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‘Europe’s Last Dictatorship’? –

*Democracy Theories and their applicability to Belarus*

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Declaration

I, Sebastian Kramer, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Europe’s Last Dictatorship? – Democracy theories and their applicability to Belarus” submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within it of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the List of References.
I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

Signed ..........................

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Preface

I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to those that supported me during the process of writing this thesis.

Firstly, I would like to thank Miss Alexandra Kononovich, Euroculture graduate of 2010 and citizen of Belarus. Alexandra was my inspiration and the reason why I chose Belarus as my topic. I realized that I do not know anything about her home country, which for me was still a terra incognita. So I began to listen to her stories about Belarus and more importantly, its political situation. I became very interested and began to research. It was then when I decided to pick Belarus as my topic. She always challenged me to do my best and not to give up. For that I owe her my utmost gratitude.

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Lastly, and most importantly, I want to thank my family (particularly my mother) and friends. I want to thank them for their words of support, especially in times when I was filled with doubt. They urged me to stay focused and to keep moving forward. However, I am most grateful for their patience with me during the whole process of writing, when weeks went by where they did not see or hear from me. They were always there for me, and I greatly appreciate that.
1. Introduction

When looking at a map of Europe, one can see that Belarus is at the very ‘heart’ of Europe – at least geographically. While it is included into Europe in terms of geography, politically the situation looks quite different. When examining how Belarus is viewed from beyond its borders (especially in Western Europe and the United States), one can see that it is the outsider of Europe.

Since its independence in 1991, Belarus has not taken the democratic road like Poland, for example. Its president of 17 years, Alexander Lukashenko, has remained in power way beyond the maximum number of terms as indicated in the Belarusian constitution of 1994, which he had changed by means of a referendum for just that purpose. As well, during presidential elections he usually wins by a landslide of around 80 per cent, a fact which was and is contested by the West, which cries foul-play and election-rigging. Moreover the political opposition and its protests in the aftermath of the 2006 and 2010 elections were brutally suppressed, and beaten down, as reported by, for example, the German public television channel ARD. Hence, Lukashenko has ruled over Belarus for nearly two decades and seemingly maintained his position due to unfair practices and the suppression of any opposition. Due to this perceived lack of democratic realities as envisioned by Western nations, Belarus and Lukashenko have received the nickname Europe’s last dictatorship and Europe’s last dictator respectively.

However, when thinking about the term dictatorship and dictator, this author automatically thinks of personalities such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, or, as a more recent example, Libya’s former ruler Muammar Gadhafi. Concerning Belarus, however, this judgment seems rather strong and populist, because there have not been cases of genocide, for example. Thus this author considers the term dictatorship/dictator as used far too liberally with respect to Belarus. Therefore this topic needs to be investigated further. In order to do so, this thesis poses, and will seek to answer, the following questions: Is Belarus really a dictatorship as claimed by the West? To what extent can Belarus under Lukashenko be seen as undemocratic and dictatorial when looked at from a theoretical perspective? Or should Belarus under Lukashenko rather be viewed in a much more differentiated way, than the often used black-and-white lens? Directly related to this is yet another question:

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How is Belarus to be situated in terms of its political character? If it is not a dictatorship or a democracy, then what is it?

The scope of this thesis shall be limited to dictatorship as a form of government and the respective manifestations in form of political participation etc. In this economic factors, as important as they are in their own right, will largely be ignored and only mentioned marginally for two reasons. Firstly, economic performance does not constitute a defining characteristic of a political regime, as some states that have a good economic performance, are governed by authoritarian / dictatorial governments (a good example for this would be China, as its economic development is unprecedented, yet it is rarely called a dictatorship, despite, for example, its efforts to curtail access to alternative sources of information and incarcerating unwelcome critics, e.g. Ai Weiwei). Secondly, to include economic aspects would cause this work to go beyond its scope, which is to be limited to Belarus’ form of government.

Therefore, this thesis will be structured as follows: It will begin with an analysis of the term democracy and how it is to be understood, as well as a definition and analysis of the term dictatorship, because this author feels that either term is used far to liberally with respect to Belarus, especially by western media. Therefore it is vital to the discussion to distinguish and define what exactly is meant by democracy and what is meant by dictatorship. Thus, this theoretical chapter will be a critical analysis of the concepts of democracy and dictatorship, including its subgroups authoritarianism and totalitarianism, as well as defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism, which can be placed in between the main theories. The choice of these concepts and their critical analysis is important, as democracy and dictatorship are not the absolute concepts the media and public discourse make them out to be, but rather they are ‘polar opposites’ with a ‘grey zone’ in between them. In order to not ignore this grey zone, and to provide for a more suitable theoretical basis, the concepts of defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism are analyzed to provide for the differentiated look on Belarus under Lukashenko, which this authors feels is missing in the regular discourse on Belarus. As noted before, this thesis assumes democracy and dictatorship to be polar opposites, while the concepts of defective democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and electoral authoritarianism are to act as theoretical foundations for the space between the polar opposites. To be more precise: Defective democracy in this work is to be seen as the in-between concept, which lies closer to democ-
racy. Electoral authoritarianism, authoritarianism and totalitarianism as in-between concepts lean towards dictatorship, while totalitarianism is to be considered closest to it.

In the second part this thesis will briefly look at the history of Belarus since its independence. Here the focus will be on the establishment of the Belarusian political system, as well as its development since the independence up until, but mostly since Lukashenko’s rise to power. The scope of this chapter is the controversial presidential elections of 2001, 2006 and 2010, but also the referendum of 2004, which did away with the constitutionally limited number of presidential terms.² The reason for this is that elections, as per the theoretical basis dealt with in chapter one, are an integral component of democracy, as it allows for the participation of the people in political processes. This part will largely be of a descriptive nature, but its importance is relevant in that it is to show under which circumstances Lukashenko came to power and how he established his regime, thereby providing for the relevant aspects that will allow for the analysis of the presidential elections in chapter three.

In the pursuit of answering the initially posed questions, the third part will critically engage with the previous two parts in a compare-and-contrast fashion. It will use the analysis of democracy theories, the definition of dictatorship and the ‘in-between’ types, as dealt with in chapter one, as well as the political-historical aspects of the second part to show whether Belarus is indeed a dictatorship as claimed by the west, or if this is an unfairly strong accusation and it ought to be described in a more differentiated way. It will look at the presidential elections between 2001 and 2010 and the way they were conducted with respect to the democratic ideals described in chapter one, in order to determine, if the western claim of it being utterly undemocratic holds true. Moreover, some remarks regarding the possible future of Belarus, especially against the backdrop of its current economic situation will be given.

The last part of this thesis shall conclude the findings and put them in the context of the hypothesis, as well as provide some concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical approaches

In order to fully answer the initially posed questions, one needs to look at how democracy is generally defined. As previously stated, it is often bemoaned that Belarus lacks true democratic structures and that, for example, its elections are ‘undemocratic’. Yet, this assumes that there is a coherent and universal definition of democracy and what it means/ought to entail. When looking at the rhetoric employed by western media and politicians, one might think that there is such a principle. However, this author considers this as a gross oversimplification, as in reality the term is much more complex, as are the political realities. For that reason, this chapter will look at the theoretic foundations behind the terms democracy and dictatorship. As both are still part of the black-and-white dichotomy, this chapter will also introduce the concepts of defective democracy, as well as electoral authoritarianism to make the theoretical approach more nuanced and to explore the ‘grey zone’ between democracy and dictatorship, which in the context of this research are taken as endpoints or two poles. First off: democracy.

2.1 What is Democracy?

The starting point will be Robert A. Dahl’s argument that there is no single democracy theory, but several theories. As a reason he states that this is due to the fact that, like any other social theory, there are many ways to approach a theory and to define it. Moreover, to answer what democracy actually is, it should be clarified that, as opposed to what popular discourse would have us believe, democracy in itself is rather an ideal than a definitive reality. Due to its long history, dating back to the city-states of Greece and medieval Italy, and the continuous use of the term, Robert Dahl described democracy as ‘an ancient kitchen midden packed with assorted leftovers from twenty-five hundred years of nearly continuous use’. In other words, what popular discourse uses matter-of-factly and on a more or less daily basis is the result of over 2000 years of interpretation and reinterpretation based on the respective contextual circumstances. Moreover, for Dahl it was not clear what ex-

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4 Ibid.
acrly a democratic theory ought to include (i.e. features), in order to measure a democratic regime against, for example, an oligarchic one.6

It was in this context, as well as the context of the impending third wave of democratization that Dahl, in his book Democracy and Its Critics, argued that democracy can be distinguished between being a theoretical ideal on one hand, and an actual regime on the other: considering democracy as an ideal-type system, he identified five criteria that ought to be satisfied in order to be an ideal democratic process:

1. Equality in voting: In making collective binding decisions the expressed preference of each citizen (citizens collectively constitute the demos) ought to be taken equally into account in determining the final solution
2. Effective participation: Throughout the process of collective decision making, including the stage of putting matters on the agenda, each citizen ought to have adequate and equal opportunities for expressing his or her preferences as to the final outcome
3. Enlightened understanding: In the time permitted by the need for a decision, each citizen ought to have adequate and equal opportunities for arriving at his or her considered judgment as to the most desirable outcome
4. Final control over the agenda: The body of citizens (the demos) should have exclusive authority to determine what matters are or are not to be decided by means of processes that satisfy the first three criteria. (Put in another way, provided the demos does not alienate its final control over the agenda it may delegate authority to others who may make decisions by nondemocratic processes.)
5. Inclusion: The demos ought to include all adults subject to its laws, except transients.7

But, as these criteria are mere markers of the theoretical ideal-type, he further distinguishes seven institutions that make a modern democratic regime:

1. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials;
2. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon;
3. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials;

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7 Dahl, Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy, 6.
4. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for suffrage;

5. Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and the prevailing ideology;

6. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law;

7. To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent political parties and interest groups.8

Thus, so his argument, technically any country / institution not approximating these criteria should not be considered democratic.9 However he also points out that said criteria are too demanding for any country to fulfill, thus considering a country undemocratic, because it does not meet these ideal-type criteria, is to deny the existence of any democratic regime.10

So, if, according to Dahl’s definition, there is no country that comes close to being truly democratic (as per the ideal), then can one really look at a country like Belarus, and bemoan a lack of truly democratic structures? How, can anyone pass judgment in the name of democracy, when the term itself has the double meaning of being an ideal, as well as a perceived reality? In other words, how can western countries claim to be democratic and consider Belarus, for example, as not being democratic, when there is still no consensus about a definition of the term? Yet, as Dahl rightly asserts, ‘democrats’ impose a false the Manichean orderliness11 onto the world, by neatly dividing it into democracies and non-democracies.12 A possible answer is that there has to be a distinction / definition, or better yet, a certain number of ‘smallest common denominators’ that make a country democratic, or rather that bring it closer to being truly democratic, if we keep Dahl’s reasoning in mind.

Dahl bridges the gap between actual manifestation of the term and its ideal form, by terming the real form as polyarchy, the institutional setup that acts as a convergence towards

8 Ibid., 10–11.
9 Ibid., 11.
10 Ibid., 7.
12 Dahl, Democracy and its critics, 316.
the idea / ideal-type of democracy. The above-mentioned seven points are this *polyarchy* and form the necessary characteristics for a democratic governmental process in a large scale system like the state.

Thus, what we understand of democracy today is the set of complex political institutions that has developed with the second democratization wave that transferred said idea of democracy from city- to nation-states. So, one can assume that of these institutions there have to be some that can be observed among democratic states. In other words, there have to be standards that were set in order to determine what democracy means today, which, as Gojczyk rightly argues, are characterized by the *western* understanding of democracy. Morlino argues for such a minimum definition of democracy and asserts that it entails at least universal suffrage, recurring, free, competitive, and fair elections, more than one political party, and more than one source of information. Thus, these are to be considered the smallest common denominators for a democracy, which, in a later publication, he extended in qualitative terms. Specifically, Morlino and Diamond put forth a list of several dimensions to determine the quality of a democracy:

- a. Rule of Law
- b. Participation and Competition
- c. Vertical and Horizontal Accountability
- d. Civil and Political Freedoms
- e. Political, Social, and Economic Equality
- f. Responsiveness.

Goiczyk elaborates on these dimensions as follows:

- Rule of law refers to the securing of the processes of vertical control and political participation, while it acts as the manifestation and guarantor of horizontal control;

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16 Gojczyk, “Übergang zur Demokratie“, 96.
• Participation is the provision of formal rights to political participation and to ensure that these rights can be executed by the people;
• Vertical and horizontal accountability is the relation between the people and political leaders, while horizontal refers to the accountability of political leaders with respect to other leaders and institutions;
• Freedoms (civil and political) are for example freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, protection from discrimination, minority rights and the right for due process, while political freedoms are concerned with clearly defined criteria for the registration and promotion of political candidates and parties, as well as ensuring that candidates and parties have the same opportunities in terms of access to media, freedom of movement and communication;
• Equality is essentially the assurance that everyone (individuals, groups) have the same rights and legal protections, as well as access to power and justice;
• Responsiveness is the obligation of a government to form and implement policies that are representative of the wishes and preferences of the population.\textsuperscript{19}

It is clear that these features are along the lines of Dahl’s concept of polyarchy. There are two features, however, that are missing. Firstly, the role of the opposition or, as Besson and Jasper call it, “the political alternative”\textsuperscript{20}, which is to prevent an identification of the ruling party with the state and thus the formation of a ‘state party’ that declares its own values and interpretations of the common good as absolute and universally true.\textsuperscript{21} One could argue that this is part of the freedom of expression in general or the right to form and expression of an opinion that deviates from that of the ruling government. However, as the role of opposition will be a vital part when considering Belarus, it was imperative that it is mentioned separately.

Secondly, the separation of powers is a crucial aspect that needs to be mentioned as well. Picking up on Montesquieu’s argument that every holder of power can be seduced to abuse it and that power needs to be strictly divided, Besson and Jasper point out the important manifestation of said separation of powers in form of the legislative, executive and

\textsuperscript{19} Gojczyk, “Übergang zur Demokratie“, 103–110.
\textsuperscript{20} Waldemar Besson and Gotthard Jasper, \textit{Das Leitbild der modernen Demokratie – Bauelemente einer freiheitlichen Staatssordnung} (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1990), 65.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
judicative, as well as the established checks and balances that enable mutual control in order to avoid one part accumulating power and therefore becoming a power monopoly.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus one can sum up the generally accepted basic features of democracy as follows: sovereignty of the people, representation of the people, the dignity and freedoms of the people, free and fair elections, responsiveness of the government, rule of law, and the separation of powers. To use Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Formula of 1863: Democracy is “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”\textsuperscript{23} Thus, in the following, these dimensions will be taken as the foundation for the analysis of Belarus’ political system, especially elections, and to measure its democratic/undemocratic character.

However, since the ideal democracy à la Dahl (including polyarchy) and Lincoln has its polar opposite in dictatorships, it is also imperative to consider how a dictatorship is defined, as the term is used as liberally with respect to Belarus, as the term democracy is used when talking about how Belarus should be. Given the complexity of the term democracy and the ease with which people use it, it should be interesting to see whether or not this applies to the term dictatorship as well. Therefore the next part will look at the opposite of democracy.

2.2 What is a Dictatorship?

As initially mentioned, upon hearing the term dictatorship the most commonly understood examples are those of Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy, or General Franco’s Spain on the extreme right side of the political spectrum. On the left one can think of Stalin’s Soviet Union, Kim Jong Il’s North Korea, as well as Mao’s China and all those former dictatorships in Latin America (e.g. Panama’s Noriega or Chile’s Pinochet). However, these are just some examples of the many different manifestations of a dictatorship. As pointed out by Schulze, the historic forms of dictatorships are diverse and took many shapes. An interesting historical discussion about this is provided by Baehr and Richter, which looks at Bonapartism and Caesarism, as well as Totalitarianism as forms of dictatorships.\textsuperscript{24} In order to avoid going beyond the scope of this work, the following will look at modern forms of dictatorship such as those that developed in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. More specifically this re-

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 82–86.
\textsuperscript{24}For further information see Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter (eds.), Dictatorship in History and Theory – Bonapartism, Caesarism and Totalitarianism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
\end{flushright}
search will deal with the concept of totalitarianism, and further look at authoritarianism, as these two are most pertinent to the argument of the paper. The reason behind this is simple: Just like with democracy, it is important to clarify the term *dictatorship* and what exactly it entails and which subtypes can be identified.

How can the term dictatorship be defined in general? The German Federal Centre for Political Education, citing Klaus Schubert and Martina Klein, defines dictatorship as “a form of governing, in which democratic rights have been abolished and where authority over people and state is exercised unrestricted by one person or a group.”

The Encyclopædia Britannica defines a dictatorship as “a form of government in which one person or a small group possesses absolute power without effective constitutional limitations.” Essentially this is a monopolization of state authority, resulting in the elimination of horizontal and vertical separation of powers. Furthermore, dictators use force or fraudulent means to gain power, which they maintain through violence, intimidation, terror, and most importantly, the suppression of basic civil liberties. In other words, a dictatorship eliminates any existing opposition, as well as a stifling of political pluralism and freedom of expression at the same time. Other elements are “the identification of the state with a single mass party and of the party with its charismatic leader, the use of an official ideology to legitimize and maintain the regime, the use of terror and propaganda to suppress dissent and stifle opposition, and the use of modern science and technology to control the economy and individual behavior.” It should be noted that the just mentioned elements are to be attributed to modern forms of dictatorship (fascism and Stalinism).

In other words, a dictatorship can broadly be described as a regime where all the aspects that can be used to define a democracy (rule of law, separation of power, free elections etc.) are simply not present or have been severely stifled or eliminated. However, this seems a bit too simplistic as this would revert the argument back to the above-mentioned Manichean orderliness that many advocates of democracy fall into. The reality is not as black and white and the same holds true for this. There is no one accepted definition of democracy, and there is no one manifestation of dictatorship. It comes in different shapes.

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 78.
and forms. Moreover, as the issue regarding Belarus is a modern one, the theoretical aspect should be limited to modern forms of dictatorships as well. Therefore this work will now look at totalitarianism and authoritarianism as the two most recent forms of dictatorship.

2.2.1 Totalitarianism

The concept of a totalitarian dictatorship, according to Robert C. Tucker, dates back to the 1930s and 1940s to account for the then new form of regime that developed in Hitler’s Germany, as well as Stalin’s Soviet Union, which were different from the types of dictatorships before.29 He goes on to elaborate, arguing that

on the road to power, totalitarian parties strive to create mass movements that indoctrinate their followers with the party's ideology by propaganda and agitation. Once in power in the single-party state, however, the totalitarian elite imposes upon its mass social constituency an unprecedented tyranny, under which political power emanating from a single source penetrates every pore of the social organism and all the resources of modern technology are used for control purposes. Autonomous social groups are destroyed, giving way to the controlled mass organizations that serve as the elite's transmission belts to the now ‘atomized’ masses of the population.30

More broadly, one can define totalitarian regimes as states that have a strong central rule that, by means of repression and coercion, wants to control and direct all aspects of the life of individuals, while dissent in any form is declared evil, thus political differences are not allowed and dissent is suppressed by means of the police that operates outside of the constraints of laws.31 Furthermore, a totalitarian regime does away with political institutions and replaces them with new ones.32

But just like with the concept of democracy, there are several theories that seek to explain what constitutes a totalitarian regime. Here I would like to use Friedrich and Brzezinski’s model, which defines six markers of a totalitarian regime:

1. An ideology that encompasses all aspects of life and is considered universally valid and to which everyone has to adhere to;

2. A hierarchical and oligarchical organized mass party, led by one individual, who is either above or intertwined with the bureaucracy;

30 Ibid., 559–560.
32 Ibid., 863.
3. A system of physical/psychological terror in which everyone in society is being monitored by the secret police, which also fights against potential and actual enemies;
4. A near complete state monopoly on mass media;
5. State monopoly on the use of force and the armed forces
6. A centrally controlled and steered economy.  

They further argue that this type of dictatorship is new, because no previous autocracy had the technological means that would enable them to exert the type of total control that Fascist Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin was able to exercise, especially by means of their secret police (Gestapo in Germany and the OGPU, and later on the KGB in the Soviet Union); however, they also stress that these markers are not to be considered individually but part of an organic system in which each element is part of a cluster of traits, which are intertwined and which mutually support each other.  

Thus, a totalitarian regime is one that penetrates each aspect of life, especially through the use of the secret police, whose ways of fighting enemies, actual and potential ones, create a sense of omnipresent state control. Political dissent is thereby suppressed as well, even if this entails the use of force.

2.2.2 Authoritarianism

So compared to totalitarianism, what is authoritarianism then? Unlike totalitarianism, which creates an absolute state and only tolerates and enforces submission to it, authoritarianism is characterized by a “strong limitation of democratic participation, the strong obstruction of the public formation of will (freedom of the press and information) and public debates regarding political decisions, as well as the limitation of the pluralistic diversity of interests.” The Encyclopædia Britannica gives a more detailed definition, arguing that authoritarianism is a system in which power is concentrated in one person or a small group of people, which is not constitutionally accountable to the majority of the people and exer-
cises power rather arbitrarily and outside of existing bodies of law.³⁶ Moreover, the freedom to form alternative or opposing political parties that can be used to compete for power with the ruling elite is either very limited or nonexistent.³⁷ As well, since there is no guiding ideology, power is exercised in comparatively predictable limits, while some form of pluralism is tolerated and there is a latent lack of the ability to mobilize the population in support of national goals.³⁸ The main point of differentiation vis-à-vis the theoretically unlimited pluralism in democratic regimes and the single-party of totalitarian regimes, is the existing limited pluralism.³⁹ Thus, authoritarian regimes are quite distinct from totalitarian regimes. There is more room for political maneuvering and participation, but still with limitations.

Thus, when considering both sides, liberal democracy and dictatorships (of which totalitarian regime ought to be considered the extreme type), one can see that there is an ‘ideal type’ (for democracy), as well its polar opposite (totalitarianism for dictatorships). But, as mentioned before, one cannot speak in absolute terms and employ either-or language when describing political systems. The fact that authoritarianism is considered to be a form of dictatorship, yet it is distinct from totalitarianism, shows that there is the need for differentiation. In this respect one can point to Hadenius and Teorell, who in their attempt to analyze the whole range of authoritarian regimes, identified three basic types (monarchic, military, and electoral regimes).⁴⁰ However, since there is no monarchy, or military junta (as in Latin America for example) this thesis will limit its focus on the last type, electoral regimes, as this is seen as most applicable to the case of Belarus. This type of authoritarianism will be dealt with later on. Moreover, to also make the concept of democracy a bit more nuanced, the concept of defective democracy will be provided in an attempt to clarify that one cannot limit one’s views to absolutes.

³⁷ Ibid.
³⁸ Ibid.
2.3 Defective Democracy

The concept of defective democracy describes a, what Merkel calls, “grey zone between democracies and autocracy,” as well as, it seeks to define the borders to democracy and autocracy. In essence, defective democracies are considered a sub-type of democracy, in which popular sovereignty has been institutionalized by means of free and fair elections, but which are undermined through the encroachments of the executive branch on the competences of other branches, as well as the withholding of certain civil liberties and rights.41

This concept, as proposed by Merkel et.al presupposes an embedded democracy and five regimes that constitute its parts, as the foundation to determine the degree of defectiveness of a state.42 The regimes that constitute an embedded democracy are elections (A), rights to political participation (political liberties) (B), civil rights (C), horizontal checks and balances or accountability (D), and effective power to govern (E).43 According to Merkel, a stable constitutional democracy is embedded in the following two ways: firstly, internally the five components and their interdependence, as well as independence secure the normative and functional existence of the democracy; secondly these regimes are embedded externally in ‘spheres of enabling conditions for democracy’, which are to protect it from internal and external shocks.44 In essence this reflects the above mentioned common democratic denominators, which is why no further explanation of the regimes should be required at this point.

This leaves the question of what is to be understood when talking about damages or defects. Merkel says that one can no longer speak of an intact embedded democracy, when one of the components (regimes) is damaged in a way that it changes or better disrupts the way a constitutional democracy ought to run.45 However, Merkel considers elections to be the most central element as they are “the most visible expression of the sovereignty of the people, simultaneous participation of the people and equal weight of their preferences; on the other hand its open competition for the central position of power makes it the main difference to autocracy.”46 Combined with equal political rights a democratic electoral re-

42 Ibid., 39.
43 Ibid., 50.
45 Ibid., 36.
46 Ibid., 48.
47 Merkel et.al. Defekte Demokratie, 50–51.
gime with regular, free, general, equal, and fair elections, represents the vertical accountability in a democracy.48

Furthermore, there are four subtypes of defective democracy (also termed democracies with adjectives), that are pure types, based on the ‘damaged’ regime, namely exclusive democracy (A and B damaged, vertical legitimacy and control dimension), illiberal democracy (C, state of law), delegative democracy (D, horizontal control), and enclave democracy (E, effective use of governing power).49 Thus, states with defective democracy exhibit mixed forms of said ‘damages’, while the most inhibited regime determines, which form of defective democracy a respective state is to be assigned to.50 More generally, Merkel characterizes the above-mentioned subtypes as follows:

1. Exclusive democracy: the formation of preferences and participation at the political level is curtailed, as certain parts of the population are excluded from universal suffrage; the principle of free and fair elections in general is violated;
2. Illiberal democracy: the relationship between the people and the state is characterized by the suspension of certain civil liberties and rights of the people, which mark an incomplete constitutional state, as well as a defective state of law;
3. Delegative democracy: horizontal checks and balances of the executive by legislative and judiciary branch are impaired/limited, while constitutional constraints are circumvented by the executive in order to affect the judiciary branch, thereby shift the power balance;
4. Enclave democracy: external powers (military, militia, entrepreneurs, multinational corporations etc.) strip the democratically elected representative of certain reserved domains, thereby forming power enclaves within the government.51

A problem with this concept, however, is that these categories are, just like Dahl’s conception of ideal democracy, pure types that do not necessarily correspond to reality, or in other words, real examples cannot be put into one group exclusively, but are rather have defects in more than one of these regimes. One telling example for this is that of Russia. Merkel declares Russia a prime example of the third category (delegative democracy).52 However, this does not account for the fact that Russia shows deficits in the other categories as well. The most telling example is the recent Duma election in Russia, where independent OSCE

48 “Embedded and Defective Democracies”,
49 Merkel et.al. Defekte Demokratie, 69.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 70–71.
52 Ibid., 164.
observers have documented many cases of obvious electoral fraud, the examples for which range from already completed ballots (in favor of Putin’s party) in, for example, St. Petersburg, to bribery of people by election officials to vote for Putin’s party.53 This clearly would fall into the first category of exclusive democracy.

Moreover, as pointed out by Jens Siegert, head of Moscow office of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, intimidation of government critics is rather common as well and on the rise, even if a direct involvement of Putin and his government cannot be proven; but the fact that most victims are critics of Putin and Medvedev is a telling sign.54 Also the arrest of numerous Kremlin-critical protesters in the aftermath of the disputed election was heavily criticized by the West, as these were not granted legal counsel.55 These would be considered part and parcel of the second category, while some might even consider this to be a sign of an authoritarian system.

Both examples show that the concept of defective democracy needs to be taken carefully. Especially its focus on deficits and the subsequent classification as one of the forms of defective democracy does not necessarily correspond to reality (see the example of Russia, mentioned in the previous two paragraphs) as it does not incorporate a sufficient discussion of when a system might no longer be considered a defective democracy, but already authoritarian. Thus I agree with Schedler, who argued that “rather than sharpening our grasp of democratic deficits, Merkel’s defective democracy weakens our sense of authoritarian realities.”56

Moreover, the concept is not as clear, as Merkel may have intended as the line between defective democracy and authoritarianism is rather blurry. Merkel’s four types of democracy themselves could be put into two categories: illiberal and exclusive democracies are legitimate types that damage the single regimes through certain laws and directives, while delegative and enclave democracies in which populism and lacking democratic mentality are the main characteristics, have not been legitimately set up. So, one could

argue that part of his defective democracy types could still fall under the category of democracy, while the other might already be considered authoritarian, which, based on the example of Russia, blurs Merkel’s concept. In other words, defective democracy risks overstretched democracy, thereby considering countries a democracy, albeit a defective one, but which has authoritarian characteristics. In that respect, Krennerich argues that if one was to go strictly by definition, this would entail that some young democracies, and by extension some established ones, ought to be considered defective, as the threshold to be considered a defective democracy is relatively low and entails having somewhat democratic elections, which when considering the subtype exclusive democracy, even condones limited voting rights and political participation rights.57

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Belarus in itself is a special case when concerning the results of the third wave of democratization in Eastern Europe. Thus, despite its shortcomings, the concept of defective democracy will provide for an important basis to test which political system can be applied best to Belarus.

Since the above cited Schedler was critical of Merkel’s concept as he saw it as neglecting existing authoritarian structures, he advocated the concept of electoral authoritarianism, which in a sense it can be seen as a link to the minimum threshold of defective democracy. Therefore the paper will now turn to electoral authoritarianism, as a theoretical concept, which ought to be considered independent of authoritarianism itself.

### 2.4 Electoral Authoritarianism

Schedler defined electoral authoritarianism as a political regime, which plays the game of multiparty elections by holding regular elections for the chief executive and a national assembly. Yet they violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than ‘instruments of democracy’. Under electoral authoritarian rule, elections are broadly inclusive (they are held under universal suffrage) as well as minimally pluralistic (opposition parties are allowed to run), minimally competitive (opposition parties, while denied victory, are allowed to win votes and seats), and minimally open (opposition parties are not subject to massive repression, although they may experience repressive treatment in selective and intermittent ways). (…) Rulers may devise discriminatory electoral rules, exclude opposition parties and candidates from entering the electoral arena, infringe upon their political rights and civil liberties, restrict their access to mass media and campaign

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finance, impose formal or informal suffrage restrictions on their supporters, coerce or corrupt them into deserting the opposition camp, or simply redistribute votes and seats through electoral fraud.⁵⁸

Picking up on the example of Russia in the previous section, it is interesting to note that Schedler puts Russia into the category of electoral authoritarianism,⁵⁹ unlike Merkel, who put it in the category of a defective democracy. Given the ambiguity of Merkel’s categorization as seen with the example of Russia it clearly shows the necessity to differentiate terms such as democracy and authoritarianism, as no state can be pigeonholed into just one category. Moreover, Lindberg pointed out that of the range between full democracies and authoritarian regimes, electoral authoritarianism appears to be the most promising, as it has the greatest potential to develop into a full democracy.⁶⁰

Also, the role of the opposition in this type of regime is worth mentioning. Lindberg pointed out that as per Dahl’s concept of polyarchy and the necessity of elections as a core dimension of democracy (political participation and competition), the role of the opposition (if allowed) in an authoritarian regime needs to be looked at.⁶¹ Lindberg concludes that if the minimum requirement for free and fair elections is met, opposition parties may partake in the election, even if the circumstances are not fully as fair and free as they ideally should be, which builds strength within the legislature and society and heightens the chances of winning the next elections.⁶² At the same time, when the conditions are tougher the incentive of opposition parties to discredit the incumbent regime as much as possible is higher, as they do not see themselves able to remove the regime in the foreseeable future.⁶³ In this, electoral authoritarianism is different from authoritarian regimes, as it does not only allow for limited forms of pluralism, but goes even further by opening the political society, which includes electoral competition, universal franchise, as well as electoral authoritarian regimes subject the head of government to electoral confirmation.⁶⁴

On the whole, one can say that electoral authoritarianism has a whole range of institutions to maintain a landscape of representative democracy, including constitutions, parliaments, courts, and elections, while allowing private media, interest groups and civic in-

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⁵⁹ Ibid.
⁶¹ Ibid., 246.
⁶² Ibid., 256–257.
⁶³ Ibid., 257.
stitutions.\textsuperscript{65} However, as Schindler pointed out, elections are given privilege and they are constitutive of the political game, even if marred by repression.\textsuperscript{66} As well, multiparty elections for the highest office install the principle of popular consent, even if it is subverted in reality; principle opposition, as permitted through the admittance of multiparty competition, ensures certain regime legitimacy as well.\textsuperscript{67}

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

As one can see, that each term, democracy and dictatorship, is rather vague and cannot be described in definitive ways or be put in absolute categories. Instead it can be divided in different ways as there is no single definition for either. As initially mentioned, Dahl rightly asserted that there is no one theory or definition for democracy, but several, which depend on the respective vantage point one takes when defining it. Yet despite the manifold ways to define democracy, there are certain characteristics that can be deemed the smallest common denominator, which seem to have been agreed upon to depict what is democratic and what is not.

In a similar vein, the term dictatorship cannot be taken at face-value, since the modern understanding relates mostly to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century dictators, which, despite the seeming inclusive character of the word, were not alike. Not all seemingly dictatorial systems worked the same way or were alike, and there are distinctions to be made, namely in the form of totalitarianism and authoritarianism.

While liberal democracy and dictatorship are to be seen as endpoints, the foggy zone or grey zone in between has its distinctions as well. The concepts of defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism provide for a good theoretical foundation, as both have elections as their central element, which will be a good basis for the discussion on elections in Belarus.

However, what this chapter has also shown, is that each concept does not exist sealed off from the others, but that there is overlapping, namely in form of the grey zone and the concepts in this grey zone. When considering the theoretical foundation it becomes clear that it is very difficult to pigeonhole a state into one category, but rather has to situate it in a sort of continuum that, in addition to the line between democracy on one end and totalitarian dictatorship on the other, encompasses the complete political spectrum (left-

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 13.
right). What should also be considered is that no political system is static, but there is fluctuation. Depending on who leads, a country can move from being a liberal democratic one, towards a more authoritarian system. Granted this does not happen overnight, but as will be shown, a transition towards authoritarian rule can happen within a few years. Therefore, one important fact becomes obvious: the aforementioned theoretical concepts, when applied to real-life examples, overlap and make the either-or mentality used by media somewhat questionable.

However, to see where Belarus can be situated in this continuum the established common denominators for democracy and the definitions of authoritarian and totalitarian dictatorships, as well as the concepts of defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism will be the foundation for chapter three, which will take a closer look at the main feature that distinguishes a dictatorship from a democracy: elections and the role of “the political alternative,”68 to use Besson and Jasper’s words again.

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68 Waldemar Besson and Gotthard Jasper, Das Leitbild der modernen Demokratie, 65.
3. Belarus since its independence – A brief overview

There is general agreement that Belarus, in comparison to other CIS-states (Community of Independent States) in Eastern Europe, is a *Sonderfall* or special case, as its course of post-Soviet transformation took a different course than the other former Soviet states, for example Poland.

The Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) declared independence on July 27th, 1990, which did not occur out of its own initiative but that was a mere reaction to the independences of the Ukraine, Lithuania and even Russia, which in essence left Soviet Union without its main component. As opposed to other now independent states, the communist party remained the dominant party in Belarus and with it the Soviet system, including a Council of Ministers and a parliament. Essentially, there was no fundamental change of Belarus’ institutional setup and the old Soviet basic law was still in effect until the first constitution was passed in 1994.

Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of independence, Belarus hit a time of political stagnation as its highest bodies (the parliament under Stanislav Shushkevich, a reformer and Viacheslav Kebich, chairman of the Council of Ministers) clashing over key reforms, thereby effectively blocking each other. Lorenz sums up the pre-Lukashenko years rather well when she says that although an independent political regime with its own functional logic has evolved since 1991, it did not completely discard its authoritarian character, because it lacked a formal democratic institutional setup on one hand, and on the other hand the real behavior of the actors also still showed authoritarian traits.

In essence this led to two concepts of possible institutional setups that faced each other. On one side there were the national democrats under the leadership of the Belarusian Popular

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71 Ibid., 50, 60.

72 Manuel Leppert, Akzeptierte Diktatur? – Lukaschenkos Herrschaft über Weißrussland (Marburg: Tectum Verlag), 44.


Front, who were rooting for a parliamentary system without a president. On the other hand there were the communists within the parliament led by Kebich, who wanted the presidency as an integral part of the political system.\textsuperscript{75} For Sahm the reason for this is that the elite of the previous Soviet regime sought to maintain their power by introducing the office of a strong president with far-reaching powers.\textsuperscript{76} The final result was that the presidential office was introduced with the acceptance of the constitution on March 15, 1994 by the parliament.\textsuperscript{77} Moreover, the constitution itself was not like the ones in Europe for example. As Gojczyk pointed out, it seemingly served a constitutional legitimacy, but it was taken out of the European context and filled with features that were rooted in communist thinking, thereby making the constitution not a limitation of power, but was rather modeled around existing power relations.\textsuperscript{78}

The electoral system for the presidency, as put forth by Stewart Parker, was based on those in Western Europe, and required a potential candidate to obtain signatures of seven parliamentary deputies or 100,000 signatures of supporters of their application.\textsuperscript{79} During the elections at least 50 per cent of the electorate has to vote, with the winning candidate receiving at least 50 per cent of the vote; in case of no clear winner, there would be a second round of elections pitting the two leading candidates from the first round against each other.\textsuperscript{80} The final result was the then unknown outsider Alexander Lukashenko, who had no party affiliation, winning 45 per cent of the vote and Kebich being a distant second at 17.4 per cent, which was not a clear victory, but led to a second round of elections in which the people of Belarus confirmed Lukashenko as their new president with 81.7 per cent of the vote.\textsuperscript{81}

Since his election, Lukashenko consolidated his power in Belarus by several means, namely referenda, as well as his establishment of a “presidential power vertical.”\textsuperscript{82} The first constitutional referendum was held in 1995, and among other issues concerned national identity, the key result of which was that Lukashenko was enabled to dissolve par-

\textsuperscript{75} Leppert, Akzeptierte Diktatur?, 45.
\textsuperscript{77} Leppert, Akzeptierte Diktatur?, 45.
\textsuperscript{78} Gojczyk, “Übergang zur Demokratie?“, 315.
\textsuperscript{79} Parker, The Last Soviet Republic, 62.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Gojczyk, “Übergang zur Demokratie“, 320–321.
\textsuperscript{82} Heinz Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, in Winfried Schneider-Deters, Peter W. Schulze, Hein Timmermann (Hrsg.), Die Europäische Union, Russland und Eurasien – Die Rückkehr der Geopolitik (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2008); 415.
liament, which essentially undermined the constitutionally guaranteed separation of powers. The second referendum took place in 1996 and was in response to the worsening of the economic situation, which Lukashenko tried to solve by means of establishing the above-mentioned power vertical. In essence, the second referendum, based on Lukashenko’s ‘one stem theory’ (the president is the stem and the other branches of the state spring from and depend on him), changed the 1994 constitution in a way that it curtailed the rights and powers of the other institutions. More importantly, it gave Lukashenko extensive new powers such as passing directives and presidential orders directly as laws, the ability to appoint officials at the regional and communal level, as well as presidential control over the media (100 per cent of television and radio, 80 per cent of print media). Moreover, the new constitution counted Lukashenko’s presidential term from the 1996 referendum onwards, which enabled him to circumvent the possible election that should have taken place in 1999 as per the 1994 constitution. Thus, this development can be seen as a reverting back to a Soviet-style government, as he in effect became the center of power and was able to steer the development of the country according to his preferences. The new constitution was tailored towards Lukashenko. Essentially he used the democratic constitution of 1994 and changed it in a way that met his preferences, i.e. made him, as the executive, practically the decision–making authority in Belarus. However, it should be acknowledged that this happened with the consent of the majority of the voters and therefore by democratic means.

In the aftermath of the new constitution and the international outrage (leading the Council of Europe to revoke Belarus’ guest status for example) Lukashenko further consolidated his power and used all means at his disposal to maintain it. For example, he made sure that Non-governmental organizations (NGO) he deemed hostile towards his regime would not be able to work properly by either making their registration so complex that it was nearly impossible to register at all, or by passing a decree (March 2001) whereby foreign support needs to be approved by the government, which in essence resulted in an uninterrupted control over foreign-funded projects by the state and in increased number of closed NGOs in Belarus.

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83 Gojczyk, “Übergang zur Demokratie“, 327.
84 Ibid., 334.
86 Ibid., 273.
During the 2001 presidential elections, the pro-democratic opposition was able to band together parties, NGOs, unions, and even some high-ranking members of the government and provide an alternative candidate to Lukashenko, which led in 2002 to a takeover of unions to force them into line with Lukashenko’s wishes, the free youth league was forcefully merged with organizations loyal to the regime.\(^{87}\) Moreover, Lukashenko, as mentioned above, controlled virtually all the media. Specifically he saw to it that strict laws would set tight limits to freedom of expression and the freedom to access of information.\(^{88}\) In the long-run Lukashenko ensured that publicly funded media are under the control of and are catering to Lukashenko, while non-conformist media were harassed (e.g. national newspapers such as *Narodnaja Wolja* or *Belaruskaja Delowaja Gazeta*) or alternative sources of information (e.g. Russian television and radio broadcasting stations) were either reduced in their sphere of influence or shut down completely.\(^{89}\) Timmermann rightly asserted this was only done to counter the spread of oppositional thinking, especially within the context of the 2006 presidential election and the attempt of the opposition to initiate a ‘colour revolution’\(^{90}\) as, for example, in the Ukraine. In the end the result of the election was that Lukashenko won by a landslide with 77.4 per cent, while the candidate of the united opposition, Vladimir Goncharik garnered 16 per cent.\(^{91}\) This election was not accepted by independent observers, who argue that the election was neither free nor fair.\(^{92}\) But this will be discussed at length and in more detail in the following chapter.

To make matters worse in the eyes of the West, in March 2003 Lukashenko passed an ordinance entitled ‘Principles of the ideology of the Belarusian state’, which is seen by Timmermann as an attempt to praise perceived positive aspects of the Soviet Union (collectivism, patriotism, social justice etc.), while at the same time it is to accentuate Belarus’ *Sonderweg* vis-à-vis Russia and the liberal West, including the need for a national identity.\(^{93}\) While this was in violation of the constitution, as art. 4 ensures a multitude of ideologies and prohibits a binding state ideology, Lukashenko introduced a program that seeks to

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 274–276.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 276.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 276–277.
\(^{90}\) Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 420.
\(^{93}\) Timmermann, “Belarus zwischen Russland und der EU”, 268.
make courses and seminars for ideological education mandatory.\textsuperscript{94} The central aim of this is clear: a state ideology allows for a demarcation that creates a we and a them. This further allows Lukashenko to establish an enemy that threatens the state and which needs to be attacked, thereby enabling him to enact further restrictive laws. Timmermann supports this, as he argues that on principle the creation of an enemy makes for certain stability, but within the context of the ‘color revolution’ in the Ukraine (Orange revolution) in 2004 it also instilled a sense of fear of the revolution spilling over into Belarus.\textsuperscript{95} This resulted in a militarization of domestic politics and the increase of ideology employed (spreading of a sense of fear that a coup is in the making and imminent), the aim of which was to brand any critic of the regime as a conspirator of the imminent coup d’état.\textsuperscript{96} According to Timmermann, this is to tighten existing laws and the criminal code, which can be applied rather arbitrarily as their wording is rather vague.\textsuperscript{97}

In yet another referendum in 2004, Lukashenko eliminated the maximum amount of times he was constitutionally allowed to run for president. According to the 1996 constitution, he can only run for the office of the president twice, but with the referendum and the seemingly overwhelming approval of the Belarusian people (88.9 percent\textsuperscript{98}, Lukashenko was now able to run in future elections and can theoretically remain in power for life.\textsuperscript{99} So he ran again in 2006.

In addition to the ordinance of 2003 that enacted a state ideology, Lukashenko passed another decree in 2005, which forbade oppositional forces the acceptance of technical support (e.g. preparations for elections and referenda, organization of protests and strikes, distribution of campaign material, initiatives for mass politicization of the public) from outside of Belarus.\textsuperscript{100} What this did was it enabled the government to interpret any form of criticism as an attempt to initiate a coup, which gave them carte blanche to use whatever means necessary to suppress dissent.\textsuperscript{101} In addition to this, the parliament changed the criminal code in a way that allowed for two-year prison sentences for everyone, who discredits Belarus and its government in other countries, which includes provid-

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 420.
\item \textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Nohlen, \textit{Elections in Europe}, 257.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 421.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
ing ‘false’ information to foreign and international organizations about the political, economic, social and international situation, as well as the legal position of Belarusians and governmental agencies.\(^{102}\) Of course this would have an effect on the elections in 2006.

The 2006 election did not differ from the previous one. Lukashenko won again in a landslide victory, garnering 84.4 per cent of the vote, while his opponents Alexander Milinkevič (United Democratic Forces of Belarus), Sergei Gaidukevich (Liberal Democratic Party), and Alaksandar Kazulin (Belarusian Social Democratic Party) received 6.2, 3.5, and 2.3 of the vote.\(^{103}\) The OSCE declared that “the conduct of the 2006 presidential election in Belarus failed to meet OSCE Commitments for democratic elections.”\(^{104}\) Yet, this time, again, the opposition showed unity and managed to agree on a common candidate and they decided on a coherent program (European-style change towards democracy).\(^{105}\) All this occurred despite the repressive measures taken by the regime in the time before the elections. Timmermann pointed out the obstruction of registrations, exclusion of media, incarceration and conviction of leading opposition members (namely Kozulin) etc.\(^{106}\) Also, the date for the elections was antedated so that the opposition had less time to organize their election campaign, which in addition to repressive acts, such as office raids, the prevention of campaign events via administrative means, arbitrary arrests etc., was seen as a tell-tale sign for the fraudulent nature of this election.\(^{107}\) Thus, the 2006 election showed the same pattern as the 2001 election.

Due to the occurrences surrounding the elections, Lukashenko managed to isolate Belarus from the West, his main partner was and remained Russia. As Timmermann points out, this was due to the historic ties that the country had and still has with Russia, especially in terms of cheap resource supply (gas, oil) and the access to Russian markets.\(^{108}\) However, the crisis over the rise in prices for oil supplies and the introduction of an export tax on oil exported to Belarus, which meant a loss in profits for Lukashenko, as they were able to re-export to Europe at a profit, meant a strain on the relations between both countries, as well as affected Western Europe.\(^{109}\) However, Lukashenko’s erratic behavior (illegal with-

\(^{102}\) Ibid.

\(^{103}\) Nohlen, *Elections in Europe*, 262.


\(^{105}\) Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”; 424–425.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 424.


\(^{108}\) Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”; 427–428.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 433–438.
drawal of oil and gas, as well as the announcement to levy a transit fee for Russian oil) makes him an unreliable partner for Moscow, which will have and already has a negative impact on their relationship.\textsuperscript{110} This in turn, will surely shake the foundation of Lukashenko’s regime and might give the opposition in Belarus the opportunity to seize the situation to their advantage and perhaps oust Lukashenko.

The most recent opportunity to do so was the presidential election of 2010, which was slightly different from the previous ones. The most obvious difference was that there were nine candidates that ran against the incumbent president,\textsuperscript{111} which on one hand is positive as it shows the increased political participation, but on the other hand it also showed that the opposition did not show the coherence and unity it had shown in the previous elections. Other than that, however, it was ‘business as usual’. Lukashenko won by a landslide, receiving almost 80 per cent of the vote with his closest competitor winning merely 2.43 per cent.\textsuperscript{112} The OSCE observer mission declared in its executive summary that Belarus was still not adhering to the OSCE commitments for a democratic vote, due to a questionable impartiality of the election administration, restrictive media environment, and a lack of transparency in all stages of the electoral process.\textsuperscript{113} As well, just like in the aftermath of the 2006 election, there were large-scale arrests of protesters including seven opposition candidates, one of which, Andrei Sannikov, was severely beaten.\textsuperscript{114} But again, the issue of presidential elections will be dealt with in much more detail in the following chapter.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 438–440.
\end{itemize}
3.1 Chapter Conclusion

Belarus was and is a special case in Eastern Europe. It developed democratic structures in the early years of its independence (i.e. constitution), but retained its old Soviet elites. The result was political stagnation until the first democratic constitution and the introduced office of presidency, which brought the then unknown Lukashenko to power. Over the course of the years, Lukashenko cemented his power, by changing the constitution several times, which did away with the fledgling democratic institutions and in effect made him the center of power in Belarus. He saw to it that the media is largely under his control and at his disposal, which became evident during elections, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Moreover political dissent and opposition was tolerated at best and, come election-time, it was obstructed or beaten down. Furthermore, Lukashenko passed several decrees, which in effect made it possible to consider criticism of the government, be it within Belarus or towards foreign states and institutions, a felony. This was also painfully clear in the aftermath of the presidential elections, which will be the focus of the following chapter. Mass arrests of protesters, opposition members under dubious pretenses (mostly in the context of the aforementioned decrees) were common. This in turn alienated the West, leaving Russia as the main ally. However, Lukashenko’s erratic behavior, especially in the context of the energy crisis in 2006, showed cracks in their relationship.

Thus, when looking at Belarus’ history since its independence in 1991, one can see that it took the democratic route in the beginning, but Lukashenko steered the country towards a presidential regime that caters to his wish to remain in power. Thus in his strive for power he pushed back democracy and pluralism. Timmermann sums it up well, when he says that in the process of Lukashenko’s consolidation of power the “functioning separation of power, certainty of law and equality before the law, unhindered space for political opposition and civil society groups, chances for the development of an open discourse and argument culture was pushed back.”\textsuperscript{115}

By all appearances Belarus seems rather far from democracy, but does that automatically make it a dictatorship? Timmermann further pointed out that Lukashenko did allow for certain latitude for oppositional actors in the political area, as well as the area of

\textsuperscript{115} Timmermann, “Belarus zwischen Russland und der EU”, 266.
civil society and the media.\textsuperscript{116} However, this is attributed to his attempt to “paint the democratic picture for the critical West.”\textsuperscript{117} Yet, what to make of the fact that there are regularly held elections, parliamentary as well as presidential, which, as pointed out in the first chapter, are an integral part of a democratic system? The following chapter will take a closer look at the presidential elections between 2001 and 2010 to answer these questions. Specifically it will look at the role of the opposition (opposition parties and candidates, as well as oppositional protest after the elections) and the role of the media.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
4. A critical look at presidential elections since 2001

Chapter one established the theoretical foundation, especially with respect to the components that are generally perceived to be indicators for a well-functioning democracy. It was pointed out that elections in their function as citizen’s participation are one of the integral aspects that form the basis for a democracy. Moreover, this author deems it necessary that elections need to be divided into several components to be able to properly comment on whether or not they ought to be deemed democratic or undemocratic. These components are opposing parties as a political alternative, the role of the media, and electoral participation and preference. Thus, in the following, the presidential elections of 2001, 2006, and 2010 will be analyzed with respect to these components to see in how far they can be deemed democratic or undemocratic. This chapter will be divided into three parts, each referring to one of the aforementioned elections.

The 2001 Election

Before dealing with the 2001 election it is imperative to mention the role of political parties in Belarus, as this will provide to be of importance when analyzing the election results.

Korosteleva pointed out that “although there were legitimate parties with predictable group loyalties, they could not develop into a stabilized party system to counterbalance power relations in society.” Moreover, Korosteleva points out that there is no participatory linkage that connects the electorate with these parties, which results in these parties lacking good electoral support. She further points out that with the establishment of the presidency, the Belarusian people were exposed to a populist Lukashenko without any party affiliations and an anti-party attitude, thus come election time they rather not waste their vote on a marginal candidate, thereby choosing the lesser of two evils. Feduta et.al describe the reasons for the weak role of parties a bit more nuanced arguing that Belarus has a majority voting system, which makes it worthwhile for candidates to run on an independent platform, as parties do not have a good reputation among the electorate, as

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120 Ibid., 70.
well as they do not have the material resources to support candidates.\textsuperscript{121} Moreover parties are effectively excluded from the electoral process (no membership in election commissions), while laws hinder parties in their political work outside of parliament (e.g. protests, rallies etc.), whilst they have no right to initiate laws.\textsuperscript{122} Most importantly, there is only a weak political culture with no democratic traditions, which slowed down the development of a political identity of groups based on ideological doctrines, such as conservatism, liberalism etc.\textsuperscript{123} On the whole Timmermann argues that by and large the weak position of parties in Belarus is due to the lacking tradition as a result of the Soviet one-party rule, which resulted in a low number of party members, as well as the inability of leading party politicians to sacrifice their personal ambitions in favor of a common position in the attempt for regime change.\textsuperscript{124}

So, one can see that the role of parties in Belarus is rather limited. While, this is partly due to the institutional and legal framework set up by Lukashenko over the years, the parties themselves also played their part in this. Korosteleva put it in simple terms, when she argues that the oppositional parties “lack a distinct ideological profile and doctrine and have limited power resources and organizational cohesiveness. Parties therefore attempt to mobilize support from a population that does not see them as likely to ever be able to equal the power of a single man, the president.”\textsuperscript{125} Even western media, usually critical of electoral outcomes and quick in labeling Belarusians as an oppressed people, admit that “most Belarusians, even if they dislike Mr. Lukashenko, have little desire to have their heads cracked [(referring to government crackdowns on oppositional protests)] for an opposition they regard as a bunch of cranks, hotheads, mediocrities and foreign stooges.”\textsuperscript{126} Timmermann brings it to a point when he argues that the potential for societal protest is larger than the willingness to vote for one of the party candidates.\textsuperscript{127}

As mentioned above, the 2001 election was different from previous ones, in that Lukashenko initially faced several candidates of the opposition that ran against him, but most of whom withdrew, in favor of Vladimir Goncharik, who was considered by the op-
position as the most electable candidate, thereby improving his chances to be elected.\textsuperscript{128} In general there were 18 parties existent at the time of the elections, eleven of which were in opposition to the president (e.g. Belarusian Women’s Party \textit{Hope}, Belarusian Socialdemocratic Party \textit{Volksgramada}, Liberal Democratic Party, Belarusian Work Party etc.), which left the other seven (Agrarian Party, Belarusian Patriotic Party, Bel. Social-Sport Party, Communist Party of Belarus, Republican Party, Party for Work and Justice of the Belarusian Republic) loyal to Lukashenko.\textsuperscript{129} The role of Belarusian parties in society is questionable at best, however.

With this in mind it is not far-fetched to think that maybe there is a reason other than electoral fraud behind Lukashenko’s landslide victories. A telling example for the weak position of the opposition in society and that it is more lucrative for candidates to run as an independent candidate is that Vladimir Goncharik, the runner-up in the 2001 election was an independent candidate. An even more telling example is that the only part-affiliated candidate, Sergei Gaidukvich of the Liberal Democratic Party, received 2.5 per cent of the vote, while 4.1 per cent of the votes were cast against all candidates.\textsuperscript{130} In other words the vast majority of votes was in favor of Lukashenko, Goncharik, or against all candidates, while the only candidate affiliated to a party, received one-sixth of Goncharik’s votes. Granted these numbers need to be taken with a grain of salt, as the OSCE repeatedly bemoaned the lack of transparency in regards to early-voting and mobile voting, as well as the tabulation of election results.\textsuperscript{131}

The low number of votes for the opposition candidates was also attributed to the excessive regulations on free and fair campaigning, as for example demonstrations had to be registered and needed approval by the city/regional council and had to have an expected attendance of over 1000 participants, and the violation of these requirements could have led to a disbanding of the respective parts or union organizing the event, which in effect was a curtailing of the freedom of expression.\textsuperscript{132} Moreover, each candidate was eligible for roughly $12,500 in campaign funds provided for by the state and were not allowed to use

\textsuperscript{130} Nohlen, \textit{Elections in Europe}, 252.
\textsuperscript{131} See OSCE, \textit{ILEOM 2001 Presidential Election}, 7.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
any other funds, except for these, which in addition to Presidential Decree No.11 that limited the opportunities to organize public mass meetings of supports. As well, the OSCE bemoaned direct interference of state officials (militia, police) in the campaign of a candidate. It cites the example of members of the United Civic Party, who were arrested after they had distributed opposition newspapers, while another example is the attempted break-in into runner-up Goncharik’s regional headquarter in Mogilev Oblast by militia, who ended up confiscating T-Shirts with a slogan deemed slanderous to Lukashenko. Even though these are only examples, they show that there was clear lack of freedom of expression and the campaign by opposition candidates was greatly hampered. This is also what the OSCE concluded when they wrote that

these incidents had chilling effects on an already minimal level of public campaigning and illustrate a trend in which opposition public organization as well as individual citizens faced harassment or intimidation while attempting to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed rights of expression, association and assembly during the run up to elections.

Thus, when considering the existing party landscape and their influence on the population, one can see that despite the allegations of electoral fraud, the weak role of parties in Belarus ought to be considered, before making rash assumptions. While this shall not downplay the obstacles that the opposition faced in the run up of the election, it provides another reason as to why the election results were clearly favoring the incumbent. So parties did not fare well in the 2001 elections, which was partly due to their weak stance in society, but also due to the adversaries they faced when campaigning. But there are also other ways to make a party platform known and that was via the media.

As mentioned before, state-owned media outlets (especially radio and television) are dominant in Belarus. At the same time radio and television are the main source of information regarding political developments and are therefore of great value and importance during elections. But as the name already says, they are state owned, so the position they will take is not hard to guess. Independent broadcasting media, such as Russian TV channels or private radio stations, as pointed out in the OSCE report, did not provide

133 Ibid., 10.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., 15.
valuable information on the elections except during the last week of the campaign.\textsuperscript{137} Independent print media were the only sources of alternative information, yet they were charged higher prices than state media and distribution was limited, so they could not reach large segments of the population.\textsuperscript{138} Moreover, several independent print media outlets have been under scrutiny and pressure of the authorities. The OSCE cites an example where a printing house that printed several independent national and regional newspapers was closed for a few days, after which it was reopened with a new director sympathetic to the incumbent and who practically censored these newspapers.\textsuperscript{139} This example was just one of some twenty-six incidents where the freedoms of expression and information were violated to the disadvantage of the independent media.\textsuperscript{140}

However, there were also positive aspects regarding the media, as the legal requirement to equally provide free airtime and newspaper space for candidates were mostly met, with the exception of Lukashenko using regular TV and radio coverage on a daily basis to seemingly present his activities as a president, but which were clearly used as a campaigning tool, which violated the electoral code.\textsuperscript{141} Coverage of the candidates was only positive with respect to Lukashenko, who received the highest degree of coverage, while the other candidates were mere side notes and depicted mostly negatively.\textsuperscript{142}

Thus, the media were clearly biased in favor Lukashenko, who received notably more airtime than the opposition candidates, and the tone was positive when the incumbent was portrayed, while the opposition was portrayed in negative terms. The only exception with respect to tone were the independent print media, as the OSCE report shows that despite Lukashenko being allocated the most amount of space, the tone was largely negative and mostly in favor of the opposition, most notably Goncharik.\textsuperscript{143}

The question that arises now is what effect this had on the voters. The basis for this will be the elections results. However, it should be stressed at this point that the results are based on the official numbers provided by the election committee. As the OSCE report pointed to numerous possibilities for and instances of rigging the votes (e.g. early voting, vote counting, and tabulation of results)\textsuperscript{144} the numbers are to be taken with a grain of salt.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{144} See OSCE Final report on the Presidential election 2001 pages 20–24 for more details.
According to the OSCE Report, there was an alleged voter turnout of approximately 84 per cent in Belarus, with the lowest turnout in Minsk city (77.6 per cent) and a similar turnout in the other electoral districts (between 84 and 85.8 per cent). The results were overwhelmingly in favor of Lukashenko (75.6 per cent). However, while the percentage ranged from 76.2 to 85 per cent in the other electoral districts, Lukashenko only received 57.4 per cent of the votes in Minsk city, while the runner-up Goncharik received 30.5 per cent, which is remarkable, considering the alleged election rigging. At the same time it can be attributed to more observant (independent) eyes in the polling stations in the city of Minsk, than in the polling stations (especially mobile polling stations) in the more remote villages. As well, the issue of early voting comes into play here.

But there were also independent observers, who collected votes from 70 per cent of voting stations around the country, and who claimed that the incumbent only received 70 per cent of votes, as opposed to the official 75.6 per cent.\textsuperscript{145} At the same time the observation mission LEOM provided a small sample of 90 polling stations where they counted 76.7 per cent of the votes.\textsuperscript{146} So it remains difficult to say for certain whether or not the official numbers are correct, despite independent support of the official numbers. But, given the weak status of parties in the Belarusian society, these numbers may actually be accurate. At the same time it should be clear that given the misgivings of the OSCE regarding the official conduct during the campaign and the possibilities for electoral fraud, it is probable that this actually happened and that the election result do not necessarily reflect the wishes of the electorate.

So the 2001 election was rather controversial. Regardless of the weak status of parties, officials did not make campaigning easy for opposition candidates either. The authorities used all legal and also questionable means at their disposal to keep the opposition from running a campaign the way they should be able to. Similarly, the state-run media was biased in favor of Lukashenko and to the disadvantage of the opposing candidates. Moreover the integrity of the elections was called into question, deemed not fair and was considered fraudulent due to violations during the vote count, as well as questionable practices during the early voting process. The results were accordingly. At the same time, runner-up Goncharik, most vocal in this process, claimed that 20 to 25 per cent of votes were illegally taken from him and given to Lukashenko, but was unable to provide credible and sufficient

\begin{footnotes}
\item[145] Ibid., 26.
\item[146] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
In the end it is difficult to say for certain if the results were justified, but it should be pointed out that Korosteleva argues that Lukashenko was elected by the will of the people, however under unfair circumstances, as the people were given the chance to ratify the institutional, structural, as well as cultural circumstances that were dictated to them. Though, one can certainly entertain doubts about whether or not it was actually the will of the people that was expressed in this election.

In the following the paper will look at the 2006 and 2010 elections to see how it was conducted.

**The 2006 Election**

On March 19, 2006 Belarusians went out to, once again, vote in a presidential election. On the whole this election did not differ much from the previous presidential election, except for the aftermath. Lukashenko was allowed to run again, since he, as mentioned above, had abolished the maximum amount of two presidential terms by means of the referendum of 2004. There were more opponents however. Sergei Gaidukevich ran again for the Liberal Democratic Party, Alexander Kozulin ran for the Social Democratic Party, and Alexander Milinkevich ran as an independent. Hence, the voters had a genuine choice of candidates for which they could cast their vote. Yet, in the end Lukashenko, again, won in a landslide victory. But before the results are discussed, this thesis will first take a look at the run-up to the elections, including the campaign and the role of the media.

Like the previous, the 2006 election was conducted according to the Election Code, which had severe shortcomings, as pointed out by the OSCE report on the election. On the whole the report concluded that the Election Code did not ensure a basis for free and fair campaigning, as it only allowed certain forms of campaigning, namely the usage of airtime in the state media, the organization of meetings with voters and the distribution of certain types of campaign material. Moreover, while the state had to provide each candidate with roughly $31,000 in funds for campaign material, the candidates were not allowed to use their own funds or donations for their campaign, but could only use the money provid-

147 Ibid., 24.
150 Ibid., 6.
ed by the state, which was not allowed to be used for billboards.\textsuperscript{151} So campaigning was off to a bad start. But first the registration of candidates.

As mentioned above, in order for a candidate to become official he needs the support of an \textit{initiative group} of at least 100 voters, who in turn had to apply for registration at least 85 days prior to election day and provide a list of at least 100,000 supporting signatures of eligible voters, which had to be completed within 30 days.\textsuperscript{152} Here the OSCE report mentions reports by observers that point out that authorities made it difficult for these groups during the signature collection, as they were denied access to student dormitories and workplaces, while those collecting signatures for Lukashenko, but also Gaidukevich, were granted access.\textsuperscript{153} Moreover, regarding voter registration, discrepancies were noticed as well. The report states that there was no publicly accessible list of voters, as well as the registry of voters was not centrally collected, but remained at the individual polling stations, which was considered a lack in transparency as no cross-reference of possibly multiple registrations of individual voters was done.\textsuperscript{154} This means that this provided a way to conduct electoral fraud, which will be picked up again later on when talking about early voting.

With respect to campaigning it can be said that the opposition had the opportunity to voice their platform. As per the Election Code, campaigning commenced on February 17\textsuperscript{th} and campaigning prior to that date was not allowed, which led to penalties for some people, who ignored this.\textsuperscript{155} Beyond that, the campaign ran quite similar to the one in 2001. Lukashenko did not visibly campaign, but presented himself in his role as president and was portrayed as such and in quite a favorable manner by the state media.\textsuperscript{156} The opposition was again hindered by state authorities in their attempt to campaign, as the authorities used state power in order to intimidate and instill fear, which limited people’s ability to act freely and therefore engage in a meaningful campaign in favor of the opposition.\textsuperscript{157} The OSCE report provides examples such as the disturbance of distribution of opposition leaflets and in some cases, the confiscation of these materials, as well as in two cases the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 10.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 11.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 12.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 13.
\end{itemize}
sentencing of Milinkevich campaign workers for distributing leaflets with the argument that they were ‘littering’.¹⁵⁸

Moreover, there were obvious violations of the freedom of association and public assembly, as authorities prevented oppositional election-related gatherings, as well as detained some 100 campaign activists and 30 official representatives of the opposition.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the state instilled a sense of fear by broadcasting a report that an imminent attempt for a violent coup under the guise of oppositional campaigning, and thus anyone partaking in protests on the election-day would be considered a terrorist as per article 289 of the penal code.¹⁶⁰ Thus, authorities significantly hindered any campaigning conducted by the opposition and their supporters. By means of physical threats, arrests, and the implied declaration that anyone siding with the opposition equals a terrorist, the government managed to intimidate opposition supporters and deter potential ones.

As previously mentioned the role of the media was once again in support of Lukashenko and thus reported extensively and rather favorably about him. Independent print media sympathetic to the opposition were vulnerable to state intervention in form of repeated police raids and confiscation of prints (e.g. Narodnaya Volya and Tovarisch).¹⁶¹ Furthermore, many journalists, as pointed out by the OSCE report, engaged in self-censorship, which is attributed to the restrictive legal framework, which makes slander (and most likely critical opinions) about the president a crime and punishable by prison.¹⁶² So, when it came to the opposition, the (independent) media were greatly restricted in their freedom and room to maneuver, but it looked quite different when Lukashenko was concerned, as, for example, non-designated media were not allowed to provide space to candidates to print campaign material, yet, when one of these media publicized Lukashenko’s campaign platform, it was somehow not in violation of the Election Code.¹⁶³

During the election, news broadcasts were also rather favorable towards Lukashenko, with prime-time newscast giving him over 90 per cent coverage, while his opponents received such coverage much less frequently.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, while Lukashenko’s critical remarks regarding the opposition were covered at length and the opposition was

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¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 14.
¹⁶⁰ Ibid.
¹⁶¹ Ibid., 16.
¹⁶² Ibid.
¹⁶³ Ibid.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.
portrayed in a negative manner, critical comments concerning Lukashenko made by opposition candidates were censored, an example for which are the radio broadcasts of Kozulin and Milinkevich, which were censored but neither candidate was informed about this.\textsuperscript{165}

The OSCE also cited a strange example of media manipulation. Belarusian television station BNT broadcasted a program entitled \textit{Vibor}, meaning choice, which included a telephone poll where people could call in order to vote for their preferred candidate, but the program was pre-recorded, which makes the result of 78 per cent in favor of Lukashenko, quite doubtful.\textsuperscript{166}

Thus, the freedom of the media, once again, can be called into question, as state media reported essentially in favor of Lukashenko, while independent media were suppressed. Foreign media (especially western media), whilst available to a certain degree, were also being blocked by Belarusian authorities, namely by asking Belarusians to take down satellite dishes as they allegedly disturbed the appearance of the city.\textsuperscript{167} So, the regime tried everything to limit the exposure of opposition candidates, whilst exposing the electorate to Lukashenko as much and as positive as possible, which is hardly democratic. What effect did this have on the elections themselves?

During the early voting period between March 14 and 18, 2006, there has been an official turnout of 31 per cent, however it is bemoaned that, according to some reports of observers, there has been significant coercion of employees by managers of companies and directors of educational institutions to go vote early, with some threatening to cancel labor contracts, as well as penalties in case of students.\textsuperscript{168} Clearly this did not represent the way free elections ought to be conducted. Moreover, the OSCE reported irregularities regarding the early voting process. Examples were, seemingly identical signatures on voter lists, poorly sealed ballot boxes (including unsealed ones after polls closed on March 18), and the presence of unauthorized personnel directing the work in the polling stations, namely police.\textsuperscript{169}

On Election Day, March 19, the situation was not that different. Seemingly similar signatures on voter lists, not properly sealed ballot boxes, as well as police officers being present and apparently directed the work in the station.\textsuperscript{170} Other irregularities included vot-

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 17–18.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{167} Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 424.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 22.
ers not voting in secrecy (showing their ballot before putting it in the box, or having someone else in the booth), group voting (several people in a booth), some people were handed more than one ballot and/or voted more than once, as well as some voters were pressured in their choice who to vote for, and state-accredited agencies announced Lukashenko’s victory with over 80 per cent of the vote as of eleven o’clock in the morning.\textsuperscript{171}

When it came to vote counting, there were significant and similar problems as well. Beginning with unauthorized persons present (police apparently in a directing function), alteration of results or results written in pencil, which makes it safe to assume that were likely to be altered later; in one example the chair of an election committee openly threatened other members with the loss of their employment should they not sign the protocol he had altered.\textsuperscript{172} The final result was another landslide victory for Lukashenko, who garnered 82.6 per cent of the total votes, while his closest competitor, Milinkevich, received 6 per cent of the votes, with an alleged total voter turnout of 92.6 per cent.\textsuperscript{173} These results were of course rejected by the opposition and Milinkevich and Kozulin attempted to take the case to the Supreme Court in order to have the election declared invalid, which, however, was rejected by the Court as inadmissible.\textsuperscript{174}

The immediate result of the election was that both opposition candidates (Kozulin and Milinkevich) took to the streets and rallied some 10,000 people in October Square to declare the result as falsified and not a true representation of the will of the people, while demanding new elections in June of the same year.\textsuperscript{175} The response by authorities was not immediate, but when it came its message was clear. During the initial phase of the protests police were merely harassing protesters, detaining some or prevented people from bringing food and the like, but after five days of protests the authorities began arresting everyone who was still there.\textsuperscript{176} The result was that Kozulin, along with some 500 to 1000 other protesters, was severely beaten, arrested and sentenced to five years in prison; as well, over 200 people were sentenced by the court in Minsk in one day, while the total of arrested and sentenced protesters was said to be 392, of which many were not provided legal counsel.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 23–24.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
Thus, while the 2006 election was similar to the previous one, it was also different. It was similar in that the way the elections were conducted was the same, results included, and the elections were, like the previous ones, antedated, which according to Leppert came as a surprise to the opposition\textsuperscript{178} Apparently, nobody had learned from the last election and that this was a tactic purposefully employed by Lukashenko in order to limit the amount of time that the opposition can use to coordinate a strategy and a single candidate.

However, the aftermath of the election was somewhat new. Firstly, the number of protesters that the opposition could rally was enormous. As Leppert points out, it was the largest protest in ten years.\textsuperscript{179} But it was also the reaction of the police and the authorities (beatings of detainees\textsuperscript{180}), especially the high number of detained people and those that were sentenced by the courts. The reason for this and the decree of 2005 (giving the government the freedom to interpret dissent as conspiracy against the president\textsuperscript{181}) was, as mentioned above, the Orange Revolution of 2004 in the Ukraine and the fear of a spill-over effect. With this in mind, the reaction of the authorities should not have come as a surprise.

However, Leppert also points to independent polls, which made clear that even without the electoral fraud it would have been even more likely than in 2001 that Lukashenko would have won this election (in February 2006 57.6 per cent of the respondents would have given their vote to Lukashenko).\textsuperscript{182} Ironically, the aforementioned poll was conducted by the independent Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Studies, which was closed due to its critical surveys.\textsuperscript{183} However, Leppert attributes the pro-Lukashenko results to the nature of his loyal voters (retired females with elementary education and elderly public sector workers in villages in Eastern Belarus), and that they have not changed much since the previous election, but, if anything, have increased in numbers due to demographic changes in favor of older people.\textsuperscript{184} So the electorate opposing Lukashenko (young people with higher education and employed in the private sector, as well as students in Minsk or other big cities) is weaker in terms of numbers than the pro-Lukashenko voters.\textsuperscript{185} This is supported by Ioffe, who cites a national survey conducted in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{178} See Leppert, Akzeptierte Diktatur?, 80.
\bibitem{179} Ibid., 81.
\bibitem{181} See above, page 27.
\bibitem{182} Leppert, Akzeptierte Diktatur?, 86.
\bibitem{183} Ibrahim Ghabbar, Belarus, eine defekte Präsidentenrepublik oder rein autoritäres Regime mit demokratischen Elementen (Norderstedt: Grin Verlag, 2007), 16.
\bibitem{184} Leppert, Akzeptierte Diktatur?, 86.
\bibitem{185} Ibid., 86–87.
\end{thebibliography}
early March 2006 by a Russian polling form (VTsIOM), which showed that 60 per cent of respondents were willing to cast their vote in favor of Lukashenko.186

In sum, the 2006 election did not differ much from the 2001 election, when the procedure is concerned. The OSCE pointed to the same irregularities concerning the way the elections were conducted (early voting, vote counting, meddling of unauthorized people, coercion of voters), and how the institutional setup greatly disadvantaged the opposition. However, against the backdrop of the 2004 Orange Revolution in the Ukraine, the oppression by the regime appeared harsher than before, which, as Leppert points out, showed a certain fear on the part of Lukashenko regarding the possible spill-over effect. However, despite these repressive measures during and after the election, they should be brought into contrast with the survey results as brought forward by Leppert and Ioffe. While electoral fraud ought not to be denied in any way, these surveys taken by independent institutions show that there was a significant percentage of people in favor of Lukashenko, which indicates that he could have won the election even without rigging the votes.

The 2010 Election

The most recent presidential election took place on December 19, 2010, this time with a modified electoral code, which meant that some OSCE recommendations were put into practice, and thus meant an improvement. More specifically these changes were that the previous permission-based system to hold public meetings was replaced and substituted it with a simple two-day notification procedure for candidates and their supporters,187 which essentially meant a theoretical improvement regarding the freedom of assembly. Other changes were the provision of broadcasted debates between candidates in the state media, as well as the possibility for candidates to set up individual campaign funds.188 Moreover, provisions regarding the early voting process were added so that a protocol needs to be completed after each early voting day, as well as that the composition of the election committees is to include at least one third of representatives of political parties and public associations.189 So far so good. However the reality was not as positive as these changes might suggest.

188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
As pointed out by the OSCE, suffrage rights were revoked for criminal offenders in pre-trial detention (not in line with the *presumption of innocence principle*), as well as the two-day notification procedure for public meetings only applied to candidates and their proxies, while other electoral actors still needed the permission by the authorities, which had to be applied for up to 15 days prior to the event.\(^{190}\) As well, even though presidential candidates were allowed to provide an advisor to the election commissions, they could not really participate as their vote on issues was not counted and none of their advice was recorded.\(^{191}\) To put this in numbers, for the territorial election committees (TEC), of the 781 nominees, 93 per cent of the eventually appointed were from pro-Lukashenko organizations, while in the precinct election committees (PEC) the success rate of pro-Lukashenko nominees was 93 percent, which means that a mere 0.7 per cent at the TECs and 0.26 per cent at the PECs were from organizations considered opposed to Lukashenko.\(^{192}\)

In terms of voter registration, there were still no centralized registries, and voter registration was still possible until after the end of the voting process, which in essence allowed for multiple voting and thus electoral fraud.\(^{193}\) Candidate registration was the same as in the previous election. A signature list of at least 100,000 signatures had to be provided in order to register the candidate, but unlike in the previous election, collectors were able to collect signatures anywhere, without limitations set by authorities.\(^{194}\) Although it was argued that the signature verification process was poorly regulated, ten candidates were eventually registered: the incumbent, Ryhor Kastusiou, Alexei Mikhalevich, Vladimir Nekliaev, Yaroslav Romanchuck, Vital Rymasheuski, Andrei Sannikov, Nikolai Statkevich, Viktor Tereshchenko and Dmitri Uss.\(^{195}\)

During the campaigning process, which started on November 18, it became clear that there was no even playing field for the candidates as it favored the incumbent yet again. Despite rallies and meetings with voters, the visibility of the campaigns was low, as some candidates had difficulties getting their leaflets printed because the print houses were pressured by the KGB not to print them.\(^{196}\) Moreover, while authorities were obliged to provide space for campaign materials, people working for opposition candidates were re-

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 6–7.
\(^{191}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{193}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{194}\) Ibid.
\(^{195}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{196}\) Ibid.
peatedly harassed by the police (e.g. campaign materials of Statkevich were seized), in one
case even beaten (one person posting leaflets for Sannikov).\textsuperscript{197} While the OSCE said that
candidates were able to organize meetings and rallies to convey their messages unhindered,
Lukashenko, in violation of the electoral code, misused administrative resources to pro-
mote his candidacy, while people were pressured to attend and to use early voting to vote
for Lukashenko.\textsuperscript{198} With regards to campaign funds, the new regulation that private funds
and donations could be used, was a step forward, but ultimately proved ineffective, as only
the incumbent, Nekliaev, and Sannikov were able to get significant contributions, which
prevented the other candidates to engage in an effective campaign.\textsuperscript{199}

Regarding the media, there have not been any improvements as their reporting was
still deemed biased and subjective in favor of Lukashenko. For example, the two largest
television and radio broadcasting stations (\textit{First Channel TV} and \textit{ONT TV}) are state-
controlled and have a nation-wide reach,\textsuperscript{200} which, given the fact that criticism of the pres-
ident in form of libel, defamation or insult can be punished with up to five years in prison
(as per the presidential decree of 2005, see above), should not leave any questions regard-
ing the tone of the broadcasts either. Moreover, despite the debate between candidates,
which was to be aired on state television, the effects were not that great as they were not
aired during primetime, while Lukashenko’s three-hour presidential address at the All Bel-
arus People’s Assembly received a primetime slot.\textsuperscript{201} Of course the OSCE screened the
coverage of the presidential campaign and the reports about the candidates. The result was
pretty obvious. Of the monitored TV channels, radio stations, and newspapers, 89 per cent
of their coverage was devoted to Lukashenko, while the other candidates were marginally
mentioned and then only as a group.\textsuperscript{202} In the case of the state-funded \textit{ONT} the discrepa-
encies were even bigger. News coverage regarding Lukashenko in his function as president
and election candidate was overwhelming. The channel allocated over 8 hours (94 per
cent) of positive coverage of the president, while the other candidates received a combined
32 minutes of mostly negative coverage.\textsuperscript{203}

\begin{itemize}
\item[197] Ibid.
\item[198] Ibid., 11.
\item[199] Ibid., 11–12.
\item[200] Ibid., 13.
\item[201] Ibid.
\item[202] Ibid.14
\item[203] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Print media essentially worked along the same lines, as the presidential presentation was on the front pages of the newspapers, while those of the other candidates were published on the inside pages, and in many cases they were censored as well. Moreover, the state-funded newspapers used 91 per cent of their election coverage to the president, while private print media were more diverse, as, for example, the Narodnaya Volia and Nasha Niva devoted lots of coverage to the opposition candidates and harshly criticized Lukashenko. Thus, like in the past elections, media coverage was greatly to the advantage and in favor of the president, and the opposition had a hard time getting their voice heard. Yet there were critical voices in the print media.

During the early voting process, some previous recommendations by the OSCE were implemented to improve security concerns. Ballot boxes were sealed in the presence of observers, daily protocols of who already voted were made public and the total number was also reported separately. However, the fact that observers of the presidential candidates were not allowed to escort the police officers in charge for the overnight guarding of the ballot boxes and election material dampened the improvements. As well, inconsistencies, such as poor quality of ballot boxes that were not secured properly, missing security features on the ballots, the mixed use of ballots etc., were observed among the individual polling stations.

On Election Day, the execution of the elections ran smoothly, albeit with irregularities. These irregularities were essentially like in the previous elections, such as interference of the work by unauthorized persons, lack of cooperation on the side of the PEC members etc. During the vote count the situation changed rapidly, as it had in previous elections during that stage. The OSCE report especially pointed out the lack of transparency, citing the lack of opportunity to observe the vote count due to restrictions, pre-signed result protocols, the participation of unauthorized personnel in the count, as well as ballot stuffing.

The tabulation of the results was also criticized by the OSCE as observers could not follow the process, in some cases the transfer from PEC protocols to TEC protocols was delayed, and in two instances the results on the protocols were apparently changed during
the transfer from PEC to TEC.\textsuperscript{210} The results, however, were in line with the previous elections, as Lukashenko received 79.6 per cent of the vote and the other candidates received a combined 12.9 per cent, with a total voter turnout of 90.6 per cent.\textsuperscript{211}

So in comparison to the previous elections, there were improvements regarding the democratic character of the elections, but these were not enough. There were still significant discrepancies and violations of proper democratic electoral conduct. Of course this resulted in protests, like it had after the previous election.

The nature of the protests was more violent, however. As a precaution, riot police had cordoned off the October Square, which was the site of the post-election protests in 2006, and prevented protesters, with presidential candidates Nekliaev and Statkevich and the others leading the way, to enter.\textsuperscript{212} The response by the police was described as rather brutal, as Nekliaev and Statkevich were beaten by, what they describe as Belarusian special forces dressed in black.\textsuperscript{213} The number of protesters was said to be over 10,000, who attempted to storm a government building, but were pushed back by riot police and beaten with batons.\textsuperscript{214} The OSCE report described the behavior of the police as an “indiscriminate use of disproportionate force [which] left several demonstrators suffering from severe head injuries.”\textsuperscript{215} Moreover, at around midnight, police violently broke up the protest, and, in the process, arrested seven of the candidates and their campaign managers, as well as over 600 activists including journalists, civil society representatives and foreign citizens, while not providing any kind of information about their whereabouts for two days.\textsuperscript{216} On May 25, 2011 the Office for a Democratic Belarus in Brussels reported that two presidential candidates, Statkevich and Dzmitry Uss, received a six year sentence in a labor colony and a five-and-a-half year sentence at a labor colony respectively, with strict conditions.\textsuperscript{217}

In sum, the 2010 elections were somewhat different from the previous ones. The election campaign was seen as much freer than in the past and the poll was, as international
monitors have said, never fairer.²¹⁸ So Belarus made some progress in that respect. However, the brutality with which the system beat down the protests in the aftermath of the contested election greatly outweighed the positive sides. Especially the treatment of the other candidates and their lengthy sentences for partaking in “mass disturbances”²¹⁹ was a heavy-handed response by the state. However, when considering the previous election and the attempt of Lukashenko to suppress any revolutionary attempts as mentioned in the previous part about the 2006 election, it should not come as a surprise that the protest, which was larger than the one in 2006, was beaten down that quickly and decisively.

²¹⁸ See “‘Hundreds of protesters arrested ‘ in Belarus’”.
Chapter Conclusion

When considering the elections that were just discussed one can provide some answers to the question posed in the conclusion of the previous chapter. While elections indeed ought to be considered an integral part of a democratic system, it is their quality that gives them democratic substance. As this chapter has shown, the elections in Belarus are far from being democratic in the sense as described in chapter one (theoretical approaches). Despite improvements between the 2001 election and that in 2010, the shortcomings of the electoral procedure (including campaigns, the role of media, the elections themselves, vote counting and the like) as described in the third chapter, made the elections far from being democratic. This is especially clear when considering how the opposition appears to be merely tolerated and how basic rights (freedom of association / assembly, freedom of opinion) are either curtailed or taken away altogether, as seen during the protests of 2006, but most obviously during and after the protests of 2010. The direction this development seems to be pointing at is away from democracy. A tell-tale sign for this is the fact that on December 31, 2010, less than two weeks after the disputed election, Belarus’ Foreign Affairs ministry announced that it would not renew the mandate for the OSCE office in Minsk and close it down.  

But what to make of all of this? How to situate Belarus in terms of its political character? Is it a democracy according to Dahl? Unequivocally no. Is it a dictatorship? It has certain aspects of one, but a dictatorship would not have allowed, for example, election observers such as the OSCE. In fact there would not have been elections at all.

The following chapter will therefore put the historical developments, as described in chapters two (Belarus since independence) and three (presidential elections), in the theoretical context of chapter one. This is to see which theoretical markers can be identified and applied to Belarus, in order to provide an answer to the initially posed questions: Is Belarus a dictatorship and to what extent is it undemocratic and dictatorial? Under what kind of political system can one place Belarus, if it is not a dictatorship?

220 Ibid., 24.
5. Synthesis – Belarus and…

At this point one can already draw some preliminary conclusions. Firstly, regarding the developments in Belarus after its independence, it is indeed a special case among the Eastern European states, especially as it “restored important elements of the former Soviet Union”, as pointed out by Timmermann, while the other states (e.g. Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary etc.) took the democratic route. The most telling example for this is the secret police that is reporting directly to the president and did not even bother changing its Soviet name (KGB). Another example is the already mentioned creation of a Belarusian state ideology, which builds on ideological elements of the Soviet Union (collectivism, social justice, and the Great Patriotic War), while Lukashenko is portrayed as the spiritual leader of the Eastern European civilization. Secondly, Lukashenko proved to be quite resilient when it came to outside pressure, especially from the European Union. Despite his concessions especially during elections, he managed to retain his status as the center of power in Belarus, thus when considering Dahl’s ideal-type democracy, it is blatantly obvious that Belarus does not fall into that category. But what about the other theories described in chapter one?

In the following the paper will take the elements described in the historical outline of Belarus’ history and the presidential elections and put them in the context of the theoretical outline of the initial chapter, in order to situate Belarus in the above-mentioned continuum. It will begin with the democratic aspects of Belarus.

…Democracy Theories

Again, when considering Dahl’s ideal type democracy, it is obvious that Belarus does not fall into that category. Belarus does not meet any of the five established criteria. With respect to the first criterion, there is no real equality in voting and it is questionable that the government in Belarus takes the expressed preference of each citizen equally into account when making decisions, which are therefore neither collective nor the will of the demos. As the previous criterion has not been met, Belarusians also do not have the opportunity to partake in the decision-making process, as power is concentrated in the hands of the

221 Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 413.
222 Ibid., 416.
223 Ibid., 419.
224 See page 8.
Lukashenko regime, while the parliament essentially caters to him (Timmermann aptly referred to it as a “pro-presidential pocket-parliament”\textsuperscript{225}) and therefore does not adequately represent the people. While the first years after independence (as mentioned in chapter two) were marked with democracy-building and a democratic constitution, the impasse in the Belarusian parliament between Shushkevich and Kebich (democratic reformers and old communist nomenklatura) showed weak points in the democratic character. As previously mentioned, given that the old communist (authoritarian) elite remained in power the new institutional setup was marked with significant flaws, namely (and here the paper shall refer back to Gojcyk as mentioned in chapter two\textsuperscript{226}) that the constitution of 1994 was modeled around existing power relations and did not represent a constraint of power, but helped to set up the presidential system. Similarly, criterion number 4, final control over the agenda, is not met by Belarus. Despite Dahl stating that it could be formulated as the demos having the liberty to delegate their authority away, even if the recipients make decision through nondemocratic processes,\textsuperscript{227} the permanent centralization of power in the hands of the president as it is the case in Belarus, is surely contrary to that.

However, as these criteria are ideal types, one should also see how Belarus fares in terms of Dahl’s seven institutions of a polyarchy, or the closest a state can come to the ideal type criteria. As pointed out in the first chapter, Dahl identifies seven institutions that constitute a polyarchy.\textsuperscript{228} But when comparing them to Belarus, it becomes quite clear that Belarus does not even come close to it. For one, elected officials (and here this work considers parliamentary officials in their function as representatives of the people) do not exercise control over government policies in the way the constitutional concept of power sharing presupposes. The reason is simple. The parliamentary system in Belarus is just too weak as to exert any kind of influence. Korosteleva and Timmermann brought it to a point when they said that the party system in Belarus is not anchored in society due to a lack of participatory linkage between the parties and the electorate, as well as the weak position of parties in Belarus is due to the Soviet legacy of one-party rule, and power politics amongst party politicians.\textsuperscript{229} Thus, the people are not included in the decision-making process as

\textsuperscript{225} Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 416. (translation by this author)
\textsuperscript{226} See above, page 25.
\textsuperscript{227} See above, page 8.
\textsuperscript{228} See above pages 8–9.
\textsuperscript{229} See above, page 34.
parties have failed and this led to a power delegation into the hands of an individual leader, which, according to Korosteleva, led to the population second-rating parties.\textsuperscript{230}

Moreover, the parliament in its role as interest-accommodating institution has failed, as it was split into two chambers (the brainchild of the president of course), in which the Lower House (House of Representatives) is dominated by the pro-presidential Zgoda and they proved to be compliant with no initiative, whilst obeying Lukashenko’s wishes.\textsuperscript{231}

In terms of the elections, it can be said that, while elections indeed did take place frequently, they were not conducted fairly. As the chapter on the presidential elections has shown,\textsuperscript{232} the restrictive regulations surrounding elections greatly disadvantaged the opposition parties in their election campaigns, as well as overwhelming pro-Lukashenko media-coverage deprived the voters of messages by the opposition. Moreover, repeated indices of vote rigging during the early-voting days and on the Election Days also did not support the image of a fair election. Moreover, reports that coercion was used to get people to vote for Lukashenko, does not adhere to the practice of democratic elections either.

While suffrage itself was not infringed upon, the rights to freedom of expression (especially criticism of the government) without the danger of punishment were greatly limited and increasingly ignored. As described above in chapter three, the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine motivated Lukashenko to change of the criminal code which enabled the authorities to consider oppositional actions an attempted coup, which made it a felony punishable with several years in prison.\textsuperscript{233} When considering the post-election protests, especially after the 2006 and 2010 elections,\textsuperscript{234} then it is quite clear that there is no real right for (fearless) expression of opinion, let alone criticism of the government. In fact there seems to be an increasing limitation of it.

In this respect it is also apparent that the right to alternative sources of information, which are protected by law, is not given in Belarus, as most of the media outlets are still state-owned (100 per cent of broadcasting media and 80 per cent of print media\textsuperscript{235}) and therefore heavily biased in favor of the president. Alternative (or better independent from the state) sources of information (in the context of the elections these are mainly print-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[231] Ibid., 64.
\item[232] See above, pages 33–50.
\item[233] See above, pages 28–29.
\item[234] See above, pages 43–44, 49–50.
\item[235] Cf. Footnote 85.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
media), if they are not suppressed by the state, are at least under heavy pressure of the authorities.\textsuperscript{236} Thus, while generally having the right to seek out alternative information, the fact that these sources are actively suppressed by the Belarusian authorities, makes this right (in the eyes of this author), not irrelevant, but definitely pointless, as the limits that constrain it are simply too tight.

Lastly, the right to form groups or parties to articulate people’s interests is severely hampered as well. This has an adverse effect on civil society, which, as Ghubbar remarks, manifests itself in the low participation of people in political life.\textsuperscript{237} Moreover, Timmermann points out that as soon as the system has the impression that oppositional thinking might be organized enough to become a threat to their position, they take measures to prevent this.\textsuperscript{238} So people technically can form organizations and parties according to their interests, but this is only possible as long as it happens within the confines set by the state. Thus, Timmermann is absolutely right when he defines the role and the influence of opposition forces as a mere “democratic alibi function.”\textsuperscript{239}

Therefore, it is established that Belarus most clearly cannot be deemed a democracy as defined in the first chapter, as the shortcomings and defects are simply to grave to warrant such a classification. Thus this thesis will now see, if one can classify Belarus as a defective democracy, since it does have structures and institutions that are democratic in principle.

\textit{…Defective Democracy}

As laid out in chapter one, the concept of defective democracies presupposes an embedded democracy that is made up of four regimes that are based on a fifth, elections.\textsuperscript{240} When one or more of these regimes show deficits or damages then the respective political system is no longer a liberal democracy, as described above, but is a defective democracy. Furthermore depending on the damaged component the defective democracy can be categorized into one of four (pure) types.\textsuperscript{241} So, based on its history and its elections, can Belarus be deemed a defective democracy?

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{236} See pages 37, 41, 47–48.
\textsuperscript{237} Ghubbar, \textit{Belarus}, 17.
\textsuperscript{238} Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 423.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{240} See above, page 17.
\textsuperscript{241} See above, page 18.
\end{footnotesize}
As mentioned before, the central component is elections, as they are “the most visible expression of sovereignty of the people, simultaneous participation of the people and equal weight of their preferences; on the other hand its open competition for the central position of power makes it the main difference to autocracy.” Elections are a central element in this thesis, therefore it is crucial to see whether or not Belarus might be placed in this category.

As chapter three has clearly shown, elections in Belarus are a big issue. Although the way elections were conducted improved somewhat over the years, there were persistent signs for vote rigging as well as the obstructions the state put in the way of the opposing candidates in form of restrictive regulations, media bias in favor of Lukashenko, and harassment of campaign workers and candidates other than Lukashenko. The elections were therefore considered fraudulent by the OSCE and therefore, by extension, also by the West. However, it was also pointed out that, despite the vote rigging, the chances for Lukashenko’s victory in especially the elections in 2001 and 2006 could have been described as certain, as he seems to have had a great deal of electoral backing, at least in 2006. So in a sense it can be argued that the elections did indeed represent to a certain extent the will of the people, which thereby served the democratic purpose. Nevertheless, the circumstances under which the elections were carried out and the repressive measures vis-à-vis the opposition outweigh the little democratic character it had. Thus, one can argue that in the case of Belarus, the electoral component of defective democracies is indeed damaged.

With regards to the second component, the right of political participation, which Merkel considers the precondition for elections, in combination with suffrage forms the vertical dimension of democracy. This includes freedom of speech and rights of demonstration (for individuals and political parties), as well as the influence of media (whose information may not be regulated through politically motivated restrictions). Given the previous discussions regarding the Lukashenko-loyal state media on one side, and the opposition media (mainly print media) in chapter three, it appears obvious that this compo-
nent is also defective, as independent sources of information are minimal in number and are suppressed by the state. Thus, as stated above, the people do not really have an opportunity to freely express their views, especially when it comes to protests, as these were literally beaten down, especially in the aftermath of the 2006 and 2010 elections. When considering that this and the first component need to be mutually connected to ensure the functional logic of a democracy, one can already see that the basis for a defective democracy is greatly damaged.

The third component, civil rights (as defined in chapter one), can also be said to be quite defective, as this component includes rights that have been greatly violated in Belarus, namely the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly. Given that examples of these violations have been mentioned above in the discussion on the applicability of democracy theories, there should be no need to further elaborate on them.

The fourth and fifth components (accountability and effective power to govern), are damaged as well. Clear indicators are Lukashenko’s one stem theory and the consolidation of his power, especially the suppression of the parliament, which did away with horizontal accountability, which is usually intended for the three branches of government (executive, legislative and judiciary) to “check each other reciprocally, without one body dominating or interfering with the constitutionally defined core-sphere of the others.” Thus, effectively there are branches, but Lukashenko remains outside of them, which excludes any kind of horizontal accountability. Moreover, in terms of the effective power to govern, Lukashenko does effectively govern Belarus, but, as Merkel stressed, “it is crucial for the concept of embedded democracy that the effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives.” Given that the elections in Belarus, as discussed at length in the previous chapters, were not considered to have been free and fair, one can say that the power to govern is centralized and does not lie in the hands of democratically elected officials.

In sum, Belarus is clearly not a defective democracy either. Despite considering elections to be central to a democracy, the other components of Merkel’s embedded de-

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249 See above, pages 43–44, 49.
251 See above, page 11.
252 See for example page 53.
253 See above, page 26.
254 Merkel, “Embedded and Defective Democracies”, 41.
255 Ibid.
democracy are vital elements too, as he argues that authoritarian regimes use elections as a 
disguise to cover the true authoritarian nature of the system.\footnote{256}{Ibid., 55.} Thus, Timmermann’s words 
were quite fitting, when he said that elections in Belarus ”paint the democratic picture for 
the critical West.”\footnote{257}{Cf. footnote 117.} When thinking about the four types of defective democracy as per 
chapter one and the defects that Belarus shows in all five components, it is quite clear that 
it does not fall into any one of these categories. Hence, picking up on Merkel’s comment 
that elections can be used to disguise an authoritarian system, the paper will now turn to 
the concept of electoral authoritarianism.

...Electoral Authoritarianism

Similar to defective democracies, the concept of electoral authoritarianism takes elections 
as a foundation. Based on Schedler’s definition provided above the main features of this 
concept are regular elections for the chief executive and a national assembly, they are 
broadly inclusive (universal suffrage), and contain pluralistic traits, in that opposition is 
allowed, but they experience repressive treatment.\footnote{258}{Cf. footnote 58.} Moreover, in such a system discrimi-
ninatory electoral rules are employed in order to keep opposition parties and candidates out 
of the electoral arena, thereby violating their political and civil rights, while restricting 
their access to media and committing electoral fraud.\footnote{259}{Ibid.} In terms of the opposition it was 
pointed out in chapter one (electoral authoritarianism) that as a minimum requirement for 
free and fair elections, the opposition must be allowed to run in elections, even if the cir-
cumstances of the elections are not as free and fair as they should be.\footnote{260}{See above, page 21.} With this in mind, 
can one term Belarus an electoral authoritarian regime?

Elections are held on a regular basis in Belarus (both parliamentary elections and 
presidential elections). They are broadly inclusive, with the exception of people in pre-trial 
detention, whose suffrage rights are revoked, as well as their right to become a candidate, 
which is seen by the OSCE as a disproportionate sanction.\footnote{261}{OSCE, Report on Elections 2010, 6.} Moreover, elections in Bela-
rus allow for an opposition to run, thus it does show pluralistic traits. At the same time, as 
has been shown in chapter three, the authorities made it very hard for the opposition in all 
of the presidential elections. Be it through excessive campaigning regulations that were

\footnotesize
256 Ibid., 55.
257 Cf. footnote 117.
258 Cf. footnote 58.
259 Ibid.
260 See above, page 21.
openly repressive towards the opposition, or the limited access to mass media, as well as the apparent electoral fraud. Regarding these aspects one can place Belarus into this category, as it meets the criteria of electoral authoritarianism. Belarus does have and maintains the institutions necessary to make its system appear to be a representative democracy, which is in line with Schedler’s definition.

However, given the weak status of political parties as discussed at the beginning of chapter three, as well as Lindberg’s implication that if conditions were favorable, oppositional parties would partake in an election even if the chances of winning were slim as this would build strength within the legislation and society (thereby enhancing the chance to win in a later election), Belarus clearly stands out. Opposition parties never really stood a chance in the elections, as the repressive methods by the authorities were simply too great, as well as the missing anchorage of parties in Belarusian society limits the likelihood of them being elected, especially during the presidential elections. Thus, while electoral authoritarianism is assumed to be the most promising system to eventually making the transition towards democracy, Belarus does not seem to make that transition anytime soon. Especially given the way authorities ‘dealt’ with the opposition and the protesters in the aftermath of the 2010 elections, one can see a clear development away from democracy. So in a way Belarus can be deemed an electoral authoritarian system, however it does not fit into the theory sufficiently, as to explicitly call it that.

As electoral authoritarianism is seen as different from other authoritarian regimes, this thesis will now compare Belarus and its elections to the general definition of authoritarianism.

...Authoritarianism

While electoral authoritarianism provides for room for democratic maneuvering, other authoritarian regimes are much more limited in this respect. They ought to be seen closer to totalitarianism.

As stated in chapter one, authoritarian regimes are marked by a power concentration in one person or group, a strong limitation of civil and political rights, and a very limited or even nonexistent freedom to form parties in opposition to or alternatively from the

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262 See for example, pages 35–36, 40–47.
263 See above, pages 20–21.
264 See above, pages 33–34.
265 See above, page 21.
266 See above, page 21.
ruling elite. Moreover, with no guiding ideology, there is only a very limited ability to mobilize the population to support national goals.

When considering Belarus’ developments since independence and especially the elections, it becomes apparent that many aspects fit into the definition of authoritarianism. A very telling example is that of the limitations in plurality. The most blatantly obvious part of this is the practically non-existent horizontal accountability in form of checks and balances, as the bicameral parliament is set up in a way that ensures absolute loyalty towards Lukashenko (one house of parliament, the Council of Republic, is manned with Lukashenko-loyal ministers, while the other is dominated by the Zgoda which essentially caters to Lukashenko). Moreover, the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press is severely curtailed as the majority of media outlets is in the hands of the state and therefore caters to Lukashenko, while the few independent (and mainly print-) media are controlled by the government through administrative means (cancellation of contracts with print houses that prevented their printing for example). This makes it quite difficult for the people of Belarus to go beyond the information they are fed by the government through the state-owned media, which is also a violation of the freedom of seeking alternative information.

Moreover Belarusians are severely limited in their means of expressing themselves as per the definition of civil liberties, as discussed in chapter one. Protests are being prevented either by not issuing the necessary permission or by simply cordoning off the venue, which became a more pressing issue for Lukashenko in the aftermath of the Ukrainian Revolution of 2004, the result of which, as mentioned before, was the decree of 2005, which allowed the authorities to interpret regime-critical thinking as a conspiracy to launch a coup to topple the government and thereby to suppress any dissent. Moreover, the change of the criminal code (also in 2005) allowed for two-year prison sentences for anyone, who discredits Belarus abroad, which included the provision of wrongful information to foreign and international organizations regarding the political, economic, social and in-

267 See above, pages 15–16.
268 See above, pages 15–16.
269 See above, page 54.
270 See above, pages 35–36.
271 Ghubbar, Belarus, 15.
272 See above, page 9.
273 See above, page 11.
274 Ghubbar, Belarus, 15.
275 See above, page 28–29.
ternational situation, as well as information regarding the legal position of Belarusians and governmental agencies.\textsuperscript{276} Therefore, political opposition, while being tolerated and allowed to a certain degree, has no real pull in Belarus. This is mostly due to Lukashenko’s preemptive governing style, which Timmermann, citing Silitski, termed preemptive authoritarianism.\textsuperscript{277}

Furthermore, there is no real political alternative to the ruling regime, either. While the weak status of oppositional parties is partly due to excessive regulations, especially during election campaigns, which reduces these parties’ visibility among the population, but also, as pointed out by Timmermann, because of a lacking party tradition as a legacy of the Soviet one-party rule, as well as the recurring inability of party officials to take a common position among the opposition parties in order to initiate regime change.\textsuperscript{278} Leppert argues even further, stating that the opposition is quarreling over claims to power, which exacerbated the already negative opinion about the opposition’s work amongst the Belarusian population, and which caused him to call it a ‘virtual opposition’, as it is not able to establish a lasting and intensive connection to the electorate.\textsuperscript{279} Lukashenko on the other hand, is using populist means to garner support among the population as he has no party base, and he seems to strike a chord. Leppert even points out that his creation of a state ideology with strong paternalistic undertones receives a lot of support among the older Belarusians, as they are still trapped in their Soviet self-perception, and therefore connect Lukashenko with the minimum of social security they knew from Soviet times and, thus, still accept hierarchical, vertical, and authoritarian structures.\textsuperscript{280}

So, while the institutional and legal framework established over the years by Lukashenko hindered the development of a coherent party-structure, the parties themselves failed to convince the people to rally behind them. As Lukashenko has no party affiliation he appears to be the only real alternative to the people, despite the nature of his regime.

Another telling example of the authoritarian nature of Lukashenko’s regime is the recent execution of two men that were sentenced to death for their alleged involvement in the bombing of the Minsk Metro in April of 2011, in a trial that can be described as a show

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{276} See above, page 29.
\item \textsuperscript{277} Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 413.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Cf. Footnote 124.
\item \textsuperscript{279} Leppert, \textit{Akzeptierte Diktatur?}, 129.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Ibid., 107–108.
\end{itemize}
trial and which was widely condemned, especially due to the way it was conducted.\textsuperscript{281} As well, it is criticized that considerable doubts and still open question have not been addressed, yet President Lukashenko did not grant them clemency and thereby refused to spare the two men’s lives, thus did not grant them due process.\textsuperscript{282} While one could argue that the United States also still has the death penalty (in 34 of its states\textsuperscript{283}) and is not considered an authoritarian regime, the issue at hand is the way death sentences come about and how they are conducted. Amnesty International essentially argues that evidence of torture to extract false confessions is a telling example of the flawed Belarusian justice system and in violation of international laws.\textsuperscript{284} What can also be seen as unduly cruel is that prisoners on death row are only told about the carrying out of the death sentence moments before it will happen, while their families are only informed about this after it happened and are not told the place of burial.\textsuperscript{285} Thus, one can see that there is no real sense of transparency either. Moreover, the way capital punishment is handled in Belarus, as well as Lukashenko’s uncompromising stance, despite doubts of the guilt of the prisoners, further point towards Belarus’ authoritarian character.

In sum, it is obvious that the Lukashenko regime clearly fits into the category of authoritarianism. It does show the trademarks of such a regime, as discussed above. However, some features of his regime warrant a comparison with totalitarian regimes, namely that of the state ideology and the paternalistic character of his regime, which is built on his role as the father of the nation.

\textit{…Totalitarianism}

Considering the aforementioned pseudo-democratic characteristics present in Belarus (regular elections, limited civil and political liberties etc.) already show that Belarus cannot be considered a totalitarian dictatorship. However, there are characteristics in the Lukashenko regime that need to be considered to determine whether or not they can be considered dictatorial.

\textsuperscript{281} For further details see “Belarusian ‘metro bombers’ executed”, \textit{Belarus in Exile – Vilnius}, (accessed on March 19, 2012), \url{http://humanrightshouse.org/noop/page.php?p=Articles/17792}.
\textsuperscript{282} See “Belarus Subway Bombing Executions Condemned”, \textit{Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty} \url{http://www.rferl.org/content/belarus_subway_bombers_executions_condemned/24519694.html} (accessed on March 19, 2012),
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid.
One aspect that gives Belarus certain traits of a totalitarian dictatorship is the personalization of power as exemplified by Lukashenko. Lukashenko’s paternal governing style, in which he is considered the ‘Batka’ (Father), shows some resemblance to the principle of the *Führer* (Fascist Germany) and the *Duce* (Fascist Italy). Stalin’s nickname, *Batyushka* (little father), bears the most resemblance to Lukashenko’s nickname. As Timmermann pointed out, in his role as the father of Belarus, Lukashenko assumes the role of a father that takes his child by the hand to guide it. The argument by many, so Timmermann, is that this paternal role requires that Lukashenko can communicate with the people directly and is not obstructed in his work by intermediary powers, which Timmermann sees as similar in tone to theories and practical elements of totalitarian regimes.

A second aspect that shows similarities to totalitarianism is the initially missing, but now introduced state ideology. As Leppert pointed out, the introduction of an ideology may only be for political reasons to counter Lukashenko’s decrease in popularity, but the tone employed (ideology as the immune system for the state, without which the state would die) and the introduction of a mandatory course in ‘Basics of the ideology of the Belarusian state’, and the simultaneous closure of the European Humanistic University, shows Lukashenko’s attempt to unify the educational system, which can be considered slip back into totalitarianism. Also when considering Tucker’s definition of a totalitarian regime, one can see that the elimination of autonomous social groups by legal means, as Lukashenko did, might become the transmission belt of Lukashenko to reach the masses. While this has not reached the level of, for example, Fascist Germany, it is a stepping stone towards totalitarianism.

Another similarity is that of the media. As stated above, a totalitarian regime has the state monopoly on mass media. Given that, as mentioned before, all of the broadcasting media and over 80 per cent of the print media are state-owned, one can see this as a characteristic, dangerously close to a totalitarian regime.

However, these aspects shall not be taken as a tell-tale sign that Belarus is a dictatorship in the totalitarian sense. After all, the developed ideology for example, unlike in a

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286 Helen Rappaport, *Joseph Stalin – A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 1999), 264.
287 Timmermann, “Belarus zwischen Russland und der EU”, 262.
288 Ibid.
290 See above, page 14.
291 See above, page 14.
totalitarian regime, does not encompass all aspects of life, it does not have to be adhered to by everyone, and it also is not considered universally valid. Similarly, Lukashenko, in his role as Batka and the power monopoly essentially being in his hands, may be considered a dictator, but he lacks the mass party, so typical for a totalitarian regime. What should be kept in mind, however, is that these examples allow for a clue as to where Belarus might be headed.

So, while Belarus does show some traits common to totalitarian dictatorships, it cannot be considered one. Especially because this would, as Timmermann rightly argues, “illegitimately relativize the brutal totalitarian dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin. At least alternative acting is allowed to a certain degree.”

Chapter Conclusion

So, how to situate Belarus in terms of its political character and in the continuum as a whole? As this chapter has shown, Belarus is a special case among Eastern European states and is hard to place in the continuum mentioned above. It shows traits of all of the theories dealt with in the second chapter, which makes it hard to situate. Nevertheless, this author shall make the attempt.

Belarus is clearly not a democracy, even though it started out with a democratic constitution, which prescribed and established democratic institutions. It started out as a presidential democracy, but since Lukashenko took office as president of Belarus he undermined the democratic institutions in favor of strengthening his position. Over the years he undermined the democratic system, ironically by democratic means, as he used referenda to get the popular support. As well, he allows for regular elections, a fact which is in accordance with the constitution, and which confirms the president in his office every time. Therefore, when considering formal requirements, he legitimately took office by democratic means. So there were indeed some democratic characteristics present in Belarus. At the same time, and despite the defects (limited civil and political rights), it has been established that Belarus cannot be considered a defective democracy either, as based on the theoretical model provided above the individual components are far too damaged. Thus Belarus cannot be considered a democracy, not even a deficient one, because the few democratic characteristics that are present in Belarus, namely elections and oppositional thinking,

293 Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 413. (translation by this author)
are used to maintain a democratic façade. Therefore, one cannot count them as democratic markers of the Belarusian political system.

Moreover, this chapter has pointed out that these democratic characteristics are a facade to give the illusion of a democracy. This was most clear when considering the presidential elections. In an authoritarian manner, opposition parties were obstructed in their constitutional rights and position as the political alternative, especially when it came to the election campaigns. Despite the weak status of these parties, which is also partly their own fault, the restrictive attitude towards them could not improve their situation either. In this the state consciously blocks any attempt at developing a Belarusian civil society. Moreover, as the state controls virtually all the media outlets (with the exception of some independent newspapers), it has the monopoly on them. This became blatantly obvious during the elections. Moreover; its use of capital punishment, or better the questionable way it is used, and the hardline Lukashenko takes when it comes to clemency, clearly point towards authoritarianism. Thus, Belarus obviously shows the trademarks of an authoritarian regime.

However, Belarus cannot be considered a totalitarian regime. Despite some similarities (state monopoly on media, principle of a strong leader, emerging state ideology), Lukashenko does allow for oppositional forces and alternative thinking within limits, which is not the case in a totalitarian regime. As well there is no all-inclusive and all-pervasive state ideology that requires absolute obedience, which is enforced by a secret state police. Also, despite Belarus retaining the Soviet name of its secret police (KGB), this ought to be considered part of Lukashenko’s attempt to gain the support of those voters that benefit from his social policies that are based on the old Soviet policies, and therefore he can connect with Belarusians via positive associations with the old Soviet system and thus secure their support. In this it becomes obvious that these totalitarian traits are situated on the far left of the political spectrum.

So, Belarus is obviously neither a democracy, nor a dictatorship in the totalitarian sense, which only leaves the conclusion that it is an authoritarian regime. What remains is the question of what kind of authoritarian regime Belarus actually is? While one might be tempted to put it in the category of electoral authoritarianism, because Belarus still has regular elections, the totalitarian traits that Belarus shows should not be ignored. Also, as the previous parts have shown, to give the democratic elements in Belarus too much weight is to give the totalitarian elements not enough weight. Thus, while some would ar-
gue that Belarus is an authoritarian regime with democratic elements (e.g. Ghubbarg) this author is in agreement with Timmermann, who sees Belarus as a “sharp-authoritarian regime or ‘preemptive authoritarianism.’” Moreover, given the last presidential elections in 2010 and especially the harsh and brutal way the government suppressed the protests over the rigged elections, the tendency seems to be going towards a totalitarian regime. But the element of elections points to some legitimacy and therefore should be considered. Therefore, this author would go so far as to call Belarus an electoral authoritarian regime with totalitarian elements and an apparent leaning towards totalitarianism.

However, despite this continuous undermining of the few democratic structures that led to the current situation, it remains doubtful that the Lukashenko regime will be able to sustain itself for much longer. Given that the Belarusian economy is to be considered backwards and not in tune with, for example, Western economies, and heavily dependent on cheap Russian oil, one can draw the historic parallel of former East Germany, which was also heavily dependent on Russian oil imports at a low price. Once the price was adjusted to market levels, the East German economy broke down. In this respect one can consider a similar fate for Belarus. As Timmermann points out, Belarusian dependency on Russia can determine what will happen, but at the same time it begs the question of whether or not such scenarios would be realistic. He also points out that the regime is sick and Lukashenko’s repetitive assurances that he has Belarus under control, show his insecurities.

In the eyes of this author the way the size of the protest and the severity with which it was beaten down in the aftermath of the 2010 election shows that the people of Belarus are getting increasingly dissatisfied with the system, while Lukashenko seems to get increasingly nervous. One important reason, aside from the limitations of civil and political freedoms, is also the economic situation, which, due to time and space constraints, was largely left out in this research.

But as Timmermann pointed out: Russia is the most important partner for Lukashenko (for cheap oil and gas), but his erratic behavior is straining the relationship.

294 Ghubbar, Belarus, 19.
295 Timmermann, “Die Republik Belarus”, 413.
297 Ibid., 472.
298 Ibid., 475–476.
299 Ibid., 473.
So he proposes three possible scenarios of what might happen. Firstly, the system will continue as it did, still backed by Russia; alternatively, pro-Moscow members of the Belarusian military might stage a coup to replace Lukashenko with a pro-Russia replacement.300

Secondly, due to economic problems, Lukashenko will lose his grip on the country, while Russia is backing a Russia-friendly and more predictable candidate; assuming good EU-Russia relations, this option might enable the opposition to organize better and to stage a coup from within the government in order to establish a system that is oriented towards the EU and Russia alike; this could be supported by the younger generation that is increasingly looking towards the West.301

The third scenario sees mass protests in response to economic stagnation, which the regime propagates as meddling of the West to break the government, but there would be the option that the EU in coordination and cooperation with Russia would mediate in the situation in order to mitigate it.302 When considering that the economy in Belarus is nearing a collapse and Lukashenko is under pressure domestically, yet does not seem to wanting to admit the gravity of the situation,303 it is hard to determine what might happen, but the second scenario seems rather possible. Nevertheless, one needs to wait and see what direction Russian will take, after the recent presidential elections, which brought Vladimir Putin back into the Kremlin. Moreover, given the current low-point of diplomatic relations between the European Union, its member states, and Belarus, it remains to be seen what will happen. However, change seems to be in the air.

300 Ibid., 472–473.
301 Ibid., 473–474.
302 Ibid., 474–475.
6. Conclusion

What can be concluded with all of this? What this thesis has shown, is that compartmentalized thinking does not work well, when considering the conundrum that is Belarus. It is most obvious that it does not qualify as a democracy, neither in the Western sense, nor according to Merkel’s idea of a Defective Democracy.

But what about the much repeated claim that it is a dictatorship? As this research has shown, the title *Europe’s Last Dictatorship* does seem to be justified, but only to a small degree, in that, at first glance, the role of Lukashenko seems to be rather close to that of a dictator à la Hitler or Stalin. However, after having examined the history of Belarus and the theoretical aspects that underlie the terms *dictatorship* and *democracy*, as well as the concepts in between, this author maintains the opinion that the terms dictator and dictatorship are still too strong and broad a term to be used for Lukashenko and Belarus, however fitting it may seem when considering the few similarities the regime bears to totalitarian ones. Moreover, by using a general term like dictatorship, one runs the risk of relativizing, or worse, trivializing totalitarian regimes, as well as authoritarian ones. Thus, one cannot just call it a dictatorship and leave it at that – differentiation is necessary.

Thus, with this in mind, one can move ahead and answer the initially posed questions. Is Belarus a dictatorship? Not per se. The theoretical characteristics, as pointed out in the chapter on theories, have shown that, while most of its features can be deemed (electoral) authoritarian, Belarus also has certain democratic (if only as a façade) and totalitarian traits. Therefore, Belarus is to be considered electoral authoritarian in character, especially since an authoritarian regime is to be considered distinct from totalitarian regimes. 304

Clearly, there are several undemocratic tendencies in Belarus, such as the restrictions regarding civil and political freedoms, as well as electoral fraud. And yes, there are also some (totalitarian) dictatorial tendencies, which, as already mentioned, seem to indicate that authoritarian Belarus appears to be leaning towards becoming a totalitarian regime, and therefore it might move closer to becoming a dictatorship in the commonly known sense. Yet, what ought not to be underestimated, is that while people may not have the same fully democratic civil/political liberties that we enjoy in Western Europe for example, they still have some. Belarusians can still vote. They are not restricted in their freedom to leave Belarus and, thus, are not imprisoned in their own country, as, for example, East Germans were in the GDR. Hence, one ought to be careful when pushing Belarus into the

304 See page 15–16.
dictatorship category. Yes it has certain characteristics, yet the still existing freedoms Belarusians enjoy, do not warrant the pushing of Belarus into the dictatorship category. However, this shall in no way relativize the authoritarian character of the Lukashenko regime. Neither should it negate the argument that change is necessary in Belarus.

Concerning the last question, this thesis has shown that, after having analyzed the different concepts in the first chapter and the political developments in the historical overview, Belarus can be classified as an *electoral authoritarian regime with totalitarian elements*. Elections, as put forth in this thesis, need to be considered as they show a dichotomy with obvious electoral fraud on one side, yet seeming support for the president among the population, and thus seeming legitimacy, on the other. Therefore, this factor needs to be included when classifying Belarus’ political system. However and here this classification deviates somewhat from the theoretical outline at the beginning, ‘electoral authoritarianism’ in the way this author understands it, does not include the opinion that it is most likely to become a functioning democracy. Rather it points out the importance of (presidential) elections in Belarus for Lukashenko to legitimize his authoritarian leadership.

So in a sense, the strong language concerning Belarus is justified to a certain degree. But what has also been shown by this thesis is that, when putting a state into one category because it does not adhere to the principles of another, then one falls into the *either-or* trap that was bemoaned at the beginning. In this respect the author hopes that Belarus will looked at more nuanced from now on.

However, it is difficult to see what will happen with Belarus and if it will continue to be an electoral authoritarian regime with totalitarian element or worse, if it will continue to move towards becoming a totalitarian regime. As mentioned in the conclusion of the previous chapter, Belarus is nearing economic collapse and Lukashenko is under heavy pressure from his own government. Moreover, given the economic situation and the likelihood that it will worsen it remains doubtful that Lukashenko will be able to convince even his most loyal voters in the 2015 election, if he will even survive that long politically. Thus, it will be interesting to follow the events to see how they will develop. One thing should be kept in mind however. If one was to assume that Lukashenko will be removed from office, be it forcefully or peacefully, the government, but especially the people of Belarus are mostly still as inexperienced in democratic matters, as they had been at the beginning of the 1990s.
As well, Lukashenko managed to get to power by democratic means and used these democratic means to undermine the fledgling Belarusian democracy. Thus the question that remains is: once Lukashenko is gone, who will replace him? More importantly however is the following question: Who is to say that the next president will not do exactly the same as Lukashenko did? Given the changes he achieved by democratic means (changing of the constitution, undermining of the horizontal accountability, abolishing of term limits for the office of president) this means there would have to be a complete overhaul of the Belarusian constitution. Moreover, the people will have to find a way to get past their lack of national identity and define who they are as a nation – outside of the Soviet context.

Obviously there are many questions open, which need to be answered eventually. However, as much as the European Union and Russia are needed in this project, it is the people of Belarus that need to make the change. The need to demand the type of democracy that Lincoln envisioned.305 A government of the Belarusian people, by the Belarusian people, for the Belarusian people. Yes, the system is using fear and ignorance of people to remain in power, and it has done so successfully for years. But if the people want change they will get it. All they have to do is to forget their fear of the system and to rise against it. They have to want the change, and only they can realize it. In this respect Gandhi’s words seem rather fitting here: “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him.”306

305 See above, page 12.
List of References

Books


*Articles*


**Online Sources / Websites**


