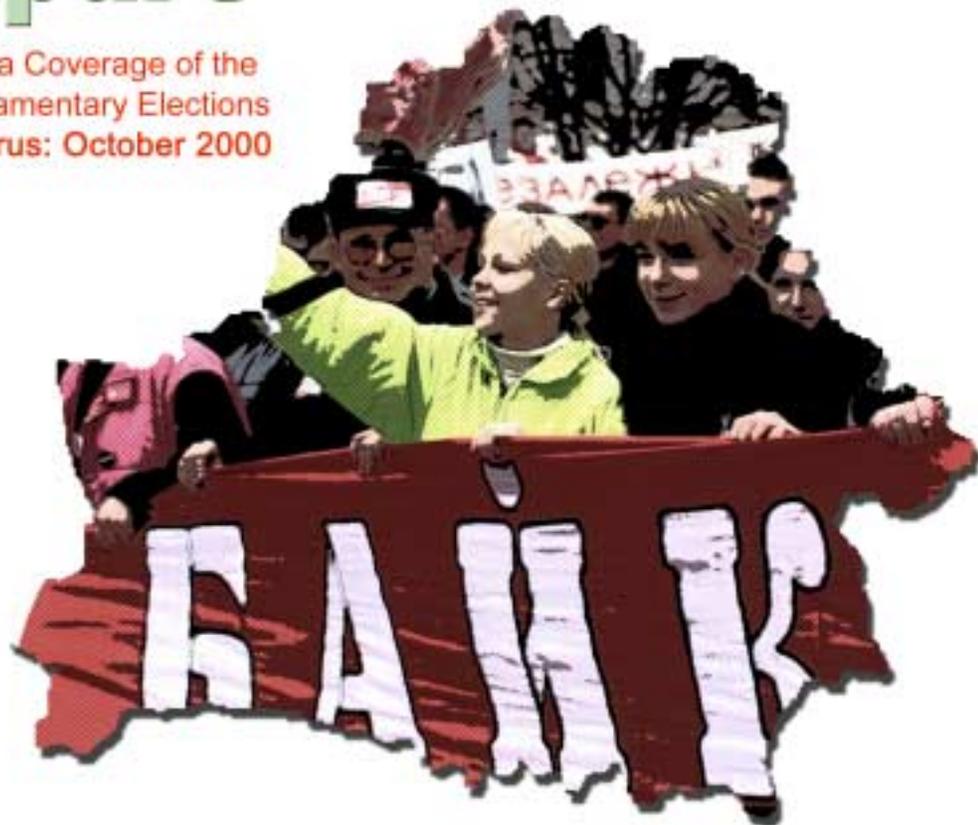


Polls Apart

Media Coverage of the
Parliamentary Elections
Belarus: October 2000



edited by Alan Davis
& Mark Grigorian

The Institute For War & Peace Reporting

Polls Apart

Media Coverage of the Parliamentary Elections

Belarus

October 2000



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Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	5
The Belarussian Media in Context	10
<i>Personal Perspectives from the Belarussian Media:</i>	
A Journalist's Duty	28
Belarus: a Legal 'Chernobyl' at the Centre of Europe	33
The Professional Challenge: Belarussian Media Today	38
Monitoring Findings	42
<i>Appendices:</i>	
1. Political Cartoons	76
2. 'The Secret Springs of Politics'	82
3. 'Are They Elections?'	87
4. Media Monitored	89
5. List of Political Parties and Candidates	90
6. Useful links	91
7. Monitor Training	94
8. Monitoring Procedures and Methodology	96
9. Monitoring tables/ charts	102

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Introduction

by Alan Davis

Local media coverage of the October 2000 parliamentary elections in Belarus was overwhelmingly driven by political and not professional concerns. With the mass media in the country fully divided into pro- and anti-government camps, the voters were the ultimate losers. Neither side presented members of the public with sufficient objective information for them to make an informed choice.

The state media's coverage of the elections – which saw only three opposition deputies elected to the 110 seat legislature – was highly partisan in both content and tone. A narrow interpretation of election law resulted in opposition candidates given very limited access to the state media and wholly negative editorial coverage. In contrast, the state media's coverage of President Aleksander Lukashenko and government-favoured candidates was extensive and largely positive.

A large section of the opposition media similarly had no intention of providing free and fair coverage of the elections, since on principle, they neither recognised the legitimacy of the elections, nor the constitution that called them. Like some opposition parties, these media advocated an election boycott in order to invalidate the results – as a minimum 50 per cent voter turnout was required to validate them under the law.

Given the conflicting positions on legitimacy in general, and President Lukashenko in particular, it is perhaps not surprising – though nevertheless depressing – to find that the state and the opposition media were not covering the same events in the run up to the vote on October 15. The mutually exclu-

sive nature of media coverage in Belarus, suggests that the public is being presented with two separate and conflicting realities. Rather than encouraging a constructive public dialogue on the country's economic and political development, the media is simply another front in the political battle between the government of President Lukashenko and the opposition.

The political and legal realities in Minsk make it all too easy to agree with the views of those like Pavel Zhuk, publisher and editor of the pro-boycott newspaper, *Nasha Svaboda*, who argue that there can be no middle ground, and that journalists must either be for Lukashenko or against him. Readers of the following study may well find it hard to conclude otherwise. Yet ultimately, by rejecting objectivity because the time is 'not right', is to do Belarussian society a disservice. A media that is partisan rather than professional, can only perpetuate conflict.

As we have seen in many of the Newly Independent States, the transition process has resulted in the majority of people discovering that tangible losses immediately outweigh figurative gains. Below a certain level, when one is trying to survive, the promise of new freedoms and rights cannot simply make up for the loss of a guaranteed job or pension. As old Soviet-era structures are abandoned for new uncertainties, a professional media can play a unique role in providing society with continuity through the dissemination of objective and reliable information. As a journalist training, publishing and media support charity working in conflicted regions, the Institute For War & Peace Reporting (IWPR), believes the media has first to be de-coupled from the political process, in order to be both a compass point and monitor of transition. A free press and not a partisan press, is a prerequisite for civil society and democratic development.

In working to support media professionalism across the board, IWPR is a disinterested observer of the political process in Belarus. While fully aware of the political realities, we took no position on the legality or otherwise of the elections. We were therefore happy to take up the invitation made by the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office last July, to design and implement a project to monitor the behaviour of the media during the October parliamentary elections. Given the monitoring period (September 24 - October 22, including a one week training period), we were obviously restricted to providing a public snapshot of media behaviour.

Whether it is in the Balkans, Central Asia, the Caucasus, or in countries like Belarus, IWPR is only as good as the people we work with. While we usually partner local media and human rights groups, in Minsk we chose to work with students and English teachers drawn from the Faculty of Journalism at the Belarus State University.

The decision to work with individuals and not a partner was a critical one. All IWPR activity – monitoring included – is designed to encourage media professionalism as well as to provide information. In Belarus we sought to stir local debate among media professionals in addition to providing a public record of their behaviour. Monitoring however becomes pointless the instant its objectivity is questioned. It is not enough that the monitoring is unbiased. It also has to be seen to be such – not least by the subjects themselves. Only then might the findings be accepted as a starting point for some future local debate. Thus, our decision to choose individuals over an organisation was no reflection on any Belarussian group. It followed on from the sad fact that in the politically charged atmosphere of Minsk, a ‘locally-owned’ media monitoring project would have been disregarded by many Belarussians as a not-so-covert political exercise of one kind or another.

This study is not intended to be any Western indictment of local reporting standards. While the project was UK-funded and led, the majority of the work was actually undertaken by IWPR staff, associates and colleagues from the former Soviet Union. From the selection and training of the monitors, through to the analysis and the writing of the study itself, the achievements are theirs.

The first thing we have attempted to do is to put the actual monitoring findings into some kind of context. Without an understanding of the legal, economic and professional operating conditions of the media – not to mention the political background to the elections – it would be difficult for the reader to come to any conclusion regarding the media’s behaviour during October. IWPR is thus indebted to Alex Znatkevich, a reporter for BelaPAN news agency in Minsk, for providing such an authoritative and balanced overview of the situation. His analysis is proof that not all journalism that comes



On the back of the standing person (presumably Lukashenko) the word 'Vertical' is written. The word 'Horizontal' is written on the ground. Those lying on the ground carry the labels 'Agrarian,' 'Communist,' 'Democrat' and 'Liberal.' Lukashenko has constructed what has been called 'vertical powers,' meaning that all the repositories of executive power (government, ministries, municipalities) are constituted in a vertical line, at the top of which is the president.

First published by Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta.

out of Belarus today is politically charged and subjective.

We are also thankful for the opinion pieces commissioned from two local journalists who find themselves on either side of the political divide, as well as for the concise analysis provided by Evgenij Dmitriev, Deputy Dean of the State Journalism Faculty. *Inter alia*, Mr Dimitriev highlights a key issue that must be addressed before we can see substantial changes for the better: Simply, journalists on both sides have to start thinking more about their audiences.

The monitoring findings' section is itself sub-divided into a number of sections. An introductory summary is followed by a look at the issues of candidates' equal access to the state media as guaranteed under law, and the latter's editorial policy concerning coverage. The monitoring then moves on to analyse media content with regard to the major news events of the month. As previously mentioned, the mutually exclusive outlook of the media meant that we saw substantial state coverage of the Congress of Deputies and President Lukashenko's address to it, while they were all but ignored by the opposition press. Our findings continue with analysis of the coverage of the two 'freedom marches' that took place in both Minsk and the regions; how the media interpreted the arrival and presence of the international observers; the elections themselves; the media's interpretation of the tumultuous events in Yugoslavia, and finally, given the popularity of the Russian mass media in Belarus, we take a brief look at their coverage of the October elections.

The texts are illustrated by a mixture of cartoons, charts and photographs – the latter all taken by the Project Manager, Mark Grigorian, a long-time IWPR colleague and head of his own media NGO, Co-operation and Democracy in his native Armenia. Details of the monitoring training, process and methodology, as well as a list of the media monitored, are included in an appendix. The study also provides the full text of two particular examples of wholly subjective writing which so typified the coverage of the elections.

As well as thanking the FCO for the invitation and financial support of this study, IWPR would like to signal our deep appreciation of our team of dedicated monitors, without whom the project design and approach would have remained precisely that. Despite having no monitoring experience and with only one week's intensive training, they demonstrated remarkable ability. More importantly perhaps, they were proving every day through their work that professionalism and objectivity is attainable – in the classroom at least.

Unfortunately, given the fact that many observers and media practitioners saw these October elections as little more than a practise run for the presidential elections scheduled for sometime next year, it is likely that poor as it currently is, media professionalism will actually worsen in the months ahead. But journalists would do well to remember, that the harder they fight for a particular



candidate or party, the more they will help further divide society.

It fully remains to be seen whether the actual conduct and count of the presidential elections will be at all free or fair. Only the heavy presence of international institutions can hope to guarantee that. But if they can possibly provide for elections of broadly accepted legitimacy, the next president of Belarus will be decided at the ballot box and not in the newsrooms. However, what may influence the mind of the electorate is both the level of information provided and the degree of trust put in it. Ideally then, the best possible campaign the media can run in the coming months would be not political – but voter educational. ○

Alan Davis is Director of Programmes, IWPR

The Belarussian Media in Context

*By Alex
Znatkevich
in Minsk*

Political background to the elections

Belarus remains the only country in Eastern Europe that openly clings to its Communist past, both economically and ideologically. After a series of half-hearted and inconsistent reforms in the early 1990s, the country reversed its course when Aleksander Lukashenko was elected president in 1994. State regulation of the economy and suppression of political dissent became the priorities of Lukashenko's domestic policy. In foreign policy, his governments have advocated closer military, political and economic ties with neighbouring Russia, while the country's relations with the West have deteriorated.

In November 1996, President Lukashenko organised a constitutional referendum, which expanded his presidential powers and prolonged his term in office to 2001 – an addition of two years to his original five-year term. The unicameral Belarussian parliament, the Supreme Soviet, was disbanded after the referendum. Lukashenko formed the lower chamber of the new parliament, the National Assembly, by picking 110 Supreme Soviet deputies who were loyal to him.

The results of the referendum were not recognised by the domestic opposition, Western governments and some international organisations, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Citing numerous violations of Belarussian law during the referendum and pointing to the fact that the new

parliament had limited legislative powers and was appointed, rather than elected, they have continued to recognise the Supreme Soviet as Belarus' only legitimate parliament.

On the other hand, it was obvious that the Supreme Soviet had no actual powers in Belarus. The OSCE, which established its Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Belarus in 1998, has tried to organise negotiations between the authorities and the opposition. The AMG suggested a compromise solution, where the opposition would not insist on the restoration of the pre-referendum constitution, if the authorities would expand the powers of the parliament, make the election law more democratic, grant the opposition access to state-run media and stop politically-motivated persecutions.

However, no compromise had been achieved by the time new parliamentary elections were scheduled for October 2000, in accordance with the post-referendum constitution. Most of the country's opposition parties announced they would boycott the elections. Among the boycott's supporters were the moderately nationalist Conservative Christian Party of the Belarussian Popular Front and Party of the Belarussian Popular Front; the liberal United Civic Party; the Women's Party (*Nadzeja*); the Party of Labour; the Green Party; and the Social Democratic Hramada. Another opposition social-democratic party, the BSDP, also declared its support for the boycott, but allowed its members to run as individuals. Since elections were organised on the basis of a majority system with no party lists, the only difference between the BSDP and the parties that participated in the elections was that its candidates had to collect 1,000 signatures to qualify for registration, instead of being nominated by the party. In the event, most of the BSDP's candidates were denied registration on minor technicalities. The same happened to the majority of independent

polls apart



The accompanying article to this cartoon was called 'Victims of the Congress of Deputies.' The script on the tribune reads: 'Tribune for Counsel to the Congress of Deputies of Councils of Deputies.' The cartoon plays on the dual meaning of the word 'soviet,' which means both 'counsel' and 'council'.

First published by Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta.

candidates who were known to be critical of the government.

The Belarussian Party of Communists, which is also in opposition to the president, decided to participate in the elections. The Liberal-Democratic Party, which initially supported Lukashenko, but later criticised his policies, also nominated candidates.

The rest of the parties that participated in the elections were clearly pro-presidential and mostly left-wing – the Communist Party of Belarus, the Agrarian Party, the Republican Party of Labour and Justice, the Republican Party, the Belarussian Patriotic Party, the Social Democratic Party of People's Concord and the Belarussian Social Sports Party. But the majority of the pro-government candidates were not related to the parties. They were either incumbent deputies of the National Assembly or representatives of the executive.

Election regulations

In Belarus, election commissions are formed by the presidiums of local legislatures and executive agencies. Out of the 12 members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), six – including the chairman – are appointed by the president, and the other six are elected by the upper house of the National Assembly.

For the October 2000 parliamentary campaign, the election commissions did not include any representatives of the opposition. Their backbone was made of local executive officers and state-run organisations' staff, whose jobs depend on the authorities.

According to the assessment of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Belarus Electoral Code fails to provide for multi-party or pluralistic representation on the Central Commission and other election commissions. 'The adopted Code grants to the ruling party in the executive branch a monopolistic hold on all election commissions,' the assessment said.

Lukashenko issued a decree on September 11, adding one representative of each political party that had put forward parliamentary candidates, to the CEC. The decree contained a list of nine party representatives. As noted earlier, only two opposition parties had nominated candidates for the elections. Even then, their representatives were not granted the right to participate in the CECs inspections or to vote on issues within the commission's competence. They had only the right to make proposals for the agenda of its meetings, speak at its meetings and study its documents.

Moreover, the opposition Belarussian Party of Communists (BPC) accused the authorities of falsification and interfering in party affairs. The BPC chairman Sergei Kalyakin told journalists on September 12 that the party had planned to nominate Alexander Pakhlopka, a secretary of the BPC Central Committee, as

its representative to the commission. Kalyakin said he did not know how a different person, Uladzimir Biadulia, got on to that list in Pakhlopka’s place. ‘The Belarussian Party of Communists is not represented in the central election commission,’ Kalyakin concluded.

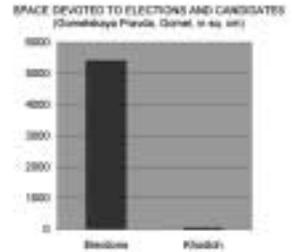
According to Article 33 of Belarus’ Electoral Code, the CEC, ‘exercises on the whole territory of the Republic of Belarus control over the observance of the election laws...’ Ironically, the CEC chairman, Lidzija Yarmoshyna, herself twice violated the provision of the law that prohibits electoral campaigning on polling day. On the afternoon of October 15, during the first round of voting¹, Yarmoshyna spoke on Belarussian state television, calling upon the electorate to come to the polling stations. Speaking on television on October 29, during the second round of voting, Yarmoshyna repeated her appeal. Moreover, she also called on voters in the five districts with only one candidate on the ballot, to vote for the candidate and not against him.

Belarussian media market: (1) Television

The Belarussian media market remains predominantly characterised by state ownership. This domination is especially striking in the case of television. State-run Belarussian Television (BT) is the only nation-wide channel in Belarus. Small, local, non-state television stations cannot provide serious competition to BT.

The style of BT’s news coverage resembles the television news of the Soviet Union before *perestroika*. President Lukashenko is given the most prominent place in the news and is always portrayed favourably or neutrally. The opposition is usually criticised or mocked. The same is also often true in documentary and feature reporting, espe-

polls apart



See appendix 9

1 For the first round of voting to be declared valid in a constituency, it was necessary that 50 per cent of registered voters cast their ballots. The winning candidates needed the support of more than 50 per cent of those who voted. Where they failed to achieve this, a runoff was to be held in round two between the two leading candidates, with the eventual winner needing the simple majority. For the second round to be valid, it was necessary that 25 per cent of registered voters cast their ballots.

cially since Viktor Chykin, the leader of the pro-presidential Communist Party of Belarus, was appointed the head of BT in July 2000.

Serious competition to BT comes only from Russian channels, which are widely broadcast in Belarus. According to a nation-wide survey of 4,866 respondents by IREX/ProMedia centre in Minsk in March 2000², Russian Public Television (ORT) has the leading position in Belarus. Eighty-two per cent of the respondents said that they watch ORT. Sixty-three per cent watch State Russian Television (RTR), with BT third at 53 per cent and the Russian private channel NTV fourth at 36 per cent.

It should be noted that in some rural areas, the choice of channels is limited to BT or ORT. Less than one per cent of respondents said they have no access to ORT or BT. Six per cent had no access to RTR and 26 per cent do not have NTV.

The Russian channels sometimes cover events in Belarus and, from time to time, even air criticism of the Belarussian government policies. In this respect, Russian television, especially NTV, provides Belarussian viewers with an alternative viewpoint. On the other hand, some critics have said that the dominance of Russian television perpetuates a Russo-centric worldview amongst Belarussians, who might still view their country as part of the Russian empire. Moreover, Russian channels can hardly be considered a wholesome source of information about Belarus because Belarussian news naturally takes a minute share of their news programmes.

Belarus' local television stations are united into a Television Broadcasting Network (TBN) with an office in Minsk. TBN comprises 17 stations. Three of them are state-owned, one has mixed ownership and the rest are privately owned. Three of the stations are cable, and the rest broadcast via local transmitters. TBN office estimates the network's potential audience (those who can receive member stations) at more than three million. However, according to the IREX/ProMedia survey, only about 11 per cent of the respondents said that they watch TBN member stations regularly.

TBN stations mostly broadcast entertainment shows, music and movies. The volume of local news varies from 10 minutes per day to 10 minutes per week. Recently, a syndicated weekly news programme has been introduced. The 30 minute programme is edited in Minsk from news pieces provided by all member stations.

Another non-state station, Minsk-based Channel 8, which is not part of TBN, is regularly watched by four per cent of the adult audience, according to the IREX/ProMedia survey.

(2) Radio

The situation on the radio market is slightly different. There, the dominance of the state-run Belarussian National Radio 1 (BNR1) is unchallenged. In the same IREX/ProMedia poll, 41 per cent of respondents said that they listen to BNR1 six or seven days per week. BNR1 resembles Belarussian Television in its presentation of news and commentary, which are laden with government propaganda.

The network of wired radio, which Belarus inherited from the Soviet Union, largely explains the high ratings of BNR1. Most of the houses and apartments in Belarus still have wired-radio outlets, which broadcast BNR1 – only four per cent of respondents said they have no access to this channel.

Privately owned FM radio stations are quite popular in urban areas, especially among younger audiences. Radio BA enjoys the highest ratings (11 per cent). Radio Rocks has seven per cent³ and Alpha Radio, which broadcasts from Minsk, has five per cent.

However, Belarussian FM stations can be named a news medium only with a number of qualifications. They largely limit their broadcasts to popular music. Of the limited number of news items broadcast, many bear no relation to Belarus. The government in August 1996 shut down the only FM radio station that actively broadcast local news, the Minsk-based Radio 101.2. The explanation given by state officials was that the station's transmitter had interfered with 'an important state frequency.' However, the same frequency was later given to the state-controlled Radio Style. Most of Radio 101.2's journalists moved to the new station Radio Racyja, which broadcasts on a short-wave frequency from Bialystok in neighbouring Poland.

The audience of short-wave radio stations is



'Isle of Tears' statue in Minsk in memory of those Belarussian soldiers, who died fighting in Afghanistan (1979-1989). Credit: Mark Grigorian

2 All respondents were aged 18 or over.

3 Both Radio BA and Radio Rocks broadcast in Minsk and several regional centres.

limited due to the low quality of broadcasting. Of those short wave radio stations that were included in the poll, less than one per cent of respondents said that they listen regularly to even the most popular – the Russian and Belarussian services of Radio Liberty.

(3) Press

Compared to electronic media, the Belarussian press has been monopolised by the state to a lesser degree. Nonetheless, state-owned newspapers dominate the market. The circulation of the daily⁴ *Sovietskaya Belorussia* owned by the presidential administration (more than 430,000 copies as of October 2000), exceeds the combined circulation of all privately owned newspapers. Other state-owned dailies also have leading positions in the market – the cabinet-owned *Respublika* has a circulation of 115,000 copies, *Narodnaja Hazeta* has a circulation of about 90,000 copies, and *Zviazda* can boast about 70,000 copies. The weekly *7 Dney* has a circulation of about 100,000. According to the Belarussian Association of Journalists (BAJ), the total circulation of state-owned newspapers is about three million. The amount of state propaganda in their content varies from paper to paper, but even the most independent-minded editors have to provide substantial space for propaganda materials.

According to BAJ information, Belarus has 53 privately owned newspapers⁵ with a circulation of more than 1,500 copies. Their total circulation is about 300,000. The circulation of the most popular private newspaper that is distributed nationwide – the weekly *Svobodnye Novosti* – is little more than 65,000 copies. The daily *Narodnaja Volia* has a circulation of 55,000 copies. *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, which is published four times a week, has little over 20,000. *Vecherny Minsk*, which is distributed in the capital only, has about 90,000.

It seems that one of the most important factors in the circulation lead held by state-owned newspaper is their low price. For example, a copy of *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* costs more than twice as much as *Sovietskaya Belorussia*. This factor is especially important in rural areas, where people have lower incomes. In addition to receiving direct state financing from the budget, state-owned newspapers enjoy other significant privileges. Belposhta, a state-owned company that has a monopoly on newspaper distribution, gives a substantial discount to state newspapers, while for private press, distribution costs often exceed the costs of production. In addition, government enterprises and institutions are forced to subscribe to state newspapers, especially *Sovietskaya Belorussiya*.

Saying this, the number of readers per copy of some private newspapers

sometimes exceeds that of state newspapers. For example, according to the IREX/ProMedia survey, the readership of *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, with its circulation of 20,000 copies, exceeds that of *Zviazda* (70,000) and can be roughly compared to those of *Narodnaja Hazeta* (90,000) and *Respublika* (115,000). This can be partly explained by the fact that *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, which started as a business newspaper, is often delivered by subscription to offices, where it is shared by co-workers.

Sovetskaya Belorussiya, however, the presidential administration's paper, remains the clear market leader. Many factors contribute to its popularity: the paper is the only daily in Belarus that has its front page published in colour (although only for those copies distributed in Minsk); salary levels for journalists are far higher than any other paper; and the level of journalistic professionalism is higher than in other state-owned newspapers. The paper also contains the most advertising out of all state publications.

The 'Russian share' is not as large in the press market as it is in television. Nonetheless, several Russian newspapers have good market positions in Belarus. According to the IREX/ProMedia survey, about 10 per cent of respondents regularly read the daily Belarussian edition of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, which has two locally produced pages dedicated to Belarus' news. Up to 15 per cent meantime occasionally read the weekly edition of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, which also includes some locally-produced news.

The media and the law

The Belarussian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and prohibits censorship and monopolisation of mass media (Article 33). Citizens of Belarus are guaranteed the right to

polls apart



Student supporters of an election boycott. Minsk, October 14. Credit: Mark Grigorian

4 The term 'daily' is applied here to newspapers that come out five or six days a week
5 The numbers relate to private newspapers that publish general news. Trade publications and papers that specialise in advertising or entertainment are not included.

obtain, store and distribute ‘full, reliable and timely information about the activities of state agencies, public associations, about political, economic, cultural and international events, the state of the environment’ (Article 34).

At the same time, Article 34 specifies that ‘the use of information can be limited by the law, in order to protect the honour, dignity, private and family life of citizens, and to allow the exercise of their rights in full.’

These limitations are elaborated in Article Five of the Press Law (‘The Law of the Republic of Belarus on the Press and Other Mass Media’): ‘It shall not be permissible to use mass media for the following purposes:

- commission of acts punishable under criminal law;
- disclosure of data which contains state secrets, or any other secrets specifically protected by the law;
- appeals for the illegal seizure of power, change by force of the constitutional order, or violation of the territorial integrity of the Republic;
- incitement to national, social, racial, religious hatred;
- propaganda for war and aggression;
- dissemination of pornographic products;
- threats to the morality, honour and dignity of citizens;
- dissemination of information defaming the honour and dignity of the President of the Republic of Belarus, or of the heads of state bodies whose status is established by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus;
- dissemination of information on behalf of political parties, trade unions or other civil action groups which have not followed the correct procedure for state registration (re-registration).

Any material relating to an incomplete official investigation or judicial proceeding may not be published without the written permission of the authorised investigator or judge, nor may any information gathered in the course of these activities.’

The State Committee on the Press (SCP) has so far been the sole agency for the registration of mass media in Belarus. For printed periodicals, no registration is necessary if their circulation is below 300 copies. For radio and television programmes, no registration is necessary if they are distributed via cable networks accessible to only one organisation or enterprise, or with no more than 10 subscribers. For audio and video programmes, no registration is necessary if their distribution is no more than 10 copies.

The SCP is empowered to monitor the media and issue written warnings if the Press Law is violated. It can also suspend a media outlet for up to three months for any violation of the Press Law. If a media outlet receives more than one warning in a year for violation of Article 5, the SCP or a prosecutor can initiate its closure through the courts.

Article Five is used quite extensively and many private newspapers have already received two or more warnings in a year, some of them in the year 2000. However, the SCP rarely uses its right to initiate court proceedings based on Article Five warnings. Mostly, these warnings are used to apply psychological pressure, keeping newspapers in danger of closure, and provoking self-censorship in journalists.

The private newspaper *Svaboda*, which was well known for its criticism of President Lukashenko, was closed by a court decision in November 1997 after receiving multiple warnings. However, the SCP did not initiate court hearings against *Svaboda*'s successor, *Naviny*, even though the paper also received several warnings. Instead, the paper was forced to close down after it lost a libel suit to Viktor Sheiman, Secretary of State for Security, in September 1999.

The lawsuit was brought on the basis of article in which *Naviny* hinted that Sheiman had built a country house with money from sources other than his official income. The paper was ordered to pay Sheiman 10 billion Belarussian roubles in damages (about \$20,000 at the black market exchange rate of the time). The journalist Aniska Siarhej who wrote the article was also ordered to pay five billion roubles to Sheiman. In Belarus, where an average monthly wage is about \$60, the fine was enormous. In comparison, when in January of this year Hary Pahaniajla, deputy chairman of the Belarussian Helsinki Committee, won a libel suit against the newspaper *Slavyansky Nabat*, known for its anti-Semitic rhetoric, he was awarded the equivalent of \$60 in damages. There have been several other cases of private newspapers being ordered by the courts to pay heavy damages to state officials, but no state-owned media outlet has lost a libel suit in recent years.

Much of the pressure exerted on private media



The jester says 'BT [Belarussian Television] has recognised the elections. Telegraph, Internet, "Magic" are taken...' The cartoon plays on the words of Lenin, who is reputed to have said that in order to stage a revolution, it is necessary to take control of the telegraph system, the bank and the post office. 'Magic' is the name of a printing house that was closed by the police because of its debts.

First published by Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta.

in Belarus is extra-judicial. Economic pressure is probably the most popular method of harassing media that are critical of the government. Belarus' legislation is not the most business-friendly in the region, and financial violations can be found in almost any enterprise after a thorough audit. For example, by the time of its closure in November 1997, a total of about \$32,000 had been levied on the newspaper *Svaboda* in tax-inspection fines. Even if repeated financial inspections find no violations, they can serve as a means of applying psychological pressure.

In the most recent reported case, the non-state newspaper *Vecherny Stolín* in the small town of Stolín was subjected to repeated tax inspections in summer and September 2000.⁶ When no violations were found, local officers of the Committee for State Security (KGB) invited several journalists from the paper for 'conversations.' As a result, three journalists left the paper.

But probably most dangerous for the private media is the current campaign of re-registration of economic entities, which was initiated by President Lukashenko. According to a presidential decree, all economic entities other than collective farms are to be re-registered by July 1, 2001. Those who fail to be re-registered by this date are liable to be liquidated.

According to new rules, the privately owned media, in addition to being registered with the State Committee on the Press, must also register their editorial offices with a local executive committee at the place of their legal address, like other private businesses in Belarus.

According to experts at the World Bank's International Finance Corporation, a large number of Belarussian businesses may fail to meet the requirements of re-registration. Although President Lukashenko issued a decree on November 18, lowering the amount of authorised funds required, it is still too great for many small businesses.

Under the new regulations, businesses are also not allowed to rent private apartments for an office, as is often the case with small businesses, including some newspapers. An editor-in-chief of a Minsk-based private paper, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that moving the editorial office from a private apartment would result in a 15 per cent increase in the price of his newspaper.

In this case, it is difficult to say that the press has been singled out for persecution, because the re-registration campaign is a disaster for most businesses in the country. But the process of re-registration may be more difficult for private newspapers than for other businesses, given the hostile attitude of the Belarussian authorities to the media. This is especially true for those private provincial newspapers which have been critical of the local governments now handling their re-registration.



The media and the elections

Most of the election-related problems experienced by the media were related to the boycott campaign organised by opposition parties.

The new Electoral Code of Belarus does not ban calls for an election boycott⁷, but such calls were still punishable under the Administrative Offences Code at the time of the election campaign. Under pressure from international organisations, and above all the OSCE, the provision that banned boycott appeals was excluded from the Administrative Offences Code, but only once the election campaign was over. Therefore, this supposed concession from the authorities had no practical impact.

The media were not the foremost victims of the repression of those appealing for a boycott. Opposition party activists distributing leaflets for the boycott campaign became the main targets of persecution. More than 100 were detained and fined.

Several private newspapers – *Nasha Svaboda*, *Narodnaja Volia* and the independent trade unions' weekly, *Rabochy* – published special free issues dedicated to the boycott. In case of *Rabochy*, the special issue looked much more like a leaflet than a regular edition of the paper.

⁶ Source: *Monitoring by the Belarussian Association of Journalists*.

⁷ Boycott appeals were led by those who sought to persuade the people not to vote, and thus prevent a voter turnout needed to validate the elections under the law (50 percent of registered voters in the first round, 25 percent in the second round). See note 1.

Dozens of activists around the country were detained while they were distributing these special issues.⁸

In particular, the special issue of *Rabochy*, of which 400,000 copies were published, became the object of a police hunt. On September 21, police confiscated 16,500 copies in the regional centre of Homel from two individual distributors. One week earlier, on September 13, police had raided Magic, a private printing house in Minsk where *Rabochy* was published, and seized more than 100,000 copies of the paper.

Viktar Ivashkevich, editor-in-chief of *Rabochy*, and Dzmitry Kastsiukevich, the paper's legal adviser, received small fines for making public calls for an election boycott. Yury Budzko, Magic's general director, was also charged with this minor civil offence, but was later acquitted.

But the problems for Magic, which publishes the majority of Minsk-based newspapers critical of the government, did not end with Budzko's acquittal. In September, representatives of the government's Financial Investigations Committee took away Magic's accounting books for the last two years. The company's bank account was frozen four days before the election on October 11, and released on November 10.

Budzko has claimed that state officials hinted that his company's problems would end as soon as it stopped printing private newspapers critical of the government.

Magic's situation shows that the vulnerability of the Belarussian private press is heightened as a result of state monopolisation. Magic is one of two private printing houses in Minsk that are technically capable of printing newspapers. Another private house, Plutos, mostly publishes 'non-political' newspapers. Magic publishes about 20 titles, among them *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, *Narodnaja Volia* and *Nasha Svaboda*.

The state-owned Printing House in Minsk has the greatest technical capability, but newspapers printed there are hostages to the government's whims. As early as December 1994, several months after Lukashenko was elected president, the Printing House stopped the publication of newspapers carrying a parliamentary report on corruption amongst Lukashenko's entourage, after receiving a telephone call from the presidential administration. At that time, even the editors of state-owned newspapers rebelled and published huge blank spaces on their front pages in place of the report. Most of these editors were fired during the following months. The following year, several private newspapers were forced out of the Print House altogether and had to be printed in neighbouring Lithuania for some time.

For many private newspapers in the provinces, the situation is even more difficult, because local state-owned printing houses have an absolute monopoly.

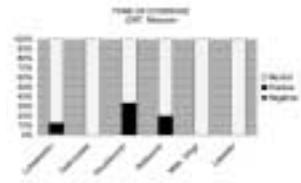
Access to information

Journalists from private media outlets have experienced major obstacles in gaining access to official information, despite Article 48 of the Press Law, which explicitly bans restrictions on the supply of information to journalists. A secret letter from the presidential administration was leaked in spring 1998, prohibiting state officials from passing any information to non-state media. Although the administration claimed that the letter was fake, many journalists of non-state media have experienced problems in obtaining information from state officials. Not surprisingly, the situation had not improved by the time of the current election campaign, and some examples are given below.

On September 28, the heads of state enterprises and organisations in the Ashmiany district of the Hrodna region, received a letter from the head of the local executive committee, in which they were ordered to provide the committee with information on the number of their employees who would take part in early voting.⁹ The editor-in-chief of the local private newspaper *Regionalnaya Gazeta*, Alexander Mantsevich, asked for comment from the deputy head of the committee, Valiantsina Luzina, who is responsible for contacts with the press. Luzina replied that she was not supposed to give out any information to the paper.

On October 7, police in Brest detained a crew of Swedish television journalists who were filming meetings of parliamentary candidates with the voters. They were released an hour later and were reportedly told to leave town as soon as possible.

During the first round of elections on October 15, the journalist Valiantsina Navarych, who writes for several private newspapers in the Brest region, was not allowed to be present at the Pinsk District Executive Committee, where all the information about the voting was gathered. She was also refused



See appendix 9

8 The information below is taken from the news agency BelaPAN, monitoring by the Belarussian Association of Journalists, and Charter 97.

9 The wide use of early voting was criticised by international organisations, because observers could not control it. Employees of state enterprises and organisations were often forced to vote early. On average, about 10 per cent of the eligible electorate in Belarus voted before the election day. In the Hrodna region, this figure was much larger: Belarus' Electoral Code envisages early voting for those who expect to be away or busy on the election day. But in fact, all those who wished (and some who did not) could cast their ballot before the election day, as voters were not required by election officials to give any explanations.

information about the number of early voters in the district. The head of the local election commission told Navarych that only the journalists of *Polesskaya Pravda*, the paper that is published by the committee, had the right to be present there and to receive information.

Journalism and training

The Journalism Department¹⁰ of the Belarussian State University based in Minsk remains the key training centre for the country's journalists. The main emphasis is put on general humanitarian disciplines, with special attention paid to Belarussian and Russian language and literature. The level of teaching of foreign languages is generally seen as low, although it can vary largely from professor to professor.

Two main complaints students have about the teaching is that it is heavily theoretical and old-fashioned. For example, most of the text books and assigned reading date back to the Soviet-era. A large part of the curriculum is devoted to lectures, and little practical training in writing is given. At the same time, it is obligatory for the students to spend a certain amount of time working for newspapers (or for radio or television) and the length increases from the first to the last year of the course.

Many of the professors are journalists for state-owned publications or Belarussian state television and radio. However, there are no explicit statements from the professors that the state line should be propagated, and objective reporting is taught – at least in theory.

Over the last few years, several private institutions of higher education have added journalism to their curricula. However, private education, for which students have to pay, is not yet widespread in Belarus.

Foreign donors also provide some journalistic education in Belarus. ProMedia is the largest and best-known organisation working for the improvement of professional standards in the Belarussian media. It organises, among other things, seminars in journalism and media management, and is available for consultation by the Belarussian media. Its programme is funded by the United States Agency for International Development and managed by the International Research and Exchanges Board (for the press) and Internews (for electronic media).

Belarussian journalists who have participated in ProMedia seminars and received consultations generally see the experience as useful. In addition to working with journalists, ProMedia also publishes Russian-language manuals for local journalists, which some professors at the Belarussian State University allow their students to use as course reading.

Ethics and self-regulation in private media

When the authorities use massive propaganda and try to suppress alternative viewpoints, private media¹¹ face a difficult choice. On one hand, independent media are supposed to reflect the whole spectrum of opinion that exists in society. On the other hand, under a dictatorship or authoritarian control, they tend to side with the opposition.

This contradiction was elucidated by Aliaksej Karol, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Zgoda* and former deputy chairman of the Belarussian Social Democratic Party, at a roundtable on the role of the press in society that took place in Minsk on October 25, 2000.¹² ‘If we present the position of Lukashenko or the position of [the National Assembly deputy] Kastsian, and do not have a critical approach, then we work against the opposition, we work for these authorities, even if we don’t want to,’ Karol said. ‘The classic example is the attempt of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to preserve its objectivity in the conditions of Hitler’s regime.’

The publisher and editor of *Nasha Svaboda*, Pavel Zhuk, said that Belarus today cannot have a ‘non-party’ press. ‘We can only be at one of the two poles which exist in Belarus at this crucial moment in its development. We can only oppose the dictatorship if we are at its opposite pole. There can be no middle ground. Middle ground is tantamount to support for the dictatorship.’ Not surprisingly, *Nasha Svaboda* was probably the most consistent supporter of the opposition’s boycott campaign, both in its editorial policy and in its presentation of news. The boycott strategy was more or less openly supported by *Narodnaja Volia* and *Rabochy*, although these papers also published the views of those opposition figures who decided to run in the parliamentary elections.

Evidently, some of Belarus’ private newspapers

polls apart



Boycott sticker on a metro station.

Credit: Mark Grigorian

¹⁰ The subchapter is based on personal interviews

¹¹ The term ‘media’ in this subchapter is used interchangeably with the term ‘press,’ moreover that Belarus’ leading private media are largely limited to newspapers.

¹² The quotes are taken from the roundtable minutes and from the newspaper *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*.

regard themselves as part of the country's political opposition. This creates the danger of a pro-opposition bias in the presentation of facts. There is always a temptation to fight propaganda with propaganda.

Some other newspapers declared that they promote democratic values without siding with the opposition. 'The press should be in opposition in the sense of opposing the regime, but not in the sense of serving some specific opposition idea,' said the editor of the weekly *Belorussky Rynok*, Viachaslau Khadasouski. 'We are a mirror, and we shall reflect those distortions that exist in reality.' Newspapers such as *Belorussky Rynok* share the view that it is possible to use Western standards of objectivity even in Belarus today. According to Khadasouski, the private newspapers may be compromising their professionalism mainly due to financial limitations. 'Where yesterday three journalists were working and receiving a certain salary, today only one works, and, maybe even practically without a salary,' he said.

But some critics claim that the authorities are effectively manipulating Belarus' private media. Leanid Mindlin, who once headed the 'Politics' studio at the Belarussian state television, said that the government has succeeded in using different levers to influence private newspapers. Such methods can range from direct legal repression to economic blackmail, or sharing confidential information with certain papers, so that they become dependent on such material. According to Mindlin, the authorities have managed to push the Belarussian private press to certain limits, which journalists are afraid to cross.

Mindlin also spoke of more subtle methods of manipulation, such as the introduction of labels, such as 'the radical opposition'. Mindlin believes that such labels, coined in the state propaganda, are sometimes used by private newspapers without their meaning being understood.

Under extreme conditions, journalistic professionalism in the non-state sector becomes even more essential than normal, as it becomes the public's only source of objective and reliable information. Whether or not a high level of professionalism can exist when the economic environment means private newspapers are on the brink of survival, is a different issue.

Prospects for the media in 2001

The situation is likely to get more complicated for the private media in 2001, the year of the presidential elections in Belarus. With much at stake, the authorities will probably increase pressure on the media to make them more obedient during the presidential campaign. Some of the private newspapers may already be defunct by the time of the elections – which must take place before next September – because even with relaxed rules, the re-registration campaign is



likely to take its toll, especially among smaller provincial publications.

It is not unlikely that the State Committee on the Press will make more frequent use of its right to initiate judicial closures of newspapers and to suspend their publication for violations of the Press Law. Private newspapers also remain vulnerable to the limitations of the printing market. The rest of the problems to have haunted the Belarussian private press in 2000 are all likely to continue in the coming year. ○

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Personal Perspectives from the Belarussian Media Industry

A Journalist's Duty

*By Ludmila
Maslyukova*

When you are a journalist for one of Belarus' main daily newspapers, you do not have much time to think about the professional responsibilities involved in reporting political events, such as elections. They just happen. Of course, the primary professional duties of a journalist are widely recognised: to provide readers with objective, comprehensive information, which presents all sides of the story. But were we able to achieve this during the 2000 election campaign?

The first round of the election of Deputies to the lower chamber of the Belarussian Parliament, took place on October 15. Over 60 per cent of those entitled to vote reportedly did so.¹ The election was valid² in 97 of the country's 110 electoral *okrugs* (districts), with 41 deputies elected directly out of the first round of voting.

I believe the Belarussian mass media exercised some influence on this result, since the most popular newspaper³, *Sovietskaya Belarussia*, and my articles within that publication, provided news, interviews with members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), analysis of candidates' programmes, readers' views, and commentary on the distribution of political power. The high turnout for the election was proof that the voters received sufficient information on the modernised Election Code, were able to distinguish between the candi-

dates, and, on the basis of easily accessible information, could formulate their choice.

Merely doing what is required of you is no great achievement, but nevertheless you do feel a certain satisfaction. For example, I gained a sense of satisfaction from the fact that a country where democracy is still young is learning to form power structures on the basis of free elections that allow voters privacy to make their choice from a variety of candidates (on average there were five candidates for each seat).

No doubt, for Western readers this is as obvious as the alphabet. However, you should remember that when you travel from Poland to Belarus, across the River Bug, you enter the geo-political space defined as 'post-Soviet.' Belarus, neighbouring Ukraine, the Baltic states and Russia – all of this region is going through a period of change. This is the zone, if you will, of the largest social experiment of the last century. It is a territory that is experiencing the effects of a frequently problematic transformation of state and social structures.

No doubt, the political terrain here is more difficult for journalists, but it is also perhaps more interesting than in Western Europe, where electoral traditions have been developed and established over the centuries. This is one of the paradoxes that exist in Belarus today.

As a member of staff of one of the state newspapers, I worked 'for the elections.' My colleagues – staff on a number of non-state publications – worked 'against the elections.' The main source of intrigue in this parliamentary election campaign was the radical opposition's attempt to encourage a boycott of the elections. These politicians had their own conceptions and their own aims, not only in relation to their parties or strategies, but also in relation to the role and responsibilities of the press in the election process. After even a brief glance at the pages of the non-state newspaper, *Narodnaya*

polls apart



The title of the article accompanying the cartoon was 'Slobo is Weak.' In the cartoon, the rabbit asks the cat 'Are you the last?' (a question asked by somebody seeking to join the end of a queue), suggesting to the reader that Lukashenko may follow Milosevic into the ranks of Europe's deposed dictators.

First published in *Belarusskaya Gazeta*.

1 Equivalent to 7.3 million votes cast.

2 The vote in an electoral district is invalid if voter turnout is less than 50 per cent . In these cases, new elections are held after three months.

3 *Sovietskaya Belarussia's* nearest competitor, *Respublika*, has a daily circulation of approximately 115,000.



Volya ('People's Will'), the publication's role is obvious: fiery agitation in favour of candidates with one particular point of view, mass propaganda for the opposition boycott, and tendentious and sharp accusations that the authorities had organised a 'farce' instead of an election. If you begin to believe the version of reality presented by the opposition mass media, then you really do start to get worried. But is that picture objective? There are grounds for doubt.

Approximately 140 international observers from 28 countries carried out monitoring in Belarus during the pre-election period and on the day of voting. The majority publicly described the election process as free, open, democratic, well-organised and clean, and maintained that the state mass media, electronic and printed, observed the statutory requirement of equality of conditions for candidates during the election campaign.⁴

If one accepts this conclusion that the election coverage met objective standards of freedom and fairness (and it is impossible not to), then my own coverage of the elections must also be considered to have met those standards. I, and my publication as a whole, covered the events in the same way the independent observers reached their conclusions on the validity of the parliamentary elections in Belarus in 2000.

I would like to stress that the process was entirely in keeping with my own conception of the principle of popular sovereignty, expressed through elections and not boycotts, disturbances or revolutions, whichever great intentions may be

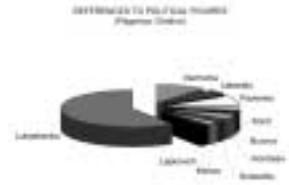
hypocritically employed to justify that sort of political extremism.

This is not the conclusion reached by the ‘parliamentary triumvirate’ of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which carried out a technical observation mission during the Belarussian elections.⁵ Its report does not directly evaluate the course of the voting and the results, but gives an overall picture of the political situation in the country during the election period. The essence of the document is simple: there is a democratic deficit in Belarus, freedom of speech is restricted, and the electoral system is combined with a weak parliamentary mandate.

Of course, if you employ the benchmark of some abstract absolute democracy, then you can find many faults in the Belarussian system (and also in many others). There is in fact no genuinely independent press: publications are dependent either on the authorities or on the opposition. In the new Electoral Code there are some astonishingly archaic provisions, such as the right of workers’ collectives to nominate parliamentary candidates.

However, the mentality of the Belarussian electorate explains more about the elections than do these OSCE findings. Belarussians have, over a long period, been disciplined to take part in elections, and the provisions of the electoral law reinforce this. Fifty per cent of voters must turn out in the first round of voting in order for the result to be valid. Additionally, the fact that Belarus is a presidential rather than a parliamentary republic was given the support of the people in a 1996 referendum, when citizens voted for the appropriate amendments to the constitution.

What is more, people here are in the habit of voting not with their minds but with their hearts. This explains their preference for a majority electoral system in which every candidate stands alone, rather than being ‘packaged’ into a party list, which



See appendix 9

4 Refers to the Election Code (Article 46): ‘Candidates...for deputy of the Chamber of Representatives...have equal rights in the use of state mass information resources.’
5 Refers to the ‘parliamentary troika,’ composed of representatives of the Parliament of the European Union, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

can be difficult for rural voters to understand – not to mention the catastrophically low ratings political parties have amongst the population.

If we use an abstract absolute of democracy to evaluate the Belarussian electorate, it becomes clear that it is in fact the main problem within the Belarussian system – the average citizen has failed to fully understand the range of democratic values. What can be done in this case?

My colleagues from the ‘opposing camp,’ who believe that they are fully-formed democrats along the lines of their Western European counterparts, have been offended by the immaturity of their countrymen, and at some point rejected the people, describing them as ‘ill’ and fundamentally incapable of democratic development. However, I am strongly convinced that it is this aspect of our society that journalists must investigate in order to enhance our understanding of the divisions that have arisen in Belarus as a result of these elections. Political correspondents should contrast the behaviour of the electorate, with the behaviour of the authorities, their respect for human rights, and the institutional structures.

My countrymen fascinate me. I am interested in their thoughts, their motives, their aspirations. The way their outlook is changing is of tremendous interest. The process is slow, painful and dramatic, but it is certainly happening. It seems to me that this type of curiosity is a necessary component of the professionalism vital for satisfactory reporting on what is happening, and vital for avoiding emotional dependence on destructive mythologies of democracy and freedom. ○

Ludmila Maslyukova is a correspondent for the Sovietskaya Belarussia newspaper

*Belarus: a Legal
'Chernobyl' in
the Centre of
Europe*

*By Vladimir
Dzuba*

In the cramped semi-darkness of a cell, above the massive iron door, a dim light bulb shines. The light is annoying, but the guards only turn it off in the morning. In prison slang, the lamp is known as 'the moon.' In the corner, free for all to see, there is a toilet with a tap hanging right over it. The tap is used both to clean the toilet and provide drinking water. An aluminum mug is to be shared by all. There are no hygiene facilities or bedding. This is the 'service' that awaits all who enter the *spetspriyomnik* or special centre' at 37 Ulitsa Okrestina in Minsk.

I was one of more than three hundred people arrested in Minsk on April 26, 1996, following the 'Chernobyl Shlykha,' a demonstration against Lukashenko's pro-Russian policies and his attempts to ignore the nuclear accident, brought 100,000 people together on the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl tragedy. The special forces dealt harshly with the demonstrators. They beat them and seized not only participants in the demonstration, but passers-by as well. I was one of the latter.

I spoke in the street in Belarussian, and that, it turned out, was enough for me to be detained. I was questioned by an investigator from the Ministry for Internal Affairs, and then by an officer of the KGB. They wanted to know what I had seen and heard during the 'Chernobyl Shlykha.' I grew tired of explaining that I had not taken part in the demonstration. Closer to morning, I was taken to an office where it was demanded that I go before a television camera, give my name, date of birth, nationality and give head-on and profile shots. When I refused, I endured a torrent of verbal abuse. I had yet to see a lawyer or any official documents.

In my six-man cell, which I shared with 10 others, I recalled the memories of former inmates of Stalinist detention camps whom I met when I made a series of radio documentaries on the 1920s, when the first wave of Soviet repression spread across

Belarus. In those days, newspapers were exclusively devoted to mass agitation and propaganda, the main element of which was the arousal of a state of patriotic euphoria and a thirst for the fight against ‘counter-revolutionary’ elements.

All those arrested on April 26 were accused on the basis of reports compiled by the militia. The witnesses called were also members of the militia. I found out that I had been sentenced to a term in prison. Apparently, I had ‘used abusive language and grabbed at the uniform of members of the militia,’ actions which were deemed petty hooliganism. I received three days’ administrative arrest, which I had almost served already. In the evening, I was to be freed. Inexplicably, I was held for another night behind bars, before being transported to another court, which sentenced me, on the basis of two militia reports that had been written the day before my arrest, to another 15 days’ administrative arrest. Again, I found myself lying on a bare bunk in a cell.

I was lucky. I went on hunger strike and received enough publicity to force the Minsk Civic Court to overturn the decision of the Regional Court after serving only eight days of my sentence.

My story is just one of thousands. Hundreds of people have been subjected to moral and psychological pressure in the *spetspriyomnik* – leaders of the democratic opposition, simple participants in mass demonstrations, representatives of the creative intelligentsia, journalists. While most were arrested for organising or taking part in protests, journalists were arrested for covering these events – all in spite of the legislation that gives us the right to attend and report on meetings and demonstrations. The monitoring of the Belarussian Association of Journalists (BAJ) bears witness to the fact that the rights of independent editorial staff and journalists are infringed almost every day.

On October 17, 1999, the Belarussian authorities yet again ignored the constitutional rights of citizens to freely attend meetings, demonstrations and pickets, demonstrating their hatred for independent thought. Members of a special forces detachment brutally suppressed a 20,000 strong ‘Freedom March’ that was making its way through Minsk in protest against the re-unification of Belarus and Russia. Hundreds of people were beaten and the militia detained over 300 people. Journalists were again among the victims.

On March 25, 2000 in Minsk, during the celebrations of the 82nd anniversary of the Belarussian People’s Republic (Freedom Day), members of the security services detained 35 representatives of the Belarussian and foreign mass media. Particular attention was paid, the report of the BAJ noted, to arresting the foreign correspondents from Russian channels such as ORT, RTR and NTV. In order to prevent the preparation of reports, their television equipment was damaged. Then, members of camera crews and other journalists were taken by force to a military base of the Ministry for Internal Affairs on Ulitsa Mayakovskovo and

locked in a sports hangar. No explanation was given for their detention, and all detainees were forbidden from informing their offices, friends or relatives of their whereabouts. Some were illegally subjected to searches, and undeveloped films were seized and exposed. This was a cynical and open attack on journalists who were merely fulfilling their professional duties.

However, the protests of international media rights organisations and pressure from the international community, forced the Belarussian authorities to change the forms and methods they use to pressure the independent press.

The ‘Quiet War’ Against the Mass Media

At present, the independent Belarussian press is perhaps the only mechanism for public control of the activities of the executive. This does not please the bureaucrats of the presidential administration. For them, there should not be even a hint of criticism of the existing regime in the press. This dogma is strictly adhered to by the electronic Belarussian mass media, which are monopolised by the state. In addition, all of their official newspapers offer the authorities the same service.

On October 1, 2000, there were 1120 registered periodical publications in Belarus. Citing this as evidence of free speech, the presidential bureaucrats are fond of telling people that only 400 of these are state publications, and the remaining 720 independent. However, they always omit to mention what proportion of this number consists of actual newspapers. When one ignores commercial, promotional and entertainment publications, you are left with only 50 independent regional and republican publications that appear with any regularity. Their total print run is around 300,000. The same figure for state newspapers is 3,000,000.



A pensioner in the Minsk ‘Freedom March’ whose flyer reads ‘Today Milosevic – tomorrow Luka’. Credit: Mark Grigorian

Government publications are, as a rule, financed by the state budget and offered a series of benefits. Therefore, their activities are, to a large extent, artificial.

This is one of the problems to arise from violation of the constitutional right to equal protection of property, which has forced the independent press to endure unequal economic conditions. The distribution of publications through the retail network is approximately twice as expensive for independent media as it is for state mass media. In the state printing houses, independent newspapers also pay an extra 50 per cent in comparison with their state colleagues.

This growing pressure on the revenue earned by independent editorial offices from sales is added to by state activity that hinders independent publications from earning money through advertising. Many private firms that had placed advertisements in the independent mass media have been warned by the authorities that they did not approve of such practices. As a result of this, and a whole series of other administrative factors, even the most prosperous editorial offices have lost around 30-40 per cent of their advertising income since the beginning of 2000 alone.

Independent newspapers today are not only unable to renew their main funds or carry out development programmes, but do not even have the necessary financial resources to acquire paper or pay for running costs.

Legislative Arbitrariness Increases

In a democratic state, the mass media is only obliged to establish relations with society (readers, viewers, listeners). However, in Belarus they must constantly consider their relations with the authorities.

In the summer of this year a new draft law was introduced, under which editorial staff can be held legally responsible for their organisation's actions, in addition to its proprietors. In the opinion of the independent experts of the Centre for the Legal Defence of the Mass Media, a body constituted by BAJ, it will require editorial offices to register as 'boards of management.' Consequently, according to Mikhail Pastukhov, the director of the legal centre, newspapers will be subject to increased scrutiny from the registering body and the arsenal of methods which can be used to influence publications will be increased. The new draft law also introduces a range of scenarios under which editorial offices can be shut down. All this significantly eases the procedure for liquidation of independent publications, which, as a result of the authorities' economic discrimination, are continually experiencing financial difficulties.

Moreover, the current law on the press gives journalists the right to collect, ask for and receive information from state bodies, enterprises and establishments. However, the bureaucrats, sensing their impunity, ignore these

obligations. For independent journalists, seeking access to official information, it is almost impossible. Non-state journalists are routinely denied accreditation and barred from press conferences and major court cases.

The independent press in Belarus is working in a legal minefield. With every passing day, our profession becomes more dangerous. On July 7, 2000, the name of our colleague, Dmitri Zavadsky, was added to the list of those individuals who have gone missing. His whereabouts and fate remain unknown today. However, despite the persecution, many journalists openly declare that they are tired of being afraid. The civilised world has seen the true face of the Belarussian regime: political persecution of those who come out against the arbitrariness and violence against peaceful demonstrators, the presence of armoured vehicles with machine guns in the centre of Minsk, and the use of trained dogs to threaten civilians.

The Centre for the Legal Defence of the Mass Media has produced several brochures on 'Security Techniques for Journalists,' including information on how to survive extreme situations. However, the issue today is not the survival of one person, but the survival in Belarus of the independent press as a whole. The regime wishes a pocket press, a groveling journalism and a silenced country. Therefore, with the approach of the 2001 presidential elections, pressure on the independent mass media will only continue to mount. Without the support of authoritative European structures, international human rights organisations and humanitarian funds, the independent press in Belarus may cease to exist, and the 'legal Chernobyl' in the centre of Europe will result in a cancerous growth in the minds of our people. ○

Vladimir Dzuba is vice president of the Belarussian Association of Journalists



On the left stands Nikita Khrushchev who says: 'I solemnly promise – in 1980 we will live in Communism!' (a famous promise he once made). In the centre stands Mikhail Gorbachev, who says: 'In 2000 every Soviet family will have a flat of its own!' (another famous promise). On the right is Aleksander Lukashenko, saying: 'In 2001 we will end poverty. Salaries will be \$100!' (a promise he made in his speech to the delegates of the Congress of Deputies.) The script says: 'We do not believe anymore!'

First published in Svobodnye Novosti.

*The Professional
Challenge:
Belarussian
Media Today*

*By Evgenij
Dmitriev*

The degree of media independence in Belarus is defined by several factors, the most important being: the presence and content of regulatory laws and their accordance with international standards; the competence and professionalism of the heads of the mass media, including the ability and skill of editorial offices to survive in a market environment; and lastly, the level of journalistic professionalism, independence and responsibility.

Other factors cannot be ignored – particularly the common mentality shared by journalists and editors and the economic climate in which the media industry must operate. In Belarus, these are heavily influenced by the Soviet experience and by the nature and difficulties of post-Soviet development.

In Belarus, as in other post-Soviet countries, the traditions of *samizdat* or underground publishing – encompassing dissident understandings of freedom of speech and decades of political repression – have led the majority of Belarussian journalists towards subjectivity, at the expense of objective and independent coverage of facts and events. A paradoxical situation has developed, whereby freedoms of speech and information require a licence or a certificate of registration. We can thus assume, with some degree of certainty, that it will be years rather than months, before responsible and objective journalism can develop in Belarus, irrespective of the way in which the political situation unfolds in the immediate future.

Today in Belarus, it is characteristic of journalism that no clear distinction is made between informative reports and expression of opinions, as in Western media. The mass media in Belarus do not believe that informative reports should be free of opinion and entirely non-partisan. The main principle of Western journalism, ‘news not views,’ is consistently ignored by state and non-state media



information sources alike. This is in-keeping with the traditions of Soviet journalism, which were founded on the theory that a text does not provide neutral information, but is rather a fragment of a wider ideological viewpoint. Belarussian journalism is therefore deeply ideological.

The continued presence of purely ‘Soviet’ journalistic practices is evident throughout the country. For example, state and non-state newspapers often publish articles by authors other than their permanent employees and readers’ letters, which sometimes occupy as much as 30 per cent of the publications. This practice illustrates Belarussian journalists’ inclination to express a defined opinion, rather than to pass on information that presents every side of the story.

It has to be said that Belarussian journalists frequently overestimate how well informed and competent they are. To some extent, this is also characteristic of their evaluations of how well they understand the themes and problems on which they write and broadcast. There is a tendency to overestimate their professional abilities, particularly in comparison with the evaluations of various social institutes and the general public. Unfortunately, the positions of journalists and the public are entirely different. The former see public opinion only on terms of strictly defined social groups: the non-

productive intelligentsia, representatives of state bodies and staff from other media sources, including foreign media groups. Journalists seldom consult with or reflect the opinions on the general population. The views and aspirations of society as a whole are therefore not well represented by the media.

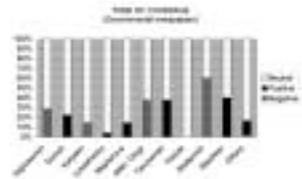
The second 'post-Soviet' characteristic that frustrates freedom of speech and the press is a consequence of the economic situation in Belarus. In the struggle for economic survival, mass media organisations, editors and their journalists often exploit their social status. Whether they are involved in state or private Belarussian mass media, few journalists are overly concerned about drawing a line between what constitutes journalism and what constitutes promotion. The result is the proliferation of political partisanship and personal opinion in the Belarussian mass media, which is essentially disguised – and subsidised – advertising.

The freedom to cover events and express points of view is only one link in the chain which enables press, radio and television to communicate with audiences. The other vital links are the printing and distribution of print media and the acquisition of broadcasting equipment. These limitations, in the view of many experts, are currently more economic than political in character. Here, in terms of print media, the crucial factors are control of the printing houses, control of paper supplies, monopolies on the distribution of publications, through the postal system; and control of the newspaper kiosks and stands.

These economic limitations should be removed, although the Belarussian mass media would then be confronted by an even more complex problem, not conditioned by state authority, but by the demands of the information market. In the opinion of several experts, the number of mass media outlets in Belarus exceeds the demands of the information market and, most importantly, their output is beyond the purchasing power of the population. No fewer than 1,100 publications are today registered in Belarus. This figure includes 740 newspapers of various kinds.

Eighty per cent of the media outlets registered in Belarus are independent of the state, but earn only 20 per cent of all media revenue. Few are capable of maintaining their profitability without state subsidies or other forms of additional financing. For the moment, the profession remains paternalistic, in terms of both form and content, as it is oriented towards the state and not towards the civilian population. The majority of mass media and journalists are entirely unprepared for free market competition, not only with foreign media, but also among themselves. It is the economic factor that will define the character of Belarussian journalism in the near future.

Another series of post-Soviet problems also influences the condition and development of Belarussian journalism. Firstly, there is the relatively poor level



See appendix 9

of journalist training and education. Training often employs outdated ‘socialist’ concepts and methodologies, while students must use redundant textbooks which do not take refer to the plurality and internationalisation of media sources.

This leads on to the issue of informational isolationism in Belarussian journalism. Neither state nor non-state media have correspondents reporting from overseas – not even from neighbouring countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania or Poland. Instead, there is the predominant use of secondary information resources and a permanent delay in news coverage.

These are just some of the elements which influence the quality of journalism in Belarus, and which have to be taken into account when discussing or analyzing the level of free speech that exists today. ○

Evgenij Dmitriev is Deputy Dean of Journalism at the Belarus State University

Monitoring Findings

Period October 1 – 22

Summary

The state has total control of the most important electronic and print media. The circulations of state-run newspapers far outstrip those of the opposition press. As a result, the media sector serves as a vehicle for the regime's opinions. Alternative points of view are drowned out or stifled.

The Central Election Commission (CEC), in its decision of September 11, established a list of seven national newspapers allowed to print the pre-election platforms of candidates for election to the National Assembly of Parliamentary Deputies. The list¹ included only state newspapers, but excluded *Sovietskaya Belarussia* – owned by the President's administration – which has a bigger circulation than all the non-government newspapers put together. The CEC decision also allowed all regional state dailies to publish these platforms.

The same decision limited the space given to candidates to 500 words. All candidates were permitted to write their own programmes and deliver them to one of the seven papers listed or any of the regional dailies, which were then obliged to publish them without changes.

Given the limitations on length and the fact that the country's biggest selling daily newspaper was not obliged to publish the platforms, candidates were effectively prevented from explaining their policies in the state-controlled print media to the widest possible audience.

Individual candidates were also offered a chance to appear on air in the state broadcast media. Candidates were given five minutes on both television and radio with some candidates opting to address regional audiences on local state TV channels, including Gomel and Grodno.

As the election campaign officially began two weeks prior to our monitoring, we do not know how many candidates took advantage of this opportunity. However, we did record 221 instances of candidates appearing in the state broadcast media between October 1 and 12 – when the appearances stopped. Belarussian Television (BT) and Belarussian National Radio 1 (BNR 1) allocated one hour each evening to these candidate spots, but the free airtime was seldom fully used, possibly because not all candidates took up the offer. The CEC stated that no complaints were filed over the issue of access.

In a strictly formal sense, we can conclude that candidates were given equal access to the state broadcasters in accordance with the law (see page 46). However, this is not the same as concluding that editorial coverage was balanced or fair. The five-minute limit failed to provide enough time for voters to make an informed choice on whom to support. Moreover, audiences were not informed in advance which candidates would be appearing on which days. Voters therefore had no idea if their local candidates would be appearing on air – and if so, when.

News coverage in the state broadcast media, as well as the state print media, was neither balanced nor fair. While broadcasters offered equal access to candidates under the CEC formula, daily news coverage during the pre-election period was overwhelmingly biased against the opposition. It appears that the state broadcasters interpreted the law regulating election coverage in an extremely narrow manner, since coverage each evening on the

polls apart



This cartoon accompanied a compilation of a series of short interviews given by the leaders of the political parties that boycotted the elections. The article was titled 'To go or not to go?' It plays on the episode in Cervantes' 'Don Quixote,' in which Quixote attacks what he believes are giants, only to discover that they are actually windmills. The implication is that the opposition leaders are fighting a campaign against Lukashenko that is noble and just, but ultimately meaningless.

First published by Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta.

1 Zvyazda, Narodnaya Gazeta, Respublika, Belorusskaya Niva, 7 Dnei, Znamiya Yunosti and Chyrvona Zmena.

broadcast media far exceeded the obligatory one-hour slot devoted to individual candidates.

During the monitoring period, the state media primarily covered official events, such as the Congress of Deputies, the sessions of the National Assembly and the public appearances of President Aleksander Lukashenko. Meetings and rallies organised by the opposition were either omitted, or portrayed in a sceptical, hostile tone.

For their part, the opposition newspapers either ignored official government events or commented negatively. ‘Unofficial’ events such as the opposition-led ‘Freedom March’ were given extensive coverage, while the Congress of Deputies was dismissed as unimportant and the speeches of Lukashenko were attacked. The Belarussian state under President Lukashenko was compared to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under the authoritarian rule of Slobodan Milosevic.

During the election campaign, a section of the opposition press was subjected to intimidation and harassment because of its calls for an election boycott. The boycott was devised to reduce voter turnout to below 50 per cent, thus preventing the election results from being legally valid.

The deeply partisan nature of the media in Belarus and its failure to distinguish between factual information and commentary meant that the public had no balanced news source unless they watched the Russian television channels ORT, NTV or RTR. In Belarus itself, neither state nor opposition media proved able or willing to rise above partisan reporting. Due to bias and a lack of journalistic training, the media failed to demand or foster an open debate on issues of concern for the electorate.

Our monitoring found that the government and the opposition media were not writing about the same events and voters were not presented with sufficient information to make an informed choice about competing political programmes and candidates. Instead of encouraging a constructive public dialogue among rival interests, the media was merely another tool in a political confrontation between the government – namely President Lukashenko – and the opposition.

Equal access to the mass media

In accordance with the Election Code of Belarus (Article 45), citizens and political parties have the right to participate in pre-election rallies. The code also allows for public discussion of candidates’ political, business and personal qualities, as well as the freedom to campaign for or against them.

Equal access to state mass media is specifically covered in the code (Article 46): ‘Candidates...for deputy of the Chamber of Representatives...have equal

rights in the use of state mass information resources.’

It continues: ‘State mass information resources...are obliged to provide equal opportunities for pre-election appearances of candidates.’

The same article stipulates that candidates have the right to publish (in the press) an ‘election programme’ of no more than two typewritten pages (3,500 characters or 500 words).

The strict limits placed on the length of election platforms effectively curtailed a candidate’s opportunity to present his or her views to the electorate. Interpreting the Election Code’s access rules far too narrowly, the state media determined that ‘pre-election appearances’ referred only to the 500-word policy programmes and the five-minute radio and TV spots. Other appearances – either on news programmes, interviews in print media or as panelists in special election broadcasts – were considered to be outside the code’s regulations. In these contexts, fair access was not granted.

While the Election Code does not regulate the activity of the non-state media during elections, the same CEC resolution of September 11 (which obliged state media to provide equal access) also required non-state media to ‘provide equal conditions for the appearances of candidates.’ The media appeared to disregard this resolution and the CEC failed to enforce it. The same code set down which newspapers were allowed to publish the platforms of candidates. None of the seven national dailies were opposition newspapers.

The following table² shows that during a 12-day period in October, there were 221 platform appearances by candidates in the state media. Candidates may have appeared more than once in the different media as permitted under the CEC regulations. The table does not document how many candidates in total appeared or their political leanings. However, as mentioned above, the television slots allocated

polls apart



Project Manager Mark Grigorian outside IWPR’s monitoring office in Minsk. Credit: Gagik Avakian

2 A full series of monitoring tables and charts relating to the election coverage is to be found in Appendix 4.

each evening for the appearance of candidates were not fully utilised during our monitoring period, suggesting that all who wanted to appear on air did so. Table 1 clearly illustrates that a substantial number of candidates chose to make appearances on the regional state broadcaster, Gomelsky TV, in the southeast of the country.

Table 1 – *Number of appearances by candidates in the state mass media (October 1-12)*

Media organisation	Number of candidates appearing
Belarussian State Television (BT)	77
Gomelsky Television Channel (regional, state)	42
Grodnensky Television Channel (regional, state)	6
Belarussian State Radio	55
<i>Narodnaya Gazeta</i>	13
<i>Respublika</i>	3
<i>Zvyazda</i>	3
<i>Grodnenskaya Pravda</i>	6
<i>Gomelskaya Pravda</i>	16

IWPR was told by both the CEC and state media representatives that no candidates had complained of being refused the right to publish or air their election programmes.

The appearances of candidates on BNR 1 took place between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., and on television between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. These are inconvenient times, as the working day usually finishes at six in the evening. The selection of the time for the broadcasts therefore violated the Election Code (Article 46), which states that the programmes of candidates had to be presented at those times of the day ‘at which television and radio programmes have the largest audiences.’

As mentioned previously, the names of those appearing were never announced in advance. Voters could only see or hear candidates from their electoral district by chance or if they tuned in to every broadcast. Formally, candidates were granted fair access to present their platforms, but because there was no schedule promulgated in advance, the right of voters to receive information on candidates was not honoured.

State broadcasters' editorial coverage of the elections

The editorial tone of the state broadcasters' coverage during the monitoring period was overwhelmingly pro-government and anti-opposition. As reported above, the Election Code was interpreted narrowly and editors did not feel obliged to provide fair access or treatment. Nowhere was this more evident than in state radio coverage. During the three weeks of monitoring, the opinions or voices of the opposition candidates never appeared on the radio news. Moreover, the opposition, presented as a single phenomenon, was only mentioned during the same period for a total of 12 minutes and 30 seconds – and then only in a wholly negative context.

On BT, Olga Abramova, the chairman of the Yabloko Association, was the only opposition figure given access to television airtime (20 min 15 sec). However, the broadcaster only used footage in which she accused the opposition newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* of unethical behavior and castigated the representatives of large capital and alleged 'oligarchs' seeking political power. Thus Abramova's appearance was seen as portraying the opposition in a negative light.

Editorial policy on BT and BNR 1 treated the opposition not as a varied alliance of parties or individuals but as a general phenomenon, set up against the president and his administration. Few names were ever mentioned. Those individuals standing for parliamentary seats, those boycotting the elections and political émigrés were all lumped together. According to the electronic media's portrayal, the opposition seemed to have little to do with the parliamentary elections.

A series of three election films broadcast on BT went a step further, associating the opposition with a myriad of villains – including fascists.



'Freedom Marchers' on the streets of Minsk, October 14. Credit: Mark Grigorian

'The Secret Springs of Politics' comprised a series of three deeply propagandistic films directed and presented by Yuri Azarenok. The films were screened between popular programmes – for instance, at half-time during a televised football match between Belarus and Armenia. One film, 'An Autumn Fairytale,' suggested that chaos and bloodshed would follow an opposition victory. (The full transcript of this film can be read in Appendix 2). Each film had scurrilous and mocking texts. The films appeared to be designed solely to lambaste the opposition and scare away prospective voters.

In contrast to the editorial coverage on BT, the attacks made by the 'Secret Spring' film series were heavily personalised. Individual opposition leaders and figures were frequently identified. 'Autumn Fairytale' opened with footage of tanks surrounding the House of Soviets in Moscow in October 1993, the burning of the Federal Parliament in Belgrade this October and footage of opposition figures presenting their five-minute platforms on television. The narrator, Azarenok, linked the images by warning that some people in Belarus sought the overthrow of all authority.

In the film 'Marionetki', both political émigrés, and opposition leaders (including Vechorka, Bogdankevich, Gonchar, Anatoly Lebedko, Statkevich and Shushkevich) were named. They are, the audience was told, no more than 'marionetki' whose strings are being pulled by 'the Western puppeteers.'

Each film was rich in emotive language and imagery:

'...the orgy which the democrats created on the streets of Minsk on October 1, 2000.'

'...And here are some familiar faces. [Shots of opposition leaders.] We spoke of this in the last programme. Sexual minorities, or to put it simply, pederasts, it turns out, are also for the boycotting of the elections to the parliament.'

Biased and often offensive commentaries, full of both adjectives and adverbs and largely lacking factual detail, were not only to be found in the films of Yuri Azarenok. BT's most popular political programme, 'Panorama,' on October 5, attacked the leader of the opposition Belarussian Communist Party, Sergei Kalyakin, by paraphrasing from an election communiqué he had written to his regional colleagues. Viewers were not allowed to read or see the letter for themselves and were thus unable to reach their own conclusions on the matter.

The full commentary went as follows:

'And so, in his blood, no doubt, there are good genetic memories of the special triumvirate courts, and the departments, and the struggle against the enemies of the people. And so his letter, as was to be expected, ends with threats. Here there is talk of incarceration for appropriate periods, penal labour and fines. As then, it's with a communist touch.'

‘In fact, Kalyakin is not a big player, but he thirsts, thirsts after power. And here he lets it slip, in the framework of socialist realism with a happy end: civic duty and severe punishment never meet face to face. For the leader of the PCB Kalyakin, it’s only seven lines from civic duty to prison, like there are seven bullets in a revolver. And in those seven lines, no doubt, is his entire political programme. In fact, while Kalyakin has led the Party of Communists of Belarus, its rating according to the latest social research of the Novak laboratory has fallen lower than that of the most blatant nationalist groups, and even lower than that of both popular fronts.

‘Kalyakin doesn’t have any personal rating of his own. Respected communist Kalyakins, perhaps your leader is a spy sent by the Cossacks? There’s some time left before the elections, think about it.’

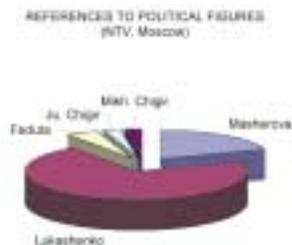
BT did, however, appear to screen a debate between three opposition candidates – including Kalyakin – one week later, on October 11.

Kalyakin, Olga Abramova of the Yabloko Association, and Vladimir Novosyad (who though not affiliated to any party on the electoral list, is head of the Citizen’s Forum) each laid out their platforms, and answered questions put by Sergei Filipov, a BT reporter.

Viewers were not asked to choose between the three candidates, as they were standing in different electoral districts: Kalyakin in district no. 105, Abramova in district no. 106, and Novosyad in district no. 95. In fact, the ‘debate’ was an artificial creation and originated in the decision by the three candidates to pool their five minutes into a shared 15-minute discussion.

Of all the candidates, BT went out of its way to promote those affiliated to the state. Thus, Natalia

polls apart



See appendix 9

Masherova, the daughter of the late Petar Masherov, the Soviet-era leader of Belarus, whom many associate with stability and order, received as much editorial coverage in the two weeks prior to the election (76min 20sec) as the entire opposition (77min). This could be explained by the fact that her opponent was the former prime minister of the country and now one of the leaders of the opposition, Mikhail Chigir.³

Overall, however, BT paid very little attention to the opposition candidates. It focused instead on Lukashenko and the opposition. The president was either depicted in a neutral or positive light, while the opposition was shown negatively. The opposition, for BT, was a generalised phenomenon. Of the opposition candidates, only certain people were named (Vechorka, Statkevich, Chigir, Gaidukevich, Shushkevich, Lebedko), some of who were boycotting the elections on principal (Vechorka and Lebedko) and some of who were participating. Consequently, the conflict against Lukashenko had little to do with the 2000 parliamentary elections.

As mentioned, BNR 1 adopted the same approach. Only 18 opposition candidates were ever mentioned, and most of these mentions came after October 15, when announcers were simply reporting the results of the vote. Thus, it was often the case that the first time listeners heard the name of an opposition candidate on air, it was to hear that he had lost.

Media coverage of the elections: Content

The political division of the media does not only determine how a story is covered in Belarus – but also determines what is covered. The most important events for the state mass media during October were the Congress of Soviet Deputies, the speech given by President Lukashenko to the Congress, the arrival of overseas monitors, the elections themselves, and the events in Yugoslavia. The latter, illustrated repeatedly by shots of demonstrators and the burning Federal Parliament building, were presented as the consequences of challenging the existing order.

For the opposition press, the main events during the monitoring period, were the ‘Freedom March’ in Minsk and the regions, the elections that did not take place and were not legitimate in Belarus, and the events in Yugoslavia, which were presented as a triumph of ‘Democracy’.

Congress of Soviets

The Congress of Soviets took place at the end of September, during our training period, but before monitoring started. This was the first time the Congress,

comprising 2,500 delegates, had been called, and although essentially a talking shop with no legislative status, the state media characterised it as an important means of strengthening links between the different branches of the administration. Although it made no specific recommendations other than urging the extension of local Soviets' powers, as an official body, the state media presented the Congress as a key event in the pre-election period, and, in turn, Lukashenko's speech was the main event of the Congress.

All of the state newspapers published Aleksander Lukashenko's speech in full. It occupied 19.6 per cent of *Sovietskaya Belarussia's* column space on October 3, 34 per cent of *Zvyazda's*, 35.3 per cent of *Narodnaya Gazeta's* and 27.5 per cent of *Respublika's*. The speech was broadcast live on both BT and Radio, and large excerpts were retransmitted in news broadcasts.

That part of his speech devoted to the elections was steeped in criticism of the opposition. They had, the president said, 'entirely lost their conscience,' and were 'selling the interests of their people to the West.' Moreover, they had 'got involved in all sorts of adventures' and 'involved themselves in brazen intrigues.'

Coverage of the Congress and of Lukashenko's speech included short Soviet-style testimonials given by delegates in tribute to the Congress and to Lukashenko. Typical was the testimonial given by Simen Livshits, chairman of the Parliamentary Commission on Economics, who was quoted by *Sovietskaya Belarussia* on October 3:

'It is very important that President Aleksander Lukashenko said...that the elections should be carried out openly, with a fair struggle between the candidates. These words...were correctly understood by the executive authorities and they were seen as a task that has to be fulfilled.'

3 Chigir subsequently withdrew his candidacy on October 24, prior to the second round, claiming the vote in his district had been rigged.

Except for several of these testimonials in *Sovietskaya Belarussia* and one interview in *Respublika*, no other commentaries were monitored in the state press.

In the few cases where the opposition media mentioned the Congress or Lukashenko's speech, they did so only to comment and not to report on what was actually decided or said. Readers were therefore provided with no information about the events themselves. Thus the October 5 issue of *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* carried an article entitled 'Victims of the Congress of Soviets'. The introduction to the article read:

'The Congress of Soviets – as grandiose an action as it is senseless'.

Svobodnie Novosti described the Congress as a 'seance of political spiritualism' and the president's speech as 'a collection of pre-election propaganda stamps, most of which contradict each other.'

The writer, Valeri Karbalevich, categorised the Congress as 'corporative democracy, the form of totalitarian and authoritarian legitimation of the ruling regime,' and described it as 'an unpleasant necessity of the historical epoch.' The Soviets ('councils') were described as 'the fig leaf of totalitarianism', and the point in the declaration of the Congress that describes participation in the coming elections as 'the essential social duty of every citizen of the Republic of Belarussia' was also criticised. This does appear to contradict the constitution, which stipulates that participation in elections is the right of citizens, to exercise or not as they decide.

Though the Congress took place during the monitor's training period, we did nevertheless record that the style of television coverage was very similar to that employed by the leading state newspapers. For example, on the edition of 'Panorama' shown on September 29 at 9 p.m., Lukashenko's speech was broadcast and followed by several interviews in which the president's speech was praised.

Radio worked in much the same way. On September 29, several excerpts from Lukashenko's report on the coming elections were broadcast on BNR 1. These were then followed up with positive interviews with Belarussian politicians, as well as with Ukrainians and Russians who were introduced as the guests of the Congress.

The same process was observed in the regional newspapers. State papers *Grodnenskaya Pravda* and *Gomelskaya Pravda* published three identical official pieces on the Congress on Tuesday, October 3. In the capital's state newspapers, these pieces were published on Saturday, September 30. On October 5, *Grodnenskaya Pravda* published Lukashenko's speech. *Gomelskaya Pravda*, meantime, published speeches given by the congressional delegates from the Gomelskaya Oblast.

Valeri Selitski, Chairman of the Council of Deputies in Gomel Region said:

‘The president’s speech underlined the directions of improvement of statehood and development of representative democracy, including local self-government... We must think together how to use better the great potential of thousands of deputies, who enjoy special confidence of the people, can convince them and have authority, which is defended by the laws.’

To which, the editor-in-chief of *Gomelskaya Pravda* added:

‘Dear comrades! Let me confess that I grew up during this congress. It could happen in such an inspiring atmosphere, in the high chamber of the palace of republic, on the highest representative meeting of participants and guests. I am sure that after the congress, when its ideas and decisions will be implemented, the set-up of my country will become more proud, more confident’.

In stark contrast, the opposition weekly *Pagonya* in Grodno did not mention the Congress at all.

The ‘Freedom March’ in Minsk

The ‘Freedom March’ held in Minsk on Sunday October 1, timed to coincide with the Congress of Soviets, was the third major opposition ‘March’ or rally held in the capital in 12 months. The first, on October 17 last year, attracted up to 20,000 protesters and was broken up by riot police, with many people hurt. The second, in March this year, ended peacefully after another 20,000 people were estimated to have marched through the streets calling for Lukashenko’s resignation. Given the timing, this October’s march was seen by observers as being of particular importance. Many of the organ-

polls apart



The cartoon accompanied the lead story, whose title was: ‘Topic of the week: farewell to the Chamber [of representatives].’ The script on the cartoon says: ‘A hat for everyone.’ This paraphrases a common Russian saying, which means ‘everyone will get what they deserve.’ In the cartoon, the rat (Lukashenko) gives hats to rabbit. There is a second meaning also: ‘to hit a hat’ is another common saying, which is translated as ‘to deal a blow.’ ‘Hit’ and ‘give’ are homonyms in Russian.

First published in *Belarusskaya Gazeta*.

isers billed it as a direct protest against the elections and a call for their boycott. In the event, however, numbers were down for the 'Freedom March-3' event, with the independent news agency BelaPAN estimating a crowd of 15,000. The police did not intervene and the rally ended without any reported violence.

The opposition newspapers devoted far more coverage to the Freedom March than either the Congress or Lukashenko's speech, with many putting it on their front pages. However, the attitude of these newspapers was extremely varied. While some claimed it as a great success, others registered their dissatisfaction.

The march had far less significance for the state broadcasters. It was not mentioned once on BNR 1 during the hours of our daily monitoring (5 p.m. – 12 a.m.). Where there was coverage – on BT – it was in the form of commentary rather than actual reporting. Much of the commentary was in fact drawn directly from a speech given on the march by Lukashenko, in which he attacked the demonstrators for being paid agitators seeking to undermine the state.

On October 1, the host of the popular 'Resonance' television programme, Alexander Zimovsky, commenting on the 'Freedom March,' said: 'The movement was headed by boys with drums *à la* 'Hitler Youth'.' It should be noted that in Belarus, which suffered greatly during Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, any reference or comparison with Nazi Germany has a powerful emotional force.

Much of Zimovsky's commentary was devoted to the alleged financing of the opposition:

'In the opposition environment, information has been circulating for a fairly long time maintaining that in order to discredit the parties and movements that are putting their candidates forward for election to the Belarussian parliament, the radicals have been promised serious material incentives, including trips to Western countries, through financial grants allocated to educating the young opposition politicians.'

He went on to imply that a fifth of the opposition has a criminal past, adding that criminal gangs in Belarus 'understood' that if they joined the ranks of the opposition, they would be given 'full political protection' in return.

During the course of his commentary, shots were shown of high-profile opposition members, including Stanislav Shushkevich, Vintsuk Vechorka and Olga Abramova.

The state media returned to the subject of the 'Freedom March' less than two weeks later on October 12, when Lukashenko appeared before the deputies of the National Assembly to close its last sitting before the elections. However, the following day, the excerpts from Lukashenko's speech published in *Narodnaya Gazeta*, *Zvyazda* and *Soyuznoe Veche*, turned out to have been taken from his address to Congress on September 29 and not from the speech he gave at the

closing session of the Assembly.

The president's speech to Parliament was broadcast live by both BT and state radio during the day. In the evening, it was rebroadcast in full on television, with substantial extracts repeated on the radio.

On the following day, October 13, Lukashenko's speech was published in the *Respublika* newspaper. Referring to the 'Freedom March,' the president told the National Assembly:

'We have to stop the activities of certain destructive elements which have come up with a formula for themselves: the worse it is for the people and the state, the better it is for them.

'Everyone understands that the people won't go for these "meetings" or for those that are meeting. And to be frank, these meetings and demonstrations are in our favour because they demonstrate the inadequacy of those who are waving their banners and wandering through the streets of our cities.

'And you must all understand perfectly well that these people are earning money. I'll give you a concrete example. The march. It's probably the third or fourth. Last Sunday, I know exactly what happened. "We'll get a half million people together in Minsk, we'll bring all work to a standstill and might even grab power." They got everyone from every corner that they could pay, just over 4,000 people who wanted the money. Some spectators joined in. As soon as the meeting started, there were only one and a half thousand left. The West sees this, there are observers here. And where does all the money that all these funds give out go? You know the statements of many, particularly our neighbours, who said (and I quote): "Political impotents. Mustn't have anything to do with them."

In contrast, the third 'Freedom March' in Minsk



'Today Milosevic, Tomorrow Luka' – Minsk, October 14. Credit: Mark Grigorian

was presented as a major event by the opposition newspapers and was given front-page treatment. Factual information was mixed with commentary, and the tone of the papers varied: from enthusiasm (*Narodnaya Volya*) to disappointment (*Nasha Svaboda* and *Svobodnie Novosti*). Only *Belarusskaya Gazeta* tried to put the march in context. None of the others discussed its significance in relation to the authorities, or to the man in the street. Thus coverage, aside from that provided by *Belarusskaya Gazeta*, was largely restricted to reporting opinions on the march from those participating in it.

The October 3 issue of *Narodnaya Volya* devoted almost all of its front page to the event. An article by Svetlana Klimentsenka, which was accompanied by a large photograph of the march, began:

‘Our political democrat-activists will forgive me, even the ones I respect the most, but I have to admit that it’s not their passionate speeches that draw me to the meetings. The main thing that grabs and moves me, almost to tears, is the people. Simple people in the line, so different, so unlike each other, but so close.’

The article is heavily subjective and deep with emotion. ‘Only in independent Belarussia will we become the masters of our own fate, and say goodbye to the poverty and injustice which is now suffocating the people;’ ‘And I want Belarus to be Belarus and not a province of Russia. I want to live in a state that is respected by the entire world. I don’t want...to go to elections where there is no choice... This is the voice of my Homeland, which lives and will continue to live while we love it.’ The writer fully identified herself with the protestors: ‘I listened to those that I spoke with in the marching column, I looked into their calm, inspired faces, lit by a beauty deep within...’

Belarussky Rynok stressed the democratic nature of the march and used the headline: “‘Freedom March’ for *Democratic* Elections.’ The lead into the article read:

‘On October 1, in Minsk, a demonstration entitled “Freedom March 3”, which had been allowed by the city authorities, took place, organised by the *democratic* opposition, which...is demanding the holding of free and *democratic* elections.’ [our emphasis]

Though it devoted the whole of its front page to the march, coverage in the broadsheet *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* was critical in tone. The report included quotes from a number of politicians with different views, and quizzed them over their views of its impact.

Belorusskaya Gazeta was even more critical of the march, although its antipathy to the authorities was also clear. Entitled ‘Mission: Impossible,’ the piece by Viktor Martinovich found:

‘the saddest thing was that in terms of the scale of its preparation, the



“Freedom March” promised to be a key event in Belarussia’s “hot autumn”. If a miracle doesn’t happen, the number of participants in future demonstrations will fall proportionally.’

According to Martinovich:

‘there is every reason to believe that hopes for a change in the situation in this country should not only be linked to propaganda manoeuvres that can be understood by the masses but also, possibly, with new figures and other social-political forces.’

The reasons for the opposition newspapers’ criticism included the fairly low numbers of participants in the march, which was seen as a failure of the opposition.

The ‘Freedom March’ in the regions

One week after the ‘Freedom March’ in Minsk, a second regional ‘Freedom March’ was organised in towns across Belarus. More accurately described as a series of rallies, the demonstrations on October 8 were joined by up to 10,000 people in 22 provincial towns, according to opposition activists. The opposition press had previously publicised the times and venues of the protests.

As with the earlier march in Minsk, the scale

and tone of the coverage of the rallies was wholly determined by the political affiliations of the media concerned. For the government press, it was important to demonstrate that few people took part in the meetings, and those who did were not typical citizens but professional agitators. For much of the opposition press, the rallies were evidence of the success of the opposition and the popular support it enjoyed.

Newspapers are not published in Belarus on Mondays and the main daily opposition newspapers printed nothing about the rallies when they reappeared on the Tuesday. It was not until the Wednesday that coverage from the Sunday's events found their way into the national opposition press

The march was not covered in *Belorusskaya Gazeta* or *Belorussky Rynok* weeklies. These weeklies are printed on Fridays and Saturdays. Consequently, they did not cover the events that took place on the Sunday. It should be noted, however, that in the previous week they were rushed out on the Sunday evening, immediately after the Minsk 'Freedom March'. Thus it seemed that neither editorial office believed the regional protests were significant enough to justify delaying their printing. The only opposition weekly to cover the events in a timely fashion was *Nasha Svoboda*.

On October 11, *Narodnaya Volya* printed a selection of reports under the heading "Freedom March" Rolls Through All of Belarus. On October 8 in 22 towns of our country, there were events protesting against the elections farce.' The selection included 10 reports from the towns of Grodno, Gomel, Budo-Koshelev, Vitebsk, Brest, Zhodino, Mogilyov, Lid and Rechitsa. Information on the number of participants in the march did not cover all of the towns involved. Crowd numbers were also given – though they differed between reports. Turnout in Gomel was estimated at 880, Brest 1,000 and Lid 100. Numbers for Vitebsk varied between 200 and 250.

Svobodnie Novosti published reports from six towns on a double-page spread on pages four and five. Coverage, which included substantial commentary, described the 'peaceful' nature of the events.

The opposition *Pagonya* from Grodno dedicated almost an entire page to the 'Freedom March.' One article, entitled 'Today – Milosevic, Tomorrow – Luka!' was accompanied by four photographs. The article alleged that riot police were prepared to break up the meeting:

'At 11.15, in the car park beyond the supermarket, a militia truck pulled up, covered in a tarpaulin. After a few moments the tarpaulin was parted and from the rear of the truck, a militia shield was put on display. At the same time, the plastered hand of a militiaman popped out to make a one-fingered gesture. They brought a cripple to break up the opposition!'

The newspaper also published reports from three towns in the Grodnensky

oblast, where marches also took place. In the report from Slonim, it was stated that not far from the picket (in Slonim and Smargon, the march was held in the form of a picket) there were militiamen on duty, but dressed in civilian clothes. From Lid, there was a report that three of the participants in the meeting were detained and their placards were confiscated. In Smargon, it was reported that the militia paid no attention to the picket whatsoever.

On October 8, on the day of the regional events, BT provided a commentary on the demonstrations, with particular reference to the opposition in Gomel, Grodno and Brest. According to the commentary, which ran for 8 minutes and 20 seconds, the ‘prestigious opposition leader, Anatoly Lebedko, came from the capital,’ to Gomel to meet a crowd of 300 to 500 people and ‘give out his autograph’.

Of the participants at the demonstration in Grodno, the anchor said: ‘For these people, there are no laws, no morals’ The event, the commentator said, was ‘banal and boring,’ the speeches left a bitter taste in the mouth, and in general it was ‘a total fizzling out. [*Shot of a crow crowing*]

On the following Tuesday, the second page of *Sovietskaya Belarussia* ran a piece called ‘March on the Spot,’ which claimed the turnout in Mogilyov to be just 70 people. Instead of a march, the paper said, a meeting was held in which ‘professionals’ who have been attending meetings for 10 years participated. One of the participants in the meeting was quoted as saying that it was not important what the orators said.

On the Thursday, (October 12), in a back page article entitled ‘No Holding Back,’ the *Narodnaya Gazeta* claimed that the speakers at the Grodno meeting had ‘defamed the current president of the republic, drawing parallels with events in Yugoslavia, openly making calls for a bad example to be followed, which is, as we know, infectious.’



A couple in national dress joins the anti-government demonstration. Minsk October 14. Credit: Mark Grigorian

On October 12, the state-owned *Grodneskaya Pravda* included a small report from Grodno headed ‘Instead of Bows...Leaflets.’ It was written in the form of a letter from an apparently distressed female reader who by chance found herself at the meeting:

‘I can’t help sharing with you what pierced my heart. On one girl, sitting on the shoulders of a young mother, I counted six political leaflets. They were in her fringe, her ponytails, on her shoulders and chest, and on both hands. Good Lord above, what has happened to turn children into propaganda instruments in the hands of opposition-minded parents...I wanted to shout out: “People, what are you doing, stop, look back in anger! Think of the children. What do they need a war for, what do they need these political games with leaflets in their ponytails for? And why boycott the elections? Go to the elections! Elect the most decent, after all, there are people to choose from!”’

Media coverage of international observation

The issue of international observers was particularly contentious in the run-up to the elections, as different sides tried to interpret their presence – or absence – as support for their respective arguments over the elections’ legitimacy. While the government claimed that the very presence of observers (including the OSCE visitors) and post-election reports were testimony to both the legitimacy of the elections and their meeting of international standards, the coalition of opposition parties leading a boycott attempted to dissuade international observers and other monitors, in order to undermine the government’s argument.

Among the international observers to receive the most attention in the Belarussian mass media were those from Europe’s leading political institutions. They included the ‘Parliamentary Troika,’ composed of representatives of the European Union Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; and those sent by the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The level of local political and media intrigue over the representative visit by the OSCE was a direct consequence of its international reputation as Europe’s foremost monitor and judge of electoral (ir)regularity.

In particular, there was debate over the status of the ODIHR mission. Initially designed as a normal election observation mission, it was downgraded on August 31, 2000, to the status of a ‘limited technical assessment mission.’ This decision was a response to what the OSCE’s Council regarded as Belarus’ failure to meet international standards for the upcoming elections.

While the government acclaimed the decision as an acknowledgement of the credibility of its election preparations, so the opposition welcomed it as an indictment of Lukashenko's anti-democratic rule. It was therefore expected that both the state and opposition media would promote their respective interpretations of whether the ODIHR observers had any official status and what weight their verdicts might carry.

The coverage of the subject of international observers, for the most part in the state mass media, was intense, reaching a peak in the final days before the first round of voting, when it became one of the main subjects. The opposition press, in turn, paid significantly less attention to the observers. For them, the fact that the observers were present was not as important as the evaluations they were subsequently expected to give.

In the state press during our training period (25-30 September), there were just four articles on the issue of international observers. The first two came in *Narodnaya Gazeta* on September 27 and referred to a report by the Russian state news agency Interfax. In one, it was reported that the CEC in Minsk had given accreditation to nine members of the OSCE's ODIHR mission, and that 'they had been given 'special status' and could not be called observers.' The second article reported that the Latvian administration had rejected a request from three Latvian deputies for permission to travel to Belarus to observe the elections.

Partly in answer to these pieces, an article appeared in *Zvyazda* and *Narodnaya Gazeta* on September 29, and in *Respublika* on September 30, by Viktor Lovgach, representing the state news agency BELTA. Headlined 'Belarussian Elections under the 'Microscope' of International Observers,' Lovgach maintained that the OSCE's Third Technical Conference on Belarus on August 30, had decided to 'recommend to the key

European organisations that they send international observers to our republic.’

In reality, however, this was not true. According to OSCE/ODIHR, the Belarussian authorities had not made enough progress in the preparation of democratic elections to justify a full observation mission.

Consequently, Viktor Lovgach’s article is misleading, and probably deliberately so, since the propaganda value of international observers at the parliamentary elections is to be found in the fact that they convey legitimacy.

On October 9, in reference to BELTA, BNR 1 reported ‘European organisations’ decision to send observers,’ and that Europe ‘had withstood the onslaught of the opposition’ and ‘the irreconcilable opposition has suffered a fiasco.’

As mentioned earlier, on October 3, the state newspapers published Lukashenko’s speech to the Congress of Soviets. *Inter alia*, he noted the importance of international recognition of the elections and the role that observers had to play in it:

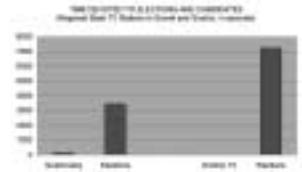
‘You can’t not take into account the attitude of other states and international organisations to the elections being held in the republic. We are inviting a significant number of foreign observers to the elections. About 100 of them from almost 20 countries, have already agreed to come.’

Gradually, more and more information on the international observers appeared in the official press. In the week before the elections, information on the observers was published every day in all the state mass media sources. Table 2 demonstrates the amount of space devoted to this subject in the newspapers.

Table 2 – *Information on International Observers in State Newspapers (October 8- 14). Coverage measured in square centimetres.*

Publication	Total on elections	Specifically on international observers	%
<i>Sovietskaya Belarussia</i>	2205	1153	52.3
<i>Narodnaya Gazeta</i>	3823	1628	42.6
<i>Respublika</i>	2610	716	27.4
<i>Zvyazda</i>	1997	1190	59.6
Total:	10635	4687	44.0

The figures demonstrate how important this subject became for the authori-



See appendix 9

ties in the final week.

Aside from information on the number of observers, the newspapers also published interviews with them. All were positive. Thus, in *Narodnaya Gazeta* on October 14, an interview was published with the secretary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union of Russia and Belarus, Vladimir Aksenov, who said:

‘The invitation itself to foreign observers stresses the respectful attitude of Belarus to the opinions of the international community.’

The lead-in to an article headlined ‘English observers astonished to learn from the opposition press that they are not in Belarus,’ published in the same paper, read:

‘The myth that Western European countries have refused to send their observers to the parliamentary elections in Belarus has collapsed.’

The subject of the article was the British Helsinki Human Rights Group non-government organisation which sent a four-man team to monitor the elections.

In the October 14 issue of *Sovietskaya Belarussia*, Ukrainian observers were quoted as saying that if the elections were held in strict accordance with the law, then they would be fair and very democratic elections.

In the same issue of the newspaper, an observer from Iran, while not directly quoted, was reported as having said that he was not in agreement with the American evaluation of the elections and that ‘in Belarus there will be democratic free parliamentary elections.’

All the newspapers published BELTA reports on how Lukashenko received the representatives of the Parliamentary Troika. The news agency reported him as saying that Belarus had met all the obligations that ‘were put forward by the international structures to Belarus.’ At the same time, the news agency report, as published in the print media, quoted him asking:

‘What hasn’t Belarus already done in order for the elections to be recognised?’

The question was presumably rhetorical since only the words of Lukashenko were published. What the representatives of the Troika might have said was not related by the newspapers or the electronic media.

The original source of information on the observers for all the media, was for the most part the BELTA agency and, to a far lesser extent, Interfax. There was almost no other original material. Therefore, where the observers were concerned, a centrally agreed delivery of information appeared to be the norm.

Television devoted a lot of time to the issue of observers. On the October 5 edition of ‘Panorama’, a lengthy report on the work of the CEC is shown. The narrator stated:

‘At present, the necessary documents have been received for over 110 people. Thus, in purely statistical terms, there will be one international observer for each electoral district. In any event, by the time of the elections this figure is bound to have risen. Representatives from the Czech Republic, Belgium, Bulgaria, the British Helsinki Committee and the Austrian “Progress” Organisation have already received accreditation.’

During the course of the report, documentation to be collected by observers is shown, with their country of origin clearly visible. Thus viewers were able to see that observers would be coming from countries including including Latvia, Belgium, Russia and the USA. However, the reality was that there were no observers from the USA at the elections.

On October 13, in an 11-minute television news programme at 7 p.m., no less than eight and a half minutes were dedicated to the observers. In the hour-long edition of ‘Panorama’ that followed, one third was devoted to the subject of the observers. How Lukashenko had received the representatives of the European Troika, the arrival of the observers and their first impressions of Belarus, were all discussed.

The following day, over half (17 minutes 10 seconds) of a half-hour news programme on television was devoted to the observers.

The issue of the observers was not given such importance in the regional state media. In *Gomelskaya Pravda* only three items were published on the international observers, and in the *Grodnenskaya Pravda* there was only one. The regional television stations were similarly restrained in their coverage.

Media coverage of the elections

The parties and candidates did not run election campaigns in the mass media in the style of a Western democracy. They did not publish party programmes or platforms and there were no proposals or public discussions of different points of view on the political and economic development of the country. Moreover, the parties appeared to withdraw from the running of campaigns, as the information on party affiliations of the majority of candidates was not presented in any significant way. With there being little in the way of political argument or discussion in the media, the phenomenon of the elections themselves became of central importance. Not surprisingly, coverage subsequently focused on the essential, yet non-political questions of how they would be organised and run. Most important was the issue of how free and fair they would be.

It would be wrong to characterise the calls of the opposition to boycott the elections and counter-calls of the authorities to ‘boycott the boycott’, as a discussion – since the authorities did not conduct this debate within the media, but through their confiscation of print runs, the detention of those who called for a boycott, fines and other administrative methods.

As a result, so-called ‘special issues’ of newspapers began to be published, distributed for free and illegally printed along the lines of *samizdat* or underground publishing. This was how *Rabochy*

(‘Worker’) was printed, as was a special edition of *Nasha Svoboda* (‘Our Freedoms’). The views of those that supported the boycott were promoted through the bulletins of various organisations, printed in limited numbers, and therefore not subject to the law on mass media.

None of the media we monitored entirely supported the idea of the boycott, although many did give the opportunity to those that were promoting the boycott to express their point of view.

Thus *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* printed an article on October 3, headlined ‘Personally, I won’t be going to the elections...,’ along with an interview with Anatoly Lebedko, head of the United Civil Party and a leader of the boycott movement.

Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta also published a series of articles which presented the positions of various parties on the election and the boycott issue. In four pieces, the positions of 11 parties are set out, five of which support the boycott, four of which, though belonging to the opposition, are taking part in the elections, and a further two pro-government parties which are taking part in the vote.

The editorial opinion itself is given in an article entitled ‘One Against All, All Against One.’ Its essence is that the opposition does not have the support of the majority of people and that more than 50 per cent of voters will take part in the elections. In addition, it states that the opposition is without a ‘comprehensible programme.’ Voters, it said, should go to the voting booths in order to vote against all candidates.

Narodnaya Volya published letter-like reports from the regions. During the Soviet era this method was employed in an attempt to show what the ‘ordinary citizen’ thought.

Thus, on October 10, in a piece called ‘Falsification of the Elections: How It’s Done’, Semyon Staroselts from Slutsk wrote that the results of the parliamentary elections in Belarus would ‘definitely be juggled, as was always the case in the Soviet Union,’ as ‘our Lukashenko is pulling his hair out in order to re-establish the communist order.’ The mechanism for juggling the results, in the view of the author, is to be found in the fact that ‘each of the members of the district commission...signs blank protocols’ as, due to unavoidable errors, ‘in the district commissions it will be necessary to rewrite the papers.’ In short, the author believes that ‘certain members of the commission have worked out that, up above, the results of the voting are adjusted, but after a good drink at the expense of the state, they quickly forget about this and dream of new booty.’

In the October 12 issue of the same paper, three days before the vote, Valery Shukin from the town of Polotsk submitted a list of those who, he alleged, have been appointed as deputies already. The publication of such a list without proof

of its authenticity or without a statement of how the author acquired it, is clearly unethical.

Both stories featured on the front page of the newspaper.

The idea that these October elections would not prove to be as important as next year's presidential elections was important for the opposition press. Thus at the height of the pre-election campaign (October 11 and 12), *Narodnaya Volya* published a highly visible front page story, reporting that the 'Election 2001' Citizen's Commission had been formed. The day after the first round vote on October 15, *Belorussky Rynok* went on sale with the headline 'The Rehearsals Have Taken Place. The Performance Isn't Far Over the Mountains.'

Post-election coverage

For the state mass media, it was important that the elections took place and that the observers were there to legitimise them. On BT on October 16, a series of interviews with monitors lasting 17 minutes was screened on 'Panorama'. All spoke positively regarding the country's compliance with European voting norms and standards.

Two days later, according to BELTA, Lukashenko met with representatives of the Belarussian and foreign mass media. The opposition press was more specific and claimed the journalists were from the state and Russian mass media.

The same day, BT featured a large report on Lukashenko's meeting with the journalists, during which he described the elections as 'absolutely democratic,' continuing: 'We set the goal of there being nothing that could be said against us. There could not even be talk of minor mistakes as they knew that they would be noted and exaggerated. There can be no talk of falsifications.' The boycott, he said, 'entirely collapsed.'



Pro-boycott demonstrator, Minsk, October 14. Credit: Mark Grigorian

‘The West has understood that you won’t take us with bare hands. The West saw that Belarus is an absolutely democratic state. They have left with a good impression of our country... But the main thing is the 250 journalists from all over the world. They left with eyes wide open, totally astonished...’

The state media did not give the Troika or those observers that might have been less positive than others a chance to appear. Condemnations of the vote were, however commented upon. A statement from the US State Department on its non-recognition of the elections was not published in the state mass media, although commentaries were given.

In contrast, the conclusions of the Troika – that the elections had failed to meet international standards – was published in *Belarusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* and *Narodnaya Volya*. The State Department statement was also published in *Narodnaya Volya*.

Commenting on the conclusions of the OSCE, the government *Narodnaya Gazeta* (‘People’s Paper’) of October 17 headed its piece ‘Progress Clear to See,’ while the opposition *Nasha Svoboda* on the same day headed its piece – ‘Troika Verifies That There’s No Progress’. Surprisingly, on the state radio ‘Postfactum’ programme on October 17, the conclusions of the OSCE team were contrasted with the statement of the US State Department.

The opposition press focused its attention on reported infringements. These reportedly included:

- the lowering of the number of lists of voters on the day of voting and the falsification of the number of voters;
- the voting of soldiers, who were marched up to the ballot boxes in rank and file;
- the forcing of people to vote (in the days of early voting, particularly with regard to students living in student hostel accommodation and soldiers);
- the preventing of observers (local and international) from being present during the counting of votes and the refusal to give out copies of the protocols.

In the view of the state media, the elections took place without any infringements.

On October 21, in three state newspapers, a large article was published, signed by the ZIS Politological Centre. The article set out the results of the elections and noted the collapse of the opposition, which is described as ‘complainers with inordinate ambitions.’ The authors had no doubt that as a result of the elections, the authority of the country had been enhanced and that it would enjoy better relations in the future with the ‘far abroad’.

Media coverage of events in Yugoslavia

The events in Yugoslavia were a central theme for the mass media during the election period and were interpreted for campaigning purposes by both sides. In analysing them, the opposition and pro-government analysts not only saw them differently, but also related them to different events. The state media linked the events in Yugoslavia to the parliamentary elections, while the opposition newspapers linked them to the next year's presidential elections. The opposition press also highlighted what they saw as similarities between President Slobodan Milosevic and President Aleksander Lukashenko, as well as between their two states. For the state press, the main theme of commentary was Western interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state and the impossibility of events in Yugoslavia being replicated in Belarus.

Thus, the October 3 issue of *Sovietskaya Belarussia* stated:

'Certain opposition activists directly connect the election situation in Yugoslavia with the situation in Belarus, finding inspiring parallels with the successes of Vojislav Kostunica. This, however, bears witness to the superficial views of the so-called "analysts" in Minsk.'

For the state press it was also important that Kostunica, who replaced Milosevic as Yugoslav president, is not so much a 'pro-West liberal,' but a politician who 'is against the departure of Kosovo from the Yugoslavian Federation, and who believes that the interests of Serbia have been infringed and declares that NATO is responsible for crimes committed on its territory.' (*Narodnaya Gazeta*, October 6, 2000).

Two articles in the state media appeared to elaborate government views on the importance of



IWPR's monitoring team in the Minsk office Left to right (upper row) Irina Oukhvanova; Oksana, Hudkova; Svetlana Bogomia, Natalya Schastnaya; Helen Savich; Diana Dudinova; Oksana Turkina (sitting on the floor) Anna Markevich; Gagik Avakian; Alan Davis. Credit: Mark Grigorian

Yugoslavia with regard to state security. The first, entitled, 'Who Is The Next After Yugoslavia?', was published in both *Narodnaya Gazeta* and *Zvyazda* on October 13.

According to writers Vladimir Nikiforov and Pyotr Abramkin, there is an 'orthodox-Slavic civilisation in the Russian historical-cultural region' and the countries therein (Belarus, Ukraine, Russia) are part of the geo-strategical interests of the USA. The attack on the Russian region, they argued, began with the collapse of Yugoslavia which was needed in order to strengthen the influence of the United States in Europe.

According to Nikiforov and Abramkin, the role of Belarus is critical:

'The pro-Russian foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus objectively undermines the solidity of the Atlantic geo-strategy and the systems of national security [and] create[s] obstacles for the domination of the USA and their allies across the entire post-Soviet landscape and, as a result, the establishment of world domination.'

The authors claim that nothing must be allowed to weaken the union between Belarus and Russia, as the 'territorial unity and sovereignty, the overcoming of the demographic and economic crisis, and the prospects for the rebirth of state-ness,' are dependent upon it.

Readers are therefore invited to conclude that the only way to preserve the unity with Russia is to support Lukashenko and not to allow the 'Yugoslavian variation' to develop. The opposition is presented as the carrier of democratic [which is to say Western, thus foreign] political values.

A second article which ran on October 14 in three papers (*Sovietskaya Belarussia*, *Narodnaya Gazeta*, and *Respublika*), the day before the elections, argued that 'globalists' or Western imperialists, were adopting specific tactics to isolate and break 'genuinely sovereign states'. In 'A Chronicle of Political Genocide', the author, Eduard Skobelev, suggested that Western values like democracy and openness, as championed by the opposition, would result in greater conflict, fed 'through the use of various economic and financial underminings' and supported by Western sources. As a result, the authorities would be forced into accepting compromises, out of which 'comes an unavoidable failure of the existing order... On a decisive day and at a decisive place, an electrified crowd of agents and hysterical people will be declared the 'revolutionary victors.'

The piece went on to 'analyse' the events in Yugoslavia and highlight the dangers they posed for Belarus:

'...What happened in Yugoslavia is the first precedent for 'technological management' in the new globalised world order: a group of leaders of Western countries with links between themselves, taking the mandates of

sovereign peoples for themselves, deciding who they want to see at the head of one country or another.

‘Let’s open our eyes: a world leadership is being forced upon us, and we don’t know it, didn’t choose it, don’t participate in it and we don’t want it like all the other peoples on the planet...’

BT and BNR 1 commentaries ran in a similar vein, with similarities between the Yugoslavian and the Belarussian opposition heavily stressed. Referring to the Yugoslav opposition and support for it in the West, commentator Igor Rudomyotov, addressing the October 2 edition of ‘Panorama’, told viewers:

‘[financial support from the West is] a tempting thing for our lovers of snorting [who are] licking their lips next to a bountiful trough.’

A quote given during the Minsk Freedom March by Anatoly Lebedko (‘We have to organise this year in such a way as to repeat the Yugoslav scenario’), drew a very strong response from Belarussian Television. The quote – captured on video – was aired in several programmes, and was presented in such a way as to give viewers the impression that ‘the Yugoslav scenario’ meant war with the West. Footage was shown of navy boats in action, military airplanes in flight and on the ground – images of corpses. A voice was heard over these shots, asking: ‘Is this what Mr Lebedko wants?’

A similar opinion on the ‘Yugoslav scenario’ was to be found within Yuri Azarenko’s short film ‘Autumn Fairytale’, the full text of which is given in Appendix 2.

The opposition media, in contrast was wholly supportive of the events in Yugoslavia that led to the ouster of President Milosevic.

The dailies, *Narodnaya Volya* and *Belarusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, each published three articles on the Yugoslav elections, as did the twice-weekly

polls apart



The script says ‘Voted... Now cry?’
First published in Svobodnye Novosti.

Nasha Svoboda. The weeklies *Belorusskaya Gazeta* and *Svobodnie Novost* each published two articles. *Belarussky Rynok* ran one.

Interest here focused on rumours that Milosevic would be offered asylum in Belarus, as well as on similarities between Milosevic and Lukashenko. The fall of the Milosevic regime was presented as the harbinger of change in Belarus.

In an article entitled ‘Yugoslavia: Democracy Defeats Dictatorship’ in *Nasha Svoboda* on Tuesday October 10, Rostislav Permyakov wrote:

‘It was just on Friday that Aleksander Lukashenko dismissed as absurd the fact that Vojislav Kostunica had declared himself president of Yugoslavia. As the BELTA agency reported, Lukashenko stated that ‘Someone from the opposition has no legal basis for becoming the president of a country.’

The article by Valery Karbalevich ‘Lessons in the Yugoslavian Revolution’ (*Svobodnie Novosti*, 13-20 October) sees what happened in Yugoslavia as providing lessons for the 2001 presidential elections in Belarus.

Mikhail Podolyak, in an article entitled ‘Slobo in October – Milosevic Plays Role of “The Fugitive” – Lukashenko May Appear in Sequel “The Fugitive 2”.’ published in *Belorusskaya Gazeta*, writes:

‘Yugoslavia, together with Belarus, is the last of the European rejects, a country in which there is not only political authoritarianism but also ideological monopolism, an information deficit, gross infringements of human rights, usurpation of power ...’



Russian media coverage of the elections

The Russian mass media – television especially – is a very popular source of information (as well as entertainment) in Belarus, which is why they were monitored. Given their popularity, and as a source of information to rival the electronic broadcasters in outreach, it was clear that Russian mass media coverage of the elections could play an important role in informing voters.

In the event, the Russian television stations proved to be disinterested observers and provided mostly factual reporting of the main political events. On October 12, on NTV, a report was shown on the appearance of Lukashenko at the final session of Parliament. The accent of the report was on Russian-Belarusian relations. At the end of it, the correspondent stated that the parliamentary elections were being seen as a rehearsal for the presidential elections, by the authorities and the opposition alike.

On October 15, reports on the election voting in Belarus were given on the ORT and NTV channels. Both reports were very professional and balanced.

The Moscow-based paper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* is one of the most popular papers in Belarus, and the local edition devotes pages four and five to a special section entitled ‘What Is Belarus Talking About?’ During the monitoring period, the paper was found to be providing local readers with objective and balanced reporting.

While it did not report on either the Congress of Soviets or the issue of international observers, it did cover the ‘Freedom March’ and the campaigns of Olga Abramova and Nikolai Statkevich.

In an article headlined ‘Are the Elections Fabricated?’ the contrasting opinions of Lidia Yermoshina, head of the Central Election Commission, and Yuri Khodyko, Deputy Chairman



of the Belarussian Popular Front, were put to readers.

Yermoshina was reported as saying:

‘In Minsk there were so many observers...I don’t know another country where the elections would be so open. At a series of polling stations in the district in which Chigir, Feduta and Masherova were standing for election, observers were allowed to do things not even provided for in the legislation: every hour they taped up the ballot boxes with their own tape. Mikhail Chigir was even allowed to be present at the polling stations, which could be seen as campaigning on the day of the elections.’

And Yuri Khodyko maintained:

‘There was an open, vulgar falsification of the elections...What talk of ‘openness’ can there be if the Central Election Commission didn’t allow representatives of the political parties to be included in the make-up of the commissions, as is done all over the world. Why? So that they wouldn’t interfere with their falsifications.’

An exception to the usual disinterested position taken by the Russian media was noted on October 10, on ORT in the programme ‘Zdes i Seichas’ (‘Here and Now’). The well-known Russian television journalist Alexander Lubimov hosted a conversation with leading opposition figures Stanislav Shushkevich and Alexander Dobrovolsky.

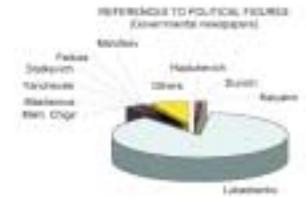
During the broadcast, the conversation covered the boycott, and Shushkevich

maintained that the current parliamentary elections were a farce, as candidates did not have any real opportunity to present their case to the public in the state media, and because the CEC was under the effective control of the government. He said:

‘These aren’t elections, because the functions of the so-called parliament are such that the parliament has less legislative authority or almost none in comparison with the functions of one person... We don’t want to elect an entourage for a man that has in effect illegally seized power.’

According to Alexander Dobrovolsky, hopes for a change in the situation this year, unfortunately, will not be fulfilled:

‘They will be fulfilled next year, and we think that, taking into account the experiences of what our friends did in Yugoslavia, we will put forward a single candidate and we will be able to win.’ ○



See appendix 9

Appendices

Appendix 1

Political Cartoons

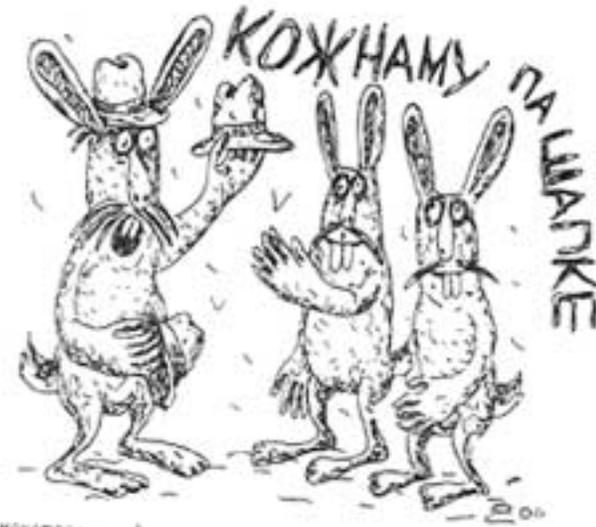
Belarusskaya Gazeta

The characters in *Belarusskaya Gazeta* are all animals. The rabbit has a moustache like Lukashenko's. The rat is occasionally reminiscent of Lukashenko but generally lacks political associations.



↑*October 2*: This cartoon was placed in the upper left-hand corner of the front page and then repeated on page three. The announcement on the front page said: 'Topic of the week: Elections in Yugoslavia.' The title of the article accompanying the cartoon was 'Slobo is Weak.' In the cartoon, the rabbit asks the cat 'Are you the last?' (a question asked by somebody seeking to join the end of a queue), suggesting to the reader that Lukashenko may follow Milosevic into the ranks of Europe's deposed dictators.

↓ *October 16*: The cartoon was on the front page (upper left-hand corner) and was repeated on page four. It accompanied the lead story, whose title was: 'Topic of the week: farewell to the Chamber [of representatives].' The script on the cartoon says: 'A hat for everyone.' This paraphrases a common Russian saying, which means 'everyone will get what they deserve.' In the cartoon, the rat (Lukashenko) gives hats to rabbit. There is a second meaning also: 'to hit a hat' is another common saying, which is translated as 'to deal a blow.' 'Hit' and 'give' are homonyms in Russian.



Svobodnye Novosti

↓ *October 6*: On the left stands Nikita Khrushchev (Soviet premier 1958-64), who says: 'I solemnly promise – in 1980 we will live in Communism!' (a famous promise he once made). In the centre stands Mikhail Gorbachev, who says: 'In 2000 every Soviet family will have a flat of its own!' (another famous promise). On the right is Aleksander Lukashenko, saying: 'In 2001 we will end poverty. Salaries will be \$100!' (a promise he

made in his speech to the delegates of the Congress of Deputies.) The script says: ‘We do not believe anymore!’



➔October 13: This was placed on the front page of *Svobodnye Novosti*, which normally carries a cartoon there. The script says ‘...But don’t sit on your freedom.’ (‘Sit on’ can mean delay or lose time.)

➔October 20: The script says ‘Voted... Now cry?’

Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta

Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta regularly publishes cartoons. They are placed in the inside pages (pages two to five), accompanying political articles (analyses, interviews, etc.). Their content is not usually directly connected to that of the articles they accompany.

The hero of the cartoons, a king, does not look like Lukashenko. His words, appearance and behaviour, though, are immediately reminiscent of him. The



identity of the characters in this newspaper's cartoons was the issue of some debate during the monitoring, but it was concluded that all the characters in *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* (the king, the ice-hockey player, the courtier, the jester) should be identified as Lukashenko.



↑ *October 4*: This cartoon accompanied a compilation of a series of short interviews given by the leaders of the political parties that boycotted the elections. The article was titled 'To go or not to go?' It looked as though that was also the title of the cartoon. It plays on the episode in Cervantes' 'Don Quixote,' in which Quixote attacks what he believes are giants, only to discover that they are actually windmills. The implication is that the opposition leaders are fighting a campaign against Lukashenko that is noble and just, but ultimately meaningless.

→ *October 5*: The accompanying article was called 'Victims of the Congress of Deputies.' The script on the tribune reads: 'Tribune for Counsel to the Congress of Deputies of Councils of Deputies.' The



polls apart

cartoon plays on the dual meaning of the word ‘soviet,’ which means both ‘counsel’ and ‘council.’



↑*October 17:* This cartoon accompanied an article that was not connected to the elections. It described the case of Vladimir Laptsevich, who was convicted in 1997 of breaking legislation pertaining to the media, for distributing pamphlets celebrating the anniversary of the Belorussian People’s Republic (the state between 1991 and 1994). The United Nations Human Rights Committee had argued that he was innocent and recommended that the court’s decision be reviewed.

On the back of the standing person (presumably Lukashenko) the word ‘Vertical’ is written. The word ‘Horizontal’ is written on the ground. Those lying on the ground carry the labels ‘Agrarian,’ ‘Communist,’ ‘Democrat’ and ‘Liberal.’

Lukashenko constructed what has been called a ‘vertical of powers,’ meaning that all the repositories of executive power (government, ministries, municipalities) are constituted in a vertical line, at the top of which is the president. Sometimes, representative bodies (parliament, regional (*oblast*) councils, local self-governing bodies), which are – or should be – elected, are also included in this vertical.

↓ *October 20*: The jester says ‘BT [Belarussian Television] has recognised the elections. Telegraph, Internet, “Magic” are taken...’ The cartoon plays on the words of Lenin, who is reputed to have said that in order to stage a revolution, it is necessary to take control of the telegraph system, the bank and the post office. ‘Magic’ is the name of a printing house that was closed by the police because of its debts. ○



Appendix 2

'The Secret Springs of Politics'

A programme by Yuri Azarenok

Editor's note: This is the transcript of a film shown on Belarussian State Television on October 4. What the viewers actually saw is given in brackets.

Film 3: An Autumn Fairytale

The fourth of October is closely linked with two stormy events in our most recent history. On the fourth of October 1993, with the aid of tanks, the House of Soviets was stormed in Moscow. Seven years later in Belgrade, an excited crowd stormed the Federal Parliament building in the Republic of Yugoslavia.

Both these events were accompanied by many impressive words on the strengthening of democracy and improving the lives of average citizens [*Shot of Vojislav Kostunica, then Boris Yeltsin.*].

In October 2000, in Minsk, a planned but thankfully peaceful storming of Belarussian television was carried out by those wishing to get into parliament [*Shots of parliamentary candidates Kapultsevich, Kiberman, Novosyad, Abramova, Kulba, Mironovich giving their five minute platform speeches.*].

They also tell tall tales about democracy, and also claim to be standing up for the ordinary man.

Candidate Vasil Bushchik: 'We must raise the standard of living and talk about pensions of, say, around 200 dollars.'

Candidate Mikhail Chigir: 'I will propose that until the average wage here in the republic reaches 200 dollars...200 US dollars...'

Candidate Yuri Karmanovich: 'Very good! My aim is not to get involved in politics. My aim is to do all that I can for my country so that one day, when God looks at my country, he can say: 'Very good! Really wonderful!''

Our contemporary nationalist-Trotskyites, meanwhile, have been quoting their ideological predecessors almost word for word [*Shots of Sergei*

Kalyakin, then Leon Trotsky.].

Those in search of that cherished deputy's mandate tell some interesting tales, don't they? [*Shot of a toad in a bog.*]. Having heard them out, we also wanted to tell you a tale.

In the big Sunny Country, lived hard-working, hospitable and happy people. They worked harmoniously, built space ships, blocked off inconvenient rivers and even danced better than anyone else on the planet. [*Shots from the animated film 'Know-Nothing in Sunny City.'*]

A girl with flowers [*A character from a cartoon.*]: 'Things are so good in our city...'

But people always want things to be that little bit better. And so, once upon a time they elected a chief that spoke better than all the others and promised more than everyone else. They called him Know-All [*Know-All is a character from the animated film and a well-known character from the Soviet children's story.*] [*Shot of Mikhail Gorbachev.*]. He really liked to direct a vast country. He did it with pleasure [*Shots of an episode of 'Kukly' ('Puppets', the Russian version of 'Spitting Image')*] from NTV television channel – the puppet-Gorbachev sings as he drives along in his truck.]

Know-All had a big spy-glass which he liked to use to look across the seas and oceans, to see how the Sprutsies lived over there [*Also characters from the cartoon – rich and greedy-looking.*]. He looked and looked and a grand idea came to him, and he told the whole world about it, and his own country, from his high tribune. The idea went down well both with the distant Sprutsies, and with the inhabitants of Sunny Country.

But instead of a better life, Perestroika arrived [*Shots from the cartoon: creatures flying, as if in zero gravity. One of them shouts: 'Everything upside down! Stop, immediately!'*]. But the creatures didn't like this. They threw out Know-All, and, taking the advice of the Sprutsies, replaced

him with Syrupy [*Shot of Yeltsin.*]. He sought out the answer to all his problems in a bottle containing his favorite tippie. But in the end he couldn't find the big genie that could have helped his country.

So Syrupy tried to find it in the bottles of the Sprutsies. He really liked their Schnapps [*Shot of Yeltsin conducting an orchestra in Germany. The German Chancellor Helmut Kohl is also in the shot.*]. He showed his own talents to the Sprutsies [*Shot of a female dancer with bare breasts.*] and enforced their culture [*Shot of a young girl in national dress.*] on the inhabitants of his own country.

Wishing to get particular praise, he gathered his friends Shusher and Kravchukch [*Shushkevich and Kravchuk.*] together in a dark forest and there, drunk on syrup, they decided that Sunny Country shouldn't exist at all [*Shots of the Belvezhsky agreement on the abolition of the Soviet Union.*].

And that's why the once happy inhabitants of this country stopped living harmoniously with each other and went off to live in their own sovereign homes. The distant Sprutsies were very happy about all this, as they could now sell them customs-free rubber fruit and vegetables.

[*Shots from the cartoon: a typical fat-cat capitalist with a cigar says: 'We're all involved in the production of synthetic products. Wonderful artificial vegetables, sweets and gingerbread muffins. Finally, the wonderful artificial tobacco of Mr Stingyfield.'*]

And in order to sell all this, Sunny Country had to be turned into an Island of Idiots.

A character from the same cartoon sings:

'A wonderful island calls to you,
There's no other in the world like it,
You can live there without work,
For ten, for twenty, even for a hundred years.

[*Shots of people dancing on the Minsk 'Freedom of March.'*]

'If you want, you can relax there,
If you want you can play there,
With all your soul,
Sing and dance.'

[*Shots from the cartoon: a door opens, Know-Nothing comes out. Falling over, he hits his head on a rubbish bin.*]

And now this is the way silly Know-Nothing is living!

What, my friend, you don't want to sleep yet? Then I'll tell you another story. About the wonderful southern Flowery Country [*A Serbian song is heard over the footage.*].

The inhabitants of that country didn't want to change. The distant Sprutsies didn't like this. They wondered how to make the inhabitants of the Flowery

Country also go through Perestroika, so that instead of ripe fruit they would buy rubber biscuits and synthetic sweets.

So the Sprutsies unleashed the evil Khashim Tachi on them, who lived in the neighboring Dolbania, and gave him lots of money and weapons. But the inhabitants of the Flowery Country proved brave, beating Khashim and his rebels [*Shot of a caricature of Madeline Albright in a cowboy hat, standing next to two fighters. One of them has a swastika tattooed on his arm.*]

The evil wizardess Albright [*Shot of the real Madeline Albright.*] began to threaten them, stamping her feet about them, but they were not frightened. She ordered that their towns and villages be destroyed [*Shot of a flying B-52.*]. But the brave inhabitants of the Flowery Country withstood the attack [*Shot of two soldiers firing from a Stinger rocket launcher, then a shot of the shattered remains of an American plane.*]. The Sprutsies then understood that force alone would not be enough. And they recalled an ancient truth: divide and conquer.

They tried to find another Know-All or Syrupy in the Flowery Country [*Shot of Kostunica.*], and to win the people over with sugary songs of the wonders of life on the island of idiots, charming them.

[*Shots of people dancing on the streets of Belgrade.*] The same character from the cartoon begins to sing:

‘Everything’s free there,
There, everything you want you can have,
There, even an idiot will become intelligent,
There, even a lie will seem to be the truth.

‘On your own or with a crowd

Be happy and sing

Drink and eat,

Fritter time away...’ [*Shot of a car burning in the street.*]

So, my friend, do you want to know how the tale ended? It still hasn't ended, it's still going on [*Shot of the storming of the parliamentary building in Belgrade, then a shot of Kostunica.*].

And you, kid, think that all the sorrows of the Flowery and Sunny countries are the fault of the Sprutsies? No you're wrong, it's Know-Nothing that's to blame. Instead of learning how to think, he listened to the songs of the Sprutsies, happily turning into a silly-billy on the pre-election rides and roundabouts.

[*Shots from the cartoon.*] A girl says: 'Know-Nothing, deary, don't, please.' [*Know-Nothing on his hands and knees, munching on a hunk of grass: 'Ha-ha-ha! Be-e-e!'*]

[*Shots from the 'Freedom March': a lad of around twenty, his head covered in a white-red-white bandage (the unofficial flag of Belarus), his mouth wide open, shouting: 'Aaaagghhh!' He then takes another breath, and again begins to shout. This goes on for a fairly long time.*]

That was a fairytale. But all fairytale characters are taken from life [*Shots of people with white-red-white flags, inter-cut with shots of sheep. The crowd of people slowly merges into a flock of sheep.*]. Let us look around, and without difficulty we will see in our political arena our candidates for Know-All and Syrupy [*Shots of the well-known leaders of the opposition, Shushkevich, Bogdankevich, Statkevich, Verochka.*]. They all want to become our leaders. And to turn us into silly sheep.

[*Shot of the programme's writer & presenter Yuri Azarenok.*]

Azarenok: 'The fairytale is make-believe, but in it lies a hint for the good guys. It's just a shame that we can't learn to take our lessons from our history or the history of our neighbors, and that we keep stepping on the same rake.

'In these autumnal days, we are again confronted by a choice – do we believe the smooth-tongued sirens or the pompous tale-tellers, or do we choose people that can bring results? After all, the people that we elect into parliament will write the laws that we and our children will have to live by. It would be good to believe that we won't become silly Know-Nothings, won't make a mistake at these elections, or at the coming presidential elections, and that all of us together will build the Sunny Country and build many flowery cities within it.' ○

Are They Elections?

Editor's note: The following article offers an alternative perspective on the elections to 'An Autumn Fairytale,' (see Appendix 2). 'Are they Elections?' was a reader's letter submitted to the newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* and published in the 'Readers' Opinions' section on Friday October 6, 2000. Its author was Nadezhda Velichko from the town of Slutsk.

Are They Elections?

In the election campaign of candidates for deputies to the *palatka*¹ in Slutsk, six of the 12 candidates have been weeded out. Who has been left in the list? Judging by what is known of them, these are people that are needed by the current regime: one of the candidates is a member of the CPB.² He is 62-years-old. I've read this party's programme. There's nothing new. At the age of 62, the mind doesn't work as well as that of someone of 40. Granddad should sit at home and baby-sit his grandchildren. But no. He's put himself forward as a candidate, and got through, and it's clear why – such a deputy will be approved because his sort is needed.

The next candidate from Slutsk is the not totally unfamiliar V. Yanchevsky, 24 years of age, and the leader of Luko Mola³. He has absolutely no experience, neither in life nor in work. But what a sweeping scale! Yanchevsky has bought the whole of Slutsk and the region. Wherever you go you'll find Seva⁴ handing out presents: cards, calendars, televisions, videos, music stereos. On the radio and on television, the presidential journalists have announced that the opposition is financing Yanchevsky! Where does a 24-year-old lad get this kind of money?

In our town, the representatives of enterprises and the opposition didn't get through, something which was known well in advance.

1 Meaning – intentionally – either 'chamber' or 'tent'.

2 Communist Party of Belarus (not to be confused with the Party of Communists of Belarus – see Appendix 5).

3 Yanchevsky is the leader of the Belarussian Patriotic Union of Youth. 'Luka Mola' or 'Lukamol' unites the abbreviations of 'Lukashenko' and 'Youth'.

4 Pet name for Vsevolod (Yanchevsky's first name).

Having followed closely what is happening in the country on the eve of the elections, I've come to the conclusion that the opposition's classification of the elections as a farce isn't just empty words. Yes, it's a farce, it's a fuss over nothing, it's the government playing at democracy, it's a con and a mockery of the people. I'm sure that those who are not a danger for these anti-people authorities, and those who suit our leader, have been placed on the lists of eligible candidates. These elections won't be fair: the system of trickery and the authorities' juggling is so well worked out, so tried and tested in practice. And no observers will do anything. Under such a regime of power as we have here in Belarus, under Lukashenko, fair democratic elections are impossible! ○

1. Belarussian State TV (BT)
2. Gomel TV (local)
3. Grodno TV (local)
4. ORT (Russian)
5. RTR (Russian)
6. NTV (Russian)

Media Monitored

Television stations were monitored from 5 p.m. (or 6 p.m. – depending on the time when the first news issue was broadcast) until midnight (or a little later – depending on the news broadcast).

Radio

Belarussian State Radio (BNR1)

BNR1 was monitored during primetime, i.e. 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. (5 hours daily).

Newspapers

Sovietskaya Belorussia (state-owned, daily/i.e. five times per week)

Respublika (state, daily)

Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta (private, four times per week)

Narodnaya Gazeta (private, daily)

Narodnaya Volya (private, daily)

Svobodnye Novosti (private, weekly)

Komsomol'skaya Pravda (Moscow-based daily newspaper that has a Belarussian edition)

Belorusskij rynok (private, weekly)

Pagonya (private, weekly)

Belorusskaya Gazeta (private weekly)

Gomelskaya Pravda (local state-owned daily)

Grodnenskaya Pravda (local state-owned daily) ○

Appendix 5

List of main political parties

Agrarian Party	AP
Belarusian Patriotic Party	BPP
Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth	BPUY
Belarusian People's Front	BPF
Belarusian Social-Democratic Party ' <i>Narodnaya Gromada</i> '	BSDP (NG)
Belarusian Social-Sports Party	BSSP
Communist Party of Belarus	CPB
Liberal-Democratic Party of Belarus	LDPB
Party of Communists of Belarus	PCB
Republican Party	RP
Republican Party of Labor and Justice	RPLJ
Social-Democratic Party of People's Consent	SDPPC
United Citizens' Party	UCP
Yabloko ○	

Media and news providers

Appendix 6

BelaPAN- an independent news agency in Minsk:
<http://www.belapan.com/flash.html>

Belarus Today Online:

<http://www.belarustoday.com/bt2/index-e.html>

Belarussian information website (*Russian only*):

<http://www.gis.minsk.by>

Belarussian Market (Russian only):

<http://www.br.minsk.by/index.stm>

Belarussian service on Radio Free Europe:

<http://www.rferl.org/bd/be/index.html>

Belarussian Telegraph Agency (BELTA):

<http://belta.minsk.by/index.htm>

Belaruskaya Delovaya Gazeta – Belarussian
Business Newspaper (*Russian only*):

<http://www.bdg.minsk.by>

Charter 97 (for political news from Belarus):

<http://www.charter97.org/English/default.asp>

Government newspaper – a state newspaper

(*Russian only*): <http://press.net.by/republic>

Nasha Svoboda – an opposition newspaper

(*Belarussian only*): <http://www.svaboda.com>

Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty:

<http://www.rferl.org>

Sovietskaya Belorussia – a newspaper founded by
the president's administration (*Russian only*):

<http://sb.press.net.by>

Belarus online: Internet Resources for Further Reading

Political parties, organisations and legal resources in Belarus



Belarus Today Online:
<http://www.belarustoday.com/bt2/index-e.html>

Political Resources on the Net – listings of political sites available on the Internet with links to parties, organisations, governments, media:
<http://www.politicalresources.net/belarus.htm>

Law and Politics in Belarus: http://jurix.jura.uni-sb.de/~serko/law_pol/law_pol.html

Presidential Administration of the Republic of Belarus – the official site of the Presidency:
<http://www.president.gov.by>



Charter 97 (for political news from Belarus):
<http://www.charter97.org/English/default.asp>

Comprehensive database of governmental institutions on the Web:
<http://www.gksoft.com/govt/en/by.html>

Homepage of the Congress of Supreme Soviets (parliament liquidated under the constitution of November 1996):
<http://www.belarus.net/parliame/index.htm>

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development:
<http://www.ebrd.com/english/opera/Country/index.htm>

International Monetary Fund:
<http://www.imf.org/external/country/BLR/index.htm>

United Nations in Belarus:
<http://www.un.minsk.by/>

World Bank:
<http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/ECA/eca.nsf/>

Human Rights Watch:
http://www.hrw.org/pubweb/Webcat-13.htm#P491_87859

General interest

A Belarus Miscellany: <http://www.belarus-misc.org>

CIA Factbook – Belarus:
<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bo.html>

The National Academy of Sciences of Belarus:
<http://www.ac.by>

Virtual guide to Belarus: <http://www.belarus-guide.com/main/index.html> ○



Presidential Administration of the Republic of Belarus – the official site of the Presidency: <http://www.president.gov.by>

*Monitor
Training*

Between September 18 and 24, the Project Assistant Gagik Avakian and Project Director Alan Davis established an office in Minsk and purchased the necessary equipment for the project. The first meeting with the monitors was held on Saturday, September 23.

Fourteen potential monitors were nominated from students and young teachers at the Belarus State University by the Dean of the School of Journalism and the Chair of Sociology of Journalism. Ten monitors were then selected from the 14, according to the following criteria:

- team members had to be generally well educated and, in particular, well informed about Belarussian politics;
- to avoid bias in their work, team members could not be affiliated to a particular political party;
- experience of media analysis was considered to be an advantage;

The trial work and media monitoring training lasted from September 25 to September 30. On October 2, responsibility for the project in Belarus was handed over to the Project Manager Mark Grigorian. On Saturdays (October 7, 14, 21), the monitors met to discuss their work during the previous week.

Training the Monitors

Before the media monitoring began, the monitors underwent one week of training, from 25 to 30 September. The training was designed to teach them the techniques and skills necessary for the collection of both the quantitative and qualitative data required for the analysis of media behaviour.

During the training period, one of the 10 monitors dropped out, due to the difficulty of the tasks involved. Nine monitors were fully trained, and worked throughout the monitoring period.

Much of the training was practical, involving the media chosen for monitoring during the project. Russian television was the exception, since it did not specifically cover pre-electoral events. The monitors who would later observe Russian television during the project were trained using Belarusian State Television coverage.

Initially, training focused on quantitative observation. Data collection tables were devised and explained, and accompanied by a memorandum specifying how they should be completed.

The second phase of the training concentrated on qualitative observation. Monitors were trained to scrutinise the general direction and context of television/radio programmes and newspaper articles, in order to reveal the attitude of media to the electoral process; their observation of the principles of tolerance and the ethics of journalism; and the treatment of candidates by the state media.

During the training, the annotation of reports and programmes was discussed in detail, both individually and as a group. The aim was to develop the monitors' ability to evaluate materials in a neutral and impartial manner. To discourage subjectivity, monitors were taught to minimise personal comments; to quote directly from the report or programme in question; and to distinguish their opinions and comments from the objective presentation of materials. During group meetings, common mistakes were discussed, as well as current political events and their coverage in the media. ○



Monitors in the work room. Credit: Mark Grigorian

Appendix 8

Monitoring Procedures and Methodology

The monitoring addressed the following questions:

- How the media covered the elections. Was access to the state media equal for both state and opposition candidates? Did the media's coverage comply with the provisions of the media and election laws? Were there violations of the freedom of speech, especially regarding the media's access to individual candidates and the transparency of the electoral process?
- What was the editorial attitude in state, pro-governmental and opposition media towards the candidates and the electoral process? Did they provide enough information for the voters to make informed choices?
- Editorial policies of individual news media and their compliance with the fundamental principles of journalism. To what degree they were biased towards a particular political option; whether they promoted democratic tolerance and respect for human rights; or whether they encouraged intolerance and hostility.
- To what degree journalists and the media respected professional norms and standards; to what degree they respected the principles of full and impartial news coverage.
- To what extent the Russian television channels interfered in the electoral process in Belarus; the extent to which they were impartial, or favoured one party or certain candidates.

The methodology of monitoring

Quantitative, qualitative and comparative analyses were used to achieve the following results:

The quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis was used mainly to achieve a more thorough and comprehensive media survey. It included monitoring of:

- specific political options, parties and personalities in the media;
- the number of news items dedicated to the elections;
- the thematic structure of texts and/or television and radio programmes.

The qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis included monitoring of:

- the length/size, structure, nature, and origin of broadcasts or stories;
- whether the media outlets covered the elections in an impartial way, including whether they presented opposite points of view or not;
- whether voters were given enough information to make an informed choice;
- the coverage of relevant events;
- the use of sources and the attitudes expressed in commentaries;
- attitudes expressed towards events and the treatment of political options and personalities;
- the application of professional standards.

These included the selection and hierarchy of news items; the use of genres, terminology and language; respect for the principles of objectivity and impartiality.

The comparative analysis

Comparative analysis of several monitored media was designed to show which issues were given priority by individual media and which were neglected or ignored, as well as to point out the differences in their presentation of the same events.

The media’s respect for the following professional standards was monitored:

- the way in which a news item was presented; the use of sources;
- the presence of commentaries; the accuracy of statements and quotations; whether a commentary came after an objective news item or not;
- the degree of news manipulation (e.g. taking something out of context, opinion poll manipulation, failure to cover important news, relying on only a single source, etc.);
- whether or not a media outlet or a journalist was partisan on a given subject;
- the language and terminology used by media and journalists (to what extent they were neutral or biased towards a single political interest).

Each assessment of the professional standards of journalists and media was supported with a quotation from or a description of a video clip, a note of the time/space allotted to footage or an article, and an appraisal of the journalist’s attitude and statistics.

The monitors compiled special tables, which were prepared for their daily notes and observations. Samples are shown below. Completed tables were presented to the monitors’ supervisor on a daily basis.

On the basis of their daily notes, the monitors composed weekly reports. The reports included summaries of the media’s thematic and editorial, conclusions and examples, accompanied by all the necessary data on an article and the time and place of its publication.

Tables

Table 1 – *Quantity and character of references to candidates*

Candidates	Number of references	Character of references		
		+	-	neutral

Table 2 – *Articles in newspapers*

Name of the article	Type of article	Genre	Candidate Party/Block	Theme	Annotation	Page (cm2)	Space
	Obligatory materials Editorial Other Not clear	Information/report Analytical Programme of the candidate/ party/block Personality and work of the candidate Interview etc		See below	Yes/no		

Table 3 – *Television and radio broadcasts*

Name of the programme	Type of programme	Genre	Candidate Party/Block	Theme	Annotation	Length of programme
	Obligatory materials Editorial Other Not clear	Information/report Analytical Programme of the candidate/ party/block Personality and work of the candidate Interview etc		See below	Yes/no	

Methodology of filling in the charts

1 *Programme/article type*. The type was chosen from the following: ‘Obligatory materials’, ‘editorial’, ‘not clear’, ‘other’:

- *Obligatory materials* – those published as a requirement of the law or the regulations of the Central Electoral Committee.
- *Editorial* – those printed and/or broadcast not because of legal requirements, but because of

the edition's free decision.

- *Not clear* – those articles or programmes that were clearly pieces of propaganda, but the newspaper or television/radio station did not indicate whether it was editorial or not.

- *Other* – usually, those programmes that had nothing to do with the elections, but used elements of propaganda.

2 Genre. The materials were defined as one of the following: a report/information; an analytical article; a pre-electoral programme of a candidate/party/block, or its description; an article describing a candidate's personality or professional achievements; an interview with the candidate or their representative; a debate; or something else.

3 Candidate or party/block. This classification was sometimes difficult. The idea was to identify who was presented in the given publication or broadcast. Was it the programme of a party or the individual candidate? In some cases, when it was difficult to distinguish between the two, the monitor made an arbitrary judgement that was then reviewed by their supervisor.

4 Theme. The candidate/party/block might have been mentioned in a programme/article devoted to different themes, e.g. social policy, privatisation, etc. In those cases, a thematic classification was attached.

5 Duration. The exact length of a given broadcast and the precise time of its ending were recorded.

6 Annotation. Brief summaries of several broadcasts and articles were made. In the annotations, special attention was paid to the following:

- in the case of news articles or broadcasts, it was recorded whether they were accompanied by pictures/photographs of the candidate, and whether they spoke or were quoted.
- comments of the journalist or author on the candidate.
- the attitude of the news programme (or the host, in the case of a debate) towards the candidates. This involved monitoring the types of questions given to the candidates, the time given to the candidates in which to speak, etc.
- for the programmes/articles that were published as a requirement of the law, whether all candidates were covered in similar conditions, or whether some had better or greater time on television/on radio/in the newspapers, etc.
- contextual anomalies, e.g. unannounced/unscheduled interviews with candidates, electricity blackouts during broadcasting, etc. Here it was necessary to be extremely cautious in drawing conclusions.

Overall, the form of the summary was free. However, it was considered desirable to have special attention paid to the above aspects. The summary could

contain any other relevant information.

Thematic classifications

- 1 Legislative powers
- 2 Executive powers
- 3 Judicial powers
- 4 Human rights
- 5 Parties (political organisations)
- 6 Elections
- 7 Russia and attitudes towards unity with Russia
- 8 Foreign policy
- 9 Economy, prices, taxes
- 10 Corruption
- 11 Social problems, salary, pensions
- 12 Education, science, culture
- 13 Religion and the church
- 14 Agriculture
- 15 Attitudes to historical issues
- 16 Unemployment
- 17 Everyday household problems
- 18 Public health services
- 19 Armed forces
- 20 Other ○

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data were collected by the monitors during a three week period. The monitors determined whether the given article or broadcast specifically concerned the elections, then they measured the area of the articles in square centimetres, or the time of broadcasts in seconds. To be more exact, all television and radio programmes were recorded.

In difficult and complex cases the monitors consulted with their supervisors.

The references to political figures (how many times, and in what context were the figures mentioned) were counted for the whole newspaper, and not only the articles about elections. For television and radio, they were counted during the whole period of monitoring within each day.

In addition to the names of the candidates, the references to Lukashenko and some outstanding politicians who were not participating in elections (for example, Julia Chigir, whose candidature was not registered by the CEC) or were boycotting them (Lebedko, Vecherka) were also taken into account.

Political players

Aleksander Lukashenko was the main player on the pre-electoral political field in Belarus. This was confirmed by the fact that the references to Lukashenko were more frequent than those to anyone else, both in the state media and the opposition press.

In the state newspapers, 87.49 per cent of references to political figures were to Lukashenko. He was mentioned 1035 times, while the nearest to him, Nikolai Dunich, was mentioned only nine times. Vsevolod Yanchevski and Mikhail Chigir were mentioned eight times each. Lukashenko was

never mentioned in a negative context and 40 times in a positive one. All other political figures mentioned in the articles connected with the elections, taken together, were mentioned in a positive context only 20 times, or half that of Lukashenko.

On state television, 45.45 per cent of references (542) were to Lukashenko. The proportion of references in opposition newspapers to the president was approximately the same (50.98 per cent). On state radio, he received 83.2 per cent of all references.

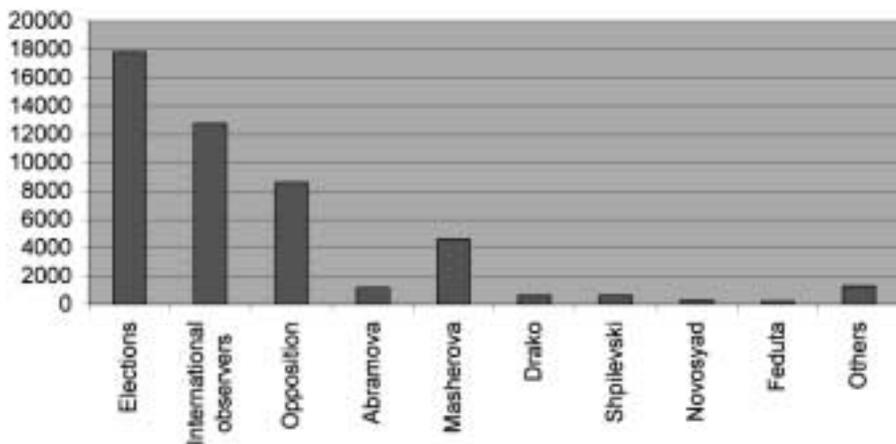
In the state media, Lukashenko was mentioned positively significantly more than he was mentioned negatively, and in the opposition media, vice versa. However, sometimes he *was* mentioned in a positive context in the opposition newspapers.

On the Russian TV channels, Lukashenko's name was mentioned frequently. He was referred to in 70.73 per cent of the cases on NTV, 76.19 per cent on ORT and 100 per cent on the state Russian channel RTR. Even in a report about the 'Freedom March' on RTR, none of the organisers of the March were named.

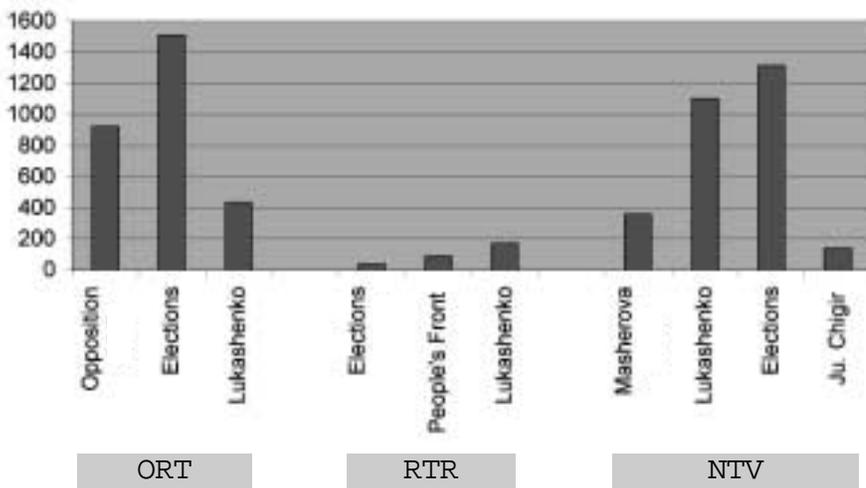
Lukashenko was mainly a positive character for Russian television, even though ORT gave 15 minutes and 21 seconds to prominent oppositionists Stanislav Shushkevich and Alexander Dobrovolski on October 10, in the programme called 'Here and Now'.

Such extensive coverage of Lukashenko's person can be explained by the fact that during the monitoring period, two meetings of the presidents of CIS countries were held respectively in Astana, Kazakhstan (October 10), and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (October 11). Lukashenko also met Vladimir Putin at his dacha in Sochi (October 19). All these meetings were covered by Russian television channels for the Russian viewers, but the presence of Lukashenko was important for the Belarussian viewers also. Lukashenko also gave a lengthy inter-

TIME DEVOTED TO ELECTIONS AND CANDIDATES
(Belorussian State Television, in seconds)



TIME DEVOTED TO ELECTIONS AND CANDIDATES
(Russian TV stations, in seconds)



view to RTR, which was broadcast on RTR before the start of the monitoring period, but was repeated on Belarussian Television (BT) on October 10.

He was also mentioned in connection with the events in Yugoslavia, when he commented on the possibility of granting Slobodan Milosevic political asylum in Belarus.

While compiling the charts, the principle of choosing the 'top ten' was used. Only the candidates who were mentioned more frequently than others were inserted into the charts. The comparison of the lists shows that only Lukashenko was in the 'top ten' of all media, and that he received the most coverage in all media.

The attention of the state electronic media was focused on three themes: elections, international observers and opposition. Individual candidates got low editorial coverage. It explains the fact that not necessarily the most prominent political figures (leaders of political parties, in particular) received the most coverage. This confirms the conclusion that in fact the personalities of the candidates did not mean much in these elections.

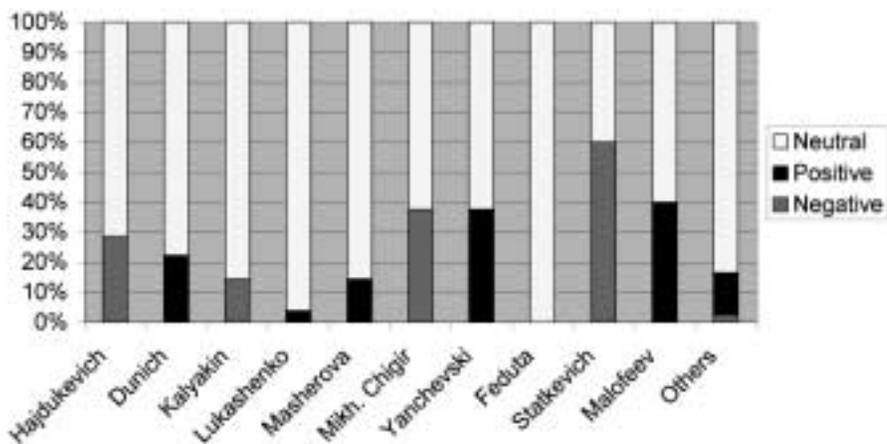
The biggest themes for the state newspapers were the elections, international observers and parties. This also confirms the aforementioned conclusion, because individuals without party backing did participate in the elections.

The opposition press wrote more about the elections, the opposition (its actions and position on the elections) and parties (relations of the opposition parties, their attitude towards the boycott). They also did not allocate much space to the candidates.

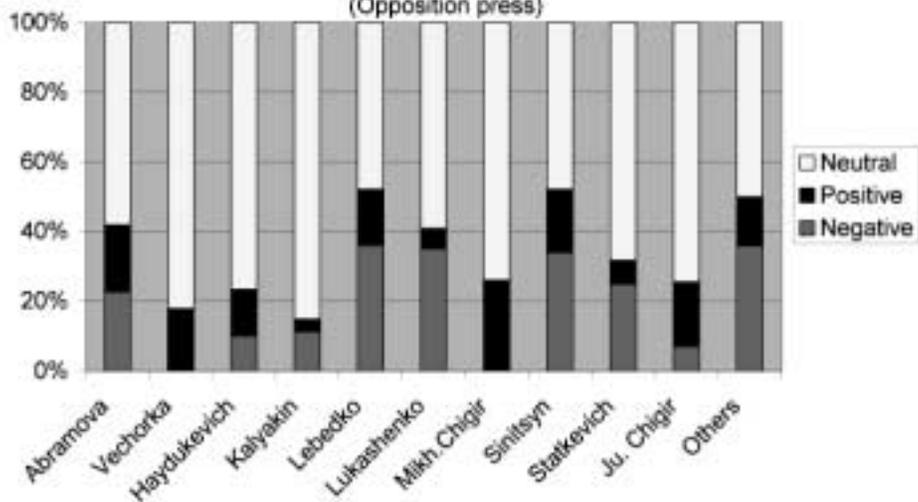
Natalya Masherova, Vsevolod Yanchevski and the Chairman of the Chamber of Representatives, Anatoli Malofeev, were often mentioned in the state media.

Natalya Masherova received much coverage in the state media, because October 4 was the 20th anniversary of the death of her father, Pyotr

TONE OF COVERAGE
(Governmental newspapers)



TONE OF COVERAGE
(Opposition press)



Masherov. The leader of Soviet Belarussia, he was known as a talented young Communist leader and touted as a possible successor to Leonid Brezhnev. Masherov died in a car accident in 1980. In all television programmes devoted to Masherov, his daughter, a running candidate, was present.

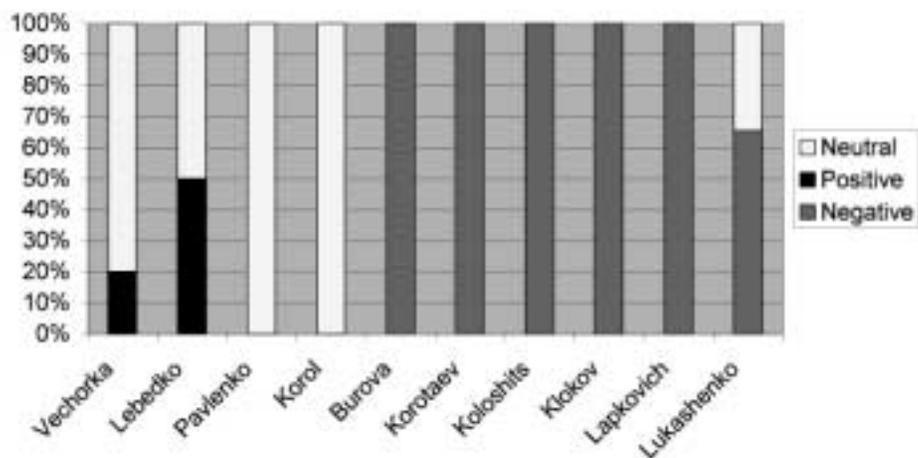
These programmes, as well as articles in the state newspapers devoted to Pyotr Masherov, were a subtle form of propaganda for Natalya Masherova. She stood in the same district as Mikhail Chigir, one of the leaders of opposition and a former prime minister. Masherova was elected a deputy in the second round.

Another political figure popular in the state media was Vsevolod Yanchevski, the leader of the Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union party, which supports the government. Yanchevski stood in the town of Slutsk, in a district where another leading opposition figure, Julia Chigir (the wife of Mikhail Chigir), was denied registration as an official candidate. Yanchevsky was elected deputy in the first round.

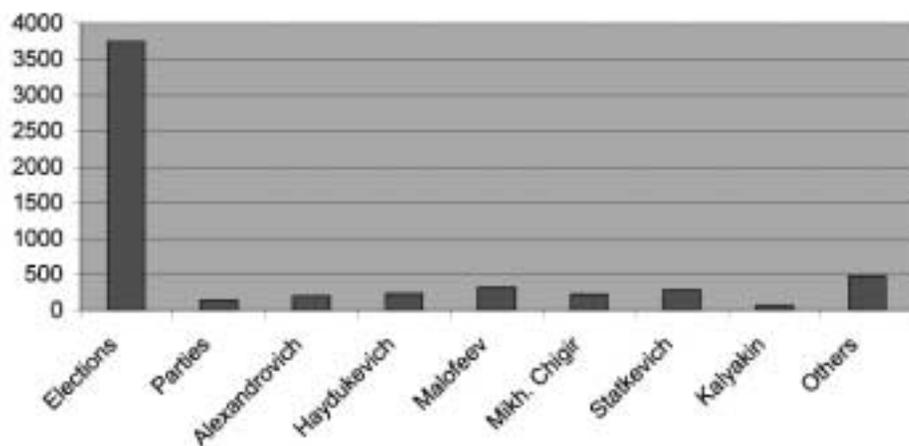
Masherova and Yanchevsky received no negative coverage in the state media. Masherova was mentioned seven times in the state newspapers, six times in a neutral context and once in a positive context. On television, she was mentioned 24 times, including twice positively and twice negatively. Yanchevsky was mentioned eight times in the state newspapers (three times positively and five times neutrally). Neither were among the 'top ten' political figures for the opposition press.

The opposite was observed with regard to Anatoli Lebedko and Vintsuk Vecherka, who boycotted the elections. Vecherka was a positive character for the opposition press. He was mentioned 28 times, including five times positively and 23 times neutrally. Lebedko was a controversial figure with 50 mentions, 18 of which were negative and eight positive.

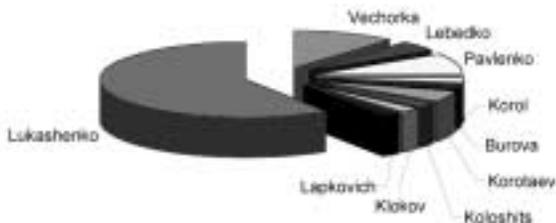
TONE OF COVERAGE
(Pagonyia, Grodno)



SPACE DEVOTED TO ELECTIONS AND CANDIDATES
(Komsomolskaya Pravda, in sq. cm)



REFERENCES TO POLITICAL FIGURES
(Pagonyia, Grodno)



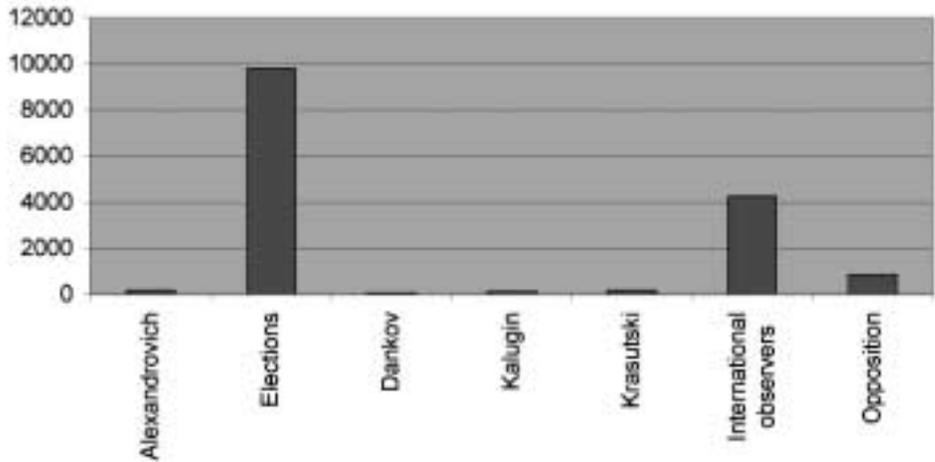
Julia Chigir, Yanchevsky's unregistered opponent, was one of the major figures for the opposition newspapers (43 mentions). However, the state media did not write about her.

One of the major events for the opposition media was the trial of Julia Chigir. She was accused of attacking a militiaman who had tried to escort her to a courtroom where her husband was facing trial. She was alleged to have bitten his ear. Julia Chigir's trial was one of the most important events for the opposition press, but was not covered by the state media at all.

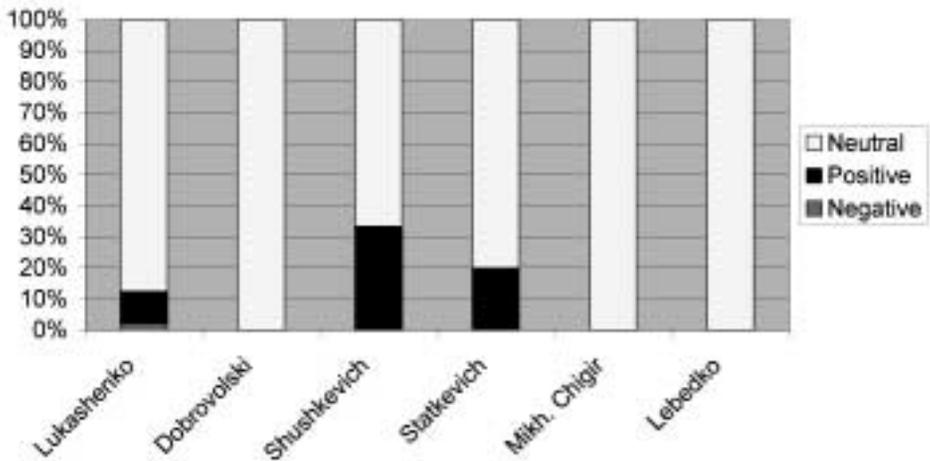
A lot of attention was given by the opposition newspapers to Leonid Sinitsin – currently the adviser to the chairman of board of the Bank of High Technologies, and formerly the chief of the presidential administration and a vice-premier (50 mentions). He was refused registration as a candidate by a regional electoral committee, but the Supreme Court of Belarus reversed this ruling.

Belorusskaya Gazeta, describing Sinitsin's return to politics, questioned whether he would join the opposition or Lukashenko. *Narodnaya Volya* described how Sinitsin had called for the recognition of the elections in his constituency as abortive, because the local authorities had declared October 15 (election day) a working day, when it should

TIME DEVOTED TO ELECTIONS AND CANDIDATES
(State Radio, in seconds)



TONE OF COVERAGE
(ORT, Moscow)



have been a holiday.

Thus some significant political figures received radically different amounts of coverage in the state and opposition media.

No single media outlet offered any discussion of candidacies, their programmes or plans from which readers or viewers could draw informed conclusions. There were almost no candidates who were evaluated positively, say, in a state newspaper, and negatively in an opposition one, which would have given readers the ability to compare and make choices.

Only the opposition between Natalya Masherova and Mikhail Chigir was mentioned. Their personalities were contrasted in the state and opposition media. However, although both Julia Chigir and Vsevolod Yanchevski were frequently mentioned by the media, Julia Chigir was not registered as a candidate, which meant that they were not in competition for a seat in parliament.

Such campaigning confirms that in Belarus there are no political discussions and no dialogue between different political perspectives and directions.

Parties

The opposition press generally shared one view on parties, partisanship and ideological differences: politically, the elections were presented in terms of Lukashenko vs. the opposition, where the opposition consists of political organisations and parties, headed by their leaders – all identified as outstanding political figures. Lukashenko is backed by political organisations and parties that support him.

Stories about parties and the opposition held a central place in the electoral coverage by the opposition press. Parties received 7473 cm² of coverage and the opposition received 9656 cm², representing about 10 per cent and 13 per cent of the stories

about elections, respectively. These stories concerned the opposition as a whole, events of the opposition (such as the Minsk 'Freedom March') and perspectives. That is, the impression that a reader of the opposition newspapers received, recognised the existence of a multi-party system and differences between the parties.

The state media did not share this approach. The state electronic media were particularly critical of the opposition. Two hours and 24 minutes of editorial coverage on state television (including the films by Yuri Azarenok) were devoted to criticising the opposition, where it was presented as a single whole, headed by several politicians but actually managed by the West. The electronic media did not speak about ideological differences between the opposition parties. The opposition was criticised on the radio for 14 minutes and 16 seconds. The opposition was the third biggest theme on the state radio, where there was less electoral coverage than on the television.

However, there was one programme on BT about state ideology, entitled 'State Ideology: Problems and Perspectives.' It was broadcast on October 10, lasting 20 minutes and 22 seconds. It said: 'We have a state ideology, which was embodied in 1994 as the programme of the President; discussed by society; and adopted in 1996 as a union of concepts, the main law of country, the constitution.'

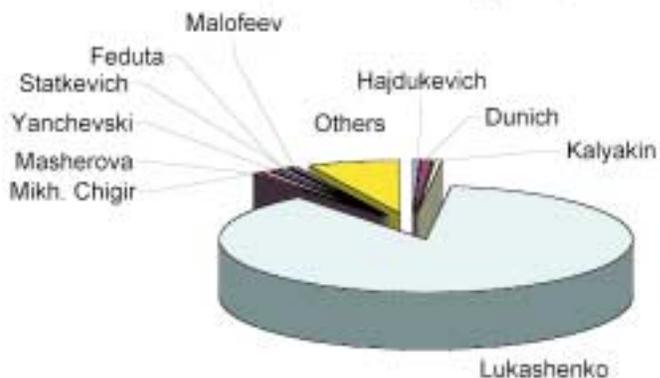
The public was informed that a presidential decree would soon be signed, identifying four levels of ideological activities in Belarus: the presidential administration; the media; the ministries; and local authorities. The logic of this programme leads to the conclusion that if there is a state philosophy, the existence of parties is reducible to an end in itself and there is no reason to speak about ideological diversity.

BT and radio did not speak about parties in connection with the elections.

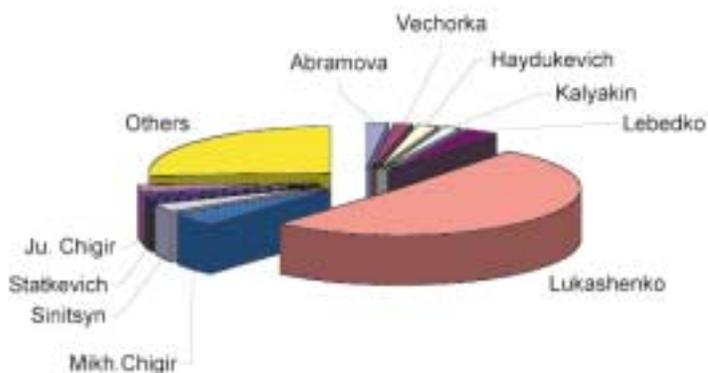
Only five per cent of the space in state newspapers was filled with articles about parties, half that given to them in the opposition press. Less than one per cent of space was devoted to the opposition (these were comments on the 'Freedom March').

Thus for the state media, the pre-electoral campaigning was a competition of persons, whereas the parties and their ideological and tactical differences were important for the opposition press. Simultaneously, it was important for the state media that on the one hand in politics there are the authorities (embodied in President Lukashenko); and on the other hand, the opposition, which was held to be a singular entity. ○

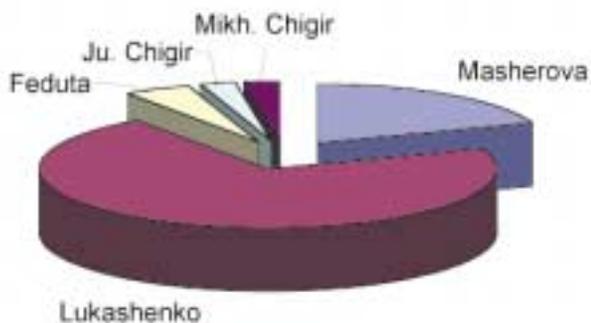
REFERENCES TO POLITICAL FIGURES
(Governmental newspapers)



REFERENCES TO POLITICAL FIGURES
(Opposition press)



REFERENCES TO POLITICAL FIGURES
(NTV, Moscow)





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