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– What is your overall take on the objective prerequisites and key incentives for the mass protests against the authoritarian regime that have taken place in Belarus from 2020?

I think it is necessary to distinguish between an occasion and reason. The occasion was the elections, the triggers were activists such as Mikola Statkevich, Pavel Seviarynets and Siarhei Tsikhanousky. The successful and active participation of Viktor Babaryka, the former head of Gazprombank in Belarus, showed that many citizens expected a more moderate opposition, a more peaceful resistance to the Lukashenka regime. Therefore, I think the main reason is the emergence of a broad but moderate movement of citizens demanding greater transparency of elections and respect for constitutional rights. The emergence of a moderate civil movement is also characterized by the class character of the revolution, the basis of which was a politically weak, but already conscious middle class, for whom the existing dictatorship and the vertical of power became unacceptable.

– What was the most surprising and striking for you in the Belarusian events throughout the last year?

The most significant were “the female face of the revolution” (following the title of the book of Olga Shparaga), the rapid organization of the joint staff of three unregistered candidates and the smart and energetic behavior of the new leaders: Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Maria Kalesnikava and Veranika Tsapkala. The growth of the political and diplomatic competence of Svetlana Tikhanouskaya, who turned from a housewife into an experienced political professional and a real leader of the moderate opposition, was very impressive. The case of the “female face of the revolution” shows the possibilities of finding and attracting women to the political and revolutionary leadership and the unreadiness of the ruling regime to democratic political innovations.



– *How do you see the prospects for the Belarusian protest movement against the unprecedented scale of repression by the authorities on the one hand, and the lasting international support for the Belarusian democratic forces on the other hand?*

First of all, I think it is necessary to create civic trust groups, not to allow the regime to destroy civic consciousness. One of the forms of preserving solidarity can be the extensive assistance to the families of political prisoners and the constant continuation of the work and thoughts of political prisoners through international seminars and discussions. In addition, I agree with the opinion of the now arrested philosopher Uladzimir Matskevich that it is necessary to separate the mobilization and demobilization periods of the revolution. Demobilization involves broad-based diplomatic work abroad, which is what Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya does; it is as well consideration of mistakes, analyzing the national, class and gender nature of revolutions, preparing new models, methods and plans for taking power and thinking through internal and external steps to change the state regime.

– *How do you place the Belarusian authoritarian regime and the internal democratic struggle against it in the pan-European social-political context?*

Modern Kremlin Russia supports the policy of incomplete peace, the growth of political and military tensions, the manipulation of demarcation and red lines, the manipulation of peace enforcement, the support of convenient authoritarian regimes. The authoritarian regime of Lukashenka gradually became a Kremlin puppet. The European Union does not find the necessary and effective tools to influence the Putin-Lukashenka conglomerate and is divided by itself in accordance with economic interests. The Belarusian opposition plays a significant role in the European democratic rhetoric, but does not have the necessary proposals and arguments for the selfish and selfish capital of the EU. The problem is that the Belarusian opposition is only playing rhetorical games, but not in military power and not in economic movements. Tsikhanouskaya's coordination headquarters does not have the necessary skills and tools of power and economic influence and is waiting for a new uprising of the people. These are important but insufficient political decisions. In addition, I find a rather low level of self-criticism in opposition circles, which is not a good sign.

– *What argument does the Belarusian case provide for the future of democracy vs the future of autocracy? What evidence does it give on the political use of (digital) media?*

The Belarusian case shows the great risk of having a strong presidential power in post-totalitarian societies. This is also an example for Ukraine with a fairly strong presidential power. On the contrary, the example of the Baltic republics shows that it is best to develop multi party parliamentary republics. An analysis of the Asian former Soviet republics shows that strong presidential power leads to authoritarianism and dictatorship. The Belarusian opposition may promise to change the constitution and turn Belarus into a fully parliamentary republic. Digital platforms and people's skills open up opportunities for broad involvement of people in the political life of the state. And in the future it will become even more important when hundreds of thousands of Belarusians want to participate in the public life of Belarus from abroad.

– The crisis of democracy is ubiquitous these days, even if with various underpinnings in different (e.g. Western and East European) settings. From your perspective, is there anything Belarusians should learn from Westerners and vice versa for the sake of a viable democratic society?

I do not support the idea of a crisis of democracy in the modern West, but in some countries of Eastern Europe, yes, there is such a thing. It is determined by a deep distrust of state power. The indices of trust in the authorities bring together countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania, regardless of their relationship to each other. In another sense, the crisis of democracy has always existed, because democracy means competition of groups of people, influence politics and tough debates, and it is difficult for people to believe their own representatives. The other problem lies in the criticism of cooperation between large corporate capital and the political interests of the states. The case of Nord Stream 2 is the best example: the discussion of democratic values and corporate interests can contradict each other, and the problem of democratic forces is that economic and military arguments do not coincide. For example, the programs of social democratic parties are very weak in the case of modern military policy and military conflicts, and democratic populism does not reflect the reasonable interests of large corporations. Rational and well-founded arguments are needed there.