

## Press contact

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### How Belarusians lost their faith in the authorities

*Belarus has seen large-scale protests since the presidential election. In a new ZOiS Report, Nadja Douglas examines the underlying causes of this fundamental breakdown of state-society relations and demonstrates how Belarus has transformed from a social welfare state into a state dominated by domestic security concerns.*

State-society relations in Belarus have been tense for many years. The presidential elections in August 2020 and the mishandling of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic have proved to be the catalyst that brought these fragile relations to a complete breakdown: “Trust in the relationship between state and citizenry eroded and ultimately collapsed, because the Belarusian welfare state has demystified itself in recent years and because a brutal police state has revealed itself to Belarusians throughout the country,” explains the author of the report, Nadja Douglas.

#### The Belarusian model failed to deliver

The Belarusian model in which economic stability and security were meant to compensate for the lack of political participation, has been challenged. The socio-economic situation has worsened over the years and the authorities have failed to address problems such as stagnating salaries and pensions, unemployment and labour migration.

#### Prioritisation of domestic security

Over the course of the last decade, Belarus has developed into a state predominantly driven by security concerns. Even before President Lukashenka de facto lost the presidential elections, the authorities have been preparing for scenarios of domestic destabilisation. More recently, officials from the security apparatus have gained more power and influence in Belarusian politics. “The broad social contract encompassing the whole of society has been redefined into a narrow security contract – between the President and the most loyal security structures”, political scientist Nadja Douglas summarizes.

#### Covid-19 as a catalyst, police brutality as an accelerant

The first genuine social protests happened in 2017, when protesters mobilised in order to oppose a tax levied against the unemployed. They can be regarded as the prelude to the events of 2020. “The feeling of solidarity and belief in self-organisation and self-help, first tested during the Covid-19 pandemic, paved the way for the widely expressed solidarity, large scale protests and the reinvention of Belarusian social and national identity”, Douglas says. Digital technology has been decisive for the organisation and decentralised mobilisation of alternative political campaigns and protests.

Police brutality, arbitrary arrests, allegations of severe human rights violations and torture, and finally the impunity of the OMON Special Purpose Police Units have motivated even more people to show their outrage and join the mass protests.

Read the full report online:

[Nadja Douglas: Belarus: From the old social contract to a new social identity, ZOiS Report 6 / 2020.](#)

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