

## **Belarus: Brokeback Revolution**

### **Why did voters in Belarus reject the “Denim Revolution”?**

#### **Executive Summary**

In the presidential election held in Belarus on 19th March 2006 the incumbent Alexander Lukashenko won a convincing 82% victory. This result had been widely predicted as had the international community's hostile response – in the weeks leading up to the election the main observer mission, the OSCE, prejudged both the conduct and result of the poll, deeming it to be neither free nor fair before a vote was cast.

At first sight, the proportions of Mr Lukashenko's victory seem barely less grotesque than the stratospherical electoral triumphs of the West's favourites. Over the last 15 years, the Western-controlled OSCE observer missions have swallowed without demur a 97% victory for the “rose revolutionary” Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia in 2004 or a modest 89% from Kyrgyzstan's “tulip revolutionary” Kurmanbek Bakiev, or 92% for Georgia's Eduard Shevardnadze back in 1992 when he was still Washington's favourite reformer, or even Heydar Aliev's 93% in Azerbaijan in 1993. Yet the same team which never raised an eyebrow about elections where one regime insider was endorsed as the successor of a predecessor whom the West had tired of could not conceive that 82% of Belarussians voted for Alexander Lukashenko.

The West, the EU in particular, threw its weight behind the candidature of Alexander Milinkevich, a little known former academic of Polish extraction, inviting him to Brussels in the pre-election period to be officially endorsed. 2 other opposition candidates were ignored by this august body. However, any candidate who stood on the West's familiar reform platform of privatization of both industry and public services was going to have an uphill struggle in Belarus where life has improved over the past ten years under Lukashenko led governments. A workable, social democratic model of the type once favoured by the EU now flourishes in Belarus where everyone is all too familiar with the costs of the reform agenda that has ravaged other post-Soviet republics.

BHHRG visited Belarus in the pre-election period returning three weeks later to observe the conduct of the poll. The Group has monitored elections in the country on a regular basis since 1994 when Lukashenko came to power. During the past 12 years its regular monitors have witnessed the vast improvements that have taken place in the republic's economy and standard of living as well as the stirrings of a genuine, home grown civil society. Yet, politicians and journalists in the West continue to refer to the country as a Stalinist outpost and economic basket case. However, the debacle in Iraq and the ignominious collapse of Ukraine's Orange revolution in 2005 have led some to begin to question these people's bonafides when it comes to nation building. It is to be hoped that the Belarussian people can be left alone to sort out their own problems without yet more meddling from politicians and journalists discredited for their clumsy, failed interference in the affairs of others.

## Belarus Today: Evolution versus Market-Fundamentalism

“The rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam to-day.”

Lewis Carroll<sup>1</sup>

Shock therapy has produced the greatest peacetime man-made social and economic disaster since Stalin’s collectivisation of agriculture in those ex-Communist countries which adopted the siren schemes proposed by Jeffrey Sachs et al. of the Harvard school. Yet, instead of rewarding Alexander Lukashenko’s instinctive revulsion for inflicting penury on his people to benefit a small class of nouveaux riches emerging from the Communist nomenklatura and their Western partners, the West has poured forth venom on the regime in Belarus which refused to rob its own pensioners and sell its daughters into prostitution or send its graduates to be plumbers in the West.

Visitors to Belarus find a rather different place from the official image of a Stalinist throwback. In fact, there is a massive gulf between the Western media portrait of a country of huddled, impoverished masses and the reality of a society which has seen steadily improving living standards since the last presidential elections in 2001.

The problem with Belarus from the shock therapists’ point of view is not that it isn’t a market economy but that it is the wrong kind of market economy. Goods and services are marketed to ordinary people; shops sell things people can buy. Unlike the empty, expensive boutiques which line the streets in nearby Vilnius, Minsk has shops filled with goods within a reasonable price range. Instead of Japanese sushi bars for the expense account types, Minsk hosts a wide variety of restaurants and pizzerias. Yet absurd claims are still disseminated such as the idea that the anti-Americanism of President Lukashenko’s regime is so all-embracing there are no McDonalds fast-food outlets in the country – a canard that can be exploded by a simple stroll down Minsk’s Lenin Street where the “big tasty” is advertised.<sup>2</sup> But most readers of such claims will not visit Minsk and therefore probably take the media’s portrayal of the country at face value.

Outside Minsk, there is the huge Zhdanovichi market with well over 30 hectares of large pavilions selling everything from food to audio and computer equipment. It has an enormous car mart. Goods from domestic production as well as imports are available. Locals as well as traders from all over the ex-USSR and as far a-field as China and Vietnam compete to sell their wares to ordinary people. Fleets of commercial mini-buses hurry shoppers back and forth. In short, a real market economy is on display - but only to those who go to see it. Sit in the gloomy, over-heated headquarters of the opposition parties and all you hear is about the regime’s Soviet-style economics. That may satisfy Western pundits but it butters no electoral bread in a country where ordinary voters know they have a better life than before. One Belgian journalist with excellent Russian and experience all over the old Soviet Union admitted to hearing something unique in Belarus: People told him life is better now than it was in Soviet times! Only in Belarus have they stopped looking back nostalgically to Comrade Brezhnev – and that is intolerable to Western shock therapy fundamentalists who insist there can be no alternative to their one true path to capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

Even former pro-Orange revolutionaries in Ukraine have a more realistic perspective on Belarus’s economic situation than Western transitologists. For instance, looking back to 2004 from Autumn, 2005, Serhiy Hrabovskyi explained (somewhat clumsily translated here) why Belarus’s relative prosperity left the Western-sponsored opposition with a mountain to climb

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<sup>1</sup> See *Through the looking Glass*.

<sup>2</sup> For the alleged absence of McDonalds, see “Author: [Faina Again](#) Date: 04/19/2004, 07:51 pm Oh, and by the way there are no McDonalds in Belarus.” On the Fodor’s website <http://www.fodors.com/forums/threadselect.jsp?fid=2&tid=34491683>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://72.14.207.104/search?q=cache:6yBAPBxfmcJ:www.ifc.org/ifcext/belarus.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/bulletinSMB7/%24FILE/bulletinSMB7.pdf+Belarus+market-traders&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=13&ie=UTF-8>.

by advocating the economic chaos of Ukraine or the penury of rose-tinted Georgia, "Byelorussian industry last year reached 130% out of 1990 level with 15,9% growth. It produces cars, busses, trolleybuses, tractors, television sets, radio sets, make optical and microelectronics devices up to the artificial heart valves. Certainly, this production cannot be compared with American or Japanese goods. But under price-and-quality ratio considerable part of Byelorussian products are quite competitive in foreign markets...The same situation is with MAZ [Minsk Automobile Works] buses, which are widely used all over Ukraine. Ukraine's LAZ [Lviv Automobile Works]... cannot make good use of its potential abilities, whereas MAZ increased bus production by 44% in 2004. At that they become cheaper and 90% of MAZ production is exported to Russia. Striking fact: last year MAZ produced 20,500 tractors, tippers, timber carrying vessels, etc. (20% growth), whereas all Russia motor works put out only 13,700 machineries."<sup>4</sup>

Even though Hrabovskyi repeated the well-worn phrase that Lukashenko is a 'dictator' he contrasted the evident economic pragmatism and success of his regime with the kleptocratic and chaotic regimes of presidents Kuchma and Yushchenko: "I would like to say that any economic system, even so sluggish as Soviet, is better, than the total state ownership division, which was carried out in Ukraine by Leonid Kuchma, and is going on until now. One more interesting detail: Ukraine's economy has practically exhausted reserves of renewable growth that means it needs radical updating to resume the normal rates of GDP growth. Yet Belarus has partly modernized its facilities thanks to the dictator Lukashenko."<sup>5</sup>

Moving on to the social benefits of Lukashenko's government, Hrabovski pointed out that: "government expenses of Belarus on the health protection make 4,8% of GDP, in Russia 3,7% of GDP, as for Ukraine it is better to keep mum. The average amount of old age pension in Ukraine has become equal to Belarusian in dollars only this year, but we should count that there [in Belarus] housing services charge is much less. Average wage in Byelorussia amounts to c. \$ 250, the sum Ukrainians can earn only in Kyiv." Elsewhere shock therapy has required privatised factories and other enterprises to scrap any welfare provision for their employees but "The majority of the Belarusian enterprises, unlike Russian, kept their hostels, sanatorium-preventoriums, aid posts, preschool institutions, gymnasiums and others like that!"<sup>6</sup>

The Ukrainian dismissed the "illusory, theoretical chance" of the Belarussian opposition, "if not to succeed, then to conduct an effective presidential campaign" because the colour-coded revolutions had produced socio-economic implosion" meaning "I am afraid today's chaos and absence of real economic success of Ukraine's new power is supposed to be a good example for Belarussians..."<sup>7</sup>

By rejecting a pseudo-Maoist "Great Leap Forward" to capitalism, Lukashenko saved his people from the tragic impoverishment and demeaning struggle for mere survival inflicted on their neighbours. In the weeks before the presidential election Belarussian State television's documentary series "15" examined the grim economic history of the other post-Soviet republics and must have reinforced what ordinary Belarussians suspected when comparing the misery and rising mortality rates elsewhere with their own fate: There but for whom they elected in 1994 went them.

Precisely because Belarus's population is not impoverished as in "successful" transition countries their society has a real chance of evolving into a genuine civil society, populated by a significant middle class of self-employed and white collar workers. Writing about Yeltsin's Russia in 1999, Matt Biven and Jonas Bernstein noted how the economic shock therapy pushed by Western governments and advisers had the effect of crushing the very embryonic civil society which the transitologists and Open Society pundits claimed to be promoting:

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<sup>4</sup> See Serhiy Hrabovskyi, "The Belarussian opposition: condemned to death?" translated by Irena Yakovina in *Ukrainsky Pravda* (11<sup>th</sup> October, 2005)  
[http://www.pravda.com.ua/en/news\\_print/2005/10/11/4826.htm](http://www.pravda.com.ua/en/news_print/2005/10/11/4826.htm)

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

“Shock therapy had an important side effect. Rampant inflation was the blow that smacked down Russian civil society just as it was showing faint signs of trying to rise, tottering, out of Communism’s sickbed. Slowly and tentatively, ordinary Russians had been taking an interest in how their country was run. They had been debating the future and demanding changes. Then, suddenly, they were financially wiped out, their savings gone, their buying power shrinking by the hour. Any energy left over went into moonlighting at second jobs... [or] tending their own garden plots... Life expectancies plummeted, particularly for men, thanks mostly to an increase in violent or stress-related deaths: suicides, murders, heart failures, and alcohol-related incidents.”<sup>8</sup>

Instead of denouncing the Belarussian economic model, civil society activists ought to be encouraging the neighbours to adopt it. But, sadly, there is no money in promoting a real civil society. Philosophic speculators don’t pay for people to become independently wealthy. The shock therapists want easy meat from sleazy deals not prosperity for all. After all they have had fifteen years to see what has gone wrong elsewhere.

### **Migration and Asylum: Who’s fleeing whom?**

Unlike its neighbours in Eastern Europe, including the new EU members, Belarus has sent neither a significant number of asylum seekers nor migrants to Britain and other EU states. Whereas Poland, the most aggressive defender of human rights in Belarus in the EU has more than twenty times the number of exiles in Britain than similar would-be asylum seekers from Belarus! Unemployment and poverty in Poland have caused 300,000 Poles to seek economic refuge in the British Isles. Ireland, for instance, has seen growing tension between Irish low-paid workers and the wave of Baltic and Polish migrants. Irish employers are discarding native labour for these ultra-low wage and socially unprotected helots from poverty-stricken Latvia and Lithuania in particular. When British newspapers report greedily on the low property prices in the Baltic States urging speculators in this country to snap up bargains in Estonia, for instance, they do not explain why so many country cottages no longer have inhabitants!<sup>9</sup>

Organisations which claim to be focussed on human rights in Belarus nonetheless advertise the export of labour from it. For instance, the Charter 97 website carries an advert for the US Green Card.<sup>10</sup>

Belarus’s failure to facilitate the trade in children is also a recurrent charge against President Lukashenko’s government. Alarmed by reports of abuse of adopted children in Northern Europe and North America, Minsk stepped in to stop the unregulated transfer of Belarussian orphans and other adoptees. For instance, it demanded consular oversight until the age of sixteen. Even if some genuine adoptive parents felt that these measures were intrusive, given the cases of murder and abuse of children adopted from the CIS countries it can hardly be considered unreasonable that the Belarussian government felt an ongoing duty of care to its infant citizens taken abroad.<sup>11</sup>

Instead of welcoming Minsk’s concern for the well-being of children adopted abroad, Washington and other West European net importers of children have added it to the list of President Lukashenko’s sins.<sup>12</sup>

One of the North European human rights activists who is regularly in Belarus (despite the government’s alleged crackdown on foreign NGOs) and who is well-known to members of this

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted from Johnson’s Russia List (February, 1999) in Nick Holdsworth, *Moscow, the Beautiful and the Damned. Life in Russia in Transition* (Andre Deutsch: London, 2000), 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> See Patrick Barkham “Eek! Baltic goldrush as Britons make Estonia Europe’s property hotspot” in *The Guardian* (11<sup>th</sup> March, 2006): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,1728752,00.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://charter97.org/eng/news/2006/03/03/usa>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://bhtimes.blogspot.com/2006/02/lukashenka-defends-children-kgb.html>.

<sup>12</sup> For the trade in children, see <http://www.jcics.org/Belarus.htm>.

Group is also a partner in an adoption agency back home. Scholars like Janine Wedel have illustrated on a grand scale the confusion of public policy and private interest which has been a hallmark of Western transition aid and democracy assistance in the post-Soviet space since 1991.<sup>13</sup>

Anyone who compares the West's treatment of post-Communist societies in Eastern Europe with America's treatment of post-Nazi Western Europe after 1945 cannot help be struck by the stark contrast. After 1945 enlightened self-interest in Washington led to the Marshall Plan and the economic reconstruction of prostrate former enemies as well as allies. In the long run American society benefited as much as the West Europeans. However, after 1989, both North Americans and West Europeans treated the ex-Communist societies as objects of plunder rather than assistance. Shock therapy enabled Western companies to buy East European assets at knock down prices while a population left poor by Communism was impoverished further.

In practice since 1989 the West has treated the post-Communist East not as George C. Marshall treated Western Europe after 1948 but as the United Fruit Company treated Guatemala in the same period. Perhaps it is hardly surprising with so many Iran-Contra veterans shaping US foreign and intelligence policy from the Baltics to the Balkans over the last fifteen years that the West sees countries as diverse as Belarus, Latvia or Macedonia as the European equivalent of Latin America.

Just as wages are held down in the west and south of the USA by an influx of poverty-stricken Hispanics from puppet states south of the Colorado River so the old EU has acquired its own belt of poverty-stricken basket cases to the east of the old Iron Curtain.

At his post-election press conference on 20th March, President Lukashenko responded to a question about EU threats to impose sanctions on his country by saying that he would stop trying to prevent the 300,000 plus illegal migrants in Belarus heading to the fleshpots of Western Europe. He pointed out that if Poland wanted to sanction his country then opening the borders to let Chinese and other Asian would-be economic migrants pass through would relieve Belarus of a problem and give Poland a chance to fill some of the spaces left empty by the mass migration of young Poles to Western European countries like Britain.

### **The Candidates:**

3 candidates challenged the incumbent, Alexander Lukashenko, for the presidency. Sergei Gaidukevich (who had stood previously in 2001), former Minsk University rector Alexander Kozulin and Alexander Milinkevich. However, local oppositionists and the Western media gave the impression that Milinkevich was the only opposition candidate always dubbing him the 'united' opposition candidate. Therefore, it was perplexing to many people who told BHRG that they had never heard of Mr. Milinkevich before he put forward his candidacy for the top job.

### **Milinkevich: The Jack-in-a-box Candidate?**

Visiting the headquarters of the Belarussian Popular Front three weeks before the poll this Group's observers found the activists busy preparing to distribute campaign literature and free newspapers (like Narodnaya Volya) on behalf of Alexander Milinkevich remarkably ill-informed about his past and personality. Repeatedly, they replied to questions about what they knew about Dr. Milinkevich with stock replies like "He is the candidate of the unified opposition" and could not explain what personal qualities or aspects of his career had led the "unified opposition" to choose him.

Glasnost is not a feature of Dr. Milinkevich's campaign. His website provides meagre data about his life, especially before 1991. Although he travelled abroad in the Soviet period – unlike Mr Lukashenko – to the University of Montpellier in France in 1980 when Comrade Brezhnev's iron-hand still gripped the country, Dr. Milinkevich's official CV makes no

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<sup>13</sup> See Janine Wedel, and

reference to membership of the Komsomol or Communist Party, usually prerequisites for visiting the fleshpots of the West. He also spent four years in Algeria (1980-84). No-one in Minsk among opposition supporters or their critics could answer whether the “unified opposition” candidate had been a Communist Party member in the totalitarian period, but it is intriguing that Milinkevich’s campaign manager, Sergei Kalyakin is also First Secretary of the Party of Belarussian Communists! Although Western journalists routinely regale their readers with allegations that Lukashenko is a “Stalinist” nostalgic running a “totalitarian” society, in reality the Belarussian president is disliked by the Communist-era elite.

En masse the beneficiaries of Brezhnev’s corrupt regime which did so much to discredit socialism in the USSR have rallied to Western-sponsored candidates at each Belarussian election – only to see them rejected by the voters as Prime Minister Vyacheslav Kebich was in 1994. Sergei Kalyakin isn’t the only ex-Communist standing behind the “pro-Western” candidate. Red Army general Valery Frolov was prominent in the opposition ranks. Vitali Silitski currently a Reagan-Fascell democracy fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States denounced Lukashenko for removing the Brezhnev-era Politburo member Piotr Masherov from one of Minsk’s main avenues and attributed this iconoclasm as the cause of Masherov’s daughter’s public opposition to Lukashenko.<sup>14</sup> These children of the nomenklatura see Alexander Lukashenko as the usurper of their rightful position as the bosses of Belarussian society. As the President pointed out at his press conference after the election, he created the “new system” and they “ONI”, the “Them” of the Soviet days, cannot forgive him. Given that Washington’s new darling in Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel, was Agitation Secretary of the East German equivalent of the Komsomol before 1989 in her East Berlin workplace, Communist activism in the totalitarian past seems not only not to be a bar to promotion but it may in fact be a requirement for the New World Order.

Already in 1990, Dr. Milinkevich crossed from physics to politics and was appointed deputy mayor of his home town, Grodno, under the former Communist apparatchik, Semyon Domash. Mr. Domash had been unceremoniously dumped as a potential opposition candidate in 2001 when the “US International Republican Institute was asked to do new polls and analyse other opinion data in Belarus. The US analysts found there was no obvious figure to challenge Mr. Lukashenko. The Americans then switched funding away from Semyon Domash, an opposition leader they had previously supported...”<sup>15</sup>

In the weeks leading up to the March 2006 poll Milinkevich was feted by the European Union in both Brussels and Strasbourg. He was also provided with a plethora of web sites too numerous to cite: For instance, under his name alone his campaign web site lists this “Interesting Fact: you can find our site under all these addresses: [milinkevich.org](http://milinkevich.org) [milinkevich.net](http://milinkevich.net) [milinkevichu.net](http://milinkevichu.net) [milinkievic.com](http://milinkievic.com) [milinkievic.org](http://milinkievic.org) [milinkievic.net](http://milinkievic.net) [milinkevic.org](http://milinkevic.org) [milinkevic.net](http://milinkevic.net) [milinkevic.com](http://milinkevic.com) [milin2006.org](http://milin2006.org) [milin2006.net](http://milin2006.net) [milin2006.com](http://milin2006.com)”<sup>16</sup>

This Group has repeatedly observed how in several countries the official Western media have sung the praises of the “single” opposition candidate, declaring him to be the people’s darling, only to drop him when he fails either to win the election or carry through the “people power revolution.” For instance, who remembers the West’s favourites contesting Slovakia’s Vladimir Mečiar in the 1990s or even who was the NATO states’ preferred candidate for that country’s presidency in April, 2004 - the Communist-era ambassador to Mengistu’s Ethiopia, Edvard Kukan. However, Slovak premier, Mikulas Dzurinda, has remained loyal to his sponsors acting as mentor to a flock of “People Power” look-alikes since coming to power in 1998.

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<sup>14</sup> See “A Partisan Reality Show” in *Transitions on line* (11<sup>th</sup> May, 2005). Mr Silitski has accused Lukashenko of being simultaneously Allende and Pinochet, thus satisfying Left and Right in America that he is a very bad man.

<sup>15</sup> See Ian Traynor, “Belarussian foils dictator-buster... for now. Tested US foreign election strategy fails against Lukashenko” in *The Guardian* (14<sup>th</sup> September, 2001): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,551533,00.html>.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://en.milinkevich.org/>

The ultra-bland Dzurinda openly boasts about his role in coordinating similar “people power” revolutionaries from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union: “Last year, near the square where we lit candles, I introduced a special group of people to President Bush” he writes “These were civic leaders who championed freedom in their homelands. These were men and women who came from countries from the Baltic to the Black seas, from Georgia to Serbia and Montenegro, and, yes, from Belarus. Later today Bush and I will talk about this meeting.”<sup>17</sup>

Dzurinda assured the readers the Washington Post that “people of all ages will be wearing blue denim, the symbol of hope for a modern, European Belarus”<sup>18</sup>, but who below the age of 58 believes that denim is a symbol of radicalism anymore even in Gomel? It was striking that in a photograph of Dr. Milinkevich attending a rock concert only the candidate and his wife were draped in denim.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Milinkevich proved a weak and uninspiring candidate. Even the ultra-Orange Ukrainian Channel 5 TV coverage could not do much to boost his campaign. On 13th March, it reported that three Ukrainian nationalists had been arrested for waving Ukrainian flags at a rally addressed by Milinkevich but what was striking to the viewer was the paltry attendance for the “unified opposition candidate” even allowing for the cold and snow.<sup>20</sup>

Belatedly, in his programme published in the days before the election Milinkevich tried populism. In this, he followed precedents set by Western-backed candidates from Slovakia to Serbia, Georgia to Ukraine, in which these supposedly “pro-market” candidates have repeatedly made populist promises to the electorate assuring voters that if elected their land will flow with milk and honey and be awash with Western aid. Yet, at the same time, they assure Westerners that they will follow strict monetarist criteria, shock therapy and the gamut of World Bank mandated measures which have produced collapse in production and employment from the Balkans to the Baltics.

Dr. Milinkevich’s programme held out a similar rosy prospect picturing a post-Lukashenko bonanza:

“10. A Prosperous Belarus:

Today we know very well how to survive, but we do not know how to really live. In our new Belarus, people know the taste of a fulfilling lifestyle, without humiliating salaries and pensions, without unpredictable inflation.

The labor market is developing quickly. A monthly income of 500 euros to 700 euros has become the average. Pensions provide an income sufficient to cover \$200 to \$300 [dollars in original] in monthly costs. The state and community are actively helping the unemployed to gain new knowledge and qualifications, successfully overcoming the crisis caused by job loss. When a person able and willing to work is not employed, the state assumes the cost of support and healthcare for his or her children. We care for our veterans, the disabled and our children.”

Whether all these goodies can be paid for “without unpredictable inflation” must be doubted. Indeed, the inflationary consequences of the programme are all too predictable particularly if the candidate’s speeches abroad are taken into account.

Dr. Milinkevich has told both West European and Russian audiences that one of his priorities is to end Belarus’s import of cheap oil and gas from Russia.<sup>21</sup> The experience of

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<sup>17</sup> See Mikulas Dzurinda, “Light the Candles Of Belarus.Europe's Last Dictatorship Will Not Endure” in *The Washington Post* (13<sup>th</sup> March , 2006), Page A15

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/12/AR2006031201111.html>

<sup>19</sup> See photographs on the Charter 97 web-site.

<sup>20</sup> See News, Channel 5 (11.20pm, 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> For instance, he indicated to BBC Radio 4’s “World Tonight” (2nd February, 2006) that “super-low gas prices” offered by Russia were an illegitimate form of “support for Lukashenko.” Even rich West Europeans might wonder whether fuel subsidies were such a bad idea when *Sky News* could report that 2 million households in Britain suffered “fuel poverty” because of soaring gas and electricity prices as

neighbouring Ukraine shows what happens when “pro-market” politicians sacrifice the national economic interest to dogmatic market fundamentalism to please their Western sponsors.

Another problem was the perception – certainly fostered by Belarussian media – that Milinkevich was more concerned with winning approval in Western capitals than votes at home. His Polish roots too suggested that he was more concerned with approval from a neighbouring nation notoriously snobbish and dismissive of the “peasants” of Belarus once ruled by Polish pans or landlords.

This combination of neo-colonial deference to the Western great powers combined with indifference to the reality of disenfranchisement of ethnic Russians in Latvia and Estonia – well-known to Belarussians – was exploited by Mr Lukashenko who queried whether an opposition victory would lead to the kind of disenfranchisement of ethnic Russians seen in Estonia or Latvia.

Without a clearly preferable economic model and consorting with foreigners who were notoriously anti-Russian – a xenophobia not shared by Belarussians – Milinkevich was courting a tiny share of the popular vote. Maybe he exhausted the potential of the pool of voters likely to back shock therapy, high fuel prices and anti-Russian nationalism.

### **Kozulin: Spoiler, Splitist or Bad-Cop Good Cop Routine?**

Alexander Kozulin is regarded as once having been a regime insider until he was unceremoniously sacked as rector of the Belarussian State University in 2003 after a wide ranging corruption investigation. When he put himself forward as a presidential candidate three years later on behalf of the Social Democratic Gromada movement, he was dismissed by the new totalitarians in the West as irrelevant or even mischievous because there was only one “unified opposition candidate”. For instance, Condoleeza’s Rice’s point man for Belarus, Dan Fried, didn’t even mention Kozulin when he told a press conference at the State Department in early February, “Our position is not to pick winners. Our position is to do what we can to promote a free and fair election,....” It is also true that the Belarussian opposition has united around Milinkevich.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Fried et al. were made uneasy by the obvious fact that Kozulin was going to have much higher voter recognition than Milinkevich and could even ‘spoil the party’.

BHHRG interviewed Dr. Kozulin’s campaign manager, Miecheslav Hryb, in February 2006 in the pre-election period. Hryb a former lieutenant-general of the Soviet militia (police) was chairman of the Belarussian Supreme Soviet and acting head of state in 1993<sup>23</sup> But that was before the outsider, Alexander Lukashenko, shot to power on the back of a popular surge against the old nomenklatura presenting itself as the natural rulers of Belarus in the New World Order. Since then, Hryb has harboured a deep dislike for the ‘upstart’ president (whom he described to BHHRG as a “vulgar Socialist”) and actively campaigned for his opponents.

Hryb confirmed that Dr. Kozulin had a “higher public profile” than Dr. Milinkevich and, at that time, he also seemed to be campaigning more actively than the ‘unified candidate’ although much of his activity seemed to involve making complaints to the Central Election Commission and the Procuracy over meetings allegedly disrupted or cancelled by the authorities. As election day drew closer, Mr. Kozulin threw himself ever more dramatically into confrontation with the authorities by bursting into a meeting held by Lukashneko loyalists and later stamping on the president’s photograph.

In fact, Mr. Hryb hinted that Kozulin might not remain in the race until the end if the “oppressive measures taken against him” didn’t stop. However, even though he almost went

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this year’s bitter winter saw the market’s downside kick in with 40% price inflation for Britain which pioneered the sell-off of state energy generating assets. (3.52pm, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> See William C. Mann, “U.S. TO SPEND MILLIONS IN BELARUS TO ENSURE FREE, FAIR VOTING IN NEXT MONTH’S ELECTIONS” AP Worldstream, Wash, D.C. (Feb 08, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> See [http://www.belarusguide.com/as/law\\_pol/belarussian\\_politics\\_1986-present.html](http://www.belarusguide.com/as/law_pol/belarussian_politics_1986-present.html).

as far as asking the Central Election Commission chairwoman to block his candidacy she refused and he stayed in the race until the end.

Before Kozulin's agit-prop antics stole the headlines, he was dismissed as a Lukashenko proxy and academic fraud. B23 told its readers as late as 17th February, "Alexander Kazulin (Kozulin) is a dark horse, a kind of pseudo-opposition, a player that will most probably be helping Lukashenka. For many years he's been a president of the Belarusian State University, a loyal supporter of Lukashenka, an enemy of the students, and then after he's been sacked he suddenly became an "opposition activist" and a democrat." B23 reported, "Also there are rumors that Kazulin's Ph.D. is plagiarized, being an exact replica of another Ph.D. thesis from some Moscow scientist." 24

When Lithuanian premier, Brazauskas met Kozulin, the totalitarian opposition went ballistic declaring "Lithuania secretly supports Lukashenko" because "Lithuanian Prime Minister, Algirdas Brazauskas, thought it possible to meet with the Byelorussian Social-Democrat presidential hopeful Alexander Kozulin in Vilnius..." In Pravda-speak of the bad old days, it went on, "It is not a secret in Lithuania that this hopeless hopeful is just supposed 'to split the opposition' and to cut the chances of Lukashenko's key rival Alexander Milinkevich. Now that Milinkevich has just been welcomed in Brussels by the EU foreign ministers and has been proclaimed by the EU as the only alternative to 'dictator Lukashenko' as Byelorussian president, such a meeting of an EU prime minister with the 'puppet' of today's ruler of Byelorussia seems to many strange, if not symptomatic." Brazauskas suggested that as leader of the ruling Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party (SDPL) it was normal for him and his party to "support the Social-Democrats of Byelorussia and their candidate Alexander Kozulin." Lithuania's guardians of the true single path to democracy were outraged: "Why after all — wonder Lithuanian political scientists — does the ruling Lithuanian party support not the 'western' candidate Milinkevich but 'some opposition splitter' and, in fact, Lukashenko servant Kozulin? And — what is more — makes this known to everybody?" Speaking openly obviously compounded Brazauskas's crime in the eyes of Lithuania's totalitarian watchdogs.

In a press-conference held on 30th January the leader of Lithuania's conservative Pro Patria union, Andrius Kubilius, said: "Brazauskas is advertising himself that he has met not with the united opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich but the united opposition splitting candidate, Social Democrat Kozulin. Thereby the Lithuanian premier is showing his support not for the united opposition but for those disuniting it." "Alexander Lukashenko will have to commend Algirdas Brazauskas for that."

But, perhaps, this meeting with the de facto "pro-Lukashenko" candidate was actually a coincidence? Kubilius says that today one can see a whole tendency of "quiet friendship with Lukashenko," with one typical example being the defiance of the Lithuanian authorities to give the green-light to Byelorussian Humanitarian University, a higher school ousted by Lukashenko from Minsk. The university has moved to Vilnius, but the authorities there prevent it from getting official status. According to the leader of the Lithuanian conservative Pro Patria movement, Andrius Kubilius: "...the education ministry bureaucrats are finding whatever stupefying arguments just not to legalize the university's status. In fact, our bureaucrats are zealously exercising the new concept of their relations with the Lukashenko regime: if Lukashenko does not like the university, we must not like it either."

It is hardly comforting for us citizens of a "united Europe" to find that our co-rulers in the ex-Soviet east who now constitute such a large part of the European Commission, European Parliament and European judicial bodies find dissent so intolerable. When will they act to silence West Europeans who naively think that the incorporation of members of the old totalitarian elites from post-Communist Europe marked a victory for freedom and pluralism?

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<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.br23.net/en/2006/02/17/milinkevich-is-registered/>.

On 24th February, the opposition NGO, Charter 97 openly backed Milinkevich and cast doubt on Kozulin: "It is still unknown, who or what is standing behind Kazulin. We'd most like to believe that he is an independent figure, or at least he wants to become one."<sup>25</sup>

However as Kozulin's antics attracted more attention the Charter 97 website raised the possibility that Milenkevich and Kozulin were playing a good-cop bad cop routine. BHHRG noted that Kozulin activists in his Minsk HQ wore the same Milinkevich campaign lapel badge further supporting this allegation .

The Warsaw-based Stefan Batory Foundation which grew out of the pre-1989 Western-funded and organised pro-dissident group published its predictions on 14th March.<sup>26</sup> They dismissed Kozulin as pro-Russian: "It is still not entirely clear to what degree Kazulin [sic.] is an independent politician." 'Independent of whom?' is always the real question but to ignore Kozulin's rumbustious antics or to dismiss them as all a sham on behalf of Lukashenko seems to be taking conspiracy theory to new lows of absurdity. Batory quoted opinion polls giving Kozulin only 3% of the vote with Lukashenko on 55% and Milenkevich on 18%

Kozulin was dangerously "cautious about the perspectives of Belarus's EU integration, which may be considered a way to win Russia's favour." The SBF report suggested that "Kazulin wants to be perceived in the Kremlin as the best alternative to Lukashenka. [sic.]" A member of what he called the Menshevik fraction of the Belarussian Popular Front who was also an election observer for the Voters' Group of Belarus told our observers that though he had supported the ultra-nationalist, Zamyon Paznyak inside the BPF, when the Bolshevik fraction which supported Milenkevich and his Communist campaign manager, Sergei Kalyakin, the Paznyak supporters switched their support to Kozulin as preferable even though he was regarded as Russophone and more likely to be acceptable to the Kremlin than a Pole with NATO-EU ambitions.

However, PubliusPundit's main author on a website which presents itself as the New World Order's "authorised version" backed Kozulin "given the EU's recent declarations, and President Bush's signing of the [Belarus Democracy Act](#), not to mention Condi Rice's declaration of Belarus as an [outpost of tyranny](#), we clearly know where the United States and the EU are looking for another revolution."<sup>27</sup>

Alexander Kozulin told the Group's observers on the day before the polls that he had not been campaigning but had just returned from Ukraine the day before because he regarded it as pointless to campaign. That seems at odds with his combative actions earlier and suggests fatalism as much as any rejection of the fairness of the proceedings.

Sergei Gaydukevich

BHHRG also interviewed Sergei Gaydukevich who was ignored by the Western media when not being labelled a Lukashenko 'front'. For example, the French website Le Courrier du Bélarus (modelled on the "humane interventionist" Courriers des Balkans) naturally has links only to pro-Milenkevich sources and didn't even condescend to notice Mr Gaydukevich's campaign.<sup>28</sup> In fact, he received more votes than Kozulin (3.5% against 2.3%). Gaydukevich told BHHRG that he could have been the 'unified' opposition candidate himself if he had been prepared to rubbish Belarus but although he claimed that there were problems to be addressed he admitted that much had been achieved. After all, the people have relatives in former Soviet republics like Ukraine and Georgia and are well aware of the situation there.

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<sup>25</sup> See <http://bhtimes.blogspot.com/2006/02/middle-east-special-mosc-bomb-nuclear.html>.

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.euractiv.com/Article?tcaturi=tcm:29-153375-16&type=Analysis>. This rapporteur used to smuggle cash for the SBF to Central Europe, or at least funds which came under its auspices.

<sup>27</sup> See "A Candidate Appears in Belarus" (20<sup>th</sup> March, 2005): <http://www.publiuspundit.com/?p=702>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://belarus.courriers.info/sites.php3>

Gaydukevich's party Republica is a member of the Liberal International and, therefore, 'acceptable' to Europe. However, he thought that the EU would have to change its tactics if it wanted to usher in a change of regime in Belarus. He said that he had no difficulties campaigning and had even written articles in the opposition media.

### **The Campaign**

The Group's six different observers who visited Belarus during the election campaign were struck by its quietness. Apart from the large posters and electronic screens urging people to vote (when they weren't showing adverts for commercial products), there was no evidence of an election campaign.

Occasionally, a handbill or small opposition sticker was sighted but nothing of significance. At opposition rallies handbills, stickers and newspapers were handed out to participants and observers alike.

Alexander Lukashenko chose not to campaign. He did not use the television and radio time allocated to him nor the official newspaper campaigning slots. He offered them to his opponents.

The opposition candidates refused that offer but did get their time on television and radio plus the publication of their programmes in the state-run media. Dr. Kozulin chose to use one of television slots to make allegations about the President's private life. (It is well known that he is separated from his wife.) He also ripped up a photograph of the President on camera. Whether Belarussian voters appreciated these personal jibes and gestures is open to doubt. Certainly when Mr. Lukashenko was asked at his post-election press conference if he intended to sue Kozulin for libel, he remarked, "Isn't getting 2% of the vote punishment enough?" and added that he had no powers of prosecution, only the power of pardon.

State media showed the President engaged in his daily duties and this undoubtedly contributed to a positive aura since opening new facilities or discussing economic growth figures reinforced Mr Lukashenko's claims to be leading the country on a path of economic growth and prosperity.

Reading the English-language press, the impression is given that next to no opposition newspapers are available in Belarus – and at the same time that every week another opposition paper there is closed down. The reality was that the well-funded opposition papers were available free - not for sale in kiosks because no-one can sell something for nothing. If individual issues were seized it was for publications of alleged libels.

Reporters Without Borders lists some of the opposition newspapers available in the country: Solidarnost, Narodnaya Volya, BG Delovaya Gazeta, Zhoda, Regionalnaya Gazeta, Nasha Niva, Vitebskiy Kurier, Brestskiy Kurier, Intex-Press, Gazeta Slonimskaya, Borisovski Novosti, Dlya Vas, Volnaye Hlybokaye et Myastsoviy Chas.<sup>29</sup> Many of these are printed abroad because they have refused to pay damages resulting from libel cases. The state-printer was then made liable as the plaintiff could seize newsprint in compensation. Even Radio Liberty's Jan Maksymiuk let that slip: "In September, Belsayuzdruk, Belarus's state monopoly that runs a nationwide network of kiosks and newsstands, terminated a contract for the distribution of "Narodnaya Volya" after a court froze the newspaper's bank account and seized newsprint demanding payment of libel damages."<sup>30</sup> In Britain, for instance, it is routine for plaintiffs to sue distributors of alleged libels – and it is almost as common for distributors to pressure the press to climb down, apologise and pay damages, or risk losing distribution.

As it happens the lavishly sponsored opposition press has preferred to abandon domestic printers and distributors, refuse to pay damages, and to relocate abroad in Russia or in Lithuania. The additional costs of trucking in newspapers and other material and of

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<sup>29</sup> See [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=15187](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15187)

<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.data.minsk.by/belarusnews/112005/40.html>.

distributing them by an alternative network do not seem to faze the sponsors. And certainly they save on libel bills.

Jan Maksymiuk reports, "In August and September, some independent newspapers in Belarus had to reregister under new names, because in May President Alyaksandr Lukashenka issued a decree limiting the use of the words "national" and "Belarusian" in the names of organizations. Private media outlets were not allowed to use both of these words in their names.

The presidential decree in particular compelled many newspapers to re-register: "Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta" ("Belarusian Business Newspaper") as "BDG; Delovaya gazeta," "Natsionalnaya ekonomicheskaya gazeta" ("National Economic Newspaper") as "Ekonomicheskaya gazeta," "Belorusskii rynek" ("Belarusian Market") as "Belorussy i rynek" ("Belarusians and the Market"); and "Belorusskaya gazeta" as "Belgazeta."<sup>31</sup> But critics fail to note that pro-Lukashenko newspapers were also affected: "Belarus Today" became simply "SB". Needless to say, Western reporters who never referred to opposition members' Communist pasts, or even present Leninist allegiance, routinely used the anachronistic title, "Sovietskaya Bielorrussia" to refer to "Belarus Today".

Opposition newspapers distributed in bulk free to people's letter-boxes carried attacks on the President and offered no more balance than state television but, also, they did not have a positive economic and social programme to offer. Moral values were preached but many Belarussians were irritated by the perception that oppositionists enjoyed free trips to the West while they had to pay at the many travel agents in Minsk for the privilege if they could afford it.

The USA and EU sponsored a variety of wholly biased broadcasts into Belarus which did not pretend to have even the reserved slots for all candidates. Lukashenko and Gaydukevich were routinely vilified by the West's model "free" media without any right of reply.

As with foreign satellite television and radio broadcasts, there is widespread access to the internet in Belarus where it is not censored, unlike in the World Trade Organisation's favourite "market dictatorship" China. If Minsk wanted to censor the internet no doubt Yahoo and Google would comply and help the regime find the software – for a fee!

The most egregious breach of the campaign rules was by Dr. Milinkevich who attended a rock concert in Minsk's Bangalore Square along with about six thousand other people on Saturday, 18th March. Although the authorities did not pull the plug on the repeated invocations from the MC to support Milinkevich, the election law forbade any campaigning twenty-four hours before the polls.

### Provocations

True to their Leninist past, many of the Belarussian revolutionaries engaged in classic agit-prop tactics. For instance, "unified oppositionists" routinely inflated both the number of participants in their demonstrations and the number of arrests. A headline may talk about "hundreds of arrests", a veritable purge, but the article below it may mention only 19 brief detentions for public order offences like swearing.<sup>32</sup>

Sympathetic foreign media exaggerated the figures for both and thus deluded people about the real state of affairs, but it helped to mould public opinion in Western Europe and North America into supporting the propaganda onslaught conceived by their own countries' intelligence services. In short, Western "democracy aid" was being used to shape public

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<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.data.minsk.by/belarusnews/112005/40.html>.

<sup>32</sup> See "Hundreds Arrested in Belarus in View of Presidential Elections" in *MosNews* (15<sup>th</sup> March, 2006): <http://www.mosnews.com/news/2006/03/15/belarusarrest.shtml>. *MosNews* is the lineal successor of the old Comintern newspaper, *Moscow News*, and like so many sprigs of the Comintern it has reversed the polarity of its parents' internationalism, nowadays criticising the Kremlin rather than the White House.

opinion in the donor countries – especially the United States – at least as much as in the target society.

Staged provocations seem to come naturally to some liberal post-Communist politicians. In her memoirs, Irina Khakamada says that when she “decided to run against Vladimir Putin in the presidential election in March 2004, she asked a Russian public relations firm how she should ‘project her brand’. A five-hour brainstorming session yielded only one sure-fire strategy: stage the kidnapping of your husband and child. They told me: ‘Can you imagine the press sensation?’... The excited PR went on to imagine the popular sympathy, the television commercial in which she tearfully vowed to fight until the end. More importantly, he said, her poll ratings would rocket, and those of her opponent – presumably dubbed her family’s kidnappers by a cynical electorate – would sink.”<sup>33</sup>

When one reads that Russia’s liberal opposition has advisers who suggest such sinister methods of appealing to public sympathy, then claims by the Belarussian KGB chief that some oppositionists intended to explode a bomb and cause casualties to precipitate a post-election crisis are not so implausible as many Western journalists have suggested. On 1st March, Stepan Sukharenko told Belarussian television, “Announcing the results of the so-called exit polls prepared in advance and saying that the election was rigged, the opposition leaders.... Will call on the public to defend the choice of the people. As a result, they are planning to bring several thousands of deceived people onto the streets.” However a secret scenario was allegedly in the works: “According to the scenario, it is planned to set off several explosive devices in the crowd. The bleeding victims will untie the hands of the organizers of the protest to organize the second stage of the scenario – to seize the buildings of administrative bodies and train stations and to block railroads, which should completely halt the functioning of the state, and on this wave, to seize power by force.”<sup>34</sup>

Then, an opposition newspaper, Zhoda (“Consensus”), republished the anti-Islamic cartoons commissioned by the neo-con Danish journalist Fleming Rose. Given the hundreds of deaths prompted by the original publication and Belarus’s own Muslim minority (mainly Tatars) as well as the country’s laws against inciting religious and racial strife it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Zhoda’s editors were seeking martyrdom, albeit of the modest kind inflicted by the Belarussian law.<sup>35</sup>

The same Western media which spread un-proven – let’s be frank – unfounded allegations that Belarus was selling weapons to Iraq also accused Ukraine’s President Kuchma – falsely – of selling sophisticated radars to Saddam’s regime. Other Western propagandists also hit on the canard that Belarus had been helping Saddam’s sons to escape by giving them passports even though they died in Mosul in July, 2003!

The opposition, however, supports the war in Iraq. The Charter 97 website has a section devoted to photographs of a motley group of demonstrators holding up banners backing America’s invasion of Iraq. Their loyalty to their sponsor is no doubt commendable at a time when so many neo-cons have backed away from their endorsements of the Iraq bloodbath, but does anybody believe it is popular in a country like Belarus with its history of “liberation” from abroad?<sup>36</sup>

Back in December, 2003, Transitions online, one of the clearing houses for New World Order techniques, carried the headline (which translates so well into Russian) “On Leninism in Georgia. Our Take: Lenin’s Lessons from Georgia.” It urged what it called “Democrats” to “look to Lenin more than the West” for models on how to promote democracy!

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<sup>33</sup> See Nick Paton Walsh, “A guide to the Kremlin: Sex, booze and Kidnap” in *The Guardian* (11<sup>th</sup> March, 2006): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1728530,00.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> See Belarussian television (3pm 1st March, 2006) as reported by <http://www.bbcmonitoringonline.com/mmu?page=77&action=view&item=5&>.

<sup>35</sup> See [www.rferl.org/newsline/3-cee.asp](http://www.rferl.org/newsline/3-cee.asp).

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.charter97.org/index.phtml?sid=4&did=20030403&lang=3>.

The Prague-based agit-probers quoted one of Georgia's professional revolutionaries, " 'As Lenin said, to have a successful revolution, you need organization, organization, organization,' says Levan Ramishvili, head of the Liberty Institute, which played an important role in organizing the Georgian revolution. Lenin as an example to Georgian democrats: now that's a transition." Well, be that as it may be, what kind of democrat can learn from Lenin 's tactics or Mussolini's coup d'etat in 1922 which is also quoted as a "People Power" variant by the sort of Serbs who advise Zubr.<sup>37</sup>

### **The best opposition money can buy**

"Party is the madness of many for the gain of a few."

Jonathan Swift

The scale of Western financial interference in Belarus is breathtaking for a country of ten million people. According to AP, US democratisation enforcer, Dan Fried "said Congress has provided more than \$21 million to finance pro-democracy activities in the landlocked country."<sup>38</sup> That is the open appropriation. What Iran-Contra legend, John Negroponte's web of intelligence agencies spends is known only to a handful of intelligence overseers if at all to any democratically-elected US politician.

An iron web of ostensibly "independent" foundations, civil society projects and think-tanks stretch across the globe to influence elections. They are not just American. For instance, the Polish Stefan Batory Foundation lists grants of US\$5 million to influence Belarus and Ukraine plus US\$6 million for its ill-defined "core programme" from the Ford Foundation alone! Mr. Soros punts in a modest US \$2.5 million. US\$5 million comes from the "Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe". As J.P. Morgan used to say, "Soon you'll be talking real money."<sup>39</sup> That is just one of the foundations which backs colour-coded revolutions in one dirt poor Central European country – and it is one of the very few who give some indication of the vast sums of money pouring into the region to "educate" local "civil society".

However, experience teaches us that outsiders can buy a society but they don't do so for its own good. Just as politicians are poor judges of which industries to back with public money so they rarely choose foreign clients with the well-being of foreigners in mind rather than their own state's interests.

Until 2006, Ukraine and other ex-Soviet republics enjoyed a fuel subsidy from Russia. In the case of Ukraine oil and gas were supplied at cheaper rates than world market prices amounting to something like US\$2 billion a year. But Orange politicians and media propagandists assured this Group's representatives in December, 2005, that they wanted Ukrainians to liberate themselves from dependence and pay the full market price! When Gazprom hiked prices at the start of the coldest winter in many years on 1st January, 2005, ordinary Ukrainians saw how hollow the claims of the market fundamentalists were. Whereas Russia had subsidised its neighbour's fuel consumption for fifteen years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West offered nothing to compensate ordinary Ukrainians huddled in freezing conditions with 800 dying of the cold. The West has given something like US\$150 million in aid to Ukraine, but this money subsidises the Orange not ordinary people, whereas Russia's fuel subsidy had actually helped limit the impact of the economic difficulties suffered by Ukrainians since 1991.

Ironically, Russia gained nothing by subsidising the fuel costs of 48 million Ukrainians while the West has bought the whole country for less than 10% of Russia's aid budget to Ukrainians. In order to buy a former Communist country there is no need to waste money on the poor masses – that only encourages an irresponsible dependency culture inappropriate in

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<sup>37</sup> See ToL (1<sup>st</sup> December, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> See William C. Mann, "U.S. TO SPEND MILLIONS IN BELARUS TO ENSURE FREE, FAIR VOTING IN NEXT MONTH'S ELECTIONS" AP Worldstream, Wash, D.C. (Feb 08, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.batory.org.pl/english/donors/index.htm>

our bracing age of cut-throat market economics – instead you need only to buy key sections of the elite. Purchasing key politicians, policemen and media figures is cheaper and more reliable than wasting resources on the people, who can be relied upon to obey docilely the new regime since suddenly there is no well-funded alternative media or opposition NGOs to challenge its predominance. The triumph of so-called “People Power” from Serbia in 2000 to the Rose and Orange revolutions should be in all economics textbooks: If you want regime change, buy key people, don’t waste money on The People.

### **Polling Day**

BHHRG’s observers visited 20 polling stations in and around Minsk (including one in the small town of Ratomskii #23), and one in the village of Zaslavi #1). Since Minsk was presented as the opposition hotbed, it seemed sensible to concentrate resources there.

Although in the polling stations there were very few observers from organizations, movements, or parties oriented toward the three opposition party candidates for president, some of the local observers under the umbrella of non-political groups admitted to being activists for either Milinkevich or Kozulin. There were generally two to three observers from large industrial concerns and other enterprises in every polling station. Observers from pro-administration youth groups (the Belarusian Republican Club of Voters) and political parties in favour of the current administration were present in most polling stations.

Belarussians were not ignorant of the double-standards which permitted British and American observers into their country but refused or heavily restricted foreign observers in the UK or USA. In Minsk #5 one domestic observer remarked, “If only we could have observers in your election as you are able to have observers in our election.”

In addition to three to four domestic observers on average on duty in each polling station, who appeared alert and well versed in the regulations, most commission chairmen reported that several groups of foreign observers had visited that day.

There was a local police presence in most polling stations, usually with two to four police officers in or around the polling station. They did not interfere with the election activities and generally kept a low profile. Only once did a policeman at the entrance to a polling place ask for observers to identify themselves. Generally, polling officials noted the names and organizations of the foreign observers.

On the outside of the polling stations and in the main floor of the buildings housing the polling stations there was a festive atmosphere with food and soft drinks on sale. Tables were set up and many families with young children went to the polling stations together and had a snack afterward. In these rooms the local population gathered and socialized with each other. No aggressive atmosphere was noticed.

Even in polling station Minsk #9 where Dr. Kozulin came with his wife and two daughters to watch one of them vote, ordinary voters approached Dr. Kozulin outside the polling station where he was talking to this Group’s observer. A courteous exchange took place but the great majority of voters who expressed an opinion were critical of Kozulin’s campaign and rebuked him for damaging the country’s image. As we left, Kozulin dismissed his critics as elderly and poor, the sort of people who backed Lukashenko, but according to his analysis of Belarussian society such people constituted the vast majority of the nation!

#### **Specific observations:**

chairman of electoral commission in several polling stations described the process for non-residents of that particular jurisdiction to vote: the polling station would call the non-resident’s home polling station and check the passport number of the resident. Home station would then cancel voter’s right to vote in home station and voter could vote in new station.

Witnessed voter in Ratomskii being turned away because she had failed to bring her identification card with her.

Two observers in Minsk Central District polling station #45 were openly wearing opposition badges. They took seats next to the pro-administration observers and were not harassed or intimidated. One young observer from the Belarusian Popular Front spent 15 or so minutes talking with us in the polling station. This observer reported that "everything is as usual and normal here." He reported seeing several people without passports being refused ballot papers. He warned that the real cheating would occur at the count. He complained that the observers were situated too far away from where the commission officials were operating, which was a legitimate complaint. A young opposition observer also relayed a story that the previous evening at 2:00 AM he was walking on the street and saw a group of men dressed in black jackets. They moved in his direction "to let me know they knew I was here" and he felt nervous so he left. I asked whether he thought it was the government and he said "who else would be out at two in the morning?" Asked about where he got the pins on his shirt, he said from the Milinkevich campaign. He said the button is just for freedom and not in favour of the opposition. "Freedom is a universal value, not a political value," he said. During the count this young man also went out of the station several times to make phone calls as did an international observer. It is unusual to let people come and go during a count in this way since they might return with information which could influence the atmosphere in the polling station.

In several polling stations, including Central District Minsk #5, observers from opposition-oriented organizations had registered to observe the elections but had not shown up.

Chairman of Central District Minsk #6 reported that he had been the chair four times previously and that there seemed to be a bit more of a turnout during the voting period this time than in previous elections.

In Minsk Central #7 OSCE observers had already visited before we arrived. No representative from the Belarusian Popular Front had registered to observe.

Most chairmen of polling station commission were familiar with the regulations and procedures. These regulations and procedures were clearly posted at the entrance to every polling station, as was a poster with the picture of each presidential candidate and his political platform.

All ballot papers were required to have the signature of at least two other commission members in order for them to be considered valid.

Register was filled in and signed by voters upon receiving ballot paper.

Poll workers were meticulous and efficient. The table was divided up according to address and voters got into line according to where they live.

In Minsk #108 the chairman of commission refused to say how many were registered, insisting that according to the regulations he is obligated to give that information only to the regional authorities. He insisted that the decision on whether to share that with observers is one for him to make. Nevertheless the other observers did not register any complaints when asked about process. No opposition representative was registered to observe in this station.

Although not illegal under Belarussian law, the publication of a running exit poll on Belarussian radio stations after 1pm on election day was undesirable. It might have influenced voters. In fact, it appears that officially-accepted exit poll results didn't differ significantly from polls conducted for the opposition. Certainly no opposition exit poll has been published with verifiable data (polling sites, numbers questioned, and breakdown of voters by age, sex, occupation, etc.) which offers a plausible alternative outcome.

Early voting was much criticised by foreign observers from the United States, Germany and Sweden where early voting is the norm. Britain's postal voting system has been much

criticised for making fraud easy and reducing at least Birmingham's local elections to the level of a "banana republic."

In fact, hidden within reports about the sufferings and intimidation of the Belarussian people in the early voting period, frequently contradictory facts emerge. The polls opened on Tuesday, 14th March, for registered voters to cast ballots. (Many US readers will also be familiar with the process from their own elections.) The Associated Press issued a widely distributed article suggesting that early voting in Belarus was inherently flawed and would permit cheating by supporters of the President. However, the original version (which soon disappeared from the web) quoted "Galina Grushnitskaya, a 72-year-old retiree, said she was voting early - for Lukashenko - because she feared opposition-orchestrated violence on voting day."

#### Post-election demonstrations: Anti-Climax rather than Tiananmen Square

After the official results were announced Milinkevich called for a re-vote – with Lukashenko banned from participating!<sup>40</sup> He had urged his supporters to protest peacefully after the vote and the world waited to see if the tents, portable lavatories and food kitchens would appear on the streets of Minsk as if by magic, as they did in Kiev in 2004. But the turnout was low. Added to which, the authorities seemed untroubled by the small gathering - for the moment, the police looked on. On Monday night, 20th March, the BBC's Emma Simpson laid part of the blame for this on the "bitter cold" but anyone who remembers the Kiev Orange protestors in November and December, 2004, will recall the media's endless references to the heroic stoicism of tens of thousands of demonstrators despite weeks of sub-zero temperatures. As a gesture of support and (possibly) to augment the numbers ambassadors from Great Britain and several other EU states visited the protestors on Monday even drawing gasps of surprise from the BBC which hinted, albeit surreptitiously, that such involvement in the politics of a foreign state could be construed as a breach of their diplomatic status. It is depressing to find supposedly educated diplomats sharing the same platform as the crude and vulgar Western neo-con fellow travellers like, for example, a visitor to one web site - "[estavisti](#)" - who says: "Oh well, you guys won't get anywhere, not enough popular discontent. Better luck next time, we tried to bring that fucker Milosevic down at least twice before we succeeded..."<sup>41</sup>

Estimations of crowd sizes are notoriously unreliable depending on vantage point of observer and bias, but even a veteran advocate of "people power" like Timothy Garton Ash, CMG, hinted that the opposition's websites were lying when they claimed a turnout of 40,000 on election night. "...Opposition leaders, helped by European and American advisers, work to create an inspiring narrative of a nation rising up to free itself from the dictatorial yoke". Belarussian NGO, Charter 97, a replica of the Czech Charter 77 movement, provided a minute by minute story of "dozens of thousands" of demonstrators defying snow, ice and the police on the Sunday night of a fraudulent election. A "10,000-strong column" has become "40,000" (an estimate far larger than that given by any foreign journalist) by 4.05 on Monday morning."<sup>42</sup>

As an index of Lukashenko's contempt for the opposition as bad losers without a popular base not only did he point out that not 1% of Milinkevich's voters in Minsk had turned out – i.e. not 0.01% of the inflated claims for his vote by opposition bloggers – but the government even cleared the ice rink covering much of the vast October Square to emphasise the paucity of demonstrators!

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<sup>40</sup> See "Lukashenko official winner in polls": <http://channels.aolsvc.co.uk/news/article.adp?id=20060323093409990001&n=collection&p=news&c=news>

<sup>41</sup> [March 20th, 2006 at 4:36 am](http://www.br23.net/en/2006/03/19/photo-from-minsk/) <http://www.br23.net/en/2006/03/19/photo-from-minsk/> TGA's loyal readers included one who didn't "give a toss" or "You are going to be sorely disappointed if you think Guardian readers give a rat's ass about anything besides sex and patriphobia."

[http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/timothy\\_garton\\_ash/2006/03/belarus\\_needs\\_you.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/timothy_garton_ash/2006/03/belarus_needs_you.html)

<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,1737370,00.html>.

Very few people were left on October Square when the police cleared away the tents and protestors on Friday morning. The mingling of foreign journalists with protestors, each photographing the other, made assessing who was protesting and who reporting difficult to determine. One Belarussian blogger got through to the BBC News web-site's "Have your say" with the claim that the "protestors here were foreign citizens mainly Polish. Lithuanians etc. I tried to talk to them.... they didn't speak language. Rollin, Minsk."<sup>43</sup> On Tuesday morning, Lithuanian speakers certainly entered the nearby Museum of the Great Patriotic War whose lavatories were used by the demonstrators and media – to the evident distaste of the staff.

Early on Friday morning, the BBC reported: "Belarus riot police halt protests" with the sinister claim that "More than 100 troops poured into the central square and loaded protestors onto waiting trucks."<sup>44</sup> One opposition blogger revealed the full depths of the Spetsnaz depravity: "Extraordinary perversions were noticed: riot policemen forced a vegetarian girl to eat pancakes with meat she had brought to the square".

In fact, the police operation was remarkably low key. None of the officers involved wore masks, now ubiquitous in crack downs by Western-trained riot police from Serbia to Iraq and everyone involved (including the demonstrators) dispersed without any visible violence. Western media failed to point out – as they had also failed to do in Ukraine – that such encampments are a public health hazard, particularly offensive to the citizens of Minsk - a remarkably clean city. Cynics also noted that Milinkevich was not present when the police ended the protest despite his previous boasts that he would stay with the protestors to the end. He "rushed to the detention centre where the protestors were taken". Russian commentator Michel Demurin had questions "about Milinkevich's morale, because despite his wordings that he would stay with the people in the square as long as there is anybody there, when police began to disperse the crowd, Milinkevich was absent. It must finish the career of any politician".<sup>45</sup>

However, the opposition promised to be back the next day to hold a demonstration to mark the anniversary of Belarus's short period of independence in 1918, a date which the present government does not celebrate. Perhaps the reason is this: "At the end of [World War I](#), when Belarus was still occupied by Germans according to the [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](#), the short-lived [Belarus National Republic](#) was pronounced on [March 25, 1918](#), as part of the German [Mitteleuropa](#) plan." <sup>46</sup> So, even the current opposition's favourite anniversary, the declaration of independence in 1918, was dependent on the military power and sponsorship of a great power which soon dropped the idea of an independent Belarus.

On 25th March, the media did get a whiff of the violence it so craves as riot police forced the demonstrators off the main streets of Minsk and into a city park. The numbers game was played again, but it seems that only a couple of thousand people at most took part in the rally. As before, there were no Spetsnaz-type troops, no masks and no CS gas. In fact, the only serious casualties reported afterwards were eight servicemen and policemen wounded in a clash between opposition supporters and police. "Bottles were thrown at policemen, and then an unidentified explosive device went off".<sup>47</sup>

According to later reports: " Mr. Milinkevich blamed the consequences of the rally, originally planned as peaceful, on Kozulin, adding that the latter had made "more than a mistake" when he urged people to go to a detention center where reportedly several hundred people who had taken part in unsanctioned rallies were kept".<sup>48</sup> Dr. Kozulin was taken into custody after calling for the overthrow of the government and President Lukashenko. Despite this - and

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<sup>43</sup> See page 2 @

<http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/nol/thread.jspa?sortBy=1&threadID=1352&start=15&tstart=0&edition=1&ttl=20060324191024&#paginator>

<sup>44</sup> See BBC2 "Ceefax", page 109 (24<sup>th</sup> March, 2006)

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.regnum.ru/english/612018.html>.

<sup>46</sup> See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Belarus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belarus)

<sup>47</sup> <http://en.rian.ru/world/20060325/44804382.html>

<sup>48</sup> <http://en.rian.ru/world/20060325/44804910.html>

the disapproval shown by their own “unified opposition candidate” to his antics - the EU rushed to Kozulin’s aid the next day, demanding that he be released immediately!<sup>49</sup>

#### The OSCE’s response

“Sentence first – verdict afterwards”

The OSCE denounced the conduct and result of the poll at their post-election meeting on 20th March, as expected. After all, they had stated as much long before polling day. Alexander Lukashenko is routinely accused of being “increasingly paranoid” because of his “claims” that foreign states are promoting “fraud and foreign intervention in the campaign - despite the fact that his opponents concede that the president will win 80% of the vote”. However the same journalist who wrote that, and who admits en passant that “Posters of the rival presidential candidates are widespread” in Belarus, nonetheless said that “The election is regarded by Western governments as so tainted from the outset that none has bothered to send official observers -and some have called on voters to throw out their president! Isn’t that foreign interference?<sup>50</sup> In fact, something like 400 of more observers from NATO states and candidate-states were officially registered as observers so the West was speaking with a forked-tongue when it both condemned the elections a priori and observed them in practice.

Just as Britain’s Daily Telegraph denounced Lukashenko while suggesting that he might get as much as 80% of the popular vote because of the economic stability and relative prosperity of Belarus in recent years so even the US-funded Radio Liberty admitted that “There is also the possibility that Lukashenka will win fair and square. Even independent polls indicate some 55% of Belarusians are prepared to vote for him; the figure for Milinkevich, by contrast, is a distant 17 percent. Lukashenka’s Belarus enjoys relative economic stability, and the standard of living has seen a steady increase during the past decade.”<sup>51</sup>

American “analysts” with mind-reading capability predicted that though Lukashenko would win the popular vote, many voters who actually crossed the ballot paper with a preference for him were not really voting for him. Robin Shepherd, adjunct fellow with the New European Democracies Project at Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), “cautioned that ... the true level of support for Lukashenka will probably be from 10 to 12 percentage points less than the actual reported vote count, because of a ‘fear factor’ within the Belarusian electorate -- that some voters will fear that Lukashenka can determine how a person voted.”<sup>52</sup>

A few brave souls have suggested in corners of the internet that the US is a poor loser for never accepting that a candidate it dislikes for geo-strategic reasons could be more popular than its anointed choice.<sup>53</sup> American bias is further revealed in the different approach it takes to ‘client’ states in the former Soviet Union, like Ukraine. For example, Dan Fried assured journalists that the 26th March Ukrainian parliamentary elections would be “free and fair”. However, confidence may not be boosted by the fact that the chief OSCE election observer there is the former Polish spy chief, Marek Siwiec, who assured us there is “no evidence... of vote-rigging” before the polls opened let alone closed with the count completed!<sup>54</sup> In fact, the

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<sup>49</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4846316.stm>

<sup>50</sup> See Nick Holdsworth, “Opposition leader warns of Belarus poll boycott” in *The Daily Telegraph* (12<sup>th</sup> March, 2006): <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/03/12/wbela12.xml&sSheet=/news/2006/03/12/ixworld.html>. In practice, there were no posters for Lukashenko and both Milinkevich and Kozulin preferred to distribute handbills and small sticker style posters.

<sup>51</sup> See [http://www.rferl.org/specials/belarus\\_votes/intro.aspx](http://www.rferl.org/specials/belarus_votes/intro.aspx)

<sup>52</sup> See [http://www.rferl.org/specials/belarus\\_votes/intro.aspx](http://www.rferl.org/specials/belarus_votes/intro.aspx).

<sup>53</sup> See Neil Clark, “Democracy is doing what Dubya says” in *The First Post* (17<sup>th</sup> March, 2006): <http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/index.php?menuID=1&subID=356>

<sup>54</sup> See Marek Siwiec, “Orange, in Black and White” in *The Wall Street Journal (Europe)* (23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2006). Of course, the chief OSCE election observer in 2001 was the former head of West German intelligence, the Bundesnachrichtendienst, Hans-George Wiek. One of his team demanded to know

Ukrainian media is filled with reports of inadequate voter registration lists, insufficient numbers of polling stations, allegations of fraud and bribery in polling commissions, but since the Orange crew controls the process now none of this is reported in the Western media. In fact, on 27th March, with only 17% of the vote counted and amid numerous reports of violations, the OSCE mission in Ukraine came out loud and clear to say that the election had been properly conducted.<sup>55</sup>

The OSCE observers are well-rewarded with large cash per diems for their work on observer missions and few would risk them by contradicting the line laid out in advance. (An embarrassing audit might follow given the usual practice of the host government, even a pariah-state, of paying for the lodgings and food of observers.) OSCE observers are nominated by the very governments which had already denounced the Belarussian elections in advance. Many work as diplomats, spies or other bureaucrats for those governments. They are professionally bound to follow government policy or seek employment or face early retirement.

The other main observer group from Russia and other CIS states was routinely charged with bias towards the Belarussian authorities. Maybe so, but the report read out by their Chairman Vladimir Rushailo at his press conference on 20th March was much more detailed than the OSCE's similar offering. Whereas Mr Rushailo listed by name and number individual polling stations which had experienced technical difficulties or even confrontations with opposition and OSCE observers, the OSCE simply issued percentages of flaws without identifying the places where they occurred. Later, addressing the press in Moscow, Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, remarked "Unfortunately we have once again witnessed a situation in which the monitoring mission headed by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights began making statements long before the election to the effect that it would be illegitimate. It commented on the progress of the election and its results in a fairly biased way. In this way it once again played - let me put it bluntly - an inflammatory role."<sup>56</sup>

Take the lead Western election observer, the US Congressman, Alcee Hastings. His condemnations of the elections in Belarus were reported ad nauseam but no Western media added that Mr. Hastings rejoices in the distinction of being only the sixth judge in US history to be impeached and removed from office by the Senate.

Imagine if Mr. Hastings's criticisms of the polls in Belarus had been introduced every time with reference to his disgrace as a judge removed from the bench for 17 "high crimes and misdemeanours" including soliciting a UJS\$150,000 bribe. Why isn't his full biography on the OSCE website so that Belarussians with access to the web (2 million plus of them) could judge the man judging them? His Wikipedia entry says, "In 1989, Hastings was [impeached](#) by the [United States House of Representatives](#) for [corruption](#) and [perjury](#), and subsequently became only the sixth Judge in the history of [impeachment in the United States](#) to be removed from office by the [United States Senate](#)."<sup>57</sup>

Conservative American pundits denounced the involvement of a Hastings-led OSCE team in their own elections in 2004: "There is no way the OSCE can be unbiased observers," charged American Policy Center President Tom DeWeese. "...Inviting the likes of Alcee Hastings and his comrades at the OSCE to hover over Americans at the polls this November is unconscionable." Mr DeWeese added, "Given his history of personal and political paybacks, not to mention the fact that he's currently under investigation for electoral shenanigans, Alcee Hastings and the OSCE are poised to smear Florida's vote tally if it's not to their liking."

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the identities of the BHHRG observers which were given to him but refused to identify himself on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2001. On 19<sup>th</sup> March, this year, a group of German "journalists" who refused to give their names or their media outlets similarly interrogated the BHHRG observers.

<sup>55</sup> See, "OSCE Praises Ukraine Vote",

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/3/574E0D37-97B0-4879-B9F3-95B616CD38A7.html>

<sup>56</sup> Reported by Channel One TV, Moscow, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2006 [www.bbcmonitoringonline.org](http://www.bbcmonitoringonline.org)

<sup>57</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcee\\_Hastings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcee_Hastings).

When American police arrested 4 OSCE observers in November, 2004, the EU didn't threaten sanctions nor did it query the re-election of George W. Bush. Mr. Hastings, in private, is willing to tell foreign observers that Ohio was rigged against John Kerry in November, 2004, as he told this Group's rapporteurs in Baku last November, after vocally condemning the Azeri Parliamentary elections, but he won't tell local media or people in the ex-Soviet Union that he thinks US elections are deeply flawed. Maybe the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly would get a new president if he did.<sup>58</sup>

Ad hominem attacks on Mr Hastings would be no more morally legitimate than invective against anyone else, but the Western media pulled a veil over Mr Hastings's successful impeachment while repeating ad nauseam frequently false or snobbish charges against Mr Lukashenko. Apparently, belonging to the Soviet-era elite is O.K. but it was unforgivable to be an outsider who appealed to the broad mass of the population who also resented the corruption and nepotism of the old Soviet elite which reinvented itself as the West's favourite "reformers" after 1991. Maybe Al Capone's famous jibe that when he bought a judge he liked "the judge to stay bought" could have been trotted out by the Minsk press but it wasn't when it reported on Mr Hastings's reaction to the elections. Perhaps Mr Lukashenko's "propagandists" could teach the free journalists in the West a lesson in manners if nothing else.

### **What went wrong? What next? Or Déjà vu all over again**

The Guardian's Ian Traynor who supports colour-coded revolutions in preference to full-blooded, CIA-sponsored coups as in Chile in 1973, quoted a Western diplomat in Minsk blaming Lukashenko for his "theft" of the election: "In my experience I can't think of anyone so obviously stealing an election and lasting by more than a year or two." Problem: that was in 2001.<sup>59</sup> So, if Western diplomatic experience says a fraudster cannot stand for five years why did Lukashenko survive?

First of all, the West's intelligence and policy-planning agencies learned nothing from their debacle in 2001. Traynor reported then, "After funnelling tens of millions of dollars to the Belarus opposition, engineering a united opposition coalition, funding websites, newspapers and manipulative opinion polls, and tutoring a student resistance movement, the Americans are taking stock of how to react to another five years of him."

Before the elections, the unified Washington-Brussels axis of interference decided who would be the legitimate winner in Belarus. "On 22-23 February in Prague, President [of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Renee] van der Linden and Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda co-hosted a conference on Belarus, which gathered a number of ministers and government representatives from the region, as well as PACE members, to discuss strategies for promoting democratisation in Belarus and end the isolation of the Belarusian people from the rest of Europe. During the last session, PACE held an urgent debate on the situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election, with the participation of Alexander Milinkevich, the single candidate of the Unified Democratic Forces of Belarus, and Vladimir Konoplev, Chairman of the Chamber of Representatives of Belarus. On that

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<sup>58</sup> See e.g. <http://www.jeffersonreview.com/articles/2004/091304/notices/election.htm> "[Leader of Foreign Election Monitors Under Federal Investigation](#)" (Posted 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2004): <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1224489/posts>. In addition to his election monitoring Mr Hastings sits on the House Intelligence Committee monitoring the CIA, DIA, NSA and the other US intelligence agencies. See <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1382896/posts>. For Belarusians interested to know how much a brief election observation mission might cost, Mr Hastings spent \$14,193.44 of taxpayers' money going to Brussels for 2 days in 2004 with a per diem claim of \$2972. See <http://www.alceehastings.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>59</sup> See Ian Traynor, "Belarussian foils dictator-buster... for now. Tested US foreign election strategy fails against Lukashenko" in *The Guardian* (14<sup>th</sup> September, 2001): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,551533,00.html>.

occasion, PACE also deplored the blatant flouting of freedom of expression and called for 'positive action to ensure that pluralist information can be provided'...<sup>60</sup>

On Friday 24th March, the model democracies of the EU met in Brussels behind barbed wire.<sup>61</sup> The EU Commission led by Portuguese ex-Maoist, Jose Barroso and the Council of Ministers chaired by Kurt Waldheim supporter, Austrian Foreign Minister, Ursula Plassnak, and including Britain's Tony Blair were out in force to demand action far more severe than sanctions against Belarus which ex-1968 Maoist, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the Greens' armchair strategist during the Kosovo and Iraq wars, dismissed as "Geschwätz" ("prattle").<sup>62</sup> Perhaps these people will be cheered up by the calls from Lithuania's Conservative Pro Patria opposition leader, Andrius Kubilius, for the regime in Belarus to be 'overthrown'. "The Byelorussian opposition has got a real leader – Milinkevich – but, on the other hand, it should be ready for a long and hard fight against dictatorship, and should start this fight right now without waiting for the next elections to come. And the EU and the US should help it in the matter."<sup>63</sup>

In case anyone had any doubts about the underlying totalitarian mentality of the New World Order's ideologues consider what the foreign policy spokesman of Germany's ruling Social Democrats, Gert Weisskirchen, demanded from the EU: it should adopt "sanctions which would hit representatives of the [Belarussian] government and anyone who publicly speaks out for it!"<sup>64</sup> What kind of freedom-lover demands the silencing of "anyone who publicly speaks out"? These are the sort of politicians who backed the black out of dissenting media by bombing Belgrade TV in April, 1999 and Al-Jazeera several times since then.

However, like his unsuccessful predecessors, Alexander Milinkevich will almost certainly be dropped down the memory hole for failing to topple Lukashenko, there is no sign that the Axis of Interference will let Belarussians choose their own opposition candidates in the future. That suggests that all parties are doomed to repetition.

Only one group can rejoice at the logjam between Belarus and the West: the cash-guzzling democracy think-tanks, civil society projects.

Lukashenko told his post-election press conference: ""The virus of colored revolutions affects weakened countries in which [those in] power are stuck in corruption and are deaf to people's concerns," Lukashenka said. "Belarus has strong immunity, which is based on effective power, a strong social policy, and a dynamic economy that does not serve individual oligarchs, but [serves] the welfare of all the people."<sup>65</sup>

Anyone analysing the recurrent failure of people power to take off in Belarus cannot avoid looking at where and why this mechanism of regime change has succeeded elsewhere.

In Serbia and Georgia, key components of the relatively small crowds who stormed key government buildings were local mafias. Contrary to the cult of people power, the heavy mob from Čačak, a lawless smuggling town on the Bosnian border played the key role in toppling Milosevic on 5th October, 2000, along with the special forces units supposedly loyal to the regime, indeed allegedly responsible for its "war crimes." Similarly smuggling gangs from Gori, where Mr Saakashvili started his march on Tbilisi at Stalin's statue, and the mafia from Rustavi provided the elbows to break into the Georgian Parliament. Again the key police stood aside.

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<sup>60</sup> See [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR135\(2006\)&Sector=secDC&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BA CE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR135(2006)&Sector=secDC&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BA CE)

<sup>61</sup> Although on Thursday Ukraine's Channel 5 news showed the Belgian police erecting anti-demonstration defences for the EU Council of Ministers meeting no EU broadcaster thought such exemplary openness worthy of comment.

<sup>62</sup> See <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,407082,00.html>.

<sup>63</sup> See, <http://www.regnum.ru/english/611703.html>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted @ <http://www.rferl.org/reports/pbureport/>.

Belarus lacks both universally corrupt policemen and a serious criminal underworld. Put simply, there is no way to “market democracy” without a local mafia or oligarchs plus cops who take bribes.

Choosing a weak “unified opposition candidate” might also have suited the West. Important interest groups have a stake in keeping Belarus a pariah-state. Ironically the success of colour-coded revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan coming on the back of the cementing of post-People Power regimes in the Balkans and Central Europe threatens the livelihood of the army of NGO activists and secret agents who make their living out of “democratisation.” Too much success could render these Western political technologists redundant so they have an interest in keeping the Belarussian “problem” alive so they can be well-paid to solve it – but not yet. Western taxpayers and ordinary souls east of the New Europe, however, may wonder what interest they have in funding the new class of permanent revolutionaries and never ending upheaval.