

---

# The Government's Reform Attempts and Policy towards Civil Society in Belarus 2016-2017

---

---

**REVIEW PAPER**

---

Supported by:



**National Endowment  
for Democracy**  
*Supporting freedom around the world*

**G | M | F**

The German Marshall Fund  
of the United States

STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION



Kingdom of the Netherlands

EUROPEAN  
ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY



Prepared by:



for BIIM

14-15th May, Warsaw

---

**Research team.** Andrei Kazakevich, coordinator of the research (*Political Sphere Institute*), Ryhor Astapenia (IdeaBY), Aliaksei Lastouski (*Political Sphere Institute*), Dzmitry Markusheuski (SYMPA), Vadzim Smok (*Political Sphere Institute*).

**Reviewers and experts.** Łukasz Byrski (East European Democratic Center), Uladz Labkovich (Human Rights Center *Viasna*), Sviatlana Zinkievich (Office of European Expertise and Communication).

*The Warsaw-based East European Democratic Center (EEDC) is an independent, nonpartisan NGO established in 2001 and one of a few organisations in Poland that came into being with the specific aim of assisting civil society development in Eastern Europe. The EEDC has trained activists and journalists in Belarus, brought them to Poland for internships and study visits, and helped other organizations to carry out similar work. To date, the EEDC has assisted over 200 independent publications and several hundred NGOs. Since 2002, in cooperation with other stakeholders, the EEDC is coordinating the activities of the Belarusian International Implementers Meeting.*

# THE GOVERNMENT'S REFORM ATTEMPTS AND POLICY TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY IN BELARUS 2016–2017

## Executive Summary

**The state.** A reduction of financial resources and the need to improve relations with the West have made the government more open to cooperation with non-governmental structures and reduced the direct pressure on the sector, replacing repression with penalties and fiscal measures of influence.

The economic situation in the country remains difficult. After the economic recession in 2015 (a 3.9% reduction<sup>1</sup>), the fall of the GDP in 2016 amounted to 2,6%.<sup>2</sup> It is predicted that the economy will not move to growth, but stagnation in 2017.<sup>3</sup> There is also an increase in unemployment, *although* official statistics deny this.

Foreign policy was characterized by a significant improvement in relations with the EU and the USA. In February 2016, the restrictive measures against Belarusian officials and businessmen were definitively abolished.<sup>4</sup> The level and intensity of contacts between Belarus and the EU have increased significantly, and relations with the USA have also improved. Despite repressive measures against protesters in February–March 2017, the authorities maintained improved relations with Western countries.

In spite of efforts to diversify its foreign policy and economy, Belarus remains heavily dependent on Russia. Russia remains the chief trading partner and major market for Belarusian products,<sup>5</sup> and even Belarusian exports to the EU are mainly composed of processed Russian oil products.

Relations between Russia and Belarus became increasingly strained during 2016 due to oil, gas and other issues, but on the whole they had improved by spring 2017.

The increasing complexity of the economic and political situation requires reforms to be implemented in the economic and administrative spheres. At the same time, top officials consider the reforms a significant risk and tend to keep to the current model as much as possible: *'...all the reforms have been carried out. We are only improving what we already have.'*

Despite the fact that changes in certain directions do take place (pension system, education, state machinery optimization, etc.), the reforms' implementation has actually remained frozen. The state machinery is still non-transparent and closed to any influence by public and civil society organizations. Civil society organizations and independent media remain a very important tool for innovation in society, foregrounding the political, social and economic problems, as well as providing feedback from the society to the state.

The Belarusian authorities continue to regard civil society as a GONGO system – primarily the Belarusian National Youth Union (BRSM), Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB), *Belaya Rus*, Belarusian Women's Union, and veterans' organizations. The number of formally independent GONGOs created to implement international and other projects has vastly increased in recent years. The GONGOs receive funding from the state budget and other governmental sources, yet at the same time remain politicized and are actively used for agitation, mobilization, electoral observation, etc. during election campaigns. Lately, the authorities have begun actively lobbying for GONGOs to be included in international projects and programs.

**GONGOs.** For the GONGO sector, the aforementioned processes primarily mean the reduction of financial resources and institutional capacities, as well as a call to seek alternative sources of funding and become more open. At the same time, the government has set targets to improve operational efficiency and meet the target groups' expectations. As a result, GONGOs have become more open to cooperation with public organizations and local initiatives. GONGOs have also become more active on the international level, competing with non-governmental civil society bodies.

The achievements, however, remain limited. Only a few organizations demonstrate new methods and techniques for working with target groups while the majority of GONGOs remain bureaucratic and inert and utilize old forms of activity. Their international cooperation continues to be dominated by Russia and the post-Soviet region.

**The independent NGO sector.** The factors indicated have different effects on society in Belarus. On the one hand, increased cooperation with the government has opened up new possibilities for developing the sector and contacts with target groups. On the other hand, competition is increasing at an international level due to growing GONGO activity, as well as reducing impact on public opinion in the West, where official Minsk is acquiring more influence.

A reluctance to interfere with the state, coupled with an improved political climate and professionalization have led to a significant depoliticization of civil society. Independent NGOs, unlike GONGOs, played almost no part in the political campaigns of 2015 and 2016, and tend to avoid parties and other governmental institutions as partners.

The state's reduced financial and organizational capabilities, as well as the decreasing level of repression, have contributed to increased social activism, with more local initiatives and self-organization, which has created a favorable background for civil society development. Crowdfunding practices have emerged, which, however, provide very limited resources for sustainable social activities.

In the conditions of economic crisis and growing social tension, civil activism and new initiatives have started attracting more attention in society. The media now focus more on such initiatives and social activity in general, including media that previously showed no interest in such topics. The role of socially oriented projects has also significantly increased.

Reduced external support and decreased interest in Belarus at an international level have hindered the work of many organizations in the sector, some of which have reduced their activities and changed their profile. At the same time, the new operating environment, depoliticization and growing professionalization of civil society are making organizations more open, flexible and ready to engage in coalitions and cross-sector interaction. Organizations have started paying significantly more attention to the needs and opinions of their own target groups, as well as working on diversifying their funding sources.

## Information Collection and Analysis

Collection and analysis of information took the form of monitoring public sources, working with documents, statistics, etc. (January–April, 2017). A methodology description is given at the beginning of each part of the report. In addition, the text was corrected in line with the results of discussions between experts and civil society representatives, in particular after the meeting held in Minsk on April 20.

## PART 1. MAIN TRENDS AND ISSUES IN PUBLIC SECTOR DEVELOPMENT BY 2017

**Methods.** This analysis is based on the results of a monitoring of publications touching on public sector development issues in the mass media and other open sources: legislative acts, officials' comments, media publications, analytical publications, reports on governmental and non-governmental organizations' activities – 129 documents in total.

**Administrative apparatus.** The state bodies' transformation is mainly carried out through austerity, reduction in the number of officials, and increased discipline. The measures are implemented in particular through Decree No.5 (2014). Among other things, this decree expanded the rights and obligations of officials and employers to ensure discipline and introduced additional, imprecise grounds for suspension from work, for example, for discipline violations that '*may cause damage to the organization*.'<sup>6</sup>

The government's program for 2016–2020 contains a reformist component and, among other things, provides for results-based assessment of managers' performance at all levels, as well as '*expanding the practice of public discussion of strategic documents and critical decisions*.'<sup>7</sup> However, it is currently hard to say how the program is going to be implemented.

**Communication with citizens.** The current political order does not allow for an effective participation of citizens, public institutions and commercial organizations in decision-making processes.<sup>8</sup> Feedback is mostly obtained from personal meetings between citizens and representatives of state bodies, and through telephone hotlines. The mechanism focuses the authorities' attention on particular problems, but fails to address systemic issues.<sup>9</sup>

The development of e-government is mainly focused on internal and interdepartmental document-flow and does not facilitate inclusiveness and transparency. Although the law provides for citizens and legal entities to submit applications and implement certain administrative procedures in electronic form, in reality this option is hampered by the inefficiency and generally closed nature of state electronic systems.<sup>10</sup>

**Adoption of laws and regulations.** According to the legislation, organizations and citizens can put forward proposals for state bodies to adopt regulatory acts. However, there are no effective mechanisms for promoting the interests and opinions of citizens and civil bodies. The legislation does not provide efficient mechanisms for reviewing and responding to proposals.<sup>11</sup>

For example, in 2014 when the National Strategy for Sustainable Development was drawn up, the Ministry of the Economy announced a public discussion which included the possibility to submit proposals to the Ministry. Applicants, however, were never informed as to whether any proposals were adopted or rejected, and had no opportunity to influence the decisions.<sup>12</sup>

The established system of planning, preparation and approval of draft laws makes it difficult for deputies and citizens to implement a legislative initiative, but does not solve the problem of unstable legislation either: about 1,500 legal acts are adopted at national level each year.<sup>13</sup>

**Public councils.** Public councils operate inside state bodies to perform advisory, supervisory or monitoring functions. As a rule, the members of public councils and their authority are determined solely by the head of the relevant state body.<sup>14</sup> Councils are mostly represented by pro-government experts, sometimes from fields unrelated to the body's activities.

The efficiency of these councils has been repeatedly questioned;<sup>15</sup> they often perform functions that have nothing to do with public participation in decision-making.<sup>16</sup> Decisions made by councils consisting of public members are normally only recommendatory in nature.

As an exceptional example, one can mention the mandatory decisions of the Republican Interdepartmental Council on Issues of People with Disabilities.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, decisions of the Council for Entrepreneurship Development in the Republic of Belarus (although being recommendatory in nature) and drafts of legal acts related to the stimulation and development of entrepreneurial activity are also subject to agreement with the Council before they reach the Presidential Administration.<sup>18</sup>

**Self-administration.** There are territorial public self-administration bodies (TPSAB) in Belarus. For example, at the beginning of 2017, 131 collegiate self-administration bodies were operating in Minsk.<sup>19</sup> However, these bodies are mainly set up and operated under the patronage of the local authorities, which deprives them of independence and narrows their field of activity. The majority of TPSABs are engaged in assisting law enforcement, preventing offenses, educational matters, organizing leisure activities for residents, and improving adjacent territories.

Generally, citizens' involvement in the life of the local community is rather low (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Answers to a semi-closed question 'Are you involved in the life of your local community (district, street, apartment block, etc.)?' (results of a 2016 public opinion poll):<sup>20</sup>**

Answer options	%
Yes, I attend residents'/condominium members' meetings	12.3
Yes, I participate in adjacent territory improvement	13.9
Yes, I participate in joint events with the neighbors	12.8
Yes, I participate in signature-collection	2.0
Yes, I am an organizer of social life in my community	0.8
I do not participate due to a lack of time	30.6
I do not participate as I am not interested	15.8
Other	4.1
Don't know/No answer	6.5/1.1

**Information.** In 2014, a Council of Ministers resolution approved a wide and vague list of information that was subject to restriction, including ‘*information that may damage the national security of the Republic of Belarus, public order, morals, rights, freedoms and legal interests of individuals and legal entities.*’<sup>21</sup>

In December 2014, amendments were made to the law ‘On the Mass Media,’ further toughening state control over the information space. In particular, the list of information prohibited for dissemination in the media now includes information that could harm national interests. The owners of online resources have now been made responsible for the content of any publications and comments, and the Ministry of Information has been granted the authority to block access to websites without a trial.<sup>22</sup>

**Law-enforcement agencies.** According to the law, protection of the rights and legitimate interests of citizens is among the main tasks of law-enforcement agencies. At the same time, the top priority for the country’s political leadership is to ensure public order and combat crime, especially corruption. As a result, citizens face excessive restrictions on their rights to peaceful assembly and demonstrations.

**Corruption.** At the same time, despite a toughening of punishments and public condemnation of corrupt officials, no effective measures have been taken to eliminate corruption-related factors, particularly in the field of public procurement. The practice of presidential pardons being issued to corrupt officials if they compensate damage caused to the state undermines the effectiveness of the fight against corruption.

**New fees.** A state fee to allow vehicles onto public roads was introduced in 2014. The need for additional investment in road construction was given to justify this fee but, judging by reports on budgetary spending, no significant additional funds have been received for road construction.<sup>23</sup>

The fee introduced for financing public expenditures (according to Decree No.3 of April 2, 2015) did not address the stated objective of stimulating able-bodied citizens to engage in labor activity, but created additional possibilities for arbitrariness of local authorities, and led to negative consequences for the unemployed and other vulnerable population groups, provoking unrest in society.<sup>24</sup> The implementation of this decree was in fact suspended in 2017.<sup>25</sup>

**Rights of the disabled.** The social welfare system has started being rebuilt to take into account the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>26</sup> The practice of state orders for social services provided by non-governmental organizations has also been introduced.<sup>27</sup>

**Pension reform.** New rules for calculating the length of pensionable service (the period during which a citizen or their employer has paid contributions to the Social Security Fund) have been introduced. From 2014 to 2016, the length of pensionable service required to receive a pension increased from 5 to 15.5 years. It continues to grow and should reach at least 20 years by 2025. In addition, as of January 1, 2017, the retirement age and age for social pensions is gradually rising, with an annual increase of 6 months until it reaches 63 years for men and 58 years for women.<sup>28</sup>

**Health care.** The quality of health care services has increased, although the services are not available to all citizens.<sup>29</sup> Parent committees act as involuntary sponsors of school infrastructure, but have no chance to influence the curriculum and the process<sup>31</sup>.

**Education.** The Secondary Education Program has been changed many times, but the quality of school education continued being criticized<sup>32</sup>. Parent committees act as an involuntary sponsor of school infrastructure but have no opportunity to influence the curriculum and the process.<sup>33</sup>

In 2015, the Conference of European Ministers of Education approved the Belarusian application to join the European Higher Education Area and the proposed Road Map for participation in the Bologna Process.<sup>34</sup> Progress on the Road Map has stalled, however, particularly due to low levels of academic freedom and limited student self-governance.<sup>35</sup>

**Housing and utilities.** In order to improve the work of housing and communal services, local experiments were carried out to reorganize the provision of public utilities. They did not receive widespread acceptance, however. Based on International Monetary Fund recommendations, tariffs for housing and communal services were raised, with plans to abandon their subsidization. Steps were taken to increase the transparency of how service costs are calculated, but the procedure for fixing tariffs remained closed, leading to mistrust from owners and tenants.<sup>36</sup>

A presidential decree dated December 31, 2015 strengthened the local authorities' power to control the operations of owners' associations and housing consumer cooperatives: prospective chairpersons must be approved by the local authorities.<sup>37</sup> Local authorities may appoint their own manager of joint property if a chairperson is not elected or performs their duties and additional duties imposed by the decree 'improperly', including reporting to the local authorities on the financial and economic activities of owners' associations (OA) or housing consumer cooperatives (HCC). This situation creates grounds for conflicts of interest between owners and the heads of OA/HCC.

**Foreign aid.** The results of large-scale international technical assistance projects aimed at developing effective, inclusive public administration are being affected right at the planning and implementation stage due to an artificially reduced group of eligible participants. For example, the implementation of a three-year international technical-assistance project 'Strengthening Inclusive Local Governance in the Republic of Belarus', launched in 2016, is structured in such a way that interested civil society organizations and non-governmental experts are not allowed to participate in the activities – contrary to the project document and the very meaning of inclusiveness.<sup>38</sup>

In 2016, changes were made to legislation governing the provision of foreign aid. The new rules significantly complicate the receipt of foreign aid, specifically by increasing the tax burden on public organizations. At the same time, state institutions can voluntarily waive taxes on individual projects and organizations, which therefore places non-governmental organizations in an unequal position.

In accordance with Clause 31 of the Regulation<sup>39</sup>, foreign grant assistance is exempted from customs duties and taxes by the Presidential Affairs Department in coordination with the Belarusian president. In order to be exempted from taxes, duties and fees, it is necessary to obtain a decision from the competent authority. Since autumn 2016, the Department has granted no exemptions from profit tax on amounts allocated for general economic expenses (costs for office rent and maintenance, postal and other services, travel expenses, etc.).



## PART 2.

### CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE SPEECHES OF THE BELARUSIAN LEADERSHIP

**Methods.** This study analyzed 15 of the most important government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) in Belarus,<sup>40</sup> as mentioned in speeches by high-ranking officials in 2016. The analysis includes 31 officials<sup>41</sup> who were selected according to their importance in the political system, as well as policy fields that could potentially include the participation of non-governmental organizations. References to the organizations were found on governmental bodies' official websites and through the Google search engine by combining an official's name and the title of the organization. A total of 76 references were recorded in public speeches. Those most referred to were the BRSM (22), FPB (16), Women's Union (9), NAK and Writers' Union (6), and DOSAAF (4).

The speeches of senior Belarusian officials demonstrate no significant change in their understanding of Belarusian civil society or their attitude towards it. As before, they only regard the largest GONGOs<sup>42</sup> as real civil society. Independent organizations are treated as an alien element, although the authorities' rhetoric towards them was not generally hostile in 2016.

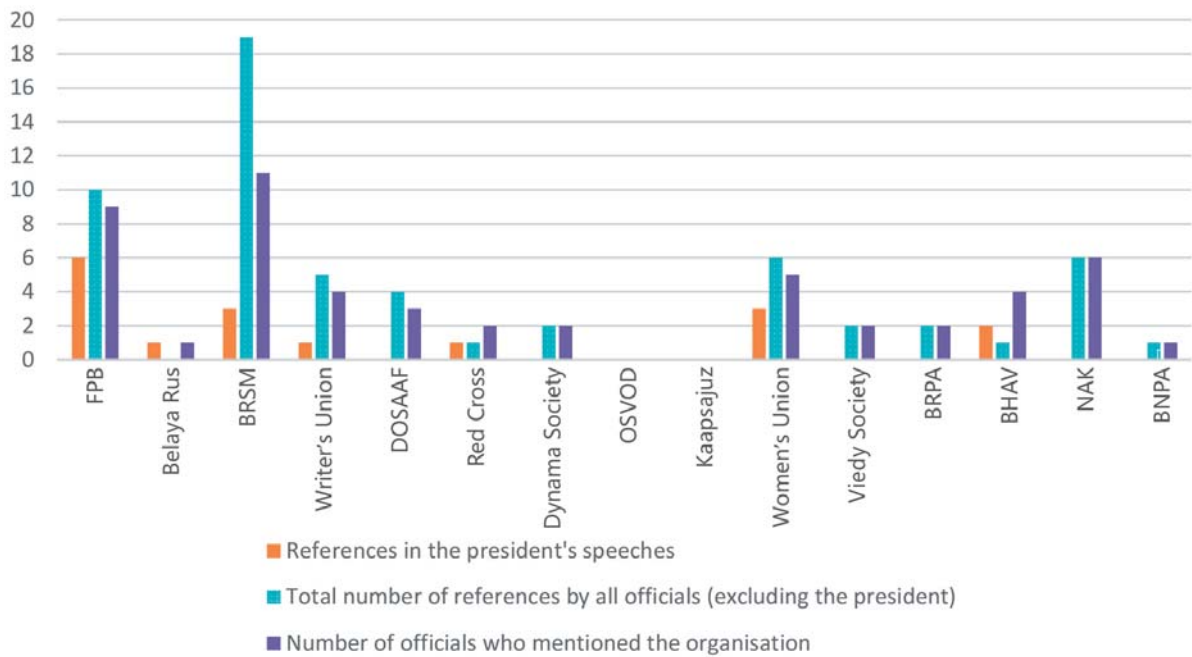
Speeches by officials and interviews with representatives of Belarusian civil society allow us to conclude that most officials do not understand the nature of NGOs, the conditions and nature of their activities, or the way the state can cooperate with them to achieve common goals. They mostly express a bureaucratic attitude towards NGOs and perceive them as bureaucratic bodies. The only exceptions include officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Economy, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection.

In his annual state of the nation address, the Belarusian president listed 'constructive public associations' as follows: *'The Belarusian National Youth Union, Belaya Rus, Women's Union, veterans' associations and, of course, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus'*.<sup>43</sup> At the same time these organizations were designated as 'helpers' of executive bodies, not independent partners. In a similar way (but with no mention of *Belaya Rus*), Lukashenko mentioned the NGO sector when addressing the All-Belarusian National Assembly: *'...today we do not have the Communist Party which was doing a huge job in ideological education of our society, so we, the vertical of power, now have to take over. But since we have no real parties, we have to rely on what we have: our youth organizations, our veterans' organizations, Women's Union, our trade unions'*.<sup>44</sup>

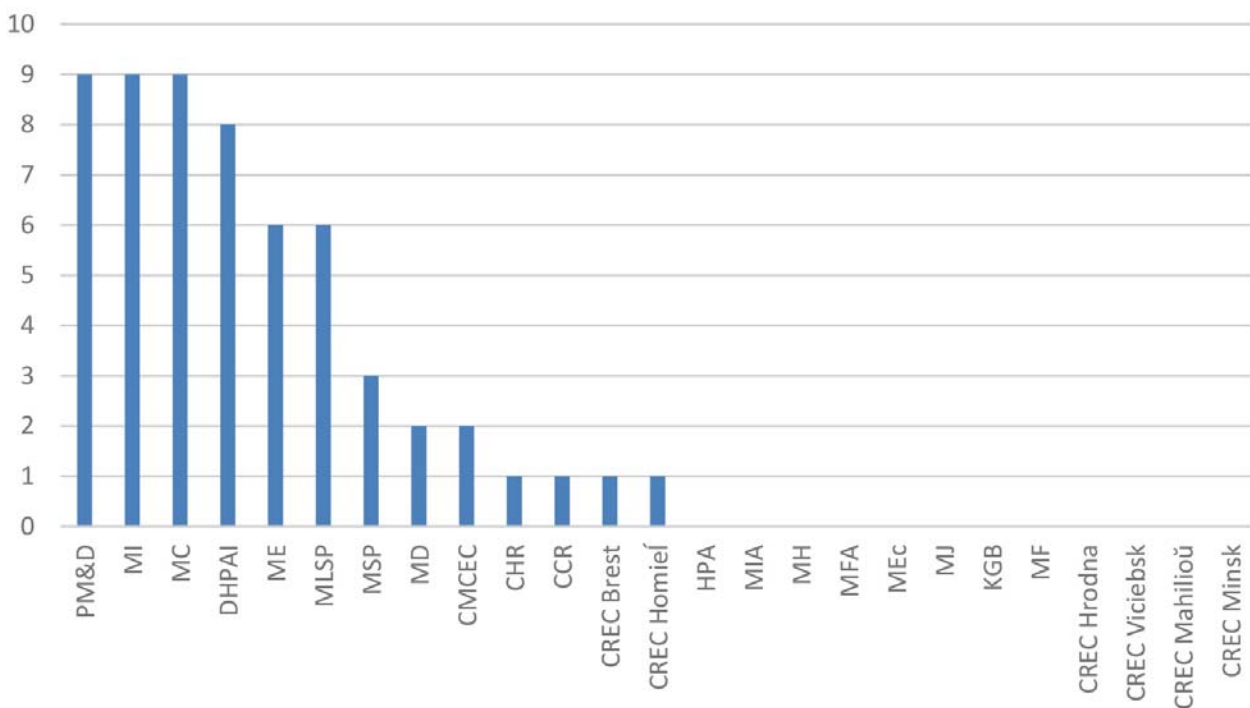
In the same speech, Lukashenko described NGOs as the heirs of the Communist Party, as they now perform its ideological and educational functions.

The president mentioned NGOs 17 times in 2016, and almost all the references included four organizations: the FPB (6), BRSM (3), Women's Union (3) and BHAV (2). These four were mentioned as being the main non-governmental organizations in major speeches that year (the state of the nation address and before the All-Belarusian National Assembly). In the context of the year's social and economic problems, the trade unions perhaps received special attention – the organization and its leader received two personal awards from the president in 2016. Other organizations were either congratulated on their anniversaries (the Writers' Union, Red Cross) or ignored altogether.

The other 30 officials mentioned NGOs 61 times in their speeches. The BRSM had the highest number of references (19), followed by the FPB (10), NAK (6), Women's Union (6), Writers' Union (5) and DOSAAF (4). Other organizations were mentioned three times or less.

**Figure 1. References to NGOs in speeches by high-ranking officials, 2016**

The analysis shows a group of organizations that are not mentioned in public speeches: *Belaya Rus* and OSVOD. While OSVOD are specialized organizations which do not play a significant role in public life, the presence of *Belaya Rus* in the list indicates this organization's low influence and significance in the activities of the country's senior leadership.

**Figure 2. Total number of references by institution, 2016<sup>45</sup>**

If we analyze how many heads of state institutions mentioned certain organizations in 2016, the leaders were again the BRSM and FPB, mentioned by 10 and 8 officials respectively. NAK (6 officials) and the Women’s Union (4) held average positions, while 2–3 institutions mentioned the Writers’ Union, DOSAAF, Dynama, Viedy, BRPA and BHAV. The rest of the organizations had 0 to 1 references.

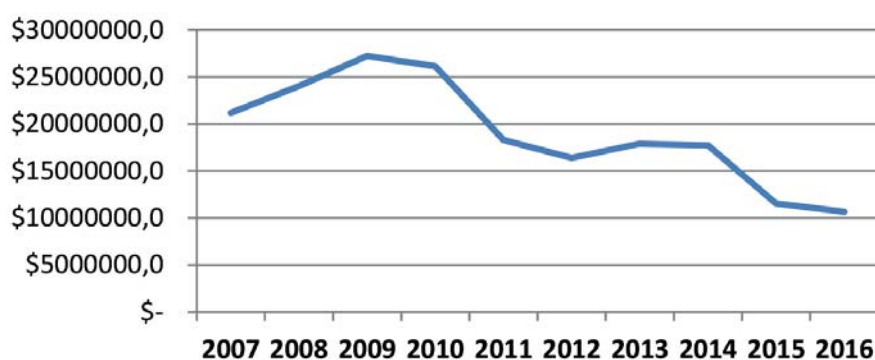
Heads of state bodies differ as to their mentions of non-governmental organizations (see Figure 2). The prime minister and his deputies made the most references to NGOs, followed by bodies responsible for information and ideology (the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Culture, Presidential Administration). Then came the social ministries (the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Ministry of Sports and Tourism). Other officials either did not mention NGOs at all, or did so only a couple of times a year. Strangely, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Health did not mention any public associations in their activities.

### PART 3. STATE FUNDING OF GONGOS: THE MAIN TRENDS

**Methods.** This section analyzed NGOs which receive funding from the annual national budget. Funding for other organizations cannot be traced from open sources.

**A significant reduction in budget allocations to GONGOs.** The data show that the economic crisis has seriously affected the GONGO sector. Over the past ten years, budget allocations to this sector have declined significantly. Compared to the peak year of 2009, they fell 2.7 times – from \$27,000,000 to \$10,000,000. The GONGO sector is experiencing a significant reduction in financial resources, thus limiting its activity and motivation to seek additional sources of funding.

**Figure 3. Allocations to GONGOs from the national budget in 2007–2016, USD**



Budgetary funding, of course, shows only part of the financial resources coming into the sector. Other sources of funding may include membership fees, donations from businesses, commercial activities, government-provided privileges, and the option to use public infrastructure. The field remains highly non-transparent, but there is every reason to believe that funding from other sources has also been reduced to a similar extent.

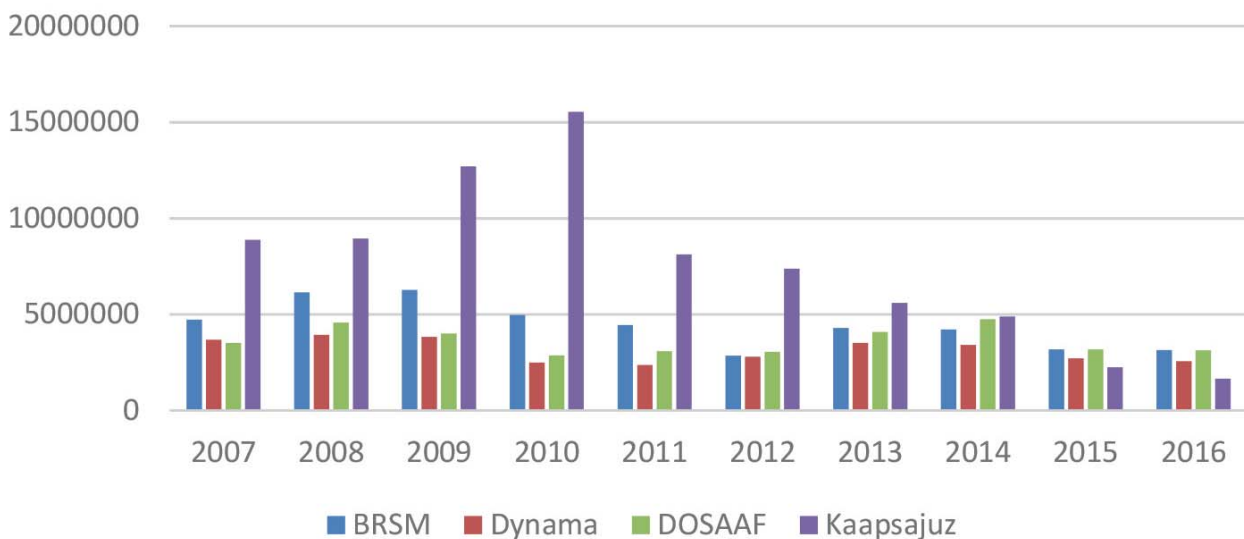
The deteriorating situation in the state sector can be seen through the dynamics for funding the most important GONGOs, which saw a 2- to 9-fold drop in the USD equivalent received in recent years. The bulk of direct budgetary allocations go to four organizations that were part of

the Soviet Union system: Bielkaapsajuz, Dynama, DOSAAF and BRSM. So the priority areas for budgetary funding in the GONGO sector are youth, sports and regional development.

Bielkaapsajuz faced the sharpest cut since 2010 (9 times). For other organizations, the drop in financial support was not so catastrophic, yet also significant: BRSM funding fell 1.9 times compared to its maximum in 2009, Dynama – 1.5 times since its 2008 maximum, DOSAAF – 1.5 times since 2014.

This trend can also be observed in funding for less significant GONGOs, such as the Writers' Union and OSVOD. These organizations receive relatively small amounts from the state budget (\$20,000–120,000), but they also faced cuts. The situation looks more stable for the Writers' Union, which receives government support of \$80,000–150,000 annually. It received 1.2 times less in 2016 than in 2014. In contrast, OSVOD, with its funding range of \$27,000–295,000, has experienced a 10-fold cut since 2008, most of which occurred over the last two years.

**Figure 4. Amount of financial support (USD) from the state budget for certain organizations, 2006–2017**



**National programs.** Another mechanism through which GONGOs can receive funding and be involved in public policy is national development programs. GONGOs and, in theory, regular NGOs can act as clients and contractors in implementing national programs. Nevertheless, the participation of non-state players remains very limited here, and some programs are completely closed to NGOs. At the moment, the government is implementing 20 major national programs, most of which are designed for the 2016–2020 period. NGOs are only mentioned in 11 programs, and all of them are GONGOs.

Bielkaapsajuz appears to be the organization most integrated into the national programs, which to some extent mitigates the reduction in its direct budgetary financing. The organization is involved in six national programs, covering combating alcoholism, radioactive contamination control, supplying goods, and small- and medium-sized enterprise development. The BRSM, FPB and Dynama are integrated into two programs. The BRSM is involved in vocational guidance for young people and other forms of youth policy, while the FPB will cover labor protection, social guarantees during restructuring, and the development of tourist services. Dynama works to train sports reserves and offer physical training to the public. DOSAAF takes part in one

program (training sports reserves, developing physical education technologies), as does the BRPA (organizing activities aimed at developing and supporting youth civic organizations, reporting and electoral conferences, meetings, youth organization congresses).

## PART 4. THE GONGO SECTOR: ROLE, STRATEGIES AND METHODS

**Methods.** This analysis was focused on third-sector organizations<sup>46</sup> that were set up directly by the state or which cooperate closely with government agencies on their core activity. A particular marker is that such organizations have been included in the most important state political campaigns – thus, while preparing and holding the parliamentary elections in 2016, nearly all the organizations mentioned below were engaged in various activities (agitation, nominating candidates, observation, legitimization).<sup>47</sup>

**Role in their field.** The efficiency rate in this case was measured by external activity (implementation of various specialized campaigns with a practical dimension) which can be tracked in open sources. A full-fledged regional presence may be considered as an additional important factor<sup>48</sup>.

**Monopolistic organizations.** There are a number of organizations that dominate the segment, and even aspire to expand into adjacent spheres. In this regard, the Red Cross and BRSM (Belarusian National Youth Union) stand out. The monopolization of the social services sector by the Red Cross was noted during a study in 2015, and one may assume that it has only intensified since then.<sup>49</sup> This also leads to a weakening of other GONGOs in the sector, which are forced to act as junior partners in coalition projects, such as the case of the Belarusian Society of Disabled Persons.<sup>50</sup> The BRSM not only stands out for its number of members, but also the variety of its campaigns, which virtually monopolize the work with youth carried out by the state.<sup>51</sup>

**Target-group organizations.** A relatively closed group of organizations are focused on working with their target audience and are not always visible to the public. Amongst other functions, these structures mobilize the population during public campaigns. The organizations hold strong positions in their sector, but influence it only partially, mainly due to their ability to use administrative resources. This group includes the public association *Belaya Rus*, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, and the Belarusian Women's Union. These organizations' nominal objectives (protection of workers'<sup>52</sup> and women's rights) are barely achieved, however. In the case of *Belaya Rus*, their activities outside of electoral involvement are questionable.

**Organizations in competition.** This group includes organizations that have strong non-governmental competitors and a limited influence in their sector. Examples include the Belarusian Writers' Union, Belarusian Union of Journalists and Belarusian Culture Fund. These organizations have remained relatively inactive, mainly supporting their own institutions or joining coalitions with larger, more active partners. These organizations' weaknesses indicate the sectors where GONGO efficiency is seriously under question and where non-governmental organizations traditionally hold strong positions.

**Project-initiated GONGOs.** It is important to note another sector of GONGOs which does not fall under the primary analysis. Many GONGOs are created to implement international projects or for specific public tenders. They are usually not well-known and not engaged in activities, but their state support gives them a definite advantage and the ability to obtain funds from

international institutions. One example would be in the environmental sector: in the ‘Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus’ project competition, financed by the European Union, the fake organization Environmental Sphere gained the highest score.<sup>53</sup>

**The main work methods.** An analysis of organizations’ activities shows that most of them operate as bureaucratic institutions, in accordance with established rules and traditions, and are hardly inclined to innovation. Information on some organizations’ work is dominated by news concerning their governing bodies. Of all the activity reports, news about various internal organizational events make up 32% in the Belarusian Women’s Union, 25% in *Belaya Rus*, and 23% in the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus. For the BRSM, the proportion of such news was only 1.5%.

Traditional methods of working with focus groups are predominant. Available reports and other public information on activities prove that old forms of operation are in exclusive use. There is almost no use of social media, advertising, or targeted popularization. With the exception of the leaders in the field, new forms of work are only used by organizations when they act in conjunction with more active partners.

**International cooperation.** The majority of large organizations in the sector are characterized by a low level of international cooperation, and experience difficulties in attracting external funding. This can be explained by both a lack of motivation to develop contacts and by Belarus’ political isolation. The situation has improved somewhat in recent years, but we are not talking about any substantial changes. In this regard, only the Belarusian Red Cross Society stands out due to its active cooperation with Red Cross offices in other countries, and it receives donor support from a wide range of countries (from Switzerland to Japan). In fact, active and significant international projects are almost entirely concentrated in the social sector. The Belarusian Society of Disabled Persons also cooperates actively with international partners.

Most GONGOs are still limited by collaborating with exclusively Russian partners and – to a lesser extent – other post-Soviet countries. As a new trend, it should be noted that even politicized organizations such as the BRSM and Belarusian Union of Journalists (BUJ) are now trying to take part in European projects and seeking funding there. The BUJ is even willing to take part in joint activities with the alternative Belarusian Association of Journalists, if external financing is available.<sup>54</sup> The BRSM has currently only announced its readiness to join international projects, but this may indicate a possible area for the organization to develop.<sup>55</sup>

**Politicization.** For GONGOs, 2016 and 2017 were marked by the parliamentary elections. Most GONGOs were actively used during the run-up to the parliamentary elections in 2016, when their members participated in the electoral process as internal observers.<sup>56</sup> Traditionally, these organizations’ management and active members joined the ranks of the deputies. Leaders of the following organizations won seats in the upper chamber of parliament (the Council of the Republic): the BRSM, FPB, Belarusian Women’s Union, and the head of the regional branch of BRCS.<sup>57</sup> In this respect, *Belaya Rus* was especially noticeable, sending about 3,500 observers to the polls, while 68 of its members were elected to parliament.

GONGOs are also traditionally used to support state policy in Belarus. This was particularly noticeable during and at the end of the fifth All-Belarusian People’s Assembly (held on June 22 – 23, 2016). Representatives of various GONGOs took part in the Assembly *en masse*, and used the site to publicly demonstrate their solidarity with state policy. This allows many organizations to work in close alliance with state agencies, run joint activities, and even receive government

funding.<sup>58</sup> However, it also imposes an ideological framework and political constraints. Civil society rhetoric promoting democracy and human rights protection is replaced by socio-patriotic education and demonstrations of loyalty. No specific progress has been observed in this direction, as there are obviously rigid ideological barriers for GONGO activities.

The degree of politicization is different and, of course, depends on the type of organization. When analyzing direct participation in politics based on news about the organizations, the most prominent were *Belaya Rus* (17.2%), the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (6.3%) and the BRSM (5%). The proportion of ideological work and patriotic education among information events is as follows: 14.9% for *Belaya Rus*, 14.7% for the BRSM, and 13.5% for the FPB. For other organizations, these values do not exceed 5%.

**New technologies.** With a few exceptions, organizations almost never use new communications technology, have no information policy, and do not explain their activities through the media. Also, very little work is done to promote a positive image of the organizations. Certain innovations introduced in recent years show that the central authorities require GONGOs to apply new technologies and approaches, but in practice this is only done in a formal manner.

Some organizations (the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, Belarusian Writers' Union, Belarusian Society of Disabled Persons) have shown no development in the forms of their work: meetings, conventions, taking flowers to war veterans and families with many children, etc. Generally, new forms of work are used by such organizations only when acting in conjunction with more active partners.<sup>59</sup>

Two organizations engage in the most dynamic work – the Belarusian Red Cross Society and the BRSM. Looking at the activities of the Red Cross, it becomes obvious that active involvement in international projects has had a positive impact on their forms of activity: along with traditional formats (financial aid, celebrations for individual categories of the population, round tables and workshops), elements borrowed from international practice are also used actively (volunteers, training sessions, billboards, bicycle races, etc.).

The BRSM is trying to implement new types of youth activities (e.g. extreme sports) and work formats: a competition for startups, *BookCrossing*, a bus museum, a virtual museum, and social media. An interesting fact is that the BRSM is also attempting to appropriate cultural trends that have emerged from independent youth circles – a good example being the fashion for *vyshyvanki* (embroidered shirts) which originated and quickly gained popularity in the independent (non-state) environment.<sup>60</sup> From the Russian context, the 'Immortal Regiment' idea was borrowed to honor soldiers who fought in World War II. This new micro-initiative became an addition to the St. George's ribbon – now discredited due to politicization.

## PART 5. BELARUSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY: MAIN TRENDS IN 2016–2017

**Methods.** This part of the study was devoted to the main trends in Belarusian civil society development throughout 2016 and early 2017. These trends include the level of interaction between civil society organizations (CSOs), the development of new funding sources, the authorities' attitude to such organizations' operations, and how close CSOs' contacts are with political parties, media and foreign governments. The analysis is based on monitoring

publications about CSO activities in specialized resources (belngo.info, eurobelarus.info, ngo.by) and popular news websites (tut.by, naviny.by, belta.by, nn.by, svaboda.org) in 2016 and 2017. A total of 120 publications were analyzed, including 90 news articles and 22 documents. The news articles were found through keyword searches in Google News. Due to the limited volume of this report, references are provided selectively. 12 analytical publications were also used in preparing this report.

**Depoliticizing CSOs.** The fact that Belarusian Language Society representative Aliena Anisim became a member of the Belarusian parliament should not distract us from the recent steady trend for the civil society's isolation and self-isolation from politics. The 2016 parliamentary campaign demonstrated that the elections only attracted human rights activists (who take the role of observers), GONGOs (providing observers, commission members and candidates) and political bodies using social movements' status as part of their political strategy. In contrast to the political campaigns of the 1990s and 2000s, when CSOs actively joined various political coalitions, their current political cooperation and involvement is minimal.

For most civil society structures, politics does not represent a space for activity, but instead threatens to raise conflicts with the authorities. Moreover, depoliticizing civil society not only improves relations with the regime, but is also a step towards attracting business support for its activities, which has been well illustrated by cultural initiatives.<sup>i</sup>

However, it should be noted that the decrease of civil society's role in routine political events such as elections does not mean a complete refusal to participate in Belarusian political processes. As an example, the #BY\_help community raised \$43,000 to support the repressed.<sup>ii</sup>

**Utilizing 'soft' forms of repression.** The depoliticization of civil society and thaw in Belarusian–Western relations led to decreased persecution of non-governmental organizations' activists in 2016. Although the legal framework for civil society organizations remains restrictive, repression mostly targeted the more politicized sector, with fines increasing many times, whereas arrests were almost non-existent (see Figure 5).<sup>iv</sup>

**Figure 5. Administrative persecution for political reasons, 2014–2017**

	2014	2015	2016	2017*
Administrative arrests	108	15	3	316
Fines	81	109	509	223

\* January–April, 2017

Based on data from the Human Rights Center *Viasna* (<https://spring96.org/persecution>)

Even the persecution at the beginning of 2017, although it had a chance to become a turning point, still shows that the authorities are trying to make room for another thaw in Belarusian–Western relations and are using repression selectively. As an example, most of the detainees on Freedom Day were released with no official record of their arrest.<sup>v</sup> In total, over 900 people were arrested in March, of which more than 100 were sentenced to administrative arrest.<sup>vi</sup>

**Increased interaction between the state and civil society.** The authorities are more willing to engage with civil society when they see it being supported by influential international partners (and,



accordingly, financial or political resources). It seems that the Belarusian authorities' degree of representation in this space depends on the status of the foreign participants. In such cases, non-governmental organizations act as facilitators for dialogue between the West and the Belarusian government, and do have a certain influence on the further improvement of this dialogue.

Examples of such interaction were the Kastychnicki Economic Forum,<sup>vii</sup> Minsk Dialogue<sup>viii</sup> or *Broadening the Horizons* forum.<sup>ix</sup> At the latter event, the Belarusian authorities were represented by the prime minister, while the forum itself was funded by the European Union and primarily concerned investment.

At the same time, the authorities are more inclined to cooperate in areas subject to pressure from the West, *e.g.* the fields of capital punishment or law enforcement.<sup>x</sup> However, in these cases the authorities often avoid contacts with CSO representatives, although there have been minor improvements in this respect. In March 2016, representatives of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee were invited to participate in an international conference on the death penalty held by the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while representatives of the Human Rights Center *Viasna* were rejected.<sup>xi</sup> During the same conference in December 2016, the authorities made a small step forward by inviting *Viasna* representatives, albeit only as individuals.<sup>xii</sup>

One particular innovation in 2016 was the setting up of a Belarus–EU Coordination Group<sup>xiii</sup> which includes not only officials from both sides, but also representatives of Belarusian civil society. At the same time, the authorities are avoiding dialogue in areas where they have no interest of their own, or where the case seems not being solved in their favor. For example, the government is reluctant to discuss the Road Map for Belarusian participation in the Bologna process, and is no hurry to implement it.<sup>xiv</sup>

Many cases of government/CSO cooperation garnered considerable media coverage and attracted significant public attention.

In 2016 non-governmental organizations received funds to implement 53 contracts to provide services to the disabled and elderly.<sup>61</sup> 47 such contracts were signed in the first quarter of 2017.<sup>62</sup>

**Reduced influence on Western governments.** Although civil society organizations are still able to attract influential foreign partners, the thaw in Belarusian–Western relations has led to NGOs having a reduced role in contacts with Western officials and the international community. Many civil society organizations are concerned that they will be expelled from the Belarusian–European dialogue.<sup>xv</sup> Official representatives from the West have begun meeting less frequently with Belarusian civil society representatives, resulting in reduced donor support programs for Belarusian NGOs. Many members of Belarusian CSOs worry that the West might close its eyes to repression from the authorities. As an example, during his visit to Belarus, the Belgian deputy prime minister, Didier Reynders, not only avoided condemning the authorities' repression on the eve of Freedom Day on March 15, but even stated that *'administrative arrests for participation in protests also happen in the European Union.'*<sup>xvi</sup>

**Flexibility and focus on target groups.** The new operating environment, depoliticization and growing professionalization of civil society have made organizations more open and flexible. There has been a general increase in willingness to work within coalitions, joint projects, and various cross-sectoral interaction initiatives. Since resources have been dwindling, organizations have started to pay more attention to increased work efficiency to achieve synergetic effects, as well as diversifying their sources of funding.

In addition, non-governmental organizations have begun to focus more on the needs and opinions of their target groups, and less on promoting their own ideas and values.

**The increasing importance of crowdfunding.** In 2016, three Belarusian crowdfunding platforms (*Ulej, Talaka* and *MaeSens*) collected about \$700,000 in total,<sup>xvii</sup> which is three times more than in 2015.<sup>xviii</sup> The largest was a campaign to raise funds for seriously ill children with special developmental needs (about \$35,000). However, Belarusian crowdfunding should not be confused with donations, as it is more a means of pre-ordering (for example, people will pay for the publication of a book on condition that they receive a copy of it).<sup>xix</sup> Therefore, crowdfunding platforms are more a way to link initiatives with their target groups than to acquire full funding for activities.<sup>xx</sup>

**Improved social orientation in civil society.** This is closely related to the deteriorating economic conditions in Belarus, the authorities' increasing commitment to socially-oriented projects, and the priorities of certain donors. As an example, projects related to social entrepreneurship and gender issues became widespread among civil society in 2016.<sup>xxi</sup>

Moreover, organizations naturally expand their field of activity if they are unsuccessful in their primary, more politicized sphere. Since achieving systemic change appears to be impossible, NGOs are seeking to resolve problems at a lower – social – level. For example, human rights organizations are increasingly turning to social and economic human rights, rather than civic and political ones.<sup>xxii</sup>

This socialization of civil society allows it to build better relations with the authorities and business, as it can count on not being persecuted by the former and supported by the latter. Therefore, social organizations will occupy an increasingly important position among Belarusian CSOs.<sup>xxiii</sup>

**Civil society promotion in non-traditional media.** Besides the traditional major media which occasionally write about civil society, the number of mentions of social activists in specialized electronic media increased in 2016, due to the media's policy to create special sections devoted to social activity (*Citydog*<sup>xxiv</sup> or *34mag*<sup>xxv</sup>). At the same time, websites such as *Imena*,<sup>xxvi</sup> set up with the help of crowdfunding, are in fact part of the civil society, having raised about \$100,000 for charity in one year of activity.

<sup>1</sup> P.28 *Republic of Belarus. Statistical Yearbook 2016*. Minsk 2016. P.117 *Global Economic Prospects*. June 2016. *Divergences and Risks. A World Bank Group Flagship Report*. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/484281463605616745/Global-Economic-Prospects-June-2016-Europe-and-Central-Asia-analysis.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Main socio-economic indicators of the Republic of Belarus in 2016: <http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/macro-economy-and-environment/main-factors/>

<sup>3</sup> *Беларусь: макроэкономический прогноз No.1 (12), июнь 2016 г.* <http://www.research.by/webroot/delivery/files/BMF2016r01.pdf>

- <sup>4</sup> Restrictions only remain in place for four persons who are suspected of involvement in the disappearances of Belarusian opposition politicians in 1999–2000. Council Regulation (EU) 2016/277 of 25 February 2016, amending Regulation (EC) No.765/2006 concerning restrictive measures in respect of Belarus: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/25-belarus-sanctions/>, [http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/d2e5970e-dd1d-11e5-8fea-01aa75ed71a1.0006.03/DOC\\_1](http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/d2e5970e-dd1d-11e5-8fea-01aa75ed71a1.0006.03/DOC_1)
- <sup>5</sup> Trade with Russia amounts to 50% of the Belarusian turnover. See: Data on foreign trade of the Republic of Belarus with selected countries in January–November 2016 – [http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/macroeconomy-and-environment/vneshnyaya-torgovlya\\_2/operativnye-dannye\\_5/data-on-foreign-trade-of-the-republic-of-belarus-with-selected-countries/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/macroeconomy-and-environment/vneshnyaya-torgovlya_2/operativnye-dannye_5/data-on-foreign-trade-of-the-republic-of-belarus-with-selected-countries/)
- <sup>6</sup> Summary in English: [http://president.gov.by/en/official\\_documents\\_en/view/ordinance-no-5-of-15-december-2014-10446/](http://president.gov.by/en/official_documents_en/view/ordinance-no-5-of-15-december-2014-10446/). Full Russian text: [http://president.gov.by/ru/official\\_documents\\_ru/view/dekret-5-ot-15-dekabrja-2014-g-10434/](http://president.gov.by/ru/official_documents_ru/view/dekret-5-ot-15-dekabrja-2014-g-10434/).
- <sup>7</sup> Text of the program: [http://www.government.by/upload/docs/pdp2016\\_2020.pdf](http://www.government.by/upload/docs/pdp2016_2020.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> See e.g. “Advocacy in Belarus: Experience of Civil Society Organizations”, Research Overview – [http://oeec.by/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Advoc\\_EN.pdf](http://oeec.by/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Advoc_EN.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> See e.g. Dzmitry Markusheuski. How to improve Belarus. The straight line (Rus.) – [http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2015/09/01/ic\\_articles\\_410\\_189640](http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2015/09/01/ic_articles_410_189640)
- <sup>10</sup> More details: Д. Володин, А. Сушко, *Е-участие как инструмент инклюзивного государственного управления* – [http://sympa-by.eu/sites/default/files/library/brif\\_issledovaniya\\_e-uchastie\\_kak\\_instrument\\_inklyuzivnogo\\_gosupravleniya\\_bipart\\_a\\_sushko.pdf](http://sympa-by.eu/sites/default/files/library/brif_issledovaniya_e-uchastie_kak_instrument_inklyuzivnogo_gosupravleniya_bipart_a_sushko.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> See e.g. *Advocacy in Belarus: Experience of Civil Society Organizations*, Research Overview – [http://oeec.by/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Advoc\\_EN.pdf](http://oeec.by/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Advoc_EN.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> See Дмитрий Маркушевский. *КАК ОБУСТРОИТЬ БЕЛАРУСЬ. Как закалялась НСУР* – [http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2015/01/13/ic\\_articles\\_410\\_187983](http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2015/01/13/ic_articles_410_187983)
- <sup>13</sup> According to data from the National Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Belarus – <http://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/normativnye-dokumenty/natsionalnyu-reestr/sistema-ucheta/novye-postupleniya/>
- <sup>14</sup> See for instance: *Положением об общественно-консультативном (экспертном) совете по развитию предпринимательства при Министерстве связи и информатизации Республики Беларусь* – <http://www.mpt.gov.by/ru/polozhenie-obshchestvenno-konsultativnogo-ekspertnogo-soveta-po-razvitiyu-predprinimatelstva-pri>.
- <sup>15</sup> See for instance: *Общественные советы в Республике Беларусь: анализ правового регулирования* – <http://www.lawtrend.org/freedom-of-association/obshhestvennye-sovety-obshhestvennye-sovety-v-respublike-belarus>
- <sup>16</sup> Thus, the tasks of the Public Council within the Ministry of Internal Affairs include cultural enlightenment, satisfying the spiritual needs and interests of servicemen and employees,

familiarizing them with the best examples of classical and contemporary works of literature and art, improving the positive image of internal affairs employees, etc. – see *Regulation on the Public Council under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus* – <http://mvd.gov.by/ru/main.aspx?guid=15971>.

- 17 See Clause 10 of the *Положения о Республиканском межведомственном совете по проблемам инвалидов (утверждено Постановлением Совета Министров № 129 от 02.02.2009 г.)* – <http://www.mintrud.gov.by/system/extensions/spaw/uploads/files/UTVERZHENO.pdf>
- 18 See *О Совете по развитию предпринимательства в Республике Беларусь: Указ Президента Республики Беларусь от 13 июля 1999 г. № 388* – <http://belarp.by/media/ra/doc/Pravo/%D0%A3%D0%9A%D0%90%D0%97%20%E2%84%96%20388.docx>
- 19 According to the *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* newspaper – <https://www.sb.by/articles/luchshie-lyudi-iz-nashego-rayona.html>
- 20 *Белорусское общество: Тест на гражданственность. Таблицы с результатами опроса* – [http://www.pactworld.org/sites/default/files/Tables\\_Civic\\_Literacy\\_Test.pdf](http://www.pactworld.org/sites/default/files/Tables_Civic_Literacy_Test.pdf)
- 21 See *Постановление Совета Министров № 783 от 12 августа 2014 г. «О служебной информации ограниченного распространения»* – <http://www.pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=C21400783&p1=1>.
- 22 Read more: *Анализ основных изменений в закон Республики Беларусь «О средствах массовой информации»*, А. Бастунец, ОО БАЖ – <http://baj.by/be/node/27373>
- 23 *Как правительство потратило деньги автолюбителей* – [http://www.zautra.by/art.php?sn\\_nid=16306](http://www.zautra.by/art.php?sn_nid=16306)
- 24 For the text of this decree, see: <http://president.gov.by/uploads/documents/3decree.pdf>
- 25 See information about the meeting on current issues for Belarusian development: [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/soveschanie-ob-aktualnyx-voprosax-razvitija-belarusi-15736/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/soveschanie-ob-aktualnyx-voprosax-razvitija-belarusi-15736/)
- 26 See *Национальный план действий по реализации в Республике Беларусь положений Конвенции о правах инвалидов* – <http://www.mintrud.gov.by/system/extensions/spaw/uploads/files/PROEKT-Nats.-plan-tekst.pdf>
- 27 *Государственный социальный заказ: анализ практики применения и предложения по совершенствованию* – [http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/gsz\\_praktika\\_i\\_predlozheniya.pdf](http://actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/gsz_praktika_i_predlozheniya.pdf)
- 28 *Ловушка страхового стажа. Понятный разбор новых правил пенсионного обеспечения* – <http://pensii.belhelcom.org/>
- 29 *Реализация белорусской модели здравоохранения и приоритетные направления ее дальнейшего развития* – [http://elib.vsmu.by/bitstream/handle/123/11787/vVGMU\\_2016\\_6\\_74-83.pdf?sequence=1](http://elib.vsmu.by/bitstream/handle/123/11787/vVGMU_2016_6_74-83.pdf?sequence=1)

- <sup>30</sup> *Белорусские лекарства – всем. Минздрав взялся за контроль врачей, аптек и поликлиник* – <https://news.tut.by/society/438855.html>
- <sup>31</sup> *Медицинское страхование: плюсы, минусы, варианты* – <http://rfrm.io/spravu/meditsinskoe-strahovanie-plyusy-minusy-varianty>
- <sup>32</sup> *Куда плывёт система образования в Республике Беларусь?* – <https://4esnok.by/analitika/kuda-plyvyot-sistema-obrazovaniya-v-respublike-belarus/>. *О рекомендациях по результатам мониторинга качества общего среднего образования в 2015/2016 учебном году* – <http://www.adu.by/ru/homepage/novosti/nauka/808-o-rekomendatsiyakh-po-rezultatam-monitoringa-kachestva-obshchego-srednego-obrazovaniya-v-2015-2016-uchebnom-godu.html>; *Рекомендации по итогам изучения качества образования в учреждениях общего среднего образования в 2013/2014 учебном году* – <http://www.adu.by/wp-content/uploads/2014/quality/r1.pdf>
- <sup>33</sup> *Минобразования определило, какие поборы в школе законны, а какие нет* – <http://naviny.by/article/20170120/1484925659-minobrazovaniya-opredelilo-kakie-pobory-v-shkole-zakonny-kakie-net>
- <sup>34</sup> *Communiqué from the conference of ministers of the European Higher Education Area (Yerevan, Armenia, 14–15 May, 2015)* – [http://nihe.bsu.by/images/titovich/Erevan\\_rus.pdf](http://nihe.bsu.by/images/titovich/Erevan_rus.pdf); *Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform* – [http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/Roadmap%20Belarus\\_21.05.2015.pdf](http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/Roadmap%20Belarus_21.05.2015.pdf)
- <sup>35</sup> *Болонский процесс для Беларуси. Дорожная карта, а не à la carte* – <http://journalby.com/news/bolonskiy-process-cto-eto-takoe-i-zachem-belarusi-769>
- <sup>36</sup> *See Дмитрий Маркушевский. КАК ОБУСТРОИТЬ БЕЛАРУСЬ. Жилкомхоз и население* – <http://naviny.by/article/20170215/1487140386-dmitriy-markushevskiy-kak-obustroit-belarus-zhilkomhoz-i-naselenie>
- <sup>37</sup> The text of the decree is available at [http://rgkh.by/docs/Ukaz\\_536.pdf](http://rgkh.by/docs/Ukaz_536.pdf)
- <sup>38</sup> Our own information. See also the project document at [http://www.by.undp.org/content/dam/belarus/docs/Prodoc\\_Strengthening%20Inclusive%20LG\\_Rus.pdf](http://www.by.undp.org/content/dam/belarus/docs/Prodoc_Strengthening%20Inclusive%20LG_Rus.pdf), as well as information on the project events [http://www.pac.by/ru/news-feeds/international-cooperation-projects/ekspertnye-seminary-v-ramkax-sovmestnogo-proekta-s-proon\\_i\\_0000006415.html](http://www.pac.by/ru/news-feeds/international-cooperation-projects/ekspertnye-seminary-v-ramkax-sovmestnogo-proekta-s-proon_i_0000006415.html).
- <sup>39</sup> Belarusian presidential decree No.5 of August 31, 2015 “on gratuitous foreign assistance”.
- <sup>40</sup> The Belarusian National Youth Union (BRSM), Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB), *Belaya Rus*, Union of Writers, Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Fleet (DOSAAF), Red Cross, Dynamo Society, Water Rescue Society (OSVOD), Belarusian Union of Consumer Cooperation (Kaapsajuz), Women’s Union, Viedy Society, Belarusian National Pioneer Organization (BRPA), Belarusian Civil Association of Veterans (BHAV), National Olympic Committee (NAK), and Belarusian Scientific and Industrial Union (BNPA).
- <sup>41</sup> President, Head of the Presidential Administration, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration on Ideology, Prime Minister, five Deputy Prime Ministers, Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Health, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Information, Minister of Culture, Minister of Defense, Minister of Education, Minister of Sports and Tourism, Minister of

the Economy, Minister of Justice, Chairman of the State Security Committee, Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, Chairman of the House of Representatives, Chairman of the Council of the Republic, Chairmen of Regional Executive Committees and Minsk City Executive Committee.

- <sup>42</sup> President's opening address and report «*Вместе – за сильную и процветающую Беларусь!*» на пятом Всебелорусском народном собрании – [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/uchastie-v-pjatom-vsebelorusskom-narodnom-sobranii-13867/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/uchastie-v-pjatom-vsebelorusskom-narodnom-sobranii-13867/).
- <sup>43</sup> *Обращение с ежегодным Посланием к белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию* – [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/aleksandr-lukashenko-21-aprelja-obratitsja-s-ezhegodnym-poslaniem-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-13517/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/aleksandr-lukashenko-21-aprelja-obratitsja-s-ezhegodnym-poslaniem-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-13517/).
- <sup>44</sup> President's opening address and report «*Вместе – за сильную и процветающую Беларусь!*» на пятом Всебелорусском народном собрании – [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/uchastie-v-pjatom-vsebelorusskom-narodnom-sobranii-13867/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/uchastie-v-pjatom-vsebelorusskom-narodnom-sobranii-13867/).
- <sup>45</sup> HPA – Head of the Presidential Administration, DHPAI – Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration on Ideology, PM&D – Prime Minister and his Deputies, MIA – Minister of Internal Affairs, MH – Minister of Health, MFA – Minister of Foreign Affairs, MI – Minister of Information, MC – Minister of Culture, MD – Minister of Defense, ME – Minister of Education, MST – Minister of Sports and Tourism, MEc – Minister of the Economy, MJ – Minister of Justice, KGB – Chairman of the State Security Committee, MLSP – Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, CHR – Chairman of the House of Representatives, CCR – Chairman of the Council of the Republic, CREC Brest – Chairman of Brest Regional Executive Committee, CREC Viciebsk – Chairman of Viciebsk Regional Executive Committee, CREC Homieĺ – Chairman of Homieĺ Regional Executive Committee, CREC Hrodna – Chairman of Hrodna Regional Executive Committee, CREC Mahilioŭ – Chairman of Mahilioŭ Regional Executive Committee, CREC Minsk – Chairman of Minsk Regional Executive Committee, CMCEC – Chairman of Minsk City Executive Committee.
- <sup>46</sup> For the analysis, we selected the following organizations, some of which were selected by their degree of importance to the government (this list is consistently present in the rhetoric of public officials and official media): *Belaya Rus*, the Belarusian National Youth Union (BRSM), the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, the Belarusian Women's Union, and the Belarusian Red Cross Society. An additional significant factor is that these organizations provided the highest number of observers for the 2016 parliamentary elections. The analysis also included the main sectoral GONGOs: the Belarusian Society of Disabled Persons, Belarusian Scientific and Industrial Association, Belarusian Union of Journalists, Belarusian Writers' Union and Belarusian Culture Fund. The basis for this analysis is *events* – *i.e.* news of any activities carried out by the NGO. Interviews and summarizing articles have also been used as a source of additional information. Open web sources – mainly the organizations' official websites and the state news agency BelTA – were used to gather the information. As a second step, information was collected from other sources, using the Google search engine. At the next stage of the analysis, the events were classified according to activity (culture, social services, international cooperation, etc.). An example of the classification is listed in the database.
- <sup>47</sup> GONGOs taking part in elections has become a stable feature of the political system in Belarus. See: Anastasiya Matchanka (2015). *Substitution of Civil Society in Belarus: Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisations*. ARCHE. No.4: 87–101.

- <sup>48</sup> For comparison, it is also possible to consider the number of events recorded in the database (for sure, this amount is not an absolute indicator and can only be used for comparison): BRSM – 341, BRCS – 165, FPB – 97, *Belaya Rus* – 87, Belarusian Women’s Union – 76, Belarusian Writers’ Union – 41, Belarusian Society of Disabled Persons – 21, Belarusian Scientific and Industrial Association – 20, Belarusian Union of Journalists – 18, Belarusian Culture Fund – 10.
- <sup>49</sup> ‘BRCS was named the largest, and occupies a very special to dominant position in the sector’ (p.78, hereinafter is a discussion of the possible causes of such a monopoly position). Office for European Expertise and Communications (2015). *Belarusian Social Service Sector Analysis* – <http://oeec.by/storyanaliz-sektora-socialnogo-obsluzhivaniia-naseleniia-respubliki-belarus/>.
- <sup>50</sup> For instance: *Белорусское общество Красного Креста заботится о пожилых и инвалидах* – <http://redcross.by/beloruskoe-obshhestvo-krasnogo-kresta-zabotitsya-o-pozhilyh-i-invalidah/>
- <sup>51</sup> Compare: ‘Many of the respondents in the interview referred to the BRSM monopoly as the reason for the low popularity of youth organizations. With state support, BRSM has the ability to capture the entire field of activity, gets access to wide public relations and thus pushes other organizations out of the information space’ (p.28). Office for European Expertise and Communications (2016). *Capacity of Youth Non-Governmental Organizations and Initiative Groups for Cooperation in Addressing Common Objectives. Sectoral analysis*. Under the general editorship of Andrey Egorov – <http://oeec.by/youthsectoranalysis/>.
- <sup>52</sup> A major trend mentioned in the analytical review of 2015 was ‘FPB’s distancing even from a seeming influence on government decisions on the situation in the labor market and social welfare of the population’ (p. 58). Dmitriy Bryukhovetskiy (2016). “Государственные общественные объединения: “грязная работа” достается неудачникам”. *Belarusian Yearbook – 2015*. Edited by Anatoliy Pankovskiy and Valeriya Kostyugova. Minsk: Logvinov. P. 58–64.
- <sup>53</sup> Андрей Бородин (2016). *Куда уходят европейские деньги: грантополучатели, отзовитесь!*. Wildlife.by – <https://wildlife.by/ecology/news/Kuda+uhodyat+evropeyskie+denygi%3A+grantopoluchateli%2C+otzovitesy%21-1/>
- <sup>54</sup> For example the conference “Professional ethics: current challenges and a search for solutions” (20–21.10.2016), organized by the Swedish Media Institute – <http://www.svaboda.org/a/bazh-vs-bszh/28064859.html>). Also the “Media // Management // Future” forum (17–19.11.2016), organized jointly with the German Deutsche Welle Akademie – <http://bsj.by/2016/10/17-19-noyabrya-mediamedzhment-forum/>.
- <sup>55</sup> For instance: *БРСМ ведет переговоры с ЕС о привлечении средств на молодежный патриотический центр в Брестской крепости* – <http://www.belta.by/society/view/brsm-vedet-peregovory-s-es-o-privlechenii-sredstv-na-molodezhnyj-patrioticheskij-tsentr-v-brestskoj-224442-2016/>.
- <sup>56</sup> Out of 25,500 accredited domestic observers for the 2016 parliamentary elections, 19,200 were delegated by non-governmental organizations. The leaders in this regard were the BRSM (5,300 observers), FPB (4,000 observers) and *Belaya Rus* (3,500 observers).
- <sup>57</sup> *Членов Совета Республики выбрали в Беларуси* – <http://www.belta.by/politics/view/chlenov-soveta-respubliki-vybrali-v-belarusi-obnovljaetsja-210041-2016/>.

- <sup>58</sup> Most projects undertaken by GONGOs are implemented in cooperation with government agencies. Sometimes, large coalitions are created. For example, on May 7, 2016, a cooperation agreement regarding the patriotic education of youth was signed between the Ministry of Education, BRSM, FPB, and the Belarusian Public Association of Veterans.
- <sup>59</sup> An example would be the *Flowers of Great Victory* museum bus, a joint initiative of the BRSM and FPB – <http://www.belta.by/society/view/muzej-bus-tsvety-velikoj-pobedy-proedet-po-vsem-oblastnym-tsentram-belarusi-192409-2016/>). Another example is the *BookCrossing* flash mob – <http://www.belta.by/society/view/sojuz-pisatelej-i-brsm-budut-aktivnee-priobschat-molodezh-k-chteniju-knig-beloruskih-avtorov-184762-2016/>). In both cases, the BRSM was apparently the initiator and organizer of the joint initiatives. Both organizations used virtually no innovative approaches, apart from cooperation projects.
- <sup>60</sup> *БРСМ прадставіў свой варыянт вышиванкі* – <http://www.belta.by/society/view/brsm-predstavil-svoj-variant-vyshivanki-194605-2016/>. *Молодежный арт-парад открывает праздник “День вышиванки”, который пройдет в Минске* – <http://www.belta.by/regions/view/molodezhnyj-art-parad-otkroet-den-vyshivanki-v-minske-199977-2016/>.
- <sup>61</sup> *29 марта 2017 г. состоялось заседание коллегии Министерства труда и социальной защиты* [http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/zasedanie-kollegii-ministerstva-truda-i-sotsialnoj-zaschity\\_2811](http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/zasedanie-kollegii-ministerstva-truda-i-sotsialnoj-zaschity_2811)
- <sup>62</sup> *Более 1 тыс. жителей Беларуси получили в январе-марте услуги по государственному социальному заказу* <http://www.belta.by/society/view/bolee-1-tys-zhitelej-belarusi-poluchili-v-janvare-marte-uslugi-po-gosudarstvennomu-sotsialnomu-zakazu-245289-2017/>.
- <sup>i</sup> *Menu.by ахвяравала курсам «Мова нанова» 6 тысяч рублёў*, <http://www.svaboda.org/a/28227365.html>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Data for mid-April 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/BYhelpBY/posts/422346581465144>.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Паляпшэньне на ўзроўні настрою. Індэкс устойлівасьці АГС Беларусі прэзэнтавалі ў Менску*, <http://belngo.info/2016.palyapshenne-na-uzrouni-nastroyu-indeks-ustojlivastsi-ags-belarusi-prezentavali-u-mensku.html>.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Сітуацыя з правамі чалавека ў Беларусі ў 2016 годзе. Аналітычны агляд*, <https://spring96.org/be/news/85804>.
- <sup>v</sup> *Спіс ахвяраў пераследу за акцыі*, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1yK1JmNh5Ee1N1nSnw2bNVY2OQy1qQWGVXdFQ8dALaA/htmlview#>.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Сітуацыя з правамі чалавека ў Беларусі. Сакавік 2017*, <https://spring96.org/be/news/86594>.
- <sup>vii</sup> Kastryčnicki Economic Forum website: <http://kef.research.by>.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Minsk Dialogue* initiative website: <http://minskdialogue.by>.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Broadening the Horizons* forum website: <http://belarusforum.by>.



- x *Прадстаўнікі МУС і БХК абмеркавалі маніторынг міліцыі*, <http://www.belhelcom.org/be/news/pradstauniki-mus-i-bhk-abmerkavali-manitoryng-milicyi>.
- xi *«Вясну» не запрасілі на міжнародную канферэнцыю, прысьвечаную сьмяротнаму пакараньню, бо яна незарэгістраваная*, <http://www.svaboda.org/a/viasnu-nie-zaprasili/27589668.html>.
- xii *Андрэй Палуда: Канферэнцыя адбываецца на фоне прыведзеных у выкананне смяротных прысудаў*, <https://ds.spring96.org/be/news/85630>.
- xiii *Беларусь – Еўразвяз: першае паседжанне ў Бруселі*, <http://www.racyja.com/palityka/belarus-eurazvuz-pershae-pasedzhann>.
- xiv *Болонскі працэс у Беларусі рухаецца вельмі медленна*, <https://ej.by/news/society/2017/02/06/bolonskiy-protsess-v-belarusi-dvizhetsya-ochen-medlenno.html>.
- xv *Асамблея: дыялёг міжнародных структураў з уладамі Беларусі не павінен быць закрытым ад грамадзкасці*, <http://belngo.info/2016.asambleya-dyalyog-mizhnarodnyh-strukturaui-z-uladami-belarusi-ne-pavinen-byts-zakrytym-ad-gramadzkasti.html>; *Гражданское общество Беларуси меняет правила общения с дипломатами ЕС*, <http://www.dw.com/ru/гражданское-общество-беларуси-меняет-правила-общения-с-дипломатами-ес/a-19210668>.
- xvi *Макей прызвае не іспользаваць у палітычных мэтах праходзячыя ў Беларусі незначныя акцыі*, <http://www.belta.by/society/view/makej-prizyvaet-ne-ispolzovat-v-politicheskikh-tseljah-prohodjaschie-v-belarusi-nemnogochislennye-aktsii-237608-2017>.
- xvii *Трансфармацыя краўдфандынг*, <https://eurobelarus.info/news/society/2017/01/29/transformatsiya-kraudfandinga.html>.
- xviii *Краўдфандынг: право выбирать будущее*, <http://director.by/index.php/arhiv-nomer-ov/-2016/163--2016/4529-2016-02-12-08-05-04.html>.
- xix *«В идеале «Улей» – это как раз про стартапы!»: Эдуард Бабарико о будущем белорусского краудфандынга*, <http://www.startuplife.by/crowd-ulej.html>.
- xx *Іван Вядзенін: Памылкова думаць, што краўдфандынг – гэта “чароўная кнопка”*, <https://eurobelarus.info/special-project/ekonomicheskij-tremor/2016/06/14/van-vyadzen-n-pamylkova-dumats-shto-kra-dfandyng-geta.html>.
- xxi *Организации гражданского общества Беларуси: 8 тенденций 2016 года*, <http://www.actngo.info/article/organizacii-grazhdanskogo-obshchestva-belarusi-8-tendenciy-2016-goda>.
- xxii A good example is the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, which has expanded its field of operations to include the pension and business sectors: <http://www.belhelcom.org>.
- xxiii Yuri Chausov, *Гражданское общество: новые геополитические реалии и вызовы финансовой устойчивости*, <http://nmnby.eu/yearbook/2016/page13.html>.
- xiv *Grassroots section*: <http://citydog.by/allposts/rubric/grassroots>.
- xv *Activists section*: <https://34mag.net/pravincyja/activists>.
- xvi *Website of the online magazine Imena*: <http://imenamag.by>.

