

Natalia Koulinka

## **Belarus and Its Flight From Democracy:**

### **Political discourse and the people's choice in the 1994 presidential elections**

*Abstract. This article seeks to answer the question of why the people of Belarus voted Alexander Lukashenko into office for the first time in 1994. Although, there is a significant amount of research on the topic, it remains unclear how the electorate was able to navigate and choose between the nearly identical promises of social justice and well-being made by all six candidates for the presidency in 1994. This article explores the texts written in the first years of the country's independence, from 1991 to 1994, by the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and its leader Zianon Paz'niak, and those that appeared on behalf of Lukashenko. The result of close analysis offers an explanation that attempts to decode the "voices" represented in these texts (namely, those of Paz'niak and Lukashenko). These "voices" were an expression of ideologies, which consequently introduced a new political discourse.*

*Key words: Belarusian opposition, presidential elections of 1994, political communication, discourse analysis*

The turn toward authoritarianism, which occurred in Belarus in 1996, is generally attributed to the obvious culprit: current Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko. In 1996, Lukashenko initiated a constitutional referendum, and with the support of 70% of voters, he dissolved the Constitutional Court and the legitimately elected the Supreme Soviet, and established a new National Assembly whose members were appointed by him alone. As of 2012, Lukashenko is still in power, and his actions over the last seventeen years have been violent and destructive to the very idea of rule of law.

Lukashenko's swift rise to power was preceded by the period from December 1991 (when the USSR was dissolved by a trilateral agreement between Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine), to July 1994,

when Lukashenko was first voted into office. The brevity of this period should not diminish the significant role it played in the modern history of Belarus. Reflecting on that time, Vitali Silitski notes that Lukashenko's success "was made possible by the fair degree of political openness that had followed the demise of communism" (2010, p. 281). However, Lucan Way argues that it was "pluralism by default" which caused "the inability of incumbents to enforce authoritarian rule," as well as a lack of "a robust civil society, strong democratic institutions or democratic leadership" (2003, p. 4). These assessments underscore another feature of the period: dramatic and unexpected changes in political, social, and economic life occurring within Belarus. But above all, the status of Belarus as an independent state gave birth to a new discourse. This emerged as a dialogue in the context of a Soviet Communist past, expectations of a democratic, Western-style future, and claims of a "third way" for Slavic civilization. Among its aims was a task of unprecedented complexity: to make people accept an evolving, radically new social reality. This discourse manifested itself, first of all, in a process of communication initiated by new political elites, consisting of texts produced within new political parties and groups. Prime examples of this new discourse existed during the presidential campaign of 1994.

This article seeks to rationalize the choice made by Belarusians during the 1994 presidential elections. For this purpose, two groups of texts are analyzed. The first consists of texts created within the most influential party – the Belarusian Popular Front "Adradzhen'ne" – and those written on behalf of its leader Zianon Paz'niak. This selection includes the party's core political document, the program upon which Paz'niak's pre-election platform and leaflets were based. On the opposing side, Lukashenko and his campaign team produced their program and published it in the newspaper *Zviazda*. This article begins by examining the existing scholarly and popular explanations for the people's choice in 1994. It then proceeds with a review of the political landscape in the early years of Belarusian independence, and concludes with an analysis of texts published in 1994, on behalf of Zianon Paz'niak and Alexander Lukashenko.

#### THE INCOMPLETENESS of EXPLANATIONS for the 1994 ELECTION RESULTS

Alexander Lukashenko won the 1994 presidential election with the support of over 80% of voters in the second round (57% of the Belarusian electorate overall). His rival, then-Prime-Minister Viacheslav Kebich, received 14.17%. The phenomenon of this victory drew wide attention both within and beyond Belarus. President Lukashenko and those who voted for him have been subjected to the close scrutiny by researchers, public intellectuals, and journalists. The explanations that have emerged range from the obvious to those hidden deeply within the history of Belarus. The following review, however, is dedicated to a goal beyond mere classification. The purpose is to put these explanations into a broader informational and discursive context in order to reconstruct the environment and circumstances surrounding this event in 1994.

Exploring factors that facilitated Lukashenko's election, Pavel Sheremet and Svetlana Kalinkina, Belarusian journalists and co-authors of the book *Sluchainii President* [*An Accidental President*, 2003] claim that the reason was simple: Lukashenko could speak with people in a language they understood. Indeed, like many Belarusians, Lukashenko speaks "Trasianka," incorporating a Russian vocabulary with a Belarusian accent. But in the social environment of contemporary Belarus, "Trasianka" is not so much a way of pronunciation as it is an unmistakable marker of low social status, signaling a lack of culture and education. Despite tremendous changes in Lukashenko's appearance and speaking manner since that time, he is unable to completely overcome this pronunciation, which continues to be an audible reminder of his origin. Another explanation existing in the same framework was introduced by Alexander Feduta, a Belarusian researcher, public intellectual, and journalist who was one of the key members of Lukashenko's campaign team in 1994. In his book *Alexander Lukashenko: Politicheskaiia Biografiia* [*Alexander Lukashenko: Political Biography*, 2005], Feduta refers to Lukashenko's "anti-corruption speech." As head of the parliamentary anti-corruption committee, Lukashenko delivered the speech at the end of 1993, and according to a commonly accepted opinion, the speech turned the once rank-and-file MP into a real political figure. Feduta writes, "Lukashenko caught the essence of the Soviet mentality.....that if somebody lives in better conditions than we can afford, then this person is our enemy" (Feduta, 2005, p. 103). Feduta also recalls that the campaign team's efforts were focused on engaging underclass voters. According to Feduta, "The only feature that could distinguish our electorate was its extreme lumpenization" (Feduta, 2005, p. 124). Feduta also cites Petr Kravchenko, a former high level Communist Party official who at the time of the interview was a prominent member of the opposition:

As a politician he [Lukashenko] was born not on the podium of the parliament. As a politician he was born in a bathhouse in the town of Shklov [near the place of Lukashenko's birth], where naked, with a bath basin in hand he listened to half-drunk villagers. They were "cutting" (резали) the truth and he was gaining information about people's lives and what bothers them (Feduta, 2005, p. 363).

Rationalizing Lukashenko's triumph by pointing to the low social and cultural status of his voters is part of the mainstream perspective concerning the voters' choice during the 1994 election. In this regard, the response to critics of ordinary Americans by the authors of the book *The New American Democracy* seems relevant. They write, "Many people fall short of the ideal, but it is the ideal that is unjustified" (Fiorina.... [et al.], 2007, p. 137). This comparison reveals the difference between political cultures of two countries. In Belarus, despite an articulated commitment to democratic values, the tendency to ignore people as a meaningful political force was a significant factor in the period that preceded the 1994 elections. After the elections, the trend became even stronger and more evident.

In opposition to this trend, another approach has crystallized, though it has never been as popular as the first. It is presented most consistently in the writings of Elena Gapova, who insists on critically examining the Belarusian liberal intelligentsia, the core of the Belarusian opposition to Lukashenko. She argues that by supporting individualistic values of liberal democracy, intellectuals and opposition politicians have been promoting the interests of their “class” which were (and are) not always congruent with what many people in Belarus regard as the common good. The prominent Belarusian philosopher Valiantin Akudovich, who once noted that there was no practical sense concerning freedom of speech and association for those in Belarus who make their living by hard work on the land, because they have a different lifestyle. To this statement, Gapova writes that having read this acknowledgement, she expected Akudovich was just about to say that unless “we” [the intellectuals] do something that would make sense for those who live off their hands “our project” will achieve neither moral right nor legitimate perspective. But he did not say this. On the contrary, Gapova writes, he expressed regrets saying that evidently, intellectuals and common folks had very different scopes of responsibility. That is why, “he wished there would be more of ‘us’ (intellectuals) to remove ‘the social province’ to where it belongs and should be; for then the province would worry about the issues that are appropriate for them, and we would take care of those belong to us” (Gapova, 2010, p. 212).

In many works, Gapova further elaborates on the idea of class division, with a language and style of speech indicating social positions associated with income inequality. This process developed rapidly in Belarus between 1991 and 1994, but was interrupted when Lukashenko came to power. The same logic informs the argument of Grigory Ioffe, who emphasizes the disparity separating social groups in Belarus since the collapse of the USSR:

...most of his [Stanislau Shushkevich, head of the first independent Belarusian Supreme Soviet] fellow countrymen were ill prepared for independence. While a few Minsk-based intellectuals were able to convert the newly emerging freedom into some sort of social capital, materialized through contacts with the West and with its financial support, most Belarusians saw their lifelong savings evaporate and their quality of life plummet. (Ioffe, 2008, p. 110)

A newspaper article titled, “Portret intelligentsii na fone ruin” [“A Portrait of Intelligentsia against a Backdrop of Ruins”] published in *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, the largest Russian-language state-run newspaper, converts this seemingly speculative conclusion into a plot from real life. The journalist recounts his discussion with a prominent member of the National Academy of Sciences, who in the course of the discussion noted that his most resourceful colleagues had left for the West to wait out the times of hardship (Efanov, 1993).

When the results of the latest presidential elections in December 2010 were announced, the contentious dispute between proponents of the two explanations resumed with new vigor. However, the debate now takes place primarily through online social networks.

An article by Coit Blacker and Condoleezza Rice titled, "Belarus and the Flight from Sovereignty" offers yet another explanation. The researchers discuss Lukashenko's tripartite pre-election pledge, "to provide strong, no-nonsense leadership, to restore social discipline, and to seek the closest possible ties with Russia" (Blacker & Rice, 2006, p. 242). They pay special attention to the third point and remark that in promising to resume a close relationship with the Russian Federation, Alexander Lukashenko met the expectations of the majority of Belarusians "to return to familiar ways," invoking the Soviet era. (Blacker & Rice, 2006, p. 242) Moreover, the results of a European Barometer survey seem to confirm this explanation. Belarusians participated in the survey in 1992 and 1993, and when questions tested their attitude toward the USSR, the answers revealed positive associations. In 1992, for example, Belarusian respondents rated the Socialist economic system a 76 on a scale ranging from -100 to +100, and this number rose to a 78 the following year (Rose, 2006, p. 32). The former Communist regime was rated as a 60 and 64 in these respective years (Rose, 2006, p. 22).

Other facts, however, contest this explanation. The same survey, conducted in 1993, found a relatively small number - 34 percent - of Belarusian respondents desired the restoration of the former Communist regime (Rose & Haerpfer, 1998, p. 33). The unpopularity of this course was also confirmed by the first-round results of the presidential elections. The Communist candidate received only 5% of the vote, the worst result of any of the six candidates for the presidency. At the same time, it is widely known that in the March 1991 Soviet referendum, nearly 83% of eligible voters in Belarus supported the idea of living in a renewed federation of equal and sovereign republics. Yet, less than a year later, on the question of the dissolution of the USSR and creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 69% of respondents in Belarus welcomed the decision.

The suggestion that Lukashenko's promise to restore the relationship with Russia was a decisive factor in his victory may also be questioned. His rival in the second round of the elections, Prime-Minister Viacheslav Kebich, employed a similar slogan: "In my life, I have two interwoven goals: the well-being of the Belarusian people, and unity with Russia." Moreover, on the eve of the second round, *Sovetskaia Belorussiia* published a number of articles praising the successful restoration of ties with Russia and emphasized that the success was possible because of Kebich's efforts. In one such text, the organization "Popular Movement of Belarus" called on its members to vote for Kebich, and declared that e-results of the first round of the elections showed that the, "people had chosen unity with Russia, a bilingual state policy, social protection, and stability." From this organization's point of view, the only politician who could guarantee all of these goals was Kebich (*Sovetskaia Belorussiia*, July 30, 1994). It should also be noted that with one of the largest circulations, *Sovetskaia Belorussiia* had significant influence, especially outside the capital city. This particular issue published 422,169 copies. Other politicians competing for the presidency made similar promises in their pre-election programs. Even Zianon Paz'niak, of the Belarusian Popular Front, fearful that his lack of emphasis on unity with Russia might hurt his chance of

victory, published a special leaflet (in Russian, no less) titled “*Chto Zenon ne budet delat*” [What Zenon (Russian spelling of the name Zianon) Will Not Do]. One of the six promises was that he would not sever economic ties with Russia.

Belarusian attitude's experienced a high degree of uncertainty in the period. Compared to political leaders and party members, the populace did not hold firmly fixed views. Their actions and decisions were, rather, defined by common sense. In a similar situation, Morris P. Fiorina noted that American attitudes are ... multidimensional, and therefore, “most Americans cannot reasonably be called left-right ideologues..... I do not consider this a fault of the electorate.” Fiorina contends, “on the contrary, the electorate does not oversimplify and distort a complex reality as political elites do” (Fiorina & Samuel, 2009, p. 16).

The allusion to people's nostalgic feelings is usually paired with explanations connecting Lukashenko's victory with the Belarusians' dearth of a national consciousness, as well as their preparedness “to sacrifice independence if they could be assured of an improvement in their economic well-being” (Marples, 1996, p. 125). Marples made this observation over the course of several visits to Belarus in 1992 and 1993. The researcher also points to a growth in the number of citizens who expressed nostalgia for Soviet times, and asks why Belarusians have sacrificed their language and even “lost interest in their own history” (Marples, 1996, p. xviii).

These observations and explanations, however accurately they reflect the Belarusian reality in the first years of independence, have limited explanatory potential due to the underlying presumption that the outcome of the 1994 election was due the ineptitude of the people. The famous Belarusian political commentator Liudmila Masliukova caught the presumption and wrote in *Sovetskaia Belorussia*: “Someone may complain that the people fall short of the ideal. They are, however, what they are, and there are no others. Their choice is a law for those who represent their interests” (Masliukova, 1992).

The stated purpose of reconstructing the environment within which the people's choice was made would remain incomplete if we fail to draw attention to another factor. It is a fact that the USSR did not collapse because the Soviet people struggled for Western democratic values. Moreover, a long history of ideological disputes in the Soviet press on the definition of “democracy” render the term vague, while people grew immune to the line of reasoning itself. An article, “*Chem izmeriat' demokratiiu?*” [“How Should Democracy Be Measured?”] in a 1977 issue of *Literaturnaia Gazeta* illustrates this point. Its author reproached the American Foundation for Peace, while speculating about the meaning of democracy, human rights, and freedom, on the basis of the Foundation's conferral of the American Medal of Friendship to a German media owner (Svetov, 1977). Fifteen years later, *Sovetskaia Belorussia* attempted a more balanced and scholarly approach to the topic in the article, “*Democratii: kak ee ponimat?*” [“Democracy: how it should be understood?”]. Its author, a scholar, drew attention to the fact that democracy as a form of political governance has different models (Rovda, 1992). The article, however, presented a sporadic case

that could not radically change people's attitudes. Moreover, the very appearance of such a text could have been motivated by an attempt to counteract the efforts by every new party to appropriate the term "democracy."

It was a competition in consumption, which the Soviet Union lost, that heavily contributed to its collapse. In this regard, it is also necessary to note the perception that the Soviets held about the West. In his book *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, Alexei Yurchak applies the notion of the "Imaginary West" (Yurchak, 2005, pp. 158 – 206). He emphasizes that the vast majority of the Soviet population derived its understanding of Western life from the "debris" of consumer goods (jeans, plastic bags with eye-catching images, beer cans, labels of fashion houses, etc.), which were periodically available to people in the Soviet Union. This imagined Western lifestyle could not help but affect people's expectations of their own lives when the Soviet Union dissolved. Moreover, these expectations have been reinforced by the assurances of new political leaders. In April 1991, for example, when Minsk factory workers took to the streets demanding an improvement in their economic conditions, the political flyer "K Belorusskomu narody" ["To the Belarusian People"] was prepared with the help of opposition MPs. Among other declarations it stated: "The market means prosperity and a decent wage; it means property allocated to each person." Finally, if people were more interested in consumer products than freedom, this resulted from the absence of the former between 1991 and 1994. According to European Barometer in 1993, 71% of Belarusian respondents indicated that they felt greater freedom of self-expression (Rose, 2006, p. 21). At the same time, 82% of respondents claimed that economic conditions in their households had been better in the past (Rose, 2006, p. 39). These seemingly disparate facts are actually parts of the same factor – the legacy of the past that was an objective reality in Belarus during the early years of independence. Summing up the observation of the socio-political environment on the eve of the elections, it can be claimed that a significant part of the population - while holding the expectations of prosperous life - found themselves in economic hardship, disoriented, and uncertain about their future.

However, the puzzle of the people's choice remains. All of the 1994 presidential candidates offered similar, even identical promises to the Belarusian people. Every candidate promised a socially-oriented economy and state-sponsored care for the poor, unemployed, retired, and physically and mentally handicapped, as well as care for children and families with multiple children. They also promised to maintain free education and medical care. Paz'niak even promised to reimburse the money to bank accounts that had been lost due to inflation and devaluation. The similarity of the candidates' promises meant that when making a final decision, people likely were not responding to the promises themselves; rather, they reacted to something hidden between the lines. The following analysis aims at unveiling those implicit meanings hidden in the texts produced on the eve of the presidential elections, on behalf of Zianon Paz'niak and Alexander Lukashenko.

## THE LATENT AUTHORITARIANISM and the NEW POLITICAL DISCOURSE

The long-forgotten diversity in public opinion was, among other factors, fertile ground for the rapid growth of competing political parties and socio-political movements. The first alternative to the Communist party was the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF). Although its statute was registered by the Belarusian Ministry of Justice in July 1991, the movement had emerged in June 1989, with its founding congress convening in neighboring Lithuania. By the spring of 1991, five parties had been formed. Following the 1994 presidential elections, *Sovetskaia Belorussia* informed its readers of a gathering of the leaders from 26 parties and seven socio-political movements in the Supreme Soviet to discuss a possible electoral system for the coming parliamentary elections (Ivanovo, 1994).

The process of party building signaled the birth of new political elites, which was characterized by two main tendencies. First, there was the low number of those who chose to be party members, or at least, support one as a “friend.” According to a guidebook published by the Belarusian Academy of Sciences in 1992, the number of members and supporters of different parties varied at the end of 1991, from the 150 members in the Belarusian Christian Democrats, to the 1,000 people who in some way or another belonged to the Belarusian Social-Democratic Granada. The party with the highest membership, the Belarusian Popular Front, claimed about 15,000 people, according to the same source. The reason for this may have been the discrepancy between views held by the new elites and the average Belarusian. This discrepancy, coupled with the generally low level of political participation was evidence to the weakness of the opposition and justified the emerging criticism. One particularly critical opinion was voiced by political scientist Nikolai Kuznets, who in 1996, wrote that an impressive number of parties indicated neither the democratization of the country, nor the satisfaction of variety of views in the society. He wrote, “These parties did not address the problems of citizens and did not represent all social strata of the society.” (Kuznets, 1996, p. 16)

It can be argued, meanwhile, that the weakness was in fact, a consequence of the lack of support, rather than a cause of it. In this regard, Krill Koktysh, a Russian political scientist, discussed the demonstration in Minsk organized by the Belarusian Popular Front in May 1991, on the fifth anniversary of Chernobyl tragedy (Koktysh, 2000, p. 31). The researcher indicates that the BPF did not usually enjoy wide support: the party won 25 seats in the Supreme Soviet elections of 1990, which can be considered as victory. However, BPF did not have much influence on the legislative process or the executive branch. Its radical nationalism and a heavy emphasis on the, “Belarusian language issue” impeded the faction’s collaboration with other political forces. Nevertheless, the demonstration initiated by the BPF in May 1991 brought 100,000 Belarusians to the streets. Koktysh concludes that when the party reflected Belarusians’ actual concerns, it received enormous social support.

The second significant feature of the party building process was the constant attempt by new leaders to create a "centrist" political force, and their repeated failures to do so. The primary reason for this was a disagreement between the parties regarding the toll that society can and should pay now for its prosperity in the future. Belarusian Social Democrats, for example, in February 1992, initiated the creation of the, "New Belarus" bloc in order to unite democratic forces. The initiative, however, did not receive support from other parties, and especially the Belarusian Popular Front. The parties did not agree with the bloc's primary objective, suggested by the Belarusian Social Democrats, to protect people from impoverishment. A journalist from the independent newspaper *Svaboda*, created in 1990, reported on the meeting. The author noted the participants' opinion as to the impossibility of creating any bloc without the BPF, because it would result in disagreement between political parties. As for the BPF, it refused to join "a bloc which does not have any clear political agenda" as argued by one of its leaders, Yury Khadiko (Pankratovich, 1992). In the same year, journalist and political analyst Anatolii Maisenia warned in *Sovetskaia Belorussia* of the danger of the old regime's restoration due to the absence of a new party or coalition to fill the gap between the left- and right-wing political poles (Maisenia, 1992). On the eve of the 1994 elections, sociologist and member of the National Academy of Sciences, Evgenii Babosov repeated this warning in a *Sovetskaia Belorussia* survey, showing that Lukashenko was far ahead of his rivals, with the support of 20.5 percent of workers interviewed; Prime-Minister Kebich garnered 8.4 percent of respondents' support, and BPF leader Paz'niak received 5.1 percent. Babosov stated that the lack of political unity was damaging, but above all, the disregard for the working-class voters could cost candidates the presidency (Babosov 1994).

The Belarusian Popular Front was the most powerful party nominating a candidate for the 1994 presidential elections. Its nominee was party leader Paz'niak, a historian and archeologist who had revealed "Kurapaty," the secret burial place of Soviet citizens executed by the KGB, and who in 1988 initiated the creation of the BPF. The front attracted the most prominent old national Belarusian-language intelligentsia, including Vasil' Bykau, Nil Gilevich, Adam Mal'dzis, and Rygor Baradulin. Overall, from the first days of BPF's existence, political scientist Olga Denisiuk writes, the party absorbed two main categories of politically-active Belarusian "dissidents": "nationalists" concerned with the "national issues" and "democrats" who adhered to general democratic values. Nationalists sought primarily to resolve national problems – namely, to revive the Belarusian language and culture, and subsequently, under control of nationally-conscious citizens, to implement democratic changes. Democrats, on the contrary, believed that the most important issue was to build democratic institutions guided by rule of law, for only afterward would it be possible to solve economic, social, and national problems of Belarusian society. "The nationalists won," notes Denisiuk (2003, p. 143).

Belarusians' attitude toward the BPF and its leader has never been simple. Discussing Paz'niak, among other candidates for the presidency, *Sovetskaia Belorussia* immediately

emphasized how his name alone evokes an emotional response: some ardently support Paz'niak, while others completely reject him (*Sovetskaia Belorussia*, June 16, 1994). Another newspaper, *Svaboda*, telling the story of the U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit to Belarus in 1994, notes that Paz'niak was not enthusiastic about the U.S. Ambassador's invitation to participate in a meeting between President Clinton and Belarusian democratic leaders. His opinion was that not all invited leaders were truly democratic. Finally, Paz'niak decided to join the group, but with the aim of explaining to President Clinton the "real" situation of the democratic opposition in Belarus (Pankratovich, 1994a, 1994c). Paz'niak's political leaflets point out the most significant details of his biography: he was born in a Belarusian village; his father perished in World War II and his mother raised him alone; he had always opposed the Communist rule, and this critical attitude toward the party had impacted his career. In a leaflet prepared especially for the female electorate, Paz'niak claims: "The Belarusian Popular Front has always said and will say the truth to Belarusian people. So far all its predictions have come true. It means that they will be true this time, too: our children and grandchildren, for sure, will be happier and wealthier than we are."

Lukashenko, a political "outsider," as Vitali Silitski called him (2010, p. 280), was another candidate whose name provoked strong emotional responses and ambivalent feelings in people. On the one hand, as Feduta points out, Lukashenko was ridiculed by fellow MPs and the media: journalists from *Svaboda*, as well as leading members of the BPF made fun of him in newspaper texts, and after his election, *Svaboda* published a number of angry and offensive articles about Lukashenko and his supporters (Hlebus, 1994; Hryniavitski, 1994; Ivanouski, 1994; Maksimovich, 1994; Pankratovich, 1994b; Shavanda, 1994; Zaneuski, 1994; Zaunerka, 1994). On the other hand, despite direct and indirect pressure on state-run newspapers (i.e. nearly all newspapers) to support Prime-Minister Kebich, many journalists, as well as some editors, sympathized with Lukashenko, and particularly with his zeal to protect the common people. In this context, the fact that Lukashenko's program was the only one published twice in the oldest Soviet, Belarusian-language newspaper, *Zviazda*, arouses suspicion. The newspaper explained that certain sentences disappeared due to technical problems when the program was published for the first time, so the decision was made to re-publish it (*Zviazda*, June 11, 1994). It is also intriguing how *Sovetskaia Belorussia* presented Lukashenko. For example, an informational article published on the eve of the first round of the elections mentioned Lukashenko's name 14 times. In the same issue, an article on Prime-Minister Viacheslav Kebich, though three times longer, contained only three mentions of Kebich's name. To present himself in a newspaper article, Lukashenko selected the following main facts from his biography: he was born in a Belarusian village; he grew up without a father; and he has never been in power, meaning he "never lied to people" (*Sovetskaia Belorussia*, June 16, 1994). Lukashenko also managed to attract young and talented Belarusian politicians and intellectuals to his campaign team, including Victor Gonchar, Valerii Tsepka, and Alexander Feduta.

As evident in the candidates' self-presentations, certain facts were presumably important to the electorate, and two candidates emphasized them. But such similarity in the self-presentations made the candidates, in a sense, similar to each other. A final significant detail related to this issue is Zianon Paz'niak's statement at a party rally after his defeat in the first round of the elections. As *Svaboda* reported from the rally, Paz'niak claimed that Lukashenko had appropriated the results of anti-communist and anti-government propaganda that had been practiced by the BPF for years (Chuiko, 1994). This can mean that both candidates, in fact, tried to engage the same segment of the electorate. Thus, once again, the question emerges: what distinguished the two candidates from each other sufficiently enough to enable the election of Lukashenko?

Five months after the elections, Liudmila Masliukova wrote in *Sovetskaia Belorussia* that, "the voice of Alexander Lukashenko was the voice of the people themselves. Though sometimes hysterically, he stated in a full voice people's burning problems" (Masliukova, 1994). Her statement highlights an important concept, "the voice" that seems to have an explanatory potential for the purpose of the article. At the other extreme, summing up the first round of the elections, Paz'niak claimed that the Belarusian mass media was monopolized by the government, and therefore presented the BPF as a nationalistic and annihilating force (Chuiko, 1994). While there is no doubt that the party had a negative image, it is unclear to what extent its "collective voice," as embodied in the texts and campaign materials created on behalf of Paz'niak, was responsible for this image, ultimately influencing the opinion of the electorate.

The concept of "voice" belongs to a theoretical legacy of Mikhail Bakhtin, who applied it in an analysis of "heteroglossia," another term coined by Bakhtin. Although, the scholar has never developed the concept's definition, its meaning can be derived from a line of synonyms in which the concept has been included. In "Discourse in the Novel," for example, Bakhtin combined in one line: "two voices, two world views, two languages." (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 325) In a basic sense, he follows the diversity of voices up to a socially prefigured language. Applying Bakhtin's idea to our purposes for this article, it should be admitted that the candidates' voices were imbued with social structure of the society and "prefigured in language itself" (ibid, p. 326). This current article, however, by applying the concept "voice," puts emphasis on the problem of what makes a voice "sound" in a written text, or which structural components of the text define how it sounds. Therefore, the next step of analysis will be to delineate the "voices" of the two candidates. As noted above, all of the candidates promised social justice, security, and prosperity. In other words, paying attention to *what* they said will not help to explain the people's choice. Rather, I will seek to clarify *to whom* these promises were addressed; in another sense, we will examine how these candidates framed their electorate. In addition, it is also important to identify how candidates defined the "enemy" and who should be punished. In order to shed light on this issue, this analysis will focus on the following materials: the BPF's second program adopted in May 1993; Paz'niak's campaign

leaflets and economic program which were published in *Zviazda* on 11 June 1994; and Lukashenko's program, which also appeared in *Zviazda* on the same date.

Immediately noticeable in Lukashenko's program is the number of times the word, "folk" is used. Indeed, in a text that occupies an area equal to half of a page of *The New York Times*, this word alone appears 19 times. Overall, the electorate whose rights the candidate vowed to protect, is defined by such words as, "people" ("людзі"), "the working man" ("рабочы чалавек"), and "the folk" ("народ"). Simultaneously, Lukashenko does not separate himself from "the folk," applying the pronoun "we" each time he warns about the unavoidable difficulties and the necessity to work hard to achieve a, "stable life and progress" (Lukashenko, 1994). It is noteworthy, however, that Lukashenko does not specify to how precisely he proposes to lead people. The words, "stable life" and "progress" despite their loose meanings, are the only ones that describe some presumably ultimate goal. Nevertheless, this lack of certainty likely goes unnoticed by the reader, perhaps due to the program's implicit engagement of the reader's imagination in the creation of a personal image of the country's future. For those whose living conditions plummeted, its statements promise to stop the rising cost of living and the general impoverishment of the population. At the same time, the text offers some hope for a new class of Belarusian entrepreneurs by indicating the reduction of internal government spending, as well as state support for the production of consumer goods and exports. Incentives to dream are offered even to those whose main goal is the creation of democratic society, when the text mentions, "the social democratic state with a rule of law" (Lukashenko, 1994).

Another important feature is the absence of certain words in the text. The word, "farm" for example, indicating a private agricultural unit, which had provoked heated debates, is absent, as is the word "market," which had alarmed many Belarusians. The ideas on how to improve the collapsing agricultural sector are presented in the following way: "The president will oppose the collapse of the system of collective farms, but will facilitate the processes of their natural transformation in structures that are more effective and profitable for those who work on the land" (Lukashenko, 1994). The word "reform," likewise unpopular among the population, is used only once and in the context of the "structural improvement of consumer goods production." Finally, the idea of a strong state and state power is articulated very clearly; it is repeated throughout the text, and employed only in a positive context. The candidate discusses "the destiny of the state" and "security of the state," declaring that state control of the economy is an opposition to anarchy and lawlessness and should not be confused with the return to a command-administrative system. In general, the Lukashenko program combines a Western-style structure – with strong logic proceeding from the description of a problem to definition of the goals and the means to achieve them – with the familiar ethos of a Soviet-style narrative. Additionally, problems of "science, culture, and education" always appear together, and always behind the description of economic

policy. Thus, summing up the first question of *to whom* candidate Lukashenko speaks, it is fair to say that the circle seems very broad – possibly the whole population.

The Belarusian Popular Front was the only political force in Belarus that developed a solid and detailed economic program, and Paz'niak was the only candidate who presented the party's economic strategy to the public as one of his promotional materials. Published in a newspaper, the strategy included domestic economic policy, land reform, and agricultural and foreign policies. It originates in the party's second program, which begins with the declaration: "The BPF inclines neither to the left nor to the right.....it not the party of a narrow, particular group but, rather, a movement that seeks to reflect and protect the interests of the Belarusian people."

The first subtitle of the economic strategy published in *Zviazda* asks, "What legacy will Z. Paz'niak receive from the Kebich Administration?" (Paz'niak, 1994). The ethos of the entire text addresses shifts from a people to a leader and leadership. Although, Paz'niak employs the phrase, "our folk" once, and the phrases, "the population of Belarus" and "our peasants" several times, his rhetoric, intended to identify with an all-encompassing audience, hardly achieves the desired effect. The lack of direct forms of address, such as "people" or "folk," especially in comparison with Lukashenko's platform, along with other features of the text which will be discussed further, withholds the feeling that he is addressing the entire population of Belarus.

Paz'niak's attempts to define an audience which could identify with the text are rather indirect. By contrast, in Lukashenko's similarly-sized text, the word "reform" is repeated ten times in his strategy. Each time, it appears in reference to radical changes in the economic, financial, political, and social status of the country and its citizens. Expounding his views on the agricultural policy, for example, candidate Paz'niak declares first and foremost that all factories processing agricultural products will be privatized and corporatized. Paz'niak's enthusiastic support for market reforms, however, outlines a perspective that could satisfy the interests of only a limited number of Belarusians. There are several other declarations that were problematic for many in the country, but at the same time, they point clearly to the specific groups which could identify with the goals. By promising to "quickly make the transition to free purchase and sale of all goods and resources," and by proclaiming "the absolute value of property and the protection of private property as a basic principle of economic reform" (Paz'niak, 1994), the candidate actually defines his electorate. In one leaflet, he lists the "life, freedom, and property" of citizens as three main values that the Belarusian state would protect. But the electorate outlined in this way is much narrower than the total population of Belarus. It should be added, however, that this bias was noticed, and in his leaflets, Paz'niak made attempts to balance by promising "owners of luxurious palaces will pay taxes that will go to fund social welfare for retired people and children" (Paz'niak, 1994).

The tendency to regulate and provide detailed prescriptions for private life, along with the assertive tone of the texts, creates the feeling that the state under Paz'niak would have sought total

control over people's lives. His strong concern for the family, embodied in the declaration that women were solely responsible for the upbringing of children gives credence to such fears. A possible feature was state control over what kind of culture the population would be allowed to enjoy. Paz'niak stated in one of his leaflets, "We should develop rich Belarusian culture ... the primitive mass culture should not be allowed."

Thus, in his presentation of the future to the electorate, the candidate from the Belarusian Popular Front advanced from the party's perception of a proper society. By unveiling his (and the party's) views on family and cultural consumption, Paz'niak displayed attempts to regulate dreams, values, and wishes that people should have. This could not but add indicators of authoritarianism and coercion to "the collective party's voice," and automatically, to the voice of Paz'niak himself.

Paz'niak's texts, which defined "enemies" as those who prevent people from creating a happy society of shared wealth, strengthen this impression. Such leaflets displayed the necessity to revive the Belarusian nation, compulsively using the adjective "Belarusian." Paz'niak discusses the Belarusian state, money, army, women, and girls. Finally, he claims that jobs should be available foremost for Belarusians. In one leaflet, he promises that Belarusian citizens will have priority in hiring decisions. Then, everything that relates to the existing state is presented as negative and worthless. It is a place of corrupt bureaucrats who should and will be punished as soon as the national Belarusian state replaces the old socialist state machine. Everything good and just he relates to only the new Belarusian state. "The BELARUSIAN [*emphasis added*] state will create the conditions for a happy and calm life for the elderly generation" says one such leaflet.

It cannot go unnoticed, that Paz'niak seemed to be the only candidate who called the enemy by name. In his leaflets, he obsessively pointed to Prime Minister Kebich and his administration as the cause of all failures. Although, in Belarus from 1991-1994, few were satisfied with the politics of Kebich and his administration, such preciseness in defining the enemy was not something to which the people were accustomed. It cannot be known for sure how this affected the electorate, but it definitely added toughness to the "collective voice of the party," as well as Pazniak's own voice. The impression became even stronger with the vocabulary of punishment that was presented in abundance in Paz'niak's leaflets. Even though all threats were directed toward corrupt state officials, or the army and police, the compulsive focus on "Belarusianness," along with the aforementioned aspects of Paz'niak's voice, could have evoked fear that the party and its leader would protect citizens' interests and rights only as long as they shared the views and ideology of the Belarusian Popular Front. This is why the promise to protect "interests of ALL [*emphasis added*] citizens of the Belarusian state regardless of their nationality, religion, or political views" (Paz'niak, 1994) may not have rung true with the electorate.

Alexander Lukashenko's program also contained a threatening vocabulary. The following example in another context could be interpreted as a capitalist form of incentive, but in Belarus between 1991 and 1994, it was perceived as a threat. Lukashenko promised, "The practice of

correlation between the salary of directors and the commercial success of their factories will be introduced” (Lukashenko 1994). He also threatened to introduce state control over prices by punishing directors of organizations and companies, appropriating their commercial profit if they raised prices without justification. However, there is a critical difference between the voice of Lukashenko and Pazniak: Lukashenko avoids the restrictive adjective, “Belarusian.” This provides an ambiguous image of the nation’s future, and narrows the category of “enemies” to corrupt officials, and inefficient and irresponsible business leaders. The majority of “common” Belarusians could not qualify themselves as those who would be punished. On the contrary, they were assured that the state would protect their rights, so long as they work faithfully and honestly.

In short, having declared its adherence to values of democracy, the Belarusian Popular Front and its then-leader failed in communicating with people. The desire to impose their vision of a proper society on everyone in the country in a sense equated the BPF with the Communist party; like the latter, the former had its own understanding of the common good; the only thing it required from people was to follow the party, and to march in the direction it selected for them. In comparison with Paz’niak, whose voice sounded authoritarian, Lukashenko appeared populist and harmless to the majority of voters. As such, in choosing between nearly identical promises of well-being and social protection, the voters in 1994, preferred the candidate whose voice, above all, addressed nearly all of them. Moreover, for the majority, there was no danger to vote for him as they did not identify themselves as enemies, facing potential punishment if he were to win.

## CONCLUSION

The period between 1991 and 1994 was in many ways the most intense, promising, romantic, and ambiguous period in modern Belarusian history. Perhaps its most intriguing feature just prior to the elections of 1994 was that that all six candidates for the presidency promised to create a state of prosperity, keeping all social benefits intact. As addressed earlier, these basic similarities prompted the question of how the electorate made its choice. Since Lukashenko’s victory in 1994, many explanations have been put forward by scholars, journalists, and intellectuals within and beyond Belarus. Despite the diversity of opinions, nearly all explanations tend to blame the electorate. However, this does not address the question of how the electorate navigated the choice between nearly identical candidates. A close reading of Lukashenko’s and Paz’niak’s campaign texts proves useful in defining the nuances that distinguished the voices of the two candidates; indeed, these subtleties may have ultimately determined the outcome of the elections.

Taking the results of this analysis into account, it is possible to conclude that the flight of Belarus from democracy occurred before 1996. This departure dated back to the period between 1991 and 1994, when new political parties and their leaders, first and foremost the Belarusian Popular Front, failed to change their inherited Soviet attitude: that people had no meaningful role

in defining the country's future. They failed to negotiate with the people in an attempt to find a shared understanding of the "common good." Further research might address to what extent this reluctance to cooperate, negotiate, and take people seriously (instead of making fun of them), contributed to how the events have developed immediately after the 1994 elections.

#### REFERENCES

Bakhtin MM 1998, 'Discourse in the Novel,' *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* ed. Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 259 – 422.

Blacker, C & Rice, C 2006, 'Belarus and the Flight from Sovereignty,' *Problematic Sovereignty* ed. S. D. Krasne, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 224 – 251.

Denisiuk, OL 2003, *Neformanie ob"edineniia. Obshchestvenno-politicheskie dvizheniia, partii v SSSR: predposylki, stanovlenie, razvitie (1985 - 1991)*, Mn.: BGU.

Ioffe, GV 2008, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Feduta, A 2005, *Lukashenko: Politicheskaia biografiia*, Evg. Budinasa, red., M.: "Referendum."

Fiorina, MP.... [et al.] 2007, *The New American Democracy*. Alternative 5<sup>th</sup> ed., New York: Pearson Longman.

Fiorina, MP & Samuel, JA 2009, *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Gapova, E 2010, 'Anxious Intellectuals: Framing the Nation as a Class in Belarus', *In Marx's Shadow: Knowledge, Power, and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia* ed. C. Bradatan and S. Oushakine, Lanham (MD): Lexington Books, pp. 197 – 218.

Koktysh, KE 2000, *Transformatsiia politicheskogo rezhima v Respublike Belarus': 1990 – 1999*, M.: Moskovskii obshchestvenno-nauchnyi fond: OOO "Izdatel'skii tsentr nauchnykh i uchebnykh programm."

Kuznetsov, NV 1995, *Politicheskie partii Belarusi: ot istorii k sovremennosti*, Mn.: NKF Ekoperspektiva.

Marples, DR 1996, *Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe*, St. Martin's Press, Scholarly and Reference Division, 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010.

"Pragrama Belaruskaha Narodnaha Frontu 'Adradzhen'ne'," 1993, Minsk, 30 Traunia. Archive, the Hoover Institution, Belarusian Special Collection, Box #1, accession # 2008C58–97.05

Rose, R 2006, *Diverging Paths of Post-Communist Countries: New Europe Barometer Trends since 1991*, Survey Measures of Democracy, University of Strathclyde.

Rose, R & Haerpfer, Ch 1998, *Trends in Democracies and Markets: New Democracies Barometer 1991-98*, Survey Measures of Democracy, University of Strathclyde.

Silitski, V 2010, 'Contagion Deterred: Preemptive Authoritarianism in the Former Soviet Union (the case of Belarus),' *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World* ed. V. Bunce, M. McFaul and K. Stoner-Weiss, Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 274 – 299.

Sheremet, P & Kalinkina, S 2003, *Obyknovennyi prezident, Iaroslavl*, "Niuans."

*Spisok politicheskikh partii, obshchestvennykh organizatsii, ob"edinenii, dvizhenii Respubliki Belarus' na 20 apreliia 1992 goda.* Akademiia Navuk Belarusi, Addzel navukovai infarmatsyi pa gumanitarnykh navukakh Ministerstva Iustytysi RB. Tematychny zbornik (belarusistyka) № 17 Palitychnyia partyi I gramadska-palitychnyia rukhi Belarusi, Minsk, 1992. Archive, the Hoover Institution, Belarusian Special Collection, Box # 5.

Way, LA 2003, *Pluralism by Default: Challenges of Authoritarian State-Building in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.* Center for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow G1 1XH Scotland.

#### Newspapers

Babosov, E 1994, 'Popytka sotsiologicheskogo prognoza v preddverii budushchikh vyborov,' *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, 2 Aprelia.

Chuiko, V 1994, 'Soim Narodnaga Frontu dyrashyu ne galasavats', *Svaboda*, no 26, Iiul'.

Efanov, V 1993, 'Portret intelligentsia na fone ruin,' *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, 9 Ianvaria.

Hlebus, A 1994, 'Chubchyk Lukashenki,' *Svaboda*, no 14, Krasavik.

Hryniavitski, M 1994, 'Tavarysh prezident abiatsae usikh nakarmits': adnykh – kaubasoiu, druhikh - "balandoiu",' *Svaboda*, no 27, Lipen'.

Ivanouski, S 1994, 'Shto takoe liumpentstva,' *Svaboda*, no 27, Lipen'.

Ivanova, S 1994, 'Cherez mnogopartiinost' – k demokratii?', *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, 5 Noiabria.

Lukashenka, A 1994, 'Advestsi narod ad bezdani,' *Zviazda*, 11 Chervenja.

Maisenia, A 1992 'Kot Leopold i natsional'noe soglasie,' *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, 6 Marta.

Maksimovich S, 1994, 'Dzhyn, neabachлива vypushchany z butel'ki,' *Svaboda*, no 21, Cherven'.

Masliukova, L 1994 'Aleksandr Lukashenko kak vyrazitel' narodnogo chuvstva', *Sovetskaia Belorussiia*, 13 Dekabria.

Masliukova, L 1992 'My, Narod Respubliki Belarus'...', *Sovetskaia Belorussiia*, 8 Dekabria.

Pankratovich, P 1992, 'Dva Belarusy – try partyi', *Svaboda*, no 1, Liuty.

Pankratovich, P 1994 (a), 'Klintan khocha sustrettsa z Paz'niakom dvoichy', *Svaboda*, no 2, Studzen'

Pankratovich, P 1994 (b), 'Narod vybrau novaha bats'ku. Tsikava, chym usio heta skonchyttsa?', *Svaboda*, no 27, Lipen'.

Pankratovich, P 1994 (c), 'Paz'niak pavazhae Ameryku I prezydenta', *Svaboda*, no 2, Studzen'.

Paz'niak, Z 1994, 'Ekanamichnaia Pragrama kandydata u prezidenty Zianona Paz'niaka,' *Zviazda*, 11 Chervenja.

Rovdo, V 1992, 'Demokratiia: kak ee ponimat'?', *Sovetskaia Belorussiia*, 6 Avgusta.

Rouda, A 1993, 'Presa – na lantsuhu. Kebich krychyys': "aty!,"' *Svaboda*, no 5 – 6.

Shavanda, A 1994, 'Svoi u doshku muzhyk,' *Svaboda*, no 26, Lipen'.

*Sovetskaia Belorussiia* 1994, 'Ni s levymi, ni s pravymi...', 16 Iiunia.

*Sovetskaia Belorussiia* 1994, 'Kordinatsionnu komitet Narodnogo Dvizheniia Belarusi prizval svoikz chlenov golosovat' za Kebicha,' 30 Iiulia.

Svetov, B 1977 'Chem izmeriat' demokratiuu?', *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 4 Maia.

Zaneuski, A 1994, 'Ne nuzhno iskat' u belorusskogo naroda nedostaiushchikh izvilin,' *Svaboda*, no 27, Lipen'.

Zaunerka, A 1994, 'Lukashenka: "Ja – nishchy!"', *Svaboda*, no 15, Krasavik.

#### Leaflets

"Belaruski Narodny Front 'Spraviadlivas'ts' i Paradak'," 1994. Archive, the Hoover Institution, Belarusian Special Collection, Box #3 Accession # XX800 – 51.05.

"Darahiia Zhanchyny!" 1994. Archive, the Hoover Institution, Belarusian Special Collection, Box #3 Accession # XX800 – 51.05.

"Chego Zenon ne budet delat'," 1994. Archive, the Hoover Institution, Belarusian Special Collection, Box #1, accession # 2008C58-97.05.