Belarus: From the First Democratic Election of 1994 to the Crisis of 2020 and its Ramifications

The Republic of Belarus became an independent state in August 1991. In 1994, Belarusian citizens elected their first (and so far, only) president, Lukashenko. Within a short period of time, the first democratically elected Belarusian president turned into an authoritarian ruler and brought under his control all three branches of government. This presentation analyzes how Lukashenko, who initially came to power by way of a democratic election, turned into a virtual dictator. It shows that when the state has enough resources to sustain itself, when political and military elites are consolidated around the strongman, and civil society is weak and suppressed or, in case of Belarus, almost non-existent, ordinary people have very little at their disposal to counter the state. The presentation concludes by considering the possible implications of the current situation for the future of Belarus.

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