

FILIP BUSAU

USE OF PROVERBS AND SIMILAR SAYINGS IN RECENT  
PROTESTS AND POLITICAL DEBATES IN POLAND,  
BELARUS, AND RUSSIA

**Abstract:** In the article, the attention is focused on recent political events in three Eastern European countries, namely Poland, Belarus, and Russia. In the case of Poland, the emphasis lies on demonstrations against the new anti-abortion law, commonly known as the Women's Strike (*Strajk Kobiet*). The focus then moves to the protests which followed the presidential elections held in Belarus on 9 August 2020. Finally, the paper addresses the public debate around the Russian opposition politician and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny. In all three cases, the use of proverbs on different levels and its role are examined. The sayings discussed here appear in interviews, official statements, on social media, and on demonstration posters.

**Keywords:** Eastern Europe, protests, politics, public debate, social media, proverbs, quotes, rhetoric, anti-proverb, allusion

**1. Introduction**

Proverbs constitute an important element of human interaction and have penetrated various spheres of lives including literature, mass media, politics, social sciences, and education. They serve as a mirror of social norms and may also justify or even reinforce existing stereotypes in different socio-political contexts. Much research covering decades and centuries in several national and international settings has been done in this respect.<sup>1</sup> The investigation of current developments around the globe indicates that the use of proverbs is still a wide-spread and popular rhetorical tool applied equally by those in power, ordinary citizens, and observers in order to defend their respective viewpoints, to intensify their message, or to describe a certain situation without addressing it directly. Such statements often start with “You know, there is a saying...” or “In our country, there is a proverb...”. In fact, the idea for this article was born after hearing a commentary given by a member of the Polish parliament for the Finnish tele-

vision, in which she cites a proverb in defense of her anti-abortion attitude (see the paragraph on Poland below). Being a native of Belarus and inspired by the peaceful and creative demonstrations regularly organized there after the controversial elections in August 2020, I decided to go further east from Poland to scrutinize recent developments from the paremiological point of view.

## 2. Poland: Protests for women's rights

Poland has experienced some essential changes in social policies ever since the traditionalist and conservative party Law and Justice (*PiS*) formed the majority government in 2015. Many of these changes concern women's and various minorities' rights. In 2020, Poland announced its withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Criticizing these plans in her article, a reporter finds fault with the fact that many Polish men still seem to have the same attitude to family as is reflected in the proverb *Jak się baby nie bije, to jej wątroba gnieje* 'If one does not beat the woman, her liver is rotting'.<sup>2</sup> In a poster campaign called *Tradycyjne Podhale* ('Traditional Podhale', referring to Poland's southernmost



Figure 1. Traditional Podhale: If one does not beat the woman, her liver is rotting. And what is your favorite proverb?

region), activists tried to make the general public aware that besides beautiful landscapes and rich traditional culture, there is also a considerable tolerance towards violence in the region. On one poster, the abovementioned saying is cited with the sarcastic addition: ‘And what is your favorite proverb?’<sup>3</sup>, as if to initiate a discussion about this severe grievance.

The situation is similar with the tightening of the Polish abortion law. In 2015–2016, the abortion ban was discussed in the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish parliament, and sparked the so-called Black Protest directed against this proposal. On 22 October 2020, a declaration<sup>4</sup> by the Constitutional Tribunal made nearly all types of abortion illegal which only fueled more demonstrations. Soon afterwards, Stanisław Michalkiewicz, a Polish right-wing political commentator and former politician labeled them as *rewolucja macic* ‘the revolution of uteri’.<sup>5</sup> As a reaction to the European Parliament resolution of 26 November 2020 on the de facto ban on the right to abortion in Poland, Michalkiewicz cites the proverb *Nie dał Pan Bóg świni rogów, bo by ludzi bodła* ‘God gave no horns to the pig so that it would not butt people with them’.<sup>6</sup> Its general meaning is that someone cannot realize their plans, usually so as to harm others – or, in this case, to alter the decision of the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland, due to the lack of the necessary tools, cf. *A cursed cow has short horns*.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes, non-Polish sayings are resorted to in such discussions. Thus, in an article on the website of *Jagiellonian Club*, a Polish non-partisan association, the authors hold the opinion that abortion should not only be regarded from the position of the mother-child relation, but rather seen in a larger context of the whole political community. In this context, they see the ‘African’ proverb *It takes a village to raise a child* as an apt expression, stating that not abortion should be the answer to women’s isolation and calamity, but rather legal changes forcing the whole society to take part in the upbringing of new citizens.<sup>8</sup>

The protests in Poland have been also rich in anti-proverbs, ‘parodied, twisted, or fractured proverbs that reveal humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom’.<sup>9</sup> Some of them are mentioned in a 2018 Master’s thesis on the Black Protest, and are popular up to the present.<sup>10</sup> One such coinage is *Nie ucz matki dzieci rodzić* ‘Don’t teach your mother how to give birth to children’, formed from the original *Nie ucz ojca dzieci robić*

‘Don’t teach your father how to make children’, cf. in English *Don’t teach your grandmother to suck eggs*. Another one is *Kto mieczem wojuje, ten od pochwy ginie* ‘He who fights with the sword shall die by the vagina’ originating in the Biblical *Kto mieczem wojuje, ten od miecza ginie* which corresponds to *He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword* (cf. Matthew 26, 26:52).

Proverbs were used in Poland in the public debate on (de)legalization of abortion as part of the argumentation throughout decades. In the early 1990s, shortly after the end of Communist rule, the access to abortion was made more difficult and was further tightened in the following years. In 1994, gynecologist Radziśław Sikorski presented in his article the opinion that abortions are harmful for the further development of Poland’s demography. “The fertility rate per woman must rise in the following years in order for a generation change to take place,” he stated referring to the so-called replacement-level fertility which, according to him, was under the necessary minimum rate in Poland. As if purely medical argumentation were not enough, the professor makes use of an “Old Chinese proverb”: *Lepiej uratować jedno życie ludzkie, aniżeli wybudować 100 pagód* ‘It is better to save one human life than to build one hundred pagodas’.<sup>11</sup> Now, nearly three decades later, in a commentary for a reporter from Finland, Member of the Sejm Maria Kurowska summarizes the position of those who advocate abortion in Poland by saying:

“We have a reasonable Polish proverb which goes ‘Better ten children on the shoulder than one on the consciousness’. And I think it very well reflects our philosophy and that of those who protect life.”<sup>12</sup>

Proverbs and related sayings are used on both sides of the debate as a means of reinforcement of the respective moral stance of the actors involved. Especially among traditionalists, the recourse to folk wisdom aims at sending the signal that their position is deeply rooted in the Polish culture and thus cannot be wrong. This is sometimes amplified by referring to other cultures, as in the case of “Old Chinese” or “African” proverbs above, the use of which implies a notion of the universality of such standpoints.

### ***3. Belarus: Presidential elections and the ongoing anti-regime protests***

Probably *the* most known expression produced during 2020 events in Belarus, especially in the post-electoral phase, is *Belorus belorusu belorus* 'A Belarusian, to another Belarusian, is a Belarusian'. The phrase is built by analogy with the Latin *Homo homini lupus est* 'Man is a wolf to man,' and reaches further back in time than to the 2020 protests. While it has had a rather negative connotation for years, roughly meaning 'everyone for himself', its meaning changed to the opposite starting with arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in Belarus. While Belarusian authorities downplayed the dangerous nature of the situation with the then President Aliaksandr Lukashenka suggesting that drinking vodka, going to the sauna, and driving tractor would help people fight the virus<sup>13</sup>, ordinary citizens had to organize themselves at the grass-roots level. With the outbreak of post-electoral violence and arbitrariness against peaceful demonstrators, ordinary people continued supporting each other providing marchers with water and snacks, helping people escape from their persecutors, and starting local support initiatives.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the proverbial coinage *Belorus belorusu belorus* now emphasizes mutual support and helpfulness of protesters.

Ahead of the presidential elections, Belarusian citizens attempted to make the formation of local election commissions more transparent by nominating impartial election observers rather than letting the authorities appoint predetermined monitors.<sup>15</sup> The longtime head of the Central Election Commission, Lidia Yermoshina, responded to these requirements by citing the popular proverb *V čužoy monastyr' so svoim ustavom ne chodyat*, literally 'You do not go to another monastery with your own rules', cf. *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*.<sup>16</sup> A few months before the elections, the Belarusian economic policy model was criticized on the non-governmental news portal *Naviny.by* using an allegedly Native American proverb *Lošad' sdochla – slez'* 'If the horse is dead, get off it' referring to Lukashenka's attempts to make his economic model work although it repeatedly proved ineffective over the decades.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the election campaign, Lukashenka repeatedly distanced himself from his nearest political ally Russia sparking critical reaction from Moscow. In her statement, Director of the

Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Maria Zakharova said:

“My grandmother had a good saying which later my mother kept telling me: ‘The maid beats herself, if she does not reap cleanly’. [...] I would not like to give any assessments. [...] But, in my opinion, this proverb suits the situation very well.”<sup>18</sup>

The basic meaning of the saying quoted here is that whenever someone neglects something they do so at their own expense. Thus, although avoiding a direct reproach, Zakharova sent a clear signal that such behavior can have unpleasant consequences for the Belarusian leader.

When peaceful mass protests erupted after the elections, and the official Moscow attested its support for Lukashenka, he commented on it using the proverb *Drug poznaëtsya v bede* ‘A friend in need is a friend indeed’.<sup>19</sup> After Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Lukashenka should not be called president in light of the rigged elections, Lukashenka responded using a slightly modified version of the saying which in English corresponds to *Pot calling the kettle black*. Referring to recent polls according to which Zelensky’s popularity had dramatically declined, he added that the Ukrainian politician “should be now worried about being called simply Zelensky instead of ‘President [Zelensky]’”.<sup>20</sup>

Accusing Poland of alleged attempts to foment a revolution in Belarus, Lukashenka said in an official statement: “I told them (the Poles – F.B.): Don’t climb into someone else’s garden, sort out your own problems first. But no, they started climbing over”.<sup>21</sup> The basic meaning of the saying with the garden is *Mind your own business*. When Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov, in his turn, accused Ukraine of being the inciter of the protests in Belarus and of intervening in the internal affairs of the country, his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba replied with the saying *Vor kriçit “deržite vora!”* ‘It is the thief [himself] who shouts, “Stop the thief!”’ meaning that Russia itself intervenes into Belarus’ domestic matters and at the same time accuses others of doing so.<sup>22</sup>

When Roman Bezsmertnyi, former Ambassador of Ukraine to Belarus, was asked in an interview how independent Lukashenka is as a political actor in his opinion, he answered that such politici-

ans can be characterized by the proverb *Laskovyj telėnok dvuch matok sosėt* ‘A friendly calf sucks two mothers’. In other words, he who is friendly with everyone, gets benefits from everyone, cf. *The stillest hog gets the most swill*, implying that the Belarusian leader has never been politically independent, but is rather a political opportunist.<sup>23</sup>

In January 2021, Lukashenka gave an exclusive interview for Nailya Asker-zade from the state-owned Russian television channel Rossiya-1. It became one of his rare interviews since the beginning of the protests in Belarus which were cracked down on systematically by the regime’s police and special forces. In the interview, Lukashenka was given an opportunity to present himself in a favorable light. The newspaper *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* described the goal of Asker-zade’s Minsk visit as “washing a black dog until it is white, which is virtually impossible according to the corresponding proverb [...]”.<sup>24</sup> The proverb in question goes *Čėrnogo kobelya ne ot moyeš’ dobela* ‘You cannot wash a black dog to make it white,’ cf. *A leopard cannot change its spots*.

However, the use of proverbs during the protests in Belarus does not restrict itself to politicians and political commentators. Protesters themselves often resort to proverbs – and anti-proverbs – in their posters. Most of them refer to the systematic violence against peaceful demonstrators. *Nasil’no mil ne budeš* is written on the poster held by three young women dressed in white with flowers in their hands.<sup>25</sup> The saying can be translated as ‘Love cannot be compelled,’ and means in this context that Lukashenka cannot regain trust and respect of the Belarusian people which was lost over the preceding months. A young man sits cross-legged on the ground smiling and holding a poster with the inscription in Russian ‘Let’s melt rubber truncheons into condoms.’<sup>26</sup> The catchphrase is known from late Soviet-time demonstrations<sup>27</sup> and is a revised version of the Biblical “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:3–4). It is also tightly linked to the slogan *Make love, not war*.

The infamous saying *Byėt značit lyubit* which roughly means ‘A loving man is a beating man’ (lit. ‘If he beats [his wife], it means that he loves [her]’) is the source of not one, but two anti-proverbs used on posters. The one is *Byėt ne značit lyubit* ‘If he beats, it does not mean that he loves’, the other one *Byėt značit syadet* ‘If he beats, it means he will go to jail’ implying possible

consequences for the regime leader after the envisioned transition of power.<sup>28</sup>

In continuation of the topic of love and violence, another apt saying was employed, *Ot lyubvi do nenavisti odin šag* ‘There is one step between love and hate’, similar to the English *The thinnest line is between love and hate*. Referring to riot police methods of detaining protestors and the often inhumane treatment of the arrested, a new coinage emerged: *Ot lyubvi do nenavisti odin avto-zak* ‘There is one paddy wagon between love and hate’.<sup>29</sup>

Another popular expression widely used in daily life was given a new form, namely *Baba s vozu – kobyle legče*, literally ‘It is easier for the mare when the woman is off the cart’, indicating that one welcomes the departure of someone else, cf. in English *Good riddance to bad rubbish*. In the light of the discontent with the long-time president, it was reworded into *Lukašenko s vozu – Belarusi legče* ‘It is easier for Belarus when Lukashenka is off the cart’.<sup>30</sup>

This is only snapshot in time, a fraction of the overall picture of how paroemias are applied in Belarus protests on the part of both the demonstrators and the authorities. However, it is enough to show how much such sayings are appreciated as instruments of conveying certain ideas and of reinforcing the respective political messages of their users.

#### **4. Russia: The case of Alexei Navalny**

The latest political events in Russia are no exception in this respect. President Vladimir Putin has been demonstrably fond of using proverbs and sayings during interviews, press conferences, and similar events. Back in 2019, the BBC Russian Service presented a video compilation with nearly thirty sayings from his speeches from different years in different contexts.<sup>31</sup> The case of Alexei Navalny is full of paraphrasing and metaphors, particularly as Putin and other officials persistently avoid using his very name in public.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, as is shown below, Navalny’s supporters are just as active in using paroemias.



*Figure 2. "It is easier for Belarus when Lukashenka is off the cart" by protesters from the Bilevo neighborhood in Vitebsk.*



*Figure 3. "There is one paddy wagon between love and hate": Women's March in Minsk in September 2020*

The Russian animation director Garri Bardin said in support of the public initiative *My za Navalnogo* (We are for Navalny): “There is a folk proverb which goes ‘constant dripping wears the stone’. Today, the power is lying around like a stone on the road of our progress. And Alexei Navalny turned out to be the drip [needed to wear that stone].”<sup>33</sup> In response to a critical complaint message on Instagram by a private entrepreneur asking how he was supposed to feed his family if his employer is unable to pay for his services, Igor Artamonov, a politician from the pro-Putin party United Russia and head of administration of the Lipetsk region, cynically remarked: “Every man is the architect of his own fortune. There is such a proverb. You are rebuking the wrong person here”. A pro-Navalny activist team from Lipetsk picked up this public conversation, reposted it on Twitter, and commented referring to Artamonov: “There is a[nother] proverb: A United Russia governor is either an asshole or a thief, or both”.<sup>34</sup>

Speaking about the denial by Kremlin of any involvement in the poisoning of Navalny, Professor at the Moscow Institute of Economics Igor Chubais said in his interview for the broadcaster Voice of America: “[...] it is appropriate to cite the old folk proverb ‘The thief has a burning hat’ (*Na vore i šapka gorit*). [...] Kremlin’s position keeps changing and boils down to a ‘we are not us’.”<sup>35</sup> The proverb used here is equivalent to *A guilty mind betrays itself*, cf. also *Liar, liar, pants on fire*. When Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany Heiko Maas accused the Russian side of taking no action to investigate the poisoning, the above-mentioned Russian foreign ministry’s spokesperson Maria Zakharova reacted by saying: “Let me remind Berlin of the Russian proverb ‘The father does not beat his son for gambling, but rather for trying to win the money back’.”<sup>36</sup> The general meaning of this saying is that there is a limit to everything, one should know where the line goes. In this case, this is an indirect request not to intervene in the issue.

Another person mentioned earlier in this paper is the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. After the detention of Navalny upon his return to Russia, Kuleba publicly called for the release of the activist and for an end to the use of violence against peaceful protesters across Russia. When asked about his official position on Navalny, the minister said: “There is a saying: The

enemy of my enemy is my friend. Therefore, if Navalny is Putin's enemy, then Ukraine will support Navalny."<sup>37</sup>

Occasionally, expressions which are thought to be proverbs are in fact quotations by famous people, as the following examples illustrate. In 2017, a series of protests broke out in the country caused, among other things, by the refusal of Russian authorities to register Alexey Navalny's 2018 presidential candidacy. Speculating about the possible rapidity of social changes brought about by these protests, the Russian human rights activist Lyudmila Alekseeva opined: "We have a proverb: 'Russians harness [the horses] slowly, but they drive fast'."<sup>38</sup> This "proverb" is often treated as a quote usually attributed to Otto von Bismarck and, more rarely, to Winston Churchill. It is nowadays gladly cited by Russians as a "Russian proverb" and was attested as such as early as in 1880.<sup>39</sup> It implies that Russian people often need much time to collect their thoughts, courage, or strength, and like to postpone things, but are highly productive and reach their goals once they get down to action.

In September 2020, an anonymous commentator on social media, reflecting on a possible annexation of Belarus by Russia, wrote:

"There is a famous proverb: A state always calls itself 'fatherland' when it is about to commit murder. One could go on by saying: When a state calls the neighboring state 'fraternal', it means trouble: an occupation, annexation, or a punitive operation. Let us hence stop talking about a 'once-united country' and 'fraternal people'."<sup>40</sup>

As a matter of fact, the proverb cited here is a quotation by the Swiss author and dramatist Friedrich Dürrenmatt used in act three of his play *Romulus the Great*.<sup>41</sup> Not only is the quotation handled as a proverb in this post, but it is also rephrased by the post author into some sort of an anti-proverb, however, not in a satirical way, which would be more typical of an anti-proverb, but rather in order to simply make his political point.

### **5. Conclusion**

Three different cases were presented in this paper from the paremiological point of view: the protests for women's rights in Poland, the civic movement against the political regime in Belarus

with the accompanying demonstrations and protests, and the situation around the Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny. The findings presented here show that in all three cases, several types of proverbial speech are used both by the protesters and by those against whom the protests are aimed. Proverbs from the respective native culture as well as from other cultures, but also anti- and pseudo-proverbs, proverbial expressions, allusions, and proverbial coinages are applied. Depending on the context, they pursue various objectives. One of them is persuasion: by citing “old” sayings, the actors seek to prove their point. The notion that these traditional expressions constitute obvious truths aims at disarming those who bring forward dissenting opinions. This strategy is repeatedly employed on high political level as a defense against critics from foreign governments. Another goal is defamation: In this case proverbs might be used for criticizing individual politicians or describing their unpopular policies. Yet another reason is emotional emphasis or appeal to certain emotions: The role of proverbs used in this context is to highlight existing grievances and to ultimately call for a change. An overarching reason for using proverbs is their shortness, explanatory power, and the economy of expression which they provide. On several occasions, they are applied to avoid taking a clear standpoint, and are thus used as an instrument for verbal evasion.

In conclusion, the data presented here demonstrates that proverbs and related expressions are considered by different actors a powerful rhetorical tool which can be applied in different contexts. They might serve as a means of either capturing the essence of an issue or making subtle insinuations instead. They are intended and perceived as generally comprehensible and effective. Most interestingly, proverbs have once again proved to be an inexhaustible source for new, creative expressions tailored to current political developments and reflecting new political and social realities.

#### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Mieder, Wolfgang (1997): *The Politics of Proverbs. From Traditional Wisdom to Proverbial Stereotypes*. Madison, Wis., London: University of Wisconsin Press; id. (2004): *Proverbs. A Handbook*. Westport, Conn., London: Greenwood; id. (2008):

“Proverbs speak louder than words”. Folk Wisdom in Art, Culture, Folklore, History, Literature and Mass Media. New York, Oxford: Peter Lang.

<sup>2</sup> <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114884,26190050,brudy-pierzcie-w-domu-co-prawicy-przeszkadza-w-konwencji.html>. The proverb also has another version starting *Jak chłop baby nie bije...* ‘If the man doesn’t beat the woman,...’, cf. [https://wsjp.pl/do\\_druku.php?id\\_hasla=3732&id\\_znaczenia=746509](https://wsjp.pl/do_druku.php?id_hasla=3732&id_znaczenia=746509).

<sup>3</sup> <https://goral.info.pl/billboardowy-protest-przeciwko-decyzji-zakopiaskich-radnych-odrzucajacej-ustawe-antyprzemocowa-zdjecia/>; cf. <https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,26631040,mikolaju-chcialbym-zeby-tata-nie-bil-mamy-wielki-baner.html>.

<sup>4</sup> English version of the judgement at <https://trybunal.gov.pl/en/hearings/judgments/art/11300-planowanie-rodziny-ochrona-plodu-ludzkiego-i-warunki-dopuszczalnosci-przerywania-ciazy>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.michalkiewicz.pl/tekst.php?tekst=4822>. The author draws parallels to women’s protests in the neighboring Belarus. In their turn, Belarusian populist commentators defame the Belarusian protest in their own way, cf. Ganzer, Christian (2020): Alles „Prostituierte“ und „Faschisten“. Diffamierung der Proteste in Belarus auf Telegram. Osteuropa: 10-11, pp. 205–214.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.michalkiewicz.pl/tekst.php?tekst=4849>.

<sup>7</sup> Apperson, George Latimer (2006): Dictionary of Proverbs. Ware: Wordsworth Reference, pp. 116–117.

<sup>8</sup> <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2020/11/05/aborcja-odpowiedzialnosc-heroizm-i-spor-o-początek-ludzkiego-zycia-wyrok-tk/>. On the “African” roots of the saying see Mieder, Wolfgang (2011): “It Takes a Village to Change the World”: Proverbial Politics and the Ethics of Place: [University of Illinois Press, American Folklore Society]. The Journal of American Folklore: 124 (492), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> For the definition see Mieder 2004: 24.

<sup>10</sup> Domańska, Monika (2018): Medialny obraz Czarnego protestu w kontekście dyskursu o aborcji [Media image of the Black Protest in the context of the abortion discourse], University of Warsaw, p. 67. The latter of the two anti-proverbs stated is used again in 2019 on the Facebook page of *Bunt kobiet* ‘Women’s rebellion’, an internet public archive of protests for women’s rights: <https://www.facebook.com/BuntKobiet/photos/kto-mieczem-wojuje-ten-od-pochwy-ginie-bunkobiet-has%C5%82ademonstracji/1409347402565511/>. The former anti-proverb was used again as a poster in October 2020 in southwestern Poland: <https://myglogow.pl/spontaniczny-strajk-kobiet-w-glogowie-nie-ucz-matek-dzieci-rodzic/>.

<sup>11</sup> Sikorski, Radziśław (1994): Bioetyczna świadomość społeczeństwa a aborcja. Ethos: 7 (1/2=25/26), pp. 232, 236.

<sup>12</sup> *Lepiej mieć dziesięć dzieci na ramieniu niż jedno na sumieniu*, in the newscast by Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE from 29 January 2021: <https://arena.yle.fi/1-50622039>, minutes 10:00–10:14. The proverb is occasionally cited with a different number such as six or eight instead of ten.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-belarus/nobody-will-die-from-coronavirus-in-belarus-says-president-idUKKCN21V1PK?edition-redirect=uk>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/713365.html?c>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/23/who-is-making-sure-belarus-presidential-election-is-free-and-fair>, see also the OSCE report on violations during the elections in question: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/b/469539.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://news.tut.by/elections/690381.html>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://naviny.media/article/20200707/1594139319-stegat-dohluyu-loshad-lukashenko-pytaetsya-uyti-ot-imidzha-konservatora>.

<sup>18</sup> *Sama sebya raba b'žet, što nečisto žnēt*, <https://tass.ru/politika/9168347>. On Belarus-Russia relations ahead and after the elections see <https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/07/ties-between-russia-and-belarus-cool-ahead-of-presidential-elections>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://ria.ru/20200914/putin-lukashenko-1577228937.html>.

<sup>20</sup> *Čya by korova myčala, a Zelenskogo molčala*, [www.kp.by/online/news/4081703/](http://www.kp.by/online/news/4081703/).

<sup>21</sup> *Ne lež'te v čužoy ogorod*, <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-o-situatsii-v-polshe-oni-hoteli-u-nas-mjatezh-ustroit-a-poluchili-sami-413180-2020/>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://nv.ua/ukraine/politics/protesty-v-belarusi-kuleba-oproverg-zayavlenie-lavrova-o-vmeshatelstve-ukrainy-poslednie-novosti-50109715.html>. More on Russia's information intervention in Belarus: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-belarus-election-russia-journalists-idUSKBN25T1GH>, <https://www.rferl.org/a/after-belarusian-journalists-quit-state-tv-russians-fill-the-void/30800576.html>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/roman-bessmertny-o-lukashenko-protestah-i-zapade/30964600.html>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.mk.ru/social/2021/01/12/batka-i-nailya-takoy-lukashenko-nam-nuzhen.html>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.dw.com/ru/zhenskoe-lico-protestov-v-belarusi/a-54557727>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/godofbelarus/>.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. <https://discours.io/expo/image/photography/mirnye-protesty-1989-lyudina-protiv-steny#24>.

<sup>28</sup> Maxim Mirovich, <https://mirovich.media/613010.html>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://t.me/plakatypratestu/309?single>, <https://euroradio.fm/ru/ot-lyubvi-donenavisti-odin-avtozak-v-minske-prohodit-zhenskiy-marsh>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2021/1/6/406641/>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/russian/media-49023163>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/03/this-gentleman-alexei-navalny-the-name-putin-dares-not-speak>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/02/world/europe/kremlin-putin-navalny-poisoning-russia.html>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://za.navalny.ru/>.

<sup>34</sup> [https://twitter.com/teamnavalny\\_spb/status/1246830364913475584](https://twitter.com/teamnavalny_spb/status/1246830364913475584).

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/navalny-poisoning-moscow-rejects/5603721.html>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ne za to otec syna bil, što tot igral, a za to, što otygryvalsya*; <https://ria.ru/2020/12/18/navalnyy-1589925511.html>.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-55796738>.

<sup>38</sup> <https://news.obozrevatel.com/abroad/57962-neporotoe-pokolenie-uzhe-vyiroslo-v-rossii-ozvuchili-revoljucionnyj-prognoz.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> The attribution to Bismarck is first attested in Anton Chekhov's private notes. Around the same time, the Russian lexicographer Vladimir Dal cites this proverb in his dictionary without the mention of the element "Russian": *Ne skoro zapryag, da skoro priehal* 'Spent too much time harnessing, but arrived soon'. Čehov, Anton (1987): Čehov, A. P. Polnoe sobranie... [A. P. Chekhov. Complete works and collections of letters in 30 volumes. Works in 18 vv.]. Tom 17. ... [Volume 17. Notebooks. Notes on loose sheets. Diaries]. Published by the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. Moscow: Nauka; Dal', Vladimir (1880): *Tolkovyj slovar' živago velikoruskago yazyka* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language]. Saint Petersburg, Moscow: M. O. Vol'f: v. 1).

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/479557>.

<sup>41</sup> The original German version reads: *Vaterland nennt sich der Staat immer dann, wenn er sich anschickt, auf Menschenmord auszugehen*. The English translation renders *Vaterland* in a different way from the one used here: "Every state calls itself 'country,' or 'nation,' when it is about to commit murder", Dürrenmatt, Friedrich (1982): *Plays and Essays*. New York: Continuum. (The German library: v.89), p. 47.

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Filip Busau  
MA in East European Studies  
Master's student in Semitic Studies  
Seminar for Semitic and Arabic Studies  
Freie Universität Berlin  
Berlin  
Germany  
E-mail: filibus@mail.com