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Belarus – institutional cycles and the historical roots of the contemporary institutional matrix

Abstract

One modern area of academic research involves searching prerequisites for the formation and functioning of specific institutional models within countries. The purpose of the article is to identify and analyze the main institutional cycles in the formation of the socio-economic systems of Belarus. This will help determine the effect of historical dependence on the trajectory of development and allow the identification of the origins of the country's modern institutional matrix. The novelty of the study of institutional cycles and their dynamics lies in its interdisciplinary nature. The author has adopted the theory within New Institutional Economics, particularly the achievements of North, Acemoglu, and Robinson. The research methods include a historical analysis and a comparative analysis.

Key words: Belarus, institutional cycles, institutional matrix, formal and informal institutions

Introduction

Approaches to analyzing the underlying factors that have significantly influenced the formation of the institutional system are hotly debated. Natural-climatic, geographical, cultural, and a variety of other factors that have exerted a strong influence on the development of a unique institutional system are often mentioned (Горичева 2000: 5–16). There is an ongoing debate about how interconnected institutions initially form within a system and what factors determine the overall direction of development and the emergence of specific types of institutions.

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Institutional systems are shaped by a combination of exogenous (external) and endogenous (internal) factors. Exogenous factors that contribute to system formation include external challenges, ethno-confessional diversity, and the influence of more powerful systems. These factors determine the system's ability to "absorb" or reject new elements and define the sphere of political, economic, and cultural influence, which in turn affects the societal development trajectory. Endogenous factors encompass the socio-cultural environment, geopolitical position, climatic factors, and religion.

The first prototypes of basic institutions can be found in the proto-institutional cycle. Within this cycle, the most significant primary determinant was an exogenous factor: the natural-climatic factor, which shaped the foundational elements of mentality and later became crucial in determining the formation of specific institutional structures. Geography and climate played pivotal roles in shaping initial stable informal connections that eventually evolved into fundamental political and economic institutions.

Two primary components of the natural-climatic factor can be distinguished: 1) the "severity" or "mildness" of the climate, which influenced the duration of the agricultural cycle, and 2) soil fertility and the potential for extensive or intensive modes of production. This factor determines fundamental characteristics of political and economic mentality, such as collectivism or individualism, high or low power distance, internal or external control, and attitudes towards uncertainty avoidance, work, and wealth.

The institutional cycle represents the period of a country's development during which the system operates based on interlocking basic institutions that form the core of the country's institutional framework. The basic institutions that emerge within these cycles subsequently define the country's institutional matrix. The institutional core serves as the central element in each local institutional matrix. It connects four distinct local environments into a cohesive system: material and technological, natural and climatic, national and demographic, and cultural and religious (Бессонова 2006: 130–143).

Two types of institutional matrix emerge as a result of specific institutional cycles, each characterized by a predominant set of institutions. The first is characterized by institutions of pluralism, democracy, self-government, and independence in the political sphere. In the cultural and ideological sphere, market economy institutions, freedom of choice, and individualism prevail. The second type is marked by institutions of centralized and authoritarian governance in the political sphere. In the economic sphere, institutions of a planned economy and distribution domi-

nate. In the cultural and ideological sphere, institutions of collectivism are predominant (Кирдина 2005: 75–101).

In this research, the following criteria will be employed to analyze institutional cycles and basic institutions at various stages of development in Belarus: the self-government of cities, the system of power relations, property institution, consolidation and the existence of property rights, religion, the institution of exchange, and the principle of distribution of wealth. By utilizing these criteria, the research aims to provide insights into the institutional cycles and basic institutions in Belarus through different stages of development.

Institutional cycles: the effect of the historical track in the development trajectory of Belarus

First cycle

The proto-institutional cycle in Belarus primarily encompasses the primitive communal system and its decline, spanning a period approximately from the 3rd century B.C. to the 7th century A.D. This period corresponds to the presence of East Slavic tribes such as the Polochans, Dregovich, Krivichi, and Radimichi. During this time, the emergence of key characteristics of informal institutions and the formation of early formal institutions were largely influenced by the natural-climatic factor. The region's rather harsh climate, including long cold winters, short summers, abundant precipitation, strong winds, and vulnerability to natural forces, compelled people to come together and form groups. The challenging natural environment served as a catalyst for cooperation and collaboration, leading to the establishment of communal systems and basic institutional structures. The need for collective survival and resilience in the face of harsh conditions played a significant role in shaping early institutions within the proto-institutional cycle of Belarus (Бусько 2003: 42–49).

Consequently, the community emerged as the primary medium for the coordination of economic activities within the territory of modern Belarus. This fostered a collective mindset and laid the groundwork for collectivism. The need for mutual assistance and survival in challenging conditions fostered an understanding that the collective interest outweighed individual concerns. Everyone relied on the group for support. Therefore, within the communities of present-day Belarus, the distributive function held significant importance from the outset.

The agrarian way of life, the intricacies of farming, and the high dependence on external circumstances necessitated the involvement of all community members. This predominantly fostered an extensive mode of production and cultivation, establishing the foundation for traditionalism. The preference for stability, aversion to rapid changes, adherence to established patterns, rejection of uncertainty, and a conservative approach to perception were all shaped by these circumstances. The combination of communal cooperation, distribution of resources, and reliance on traditional agricultural practices became deeply ingrained in the social fabric and economic mentality of the communities in the territory of modern Belarus during this period (Бартаева 2010: 103). Meanwhile, the abundance of shallow rivers, plains, and diverse terrain provided a sense of interconnection with nature. Nature began to be perceived as a sacred force. It defined the feeling of dependence on the forces of nature and subordination to them, and it also determined the Belarusian people's contemplation, tranquility, and dislike for making quick decisions (Коршук 2008: 22–28).

The first institutional cycle spans from the eighth century to the first half of the thirteenth century, a period during which the initial state formations, namely the Polotsk and Turov principalities, were being established. The foundational framework of the Belarusian state began to take shape during this period, throughout which basic institutions were solidified. In the political sphere, there was a centralization of power with certain limitations and elements of self-government. The supreme ruler served as the guardian of property and provided protection against external aggression. In the economic sphere, extensive public, official, and private property were present. The supreme ruler acted as the guarantor of property rights, and the state played an active role as an economic agent. Relations were characterized by a distributive nature. Public service property was inherited. In the realm of mentality and ideology, collectivism and tolerance prevailed. It can be concluded that the Belarusian lands were initially characterized by extractive institutions, albeit in a milder form (Ксензова, Ксензов 2013: 145–156).

During this period the first institutions were being formed, and statehood began to take shape in the lands of modern Belarus. The following key developments can be highlighted:

1. The princely-vetch system emerged, which curtailed the power of the supreme duke and involved the broader population in decision-making. The vetch, a general assembly of adult men, possessed the authority to depose and appoint a duke.

2. The formation of patrimonial and manorial landholdings took place. The patrimonial system revolved around the consolidation of private property and the recognition of inviolable rights, including the right to pass property down through inheritance. The manorial system, on the other hand, was based on service property granted by the prince in exchange for loyal service. Patrimonial landholdings could be inherited, gifted, purchased from other feudal lords, or provided as "fodder" from the prince as a reward for faithful service (known as estates).
3. The community, with its distributive role, continued to be the primary form of coordinating economic activity. However, over time, communities gradually came under the influence of feudal lords, who acquired landholdings in two main ways: firstly, "from below" by gaining control over community lands, and secondly, "from above" through fiefdoms and estates.

During this transformative period, the development of these institutions and power dynamics laid the foundation for the evolving social and economic structure in the region that would shape the subsequent historical trajectory of Belarus.

The second cycle

The second institutional cycle spanned from the middle of the 13th century to the second half of the 16th century, a period of flourishing and strengthening of Belarusian statehood within the framework of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). The formation of the GDL was relatively peaceful, based on voluntary agreements and compromises. During this period, the communal system and the enslavement of peasants began to disintegrate. The absolute monarchy, which was consolidated during the reign of Grand Duke Vytautas, was limited by the privileges of Prince Alexander in 1492 and 1506, which curtailed the power of the Grand Duke. This marked the establishment of a class-representative monarchy. Additionally, in 1505, the *Nihil novi* (Radom) Constitution was adopted, requiring the consent of the Sejm for the appointment of the Grand Duke. The power of the Grand Duke was constrained, and the Sejm gained extended authority in making important political and economic decisions. At the same time, the nobility's power over the peasants greatly increased, resulting in a trend toward complete enslavement.

During this period, a significant amount of land was granted for service, both by the Grand Duke to his subjects and the church, as well as by large feudal lords to their vassals. The amount of state land continual-

ly expanded. Meanwhile, the nobility was granted privileges of private land ownership rights and tax immunity. The power of the Duke became limited, with the nobility gaining the right to elect the Duke and make decisions regarding matters such as war, peace, and taxes. This coincided with the complete enslavement of the peasants. In 1447, the gentry received guarantees of private land ownership and tax immunity. An important step was the introduction of Magdeburg Law, which gave towns the right of self-government and autonomy. Magdeburg Law gave towns the right to make their own decisions in certain judicial, economic and political matters. The collection of various duties, such as *panchyna*, *chinch*, tribute, and others, played a main role.

The *pomestno-votchin* system was a feudal land tenure system where land was granted to vassals (*pomestniki*) by the ruling authority (such as a prince or noble) in exchange for military or other services. The *pomestniki* were responsible for managing and cultivating the land, often with the labor of dependent peasants. The community gradually lost its basic functions and came under the authority of the feudal lords. After 1557 came the introduction and consolidation of the *folwark* (manorial) system, which was an agricultural system characterized by large estates or farms, usually owned by landlords, where peasants worked as tenants or hired laborers. It was a means of increasing the State treasury revenue, transferring the peasants mainly to the *chinch* (a cash tribute), introducing market relations and involving the peasants in them, and destroying the peasant community. It took place mainly in the west of the country, and later in the east (but not everywhere) due to the wars with the Moscow principedom. Benefit distribution was predominantly based on the distributive principle, while the introduction of the manorial system contributed to the growing importance of sale and purchase relations.

An important aspect to consider was religion, with the majority of the population adhering to the Orthodox faith. In 1385, the Union of Krevo was established between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland. This dynastic union was formed when the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jogaila married the Polish Queen Jadwiga, subsequently becoming King of Poland. The union also initiated the spread of Catholicism among the nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. (Чернявская 2008: 195–206; Чернявская 2010: 67–71). In this institutional cycle, inclusive institutions began to strengthen, while extractive ones remained in place. This was largely due to the strengthening of links with the Kingdom of Poland. Thus, the formation of the GDL represented a unique consolidation of an institutional matrix with its initial basic institutions.

The basic institutions of the GDL emerged within the context of a clash between Byzantine and Western European civilizations. The first Christians in this region were baptized in accordance with the Eastern rite, indicating the development of socio-cultural institutions of the Eastern (redistributive) type. Simultaneously, the presence of major trade routes from Western and Central Europe facilitated the spread of market economic institutions.

An important factor that influenced the formation and evolution of social system institutions was the presence of external threats. The lands that became part of the GDL faced threats from both the East and the West. These external threats led to the incorporation of the Slavs and Balts, who were experiencing the disintegration of their feudal systems, into the GDL. This stimulated their civilizational advancement and facilitated the establishment and consolidation of a centralized state with dominant distributive institutions. One example of this was the prince granting offices and lands from state funds to the new elite as a reward for their loyal service and refusal to compete with the sovereign in terms of dynastic lineage or wealth. However, a consequence of this dual influence on the GDL was that both the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, which played ideological roles in the feudal state, became large landowners.

Overall, exogenous factors had a tremendous impact on the formation of the GDL's institutional system. The Teutonic Order compelled the GDL to adopt Western methods of warfare, weaponry, and technology. Close economic ties with neighboring Western powers, such as Poland and the Holy Roman Empire, also facilitated the transfer of technology, as evidenced by the adoption of Western European cultural patterns in monumental architecture, weaponry, luxury goods, and everyday life. The active growth of cities and the development of commodity-money relations gradually led to changes in political institutions, such as the introduction of Magdeburg Law, which regulated economic activity, property rights, social and political life, and the class status of townspeople by a special system of legal regulations. These things were not found in the neighboring principality of Moscow, for example.

An important aspect was the religious situation in the GDL. Prior to the Union of Krevo (1385), the GDL had two distinct religious regions: the north-western part of the state, which remained pagan, while the rest comprised Orthodox Christians. After the Union, Catholicism gained prominence, and later, in the 14th century, Judaism and Islam also became prevalent. The Reformation movement, which was propagated by citizens of German origin and students from European universities, did

not resonate as widely among the masses as it did in Germany. However, it did gain popularity among Belarusian-Lithuanian magnates and intellectuals due to its democratic principles. In order to maintain a balance between all religious denominations, the Statute of 1588 enshrined the institution of religious tolerance (Барахвостов 2020: 11–15).

A notable characteristic of the second institutional cycle was the adoption of the Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), which were pioneering legal documents in Europe. The Statutes of 1529, 1566, and 1588 played a significant role in shaping the legal framework. During this period, inclusive institutions began to be established, driven by the prevailing external threats. However, the influence of inclusive institutions remained important, given the widespread prevalence of Orthodoxy.

The third cycle

The third institutional cycle was essentially a continuation of the second and was motivated by the need to unify with a stronger neighbor, Poland, to counter the threat from the Duchy of Moscow. The Statute of 1588 was ratified in conjunction with the Union of Lublin in 1569. It legally affirmed the separation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from Poland and introduced principles such as the unity of law, the principle of justice, the universality of law, and the presumption of innocence (Гуржий 1989: 157–163).

In Poland, non-municipal (private) ownership was already more advanced than in the GDL. As there was more fertile land, individual families were able to independently utilize parts of the material and technical environment for economic purposes without needing to cooperate with other members of society. They could maintain efficiency and, importantly, dispose of the results obtained on their own. During this time, the emerging state institutions in Poland focused less on organization and more on maintaining effective interaction between separate economic and social entities. Economic relations in Poland were also influenced by exogenous factors, but they had more positive characteristics.

In general, the institutional framework in Poland was initially more inclined towards inclusive institutions compared to the already established matrix of the GDL. Therefore, the unification of the GDL with the Polish Kingdom triggered a period of turbulence and imbalance in the institutional system of the GDL. With the reduction of external threats, elements of the Polish institutional framework were transplanted, and the

development of market institutions was stimulated. The Polish political system at that time represented a noble electoral democracy, and its institutions began to actively influence the political system of the GDL. The expansion of Catholicism, which had closer associations with Western culture compared to Orthodoxy, also gained momentum. In Poland, the supremacy of freedom and law prevailed, primarily benefiting the nobility, while the lower classes had limited power. In order to gain more rights, the Belarusian nobility actively converted to Catholicism.

Among the political institutions in the market, local self-government also played an important role, specifically urban self-government in the form of magistrates and nobility self-government. The peculiarities of the political sphere determined the transformation of the socio-cultural subsystem within the institutional matrix of the GDL as part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. There was an active expansion of Catholicism, which was more inclined towards subsidiary principles compared to Orthodoxy. The ideas of the supremacy of liberty, previously unknown in the GDL before the union with Poland, were disseminated. However, it was understood as granting exclusive rights only to the nobility, while society began to stratify into the nobility-wielding "freedmen" and the powerless lower estates. Furthermore, the Belarusian nobility, aiming to enjoy the same privileges as their Polish counterparts, chose the path of voluntary Polonization. Other social strata were also Polonized under the influence of the Catholic Church (Ксензов 2010: 2–9).

An important role in the development of economic institutions was played by the 1557 Voloki Statute, a state legal document (statute) that implemented the Volok system in the GDL. The reform aimed to regulate taxes and duties that peasants had to pay in exchange for land usage without considering the size of the attached land. The volok became the unit of taxation, resulting in increased funds in the state treasury. A distinctive feature of this reform was its orientation towards establishing raised barns, which produced goods for sale, introducing market elements. The folwark system was primarily prevalent in the fertile western lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Колмыков, Черкашина 2014).

Thus, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth provided the clearest example of the interaction and interdependence of the subsystems within the institutional matrix. The third institutional cycle served as a continuation of the second, defined by reinforcing inclusive institutions driven by external factors, particularly external threats, and convergence with the institutions of the Polish institutional system.

The fourth and fifth cycles

The transition to the fourth institutional cycle began with the weakening of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth due to external threats. The strengthening of the Russian Empire led to three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the annexation of Polish and GDL lands. The institutional matrix of the Russian Empire primarily consisted of extractive institutions with centralized power and a lack of political and economic freedoms. Orthodox Christianity held a dominant position as the leading religion. Unlike the institutional system in the GDL, the Russian Empire did not tolerate religious diversity. The aim of the Russian government in the newly acquired territories was full integration and homogenization with the Russian interior. This process went comparatively more smoothly in the GDL lands than in Poland, despite significant problems and contradictions.

At the time of the Partition, the institutional matrix of the GDL was characterized by the simultaneous presence of two strong institutions: the distributive principle of land ownership formation and the (proto)federal principle of the state structure. The western regions experienced the notable influence of trade capital, along with the substantial presence of large landowners and powerful magnates, all of which played a decisive role in shaping the functioning of state bodies. These factors distinguished the institutional matrix of the GDL from the Russian matrix, which was dominated by redistributive principles.

Within the Russian Empire, cities lost their autonomy rights, which had previously allowed for independent regulation of economic activity, property rights, and the political life of citizens. Many townspeople were equated, with peasants, and oppression of the peasantry, increased during this period. Property rights were guaranteed through loyal service to the emperor, and, upon annexation, the Belarusian nobility was granted the same rights as their Russian counterparts, contingent on taking an oath. Much Belarusian land was transferred to the Russian nobility, and the Belarusian nobility was deprived of their political rights. The Emperor held absolute power, and administration was carried out through decrees, the establishment of state ministries and institutions, the collection of various duties (such as rents and tribute), the state register of revenues and expenditures, as well as the keeping of records for fees and dues of landlords and monasteries. Lands were distributed based on loyalty to the Emperor, and forced orthodoxy was promoted. The distribution of benefits primarily followed the distributive principle (Бессонова 2014: 73–86; Бессонова 2013: 50–54; Бессонова 2012: 122–144; Огурцов

1994: 52; Радаев 1996: 69–76; Дряхлов, Давыденко 1997: 143–149; Голубович 2007: 63–80).

The fifth institutional cycle encompassed the Soviet period, characterized by the prevalence of extractive institutions under the leadership of the Plan. During this period, the formation of institutions occurred within the planned system of the Soviet Union. From 1917 to 1930, the policy of war communism was implemented, followed by the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP), collectivization, and industrialization policies (Огурцов 1994: 52; Радаев 1996: 69–76; Дряхлов, Давыденко 1997: 143–149).

According to the Soviet constitutions, the republics were proclaimed independent entities. However, in practice, the policies in all areas of the individual republics were tightly controlled by Moscow. Power was centralized within the Communist Party, which made policy decisions across all spheres of society. The central government dictated all political, economic, and social decisions, leaving little room for autonomy or independence. All members of the party, as well as all individuals within the state, were required to adhere to the party's ideology.

Under Soviet rule, property became national or state property, and property rights were solely assigned to the state, which had full control over all property. The state could temporarily lend property to private entities but maintained complete oversight and accountability. Only a small number of private owners remained, and their presence was highly limited.

Starting from the 1930s, the Soviet Union implemented active policies of collectivization and dekulakization. Collectivization aimed to radically restructure the agricultural sector. The Soviet Union considered the rural areas a vital source of funds for rapid industrialization. During this period, two interconnected processes took place. First, there was the dekulakization of the peasantry. This involved targeting and eliminating the wealthier peasants, known as kulaks, through various means, such as forced confiscation of their property, exile, or execution. The aim was to remove a perceived class enemy and redistribute their resources. Secondly, the creation of kolkhozes (collective farms) occurred. Peasants were compelled to join collective farms, where they worked collectively and shared the land, livestock, and resources. The state exerted significant control over these collective farms, dictating production targets, resource allocation, and distribution of outputs.

Both dekulakization and the establishment of kolkhozes were part of the broader Soviet policy of collectivization, which sought to transform agriculture into a centralized, state-controlled sector, supporting the

goals of industrialization and the consolidation of power. The main aim of the policy of dispossession was to liquidate the village bourgeoisie to further provide the collective farm with a material base.

The main forms of organizations in the Soviet Union were state enterprises, state organizations, collective farms, and service properties. The principle of equalization and distribution played a significant role, with an emphasis on ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources and wealth among the population. This principle guided various aspects of the Soviet system, including the allocation of goods and services. Meanwhile, religion was replaced by faith in the Communist Party, which was seen as a paternal figure that made decisions on behalf of its "children" in all aspects of life.

Economic relations were primarily structured around a planned mechanism, where production was submitted to the state for distribution, and resources were allocated according to a planned system, although there were also elements of small-scale commodity relations present within the economy. Non-cash exchange was facilitated through the State Bank. The planned economic mechanism ultimately did not, however, effectively promote efficiency in the economy.

The Soviet Union faced several key problems, including low productivity across all sectors, a virtually non-existent private sector with private enterprise considered a criminal offense, a marginal role for commodity-money relations, and a command-administrative system that dominated the economy. The development of industries was disproportionately focused on the military industrial complex and heavy industry, resulting in imbalances. Additionally, there were issues of latent inflation and constant shortages of goods.

As a result, by the 1960s, there was a recognized need for economic reform and the introduction of market institutions to improve efficiency. In 1965, the Kosygin reform was implemented, aiming to introduce market incentives into the planned economy of the USSR. The reform included measures such as new economic management methods, increased economic independence of enterprises, and the use of innovative material incentives. The goal was to enhance the efficiency of the economy through the introduction of market institutions. However, the reform was eventually abandoned due to the authorities' reluctance to fully embrace market mechanisms and implement comprehensive economic system reforms in all areas. The problems in the political and economic spheres continued to intensify, leading to the beginning of perestroika and, ultimately, the collapse of the Soviet Union (Литвиненко 2010).

Features of Belarus' basic institutions in the sixth institutional cycle

The sixth institutional cycle for Belarus began in the 1990s. Here are some of the key developments:

Economic institutions: Belarus has maintained a predominantly state-controlled economy, with the government owning a large share of key industries such as energy, transportation, and manufacturing. According to the World Bank, in 2020, the state sector accounted for 70% of the economy, with private sector activities mostly limited to retail and wholesale trade, construction, and some services. Belarus has struggled with persistent economic challenges, including low productivity and a lack of foreign investment. According to the World Bank, Belarus's GDP per capita in 2020 was \$6,678, significantly lower than the average for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (\$10,492). The economy has also been affected by a significant external debt burden and high inflation, which was around 10% in 2020 (*World Bank* <https://databank.worldbank.org/>).

Property rights are a crucial aspect of a market economy as they help establish the legal framework for private ownership and entrepreneurship. In Belarus, property rights have been relatively weak due to the extensive state control of the economy. For example, according to the 2023 Index of Economic Freedom by The Heritage Foundation, Belarus performs poorly in the property rights category, with a score of only 31.2 out of 100 (*Belarus, 2023 Index of Economic Freedom* <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/belarus>).

The financial sector is dominated by state-owned banks, with limited competition or access to credit for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). According to the World Bank, in 2019, the ratio of bank credit to GDP was only 27.5%, indicating limited access to finance (*World Bank* <https://databank.worldbank.org/>).

Political institutions: The political institutions under the rule of President Alexander Lukashenko have been characterized by a highly centralized power structure, limited development of civil society, significant repression of political opposition and dissent, and high levels of corruption. In this essay, a detailed analysis of the political institutions in Belarus during the Lukashenko period will be provided, examining key areas such as power distribution, civil society development, repression, corruption, freedom of speech, and others, with reference to statistical data and credible sources.

Elections in Belarus have been criticized as lacking in transparency and fairness. For example, the 2020 presidential election, in which

Lukashenko was declared the winner with over 80% of the vote, was marred by allegations of vote-rigging and a crackdown on opposition candidates and protesters (*Freedom in the World 2023* https://freedom-house.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf).

Power Distribution: The power structure in Belarus has become highly centralized, with the president holding significant control over the government, judiciary, and other institutions. According to the 2022 Democracy Index by The Economist Intelligence Unit, Belarus is a highly authoritarian regime. It has been characterized by a lack of checks and balances, with limited separation of powers and minimal autonomy for local and regional authorities.

Civil Society Development: The development of civil society has been limited under the Lukashenko regime, with restrictions on the formation of independent organizations and civil society groups. According to the 2022 Human Rights Watch report on Belarus, the government has regularly harassed and detained members of civil society groups, including human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition figures. The report also notes a lack of respect for freedom of association, assembly, and expression (*Human Rights Watch report 2022* <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/belarus>).

Repression: The repression of political opposition and dissent has been a defining feature of the Lukashenko regime. According to the 2020 Freedom in the World report by Freedom House, Belarus is ranked as "not free," with a score of 13 out of 100, indicating a highly repressive political environment. The government has used tactics such as arbitrary arrests, detentions, and physical violence against opposition figures, journalists, and civil society activists. The crackdown on opposition following the disputed presidential election in 2020 led to widespread protests and international condemnation.

Corruption: The lack of transparency and accountability in government institutions has contributed to high levels of corruption in the country.

Ideological institutions: In the ideological sphere, under Lukashenko's rule, a cult of World War II and nostalgia for the Soviet past began to develop. The Belarusian government has emphasized a nationalist and pro-Russian ideology, with a focus on preserving national culture and identity. The government has also been critical of Western liberal values and has pursued closer ties with Russia and other post-Soviet states. For example, Belarus is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, a regional economic bloc comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan. (Maszkiewicz 2012).

Social institutions: Belarusian society has experienced significant changes under Lukashenko's rule. According to the World Bank, in 2019, the government spent 5.7% of GDP on education, resulting in high levels of literacy and access to education services. However, the education system has also been criticized for promoting a narrow, pro-government curriculum and limiting critical thinking (*GDP Belarus, World Bank* <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>).

The media is heavily controlled by the state, with independent journalists facing harassment and censorship. According to Reporters Without Borders, Belarus ranks 158th out of 180 countries in terms of press freedom (*Belarus. Reporters without Borders* <https://rsf.org/en/country/belarus>).

Conclusion

The historical development path has a significant impact on a country's institutional development. The historical trajectory of a country shapes its institutional landscape, setting the foundation for the development of both formal and informal institutions. Historical path dependence can influence the alignment or divergence between formal and informal institutions. In some cases, formal institutions may reinforce and support existing informal institutions, leading to a harmonious and stable institutional framework. In other cases, there may be a dissonance between them, creating challenges and conflicts within the system.

In Belarus' institutional trajectory of development, six institutional cycles can be identified that have shaped the structure of and interaction between formal and informal institutions. An important determinant of the country's development has been the influence of external factors, particularly the influence of the institutional environment of neighboring countries. At different stages of development, Belarus' institutional environment has been influenced by both the institutional matrix of the Polish Kingdom and the Russian Empire. The institutional matrix of Belarus reflects a combination of inclusive and extractive institutions. By the time the institutional restructuring of Belarus' system began, well-defined extractive-type institutions had been established. While formal inclusive institutions were implemented rapidly, informal institutions remained at the same level. This ultimately led to the election of President Lukashenko in 1994.

The basic economic institutions in Belarus during the Lukashenko period have been characterized by high transaction costs, weak property rights, mixed macroeconomic stability, limited financial sector development, low productivity in the real-estate sector, and limited market rela-

tions. While some progress has been made in key areas, such as the manufacturing sector, the overall state control of the economy has limited the development of a market-oriented economy in Belarus.

The political institutions during the Lukashenko period have been characterized by a highly centralized power structure, limited development of civil society, significant repression of political opposition and dissent, high levels of corruption, and restricted freedom of speech. An authoritarian system has developed in the political base of institutions, based on the strict total control of one person over all spheres. There are strong barriers to equal and free participation in the electoral system and to the involvement of the wider population in public administration. While there some efforts have been made to improve political and civil liberties, the overall situation remains concerning, with ongoing violations of human rights and a lack of progress toward democratic reform.

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Białoruś – cykle instytucjonalne i historyczne korzenie współczesnej matrycy instytucjonalnej

Streszczenie

Jednym z nowoczesnych obszarów badań naukowych jest poszukiwanie przesłanek kształtowania i funkcjonowania określonego modelu instytucjonalnego kraju. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja i analiza głównych cykli instytucjonalnych w kształtowaniu systemów społeczno-ekonomicznych Białorusi. Pomoże to określić wpływ czynników historycznych na trajektorię rozwoju administracyjnego kraju oraz ustalić, skąd pochodzi współczesna matryca instytucjonalna Białorusi. Szczególną cechą badania cykli instytucjonalnych i ich dynamiki jest interdyscyplinarny charakter problemu. Autor prowadzi analizę z perspektywy nowej ekonomii instytucjonalnej, zwłaszcza odwołując się do osiągnięć D. Northa, D. Acemoglu i J. Robinsona. Zastosowane metody badawcze to analiza historyczna, analiza porównawcza.

Słowa kluczowe: Białoruś, cykle instytucjonalne, matryca instytucjonalna, formalne i nieformalne instytucje