for a thousand cubic meters (TCM) of gas by USD 20 to the previous contract, making it USD 50 per TCM, comparable to the price it sold gas to Ukraine (Sokol February 13, 2004, [Kommersant-Daily]). The Belarusian government, in response, switched to purchasing gas from other Russian suppliers (at the price of USD 50 per TCM) and doubled its transit fees for Gazprom's gas from USD 0.5 to USD 1.02 per TCM (Ratnikova June 14, 2004, [Politkom]). After prolonged negotiations, the Belarusian government and Gazprom signed a new contract in June 2004, in which Belarus agreed to pay USD 46.68 per TCM, and charge USD 0.75 per TCM of transit (Polesskii June 14, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]). The Belarusian government retained the ownership of Beltransgaz. It formally agreed to transform Beltransgaz into a joint venture, but attached a price tag of USD 5 billion to it (Gubenko June 7, 2004, [Izvestiia]). Gazprom deemed USD 500 million a reasonable price (Vedomosti May 20, 2004). After half a year of negotiations, since January to June of 2004, the only step towards settlement of the matter was that the Belarusian government agreed to hire the independent auditing firm, Deloitte & Touche, to estimate the

[75] We discuss the ideological benefit that PresidentLukashenka managed to extract from this act in chapter 5.

value of Beltransgaz, and the whole process was left open to further procrastinations. The Belarusian President, as in other cases of repelling foreign investors, has explained this refusal to privatize Beltransgaz and give away its controlling portfolio of shares to Gazprom by saying that it would 'squander national assets' (quoted in Gubenko June 7, 2004, [Izvestiia]).

Tensions between Russia and Belarus over the detainment of ORT journalists, investments by Baltika, and purchase of Beltransgaz testify that the Russian government has been unable to exert much political and economic influence over the Belarusian regime, despite rendering obvious political and economic support to it. Ioffe (2004, 95) even compared the relationship between Belarus and Russia to 'the tail wagging the dog'. This is an overestimation, since Belarus, and the Belarusian President, have had no influence over domestic developments in Russia. Rather, it would be more correct to argue that the Belarusian President has extracted political, economic and ideological benefits from Russia's interests in Belarus, while managing to avoid falling into direct dependence on his Russian partners or conceding them even a part of his domestic authority. Such a crucial and important flexibility of President Lukashenka's policy towards Russia derived from a shrewd assessment of Belarus's real leverage power and the equally shrewd justification of his actions by references to national interest.

President Lukashenka related both the pursuit of integration with Russia, and the demarcation of the limits of that integration in terms of national identity and interest. In advocating integration with Russia, President Lukashenka built on the results of decades of soviet ideological work that had promoted unity between the Belarusian and Russian nations. Close links with Russia were an essential part of the everyday experiences for the absolute majority of the Belarusian population following 70 years of Belarus and Russia's co-existence within the USSR. While using pan-Slavist references, the Belarusian President nevertheless simultaneously reinforced Belarusian sovereignty and continued to construct national identity in terms that necessitated resistance to Russian political and economic pressure.

The egalitarian national ideology that recombined some soviet values with the appreciation of Belarusian statehood thus both justified the close integration with Russia during the 10 years of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's presidency, but also prevented Russia from acquiring a strong leverage in Belarus. The construction of national identity on the basis of soviet

references was also essential to avoiding engagement with the democratic West and to precluding its attempts to undermine the increasingly authoritarian regime in Belarus being developed.

III. From cool to glacial relations with the West

The consolidation of authoritarian rule in Belarus since 1996 raised concerns in Western countries and organisations, and prompted their counter-action. Western institutional actors have employed a wide spectrum of measures against the authoritarian regime in Belarus, from international isolation to attempts at influence through engagement with the government, and support of pro-democratic oppositional forces. None of these policies, however, has been able to effectively dent the authority of President Lukashenka or induce democratic development of Belarus. Egalitarian national ideology allowed the Belarusian President to construct foreign policy in such form as to opt out of the European developmental framework which was a *comme il faut* matter to other postcommunist countries professing European identity that consolidated as democracies. Western attacks on his rule in a way that actually reinforced his authority. This section demonstrates that the more the Western institutional actors attempted to interfere with President Lukashenka's rule, the more he reinforced his egalitarian national ideology as the primary means to withstand their pressure.

In contrast to Russia, which has considerable economic and security interests in Belarus, the West's concerns with Belarus have been predominantly political. 'Belarus is too small to stir a serious economic interest of the West', assures Mark Taplin, the director of the office for Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus of the US State department (personal communication, January 13, 2004). Indeed, the country is poor on natural resources of strategic economic importance, such as gas or oil. Security concerns have also been virtually absent from the Western agenda. On November 26, 1996, the last remaining nuclear missiles were removed from the territory of Belarus (Marples 1999, 109). Illegal arms sales to the developing world, in which Belarus had been implicated (Beaumont and Walsh September 22, 2002, [Observer]) constituted only a minor worry to the West. 'Even if Belarus does operate on the grey arms markets, the products it offers are old and pose no serious concern' (Taplin, personal communication, January 13, 2004). Therefore, there were and are no economic or security incentives for the Western governments to tolerate the Lukashenka regime in Belarus, unlike those of the natural resources-rich authoritarian regimes in Central Asia.

There is no reason to disagree, therefore, with the official of the US Helsinki Commission, Orest Deychakiwsky (personal communication, January 15, 2004) when he argues that the Western interest in Belarus has been mostly political, in the sense that an authoritarian state creates a dissonance in a democratic Europe.

On his part, President Lukashenka initially followed up the accomplishments of his predecessors with respect to relations with the Western institutional actors. In December 1994, the Belarusian President took part in the CCSE summit in Budapest, where the UK, USA and Russia signed the Memoranda on Security Guarantees to Belarus as the state that had relinquished its nuclear weapons. In January 1995, Belarus signed a Partnership for Peace agreement with NATO, and on March 7, 1995, it concluded Partnership and Cooperation agreement with the European Union. The IMF allocated Belarus USD 200 million stand-by loan in 1995 (IMF 1995, online). Before long, however, the Belarusian President revealed his lack of enthusiasm for serious cooperation with the West.

During his meetings in the framework of the CSCE 1994 Budapest summit, President Lukashenka perplexed his counterparts by constant references to the importance of Belarusian integration with Russia, which implied the absence of a similar interest in the development of relations with the West (Kozhuro January 17, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]). In an interview to the German newspaper 'Handelsblatt' in November 1995, Aliaksandr Lukashenka named Adolf Hitler as an example of an effective leader, whose policies had proved critical for the successful development of Germany after the First World War (Marples 1999,79), thus going against the only acceptable attitude to totalitarianism and Nazism in Europe. These acts demonstrated a certain lack of concern for keeping up the international image of Belarus as an aspiring democratiser, to put it mildly. In November 1996, President Lukashenka took a decisive step towards strengthening his power hold over Belarus by amending the Constitution in a way that dramatically increased his authority. Western countries and organisations questioned the legitimacy of the popular referendum by which the Constitution was changed. President Lukashenka ignored their protests and went ahead with implementation of the constitutional amendments to strengthen his authority. Indeed, it became increasingly clear that President Lukashenka's goals were to consolidate his authority and overrule the democratic institutional arrangements in the country that he had inherited. His foreign policy matched these goals by ignoring opinion of the democratic West.

The first reaction of the Western institutional actors towards the clearly authoritarian tendencies in Belarusian President's rule was to isolation. Within a year of the November 1996 referendum, major European organizations took measures to ostracise President Lukashenka and his regime: the Council of Europe ruled that the presidential amendments to the Constitution virtually abolished the separation of powers in the government; the European Parliament adopted a resolution on freezing the ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Belarus, and the NATO Assembly unilaterally adopted a resolution calling its members not to recognize the results of the referendum (all in Fedorov 2001, 316). The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) suspended the Special Guest status of Belarus' National Assembly in 1997 (Wieck 2002b, 265). The EU Council suspended ratification of the PCA, froze the Interim Trade Agreement and reduced technical assistance to Belarus in the same year (Martynov 2002, 35). It was also agreed in 1997 that EU members would not support Belarus' membership application to the Council of Europe, that bilateral ministerial contacts between the EU and Belarus at the ministerial level would be established only through the presidency of the Troika (Council of Europe, EU and OSCE), and that assistance programmes to Belarus would be reduced, except for humanitarian or regional projects or those that directly support the democratization process (Wieck 2002a, 375). On April 5, 1997, the Standing committee of NATO deprived Belarus of its status of an associated member (Fedorov 2001, 318). On the individual level, the Belarusian President has not been to an official visit to a Western European country since 1996; he took part in no more than 10 summits of international organizations during 10 years of his presidency, but most of them within the OSCE framework (Alechkevich, personal communication, November 27, 2002). Moreover, Western governments have imposed a travel ban on President Lukashenka and several top state officials four times. Neither has Minsk been a popular destination for Western politicians; none of the key European officials have paid an official visit to Belarus during Aliaksandr Lukashenka's presidency. This isolation from the West, however, did little to make the Belarusian President amend his policies. In fact, he has clearly benefited from disengagement with the West, as it exempted his regime from the need to adhere to democratic principles and procedures. As we have seen in the previous section, Aliaksandr Lukashenka professed an egalitarian national ideology that effectively dismissed the West and its democratic paradigm as irrelevant to Belarusian national development. To emphasise his disagreement with Western policies, the Belarusian President even paid an official visit to Serbia at the time when it was bombed by NATO forces in April 1999, to explicitly express his support for Slobodan Milosevic (BBC April 14, 1999, online). Isolation from the West,

therefore, did not dent Aliaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian regime, but, on the contrary, rather strengthened it.

After two years of isolation have evidently failed to have an impact on the authoritarian rule in Belarus, Western institutions amended their strategy and attempted to promote democratic processes in the country through engagement with its government. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe set up an Advisory and Monitoring Group for Belarus (AMG) on September 18, 1997, with the mandate to 'assist the Belarusian authorities in promoting democratic institutions and in complying with OSCE commitments and to monitor and report on this process'(Wieck 2002b, 266).

The Advisory and Monitoring Group of OSCE (AMG) started its work in Belarus in February 1998, but has not been able to induce the Belarusian government to comply with democratic institutional and procedural requirements. Despite some 'substantive consultations' (Wieck 2002a, 377), and the acceptance by the Belarusian authorities of some AMG suggestion with respect to legislation, the eventual documents adopted in Belarus, in particular, the local elections law, still fell short of OSCE standards (Wieck 2002a, 378). In 1999, The AMG initiated a dialogue between the representatives of the government and the political opposition with a view to ensure that the parliamentary elections of 2000 were held according to democratic standards. The government initially agreed to the dialogue, and a presidential representative signed a protocol in November 1999 promising the opposition a regular and uncensored access to the official electronic and print media (Wieck 2002b, 270). A few months later, however, in February 2000, President Lukashenka reframed negotiations with the opposition into a 'public political dialogue', which was to include pro-presidential organizations as well as the opposition, and whose decisions were to have an advisory, not compulsory force for the government (Wieck 2002a, 386). As a result, the AMG was not able to contribute to the observance of democratic procedures at the 2000 parliamentary and 2001 presidential elections.

After the 2001 election, the international staff of the AMG group did not have their visas renewed, and by October 2002, all of them had to depart. The West responded with visa restrictions to President Lukashenka and seven top Belarusian officials. After two months of negotiations, a new agreement was signed, and in February 2003, the AMG resumed its activities, albeit under a more restrictive mandate (Grib February 18, 2003, [Kommersant-Daily]). Thus, the OSCE attempt to influence President Lukashenka's policies towards

accepting democratic standards proved futile. The Belarusian government circumscribed the AMG OSCE activities in the country by presenting it as a national security threat. To oust the head of the Advisory Monitoring Group of the OSCE, ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck, in 2001, President Lukashenka accused him of 'training 14 thousand paramilitaries', which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs put in more conventional and formal terms as 'exceeding his mandate and subversive activities' (Feduta May 22, 2001, [Moskovskie Novosti]).

As policy demarches and attempts at negotiation by Western governments and organizations did not bring the desired effect of inducing President Lukashenka to relinquish his authoritarian policies, the West, consequently, made efforts to uproot the Lukashenka regime through supporting the Belarusian political opposition and the development of civil society and free media. As we elucidate in greater detail in chapter 6, the Western institutional actors used the presidential election in 2001 as an opportunity to topple President Lukashenka's regime by electoral means, and rendered technical and material support to the campaign of the single democratic candidate. This effort also proved futile, however, as it was rebuffed by President Lukashenka as a Western conspiracy, and not as much against his regime, as against the Belarusian national developmental choice altogether. Few days before the presidential election on September 9, 2001, the largest (and state-owned) newspaper in the country, *Sovetskaia Belorussiia*, doubled its print run from 350,000 to 629,000 (OSCE 2001, IX A) to publish the incumbent President's electoral platform and a 'leaked analytical document from the West' entitled 'Operation 'White Stork', which presented a conspiracy of the Western secret services to subvert the Belarusian way of life by trying to replace President Lukashenka with one of their agents, disguised as a democratic opposition candidate (Sovetskaia Belorussiia September 5, 2001).

During the second presidential term of Aliaksandr Lukashenka, since 2001, the West took further measures to marginalise his rule, and the Belarusian President responded by strengthening his national ideology to rebuff them. In spring 2004, the European Union excluded Belarus from its 'Good Neighbourhood' programme, aimed at augmenting the links across the expanded EU frontiers. In October 2004, the USA passed the Belarus Democracy Act (BDA), which proclaimed Belarus a dictatorship[76], ordered the US representatives in the international bodies to vote against any measures beneficial to the Belarusian government,

[76] In January 2005, US Secretary of State, Condoleeza Rice named Belarus one of five 'outposts of tyranny' in the world BBC (January 19, 2005). Rice names 'outposts of tyranny'. BBC News, UK edition online. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4186241.stm. Her policies, however, fall beyond the chronological frame of this research, which ends in December 2004.

and stipulated support for pro-democratic activities in Belarus. The reaction of the Belarusian government to the EU decision was to withdrew their initial permission for the EU-sponsored show in Minsk on the day of the EU enlargement (May 1, 2004), if it included a recorded message from the head of the European Commission, Romano Prodi (Vener April 29, 2004, [Charter 97]). In response to the US Belarus Democracy Act, the Belarusian delegation to the United Nations promptly submitted (but later withdrew) a draft resolution expressing concern over democracy and human rights in the USA (Permanent Mission of Belarus to the United Nations November 4,2004, online). The Belarusian Foreign Ministry consistently accused the West of 'double standards' towards Belarus (Martynov February 27, 2004, [Rzech Pospolita]). The principal means of withstanding Western pressure, however, has been not demarches, but the further deepening of the ideological message.

President Lukashenka interpreted Western pressure on his regime as a threat to the national development of Belarus, and rejected it as such. The Belarusian way of life, the President explained, was subject of to the 'cultural and ideational aggression of the Western world' (Lukashenka March 27, 2003, part 4).'With its clear lakes, uncultivated forests and non plundered national economy, Belarus attracts avaricious glances from all directions', insisted the President (Lukashenka September 9, 2004, online). At the military parade celebrating the 60th anniversary of Belarus liberation in the Second World War on July 3rd, 2004 President Lukashenka made parallels between the Western pro-democratic pressure and the Nazi aggression, and described the European organizations' effort to promote democracy in Belarus as an attempt to punish it for the ability to defend itself in the war (Lukashenka July 3, 2004, online). The Belarusian media also immediately interpreted the Belarus Democracy Act of the US as a national threat. The Belarusian TV labeled the five conditions of revoking the BDA[77] as 'five conditions of national capitulation' (ATN October 8, 2004, 21.00-21.30). President Lukashenka claimed that 'the adoption of the Belarus Democracy Act added at least 10 per cent of popular support for me at the [2004] referendum'(quoted in Maksymiuk

[77](1) The release of individuals in Belarus who have been jailed based on political or religious beliefs.
(2) The withdrawal of politically motivated legal charges against all opposition figures and independent journalists in Belarus .
(3) A full accounting of the disappearances of opposition leaders and journalists in Belarus , including Victor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky, Yuri Zakharenka, and Dmitry Zavadsky, and the prosecution of those individuals who are responsible for their disappearances.
(4) The cessation of all forms of harassment and repression against the independent media, independent trade unions, nongovernmental organizations, religious organizations (including their leadership and members), and the political opposition in Belarus .
(5) The implementation of free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in Belarus consistent with OSCE commitments. US CONGRESS (2004). Belarus Democracy Act. 108th CONGRESS 2d Session H. R. 854. http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2004/10/27/act.

October 7, 2004, [RFL/RE]), in the sense that it provided additional evidence to his argument that the West was intolerant and jealous of the Belarusian model of development. The Belarusian President thus portrayed Western institutional actors as external enemies of the nation, and their concerns for democratic development of the country as a hypocritical pretext for disguising the aspiration to subdue Belarus. Thus not only was Western pressure rebuffed in the name of national security, but promotion of democracy in general was discredited as nationally alien and a threat to the Belarusian way of life.

By consistently ignoring Western demarches and advice and curbing Western assistance to democratisation projects, President Lukashenka has successfully limited Western influence in Belarus to the extent that they had virtually no leverage in the country: 'no engagement-no influence', as the Belarusian Foreign Minister Siarhei Martunau put it in 2002 (Martynov 2002, 311). Such a stance of mutual isolation has benefited President Lukashenka's authority. It allowed the Belarusian President to ignore Western democratic standards and thus released his regime from the conditionality imposed elsewhere in post-communist Europe. In the formulation of his foreign policy towards the West, Aliaksandr Lukashenka recombined the soviet ideological hostility to it and the new rhetoric of Belarusian national independence and egalitarian nationalism thus became the principal means for the Belarusian authoritarian leader to withstand Western democratic pressure.

The foreign policy of President Lukashenka has been characterised as 'a complete and utter failure' (Kozhuro January 17, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]), and from the point of view of Belarus' stance on the international arena, it has indeed left the country marginalized and isolated from the democratic international community. From the perspective of President Lukashenka's regime, however, it has been highly successful. The statement by the Foreign Minister Siarhei Martunau (February 27, 2004, [Rzech Pospolita]), that 'Belarus is ruled neither from Moscow, nor from Washington nor from Brussels', appears to reflect reality. Aliaksandr Lukashenka has managed to play up the interests of Russia and the West in a way that allowed him virtually unlimited room for political manoeuvre within the country, ensured Russia's economic support for the unreformed and state-controlled economy and gave the possibility to bypass and ignore Western standards of democratic procedures and freedoms. All the foreign policy choices of President Lukashenka have been underpinned in substantive nationalist terms. They utilized the socially familiar references of cooperation with Russia and wariness of the West, while rejecting foreign pressure as a national threat.

The foreign policy President Lukashenka, therefore, had a firm national foundation, and as such became a pillar of his authoritarian regime in Belarus.

Conclusions

The international dimension of post-soviet development of Belarus clearly demonstrates that the capacity of international institutional actors to influence postcommunist transitions is strongly determined by the national ideology pursued in transition societies. Liberal national identity in Central Eastern Europe predicated a European orientation, which allowed for Western reform guidance; whereas egalitarian national identity emphasised national sovereignty and left little room for foreign, especially Western pro-democratic, influence. The consistency of foreign policy with national ideology is apparently a necessary condition for the maintenance of legitimacy and power of postcommunist political elites.

Within the domestic aspect of the Belarusian transition, political success has attended the leader that found a positive nationalist basis to justify his foreign policy. The soviet elite offered no such a positive ideological underpinning to their effort in the international arena, nor related it to the national mobilisation that their counterparts within the elite pact, the cultural elite, pursued at the time. As a result, the democratization process in Belarus was left without a powerful mobilising external focus, and this contributed to the eventual popular discrediting of both democratisation and its leaders. President Lukashenka, in contrast, related his foreign policy to a national identity that dismissed the Western developmental model, praised cooperation with Russia, but valued Belarusian sovereignty and independence above all. The international pillar of the authoritarian regime in Belarus thus found a firm national foundation.

Throughout our analysis of the economic and international aspects of the Belarusian transition so far, we have established that national ideology proved crucial to their development. In the next chapter, we consider this ideological resource in greater detail.

5. Same people, different nations: pro-European and egalitarian nationalism

The literature on democratisation lists nationalism among the factors that affect transition, but it sees only two ways in which nationalism may work in the setting of a transition to democracy: if national mobilisation is ethnically inclusive (liberal), it is supposed to sustain democracy, and if it is ethnically exclusive (ethnic), it is said to undermine it. We have argued in the opening chapter that this assumption is flawed, because it simplistically equates stable statehood, which inclusive nationalism has tended to sustain and which ethnic nationalism has tended to disrupt, with democratic progress. We suggest that, in practice, ethnically inclusive national mobilisation has worked in the postcommunist context towards both democratic and authoritarian regime consolidation, and its impact on the character of transition has rather depended on the values and identity promoted as national. Thus, the liberal nationalism that upheld European values has indeed sustained democracy, while an inclusive but egalitarian nationalism that advanced collectivist virtues has clearly underpinned authoritarianism. This chapter aims to prove our argument on the Belarusian case.

'A denationalized nation'- so stands the title of the only monograph on Belarusian post-soviet development[78]. At first sight, this statement seems to be accurate, given that the proponents of Belarusian nation-building during 1990 to 1994, the Belarusian popular front (BPF), did not receive a single seat in the 1995 parliamentary election; that Belarusian speakers form a virtual ghetto among the Russian-speaking majority of the population, and that for the good part of the late 1990s, the country seemed on the brink of relinquishing its sovereignty for the sake of integration with the Russian Federation. If one stopped looking for the signs of a Belarusian national identity as it was promoted in the democratisation period of 1990 to 1994, however, one would undoubtedly notice that a rather different form of national mobilisation was steadily on the rise in Belarus during the decade of authoritarian consolidation, from 1994 to 2004. Such a mobilisation had gone unnoticed for a long time because, counter intuitively, it has employed mostly soviet references.

Over time it has become clear that the national ideology of the authoritarian resident, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, was ethnically inclusive but anti-liberal, and, at the time of writing, this has hardly been commented upon. We call this form of national mobilisation

[78] Marples, D. (1999). Belarus: a Denationalised Nation. Amsterdam: Harwood academic publishers, 1999.

'egalitarian' and argue that it has been crucial for the establishment and consolidation of an authoritarian regime in Belarus.

This chapter has two purposes: to reveal and characterise the egalitarian national ideology advanced by the Belarusian authoritarian leader; and to compare pro-European and egalitarian national mobilisation strategies of the Belarusian elites and argue about their impact on the post-soviet development of the country: namely, that the failure of pro – European nationalism predicated the stalling of democracy in 1994, and that the success of egalitarian nationalism underpinned authoritarian consolidation. The chapter proceeds in four parts: first, we describe the social legacy of the soviet system and its repertoire of references for popular mobilisation; second, we characterise national ideology, based in European liberal values, and establish its weaknesses in respect to popular mobilisation; third, we follow the development of the egalitarian national ideology, premised on soviet values, and point to its strengths for enrolling popular support; forth, we suggest the reasons for the failure of the liberal strategy and for the success of egalitarian nationalism in Belarus and conclude with some preliminary implications of the Belarusian case for the theories of democratisation per se (which we develop further in chapter 7).

I. The soviet legacy as nation-building material

Belarusian history has had a long list of diverse experiences from which to draw national mobilisation, but it was the soviet period that resonated with society most, as it formed the lived experience of the voting population.

Ten centuries of Belarusian history condensed into one paragraph yield the following summary. Belarus was home to several principalities during the ninth to twelfth centuries; they were superseded during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries by the Great Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), a reasonably large and powerful state to which the Belarusian nobility, language, territories were central. Since the sixteenth century, the GDL fell under the influence of the Polish state, *Rzech Pospolita*, and, with its partition in the late eighteenth century, was incorporated into the Russian empire. The socialist and national-democratic movements of the early twentieth century were subdued by the Bolshevik forces, and the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was established in 1919 and existed until 1991. The soviet system, as the most profound and the most recent social experience, became the primary reference point for political mobilisation in the post-soviet years. From the nation-

building angle, however, the impact of the soviet system over Belarusian nationhood was open to contradictory interpretations in the 1990s: as either very positive or gravely negative. In the course of the decade, both interpretations took hold: the soviet experience was fully rejected by pro-European nationalism until 1994, and afterwards it was highly praised by egalitarian nationalism. Before we come to analyse these two interpretations, however, we need to know the actual impact of the soviet system over Belarusian national development, insofar as this may, objectively, be described.

The USSR formally promoted the national development of its constituent republics, and advanced the languages and cultures of their dominant ethnic groups. This policy derived from Lenin's view that socialism should co-opt national allegiances, rather than try and dispense with them. The USSR government thus treated national cultures as a form of common socialist culture (Kastsiuk 1995, 405). The programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961 argued for the necessity to foster 'a common culture of the communist society' (Kastsiuk 1995, 406). Consequently, the nation-building policies of the soviet regime were 'nationalist in form, but socialist in content' (Stalin's directive quoted in Vakar 1956, 147). In other words, the aim of the national policy in the USSR was to use national allegiances as routes to inducing collectivist socialist values into the society. As communism preached indifference to people's ethnic origins, so the soviet regime formulated national identities in ethnically open and inclusive terms. Thus the soviet system made national identities ethnically inclusive, but secondary to the overarching collectivist soviet ideas, values and goals.

The soviet system profoundly affected and reshaped Belarusian society and its national values and characteristics. To start with, it completely overhauled the elite circles of Belarusian society: the prior national intelligentsia was exterminated, and replaced by natives and non-natives who professed communist values. The Belarusian national intelligentsia by and large rejected the Bolshevik ideology in the late 1910s and the 1920s. Even those representatives of the national elite who partook in the administration of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) when it was established in 1919, challenged some key policies of the Stalin government, so that eventually, Vakar (1956,146) argues, 'a purge of nationalists in the BSSR had become a matter of life and death for the Kremlin'. In the 1930s and after Second World War, the Belarusian national elite were almost completely annihilated. During the 1930s, the Belarusian Communist Party purged more than 40 per

cent of its members (Kastsiuk 1995, 206). All the Narkoms[79], trade union and Komsomol[80] leaders, and factory managers of the 1920s - early 1930s were purged, along with 26 academics and 6 correspondent members of the Academy of Sciences[81] and more than 100 Belarusian writers (Kastsiuk 1995, 207), as well as 6 out of 7 chancellors of the Belarusian state university (Parashkou 2003, 266). Bich (quoted in Zaprudnik 1993, 87) argues that in the 1930s, almost the entire national intelligentsia became the victim of the Stalinist repressions. By the middle of 1946, 90 per cent of all district Party secretaries, 96 per cent of all district and city administrative officials, and 82 per cent of the collective farm chairmen had been repressed (Lubachko 1972, 170). The number of Belarusian prisoners in the soviet labour camps grew from 15, 264 in 1944 to 96, 471 in 1951 (Kastsiuk 1995, 341). Thus, the soviet regime effectively wiped out nearly all the individuals who could have advanced a vision of Belarusian nationhood that was alternative to the soviet ideology.

The places of the purged national elite in the administrative, academic and cultural spheres were filled with either representatives of other nations (mostly Russian), or the younger generation of Belarusians, 'ideologically conditioned in the soviet mixer' (Vakar 1956, 150). Key governmental positions had been placed in the hands of non-natives since the 1930s, as a safeguard against a nationalist derailment from soviet policies. In 1951, the BSSR government comprised twenty-four non-Belarusians and nine Belarusians (Vakar 1956, 215). In 1953, only 62.2 per cent of the republic's central Party apparatus were Belarusians (Kastsiuk 1995, 362). No earlier than in 1956 was a Belarusian, Cyril Mazurau, trusted to head the BSSR (in the position of the First Secretary of the Belarusian Communist party). Nevertheless, according to Khaduka's (1999, 13) estimations, in the 1980s, Belarusians were still only the fourth largest national group in the central and mid-level administrative organs of the BSSR. The soviet regime thus completely overhauled the national elite in Belarus.

In the absence of nationally distinctive elites, the social changes brought about by the processes of modernization further eroded native national characteristics in Belarusian society. During the soviet period, the BSSR was transformed from an agricultural to an industrial state. We mentioned in chapter 3 that the soviet authorities claimed to have had increased the industrial potential of Belarus by 192 times over the period of soviet rule

[79] Equivalent of Ministers - heads of 'people's commissariats'.
[80] The youth league of the Communist party.
[81] The Academy of Sciences hosted 139 PhD students in 1934, but only 6 in 1938 Kastsiuk, M., Ed. (1995). Narysy historyi Belarusi. Dapamozhnik dlia VNY. vol.II. Minsk, Belarus.

(Drozd and Tsimoshak 1978, 2). Intensive industrialisation entailed rapid urbanisation and profound occupational changes. Between 1959 and 1986, the urban population in the republic increased by 250 per cent, on the background of total population growth of 24 per cent; thus the size of the urbanized Belarusian population had more than doubled, from 31 per cent in 1959 to 66 per cent in 1990 (Marples 1996, 21). The capital city, Minsk, underwent a remarkable growth from 237 thousand residents in 1939 to 1, 613 thousand in 1989 (Marples 1996, 22), equalling a 6.7-fold increase. Occupation-wise, the number of professionals with higher and specialized education increased by 4.6 times over 1960-1986, and that of workers by 2.2 times (Famin 1993, 228). The share of workers in the labour force grew from 45 to 60 per cent, while the share of peasants declined from 40.4 per cent to 14.6 per cent (Famin 1993, 228). This external and internal migration and the proliferation of professional education was ultimately directed by the USSR government and obviously catered for the all-soviet benefit; in the absence of a nationally distinctive elite to safeguard national interests vis-à-vis the USSR leadership, the processes of modernization significantly advanced soviet elements in the Belarusian national culture.

The soviet authorities promoted Belarusian arts and literature, but only of the kind which favoured the soviet system and its values. During 1946 to1952, 180 Belarusian books were published in 1,433 thousand copies, and 80 Belarusian works were translated in the languages of the Soviet Union nationalities (Kastsiuk 1995, 365). Membership of the Belarusian union of writers grew from 170 in 1959 to 364 in 1985 (Kastsiuk 1995, 406). The state supported only those writers and artists, however, who praised socialism in their works. As a result, the principal topics of Belarusian art and literature became the partisan warfare of the Second World War and the glorification of the everyday life of soviet society (Kastsiuk 1995, 370). The writers who addressed the moral dilemmas of wartime, or the pre-soviet national history: Vasil' Bykau, Ales' Adamovich and Uladzimir Karatkevich, were accused of nationalism and constrained in their work (Famin 1993, 259). While libraries were developed, any 'politically harmful literature' was removed from them, which in 1953 alone amounted to about 40 000 books (Kastsiuk 1995, 372). Thus the claim that 'Belarusian literature has become one of the most effective tools of communist education' (quoted in Vakar 1956, 217), ironic as it may seem, correctly reflected the reality.

Architecture offers another example of how Belarusian national culture was bestowed with a soviet content. The 1946 general plan for the reconstruction of Minsk after the Second World War did not provide for the preservation of historic and cultural relics (Famin 1993, 353).

Instead, it emphasized soviet administrative and cultural centres, such as the House of Government, the House of Officers, and the Palace of Trade Unions. A major square was set around the monument to the victory in the Second World War (Parashkou 2003, 317). The central avenue of Minsk was named Lenin Avenue, as was the central square, where the statue of Lenin was placed. Streets in cities, towns and even villages were re-named after the classics of Marxism-Leninism, the Communist Party leaders and partisan fighters. At the same time, the architectural relics predating the soviet era were demolished as useless waste. Therefore, paradoxically, the more the Belarusian culture developed, the less natively national it became (Famin 1993, 201), in the sense that it incorporated soviet values as a part of national culture and lost its non-soviet references.

The most significant evidence for the 'sovietisation' of Belarusian culture was the eventual prevalence of the Russian language in the BSSR. The processes of industrialisation and the significant presence of non-natives in administrative and professional positions (and, consequently, in the urban areas were they dwelled) favoured and sustained the spread of the Russian language as the main means of communication in the country. After the Second World War, Russian became the language of high culture in the BSSR, and most of the schools in urban areas taught in Russian. Thus, in Minsk in 1953, only 9 out of 46 schools in Minsk were Belarusian, as opposed to 14 out of 28 1946; 29 towns in Western part of Belarus did not have Belarusian schools at all (Kastsiuk 1995, 362). In the mid-1980s, only 23.1 per cent of schools and 19.3 per cent of daily childcare centres taught in Belarusian, and most of them were in rural areas (Kastsiuk 1995, 402). In the late 1980s, only 0.2 per cent of secondary school students attended schools with Belarusian as the language of instruction in urban areas (Ioffe 2003a, 1015). Belarusian language and literature were still taught at all secondary schools in the 1980s, but since the mid-1950s, parents had been allowed to withdraw their children from those classes, and to do so was a popular practice because knowledge of Belarusian did not entail any benefits for educational or professional advancement.

By the late 1980s, the majority of the Belarusian people conversed in Russian. The 1989 census registered that only 10 per cent of the population spoke Belarusian in everyday life, although Ioffe (2003, 1017-1018) persuasively questions the figure and estimates it at 3 per cent to 7 per cent. This was because Russian was associated with high culture and success, whereas Belarusian was disparaged as the language of a (non-modernized and unpopular) rural life (Goujon 1999, 667). So limited was the usage of Belarusian that in 1987, 28

representatives of the cultural intelligentsia argued that the language was 'nearly extinct' in two open letters to Mikhail Gorbachev (Goujon 1999, 662).

To summarise, during soviet times, the Belarusian language was taught at schools, but few people actually spoke it; the works of the national intelligentsia were promoted, but only as long as they conformed to the imperatives of soviet rule; native Belarusians acquired positions in state administration, but only those who had been educated within the soviet system, while the original national elite was almost completely annihilated by the end of Stalin's rule. The soviet system, therefore, endowed the Belarusian national culture with soviet values and references, and made its key ethnically distinctive elements, such as the language, both unpopular and socially irrelevant. Such a situation opened the possibilities for two completely different views on Belarusian nationhood in the post-soviet era: as thriving or as nearly extinct. Although the political protagonists of both views could draw convincing evidence to their positions and strategies of national mobilisation, only the strategy that was socially resonant and based on the lived soviet experience, proved politically sustainable.

II. 'Belarus to Europe'...of the past

Belarusian society saw an overhaul of soviet national policies between 1990 and 1994. Following a power-sharing agreement between the soviet and cultural elites in the country, the cultural elite instigated pro-European nationalism at the level of state policy. The Belarusian cultural elite saw democratisation and national development as intrinsically linked, and named the pro-democratic oppositional movement it organized in 1989 *'Adradzenne'*, meaning 'national revival'[82]. Under the notion of *'adradzenne'*, the cultural elite implied the return of the Belarusian nation to its pre-soviet roots, and the reconstruction of the Belarusian national identity around European liberal, rather than soviet collectivist, values. The cultural elite's agenda for national revival thus included two elements: 1) the imitation of the characteristic of European nation-states and claims to Belarus' belonging to Europe; and 2) the rejection of the soviet system and projection of the image of the external national enemy onto Russia. Both of these strategies failed to gain popular approval, because the experiences and values they degraded were the freshest in the popular memory, and the features they praised were the farthest from voters' lived experiences, while the manner of promotion of nation-building policies by the cultural elite contradicted the liberal values they purported to uphold. Eventually, a larger part of Belarusian society rejected national

[82] Full title: The Belarusian Popular Front for *perestroika* and democratisation *'Adrazdzenne'*
[84] 'Belarus', not 'Belorussiia' as the Russian term holds.

mobilisation as proposed by the cultural elite, and European national identity and democratisation together with it.

'The Belarusian developmental path leads to European civilisation, from which our nation has been forcefully removed for the last 200 years', argued the leader of the principal organisation of the cultural elite, the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), Zianon Pazniak (October 29, 1992, [Narodnaia Hazeta]). The policies that the cultural elite advanced under the slogan of 'return to Europe', however, did little to connect Belarus with the processes and developments taking place in Europe in the early 1990s. Instead, the cultural elite were rather keen to overhaul and erase the soviet impact over the Belarusian society; by association, they appeared to take the society at least seven decades back, to pre-modern times, and this strategy that invoked little enthusiasm among the population.

As a first part of its strategy to eliminate the soviet legacies in public life, the cultural elite advocated the change in the fundamental attributes of the state. On August 24, 1991, after the failed coup-d'état in Moscow, the Parliament endowed the Declaration of Sovereignty, adopted on July 27, 1990, with a constitutional status. On September 19, 1991, the Parliament voted to change the national symbols. The red-green flag and state emblem of the BSSR were replaced with the white-red-white flag and *Pahonia* coat of arms of the Great Duchy of Lithuania. The official name of the state was dispensed with the terms 'soviet' and 'socialist', and changed to the 'Republic of Belarus', spelt according to Belarusian grammar.[84] National holidays were also revisited: The October Revolution day was replaced with Independence day as the major public holiday, while Christmas and Easter Days (both Russian Orthodox and Catholic) became holidays, as well as the Day of Remembrance of Ancestors (*Dziady*), the equivalent of All Saints' Day. Geographical names were also dispensed of soviet references: the name of the central avenue of Minsk was changed from Lenin to Skaryna (after the first Belarusian publisher), the Minsk street named after the Russian writer Maxim Gorky found itself renamed after the Belarusian writer Maxim Bahdanovich, and the Minsk square of 'the Eighth of March' became 'Freedom square', to list but a few.

Apart from the change of state symbols, the cultural elite advocated the promotion of the national language as the principal means for eradicating soviet elements from the Belarusian national identity. The Parliament established the primacy of Belarusian as the state language in January 1990. The Law on Languages, and a tailored state programme stipulated replacing

Russian with Belarusian as the language of state administration and the public sphere within 10 years (Zakon Respubliki Belarus N 3094-XI 1990, online). Provisions of the programme included the compulsory study of Belarusian in secondary and higher education establishments, language qualification exams for state employees, and the gradual abolition of the usage of Russian in the media, education and administration. Schools and classes teaching in the Belarusian language were opened throughout the country, and in the 1993/1994 academic year, 80 per cent of first year school students commenced their studies in Belarusian (Kastsiuk 1995, vol.II, 469).

The implementation of the language programme, however, posed problems of both a theoretical and practical kind. Among the theoretical problems was a deficit of Belarusian terminology, as the neglect of the language during the second half of the twentieth century had prevented it from following technological and scientific progress. New Belarusian terms were being hastily invented, in particular in the natural sciences; however, more often than not they sounded awkward and became the subject of ridicule. The unresolved linguistic problems also caused an incorrect usage of Belarusian grammar and vocabulary on a mass scale, leading to the pronunciation of Russian words and sentences with a Belarusian accent, which was taxing both on the tongue of the speaker and the ear of the listener; thus people were obliged to communicate in a language they could not comfortably speak. Also, as knowledge of Belarusian became a career asset, this affected the hierarchies of authority in public administration and education. It was not long, therefore, before the disadvantaged (urban) Russian-speaking specialists looked down upon the (rural) Belarusian speakers as opportunists, availing themselves of the new language policies to reach professional positions for which they might otherwise not qualify. Hence, the language programme of the cultural elite created several unintended consequences: it partly discredited the Belarusian language as insufficiently developed, created some social tensions on the grounds of language expertise, and bred a certain social reluctance towards the usage of Belarusian, as the majority of the population spoke Russian with more ease.

In addition to the language policies, the cultural elite instigated compulsory studies of Belarusian history in all schools and universities. They challenged the soviet historiography, which unequivocally established Belarusians as an East Slavic nation, and the BSSR as the culmination of the Belarusian historical development, and offered their own interpretation of

[86] Ignatouski, Y, 'Karotki Narys Hisotryi Belarusi', Minsk: Belarus, 1992, reprinted from Minsk, DVB, 1926; Dounar-Zapolski, M, 'Historyia Belarusi'. Minsk: Belaruskaia Encyklapedyia, 1994, Lastouski, V, 'Karotkaia Histoyia Belarusi'. Minsk: Universitetskae, 1992.

the Belarusian past, that emphasised Belarusian links with Europe. A new, four volume, set of school text books on Belarusian history was written, and several major academic publications were launched: a six-volume Encyclopaedia of Belarusian history, an eighteen-volume Universal Belarusian encyclopaedia, single-volume encyclopaedias of the Belarusian language, Belarusian philosophers, an illustrated chronology of the history of Belarus, and several others (Zaprudnik 2002, 165). State publishers also reprinted books on the Belarusian history written by historians of the early twentieth century [86]: they saw Poland and Russia as having exerted a negative impact over the national development of Belarus. (The authors of these books, Usevalad Ignatoyski, Mikola Dounar-Zapol'ski, Vaclau Lastouski, were repressed in the 1930s, and their works were banned during the soviet time.)

The Belarusian history contains sufficient evidence to claim that Belarus within the Great Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) was a part of the European cultural and socio-economic space. The GDL Statute of 1588 was one of the first constitutions in Europe (Yukho 1992, 171); a Belarusian, Dr. Frantsysk Skaryna, was the first to print a book among Eastern Slavs in 1517; and the GDL aristocracy observed European cultural traditions and trends (such as the development of the theatre) (Parashkou 2003, 132). The cultural elite did, however, have a major problem with the 'Europeanised' version of Belarusian history. By their own admission, the 'golden age', when Belarus could be claimed a part of Europe, fell on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the age of Reformation and Renaissance (Saverchanka and Sanko 1993, 41). After the GDL, as a part of Poland, was partitioned in the late 1700s, and Belarus became a part of Russia, and later the USSR, any arguments about Belarusian belonging to the European political and cultural tradition were rendered obsolete. It is not surprising then that the cultural elite turned on Russia and the soviet system as the major impediments to the Belarusian national development.

The BPF acknowledged that the soviet system had left a profound impact on Belarusian society, but saw it strictly in negative terms. As the reader may recall, the pro-democratic popular movement that the cultural elite led emerged on the basis of two charges against the soviet system: the mass repressions of the Belarusian population during the Stalin rule (to which the discovery of mass graves in Kurapaty forest near Minsk was claimed as evidence), and the explosion of at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986. The cultural elite kept reiterating those charges (e.g. Pazniak October 29, 1992, [Narodnaia Hazeta]), and also derived from them the imperative to reject links with Russia.

The BPF saw soviet rule as a part and parcel of a more overarching strategy of Russia to subdue Belarus, which had allegedly started in the times of the Russian empire. Consequently, the cultural elite projected the image of Russia as an enemy both to the past and present relations between Belarus and Russia. The BPF arranged annual celebrations on September 8th to commemorate the battle of Vorsha of 1514, during which the army of the Great Duchy of Lithuania under the command of a Belarusian magnate, Kanstantsin Astrozhski, reversed the onslaught of the troops of the Muscovy prince, who outnumbered the army of the GDL three to one. With regard to current affairs, the BPF leader Zianon Pazniak argued in one of his most well-known articles, 'The empire and property', that the Russia's imperial essence would always impel it to conquer Belarus (Pazniak January 24, 1991). On that premise, the BPF leader vehemently opposed the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991 as an attempt to reunite the former soviet republics under the Russian hegemony. The BPF's rejection of the soviet experience and of links with Russia was rather logical given their purpose to promote 'European' identity and values, but it was hardly in harmony with the experiences of Belarusian society.

The content of the BPF programme of national revival, in fact, hardly struck a single chord with Belarusian population. By dismissing the soviet period as a tragic mistake, the BPF implicitly suggested that people should dismiss large parts of their own lives. The BPF requested them to speak the language which had been previously looked down upon as outdated. The cultural elite claimed to lead Belarus to Europe, but did so primarily by invoking the glory of medieval ages, with which little personal connection could be felt, instead of proposing their country's membership in the European Union[87], as pro-democratic elites in Central Eastern Europe had done. The nation-building policies of the cultural elite were thus past-oriented, and in such a way that rejected all lived experiences as utterly negative, and offered little, if any, vision of the future.

The type of national mobilisation that the Belarusian cultural elite employed was certainly pro-European in character; it was ethnically inclusive and it propagated liberal values. 'We all [who live in Belarus] are part of the Belarusian nation, - reiterated the BPF leader Zianon Pazniak- Russians, Jews, Poles, Tatars – everybody' (1992, 61). The appraisal of European liberal rather than collectivist soviet values was also apparent in the BPF's programme documents, that requested democratic institution building and market reforms, and in the cultural elite's relentless criticism of the soviet system. The problem, however, was that the

[87] As we have established in chapter 4.

manner in which the cultural elite promoted their nation-building policies was oddly illiberal so far as the cultural elite proved themselves tremendously elitist.

While advocating respect for the individual, the cultural elite rather disrespected the society they were purporting to champion. They did not concern themselves with the signs of strain their language and identity politics were putting on society, but dismissed them in the belief that the soviet system had deprived people of the ability to make fair judgements. The BPF leader Zianon Pazniak argued that soviet rule left Belarusians 'a sick nation, lacking national consciousness, with an inclination for servitude worse than in Asia, with the majority of people brainwashed and idioticised, hating themselves but doing nothing to improve the situation' (quoted in Karbalevich 2000, 196). Another member of the cultural elite lamented that the soviet system eradicated social appreciation of things Belarusian:

> All of us are ill. Myself included. But I am aware of this and I take a cure. The illness is Belarusophobia, a particular kind of neurosis. The illness has developed from forced Russificatory activities, and is characterised by the fear to adhere to things Belarusian (i degree), which sometimes develops into a hatred of Belarusianness (ii degree); the most dangerous from of this illness are various types of aggressive, militant, Russian chauvinism (Lozka May 13, 1994, [Narodnaia Hazeta]).

The cultural elite assumed that people would support their policies as soon as they have been 'purified' of the soviet legacy. The cultural elite's strategy of national mobilisation thus had a missionary character, trying to change people rather than seeking to gain their support as they were. In trying to convert the Belarusian population to appreciate something they could feel little attachment to, the cultural elite inadvertently discredited the liberal ideals of individualism they preached. Eventually, the policies of the cultural elite during 1990 to 1994 had a reverse effect to that intended: the manner in which the cultural elite promoted the European and democratic ways of life convinced the Belarusian voters that those ways were not quite adequate to them.

In the 1994 presidential elections, the BPF leader Zianon Pazniak received 12.9 per cent of the vote (Narodnaia Hazeta, June 25,1994), and in the 1995 parliamentary election, the BPF did not win a single seat, which testified to people's refusal to embrace the cultural elite's policies. Yet, the voters' rejection of the cultural elite and their national policies in the mid-1990s does not mean that nationalism in Belarus had failed, contrary to a predominant interpretation in academic and policy circles. Aliaksandr Lukashenka has proved that

Belarusian society was in fact pliable to national mobilisation, to the extent that he made nationalism the foundation of his authoritarian rule.

III. Egalitarian national ideology for an authoritarian regime

National mobilisation in Belarus received a new direction under President Lukashenka. It moved away from Europe, briefly went back to Russia, but ultimately, dispensed with any external orientation altogether. During his first term in office, President Lukashenka rejuvenated the ideological references typical of the soviet times. After his re-election in 2001, the Belarusian President increasingly endowed these references with an appreciation of the value of Belarusian sovereignty and actively constructed the Belarusian national identity in collectivist and inclusive, terms. Thus he created a recombinant national identity; it was rooted in the ethnically egalitarian and anti-liberal principles of soviet collectivism, but held as its highest value not the communist utopia, but the realised potential of Belarusian statehood. This section reviews the development of egalitarian nationalism with a recombinant national identity in three parts: from the upholding of soviet identity, to the promotion of Belarusian sovereignty and, finally, the advancement of the Belarusian state ideology.

3.1. 'Back to the USSR'

During the presidential election campaign of 1994, Aliaksandr Lukashenka had distanced himself from both the soviet elite, by criticising their economic policies, and from the cultural elite, by dismissing their nation-building effort. Presidential candidate Lukashenka conversed in Russian, with a distinct Belarusian inflection, and promised at election meetings that he would not force anybody to speak Belarusian (Aliachkevich, personal communication, November 27, 2004). Soon after his election, President Lukashenka set to reverse the nation-building achievements of his predecessors, who became his rivals[88]. The apparent purpose of President Lukashenka's national strategy during his first term in office was to rejuvenate soviet values and ways of life, because they suited authoritarian rule, and to eradicate the first signs of the nation-building of the early 1990s.

The official change of nation-building policy was signalled in May 1995. As explained in chapter 1, the Belarusian President clashed with the Parliament fairly soon after his election

[88] Unlike the soviet elite, whom president Lukashenka co-opted into his regime, as we explained in chapter 2, the cultural elite formed the opposition to the Belarusian president.

in 1994. To enable the claim that the Belarusian population was on his side, the President proposed a national referendum on the issues of nation-building: he offered to reinstate the soviet state symbols and restore Russian as the official language of public life. The fact that President Lukashenka chose national issues for the referendum proved that it was indeed a major point of social contention, and that he was confident that the public would reject the pro-European nation-building policies of the cultural elite, with which the Parliament was associated. The referendum took place on May 14, 1995. With a turnout of 64.8 per cent, 83.3 per cent of those who voted supported granting the Russian language parity with Belarusian in the public life, and 75.1 per cent backed the return of the BSSR state symbols in a slightly modified form (Marples 1999, 75; Mihalisko 1997, 262). The referendum of May 1995 directly linked national ideology with the course of political development of Belarus, as the demonstration of public support to the President would be used to justify his later assaults on the democratic institutional and procedural achievements of the 1990-1994 period. The white-red-white flag, which had been the county's symbol since 1991, was taken down from the mast over the President's official residence and replaced with the red-green flag of the BSSR, without the hammer and sickle (Marples 1999, 75). This event marked the rejuvenation of a sovietised national identity and thus a U-turn in Belarusian nation-building policies.

The return to soviet identity was swift and sweeping. The BSSR symbols were once again pushed audaciously into everyday life. A presidential decree required the display of the resurrected soviet flag and emblem in all state organisations. Passports with the *Pahonia* coat of arms, adopted in 1991, were declared void and replaced after December 1996 with passports with the 'new' soviet insignia. Car owners were obliged to glue the new state emblem on top of the *Pahonia* on vehicle number plates. In 1996, Independence Day was transferred from the date of declaring sovereignty (27th July) to the date of the soviet liberation of Minsk from Nazi occupants (3rd July). *Dziady* (the day of the commemoration of ancestors) lost its status as a public holiday, while the day of the October (Bolshevik) revolution was returned to the list of national holidays.

A 'poor language, in which one cannot express great thoughts'[89] – was the President's verdict on the Belarusian language, and it marked a sea change in language policies. Following the 1995 referendum, the Law on Languages was amended to permit usage of *either*, but not *both*, Russian and Belarusian in state and legal documents (Zakon Respubliki

[89] This well-known phrase is quoted, among others, by Eke and Kuzio (2000, 525).

Belarus N 3094-XI 1998) During 1995-1998, the proportion of books printed in Belarusian decreased from 20.5 per cent to 13.2 per cent, while the share of Belarusian-language newspapers diminished from 42 per cent to 34 per cent (Ministerstvo statistiki 1999a, 104). The number of schools with Russian language of instruction has duly grown from 594 to 1076 over the same period (Ministerstvo statistiki 1999b, 157).

A new (or, rather, old) interpretation of history made its way into schools and universities. History textbooks published during 1992 to 1994 were declared "politicised" and taken out of circulation. The school history textbook that replaced them in 1996[90] did not differ much from its soviet predecessor. It organized history into feudal, capitalist and socialist phases, which was in distinction to the version of 1992-1994 that had divided Belarusian history on the basis of the states that Belarus had been progressively part of (e.g. the Great Duchy of Lithuania, Rzech Pospolita). A history guide for university applicants, approved by the Ministry of Education, established the origins of the Belarusians as a part of the triunite Slav family (Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians), deplored the Uniate Church[91] as a 'means of Catholisation' and regarded the partition of Poland as conducive to the enrichment of cultures (Novik and Martsul 1998, 258). Another history guide argued: 'the white-red-white flag and *Pahonia* coat of arms cannot be defined as historic national symbols, for which purpose the soviet flag and emblem are more suitable' (Smiatannikau 1998, 112).

With the reinstatement of the BSSR state symbols, the return of the prevalence of Russia and re-introduction of soviet historiography, President Lukashenka rejuvenated national identity elements socially familiar since the soviet times. They worked well to sustain the needs and policies of his regime during the second half of the 1990s. The soviet identity substantiated President Lukashenka's economic policies, with their emphasis on the collective, rather than individual ownership of economic assets, as we argued in chapter 3. The soviet-type message of Slavic unity became the driving force for the President's policy on integration with the Russian Federation, as we demonstrated in the chapter 4. However, as the practice of integration with the Russian Federation started to go astray from President Lukashenka's plans, and to threaten his domestic authority in the early 2000s, mere soviet references no longer sufficed to substantiate his rule. In these circumstances, the Belarusian President

[90] Novik, Y. and V. Tsiaplova (1996). Historia Belarusi. Minsk, Narodnaya asveta.
[91] The Uniate Church was established in 1596; it was under authority of the Roman Pope, but utilized practices of the Russian Orthodox church. Until its abolition by the Russian government in 1839, the Uniate church was the dominant confession on the Belarusian territories.

needed to introduce additional values to Belarusian society, and most prominently among them, a renewed appreciation of Belarusian sovereignty.

3.2. Belarus 'über alles'

The change of the Russian presidency from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin in 2000 affected the integration process between Belarus and Russia in a way that limited Russian economic support for the regime of President Lukashenka, and attached a political price tag to it. In summer 2002, Russian President Putin declared that the disparity of size between the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus ruled out any possibility of an equal union between them, and hence Belarus had either to join the Federation as its constituent member or not to expect any preferential economic treatment from Russia (Sokolov August 29, 2002, [Izvestia]). For the Belarusian President, this offer meant a change of status from the head of an independent state to a regional *gubernator* in Russia, which obviously significantly curtailed his authority. Belarusian sovereignty, therefore, became an essential asset for President Lukashenka, and he needed to re-enlist the Belarusian population behind it. Thus the Belarusian President effectively re-introduced some of the messages that the Belarusian cultural elite had employed in the early 1990s. Neither the cultural elite, nor the President, however, acknowledged this newly found unity of purpose; the cultural elite, together with the rest of the opposition, kept condemning President Lukashenka for his poor democratic record, while the President named the opposition the major enemy within the nation.

Since the early 2000s, the President gradually changed the emphasis of his rhetoric from Slavic unity to Belarusian sovereignty. This shift was evident in several spheres of social life. In the summer of 2002, a long-standing gap in the array of state symbols, caused by the absence of a national anthem, was finally covered with a revised version of the BSSR anthem. New words were set to the music familiar from soviet times. The anthem's refrain says: 'Our beloved Motherland, may you always thrive, Belarus'. In December 2002, three thousand people were gathered in the Freedom square in Minsk to record the anthem. That 'popular' version was subsequently shown every day at the start and end of each Belarusian state TV transmission. The record switched between panoramic views to groups of 5-6, representing Belarusian families of three generations: the elderly, the middle-aged, and the youth, and projected a strong message of a happy nation.

Since 2000, the state flag and coat of arms have also started to make their way into the more mundane aspects of daily life. They have appeared at the beginning of the evening news on

Belarusian TV and on the front pages of state newspapers. The placement of the Belarusian flag, emblem and map at the front cover of the school diaries, which all pupils are obliged to carry, has sent the sovereignty message widely into the younger generation.

Other examples of a 'slow institutionalisation of nationhood' (Zaprudnik 2002, 162) were furnished by the changed names of key state and cultural institutions. The Academy of Sciences, Central Historical Archive, the largest airport Minsk-II – all acquired the status and name of 'National'. The name of the Parliament was amended from the 'Supreme Council' to the 'National Assembly'.

This emphasis on sovereignty necessitated the publication of yet another (third) set of school history textbooks in 2002. Their message was astoundingly different from the historiography advanced during the first term of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's presidency with respect to relations with Russia and Belarusian sovereignty. The textbook for 15-year old pupils established the roots of Belarusian statehood in the Belarusian principalities of the ninth century, the largest of which, the Polotsk principality, was characterised as 'the main rival of the Kievan state' (soviet historiography held that all Slavic states emerged from the Kievan Rus). The book held that the Belarusian nation emerged as early as between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The treatment of the relationship with Russia was a far cry from the 'Slav unity' rhetoric that history textbooks advocated in the late 1990s:

'The Moscow principality was the main threat to the Great Duchy [of Lithuania] During the wars of the early sixteenth century, initiated by Moscow, the Duchy lost the larger part of its eastern territories' (Historyia Belarusi 10 2002, 7).

The partitions of Poland were said to have 'deprived Rzech Pospolita of the historical perspective of civilised development', while the Russian imperial rule in Belarus was presented as a blow to national development:

'The Belarusian cities were deprived of their old coats of arms, the cities' Magdeburg right to self-governance, which had existed on the Belarusian lands for four centuries, was abolished, compulsory recruit service of 25 years was introduced, and the Orthodox church received the state status, while the Catholic church's lost its erstwhile privileges. After the subduing of the national liberation uprising of 1830, the Russian emperor prohibited usage of the terms 'Belarus' and 'Lithuania', and the conduct of church services in Belarusian' (Historyia Belarusi 10 2002, 7).

A textbook for final school year pupils (Historyia Belarusi 11 2002, 11) presented 'the revival of the national culture and return to the historic roots' as the 'major task for the post-communist development of Belarus'. Of all the previous interpretations of the Belarusian history, the 2002 version was the closest to the version proposed in the 1992, during the period of pro-European nation-building. Yet, the 2002 version of Belarusian history did not link an appreciation of Belarusian statehood with the imperative of democratic development, as the 1992 version did. In fact, the 2002 textbook condemned the early democratisation period in Belarus as the 'time of disarray', which the Belarusian people had supposedly chosen to end by electing President Lukashenka (Historyia Belarusi 11 2002, 11).

The 'rediscovery' of Belarusian history has gone beyond the school walls. In August 2002, a Council of Heraldic Affairs was established at the presidential administration with the purpose of codifying the creation of heraldic symbols and medals, and to register them. By autumn of the same year, 97 towns had registered their coats of arms, testifying that the acquisition of identity has spilled over the bounds of governmental policy to become a fashion. In summer 2003, a replica of a nineteenth century city tower was built in Minsk with public money.

Yet the most palpable evidence of the President's reinforcement of Belarusian sovereignty was his own frequent reference to the country's independence, as a thematic analysis of some key presidential speeches and state TV broadcasts demonstrates. In his parliamentary address in 2002 (Lukashenka April 23, 2002, online) President Lukashenka used the word 'state' 14 times, 'motherland' 3 times, and referred to 'national traditions' in 5 cases. In the Address to the Nation on Independence Day in 2002 (Lukashenka July 3, 2002, online), the President declared that 'the notions of Independence, Sovereignty, Freedom are and will always remain sacred to us' (capitalisation in the official transcript). He pointed to the roots of Belarusian statehood in the medieval countries (Polotsk Principality and the Great Duchy of Lithuania), but declared BSSR as the 'first real Belarusian national state', apparently so as to give more historical depth to the soviet heritage. His New Year (2003) speech contained 11 references to the Belarusian people and state, reiterated an adherence to the sovereignty, and called on Belarusians to be 'worthy children of out native beloved Belarus, for it is our most precious asset' (Lukashenka January 1, 2003, n.p.) The media reinforced the message of sovereignty and statehood. The half-an-hour evening news broadcast of the Belarusian TV on a typical day contained up to 32 references to statehood – more than one per minute (ATN February 24, 2003, 21.00-21.30). In 2004, President Lukashenka proclaimed

sovereignty and independence as 'the sacred and eternal value, and the chief principle of the Belarusian foreign policy' (Lukashenka July 22, 2004, online).

This powerful projection of a positive image of Belarusian statehood onto a society, which had more recently been used to see itself in the context of a soviet, or Slavic, family of nations, was a critical step in the creation of the feeling of national uniqueness among the Belarusian population. Although claims to popular legitimacy of policies are problematic for authoritarian regimes, there are many indirect sights that President Lukashenka has succeeded in making society value Belarusian sovereignty. In 2002 alone, at least six new volumes[92] on Belarusian history were published, some of them by commercial publishers, which testified to a growing popular interest in national history. A nation-wide poll in December 2002 demonstrated that whereas 53 percent of the respondents still favoured some form of a union with Russia, almost 75 percent of them said they would not support any form of a Russia-Belarus union that would involve the loss of Belarusian sovereignty and independence (RFE/RL January 21, 2003, online). Another study in Minsk yielded an almost identical result: 54 per cent of those questioned in the late 2002, were in favour of integration, while nearly three-quarters opposed Belarus altogether losing its independence (IWPR BRS 2003, online).

The entrenchment of the appreciation of Belarusian sovereignty paid President Lukashenka well in winter 2004. In February 2004, the principal gas supplier to Belarus, the Russian company Gazprom, cut off gas deliveries to Belarus. Such an action had been seen among political and academic experts as one of the most certain ways to topple Lukashenka's regime; it was suggested that the cold and angry people would go out in the streets and bring Lukashenka's rule down in a matter of days (Rouda, personal communication, November 22, 2002). The real outcome of the gas cut-off, however, was the complete opposite: President Lukashenka strengthened his authority rather than lost it. He accused Russia of 'economic terrorism' for 'having condemned people to freezing at the temperatures of 20C below zero' and, in one of his most ingenious turns he argued that 'the relations between Belarus and Russia had been 'poisoned by gas', and promised that 'If Putin wants us to pay the money, we will collect it from Chernobyl victims and veterans who rotted in [Second World war] trenches... we will collect [the required] 200 million of dollars, but we will not stand

[92] Among them are: *'Belarus na rubezhe tysiacheletii'*, Minsk: Encyclopaedia; *'Historyia Belarusi u tablitsakh I skhemakh'*, Minsk: Unipress; *'Belarus u XX stagoddzi'*, Minsk:Vodolei; *'Karotkaia hisotryia Belarusi'*, Minsk: Unipress; *'Flag I Gerb Belorusskogo gosudarstva'*, Minsk: Iunatstva, *'Materialy po Belorusskoi Istorii'* Minsk: Aversev.

manipulation and blackmail [by foreigners] any further' (all MFA February 20, 2004, online). Popular support for integration with Russia dropped from 21.2 per cent to 15.5 per cent over March 2003 to June 2004, according to a non-governmental pollster in Belarus (NISEPI 2004, 57); or from 25 per cent to 13 per cent over the 'gas war' time, according to Moscow Carnegie Centre (Frumkin 2004, 15). President Lukashenka's policy for upholding Belarusian sovereignty thus proved a shrewd and extraordinary timely move for the purposes of sustaining his regime.

In the course of several years, President Lukashenka had managed to instil the appreciation of national sovereignty into the population, which had previously been described as unable to imagine itself beyond the context of the USSR (for an example of such argument, see Mihalisko 1997, 259). This result is even more impressive given that the starting point of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's national ideology was the pursuit of the unification of Slavic peoples. The radical turns that followed demonstrate the flexibility of national ideologies as tools for popular mobilisation in the hands of political elites. Having ensured popular support for Belarusian sovereignty by 2003, President Lukashenka started adorning it with the proscription of Belarusian national identity features, in ways that have further suited his authoritarian regime; needless to say, they all came from the collectivist repertoire.

3.3. Recombinant national identity: collectivist values as national features

In March 2003, the Belarusian President gathered state administrators to a seminar 'on the improvement of ideological work', and argued for the necessity of ideology for the society, which, in the President's words, was 'to a state what the immune system is to a living body' (Lukashenka March 27, 2003, part 1). In June 2003, presidential decree No 254 established 'informational-propagandist' groups at the state administrative organs and instructed them to conduct the 'day of ideology' on every third Thursday of a month on the agenda of choice by the presidential administration (Ukaz Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 254 June 16, 2003). In February, 2004, President Lukashenka signed a decree 'On enhancing the cadres for ideological work', which obliged the managers and heads of all state enterprises and organisations with the number of employees above 300 people to appoint deputy heads for ideology (Maksymiuk March 2, 2004, [RFE/RL]). A compulsory course on ideology was introduced in universities and schools, and in 2004, the Academy of Management of the Presidential Administration published the textbook for the course[93].

[93] Kniazev, S., Ed. (2004). Osnovy Ideologii Belorusskogo gosudarstva. Minsk, Academy of management of the administration of the president of Republic of Belarus.

When the Belarusian President announced the development of national ideology, many analysts were sceptical of its feasibility and usefulness for President Lukashenka's regime. Valery Karbalevich (August 21, 2003, [Charter97]) predicted that:

'Lukashenka is launching the most useless and worthless project in his political biography. The system of ideological work has failed in the closed soviet society, let alone in a transition society, placed at the crossroads of informational streams ...it would breed formalism and cynicism on the scale unprecedented in the soviet times'.

We argue that, on the contrary, national ideology has been a logical continuation of the President Lukashenka's nationhood policies and has been essential for sustaining his regime. The egalitarian national ideology not only further endorsed the sovereignty of Belarus, but also in nation-building terms it provided a set of attitudes and behavioural patterns favourable to authoritarian rule.

The ideology officially propagated by the state since 2003 is ethnically inclusive; it unites people on the basis of a shared appreciation of the Belarusian statehood, rather than on the basis of ethnic belonging to the Belarusian nation per se, as its very name, *'Belorusskaia gosudarstvennaia ideologia'* (ideology of the Belarusian state) (Lukashenka March 27, 2003, online) makes clear. The President himself stressed the inclusive character of the ideology: 'the principal distinction of our national ideology is that it is aimed at the consolidation of our society, at the unification of all movements and blocks towards the noble goal of building a strong and prosperous country' (Lukashenka April 14, 2004, part 6). 'The core of the ideology of the Belarusian state is the idea of the Patria', reads the university textbook on ideology (Kniazev 2004, 20), and explains that 'Patria is the common Motherland for patriots, apolitical citizens, and citizens who support the opposition' (Kniazev 2004, 20). The basis for differentiation of the citizen is thus, notably, not their ethnic origin, but rather, the attitude towards the country's political regime.

While being ethnically inclusive, the Belarusian ideology is also collectivist and egalitarian rather than liberal and individualistic. To quote the textbook on ideology again: 'only love of the Motherland can make a person truly happy...just as a person can have only one mother, he can have only one Motherland' (Kniazev 2004, 80); the textbook refers to one of the oldest Slavic scripts, *'Povest vremennykh let'*, to argue that 'it is better to die in the native

land than live happily abroad' (Kniazev 2004, 80). Thus the state ideology teaches that the purpose of individual's life is to serve the nation and the state, rather than advance and develop oneself. The textbook openly places the individual in dependence of the collective, just as the soviet system did: 'The communist principles of collectivism, patriotism, social justice, altruistic work for the good of the society remain pertinent for present day Belarus' (Kniazev 2004, 78).

Apart from defining the Belarusian national identity in collectivist terms, the Belarusian ideology has also promoted a set of attitudes that form a defensive world outlook within the society and mobilize people behind the president. One feature of such an outlook is the praise of social unity, which derides debate as socially harmful. The President named 'intellectual disarray', or the open debate between the soviet and cultural elites as the negative features of the first years of Belarusian independence (Lukashenka July 22, 2004, online). The imperative of social unity thus presents political opponents of the President as a threat to national development. The image of the opposition as a traitor of the nation was evoked in the state-produced feature film *'Anastasia Slutskaia'*. The film is set during a siege of a Belarusian town in the sixteenth century. One of the film's characters opens the city gate to the enemy. The traitor explains his action by his dissatisfaction with the city ruler, because he 'had done away with the council and took all decision-making into his own hands' (Elkhov 2003, [film]). These traitor's worlds are nearly a direct quote from the Belarusian opposition leaders with respect to President Lukashenka; and thus the film makes parallels between the opposition to the ruler and betraying the nation to the enemy. At the 60th anniversary of liberation of Belarus in the Second World War, the President called the democratic opposition 'the ideological heirs of the Nazi collaborators' (Lukashenka July 3, 2004, online).

The ostensible virtues of patriotism and collectivism, promoted as a part of national ideology, dictate a defensive stance towards the external world. To resist the political pressure from the West, and economic pressure from the East, the Belarusian President has revoked the Second World War as an example of the nation's ability to defend itself from external aggression and emphasise its own achievements. The 60th anniversary of the soviet liberation of the BSSR from the Nazis in July 2004 occasioned three days of festivities, including a military and civil parade, which involved:

'some 3,000 troops, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, rocket launchers, tractors, trucks, and household appliances, including Belarusian-made refrigerators and television sets. Participants in the parade included

athletes clad in the uniforms of the Second World War, farmers driving harvesting machines, and a military band. The show also involved more than 40 civilian and military helicopters and aircrafts, including a Boeing 737'(Maksymiuk July 8, 2004, [RFE/RL]).

To reassure people that the state is still able to protect them from external assault, the defence forces hold large-scale manoeuvres annually, and these manoeuvres are heavily publicised (e.g. Raskolnikov October 4, 2004, [Belorusskaia Gazeta]).

The Belarusian President has taken not only a defensive, but also a competitive stance towards the Western world, and claims that his government managed to stage a competition to the Western model of development. The President instigated the building of new premises for the National Library, declared to be a symbol of highly educated Belarus (Lukashenka April 23, 2002, online). A 'park of high technologies', an incubator for the development of new technologies, has been initiated as an alternative to the Silicon valley in the USA (BelaPAN June 11, 2004, online). The Belarusian government even announced the intention to launch its own satellite (BelaPAN November 30, 2004, online). Among other points of claim to 'overtaking' the West are the economy allegedly growing at 9 to 10 per cent annually (BelaPAN April 13, 2004, online) and the Belarusian gold medal in 2004 Olympic women's sprint[94]. 'The time, the fate, the context has endowed Belarus with the great mission of the spiritual leader of the Eastern European civilisation' – claims the Belarusian President (Lukashenka March 27, 2003, part 2). Notably, Belarusians are purported to lead not merely 'Eastern Slavic', but the 'Eastern European' civilisation altogether. Aliaksandr Lukashenka argues that this leadership derives from the Belarusians' ability to disregard foreign advice and explains Belarusians' success in nation-building terms:

'We followed our own path, and as a result we have preserved in our country, in our hearts, souls and brains all the sacred features of the Eastern European civilisation. The Belarusians have preserved all the best, all the most valuable, which our nations have created for centuries. We must be calm, tolerant Belarusians, and pursue our lives according to the principles of our culture, spirituality, traditions of the Eastern European ethnos' (Lukashenka March 27, 2003, part 2)

If Belarusians are self-professed Eastern Europeans leaders, there is no doubt as to who is the leader of Belarusians. The President has continued to employ the image of the 'father of the nation', or *'batska'*, which he took on during the presidential elections campaign in 1994 (as described in chapter 2). At the press-conference on the 10th anniversary of his presidency,

[94] The 2004 Olympic sprint finish of the Belarusian runner, Yulia Nesterenko, was shown daily to the transmission of the national anthem on TV.

Aliaksandr Lukashenka referred to the workers of *Horizont* plant as 'children' (Lukashenka July 20, 2004, online). At the military parade on the 60th anniversary of liberation in Second World War in July 2004, President Lukashenka wore the uniform of generalissimos, arguably projecting the image of the nation's principle defender. In the address to the nation summoning the referendum to allow him to run for a third term, the President reminded that: 'all the past years, I have carried Belarus in my own hands, with care and concern, as a precious crystal ball'[95] (Lukashenka September 9, 2004, online). President Lukashenka's portraits are sold widely across the country. Yet, Aliaksandr Lukashenka eschewed claiming ownership of the national ideology (Lukashenka March 27, 2003, part 2) and has avoided seeking direct personal praise: his name is absent from the geographical map, there are no statues of him, and his 50th anniversary in 2004 attracted very little publicity. Aliaksandr Lukashenka's ultimate purpose is apparently to make himself indispensable to the nation rather than to be simply adored. Aliaksandr Lukashenka has presented himself as the founding father of the Belarusian nation, and anchored his own personality within the national foundation, a matter potentially more long-term and sustainable than a plain personality cult.

Like all previous national mobilisation effort of the President, the Belarusian ideology has been promoted with a great thrust. On the eve of the October 17th 2004 referendum on abolishing the constitutional limitation of two presidential terms, all major road junctions in Minsk displayed billboards depicting either a group of happy looking young people, or a war veteran or an elderly peasant women, with a simple message 'Yes to Belarus' (*'Za Belarus'*) [96], implying the vote 'yes' for the President's referendum proposal. The same message, 'Yes to Belarus', was regularly disseminated on the state TV channels, as well as a picture of a hand ticking 'yes' in a ballot box. The Belarusian TV spared no effort to make people feel good about the way they lived[97]. In October 2004, according to official voting results, 79.42 per cent of the registered voters supported the President's proposal in the third national referendum in Belarus (Tsentralnaia Komissiia po vyboram i provedeniiu respublikanskikh

[95] Following the President's metaphor, posters with a hand holding a crystal ball with the contours of Belarus in it were displayed at ballot stations.

[96] Except for the billboard with two young women pushing prams while skating on rollerblades: they were purportedly going 'into the future' ('u buduchuniu').

[97] For example, the evening news broadcast on October 8th, 2004 reported on: the President opening a museum to the founder of the soviet KGB, Felix Dzerzhinsky; free housing for families with many children; new forms of social assistance given to war veterans; an immigrant from Russia praising his new homeland; students working voluntarily on construction sites; state-of-the-art heart surgery unit in Minsk; new computers for rural schools; and by the way of international news listed the recent acts of terrorism around the globe. Most of the reports hardly qualified as news, they were rather propaganda pieces to praise the Belarusian way of life. (ATN, October 8, 2004; 21.00-21.30)

referendumov October 18, 2004). (The estimations of the Gallup organisation suggested that 48.8 per cent those on the electoral ballot approved the President's position (Gallup Organization October 17, 2004, 1). There were no significant popular protests to challenge the referendum results, which served as another indirect confirmation of the success of the national ideology.

The Belarusian national ideology, gradually created by President Lukashenka through the years of his rule, is thus based on a set of collectivist values, presented as innate to the Belarusian nation, but which is open to all residents of the country to join in. It is ethnically inclusive and egalitarian: 'the national interest of Belarus is wider than the Belarusian ethnic interest...it is associated with all the territory of Belarus' (Kniazev 2004, 21). At the same time, it praises the collective, the nation, the state as the ultimate value, which means that people should relinquish self-advancement, typical values of deplorable 'Western individualism' and conform to the majority instead. Dissent is portrayed as socially harmful, and social unity is promoted instead. The postulate that Belarusian way of life is a pole of attraction for foreign forces and the subject of their subversive activities has served the government as a convenient point of blame for social and economic difficulties, and also justified its disregard for the opinion of foreign countries and organisations. The values and attitudes upheld by national ideology are not new to Belarusian society after 70 years of soviet rule. The achievement of President Lukashenka, however, has been to refocus those collectivist values from the communist ideology onto the post-soviet Belarusian state and present them in national terms. Thus Aliaksandr Lukashenka has created a recombinant national identity, projecting the soviet anti-liberal values onto the sovereign Belarusian nation; this recombinant identity has sustained a specific post-soviet type of national mobilisation, egalitarian nationalism.

National mobilisation is the only sphere in which President Lukashenka can objectively claim popular legitimacy of his policies. The referendum of 1995 deciding on national symbols and state languages was the only internationally recognized free and fair expression of popular opinion in Belarus during his rule, and it decisively supported the President's stance. The nationwide polls by non-governmental agencies we referred to earlier in the chapter also demonstrate the growing popular appreciation of the Belarusian nationhood, as promoted by the president. As we have seen in the previous chapters, President Lukashenka has consistently aligned his economic, international, and cadre policies to the national

identity he constructed, and made sure that it related to people's experiences[98]. Thus, contrary to the statement that 'it is the absence of nationalism that makes Lukashenka regime possible' (Mihalisko 1997, 224), we can plausibly argue that egalitarian national mobilisation has sustained all policies of President Lukashenka and, ultimately, made his authoritarian regime possible.

IV. Liberal versus egalitarian nationalism: no foregone result

Belarusian society had been subject to two nation-building strategies in the post-soviet years: first, from 1990 to 1994, the cultural elite sought to instil a 'European' identity into the Belarusian population by the means of nation-building policies. Belarusian society rejected these policies and their protagonists, and this refutation was consistent with the end of democratisation in the country. From 1995 to 2004, President Lukashenka advanced egalitarian nationalism with a recombinant national identity, which projected the soviet collectivist values onto the Belarusian nation. That egalitarian ideology was crucial for the consolidation of authoritarian regime in Belarus.

Many observers attributed the failure of pro-European nationalism in Belarus to the fact that its society was ill-prepared to embrace European values and developmental model, and democracy altogether. Thus, Marples (2002, 39) explains: 'The [cultural elite's] measures to bring about changes in the political environment were hardly warranted by the level of national consciousness in the country'. Eke and Kuzio (2000, 537) argue that 'both leadership and their electors have shown themselves psychologically incapable of distancing themselves from the soviet past', and Mihalisko (1997, 259) holds that the '[Lukashenka] rule is a logical outcome of the population's entrenched soviet mentality and widespread nostalgia for the relative prosperity and stability of the old system'. The cultural elite within Belarus agreed with those explanations: the Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front, the principal organisation of the cultural elite in the early 1990s, Yuri Khaduka (1999, 13) writes that 'the social legacy of strong Russification of the Belarusian population essentially left no chances for a national democracy in the early 1990s'. As we have seen in

[98] To give a flavour, here is the president arguing for the reinstallation of pioneer organizations in schools: 'The pioneer organisation added spice to the school life... I was proud to wear the pioneer tie: I think, 99 per cent of those present here were proud as well. I remember my first tie. I ironed it myself with those heavy coal irons, can you recall them? I washed my tie, and ironed it often, so that it looked its best'. Lukashenka, A. (March 27, 2003). Doklad na seminare rykovodiashchikh rabotnikov respublikanskikh i mestnykh sogudarstvennukh organov po voprosam soveshenstvovaniia ideologicheskoj raboty: www.president.gov.by.print/rus/president/speech/2003/seminar/0da4f9c332ea9.1.

chapter 1 and chapter 3, however, Belarusian society at the end of 1980s was open to different interpretations of the soviet experience and a considerable proportion of people seemed ready to embrace the Western model of development, with more than half of the population supporting market economy reform and hundreds of thousands of people turning up at rallies to demand the end of the soviet system. We disagree that the failure of national mobilisation in support of the European model and democracy was a predetermined result. Rather, it was a consequence of the manner in which pro-European nationalism was promoted

The pro-European and egalitarian national ideologies in Belarus differed not only in their content, but also in the manner of implementation. Pro-European nationalism was pursued in Belarus in a highly inconsistent way. The elite pact prevented a comprehensive and consistent pursuit of a 'European' identity and developmental mode, because cultural elite's identity-building policies were not supported by either the creation of a market economy nor the explicit aspiration for membership in the EU. Furthermore, the adherents of this type of nationalism promoted it not so much by relating the society to present-day European developments and values, as by ardently denying the soviet experience and offering five centuries-old references as sources of pride instead. In their zeal to claim Belarus as part of the European cultural space, the cultural elite sometimes refuted the very value of the individual choice they preached. The eventual social rejection of the European developmental model together with its protagonists appears in this light as a rather logical and rational decision by voters to rid themselves of their apparently incapable leaders, rather than being a testimony to people's inherent inability to distance themselves from the soviet past.

In contrast to pro-European mobilisation in Belarus, egalitarian nationalism fully reflected popular experiences and was consistent with its protagonist's policies in all spheres of political and social life throughout all stages of its development, from the reinforcement of the soviet references, to propaganda of Belarusian sovereignty, and the construction of a recombinant identity. The key building blocks of the recombinant national identity, soviet references, were of a recent historical age and thus more socially familiar than those of the 'European' identity. (Although the proponents of pro-European nationalism extensively used the references to the soviet era, they presented them exclusively in negative terms, while the advocate of egalitarian nationalism portrayed the soviet period in an overwhelmingly positive light, an interpretation more in accord with the lived experience of a sizeable

proportion of the Belarusian population.) Furthermore, the protagonist of egalitarian nationalism, the Belarusian President, actively sought popular consent and cooperation, and took effort to represent himself credibly in the eyes of the nation. The advocates of pro-European nationalism, on the contrary, dismissed popular concerns with their agenda as having been bred by ignorance and brainwashing during the soviet rule. The fact that liberal nationalism failed and the egalitarian nationalism succeeded in Belarus is thus better explained by the manner of their implementation, in terms of the protagonists' ability to formulate policies in all spheres of development, and the capacity to make such policies socially resonant and consistent.

Charles King (2000, 160) has observed that 'residual communist mentalities are the favourite obstacle for reform named by postcommunist politicians'. Taking his argument further, we disagree that the failure of national mobilisation towards the European developmental model was a foregone conclusion in Belarus. Rather than seeing social legacies as pre-determining the transitions' outcome, we suggest that they represent a repertoire of opportunities for popular mobilisation. The eventual policy choice, social changes, and unveiling of postcommunist transition paths, have depended on how skilfully political actors used this repertoire.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that Belarusian society has been subjected to two different versions of national mobilisation in the post-soviet years, and that the results of social appropriation of these versions was consistent with the political fortunes of their protagonists, as well as the democratic and authoritarian directions of the Belarusian post-soviet development. Among the two elite groups who administered the country in the democratisation stage in the early 1990s, the soviet elite avoided the issues of national mobilisation and ideology, seeking popular support through economic policies (with hindsight, an erroneous choice). The cultural elite chose to deny any soviet success and to uphold a 'European' identity for Belarusian society. In so doing, they refuted the lived popular experiences, and treated the society as a defiant object to be improved, rather than the audience whose support was to be won. Due to the elite pact, the cultural elite was not able to complement their nation-building effort with relevant economic and international policies, while the soviet elite formulated their decisions in economic and international spheres without regard for the national ideological aspect. As a result, both elite groups appeared as incapable leaders and suffered an electoral defeat. Their departure from the decision-making structures marked the end of

the democratisation processes in Belarus. President Lukashenka refocused the soviet collectivist values onto the post-soviet Belarusian statehood and constructed Belarusian national identity in a way that suited authoritarian rule. He never spared effort or opportunity to engage with the population, and the ideas familiar to it. The entrenchment of President Lukashenka's egalitarian nationalism strongly supported the consolidation of his authoritarian rule.

On the theoretical level, the Belarusian evidence demonstrates the existence of a new kind of post-soviet nationalism, egalitarian nationalism, which is both ethnically open and inclusive, and at the same time anti-liberal. It also suggests two factors for the success of a national mobilisation strategy: social resonance and consistency with the developmental model professed. We elaborate on those factors in the concluding theoretical chapter.

Before we come to the concluding theoretical proposition of the thesis, however, we need to consider the possibilities of regime change in Belarus, and argue that they also have to stem from a national foundation.

6. No alternative (yet)

Now that we have explained how democratisation stalled in Belarus and an authoritarian regime emerged, the question to address is that of why no political actor has been able to mount a credible challenge to the Belarusian authoritarian leader? This is a pertinent issue, given that the national referendum on October 17, 2004 lifted the constitutional limitation of two terms of presidential service, and nothing legally prevents Aliaksandr Lukashenka from being President for life. He appears to have the will to stay in power in Belarus, but how long can he hold it? What can break his regime, and when? The answer to these questions, we believe, again rests with nationalism, and in particular, with the re-emergence of a liberal and pro-European national ideology.

As we have suggested in chapter 1, the conceptualisation of the nation in liberal or egalitarian terms has been crucial for determining the path of transformations in the postcommunist space, with liberal nationalism underpinning democracy, and egalitarian nationalism leading to authoritarianism.

In the previous empirical chapters we argued that national, and increasingly nationalist, ideology has been the cornerstone of President Lukashenka's power, which enabled him to build the administrative, economic and international pillars of his authoritarian regime. A merely liberal programme void of a national foundation would not constitute any viable alternative to Aliaksandr Lukashenka's policies. Any alternative regime that could succeed in building democracy in Belarus needs to be conceptualised in national terms, and be based in pro-European national ideology, which would advance liberal and democratic values as part of an alternative Belarusian national identity.

We have established that egalitarian nationalism has been built on the authoritarian collectivist values that had already been imbued in the society in the soviet times. Our task in this final empirical chapter is, therefore, to investigate the degree of the development of liberal values in the post-soviet period and the social potential for liberal national mobilisation in the authoritarian atmosphere of Belarus, find its possible protagonists and assess their chances of success.

We started our empirical investigation with an analysis of the Belarusian political actors, and shall conclude with it. The first part of the chapter argues that the power-holders and socially

significant organisations are highly unlikely to take any stance that would challenge President Lukashenka's rule. The second part contends that the political opposition to President Lukashenka, although formally committed to liberal national development, has not been able to challenge the authoritarian regime in the country because of their inability to advance a viable alternative to President Lukashenka's national ideology. The third part discusses the existence of the social potential for the liberal conceptualisation of the Belarusian nation and points to its possible protagonists among the circles of small businessmen and civil society activists. It also highlights the impediments to the growth of liberal nationalism: the President's vigilance against it and the international isolation of Belarus. The conclusion assesses the impact of President Lukashenka's rule on the development of Belarus, and contemplates the perspectives regime change. This leads us to the thesis conclusion, where we make and test the final argument of the thesis about the role of nationalism in comparative postcommunist transitions.

I. The complacent stakeholders of the authoritarian regime

The individuals, social institutions and organisations with most authority in Belarus have become stakeholders in President Lukashenka's authoritarian rule and therefore have little interest in subverting it. These stakeholders are described in so far as it is sufficient to demonstrate their loyalty to the present authoritarian regime, reflecting the purpose of the chapter. We shall see in this section how the President co-opted the two largest social organisations in the country, the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions and the Belarusian National Union of Youth, and also won over the social institution which people seemed to trust most[99]: the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, the members of the administrative corpus in the country have not had the interest, or opportunity to challenge the President, suggesting that there are few clear institutional sources for change.

1.1. Administrative elite

The administrative bureaucracy has often been identified as the most viable potential opponent of President Lukashenka (e.g. Rouda, personal communication, November 22, 2002). The US ambassador to Belarus during the 2001 presidential election, Michael Kozak (personal communication, January 13, 2004) testified that the state bureaucracy yielded the lowest re-election ratings for Aliaksandr Lukashenka on the eve of 2001 presidential

[99] A nation-wide poll by a non-governmental organization in March 2004 registered that the Belarusian Orthodox church had the highest social trust, with 64,7 per cent of the polled NISEPI (2004b). Novosti NISEPI 2 (32): Minsk. 27

election. One indeed can see reasons for bureaucratic dissatisfaction with the President: he has deprived state administrators of effective power and made their professional lives highly insecure (as argued in chapter 2). Yet, the '*nomenclature* revolution', or the bureaucracy's turning against the President, 'has not only ripened in Belarus', but, in a pity phrase of Russian analyst Boris Kagarlitsky, 'has also already gone rotten' (quoted in Martinovich May 31, 2004, [Belorusskaia Gazeta]).

The Belarusian administrative elite has comprised three groups, as we have listed in chapter 2: regional officials promoted by Aliaksandr Lukashenka to top levels of state administration, security services officers, and representatives of the former soviet elite. None of these three groups can mount a challenge to President Lukashenka. His protégés from the regions owe their positions to the President and have no interest in seeing him leave. Top security service officials are constantly reshuffled by the President, (see chapter 2), preventing them from creating a sustainable base to challenge the President. The soviet technocrats, once a powerful elite group who dominated administration of the country during the soviet era and until 1994, have also been weakened day by day by the President's cadre policies, which reduced their significance. As seen in chapter 2, President Lukashenka had first co-opted some soviet technocrats to win their loyalty, but sidelined them into positions of little authority several years later when he had strengthened his personal grip on power. Even if the soviet elite contemplated turning away from President Lukashenka, the President was alert to prevent the rise of a challenger from their ranks. In November 2003, the President fired the chancellor of the Belarusian State University, Aliaksandr Kazulin (Tomashevskaia November 17, 2003, [BelaPAN]), and in December 2004, the former soviet elite member and ex-Minister of Foreign Economic Affairs, Mikhail Marynich, was jailed (Charter97 December 30, 2004, online); both men having been contemplated as Aliaksandr Lukashenka's credible rivals in a competition for the presidential position (for example Pulsha April 27, 2004, [BelaPAN]). Furthermore, if the soviet elite proved incapable of formulating a national ideology while they were in power during the soviet time and in the early 1990s, it is hard to expect them to do so under Lukashenka rule. Therefore, while we agree in principle with Silitski's (June 6, 2004, [TOL]) conclusion that 'none of [the elite groups] has the assets and independent power base to mount a challenge to Lukashenka', we would note that they have so far lacked the imagination to do so by the means of advancing an alternative national ideology.

While the administrative elite have been systematically prevented from challenging President Lukashenka, the largest social organisations and institutions have had neither the need for will to do so.

1.2. The Belarusian Orthodox Church

The Belarusian Orthodox Church (an Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church), is the largest religious organization in Belarus, with 1172 dioceses and 978 acting churches; the second largest religious group, the Belarusian Roman Catholic Church, is almost a third of the size, with 417 dioceses and 342 acting churches (MFA 2004, online). The Russian Orthodox Church is known for its deeply conservative nature, and it has often been described as imbuing a docile and compliant world outlook, aimed at the preservation of the existing social order. Such an ideological stance made the Belarusian Orthodox Church a natural ally of President Lukashenka's rule, and he actively sought its support.

President Lukashenka has favoured the Belarusian Orthodox Church. 'The state will be always committed to supporting the Belarusian Orthodox church', assured the President to the Church synod in 2003 (quoted in BelaPAN October 23, 2003, online). In June 2003, the Belarusian state and the Belarusian Orthodox church signed an agreement on cooperation, in which the state endowed the church 'a full freedom of internal organisation, conduct of religious services and recognized the jurisdiction of the canon law within the territories of the church' (Soglashenie o sotrudnichestve June 12, 2003, online) This agreement effectively exempted the Church from the tight state control to which all other religious organisations were subjected according to the Law on Religion in 2002, as mentioned in chapter 1. The Roman Catholic Church, the second largest religious organisation in Belarus, was not bestowed any similar favour from the state. Following the June 2003 agreement, 10 (out of 25) ministries of Belarus launched programmes of cooperation with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (Soglasheniia n.d., online), which, among other developments, gave the Church the right to promote its teaching among the Belarusian armed forces and the police. In 2003, the presidential homepage contained the message that 'the Church[100] plays an omnipotent role in our state and is a uniting element of our society' (Lukashenka n.d., online). President Lukashenka thus created very favourable monopoly conditions for the activities of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, and the Church reciprocated with support. The head of the Belarusian Exarchate, Patriarch Filaret, has endorsed the President; to give one

[100] The word *'tserkov'* ('church') in the Belarusian context refers to the Orthodox Church, whereas the Catholic Church is known as *'kastsel'* ('cathedral').

example, on the eve of the October 2004 referendum, he publicly 'supposed' that people would say 'yes' to President's proposals (BelaPAN October 11, 2004, online). There is clearly little incentive for the Belarusian Orthodox Church to relinquish the prominent role it enjoys under President Lukashenka's rule and to withdraw their support from him, particularly to any more liberal, and potentially more secularizing political force.

1.2. The trade unions

The labour movement is a significant social force in Belarus. There are 38 nation-wide trade unions and 16 company-based trade unions registered in the country (Yekadumava 2001, 186). The Federation of Belarusian Trade Unions (FPB) is the largest umbrella organisation, uniting 32 nation-wide professional trade unions. In 2002, the FPB had 4,009,648 members (FPB 2002, online), thus engaging the absolute majority of the working population in the country, which numbered that year 4,500 300 people (Ministerstvo statistiki 2002, online). Partly, such a wide membership is a legacy of the soviet practice to automatically enroll all employees of state organisations in trade unions. However, the fact those trade unions have survived during the post-soviet years, in stark contrast to those in Central Europe, where membership has been in steep decline, testified to their organisational effectiveness and social relevance.

Trade unions proved themselves to be a relatively formidable social opponent to the authorities in post-soviet period. In April 1991, workers' strikes paralyzed 90 per cent of factories in the capital, involved some 200,000 people and these continued for several days until the government went back on their policies of price liberalisation (Narodnaia Hazeta April 11, 1991). In August 1995, the trade unions of Minsk public transport services staged a 3-day strike against wage arrears (Mihalisko 1997, 266)[101], the only large strike of public sector workers during President Lukashenka's rule. The single opposition candidate at the 2001 presidential election, Uladzimir Hancharyk, was also the Chairman of the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions. The trade unions thus have shown themselves relatively unafraid of opposition.

President Lukashenka has nevertheless managed to subdue the trade union movement. He has rendered the key trade union organization, Federation of Belarusian Trade Unions (FPB), into a supporter of his regime, while marginalizing trade unions outside the FPB. After the 2001 election, the President abolished the system of direct debit for FPB membership fees

[101] The strikers were fired, their leaders persecuted in court, and their trade unions outlawed.

from state enterprises, which left the FPB to collect its dues in cash. The task proved so difficult and so critical than in less than a year, the FPB acquiesced to the chairmanship of a presidential trustee, Leanid Kozik, who could restore the direct debit system (Levshina February 21, 2003, [IWPR]). Under the chairmanship of Leanid Kozik, the FPB officially declared that the Federation would not 'stand apart' from the state or challenge it (Levshina February 21, 2003, [IWPR]).

While supporting the tamed FPB, the Belarusian authorities denied registration to the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Labour Unions (BCDLU), who had challenged the official line of the Federation of Trade Unions under the chairmanship of Leanid Kozik, and claimed membership of 15,000 people (Levshina January 23, 2004, [IWPR]). The state's treatment of the BDCLU attracted the attention of the International Labour Organization (ILO). In April 2001, the ILO demanded improved labour legislation and an end to violations of trade union rights (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 2002, 101), and following the disregard of these recommendations, set up an independent commission of inquiry to examine the violation of worker's rights in Belarus, to be competed by the end of 2004. Even if the results of the inquiry induce the Belarusian authorities to permit activities of the BDCLU, the trade union movement in Belarus would continue to be divided, with its dominant organisation, FPB, now tame to the President.

1.3. The Belarusian National Union of Youth

The Belarusian National Union of Youth (BRSM) is the largest youth organization in the country, created in September 2002 by a merge of the heir to the soviet Komsomol organisation (Belarusian Youth Union), and a pro-presidential Belarusian Union of Patriotic Youth, established in 1996. With about 117 thousand members in 2002, BRSM had 7 regional, 27 town and 128 local committees (BRSM n.d., online). Intriguingly, the official BRSM website does not have any message as to the purposes of the organisations, except mentioning that it 'acts in support of the state authority as the institution which guarantees law and order, stability and the further development of the society' (BRSM 2004, online) The 'state authority' certainly supports the BRSM. A special presidential decree (Ukaz Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 81 February 19, 2003) ruled that the BRSM be financed from the state budget; included top BRSM officials into consultative groups at the Ministries of Culture, Education, Information, Agriculture, Sport and Labour; and ordered the renovation of the BRSM headquarters opposite the Presidential Administration premises. The state also encourages the establishment of BRSM units in the army and police forces

(BRSM 2004, online). BRSM members are given priority in the allocation of university accommodation, among other preferential treatments. As a pro-presidential body created and sustained by the government, BRSM owes its whole existence to President Lukashenka, and thus could hardly be expected to go against his authority.

President Lukashenka has thus rendered the largest social institutions and organisations in Belarus into stakeholders of his regime, and neutralized potentially strong institutional opponents. As direct beneficiaries of Lukashenka's rule, they have little interest to challenge the President, let alone to adopt and to profess a more liberal ideology. The administrative elite, likewise, has lacked the capacities and imagination to contest the Belarusian authoritarian leader. Somewhat more surprisingly, this also seems to be true of his professed opponents.

II. The nationally disconnected opposition

The Belarusian opposition is used to being labelled. Depending on the commentators' political views, the leaders of the Belarusian opposition have been seen as heroes, traitors, hypocrites, dependants and saboteurs. Over 10 years of President Lukashenka's rule, they have not been able to critically test his authority. Is that because they were oppressed or because they were unpopular, and if the latter, why so? This section explores the key characteristics of the Belarusian opposition and principal criticisms of them and argues that the opposition's major weakness has been the inability to capture a resonant national idea, and so credibly claim national leadership. We first analyse the oppositions' effort during the 2001 election as an introduction to the following general discussion of the current opposition's characteristics and their failure to engage with the society.

2.1. Defeat of the opposition at the 2001 presidential election

The cases of highly mobilised populations ousting authoritarian rulers have been notable in the post-communist area. Franio Tudjman in Croatia and Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia had to leave office following election defeat. Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Edward Shevardnadze in Georgia were forced to relinquish their leadership positions by popular protests challenging election results. An attempt to force Belarusian President Lukashenka out of office during the presidential election of 2001 failed, however.

The second presidential election took place in Belarus on September 9, 2001. The Belarusian opposition and democracy-promoting actors in the West saw this election as an opportunity to challenge and topple the authoritarian regime in Belarus. The approach they chose towards conducting the electoral campaign was essentially similar to the methods employed by victorious opposition movements elsewhere in the post-communist area, and in particular in Serbia (Traynor September 14, 2001, [The Guardian]). It comprised the advancement of a single candidate from the opposition, a campaign by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to mobilize the electoral vote, and the training of election observers to prevent the abuse of the Election Law and to credibly challenge the results of the election in case the incumbent claimed victory regardless of the results.

The principal Belarusian participants in the pro-democratic election campaign were the leaders of the opposition parties and a large network of activists of non-governmental organisations. The single oppositional candidate was chosen among 5 potential runners in the presidential election, who had signed an agreement on the coordination of their activities on April 25, 2001. The potential runners were Mikhail Chyhir, Prime Minister during 1994-1996, Siamen Domash, former Head of the Hrodna regional executive, Uladzimir Hancharyk, Chairman of the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions, Siarhei Kaliakin, Chairman of the Belarusian Party of Communists, Pavel Kazlouski, Defence Minister during 1992-1994 (Charter97 May 3, 2001, online). The Central commission for election and national referenda validated 100,000 signatures in support of only two of these candidates: Siamen Domash and Uladzimir Hancharyk, and put then on the electoral ballot. On August 13, they publicly signed an agreement that Siamen Domash would withdraw from the election in favour of Uladzimir Hancharyk as the single democratic candidate, and would become Prime Minister if Uladzimir Hancharyk won the presidency (Charter97 August 13, 2001, online).

Parallel to the advancement of the single democratic candidate, two civic initiatives were launched: *'Vybirai!'* ('Make your choice!') and *'Nezalezhnae Naziranne'* (Independent observation). The 'Vybirai' campaign focused on mobilizing the electoral vote and encompassed some 200 non-governmental organisations, including youth and women's organisations, and the network of NGO resource centres (Yekadumava 2001, 205). During the campaign, about 4 million posters, T-shirts and other products with the campaign slogan were produced, and some 500 concerts, marches and other public events were organized, with the single minded purpose of mobilising the popular vote (Potocki 2002, 150). The

'Nezalezhnae Naziranne' initiative, in turn, focused on the enrolment of independent election observers, and claims to have trained, according to various sources, from 8,000 (Pliska 2001, 248) to 10, 000 (OSCE 2001, X.C) or even 16,000 (Potocki 2002, 151) independent observers.

In the light of this effort, the result of the voting in the election was frustrating to the opposition. The official election results registered 75.65 per cent of votes in support of the incumbent President Aliaksandr Lukashenka and 15.65 per cent of vote for the single democratic candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk, with the official turnout of 83. 86 per cent (Tsentralnaia Komissiia po vyboram i provedeniiu respublikanskikh referendumov September 14, 2001, online). The opposition claimed that the actual vote was much closer, about 46 per cent to 40 per cent in favour of the incumbent (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 2002, 98; Potocki 2002, 152). Uladzimir Hancharyk called people to come to a central square in Minsk to challenge the election results (Charter97 September 10, 2001, online), but only a few hundred responded. Thus the attempt to topple the Lukashenka regime through the electoral ballot in 2001 fell through: the single democratic candidate received significantly fewer votes than the incumbent President, at least according to the official statistics, and people did not respond to the opposition's calls to protest against the official election results.

The subsequent explanations of the opposition's failure to win the 2001 election fell into several categories, each with convincing arguments. One strand pointed to coercion, and to the highly unfavourable environment for the oppositions' activities. Thus, Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (personal communication, January 14, 2003) believed that President Lukashenka simply had a sufficiently strong grip over the society that he could withstand the impact of the pro-democratic campaign, in contrast, for example, to President Milosevic in Serbia. Convincing examples can indeed be drawn to support this argument. As argued in chapter 1, the opposition candidates did not have equal access to the media with the incumbent President; also the presidential decrees No 8 and 11[102] erected barriers to financial assistance for the opposition and hurdles to the conduct of their campaign, not least by restricting the opportunities for public meetings. In addition, on September 8th, a day before the election, the Central electoral commission annulled the accreditation of 3000 observers delegated by the member organisations of the 'Independent observation' initiative (OSCE, 2001, X.C; Pliska 2001, 249). Consequently, there is little doubt that the pro-democratic campaign in 2001 was significantly hampered by limited

[102] We have considered these decrees in chapter 1.

access to the media and sources of finance, and, indeed, to the voting and counting process itself. The coercive and unfavourable environment, however, might not have been the only cause of the opposition's failure. Criticisms of their own strategic and tactical decisions have also been voiced, although these explanations appear unconvincing.

One such criticism was in the choice of the single candidate. Siamen Domash appears to have been more popular with the campaign activists than Uladzimir Hancharyk, the eventual candidate. During the author's interviews with NGO members throughout the country, many said that the choice of Uladzimir Hancharyk cooled their enthusiasm in conducting the voter mobilisation campaign. (Siamen Domash's portraits and campaign materials adorned the offices of, among others, youth organisation 'Hart' and a resource centre for NGOs 'Civic Initiatives' in Homel more than a year after the election, the author observed). Their testimony concurs with Potocki's argument that a 'bland 61-year old labour leader [Hancharyk] could not compete with the energetic and charismatic Lukashenka' (Potocki 2002, 148). However, Uladzimir Hancharyk was better known among the state administrators and civil servants, whose cooperation the opposition campaign sought to attract (Buhrova, personal communication, December 4, 2002). Opposition' supporters, at the same time, even if unhappy with the choice of Hancharyk, were more likely to support the single democratic candidate whoever he was, rather than the incumbent President. From this wider perspective, the personality of the single candidate does not seem to be a decisive reason for the campaign's inability to topple President Lukashenka but possibly a minor contributory factor.

Poor organisation is another reason given for the campaign's failure but again there is little conclusive evidence that this was a pivotal factor. Irina Buhrova (personal communication, December 04, 2002), a political scientist and a member of the coordinating committee of the single democratic candidate during the 2001 election, blamed the failure of the campaign on the lack of a common strategy to which all the participant organisations could adhere. Buhrova (personal communication, December 04, 2002) concluded that 'campaign funds just sunk through without making any real impact'. Roger Potocki of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) disagreed, however: 'I do believe that centralisation of civic campaigns never works. We have done successful campaigns like this in Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia. They were never centralized campaigns, they were lots of different things' (Potocki, personal communication, January 16, 2003). A Belarusian political scientist, Vladimir Padkapaeu (personal communication, November 6, 2002) drew examples of the

ineffective work of some rank-and-file campaign members, who saw the campaign as a means of earning themselves money rather than changing the political regime. While certain misappropriation of funds may have taken place given the absence of accountability for the funds and often unofficial character of their distribution, it would be over simplistic, however, to blame the campaign failure on that fact only. Alongside accusations of embezzlement, there are stories of people putting their jobs on the line for the campaign, investing their 'health, time and hopes'(Buhrova, personal communication, December 4, 2002). Nine members of the Belarusian Association of Working Women, for example, were fired from their jobs for their participation in the 'Independent observation' campaign, the head of the organisation Maria Alieva (personal communication, November 18, 2002) testified. Embezzlement might have been a feature of the campaign, but, elsewhere, so was real commitment to it.

The reasons for the failure of the attempt to topple the authoritarian leader in Belarus through electoral ballot in 2001 may, it seems, not simply be limited to the harsh electoral environment and strategic and tactical mistakes of the opposition. Those factors meant that the opposition's message did not reach the population in a consistent form. Yet, a more straightforward explanation should also be considered: it should also be borne in mind that the message may have been heard but perceived as irrelevant. The presidential election campaign of 2001 was not the only one example of the opposition's failure to gather popular support. There must, therefore, be other issues and constraints that hindered the ability of opposition to Lukashenka to mobilize the population against the President. We now turn to consider them.

2.2. Opposition without ideology

President Lukashenka's popularity ratings have reached up to 48 per cent, according to a non-state polling organisation in Belarus, NISEPI (2001, 31), yet, even such high ratings suggest that a significant proportion of the Belarusian population have not been satisfied with his rule. Nevertheless, the President's political opponents have not been able to harness popular dissatisfaction with the President and to render it to their advantage. In fact, the Belarusian democratic opposition has seemed so helpless and incapable, that the President mocked them in a very particular way within only three years into his office: 'I should indulge and pamper my opposition, so that they do not vanish, for any President would be happy to have an opposition like that' (Lukashenka 1997 quoted in Bukhchin 2000, 209). The Belarusian opposition has attracted much domestic and international criticism, and while

some of this is covered in the analysis of the 2001 campaign, we now turn to more general comments and argue that they essentially signal one major problem; the continuing inability to credibly advance an alternative to the President's vision of national development.

The organized opposition to President Lukashenka's regime has comprised several political parties and, within the 2000-2004 parliament, a parliamentary caucus -'Respublika'. Oppositional parties cover the full range of the political spectrum, from communists to conservative nationalists. There are two nationalist parties (the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and the Christian Conservative Party 'Adradzenne' (a split wing from BPF since 1999), two liberal parties, the United Civic Party (UCP) and Liberal-Democratic Party (LDPB), and several socio-democratic parties, such as the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party, Belarusian Social-Democratic Party 'Narodnaia Hramada' (BSDP NH), a women's party 'Nadzeia', and the Party of Communists of Belarus (PCB). The membership figures for political parties are not readily available; in 1998, the largest parties were the PBC with 10, 429 and the BPF with 2, 228 members respectively (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 1998, online); the Nations in Transit survey suggests the membership of the BPF in 2003 at 1,260 and of the BSDP NG at 4, 000 (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 2004, online) which in any case do not constitute a significant social backing. The actual degree of popular support that the opposition parties command is, of course, hard to assess given that the parliamentary election in the country have not been free and fair. However, it is fairly clear that they have not been able to mobilize the society to support them to any socially significant extent since 1996 and 1997, when they organized a series of popular rallies against President Lukashenka's policy of integration with Russia. (There is more on the rallies in chapter 1.) Strikingly, the popular trust ratings of the oppositional parties and their leaders have hardly reached two-digit figures, according to the director of the largest non-governmental pollster in Belarus, NISEPI, Aleh Manaev (personal communication, April 15, 2001); and attendance of opposition rallies has consistently declined[104]. The most common explanations for the opposition's apparently systematic failure to mobilize popular support point to the internal splits and divisions within the opposition leaders and the opposition camp.

[104] The 'Chernobyl path' rallies to venerate the Chernobyl explosion gathered 5,000 people in 2001 Charter97 (April 26,2001). Novost dnia. Charter97.org. http://charter97.org/rus/news/2001/04/26. , and 3, 000 people in 2002 Charter97 (April 26,2004). Chernobylskii shliakh-2002. http://charter97.org/rus/news/2002/04/26. Another annual oppositional rally, on March 25 to celebrate the proclamation of the Belarusian Popular republic in 1918, was attended by more than a hundred people in 2003 Charter97 (March 24, 2003). 'Khapun' na prazdnik BNR. http://charter97.org/rus/news/2003/03/24/bnr. and about two hundred people in 2004 Charter97 (March 25, 2004). V Minske snova arestovyvaiut v Den Voli. http://charter97.org/rus/news/2004/03/25/action.

Internal division is apparently the most oft-named weakness of the opposition. Roger Potocki of NED argues: 'The Belarusian opposition are more divided than any other opposition I have ever worked with. More than Solidarity, more than Civic Forum, the Public Against Violence...There are much deeper splits within the Belarusian opposition' (Potocki, personal communication, January 16, 2003). Indeed, the leaders of the opposition came from different professional and ideational backgrounds. Some were members of the cultural elite (they mostly belonged to the BPF), yet others were former President Lukashenka's associates who had left his team in the early years of his presidency (and gravitated primarily towards the United Civic Party).

In principle, there is nothing wrong with a multitude of opinions among a political elite; Dahrendorf (1968, 219), indeed, names political multiformity as a characteristic of liberal elites. Also, the opposition leaders and parties managed to unite (if rather late) for the 2001 election, and did so again well in advance of the parliamentary election of 2004; but this did not help them win in either case. Moreover, the opposition leaders' agreement to subscribe to a single position and a common strategy could be interpreted as a sign of unprincipled opportunism. This, indeed, was done by one of the opposition's own members, an executive in the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party 'Narodnaia Hramada', Aleh Bahutski, in 2003. In the article 'The coalition of a hedgehog and an adder', he argued that an ideological union of communists and nationalists was theoretically unfeasible and suggested that the agreement by the opposition parties to pursue a common strategy for the parliamentary election of 2004 meant that the party leaders were ready to forego their ideological views for the sake of partaking in foreign assistance grants (Bogutskii Novermber 4, 2003, [BelarusFree]). Unfortunately, the evidence of internal quarrels and backstabbing among the opposition leaders was more likely to diminish their popular credibility than their real ideological differences[106].

[106] The opposition leaders' credibility was further damaged by the non-relenting smear campaign against them by the president and in the state media. We have mentioned in chapter 5 that the president had continuously portrayed the opposition as agents of destructive forces of the West. The state broadcast media run a series of 'documentaries', supporting that claim. The largest print media, newspaper Sovestkaia Belorussia, , on its part, alleged the opposition's connection with the West in the article 'Operation 'White Stork' 4 days before the presidential election in 2001, as we mentioned in chapter 4. In another example, it promptly reprinted 'The coalition of a hedgehog and an adder' article on its pages, with the comment that it 'contained nothing that we did not know before' Pogranzon, I. (November 14, 2003). S nimi khorosho idti v kontrrazvedky. Sovestkaia Belorussiia. http://www.sb.by/article.php?articleID=32617.

If the leaders' credibility alone had been the main problem of the opposition, it would only have taken new leaders to remedy it. The lack of success of a new strand of opposition in summer 2004, however, defies the argument that popular distrust of the leadership is a key reason for the oppositions' failure. This new strand emerged as a parliamentary caucus 'Respublika', headed by the army general Valery Fralou, the businessman Siarhei Skrabets and the Olympic champion Uladzimir Parfianovich. These three new oppositional figures proved their commitment to their cause when in June 2004 they staged a 18-day hunger strike, challenging the arrest of ex-Minister for Foreign Economic Relations, Mikhail Marynich as politically motivated, and demanding amendments to the Election Law to ensure the democratic character of parliamentary election in autumn 2004 (Pulsha June 18, 2004, [BelaPAN]). The strikers organized a rally on July 21, 2004, the 10th anniversary of Lukashenka's accession to power, intended as a demonstration of popular dissatisfaction with his rule. According to the organizers' own estimations, the rally attendance reached 5 thousand (Frolov July 22, 2004, [Charter97]), but even this probably optimistic count does not suffice to qualify the rally as a significant popular protest. Thus, the 'new' 'Respublika' leaders received as lukewarm a popular reception as the long-standing opposition leaders. This was despite the fact than they had had little public connections with the principal oppositional figures and hardly any negative media coverage prior to their protests. Thus, the lack of popular credibility may be a serious problem of the opposition, but apparently it is not the principal reason for their failure to enrol popular support.

Yet another often suggested weakness of the opposition is their apparent inability to relate to the society. The opposition did not learn the lessons from the cultural elite's failure to win popular support for their policies in the early 1990s. We have argued in chapter 5 that the cultural elite preached and pushed people into the 'European' identity, instead of trying to convince and convert them into adopting it, and that was a principal reason for their electoral fiasco in 1994 and 1995. The testimony of the US ambassador to Belarus during the second presidential election in 2001, Michael Kozak, however, proves that the opposition still preferred to preach to the public rather than engage with them:

'The first time I met the opposition, they started into that pitch that you, the international community, have to get us access to the state TV so that we, the opposition, can teach people how to think correctly. I replied: where I come from, the politician who goes around and says that people are stupid is a stupid politician. Would you vote for somebody who calls you stupid, ignorant and uneducated? I said: 'Did you ever think about going to the general store near your house and standing in the door of that store, introducing yourselves, shaking hands, and explaining whatever?' And the reaction I got was: 'Me? Talk to a common person?' That's what

happens with elite politics. They think they should not do that... You have to have a certain amount of humility, and have some contact with people and know what they think. The fundament of democracy is that you have to start out going out and dealing with the population' (Kozak, personal communication, January 13, 2003).

The Belarusian population indeed knew little about the activities of the oppositional organisations, as opinion polls showed. In December 2003, the oppositional parties formed two electoral blocks in preparation for the parliamentary election in 2004: 'Five Plus' and 'Free Belarus'; an opinion poll in April 2004 showed that 85.2 per cent and 86 per cent of those polled did not know of these two blocs respectively (Charter97 May 11, 2004, online). Another poll in June 2004 registered 71.3 per cent voter non-awareness of the Five Plus coalition (NISEPI 2004, 49) [107]. This absence of popular knowledge of the opposition's activities may be partly attributed to the coercive authoritarian environment, which hinders the dissemination of the opposition's message. We suggest, rather, that the message itself is absent.

The internal divisions and elitism of the opposition, and their tactical and strategic miscalculations have certainly contributed to the failure of any pro-democratic movement in Belarus. Yet, they were arguably all signs of a more fundamental problem. To quote Michael Kozak again: 'If everybody hates the dictator, the opposition thinks they will say they really really really hate him, and people will support them. No. People may hate him, but they want to know what the opposition is going to do, and whether they are capable' (Kozak, personal communication, January 13, 2003). Following Kozak, we argue that the lack of popular support for the opposition should rather be attributed to their inability to advance a viable alternative to President Lukashenka's national ideology.

The political opponents of President Lukashenka enjoyed their largest popular support in 1996 and 1997, when they protested against the President's policy of integration with Russia and demanded the preservation of Belarusian sovereignty. The appreciation of Belarusian statehood and the importance of the advancement of Belarusian culture at that time became the major rallying point of oppositional parties across the political spectrum (Khaduka 1999, 10), and struck a chord with the society. However, President Lukashenka has, as we have

[107] This detachment from the people contrasted strong with the President's policy. Aliaksandr Lukashenka has been very keen on maintaining an engagement with the society throughout the years of his rule: he has traveled extensively throughout the country and always held meetings with the public during his trips.

shown, successfully stolen the national agenda from the opposition. As we revealed in chapter 5, since the early 2000s, President Lukashenka has promoted Belarusian sovereignty with a stronger force than any oppositional organisation could muster. He also emphatically 'advanced' the development of Belarusian culture through an active construction of the Belarusian national identity in collectivist and anti-liberal terms. The Belarusian opposition, for their part, did not even try to challenge President Lukashenka's nation-building policies since the early 2000s. The opposition may indeed have had no reasons to object to his sovereignty message. However, the democratic agenda, to which all the opposition parties purportedly subscribe, obviously does not fit well with the collectivist anti-liberal national identity, which the President has developed and sustained. The opposition, however, have not presented liberal values in national terms or claimed the respect for the individual as part of a coherent Belarusian national identity. In other words, the opposition have pronounced a few individualist principles, but have not advanced anything like a 'counter-nationalism' – a liberal nationalism, or any national ideology for that matter, capable of constituting a credible nation and state-building alternative to President Lukashenka's egalitarian nationalism. In failing to formulate a national ideology they have missed an essential means to appeal to the society and engage with it through the issue that crosses over political, economic and social divides. The inability to support their pro-democratic message with a pro-European national ideology is therefore the fundamental problem that has prevented the Belarusian democratic opposition from successfully challenging the authoritarian rule of President Lukashenka in Belarus.

III. The potential for pro-European nationalism: existent but diminishing

Neither the largest social organisations, nor state administrators, nor the democratic opposition have been willing or able to advance a liberal national ideology to challenge the foundation of President Lukashenka's rule, egalitarian nationalism. This being so, what other actors could advance liberal nationalism? Is there a social basis for it? In this final section, we first draw the evidence of popular discontent with President Lukashenka's rule to argue about the existence of the social potential for civic nationalism, and name small business owners and civic activists as its most likely protagonists. Following that, however, we point to the impediments to the emergence of a pro-European national ideology, and suggest that liberal nationalism and democracy will take long to materialize in Belarus.

The independent social surveys and election-day exit polls that we have drawn upon throughout the thesis demonstrate that at least a significant proportion of the Belarusian population have been satisfied with the ways of life under President Lukashenka's authority. Yet, there are signs of problems and tensions within Belarusian society which indirectly prove that people find it hard to cope with their everyday reality: alcohol consumption in 2003 was 9.7 litres per capita, well above the threshold of 8 litres per annum, which World Health Organisation ranks as endangering any society's ability to reproduce itself (Belorusskaia Gazeta December 12, 2003, online). Belarus had the highest ratio of heart disease per capita in Europe (Vasilevskaia January 19, 2004, [Charter97]). The number of manslaughter cases increased by 50 per cent over 1995 to 2002 (Kozhuro March 8, 2004, [Nashe Mnenie]). The number of broken marriages doubled from 35 per cent in 1995, to almost 70 per cent in 2000 (Romanchuk 2002, 170). The prominent Belarusian writer Vasil' Bykau, whose moral opposition to Lukashenka's rule was well-known, sensed that 'hatred has become the main feature of the Belarusian society' (Bykau 1998, 517). His death in June 2003 caused an impromptu demonstration, indicating that many people shared his views on the state of Belarusian politics and society. About 10 thousand people came to Vasil' Bukau's funeral; they carried the writer's coffin on their shoulders for about 3 km along the central avenues of Minsk, and then followed him on foot for another 10 km to the cemetery (Svirko June 26, 2003, [Kommersant-Daily]). This was a greater mobilisation than any oppositional meeting had gathered since 1996. Nothing was said in political terms, only the coffin was, according to Vasil' Bukau's wish, adorned by flags of red-white-red; the symbols of the Belarusian national ideology of the early 1990s. 'It was a protest without protesting', as Roger Potocki (personal communication, January 16, 2004) succinctly summed up. Furthermore, even the official results of the 2001 presidential election and of the national referendum in 2004, disputed as rigged, acknowledge that a significant proportion of Belarusian society disagrees with President Lukashenka's policies. (15.65 per cent of the vote in the 2001 presidential election went to the single democratic candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk (Tsentralnaia Komissiia po vyboram i provedeniiu respublikanskikh referendumov September 14, 2001, online), and 9.90 per cent of the registered voters in the 2004 referendum opposed the presidential proposal (Tsentralnaia Komissiia po vyboram i provedeniiu respublikanskikh referendumov October 18, 2004)).

While some part of Belarusian society thus disagrees with authoritarian rule, some particular sections, namely private entrepreneurs and civic activists, practice liberal attitudes and principles in their everyday lives. Since the early 2000s, cases of individuals' self-

organisation for the defense of their interests, which are characteristic of liberal, rather than collectivist, regimes, have gradually accumulated in Belarus. Small business owners[108] throughout the country have organized protests and strikes against economic and administrative regulations that hindered their activity (market traders people in Vitsebsk and taxi drivers in Volkovysk went on a hunger strike in February, 2004; traders at Minsk markets stages several strikers throughout 2002-2004, taxi drivers in Hrodna had a strike in April 2004, and shuttle traders conducted a strike in Brest in August 2004); in most of these actions, moreover, strikers had their demands fulfilled by the authorities, a fact which, as the experience of Polish trades union activity under communism tells us, is actually likely to encourage such actors to believe in the efficacy of self-organisation.

At the same time, civic organisations[109] have fostered the pursuit of common interests and the solution of shared problems by individuals' own means and without reliance on the state, again a sign of a nascent liberal civic culture. To give some evidence, youth groups throughout the country (Talaka in Homel; Dzedzich in Brest, Yaravit in Vitsebsk, VIT in Hrodna, Ekacentre in Mahileu, New faces and Next step-New life in Minsk to name some) have engaged in educational projects, advocacy of youth issues and social help. The Young Christian Women Association and Women's International Democratic Centre have advanced women's development. Members of a resource centre 'Kola Siabrou' ('a circle of friends') had literally built their headquarters with their own hands. Private charitable foundations have even emerged: a former school teacher organized an orphanage near Minsk ('Children's village'), and a former school director established a hospice for teenage girls in Hrodna (Charitable centre 'Family'). We can thus argue plausibly for the gradual emergence in Belarus of a circle of individuals who rely on their own initiative, personal effort and voluntary cooperation to advance their interests and improve social life in aspects they consider pertinent. Their activities go against the authoritarian atmosphere in the country and slowly disrupt it. A clear majority of the nearly 100 NGO leaders the author interviewed throughout the country supported the idea of a liberal democratic state for Belarus. Moreover, as the author observed, many NGOs have adorned their offices with the national symbols of the national ideology of the 1990-1994s. This means that Belarusian civil society organisations often associate their essentially liberal activities with a national agenda, thus sustaining a basis for a liberal national ideology. As Central European dissident activity in

[108] The number of registered individual entrepreneurs in Belarus in summer 2004 was 186, 2 thousand. (Ekonomicheskaia Gazeta 2004, Minsk, No 60)

[109] The amount of officially registered non-governmental organizations was 2, 214 as of 2004 (Kuzmenkova, T. (2004). Tretii sektor v Belarusi:problemy stanovleniia i razvitiia. Mozyr, Belyi Veter). Some of them are not active, while others (e.g. 'Mizhnarodny Kantakt') operate without official registration, as the author established.

the communist era again tells us, however, civil society is only really powerful insofar as it can have impact on the power of the state, and this is not yet true of Belarus. Although the social potential and possible supporters for liberal nationalism in Belarus are arguably present, the intellectual forces that could harness popular dissatisfaction with authoritarian rule and translate positive experiences of liberal European ways of life into the form of a credible alternative: a liberal national ideology, have not yet presented themselves. Moreover, the room for the emergence of a liberal, pro-European national ideology in Belarus has been diminishing, rather than increasing, due to the authoritarian ruler's vigilance against such an event and the decreasing ideational interchange between Belarus and the world.

With respect to the formulation of alternative ideologies, academia, with its purpose of fostering intellectual development and debate, could be an obvious source for the advancement of the liberal national ideology. However, President Lukashenka is mindful that it was academia that fostered the cultural elite who instigated anti-soviet mobilisation in the late 1980s, and he has taken measures to keep academia in check. The two largest academic organisations in the country, the Academy of Sciences and the Belarusian State University, were put under direct presidential control, and their leading positions (the President and the Chancellor respectively), were rendered from elected into appointed posts (Zakon Respubliki Belarus N 159-3 1998, art. 16; Ukaz Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 342 August 29, 1996, art. 2). In 2003, state authorities closed the only private Belarusian-language lyceum, and in 2004, the government withdrew the license from the private European Humanities University, which had a high record of guest Western lectures[110]. The most systematically damaging blow to the development of social ideas in academia, however, was the presidential decree No 560 of December 2004, which ruled that university lecturers may be deprived of their academic degrees for 'behaviour incompatible with pedagogical activity' (Ukaz Presidenta Respubliki Belarus No 560 November 17, 2004,art. 14), strongly implying that professing views different from the state line would be sanctioned with redundancy (Rich December 9, 2004, [RFE/RL]). By limiting academic freedom, the President also limited the grounds for the development of liberal views and pro-European national ideology within the purportedly most propitious environment for ideational development.

[110] Instead, following the President's wisdom that 'knowledge of technical sciences was more expedient than of humanities' (Silitski, V. (May 28, 2005). Brave new schools. Transitions online 28. http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=66&NrSection=2&NrArticle=122188&tpid=22&ALStart=16) a new university specializing in technology and science was opened in Baranovichi in 2004.

The social dissemination of experiences of liberal practices and European ways of life has also been diminishing since the early 2000s. Apart from the fact that President Lukashenka continued to stifle private economic and social activity, as we argued in chapters one and three, the isolation of Belarus by the major Western institutional actors likewise played in the hands of the authoritarian regime. The policy of the Western institutional actors to marginalize Lukashenka's regime, as we described in chapter 4, has entailed the closure of the Western states to Belarusians. Belarusian citizens need visas to travel to the majority of countries in the world, including three out of Belarus's five neighbouring states. Belarusians are among the 11 nations the British authorities prohibit from staying even within airport transfer zones without special permission. For USA visas, Belarusians pay double. In the first quarter of 2004, the amount of trips abroad by Belarusian citizens decreased by 3.47 times in comparison to the first quarter of 2003 (Charter97 July 27, 2004, online). This dynamic is likely to continue after the expanded EU excluded Belarus from the 'Good Neighbourhood' programme, aimed, ironically, at increasing links with its new neighbouring-states. The Belarusian President, for his part, announced in November 2004 that he would take measures to put an end to the recreational trips to Europe of Belarusian children from contaminated Chernobyl zones, and also would limit educational and work trips abroad for adults, under the pretext that these trips were disguised forms of human trafficking (Lukashenka November 17, online). The ability of people to learn about Western ways of life from within the country is curtailed by the facts that only the state TV channel 'BT' fully covers the territory of Belarus, and only 15 per cent of its citizens use Internet (Ekonomichskaia Gazeta 2004, No 61). The opportunities for Belarusians to see alternative ways of life to those proposed by the President have, as a result, been constantly diminishing. To sum up, the opportunities for the development of liberal nationalism in Belarus arguably existed and even slowly grew in Belarus over 1995 to 2004, but they have been overshadowed by the vigilance of Belarus's authoritarian President and by the increasing closure of Belarus to the Western world.

Conclusions

Aliaksandr Lukashenka has gained and sustained his political authority in Belarus by creating an egalitarian national ideology for Belarusian society. This ideology built upon a positive interpretation of some of the collectivist lived experiences. The appeal of this ideology will cease when the society has accumulated a sufficient amount of positive experiences, values and expectations associated with democratic and liberal ways of life, and

when some political actors uphold them as a part of the Belarusian national identity within a framework of liberal national ideology. As we have shown, however, the accumulation of such experiences is becoming harder.

At the end of the 2004, the democratic development of Belarus seemed a distant prospect. The authoritarian regime in Belarus appeared strong and stable. None of the social actors that commanded wide access to the population were interested in the end of President Lukashenka's rule, and the opposition had not advanced any credible alternative programme of national development. Self-organisation and mutual help at the individual and civic organisations' level pointed to a slow accumulation of experiences of liberal democratic rather than authoritarian ways of life, but they were arguably strongly outmatched by the thrust of authoritarian policies in the country.

The rejuvenation of democratisation processes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, which all came in an abrupt and unexpected manner in 2003-2005, have raised hopes for the democratisation of other post-soviet authoritarian regimes. We do not have the grounds to suggest the rapid approach of such a change in Belarus, however, and believe that to predict it would be a case of optimistic and wishful thinking. We would rather be proven wrong, but in the summer of 2005, we conclude our analysis of the Belarusian post-soviet development with the forecast that the end of authoritarian rule in the country and the new impetus for a democratic development, sudden as it may eventually be, is a matter of several years at least, and more likely to take decades rather than years.

What will the legacies of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's rule in Belarus be? Orest Deychakiwsky of the CSCE Helsinki Commission believes that 'in the eyes of history, Lukashenka and his circle are losers, because they have not brought any improvement onto society' (Deychakiwsky, personal communication, January 15, 2002). We argue that one historically and politically significant consequence of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's leadership will be the strengthening of Belarusian statehood and the inducement of the feeling of national belonging among the Belarusian population. This can form a foundation for a liberal national ideology. At least in its national aspect, Lukashenka's rule may inadvertently lay the deeper foundation for the eventual democratic development of Belarus.

7. Theoretical proposition and research conclusions

The significant divergence of democratic transitions in the countries of the former Soviet bloc is well documented. In an attempt to explain the transitions' outcomes, students of postcommunism paid the bulk of their attention to successful democratisations, for fairly obvious and justifiable reasons. Several theories emerged, naming elite bargaining, market economy reforms and international influence as the principal factors determining the outcomes of postcommunist transformations. An investigation of stalled or reverted democratisations, however, quickly reveals that the proposed factors of democratic success were often also present in these cases, but did not work in the expected way in them: ostensibly pro-democratic elite pacts paved the way for authoritarian leadership, market economy reforms eventually sustained state-dominated economies, and the democratic West turned out not to be the only influential foreign partner for some of the transition states, nor the ultimate model for development. Hence, an examination of these stalled transitions has the potential to reveal new explanations for the divergence of postcommunist transformations.

In this final chapter, we propose that nationalism is a cause for such a divergence, and test our theory on three different outcomes of postcommunist transformations: consolidated democracy (Lithuania), stalled and rejuvenated democracy (Ukraine) and consolidated authoritarianism (Uzbekistan). Further, we summarise the findings of the empirical part of the thesis and conclude with an argument about the crucial role of nationalism and ideology in postcommunist political development.

I. Nationalism as the critical elite strategy leading to the variation in postcommunist transformations

Our analysis of a critical case of a stalled democratisation leading to authoritarian consolidation, the post-soviet transformation of Belarus, resolutely points to the salience of nationalism as a crucial strategic tool that allowed political elites to achieve leadership and shape postcommunist transitions. Although some students of democratisation have acknowledged the role of nationalism, they have seen it in dichotomous terms, with nationalism being pro-democratic if inclusive, and anti-democratic if exclusive. Stalled democracies open a wider spectrum of the forms that nationalism can take in postcommunist transitions. In particular, they reveal the existence of an ethnically inclusive and egalitarian,

but anti-liberal and anti-democratic type of nationalism, while demonstrating the overall importance of national mobilisation for the unveiling of postcommunist transitions.

1.1. Theoretical proposition

Instead of being a mere background factor, or pre-condition for democratisation, as the democratisation literature sees it at most, nationalism has arguably been the principal tool for shaping postcommunist transitions in the hands of political elites. National mobilisation has acquired more prominence in these transitions than in transitions elsewhere due to the communist legacy of social homogenisation. The communist system had so profoundly homogenised societies under its rule, that after its demise, socio-economic divides were not dramatic enough to substantiate political competition on the basis of interests of specific social groups[111]. Unable to represent any particular social stratum in the absence thereof, postcommunist political actors had to seek their mandate and legitimacy with the society as a whole. Nationalism proved an unsurpassed tool for this purpose, due to its capacity to create a broad consensus with a reach to potentially all members of the polity. Therefore, the ability to mobilise people within the already existing states as one nation proved the key means for rallying popular support and achieving political power in postcommunist settings.

Both the political elites who sought to establish democracy and those who wanted to undermine it resorted to an inclusive conceptualisation of the nation to rally popular support behind themselves. (The nationalist leaders in the federative states of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia could not resist the temptation of emphasising ethnic exclusivity as well, although even in these cases we can find evidence of inclusive nationalism being employed.) Hence, inclusive nationalism acquired two forms: liberal, based in individual values, and egalitarian, grounded in collectivist values. Political actors promoted developmental models of their choice by referring them to either of these types. Politicians that professed democracy followed a 'European' developmental mode, including the advancement of democratic institutions, market economy, and EU membership, utilised liberal nationalism, and claimed 'European' national identity for their societies, based on the values of individualism and rationality [112]. Politicians with authoritarian inclinations created

[111] As Lewis (2000, 150) found with respect to political parties in Eastern Europe, 'party development has been weak ... parties have not generally established a firm base among the postcommunist electorate'. Lewis, P. G. (2000). Political parties in post-communist Eastern Europe. London, Routledge.

[112] One could question the possibility of a single European identity, pointing to the ongoing travails to foster a common European identity among the EU member states. We refer here not to the process of overcoming

'recombinant'[113] developmental models, which superficially imitated democratic institutions and economic restructuring, but in fact enabled the concentration of power in the executive, and the preservation of state-controlled economy, while avoiding close involvement with the democratic West. This model was advanced by the means of egalitarian nationalism and 'recombinant' national identities that used the collectivist values of communism and socialism but projected them on the nation and its sovereignty [114](and, in cases of federal competition, with added-on elements of ethnic nationalism). Eventually, the ability of politicians to define the national discourse determined their political fortunes and the postcommunist transition paths altogether: the countries where the European national identity prevailed developed towards democracy, while the countries where 'recombinant' national identity dominated moved towards authoritarianism.

Next, the question arises as to what enabled postcommunist politicians to capture the nation, or mobilise the society towards their professed national discourse? After all, Brubaker (1998, 289) has rightly pointed to numerous cases of failed nationalist mobilisation, arguing that nationalism is not necessarily a most profitable or rational strategy for elites to achieve legitimation, and nationalist sentiment is not easy to stir. Schopflin (2003, 479) is even more sceptical and notes that successful nationalist mobilisation implies that the 'elites are super-cunning and the people are stupid and malleable to be ready to sell their rationalist birthright for a mess of nationalist pottage'. We suggest that postcommunist political elites could successfully mobilise the nation if their strategies met two criteria: 1) social resonance and 2) consistency between the professed national identity and developmental model pursued. Let us elaborate.

The national discourse that political elites offered the society had to be socially resonant, or needed to reflect the society's history, and especially the experiences in living memory, because historic experiences affect the perception of and attitudes towards political systems. Following Van den Bossche (2003, 503), any new ideas put to the population can be socially internalised only after they have been anchored in familiar images, concepts or patterns; in

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national divides within the EU, but a to a set of liberal democratic values and principles which formed the basis of a *national* identity within the postcommunist states.

[113] Borrowing Stark and Bruszt (1998) term for characterising property ownership in postcommunist economies, in which elements of the old and new structures are blurred together. Stark, D. and L. Bruszt (1998). Postsocialist pathways : transforming politics and property in East Central Europe. Cambridge England New York, Cambridge University Press.

[114] Unlike the communist ideology, which treated national allegiances as unimportant.

other words, set in familiar contexts. Hence, nationalist propaganda is successful when it relates to the normative language of the people, or suits their prevailing values and assumptions (Van den Bossche 2003, 501). In Central Eastern Europe and the former Baltic republics, the communist regimes intercepted sovereign national development that had started in the interwar period. In the former soviet republics, however, the communist systems had arrived after the First World War and shaped these societies altogether. Consequently, in Central Eastern Europe, the communist system was more likely to be perceived as alien and the 'European' identity as inherent, whereas in the former Soviet Union, this situation was reversed.

Postcommunist political actors were also successful in gaining and retaining state leadership if the developmental model they pursued was consistent with their professed vision of national identity. Thus, political leaders in consolidated democracies framed market economy reforms and strong cooperation with the European Union and other Western institutional actors as part and parcel of the 'European' identity and European developmental mode, sustained by liberal nationalism. The political leaders in stalled democracies sustained state-dominated economy and avoided undesirable international engagements in the framework of the 'recombinant' model, underpinned by egalitarian nationalism. (Notably, Serbian and Slovak nationalism had socially egalitarian character, although for the titular nation only.) Yet, the postcommunist state leaders whose policies were inconsistent with the national identity they professed (for example, the proclamation of 'European' identity while avoiding radical economic change, as typical of 'recombinant' vision), invariably lost power after one term in office (e.g. Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine, Mircea Snegur in Moldova). Even if the inconsistency between identity policies and developmental choices derived from a power-sharing agreement between two elite groups, it was to the detriment of them both, as the Belarusian transition demonstrates. McFaul (2002, 214, 223) and Bunce (2000, 717) observed that elite pacts led to very uncertain outcomes in postcommunist context, but have not been able to explain why this should be so. The answer, we suggest, is that any groups concluding a pact have competing political programmes, and their power-sharing agreement, a pact, thus leads to an unsystematic simultaneous pursuit of two visions of national development; eventually, both elite parties to the pact lose popular credibility as they are unable to deliver the national development they profess, thus rendering transition outcomes open and uncertain.

A *consistent* pursuit of a *socially resonant* national discourse is thus characteristic of successful political leadership in postcommunist countries.

1.2. Evidence

We have proposed that the greater the strength of the 'European' identity and liberal nationalism in postcommunist societies, the more likely they were to succeed in democratisation; the more they conformed to recombinant identity and egalitarian nationalism, the more likely they were to develop a new form of authoritarianism. Let us now turn to the evidence to augment our proposition. In the champions of democratic transition, such as Slovenia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, the prevalence of the European framework for national identity was so obvious that it was hardly commented upon (which also explains why the democratisation literature, largely based on the analysis of these cases, has attributed so little significance to nationalism as a factor in transitions). Political leaders in those countries justified the hardship of transition reforms by claiming it to be imperative for national development along the European track. In the Central Eastern European countries where the communist systems had imprinted more profound social changes, and the 'European' identity was not as clearly prevalent, such as Bulgaria or Romania, the progress in transitions to democracy was slower. The situation is the same with respect to the cases of 'recombinant' national identity. Central Asian states had virtually no historic associations with the liberal values (let alone 'European' identity) to foster, and their transitions swerved towards authoritarianism barely after they had begun. In Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Caucasian republics and even Russia, however, we saw a competition between liberal, egalitarian, and also exclusive nationalism[115]. The outcomes of their transitions are conflicting and unstable after fifteen years, and more changes are likely to be expected in the future as national identities continue to evolve and be shaped.

For the purpose of a more detailed verification of our theory, we juxtapose the Belarusian case against three other three different cases of transition: a successful democratisation (Lithuania), a stalled and rejuvenated transition to democracy (Ukraine), and a transformation from the soviet to a personalistic authoritarian regime (Uzbekistan) - to elucidate how political elites in these countries used national ideology to pursue their desired outcomes.

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[115] Moldova and the Caucasian republics also hosted the cases of ethnic nationalism; we do not discuss it here, because our purpose is to demonstrate how ethnically inclusive national mobilisation can also jeopardise democratisation.

Uzbekistan: recombinant identity and egalitarian nationalism as a basis for an authoritarian regime

Despite the very different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of their countries, the authoritarian leaders in both Uzbekistan and Belarus successfully employed egalitarian nationalism and constructed recombinant identities to support their political aspirations. The Uzbekistani authoritarian leader has acquired wider domestic powers and authority than his Belarusian counterpart, and this arguably has to do with the fact that the Uzbekistani President had more time to develop his national discourse. In Uzbekistan, liberal nationalism had barely surfaced, and egalitarian national mobilisation started in full gear in 1993. In Belarus, however, egalitarian nationalism started to shape up at the policy level in 1995, and became salient only by the early 2000s. Consequently, the Uzbekistani authoritarian leader could consolidate his regime earlier and faster. Altogether, however, the fact that leaders in both Uzbekistan and Belarus have successfully utilised recombinant identities to create authoritarian regimes, proves egalitarian nationalism's vitality across a variety of post-soviet socio-economic terrains.

The Uzbekistani society has seen virtually no competition between different types of national mobilisation. The national ideology advanced by the country's leader has had few if any references to European liberal values. Instead, it recombined the social, economic and political elements of the soviet era with the Uzbekistani national sovereignty. Egalitarian nationalism thus sustained the creation of one of the most oppressive authoritarian states in the world, with hardly any democratic interlude between soviet rule and the new authoritarian regime.

The Uzbekistan ruler, Islam Karimov, first headed the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic as a communist leader in 1989. In March 1990, he was elected the Uzbekistani President. Just as the first Ukrainian President, Leonid Kravchuk, Islam Karimov appropriated the ideas of the nationalist movement that emerged in the country in the late 1980s. He went further, however, and banned the movement (called *Birlik*) altogether (along with any other oppositional organisation), and thus established himself as the only authority on national matters. President Karimov actively formulated and promoted a national ideology in Uzbekistan. In 1993, he wrote a book arguing about the importance of national independence and national ideology in the Uzbekistani development (Roy 2000, 182). In 1993, the Uzbekistani government launched a campaign to create an ideology for the republic's

independence (Smith 1998, 85). In 1994, a Centre for spirituality and enlightenment was opened with the purpose to formulate such an ideology (Smith 1998, 86), and soon the ideology emerged and was promoted in what Melvin (2000, 43) describes as a 'powerful top down drive'.

The Uzbekistani national ideology has an inclusive character, although we need to note that the core values for social unity it advances are Uzbek ethnic attributes. In that sense, the Uzbekistani national policy is similar to national policies in France and the USA, which claim to be secular and ethnically inclusive, yet clearly seek to assimilate all the population into the values and characteristics of the dominant nation. The strength of ethnic core transpires in President Karimov's statement that the national ideology 'reflects the spiritual particularity and uniqueness of the sacred traditions and aspirations of our nation, formulated over many centuries and millennia' (Karimov 1999 quoted in March 2003, 312). Also, the state has favoured the Uzbek language. In 1993, the Cyrillic script of Uzbek was replaced with Latin, and in 1995, the revised Law on Languages abolished the special status of Russian in the country and put it on a par with all other 'foreign' languages (Smith 1998, 197). The purpose of these measures to strengthen the Uzbek ethnic core has been apparently to consolidate the population of the country around it, as befits egalitarian nationalism, rather than to exclude non-ethnic Uzbeks from the political and social life, as would be typical of ethnic nationalism. The Karimov regime is indeed known to discriminate within the Uzbekistani society; it is implicated in keeping some 6,000 political and religious prisoners (Monbiot October 28, 2003, [The Guardian]). Yet, the principal ground for their persecution is ostensible Islamic fundamentalism and political disloyalty to the President, but not their ethnic belonging. An academic observer of Uzbekistani post-soviet development, Melvin (2000, 29), argues that President Karimov seeks to 'bind the country together through an increased stress on a common identity [and] uses Uzbek nationalism as a means to unite society'. Another observer, Hunter (1996, 34), notes that 'Uzbekistan has gone farthest of all Central Asian countries in trying to assimilate other minorities, especially the Tajiks'. Uzbekistani national mobilisation, therefore, has been clearly egalitarian, although perhaps a little more ambiguously inclusive.

It has also been anti-liberal, for the set of values and attitudes constructed as part of national identity have been borrowed from the soviet collectivist repertoire. In fact, the construction of history and ideology in post-soviet Uzbekistan is firmly rooted in the soviet approach, albeit it employs more Uzbek national references. March (2003, 318) has observed:

'Karimovism is national in content but Leninist in form... Replace proletariat with nation, Lenin with Tamerlane [an Asian warrior leader of the Middle Ages], imperialism and the bourgeoisie with 'great power hegemony' and *'vakhabisty'* [ostensible Islamic fundamentalists], dialectic materialism with pseudo-idealism, May 1 with September 1 [Independence Day], and one has a 'new national ideology'. Roy (2000, 167-168), similarly, points out that in historiography, 'Uzbek historians today adopt precisely the soviet matrix, and simply alter its negative assessments of certain historical figures, such as Tamerlane... The vision of history underpinning the new state is certainly not Marxist, but it is very soviet'. Thus, the national identity in Uzbekistan has been created through the recombination of the soviet attitudes with Uzbek national references.

The Uzbek egalitarian nationalism and recombinant identity fully meet the two conditions of successful popular mobilisation which we propose in this thesis. First, it has been socially resonant to the majority of the population. The nation-state model of polity organisation was introduced to Uzbekistan by the soviet system, and 'since the Uzbek population had no experience of state- and nation-hood prior to the soviet era, the usage of soviet references in Uzbek national ideology was essential' (Hunter 1996, xiv). In other words, the soviet ways of life were the only references familiar to the majority of Uzbek residents, and the national ideology amply embraced them.

Second, the Uzbekistani President has ensured that the national identity he promoted was consistent with his economic and international policies. In the economic sphere, he avoided dramatic economic restructuring, or a firm commitment to market economy. Instead, the government has sought to maintain as much of the soviet era social security system as possible (Melvin 2000, 58). It engaged in sporadic reforms to attract some influx of foreign capital, but in fact the state retained strategic stakes in most enterprises, while the President and his council remained the locus for all major economic decisions (Melvin 2000, 73). In the sphere of international relations, the Uzbekistani President has pursued an independent stance, without any clear alignment with either Islamic states or Russia (Olcott 1994, 225). Thus the developmental choices of the Uzbekistani President and his government were adequate to and consistent with the recombinant identity, with its preference for the soviet ways of life and emphasis on national independence.

The national ideology has been an important instrument for Islam Karimov which helped him to establish a personal authoritarian rule in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has been notorious

for its poor democratic record. Over 15 years of his unbroken rule, President Karimov constrained the capacities of the Parliament and oppressed democratic rights and freedoms. Although Karimov's presidency is formally based on popular will, exceptionally high turnout at referenda and elections causes doubt about the democratic legitimacy of their results. In March 1995, a nation-wide referendum attended by 99.6 per cent of those eligible to vote, extended President's Karimov mandate until 2000, by 99.3 per cent of the votes (Melvin 2000, 34). In January 2000, Islam Karimov was re-elected as President until 2007, with 91.1 per cent of the vote (Melvin 2000, 31). The Parliament, *Oliy Majilis*, met only every few months to approve laws prepared by the government (Melvin 2000, 33). Freedom of association and assembly has been extremely limited, and there is practically no right to peaceful political or public activity (Melvin 2000, 35). Freedom House consistently rated Uzbekistan among the consolidated authoritarian regimes (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 2003, 14). The Uzbekistani leadership has been implicated in large-scale use of coercion, which certainly has helped President Karimov to keep discontent at bay. Yet, it is plausible to argue that the deployment of coercion and violence has not been the only means for creating and sustaining an authoritarian regime in Uzbekistan. As Melvin (2000, 58) emphasises: 'While the use of internal security forces has provided an important element of the regime's hold over society, critically the promotion of Uzbek nationalism and the ability to fuse the former leadership of soviet Uzbekistan with a specifically national historic narrative has provided a powerful stimulus to mobilise the Uzbekistani society beyond the deployment of fear and violence'.

The egalitarian national mobilisation of the Uzbekistani population within the framework of a recombinant Uzbek identity has been a consistent policy of the Uzbekistani President since the early years of his rule. The only national discourse available, it was socially resonant and consistent with policy choices in other areas. As such it arguably formed the bedrock upon which the authoritarian regime in Uzbekistan was established and consolidated.

Ukraine: pendulum identity and transition

Ukraine also contrasts well with Belarus in such as way as to show that national identities are not pre-ordained, but are in fact subject to political construction. Both republics have been profoundly affected by the soviet system, with the population purges in the 1930s, rapid industrialisation, and the post-Second World War pan-soviet immigration, which all created the grounds for a strong soviet content to their national identity. Both republics had had their western regions develop outside the soviet system until 1939, thus also substantiating non-

soviet identification. In both countries, the elites advanced pro-European nationalism emerged in the early 1990s, but pursued it in an inconsistent way until the mid-1990s, when they lost power to the advocates of egalitarian nationalism. Yet, in Belarus, the authorities pursued egalitarian nationalism and recombinant identity with much stronger vigour than in Ukraine, where the leadership chose to eschew professing any particular national identity. As a result, by the end of 2004, pro-European liberal nationalism acquired salience in Ukraine, and the prospects for its democratic development looked much stronger than in authoritarian Belarus, where egalitarian national ideology continued to prevail.

A brief overview of the works of several established experts on Ukrainian political and national development confirms our thesis' argument about the causal link between the type of national mobilisation elites pursue and transition outcomes.

The Ukrainian post-soviet transition went along the democratisation track until 1994, gradually stalled and acquired some authoritarian features during 1994 to 2004, and received a new lease of democratic development at the end of 2004. This uncertain transition path stemmed from the fact that no national discourse, either 'European' or recombinant, clearly dominated the country during 1990 to 2004; and the eventual prevalence of the European discourse brought about the rejuvenation of democratisation in Ukraine in late 2004.

Ukrainian history, and the impact of the soviet system in particular, predicated the existence of social potential for both liberal and egalitarian nationalism in the country. In its 1991 borders, independent Ukraine is a historical novelty (Sasse November 30, 2004, [The Guardian]). Its borders were fixed during the soviet time, and over a period of several decades. Various Ukrainian regions entered the Soviet Union at different historical moments, with different levels of socio-economic development, with different religious allegiances, and at different levels of national consciousness (Liber 1998, 188). Eastern and southern Ukraine had been part of the Soviet Union since its foundation in 1922, and their 'political and national-cultural socialisation came about almost entirely under the period of soviet rule' (Wilson 1997, 195). Western Ukraine, in contrast, entered the USSR only in 1939; previously a part of the Habsburg Empire and interwar Poland, it retained associations with Europe. The apparent paradox: opinion surveys in the late 1990s regularly indicated that around two-thirds of the Ukrainian population expressed some type of regret at the passing of the USSR, while simultaneously two-thirds supported Ukrainian independence (Wilson 2002, 37) – in fact signalled that the Ukrainian society could see itself both in European and

recombinant, soviet-based terms. Post-soviet Ukraine thus had the potential for both liberal and egalitarian national mobilisation. The way in which Ukrainian Presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma navigated that potential affected their political authority and the transition path of the country.

The policies of the first post-soviet Ukrainian President, Leonid Kravchuk (elected in 1991) were inconsistent from the national mobilisation point of view. On the one hand, President Kravchuk favoured the Europe-oriented tradition that originated in the Western parts of Ukraine, and in the process, he rather lost touch with the soviet Ukrainianism (Wilson 2002, 51); in other words, the version of national identity he propagated was not resonant in the Eastern parts of the country. On the other hand, President Kravchuk did not fully adhere to European developmental model, and in particular, to market economy reforms. In the apparent hope of appeasing the Eastern 'soviet' Ukrainian population, the Kravchuk government eschewed drastic economic restructuring: it preserved state subsidies to inefficient state enterprises and the collectivised agricultural sector and did not make any substantial progress toward privatisation, price and currency liberalisation (Karatnycky 1995, 120). Thus, President Kravchuk tried to appeal to the Western parts of Ukraine by supporting their identity, and to the Eastern parts of Ukraine by sustaining their economy. He did not achieve nation-wide consensus and commitment to endure the hardship of reform, nor did he pursue reform in a robust way as such. Such policies eventually cost President Leonid Kravchuk his office.

By 1994, following stop and go reform policies, economic problems in Ukraine worsened, and the rate of inflation became the highest in Europe in 1993 at nearly 10,000 per cent, and GDP declined every year at double-digit rates (Karatnycky 1995, 117). As economic performance deteriorated, so did the appreciation of the supposed benefits of Ukrainian sovereignty. Although Ukrainian voters overwhelmingly supported independence in the December 1991 referendum, a June 1994 poll found that 47 per cent would vote against independence while only 24 per cent would vote for it (Karatnycky 1995, 118). In 1994, following a deep economic crisis (Liber 1998, 188), popular demand forced Leonid Kravchuk to call a presidential election. He lost to Leonid Kuchma, the contender who advocated the reintegration of the Ukrainian economy into the Commonwealth of Independent States and proposed to make Russian the official state language (Duncan 1996, 206).

Despite winning the presidency on an essentially recombinant ideological agenda, President Kuchma pursued no particular stance at all in terms of national identity and a developmental model. He oscillated between European and recombinant traditions, and selected policies from both (Wilson 2002, 51). Thus, he switched to speaking Ukrainian shortly after the election, but stated in his 1994 inauguration speech that 'Ukraine is historically part of the [same] Eurasian economic and cultural space as Russia and Belarus' (Wilson 2002, 38). President Kuchma signed a major treaty on friendship and cooperation with Russia, but also propelled Ukraine's partnership with NATO. In 1994, Leonid Kuchma initiated radical economic reforms, but halted them as soon as the Western institutional actors supporting them started to demand compliance with rigid criteria (Molchanov 2002, 183). In one and the same year, 1996, President Kuchma both criticised the advocates of cautious reform, saying that 'most countries successfully overcame their difficulties without looking for some special way but by persistently implementing reforms', and called for a 'more active and persistent search for our own Ukrainian market transformation model, which could reflect 'the unique and independent character of Ukrainians' (quoted in Kuzio 1998, 56). Wilson (2002, 51) characterised President Kuchma's national policy a 'unique pillarisation model, with no well-defined 'pillars' of association at all to accommodate differences within the population and retain nationalism in Ukraine as synthetic and highly eclectic' (Wilson 2002, 51).

Over the ten years of Leonid Kuchma's presidency, the course of democratisation in Ukraine gradually stalled. Although democratic institutions and procedures were formally upheld in the country, the President was known to have almost unconstrained economic powers, while four of the five major party factions in the Parliament could be identified directly with financial-industrial groups by the late 1990s (Duik 2001, 61). Ukraine was acquiring a reputation of a 'pseudodemocratic state led by a criminal elite' (Karatnycky 2005, 3). Freedom House classified Ukraine among hybrid regimes, and its democracy score persistently fell from 4.0 in 1997 to 4.88 in 2004 (Karatnycky, Motyl et al. 2004, 14).

The worsening democratic performance of Ukraine under the Kuchma presidency, however, still left some room for the development of the 'European' identity in the country. Although Ukrainian economic reforms were bogged down with corruption, they spawned a new middle class committed to both market economy and Ukrainian statehood, as Karatnycky (2005, 5) and Kuzio (1998, 60) note. The ideological indecisiveness of the government together with these factors sustained the 'European' identity within Ukrainian society and led

Ukrainians to contest the results of the 2004 presidential election and to rejuvenate the country's democratic development.

The two major contenders in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election clearly set their positions in competing identity terms. President Kuchma's preferred successor, Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich, espoused the recombinant identity: he supported close links with Russia and promised to make Russian a state language and offer dual Ukrainian-Russian citizenship. The opposition candidate, Victor Yushchenko, advocated the 'European' identity: he called for the European Union and NATO membership for Ukraine and promised market and democratic reforms (Krushelnycky December 27, 2004, [RFE/RL]). When the official election results proclaimed victory for Victor Yanukovich, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against what they perceived as a massive electoral fraud. Eventually, the Constitutional Court ruled to hold another round of voting, and Victor Yushchenko won the presidency with the support of 17 out of 27 regions in Ukraine (Tsentralna viborcha komisiia Ukraini December 26, 2004, online). People's readiness to protest against the perceived misuse of their vote, for several days in freezing temperatures, signalled that at least the aspiration towards liberal values and democratic freedoms had been appropriated across the country. As Timothy Garton Ash reported during the protests, 'demonstrators are sending us two desperate yet dignified messages: "We want to join Europe" and "We want to do this in a European way" (Ash November 25, 2004, [The Guardian]).

Democratic transition received a new lease of life in Ukraine in 2004 because the soviet past became less appealing to the majority of the population, whereas the experiences of living under democratic institutions and market economy conditions, resembling, albeit grossly imperfectly, the European ones, were positive enough for people to answer the call of a pro-democratic politician, Victor Yushchenko. The development and competition of national identities in Ukraine proves that national identities are not static, but indeed are 'a work in progress' (Szporluk 2004, 60) and that they can be reshaped by the political actors in response to socio-economic context in relatively short historical periods.

Lithuania: democratisation sustained by 'European' identity

The Lithuanian and Belarusian contrasts are particularly striking. These two countries shared centuries of common history as part of one state (the Great Duchy of Lithuania). Hence the historical references and myths employed in pro-European national mobilisation in both countries were very similar and the official state emblems of Belarus and Lithuania were

almost identical during 1990 to 1995. Yet, in 1995, Belarusian society departed towards a different national discourse, based in recombinant values, while Lithuanian society adhered to the European discourse. A decade later, in 2004, the results of their transitions were poles apart: Lithuania became a member of the European Union, and Belarus rendered a closed authoritarian state. A comparison of national identity construction in these two countries, however, leaves no mystery as to why this dramatic difference has occurred: the Lithuanians professed pro-European national ideology, whereas the Belarusians quickly mobilised for the egalitarian one.

The transition of Lithuania from a communist soviet republic into a democratic state could not have been more straightforward. It was the first of the Soviet Union member states to proclaim its sovereignty on March 11, 1990, and it was in the first echelon of postcommunist states to join the European Union on May 1, 2004. Not only did the country establish undoubted democratic credentials, but it also successfully restructured the economy from planned to market forms, and fully realigned the focus of external relations from the former soviet countries to the European and global organisations and markets. Such a remarkably fast and decisive transformation owed its origins to liberal nationalism and national mobilisation on the basis of 'European' identity.

As in Uzbekistan, only one type of national ideology acquired prominence in Lithuania. Unlike in Uzbekistan, the nationalism that Lithuanian elites put forward was of the liberal, pro-European type. In advancing such a pro-European national discourse, the Lithuanian elites were responding to the historically strong resonance with Europe within the society, deriving partially from the experience of independent statehood in the interwar period, and the failure of social assimilation into the soviet system and its values during the five decades of soviet rule. There is no shortage of evidence to the argument that national discourse in Lithuania was shaped to emphasise its connections with Europe and its liberal values. As Pavlovaite (2003, 244-245) testifies, 'Europe acquired a near-mystic, taken-for-granted status in the Lithuanian discourse on economic, political and social transformation of the country...to be 'European' had been a sort of Lithuanian *idée fixe,* inherently good and valuable.' One example of such fixation is the 1989 'time reform', the adjustment of the clock so that Lithuania literally lived in the same time zone as the majority of Western European countries and therefore demonstrated its belonging to Europe (Pavlovaite 2003, 239). Such a belonging was also claimed judicially, in the preamble of the Law on National Security that postulated that 'the Lithuanian state, established many centuries ago and resting

on the Christian cultural foundation unifying Europe, is a part of the community of European nations' (quoted in Pavlovaite 2003, 244). At the referendum on joining the EU in May 2003, 63.37 per cent of the eligible population voted, with 89.95 per cent in favour of membership (Lithuanian Government 2003, online). The surveys of public opinion since the referendum have shown consistent support for EU membership by at least 70 per cent of the Lithuanian population (Lithuanian Government 2005, online).

The salience of pro-European nationalism in Lithuania derived from the fact that it was both socially resonant and pursued consistently, thus meeting the two conditions for successful national mobilisation we have specified in our theory. Association with Europe had been highly resonant for the Lithuanian society and struck a much stronger chord with it than the soviet system for a number of historic reasons. To start with, unlike most other soviet republics, Lithuania had had an experience of independent national development prior to soviet rule. It lasted for 28 years between the end of the Polish-Soviet war in 1921 and the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states following a pact with Germany in 1939. While this independent statehood was rather short-lived, it was nonetheless marked by an intense state-building (Smith 1994, 2) and was a period of significant cultural advance for the Baltic peoples (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 13).

The soviet system, therefore, came upon the already emergent fabric of national identity, and never actually reshaped that fabric or affected it in an essential manner. Lithuania's integration into the soviet system was comparatively weak, for two reasons. First, the head of the Lithuanian Communist Party, a native Lithuanian, Antanas Snieckus, enjoyed unusually strong credentials with the USSR leadership in Moscow that allowed him a wide remit on running the republic. During the1950s, Antanas Snieckus secured a rapid and evident nativisation of Lithuania's administrative apparatus (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 132), so that the local Party administration at the time consisted of 91.5 per cent Lithuanians , which was higher than their total share within the population, 79.6 per cent (Smith 1994, 123). Second, unlike other western soviet republics, Lithuania had not been subjected to rapid industrialisation during the post-war years. It was industrialised slowly from the late 1950s and in the manner that allowed a greater input into the process from the national and local bodies (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 187). The Lithuanian government dispersed industrial projects in such a way as to maximise the use of local natural and labour resources (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 187). Hence, there was little need in the country for immigration of

labour from other parts of the USSR, and it avoided the massive pan-Soviet influx experienced by Tallinn, Riga and Minsk (Snyder 2003, 94).

Consequently, the soviet system remained alien to the Lithuanian people, and the signs of dissent against it were salient throughout the years of soviet rule. The most numerous expressions of dissent were refusals to speak Russian when addressed in that language (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 251). Moreover, Lithuania was the richest country for *samizdat* publishing, not only in the whole of the USSR but also in Eastern Europe (Shtromas 1994, 104). Open manifestations of dissent took place as well, the largest being student riots in 1956 and 1972 (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 136, 253). Thus, 'the society constantly probed the limits of the regime's tolerance for efforts to preserve Lithuanian nationalist identity and culture...[so that] the generation, born and educated under the [soviet] regime, seemed to be fully aware of its ethnic and cultural particularities' (Vardys 1965, 253). A particularly revealing sign of the strength and popularity of the Lithuanian national identity is that during the 1989 census, 10 per cent of those people who declared themselves to be Lithuanians had at least one non-Lithuanian parent; some of them had two (Snyder 2003, 95). As Shtromas (1994, 98) argues, 'it is paradoxical but nevertheless true: the apparently total victory of soviet communism over Baltic societies gradually brought an equally total rejection of it within the moral and political consciousness of the Baltic people'. In short, the Lithuanian society never fully embraced the soviet system and values.

The lack of social embeddedness of the soviet system and rejection of it in the 1990s made Europe the point of reference and legitimation for post-communist reform processes. Indeed, the aim to 'become a normal European state' (Pavlovaite 2003, 245) was pursued by the Lithuanian government consistently and relentlessly. During the early 1990s, the government launched a comprehensive programme of market-oriented reforms, which included the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the lifting of price controls, land reform, and reform of the banking sector. Also, a new national currency, the *litas*, was introduced in June 1993 (US Library of Congress 1994, online). Privatisation occurred at a rapid rate in the 1992-94 period, so that by November 1994, 80 per cent of the assets earmarked for privatisation had been sold off and 83 per cent of the agricultural privatisation programme had been completed (US Library of Congress 1994, online). Economic restructuring did incur grave costs and placed a serious burden on the population. Inflation, which stood at 225 per cent in 1991, increased to 1,100 per cent in 1992; wages remained stable in 1991 but declined by 30 per cent in real terms in 1992; agricultural production declined by 39 per cent; unemployment,

including partial unemployment, rose from 9,000 to more than 200,000; prices increased several times more than wage and pension raises (US Library of Congress 1994, online) By the end of 1992, lack of heating and shortages of hot water in wintertime were registered throughout the country (US Library of Congress 1994, online). Remarkably, when the opposition organised a referendum in August 1994 on compensations to savers and investors and retreat on some privatisation measures, only 36.89 per cent of the population turned out to vote, and the referendum was void (Moller 2002, 288). This testified to a strong social commitment to economic reforms and acquiescence to take up their burden for the sake of progress towards the aspired goal of creating a European-type economy.

The pro-European character of Lithuanian nationalism was upheld by the inclusive conceptualisation of the nation, as well as adherence to liberal values. Smith (1994, 135) argues that Lithuania had 'an inclusionary conception of community, designed to mobilise all those who lived and worked within the territory of the republic, to identify with and feel that they had a stake in national self-determination'. Indeed, the Law on Citizenship, adopted in November 1989, granted automatic citizenship to all those born in the republic or who had at least one parent or grandparent born there (Chinn and Truex 1996, 135). It thus offered a 'zero option', permitting all individuals normally resident in the republic at that time to become Lithuanians (Hogan-Brun and Ramonien 2003, 36). Beresneviciute (2003, 2) also claims that 'many steps have been taken to ensure the civic integration of representatives of Lithuania's ethnic groups'. Lithuanian nationalism was thus ethnically inclusive and, as we have seen above, based on 'European' identity and liberal values.

The success of postcommunist democratisation in Lithuania stemmed from the strength of national ideology, which sustained popular consent to endure the transition reforms for the sake of belonging to Europe, and thus enabled the political elites to carry reforms through.

The evidence of the cases above thus clearly demonstrates the importance of the type of national mobilisation and national identity construction for the definition of postcommunist transitions' outcomes. A counterfactual to our argument would be a stalled transition in a society that espoused liberal nationalism and 'European' identity, or a successful democratisation in the country with egalitarian nationalism and a collectivist recombinant identity. The closest we could note to any such cases are inconclusive simultaneous pursuits of two identities, as happened in Ukraine and Belarus until 1994. Otherwise, the close and

functional connection between liberal nationalism and democracy, and egalitarian nationalism and authoritarianism is upheld throughout the postcommunist area. To make out theory more convincing to the reader, let us deal with some alternative propositions.

1.3. Counterarguments

Here is a good place to review some possible criticisms of our argument. The most obvious counterargument is that it was not the 'European' identity, but EU conditionality that supposedly sustained and guided successful postcommunist transitions in Central and Eastern Europe; and the absence of that same conditionality might be supposed to explain stalled transitions further east. This appears to be a strong argument, given the apparent correlation between EU assistance and the outcomes of transition. We argue, however, that this correlation mistakes an outcome for an explanation. As we mentioned in the introductory chapter, this argument presumes that the successful democratisations were entirely externally driven, and the evidence is to the contrary. The successful postcommunist democratisers in Central Eastern Europe showed an overwhelming elite and popular consensus over the pro-European agenda in the late 1980s, and persisted with political and economic reforms in the early transition years in the absence of any clear indication on the part of the EU that the organisation might accept those countries into its ranks; such indication came as late as in 1993 (in the form of the Copenhagen declaration). Similarly, in Lithuania, the EU only started to play an active role after the signing of the 1995 Europe Agreements, when the bulk of economic and political reforms had already been accomplished in the country. We argue, therefore, that it was the societies' vision of themselves as Europeans rather than external incentives from the EU that enabled the success of democratisation. The EU assistance and conditionality, and compliance with them were possible because of the social consensus within the transition societies themselves over the imperatives of belonging to Europe. In other words, the transitions were internally driven, and the 'European' identity was the basis for social consensus for undertaking dramatic and painful reforms. The EU's eventual support, symbolic no less than material, was certainly crucial, but to argue that it was the defining, essential and primary reason for the success of postcommunist transitions is to give a simplistic interpretation to postcommunist transitions.

Another possible objection to this thesis is that the success of democratisation was derived not so much from identity construction, as from the transition societies' experience of statehood prior to the communist era. Such an assumption may derive from an observation that all successful postcommunist democracies in Central Eastern Europe had had a history

of national statehood before the arrival of the communist rule, whereas the countries where the transitions stalled had been shaped as nation-states only under the soviet system. Indeed, the pro-democratic politicians in Central Eastern Europe had at their disposal a whole set of values and references in living memory that were not only alternative to the communist rule, but that also interpreted it as nationally alien. The pro-democratic leaders in the soviet states were in a more difficult position as they did not have any 'non-soviet' references in living social memory to emphasise. Yet, to completely rule out democratic development for the countries that have not had nationhood experience outside the soviet system would ignore the fact that pro-European nationalism emerged and gave a new lease on life to democratisation in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004. This confirms the thesis reasoning that national identities are not pre-determined, but in fact are subject to shaping by political actors and socio-economic circumstances.

Our final concluding point is to stress the ambiguity of inclusive nationalism. As we have argued, a regime's ethnic blindness *per se* is not a sign of its respect for the individual rights and democracy altogether. The post-soviet authoritarian leaders have upheld inclusive national mobilisation to create the widest possible social support base[116]. Yet, they used it to set the nation, the collective, above the individual, and by so doing legitimise their non-democratic rule. In short, inclusive nationalism can have both liberal and illiberal aspects, and as such has had divergent implications for postcommunist democratic transitions.

To complete the thesis, let us demonstrate how our proposition about the key role of national mobilisation explains the critical case of stalled and reverted transition, the post-soviet transformation of Belarus.

II. The post-soviet transformation of Belarus from the perspective of national mobilisation

The post-soviet transformation of Belarus reveals a clear logic if considered from the perspective of national mobilisation. The initial impetus for democracy in the country and the later redirection of transition towards authoritarianism are both the result of the implementation of liberal and egalitarian nationalism. The proponents of democracy in Belarus advanced a 'European' national identity, but did not pursue it in either a socially

[116] The only reason for exclusion of particular groups from the nation was their principled disagreement with the authoritarian leader, and not their ethnicity. Thus, the Central Asian leaders portrayed religious fundamentalism as the principal threat to their nations; while the Belarusian president pointed to democratic opposition as the agents of the aggressive West.

resonant or a consistent way, and eventually lost popular credibility. The former communist leaders eschewed national mobilisation altogether, with fatal consequences for their authority. A political actor from outside the circles of established elites spotted the opportunity for the advancement of a 'recombinant' national ideology, and did so in a both socially resonant and consistent manner. This allowed him to capture the nation and the state, and shape the Belarusian transformation towards his desired goals. In this concluding section, we pull together evidence from the empirical chapters of the thesis to compare the two nation-building strategies in post-soviet Belarus and demonstrate how their implementation affected the country's transformation. First, we argue that the manner of pursuit of a pro-European and allegedly liberal national ideology was a principal reason for the discrediting of democratisation in the country. Second, we demonstrate how egalitarian nationalism formed the foundation of an authoritarian regime in Belarus.

Pro-European nationalism: non-resonant and inconsistent

It is hard to imagine a more awkward and ill-fated route for the advancement of democracy than the one taken in Belarus. Although the popular momentum for democratisation had gathered by the end of the 1980s, it was effectively wasted in the competition between two elite groups in the country: the cultural elite and the soviet elite. The pro-democratic cultural elite advanced democratic institutionalisation, market reforms and international orientation towards Europe, and saw the primary means for achieving these goals through a re-construction of the Belarusian national identity as European. The soviet elite, meanwhile, formally subscribed to democracy and economic and international openness, but in practice were more comfortable with the soviet methods of running the economy and maintenance of close links with Russia. As neither elite group secured a controlling leadership of the country, they reached a pact to divide the spheres of influence. Each group received a free hand in running the country in areas of their immediate concern: the cultural elite defined nation-building policies, while the soviet elite ran the economy. As a result, the cultural elite commenced construction of a Europe-oriented national identity, but could not complement it with adequate economic and international policy content, because this was beyond their remit. Instead, the soviet elite filled the 'European' identity framework with economic and international relations typical of the 'recombinant' type, with preservation of state control over the economy and no commitment to integration into the EU. Yet, the soviet elite never challenged the pro-European national mobilisation as such. Consequently, despite the fact that the elite pact introduced democratic institutions and procedures in Belarus, the non-

resonant and inconsistent pursuit of European developmental mode that it also allowed increasingly discredited democracy in the country.

The cultural elite's effort to create a 'European' national identity was rigorous and intensive, but it created little resonance with the society. Their nation-building policies encompassed the introduction of new state symbols, a new interpretation of Belarusian history (and its compulsory studies in educational establishments), and a transfer from Russian to Belarusian as the language of public life and state administration. The purpose and content of these cultural elite's policies were purportedly to 're-awaken' the Belarusian nation to its pre-soviet roots. The cultural elite did not refer to the soviet period in terms other than negative, and argued that 70 years of soviet rule had literally 'debilitated' the country. This policy stemmed from the understanding that the sooner people were purged of their soviet past and ways of thinking, the sooner democracy would be entrenched in Belarus. The cultural elite's strategy of national mobilisation, therefore, contested and demolished the prevailing attitudes and values in the society, rather than making any attempt to relate to them. The cultural elite effectively preached to the people that their lives under the soviet system had been nothing more than tragic mistakes and that it was time they embraced other values. Many of the alternative references to national pride they proposed were of medieval vintage, with which there were no immediate, let alone positive, connections in popular living memory. Not only did the early nation-builders deride all positive elements of the soviet past, which in the Belarusian case were real and substantial in the experience of many in the population. They also told them to be proud of the Belarusian language, culture and ways of life that in soviet times had been looked down upon as outdated and unsophisticated. Hence, instead of grounding their nation-building policies in the existing social experiences, the proponents of pro-European national ideology chose to ignore and overrule them. With hindsight, it is hardly surprising that the majority of the Belarusian population found such a national mobilisation irrelevant, if not annoying and humiliating. The cultural elite did not relate their nation-building strategies to the society they were supposed to serve, and thus failed to establish themselves as credible national leaders. Ironically, the cultural elite's effort to build the nation of their dreams prevented them from touching, let alone capturing, the nation that they lived in.

The soviet elite also contributed to discrediting the 'European' identity and developmental mode. Unlike the cultural elite, the former soviet leaders cared for the popular opinion of their policies, but believed, with hindsight, erroneously, that they could win popular support

through economic means. The soviet elite avoided radical economic reforms for fear of social discontent and tried to preserve as much soviet-type social security as was possible, a task hardly achievable after the collapse of the soviet economic system. The soviet elite did not manage to avert a growth of social inequality, the fall of living standards for the majority of the population and shortages of essential goods, including cash itself. The inability to effectively manage the economy towards their proclaimed goals eventually diluted popular trust in the soviet elite. Their lack of credibility was also aggravated by the popular perception that the soviet leaders used the pretext of economic restructuring to transfer state assets into their own private ownership, and evidence of this was available, under the conditions of democratic openness. Although some economic reform winners did in fact emerge outside the circles of the soviet elite, they were not numerous enough to produce a socially significant stratum to sustain popular momentum for further economic reform. What was presented to the people as 'economic reform' was in fact a hasty and haphazard combination of desperate measures to keep popular discontent at bay, while the opportunities for enrichment were used by those with access to the administration of state resources. Although reforms did not actually take place in the manner typical for economic restructuring towards the market economy, the economic changes in the country during the democratisation years were presented and perceived as such. Thus market economy became associated with poor economic management and misappropriation of collective assets.

The international policies of the soviet elite did not reflect 'European' identity either, or use its potential to the extent of contending EU membership. The soviet elite sought international cooperation as far as it could help alleviate the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe and the soviet legacy of heavy militarisation of the country. They did not demand, or even uphold as a goal, membership of the European Union, which was the lynchpin of liberal national mobilisation elsewhere in Central Eastern Europe. The furthest the soviet elite's vision went with regard to the European Union was the possibility of joining the Union together with Russia, a prospect even more unfeasible than sole Belarusian EU membership. Instead of pursuing the European foreign policy orientation, the soviet elite increasingly inclined towards Russia, the partner they were more familiar and comfortable with. Europe, therefore, remained in the soviet elite's policies a distant entity, not entirely unfriendly, but certainly much more remote than Russia. This approach to foreign policy deprived the European model and identity of its crucial element, the aspiration to EU membership, which has served as a developmental goal and imposed disciplining conditionality on the successful democratisers in the region.

The economic and international policies of the soviet elite, therefore, contradicted the European mode of development, and were more characteristic of a 'recombinant' model. Crucially for the development of the Belarusian transition, however, the soviet elite did not offer people an alternative vision of national development. Instead, they formally subscribed to democracy and 'European' identity and thus, unwittingly, helped discredit it in a significant way by making its pursuit inconsistent. At the same time, the cultural elite were unchecked in their effort to create the nation they desired and eventually lost touch with the real conditions, aspirations and interests of the population in general. The ways in which the 'European' identity was pursued in Belarus, therefore, did not create a national foundation for democracy, but instead created a hole into which it fell.

Although democracy was upheld in Belarus during the early transition years, the ostensible following of the European developmental mode became associated with the worsening quality of life that formed the backdrop of the pressure to embrace a formerly derided national culture. It is of little surprise, then, that given free choice in the presidential election in 1994, a large proportion of the Belarusian population trusted the country's development to the individual who claimed to both understand and represent the people, and promised to do away with the European discourse in favour of an adjusted developmental model that had already proved to work relatively well.

Egalitarian nationalism: resonant and consistent

As popular discontent with the European mode of development became apparent under the conditions of democratic openness, it was plausible that someone would see an opportunity for political advancement by proposing an alternative to it. Such an alternative model had to be based in the elements of the soviet past, as they were rejected within the apparently failing 'European' national identity construction; at the same time, the model had to reconcile such elements with Belarusian state sovereignty and the absence of the communist ideology as a principle means for popular mobilisation. An alternative, 'recombinant' identity and egalitarian nationalism to support it were proposed as the solution; the only surprise in this regard was that they were formulated not by their most likely protagonist, the soviet elite, but by a third political force. An energetic individual with a thirst for power, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, advanced the recombinant identity in a socially resonant and consistent manner. In so doing, he captured and shaped both the nation and the transition in a way that suited his authoritarian aspirations.

The reason Aliaksandr Lukashenka opted for the 'recombinant' model, was, of course, because the soviet principles of state governance, and a communitarian interpretation of democracy in particular, were more suited to an authoritarian rule than the European model. The soviet system sustained a set of structures, values and attitudes that put the collective above the individual, and therefore created more opportunities for generating and shaping popular consensus towards the goals of power-holders. And yet, President Lukashenka did not seek the restoration of the soviet system as such, if only because it presumed a collective (party), rather than individual, leadership. Also, his model had to reflect the existence of Belarusian statehood. Hence, Lukashenka amalgamated elements of communism and socialism, together with his other preferred features, into a national framework.

The evolution of national identity construction in Belarus following the needs of President Lukashenka's regime makes for a remarkable story. At the very start of his political career, Aliaksandr Lukashenka needed to grip the attention of Belarusian society and to utilise grievances they had accumulated in the first post-soviet years. During the 1994 presidential election campaign, Aliaksandr Lukashenka publicly deplored the developments which had become associated with pro-European nationalising: intensive Belarusisation, the embezzlement of collective assets, the disruption of social and economic links within the former Soviet Union – and claimed them all as symptoms of the elites' remoteness from the everyday concerns of the nation. Such an approach won him the Belarusian presidency by a considerable margin.

President Lukashenka sustained popular support in his early years of office by the continued pursuit of policies that had made people feel secure in the soviet era but which had been refuted during the early transition years. The majority of the urbanised population spoke Russian – and he restored Russian as the language of public life, thus effectively putting an end to Belarusisation. State ownership of collective assets was perceived as fair – and he halted privatisation and created a harsh environment for private business. Many Belarusians looked upon Russia as their own state – and he signed far-reaching union treaties with the Russian Federation. In other words, President Lukashenka *consistently* and vigorously pursued the policies that struck positive *resonance* with the society. More than that, President Lukashenka also eradicated the 'European' national identity construction, and replaced it with the Belarusian national identity of the soviet era. He reinstated the flag, emblem and anthem of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic and re-introduced history

textbooks that glorified the soviet system as the culmination of Belarusian national development, as opposed to the message of identity construction under pro-European nationalism.

A significant element of President Lukashenka's recombinant model was a political, ideological and economic orientation towards Russia, as it was typical of the soviet time. Around the year 2000, however, the integration processes between the two countries reached the point at which the Russian leadership suggested that for Belarus to further enjoy preferential economic treatment from the Russian government, it should be incorporated into the Russian Federation. As the integration process thus threatened to undermine President Lukashenka's unlimited authority in Belarus, he pulled out the ace of Belarusian sovereignty and independence. Almost overnight, President Lukashenka changed himself from a self-professed 'Slavic integrator' into a principal defender of Belarusian national independence. The displays of national symbols became an indispensable feature of everyday life. History textbooks were re-written yet again, this time to praise the soviet system, but even more so, Belarusian independence and the achievements of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's leadership, while the rhetoric of Slavic unity was put at the back stage.

Gradually, President Lukashenka started filling the message of national independence with the pragmatically named 'national ideology', that prescribed features of 'national character' and 'national traditions' in nation-building terms and in the ways that suited the needs of his regime. Hence, the President advanced a 'national economic model', effectively a policy for the preservation of the state-based economy, and claimed that it reflected the 'national' traits of collectivism and egalitarianism and, no less importantly, a national disinterest in materialism and individualism. The more the Western institutional actors ostracised the Lukashenka regime for its failure to observe democracy and democratic procedures in Belarus, the more the Belarusian President invoked the Second World War to associate Western pressure with the Nazi aggression, using the message of 'national endurance in resistance to foreign pressure' in an intense crescendo. President Lukashenka appealed to the imperatives of national security in order to silence the opposition and stifle the development of civil society and the independent media in the country as betrayers of the nation, and to interpret social discontent as nationally alien. He also offered people a source of pride through a nearly messianic claim to the leadership of the 'Eastern European civilization'. The Belarusian recombinant national identity and Lukashenka's authoritarian regime thus acquired a symbiotic relationship, in which one strengthened the other.

Instead of reshaping popular attitudes or refuting the soviet past, as the cultural elite attempted, Aliaksandr Lukashenka amply offered the post-soviet Belarusian society a sense of distinct national identity, based on socially and nationally familiar references. As the needs of his regime evolved and he changed his policies, President Lukashenka always adjusted the national discourse to fit them and to keep national identity in tune with his regime. Thus national mobilisation and identity construction became a principal means for the consolidation of Lukashenka's authoritarian regime.

The national foundation of the Belarusian transformation

Our final task is to convince the reader that it was nationalism and national mobilisation that played the crucial determining role in the stalling of democracy in Belarus, rather than any other factor. Therefore, we briefly return to the democratisation literature's principal explanatory variables, to demonstrate that the workings of all of them were grounded in the national premise.

The configuration of power between political elites at first sight appears a reasonably plausible explanation for the unfolding of the Belarusian transformation. We indeed have argued throughout the thesis that the elite pact in the early transition years helped discredit democracy. Yet, we also demonstrated that the principal reason for such disillusionment was the fact that the pact allowed for an inappropriate and inconsistent pursuit of liberal nationalism. One may also suggest that the difficulty of the democratic transition stemmed from the fact that the soviet elite administered the country as a factionalised group, which placed additional demands on its leaders to balance the interests of group members and of the society in general. Aliaksandr Lukashenka's individual leadership certainly may seem to have been easier to handle, as he did not have any particular group whose interests to secure, although he had to defend himself against a coup. Still, to cap the administration of the country and bring the corpus of executives under his full command had been a challenging task in itself. Aliaksandr Lukashenka accomplished it by getting the nation on his side and relating his cadre policies to ostensible national interests and preferences[117].

[117] Lukashenka's success is more impressive if compared to the fortune of Zianon Pazniak, the erstwhile leader of the cultural elite and the leader with at least comparable, if not stronger, public charisma. From commanding popular rallies whose attendance counted in tens of thousands, Pazniak evolved into a political exile, living in obscurity in the US, with a circle of followers apparently limited to hundreds of individuals at best – arguably all because of his inability to relate to the Belarusian nation.

The economic aspect of the soviet elite and President Lukashenka's rule makes for a particularly good contrast to highlight the importance of national foundation for the transition. The soviet elite and President Lukashenka pursued very similar goals in their economic policies. Both sought to keep the population content and to maintain an upper hand over the economy. Both limited the economic freedom of enterprises. Both claimed to have ensured economic stability and security. Yet, the soviet elite lost office primarily on the basis of economic performance, while President Lukashenka turned the economy into one of the ideological backbones of his regime. The explanation of such a dramatic difference is in the fact that the soviet elite endowed no ideological foundation to their economic choices, while the President established a firm national grounding for it. The soviet elite professed no vision of social development of their own; in a haphazard manner, they unsuccessfully tried to resuscitate soviet social security, when the central pillars of the soviet economic system, such as all-soviet central planning and secondary importance of money, had collapsed. President Lukashenka, on the contrary, framed the socially familiar principles of economic management, such as collective ownership of economic assets and long-term planning, within a specific, 'unique' national developmental model, to which he never failed to claim success. The grounding of economic policies within the resonant national foundation, or absence thereof was the principal explanation for the divergent political outcomes of the essentially identical economic policies of the soviet elite and President Lukashenka.

But was it not the economic cooperation with Russia, one may object, that sustained Lukashenka's economy and its absence that contributed to the failure of the soviet elite? Hardly so. First, the soviet elite did cooperate with Russia; they signed significant treaties, including a currency union. Also, the Russian leadership obviously endorsed their Belarusian soviet counterparts. Yet, none of this had helped the soviet elite to gain popular support for their candidate during the presidential election in 1994. Second, Russia's economic assistance to the Belarusian regime under President Lukashenka was premised ideologically more than economically. President Lukashenka always portrayed the Belarus-Russia union as something much grander than merely a pursuit of mutual economic interests. He always grounded integration in the national rhetoric of Slavic unity, and such rhetoric appears to have been the principal bait for the Russian leadership's preferential treatment of Belarus and the popularity of the integration in both countries. At the same time, the proclamation of the imperative of national independence allowed the Belarusian leader to withstand the expansion of the Russian capital in the country or its incorporation into the Russian Federation. Without doubt, the authoritarian regime in Belarus has derived significant

economic and political benefits from its close relationship with Russia, but its founder has been able both to build and manage that relationship through a careful construction of national identity. The soviet elite did not win the Russian card because they played it purely from the economic point of view, whereas the Belarusian President managed the game from an ideological standpoint, and succeeded. Thus ideology, rather than economy and technocratic management, proved the key causal factor for the Belarusian transition.

Further, can the stalling of democratisation be attributed to a sheer use of force? The democratic openness of the early transition years meant that the population had the channels for the expression of their discontent with the elites ruling the country, and the opportunity to replace them with electoral means, whereas they have certainly been denied that under Lukashenka's rule. The limitation on information, the crack down on dissent, a formidable security forces presence and imprisonment of prominent individuals from both the presidential and oppositional ranks has certainly created a climate of fear and caution within Belarusian society, and halted the expressions of discontent. Still, as we pointed out in the opening chapter, the degree of the use of violence by the authoritarian Belarusian regime has been insignificant against the backdrop of authoritarian dictatorships elsewhere in the world, and even in the postcommunist area. Obviously, any claims to popular legitimacy of the regime are problematic in an authoritarian context, but there are also signs that coercion is not the sole foundation of Lukashenka's rule in Belarus. President Lukashenka came to power by democratic means. The referendum he organised in 1995, to change the national state symbols and restore the Russian language in public life, essentially offered people a choice between two national identities; their support of the recombinant one against the 'European' was expressed freely and fairly. In 2004, Lukashenka's presidency faced an unexpected and crucial legitimacy test, the cutting off of gas supplies from Russia in winter 2004, and withstood it without reference to force at all. Analysts en masse predicted that this shutdown would cause instantaneous popular protests against the President which would bring down his regime. The Belarusian President, however, portrayed the Russian action as an act of foreign aggression and appealed to the national ability to resist foreign pressure. As a result, people did not go out in the street to protest and agreed with the President Lukashenka's interpretation of the matter.

Finally, we have to oppose the tired journalistic cliché that Belarusians simply refused to live in any way different from the soviet way. In academic debate, this argument has been phrased as saying that it was political culture of Belarus that invoked its post-soviet

authoritarian development. The argument that popular attitudes affect the legitimacy and stability of political systems is certainly a lead to understanding of the outcomes of transitions. Yet, the capacity of the concept of political culture to explain social development is often problematic. Almond and Verba (1989, 26) define political culture as 'cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations to political phenomena, distributed in national population'. Diamond's (1993, 8) definition of the concept also stresses its political dimension: 'people's predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals sentiments and evaluations about the political system of the country, and the role of the self in this system'. In countries undergoing transition, attitudes and perceptions about political systems are as volatile as hopes, frustrations and expectations linked to them. Transitions, therefore, are more likely to be affected by social attitudes and values in general, not merely those related to political systems. Also, as Diamond (1993, 8) acknowledges, all social groups do not necessarily share the same political culture, and values and beliefs are not evenly distributed throughout the population, so that it is ... misleading to talk of the political culture of a nation'. Finally, Almond and Verba themselves allow that political culture is not a theory, but 'refers to a set of variables which may be used in the construction of theories' (1989, 26, 28-29 quoted in Formisano 2001, 405). Further, Verba quoted in Formisano 2001, 399) acknowledges that 'political culture could become a 'residual category casually used to explain anything that cannot be explained by more precise and concrete factors'. Crucially, studies of political culture are mostly quantitative snapshots of the state of societies, and do not explore the sources and dynamics of the development of the attitudes and values they describe. Therefore, while 'it is obvious that the emergence and persistence of a democratic government among a group of people depends in some way of their beliefs' (Dahl 1989, 30 quoted in Reisinger 1997, 56), the concept of national ideology can arguably explain the link better the concept of political culture, since it allows a more precise deconstruction of the sources, protagonists, and entrenchment of people's beliefs.

The concept of political culture provides a weak explanation to the stalling of democratic development in Belarus. First, if people were not reflexive enough about their social and political conditions, we would expect them to preserve the leadership of the same people who administered the country in the soviet time, which did not happen. Second, Belarus under Aliaksandr Lukashenka's rule is different from the BSSR. The consolidated authoritarian regime in Belarus lacks some key features of socialism: there is no ruling party, the ruling elite is not collegial, but relies on the corner-stone of one person; the economy is not fully planned and is money-based, and the state ideology is distinctly non-communist.

Arguably, the Belarusian authoritarian leader did not use socialism as a blueprint for development, but as construction material for his own regime. Finally, the popular mobilisation for democratic change and the support for market reforms and state sovereignty in the early 1990s refute the deterministic logic of political culture argument. Rather, it would be more correct to argue that the potential for democratic development in the country was wasted through the association of the European mode of development with socially non-resonant nation-building policies and incongruous economic and international policies that were misleadingly labelled as pro-democratic and pro-European. That the people opted out of the development they found inept, mistaken and annoying, given the choice to do so, is nothing short of rational and should not be so surprising. The democratic transition in Belarus was stalled by its own advocates, who failed to relate to the nation, and the authoritarian regime became entrenched because of its protagonist's ability to do exactly that. Also, The cliché that the Belarusians would not accept anything but the soviet regime has to be replaced with the understanding that they simply chose to stay with the regime which appeared responsive and reflexive to them. To summarise, democracy in Belarus failed because its advocates did not give it an adequate national foundation, whereas authoritarianism consolidated on the basis of a carefully crafted and skilfully constructed national premise.

Elite power configurations, economic policies, international standing – all these factors undoubtedly played a role in the Belarusian post-soviet transformation. Yet, what has proved to matter ultimately is the way these pillars have been anchored in the national ideology. The national foundation thus affected the popular choice between democracy and authoritarianism in Belarus and proved crucial for the Belarusian transition path. The Belarusian developmental model per se has nothing new to offer other nations, regardless of what the President claims. However, Aliaksandr Lukashenka himself may prove to be a 'saviour' to aspiring authoritarian leaders by showing how a highly skilful national mobilisation can be used to create a sustainable authoritarian regime.

Conclusions

The relationship between nationalism and democratisation has been more nuanced in the postcommunist settings than the democratisation literature has suggested so far. We have seen that national identity construction is a dynamic and ongoing process, shaped both by political actors with reference to socio-economic circumstances. We also argued that national mobilisation may take place within established polities in the way that supports rather than disrupts them. Furthermore, an inclusive and ethnically egalitarian national mobilisation does not always support democratisation, but may in fact work towards the entrenchment and sustaining of an authoritarian regime. The critical tool for political legitimation in postcommunist countries, nationalism, can explain the divergence of postcommunist transitions more than any other single factor, as evidenced by the consistent patterns of liberal versus egalitarian national mobilisation and the concomitant trends in regime type across the region.

Democratisation is known as the introduction of democratic institutions, supported by adequate procedures and individual freedoms, into a state that had been previously run by more authoritarian methods. The democratic institutional structure has been in operation for more than two centuries, but, to use an architectural analogy, its installation across the world has not been straightforward. In particular, when the democratic structure was introduced in place of the communist regimes in Central Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the results were very different: it has entrenched and consolidated well (as in, for example, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia), or quickly collapsed, retaining only some façade elements (as in the Central Asian republics), or has remained unstable and shaky, eventually crumbling away (as in Russia), or it has settled down after a major shake-up (as in Georgia and Ukraine). Such a divergence proves that the democratic institutional structure does not work by default, however perfect in itself. Most observers insist that it needs the pillar of a market economy, others argued that it should receive support from the already established democracies, yet others pointed to the qualities of the architects, the political elites. While the importance of these factors is undoubted, each of them taken alone cannot elucidate the unveiling of democratisation in a clear way. This is because these factors themselves are, we argue, premised upon something else – namely, the people who were to dwell in the democratic building. Their common values, perceptions, attitudes and understanding of the world and themselves formed the foundation upon which to anchor the democracy itself, as well as its international and economic pillars.

'The people' mattered in the postcommunist transitions no less than the political elites, economic reforms or international support. They mattered not only as a mass of individuals who could use their vote or disrupt the state by coming out onto the streets. They were also important as a group which shared an identity, values and visions of the future. The nation, it seems, was the primary form and container of such collective ideas.

Our argument is that the divergence of transition paths after communism depended on how the architects of the democratisation project, political elites, treated the foundation of national identity, or could relate their desired regime design to already existing common values and strengthen them accordingly in a process of nation-building. Ideology, in other words, was a vital determinant of the postcommunist transition paths. If the political elites were committed to democracy, and the societies themselves preferred to live in the same ways as the democracies of Western Europe, the democratic institutions and procedures, market economy and international cooperation did not take long to entrench. If the architects formally subscribed to the democratisation project, but in fact were more interested to ensure themselves an unlimited rule, they fascinated people with the promise of an original design to reflect their national uniqueness, and shaped the national foundations accordingly to create new authoritarian edifices. Yet, not all political architects realised the importance of national foundations, or have been able to relate them to their goals; in these cases, they have quickly lost the popular commission, and been forced to withdraw, taking their discredited political designs along with them, and leaving the site open for new architects and national projects.

The postcommunist transformations proved that democracy requires more than a set of institutions and procedures. Democracy is a state of mind, more so, of a collective mind. The nation remains the principal modern expression of that mind. Contrary to the arguments that democratisation is a mechanistic process of copying democratic institutions and practices, and that rationality has prevailed in modern societies and polities, the postcommunist transformations prove that ideology, and in this case, national ideology, remains the key determinant of effective leadership and development in modern states.

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