

**Domestic election observation, civic society
and democratisation: international experience
and possibilities for Belarus**

by

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Introduction

Political regime in Belarus continues to raise interest among researchers and general public outside Belarus. The term “last dictatorship of Europe” used in respect of Belarus became almost a cliché in both academic and journalistic texts. This curious phenomenon of authoritarian reaction in Eastern Europe draws attention of Western scholars, who try to understand the puzzle of Belarusian situation. On the other hand, Belarusian society suffers from traditional post-Soviet orientation to the East and significant isolation from the West and the rest of the World especially in terms of culture, academic achievements, political practises etc. Thus, many achievements of non-Russian language academia, particularly in terms of democratisation remain unknown for Belarusian scholars as well as civil society members. Similarly, the experience of democratic activists around the world, which may be extremely useful for the Belarusian civic society, remains largely unknown to wider Belarusian public or academia and does not appear in public discussion on the topic of democratisation of Belarus.

One of the most prominent non-democratic features of Belarusian regime that was established in mid-90s were state elections, every one of which OSCE considered to be flawed from 1996 till nowadays. Belarusian regime uses the range of methods of falsifications on many different levels of election process. Still, the Belarusian civil society undertakes the task of monitoring elections in order to improve their transparency, or at least get the proofs of election fraud.

Thus, the main object of this paper is to get Belarusian public acquainted with the current view on domestic election observation among scholars around the world. It is important to underline, that the findings of these scholars were based on the analysis of many domestic election observation campaigns in various countries. In the paper, I try to put domestic election observation activities in the wider context and describe several theories and

ideas about it which Belarusian civic activists that want to engage in independent election monitoring in Belarus could find useful. The text also contains the suggestions made to the current and future election monitors in Belarus aiming to improve their chances to success. However these suggestions are only a personal opinion of the author and may be challenged and disputed. Thus another aim of this paper is to raise a debate or discussion on the future of domestic election observation in Belarus, its objectives, methods and direction.

1. Democratisation and democracy assistance in the last decades

In the last quarter of the XX century the world has witnessed what Samuel Huntington called the “Third Wave of Democratisation”. Starting off in the Southern Europe with the fall of right-wing autocracies in 1970s, this wave swept through regions of Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia triumphing with the fall of Socialist block including Soviet Union itself which gave the way for democratisation of Central and Eastern Europe.¹ As a result of this world-wide phenomenon, in the beginning of the XXI century about fifty-seven per cent of the world’s population now lives under sovereignties of democratic states, and more 140 out of almost 200 countries of the world orchestrate pluralistic elections.²

However, in the Post-Soviet area the wave dashed against the rock of autocratic regimes that overthrew short-lived democracies of early 1990s. As Vital Silitski describes it, the authoritarian reaction to the “coloured revolutions” in the former Soviet Republics created a new kind of regimes – “preemptive authoritarianism” which is characterised by preventive offenses on possible threats from democratic opposition, independent press, civil society and

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

² Eric Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy* (Washington, D.C. : Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 7–8.

international organisations engaged in promotion of democracy etc.³ Countries with such regimes, namely Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and some others formed what Silitski called “Authoritarian International” or authoritarian convergence i.e. the consolidation of surviving autocratic governments for the purpose of withstanding the wave of democratic transitions that occurred around the former Socialist bloc countries in the first half of 2000s.⁴ Despite the strength of authoritarian regimes that sprang under the hegemony of Kremlin, the civil society in these countries keeps on to the struggle for some democratic changes in their countries. The recent developments in Northern Africa and Middle East (Arab Spring) as well as parts of Asia (namely, Myanmar) are seen by some analysts as the rise of fourth wave of democratisation.⁵ The civic upheaval during the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2012 in Russia also gives hope that the trend will continue and will spread to the remaining autocracies of Eastern Europe including Belarus.

It is worth mentioning that the trend of democratisation in the last decades is directly correlated with the increased efforts of democracy assistance from the developed countries. The period of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s was significant for the creation of several governmental and intergovernmental organisations aimed at democratic promotion: the National Endowment for Democracy, an umbrella organisation that associates with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and International Republican Institute, the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights as an institution of Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance based in Stockholm and many others.

There were several reasons for such a turn in international politics. According to

³ Vitali Silitski, “‘Survival of the Fittest:’ Domestic and International Dimensions of the Authoritarian Reaction in the Former Soviet Union Following the Colored Revolutions,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, no. 4 (December 2010): 342, doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2010.10.007.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁵ Cristian C. Popescu, “Is There A Fourth Wave Of Democracy Or Not? An Evaluation Of The Latest Theories,” *The USV Annals of Economics and Public Administration* 12, no. 1(15) (2012): 36.

scholar Vikram K. Chand five significant factors contributed to this phenomenon (Table 1).

The first factor is that since the first stages of the “third wave of democratization” that is the fall of autocratic governments in Southern Europe in 1970s, the composition of the international organisations changed significantly as the democratic countries now represented increasing majority. Thus, the intergovernmental organisations became more encouraged for promotion of democracy and resisting the regression to authoritarianism.⁶

The second factor according to Vikram K. Chand was the end of the Cold War. This affected democracy promotion in two ways. First of all, the United States seized their support to several authoritarian regimes which they relied upon in their struggle against communism. Secondly, the collapsing Soviet Union was no longer able to support its own autocratic allies. For the United States democracy promotion was now a new issue of national and international security, as democratic regimes tend to be more predictable and peaceful.⁷

Another factor was strengthening of civil and political societies in countries around the globe, both democratic and non-democratic which was indicated by sharp increase in the quantity of the appeals regarding abuse of political rights to international organisation in the last decades of the XX century. Thus it became easier for domestic actors to gain international support for democratic changes.⁸ In addition, the development of new ways of mass communication, mobile phone networks, and internet including new media made the process of bringing issues of political oppression to worldwide attention even easier.

The fourth factor that influenced global shift towards more active democracy promotion was the change in theological position of the Catholic Church, which became especially evident after the II Vatican council. The Church found no longer acceptable to

⁶ Vikram K Chand, “Democratisation from the Outside in: Ngo and International Efforts to Promote Open Elections,” *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1997): 542, doi:10.1080/01436599714867.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 544–545.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 545.

support right-wing autocrats like Salazar or Franco, instead it underlined the importance of human rights and democracy. Thus, the visits of John Paul II, who condemned abuse of human rights and declared the Catholic Church to be the “guardian of freedom”, to countries such as Chile, Poland, Philippines and many other countries with significant Catholic minority caused a consolidation of democratically oriented forces in those countries.⁹ In addition, many domestic Catholic organisations around the world joined civic and political movements for democratization in their own countries, as will be shown later.

The last factor that Vikram K. Chand mentions is the changing understanding of state sovereignty. As the economic globalisation advanced and the states became more and more interconnected and integrated, the activities on democracy promotion, which previously would be considered the infringement of sovereignty, now became acceptable.¹⁰ Eric C. Bjornlund seconds Vikram Chand stating that international community agreed that national sovereignty should be used as an excuse to discard criticism of state political system.¹¹

Table 1. Five factors of increasing efforts in democracy promotion in the late XX century according to Vikram K. Chand.¹²

	Cause	Effect
1	Wave of democratisation which started in 1970s	Democratic countries now constituted a majority in intergovernmental organisations, which directed their activities to promotion of democracy
2	End of the Cold War	Withdrawal of US support to their non-democratic allies. Collapse of USSR and assistance to its authoritarian satellites.
3	Strengthening of civil and political societies	Increase of direct communication between local democratic activists and international audience
4	Theological stance of the Catholic Church that favoured human rights and democracy	The Church withdrew their support for the right-wing authoritarian regimes and at the same time advocated against violations of human rights and supported democratic movements throughout the globe.
5	Weakening value of traditional state sovereignty	Democracy promotion activities including the election observation and international support for domestic organisation became an accepted norm.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 546.

¹¹ Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 22.

¹² Chand, “Democratisation from the Outside In,” 543–546.

2. Elections within the context of democracy promotion

One of the strongest emphases within the democracy promotion movement was put on the conduct of elections in authoritarian, semi-authoritarian and transitional countries. Eric C. Bjornlund put the following quote from the seventh UN secretary general Kofi Annan – “While democracy must be more than free elections, it is also true... that it cannot be less”¹³. This quote indeed explains the reason for such a keen attention from the side of international community towards election, particularly in transitional countries: though for a state to be acknowledged as truly democratic, it should meet a number of criteria, such as the rule of law, the separation of powers, respect for civil liberties and human rights in general and so on, the regular organisation of some kind of elections where a genuine will of people can be manifested is one of the most basic prerequisites for a country to be considered democratic. Eric Bjornlund suggested five main reasons for such a strong emphasis of the international community on elections in democratising countries (Table 2).

The first of these reasons is mostly normative, that is – the most significant international agreements on human rights mention the right to periodic and genuine elections. For instance the Universal Declaration of Human Rights considers the will of people expressed in periodic and fair elections to be the source of authority in a state. Similarly, the right of a citizen to vote and be elected is specified in the International Covenant for Civic and Political Rights. Besides, the right to regular genuine elections by universal and equal suffrage and secret ballot is specified in many regional and national documents.¹⁴ Thus it can be concluded that the very principle of free and fair elections described above became accepted as a norm in most of the world’s countries, despite it often not being implemented in

¹³ Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

practice.

Another reason for close attention towards elections in transitional countries and new democracies is that the conduct of elections is correlated with the increase respect of certain civic and political rights.¹⁵ For instance, when elections are organised in a country, even more oppressive governments tend to loosen the authoritarian grip and try to respect rights of its citizens such as free speech or free assembly at least for some period. In many of autocracies that still try to mimic democracies, election period is the rare chance for the citizens of a country to become politically active without severe consequences.

The third reason for the importance of elections is that they usually lead to mobilisation of politically and civically active parts of the population. While in established democracies such a mobilisation does not usually cause deep changes in political environment of the country, in semi-authoritarian states, elections are often becoming the moment of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. This happened in Philippines, Chile, Poland, Yugoslavia and most recently in Ukraine and Georgia.¹⁶

One more factor that underlines the significance of elections in democratisation effort is that even in semi-authoritarian states, the elections provide the citizens with the opportunity of engagement in politics.¹⁷ This is particularly valuable chance in more oppressive regimes since this opportunity can be rather rare one.

Finally, if properly conducted, democratic elections create political system that is more stable, effective and accountable than the one present in autocratic state. The clearly defined rules of elections and leadership succession creates more stable situation in the

¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

country as compared to the struggles with no rules between various clans in the leading elite of an authoritarian state.

Table 2. Five reasons for the international emphasis on election according to Eric C. Bjornlund¹⁸

1	International law and international norms establish the right to “periodic and genuine elections”.
2	Elections reinforce respect for human rights.
3	Elections can catalyse political transitions.
4	Elections provide opportunities for citizen participation and political involvement.
5	Elections contribute to effective, accountable and stable government.

3. Rise of election observation

As significance of free and fair elections for democratisation became evident, the intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations engaged in democracy promotion made steps in ensuring that elections organised in a country can be considered as conforming to international norm for free and fair elections specified in Universal Declaration, ICCPR and other milestone documents. The international actors dedicated to the democratic assistance thus became actively involved in election monitoring. Such organisation keenly engaged in primarily transitional elections through organisation of election monitoring groups, supplying and education observers, offering practical and logistical assistance and passing conclusion on whether the plebiscite could be counted as free, fair and transparent.¹⁹

There are also several objective reasons for the growth of international election monitoring activities (Table 3). The first one was already stated above, that is – the massive wave of democratisation that made democratic elections a prerequisite of international recognition. The second reason was that the new states that emerged from the break-up of

¹⁸ Ibid., 35.
¹⁹ Neil Nevitte and Santiago A. Canton, “The Role of Domestic Observers,” *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 3 (1997): 47, doi:10.1353/jod.1997.0046.

colonial empires or socialist federations sought international help to conduct legitimate elections. In some of the democratising states, it was the opposition and civil society that requested the presence of international election observers, as they did not trust that the government in power would respect international norms regarding the elections. Finally there are some of the regimes trying to become legitimate or assert their legitimacy if questioned. Such governments turn to the help of the international observers who can confirm on international and national level that the elections were in accordance with the international law and express the genuine will of the people.

Table 3. Reasons for the growth of international election monitoring according to Eric C. Bjornlund²⁰

1	International emphasis on democracy made free and fair elections precondition for international legitimacy
2	New post-authoritarian states seeking international assistance for organising elections according to the world practice
3	Request from the democratic opposition or civil society if the government in power cannot be trusted
4	Request from the government in power which desires to prove its legitimacy

Though election observation seems like a straightforward activity, it includes much more than just poll watching on the Election Day. Vikram K. Chand mentions following activities as part of election monitoring: “passive observation of electoral processes; pressure for changes in the electoral environment; verification of voter registration lists; balloting and the count; mediation between the government and opposition; the provision of technical assistance; and, in the most extreme cases, the actual administration of elections by outsiders”.²¹

Despite these activities being successful in bringing democratic changes around the world there are several flaws in current international practice of election observation (Table 4).

²⁰ Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 8.

²¹ Chand, “Democratisation from the Outside In,” 546.

First and the most important is that international elections often has unreasonably high expectations on elections and election monitoring believing them to be a panacea from non-democratic process, while in fact in certain circumstances, elections can exacerbate violence or provoke authoritarian crackdown. Another problem lies with the methodology since the Election Day receives much more attention than election process prior or after the E-day. Thus seemingly normative conduct of polling on E-day may still give flawed results, if the environment in the country is not democratic.²²

Another important issue, pointed out by several researchers is that quite often, economic, political and other interests of observers overweight the principal interest of promoting democracy. Judith Kelley argues that it's rather dubious that there is such thing as "neutral" election observers, as any election monitoring group has certain predispositions towards their mission.²³ This case is particularly important for post-Soviet space, since the Commonwealth of Independent States organised what Vital Silitski called "counter-observation" missions that were designed to counterweight the assessments of OSCE-ODIHR missions.²⁴

The fourth problem with the international election observation is that it attracts disproportionate amount of funds and media attention especially in comparison with the domestic observation and other grassroots activities which often are more efficient in democratic transformations of a country.²⁵

Finally, international election observation often fails to apply consistent standards and judges some elections superficially or in relative terms, thus undermining the hopes of

²² Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 13.

²³ Judith Kelley, "Election Observers and Their Biases," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 3 (2010): 168, doi:10.1353/jod.0.0173.

²⁴ Silitski, "The New Authoritarianism in the Former Soviet Union," 347–348.

²⁵ Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 13.

domestic democratically oriented groups for international assistance.

Table 4. Current flaws in the practise of international election observation according to Eric C. Bjornlund ²⁶

1	Unreasonably high expectations of elections and election monitoring in providing democratic transformation
2	Unreasonably high attention paid to activities connected with the E-day
3	Presence of interests and objectives other than democracy assistance among election observers
4	Disproportionate funding and attention towards international observers while neglecting domestic observers
5	Presence of inconsistency in judging the fairness of elections in various circumstances

4. Domestic observation: short term and long term effects

The idea of non-partisan election observation was originally met with scepticism within the international community oriented for democracy promotion. As was stated in the previous chapter, the international organisation diverted most of their funds and the media drew most of its attention towards international election observation activities while neglecting the action of domestic groups. Despite the spread of domestic election observation around the world from Philippines to Chile and from Zambia to Belarus, the very phenomenon remain largely understudied in academic circles and receives disproportionately little attention from the international community. However, after several successes of domestic monitoring groups, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisation extended their support towards domestic actors in election observation process.²⁷

Sharon F. Lean defines domestic election observation as the non-partisan monitoring of election by civic association in their home country. Similarly to the international observer, the domestic monitors assess the quality of conducted elections, at the same time they have no

²⁶ Ibid., 12–13.

²⁷ Nevitte and Canton, “The Role of Domestic Observers,” 47–48.

authority over election processes, neither they are involved in partisan struggles.²⁸

The last point is particularly important for impartiality is even more required from the domestic groups than from the international one, since the credibility of the former is questioned more often both by international and domestic actors.²⁹ This scepticism of activities of the domestic monitors forces them to conduct strictly neutral policy in order to be recognised. For instance some of the domestic election monitoring organisations have it specified in their statute, that their members may not be party members or in other way involved in the partisan activities.³⁰

Though partisanship is considered to be one of the problems with domestic observing, especially comparing it to the international observing, the former has other advantages. The main one is that domestic observation has advantage of scale and profoundness.³¹ While the international organisation can bring dozens of long-term observers and hundreds of short term observers, domestic groups mobilise thousands of activists, who in addition are constantly present in the country, know the language, culture, laws and political situation in the country thus can assess the election process as a whole.

Only in the last decades has the international community realise that civic domestic observation is more than mere pall watching on the Election Day, but in fact has profound effects on the wide range of democratisation processes. Besides trying to achieve the election that would be in accordance with the international norms, the very organisation of monitoring activities, domestic election observation groups have a long-lasting effect of spreading democratic practices, values and institutions, catalysing the consolidation and growth of civic

²⁸ Sharon F. Lean, "Democracy Assistance to Domestic Election Monitoring Organizations: Conditions for Success," *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (2007): 290, doi:10.1080/13510340701245835.

²⁹ Nevitte and Canton, "The Role of Domestic Observers," 50.

³⁰ Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 239.

³¹ Nevitte and Canton, "The Role of Domestic Observers," 50–51.

society.³²

Sharon Lean applies the notion of social capital suggested by American political scientists Robert D. Putnam to the case of domestic election observation. According to Putnam social capital refers to “features of social organization, such as trust, norms [of reciprocity], and networks [of civic engagement], that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions”.³³ The domestic monitoring organisation if organised properly are usually successful in building the social capital which creates the virtuous cycle and leads to the growth of civic participation as common volunteer activities build trust and habit. Although, according to Howell and Pearce there is no direct positive correlation between development of social capital and the democratisation process in the country.³⁴ Robert Putnam sets aside the “bridging” social capital of democratic nature which serves for uniting polarised and conflicted society groups from “bonding” social capital that develops within separated groups and may actually be anti-democratic.³⁵ One of the examples of such capital is one developed in Russian society, particularly in the groups from right and far-right spectrum of Russian politics. There is indeed trust, norms and networks developed among such groups, but it is often directed against other societal groups (immigrants, members of LGBT community, most recently – various secular or atheist groups) or democratic principles in general. In addition, international support to civil society organisation such as DEMOs in the country with strong society polarisation may lead even to further deepening of cleavages among various social groups.

From this point of view, the criteria for success of domestic election observer groups

³² Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 251.

³³ Lean, “Democracy Assistance to Domestic Election Monitoring Organizations,” 293.

³⁴ Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce, *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 49.

³⁵ Lean, “Democracy Assistance to Domestic Election Monitoring Organizations,” 294

is not just to conduct thorough and impartial monitoring of single election and to publish a comprehensive report, although this is of course a short term objective. Instead Sharon Lean suggested three other indicators of success of domestic election observation in the sphere of civil community development (Table 5). This means, of course, building democratic “bridging” social capital, which in some divided societies is extremely complicated and delicate procedure. Thus, while the achievements of one free and fair election can be cancelled by the authoritarian reaction, created by the domestic observation groups “bridging” social capital is much harder to destroy.

The first indicator is whether the domestic election observation group has provided citizens with the opportunity to acquire civic skills and a chance to participate in political life of the country. The most straightforward way of achieving this is the massive mobilisation of volunteers. The second criterion for success is whether the domestic election observation organisation itself could be seen as model for democratic groups, i.e. if there is transparency and accountability within the organisation itself. Domestic observers should serve as examples of democratically structured institution with plurality, freedom of expression and inclusion. Finally, DEMO can be considered successful if it achieved the national level of recognition both by civil society, political actors, government and electoral officials. The organisation ought to be recognised as a legitimate mediator between the people and the government and possibly the international community in electoral affairs.³⁶

³⁶ Lean, “Democracy Assistance to Domestic Election Monitoring Organizations,” 296.

Table 5. Three indicators of success of domestic election monitoring organisation in terms of building social capital according to Sharon Lean.

1	Teaching democracy (mobilisation of volunteers)
2	Modelling democracy (transparency accountability, inclusivity and pluralism within the organisation itself)
3	Intermediary role between society and the state (achieved level of recognition by main political actors in the electoral process)

In order to achieve these goals, domestic observers engage in a set of activities. As Eric Bjornlund argues, the most experienced and effective DEMOs try to analyse and assess the whole election process prior, during and after the Election Day.³⁷ These activities include monitoring the campaign, media coverage, voter register lists compilation, establishing local electoral committees, conduct of voting, conduct of counting etc.³⁸ Majority of domestic election monitors engage in parallel vote tabulation at the end of the E-day in order to double check the results announced by the official electoral commission.

Though the activities conducted by DEMOs connected to election process itself vary from country to country depending on the political environment, still the set of these activities is rather universal. But as it was stated before, the work of domestic election observation organisation is much more than just observing the polling day. Recently published “Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations” (2012) showed that the international community of domestic election observers turned to more process-oriented approach which goes well beyond the simple fraud-prevention.³⁹ That means that the DEMOs which signed the declaration committed themselves to support the wider processes of democratisation in their respective country

³⁷ Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 237.

³⁸ Domenico Tuccinardi and Franck Balme, “Citizen Election Observation Towards a New Era,” *Election Law Journal* 12, no. 1 (March 2013): 97, doi:10.1089/elj.2013.I216.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

through constant monitoring of elections in plebiscites taken as a continuous process rather than separate events.

With this in mind it is worth mentioning in which ways, do the domestic election monitors support the democratisation processes in between the elections (Table 6). The most prominent activity undertaken by most of DEMOs is civic education. It can range from simple dissemination of literature to sophisticated campaign on informing citizens about electoral legislation, parties, candidate platforms, political and human rights in general etc. Another important objective that many domestic observation organisations undertake is lobbying for the electoral reform. This activity is rather natural since it is the observers who know the best the shortcomings of existing electoral legislation. In this sphere, the domestic observers often work together with the international ones, in order to urge the government to improve country's legislature.⁴⁰ In the same vein, the DEMOs can urge governments to reform the institutions and public offices in order to bring them closer to the democratic standards.⁴¹

Some of the organisations that previously engaged in domestic monitoring, use their experience during the observation for research purposes thus becoming research centres, often playing the role of advisory to the government or state institutions, such as central electoral offices.

Many DEMOs shift their attention to a range of other public policy issues such as protection of environment, human rights and civil liberties, pushing for reforms in various branches of legislation.

In some cases, the observers expand their object of attention and monitor the governmental institutions, state officials or activities of the political parties. In this case the

⁴⁰ Nevitte and Canton, "The Role of Domestic Observers," 57.

⁴¹ Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair*, 254

election observers become the “watchdogs of democracy”.⁴² Similarly, a big number of domestic observation groups engage in increasing accountability of the elected officials – presidents, deputies, governors and so on. Special attention is often paid to the issues of corruption among government officials.

Moreover, many DEMOs engaged in organisation of unofficial opinion polls or referendums regarding some important issue in the life of the country. Sometimes reaching significant scale, these events convey to the government the opinion of people on some crucial laws, policies or practices.

Table 6. The range of activities of DEMOs between elections

	Type of activity	Forms of activity
1	Civic education	Dissemination of literature, seminars, school lessons, TV- and radio programmes, media campaigns etc.
2	Lobbying for electoral reform	Proposing required changes to the government, collection of signatures for the reform.
3	Lobbying for institutional or constitutional reforms	Proposing possible adjustments to the existing state institutions or legislature in order to make them more transparent and democratic.
4	Research	Using the experience and the information gained during the monitoring campaigns with the aim to further research the democratisation possibilities in the given country, possibly becoming governmental advisor.
5	Bringing up public issues	Advocacy work (human rights, civil liberties), bringing up issues such as environment, land reform etc.
6	Beyond election monitoring	Monitoring of the work of state institutions, disclosure of corruption, monitoring the activities of elected officials
7	Unofficial referendums	Conduct of nation- or region-wide polls on certain essential issues in order to advocate the interest of the population.

⁴² Ibid.

5. Possible tactics of domestic election observation in Belarus

As was said in the beginning of the text, Belarus along with several other post-Soviet states represent the result of authoritarian reaction and fall-back from democracy. Pre-emptive authoritarianism considers independent domestic monitors as one of the potential threat that must be eliminated before it can do any harm to the regime. Thus, “Partnership” the chief DEMO in Belarus was shut down by authorities just one month before the presidential elections of 2006.⁴³ Since then, independent election monitoring activities in Belarus were conducted mostly by human rights defenders from NGOs Viasna and Belarusian Helsinki Committee within the framework of campaign “Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections”⁴⁴. The observation of the organisation is highly professional and the post-elections reports are comprehensive, however, the scale of the monitoring is rather narrow, since only several hundred observers participate in the campaign. In addition, the observation represents only small portion of activities done by this organisation. Thus, the present situation with domestic election observation would not fit in the definition of successful drawn by Sharon Lean.

Several suggestions can be made in order to improve the situation with the election observation in Belarus. It is crucially important for the Belarusian civil activists to understand and learn the international experience of democratisation efforts in countries all around the world. This will help to clearly define the long term and short term objectives of the DEMOs activities, to define possible tactics and methods of their work, to adopt the relevant criteria for success.

First of all, it is important to avoid the misconception listed in Table 4, namely –

⁴³ Silitski, “The New Authoritarianism in the Former Soviet Union,” 343.

⁴⁴ “Human Right Defenders for Free Elections 2012,” *Human Right Defenders for Free Elections 2012*, accessed August 9, 2013, <http://elections2012.spring96.org/en>.

overemphasis on elections and observation of election on E-day. Belarusian civic activists should realise that Serbian or Ukrainian scenario of electoral revolution has little chances of happening in the member-state of “Authoritarian International”.⁴⁵ Instead, civic society of Belarus should embrace the process-oriented approach accepted by the vast majority of DEMOs in the world and stated in the recently adopted documents of GNDEM. The activists of Belarusian NGO and regular citizens who favour democratization of their country should consider every election as another step in bigger process of democratization, rather than a possible turning event. With this in mind the main objective for every election monitoring campaign is to conduct it in the way of building the most democratic “bridging” social capital as possible. DEMOs should create, expand and sustain the networks of volunteers develop trust among them and regularly provide them with the opportunities for political participation in the period between the elections.

Another suggestion on the practical level regards the organisational structure. The DEMOs around the world usually exist in two forms – the single organisation responsible for election observation, or a network of NGO and other civic groups united within one campaign or under one umbrella organisation. In the Belarusian case, the latter seems the best choice. As the sad example of “Partnership” showed, the only possible tactic in Belarusian conditions is decentralisation of activities to a maximum level. In this way, it would be harder to eliminate the whole network of observers. This statement draws following conclusion: the network should be as broad as possible and should include various NGOs (in the best case also other civic organisations such as religious groups) in order to mobilise the larger number of volunteers. Another conclusion that can be made from the statement is that the funding for the campaign should be as diverse as possible for the very reason of security. Modern

⁴⁵ Silitski, “The New Authoritarianism in the Former Soviet Union,” 349.

communication technologies make the decentralisation process more safe, efficient and easy. However, decentralised structure requires strong and well-defined methodological basis. Such basis (various regulations, instructions, guidelines, codes of conduct, observation forms) should be either developed by the representatives of DEMOs, or adopted from other institutions such as OSCE, NDI or GDNEM prior to elections.

Following the example of Latin American and South-East Asian DEMOs, Belarusian organisations should seek partnership on the regional level, primarily in Russia and Ukraine, possibly also other CIS countries. There was already progress in this direction since the representative of GOLOS association met with several Belarusian organisations in 2012 in order to share the Russian experience of observing parliamentary and presidential elections of 2012. Belarusian observers may also be encouraged to participate in election monitoring in the neighbouring countries of CIS in order to gain practical experience. It would be also desirable for interested Belarusian organisation to become a member of GNDEM (Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors) which would help bringing expertise to Belarus as well as show Belarusian problems to wider international audiences. Be

In order to be successful according to the first indicator of Table 5 (Teaching democracy), Belarusian DEMOs should orient on volunteer work during the observation campaign rather than to paid work as it is done now. Such organisations should also try to overcome Belarusian society polarisation and offer possible participation in their activities to all social groups. Particularly interesting can be the attempt to work with the “pro-governmental” observers from NGOs and working collectives, who are often obliged to “counter-monitor” the elections.

If the working and efficient DEMO network is created in Belarus, it should bring its attention to “in between” activities listed in the previous chapter. Similar activities were

already implemented by some Belarusian NGOs (for instance campaign by Nash Dom organisation on rising accountability of the deputies “Make Deputy Answer”⁴⁶). However, the emphasis on civic education in my view should be central, since the low level of civic consciousness is one of the significant factors contributing to impeding the processes of democratisation in Belarus. Many of the other activities listed in the previous could be desired to be implemented in Belarus. For instance Belarusian DEMOs could suggest clearly defined alternative Electoral Code, engage in research or advocacy activities in order to sustain the social capital it would earn during monitoring campaign.

Finally, the future DEMO network in Belarus should become the model of democratic process, with transparent internal politics, rules and funding.

⁴⁶ “Кампанія «Депутатов — к Ответу!» с Начала Года Провела Более Трех Десятков Мероприятий | БЕЛОРУССКИЕ НОВОСТИ,” accessed August 21, 2013, http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2013/04/07/ic_news_116_414262/.

Conclusion

These are basic recommendations for the NGOs and civic activists that would like to engage in domestic election observation in Belarus. Most of them are based on the ideas and theories of several scholars, which are described in the previous chapters. There should be of course different views on the matter, especially concerning the organisation structure of possible DEMO. However, as I stated earlier, the main point of the paper is to raise a discussion among Belarusian civil society regarding the matter. Hopefully, such notions as “process-oriented approach” and “bridging social capital” will be examined and adopted by Belarusian civic activists.

Democratisation cannot and will not happen overnight even if all the regime leaders will miraculously disappear. Democratisation is a long and complicated process with its advances and set-backs which embraces the whole society. Every election, even if it is known to be rigged from the beginning is but a powerful instrument which can be used both in favour and against the democratisation. It is the duty of civic society to use the possibilities that every election gives to advance the democratic values, to promote respect for human rights, to create the bridges across social cleavages and to bring closer by another step democratic future to Belarus.

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