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- PANDEMIC RESPONSE
- INFODEMIC AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS
- SECURITY STRATEGIES

New Threats

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BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES' RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A SECURITY THREAT: FROM VIOLATING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS TO DEEPENING THE STATE'S VULNERABILITY

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Taking into consideration that many legal systems qualify a pandemic as a state of emergency justifying limitations of citizens' and human rights, the questions worth asking are: To what extent may the opposite (not taking any actions and downplaying the problem) lead to human rights violation and what are the possible consequences thereof for the security of both the individual and the state? This issue will be addressed through an assessment of the response of Belarus to COVID-19 from the perspective of internal (human rights and well-being of individuals) and external (hybrid threats) security.

Introduction

Despite some degree of coordination declared by European states, illustrated by sending masks or disinfectants, their approach was far from uniform in terms of both the depth of the lockdown and the schemes for reporting new cases and deaths. With regard to the former, a liberal Swedish reaction contrasted with firm French regulations preventing

citizens from leaving homes without a special information card.¹ Divergences arose also in the manner deaths were reported: from Belgium, accused of overestimating the death toll, to Poland, which hesitated as to how to qualify COVID-19-related deaths in the event of comorbidities.² Despite those differences, however, the overwhelming majority of European states approached the problem seriously.

1. Y. Plantey, *Non-confinement: aux origines de l'exception suédoise (Non-containment: The Origins of the Swedish Exception)*, "France Culture", 02 May 2020 [<https://www.franceculture.fr/societe/non-confinement-aux-origines-de-lexception-suedoise> access: 10 August 2020]; *Coronavirus: ce qui est permis et ce qui est interdit pendant le confinement en France (Coronavirus: What Is Allowed and What Is Prohibited During Confinement in France)*, "Le Monde", 17 March 2020 [https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2020/03/17/coronavirus-le-point-sur-les-interdictions-et-les-autorisations-liees-au-confinement-en-france_6033337_3244.html access: 14 August 2020].
2. A. Delvoe, *Pourquoi la Belgique est-elle toujours le pays où il y a eu le plus de morts par habitant du Covid-19 au monde? (Why Is Belgium Still the Country Where There Have Been the Most Deaths per Capita From COVID-19 in the World?)*, "rtbf.be", 06 July 2020 [https://www.rtbf.be/info/dossier/epidemie-de-coronavirus/detail_coronavirus-la-belgique-est-elle-vraiment-le-pays-le-plus-touche-par-le-covid-19-au-monde access: 14 August 2020].

Legally, a pandemic may be qualified by many systems as a state of emergency formally justifying general limitations of human rights. Nevertheless, it is also worth considering to what extent the omission of restrictions and downgrading of the scale of the pandemic may be perceived as a human rights violation and what the possible consequences are from the standpoint of security of the individual and the state. It seems that such an approach may endanger the right to life, health, or information.



Unlike Stockholm, Minsk actively downplayed the problem. For instance, President A.

Lukashenka criticised other countries for exaggerated reactions and advised his citizens to go to sauna, work out physically, and drink vodka

To amplify on the aforementioned, the present article will study the response of Belarus to COVID-19 from the angles of internal (human rights and well-being of citizens) and external (hybrid threats) security. It starts with a brief overview of the approach of state leadership, proceeding with an analysis of the legal basis for human rights' protection and their possible infringements, and ends by placing the findings within the broader scope of Belarusian state vulnerability and security.

Belarusian Response to COVID-19

While Minsk admitted to having the first case of COVID-19 on 27 February 2020³, it started international reporting only from 18 March 2020.⁴ From the end of April until early June, the number of new cases hardly went below 900 daily.⁵ The only measure taken was mandatory isolation of people coming from abroad. At the end of April, state authorities maintained that there had been no need to introduce any other limitations apart from prolonging school holidays to three weeks and advising people to avoid bigger gatherings.⁶ Moreover, any restrictions (e.g. calling to keep distance of at least 1.5 metres between restaurant tables) remained non-binding recommendations.⁷ Also, actions undertaken by the authorities themselves could go against the abovementioned without impediments (e.g. Belarusian citizens were promised to get triple base salary if they came to the 9 May Victory Day parade without masks⁸).

Although it may be disputed to what extent there exists any obligation for states to enact a lockdown proactively in addressing a pandemic, which is to be seen on the Swedish example, the Belarusian problem lies elsewhere. Unlike Stockholm, Minsk actively downplayed the problem. For instance, President A. Lukashenka criticised other countries for exaggerated reactions and advised his citizens to go to sauna,

3 J. Olchowski, *Białoruś wobec COVID-19 – bezradność i bezczynność (Belarus towards COVID-19 – Helplessness and Inaction)*, "Komentarze IEŚ", April 2020, p. 1.

4 Worldometers, *Coronavirus Belarus* [<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/belarus/> access: 03 August 2020].

5 Ibid.

6 Olchowski, n3, p. 1.

7 Ibid.

8 R. Sikorski, *O Białorusi z Alesiem Zarembiukiem rozmawia Radosław Sikorski (Radosław Sikorski Talks to Ales Zarembiuk about Belarus)*, "Wolne Radio Europa", 09 May 2020 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma8jiitMQqA> access: 09 July 2020].

work out physically, and drink vodka.⁹ The Belarusian head of state repeatedly praised the state's public health care system¹⁰, giving a misleading impression of its exceptional preparedness to handle the situation. On 21 March, he allegedly decided that a priority for the KGB¹¹ shall be countering the diffusion of information on the development of the pandemic, and medical staff were ordered to sign a special commitment not to reveal any professional secrets under the threat of criminal sanctions.¹² The aforementioned was further supported by increasing numbers of patients diagnosed with pneumonia.¹³

Concerns regarding the steps undertaken by Minsk were raised also at the international level. For instance, on 21 April, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended "strong government commitment and leadership to implement a blend of containment and mitigation measures" and "public engagement by all levels of government to clearly, transparently and regularly communicate the risks, health advice and response measures, including postponing gatherings and curtailing movement".¹⁴ This suggests that the authorities did not inform the population

properly, let alone took adequate steps to handle the problem.

Why did Minsk decide to adopt such an approach? First, the consequences of a lockdown for the domestic economy would be disastrous.¹⁵ Second, the narrative of a strong and stable state constituted a part of the electoral campaign for Lukashenka, creating an image of a good leader, allowing him also to criticise the Kremlin for poor internal management of the situation.¹⁶ The outcome, however, has been different, as the COVID-19 crisis management was compared to the Soviet reaction to the Chernobyl disaster, pointing out the incapability of the decision-makers to handle an extraordinary situation properly.¹⁷ This, in turn, raises another question: How does such an approach translate into effective protection of human rights?

Legal Consequences: Human Rights in Normative Framework Binding on Belarus

Human rights violations may consist of either action or omission. The Belarusian case qualifies rather as the former, since the authorities have not been passively

9 A. Åslund, *Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*, "Eurasian Geography and Economics", June 2020, p. 2.

10 K. Kłysiński, P. Żochowski, *Zaklinanie rzeczywistości: Białoruś w obliczu pandemii COVID-19 (Conjuring Reality: Belarus Facing COVID-19 Pandemic)*, "Komentarze OSW", April 2020 [https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/node/27951 access: 03 August 2020].

11 State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus.

12 Kłysiński, Żochowski, n10.

13 Åslund, n9, p. 11.

14 WHO Expert Mission to Belarus Recommends Physical Distancing Measures as COVID-19 Virus Transmits in the Community, World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 21 April 2020 [https://www.euro.who.int/en/countries/belarus/news/news/2020/4/who-expert-mission-to-belarus-recommends-physical-distancing-measures-as-covid-19-virus-transmits-in-the-community access: 04 August 2020].

15 L. Jegelevicius, *Belarus and Coronavirus: Lukashenko's Business-As-Usual Approach Is "Mind-Blowing Negligence"*, "Euronews", 21 April 2020 [https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/21/belarus-and-coronavirus-lukashenko-s-business-as-usual-approach-is-mind-blowing-negligence access: 01 August 2020].

16 Kłysiński, Żochowski, n10; V. Maheshwari, *The Leader of Belarus Is Using the Coronavirus Crisis to Troll Putin*, "Politico", 19 May 2020 [https://www.politico.eu/article/belarus-lukashenko-is-defying-the-coronavirus-and-putin/ access: 01 August 2020].

17 Kłysiński, Żochowski, n10.

observing the proliferation of the pandemic, but actively agitated to downgrade the scale of the problem.¹⁸ In order to properly assess the degree of respect of human rights in the light of Minsk's response to COVID-19, legal instruments binding on Belarusian authorities, as well as particular rights, will be identified first.



This illustrates a paradox of human rights protection and violation in Belarus. Whereas restrictions and infringements of human rights seem for Minsk “business as usual”, when faced with a situation allowing for limitations of the aforementioned rights on universally accepted legal basis, it refrains from taking adequate steps

The Constitution of Belarus of 1994 states in Article 2 that “[t]he individual, his rights, freedoms and guarantees to secure them are the supreme value and goal of the society and the State”. Apart from the right to life, it provides citizens with “the right to receive, store and disseminate complete, reliable and timely information on the activities of state bodies and public associations, on political, economic, cultural and international life”. Whereas “[s]tate bodies, public associations and officials shall provide citizens ... with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with materials that affect their rights and legitimate interests”, “[t]he use of information may be restricted by the

legislation with the purpose to safeguard honour, dignity, personal and family life of the citizens and the full exercise of their rights”.¹⁹

Although the provision does not explicitly refer to a pandemic, due to its global character it can potentially be regarded as *information on international life* and – together with accurate information on the health care system – should qualify for *materials that affect rights and legitimate interests* of citizens, confirming duty of the state to make it available. The aforementioned is further supplemented with presidential duty to address the people on “the state of the nation and on the guidelines of the domestic and foreign policy”,²⁰ which is particularly striking in the light of Lukashenka's statement that “no one has died from COVID-19, everyone is dying from chronic illnesses because all viruses strike those who are weak and have no immunity”.²¹

Moreover, there is no such thing as a constitutional right to health or security; the only reference to them is made in Article 23, which clarifies that “restriction of personal rights and freedoms shall be permitted only in the instances specified by law, in the interests of national security, public order, protection of the morals and health of the population”. This illustrates a paradox of human rights protection and violation in Belarus. Whereas restrictions and infringements of human rights seem for Minsk “business as usual”, when faced with a situation allowing for limitations of the aforementioned rights on universally accepted legal basis, it refrains

18 Moreover, from the perspective of potential claims, such an approach may be more effective as it is easier to prove (e.g. by referring to particular statements of A. Lukashenka) than negligence, where the level of adequate care remains harder to define.

19 *Constitution of the Republic of Belarus of 1994*, Art. 24 and 34, 1994 [<http://Law.By/Document/?Guid=3871&P0=v19402875e> access: 01 August 2020].

20 *Ibid.*, Art. 84(13).

21 Åslund, n9, p. 2.

from taking adequate steps. Why is that? One could claim that the constitution does not foresee the case of a pandemic. Just as many other national basic laws, the Belarusian one provides basis for temporary suspension of rights and freedoms in case of emergency or martial law. However, a pandemic seems not to be encompassed by legal definition of the former, provided in Article 84(15) and covering only “the event of a natural disaster, a catastrophe, or unrest involving violence or threat of violence on the part of a group of persons or organizations that endangers people’s life and health or jeopardizes the territorial integrity and existence of the State”.²²

Taking the aforementioned and the general political climate in the country into consideration, it seems that its domestic standards do not provide adequate protection. Since Article 21 of the Belarusian constitution declares that “[t]he State shall guarantee the rights and freedoms of citizens of Belarus that are ... specified by the State’s international obligations”, it is justified to analyse the international acts binding on Minsk.

It should be noted that Belarus is the only European country that is not a member of the Council of Europe and has not signed the European Convention on Human Rights, which is currently perceived as the most effective international instrument to defend rights and freedoms of individuals. Therefore, other international mechanisms shall be taken into consideration. The first of them is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its Article 3 indicates that “everyone has the right to *life*, liberty and the *security* of person”.²³ The denial of the proliferation of the pandemic within Belarusian territory

could be said to jeopardise, and in numerous cases violate, rights to life and security. While infringement of the right to life faces the same problems as in the case of the Belarusian constitution, i.e., it remains challenging to prove (e.g. the problem of establishment of an adequate causal link between coming to the 9 May events and getting the infection), violation of the right to security (not covered by the basic law), i.e., by forcing doctors to diagnose patients with pneumonia instead of the coronavirus, resulting in placing COVID-19 patients in the same wards with non-corona-positive ones, is more evident.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, in turn, contains more detailed references to health and extraordinary situations. Apart from the right to life (Article 6[1]), it provides for freedoms of expression and assembly. Although both are covered also by the Belarusian constitution, the ICCPR regulates the former more broadly as “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media”.²⁴ This right is not absolute; it may be subject to some restrictions provided by law, if they are necessary “for the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals”²⁵ (*nota bene*, similar regulation concerns the right to peaceful assembly, provided in Article 21).

What makes an even more considerable difference is the regulation of the state of emergency embodied in the Article 4 of the ICCPR. Unlike the Belarusian constitution, it does not contain a precise legal definition of emergency, referring broadly to the “time

22 *Constitution*, n19, Art. 84(15).

23 United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, emphasis added.

24 United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December 1966, Art. 19(2).

25 *Ibid.*, Art. 19(3).

... which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed”.²⁶ Although it is more intuitive to link it to violent conflicts, one may not exclude an interpretation referring to any other circumstances that could endanger the survival of the population.



On the one hand, the absence of limitations on public gatherings endangered the life and health of Belarusians, while, on the other, a restriction of freedom of information, which could have been legally introduced due to the pandemic, would have also threatened the life and health of individuals

The use of the ICCPR remains problematic, as in terms of perception of the role of health, the logic of the former matches the Belarusian constitution. For the purpose of the ICCPR, it constitutes a value rather than a right of an individual. While there exists no explicit basis for its protection, it constitutes an important factor determining whether some other rights will find their full application. Moreover, it remains a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the absence of limitations on public gatherings endangered the life and health of Belarusians, while, on the other, a restriction of freedom of information, which could have been legally introduced due to the pandemic, would have also threatened the life and health of individuals. The right to health as such should be, however, sought elsewhere.

According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, everyone has the right “to the enjoyment of *the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*”.²⁷ Article 12(2)(c) further explains that one of the steps to achieve this goal is in “prevention, treatment and control of epidemic”. While one may have doubts as to how to measure the highest attainable standard, it goes without saying that this provision was violated by Belarusian authorities. Nevertheless, it becomes more problematic if read together with Article 2(1) of the ICESCR, according to which “each State ... undertakes to take steps ... to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant”.²⁸ Therefore, the mere fact of making health a self-standing right does not automatically translate into its effective protection. The WHO Constitution, however, fills this lacuna.

Despite focusing on internal arrangements of the organisation, the constitution of the WHO contains some norms directly addressed to its member states, including Belarus. Special attention shall be given to its preamble, which states that its principles are basic “to the happiness, harmonious relations and *security of all peoples*”.²⁹ What is of particular relevance for the issue at stake, the preamble conveys, in the first place, a definition of health, which is understood broadly as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.³⁰ Although it would be too far-fetched to claim that this definition may serve as a legal basis

26 Ibid., Art. 4.

27 United Nations, *International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights*, 16 December 1966, Art. 12(1).

28 Ibid., Art. 2(1).

29 World Health Organization, *Constitution of the World Health Organization*, 22 July 1946, emphasis added.

30 Ibid.

for the claims of Belarusian citizens, it does, however, constitute an important indication as to the direction of interpretation of state parties' commitments under the WHO basic law, not limiting health to its purely medical dimension. The principles contained in the preamble should be therefore read with this very particular definition in mind.

The WHO Constitution stipulates that "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition".³¹ This postulate highlights that health should be perceived as a stand-alone human right. Importantly, it is closely related to the right to information. The preamble states that "the extension to all peoples of the benefits of medical, psychological and related knowledge is essential to the fullest attainment of health" and that "informed opinion and active co-operation on the part of the public are of the utmost importance in the improvement of the health of the people".³² This is illustrated by the Belarusian example: Had the society been properly informed of the dangers relating to the coronavirus, the mortality rate could have potentially been lower.

Second, the preamble places the issue of health in a broader context, indicating that "the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and States"; that should be read together with the principle according to which "unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and

control of disease, especially communicable disease, is a common danger".³³ Whereas the former may be interpreted as referring to public security and touching upon state population as a whole (preventing vulnerabilities to reduce hybrid threats), the latter may be perceived as referring first to the well-being of an individual (which, in turn, translates into the health security of the respective groups of individuals formed within a state and beyond). This dimension should not be underestimated. Although it would be too far-fetched to accuse Belarus of proliferating a biological weapon that could be used against another international actor, one should not forget the preventive outcome of the approach adopted by Lukashenka. The gravity of the pandemic in Belarus, on the one hand, discouraged the OSCE from sending its observation mission to the presidential election out of concern for the health of its officers, while, on the other, it gave Minsk a reason to dismiss accreditation applications of journalists coming from infected abroad.³⁴

Furthermore, the WHO Constitution contains a series of more precise obligations of WHO members (Articles 61-65), consisting of a duty to provide various health and health care-related information to the organisation. This group of obligations is of a different character than the commitments embodied in the preamble. Whereas the latter constitute standards and postulates for the benefit of society as such, the former are inherently bound to the membership in the WHO and designed to facilitate the cooperation within the organisation. Therefore, this does not directly affect the

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 *Białoruś: Ostatnia prosta przed wyborami prezydenckimi. Część osób może zagłosować już dzisiaj (Belarus: The Final Straight before the Presidential Elections. Some People Can Already Vote Today)*, "Onet", 04 August 2020 [<https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/bialorus-ostatnia-prosta-przed-wyborami-prezydenckimi/djksq6b> access: 04 August 2020].

rights and duties of the member states to individuals under their respective jurisdictions. What is, however, common to both groups, is their unenforceability in practice.

The WHO has actually no means to make its member states fulfil any of the aforementioned commitments. The only case in which states may face a concrete sanction (suspension of voting privileges and services on the basis of Article 71) is not fulfilling financial obligations.³⁵ For questions or disputes regarding the interpretation or application of the WHO Constitution, Article 75 foresees negotiations or decision of the Health Assembly and, should those measures prove ineffective, a referral to the International Court of Justice if the parties do not agree to any other way of reaching settlement.³⁶ This powerlessness of the WHO was illustrated by Minsk's ignoring its recommendation to cancel all public events and suspend classes at schools and universities as well as activity of all non-essential organisations and businesses³⁷, or the appeals to cancel the Victory Day parade, warning that it may be particularly dangerous for elderly people.³⁸

The aforementioned demonstrates that notwithstanding the formal mentioning of the right to life, health, security, or

information in legally binding acts, their implementation in practice cannot be taken for granted and relies upon the good will of respective states. The Belarusian example demonstrates, however, that despite the absence of legal responsibility, a state may face considerable political consequences for violation of those rights.

Political Consequences: Increasing Vulnerability to Hybrid Threats

Violations of human and citizens' rights of Belarusians, especially the right to life and health, destabilised the position of Lukashenka's regime; for the first time people started to protest on such a scale and openly expressed their dissatisfaction with his leadership.³⁹ In the context of August 2020 presidential election, the overall situation made Belarus even more liable to hybrid threats,⁴⁰ understood as "methods and activities ... targeted towards vulnerabilities of the opponent," which may be "created by many things, including historical memory, legislation, old practices, geostrategic factors, strong polarisation of society, technological disadvantages or ideological differences".⁴¹ Interestingly, as the events after the presidential election demonstrate, despite presenting Lukashenko as the only guarantor of state's sovereignty against Russia and the

35 World Health Organization, n29.

36 Ibid., n29, Art. 75-76.

37 R. Szoszyn, *Epidemia na Białorusi. Jak przekonać Aleksandra Łukaszenkę (An Epidemic in Belarus: How to Convince Alexander Lukashenka)*, "Rzeczpospolita", 02 May 2020 [<https://www.rp.pl/Koronawirus-SARS-CoV-2/304299847-Epidemia-na-Bialorusi-Jak-przekonac-Aleksandra-Lukaszenke.html> access: 03 August 2020].


38 *Łukaszenko zaprasza na paradę zwycięstwa innych prezydentów (Lukashenka Invites Other Presidents to the Victory Parade)*, "Rzeczpospolita", 05 May 2020 [<https://www.rp.pl/Bialorus/200509733-Lukaszenko-zaprasza-na-parade-zwyciestwa-innych-prezydentow.html> access: 03 August 2020].

39 J. Forbrig, *Lukashenko's Coronavirus Election*, "Politico", 02 July 2020 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/aleksander-lukashenko-belarus-coronavirus-covid19-pandemic-election/> access: 05 August 2020].

40 For the sake of clarity, by no means is the author's intention to criticise the protests; the present remark refers to what is often called "stability (or security)-democracy dilemma".

41 *Countering Hybrid Threats*, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, [<https://www.hybridcoe.fi/hybrid-threats/> access: 12 August 2020].

opposition candidates (V. Babaryka and V. Tsepkalo) as Kremlin collaborators⁴², a considerable part of the Belarusian society was ready to take the risk and oppose the autocrat.



everyday violations of the right to information translated into the state's vulnerability to dissemination of propaganda, threatening, in turn, the rights to life, health, and security

Moreover, everyday violations of the right to information translated into the state's vulnerability to dissemination of propaganda, threatening, in turn, the rights to life, health, and security. Since Russian media are widely available in Belarus, they affect the shape of the message conveyed.⁴³ Initially, they marginalised COVID-19 as a domestic problem of China, South Korea, and Italy.⁴⁴ It could be argued that, at least initially, their impact was further catalysed by Belarusian legislation prohibiting “defaming the honour and dignity of the Belarusian president or disseminating information on behalf of unregistered organizations, for example, certain opposition groups”.⁴⁵ Although contradicting the obviously wrong information spread by the head of state

does not amount to his defamation, this provision could have been easily abused by the authoritarian regime to fight people expressing dissenting opinions, in consequence indirectly validating the narrative created by the Russian media. Therefore, as long as the latter had spoken in one voice with Lukashenka, there were no legally effective means to fight it. The consequences of this are particularly visible in comparison with the COVID-19 management in Ukraine, where the Russian discourse undermining the gravity of the pandemic was promptly challenged and mitigated by free media warning the society about the gravity of the pandemic.⁴⁶

Last but not least, as far as security is concerned, in the context of this domestic crisis, one should not undermine signals coming from abroad, suggesting “the need to save the brotherly Belarusian people from the impending humanitarian catastrophe— if need be, by force”⁴⁷, particularly in the context of the arrival of “Wagner Group” members to Belarus just before the presidential election.

Conclusion

The present article demonstrates that not taking adequate measures and downplaying the gravity of a pandemic may lead to human rights violations. The rights that are most susceptible to and directly endangered by such a response by state authorities

42 A. Szabaciuk, *Białoruska kampania wyborcza w cieniu pandemii COVID-19 (The Belarusian Election Campaign Overshadowed by the COVID-19 Pandemic)*, “Komentarze IEŚ”, June 2020, pp. 1-2.

43 Ibid., p. 3.

44 Åslund, n9, p. 6.

45 J. Szostek, *Russian Influence on News Media in Belarus*, “Communist and Post-Communist Studies”, 48 (2-3), 2015, p. 124.

46 Åslund, n9, p. 6.

47 A. Shraibman, *Minsk and Moscow Fail to Unite against Common Foe*, “Carnegie Moscow Center”, 08 July 2020 [https://carnegie.ru/2020/07/08/minsk-moscow-fail-to-unite-against-common-foe-pub-81900 access: 07 August 2020].

are the rights to life, health, information, and security. All of them vary in terms of character and legal basis for protection. What they have in common, however, is that they are of particular value to the society. Faced with an absence of effective means of their protection, the population becomes eager to challenge state authorities that manifestly violate them. This, in turn, may result in deepening vulnerability to hybrid threats.

At the time of writing of this article, the demonstrations, originated right after the August 2020 presidential election, are still ongoing and their final outcome is unknown.

What is certain, however, is that the reaction of Lukashenka to COVID-19 had caused the cup of bitterness to overflow and Belarus will never be politically the same after the pandemic.

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