

Summoning the citizen militia. State-run TV preps the viewers for violent riot control

Monitoring of State TV Narratives in Belarus

(12/10/2020 – 18/10/2020)

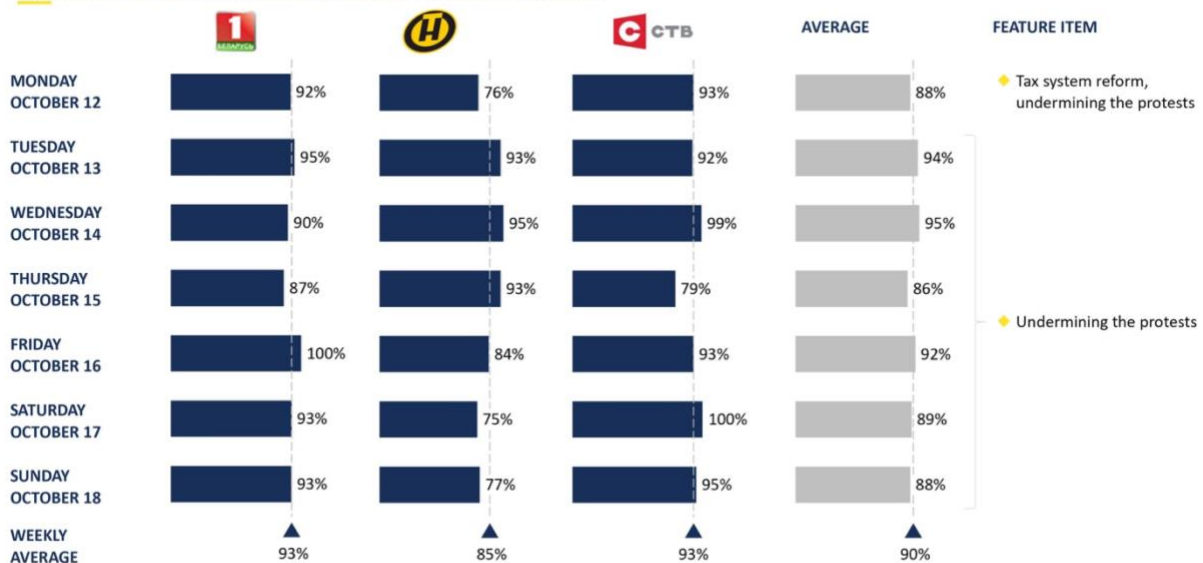
The purpose of this monitoring is to study how the Belarusian state conveys its ideological narrative. The most important mechanism for conveying its narrative is the evening broadcast. Then the informational function of media is complemented, and sometimes replaced by, the broadcasting of official ideological 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

State channels are increasingly making threats and insults to opponents. The key narrative was the radicalization of the protests, from which the state-run TV drew three conclusions: the protests are declining and becoming gang war, the authorities must put an end to them by any means, including the use of weapons, and citizen militia is a way to do it.

- THE KEY NARRATIVE WAS THE RADICALIZATION OF THE PROTESTS: THE PROTESTS ARE DECLINING AND BECOMING GANG WAR, THE AUTHORITIES MUST PUT AN END TO THEM BY ANY MEANS

THE SHARE OF STORIES WITH STRONGLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE*



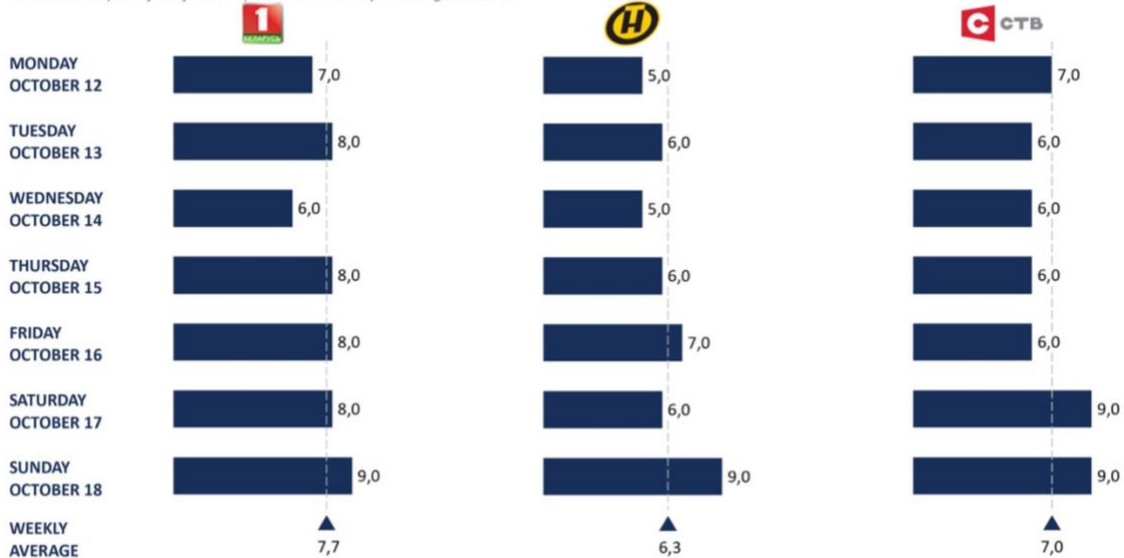
*STRONGLY ARTICULATED IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE - one or more key ideas that define the content of a news story (e.g., the inadmissibility of destabilizing the political situation).

The share of ideological stories exceeded 90%. The novelty of the week was the abundance of statements, warnings and interviews with representatives of power structures, mainly the top brass of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

- CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX DURING THE WEEK REMAINED AT THE SAME HIGH LEVEL. IN ADDITION TO KEY NARRATIVES, STATE CHANNELS DEPRIVED PARTICIPANTS OF PROTESTS OF SUBJECTIVITY

CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX*

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

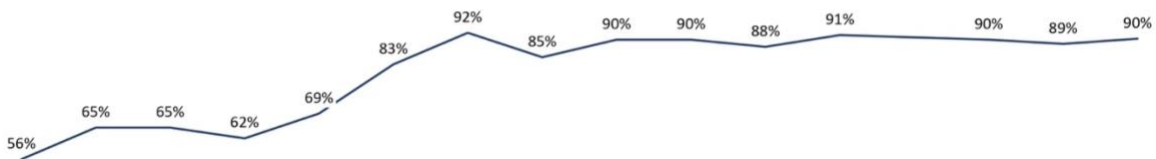


*CONFLICTOGENITY INDEX - an indicator measuring the percentage of news stories that intensify political tension and conflicts (through accusations and threats towards opponents, equating protests to violence, and similar).

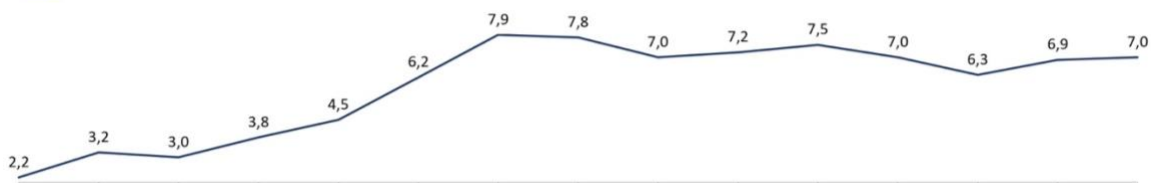
At the global level, discussions about global and regional instability were heard again, geopolitical explanations for internal political processes were sought.

- CONFLICTOGENITY INCREASED QUALITATIVELY DURING THE WEEK, QUANTITATIVELY THE SHARE OF AGGRESSIVE NARRATIVES REMAINS CONSISTENTLY HIGH

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 21.09 - 27.09 28.09 - 04.10 05.10 - 11.10 12.10 - 18.10

The post-Soviet arc of instability was discussed not only in the context of the events in Kyrgyzstan and Nagorno-Karabakh, but also with a view to the upcoming elections in Moldova and Georgia.

On the domestic agenda, laudatory coverage of pro-government actions and promotion of the personal role of Lukashenka continued. The problems in Europe and the world were juxtaposed with the positive Belarusian experience and the preparedness of domestic healthcare. Following this, there was also an increase in the portrayal of the state as a guardian.

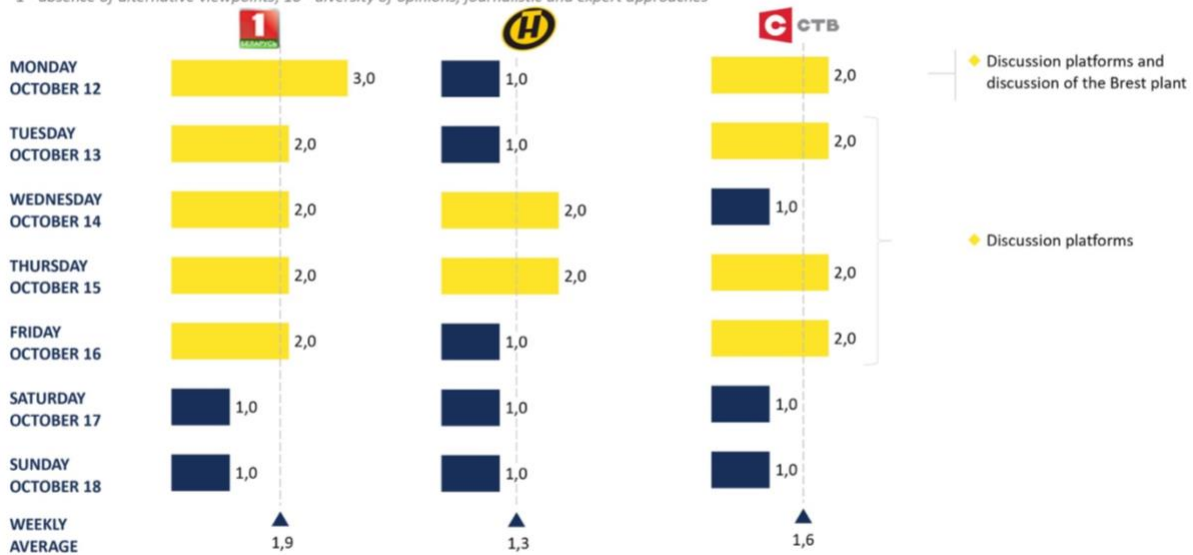
Key narratives can be found in [APPENDIX 1](#)

Demonstration of pluralism was again restricted to official discussion platforms, which were presented as the main format for discussing controversial issues. There was still no talk of dialogue on the protesters' agenda.

PLURALISM LEVEL WAS MAINTAINED BY THE TOPIC OF OFFICIAL DISCUSSION PLATFORMS, BUT THERE WAS STILL NO TALK OF DIALOGUE ON THE PROTESTERS' AGENDA.

PLURALISM INDEX*

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



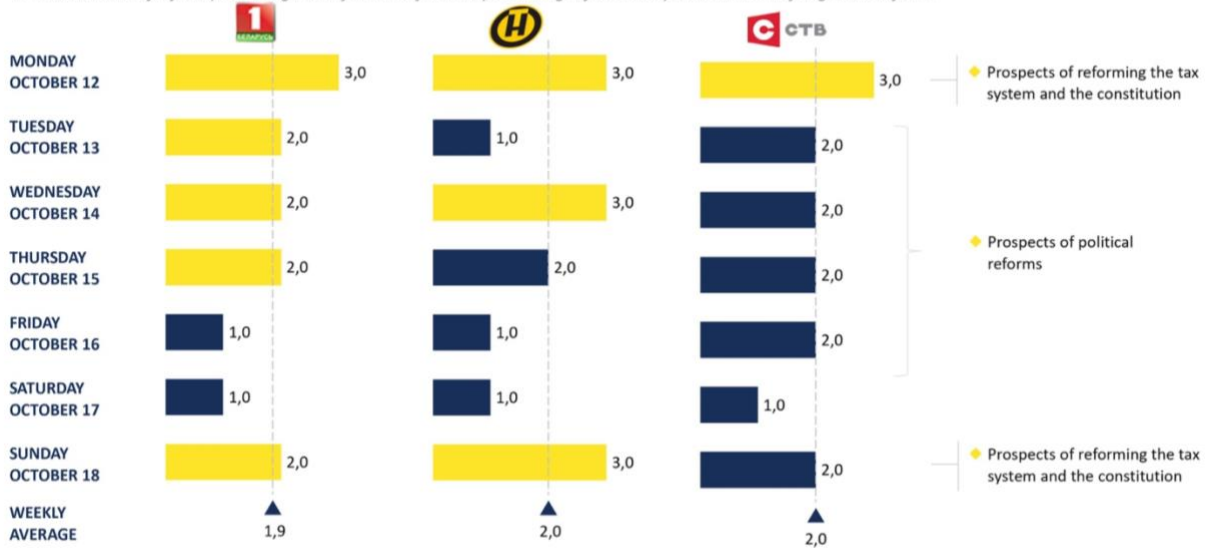
*PLURALISM INDEX - an indicator evaluating the share of critical reports and news stories citing opposing, critical, and other opinions alternative to the official rhetoric.

Talk about reforming the tax system and the constitution somewhat raised the level of reformist orientations.

TALK ABOUT REFORMING THE TAX SYSTEM AND THE CONSTITUTION SOMEWHAT RAISED THE LEVEL OF REFORMIST ORIENTATIONS

REFORM-ORIENTATION INDEX*

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

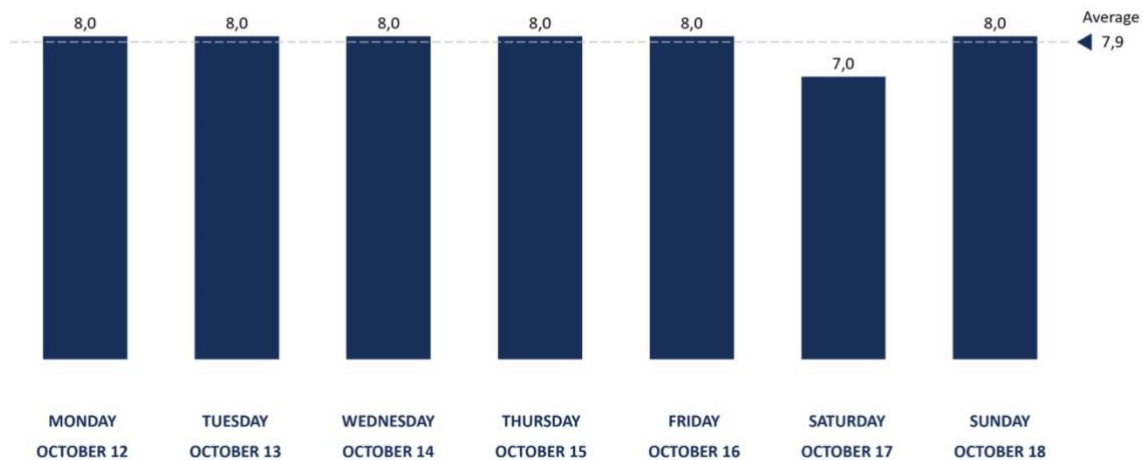


*REFORM-ORIENTATION INDEX – an indicator evaluating the presence of news stories with reformatory proposals or decisions.

There were no significant substantive differences in the information policy of the channels.

THERE WERE NO SIGNIFICANT SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES IN THE INFORMATION POLICY OF THE 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

ALL STAKES ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND WEAPON EMPLOYMENT

- “What can the state oppose to aggression in order to protect civilians? Only force if the crowd understands only the language of the force. The Ministry of Internal Affairs assured: the law enforcement and militarized police will not leave the streets and, if necessary, will use special equipment and combat weapons to ensure order and security.”
- “No one will tolerate gang violence and lawlessness on the streets of Minsk. You seem brave when you run in packs or on the Internet, you will flee like cowardly jackals. There will be no fascist youths in a country of historic guerrilla warfare. You will be running on scorched earth. You will run as fast as you had before. You have seen none of the Belarusian police yet. Water cannons will seem like urban fountains to you. You'd better wrap yourself in your toilet paper now and run.”
- “There is a growing threat primarily for the civilian dwellers. Completely innocent people may come under attack. But no one will endure this chaos anymore. The law enforcement has enough forces and means to restore order. If necessary, the security forces will respond, with a vengeance.”
- “As for the use of weapons, once again: being police officers, before using firearms, of course, we use all sorts of other methods. But if one has to do it, of course, it will be done. This will be done only in cases of attacks on our officers, in the event of someone trying to strike them with makeshift items. There is the law "On the Law Enforcement Agencies", everything is spelled out there, loud and clear. It's in public domain, one should read it carefully, if interested. A law enforcement officer of the Republic of Belarus today has quite broad powers, including the use of weapons.”
- “The revolution has only one method left — terror. They recon, they're tough and shouldn't be intimidated by the police ? And then someone reads off their smartphone: "Whoa, the police are resorting to their power of employing firearms?" — bleats the "independent" webpage. They sand there, silent, brooding. And then Stepanych said: ok, let them do it. We authorize it, the people do. Others nodded in agreement: about time. It's time to put things in order.”
- “From that day on, the very citizen militia units were mobilized in Minsk. That is, two strong men and one policeman to help them. A kind of local community initiative – everyone getting sick of the thugs blocking the roads and burning tires. In general, for some reason they believe that they own Minsk streets.”

UNDERMINING THE PROTESTS

- “It's 2020 and the gangs attempted a comeback. While before this weekend some believed in peaceful opposition rallies, now this myth has been completely dispelled. They don't need change. They need fights, mayhem and blood in our streets. Yesterday, the protesters did waste time with buildup. They came out to fight.”
- “One thing you should know, maniacs — we will hurt you in every city of Belarus, wherever you go. People here have zero tolerance for fascists.”

- “A few words about the dismissal of Sergei Dylevsky from Minsk Tractor Works. Under other circumstances, hardly anyone would have noticed his departure, but the leader of the plant's strike committee, a member of the presidium of the so-called coordinating council, reported that “they forced me to write a statement. Threatened my parents.” In fact, it turned out that all this was not merely ungrounded accusations and slander, but a carefully calculated move. As for the parents, they have been working at the factory for more than 15 years and, unlike their son, are respected hardworking workers, taking no part in their son's schemes, they did not go on strike. They keep working.”
- “Flaming tires, night clashes with the security officials and complete anarchy on the roads. For the first time in many years the residential areas, the very places where our children play, where our seniors walk, are unsafe.”
- “People are commuting to work, taking their children to schools, preschool, there might be an ambulances in a rush — Sunday marches caused another COVID-19 outbreak. But the bitter low-lives are taking revenge for the city not responding to their “take to the streets” calls. Al in all, it is now crystal clear where they would have driven the country.”
- “White-red-white flags, Molotov cocktails, spike strips, drugs — all that in the hands of the same people. An explosive mixture of Belarusian protests. And let's take a closer look at them, they are often minors. That is, they not yet eligible to vote, but old enough to do time.”
- “The backbone on the street riots are football fans, anarchists, people with criminal record. Even those leaving messages on the walls have a record. We have the figures. 15% of those detained (that is, one out of ten, even more) have been in trouble with the law. Among the provocateurs and coordinators — every second with a criminal record or various degrees.”
- “After all, it is already clear to every child: the rally is unauthorized, there will be detentions, which will be provoked by the participants themselves. And today rocks were thrown at law enforcement officers again. This is something stubbornly neglected by, as they call themselves, independent media. Their goal is to legalize the supposedly peaceful protest. And those who highlight the other side of the rally are traditionally bullied.”
- “The gist of this message is (and Tsikhanouskaya herself may very well be unaware of that) that an ultimatum is no dialogue. Quite the opposite, this is rejection of a compromise. An ultimatum is an admission that one of the possible scenarios for the opposition could be civil war. Division of the people with all the inevitable fallout.”

CONTROLLED DIALOGUE

- “Lawyers, representatives of political parties, teachers and deputies shared their views on the future of the country. Redistribution of the constitutional powers of the president, government, parliament and local authorities, changing the electoral system, expanding the circle of persons entitled to appeal to the Constitutional Court — a packed agenda for the specialists and experts to discuss.”
- “The radical behavior in the street coincided with the real movement of representatives of the civil dialogue to modernize the political and economic system of the country.”
- “Work continues on updating the Constitution — the basic law in our country is being prepared for amendments. The first expert meeting was held in Minsk. The dialogue

platform brought together representatives of various parties, public associations, deputies and senators."

- "The language of the street is not helpful in addressing the problems and contradictions, and disrupting public order by no means helps developing constructive ideas. There is a normal civilized way to resolve issues. It is offered by the authorities and, fortunately, preferred by the majority of Belarusians. Dialogue platforms continue to operate in different regions of the country."
- "Constitution of Belarus" is all-time hot on Google Trends in 2020. This is the first time in the past five years there is so much interest. This is related, of course, to the future changes to the Basic Law of the country. Dialogue platforms are now taking place across the country, gathering a wide variety of opinions from people. But not only about what the Constitution should be like. They also serve the venue for addressing the most important issues of concern to our society."

ANTI-WEST NARRATIVES

- "Let's live like Poland," — that is the dream of those who go out on Sunday walks. What will the "Polish paradise" turn out to be for Belarus? We have the opinion of the Polish political scientist Mateusz Piskorski. Poland has no own capital, by the way. And here I tell them all —if the color revolution in Belarus is now implemented in full, Belarus would not end up in Poland 2020, but in Poland of the 1990s with poverty, with the destruction of all social policy foundations, economic policy, with privatization, with the disposal of all state property and industry."
- "The results of the first round of parliamentary elections are being summed up in Lithuania. White Gloves, an organization of independent observers, claims that violations took place at every third polling station. And on the days of early voting, voters were offered from 5 to 10 euros per vote. The information has been sent to the police for investigation."
- "In Ukraine, about 80% of retired seniors live in poverty — their pension is below or at the level of the monetary poverty line. In general, 25% of the population live below the poverty line. This is the aftermath of the coup d'etat in Kiev in 2014, when the new government cut off economic ties with some partners in the CIS, and the losses from this were not offset by the income from trade with the EU."
- "Germany and NATO are secretly preparing for a nuclear war?! Against the backdrop of unrest, a very difficult presidential race in America is taking place. A state of emergency has been declared in Bangkok amid protests."
- "A brutal murder in the suburbs of Paris. France is shaken. Freedom of speech does not protect against radicalism."
- "The Ukrainian authorities, instead of addressing their own problems, took a liking to giving us unsolicited advice. While they should rather be taking care of their own unemployed. In Kiev, they decided to take a different path, to entice the Belarusian talent. A similar decision came to the mind of the Polish authorities, only there there was a demand for blue-collar workers from our country. One Belarusian housewife is not enough to fill the vacancy of the opposition leader. It looks like foreign curators are also keen to import protest moods."

- “Who's next in our region? I'll try to predict. On the last day of October, elections to the Georgian parliament will be held. Experts already fear that the new electoral system, which allows small parties to get seats, could lead to conflicts.”

PRO-GOVERNMENT ACTIVISM

- “Hello! I am a resident of Borisov. I ask you to convey our deep gratitude to all police officers for protecting us. Only with their protection can we somehow live here peacefully. — Hello! I am a girl and I want to thank you for being there: men and women of our police. Thank you very much!”
- “On the evening of October 14 in Minsk, a rally of people advocating the peace and prosperity of their country walked in an organized way from Independence Square to the Victory Monument. Belarusians continue their patriotic marathon in support of their country and for the preservation of everything that has been built by our shared labor over the past quarter of a century. ”
- “Belarusians are also united by the desire to live in a stable and safe world. It is for this that they voted on August 9 and that is why they are getting together to say “We stand for a united Belarus”. The motor rally with state flags will start tomorrow in Minsk at 10 am.”
- “You should just love and appreciate what one has. Cherish it. Recently, the rally for a united Belarus happened from Minsk to Vitebsk. Very peacefully — no aggression, no radical calls. For peace, for tranquility, for the future.”

PATERNALISM, DIRIGISME

- “Improvement of the Tax Code and digital transformation of the entire system. Topical issues of taxation were discussed today at the Palace of Independence. The logic of the president's demands in this area remains the same — taxation should be as comfortable as possible for people and business, while guaranteeing the implementation of the legitimate interests of the state.”
- “Alyaksandr Lukashenka started this meeting not with a narrow and specialized subject, but with the general and popular topic of the redistribution of powers. The head of state repeated what he had said more than once. He intends to delegate some of the functions and responsibilities of the executive branch.”
- “Talking about state support for motherhood, look at the number of benefits that we have today, at the duration of maternity leave, three years — not many country can afford such a long leave with the payment of state benefits. In fact, all legal instruments in various areas of the social sphere prioritize motherhood and childhood.”
- “We have a new preschool, a school with a swimming pool, and shops. A lot has been done for this large and beautiful district. It's new, there are many young families.”
- “The President visited the largest potato field, which, being part on the Tolochin cannery, is breaking records in terms of productivity. No wonder, an entire institute of the Academy of Sciences was working on it. Despite the difficult year, Belarus has ensured its food security.”
- “State regulation of prices for socially important goods has been extended in Belarus. This will help protect consumers, including during a pandemic.”

- “Construction does not stop, resources are being allocated to finance the construction of social houses. The construction industry of Belarus continues to develop dynamically in the current difficult conditions.”
- “Over the past five years, shipments from Belarus have grown by one third. Dairy products can be bought in 58 countries around the world. This is an absolute record. Manufacturers are also exploring new markets, outside Russia and the CIS.”
- “Belarus has always paid special attention to the development of the agro-industrial complex, which feeds the country. It is equally important to observe the technologies and to apply advanced developments. For example, a company in Pinsk began to producing sleeping pads for cows. And near Vitebsk, cows are being dressed in vests.”
- “Hospitals and clinics have been staffed with neurologists, anesthesiologists, ultrasound diagnostics doctors. In order to incentivize young people, comfortable conditions for life and work are being created in the region.”

STRESSING THE ROLE OF CSTO

- “A command-staff exercise with the CSTO peacekeeping forces “Indestructible Brotherhood - 2020” has begun in Belarus. It is noted that the exercise will be another measure of strategic deterrence in the difficult situation that is developing in the world and, in particular, in the post-Soviet countries. ”
- “This exercise is relevant. There are crisis points in the zone of contact with the CSTO countries. And, as the events of recent weeks show, no one is immune from the tragedy. Now the military have a common saying — “peace enforcement”. This is when the parties to the conflict understand that it is pointless to continue the war, but they cannot stop themselves without outside help. And the military, like no one else, know: to ensure peace, gunpowder really needs to be kept dry.”
- “Let me remind you that the chairman of the collective security council Vladimir Putin made it very clear in time that the CSTO is ready to provide any support to Belarus, if needed, of course.”

PREPAREDNESS OF BELARUS TO COVID-19 SECOND WAVE

- “Belarusian healthcare has proved more than once that it is able to cope with difficulties when our health and even our lives are at stake. A new surge of COVID-19 is on the way. Modern medical and diagnostic equipment has been purchased and is in operation, doctors have learned to work in emergency conditions, polyclinics have learned to triage the patients.”
- “The first wave of the pandemic showed that in a crisis, the EU countries can completely forget that the EU is, first of all, a union. The second wave of coronavirus will give it a second test.”
- “Once again, some Western countries are gradually tightening the regulations. But the introduction of a lockdown, which Europe used left and right in the spring as the main antidote to the pandemic and even urged others to do so, today is only considered to be the most nightmare. The politicians say frankly: if we close down again, the economy will

simply not survive. That is, the operating a tractor in the field, apparently, will also save Europe, which was once quite ironic about the words of the Belarusian leader”.