

# Implications of the September 9, 2001 Belarusian Presidential Election for Europe & the United States

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Ethan S. Burger, Esq,  
Project Director and Research Professor  
Transnational Crime & Corruption Center (TraCCC)  
School of International Service  
American University  
Washington, D.C. 20016

[www.american.edu/tracc](http://www.american.edu/tracc)



# Political/Legal Background

- November 1996 Referendum, which, *inter alia*, extended President Aleksandr Lukashenka's term was of questionable legality.
- Would the role of OSCE and other international observers legitimize an illegitimate electoral process?

# Philosophical Dilemma: Is fair voting a sufficient condition for fair elections?

- Impact of the lack of an effective independent media in Belarus and the role of Russian television.
- The message of “Vote for the President” posters – elections Soviet-style.
- A short, non-campaign as a result of severe financial restrictions on opposition spending (approximately \$12,500) provided by the state, and as well as money received from a fund derived from contribution from citizens, which was evenly distributed among the candidates.
- Possible role of death squads in the “disappearance” of potential opposition political candidates (Viktor Gonchar & Yuri Zakharenko).

# The Kremlin's Ambivalent Attitudes Toward Lukashenka

- Belarus is a supplier of key products for the Russian economy, but Russian oil/gas pipelines to Western Europe go through Belarus.
- Belarus provides strategic depth and psychological benefits.
- But the Belarusian economy depends on Russian subsidies in the form of Russian energy – can Russia afford it?
- Lukashenka's interest in a Belarusian-Russian Union, while perhaps furthering Russian political goals, may be viewed as threatening to Russian President Vladimir Putin's long-range foreign and economic policies as well as poses a potential rival for the presidency.

# European/US Policy Dilemmas

- Isolate Belarus or conduct a policy of engagement.
- Belarus is not Yugoslavia – justification for interfering in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state is lacking.
- Concern for the well-being of the Belarusian people.
- Economic interests.

## The Crime is not what is illegal but what is Legal: Stacking the Deck Against the Opposition

- The Belarusian Electoral Code was developed to ensure a victory for Lukashenka.
- Limit the ability of (i) OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM), OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE/PA), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), European Parliament, foreign independent observers (e.g. ACEEO) and (ii) domestic (e.g. Civic Initiative Independent Observers and the Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth) to function.
- Membership of Central Election Commission Lydia Yermoshina, Chairperson) and Precinct Election Commissions were Lukashenka supporters.
- Pre-election day voting (14-19% of total votes cast), unnumbered ballots, mobile voting, the number of ballots printed exceed the number of voters by 7%, last minute increase in size of election rolls by over 100,000.

# Belarusian Political Realities

- \* A divided opposition (originally 22 candidates). Pragmatic endorsement of Trade Unionist Vladimir Goncharik for President by candidates Mikhail Chagir, Syamyon Domash, Sergei Kalyakin and Pavel Kazlouski as well as by Vintsuk Vyachorka, of the Belarusian Popular Front. According to CEC, only Lukashenka, Domash, Goncharik and Gaidukevich got the required 100,000 signatures for registration as a presidential candidate.
- \* Belarusian populace's perception that the economy is not in bad shape – fear of privatization.
- \* Demographics is destiny: a conservative, aging population.
- \* Voting with one's feet – one can easily leave the country – loss of potential opposition supporters.

# September 9<sup>th</sup>'s Official Results of Voting, according to the CEC

- Aleksandr Lukashenka - 75.65%.
- Vladimir Goncharik – 15.65%.
- Sergei Gaidukevich – 2.48%.
- Against all and invalid votes – 6.22%.
- Total Turnout – 83.86% of eligible voters  
(6,169,087 votes)



# Lukashenka's Last-Minute Electoral Ploys

- Accusations against Ambassador Hans-George Wieck, head of OSCE Mission in Belarus.
- Increase in pro-Lukashenka media prior to election (e.g. Sovetskaya Belarussiya).
- Seizure of American computer equipment used to publish independent newspaper "Volny Horad", detention of persons distributing opposition newspapers and arrest of pro-opposition demonstrators.
- Opposition Web Sites Blocked on Election Day.
- Prohibition on post-election exit polling.
- Conduct of military exercises, free train travel for students, etc.

# Election Post-Mortem

- Legal challenge to preliminary voting rejected.
- Final results were known early on September 10th.
- Goncharik claimed Lukashenka got only 46.7% of vote, he claimed he received 40.8% – call for second round of voting rejected by CEC. Lukashenka’s alleged victory in Minsk is highly suspicious.
- Irony – Lukashenka would have probably won a fair and free election. He has appointed Genadz Navitski to be his new Prime Minister and hopes to attract foreign investment.
- OSCE criticized voting as failing to meet international standards, but stopped short of declaring it invalid.
- US Ambassador to OSCE David Johnson stated that “the incumbent’s apparent success at the polls is meaningless.
- Introduction by Senator Helms of Belarus Democracy Act of 2001.
- Implications of the Events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

# Web Sites to Monitor Developments in Belarus

- [www.osce.org/belarus](http://www.osce.org/belarus)
- [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)
- [www.usis.minsk.by](http://www.usis.minsk.by)
- [www.ilhr.org](http://www.ilhr.org)
- [www.belapan.com](http://www.belapan.com)
- [www.csce.gov](http://www.csce.gov)
- [www.batory.org.pl](http://www.batory.org.pl)
- [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org)