

# Europejski wybór dla Białorusi

# European Choice for Belarus

# Эўрапейскі выбар для Беларусі

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## Belarus before and after 19 March – Possible Scenarios

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### I. Scenarios

- The presidential elections in Belarus on 19 March 2006 will not comply with democratic standards. The course of the electoral campaign alone proved it, as the oppositional candidates were deprived of basic rights, e.g. the liberty to hold election rallies. It is very likely that the voting results themselves will be falsified. Regardless of the election outcome Alyaksandr Lukashenka will be announced winner. This is why scenarios presented in the text do not concern the course of elections and the election results themselves, but a possible development of events in Belarus, especially after 19 March 2006.
- It is difficult to predict how the situation in Belarus will develop, hence the need to prepare several scenarios of events for both pre- and post-elections time.
- Yet before the elections the EU (the Austrian presidency) should issue a statement condemning Belarusian authorities' actions against the opposition (arrests, beatings, confiscation of elections materials etc.) and, above all, warn the Lukashenka regime that using force against peaceful demonstrations will meet with a particularly harsh response of the EU.
- The EU should be prepared to undertake specific measures, which will be applied adequately to the development of events. And more so because the EU (the Austrian presidency) threatened that it "will take further restrictive measures against the responsible individuals if the elections are not conducted according to international standards and in line with Belarus' commitments in the OSCE." This warning cannot remain an empty threat.
- Relatively few possibilities stay at the EU's disposal, as far as potential sanctions against the Lukashenka regime are concerned. Many diplomatic sanctions are out of question – Belarus' relations with the EU are frozen (e.g. the PCA is not binding) and the country is not a member of the Council of Europe. This is why the EU cannot put pressure on the Belarusian regime e.g. by threatening to suspend its membership in the Council of Europe or to limit relations with the EU. Having little room for maneuver the EU must care-

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fully think over application of particular sanctions and which of them should be applied in different scenarios. Majority of applicable sanctions (e.g. visa restrictions for representatives of the regime) should be introduced in every of the following scenarios. The question is scope of their application.

- Apart from negative actions against the regime a positive response for the opposition (which is at least equally important) should be thought over. The response should vary depending on the scale of the authorities' repressions against the opposition.
- Several detailed scenarios are presented below – arranged in the order of their probability. Each of them comes with potential negative and positive actions of the EU.

### 1. 2001 Scenario

The scale of election manipulations and the official results are similar to those in the 2001 elections. Protests of opposition's followers are relatively not numerous (up to dozen or so thousands of people in Minsk). The police and/or the military are passive or use coercive measures to a limited extent. The demonstrations come to an end after 2–4 days without any particularly brutal pacifications. The scale of repressions against representatives of the opposition is not significantly increased, i.e. there are no mass arrests or sentences spanning several years for opposition leaders and no democratic parties are made illegal. It should not be ruled out, however, that Alyaksandr Milinkevich and/or Alyaksandr Kazulin and some of their closest collaborators are arrested for several days or weeks. The OSCE and the EU routinely state that the elections did not comply with their standards and declare them null and void. Russia announces that Alyaksandr Lukashenka was legally elected for his third term.

The scope of sanctions against Belarus should be at least symbolically broadened. It seems appropriate to direct them at the people responsible for improper course of the elections. Visa sanctions should involve chairpersons of all the district electoral commissions and members of the Central Electoral Commission, chiefs of the military and the police, as well as leaders of the public media, who are responsible for censoring statements of the oppositional candidates and misinforming the society.

The EU should convince candidate countries, particularly Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey to join the sanctions (it is important, because representatives of the Belarusian regime often spend vacations in these countries). Names of people who are subject to visa sanctions should be made publicly available; a list of them should be placed on EU's websites, and through them also on the websites of independent Belarusian newspapers, European media and NGOs. This should contribute to the pressure against people who are subject to sanctions. It may turn out, however, that the sanctions are not always executed efficiently due to technical reasons. The EU could threaten the Belarusian authorities to introduce more sanctions, should the repressions against the opposition become harsher. These new sanctions could include e.g. freezing bank accounts of the regime's representatives in EU member states' banks.

The post-elections EU announcement should include declaring determination to break the information blockade in Belarus and to support Belarusian media more resolvedly. It is particularly desirable to launch an all-day television channel in the Belarusian language. The Belarusian problem should be raised more intensively in the EU's, the EU member states' and US talks with Russia. A special plenipotentiary for Belarus should be appointed.

### 2. 2001 Scenario, but with Harsh Repressions against the Opposition

There are significant repressions against the opposition and participants of demonstrations. Many people are arrested and receive prison sentences spanning several months or even years.

Apart from the visa sanctions from the first scenarios, it should be considered, whether not to freeze bank accounts of the regime representatives in the EU member states and to encourage the USA, Switzerland and EU candidate countries to do the same. Brussels could threaten to introduce "gradual" economic sanctions against Belarus, should the repressions escalate.

Besides the positive actions from the first scenario, particular EU member states should also organize help for the oppressed and their families. The help does not necessarily have to take form of a formalized fund, but it could be coordinated between the member states.

### 3. The Authorities Use Force (a)

After the elections street protests of many thousands people begin and intensify. There are brutal pacifications of the manifestations: beatings, arrests. The authorities accuse the opposition of an attempt to overthrow the government. Consequently, opposition's leaders and majority of their collaborators are imprisoned. Majority of political parties and some NGOs are made illegal.

The EU announces visa sanctions for several thousands of people: chairpersons of district and oblast electoral commissions, chiefs (and also officers) of the police and/or military formations that suppressed demonstrations, leaders of the state media. Bank accounts of the regime representatives are frozen on a larger scale than in the second scenario. Limited economic sanctions are imposed against selected enterprises, which are particularly important for the regime. The EU member states (or at least some of them) lower the level of their diplomatic relations with Belarus: the ambassadors in Minsk are recalled and the Belarusian ambassadors are declared *personae non gratae*.

Apart from the positive actions from the second scenarios an EU fund to help the oppressed is created additionally. Attempts are made to pressure Russia to exert influence on Belarus.

### 4. The Authorities Use Force (b)

The same description as in the third scenario. The police and/or the military open fire against the demonstrators, there are killed and wounded. The situation in Belarus becomes the principal subject of media interest not only in Europe.

The scope of sanctions is broaden compared to the third scenario. An embargo against Belarusian goods is introduced, as is a ban on exportation from the EU to Belarus. Lowering the level of diplomatic relations, and in case of some EU states even breaking off the relations. The latter should apply to states, who do not have diplomatic representatives in Minsk. It would be a mistake to close embassies in Belarus, because they are a symbol of the EU countries' involvement in the Belarusian affairs for the opponents of Lukashenka. Introducing a ban on participation in international events for Belarusian athletes.

Apart from the positive actions from the third scenario the EU prepares to host political emigrants from Belarus.

### 5. Quasi-Ukrainian Scenario

Mass street protests begin after the elections and they intensify quickly – in several subsequent days tens of thousands of people gather on the main street of Minsk. There are also demonstrations against the electoral frauds in oblast capitals and in some district cities. The police and/or the military are surprised with the scale of protests and do not intervene.

The EU, acting in agreement with Russia, extends an offer of mediation. Neither the Poles, nor the Lithuanians are mediators on the EU side (the Swedes should not be ruled out). Multilateral negotiations (the authorities, the opposition, the EU, Russia) lead to the elections being repeated. Alyaksandr Lukashenka does not, however, participate in the repeated elections.

### 6. Radical Violation of the Rules of the Game before the Elections

In the first variant of this scenario both Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin are arrested a few days before the elections, but not crossed off the list of candidates. Alyaksandr Lukashenka wins the elections, the scale of social protests is small and they end quickly. In the second variant of this scenario one or even both oppositional candidates are crossed off before the beginning of the voting. It seems improbable for only Alyaksandr Kazulin to be excluded from the election, as such a measure would work to the advantage of the united opposition's candidate.

In the first variant it is obvious that the European states should react very severely and demand for the arrested to be released, in the second variant the OSCE should be called on to withdraw its observation mission and to introduce diplomatic and economic sanctions (described in the first and second scenario).

## II. Situation before the Election

The current electoral campaign in Belarus is completely different from the 2001 presidential campaign. Lukashenka regime's actions against the Belarusian opposition and the representatives of

the EU countries and the USA are much harsher. On the other hand, the democratic opposition – and first of all Alyaksandr Milinkevich's staff – is much better organized than it was five years ago, and its activity is noticeable not only in Minsk, but also in other Belarusian cities, both big and small ones. It seems that a considerable part of the Belarusian society is open to the rhetoric of the democratic politicians. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily have to translate into Belarusians' massive participation in protest manifestations after the election.

## 1. The Activity of the Belarusian Regime

The last months, and especially the last weeks showed that Lukashenka's regime was increasing the scale of repressions against the Belarusian opposition. The number of arrests rose, as did the number of searches in the offices of organizations, who engage in oppositional activity. The anti-oppositional propaganda was intensified in the media and especially in the electronic media who are fully controlled by the authorities. The activity of the oppositional candidates – Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin – within their electoral campaigns is often declared to be illegal by the representatives of the regime or by the Central Electoral Commission, which is also controlled by the government. Electoral leaflets were confiscated, some representatives of the electoral staffs were arrested. The regime also resorted to using force – as it happened in the case of Kazulin, who was beaten on March 2. The authorities also demonstrated the possibility of using force – e.g. by making it difficult for a Milinkevich's election rally to be held in the center of Minsk on the same day.

Belarusian authorities have denied the right to enter Belarus from many politicians, NGO activists and journalists of the EU countries, USA and Ukraine. An example of such policy was the blocking of EU and US high representatives' common visit to Minsk in January 2006; the representatives wanted to meet with both members of the Belarusian opposition and of the government.

While using repressions, the Belarusian regime tries to keep up the appearances of legality. The authorities agreed for the OSCE and also the Lithuanian Seimas to send an election observation mission. Contrary to prior fears, the representatives of the opposition were registered as candidates for the presidential election.

According to the electoral statute, as candidates they are allowed to appear in the state television and radio.

All the time there is an intensive propaganda campaign, presenting Alyaksandr Lukashenka as the only person, who can be the Belarusian president. The peak of the campaign was the third All-Belarusian People's Assembly, during which Lukashenka presented his program for the next three years in a three hour speech. It is worth noticing that national tones, similar to the oppositional rhetoric, are more and more noticeable in the actions of the government.

The conduct of the Belarusian authorities during the presidential campaign can be described as typical for authoritarian regimes, which, attacking sharply their opponents, try to keep social support. One may have the impression that Lukashenka and his closest collaborators are more and more concerned by the course of events, which is getting out of their control. This contributes to the nervousness in their actions, an example of which could be the censuring Milinkevich's and Kazulin's television and radio appearances. The first programs of the two oppositional candidates were broadcast by the Belarusian television without any interference in the contents.

## 2. Two Campaigns of Opposition

Out of the three registered candidates (besides Lukashenka) only Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin are real competitors of the incumbent president. Haydukevich – who also participated in the 2001 election and gained 2,5% of votes – is not a part of the opposition to the government and is only a "technical" candidate, who acts in agreement with the presidential camp. Milinkevich is the common oppositional candidate, chosen at the Congress of Democratic Forces in October 2005 and enjoying the support of almost all major Belarusian political parties and oppositional organizations<sup>1</sup>. Contrary to Kazulin, he has never been an apparatchik of the Lukashenka's regime.

Alyaksandr Kazulin is known primarily as former dean of the Belarusian State University in Minsk

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<sup>1</sup> More on the Congress of Democratic Forces and on the process of appointing a common oppositional candidate can be found in: W. Konończuk, *Towards Unity. Belarusian Opposition Before the Presidential Elections*, Stefan Batory Foundation, December 2005; <http://www.batory.org.pl/doc/towards-unity.pdf>.

and as former minister of education. He was the first dean ever to be directly nominated by Alyaksandr Lukashenka and he was believed for a long time to be “a president’s man”. After a conflict with the president and a Kazulin’s dismissal in 2003 he joined the opposition and became engaged in political activity.

### ● Milinkevich’s Campaign

Alyaksandr Milinkevich’s campaign, which *de facto* started in the fall 2005, has had from the very beginning two dimensions: internal and external. Directly after the Congress of the Democratic Forces the united opposition’s candidate started an intensive tour of Belarusian regions, holding many meetings with the voters in towns and cities. Due to the lack of access to the media this was the only way to reach the Belarusians. The polls showed that this method of campaign was relatively efficient. After three months of an intensive electoral campaign Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who in the beginning had been almost completely unknown to the Belarusian society, was recognized by 54% of Belarusians – even before his appearances in the Belarusian television and radio.

After being granted the official candidate status by the Central Electoral Commission Milinkevich started to hold election rallies. They enjoyed a wide interest of the Belarusians. Besides Minsk, where at least 3 thousands people came to a rally, in the smaller cities several hundreds up to two thousands people participated in every meeting with Milinkevich. Particularly the meetings in the regions show that the united opposition’s candidate enjoys a considerable support, and that his electoral campaign arouses considerable interest.

In the last phase of his campaign Milinkevich started to use more radical rhetoric. In the beginning of March he did not exclude the possibility that if he received more than half of the votes, “taking over of the power would be performed immediately”. This change of attitude of the united opposition’s candidate was most probably caused by the unexpected radicalism of Kazulin, who attacked Lukashenka sharply.

In the end of 2005 and in the beginning of 2006 Milinkevich made a few foreign visits, meeting with EU politicians, among others: the president of the European Commission, chancellor of Germany, presidents of Lithuania and Poland, ministers of foreign

affairs of France and Czech Republic, he also spoke at the Council of Europe, at the European Parliament and at the Polish Sejm. The aim of the meetings was to present himself as the leader of the united opposition and to gain international support, as well as to popularize the Belarusian question in the UE. Milinkevich’s foreign campaign was a big success: not only was he acknowledged as the leader of the democratic opposition, but also the Belarusian question permanently became one of the crucial issues the EU foreign policy faces. On the other hand Milinkevich tried to convince Russia, among others during four visits to Moscow, that he is not a anti-Russian politician, and that his potential victory would not translate into a crisis in the bilateral relations. His assurances were not, however, accepted in the Kremlin, and most of the Russian media did not stop treating the opposition’s common candidate as a Belarusian nationalist.

### ● Kazulin’s Phenomenon

It is still not entirely clear to what degree Kazulin is an independent politician. In the beginning of 2005 he created a social movement “Nation’s Will”, which he did not manage to transform into a mass organization, and he took leadership of the Social Democratic Party Hramada, one of the most powerful Belarusian political parties. The party joined the “10+” coalition, but soon started to distance itself from the rest of the opposition. Representatives of Hramada did take part in the Congress of Democratic Forces, but it was boycotted by Kazulin himself, who considered the assembly only a phase in appointing a single candidate for the presidential election. There are not many known people in his electoral staff, and his activity is based on the Hramada’s regional structures. Kazulin started his electoral campaign late and in the first phase it was passive and focused on few meetings with the voters. It was not until the middle of February that he started to intensify his campaign, attacking sharply the regime and personally Lukashenka in two television and radio appearances (it was surprising that they were broadcast without major cuts). This unexpected radicalization and new tones in the activity of Kazulin became the biggest surprise of the Belarusian electoral campaign.

Observers of the Belarusian political scene try to explain his candidacy in the three following ways: he is a man of the regime, acting to take a number of

votes from Milinkevich; he is supported by Russia from behind the scenes; he acts independently. The latter seems to be most possible. The criticism of Lukashenka that Kazulin presented in the electoral campaign is too radical for him to be an agent of the regime. Kazulin did not propose a specific electoral platform. Apart from criticizing totally 12 years of Lukashenka's rule and declaring that he is a "determined opponent of destabilization of the current situation", he supported the need to end Belarus' international isolation and to improve her relations with all the neighbors. Nevertheless, he was cautious about the perspectives of Belarus' European integration, which may be considered a way to win Russia's favor. One may have the impression that Kazulin wants to be perceived in the Kremlin as the best alternative to Lukashenka. It is interesting that his electoral campaign is in many respects similar to the incumbent president's campaign of 1994.

The activity of Kazulin in the fall of 2005 and in the beginning of 2006 was without doubt positive for the Belarusian regime, because he broke the Belarusian opposition's unity. The last weeks of Kazulin campaign turned out to be, however, a difficult experience for Lukashenka and his collaborators.

### ● Relations between Milinkevich and Kazulin

Both Milinkevich and Kazulin avoid criticizing each other. Nevertheless, Kazulin tried to distance himself from the "old opposition" in his television program, accusing the opposition of "not being able to achieve anything but defeats" and presenting himself as the leader of a "new opposition" of more realistic views. Both candidates *de facto* compete for the votes of a similar electorate, with the reservation that Kazulin is unacceptable for the more radical part of the electorate, because he does not speak Belarusian. The agreement between Milinkevich and Kazulin, concluded before the election and stating that one of them would resign and transfer his support to other one (and one could take into consideration only a resignation of the leader of Hramada), seems no longer to be possible.

### 3. The society

It is exceptionally difficult to assess the feelings of the Belarusian society in the eve of the presiden-

tial election due to incompleteness of available results of public opinion surveys. Most probably a large part of the Belarusian society is still afraid of potential changes, believing that they could cause their financial situation to deteriorate. The regime is also trying to intimidate the Belarusians and force them to vote for Lukashenka, an example of which is the campaign of gathering signatures for the Belarusian president. It was conducted using various methods of pressure, including threats of expelling from work or taking away social benefits (80% of Belarusians are dependent on the state, which is their employer or grants them various benefits). In a survey as many as 55% of respondents chose Lukashenka as the future president. 18% wanted to vote for Milinkevich and barely 3% supported Kazulin. The electoral campaign, and particularly television and radio appearances of the oppositional candidates, who for the first time in a few years could present their opinions to the Belarusian society, probably caused a rise of their support and decline of the support for the Belarusian president. There are, however, no data from the beginning of March available that could confirm the above thesis.

A support of more than 30% voters for Milinkevich (or even for Milinkevich and Kazulin together) would translate into a new political situation in Belarus. The course of the previous election shows, that the Belarusian opposition is able to gather about 20% of votes without much difficulty. The core of the opposition are people, for whom the Belarusian language and culture are important, and also members of a younger generation, who are open-minded and who would like to live in a democratic country. A support of more than 30% voters would mean that new social groups, discontent with the situation in their country, join the electorate, which has so far supported the opposition.

The electoral campaign, and especially the Milinkevich's campaign showed, that the Belarusians were partially able to overcome fear and apathy. Despite the difficulties caused by the authorities the opposition was able to gather almost 200 thousands signatures supporting his candidature. The people are coming to the election rallies of the united opposition's single candidate. Milinkevich enjoys particularly large support in Minsk. According to approximate data Milinkevich can count on more than 40% of votes in the capital.