“Sacred sacrifice”. State-run TV had to find time away from Lukashenka’s interview to cover Bondarenko’s death.

Monitoring of State TV Narratives in Belarus
(09/11/2020 – 15/11/2020)

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 main event of the week, according to state-run TV, was Lukashenka's interview with the foreign media marked by his "traditional frankness" and "brilliant presentation."
However, the TV channels had but mention the death of Roman Bondarenko, accusing the opponents of the authorities of creating a “sacred sacrifice” out of the tragedy.

TV channels continued to experiment with forms of influence on viewers. This time, to promote the black-and-white picture of what is happening, they used a “This is not us!” video, where the protests were juxtaposed with positive images of stability, creativity and pro-government actions.

During the week, the state-run TV's orientation towards paternalism and state control increased. The greatest importance in this narrative was played by the trade unions executing presidential orders.
Another topic was the achievements of national healthcare. This issue was discussed in the context of the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and the desire to prevent the growth of protests among the medical workers. As the mandatory mask-wearing was introduced in Belarus, calls for compliance with sanitary and hygienic measures intensified.

Key narratives can be found in **APPENDIX 1**

The conflict potential index began to grow again (6.4 points). The TV channels carried on with the theme of the inevitability of punishment for protests and actively covered the proceedings against the protesters.
With rare exceptions (mention of a talk show with the participation of the BPF leader Kostusev), pluralism was missing from the news broadcasts.

**THE TV CHANNELS CARRIED ON WITH THE THEME OF THE INEVITABILITY OF PUNISHMENT FOR PROTESTS AND ACTIVELY COVERED THE PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THE PROTESTERS**

**CONFLICTOGENICITY INDEX**

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*CONFLICTOGENICITY 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).*

**APART FROM MENTIONING THE OPINION OF THE BPF LEADER KOSTUSEV ON THE ONT TALK SHOW, THERE WAS NO PLURALISM IN THE NEWS BROADCASTS**

**PLURALISM INDEX**

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

Fragment of the opinion of Grigory Kostusev
Reformism was again reduced to looking into the future, especially to the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly.

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.
CONTROLLED DIALOGUE

- “At the meeting, various ideas and the most pressing issues were brought up – everything that young men and women are concerned about. There was also a proposal to use the youth parliament as a communication channel”.
- “Listening to everyone and helping address the pressing issues: from common hurdles to those concerning the future of the country. Public reception offices were operational in the capital and regional centers today.”
- “10 proposals were received concerning the constitutional reform and party building, 9 initiatives related to increasing the role of local government and self-government. There were also proposals in the spheres of business and economics.”
- “Dialogue about the future of Belarus has been going on for a month in all regions of the country. The most sensible proposals, which can really positively affect our life for several years to come, will be discussed at the beginning of next year at the All-Belarusian People's Assembly. The socio-economic plan is always in the center. But this time it is not only about the economy. Social and political development of the country is already on the agenda.”
- “We are constantly demanding something from the state, we feel that it is obliged to do something for us, but we forget that the Constitution stipulates that citizens also have duties and obligations for the country too. Therefore, we must mutually find a compromise here, certain solutions that could unite us.”

UNDERMINING THE PROTESTERS, THE IDEA OF “SACRIFICE”

- “Yes, they violated the law, yes, the students are always cannon fodder of the Maidans — remember Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Yes, they are manipulated and they are oblivious not only to the experience of the past generations, also of that of their peers in Kiev and Bishkek. But this is our youth, it is worth fighting for.”
- “As if to serve the proof — the sudden death of a Minsk resident Roman Bondarenko in a street fight. We knew that they were looking for one to sacrifice. We knew that they were deliberately inciting hatred — from terrorizing the police on the Internet to clashes and blocking of transport. And now they have a victim.”
- “And while in the special forces, he definitely voted for the current president. In fact, he is an ideological rival. But how easily he became a hero.”
- “Roman Bondarenko served in military unit 3214. For some reason his fellow me are now called “weaklings”, “punishers”, “fascists”. That is, he is also a "punisher" — but somehow one of their own? He could have well been protecting the House of Government from the attacks and suppressing the protests in December 2010.”
- “The vile tongues of provocateurs easily move to call doctors to strike while there is the second wave of the pandemic rising all over the world.”
● “Who benefits from ignoring the great public dialogue? Why do those who call themselves opposition politicians keep their distance from constructive discussion? And by what methods are those who deal in destruction are trying to gain the mass for the protest.”
● “There will be a register of non-citizens, with passports bearing a note “the oppressor of the people”.
● “It seems that until recently the news feed of our country was made exclusively of the achievements and merits of the Belarusians — young and active, before whom all doors are open, and those already experienced. And it’s hard to believe that all this can turn into chaos. We all want to live in a stable and prosperous country. And everyone can contribute to its development not by destructive action, but by creative labor.”
● “During the years of independence Belarus has achieved a lot both economically and socially. This must be admitted, cherished and preserved. And fighting for the sake of fighting benefits only those who organize and feed it. In this case, as a rule, ordinary people suffer. This opinion was expressed to our channel by a well-known lawyer, Doctor of Political Sciences, coordinator of the Public Anti-Corruption Initiative movement Aleksey Binetskiy.”
● “The Zhlobin District Court found a 27-year-old young man guilty of desecration of the national flag.”
● “Political ultimatums and fantasies about a nationwide strike have predictably failed, so the aggressive minority is trying to capitalize on the growth of radicalism at rallies in the city. However, no surprise here — those who are leading these protests no longer hold back. To the applause of the highest ranking Polish and Baltic politicians, they openly, without hesitation, call for harassment, violence and even terrorist attacks.”
● “Blocking roads, riots and provocations. The scenario of Sunday rallies remains the same. As well as the core group of the participants: drunks and young people.”
● “Prosecutors have sent more than 100 criminal cases on mass disorders and participation in unauthorized rallies to courts — these are the figures for today. First of all, in this case, we are talking about the use of violence against the law enforcement, resistance to the police, hooliganism, use of Molotov cocktails.”

PATERNALISM, DIRIGISME
● “The Federation of Trade Unions, on behalf of the President, continues to control the prices of socially important goods in the country.”
● “I’ll say it as it is: if a business owner decides to play politics and shut down his company, the staff should have the opportunity and strength to say “no!” if it is more important for them to have something to eat at home. And what is unfair here? Staff should be able to stand for themselves, whether the private business likes it or not, it will be so.”
● “Due to the coronavirus, the Dozhinki celebrations in the Mogilev region, as well as throughout the country, were canceled. But the gifts still keep coming. Socially significant facilities were opened in Osipovichi.”
● “If we speak in a few words about what defines Belarus, this would be space, nuclear energy, information technology.”
● “Intelligent, space-faring and young nuclear country. These adjectives are behind the main achievements in the sovereign history of Belarus. We dream, set goals and achieve them. Under the ground, on land, in the sky and even beyond the Arctic Circle.”
● “And yet, the key issue of the meeting is specifically the relationship between employers and workers and the role of trade unions in this dialogue. Its primary organizations advocate ever more comfortable conditions for employees and a wider benefits package. And it seems logical and fair if it is the members of the trade union that will use these benefits, and not everyone by default. After all, everyone looks favorably at the, but opinions sometimes differ on duties and performance of important tasks.”
● “The plans for the next four years are to actively develop the agricultural business in Belarus. For this, a state support program will be launched.”

PREPAREDNESS TO COVID-19 SECOND WAVE, LOYALTY OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
● “Our dear doctors, I very well understand that you are a corporate, collegial, specific crowd. And that is why the appearance of a black sheep casts a bigger shadow on the entire herd. But be stronger, be more courageous. Smarter and more professional.”
● “There are many people among students who do not need any help. They themselves are ready to help in difficult times, and moreover, they do so. And not by fighting for abstract ideals, but extending real help where it matters most.”
● “As for our country, the situation is under control. This was confirmed today by the Deputy Prime Minister. There are no prerequisites for transferring schools to distance learning. There is enough personal protective equipment in medical institutions, and stocks are being replenished. The bed fund reserve has also been created.”
● “The epidemiological situation in the country is under control. There is sufficient bed capacity for the treatment of patients with the coronavirus infection. We also have enough lung ventilators —more than two thousand of them in Belarus.”

ALL STAKES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND WEAPON EMPLOYMENT
● “People of completely different ages and professions are enrolled in the ranks of citizen militia. There are already over 2 thousand such people in Grodno region alone. They are ready not only to do regular patrols, but also to help the police fight the people who are trying to destabilize the situation in the country. And not only in cities, but also in rural areas.”
● “Compensation for moral damage was spent on gifts for his own old school. A very unexpected surprise for the leadership and students of the Sidorovichi school came from the head of the Chechersk police unit, police colonel Vladimir Bukhavtsov. He donated a refrigerator and a microwave to the school.”
● “We merely warn you, dear terrorists. All your conspiratorial addresses are known. The chats that you use are known, all the tricks and stashes are known. You and your curators are known. We know what you did yesterday and plan to do tomorrow. If you were not arrested today, it is only because it is not practical yet. It is impossible to win a war against the state that protects its people.”
● “Do you like all this anger? The militia brigades have a lot on their hand to restore order. And often their raids end in brawls. We saw it ourselves. The couch warriors do not like encroachment on their so-called creativity.”
● “More and more often the 102 hotline receives calls with requests to the law enforcement to finally restore order on the streets of the Belarusian capital city.”

PERSONALISM
● “Colossal political experience, traditional frankness of the president, audience of tens of millions of people and more than 130 years of journalism experience between the six of them.”
● “The thing is that in front of the camera a person should be as concentrated as possible, thinking only about business, and not about himself — his mood or state of health. So in this sense, Aliaxandr Lukashenka performs brilliantly.”
● “A big conversation between the number 1 politician of Belarus and the leading political observers of the quintet of countries was, as expected, not only about politics, and very frank. Redivision of the world and literally war against competitors are the background and conditions against which our countries live, work and defend the national interests. Each week brings up new challenges — whether it be a sudden death in Minsk, thousands of deaths in the Caucasus or a turning point in Moldova, which is becoming a boiling pot too.”

ANTI-WEST NARRATIVES
● "In Ukraine, the situation is close to catastrophic. This is not just some common Joe’s assessment, but that of the Minister of Health. Nearly 10 thousand new cases are registered here a day."
● “And where they made a choice in favor of a weak, liberal state, everything fell apart. Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia. Belarus, Russia and Georgia are holding on, there are elections in Moldova today, and tomorrow we will see how strong the national project is. But, there is a silver lining. Those who most actively fan the fire of foreign conflicts and Maidans are now reaping their own fruit.”
● “It seems that for the Armenians it has become somewhat of a habit to resolve issues by means of devastation and chaos. The rebellious crowd, which several years ago named Pashinyan their leader and handed him the reins of government, are now as enthusiastically demanding his resignation.”
● “Marches, skirmishes and burning flags. The US election campaign continues to turn into intrigues and scandals." 
● “Poland was directly involved in destabilizing the situation in Belarus, calling it a struggle for democracy. But as soon as they got the same thing in their own country, they immediately radically changed the rhetoric. After all, protests are only tolerated in other countries, but not in Warsaw."
● “There is a word for it — undiplomatic conduct. However, the representatives of the land of lords probably forgot that the purpose of the British mission in Belarus is to maintain peace, and not to create discord. And even more so, not to partake in unauthorized rallies.”

PRO-GOVERNMENT ACTIVISM
● “This weekend was marked by another symbolic event, which is important from the point of view of the country’s future. Thousands of patriots who want to see Belarus prosperous and stable and are ready to develop it with their own labor, gathered at the Lipki airfield. The next motor rally "For United Belarus!” started from there.”
● “Center of Novopolotsk. Saturday morning. When the city was just waking up, those who decided to take part in the rally "For Belarus!" were making their way to the central square. They all have different background, but they have a lot in common.”
● “Yes, for the third rally, when it takes place, I will also take the Belarusian flag with me. When they ask me: "Which one?" I do not even know how to answer this one. Do we have so many state flags? The national flag is always the one, this is our Belarusian flag, with a Belarusian ornament, red and green. And to change it, I think it’s just ugly.”
● “Each of our rallies is some kind of expression of love for the motherland, expression of such creativity and gratitude to our president, our country. We want to have it back, the Belarus we all had before all these terrible events.”