From a Western point of view Belarus has failed to overcome dictatorship. Independence from the USSR in 1991 was not the result of deliberate action; instead, it emerged rather unexpectedly and is consequently not perceived as an achievement but rather as a dangerous outcome. After a short period of political, social and economical liberalization between 1991 and 1994 the election of Aleksandr Lukaschenko to the presidency resulted in a recurrence of strict regimentation and government control of all spheres. Through the Constitutional Amendment of 1996 he dissolved the division of powers and the system of checks and balances and concentrated power in his own hands while formally keeping up democratic appearances. Political communication and aesthetics as well as education, public discourse and media reflect a continuity with Soviet traditions. From the regime's perspective, Belarus has not failed to break with Soviet dictatorship since such attempt was ever intended. Moreover, the Soviet Union is viewed not as a dictatorship but rather as the source of Belarusian statehood and peace.

However, the growing Belarusian opposition shares the Western interpretation. They condemn the regime as a dictatorship that preserves Soviet power; they postulate the necessity of radical political, economical and social change; they demand that the regime’s crimes before and after 1991 are investigated and call for a process of coming to terms with the dictatorial past.

These two positions point to a competition between not only two antithetical political concepts but also between two different worldviews. They are expressed by a double set of symbols, rituals and holidays, by distinct concepts of education and socialization, by conflicting sets of norms, values and cultural codes and also by different, even partly contradictory, historiographies.

Belarusian society is stretched between different constructions of self and other. In search of general frames of orientation it developed mixed identities and generated its own approaches to dictatorship and democracy, to the past and present.