OCCASIONAL PAPERS

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THE CHALLENGE OF BELARUS AND EUROPEAN RESPONSES

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INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES - WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION
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THE CHALLENGE OF BELARUS, AND EUROPEAN RESPONSES

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

This paper deals with Belarus's slide into authoritarianism, its foreign policy – especially its relations with Russia – and the European responses (or lack thereof).

The Republic of Belarus remains an exception and outsider among the states of Central and Eastern Europe. Whereas almost all the other states in the region have adopted Western orientations and market-driven reforms, Belarus has chosen to remain exclusively in the orbit of the Russian Federation.

The paper explores why Belarus fell into authoritarianism and provides a tentative analysis of its failed economic reforms and underdeveloped political system. As it becomes clear, it is the examination of Belarus's national identity and civil society that provides the best explanation for the country's choice to accept authoritarianism.

Presently Belarus articulates its security and foreign policy almost exclusively according to the interests of the Russian Federation. Such trend started developing even before Alexander Lukashenko became president. Under his rule, however, the country's foreign policy has focused only on the East. The reasons are of both a domestic political and general economic nature, ranging from the country's weak national identity to the legacy of the Soviet past, from trade and energy dependency on Russia to the feeble ties to the West. A detailed analysis of the Minsk-Moscow relationship shows, however, how intrinsically tense this is and how potentially contradictory mutual expectations are.

Taking into consideration Belarus's direct border with NATO and (sooner rather than later) with the EU itself, the paper shows why Belarus poses a challenge to European security and what policies could be adopted to deal with it. Past and current responses by various European organisations and institutions are also examined. Europe is trying to find a solution through a policy of fostering an alternative elite in Belarus and strengthening civil society. At the same time, however, Europe presently has only modest leverage to influence developments in Belarus. More could perhaps be done indirectly, i.e. through Moscow, but so far the Russian leadership has refused to discuss matters related to Belarus with either the EU or other European and international organisations.

Presidential elections are expected to take place on 9 September 2001. They will represent an important test for both Belarussian and European policies.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Belarus has become an exception to the norm and an outsider among the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Whereas all countries in the region, to various degrees, have adopted and taken steps to implement democracy, free market ideas, and westward orientations, Belarus has restored and resurrected old values and principles of the Soviet Union such as authoritarianism and a state-regulated economy. The country is also striving to form a united state with the Russian Federation. After the fall of Slobodan Milosevic, Belarus is now the last bastion of authoritarianism in Europe. At the moment, the image of Belarus as a 'lost country' run by an undemocratic leader is firmly fixed in the mental images of European political élites. The latest parliamentary elections that took place on October 15, 2000 might serve as evidence of the lack of democracy in Belarus. The international community did not recognise the poll results because they failed to meet any sort of standard for democratic elections.

It is arguable that Belarus would remain almost totally forgotten in Western capitals if NATO and EU candidate countries did not share borders with it. The Atlantic Alliance has had a direct border with Belarus since 1999, when Poland became a member. Poland and two other neighbours of Belarus - Latvia and Lithuania – will soon become members of the EU. Ukraine has been trying to walk a fine line by taking a balanced approach to its relationship with the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia. Therefore, taking into consideration the undemocratic nature of the current regime in Minsk, the deteriorating economic situation in the country, its highly capable and well supplied military, as well as its pro-Russian orientation, the potential impact Belarus could have on European security is hardly negligible. This leads to the question: does Europe have a specific strategy for Belarus? What is Europe's response to the challenge of Belarus?

Belarus has not been included in significant political or academic discussions or debates in Europe or the US. This is illustrated by the very short list of books specifically devoted to current developments and politics in the country. Very few academics focus their attention on Belarus, the most noteworthy being David Marple, Jan Zaprudnik, and Robert Legvold.[1] The EU leadership has recognised the need for experts specialising in Belarus as evidenced by EU Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten's statement: 'I am keen that in human rights and democratisation, as in all areas of external relations, the Commission should draw on the views of experts . . . when it comes to considering how we can best support democratisation in Indonesia or human rights in Belarus.'[2]

This paper is an attempt to analyse the internal situation in Belarus, the reasons why democracy was never given a chance to take hold, Minsk's foreign policy and overall potential impact on European security. In addition, this paper will focus on the specific strategies European security organisations have for Belarus. Do such strategies exist among European organisations?

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1 Marple, David R.: *Belarus a Denationalized Nation,* Harwood Academic Publishers 1999. Marple, David R.: *Belarus. From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe,* Macmillan Press Ltd 1996. Zaprudnik Jan (ed.): *Belarus at the Crossroads,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Moscow 1998.

2 Rt. Hon. Christopher Patten, member of the European Commission responsible for External Relations. Speech in Brussels, Human rights Discussion Forum Plenary Session on November 30, 1999. http://www.europa.int/rapid/st...gt&doc=SPEECH/99/193I0IAGED&lg+EN

The question of where Europe ends in the East is very appropriate when trying to get a perspective of Belarus's place in Europe. The country is in a crucial strategic location as it borders Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Throughout its history, due to peculiar historical circumstances and lack of natural resources, Belarus has never been a destination but rather a transit point to Moscow and other points further East, or from there to Western Europe. In terms of geography, there is no doubt that Belarus belongs to Europe.

Karl W. Deutsch introduced the notion of a security community as one with 'members having a real assurance that other members of the community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way.'[3] Such he defined the North Atlantic area. Ian Gambles embraced this notion and further developed the understanding of a *European* security community as based on common values and requiring domestic, regional and geopolitical stability.[4] The concept of a European security community that is used in this paper has a slightly different meaning, as thinking on this subject has undergone an evolution to the point where the European security community is now defined as an area where a war between member states is utterly unthinkable. According to such definition, Belarus does not presently fit in. However, if it was to reject authoritarianism and adopt a democratic system, market economy and westward orientation, Belarus could still become part of the European security community.

Thus, the Republic of Belarus finds itself between two poles. One is the European security community, the other is the Russian Federation. Belarus is well within Russia's sphere of influence. As a result, relations between Belarus and Russia have a direct impact on European security. Therefore, this paper will also analyse Belarus's relations with its Eastern neighbour.

[3] Karl W. Deutsch, Political Community and the North Atlantic Area (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957) p.5.

[4] Ian Gambles (ed.) 1995 *A lasting peace in Central Europe?*, Chaillot Papers No. 20, October; 'Introduction: The European Security-Community' p. 2.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DOMESTIC SITUATION

The key to understanding why Belarus has chosen authoritarianism and a pro-Russian foreign policy orientation lies in an analysis of the internal situation. And the main reason is related to the country's failure to implement democracy. An analysis of Belarus's domestic and foreign policies would be inadequate without understanding why democracy has failed to take root so far.

The break-up of the Soviet Union and the collapse of non-democratic regimes within its former sphere of influence triggered optimistic discussions on trends in global development. Francis Fukuyama in his article 'The End of History' argued that democracy, capitalism and liberalism would finally win the day in the entire world.[5] The establishment and the further consolidation of democracy in most countries of Eastern and Central Europe seem to have vindicated those ideas. However, hopes for an 'end of history' scenario have since faded in some countries of Central Asia, and certainly in Belarus. There has been no consolidation of democracy in these countries and most of them have returned to some form of authoritarianism.

I.1 Democratisation and Belarus

Before addressing the reasons why democracy never took hold in Belarus, it seems appropriate to introduce the dangers for democratisation during the transition period and the possible alternatives. There are necessary conditions that should be present in order to ensure that a country does not reverse its democratic achievements.

Four political scientists - Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub and Fernando Limongi – singled out these conditions in the article 'What Makes Democracy Endure' (1996). According to them, good economic performance has immense importance for the success of democratisation. However, it is not only economic factors that determine success. In fact, they argue that the international environment also has great influence on the successful implementation of democracy. The more a country is exposed to Western democracy and liberalism, the greater the possibility that democratisation succeeds. Political traditions, too, matter in this respect. If a country has experienced democratic periods, it is more likely for it to successfully implement democratisation. Besides that, institutional structures are also important: it has been shown that those countries that have chosen a parliamentary system are twice as successful in implementing democracy as those that have adopted a presidential one.[6]

Huntington's theories and views on democratic consolidation can be applied to the case of Belarus. This is especially true when he describes the phenomenon of political leaders and groups that win elections, seize power and then manipulate the mechanisms of democracy in order to limit or even suffocate democracy. Earlier democratic regimes failed due to revolutions or *coup d'états* and transition to authoritarianism was very fast, whereas third-wave

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[5] F.Fukuyama, 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), 3-17.

[6] Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, 'What Makes Democracy to Endure', *Journal of Democracy*, (1996) 7 : 39-55.

democracies are not overturned but are gradually eroded by those elected to implement democracy.[7]

During the transition from a communist system to a democratic and market-oriented one, a society obviously goes through plenty of difficulties due to worsening living conditions, growing criminal activities, general weakening of state structures. According to supporters of authoritarian systems, an autocratic regime is more suited to ensure political stability and order in society, curb criminality and solve problems in the economy because divisive debate and controversy within government are eliminated and decisions can be expediently carried out. Authoritarianism may be attractive for states that do not have a long-lasting tradition of market economy because a charismatic leader is able to mobilise society and pursue unpopular reforms. However, such leader might also concentrate power solely in his hands, turn unpredictable, and reject market reforms.[8]

The latter scenario materialised in Belarus over the past decade. After the failed *coup d'état* in Moscow in 1991, Belarus declared independence and started to put in place liberal reforms. Three years later, in 1994, Alexander Lukashenko became president of the country after legitimate democratic elections. He was elected by 80.3 % of all voters casting ballots. However, Lukashenko quickly consolidated power by implementing a system of government based on authoritarianism. This is illustrated by his illegal actions to concentrate power in his hands, dissolution of a democratically elected parliament, disregard for the Constitution, restriction of the press, restraining opposition activities as well as overseeing and working behind the scenes of political trials that hark back to the days of the Soviet Union's 'show trials'. In addition, unexplained disappearances of some of his political opponents have unfortunately occurred. Most Belarussians seem fully aware that he is undemocratic in his governing: Lukashenko presented authoritarianism as an alternative to democracy and Belarussians accepted that.

The decision to declare independence and follow the path towards democracy and market economy after 1991 was an unexpected decision for the country. It is important to stress that these events came as a result of external factors rather than the objectives and actions of the citizens of Belarus. The elite was unprepared to deal with these changes, and democratic forces were not able to mobilise support and seize control. Instead, the ensuing power vacuum was successfully filled by the old party nomenclature that used democratic mechanisms.[9]

In other words, Belarus was an exception among post-communist countries. Despite the break-up of the Soviet Union, political and economic power remained in the hands of the same political elite. Moreover, this elite was not forced to change. The main goals of the elite were to keep state property of economic assets and to have access to Russian markets.[10] Moreover, during the Soviet years Belarus was arguably the most integrated republic in the Soviet Union's state planning and economic system. The Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic used to be referred to as 'the assembly department' of the Soviet Union. It is no wonder that Russian markets were and still are of paramount importance to Belarus.

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7 Ibid.

8 V.Cernov, 'Priroda Politiceskovo Režima v Belarusii i Perspektivi Evo Transformacii', *Belarus-Monitor. Demokratièeskije Procesy v Belarusii: Osnovnyje Tendencii i Protivoreèija'*, (1997) p. 66-67.

9 Ibid. p.68.

10 Ibid. p.69.

After the failed *coup d'état* in Moscow, the Belarussian nomenclature was forced to follow market reforms similar to those enforced in Russia. However, such reforms were carried out half-heartedly and only partially. Belarus liberalised prices, but did not pursue privatisation or a tight monetary policy. The decision not to privatise state assets is explained by the aspirations of the ruling elite. Otherwise, under the conditions of free competition, most enterprises would have collapsed.[11] Another reason that explains the absence of privatisation is the lack of private financial resources: the nomenclature was not able to accumulate enough capital in order to create a self-sustaining private sector.[12] These half-reforms had an extremely negative impact on the majority of the population, as they were solely in the interest of the nomenclature. For it, the presidential institution was one of the instruments used to keep such a status quo unchanged. Therefore, the nomenclature supported Lukashenko's candidacy for president because he met their requirements for economic policy.

Belarussian political scientist Viktor Chernov distinguishes three reasons why the political elite at that time supported the establishment of the presidential institution. First, it would support state control of socio-economic processes. Second, the nomenclature was worried that democratic forces were getting stronger. At the beginning of 1994, the nomenclature was stronger than the democratic forces and was convinced that its candidate would win the presidential election. Therefore, the presidential institution would ensure control to the elite if a majority of democratic representatives were elected to Parliament. Third, the elite of that time - along with majority of Belarussian citizens - wanted a strong central authority that would ensure stability during the transition.[13]

An analysis of political reforms should not oversee the fact that independence was not achieved in the wake of a national movement in the country. As opposed to the Baltic States and Ukraine, in Belarus a national movement was not the main catalyst for radical changes.[14] Furthermore, there was no activity at all by dissidents in Belarus. Intellectuals also had a very passive approach toward the reforms initiated by Gorbachev as well as independence itself.[15] Thus, the domestic political elite remained unchanged. Taking this into consideration, the situation in Belarus after 1991 became quite unique. 'In the economic field, the old system was worn out, whereas on the ideological and psychological level, it remained vivid. As a result, a peculiar consciousness of crises was formatted.'[16] Economic reforms were pursued only partially. Political changes did not happen. For example, the Parliament elected in Soviet times continued to function until 1995 and rejected all demands by the opposition to arrange timely elections. Thus power became concentrated in the hands of the executive branch and laid the groundwork for Lukashenko's consolidation of authoritarian power.[17]

The party system after independence was very weak, making a transfer of supreme authority from the legislative to the executive branch possible. Democratic forces were deeply divided and led by leaders who formulated policies far removed from the realities of Belarus. In addition, more and more citizens of Belarus felt the brunt of worsening economic conditions related to changes brought on by democratic forces. Even the suggestion by democrats to

[11] Cernov. p.70.
[12] A.Lukashuk, 'Explaining Lukashenka's hold on power Yesterday as Tomorrow: Why It Works in Belarus's, *East European Constitutional Review*, (1998) 7 (3) : 1-8, New York University Law School and Central European University. In http://www.nyu.edu/eecr/vol7num3/special/belarus.html
[13] Cernov V. Op.cit. -p.71.
[14] V.Karbalevic, p.9.
[15] Ibid.
[16] V.Karbalevic p.10.
[17] Lukashuk. A.

introduce Belarussian as the official language was met negatively by society. Thus, already by 1992, less than one year after obtaining independence, democratic forces had lost their popularity. Inability to mobilise citizens that supported political change marginalised democratic forces in Belarus. Finally, the Communist Party in Belarus was also weak. It was not even able to put forth a candidate that could have be a serious challenger in the presidential election.

As opposed to Russia and Ukraine, once again, in Belarus neither the communists nor democrats were in power at the beginning of its independence. The authority was not related to a party. Prime Minister Kebich was not able to establish a party. His support came from a group that was not based on formal party structures but on corporate interests and personal contacts.[18]

'One might get the impression that in 1992 there was a normal system of multiple and diverse parties. Indeed, Belarussian nationalists, liberals, communists, pan-slavists and Russian nationalists filled the whole political spectrum. However, this system was extremely weak and fragile.'[19] The presidential election of 1994 proved this: Lukashenko won by an overwhelming majority and easily beat all candidates supported by parties. During his campaign he underlined his independence from all of them by also choosing a motto that resonated well with the majority of Belarussians: 'I am neither with the leftists, nor with the rightists - I am with the people.'[20]

Finally, one of the keys to understanding Lukashenko's success in the presidential elections and the later failure of democracy is the feeble tradition of Belarussian statehood and national identity. For many years, the territory comprising present-day Belarus was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and, later, tsarist Russia and the USSR. The country experienced three major rebellions (in 1794, 1831 and 1863), the First World Wars, an independent republic that lasted only a few months, occupation by Bolsheviks and then its status as a Republic within the USSR. In addition, Moscow pursued an active policy of Russification. Therefore, the majority of Belarussians still feels a strong connection to Russia – the effect of being to some extent 'colonised'.[21] These factors had a huge impact on Belarussian national identity (or lack thereof). The effect of Russification can be seen in that a large part of the population does not associate Russia with negative images or feelings. This situation is perfectly illustrated in recent polls: the most popular personalities in Belarus are Russian tsar Peter the Great and the former leader of the Belarussian Communist Party, Piotr Masherov.[22] Russians are not even considered a national minority. The Belarussian language is not spoken nearly as much as Russian. A large part of society does not even consider that an independent and sovereign Belarus is an important issue. Therefore, many people are inclined to accept the idea of a union with Russia, whereas Belarus's neighbours - Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia - have far different attitudes regarding their much cherished independence. Most Belarussians also feel that a union with Russia would bring back the Soviet times of relative prosperity compared with the dire economic situation of today's Belarus. Indeed, many support Lukashenko's ideas of joining a union with Russia because they think it would be economically beneficial. However, the Soviet Russia of the year 1990 is very different to the Russia of the year 2000. Most Belarussians indicate that

[18] Furman D.E.: (ed.): *Bielorusija i Rosija: Obsestva i Gosudarsta*, Prava Celoveka Moskva 1997., p.123.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid. p.125.
[21] I.Babkou, 'Belarus: Dual Modernity', *Cultural Encounters in East Central Europe'*, Stockholm (1998), p.106.
[22] Interview with Mr. Adam Vardamacky, sociologist specializing in Belarus, in Warsaw on June 30, 2000.

they would prefer to be living in the relatively poor but stable and stagnant conditions of Soviet Belarus in the 1970s than in the Russia or Ukraine of today, yet a union with Russia would not mean travelling back to the Soviet years.

I.2 Lukashenko's rise to and resilience in power

The failure of democracy in Belarus is closely related to Lukashenko's rise to power. Therefore an analysis of the Belarussian electorate may show why there has been a failure to implement democracy.

The majority of Belarussians lives in the countryside. 82% of the population rely in some way on the state for income.[23] Those who live in cities often have come only recently from rural areas. These people adhere to patriarchal and traditional values – 'archaic conservatism, low demands, fear of competition and freedom, incomprehensibility of representative institutions, loyalty to any centre of authority, passivity and compliance.'[24] This phenomenon might be explained by the strong tradition of peasant lifestyle, the devastation of two world wars fought on Belarussian territory, the distance of the average citizen from centres of authority, the lack of a civil society and, of course, the legacy of Soviet totalitarianism.[25]

When economic reforms started, most of the population was not able to find its place in a free market society. Besides, due to the demographic situation, one third of voters are retired people, most vulnerable during a transition. They saw the only way out of their economic situation in the restoration of the old Soviet system. To better illustrate this point, it is worth pointing out that Leonid Brezhnev - a man who is widely criticised in the West, and even in Russia, for having presided over a time of economic stagnation - is still remembered in a positive light by many Belarussians, especially the elderly and retired. A large number of blue collar workers and retired military officers – who make for a large portion of eligible voters - share this mentality. Table 1 illustrates the priorities of Belarussian society at the time of Lukashenko's rise to power:

Table 1
Will you vote for Lukashenko tomorrow[26]

	Yes %	No %
Are you in favour of an economy that is:		
- state planned	66.6	33.4
- market economy with insignificant regulation of state	19.5	80.5
The most effective form of property is:		
- state owned	63.9	36.1
- private	26.8	73.4
Are you in favour of allowing citizens to		

[23] Interview with Andrew Carpenter, Political Officer for the OSCE's Advisory and Monitoring Group in Minsk. March 26, 2001.
[24] V.Cernov, 'Avtoritarnij Rezim v Belarusi: Charakter, Zapas Procnosti, Varianti Transformacii', *Adkrytae Gramatsva,* (1998) 4 (106) p.1. http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/106/2.html
[25] Ibid.
[26] O.Manaev, 'Po Tonkomu Ldu (socialogiceskij portret elektorata Aleksndra Lukasenko)', *Novosti NISEPI*, Minsk (1997) 3 (5). p. 8.

acquire land:	
- no	67.3 32.7
- yes	37.9 62.1
Your preferred economic model :	
- USSR	69.3 30.7
- Poland and Baltic States	28.3 71.7
- United States	24.3 75.7

The political features of the electorate are presented in Table 2. Lukashenko voters do not identify with the opposition and generally do not support the independence of Belarus. They blame the West, 'foreign security services', and private initiative for the worsening conditions of the economy.

Table 2
Will you vote for Lukashenko tomorrow[27]

	Yes % No %
Attitude towards activities of the opposition:	
- an attempt to destabilise the situation in the country	62.6 37.4
- a legal protest against unfair policy of authorities	19.6 80.4
Should Belarus be an independent country:	
- no	59.6 40.4
- yes	44.1 55.9
Does NATO eastward expansion pose a threat to Belarus	
- yes	57.3 42.7
- no	16.3 83.7
Why do people in Belarus live worse that in the West:	
- domestic and external enemies make trouble for us	70.4 29.6
- bad governance	41.1 58.8
Who is responsible for the deteriorating economic situation:	
- Belarussian businessmen	60.1 39.9
- mass media	60.2 39.8
- mafia	59.8 40.2
- foreign investment	54.9 45.1
- the West	68.0 32.0

In conclusion, the main support for president Lukashenko came from two social groups – those of the nomenclature and those adhering to conservative, patriarchal-traditional values. In this respect, a few words should be said about Lukashenko's background. His notorious hatred toward the rich and the elite might be explained by difficulties during his youth and the early part of his career. He was raised without a father and experienced a lot of hardship when he was young. He graduated in history but could not make use of his education. Instead, he had a variety of jobs, ranging from ideological officer in the Soviet Army to manager of a collective farm in Eastern Belarus. Therefore, his knowledge of public and State affairs was quite limited and based only on his collective farm experience. In the 1980s Lukashenko was

[27] Ibid. p. 9.

elected to Parliament, where he focused his activities on fighting corruption. However, apart from loud speeches and groundless accusations, his accomplishments in that field were quite modest. Nevertheless, with his loud and brash manner he made a name for himself and 'arrived' on the political scene. Alexander Lukashenko also claims to have been the only parliamentarian to vote against the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and uses this to play upon the strong nostalgia many citizens feel for the 'good old days' of the Soviet Union.

It is worth noting, too, that he has a very complicated history of relations with the nomenclature. On the one hand, he was not part of the political establishment but, on the other hand, he needed its support in order to be elected president. It must be said also that Lukashenko has a strong charisma and is a brilliant politician - in the Belarussian context. He always has simple answers to complicated questions, which many citizens appreciate. However, his vision of governing the state has clear authoritarian traits. According to Lukashenko, authoritarianism is a stronger and more stable form of governing. He even admitted as much during an interview with the German newspaper 'Handelsblatt' in December 1995. President Lukashenko has been governing according to this vision. The world is divided into 'us' and 'them', 'allies' and 'enemies'. Lukashenko decides who belongs to which category. Thus, democrats were assigned to the 'domestic enemies' category.[28] Furthermore, he has tried to separate his country from the democratic world, as illustrated by his statement 'I will not lead my people together with the civilised world' in an interview with Moscow newspaper 'Moskovskij Komsomolec' on 18 December 1996.[29] Lukashenko did much to damage his standing with the democratic world during the Drozdy crises in the summer of 1998 when, ignoring established rules of the international community and the Vienna convention, he evicted foreign diplomats from their residences (see below, ch.II.1).

The turning point in the political situation of Belarus was *the referendum of November 1996*. The impact of this referendum is crucial to understanding the current political situation in Belarus.[30] After the referendum Lukashenko was able to consolidate power in his hands. He dissolved a parliament that did not bow to his every wish, restricted the freedom of the press,

[28] Ibid. 270.

[29] 'Moskovskij Komsomolec', 1996 12 18. From V.Cernov, 'Avtoritarnij Rezim v Belarusi: Charakter, Zapas Procnosti, Varianti Transformacii', *Adkrytae Gramatsva*, (1998) 4 (106) p.1. http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/106/2.html

[30] On March 30, 1994, a new Constitution was adopted in Belarus. It provided for a President (Alexander Lukashenko would be elected in 1994 for a five year term of office), a Parliament and a Judicial system. Central to the Judicial system was a Constitutional Court with authority to determine the constitutionality of laws passed by Parliament, Decrees of the President, Rules and Regulations of Bureaucracy, and actions of officials. In late summer, 1996, the Presidency and the Parliament came into open warfare. President Lukashenko, as he had the right to do, called for a nation-wide referendum with proposals for amending the 1994 Constitution. Parliament also put forth amendments. A referendum was scheduled for November 26, 1996. On November 4, 1996, the Constitutional Court, after a contested hearing, held: (1) both proposals were not amendments but represented total new constitutions, fundamentally changing the structure of government; and (2) while amendments may be adopted by referendum, new constitutions could only be adopted by Parliament. The referendum could proceed, but would have no binding effect. The referendum did indeed proceed and Lukashenko controlled printing, distribution and counting of the ballots as well as all significant media outlets. He then disregarded the decision of the Court and declared the results binding. He proceeded to oust the existing Parliament and Constitutional Court and install an entire new regime - assuring himself the start of a new five year term of office. Acting under his concept of a new Constitution, President Lukashenko has virtually total control over: the judiciary in general (being able to hire and fire at will without any parliamentary check), the Constitutional Court (controlling by appointment 6 of the 12 members including the Chairman), the lower house of Parliament (personally selecting the current members without benefit of election), the upper house of Parliament (personally selected the current members without election and having the power to appoint 1/3 of the upper house at all times), all state revenues and expenditures, and all meaningful media. Quoted Internet source http://geocities.com/WallStreet/1730assessment.html

illegally changed the composition of the Constitutional Court, and neutralised all the mechanisms of democracy. Disappearances of opposition members, questionable detentions, court verdicts with political implications, restrictions of the right to assemble, and violence against opposition demonstrations became an everyday reality in Belarus.

An important aspect of Belarus's domestic situation is the contradictory nature of the legal situation regarding the presidency. Lukashenko's presidential term expired on 20 July 1999, according to the constitution of 1994. However, after illegally amending the constitution through the November 1994 referendum., Lukashenko has been adamant that his terms expires in 2001. Attempts by the opposition to organise presidential elections after 20 July 1999 failed miserably and, at the moment, Lukashenko remains the de facto president of Belarus. However, his legitimacy is recognised only by Russia (except for the liberal 'Jabloko' party). For the rest of the world, Lukashenko has been an illegitimate president since July 1999. Yet the issue of whether his presidency is illegitimate is not even an issue for internal debate in Belarus: his authoritarian drive remains unchecked.

Lukashenko now controls the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of power. In addition, presidential decrees have more power than the Constitution. The government does not have any real influence on decisions concerning the most important economic issues. Lukashenko directly controls all of the following:

- the financial base of the state, which consists of the Board of Presidential Affairs, its controlled firms, state concerns, national bank and banking system. The Board of Presidential Affairs consists of more than 100 various organisations; it has its own real estate in Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, and Russia. Three national parks, 19 mills, and a shopping network belong to this Board. It is also engaged in the medical service industry, tobacco industry and large-scale imports to Belarus. The office serving diplomats also belongs to this Board;
- the security forces, which consist of the State Security Committee, State Control Committee, the analytical centre of the Presidential Security Council, the Ministry of the Interior, Prosecuting Magistracy, Security Council staff and other institutions of this type;
- the ideological base of the state, which consists of a State board of socio-political information, institutes connected with the president, authorised vice-Prime Ministers and others.

The president also governs by direct order and fully controls the Council of Ministers, staff and local boards of authority.

The head of the President's administration, M. Miasnikovich, is not very close to the President but he is one of the most influential personalities surrounding Lukashenko. He is respected among the nomenclature and has influential contacts in Russia. The Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, V. Konopliov and the head of State TV and Radio, G. Kisel are closest to Lukashenko. Other key supporters include the secretary of the Security Council V. Sheiman and the Manager for Presidential Affairs, I. Titenkov. They lead two different groups that are often at odds over their respective areas of influence. It is important to point out that President Lukashenko has no one really close to him.[31] He is not even that close to his own family: he is separated from his wife and lives with his sons. There is literally no one in Belarus who can significantly impact on Lukashenko's thinking or decisions.

[31] Non-paper by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania; December 2, 1999.

Only the highest political leadership in Moscow has influence on the president of Belarus. This can be illustrated by the so-called ORT affair. Journalists from Russian state TV (ORT) were jailed in the summer of 1998 due to their reporting on the political situation in Belarus and its president. There was no political actor or group in Belarus that was able to convince Lukashenko not to jail these journalists simply for their critical attitude. Only after direct intervention and pressure by Russian president Yeltsin did Lukashenko, albeit begrudgingly, free the journalists.

To the astonishment of many in the West, in establishing his personal and undemocratic power Lukashenko was supported by the majority of the population. Societal support for him is based on an emotional, non-rational basis. He always finds someone else to blame for his failures. In addition, the majority of the population has a very light-minded and simplistic view of the rule of law. Therefore the people of Belarus remain only passive observers of the strengthening of authoritarianism in their country.

In addition, Lukashenko's 'special services' allow him to control the main spheres of state and public life. There are seven special services that provide information to the president about the mood in the government and the opposition, in the country at large and abroad. In addition, these services have significant influence inside the presidential administration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[32] Current Foreign Minister Ural Latypov was a long-time professional within the KGB. Yet, much like in Russia, the society tends to have a quite favourable attitude towards officers and former officers of the security services.

One has to acknowledge the thoroughness with which Lukashenko has marginalised the democratic opposition: it is now very weak and does not have popular support in Belarus. Thus, its decision to boycott parliamentary elections in October of 2000 further demonstrated its inability to mount a serious challenge to Lukashenko. Nevertheless, representatives of Belarussian opposition groups continue to argue that there is a potential in the citizens to confront and ultimately defeat him. These groups maintain that workers, intellectuals and academics, army officers (not the interior army, which is made almost exclusively of the president's henchmen), and a large portion of the younger generation do not support Lukashenko.[33] This said, these sectors are too weak and the opposition has leaders that proclaim to be democratic simply because they are against the president. Unfortunately, many would most likely be just as undemocratic as Lukashenko. At any rate, no opposition group has presented or even formulated a coherent economic plan that Belarussian voters might potentially be interested in. The opposition has not made any serious effort to promote political initiatives at the local level. Most leaders are former communist apparatchiks that have now re-invented themselves as so-called western reformers and simply do not want to be bothered with the grass-roots, local campaign effort that is required. Politics is indeed local and opposition leaders do not want to roll up their sleeves and get involved in the nitty-gritty, day-to-day work of building local political power bases.

Besides the opposition, another section of society is very displeased with the president: ironically, it is segments of the nomenclature that actually supported Lukashenko's rise to power in 1994. This part of the nomenclature is not monolithic and has different opinions regarding the president, mostly due to the fact that the president often blames it for the failure of his policies. Members of the nomenclature are often jailed on false charges by the current

[32] Interview with appropriate officials in Lithuania.
[33] Conference 'Belarus: hidden potential' organized by the Stephan Batory Foundation on 30 June 2000 in Warsaw.

regime and made scapegoats for failed policies. This obviously generates a lot of concern, though not strong enough to be translated into mounting a serious challenge to Lukashenko.
In the immediate future, therefore, neither a 'Polish' (negotiated transfer of power, round table and elections) nor a 'Romanian' (violent uprising against dictatorship) nor a 'Yugoslavian' (removal of authoritarian leader via elections) type of regime transformation look likely in Belarus.[34]

To sum up the main reasons why democracy has never taken hold in Belarus, the following factors should be stressed: the lack of proper economic and political reforms, the absence of a functioning civil society, and the weak traditions of statehood and national identity. The only country that has any influence on Belarus is Russia. If it so chooses, Moscow could undermine the president. At the moment, however, Lukashenko is acceptable to the Russian Federation, although there have been recent reports in Russian newspapers speculating that President Putin is displeased with Lukashenko and may even support one of his opponents (notably a former KGB official) in the upcoming presidential elections, due to be held on 9 September 2001. In fact, during his visit to Belarus in mid-June, the Russian President did not back him at all. Speculations aside, it is a fact that Moscow tolerates the non-legitimacy of Lukashenko's presidency and this is one reason why the European security community is finding it difficult to support the democratic opposition. Even if Moscow decided to remove Lukashenko from power, the new leader installed by Russia would almost certainly continue his policies.

I.3 The economic performance under Lukashenko

Even before Lukashenko's rise to power, the economy of Belarus was lagging behind its neighbours due to inconsistent and half-hearted economic reforms. However, Lukashenko's economic policies were even worse than the previous ones and had a very damaging effect on the country. Thus, despite ongoing attempts by the leadership to stop the downward spiral of the economy, the country remains in a deep economic crisis. According to International Risk and Payment Review, Dun & Bradstreet UK Ltd., Belarus is the fifth riskiest country to do business with - after the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Albania, Myanmar and Yugoslavia.[35]

Lukashenko's economic policy was based on the ambition to develop the Belarussian economy without enforcing the necessary economic reforms. Former collective farm manager Lukashenko adopted Soviet-style methods of economic policy and rejected market reforms. He also imposed harsh restrictions on the privatisation process: privatisation was effectively suspended at the end of March 1995. Only some of the suspended initiatives would later be permitted to resume.[36] As a result, the private sector today makes up only a few percent of the economy and is limited to small-scale enterprises.[37] The government's regulatory policy is not at all transparent, and the rest of the economy is directly controlled by the state.

In addition, the bleak economic situation is compounded by the country's lack of energy resources. Belarus continues to receive cheap energy from Russia but has trouble paying for it. Lukashenko is seeking a political solution to that problem: he is relying heavily on Russian

[34] Ibid.
[35] http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sergei/belarus/economy/belstats.html
[36] http://www.bisnis.doc.gov/bisnis/country/99belov.html
[37] Interview with Ms Irina Kravchenko official responsible for Belarus at EBRD. 2000 10 27

help and hopes to solve the country's economic problems through a union with Russia, not by receiving assistance from Western financial institutions.

Due to the deteriorating economic situation, millions of dollars of foreign capital have left Belarus. Ford, the US automotive giant, had firmly established itself in Belarus but decided to cease operations in 1999. This trend continues further as foreign companies are afraid to invest capital in an unstable country with a ruler like Lukashenko. These negatives factors largely 'outweigh the considerable advantages of doing business in Belarus – its central location, cheap and educated work force, low crime rate and easy access to the Russian market'.[38]

In order to improve the economic situation, Belarussian authorities have started to seek new markets in the countries of Latin America, the Middle East and South Asia. Moreover, Belarus is starting to rely more heavily on its highly educated workforce and has begun copying technologies and know-how from the West.[39] However, such a policy only decelerates the downward spiral of the economy: it does not solve the underlying basic problems.

Minsk, due to its resistance to implementing market reforms, is not able to receive the level of assistance from the IMF that it needs. To say that Lukashenko has further complicated relations with the IMF is an understatement. His attitude toward the IMF has ranged from hopeful engagement to extreme rage. During a speech to the Russian Parliament he referred to the IMF as crooks: 'why do you get on your knees in front of these crooks from the IMF?', he asked Russian parliamentarians.[40] In turn, the deteriorating economy creates additional obstacles for Belarus in its attempt to conclude a union with the Russian Federation, since Russia's economy is far more advanced and market oriented. Yet, interestingly, the economic crisis does not necessarily pose a serious threat to Lukashenko in terms of remaining in power. The population silently accepts a deteriorating economy without blaming the leader. In conclusion, the economy of Belarus will continue to deteriorate but not face total collapse because Russia supplies just enough subsidised, cheap energy exports to prevent such a meltdown.

[38] http://www.bisnis.doc.gov/bisnis/country/99belov.html

[39] Interview with Mr. Jurii Shevtcov, lecture at European Humanitarian University during a visit of lecturers and students from Vilnius University's Institute of International Relations and Political Sciences to European Humanitarian University. 1998 12 01.

[40] Sophie Lambroschini, Russia: Lukashenka Performs To Ovations In the Duma, RFL 1999 10 27. From http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1999/10/F.RU.991027143754.html

CHAPTER TWO: THE FOREIGN POLICY OF BELARUS – DESTINATION: EAST

One of the easiest ways to analyse a country's foreign policy priorities is to check the flight destinations from its main airport.[41] Minsk international airport is an excellent example. First of all, it should be mentioned that it is a huge and almost empty building. This is because there are only a few flights to the West. Most destinations are to Russia and the former Soviet Union. This gives an initial understanding of the foreign policy priorities of Belarus in that it shows that the external policy of Belarus is hardly proactive, with very limited contacts with the West and focused mainly on the East.

II.1 The first years of independence

The foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus has undergone many changes over the last decade. In the Soviet Union, there was a Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Belarus. In addition, Belarus had a mission to the UN and was a founding member of the organisation.[42] However, the country was obviously not able to pursue its own foreign policy as everything was decided in Moscow. After the failed *coup d'état* on 25 August 1991 Belarus declared independence. From the very beginning, Minsk stressed its desire to be a non-nuclear and neutral state. These principles were also included in the constitution of 1994.

Foreign policy in the period from attaining independence up until the Lukashenko's presidency might be defined as a balancing act between East and West. Russia continued to be one of the main priorities of Belarus's external relations, but not the only one. The Belarussian leadership was trying to strengthen its ties with Europe. One of the main themes from the speeches of Belarussian leaders at that time was the need for Belarus to 'return to Europe'.[43] Apart from such simple rhetoric, Belarus took some concrete steps to 'return to Europe' and became a member of the IMF, the World Bank, the EBRD, and the CSCE (later OSCE). The country also accepted and complied with the START and CFE treaties signed by the USSR, and took on all the obligations associated with these agreements. The disarmament process actually went fairly smoothly. US President Bill Clinton visited Belarus in January of 1994 as a sign of support and positive relations with the West. The latter probably was the highest point in Belarus's relations with the West.

Even then, however, Belarus's level of engagement with the West was among the lowest in Eastern Europe, much as there were no explicit indications that the country might change its orientation drastically and reverse its domestic policies. There were only subtle signs that Belarus was losing its balance and was gradually falling into the grip of Russian influence. The Belarussian leadership of the time was split regarding relations with Russia. The executive branches of power under Prime Minister V. Kebich were active supporters of closer relations with Moscow, whereas the Speaker of Parliament, S. Shushkevich, strongly opposed initiatives designed to bring Belarus closer to Russia. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister was able to win the day: in December 1993 Belarus joined the CIS (Commonwealth of Independ-

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[41] William Wallace, lectures at Central European University. Prague/Budapest 1995/6.

[42] Stalin insisted that Belarus and Ukraine together with Russia should have their own missions at the UN.

[43] Jan Zaprudnik, *Development of Belarussian National Identity and Its Influence on Belarus's Foreign Policy Orientation*, in 'National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia' ed. Szporluk, Roman. M.E. Sharp Inc, New York 1994.

ent States) Treaty on Collective Security which, *inter alia*, forbid military alliances with non-member states, entailed a collective defence commitment, and created a security council.

Belarus also concluded an agreement on monetary union with Russia in April 1994 which was to relinquish Belarussian control of fiscal and monetary policy, bring national legislation in line with Russia's, and allow Moscow to use military installations free of charge.'[44] In addition, the deteriorating economic situation forced the Belarussian leadership to look for pragmatic solutions. The leadership and a large part of society were unable to envisage alternatives to relying on Russian markets and assistance.

II.2 Evolution under Lukashenko: Russia first

The relatively balanced foreign policy of Belarus towards East and West ended when Alexander Lukashenko took power. Since Lukashenko became president, the country's foreign policy has shifted almost exclusively to strengthening relations with Russia and trying to implement a union with the Russian Federation. Contacts with Western states have declined tremendously and are all but frozen at the present time. On top of that, Belarus started to seek and develop relations with such undemocratic regimes as Yugoslavia, Vietnam, China, Libya, Iran. Yet Russia became the absolute focal point for Belarus. Minsk adjusted its foreign and security policy according to the interests of the Russian Federation. One might go as far as to argue that under Lukashenko's leadership Belarus has lost its ability to conduct an autonomous foreign policy and behaves more like a region of Russia than an independent state.

There are two explanations as to why Belarus wanted to develop the closest possible ties with the Russian Federation. One is related to ethno-nationalism and the other relates to economic factors. 'Ethno-nationalism, national identity, and ethnicity *always* affect the foreign policies of any state. The collective experience of a nation and its history as reflected in group memory, attitudes, and systems of values, largely shape the approach to major foreign policy issues, assessment of a particular situation, and expected outcomes. This relatively stable and universal collection of factors sets certain limits on foreign policy groups in power...'.[45] Prazauskas's quotation is appropriate and relevant to explaining the behaviour of Belarus towards Russia (and Europe). Both countries share the same values and mentality, and belong to the same religion – the Orthodox Church. There are no significant differences between Russians and Belarussians. Just to illustrate in a humorous way their close association: it is surprising to most Westerners that, on New Year's Eve, many Belarussians pop the champagne at 11:00 (midnight in Moscow) and are already in bed when the new year in Belarus is rung in.

In addition to these considerations, economic factors also had a fundamental influence on Belarus's return to the Russian sphere of influence. As mentioned above, the economy of Belarus was one of the most integrated in the Soviet system. During the first years of independence the country was not able to gain access to the markets of other countries and was extremely dependent on energy resources from Russia. During his presidential campaign, Lukashenko focused on closer integration with Russia, promising to get cheap energy and

[44] Ingmar Oldberg, 'Sunset Over the Swamp – the Independence and Dependence of Belarus's, Central Slavic Conference, University of Kansas, 10 – 12 April 1997.

[45] Algimantas Prazauskas, The Influence of Ethnicity on the Foreign Policies of the Western Littoral States, in Szporluk, Roman ed. : National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia, M.E. Sharpe, Inc. New York 1994.

access to Russian markets. Despite Lukashenko's numerous statements that Belarus would pursue a 'multi-vector' foreign policy, Russia became the only direction his compass pointed to after he became president. Lukashenko even initiated a 1995 referendum on future relations with Russia. The referendum question was: 'Do you support the actions of the Belarussian president directed towards economic integration with Russia?' 85 % of voters expressed their approval. Thus, after receiving overwhelming support from the population, Lukashenko had also a legitimate mandate to pursue further integration with Russia. The government of Belarus had already made enormous strides in developing relations with Russia in 1993 and 1994. Thus, the different domestic factors mentioned above - a Russified population, a weak national identity, existing ties to the Russian economy, full dependency on energy resources from Russia, and general historical experience – added up to ensure that Belarus's foreign policy attention turned almost exclusively towards Russia.

As for Russia itself, the only true ally among its neighbours remains Belarus. Naturally, Moscow has reacted positively to Minsk's increasingly closer orbit. Belarus has supported all of Russia's foreign policy positions such as the Chechen war(s). However, the two countries have asymmetric thinking when it comes to their respective view of one another. Russia is the main focal point for Belarus whereas Belarus is much less so for Russia. Thus, Belarus is much more focused and determined to integrate with Russia than vice versa. Perhaps most importantly, decisions and strategies regarding the union and further cooperation are made in Moscow, not Minsk - much to Lukashenko's frustration.

Belarus has adjusted its foreign policy according to the interests of the Russian Federation. On 20 April 1998, in his annual address to the National Assembly, Lukashenko stressed that Russia was the top priority for Belarus's foreign policy.[46] Highlighting common ground with Russia in foreign policy matters is present in almost all of Lukashenko's speeches, especially when the audience is the Russian political leadership. The most obvious example is the issue of NATO enlargement. Both Belarus and Russia boycotted NATO's Washington summit in 1999, and both countries strongly oppose NATO enlargement. Lukashenko has repeatedly declared his negative view of the Atlantic Alliance. On 23 March 1998, in the Russian city of Jaroslavl (at the 'Slavonic World: Similarities and Differences' conference), Lukashenko stated that 'the Republic of Belarus as well as brotherly Russia categorically object to NATO enlargement, and this is our main position.'[47] Extremely negative statements regarding NATO were also made by Lukashenko on 9 May 1999 - the anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany. Due to country's devastation and heavy losses in World War II, the anniversary has a highly symbolic meaning for the people of Belarus. Lukashenko stated that 'NATO is becoming a world gendarme. The Washington summit endorsed operations without the consent of the United Nations Security Council. This means that the new structure of the world is shaped according to dictates from NATO and the United States. Events in Yugoslavia are only the beginning of that process. Taking into consideration these developments, we will strengthen the security of our country. Therefore, we have to upgrade our military forces. We view the security and national interests of Belarus as being protected only by strengthening our Union with brotherly Russia.'[48]

The adjustment of Belarus's foreign policy to Russia's interests was clearly illustrated during the Kosovo crisis. Belarus adopted an extremely negative position towards NATO's action and policy in Yugoslavia. 'The beginning of military action by NATO armed forces against

[46] ITAR-TASS, quoted from http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/russia94-3q98.html
[47] http://www.president.gov.by/rus/Speech/vis tup23_5.htm
[48] http://www.president.gov.by/rus/Speech/9may.htm

the Republic of Yugoslavia is an overt act of aggression and a gross violation of the main principles of world order,' Lukashenko stated on 25 May 1999. He also declared that Belarus considered NATO actions in Yugoslavia a direct threat to international security and would take, along with allied Russia, 'appropriate measures'. Moreover, the president of Belarus visited Yugoslavia during the Kosovo crisis and proposed that Yugoslavia join the Belarus-Russia Union. All steps and initiatives taken by Lukashenko regarding policy towards Yugoslavia were closely coordinated with Russia.[49]

Belarus also strongly supports Russia vis-à-vis Chechnya. On 27 January 2000, Lukashenko made a statement regarding events in the Northern Caucasus. He stressed that the Chechen crisis was an internal Russian matter and that Russia's response was designed to ensure the territorial integrity and unity of the Russian State.[50] Lukashenko also stated that Belarus would not provide military assistance to Russia. However, this same statement shows that he considered at least the possibility of providing military assistance and gives a clear sign of Belarus's overall support for Russia. Belarus's decision not to send troops to support Russia in Chechnya is understandable and acceptable to Russia due to historical considerations: Belarus suffered huge population losses in World War II, and many young conscripts were killed during the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Most Belarussian citizens are against the participation of their soldiers in the Chechen war.

As for the rest, however, Belarus fully shares the Russian aim of counterbalancing NATO influence in Eastern Europe. The Russian and Belarussian defence ministers, meeting in Minsk in December 1997, said that the eastward expansion of NATO would be destabilising and would threaten the security of their countries.[51] The negative perception of the Atlantic Alliance by Minsk and Moscow has given momentum to even closer bilateral cooperation. The two countries have signed 20 cooperative agreements in the security field alone. According to Lieutenant-General Alexander Pavlovsky, Chairman of the Belarussian State Committee of Border Guards, concepts of joint defence, security, and border policies serve as a basis for deeper and continued integration of Russian and Belarussian military forces.[52] In April 1999, the Supreme Council of the Russian-Belarussian Union ratified a joint defence concept. Bilateral cooperation is focused on:

- defence policy and strategy;
- harmonisation of legislation regarding defence;
- creation and implementation of common industrial programmes;
- use of military infrastructure;
- personnel training;
- creation of an integrated air defence system.

Taking advantage of every opportunity to show his firm commitment to Russia Lukashenko, in his yearly address to the National Assembly in Minsk on 17 April 1998, said that integration with Russia is in Belarus's fundamental interest. 'If necessary, we will defend the Western frontier of our country not only for ourselves, but also for our common fatherland,

[49] Sobytija v Kosovo: Agresija NATO (Events in Kosovo: Aggression of NATO) in http://www.president/gov.by. This site gives an extensive coverage of Belarus policy during the Kosovo crisis and illustrates constant coordination of Belarus's and Russian policy with respect to Yugoslavia.

[50] http://www.president.gov.by/rus/president/press.htm

[51] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/west94-1q98.html#122297

[52] Aleksandr. Jeroshenko, Nikolaj Plotnikov, Vmiestie My Silnee (Together We Are Stronger), *Nezavisemaja Gazieta,(Russsian Daily)* 1999 11 30.

the Union of Belarus and Russia.'[53] This commitment was repeated on 1 February 2000. Lukashenko also said that his country and Russia would form a military force of hundreds of thousands to defend their Western frontier from NATO. 'A powerful military group is being established, which will include more than a hundred thousand people and will be armed with the most modern weaponry. This group will be the shield for our fatherland on the common Western frontier,' he told a delegation from Russia's Penza region.[54] Of some concern to NATO is Russia's plan to create an integrated anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence system with Belarus.

Russia and Belarus have also conducted a number of joint military exercises, the latest significant one in June 1999. Code-named Zapad '99 (West '99), its aim was to defend both countries from a simulated attack from the West. Name, timing and purpose were not accidental – the exercise was to meant to show some teeth alongside the rhetoric of Russia's extreme dissatisfaction with NATO's action in Kosovo. Belarus actively participated in it to show once again its unshakeable commitment to close bilateral ties.

Belarus has two Russian military bases on its territory. The Vileika base is used as a communication base for the Russian navy in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. The radar station near Baranovichi serves as an early warning system against missile attacks. During his address to the Russian Duma on 27 October 1999, Lukashenko stated that he attached the utmost importance to these Russian bases.[55] In the same speech, he reminded the Russian MPs Belarus controls roughly 2000 kilometres of border and air space for the Russian Federation. In addition, Belarus provides free military transit for Russia on its territory.

As S.J. Main, an expert on Russian-Belarussian relations, notes, 'the defence forces of Belarus and Russia are so intertwined that formal re-union between the two becomes a matter of when, rather than if. Joint doctrine, joint defence space, even joint operational command – all these factors seem to be pointing to the inevitable: the creation or rather re-unification of two defence forces to defend both Russia and Belarus equally.'[56]

Belarus significantly strengthens the geopolitical position of Russia. It provides direct access to the borders of East European states, facilitates mainland ties with the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, and eliminates the Baltic–Black Sea 'belt' around Russia. In its efforts to unite with Russia, Minsk presents itself as a model for reintegration to other CIS countries, if they so chose. Taking all these factors into consideration, Russia certainly appreciates its existing close ties with Belarus.

Despite such excellent bilateral relations, however, there are issues where Belarus and Russia have differences. Lukashenko's conflict with the Russian media is a good example. As an authoritarian leader, he does not tolerate independent media as they may threaten his grip on power. Lukashenko has successfully managed to silence the independent press of Belarus. His efforts to control representatives of the Russian mass media have been less successful and put him in direct conflict with the Russian political leadership. Belarus's president and political elite have repeatedly stated their negative attitude vis-à-vis the way the Russian media portray developments inside the country. Their sensitivity is understandable, due to the easy access to

[53] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/west2q98.html
[54] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/nuclear.html
[55] http://www.president.gov.by/rus/president/Speech/duma99.htm
[56] S.J.Main, *Belarus's-Russian Military Relations (1991-1998)*, Conflict Studies Research Center, June 1998, p. 7.

Russian TV channels by the Belarussian population. Belarus's foreign minister Ivan Antonovich accused some members of the Russian media of 'misinformation, fabrications, and defamation' against President Lukashenko - ITAR-TASS reported on 13 March 1998. Antonovich said that there had been 'a wave of innuendoes, inventions, and fabrications' against Lukashenko and that foreign journalists would lose their accreditation if that continues.[57]

Perhaps the most famous case of Lukashenko's conflict with the Russian media is the trial of Russian Public Television (ORT) journalist Pavel Sheremet and his cameraman, Dmitry Zavadsky.[58] Such brutal behaviour by the Belarussian authorities strained relations with Russia, that in turn responded using its overwhelming leverage. As a sign of his displeasure, Russian President Yeltsin did not allow Lukashenko to visit two Russian provinces. Lukashenko soon caved in and released Sheremet.

Another example of Russia' leverage on Belarus was Lukashenko's initial resistance to the appointment of Pavel Borodin as State Secretary of the Belarussian-Russian Union. Lukashenko, who cherishes his reputation as a no-nonsense politician who has no tolerance for corruption, was displeased with the nomination of Borodin, who is notorious in Russia for his under-the-table dealings. His disapproval was not sufficient to dissuade Russian governmental officials from appointing Borodin. Interestingly enough, Borodin is now being held in the U.S. awaiting extradition to Switzerland on embezzlement charges. And, ironically, Lukashenko has been one of the most vocal Russian or Belarussian leaders calling for his release - although one wonders if he is not secretly smiling about the situation.

Competition between Russia and Belarus in the economic field also creates tensions between the two states. Selling second-hand weapons to foreign nations has generated competition for Russian exporters that deal with the same types of weapon systems from the Soviet era. Belarus's sale of 18 MiG-29 fighter aircraft and 18 Su-25 *Frogfoot* ground attack aircraft to Peru in 1996-1997 is a case in point. The deal was a significant blow to efforts by the Russian State arms export organisation Rosvooruzheniye to set foot on Latin American markets. The sale was also seen by the Russian financial-industrial group MiG-MAPO (the design bureau that had developed the aircraft) as an infringement of intellectual property rights.[59] Belarus has also pursued its own independent commercial policy regarding the trade of military goods with countries such as China, North Korea, (but also Slovakia) as well as African and Middle Eastern states. These countries have been traditional markets for the Russian military industry. Therefore, Russia generally looks negatively upon Belarus's autonomous weapons export policy.

[57] 'RFE/RL Newsline,' 13 March 1998 in http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/press.html

[58] Both journalists were arrested and charged with illegally crossing the Belarussian border. The journalists were preparing a report on smuggling in the Russian-Belarus customs union. On 28 July 1997, Belarussian KGB authorities raided ORT offices in order to confiscate Sheremet's belongings. Belarussian authorities suspecting that representatives of the Russian media might start their own investigation of the Sheremet case and on 15 August 1997 detained another five ORT journalists. Three days later ORT journalist Valery Fashenka was arrested for refusing to cooperate with Belarussian authorities regarding the ORT case and was expelled from the country.

[59] Russia and Belarus: Cooperation and competition in military-technical and arms export fields. In http://www.sipri.se/projects/expcon/cis/rusbyr2.htm

II.3 The state of the (Russia-Belarus) Union

Despite these relatively minor tensions, Belarus and Russia continue to pursue a policy of close integration. Yet perhaps the most important reason why Lukashenko fosters closer cooperation and eventually a union with Russia is related to his ambitions to one day preside over the Union of Russia and Belarus. This might have been remotely possible if Yeltsin was still in power: Lukashenko is somewhat popular in Russia and, theoretically at least, he could have managed to be elected president of a Russian–Belarussian Union. He often travels to Moscow and the outer regions of Russia in order to foster economic ties and is an important player in Russian politics. However, since Vladimir Putin assumed power, Lukashenko's chances of heading the Russian-Belarussian union seem far less likely. Contrary to his predecessor, Putin is popular among Russian nationalists, officers, people nostalgic for the Soviet Union and all those who are looking for a president with a firm hand. In other words, if elections for the union were held, Putin would certainly have the support of those citizens who most likely would have voted for Lukashenko if he had challenged someone like Yeltsin.
Over the past six years, under the leadership of Lukashenko, Belarus has exponentially increased its cooperation with Russia. To date, Belarus and Russia have signed 110 general agreements. Yet the main task remains the implementation of the union. The main treaty regarding the Russian-Belarussian Union was signed on 8 December 1999 and represented the culmination of a series of prior agreements and cooperative initiatives: the 2 April 1996 Agreement creating the Russian–Belarussian Commonwealth, the 23 May 1997 Treaty on statutes for the Russian–Belarussian Union, and the 25 December 1998 Declaration on further integration.

Despite the aforementioned agreements and optimistic statements from Minsk, the Russian–Belarussian Union is full of contradictions. If one considers the extremely close cultural, economical, historical, and political links of the peoples of Belarus and Russia and their general support for such an initiative, there should be no serious obstacle for the implementation of the Union. In addition, the political leaders of both countries have made numerous speeches in which they have maintained their resolute determination to complete the Union.

Nevertheless, there are enormous differences between the two countries in their approach to it. This is related to the asymmetric perception that Minsk and Moscow have of one another. Russia considers itself as the uniting centre for Eurasian states and views the Republic of Belarus as only one country in its sphere of influence. For Russia, with a population of 145 million, a union on equal terms with Belarus, with a population of 10 million, is simply not conceivable. Moscow would accept a union with Minsk only if Belarus gave up its sovereignty. But a union under these conditions is unacceptable for Minsk, and Lukashenko would definitely not agree to a minor political role. This would annihilate one of his main reasons for wanting a union in the first place – that is, to increase and expand his personal power. Complicating matters for Moscow is the fact that the regions of Russia would react negatively to the union of Belarus and Russia. Regions such as Tatarstan would like to have the same status as Belarus would have in the union, and Moscow is certainly not in a position to offer this. Conversely, Belarus certainly would not agree to a status equal to that of a region of Russia.

Many in Belarus now lament the fact that the economy of Belarus under the Soviet system was too focused on the industrial production of, for instance, large trucks and tractors. During Soviet times, the fact that Belarus did not have any raw materials did not matter much as raw materials and energy were totally provided and subsidised by Moscow. Now that it is inde-

pendent, it cannot afford to pay for them. Many argue that, in these conditions, nothing short of totally breaking down the economy with shock therapy and conversion to a service-based economy is necessary if Belarus is one day to have a viable and self-sustaining economy.

It is obvious that economic considerations contribute to the contradictory nature of the Russian-Belarussian Union. The economy of Belarus is in very bad shape and a market economy simply does not exist, whereas the Russian economy is far more advanced and a market system is somewhat in place. Thus, a union with Belarus would mean a significant economic burden for Russia. It is therefore understandable that the Russian leadership is not in favour of the rapid integration of the two countries. The Russian position became clear when Putin succeeded Yeltsin: according to the Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus, Valerij Drako, 'everything that was agreed to with Yeltsin has been frozen'.[60] The Russian side also opposed Belarus's plans to hold elections for a common Belarussian-Russian parliament before 2001 (the Belarussian side wanted to have elections during the first half of 2000). Irrespective of this snub, the Russian side ignored Minsk's concerns and took the initiative to occupy the most important political positions inside the Union. According to Alexey Krasutskiy, Chairman of the Russian integration committee of Belarus's parliament, 'those Belarussians who hoped that the most important posts will be divided equally were disappointed'. [61]

Minsk often finds it very difficult to accept Russian conceptions of the Union. On 11 October 1999 even Lukashenko made negative comments on the draft treaty of the Union. According to him, the treaty should lay the groundwork for the creation of institutions of state authority as well as a common currency and army. He also lamented that Russian President Yeltsin rejected the offer to create a common presidency, government and parliament. Lukashenko further criticised the Russian side for not coordinating a union policy which was mutually beneficial to both Belarus and Russia. According to the Belarussian leader, the draft treaty of the union disproportionately favoured Russia. Yet Lukashenko admitted that he would sign the agreement despite the existing shortcomings[62], which clearly demonstrates how asymmetrical relations between Belarus and Russia are. To sum up, the Union of Russia and Belarus is still a work in progress. Due to the enormous contradictions inherent to a Russian–Belarussian Union, we may not see its full implementation in the near future, in spite of the frequent optimistic statements from leaders of both countries.

[60] Anatolij Slanevskij, 'Relations between Minsk and Moscow are Getting Weaker' in Lietuvos Rytas (Lithuanian daily newspaper), January 19, 2000.
[61] Ibid.
[62] 'Lukashenko Criticises Position of Russia Regarding Creation of the Union State', INTERFAKS-ZAPAD, Minsk 11 October, 1999.

CHAPTER THREE: EUROPEAN POLICIES TOWARDS BELARUS

From the very beginning of independence, in 1991, the European security community focused mainly on nuclear disarmament – namely the removal of nuclear missiles from Belarussian territory – in its relations with Minsk. Belarus's lukewarm approach to engaging the West was a major reason for its not being a top priority for the Euro-Atlantic community. Neither did Belarus's neighbours pursue an active policy of engagement in the pre-Lukashenko era: at that time, in fact, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine at that time were focused on their own problems and orienting themselves towards the West and the 'return to Europe'. Yet Belarus was not completely forgotten by the European security community. For example, on 14 November 1995 (one year after Lukashenko assumed the presidency), the Extraordinary WEU Council of Ministers, in a Communiqué on European security and Belarus, stated: 'an effective political and economic transformation of these countries is also an important element for European security. A continuation of the reform process is dependent upon stable political conditions, which will help bolster their independence. Cooperation with these two countries (Moldova and Belarus) is important for WEU countries.'[63]

The relevance of Belarus to the European security community has increased now that Belarus has a direct border with NATO and is set to acquire a border with the EU. The Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian borders with the Republic of Belarus will soon become Europe's Eastern frontier. At present, however, relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Euro-Atlantic community are at a low, mainly as a result of the country's domestic political situation and its effects on foreign policy. Lukashenko has made numerous statements where he expressed his abhorrence of NATO and lambasted Brussels for simply considering enlargement. Ominously, he even suggested that he might consider re-deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus. This said, it is a fact that relations with the Euro-Atlantic community are fairly unimportant to Lukashenko. Occasionally, he may affirm that Belarus would like to normalise relations with the West: during a joint Russia-Belarus parliamentary session, at the beginning of July 1999, he stated that his country should change its foreign policy priorities by paying more attention to the West. He also declared that he supported a moratorium on all initiatives for integration with Russia.[64] In addition, Belarussian embassies in Warsaw, London, Brussels, Paris and Washington received instructions to prepare proposals to normalise relations with European governments and organisations. Lukashenko maintains that the West has an irrational view of Belarus and that the country is misunderstood. On 9 March 2000, Belarussian Minister of Foreign Affairs Laypov gave a speech about European priorities at the 'Dialogues on Eastern Europe' Conference in Munich. He argued that Belarus is a responsible and stable neighbour that would never threaten another country. Moreover, according to Latypov, Belarus is on the forefront in non-proliferation efforts and acts as a reliable barrier against new threats to regional and world security. He also stated that the West's current negative image of Belarus is due to the fact that Belarussians are trying to live by their own thinking and without external influence.

Belarussian policy vis-à-vis the West could be defined as isolationist and confrontational. What kind of strategy should the European security community adopt in dealing with it? Some Western think tanks already explicitly define Belarus as a threat to European security. Ted Galen Carpenter and Andrew Stone from the Cato Institute, an influential conservative think tank in the US, argue that political upheaval or economic chaos in Belarus might

[63] http://www.weu.int/eng/comm/d951114d.htm
[64] Anatolij Slanevskij, 'Belarus Is Turning to the West', in Lietuvos Rytas, 1999 07 09.

generate turmoil that could spill over the Polish-Belarussian border. They draw a scenario that entails refugee flows into Poland along with civil strife and violent clashes domestically. Carpenter and Stone point out that, according to Article 5 of NATO's charter, the members of the Alliance would have the obligation to defend Poland. For its part, Belarus would naturally expect military assistance from Russia.[65] Even though such a scenario is quite unlikely, it shows that some scholars and policy-makers in the West regard Belarus as a security threat. Perception, too, plays a huge role in Belarus's image in the West. Constant verbal attacks on the US and Western Europe and Lukashenko's unpredictability have significantly damaged Belarus's reputation in the West. On top of that, such incidents as shooting down a private hot air balloon involved in a race and killing two Americans, in 1995, have further damaged Belarus's already poor showing. The country hardly receives any attention in the Western press and, when it does, it is almost always cast in a negative light.

Belarus presents an intriguing challenge for Europe. On the one hand, it would be possible to resort to negative diplomacy, that is, to freeze all forms of contact and cooperation and cut aid and assistance programmes. By doing so, however, the West would completely lose what little means of influence on Belarus it still has. There would be no channels of communication left, and the relationship would deteriorate even further. On the other hand, if the European security community ignored the constant violations of human rights and democracy, it would lose credibility. Yet, in terms of positive diplomacy, there are limits on what the European security community can offer Belarus if the country reversed its current domestic and foreign policy orientation. Belarus's trade with the West is rather insignificant, and Minsk is not seeking either EU or NATO membership. What type of stance, therefore, should the different European security community institutions adopt towards Belarus?

III.1 The European Union

The European Community recognised the independence of Belarus in December 1991. Until 1994 relations between the EC and Belarus were based on the Trade and Cooperation Agreement signed by the USSR in 1989. In addition, in 1994, the EC and Belarus signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that was due to build on the 1989 agreement. Until Lukashenko took over, the relations between the EC and the Republic of Belarus were developing similarly to those with other CIS countries. There were no indications that relations would become confrontational. Some government officials in Minsk even considered openly the possibility of Belarus becoming a EU member: on 4 March 1994, for instance, the Belarussian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Piotr Kravchenka, stated during an official visit to Germany that by 2005 the country would fulfil the Maastricht requirements and be integrated into the EU.

One of the turning points that shaped Western Europe's negative view of Belarus was the 1996 referendum. 'The EU refused to recognise the operational constitution, holding the 1994 constitution as the legitimate legal order. The Council of Ministers decided upon a number of sanctions against Belarus: in 1997 the PCA was not concluded nor was its section on trade (Interim Agreement). Belarus's membership in the Council of Europe was tabled. Bilateral relations at the ministerial level were suspended. EC technical assistance programmes were

[65] Ted Galen Carpenter and Andrew Stone, NATO Expansion Flashpoint No.1, Cato Foreign Policy Briefing No.44, September 16, 1997.

frozen (with the exception of humanitarian aid, regional programmes and programmes directly benefiting the democratisation process).'[66]

Presently, there still is no EU representation office in Belarus. On 4 March 1997 the EU delegation presented a report to Lukashenko on the situation in Belarus. The EU asked that the November referendum be invalidated and the former parliament reinstated. Otherwise, the EU explicitly said it would adopt sanctions and stop investing in Belarus. Negative diplomacy, however, did not produce the expected outcome. Belarus was already focusing on Russia and, in a way, the EU pressure turned somewhat counterproductive in that it provided the Belarussian leadership with additional arguments for its policy reorientation. Lukashenko was able to show that Belarus was not welcomed in the West, and that energies should instead be spent on developing closer ties with Russia. On top of that, trade between Belarus and the EU was insignificant, and not nearly enough to cause Belarus to modify its behaviour. Therefore, neither positive nor negative diplomacy bore results. The EU now acknowledges that the incentive of EU membership is not applicable in Belarus. This creates a unique situation for the EU diplomacy, certainly one of relative impotence as compared to other countries in the area.[67]

Ever since relations between Belarus and the EU continued to deteriorate, and were dealt a very serious blow by the so-called 'Drozdy conflict', when Belarussian authorities evicted foreign diplomats from their residences in Minsk's Drozdy suburb with the pretext of repairing water and sewage pipes. The true reason behind the decision was quite different: Lukashenko's residence was in the same compound and, according to a senior Belarussian official, 'it cannot be that State President Lukashenko is neighbours with Western ambassadors'.[68] As a result, the EU and the US retaliated by imposing a travel ban to their countries.[69] Finally, after 15 months of confrontation and impasse, Belarus decided to improve its relations with the Western countries affected and agreed to pay compensations.

Nonetheless, the EU continues to be engaged with the country, albeit on a very small scale. In 1997 the EU adopted an approach of critical dialogue and selective engagement with the government. The dialogue is not completely frozen, but is very limited. The five ambassadors of EU countries to Belarus (France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and Greece) represent the interests of the EU and keep Brussels informed about developments in the country. Since 1997, the EU has demonstrated a coordinated and unified response to human rights abuses, restrictions on independent media, excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrations, disappearances of opposition members etc. In addition, EU associate and candidate countries support these positions although, occasionally, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania have abstained from endorsing the positions of the EU regarding developments in Belarus in the interest of maintaining cordial (albeit cool) neighbourly relations.[70]

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[66] The EU's relations with Belarus – an overview. http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/index.html

[67] Interview with Ms Emma Toledano-Laredo, administrator of the European Commission Directorate – General IA External Relations: Europe and the Newly Independent States, Common Foreign and Security Policy and External Missions. Ms Laredo is responsible for EU relations with Belarus. Interview was conducted on November 30, 2000.

[68] Jan de Weydenthal, 'Belarus: Government Moves Against Foreign Diplomats', Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 1998 06 09; in http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1998/06/F.RU.980609145231.html

[69] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/coldwar070198.html

[70] Poland, Lithuania and Latvia did not join the Common positions of the Council of the EU on July 9, 1998 to bar high Belarussian officials from visiting EU member states.

As a precondition for normalising diplomatic relations, the EU has demanded that Minsk undertake democratic reforms and respect human rights. Frustration over Minsk's lack of progress in these areas is illustrated by the continuing decrease in EU financial flows to Belarus. The EU has significantly cut its aid and assistance to Belarus, especially when compared to the levels of funding after Belarus gained independence. From 1991-1995, within the framework of the TACIS programme, Belarus was given 10 billion ECU per year. In 1996 the EU dropped its assistance slightly, to 37 billion ECU over four years.[71] In the end, however, the EU suspended its financial aid. On 11 December 1997, the TACIS office for assistance to CIS countries stated that the decision to suspend aid to Belarus would not be reviewed until 1999. During 1996-1999 Belarus was given only five million ECU per year. The same amount of financial assistance was allocated for 2000 and 2001, and there are no plans to alter this figure for 2002.[72]

Since 1996, aid from the Commission has only been allocated to programmes dealing with the development of civil society. Therefore independent media, NGOs and youth organisations usually are the main recipients of aid.[73] Lukashenko has reacted with disdain to this policy, going as far as saying that 'grants by the EU to fund civil society programmes in Belarus are exclusively used to finance the opposition, opposition media and researchers.'[74]

In perspective, the EU insists that Minsk knows what it must do to remedy the situation. 'Our restrictions are still in force. But the ball is in Minsk's court, not that of Brussels,' stated the head of the EU delegation in Minsk, Rene Niberg.[75]

In addition to the TACIS programme, the EU continues to provide financial assistance within the framework of the Interstate Programme of Home and Justice Affairs. This programme was not affected by the EU's displeasure with undemocratic developments in Belarus. The EU realises that the Belarussian border will soon be its Eastern frontier, and its strengthening remains a priority. This is the main reason why the Interstate programme, which is devoted to the demarcation and reinforcement of borders, has not been suspended. Significantly, perspective EU members as Poland and Lithuania will have to comply with EU visa regulations for Belarussian citizens. It is currently possible for some Belarussian citizens to visit Lithuania without a visa. Thus, the EU is working with candidate countries to adopt a common visa policy towards Belarus. The EU hopes that the border will be strengthened and such problems as organised crime, illegal migration, and the flow of drugs and illicit materials from Belarus kept in check.

EU member states have slightly different approaches toward Belarus. Differences and nuances, however, are not related to any disagreement a member state may have with the common position of the EU vis-à-vis Minsk, but are rather a product of a country's level of trade and cultural links with Belarus. Germany is one of the most active member states, given that most of Belarus's trade with the EU is with Germany and that Minsk sees Germany as its main economic partner in the West. On a visit to an industrial fair in Hanover on 22 April 1998, Lukashenko said that if Germany and Belarus could not interact politically, they would focus on economic and trade ties.[76] By contrast, France is more focused on cultural exchanges,

[71] Interview with Ms. Emma Toledano-Laredo.
[72] Ibid.
[73] The EU's relations with Belarus – an overview. http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/index.html
[74] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/west94-1q98.html
[75] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/west4q99.html
[76] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/west2q98.html

as demonstrated by the financial support it provides to the European Humanitarian University in Minsk, one of the few independent (non-state) schools in the country. Denmark and Sweden focus their activities exclusively on NGO exchanges. Similarly, the Netherlands supports NGOs and small enterprises. Austria, Italy and Belgium focus their attention and assistance on the humanitarian side. Their aid generally goes to charitable organisations that deal with victims of the Chernobyl disaster.[77]

The European Union has a common strategy towards Russia, yet it has no common strategy vis-à-vis Belarus. The EU considers that adopting common strategies is a better way to coordinate activities and improve the visibility of its policies, but gives different priority to Russia and Belarus.[78] It understands also that Russia is *the* critical factor in trying to convince Belarus to implement democratic reforms. Accordingly, the EU has tried to put the issue of Belarus on the bilateral EU-Russian working agenda. So far, however, Moscow has rejected to even discuss the situation in Belarus in bilateral meetings, suggesting instead that the EU continue to maintain a dialogue with Belarus and Lukashenko without Russian involvement.[79]
Actually, possibilities would exist to influence the situation in Belarus via cross-border cooperation: the EU can play a more prominent role in Belarus by encouraging cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries, e.g. by playing on the need to ensure transit between the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad and Russia – transit that goes through Lithuania and Belarus.

Finally, the European Union recognises that there is a need for policy coordination with other international organisations. For instance, the EU, OSCE, and the European Parliament are coordinating their policies to deal with Minsk. A 'European troika' including the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament was invented specifically to meet these requirements.[80]

On the whole, it is a fact that now overall assistance from the EU is minimal: it provides support for independent media, NGOs and the educational sector. In doing so, it focuses on the parts of society that have the best chances of initiating democratic change in Belarus. As a result, the EU aims at building an alternative (or just different) elite that could become an interlocutor in the event of radical political changes in the country.

III.2 NATO

Belarus's relations with NATO are stagnant and without significant achievements. In light of President Lukashenko's negative statements and rhetoric about the Alliance, Belarus's close military cooperation with Russia, and the general critical attitude of the Belarussian population vis-à-vis NATO, bilateral relations are extremely challenging, to say the least. Suffice it here to say that NATO officials dealing with Russia and Belarus rejected my request for an interview due to the delicate nature of the subject. Belarussian officials in Minsk, too, turned down my requests for an interview on the present state of relations between Belarus and the Atlantic Alliance.[81]

[77] Information provided by Ms. Toledano-Laredo.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Information provided by Ms. Toledano-Laredo.
[81] Official from the Belarussian Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted that NATO issues are too confidential and sensitive to discuss during an interview in May 1998.

Minsk has extremely limited contacts with NATO. The country joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme on 11 January 1995. However, dialogue with NATO has developed at a very slow pace and relations have actually worsened. Many government officials in Minsk keep arguing that NATO enlargement is a catastrophic mistake and claim that NATO is creating dividing lines in Europe.[82] In addition, Belarus's already problematic relations with NATO are further exacerbated by the inadequate funding that Belarus devotes to PfP activities.[83] Finally, its participation in PfP exercises is made all the more difficult by the fact that Belarussian law prohibits deploying or sending troops abroad.

Belarus has unsuccessfully approached NATO with two initiatives. The first one was Belarus's intention to establish a 'special relationship' that would provide Minsk with security guarantees.[84] The 'special relationship' envisioned by Belarus was meant to be similar to that of the Founding Act between Russia and NATO, or closely resembling that of the Ukraine-NATO Charter. NATO did not respond favourably to this initiative, as Rozanov points out: 'NATO representatives drop hints that such relations cannot start from scratch. They require adequate participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace programme.'[85]

Belarus's second initiative dealt with the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in Eastern and Central Europe. As envisioned by Minsk, the creation of such a zone would have prevented the stationing of nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus, the Baltic States, Ukraine, as well as in the new NATO members Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic. Yet the Alliance did not seriously consider this initiative, since any such agreement would tie NATO's hands and would severely limit any military response.

Belarus was at one time an associate member of the North Atlantic Assembly. The latter, however, froze all ties with Belarus on 14 March 1997. According to U.S. Senator W. Roth, this decision was taken because Lukashenko undermined the rule of law and the democratic legitimacy of the country's legislation.[86] The relationship between NATO and Belarus might therefore be best defined as one of 'cold peace'.

III.3 The EBRD and other IFIs

Belarus's record of cooperation with international financial institutions is quite modest and has often been contentious. This can be illustrated by Belarus's relationship with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The latter started its activities in Belarus in July 1992. It has since provided 31.3 million ECU of credit for small and medium-sized enterprises and has a 2.6 million ECU equity stake in a private bank.[87] The EBRD's operational strategy in Belarus focuses on the development of private business and a financial sector. The prospects for further cooperation between the EBRD and Belarus, however, are cloudy at best. Due to the tiny private business sector in Belarus, the absence of real market reforms, and general economic instability there is no favourable climate for investment. The EBRD has a pragmatic approach with regard to Belarus, and EBRD officials have indicated

[82] Presentation by First Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Belarus, Sergei Martynov at EAPC meeting of Foreign Ministers, Luxembourg, 29 May 1998.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Anatoliy Rozanov, 'Belarus, Russia, and New European Security Architecture', in Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy, Vol 1: *Russia's Place in Europe: A Security Debate*.
[85] Ibid.
[86] http://www.friends-partners.org/cgi-bin/friends/rferl/select-rec.pl
[87] http://www.ebrd.com/english/opera/COUNTRY/Belaact.htm

unofficially that they now have a policy based on conditionality - good performance of the country economically might result in larger investment and assistance.[88] It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the past two years have seen a significant decrease in EBRD investments in Belarus. Up until October 1998, the EBRD invested a total of 151 million ECU whereas, by October 1999, the overall total had risen by only 13 million ECU[89] - and the value of the Euro decreased notably during that year, so that the 13 million ECU did not have the same purchasing power as in preceding years.

Every two years the board of directors at the EBRD review the progress and strategy for operations in Belarus. Every indication from the Bank points to a continued decrease in cooperation with Belarus if the country maintains its present archaic financial policies. Even taking into consideration the influence Russia has on Belarus, EBRD prefers to deal directly with Belarus's authorities. Consequently, the issue of Belarus is not even on the bilateral EBRD-Russia working agenda.[90]

A similar attitude towards Belarus has been adopted by the World Bank (WB). Belarus attained membership of the World Bank in 1992. 'The Bank's overall objective has been to support the country's efforts to move to a market economy and restore growth by promoting the development of an efficient, competitive private sector and by supporting improvements to physical and social infrastructure . . . However, since 1995, stalled policy reforms have led to a slowdown in assistance and, in 1998, the developments of a new lending programme were put on hold.'[91] The World Bank has constantly criticised Minsk for lack of progress in market reforms. The WB has been especially blunt in its criticism concerning the distorted rouble exchange rate. David Phillips, a World Bank official, stressed that the main obstacle toward economic reform in Belarus is the practice of using multiple and distorted official exchange rates for the Belarussian rubble. As a result, Belarus has a problem with its balance of payments and is prevented from accumulating hard-currency reserves.[92] In addition, the WB is concerned that instead of tackling its many economic problems, Minsk has actually exacerbated them by imposing ever more controls and red tape, especially on private business.[93]

In order to re-establish normal cooperation with Belarus, the World Bank has set forth targeted requirements for Minsk. In specific, it calls for the 'establishment of a transparent, uniform, market-based exchange rate system, substantial reduction of price controls as well as price subsidies, and resumption of structural reforms.'[94] Yet the current Belarussian leadership shows no intention of changing its economic policy: relations with the World Bank seem bound to remain chilly.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has similar positions. As a precondition for the normalisation of relations, the IMF continues to stress that Belarus implement economic reforms. After losing patience with Belarus and acknowledging that Minsk would most likely not implement recommended reforms in the near future, the IMF withdrew its representative from Belarus on 5 July 1998: the official now works from the IMF office in Vilnius.

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[88] Interview with Ms Irina Kravchenko. EBRD official responsible for relations with Belarus. 2000 10 19
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] EBDR policy as stated in http://www.ebrd.com/english/opera.
[92] http://www.belarus.com/chronology/west2q98.html
[93] Robert Lyle, *Belarus: World Bank Official Holds Little Hope For Reform*, RFE/RL report from http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1998/11/F.RU.981110130949.html
[94] Ibid. note 91.

To sum up, due to Belarus's almost exclusive focus on Russia, international financial institutions have a very limited influence on Minsk. Nevertheless, these institutions have not totally frozen their relations with Belarus and have adopted a policy that calls for waiting until Minsk has implemented market reforms before normalising relations.

III.4 The Council of Europe

Immediately after independence, Belarus wished to join Western political structures and organisations. The country applied for membership of the Council of Europe (CoE) and was granted special guest status in this organisation on 16 September 1992. However, after the referendum of November 1996 and the increasing blows to democracy in the country, the special guest status accorded Belarus in the CoE was suspended. Yet the Council did not freeze all contacts and decided to keep channels of dialogue open. 'Although the Assembly cannot accept continued relations with a Parliament appointed by President Lukashenko, we nevertheless preferred suspension to withdrawal of guest status from Belarus so as to maintain contact and support positive developments,' stressed the President of the Parliamentary Assembly.[95]

In 1997 the Council of Europe revised its assistance programme for Belarus. The aid refocused on supporting civil society and independent media. The CoE has remained partially engaged with Belarus and has urged Minsk to respect democracy and to stop political persecutions and human rights violations. As a main precondition for normalising relations, the Council has insisted that Belarus hold free and fair democratic elections. Lukashenko. However, has an extremely negative attitude towards the initiatives and statements of the CoE. He has blamed it for adopting double standards when assessing countries. According to Lukashenko, 'other countries of the former Soviet Union with a record of bloodshed and violations of human rights have not come under fire because they are 'strategic partners' of the West'.[96]

Lukashenko was livid regarding the decision on 26 January 2000 by the Parliamentary Assembly to revoke the status of Belarus in the Council. According to Lukashenko that decision was 'foolishness'. His mercurial nature once again prevailed as he continued his tirade: 'I am not going to comment on this foolishness. It is political boorishness. I'll tell you one thing – the West will never outplay me and create opposition out of my own men. There will be no double standards here. As for human rights, we respect them as much as they do in the member states of the Council of Europe. Do they think we are waging wars here, or what?'[97]

At bottom, however, the positions and initiatives of the CoE are simply of no great importance to Lukashenko. The Belarussian leadership not only ignores the decisions and statements by the Council but actually uses them to vilify the West.

[95] http://stars.coe.fr/compress/cp97/11a(97).htm
[96] http://www.Belarussian,com/chronology/west2q98.html
[97] http://www.Belarussian.com/chronology/west1q00.html

III.5 The OSCE

Belarus shares Russia's view that the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) should be a cornerstone of the European security architecture. Consequently, Belarus has adopted a relatively moderate position toward the OSCE. Despite constant criticism from the OSCE towards developments in the country, President Lukashenko attended the OSCE summit in Istanbul in late 1999.

It should be stressed that the OSCE has managed to establish a pragmatic relationship with Minsk. The Organisation was very concerned about developments in Belarus after the referendum of 24 November 1996. At an OSCE summit in December 1997, Belarus agreed to the establishment of an OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) based in Minsk. Since February 1998, the AMG has been the only international body represented in Belarus. The AMG was established on 18 September 1997 to assist Belarussian authorities in promoting democratic institutions and complying with other OSCE commitments. The AMG also monitors and reports on developments in Belarus in addition to providing a voice for European democratic ideals. The AMG's actions in Minsk are coordinated between the OSCE and the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Political Affairs. In addition, the AMG coordinates its activities with the policies of neighbouring states (Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine) as well as regional and global powers (Germany, Russia and the US).[98]

The AMG mission in Minsk is considered to be one of the most difficult tours of duty for an OSCE official. Therefore the OSCE has sent highly qualified diplomats to represent its interests in Belarus. The mission is headed by Hans-Georg Wieck, a German career diplomat with experience in running embassies and missions in Moscow, Baghdad and NATO. According to Ambassador Wieck the OSCE, as compared to other international organisations, is in a condition to make a real difference in Belarus.[99] The OSCE is able to approach the highest political leadership in Belarus to voice concerns over developments in the country as well as deliver the positions of the West. The AMG has analysed over 600 human rights cases and its members have visited some 40 prisoners or detainees. Furthermore, court proceedings, re-registration of political parties, NGOs and independent media activities are closely observed.[100] The AMG is working gradually to change the political landscape in Belarus by strengthening civil society. It plays a vital role in strengthening civil society by organising seminars, conferences and workshops on such issues as elections, media law, penal code and citizenship.[101]

The OSCE AMG also performs an important function by facilitating dialogue between the president and the opposition. President Lukashenko's view of the opposition has been extremely negative as he sees opposition members as personal enemies. Even just initiating a dialogue between the two sides may therefore be considered as an achievement: the idea was received favourably by both sides, and the 'dialogue' sessions now include representatives from the government, the opposition and NGOs, along with officials from the OSCE AMG.

[98] Statement of Mr. Adrian Severin, Chairman of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus. From http://prcenter.newmail.ru/6_mar_2000_belarus_at_the_crossroads.htm

[99] Meeting of Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck with representatives of Vilnius University's Institute of International Relations and Political Science in Vilnius. December 1999.

[100] http://www.osce.org/belarus/overwiev.htm

[101] Ibid.

One of the tasks of the AMG was to ensure that the dialogue would lead to free and democratic parliamentary elections on 15 and 29 October 2000. This task clearly was not achieved. Parliamentary elections failed to meet international standards and certainly could not be considered to be free and democratic. The government pledged to hold elections in an atmosphere of trust and confidence, but did not comply, so that both the OSCE and the US stated in advance that the results should not be considered as legitimate. This position was reiterated after the poll. For its part, the opposition could not agree to present a united front and decided to boycott the vote. Only the Russian Federation has recognised the results of the elections (see Table 3 below). [102]

Table 3

The Parliament of Belarus

The **Natsionalnoye Sabranie** (National Assembly) has two chambers. The **Palata Predstaviteley** (House of Representatives) has 110 members elected in single-seat constituencies elected for a four year term. The **Soviet Respubliki** (Council of the Republic) has 64 members, 56 of which are elected indirectly and 8 appointed by the President.

Palata Predstaviteley: 15 and 29 october 2000 (61.1 resp. 53.9 %)		**%**	**110**
Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Belarusi (Communist Party of Belarus, communist)	**KPB**	**.**	**6**
Agrarnaya Partiya Belarusi (Agrarian Party of Belarus, agrarian)	**APB**	**.**	**5**
Respublikanskaya Partiya Pratsy y Spravyadivasti (Republican Party of Labour and Justice)	**RPPS**	**.**	**2**
Liberal-Democratic Party	**LDP**	**.**	**1**
Satsiyal-Demokratychnaya Partiya Narodnaya Zgody (Social-Democratic Party of People's Accord)	**SDPNZ**	**.**	**1**
Social and Sporting Party	**SSP**	**.**	**1**
Non-partisans	**-**	**.**	**81**
Vacant (constituencies were elections were not valid)	**-**	**.**	**13**

Source: IPU

On the whole, however, the overall strategy of the OSCE AMG can be viewed as a qualified success. Some opposition groups, for instance, are finding common ground, although AMG officials express dismay that no grouping has a somewhat coherent economic plan for the future or is willing to do the necessary work to build local power bases. The AMG has also been responsible for facilitating the release of political prisoners and coordinating the aforementioned 'European troika'.[103]

The Final Declaration of the OSCE Istanbul Summit in November 1999 expressed support for the work of the AMG. The OSCE shares the international community's position that Belarus should start the democratisation process immediately in order to normalise its relations with the European security community. However, the OSCE insists that, despite the lack of

[102] Statement by OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Belarus elections. Vienna, 17 October, 2000. From http://www.osce.org/news/generate.php3?news_id=1160

[103] See statement of Mr. Severin.

progress of democratic reforms, 'international contacts with Belarus should be maintained, even during difficult periods in its political development process . . . The isolation and continued Eastward drift will not serve any long-term interests.'[104]

The crucial test of Lukashenko's endurance in power will certainly be the forthcoming presidential elections of 9 September 2001. For what they are worth, opinion polls still consider him as the strongest candidate with a potential support of 37.2 %. The system is such that an absolute majority of cast votes is necessary to be elected on the first ballot: or else, a run-off between the two best-placed candidates is to be held in a fortnight. Lukashenko is still confident to win a full mandate already on September 9. This time, however, the opposition seems to have found some unity in support of Natalya Masherova, daughter of the still very popular Communist leader of Soviet Belarus Piotr Masherov (see above, ch.I.1).

[104] Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS

Especially over the past six years, Belarus has consolidated its reputation as one of the most enigmatic countries in Europe. Due to its weak traditions of democracy, statehood, and national identity, and to utter lack of economic progress, the country has failed to create a democratic system of government. Such failure has led to the restoration of authoritarianism and the waning of a balanced foreign policy. There is a direct correlation between the worsening human rights situation in Belarus and President Lukashenko's increasingly firm grip on power. He has initiated an illegitimate referendum, changed the constitution to suit his political needs, and turned the country into the last bastion of authoritarianism in Europe. As a result, Belarus now represents a very significant challenge for the European security community. Under Lukashenko's rule, Belarus has also lost its ability to conduct a relatively autonomous foreign and security policy. Presently the country's foreign, security and domestic policies are all conducted in tune to the interests of the Russian Federation. It could even be argued that Belarus is behaving not as an independent Republic but simply as a region of Russia. Moreover, Russia and Belarus have taken steps to implement a union that is contradictory in nature as the two countries have different expectations and perceptions of what each can bring to the union.

Belarus's shift to authoritarianism and acquiescence to Russian hegemony was not anticipated by the European security community. Although Belarus is not perceived in most European capitals as a direct threat, the country should be considered as relatively unstable. Therefore, the European security community is called to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with Belarus. The objective of any long-term strategy should be a developing and democratic Belarus with a more balanced foreign policy. At the moment, however, Belarus creates a major headache to European policy-makers who try to develop responses to Lukashenko's authoritarianism and abuses of human rights, media restrictions, political trials and anti-Western policies. Any response is complicated by Belarus's close ties to Russia, because Minsk is influenced only by Moscow. In order to change the situation in Belarus, therefore, the European security community should try and work with Russia. Presently, however, Moscow is still reluctant to discuss issues concerning Belarus with its partners from Europe.

On the one hand, the current policy of the European security community at large involves keeping a dialogue open with the current leadership in Belarus. On the other hand, the same European security community is making modest efforts to strengthen civil society, the educational sector, NGOs and youth organisations in the country - much to Lukashenko's dismay - with a view to fostering an alternative elite. If political change occurs in Belarus, Europe would then be better prepared to deal with a new leadership.

Much as there is policy coordination among European and international organisations and EU member States, countries having a direct border with Belarus, due to security concerns, have sometimes had to abstain from participating in the common efforts of the European security community with respect to actions taken concerning Belarus. Especially now that Poland has joined NATO and Lithuania is a leading candidate to join in the Alliance's next round of expansion, the European security community has had to take a hard look at how to deal with having direct borders with Belarus. As a result, programmes directed at demarcation and overall strengthening of borders with Belarus have become a priority. Accordingly, they have not been suspended nor frozen, despite profound dissatisfaction in most European capitals with the political developments in Belarus.

The European security community's policy of conditionality, however, is hardly applicable to Belarus. The country not only has meagre trade with the West, but normalising relations with the EU and the West is simply not a priority for the current leadership. Thus, the European security community has few instruments and incentives to influence or alter Belarus's behaviour. Relaunching the TACIS programme or receiving other forms of assistance from the West is not important enough to Lukashenko to justify what he perceives and denounces as Western meddling in his country's affairs with the ultimate intent of ousting him from power. Neither is the European security community able to use negative diplomacy effectively. Political sanctions, suspension of Belarus's membership in European/international organisations, and protests by organisations and individual EU member states have done very little to change the behaviour of government officials in Minsk. Relations between Belarus and the European security community will be normalised only after democratic change occurs in Belarus. That will not happen as long as Lukashenko remains in power, but there seems to be no serious challenge to his leadership in this autumn's presidential elections. Even beyond his undemocratic practice, however, it must be stressed that Lukashenko has also enjoyed genuine support from a population that is still a bit nostalgic of Soviet times and somewhat identifies with his style and mentality. At any rate, much of the immediate future of Belarus will depend on the results of the forthcoming presidential elections of 9 September.

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