

Hans-Georg Wieck<sup>1</sup>

## Democratic Civil Society - An Alternative to the Autocratic Lukashenko Regime in Belarus

*The Work of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus 1999-2001*<sup>2</sup>

In the past six years, the three major European institutions - the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union - have promoted the development of democratic structures in Belarusian civil society as a political alternative to the autocratic Lukashenko system imposed on the country through a constitutional *coup d'état* in November 1996. Since then, the Lukashenko regime has been backed politically and economically by the Russian Federation.

### *Testing the Ability of the Lukashenko Regime to Reform*

After the failure of the alternative presidential elections of May 1999<sup>3</sup> Alexander Lukashenko had nothing to fear immediately from the West's reaction to the loss of his democratic legitimation. However, he suffered a painful defeat in another field, which he hoped to compensate for by opening doors to the West: At literally the very last minute, Boris Yeltsin, due to the interventions of influential Russian political circles (among others, Anatoli Chubais), evaded Lukashenko's plan in the summer of 1999 to conduct direct elections for the offices of President and Vice-President of the Union between the Russian Federation and Belarus, in which Yeltsin was to run for President and Lukashenko for Vice-President. The elections were to take place simultaneously in Russia and Belarus. In view of his popularity in Russia, which he had gained by systematically travelling there, Lukashenko could, also in Russia, certainly have won the vote for the Vice-Presidency of the Union with a large majority. Lukashenko felt betrayed and drew nearer to the West - for tactical reasons, as one was to discover later.

---

1 Ambassador Dr Hans-Georg Wieck was the Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus from December 1997 until December 2001. This article reflects the personal opinions of the author.

2 On 18 September 1997, the OSCE Permanent Council passed the decision to establish the Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus. The Group was mandated with assisting the Belarusian authorities in promoting democratic institutions and complying with OSCE commitments and with monitoring both these activities. Cf. OSCE, Permanent Council, Decision No. 185, PC.DEC/185, 18 September 1997. On the period between 1997 and 1999 see Hans-Georg Wieck, *The OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (Ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 1999, Baden-Baden 2000*, pp. 185-193.

3 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 191.

In the face of the domestic confrontation in Belarus, the *ad hoc* working group of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly under the direction of the former Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Severin and the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus made efforts to build bridges leading to new negotiations between the government and the opposition on a limited reform programme. This was achieved after an informal conference lasting several days attended by high-ranking representatives of the opposition and non-governmental organizations with the collaboration of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, which took place at a health resort near Bucharest from 11-14 June 1999. In the end, the government did not participate in the discussions, but ultimately was in agreement with the results, a fact that Adrian Severin and I, in my position as the Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group, were able to ascertain on 15 July 1999 in a conversation with President Lukashenko lasting several hours.<sup>4</sup>

After building a "Consultative Council of the Political Parties in Opposition"<sup>5</sup> with a rotating chairmanship and the appointment of expert groups on issues pertaining to negotiation procedures, parliamentary rights as well as the electoral law and media problems, preliminary negotiations on confidence-building issues were agreed, which began in September 1999 with the collaboration of the OSCE Group as advisors and observers. They had the task of regulating opposition access to the state media for the period of the negotiations. For these preliminary negotiations, the President appointed his closest aide, Mikhail Sasonov, who had already conducted the negotiations with the Russian Federation on the Union Treaty. These negotiations, which on the side of the opposition were conducted by the head of the "Media" expert group and former judge of the Constitutional Court, Mikhail Pastukhov, yielded a satisfactory preliminary result surprisingly quickly. It gave the opposition regular and uncensored access to state-controlled electronic and print media. On 29 October and 5 November 1999 - in good time before the OSCE Istanbul Summit Meeting of the Heads of State or Government on 18-19 November 1999 - the protocol and an

---

4 Lukashenko accepted the fact that, under the auspices of the OSCE, discussions with the opposition would be held on free and fair parliamentary elections in the year 2000 as well as on resolving the questions connected with these.

5 The parties included were: the Communist Party of Belarus (Chairman Sergei Kalyakin; there is also a pro-Lukashenko Communist Party chaired by Viktor Chikin), the Social Democratic Party Hramada (Chairman Stanislav Shushkevich; Chairman of the 12th Supreme Soviet and thus President of the State from 1990-1994), the Social Democratic Party National Hramada (Chairman Nicolai Statkevich), United Civil Party (Chairman Stanislav Bogdankevich, former President of the National Bank; in the year 2000, he was followed by Anatoli Lebedko as Chairman), the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF; established by Zianon Paznyak in 1998, in exile since 1994; the party was divided in the year 2000; the Conservative Christian Party was led by Paznyak in exile; the BNF itself was then headed by Vintsuk Vyachorka), the Labour Party (trade unions party close to the Social Democrats; Chairman Leonid Lemeshonok, later Alexander Bukhvostov), Women's Political Party "Nadzeya" (close to the trade unions; President Valentina Polevikova), and the Liberal Democratic Party. The Democratic Party Yabloko was not admitted to the Consultative Council because it is not registered in Belarus as a party.

additional technical agreement were signed on opposition access to state-controlled mass media, which it was assumed the President would approve. Just after the OSCE Summit, however, it became clear that there was decisive resistance to this agreement within the Lukashenko system - especially from journalists of the state press and the associations of war veterans. Lukashenko rescinded his agreement with the results of the negotiations and in the end did not approve them. In retrospect, it is permissible to pose critical questions on and place in doubt the seriousness of the Lukashenko regime's intention and willingness to negotiate at all. In view of Mikhail Gorbachev's destiny after his "Glasnost" campaign, the catastrophic effects of a period of openness were all too familiar to the representatives of the authoritarian state.

In the following period of government-controlled "Public Political Dialogue" (February - May 2000), there were unexpected - at least by the government - confrontations between non-governmental organizations and representatives of the regime on freedom of the press and opposition access to the state-controlled media, although the opposition parties and those non-governmental organizations representing a European concept of democracy were only marginally involved if at all. The Chairman of the "Public Political Dialogue", Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Vladimir Rusakevich, agreed to the proposals by the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group to conduct separate talks, at the periphery of the public dialogue, between the Presidential Administration and the Consultative Council of the Political Parties in Opposition on steps towards reform. After several preliminary talks between both sides to sound things out - with the collaboration of the OSCE Mission - Rusakevich was discharged from his office and sent to Beijing as ambassador. This exemplifies how nervously the President was reacting to any development leading to new negotiations with the opposition on steps towards reform. A similar situation occurred with another of his closest aides, Sergei Posokhov, after the 2001 presidential elections.

In the final debate of the "Public Political Dialogue" on 30 May 2000 in the Palace of the Republic, chaired by Lukashenko and attended by representatives of 110 organizations, the President's and the Head of the OSCE Mission's positions were diametrically and irreconcilably opposed. This dispute was carried out in all candour.

Thus, the short but intensive period of co-operation between the government, the opposition and the OSCE Mission came to an end - a co-operation which had found a clear expression in the very positively and constructively drawn up paragraph 22 of the common Summit Declaration, which the Heads of State or Government including Lukashenko adopted on 19 November 1999 at the Istanbul Summit.<sup>6</sup>

---

6 "We strongly support the work of the Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus, which has worked closely with the Belarusian authorities as well as with opposition parties and leaders and NGOs in promoting democratic institutions and compliance with OSCE commitments, thus facilitating a resolution of the constitutional controversy in Belarus. We emphasize that only a real political dialogue in Belarus can pave the way for free and

The Istanbul Declaration served as a foundation for the active structuring of consultations in mainly parallel processes with the government and with the opposition parties, but also with numerous non-governmental organizations, in preparation for the parliamentary elections on 15 October 2000 and the presidential elections on 9 September 2001. The Istanbul Declaration emphasizes the positive role of the OSCE Mission to Belarus as a result of its direct contacts with the government, opposition and non-governmental organizations and sees these contacts as a foundation for a fruitful dialogue which should lead to free and democratic elections as well as surmounting the constitutional conflict.

After the parliamentary elections in the year 2000, in which very effective independent domestic election observation was implemented, President Lukashenko realized the dangers for his regime which was suddenly faced with a civil society that with the collaboration of international organizations (the OSCE, Council of Europe, European Parliament) was emancipating itself from the authoritarian regime and building up its own political structures that were not only able to escape the control and influence of the authoritarian regime, but also to act effectively.

Since November 2000, the Lukashenko regime had been fighting against the activities of the OSCE Mission, which was able to rely on the official interpretation of the 1997 mandate by the Heads of State or Government in the Istanbul Declaration of 19 November 1999. This interpretation could only have been corrected in a new OSCE Summit Decision.

In preparation for the 2000 parliamentary elections, the OSCE Mission supported the establishment of a nationwide network of non-governmental organizations to carry out comprehensive domestic election observation including all phases of election preparations. Governments of European OSCE participating States and the European Commission of the European Union provided the not inconsiderable funding which was necessary for the construction of a nationwide network with the corresponding technical equipment, training and introduction to the various tasks involved like reporting, initiating the relevant legal steps (complaint, appeal) and media work. Between January and October 2000, over 6,000 volunteers were trained by the non-governmental organizations involved. These included the Belarus Helsinki Committee, the Republican Club of Voters, the free trade unions, a women's organization, the Lev Sapiega Foundation, which is active regionally, as well as the unregistered voters organization "Democracy and Free Elections" that was headed by the chairman of the Central Co-ordination

---

democratic elections through which the foundations for real democracy can be developed. We would welcome early progress in this political dialogue with the OSCE participation, in close co-operation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We stress the necessity of removing all remaining obstacles to this dialogue by respecting the principles of the rule of law and the freedom of the media." Istanbul Summit Declaration, November 1999, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (Ed.), OSCE Yearbook 2000, Baden-Baden 2001, pp. 413-424, here: p. 419.

Council, Mecheslav Grib. In connection with the elections, for the first time in a Soviet successor state, a comprehensive organization has through the OSCE Mission carried out a public task within a developing civil society with the goal not to ascertain the vote for specific candidates, but to achieve objective reporting on how national elections controlled by the state had been conducted. Observers also had the task of introducing appeal and complaint procedures in cases in which the laws and regulations had been violated in connection with the election process. The results of the comprehensive election observation were documented and published in Russian, Belarusian and English.<sup>7</sup>

From the viewpoint of the OSCE Mission, the greatest significance of the development of a nationwide domestic independent network of trained and motivated election observers lies in the creation of grassroots democratic structures in which democracy is not only preached and expressed by avowals, but in which also a visible contribution to control the actions of the authoritarian state in the most important area - the elections - is made, a contribution which demands courage and engagement and which is also concrete. Quite directly, in a specifically tangible manner, a credible alternative to the authoritarian state emerges. Naturally, these structures are vulnerable and have to be renewed repeatedly. It has been shown that to an increasing degree, youth organizations have seen a rewarding, constructive field of activity in this area. Thus, a new generation, full of hope, is coming of age. After the elections in September 2001, President Lukashenko stated he knew that it was the youth that had lost him the election.

*Supporting Political Structures of the Civil Society through European Institutions - an Indispensable but Controversial Strategy*

In states that have refused to implement democratic reforms according to OSCE standards, OSCE institutions, especially the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), have been reserved in systematically

---

7 In several other countries, the American non-governmental organizations NDI (National Democratic Institute) and IRI (International Republican Institute) had given their support to independent domestic election observation. However, in Belarus, the US advocated a boycott of the parliamentary elections in 2000 and thus did not organize domestic election monitoring.

Nevertheless, subsequently, in the presidential elections in September 2001, there was on the whole satisfactory co-operation between the OSCE Mission to Belarus and the NDI on planning and implementing election monitoring by domestic non-governmental organizations. Over 20,000 Belarusians were trained for this operation; 4,000 of these withdrew due to pressure from the state apparatus. Several thousand observers had their election observation licences taken away the night before the elections. Because the Belarusian Central Electoral Commission, in face of the bad experiences in the parliamentary elections in 2000, had the local electoral commissions forge the vote count in each individual constituency before the election results were announced, the independent election observers were only able to find visible manipulations but not manipulation in the count itself.

promoting non-governmental organizations dealing with election monitoring. Belarus is the exception to this rule. Usually, the OSCE only deals directly with steering these processes in those countries where after the formation of democratic governments domestic election observation is to be organized as well, like for example, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo.

However, another problem emerges in connection with the development of democratic structures in civil society in transition countries: Whoever has had the opportunity to participate in an international conference of donor organizations, has had to recognize that Western Europe's and North America's praiseworthy, valuable and also irreplaceable support for these many groups in each transition country does not appear as a coherent concept, but is a confused muddle of well-meant often overlapping initiatives that can be helpful but that lack a comprehensive political strategy. Occasionally, contradictory political strategies emerge, e.g. for or against a boycott of national elections or for or against allowing government officials to become involved in programmes of international donor organizations. This is understandable, but inevitably also evokes a call on the European institutions and the Transatlantic partners for a consistent political concept. Here, opinions differ - better said, opinions differed in the past. While national governments - and also the department of the European Commission responsible for promoting democracy - did not have any difficulty in providing funding for the construction of nationwide civil society structures for the implementation of independent election monitoring, it is another story regarding the crucial question: Are the European institutions and/or the governments of their member states willing to systematically finance the democratic alternative to an authoritarian regime within civil society - or at least their international activities and common domestic actions like conferences and congresses on factual issues with the interested social structures of the country where the large majority of voters is located organizationally? One should recall the historical examples, especially the support during the 1970s granted to the democratic "alternatives" in the authoritarian Mediterranean states of Spain, Portugal, Greece (during the rule of the colonels) and in Turkey (during the period of the military dictatorship) as well as more recently Yugoslavia, during the period Milosevic ruled. In the face of the undisputed fact that in the presidential systems of the successor states of the Soviet Union at best a state-controlled civil society has been desired and thus promoted, but that (perhaps, just perhaps with the exception of the Russian Federation and naturally the Baltic republics, who, however, "play in another league") a civil society has almost never been supported officially which finances its political structures independent of the state and represents a credible political alternative for the voter, the question must be asked whether, and as the case may be, in what form, international organizations, predominantly, however, the European institutions, can promote building civil society structures capable of taking political action which are committed to democracy as a system of values. Only when we can ob-

serve the development of political structures in the civil societies of the successor states of the Soviet Union which are capable of taking action and can send a common candidate to the all-decisive presidential elections and which plan their participation in the parliamentary elections with an optimal strategy each time, will one have good reason to say that the integration of democratic structures in the successor states has been sustainable. Until then, a "presidential democracy" will rule which has a tendency to be authoritarian and is formed by the "party of power", the presidential system itself, and co-opts the forces in the country and builds up successors from its own ranks. In this kind of a constellation, the judiciary is in danger of being compromised by the executive branch. The legislative branch is in danger of becoming the lackey of the executive branch or continuing to remain in this role. It is obvious that the task of supporting the political emancipation process of civil society from the authoritarian state cannot be fulfilled by the numerous non-governmental organizations and foundations operating internationally or based nationally. Also the OSCE, which (with few exceptions) is dependent on the consensus of all those involved, is not in a position to do this - at least not as a rule. The European institutions - the European Union and the Council of Europe as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly - must jointly and in co-ordination make this task a priority and implement it in co-operation with the corresponding structures in the US and Canada. Of course, governments and institutions will not act as agencies in and of themselves. Intermediary structures are required here.

Under the exceptional circumstances during the period from 1997 to 2001, the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus was able to a large extent to fulfil this function.

Certainly, it should be critically questioned whether international funding of a political alternative should be taken into consideration at all in an authoritarian state that bends the law as is the case in Belarus. However, encouraging people and organizations to become actively involved for democracy without giving them the means to build structures capable of acting and to finance programmes must, from a moral and ethical point of view, be seen as doubtful and in a practical sense unproductive. Democracy is not only a question of avowal, it is the guideline for practice to bring justice to bear, to put a stop to the misuse of power, to make the exercise of power a matter of confidence based on control and on free and fair elections and to win people over to becoming actively engaged in the municipalities, regions and nations and beyond.

In particular, when this funding is provided by European institutions, that is, not national power politics but the demand for regional co-operation based on documents which all countries - also Belarus - have made their own are behind this, the asserted doubts must be rejected as unfounded. Neither does the authoritarian state hesitate to use state funds for its own purposes without

budgetary control and to allow international as well as domestic companies to share in financing the presidential election campaign.

It is proven that the international funding placed at the disposal of the Belarusian election monitoring organizations in the years 1999-2001 was processed correctly. An overwhelming amount of documentation on the implementation of election monitoring and the observations made (violations of the election campaign rules and regulations and manipulation of the results) is also available for the parliamentary elections in 2000 and the presidential elections in 2001 as well as for the municipal elections of 1999, for example. In 2000, in the parliamentary elections there was evidence that in over 30 constituencies the required turnout of 50 per cent of registered voters to make the vote valid had not been reached. The government and/or the Central Electoral Commission had ascertained this for only 13 constituencies.

Domestic opponents, thus also the government, questioned whether the international funds received in 2001 by the election campaign organization of Vladimir Goncharik, the common presidential candidate from the broad democratic coalition, had been employed according to the regulations. Improper use of funding can never be excluded. Assessments made by the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group indicated, however, that they had been used according to regulations. Because in one case the funds pledged were not allocated, the financial commitments towards election campaigners could not be met rapidly. That caused bad blood and placed doubts on whether the funds were being processed correctly. However, the reproach of "improper use of election campaign funding" also occurs in political battle even when there is no evidence that it is justified.

The position of the opposition parties towards European institutions remained ambiguous for a long time. On the one hand, the regular and sustained co-operation between the parties in the Consultative Council of the Political Parties in Opposition created a minimum of mutual trust and a platform for producing agreement on their positions with respect to Belarusian state structures as well as their stance towards European institutions. On the other, the parties did not consider this framework adequate for co-ordinating their domestic policy strategies and representing these publicly with the participation of delegates from all parts of the country. This purpose was served by the "Council of Democratic Forces", in which parties like the Belarusian Popular Front and the United Civil Party as well as non-governmental organizations like the Charter 97 and the Assembly of Democratic Non-governmental Organizations have the most say, and who, for example, pushed through the boycott of the 2000 parliamentary elections. Some representatives of the United Civil Party (Vladimir Novisiad, Chairman of the youth wing of the United Civil Party) and the Social Democrats under the leadership of Nicolai Statkevich evaded this pressure. Alongside this, a large number of respected or ambitious citizens applied for an "independent" candidacy in the parliamentary elections in order to eliminate the representatives of state power. In



many cases, the state authorities forced them to abandon their endeavours by threatening negative consequences to their professional positions - among them were teachers, entrepreneurs, doctors and workers.

In the 2000 parliamentary elections, all parties were losers. Lukashenko did not honour the courageous step that the Social Democrats and the Liberals had made, who had decided against the prevailing opinion of the more radical opposition to take part in the elections as had numerous independent candidates not bound to a party who were running for candidacy against the state apparatus. Over 200 independent candidates, in the truest sense of the word, and most of the candidates belonging to democratic parties were eliminated either during the registration phase based on lame justifications or during the vote count through manipulations. In this manner, Lukashenko gambled away his chances of obtaining a Parliament that would have contained about 15 to 20 per cent opposition members and therefore would have gained a considerable amount of recognition and encouragement at the international level.

The rift between the advocates and the opponents of the boycott of the parliamentary elections was also not surmounted completely in the 2001 presidential elections, in which, nevertheless, all parties participated actively either by supporting their own candidate or the candidate determined jointly by the coalition. After the presidential elections, a heated debate broke out between the political parties on who was to blame for the alleged defeat. This was rather odd, as everyone knew that the official election results had been grossly falsified and that according to the polls, the common presidential candidate of the political and social opposition held 30 to 40 per cent of the vote.

The repeatedly demonstrated lack of willingness of the Lukashenko regime to introduce a reform course pointing in the direction of the European "democracy model" is certainly not only attributable to the inherent striving of an authoritarian regime to maintain power, but also reflects the still fostered objective to see authoritarian systems established in the other successor states of the Soviet Union as well, which - supported by central economies - could re-establish an internationally relevant politically powerful bloc having independent importance - also as a counterweight to Western interests. Lukashenko knows he is in agreement with the nationalist and communist elites in the Russian Federation who view President Putin's political course with suspicion - a course towards the West whose goal seems to be to gain status and importance in the Western world through competitiveness and indispensability, but at the same time to develop the economic and social potentials of Russia and to bring about prosperity.

Also in relation to Russia, Lukashenko has not shown any willingness to reform on economic and monetary issues. The necessity for harmonization in economic and monetary policy is repeatedly referred to in the Union Treaties and the corresponding individual agreements, however this fails in imple-

mentation (privatization, market economy reforms, production of goods not oriented to target figures, price liberalization for agrarian products, creating legal certainty on the market and for economic processes).

Lukashenko repeatedly - before and even after the presidential elections - announced the liberalization of the political system and economic policy, however these remained verbal promises. The substance of the economy, its stock of capital goods, has not been renewed. The same is true for the lack of orientation to the market - i.e. doing without new products. The Belarusian economy lives off its substance and from Russian subsidies, primarily in the energy sector.

One can draw the following conclusion: The Lukashenko model of an authoritarian state, a state-governed society and a state-controlled citizen has up to now not passed the test of its ability and willingness to reform and transform. The political viability of this system depends on sustained toleration by and support of the leadership of the Russian Federation and other CIS countries as well as the determination of the Lukashenko government to also continually implement the instruments of power of the state and economy to suppress democratic development.

#### *The Emancipation of Civil Society and the Citizen from the Authoritarian State in Belarus*

The 12th Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus was elected still under the framework conditions of President Gorbachev's reform system in 1990. A certain number of its Deputies were elected in the constituencies - without disclosing their party membership -, i.e. they were "independent candidates" who had to obtain a predetermined number of signatures to run for election. Other Deputies were sent to Parliament by the mass organizations, among others, by the parties, but also by the Russian Orthodox Church, the trade unions, the armed forces and youth associations. The Communist Party had lost its monopoly.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the structures of the Communist Party and the mass organizations as well as the state control of enterprises remained intact. The Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet exercised the function of Head of State, however, without having control over the executive branch, which - represented by the Prime Minister - required a parliamentary majority. In Parliament, there was a *de facto* communist majority along with several other parties, the most important of which in the initial years of Belarusian independence was the Belarusian Popular Front under Zianon Paznyak, which followed an anti-Russian course. The state emblem and state flag were commensurate with the symbols of the earlier White Russian-Lithuanian state that had existed for a short time in 1918. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Belarusian industry, which was closely inter-

locked with and dependent on the Russian economy, became subject to a decline; in the West, Belarus was an object of interest only in connection with arms control and disarmament measures (removal of all nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory/START I, Lisbon Protocol; limiting conventional armed forces/CFE Treaty).

Nevertheless, in 1994, a constitution according to the CSCE standards of the Copenhagen Document (Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension, June 1990) and the Charter of Paris (Summit Meeting of the Heads of State or Government, November 1990) was adopted, which introduced and anchored the principle of separation of powers, above all the independence of the judiciary, and the principle of the media free from monopoly in Belarus. However, this constitutional precept was not implemented in the electronic media. In the following presidential elections in June and July 1994, Lukashenko prevailed in the second ballot. He declared he would fight corruption in the state and promised a decisive pro-Russian policy. Russian became the second official language and after the constitutional coup in 1996, a flag adapted from the Soviet state emblem (without the hammer and sickle) and a corresponding state emblem with motifs from folk art were introduced.

In the struggle over the so-called *Kompetenzkompetenz*, i.e. the competence to delineate competencies, with the Supreme Soviet (the 13th Supreme Soviet was elected in 1995/1996), Lukashenko only prevailed through a manipulated referendum on his own constitutional draft and that of a majority of the 13th Supreme Soviet in November 1996. Without wasting any time Lukashenko - backed at the foreign policy level by the Russian Federation - replaced the democratic state based on the 1994 constitution with an authoritarian state. In his relations with the European institutions, the only thing that mattered and still matters the most to Lukashenko is the recognition of this state, its constitution and the political status quo, that is the recognition of this authoritarian model, at best a model of a people's democracy, as a democratic order acceptable to European institutions (acceptable in the sense of the criteria in the Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension and the Charter of Paris for a new European order after the Cold War). Lukashenko draws support from the nomenklatura of the vertically constructed state apparatus and the state industrial enterprises. Analogous to this, there are kolkhoz enterprises in rural areas whose directors are appointed by the state. In addition to this, social mass organizations exist in which consistent with Soviet tradition all citizens are formally organized according to profession or status and on special occasions (elections, organized demonstrations) receive instructions, which they follow - most often without inner conviction. Likewise, there are workers collectives and agrarian collectives. The latter emerged in the Soviet Union during the Gorbachev era and were to create a counterweight to the trade unions.

Due to the legal regulations on the registration of social organizations, including political parties, trade unions and classical non-governmental organizations with specific, self-elected tasks - whether these are human rights organizations, sports clubs or stamp collectors -, the state authorities have it in their grip to stop or restrict alternative political structures as well as preventing their nationwide enlargement. Because of the abundance of formal requirements to be fulfilled and in face of the difficulties in obtaining funding, these structures remain in administrative dependence on the authorities or are forced to take actions that are illegal in the eyes of the authorities. It is made clear to hotels and landlords - often state institutions - that they must not give certain parties and associations access to conference rooms or that they must not rent office space to them. Factory directors have been dismissed because they have given the opposition candidate the opportunity to speak to their workers.

Against this background, the political parties "went to the streets" to demonstrate against the arbitrariness of the state - but they were not joined by the masses as these were guided by state-controlled organizations which also have an influence on whether people in state structures would continue to be employed. As, logically considered, there is no room in the thoroughly organized authoritarian state for political parties and thus also no room for political opposition, or at best for a constructive form of opposition within the existing social structures, every attempt to create these kinds of political structures will lead to those political parties and associations outside the state and state-social framework being declared as enemies of the state or maligned as being a sect without public support.

The government had expectations that the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group would make proposals for adjustments to the existing state structure, however, it did not expect proposals in the sense of the 1990 Copenhagen Document on the equality of political parties having a democratic orientation with the social institutions created by the state as a vehicle for the political formation of public opinion in the country and in Parliament.

In face of the fact that it was impossible to reach state reform through a "mass rebellion in the streets" or direct international pressure, political parties - in accordance with the recommendations of European institutions - drew the conclusion that targeted political and legal changes would have to be achieved primarily through elections. The efforts of the European institutions and the OSCE Mission on site were directed towards improving framework conditions for elections, building a network of effective domestic election observer structures as well as developing organized international election monitoring that was prepared by European institutions. The Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials (ACEEEO), an association of representatives of national election commissions from over a dozen Central and Eastern European states, including the Russian Federation, first or-

ganized this kind of election monitoring during the 2001 presidential elections and published an unquestionably critical report on these.

For a long time now, the Belarusian government has tried to persuade the ODIHR to undertake a comparison of the electoral laws of all OSCE States, in the hope that this would give evidence that its own electoral law has a democratic character. However, it is an undisputed fact that the nature of the elections is the deciding factor in determining the democratic character of an election.

Preparing an election and the election campaign are legitimate means for the political parties to approach the citizen and try to influence public opinion. Although the funds available for this purpose are modest, there are a number of ways to evade these limitations. Sometimes, however, this does not work. In face of the dominance of the state television and broadcasting company as well as the state press - compared to the small-scale print runs of the independent press, which must for all intents and purposes be attributed to the opposition - there are normally only limited possibilities to reach the state-organized voter. Of great psychological significance here is the way the Russian television stations, which enjoy a relatively high standing in Belarus, do their reporting - in any case they are more popular than Belarusian state television. Critical reports by Moscow television stations on Belarus and in particular on Lukashenko himself and his policies receive much attention and are considered an indicator of the Russian position towards Lukashenko. In November 2000, a report by the Russian state television station ORT was broadcast on three Belarusian politicians who had disappeared, Yuri Sakharenko, Victor Gonchar and Anatoli Krasovski. There are frequent reports on the ORT television camera man, Dmitri Savadski, who disappeared in 2000. The Russian government could have contributed greatly to making the very important presidential elections of September 2001 free and fair by providing balanced reporting on the adversaries, the government and the opposition. However, it did not use the possibilities at its disposal to influence, through its own television stations, the government and the Electoral Commission to conduct fair elections - let alone the opportunity to promote the rival candidate of the coalition, the trade unionist Goncharik, directly. After all, he was supported by the Russian trade unions. Again, it appeared that Moscow would rather take on the burden of an authoritarian head of state who was for the most part under its thumb in a country highly interesting to it than to stand up for change. Against this background, it is a necessity that the democratic forces and the social organizations in opposition to the system strengthen the cohesion of the alliance of political opposition parties so that it is accepted also in Moscow as a credible alternative before or after an election campaign. In the 2001 presidential election campaign, this definitely did not occur.

In connection with the presidential elections in 2001, the political and social groups made considerable progress in their efforts to decide upon, nominate

and register a common candidate for the office of the President and then send him into the election campaign. The parties - with the exception of the Communists and the Liberal Democrats - agreed with one another that none of the party leaders should belong to the small group of candidates running for office. Sergei Kalyakin (of the Communist Party) and the Chairman of the Liberal Democrats, Sergei Gaidukevich, did this anyway. The coalition partners agreed that all candidates would apply for registration and in light of this registration and the general situation at the beginning of the heated election campaign phase the decision would be made within the coalition on which candidate the coalition - the democratic parties and the social organizations behind the trade union candidate - would place in the running in the end phase of the election campaign. The political parties were consulted and approved the planned decision. However, because the candidate Semeon Domash - a man of the right-wing camp - withdrew his application relatively late, the election campaign for Goncharik was unable to be really effective. Neither did the coalition partners support Goncharik to the extent originally planned. There was no assertive election campaign manager and probably not enough funding.

Because the protocols of the 6,500 polling stations were only published after all necessary manipulations had been carried out, the results of the "parallel vote count" by non-governmental organizations were not of very much value. Evidence of manipulation was not found in the figures, but in the methods applied by the electoral commissions. According to opinion polls before, during and after the elections, Goncharik gained 30 to 40 per cent of the vote. However, Lukashenko claimed 75.5 per cent of the vote for himself, Goncharik was allotted 15 per cent and Gaidukevich officially gained 2.5 per cent of the vote.

After the elections, under massive pressure from the government, Goncharik was forced to resign from his post as Chairman of the (state) Trade Union Federation; Frants Vitko, who was just as critical of the government, followed him as Chair, while Goncharik is now to co-ordinate trade union work of all the CIS member states. The "official" trade unions, who joined the Free Trade Unions of Belarus and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in an ultimately successful complaint at the ILO on unauthorized government intervention in trade union rights, are an impressive example that also in closed authoritarian state structures, political opposition by "official" organizations to the ruling regime is, within certain limits, possible. The Belarusian Students Association went through a similar development in changing from a state organization into a dissident organization.

Before the elections, there were reports available to the President on the deterioration of his reputation among the people. Therefore, Lukashenko had to put all his efforts into ensuring his victory through manipulation. In addition, after the elections, he several times purged the nomenklatura particularly among the "industrial bosses" to punish and weaken his opponents.

The government was able to prevail "in the Soviet manner" in the elections by using manipulation and intimidation and by abusing its power. Neither has the new presidential term of office been marked by a political departure, but by a revenge campaign against dissidents and by protecting one's own positions. Promises for liberal political reform, primarily regarding parliamentary rights, and for reforms in the economic area are now only mentioned occasionally and in very moderate words. In relation to Moscow, the focus is on the question of whether the common currency planned will be issued from one or two centres - a question that has immense importance for Lukashenko's current economic policy, which guarantees his presidential power. This is also true of his goal of maintaining political control over companies and company policies when enterprises are taken over by Russian capital. A new Union Treaty will most likely be concluded in the near future and may be used by President Lukashenko for a referendum to "legalize" yet another term in office, his third. There are inglorious models for this among the CIS member states (Moldova, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan).

The coalition of the five candidates who filed applications to register for the presidential elections is no longer in existence. The initiative and responsibility for the strategy of the political and social opposition has fallen back into the hands of the political parties and the Consultative Council of the Political Parties in Opposition. As the period in office of the 13th Supreme Soviet ended in January 2001, the European institutions consider this once democratically elected body no longer in existence, although the Constitutional Court had decided in a lawsuit between the 12th and 13th Supreme Soviets that the outgoing Supreme Soviet stays in office until a new Parliament has achieved a quorum. The opposition draws the conclusion from this that because democratic elections have not been held, there has been no successor Parliament to the 13th Supreme Soviet up to now.

For the Parliament elected in 2000 to be recognized by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and/or for the special guest status in the Council of Europe to again be acknowledged, European institutions are demanding that the parliamentary rights be strengthened, the opposition have regular access to state-controlled mass media, the electoral law be democratically reformed and the prosecution of political opponents by bringing criminal charges against them be discontinued. Up to now, these kinds of steps have not been introduced. Also the European Union measures of the year 1997, which caused constraints in the relations, will only be able to be revised, when Belarus has moved sustainably, in the above-mentioned sense, towards a democracy according OSCE standards.

Against this background, one must reckon with a longer phase of tension between European institutions and Belarus. Thus, it is all the more important that the opposition parties emphasize their unity in the international arena as well as increase their ability to implement a common strategy in future elections. This may mean - for example in the municipal elections in 2003 - cam-

paigining for seats in several groups. In face of the continued control of the state over all large social organizations, it will also be important for the opposition, in panel discussions and dialogue with the various social forces of the country, to present credible alternatives to government policies in international relations and in the areas of economics, social security, culture and education with long-term goals.

It will also be important to create common structures for certain tasks, for example an information and press service, an efficient secretariat as well as bodies for common planning tasks (programme work) and for common activities in the international arena whose importance should not be underestimated. These problems go beyond the tasks of the expert groups that have been in existence for several years now (media questions, parliamentary rights, electoral law) in the style of the Consultative Council.

One cannot overlook that the rivalries within and between both wings of the political spectrum - within and between both the Social Democrats and the conservatives - is not beneficial to fulfilling this central task of the opposition. Up to now, the attempt to transform the Consultative Council of the Political Parties in Opposition into a "Council of Democratic Parties" or an "Alliance for Democracy" has failed.

The political structures of the political and social opposition within Belarusian civil society require comprehensive international support.

#### *The Development of Public Opinion in Belarus*

For years now, Belarusian social research institutes, which have achieved international standards, have been observing and analysing the mental state of the population. As is the case everywhere, the results are not conclusive in themselves but reveal contradictions that point towards divided opinion within the population. There are clearly recognizable differences between the urban and rural populations as well as between the generation branded by the Soviet system and the under 40-year-olds. The elites of the system and the society favour democratization according to European standards, i.e. separation of powers between the key state institutions (executive, legislative and judiciary). They spoke out against a second presidential term and evaluated the significance of the activities of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus very highly. The elites would like to see their country have good relations with both Moscow and the European Union. Transformation into a social market economy is favoured. Results of opinion polls after the presidential elections confirm that about 30 to 40 per cent of those in the population that took part in the elections voted for the coalition candidate Vladimir Goncharik. The large majority of the population is convinced the election results were forged. About 50 to 55 per cent of the population voted



for Lukashenko. In the spring of 2002, Lukashenko's popularity sunk to an all-time low. His popularity quotient now lies at 30 per cent.

### *Prospects and Recommendations*

1. European institutions should pursue a double strategy:
  - In dialogue with the regime, its willingness to implement substantial reforms should again and again be sounded out and in the case real progress is ascertained, but only then, an improvement in the status of the Belarusian institutions with European institutions should be undertaken.
  - The democratic political structures of civil society should be promoted systematically and in co-ordinated fashion so that they have a real chance in the elections to reach the voters and that votes are in fact recognized and do not suffer the losses of manipulation (independent election monitoring, coalition-building, international presence, ability to take action domestically, grassroots democracy).
2. The OSCE Mission will no longer have the scope that it had in the first four years of its activities in Belarus - even if the mandate is not changed. However, its presence can still be of importance domestically and should thus be maintained. In the case Belarus decides to close the Mission or to eliminate it *de facto* by refusing to grant visas to the international Mission members, Belarus must face the same sanctions as Belgrade experienced in 1992 after the Yugoslav authorities closed the CSCE Mission on Yugoslav territory - namely, the suspension of membership in the OSCE. It would also be possible and politically reasonable to continue the activities of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group outside the country.
3. Today, Belarus does not enjoy political priority in any of the chancelleries of European institutions and their member states. This raises doubts as to the credibility and seriousness of European institutions in their commitment to democracy in all European states. In Belarus, citizens expose themselves to attack to protect human rights and conduct free and fair elections. This commitment must be acknowledged and given support.