

The events in Belarus show that “the old and already customary mechanisms for extending the power of authoritarian leaders are failing,” Yuliy Yusupov, director of the Center for Assistance to Economic Development of Uzbekistan, said in an interview with CABAR.asia.

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*Photo: Reuters*

**How important, in your opinion, are the events taking place in Belarus for the countries of Central Asia?**

I think this is the number one event of 2020 for the entire post-Soviet space, where until recently political regimes of “presidency for life” prevailed. Presidents who gained power in the 1990s and 2000s, by hook or by crook, ensured themselves virtually lifelong rule.

There were, of course, exotic exceptions (the Baltic countries are not counted, they have not completely become “Soviet”): Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova. But even there the

change of power sometimes went through a violent confrontation.



Yuliy Yusupov. Photo: CABAR.asia

In 2019, “something went wrong.” Armenia has unexpectedly joined the “rogue states” and did not want to renew the mandate of the former leader. Nazarbayev resigned from the post no less “unexpectedly” (so unexpectedly that many still do not believe that he has really left).

Moreover, this year the “veterans” - Putin and Lukashenko have also faced the issues. The special operation of the first, called “setting to zero”, is bewildering even among the supporters of VVP.

The second was faced with the fact that the population was already so fed up with the president, that people were ready to vote for anyone, just not for him.

**“The ongoing processes are a natural stage in the formation of a civilized democratic society in our countries.”**

It turns out that the old and familiar mechanisms for extending the power of authoritarian leaders are failing. Something broke in these mechanisms. New generations have come that do not take them for granted and are not going to put up with them.

Moreover, I think this is extremely important for the entire post-Soviet space, including Central Asia. In my opinion, the ongoing processes are a natural stage in the formation of a civilized democratic society in our countries.

I wrote about the inevitability of this kind of processes in the article [“The democratization prospects of Central Asian countries or how to wake up the sleeping institutions?”](#) for [Cabar.asia](#) .

**What is your forecast for the development of the situation in Belarus? Will Lukashenko be able to stay in power?**

I think Lukashenko’s resignation is a foregone conclusion. It is impossible to rule a European country in the 21st century when at least 70% of the population hates

you. Lukashenko himself pushed the situation to the limit, announcing his 80% victory (well, say that he won with 53% of the vote and many would have calmed down), and then sanctioning a savage violent suppression of protests in the first days after the elections. Lukashenko will leave, if not now, then within the next year.

His only support today is the Kremlin, for which he is more of a burden than a support. Putin, it seems to me, temporarily supports Lukashenko for two reasons. First, so as not to create a dangerous precedent for the authoritarian leader's resignation under pressure from the population. Secondly, he wants to test technologies for suppressing mass protests in order to have them ready for Russia (as he once tested military equipment in Syria).

It seems to me that the question is not about Lukashenko's resignation, but how this process will be carried out and what price the Belarusian people will have to pay for the possibility of civilized development. The main danger is that Lukashenko may "present" Belarus to the Kremlin before leaving. This is fraught with big problems for everyone, not only for Belarus.

I really hope that Putin will not accept this scenario. It will not give him big domestic political dividends (unlike the annexation of Crimea), but it can create many additional problems:

- inside Russia (a new region will appear in the country, the revolutionary sentiments of which may spread to other regions of the country).
- in the post-Soviet space (other neighboring countries are unlikely to be delighted with such an example of the Kremlin's "friendly embrace").
- on the part of the international community (the Anschluss of an entire European country is already too much, even by the standards of the most peaceful Western politicians).

Although, as the sad experience of recent years shows, the Kremlin is sometimes capable of acting irrationally, even to the detriment of its own interests. Thus, anything can happen.

### **How will the events in Belarus effect other CIS countries?**

The people of Belarus set an example for many post-Soviet countries. Shows that the movement towards democratization is inevitable, that we are not doomed to eternal authoritarianism. However, these events also demonstrate that this path is very difficult and not fast. It took Belarusians 26 years of Lukashenka's uninterrupted rule to eventually "wake up" and begin to defend their "natural rights".

Events in Belarus should also show the authoritarian leaders of other post-Soviet countries the limits of their power.

Surely, in our countries it is relatively easy to hold on to the existing power. However, up to a certain time. If, at the same time, stable democratic institutions are not formed (albeit gradually), including the institutions of power change, then these are:

1. a) very harmful for the country's development prospects.
2. b) dangerous for the half-monarchs who have sat on the thrones themselves.

Problems can be driven into the depths, but not indefinitely. The more persistently the problems are ignored today, the more difficult it will be to solve them in the future, the more acute the future conflicts and crises will be.

**“Problems can be driven into the depths,  
but not indefinitely.”**

Although, for the most “tough” authoritarian leaders, the “Belarusian lesson” will be that:

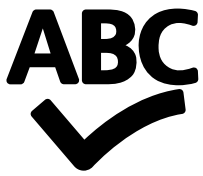
1. a) under no circumstances should alternative candidates with at least some chances of winning be allowed before the elections (Lukashenka “by mistake” allowed Tikhanovskaya, now he is paying the price).
2. b) any even hints of protests should be strictly suppressed (the Belarusian protests were not “suppressed” in the first days, so they expanded).
3. c) it is necessary to close all alternative sources of information, including social networks.
4. d) no concessions should be made and so on.

Finally, one more lesson for the post-Soviet space: the forces of revenge of the Russian (Soviet) empire are still strong and are always ready to take advantage of the internal problems of the newly independent states.

“At the same time, the elites need to finally understand that these problems are mostly created by themselves – the inability to give up even a fraction of their power and their private interests.”

The nations and future generations are paying the price for the egoism and narrow-mindedness of the elites.

*This material has been prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change - from the Borderland to the Steppes Project. The opinions expressed in the article do not reflect the position of the editorial board or donor.*



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