

# Tendencies of regional elites development in Belarus (Local elections results of 1999, 2003 and 2007)<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract*

The article studies tendencies in the development of regional elites in Belarus by analyzing composition of the Regional Local Councils based on the results of local elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007. It examines the validity of regional elites' analysis by studying Local Council Members and a level of electoral discipline of local executive committees during the local elections. Besides, it reviews political parties' representation in the local Councils, age and gender composition and peculiarities of the territorial representation, etc.

*Key words:* local elections, local elections in Belarus, elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007, regional elites, political parties, party system, local councils.

Regional elites, their organization and the very fact of their existence is still a debatable question for the Belarusian political science. Some researchers admit that regional patronage and elite groups exist however their unstable character is usually emphasized. Others talk about functional lobby / clan groups (i.e. industrial and agricultural lobby) which have a nationwide character and which therefore do not create political (and even economic) wholeness on the regional level. At the same

time, the majority of analysts ignore regional communities explaining it by a high degree of the bureaucratic system's centralization, the Center's rather frequent interventions into the Regions' affairs and by different forms of political and economic dependence. Nonetheless, it is important to watch ongoing processes in the regional centers of power in order to feel the political processes and probable transformations of the political regime in today's Belarus.

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<sup>1</sup> This text presents the results of a study carried out by the Political Analysis Center of the Political Sphere Journal in May – August 2007. The source for translation is: Андрэй Казакевіч Тэндэнцыі ў рэгіянальных элітах Беларусі (па выніках мясцовых выбараў 1999, 2003, 2007 гадоў) // “Палітычная сфера” №9, 2007 с. 40–55.

We think that regional elites and clan groups are stable institutions. They are strongly linked to local interests' representation and have a quite high social (and economic) potential, which allows us to consider them as long-term participants of the political process.

However our knowledge about the modern regional elites in Belarus is seriously limited because there are almost no quantitative studies and systematized empirical data. A lot of conclusions concerning ongoing political and administrative processes in the regions of Belarus are of an intuitive character, with all their advantages and disadvantages. Under such circumstances it seems quite important to collect quantitative data about regional political and administrative processes so that estimations could be better systematized and could have a legitimate character.

## I. Methodological part

The main obstacle in analyzing elites is their opacity, ambiguity of their structure and political autonomy within the conditions of the authoritarian political system. Still, we do not want to exaggerate the depth of the Center's staff policy. More often than not, the staff redistribution in the regions concerns the highest bureaucratic apparatus only, while on the middle level there are no considerable changes. Taking into account the high degree of opacity, we have chosen to analyze the only relatively open part of the regional elites, which is suitable for statistical analysis, i.e. the Members of the Regional (Voblast/Oblast) Local Councils (Saviets/Soviets) based on the

local elections results in 1999, 2003 and 2007.

The obvious advantage of this exploration target is that it is possible to obtain information about it. The Local elections results are published in the local mass media together with a short CV of each member, thus providing us with an opportunity to analyze the Council members' social and political characteristics. Of course, we admit that the most available target does not mean it can also demonstrate the important trends in the regional authorities. It is difficult to characterize univocally the status of the Regions' Councils in the current system of power; nevertheless analysis of their structures does not allow us to conclude that they are formal.

Ninety percent of the Regional Councils members include persons occupying executive positions. There is a tendency of status persons' growing number; there are also some elements of their "oligarchizing". The age of the absolute majority of Members varies between 40 y.o. and 60 y.o., i.e. the age of the major career and political achievements. "Youth" and pensioners constitute an inconsiderable group. The majority of the Members live in the regional capitals and cities, while rural dwellers' and towns' representatives are marginalized. This and other facts allow us to consider Local Councils as an important source of information about the regional elite groups, even though such data must be treated carefully until it is supported by additional studies.

This article's figures are obtained by analyzing open sources of information, therefore they can be verified. There

were some problems of a technical and methodological character during collecting, analyzing and calculating the information. The results were double-checked, nonetheless there might be insignificant mistakes which, however, should not influence the conclusions and quantitative correlations considerably. The results of calculations and methodology are presented in full. All these should help eliminating our researchers' probable inaccuracies of statistical and methodological character.

In addition to the information published in the regional media, elections results can also be found in the official information distributed by the CEC (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus) that deals with elections and national referenda, as well as in analytical releases accompanying every electoral campaign. Nevertheless, elections results of 1999, 2003 and 2007 have different levels of analytical and informational representation: the 2003 campaign is described the best of all, the 1999 one – the worst of all.

The 1999 elections results are reviewed in an article by P. Natchyk (Natchyk, 2003). A small chapter is devoted to an analysis of the electoral campaign's context, the process of candidates' nomination and registration, candidates' corps, etc. This chapter is

also the first attempt of making a statistical analysis of the results of the local elections, that's why its material is interesting and useful however unfortunately incomplete. Its figures mostly concern candidates, but not the elected Members. Regardless of the statement that social and political composition of candidates is equal to that of Members (Natchyk 2003: 24), quantity determination is needed. The information presented concerns only several Regions, mostly Mahilou and Homel; the Council members are analyzed with the help of one criterion only, i.e. its social status. By the way, this first attempt of making a statistical analysis revealed a number of difficulties the researcher faced.<sup>2</sup>

The 2003 elections results are analyzed in two analytical texts (Jekadumava 2003; Elections... 2003). The latter is dedicated mostly to the analysis of the electoral process and law infringements, thus not analyzing elections results per se. Jekadumava's text does not analyze the elected Members corps, its basic attention is paid to the elections' course and candidates all across the country and in some constituencies, while elections' course and results on the level of the Regional Councils are not detailed.

The Belarusian CEC official data is published on its official web-site. There

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<sup>2</sup> In particular, P. Natchyk says that during the 1999 elections there were 32 non-alternative constituencies (Natchyk 2003: 22), while we have counted 35 of them, using the same sources of information. During the 1999 elections, in Mahilou Region, the non-alternative constituencies were №№ 3–5, 8, 13, 20, 23, 28, 31–39, 42–55, 57–60. Moreover he says that among non-alternative candidates, only one did not belong to directors' corps, while it is obvious that there were more such candidates (№ 23 – a Doctor, № 34 – a Deputy President of the Executive Committee, № 35 – the President of a Local (District) Council).

is some useful information about the Regional Councils members, but its main drawback is that elections results are not detailed enough, which makes it difficult to analyze without an additional study of the situation. The 1999 elections open results have no specification of the Regions' Councils and their members. The most detailed information is about the 2003 elections. The CEC data provides with information about the elections results, including constituencies, constituencies where there was the second round, and constituencies where elections failed. There is also data about the Council members (according to the first and second rounds) with the age and gender information, including second term members, their professional spheres, belonging to political parties, etc. This information is not detailed enough with regard to some Regions, therefore it does not comply with our analysis' tasks. The data concerning the 2007 elections results is even more limited, there are no details about the Regions' Councils at all.

## II. Determination of the electoral discipline

The electoral process character is not linked directly to the analysis of the members of the Regional Councils however it reflects peculiarities of the political activity in the Belarusian Regions, which can be useful in understanding the elites' characteristics.

In Belarusian authoritarian system we understand the electoral discipline as an electoral machine, its effective and harmonious work (from the point of view of authorities) in every Region,

in other words, the attitude of the Regional administrations towards elections, whether or not they allow for any self-organization, a degree of their control over the political field.

While analyzing the electoral discipline, the following criteria are used: the number of elected members (without by-elections), the second round practice, and a competition level in electoral constituencies. It should be mentioned that while the authoritarian regime is consolidating, the discipline is increasing so that some criteria reach its maximum (100% of members were elected; cancellation of the second round), thus making the comparative analysis of discipline impossible in the future.

Since 1999, in almost all electoral constituencies, elections ended by a member's election. In 1999 and 2003, as a result of the first and second rounds, 94-96% of the Councils members were elected, thus, the problem of Councils' composition which existed in 1995, was surmounted. In 2007, this indicator reached its possible maximum – 100% in all the Regions (See Table 1).

The 1999 and 2003 elections analysis shows that the electoral discipline's lowest level was in Vicebsk Region (86,7%; 91,7% – 13 not elected members in total). Intermediate positions are occupied by Minsk and Brest Regions (both 7). The highest discipline was demonstrated by Mahilou, Homel and Hrodna Regions (each – 4 not elected members in 1999 and 2003).

Another criterion in measuring the electoral discipline is the practice of second round, and correspondingly

**Table 1. Number of elected members into Regional Councils (First and second rounds, no by-elections)**

Region (Voblastc)	1999		2003		2007	Number of not elected members in 1999-2007
Brest	55	91,7%	58	96,7%	60 (100%)	7
Vicebsk (Vitebsk)	52	86,7%	55	91,7%	60 (100%)	13
Hrodna (Grodno)	59	98,3%	57	95%	60 (100%)	4
Homel (Gomel)	59	98,3%	57	95%	60 (100%)	4
Mahilou (Mogilev)	56	93,3%	60	100%	60 (100%)	4
Minsk	56	93,3%	57	95%	60 (100%)	7
Total	337	93,6%	344	95,6%	360 (100%)	39

the fact whether it was possible not to have it. The second round as a procedure was abolished in 2007, therefore it is possible to analyze the 1999 and 2003 electoral campaigns results only. The largest number of the second rounds was carried out in Homel Region (27). The Homel Region's first position is explained by the 1999 election's "débâcle" when there were 20 constituencies with the second round, rather than by the tendency's stability. The second place belongs to Vicebsk Region (22), where the tendency was stable. There was a growth in the second rounds' number from 1999 to 2003 – it is the only case

among other Regions. Intermediate positions belong to Minsk and Brest Regions. Here, there were correspondingly 14 and 13 second rounds. The highest discipline was again demonstrated by Mahilou and Hrodna Regions (both – 7; the lowest figures both in 1999 and 2003; See Table 2).

One more criterion in measuring the electoral discipline is the extent of competition. In particular, while comparing the number of non-alternative constituencies, the level of political competition becomes clear. Unfortunately, the information is not complete here; therefore the conclusions cannot

**Table 2. Second Round Practice during the 1999, 2003 and 2007 local elections<sup>3</sup>**

Region	1999	2003	2007	Number of constituencies which had a second round in 1999-2003
Brest	43+13	55+3	60+0	16
Vicebsk	42+10	43+12	60+0	22
Hrodna	54+5	55+2	60+0	7
Homel	39+20	50+7	60+0	27
Mahilou	49+7	60+0	60+0	7
Minsk	45+11	54+3	60+0	14
Total	272+66	317+27	360+0	93

<sup>3</sup> The first figure shows the number of constituencies where members were elected during the first round; the second figure shows the number of constituencies which had the second round.

be fully accurate. While collecting data for this study in the regional media, it was not possible to find lists of registered candidates in Minsk Region (1999, 2003) and Homel Region (2007). Still, the information available demonstrates the tendencies, which coincide with the tendencies revealed while analyzing the previous indicators. The leader among non-alternative constituencies is the Hrodna Region (130), which proves once again its high level of political discipline. This Region is the leader in one more indicator of the electoral competition – during this period, there were no more than 4 candidates in all constituencies (in the other Regions, this tendency appeared after the 2003 elections only). Its one more record is that there were 83,3% of non-alternative constituencies in 2003. The lowest number of non-alternative constituencies is in the Vicebsk Region (97), the other Regions are in the middle (110-114; See Table 3).

Summing up the analysis of the electoral discipline's level, it is possible to diagnose its significant increase during elections, as well as some rather obvious regional differences, which need to be explained in the future. In 1999 – 2007, the lowest electoral discipline during local elections was demonstrated by the Vicebsk Region, and this tendency was stable. The highest political discipline was in Hrodna and, to a lesser degree,

in Mahilou Regions. Maybe, such differences reflect various approaches in regulating the political processes on the regional level, as well as strategies of the political activity.

### III. Parties and their representation

Observation of parties' representation can be quite interesting, especially when in the 2008 Parliamentary election's context, there was a discussion about a possibility of creating one party of power or introducing a proportional system. The parties' representation in local Councils at the regional level totally corresponds to the nationwide "non-party" political model. The parties' representation in almost all Councils was insignificant and had no important political meaning. Still, there are no oppositional parties' representatives in the Local Councils at all (except for the Belarusian Communist Party (PKB) in 1999-2003), though it could have a latent character, e.g. before elections, members left their parties or did not join them due to various reasons, but kept in touch with the parties' structures. Unfortunately, such data could not be analyzed, that's why only formal party membership is analyzed here.

A detailed analysis of the parties' representation can be useful in order

**Table 3. Number of non-alternative constituencies during 1999–2007 local elections**

Region	1999		2003		2007		1999-2007	
Brest	25	41,7%	45	75%	40	66,7%	110	61,1%
Vicebsk	22	36,7%	28	46,7%	47	78,3%	97	53,9%
Hrodna	40	66,7%	50	83,3%	40	66,7%	130	72,2%
Mahilou	35	58,3%	38	63,3%	41	68,3%	114	63,3%

to reveal political tendencies on the regional level, as well as in specifying functional mechanisms of the political (especially, party) system of the Republic of Belarus. The basic tendency in 1999–2007 was a steady decrease of the parties' representation in the Regional Councils. According to the 1999 elections results there were only four parties – Belarusian Communist Party (PKB), Communist Party of Belarus (KPB), Agrarian Party (AP) and Belarusian Patriotic Party (BPP). In 2003, there were four parties as well, but in 2007, there were only two parties left – KPB and AP. The decrease in the number of members associated with political parties is even more significant. In 1999, there were 29 members of this type in the Regional Councils, in 2003 – 19, in 2007 – only 6. Even the KPB's representation (considered to be a probable base for one party by some analysts) was curtailing: 8 members in 1999, 6 – in 2003, 5 – in 2007. This result does not correspond to the nationwide tendency of the KPB's growing representation in Local Councils of different levels by almost three times – from 107 to 299 (See more details: Kazakevich, 2007).

It is interesting to study the AP's phenomenon, especially in the Hrodna Region (probably, it is the only Region where its organized agrarian lobby has survived). In 1999, the party had 6 who were in three Regional Councils (Hrodna, Minsk and Homel). In 2003, it was represented in the Hrodna Region only, but there were 8 of its members, which constituted 14% of the Council members. That was an absolute record of the parties' representation among all the Regions during 1999–2007. In

Mahilou Region, according to the 1999 campaign results, there were 12,5% representatives of PKB and KPB. After its quite successful results, in 2007 the AP lowered its representation in the Regional Councils down to one Member. Such oscillations of the political representation may reflect certain tendencies of the Belarusian Regional political development.

The PKB is the only oppositional party which had its representation in the Regional Councils, though its number of members is lower than that of the KPB. The year of 1999 was especially successful for this party as the majority of other oppositional parties ignored or boycotted those elections. The PKB elected 14 members, which was higher than other parties' results, and had its representation in all of the Regions, except Hrodna. In 2003, the party's representation decreased down to two people (one in Homel, one in Vicebsk Regions). Within the conditions of the authoritarian regime's strengthening and the PKB's close integration with the democratic coalition during the 2007 elections, the party received no representation in the Regional Councils.

A review of territorial peculiarities of the parties' representation demonstrates some differences between the Regions on the level of the parties' activity. Due to some reasons, the most stable parties' representation was observed in Homel Region – during 1999–2007, there were 15 persons – members of all four parties (PKB, KPB, AP and BPP). It is followed by the Hrodna Region – 12 persons – members of the AP only. A stable parties' representation is demonstrated by the Mahilou

**Table 4. Parties' representation in Regional Councils according to 1999–2007 elections results**

Regions	1999		2003		2007		1999-2007
Brest	2 (PKB)	3,6%	0	0	1 (KPB)	1,7%	3
Vicebsk	2 (PKB), 4 (KPB)	11,5%	1 (PKB), 1 (KPB)	3,6%	0	0	8
Hrodna	3 (AP)	5,1%	8 (AP)	14,0%	AP (1)	1,7%	12
Homel	1 (KPB), 3 (PKB), 1 (AP), 1 (BPP)	10,2%	4 (KPB), 2 (PKB), 1 (BPP)	12,3%	2 (KPB)	3,3%	15
Mahilou	3 (KPB), 4 (PKB)	12,5%	1 (PKB)	1,7%	2 (KPB)	3,3%	10
Minsk <sup>4</sup>	3 (PKB), 2 (AP)	8,9%	1 (KPB)	1,8%	0	0	6

**Table 5. Parties' members in Regional Councils in 1999-2007**

	1999	2003	2007	1999-2007
Parties' members	29 (8,6%)	19 (5,5%)	6 (1,7%)	54 (5,2%)
Number of parties	4	4	2	4
PKB	14	4	0	18
KPB	8	6	5	19
AP	6	8	1	15
BPP	1	1	0	2

Region (where, like in the Homel Region, party members were elected in all electoral campaigns). The lowest representation of parties was in the Brest Region – during 1999-2007, there were only three members representing KPB and PKB (See Tables 4 and 5).

The 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections results show a stable tendency of a decline of party system. It concerns both parties which were traditionally supported the authorities (KPB, AP) and oppositional parties. While the KPB's representation curtailed, the AP, after its obvious success in 2003, had no representation in the Regional Councils after the 2007 elections. The analysis of the development of the parties' structures could be interesting in the context of the discussion about a possibility of

creating one party of power, as well as to define the logic of the party system's development and the relations of the parties' structures with the regional elites. According to some analysts and their interpretations of this study's data, there is a final marginalization of the party institutions, which creates a field for the creation of a one-party structure. If there were such actions, then they were obviously not systematized. At least, we have no information sufficient to make any valid conclusions.

The degradation of the parties' structures and their abatement has to do with the logic of the parties' interaction with the regional elites and the bureaucratic apparatus. According to the authorities' system which was formed after the authoritarian regime

<sup>4</sup> No certain information about 2 persons.



was installed, dominating positions in the regional politics belonged to the executives, the other bodies performed accessorial functions and were subordinated (*de facto* or *de jure*) to the Executive Committees. Parties, including those traditionally supported by the authorities, are an example of an autonomous political institutions. Such institutions existence, firstly, does not comply with the logic of the centralized political process and, secondly, creates an infrastructure for a creation of corporate community based on the non-bureaucratic grounds. In any case, the existence of political structures in parallel to the executive vertical is not good for the regional administrative elites. Therefore, the parties are being superseded from the political process step-by-step.

In various Regions, the situation is different (depending on the degree of integration of parties' functionaries into the regional elites or on lobbying from the Center), but the regional bureaucrats' common logic and interests do not work for the parties' benefits. It is difficult to find functions which could be performed by parties for the executives, except an imitation of democracy, but it is not priority. The situation might change only if the Center expresses its initiative in this direction however administrative elites would oppose such processes. The introduction of the parties' structures will threaten the politi-

cal status quo on the regional level lest administrative and political structures coincide completely, which is difficult to achieve.

#### IV. Age and gender composition

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The age and gender structure of the Local Councils in 1999-2007 suffered some changes which are interesting in order to create a complete understanding about the political processes on the regional level. While analyzing ages, the following scale was chosen: Deputies younger than 31 y.o., 31-40 y.o., 41-50 y.o., 51-60 y.o., 61-70 y.o., and 71 and older<sup>5</sup>. For our study, the age and gender are interesting due to three important aspects.

The first aspect: to identify the level of modeling of the Local Councils' corps (it is known that the authorities announced their norms concerning the age and gender composition of the Council members).

The second one: to identify the members' social profile, e.g. youth, older people, pensioners, etc., which will allow us to draw preliminary conclusions about the degree of the Councils' formality and their similarity to the regional elites (we believe that a high degree of youth [younger than 31 y.o.] or pensioners [older than 60 y.o.] means the representation is formal).

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<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot identify all Members' date of birth, therefore we consider the year of birth only. E.g. if a deputy was born in 1972, then we think the person is 31 y.o. (category "31-40 y.o.") during the 2003 elections. If the year of birth is 1973, the Deputy is in the category "younger than 31 y.o." That's why the data can differ a bit from the official one, but in our opinion all possible differences have no principled character.

The third one: to consider the gender structure, which could be useful while studying peculiarities of women's political activity and their representation under the authoritarian regime's conditions.

## Age composition

A study of the biographical data of the Local Councils' members shows that the dominating age groups are persons of 41-50 y.o. and 51-60 y.o., the other groups are additional (31-40 y.o.) or marginal (younger than 31 y.o.; older than 60 y.o.). The dominating groups have the biggest political and economic influence and activity. Still, the correlation between different age groups has changed, sometimes drastically, during 1999-2007.

Regardless of some political allegations, the members younger than 31 y.o. have little representation (as a rule, a Council has none or one member younger than 31 y.o.). In 2003, their representation grew a little, but in 2007 it decreased again. This model is not applicable to the Mahilou Region which had from two to four members.

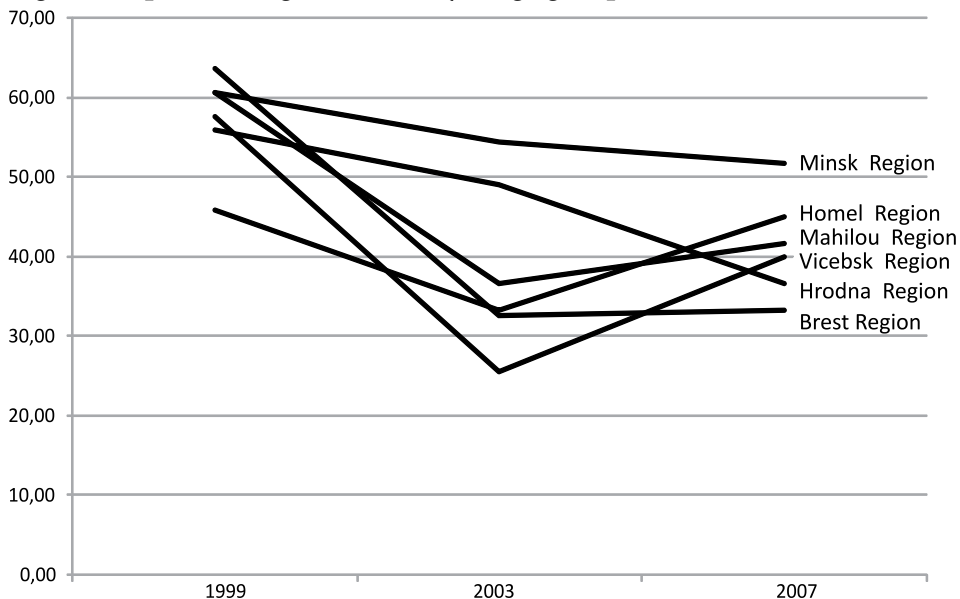
The members of 30-40 y.o. constitute a small group, approximately 8-15%, without clear representation tendencies. After 1999, some Regions demonstrated a decrease of this group's representation: Homel (a critical decrease), Brest, Minsk, Hrodna, Vicebsk and Mahilou Regions demonstrated an increase in 30-40 y.o. members' representation in 2003 and a decrease in 2007, which could be used as an additional argument for the benefit of the thesis that

the peak of political engineering for the Local Councils was in 2003.

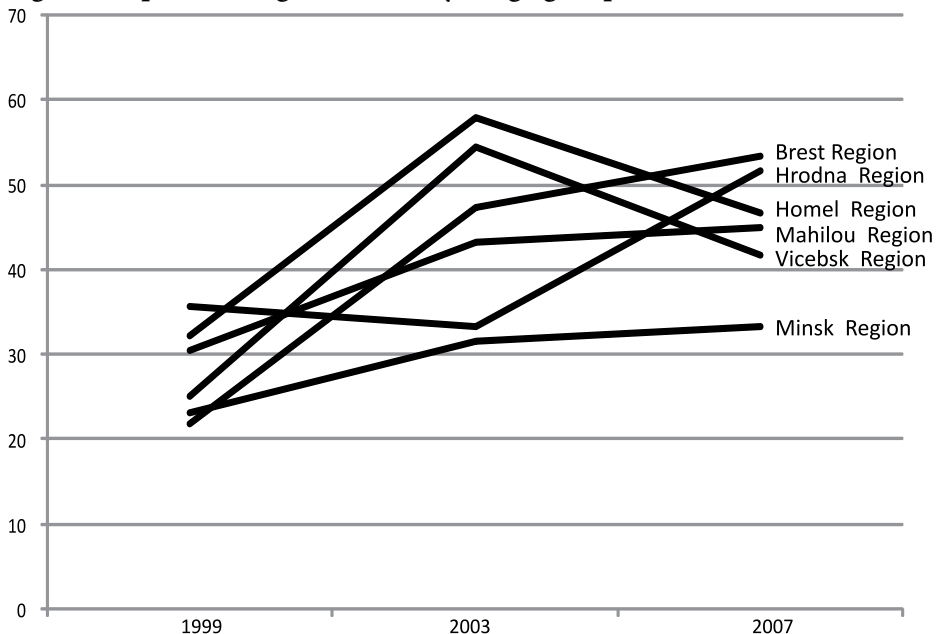
The structure of the Regional Councils shows that it is far from a gerontocracy model. There were only two members older than 70 y.o. The age group of 60-70 y.o. (pension age for men) is also marginal, just like the "youth" younger than 31 y.o. The Councils usually have none or two members older than 61 y.o. There is only one case where there were four representatives in the Vicebsk Region in 2007.

As for the basic age groups, the peak of 40-50 y.o. members' representation was in 1999, when it was a dominating group: 63,6% (the highest record) in Brest Region; 60,7% in Minsk and Mahilou Regions; 57,7% in Vicebsk Region; 55,9% in Hrodna Region; and only in Homel Region it was lower than the half - 45,8%. Thus, 40-50 y.o. representatives were the biggest group in all Councils. However the situation changed during the next elections. The share of the age group of 40-50 y.o. decreased in all the Regions. In a number of the Regions, it dropped by two and more times: in Brest, Vicebsk and Mahilou Regions down to 25-36%. In Homel Region, it dropped down to 33%, and only in Hrodna and Minsk Regions the decrease was insignificant. At the same time, the representation of the age group of 50-60 y.o. grew up to 43-58%. In 2007, the situation stabilized. Members of 51-60 y.o. became the biggest group in five Regions. The Minsk Region only demonstrated a different tendency, there in 2007, younger members were in the majority (51,7%; See Tables 6-12).

**Figure 1. Specific weight of 41–50 y.o. age group in 1999–2007**



**Figure 2. Specific weight of 51–60 y.o. age group in 1999–2007**



**Table 6. Age composition of Councils in 1999–2007 (Brest Region Council)**

	1999	2003	2007	1999–2007
younger than 31	0	1	0	1
31–40	8 (14,5%)	7 (12,1%)	7 (11,7%)	22
41–50	35 (63,6%)	18 (31%)	20 (33,3%)	73
51–60	12 (21,8%)	29 (50%)	32 (53,3%)	70
61–70	0	2	1	3
older than 70	0	1	0	1

**Table 7. Age composition of Councils in 1999–2007 (Vicebsk Region Council)**

	1999	2003	2007	1999–2007
younger than 31	0	1	1	2
31–40	8 (15,3%)	10 (18,2%)	6 (10,0%)	24
41–50	30 (57,7%)	14 (25,5%)	24 (40,0%)	68
51–60	13 (25,0%)	30 (54,5%)	25 (41,7%)	68
61–70	1	0	4	5
older than 70	0	0	0	0

**Table 8. Age composition of Councils in 1999–2007 (Hrodna Region Council)**

	1999	2003	2007	1999–2007
younger than 31	0	2	1	3
31–40	5 (8,5%)	7 (12,3%)	4 (6,7%)	16
41–50	33 (55,9%)	28 (49,1%)	22 (36,7%)	83
51–60	21 (35,6%)	19 (33,3%)	31 (51,7%)	71
61–70	0	1	2	3
older than 70	0	0	0	0

**Table 9. Age composition of Councils in 1999–2007 (Homes Region Council)**

	1999	2003	2007	1999–2007
younger than 31	1	0	0	1
31–40	10 (16,9%)	5 (8,8%)	3 (5,0%)	18
41–50	27 (45,8%)	19 (33,3%)	27 (45,0%)	73
51–60	19 (32,2%)	33 (57,9%)	28 (46,7%)	80
61–70	2	0	2	4
older than 70	0	0	0	0

**Table 10. Age composition of Councils in 1999–2007 (Mahilou Region Council)**

	1999	2003	2007	1999–2007
younger than 31	2	4	2	8
31–40	2 (3,6%)	8 (13,3%)	5 (8,3%)	15
41–50	34 (60,7%)	22 (36,7%)	25 (41,7%)	81
51–60	17 (30,4%)	26 (43,3%)	27 (45,0%)	70
61–70	1	0	0	1
older than 70	0	0	1	1

**Table 11. Age composition of Councils in 1999–2007 (Minsk Region's Council)**

	1999	2003	2007	1999–2007
younger than 31	1	1	2	4
31–40	7 (12,5%)	5 (8,8%)	5 (8,3%)	17
41–50	34 (60,7%)	31 (54,4%)	31 (51,7%)	96
51–60	13 (23,2%)	18 (31,6%)	20 (33,3%)	51
61–70	1	2	2	5
older than 70	0	0	0	0

**Table 12. Age composition of Regional Councils in 1999–2007**

	1999	2003	2007	1999–2007
younger than 31	4	9	6	19
31–40	40	42	30	112
41–50	193	132	149	474
51–60	95	155	163	413
61–70	5	5	11	21
older than 70	0	1	1	2

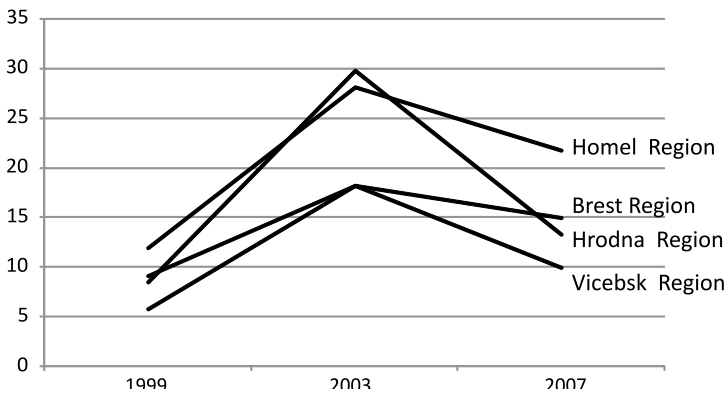
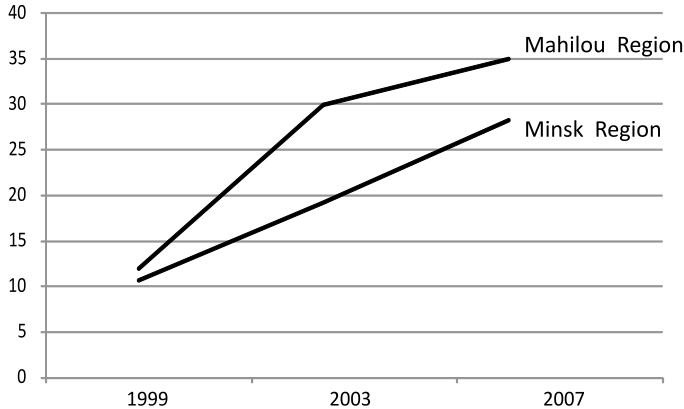
## Gender composition

At the end of the Soviet period, a demonstration of the political and social equality between men and women was set as a high value. One of the results of such policy was both genders' almost equal representation in the Local Councils. It was achieved due to formal means, and therefore after disintegration of the Soviet system, the equal representation did not survive. In the 1990s, there was a drastic decrease of women's representation in the political bodies, including the Local Councils,

which can be proved by the 1999 elections results. Under the conditions of the authoritarian regime's stabilization in 2000-2001, the gender representation became mandatory – the authorities demanded it, thus influencing the 2003 elections results. The political engineering resulted in women's increasing representation in the Regional Councils; their number more than doubled (from 9,5% to 24,7%). It was considerably lower than the average indicator in the Local Councils (44,4%) (the Local Councils' members data, 2003), however it reflected the overall tenden-

**Table 13. Age structure of Regional Councils in 1999-2007**

Region	1999		2003		2007	
	M	W	M	W	M	W
Brest	50	5 (9,1%)	47	11 (19%)	51	9 (15%)
Vicebsk	49	3 (5,8%)	45	10 (18,2%)	54	6 (10%)
Hrodna	54	5 (8,5%)	39	18 (31,6%)	52	8 (13,3%)
Homel	52	7 (11,9%)	41	16 (28,1%)	47	13 (21,7%)
Mahilou	50	6 (12%)	42	18 (30%)	39	21 (35%)
Minsk	50	6 (10,7%)	46	11 (19,3%)	43	17 (28,3%)
Total	305	32 (9,5%)	260	85 (24,7%)	286	74 (20,6%)

**Figure 3. Women representation (1999, 2003, 2007)****Figure 4. Women representation (1999, 2003, 2007)**

cy accurately. The 2007 elections campaign results show a relative weakening of the constructivist tendencies, which led to the representation's certain decrease. There is a decrease in all the Regions, in the Hrodna Region by two and

more times. Only the Mahilou Region does not support this tendency – there, the number of women grew up to 35%, which is the highest record. Moreover, the Mahilou Region was the leader in leveling a gender disproportion during

all 1999-2007 electoral campaigns. The Minsk Region is also characterized by an increase in women’s representation, while The Vicebsk Region demonstrates women’s lowest representation during all electoral campaigns.

## V. Territorial representation

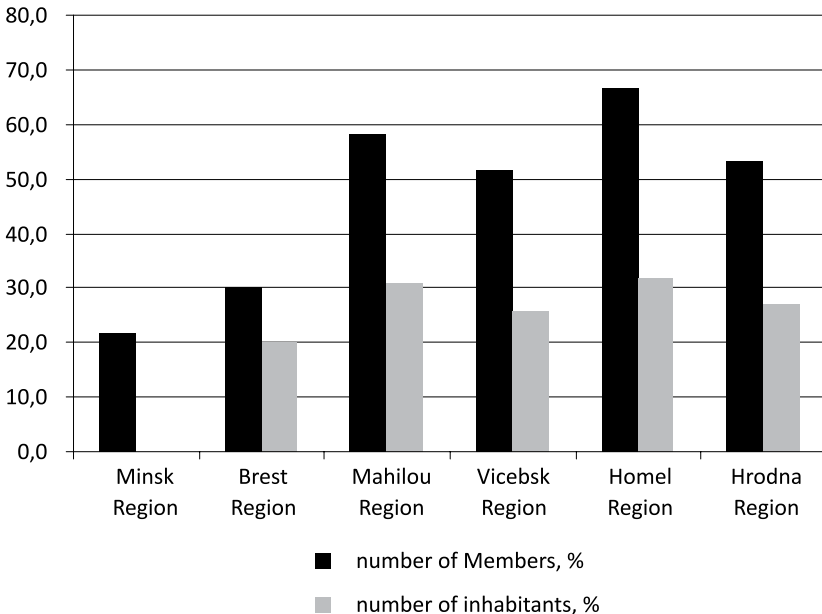
An interesting aspect of the social structure of the Local Councils’ members is their territorial distribution according to their permanent place of residence. The territorial representation is often ignored by analysts and researchers, but it is important for understanding the logic of the regional political processes. The Belarusian authorities usually say the political representation’s character is fair and balanced however this principle is not carried out at all at the level of the Local Councils, thus

challenging the idea of “the authorities’ closeness to people”.

An analysis of members’ places of residence demonstrates interesting processes, e.g. a growing representation of the Regions’ capitals and cities, while the representation of members who live in towns and rural areas decreases. More often members are no longer representatives, rather curators of electoral constituencies.

In all the Regions, except for Minsk and Brest ones, the majority of members are inhabitants of the Regions’ capitals. We did not include members who live in the suburbs to the category of the capitals’ inhabitants because it is difficult to identify them as either urbanites, or ruralists. If we did, the representation of the Regions’ capitals would grow by 2-7%.

**Figure 5. Comparison of the demographic data and representation of members from Regional capitals in 2007**

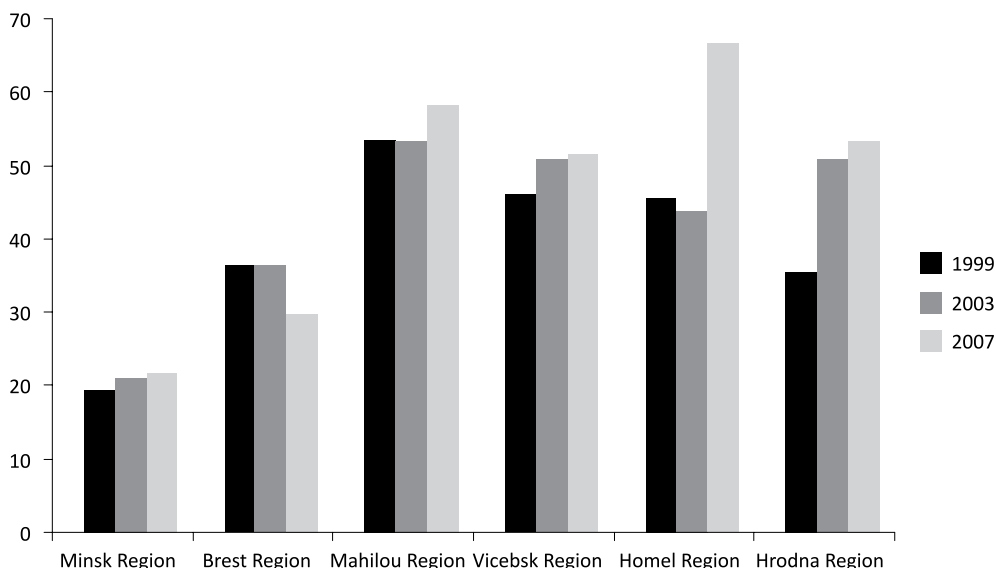


In 2007, the absolute leader of “centralization” was the Homel Region – 66,7%, 45,8% (1999), 43,9% (2003), i.e. 2/3 of Members lived and worked in the city of Homel, while the city’s share in the Region’s population was only 31,7%. It is followed by the Mahilou Region – 58,3% (2007), 53,3% (2003) 53,6% (1999), the city’s share in the Region’s population was 30,8%. The Hrodna Region has the following data: 35,6% (1999), 50,9% (2003), 53,3% (2007), the city’s share in the Region’s population was 27%. The Vicebsk Region has the following data: 46,2% (1999), 50,9 (2003), 51,7 (2007), the city’s share in the Region’s population was 25,6%. Thus, according to the 2007 elections results, the representation of inhabitants of the Regions’ capitals is much higher than their demographic share. For the known reasons, the Minsk Region is not a part of this tendency, however there inhabitants of the capital of Belarus constitute 19–22%

of all members as well, i.e. they do not live on the Region’s territory. Near 30% of members also live in the Region’s cities.

The only real exception is the Brest Region Council, there, a representation of inhabitants of the city of Brest has decreased in comparison with the previous campaigns – 36,4% (1999), 37,9% (2003), 30% (2007). The city’s share in the Region’s population is about 20%. Other towns representation, e.g. the town of Pinsk, has increased (See Tables 14-20).

An additional indicator of the representation’s centralization is a decrease of a number of cities and towns, which inhabitants are represented in the Regional Councils. The biggest decrease was in 2003, after that the situation stabilized with a decrease tendency. In 1999, 93 towns were represented; in 2003 – 78; in 2007 – 74; It is relevant for all the Regions, except for Brest one,



**Figure 6. Dynamics of representation of inhabitants of Regions’ capitals in Regional Councils in 1999–2007**



**Table 14. Territorial representation in 1999–2007 (Brest Region Council)**

	1999		2003		2007	
<b>Brest</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>36,4%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37,9%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30%</b>
Brest District	2		2		3	
Cities (A <sup>6</sup> )	10 (2*)	18,2%	11 (2)	19%	20 (4)	33,3%
Suburbs of Cities (A)	3		5		0	
Towns (B)	4 (2)	7,3%	0	0	4 (2)	6,7%
Other towns	10	18,2%	10	17,2%	9	15%
<b>Village</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10,9%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13,8%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10%</b>

\* Number of cities

**Table 15. Territorial representation in 1999–2007 (Vicebsk Region Council)**

	1999		2003		2007	
<b>Vicebsk</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>46,2%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>50,9%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>51,7%</b>
Vicebsk District	0		2		3	
Cities (A)	12(3)	23,1%	5(1)	9,1%	14 (3)	23,3%
Suburbs of Cities (A)	1		3		2	
Towns (B)	2	3,8%	8	14,5%	0	0
Other towns	7	3,5%	5	9,1%	5	8,3%
<b>Village</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11,5%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7,3%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8,3%</b>

**Table 16. Territorial representation in 1999–2007 (Hrodna Region Council)**

	1999		2003		2007	
<b>Hrodna</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37,3%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>50,9%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>53,3%</b>
Hrodna District	2		3		3	
Cities (A)	5 (1)	8,5%	12 (4)	21,1%	7 (2)	11,7%
Suburbs of Cities (A)	1		3		2	
Towns (B)	8	13,6%	2	3,5%	4	6,7%
Other towns	11	18,6%	6	10,5%	6	10%
<b>Village</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16,9%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3,5%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10%</b>

<sup>6</sup> Cities A are the cities which have three or more representatives in the Region's Soviet, e.g. Kobryn District, 2003. Suburbs of Cities A is a separate category, reflecting the suburbs of such cities as Vorsha (Orsha), Barysau (Borisov), etc. Towns B are the towns where two members of the Region's Soviet live. Other towns and urban villages have one representative.

**Table 17. Territorial representation in 1999–2007 (Homel Region Council)**

	1999		2003		2007	
<b>Homel</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>45,8%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>43,9%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>66,7%</b>
Homel District	4		3		2	
Cities (A)	17 (5)	28,8%	14 (3)	24,6%	13(4)	21,7%
Suburbs of Cities (A)	1		1		1	
Towns (B)	0	0	4	7%	2	3,3%
Other towns	7	11,9%	6	10,5%	2	3,3%
<b>Village</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5,1%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 18. Territorial representation in 1999–2007 (Mahilou Region Council)**

	1999		2003		2007	
<b>Mahilou</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>53,6%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>53,3%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>58,3%</b>
Mahilou District	0		0		2	
Cities (A) Babrujsk (Borubruisk)	11 (1)	19,6%	11 (1)	18,3%	10 (1)	16,7%
Suburbs of Cities (A)	0		0		0	
Towns (B)	2	3,6%	6(3)	10%	2	3,3%
Other towns	9	16,1%	7	11,7%	9	15%
<b>Village</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7,1%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6,7%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3,3%</b>

**Table 19. Territorial representation in 1999–2007 (Minsk Region Council)**

	1999		2003		2007	
<b>Minsk</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19,6%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21,1%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21,7%</b>
Minsk District	2		1		3	
Cities (A)	14(4)	25%	18(4)	31,8%	17 (4)	28,3%
Suburbs of Cities (A)	0		1		5	
Towns (B)	6	10,7%	4	7%	6	10%
Other towns	15	26,8%	12	21,1%	10	16,7%
<b>Village</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14,3%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15,8%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10%</b>

**Table 20. Territorial representation in Regional Councils in 1999–2007**

	1999		2003		2007	
<b>Regions' capitals</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>39,8%</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>42,8%</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>46,9%</b>
Suburbs of Regions' capitals	10		11		16	
Cities (A)	69	20,5%	71	20,8%	81	22,5%
Suburbs of Cities (A)	6		13		10	
Towns (B)	22	6,5%	24	7%	18	5%
Other towns	59	17,5%	45	13,2%	41	11,4%
<b>Village</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>9,1%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6,9%</b>

**Table 21. Number of cities, towns and urban villages represented in Regional Councils**

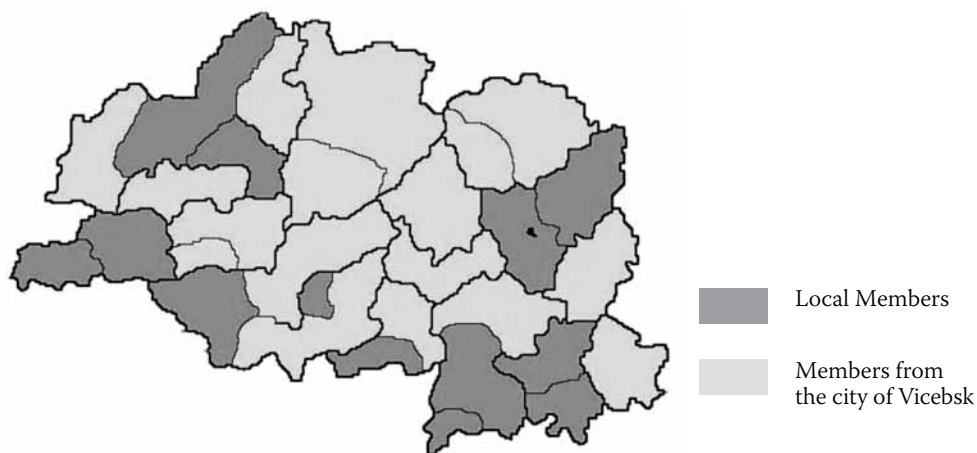
Regions	1999	2003	2007
Brest	15	12	16
Vicebsk	13	11	9
Hrodna	17	12	11
Homel	13	12	8
Mahilou	12	12	12
Minsk	23	19	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>74</b>

where there was an increase, and Mahilou one, where since 1999 the number of cities has not changed – 12 (See Table 21).

Besides the Regions' capitals, other cities which representation in the Regional Councils is 20-30%, are also important. Still, in Hrodna and Mahilou Regions, it is less than 11-16% because there is only one city in each of these Regions (Lida and Babrujsk). As for the

Mahilou Region it was 3,3%. The Homel Region Council had no members who lived in the rural areas at all.

The situation with territorial representation can be detailed with the help of some facts. E.g. inhabitants of the cities of Mahilou and Babrujsk are represented by 45 members (75%) in the Region Council, while these cities' demographic share is 49,6%. In 2007, Vicebsk Region was divided into 60

**Figure 7. Vicebsk Region: distribution of territorial representation in 2007**

village, its representation is marginal. In 2007, the rural areas' highest representation was in Brest, Hrodna and Minsk Regions – 10% each, a little less in the Vicebsk Region – 8,3%, while in

constituencies: 15 belonged to the city of Vicebsk, 9 to the towns of Polacak (Polotsk) / Novapolacak (Novopolotsk), 6 to Vorsha, and 30 constituencies could be called territorial. Only 13 of

them had local members, the rest were represented by inhabitants of the city of Vicebsk.

## Conclusions

Taking into account the particularity of the Local Councils as an institution and their not clear political status in the present state model, all conclusions would bear a preliminary character only. Nonetheless, the presented and analyzed facts allow us to somehow sum up the political processes' particularity on the regional level. The same facts prove that the composition of the Regional Councils is not formal. Members are mostly men of 40-60 y.o. who have executive positions in various fields of economy. They form a part of the local elites. The Councils' corps can reflect political, social and economic dispositions on the local level. Besides, members of the Regional Councils can be used as a focus group in obtaining information about the regional elites under the conditions of non-transparency of local politics and lack of open information.

It is possible to note the evident territorial differences in the approaches to the composition of the Regional Councils, which should further be explained. On the average, the Mahilou and Hrodna Regions have a bigger electoral discipline and a desire to carry out the representation's norms ordered by Minsk. Au contraire, the Vicebsk Region demonstrates the lowest level of the electoral discipline.

As for the social structure of the members, the age groups' dynamics seems interesting. Most members are

41-60 y.o. An additional group is represented by people who are 31-40 y.o. Youth (younger than 31 y.o.) and those who are older than 60 y.o. constitute a marginal group. On the average, Council members are becoming older. In 1999, the majority of the members were 41-50 y.o.; in 2003 and 2007, there was a balance between this group and the members who are 51-60 y.o. It serves as an indirect evidence that new elites appeared on the regional level on the border line of 1990s and 2000s. Peculiarities of the age groups' dynamics, as well as the gender balance, in 1999-2007, makes it possible to say that the peak of modeling of the corps of the Regional Councils was during the 2003 election. In 2007, the control was lower, which might have increased local authorities' autonomy in defining the Council members' composition.

The analysis of the parties' representation in the Regional Councils reveals a nationwide decrease in the parties' structures in 1999-2007. It concerns both oppositional and pro-governmental parties. The basic reasons for that could be that it was uncomfortable for the regional bureaucracy to have parallel political structures and their desire to eliminate them.

It is possible to follow a stable tendency of a growing representation of inhabitants of the Regions' capitals and cities in Local Councils. Probably, it reflects the centralization of the regional elites and a growing political importance of the Regional capitals. Such growth does not correspond to the electorate's demographic structure; a great number of rural constituencies are not represented by the local mem-

bers. If compared to 1999, there is a decrease in the number of towns which have their representatives in the Regional Councils. The representation of rural areas is marginal.

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