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Political Party/Campaign Finances and Use of Administrative Resources in Belarus

Country Report

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¹ Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of SAOG, Council of Europe, International IDEA, IFES, NIMD, OSCE-ODIHR, or TI Georgia.

ABSTRACT

The report touches upon the issues of Belarusian political system functioning paying special attention to the problems of funding of political parties and elections campaigns. It specifies legal framework regulating activities of non-commercial organizations and analyses the role of public associations and state-subsidized organizations in the last 2016 parliamentary elections in Belarus. It also discusses main features of elections campaigns financing in 2015 and 2016. The report addresses main conclusions and recommendations provided by international organizations and domestic election initiatives and envisages recommendations to improve the existing process regulating money in politics in present Belarus.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Belarus obtained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1994 during first democratic elections Belarusians elected its first president Aliaksandr Lukashenka. He has remained in power until now having accumulated control over all three branches of power with the help of national referendums, police and secret police forces as well as state mass media machinery, especially mastering and perfecting the key process which has been ensuring the stability of the regime – elections. Belarusian economy is also at a large extent controlled by the state. Private small businesses are regularly suppressed whereas medium and big businesses have to be apolitical in order to function. All of them are constantly controlled by various state bodies.

Activities of the political parties and election campaign process are regulated in the Republic of Belarus by a number of legislative acts. The main legislation includes but is not limited to: the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (with changes and additions adopted at the nationwide referendums of November 24, 1996 and October 17, 2004), the Electoral Code of adopted in 2000, the Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Offenses and the Civil Procedure Code, the Laws on Mass Events, on Mass media, on Political Parties, on the Applications of Citizens and Central Election Commission (CEC) resolutions. In addition to that, a number of Presidential Decrees, Resolutions of Council of Ministers, Ministries and National Bank of the Republic of Belarus are obligatory for political parties and non-commercial organizations in Belarus².

Central Election Commission is a permanent body with a five-year mandate responsible for election administration. Six of its members are appointed by the President whereas the other six – by the Council of Ministers which challenges the autonomy of CEC activities. Most political parties and civil society actors express lack of confidence in CEC impartiality during the election process, according to OSCE/ODIHR 2016 Final Report on Parliamentary Elections in Belarus³.

At present moment Belarusian Civil Code defines legal forms of non-governmental organizations which are based on either membership or property basis criteria. Political parties together with trade unions and public associations fall under the following category of a non-governmental organization: public and religious organizations (associations) –membership-based associations of citizens united on the basis of their common interests to meet spiritual and other non-material needs in compliance with the legislation⁴.

The state body responsible for the registration of non-governmental organizations and political parties in Belarus is the Ministry of Justice and chief directorates of Justice at the oblast executive committees and Minsk and the National Department for Religious Affairs (in case of religious organizations)⁵. Since 1999 they have been registering new organizations and political parties more reluctantly. In addition to that, Belarusian authorities amended key laws regulating the activities of Belarusian civil society organizations. Thus, once a progressive law of 1994 “On Public Associations” has been amended in 1999 and 2005 and gradually limited the scope of functioning of non-governmental organizations in the country.⁶

² Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus. Available at: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

³ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

⁴ Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus. Available at: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

⁵ Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus. Available at: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

⁶ Solidarity with Democratic Belarus, Information Office. Legal Framework for the Activities of Political Parties and Non-governmental Organizations. In: *A Report on the Condition of NGOs and Independent Culture in Belarus*. Fundacja Kultura Enter, Lublin, 2011, p. 157.

Overall process of state registration of non-governmental organizations remains burdensome and complicated⁷. Despite its wide range, legislative acts make the process of registration unclear and often contradictory to each other. Belarusian state bodies often refuse to register a non-commercial organization on insignificant grounds and impose their decision in an arbitrary manner.

Organizations facing challenges with the registration may encounter further problems. Presidential Decree of 16 January 1999 No 2 banned all organizations not registered by the government. Later this ban was introduced to the Law “On Political Parties” and “On Public Associations” together with administrative liability for the violation of these laws ranging from a fine to an arrest for up to fifteen days⁸. Two other amendments of the Criminal Code of Belarus made operation on behalf of an unregistered organization or political party even more risky. Thus, on 15 December 2005 Article 193.1 titled “Illegal Organization of a Public Association, a Religious Organization or a Fund, or Participation in Their Activities” amended the Criminal Code of Belarus. It envisaged a punishment by fine or imprisonment for up to two years for activities in any of the non-registered organization, fund or political party⁹. In addition to that, Part 2 was added to Article 193 of the Criminal Code, envisaging up to three years of imprisonment if the activities of a public association that violate citizens’ rights in case they were carried by an non-registered party or association¹⁰.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Belarusian public associations and their role in election campaigns

Although a strategy of registering as fewer political parties as possible (in practice none of them has been registered since 2000¹¹) is still in place, the Belarusian authorities have been registering some public associations and funds in rather a slowly growing manner. Organizations which had a clear political agenda face particular obstacles though. Nevertheless, two significant political movements were registered since 2000 – Movement for Freedom (in 2008) and “Tell the Truth” civil campaign (2017). On the other hand, some significant political movements like Belarusian Christian Democracy have been applying for registration for many years unsuccessfully.

Belarusian Legal Transformation Center together with the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus publish reports covering statistics, legal issue and overall trends in the development of non-commercial organizations in Belarus on yearly basis. In their 2017 report the authors stress the fact that despite legal restraints and unfavourable political conditions a total amount of public associations is constantly growing since late 2000s.

Belarusian Legal Transformation Center and the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus stress in their recent report the fact that organizations loyal to the state primarily obtain registration and arbitrary refusals and censorship are still in place¹². Moreover, recently Belarusian authorities intensified registration of non-commercial organizations often indirectly affiliated with the state but still initiated and established with the help of the state authorities. *De facto* GONGOs could serve two important goals for Belarusian state apparatus: firstly, they ensure ability to participate in Western donors’ programs and secondly, substituting

⁷ Legal Transformation Center / Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. *Freedom of Association and Legal Conditions for Non-Commercial Organizations in Belarus*. Available at: <http://belngo.info/2017.freedom-of-association-2016.html>. Accessed on 10.06.2017.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Solidarity with Democratic Belarus, Information Office. *Legal Framework for the Activities of Political Parties and Non-governmental Organizations*. In: *A Report on the Condition of NGOs and Independent Culture in Belarus*. Fundacja Kultura Enter, Lublin, 2011, p. 163.

¹² Legal Transformation Center / Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. *Freedom of Association and Legal Conditions for Non-Commercial Organizations in Belarus*. Available at: <http://belngo.info/2017.freedom-of-association-2016.html>. Accessed on 10.06.2017.

them in internal political processes, for example in elections when participation of non-governmental organizations in the process is required by law.

As of January 1, 2017, Ministry of Justice claimed there were 15 political parties¹³ and 2731 public associations registered in Belarus. This number included 221 international, 730 republican and 1780 local public associations, 36 unions (associations) of public associations, 172 foundations (16 international, 6 republican and 150 local ones), 7 republican state and community associations¹⁴.

Notably, a large number of public associations in contemporary Belarus can be labelled GONGOs due to their impressive state financial support and frequent collaboration with the state on political matters, such as elections campaigns, involvement in ideological struggle with the Belarusian opposition, organization and participation in state celebrations of national importance and others. In this way Belarusian authorities preserved a Soviet tradition of engaging of public associations for ideological and political matters.

Many of them openly consider themselves as successors of old communist-time associations like BRSM (Belarusian Republican Youth Union) which claim to continue the traditions of *Komsomol* (Soviet-time youth organization which was obligatory for those who was planning their career in the Communist party, public services or state enterprises later).

Others were founded in 2000s by the initiative of the Belarusian authorities and often substitute NGOs where their role might become vital in case independent organizations outbalance. A good example of such organizations is *Belaya Rus* founded in 2007 and since then playing a very big part in election campaigns in Belarus. Members of this public association not only collect signatures for the incumbent and pro-governmental parties' candidates for the elections and participate in pre-election agitation, they also become members of district and precinct election commissions and election observers forming a large part of them. Similar role is undertaken by other public associations such as Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, Belarusian Women's Union, Unions of Veterans, and even Belarusian Red Cross Association¹⁵.

Thus, according to the OSCE/ODIHR 2016 Final Report on Parliamentary Elections in Belarus, only 0.1 per cent of Precinct Elections Commission (PEC) members were opposition nominees and only 10.4 per cent out of nominees representing 4 oppositional political parties were elected to PEC. In contrast, 96.9 per cent nominated by 5 remaining political parties and 94.2 per cent nominated by 5 state-subsidized organizations were included into PECs (See Table 1 below)¹⁶. As for Territorial (TECs) and District Elections Commissions (DECs), representatives of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, Belarusian Women's Union, Unions of Veterans, *Belaya Rus* and BRSM members composed 40 and 42.3 per cent of the overall amount of members respectively.¹⁷

¹³ Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus. Available at: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

¹⁴ Legal Transformation Center / Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. *Freedom of Association and Legal Conditions for Non-Commercial Organizations in Belarus*. Available at: <http://belngo.info/2017/freedom-of-association-2016.html>. Accessed on 10.06.2017.

¹⁵ See OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Presidential Elections, 11 October 2015. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/belarus/218981> Accessed on 12.06.2017; OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017; Legal Transformation Center / Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. *Freedom of Association and Legal Conditions for Non-Commercial Organizations in Belarus*. Available at: <http://belngo.info/2017/freedom-of-association-2016.html>. Accessed on 10.06.2017.

¹⁶ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

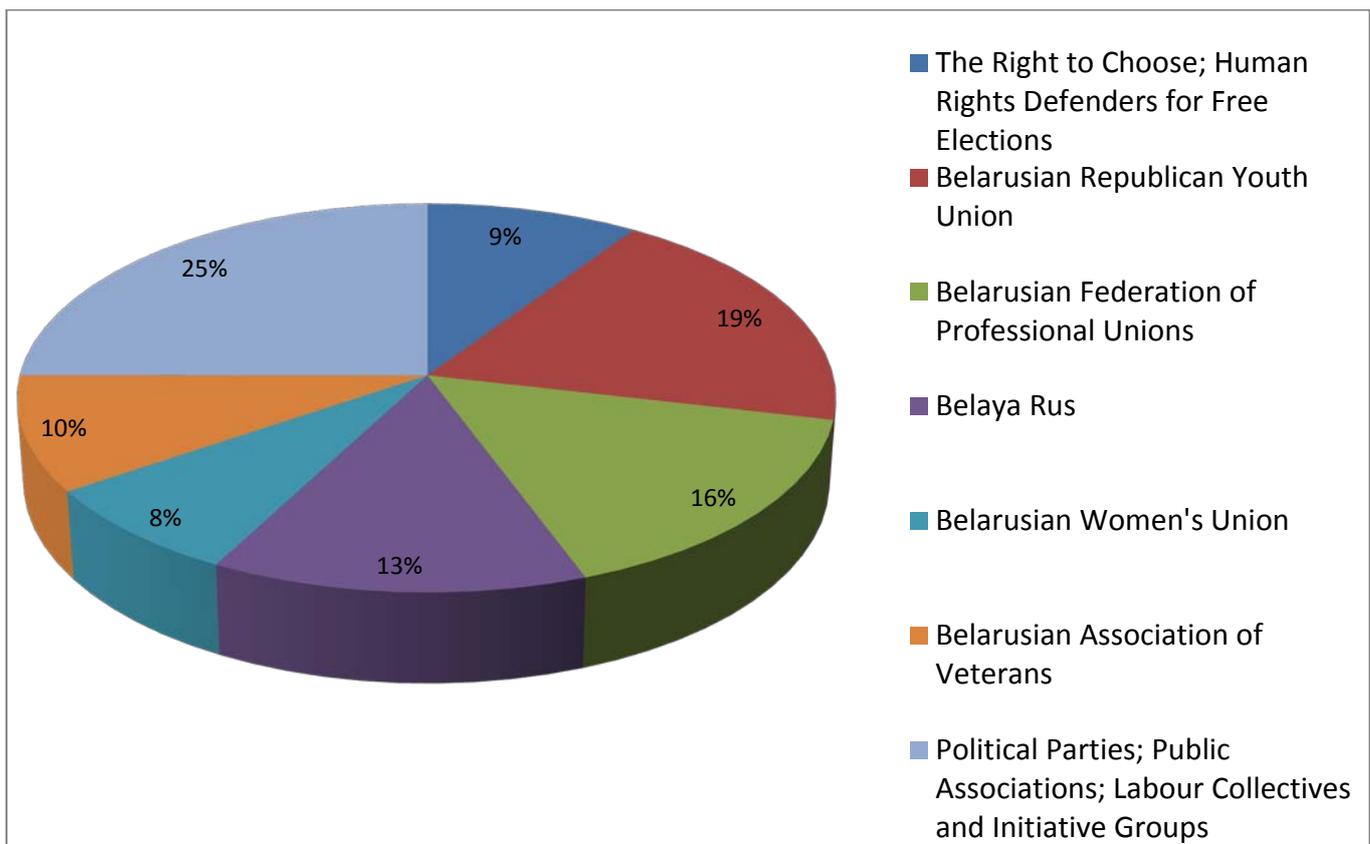
¹⁷ Human Rights Defenders For Free Elections. Parliamentary Elections. September 11, 2016. Analytical Report (full text). Available at: http://spring96.org/files/misc/analytical_report_en.pdf Accessed on 12.06.2017.

	Nominated (numbers)	Appointed (numbers)	%
Oppositional Parties (Belarusian Popular Front, Belarusian Party of the Left "Fair World", Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada", United Civil Party)	514	53	10.4
Other Political Parties	3463	3356	96.9
State-subsidized 5 public associations	25546	24082	94.2

Table 1. PECs Composition. Parliamentary Elections in Belarus, 11 September 2016. Based on the data from OSCE/ODIHR 2016 Final Report on Parliamentary Elections.

Furthermore, many DEC and PEC members actively campaigned for some candidates and acted as moderators during campaign events often expressing preferences towards certain candidates¹⁸.

During 2016 Parliamentary Elections in Belarus 32,105 citizen observers were accredited. 24,000 of them were representatives of state-funded organizations and often simultaneously campaigned for pro-government candidates (representatives of state apparatus, state enterprises or loyal to the government political parties). Namely, 6,170 registered observers represented the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM), 5,040 – the Belarusian Federation of Professional Unions of Belarus, 4,261 – *Belaya Rus*, 2,473 – Belarusian Women’s Union and 3,070 – Belarusian Association of Veterans – 3,070. The remaining observers were nominated by political parties, public associations, labour collectives and initiative groups (See Diagram 1 below)¹⁹.



¹⁸ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

¹⁹ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

Diagram 1. Composition of citizen observers during Parliamentary Elections in Belarus, 11 September 2016 (in %). Based on the data from OSCE/ODIHR 2016 Final Report on Parliamentary Elections.

Political parties and election campaigns funding

Unlike other countries of the region, Belarus remains the state with one of the most rigid regulations of foreign help and private donations. As IDEA's Handbook on Political Finance *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns* specifies, in post-Soviet states "bans on foreign funding are more far-reaching and generally aim to insulate all political activities from foreign sponsorship, including work of pro-democracy NGOs".²⁰ Belarus is a vivid example of such approach.

Belarus is a country where state structure favours executive branch of power and governing parties enjoy a privileged position.²¹ Independent parties have only a limited number of ways for financing, mostly foreign or domestic donations. Foreign donations are prohibited in Belarus.

Activities of foreign organizations (including funds) are prohibited unless their branch in Belarus is registered by the Belarusian Ministry of Justice or the permission to open a branch has been granted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs²². This policy is regulated by a number of Belarusian laws. One of the last ones regulating came into force on March 4, 2016. The President's Decree No 5 of August 31, 2015 "On Foreign Gratuitous Aid" in fact confirmed maintained the previous order for the receipt of foreign donations, requiring their obligatory registration. Criminal responsibility for violation of this provision remained as well. However, a range of ambiguities and contradictory interpretations, concerning implementation of the new decree, caused significant difficulties for the activity of non-commercial organizations, receiving foreign funding.²³

In terms of domestic donations, Belarusian legislation maintains provisions which create further obstacles for activities of non-governmental organizations. Thus, in accordance with the Belarusian legislation, non-commercial organizations may receive financial aid only for listed purposes. There are no tax benefits for donations to a non-governmental organization. If any of non-commercial organizations (with the exception of consumer and sports organizations) decide to carry out some independent entrepreneurial activities, this can only be possible by creating or participating in a commercial entity²⁴.

In 2013 direct public funding for parliamentary candidates was abolished in Belarus. 2016 Parliamentary elections were the first parliamentary elections with no direct funding available which was contradictory to Paragraph 167 the Joint 2011 OSCE/ODIHR Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation on public campaign funding, "which notes the potential of public funding to strengthen political pluralism"²⁵. The law, however, implied free access of the candidates to premises for campaign events, campaign materials and media.

²⁰ *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. A Handbook on Political Finance. IDEA. P. 179. Available at: <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/funding-of-political-parties-and-election-campaigns.pdf> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

²¹ *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. A Handbook on Political Finance. IDEA. P. 185. Available at: <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/funding-of-political-parties-and-election-campaigns.pdf> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

²² Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus. Available at: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

²³ Legal Transformation Center / Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. *Freedom of Association and Legal Conditions for Non-Commercial Organizations in Belarus*. Available at: <http://belngo.info/2017.freedom-of-association-2016.html>. Accessed on 10.06.2017.

²⁴ Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus. Available at: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

²⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

IDEA's Handbook on Political Finance *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns* states, lack of public funding is "simply another way to discourage independent political activity" in the condition of absence of democratic processes and freedom of association²⁶.

During 2016 Parliamentary elections candidates were allowed to receive donations from individuals (up to BYN 105 or approximately EUR 48) and legal entities (up to BYN 210 or approximately EUR 96). The total expenditure maximum for a candidate was BYN 21,000 or approximately EUR 9,633. Despite the fact that state-funded organizations, charities, and religious organizations are forbidden to donate, several state-subsidized organizations participated in election campaigns for some candidates²⁷.

Similar case occurred during 2015 Presidential elections in Belarus when a number of state-funded organizations and state-enterprises took part in the incumbent's campaign and made in-kind and financial donations to his dedicated campaign account. On a positive step, 2013 Amendments to the Electoral Code increased the limits on donations by both individuals and legal entities and allowed to use funds at an early stage to finance signature collection. The maximum amount of funds spent could reach up to the equivalent of EUR 85,000. Nevertheless, several OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors opined during the Election Observation Mission, that the incumbent's statement from 2013 discouraging businesses to fund opposition might have affected negatively on their willingness to make donations.²⁸

Unlike several other post-Soviet countries 'oligarchic' parties do not exit in Belarus due to the fact that business people not associated with the government are constantly targeted by an aggressive justice system in Belarus²⁹, donations during election campaigns is one of the few means for Belarusian entrepreneurs to participate indirectly in election campaigns. However, due to the lack of political alternative as Belarusian opposition is very much marginalized and is monitored by the Belarusian police, only those business people who are loyal to the Belarusian government tend to openly make donations to pro-governmental candidates.

Banks were obliged to provide weekly information update on campaign fund transactions, but this information was not published on time or was not published at all despite law requirements. The law does not require these reports to make public or be audited which in accordance with OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on 2016 Parliamentary elections in Belarus should be changed.³⁰

In order to address issues related to recent corruption matters in Belarus, on 1 September 2016 Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) released a summary of Interim compliance report. Belarusian side did not agree to make the whole report public. GRECO expressed its dissatisfaction with a process of implementation of 2012 Joint First and Second Round Evaluation Report recommendations³¹. The summary stated that "presidential immunity has not been limited to the term in office and the number of

²⁶ *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. A Handbook on Political Finance. IDEA. P. 183. Available at: <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/funding-of-political-parties-and-election-campaigns.pdf> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

²⁷ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

²⁸ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Presidential Elections, 11 October 2015. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/belarus/218981> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

²⁹ *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. A Handbook on Political Finance. IDEA. P. 182. Available at: <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/funding-of-political-parties-and-election-campaigns.pdf> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

³⁰ OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

³¹ Council of Europe's anti-corruption group publishes summary of its report on Belarus, says faith in country's commitment is undermined. Available at: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2438623&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE&direct=true> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

officials who benefit from specific procedures that limit the extent to which they can be investigated/prosecuted for corruption offences still goes beyond what is required in a democratic society”.³²

Belarusian bureaucratic machine remains a non-transparent body dependent in its functioning very much on the head of the state. GRECO representatives noted that they had received “significant volume of irrelevant information” which undermined “faith in the country’s commitment to the process of mutual evaluation”.³³ This case demonstrated the lack of transparency of Belarusian political system and lack of political will of the Belarusian authorities to cooperate more intensively on anti-corruption changes.

³² Council of Europe’s anti-corruption group publishes summary of its report on Belarus, says faith in country’s commitment is undermined. Available at: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2438623&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE&direct=true> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

³³ *Ibidem.*

FINDINGS

The legislation and functioning of election campaigns in Republic of Belarus reflect trends common for several post-Soviet states and a number of countries of Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe.³⁴ The two main problems related to financial violations in politics of Belarus are 1) lack of state/public financial support for independent/oppositional candidates and also 2) abuse of administrative resource by the ruling parties/the incumbent.

The first phenomenon can be explained by the following reasons. Firstly, the legislation itself creates obstacles for independent political parties funding by the cancellation of state funding since 2013. Secondly, despite the legal opportunity to receive financial aid from the general public, oppositional parties and politicians stress the fact that Belarusian people are often afraid to help them in fear of persecution from the state authorities. Taking into consideration economic problems of recent couple years in Belarus and overall apathy and disappointment of a big part of the Belarusian population in political processes and elections especially, this problem of financial donations is deteriorating. Thirdly, inability of big and medium Belarusian businesses to perform their activities in case of disloyalty to the Belarusian regime discourage them from any active political activities, including support of political parties and politicians.

The second phenomenon is directly connected with the nature of the autocratic system created and maintained by the Belarusian state apparatus. The vicious circle of mutual support of all three branches of power together with state-subsidized organizations, predominantly state enterprises and monopoly on media gives little chance to any alternative behaviour patterns of system members. All the elements of the system are interdependent and not interested in showing any disobedience to its rules as this would challenge their personal interests. The state apparatus especially intensifies all its functions during election campaigns as their outcomes guarantee longevity and stability of the current situation. As a result, the system has become very autonomous and is unlikely to allow any infiltration of external elements into such a key process as elections (namely, for example, oppositional party members or civil society representatives in elections commission or among observers).

In the condition of limited local resources and illegal foreign financing oppositional political parties and non-governmental organizations face severe challenges in overcoming the state-controlled machine surrounding them constantly and interfering into their activities on a regular basis through an extensive network of control. Election observation missions and international organizations delegations are often the only platform for them to express their opinion and ideas.

A cumbersome legislation is another complication for political parties and election campaigns participants. Very often laws are contradictory, unclear and inconsistent. They enable state bodies to make arbitrary decisions and abuse their power when necessary.

Despite its efforts and a number of positive changes in election procedures and general legislation, Belarusian state reveals little willingness to introduce major changes in its legal acts. Most of recommendations keep on being repeated in every report of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions and major domestic observers initiatives – *Right to Choose* and *Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections*. Typically Belarusian authorities address minor issues whereas major recommendations remain without their attention.

³⁴ *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. A Handbook on Political Finance. IDEA. P. 194. Available at: <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/funding-of-political-parties-and-election-campaigns.pdf> Accessed on 12.06.2017.

On a positive note, Belarusian authorities continue to express their eagerness to discuss problematic matters and claim their openness for the dialogue with international organizations interested in political and legislative reforms in the country although still more actions could be undertaken to confirm their intentions.

Recommendations³⁵

1. Election commission should include representatives of all political parties and both independent and state-subsidized organizations on a basis of equal representation.
2. Clear sensible criteria for election commission members selection should be introduced in order to avoid arbitrary and corruptive decisions.
3. Election commission members should refrain from participation in election campaigns of contestants and should not reveal any bias towards candidates publicly.
4. Local officials should not be allowed to serve simultaneously in election commissions or interfere into their activities.
5. In line with the recommendations of 2015 and 2016 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions and OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, re-introduction of direct public financing should be considered in order to create equal opportunities for all the contestants of the election process.
6. Candidates in parliamentary elections should be allowed to use their funds already on the stage of signature collection similarly with presidential elections candidates.
7. State-subsidized organizations and enterprises should be forbidden to provide financial or in-kind support for candidates.
8. To enhance transparency and integrity, financial reports on income and expenditure should be published in a timely manner. In addition to that, independent and impartial audit should be performed over campaign financial reports. The results of it should be shared with the state control bodies and the public.
9. Belarusian government should aim to avoid abusive corruptive practices involving misuse of administrative resource and ensure transparency in its financial election activities.
10. Opposition political parties should utilize proofs of administrative resource abusive practices in their political campaigns to raise awareness of such problems among apathetic Belarusian population and gain more support from them.
11. International actors should support fight against corruption, ensure check and balances system is in place and address lack of political will to address political reforms.
12. Organizations performing election observation missions should elaborate a follow-up mechanism to ensure recommendations are addressed.

³⁵ In line with *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. A Handbook on Political Finance. IDEA. Available at: <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/funding-of-political-parties-and-election-campaigns.pdf> Accessed on 12.06.2017; OSCE/ODIHR Final Report. Belarus, Parliamentary Elections, 11 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/287486> Accessed on 12.06.2017; 4. Human Rights Defenders For Free Elections. Parliamentary Elections. September 11, 2016. Analytical Report (full text). Available at: http://spring96.org/files/misc/analytical_report_en.pdf Accessed on 12.06.2017 and “Right to Choose-2016” campaign for observation of election of deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus (6th convocation). Available at: http://pvby.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/PV-2016-FinalReport-Draft_Part1-eng-FINAL.pdf Accessed on 10.06.2017.

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