

Oleg Manaev

## Belarus on the 'Huntington Line': The Role of Media

(Devoted to the Memory of Samuel Huntington)

### Introduction

For centuries Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, were on what Samuel Huntington described as the 'clash of civilizations line,' between Western European Catholic/Protestant and Eurasian Orthodox civilizations (Huntington 1993). Different and sometimes opposite external influences continually influenced its' geo-political reality and even national identity formation process. According to Timothy Garton Ash, after the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War this region, "became a battle ground between two empires – Russian and European (or the European Union)."<sup>1</sup> However, unlike in the past, this 'battle' is now conducted with 'soft' rather than 'hard power'. The proposed article examines a role of media and communication in this process.

### The Belarusian Puzzle

For most of international experts, Belarus today is a puzzle. On one hand, Belarusians maintain a thousand-year-old culture that is within a framework of European Christian traditions, which survived despite decades of Soviet rule. A majority of Belarusians attend

1 See <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/1749538.html>.

church primarily on major holidays (23.4% visit church once a month and more often)<sup>2</sup>, yet more than 90% of them are baptized (approx. 75% are Orthodox, 13% Catholic, and 2% are Protestants). Although the era of Soviet rule was a difficult one, significant progress was made in a number of spheres. For example, the level of education and professional skills was significantly increased. More than 15% of today population has a completed higher education. Since 1992 the number of people with a University degree in a field of industry has doubled, and in the field of transportation, communication and economy – tripled. As various public opinion polls show, President Lukashenko’s socio-economic and political course does not correspond to Belarus potential. In January 2007, 16.7% of respondents considered the year 2006 to be “better than 2005”, 45.8% – “the same as 2005”, and 33.2% – “worse than 2005”. The number of those who expect improvement of socio-economic situation in the country in forthcoming years exceeds the number of those who expect its deterioration just on some percent only (30.6% vs. 25.6%). In June 2008, 37.5% of respondents believed “in general situation in our country is going in wrong direction”. It seems that aspirations for freedom and change among Belarusians are quite visible.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the potential for change based on culture and experience remains unrealized. Twenty percent of respondents state that they are ready to protest actions against the worsening of their economic position; yet the number of protests has dwindled from a few thousand to only a few hundred. Most Belarusians have negative attitudes towards a change in the labor contract system (positive – less than 20%); however, the reality is they accept these contracts. Many do not trust the authorities but continue to follow their orders. (For example, more than half do not trust local authorities, 45% do not trust Parliament, almost 40% do not trust the government, and almost one third do not trust the President.) Foreign bodies such as

- 2 Here and subsequently, data is from the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IIEPS) nation wide public opinion polls (1,500 respondents of age 18+ were face-to-face interviewed, marginal error did not exceed 0.03). See <http://www.iieps.org/epoll.html>.
- 3 To avoid the influence of the global crisis of 2008, all the data in this paragraph is from polls conducted before September 2008.

the Council of Europe, United States Congress or United Nations Human Rights Committee discuss the disappearance of Lukashenko's political opponents much more often than Belarusian families. Poles and Lithuanians express their concerns about the brutal repression of demonstrators by Belarusian police forces more often and louder than Belarusians themselves. More than one third of the population (and almost half the youth) would like to emigrate, but according to the Interior Ministry official data more Belarusians have come to Belarus during the years of independence than have left. The level of emigration is low.

Paradoxically, after seventeen years of independence, national and geo-political identification for millions of Belarusians is still incomplete and contested. In March 2009, 37.1% respondents said "yes" to the question, "Do you identify yourself as European, associated with European history and culture?" while 52.8% answered "no" and 10.1% could not answer the question. Responding to another question: "Are Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians different nations or three branches of the one nation?" in August 2006 only 28.3% respondents said "different nations", and 67.7% - "three branches of the one nation". To the question: "Have you personally benefited or suffered due to Belarus becoming an independent country?" asked in January 2007, 38.1% respondents said "benefitted", almost 30% - "suffered", and one third could not answer. In March 2009 responding the question: "If you have to choose between integration with Russia or EU, what would you prefer?" 42.4% respondents said "Integration with Russia", and 35.1% - "integration with EU". It seems, many Belarusians perceive freedom as "disorder" and changes as "turmoil", and prefer to avoid or even to escape from them.

Unfortunately, the post-Communist regime in Belarus is based mostly on support of those who prefer "stability" to "changes". Incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko was elected through a free and fair election in 1994 on the wave of massive expectations 'for change'. Yet from his first days in office he pursued a pro-Russian and anti-Western policy. Indeed, it was not just a political conflict, but a civilization conflict as well. Many times Lukashenko stressed in public that "Western values have nothing in common with Belarusians' mentality", and "I will not lead my country after the civilized world".

According to the Freedom House' *"Freedom in the World 2009"* Annual Report, in terms of freedom and democracy Belarus was ranked as one of "the worst from the worst" among almost 200 monitored countries.<sup>4</sup> Another Freedom House Annual Report, *"Nations in Transit"* clarified indicators of this ranking:

Table 1: Belarus Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores, 2008\*

NIT Ratings	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003
Democracy Score	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
National Democratic Governance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Electoral Process	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Civil Society	5.75	6.00	6.50	6.25	6.50
Independent Media	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Local Democratic Governance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Judicial Framework and Independence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Corruption	N/A	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50
NIT Ratings	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Democracy Score	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6.71
National Democratic Governance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7.00
Electoral Process	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
Civil Society	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.50	6.50
Independent Media	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Local Democratic Governance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	N/A	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Corruption	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25

\* For all 29 countries and administrative areas in *Nations in Transit 2008*, Freedom House, in consultation with the report authors and a panel of academic advisers, has provided numerical ratings in the seven categories listed above. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest level of democratic progress.

4 See [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw09/FIW09\\_OverviewEssay\\_Final.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw09/FIW09_OverviewEssay_Final.pdf).

As this report stressed, Lukashenko "has remained president since then and has instituted direct presidential power over all institutions, controlled the electoral process, marginalized the opposition, reduced the independent press to a bare minimum, and created pervasive mechanisms for controlling the economy and society. The country's unreformed and extensively bureaucratized economy performed strongly for most of the last decade owing to an economic upturn in countries traditionally importing Belarusian goods, and generous discounts on energy prices provided by Russia."<sup>5</sup>

### 'The Civilization Divide'

How can such diverse attitudes coexist in one nation? Some observers puzzle over a 'mysterious Belarusian soul'. Indeed, there are many historical, cultural, political and economic explanations of this 'mystery'. The most important one is the 'civilization divide' or, according to Samuel Huntington's theory (Huntington 1993), "the line where civilizations' clash," between Western European Catholic/Protestant and Eurasian Orthodox civilizations crossed Belarus, as well as Ukraine and Moldova, for centuries. As an old Russian saying goes, "What is good for a German is death for a Russian."

However, despite these controversies (from ethnic-cultural to geo-political) one cannot say that the modern system of values in Belarusians is completely pre-determined by their historical heritage. They are changing. Thus, their Soviet-Communist heritage, largely, rooted in the Eurasian Orthodox civilization, is gradually going away.

This shows that the number of people who favour restoration of the USSR decreased by 2.5 times in the fifteen years of independence, while those who oppose it almost tripled. The number of uncertain responses also decreased significantly.

5 See [http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/nit/inc\\_country\\_detail.cfm?page=47&nit=446&year=2008&pf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/nit/inc_country_detail.cfm?page=47&nit=446&year=2008&pf).

Figure 1: "Civilization Divide" through Belarus.



Table 2: Distribution of Answers to the Question: "Would you like restoration of the USSR?" (in percent)

Option	11/93	11/97	11/99	04/02	06/04	04/06	12/08
Yes	55.1	49.9	38.0	38.8	39.5	26.7	21.5
No	22.3	25.5	30.1	42.6	50.8	63.4	63.3
DA/NA*	22.6	24.6	31.9	18.6	9.7	9.9	15.2

\* According to public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS. Here and after DA/NA means "Difficult to answer" and "No answer".

There are two fundamental factors which determine this shift. The first one is the nature of life in an independent state. Millions of adults became used to having various advantages of independence (those 38% who "benefited" – see above), while millions of youth

grew up under new circumstances and just do not know about the 'golden Soviet past' (for example, who were Lenin and Stalin at the time). A second factor is various influences from the outside. One of the sub-factors is globalization, which gradually unifies a system of values around the globe, but it cannot be considered as something unique in the case of Belarus. Moreover, another sub-factor is the influence that comes from the neighbor countries. They are unique because come from very different geo-political and cultural super powers – Russia and the West. According to Samuel Huntington's theory, this influences come not within 'one civilization frame' (as from Canada and Mexico to the United States), but as a 'civilization clash' because they bring very different, sometimes opposite values.

## Controversial Neighbourhood Influence

How do neighbouring countries influence Belarus now in terms of attitudes towards freedom and democratic changes? There are three different geo-political neighbours near Belarus now: the European Union (or 'the West'), Russia, and Ukraine. Ukraine's history and heritage is similar to that of Belarus, and millions of Belarusians correlate Ukraine with the Newly Independent States. However, Ukraine's leadership and ruling elites clearly state that they are, "Returning to Western civilization". That is why Ukraine's influence on Belarus has potentially a 'dual' or 'intermediate' character.

Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of public attitudes in Belarus towards the most important economic, political, and geo-political issues, namely, should their country establish the closest relations with Russia, NIS or EU (which is an indicator of their pro-Russian, pro-Western, or intermediate geo-political attitudes).

Obviously, those respondents who believe Belarus should establish the closest relations with the EU have much more pro-democratic values than those who choose NIS (Ukraine), and the latter have more pro-democratic values than those who choose Russia. It is also

Table 3: Public Attitudes of Respondents Who Believe Belarus Should Establish the Closest Relations with Russia, NIS or EU, (in percent)\*

Public attitudes	Russia (58.6)	NIS (35.2)	EU (44.5)
<b>In general, is the situation in our country developing in a right or a wrong direction?</b>			
In a right direction (57.8)	67.3	61.5	39.4
In a wrong direction (30.0)	20.8	27.3	47.2
<b>Do you feel opposition should exist in Belarus?</b>			
Yes (55.7)	49.2	55.8	72.8
No (29.6)	35.4	28.3	14.4
<b>Do you feel yourself in opposition to the authorities?</b>			
Yes (16.5)	10.0	12.3	26.8
No (72.5)	80.1	77.8	61.6
<b>Should authorities start negotiations with the EU or with opposition as well?</b>			
Yes, because only through negotiations our society could reach public accord (48.6)	43.9	48.7	56.5
No, because opposition represents nobody (21.5)	26.7	26.6	10.8
No, because authorities violate human rights and laws (17.9)	15.9	14.6	22.7
<b>Whom did you vote for during the Presidential elections in 2006?</b>			
For A. Lukashenko (50.0)	61.5	52.1	30.3
For A. Kozulin (6.4)	3.8	5.3	10.4
For A. Milinkevich (17.0)	12.5	17.5	29.1
<b>What is your opinion on the imprisonment of former Presidential candidate A. Kozulin?</b>			
He was sentenced fairly and should be punished	32.4	26.3	12.3
He was sentenced unfairly and should be released	27.5	36.2	53.0
<b>Should Belarus initiate a process of integration with EU?</b>			
Yes (45.8)	35.3	44.9	83.7
No (39.1)	48.5	40.4	8.7
<b>Should Belarus become a member of EU?</b>			
Yes (33.5)	23.1	23.4	61.1
No (49.3)	58.2	57.6	23.7



Public attitudes	Russia (58.6)	NIS (35.2)	EU (44.5)
<b>If you have to make a choice between integration with Russia or the EU, which would you prefer?</b>			
Integration with Russia (46.9)	66.2	47.9	22.0
Integration with EU (34.4)	17.0	31.2	63.8
<b>What variant of Belarus-Russia integration would you prefer?</b>			
Relations between Belarus and Russia should be the same as with other countries (41.6)	26.6	49.8	58.7
Belarus and Russia should create a Union of independent states with close political and economic relations (43.5)	57.5	42.6	33.2
Belarus and Russia should integrate into one state (8.3)	12.2	4.4	3.9
<b>In case a prices rise for Russian gas and oil seriously affects your family, would you accept Belarus incorporation into Russia?</b>			
Yes (31.7)	44.9	27.2	22.1
No (56.9)	42.5	61.7	70.9
<b>What definition does Europe associate with?</b>			
Democracy (40.1)	35.6	45.3	52.7
Degradation (10.6)	12.8	11.3	4.4
<b>On May 1, 2004 Poland, Lithuania and Latvia joined EU. In your opinion, how has the life of their citizens changed since then?</b>			
Improved (27.4)	18.9	25.5	44.1
Remains the same (33.3)	35.9	31.1	31.1
Deteriorated (18.0)	21.4	18.1	7.2
<b>Do you support the OCSE democratization demands to Belarusian authorities (all four demands, June 1999)?</b>			
Yes (46.9)	39.0	44.5	67.3
No (53.1)	61.0	55.5	32.7
<b>Do you support the EU democratization demands to Belarusian authorities (all twelve demands, November 2006)?</b>			
Yes (30.3)	21.4	29.6	49.9
No (69.7)	78.6	70.4	50.1

\* According to a public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS on May 5-15, 2007. DA/NA is eliminated for easy perception. Percentage of all respondents is in brackets.

evident that so called 'average attitudes' in fact mask very different or even opposite ones. It confirms again that in the case of 'the civilization divide,' geo-political orientations also mean different value systems. It also demonstrates the very controversial character of Belarus neighborhood influence.

## The Media Landscape

In the contemporary world one of the most important instruments of influence of one country on another is mass media. Attitudes of the public, the ruling elite and governments towards one or another country, as a rule, are visible not just in traditional political, economic, military, diplomatic and other strategies. Mass media also reveals much about a country.

As of April 1, 2009 there were 1,314 print media outlets registered in the Republic of Belarus, 663 newspapers, 594 magazines, 42 bulletins and 6 catalogues. This number has grown by more than 5 times since the collapse of the USSR, with a total number of circulation exceeding 14 million copies, and 9 news agencies. Among them, 409 media outlets (including 221 newspapers) are state-owned.<sup>6</sup> However, the quantitative prevalence of non-state press is explained by the fact that the majority of these papers contain mainly entertainment or advertising. According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), there are less than 30 non-state political editions in the country.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, 229 radio and TV channels were registered in Belarus, of which 158 were radio channels and 71 television channels. This number has grown in dozens of times since the collapse of the USSR. The majority of registered radio and TV channels are state-owned (137 radio channels and 28 television channels). 113 state TV and radio channels were founded by local executive committees,

6 See <http://www.mininform.gov.by/smi>

7 See <http://baj.by/index.php?module=p&tid=6&filter=typemon^sub^14&cv=14>.

and 60 – by local Councils of deputies. There are also 30 FM radio stations, 15 of which are based in Minsk.

Nevertheless, the fastest developing media sector is the Internet: today Belarusian external information gate width exceeds 12Gbit/sec while a decade ago it was only 7 Mbit/sec<sup>8</sup> (i.e. has grown in 1.700 times).

However, despite the real 'information explosion', Belarusian media in general has not contributed significantly to the development of freedom and democracy. In fact, the situation is quite opposite: media contributed to the strengthening of authoritarianism. The major reason of this is that the authorities introduced almost total control over the media.

When, analyzing media's role in Belarus, the US based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) noted in its 2008 Annual Report, that "In a February visit to Belarus State University, President Lukashenko bluntly outlined his regime's press policy. 'Media hold a weapon of mass destruction,' Lukashenko told journalism students, 'and they must be controlled by the state'». True to his word, Lukashenko signed into law a repressive media bill that promised to have sweeping ramifications. Signed in August 2008 and due to take effect in early 2009, the measure set up an obstacle course for journalists seeking government-issued accreditation, necessary to work as a reporter in Belarus. Journalists must obtain accreditations from multiple agencies, international journalists may not work without accreditation, and local and federal agencies have broad authority to deny accreditation without explanation. A new set of registration requirements illustrated the government's determination to obstruct news outlets. The bill required all news outlets to re-register with the government within a year, a provision that effectively granted authorities the power to pull licenses from existing news outlets that irritated or offended them. The cumbersome registration process required applicants to provide exacting detail on content, staffing, and business leadership. The measure also extended restrictions, for the first time, to Internet publications. The law-toughened sanctions, granted authority to suspend or close news outlets to both the Ministry of Information and state prosecutors if content is deemed

8 See <http://news.tut.by/136404.html>.

inaccurate, defamatory, «not corresponding to reality,» or «threatening the interests of the state or the public.» The measure also banned media outlets from accepting aid from international groups. Even without the new law, the government was effective in «bringing discipline.» Throughout the year, authorities arrested and harassed independent journalists, confiscated equipment, and blocked distribution of independent newspapers.”<sup>9</sup>

What is especially important, when analyzing Belarus media landscape in the context of a ‘civilization divide’ is the fact that “*the majority of printed publications are published in Russian – 572. There are only 71 publications in the Belarusian language. 357 certificates of mass media registration specify ‘Russian and other languages’ as the language of the edition and 299 editions specify ‘Belarusian and other languages’. Only 8 editions are published in other languages (English, Polish, Ukrainian, etc).* The language situation on the airwaves, completely controlled by national and regional state authorities, is even worse. *Only 5% of registered TV and radio programs are produced in the Belarusian language.*”<sup>10</sup>

When discussing the domination of the Russian language in Belarusian media one should also keep in mind a massive presence of Russian media themselves. Major Russian TV Channels<sup>11</sup> broadcast directly in Belarus, and there are various so-called ‘joint-venture’ or ‘Russia-Belarus Union state’ channels. TV Channels<sup>12</sup>, as well as Russian Radio.

To counter-balance domination of the state-run and pro-Russian media, the West began to increase its information presence within Belarus as well. In recent years the European Union, the US, and some Western governments allocated special resources for this aim. Thus, since October 2005 the Russian Service of Radio Deutsche Welle<sup>13</sup> started a daily program titled ‘Belarusian Chronicles’ for Belarus. The Russian Service of Euro News TV<sup>14</sup> began to cover Belarusian cases in its news programs from January 2006. New

9 See <http://cpj.org/2009/02/attacks-on-the-press-in-2008-belarus.php#more>.

10 See <http://baj.by/index.php?module=p&tid=6&filter=typemon^sub^14&cv=14>.

11 ORT, RTR, NTV, TNT and others

12 For example ‘NTV-Belarus’, ‘RTR-Belarus’, ‘MIR.’

13 Broadcast from Bonn.

14 Broadcast from Lyon.

European Radio started its broadcasting for Belarus from Warsaw in February 2006. At the same time US-Israel RTVi<sup>15</sup> started a special weekly program for Belarus. A new independent TV Channel BelSat, started broadcasting to Belarus from Warsaw in December 2007. Two independent Belarusian Radio stations, Radio Racia and Baltic Wave, re-started their broadcasting to Belarus from Belostok (Poland) and Vilnius (Lithuania) in 2006 as well (Manaev 2008).

However, these external media resources focusing on Belarus from both sides have a potential rather than actual influence, if estimated in numbers, print copies, Gbits/sec, and broadcasting hours. If a newspaper publishes millions of copies but sells only thousands, its real influence is insignificant.

What is the real audience of Russian and Western media in Belarus? Due to a common language, Russian TV Channels reach almost 90% of the population. Western media can reach large Belarusian audiences only if they broadcast in Belarusian or Russian, due to language barriers. Therefore, when speaking about the influence of Western media, the reference is only to those who offer their products in these languages.

Table 4: Distribution of Answers to the Question: "What TV channels do you watch?" (in percent)\*

Options	Watch	Do not watch	DA/NA
Belarusian Channels (BT, ONT, STV, etc.)	92.4	6.7	0.9
Russian Channels (ORT, RTR, NTV, etc.)	85.6	13.4	1.0
Local Channels	54.2	42.6	3.2
Cable Channels	43.3	53.0	3.7
Satellite Channels	19.8	77.2	3.0
Euro News Russian Service	16.0	79.8	4.2
Polish Channels	7.8	87.9	4.3
Special RTVI program for Belarus	5.8	90.1	4.1
New TV Channel BelSat	5.0	90.8	4.2

\* According to a public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS on March 3-13, 2009.

15 Broadcasting in Russian from New York and Moscow.

According to this table, only the last five TV Channels are Western (despite the fact that over 130 cable TV companies operate in the media market, content of their broadcasting is controlled by the authorities). Moreover, we cannot just sum up all of them because their audiences in fact crossed each other. Cross correlation analysis shows that in total *one third* of Belarusians in different combinations watch foreign TV channels (Satellite, Polish, Euro News, RTVi) containing alternative (i.e. not controlled by the state) information.

Audiences for Western radio stations are somewhat smaller:

Table 5: Distribution of Answers to the Question: "What radio stations do you listen to?" (in percent)\*

Options	Listen	Do not listen	DA/NA
Belarusian state-run radio	50.9	46.8	2.3
Belarusian FM-radio stations	50.8	47.6	1.6
Russian radio stations	24.8	72.2	3.0
Voice of America	2.2	93.6	4.2
European radio for Belarus	3.6	92.1	4.3
Belarusian Service of radio Polonia	3.1	92.6	4.3
Radio Racia	2.4	93.4	4.2
BBC (from London)	2.3	93.3	4.4
Russian Service of radio Liberty	2.3	93.5	4.2
Baltic Wave	2.2	93.5	4.3
Belarusian Service of radio Liberty	2.1	93.7	4.2
"Belarusian Chronicles" of Deutsche Welle	1.6	94.4	4.0
Belarusian Service of Radio Sweden	1.1	94.6	4.3

\* According to a public opinion poll conducted by ISEPS on March 3-13, 2009.

In total *about 10%* of Belarusians listen to at least one of the above Western radio stations. Comparative analysis shows that if watching foreign TV Channels in Belarus is gradually increasing, listening of

foreign radio stations is gradually decreasing (from 15% just some years ago).

Although not all Internet resources used by Belarusians are from outside the country, in fact, the authorities do not control most of them, and in this sense one could equate them with outside information sources. According to IISEPS polls, approximately one third of Belarusians today use the Internet. Almost two thirds of them are regular users, i.e. use Internet daily and a few times a week, and almost half spend more than one hour. At the same time, Belarusians use Internet mostly for communicating (e-mailing), getting professional information and entertainment, rather than getting public and political information. In the light of the above analysis it is not surprising that those who use non-Belarusian Internet resources (over 30%) is almost two times more than those who use Belarusian ones (Manaev 2005).

A sizable percentage of Belarusians consume Western media product. 51% of respondents watch foreign TV Channels, listen to Western radio stations, use Internet, or do a combination of all three. If we add those people who have either a VHS or DVD player (two thirds of all respondents) or both (one-quarter) and could watch Western movies, the audience of Western media is in the millions.

## The Influence of Outside Information

However, even large audiences for Western (European) and Russian (Eurasian) media does not give an indication of their real influence on Belarusians. Perhaps, Belarusians accept information, which only confirms their expectations and habits, i.e. in fact this influence is not alternative to national media?

Those respondents who believe Belarus should establish closer relations with the EU have much more pro-democratic values than those who choose NIS (Ukraine), and the latter have more pro-democratic values than those who choose Russia. However, it is not enough to make a conclusion about their influence on Belarus in

terms of freedom and democratic changes (Table 3). Perhaps, Belarusians have a wrong image of their neighbors, and associate them with irrelevant features.

To avoid this uncertainty we should deepen our analysis.

Responding to the question: "To what extent does the information that you received from official sources (including state-run media) correspond with your real life?" in March 2009, 40% of respondents said "completely or to some extent not" while "completely yes" – 16.3% and "partly yes" 43.3%. Only 46.7% responded positively to the question: "Do you have enough access to information about the current political situation in Belarus?" while 52.9% responded negatively. This clearly reveals a huge need for unbiased information and well-grounded analysis of 'real life' inside and outside the country.

As for national media, most of Belarusians are aware of existing restrictions:

Table 6: Distribution of Answers to the Question: "How do you assess mass media in Belarus?" (in percent)\*

Options	%
Mass media in Belarus is independent	13.1
Mass media in Belarus is dependent	43.6
Some mass media in Belarus is independent, and the other is not	29.4
DA/NA	13.9

\* According to a public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS on March 3-13, 2009.

Responding to the next question: "If you believe mass media in Belarus is dependent, then on whom is it dependent on (*multiple choice*)?" our respondents clarified all "the circumstances". Of those who believe media in Belarus are dependent 76.6% said "on the President", and 38.7% – "on other authorities" (total number exceeds two thirds of all the respondents), while only 15.5% – "on international institutions and foreign capital", 14.1% – "on audience's demands",



13.1% – “on corporate interests of journalists”, 10% – “on political parties and public associations”, and 1.1% – “on Belarusian business”. Responding to the question: “In your opinion, whose interests should Belarusian mass media express (*multiple choice*)?” over three quarters of respondents said “public interests”, and less than one third – that of “the state”.

This clearly demonstrates that approximately half of Belarusian society has unsatisfied information needs, yet also understands that existing national media system could not do this by political reasons. It also means that many of those who try to get information from outside sources are really seeking alternatives.

What alternatives do they get from both sides of ‘the Huntington line’?

Research conducted by IISEPS in 2006–2007, using a special methodology of computer content analysis through Internet search systems (Google, Yahoo, etc.), shows that Belarus does not get regular or in depth coverage by Western media because it is considered a “stable” country. Relations between Belarus and the EU are covered mainly within “active political discourse”, and do not play a sufficient role. Russian media reporting on Belarus does not cover activities of opposition, which is one of the important public actors in the country, and that is why is not representative as well (Bykovski 2007). And even this quite formal analysis<sup>16</sup> proved that “the world pictures” offered by the western and Russian media or, in other words, “framing” and “agenda setting” significantly differ from each other, as well as from Belarusian national media.

Table 7 provides a comparative analysis of public attitudes among those Belarusians who watch Western or Russian TV Channels or listen to Western radio stations:

Obviously, audience s of Western media (primarily TV Channels) generally have much more pro-democratic values than Russian media audiences. This is despite many Belarusians, even those who get information from the Western media, have traditional suspicious attitudes towards them. Thus, responding to the question: “In your opinion, how do Western radio stations report on life in

16 It did not pay special attention to the Western media broadcasting to Belarus mentioned above.

Table 7: Public Attitudes of Respondents Who Watch Western or Russian TV Channels or Listen to Western Radio Stations (in percent)\*

Public attitudes	Western TV (19.0)	Western Radio (14.0)	Russian TV (79.3)
<b>In general, is the situation in our country developing in a right or a wrong direction?</b>			
In a right direction	32.8	45.3	58.3
In a wrong direction	54.3	42.7	30.2
<b>Do you feel opposition should exist in Belarus?</b>			
Yes	75.9	65.5	57.6
No	16.6	28.1	29.5
<b>Do you feel yourself in opposition to the authorities?</b>			
Yes	30.8	30.8	16.7
No	59.3	56.6	73.1
<b>Should authorities start negotiations with the EU or with opposition as well?</b>			
Yes, because only through negotiations our society could reach public accord	53.2	50.6	49.1
No, because opposition represents nobody	12.1	16.4	22.6
No, because authorities violate human rights and laws	28.9	27.3	18.3
<b>Whom did you vote for during the Presidential election in 2006?</b>			
For A. Lukashenko	27.2	39.6	49.1
For A. Kozulin	11.1	8.0	6.8
For A. Milinkevich	35.5	26.2	16.9
<b>What is your opinion on the imprisonment of former Presidential candidate A. Kozulin?</b>			
He was sentenced fairly and should be punished	13.0	18.3	26.3
He was sentenced unfairly and should be released	57.7	48.0	35.7
<b>Should Belarus initiate a process of integration with EU?</b>			
Yes	66.7	58.2	46.9
No	24.2	31.6	39.5
<b>Should Belarus become a member of the EU?</b>			
Yes	50.5	56.0	33.8
No	36.7	35.2	50.4

Public attitudes	Western TV (19.0)	Western Radio (14.0)	Russian TV (79.3)
If you have to make a choice between integration with Russia or the EU, which would you prefer?			
Integration with Russia	31.3	41.8	47.5
Integration with the EU	58.8	42.5	34.9
What variant of Belarus-Russia integration would you prefer?			
Relations between Belarus and Russia should be the same as with other countries	56.5	43.2	42.3
Belarus and Russia should create a Union of independent states with close political and economic relations	29.7	36.3	44.0
Belarus and Russia should integrate into one state	8.4	14.1	7.9
In case a price rise for Russian gas and oil seriously affects your family, would you accept Belarus incorporation into Russia?			
Yes	23.5	33.7	31.4
No	71.1	56.8	57.5
What definition does Europe associate with?			
Democracy	59.1	33.0	42.6
Degradation	6.9	12.3	10.3
On May 1, 2004 Poland, Lithuania and Latvia joined EU. In your opinion, how has the life of their citizens changed since then?			
Improved	39.7	43.8	27.9
Remains the same	32.7	32.0	33.2
Deteriorated	10.2	12.4	18.8
Do you support the OCSE democratization demands to Belarusian authorities (four demands, June 1999)?			
Yes	66.5	57.9	48.1
No	33.5	42.1	51.9
Do you support the EU democratization demands to Belarusian authorities (twelve demands, November 2006)?			
Yes	44.3	34.1	31.5
No	55.7	65.9	68.5

\* According to public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS on May 5--5, 2007. Read by columns. DA/NA is eliminated for easy perception.

Belarus?" equal number of respondents (22%) said "coverage is unbiased" and "coverage is biased" (with 56% of DA/NA). Of course, we cannot say that these attitudes are a direct result of media influence. Many people choose some particular media because their "world picture" coincides with their own picture. Nevertheless, it seems that ideas and values of these audiences are supported, consolidated and expressed by mass media. In this way, media influence their audience. It also proves that Western and Russian media promotes different values to Belarusian audiences.

## The Role of Communication Mediators

However, as mass communication theory states, 'framing' and 'agenda setting' do not determine a final influence. Influencing is a complicated process because perception of information is mediated by a person's attitudes and communication itself. As a rule, there is a 'two-step communication flow' when perception of information is mediated by so called 'public opinion leaders' or 'communication mediators'(McQuail 2005). Indeed, this is twice as important when we speak about information influence from outside the country, especially when the audience has suspicious attitudes to these sources and prefer to rely on competent opinions.

According to the a recent ISEPS opinion poll, 13.5% of respondents "constantly" and 50.1% "occasionally" discussed public and political news with their relatives, friends, and colleagues. Another, higher level of 'mediating' is discussing information not just with relatives and friends but also with the public. According to the same poll, 11.7% of respondents during the last three years experienced speaking in public (i.e. at various meetings, concerts, mass media, etc.), including 6.8% - several times, and 2% - many times. Moreover, there is a close correlation between two forms of communication mediating: among those who discuss news constantly, 25.6% speak in public, among those who discuss news occasionally - 13.1%, and among those who never discuss news - only 4.4%. In total,

those who are involved in both activities consist of almost 10% of all respondents. This is exactly those 'communication mediators' who (re)transmit and (re)interprets outside information flows inside the country, and according to communication theory, largely determine their final influence.

Now we should check is there any correlation between 'communication mediating' and use of Western media. Could we really consider these people as a crucial agents of the 'two-step communication flow'? For this purpose I will examine various communication activities among audiences of Western media (those who, in various combinations, either watch foreign TV Channels or listen to Western radio stations or use Internet), and audiences of non-Western media):

Obviously, audiences of Western media are more actively included in various communication infrastructures than audiences of non-Western media. Of course, this higher level of communication activity cannot be explained by use of Western media only. Thus, this audience is much younger (there are three times more respondents under 30 years among the audience than among non-audience), and educated (there are two times more respondents with high/college education among the audience than among non-audience). However, demographic factors rather predispose for various activities than pre-determine them (for example, the age factor does not correlate with 'communication mediating' at all). Therefore, we could suppose that the use of Western media to some extent 'activates' interest in public issues and the intention to 'share' this interest with others.

However, the the crucial question for identifying a role of 'communication mediators' in Western media influence on Belarusian audience is their attitudes to important social, economic, and political issues. Do they really 'transmit' the values of Western media information to others? Theoretically speaking, they could disavow or even discredit these values in favor of the Belarusian regime (as Soviet propagandists did decades ago). In other words, should we define a role of 'communication mediators' as agents of so-called 'stability' (i.e. pattern of the authorities) or agents of change (i.e. pattern of the democratic forces)? For final clarification, I will examine public attitudes of 'communication mediators' and 'non-mediators':

Table 8: Communication Activities Among Audiences of Western Media and Audiences of non-Western media (in percent)\*

Communication activities	Audience of Western media (51)	Audience of Non-Western media (49)
To what extent information from official sources correspond with your real life?		
Completely yes (16.3)	8.2	24.7
Partly yes (43.3)	42.8	43.9
Partly not (22.6)	24.1	21.2
Completely not (17.4)	24.6	9.9
Do you have enough access to information about current political situation in Belarus?		
Yes (46.7)	40.9	52.8
No (52.9)	59.1	46.6
Have you spoken in public (at meetings, concerts, mass media, etc.) during last three years?		
Yes, one time/several times/many times (11.7)	18.0	5.1
No (87.9)	82.0	94.9
Do you discuss public and political problems with your relatives, friends and colleagues?		
Constantly (13.8)	18.9	8.5
Time to time (50.1)	53.7	46.4
No (35.6)	27.1	44.5
Have:		
Mobile phone (63.7)	81.7	44.9
Videotape recorder and DVD player (24.4)	32.0	12.8
During last year got:		
various information materials (independent newspapers, leaflets, etc.) in mail box on public and political issues (22.4)	27.6	17.0
acquainted (via mass media, leaflets, inter-personal communications, etc.) with results of independent public opinion polls (20.5)	30.4	10.3

\* According to public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS on March 3-13, 2009. Read by columns. DA/NA is eliminated for easy perception. Percentage of all respondents is in brackets.

Table 9: Public Attitudes of 'Communication Mediators' and 'Non-Mediators', (in percent)\*

Public attitudes	Discuss public & political news:	
	Constantly (13.8)	Rarely (35.6)
<b>On January 2, 2009 national currency was devaluated by 20.5%. Was it unexpected for you?</b>		
It was absolutely unexpected	35.2	68.1
I did not exclude it could happen	42.4	23.7
I was sure it would happen	20.5	6.7
<b>Who is to blame for deterioration of the economic situation in the country?</b>		
President	57.9	42.1
Government	59.3	44.9
West	27.6	30.7
Russia	11.9	10.0
<b>How do you assess in general the political situation in Belarus?</b>		
Good/normal	37.3	60.7
Tense/critical	60.7	31.5
<b>On your opinion, is the country in general going in right or wrong direction?</b>		
In right direction	32.4	48.6
In wrong direction	50.0	23.0
<b>Do you consider yourself as supporter or opponent for the ruling authorities?</b>		
Supporter	25.4	41.9
Opponent	39.7	13.9
Indifferent	28.2	39.7
<b>What opinion do you share?</b>		
Belarus needs changes	72.4	57.7
Belarus needs stability	17.6	13.4
<b>Do you consider yourself as European, associated with European history and culture?</b>		
Yes	52.2	34.1
No	42.1	55.7

Public attitudes	Discuss public & political news:	
	Constantly (13.8)	Rarely (35.6)
In May 2004 our neighbor countries Poland, Lithuania and Latvia joined the European Union. Do you think life of their citizens has become better or worse?		
Better	40.9	27.1
Worse	22.1	16.7
Has not changed	25.0	24.3
If you had to choose between Belarus unification with Russia or joining the European Union, what would you prefer?		
Unification with Russia	40.2	41.6
Joining the European Union	45.0	30.4

\* According to a public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS on March 3-13, 2009. Read by columns. DA/NA is eliminated for easy perception.

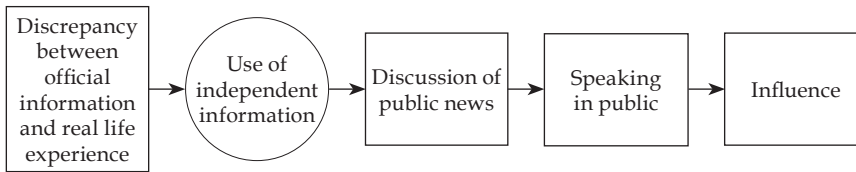
Obviously, the difference in their public attitudes is significant: “communication mediators” are much more critical towards the Belarusian regime, and have more democratic and pro-Western attitudes. Of course, one cannot affirm that these attitudes are due to Western media influence; many of them had these attitudes before Western media use. However, providing arguments that Western media makes for their self-confidence (neutralizing rather than strengthening existing suspicions) and inspires them to ‘share’ their ideas with others. At least we could affirm that ‘communication mediators’ use Western media, strictly speaking independent information, for ‘transmitting’ its values to others rather than for disavowing or discrediting them in favor of the Belarusian regime. If there are ‘agents of stability’ among them, their role is less significant than of ‘agents of change’.

With some simplifications, this process could be presented by the scheme of Figure 2.

The pre-condition of such influence is the discrepancy between official information and real life experiences (i.e. need), and the crucial element is a use of independent information (i.e. tool). In the case of Belarus, the pre-condition ‘is provided’ by the authoritarian regime



Figure 2: Communication Structure of Independent Information Influence



of President Lukashenko (most of the media system works mostly on propaganda rather than communication principles). Independent information is available from various domestic sources (non-state media, Internet, interpersonal communications) and sources from outside the country (when speaking about democratic influence, this refers mostly Western media). Of course, the 'battle for Belarusians' minds and souls' is determined, firstly, by their real life experiences, and secondly, by their access to independent information and its quality. However, those who succeed in using the potential of 'communication mediators' will get effective allies in this battle.

## Geo-Political Perspectives

As I stressed at the beginning, millions of Belarussians are still in the process of consolidating the national and geo-political identities, and their system of values is gradually changing. The role of various influences from the outside is growing significantly, due to global and regional developments of the last decade, such as the 'widening Europe Eastwards' (including enlargement of both the EU and NATO) and Russia's attempts to restore its role as a world super power. For the past fifteen years, President Lukashenko's authoritarian regime based its resistance to influence from the West and reluctant acceptance of Russia's influence mainly on its Eurasian/Orthodox civilization heritage, rather than European Catholic/Protestant

one. That is why Belarus shifted to the Eurasian/Orthodox side of 'civilization divide.' The Pro-European choice of Belarusian society during this period did not expand. This is in contrast to Ukraine and Moldova, also located on Huntington's line, but where ruling elites balanced between the two civilizations, and even proclaimed a pro-Western geo-political choice.

Table 10: Distribution of Answers in Belarus to the Question: "If you have to choose between integration with Russia or EU, what would you prefer?" (in percent)\*

Option	9/03	6/04	3/05	4/06	12/07	6/08	3/09	x
Integration with Russia	47.6	47.7	51.9	56.1	47.5	50.3	42.4	49.0
Integration with EU	36.1	37.6	31.6	31.9	33.3	32.4	35.1	34.0
DA/NA	16.3	14.7	16.5	12.0	19.2	17.3	22.5	17.0

\* According to a public opinion poll conducted by IISEPS.

However, in recent years, the geo-political situation began to change dramatically. Russia's growing ambitions, mostly based on oil and gas wealth, are leading to serious growing concerns in the West. Manifestations of these ambitions include 'energy pressures' on Europe, particularly the local 'gas and oil wars' with Belarus and Ukraine, and the war with Georgia in August 2008 that resulted in Russia annexing almost one third of Georgia's territory. In 2009, this concern was transformed into a new EU initiative 'Eastern Partnership,' intended to strengthen ties with six CIS countries: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The EU has prevailing concerns about a number of these authoritarian regimes and political turmoil in some of them. Despite Brussels' formal statements that "it is not oriented against any country," everyone understood its real intention - to reduce Russian influence and to strengthen Western influence in the region. Thus, just days before the 'Eastern Partnership' summit in Prague on May 7, 2009, the deputy Prime-Minister of Czech Republic, Alexander Vondra, stated on behalf of the EU Presidency that the "Eastern Partnership" should

fill up 'the vacuum' between the EU and Russia."<sup>17</sup> Executive Secretary of CIS Sergey Lebedev (former Director of the Russian External Intelligence) commented that "former USSR countries should make a serious choice between CIS and EU, i.e. participation in this initiative." Russian Prime-Minister Vladimir Putin unequivocally disclosed the consequences for members of 'Eastern Partnership': "For 15 years Russia extended a hand towards its partners, former USSR Republics, and sold them energy at prices much lower than world prices. Thus, we subsidized economies of these countries in the amount of hundreds of billions dollars. We believe that this period is over. We should move to the market relations."<sup>18</sup>

President Lukashenko could not ignore these developments because Russia's 'hard line course' potentially threatens his regime and his personal power. He accepted membership in new EU initiative. In his interview to Reuters on the eve of the Prague summit, he stated, "If Belarus is located between the East and the West, on the cross-roads, we have to conduct a multi-vector foreign policy. Moreover, if this is a balancing, it is not too bad. Without this balance there will be no success in economics, politics, or public policy."<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, to avoid the Kremlin's irritations, he did not come to Prague in person (the Belarusian delegation was led by the First Deputy Prime-Minister), and demonstratively received the Russian Ambassador and "had a warm discussion about Belarus-Russia relations" on the day of the summit.

Despite various complications and uncertainties, there is no doubt that this geo-political shift gives new perspectives for a future of 'civilization clash in this region. If 'the ground' for a pro-European choice has existed in Belarus for centuries, this 'clash' could be finally resolved in favor of Europe with some effective outside influence. Today a pro-European orientation is supported by one third of population. On the other hand, 'the ground' for a pro-Russian choice in Belarus is even stronger, the "clash" could be finally resolved in favor of Russia. Today, almost half the population supports a pro-Russian orientation. How long Belarus, and other countries

17 See <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/1622717.html>.

18 See [http://pahus\\_1978.blog.tut.by](http://pahus_1978.blog.tut.by).

19 See <http://www.belta.by/ru/topics?tid=753>.

on “the Huntington line”, can succeed in balancing between two major geo-political and civilization players is impossible to predict. However, keeping in mind global and regional developments of the last decade (end of ‘Cold War’, the EU and NATO enlargement, Iraq and Afghanistan wars, current financial crisis) we could – at least expect if not predict – that ‘civilization clashes’ or conflicts will be resolved most probably by ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ power. Effectively organized information influence based on communication theory and new technological achievements, as well as local peculiarities, could contribute to more rather than less use of this type of power, in addition to more traditional tools as diplomacy, trade, investments, culture, education, or public policy.

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