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Introduction

The interviews published in this book were recorded between March and May 2006, during and immediately after a presidential election in Belarus. It is not incidental that respondents often allude to that political campaign.

In the spring of 2006, independent pollsters said it was impossible to conduct surveys in the country because of the lack of proper conditions for interviewing people. The conclusion came after nearly 25 percent of respondents refused to say who they voted for on exiting polling stations. Those who were taking interviews for the book came across the same difficulties. More than half of the potential respondents refused to cooperate. Among those who declined requests for an interview were all athletes and businesspeople approached, a majority of cultural figures, artists, journalists with connections to the authorities and officials.

Refusals may help identify spheres whose representatives are more exposed to the government's pressure.

The material does not purport to be exhaustive and comprehensive, but it should be of interest to people curious about the Belarusian elite's views on national identity and Belarus' relations with European countries and Russia. It shows that ideas and mentality of people belonging to one group, the pro-democratic or pro-European part of society, are very diverse and often conflict with each other.

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