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**The role of civil society in the process
of democratic transition in Mexico
and Belarus**

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DECLARATION:

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography. The thesis as submitted is 19139 words long, i.e. 74 manuscript pages.

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Abstract

Civil society has emerged as a challenging concept in political development theories. As researches claim, economic restructuring has undermined the political hegemony of authoritarian regimes and set up a scene for different autonomous associations.

The selection of the two countries (Mexico and Belarus) was conditioned by the fact that they both are representatives of “third wave” democracies and have striking similarities in the post-authoritarian development, assuming there is a undeniable possibility to learn the lesson from the differences as well.

From the viewpoint of the citizen, civil society is first and foremost a channel for protecting and promoting personal values and interests. In the authoritarian regime, however, civic freedoms rarely exist and there are limited possibilities for an independent society to function. The main goal of the civil society in the country, which is undergoing the democratic transition, should be to promote change and create all the conditions for the proper functioning of open and public civic movements, which will eventually reflect the views of the citizens through governmental actions. Another important sphere in the democracy building is free media – it helps encouraging citizenry by giving different sides of the event to people, but is often commercial, as well as political parties, which will further represent the ideas of its voters and have a say in policy-making.

The external actors, which can provide the countries with political guidelines and financial support play essential role as well.

I. Introduction

1.1 Background

Civil society has emerged as a challenging concept in political development theories. As researches claim, economic restructuring has undermined the political hegemony of authoritarian regimes and set up a scene for different autonomous associations.

The selection of the two countries (Mexico and Belarus) was conditioned by the fact that they both are representatives of “third wave” democracies and have striking similarities in the post-authoritarian development, assuming there is a undeniable possibility to learn the lesson from the differences as well.

In Mexico just like in Belarus serious economic crisis and economic adjustment policies were major reasons for public discontent in the late 1980s. The regimes had the intention to channel peoples’ dissatisfaction into the political arena through a series of reforms. They were both representatives of the “third wave” democracies.

In the context of these economic and political changes, scholars have observed an awakened civil society in Mexico. They have chronicled the emergence of independent organizations of workers, peasants, and the urban poor with its peak in 1994. They have also documented new types of civic associations such as environmental groups, election-watch groups, human rights organizations, debtors’ groups, and women’s movements. Numerous studies of social movements beginning in the 1980s notice a significant rise of civil society movements in the era of economic and political liberalization.

If we look on the other side of the planet, with the collapse of Soviet Union there was hope that the newly independent states would democratize. Most of these states did attempt democracy, but their success has varied. There are some contradictions when it comes to defining and analyzing democracy in Belarus, which is one of the many similarities with Mexico. There has also been a serious development of civil society groups and we’ll later

see why.

1.2 Research focus

The objective of the proposed thesis is to analyze the performance of the civil society in the democracy building. The main stress will be put on the direct influence that each sector of civil society has in Mexico and Belarus, and secondly, on examination of the role that the particular sectors of civil society have had in the democratic development. In the end the analysis of the similarities and differences and assumptions about possible reasons for those will be made along with the analysis of the existing limitations to the development of civil societies under study.

Of course before comparing and drawing any kinds of conclusions one has to define such notions as democracy, development and civil society. It can be done by analyzing the theories related to civil society and it will also help to determine the sectors which contribute to the relation between the state and the civil society and democracy development. This theoretical framework will serve to examine the situation of civil society in the context of democracy building in the both countries.

I believe that the analysis of performance of the sectors of civil society in the democracy building will provide on one hand a detailed picture of what sectors are most important political and social players, and on the other hand by the comparison of 2 countries examine how vital is the context and historical and cultural background for the particular achievements in democracy building.

Hypotheses and questions

In the wake of regime transitions in Eastern Europe and Latin America in the past two decades, the concept of civil society has been embraced by the political scientists and policy makers as a key component in the construction of democratic political systems. Although

the regimes in Latin America were by large military-authoritarian and those in Eastern Europe communist-totalitarian, what they definitely shared was an extreme imbalance in the relationship between state and society, though for different reasons.

The hypothesis I have regarding the participation of the civil society in the democracy building is that the recognition of the state of various movements is important for the level of influence it has on the policy making process. On the example of the two countries we can see what kind of social and cultural context can be the explanation of the extent of the role of the civil society. The other point of the hypothesis is that the democracy is still transitional is the civil movement are not fully presented and are not important actors in the democracy building.

With respect to the hypothesis I will address the following questions:

- What is democracy? Are Belarus and Mexico democracies?
- What is civil society and the theoretical role the civil society should play in the democracy development?
- What was the performance of the civil society in the democracy building? What sectors participate in policymaking? Do governments of the countries under study recognize the importance of civil society? How do they react?
- What are the limitations of the successful participation of the civil society in the democracy building? How can the obstacles be addressed in order to create positive conditions to the activities of the civil society with respect to the future democratic process?
- The influence of external factors (such as foreign policies) on the democratic transition process.

Structure

I would start my work with the theoretical part in order to define the two main notions that we are going to discuss: democracy and civil society, later trying to examine the theoretical role that civic movements play in the democratic transitions. Further, in the practical part we would see how those notions work in both Mexico and Belarus, paying special attention to the EZLN movement in Mexico and 2006 elections in Belarus respectively. After that I will analyze the main limitations for the development of the civil society, putting stress on the external relations of both countries and finally drawing comparison and conclusion.

II. Overview of democratization process

The end of 20th century was an open moment in world history. Millions of people in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa were experiencing a new freedom. As this struggle toward freedom progress and profound, global and irreversible developments affecting all aspects of the world society take place an analysis of their impact on the present international system is called for. The end of the Cold War makes possible makes possible new struggles for human rights and a renewed fight against poverty. For too many years and in too many countries, rights were not inherent; rather they were handed down from the higher authority. But “the idea of human rights, the notion that societies should be governed as if people matter is so fundamental and so natural, so obvious and so revealed”¹ that it may just be the first revolution to achieve a global reach in the history of political philosophy.

2.1 Defining democracy

The literature concerning democratization process offers different theoretical perspectives. For practical purposes, I focus on 2 dominant approaches: the structural and approach and the agency approach. The latter involves the so-called transition theories as well.

The structural approach

This approach, known by its focus on historical perspective, suggests that long-term and deep structural changes (economic development, urbanization, increased literacy rate, political participation, and so on) are prerequisites for a stable and effective democracy. This approach has traditionally been associated with the work of Seymour Martin Lipset.²

The agency approach

¹ Cleveland, Harlan (2002): Nobody in Charge: Essays on the Future of Leadership, San Francisco, Calif. : Jossey-Bass.

² Lipset, Seymour Martin (1959): Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and political legitimacy, American Political Science Review. Vol. 53, No.1, 1959: 69-105.

This approach is also known as “the choice model,” emphasizes the significance of the strategic choices, policies, and interactions of the ruling elites for transition. It has been identified with the work of Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead.³ From a human right prospective it is also underscored the importance of the ideas and policy choices of leaders in the mix of variables affecting human rights and the expansion of political space.

Working together, Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, Lipset⁴ and Huntington⁵ have attempted to bridge the gap between these two approaches by emphasizing the significance of both – the structural forces (economic growth, external influence, the state) and political leadership. Moreover, the question of which strategy works best in Third World countries – gradualism or fast-track liberalization and democratization – remains at the heart of these contributions and an ongoing debate about how to promote political and economic liberalization.

In keeping with these perspectives and their value I assume that often the abrupt transition from authoritarianism to democratization relapses into non-democratic processes which in its turn entail the formation of civil society actors. The main mission of many of them is to facilitate and enhance the democratization progress. Some researchers tend to assume that, not in all the cases and circumstances “sharp economic shocks are likely to widespread demands for public assistance and possibly changes of regime. Long periods of slow growth, by contrast, do not necessarily produce destabilizing political responses.”⁶ Economic freedoms plus a relaxation of civil restrains could lead to a stable and mature democracy over time, leaders must commit to gradual economic and political reform.

³ O’Donnell, Guillermo, Philippe C. Shmitter, and Laurence Whitehead (1986): Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy, Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.

⁴ Diamond, Larry, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Lipset (1989): Democracy in developing countries, Boulder CO.

⁵ Huntington, Samuel P. (1991): The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, Univ. of Oklahoma Press.

⁶ Haggard, Stephan, and Robert R. Kaufman, eds. (1992): The politics of economic adjustment: International constraints, Distributive conflicts, and the State, Princeton Univ.

Speaking particularly about Third World countries, I assume that democratization in those doesn't always result in enhanced human rights, which often causes the disappointment in the societal communities and formation of civil society groups. Human rights in fledgling democracies are most likely to be improved if the transition from authoritarianism is preceded by a process of economic liberalization, which works as a prelude to a gradual expansion of civil society.

The definition of democracy is problematic. One view puts the stress on the existence of equity in both economy and in society as a fundamental condition for the successful functioning of democracy. Another definition includes popular participation in free and fair elections as well as measures for substantial protection of minorities.⁷ So defined, democracy is based on limits on majority rule that ensure pluralism and stability. Adam Przeworski maintains that "in a democracy, no group is able to intervene when outcomes of conflict violate their self-perceived interests...It is this very act of alienation of control over outcomes of conflicts that constitutes the decisive step toward democracy."⁸

I prefer to operate the definition of democracy, which includes both procedural and substantive dimensions. This definition of democracy would encompass a set of institutional arrangements: elections, political parties, and an independent judiciary designed to safeguard popular participation and contestation, minority rights and rule of law. Democracy in this definition also has a set of structures and processes for the promotion of socioeconomic justice. Thus conceived, democracy involves more than a multiparty system and electoral laws: it also includes structures that promote socioeconomic opportunity. Therefore democracy has various applications in the economic, social and cultural spheres, but it usually implies some degree of equality.

⁷ Monshipouri, M.(1995): *Democratization, Liberalization & Human Rights in the Third World*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner.

⁸ Przeworski, Adam (1991): *Some problems in the study of the transition to democracy*, New York: Cambridge Uni.press.

Democratization, in its turn, is generally defined in terms of rules and procedures for the implementation of competitive and free and fair elections. This definition fails to reflect the complexity of the democracy implementation. By democratization, I refer to a highly complex process involving successive stages of transition, endurance and consolidation. This process ultimately leads to both institutionalization and consolidation of structures and conditions of structures and conditions conducive to structural transformation and regime change from authoritarian rule. The contemporary transitions include cases of democratization initiated from within the authoritarian regimes (as in Latin America) as well as cases triggered by external forces (as in some parts of Eastern Europe). In the both cases, transitions are imposed from the above: they are clearly not mass-based. Democratization has also been defined in terms of consent to procedural rules and of compliance with the outcomes of the process, “an act of subjecting all interests to competition, of institutionalizing uncertainty. The decisive step toward democracy is the devolution of power from a group of people to a set of rules.”⁹

Many researches were inspired by the Huntington’s theory of the “third wave” of democratization and therefore dedicated their works to the possible developments of the post-Soviet area and analyzed the democratization and transitions in other parts of the world – Southern and Central Europe and Latin America. Unfortunately all the hopes and enthusiasm about the possible transformations of former USSR turned into skepticism and critics of the most followers of democratic ideals. We see a slight resemblance of the situation after the Mexican revolution of 1910, where in the post-revolutionary time not many things have changed and actually the revolution followers established the party (PRI) which would be ruling the country for more than 70 years.

It led to the situation when more and more scholars started to consider those developments as the possible characteristics of some semi-regimes, such as facade democracy and even

⁹ Przeworski, Adam (1991): *Democracy and Market*, New York: Cambridge Univ.Press.

quasi-democracy¹⁰, which essence and tools of implementations do not quite correspond to the liberal standards.

It is quite difficult to draw the typical characteristics of such regimes as they are still in the process of formation. In general there are several questions to be asked in order to find the outstanding features of these types of regimes. First of all – to what extent the developing regimes of the two countries are real democracies regarding the definitions of democracies we examined before? What is the place of civil society in formation of these kinds of democracies? What are the distinguishing moments about the developing democracies?

Let's try to find the answer to these questions in comparisons of two cases of democratization of the so-called “third wave” countries.

2.2 Defining civil society

The notion of civil society has been used quite differently by the scholars. In light of political theorists like John Locke, society becomes civil when it strives to define and establish political authority; in which case it determines the rules as well as norms of political legitimacy¹¹.

People often associate the notion of civil society with the state itself, however “The modern idea of civil society originated with the enlightenment of the 18th century when civil society began to be referred to as a domain parallel to but separate from the state where citizens associate according to their own interests and wishes”¹²

Similarly, Gordon White discusses what the term currently means to most people in the world by saying “...the term ‘civil society’ is that of an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy

¹⁰ Johari J.C. (2008): Comparative politics, Sterling Publishers

¹¹ Diamond, Larry (1994): Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries, Boulder.

¹² Carothers, Thomas (2001): Civil society <http://www.strom.clemson.edu/becke/prtm320/Carothers.html> [12.04.2010]

autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or advance their interests or values.” The conventional dichotomy between state and civil society is important in identifying the latter as a social sphere separate from and independent of the former. Nevertheless, White warns us to take care to distinguish between civil society as an ideal-type concept which embodies the qualities of separation, autonomy and voluntary association in their pure form and the real world of civil societies composed of associations which embody these principles to varying degrees.¹³

However civil society can hardly be regarded as a sector with well-defined boundaries. Civil society system actively interacts and overlaps with both political, social and economic systems.

Hence, as White suggested:

“We would then need to distinguish between different types or sectors of civil society: for example, between ‘modern’ interest groups such as trade unions or professional associations and ‘traditional’ ascriptive organisations based on kinship, ethnicity, culture or religion; between formal organisations and informal social networks based on patrimonial or clientelistic allegiances; between those institutions with specifically political roles as pressure or advocacy groups and those whose activities remain largely outside the political system; between legal or open associations and secret or illegal organisations such as the Freemasons, the Mafia or the Triads; between associations which accept the political status quo or those which seek to transform it by changing the political regime (such as the guerrilla movement or a reactionary religious organisation) or redefining the nation (as in the former Yugoslavia).”¹⁴

In the midst of the flourishing rhetoric about civil society among democracy promoters, it is worth recalling briefly why independent civic activity is so essential for democracy and democratization. To begin with, it is one of the key features of democracy that people act

¹³ White, Gordon (1996): *Civil Society, Democratization and Development*, Manchester Univ.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

together in an organized manner in order to formulate and express their interests, values, identities. Civil society is the sphere where such organized bottom-up activity takes place. It is by definition autonomous from the state and the business sector and includes a wide variety of civil society actors that do not necessarily share more with each other than the core characteristics of being voluntary, independent, non-profit, open, public and non-violent. The existence of civil society obviously requires a democratic political system that guarantees the civic freedoms of association, opinion and speech. On the other hand, the functioning of democracy requires civil activity, and the quality and strength of democracy are defined, among other things, by the level of activity and development of civil society.

From the viewpoint of the citizen, civil society is first and foremost a channel for protecting and promoting personal values and interests. In addition to policy advocacy that aims to directly influence policy making, civic activity also has the broader function of shaping public opinion and bringing the views of different groups to the attention of general public. Secondly, it is a classical function of civil society to exercise control over power holders and to prevent the concentration and misuse of power. In this watchdog role, NGOs complement the media, as they scrutinize the work of public officials, demand openness and accountability and expose possible misbehavior.¹⁵ For example, NGOs have a significant role in the fight against corruption. Another important task of NGOs in democratizing countries is to observe the election process. Thirdly, NGOs can perform social tasks such as taking care of children, elderly, helping disadvantaged groups and promoting public health.

From the viewpoint of the democratic system, an active, well organized citizenry may enhance the stability of democracy and the effectiveness of decision making in many ways. NGOs and interest groups provide public authorities with valuable information and expertise

¹⁵ Soesastro, Hadi (1990): Civil society and development: the missing link, <http://www.cis.org.au/policy/Spr99/spr99-2.pdf> [14.04.2010]

on the problems and needs of the society. Civic activity also has an educative function: it teaches responsible social and political action and respect for the common public interest. People are more likely to approve public decisions and comply with common rules and norms if they take part in public life themselves and feel that they have a say in decision making affecting their lives. Furthermore, civil society is a channel for the state to communicate its decisions and policies to the people.¹⁶

‘Under the conditions imposed by an authoritarian regime, where democracy and civic freedoms do not exist or are severely restricted, there is a limited space, if any, for an open, public, legal and independent society. The primary task of civic activity is, therefore, to work for democratic political change that can create the conditions for the normal functioning of civil society. It is first and foremost politically oriented civic activity (politically is meant in a broad sense, as aimed at having an impact on public life and the functioning of a certain aspect of society) that eventually helps to establish democracy. It stands close to two other sectors that are also very important for democracy – the media and political parties. The media, however, is often commercial as opposed to the non-profit nature of civil society. And political parties, unlike civil society, strive to attain the power of various state institutions.’¹⁷

Democracy assistance to developing states should basically focus on those three sectors: politically oriented civic activity, independent media and democratic parties. It is also essential for pro-democratic groups to reach the broader public through alternative media. This is needed to spread information about their own goals, activities and to mobilize support and make people believe that they offer a credible alternative to the authoritarian

¹⁶ Verbam Sydney (1999): Representative democracy and democratic citizens, <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/verba00.pdf>

¹⁷ Raik, Kristi (2006): Promoting democracy through civil society: how to step up the EU's policy towards the eastern neighbourhood, CEPS, Brussels, p.5

regime. It is also necessary to delegitimize authorities by making available uncensored information about all the repressions and violations of basic human rights.¹⁸

In case the state doesn't allow democratic reforms, civic activity can not be fully open and it may have to ignore or violate the non-democratic legislation imposed by the regime. Instead of taking place in the public sphere, politically oriented civil activities are forced underground and are treated by the regime as criminal. Under such circumstances, civil society entails, first, dissident groups that are not allowed to act publically, but that work for democratic change more or less in secret and second, non-political organizations that are allowed by the regime to be active, but are autonomous and do not work for the regime. And thirdly, there are NGOs, which are established and supported by the regime, which does not really qualify as a part of civil society.¹⁹

One can face some difficulties in making distinctions between civil and un-civil society, and between true autonomous NGOs, and fake NGOs that are established by and are dependent on the government. Therefore, active groups, which are promoting democracy, sometimes will face the situation where they will have to violate the law, which further makes them vulnerable to being discredited by the regime. "It is a complicated but the more essential task for external donors in such circumstances is to find reliable partners and to deliver assistance to independent pro-democratic forces. Obviously, external actors can do very little through formal channels of assistance that are approved by non-democratic regime. Assistance to pro-democratic groups often has to be given in secret or indirectly, and is, for example, channeled through neighboring countries or NGOs based outside the targeted country."²⁰

¹⁸ Silitski. Vitali (2006): Signs of Hope Rather than a Color Revolution, in "Prospects for Democracy in Belarus", second edition - German Marshall Fund of the United States and Heinrich Boell Foundation, pp. 20-26.

¹⁹ Raik (2006)

²⁰ Ibid.

III. Analysis of democratic transitions and the state of civil society

3.1 Mexican democratization case

Vicente Fox's presidential election victory in Mexico on July 2 was not only a dramatic defeat for the world's longest-ruling governing party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), but it was also a hugely significant victory for democracy. In Mexico, it puts a long-awaited end to seven decades of rotten, cynical control by a single party over a controlled and abused state. In Latin America, it ends the biggest exception to the two-decade-long regional swing toward genuine electoral competition.²¹

The autocratic methods of managing the country and interfering in all the aspects of people's life made Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) powerful and the most long-lasting ruling political party. Mexican people and civil society actors had to make many single steps in order to regain the power in a peaceful and gentle way.

The situation entailed introducing some extraordinary reforms. First of all, suffered so many electoral frauds politicians decided to give control of the elections process to an independent public body²² IFE (Federal Electoral Institute) that is now using a modern balloting system, preventing fraud and making elections transparent.

In addition they built up a base for new political parties to emerge to pose a threat to PRI monopoly and as well replaced the Congress, which was always the strongest supporter of all the presidential ideas no matter what. Some measures were introduced to limit the power of a President that wasn't really restrained before by any of the power branches.

Mexicans from all levels of society took part in this important challenge. Election observers were struggling against vote fraud, journalists started to make their own investigations.

²¹ Preston, Julia and Dillon Samuel (2004): *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*, Oceano de Mexico

²²Federal Electoral Institute in Mexico : http://www.ife.org.mx/portal/site/ifev2/30_essential_questions/#1 [29.03.2010]

Various international organizations were trying to keep a track of violations of human rights and abuses towards the existing civil society while indigenous communities and farmers were fighting against the devastation of the forests and saving the natural reserves of the country currently exploited by various transnational corporations. Groups of friends, families and neighbors were joining in the demand to punish corrupted authorities and criminal gangs. Even the President, Ernesto Zedillo, who represented PRI at that time preferred and adopted some liberalizing strategies.

The tragedy of 1968 was the peak point when the system lost its credibility, the whole generation of Mexican students, young people and the parents of the injured had deeply condemned the governmental actions.²³

The next phase of transformation was the post-earthquake period after 1985, when the government failed to response accordingly to the consequences of the earthquake in Mexico City which initiated another wave of disappointment.

One of the characteristics of PRI policies was the effort to make the nation believe that they are not supposed to get into politics and exercise any kind of political activity or initiative outside of the party. But after the quake while looking for the remains of their relatives and friends, people for the first time discovered that the only way to get the attention of the government is by going to the streets, manifest their demands of the new shelters and residences and organize themselves.

The next logical stage was initiated in 1986, when activists in the northern part of Mexico expressed their reaction to constant cases of frauds in the election process and therefore gained new objective on the initiatives to reform the electoral procedures in order to promote democracy.

The elections of the year 1988 and the victory of Carlos Salinas are now regarded as another vivid fraud, which was another hit on the credibility of the political regime.²⁴ Nevertheless

²³ Lawson, Chappell (2000): Mexico's Unfinished Transition: Democratization and Authoritarian Enclaves in Mexico, *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 16, No. 2

this fact helped to promote some oppositional leaders, such as Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, a son of the prominent post-revolutionary politician.²⁵

Trying to settle and negotiate the situation Salinas initiated some economic reforms. His special attention was dedicated to economic integration with NAFTA and opening Mexico's economy, while not emphasizing the need of any political reforms, which is quite a contradiction from the economic side of view, as the opened economies experience some serious strains within the closed political systems which Mexico was in the early 90s.²⁶

After Salinas, President Ernesto Zedillo, who was obviously representing PRI, but was not a part of its inner circle, appeared to be capable of supporting needed reforms in political and electoral sectors which allowed the oppositional forces to gain some access and power in the electoral campaigns.

Thanks to the united efforts in the presidential elections of the year 2000, Mexicans had the majority of votes in favor of the democratic movement, represented by Vicente Fox, member of National Action Party. The elections were recognized as the cleanest in the history of Mexico and have officially ended the 71-year long monopoly on power.

The second, but this time peaceful revolution, in which the power was taken over from the rulers to the oppositional forces through the electoral procedures was so efficient and accomplished that not many Mexicans managed to perceive the significant importance of the event. Now many people in Mexico take it for granted those events and underappreciate the effort of the oppositional forces, which preceded the elections of 2000.

The triumph of Mexican opposition had several particular features. It is important to notice that there was not any united prodemocratic party or movement. The initiatives and actions came from manifold public organizations, private individuals and groups from all over the

²⁴ Meyers, William (1993): Betting against time - Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's barely one-year-term left in office, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1568/is_n6_v25/ai_14527031/ [12.04.2010]

²⁵ Charles Krause interviews Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/august97/cardenas_8-12.html [12.04.2010]

²⁶ Samstad, James (2002): Corporatism and Democratic Transition: State and Labor during the Salinas and Zedillo Administrations// *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 44, No. 4

country. In addition the economy of the country had the same characteristics and hasn't been changed all the way starting from the revolution of 1910.

In contrast to economy, the manifold clashes and misunderstandings between Mexican social classes provoked the rebels of farmers, workers and rural representatives throughout the history.²⁷ The peak of the discontent of the indigenous peoples was the uprising on 1994, which will be given special attention in the further examination of civil society movement of Mexico. All these events have significantly weakened the PRI regime and contributed to the democratic efforts and demands for reforms.

Now it is common knowledge, that PRI's policies were deeply intertwined and connected with the interests of elites and big businesses, the cooperation which was mutually profitable for the both and therefore they were resistant to any kind of change. But in the end the corporations have supported the reforms and transitions, bearing in mind that open political system would be profitable in the context of globalization and world economy.

Another distinctive point of Mexican transition is that it was not about the contradictions about liberals and conservatives, as it happened in many other countries. Both lefts and rights supported the change to some extent. At some critical moments the left would encourage greater freedoms and conservatives possessing many ideas of the Catholic Church would promote individual rights and free market economy. Nevertheless the religious features of the country never embittered Mexican democratization process, as it did it many other countries.²⁸

Mexico is recognized as a negotiated transition with the initiatives from the below, fueled by individuals and recognized civil society groups. The above sometimes heard the voice of the

²⁷ Mexico: Regime in Crisis: <http://www.internationalist.org/mexico.html> [15.04.2010]

²⁸ Preston, Julia and Dillon Samuel (2004):

below and made some conclusions and adjustments, but for the sake of its own interests and believes.

3.2 Belarusian democratic transition

One of the most significant features of Belarus, which one should definitely into consideration while analyzing political and economic changes in the country, is that up to the collapse of the Soviet Union there was no distinctive Belarusian identity. The thing is that the lands of Belarus have always been possessed by various state formations, such as the Russian Empire, Kiev Rus, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.²⁹ The Belarusian People's Republic, which managed to maintain its independence in 1918-1919³⁰, later became one of the socialistic republics of the Soviet Union.

The formation of modern borders of Belarus was concluded in 1939 due to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which gave some territory of the Second Polish Republic to the Soviet Union and formed Soviet Belarus. During the Second World War the people of Belarus lost about one third of their fellow citizens and the country was economically devastated and had to be widely redeveloped in all the spheres. After the War Belarusian SSR became one of the states-founders of the United Nations Organization.³¹

The sovereignty of Belarus was declared in July 1990 and independence in August 1991, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Alexander Lukashenko has been leading the country since the elections of 1994. According to the very first article of the constitution of the Republic of Belarus, "The Republic of Belarus shall be a unitary, democratic, social State governed by the rule of law. The Republic of Belarus shall possess supremacy and complete authority in its territory, and shall independently pursue domestic and foreign

²⁹ Zaprudnik, Jan (1993) :Belarus: at a crossroads in history, Boulder

³⁰Belarusian Language Society greets nation on forthcoming BNR anniversary
<http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2005/03/24/bnr> [20.04.2010]

³¹ Belarus history <http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Belarus/History> [21.03.2010]

policy. The Republic of Belarus shall defend its independence and territorial integrity, its constitutional system; it shall guarantee legality and law and order.”³²

Shortly after assuming the Belarusian presidency in 1994, Alexander Lukashenko began to seek the ways to increase his powers. Initially he took small steps to limit the media’s independence and due to the Soviet legacy not many people comprehended that as something really disturbing. In 1996 the referendum was held and as the consequences, the amendments to the constitution significantly increased President’s power. In addition to extending the president’s term in the office from 4 to 5 years, it granted him the power to issue decrees previously solely within the competence of the legislature. It is worth to mention that this kind of powers is available to most chief executives only during states of emergency.

I believe that when understanding Belarusian democracy we can compare it with a tree – there are visible parts – above the ground, with all the established institutions, constitutional norms, the presence of elections and some kind of political competition and the root of the tree – with its post-Soviet legacies, young self-identity, and many more other things.

Let’s get a closer look at the political development of Belarus after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I assume, that Belarus and many ex-Soviet states hardly followed the pattern of American or Western democracy and mainly took the way of going back and updating of patrimonial domination system. If compared to Latin America, where Huntington’s third wave democratization has been taking place in the nations which have accomplished the nation-building process, Belarusian democratization had to be initiated before this process, which led to the emerging of some particular economic strategies and new political institutions.

Therefore I assume that the state-society relations and the style of governance are deeply rooted in this notion of unaccomplished nation-building and entail the further development

³²Constitution of the Republic of Belarus: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/bo00000_.html [18.04.2010]

of patrimonial ruling style. This can be seen as the deepest and the most important difference between the two countries under study.

When talking about patrimonialism we have to deal closely with Max Weber, who dedicated many of his works to this issue. To Weber, patrimonialism was a type of traditional domination. Let us see how he put it:

“The roots of patriarchal domination grow out of the master's authority over his household. Such personal authority has in common with impersonally oriented bureaucratic domination stability and an "everyday character." Moreover, both ultimately find their inner support in the subjects' compliance with the norms. But under bureaucratic domination these norms are established rationally, appeal to the sense of abstract legality, and presuppose technical training; under patriarchal domination the norms derive from tradition; the belief in the inviolability of that which has existed from time out of mind.”³³

He also adds:

“We shall speak of a patrimonial state when the prince organizes his political power over extra-patrimonial areas and political subjects - which is not discretionary and not enforced by physical coercion - just like the exercise of his patriarchal power. The majority of all great continental empires had a fairly strong patrimonial character until and even after the beginning of modern times.”³⁴

As we will see in the following chapters the patrimonialistic culture of Belarus has a deep effect on the development of the state-society relations and civil movements and organizations.

³³ Weber, Max (1968) *Economy and Society*, New York. Bedminster Press, p. 1007 : <http://www.schwartzman.org.br/simon/malloy.htm> [5.04.2010]

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1013

The data above was provided by The World Bank, *World Bank Indicators 2009*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	1999-2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Electoral Process	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.75
Civil Society	6.00	6.50	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.50	6.50	6.25
Independent Media	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Governance*	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.75
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Corruption	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.00
Democracy Score	6.25	6.38	6.38	6.46	6.54	6.64	6.71	6.68	6.71	6.57

* Starting with the 2005 edition, Freedom House introduced separate analysis and ratings for national democratic governance and local democratic governance to provide readers with more detailed and nuanced analysis of these two important subjects.

Table 1. Democracy scores in Belarus³⁵

In the table above we can see and analyze the developments of democratic transition in the Republic of Belarus. The authorities are gaining more and more influence and power in all the spheres with the peak in 2006, when the controversial presidential elections were held. What concerns the civil society development there hasn't been and significant changes, but the repressive tendency exists.

3.3 The situation of civil society in Mexico

“The concept of civil society as it is used in Latin America can only be understood as the outcome of a very distinctive historical experience: no understanding of the place of civil

³⁵ Nations in Transit Ratings and Scores : Belarus
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,FREEHOU,,BLR,,4a55bb3937,0.html> [28.04.2010]

society in Latin America today is possible without a perception of the role republicanism has had to play as a moral basis for all forms of political life.”³⁶

Given recent political changes in Mexico, a central concern for many researchers has been the degree to which there is a widening space for citizen access to the political process. This has become increasingly important because of the multitude of actors that are visible on the political scene. One characteristic that civil organizations have in common is the strength in their collective voice and therefore creating competition for existing governments and political parties, encouraging participation and activism by citizens. In fact their opinions, the geographical range and the scope of their demands have turned the heads of political leaders over the past two decades. Because of the uprising civil society movement and NGOs, those organizations now represent a challenge that extends from local and regional levels to national and international levels, whereby the organizations contest traditional forms of political power and new ways of doing politics and promoting democracy.

Many scholars see the beginning of civil society activity in the year 1968, when student demonstrations in Mexico City were suppressed by repressive actions by the government.³⁷ As with many other parts of the world during the late 1960s and early 1970s, where social movements took on a new and more forceful role, students as well as workers, peasants and popular middle classes began to challenge the political system more openly. The 1968 demonstrations took place in the same year that Mexico hosted the Olympics, thereby creating an international spotlight on the country. The government under former President Diaz Ordaz violently repressed the movement on October 2, 1968 when the troops fired

³⁶ Kaviraj, Sudipta and Khilnani, Sunil Khilnani (2001): *Civil society: history and possibilities*, Cambridge Univ.

³⁷ Doyle, Kate (2003): *The Tlatelolco Massacre*: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB99/> [5.04.2010]

upon the peaceful demonstration and killed an estimated 200 people, thus leaving Mexican citizens and the world questioning the legitimacy of the Mexican government.

While following the 1968 massacre relations between the state and society became dramatically strained, it was also the next two presidential terms – Luis Echeverria and Lopez Portillo – that brought election reform to the light and the initial movement toward decentralizing power.³⁸ Echeverria's administration, in an attempt to regain legitimacy, initiated the "democratic opening" by decreasing state censorship of the press and diminishing control over the labor movement. The administration's concern centered on a growing urban middle class that couldn't be easily incorporated into the Mexican political system by the traditional means. Echeverria's development strategy included tackling issues of income distribution and unemployment, raising the population's standard of living, reducing external dependency, and controlling the foreign investments. Another important idea of his six-year term was to initiate decentralization of power and policies from the capital of the country to other regions and authorities. In particular Echeverria focused on public investments for development of the rural areas in Mexico and in the urban areas and industrial decentralization.

Lopez Portillo took the "opening" by establishing electoral reforms that included legalizing left-wing parties and giving them an opportunity to occupy seats in the Congress, depending on the total votes received. It is important to note that despite these reforms, electoral fraud continued to prevail. Therefore the decentralization policies and programs developed both by Echeverria and Portillo had almost no effect or impact whatsoever on the democratic development of the state and continued to be mainly centralized.

Changes in the Mexican society occurred after the announcement by the Mexican government, under the leadership of Miguel de la Madrid of the inability to repay the

³⁸ Doyle, Kate (2003)

existing external foreign debt. Coupled with the beginning of the debt crises, the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City plunged the vast majority of Mexicans into severe economic and social conditions. In response to the crisis, de la Madrid promoted the opening of Mexico's economy to foreign investment as well as the reduction of state control in the economy. He as well focused on decentralization as the way to develop Mexico economically, socially and politically.

On the peak of the debt crisis, the earthquake and shifting political terrain in state-society relations, Carlos Salinas de Gortari took office amidst much controversy at the voting polls.³⁹ As the result of what many view as blatant voter fraud and manipulation of election result, the PRI suffered a loss of legitimacy, whereby suggesting that Mexico had not moved toward democracy and developed and recognized civil society. In an effort to recoup a legitimate power structure, as well as to drive a wedge between the leftist PRD and popular movements, Salinas initiated a series of welfare-like programs, such as the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL). It was a community participation program whereby any organization could request funds from the administration for public-works projects. Organizations included those located in civil society, as well as state and local governmental offices. One of the directives of PRONASOL was to decentralize governmental power and give more strength to those organizations located in civil society, such as local associations, neighborhood coalitions and grass-roots organizations.⁴⁰ However, there were conditions attached to the funds, which included the requirement of the organization to establish a solidarity committee that would create space for the state and municipal authorities to work with the organization in order to define, manage and execute programs, and thus potentially undermine the autonomy of the organizations. Despite these conditions, the linkage

³⁹ Otero, Gerardo (1995): Mexico's Political Future(s) in a Globalizing World Economy, the Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol. 32

⁴⁰ Campbell, Tim and Freedheim, Sara (1994): RONASOL in Principle: Basic Features and Significance of Mexico's Solidarity Program, World Bank Latin America and the Caribbean Region Department

represents a contrast from previous administrations and provides yet another marker in changing state-society relations in Mexico. It is important to note that NGOs were notably absent from the PRONASOL program, where funds were funneled from the State to other locally based organizations.

Despite Salinas' attempt to strengthen civil society, some controversy existed and some researches suggest that PRONASOL only reflected the PRI's interests in targeting areas of oppositional party strength. Moreover some scholars assume that PRONASOL experienced serious interference by PRI state and local officials, thus impeding the redistributive programs and harming the strength of those organizations located in civil society. In addition, one study shows that proximity mattered, for which organizations received funds so that independent organizations in areas with growing opposition to PAN and PRD were more successful in attaining the funds. Not only did Salinas initiate PRONASOL, but in a seeming contradiction his term also ushered in full-force neoliberal economic policies that have arguably increased poverty and diminished the distribution of income.⁴¹

Since 1968, there has been an increase in political participation, particularly Urban Popular Movements, which challenge existing policies and procedures of the government, especially in regard to housing, education, health and various urban services. These initial challenges by urban popular movements occurred primarily in the North and in the southern region of Chiapas. Indeed, it was also in the 1970s that the women's movement in Mexico began to rise and flourish. The student movements in Mexico City and Monterrey became stronger and more radical and collective action by other marginalized groups became visible. Importantly, this continued rise of collective action also took place under the political reconstructing of administrations of Echeverria and Lopez Portillo, thereby suggesting that, despite electoral reform, many Mexicans continued to participate politically outside of institutionalized channels of political participation.

⁴¹ Campbell, Tim and Freedheim, Sara (1994):

In the response to Mexico's devastated economy throughout the 1980s, social movements and other forms of collective action have continued to flourish, particularly in Mexico City and more specifically following the 1985 earthquake. It is in Mexico City, where urban popular movements have continued to become increasingly visible and loud. The strength and number of these social movements were not only visible at the neighborhood level, but the movements brought the problems of everyday life to the forefront at the regional and national levels. And, importantly, these movements also made visible how everyday life, politically, socially, and economically, differed among various social groups. That is, these movements have challenged traditional notions of what politics is by raising issues of a variety of demands and articulating these demands as rights, whether labor rights, human rights or land rights.

Interestingly, urban popular movements have largely been dominated by women's participation. While female participants outnumbered males in the urban popular movements, when examining the organizational structure of the urban popular movements, women's invisibility becomes evident as women are either underrepresented or absent from the formal leadership structure. This raises additional questions about the plurality of movements and the degree to which they represent citizens' interests. In other words, there appears to be a widening of civil society in the public sphere for all citizens, but it also appears that civil society remains hierarchically structured, where women and poor continue to be marginalized.

Zapatista National Liberation Army

The first of January 1994 will always be the date which marks the paradox nature of Mexico. "Just when the country had been inaugurated as one of the "First World" by joining its powerful neighbors in the economic association NAFTA, an armed rebellion started in

the southern state of Chiapas.”⁴² During 12 days of fighting a new social-active movement emerged that challenged the direction of the nation’s future viewed by the state’s ruling mechanism – Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party - PRI). The base of the new movement was mainly composed of Mayan peasants, members of Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army—EZLN), and their supporters. By examining this uprising and the emergence of a social movement, we focus on the link between civil activity and political changes, in this particular case – democratization. Scholars assume that the movement initiated by EZLN has been a driving force in the democratization of Mexico. Some suggest it has been even more influential than oppositional parties, which is quite understandable as they were historically undermined and forced to be allies of PRI. In contrast, the new social movement encouraged high level political activity and debated related to democratic progress. The main distinction between the strategies of political parties and EZLN is that parties were trying to bring changes within political circles and through reforms, while EZLN has encouraged society to promote and enforce the democratization from bottom up.

The Zapatista uprising contributed to the enhancement of democracy in the domain of political society but also beyond it—into civil society and the cultural sphere. In addition it tried to expand democratization to the economy, as it was necessary to cover the cost of neoliberal reforms. The contradiction was in the fact that a guerrilla movement suggested the way to resolving discontent through peaceful measures. Thanks to them there appeared new spaces for political participation.⁴³ With the help of popular consultations with civil groups ranging from indigenous communities to members of international organizations and direct discussions the democratic dialogue has been opened. Various NGOs started to emerge in the 1980s, but Zapatistas managed to inspire huge number of new NGOs which aimed at

⁴² Gilbreth, Chris and Otero, Gerardo (2001): “Democratization in Mexico: The Zapatista Uprising and Civil Society.” *Latin American Perspectives*, vol.28

⁴³ MeeNilankco T Gz and Sivasegaram S (2009): *The Meaning of the Zapatista Struggle*: <http://radicalnotes.com/content/view/82/39/> [15.04.2010]

stopping the war in Chiapas and addressing the issues of democratization. During that time, some NGOs restricted their activity and affiliations to civil society, while others became political allies and established networks with the state. When members of NGOs join political parties there are compromises to be made in terms of the identity and ability of the organization to operate autonomously.

In addition EZLN challenged Mexican racism, by creating broad awareness of indigenous rights, which is recognized as one of its most prominent contributions to democratization. The movement was hoping to expand democratization in the economy as well, by following the model of neoliberalism, which promotes free markets and globalized trade. They also addressed the issues of political exclusion and its effect on democratic development and criticized the declining ability of a state to form domestic economy because of the sufficient integration into global capitalism. Zapatistas called into question the monopoly of power of PRI and advocated the reconceptualization of how markets can be made accountable to principles of social justice therefore strengthening civil society movements.⁴⁴

Nevertheless the contradiction inside the movement itself was in the fact that one of the bases of the organization (indigenous support) was neglected to a certain extent. At the same time it encouraged Mexican civil society to cooperate and eventually defeat the ruling party. The elections of 1994 with the victory of PRI put under question its legitimacy and therefore pushed the pace of political reforms. The most outstanding results of the reforms were – establishment of electoral observation on the national and international levels, reforms of IFE (Federal Electoral Institute) and free and fair elections of Mexico City Mayor. As the consequence of those, as we mentioned before, in the year 2000, the PRI monopoly on power ended, which became major overhaul of the politics of Mexico.

According to Jean- François Prud'homme, the Chiapas rebellion may have created indirect incentives for Mexico's major political parties to establish rules for electoral competition

⁴⁴ Gilbreth, Chris and Otero, Gerardo (2001)

that all could agree upon.⁴⁵ This process had its peak in the electoral reforms that made opposition victories more probable in the mid-term and municipal elections of 1997. We argue that popular civil society movements mattered to the extent that they intertwined with other key factors in Mexico's democratic transition: severe economic shocks, divisions within the ruling establishment, and political reforms that triggered major electoral advances.

3.4 Belarus civil society

As I mentioned before after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Belarus became a sovereign state and after the 1994 election of the current President its main trajectory of external relations became Russia. Russian Federation has been and is still the main trade partner of Belarus with around 50% of its exports and 70% of its imports.⁴⁶

When examining and explaining civil society developments of Belarus, we have to admit that due to the close relations with Russia (in spite of some recent gas conflicts) we should take into consideration the impact this cooperation has on the social moods and ambitions. If compared to Baltic states or previously socialistic - "Among Central European nations Belarus one of the most repressive, and definitely receives the least amount of money from the United States and the European Union, and is the least integrated with Western political and economic institutions. According to several international organizations that monitor political rights and civil liberties, Belarus has grown increasingly intolerant of dissent and

⁴⁵ Prud'homme, Jean-François (1998): "Interest Representation and the Party System in Mexico." In *What Kind of Democracy? What Kind of Market? Latin America in the Age of Neoliberalism*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

⁴⁶ Starr, Martha A. (2005): Does Money Matter in the CIS? Effects of Monetary Policy on Output and Prices, *Journal of Comparative Economics* Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 444

anything resembling political activism among the populace over the last decade and a half.”⁴⁷

One more point that is worth to remember is that in the Soviet times, especially during Gorbachev’s period of reconstruction and reformation of politics and economics, Belarus economy was growing quite rapidly, which entailed boosting of urbanization movement. Fresh urban population still had quite conservative values and was not ready and open for capitalistic style of business, for the idea of rule of law and didn’t see an urgent need in speaking up their minds. They still tended to prefer authoritarian model, which also implied a serious underestimation of the value of human rights. This outlook is one of the factors that preconditioned the populist choice of Belarusian people. They needed to see someone who would be powerful enough to deal with the collapse of Soviet Union and would know how to solve manifold problems which appeared after that. This was one of the most important reasons they voted and keep voting for populist Lukashenko. That’s quite ironic that the nickname of the President Lukashenko is “bat’ka” which basically means “father”.⁴⁸

We can also see the legacies of Communism even in the current politics, as some of the representatives of the Communist Party currently hold seats in the Parliament and promote the ideas of controlling capital and following the patterns of command economy.⁴⁹ In addition many of the former Soviet communists occupy very important posts in the government.

The transition from the Soviet-style political and economic system began in 1990, when Stanislav Shushkevich was elected a chairman of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet and Parliament, which basically can be equated to being the head of the country. His statements

⁴⁷ Freedom House (2006): Country Report, Belarus

⁴⁸ Klussmann, Uwe (2009): Lukashenko's High-Tech Ambitions for Belarus
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,668405,00.html> [22.05.2010]

⁴⁹ Communist Party of Belarus <http://www.comparty.by/spravka.php> [23.05.2010]

provoked a lot of discussions, as he openly criticized authorities in Moscow which was almost impossible before, putting a serious attention to their handling of Chernobyl nuclear disaster when 70 percent of the total radioactive fallout from the accident descended on nearly one-fourth of the country. The fallout affected more than 2.2 million people, including 500,000 children.⁵⁰

Belarusian Popular Front strongly supported Shushkevich's ideas for market economy and democratic reforms, but those never became popular in the wide public. The thing is that Shushkevich's innovative ideas were supported by a very small circle of activists and politicians, as most of the authorities still preferred Soviet school politics and intended to keep their power and therefore demonstrated resistance to the liberal approach of Shishkevich.

In early 90s there were two most possible ways to deal with economy – to act step by step or implement harsh reforms. Shushkevich and his allies chose neither options, borrowing tactics from both approaches. In the result liberalization of prices and high level of inflation, combined with the inherited state control entailed decrease in Belarusian GDP and level of purchasing as well as living standard in general.

In the consequence, when the economic conditions worsened Shushkevich was accused of corruption and dismissed from the government in 1994. The accusation in corruption would soon proved to be quite doubtful.⁵¹ Lukashenko won the elections of 1994 thanks to the gained popularity as a member of parliament and the head of anti-corruption committee. He bit both Communist Party and Belarusian Popular Front, promising decisive actions and having fresh ideas. Nevertheless Lukashenka had made enemies of the Communists due to

⁵⁰ <http://www.un.org/ha/chernobyl/belarus.htm> [15.05.2010]

⁵¹ Belarus Parliament Fires Liberal Leader Shushkevich (1994)
<http://themoscowtimes.com/news/article/belarus-parliament-fires-liberal-leader-shushkevich/215542.html>
[15.05.2010]

his initial pro-reform positions.⁵² No wonder that he got back to Soviet strategies of economic planning when the economic situation deteriorated.

Nevertheless, the economic satiation in Shushkevich's Belarus can be seen as partially adopted market reforms, but dramatically restrained by the communistic government and the population which was not ready to any critical inventions. This period made many Belarusians superstitious and skeptical towards market economy, further liberalization and capitalist approach in general. Belarusians experienced only negative sides of capitalism and haven't seen any benefits, which led to condemning this approach. All this helped Lukashenko to promote his views on the economic development and gain even more popularity. The limited marketization performed in the early 90s, which had those negative consequences, gave a way to Lukashenko to return to command economy with the popular support. Regardless the conflicts Lukashenko had with Constitutional Court in the beginning of his term, he managed to hold a referendum of 1996 that had significantly increased the president's authority and powers. Many international organizations criticized the outcomes of the Referendum and recognized those as undemocratic, which basically began the international isolation period for Belarus which continues up to this time.

Currently many large-scale state enterprises hold monopolies and political elites enrich themselves through absolute state control of business in Belarus. It reminds us the Soviet times when shadow economy emerged in Belarus, as the conditions for the political and economic developments worsened. People were going abroad (Poland, Lithuania) to smuggle goods and resell them illegally in Belarus. Now it would be a bit more complicated due to visa restrictions and wider governmental control.

"In addition in the annual "Index of Economic Freedom" was issued in mid-January 2008 by the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal, ranked Belarus 150th out of 157 countries. In terms of financial freedom, it placed dead last. Coincidentally, January in

⁵² Korosteleva, Elena (2002): "Political Leadership and Public Support in Belarus: Forward to the Past?," in *The EU & Belarus: Between Moscow and Brussels*, ed. Ann Lewis, London, p. 54-55.

Belarus has been marked by two mass protests by private entrepreneurs on January 10 and 21 against new laws that became effective this year and force such businesses to make social security payments and prohibit them from employing workers other than close family members. Linked to these protests, which took place across the country and involved a reported 50% of all individual entrepreneurs, the Ministry of Justice has demanded the dissolution of their union, the Perspektyva organization. Its leader, Anatol Shumchanka, arrested along with dozens of other participants in the protests, received a 15-day prison sentence on January 11.⁵³

Present conditions directly weaken the emergence of entrepreneurial relationships, which can occupy important place in the independent power of the government and stimulate civil society development.⁵⁴ However the current government saw the consequences of such developments in the neighboring Ukraine and now shows its resistance to market capitalism and private business social activities.

Belarus is frequently referred to as the last dictatorship in Europe.⁵⁵ There are some serious reasons for that - starting from referendum of 1996 that we spoke already about and up to now the President of Belarus has been extending his power in all the possible spheres, especially visibly during the elections of 2001 and 2006. There were some disappearances of journalists and political activists during this time and a lot of co-workers and relatives of disappeared people assume it can be connected with their politics-related views and statements.⁵⁶ Nevertheless there is no proof that those disappearances were politically-motivated, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stated that it was "seriously concerned about the lack of progress" in the criminal proceedings of Belarusians

⁵³ Marples, David (2008): REPRESSION UNDERMINES DIALOGUE WITH BELARUS

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=33329](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33329) [21.04.2010]

⁵⁴ Bunce, Valerie (2001): Democratization and Economic Reform, Annual Review of Political Science Vol. 4, p.52

⁵⁵ Klussmann, Uwe (2009) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,668405,00.html> [19.04.2010]

⁵⁶ Tenth Anniversary Of Belarus's 'Disappeared' (2009)

http://www.rferl.org/content/Tenth_Anniversary_Of_Belarus_Disappeared/1824314.html [18.04.2010]

and began its own investigative subcommittee to investigate the disappearances of the journalists.”⁵⁷

For more than 40 years, one of the major goals of communism in Eastern Europe was the creation of an “ideal socialist citizenry”, obedient to state directives and to centrally formulated policy. Communism attempted to impose, from above, a political culture of allegiance among citizens to programs determined by some narrowly defined ruling elite. In doing so, it prohibited the expression of independent initiatives and punished deviations from the centrally determined plan. Yet the decade of the 1980s proved that autonomous groups, independent of state sponsorship and thus illegal under the Marxist order, could and did emerge. The decade was full of confrontations between an imposed communist political culture that was never fully integrated into the societies and an indigenous, anticommunist political culture that found its fullest expression in narrow circles of opposition in some of the countries. Autonomous groups in communist Eastern Europe are often viewed as the result of citizens’ attempts to circumvent the strict structures of totalitarianism. It’s important to mention that autonomous groups refer to a form of voluntary association in that they were created by their memberships and functioned outside the sponsorship of the state. They differed from many voluntary associations in the West because their members form more of a community than an organization.

We can’t deny that there is some visible political repression in Belarus, but oppositional parties still exist. There are some dates during the year when one can see mass rallies mainly in the capital of Belarus – Minsk, with several thousand people participating. The thing is that the people’s support for current President is undeniable, even oppositional forces can’t help agreeing with this fact but a lot of people maintain that it simply can’t be not so big, as presented by the authorities.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Various subcultures and organizations of young people of Belarus are often referred to as having quite contradictory political and ideological orientations and attitudes. Some would see it as an identity crisis which significantly constitutes to their participation in political life of the country and civil performance in general. It's worth mentioning that there is a huge ideological gap between educated intellectuals and majority of the lower class, between city residents and rural inhabitants. If we want to look deeper into the origins of such pattern we should recall the models of civil identities widely presented in Belarus and Eastern Europe in general.

In Eastern Europe the formation of ideologies, religions, national symbols, anthems, flags, and new history books were written mostly in the end of the nineteenth century. The national language also played an important role in such new states like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, which were trying to get rid of Soviet legacy by the means of implementing stricter norms of differentiating between official languages and Russian. In contrast, following the referendum of 1996, Belarusians decided to give the Russian language the status of second official language of the Republic.⁵⁸ Which means many of them associated themselves with Russian cultural patterns, religion, and didn't make any attempt to isolate themselves and develop a new sovereign identity. The Belarusization, promoted by Belarusian intellectual elite appeared to be raw and didn't find wide popular support.

This was the caused by unfavorable internal and international conditions: neither Poland nor Russia saw Belarus as an independent state and the legacies of Soviet times were too strong.

The religion believes also were not stimulating the nationalization and could not play a consolidating role in nation-building as the highest Orthodox authorities were under the Russian leadership.

⁵⁸ Smolich, Jerzy and Radzik, Ryszard (2004): Belarusian as an endangered language: can the mother tongue of an independent state be made to die?, *International Journal of Educational Development* Volume 24, Issue 5.

The policies of denationalization introduced at the early 19th century had some serious impact on the political culture of the country. As we see, the Belarusian People's Republic declared in 1918 didn't manage to receive any significant support from its population.

In addition if we look at the fundamentals of the state, such political symbols as flag and coat of arms were adopted from the Soviet model and introduced by Alexander Lukashenko in the same referendum of 1996.⁵⁹ Therefore the adopted Soviet identity became officially prevailing and recognized by the majority as part of their own consciousness. That draws up another contradiction in the current politics, when young people tend to deny the Soviet part as central part of their identity and therefore refer themselves back to the 1918, borrowing the political symbols of that time and promoting them as their own, regardless the fact they lived through Soviet or early post-Soviet times. It created quite an interesting situation when prodemocratic forces also are prone to use native language and 1918 symbols as the only alternative to the ones of the existing regime but still they are not approved and enhanced by the majority population, which doesn't feel any cultural ties to that time. At this point we see the evident self-identity problem, where one doesn't have many option to chose from which in the consequence can lead to the passiveness of civil society and some ideological problems.

We can not generalize, but even looking at the history of the country we can not find one adopted and commonly recognized version of the history. And this factor also has an impact on contemporary Belarusians and their models of identity. However, the dominant model is that which has little in common with liberal Western values and which is subservient to the dictatorship.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Belarus: Hopes for democracy and doubts about national identity
<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-03-16-katauskas-en.html> [12.05.2010]

Besides ideological contradictions there are some serious economic obstacles for the democratization process to face. If the transformations take the extreme pace and the oppositional party wins, many analysts are maintaining that it won't last due to the fact that economy of Belarus can't afford harsh reforms that are needed for more liberal approach. They say it could lead to temporary social disorder and further economic chaos.

As for the situation of civil society, which is undoubtedly important component for the democratization, we observe some weakness of this sector due to the dramatic control from the governmental side. In addition there is a serious lack in the integration of social groups and common ideology or strategies. The representatives of oppositional parties and civil society groups do not share the same views of the prospect of the country's further development, which is quite necessary in order to gain more support of the population, become more visible and promote changes.

Therefore, I suggest that pro-democratic civil society movements should put most of their attention and efforts to the creating a united ideology, that is easy to understand for everyone and takes into consideration the specific conditions which I mentioned above.

Elections 2006

When speaking about the civil society and democracy building we can't help recollecting the events of the year 2006. March of 2006 was the month of Presidential elections in the Republic of Belarus, so elections campaign has started before that with manifold rounding ups of the representatives of oppositional forces. The current president had 2 opponents (Alexander Milinkevich and Alexander Kozulin), and both of them were encouraging people to protest and go in the streets right after the counting of votes is over.

In the evening of the elections day the main square of the capital of Belarus was full with people, who disagreed to believe the “elegant victory”⁶¹ of the 83% of votes which meant that the current President can stay for another 5 years. Leading by the 2 oppositional candidates mentioned above and some important oppositional authorities it was decided to meet in the same square on the following day. By the next day, representatives of the oppositional forces and leaders of various civil society groups drew up a declaration, which stated that the elections were a fraud and encouraged officials from CentIzbirKom (Central Election Commission) to recognize the elections as illegitimate and to recount the votes in the presence of international observers and representatives of the protesting forces.

At the same time a small tent town started to grow in the central square of the city ultimately having 35 tents, which is not so big in numbers, but was considered quite important in its significance, as it has never happened before. As well many people have come from the other regions of the country in order to support the movement. The demonstration can not be compared to those during the “orange revolution” in Ukraine, but we should take into the consideration that that was the time when people and organizations finally consolidated the efforts and showed that Belarusian civil society has some perspectives and voice in the democratization process. During the time of the tent town there were governmental Special Forces representatives spread around the area, which were detaining people one by one, not letting the town grow in numbers and preventing the demonstrators of getting food and goods supplies.

As the more massive event was planned to be held on the 25th of March, which was named “Liberty Day”, on the early morning of this day the Belarusian police with the help of Special Forces evacuated journalists from the area of the tent town and arrested all the demonstrators, who stayed in the tents during the night. Some sources say it was around three hundred people who were thrown in the buses by force and delivered to the prison.

⁶¹ Press digests Belarus vote (2006): <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4829002.stm> [20.04.2010]

Many of them had to spend from 1 day up to one week in there, many got some fines. Most of those people were students and young professionals.

The planned demonstrating happened with the dramatic resistance of the police force, which was trying to disperse the public with tear gas and beating and squeeze it off the main avenue. In the result around 500 people were arrested including one of the presidential candidates –Alexander Kozulin. He is going to spend 5 and a half years in the forced labour colony.⁶²

In contrasts in many color revolutions in the neighboring countries which in the end chose closer integration with the EU and western model of development, Belarus followed the pro-Russian pattern and the oppositional force didn't achieve any visible results.

Many scholars assume that the main reasons for that was the lack of consolidation in the democratic forces, as we mentioned before, intolerance and harsh measures of the current regime towards public demonstrations and challenges of the President's power, undeveloped independent media sources, weak civil society and the fact that NGOs are subject to many restrictions of the government. Laws forbid any unregistered organizational activity, and organizations associated with foreign aid are often refused registration because they are "radical and subversive."⁶³ Non-registered organizations are not supposed to meet in the private flats or public offices, and the foreign aid has some serious obstacles to overcome in order to reach its addressee, which makes it practically impossible for them to function properly and legitimately in Belarus.

The 2006 protest brought as well some positive outcomes:

- 1) The growing repression resulted not only in increased apathy within the society but also in a certain radicalization of its democratic subculture, especially of the core of opposition

⁶² OSCE Chairman seriously regrets sentence against Belarus opposition leader Kozulin upheld during appeal (2006)

http://www.osce.org/cio/item_1_20648.html [24.04.2010]

⁶³ Myers, Steven Lee (2006): Court in Belarus Convicts and Sentences 4 Election Observers, The New York Times <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=FA0614F93A5B0C768CDDA10894DE404482> [24.04.2010]

and civil society activists who turned out to be ready to engage in seemingly hopeless and illogical protest actions.

2) The post-election protests confirmed that civil society in Belarus has matured and enhances its commitment to democracy building in spite of the dramatic consequences and even criminalization of its activities. Particularly after the regime rounded up some of the principal political opposition leaders before the ballot, it became clear that NGO activists have somehow become capable of self-organization to the extent that even the disruption of the chain of command failed to cause disarray and stop the protest efforts. The maturity of civil society, however is the reverse side of insufficient professionalism on the part of political leaders who seemed to be unprepared to meet the unexpectedly high turnout on the square and failed to come up with any meaningful plan of action to harness the mobilization before them.

3) There are signs of a broader democratic subculture being activated, or of the activation of democratic-minded citizens who are so far not actively involved in the opposition. Invigorated by the election campaign they came up with new forms of activity and new methods for communicating with the public. For the first time, the mood of the civil society changed from waiting until the political opposition would do something to getting ready to make small independent actions by themselves. This segment of society was responsible for an outburst of unconventional protest activities, such as flash mobs, internet and blogs were full of spontaneous suggestions and calls for action, some alternative web sites were created in order to make up for the ones blocked during the campaign.

4) For the first time in Belarusian political history, Internet was an important alternative medium of communication. During the peak political events, such as arresting Kazulin, tent town installation, the protests, the number of visits to the main independent news sites was

several times higher than usual.⁶⁴ Likewise, many spontaneous protests were coordinated online. The Internet has also become a tool of campaigning for the NGO sector, which was also one of the consequences of the difficulty to be operating legally, which we discussed before. The online communication made it possible to follow and organize the civil society actions faster and more efficient.

5) The protests confirmed the importance of identity, culture and symbols in consolidating the efforts of civil society in the democratization promotion. The ranks of independent, socially-active citizens who took huge personal risks during the election campaign and after, were dominated by those who were struggling not only for democracy, but for the right to use and study in their native language, revive national culture which is influenced by Russification politics of the regime. The campaign showed the extent to which cultural and political divides in Belarus are intertwined. While the government instigates the images of a cultural war between the West and the orthodox civilization, the prodemocratic opposition tries to put an accent of the revival of Belarusian culture which does not necessarily contradict the values of the Western world.

Regardless all the points above, uprising in activism and integration of the efforts, the events of 2006 also showed the gap that separates the democratic civil society activists and the rest of the society. A combination of fear imposed by the government on some and acceptance of the current regime by the others still limits the democratic development.

⁶⁴ Online Campaigning in 2006 Presidential election in Belarus (2006) <http://www.e-belarus.org/article/epolitics2006.html> [13.05.2010]

IV Limitations to the developments of civil society

In this section I would like to examine the main limitations to civil society development in the different spheres of life in the both countries and later draw a comparison based on the information provided.

4.1 Ideology

Although no political system can completely fulfill its own ideal requirements, it is important to consider its ultimate goals when evaluation the real and potential impact it has on society as a whole. In Soviet system the barriers to democratic political culture were constructed through a comprehensive authoritarian ideology and elaborate state policies aimed at isolating citizens, destroying communities, and controlling the resources necessary for independent action. Punishment for taking part in independent activities include expulsion from the country, exile, prison sentences, expulsion from work, educational establishment or payment of fines, aimed at destroying the person financially. Such punishments were enforced in all Marxist-Leninist countries and are still practiced to some extent in Belarus.

In addition in the Soviet systems the state exercised complete control over all forms of activity in the society: political, economic and social. Mass voluntary associations are created and sponsored by the state, which uses those to communicate and implement its policies. Other systems can be established only in the case they do not overlap with those of the state, therefore eliminating competition. In nowadays Belarus we see clear examples of those policies in the creation of pro-state youth organization BRSM.⁶⁵ Its goals are to promote patriotism and to instill moral values into the youth of Belarus, using activities such as camping, sporting events and visiting memorials. The organization was created after a merger of other youth groups in 2002 and is the successor of the Leninist Communist Youth

⁶⁵ Belarusian Republican Youth Union <http://www.brsm.by/> [11.02.2010]

League of the Byelorussian SSR. The BRSM is the largest youth group in Belarus and is supported by the Belarusian government.⁶⁶ Some people and researchers have accused the group of using methods of coercion and empty promises in order to recruit new members and of being used as propaganda for the government of Alexander Lukashenko.⁶⁷

Through the system of registration, the state controls the resources necessary for the establishment and functioning of voluntary associations. Unregistered organizations are, of course, denied all the rights and privileges. One more example from Belarus: ICJ reported to the UN on numerous obstacles for Belarusian human rights organizations and other NGOs: they “must register and fulfill a number of administrative requirements, which unduly hinder the exercise of freedom of association.

Activities of unregistered organizations are banned, and it is a criminal offence to organize or participate in such activities under Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code.

Furthermore, many human rights defenders face charges as a result of their monitoring elections in Belarus. NGOs that have successfully registered are nevertheless under strict supervision by the Government, especially in areas of tax and financial aid, which may even lead to the termination and dissolution of the organization. Such measures, which prevent associations from freely carrying out their activities, give rise to violations of the right to freedom of association as protected by Article 22 of the ICCPR.”⁶⁸

4.2 Media freedom

⁶⁶ Address by President of the Republic of Belarus at a seminar on matters of ideology participated by top-level officials of the central and local government Bodies (2003)
<http://www.president.gov.by/en/press29213.html> [11.02.2010]

⁶⁷ United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance. Nations in Transit 2003: Country Report of Belarus : <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/NISPAcee/UNPAN012373.pdf> [10.04.2010]

⁶⁸ UPR of Belarus: reports by NGOs submitted to Geneva (2009)
<http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/12410.html> [11.04.2010]

The Republic of Belarus is relatively young nation state with strong post-soviet and communistic legacy therefore its media before perestroika time was under strict control of the Communist Party and the Soviet state.

During perestroika and after the collapse of the Soviet Union media expression was really varied and flourished like never before and never after. A wide selection of point of view was represented through various media canals such as independent newspapers and magazines and alternative TV channels.

In 1994 the first president of the sovereign state was elected and during his first 10 years of presidency Lukashenko brought most of the Belarusian media spheres (newspapers, radio, television) back under the strict control of the state.⁶⁹

Therefore nowadays the state-controlled media present only pro-government points of view and interpretation of events just like in the Soviet period. There are a number of privately owned media outlets, most of them small independent newspapers. Although they have to operate under a permanent threat of being closed down for violating various government regulations, such as mis-stating their corporate name on publications or operating out of an office not registered with the government.

4.3 The influence of external policies

“A country’s prospects for democratization are significantly affected by the actions of other nations that seek to spread democracy around the world. Democracy promotion is generally viewed to be motivated by a sense of enlightened self-interest. First, it is often framed as a moral duty. Democratic countries, the US foremost among them, are said to believe that developing liberal self-government is a moral prerogative of modern nations and that

⁶⁹ Belarusian Association of Journalists

<http://baj.by/index.php?module=p&tid=6&filter=typemon^sub^15&cv=15> [10.03.2010]

democratic systems best safeguard basic universal human rights. Second, since prosperity is thought to correlate with democracy, the promotion of democratic governance is seen as an anti-poverty or human development mechanism. Along these lines, democracies may be said to not only promote egalitarian values worldwide (which serve to burnish their own democratic credentials), but to also seek to cultivate friendly allies and open up lucrative global markets that ultimately benefit them as well. Finally, democracy promotion is seen by its proponents as a vital security issue.”⁷⁰

Although there is a growing empirical and theoretical literature considering the effect of international variables on democratization, few scholars examined the influence of non-democratic political pressure. Let’s see the examples of both of the models.

a) Russia – Belarus Union and external actors

The Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation entered the way towards full-scale unity on April 2nd, 1996, when, impressing their peoples' will, the Presidents of the two countries, Alexander Lukashenko and Boris Yeltsin signed a Contract on the creation of a Belarusian and Russian Community in Moscow.

On April 2nd, 1997, the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation signed the Contract on the Belarus and Russia Union that added a new impulse to the process of the omnibus integration of the two states.⁷¹

Russia and its position towards Belarus has, since its independence, been something of a thorny subject. Undoubtedly, the attitude of successive Russian presidents has been

⁷⁰ Democracy Promotion by Other Countries
http://worldsavvy.org/monitor/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=178&Itemid=367
[23.04.2020]

⁷¹ Belarus-Russia Union State
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/belarus/union.htm> [2.04.2010]

ambiguous and demands a certain attention, especially since the approach of former President Vladimir Putin seemed to be beginning to evolve and change.

During much of his first presidential term, Putin didn't hide his dislike for the regime built by Alexander Lukashenko. Above all, Putin wanted to bring to an end the games Lukashenko had been playing with the former President Yeltsin, endlessly promising integration while profiting from Russian subsidies. It was the time, when Putin laid down Moscow's terms for integration and the options available to Belarus. Essentially, Russia offered Belarus full integration, European Union style but Lukashenko decided that the price is too high and defended Belarusian sovereignty. Moscow pushed harder and when Minsk reneged on its promise to sign over the Belarusian gas transportation system (Beltransgaz) to Russia, Gazprom halted its gas shipments to Belarus for 24 hours. Putin succession of Yeltsin undoubtedly put an end to Lukashenko's hopes of raising his positions in the reunified state.

Between 2003 and 2005 major changes occurred in Russia's domestic situation and its foreign policy. The Khodorkovsky affair resulted in the once relatively liberal approach of the government to domestic politics and economics giving way to a harder-line set of policies.⁷² The terrorist atrocity of Beslan led to further political centralization with the announcement that regional governors would be appointed by the president rather than popularly elected. Reacting to Western criticism of the rescue operation that had gone badly wrong, and of its steps towards power centralization, the Kremlin in turn accused the West of sympathizing with Chechen separatists. The Rose Revolution in Georgia and Orange Revolution in Ukraine resulted in a serious revision of Russia's relations with the West and now putting some serious attention to Minsk in order not to let anything like that happen there. A regime change in Belarus would be tantamount to Moscow getting "a second

⁷² The tycoon and the president (2005)

http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=3983898 [19.03.2010]

Ukraine” right on the border with Europe. While the Russian authorities were restricting the activities of Russian civil society organizations supported by the West, Belarus passed some laws to cut the outside funding to Belarusian NGOs.

Nevertheless Putin was always quite careful with Minsk, as its geopolitical place in Europe can not be underestimated. Russian authorities always knew there was a possibility of the closer cooperation with West, especially after launching such programs as “Eastern Partnership”. As European Commission states: “What happens in the countries in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus affects the European Union. Successive EU enlargements have brought these countries closer to the EU and their security, stability and prosperity increasingly impact on the EU’s. The potential these countries offer for diversifying the EU’s energy supplies is one example.

All these countries, to varying degrees, are carrying out political, social and economic reforms, and have stated their wish to come closer to the EU. The conflict in Georgia in August 2008 confirmed how vulnerable they can be, and how the EU’s security begins outside our borders.

The European Commission put forward concrete ideas for enhancing our relationship with: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. This would imply new association agreements including deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with those countries willing and able to enter into a deeper engagement and gradual integration in the EU economy. It would also allow for easier travel to the EU through gradual visa liberalization, accompanied by measures to tackle illegal immigration.

The Partnership will also promote democracy and good governance, strengthen energy security, promote sector reform and environment protection, encourage people to people contacts, support economic and social development and offer additional funding for projects to reduce socio-economic imbalances and increase stability.”⁷³ The project would also

⁷³ Eastern Partnership http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/index_en.htm [18.03.2010]

include wider support of civil society organizations and additional financing. The interesting part is that due to the problems with Russia and some contradictions in the process of negotiating the gas price with Russian authorities, Belarus signed the Eastern Partnership treaty.⁷⁴

In addition Russian observers can hardly ignore the message of the 2006 elections. Lukashenko retained the power, but he will not be president for life. In comparison with previous elections of 2001, the opposition and civil society has grown bolder, both at the level of its leaders and supporters.

However, Russian policy has overcome Western pressure by providing the current Belarusian government with an alternative source of support in diplomatic, political, economic, and strategic spheres:

Diplomatic

Russian efforts to help isolate Belarus diplomatically from the West have been quite successful up to the recent time. The USA, for example, during 2004 issued the Belarus Democracy act, “that has become the main document in the relations of the US to the Belarusian regime, provides for imposing sanctions against Belarus in case the Belarusian authorities would not stop pressure on opposition and independent media, to investigate cases of politically motivated disappearances. A number of Belarusian high officials were banned entry to the US. Strategic export to Belarus, state investments should not be extended to the Government of Belarus.”⁷⁵

The EU hasn't been so harsh with Belarusian authorities, demonstrated the willingness to have the dialogue and finally launched the Eastern Partnership, promising to assist Belarus with funding, referring to Belarus as a part of European family. Now after two years passed after the implementation of the program, we can not see any significant outcomes. One of

⁷⁴ EU's "Eastern partnership" and Russia-Belarus relations (2008) http://rbth.ru/articles/2008/12/19/191208_relations.html [19.03.2010]

⁷⁵ Belarus Democracy Act Full Text (2004) <http://charter97.org/eng/news/2004/10/27/act> [20.04.2010]

the reasons for that can be economic crises that all the countries had to face recently and Europe hasn't been an exception. The OSCE and Council of Europe have tried to negotiate with Belarus but without any visible results.

Therefore Russia is still the main Belarusian ally and trade partner, which does not make any effort to democratize Belarus, and, on the contrary, always confirms the legitimacy of the president and continue to subsidize Belarusian economy. The Presidents of Belarus and Russia or the prime-ministers meet quite regularly to discuss the further integration process, which is nor also partly accompanied my Kazakhstan or resolve disputes and find compromise.

When Medvedev was elected the President of the Russian Federation, he followed the pattern of communication set by Putin, encouraging further integration.⁷⁶

Political

Russian administration has traditionally given the political support to Belarus, responding the critics and skepticism from the other side of the border. It's common fact that Russian support is one of the key features, which raise and keep the popularity of the current President in his own country as well as in Russia. One of the reasons for that is the fact that all the Russian TV channels which are transmitted to Belarusian audience as well are mainly under control of the government⁷⁷ and therefore are help to maintain the positive image of Belarusian President.

Lukashenko gets the approval and recognition by Russian authorities in all kinds of elections and referendums, even when all the international organization regard those as fraudulent and maintain that there were some serious violations of the procedure. The official position of

⁷⁶ Medvedev praises achievements of Russia-Belarus Union State (2009)

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091210/157190185.html> [3.05.2010]

⁷⁶ Danilovich, Alex (2006): Russian integration: playing games behind the Kremlin walls, Ashgate publishing company p.71

the Russia is that all those violation accusation is some kind of the reaction of the West on the ongoing process of Russian-Belarusian integration, and an attempt to interfere in the domestic politics of Belarus. It's obvious that without the political support of Russia I would have been much more difficult for Lukashenko to maintain the authority and power.

Economic

That sounds quite as a paradox that a country, which borders with 5 countries and often serves as a buffer zone between Europe and Russia, is so economically isolated from its Western neighbors. Because of the regime's human rights violations there were introduced some strict economic restrictions and sanctions. Of course one of the reasons of such low level of trade is the lack of natural resources in the Republic of Belarus. In addition there are some underdevelopments in the manufacturing and production infrastructure which results in the low competitiveness of Belarusian goods in the European and global market.

Nevertheless Belarus is the third among Russia's most important trade partners,⁷⁸ and in its turn, Russia is number one trade ally for Belarus. If we take into consideration only energy supplies – 90% of them comes from Russia. In addition Belarus imports huge amounts of fuel and raw materials and exports their own ready-made products to Russia.

As we see, Belarus is not really dependant on the West as a trading partner, therefore its sanctions and limitations do not affect the economic situation in Belarus. Of course there are some effects but they are not as crucial as Russian impact: without Russian financial assistance (subsidies on energy and benefits from the economic Union) Belarusian economy would be under serious threat. In general, Russian help accounts up to 20% of Belarusian GDP. Many economists agree that the situation of the economy of Belarus will be deteriorating if no steps are taken towards minimizing the impact of Russian aid. The majority of Belarusian population is oriented towards Russia which shares quite negative experiences and examples regarding civic movements and freedom of speech.

⁷⁸ A Common Currency for Belarus and Russia?
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2004/wp04228.pdf> [25.05.2010]

Therefore we see that dynamic democratic transitions are not really possible without the significant economic support of some external players, as Russia's massive influence causes limitations to the national revival, civil society development and further democratization.

b) Mexico-USA-NAFTA cooperation

*"For the first time ever, Mexico has a deadline
for becoming more efficient.*

There is no more mañana."

Carlos Salinas, President of Mexico

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of USSR, the United States of America continued to build up "a new world order", the main points of which were democracy and free trade, to the northern border of the United States. During one of the bilateral Mexico-US meetings in 1989 Mexican President Salinas assumed that the level of the Mexican development could not correspond to the objectives of the free trade cooperation but promised to do everything possible to catch up. Actually it was high time to propose some harder economic reforms, as the Peso was dramatically devaluated in 1976 and the pro-democratic movements became louder and more influential. Salinas won the elections by the small margin and urgently needed to do something significant regarding economic situation in order to provide the next PRI candidate with victory. He bet his presidency on this project and realized that the achievement of failure would determine quite a lot in the future of the whole Mexican nation. If he gets the deal – the Presidential elections of 1994 are likely to be won by PRI, if not – the economic situation would deteriorate even more and PRI could lose its 70-year monopoly on power. Therefore, starting the same year Salinas managed to reduce Mexico's \$48 billion debt and decided to attract more foreign capital promising investors more open markets and closer integration with the US. Pursuing this idea the next year he

met President Bush and suggested that the two governments start negotiations about prospective free trade area in the North America.

The central issue of the debate became the lack of democratic institutions in Mexico and the further criticism of 1991 mid-term elections where the obvious fraud in two elections of the governors made Salinas reconsider the outcomes of the elections and make some visible corrections.

In the end Mexican accession to NAFTA was approved by the Congress. “The Mexican economy has grown substantially under NAFTA, especially when measured by foreign direct investment (FDI). In the eight years before NAFTA was implemented, the average annual FDI in Mexico was \$3.47 billion. From 1994 to 2002, the average FDI topped \$13 billion annually. Mexican exports have tripled since 1994, from \$52 billion to \$161 billion, and Mexico now (2003) has the world’s ninth largest economy (it was the fifteenth largest in 1991).”⁷⁹

Speaking about the political and economic interdependency we see that in the case of Mexico the transitions from state-led, protected economy to the open markets led to the emergence of preconditions for democracy. When governmental control over the economy is not so strict and allows some liberalization, political liability of the state can be challenged with the less probability of further economic problems. In Mexican case PRI didn’t consider NAFTA to become democratizing means, but a tool to fix economic problems and to integrate into the global economy. However NAFTA would draw international attention to the country and some past and present abuses of power and manifold violations would become visible to international community and its opinion and therefore giving the way to political expression of Mexican oppositional force.

⁷⁹ Smith, Geri and Cristina Lindblad (2003): Mexico: Was NAFTA worth it? *Business Week* p. 258.

The neo-liberal model of economic development, which makes its goal in the removal of all barriers to commerce, and the privatization of all available resources and services,⁸⁰ also implies democracy in economics and multicultural politics, which in its turn consists of free markets and entrepreneurial investors.

Therefore NAFTA, as an important component of neoliberal economy with its market reforms, played crucial role in the democratic developments of Mexico. It created the opportunities for international networking, made the existing political regime weaker by provoking a row of interdependent economic and political crises and raised the expectations of the people to the level which was hardly manageable in the present monopolistic single-party system. Of course it's not only NAFTA reforms that triggered the transformations, but other turning points such as societal mobilization represented by the 1994 riot of Zapatistas, the Red Mexicana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC) and the Action Canada Network. Here we see the contradiction as many of those civil society groups' aim was to fight capitalism and therefore not to allow neoliberal reforms. Some of the popular movement had also become the victims of clientalism of PRI.

“Because of NAFTA, Mexico can now afford the luxury of democracy. Inflation is relatively low, commercial banks are on their way to recovery and foreign debt is under control. With an export-led growth strategy, commerce between the United States and Mexico has expanded by more than 150 percent to dollars 220 billion last year

In 1998, Mexico replaced Japan (which has an economy 11 times its size) as the No. 2 trading partner with America. In less than 10 years it can become number one, replacing Canada. It has free trade arrangements with 28 other countries, including those in the

⁸⁰ Neoliberalism and Economic Globalization (2006)

<http://www.stwr.org/globalization/neoliberalism-and-economic-globalization.html> [15.05.2010]

European Union. Given its history as a protectionist economy, this is an extraordinary turnabout.”⁸¹

4.4 Violence and drug trafficking in Mexico

“Forbes magazine recently placed two Mexicans, Carlos Slim and Joaquín Guzmán, high on their list of the most powerful people in the world. Carlos Slim is the world’s third-richest man and CEO of a telecommunications company and Joaquín Guzmán is the leader of the Sinaloa drug cartel. While the purpose and the methodology of this list is problematic, the inclusion of these two names in Forbes' list tells us a lot about the long night of neoliberal rule in Mexico as well as the current administration of Felipe Calderón, who belongs to the centre-right Action National Party (PAN).”⁸²

As we see the economic growth which entailed NAFTA treaty hasn’t resolved many of the biggest Mexican problems. 40% of Mexican population still lives below the poverty line in addition to the rising amount of drug-related crimes and growing informal economy. Those issues are closely interconnected in Mexican society.

Starting with the presidential elections 2006, and due to the militarization policy of the new President, the organized crime dramatically spread all over the country. In the beginning such measures were quite popular and necessary for the markets, but now, in 2010, many people start to doubt it was the right choice.

“The PRI claims that political stability was ensured under its presidential administrations and blames the PAN for the rising levels of violence in the country. At the same time, the PRI is evoking rosy political images of the past, which recall its clientelistic practices through which the party used to allocate a small proportion of illegally appropriated funds to

⁸¹ Mexico After NAFTA Becomes a New Home for Democracy (2000)

http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/28/opinion/28iht-edstan.t_0.html [20.05.2010]

⁸² Muñoz-Martínez, Hepzibah (2009) Crisis, Populist Neoliberalism and the Limits to Democracy in Mexico:

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=16563> [20.05.2010]

subordinated classes in order to maintain the legitimacy of the party outside democratic mechanisms. These practices have been maintained at the state and local level, resulting in a growing support for the PRI at the local level from those sectors of the population increasingly marginalized in the past years by neoliberal policies.”⁸³

One visible conclusion of the situation is that the violence rate is growing, corruption on all levels, and the problem of poverty still hasn't been addressed properly, which creates some vivid obstacles to the development of democratization. All this will make it difficult for Mexicans to choose the new head of state in the year 2012.

4.5 Comparison

First of all, the state and *quality of democracy* in two countries are quite different. Mexico is recognized as the democracy since 2000, when the first transparent elections were held and after 71-year power monopoly, PRI had to go. Nevertheless, the presidential elections of 2006 were already criticized for being not so transparent, but those can still be regarded as democratic. Mexican democracy is not complete, but compared to Belarusian is definitely more advanced. One of the reasons for that can be free media, more active civil society, governmental recognition of civic movements and the support of the United States.

Central problems and further limitations in the two countries are also quite different: for Belarus one of the deterrent factors for further civil development is overwhelming economic and political control of the government, entailed by one-sided isolation and the absence of clear national identity. In addition many civil society actors have to stay in the shadow, because of the harsh rules we mentioned. For Mexico, in its turn, current central problems, it urgently needs to deal with, would be definitely poverty, corruption and increasing drug-related violence.

⁸³ Ibid.

Special attention in the comparison should be given to *external relations* of the two countries under study: for Belarus partner number one is Russia, while for Mexico it is the United States. The NAFTA effect on Mexico can not be underestimated – it helped to promote democratic values and views and supported Mexico economically, while Russian influence on Belarus, as mentioned before, is quite different – it stimulates diplomatic and economic isolation of Belarus from the Western pro-democratic ideas, but at the same time, also gives significant economic and political support to the current regime.

As we see there are visible distinctions in the limitations and the quality of democracy in Belarus in Mexico.

V. Conclusion

This section represents an overview of the explored materials and the research objectives. To come to a resolution of the research question, it is necessary to summarize the findings of the analytical part of the study. On the basis of the analysis of the findings, conclusions will be drawn.

The overall aim of the research was to analyze the role of civil society in building of democracy. According to the objectives set in the beginning of the paper I managed to

- Define democracy and civil society;
- Analyze if Belarus and Mexico are democracies;
- Examine the theoretical role the civil society should play in the democracy development;
- Analyze the participation of civil society in democracy building in Belarus and Mexico and its status in the countries;
- Analyze the limitations to the successful civil society participation and see how they can be addressed with the respect to future democratic process;
- Examine the influence of external factors on democratic transition.
- Compare the limitations, that the civil society actors faces in both countries.

According to the comparison presented we can conclude that, although both Mexico and Belarus are representatives of the third wave democracies, there are significant differences in their democratic development. What concerns civil society, we can conclude, that it faces different central problems in both countries, but the essential role it plays in democratic transitions in Belarus and in Mexico can not be underestimated.

The factors necessary for democratic transition, presented in the research contributed to change in Mexico in the year 2000 and continue to facilitate the transitions, however, few of

those factors are present in nowadays Belarusian reality. Some external support is needed in Belarus to make people realize and believe that there are alternatives to the current regime, alternatives that may be better than the stability of today and that it is possible for the citizens to contribute to democratic change by participation in the civil society regardless all the problems and limitation it is facing.

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Master Thesis Project

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Thesis title: „Role of civil society in the process of democratic transition in Mexico and Belarus“

Hypothesis

The hypothesis I have regarding the participation of the civil society in the democracy building is that the recognition of the state of various movements is important for the level of influence it has in the democratic transition.

Research question:

Central to this research is the need to answer the questions : *What is the role of civil society in democratic transitions? what are the major limitations to the civil society in the democracy building?*

Objectives

- Define democracy and civil society;
- Analyze if Belarus and Mexico are democracies;

- Examine the theoretical role the civil society should play in the democracy development;
- Analyze the participation of civil society in democracy building in Belarus and Mexico and its status in the countries;
- Analyze the limitations to the successful civil society participation and see how they can be addressed with the respect to future democratic process;
- Examine the influence of external factors (such as external policies) on democratic transition.

Structure

Abstract

1) Introduction

2) Defining democracy

3) Defining civil society

4) Overview of the democratization process

- Mexico
- Belarus

5) Civil society in democratization

- Mexico
- Belarus

6) Limitations

7) Comparison

8) Conclusions

9) Bibliography

Methodology

- ◆ Literature review is an essential part of my research. It includes overview of analytical works made by various scholars and think-tanks.
- ◆ Data and statistic analysis is applied to make a comparative analysis of the structure, aims, methods and techniques of the civil society groups in the countries under study.
- ◆ Democracy theories help to examine the importance of NGOs as political and social players in the process of democratization.
- ◆ Comparative analysis of civil society movements in the 2 countries is based on both economical and political strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and achievements, putting special stress on its limitations.

It's worth mentioning that while studying democratic processes in the Republic of Belarus, we face certain limitations, because of the fact that the issue is not studied in Belarus itself. In addition the governmental policies also create various impediments for the international scholars to research this issue. Therefore we use various electronic data and restricted number of international reports.

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