

Behind the Belarus Election: A Nation That Says, 'Just Try'

by Konstantin Chermnykh

People doubt that George W. Bush can tell Slovakia from Slovenia, or Uruguay from Paraguay. There is one country in Eurasia, however, not much larger than those, which is definitely accessible for the restricted capabilities of Mr. Bush's intellect. He can point it out perfectly on the political map, although this country is not a site of warfare or civil conflict; its citizens don't turn up on lists of international terrorists or religious fundamentalists; and it does not bother the U.S. State Department with requests for material and moral support (although, lacking both raw materials and an outlet to the sea, it certainly could). Still, this country constantly draws attention, like a white crow or a black sheep. It disturbs the sleep of any strategist of the new globalist order—because, for some mysterious reason, it remains an exception to this order, at least among the surrounding nations. From the standpoint of such a strategist, something must be done about it, but a multitude of attempts to intervene have turned up as humiliating failures.

This country is the Republic of Belarus, which, as the Soviet Republic of Byelorussia, was one of the Soviet republics with its own United Nations Mission, alongside that of the U.S.S.R. Today, attitudes toward this country and its leadership have become a kind of a litmus test: If you want to know something about an intellectual's political views, ask him about Belarus. His answer, and especially his arguments, will always tell you a lot. Just try.

In a much-publicized speech last summer, the President of the United States, carefully reading from a prepared text, named one after another the countries in the world that have made a choice in favor of what he called democracy. Two of them, by that time, were in a state of physical warfare. The others were facing desperate internal political conflicts. Belarus was not among them, but any diplomat or political journalist knew that it was on the long-ago composed waiting list.

In one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, a person expecting that a certain revenge will be exacted in a hundred days sees a number on his door, or on his ceiling, and each day it is a lower number. The mere fact of being on some kind of a blacklist is not a pleasant experience for any person, politician, or statesman. One needs to have certain specific personality traits to overcome this fear, especially upon realization that in today's glorified open society, one cannot know exactly where the global judge's agent is, and what

kind of surprise he is preparing.

Add in the fact that the number of strategic institutes and organizations, which used to service the Cold War, did not shrink after the end of that global rivalry. Add the fact that this Cold War finished off what had been declared an "indissoluble union of peoples." Add the fact that most of the instruments of this war are now focussed on your country, and are engaged virtually in a competition to create the best scenario to crush your unwanted regime for its blatant disobedience to the rules of the world order.

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka was not alone in this position. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov had similar grounds to feel insecure, at least since he stopped cooperating with political projects, designed for the sole purpose of cornering Russia. Karimov did resist, but the price of his resistance was paid in human lives, including many quite innocent lives. Generally, however, with respect to financial capabilities, as well as natural resources and defense forces, Karimov had more ways to protect himself.

In many respects, Alexander Lukashenka was less secure. His country shared a border with the European Union and NATO. The governments of two of the adjacent countries were openly hostile to him and his rule; a third country, along with the supposedly precious fruits of democracy, was enjoying transformation into a field of operations for sophisticated destabilization techniques; while relations with a fourth adjacent neighbor, Russia, were not as smooth as had been expected, especially as concerns its powerful corporations with their long and merciless teeth.

Despite all this, Lukashenka made a political decision which could only multiply the rage of his opponents, providing them with an additional argument for his illegitimacy: introduction of a constitutional amendment that permitted him to run for one more term. In addition, he insisted that the elections be conducted three months before the end of his term. One could imagine the rage of the international functionaries involved in the effort to topple him: three months of salary were gone!

This detail is important. From the position of an object of a political effort—a global one, without exaggeration—he put himself into the position of a subject. For any of his opponents, it was all too clear that his preemptive measures were not motivated by fear; it was not defensive behavior. The



Press Service of the President of Belarus

Alexander Lukashenko commissions an electric power plant, Dec. 30, 2005. Western experts who try to explain why their attempts have failed to unseat this politically incorrect but extremely popular President need to consider the positive effects of his rejection of globalist economics, and reacquaint themselves with Classical culture.

adversaries had been arranging plans, seeking instruments, hiring task forces, and calculating options in accord with their textbook science of political, economic, cultural, and mental intervention, on the basis of books like Zbigniew Brzezinski's infamous *The Grand Chessboard*. Lukashenko did not wait for the powerful pieces to corner him. He kicked the chessboard over, so that the well-prepared arrangements were hopelessly confused.

Just try, he said, as he was told about new foreign-made plans to "unseat" him. Just try.

What did this ambition rest upon?

Lukashenko knew he had an advantage of the sort that cannot be obtained in one day, or one month, or one year. Unlike other figures on the Washington-composed blacklist of "rogue dictators," he was protected from the rear. The economic and social policy he had conducted for years, since his first election, year after year and day after day, provided a base of support of a really unusual quality. Its essence cannot be described with terms like loyalty or obedience. The appropriate terms of characterization are not found in today's political dictionaries. They are: gratitude, confidence, hope.

Western analysts wonder why he is still "afloat." The term is inappropriate; he never was. He was firmly standing on his feet when he entered politics, and he radiated confidence to the population, which he has the habit of addressing not only on the eve of elections, but at any point of decision-making. Grain harvests, signing of international agreements, building a national library in the center of Minsk, replacing a government official—all of these were things he would talk about to

the population.

Without any teachers and without hiring advisors, he followed his own path, managing never to alienate himself from the population beyond the walls of his office, which remains as modest as it was ten years ago. Keeping the connection, he would address the honor of the population. Consciously or subconsciously, he was becoming a part of everyone's life; his success was viewed a common success; his mistake as a common mistake; an assault on him as an assault on the whole nation. His "try and attack me" sounded equal to "try and attack all of us." And he knew that.

The harder the enemies tried, the funnier their failures.

On March 20, the sparse pro-Western opposition, gathering for an unauthorized rally in Minsk's October Square, was dispersed not by the police, but with an unexpected heavy snowfall. "That is an unusual blizzard," said the most unlucky opposition candidate, Alexander Kozulin, subconsciously ascribing supernatural capabilities to the President.

The Colored Subjunctive

After an obvious failure, institutions that spend taxpayers' money on foreign operations are supposed to analyze their mistakes. In the case of Belarus, such a study is likely most complicated, especially today.

The international forces behind Alexander Milinkevich, the pre-selected "unified democratic candidate" (earlier, chairman of the Association of Resource Centers, which means the distributor of foreign grants among non-governmental organizations, or NGOs), clearly recognized that the



Three of the immediate neighbors of Belarus—Poland, Lithuania and Latvia—joined NATO and the European Union in 2004. The governments of Lithuania and Poland are hostile to President Lukashenka of Belarus. A third adjacent country, Ukraine, became a laboratory for sophisticated destabilization techniques, while relations between Belarus and Russia have been not as smooth as expected.

battle was going to be tough. But they expected a better result than the miserable 6% of the vote he received.

So did the Moscow experts. With formidable reference to the so-called “factor of exhaustion of popularity,” they predicted that Lukashenka’s score would hardly exceed 60%. This forecast belonged to Yuri Levada’s Analytical Center in Moscow—the real one, not the fake “Levada Center” to which some Minsk oppositionists attributed an exit poll showing only (only!) 47% for Lukashenka. (That was a really unique swindle in all post-Soviet history: the pro-Western opposition named their poll after a Moscow-based center, on the supposition that those irrational Belarusians would not trust a Western institution!)

In the rural areas, as before, the support for the President was higher, while in some Minsk districts rival candidates gained 25-30% of the vote. But, despite all the forecasts by experts from the West and from Russia, as well as national research groups, the difference was much smaller than five years ago. In 2001, the candidacy of the incumbent President Alexander Lukashenka was supported, according to official records, by 49% of the citizens of Minsk. This year that figure rose to 70%, and 82.6% nationwide, the highest result in the President’s political biography.

Other differences were registered in the Belarusian dias-

pora in the former Soviet Union. The lowest vote was in Moscow—around 75%; the highest came from Ukraine—almost 92%—and a number of Russian border regions, especially Kaliningrad and Krasnodar Territory. In quiet Estonia, where the Belarusian diaspora mostly identifies itself as Russian, the turnout increased by one-third over the level five years ago, and support for Lukashenka also exceeded 90%. This self-mobilization of the Belarusians can’t be explained as massive vote fraud, as U.S. and EU officials continue to insist, without formidable proof.

Alexander Lukashenka’s victory was anticipated by both his friends and his most aggressive opponents. No wonder. Anybody who has visited Belarus even once, would admit that games that may work conveniently in Kiev, Tbilisi, or, for example, Manila, would not work here.

In the typical scenario of a “color revolution,” some popular organization, institution or group of persons, possessing sufficient authority in the population, raises sufficient doubts around the official vote tally, to mobilize a sufficient number of the citizens for real unrest, paralyzing the incumbent regime and forcing it into a dilemma: either a brutal crackdown on their own people, or unconditioned surrender.

No such popular organization, institution, or group of persons existed in Belarus in 2001, when millions of dollars were poured into the opposition campaign of a bleak trade unionist, Vladimir Goncharik. It did not emerge in 2003, either, when well-trained professional organizers tried to get started in Belarus a movement analogous to “Otpor” in Serbia or the later Ukrainian example, “Pora.”

One of the key obstacles the destabilizers confronted, was the small possibility of speculating on social dissatisfaction and material greed. Special “reservations” for government officials and financial tycoons, so typical for Russia and Ukraine, did not exist here. There was no place comparable to Moscow’s elite community Zavidovo, or Kiev’s Koncha-Zaspa. Desperately poor towns and villages were similarly atypical. It was unclear how to launch revolutionary propaganda in a village street of nice brick houses, and a low level of social stratification.

The organizers, realizing that Belarus could not be cracked in the same easy way as Georgia or Ukraine, initiated their effort years before the elections. But the artificially planted “Zubr” movement, despite being named after a wild bull, failed to develop into a serious force, either official or underground. The strategists, who composed their plans in comfortable offices far away from Minsk, were probably unaware that a “ZUBR” Movement already existed. It was a semi-official organization, blessed by Lukashenka and composed mostly of youth, whose diametrically opposite mission was encoded in the name: Za Ukrainu, Belorussiyu i Ros-siyu—“For Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia.”

To organize masses of youth, eager to destroy the existing power structure, would require sufficient support from the street—from idle and desperate masses, who have no finan-

cial possibility for studying and no jobs to find. In 1994 or 1995 that might have been possible, but not by the end of Lukashenka's second term. Now, the great majority of Belarusian youth are either studying, working, or in military service.

The only option was to try to spread the opposition sentiment among scholars. That is why the person, finally recruited for the role of an alternative to Lukashenka, was a former professor.

The other option, similarly to the pattern of Serbia (Vojvodina Hungarians), Ukraine (Crimean Tatars), and Kyrgyzstan (the Uighurs), was to exploit the sentiments of ethnic minorities. The only numerous and relatively compact minority in Belarus was the Poles, living most densely in the western Grodno Region. That is why Alexander Milinkevich was picked from Grodno. But the traditional pattern did not work here, either.

The agents of destabilization stumbled against two unexpected circumstances. One of them was merely cultural. Most of the Polish minority in Belarus did not speak Belarusian. The Grodno-centered Catholic Polish culture of the towns was different from that of the Belarusian-speaking, largely Orthodox countryside. With the general revival of Christianity, which was as great in this country as in any other post-Soviet state, this difference had become only more significant. Surprising for the revolution-mongers, neither of the two religious communities was eager to oppose the state, for in the reconstruction of old churches and building of new ones, local officials and priests have worked side by side (as well as living side by side). Again, there was also no great social difference among the religious communities, which could be played upon in some way.

The second obstacle was the active involvement of the Polish minority in public affairs, as well as the high authority of state officials of Polish origin, associating their own careers and government service with the name of the President. The Parliament's Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, in particular, is half Polish. The attempt made last year to replace the loyal leadership of the Polish Cultural Association failed miserably.

The third precondition for success of destabilization would be, theoretically, at least one positive example of a "democratized" and happy country. There was none. Ukraine had already been regarded here as a badly governed and desperate area, a permanent source of street crime. The very image of Ukraine's "orange revolution," President Victor Yushchenko, did not contain a single positive feature for a Belarusian. Who is that man? A state banker? Has he improved the well-being of his people? If not, why is he worthy of admiration?

The year following that "color" revolution in neighboring Ukraine could convince a Belarusian farmer or worker, student or pensioner, only that this is the choice a reasonable nation *should not* follow, under any pressure or temptation,



The image of Ukraine's "orange revolution," President Victor Yushchenko, did not contain a single positive feature for Belarusians, who ask: Who is that man? A state banker? Has he improved the well-being of his people? The year since Ukraine's regime change could convince a Belarusian only that this is the choice a reasonable nation should not follow.

no matter what carrots and sticks might be used. In the western regions, close to the Polish border, the example of those neighbors—in many cases, including relatives—likewise offered little inspiration. The farther these adjacent economies had gone down the free market path, the less attractive they became for any farmer or worker, interested in working for himself and his nation.

This was no longer a matter of taste; it had become a question of values. These people were no longer an abandoned piece of a larger community, as many Ukrainians, especially intellectuals, still feel they are. Belarusians have saved too much, reconstructed too much, and built too much with their own hands, to regard it all as other than their own.

Dust in the Air

In an interview with a Russian web agency shortly before the election in Minsk, Dmitri Simes of the Nixon Center plainly admitted that a "color revolution" is impossible in today's Belarus. "We can't punish this country by rejecting assistance to it, as we can't deprive them from something

that they don't enjoy," he said.

Simes was a rare example of an analyst who honestly tried to save the face of his own President—by admitting that Mr. Bush's power and authority is not absolute. Others served Washington badly. That goes for the sponsors of the unregistered "Partnership" group, caught red-handed with exit-poll results for 107 precincts—ten days before the election—with the pre-printed forms, the ready-made "analysis" announcing the victory of Mr. Milinkevich, and a six-digit sum in U.S. dollars.

Even worse was a certain Global Democracy Fund, reportedly based in Indianapolis. On March 10, the *Lenpravda.ru* website reproduced the text of a plan called White Dust, prepared by this mysterious think-tank. The reader was left with a mixed feeling of amusement and disappointment, like a pupil who suddenly finds his teacher scratching his rear end like a baby.

The plan as made available on *Lenpravda.ru* resembled the fantasy of a disturbed mind in Freudian treatment. It suggested a massive revolt, which was supposed to start in the center of Minsk after the death or injury of Lukashenka's major opponent, Milinkevich, which naturally would be ascribed to Lukashenka's police.

For any Russian, acquainted with the methods of manipulation used by the disgraced and exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky, the scenario sounded quite familiar. Something similar was supposed to happen with Berezovsky's former political ally Ivan Rybkin, who was registered as a Russian Presidential candidate in 2004, with no prospects for victory, but with a definite prospect of being "disappeared" during a visit to Kiev just before the election. Rybkin was accidentally saved by those Ukrainian politicians who were cynical enough to take money from him and use it for different games. Milinkevich was saved by Belarusian intelligence. This intelligence service is hardly anything special in terms of skills and methods. It is simply capable, like Belarusian industry, agriculture, construction, and the armed forces.

Reflecting on the disgrace of the ousted Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, one should bear in mind that he could not rely on his own special services. In a recent Ukrainian publication, the newly appointed director of Ukrainian intelligence, the SBU, was described as a junior partner of an influential gangster. The same website honestly admitted that his opponent, who launched a campaign to discredit him, was a partner of another gangster.

No U.S. think-tank had confirmed or rejected the existence of the "useful sacrifice" scenario. Yet the very fact that the opposition refrained from initiating a street clash, a kind of action it had done many times before, may be evidence that Lukashenka's opponents at least admitted that their patrons were capable of playing that kind of game.

Some Lukashenka-haters in the Russian liberal community complained that the West's clumsy games have again played to Lukashenka's advantage. The leftist *Pravda.ru* web

site jeered on the same subject: "They [the West] realize that their services are backfiring. But it is probably too exciting, so they can't stop."

Generally a masturbator is really not a dangerous person. The Freudian scenario would not really shake Belarusian statehood. In case something bad really happened to the health of Milinkevich, success of the destabilization still remained improbable. From a cynical standpoint, it was not necessary for Belarusian intelligence to intervene. Most probably, the voters would anyway have rather trusted the leader of their country, than any explanation offered from the West. In addition, a leader who is really convinced of his authority does not need blood of his enemy.

Lame Arguments

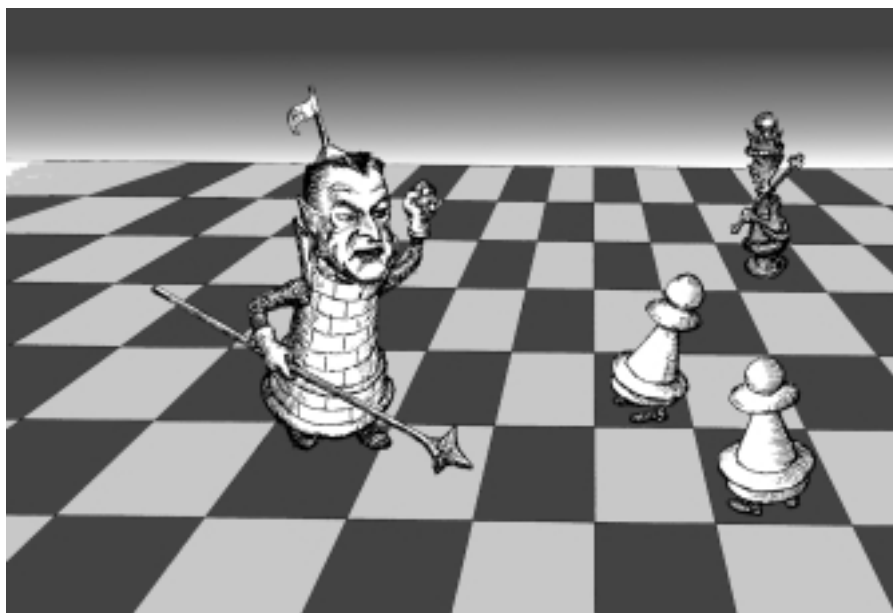
The ready-made explanation, or "excuse," for Lukashenka's success was available months before the elections. Experts referred not only to the authoritarian style of the Belarusian leader, but to some additional factors. In particular, there was the fact that Russia's Gazprom did not increase the price of natural gas exported to Belarus, unlike all the other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. This was supposed to serve as an additional argument in favor of Lukashenka, regarded as a foreign policy success.

Another argument, mentioned even before the opposition chose its own candidate, was the notorious lack of charismatic opponents. But that argument is too obviously lame. Any unbiased observer would admit that Milinkevich, selected as the "unified opposition" figure this time, is at least a more individual character than the faceless personalities of earlier candidates like Semyon Sharetsky or Vladimir Goncharik.

Two more arguments were raised in the Russian media after the elections. Sergei Baburin, representing a conservative patriotic community among the "conditional opposition" in Russia's State Duma, indicated that the extraordinary success of Lukashenka, as well as an extraordinarily high turnout (93.3%), resulted primarily from outside pressure.

Again, this was not quite true. Fairly speaking, the pressure was not as concerted as five years before. A number of European states, previously involved in destabilization efforts through various institutional channels—especially Germany—were now reluctant to serve as an instrument of political and cultural pressure. The financial clout of the networks, earlier tasked for such purposes in Poland and the Baltic countries, should also not be exaggerated. To some extent, they were discouraged. Weeks before the Belarus election, Vladimir Velman, the chairman of Estonia's Association for Democracy in Belarus, unexpectedly resigned. Without going into detail, he explained that some "radical" figures from the same institution, like deputy Marko Mihkelson, were engaged in "orange clownery" (sic), with no regard for the political realities of Belarus.

As Dmitri Simes admitted, the West would prefer that Moscow introduce a "change" in Minsk. The next phrase



Alan Yue

Assigned a losing part in a nasty strategic game—shown here in an illustration for Lyndon LaRouche’s March 1999 article, “Mad Brzezinski’s Chessboard”—Belarusian President Lukashenko did not wait for the powerful pieces to corner him. He kicked the chessboard over.

sounded ambiguous and a bit provocative, “But I’m not sure that today, this is possible for Moscow either.”

In 2001, in Minsk and Moscow, this author was told, by various sources, about four (!) scenarios for regime change in Belarus. One of them allegedly involved the chairman of the Belarusian State Security Service, who ended up quietly serving a prolonged posting as Ambassador in Belgrade.

The made-in-Moscow scenarios of that time were also reinforced with a massive attack in the liberal media, including through “daughter” papers issued in Minsk. The central instrument of this operation was *Izvestia*, co-owned at the time by the Lukoil corporation. The effort had a distinct smell of crude oil.

By 2006, the major problems with Russian corporations had been solved at the level of the Presidents of Russia and Belarus—even disputes with Gazprom, at least for the time being. The Russian leadership, having learned something from the events in Kiev, realized that a change in Belarus would bring no political benefit, and would inevitably be interpreted as “Moscow’s weakness.” President Vladimir Putin was sick and tired of this argument, excessively propagated through the global media after the “orange revolution” in Ukraine. After the Belarusian police, a week before the elections, seized several thousand copies of a forged pro-Lukashenko Belarusian newspaper (one more desperate invention of the opposition), the typesetter in Smolensk, where the provocative edition had been produced, was forced to break all its contracts with the Belarusian opposition press.

Thus it is obvious to the informed observer, that five years ago most of Lukashenko’s supporters had far more reason to mobilize in the face of foreign pressure from both West and East. Yet the 2001 result was far less convincing, and the turnout was lower. Why?

You will never find the answer in a Russian paper, whether loyal to the Kremlin or not. This answer is too uncomfortable for both sides inside Russia, though it lies on the surface.

In 2001, the most significant foreign factor, influencing the minds of Belarusians and other former Soviet citizens, was the exceptionally high popularity of Russia’s Putin. Millions of people of the former U.S.S.R. saw the young and energetic leader, originating from the once powerful KGB, as a figure, capable of re-establishing a new kind of union of the former Soviet peoples. The first disappointment came with the decision of the Russian govern-

ment to introduce foreign rates for rail travel and phone calls to all CIS countries. The next one was the exchange of passports, which meant real trouble for a lot of divided families, but was chiefly significant as an unexpected psychological blow.

What did that mean to a Belarusian? Just that he had to rely upon himself, and not have any illusions about a strong, just, and protecting authority in the Kremlin. Should he be blamed for forming his own standards for a state system and government leadership?

On Monday, March 20, Russian political commentator Mikhail Leontyev, once a furious Lukashenko-basher, claimed on his own TV show that Russia has no choice in Minsk except Lukashenko. This was the truthful part of his argument. The fraudulent part was that the vote of the Belarusians actually reflected an all-national enthusiastic choice in favor of Russia and the Kremlin’s policy.

Kremlin policy?... Which one?—today’s handshake with Hu Jintao or tomorrow’s flirt with VIPs from the G-8? Today’s founding of the State Military Industrial Commission, or yesterday’s elimination of benefits for the poorest layers of the population?

Which policy? Frankly speaking, I can’t imagine an average Belarusian—who is usually an educated person—inspired by the liberalization of trading in Gazprom shares, or by Russia’s entry into the World Trade Organization, which has been blessed in public by George W. Bush, the very self-confessed bitter enemy, as it is understood by the population

of the Belarusian nation.

Tell that one to your grandmother, Misha, as the Russians saying goes. The truth does not lie there. The point is not the choice between one political side and another. The values, which mobilized Lukashenka's supporters, like most values, don't have political borders.

"Outside pressure" is certainly not a sufficient explanation. Something else got more than 92% of the adult population out of their houses and away from their jobs, to the polls, to vote overwhelmingly for the internationally hated "white crow," adored at home. This "something" extends far beyond everyday political reality, including the West's political pressure as such, to which people in Belarus are accustomed. This "something" extends beyond the choice of a particular person, though to understand this, one has to address the person of Lukashenka, in some seemingly unimportant details of his personal behavior.

Harry Potter and Jesus Christ

This incalculable Lukashenka has been politically incorrect from the very outset of his career. As a parliamentary deputy, he demanded the investigation of financial crimes, including those involving international corporate interests. As a young President, he was invited to the British Embassy and offered money, but instead of expressing grateful loyalty, he raced to his parliament to say, "See, they just tried to bribe me." Like other Presidents in the former Soviet Union, he was offered the chance to purchase a personal aircraft in Moscow, and he chose the cheapest, two-seat version. As head of state, he could have sent his son to study at a university in the West, but both father and son decided that the education in their country is not inferior.

Not inferior to renowned European institutions? Not inferior to the Sorbonne or Oxford?

If the measurement is to be not merely statistical, it should start with the idea of education and, therefore, with what the result of an education is supposed to be.

In a modern Oxford English textbook, distributed in Russian cities through the British Council, a child cannot find any reference to human tragedies or social disasters; a child of 13, unlike a Young Pioneer in the Soviet era, is not supposed to be engaged in anything except fun. Fun, fun, and, once again, fun. Professions? Grow up to be an advertiser, a movie star, or a DJ. Nice books? Harry Potter, and once again Harry Potter. Forget about the old and outdated Dickens, Thackeray, and Jack London. These names, familiar to any Soviet-era schoolchild, have been ousted from today's school program. Music? The Classics are the Beatles. Again, not all of them. If a kid hears a song like "Revolution Number Nine," he might suspect that John Lennon was a Communist. And even "Lady Madonna" and "When I'm Sixty-Four" are too bad, because they suggest an echo of some troublesome reality. No, no, no! The "best intentions" of the authors can't allow them to publish anything by the Beatles except "Can't Buy Me Love."



European Union Contest for Young Scientists

Belarus student Dzmitry Makatun explains his winning project in the European Union Contest for Young Scientists to the Irish Minister for Education and Science. Belarus has put a premium on scientific and Classical education, and spurned the fantasy Harry Potter culture offered to youth in other countries.

A Russian who would like his child to be educated as a human being, and not as an ape, can feel only envy towards Belarusian parents, who are lucky enough not to know what the British Council is, because this institution does not dictate fashions or standards in Belarus. A Belarusian kid still enjoys access to real Classical culture, including Classical English and American language, from re-issues of some Soviet textbooks, as well as locally produced educational supplies. The basic texts, inherited from the European and American humanist traditions, illustrated also with Classical art, are still there. This heritage is not regarded as outdated. It is regarded as necessary as air, water, and bread.

This Belarus youngster is not forced to put on a Young Pioneer's uniform or swear oaths before a red banner. But neither is he locked in a destructive world of postmodernist virtual ghosts. Instead, he is allowed to enjoy the masterpieces of humanist culture, and thus to relive the experience of Classical characters, with their compassion for the poor, courage to speak the truth, and human dignity. This schoolchild's heart is open to the troubles and injustice of mankind, and welcome to think about how to overcome it. He is welcome to train his knowledge and skills in applied practice. He is allowed to feel the joy of productive labor, as the system of vocational schools, the laboratory of physical economy, is functioning and expanding. That is because the government of this country sincerely believes that in the absence of raw materials, easy to extract and ready for sale, a citizen needs to be skilled and trained in a broad range of assembly, chemical, and agroindustrial industry skills, and last but not least, in the military professions, as the Good won't survive if it does not have fists.

These elements produce a strange effect, which will be probably a subject of future studies: In this unusual country,

generational conflict is not a problem. That fact was demonstrated, in particular, in the March 19 national election, where the result of the vote did not display differences among the generations.

Classical culture plays a role that not easy to capture in words, except through contrasts. Many Belarusians are shocked by such a contrast, upon travelling to Moscow or the West, as soon as they look out the window, or open a Moscow-published popular magazine, or talk to a Russian teenager who can't name the dates of the beginning and the end of World War II, which once rolled mercilessly across his country, but can rattle off all the characters in the latest Harry Potter sequel.

Classical culture, without pressure and didacticism, introduces a certain view of the world, populated with real, not virtual, good and evil forces, and provides a myriad examples of personal and collective resistance to evil. A Belarusian Communist could ask Gennadi Zyuganov, chairman of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation: "Dear comrade, what were you doing last week in the company of financial tycoons and casino owners at a rock star's wedding bash? What were you doing at this *Vanity Fair*? A Belarusian businessman could ask his Russian partner, "Gospodin Ivanov, why don't you donate a bit of your money to an orphanage, full of little *Oliver Twists* of Russian origin?"

"What really shocked my people was this killing of Slobodan Milosevic," a Belarusian friend told me.

"Was he very popular in Belarus?"

"No. Since the Dayton agreements, we regarded him as a weakling."

"Then why?"

My friend was silent for some minutes, trying to choose an argument I could understand. "Your idiotic TV channels compare the Hague Tribunal with the Nuremberg Trials. Why don't they think of a better parallel?"

"Which?"

"The Leipzig trial."

The case of Georgi Dimitrov?"¹

"Yes."

That was surprising to hear from my friend, who is by no means a Communist.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand? The Nazis did not kill Dimitrov, although he was their worst ideological enemy. These guys in the EU are *less moral than the Nazis*."

Now, it was my turn to be silent. He went on, "See, it is not a question of Milosevic. The point is that this (European) bureaucracy is not Christian. They don't mention Christianity in their Constitution. They indict some war criminals from all the sides in the Yugoslav conflict, but have they ever said a word about the destruction of monasteries in Kosovo? Those

were, by the way, Christian churches, weren't they?"

As I am still silent, he asks: "Do you think we are all crazy here? We believe that *they* are all crazy."

I didn't argue. I just realized that now I had the complete answer, which could not be measured with statistics. These people have mobilized themselves not to protect their leader, but to stand for their truth—as they understood it from their own experience, and from comparison with a different reality.

Truth does not emerge from propaganda. Truth can't be imposed with force. It arises from the whole tissue of life, sparked with Classical culture and nurturing Classical values.

No sociologist can explain the result of the Belarusian vote, for just that one reason: Truth cannot be measured with statistics.

But it is powerful. And that is why the rulers of the new world order lose sleep, when the President of Belarus wins. This victory means too much. It means that incalculable phenomena of this sort are possible, and can be repeated.

The Price of Joy

In 1999, shortly before the Presidential elections in Ukraine, President Leonid Kuchma angrily said to his subordinates: "Why are you cheating me again? Do you want me to give you Lukashenka's kind of treatment?"

That was not the only indication that the Belarus example has been an object of envy by Ukrainian leaders. Here's a noteworthy coincidence, in the given context: Explaining Kuchma's easy and ignominious political surrender, a Ukrainian friend of mine said, "See, he was just afraid that if he tried to use force, he would be dragged to The Hague."

Kuchma never could introduce any Lukashenka treatments or Lukashenka strategy. To do that, one has to be born in a village where everybody is engaged in productive labor, providing needed goods for the people. One has to serve in a remote army unit, and be tasked with supervising morality there. Being elected to parliament, one has to establish a special commission for financial investigation, assembling a team of professionals that is later incorporated into the first financial monitoring ministry in a CIS country, established without instructions from the international Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), and reporting only to the head of the state. During the first Presidential campaign in Belarus, one had to not only oppose the candidate backed by the Moscow oligarchs, but also resist the whole allied complex of political, economic, and criminal circles. After winning, one had to start from practically nothing, from zero, and to rely only on one source of power—the millions of people who trusted him. One had to feel the pulse of this people, their immediate desires, as well as the immediate needs of the stalled economy. To make this economy viable, one had to establish a complicated and flexible strategy of foreign trade. All of these tasks together require not only skill, but hard and sustained labor

1. Dimitrov was Bulgarian Communist and Comintern leader, framed up by the Nazis for the Reichstag fire in 1933.

by this people, who had to be organized for the sake of their own future.

Steady 9% annual economic growth in Belarus, achieved in the physical economy, is the result of an enormous effort. Other former Soviet republics, possessing a much larger initial potential, can only dream of such success, not to mention such a level of economic sovereignty. Any of Lukashenka's colleagues in the CIS can only dream of responding to outside pressure as the leader of Belarus today can allow himself to do.

The day after the elections, the EU bureaucracy threatened Belarus with economic sanctions. "Lukashenka is laughing," headlined Moscow's *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. Instead of begging for mercy, he just reminded the European community that the national incomes of two of its new members, Lithuania and Latvia, are 30% dependent on exports from Belarus.

In his address to his nation a day before the elections, Lukashenka had said, "I guarantee that the future of Belarus will be decided solely by the Belarusian people." A lot of other politicians around the world are unable to guarantee the same for their nations, although they would like to.

They would like to have a people who would listen to them with such respect, with such confidence, and with such hope. But to obtain that result, the demands are too much for any of them.

Firstly, compassion for the people, and sympathy for their

natural values, associated with labor, and the joy of labor—something not found in economics textbooks.

Secondly, the courage to protect these people in the face of any authority, no matter how high, be it the skyscrapers of Wall Street, or the Kremlin towers.

Thirdly, a commitment to overcome evil locally, nationally, and globally.

I feel sorry for Mr. Kuchma's successor, President Yushchenko in Ukraine. His rule, arranged through a "color democratic" third round of elections, is obviously coming to an end. The major reason is not a lack of leadership talent, but the lack of courage even to convince his international backers of the "orange revolution" that the constitutional reform, invented by his unpopular predecessor for the sole purpose of staying in power, should be cancelled. The compromise he made, along with a lot of other compromises, is burying not only his career, as his split coalition is unable to win, but also the basis of Ukraine's statehood.

The parliamentary elections, which are to elevate the leader of the winning party to the position of Premier, are supposed to be free and fair. But the current campaign for the March 26 election has already swallowed at least 6% of Ukraine's GDP, and the legitimacy of its results will inevitably be questioned. A lot of voters' names are missing from the election rolls, since apparently the master list of voters, prepared for the 2004 Presidential elections, has mysteriously disappeared. Who is to blame? In the furious battle of clans, splitting the Government and local elites into pieces, it is practically impossible to trace who falsified what.

Most of the polls, conducted by Yushchenko's friends and foes alike, recognize that the Party of Regions, led by his former rival Victor Yanukovich, is going to receive the largest vote. But it will be a pyrrhic victory for Yanukovich's party, since his team will be faced with an avalanche of problems, multiplied during the "orange rule." And the head of the Party of Regions also has not demonstrated any excess of courage during this time, even to support of his own ostracized allies. All of his initiatives in the economy have been irreversibly undermined.

To follow the example of Belarus, Ukraine needs an outstanding leader, who is able to face the prospect of starting from nothing, and initiating the exceptionally hard, selfless, and physically dangerous work of transforming policy, the economy, and culture in the interests of the whole people, addressing a desperate nation with convincing words that are able to reach a pensioner and a child, an engineer and a farmer—words of compassion, faith, and hope.

Those values cannot be measured in terms of price. They are not traded in the market. But the potential they create still allows humanity to survive, as all the evil in the Universe is helpless before them.

The author is a Russian physician and writer based in St. Petersburg.

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