BELARUS — TOWARDS A UNITED EUROPE

Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe
Wrocław 2009

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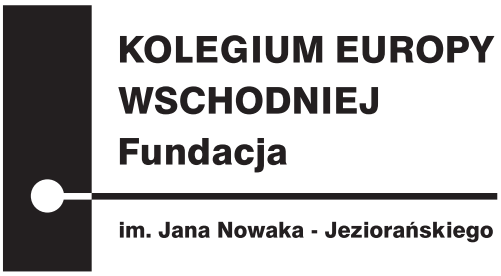

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Introduction

BELARUS — TOWARDS A UNITED EUROPE

Mariusz Maszkiewicz

I

The following collection has come together as a result of many conversations and discussions with Alyaksandr Milinkevich and his colleagues during the last three years — from the time of the 2006 presidential elections in Belarus into late autumn, 2008.[1] We reached the conclusion that Belarus needs the elaboration of a mature "European strategy", one which would be neither a one-time act of protest against the Belarusian authorities, nor become another form of political opposition activity. What is necessary is to foresee and forestall the events and problems which Belarusian society may see as it glances towards a united Europe. Nearly half of Belarusian citizens visit EU countries and many study and work in the West. Sociological investigations are showing with increasing clarity the pro-European orientation of this society. The Belarusian economy is growing ever more strongly interlinked with the EU market, and through its closest neighbours — Poland, Lithuania and Latvia — is becoming increasingly subjected to the active forces of the globalisation process. It is becoming ever clearer that cooperation with Brussels is becoming the dominant vector in Belarusian foreign policy, and that this must be taken into account by both the authorities in Minsk and the political and economical institutions of united Europe. The present collection of expert analysis is an at-

[1] Discussions were also held in a wider circle of experts; these were documented in the Stefan Batory Foundation's publication "The European Choice for Belarus", available on the website (http://www.batory.org.pl/english/intl/pub.htm); in another example of these conversations, meetings were held under the College of Eastern Europe conference "Poland's Eastern Policy"; see the publication "Polska Polityka Wschodnia", Wrocław, KEW, 2008

tempt to embrace the issues and key areas which determine the relationship between Belarus and its integration with Europe. Reaching a little further and a little deeper than current political activities and events, over a dozen experts provide their analyses on how well prepared Belarus' authorities and society are to accept the EU as a close and lasting partner.

This enterprise coincided with the appearance of some positive signals from the Belarusian authorities regarding their willingness to enter into dialogue with the EU. As of the middle of 2008, the representatives of the Republic of Poland and senior members of EU bodies have been assured by Minsk of a readiness to deepen their collaboration with Brussels. Events on a more important and wider scale have occurred in parallel. The Polish-Swedish initiative entitled the "Eastern Partnership" has opened within the EU a new line of institutional activity in connection with its eastern neighbours, or, in other words, with the EU's "Eastern Dimension". United Europe, in its own well-understood interest, must open itself more to the countries of the post-Soviet region. This is firstly because these countries are situated within the geographical and cultural-civilisational boundaries of Europe, and secondly because our collective European strategic interests demand it, in such fields as security, economy, communications, the environment, and many others covered since 2003 under the European Neighbourhood Policy. The reaction of official Belarus to the Eastern Partnership initiative has been surprisingly positive. For the first time in a very long period, the authorities are speaking in one voice to the representatives of NGOs and civil society.

Of course there is still a degree of uncertainty on whether the Belarusian authorities' declared opening towards Europe will have a long-term character, and how the government, society, and ruling and intellectual elites will react to these "doors opening on Europe" as events play out. What factors will influence this reaction? What promises will they make and what threats will lie behind them?

The works presented here are an attempt to collect together the questions, indicating the differences in approaching the problems and an exposing at least some of the doubts.

II

After the collapse of the USSR, the societies of the post-Soviet region, on the whole, welcomed the widening of collaboration with the West with sincerity and hope. By the "West" I mean here not only the European Economic Community and political organisations (such as NATO and the Western European Union), but rather everything that together symbolised the prosperity, welfare, stability and modernisation of the Western countries.

However, a few years after the changes had taken shape, prosperity had not arrived. Instead of reform and equitable redistribution of the state's property, the so-called "bad privatisation" happened. Stability and security stopped being the domain of the state, and were taken over by mafia structures and the "oligarchy". Modernisation ground to a halt in an ideological desert, where it roams to this day, held up principally by the idea-less development of information technologies generally accepted as a kind of *ersatz* progress and modernity.

It is necessary to remember that in Soviet times, Belarus was recognised as the number one beneficiary of the communism-building process. It was in the Belarusian SSR that, in the course of 30 years, the transformation of the rural (in the language of the times, "backward") person into the Soviet, "modern" citizen was carried out with most success.[2] As an effect of mass migration, society was relocated from rural and small-town environments to new metropolises and industrial centres. The generations born in the 1930s, '40s and '50s gained from the communist system the opportunity to receive an education, improve their material conditions and career perspectives. That is, at least, how it was seen at the time. The degree to which this conviction was widespread is attested by the relative paucity of the dissident movement in the Belarusian SSR, as well as the high support to this day of the post-Soviet regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. In connection with the high standard of living in the Belarusian SSR, acceptance of transformation and perestroika was low, and at the very beginning of the '90s social expectations for the new era were roused much more than in other countries; similarly, the level of assent to the Soviet system was higher than in the neighbouring republics of Ukraine and Lithuania. During the Yeltsin years, disappointment in the

[2] In 1955 the rural population comprised nearly 80% of the Belarusian Republic; in 1989, according to census data, the rural and small town populations made up less than 30% of the total.

West deepened while his offers of modernisation and potential for cooperation failed to meet the high expectations of the Belarusian public. It was not by coincidence that Lukashenka in his anti-Western rhetoric pronounced objections that the West only sought to exploit the cheap and well-qualified labour force, expand its market, and bring nothing worthwhile to the Belarusian economy. These expectations are described expertly in the wider context by Dimitri Simes in his essay in *Foreign Affairs*.[3] The author concentrates mostly on USA-Russia relations, but accurately conveys the expectations regarding the West in the former USSR republics: a great deal of assistance, even a 'new Marshall Plan', and numerous guarantees of security. In political writings in the post-Soviet area, the refrain that "the West deceived us" is repeated to this day. They promised one thing, took another, and especially deprived us of our feelings of superpower-dom, which had allowed the average USSR citizen to "live with pride". For the average observer of international politics in the post-Soviet countries, it does not matter whether it was Washington who betrayed Russia, leaving it prey to economic and political hurricanes, or some vaguely understood 'Brussels' (NATO or the EU, it matters not) who, within a modest assistance package, offered "unnecessary" expertise and office materials for "improving administrative capabilities". In Ukraine it is to this day recalled with aversion, on the example of TACIS, how badly and thoughtlessly the huge resources for assistance have been allocated. The countries of the CIS were not prepared for such quick and violent political, social and economic change. Hence the feeling of shock. The statement that shock came without reform applies equally in relation to this aspect of the transformation.

Whether the West had some kind of duty to help remains a separate question. What obligations did it have before the USSR? What crimes to atone for? Did these mythologised obligations not arise simply from the excessive expectations and excited hopes of post-Soviet politicians, immersed in an ideological no-man's land, as the embodiment of the collapsing world of their "values"? The system of bipolar international politics, to which they become so strongly accustomed in the Brezhnev era, had ceased to exist because it was bound to dissipate sooner or later. Those who had no ideas on how to govern, other than by making empty promises, would of course have to be disappointed. Would we, however, succeed in untangling the knot of expectations and hopes by offering new forms of help? Do these expectations on the part

[3] Dimitri K. Simes, "Losing Russia", Foreign Affairs vol. 86, 2007, pp. 36-52

of the post-Soviet societies not stand at variance with their powerlessness in overcoming the problems resulting from neglect and lack of effective solutions in their very own region? Such questions can be stretched further — to what extent has an effective reckoning with the communist totalitarian past been achieved? After all, in Russia and many other countries of the area, we frequently hear that such a reckoning is unnecessary, even harmful. To the issue of the responsibility of the elites for the state, we can add another packet of questions: on the level of the elites' responsibility in general, on the scope of what is understood in the post-Soviet countries by the concept of 'responsibility' in the wider and narrower perspectives — towards the populace, the family, the nation, the state. And a last question: to what extent did the totalitarian system displace these concepts and impulses from public life?

As many Russian analysts emphasise, society has not matured to democracy, and what we refer to as a lack of social cohesion is the result simply of the problem of responsibility, a problem which reaches into the inner circles of society, i.e. into the family, clan and social group. A strong family, clan, or group bond is something different to the state and its institutions. In a certain fundamental aspect, we see this same problem in Belarus.

More recent experiences have added to the set of issues discussed above. In the last 5-8 years in Russia and the majority of other CIS countries, the conviction has strengthened that democratisation processes aimed at building a strong state do not need to correlate with a high level of empowerment and economic welfare among the population. In this atmosphere a set of new political idioms has appeared which serve to define the aims of governments, amongst which the term "sovereign democracy" is the most well-known example. This phrase was supposed to be an ideological antidote to the "colour revolutions", or, in the understanding of the authorities from Astana to Minsk, the threat to stability and prosperity. The boom in oil, gas and other resources gave Putin and his team (including the ideological figures in it, such as Gleb Pavlovsky and Vladyslav Surkov) the conviction that it would suffice to ensure financial welfare, and build a strong state, for society not to demand access to all of the instruments of democracy. It was assumed that people would not want the democracy and so-called civil freedoms offered by the West, if the state took them under its wing.

The Ukrainian breakaway from this post-Soviet condition, the symbol of which was the Orange Revolution, merely assured the dictatorial regimes of

the CIS that they need to defend themselves from the threat of "colour revolutions" through a broader sharing of the wealth within a new system of redistribution. The state-owned concerns and mega-corporations were to ensure a necessary minimum of well-being and social security. In Belarus, an element of this strategy is the 'new social contract', according to which 'you, i.e. society, don't get involved in politics, and We, i.e. the authorities, will give you a minimum of liberty and a social safety net beneath you.'[4]

III

Today it is increasingly clear that in Russia, Belarus and other CIS countries, the basis of state ideology is a set of non-negotiable "ideologemes" (Orthodox religion, language, Slavic kinship, the post-Soviet community, etc.). The community of post-Soviet states is constituted in solidarity against a foreign community of interests, especially solidarity against the West. This is upheld by certain phraseological devices composed using the same methods as in the times of the cold war. Can this still be effective?

An example of this construction of distrust is the ideological creation/maintenance of the image of NATO. This is carried out by feeding the fear of being under threat by NATO, reacting nervously to the installation of anti-missile systems in the Czech Republic and Poland and the propositions of NATO expansion to the East, etc. In this atmosphere of peril, built around the idea of a community of the disregarded and/or threatened, there is a whole set of matters which Russia describes as a transgression of the "red line", and which the Orthodox church refers to as an incursion by foreign denominations into its territory.

For those members of the ruling elite who have kept the Soviet mentality, the offer of leaving aside the differences and searching for a common ground within a globalised international community is not overly enticing. Are certain signals nonetheless gradually beginning to appear? Is the so-called Medvedev Plan, perhaps clumsy in its form and vague in content, just such a signal? Is it an honest proposal, or just a game of appearances resulting from a feeling

[4] See materials from conferences organised by the Stefan Batory Foundation, especially the texts by V. Silicki, A. Chubrik and K. Khayduk (in Polish: http://www.batory.org.pl/mnarod/wydarzenia.htm); N.B. this project is a continuation of an earlier undertaking of the Foundation, "The European Choice for Belarus" of 2006.

of helplessness in the knowledge that the governments of Russia and other post-Soviet countries do not possess a set of values with which they can support their political projects, both large and small? Uncertainty about the honesty of Lukashenka and his recently announced "liberalisation" is based on the negative experiences of bygone years, when we were faced with constant manoeuvring between the commonality of interests and the commonality of values. The emphasis more often fell on the first. Real communism, whose construction was officially completed only twenty years ago, over many decades smashed society's trust in any system of ideas which would bring any form of order to social relations. After communism, the post-Soviet states have seen the rise of "monstrosities" in the form of state ideologies, featuring the instrumentalisation of religion, the re-writing of history, the creation of personality cults, etc. Served up all together, what is offered is a ready meal with a sauce of pragmatism and *chekist* cynicism, where the accent is of course on the economy.

IV

At the same time — starting from the early '90s — a different part of Central and Eastern Europe set out to "catch up with Europe", sometimes in a humiliating and ineffective manner, because this partly meant confessing to previous mistakes. In Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the three post-Soviet Baltic republics, there was a dominant conviction that integration with the structures of the West was an element of a profound and well-considered strategy, supported by a shared system of values, and only in the longer-term perspective by a shared system of interests. Even joining the community of the West, if not bound to be always profitable, was part of large-scale project aimed at a long-term docking in the "maternal harbour". Today we would say that the difference between Poland and Belarus lies in our different interpretations of the need and/or necessity of "welding ourselves" on to the Western world.

A clear majority of Belarusians know what is involved in reaping the economic and other benefits of sharing their interests with the West. It is difficult, however, for politicians like Alyaksandr Milinkevich to reach out to society with the message that it is a matter of more than just economic well-be-

ing. Poland's joining of the European Community was embedded in a deeper tradition, which was accompanied by a conviction (sometimes anachronistic, causing pitying smiles among Western partners) that this was a matter of a civilisational leap, of joining the world of values whose basic ingredients are not always easily identifiable as an axiological system operating at the level of political discourse. This is where our activeness in Brussels derives from, up to engaging the entire EU in issues surrounding the world beyond its *limes*. There is in this something of a romantic responsibility for the "younger" neighbours in Europe. In the last few years a part of this discourse or argument was the geographical and historical expansion of the borders of Europe, above all in the consciousnesses of the politicians and civil servants of Brussels.

In the present collection of reports and analyses, we are not given an unequivocal answer as to whether and how Belarus has decided on its "European orientation". It is made clear rather that this is a process whose conclusion has not been decided and whose future course is difficult to foresee.

In March 2006, during the presidential campaign and in the course of political demonstrations, a clearer depiction than ever before was given of the methods and philosophies employed in the struggle for Belarusian identity. In a move never expressed more clearly and expressively by any Belarusian politician, Alyaksandr Milinkevich indicated the two roads the people of Belarus has before it. The first one is the conservation of the post-Soviet system and support for an authoritarianism upheld on some form of social contract. The second is the path tread by all the surrounding countries with the exception of Russia. The choice between a Soviet Belarus and a European Belarus is increasingly clearly the subject of general social reflection, and even forms part of the strategy of both the authorities and the opposition. Unfortunately this process is seen by many, mistakenly and superficially, as making a choice between Russia and the West.

V

In order to understand the causes and political background of the offer currently being extended to Belarusian society by Brussels,[5] it is necessary to

[5] See the European Commission document of December 2006 "What the European Union could bring to Belarus"; http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/belarus/intro/non_paper_1106.pdf

reach back to the beginning of the cooperation, particularly to the TACIS programmes, starting from 1991. After the constitutional changes of 1996, cooperation with the countries of the West was systematically narrowed. Attempts to start a dialogue in the years 1998-2000 ended without success, as the condition set by the authorities was taking "control" of how EU programme resources would be distributed to non-governmental organisations (the most well-known example being the case of the Helsinki Committee in 2001). In 2003, Belarus entered the agenda of the European Neighbourhood Policy; official Minsk, however, did not answer this proposition for a variety of political reasons. The civil rights situation continued to worsen. In 2004, NGOs were "brought to account" for the donations (both real and alleged) that they had received from the EU; one of the results of this process was that many organisations were liquidated, contributing to the weakening of the third sector at the same time as consolidating the "freeze" of relations with the EU.

At the present time, Minsk's positive reaction to the invitation to participate in the Eastern Partnership initiative must be consolidated by taking real steps towards liberalising the system. In the texts presented below, this demand is elaborated in a number of aspects. **Vyachaslau Pazdnyak** and **Yelena Rakava** analyse the tools and areas of collaboration which the EU has offered Belarus since the beginning of the 1990s. They describe in detail the opportunities available for using European resources towards developing infrastructure, administrative capabilities, and humanitarian assistance. The authors note, however, that the low level of utilisation of these funds is also a result of passivity and lack of will to cooperate on the part of the Minsk authorities. Projects on offer either had to be financed in their entirety from outside, or they were simply not realised at all because the Belarusian side did not invest its own resources. Meanwhile, humanitarian aid agencies and non-governmental organisations were also subjected to legal restrictions on the acceptance of funds; in many cases, donations were made taxable. Yelena Rakava's recommendations for foreign institutions on how best to offer help to Belarus and what demands should be made on the Belarusian government are well worth noting.

Andrey Lyakhovich provides a sketch of the extent to which Belarus' ruling elites are prepared for dialogue and cooperation with the European Union. Dr Lyakhovich presents the ideas of those Belarusian analysts who are moderately critical of the government, and leans towards the thesis that any

change in his country will come not as a result of opposition activity and civil disobedience, but rather as a product of a slow evolution of the ruling camp; the ruling group is increasingly displaying discourse characteristics more typical of the democratic groups of the beginning of the 1990s. Within this political landscape, president Lukashenka fulfils a vital role as the guarantor of rights and privileges. Lyakhovich asserts that his presidential power rests on three pillars: the first is the social contract binding him to the citizens, the second his contract with the *nomenklatura* (the guarantee of sharing power with them on condition of absolute obedience), and the third his exceptional ability to mould himself to any situation and balance the interests of the populace and the ruling elites.

According to Lyakhovich, official Minsk's relationship with the West was, until the middle of 2008, a function of the relationship between Belarus and Russia. After Russia's conflict with Georgia and the "turbulences" in its relations with Ukraine, both president Lukashenka and the loyal *nomenklatura* reached the conclusion that relations with the West should be built according to parameters grounded in Minsk, rather than Moscow. It can be said that an independent foreign policy, upheld by interests (profit and loss) rather than values, was embarked upon. In this context the *nomenklatura* is interested above all in insuring its own field of interests (e.g. having its share in the privatisation process, being protected from aggressive Russian business practices, etc.). These interests are identified with the necessity of cooperating with the West. Lyakhovich describes accurately the range of possible compromises, conveying with precision the particular mode of 'contractual' thinking employed by the Belarusian authorities. The issue remains that of whether the West and its institutions (financial, economic and political) will be able to maintain a coordinated and uniform strategy in relation to the Minsk government. It seems that, in relation to this particular country, the positive image of the cohesive policy of the European institutions and their executive capacity and decisiveness is at considerable variance with reality. Lukashenka himself would prefer to have on the Western front a partner/enemy more similar to that in Moscow. Yet the Western world is not a uniform entity and it is difficult to obtain from it the same kind of decisions and benefits which are offered by Moscow (gas tariffs, 'deals' on political decisions, etc.). Lukashenka's flirt with the West could end in disappointment for the president, because in the present financial crisis it is rather unlikely that high-value investments and

state-of-the-art technologies will start flowing into Belarus solely on the basis of his volition and his personal invitation to start doing business in the country. Nevertheless, the current opening up of the *nomenklatura* will favour the warming of ties with the West — and this is the biggest benefit equally for Belarusian sovereignty as for the process of building a modern society.

A comparative analysis of the conditions set by the EU upon the Belarusian government in December 2006 and of the human rights situation and political climate shows to what extent the Belarusian authorities are not fulfilling those conditions.

Yury Chavusau, analysing the state of civil activity from the perspective of the Belarus-EU relationship, points out the legal-political restrictions operating on civil society at present and also details the historical perspective (the maturing process, up to the point of "being and acting as if in Europe") and the context of current events.

Iryna Vidanava analyses the Belarus-EU relationship from the point of view of society, family ties, group cultural endeavours and the influence of mass media outlets (both local and international). Her analysis of programmes aimed at the youth leads her to state that investing in contacts with the youngest layer of Belarusian society (scholarship programmes, cultural and entertainment events, internships and trips abroad) creates a unique base of beneficial collaboration both with the country's immediate neighbours and the EU as a whole.

Ihar Lalkou presents the platforms of individual political parties in Belarus from the angle of their relations with the EU, whilst **Andrey Fyodarau** notes in his analysis that among the five countries bordering on Belarus, one (Russia) is a clear antagonist, three are EU members and the last (Ukraine) has declared its readiness to join the ranks of NATO. The author relates and describes all of the areas in which Belarus has cooperated with NATO, from 1992 onwards, which indicates, against all appearances, a rich infrastructure of contacts both of a political character and in military-technical and training aspects. In 1997, sociological studies showed an anti-NATO orientation among 30 % of the population. In the spring of 1999, after the alliance's actions in Yugoslavia and a corresponding propaganda campaign in all official media outlets, this figure climbed to 47 %. It is worth adding that it was in this very period that Poland joined the alliance, and the authorities did not forego the opportunity to manipulate fears of a threat closing in on Belarus' bor-

ders. The author cites data from the Independent Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS), headed by Prof. Manayeu, whose indicators have changed little to the present day. Certainly the distribution of percentages varies according to age group and level of education. Attitudes to NATO also have other contexts, which we do not always understand. The representatives of the administration and the ruling elites have emphasised repeatedly that after the retreat of the Soviet army from the GDR and the Eastern bloc countries, the West gave a solemn promise not to force its influence beyond the borders of the former USSR. Representatives of the Belarusian opposition and independent analysts hold the position that it is too early to talk of moving closer to NATO, not only with reference to the results of the sociological surveys which indicate an unwillingness and even hostility to the alliance. In the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus — both in the old version and the amended one from 1996 — there is a neutrality clause. Entering a military alliance with Russia was a violation of this requirement, as were the acceptance of obligations within the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus and entry into the Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

Authors in this volume also analyse selected aspects of the cooperation up to the present day of social actors and representatives of the administration with the EU and its institutions. The Bug Euroregion is among the subjects discussed.

In his work, **Syarhey Nikalyuk** reminds us of a series of surveys carried out in 1991 in a majority of Soviet republics, in which people's level of identification with the USSR and with their own nations (republics) was gauged. As many as 69 % of Belarusians identified the USSR as their home, while only 24 % indicated the emerging independent republic as their fatherland. In comparison, in Ukraine these proportions were 42 % and 46 % respectively, and for Estonians 3 % to 97 %. In the times of the USSR, in relation to the strong dynamic of development, the Belarusian SSR was recognised as the number-one beneficiary of the communism-building process. Between 1991 and the beginning of the 21st century, there were significant changes in people's attachment to the USSR and its attributes or substitutes (which is undoubtedly what Lukashenka's political project, with its inclinations towards the Union State, should be described as). Nikalyuk provides an overview of sociological studies from the angle of the dynamics of change in attitudes to the European Union, to the West in general, and also in the other direction: to the idea of

unification with Russia. A differentiation of opinion in favour of the West begins to appear only among younger age groups — for the generation for whom the USSR does not present a set of positive associations. In recent years, support for eventual entry into the European Union has appeared most noticeably among students, youths and representatives of the private sector. The idea of unification with Russia is seen to gain most acceptance among retired pensioners and employees of the public sector. At the end of this article, which is full of very interesting compilations of sociological data showing in cross-section the inclinations and preferences of Belarusian society during the last decade, we are given some encouraging news. The proportion of internet-users in 2008 was 36 % of the population, up from less than 10 % in 2001. The surveys show that internet-users tend to have a pro-Western orientation with much greater frequency than non-users.

Valery Karbalevich analyses the Belarus-EU relationship in the aftermath of the Russian-Belarusian disputes on the supply and transit of energy resources. In this author's opinion, it was only after the Russia-Georgia conflict that real diplomacy arrived on the scene in Belarus. This incident gave rise to a more refined and complex game using all the instruments available to participants of international politics. In this context, it becomes difficult to describe the parliamentary elections of September 2008 as a resounding success — the authorities did not exploit the opportunity to strengthen their position with regard to the West. Meanwhile, the West went against the Belarusian opposition by deciding to continue the dialogue with the West, not wanting to appear the loser in this particular round of the game.

A very interesting study is provided in **Anatol Lysyuk and Maryna Sakalouskaya**'s analysis of the relationship with the EU of local authorities in the border regions of Belarus. The authors give results from their own sociological investigations of populations in these areas, conducted under the aegis of Brest University. Their findings concluded, *inter alia*, that:

- over 70 % of respondents do not feel a threat emanating from Poland (13.6 % replied that there is such a threat, but this was found to be dominated by fears of contraband, crime and migration, rather than the proximity of NATO);
- over 60 % of respondents had visited Poland in recent years;
- 57.6 % of respondents believe that life in Poland is better than in Belarus;
- 36 % describe relations between Poles and Belarusians as friendly, 29.6 % replied that relations were more friendly than unfriendly, and nobody said

that the two nations were enemies; meanwhile, official relations between the two states are described as friendly by 16.8 % and 13.6 % replied that the two states were mutual enemies;

- attitudes to the EU are positive; a feeling of being under threat from the EU is felt by only 7.9 % of respondents.

Alyaksandr Zhuchkou analyses the legal and political environment for local administrations engaging in relations with the EU. Belarusian self-government can benefit from many assistance programmes within the framework of cross-border cooperation, regional (including Euroregion) and wider national initiatives which, for example, foresee the development of administrative capabilities (training workshops for civil servants should not be formal and routine, but rather should take account of the many positive experiences provided by e.g. the Polish participation). N.B. Alyaksandr Zhuchkou is one of the founders of the concept of self-government reform in Belarus, and has been putting forward his ideas since the mid-1990s. The project has not yet met with success and has been effectively shelved until more a favourable political climate arises in the country. Basic conditions of reform are provided by the author at the end of his paper, in bullet-point format.

Finally, **Mikhal Zaleski** gives an overview of the economic infrastructure of Belarus and its potential for cooperation with the EU. The final questions on the manner in which the current global financial crisis and its effects in Belarus will affect Belarus-EU relations are of particular importance.

I believe that the collection presented here will serve to deepen understanding of the situation in Belarus, as well as provide a perfect opportunity for the redoubling of intellectual and organisational efforts, on the part of interested specialists of the EU and Belarusians alike, on the road to a united Europe.

Warsaw, February 2009

European Programmes for Belarus

EXPANDING EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD MENUS FOR BELARUS: IN SEARCH OF A GOURMET.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE STATE OF PLAY AND OUTSTANDING ISSUES.

Vyachaslau Pazdnyak

1. New design and instrument of external cooperation and the European Neighbourhood Policy

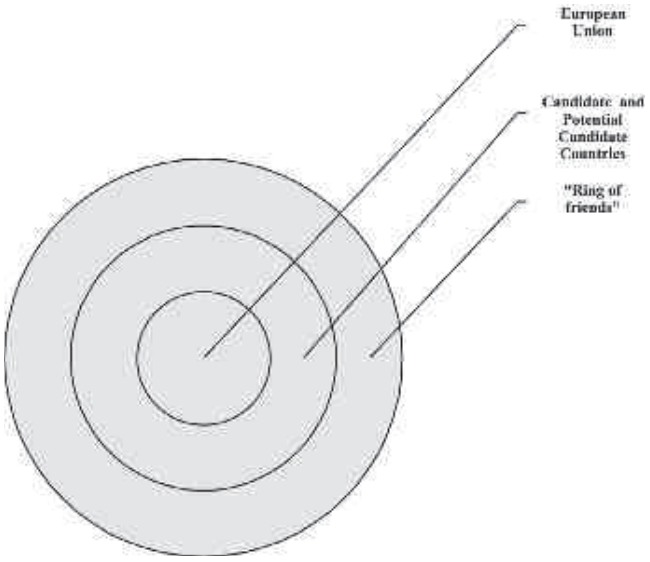
The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was first outlined in a Commission Communication by "Wider Europe" in March 2003. The EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development).The ENP goes beyond existing relationships to offer a deeper political relationship and economic integration. ENP is not about enlargement and does not offer an accession perspective.

Launched by the EC in 1991, the TACIS Programme provides grant-financed technical assistance to 12 countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan), and is aimed principally at enhancing the process of economic and political transition in these countries. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) substitutes the TACIS programme from 2007 onwards. However, TACIS will continue to fund projects until the ENPI is well in place and the TACIS 2006 budget is depleted.

Since 2007, the European Union's external cooperation and neighbourhood policy has been restructured and is now represented by three concentric circles, with the EU in the innermost circle, the Candidate Countries and Po-

tential Candidate Countries in the second, and the "Ring of friends" (Ukraine, Belarus, Mediterranean Countries etc.) in the outermost circle.

Figure 1.



Different instruments are applied within each of these circles:

- The Objective 3 — "European Territorial Cooperation" financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for cooperation within the EU Member States;
- The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for cooperation between candidate and potential candidate countries and between them and the EU Member States;
- The Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) for cooperation between the EU Member States and the "Ring of friends" states.

Key to the reform of EC aid is the change from centralised to decentralised management of development assistance. Mainly, this entails that the management of aid is decentralised towards the delegations of the Commission. The basic principle is that "everything that can better be managed and decided on at a local level should not be managed or be decided on in Brussels". Now, this devolution exercise has been completed with 77 delegations in the field responsible for the implementation of assistance. In practice this means that delegations now have increased influence over project identification and appraisal, contracting and disbursement of Community funds and project monitoring and evaluation[1].

[1] http://www.interact-eu.net

The Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) finances the ENP action plans in the Mediterranean Countries, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and the Strategic Partnership with Russia.

Most assistance managed by EuropeAid is channelled through national and regional programmes covered by the EU's European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI). However, an Inter-regional Programme (IRP) has also been established to support the ENPI southern and eastern regions. Such a programme is required because some aid activities can be managed more efficiently and flexibly at inter-regional level[2].

The European Commission's Inter-regional Programme (IRP) aims to support the reform and transition processes currently underway in the EU's neighbouring partner countries. It promotes the approximation of EU law, while enhancing cooperation, economic integration and democratic governance.

To achieve these goals, the IRP deploys two key instruments: TAIEX and SIGMA. TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchanges) was set up in 1996 to provide short-term, targeted technical assistance to the Central and Eastern European candidate countries. TAIEX helped the candidates to understand, draft and implement EU legislation. It produced information on EU laws, arranged study visits to the European Commission and Members States, and provided a team of experts to offer advice on accession-related issues.

TAIEX was introduced to the ENPI regions in 2006 to offer advice to partner countries as they implement their European Neighbourhood Policy action plans.

SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) is a joint European Commission and OECD initiative. Principally financed by the EU, it focuses on strengthening public management in areas such as administrative reform, public procurement, public sector ethics, anti-corruption, and external and internal financial control[3].

The European Union wishes to reinforce existing forms of regional and sub-regional co-operation with countries that lie to the east of its borders. The goal is to build on regional activities that were financed under the EU's TACIS programme during the past decade.

[2] http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/irc/index_en.htm
[3] http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/irc/reform_en.htm

TACIS proved to be a valuable tool for tackling challenges with a regional dimension and for promoting inter-state cooperation on regional issues. Assistance for regional cooperation focused on transport, energy, border issues and the sustainable management of natural resources. Between 2000 and 2006, more than €950 million was allocated to regional programmes and projects.

Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) was launched under the TACIS technical assistance programme in 1996. It aimed to support the development of cross-border cooperation between the then candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe and also Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and Moldova. The total funding for TACIS CBC during the period 1996-2003 amounted to €257 million. TACIS CBC complemented PHARE CBC which aimed to increase cooperation between neighbouring countries and provide support to the cross-border regions among accession countries (2004 accession) and between these countries and existing Member States.

Drawing on earlier CBC experience under TACIS, PHARE and INTERREG, a new policy and implementation framework for CBC has been incorporated in the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The core objectives of Cross-Border Cooperation remain: to support sustainable development along both sides of the EU's external borders; to help decrease differences in living standards across these borders; and to address the challenges and opportunities following from EU enlargement or otherwise arising from the proximity between regions across land and sea borders. In particular, CBC is intended to aid with:

- promoting economic and social development in regions lying on both sides of common borders;
- addressing common challenges in fields such as environment, public health and the prevention of and fight against organised crime;
- ensuring efficient and secure borders;
- promoting local cross-border "people-to-people" actions.

From 2007-2013 the EU will provide around €1.1 billion to reinforce cross-border co-operation. Local authorities as well as NGOs and other institutions will have access to funds under three Land and Sea Border Crossing Programmes: (1) Poland, Belarus, Ukraine (€186 million), (2) Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine (€68 million) and (3) Romania, Ukraine and Moldova (€126 million)[4].

[4] EU Cooperation News. Bi-weekly newsletter of the Delegation of the European Commission to Ukraine. Project on information and PR activities for the EU and its Programmes in Ukraine. #14, 8 October 2008.

Priority areas for regional cooperation are now defined in the ENPI Eastern Regional Strategy Paper for 2007 to 2013, which was adopted by the European Commission in March 2007. Funding of €223 million has been earmarked for the period 2007 to 2010[5].

Regional programmes and projects for the Eastern region are grouped in the following six priority areas:

- Transport;
- Energy;
- Sustainable management of natural resources;
- Border and migration management, the fight against transnational organised crime and customs;
- People-to-people activities;
- Landmines, explosive remnants of war, small arms and light weapons.

There has been a modification of priorities for Cross-Border Cooperation programmes for the period 2007 2013 as compared to 2000-2006 — See Table 1.

Table 1.

Cross-Bborder Ccooperation: Main topics

2000-2006:	**2007-2013:**
Urban, rural and coastal development	**5 Priorities:**
Entrepreneurship, SMEs and employment	**Encouraging entrepreneurship**
Labour market integration and social inclusion	**Natural & cultural resources/risk prevention**
Research, technology, education, culture…	**Urban and rural areas**
Environment and energy	**Reduction of isolation**
Transport, information and communication	**Infrastructures**
Legal and administrative cooperation	

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-east/index_en.htm

Additional instruments of EU assistance include:

Instrument for Stability

The objectives of the Instrument for Stability are twofold:

(1) in a situation of crisis or emerging crisis, to contribute to stability;

(2) in the context of stable conditions, to help build capacity both to address specific global and trans-regional threats having a destabilising effect and to ensure preparedness to address pre- and post-crisis situations.

€ 2.062 billion have been allocated to the Instrument for Stability for the period from 2007 to 2013.

European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

EIDHR is a financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide, allowing for assistance independent of the consent of third country governments and other public authorities. €1.104 billion have been allocated to the EIDHR for the period from 2007 to 2013.

Humanitarian Aid Instrument

The humanitarian aid instrument comprises assistance, relief and protection operations to help people in developing countries and as a priority those in developing countries, victims of natural disasters, man-made crises, such as wars and outbreaks of fighting, or exceptional situations and circumstances comparable to natural or man-made disasters.

Support for SRHR and HIV/AIDS activities

The EC's objectives described in the European Consensus on Development refer to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), recognising the multidimensional problem of poverty including the role of health aspects. In addition, HIV/AIDS and SRH, together with the ICPD agenda, receive high attention and are explicitly addressed. However, there is no direct link between policy texts and funding.

Cooperation with NGOs

The European Commission acknowledges that NGOs are gradually becoming one of the key partners in development policy, being involved in the development process either as partners in dialogue or consultation

with relevant authorities, or as "full" actors (proposing and implementing projects)[6].

Belarus can participate in the following ENPI programmes:

- National (€5 million annually in 2007-2010 for energy, environment, democratic development and effective governance);
- Regional Eastern Programme (along with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) — transport and energy networks, environment and forestry, border management, customs, migration and international crime, people-to-people cooperation, liquidation of anti-personnel mines and small and light weapons;
- Inter-regional — TAIEX, agriculture, infrastructural programmes, market development, Justice and Home Affairs, education, TEMPUS, ERASMUS-MUNDUS);
- Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) — "Baltic Sea Region", "Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus," "Poland-Belarus-Ukraine");
- Thematic programmes ("Investing in People," "Migration and Asylum," "Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources including energy," "Non-State Actors and Local Authorities," "Food Security," 'Public Associations and Local Self-Government," and some others[7].

2. Lessons learnt or unlearnt?[8]

As experts from the Coordinating Unit of Belarus for the European Union's TACIS Programme admit, so far Belarus has not used the opportunities

[6] http://www.interact-eu.net/

[7] For more details see Information Bulletin No.4 of the Coordinating Unit of Belarus for the European Union's TACIS Programme (TACIS CU).

[8] For a review of results of the implementation of ENP programmes with Belarus' participation before 2007, see Belitskii V., Odinets Je., Orlov L. "Opyt uchastija Belarusi v programmakh dobrososedstva Evropeiskogo sojuza" [Belarus' experience of participating in the EU's neighborhood programmes], in *Zhurnal mezhdunarodnogo prava i mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii*. 2008, No. 3. <http://evolutio.info/images/journal/2008_3/2008_3_tacis.pdf>; Pazdnyak V. "Europe of the Regions, European Neighbourhood Policy and Belarus: In Search of a Roadmap" (in Russian). In: **Wider Europe Review (in Russian).** Vol. 3, Issue 3 (9), Summer 2006. <http://review.w-europe.org/9/1.html>.

offered by the neighbourhood programmes to meet its economic challenges at the local level. This can be explained by a number of factors:

- low activity of local authorities regarding the neighbourhood programmes;
- lack of sufficient information and communication technology resources at the local level;
- lack of sufficient organisational and administrative capacity at the oblast and district levels in terms of necessary structures and experts involved on a daily basis in the preparation of project proposals;
- language barriers, due to the fact that the bulk of information on programmes is available only in English[9].

Basically, Belarus' needs and requirements (priorities, aims and objectives) of foreign "technical" aid have been identified in the National Programme of International Technical Cooperation for 2006-2010[10]. According to official Belarusian estimates, the sum total of Belarus' current and prospective needs in foreign technical assistance is over 202 million USD. The Programme envisages strengthening the national economy, raising living standards, improving ecological security, overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, "democratisation of society" and others. Its stated priorities are as follows:

- facilitating human development, raising living standards, supporting social programmes and mechanisms of social assistance;
- contribution to sustainable economic development through developing innovative foreign economic and investment activities and international cooperation;
- promoting energy and resource saving;
- environmental protection, ecological sustainability, rehabilitation and sustainable development of territories affected by the Chernobyl disaster.

However, the cumbersome bureaucratic machinery, restrictive legislation that often requires obtaining permission even for the organisation of technical seminars, as well as a tradition of caution, suspicion and fear of responsibility on the part of bureaucrats, especially on the local level, make this "depoliticised" programme, if not completely starved of public initiative, rather difficult to run.

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[9] Information Bulletin No.2 of the Coordinating Unit of Belarus for the European Union's TACIS Program (TACIS CU).

[10] Official website of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus. http://w3.economy.gov.by

In order to develop cooperation with the EU in good faith, a renewed legal basis is required to include the functioning Partnership and Cooperation Agreement or its equivalent, to be followed by an Action Plan within the ENPI framework and also new sets of bilateral and domestic regulations on foreign aid. The latter should be "democratised" along with the whole of society. Most importantly, local self-government units, civil society and NGOs should be radically strengthened and granted enough autonomy from the State through legal, political and economic mechanisms.

3. Sectoral Developments in 2007-2008 involving Belarus

The year 2007 (the first year of the ENPI operation) has been rather modest for Belarus in all aspects of the ENPI, particularly in sectoral cooperation. The latter includes: transport, energy, environment, research and innovation, and information society. In many of these more technical sectors, progress is being achieved by incremental steps that are part of the countries' sectoral reform policies.

Regarding **transport**, exploratory talks were launched with Belarus to assess how to integrate the country in the technical work to be carried out on the Northern Axis.

Energy security remained at the top of the EU's political agenda. The European Commission's Communication "An Energy Policy for Europe", as endorsed by the March 2007 European Council, reinforces the development of an external energy policy. On this basis, the EU and the ENP partners further enhanced bilateral and regional energy cooperation. Belarus' authorities made some progress on the bilateral level.

On 13 November 2008 the European Commission adopted the Second Strategic Energy Review entitled "An EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan." It points out that energy interdependence is influencing development, trade and competitiveness, international relations and global cooperation on climate issues. Energy, therefore, must be given the political priority it merits in the EU's international relations outlook, including its trade policy and agreements, its bilateral partnerships, cooperation and association agreements and political dialogues. "The widely-varying interests of countries in

the energy field, in a context of increasing energy interdependence, point to the need for more robust international legal frameworks based on a balance of commitments and benefits, within energy and across economic sectors."[11]

It further says that "as much as the European Union seeks security of supply through greater predictability and diversity, including from different companies within upstream markets, foreign governments and external suppliers seek security of demand, particularly where large investments in new upstream gas supplies for delivery by pipeline are concerned. They require clear and stable rules for the functioning of the internal market and arrangements on access to investment in the European market. In many cases, there is a need to develop trust alongside deeper and legally binding ties between the EU and producer and transit countries, which could deliver significant mutual benefits in the long-term perspective that is needed to finance the more capital-intensive projects of the future. The EU should therefore use all the tools at its disposal, internal as well as external, to strengthen its collective weight with energy supply countries and to offer new kinds of broad-based partnerships. At the multilateral level, the EU should continue to press for further liberalisation of trade and investment in the energy sector."[12]

Reacting to several partners' announced plans or expressed interest in developing nuclear power production, and those of Belarus in particular, the European Commission emphasised that ENP partners should ensure a high level of safety and security of nuclear installations and ensure that the research, development and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes are carried out in compliance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Following the completion of the TACIS Programme in 2006, a new Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC) was adopted to continue the activities of the Commission in this field, with financial resources of some €524 million for the period 2007-13. On November 13 the Commission issued a Memo "Towards secure, sustainable and competitive European energy networks," in which it addressed the spread of nuclear power and nuclear safety. It notes that nuclear power is an established part of the energy mix in a number of developed countries, and that some of these — for example, Rus-

[11] Second Strategic Energy Review. An EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Brussels. Commission of the European Communities. Unofficial Version. [13 November 2008].
[12] Ibid.

sia and China — are looking to expand its use. A number of countries (including some in "geopolitically challenging" areas), which do not currently generate nuclear energy, have expressed an interest in doing so. The Community itself has a mature nuclear industry, and possesses the capacity to help others to embark on nuclear activity in compliance with the highest standards of safety and security, with safety and non-proliferation issues being two interlinked pillars of Community policy in this area[13].

As regards nuclear security and non-proliferation, the Commission says that, given the possible dual use (peaceful and military) of some materials, equipment and nuclear installations, the growth of nuclear power could increase proliferation risks, and that there are growing concerns that peaceful nuclear technologies could be misused by terrorists. It also observes that tackling nuclear smuggling requires new capability-building at national, regional and international levels[14].

The May 2008 Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament identified the following objectives of future assistance/cooperation to/with third countries in the nuclear field:

- improving the culture of nuclear safety (including at the levels of design and operation);
- improving protection against ionising radiations;
- addressing problems related to radioactive waste and spent fuel;
- assisting in implementing nuclear safeguards[15].

The Commission held **technical environment meetings** with Belarus.

The Erasmus Mundus (EM) programme, as compared to 2006: **mobility of students and scholars,** as well as academic co-operation, received a significant boost from the new Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (EMECW). The Jean Monnet programme funded in 2007 one new **Jean Monnet Chair in Belarus**.

ENP partners continued with **health** sector reform as a multi-annual task to be pursued in the coming years. HIV/AIDS, and increasingly also tubercu-

[13] Towards secure, sustainable and competitive European energy networks. MEMO/08/694. Brussels, 13 November 2008.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Addressing the international challenge of nuclear safety and security. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. COM (2008) 312 final. Brussels, 22.5.2008.

losis, pose a serious challenge in the Eastern neighbourhood. In 2007, the EU and its neighbours considerably increased health cooperation and dialogue. The Commission invited Belarus, amongst other countries, to the Commission HIV/AIDS Think Tank[16].

4. Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) programmes under the ENPI 2007-2013 with Belarus' designated participation

The Cross-Border Cooperation component of the ENPI finances programmes, projects and other measures contributing to the objectives of the ENPI. It aims at reinforcing cooperation with territories bordering the European Union. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) has been in place since 1 January 2007. It replaces the MEDA and TACIS programmes. The overall goal of the instrument is to promote enhanced cooperation and progressive economic integration between the European Union (EU) and its neighbouring partner countries. This is particularly an instrument for providing assistance to those countries which will not accede to the European Union in the near future. It also encourages partner countries' efforts aimed at promoting good governance and equitable social and economic development.

The overall ENPI budget for the period of 2007 to 2013 is € 11.181 billion. Amongst others, the ENPI finances "joint programmes," bringing together regions in Member States and partner countries sharing a common border. This is the Cross-Border Cooperation component of the instrument to which € 1.118 billion is allocated (50 % from the ENPI budget and 50 % from the Budget of General Directorate for Regional Policy). The core policy objectives of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) are to support sustainable development along both sides of the EU's external borders, to help eradicate differences in living standards across these borders, and to address the challenges and opportunities following from EU enlargement or otherwise arising from the proximity between regions across our land and sea borders.

[16] Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2007. Sectoral progress report. Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Commission of the European Communities. Brussels, 3 April 2008. SEC(2008) 403.

The CBC funding priorities are defined in the Cross-Border Cooperation Strategy Paper. Four key objectives are addressed under the ENPI CBC programmes:

- Promoting economic and social development in regions lying on both sides of common borders.
- Working together to address common challenges in fields such as the environment, public health and the prevention of and the fight against organised crime.
- Ensuring efficient and secure borders.
- Promoting local cross-border "people-to-people" action: Actions in the social, educational, cultural and media fields, as well as enhanced cross-border contacts between civil society groups and NGOs.

Two main categories of programme are established under ENPI-CBC:

- programmes covering a common land border or short sea crossing
- programmes covering a sea basin.

ENPI CBC Baltic Sea Region Programme

TOTAL EU ALLOCATION (2007-2013): 22.608 million EUR.

ELIGIBLE REGIONS: The entirety of Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

Germany: the States (Länder) of Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schleswig-Holstein and Niedersachsen (only NUTS II area Regierungsbezirk Lüneburg).

Russia: St Petersburg and the surrounding Leningrad Oblast, the Republic of Karelia, the Oblasts of Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Novgorod and Pskov; for projects addressing the Barents Region, cooperation with Archangelsk Oblast, Komi Republic and Nenetsky Autonomous Okrug is also envisaged.

The strategic objective of the programme is to strengthen the development towards a sustainable, competitive and territorially integrated Baltic Sea region by connecting potentials across borders. As part of Europe, the Baltic Sea region is also expected to become a better place for its citizens to invest, work and live. The programme will thus address the European Union's Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies in order to boost the knowledge-based socio-economic competitiveness of the Baltic Sea region and its further territorial cohesion.

PRIORITIES:

1. The first priority is focused on facilitating the generation and dissemination of innovations across the BSR.

It is dedicated to core innovations in the field of natural and technical science, but also to selected non-technical innovations such as business services, design and other market-related skills. Actions will be targeted at the performance of innovation sources and their links to SMEs, the facilitation of transnational transfer of technology and knowledge, as well as making special social groups of citizens fitter for generating and absorbing knowledge.

2. The second priority is dedicated to improving the external and internal accessibility of the Baltic Sea region.

Priority topics highlight the promotion and preparation of joint trans-national solutions in the fields of transport and information and communication technology (ICT), in particular those overcoming functional barriers to both the diffusion of innovation and to traffic flows. Also, the further integration of already existing strategic development zones spread along trans-national transport corridors in the BSR will be promoted, as well as the creation of new trans-national links.

3. The third priority concentrates on environmental pollution in the Baltic Sea within a broader framework of sustainable management of sea resources.

It supports operations aimed at limiting pollution inputs into the marine environment and pollution impacts on it.

Special emphasis is put on enhanced maritime safety.

This priority also promotes the economic management of open sea areas by means of the best available technologies and practices. Attention is given to the integrated development of offshore and coastal areas in the BSR in the context of climate change tendencies.

4. The fourth priority promotes cooperation of metropolitan regions, cities and rural areas, enhancing their attractiveness for citizens and investors.

It features action programmes and policies at BSR level to make cities and regions more competitive engines for economic development. At the same time, ideas will be to promoted strengthen urban-rural partnerships and support a viable economic transformation of BSR areas with smaller and less dense settlements.

This priority is also open to the preparation of pan-Baltic strategies, action programmes, policies and subsequent investments. Joint actions dedi-

cated to the social spheres of regional and city development are a special feature under this priority.

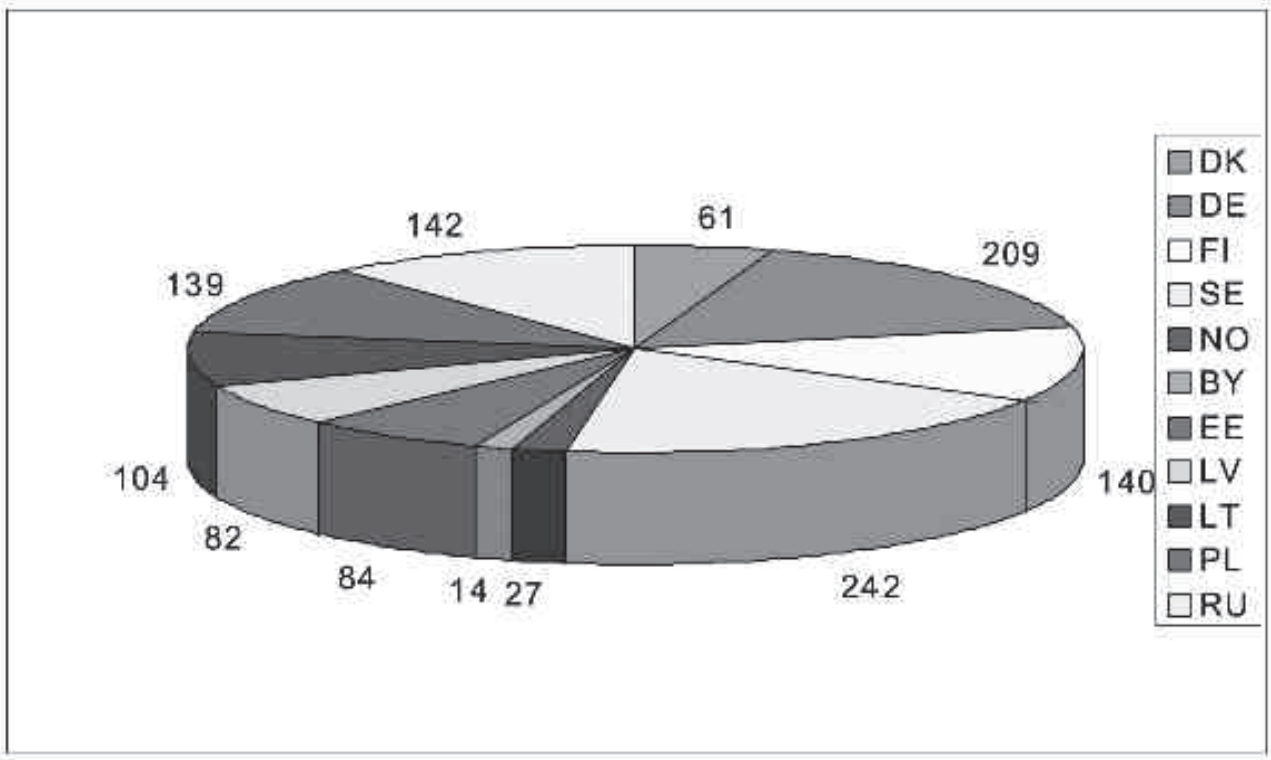
These will be particularly promoted in cooperation projects with Russia and Belarus.

STATE OF PLAY:

The Commission adopted the programme as the first ENBI CBC programme in December 2007. The first call for proposals has already been launched in spring 2008 with a suspensive clause for the partner countries Russia and Belarus. A second call will be launched in the first quarter of 2009. The CBC projects are likely to start at the beginning of 2009, provided that Russia or Belarus has signed the Financing Agreement with the Commission (the deadline is at the end of 2008)[17].

Figure 2. Baltic Sea Region INTERREG IIIB project applications within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Instrument

8th Application Round (ENPI): Number of applications by country (14 from Belarus)

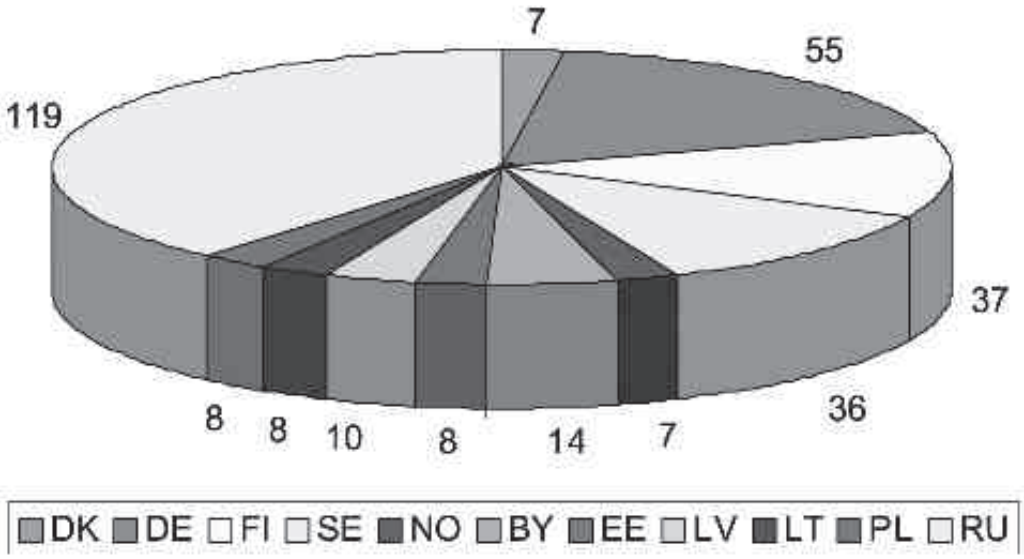


Source: **www.eu.baltic.net**

[17] www.interact-eu.net

Figure 3. 9th Application Round (ENPI): Number of applications by country (14 from Belarus)

33 project proposals have been prepared jointly by Russian and Belarusian partners



Source: **www.eu.baltic.net**

ENPI CBC Latvia/Lithuania/Belarus Programme

TOTAL EU ALLOCATION (2007-2013): 41.737 million EUR.
ELIGIBLE REGIONS:
Latvia: Latgale Region.
Lithuania: Utenos, Vilnius and Altyaus Apskritis (adjoining regions: Kaunas and Panevezys Counties — NUTS III).
Belarus: Hrodna and Vitebsk Oblasts (adjoining regions: Minsk and Mogilev Oblasts, Minsk City).
The strategic objective of the programme is to enhance the cohesion of the cross-border area through reducing regional disparities and securing the economic and social welfare and cultural identity of its inhabitants.

PRIORITIES:

1. Promoting sustainable cross-border development and social development.

The sustainable economic and social development of the border region is a key objective of this Programme.

Therefore, this priority shall try to turn these disparities into opportunities and use the potential of each country for the benefit of the whole region. The main areas to be addressed under economic development are: the promotion of business development and cooperation in order to increase the region's competitiveness; and common regional and local development/territorial planning. These areas will be facilitated by improvements to accessibility/connectivity and the physical infrastructure (including tourism and cultural infrastructure) of the border regions.

2. Addressing common challenges.

The cross-border region as a whole faces a number of serious challenges, mainly in the environmental, health and social spheres, which could be best addressed through jointly coordinated and well-planned actions. The rich natural resources of the region sometimes lack proper and equally balanced management by all countries. Of special concern are insufficient and/or substandard environmental monitoring and economic activities in the protected territories, which do not always comply with EU/international conventions and programmes. Another environmental/health problem to be solved by joint efforts is related to the abundance of biting flies which harm cattle and other animals and therefore create a problem for people in Belarus and the southern part of Lithuania. Under this priority, the focus should be placed on environmental monitoring, the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources, and the limitation of the potentially negative impacts of the increased intensity of economic activity in the region. This particularly concerns the balanced development of protected territories, NATURA 2000 sites and forested/water areas, and calls for a further decrease of pollution emissions by different measures, including the development of bio-energy.

STATE OF PLAY:

The Programme has been submitted to the European Commission for approval. The adoption of the programme is expected at the end of 2008. The first call for proposals will be launched soon after the programme is

approved. The first round of projects will probably be approved by autumn 2009[18].

ENPI CBC Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programme

It continues and broadens cooperation in the border zone areas of the three countries, which has been developed within the framework of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine INTERREG IIIA / TACIS CBC 2004—2006 Neighbourhood Programme.

Despite substantial progress in cross-border cooperation, the level of integration in the programme area needs further improvement in order to realise and utilise the full social and economic potential of the region. The area's economic development is still insufficient, with a comparatively low GDP per capita, a very high unemployment rate on the Polish side of the border, a high proportion of agriculture in the employment structure and a relatively low innovativeness in SMEs, R&D spending and technical environmental standards.

The programme will enable cross-border cooperation by bringing the different actors — people, institutions and organisations, enterprises and communities — closer to each other, in order to better exploit the opportunities offered by joint development of the cross-border area[19].

TOTAL ALLOCATION (2007-2013): 186.201 million EUR.
ELIGIBLE REGIONS:
Poland: Bialostocko-Suwalski, Ostrolecko-Siedlecki, Bialskopodlaski, Chelmsko-Zamojski, Rosnienskoprzemyski (adjoining regions: Lubelski, Rzeszowsko-Tarnobrzeski, Lomzynski). **Belarus:** Hrodna and Brest Oblasts, western part of Minsk oblast [Miadel, Vileika, Molodechno, Volozhin, Stolbtsy, Niesvizh and Kletsk districts] (adjoining regions: eastern part of Minsk Oblast, Gomel Oblast) **Ukraine:** Volynska, Lvivska and Zakarpatska Oblasts, adjoining regions: Rivnenska,Ternopilska Oblasts and Ivano-Frankivska Oblasts.

The core objective of the programme is providing support for cross-border development processes. The programme objectives will be realised through non-commercial projects implemented within the following priorities and measures.

[18] www.interact-eu.net
[19] Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland — Belarus — Ukraine 2007-2013. Final version. 6 November 2008.

PRIORITIES:

1. Increasing competitiveness of the border area including:

- Better conditions for entrepreneurship (Measure 1.1);
- Tourism development (Measure 1.2);
- Improving access to the region (Measure 1.3).

2. Improving the quality of life including:

- Natural environment protection in the borderland (Measure 2.1);
- Effective and secure borders (Measure 2.2).

3. Networking and people-to-people cooperation including:

- Capacity building in regional and local cross-border cooperation (Measure 3.1);
- Local community initiatives (Measure 3.2).

STATE OF PLAY:

The programme was submitted to the European Commission in June 2008; a revised version of the Programme, taking into account the EC's comments, was sent to the EC on 10 October 2008. The programme was adopted on 6 November 2008. It is expected that the first Joint Monitoring Committee will be organised in the first quarter of 2009. Thereafter, the first call for proposals will be launched and it is expected that the first round of projects will be approved in the 3rd-4th quarter of 2009[20].

5. What's new and what's true?

The year of 2008 has become a watershed in EU-Belarus relations for numerous reasons. To list only some of the significant developments: it has been marked by Minsk's official declarations of intent to "normalise" bilateral relations; expectations of a "new beginning" coupled with disappointment at obviously insufficient moves from the Belarusian side; the launching of the EU's second-generation European Neighbourhood Programmes and initiation of the East-European Partnership (in a sense balancing the creation of the Mediterranean Union). Indeed, there have already been other moments and even periods in history (albeit short-lived) when rhetoric from Minsk was losing belligerent overtones and became conciliatory to the point of showing readiness. These days, however, for better or worse, some real change has come, even if a smaller one than desired, or hoped for.

[20] www.interact-eu.net

An uncertain dialogue between official Minsk and the European Union culminated in November 2008 in yet another trade-off. This time, allegedly in response to the promised reduction of the 12 EU preconditions and pledges addressed to the Belarusian government and people to five,[21] Minsk praised the six-moth suspension of visa sanctions against Belarusian officials (Council decision of October 13) in a two-page document sent to Brussels and expressed readiness to normalise political relations and develop cooperation on issues of mutual interest[22]. In return, the Belarusian authorities pledged to do three things: to discuss with the OSCE ways of improving the country's election code; permit the publication and legal circulation in Belarus of two (out of about 20) opposition newspapers; and organise a "round-table" discussion on Internet regulation between the Ministry of Information and the OSCE, with the results to be "taken into account" for the "further improvement of the relevant legislation and its implementation."

On November 20, President Lukashenka signed two edicts which envisage the signing of a framework agreement between the government of Belarus and the European Commission, define the status and conditions for the provision of technical assistance under the ENPI and facilitate the functioning of the future EU representative office in Belarus. The President's Press Service listed energy, transport, customs infrastructure, combating illegal migration and international crime, as well as protection of the environment, as priority cooperation areas for both sides [23].

The European Union's Commissioner for External Relations and the European neighbourhood policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, welcomed the Belarusian government's "important and encouraging steps." "For its part, the Commission is intensifying technical dialogue with Belarus in the fields of mutual interest and I anticipate concrete results to help foster Belarus' economic development," she said[24].

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[21] See "What the European Union could bring to Belarus." http://www.delblr.ec.europa.eu/page3242.html. Reportedly, the five remaining preconditions include: changes in electoral legislation, greater freedom of the mass media, abrogation of criminal persecution for political and public activities and a moratorium on imprisonment on political grounds.

[22] Rakhlei, Marina. "Belorusskije vlasti gotovy sdelat' tri shaga v storonu Brusselja" [The Belarusian authorities are ready to make three steps closer to Brussels' expectations]. BelaPan. 21.11.2008.

[23] BelaPan. 21.11.2008.

[24] EU commissioner welcomes Belarusian government's promise to level playing field for two private newspapers. 24.11.2008. http://naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2008/11/24/ic_news_259_301975/

The Belarusian president drew his own conclusions from the changing situation. He concurred that the EU is concerned that Belarus may lose independence and has realised the country's role[25].

Another major development in 2008 has been the elaboration of the European Union's new "Eastern Partnership" originally proposed by Sweden and Poland. It is ironic that Belarusian officials have perceived it as a more flexible framework (in the sense of less demanding, with no conditionality attached) that would allow Minsk to pragmatically solve its economic and other problems and forget about reforms, democracy and human rights. The real meaning of the Eastern Partnership is "**more Europe**," **still more intensified relations with the EU** based on the "choice for Europe." Association agreements for partner states, being one of the five key elements of the Eastern Partnership, constitute a strong political bond with the Union. Belarus is far behind its neighbours in developing mutually beneficial cooperation with the EU and it is difficult to conceive how it can "jump" into the Eastern Partnership without completing the preceding stages. The European Union's message to Belarus is clear: the EU is ready to engage with it, but Belarus must do its part too — by continuing positive trends[26].

What is diplomatically being labelled as a "thaw" in EU-Belarus relations otherwise looks like a sort of "meltdown" of the previously principled stance of Brussels with regard to the situation in Belarus. But it may come as no surprise if the "new beginning" turns out to be only the beginning of yet another circle.

[25] Lukashenka explains why EU seeks closer ties with Belarus. 28.11.2008. http://naviny.by/rubrics/inter/2008/11/28/ic_news_259_302264/

[26] Ferrero-Waldner, Benita. "An Ambitious New Partnership for the East." Polish Parliament, Poland, 27 November 2008. http://ec.europa.eu/polska/documents/news/081123_poland_speech.doc

EVALUATION OF THE PREVIOUS PROGRAMMES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (TACIS, NGOS, CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION, ETC.)

Elena Rakova

1. Introduction

Today it is quite clear that CEE countries have achieved greater successes than CIS countries in creating of a market economy and are better able to increase living standards for their citizens. Still, this success would be much smaller without the help of international organisations, NGOs and different programmes of technical assistance (TA).

The American "Marshall Plan" set the stage and provided the modern concept by which developed countries provide help to transitioning and developing countries. However, the success of the Marshall Plan is explained by the principal difference between American help directed at *market economy recovery* in a war-torn Europe and the modern form of assistance for *creating democratic institutes and a market economy* in the countries of Africa, Latin America and the CIS. It is precisely the lack of demand for market-orientated and democratic institutions on the side of recipients which has caused the low efficiency of many programmes of technical assistance. A limited understanding of what is going on in the recipient countries, an idealised wish for change, and an approach to local elites based on Western standards has led to corruption, misuse of funds, and, most importantly — an absence of progress in reform. Moreover, the failure to connect further assistance with positive changes has led to a situation whereby many poor countries do not seek change but rely on "aid-seeking" instead.

Despite the widening criticism of technical assistance programmes, stopping them altogether seems harmful and counterproductive. The process of bringing about changes in transition countries gives developed countries a unique opportunity to elaborate effective programmes of technical assistance. Naturally, the most effective technical assistance occurs at the initial stage of change, when living standards are low and demand for change is high. As market reforms are postponed until the 'realisation of necessary preconditions' and are implemented under the 'stop and go' principle, the efficiency of technical assistance decreases as donors are simply unable to follow developments in the country and leapfrog from one politician or official to another. In this situation it is unclear whom to help, from whom to demand action and how to measure the results.

Technical assistance to CIS countries is a unique case study, when compared with CEE countries. In CEE countries, the elites knew what they wanted; within individual states there was a consensus on the direction and degree of change. The demand for new 'rules of the game' was met accordingly by the donor side. The donor community, with its wide set of technical assistance programmes — from training to credits — was a useful 'shoulder' for softening structural and price shocks and adapting to them. The intention of the CEE countries to join the European Union opened access to EU structural funds; this stimulated other foundations and international organisations to provide other forms of assistance, which allowed CEE countries to implement or finish further reforms. In CIS countries the situation was completely different. This paper does not intend to analyse the efficiency and relevance of the TA programmes for the CIS. Suffice it to say that donor societies are currently changing their attitude and approach towards CIS countries.

This paper focuses on Belarus. Belarus is a unique country in its region, which from the start has officially refused most TA programmes. Also, the termination of initial democratic and market reforms closed its possibilities to cooperate with many foundations and international organisations. The government's subsequent actions on legislation for technical assistance considerably limited the possibilities for future cooperation. This paper is organised as follows. In the second section, general information on the conditions of TA to Belarus is provided. In the third section, some flows of TA received by Belarus and their comparisons with other CIS countries are analysed. Special focus is given to the analysis of European TA to Belarus. The fourth section provides the reader with some empirical facts on problems within technical cooperation from the recipient side (Belarusian state and non-state organi-

sations). The fifth section gives conclusions, presenting the ways forward to improve the efficiency of TA to Belarus.

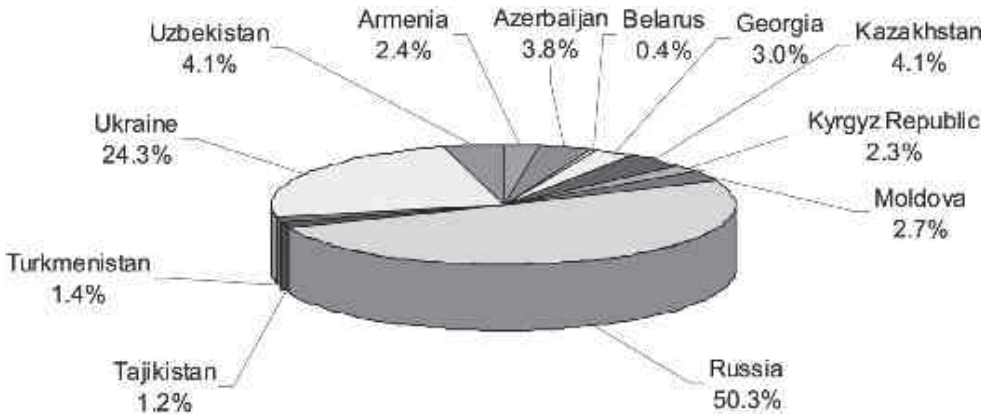
2. Belarus and international technical assistance

Different CIS countries have received very different amounts of TA. Factors such as the size of the recipient country in terms of their population and GDP, its demand and willingness to implement market and democratic reforms, as well as political considerations of donor countries/organisations and their understanding of the relative importance of some countries and sectors usually determine the flows of TA to CIS countries.

As a result, the amount of received TA considerably varies in terms of time, GDP per capita and is distributed highly unevenly. For example, in 2006, in per capita terms, Armenia received 11 times more TA than Uzbekistan[1].

A distribution of total TA amounts by country can be obtained from TACIS data for 1991-2006. TACIS is the only — although a major — channel of TA to CIS countries and to some extent could represent the TA pattern typical for the majority of donor organisations. In 1991-2006 the major recipient of TA was Russia, which received half of all funds (Figure 1). Ukraine was the second largest recipient of the EC's TA, with almost a quarter of all TACIS resources.

Figure 1. Distribution of TACIS funds by recipient country, 1991-2006



Source: Mogilevsky R. and Atamanov A. (2008), Technical assistance to CIS countries, CASE Network Studies and Analysis, #369.

[1] Mogilevsky R. and Atamanov A. (2008), Technical assistance to CIS countries, CASE Network Studies and Analysis, #369.

In this regard, Belarus — a European country positioned between two huge markets — Russia and the EU — received the smallest share of TA. This 'success' seems to have been earned. Since the first electoral victory of A. Lukashenka, the official position of the government is one of minimal foreign presence and interference with internal affairs. The programmes for civil society and development of democratic institutes, as well as economic projects are often treated by official Minsk as interference in internal affairs.

In 2003 Belarus adopted new legislation which would affect TA prospects. According to edict #460, most international assistance ought to be taxed. Also, international assistance projects must undergo a registration process and be scrutinised for tax exemption by the Department of Humanitarian Activities of the Presidential Administration and receive formal approval before they can start.[2] Many representative offices of donor organisations were closed (IREX, Counterpart, Eurasia, Open Society Institute, etc.) or did not receive governmental approval for opening or prolonging their activities (most of the German foundations, such as Friedrich *Ebert* Stiftung, Conrad *Adenauer Foundation, etc.)*. They are regarded as 'too political' or prejudiced against official Minsk. European (EC) aid also faced many difficulties (see next chapter).

The government of Belarus is not keen on co-financing. For example, the World Bank project on AIDS and tuberculosis has been considered for a few years and is now being implemented in a strongly diminished form. The only examples of co-financing are humanitarian and social projects of UNDP or the World Bank. Until recently, Belarus avoided IMF loans and financing.

Programmes for increasing the competences of governmental officials are also scarcely welcomed. Every official must apply for a permit from the Presidential Administration to go abroad and participate, for example, in a conference or seminar. However, IMF training projects do meet with governmental approval and many middle level employees of the National Bank , for example, have been trained in IMF programmes in Vienna or Washington.

Therefore, there is a demand-supply model for two different kinds of technical assistance. On the one hand there are the economic and social programmes and cross-border cooperation initiatives which meet governmental support (social projects, energy sector, infrastructure, strengthening borders, technical trainings of officials). For this kind of cooperation, the 'market' in the current

[2] Decree #460 of the President of the Republic of Belarus On Receiving and Use of Foreign Grants, as of 22 November, 2003, http://www.belarusembassy.org/economic/Tech_assistance.htm.

institutional environment is more or less balanced, with modest supply and demand. On the other hand, there is civil society (political parties, NGOs, analytical organisations), which needs financial resources for its support and development. 30-40% of the population supports market and political reforms[3], so the programmes for supporting alternative information sources are highly appreciated (radio, internet, TV, educational programmes for students, exchanges, capacity building, etc.). Indeed, for such projects donors need special schemes for working in Belarus (for financing, audit etc.) and the mandates of many of them do not allow them to do so. To some extent, this 'market' is imbalanced, since demand exceeds supply; thus, supply should be increased, albeit by changing its principles and ways of providing support.

3. TA flows to the country

3.1. General information on approximate TA flows in Belarus

Many global foundations are unable to function under the current institutional conditions created for international organisations and foreign governments by the Belarusian authorities. Some programmes and foundations operate from their representative offices in Kiev, Vilnius or Warsaw; some Belarusian NGOs work in collaboration with Polish, Slovak or Lithuanian structures and organisations. All that, to some extent, hampers the transparency and efficiency of TA, making it difficult to analyse and control financial flows and measure real inputs of implemented projects.

The lack of market and democratic reforms has made it very difficult for some international organisations to provide any substantial amount of TA. Organisations and institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and others, link their TA for transition countries to the extent to which reforms are being implemented. The limited mandate for these organisations means limited amounts of help provided. On the other hand, the necessity to meet legal requirements determines the character of the projects implemented by the World Bank, UN or the EU (TACIS), which

[3] Rakova E., Chubrik A., Shymanovich G. (2006) *Attitudes of Belarusian population towards market reforms*, IPM Research Center, WP, http://www.research.by/pdf/wp2006e06.pdf.

become limited to the domains of medicine, strengthening borders and social projects[4].

Belarus has received one of the smallest amounts of TA out of all the CIS countries. The country is an outsider for both US and EU TA. For example, in the years 1991-1999 Belarus received only 2% of all TACIS funds (Ukraine — 20%, Russia — 51%, Uzbekistan — 4%, Moldova — 2%). Later, as is shown in Figure 1, this share even fell. The same applies to American TA — Belarus receives many times less than Ukraine, Russia or even Moldova. Most of the larger donors to transition countries, such as the WB, IMF, IFC, UNDP and TACIS, claim that their programmes of technical cooperation with Belarus are one of the smallest among all CIS countries due to the reluctance of the Belarusian government to implement any reforms.

Due to a lack of information, it is generally very difficult to estimate real amounts of provided assistance[5]. No databases are available; numbers are fragmentary, incoherent, or cover only a limited number of years. Donor sites do not provide proper information, while the OECD database with this kind of information is available for two years only: 2005 and 2006. According to this database, in 2005 Belarus received USD55.7 million of TA (USD33.3 million from bilateral donors and USD22.4 million from multilateral agreements); in 2006 the annual amount was USD62.6 million (USD44.9 million from bilateral donors and USD17.4 million from multilateral agreements)[6].

Compounding the major donors (EU, US) together with bilateral donors such as the EBRD, UN and the WB, and assuming that 1) the annual amount of officially registered TA is around USD50 million per year and 2) that other donors do not exceed 20%, we can put the amount of total TA received by

[4] Ongoing projects within the TACIS programme: Rehabilitation of Patients with Radiation Induced Thyroid Cancer and other Thyroid Pathologies in the Stolin Region; Enhancing Border Management in the Republic of Belarus" (BOMBEL 1); Programme of Assistance for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova (BUMAD II Programme); Technical Assistance to Support Climate Change, Energy Supply, and Environmental Issues; Establishment of System of Mobile Palliative Care for terminally ill adults in the Republic of Belarus, http://www.delblr.ec.europa.eu/page2066.html.

[5] The official data of registered TA are very limited and sometimes miss an essential number of projects and organisations. The main reason for this is Belarusian legislation, which allows registration of very few TA projects for political reasons. The second reason is taxation and long and bureaucratic procedures of registration, which also prevents some donors from official registration. Due to these reasons neither the Belarusian authorities nor foreign organisations have a proper and adequate understanding of projects, their sums and direction.

[6] http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/Default.aspx

Belarus during 1991-2006 at approximately USD900 million. In terms of TA per capita this is much less than in its neighbours (Table 1).

Table 1. Approximate flows of technical assistance to Belarus, Russia and Ukraine

	Approximate accumulated TA for the period from 1992-2006, million USD	Approximate annual TA in the period 1992-2006 to annual GDP[7], %	Total accumulated TA per capita, USD
Belarus	900	0.40	90
Russia	20897	0.36	143
Ukraine	7200	1.00	145

Source: author's estimations and calculation. Rakova E. (2008), Technical Assistance to CIS countries. The Case of Belarus. Working paper D27 in EU Eastern Neighbourhood: Economic Potential and Future Development (ENEPO project, funded by the 6th Framework Programme of the European Union).

The US government is one of the largest donors to Belarus, providing TA mainly in spheres such as support for civil society organisations and political processes (50% of total support); support for private sector development; support for independent media and support for vulnerable groups. For example, according to this author's calculations, in 1991-2006 Belarus received approximately USD900 million of TA grants, of which more than 50% was from American grants and another 20% from different bilateral donors. Compared with that of the US, *EU TA for Belarus* is very limited, as cooperation between Belarus and the EU hardly exists[8].

3.2. EU TA to Belarus

According to official data, the total amount of EU TA received by the country in 1991-2006 is 232 million Euro, which is much less than, for example, that received by Ukraine or Moldova (2.5 billion and 1 billion respectively).

[7] Annual GDP was calculated based on EBRD data.

[8] The author is focused on the events that took place before the Parliamentary elections of 2008. Since October 2008 there have been some signs and clear intentions of both sides (EU and Belarus) to improve and create a more sustainable relationship. However, it is difficult to foresee future changes in the institutional environment for TA or the amounts and content of new projects.

Table 2. EC assistance to Belarus, 1991-2005 (in millions of euro)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004-2005	Total
TACIS National Programme	8.92	14.6	9	7	12	0	0	5	0	5	0	0	5	10	76.55
TACIS Nuclear Safety	0.3	0	1.5	0	0.6	0	1.1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	6.5
TACIS CBC	-	-	-	-	-	1.34	2.8	4.7	2.31	8.15	0	11.2	N/A	6	36.5
CBC SPF	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.6	0.2	0.4	0	0.9	0.2	0.44	0	2.74
TACIS Regional Programme	5.4	4.6	5.1	2.6	3.3	6.5	6.3	4.6	1.7	2	3.9	2.2	7.4	N/A	55.6
ECHO	0	0	0	0.56	2.73	1.73	0.95	0.34	1.99	0.69	0.2	0	0	0	9.19
INTAS	0	0.02	0.9	0.5	0.1	0.6	1.2	0	0.4	0.8	0.5	0	N/A	N/A	5.02
Macro-financial assistance	0	0	0		0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	222.1

Source: http://www.delblr.ec.europa.eu/page84.html

The Partnership Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which is one of the main documents describing the direction, fields and intensity of cooperation with the EU, was not ratified after it was drafted in 1995. Due to political disagreements on the official position of Belarus, EU technical assistance is limited to "humanitarian or regional projects or those which directly support the democratisation process". The relationship between the EU and Belarus considerably worsened at the beginning of 2000, when Minsk refused to implement any democratic and economic reforms on the one hand, and on the other hand considerably toughed the legislation concerning technical assistance. In 2001-2004 most of the EU projects in Belarus (realised through TACIS) were frozen or cancelled.

After Parliamentary elections and a national referendum in 2004, which were neither free nor fair, the EU committed itself to further supporting civil society and the democratisation process in Belarus. There were a few meetings in 2005 with different relevant groups and stakeholders, in order to clarify the needs and possibilities of supporting civil society and independent mass-media[9].

[9] http://www.delblr.ec.europa.eu/page84.html

As the result of this policy discussion process, the EC increased its assistance to Belarus from around 10 million Euro annually to around 12 million Euro each year in 2005 and 2006. According to an EC press release, "Over 5 million Euro will be available in 2005 alone to support civil society in areas such as strengthening NGO capacity, promoting awareness of and respect for human rights and democracy, promoting cultural diversity, and the fight against poverty and intolerance[10]. However, only 2 million Euro out of the annual 12 million was available through grant mechanisms, independent of the Belarusian authorities. This was aimed at direct democratisation and civil society programmes: the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and Decentralised Cooperation Budget Line (DC). The majority of the European TA goes through the TACIS programmes. TACIS projects face numerous difficulties with the authorities, such as that of holding back on signing financial agreements[11].

Box 1. EU projects in Belarus

Since 1997, two TACIS National Programmes for Belarus were launched for 2000-2001 and 2002-2003, both worth €5 m and focusing on the development of civil society. Under the programme endorsed by Belarus in 1999, there was a further €5 m allocation in 2003 targeting civil society and activities related to the effects of Chernobyl. At the same time, Belarus received €16 m in 2001-2003 from the CBC (cross-border cooperation), Interstate/regional and the Nuclear Safety Programmes. In addition to TACIS resources, Belarus was provided with €3.2 m in food aid during 1998-2001. ECHO provided €6.7 m to Belarus for humanitarian assistance linked to the effects of the Chernobyl accident.

Technical assistance to Belarus was hampered in 2002-2003 by the fact that Belarus stopped granting tax exemption to TACIS projects. A new coordination model was set up in the autumn of 2003 for activities related to the alleviation of Chernobyl consequences. The CORE programme (Cooperation for Rehabilitation), in which the EU is participating, was established with the objective to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of selected districts by reaching out to the people themselves, helping them to get involved in the development and execution of specific projects. The model emphasizes a participatory approach and active involvement of those affected by the Chernobyl accident. National and international partners as well as governmental and non-governmental actors operate under the CORE programme.

Through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) the EU has provided assistance to the European Humanities University, in cooperation with the OSCE, and finances some other projects. The EIDHR and Decentralised Cooperation provided approximately €3 m per annum in 2005-2007 for the projects supporting civil society in Belarus (human rights, media projects, etc.).

Source: http://www.delukr.ec.europa.eu/internship_opportunities.html , http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/belarus/intro/index.htm, http://www.delblr.ec.europa.eu/page84.html

[10] http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/ip05_326.html

[11] EU Democracy Assistance to Belarus: How to make small improvements larger and more systematic? (2005), Policy brief by Pontis foundation/Institute for Civic Diplomacy.

So, after something of a break, the EU continued to provide technical assistance to Belarus in 2005-2007, with more of a focus on programmes that support civil society development, international student exchange, cross-border cooperation and so on. Most of the EU projects supporting independent mass media and civil society development now go through the programmes of EIDHR and Decentralised Cooperation. Nevertheless, demand for support is much higher than European supply. The EU programmes and mechanisms are not eligible to support non-registered, non-governmental organisations, while in Belarus the legalisation of civil society organisations is often difficult (many organisations have been closed or are not registered).

As for ENP, the Minsk authorities initially welcomed the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) concept. But later on, disagreement on the particular programmes and specific areas for cooperation, and further anti-democratic developments and human rights violations, made it impossible for both sides to develop and widen the policy framework.

Box 2. ENP and Belarus

According to the official definition, within ENP the EU offers its neighbours an intensified political dialogue and a deeper economic relationship, based on shared values and common interests in tackling common problems[12]. In this regard, in the case of Belarus, ENP has failed not only in promoting the same reforms implemented by CEE countries but has even failed in slightly improving the situation with regard to democracy or human rights. Stimuli and incentives have hardly had any influence on implementing economic (market) or political reform, necessary from an EU point of view. Rather, on the contrary, scepticism about the place of Belarus in a united Europe has increased. Instead of an action plan and ENP instruments, the EU suggested the reduction in General System of Preferences (GSP), an increase in visa prices, minimal cooperation in humanitarian and cultural spheres and, as a result, a further distancing from European life in all spheres.

Indeed, this is neither in the interest of Europe, nor in that of Belarus. The isolation of Belarus (step by step approach) is non-productive. Negotiating from a position of strength, according to which first Belarus should change some things, only after which the EU will start closer cooperation, does not seem to work.

Therefore, currently with regard to Belarus, EU policy lacks the proper incentives (of both 'carrot and stick' instruments). With such preconditions and in such an institutional environment, all EU policy instruments are anything but effective and influential. There should be a shift from a policy of limitations and sanctions to a constructive, positive and profitable cooperation in a process connected to European integration.

Besides official assistance from the EC, there are many other European donors and programmes for Belarus. For example, the German federal govern-

[12] http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/faq_en.htm

ment has been one of the largest bilateral donors in the country in the economic sphere through its TRANSFORM programme (supporting civil society, SME development, independent mass media, local self-governance, and land reform), active in 1993-2003. By 2004 it had brought around 40 million Euro to the country. But since 2004, this programme for Belarus has been cancelled (it has, however, continued its project in Ukraine, funding for which was even increased recently). The German government provides assistance to Belarusian civil society within a "Programme of support of Belarus" (1 million Euro per year) and some other projects. Other foreign governments such as those of the UK, Sweden or Canada, have rather limited programmes of TA in Belarus. Their focus is mainly on the fields of democratisation, human rights, SME development and the environment.

Recently, European support for Belarus was increased through the programmes of the Polish (Polish Aid), Dutch (Matra/KAP programme) Slovakian and Lithuanian governments, but these programmes have a limited character and minor financing (compared, for example, with their support for Ukraine). Many German, Swedish, Swiss and other foundations are not represented in Belarus.

4. Problems in technical cooperation

Technical cooperation (TC) and programmes of technical assistance (especially European) meet numerous difficulties in their implementation in Belarus. Information from private conversations and minor research in this field[13] allow for the identification of the following problems:

1) Management and flexibility of European projects

- All respondents point out the complex character of the application process. For example, the EU programmes of Decentralised Cooperation are made by and for Belarusian civil society (as the TACIS programme meets organisational difficulties from the governmental side). However, the requirements for participation in these programmes have a complex and bureaucratic nature (and many NGOs are unable to fulfil them).

- European TC lacks adequate adaptation mechanisms to the conditions of an authoritarian state.

[13] During this research, the respondents were mainly from civil society; however, there were a few representatives from the government. The total number of interviews was 12 persons.

- Most stakeholders mention that European assistance is usually less flexible than American; that European projects are the most bureaucratic. It is almost impossible to correct the design of projects once they are approved, even if this would improve their quality and efficiency. However, some donors (Slovakia, Poland) and German political foundations are flexible (i.e. organisations which do not work formally in Belarus).

- The duration of the preparation process for projects (TACIS, EC projects) is long: if a grant application is prepared and sent in 2008, project realisation would start in 2010, i.e. the process of negotiation and approbation takes 3 years.

2) Eligibility criteria

The criteria for the relevant projects are questionable and doubtful. Often criteria do not suit the real situation, especially when it concerns sound economic or political expertise. Assistance often has political directivity; it is very difficult to get approval for a project aimed at research and analysis.

Many respondents complain that the real needs of Belarus often are not taken into consideration. For example, projects aimed at tolerance, gender equality or cooperation of NGOs with the authorities are popular objects of European assistance, i.e. these are non-topical, unrealistic or inadequate criteria. Sometimes the topic and subject of a project can be imposed by a donor.

For example, in 2006 the guidelines for grant applicants responding to the call for proposals had the following priorities[14]:

- development of social dialogue between local governments and civil society organisations promoting social and cultural rights (which is rather difficult in current Belarusian conditions);
- empowerment of grass-roots organisations and vulnerable groups, by promoting partnerships between these groups and other decentralised cooperation actors;
- encouraging effective operation of the local democratic process (it is not clear what exactly the local democratic process is in the context of Belarus);
- actions in support of poverty reduction (although Belarus has the lowest poverty rates of CIS countries);
- promotion of cultural diversity and the fight against intolerance (according to many social scientists, Belarus is one of the most tolerant countries in the region due to an absence of religious, nationalistic and ethnic conflicts).

[14] http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tender/gestion/index_en.htm

It is difficult for any NGO to come up with a project that will fit all of these priorities. As a result, organisations such as UNICEF, the Red Cross, etc. receive a considerable proportion of these funds. Certainly, activities of these organisations are highly important; but they do not help realise the goals set forward by EU policy makers with regard to a stronger civil society or democratic reforms.

3) Lack of information and ability to compete

Beside the complex and bureaucratic character of choosing eligible projects, irrelevant to the current situation in the country, the information on possibilities of participation in European projects is rather limited. For example, recently, the EU has increased its appearance in Belarus, providing more TA and support through programmes of the Polish or Lithuanian governments and other decentralised programmes.Yet information about EU support to Belarus is limited, if available at all.

And even when Belarusian agents come up with ideas and projects, they are often unable to compete, as the procedures of tenders are complicated. All applications and relevant documents must be sent via regular mail (160-200 pages), which is neither cheap nor easy for many NGOs.

4) Suitability to needs of recipients

Besides the sometimes arguable eligibility criteria for Belarusian projects, one can mention the following problems regarding the suitability of the assistance to the needs of Belarusian recipients:

- very few donors have a goal of institutionally strengthening the non-government sector (lack of assistance to the development of organisations themselves, for example through institutional grants);
- European projects often orientate on formal criteria and short-term results. Lack of projects which work toward the formation of an social elite in Belarus in the long-term;
- wage rates are often set on a low level, therefore low compensation and the temporary nature of work is not attractive to professional experts (many of them leave civil society organisations for business or government);
- a few respondents mentioned a refusal on the part of donors to finance the purchase of real estate, which is very important for the stable and sustainable work of non-commercial organisations in Belarus.

Another typical problem is the introduction of the experiences of developed countries as a model to be copied by recipient countries, without consider-

ing the differences in the levels of economic development, political economy, culture, etc. Solutions which may fit very well to the conditions of developed countries may not be satisfactory for countries with immature markets, undeveloped administrative systems or different kinds of accountability mechanisms. In this regard, many recipients mention that it is easier and more efficient for them to work with experts from the new EU Member States from CEE countries, as they have a better understanding of the conditions of ex-Soviet countries.

5) Sufficiently and sustainability of TA

All experts agreed that technical cooperation with Belarus is either insufficient or entirely lacking in some fields. Also, some experts mention that the goals which donors want to achieve (creation of a market economy, democratisation) are sometimes not matched by the resources provided (i.e. one cannot improve the situation for small businesses with USD 25,000).

Many experts claim that one of the sustainable ways to build local capacity is through the development of the local consulting industry. In this regard, many donors prefer to use international, rather than local experts; or use individual projects (contracts) rather than institutional means.

Capacity building in the NGO sector also suffers from insufficient sustainability. In many cases, after one relatively major project requiring an NGO to expand its capacity, there is no follow-up, causing stress and even institutional 'death' among NGOs. A majority of experts believe that the current practice of having many relatively small projects is counterproductive.

6) Efficiency and impact for the country (for public discussion in the country)

While many projects and organisations which work in the field of economic expertise and policy advice are mentioned as successful and useful in both state and non-state circles, one might add that the efficiency of many programmes (such as sponsoring new TV channels and radio stations) is rather low. Many experts complain that the quality of mass-media programming and the expertise of their journalists are not sufficient. The TV channel Belsat is often mentioned with regard to the issue of 'cost — benefits'. The project is very expensive, however the quality of its programming is arguable; it is not clear who decides on journalists and content (there were no public tenders or discussions on the content of these programmes).

Besides, for most people these channels are not available or even known (according to some opinion polls, less than 5% of the population consume these

programmes) while these projects consume large resources. Also arguable is the decision to make a new TV channel in the Belarusian language.

Another problem of TA programmes is a lack of transparency. Lack of transparency and the closed nature of many projects is an obstacle for the effectiveness of TA projects. Some donors and Belarusian organisations post all of their projects on their websites, but in many cases the outcomes of the implemented projects are not accessible outside beneficiary organisations. Sometimes, the outcomes of projects devoted to the development of Belarusian civil society are not available for other organisations. This reduces the impact on relevant audiences and the content of discussion inside the country.

7) Structure of expenditures

Many organisations who work with European projects complain about the following problems:

- often donors themselves consume up to 50-75% of all sums of assistance (especially if there is a foreign consultant);
- sometimes a large proportion of resources goes to different events (conferences, expensive polygraphs, air tickets, hotels) and too little contributes towards the wages of local experts. Very often the wages of local independent experts are lower than existing Belarusian wages in business or in official structures.
- many donors demand tenders for small expenditures (USD200-300) which is not always easy or wise as tender procedures are complicated and time consuming.

5. Ways to Increase TA Effectiveness

The economic situation changed to a large extent in 2007. Today, Belarus has reached a crossroads of new trends and challenges, which require changes in economic policy and which would lead to changes from previous patterns between society and the state. *Firstly*, Russia intends to reduce its subsidisation of the Belarusian economy through a gradual but substantial increase in gas and oil prices. A significant reduction in rent incomes forces the Belarusian government to look for new sources to finance social programmes and to support loss-making state enterprises. There are two main options for doing so — privatisation revenues and international credits and loans — but both

are rather limited in the context of the current global financial crisis. *Secondly*, the government is slowly adapting its economic policy towards fewer subsidies for special groups, such as benefits to agricultural enterprises, social benefits to pensioners, students and other social groups. There are also plans to increase tariffs for utility services. *Thirdly*, an increase in living standards caused a consumption boom, an increase in travelling, and the appearance of a middle class. Sociologists are discussing the so-called 'phenomenon of Lukashenka's rating motivation trap'15. What is meant by this is that, in order to support his current high level of popularity, he needs to maintain and increase households' welfare. But increased welfare changes human motivation (Maslow's hierarchical effect). So at some point Belarusians will demand more economic, political, informational etc. freedom and space for self-realisation. All of this would contradict the intrinsic nature of the current political regime. Therefore, maintaining current economic growth rates is, to some extent, a question of the 'political survival, and, simultaneously, death' of A. Lukashenka. *Fourthly*, there is increasing electoral support for national independence among the elites, as well as the population at large (and negative support for any Union State with Russia), accompanied by a European vision of the country's future.

All of these trends and challenges necessitate a revision of the directions and methods of technical assistance and donor support. This assistance should be put into perspective. Economic changes would inevitably cause changes in the political situation.

Among the main policy recommendations in the field of European TA are the following:

1) Management of technical cooperation is one of the key areas for improving TA effectiveness. Complicated, inflexible and burdensome procedures for preparing EC projects were mentioned by all recipients. Reporting and implementation procedures for many projects can and should be simplified. Mechanical comparison of planned and produced outputs does not necessarily guarantee the realisation of intended outcomes. Fewer larger projects, with clearly defined outcomes and sufficient flexibility, seem to be a more promising option for TC organisations.

2) In order to increase the impact of allocated funding through alternative mechanisms, direct funds for democratisation should identify clear priorities for selecting projects to support civil society and democratisation. Among them,

[15] http://www.nmnby.org/pub/0709/27d.html

one should mention increased access to free and truthful information (support for independent print media and internet-based projects), as well as research and analytical projects. Currently, with new political conditions arising between the EU and Belarus, Europe should press the authorities more to create the necessary conditions for setting up new printed media (i.e. not just returning a few existing outlets to the channels of state distribution and selling), and for setting up new think tanks and NGOs. Up to now, the situation has been such, that there were a few times more independent mass-media outlets (primarily radio stations) than independent think tanks, analytical centres and experts, which can provide journalists with relevant expertise and sound analysis.

3) One simple way to increase the transparency of TA and provide necessary feedback is to make public all TA products, including consultant's reports, legislation drafts, training materials, etc. This could be easily done by posting all materials on the websites of donor and TA organisations. This would provide access to TA products and support capacity-building for a broader audience not limited to the narrow circle of beneficiary organisation representatives. The ability of third parties to see, judge and provide feedback on the quality and utilisation of provided expertise would become an effective tool in increasing the its impact effectiveness of TA.

4) The US experience in providing grants to support civil society, as well as the experiences of selected EU members (The Netherlands, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden) should be more widely taken into account;

6) Excessively rigid donor rules prevent TC providers from attempting any optimisation in the use of available resources. In this regard, the use of lump-sum contracts with well-defined and verifiable outputs and outcomes, of the type already used by some donors, seems to be a promising approach with an appropriate level of perspective.

7) A steady and smooth flow of donor resources to support NGO capacity and an emphasis on long-term cooperation, coupled with careful monitoring of NGO activities, might be a more sustainable option for supporting Belarusian civil society, where domestic resources for NGOs are absent.

8) All of the following are needed: more intensive involvement of local experts and the creation of a sustainable local experts' network; work on the formation of future elites, support groups and experts who can hold a dialogue with the government; and elaborate proposals for sound economic, legal and political reforms.

Belarusian Society and Authorities in the Process of Searching the European Way

BELARUS' RULING ELITE: READINESS FOR DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION WITH THE EU

Andrey Lyakhovich

Introduction

On September 28, an estimated 600[1] demonstrators marched through the Belarusian capital, Minsk, to protest alleged fraud during the September 23-28 parliamentary election. The small number of participants indicates that two of the political players in Belarus — the opposition and the public — will not be able to influence developments in the country for quite a long time.

The opposition is fragmented, with various small groups having absolutely different visions of the past, present and future. The conflicting opposition parties of national democrats, liberals and hard-line Soviet communists cannot come up with an alternative to Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Belarusian society has been overtaken by consumerism. Many people give credit to Lukashenka and his "correct" policies for the opportunity to consume. Even if the global financial crisis cripples Belarus' economy, a considerable number of Belarusians will remember how much they consumed in the last ten years. They will try to get though hard times and wait for the economic situation to improve.

The government will be the driving force for change in Belarus.

When we talk about the government in Belarus, it is difficult to explain what it really is by defining it in terms of the responsibilities and functions

[1] The estimate includes journalists and plainclothes security officers.

of officials or the role of political institutions. You could read through all the legal acts outlining the powers of the president, but this would give you only a vague idea of what the presidency really is in Belarus. Power is personified in this country. When we speak of "the authrorities" in Belarus, we do not refer to officials and political institutions, but rather to concrete individuals and groups.

Lukashenka: Team player

There is not a single country where one person has a monopoly to make all political decisions. Even in absolute monarchies, the entourage has an influence on the king to a certain point. If he loses the support of the ruling elite, the king loses his crown and his life. Belarus is not an exception. Lukashenka often describes himself as "a popular president" and "a man of the people."

In reality, Lukashenka is beholden to the former Soviet *nomenklatura* for the success of his political career. An influential group within the ruling elite threw its weight behind Lukashenka in the run-up to Belarus' first presidential election. It backed the right horse and Lukashenka won the race.

Three reasons can be cited to explain why Lukashenka has been in office for more than 14 years and will be "re-elected" in the next presidential election in 2010[2], if health permits.

Firstly, Lukashenka fulfils his contract with the people: the nation retains its independence; the economy has been growing; living standards have been rising; and the quality of services offered by the government to the people has improved. Most people do not expect a better performance from the authorities.

Secondly, Lukashenka has fulfilled his contract with the *nomenklatura*.

Thirdly, Lukashenka is a rather flexible politician. He is very responsive to changes in public sentiment and the interests of the electorate and the *nomenklatura*.

Precisely because Lukashenka possesses this quality, he became a stalwart advocate of Belarus' independence in 2002, and portrays himself as the de-

[2] Mikalay Lazavik, secretary of the central election commission, said on November 25 that the next local elections would be held on December 14, 2010 at the latest, and the next presidential election would take place on February 8, 2011 at the latest. Officials indicated that the local and presidential elections may be held on the same day to save public funds.

fender of Belarus from Russian pressure. Since the beginning of 2007, the authorities have been losing interest in pushing "a state ideology" into people's minds, and have become more interested in using Belarusian culture and history to create an attractive image of Belarus for the masses.

Lukashenka has radically changed his views on the economy. He has been trying to sell to the electorate the idea of market-oriented reform, economic liberalisation and cautious privatisation. He has called for liberalising society and building stronger ties with the West.

Changes in the composition of the ruling elite

Lukashenka is not the central figure of the political process in Belarus. He does not play as crucial role in setting the direction of change in Belarus as the West thinks. Lukashenka retains an opportunity to control the speed of change in Belarus. He can slow change but he cannot reverse it. Groups dominating the ruling elite are the main driving force of Belarus' political development. They decide on the direction of change and Belarus' political transformation. The composition of the ruling elite changed dramatically after the March 2006 presidential election. This reshuffle is responsible for changes in internal and foreign policies.

The fall of the *siloviki*

Viktor Sheyman was considered the second most powerful figure in the government hierarchy after Lukashenka. Between 1999[3] and 2006, he served as state secretary of the Security Council, prosecutor general and head of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's Presidential Administration. He coordinated the efforts of the State Control Committee, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Committee for State Security (KGB), the police and courts. All these agencies were led by people picked by Sheyman. Many posts in the Presidential Administration were held by Sheyman's allies.

[3] In 1999, Lukashenka's presidential term ran out based on the 1994 Constitution, but he refused to step down. Sheyman gained much influence because as state secretary of the Security Council, he coordinated efforts by law enforcement agencies and courts to thwart the opposition's attempt to hold a presidential election that year to oust Lukashenka.

This powerful group of *siloviki* in the ruling elite had a considerable influence on the country's internal and foreign policy. The *siloviki*, implicated in brutal oppression, including abductions and murders[4], opposed steps aimed at liberalisation for fear that they may eventually be held accountable.

Sheyman saw his influence wane after Moscow demanded in late March 2006 that Belarus pay market prices for energy. By that time, he had actually accomplished his mission. Economic top-managers and technocrats took over the leading posts in the Lukashenka government.

In late March 2006, Zyanon Lomats[5], a member of the Shklou/Mahilyou group, replaced Anatol Tozik, Sheyman's protégé, as chairman of the State Control Committee.

In July 2007, Sheyman's ally Stsyapan Sukharenka was replaced by Yury Zhadobin as chairman of the KGB. Zhadobin had served as chief of the Presidential Security Service prior to the appointment.

In February 2008, Ryhor Vasilevich, ex-chairman of the Constitutional Court, succeeded Pyotr Miklashevich, Sheyman's protégé, as prosecutor general.

On July 8, 2008, the Belarusian leader sacked Sheyman as state secretary of the Security Council over a bomb explosion that injured about 50 people during an Independence Day concert in Minsk on July 3. Lukashenka also dismissed Henadz Nyavyhlas, head of the Presidential Administration and an ally of Sheyman.

Lukashenka's decision delivered a fatal blow to Sheyman's group.

The crackdown on Sheyman's *siloviki* group led to considerable internal changes in the government system, put an end to the *siloviki's* arbitrary rule and increased the influence of the technocrats. It also spurred privatisation, tightly controlled by the *nomenklatura*, and some liberal changes — the authorities suspended mass audits of businesses, reduced the tax burden on enterprises, gave more powers to top managers, etc.

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[4] Sheyman, and officials answerable to him at the time — Yury Sivakou, interior minister in 1999 and 2000, and Dzmitry Paulichenka, then-commander of an elite police unit, were accused of involvement in the disappearance of two prominent opposition figures, a businessman and a journalist in 1999 and 2000 in a report that Cypriot MP Christos Pourgourides presented to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in 2004. Some opposition figures also hold Sheyman responsible for the death of opposition leader Henadz Karpenka in mysterious circumstances in March 1999.

[5] Lukashenka first met Lomats in the early 1990s. The former was a member of the Supreme Soviet at the time.

The rise of Viktar Lukashenka

Sheyman will never regain his former political clout (as the second most powerful official in the government) because his fall was orchestrated by Lukashenka's elder son, Viktar. Viktar actually filled the position left vacant after Sheyman's departure.

In 2007, Viktar Lukashenka masterminded a major reshuffle in the government to take over new spheres of influence, seize economic positions from the Sheyman group and crash the *siloviki*. Viktar Lukashenka used the State Control Committee and the Ministry of Internal Affairs as a tool to secure his objectives. He established control over commercial companies that used to be a source of income for top officials of the audit agency and the interior ministry[6].

Most likely, Viktar Lukashenka was behind his father's decisions to replace key officials in the audit and law enforcement agencies in 2007 and 2008.

Before the March 2006 presidential election, the audit and law enforcement agencies and courts were coordinated by Sheyman, state secretary of the Security Council at the time, whereas now these agencies operate under the close supervision of Viktar Lukashenka, presidential security aide[7]. The Security Council currently plays a less prominent role in the political system.

In July 2008, President Lukashenka appointed Uladzimir Makey, a protégé of Viktar Lukashenka, to direct his administration. In September and October 2008, the Belarusian leader appointed to key positions at the administration persons who had studied at Viktar Lukashenka's alma mater, the Belarusian State University's International Relations Faculty.

Alliance between technocrats and Viktar Lukashenka

Russian pressure on Belarus over energy prices[8] threw President Lukashenka into a dilemma: either to bow to pressure and sell controlling stakes in

[6] For details on the subject read Andrej Lachowicz. Dynastia Lukaszenkow // Nowa Europa Wschodnia. №1, S.40-49.

[7] Alyaksandr Lukashenka has one security aide.

[8] Gazprom cut off gas supplies to Belarus on January 24, 2006. Natural gas accounts for 90 percent of Belarus' fuel consumption.

Beltranshaz, a gas pipeline system operator, and other major enterprises to Russian companies, or launch a large-scale economic modernisation and energy efficiency programme.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka does not want to be a Russian puppet, a political figure dependent on Russia and easily replaceable. He chose the latter option. As a result, a group of his top economic advisers, technocrats led by Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski and Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka, grew more powerful within the ruling elite.

1The technocrats welcomed the rise of Viktar Lukashenka. They sought guarantees of protection from *siloviki* pressure and an opportunity to do their job without fear of excessive intervention by Sheyman's group[9]. The fall of the *siloviki* and greater influence of Viktar Lukashenka (as a guarantee of protection from Sheyman) was in their interests.

The technocrats and Viktar Lukashenka have similar interests for a number of other reasons.

1. The technocrats helped Viktar Lukashenka gain experience in managing large economic organisations.

Syarhey Sidorski was named prime minister in July 2003. It would have been unwise and short-sighted of him not to try to establish a good relationship with Alyaksandr Lukashenka's elder son, who was making a promising career as a manager at a major state company between April 2003 and December 2005[10]. After Alyaksandr Lukashenka's re-election in March 2006, his elder son received a "crown prince" status. Sidorski was smart and far-sighted enough to befriend him.

2. The technocrats helped Viktar Lukashenka acquire business experience.

Viktar Lukashenka was not involved in major privatisation deals, nor was he considered one of the major businesspeople, up until 2007. He was just gathering experience. The technocrats played an important role in this learning process.

[9] Sheyman orchestrated and coordinated an anti-corruption drive in 2001 and 2002 that resulted in the arrest of many top managers of state enterprises.

[10] During that period, Viktar Lukashenka was a deputy director for external economic activities at Ahat, a defence industry company that manufactures command-and-control systems and other defence products.

The group of directors of defence industry enterprises is not an independent political player, but some top defence company executives are associated with the group of technocrats. Hyanadz Sinyahouski, director general of the Minsk Wheeled Tractor Factory, one of the largest defence-oriented companies, was under criminal investigation in 2005. He was released from prison at Prime Minister Sidorski's request. The top executives of other defence enterprises are not known to have ever tired to solicit his release.

3. Viktar Lukashenka went to college together with the children of technocrats.[11]

Viktar Lukashenka has a background that dissociates him from members of Sheyman's *siloviki* group. He earned a degree in international relations from the Belarusian State University, where he completed an extensive course in economics and international economics. During his career after graduating from university, he learned to make money using methods not as criminal as those employed by the *siloviki,* but still involving the abuse of power and his official status. Like the technocrats, he regarded Sheyman's *siloviki* as criminals and undereducated people.

4. Both the technocrats[12] and Viktar Lukashenka are interested in privatisation, organised in such a way as to enrich the *nomenklatura*.

There are all grounds to assume that the alliance between the technocrats and the "crown prince," Viktar Lukashenka, will be a long-lasting one.

Privatisation designed to enrich the *nomenklatura*

The technocrats used Viktar Lukashenka, up to a point, to remove the obstacles preventing a large-scale privatisation designed to enrich the *nomenklatura*. After the group of Viktor Sheyman, coordinator of anti-corruption drives, was eliminated in June 2007[13], the Belarusian leader's threats to "cut off the hands" of those pushing for an unfair privatisation which would benefit the *nomenklatura* were just hot air. Sheyman and his group had acted as a deterrent for the *nomenklatura*'s appetite to take possession of state assets.

Interestingly, since July 2007, reports have been coming in of the government's plans to launch large-scale elite housing construction projects in various areas in Minsk. The *siloviki* with their uncivilised methods were expelled

[11] Unlike the children of the technocrats, few children of high-ranking military officers go to civilian colleges, let alone study at elite civilian universities.

[12] Like the other groups within the ruling elite, such as the Shklou-Mahilyou group and smaller less influential groups.

[13] By this time, Sheyman had lost control of the State Control Committee, the KGB and the interior ministry. Of all his protégés, Prosecutor General Miklashevich was the only one retaining his job. Miklashevich was hardly interested to act in Sheyman's interests in late July 2007 because he was aware of what was going on.

from that market. The technocrats neutralised them to grab their share[14]. The real estate market is too big for one major player like Viktor Lukashenka to control. He shares it with other big players — the technocrats and possibly other groups.

Since September 2007, Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski, First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Syamashka, National Bank head Pyotr Prakapovich and Ryhor Kuznyatsou, chairman of the State Property Management Committee, have called for transforming state enterprises into stock companies, speeding up privatisation and creating a more favourable investment climate.

Sidorski's aides (Belarusian independent experts call them "economic nationalists") repeatedly warned against allowing Russian oligarchs to buy up assets on the cheap.

In March 2008, the board of governors of the National Bank announced that "bank executives are eligible to acquire up to 20 percent of shares in banks and other companies." The National Bank was giving voice to plans by the *nomenklatura* to take over manufacturing enterprises. By virtue of their profession, bankers are cautious, pragmatic and well-informed people. By making this declaration, they were aware that something that was not allowed yesterday was today becoming permitted.

Back in April 2006, Alyaksandr Lukashenka said that bureaucrats had been discussing behind the scenes the possibility of privatising state assets, and warned that those who seek to make fortunes in the process of privatisation will be severely punished. Since September 20007, many *nomenklatura* voices have openly and loudly declared their desire to participate in privatisation[15], but their statements have elicited no reaction from the Belarusian leader.

Moreover, Lukashenka signed edicts that gave the *nomenklatura* access to a broad range of state assets. In April 2008, he issued an edict to phase out a moratorium on the sale of stakes in stock companies[16]. The edict gives the *nomenklatura* an opportunity to buy stakes from holders who have less money and power.

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[14] Independent economists say that the real estate business is almost as lucrative as arms sales. It costs $350 to $500 per sq meter of floor space to build an apartment in Minsk, while the average market price is close to $2,000 per sq meter. Elite housing is marketed at $3,500 per sq meter.
[15] Belarus' *nomenklatura* has privatised most trade and services enterprises. Now they are eyeing banks and manufacturing enterprises.
[16] Restrictions on the sale of shares in stock companies are to be fully lifted before January 1, 2011.

The State Property Management Committee suggested that the president's permission should be required only for deals in excess of one million times the Base Rate[17]. That means that the State Property Management Committee would have the power to authorise transactions of less than $16.5 million. By all appearances, representatives of higher government echelons will be able to use their formidable powers of persuasion to have the committee approve the sale of state property.

Based on painful experiences in Russia, where chaotic privatisation efforts caused political and social tensions, and the political instability of the mid 1990s, the Belarusian *nomenklatura* is not insisting on a rapid and sweeping privatisation of manufacturing enterprises. It has called for "a controllable, cautious and well-considered" approach to guarantee political stability during the privatisation process and enable the n*omenklatura* and the public to become accustomed to the process.

By setting the 20 percent limit, the *nomenklatura* made public its plans to profit from the possession of stakes in major manufacturing companies. It may be a long time before it announces its intention to control the blue chips. First, they will wait and see whether the companies survive an energy price hike. Delays in the introduction of market-driven pricing should help Lukashenka to ease the pressure from the *nomenklatura* to sell off shares in major industrial enterprises.

The transformation of state manufacturing enterprises into stock corporations gives the *nomenklatura* an opportunity to immediately acquire infrastructure elements that are not essential for their operation, but may be quite profitable[18].

Nomenklatura income legalisation

Back in April 2007, Lukashenka said he was dismayed by the fact that factory managers earned more than $1,500, alleging that their salaries are higher than the president's pay. He urged the law enforcement agencies to look into the le-

[17] At present, all transactions involving state property in access of 10,000 times the Base Rate (the Base Rate currently amounts to 35,000 rubels or $16.5) are subject to the approval of the president.

[18] Take, for instance, the Belarusian Railways (BR) leadership's proposal on the state company's transformation into a stock corporation. BR, one of Belarus' largest state companies, operates facilities that generate considerable profits such as cafeterias, pubs, restaurants, stores, slot machines, etc. But as far as BR is concerned, groups within the ruling elite that stand to benefit from the company's privatisation will not immediately insist on the sale of elements instrumental for the company's operation.

gality of the income of owners of luxurious cottages in Minsk's suburbs. Things changed dramatically that year, during which Viktar Lukashenka and the technocrats overpowered the *siloviki*. In the fall of 2007, luxury villas appeared in a prestigious neighbourhood located close to Alyaksandr Lukashenka's Drazdy complex. Each of the 100 villas built is worth more than $1 million[19]. One often sees expensive vehicles such as Bentleys, Hammers and Jaguars worth more than €100,000 on Minsk's streets, as well as brand-new Mercedes and Volvos. Therefore, in late 2007 and early 2008 wealthy Belarusians were no longer afraid to show off to Lukashenka their possessions worth over $1.5 million.

It is appropriate at this point to quote a statement made by Belarusian economist Leanid Zaika on 20 May 2008, "The Belarusian *nomenklatura* is seeking to monetise its political power. It has been 10 years since Lukashenka issued an edict in 1998 banning the privatisation of fixed assets. During this period, the *nomenklatura* managed to take possession of the working capital of companies. Now, pressure from the Belarusian *nomenklatura* is aimed at the redistribution of fixed assets in the country. Belarus is the only country in the post-Soviet space where property has not yet been divided. What we're about to see is an interesting act of the Belarusian drama.

Several thousand people in Belarus will manage to become millionaires, others will remain hired workers. In Belarus, €20,000 could generate €1 million in the next three to five years. But only several thousand people will be able to do so. The children of 20 to 30 of Belarus' leading families have reached the right age (...). The Russian privatisation began when Deripaska and Abramovich were 25-27 years old (...). As soon as the kids grow older than 20, their dads launch privatisation."

The children of Belarus' leading families, Viktar Lukashenka for instance, are already over 30. They do not want to miss opportunities which should just fall into their laps.

Lukashenka's new contract with the *nomenklatura*: Contents and guarantees

Changes in the alignment of forces within the ruling elite and the government system took place with approval from Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The

[19] Plots for building in the neighbourhood sold at an auction for $350,000. Every home's floor space is in excess of 400 sq meters.

years of 2006 and 2007 were the point at which he realised the need to rewrite a contract with the *nomenklatura* to make sure that it remains loyal to him. The terms and conditions of the contract were determined by the interests of the groups dominating the ruling elite — the technocrats, the Shklou-Mahilyou group and Viktar Lukashenka's team.

The new contractual conditions included safeguards against pressure from Sheyman's *siloviki,* expanded privatisation benefiting the *nomenklatura* and *nomenklatura* income legalisation.

However, the new contract also reaffirmed the old conditions that Lukashenka has fulfilled since his election as president in 1994. The Belarusian leader believes that the rising economic clout of certain groups within the ruling elite does not pose a threat to his authority, because the *nomenklatura* relies on him for fulfilling the old and very important conditions.

Firstly, during the planned privatisation, Lukashenka will protect the *nomenklatura* from its competitors such as Western businesses, and the Russian business-political community. He will shut out rivals.

Secondly, he will protect the *nomenklatura* from itself. It is in the best interests of the ruling elite to prevent privatisation from plunging into chaos.

The statement by the National Bank of Belarus that makes executives eligible to buy a 20-percent stake in "banks and other companies" is also remarkable in the following sense: the *nomenklatura* does not seek to acquire controlling stakes in major enterprises immediately. Their operation depends considerably on political circumstances, in particular on Minsk's ability to reach a deal with Russia on cheap energy supplies and market access, and to secure Russian government orders for Belarusian enterprises. On the other hand, the smooth operation of major manufacturing enterprises is crucial for political stability in Belarus.

Thirdly, Lukashenka plays the role of a moderator in relations among various groups within the ruling elite, forcing them to act in the common interest.

Fourthly, he plays a large role in making sure that the state fulfils its social obligations to the population and maintains political stability.

Fifthly, Lukashenka guarantees Belarus access to the Russian market and cheap energy supplies from Russia. These guarantees created conditions for the enrichment of the ruling elite who now have enough cash to spend on the acquisition of state assets.

The government seeks to improve relations with the West

Until recently, the Lukashenka regime's relations with the West hinged on the nature of the relationship with Russia. In response to pressure from Russia, Lukashenka would usually make overtures to the EU and the United States, calling for stronger ties. When Russia made concessions in an effort to cool tensions with Belarus, Lukashenka reaffirmed Minsk's commitment to the alliance with Moscow and raised concerns about threats coming from the West. For quite a long time, the Lukashenka regime did not worry about the frozen high-level political contacts with the West, taking comfort in expanding trade and economic cooperation.

In 2008, the Belarusian leader declared his willingness to make concessions to the West. The question is whether Minsk has a genuine desire to mend fences or it is just trying to manoeuvre between Russia and the West.

In August 2008, Minsk stopped treating its relationship with the West as secondary to ties with Russia. It has become a relatively independent foreign policy priority. Foreign policy objectives and efforts directed toward the West are no longer seen in the context of relations with Russia.

It is beyond doubt that if the West accepts the key conditions put forward by Minsk (a dialogue without the involvement of the opposition and that considerable political concessions by Lukashenka will not be part of the discussion), the government will make a real effort to boost ties with the West under the current circumstances.

There are three reasons for that.

Now or never

For the first time since 1996, when nuclear weapons were removed from the territory of Belarus, the country has found itself the focus of the West's attention. Belarus had been "a shelved issue" for longer than a decade.

Other CIS nations were in the spotlight of the United States — countries in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Ukraine. The EU was preoccupied with European integration, occasionally reacting to developments in Ukraine when necessary.

Russia's invasion of Georgia highlighted the issue of a future "buffer zone" between Russia and the West. Politicians in the EU probably realised that Russia will not passively wait until the EU sorts out all internal integration problems and turns its attention to the East.

Reports indicating that Russia may employ the Abkhazia (South Ossetia)[20] scenario in Ukraine's Crimea may prompt the West to consider the possibility of creating a buffer zone. But this is only a supposition. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev says that Russia is not pushing for a new cold war with the West.

Therefore, one can never be sure that the West will be willing to engage with Lukashenka in the future in the same way as it does now. The authorities have a reason to fear that the West may turn its back on Belarus when it comes under heavy pressure from Russia. The EU has a slow bureaucratic machine. Unlike the United States, it more often than not has given reason to question the consistency of its policies with regard to former Soviet republics.

The authorities appear to realise that it is worth trying to change relations with the West, now that the country has some leverage in negotiations. In different circumstances, Minsk might have to make greater concessions or even find it hard to draw the West's attention towards Belarus.

The Lukashenka regime may never have another opportunity like this.

The threat from Russia

At present, the Belarusian leader is quite happy with his relationship with Russia. Russia considerably increased economic support for its only ally shortly before NATO's Bucharest Summit, held from April 2 to 4, 2008. Minsk hopes that Russia, concerned about the Belarusian government's overtures to the West, will keep paying a good price to have Belarus play the role of its shield or "outpost" vis-à-vis NATO.

However, politicians in Minsk realise that a thaw in the country's relations with Russia will not last long. Russia has many problems to deal with other than Belarus. Its attention is currently focused on Georgia and Ukraine. After it has achieved its foreign policy objectives in these countries, it will shift its focus to Belarus.

[20] According to some reports, about 30 Crimea residents hold Russian passports.

Russia needs firm guarantees that Belarus will keep playing the role of its shield from the West. To tighten its grip on Belarus, Russia is pressing for a sequence of integrating steps.

One is the sale of controlling stakes in major Belarusian enterprises to Russian businesses. Another is a monetary union. Third is the adoption of the Kremlin's version of the so-called Union State Constitutional Act. These steps are to be followed by Russia's military build-up in Belarus[21] and deeper military integration.

Russia has removed Step 1 from the agenda of its relations with Belarus for an indefinite period[22]. Judging by statements made by Lukashenka and other officials, they know the reasons for this delay perfectly well, and are aware that after Belarus has taken Step 1 in its integration, the Kremlin will push for more steps in that direction.

Most importantly, they know that after making the first step, they will be puppets completely dependent on the Kremlin. The Kremlin will be able to replace them with more pliant figures. They would be nonentities for Russia.

Lukashenka came to realise long ago that the tempting opportunity for him to take over the Russian presidency in 1996-1999 was a setup aimed at incorporating Belarus into Russia. In a move indicative of the opinion of the Russian political elite and public, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on 14 June 2002 that the most comprehensible option for integration of Belarus and Russia would be the accession of Belarus to Russia as a federation subject. Unlike his attitude to the West, which minds its own business to a point, Lukashenka is mindful of Putin's offers.

Likewise, Belarusian government officials will never forget about their humiliating treatment at the hands of Gazprom executives during tough gas talks in Moscow in December 2006. They see Russia's attempt to regain its predominant influence in Belarus as a grave threat to their interests and status.

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[21] Russia has two military bases in Belarus — the Volga missile-attack early-warning radar station in the vicinity of Baranavichy, Brest region, and a submarine communication centre near the town of Vileyka, Minsk region.

[22] The Kremlin conditioned its recognition of the official results of the 2001 presidential election in Belarus on the sale of controlling stakes in the top 30 Belarusian companies. Having realised that Minsk fell short of its expectations, Russia cut off gas supplies to Belarus on 24 January 2004. The Kremlin made another attempt to pressure Lukashenka into making concessions in December 2006. It managed to clinch a deal for Gazprom to acquire a 50-percent interest in Belarus' gas pipeline system, Beltranshaz, within four years.

Belarus needs to make its economy more competitive and energy efficient to be able to resist pressure from Russia, amongst other goals. The government does not have enough money to cope with this huge task on its own. It is wary of turning to Russian businesses for support, realising that Russia's stronger economic position in Belarus would eventually translate into more political clout. Based on first-hand experience, particularly in cooperation with Austrian companies, officials know that western businesses play by the rules, unlike the Russians. Western companies make more beneficial and safer partners.

The *nomenklatura*'s interests

Most trade and services enterprises have been privatised in Belarus. Now, members of the ruling elite openly express their desire to acquire stakes in banks and big manufacturing enterprises.

The ruling elite have amassed rather large financial resources. They show off their wealth. High-priced vehicles are no longer a big deal, just like villas worth more than $1 million. Officials would like to be free to invest their money in Belarus and make higher profits. The *nomenklatura*'s cash already flows to the country under the guise of Cypriot or Arab investment. But they want their capital completely legalised.

The *nomenklatura* would benefit from closer ties between Belarus and the West and a greater presence of western businesses in the country.

Firstly, it would take advantage of the economic liberalisation needed to attract foreign investment.

Secondly, cooperation with western companies would make it easier to upgrade enterprises, in which officials will hold stakes, in order to make them more profitable.

Thirdly, cooperation with western companies would enable the *nomenklatura* to make money safely. Unlike Russian businesses which are heavily reliant on criminal methods, western companies are civilised partners.

At present, the authorities are not expected to swing the door wide open to western businesses. Western companies are likely to be offered controlling stakes in ailing Belarusian enterprises and encouraged to put their money in promising large-scale projects that require huge investment.

The government defines the conditions and subjects of a dialogue with the EU

The authorities' declarations and actions

Since the 2008 parliamentary elections, Lukashenka has said and done enough to make it clear to the West on what conditions the authorities are ready to conduct a dialogue and what subjects they are prepared to discuss.

He assured Anne-Marie Lizin, vice president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and special coordinator of the OSCE's short-term observer mission for Belarus' September 23-28 House of Representatives elections, of the government's willingness to build closer ties with the EU and make concessions. "If in this cooperation, political or economic, Europe makes two steps, we will make three steps to meet halfway (...). We will think about, analyse and certainly correct our mistakes."

On October 3, he gave his consent to Austria's ATEC Holding expanding its business in Belarus, in a move indicative of his interest in an increased presence of western companies in Belarus.

On October 6, Lukashenka sacked Colonel Dzmitry Pawlichenka, commander of an elite police unit accused by the West and Belarusian opposition of involvement in the abduction and murder of high-profile opposition figures in 1999.

On the same day, the Belarusian leader met with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, but stopped short of making a promise to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

On October 7, Lukashenka signed an edict to move the Great Patriotic War Museum from central Minsk to the city's outskirts.

On the same day, he met with Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, then chairman-in-office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In exchange for Stubb's remark, "What we are starting to see is the first steps in the right direction," he noted "I've already said that if Europe makes two steps toward us, we are ready to make five. (...) In gratitude for what you have just said, we are ready to vote for you to be chairman of the OSCE for life." He expressed regret that the EU sets its objectives with regard to Belarus based solely on the viewpoint of the Belarusian opposition.

Later the same day, he said in an address to KGB staff, "The recent parliamentary elections proved our system transparent and democratic to a maxi-

mum degree, and the people committed to the government-selected course (...). To let them [the opposition, observers] count votes means humiliating the Belarusian people (...). The situation is completely controllable."

In November 2008, the authorities made another conciliatory gesture toward the West. Uladzimir Makey, head of the Presidential Administration, unexpectedly accepted an invitation to take part in the Minsk Forum (officials of lower ranks had attended the event before). Makey made a surprise promise that the authorities would give unspecified independent (opposition) newspapers access to state-controlled distribution networks. Later the same month, *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva* signed distribution contracts with Belposhta and Belsayuzdruk. The authorities had kept their promise.

Dialogue conditions for the West

The authorities are willing to improve relations with the West, but they may withdraw from the dialogue if the West fails to meet conditions of fundamental importance to the Lukashenka regime:

1. Lukashenka will not talk to the West if it insists that the opposition take part in the negotiations.
2. Serious political concessions on the part of Lukashenka will not be under discussion.

Lukashenka will not make political concessions. One of the reasons is that he sees himself as president for life. The slip of the tongue he made at the meeting with Finnish Foreign Minister Stubb was not coincidental.

The release of political prisoners was the first and last political demand by the EU that the authorities considered possible to satisfy. The authorities also agreed to let two independent periodicals be distributed through the state-controlled chain. But this decision does not mean that the authorities will stop harassing the independent media. By all appearances, they will keep using official warnings to punish independent periodicals for alleged legal violations, and continue confiscating newspaper print-runs and equipment. On November 27, Lukashenka told AFP that a controversial article that penalises defamation of the president may be abolished if the European Union and the United States offer Belarus something in return. "If the European Union and the Americans want this so much and are ready to offer us something, then... we'll cancel the defamation article," AFP quoted him as saying. The au-

thorities have used the article on many occasions to jail journalists and opponents of the government.

The regime is very unlikely to make other meaningful political concessions. Incidentally, Lukashenka told Finnish Foreign Minister Stubb that Belarus is ready for any relations with the European Union. "In exchange, we only ask you to respect our sovereignty, our traditions and not to require what we cannot do."

Dialogue conditions for the regime

Steps taken by Lukashenka after the parliamentary elections indicate that the authorities have adopted a certain platform for negotiating with the West and more concessions are not likely to follow.

1. Belarus does not recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

2. The government will is limiting itself to making public statements denouncing the deployment of the US Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) elements in Poland and the Czech Republic, and the entry of Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. It is not taking any real steps in response. For instance, it is not allowing Russia to set up military bases on the country's territory[23].

3. Belarus does not have political prisoners.

4. The government is offering stakes in state enterprises to western businesses and taking a tough position on the sale of controlling interests to Russian companies.

5. The government is making steps aimed at economic liberalisation.

6. The Belarusian leader has dismissed the most controversial figures who could have hampered the dialogue with the West.

7. Officials and the state-controlled media have toned down their anti-Western rhetoric. The state-controlled media is advertising opportunities for "a constructive dialogue and cooperation" between Belarus and the West. Re-

[23] Lukashenka said in October 2008 that Belarus is considering buying Iskander short-range missiles from Russia. On November 27, he said that the move will be part of a scheduled upgrade of the Belarusian Armed Forces and does not come in response to the US plan to site BMD interceptors in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic. Some Russian generals repeatedly indicated that Russia should deploy an Iskander missile brigade in Belarus, and cautioned against selling the Iskander or other state-of-the-art weapons to Belarus. Many politicians in Russia are suspicious of Lukashenka. They are not confident that the Belarusian Army will not target its missiles at Moscow one day.

ports about the United States have changed in the same direction, although not as fast as coverage of the EU.

8. The state media has stopped propagandising "the unity of Slavic peoples." The government is selling the electorate a perception of Belarus' past, present and future that is more in line with national interests and more conducive to cooperation with the West.

Topics of the dialogue

Lukashenka has made it clear to the West that he is willing to discuss expanded trade and economic ties. The government is seeking to attract western technology and investment.

Lukashenka seems to mean it when he says that he does not hope for political concessions from the West. The government does not anticipate a change in the West's attitude to Belarus' political system, elections etc.

Conclusions

For the time being, the main task of the government is political and economic modernisation of the authoritarian regime. The government is set to continue with economic liberalisation and launch a privatisation programme, aimed to benefit the *nomenklatura*. Officials are becoming personally interested in a higher profitability of Belarusian enterprises. The government will keep trying to build stronger ties with the West in order to take advantage of its advanced technologies and investment.

The current dialogue between the government and the West may lead to closer trade and economic ties in the first place. The Lukashenka regime is likely to adopt a more cautious rhetoric on integration with Russia. Groups which may call in the future for a liberalisation of the political regime in Belarus will play an increasingly powerful role within the ruling elite.

This is nearly all that the West can achieve in Belarus at the moment. The government would not make considerable political concessions.

If the West fails to make attractive offers during negotiations, Minsk will keep playing off the East against the West. It will frighten the West with the prospect of Russia seeking to control a vast territory from the Kamchatka Pe-

ninsula to Brest, and Russia with NATO bases located just 400 kilometres west of Moscow[24]. Lukashenka will wait for more attractive offers and a more favourable situation.

Measures designed to ensure the survival of the authoritarian regime -- the legalisation of the *nomenklatura*'s income and the sale of state assets — will create long-term conditions for political liberalisation and democratisation in Belarus.

At present, the ruling elite have their sights set on state assets. They are wary of strong competitors — western businesses and especially Russian companies with ties to criminals. The ruling elite need to establish rules to have an advantage over rivals during the distribution of state property. They are opposed to immediate democratisation but are in favour of an economic liberalisation process that can give them access to western technologies and investment. The Belarusian side will respect contracts signed with western investors who invest their money in the country.

However, the authoritarian regime cannot offer members of the ruling elite complete guarantees of ownership rights to privatised property. The ownership rights will be fully guaranteed only when Belarus becomes a genuine democracy, in which the Constitution and laws are respected by those in power and ordinary people alike.

Democracy-oriented changes will take place faster if:

1. **The West expands its economic presence in Belarus as much as possible.** It might offer loans to the Belarusian government conditional on the sale of enterprises to western companies.

2. **Western politicians, business leaders and prominent figures[25] seize opportunities for contacts with "Crown Prince" Viktar Lukashenka and the technocrats.** This is necessary to send a message to the Belarusian elite that it does not matter to the West who is behind democratic reform. It might as well be Viktar Lukashenka or Syarhey Sidorski.

[24] Lukashenka has been exploiting such scares throughout 14 years of his rule. On the one hand, neither the West nor Russia believes that his threats are real, while on the other the threats are useful because they keep the West from imposing tough economic sanctions on "the last dictatorship in Europe" for fear of pushing Belarus too far into Russia's orbit. Meanwhile, Russia has increased economic support for its ally.

[25] Incidentally, during his meeting with Michel Platini, president of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), in Minsk on April 1, 2008, the Belarusian leader said, "I've met my idol." "You are a figure too high for me to equal; I remember the goals you scored," he added.

The West should make it clear that it will not press for the criminal prosecution of Alyaksandr Lukashenka or a redistribution of property in Belarus[26].

3. **The West expands student exchange and internship programmes involving universities and companies.**

4. **The EU simplifies visa formalities for Belarusian citizens.**

5. **The West stops treating every opponent of Lukashenka as a pro-democracy activist.** The practice hampers progress toward the attainment of the objectives of the West in Belarus. Changes should be made in the way the West supports the Belarusian opposition to encourage change within the opposition so that it will not disappoint voters and turn off the authorities. The opposition needs to forge a real pro-democracy coalition capable of being a partner in a dialogue between society and the authorities.

[26] Some politicians in the EU say that the West should not deal with problems of the opposition in its relations with the authorities because it cannot interfere in internal affairs. But the opposition coalition, called United Pro-democratic Forces (UPF), is currently not positioned to make any articulate proposals to the public and the authorities. The West must clearly outline its position in its relations with the authorities because this is crucial for future change in Belarus.

BELARUS' CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF DIALOGUE WITH THE EU

Yury Chavusau

A strong and independent NGO sector is one of the basic elements of the European model of communication and interaction between the state and the public. Legal guarantees of freedom of association enable citizens to form organisations independent of the government, influence public politics, set tasks for government agencies, articulate the opinions of groups of interests based on diverse views and respect for the rights of minorities, employ volunteers and civil society activists for addressing social problems directly without help from the state, and draw public attention to areas where the state government may be ineffective or there is a great chance of power abuse. Effective guarantees of freedom of association are a tool for building a civil society infrastructure and a rule-of-law state.

Although the laws of European countries which govern civil society institutions may differ, all of the acts are based on European standards of freedom of association which guarantee non-governmental organisations an appropriate legal status. At the moment, the European countries' standards are not only in line with international law in the framework of the United Nations Organisation, but are even better, offering more solid guarantees of freedom and independence to civil society organisations.

European laws governing non-governmental organisations are based on the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. Article 11 of the convention states that, "Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests." The article plays a large role

in the day-to-day operation of the European Court of Human Rights, which is instrumental in enforcing the right to freedom of association. The practices of the Strasbourg-based court reflect the modern European approach to the issue of cooperation between government agencies and civil society organisations. In 2007, member states of the Council of Europe passed recommendations concerning the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe. These instruments taken together form the basis of Europe's legal framework for the establishment and operation of non-governmental organisations.

The European Union has been pushing Belarus to adopt and respect European standards of freedom of association. Observers assess the current state of Belarus' civil society sector as unsatisfactory, citing the Belarusian government's repressive and lawless policies. In November 2006, the EU issued the non-paper, "What the European Union could bring to Belarus" calling on the Belarusian authorities to respect the rights of non-governmental organisations. Since then, European standards and approaches have been seen as a gauge for measuring the Belarusian government's progress in improving conditions for civil society organisations.

Civil society evolution in Belarus

Grassroots civil society elements — political clubs, societies of owners, consumer cooperatives and organisations for assistance to farmers and workers — emerged in Belarus in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the early 20th century, these organisations evolved institutionally, just like similar organisations in other European countries. Non-governmental organisations played an important socio-political role in Western Belarus in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the natural evolution of the non-governmental sector was disrupted by Soviet rule in Eastern Belarus after the Bolshevik revolution and in Western Belarus after 1939. Associations stopped developing in the same way as non-governmental organisations elsewhere in Europe. For decades the Soviet authorities used associations as a tool to exercise political control over the spontaneous activities of the masses. It should be noted that few elements of the pre-Soviet civil society have been left in Belarus at present. On the contrary, relics of the Soviet "civil society," namely government-controlled organisations of youths and veterans, corporate organisations, enjoy preferential treatment in

present-day independent Belarus. In the grand scheme of things, Belarus' civil society began to thrive during the decline of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, when a large number of underground and legal "non-establishment" groups cropped up in the country. These groups formed the base of the growing civil society sector in Belarus in the 1990s.

The community of non-governmental organisations went through several phases of evolution. The sector mushroomed in the early and mid-1990s after the country gained independence from the Soviet Union. The number of registered non-governmental organisations rose from 24 in 1990 to 1,000 at the end of 1995. Civil society organisations grew in number and strength. For instance, a typical area that had one or two associations independent of the government (mostly chapters of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) "Adradzhenne" and the Francisak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society) in 1990, had dozens of local NGOs, branches of national associations, and local environmental, local lore, youth and social groups two or three years later.

At the beginning of this evolution process, most civil society groups were involved in a nationwide effort establish democracy in Belarus and secure the country's independence, but many organisations later distanced themselves from politics and functioned as NGOs do in any democratic and pluralistic society. A democratic and free atmosphere in the society of the time contributed to the growth of the third sector as the nation made its transition from totalitarianism to democracy. Even pseudo-NGOs set up during the Soviet era functioned independently of the government, because otherwise they could lose their membership base and would not survive.

But as the political environment became more and more oppressive under Alyaksandr Lukashenka's rule, non-governmental organisations found it difficult to perform their functions. The president's high-handed style of governance and attacks on civil society necessitated the renewed politicisation of NGOs and their active participation in resisting authoritarianism. The starting point of this new period in the evolution of Belarus' civil society sector was the 1996 constitutional referendum that gave Lukashenka sweeping powers. Most non-governmental organisations had no option but to engage in political activities to stop the country's slide towards totalitarianism. At the beginning of that period, many new non-governmental organisations were established to promote democratic change and work towards creating socio-political conditions for returning Belarus onto a democratic path. Most of these

NGOs relied on grants from foreign donors. Resource centres cropped up and played an instrumental role in the development of the pro-democracy community. Non-governmental organisations expanded in terms of their organisation; they took on specific tasks and grew in number. Belarus had as many as 2,191 NGOs (1,061 national and international associations and 1,130 local ones) on 1 April 1998. This number does not include trade unions or political parties and their branches. In addition, many civil society groups were working without being registered with the authorities.

Since the organisations sought to influence social and political processes, they established close cooperation with political parties. Some groups of NGOs functioned under the patronage of political parties. In general, in that period, non-governmental organisations began to play an independent political role, working toward the country's democratisation. Two national umbrella organisations were formed at the time, namely the Assembly of Non-Governmental Pro-democracy Organisations and the Belarusian Association of Resource Centres. Both associations advocated democracy, free market economy, respect for human rights and the independence of Belarus. Belarusian civil society sector was extremely politicised at this time, united by the common goal of democratisation.

Politicisation could not escape the attention of the authoritarian government and a large-scale campaign was launched to stifle non-governmental organisations. In reaction to third sector consolidation, the government announced the compulsory re-registration of NGOs in 1999. It sought to purge the third sector of its most active political groups in the lead-up to the 2000 parliamentary and 2001 presidential elections. The re-registration drive took a heavy toll on the sector. In all, 1,537 associations, or 63.2 percent of the total number, applied for re-registration but only 1,326 managed to complete all formalities. Many prominent and respected organisations lost their legal status. The government also took their first steps to taking control of NGOs' financial support. In 2001, the Belarusian leader issued Edict No. 8, requiring NGOs to obtain approval from the authorities for every foreign grant.

However, these was not the most repressive and ruthless tactics employed by the authorities against pro-democracy groups — the worst was yet to come. Non-governmental organisations could still function relatively freely. The registration authority had limited tools to intervene in their activities. The authorities largely abided by the laws and regulations governing the sector. Non-

registered groups continued to operate without problems, although a clause had been introduced into the Administrative Offenses Code stipulating penalties for acting on behalf of non-registered organisations. In general, relations between NGOs and governmental agencies were strained to a certain point before 2003, but it was still far from a large-scale war. The sides could still organise joint events, and continued to cooperate and communicate. Some organisations independent of the government could even boast successful cooperation with government institutions.

Non-governmental organisations played a key role in the 2001 presidential campaign of opposition candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk against Alyaksandr Lukashenka. In fact, they functioned as part of the political opposition and had an equal place alongside political parties. The Assembly of Pro-democracy Non-Governmental Organisations was admitted as a fully-fledged member to the Coordinating Council of Pro-democracy Forces. The Belarusian Association of Resource Centres worked closely with groups that pursued political ends. The Charter-97 human rights group saw its political influence increase. Finally, the opposition challenger signed an agreement with a broad civic coalition outlining the mutual obligations of the candidate and NGOs during and after the presidential campaign. These facts suggest that there was no fundamental functional difference between NGOs and political parties within the pro-democracy coalition.

The presidential campaign put an enormous strain on Belarus' civil society. It was the final act of the country's third sector. It employed all available methods and tools, but failed to achieve the goal of democratising Belarus. Non-governmental organisations kept trying to operate legally between 2001 and 2003, but it was clear that the autocratic regime would not tolerate the existence of independent and democratically-minded organisations for much longer.

As the government geared up for a new referendum, held on 17 October 2004, on whether to abolish the two-term limit for presidents, it launched a massive assault on pro-democracy NGOs in 2003. The crackdown continued throughout 2004 and 2005. Many organisations were closed down, while it was virtually impossible to register a new NGO. In 2005, the government enacted new laws governing associations and foundations, announced the re-registration of foundations, and ordered that non-governmental organisations introduce changes to their internal regulations. The NGOs were required to

re-register their internal rules after bringing them into line with the new requirements specified by the authorities. The limited opportunities for NGOs to raise funds in Belarus were further restricted by presidential acts concerning internal sponsorship. The presidential edict on sponsorship aid included a short list of purposes for which donated funds could be used. The government also limited the opportunities for receiving foreign technical assistance from the UN and the European Union; for staging seminars, conferences and other events at the expense of foreign partners; and for accepting humanitarian aid. It introduced penalties for failure to comply with these regulations. The government also established a legal framework for the launching of rival government-funded organisations. The few remaining human rights groups were stripped of the right to defend people in court. Some members of non-registered NGOs were fined or sentenced to imprisonment for terms of up to 15 days. In late 2005, months before the presidential election, the authorities enacted a criminal article carrying harsher penalties for involvement in non-registered groups.

After the crackdown, it was quite clear that Belarus' third sector would never be as strong as it was in the run-up to the 2001 presidential election. The civil society landscape changed dramatically in the period between the 2001 and 2006 presidential elections. During the 2001 presidential campaign, the civil society sector represented a powerful and expanded network capable of conducting nationwide awareness campaigns. It consisted of hundreds of legal pro-democracy groups that could form coalitions and pursue their ambitions to play first fiddle in the pro-democracy orchestra. By the run-up to the 2006 presidential election, it had become a weak network of non-governmental organisations and initiatives, divided along political lines or depoliticised for fear of repercussions. Many organisations went underground and many were subordinate to other political entities. Activists worked in constant fear of criminal persecution. The sector was weak, cowering under the weight of the security services.

Thus, as the authoritarian regime tightened its grip, NGOs operated almost underground between 2003 and 2006. Let us examine in more detail how relations took shap between NGOs and the authorities, and how the government's repressive mechanism functioned.

Measures to stop civic groups' involvement in politics

The algorithm of pressure on civil society

At present the government takes a rather hostile attitude to NGOs. Its policies with regard to civil society organisations are part of a broader effort targeting any dissent as a potential threat to the foundation of the regime. The government has pursued repressive policies throughout Alyaksandr Lukashenka's rule, increasing the level of intimidation in the run-up to elections and referenda. Clearly, harassment and closures of civil society organisations could from time to time be part of a short-term campaign aimed, for instance, at outlawing groups that could use their legal status to influence the political process. But in the grand scheme of things, the government's policies were directed against alternative views that could, the authorities feared, spread in society. By fighting non-governmental organisations, the government attempted to eradicate the way of thinking implanted by these groups.

The authorities took a step-by-step approach in their campaign to weaken the third sector. In the run-up to elections and referenda, the government targeted NGOs suspected of dissent, sought to destroy the institutional foundation of civil society and establish a legal framework for stifling dissent.

For instance, one year before the 2000 elections for the House of Representatives of the Belarusian National Assembly, the authorities ordered the re-registration of all NGOs and political parties to purge the political landscape of their most critical and vehement opponents. The government used tools that seemed legal on the surface, in particular relying on lawsuits and legal persecution methods, the adoption of new discriminatory laws, and the limiting of legal opportunities for civic and political activity deemed dangerous by the authorities.

In the next phase, as the political campaign unfolded, the authorities employed illegal measures without even trying to justify the repressive moves by the adoption of appropriate laws. The authorities usually stepped up harassment measures by conducting raids on NGO offices, seizing equipment, leaflets and newspapers, jailing activists and using other acts of intimidation.

During election campaigns and in the lead-up to referenda, the authorities did not have time to draft and enact legislation to justify their actions.

The regime needed to react immediately, therefore it acted quickly and boldly without any legal grounds. In addition, periods of major political campaigning put Belarus into the international spotlight, and the adoption of new repressive regulations could enrage the international community. During this phase, the authorities also relied on illegal methods to neutralise major opposition candidates.

When an election or a referendum was over, the authorities took actions that appeared to be intended to punish activists and organisations for their role in the recent campaign. Activists lost their jobs and faced persecution, and groups that were instrumental in the anti-regime campaign were outlawed. In the aftermath of the campaign, the authorities were out for revenge, seeking to complete what they had failed to do during the preparation period by an oversight or because of excessive liberalism. Step by step, the authorities legalised their repressive policies, issuing new discriminatory laws, especially as a new election cycle drew closer. The repressive mechanism functioned the same way before, during and after every major political campaign.

As has already been noted, the Belarusian regime has always taken a hostile attitude to independent civic groups, trying to make it difficult for them to operate. The government launched a major assault on NGOs in early 2003, almost immediately after the local elections. Following the 2001 presidential election, the authorities acted selectively, targeting mostly those organisations that had played a prominent role in the opposition challenger's campaign. The government closed down the Association of Belarusian Students, the Youth Information Centre, the Vezha Center for Support of Regional Initiatives in Brest and other groups. It moved to take control of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB), which formed the backbone of Uladzimir Hancharyk's presidential campaign. But the Year 2002 was relatively peaceful — it was the third phase of a repressive cycle and persecution of dissidents was only part of a short-term effort to punish those who had angered the authorities during the previous year's campaign.

The major assault began after Alyaksandr Lukashenka held a seminar on matters of ideology at his Presidential Administration in March 2003. During the discussion, the Belarusian leader actually called for a large-scale campaign targeting civil society. To a large extent, the anti-opposition drive was linked to the 2004 referendum which removed the two-term limit on presidents, and the next presidential election held in 2006. One of the items on

the government's agenda was to 'discipline' the non-governmental organisations, and it immediately put this plan into action.

NGO closures

It should be noted that Belarus has the most repressive legislation governing non-governmental organisations as compared to other CIS countries, including countries in Central Asia. The authorities have imposed new and increasing restrictions on freedom of association. In 2003, the government began a large-scale campaign to eliminate the most prominent NGOs that were at the core of Belarus' civil society. In April 2003, one month after the aforementioned seminar on ideology, the Ministry of Justice brought closure suits against Ratusha, a regional NGO resource centre in Hrodna, Varuta, a regional development agency, the Homel-based Civil Initiatives organisation and the Youth Christian Social Union. The move kicked off what civic activists later described as the "purge" operation that resulted in the closure of several dozen pro-democracy NGOs all over Belarus.

The criteria used by the justice ministry's departments for selecting targets for liquidation included: involvement in opposition election campaigns and election observation efforts; personal connections with political parties; an active role in creating local NGO networks; and participation in human rights campaigns. The prime targets were groups that were likely to play an active role during the next political campaign. Later, starting in 2004, the authorities turned their fire to analysis centres and think tanks that offered alternative visions of Belarus' future to the public. The authorities also closed down several phantom organisations like the Association of Young Entrepreneurs, which were not active but could be used by the opposition as "reserve bases." Obviously, the Ministry of Justice and its departments did not need substantial legal grounds to file closure suits — both the Ministry of Justice, which filed the lawsuits, and the judges who consistently ruled against the NGOs, simply carried out decisions which had been made at higher levels of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's government. The repressive mechanism would not work properly without the approval of the Prosecutor General's Office. The Presidential Administration and ideology officers on the ground supervised the cleansing operation.

Alongside closures of NGOs, the authorities also employed other tools to intimidate and harass civil society groups. In 2003, the Ministry of Justice di-

rected that NGOs must submit annual reports detailing their activities, events and members for official examination. In 2005, the requirement was encoded in a new version of the law governing non-governmental organisations. The new law also included a provision that allows the authorities to suspend NGOs for six months.

Complicated procedures make it difficult for activists to register new organisations that could replace the outlawed ones. Applications for registration are carefully screened, and groups that seem suspicious are rejected over petty irregularities or on spurious grounds. The methods of the registration authorities — the Ministry of Justice and its regional justice departments — can be said to comprise political censorship.

Cutting off funding

Cutting off NGO funding from donors in Belarus and abroad is one of the most powerful tools for exerting pressure on civil society. Opportunities for obtaining funds from local non-profit organisations were already quite limited previously, because of the authorities' belligerent attitude to such groups, while receiving financial support from Belarusian businesses has been out of the question since 1999.

In March 2001, the Belarusian leader issued Presidential Decree No. 8 concerning the use of foreign financial aid. This was a major effort to cut off foreign grants to NGOs. The decree required non-governmental organisations to obtain permission from the Presidential Administration's Humanitarian Activity Office for accepting and deploying any foreign financial aid. Most pro-democracy groups within the third sector refused to obey. To enforce the decree, authorities seized equipment and other property from NGOs, and sued activists.

Angered by the fact that many organisations kept using foreign grants in defiance of the decree, the government in 2003 enacted legal acts to tighten enforcement procedures and introduce severe penalties for the "illegal" use of foreign aid. The new regulation empowered the authorities to close down NGOs and political parties caught using foreign grants and deport foreigners involved in financing opposition and civil society groups.

The authorities immediately began to apply the new law. The blacklist of foreigners banned from entering Belarus was expanded and deportations of

foreign citizens became routine in 2003, whereas such incidents had previously created a sensation. The same year, the authorities also ordered the closure of the Minsk offices of the US organisations IREX/ProMedia and Internews Network, which supported local media. The move followed the state-controlled media's mud-slinging campaign against the two organisations. In 2004, the government refused to extend the accreditation of Counterpart, a US non-profit organisation that provided assistance to local NGOs in Belarus. In early 2004, authorities brought tax evasion charges against the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC), the Belarusian Alliance of Youth and Children's Associations "Rada" and the Slonim-based NGO Volya da Razvitsya, organisations funded in the framework of the European Commission's Technical Assistance to the CIS programme, approved by the Belarusian government. An agreement between the Belarusian government and the European Commission had given tax-exemption to financial assistance provided for government-approved projects. Although the economic courts ruled in favour of the NGOs, observers say that the authorities only backed down after the European Commission threatened to withhold €16 million earmarked for the Belarusian-Polish border infrastructure programme and stop funding other projects in Belarus. Nevertheless, the tax authorities kept pressing charges against the Belarusian Helsinki Committee even after the case was dismissed in the Supreme Economic Court, while a huge fine imposed on the Belarusian Alliance of Youth and Children's Associations "Rada" was revoked only after the organisation's closure by a court order.

Lukashenka-style civil society

All measures undertaken to stifle the 'uncontrollable' third sector went hand-in-hand with the establishment of government-controlled and government-friendly non-governmental organisations. The process of creating an artificial civil society took several directions. On the one hand, the government sponsored the establishment of so-called state public associations, designed to bring people together to carry out government-set tasks. On the other, to take the place of outlawed groups, the government orchestrated the formation of pseudo-NGOs. For instance, allegedly independent business associations cropped up all over the country in 2002 and 2003. In fact, executive authorities were coordinating and using these groups to quell protests by small

business owners. Later, a pro-presidential Union of Writers was set up to take on the role of the independent Union of Belarusian Writers. The government also moved to "nationalise" major associations. The process began with Lukashenka's election as chairman of the National Olympic Committee. Later, senior government officials took over leading positions in all sports associations and federations. Finally, in 2005 the authorities installed government-friendly leaderships at the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus and the Union of Poles in Belarus.

Incidentally, apart from these new organisations, the government revived and funded organisations that had been inactive after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2002, it sponsored the formation of the Belarusian National Youth Union, which declared itself an ideological and functional legal successor to the Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol). In fact, the government expected the new organisations to govern the civil society sector. These pro-government organisations routinely used various tools of compulsion to boost their membership. Not surprisingly, this relatively large segment of civil society is an integral part of the government system.

In the run-up to the 2004 parliamentary elections and referendum, the authorities also set up umbrella organisations for pseudo-NGOs such as the National Council of the Leaders of Political Parties and Associations. Similar organisations were set up in the regions. The government also established a youth umbrella organisation led by the Belarusian National Youth Union (BNYU). It should be noted that these umbrella associations attracted, amongst others, independent grassroots groups specialising in studying local lore and history or organising hiking tours. The independent grassroots NGOs had been the natural allies of pro-democracy groups in the past, whereas now they are increasingly leaning toward the BNYU. Later, the umbrella organisations were involved in canvassing support for the president as part of Lukashenka's presidential campaign, and helped conduct exit polls controlled by the authorities.

In 2007 and 2008, the authorities supported the formation of Belaya Rus, a national association designed to fulfil the role of the country's main pro-government political organisation.

Did the government's large-scale and multi-direction assault achieve its objectives? Did the authorities succeed in stifling civil society? Many of the outlawed NGOs continue to function. Some even have a certain legal status. It

appears that the Belarusian ruler and his advisers made the same mistake as other dictators. Fighting manifestations rather than causes, they failed to root out dissent, but only suppressed some of its external forms. Dictatorships tend to deal with effects rather than causes, thus speeding up their own downfall.

Criminal persecution: A threat to NGOs

Realising that court orders could not curb NGOs, the authorities took more severe measures to crush civil society. The task of suppressing civic activism was on the government's agenda in the run-up to the 2006 presidential election. The authorities employed the standard tools used by dictators — intimidation, threats and blackmail.

On 26 January 1999, Lukashenka issued Presidential Decree No. 2, prohibiting non-governmental and religious organisations from working without official registration. Belarus was the first former Soviet republic to impose the ban, followed by Turkmenistan and other Central Asian countries. The charge of involvement in a non-registered organisation carried a fine or a jail sentence of up to 15 days. The authorities mainly used the measure against activists involved in politics. But this individual intimidation tool proved ineffective and insufficient because opposition activists were prepared to spend 15 days in jail for their cause. The authorities began working on legislation to introduce harsher penalties.

The government made changes to the Criminal Code, introducing criminal punishment for some civic and political activities. On 2 December 2005, the House of Representatives of the Belarusian National Assembly passed changes to the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code that specified punishment "for actions against individual and public security." The bill was introduced by the president on November 23 and rushed through parliament. It drew fire from the Belarusian opposition and the international community. Even some members of the lower chamber, which was fully controlled by Alyaksandr Lukashenka, voiced concern about the tough measures, but the bill was approved under pressure from the Presidential Administration and the Committee for State Security (KGB), which had drafted the legislation. Shortly before the legislation was to be debated, House members were handed a booklet explaining the need for tough action against "revolutionaries" and listing more than 30 foreign and international non-profit organisations allegedly support-

ing the political opposition to the Belarusian regime. The list included the US non-profit organisations National Endowment for Democracy, National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute, the Poland-based East European Democratic Center and Stefan Batory Foundation, the Polish-US Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe and the Pontis Foundation, based in Bratislava. Officials admitted that the bill targeted specific individuals.

Article 193-1 was added to the Criminal Code, introducing more severe punishment for "the illegal organisation of the activities of an association, religious organisation or foundation, or involvement in their activities." For the crimes of running an organisation or participating in the activities of an organisation closed down by court, the article carries possible punishments of a fine, an arrest sentence of up to six months, or a prison sentence of up to two years. At the time, many NGOs operated without official registration and did not have the remotest chance of obtaining permission for legal operation. Therefore, the new provision threatened thousands of activists with criminal prosecution. The bill stipulated that those who voluntarily left the outlawed NGOs and informed the authorities of this action would not be prosecuted unless they had committed other offenses.

An amendment introduced into the Criminal Procedure Code allowed investigators to detain individuals for up to ten days without charges on suspicion of involvement in acts of terrorism and "malicious hooliganism."

The law enforcement agencies immediately began using the new legislation against opposition supporters. In February 2006, one month before the March 2006 presidential election, KGB officers arrested and brought criminal changes against four members of Partnerstva, an election observation group, frustrating the opposition's effort to establish a national parallel vote tabulation network. Criminal proceedings were later brought against members of Malady Front, Hart and other groups.

In 2007, the authorities used the article mainly to intimidate members of unregistered groups and force activists to abandon politics. Criminal charges were brought against members of political organisations and scare tactics employed against other outlawed NGOs. In 2007, prosecutors warned activists of the Association of Belarusian Students and the For A Clean Barysaw group against acting on behalf of non-registered organisations. In 2008, the same warning was issued to leaders of the Association for Freedom of Enterprise, registered in Ukraine.

Experts estimate the number of non-registered groups at around 2,000. About the same number of NGOs currently have official registration. Every member of a non-registered organisation can potentially face criminal charges and a prison sentence. This threat discourages many youths from joining non-registered groups.

In 2007, eight members of Malady Front were convicted of acting on behalf of the outlawed group and ordered to pay fines or cautioned. Three other members — Andrey Tsyanyuta in Homel, Kiryla Atamanchyk in Zhlobin and Arsen Yehorchanka in Mazyr -- were charged with the same offence. Investigations against them were suspended, but the cases were later reopened. In 2008, a judge in Polatsk imposed a fine of 1,750,000 rubles ($820) on Katsyaryna Salauyova, a 20-year old member of Malady Front. Dozens of Malady Front members have been interrogated in connection with their activities in the organisation.

The total number of convictions rose in 2007 compared to 2006, when Article 193-1 took effect. In all, six members of Malady Front and Partnerstva were convicted in 2006, five received prison or "restricted freedom" sentences and one was fined. Several other criminal cases are known to have been opened in 2006, but the files were closed before trial. Nine members of two non-registered groups were convicted in 2007. Only one was given a "restricted freedom" sentence, while the others got away with fines and cautions. Not a single activist was acquitted. The law enforcement agencies continued to use the article in 2007 and 2008 to harass Malady Front members. Those prosecuted include Zmitser Fedaruk, Barys Haretski, Nasta Palazhanka, Aleh Korban, Alyaksey Yanusheuski, Nasta Azarka, Yan Shyla, Yaraslau Hryshchenya.

Conclusions

Summarising recent changes in the government's policies regarding NGOs, one should note a shift from brutal and overtly illegal methods to more subtle mechanisms for controlling civil society. Still, criminal prosecution remains the greatest threat to non-registered groups, especially those involved in politics. The repressive laws force many other organisations to distance themselves from politics.

The authorities continue their efforts to set up pro-government NGOs and have them replace groups opposed to the government, where possible. Most

NGOs come across many obstacles in their day-to-day operation, but face unconcealed repression only in rare instances. It is only possible to register new NGOs if the founders pass a vetting process. People linked to the opposition or critics of the government are usually rejected.

While legal barriers to the establishment and operation of NGOs remain in place (complicated registration procedures, forced closure), practical legal measures have not been employed significantly more or less often than before. Thus, the general situation with regard to freedom of association and non-governmental organisations in Belarus remains stable, but unsatisfactory. Although no escalations have been observed lately, the current legal framework considerably restricts freedom of association, while political opponents of the government have been deprived of the opportunity to exercise their right to freedom of association almost completely. The government's steps to lower the barrier to registration and simplify registration procedures should not be seen as a steady trend, because it has not become easier to register a new NGO. The problem of arbitrary refusals of registration and arbitrary decisions to close down NGOs is still topical for Belarusian society.

However, Belarusian civil society's agenda is dominated by the need to decriminalise people's involvement in activities of non-registered NGOs, political parties, religious groups and foundations. Repealing the controversial Article 193-1, which specifies punishment for "the illegal organisation of the activities of an association, religious organisation or foundation, or involvement in their activities," and lifting a ban on the operation of non-registered NGOs would be viewed as a meaningful step towards guaranteeing freedom of association. This is the minimum requirement for brining Belarus closer to European standards of freedom of association.

I'M LOVIN' IT! BELARUSIAN YOUTH AND EUROPE

Iryna Vidanava

Today's Belarus has a love-hate relationship with Europe. The small democratic opposition speaks proudly of Belarus' European past and future, while Alexander Lukashenka describes Belarusians and Russians as "one people" and has signed a treaty to create a Russia-Belarus Union. Due to its authoritarian government and poor human rights record, Belarus is the only country in Europe that is not part of the Council of Europe; it is one of the most active members of the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States. Nostalgic for Soviet times, more Belarusians would rather be part of Russia than the European Union. But due to higher energy costs and the world financial crisis, the Lukashenka regime is seeking increased European trade and investment while trying not to alienate its Russian big brother. The only part of Belarusian society that does not display this schizophrenia about Europe is the country's youth.

Looking West

Despite the government's anti-western propaganda, Soviet-style curricula, Russophile cultural policies, travel restrictions, Soviet heritage and self-imposed isolation, the majority of Belarusian youths firmly believe that Belarus should be part of the European Union. This fact is all the more remarkable when one considers that most Belarusian youths have never travelled to the West, and those who call for "Belarus in Europe" are often beaten, arrested, imprisoned, expelled from school, drafted into the army or fired from

their jobs. There is no doubt that the Belarusian youth is more pro-Europe and pro-democracy. While to many observers, Belarus seems to be a museum of all things Soviet, young Belarusians today belong to both worlds, East and West. Increasing numbers are studying in Europe and young people travel more to the EU than any other segment of the population. The majority of young Belarusians see their future in Europe.

This is not a recent trend. More than ten years ago, surveys had already indicated that young Belarusians had no "nostalgia for Soviet times… and would prefer to see the West European model" established in Belarus. In a 1997 national poll, more than 54 percent of young respondents favoured a European-style democracy, while only 42 percent of the total sample did. Among college students, support for democracy was 81 percent. The statistics are not very different today. A 2004 nationwide survey indicated that the pro-European orientation of 18-25 year olds was twice as high as that of the older population. Of young respondents, 51 percent said that it would be better for Belarus to be in the EU, as opposed to 34 percent who favoured a union with Russia. Of those 26 and older, 27 percent were for the EU and 52 percent preferred Russia.

More recent studies indicate that the trend has not changed much since then. A recent poll confirms that, in a choice between joining a union with the EU or Russia, young people overwhelmingly choose Brussels over Moscow. According to an October 2008 survey conducted by the Novak Laboratory, 43 percent of young Belarusians are partial to the EU, while 32 percent lean towards Russia. The older the respondents are, the higher the percentage of those who favour a union with Russia (50 percent of 35-44 year olds, 62 percent of 55-64 year olds and 73 percent of over-65s). These figures are encouraging, given Belarus' demographic realities and the general rule that the geopolitical orientation of each generation tends to stay the same throughout their lifetime.

There is, however, one statistic that could have two interpretations, one positive and one negative. There are a rising number of respondents who find it hard to make a choice between the EU and Russia. In 2004, 15 percent of respondents chose this category in a survey; two years later the number had climbed to 25 percent. On the one hand, this finding may reflect young people who are moving away from a pro-Russian stance but are not yet ready to side with Europe. On the other hand, it could reflect the impact of the regime's

anti-western actions and the country's isolation. According to Laima Andrikiene, a Member of the European Parliament, only 26 percent of Belarusians have visited an EU country at least once and 60 percent have not met a foreigner in the last three years. A lack of objective information, as well as language and visa barriers, sow confusion in the minds of young Belarusians. Recent research indicates that young people tend to blame western embassies and not Belarusian foreign policy for the country's isolation.

Lacking personal experience and knowledge of life in the "promised land," many young Belarusians have not yet developed a comparative mentality. Worried about the quality of their education as well as the competitiveness and demands of Western society, young Belarusians are unsure about their chances of fitting into the European community. They praise the personal and economic freedoms of democratic societies but, adopting clichés pushed by state propaganda, are afraid that "the EU will enslave us" or "turn independent Belarus into a puppet state." And yet, they are dissatisfied with life in Belarus and are willing to try their luck somewhere else. According to the Ministry of Statistics, Belarusians aged 16-30 make up 40 percent of all emigrants over each of the last three years (3,804 out of 9,749 people in 2007).

Bad Examples

What is it about the European Union that appeals to young people in Belarus? For them, Europe means "the West" and, since Soviet times, "the West" has stood for freedom, individuality, creativity, quality and vibrancy. Before 1991, everything beyond the Soviet bloc was considered to be bigger, better and brighter. In this respect, not much has changed. Like kids everywhere else, young Belarusians are crazy about the Internet, popular culture, alternative lifestyles, countercultures and subcultures. But unlike in the West, where all of this is readily available, in Belarus the government attempts to control anything smacking of independence. Young political activists are repressed and forced into exile. Independent schools have been closed down, youth NGOs dissolved, youth publications seized and alternative bands banned.

The Lukashenka regime seeks to control practically every aspect of youth life because it fears any free ideas, whether home-grown or from the West. A "state ideology" course is taught during early school years and is required for

all college freshmen. All state employees must take a special ideology exam as a part of hiring procedures. A recent regulation requires that all college applicants wanting to study journalism, international relations and law must obtain letters of recommendation from their local authorities. Students must obtain a special permit from the Ministry of Education if they want to travel during the academic year or spend a semester studying abroad. The Ministry of Culture decides what kind of music private FM radio stations should play and the Ministry of Education sets the official guidelines for youth fashion.

The authorities can try to restrict, impose, threaten and repress, but in actual fact they cannot determine what young people wear, listen to, read or watch. As was the case in the Soviet bloc with jazz in the 1950s and jeans in the 1960s, what is forbidden in today's Belarus has become even more fashionable and desirable. For youth, western popular culture is attractive precisely because it is excluded and exotic. Young Belarusians are no different to other youths who respond to restrictions and regulations with creative forms of dissent. Europe is still seen as a primary source of and inspiration for freedom of thought and expression.

Thanks to the regime, youth counterculture is alive and well in Belarus. When peaceful meetings are broken up, young activists stage street performances that ridicule the absurd practices of the government. When there is no officially approved venue for their works, young artists, photographers and designers exhibit in alternative art galleries and post their works online. When concerts are banned, youngsters go to underground night clubs and outdoor festivals to listen to their blacklisted bands. Independent writers and journalists publish underground newspapers and magazines, create online communities, and spread information through blogs and home-made documentary films and videos. "New media" are becoming more and more popular in a country that finds itself near the bottom of every ranking of freedom of expression. Many forms of free expression employed by young Belarusians, such as flash mobs and stencilling, have been borrowed from Europe's creative youth.

Rockin' in the Free World

In terms of independent culture, the strongest connection between Belarus and Europe is in music. Due to its greater cultural freedom, young Belaru-

sians were travelling to Central Europe even before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Music has played an important role in this cross-border traffic. The oldest Belarusian rock festival, "Basoviszcza," has been held in Haradok, in eastern Poland, every summer since 1990. Basoviszcza is a two-day concert and contest for young bands (http://www.basowiszcza.org). Many legendary Belarusian singers and groups played the early festivals, and it jump-started the careers of many young bands which later gained popularity.

The trend of "going to Europe" by both bands and fans accelerated after 2004. That year, a number of rockers played a concert protesting the 10th anniversary of Lukashenka's presidency. As a result, certain leading lights were not allowed to perform in state-run concert halls or appear on state radio and TV. Later, the list of banned bands was expanded to include almost all independent bands, even those which came together much later than the infamous 2004 concert. Festivals and concerts organised abroad became the only opportunity for many Belarusian musicians and thousands of their fans to meet in big fields and on concert stages.

As the situation in Belarus deteriorated, European NGOs began organising concerts of solidarity with Belarus. Just before the country's September 2006 presidential elections, the Polish NGO "Free Belarus" organised a concert in Warsaw's Castle Square (http://wolnabialorus.pl/main.php). A year later, the Poles invited Belarusian bands to perform Bob Marley's protest songs in Belarusian on March 25th, the 89th anniversary of the Belarusian People's Republic. In March 2008, the concert in Warsaw was broadcast live on the Polish television channel TVP Info and via the Belarusian satellite television channel BelSat.

In August 2007, a music festival promoting closer ties between Belarusians and Europe was organised in Lithuania, literally 100 meters from the two countries' common border. Unlike Basoviszcza, with its focus on presenting and promoting new Belarusian music, the "Be2Gether" festival was designed as an international music festival with several stages and international headliners (http://www.b2g.lt/2008/en). While still focused on promoting European-Belarusian solidarity, the 2008 edition of Be2Gether featured transatlantic stars as well as Belarusian bands. Belarusian bands have also played at the Bazant Pohoda Festival in Slovakia, the Pepsi Sziget Festival in Hungary, and the GOOD —BY ("BY" is the international abbreviation for Belarus) in Berlin, Germany.

It would be wrong to assume that Belarusian music is the only aspect of culture being celebrated and shared with Europe. A number of New Member States, including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and the Czech Republic, have organised a plethora of events celebrating Belarusian art, film, poetry, graphic arts and theatre. Most of these events include a generous number of works by young creative Belarusians. The fourth annual Festival of Belarusian Culture (2007) in Wroclaw, for example, included the presentation of an anthology of young Belarusian poets, translated into Polish. Belarus' "Free Theatre," organised and performed mostly by young people, has toured in cities throughout Europe (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarus_Free_Theatre). Regularly repressed in Belarus, the Free Theatre has been praised and supported by Vaclav Havel, Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter, and has won several European awards.

Although they make it possible to bring together audiences of thousands, popularise Belarusian independent culture abroad, and also simultaneously make a political statement, these events have been praised by some and criticised by others. Critics say that these events mainly target foreigners rather than Belarusian society itself. Some claim that these events, which are quite expensive to organise, attract only the same narrow circle of Belarusian creative people and fans and do not broaden the audience for independent culture or bring new people into the democratic movement. Many raise concerns about the effectiveness of the events in Europe, given the problems with obtaining Schengen visas by Belarusian participants and audiences. But it is certainly true that these events reinforce the notion that Europe is a champion of free culture and a sanctuary for repressed Belarusian creativity.

Better Over There

Europe is also a beacon to young Belarusians because the situation at home is so desperate. The dramatic outburst of youth activism and the appearance of so many new faces following the demonstrations of spring 2006 raised the hopes of many domestic and foreign observers. But by summer 2006, it was already obvious that most of the new political or civic youth initiatives which had appeared during the protests had proved incapable of establishing strong and effective structures. Flash-mobbing, the best known of the post-election youth activities, was also a brief phenomenon, at least on a mass scale. While

inspired by winds of change, the majority of the March youth lost their enthusiasm when they realised that a quick victory was not possible. They turned away from political and civic battles and returned to normal life. Also, after being expelled from schools or fired from jobs, many of the country's best and brightest left the country, mostly for Europe, in search of better opportunities (80 percent of those who leave Belarus are students).

Although the scale of activities may have declined, the in-your-face attitude remains. While there is some proof that young people are turning into supporters of the current regime, this trend is not on a mass scale. The real impact of the regime's propaganda, mandatory state ideology classes, and repression seems overestimated. Lukashenka has centred his youth policy on the Belarusian Republican Union of Youth (BRSM), a state-controlled, mass-organised movement modelled on the old Communist Youth League (Komsomol). The BRSM has branches in all high schools and universities, monopolises state activities involving students, operates a radio station and a travel agency, and organises youth labour brigades. Despite state pressure to join and attractive benefits, the BRSM does not seem to have many active adherents. In a recent student survey, 70 percent of respondents knew about the organisation but only 26 percent admitted to being members. Some members were ashamed to acknowledge their status, while others claimed that they had been "enrolled" without their knowledge.

Clearly the regime's policies have not succeeded in winning over the youth. Lukashenka has criticised the state's other mass youth organisations, including the old Leninist Pioneers, for their "mistakes." In a leaked state survey of Gomel university students, only 17 percent of respondents indicated that it was important to be "patriotic." In a fall 2006 focus group, young people who took part in the March events but were not affiliated with any political party or NGO made it clear that their motivations for protesting were limitations on their everyday personal freedom, disgust with state propaganda, and anxiety about their own futures and the future of the country.

Being Different

Despite the government's heavy hand, only a tiny percentage of youths play an active role in the democratic movement or collaborate with the regime. Ten years ago, a national survey of youths found that only 6 percent of

respondents actually took part in protests. Not much has changed. A recent survey found that just 10 percent of students can be considered to be "active." More than 50 percent of respondents believe that their classmates are passive. Three quarters of the students surveyed had never collected signatures for a candidate (the least risky political activity), 56 percent had never participated in a demonstration, and 50 percent had never been involved in a charity event. But while only a small part of the youth is ready for open protest, a significant number is dissatisfied with the current situation in the country. To the question "what would you change if you were elected president of Belarus?" 16 percent of a group of non-active students answered "Everything."

The majority of young people in Belarus occupy a "grey area" of activism somewhere between the extremes of opposition and support for the regime, often unknown and unseen by internal and external observers. While most young people are politically passive, many are not apathetic. They are presently focused inwards, on activities promoting self-realisation. More than 37 percent of students surveyed declared that the main value for them is "to be themselves," and another 32 percent cited "internal harmony." Young people are participating in a broad range of independent activities, many of which are anti-establishment but not overtly political, such as underground publishing, environmental initiatives, local Internet radio, social networking, open air music festivals, street soccer tournaments, poetry societies, book clubs, live-action role-playing games, alternative religions, historical re-enactments and amateur film-making. While innocent enough, these youth initiatives are perceived as a threat in Belarus, where any independently organised activity is considered dangerous.

For this active segment of youth, who make up Belarus' pro-democracy, pro-Europe elite and inspire other youngsters, the European choice is not an abstract concept. By travelling, studying and participating in the European experience, these young leaders are able to absorb and adapt some of it to Belarus' specific conditions, use it to develop concrete programmes, and plan future reforms. This is Belarus' "Generation Y," born in the 1980s and 90s. They are today's university and graduate students, young professionals, teachers, journalists, artists, designers and "new media" practitioners, as well as witnesses of European integration. "Like their peers around the world, Belarusian 'Y's have a sharp sense of their own personal freedom, are keen about new technologies, tend to be well-educated, and have a practical attitude towards life. "The only difference," says a founder of Generation.By, one of the most popu-

lar youth web portals, "is that Belarus' Generation Y was born at a time of political and social turmoil. These young people are used to living in and adjusting to a constantly changing environment. These people want to be successful and are positive and optimistic. They set concrete goals and achieve them."

Restless Youth

Belarusian youth activism came of age in 2006 when young people emerged as the most active part of opposition society. In describing the demonstrations after the rigged March presidential elections, one parent explained: "our children led us onto the streets." Of more than 1,000 people arrested, the overwhelming majority were youths, including many who had never before been active in opposition circles. These youngsters not only protested against the regime's electoral shenanigans, they also pushed the opposition leadership to be more confrontational. The struggle didn't end with the destruction of the "tent city" in October Square. The upsurge in youth activities scared the regime, which retaliated by detaining, arresting, expelling and firing hundreds more for their political activities. The repressive atmosphere of 2006 was eloquently captured by a photograph of a Belarusian mother outside a detention centre holding a handmade sign that read "looking for my son."

If 2006 was, according to Belarus' leading human rights group, "defined by the severe harassment of youth activists," 2007 was no different. The EU, OSCE, Amnesty International and other international human rights groups have criticised the ongoing repression of the youth. Regularly denouncing them as terrorists, the regime fears young activists more than any other segment of the opposition and has put them squarely in its crosshairs. In September 2007 alone, more than 100 young activists were detained and dozens imprisoned. The regime continues to use "anonymous tips" of hidden bodies, rape, explosives, drugs, and trafficking to harass young activists, as well as trumped-up charges of obscene language and other types of "indecent behaviour" and "malicious hooliganism" to jail them.

Pro-Euro Criminals

The regime understands the lure and danger of pro-European sentiments among Belarus' activist youth. It therefore uses repressive measures to damp-

en demonstrations or calls for European values. While it might be difficult to believe, even trying to celebrate popular European holidays such as Halloween and St. Valentine's Day can be quite risky in Belarus. In 1997, the Young Front, one of Belarus' oldest and largest youth organisations, began a public campaign based on the theme "Belarus to Europe." Several thousand young people gathered for a peaceful march to celebrate St. Valentine's Day and visited the Minsk embassies of European countries to hand out Valentine's Day cards. By 2000, similar marches and performances were taking place in 12 Belarusian cities. Last year, a broad range of events was organised under the common title "Love. Freedom. Changes." in 32 cities and towns. Most recently, on February 14th, 2008, the Young Front launched a three-month nationwide civic campaign, again entitled "Belarus to Europe," to demonstrate that young Belarusians are against unification with Russia and for European integration. In response, five youth activists were sentenced to five days in prison for placing a "We Love Belarus" banner on the City Administration Building and handing out Valentine's Day cards to people on the streets of Salihorsk. Two days earlier three people had been detained for distributing EU informational materials in Minsk.

The Young Front, together with "Jeans for Freedom," another youth initiative, joined the "European Coalition," which was founded in 2007 by a group of pro-democracy organisations. Youth are the most active implementers and participants in the coalition's "European Belarus" civic campaign. For these benign activities, they are regularly questioned by KGB, have problems at their educational institutions and are harassed, fined and arrested. In the end, the Belarusian authorities rarely ever charge youth activists specifically for their pro-European activities. They usually are detained and convicted under different pretexts, such as the use of improper language or hooliganism. But sometimes the regime's actions are more obvious, as during this year's May 1st demonstration, when police seized and destroyed EU flags carried by members of the European Coalition, even though these flags are flying over Minsk from the embassies representing EU states. Or when a young female activist was sentenced in July to five days in prison after the police stopped her on the street and found an EU flag in her backpack. But despite these risks, one foreign observer has commented that there is more pro-European sentiment among the youth, and that more EU flags are carried by young people at demonstrations, in Minsk than anywhere else in Europe.

One would think that this pro-European attitude would be considered a good thing. And it is in most countries. But in Belarus it can cause serious problems. As a "reward" for being the first Belarusian to be elected to the Board of the European Students' Union, Tatsiana Khoma was expelled from the Belarusian State Economic University in 2005, during her final year. It was not the first expulsion in Belarus on political grounds, but it was the first for the "crime" of being a part of Europe. In this case, young activists did not just accept the unjust verdict. The Belarusian Students Association and Generation. BY, a popular independent student web portal, launched a solidarity campaign to support Ms. Khoma. It became the first domestic and international campaign in Belarus for a student unjustly expelled, and it was conducted by youth-led "new media." Due to the efforts of student volunteers, who wrote about Ms. Khoma in their blogs, translated information about her case into foreign languages, and reached out to media abroad, her case became headline news in Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian and a number of European media.

This virtual information campaign had a very real impact. Students in Belarus collected signatures in support of Ms. Khoma and international organisations sent hundreds of letters to the University's rector. Ms. Khoma was not reinstated nor was the wave of repression against active students halted. But the University was excluded from the European University Association, subservient bureaucrats learned that violations of laws will not go unnoticed, and Belarusian students were encouraged to keep fighting the good fight. In April 2006, the University's students refused to participate in the public repentance demanded by the rector for students who had taken part in the March 2006 demonstrations. In March 2008, Austrian students picketed a conference where the school's rector took part and Dr. Shymau was forced to publicly explain why he had expelled Ms. Khoma before he could move on to his presentation on economic cooperation and political dialogue between Belarus and Europe. In April 2008, Rector Shymau changed his mind and chose not to expel Mauliuda Akulava, a third-year student and Young Front activist, after 150 students signed a petition in her support.

Today Tatsiana Khoma continues her studies abroad and is a prominent international student advocate. Approximately 500 students expelled from Belarusian universities for their political and civic activities are continuing their education in Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Estonia, Romania, Latvia, France and the Czech Republic.

Crossing Borders

The regime has not been content with just persecuting individual youth activists. Since 2002, it has consistently repressed and closed down youth organisations involved in fostering cooperation with European youth. In the wake of the manipulated presidential elections of 2001, the regime realised that independent youth NGOs were in the forefront of organising get-out-and-vote programmes that were perceived by Lukashenka as anti-government. The authorities closed down the Belarusian Students' Association (BSA), one of the country's oldest NGOs, and the Youth Information Centre (YIC). The former had extensive ties with European student organisations and the latter was responsible for issuing the EURO<26 card in Belarus.

In December 2005, Belarus' Supreme Court issued a ruling to close down the Rada (Council), an umbrella organisation of Belarusian children and youth NGOs and one of the most active participants in European youth projects. The Ministry of Justice, which brought the lawsuit against the Rada, accused the organisation of engaging in politics and interfering in the internal affairs of government agencies. It described as unacceptable the Rada's proposal for designing an alternative youth policy based on the European model. Like most other youth organisations that have lost their legal registration, the BSA, YIC and Rada continue their work in the underground. Despite the hardships and risks of operating as unregistered organisations, they continue to maintain contacts with their European counterparts and promote civic activism among young people in Belarus.

Other important youth groups that have been repressed have been forced to seek sanctuary in Europe. Zubr (Bison), which was the Belarusian youth group best known to Europeans, was dissolved in 2006 after years of heavy repression. Several of its leaders are living in exile in Europe. Third Way, which was the first youth NGO to be criminally prosecuted by the regime in Belarus, is now operating in exile from Europe. Its informational and analytical web portal remains popular among Belarusian youths, despite being run from outside of the country. Many exiled youth activists continue to be active by organising international solidarity campaigns with Belarus.

Due to the government's fear of, and disdain for, the West, NGOs continue to play an important role in linking young Belarusians to Europe. Though learning about Europe is becoming more popular among students, for exam-

ple, European studies are not encouraged by state universities and research centres. While it is a member of the Eurasia University Association and has a Chinese Studies Centre, the Belarusian State University has no special European Studies programme. Most of the research on Europe is being done by young scholars at independent think tanks, like the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (http://www.belinstitute.eu) and the "New Europe" portal (http://www.n-europe.eu).

Studying "Over There"

While young people around Europe have benefited from a plethora of opportunities to study abroad and participate in cultural exchanges on EU-sponsored programmes, Belarusian youths have generally found themselves on the sidelines. Only a limited number of EU programmes have been available for Belarusian citizens, who were often unaware of their very existence. But over the last few years, several major projects funded by the EU and its member states have opened up new windows of opportunity for hundreds of young Belarusians to travel and study abroad. These projects have also attracted the attention of the broader Belarusian public to the positive role of EU activities in the educational and cultural fields.

The European Humanities University (EHU) is perhaps the most significant and best known example (http://en.ehu.lt). Founded in Minsk as a private university in 1992, EHU was closed down by the Lukashenka regime in 2004. Re-established a year later in Vilnius, Lithuania, it is today a Belarusian university in exile. Thanks to European support, EHU is the only Belarusian higher education institution free from government control, ideology and censorship. The University has made a significant contribution to forming a new generation of well-educated young professionals. While it operated in Belarus, EHU actively pursued a strategy of cross-border cooperation with other universities, foundations, governments and educational institutions. It launched a number of international student- and faculty-exchange programmes with Europe and initiated efforts to bring Belarus into Europe's common sphere of higher education by joining the Campus Europae international consortium of universities. The overarching aim was to speed up the process of attaining the goals of the Bologna Declaration. EHU's acceptance into the Campus Euro-

pae demonstrated the European quality of its programmes and values. It became the first university in Belarus to pattern its doctoral programmes along the lines of those in Western Europe. But in summer 2004, EHU was closed by the Belarusian authorities.

EHU's renewal and continued existence in Vilnius is possible only due to support from the European Commission, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Sweden and Finland within the framework of the Belarus Higher Education and Human Rights programme. This European support allows more than 300 Belarusian students to study either at EHU or several universities in Ukraine. In April 2008, the European Commission allocated €1 million to support EHU through *the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights*.

This year, EHU became the first Belarusian university to receive an Erasmus University Charter, which allows students and faculties to participate in exchange programmes launched by the European Commission, European universities and other educational institutions. EHU also takes part in the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window Mobility Programme, which is designed for BA, MA and PhD students, as well as post-doctoral researchers and faculties. Despite all the hardships involved in "studying abroad" in Vilnius and the discouraging fact that its diplomas are not recognised in Belarus, EHU remains a popular option for Belarusian university applicants. The EHU's European curricula and teaching methods, high quality education, extensive international ties, and the opportunity to live and study in the EU, are highly appealing to Belarus' most active, creative and adventurous youths. EHU is a mecca for students who want more than a post-Soviet university in Belarus and a sanctuary for those who were expelled from Belarusian institutions due to their political and civic activities. EHU is a unique meeting point where academic freedom, democratic activism, European values and European studies come together. It is one small part of Belarus that has succeeded in joining the European Union.

While EHU is a truly European effort, the Polish government has taken the individual country lead in assisting hundreds of repressed young activists to continue their education in Poland after being expelled from universities in Belarus in the aftermath of the March 2006 demonstrations. Since 2006, the Kalinousky Programme, named after a 19th century Belarusian-Polish patriot, has offered scholarships, free tuition, stipends, room and board and lan-

guage programmes at Polish universities (www.salidarnasc.org). In 2008, Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated €1.2 million for the programme. Thanks to this programme, more than 300 Belarusian students are currently studying in Poland. In June 2008, 70 more students were accepted to the programme's third year.

At this moment, it is hard to say what will be the long-term impact of the Programme on those who have left to study abroad, the democratic movement, and the country as a whole. Over the last decade, thousands of young Belarusians have gone abroad to work or study, and most are yet to return. Compared to these numbers, 300 students temporarily studying outside of the country are but a drop in the emigration stream. Nevertheless, the Kalinousky Programme has become synonymous with "brain drain." This stereotype has persevered in part because of the regime's aggressive propaganda but also because of the democratic movement's fears that it will lose some of the most active leaders of the young generation. But Ina Kuley, head of the Committee for the Defence of the Repressed "Salidarnasc" and one of the advisors to the Programme, is convinced that it only helps to strengthen the pro-democratic mood of society. She says that students now smile while facing the police during demonstrations because they are no longer afraid. Young people know that someone is watching their back.

While debates over such European programmes continue, as does the regime's repression of activist students, it is important to remember that studying abroad is not always a personal choice for young Belarusians. It is an unfortunate reality in the social and political life of authoritarian Belarus. Yet EHU, the Kalinouski Programme and other European initiatives help young Belarusians to gain a higher education, experience Europe, overcome fear and become integrated into an international community of students while remaining relatively close to their own country. For many, a trip back home is less than four hours by bus. Most students frequently return to Belarus and many continue their civic activities back home. Some have become active in civil society in their new host countries, including with NGOs working across the border with Belarus. In Poland, for example, some Kalinousky Programme students are working as correspondents and technicians for the Belsat satellite television channel and the European Radio for Belarus, two media entities broadcasting from Poland into Belarus.

Come a Little Closer

Since 1994, NGOs from "New Europe" have played a crucial role in helping to promote democracy in Belarus. Sharing similar memories from the communist period, they understand well the specific conditions in Belarus and are able to adapt their transition experience and programmes to the needs of their Belarusian partners. A number focus specifically on assisting young activists. The Warsaw-based Polish-Czech-Slovak Solidarity Foundation, for example, improves the desktop publishing skills of independent NGOs and media through training and internships. Dozens of young Belarusian journalists and activists have attended its "Free Word Technique" courses over the last decade. Its programmes allow Belarusian participants to study the history of Polish underground publishing, learn from prominent editors and journalists who began their careers in the Solidarity underground and are now working for European newspapers, improve the quality of their publications at home, and also build a better network of independent media partners in Belarus.

The East European Democratic Center (formerly the Institute of Democracy in Eastern Europe — Poland) has implemented a number of democracy-building and publishing programmes for young Belarusians, which has significantly contributed to the development and growth of civil society. One can say that the EEDC has helped to develop a new generation of young regional leaders. Many of these "new faces" of the Belarusian opposition were elected to local government positions in 2003, played leading roles in the 2006 events, and ran the most successful campaigns during the 2008 parliamentary elections. The Education for Democracy Foundation (Poland) has brought hundreds of Belarusian students to Poland through its "Study Tours" programme and helped to educate thousands of Belarusian school children about democracy and freedom via extensive training programmes for teachers on new civic education curricula and methods of teaching. The Foundation also administrates the Region in Transition programme (RITA) of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation, which supports democratic transitions in Belarus and the former Soviet bloc by preparing a new generation of intellectual, economic, and political leaders open to western values, trained and able to work towards the establishment of democracy, a market economy, and civil society.

Czech NGOs, especially the People in Need Foundation, Civic Belarus and Association for International Affairs, are very active in promoting human

rights and democratic change in Belarus, as well as organising study visits so that young civil society activists can learn from the Czech Republic's transition experiences. It is unfortunate, however, that more of these activities are not being supported by the EU. Most of the support for civil society programmes in Belarus, as well as cross-border democracy-building efforts conducted in partnership with Central European NGOs, are funded by U.S. organisations.

The geographical proximity of Central Europe to the "last dictatorship in Europe" makes the New Member States a true meeting point for those promoting democracy inside Belarus and those supporting the movement from outside. Vilnius and Warsaw have become second homes for Belarusian democracy activists, since it is almost impossible to organise independent events inside Belarus without them being closed down. Since 2007, thanks to the joint efforts of a number of EU and US organisations, Belarusians have their own "island of liberty" in Lithuania, called the Vilnius Human Rights House. It regularly hosts events for young people, including meetings with EHU students, human rights schools, seminars and cultural events.

Breaking the Barrier

Belarus borders three members of the European Union. Vilnius is closer to Minsk than any Belarusian regional capital. Warsaw is closer to Belarus' capital than is Moscow, and Riga can be reached overnight by train or bus. So close, yet so far, Europe remains *terra incognita* for the majority of Belarus' youth, which makes up 24 percent of the country's population. Why is Europe often seen as a bridge too far? The Lukashenka regime is not interested in letting young people travel freely, become familiar with the European community, critically compare systems, and become infected with the spirit of freedom. In addition, young Belarusians lack foreign language skills, limiting their mobility. While all school children are obliged to study a foreign language (according to official statistics, 69,000 pupils were studying English in 2007), less than 30 percent of adult respondents in a 2007 survey said that they can speak a foreign language (13 % English, 7 % German and 2 % French). The products of a post-Soviet educational system still based on lecturing, memorisation and recitation, most students also lack the confidence, self-initiative and knowledge of available opportunities to look beyond Belarus' borders.

Many young focus group participants also complained about not having the financial resources to travel abroad. Visa costs and requirements, as well as long lines at the consular sections of European embassies, are often seen as the primary barriers to entering the free world. Belarusian youth organisations interested in cooperating with European groups often lack the skills, experience and formal requirements to comply with the EU's bureaucratic procedures, even if they actually qualify for a programme. Finally, most Belarusian pro-European initiatives and campaigns tend to employ empty slogans and clichés (i.e. "Belarus to Europe") instead of focusing on really educating the population about the concrete benefits of Belarus joining the EU and what it takes to achieve this goal.

It will take a long-term effort to bring Belarus back into the European family of states, where it belonged for centuries. A variety of diverse strategies, approaches and programmes will be needed to help young Belarusians join the ranks of Europe's youth community. But some steps to help this process can be taken immediately. While the conditions put forward by the European Union during the "Dialogue Process" are crucial for changing the political climate in Belarus, it is important to continue and expand democracy assistance programmes. It is important that the EU realises that efforts at democracy promotion are more effective when channelled through and towards civil society. Government-to-government programmes simply do not work well when a regime is not really interested in undertaking reforms.

The EU and international community should continue to monitor violations of student rights and repression against youth activists, even if these issues are only indirectly covered by the five points being evaluated during the six-month Dialogue Period. It is important that Brussels remembers that, since 2006, the single most repressed segment of Belarusian civil society has been the youth. No other group has had as many of its activists harassed, detained, arrested, fined or imprisoned. No other group has had so many special procedures used against it, such as expulsion from schools, being drafted into the army, or forced work placements in the Chernobyl Zone. Therefore, although most regime officials were removed from the list of those banned from travelling to the EU, it would be wrong to permit university officials directly implicated in the persecution of student activists to participate in EU-Belarus educational programmes and exchanges. To do so would send the wrong signals and undermine students' belief in the principles of morality and ethics promoted by European educational charters.

Some European youth programmes have been designed to take into account the peculiarities of working with Belarus. Young Belarusians are eligible to participate in two of five actions of the European Commission's "Youth in Action" programme: "Youth for Europe" and "European Voluntary Service". "Youth for Europe" encourages young people's active citizenship, participation and creativity through youth exchanges, youth initiatives and youth democracy projects. Young Belarusians, including representatives of youth groups and private individuals of 6-25 years of age, can apply directly to the programme or participate in exchanges organised by other international initiatives. Applicants should propose an idea for an exchange, study trip or seminar, which addresses an issue relevant to youth from different countries, and find foreign partners with whom to work. The EC grants cover accommodation, meals and 70 percent of travel expenses for all participants. Each partner organisation also receives €400 to partially cover administrative costs.

The "European Voluntary Service" programme helps young people to develop their sense of solidarity by participating, either individually or in groups, in non-profit, unpaid voluntary activities abroad. Individual volunteers are responsible for finding a host organisation, which is possible via numerous websites and electronic resources, while the European Commission will cover accommodation, insurance and transportation costs for a period from three to twelve months.

While these European programmes are sometimes criticised for being too "touristy" and having a weak focus on fostering pro-democracy activism, they are easily accessible for young Belarusians, less bureaucratic than other EU programmes, stimulate self-initiative, allow Belarusians to meet their peers from other countries and debate issues of common concern, which often alters the outlook of all participants, not just the Belarusians. The design and organisational principles of these programmes, which encourage creativity and permit partners' flexibility, should be applied in other programmes more directly related to democracy-building. EU programmes with less bureaucracy, free-of-charge visas, and a focus on expanding the number of exchanges for young Belarusians will help to open the minds and borders not only of individuals but also of the entire country.

THE EU IN THE PLATFORMS OF BELARUS' POLITICAL PARTIES

Ihar Lyalkou

Belarus' Ministry of Justice currently has 15 political parties on its register.

The parties can be categorised in different ways, but given the current regime in Belarus, it seems better to classify them based on their attitude to the government.

Thus, the pro-government (or more accurately, pro-presidential, taking into account the nature of the current regime) parties are the following:

- the Belarusian Agrarian Party (BAP) established in 1992 and currently led by Mikhail Rusy;
- the Belarusian Patriotic Party (BPP), 1994, Mikalay Ulakhovich;
- the Belarusian Socialist Sport Party (BSSP), 1994, Uladzimir Aleksandrovich;
- the Communist Party of Belarus (CPB), 1996, Tatsyana Holubeva;
- the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), 1994, Syarhey Haydukevich;
- the Republican Party (RP), 1994, Uladzimir Belazor;
- the Republican Party of Labor and Justice (RPLJ), 1993, Vasil Zadnyaprany;
- the Social Democratic Party of People's Concord (SDPPC), 1997, Syarhey Yarmak.

It is necessary to note the distinctive positions of the Liberal Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party of People's Concord. The former officially describes itself as "a constructive opposition to the current government," while the former calls for "a unity of all sensible public and political forces,

and a coalition of Belarusian society", without division into the pro-government and opposition camps. But in real-life politics, both parties always take the government's position on all key socio-political issues. Therefore they do not fall into a separate category.

Seven of Belarus' registered political parties are in opposition to the Alyaksandr Lukashenka government:

- the United Civic Party (UCP) formed in 1995 as a result of a merger of the United Democratic Party of Belarus, established in 1990, and the Civic Party, established in 1994. The UCP is led by Anatol Lyabedzka.
- the Belarusian Green Party, 1994, Aleh Novikau;
- the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada (BSDH), 1998, Stanislau Shushkevich;
- the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada" (BSDP "Hramada"), 1996, Anatol Lyaukovich;
- the Conservative Christian Party BPF (CCP-BPF), 1999, Zyanon Paznyak;
- the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) established in 1993 as a political wing of the Belarusian Popular Front "Adradzhenne" formed in 1988, Lyavon Barshcheuski;
- Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC), 1991, Syarhey Kalyakin.

Several opposition political parties — the Belarusian Party of Women "Nadzeya" led by Alena Yaskova, the Belarusian Party of Labour, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Hramada" chaired by Mikalay Statkevich and the Belarusian Christian Democracy co-chaired by Mikalay Artsyukhou, Heorhi Dmitruk, Vital Rymasheuski, Paval Sevyarynets and Alyaksey Shein, and the Party of Labour and Progress led by Uladzimir Navasyad — continue to function despite the fact that the former two were struck off the register by Supreme Court rulings, while the latter three have had their applications for registration turned down repeatedly.

It is difficult to classify these parties based on their ideologies, the main principle used for identifying political parties in most other countries, because the criterion does not properly work in Belarus' specific conditions. For example, despite a stark contrast in ideology, the Liberal Democratic Party pursues policies that are more characteristic of the Communist Party of Belarus rather than of the liberal United Civic Party, for instance, whereas the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada takes the same position as the Belarusian Popu-

lar Front on most basic issues and it has nothing in common with the Social Democratic Party of People's Concord.

It is much more important to distinguish the parties that engage in real activities, have real members (not just on paper) and a certain influence in society, from 'dummy' political parties whose activities are limited to occasional statements by their leaders and symbolic involvement in election campaigns. Of the pro-presidential political parties, only the Communist Party of Belarus and the Liberal Democratic Party fall into the category of "living" parties. In the opposition camp, the UCP, the BPF, the BPC and the BSDP "Hramada" have the largest numbers of active members and functioning local chapters.

Before beginning an analysis of the role that EU-related issues play in the platforms of Belarusian political parties, it should be noted that most manifestos say little about foreign policy. This is characteristic of both opposition and pro-presidential parties. Most party programmes describe foreign policy priorities in very general terms. A classic example in this sense is the following statement, set forth in the programme of the Republican Party: "In international politics, the Republican Party advocates (...) closer cooperation with the former USSR republics, with countries on all continents, their alliances and communities, and international organisations."[1] Nevertheless, even the short statements found in various official documents give a clue as to what foreign policy priorities and options these parties offer to the Belarusian people.

As far as pro-government groups are concerned, their "Appeal to the Russian Public", published in November 2004, is indicative of their pro-Russian stance. The leaders of the Belarusian Agrarian Party, Belarusian Socialist Sport Party, Belarusian Patriotic Party, Republican Party, Republican Party of Labour and Justice and Communist Party of Belarus put their signatures to the following statement: "The prospect of the unity of Belarus and the Russian Federation meets with opposition from those forces in the West that have not abandoned their plans to eternalise the split among the eastern Slavs and turn Russia into an uncontrollable and fragmented territory. That is why attempts have never stopped to discredit both the Republic of Belarus and its efforts to build the Union State (...). Belarus, steady in its allegiance to its ally, its blood relationship and spiritual unity with the Russian people, defends the interests of Russia on the western border of the Union State. For this particular reason it has come under pressure and attack from the West and its po-

[1] http://rprb.narod.ru/program.htm

litical mercenaries inside the republic (…). Under current conditions, where the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus are allies loyal to each other and truly brotherly states, it is necessary to clearly realise that we — Belaya Rus and Great Russia — are part of one eastern Slavic world, and therefore in defending Belarus we are defending Russia, and in defending Russia we are defending Belarus. So, let us work together to strengthen the unity of brotherly nations and put up a vigorous resistance against attempts to break it up!"[2] As it is clear from the statement, these political parties have made an unequivocal foreign policy choice, and there is no room for the European Union in their platforms.

Not surprisingly, not a single pro-presidential party mentions the EU in its manifesto. For instance, the Communist Party of Belarus describes its foreign policy priorities as follows, "To achieve the goal of putting Belarusian society back on track for building socialism, the Communist Party of Belarus considers it necessary (…), while developing Belarusian statehood, to work toward a stronger and closer Belarusian-Russian Union State and the gradual restoration of an upgraded Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on a voluntary basis, as well as to enhance its political and economic independence by reasserting its traditional interests and position in the world."[3] The phantom Republican Party of Labour and Justice expresses itself in the same vein. "The party will support actions by the country's political leadership aimed at strengthening and developing union ties with the Russian Federation."[4] The Belarusian Patriotic Party, formed by former members of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's presidential campaign team, says that its goals include "working toward the reestablishment of an upgraded union of brotherly people, of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine in the first place."

The Liberal Democratic Party has a somewhat different stance on international issues, judging by its basic documents. Incidentally, its leader did not subscribe to the above-mentioned "Appeal to the Russian Public." The party's objectives, declared in its programme, include "reform of the electoral system of the Republic of Belarus in accordance with European standards" and "reform of the Constitution based on democratic European standards." As far as foreign policy priorities are concerned, the programme states that: "Special priority is given to the development of equal relations with the nearest neigh-

[2] http://www.businesspress.ru/newspaper/article_mId_43_aId_322253.html
[3] http://comparty.by/programma.php
[4] http://rpts.by/ustav.php

bours — the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the Baltic countries and Poland." One of the party's foreign policy tasks is "to reinvigorate relations with all European countries and the leading European institutions such as the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, etc. with the purpose of Belarus' involvement in general European integration processes."[5] But to determine the party's real foreign policy standing, it is necessary to turn to other material beyond its "politically correct" manifesto. For instance, "The Election Platform of Haydukevich S.V., a Candidate for the Presidency of the Republic of Belarus" adopted in 2006 said "Belarus' should give priority to efforts to deepen integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States, including in the framework of the Common Economic Space and the Eurasian Economic Community."[6] In 2005, in a keynote interview published under the eye-catching headline "We, the Russians and Belarusians have our own viewpoint on democracy" Syarhey Haydukevich made an overtly pro-Russian remark, "Today, we have approached the logical point where the formation of the Union State should be successfully completed (...). I believe that Vladimir Putin with his great intellect and huge political baggage, — I say again, Russia is lucky — will be able to get to the bottom of the current situation."[7] The excerpts give a better idea of what the Liberal Democratic Party leader really thinks about international policy. Although the party's platform includes clauses calling for closer ties with the EU, its leader prioritises relations with Russia like the other pro-presidential parties and is ready to support all initiatives by the current regime to build a stronger alliance with the Russian Federation, which would inevitably weaken the country's ties with the EU.

The opposition political parties set an absolutely different tone regarding relations with the European Union and Russia in their electoral platforms. The opposition Belarusian Party of Communists seems to be less pro-EU than other political groups. Its programme includes the following statements on the party's foreign policy objectives: "the active participation of the Republic in collective efforts by progressive forces of the world community to counter the hegemonic and expansionist plans of the NATO alliance, the striking force of world imperialism" and "the real advancement of integration processes involving, above all, the Russian Federation and Ukraine."[8] The party programme gives only a

[5] http://www.ldpb.net/programm.htm
[6] http://www.ldpb.net/programm%20svg.html
[7] http://www.ldpb.net/press.htm
[8] http://www.ucpb.info/rus/library/alterprog/2-7.shtml

vague idea of how the opposition communists view future relations between Belarus and the EU. But one sentence offers a hint, "The restoration of fully-fledged mutually beneficial relations with other countries and interstate organisations." Therefore, in fact, the BPC's foreign policy objectives as outlined in its manifesto do not substantially differ from the declarations of pro-presidential political parties. But to be fair, it should be noted that, theoretically, the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists should follow the principles set out in the platform of the opposition coalition United Pro-democratic Forces (UPF), of which it is a member. The UPF platform calls for maintaining reliable and mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia, Ukraine and other CIS countries, establishing a real free trade zone, entering into the World Trade Organisation and the European Free Trade Area, signing a partnership agreement with the European Union and joining the European Neighbourhood Policy.[9]

The Conservative Christian Party BPF has a peculiar view on Belarus' role in Europe. On the one hand, its programme states that "European politics is an unquestionable priority of the Belarusian state because the key values that inspire our people to carry out historical change — freedom, justice, solidarity and the national state — are shaped on the spiritual and political soil of the European context, European history and European culture." One the other hand, the manifesto makes no mention of the European Union. The Conservatives note only that "History and developments have once again proved the need to develop the Western vector of Belarusian politics and cooperate with European political and economic organisations." In the section focussing on foreign policy, the CCP BPF stresses the need for cooperation with neighbouring countries, including members of the European Union. "Belarus should have good relations with its neighbours above all. We believe that East European countries located between the Baltic and Black Seas have the same interests in the West and the same problems in the East. These are countries with a similar history, while Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine have a common history. They are located in the same European culture zone and have similar economic interests. We believe that this solidarity should translate into a Baltic-Black Sea Cooperation (BBSC) among nations. This would help to better coordinate economic, trade and customs ties between our own countries and also our relations with the East and the West."[10] Alongside the party programme, the CCP BPF also has a short-

[9] http://svaboda.info/about/values/
[10] http://www.pbpf.org/art.php?cat=0&art=4

term action plan called the Programme of Immediate Steps. This paper mentions the EU (but what is unusual about it is that the Belarusian Conservatives list the European Union and the European Parliament in a sequence divided by a comma, as if these are items of the same category): "It will be necessary (...) to step up international activity, normalise relations with the countries of the Euro-Atlantic alliance, re-establish cooperation with the European Union, European Parliament, the IMF and other international organisations."[11]

As we can see, the CCP BPF stops short of explaining in its basic documents how the party views Belarus' role in the process of European integration and whether the country should join the EU. However, Belarus has political parties that clearly give priority to integration into the EU. One of them, in my opinion, is the United Civic Party, although its party programme also makes no mention of the EU. At the same time, "The United Civic Party's Address to Citizens, Businesses and the State" adopted in May 2008 unequivocally declares, "We stand up for a free, democratic and European Belarus (...). The UCP's choice for Belarusian politics is entry into the Council of Europe within a year after presidential and parliamentary elections, and preparations for Belarus' entry into the European Union. The latter is quite realistic, if we set this goal. It was a realistic goal for our neighbours, Poland and Lithuania, which, according to international assessments, had worse initial conditions than Belarus. To achieve this goal, it will not be necessary to proffer a begging bow — under the Copenhagen agreements, a country that honours EU principles and meets its standards cannot be denied admission to the EU (...). As far as European standards are concerned, does Belarus have less chance than Bulgaria or Romania? If the nation seeks membership of the European Union, and takes steps in this direction, membership of the EU is quite a feasible goal."[12]

Another liberal party, the non-registered Party of Freedom and Progress, is positive about the idea of European integration for Belarus, but it does not elaborate on possible EU-membership and does not even mention the bloc. "We, liberals, are in favour of a well-considered integration into common European organisations on the condition that priority is given to good relations and cooperation with all neighbours. While advocating European integration, we attribute a great importance to the development of friendly, good-neighbourly relations with Russia and Ukraine."[13]

[11] ibid
[12] http://www.ucpb.org/index.php?page=documents&open=365
[13] http://www.cf-by.org/static-programma.html

The Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada" expresses its vision of Belarus' relations with the Europe Union in a succinct but accurate statement, "We want Belarus to become a fully-fledged and respected entity of the European Union. We believe that Belarus' membership of the enlarged European family — where intellectual, economic, financial and technological resources are concentrated, where the cultural distinctions of every nation are preserved and secured, where high standards are ensured in all spheres of human life — is in the deep interests of the Belarusian people."[14] It should be noted that the non-registered Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Hramada," whose former members formed the BSDP "Hramada," has an almost identical platform. Their section concerning EU membership includes exactly the same statement. But it is followed by a quite interesting idea that cannot be found in the manifestos of other Belarusian parties. "Belarus should provide all-round support for the movement of Russia, Ukraine and Moldova into the European Union."[15]

The Belarusian Popular Front, the first party in Belarus (2002) to advocate EU membership, offers in its basic documents the most detailed description of its views on the prospect of Belarus' integration into the European Union. The programme of the BPF "Adradzhenne" adopted at the party's fourth conference held on 1 December 2002 states that, "We see Belarus' future in the European Union. For us this means guarantees of national security, well-being, respect for national interests and values. An independent, democratic Belarus can make its own economic, cultural and value contribution to the common European home. We advocate unity and diversity, 'a Europe of Fatherlands' as the founding principle of European integration. Together with other like-minded people across Europe, we stand up for the traditional moral values of European civilisation. The BPF "Adradzhenne" seeks Belarus' inclusion in the European Union's expansion strategy and views the move as an incentive for democratic change and market-oriented reform in our country. Our practical goal is to ensure that Belarus meets all political, legal and economic criteria for EU membership as soon as possible to speed up the process." The BPF platform also stresses "the need to unify Belarusian legislation with the legislation of European community countries." On national security, the platform says that "Belarus should join NATO and participate in the Eu-

[14] http://bsdp.org/?q=be/node/30
[15] http://www.bsdpng.info/modules.php?name=Articles&file=view&articles_id=61

ropean Union's effort to build the European security architecture." The last chapter, entitled "The Platform's Time Limits", states that, "The basic principles of this programme should guide the BPF "Adradzhenne" until a democratic and independent Belarus has been admitted to the European Union and NATO, which would ensure that our independent statehood is irreversible, guarantee security and well-being to our people, and legally codify the final and irreversible return of Belarus to Europe."[16]

Alongside the manifesto, the BPF party is guided by the Strategic Platform, which was also adopted in 2002. It contains most of the quotes from the above-mentioned manifesto of the BPF "Adradzhenne," but among the party's methods it mentions the following, "To conduct active international policies aimed to inform our Euro-Atlantic partners about the will of a considerable part of the Belarusian people to have independent statehood, and join the European Union and NATO."[17]

Thus, a summary of this brief analysis of the platforms of 20 political parties (both registered and non-registered) gives the following picture: the European Union and/or European integration is mentioned in the basic acts of seven of 20 political parties (the Liberal Democratic Party, the Conservative Christian Party BPF, the United Civic Party, the Party of Freedom and Progress, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada," the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Hramada," and the Belarusian Popular Front). It is symptomatic that the list includes nearly all of the right-wing and liberal parties that operate in the country and only two of the many left-wing parties (which were, moreover, one party until recently). It is also symptomatic that nearly all opposition parties mention Belarus' large neighbour, the European Union, in their manifestos, while the pro-government forces seem to ignore the issue of relations with the EU. The LDP stands out in this context. Its Chairman Syarhey Haydukevich even served as the Belarusian foreign minister's special envoy to the European Union in 2006 and 2007. But an analysis of other basic documents of this party, other than the manifesto, suggests that despite a positive treatment of the EU in its official programme, the party gives more foreign policy weight to closer ties with Russia and its position does not significantly differ from the stance of other pro-government organisations.

[16] http://pbnf.org/doc/pragrama_adradjene.doc
[17] http://pbnf.org/statut.html

Based on the party programmes and other basic acts, one may draw the conclusion that the BPF, the BSDP "Hramada" and the BSDP "Narodnaya Hramada" are the staunchest and most consistent in their support for the possible entry of the Republic of Belarus into the European Union. The United Civic Party and the Party of Freedom and Progress also take a strongly pro-EU stance.

Belarus and NATO

BELARUS-NATO RELATIONS: CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS

Andrey Fyodarau

Security factors should be given special attention in analysing the relations between the Republic of Belarus and the European Union. Military security is one of the main aspects, although not the most important one on the continent. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the major military alliance without which it is impossible to imagine the European security system.

Three of five Belarus' neighbours are members of the bloc. Ukraine is at the crossroads, while Russia is acting as the alliance's main antagonist. It is not easy for a nation to identify its priorities under normal circumstances, let alone in these. But it is incomparably more difficult to make a choice under the current government in Belarus.

Let us first take a look at the government's official position. The Belarusian foreign ministry's website, www.mfa.gov.by, provides some information on Belarus' relations with the alliance. Here's an excerpt : "As a state that shares a border with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Belarus attributes particular importance to the development of mutually beneficial and stable relations with NATO and its member states. The Republic of Belarus cooperates with NATO in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme (...).

Belarus attributes special importance to the implementation of the PfP programme, regarding it as one of the major instruments for developing practical cooperation with both the North Atlantic alliance and individual countries in Europe and North America. Belarus joined the PfP in January 1995 after sign-

ing the Programme's Framework Document. On 29 April 1996, Belarus officially submitted to NATO headquarters a PfP presentation document outlining the objectives and priorities of its cooperation with NATO.

Most of the cooperation between Belarus and NATO is concentrated in the framework of the Individual Partnership Programme (IPP). The IPP outlines priorities of cooperation between Belarus and NATO for a two-year period, and specifies forces and capabilities which might be made available by the country for participation in the PfP. A list of specific measures involving representatives of Belarus is updated on an annual basis.

The dynamics of the implementation of IPP measures have been steadily rising. If in its first IPP for 1996 and 1997, Belarus expressed interest in participating in 17 areas of cooperation with NATO, the current IPP for 2007 and 2008 covers 25 areas of cooperation. At present, the IPP gives priority to the following areas: training to enhance cooperation during emergency response operations; arms control and non-proliferation; efforts to counter challenges to modern society; planning and conducting peacekeeping operations; the fight against terrorism; language instruction; and public diplomacy.

In 2004, Belarus acceded to the Planning and Review Process (PARP), one of the basic elements of the PfP programme designed to prepare forces and capabilities which might be made available by a partner country for participation in operations and exercises in conjunction with the forces of NATO member states. Involvement in PARP helps Belarus develop and improve its peacekeeping potential.

Cooperation between Belarus and NATO in the area of science and technology is characterised by a positive dynamic. The National Academy of Sciences of Belarus maintains contacts with NATO in the framework of the Research and Technology Organisation and the NATO scientific committee. A number of innovative projects have been carried out in the area of communication and information technologies."

Regrettably, this description of activities does not fully and accurately reflect the real state of relations with the alliance. It makes no mention of any points of contention. That is why, to correctly understand the situation and analyse the prospects of relations between Belarus and NATO, it is necessary to describe in more detail the current state of relations, starting with a brief retrospective journey into history, which offers illustrative examples of bitter confrontation.

One spat after another

Belarus' first step in cooperation with the alliance was its entry, along with other CIS countries, into the North-Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in March 1992. The council was created by the alliance to carry out its new strategy, aimed at establishing and developing partnership, a dialogue and cooperation with countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Apart from that, in May Belarus was granted associate member status in the North-Atlantic Assembly, currently the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. A Supreme Soviet delegation attended the assembly's sessions and seminars on a regular basis. Associate membership was expected to help Belarusian lawmakers better understand security issues and familiarise themselves with basic principles and civilised approaches to the problems.

It should be noted that the foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Belarus at the time were largely conducive to close cooperation with the North-Atlantic alliance. Belarus assessed the role of NATO in the European and international security system realistically and sought to boost cooperation in the interests of security and stability on the continent. The Belarusian leadership at the time pursued a foreign policy based on the ideas set forth in the Declaration of State Sovereignty; in particular it sought to make the country a neutral state and remove nuclear weapons from its territory.

In that period, a particular emphasis was made on forms of cooperation such as NATO military inspections in the Republic of Belarus, joint efforts in the area of arms control, the conversion of defence enterprises to civilian use, contacts between military officers and scientific cooperation. A number of politicians, governmental agency employees, public figures and journalists visited the NATO headquarters on study tours. NATO head office employees told Belarusian visitors about the organisation's priorities and explained the alliance's position on various issues of international politics.

In November 1992, Manfred Werner, the then-secretary general of NATO, paid a visit to Belarus which was seen as a landmark in bilateral cooperation. He welcomed Belarus' decision to seek a neutral and nuclear-free status, noting the alliance's interest in maintaining good relations with the country. Other high-ranking NATO officials visited Belarus in the early 1990s – Gen. Henning von Ondarza and Robert C. Oaks, commanders-in-chief of NATO Allied Forces Central Europe; Field Marshal Sir Richard Vincent, chairman of the

NATO Military Committee; and Gebhardt von Moltke, NATO assistant secretary general for political affairs.

In that period, NATO's priorities with regard to Belarus included assisting the country in meeting its commitments under international arms reduction treaties; monitoring the political and military-political situation in the country; organising events aimed at informing the Belarusian leadership and political elite of the goals and objectives of the North-Atlantic alliance under new conditions; and dispelling the image of NATO as an enemy in the mentality of Belarusians.

Really, although the authorities had almost completely stopped anti-NATO propaganda during the last year of the existence of the Soviet Union, after Belarus gained independence most Belarusians continued to associate the alliance with the image created during the Cold War, i.e. as an enemy . That perception reflected on the nation's official position. That was one of the main reasons why contacts between Belarus and NATO were not as close as the alliance expected. For instance, officers from the NATO office in Brussels complained that they had been receiving few proposals, requests and questions from Belarus.

Besides Cold War stereotypes, Belarus' policies were also adversely influenced by the political and military-industrial elite's traditional inclination to form alliances with Russia. Belarus signed the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) in December 1993, citing concerns about NATO's alleged failure to offer Belarus sufficient security guarantees and dangers associated with the North-Atlantic alliance's attempts to expand is sphere of influence.

It may be said that in 1992 and 1993, the issue of relations with NATO was sort of a trial balloon in discussions between those who advocated closer ties with the European community and supporters of a union with Russia. Experts, scientists and politicians discussed increased cooperation with the alliance and even possible membership. But the alliance leadership seemed to be sceptical about the prospect. For instance, Manfred Werner told Belarusian journalists in the autumn of 1992 that Belarus did not need to join NATO to cooperate with the alliance.

The situation began to change radically in 1994. In January, transformation processes began within the alliance after participants at the NATO summit declared that the bloc was ready to admit new members located in Central and Eastern Europe. NATO also approved a Partnership for Peace (PfP)

Framework Document, inviting all NACC partners to sign it. These goals and plans significantly modified NATO's role in the system of European and international security. In July, Alyaksandr Lukashenka was elected as first president of the Republic of Belarus. True, no immediate changes were introduced into the government's security policies. The new head of state reaffirmed the country's commitment to neutrality and the nuclear-free status. Nevertheless, it was these two events which would define the basic trajectories of the Belarus-NATO relationship, and all it inherent contradictions.

The major developments that took place during this new phase included Belarus' accession to the PfP, the removal of nuclear weapons and conventional arms reduction in line with the country's international obligations. The Belarusian government, for its part, put forward a proposal to create a nuclear-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe, and voiced its opposition to NATO's eastward expansion.

Belarus was the last nation in Europe to join the PfP in January 1995. Initially, it limited its participation in the programme but continued to express its interest in maintaining ties with the alliance. In fact, the Belarusian leader's prejudice against NATO – the officials responsible for PfP implementation were well aware of it – was the major obstacle to real cooperation.

The Belarusian leader was angered mainly by the alliance's plan to admit the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. In late February 1995, Lukashenka declared that NATO enlargement creates new military threats to Belarus and suspended its observance of the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The move drew severe criticism from NATO member states. The CFE issue dominated German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel's talks with Belarusian officials in Minsk in August 1995. That visit played a crucial role, and Belarus reinstated the treaty. However, the dispute exposed the Belarusian leadership's anti-Western stance and raised questions about its ability to honour international commitments.

Thus, from that moment on, Lukashenka's fierce opposition to NATO's enlargement has had a significant effect on the country's foreign policies.

Nevertheless, in May 1997 Belarus acceded to the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which replaced the NAPC. Belarusian officials regularly attended EAPC meetings. Given a lack of political contacts with Western countries, meetings in the framework of the EAPC offered the Belarusian government a good opportunity to convey its position to Western politicians. As

the Belarusian foreign ministry said in 1998, "cooperation of the Republic of Belarus with NATO, both with the alliance and its member states, is in the interests of its national security, and can have an effect on Belarus' relations with the Council of Europe, the European Union, the OSCE and other European and international organisations."

Moreover, Ivan Antanovich, foreign minister at the time, said in December 1997 that Belarus' position with regard to NATO had been evolving, although slowly. Noting that many Belarusians were still apprehensive of the North-Atlantic alliance, Antanovich stressed, "it takes time to explain to our people what is going on." Later, Ural Latypau, the new head of the Belarusian foreign policy office, said that Belarus does not see any direct threats in NATO's enlargement, provided that the bloc's leadership makes good on its promises not to site nuclear weapons on the territory of the new members or deploy considerable contingents of troops there. Belarusian officials often stressed in their statements that Belarus respects NATO's right to make independent decisions and the right of nations to join military alliances at their own will.

However, relations with NATO deteriorated sharply again during the Kosovo crisis. Lukashenka made several strong-worded statements on the matter, describing the alliance's use of military force against Yugoslavia as "plainly an act of aggression." In late March 1999, Belarus followed Russia in suspending cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but unlike Moscow, Minsk did not recall its official representative from Brussels. Belarus also suspended its activities within the PfP and EAPC. In addition, the Belarusian government turned down an invitation to a ceremony which was held in Washington to celebrate the alliance's 50th anniversary.

Strong tensions remained for some time and it was not until a year later that relations returned to normal, but not for long. After the Belarusian authorities actually forced the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group to leave the country, the Czech government in November 2002 denied an entry visa to Lukashenka, who intended to take part in an EAPC meeting held in the framework of the alliance's Prague Summit. Syarhey Martynau, Belarus' ambassador to Belgium and representative at NATO at the time, severely criticised the alliance at the EAPC meeting.

Belarus also attacked NATO over the United States' plan to move some of its bases from Germany to countries in Central Europe, including Poland. A year later, NATO admitted new members, including three of Belarus' neigh-

bours, in a second wave of accession. Minsk's reaction to the move was more measured than before. Lukashenka noted that he had opposed NATO eastward expansion for ten years, stressing that Belarus would enhance its armed forces to prepare for a possible act of aggression. Yet arguably, this was the first time that the Belarusian leader had expressed himself without escalating his confrontational rhetoric

To be fair, the Belarusian authorities made several attempts to build bridges with NATO. But the actions appeared to be intended to suit the politics of the moment – when Belarusian-Russian relations hit a dead end, Minsk wooed NATO to remind its ally that it is not the only pebble on the beach. In other instances, Minsk hinted at a willingness to work more closely with the alliance because it exaggerated the role and place of the Republic of Belarus in international and European politics. This seems to be a credible explanation for the Belarusian government's insistence on signing a pact similar to the NATO-Russia Founding Act or the NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership Charter.

Cautious rapprochement without common values

No significant escalations of tension have been observed since then. Clearly, this does not mean that the authorities have radically changed their point of view. The Belarusian leader keeps criticising the alliance now and then. Every year, Belarus conducts large-scale manoeuvres based on scenarios indicative of an overtly hostile attitude to NATO. In spring 2005, the Belarusian government postponed indefinitely the opening of the alliance's information centre in Minsk, citing "technical problems." The centre has not yet opened. Meanwhile, the authorities have considerably toned down their rhetoric.

The NATO leadership, for its part, also criticises Minsk from time to time. For instance, after Alyaksandr Lukashenka's re-election, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, secretary general of NATO, on 20 March 2006 condemned "the way in which the elections in Belarus have been conducted," urging the Belarusian authorities "to take steps to respect Euro-Atlantic democratic standards, including those to which they have committed in the Partnership for Peace." A week later, the alliance issued a statement saying that it was "closely examining its relationship with Belarus." However, NATO decided against breaking off ties with Belarus because this would be counterproductive.

Like other Euro-Atlantic organisations, NATO is mainly concerned about problems with democracy in Belarus. In 2005, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said, "It is not a secret to anyone that the cause of limited cooperation between Belarus and NATO lies in the country's regime and the consequences of this regime." He stressed that relations would not change significantly until Belarus carries out democratic reform.

Robert F. Simmons, deputy assistant secretary general of NATO for security cooperation and partnership, said in May 2005 that since NATO and Belarus do not share common values, they cannot identify common goals. He added that Belarus has the opportunity to choose and does choose NATO programmes, exercises and conferences in the framework of a partnership agreement. Simmons stressed that cooperation was limited because the Belarusian side did not take steps for rapprochement with NATO and because Alyaksandr Lukashenka did not share "our common values." He accused the Belarusian authorities of restricting access to information about NATO, leaving the Alliance's training courses for Belarus' command staff as one of the few remaining options for cooperation. But even these courses disturb the authorities and prompt them to still further restrict cooperation with the alliance, he noted.

Nevertheless, cooperation does seem to have been gradually expanding, therefore the information posted by the Belarusian foreign ministry on its official Web site gives us a basically true picture. More Belarusian soldiers and officers have been involved in various activities organised under the aegis of NATO. Some of the organisation's events took place in Belarus. In the last few years, NATO has held regular courses for Belarusian soldiers preparing to take part in peace-keeping missions.

Officers at NATO headquarters say that the Belarusian defence ministry has shown a genuine willingness to cooperate. Until recently, Belarus' Individual Partnership Programme was very limited and the country's participation in the PfP was largely symbolic, whereas the IPP for 2008 and 2009 provides for technical and military cooperation in nine key areas. The author's personal contacts with officers involved in the PfP programme proved a lack of prejudice against the alliance.

Moscow's behind us

The Russian factor cannot be ignored in the examination of Belarus' relationship with NATO. It is beyond doubt that Russia is NATO's main antagonist and relations between the two have a great impact on security in Europe.

It is common knowledge that Moscow has never been happy with the alliance's behaviour, but it agreed to expand cooperation up to a certain point. In May 1997, Russia and NATO signed the F*ounding* Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation and set up the NATO-Russia Council.

By all appearances, that relatively short period of tolerance is now over. The main point of contention was attempts by the Georgian and, especially, Ukrainian leaders to have their countries join NATO. Earlier plans by NATO to admit new members had met with strong opposition from Moscow. Ukraine's bid to join the alliance outraged the Kremlin, causing Russia-NATO relations to fall to the lowest point since the Cold War. Moscow regards (or pretends to regard) Ukraine's possible membership as a direct threat to its strategic interests, an encroachment on its territorial integrity, and a throwback to the geopolitical configuration of the 18th century.

That it would be a serious psychological trauma to the Russian public and elite is beyond reasonable doubt. But there is an impression that Russia is so concerned about it not because the possible expansion poses a real threat, but because it cannot come to terms with the fact that Ukraine would be lost forever. If Ukraine succeeds in its bid to enter NATO, the Kremlin can give up its effort to bring the country back under its fold.

If that ever happened, the consequences for Belarus would be both positive and negative. What is good about it is that Belarusians could be persuaded that the alliance is not inherently evil, as their southern Slavic neighbours had bound their fate to it. In this sense, the emotional effect would be greater than in the case of the response to the NATO accession of Poland and the Baltic states, which are perceived more as foreign nations.

However, any escalation between Russia and the West also plays into the hands of the Belarusian authorities because it adds to Belarus' political weight in Russia's foreign policy, gives the Belarusian government leverage in negotiations with Moscow, and enables it to demand additional economic and other preferences. Ukraine's final departure would create an extremely favourable context for the Belarusian ruling class, accentuating the difference between geopolitical priorities of Minsk and Kyiv. Therefore, it should be reasoned, Ukraine's entry into NATO would benefit the Belarusian ruling elite.

As for Belarus, its leadership has entered the nation into a real military alliance with Russia in defiance of the Constitution. The prominent Russian

hawk, Gen. Leonid Ivashov, former chief of the Russian defence ministry's International Military Cooperation Office and current vice president of the Moscow-based Academy of Geopolitical Studies, specified the benefits for Russia of the military alliance with Belarus. In his highly competent opinion, Belarus means the following to Russia:

- a military-strategic buffer that pushes NATO's attack capabilities farther west of Russia, securing the Smolensk-Moscow attack route;
- a forward defence area that screens Russian troops from a possible thrust from the west;
- a system for gathering intelligence on the situation in the air and on the ground, and the disposition of Russia's external military elements (the missile-attack early-warning radar station near Baranavichy, Brest region);
- an element of the combined defence industry complex;
- a spiritual border between the Russian Orthodox Church on the one side and the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant congregations on the other;
- a helping hand for the Kaliningrad exclave, the Baltic Fleet and a tool of political influence over Lithuania.

In view of the above-mentioned circumstances, Gen. Ivashov said that the Russians should bear in mind that a drift of the Republic of Belarus toward NATO would have the following consequences for Russia:

- Russia would lose a reliable ally, whose capabilities would go towards strengthening the enemy;
- it would take NATO planes a shorter time, just 20 minutes, to reach positions for delivering air strikes on Moscow;
- Russia would need to establish a new grouping of forces and capabilities to secure the Smolensk-Moscow attack route and deploy additional defence capabilities around Moscow;
- it would have to spend heavily on building new missile-attack early-warning stations on Russian territory, or give up the early warning system altogether, which would cause a blackout, preventing the Russian Strategic Missile Forces from planning a counterstrike (which is equivalent to the devaluation of the strategic nuclear forces);
- the move would disrupt economic ties in the defence industry complex and leave Russia without some of the components used for manufacturing defence systems;
- Russia would lose ground in international politics, its prestige would be damaged and it would be seen as a less attractive partner;

- the move would demoralise the Russian population and Orthodox believers, the military and possibly other groups would lose confidence in the Russian government.

While some of these statements by the Russian expert in geopolitics may be arguable, in general one has to admit that Belarus' entry into NATO would be a major setback for Russia, especially taking into account its current government's confrontational spirit.

However, Belarus' interests should also be taken into consideration. The general painted an apocalyptic picture of misfortunes the Belarusian people are likely face if the country joins NATO, but his arguments do not hold water. "This is the loss of sovereignty, national traditions and culture, and the population's conversion to Catholicism. The republic's entry into a foreign and hostile environment would make Belarus a European pariah. Most production facilities will stop because they fall shy of western standards. The intelligentsia and educated youths will be servants to foreign companies and chewing gum vendors. Equipping the Armed Forces with NATO technologies and standards would require additional expenditures and leave thousands of officers without a job. Belarusian boys will be used as cannon fodder in American military gambles."

Most members of the Russian political elite hold the same or similar views, even if they do not talk as straight as the general. Nostalgia for the lost superpower status and a desire to restore the Russian Empire's former might are characteristic of a certain (quite considerable) part of Russian society, coupled with an almost organic inability ingrained in Russia to provide decent living standards for the masses, even in the best of times, and a tendency to create a situation that causes serious concern from the viewpoint of regional and global security.

These circumstances make Russian politicians suspicious, so they start looking for enemies who prevent Russia from regaining something which they believe has always belonged to Russia, trying to exert influence on developments at any point on the globe. Delusions ascribing hostile intentions to others cause inadequate reactions to actions by the other side, regarded without foundation as a threat to mythical national interests.

This is true. But Russia is Belarus' neighbour on whom our country heavily relies economically. The examples of Ukraine and Georgia suggest that Moscow reacts with anger and frustration when it sees former Soviet Empire

territories abandon its sphere of influence, following the lead of former East European satellites. In these circumstances, Belarus' possible attempt to join NATO would be equivalent to suicide, because the Kremlin would use all tools available to prevent it from doing so under any circumstances. Given Belarus' economic dependence on Russia, the Kremlin has more than enough tools to force the country to drop its bid.

The masses do not want it yet

Officials often express fear that NATO policies can cause internal changes in Belarus. But this is a big mistake. Not only the alliance, but the West as a whole cannot impose change on Belarus if most people in the country are opposed to reform. The example of Ukraine indicates that the lack of public consensus on the issue of NATO membership can create serious internal political problems.

In Belarus, there is consensus in a denial of the possibility of NATO membership. The point is that the authorities have used NATO enlargement for internal policy ends, to create a feeling of anxiety in Belarusian society and make people feel as if they are living in a besieged camp. Since the purpose of the campaign was to change the situation in the country, the exaggeration of external threats helped fuel public sentiment, enabling the president to win public approval for an expansion of his powers and create a convenient atmosphere for freezing economic and political reform.

It is almost beyond any doubt that the Belarusian government's restrictions on people's access to unbiased information about the North-Atlantic alliance play an important role in creating a negative image of NATO, and help the authorities garner public support for its policies with regard to the alliance. At one time, Alyaksandr Lukashenka even suggested putting the question of NATO's enlargement to a national plebiscite to see what people think about the issue. Given the heavy anti-NATO propaganda, it is beyond doubt that most Belarusians would denounce the move even if their votes were counted fairly.

Opinion polls prove this. A survey conducted among major groups of the Belarusian elite by the NOVAK sociological service in early 1996 found two in three respondents opposed to the idea of NATO membership. Only 18.6 percent said that Belarus should join NATO within the next five years.

As expected, the bombing raids on Yugoslavia over Kosovo stirred up anti-NATO sentiment. NATO's air campaign dealt a really powerful blow to the few advocates of Western values in Belarus as it gave the authorities an opportunity to resume anti-NATO propaganda, including in the most primitive way, to further their interests. As a result, the proportion of people who said that NATO's eastward expansion was a threat to Belarus rose from 30.8 percent in 1997 to 47.7 percent in mid-1999, according to surveys conducted by the Independent Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS). In mid-1999 only 17.6 percent said that the enlargement did not represent a threat.

The polarised views of Belarusian society on the issue of the country's relations with NATO also reflected on the positions of political parties. For instance, the platform of the Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) says, "Noting the persistent advance of the military-political bloc NATO towards the border of the Republic of Belarus and the unceasing aggressive acts by the United States and NATO against other sovereign states, the party calls for an all-out enhancement of defence capabilities of the republic and the Union of Belarus and Russia." On the other hand, the Conservative-Christian Party (CCP) describes NATO membership as "the most important task for Belarus' national security and policy." Both parties are in opposition to the government.

Public opinion on the issue seems to have been frozen in the last two years. About 20 percent of Belarusians approved of (had confidence in) NATO and 58-59 percent were wary of the alliance, according to NOVAK. The proportions were virtually the same among various age groups, with the exception of pensioners, and among people with different education backgrounds. A higher level of approval, 35 percent, was registered among those who went to college or university.

Nevertheless, when people hear a constant barrage of negative reports and statements about NATO (all broadcast media in Belarus are controlled by the government, while the print media are dominated by state-controlled outlets with a few independent newspapers having a very limited circulation) and almost never hear positive opinions about it, they can hardly be expected to change their perception of the alliance.

Incidentally, quite to the broadcaster's surprise, 54.2 percent of viewers said they were not fearful of the North Atlantic alliance in a television poll conducted during a show on the STV-RenTV channel in April 2008. Before the

voting, the host had cast the alliance in a negative light, denouncing its policies and playing anti-NATO videos.

Thus, "the monster's" presence at Belarus' border for nearly 10 years has not given rise to great fears and most people do not perceive the alliance as a source of new external threats. One can expect public opinion to change in favour of NATO if the media campaign shifts from negative to positive.

Conclusions

The above-mentioned facts should not be viewed as a sign that attitudes toward NATO have changed and that the authorities will never revert to their confrontational rhetoric again. For instance, in mid October 2008, Lukashenka told members of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus that NATO's eastward expansion was a trend. "The question is not about sweet words by Western generals and politicians that the alliance does not pose a threat to anyone. The fact is that the NATO military infrastructure has become firmly entrenched close to the Belarusian border, American military bases have been moved to east European countries, and the bloc has been building up its offensive potential. Moreover, Ukraine's membership of NATO is on the agenda. They have been frantically accelerating the process. In fact, the alliance is drawing new division lines in Europe."

Naturally, the Belarusian government as a whole takes the same position. "NATO threatens the Union State by situating its military bases on adjacent territories under the guise of the fight against terrorism," Mikalay Charhinets, the then-chairman of the Committee on International Affairs and National Security at the Council of the Republic of the Belarusian National Assembly, said in late June 2008. "At present we are observing a world map revision that runs counter to all international agreements, including the Tehran treaty signed after World War II."

The former member of the upper parliamentary chamber accused the North Atlantic alliance of failure to keep its promise "not to move an inch westward" allegedly made after the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Germany. "Now we see that NATO has moved more than 1,000 kilometres closer to the Union State," he said, adding that NATO is preparing "full-scale positions for deploying offensive weapons."

Statements like these indicate that the Belarusian authorities generally stick to the old position and will keep demonising NATO in the eyes of the electorate. Therefore, it would be quite naïve to expect the Belarusian government to chart a radically new foreign policy course towards real rapprochement with Euro-Atlantic organisations including NATO. Moreover, the public mood in no way encourages the authorities to take steps in this direction.

Hypothetically, of course, Belarus' entry into NATO cannot be ruled out, especially if the nation is confronted with new global political challenges. As a rule, medium-level officials in Belarus never make public statements about the country's relationship with NATO for fear that they will be out of tune with the leader's mood of the moment. This fact adds value to a remark made by Valery Surayeu, head of the Centre of Geopolitical Studies of the Institute of Social and Political Research, affiliated with the Presidential Administration, in 2004. He said that an unthinkable move such as entry into NATO may be quite possible in 10- or 20-years time, for instance in response to an Islamist or Chinese expansion.

On the other hand, it is clear that NATO will not compromise its values for the sake of closer cooperation with Belarus. Nevertheless, the alliance cannot ignore a country that shares borders with three of its members.

As officials in Brussels have said, issues concerning relations with Belarus have been raised and discussed at all levels of the organisation. Among the priority areas of cooperation are the use of air routes, measures to counter terrorist threats to the energy infrastructure, and efforts to prevent and alleviate the consequences of industrial accidents and natural disasters. Energy security could be another subject for discussion as the issue has been high on the alliance's agenda in the last two years.

In addition, the Belarusian ruling elite seems to have realised that in the event of a new confrontation, Belarus will find itself on the sidelines of European politics because the country will never succeed in building stronger ties with the West without making concessions. Its relationship with Russia has definitely deteriorated lately. Mindful of this fact, Minsk is likely to avoid real, not verbal, tensions with the alliance.

In conclusion, generally speaking one should note that the existing situation is likely to remain unchanged in the foreseeable future – Belarus and NATO will continue to maintain limited but stable ties. A fundamentally different type of relationship, a real partnership, is possible only after the establishment of democracy in the country.

Ideally, it would be good for Belarus to join the alliance. That would give it complete and irreversible guarantees of sovereignty. However, taking into consideration the above-mentioned realities – a fierce opposition from Russia and insufficient public support for such a move, the issue will hardly be on the agenda in the foreseeable future. However, this is not a matter of principle – after all, not all members of the European Union are members of the alliance and seek its membership.

On the other hand, the necessity to take into account the phobias of Belarus' eastern neighbour does not imply that Belarus should not advance its own interests, especially when Russia's actions are totally inadequate to the reality.

Taking into account all these circumstances, the best option for Belarus in the current situation would be to retain its neutral status. More accurately, the country should seek to achieve a neutral status because despite the fact that this is codified in the Constitution, the government violated the provision in joining the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and forming a military alliance with Russia.

By sticking to neutrality, Belarus could play a role similar to that of Austria during the Cold War. Clearly, this can hardly be considered an ideal solution, but parallels with Austria suggest that this is also not the worst option. After all, despite the drastic change in the configuration of Europe, Vienna has not displayed an intention to give up its neutral status, but still remains committed to Euro-Atlantic solidarity.

It appears that nothing prevents Belarus from taking the same position in the current circumstances or in the mid-term future. As for a more distant future, it is too difficult now to make any reliable forecasts.

In the Mirror of Sociological Studies and Political Processes

SOCIOLOGICAL DATA ON ATTITUDES TO THE EUROPEAN UNION IN BELARUS

Syarhey Nikalyuk

A stable divide

Belarus is a paradoxical country in the geographic centre of Europe. It would seem that the nation's centuries-long development as part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania should have conditioned an overall support for the pro-European vector of the country's development following the collapse of the Soviet Union; yet it has failed to follow the path of the Baltic countries.

The framework of post-Soviet transformations was fixed firmly, first of all, by Belarusian society itself, in both its qualitative and quantitative features. A close look at the past through the prism of collected knowledge leaves no doubt that the nation had almost no chance of choosing a different path. Take the numbers for instance. A poll conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Study Centre (VTsIOM) in March 1991 found that 69 percent of respondents in Belarus considered themselves citizens of the USSR and only 24 percent said they were citizens of the republic in which they lived. Belarus had the highest proportion of "Soviet citizens". In Ukraine, the ratio was 42 percent to 46 percent, and three percent to 97 percent in Estonia. Even ethnic Russians living in other republics were less pro-Soviet with 66 percent associating themselves with the Soviet Union and 24 percent with its republics.[1]

The idea of national revival fell on deaf ears for about 70 percent of Belarusians, at the time when a strong sense of national identity inspired the Baltic nations to move closer to Europe. Some scientists cite the Baltic na-

[1] L. Gudkov. *Negativnaja Identichnost. Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, "VTsIOM-A". 2004, p 142

tions' shorter Soviet legacy to explain this sad fact. They say that the Bolsheviks had ruled on a greater part of Belarus' current territory since 1917, while the Baltic republics were occupied 22 years later. The latter had an opportunity to gain experience in building an independent state and form a national elite, they argue.

This is a valid argument, but it cannot by itself explain the large difference in the nations' behavioural patterns. The problem has deeper roots, and one needs to go back in history to trace them. It should be recalled that the Belarusian Socialist Hramada gained less than half a percent of the Belarusian vote in the 1917 Founding Assembly elections, which are regarded by historians as relatively democratic, like Belarus' first presidential election in 1994.

Belarusian speakers began forming an elite in the late 20th century, when the nation-building processes in Europe were close to their conclusion. That was a result of diverse factors beginning with the Polonisation of the Belarusian nobility in the Rzeczpospolita and ending with the Russian Empire's Russification policies. Not insignificantly, the ethnic Belarusian territory had no university that could bring up nationalist-minded people.

According to the 1897 census, most ethnic Belarusians, 92 percent, were engaged in traditional agriculture and only 1.1 were employed in the manufacturing sector. People of free professions made up a very small percentage of the population. Three in four Belarusian speakers aged between 10 and 49 were illiterate. Valer Bulhakau, author of *The History of Belarusian Nationalism*[2], made the justified conclusion that the success of nation-building hinges on a balance between those who can propose a nation-building plan, and a critical mass of those who can embrace it. Belarusian cities definitely fell short of the required critical mass in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and it would be an exaggeration to define them as Belarusian. According to the above-mentioned census, Belarusians accounted for no more than 10 percent of the population in cities of more than 10,000.

According to the VTsIOM poll of March 1991 this proportion has not changed significantly over time. The results gave a view of the structure of Belarusian society that is instrumental for understanding its nature and analysing social trends in Belarus, including changes in people's views on geopolitical priorities.

[2] V. Bulgakov, *Istorija belorusskogo natsionalizma,*Vilnius, Institut Belorusistiki, 2006, pp 277-287

Let us consider Table 1.[3]

Table 1. Who did you vote for in the recent presidential election? (%)

Answer	1994	2001	2006
Alyaksandr Lukashenka	34.7*	48.2	58.2
Pro-democracy candidates	**26.4**	**21.0**	**23.5**
Other candidates	18.9	2.9	2.0
No answer/refused to answer	1.6	8.6	5.2
Against all	4.4	7.1	3.2
Did not vote	14.0	12.1	8.0

* First round data

There are striking differences between the socio-political situations in Belarus in 1994, 2001 and 2006. The first presidential election was held amidst a major crisis, as GDP had plunged by 13.3 percent that year. The country's economic performance had improved by 2001, with Lukashenka reporting to delegates at the Second Belarusian People's Congress that "Gross Domestic Product has grown by 36 percent over the last five years. Industrial output was up 65 percent and fixed capital expenditures up 26 percent. Last year, industrial output, consumer goods production, people's real income and other indicators surpassed the 1990 pre-crisis level (the most effective year of the Soviet era in terms of economic indicators."[4]

Five years later, speaking at the Third Belarusian People's Congress, Lukashenka looked even more confident. "Today we live in a stable, trouble-free and civilised country. We have a strong economy, developed science and culture and one of the world's best education systems. National security is completely assured. We have learned to cope with difficult tasks, to implement big projects, to perform effective, fruitful and high-quality work."

Polls suggest that Lukashenka's conclusions were correct. Optimism about family living standards climbed over the five years from 9.1 percent in October 2001 to 23.6 percent in 2006. The proportion of those dissatisfied with their financial situation shrank in the same period from 32.4 percent to 16.4 percent.

[3] When not specified otherwise, all poll results were found on the website of the Independent Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS), www.iiseps.org.

[4] The Belarusian People's Congress is an assembly that Lukashenka convenes before presidential elections and referenda. The Belarusian Constitution makes no mention of the assembly.

Lukashenka's arguments about successes achieved under his rule look especially credible against the backdrop of remarks he had made at the First Belarusian People's Congress. He began his speech with the following statement, "We face a choice: either Belarus remains a hostage held by politicians seeking revenge over their losses, or we establish a proper legal order and concentrate all the forces of the people on the solution of urgent problems."

The economic upturn recorded during Lukashenka's presidency did not reflect on overall support for pro-democracy candidates such as Zyanon Paznyak and Stanislau Shushkevich in 1994, Uladzimir Hancharyk in 2001, and Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin in 2006. It is possible to see that the percentage of pro-democracy supporters has been relatively the same over the years, by adding half the number of respondents who failed/found it difficult to answer (an analysis proves this formula quite reliable) to the number of votes the opposition candidates captured in elections.

Let us consider Table 2.

Table 2. What language do you use in day-to-day communication? (%)

Language	1994	2001	2006
Belarusian	17,3	1,7	3,5
Russian	66,6	46,4	61,0
Russian and Belarusian	7,0	20,9	12,9
Mixed	6,4	30,0	21.4
Other	1,6	0,1	0,2

Numbers of Belarusian speakers shrank from 17.3 percent in 1994 to just 1.7 percent before the next presidential election held in 2001. The sharp decrease could be blamed on Lukashenka's Russification policies. But then it would be difficult to explain a 20.2-point fall in the number of those using only Russian on a daily basis.

A possible explanation is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, people in the former Soviet republics were more ready to mobilise to support certain ideals. In Belarus, the nation's mobilisation readiness was even higher. The politically-charged environment prompted people to choose in favour of one language or the other. The proportion of bilingual speakers and those using *trasyanka* (a mixture of the two languages) was very low.

If this explanation is correct, it proves a rigid structure of the Belarusian electorate. In 1994, both Stanislau Shushkevich, former speaker of the Su-

preme Soviet, and Zyanon Paznyak, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), employed pro-democracy and pro-independence rhetoric, but it did not help them win additional votes.

Torn between East and West

The above-cited examples of voting in presidential elections illustrate a socio-cultural divide in Belarusian society. It is very important to trace the cause and effect relationship. The split manifested itself in an interesting Belarusian phenomenon -- a steep decline in Lukashenka's national poll ratings after the 2001 presidential election to a record low of 27 percent in September 2002 failed to translate into a rise in support for his political opponents. The nation is divided not along the lines of approval/disapproval of the authoritarian leader, but depending on the possession or lack of certain personal resources.

Lukashenka scored better among older rural women with a low level of education, i.e. those who would not survive without state support under free market conditions. On the contrary, opponents did better among educated young men living in big cities. The former outnumber the latter by a proportion of approximately seven to three. The ratio has not changed over the years as more people reach retirement age.

Based on this presumed structure of Belarusian society, it is easy to understand that the proportion of staunch supporters of integration into the European Union stands close to 30 percent. Numbers cited in Tables 3 and 4, in general, prove this conclusion (the reasons for an unusual rise in support for EU membership in December 2002 and a temporary drop in September 2008 will be explained below).

Table 3. If a referendum on Belarus' entry into the European Union were held now, how would you vote?

Answer	12'02	12'05	11'06	03'08	09'08	10'08
Yes	**60.9**	32.0	36.0	35.4	**26.7**	36.0
No	10.9	26.8	36.2	35.4	51.9	39.1
Would not vote	10.0	20.4	15.5	15.4	12.2	14.0
Failed/found it difficult to answer	18.2	20.8	12.3	13.8	9.2	10.9

Table 4. If you were to choose between unification with Russia and membership of the European Union, what would you choose?

Answer	09'03	03'04	06'06	03'08	09'08	10'08
Unification with Russia	47.6	41.0	52.3	45.3	54.0	48.1
EU membership	36.1	36.5	29.6	33.4	26.2	31.1
Failed/found it difficult to answer	16.3	22.5	18.1	21.3	19.8	20.8

The IISEPS surveys make it possible to identify the integration priorities of various social and demographic groups.

Table 5 shows that opinions are not significantly divided along gender lines. Support for EU membership is 5.5 percentage points higher among men, and not much fewer men are opposed to the idea. A similar pattern holds for the question about a possible referendum on Belarus' entry into the EU.

Table 5. Integration priorities of the population depending on sex*

Answer	Men	Women
Should Belarus join the EU? (09'05)		
Yes	41.0	35.5
No	42.8	44.9
If a referendum on Belarus' entry into the European Union were held now, how would you vote?(11'06)		
Yes	39.1	33.5
No	33.6	38.4
Would not vote	15.4	15.5
If you were to choose between unification with Russia and membership of the European Union, what would you choose? (01'07)		
Unification with Russia	45.1	51.4
Integration into EU	39.0	29.2
Do you think that the West takes a hostile attitude to Belarus and that Belarusians should be wary of it? (09'05)		
Yes	43.0	45.6
No	46.4	39.4
Confidence in international organisations (UN, OSCE, EU, European Parliament, Council of Europe etc.) (09'05)		
I have confidence	39.0	38.4
I do not have confidence	40.6	32.4

* Here and below the month and year of the survey are indicated in brackets.

More men and women favour unification with Russia than EU membership, but 1.8 times more women support the pro-Russian choice, compared to the 1.2 times higher support among men.

More men do not consider the West to be hostile toward Belarus, while more women said the West takes a hostile attitude to the country. At the same time, the difference between the opposing points of view is not very big.

The same proportion, 40 percent, of men and women expressed confidence in various international organisations, but more men said they had no confidence in international organisations.

Differences in opinion are greater among various age groups. As Table 6 indicates, nearly half (49.3 percent) of respondents under 30 advocate EU membership, with only 33.1 percent members of the same group are opposed to it. Meanwhile, people over 50 are more likely to vote against EU membership — 52 percent were opposed to it and only 25.4 welcomed the idea. As for the middle age group (30 to 49 years), they are split down the middle. A similar pattern holds for the question of a possible referendum on Belarus' entry into the EU: younger respondents are more likely they are to say "Yes" to EU membership, while older respondents are likely to say "No."

The age factor plays an important role in people's integration preferences. The polls suggest that unification with Russia is more popular with older persons, while pro-EU sentiments are higher among younger groups of respondents.

Assessments of the West's attitude to Belarus also differ depending on age. More than half of respondents in the oldest age group said that the West takes a hostile attitude to Belarus, compared to 36.7 percent in the youngest age group. On the contrary, nearly 52 percent of respondents in the youngest age group do not consider the West to be hostile toward Belarus, compared with slightly over 34 percent in the oldest age bracket. Respondents were split down the middle in the middle age group (the difference was within the margin of error).

Belarusians' attitudes to international organisations also depend on their age. The polls found that 44 percent of respondents in the youngest age group had confidence in international organisations, while about 32 percent had no confidence in international organisations. The proportion was 32.4 percent to 39.1 percent, respectively, in the oldest age group. In all, the number of those who approve of international organisations was 2.5-percent higher than the number of those who question their credentials because six-percent more people had a favourable opinion in the middle age group.

Table 6. Integration priorities of the population depending on age

Answer	Under 30	30-49 years old	Over 50
Should Belarus join the EU? (09'05)			
Yes	49.3	43.9	25.4
No	33.1	42.4	52.0
If a referendum on Belarus' entry into the European Union were held now, how would you vote? (11'06)			
Yes	52.7	38.5	23.7
No	20.5	32.3	49.6
Would not vote	12.2	16.8	16.0
If you were to choose between unification with Russia and membership of the European Union, what would you choose? (01'07)			
Unification with Russia	31.5	43.1	64.0
EU membership	55.2	38.2	16.5
Do you think that the West takes a hostile attitude to Belarus and that Belarusians should be wary of it? (09'05)			
Yes	36.7	42.7	50.8
No	51.9	45.6	34.1
Confidence in international organisations (UN, OSCE, EU, European Parliament, Council of Europe etc.) (09'05)			
I have confidence	43.9	41.7	32.4
I do not have confidence	31.6	35.8	39.1

Opinions on integration priorities also considerably differ among various groups categorised on the basis of education (see Table 7). Less educated persons were more likely to be opposed to EU membership (more than 53 percent). Only 23.3 percent of respondents in this group would like the country to join the EU. Holders of higher education degrees were more likely to vote in favour of the EU, as 51.5 percent were in favour of membership and 35.2 percent opposed to it. People holding secondary education certificates support and oppose EU membership roughly in equal numbers. A similar pattern holds for the question about a possible referendum on EU membership.

Less educated people were more likely to be wary of the West. In particular, 52.4 percent of respondents who had not completed secondary school said the West takes a hostile attitude to Belarus (almost double the number of those who thought the opposite), while 43.1 percent of higher education degree holders are apprehensive of the West, compared to 46.8 percent who did not consider the West to be hostile.

More educated people have more confidence in international organisations (from 31.3 percent in the least educated group to 40.9 percent among those with a higher education degree). However, the proportion of those disapproving of international organisations is roughly equal in the least and most educated groups (the difference is within the margin of error). The level of distrust of international organisations is the lowest (34.3 percent) among people with secondary education.

Table 7. The population's integration priorities depending on education,%

Answer	Below secondary education	Secondary, including technical school	Higher, incomplete higher education
Should Belarus join the EU? (09'05)			
Yes	23.3	41.1	51.5
No	53.1	42.2	35.2
If a referendum on Belarus' entry into the European Union were held now, how would you vote? (11'06)			
Yes	25.0	38.7	44.6
No	46.0	33.1	31.8
Would not vote	18.1	15.7	8.4
If you were to choose between unification with Russia and membership of the European Union, what would you choose? (01'07)			
Unification with Russia	68.2	43.6	34.5
EU membership	11.7	37.7	55.2
Do you think that the West takes a hostile attitude to Belarus and that Belarusians should be wary of it? (09'05)			
Yes	52.6	41.3	43.1
No	28.2	47.8	46.8
Confidence in international organisations (UN, OSCE, EU, European Parliament, Council of Europe etc.) (09'05)			
I have confidence	31.3	41.2	40.9
I do not have confidence	39.1	34.3	38.2

As indicated in Table 8, the idea of EU membership found most support among students (55.7 percent) and private sector employees (52.3 percent). In the former category, the number of supporters was 33 percent higher than the number of opponents. Supporters outnumbered opponents by 14 percent in the latter category. The poll found more pro-EU housewives and unemployed persons, although the difference is within the margin of error. Opponents of EU membership dominate among pensioners and public sector em-

ployees. Opponents held an edge of nearly 32 percentage points in the former group (53.7 percent to 22 percent) and of 3.2 percent in the latter group (43.3 percent to 40.1 percent). A similar pattern holds for the question of a possible referendum on Belarus' entry into the EU.

Quite naturally, supporters of unification with Russia dominate among pensioners, 66.8 percent (five times the number of EU membership advocates) and public sector employees, 47.3 percent (1.5 times the number of EU membership proponents), as well as among housewives and the unemployed, 48.3 percent. The idea is not popular with students, with only 24.6 percent embracing it.

Table 8. Integration priorities of the population depending on occupation, %

Answer	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Pensioners	Students	Housewives, the unemployed
Should Belarus join the EU? (09'05)					
Yes	40.1	52.3	22.0	55.7	42.4
No	43.3	38.3	53.7	22.8	40.0
If a referendum on Belarus' entry into the European Union were held now, how would you vote? (11'06)					
Yes	36.2	46.2	22.8	67.3	37.9
No	34.4	28.1	50.7	13.6	25.7
Would not vote	15.8	12.2	16.2	10.7	24.7
If you were to choose between unification with Russia and membership of the European Union, what would you choose? (01'07)					
Unification with Russia	47.3	32.4	66.8	24.6	48.3
EU membership	31.7	56.7	13.3	59.4	39.4
Do you think that the West takes a hostile attitude to Belarus and that Belarusians should be wary of it? (09'05)					
Yes	45.9	33.3	51.1	35.4	42.4
No	41.3	58.3	32.2	46.8	50.6
Confidence in international organisations (UN, OSCE, EU, European Parliament, Council of Europe etc.) (09'05)					
Confident	41.9	41.7	31.7	45.6	30.6
Mistrustful	33.3	40.2	39.2	26.6	37.6

There is a widely held perception that the West is hostile toward Belarus among pensioners (51.1 percent) and public sector employees (45.9 percent). The opposite point of view dominates among private sector employees (58.3 percent), housewives and the unemployed (50.6 percent) and students (46.8 percent).

Opinions on international organisations are more favourable among students (45.6 percent) and public and private sector employees (about 42 percent), but the proportion of those with a positive opinion of international organisations is lower among housewives and the unemployed (30.6 percent) and pensioners (31.7 percent).

Students were least likely to be suspicious of international organisations, with only 26.6 percent registering their disapproval. More respondents are wary of international organisations among private sector employees (40.2 percent) and pensioners (39.2 percent).

Thus, one can draw the conclusion that pensioners and public sector workers give preference to unification with Russia, while private sector employees and students are mostly in favour of EU membership.

As indicated in Table 9, residents of larger cities are more likely to endorse Belarus' EU membership bid. The proportion of pro-EU residents is higher in regional cities (51.3 percent) and lower in villages (27.9 percent). However, replies to the question about a possible referendum on Belarus' entry into the EU did not show any difference in opinions among various locations — roughly the same numbers would vote for and against (the difference is within the margin of error).

There is not a big divergence in response patterns between cities and villages as regards the question of choosing between two alternatives — the EU or Russia. It should be noted that Belarusians are often hesitant when faced with a tough choice between two alternative options.

As for perceptions of the West, the proportion of people who considered it hostile toward Belarus was smaller in regional cities (36.5 percent) and small towns (43.1 percent), and larger in villages (50.2 percent) and big cities (50 percent). Those who did not consider the West hostile considerably outnumbered those who held the opposite opinion (51.3 percent to 36.5 percent) in regional cities.

Polls found more favourable opinions of international organisations in small towns (45 percent said they had confidence in international organisations) and regional cities (42.4 percent). Only 29.8 percent of big city residents registered approval of international organisations. Regional cities had fewer residents distrustful of international organisations (29.8), while in other settlements non-confidence levels stood between 37 and 40 percent. Sceptics outnumber sympathisers (39.4 percent to 29.8 percent) in big cities only.

The attitudes might be linked to the distribution of humanitarian aid, which is channelled to regional cities first and then delivered to small towns and villagers. But this theory is yet to be verified.

In general, one may draw the conclusion that residents in smaller settlements tend to approve of unification with Russia, while closer ties with the EU find more support in bigger towns and cities.

Table 9. Integration priorities of the population depending on place of residence, %

Answer	Regional cities (except Minsk)	Big cities	Small towns	Villages
Should Belarus join the EU?(09'05)				
Yes	51.3	38.6	38.9	27.9
No	32.2	40.7	41.8	55.0
If a referendum on Belarus' entry into the European Union were held now, how would you vote? (11'06)				
Yes	34.8	38.4	36.9	35.5
No	35.3	39.7	35.0	34.3
Would not vote	17.6	14.5	16.8	16.4
If you were to choose between unification with Russia and membership of the European Union, what would you choose?(01'07)				
Unification with Russia	47.1	56.0	44.9	51.5
EU membership	35.2	31.5	33.7	24.4
Do you think that the West takes a hostile attitude to Belarus and that Belarusians should be wary of it?(09'05)				
Yes	36.5	50.0	43.1	50.2
No	51.3	35.5	38.7	38.1
Confidence in international organisations (UN, OSCE, EU, European Parliament, Council of Europe etc.)(09'05)				
Confident	42.4	29.8	45.0	39.3
Mistrustful	23.6	39.4	39.7	37.2

The idea of EU membership is more popular in Minsk than in other cities in Belarus. The opposition could take advantage of pro-EU sentiments in the capital.

Non-patriotic youths

Belarus has an open economy. In addition, the country borders EU member states in the west and north. Therefore, people's sympathetic attitude to

the EU, registered in national polls, poses a serious threat to Belarusian stability and Lukashenka's autocratic regime. The Belarusian leader is aware of the threat. Let me quote one of his statements to prove it. "Neither the government nor local authorities should forget that we must considerably raise people's incomes in the next few years. If, for instance, wages in the neighbouring countries amount to $1000, we must follow suit. We must not lag behind."[5]

Respondents' answers to the question, "If you had an opportunity, would you accept temporary employment in a European Union country?" prove that he had reasons to worry. A poll conducted in December 2007 found 47.7 percent willing to accept a temporary job in the EU. Taking into consideration the fact that one in three Belarusians is a retiree, nearly all working-age Belarusians would like to work in the EU. The number is indicative of the poor competitiveness of "the Belarusian model of economic development", touted by the pro-government media.

Table 10 helps trace changes in the number of Belarusians seeking to move to other countries for permanent residence. The first thing that catches one's eye is the lack of any change in the numbers. The total number of people seeking to leave the country has not changed over the last eight years. Interestingly, the proportion did not change when Lukashenka's approval ratings hit an all-time low in 2003, when people's income stopped rising, and when it hit an all-time high before the 2006 presidential election. It did not increase considerably amid inflation fears that gripped the nation in December 2007.

Table 10. Answers to the question "Would you like to move to another country for permanent residence?" in various opinion polls, %

Answer	11'99	11'00	10'01	09'02	09'03	06'04	06'06	12'07
To Germany	15.2	14.1	18.5	13.3	13.2	13.5	11.4	9.0
To the United States	11.5	11.1	6.1	8.6	7.7	9.8	7.2	8.7
To Russia	1.3	3.2	3.6	4.3	6.5	6.3	4.3	5.6
To Poland	3.9	3.1	5.8	5.7	4.9	5.4	5.0	4.3
To Baltic countries	1.8	1.3	1.8	1.7	1.7	3.8	2.9	2.7
To another country	4.7	7.1	6.3	4.7	4.8	4.0	2.7	5.7
Total	48.8	39.9	48.0	45.4	42.9	47.9	42.4	44.7
I do not want to move anywhere	61.2	60.1	52.0	54.6	57.1	52.1	57.6	55.3

[5] Doklad "Vozrozhdenie malykh gorodov i poselkov — prioritetnaja zadacha sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitija strany" 29.12.2007

Although the total number of Belarusians willing to settle in another country has not changed considerably, certain variations can be observed in their choices. Germany and the United States were less attractive destinations in December 2007 as more people were contemplating departure for a neighbouring country, mainly for Russia. People who change their country of residence are usually quite practical. Flush with money from oil and gas sales, Russia offered bright prospects to young and educated Belarusians.

The above-mentioned change in the preferences of anti-patriots takes us back to the problem of the competitiveness of the much-advertised "Belarusian model of economic development." It is definitely losing out to its neighbours.

Not surprisingly, people critical of Lukashenka are twice as likely as his supporters to declare their readiness to leave the country (60.2 percent vs. 32.1 percent). As a rule, they are younger and more educated than their political opponents, i.e. have more of the assets (personal resources) mentioned earlier. They think they have better prospects in market economies. Table 11 shows a link between the desire to move to another country, readiness to vote for Lukashenka and the age of respondents. That a correlation exists is obvious. As people grow older, they are less disposed to changing their lifestyles (and places of residence) in a radical way, and develop a greater need of support from the state.

Table 11. Links between the desire to move to another country, readiness to vote for Lukashenka and age.

Age	**18-29**	**30-39**	**40-49**	**50-59**	**60 and over**
Do not want to move	27.8	50.0	57.4	63.7	77.8
Ready to vote for Lukashenka	19.2	25.4	34.3	45.5	70.7

Thus, Belarusians in their productive prime do not need a country called Belarus with an authoritarian regime. They prefer to realise themselves abroad. As people grow older, they tend to have a better opinion of their country - in fact it would be more correct to say "of the state," not "of their country." They hold on to the state that, as Russian political analyst T. Sergeytsev put it, "tries to justify its existence through social payoffs, on the basis of which it wants to possess socially secure citizens in a feudalist way, to exploit their dependency and their votes."[6] As long as such a state has enough money to pay out social

[6] T. Sergeytsev, *Proekt Demokratii*. http://shh.neolain.lv/seminar14/alm8.sergejsev.htm

benefits, the mutual dependence of an authoritarian state and the citizens addicted to its generous handouts guarantees political and social stability.

"Oil offshoring" and geopolitical priorities

The idea of fixed opinion patterns in Belarusian society does not seem to hold water, taking into account the fluctuations in pro-EU sentiment noted in Table 3. Support for possible EU membership plunged from 60.9 percent in December 2002 to 36 percent in October 2008. Clearly, a change in social values cannot explain such a large deviation over such a short period of time.

Values evolve so slowly that it is almost impossible to trace changes using national opinion polls. Surveys usually reflect changes in public sentiments. The steep decline in support for EU membership is a phenomenon of the same type. After generous social payouts made before the second presidential election in 2001, most Belarusians were unhappy that their incomes stopped rising in the following years.

Let us examine Table 12. The second presidential poll was held in September 2001. That explains a rise in the number of optimistic replies to the question, "How has life changed for you and your family since 1994?" After the election, optimism fell to its pre-election level. It should be noted that the Belarusian government took advantage of favourable terms of oil trading to launch, in late 2003, a scheme often referred to as "oil offshore."[7] The government used profits from petroleum sales to raise wages and pensions. The authorities hiked wages and pensions in the lead-up to the 2006 presidential election.

Table 12. How has changed for you and your family life since 1994?

Answer	04'01	10'01	09'02	06'06
For the better	**11.8**	**22.8**	**13.8**	**51.2**
Has not changed	27.7	34.2	33.1	27.1
For the worse	50.7	38.3	48.5	17.4

[7] "Oil offshore" enabled the Belarusian government to earn billions in profits by buying Russian oil at below-market prices without paying any duty, and selling petroleum products to Europe at market prices.

Rises in income levels are a very strong factor that can contribute to geopolitical change, and could be significantly influencing Belarusians' views on politics and the economy. Table 13 provides examples that prove this assumption.

Table 13. Electorate structure

Types of electorate	04'00	10'01	09'02	06'06
Stalwart supporters of Lukashenka*	15.5	20.2	10.7	21.9
Undecided	54.2	43.9	48.0	47.0
Stalwart opponents of Lukashenka**	30.3	35.9	41.3	31.1

* Stalwart supporters are ready to vote for Lukashenka in the next presidential elections and elections for the president of a Russian-Belarusian Union State. They approve of his performance in the job and consider him an ideal politician.
** Stalwart opponents would not support Lukashenka on all the above-mentioned points.

Naturally, rises and falls in income are not the only factor responsible for changes in public moods. For instance, what explanation can be given for an abrupt decline in support for EU membership in September 2008? (See Table 14). The steep fall over a short period came as a surprise to sociologists, especially in the context of the government's efforts to improve relations with the European Union and EU-friendly statements made by officials in the run-up to the parliamentary elections.

Table 14. If a referendum on Belarus' entry into the European Union were held now, how would you vote? %

Answer	12'05	11'06	12'07	03'08	09'08	10'08
For	32.0	36.0	37.1	35.4	**26.7**	36,0
Against	26.8	36.2	35.0	35.4	51.9	39.1
Would not vote	20.4	15.5	16.3	15.4	12.2	14.0
Failed/ found it difficult to answer	20.8	12.3	11.6	13.8	9.2	10.9

A recorded surge in support for unification with Russia, from 38.7 percent in 2008 to 46.3 percent in September 2008, proves that the waning of pro-EU sentiment is not a result of possible polling flaws. Just like the decrease in pro-EU support, it is difficult to link the rise in pro-Russian responses to specific developments in Belarusian-Russian relations. The considerable change seems to have been unmotivated.

The war that broke out between Russia and Georgia in August is the only possible explanation of the unexpected change in attitudes. The conflict did not go unnoticed in Belarus. Belarusians did not hesitate to answer the question, "Who do you think is to blame for the conflict between Georgia, South Ossetia and Russia?" Most respondents, 55.9 percent, blamed Georgia, 35.1 percent pointed the finger at the United States and only 8.4 percent accused Russia.

That such a large role was assigned to the United States in a local armed conflict in the Caucasus may at first seem surprising , but the answer to the puzzle is quite simple.

Russia's Levada Centre conducted a survey between August 15-18, hot on the heels of the war. The poll found 49 percent of Russians blaming the war on "the US leadership's desire to expand its influence to Russia's neighbours." Only 32 percent noted the role of the Georgian leadership with "its discriminatory policy with regard to the Ossetia and Abkhazia population." Thus, the Kremlin's large-scale brainwashing campaign worked, but only to some extent. Its reverberations were detected in Belarus by an IISEPS poll conducted in September.

The Russian media have retained much of their influence in Belarus in the years that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. They succeeded in imposing on Belarusians a pro-Russian view of the war. Clearly, public opinion went back to its normal state as soon as the war was over and the discourse of the elites was exhausted.

It should be noted that the maximum deviation of public opinion from its average level is greater in Table 4 than it is in Table 3. Not surprisingly, deviations are always smaller if respondents face a tough choice, in this particular case between Russia and the EU.

The conclusion made earlier, that Belarusian views on economic, political and social trends depend on changes in income levels, can be substantiated by examining answers to the question, "How do you think people live in neighbouring countries?" (Table 15). As people's financial situation improved, more respondents believed that living standards were declining in neighbouring countries. Such a change in comparative assessments had nothing to do with the real situation in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

To conclude the examination of Belarusians' geopolitical priorities, let us briefly dwell on the eastern vector of Belarusian integration. As indicated in

Table 16, support for a merger of Belarus and Russia into one state fell considerably after 2001. This trend is attributable to corrections made by the ruling elite to its integration plans. In the first few years after Belarus gained its independence, the pre-Lukashenka and Lukashenka ruling elites regarded Russia as the only guarantor of its political survival. But as time went by, its need for internal legitimacy grew and it came to realise the importance of creating a sense of national identity. For that purpose, it sponsored state ideology textbooks and courses in 2003 and launched the "For Belarus" pro-independence campaign in the lead-up to the 2006 presidential election.

Table 15. How do you think people live in neighbouring countries?

Answer	Better than in Belarus			Living is the same as in Belarus			Living is worse than in Belarus		
	03'05	04'06	08'06	03'05	04'06	08'06	03'05	04'06	08'06
In Poland	63.1	50.8	46.2	15.2	26.0	22.5	2.9	11.4	14.9
In Latvia	47.6	39.7	34.1	19.1	26.3	23.3	6.4	18.0	21.9
In Lithuania	45.7	36.8	33.1	20.8	27.3	25.0	6.2	20.0	21.9
In Russia	28.9	24.6	21.2	40.4	40.7	44.6	15.9	28.1	23.6
In Ukraine	11.2	10.9	8.4	30.9	26.0	29.3	41.6	56.1	50.6

Table 16. Best option for relations between Belarus and Russia

Answer	09'98	11'99	08'00	08'01	02'06
A union of independent states	28.1	33.4	37.2	41.2	41.5
Good-neighbourly relations between two independent states	50.8	42.4	37.7	35.9	41.4
Unification into one state	20.1	21.8	22.5	21.2	14.8

Naturally, a change was observed not only in support for integration with Russia but also in Belarusians' perceptions of the acceptable degree of integration (see Table 17). More Belarusians want the government to maintain the same relations with Russia as with other CIS countries.

Certainly, propaganda spread throughout the media does have an effect on Belarusians' geopolitical preferences. But its role should not be exaggerated. Given the socio-cultural divide and in spite of their complete domination, the state-controlled media can only influence supporters of the authoritarian government. In the same manner, the opposition media has an observable effect only on ideo-

logical supporters of the opposition. Moreover, the example of a change in public opinion following the Russian-Georgian war proves that large-scale brainwashing campaigns involving the media can have only a short-term effect.

Table 17. What option for integration of Belarus and Russia would you prefer personally? *(more than one answer possible)*

Answer	12'02	03'04	11'04	06'06	12'07
The countries should form a union of independent states bound by close political and economic ties	51.7	50.1	47.8	44.7	43.8
Relations should be the same as with other CIS countries	19.7	27.0	32.1	25.1	36.3
The countries should form one state with one president, government, army, flag and currency	21.2	13.8	11.6	21.8	13.1

Effects of propaganda on geopolitical choices

Table 18 makes it possible to assess the effects of the anti-Western propaganda campaign launched by the Belarusian authorities in the lead-up to the 2006 presidential election (it added 10.5 percentage points to perceptions of the "threat from the West", compared with June 2004). The table lists issues of concern to Belarusians, depending on their significance. Table 15 suggests that Belarusians do not perceive a threat posed by the West to be the most pressing worry.

Table 19 shows the top concerns of supporters and opponents of the Belarusian leader in December 2007. The issues are arranged in three groups. The first features worries shared by the supporters and opponents of Lukashenka. The second includes issues of greater concern to Lukashenka supporters than to opponents, and the third vice versa.

Table 19 suggests that all Belarusians share concerns about the economy (an industrial downturn and rising prices), the decline of national culture and a split in society (it should be noted that the latter is too abstract an issue for the public).

A threat from the West worries three times as many Lukashenka supporters as his opponents. Quite unexpectedly, more Lukashenka supporters worry about a threat to Belarus' independence. This may be a result of a government-sponsored propaganda campaign: the state-controlled media started giving prominence to the issue in 2006.

Table 18. What problems are the most pressing for our country and its citizens?" % (more than one answer is possible)

Answer	09'99	09'02	06'04	06'06	12'07	*
Rising prices	82.7	71.9	73.2	60.1	84.2	+24.2
Poverty	73.2	60.6	58.0	19.5	34.7	+15.2
Crime	44.6	49.4	37.3	23.2	26.9	+3.7
Unemployment	35.7	35.3	49.7	37.0	38.3	+1.3
Industrial downturn	31.8	38.7	22.2	18.7	20.6	+1.9
Corruption, bribery	29.7	27.8	35.6	27.6	33.4	+5.8
Chernobyl aftermath	29.5	19.7	21.1	25.5	22.3	—3.2
Lack of law and order	24.6	27.4	32.9	22.1	21.3	—0.8
Human rights violations	23.3	25.2	30.4	22.1	25.6	+3.5
Decline of national culture	13.1	10.2	13.8	10.8	12.8	+2.0
Threat from the West	**9.3**	**3.6**	**7.7**	**18.2**	**12.0**	**—6.2**
Belarus' international isolation	9.1	14.4	14.7	14.4	14.5	+0.1
Split in society	5.0	5.2	8.9	7.3	7.2	—0.1
Risk of Belarus losing its independence	—	10.2	7.2	8.3	8.4	+0.1
Population decline	—	—	19.8	21.9	20.1	—1.8

* The difference between the results of polls conducted in December 2007 and June 2006

Table 19. What issues are the most pressing for our country and its citizens? Replies have been sorted based on the respondent' attitude to Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Answer	Lukashenka supporters	Opponents of Lukashenka	Difference
Group 1			
Decline of national culture	12.5	11.5	+1.0
Industrial downturn	19.9	20.6	—0.7
Split in society	8.5	9.1	—0.6
Rising prices	84.1	83.7	—0.4
Group 2			
Crime	35.1	19.6	+15.5
Chernobyl aftermath	27.8	14.3	+13.5
Threat from the West	**17.4**	**6.1**	**+11.3**
Population decline	23.6	16.1	+7.5
Risk of Belarus losing its independence	9.8	4.4	+5.8
Group 3			
Human rights violations	11.5	43.3	—31.8
Poverty	25.7	45.5	—19.8
Corruption, bribery	26.9	40.7	—13.8
Belarus' international isolation	9.0	22.0	—13.0
Lack of law and order	18.0	27.9	—9.9
Unemployment	37.0	42.4	—5.4

Those opposed to Lukashenka increasingly worry about human rights abuses, Belarus' international isolation, the rule of law, corruption and unemployment.

So, how do supporters and opponents of the president perceive the West while watching TV? There is no definite answer to this question, because the one who "orders the picture" always acts to suit the politics of the moment.

Quotes from a news conference that Lukashenka gave on 20 March 2006 testify to the use of diverse approaches to drive home certain ideas.

"Despite the overt foreign diktat and colossal pressure from the outside, they did not manage to break us down. Quite the contrary, these efforts achieved the opposite effect. The Belarusian people are a nation that cannot be manipulated. It makes no sense to put pressure on it. The results of voting proved this with all certainty." In this remark, Lukashenka portrayed the West as an enemy, indicating that the nation should rally round him to resist its pressure. He also seizes the opportunity to create an image of a firm and invincible nation.

"Secondly, and this is probably the most important argument against those who criticise us, early voting has been practised in most countries of the world, including super-democracies, in inverted commas, like the United States, Germany and others. They do not see it as falsification. Moreover, they vote by mail. Imagine us introducing the same clause and voting by mail? We would probably be wiped off the surface of the Earth."

In this statement he takes a different approach. He seeks to discredit his opponents by using the argument, "Do not blame the mirror for the ugly face." He tries to make it clear to Belarusians that the West's claims of ideological and cultural superiority are unfounded.

"Thirdly, what kind of falsification are they talking about, if more than 1,200 international observers, more than 30,000 local observers and more than 1,000 journalists monitored the election? I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to local and international observers, most of whom contributed their constructive deeds to the conduct of a really free and fair election." In this statement, Lukashenka unexpectedly goes positive, depicting the international community as the highest criterion for appraising the achievements of the Belarusian regime.

"Belarusians take a very respectful attitude to the peoples of the United States of America and the European Union. But this does not mean that we

are ready to modify ourselves to meet some standards applied by Washington, Brussels or Warsaw. Whether others like it or not, the Belarusians will remain Belarusians in the 21st century — a European nation with its own state, culture and traditions." In this remark, Lukashenka indicates that the nation follows "a special path," employing a negative demonstration to justify its choice. If there is no West, there is no "special path."

Table 20 features results of an IISEPS poll conducted in April 2007 and a Levada Centre[8] survey performed in March 2006. The propaganda of the "special path", carried out over many years, seems to have found a receptive audience. More than half of Belarusians said that the nation follows a special path.

Table 20. What do you think Belarus' historic path is? What do you think Russia's historic path is?

Answer	Belarus (04'07)	Russia (03'06)
The common path of European civilisation	17.3	29.5
The country should return to the Soviet path	25.5	19.2
Unique, special path	56.8	51.2
Failed to answer	0.4	0.1

"The dynamics of socioeconomic development in the last few years, our people's industriousness and their sense of purpose give me confidence that the living standards of Belarusian families will climb to the average European level. On the international arena, we will continue to pursue a peaceful multidimensional foreign policy, strengthen good neighbourly relations with everybody. Belarus has never threatened anyone. But we will defend our independence and national interests by all civilised means. Me and you, we have earned it through hard work." This is yet another reference to the "special path," with Lukashenka expecting the West to attest that this is the right choice. Belarus, which has borders with EU countries, cannot fence itself off from the West. That is why he often evokes the West in his statements.

As noted earlier, the government controls all major media outlets in the country, while the opposition has access to a handful of periodicals and foreign-based broadcast media that have a small audience. Table 21 features results of a survey conducted in October 2008.

[8] The Levada Centre was established by prominent Russian sociologist Yury Levada in 2003.

Table 21. What TV channels do you watch?

Answer	Watch	Do not watch
Belarusian TV channels (BT, ONT, STV etc.)	90.1	9.1
Russian TV channels (ORT, RTR, NTV etc.)	84.0	14.4
Local TV	46.2	51.0
Cable TV	39.0	58.3
Satellite TV	18.3	78.6
Euronews Russian Service	16.2	80.5
Polish TV	8.4	88.0
RTVI weekly show for Belarus	7.6	88.9
New independent channel Belsat	4.1	92.3

The Internet remains the only source of information uncontrolled by the government. Table 22 shows an increase in the number of Internet users in the last eight years. Internet penetration has nearly quadrupled among adults from 9.7 percent to 35.9 percent. The number of users has been rising by 25 percent a year.

Table 22. Do you use the Internet?

Answer	08'01	12'02	09'03	11'04	12'05	11'06	05'07	09'08
Yes	9.7	15.9	17.3	16.4	24.7	29.2	30.0	35.9
No	90.0	80.3	81.2	72.8	72.6	70.6	68.8	63.8

Let us paint a socio-political portrait of the population according to people's attitudes to the Internet (see Table 23). Internet users are more likely to support Belarus' entry into the EU. At present, one can say with a high degree of certainty that most opponents of the government in Belarus have no problem receiving information from news outlets not controlled by the authorities. On the other hand, the Internet has failed to change opinion patterns in society, because public opinion depends more on personal assets than on access to information.

Certainly, Belarusians form their opinions on life in EU countries not only on the basis of media reports. They also get first-hand experience. An April 2006 poll found that 12.1 percent had travelled to neighbouring countries to visit friends or buy goods. Of those who had travelled, 46.4 went abroad several times a year, and 10.2 percent several times a month. It appears that most people in the latter group were so-called "shuttle traders."

Table 23. A socio-political portrait of the population according to attitudes to the Internet, %

Answer	Internet users (35.9)	Non-users (63.8)
Do you think the country is headed in the right or wrong direction?		
In the right direction (53.4)	38.8	61.8
In the wrong direction (30.0)	44.9	21.8
Would you like to see drastic changes in the Belarusian government's internal and foreign policies?		
Yes (52.2)	61.9	46.9
No (15.6)	13.9	16.6
I do not care (14.7)	10.4	17.0
Do you have confidence in the president of Belarus?		
I have confidence (51.9)	34.9	61.5
I do not have confidence (32.1)	46.0	24.3
If you were to choose between unification with Russia and membership of the European Union, what would you choose?		
Unification with Russia (54.0)	38.9	62.6
Membership of the European Union (26.2)	43.2	16.8
Do you watch Euronews Russian Service?		
I do (13.9)	26.7	6.7
I don't (83.1)	70.3	90.6

Belarusians can also learn about life in other countries from foreigners visiting Belarus. In April 2006, 49.6 percent of respondents said they had met foreigners, CIS residents not included, in the last three years. Respondents had met foreigners only once (11.4 percent), several times (20.3 percent) and many times (8.9 percent).

Still, independent news outlets play an important role in changing the perceptions of Belarusians about life in the countries that joined the EU in 2004 for the better (see Table 24). One should note both a rise in positive replies and a fall in the number of those who failed to answer.

Table 24. In May 2004 Belarus' neighbours — Poland, Lithuania and Latvia — joined the European Union. Do you think the life of people in these countries changed for the better or for the worse in the last four years?

Answer	12'05	03'08
For the better	19.4	38.3
For the worse	23.7	12.8
Has not changed	25.2	26.0
Failed/found it difficult to answer	31.7	22.9

First-hand information might have made Belarusians invulnerable to massive anti-Polish propaganda that came in response to the adoption of the Polish Charter Law, which granted extensive privileges to people of Polish descent living in the post-Soviet region.

Table 25. What is your attitude to the so-called Polish Charter — a document giving visa and other privileges to ethnic Poles living outside Poland?

Answer	%
I do not care about it	44.4
I approve of the decision	42.6
I disapprove of the decision	12.6
Failed to answer	0.4

In conclusion of this brief analysis of Belarusians' geopolitical preferences, it is interesting to consider people's attitudes to NATO. It is particularly interesting to compare the results of polls conducted in Belarus and Ukraine (December 2005)[9].

Table 26. If a referendum were conducted in Belarus (Ukraine) on the question of entry into NATO, how would you vote?

Answer	Belarus 04'06	Ukraine 12'05
Against	46.2	57
For	14.4	16
Would not vote	22.6	9
Failed to answer	16.8	18

As indicated in Table 26, the proportion of opponents to possible membership of NATO is similar in Belarus and Ukraine, despite the fact the Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko advocates his country's entry into the alliance, while his Belarusian counterpart has been consistently building a military alliance with Russia to counter "NATO's aggressive plans." The poll results are yet another piece of evidence that propaganda plays a secondary role in forming opinions about the nation's geopolitical priorities.

Based on our theoretical assumptions about the nature of the socio-cultural divide in Belarusian society, it is possible to predict a rise in pro-EU sentiment in Belarus in 2009. It will be fuelled by the deepening economic crisis, which has been primarily imported to Belarus from Russia.

[9] The Kyiv International Sociology Institute, *http://www.kiis.com.ua/index.php?id=4&sp=1&num=24).*

BELARUS-EU RELATIONS: NEW TRENDS

Valery Karbalevich

Attempts to establish a dialogue after an oil and gas row

The Belarusian government revised its approach to internal and foreign policy following a row with Russia over oil and gas prices in late 2006 and early 2007. Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka was perfectly satisfied with the pattern of Belarusian-Russian relations established over the previous 12 years. Russia supplied Belarus with cheap energy, thereby helping the government to satisfy the material needs of the electorate. In addition, it offered Minsk political support and military assistance, and gave Lukashenka a free hand in achieving his ambitions for political power. The friendship with Russia propped up Belarus' economy, helped the government fulfil its social contract with society, and was the cornerstone of the government's foreign policy and ideology. Lukashenka's image was as Russia's best friend and enemy of the West. The Belarusian leader prided himself on stability, delaying reform. Relations with Russia formed the basis of the world created in people's minds by official propaganda, and seemed to be a reliable anchor holding the country in a safe haven, away from disturbances and the crushing waves of globalisation.

But all that suddenly collapsed. Moscow's demand that Belarus pay market prices for gas and oil ruined the established world order and knocked out the foundation pillar of the Belarusian development model, resulting in the deconstruction of its support structure. It is impossible to find an adequate and sufficient replacement for it.

Immediately after the gas and oil spat with Russia, Belarus offered to begin a dialogue with the European Union. Lukashenka repeatedly made overtures to the West in interviews with journalists from major European news outlets. That was Minsk's most serious offer of normalisation to the EU since 1996. Lukashenka's interview published in Germany's *Die Welt*, for instance, was seen as a U-turn away from Russia.

The Belarusian leader expected Brussels to clash with Moscow over political control of Belarus, under new circumstances that emerged after New Year Eve's oil and gas feud. He expected both sides to restore old preferences, offer new ones, and make new attractive offers. Minsk would be able to choose and reap the benefits from both sides, making steps in one direction or the other.

The idea was quite rational in itself. Playing the East off against the West, trying to woo both major players in a bid to win economic and political concessions from both sides is a well-known geopolitical pattern of behaviour, widespread in global politics. Yugoslavia and Romania employed such tactics during the Cold War. It enabled the two governments to avoid making radical changes to their economic and political systems and get away with cosmetic modifications and small sacrifices.

But the Belarusian government ran into a number of difficulties trying to put the idea into practice in 2007. One of the major problems was a wide gap between expectations and offers in the political horse trading between Minsk and Brussels. The EU gave priority to democratic values. In late 2006, Brussels proposed a programme of assistance to Belarus but made it conditional upon democratic change.

Minsk initially refused to discuss the conditions, suggesting that the sides build relations around pragmatic interests rather than common values. This was also a brilliant idea. But, in the grand scheme of things, it turned out that Belarus had nothing to offer. Minsk did not have a commodity valuable enough to have the EU turn a blind eye to human rights abuses. Azerbaijan, for instance, can offer oil. Uzbekistan can offer natural gas, while Libya can pledge to stop supporting international terrorists.

What bargaining chip could Lukashenka use in negotiations with the EU? He could promise that his country would stop pursuing the creation of a union with Russia and drift away from Russia's orbit. In an interview with *Die Welt*, published on 25 January 2007, Lukashenka made overtures to the EU, hint-

ed at threats from Russia ("you'll be next") and suggested that Belarus could guarantee reliable protection of the European Union's eastern border.

But politicians in the EU did not take his statements seriously, because a few days later he dismissed "wild speculations that Lukashenka flirts with the West" at his meeting with Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, and Aleksandr Prokhanov, editor of the Russian newspaper *Zavtra*. "I am well aware of how I am perceived in the West and what the West wants from us," he said. He enthusiastically talked about a union with Russia. "We will always be with the Russian people. If you would like to call us Russia's outpost in the west, we do not mind, we have never denied that."

Later, Lukashenka reiterated his commitment to Russia as a military ally, commenting that Belarus would stop "tanks advancing to Moscow from the West."

Thus, Lukashenka indicated, Belarus could be "an outpost" of Russia and the EU at the same time. Minsk tried to sell the same thing to two buyers. He expected the EU to offer a good price for his conflict with Russia, and hoped that Moscow would buy his flirtations with the EU. However, when he publicly made mutually exclusive offers to both sides, the price went down. Western politicians did not buy Lukashenka's rhetoric.

Apart from making military plans (building outposts), the Belarusian leader aired other proposals. He said that Belarus could offer the EU reliable transit guarantees. However, Belarus' reputation as a transit partner was badly damaged by the three-day disruption in the flow of Russian oil to the EU during a Belarusian-Russian dispute over prices in early 2007.

Conflicts with transit nations prompted Russia and the EU to consider bypass routes. In addition to the trans-Baltic North European Pipeline, Gazprom decided to build the South Stream pipeline to transport natural gas across the Black sea to Bulgaria.

Belarus also offered the EU economic cooperation. But its invitation of European investors to Belarus would make sense only if the government launched a large-scale privatisation programme. The authorities have made many declarations about economic liberalisation, but have taken few real measures in this direction so far.

In other words, Belarus and the EU had no serious agenda for a fully-fledged dialogue. The EU's decision to suspend Belarus' benefits under the Generalised

System of Preferences in 2007 was a signal that the bloc took a tough position on Belarus because it was disappointed by window-dressing. The EU signalled its willingness to change its attitude to Belarus on condition of meaningful and far-reaching changes in the country. In other words, the Belarusian government had failed in its effort to normalise relations with the EU.

The Russian-Georgian war and the beginning of a new affair

The situation changed dramatically in August 2008. An armed conflict broke out between Russia and Georgia. Earlier, during major international crises that heightened tensions between the West and Russia, Minsk had always shown off its loyalty to Moscow, and had often been even sterner in criticising the West. Take, for instance, Minsk's reaction to NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia over Kosovo in 1999, the 2003 Iraqi crisis or the alliance's eastward expansion. Belarus received generous subsidies from the Kremlin in return.

The Russian-Georgian war seemed to offer Minsk an excellent opportunity to prove its loyalty to Moscow and demand a new portion of financial subsidies. Unexpectedly, Minsk took a position close to neutral in one of the bitterest stand-offs between Russia and the West since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The Belarusian government delayed decision-making on the issue of recognising Georgia's breakaway provinces Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

Moreover, as international tensions over the war boiled over, the Belarusian government renewed its effort to mend fences with the EU. Why? In my view, there were several reasons for this change in the country's foreign policy.

Relations between Belarus and Russia have been marred by disputes during the last few years. Lukashenka drew the paradoxical conclusion that he could blackmail Moscow into subsidising Belarus by threatening to move closer to the EU. These tactics may seem questionable, but let us consider some facts.

Days before his scheduled meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi in early 2008, Lukashenka held an ostentatious meeting with German Ambassador Herbert Weiss. The president sees the heads of foreign diplomatic missions on very rare occasions, except for the habitual meetings at

the start and the end of a tour of duty. It does not really matter what Lukashenka discussed with Ambassador Weiss, be it the weather, soccer or women. The fact of that meeting was a signal to Moscow.

Fact Two. During the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 and shortly before another trip by Lukashenka to Sochi for talks with Russia's new President Dmitry Medvedev, Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Surikov criticised Minsk for its failure to back Moscow and denounce Tbilisi over fierce fighting in South Ossetia. On the same day, Lukashenka summoned Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynaw and told him to improve ties with the EU and the United States, Moscow's opponents in a diplomatic tussle over South Ossetia. This appeared to be a deliberate move.

In addition, the conflict in the Caucasus proved that the Kremlin leadership is ready to use military force to achieve its goals, defying international law and protests from the international community. This fact alarmed Lukashenka.

The Belarusian leader found himself facing a dilemma: to take a neutral position and retain the opportunity to manoeuvre between Russia and the West, or back Moscow despite uncertainty over future bilateral relations and its vigorous effort to tighten its grip on Belarus. The Belarusian leader concluded that it would be impossible to pressure the Kremlin into concessions without a dialogue with the EU and the United States, or at least without a simulated dialogue.

If one takes a closer look at the Belarusian government's policies following Russia's invasion of Georgia, it becomes clear that Minsk made significant progress in diplomacy. Moreover, recent developments suggest that diplomatic efforts are more effective when foreign policies are not excessively directed to the East and there is more room for manoeuvre between Russia and the West.

For instance, when Russia stepped up pressure on Belarus to recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, the Belarusian leader demonstrated considerable wire-dancing skills. First, he suggested discussing the issue at a summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). At the summit, Russia suffered a diplomatic setback. Although the leaders of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan took Russia's side in the conflict, they stopped short of making any commitment to the recognition of the breakaway provinces. Despite the diplomatic failure, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev put on a brave face, saying that each country will make an independent decision on the issue.

Lukashenka explained how the matter would be handled in Belarus. He said that the issue of the recognition of the two territories will be considered by the next Belarusian parliament. His position gave rise to two questions. Why can the president not do it? Does he not have enough power? The foreign ministry also could issue a recognition statement. Belarusian law does not specify who is responsible for dealing with matters like that.

The other question: if parliament was to decide on the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, why could the current parliament, which was in session at the time, not consider the issue and why was there a need to wait for a new parliament to be elected? It was absolutely clear that the Belarusian leader was playing for time, expecting the proposal to drown in a sea of red tape.

The motives for such behaviour are quite clear. The main reason is that Lukashenka did not want to be the odd-one-out. In the context of other CSTO allies' reluctance to recognise the breakaway territories, Minsk's immediate and unyielding support for Moscow would bolster the widely held perception of him as "the Kremlin's puppet." This is a humiliating status for Lukashenka, who seeks to play a significant role in international politics. So he decided to wait and see who else will be persuaded by the Kremlin to follow Russia's suit, apart from Nicaragua, and make conclusions afterwards.

Also, since Belarus' recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is of such great importance to Russia, Lukashenka wanted the Kremlin to pay a good price for it. He could play the card when Minsk and Moscow were to negotiate a gas contract for 2009. It would be clear then how much Belarus' recognition costs in US dollars.

Finally, the issue should be examined in the context of Belarus' effort to mend fences with the West. With the United States and the EU seemingly prepared to make concessions to Minsk, Lukashenka feared that Belarus' recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia may dash prospects for better relations.

In truth, when compared to 2007, the West showed a much greater interest in cooperation with Minsk in 2008. There were several reasons for that.

Firstly, the Belarusian government took some real steps to open up its politics — it released political prisoners, took some measures to reform the economy, and took a more tolerant attitude to the opposition during the parliamentary election campaign.

Secondly, unlike in 2007, Minsk did not only declare but also made real attempts to distance itself from Moscow, during the Russian-Georgian war. The West was encouraged by the Belarusian leader's reluctance to recognise the Georgian breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

Thirdly, tensions heightened between Russia and the West as a result of the Caucasian conflict. Wars are usually played by different rules. Disassociation from Russia was a commodity rising in price, and the West was willing to pay a higher price for it. Belarus could seek the same treatment as Kazakhstan or Azerbaijan, which also have serious problems with democracy, but the United States and the EU are not as principled in their approach because the countries have oil and gas, and maintain friendly ties with the West.

Finally, the September 23-28 elections for the House of Representatives were seen by the West as a good opportunity for the Belarusian authorities to display willingness to liberalise the political system.

The EU was fed up with failed attempts to democratise Belarus. Voices that called for an end to the isolation of the country and a political rapprochement with Minsk took the upper hand.

House of Representatives elections: A turning point

The EU placed conditions of normalising and democratising the electoral process in Belarus. The House of Representatives election held in late September was seen as a test of the Belarusian authorities' willingness to take steps toward democracy. On the other hand, Lukashenka threatened before the election to break off all dialogue with the West if it refused to recognise the parliamentary vote as democratic.

However, the election ended in the traditional way for Belarus, with the OSCE observation mission concluding that it fell short of international democratic standards.

It seemed that Minsk would react in its usual manner to the critical report by Western observers. In particular, the Belarusian state-controlled media were expected to pounce on the OSCE monitors' verdict, shame the West, accusing it of double standards and a biased attitude toward Belarus, and use

all the other standard tools of waging ideological war. That would have put an end to Belarus' short affair with the West and Lukashenka's threats to break off all dialogue would have come true.

Paradoxically, and quite unexpectedly at first glance, the Belarusian authorities used an absolutely different script. They stopped short of declaring an ideological war on the West. Instead, they made a feint that could be described as elegant. If you cannot change the thing itself, you can still change the perception of it. The authorities changed negative for positive, black for white, by telling trusting TV viewers that the OSCE monitors made an overall positive assessment of the election despite noting some flaws. It was a brilliant move courtesy of British PR guru Lord Bell.

The farther into the forest, the deeper the trees. One day later, the Belarusian leader met with Anne-Marie Lizin, vice president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and special coordinator of the OSCE short-term observers who had a hand in writing the critical conclusions about the Belarusian election. Lukashenka admitted mistakes and offered to continue the dialogue. The move was quite unusual for Lukashenka, known for his anti-Western rhetoric. He behaved as if he wanted to apologise for his failure to keep his promise to hold a free and fair election by Western standards. In addition, Belarusian officials offered unofficial apologies to European diplomats, explaining that the Belarusian leader had ordered a free election, but authorities on the ground failed to obey. That exceptionally naive excuse was designed to mitigate confusion following the election.

So, why, despite OSCE disappointment with the election and Lukashenka's threat to end all dialogue, did Minsk do exactly the opposite, indicating its strong desire to continue the dialogue? First of all, the Belarusian leader sensed the moods prevailing in Western capitals, in particular European politicians' eagerness to normalise relations with Belarus. He based his tactics on the assumption that the West has little or no option. Confident that the EU and the United States want normalisation with Belarus so much that they would swallow the pill, Lukashenka hiked the price.

Lukashenka proved right. That time, the West also behaved itself in an unusual way, not as it would have acted before. European politicians and diplomats made the best of a bad bargain. They pretended as if nothing unexpected had happened and expressed a readiness to continue the dialogue. EU leaders and institutions were not as critical in their assessments of the election as be-

fore. They only expressed regret and hope that the dialogue would continue. Some EU ambassadors bought the theory that the top leadership is willing to change, but hard-line officials on the ground were slow to act. The OSCE observation mission's criticism of the election did not discourage the two sides from continuing the dialogue.

Since the beginning of the dialogue in mid-August, the West had made token steps to encourage Minsk to drift away from Russia. On September 4, the US Treasury Department lifted for six months a ban on dealing with two Belarusian companies, Lakafarba and Polatsk Shklovalakno. Western politicians held a series of meetings with high-ranking Belarusian officials. Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, chairman-in-office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), paid a visit to the Belarusian capital. He was the highest-ranking European politician to visit Minsk in several years. For the first time since 1997, the Belarusian foreign minister was invited to Brussels to meet with EU foreign ministers.

As the result of a new policy, the EU on October 13 suspended for six months a visa ban on Alyaksandr Lukashenka and 35 other Belarusian officials. This was a landmark decision in the EU's new policy with regard to Minsk. It was indicative of EU readiness not only to make statements, but also to act. It was a major shift in the EU's policy with regard to Belarus.

The EU used to prioritise democratisation in Belarus, but that objective had become secondary to geopolitical goals.

Nations often revise their policies with regard to each other - this is normal. However, as a rule, decision-makers responsible for drastic changes make efforts to make their decisions seem logical to the politicised public and ordinary people. But that was a big problem.

The point is that EU officials had made it clear that the bloc's policy with regard to Belarus would depend on the conduct of the parliamentary election. They had stressed the importance of a democratic, free and fair election on so many occasions that it was seen by experts and politicians alike as a condition for rapprochement. Therefore, both the authorities and opposition looked forward to the OSCE mission's recognition or non-recognition of the parliamentary race. The issue dominated analysis stories and forecasts because it was viewed as crucial for future relations between Belarus and the EU.

However, after the election the OSCE observation mission said that the poll fell short of democratic standards. Nevertheless, the EU decided that the

travel ban should be temporarily lifted. It turned out that the compliance of the election campaign with OSCE standards was not essential for the EU's relationship with Belarus. In other words, the EU's decision appeared illogical, to say the least.

Maybe, the most comprehensible explanation for this decision by the EU's foreign ministers would be the following: both sides, Belarus and the EU, had let themselves become entangled in the gambling game called dialogue. It would be more precise to say that Minsk drew the EU into a mutual political communication process. When several steps had already been made along the way, it was not easy to back out. It was more difficult to quit the game than it had been to enter it. A certain amount of political capital had been invested. Moreover, the bulky EU interest-coordinating and decision-making machine is characterised by a powerful force of inertia.

However, a more important question is whether the EU's efforts will pay off. It may or may not be a success. Brussels probably hopes to bind Minsk with certain agreements. Any game implies that its participants play according to a set of rules. Therefore, European politicians reasoned, once the authorities had entered into the dialogue, they would find it harder to crack down on the opposition, imprison opponents of the government or recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. They hoped to encourage Lukashenka to move slowly, step by step, along the path of liberalisation and rapprochement with the West.

Apart from that, the dialogue with the West would require the authorities to introduce drastic changes into the government's ideology. Earlier, government propaganda had portrayed the West as alien to the Belarusian nation. The West was depicted as an enemy that is working day and night, making plans to capture and enslave Belarus. At the same time, Russia, China, Venezuela and Iran were painted as Belarus' real friends, allies, brothers by blood and civilisation. The government would have to explain to the people why it suddenly started seeking friendship with enemies.

There is a certain logic in this kind of reasoning. But it seems logical to European politicians only. It is common knowledge that Lukashenka is not one of them. He hates to play by the rules. More accurately, the president follows only those rules that give him an advantage.

The Belarusian ruler achieved what he had sought to accomplish since early 2007 — to improve relations with the West without changing the author-

itarian governance system in the country. He expects the EU to shelve its 12 conditions calling for democratisation in Belarus, hide them in the darkest corner so that they will no longer be an eyesore and will not be reminiscent of the noble causes of the past. The president has won an almost bloodless diplomatic victory. In general, he made no any other serious concessions than the release of three opponents from prison.

Therefore, there was a great chance that Lukashenka would view the EU policy shift as his victory and a sign of weakness on the part of the EU. In that case, he would not consider it necessary to open up his politics. The flawed parliamentary election was a signal that he was reluctant to change. Moreover, many opposition politicians feared that the reconciliatory gestures by the EU would be interpreted by the regime as a blank cheque for a new crackdown on opponents. Incidentally, after casting his ballot at the polling station, Lukashenka predicted that the opposition would disappear after the election.

An urgent need for investment prompted Lukashenka to seek closer ties with the West. The need arose from dramatic social changes in Belarus. Between 2003 and 2008, Belarus was flush with money from petroleum sales as the country was an offshoring destination for Russian oil companies. Consumer spending rose steeply during those years. People's incomes increased and relatively cheap credit was made available for buying apartments, cars and consumer goods. Lukashenka's electoral base also changed. He had previously relied on working-class voters and collective farmers, but later expanded his base to include people of middle-income.

However, it turned out that the emerging middle class had much higher consumer standards than lower-income groups. In addition, its consumption needs were growing rapidly. If Lukashenka failed to satisfy those needs, he would lose support from the new electorate. Lukashenka found himself hostage to the growing consumption needs of that social group. This is why he declared economic liberalisation plans and vowed to attract investment from the West, despite the fact that the move conflicted with his ideology and he was aware of threats that market-oriented changes can create to his social and political system.

A global financial crisis added one more topic to the agenda of talks between the Belarusian government and the West. The Belarusian government urgently needed money to prop up the national currency and provide emergency loans to industrial enterprises hit by declining global demand.

In November 2008, Russia approved a $2 billion stabilisation loan to Belarus, making the first instalment of $1 billion available the same month. The government also requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to issue a $2 billion loan, saying the money is needed for replenishing the country's gold and foreign exchange reserves amidst the global financial crisis. An IMF mission stayed in Belarus between October 27 and November 23 to discuss the loan request with the government. The talks resumed in mid-December.

Thus, Belarus asked for loans in two places. The Belarusian authorities saw that abandoning polices tilted toward Russia and manoeuvring between centres of power could produce a quick and great effect. The temptation to receive aid from both sides was a great one. The need to play was real, and the excitement of the game prompted some risk-taking.

Needless to say, Moscow approved the loan not just for fun, but in exchange for concessions from Belarus. Minsk and Moscow had been negotiating the deal for a year. The Russian leaders no longer believed that the Belarusian leader would keep his promises. They agreed to release the second instalment only after Minsk fulfils certain conditions. Presumably, Russia expects Minsk to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or sign an accord to establish a common air defence system, or take some other steps.

But in that case, Minsk would face a new geopolitical dilemma. As soon as Belarus recognises the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and strikes an air defence deal with Russia, its negotiations with the EU may stall.

Most importantly, it will have a slim chance of obtaining a loan from the IMF. The Fund is not a charity. Political factors play an important role in its operation. The IMF is controlled by Western countries, the United States in the first place. That is why, when making decisions, it is guided not only by considerations of global economic stability, but also by geopolitical interests. The IMF's approval of a $16.5 billion to Ukraine was partly a payment for the country's geopolitical choice in favour of the EU. If Belarus scrambles firmly back into Russia's orbit, there will be no sense in helping it.

The point of Minsk's strategy of playing up to the West is to not quarrel with Russia, reconcile with Europe, and be able to receive aid from both sides. In addition, the Belarusian leader would like to have a tight grip on society and keep the opposition shut out from establishment politics. But it will take a very skilful and delicate performance, and a lot of balancing, to achieve that

goal. Will Belarus' current political system, pre-programmed to perform absolutely different functions, be able to cope with the task?

The Belarusian opposition may fall victim to the new geopolitical alignment. If the emerging trend intensifies, the leaders of opposition parties and organisations may lose a controlling stake in relations between Belarus and the West. They will be sidelined. Key decisions will be taken without any regard for their position.

A discussion is currently under way in opposition circles as to what would be better: Lukashenka's drift toward the West without any change in his autocratic style of governance, or continued isolation and heavy pressure on the Belarusian regime from the EU and the United States? The opposition is divided on the issue. For instance, former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich drew fire from the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) for advocating engagement with the Belarusian regime.

IDEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL REASONS BEHIND ANTI-WESTERN RHETORIC IN BELARUSIAN SOCIETY (POWER HOLDERS, STATE MEDIA)

Yury Likhtarovich

Introduction

The notion of 'the West' or 'the Western world' has multiple meanings, depending on the time period and region. In today's Belarus this term primarily signifies Western Europe and the United States together with the political and military institutions built around these countries, such as the European Union and NATO. This Western world is, on the one hand, idealised as a consumerist heaven, where one could simply enjoy his/her life. The West is also represented as the bearer of political and civic freedoms, social welfare and economic abundance. On the other hand, the ruling elites, as well as a part of population, stigmatise it as the cause of many of the political and economic problems faced by Belarus, thereby following the Soviet pattern. From this perspective, the West is to blame for the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the betrayal of the post-Soviet countries which wholeheartedly opened themselves up to the Western capitalism, with its lifestyle and values, but in return received hyperinflation, mass unemployment, mafia structures, extreme inequality and the loss of major assets taken over by multinational corporations instead of welfare and rule of law.

This attitude towards the Western world can be explained as a result of historical, political and ideological factors.

Firstly, from the historical point of view, Belarus has traditionally been seen as a 'crossroads country' between West and East. This border status of Belarus, between Western and Russian influences has had an impact on the political thinking of the elites and the self-identification of Belarusians. Over the last two centuries, Belarus evolved as a constituent part of larger state entities, namely the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, consistently opposed to the West. From the imperial Russian perspective, Belarusians were part of the Russian people, but had been 'spoiled' by Western and especially Polish influences. The Belarusian national movement born in these conditions in the mid-19th century was weak and developed relatively late. Being split between Polish and Russian orientations, the ruling elites most often chose to espouse a set of pan-Slavic or Soviet ideas, where the West was represented as a hostile and rival force.

Secondly, the political regime of independent Belarus that has been formed since Alyaksandr Lukashenka's coming to power in 1994 has regularly resorted to the rhetoric of "external enemies". Since the 1996 constitutional coup, it was the Western world that was blamed for plans to "destabilise" and isolate Belarus because of its criticism of authoritarian rule in the country.

Thirdly, since 2000, the Belarusian authorities have sought new ways of exerting influence on the Belarusian people to reinforce the power system built in the country. They adopted a new "ideological" doctrine of a particular "Belarusian way of development". Though elsewhere recognised as an unacceptable instrument of mass manipulation after the collapse of the USSR, in Belarus the state ideology was reanimated — though not as a totalitarian "science of the idea" that aspires both to provide a comprehensive picture of the world and to radically change it. Its rationale in Lukashenka's Belarus is limited to justifying the existing regime and its erratic policies and to preserving it. After reviewing this particularity, this paper explores the reasons behind this unprecedented appeal to ideology by the post-communist elites. On the one hand, ideology plays a legitimising role for the current regime and Lukashenka's permanent stay in power. On the other hand, it strengthens the internal cohesion of the ruling group. The introduction of ideology can be seen a kind of veil that conceals from society the political and economic changes, with the purpose of stifling high social expectations. Its anti-Western element is simply functional here: as long as Lukashenka is criticised and unaccepted by the West, the latter is the "enemy". If Lukashen-

ka were to be accepted by the West, Belarus would develop a dialogue with Western countries.

1. Anti-Western rhetoric in Belarus: historical perspectives

For most of its history, Belarus evolved as a part of larger geopolitical/state entities: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Rzeczpospolita, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. This fact deeply affected the self-identification of Belarusians and the political ideas of its elites. Among the elites there were several different conceptions of the future political development of the Belarusian lands or, later, the Belarusian nation: "unionist" (different versions of union with Russia), "federalist" (different projects for federal bonds with Poland), "regionalist" (ideas of regional cooperation with Lithuania and Ukraine), and, finally, "independence" (project of an independent Belarusian state). The entire political history of the Belarusian territories since mediaeval times can be described as an endless struggle between different groups of elites that opted for one of the above options. Moreover, the independence strand started to develop relatively late in the second half of the 19th century and is still rather weak in today's Belarus. This explains the weakness of nationalist sentiment among Belarusians and their inclination toward "unionism" - a social acceptance of the idea of integration (unification) with other states, particularly Russia. For that reason, today's Belarus is often seen as a country reluctant to develop and affirm its own national identity. For example, in March 2005 Adrian Severin, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, published his report where he described the situation of the country as "being without its own identity". By saying it, he reproduced the formula of a Canadian scholar, David Marples, who called Belarusians a "denationalised nation". In these conditions of national identity weakness or uncertainty, the ruling elites of the newly independent Belarusian state have primarily opted, since 1991, for staying with and developing the familiar set of pan-Slavic and Soviet ideas that are essentially anti-Western. This can be seen both as their response to the identity problem and an aspiration to establish their own "only game in town".

Peculiarities of the identity situation in Belarus before 1991

Despite the fact that Belarus was a relatively ethnically homogenous USSR republic, where Belarusians composed the majority of the population (around 80%), the Belarusian language and cultural practices were marginalised until the eve of the independence, and the new Belarusian society encountered serious social integration problems. After the end of the Second World War, Belarusian society went through an intensive urbanisation process and there were resulting changes in the values system of the population1. One of the most important changes was a rise in the pain sensitivity threshold. Belarusians seem to be ready to withstand privation with endless endurance. Urbanisation provided them with a chance to achieve a happy and worthy life; all their hopes for a better life and moving up the social ladder started to be connected with moving to the city. The city dwellers were expected to use mainly Russian, which pushed Belarusians to abandon their language, traditions and identity. Thus, for example, in 1950 Belarusian speakers formed a majority in Minsk, whereas in 1970 54.5% of Minsk dwellers said Russian was their native language. At the same time, 37.3% of books and 36.5% of all the newspapers in circulation were published in Belarusian. In 1984, only 5% of Belarus' newspapers were printed in the vernacular language. As a result, at the end of the 1980s, Belarus was ranked last among all the nations of the USSR in the percentage of people living in the republic and retaining the capacity to speak their native language.

Moreover, from the 1950s the Belarusian Soviet *nomenklatura* promoted the ideological construction of "Soviet Byelorussia" as the most Soviet republic of the USSR, where there were no nationalistic movements and where the Belarusian language and culture were confined to a kind of social ghetto, or a golden cage. This implied that Belarusian culture had a recognised official status and some financial and material support from the Communist Party of Belarus but, in return, it had to glorify the republic as the conqueror of Nazism that suffered the most and remained faithful to the "Soviet motherland". This myth is one of the basic ideological conceptions of the current Belarusian authorities.

[1] In 1950, ≈79% of Belarusian population lived in rural areas; in 1989 — only 35%. *Naselenie Respubliki Belarus'*, Statistical Compendium, Minsk 2001

The victory of the *nomenklatura*'s vision for an independent Belarusian state

The last decade of the Soviet Union was a period marked by the growing disintegration of the Soviet state apparatus, and the attempt of the local Soviet elites to adjust to new circumstances. In other words, there were problems of "system integration" and of "social integration", or legitimisation. The systemic problems were characterised by the lack of effectiveness of the Soviet regime in managing and coordinating supply and demand in the civilian and military sectors. The legitimisation difficulties led to the decline of the communist ideology that nobody believed any more, including the members of the Communist Party themselves, and to a growing gap between society and Party/State institutions.

The local elites found a new possibility for legitimisation in the adoption of a national revival discourse. At first, these requirements did not contest the system itself, since local elites demanded only the abandonment of the late Soviet approach of ignoring national diversity. Thus, the Republics started to demand the recognition of national minorities by the central powers. However, this process of becoming more nationally-minded was not the same for regional communist elites in all of the republics. While in the Baltic republics the new national revival discourse provided a common platform of compromises both for communist elites and the anti-communist opposition, in Belarus it became a matter of political conflict.

In Belarus, the last years of the USSR and first years of independence were a very contradictory time. The Belarusian population was uncertain of its opinions about the breakdown of the USSR and the newfound independence. In a December 1991 survey, the question of support for the independence of Belarus and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) treaty received 69% positive answers and 10% negative ones. One year later, in December 1992, the figures were respectively 42% and 34%. At the same time, opinions in the summer of 1992 on the withdrawal of Belarus from the USSR were only 30.7% positive, with 52.6% responding in the negative. The political and intellectual elites were profoundly divided. While the democrats defended the new democratic project based on national revival for the future of Belarus, the former Soviet *nomenklatura* was calling for restoring its previous experience, in the other words the idea of "Soviet Byelorussia".

The pro-democracy camp was represented by a number of political forces. The biggest was the Belarusian Popular Front that emerged in 1988-89 as a national, cultural and ecological revival movement, among other things as a reaction to the Chernobyl disaster. It started with a moderate criticism of the Soviet model. But, rapidly, the whole Soviet system was called in question in favour of independence for Belarus.

A conflict between Belarusian democrats and communist leaders was imminent. The "Conservative" camp mainly consisted of members of the former Communist party *nomenklatura*, who were unwilling to accept the ideas of independence, democratic change and national revival. This was largely due to the lack of a national consciousness among the Soviet ruling elite in Belarus. In Belarus, local communists did not follow the pattern set by Ukraine or the Baltic States. However, until 1994 there was a coexistence of the old and new political elites, because neither of the groups had sufficient political resources to completely neutralise the other. The former communist *nomenklatura* retained its network of connections, the bureaucratic hierarchy and the backing of the Communist Party of Belarus. The national democratic movement took the initiative to change the ideological climate in Belarus and to start reforms in this field. But there was no discussion of political and economic reforms. The main debates took place at the symbolic level and concerned the perception of the past, national symbols and geopolitical orientations. Three different visions of Belarus' developmental path were discussed. The first was the "*nomenklatura*'s vision" — to embed the existing sovereign Belarusian state in the frame of the Union State of Belarus and Russia. The second was based on the national revival vision which called for achieving nation-building processes while gradually moving towards Europe. The third one, called liberal, was less articulated, emphasising economic well-being issues and taking the West as a model, but largely ignoring identity and nation-building issues. The conservative vision eventually prevailed. For the former *nomenklatura*, the Western world was the "natural" enemy.

2. Anti-Western rhetoric in Belarus: the political perspective

At the most fundamental level, social problems in the human imagination are connected with two things: the particularity of the social order and the

nature of human being. It is often stressed that man started to understand the surrounding world by regarding first the group and then himself. Hence, there are two basic concepts for apprehending the social order: integration and equilibrium. Problems appear when there are signs of disintegration or of disequilibrium, where a minority group dominates and oppresses the majority group, creating inequality and conflict. This is exactly what we find in today's Belarus, where power is under the total control of the post-communist *nomenklatura*, with Lukashenka at the top. To maintain the existing social order, the authorities have built into society an enduring distinction between 'us', meaning the group of people loyal to the president, and 'others', meaning society at large, the political opposition, and Westerners. Originally, this conflict was used by the post-Communist elite as a tool to keep hold of power and later it was constantly reemployed to further legitimise the *nomenklatura*'s stay in power. As a result, society is kept under the threat of disintegration by the ruling group. This leads to the strengthening of the unity of each of the groups that act in the framework of the conflict using, for instance, mechanisms of self-identification through the existence of an opponent.

The political regime that has been built up in Belarus over the last 14 years relies on a constant appeal to the "external and internal enemies" rhetoric that has hampered the development of essential political processes in Belarus. Since 1996, it has been the Western world which has been stigmatised as the "external enemy" by the regime, mostly for political purposes, because of its refusal to accept the political, social and economic system and the governing practices of the ruling group.

The period 1991-1994 saw the end of the coexistence of the old and new political elites and the victory of *nomenklatura*'s vision for Belarus. This was strongly connected to the figure of the first president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenka. His victory in the 1994 elections was called an "electoral revolution" because it was a victory by representatives of the lower levels of the former Belarusian communist party apparatus, who replaced the high elite of the *ancien régime*. Lukashenka's victory was also a proof of the underestimated potential of the system of unofficial relations and ties which had been formed during the Soviet period, as well as a demonstration of the overestimated vigour of the newly established democratic institutions of government. The democratisation process did not become irreversible in Belarus. As it turned out, the authoritarian and non-democratic method of govern-

ment was closer and more familiar to the newly elected head-of-state and his advisers. On the one hand, it provided the opportunity to control the situation and avoid the threat of losing power. On the other hand, the authoritarian model was considered functional and appropriate for responding to pressures from the external world (i.e. EU and US policies of supporting democratisation in Belarus).

Thus, the first step of the new president was to contrast the issue of national revival with the issue of economic reforms. He politicised linguistic and national issues to reorient his main political opponents (the national revival movement) towards defending the Belarusian language and culture, which finally deprived them of a credible economic platform. The May 1995 referendum on national symbols illustrates these tendencies clearly. At the start of 1995, a significant deterioration of the economic situation was observed and the government had to adopt painful measures. This led to a rise in social dissatisfaction with the policies of Lukashenka, and it became increasingly obvious that the national democratic forces had a good chance of winning the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The call for a referendum disoriented the opposition and led them to change their emphasis in the political struggle. From then on, the issue of national symbols became part of its political programme. Returning the Soviet symbols in modified form, and ending the policy of support for the Belarusian language, was aimed at diminishing the social basis of the opposition and, at the same time, enlarging the public support base of the ruling group.

Lukashenka's second step was to concentrate all power into his hands. This was done through constitutional reforms in 1996 that gave the Belarusian president extraordinary competences and, from 2004, an unlimited number of terms in office. Now, the Belarusian president is above and beyond the reach of any other state institution. His rule is based on a highly centralised power vertical of distribution of competences, with the presidential administration playing the role of major decision-making institution, instead of the government which has been transformed into a strictly executive-administrative institution. Legislative power depends on the president because the parliament has no right to initiate legislation and *de facto* approves all bills prepared by the presidential administration. The president himself has legislative power: he issues edicts, which have the same force as laws. The parliament has no real possibility to impeach the President, while he can easily dissolve the parlia-

ment. The president also controls the judiciary branch: he appoints and dismisses judges at all levels, including the prosecutor-general. Some attributes of a democratic system, such as "elections" and "majority rule", exist in Belarus, but only as a means to ensure public support for the regime or as a self-legitimising mechanism of the regime. For example, elections serve only as a cover for the redistribution of positions among representatives of the same ruling group, not as a natural mechanism of selection and change.

Lukashenka's final step in building his regime was to reintroduce an official ideology which assures the centralisation of the regime's core values and defines the indicators of anomaly or deviation from the system. The system is built around the concept of a strong state that takes care of citizens, treats them as "children" under the protection of a "father", i.e. president Lukashenka. The citizens in return have to be loyal to the president/state. "Deviation" means to be in opposition not only to the president and his model of Belarus, but to the state and the country. Such a policy reinforces the divisions within society, adding to the identity fractures a new line of distinction — partisan/opponent to Lukashenka. Each group is closed to outsiders and there is no communication between them. All the difficulties and problems of Lukashenka are explained by activities of all his opponents, no matter who they are: democratic opposition parties or foreign countries, primarily the USA or the EU.

3. Anti-Western rhetoric in Belarus: the ideological perspective

The period of change — the breakdown of the Soviet Union —led to a strong social disintegration in Belarus. Traditional beliefs were weakened and the power-holders started to introduce ideology as a basis for the new social beliefs on which they would construct their legitimisation. It provided them with a platform from which to speak to the whole population.

In today's Belarus, ideology does not have its traditional meaning of a "science of ideas" which serves men by ridding their minds of prejudice. Belarusian officials do not hide the instrumental orientation of their reestablishment of ideology at the beginning of 2000. The main objective of this ideology is to exert influence upon the people. They believe that ideology has a stronger

influence on people, because of two basic elements: appeal and persuasion. This is in contrast to politics, where legal and administrative instruments are also in use. It turns ideology into "a specific form of sanctioning an existing system of domination and subordination in society, a defined regime of power, or, on the contrary, its radical transformation"[2].

The current Belarusian official ideology consists of what could be called a "Belarusian ideological triad": "the national idea", the traditional values of the Belarusian people, and the constitutional and legal basis of the state. In the context of the official ideology, the Belarusian national idea is based on classical concepts formulated in Belarusian literature in the late-19th and early-20th centuries: "to be named Belarusian" and "to be treated as a people". These two historic claims refer to the ideas of having an independent state and developing an equal society. At the same time, the official ideology opposes the traditional values of the Belarusian people to Western values of unlimited freedom and the power of money.

The ideology insists that among the main Belarusian values are tolerance, order, a capacity for hard work, non-recognition of violence, and others. As a result, there is no concrete information about the values of contemporary Belarusian society, but rather a set of ideological statements that nobody would argue with. In the same way, the constitutional and legal basis of the Belarusian state is treated through a division of the modern political history of Belarus into two periods. The first one lasts from the gaining of independence until the mid-1990s and is described in categories of 'identity drama' and 'demagogy'. The second one starts from the 2nd half of 1990s, when the people voted for "the presidential republic under the power of the president". The final triumph of the Belarusian state organ would be the unification of the Belarusian and Russian peoples in the Belarus-Russia Union State. This ideological construction is reminiscent of the old *nomenklatura*'s vision of Belarus, but with minor modifications due to the fact of having an independent state. An important engine for nation-building is the profit that the political elites gain as a result of sovereign independence. The Belarusian post-communist elites are no exception. In contrast to the first years of independence, they no longer question independence as such, but still do not manage to govern according to democratic principles and create a pluralistic society. This is the main reason why they are so suspicious of the West.

[2] E.M Babosov, *Osnovy ideologii sovremennogo gosudarstva,* Minsk, Amalfeya 2004

The fact that the Belarusian post-communist political elites have chosen to re-impose an official ideology can be explained with reference to their adherence to power categories. The official "ideology" serves to defend the concrete interests of the ruling groups. Immediately after the 2001 presidential election, Lukashenka faced the problem how to ensure his continued tenure of office. He required more effective mechanisms of legitimisation. The Soviet conception of state ideology was used as a model. It permitted the omission of all the problems which had appeared during the previous years of his rule. Among them, one of the most notable was legal instability (the Constitution was changed three times), inadequate balance of power, repressions against political opponents, a refusal to make reforms, etc. Instead of all this, the population is supplied with a positive vision of the Belarusian reality with Lukashenka as the central figure who is building an independent Belarusian state and assures order, stability and prosperity in the country. All criticism is rejected. The past and present of Belarus is being constantly remade by the ideologues: they change, throw away, and reformulate those moments of the country's earlier and modern history that do not serve the regime's purposes.

Another possible explanation for why the ruling group decided to re-introduce ideology can be taken from Asian political philosophy. One of the central elements of China's reforms was the idea of providing them on the local level, whilst avoiding social recognition of the fact that change is actually happening, thereby serving to extinguish high social aspirations. In Belarus during the spring of 1991, there was a huge wave of demonstrations in the country. This put the then-Communist government in a very fragile situation: they were confronted with several days of fear because of popular dissatisfaction and protest. They realised how shaky and weak their power was. The main conclusion that the post-communist elites drew from these events is to never allow such manifestations to happen again. One can therefore argue that the introduction of the ideology was meant to introduce a kind of veil that conceals change from society. It also hides divisions and fraction lines within the *nomenklatura* circles. More recent events can serve as evidence. Among the current Belarusian ruling elite, important changes are taking place: old Lukashenka advisers with links to law enforcement agencies have lost their positions to younger, more 'pro-Western' groups. It is also illustrated by the change of official rhetoric in the Western world. The Belarusian regime is no longer presented as the enemy. However, the Belarusian power elites are se-

cretive and it is difficult to say how sincere they are being in their *rapprochement*. This shift in rhetoric could be a temporary phenomenon, merely an additional element of Minsk's bargaining with Russia.

In any case, the establishment of the official ideology, together with its anti-Western rhetoric, is limited in purpose to an internal political legitimisation of the ruling group and has almost no external imperial implication, in contrast to the Soviet internationalist ideology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that anti-Western rhetoric in Belarusian society is descended from the ideological heritage of the Soviet Union, a lack of strong national feeling and the peculiarities of political development in independent Belarus.

Over the last 14 years, Belarus has been developing as an authoritarian regime where the relations between rulers and the society are based more on coercion than on persuasion. The society is still living in the so-called medley identity condition, when several national identity models coexist, collide and interpenetrate. The post-communist political elites have used these structural particularities to conserve their power via the creation of artificial political conflicts around the question of identity. Finally, after strengthening their position, they could no longer support this medley identity condition. The decision was taken to go back to using old tricks, namely to re-introduce the official ideology that defines the "Belarusian national idea" according to the 'Soviet Byelorussia' model. All other possible propositions and projects concerning the Belarusian national idea were banished. Anti-Western rhetoric was an important element of the Soviet ideology, and it is also presented in today's official ideology of the Belarusian authorities. However, in their relations with the external world, the Belarusian rulers are showing a more flexible and pragmatic approach. When the question arises of economic cooperation and business interests with the EU or USA, they easily abandon their ideological criticism of the Western world. The same tendencies can be found among the population. Western countries attract the majority of Belarusians with their high level of economic welfare, but only one third of the population positively perceives the prospects of political integration with the EU.

Belarusian Local Authorities and Self-Government vis-a-vis the European Union

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN BELARUS' BORDER AREAS: EU-ORIENTED

Anatol Lysyuk, Maryna Sakalouskaya

Belarus' shared border with Poland is associated not only with frontier markers, border guards wearing green service caps and tight customs controls, but also with a division line between two political blocs (even two worlds) that are still in a state of military-political confrontation with each other. Nevertheless, many invisible lines connect border area residents in Belarus' Brest region with the neighbouring nations and states: historical stereotypes, real practices, people-to-people contacts, information flows, the economic routine, tourist routes, language similarities, joint activities within the Bug Euroregion project, etc. What do border area residents think about relations with their neighbours Poland and Ukraine, and with the European Union as a whole?

Public opinion on security issues in the border areas

The Border Area Community Research Centre at Pushkin State University in Brest conducted a series of opinion polls between late 2005 and early 2007 to examine the views of border area residents on security issues. It interviewed 375 residents living in border areas in the Brest region from a random sample, stratified according to demographics and occupation. The results have a margin of error of plus and minus five percentage points.

The survey focussed on security factors. Most respondents do not perceive Ukraine and Poland as a potential foreign policy threat. In particular, only five percent said that Ukraine constitutes a threat to Belarus and 13.6 percent said the same about Poland (see Table 1). Interestingly, asked to mark off types of threats associated with these countries, most respondents picked measures that restricted cross-border trade and made it more difficult for Belarusians to travel to the neighbouring countries, rather than military and political factors of security. In addition, a small number of respondents (about five percent) ticked off "support for activities of the Belarusian opposition from abroad" as a threat to Belarus coming from the border areas of the neighbouring countries.

Table 1. Does Poland (Ukraine) pose any threat to Belarus? %

Answer	Poland	Ukraine
Yes	13,6	5,0
No	70,4	88,1
Difficult to answer	16,0	6,9

So, why do most border area residents believe there are no tensions in the region? This perception may be attributable to the content and intensity of the information and communication flows in which they have been involved.

Three types of flows can be singled out. Above all, it is necessary to point out frequent visits by border area residents to neighbouring countries. First-hand impressions are more convincing than anything else. In the last few years, 60 percent of border area residents visited Poland and 89.1 percent made trips to Ukraine. Most of them indicated commerce, tourism, or a visit to friends and relatives as the purpose of the journey.

It should be noted that most border area residents in Belarus have access to Polish (to a lesser degree) and Ukrainian (to a greater degree) media: 20 percent listen to Polish radio stations and watch Polish TV, and 43.6 percent receive information from Ukrainian broadcast media. It has been observed that foreign broadcasters often cast their neighbours in a negative light.

In addition, Poland and Ukraine are often the subjects of conversation among border area residents in Belarus. They share their impressions of visits to these countries.

The surveyed border area residents are increasingly worried about three major issues: (1) cross-border smuggling, especially across the Belarusian-

Ukrainian border; (2) an inflow of criminals and migrants to the border areas; (3) a small number of border area residents fear that NATO may use neighbouring territories to launch an attack on Belarus.

On the other hand, in the perceptions of border area residents, the benefits of living close to the border considerably outweigh the drawbacks. The border offers a great opportunity to earn cash in addition to one's salary as it opens access to cheaper goods in Poland and Ukraine. Local residents are more involved in cultural ties with their neighbours than people living elsewhere in Belarus. Access to neighbours' information flows is also an advantage.

So, how do Belarusian border area residents perceive their neighbours and how do worries and concerns affect this perception? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the images of Poland and Ukraine separately, due to a big difference in their perceptions.

Firstly, Poland is seen as a country in which residents live better than in Belarus, while Ukraine represents quite the opposite (see Table 2). In particular, 54.4 percent of respondents said that people are better off in Poland than in Belarus, while only 18.8 percent said the same about Ukraine.

Table 2. Assessments by respondents of living standards in Poland and Ukraine as compared to Belarus, %

Answer	Poland	Ukraine
Higher	57,6	15,8
Lower	7,9	61,4
Like in our country	25,6	11,8
Find it difficult to answer	8,9	11,0

Secondly, most residents of the Brest region border area say that Belarus has a better social security system and a lower crime rate than Poland and Ukraine.

Thirdly, most respondents consider Poland's governance system more effective than that of Belarus, but at the same time, border area residents are critical of governance in Ukraine.

Fourthly, the surveys suggest that despite political tensions between Belarus on one side, and Poland and Ukraine on the other, border area residents emphasise friendly relations, a blood relationship and a close bond between the peoples of Belarus, Ukraine and Poland. Based on empirical data, only 14.4 percent has a somewhat hostile attitude toward the Poles and four percent take the same attitude toward the Ukrainians (see Table 3).

Table 3. Answers to the question "How would you describe the current state of relations between people in Belarus and Poland?" %

Answer	Poland	Ukraine
Friendly	36,0	44,6
Rather friendly than neutral	29,6	40,6
Neutral	17,6	7,8
Rather hostile than neutral	14,4	4,0
Hostile	0	0
Find it difficult to answer	2,4	3,0

Fifthly, cross-border relationships can not be free of the influence of "big politics" i.e. Belarus' interstate relations with Poland and Ukraine. The border area residents are considerably divided in their perceptions of the friendliness/hostility of relations between Belarus and Poland, and in the case of Ukraine a majority of border area residents share a positive opinion (see Table 4).

Table 4. Answers to the question, "How would you describe the current state of interstate relations between Belarus and Poland (Ukraine)?" %

Answer	Poland	Ukraine
Friendly	16,8	7,9
Rather friendly than neutral	24,8	50,5
Neutral	22,4	20,8
Rather hostile than neutral	21,6	12,7
Hostile	13,6	3,9
Find it difficult to answer	0,8	4,2

Sixthly, in the opinions of respondents, neighbouring countries have a limited influence on Belarus regardless of their foreign policy priorities — only 11.2 percent said that Poland has a strong or very strong impact on developments in Belarus, and 5.9 percent said the same about Ukraine.

As for the nature of neighbour states' influence, many respondents describe it as positive with only 6.9 percent saying that Poland exerts a negative influence on Belarus and 45.5 saying that its influence is sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

In the case of Ukraine, these proportions are 3.9 percent and 38.6 percent, respectively, (see Table 5). On the whole, respondents have a positive perception of the influence of neighbours on Belarus, including its border areas.

Table 5. Answers to the question, "What influence does Poland (Ukraine) have on developments in Belarus?" %

Answer	Poland	Ukraine
Positive	16,8	21,7
Negative	6,9	3,9
Sometimes positive, sometimes negative	45,5	38,6
No influence	9,6	12,8
Find it difficult to answer	21,2	23,0

It should be noted that the pro-Euro-Atlantic policies of Poland and Ukraine do not considerably worry border area residents in the Brest region. A poll found 18.8 percent wary of Poland's decision to join NATO and the EU, while 56.8 percent said this is "the Poles' business." Largely the same pattern applies to Ukraine. Just 10.9 percent are concerned about Ukraine's bid to enter NATO and the EU, while 20.8 percent said that Belarus should follow suit and 46.5 percent indicated that this is "the Ukrainians' business." Quite predictably, only 15.5 percent are unhappy about the fact that Belarus now shares a border not only with Poland but also with the European Union.

There are three reasons for a predominantly positive perception of the European Union. Above all, many border area residents see their counterparts in the EU as similar people. Only 16 percent of those polled said that they are "absolutely different people" (see Table 6).

Table 6. Answers to the question, "D o you think nationals of European Union countries are like us, or they are absolutely different?" %

Answer	%
They are like us	32,4
They are absolutely different	16,0
They are somewhat similar and somewhat different	46,7
Find it difficult to answer	4,9

In addition, there is a widely held perception in the Brest region border areas that the EU is an effective economic and social commonwealth, membership of which guarantees the effective realisation of a broad spectrum of citizens' interests. As many as 76.8 percent of respondents said that Belarus' entry into the European Union would boost the living standards of its population.

Thirdly, 44.8 percent of respondents subscribed to the statement that "EU membership would make the Republic of Belarus more secure." A considerably smaller proportion, 28.9 percent, noted that "Belarus' entry into the EU would aggravate its relations with Russia."

It should be noted also that the threats to Belarus' security most commonly noted by respondents included "international isolation," "poverty and backwardness" and "the loss of state sovereignty." Obviously, Belarus' efforts to improve ties with the EU, tentative as they are, may eventually make these threats unimportant.

However, two sociological facts speak, as they say, "not in favour of" the European Union. One is that about 30 percent of those polled fear that "Belarusians will be treated as secondary people in the EU."

In addition, the poll found a high degree of uncertainty about the possible consequences of EU membership for Belarus. A high percentage of respondents ticked off "no opinion" or "find it difficult to answer."

Table 7. Respondents' agreement/disagreement with statements about effects of possible European Union membership on Belarus and Belarusians

Statement	Completely agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Completely disagree	Find it difficult to answer
I think Belarusians will be treated as secondary people in the EU	8,4%	24,4%	15,1%	34,7%	6,4%	11,0%
Belarus' membership of the EU would boost living standards of its population	29,7%	47,1%	12,4%	16,7%	2,6%	1,5%
Belarus' entry into the EU would aggravate its relations with Russia	8,5%	20,4%	17,7%	35,5	2,2%	15,7%
The EU will offer solid guarantees of the rights and dignity of Belarusians	8,0%	31,5%	20,4%	19,5%	3,1%	17,5
Unemployment will rise after Belarus joins the EU	5,3%	18,2%	24,5%	33,8%	4,9%	3,3%
EU membership will make Belarus more secure	4,8%	40,0%	16,8%	18,2%	2,5%	17,7%

Incidentally, both Belarusian Eurosceptics and Eurooptimists (81.3 percent of all respondents) advocate closer ties with the European Union. Among the priority areas for cooperation, respondents singled out small and medium-sized business development (60.4 percent), border infrastructure improvement (49.5 percent), environment (43.2 percent), healthcare (37.8 percent) and education programmes (36.9 percent).

Taken together, these positive views overshadow possible threats and fears associated with the European Union in the mentality of border area residents. Despite persisting tensions between Belarus and the EU, and a tide of state media reports that portray the European Union as a political enemy, only 7.9 percent of Brest region border area residents see the EU this way. Predictably, many more border area residents consider the United States Belarus' Enemy Number One (see Table 8).

Taking a closer look at the problem, it is easy to see that Belarusians perceive the United States as a virtual phantom, while the EU countries are seen as a day-to-day reality that does not scare at all and as a partner with which this nation maintains close links. For instance, the EU accounts for about 44 percent of Belarusian exports. Besides, public opinion has been shaped by anti-American propaganda in the Belarusian and Russian media, and anti-American stereotypes ingrained since the Soviet era.

Table 8. Answers to the question, "What countries do you think pose a real threat to security of modern Belarus?"

Answer	**%**
USA	29,3
Islamic countries	11,1
EU countries	7,9
Russia	5,0
Israel	1,8
Ukraine	1,0
CIS countries	0,6
China	0,6
No one threatens Belarus	26,9
Other	1,5
Find it difficult to answer	2,2

Several conclusions may be drawn on the basis of the surveys. Firstly, the level of military and political fears is low in the perceptions of border area res-

idents. In addition, it is quite static. The European Union's eastward expansion and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine have not raised additional concerns among locals.

Secondly, among all potential sources of threat, more locals named the United States and Islamic countries that are a long distance away, not neighbours.

Thirdly, a positive perception of the neighbouring nations as very similar people ("they are like us") makes people less likely to view them a potential threat.

Fourthly, a good image of the European Union significantly contributes to a positive public perception in border areas.

Nevertheless, most local residents still see Russia and international alliances built around it, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), as the main defenders of Belarus from "external enemies."

Civic society in the border areas in the context of European integration

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have a definite influence on relations between Belarus and the European Union. An encouraging sociological fact is that respondents noted the growing role of local businesses and religious communities in addressing local issues. Of particular interest is the position of 29.3 percent of respondents who pointed out "a social contribution" of religious congregations, despite the fact that only 0.5 percent said that religious groups are responsible for tackling local issues (see Table 10). The high percentage is attributable to an increase in the number of Protestant communities, and a new interpretation by the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches of their own social missions.

Regretfully, one should note the diminishing social contribution of NGOs to regional development, which is linked to the unfavourable socio-political environment and the public sector's domination in the system of human relations. Nevertheless, one can spot examples of effective cooperation in this social segment between Belarusian NGOs and associations in EU coun-

tries. For instance, an organisation called *Invalid i Sreda* has been working together with German partners to help people with disabilities to integrate into society through the arts. The Public Council for Agricultural and Ecological Tourism, which operates under the auspices of the Brest Region Business Association, has been working to promote agricultural tourism in the area, in cooperation with Germany's Green League and the Regional Development Foundation based in Biala Podlaska, Poland. The Business Women Club has been working together with European organisations for quite a long time to prevent human trafficking and help victims of trafficking. These are but a few examples.

One should note the weak pro-EU sentiments within religious communities despite a certain spike of social activity. The Russian Orthodox Church is known for its sceptical attitude to European values, and its position has been imparted to its parishioners in one form or another. Protestant communities, for their part, are suspicious of the EU because of its tolerant policy with regard to sexual minorities. The Roman Catholic Church has a great influence in the border areas of western Belarus, but it overtly distances itself from politics.

Local authorities in Belarus' border areas and the prospect of Europe

Recognising the importance of public opinion, one should realise that government elites, including local officials on the ground, have a greater influence on the political decision-making process in present-day Belarus. The residents of the Brest region border area are well aware of this, as 58.7 percent of respondents said that local authorities shoulder the responsibility for addressing local problems. They also noted the role of the president (33.3 percent) and the central government (26.6 percent). What is very important is that one in four respondents (25.8 percent) said that local residents are also responsible for handling local affairs. A small proportion said that non-governmental organisations (9.3 percent), local businesses (4.8 percent) and the media (four percent) share responsibility as well (see Table 9).

Table 9. Views on the degree of responsibility of various social institutions for addressing social, economic and environmental issues in the Brest region, %

Answer	%
Local authorities	58,7
President	33,3
Government	26,6
Local residents	25,8
National Assembly	17,7
Non-governmental organisations	9,3
Local businesses	4,8
Media	4,0
Religious organisations	0,5
Other	3,5
Find it difficult to answer	5,7

The poll found that 40.9 percent of respondents believe that the local authorities have played a greater role in tackling local problems in the last few years, while 9.7 percent said they have played a smaller role (see Table 10). This is an interesting fact, considering the shift to political Caesarism observed in the country. To a certain extent, this opinion was shaped by large-scale public works projects carried out in the city of Brest and border areas. The development is associated with local leaders, as well as with Pyotr Prakapovich, head of the National Bank of Belarus (NBB), who is also known for lobbying the special interests of the Brest region.

Table 10. Replies to the question, "Have local authorities, non-governmental organisations, businesses and religious organisations played an increasing or decreasing role in tackling local problems in recent years?" %

	Increasing role	Decreasing role	Similar role	Find it difficult to answer
Local authorities	40,9%	9,7%	37,7%	11,7%
Non-governmental organisations	16,9%	22,2%	40,5%	20,4%
Religious organisations	29,3%	11,6%	39,0%	20,1%
Businesses	32,2%	23,3%	20,4%	24,1%

Certainly, the specific political regime in Belarus and the restricted powers of local self-government bodies considerably limit opportunities for the local elite to play an independent political role and manage affairs in the region, in contrast with much the greater influence of the local authorities in Russia, Poland, Ukraine and all European Union countries. Obviously, the Belarusian local elites are politically and legally dependent on central government to a great extent. Its political loyalty to the president

is unquestionable because the Belarusian *nomenklatura* has historically been shaped as a social entity designed to follow and convey the political will of the state leader or the central government, without questioning or obstructing it. In general, the current local elite in Belarus' border areas has adapted itself to current socioeconomic and political conditions, and takes advantage of its political status to derive considerable profits, benefits and preferences. In this sense, it cannot pursue a policy independent from Minsk with regard to the European Union and other neighbours.

At the same time, it should be noted that it has a latent potential to play a relatively independent political role, in particular as far as west-directed policies are concerned.

Above all, it is necessary to point out a high degree of coalescence of the basic (*nomenklatura*) element of the state elite in the Brest region border areas, based on a common past and present, intertwined careers, connections, shared strategic interests and values. Up until now, few civil servants are known to have carved out a non-*nomenklatura* career, relying on protection from their more successful friends who are natives of the Brest region but have settled in Minsk.

Apart from that, the regional ruling elite, especially in the border areas, is wary of Belarus' isolation from the European community, including at the institutional level, because this blocks its integration into European economic and political bodies and prevents them from obtaining economic and other privileges in exchange for lobbying the interests of leading Western corporations and organisations.

It should also be noted that the local electoral process, just like the results of the recent parliamentary elections, exposed a distinctive trait of the local elite — its actions have not been motivated by an ideology. It has sought to distance itself from the communist ideas articulated by those representatives of the political class who used to publicise their adherence to the communist ideology, because this ideological position has lost its pragmatic origins and practical application.

Moreover, well-integrated into the local market environment as it is, the elite seems to be willing to spur market-oriented changes. The local government has been criticised for the widespread practice of giving protection to selected businesses and organisations. At the same time, economic entities are interested in fairer competition, and the local elite in Belarus' western regions has been making certain steps in that direction.

Clearly, the local elite is, predominantly, extremely materialistic and profit-conscious in its motives. It takes a sceptical attitude to Western values. On the other hand, it is obvious that as state sovereignty strengthens, it slowly but consistently develops feelings of patriotism and pride in the state, the nation and its history. To a greater extent, these feelings manifest themselves in a willingness to restore historic and cultural sites connected with the territories' pre-Soviet and even pre-Russian

history. One of the decisions taken in this vein by the local elite in Brest was a plan to rebuild the old town, which had been located on the territory where the Brest Hero Fortress, a famous symbol of Soviet heroism and the Soviet era, sits at present. Under these circumstances, the restoration of the old town entails an encroachment on Soviet traditions, despite the limitations of the project. The local elite's decision to rebuild the old town may be indicative of a shift towards new values.

The value system of the local elite in the border areas has been closed to empirical examination. Nevertheless, there is a certain combination of facts that makes it possible to analyse to what extent the elite is interested in pursuing closer ties with the European Union. Certainly, its limited political powers and capabilities also should be taken into consideration.

Firstly, the local government is interested in increased cross-border cooperation in the framework of the Bug Euroregion. Empirical analysis suggests that contacts have intensified in the area.

Secondly, it is possible to measure the local ruling elite's involvement in the technical assistance programmes of the EU and its member countries. In the last few years, more applications have been filed for projects involving local authorities in the Brest region, which provide experts and institutional support. Importantly, local authorities did not only initiate projects and programmes, they were also actively involved in projects sponsored by Polish and German partners.

Thirdly, contacts have been more frequent between local authorities in the Brest region and Poland's Lublin Wojewódstwo. An increase has been observed in the number of joint sporting events, cultural and educational programmes, and economic projects.

Fourthly, information contacts and exchanges arranged primarily in the framework of the Bug Euroregion have been conducive to stronger cross-border ties. An illustrative example of such cooperation was the establishment of the cross-border information centre, TRIK Platform, at the Brest Regional Executive Committee with support from the European Union. The centre provides quality information to non-governmental and governmental organisations seeking to boost ties between authorities and people in the border areas of Belarus and Poland.

Conclusions

Evidently, the public, local communities and authorities in the border areas are quite friendly toward EU member states and organisations and willing to co-

operate with them closely. If the recent statements by the president and the head of his administration on the need for stronger ties with the EU are followed by the establishment of an appropriate institutional base, one may expect a rise in pro-EU sentiment in the border areas, and increased cooperation between non-governmental and political organisations and companies on both sides of the border, especially if Brussels makes the decision to lift (simplify) visa formalities for border area residents or ease travel restrictions on Belarus as a whole.

Border area residents working in both non-governmental and governmental organisations have similar views on cooperation with the EU, because of a traditionally friendly attitude to the "Western world" and a more critical attitude to the "Russian world". This presents a marked difference from Belarus' eastern regions. Belarusian political analyst Leanid Zaika concluded, based on national surveys, that Western civilisation had less appeal among residents in the Homyel region than among people living elsewhere in Belarus, and the greatest appeal among Brest region residents.[1] The dissimilarities are attributable to historical factors, in particular the fact that the territories developed in different political and socio-cultural environments for centuries. It has been generally assumed that western Belarus is more receptive to Western civilisation values.

Apart from that, there is a direct link between Belarusians' sense of national identity and their political preferences — individuals more aware of their national identity are more likely to uphold democratic values. Belarusians who identify themselves as Soviet or Russian people usually lean toward leftist authoritarian ideologies. There is also a difference between regions in how people see their identity. Zaika noted that "Residents of the Brest region border area are characterised by the highest proportion of self-identification as Belarusians (...). The Vitsyebsk region is the least Belarusian."[2] Clearly, this kind of mentality has an indirect effect on the local elite — the style of governance in the border areas of the Brest region is more moderate than in Belarus' eastern territories and at the national level.

In the long run, a European prospect for Belarus and its border areas will depend on the readiness of its political class to carry out profound socioeconomic changes, and make a clear and unequivocal choice in favour of a European identity.

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[1] Zajko, L, *Regiony Belarusi: Iskhodnye printsipy sravnitelnogo analiza, Analiticheskij b'ulleten' Belorusskikh Fabrik mysli, 2000, No. 4 (9)*, pp4-5

[2] ibid

READINESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT REFORM IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Alyaksandr Zhuchkou

Belarus' development as a democratic, socially-oriented and rule-of-law state calls for a more active realisation of national and local potential, public initiative and people's involvement in government and day-to-day matters of the community. An effective local government based on self-government principles is essential for the sustainable socioeconomic development of the country. Local self-government forms the basis of every individual's real constitutional status, and ensures the proper organisation and functioning of society and the state. Ultimately, any policy has an effect on local communities.

At present, people in our country are becoming increasingly interested in local government and issues and mechanisms of self-government. Both governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as political groups, consider these matters to be of great importance.

In September 2000, delegates at a Congress of Local Council Deputies refrained from openly criticising the current local government system, but stressed the need for reform. In a final declaration, the delegates called for the development of a concept of local government and self-government reform in the Republic of Belarus, the drafting of a local government and self-government code, and the establishment of a special agency to coordinate local government bodies.

On the other hand, non-governmental organisations have been disseminating diverse theoretical and practical recommendations on how to boost the role of local councils and executive committees in tackling local issues and improve the local government and self-government system.

Central government should only establish an appropriate legal framework, monitor compliance and enforce laws and regulations. Local authorities should have powers to deal with the most immediate day-to-day problems and to do so in the most effective way in order to create comfortable conditions for living, work and rest.

Local self-government legislation before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union

Back in April 1990, changes in the Soviet Union prompted the government to pass the law "On the Basics of Local Self-Government and Local Economy in the USSR." In general, the law was in line with the principles of the 1985 European Charter of Local Self-Government, on which all European countries based their national laws. It was a progressive but non-binding act. The Charter defines local self-government as "the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population."

The Soviet Union's law was in fact a model act to be used by the republics for developing national legislation. The first, relatively democratic local elections held the same year gave rise to a new generation of local and regional politicians willing and able to press for drastic changes at the local level.

In February 1991, the Belarusian government passed the law "On Local Self-Government and Local Economy", which outlined the principles of public involvement in local affairs and provided for the independence of local self-government bodies within the limits of their responsibility and the separation of the powers and functions of the legislative, executive and judiciary branches. The law defined local (territorial) self-government as the right of citizens to manage social, economic, political and cultural affairs directly or through elected bodies in the interests of the local population.

The law introduced self-government in all administrative and territorial entities — villages, settlements, towns, districts and regions. It classified local self-government bodies into three tiers: primary, basic and *Oblast*. The primary tier included village councils, town-like settlements, towns (not subdivided into districts) and districts within towns. The basic level covered towns sub-

divided into districts and regions, while the *Oblast* level represented Oblasts. The Belarusian capital, Minsk, had the status of a regional self-governing entity. To a certain point, the authorities in Minsk and regional cities functioned as coordinating centres for self-government bodies of lower tiers.

The law stipulated local self-government guarantees, such as the independence of local self-government bodies within the limits of their responsibility. In addition, the approval of local councils was required for the construction of production and other facilities in the territory under their jurisdiction, as well as to use local natural resources or change the borders of the territory.

Thus, the 1991 act included a number of progressive provisions. But it failed to create conditions for the development of a real and effective local self-government system in the country.

On the one hand, it declared the independence of local self-government bodies, but in reality they functioned as part of the centralised government system.

The law failed to draw clear boundaries, based on the principle of subsidiarity, which provides that any problem should be resolved by the level of government closest to the citizens concerned. Under this principle, higher authorities perform only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

The law failed to specify tiers — primary, basic or *Oblast* -- directly responsible for general secondary education, specialised healthcare services, the operation of cultural establishments and public transport. Special laws governing these sectors also gave no answers to these questions, stating the functions of local authorities in general without detailing responsibilities of specific tiers of self-government.

Traditional terms like “local community” or “municipality” were not used in the law. On the contrary, locally elected bodies were defined as national (state) government bodies.

Communal property was regarded as part of state property, and could be seized and turned over to third party control by decision of a higher authority. Indeed, this did often occur in practice. Land and other natural resources were classified as state property.

All of these drawbacks have been responsible for a lack of progress in the development of local self-government and local democracy, and a trend toward centralisation. The Constitution adopted by the Supreme Soviet of Belarus in March 1994 intensified the trend.

The Constitution included Chapter V, entitled "Local Government and Self-Government." Amended as a result of the 1996 referendum, the Constitution details the powers of the central and local, executive and elected authorities.

Under the Constitution, citizens exercise their right to local government and self-government through locally elected councils, executive bodies, territorial public bodies of self-government, local referenda, assemblies and other forms of direct involvement in national and public affairs.

After the Constitution was adopted, changes were introduced to the local self-government legislation. The new law was entitled "On Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus." Even the title makes it clear what takes precedence.

The current version of the law came into effect on 10 January 2000, and changes introduced earlier were considerably at variance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government. In the first place, amendments affected relations between locally elected and executive authorities. The elected councils were stripped of the right to form executive bodies and participate in the formation and distribution of local budgets.

Elected local self-government bodies

Under the Electoral Code enacted in February 2000, local councils are elected on the basis of universal and equal suffrage by direct vote in one-member districts for a term of four years.

Locally elected councils have the status of state elected bodies. However, this status does not give them authority, but rather undermines it. The state body status has enabled the central government, starting from 1991, to trim their powers in favour of local and central executive authorities.

There are many facts to prove this. Under the law, councils have the status of a legal entity, but in practice this means that they have an official stamp and a small staff whose size is determined by presidential edict, not by the council based on its actual requirements. The council does not have a bank account, no executive bodies under its control and no real powers to effectively manage local affairs. It is financially and administratively dependent on the local executive committee.

The exclusive responsibilities of elected councils include: passing local development programmes, budgets and taxes; laying down local property management rules; calling referenda; handling territorial matters; issuing local bonds; and sorting out organisational matters.

However, the councils' involvement in deliberating and passing decisions in these matters is limited to rubberstamping proposals prepared and submitted by local executive authorities that are directly accountable to the central government. Most elected officials are employed in the state sector and are unable to effectively resist financial and administrative pressure from the executive authorities.

The new version of the law "On Local Government and Self-Government" empowers the chairpersons of higher councils to pick the chairpersons of basic- and primary-level councils. The same procedure applies to proposals on the dismissal of local council chairpersons.

Under the law, the local self-government system (the local democracy system) includes the local elected councils, the public territorial self-government bodies that may be established in *microrayons*, neighbourhoods, apartment blocks and villages, and various forms of direct democracy such as local referenda, assemblies of residents etc.

In practice, local public self-government bodies have no decision-making powers whatsoever. As a rule, they can only participate in the decision-making process within the local government bodies, in particular discussing and making non-binding recommendations concerning the allotment of land plots, planned construction projects, office lease contracts and the location of retail kiosks. In some instances, they can recommend sites for parking lots, bus stops and pedestrian road crossings. They are eligible to assume responsibility for maintaining and managing social, cultural and sports facilities, and historic and cultural properties.

On rare occasions, local authorities conduct opinion polls, public hearings and investigations involving experts proposed by the public. Not a single local referendum has ever taken place in Belarus.

In general, one may draw the conclusion that a tradition of group public activity, in the framework of a constructive dialogue between people and local authorities, has not been established during all these years.

Local executive authorities

Local executive committees are no longer accountable to local self-government bodies and function as part of the executive branch and "local government". The law provides that local government bodies perform local tasks, prioritising national interests.

The local government system consists of regional, district, city, town and village executive committees and city district administrations. The law authorises the central executive "vertical" to appoint the heads and officials of local executive committees and gives them sweeping powers to govern territories under their jurisdiction.

The law "On the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus" empowers the cabinet to issue binding directives to local executive authorities. The president has powers to annul any decision taken by a local executive committee if it is deemed to contravene the law. In addition, the principle of independence does not apply to executive bodies.

The functions of executive committees include drafting local budgets, economic and social development plans and programmes for the territory, as well as managing communal property. Executive committees have broad organisational and administrative powers. They distribute budgetary funds, monitor the proper use of public money, and they decide on the issue of local bonds and the organisation of auctions.

Executive committees manage the assets and financial resources of the territory under their jurisdiction, make the decisions to set up, reorganise or shut down communal property enterprises, establishments and organisations, and sign leases and other business contracts with legal entities and real persons.

Given such broad powers, it is disappointing that executive committees are answerable neither to elected councils nor to the public, because officials are not elected by local residents but appointed by the higher executive body or the president.

Executive committee chairpersons play the key role in governing territories. The chairpersons of the regional executive committees and the city of Minsk are named by the president and their nomination must be confirmed by the respective regional (city) elected councils. The regional executive committees pick the chairpersons of district and city executive committees, but nominations must be approved by the president and the respective elected councils.

If a candidate is rejected by the elected council, another person is proposed for approval. If elected officials reject the other nominee, the president or the regional executive committee chairperson makes a final decision. Chairpersons remain in office until they are promoted or replaced by the higher executive committee.

Executive committee chairpersons have a broad range of organisational, administrative and supervisory functions. They are responsible for cooperation between the executive committee and local council, decide on the committee's organisation and staffing levels and supervise enterprises, establishments and organisations operating under the committee's authority.

Not a single legal act specifies the responsibilities of executive committee chairpersons to the people.

The law does not clearly delineate the functions and responsibilities of local authorities of various tiers. The central government's aggressive policy of intervention in local affairs, pursued over the last ten years, makes such a separation of functions unnecessary.

An illustrative example of the strong trend toward centralisation is the law "On the Budget System of the Republic of Belarus and State Off-Budgetary Funds" dated 15 July 1998. Unlike the 1993 law on the Budget System, it uses the terms "lower," "higher" and "consolidated" budget. Under the law, regional elected councils set the upper deficit limit for district consolidated budgets, which are formed of primary-level budgets in a particular district. The deficit limits for regional budgets are specified in annual national budget laws. District executive committees decide on the deficit limits for village and town budgets.

The administrative and territorial division of the Republic of Belarus

Because of the centralised nature of the Belarusian government, the country has quite a distinctive mechanism of administrative and territorial division. Back in 1994, the central government made attempts to abolish primary-tier self-government bodies in villages and small towns under the jurisdiction of district governments.

The Constitutional Court declared the move unconstitutional. That and other controversial steps prompted lawmakers to launch impeachment proceedings against the president.

Nonetheless, pursuant to Presidential Edict No. 434 "On the Unification of Administrative and Territorial Units of the Same Name with One Administrative Centre" dated 20 October 1995, more than 80 locations and small towns that had the status of district centres were stripped of the right to have elected councils and separate budgets.

In June 1996, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet discussed a report on the merger of elected councils in the Brest region. The report said that only in three of eleven instances had elected council mergers received approval from district and town elected councils, as required by the law. Town councils were disbanded and their functions were transferred to the appropriate district councils. Later, the central government disbanded elected city councils in most regional centres, transferring their functions to regional councils. In the last few years, city councils were dissolved in a number of big cities such as Barysau, Kobryn, Slonim, Zhlobin and others. There are more than 200 towns and town-like settlements in Belarus, but only 28 towns and 78 town-like settlements have elected councils.

Edict No. 383, entitled "On Reform of Local Government and Self-Government Bodies", dated 19 September 1995, abolished 25 district councils in seven cities divided into districts. Instead, the government established district administrations directly accountable to the city executive committees. The law of the Republic of Belarus "On Administrative and Territorial Division and the Procedure of Making Decisions Concerning the Administrative and Territorial Division of the Republic of Belarus", dated 5 May 1998, lists regions, districts, villages, towns and town-like settlements as administrative and territorial units that have elected councils and their own budgets.

The term "territorial units" was introduced into the legislation a few years ago. Territorial units are areas (reserves, national parks and natural sites etc.) that are managed differently from normal territories, as well as town-like settlements without elected councils and executive and administrative bodies governed by subsidiaries of higher-level local government bodies. Districts within cities are categorised as territorial units because they do not have elected councils and budgets, and are governed by local administrations established by the city's executive committee. The local administrations' powers and functions are set out in the law "On Local Government and Self-Government."

Thus, under the law, regional and district towns and town-like settlements can have the status of "administrative and territorial units" and "territorial units," while all districts within city boundaries fall within the "territorial unit" category.

Restrictions imposed by the government on the rights of lower-level territorial units contravene the constitutional principle of democracy.

Towns and town-like settlements, real municipal units that exist in time and space, must have the same rights as "administrative and territorial units," i.e. they must have elected councils.

Lawmakers will have to revisit the matter in the future. They could restore the rights to towns and town-like settlements step by step. The first step would be to set up administrations in towns and town-like settlements which are similar to bodies governing districts within boundaries of cities. The second phase would be to elect councils in towns and town-like settlement.

Prospect of local self-government reform

The need for radical changes to Belarus' local government and self-government system is growing more urgent. Both academics and practitioners realise this. Many see the need for a consistent effort to improve the legal, economic and organisational basics of local government.

Starting from 1993, lawyers and experts have drafted and proposed several plans of local government reform based on the experiences of East and Central European countries in the area.

But the government ignored the proposals because the country leaders at the time did not quite understand the importance of local self-government and its role for bringing about democratic change and making it irreversible.

The elaboration and adoption of a reform concept has the following objectives:

1) designing a legal model for local self-government and state government at a local level;

2) initiating a process of reform in Belarus;

3) codifying in the national legislation the principles set out in the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

4) drafting and enacting a package of laws on local self-government aimed at putting into effect the principle of decentralisation.

In the early stages of reform, it is necessary to separate the system of state government from the system of elected authorities on the ground. It is necessary to take the following steps:

- to draw a clear line between powers of state government bodies and local self-government bodies;
- to separate the functions of various tiers of local self-government so that they will not overlap and local self-government bodies will be truly independent and have meaningful powers;
- to create a financial and economic basis for the operation of local self-government bodies by allowing them to have their own budgets, manage property and land, and giving them more rights with regard to local taxes and charges.

The responsibilities of state bodies and local self-government bodies should be separated, based on the following principles:

- the system of public government should be organised in a way that enables it to perform its task effectively in accordance with the law, at the lowest possible cost of maintaining public governmental bodies;
- every tier of the system and every agency performs functions relevant to their tasks within the system of state agencies and local self-government bodies;
- state administration agencies should handle only those tasks that cannot be performed by local self-government bodies (the subsidiarity principle);
- state administration agencies may delegate some of their powers to local self-government bodies;
- local self-government bodies cannot delegate their proper responsibilities to state government agencies;
- local self-government bodies can work together with state administrations only in the interests of the local population and in the framework of the law.

Later, the following steps should be taken to improve the local government system:

- a system of guarantees and judicial protection for local self-government rights should be established;
- the right for elected councils to form their own accountable executive bodies should be restored;

-a system should be established for training and re-training the staff involved in all stages of the reform;

-a financial distribution mechanism should be introduced for maintaining minimum standards.

In parallel, based on the results of monitoring and a comprehensive analysis, it is necessary to make scientifically-substantiated preparations for the next reform phases that are likely to change the administrative and territorial division of the Republic of Belarus and its regions, and lead to a further shift of responsibilities from central to local government. In addition, new democratic procedures may be introduced to offer additional guarantees to the local-self-government system and ensure the accountability of local authorities to the people.

Reform efforts should be planned taking into account economic, social, demographic, environmental and other factors that have an effect on regional development.

Experts believe, based on other countries' experiences, that a special national agency (a ministry, committee or department) should be established to prepare and carry out the reform. However, the agency should not be authorised to issue directives to local self-government bodies, in order to ensure their independence in local decision-making.

The reform should lead to the establishment of a local state administration system and a multi-functional system of locally elected government councils, or in fact, local self-government bodies. A scientific study and discussions involving all parties concerned, including experts and public representatives, should be organised to determine how many tiers and local self-government councils the country needs. It is difficult to say how fast these changes can be carried out.

For instance, local self-government reform was very effective in Poland. It began at one moment after long preparations and included several phases that were launched after a series of trials and a thorough analysis.

There are several ideas on the possible timing of the reform. It could be carried out in the period between the last (2007) and next (2011) local elections. The intermission could be used to ensure a high pace of reform and the shifting of responsibilities to elected officials. The launch of the reform would make it possible to bring new people, capable of putting ideas into practice, to local government agencies. However, the government has shown no sign of willingness to work in this direction, therefore the moment is likely to be lost.

Another question to consider is the tier that should function as the basic element of local self-government. District and city elected councils (in cities divided into districts) play this role at present. They accumulate major resources and powers. However, experts suggest changing that approach and, based on the principle of subsidiarity, shifting authority to the smallest or lowest tier of the system, closer to the local population. Thus, authority and resources should be concentrated in the primary tier, while higher authorities should perform only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

Among the international acts on local self-government, the most important ones are the European Charter of Local Self-Government and decisions by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the harmonisation of national laws with the Charter is one of the conditions for Belarus' entry into the Council of Europe. Ratification would guarantee some degree of independence to local self-government bodies, because the Charter's provisions would take precedence over the national Constitution and laws. Considering the fact that the central government relies heavily on sub-laws, it is necessary to specify the basic powers and responsibilities of local self-government bodies in the Constitution and the law, as prescribed in Item 1, Article 4 of the Charter.

Incidentally, Article 97 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus provides that the House of Representatives of the Belarusian National Assembly, the parliament, shall consider draft laws, including those concerning local self-government.

In this connection, it may be necessary to rewrite Section V of the Constitution entitled "Local Government and Self-Government."

Clearly, given the Belarusian government's traditional approach to local democracy issues, and taking into account the economic and political situation, one cannot expect a speedy transition to the new model based on the principles set forth in the European Charter. Most likely, measures should be taken at an early stage to strengthen the financial powers of grassroots elected councils in villages, town-like settlements and small towns, and limit the powers of regional authorities to distribute funds. The government does not appear to have the political will to carry out a drastic reform because it would significantly change the existing governmental system.

Phases of local self-government reform in Belarus

To fundamentally change the current situation and establish an effective system of local self-government, the central government should draw up and approve a concept or a national programme of reforming local self-government and state government at the local level in the Republic of Belarus. The concept or the programme should be based on provisions of the 1985 European Charter of Local Self-Government and the 1998 CIS model law entitled "On Common Local Self-Government Organisation Principles."

The concept should be complemented by a package of bills that would establish a broad legal framework to govern the activities of local authorities. Legislative changes should address the following fundamental issues:

1. The significance and role of local self-government. It would not be enough to make provisions in the Constitution and laws which simply mention the fact of the existence of local self-government, as Section 5 of the current Constitution does. It is necessary to stipulate in Section I of the constitution, entitled "The Basics of the Constitutional System", that citizens are entitled to take part in local decision-making in both state government agencies and local self-government agencies. This would make local self-government one of the basic institutions of the constitutional system, as important as the parliament, the Council of Ministers, the president and the judiciary.

2. Specify the object of local self-government. It is necessary to include a clause to explain that the objects of local self-government are not official establishments like elected or appointed bodies, but local citizen-led communities empowered to exercise their rights both directly and through local bodies that they form for the purpose.

3. Independence of local self-government bodies. The Constitution and laws should not treat local self-government as part of the state government system. This would help to end the dependency of locally elected authorities on the central government. This could be achieved by adding a provision to Section I of the Constitution, declaring the independence of local self-government bodies and their separation from the state government system. It should be noted in the same paragraph that the principle of the separation of powers of the legislative, executive and judiciary branches, in the case of local self-government, shall be interpreted as the principle of separation of powers of various tiers of local self-government.

4. Economic basics of local self-government. The Constitution and laws must distinguish not only between state and private forms of ownership but also between state, private and municipal, or communal, property. Categorising municipal (communal) property as a separate type would lay the economic foundation for the operation of local self-government bodies. The economic foundation of each tier of local self-government should be proportional to its functions and responsibilities.

5. The separation of powers of local self-government bodies and the central government. It is necessary to make provisions providing for the separation of powers of the central government and local-self government bodies in exercising public authority within the boundaries of the same territory. Local self-government bodies should be responsible for handling local matters concerning the territory, while administrations established by the central government should be responsible for dealing with national matters on the same territory.

6. The basic element of local self-government. It is necessary to write down in the law that the lowest or least centralised competent authority constitutes the basic element of local self-government. In the case of Belarus, this may lead to the unification of the primary and basic tiers of local self-government. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, the basic element should have more powers and financial resources than other tiers for exercising its authority.

7. The separation of terms of reference of various tiers of local self-government. It is necessary to draw a clear line between the responsibilities of various tiers of local self-government by specifying the terms of reference of each tier. Matters that are not listed among responsibilities of any tier should be referred to the basic tier of local self-government. This would help avoid disputes in relations between various tiers and eliminate the hierarchical structure of local self-government.

8. Improvements to the voting system applicable to local elections. Changes should be introduced into the Electoral Code to replace a single-member plurality voting system with a proportional or mixed single-member/proportional system. Voters should have the opportunity to indicate their order of preference within the party list. This would ensure a closer match between the percentage of votes that groups of candidates win in elections and the percentage of seats they receive on elected councils. In addition,

this would make the work of local authorities more transparent and effective. Other changes to the Electoral Code aimed to prevent election fraud should alter procedures for forming electoral commissions and give more rights to public election observers.

9. The formation of executive bodies by elected local government bodies. The elected local government councils should be entitled to form local executive bodies and oversee their work — not only to ensure that its activities comply with the laws, but also to make sure that its decisions are justified, effectively carried out and that competent people are employed to carry out these decisions. The local executive body should not have exclusive competence that infringes on the rights of the locally elected self-government body. It should be accountable to the local community, an object of local self-government.

10. Financial independence of local self-government bodies. Separating local self-government bodies from the state government system, building economic foundations for local self-government by putting them in charge of municipal (communal) property, and separating the terms of reference for various tiers of self-government and state government bodies, should guarantee financial independence and full autonomy for local self-government bodies. In addition, changes should be made to current laws to give local self-government bodies new sources of income, expand their authority to levy local taxes, use municipal property and national resources, prohibit the central government from taking money out of local budgets, and establish an income distribution mechanism.

11. The right to set up local self-government unions and associations. Legislation should entitle local authorities at all levels to set up local self-government unions and associations based on their jurisdictional territory and functions. In addition, local government bodies should be given the right to join international unions and associations. Such a practice would enable local self-government bodies to manage local affairs more effectively and defend self-government rights vis-à-vis state government bodies.

The central government should be required to discuss with the National Self-Government Association (Union) all draft decisions by the parliament, the president or the Council of Ministers concerning the authority and other interests of local self-government bodies.

Associations (unions) should represent and advance local self-government interests in relations with the state agencies, help local self-government bod-

ies to coordinate their efforts with the parliament, the Council of Ministers and other state agencies and officials, and offer methodological, informational and advisory support to local self-government bodies.

12. Guarantees and continuity of local self-government. Changes should be made to the national legislation, calling for the adoption and registration of special documents — statutes outlining formation and operation procedures for every self-government entity. The document should detail the rights and duties of citizens and authorities within a specific territory. It should be a document designed to coalesce the local community of citizens.

13. The out-of-court settlement of disputes between local self-government bodies and state administrations. Changes should be introduced to the Constitution and laws to limit and later eliminate opportunities for intervention by the central government in disputes involving local self-government bodies. It is necessary to establish a special judicial institution for handling disputes and defending the rights of citizens, legal entities, local communities and local government agencies if the central government or its local administrations make decisions that infringe on their rights.

14. Municipal service. The local self-government law should be amended to make provisions for municipal service. Municipal service should be defined as a type of public activity concerned with the consideration of local issues, decision-making and the implementation of decisions, and aimed at addressing people's needs that have nothing to do with the governmental civil service.

15. Reform of the administrative and territorial division of Belarus. Changes should be made in the administrative and territorial division of Belarus. It is necessary to define principles that entitle local communities to govern themselves and to establish economically subsistent local self-government entities and regions on the basis of a new administrative and territorial division. The changes should ensure the rapid development of locally governed territories and streamline relations between central and local authorities.

On the one hand, the model of real and effective self-government in the Republic of Belarus should take into account the national historical experience of our people that spans centuries, while on the other it should meet modern European requirements for local self-government, set out in the European Charter of Local self-Government.

Based on the assumption that, in any free county, all political power is inherent in the people and people exercise their right to participate in government decision-making both through state government agencies and local self-government bodies, it should be written down in the law and acknowledged in practice that a self-governed local community of citizens, with their specific interests that differ from state interests, is an object of local self-government.

The ideal model of local government, in our view, represents a multi-tier system of public municipal bodies which are functionally and organisationally independent of the central government.

Close cooperation in this area with EU neighbours and the organisations of the EU and Council of Europe would make it possible for Belarus to use their expertise and experience of local self-government reform, to avoid or reduce the number of mistakes and also shorten the period needed to implement the reform.

Belarusian Economy and the EU Cooperation Prospects

TURNING POINT

Mikhal Zaleski

The Belarusian economy's ability to begin transformation in the context of its possible future entry into the European Union

When we call something "a system" we do not always make sense. Sometimes it happens that "systems" are like the stars in the sky — a set of elements that form an integrated whole only in our imagination. But there are things that are interlinked, and if one element were missing, the whole structure would be incomplete and unable to perform the functions for which the individual parts were collected and organised.

Europe, an integrated whole of interdependent entities, shied away from the east for two centuries. Two decades ago, the process stopped and Europe began expanding eastward. The time has come to think about the territory on which a predominantly Belarusian population has lived for centuries. The territory may become the last element to return to the integrated whole. Can this branch, which was cut off long ago and put down new roots in foreign soil, be engrafted back on the mother tree?

In deliberating on this question, it would be useful to compare trends that have been observed in Belarus and elsewhere in Europe, and then extrapolate out to the fairly distant future, at least 20 years from now. If the reintegration of the country begins now, formal entry procedures are unlikely to be on the agenda earlier than in 20 years' time.

Let us see what Belarus and the EU have in common and what the country needs to change to become a member of the EU. Afterwards, let us esti-

mate the costs of the changes. And, finally, will our economy remain a single whole as a result of the transformation?

General

The Border. One thing that Belarus definitely has in common with the EU is the border (see Figure 1). Back in Soviet times, it was carefully equipped to make sure that "a fly will not fly over unnoticed." But the Soviet-built infrastructure secured only the 399-kilometre Belarusian-Polish border. Lithuania and Latvia were quite open. Naturally, there are two development options for the border infrastructure— to dismantle the Soviet-built infrastructure or to build similar installations on the shared border with the Baltic countries.

Source: interenvirexperience.iatp.by

Figure 1. Belarus' shared border with the EU.

The latter option would cost a lot of money, as much as $10,000 per linear metre if the infrastructure is to be up to the standard of the Belarusian-Polish border. Belarus has a 462-kilometre border with Lithuania and a 143-kilometre border with Latvia. Yet statements made by the Belarusian leader suggest that the government has chosen the costly option.

One fundamental question still lingers: Where is the border of Europe? I do not mean to question the delimitation and demarcation agreements and efforts of governments. What I mean is the functional edge of Europe as a

whole, beyond which life is absolutely different. We believe this is Belarus' eastern frontier.

Therefore, in the next 20 years the border infrastructure would have to be rebuilt in all directions. In the first place the interests of the Russia and the EU would have a stake, while our country would play an intermediary role at best. But this position has not yet been properly verbalised, discussed and included in economic and architectural plans. Customs and consignment warehouses, logistics centres, cargo terminals and gas storage depots have been erected without taking into consideration the fact that Europe's edge is somewhere between the River Bug and the Kuril Islands. It may be good that construction is making slow progress, as there will be an opportunity to do everything right technologically and economically, if the necessary institutional changes take place in the country.

Supply Lines. The belligerent rhetoric and defence hysteria surrounding US and Russian military plans cannot stop international trade. Vilnius is located 215 kilometres from Minsk, Riga 470 kilometres and Warsaw 550 kilometres. Supply and communications lines run across the borders. Oil and gas pipelines play an especially important role at present (see Figure 2). Belarus also has pipelines on its territory, pumping $100 billion to $125 billion worth of oil and gas from Russia to Europe every year. One of the major pipelines is Yamal-Europe. The Europeans have plans for new supply routes, which are shown on the map below.

The reality is that Russia will have sold out all of its natural gas before 2033. It will not have enough cash for prospecting and building new supply lines. It has quite a dubious plan to build a new gas pipeline to link Russia and Germany via the Baltic Sea. It also plans to build an oil pipeline bypassing Belarus.

Reform of the gas pipeline system appears to have begun in Belarus, but the acquisition of a stake in Beltranshaz by the Russians has not made the system more technologically reliable, effective and convenient to operate, i.e. more similar to such facilities in Europe. The same is true of oil pipelines and refineries. There is not a big technological difference between the Navapolatsk and Mazyr-based refineries, operating as part of Slavneft. The Soviet-built Druzhba is still pumping oil, but it is unreliable.

The country's leadership is pinning its hopes for a revamp of the gas transport and distribution systems, and the necessary strategic investment, on the Russian middlemen swarming around Belarus. The Russians would take ad-

vantage of Belarus' huge debt (a debt surge is quite possible) to take control of oil and gas pipelines, storage depots, distribution facilities and refineries. They would do so with the only purpose of reselling the infrastructure to the highest bidder. And they will successfully resell it, because they have done so in the past on many occasions. The local nomenklatura still cannot figure out how to profit from these takeover deals. The opposition is working to figure out how to prevent it.

Source: Izvestiya, 15.11.08

Figure 2. Europe's plans to build new gas pipelines

Meanwhile, Asian exports would flow through Belarus. A reasonable solution would be to make the final consumer, not the supplier, responsible for reliable delivery. But that would be impossible without creating institutional conditions for the country's participation in an upgrade to Community Gas Ring standards of pipeline systems.

Land Routes. Highways and railroads account for a greater share of import and export flows to and from the European Union. In money terms, up to $200 billion worth of goods are transported via land routes every year. Import-oriented shipments exceed exports because the former include goods consigned to the territory of the former Soviet Union and also Japan and China.

An examination of changes in Eastern Europe's night-time lights in the last 10 years (Figure 3) suggests that, along with the old major routes linking Saint Petersburg and Odessa (blue line), and Moscow and Warsaw (red line), a new land route, linking the southern city of Homel with the Baltic Seas ports (yel-

low line leading to Vilnius), is gaining more and more strategic importance. The role of railroads and highways is unlikely to diminish.

The main question for the next few decades is how to maintain the land transport infrastructure under conditions that ensure its interoperability within the European infrastructure. Obviously, the government already faces a shortage of money for this purpose. The quality of the transport network has been diminishing. If the trend continues for years to come, it may slow the integration of Belarus' land transport network into the European infrastructure.

Source: NOAA/NGDC — Earth Observation Group — Defense Meteorological Satellite Program,1 Level of lighting: white — bright steady; yellow — usual steady; red — going brighter; blue — going dimmer.

Figure 3. Economic dynamics in Europe in 1998-2007.

Costs of the unnecessary

Collective farms. Collective farms are something that the EU definitely does not need. Certainly, things have changed and collective farms are no longer called collective farms. But the desperate state of Belarus' "agricultural enterprises" and their social organisation is incompatible with the concept of sound and rational management. The government has acknowledged the failure of its plan to boost the agriculture sector by building agro-towns and

[1] See how to make and study comparative maps in: Elvidge C.D., Baugh K.E., Safranb J., Tuttle B.T., Howard A.T., Hayes P.J., Jantzenb J., Erwin E.H. Preliminary Results From Nighttime Lights Change Detection, NOAA National Geophysical Data Center, Boulder, Colorado 80305 USA; Cooperative Institute for Environmental Research, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80303 USA. www.isprs.org/commission8/workshop_urban/elvidge.pdf

establishing big exemplary farms. But it keeps defending its agricultural policies, claiming that Belarus is running neck and neck with the world's leading food producers.

What is the real state of affairs in the agriculture sector? It is very fragmented. Belarus' farmers work tiny plots of land. A survey conducted by the economy ministry found 13.9 percent of farmers owned plots of less than 0.06 hectare, 32.6 percent had plots between 0.06 and 0.2 hectare, 10.4 percent had plots between 0.2 and one hectare and only 0.6 percent were farming more than one hectare.

In the meantime, personal plots rank second among Belarusians' sources of income, followed by dachas. Personal plots and dachas are the main source of income for 40 and 30 percent of households, respectively. The percentages correlate with the populations of villages and small towns (Belarusian district centres cannot be considered urban settlements, by any stretch of the imagination) and the number of pensioners in the country.

General economic trends do have an effect on this sector of the economy. A third of Belarusian households live in villages and are engaged in subsistence farming, and close to half a million urban residents have dachas. One in four city residents help their relatives to cultivate their tiny plots.

Incidentally, the Belarusians have an enormous passion for farming and manual work. They are used to picking berries and mushrooms, cutting firewood, and digging clay and sand when possible.

At the beginning of 2008, Belarusians owned and used more than 1.5 million hectares for various purposes. An estimated six million people, out of a total population of ten million, dug potatoes during the 2008 harvest season. As the Belarusian saying goes, "We're gonna eat what we've harvested."

But what does subsistence farming have to do with the 21st century, industrialisation or information technology? Quite the contrary, the country has experienced a trend towards a deindustrialisation of the agricultural sector. The sector is plagued by fake subsidies and distorted prices. The average ratio of the Industrial Producer Price Index to the Agricultural Producer Price Index has been nine to eight in the last six years. This explains some of the government-reported agricultural output numbers for the government-controlled sector (Table 1).

Table 1. Some agricultural output indicators for 1990 and 2007

	1990	Average for 2000-2005	2007	2007 as % of 1990
Gross production of potatoes, thousand tons	8590	8436	8744	102
Cattle stock, thousand	6975	4030	4007	57
Cows	2362	1696	1459	62
Milk production, thousand tons	7457	3380	5909	79
Hog numbers, thousand	5051	3395	3598	71
Poultry numbers, million	50,6	26,2	29,4	58

Source: The National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus

The sector will soon be hit by demographic and staffing problems. Fewer working-age men engage in food production. As many as 1.1 million men aged between 16 and 59 worked the fields in 1970, whereas now just over 700,000 do so. Life expectancy for men is 17 years shorter than for women in the rural areas, mainly because men drink themselves to death.

Noteworthy is the growing importance of dachas as a source of household income, against the backdrop of a certain decline in the role of personal plots. Stone-age technologies are used for growing 60 percent of "secondary," by collective farm standards, crops, such as beans and turnips.

Non-locals find it hard to understand the role of collective farms in the social security system in the rural areas. If it were not for collective farms, there would be no one to take care of pensioners, children and other vulnerable groups. No one in Europe would be happy with a backward agricultural sector like this, and no one expects it to become part of the EU.

Meanwhile, the collective farm system is the last thing the government wants to change because agricultural reform is expensive and it may spark social tensions. Farms would need to sell off their harvest for three consecutive seasons, leaving nothing for their own consumption, to pay off their overdue debts. The government would do better to give up its Soviet-style megalomania in agriculture and fork out $3 billion to $4 billion for restructuring.

Planning System. The government-employed planning system is unlikely to bolster Belarus' bid to return to Europe. One can hardly describe it as planning because forecasts are based on directives that the president gives to the nation and the government at unconstitutional People's Assemblies.

Government agencies note his directives and use them as the basis for drafting presidential edicts.

The real needs of the people and industry are not essential. Feedback does not go directly to the representatives elected by the people or influence groups in government agencies, but to employees of ministerial secretariats. This breeds corruption and slows the information flow from the global market to enterprises, and from consumers to enterprises, converting their reactions into an awkward struggle for the distribution of resources.

As a result, the economy reacts to external signals with a delay. To eliminate the flaws, it will be necessary to spend between $1.5 billion and $2 billion on governance reform.

The Education and Social Security System. The Pension Fund and Healthcare. The Army and the Law Enforcement Agencies.

All these sectors fall short of European standards and the gap has been widening. Let us examine the two most critical sectors to save space.

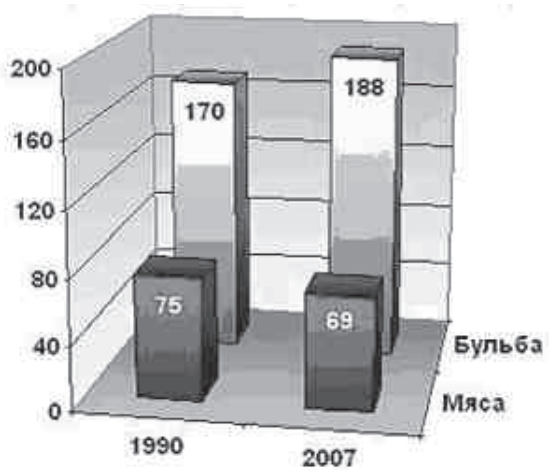
The healthcare system consists of two groups — those who need care and those who take care of them. What the Belarusians have come to notice is that both groups are miserable. Why?

I believe they have lost confidence in the future. Tens of thousands die because of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gluttony, sexually transmitted diseases and suicides. Drinking water and food are contaminated with chemicals and radionuclides. The nation is getting older because of a low birth rate. In addition, one in three conceptions ends in an abortion. As many as 100,000 abortions were registered in the last two years, while only 200,000 children were born during the same period.

Frustrated parents are abandoning their infants. More than 30,000 children are being raised at the country's state-run orphanages. In rural areas, in one in ten families with children kids are not fed enough protein because their parents have boozed their brains out. The same often happens in cities.

We have gotten off the ground but have not reached the sky. That is why this nation is dying out.

Meanwhile, Lukashenka's aides are trying to serve us GDP instead of food, but even the official indicators weigh heavily on the propagandists (Figure 4).



Source: http://belstat.gov.by

Figure 4. Meat (red) and potato (yellow) consumption in 1990 and 2007 (kilogrammes per capita per year)

According to communist traditions, one should admit that "the complicated environmental situation and other factors" have a greater effect on people's health than GDP, because diseases rise at the same rate as crop yields.

Good doctors advise people "to make it a habit to read the labels on food products carefully, to know exactly what you are eating," given the lack of obstacles to junk food, whether made in Belarus or imported from all over the world.

Another excellent piece of advice is that children should be given the opportunity to do sports together with their parents at school gyms. Meanwhile, the average family spends much more money on cigarettes and liquor than on health. In the second quarter of 2008, spending on liquor jumped by nearly 30 percent.

It can be said that caring about one's own health is not a function of GDP. Individuals take care of themselves when they have the will and awareness to do so. Will and awareness come with education. Education fully depends on one's language, which stores the nation's heritage, created over millennia. Primitive people without their own language do not understand the world around them, cannot stand this life and literally go mad. Not incidentally, the incidence of mental disease jumped by 34 percent during the last five years of economic boom. This is the highest rise among newly diagnosed diseases.

Successful farming in the territories contaminated with radioactive substances contributed also to a sharp rise in cardiovascular diseases (28 percent), malignant tumours (25 percent) and pregnancy complications (14 percent). Poor infants get sick twice as often as in 1990. Sad to say, but people can live even in worse conditions.

Meanwhile, a lack of will, awareness and confidence in the future of our godforsaken country is responsible for the rising suicide rate. Some 200,000 people are treated for alcoholism, while the rest of the 800,000 alcoholics think they are not sick and keep enjoying drinking. Every third person who perished in the battle for GDP was drunk to the point of incoherence. Officials reported that those who committed suicide during the six months of robust economic growth in 2008 include 1,075 people capable of working, nine legal minors and 329 retirees. As many as 2,030, including 85 boys and 69 girls, tried to kill themselves but failed. Despite the rise of agro-towns, rural men keep setting shocking records — more than 100 suicides for every 100,000 people. To better understand the number — this is 50 times the suicide rate in Armenia. Five suicides for 100,000 were registered in Tsarist Russia; and 30 in the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, as the government boasted, scavengers from prosecutors' offices have recently discovered flaws in the sector, although people have complained about these problems for years:

1) poor quality specialised care;
2) disregard for professional ethics;
3) disregard for sanitary standards;
4) patient accommodation irregularities;
5) violations of services-for-a-fee rules;
6) failures to meet deadlines for the examination of complaints.

How could it be different if the national staffing levels among doctors stood at 95 percent (70 percent in emergency hospitals), more than 6,000 doctors were over the retirement age, and only 80 percent of the 52,000 general practitioner positions were filled at the beginning of 2008? The sector is short of 34,000 employees. This is not surprising, considering the country's average doctor earns just 3,500 rubles ($1.5) an hour, while the nation's average pay is 4,400 rubles per hour ($2), and 5,100 rubles ($2.3) in the manufacturing sector.

The government spent $0.5 per person a day on healthcare this and last year. Healthcare funding was 19 times that level in the EU and 37 times that level in the United States. Belarus' health spending makes up less than five percent of GDP, while European nations believe that health costs more, allocating nine percent of GDP. In the United States, health expenditures account for 15 percent of that country's huge GDP.

Our bureaucrats know which side of their bread to butter, which is why they earmarked 1 trillion rubles for healthcare this year, and twice as much for their own protection, the police and the Committee for State Security (KGB).

It will be impossible to integrate into the EU with a flimsy healthcare system like this. Huge investment is needed to revamp the whole system, from institutional changes in the first place to moves towards free private enterprise and reliable targeted assistance.

Incidentally, a target-oriented approach is the main problem in all of the above-mentioned areas, not only healthcare, because the government still uses Soviet-style methods of tackling issues en masse. Specially designed for the era of militant communism, the approach does not work in a post-industrial society in the information age.

A low life expectancy and a high incidence of disease amongst working-age people (9-10 days of paid sick leave per person every year) cannot be tackled overnight. But capital investment is required immediately. It is expected to pay off within ten years.

Housing Construction. No matter how hard the president and government have tried, waiting lists for housing have not become shorter. A quarter of city residents and one in five villagers are in need of housing as before. Maybe it is because the government's declared desire to address the housing problem was not genuine (see Table 2). Housing credit programmes surged in the last two years. It is unclear why the surge occurred so late.

Table 2. Number of apartments built per 1.000 residents per year

1970	1980	1990	1999	2006
10	8	8	4	5

Source: The National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus

Not by any stretch of imagination is it possible to spot an upward trend in these numbers. Given such "progress," the waiting lists should have expand-

ed. But that has not happened because of a decrease in the young population in the country.

I cannot even say that those who bought new apartments gained enough space for living. Belarus is at the bottom of the European countries' ranking in housing floor space per capita (Table 3).

Table 3. Housing indicators for some European countries

Country	Live together, people.	Floor space, sq M.	Floor space per capita sq m.
Belgium	2,6	201	77
Lithuania	2,9	112	39
Slovakia	3,3	109	33
Denmark	2,2	62	28
Poland	3,3	92	28
Belarus	2,8	69	25

The ranking is based on the average area of housing space per person living permanently in a certain apartment or home. Source data: http://www.stat.gov.pl, http://www.worldbank.org; and the author's calculations.

Officials have discussed several ideas of how to address the housing problem. One is to print money and offer credit. One of the results of such a policy worth mentioning in the historical perspective is currency depreciation. Another is to stimulate natural demand. With half a million households on the waiting list, real estate prices in Belarus have skyrocketed to reach the levels of major European capitals. Apartments will soon be cheaper in Brussels, a city swarming with highly-paid bureaucrats, than in Minsk.

Our own: A Turning point

They say aviation manuals include the rule concerning the point of no-return, after which the aircraft can not return because it has not enough fuel. Here is the question: What distance will Belarus cover in the next few years in the direction of Russia?

In the grand scheme of things, there are only two reasons why Belarus is leaning toward the East — energy and Lukashenka. Belarus is becoming more dependent on energy, not only because of its geographic location as a border

and transit nation, but also because of poor management. The latter is not only attributable to the fact that Belarusians say "A settled stone gathers moss," whereas the Europeans say "A rolling stone gathers no moss." The real reason is that industry and agriculture remain unreformed. It is hard to say when Belarus' Soviet-style economy will get on the European track. Let us consider the comparative energy consumption numbers in Table 4.

Table 4. Primary energy consumption measured in kilogrammess of standard oil per $1,000 of GDP (In 2000 prices)

Country, region	On purchasing power parity basis		
	1995	2000	2008
World	240	220	205
Belarus	700	510	420
Russia	670	590	470
EU-25	180	160	150

Computed on the basis of: Energy Balances of Non-OECD Countries, 2003-2004, 2006 Edition, OECD/IEA, Paris, 2006, pp.II.333-II.338

A troubling trend has persisted against the backdrop of rising exports of raw materials and a heavier reliance on raw materials processing. Imported fuel and energy has been used less efficiently. The country's foreign trade is in deficit and the gap keeps widening.

Based on a scenario selected for this article, Belarus' population will decline to 8 million by the time it applies for EU membership (Table 5)

Table 5. Description of the country's socioeconomic state

	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Population at the end of the year, thousand people	10190	10177	9990	9951	9899	9849	9800	9751	9714

Source: The National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus

In 1995, Belarus' population fell by 463,000 people. Because of a high death rate among working-age men, the life expectancy gap between men and women has widened to 15 years. The main causes of death are cardiovascular diseases, which account for more than half of all cases. The labour market will

shrink after 2010, and again after 2030 because of the population decline in 1990 through 1995.

Table 6. The average number of people employed in the economy, thousand people

1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
5151	4410	4441	4417	4381	4339	4316	4350	4362

No shift has been observed in the employment structure towards more advanced sectors of the market. An estimated 300,000 people are permanently looking for work. The official number of unemployed persons stands at about 70,000. About 160,000 employees work part-time during an average year.

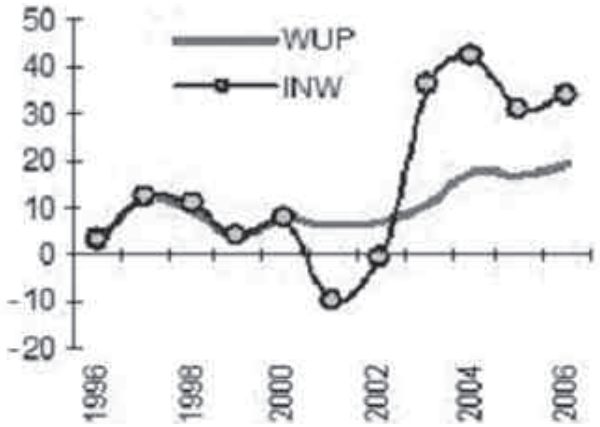


Figure 5. Investment rise in 1994 prices with 1995 = 100 percent.

Approximately 30,000 new jobs have been created every year, but this is half the required number, taking into account equipment depreciation and ageing. At least 250,000 people, registered by official statisticians as full-time employees, work abroad on a part time basis (an optimistic estimate based on reported numbers of Belarusians convicted abroad).

The government does not have evident fiscal problems because of a flawed process in the consideration and adoption of Budget Laws. Meanwhile, the taxation base has not shown a clear steady trend towards expansion. A quarter of the enterprises registered in the country cause the net budget losses. VAT levied from sales revenues accounts for the largest proportion of tax arrears, nearly 40 percent, and excise duties make up about 10 percent. Overdue debts account for 20 percent of enterprises' total debt - about 5 trillion

rubles for goods supplied on credit. Naturally, debts are likely to worry potential investors.

GDP growth has been real even if Gross Domestic Product is calculated in prices adjusted for inflation. After 2002, growth was propelled by a wide difference between the prices of imported crude oil and exported petroleum products, but the terms of foreign trade have worsened and therefore the short-term outlook is not optimistic.

The grandeur of accomplished public works projects — 1,500 religious buildings, ice hockey arenas, the Stalin Line of Defence memorial, agro-towns — has been out of proportion with reported expenditures because the government has blended economics with ideology.

Investment in fixed assets has been insufficient. Evidence for this is provided by a slowdown in productivity growth inconsistent with the reported surge in investment.

Figure 5 indicates that the government has reacted to the situation, but effects will manifest themselves no earlier than in three or four years if conditions are favourable. But conditions have somewhat deteriorated.

People see the comforting effects of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) when new jobs are being created. It is better when jobs are created for highly-skilled workers. It is better still when one has to undertake additional training to be able to compete for a job.

This is why it is not as important to know the total amount of FDI as to trace the FDI flows to specific sectors. It is also essential to find out what kind of money it is — loans, equity investment, investment in equipment or in personnel skills.

FDI increased by 16 percent in Central and Eastern Europe last year. FDI flows markedly shifted eastward. The EU's new members saw their share shrink to 44 percent from 55 percent in 2006. The Balkan countries accounted for just ten percent, while as much as 47 percent went toward Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, up from 35 percent in 2006 (Table 7).

The EU's new members are losing steam because privatisation is largely complete there, foreign multinationals have finished their takeovers of local markets and unit labour force costs are rising. Additional investments take place primarily within existing companies, by reinvesting profits.

The Baltic and Adriatic Sea countries saw investment flow into the real estate and business services sectors. It should be noted that Russia is eyeing similar sectors in Belarus (the Minsk City project, etc.). However, a major problem with this type of FDI is that it will not generate the exports which Belarus critically needs to correct its soaring foreign trade deficit. It should also be kept in mind that Russia plays a big role both as an investor and a receiver of FDI. Its share in the FDI inflow in the region rose from 17 percent in 2005 to 38 percent in 2007.

The rise is linked to Russia' dynamic consumer goods sector, favourable terms of trade in oil and other raw materials, and its buoyant financial sector. Incidentally, Belarus benefited indirectly from the FDI surge in Russia. However, Russia's unpredictable politics, from foreign investors' point of view, means that Ukraine and Belarus are more attractive investment destinations.

The region has been unsettled by a grim outlook for financial markets in late 2008 and early 2009. In my opinion, investment in non-manufacturing sectors may decrease, while FDI in export-oriented industries may grow because decreasing sales may prompt international corporations to channel their capital into new plants in countries with economically advantageous conditions. A Euro appreciating against the dollar may challenge the external competitiveness of European producers and they will turn their attention to Belarus.

Noteworthy are the discrepancies between forecasts made by the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (WIIW) in spring 2008 and data from the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis. The ministry reports a 44-percent year-on-year increase in FDI in the real sector (excluding banks) in the first six months, to €2 billion.

Regrettably, less than half of all investments flowed to the manufacturing sector, with loans accounting for 2/3 of the amount. It should be noted that portfolio investment has no effect on the country's economy, because of the underdeveloped stock market.

Russia accounted for about 30 percent of FDI, Switzerland for about 20 percent, the UK for about 14 percent and Austria about 10 percent.

The ministry's report indicates that the investment has been rising at a higher pace, but, obviously, drastic institutional and legislative changes are needed to make sure that it soars to the required level in per capita terms.

Table 7. FDI in Central and Eastern Europe (€ million, 2001—2007)

Country	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008*
Albania	232	143	158	278	224	259	463	600
Bulgaria	903	980	1851	2736	3152	5961	6109	4500
Belarus	**107**	**262**	**152**	**132**	**245**	**282**	**1293**	**300**
Bosnia	133	282	338	567	478	564	1478	800
Hungary	4391	3185	1888	3633	6172	5428	4049	3500
Latvia	147	269	270	512	568	1326	1589	1100
Lithuania	499	772	160	623	826	1448	1412	1200
Macedonia	499	112	100	261	77	345	239	500
Moldova	116	89	65	121	159	193	335	200
Poland	6372	4371	4067	10453	8317	15198	12834	13000
Russia	3069	3660	7041	12422	10354	25979	38344	35000
Romania	1294	1212	1946	5183	5213	9060	7141	8000
Serbia	184	504	1204	777	1265	3504	2258	2000
Slovakia	1768	4397	1914	2441	1952	3324	2093	2000
Slovenia	412	1722	271	665	473	512	1073	500
Ukraine	884	734	1260	1380	6263	4467	7720	7000
Croatia	1468	1138	1762	950	1468	2738	3626	2800
Montenegro	5	76	44	53	393	644	1008	800
The Czech Republic	6296	9012	1863	4007	9374	4797	6674	6000
Estonia	603	307	822	775	2255	1341	1815	1200
Average in 20 countries	1469	1661	1359	2398	2961	4369	5078	4550

*WIIW forecast

Data:

	FDI in 2007 as %age of FDI in 2001-2007		Total FDI, million euros 2001-2007
Belarus	**52**	Russia	100869
Montenegro	45	Poland	61612
Bosnia	38	Czech Republic	42023
Russia	38	Romania	31049
Ukraine	34	**Belarus**	**2473**
Average in 20 countries	26	Average in 20 countries	14252

Source: WIIW Database on Foreign Direct Investment in Central, East and Southeast Europe, 2008

Let us take a look at Belarus' imports and exports. Both have soared in the last 14 years. At the same time, growing foreign trade has boosted traffic capacity in the channels through which the country imports problems from its neighbours. The demand for Belarus' goods has decreased and prices for imported goods have changed.

Table 8. Key foreign trade indicators (US$ million)

	1995	2000	2005	2007
Exports of goods, including to:	4803	7326	15979	24275
Russia	2185	3710	5716	8879
West	1776	2927	8919	13054
Imports of goods, including from:	5564	8646	16708	28693
Russia	2965	5605	10118	17205
West	1887	2576	5566	9677

Source: The National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus

Table 8 shows that trends radically changed the direction in the middle of the period, after the 1997-1998 financial crisis, — exports to the West skyrocketed, surpassing exports to Russia, while imports from Russia also rose dramatically. These trends are linked to prices for crude oil and fertilisers.

As prices kept rising, the commodity structure of exports (Table 9) began to change and additional foreign currency revenues flowed in, helping the government to address some of its internal issues. The rising foreign currency revenues from external trade, the inflow of cash earned abroad by migrant workers (an estimated 250,000 Belarusians have worked abroad full time in each of the last five years) and a foreign debt increase (Table 13) enabled the National Bank of Belarus to keep the national currency steady against the dollar and build up foreign exchange reserves (see http://www.nbrb.by/statistics).

Table 9. The commodity structure of exports and imports in 2007 as a percentage of the total

Right — exports; Left — imports
Boxes from the top down: Food and agricultural produce; other (timber, building materials and textiles); machines, equipment and vehicles; mineral and chemical industry products.
Source: The National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus

The disappearance of the above-mentioned factors will lead to various consequences. Therefore, the main question connected with the crisis for this country is to identify a general direction based on expected changes. Let us start with oil, petroleum products, potash fertilisers, natural gas and the major internal market indicators such the demand for housing, brand-new vehicles and computers (Tables 10 and 12).

Tables 10. Some import and export indicators in physical terms

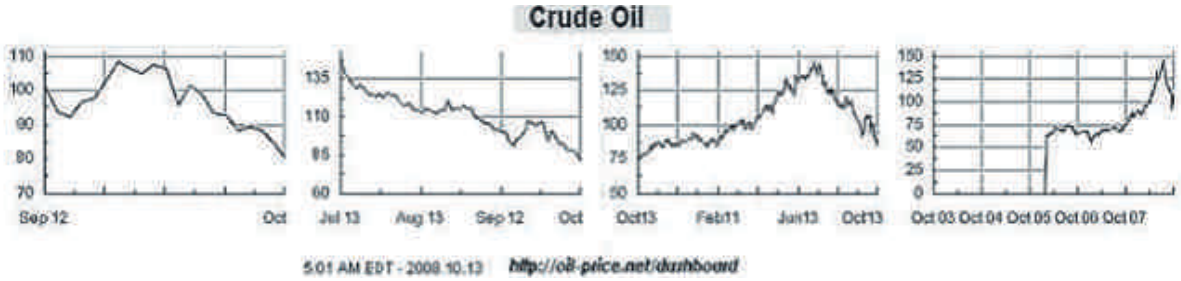
	2000	2005	2007
Crude oil imports, million tons	11.9	19.2	20.0
Petroleum exports, million tons	7.8	13.5	15.1
Natural gas imports, billion cu metres	17.1	20.1	20.6
Potash exports, thousand tons	2840.2	4288.7	4354.0
Car imports, thousand cars	57.7	131.3	180.4
Computer imports, thousand computers	1001.6	738.1	1747.4

Source: The National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus

All the selected indicators have been rising. It is important to note a steady domestic demand for imported oil and a rise in the consumption of natural gas to what appears to be an upper limit.

Petroleum products accounted for more than half of Belarusian exports (Table 9). Oil prices have been falling as a result of the crisis (Table 11). Prices are decreasing amidst a shrinking demand for petroleum products. The country will import less oil and export less petroleum (it should be noted that Russia will claim a greater share of the petroleum export duty).

Table 11. Crude oil prices in the previous month, quarter, year and five years



These trends are obviously not favourable for Belarus. That natural gas will be cheaper following an oil slump is not a big relief, because, as the foreign trade gap narrows, the country will lose its competitive edge, which is di-

rectly proportional to the difference between the average price of gas in Europe and the discounted price paid at the Belarusian border. Gazprom's poor financial position also does not inspire hope for relief. The nation will not be able to substantially change its fuel consumption pattern over a short period of time.

Hopefully, potash fertiliser consumers in India, China, Brazil, the United States and Poland will remain solvent.

As for the so-called "authoritarian modernisation," it is a product of the imagination of the Lukashenka propaganda apparatus. During the crisis, it would be possible to increase sales of the products of Belarus' barely competitive equipment manufacturing industry, but only in the former Soviet republics and through barter transactions. A major setback for Belarusian enterprises will be the likely launch in Russia of plants that manufacture the same products but use more advanced technologies.

Incidentally, the crisis has triggered layoffs in all the neighbouring countries. As a result, a workforce shortage was eliminated in Belarus' construction industry. The inflow of money from migrant workers slowed down.

Meanwhile, Belarusians are on a spending spree as they have become used to a better quality of life. The consumption boom was fuelled by the banking sector as the credit market expanded for six years. The borrowers, mostly persons aged between 20 and 50, were in the red by more than 10 trillion rubles (approximately nine percent of GDP in 2007) in mid 2008.

Table 12. Commercial bank loans to households

(In billions of rubles). Data for 1 January 2007, 1 April 2007, 1 July 2007, 1 October 2007 and 1 January 2008. Navy blue: the real estate market; light blue: loans provided for the purchase of consumer goods.

Table 13. The gross foreign debt of the Republic of Belarus in 2003-2007 (US$ million)

	01.01.04	01.01.05	01.01.06	01.01.07	01.01.08
Gross foreign debt	4,174.9	4,935.4	5,128.2	6,844.1	12,493.5
Governmental agencies	343.9	492.1	606.8	589.0	2,036.3
Banks	400.7	625.8	948.3	1,486.7	2,570.8
and other sectors	2,853.6	3,402.5	3,219.1	4,368.0	6,782.0
Direct investment: Loans among companies	293.0	338.2	353.3	399.7	508.2

Source: the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus

The government, commercial banks and enterprises have fallen deeper into debt. Given considerable debts amassed by the latter, short-term liabilities create risks for the manufacturing sector. The foreign debt totals nearly $15 billion and is still rising.

The government declared a plan to borrow an additional $4 billion from Russia and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which corresponds to the country's foreign trade deficit at the end of the year. It should be noted that the debt changed according to a well-known pattern of growth on the basis of discreet and limited resources. In particular, it reached a point where the debt growth and contraction process can no longer be regarded as linear. Calculations suggest that with the current pace of growth, the foreign debt will range between $17 billion and $20 billion at the end of 2009, because loans will only be approved for debt restructuring. If a steady increase continues, cyclical fluctuations may turn into a chaotic mess.

State and private sector borrowers adjust their liabilities and payment discipline in proportion to the money supplied by banks, based on market changes.

The government took urgent measures in response to the crisis (see below, selected data from the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus). One of the steps in this direction was the president's decision to fully guarantee all bank deposits.

Table 14. Data indicative of action in response to the crisis Bullion prices for precious metals (rubles)

Date	Gold (1g)	Silver (1g)	Platinum (1g)	Palladium (1g)
01.08.2008	61,986	1,164	119,146	25,691
01.11.2008	49,654	633	53,846	13,359

Refinance rate

Effective from	Base refinance interest rate, % per annum
2008	
15.10.2008	10.75
13.08.2008	10.5
01.07.2008	10.25

Ruble exchange rate

	August 1	October 1
US dollar	2123	2114
Euro	3301	2691

Source: The National Bank of the Republic of Belarus

Ruble deposits rose by 26 percent, or nine trillion rubles, in the first nine months to October 2008. Hard currency deposits reportedly increased by $2 billion. The urgent measures adopted helped curb the surging demand for foreign cash, although in some sectors, demand is ten times higher than the supply.

In this situation, banks are seeking to create a "safety cushion." In September alone, the National Bank's gold and foreign exchange reserves plunged by $700 million to $4.9 billion.

The government has an effective set of tools to alleviate the effects of the global economic crisis:

1) privatisation of state enterprises (although their price will go down);

2) economic liberalisation (the government has declared its intention to liberalise the economy, but has taken few real steps so far);

3) agricultural reform (aimed to stir up social and economic activity);

4) ruble devaluation (the government sees this as a last resort measure).

The Belarusian leader's long-term goals and priorities. Alyaksandr Lukashenka urged his government to achieve the following mid-term objectives: boost exports and food production, and build more houses. He expects the government to maintain public sector domination over the private sector, and keep adopting budgets oriented toward social needs.

Among factors that may contribute to success, Lukashenka mentioned 1) a higher solvent demand and the expansion of Belarus' share in foreign mar-

kets; 2) innovation; 3) the streamlining of government administration and management system; 4) the diversification of foreign suppliers of raw materials; and 5) continuing integration with Russia.

Conclusions

Official statistical data do not provide a full picture of long-term economic trends in Belarus because structural defects generate factors beyond the limits of the economy. Methods employed by the government to manage the economy enable it to manipulate resources, regardless of ownership. Inventories do not directly depend on the internal and external demand, and deviations increase. Russia remains the major market for Belarusian goods but it has become less reliable as both investor and consumer. The type of relationship established with Russia helps the government to delay restructuring and distorts conventional market signals. Unwelcome trends in relations with Russia force the government to take more unconsidered steps and tighten policies.

Forecast. Resources of extensive growth, on which the government has relied from 1995 until the present, are becoming exhausted for the following reasons:

1) Enterprises need more loans, while internal and external credit is now more expensive;

2) The price gap impairs the interoperability of agriculture and industry, while a global market uncertainty casts doubt on steady export growth;

3) Belarus' dependence on Russia for energy will increase;

4) The defence industry and industries that supply it with components will remain heavily dependent on Russian interests;

5) The shadow sector will expand and economic crime will rise because people are not in a mood to reduce their consumption;

6) With time, Belarus' output will become less and less compatible with the output of developed countries.

What alternatives are realistically possible?

Foreign businesses crop up, lured by Belarus' "constructive offers" and intellectual potential, on concessions-in-exchange-for-markets terms.

The government offers tax breaks only to companies offering environmentally-friendly technology-intensive projects.

What are the possible adverse consequences?

Officials are already fighting with each other for the right to distribute and use foreign loans.

The living standards have risen temporarily, but considerable numbers have not earned a better living.

Foreign loans mainly go towards the overproduction of unnecessary goods.

The country is growing dependent on foreign loans.

The following conclusions can be drawn from what has been said above:

1) Energy is the root of all problems;

2) Europe is battling for future energy prospects using legal tools; Russia employs financial and bullying tools; while Belarus relies on ideological and political tools;

3) Transformation in Belarus is quite possible and it would benefit Europe;

4) In five years, if current trends continue unabated, Belarus will only be able to integrate with what will be left of Russia at the time.

Conclusion

BELARUS NEEDS ACTIVE DIALOGUE AND INTEGRATION WITH THE EU

Alyaksandr Milinkevich

The European Union is of vital value for Belarus and its future as a European democracy. Belarus is a new nation-state in central-eastern Europe. Throughout its history it has exchanged thoughts, human resources and goods with other European countries. Over the centuries, many Belarusians have contributed to the development of European ideas, science and culture.

Unfortunately, during the last two centuries Belarus' relations and contacts with European countries were not developing on a full scale. The political regime that exists in Belarus at the moment has also been trying, until very recently, to build a fence between Belarusians and united Europe. The current political and economic system of Belarus is obviously leading the country into a deadlock. This path lacks any long-term vision for the development of the country. Because of the government's refusal to promote pluralism, both political and economic, Belarus has not been able to positively contribute to regional prosperity and security and fully benefit from a relationship with the EU and its member-states, based on common values and shared interests. As a result, we face a situation where our potential for mutually beneficial relations is extremely underdeveloped.

Nowadays, the very first glance at Belarus proves that its political and societal system differs substantially from its direct and indirect European neighbours. The monopolisation of the political sphere by a small group, eager to keep and expand its tight grip on the economy and civil society, impedes private initiative and individual creativity, generates apathy and a lack of trust. Regular, and at times even increasing, assaults on fundamental freedoms and

pluralistic norms keep the government unaccounted and non-transparent. The misleading figures of mechanical GDP growth in Belarus should not be taken for granted since they are mostly due to preferential energy prices from Russia and fall within the dynamics of a larger regional economic recovery. Today, in the context of the global economic crisis, the short-sightedness of Belarus' government becomes more and more obvious. Our immediate neighbours, Poland and the Baltic countries, have made far better policy decisions, resulting in stable democratic institutions, sustainable development, greater competitiveness and business attractiveness. One has to bear in mind that our starting positions were relatively similar at the beginning of 1990s.

Belarusians enjoy very few European freedoms and have a fresh look on what is going on in the EU. We can only congratulate the EU on what it has already achieved and we wish it to successfully continue its efforts in promoting peace, European values and the well-being of its peoples. From time to time, EU citizens raise voices of displeasure and frustration with the EU's existing practices in economics, domestic and foreign policy, and other spheres. This only confirms that there is no ideal society and that people tend to get used to good things. EU citizens need to appreciate what they have in comparison with what people in other countries, like Belarus, have.

Built upon on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, the European Union has achieved a lot since the beginning of European integration. The mere existence of freedom of movement in the EU has enormously changed the lives of its people and provided advanced dynamics for its national economies. Freedom of assembly, speech, and conscience contribute to healthy dialogue within and among nations, thus helping them to find balanced solutions for various problems.

The European integration project has also proved to be authoritative and attractive for those European countries that were not initially engaged in it. Consecutive enlargements have extended the area of prosperity and freedom in Europe. The EU has played an outstanding role in helping its new members to consolidate democratic traditions and to modernise their economies.

We expect the EU to play the same prominent role vis-à-vis Belarus, i.e. helping to bring Belarus back to the European family of free nations. We want the EU to develop a more active policy and a better understanding of what

Belarus is, in which directions it is moving and how Europe can influence the dynamics taking place within Belarusian society and economy.

Our democratic civil society is following the Central European pattern by developing various advocacy coalitions for a European Belarus. There are an increasing number of Belarusians, especially among young and educated people, who want positive changes and stand for independence, democracy and the European choice for Belarus. United Europe is a natural gravitation centre for us. For all of us, the European choice is not only a choice of better living conditions or modern technologies. It is our civilisational choice. Our country belongs to Europe; we want it to share fully European values of democracy and civil society. I strongly believe that Belarusians deserve to enjoy freedom, parliamentary democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, market economy and a relationship model between the individual and the state which is based not on submission but on partnership and mutual respect. For Belarusians, the European Union is attractive for its diversity and this aspect is crucial for us as we need to preserve our identity and strengthen our sovereignty. We see how attentive to these issues the EU is and we understand that all nations inside the EU have good opportunities for developing their prosperity and freedom.

Today we can see that Belarus, despite, until very recently, its policy of self-isolation, is becoming more and more exposed to the EU. The EU as a whole and its member-states now have more influence and leverage on Belarus. The economic problems triggered by the shift in Russia's policy on energy pricing for Belarus have recently shaken the regime. The ruler of Belarus wants to avoid being totally dependent on Russia. He wants Western economic support without having to change the political climate in Belarus. The unreformed and uncompetitive economy of Belarus is not ready to face market prices on energy resources. Even a slight rise in gas price makes the government ask Moscow for billions of dollars in loans. If Belarus does not start to modernise its economy and liberalise its political system, its dependence on Russia will lead critically to *de facto* protectorate status.

The EU has always declared that it keeps its door wide open for dialogue and closer relations with Belarus. We also stand for a policy of dialogue and engagement with Belarus and its government since we know that sanctions can be counter-productive, they hurt the most ordinary people and push Belarus in the direction of Russia. The only alternative to the dialogue strate-

gy is the continuing self-isolation of Belarus with the ultimate end of firstly economic and later political independence of the country. We are aware that there are very few reasons to truly believe in the credibility of the Minsk's official promises. But European dialogue is needed for Belarus, for its survival and evolution as a free and independent European nation. Europe will not be complete without Belarus; Belarus will not be democratic without a united Europe. This dialogue can produce many things that had not been expected. It opens a window of opportunity for gradual change in Belarus. It will allow greater visibility of the EU in Belarus and contribute to the Europeanisation of Belarus, i.e. the transfer of EU rules, procedures and norms, bringing about changes to Belarus' political and economic institutions, legislation and social life, values and identities.

Throughout the year 2008, there have been a number of positive moves from the regime: 8 political prisoners were released; the regime has started dialogue with the EU; two independent newspapers were re-included in the state distribution network. The regime has declared its readiness to talk about changes in the media and electoral law. This is only a beginning. We should use this opportunity to achieve the liberalisation and democratisation of Belarus.

I think that there is no better moment for EU engagement with Belarus. After the release of political prisoners, the EU is and should be the most reliable modernisation partner for Belarus. But the constructive dialogue has been hindered by, on the one hand, EU conditions and, on the other, by the position of Belarus' political leadership, which is unwilling to start transformations in the country without proper guarantees. If the parties agree that the 12 EU conditions could be reformulated, and could be fulfilled by the Belarusian side gradually (i.e. a 'road map'), it should be highly possible to develop a real dialogue with the Belarusian government. This would open up prospects for an improvement in Belarus-EU relations and create more chances for strengthening our independence.

This dialogue is to be conditional. The prerequisite for such a policy and the best indication of the Belarusian government's goodwill is the full and unconditional end to politically motivated pressure and persecution of Belarusian democratic activists. The Belarusian government is capable of making this step, which corresponds to the principles of moral politics and creating better conditions for equal and mutually beneficial dialogue and cooperation

between Belarus and the European Union. This dialogue must also be transparent and understandable to the Belarusian people, and should also involve, wherever possible, Belarusian civil society as a third partner.

Nowadays, in order to prevent Belarus from sinking into a deep crisis, the EU needs to develop an active, moral and flexible policy with a precisely formulated consistency in its actions. The EU-Belarus dialogue should result in the adoption of a programme of economic and political steps, with each side making conciliations towards the other. The road map should comprise mutual actions and mutual commitments between the EU and Belarus. Belarus' initial commitments should include the ending of politically motivated pressure on the opposition and civil society, legal and real guarantees for media freedom and freedom of association, as well as adopting changes in its electoral legislation that would meet the OSCE criteria for free and fair elections. The EU would commit itself to quickly reducing the price of Schengen visas for Belarusian citizens to the same level of 35 Euros paid by Ukrainians and Russians; to the gradual removal of Belarusian officials from the visa ban list; to providing a preferential trade regime for Belarusian exports and allowing Belarus to become part of a number of ENP and EP programmes, especially in the fields of energy, transport and ecology. The visa issue is the most urgent matter that could be solved unilaterally by the EU as a demonstration of its goodwill towards ordinary Belarusian citizens, who now feel isolated from Europe by a new wall. The way the EU member states address the visa issue for Belarus will prove to be one of the crucial factors concerning the future of Belarus and its people.

After completing the first stage, the parties could start working on the next steps. If one side fails to fulfil its commitments, the other side suspends its moves. Economic incentives could be used as instruments to demand more concessions from the Belarusian government on human rights. The Belarusian government has been showing interest in investments and technologies from EU countries, in learning from them how better to guarantee sustainable development while protecting natural resources and the environment. Belarus needs further development of trade relations.

The EU can have an impact on Belarusian economic actors since the enlarged EU absorbs about half of all Belarusian exports. Today, the economic relations of Belarus with EU countries are one-sided and obviously underdeveloped. They are mostly limited to exchange of goods and, moreover, min-

eral products constitute the major part of Belarusian exports to EU countries. Belarus' main export positions are connected to raw materials and derivatives (minerals, oil by-products, timber), not goods and services made through the application of new technologies. Forign investment is unsatisfactorily low, due to the unfavourable investment climate. Opening our economy to European investment, technologies and business culture is one of the main tasks facing us today. In fact, this is the only way for a small and export-oriented economy like Belarus to survive in a highly competitive environment.

In the energy sector, a common energy and transport network from the Baltic to Black Seas is in the geopolitical interest of Belarus, helping to diversify and reduce over-reliance on one supplier. Developing such an infrastructure will enhance regional cooperation in fighting organised crime, arms-, drug- and human-trafficking. European technologies, expertise and assistance in strengthening energy efficiency and developing alternative energy sources are of paramount importance for the industrial and agricultural sectors of Belarus. Nowadays, where the Belarusian government has taken a hushed and non-transparent decision to start building a nuclear power plant in post-Chernobyl and authoritarian Belarus, the exchange of experience and know-how on energy efficiency becomes all the more essential for Belarus to preserve its independence. Clean technologies based on renewable sources of energy such as wind and solar powers and biomass re-cycling ought to become alternative to nuclear power, making energy consumption environmental friendly and cost-efficient.

We also expect that the EU, while pursuing dialogue and cooperation with the Belarusian government, will increase support for civil society in Belarus until there is a strong democratic national identity coupled with responsible civic participation in public affairs. Since the political system of Belarus is not currently conceived to allow a democratic public dialogue within Belarusian society, and it is also set to prevent a democratic national identity from developing, the EU can also help to explain and initiate grassroots democratic processes of interest-formation and representation. This would also mean increasing the emphasis in its democratic public discourse on the idea of both European and Belarusian-European national identities.

The EU has an interest in supporting its friends within Belarus by offering them tangible benefits for cooperation and bypassing the regime's obstacles. To that end, the various domestic Belarusian pro-European interest

groups and political structures are to be engaged in a dense network of contacts and common programmes. There is huge potential for cooperation between the Belarusian and European civil societies. Belarusian society needs more knowledge about democracy, human rights and market economics. European partners can promote cooperation in the fields of educational youth exchanges and civil society contacts. Cooperation can be strengthened in the fields of environmental and historical heritage protection. The EU member-states which had themselves to pass from authoritarian rule to democracy are aware of challenges that authoritarianism poses and how important European solidarity is. For us, their experience is extremely valuable and worth studying in depth. This should be done by both civil society's and government's representatives.

A more active and consistent EU policy on democracy promotion in Belarus, coupled with a concrete offer of a European alternative for the Belarusian people will vitally help Belarusian democratic forces to vanquish the apathy and uncertainty upheld by the regime among citizens of Belarus. Belarus badly needs the largest possible political, economic, scientific and societal contacts with European countries. It is in Belarus' interest to seek to achieve visa-free travel and to create a free trade area as a first step towards achieving the free movement of labour, capital, goods and services with the EU. This is why the Polish and Swedish initiatives on European Partnership aimed at the economic integration, legislative approximation, regulatory convergence, and strengthened institutional capacities of the 6 Eastern European countries, including Belarus, is extremely timely and promising. It can induce Belarus to make necessary reforms and be more integrated with the EU.

The Belarusian pro-European forces are aware of the opportunities and challenges that a responsible and accountable Belarusian government will face in order to be integrated into European networks and institutions. We are on the beginning of the road. Returning to Europe is not an easy step to make for Belarusians, requiring laborious efforts spread over decades by the whole generation in order to improve the economic, legal and spiritual outlook of our society. Many Europeans countries have successfully followed this path. Belarus is not an exception. For us as a European democratic nation, there is no alternative.

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