

# It's witch-hunt de novo. The state-run TV drives the wedge deeper into the society

## Monitoring of State TV Narratives in Belarus

(14/09/2020 – 20/09/2020)

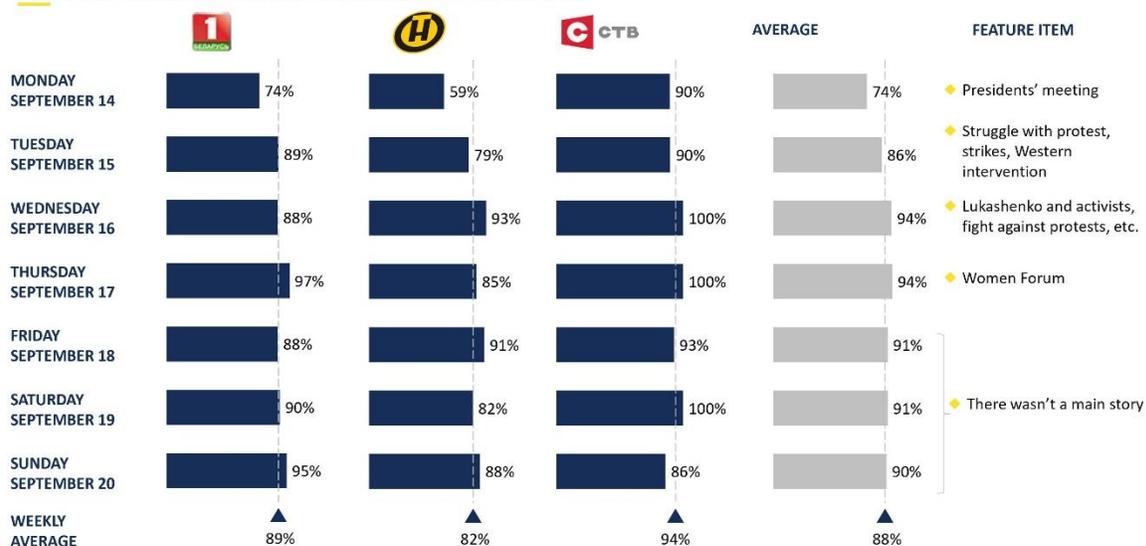
The purpose of this monitoring is to study how the Belarusian state conveys its ideological narrative. The most important mechanism for conveying its narrative is the evening broadcast. Then the informational function of media is complemented, and sometimes replaced by, the broadcasting of official ideological 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 meeting of Aliaksandr Lukashenka with the political lieutenants on September 16 brought the already declining intensity of the information war to its earlier highs. The main technique was the juxtaposition of the rallies of the supporters of the government — “patriots who are not indifferent to the fate of the country”, and the rallies of its opponents, whose image was persistently reduced to criminal and incomprehensible agenda, not forgetting to emphasize the Western hand in all this.

#### ■ THE MEETING OF ALIAKSANDR LUKASHENKA WITH THE POLITICAL LIEUTENANTS ON SEPTEMBER 16 BROUGHT THE ALREADY DECLINING INTENSITY OF THE INFORMATION WAR TO ITS EARLIER HIGHS

THE SHARE OF STORIES WITH STRONGLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE\*



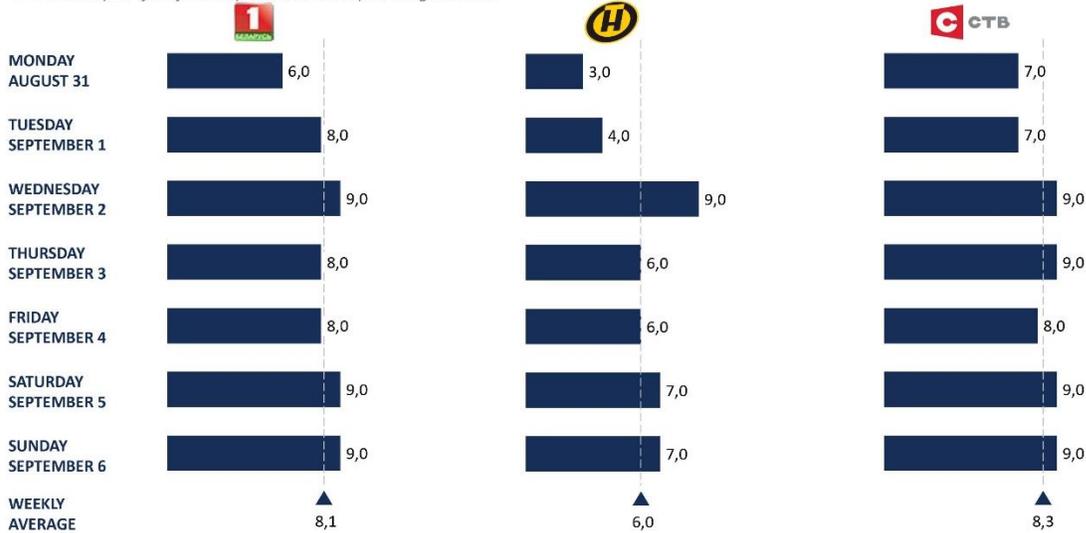
\*STRONGLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE - one or more key ideas that define the content of a news story (e.g., the inadmissibility of destabilizing the political situation).

STV can be called the “champion” of ideological influence. This is expressed, in particular, in the numerous editorials for undermining the opponents (comments by Azarenok, Pustovoy, Mukovozchik).

**CONFLICTOGENITY WAS CLOSE TO ITS MAXIMUM LEVELS - THE MAIN CONTENT OF THE STORIES WAS ONE-SIDED DENUNCIATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OPPONENTS**

**CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX\***

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

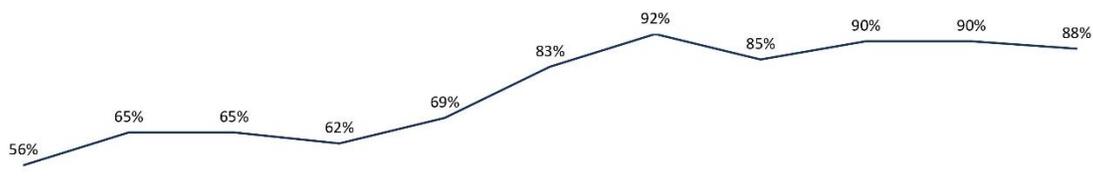


\*CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX - an indicator measuring the percentage of news stories that intensify political tension and conflicts (through accusations and threats towards opponents, equating protests to violence, and similar).

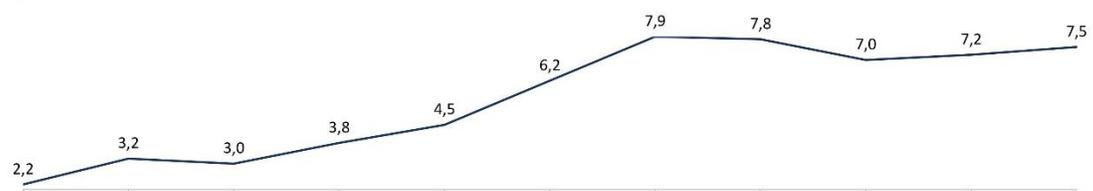
Against the background of the talks in Sochi, Russian support and special relations between the two countries remained an important narrative. State TV channels expressed concern about the likelihood of the protests spilling over from Belarus to Russia.

**CONFLICTOGENITY AND IDEOLOGICAL BIAS REMAINED AT THE SAME LEVEL – THE INFORMATION WAR POLICY REMAINS UNCHANGED**

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



**AVERAGE CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX, by weeks**



29.06 – 05.07 06.07 – 12.07 13.07 – 19.07 20.07 – 26.07 27.07 – 02.08 10.08 – 16.08 17.08 – 23.08 24.08 – 30.08 31.08 – 06.09 07.09 – 13.09 14.09 – 20.09

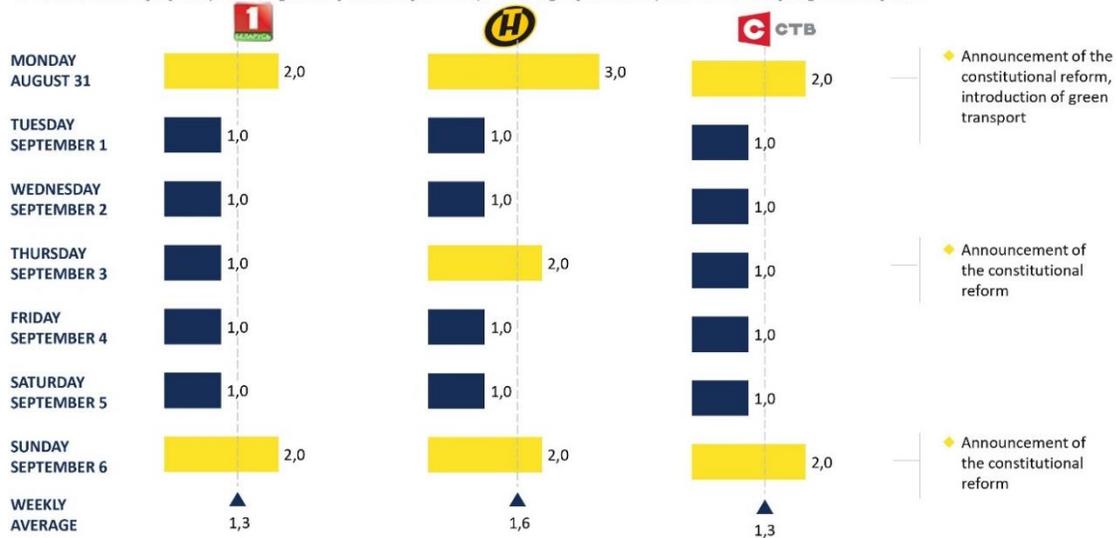
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**ANOTHER WEEK WAS ACCOMPANIED BY PERIODIC PROMISES OF MANAGED REFORMS, BUT WITHOUT SPECIFICS**

**REFORM-ORIENTATION INDEX\***

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



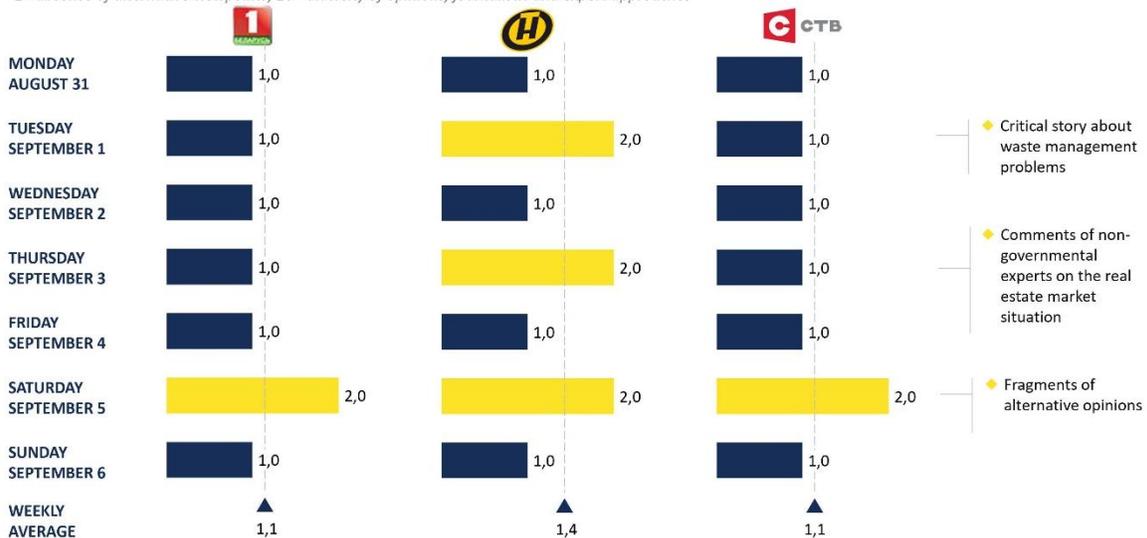
\*REFORM-ORIENTATION INDEX – an indicator evaluating the presence of news stories with reformatory proposals or decisions.

Minimal degree of reformism manifested itself in the announcements of future reforms, but without specific content.

**DURING THE NEGATIVE COVERAGE OF THE PROTEST ACTIONS, THE STATE CHANNELS SHOW FRAGMENTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS OF THESE ACTIONS**

**PLURALISM INDEX\***

1 - absence of alternative viewpoints; 10 - diversity of opinions, journalistic and expert approaches

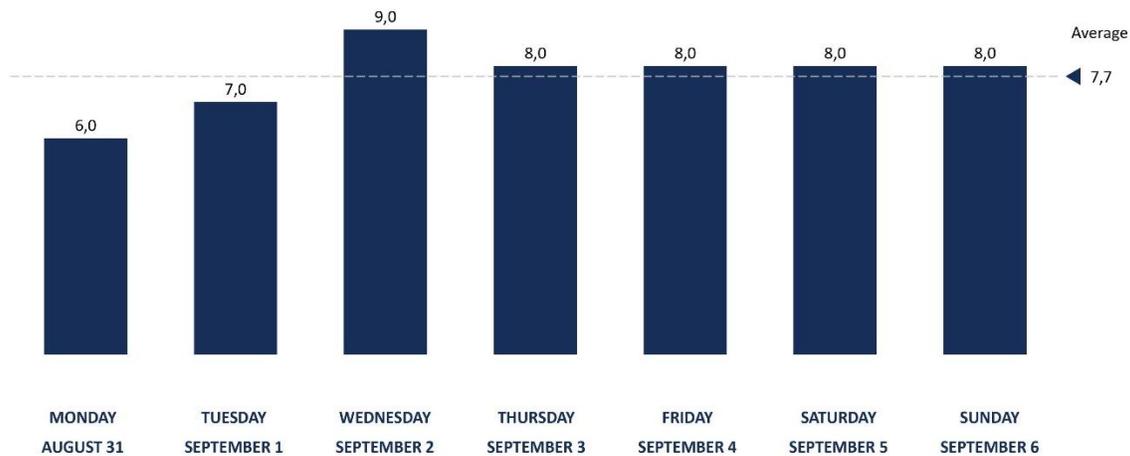


\*PLURALISM INDEX - an indicator evaluating the share of critical reports and news stories citing opposing, critical, and other opinions alternative to the official rhetoric.

The lack of pluralism and the nearly-maximum level of synchronization of the information agenda of the state-run channels remained unchanged.

## THE LEVEL OF UNIFORMITY IN IDEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES WAS MAINTAINED AT MAXIMUM LEVEL AND THE BASIC SET OF NARRATIVES AND STORIES WAS BROADCAST ON ALL CHANNELS

### 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 AND PRO-GOVERNMENT RALLIES

- “The atmosphere was simply amazing. The venue was packed to the brim with flags, as if showing that Belarus has so many different women. Strong. Brave. They are all professionals in their fields. And so beautiful.”
- “The energy was fascinating. And it’s couldn’t have been otherwise, for there was love in the air, not anger and hatred and banshee wails. The venue was filled with people of loving hearts and strong spirit.”
- “On Tuesday, Alexander Lukashenko gathered the political lieutenants of the country — almost 300 representatives of the regions, ministries, enterprises — these people are seasoned and, of course, reliable”.
- “The Belarusians not indifferent to the fate of their country organized a rally carrying the national flag a little less than an hour ago. The route chosen was symbolic — from Independence Square to the Victory Monument. Young people, elderly people — all with active citizenship stand. This is why they come together to defend peace both in the streets and in their homes. And, of course, to disallow any discord in the society. And, more importantly, to disallow the misrepresentation of true symbols, values and ideals.”
- “A cordial, sincere and beautiful forum was held today in Minsk. The most driven women of the country gathered in the large venue of the country — “Minsk-Arena”. According to the most conservative estimates, they were at least 13 thousand strong. They all had one thing in common — love for Belarus, its values and the desire to live in their own country — peaceful, calm and stable, be able to raise children and be confident about the future. Thousands of representatives of the fair sex from different parts of the country, in solidarity with those now doing everything to preserve these values, and therefore the united Belarus.”
- “Honest, emotional, sincere, and touching. In a word, so typically Belarusian. There has never been such a women's forum in Belarus, but there are so many stories to be told, and so many women to be heard that even the largest concert venue in the country was barely enough. Not all foreign stars managed to sell out Minsk Arena, but tonight there were no vacant seats.”
- “And another gift not only for the participants of the forum, but for all of us, was the premiere of the song “You don’t give up the one you love.”

### UNDERMINING THE PROTESTS

- “In place of Mount Brocken, the streets of Minsk have become the venue for weekly Saturday Sabbaths. The witches are back.”
- “This week Belarus saw the ever diminishing protest rallies. The fading momentum of the calls of the Polish propaganda only managed to mobilize an unpretentious women's march on Saturday.”

- “And now to something which, by definition, is outside of politics, but which they are trying to politically engage. Religion — lately one gets to hear the comments of certain clergy members against the background of the events taking place in Belarus.”
- “Those who now call themselves “the incredible” were briefed from Poland to go march towards the presidential residence and the residential area in the city center. The Western curators drew up a route and even indicated personal addresses of the public officials implying that people should, so to speak, pay a visit. And as usual, all this was presented as “peaceful” protests. Moreover, every step of the “people going for a walk” was clearly coordinated.”
- “The foreign calls to take to the streets mobilized mostly the teenagers and those under 30. All they did was loiter. Climbing the roofs of storage garages, the canopies of the underground passages. And they constantly provoked the police. And they even sprayed gas in the eyes of the law enforcement officers.”
- “For a month now, normal people have been robbed of their weekends. This time it was the March of Heroes. I mean, the only way to get called a hero is to self-proclaim. Even though making sense of these basket cases is a thankless task, let’s figure out what’s what. For several days, the Warsaw office was silent about where to dispatch its sect. The so-called women’s march took place on Saturday. Although secretin stances of it looked more like Walpurgisnacht.”
- “On September 13, the enforcers, who were lying low for a month, resurfaced. A gang with baseball bats was detained. There were also cases of car tires piled up in front of patrol vehicles, attempts to block the traffic. There were looking for clashes, and there were some cases of it happening.”
- “Belarus, our country, found itself on the edge, on the rift between the Western and Eastern civilizations. What is the distinctive feature of this so-called our revolution? This might sound like a broken record, but the distinctive feature is that there were no domestic reasons: neither social nor political. What happened was a first-ever attempt of a Telegram revolution, now followed by a “diplomatic war”.
- “When looking into the cases, the police get the feeling that most people in the crowd do not even know what they are protesting against. They hear the call — they take to the streets. Or to do some trolling of the police or military officers — I mean, this might go unnoticed in the big crowd — that’s what the haters are counting on.”
- State procurement webpage, the Belarusian Commodity Exchange webpage are down, next are the state channels, the tax and banking systems. This is what cyber-guerrillas’ are threatening the government with today. How does it look in an IT-country which has a Hi-Tech Park and has created all but enabling conditions? It looks bad. From all points of view. It damages the image: IT in Belarus is business, people come here for preferential treatment, not to “play revolution”. It damages the economy: greater instability in this area means less business.”
- “The place at the center of the lessons of history today is the Museum of the Great Patriotic War, for Belarusians it is a temple of memory that makes them cherish peace. Makes them understand the cost of the Great Victory, and realize what future generations must do so that such events never happen again. Therefore, the very thought of the uselessness of this memorial museum, which today is casually posted on the Internet by the social justice warriors, is blasphemous.”

- “The organizers of this party get an “F” for their unprecedented stupidity. I mean, their “playlist” borrows heavily from the football fans chants, and some of those, for example, “Let go!”, go back to the times of the Soviet Union.”
- “This is nothing but a violent mood swing of pregnant highschoolers denied their favorite dessert. With such opposition, Alyaksandr Lukashenka has nothing to worry about for another 70 years. I mean, it would take them this long to get their chants straight, apparently. They are absolutely hopeless. And I have a feeling that the people behind this are not much brighter than Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, now also known as the “teleprompter woman”, since, when on her own, she cannot even make two sentences in a row to make sense...”
- “Revelations of a traitor. This was the gist of the another video by the Russian blogger Yuri Doud released on September 18. It featured Stepan Putilo, emigrant and provocateur of public events.”
- “Today there was another so-called Women's March held in the capital city. According to the organizers' plans, it was to be most flashy, literally. But, apparently, something went wrong. Therefore, they resorted to their strong voices, strong language and mischief, like “accidentally” tripping our operator. Why do the se women have so much anger and aggression? After all, their destiny is to be the house keepers.”
- “A few words about the rules of conduct at rallies, so as not to stay unnoticed. And most importantly, do not forget to bring children, because socialization should start when still in the womb. The pattern is quite simple — whatever happens, just cream and and provoke, scream and provoke. And, of course, the best defense is a good offense. This is what Saturday’s Women's March was all about. A faint flicker, not more. What will the girls come up with next time, who will be the provocateur and who, will they target? I mean, just walking around is a bit boring. And they are girls, after all, they don’t have to make up their minds about anything.”
- “I believe that everyone who brings children and uses them as a shield during the political rallies is a criminal, they should be brought to justice. They exploit their children for his own benefit. It is forbidden. No country in the world should permit this. Children cannot be a shield or a cover for political demonstrations — children are sacred. Parents should be tried and fined for bringing children to the demonstrations. And in case of repeated offences, stripped of parental rights. They do not deserve to be parents. Because for them children are a means to an end.”
- “You don’t give up the one you love; you don’t forget the one you love. Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, however, is getting forgotten.”
- “Violations of law and order on Sundays are already called a tradition. This tradition enjoys less and less support. After all, what kind of support can there be for something so destructive?”
- “But for the protest to look impressive it needs to be nicely packaged. At the most opportune moment, opinion leaders suddenly get expensive video equipment, have thousands of dollars to pay for fuel and arrange entire convoys of cars to daily drive around the cities and villages. There is a whole crew filming, editing and posting all this on their channels. Then the owners of the channels cross-post all this. Millions of views and it creates a sense of the whole country being on strike. This is what those behind the scenes are trying to achieve. Those who suddenly secured all these thousands (and maybe millions) of dollars

for equipment, wages and etc. They also achieved a sense of permissiveness and mass character. Business. Nothing personal".

## UNDERMINING THE STRIKES

- "They failed to destroy the Belarusian economy by means of making the state-owned companies go on strike. And this was, among other things, thanks to the workers done any country any good."
- "Calls to disrupt the production process at Belarusian companies did not resonate with the. "Grodno Azot", "Naftan", Mozyr Oil Refinery — foreign masterminds put a bet on the country's blue chips. However, the play failed."
- "First of all, the strikes will affect the most vulnerable categories of citizens, including those who are now getting free education, and then their first guaranteed job. The young professionals are also taken care of in terms of accommodation."
- "Oh, my dear oppositionists, you don't know the Belarusian people, they'd rather work and study, then go out and cripple the economy of their beloved country at your bidding."

## SUPPORT FROM RUSSIA

- "Every now and then there was a question — how does the Kremlin feel about what is happening in Belarus, the street rallies, the position of our western neighbors, Poland, Lithuania? Do they understand that today they are targeting the Belarusian system of power, and tomorrow, in case in collapses, Russia will be the new target? Thus, our countries have a common vision of the ongoing processes, they share their view, which means that, if necessary, we can count on mutual support."
- "Well, this is another message addressed to ill-wishers. Russia really really supported the Belarusian state in the post-electoral crisis period and this cannot be ignored. Unlike other neighbors, who spoke out unequivocally and continue to act accordingly in relation to the official Minsk, Russia chose not to interfere, and following the "do no harm" principle in, quite on the contrary, helped. Therefore, it is natural that the President of Belarus began his address with the words of gratitude."
- "Russia and Belarus will always lend each other a shoulder to lean on and provide all-round support, as befits the allies we are."
- "We are different, but we are the closest. We are independent, but we help each other in difficult situations. This is a touchstone of who is who on the political map of the world. The list of issues is very broad, the conversation behind closed doors lasted for several hours. There are only few presidents with whom Alyaksandr Lukashenka would speak for so long — this is also an indicator of the importance and strategic nature of the meeting."
- "Sochi is the warmest place in the largest country in the world. This is where Putin invited Lukashenko for a meeting. Quite symbolic — this is about warmer integration relations between Minsk and Moscow. Although, why more symbolism? During these difficult days Belarus got a clear and direct message: Moscow is by its side."

## ANTI-WEST NARRATIVES

- “There is no need to explain or remind to the Belarusians that Poles are good people and good neighbors. And Lithuanians are good neighbors and kind people. But the summer of 2020 also clearly showed that the leadership of these states is pursuing a policy hostile to the Republic of Belarus. Therefore, children should learn not only about Khatyn and the Lithuanian punishers, but also about the Podlasie villages and the executioner Romuald “Bury” Rice.
- “Russian YouTuber Yuri Doud displayed a keen interest in the tool of Polish propaganda. In fact, the Polish Telegram channel was presented to the Russian audience on the most popular YouTube –branded silver platter.”
- “Well, the Warsaw-Vilnius Blitzkrieg failed. In my opinion, it is not a secret for anyone that Warsaw has been lying in wait for a long time to make a move at Belarus, to somehow — if not all of it, then at least a part — not just annex it, but make it its satellite. And here is an interesting this, Warsaw itself is someone else’s satellite, and decided to get one for itself.”
- “One of the ex-presidential candidates is actively touring Lithuania and Poland, supporting the sanctions against Belarus and calling for international pressure on our country, and this is coming from a person who until recently was rooting for Belarus and wanted to be its leader. And this despite the fact that in Western states are the ones not treating the protesters with kids’ gloves. Water cannons, rubber bullets, pepper gas and violent arrests — well, same scenario, different country.”
- “Supporting the economy of Belarus (sic!) is Poland’s new populist tactics.”
- “Polish money promises are, in fact, Warsaw’s way of simply draining the Belarusian brains. One such case being the launch of a relocation program for IT companies. Apparently, they were jealous over our status of an IT-haven. And any hardworking and capable Belarusian will fit blend in perfectly in Poland. Who needs enemies with neighbors like this?”
- “The fact that the crisis in Belarus was organized by external forces is actually common knowledge. There are clear political interests covered with catchy slogans. How and why did we cross some of our neighbors? The most active players on the Belarusian field, as expected, are the closest western neighbors, Poland and Lithuania. The former has long been suffering from the Rzeczpospolita-withdrawal syndrome, while the phantom pains of the imperial grandeur of the times of Pilsudski haunt the polish “gentry”. But there is also a certain selfish interest in this.”
- “The Belarusians today strongly express their position against interference in the internal affairs of our country. Poland has been increasingly zealous lately, now and then supporting impostors from Belarusian politics. Gifts in the form of real estate in Warsaw to the ex-candidate, their own “Marshall Plan” for allegedly saving Belarus. All these actions are all geared to one purpose — to destabilize and undermine our country. Only it won’t work.”
- “The European Parliament is sort of a Special Olympics with an open mike for the alternatively gifted politicians.”
- “Nexta, funded and supervised by Western intelligence services, has set up a channel for the eastern neighbors. It even couldn’t have been bothered with mix-and-matching the content. It simply carbon-copied the guides for the coordination of the Belarusian protests. As in the case of Belarus, they suggest that the Russians should start fighting for change by going for walks, feeding pigeons and building chains of solidarity. Where? Wherever you want, says the Telegram channels. The cause for the civil action, according to the writers on

the Russian version of Nexta, is disagreement. With anything. Although, there are also specific options: one can do this to support the Belarusians, Khabarovsk residents, the famous Navalny, the lesser know Platoshkin and Sheremetyev, or just all the powerless and oppressed.”

- “Stepan is nothing more than a puppet with Washington, Prague, Warsaw and Vilnius pulling the strings. However, in the era of telegram-based anonymous post-truth, there are few real persons who owning up to their actions and taking responsibility. But there are plenty of puppets. This is, by and large, exactly what happened in interview, with two Internet personalities — the slightly older one and the younger one, but both equally teenager-faced — acting to someone else's cues.
- “The NATO tour of the Belarusian border continues. Poland, Lithuania and now Ukraine are happy to stage a military play in the framework of NATO exercises. Who needs enemies with neighbors like this?”

### **ASSISTANCE TO HASIDIC PILGRIMS**

- “More than a thousand pilgrims were stuck on the border with Ukraine — they were not allowed into Uman because of the COVID-19 situation. Belarus was ready to take people to their sacred places, but the politics got in the way again. Again, these decisions were covered with the coronavirus shroud.”
- “The large group of people will have to spend the night in these tents set up right on the ground. Here we see people cooking their meals on makeshift stoves with open fire. It is difficult to say how many days they will have to spend here in the open, facing no understanding on the part of the Ukrainians. But one thing is clear, the Belarusians come through for them.”
- “They are also running out of time, because the day after tomorrow the celebrations begin — they will last all weekend. And the Jews are still there — in the neutral zone — between Belarus and Ukraine. Kiev not only does not let them in, blaming it on the pandemic, but even put out military reinforcement. When it comes to this, people need help. The situation is personally supervised by the President of Belarus. The government was instructed to negotiate with the Ukrainian party the possibility of providing a green corridor.”

### **LIKELIHOOD OF THE COVID-19 SECOND WAVE**

- “Now, those who are still counting on at the revolution, which has already run out of steam, are not concerned with such “minor” issues as the health of the people. And the people themselves have dropped guard. Does this mean that they thus acknowledged that the way Belarus dealt with the pandemic was right? Once, against the background of constant talk about the second wave of COVID-19, they are not even a bit scared". "But every day we have up to 200 new cases. We won't even give you a hint of what mass events caused this increase in the incidence rate.”
- Our doctors remain "on the front line." Belarusian healthcare professionals are preparing for the next epidemic season. In addition to common respiratory diseases, there is still coronavirus to be reckoned with. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health, we observe a small growth, but growth still of the number of those infected with COVID-19.”

- “Moreover, new anti-records in the number of cases are registered in the countries where rallies with many thousands of participants happened. The picture is painfully familiar. And Belarus also sees the growing numbers. The dynamics, of course, are not the same as in Europe.”
- “In the spring, many talked about strict quarantine and social distancing. They were saying that this was the only way to contain the spread of COVID-19. Belarus did not take such tough measures and for this it got attacked on the independent media and Telegram channels. And today, when the second wave of the pandemic is crashing over the world and Europe, the very same media and Telegram channels urge people to take to the streets more actively. What about quarantine? No, this is no longer relevant, now there are new goals and objectives, so these rules can and should be neglected.”

## PATERNALISM

- “All these achievements in different spheres of our life are the result of decades of work. Yes, a quarter of a century is a minor speck on the scales of history, but during this time we have managed to create and develop a lot. Today Belarus is ranked high globally in terms of social development, education and well-being, but this was not always the case.”
- “The significance of the revival, in particular, of the rural areas and the agriculture is difficult to overestimate. This is a significant niche in the country's economy. This is our food security.”
- “The global economy is gradually reviving after the pandemic and prolonged stagnation. And many Belarusian companies took advantage of this.”
- “Glass instead of plastic. Belarus is building up the production of environmentally friendly food packaging.”
- “Thanks to government support, as well as the government's focus on various social benefits and guarantees, the number of large families has substantially increased. Large families receive various types of monetary assistance. This includes the allocation of the family allowance, which has been allocated to more than 500 families in the region, and the early use of family allowance funds.”
- “On a national scale, it is good when there are predictable and understandable conditions for doing business. Clear and understandable tax legislation. When law enforcement ensures the security of each citizen individually and the state as a whole. All these are difference facets of reliability”

## CRITICISM OF COLOR REVOLUTIONS

- “An example of how the Maidan affects the country and the fate of people. It is difficult to imagine that a company, which has been a strategic asset for Ukraine for decades, ends up shut down and destroyed in just a year. These are the consequences of color revolutions.”
- “The sign of victory is no new thing. Iran, "green revolution". By the way, they also had flower parades, also hand supporters wearing white and red. And all this was called "The March of Millions" — just like ours, it even hurts.”
- “Perhaps Sharp, being a scholar, conceived his manual for defense purposes. But it became a weapon. And Gene would spend years denying that he had created a non-violent

analogue of a nuclear bomb. And he proudly listed the countries defeated and destroyed by his invention.”

## LAMENTING THE BULLYING

- “Teachers are also receiving threats. A striking example is a case of a school principal in Minsk. She posted a video with words of gratitude to the police officers who ensured order at the polling station. The recording was edited and presented in a completely different way, and then, without exaggeration, the "hunt" for the teacher started. Her photos got posted up in the neighborhood. Some people got detained for that. One of them is a former student of this school. The Ministry of Internal Affairs once again reiterates — if someone is threatening violence, you should immediately save the information and turn to the police with it.”
- “Some channels encourage the audience to come up with threats and insults. The goal is simple — to leave people shaken, this is one of the elements of the technology of color revolutions. Only those behind it are far away, while the senders of the offensive messages are here. And, as we see, it is not hard for the police to find them.
- “Police have identified another author of the insulting messages sent to a policeman. The anonymous hooligan who insulted the police officer was a 17-year-old student. As the young culprit said himself, he was incited to attack the law enforcement officers this way by the destructive telegram channels. The young man's mobile phone contained numerous offensive messages sent to the country's officials.”
- “Recently, more than 250 employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and their relatives have already been subjected to threats, insults and slander. Intimidation takes various form: over the phone, in e-mails, there are flyers being posted. The Ministry of Internal Affairs noted that the it provides assistance and ensures the safety of the employees who receive clear threats.”