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country report

Auslandsbüro Belarus



One nation – two new representative bodies?

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In spring 2024, Belarusians had the “pleasure” of renewing two political bodies, both of which claim to represent the people, albeit in diametrically opposed ways: The All-Belarusian People's Assembly, appointed by Lukashenka, is intended to be the new super-authority to ensure his personal rule and the continuation of the authoritarian system, while at the same time fulfilling a demand by Vladimir Putin for internal reforms in Belarus. Staffed by 1,200 loyalists, it is also an artificial image of an “ideal society” in the eyes of the ruler, which excludes political opponents, i.e. most of the electorate, from participation. The democratic forces in exile, on the other hand, held what was probably the first Belarusian democratic election since 1994 with the elections to the Coordination Council. Technically successful, they hardly managed to arouse greater interest among the population, as the mandate, function, and potential for action of the “proto parliament” remains unclear. This report analyses how both work, how they came about and how they fit into the current political situation in and around Belarus.

Two Belaruses

Do country names have a plural? And if so, how would you form it? Do you say, “three Frances,” “four Indias,” or “five Finlands”? In most cases, this question practically never arises. In the case of Belarus, on the other hand, it is often said that there are essentially two different “visions” of the same country: the dictatorial-repressive *Belarus* of *Aliaksandr Lukashenka*, closely aligned with Putin's Russia, on the one hand, and the freedom-seeking, pro-European “new” Belarus, represented by *Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya* and the democratic forces. Over the past few weeks, both “Belaruses” have experienced the renewal of a central political body – the “All-Belarusian People's Assembly” (ABPA) and the *Coordination Council* (CC). But even if both have some similarities on the surface, in substance they could hardly be more different. While *Lukashenka* has created a new super-organ in the constitutional structure by establishing the previously rather ceremonial ABPA, which is intended to secure his personal rule and the continued existence of the hard-authoritarian system, the democratic forces have held direct elections for their “proto-parliament” in exile for the first time. After the rigged presidential election in autumn 2020, this was at least recognized in *EU* and *US* documents as an “interim representative body” of the Belarusian people. [1].

The “All-Belarusian People's Assembly” – New “super-organ” in sleep mode

When the “All-Belarusian People's Assembly” met in *Minsk* on April 24 and 25, 2024, it was already the seventh time that this loyalist body of over 1,000 members had met. Since its founding in 1996, the format, which looks like party congresses of the CPSU, has been closely linked to *Lukashenka*'s personal securing of power. Its first meeting, with a proud participation of almost 5,000 delegates, took place just a few weeks before a controversial constitutional referendum that sealed the concentration of power in the hands of the young

president. But even if the *ABPA*, which was officially supposed to represent a broad sample of Belarusian society, which of course always excluded opposition forces, was formally allowed to set the major guidelines for the country's development, it was not provided for in the country's constitutional system.

A controversial referendum on February 27, 2022, fundamentally changed this – at least on paper – and made it the highest body in the political structure of the Republic of Belarus. Nevertheless, it took more than two years before the body met in this form for the first time. The political run-up to this development began shortly after the rigged elections in summer 2020.

When *Lukashenka* investigated the abyss of his downfall in the face of the peaceful mass protests, he turned to his ally in *Moscow* for help. *Vladimir Putin* provided political, propaganda and financial support, but many observers agree that he attached specific conditions to it. Comments by high-ranking Russian officials in the months that followed suggest that this included not only plans for the economic and political integration of both countries in the so-called “union state”, but also changes to the Belarusian constitution. In the 25 years of his rule to date, *Lukashenka* had highly personalized his system of rule and made himself the central “gatekeeper”. A constitutional reform with the aim of a broader distribution of power, relatively strengthening the “parliament” and loyal, potentially pro-Russian parties, for example, seemed to be an effective means for the *Kremlin* to expand its channels of influence. In November 2020, *Lukashenka* also pledged that he would not run for president in future elections.

Observers assume that the final version of the revised constitution was personally confirmed by *Putin* at the meeting between *Lukashenka* and him in December 2021. However, since *Lukashenka* had in the meantime brought the situation in the country back under his control through the massive use of force by his security forces at the price of extensive isolation from the countries of the political West, his negotiating position with *Putin* had been somewhat strengthened. The “elevation” of the *All-Belarusian People's Assembly (ABPA)*, a body that most commentators had previously granted the status of a Soviet-nostalgic placebo body, to the rank of an authority that is legally above the president, thus seemed to be a way out of vacating the presidency but still retaining the reins of power from a new position.

Since the major Russian attack on Ukraine, the *Kremlin* seems to be granting *Lukashenka* more leeway on its own initiative. On the one hand, the unexpected resilience of the Ukrainians has shifted the *Kremlin's* priorities. On the other hand, *Lukashenka*, as a co-aggressor, is now isolated from *Ukraine* and even more firmly in *Putin's* hands, while he seemed to be “delivering” to *Moscow* in all important areas, including a comprehensive Russification of the Belarusian cultural and educational landscape. In this way, the ruler of *Minsk* was able to cement his position in the system and reshape the *ABPA* in such a way that it could continue to rule as a kind of “collective *Lukashenka*” even if he would leave power. He summed all this up in the *ABPA* law of February 7, 2023. [2]

Orchestrated and timed

The preparation for the first session of the *People's Assembly* began with the appointment of Deputy Speaker of Parliament *Valery Mitskevich* as head of the new *ABPA* Secretariat on February 2, 2024. According to *Lukashenka*, the official was to select about ten employees [3]

for the secretariat and prevent possible “chaos” that the *ABPA* could cause with its new powers in Lukashenka’s vertical of power. [4] Prime Minister Raman *Halouchanka* was appointed to head the organizing committee. [5] After “parliamentary elections” [*1] took place on February 25, the committee had 60 days until the first session of the *ABPA*.

“Exclusively Lukashists”

The *ABPA* is made up of various groups that are supposed to embody an ideal image of society according to Lukashenka’s ideas. About a third, with 412 people, represents the (political) official elite: the deputies of both “parliamentary” chambers (110 members of the lower house and 64 members of the upper house), the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers, chairpersons of the executive committees of the regions and the city of *Minsk*, the districts, cities, chairpersons and judges of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court. [6]

Almost a third represents the local and regional “soviets”, i.e. the deputies of the nationwide local councils including all deputies of the *Minsk City Council*. [7] The last (good) third is made up of so-called “subjects of civil society” – five GONGOs with over 100,000 members each, which, according to the law “*On the Foundations of Civil Society*” of February 2023, play a prominent role thanks to their special loyalty. [8] Specifically, these are “*Belaya Rus*”, a mass organization loyal to Lukashenka, which has also formed a party of the same name since March 2023, the “*Veterans’ Association*”, the “*Republican Youth*” and the “*Belarusian Women’s Union*” as well as the *Trade Union Federation*. [9] *Lukashenka* commented with satisfaction at the opening of the meeting that only “Lukashists” were gathered in the hall and that “there are and will be no enemies here.” [10] In addition to the political function of securing power, this apparently also has a psychological relevance for *Lukashenka*. After seeing himself as the “father of the country” for decades (his supporters sometimes call him “*Batska*” – father), the experience of 2020 became a recognizable trauma for him, when “his” people turned away from him by the majority. Since then, after hundreds of thousands of the “traitors” have been forced into emigration, silenced, or put in prison, *Lukashenka* is also regaining “his” society in the People’s Assembly. The state media also spoke of the *ABPA* as the “realization of true popular rule”. [11]

Despite already having total control over the process, the regime issued strong security measures for the event on April 24 and 25. 3,000 militiamen were deployed, and the meeting was dominated by the speeches of *Lukashenka* and his top officials. [12] While the former launched an emotional all-out attack on the *West*, the latter sang a hymn to their master that was unprecedented even in 30 years of continuous Lukashenka rule. With a single dissenting vote, *Lukashenka* was finally elected chairman of his assembly and its presidium, and a deputy chairman and 13 presidium members were appointed. A national security concept and a new military doctrine were also adopted at the meeting.

Observers said the form and course of this *Seventh All-Belarusian People’s Assembly* was reminiscent of the late *Brezhnev* era: thunderous applause, demonstrative unity, the creation of a dual role for the head of state and a growing personality cult around a ruler in poor health who is of retirement age and who primarily flaunts his own successes and achievements. [13]

Uncharismatic presidium

In addition to two bizarre statements on security policy – KGB chief *Ivan Tsertsel* claimed in his speech that *Lithuania* had planned a drone attack on *Minsk* and *Lukashenka* described a “plan” by the democratic forces to occupy the *city of Kobryn* on the border with *Ukraine* – two results of the meeting were particularly worth mentioning: By being elected chairman of the *ABPA*, *Lukashenka* not only “acquired” the aforementioned dual role in the state, but also a deputy for the first time in his political career. The fact that the choice fell on *Alexander Kosinets*, a politically pale former head of the presidential administration who once fell into disgrace and is considered the “opposite of a team player”, underlines that the post does not entail any expectations of personal initiatives.

The same applies to the composition of the 13-member *ABPA* presidium, which is to run the business between the annual meetings. Previous speculation that a new organ of power could be created here, comparable to the *Security Council* or a *Soviet Politburo*, did not come true: the Presidium members are all representatives of the lower and middle levels of the nomenclature [14]. Only the governors of the *Brest* and *Hrodna* regions are relative “heavyweights” [*2].

Thus, *Lukashenka* reunited the powers divided by the 2022 Constitution between the President of the Republic and the Chairman of the *ABPA* in his hands, and by all appearances he currently intends not to share them with anyone, not even the decorative Presidium. In accordance with the Constitution, he now controls himself and had previously determined that he alone – *ad personam* – can ever combine these two functions.

Fifth wheel on the wagon?

In his speeches at the *ABPA* meeting, *Lukashenka* avoided making any clear statements about what exactly the *ABPA* and its delegates should do, other than dealing with

“global issues and strategy: how we should continue to live, how we should develop, based on what values we should raise our children and build our social relations.” [15]

However, he did specify what they **should not do**: the *ABPA* does not replace state bodies and does not interfere in their activities. A meeting on April 29 between *Lukashenka* and his deputy *Kosinets* and the head of the *ABPA* secretariat *Mitskevich* also failed to provide any clarity on this issue. The two were instructed to set up a “vertical system” for ongoing work with the *ABPA* delegates. Secondly, the two were to set up a structure to organize the *ABPA*’s work – i.e. an administration that would be lean in terms of personnel but effective and would ensure interaction with authorities and “civil society”. However, *Lukashenka* left the exact content unclear even during this consultation. [16]

On the one hand, *Lukashenka* seems to have managed to square the circle – he has delivered on the promise of constitutional reform to *Moscow* in autumn 2020 and he has implemented its conditions on paper. At the same time, the realities, especially his relationship with *Moscow*, have since stabilized to such an extent that he himself continues to hold all the reins of power. Thus, the *ABPA* seems for the time being like a dormant organ or an instrument for a “transit of power on demand”. This could gain new relevance at a time

when *Lukashenka* is tired (or incapable) of operational political business. Above all, this makes a democratic transition even more difficult. While a “fair counting of votes” in the presidential election in the summer of 2020 could have initiated political change, the new body ensures that such a “system failure” does not occur or can be reversed in the authoritarian system.

Coordination Council: first democratic Belarusian election since 1994?

The contrast could hardly be greater with the elections to the *Coordination Council* held by the democratic forces in exile on May 25-27, 2024.

Voice and face of the mass protests

This body was originally created in August 2020 at the height of the demonstrations by *Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya* to channel the mass protests and give the “street” a political voice. According to *Maxim Znak*, lawyer at the headquarters of presidential candidate *Viktar Babaryka*, there were several hundred applications. [17] Almost 14,000 applications were received for membership in the “*extended Coordination Council*”. [18] This “first” Coordination Council was then made up of 70 people and seven representative members of the Presidium, whose task was to enter dialogue with the regime and negotiate a way to overcome the political crisis. An online survey conducted at the time showed that 96.75 percent of 522,000 survey participants wanted the CC to represent them in such negotiations. The *European Parliament* then recognized the *Coordination Council* as a legitimate interim representation of the *Belarusian people*. However, the regime not only refused any negotiations, but immediately declared the body illegal and began a hunt for its members. Two of the seven Presidium members – *Maria Kalesnikava* and *Maksim Znak* – received draconian prison sentences for “attempting to illegally seize power”, four were exiled abroad and one was placed under house arrest in the country and politically silenced. In the spring of 2021, when the protests had already largely been pushed off the streets, the democratic forces made another attempt to renew their “mandate from the people” for negotiations. In a poll conducted via secure online tools, three quarters of a million Belarusians again voted for negotiations, but the regime ignored this too. It was therefore clear that the *Coordination Council* would not be able to fulfill its founding purpose. Although the Presidium members who had been exiled continued to make prominent appearances, but at the same time they like Presidium member *Pavel Latushka*, for example, publicly called for the regime to be sanctioned to the maximum.

Approaches to reform

Even at this time, discussions began within the democratic community about how the *Coordination Council* could be renewed and further developed. The concepts ranged from a platform for the internal coordination of Belarusian civil society with the political forces to a proto parliament in exile or a parliament for the Belarusian exile. Even then, debates were being held about how an election to the *Coordination Council* could be organized, which electoral systems would be possible, majority, or proportional representation, whether parties should run, electoral districts should be formed that might correspond to the Belarusian oblasts and the countries of exile, etc. There was also debate about the mandate

and functions of the *Coordination Council*. Should it have its own budget and carry out “projects”? Should it, like a parliament, pass “laws” that would serve as guidelines for the democracy movement or simply advise on possible reform programs for a future period of transformation in Belarus? How should its powers be defined vis-à-vis the other institutions of democratic forces?

These questions became more relevant when the *United Transitional Cabinet of Democratic Forces (UTC)* was set up at the conference on the “new Belarus” in August 2022, which presented itself as the “executive body” of the democratic forces in analogy to the “presidential office”, which is how the *Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya* sees itself. A “proto-parliament” would then, in the opinion of many, also have the appropriate powers to control the “proto-government”. At the same conference, it was therefore announced that the CC would reform itself and, in the future, would deal with the development of “program and strategy documents” but would also be allowed to “confirm” the representatives of the UTC. As a result, a renewed, “second” CC was initially created in February 2023, consisting of 19 of the previous members, 71 representatives of NGOs and parties, and 15 “non-party” individuals. The latter were elected by the representatives of the first two categories. This renewed CC saw itself, in accordance with the first variant mentioned above, as a body representing civil society and as a platform for discussing future scenarios for *Belarus*. Even before this “Second” *Coordination Council* met, the *Minsk regime* declared the CC an “extremist organization”.

The second CC dealt with constitutional reform and plans to ensure the rule of law and economic stability in a democratic transformation. Issues such as the release and rehabilitation of political prisoners were also on the agenda, for example in the context of comprehensive hearings in winter 2023. The CC seemed to have reached the zenith of its “power” when it withdrew its confidence in the UTC representative for internal security, *Aliaksandr Azarau*, during the hearings of the UTC representatives in August 2023 and *Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya* subsequently deposed him. The CC became part of the strategic dialogue between the democratic forces and the USA and participated in the development of roadmaps for cooperation with the *European Union*. Nevertheless, its members repeatedly criticized that they were not sufficiently involved in decisions by the other democratic forces. Since the mandate of the second CC had been set at one year from the outset, an election should take place in spring 2024 to obtain direct democratic legitimacy for the “third CC” and to strengthen contact with politics and society.

Successful test with unclear prospects

The discussions about the modalities of the election dragged on for months. On the one hand, there were technical challenges, including the security of the electoral process. The question of a binding quota for women (of 40 percent) also heated tempers. On the other hand, the fundamental questions remained unclear: How does the *Coordination Council* relate to the other bodies of the democratic forces? What role does the election play in the overall strategy up to 2025? What added value can the work of this body really provide for Belarusians – in European exile, but above all at home in *Belarus*? Ultimately, the election could not take place at the same time as Lukashenka’s parliamentary election in February, as originally planned, but took place a week before the European elections on May 25-27. The organizing committee had agreed on proportional representation with electoral lists with a three percent clause.

Around 280 people ran for around 80 seats in the Third Coordination Council on 12 electoral lists:

1. **“Solidarity”** – union of the *social democratic party “Narodnaya Hramada”* and the *“Belarusian Christian Democrats”* [*3], list of party leaders *Yauheniy Vilsky* and *Heorhi Dzmitruk*. This was the only explicit party bloc, but without a common party ideological basis.
2. **“Volya”** (The Will). The list of representatives of volunteers and active resistance organizations focuses primarily on building a *Belarusian Liberation Army* and supporting Belarusian volunteers fighting on the front lines.
3. **“European Choice”**. The list of *Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s* advisor *Alexander Dabravolski* and the *director of the Free Theater Nikolai Khalezin* includes many candidates with a liberal-conservative-national background. *Dabravolski*, for example, was deputy chairman of the *United Civic Party* for a long time.
4. **“Our Cause Association”**. A list of the *Christian Democratic Party* and representatives of Belarusian solidarity organizations abroad, led by political scientist *Roza Turarbekova*. The list supports freedom of movement and the development of relations between the diaspora and the opposition in the country.
5. **“Law and Order”**, a list of *BYPOL* leader and former *UTC* member *Azarau*. This list was excluded for violating electoral rules.
6. **“Voice of the Diaspora”** – Unity Across Borders. A list of representatives of the *Diaspora* and *Femme* movement, led by *Nadezhda Norton* and human rights activist *Raman Kislyak*.
7. **“Independent Belarusians”**. The list of blogger *Maxim Shabutsky*, who fought against *Russia* in *Ukraine*, aims to consolidate all democratic subjects, including active units of Belarusian volunteers, to create a unified political structure.
8. **“Prokopyev and Yahorau Bloc”**. The list of political activist and businessman *Vadzim Prokopyev* and the speaker of the *Second Coordination Council* *Andrei Yahorau* wants to abolish “superfluous structures” in the democratic movement and build a unified liberation movement that relies on its own resources.
9. **“Team of Latushka and Movement “For Freedom””**. The list of the head of the *National Anti-Crisis Management* and *deputy head of UTC* *Pavel Latushka* and the *chairman of the movement “For Freedom”*, *Yuri Hubarevich*, stands for sanctions pressure on the regime, its criminal prosecution, and the development of competencies for the seizure of power in *Belarus*.
10. **“Stop being afraid”**. The list of the blogger *Tatyana Martynova*, who lives in *Kyiv*, stands for sanctions pressure on the regime, support for Belarusians at home and abroad and strengthening relations with *Ukraine*.
11. **“Country for Life”**, this list by *Vitaly Savyuk* and *Eva Saprygina*, brings together representatives of the initiative originally founded by *Siarhei Tsikhanouski*, *Tsikhanouskaya’s* husband, which supports political prisoners and Belarusians in exile.

12. "Youth Offensive". The list of youth activists and young politicians, headed by the *Secretary General of the Belarusian Youth Council "Rada", Lisaveta Prakopchyk*, and *Tsikhonouskaya's advisor on youth and student affairs, Margarita Vorikhova*, aims above all to increase the role of young people in the political process.

Lively discussions – minor differences

As a discussion between the representatives of all electoral lists on the eve of the three election days demonstrated, the goals of the coalitions differed little from one another: they all demand the restoration of democracy and the rule of law and the preservation of Belarus' independence. Differences were particularly evident in the approaches to how this should be achieved: whether with political, military, legal, international law, economic means, or a mixture of all of them. Some groups also emphasize the interests of individual social groups. Otherwise, the electoral lists rely on well-known personalities and political or civil society brands, as is usual in proportional elections. The voters' preferences were clearly shown in the preliminary results:

1. *Latushka's team and the "For Freedom" movement* – 28 seats (2358 votes, 35.07%)
2. *Prokopyev-Yahorau bloc* – 13 seats (1050 votes, 15.62%)
3. *"Independent Belarusians"* – 8 seats (616 votes, 9.16%)
4. *"European Choice"* – 8 seats (605 votes, 9.00%)
5. *"Youth offensive"* – 8 seats (598 votes, 8.89%)
6. *"Our cause"* – 6 seats (489 votes, 7.27%)
7. *"Volya"* – 6 seats (432 votes, 6.43%)
8. *"Stop being afraid"* – 3 seats (226 votes, 3.36%)
9. *"Vote of the Diaspora - Unity across Borders"* - 0 seats (184 votes, 2.74% - below the 3% hurdle)
10. *"Solidarity"* - 0 seats (104 votes, 1.55%)
11. *"Country for Life"* - 0 seats (61 votes, 0.91%)

The *Coordination Council*, which was directly elected for the first time, will therefore be made up of eight lists, more than half of which will be made up of *Latushka's team* and the *Movement for Freedom* as well as the *Prakopyev-Yahorau bloc*. Overall, lists that are in favor of a tougher approach to the regime – from tougher sanctions to armed resistance – dominate. The liberal-conservative character is also noteworthy. Voter lists that are (co-)led or shaped by representatives of the three *EPP*-associated parties together account for more than half of the seats.

Disappointingly low voter turnout

Even in the weeks before the election, it was clear that the Belarusian public was not very interested. Independent media – mostly in forced exile – called mentioning the *Coordination Council* in an article headline a “guarantee” that it would hardly be read. When all the electoral lists were presented at a “*large political conference*” in *Warsaw* on May 19, barely more than 300 people watched the online stream. And in fact, only 6,723 people voted on the three election days. This corresponds mathematically to less than 0.01 percent of the total of 6,912,221 Belarusians eligible to vote. These numbers are also marginal when you consider the diaspora, which was the main party to vote. Depending on how you look at it, it is around 0.45 percent of the 1,483,626 Belarusians living abroad according to the *UN*, or a conservative estimate of up to three percent of adults who have emigrated or fled since 2020.

There appear to be many reasons for the low voter turnout. On the one hand, the regime relied on massive repression against all candidates and the electoral lists, all of which were recognized as “extremist formations.” Their houses and apartments in Belarus, where they still existed, were searched and relatives harassed. Participation in the elections was made a criminal offense and equated with “supporting an extremist formation,” which could result in harsh prison sentences. The propaganda spread the fear narrative that access to the IT systems had been hacked and that every voter could be identified. On election day itself, hackers launched a D-DOS attack and VPN services were also blocked. However, the IT experts behind the election confirmed that the process had gone well technically and that there was no risk to the participants.

On the other hand, the long delay in the procedure may have had a deterrent effect on many observers. Statements by *president-elect Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya* and her team also showed a divided attitude to what was probably the first democratic election in *Belarus* since 1994. One of her key political advisors headed one of the lists himself and several close confidants, including members of the interim cabinet, ran and won seats. But *Tsikhanouskaya* herself was particularly conspicuous in the weeks and months before the election by not saying anything about it. It was only on the day of the election that she spoke out and called on Belarusians to vote. At the same time, she pointed out shortcomings in the process and the way it was carried out. For many observers, this gave the impression that the “*Leader of Free Belarus*” herself was not particularly convinced of the process in which she was calling on her compatriots to participate. Nevertheless, she thanked all participants and candidates afterwards for their “heroic” efforts.

This low voter turnout is unlikely to give the *Coordination Council* a strong direct democratic mandate as its own player in the system of democratic forces. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that this election was able to take place at all and that the Belarusian democracy movement continues to fight not only to generate international attention for the problems and potential of their homeland, but also to build structures, institutions and technical solutions that make concrete preparations for a democratic transition. From circles of the Russian opposition in exile, for example, it is regularly heard that they envy the Belarusians for this high level of coherence and institutionalization. How exactly the new *Coordination Council* will set itself up and how it will exercise its mandate remains to be seen. The first joint meeting is planned for June 15.

Conclusion

Although the election to the *Coordination Council*, given the low turnout, is likely to be exploited by *Minsk* propaganda as “proof” that the democratic forces have lost all relevance, the regime’s actions tell a different story. Because the regime evidently felt it necessary, as it did in the “parliamentary elections” in the spring, to proceed with massive repression against the *CC* elections and all those associated with them. It thus makes it clear that the process cannot be so irrelevant. In fact, despite all the shortcomings, especially regarding the timeline and the inadequate embedding of the process in a recognizable overall strategy, the democratic forces managed to hold an apparently technically clean and secure free election to a general representative body. The process was open, equal, and fair. The fact that *Alina Koushyk*, one of *Tsikanouskaya*’s closest confidants, was almost excluded from the election due to a formal error in her candidacy shows that the standards set applied to everyone.

Lukashenka, on the other hand, has once again made it clear with his actions that he is not only afraid of the slightest stirrings of self-determination from his people, but also that he does not trust his close followers. The presidium of his new super-organ, the *All-Belarusian People’s Assembly*, is far from being an actual collective organ of power, like the *Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU* once was. The members of the presidium are “nobodies” without political weight or influence. Not one of them comes from the “siloviki”, military, police, or secret services, with which *Lukashenka* has otherwise been used to fill important positions since 2020. [19]

As a result, both newly created or completely revamped “people’s representative bodies” are deficient and cannot claim to represent the Belarusian people as a whole – albeit for diametrically different reasons. The *All-Belarusian People’s Assembly* is a hand-picked gossip committee of – as *Lukashenka* says – “Lukashists” that serves to safeguard an increasingly totalitarian system and in which “enemies” will never have a place. *Lukashenka* thus excludes all political opponents, i.e. most of the people who voted him out of office in 2020.

The *Coordination Council*, on the other hand, despite the technically successful process, hardly has any appeal or interest beyond a small circle of activists, probably mainly because it cannot initiate any real changes in the country in view of the massive repression and its mandate within the democratic forces remains vague. Belarusians will therefore only have a truly general respectable representation of the people when general, free, and fair parliamentary elections can be held in the country itself. Achieving this is the goal of the *Coordination Council* and the democratic forces.

[*1] [Detailed report from February 2024](#)

[*2] The others are a university rector, three directors of state-owned enterprises and institutions, a head of the Council of Ministers apparatus, two chairmen of the parliamentary committees – for legislation in the lower house and for international affairs and national security in the upper house of *Lukashenka*’s parliament, a deputy head of the Mogilev regional administration, a judge of the Supreme Court who also heads the National Council of Judges, and two GONGO representatives.

[*3] Since January 2024, the Christian Democrats have been divided

- [1] <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200910IPR86829/meps-call-for-eu-sanctions-against-belarusian-president-and-navalny-s-poisoners>
- [2] <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=H12300248>
- [3] <https://www.belta.by/society/view/zadachi-kolossalnye-mitskevich-o-predstojaschej-rabote-vo-glave-seCCetariata-vns-613216-2024/>
- [4] <https://www.belta.by/president/view/mitskevich-budet-rukovodit-seCCetariatom-vsebelorusskogo-narodnogo-sobranija-613190-2024/>
- [5] <https://www.belta.by/president/view/v-belarusi-sozdan-respublikanskij-orgkomitet-po-podgotovke-i-provedeniju-vns-613311-2024/>
- [6] <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/20631015>
- [7] <https://moopl.by/czik-ustanovil-itogi-vyborov-delegatov-vns-ot-mestnyh-sovetov-deputatov-i-grazhdanskogo-obshhestva/>
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