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***The long road to the national state of  
Belarus: How to avoid a submersion in  
the swamp of the “Russian world”***

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## The deliberate dismantling of Belarus as a nation-state is a longstanding tactic of dictatorial regimes

Until recently, many Belarusians overlooked the significance of the nation-state in their life. Any semblance of nationally oriented political opposition to Lukashenka's dictatorship was swiftly marginalized or eradicated by the regime. Concurrently, Lukashenka eroded the concept of Belarus's national identity while reaping political and financial rewards from Moscow. The core focus of Lukashenka's regime was to undermine the collective self-awareness of Belarusians. This effort was epitomized by Lukashenka's attempt to redefine the Belarusian nation as "Russians with a sign of quality", a narrative later exploited by Putin's propaganda and various pro-Kremlin entities within the so-called "union state."<sup>i</sup>

Awareness of the need to build the nation-state based on a democratic political system came to the majority of Belarusian society as a result of the pain and suffering endured in Lukashenka's punitive dungeons in 2020, as they witnessed the deaths of political prisoners and endured the subsequent political repression following the suppression of the Belarusian revolution by the security forces of Lukashenka and Putin.<sup>ii</sup> The looming threat of sovereignty loss, realized in 2022, and the risk of Belarus being embroiled in the war against a neighboring state, contrary to the will of Belarusian people, further underscored the necessity for political change.

The imperative to establish an independent national state in Belarus is likely understood by Western countries,<sup>iii</sup> particularly neighboring nations. They keenly feel the repercussions of Belarus's hybrid occupation by Russia, grappling with migration pressures orchestrated by Putin's regime through his proxy Lukashenka. Putin's deployment on Belarusian territory to assault Ukraine suggests potential future aggression against the Baltic countries and Poland. American historian Yuri Felshtinsky asserts that liberating Belarus from Russian occupation would significantly enhance European regional security,<sup>iv</sup> diminishing the risk of conflict between the EU states and the Russian dictator, who is determined to regain control over the Baltics.

If Putin manages to execute the full occupation of Belarus via the so-called "union state", he won't stop at merely "denazifying" Belarus. Putin aims to purge the Belarusian

army and gain control over its military units, mirroring the strategy seen in occupied Ukrainian territories. Such actions would pose considerable risks to European security, as the Belarusian army will be involved in the war against neighboring countries and push the people of Belarus to the brink of survival.

### **The nation-state: Key to uniting Belarusians and defying total occupation**

Liberating Belarus rests primarily on the shoulders of its people. The concept of a nation-state aims to bridge divides among Belarusians, transcending borders and political differences. Recognizing the historic opportunity to establish a modern national state can rejuvenate Belarusian society, empowering it to withstand Putin's totalitarian grip on Belarus.

Establishing the national state of Belarus — which has a national language, a national culture, and a national army as its cornerstones — could serve as a crucial objective for Belarusian society. This is particularly vital amidst ongoing political repressions and the erosion of the civil society's capacity to oppose occupation. The nation-state model assumes that its population constitutes a nation united by a common ancestry, a common language, and many forms of a common culture.<sup>v</sup> It promotes a single national language through a language policy. The economic basis for building a national state in Belarus should rest on three key pillars:

1. Implementing a strategy of “soft Belarusization” through the establishment of a nationally oriented corporate governance system.
2. Introducing a national currency to replace the post-soviet ruble, ensuring genuine independence of the central bank from political interference.
3. Adopting an open government strategy as the primary approach to reforming the public governance system.

***Establishing a nationally oriented corporate governance system in Belarus*** is integral to the development of the national state. Corporate governance profoundly impacts a society, given citizens' extensive engagement with enterprises and organizations. A robust corporate governance system, embodying a sense of responsibility towards the

nation's future, should actively contribute to shaping Belarus' national identity and upholding its independence.

Reforming the corporate governance system can facilitate the "soft Belarusization" strategy, particularly by swiftly and effectively promoting the use of the Belarusian language. When corporate management communicates in Belarusian and corporate documentation is conducted in Belarusian, native language usage within organizations naturally expands. Such an approach to Belarusization would be viewed within Belarusian society as customary, aligning with the corporate culture of the enterprise or organization.

***Introducing a national currency in Belarus*** would mark a significant step towards forging a national identity and breaking ties with the Russian empire. The adoption of the Belarusian thaler as the national currency would be a pivotal move. Crucially, monetary reform must ensure the Central Bank of Belarus operates independently, free from political pressures and executive control.<sup>vi</sup> This reform also entails ending the government's practices of funding Lukashenka's unproductive populist ventures at the expense of Belarusian citizens and forgiving loans extended by state banks to the dictator's appointees.

***Revitalizing public institutions and fostering transparency through an open government strategy*** are essential steps in building the institutional framework of the Belarusian national state.<sup>vii</sup> Lukashenka's authoritarian regime not only undermines national unity but also weakens the very foundations of public governance. A maniacal desire for power, characteristic of any dictator, creates in dictatorial regimes a hatred of public institutions and drives the systematic erosion of civil society in Belarus.

*"On August 30 [2022], the head of Lukashenka's administration, Igor Sergeenko, announced at a meeting on draft laws on the civil society, the activities of political parties and other public associations that more than 400 non-governmental organizations had been liquidated in Belarus in two years. The official called it a 'restoration of the public field' and called NGOs 'destructive and other dubious associations'."<sup>viii</sup>*

The public administration systems of dictatorial regimes share common traits, particularly in terms of government accountability (see the “Voice and accountability” and “Rule of law” indicators, Table 1). This similarity is evident when comparing data from Belarus and Zimbabwe, a similar dictatorial regime with which Lukashenka’s administration has forged a “strategic partnership.”<sup>ix</sup>

**Table 1.** Public governance indicators of Belarus and Zimbabwe (percentile rank).

Country	Control of corruption		Government effectiveness		Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism		Regulatory quality		Rule of law		Voice and accountability	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Belarus	56.2	31.6	44.8	19.8	58.5	18.4	27.6	7.5	21.0	11.8	11.1	5.3
Zimbabwe	10.0	8.5	8.6	10.8	15.1	16.5	6.2	6.6	7.1	11.3	16.4	18.8

Source: WB Worldwide governance indicators, 2024

The reform of Belarus’s public governance system based on the implementation of open government principles entails several key components. This includes establishing a protected and active civil space,<sup>x</sup> integrating that civil space into public governance mechanisms, and enacting a modern legal framework for open government. This framework encompasses laws on access to public information, citizen participation, government accountability and integrity, conflicts of interest, lobbying, and whistleblower protection. Additionally, fostering civilian oversight involves supporting a free press and independent public institutions.<sup>xi</sup>

An intriguing aspect of implementing the open government strategy in the context of Belarus' national state formation is its historical tie to Kastus Kalinouski, a national hero of Belarus. Kalinouski famously proclaimed, "Not people for the government, but the government for the people." This slogan, relevant even today, resonates with the ideals of open government embraced by democratic nations worldwide. Its contemporary

interpretation underscores Belarus' ongoing struggle against Russian occupation, echoing the challenges faced by the nation two centuries ago.

### **Belarusians' civilizational choice mirrors Friedrich Hayek's political testament for democratic nations**

The citizens of Belarus must decide between an Asian-style dictatorship, which features the collectivist ethos of a totalitarian state, or embracing the Western Anglo-Saxon model, which values the individual personality of each citizen.<sup>xiii</sup> For any Belarusian, the preference for the Western civilizational approach is clear. In 2020, Belarusians made a resounding statement to the world: they refuse to sacrifice personal freedom in exchange for benefits from a totalitarian regime. The democratic, pro-European aspirations of Belarusians stand in direct opposition to the ambitions of the totalitarian regimes led by Lukashenka and Putin.

Modern dictatorships essentially deny small nations the right to an independent existence. Representatives of China's totalitarian regime assert limited sovereignty for post-Soviet countries,<sup>xiii</sup> while Russian dictator Vladimir Putin outright denies the former Soviet empire's "republics" the right to independent existence. According to Ukrainian political scientist Vitaly Portnikov, Putin's description of Russia's war with Ukraine as "a special military operation" reflects his refusal to recognize Ukraine as an independent state.<sup>xiv</sup> Instead, he is conducting "a military operation" in Ukraine, similar to the military operation that Russia carried out in Chechnya.

Undoubtedly, if left unstopped, dictatorial regimes will persist in their assault on Western civilization. The only effective response lies in a concerted strategy by democratic nations to support smaller states facing direct or hybrid aggression from totalitarian regimes. In this context, the words of Friedrich Hayek, a prominent figure in neoliberalism, ring true. In his monograph *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek underscores the importance of upholding Western civil values and the imperative to resist totalitarianism.

*"The small [states] can preserve their independence in the international as in the national sphere only within a true system of law which guarantees both that certain*

*rules are invariably enforced and that the authority which has the power to enforce these cannot use it for any other purpose...”<sup>xv</sup>*

Nowadays, the system of international law and rules is experiencing the same challenges as on the eve of the Second World War. Then, Adolf Hitler broke the international order; today, Vladimir Putin is following the same path. The crucial mission for democratic countries seems to be preventing the elaboration of the same catastrophic scenario that occurred 90 years ago.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Официальный сайт Постоянного комитета союзного государства. “Кто такой белорус? Это русский со знаком качества [Who is a Belarusian? It's a Russian with a quality mark].” April 14, 2024. <https://xn--c1anggbdpdf.xn--p1ai/news/various/235094/>
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- <sup>iii</sup> Эштон, К. “«Мы не думали о Беларуси стратегически». Экс-глава дипломатии ЕС – об отношениях с Минском [“We did not think about Belarus strategically”. Former head of the EU diplomacy - on relations with Minsk].” *BelSat*, April 3, 2023. <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/03-04-2023-my-ne-dumali-o-belarusi-strategicheski-byvshij-glava-diplomatii-es-ob-otnosheniyah-s-minskom>
- <sup>iv</sup> Фельштинский, Ю. “«Вхождение войск НАТО в Беларусь – вопрос первостепенной важности» [“The entry of NATO troops into Belarus is a matter of paramount importance”].” *Хартия'97*, February 29, 2024. <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2024/2/29/585571/>
- <sup>v</sup> Feinstein, Y. Nation-state. *Britannica*, January 5, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nation-state>
- <sup>vi</sup> Under Lukashenka’s dictatorship, the M1 money supply in Belarus surged, reaching a staggering 2,450,400 trillion Belarusian rubles by the end of 2023. This figure factors in the denominations of 1994, 2000, and 2016. Consequently, the exchange rate stood at 326.4 million Belarusian rubles per US dollar.
- <sup>vii</sup> Open government is defined by the OECD as “the culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth” OECD. Recommendation of the Council on Open Government. OECD/LEGAL/0438. 2024. <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/359/359.en.pdf>
- <sup>viii</sup> Михалевич, М. “В Беларуси более 600 НКО находятся в процессе принудительной ликвидации [More than 600 non-profit organizations in Belarus are in the process of forced liquidation].” *BelSat*, September 9, 2023. <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/03-09-2022-v-belarusi-bolee-600-nko-nahodyatsya-v-protseste-prinuditelnoj-likvidatsii>
- <sup>ix</sup> БЕЛТА. “Беларусь хочет вывести отношения с Зимбабве на уровень всеобъемлющего стратегического партнерства [Belarus wants to bring relations with Zimbabwe to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership].” March 27, 2023. <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/belarus-hochet-vyvesti-otnoshenija-s-zimbabwe-na-uroven-vseobjemljuschego-strategicheskogo-partnerstva-557622-2023/>
- <sup>x</sup> OECD. “The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance.” *OECD Publishing*, December 16, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1787/d234e975-en>
- <sup>xi</sup> OECD. “Better Regulation Practices across the European Union.” *OECD Publishing*, March 19, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264311732-en>
- <sup>xii</sup> Hayek, F and Friedman, M. 18.09.1944. “The Road to Serfdom.” United Kingdom: Routledge Press, US: University of Chicago, 266 p.
- <sup>xiii</sup> BBC News Русская служба. ““Хрущев подарил Крым Украине”. Посол КНР усомнился в суверенитете государств бывшего СССР, страны Балтии и Киев возмущены [“Khrushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine”. Chinese ambassador questions the sovereignty of former Soviet states, Baltic states and Kyiv outraged].” April 23, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-65365982>
- <sup>xiv</sup> ФЕЙГИН. “Кремль и насилие. Беседа с Виталием Портниковым. [The Kremlin and violence. A conversation with Vitaly Portnikov].” April 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcft0dxhE84>
- <sup>xv</sup> Hayek, F and Friedman, M. 18.09.1944. “The Road to Serfdom.” United Kingdom: Routledge Press, US: University of Chicago, 266 p.

