

Traitor-hunt and the Inauguration Debate. What made the State-run TV's headlines.

Monitoring of State TV Narratives in Belarus

(21/09/2020 – 27/09/2020)

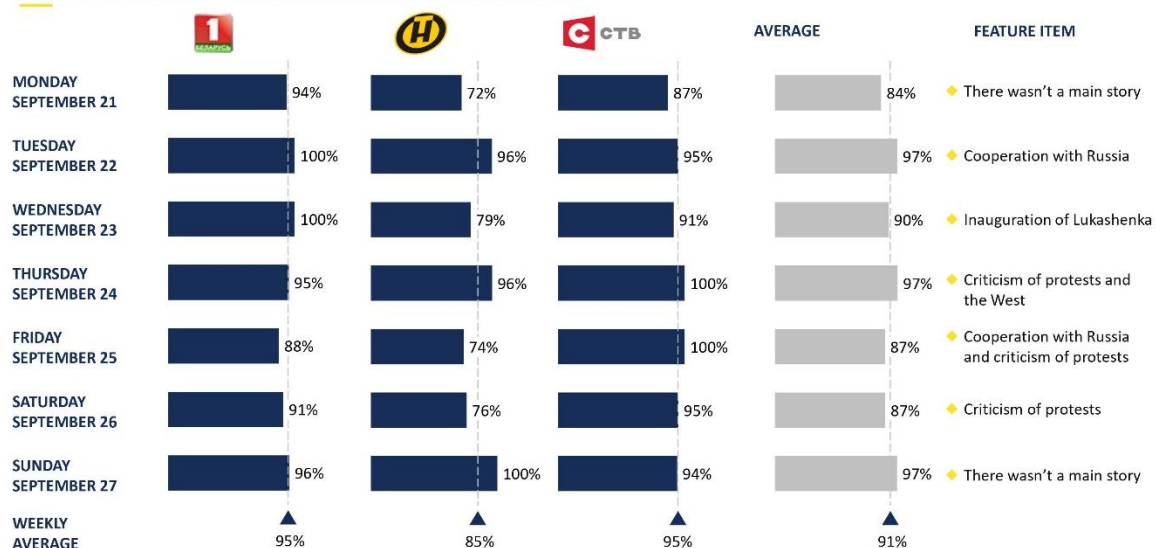
The purpose of this monitoring is to study how the Belarusian state conveys its ideological narrative. The most important mechanism for conveying its narrative is the evening broadcast. Then the informational function of media is complemented, and sometimes replaced by, the broadcasting of official ideological messages. We monitor the outputs of the Agency of the Television News (ATN), which prepares the news broadcasts for the **Belarus-1** channel ("Panorama" and Sunday's "Main Airtime"), the channel **ONT** ("Our News", "Saturday's Edition" and "Contours"), and the channel **STV** ("24 Hour News" and "The Week").

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sudden inauguration ceremony brought to the fore the personalism agenda of consolidation around Lukashenka. One of the main topics was the polemic with the opponents about the format of the ceremony itself. The saturation of the airtime with ideological stories still exceeded 90%.

THE SUDDEN INAUGURATION CEREMONY BROUGHT TO THE FORE THE PERSONALISM AGENDA OF CONSOLIDATION AROUND LUKASHENKA

THE SHARE OF STORIES WITH STRONGLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE*



*STRONGLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE - one or more key ideas that define the content of a news story (e.g., the inadmissibility of destabilizing the political situation).

The role of the main foreign ally was firmly vested into Russia — orientation towards financial, economic and military-political support from the Russian Federation. While under the military topic the priority was clearly given to the might of the Russian armed forces, in the economic sphere, on the contrary, the TV emphasized the special importance of Belarus for the Russian regions.

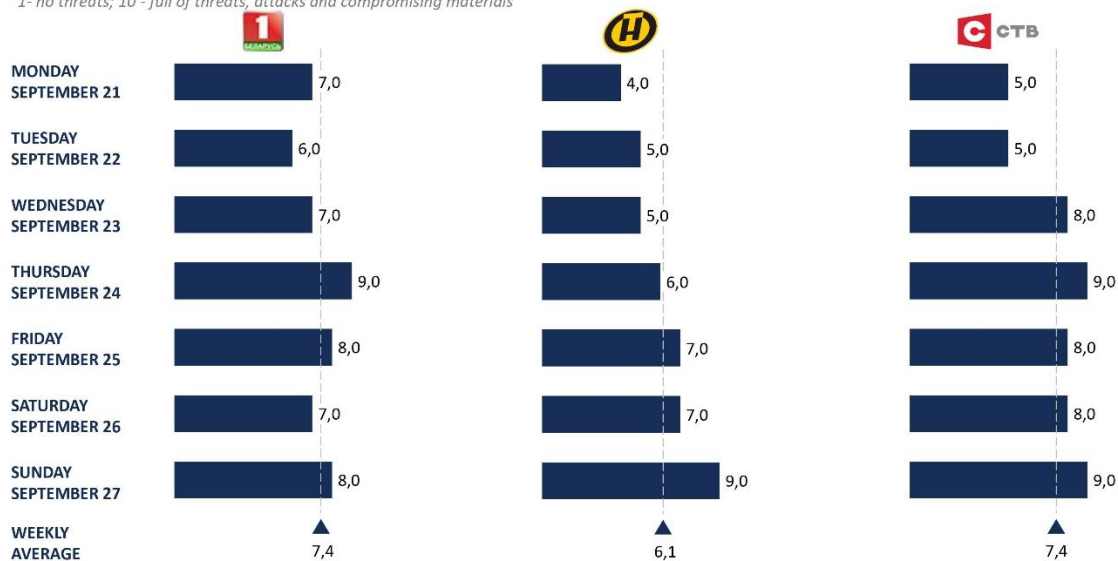
The main task in the undermining the protests was trying to prove that the protests are fading, people are getting tired of them, the speeches are aimless and, at the same time, are orchestrated externally.

Key narratives can be found in [APPENDIX 1](#)

■ CONFLICTOGENITY WAS REMAINED HIGH - THE USUAL AGGRESSIVE VOCABULARY AND PERSONAL ATTACKS WERE AMPLIFIED BY THE RHETORIC OF IDENTIFYING "TRAITORS AND ENEMIES"

CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX*

1- no threats; 10 - full of threats, attacks and compromising materials

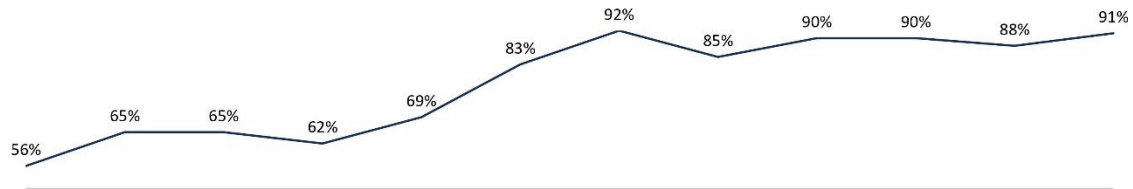


*CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX - an indicator measuring the percentage of news stories that intensify political tension and conflicts (through accusations and threats towards opponents, equating protests to violence, and similar).

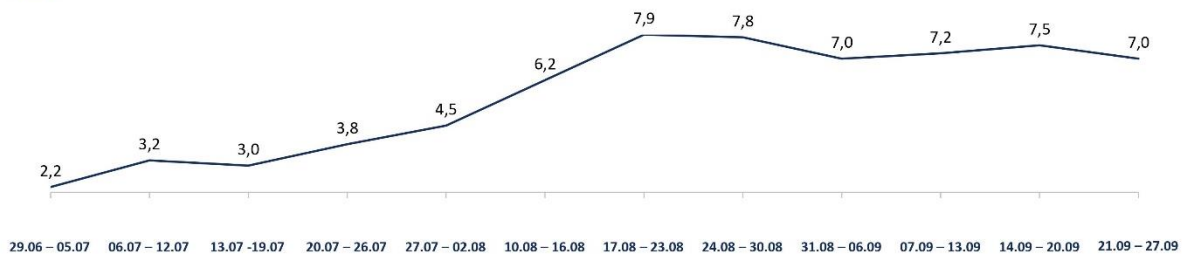
State-run TV actively challenged the peaceful nature of the protest. The usual aggressive vocabulary and personal attacks were amplified by the rhetoric of identifying "traitors and enemies", for example, the ex-head of the Kupala Theater and former diplomat Pavel Latushko.

CONFLICTOGENITY AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS REMAINED AT THE HIGH LEVEL

AVERAGE SHARE OF STORIES WITH STRONGLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE, by weeks



AVERAGE CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX, by weeks

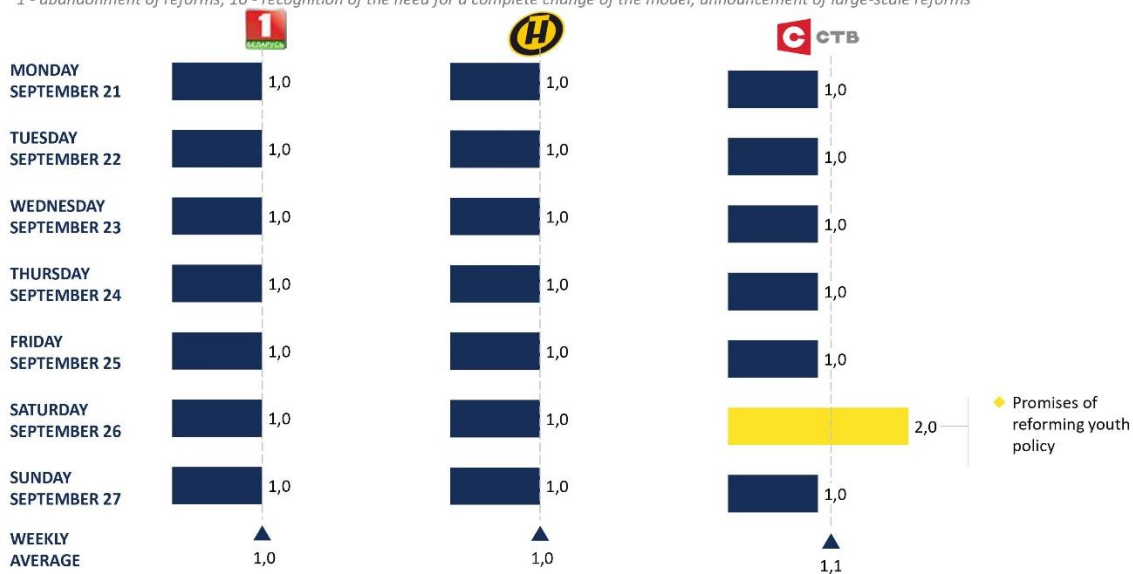


Reformist attitudes this week manifested themselves in promises of changes in youth policy.

REFORMIST ATTITUDES THIS WEEK MANIFESTED THEMSELVES IN PROMISES OF CHANGES IN YOUTH POLICY

REFORM-ORIENTATION INDEX*

1 - abandonment of reforms; 10 - recognition of the need for a complete change of the model, announcement of large-scale reforms



There was no significant manifestation of pluralism — matching the videos of protest rallies with the accompanying negative comments remains the main way of covering key political messages.

THERE WAS NO SIGNIFICANT MANIFESTATION OF PLURALISM — MATCHING THE VIDEOS OF PROTEST RALLIES WITH THE NEGATIVE COMMENTS REMAINS THE MAIN WAY OF COVERING POLITICAL MESSAGES

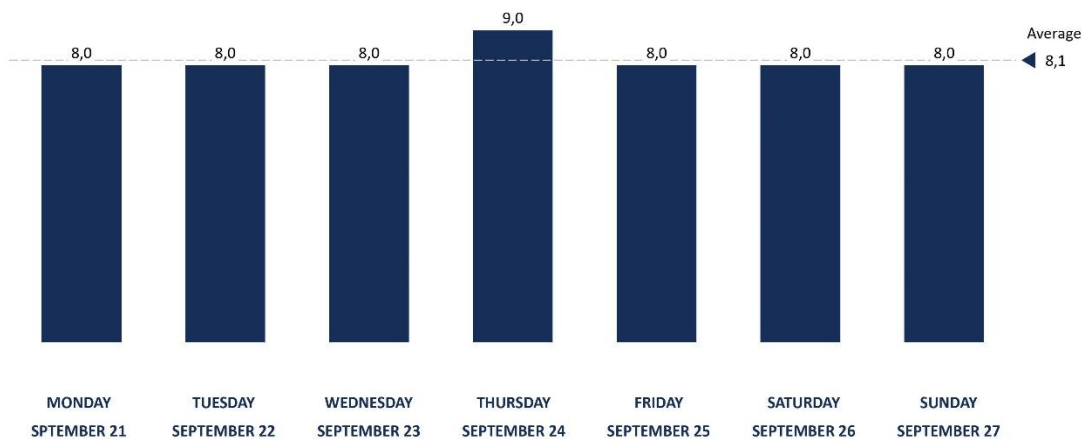


*PLURALISM INDEX - an indicator evaluating the share of critical reports and news stories citing opposing, critical, and other opinions alternative to the official rhetoric.

The level of uniformity of information policy remained extremely high, which manifested itself in the exact reproduction of the key narratives on each channel.

THE LEVEL OF UNIFORMITY OF INFORMATION POLICY REMAINED EXTREMELY HIGH, WHICH MANIFESTED ITSELF IN THE EXACT REPRODUCTION OF THE KEY NARRATIVES ON EACH CHANNEL

THE LEVEL OF INFORMATION POLICY COORDINATION*



*THE LEVEL OF INFORMATION POLICY COORDINATION – an indicator evaluating coordination across the air. This is inferred from news stories having similar structures, as well as the duplication of opinions, positions and ideologemes among state TV channels.

The project “Monitoring of State TV Narratives in Belarus” is implemented by Sense Analytics in partnership with Press Club Belarus and with the support of [Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung](#). The author of the weekly reports is Maxim Stefanovich, the editor and coordinator of the project is Artyom Shraibman. The authors of the project thank the SATIO team for their help with illustrating the monitoring results.

To see the full version of the report in Russian [click here](#).

APPENDIX 1

KEY NARRATIVES

PERSONALISM

- “The inauguration of the President was not secretive, as some media and telegram channels were quick to report. It's actually strange to hear this, because the route itself showed feels free and secure in this country. The President rode along the main avenues of Minsk: along Independence Avenue (this is most symbolic), then Victory Avenue, the one paying tribute in its name to those who once saved our land. And this is also symbolic — the President was victorious. And this is a victory for our entire country, for each of us who made their choice in favor of peace, development and independence.”
- “Belarusians have done it. We are great. And our president is really the best politician of our time. Easily in the top five globally.”
- “On September 21, the President dismissed and appointed the new leadership of the all medical schools of the country. The head of state was deeply shaken by a terrible story: an MD at a state medical institution put political views before the decision to help a child. Turns out, some people have so little moral fiber.”
- “As always during the important moments, the President has people by his side. Those who know how to create and pay tribute, those who work for the good of both the country and the future generations. About 700 people were invited to the ceremony, including the high-ranking officials, deputies of the House of Representatives and members of the Council of the Republic, heads of state bodies and agencies, local authorities, national media, scholars, cultural figures and athletes.”

ALL STAKES ON THE LAW ENFORCEMENT, COMPLIANT AUTHORITIES AND LOYAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

- “There were no empty seats in the hockey arena, neither in the stands nor on the dance floor. A total of more than 4 thousand people — initiative and talented, athletic and strong. This is the talent pool of the future of Belarus! The young people are ready to stand for the interests of a strong, independent young state.”
- “The goal of the Belarusian Women's Union is precisely about family, childhood, motherhood. Today, it seems, the issue of patriotic education of our youth, our girls, our mothers, gains special prominence.”
- “Those who maintain public order and peace have no time off service. Duty calls. And this hard work, along with male police officers, is also done by women in uniform. They are not used to giving in to difficulties. Someone will say that the policing is not a woman's business, but the key figure of our next story begs to differ.”
- Before the servicemen took their oath of loyalty to the Belarusian people and the President, Alyaxandr Lukashenka himself addresses the people in uniform. In many ways, it was gratitude — for saving the country.”

SOVIET HISTORY NARRATIVE

- “The largest youth social and political organization of the Soviet Union was performing important tasks. It was by the effort of the Komsomol members, that post-war Minsk would be rebuilt, cities and villages would develop, new industrial companies would be set up. The BRYU can be considered the present-day successor of that organization.”
- “Many families still keep the small red folder with a photograph and a small statement sheet of monthly contributions. And, of course, the Komsomol membership card. But there is much more to it – all kept in the memory. The Komsomol was not just certain age (they would accept those aged 14 to 28), it was the age of romance, age of accomplishment. Construction brigades would erect entire cities — Soligorsk, Novopolotsk, Novolukoml. This was the Belarusian kind of BAM pioneers — they were building the future.”

SUPPORT FROM RUSSIA

- “Belarus and Russia intend to protect not only the interests of our people, not only the common market, but also the joint borders. The joint exercises “Slavic Brotherhood” continue.”
- “It is difficult for us to imagine not having local cheese or milk at all, only imported dairy with a long shelf life and frozen meat, while this is the way the Far East lives, so they come to agree first of all on the most delicious items on the agenda.”
- “Since there is pressure coming from the West, the closest ally lends a shoulder to lean on. That ally being the Federation. That is, theoretically, Minsk has 85 allies. Russia is not just Moscow, but primarily the regions.”
- “Regional plane of cooperation between Belarus and Russia. This is what will be discussed at different levels in the coming days. The coming week will see the launch of a Forum of the regions of the two countries. The governors are already arriving. The meeting in Minsk is a good reason for “reviewing” the common projects. Among them are the new ideas and the new development of what has proven efficient.”
- “Cooperation with the Leningrad Region is now getting a new perspective. For one, against the backdrop of the sanctions policy of the Baltic States, the Leningrad port of Ust-Luga may very well become a replacement for Klaipeda.”

SUPPORT FROM CHINA

- “All-weather friendship — such a high level of relations between Belarus and China underlines the stability of relations in politics, diplomacy and economy.”
- “The countries are united by long-term mutually beneficial cooperation and strong friendship. And the personal friendship of the two leaders has become the most convincing guarantee for businessmen. Chinese capital is present in virtually every sector of the Belarusian economy.”
- “As for our partners in the Celestial Empire, everything is very clear here: China resolutely opposes the interference of external forces in the internal affairs of Belarus. At the same time, the attitude of our partner in many aspects is indicative and an example for many. When some are allegedly trying to help in words, others come through with real actions. And this year has proven once again: a friend in need is a friend indeed. When China faced the unknown virus,

Belarus was the first to provide support: we sent a humanitarian shipment of everything necessary. And when the wave of the pandemic touched us, China was sure to return the favor.”

UNDERMINING THE PROTESTS

- “The “peaceful” protests are turning into outright attacks with clear confrontation. Why, what for? Who “orders” this violence? This is worth thinking about. After all, one should not forget the inevitability of the liability.”
- “Maybe one shouldn’t become a puppet in the hands of the protest masterminds? Their goal, as practice shows, is not stability, independence and development at all, but rather separation, change of spheres of influence and “running in” the technologies. It is very likely that our situation is a sort of exercise with fictitious leaders endowed with non-existent qualities before a big game in a different theater of information and combat operations.”
- “Meanwhile, the young ladies of the capital city seem to have got tired of aimless walking around or have lost their coordinator.”
- “The street-wandering is clearly fading, the ladies have drawn in their claws, and the residents of the capital are getting tired of having their weekends ruined.”
- “Peace and tranquility in the Belarusian land, apparently, is, proverbially, something we don’t know we got till it’s gone. And it would be too late to cry. Those who have been aimlessly wandering the streets for several weekends are hardly thinking about this now.
- “These people have developed a habit of annoying the others and disrupting the usual course of life of the townspeople on weekends.”
- “It is obvious that the task is not even to overthrow Lukashenka, but simply to destroy the country. Divide it, tear it apart and, of course, create a hot conflict pocket on the western borders of Russia. I mean, I can clearly see this from the plans and strategic documents that the American think tanks have come up with, that the meaning of all this is, of course, not in power within Belarus alone. There is Kaliningrad, which must be surrounded and strangled. It is necessary to tighten this Baltic-and-Black Sea alliance, where Poland will end up the dominant power with revived imperial ambitions to return as masters to the Belarusian lands and annex Ukraine as well.”
- “For residents of the capital and other cities, the weekend was again ruined by the so-called protesters. Their rallies are getting ever smaller.”
- “While previously Sunday marches were agitated and perky, now they are boring and dull.”
- “A wandering troupe of the Telegram-driven sect comes out, blocks traffic, wanders aimlessly and shouts loudly.”
- “Doing everything possible for the country to return to calm and peaceful life — the way it was before the protests. More and more Belarusians consider it their duty not only to argue their position, but also to be proactive. A group of like-minded people in Minsk, for example, created sort of “anti-vandal militia”. People bought cans of spray-paint and in their free time they go out to paint over the protest symbols. This is not only a political gesture — this is how Minsk residents help the utilities companies and the motorists. Advocates of change have recently taken a particular interest in the markings, while tampering with it creates real danger of accidents.”

- “I’ll go out into the street. Shout a few slogans, maybe pelt the riot police. To make our life better.” This is not an asylum break, this is another street rally ordered by the general contractor of the Belarusian sorry-excuse-of-a-Maidan. Foreign telegram channels got all aggravated because of the inauguration of the President, so they sent the youth forth — some five thousand maybe.”
- “You look at some telegram channels and it seems like a completely different reality. Which, fortunately, did not prevent the Belarusians from making their choice in favor of peace and tranquility. And one can also add — the choice in favor of social security.”
- “Already in the morning, radical Telegram channels called to take to the streets at 18:00. They posted instruction on how to attack the law enforcement and block the city districts. And although only a small fraction of the audience heeded these calls, their aggressive behavior caused to inconvenience Minsk residents. People randomly tried to paralyze traffic in the streets and avenues in different parts of the capital city, blocked the roadway, and held up public transport. The calls on the Telegram come from abroad, while people will be held liable here. Blocking the roads entails both administrative and criminal liability (in case of major damage or accidental death — up to 10 years of imprisonment).”
- “Does anyone still believe the protests are peaceful? The riots are clearly planned and aimed only at destabilizing the situation. Last night the police hotline got many calls with complaints about the protesters.
- “This annoyance felt by Minsk residents is understandable. The opposition has become basically an organized criminal group coordinated from abroad. Telegram channels teach it how to make Molotov cocktails, to resist the police, to persecute those with dissenting opinions. If Telegram suddenly becomes silent, the Nexta-Jugend literally don't know what to do.”
- “One can talk endlessly about the damage done. In the first days alone, it cost the city half a million rubles. Each other rally now is chipping away at the finance, the nerves of the townspeople, and the budget of the city. Go figure out the aftermath of the blocked roads or shutdown businesses. The street protests are frankly not numerous, but even a few people blocking the road can cause a lot of trouble for a city with two million inhabitants.”
- “September 23 marked a decisive end of the story of the Belarusian election period. The President took office in accordance with the law and the Constitution. And the masters of the local lemming pack got hysterical. They threw their few supporters into the final and decisive battle.”

ANTI-WEST NARRATIVES

- “There are many clearly dubious issues. Including calls that we hear. Some, not without certain flair, or even being “mematic”, such as the nomination of Tsikhanouskaya for the Nobel Peace Prize. But one shouldn’t get misguided by the way the West glamorizes the Belarusian opposition. If Tsikhanouskaya receives the Nobel Prize, this will not be the beginning of a revolution in Belarus. This will be the end of the Nobel Prize! It will be a shame, not an honor.”
- “The wind of revolutionary changes in Belarus comes precisely from the West”.

- “Blatant interference in the internal affairs of Belarus — this is the assessment of the attempts at anti-Belarusian sanctions in the European Parliament given by international experts. Despite the pressure from some deputies, the EU has not yet been able to come to a common opinion on Belarus.”
- “Look at us and remember — they will do the same to you once you start squandering and lower your guard. The West is a raging pit-bull — it will go for your throat. Brothers, remember what happened to Yugoslavia. Don't let them do the same to you.”
- “Today the head of state also responded to those fantasizing and writing on the Internet. There were some outright ridiculous theories about the supposedly “secretive” inauguration of the Belarusian president. Especially many reproaches came from the western neighbor, Poland. About not being given notice in advance, not being informed properly — and not invited! Generally speaking, one can only wonder why the West is getting so riled up about it, given the current situation, in particular, their attitude towards our sovereignty, plus constant nagging about how we should go about our own lives. Alyaxandr Lukashenka made it clear to the advisers from abroad that the affairs of our state concern only our state.”
- “Today, the head of European diplomacy Josep Borrell, who a few weeks ago confused Belarus with Ukraine, made another statement that raised an eyebrow, saying that yesterday's ceremony was not legitimate enough. What does it even mean? Is this a new term in big diplomacy? Or, according to European officials, the inauguration would have been legitimate if the Polish ambassador was attending? ”
- “The experts see it strange, to put it mildly, that President Zelensky spoke quite harshly about what is happening in Minsk. The closest neighbor of Belarus, apparently, has forgotten who stood by them in difficult times, or maybe they are not allowed to remember.”
- “Some people were quick to call the inauguration a big secret for everyone. Our western neighbors were especially indignant. I would ask them not to generalize — if it came as a surprise to you, it does not mean that it did to everyone else. Although feeling offended about not being invited to the celebration is understandable — what else could explain such a reaction?”
- “You may not know it, but the current president of Poland was accused of rigging the elections, using administrative leverage and the state media in his own interests.”

COVID-19 SECOND WAVE

- “Meanwhile, being carried away by other people's affairs, Europe runs the risk of missing a domestic problem. The number of Covid-19 cases is on the rise.”
- “Following Madrid, the London authorities intend to introduce new restrictions. And this is unlikely to go well with the public. This is why in spring Belarus decided to take a softer approach. Wearing masks, observing the distancing requirements, hand washing — everything presented as strong recommendations. The companies did not shut down. Whenever possible, people were sent off to work from home. It was all handled locally.”

- "All these rallies, all this walking around, in the squares and along the avenues, of course, has an impact on the epidemiology, all of them are not wearing masks, all of them rubbing shoulders... This is what causes further spread of the infection of our society."
- "All countries that quarantined during spring, and then relaxed the lockdown, faced the fact that the coronavirus is reaping a harvest it missed earlier. The Swedes are most at ease: their government, like the Belarusian one, introduced virtually no restrictions. They managed with a set of anti-epidemic recommendations: keeping the distance, taking care of the elderly, refraining from mass events. Compared to the peaks in June, the number of cases has decreased tenfold."
- "A possible increase in the new coronavirus cases may be caused by no social distancing, which is now not uncommon in Minsk on weekends."

LASHING OUT AT TSIKHANOUSAKAYA

- "Men tell stories of how stupid their ex was. This is ever more true in case of the ex-presidential candidate Tsikhanouskaya. Having fled from Belarus, she has been touring Europe and broadcasting her pleas."
- "She shows all the signs of a mentally unstable person. She has all the signs of incipient depression. This is actually an unhappy woman with all this being forced on her. I don't understand why she is still being a part of all this, because by what we can deduce from her gestures, her verbal and non-verbal signs, it is clear that she does not want this, that she is being controlled, that she is pulled by the strings. She only voices what she is told."