



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT



**SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY
ON THE COMPOSITION
OF THE BELARUSIAN
SOCIETY**

AFET



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION

DIRECTORATE B

POLICY DEPARTMENT

STUDY

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE COMPOSITION OF THE BELARUSIAN SOCIETY

Abstract

For failure of complying with democratic standards, since 1997 Belarus has been (self-) isolated from European integration dynamics. Save for a short-lived 'thaw' with the West in 2008-2010, when Alexander Lukashenka's regime was seeking to compensate for its degraded relations with Moscow, Belarus has been the target of EU sanctions. Yet the country remains apparently impermeable to democratisation and Europeanisation alike.

A 'reluctant partner' in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, Belarus is also the cornerstone of Russia's Eurasian Union project. In late 2011 Russia's renewed subsidising of Belarus virtually saved the country from economic collapse. In energising its own integration offer along the Eurasian vector, Moscow offers official Minsk a cooperation prospect void of democratic conditionality which is more attractive than the EU's could ever be.

Do Lukashenka's geopolitical preferences reflect the aspiration of the Belarusian people however? Building on the results of independent sociological surveys, this study tries to assess the worldviews, social needs and dividing lines among Belarusian society ahead of the 2012 legislative elections. It critically reviews the EU's 'dual track' policy and instruments and calls for adopting a new strategy to draw the country closer to the EU while circumventing its authoritarian leadership. Exploring the potential of 'third track' diplomacy – towards a real, pragmatic partnership with Belarus as a country – this study advocates a more inclusive approach of neighbourhood relations, allowing for mutually beneficial cooperation for the sake of modernising and hopefully democratising Belarus.

This study was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

AUTHOR:

Dr Anaïs Marin, Researcher, The EU's Eastern neighbourhood and Russia research programme, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki

ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBLE:

Julien Crampes
Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union
Policy Department
WIB 06 M 075
rue Wiertz 60
B-1047 Brussels

Editorial Assistant: Elina Stergatou

LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

Original: EN

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Editorial closing date: 11 May 2012.

© European Union, 2012.

Printed in Belgium

ISBN: 978-92-823-3738-7

DOI: 10.2861/80947

The Information Note is available on the Internet at

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies.do?language=EN>.

If you are unable to download the information you require, please request a paper copy by e-mail : poldep-expo@europarl.europa.eu.

DISCLAIMER

Any opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament.

Reproduction and translation, except for commercial purposes, are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and provided the publisher is given prior notice and supplied with a copy of the publication.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1. INTRODUCTION: BELARUS, A CHALLENGE FOR THE EU	8
1.1 THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF THE 'BELARUS PROBLEM'	8
1.1.1 Deadlocks	8
1.1.2 Dilemmas	9
1.1.3 Disinformation	10
1.1.4 Deadlines	11
1.2 TIME FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT	12
2. WHY IS SANCTIONS POLICY FAILING?	13
2.1 HALF-MEASURES BRING ABOUT HALF-RESULTS	14
2.2 HOW MEMBER STATES UNDERMINE THE COHERENCE OF THE EU'S COERCIVE DIPLOMACY	15
2.2.1 Internal divisions among EU member states play in Lukashenka's favour	15
2.2.2 Increased trade exchanges with Belarus cancel out the impact of sanctions	16
2.3 TIME FOR SMARTER SANCTIONS	16
3. UNDERSTANDING BELARUSIANS' WORLDVIEWS	19
3.1 THE STRUCTURING FORCES AND COMPOSITION OF BELARUSIAN SOCIETY	19
3.1.1 The constraints of the 'power vertical': state-built myths and repression	19
3.1.2 Sociological composition of the Belarusian society	20
3.1.3 A 'denationalised' nation? On Belarusian identity	21
3.2 WHAT DO RECENT OPINION POLLS TELL US ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF BELARUSIAN SOCIETY?	22
3.2.1 Belarusians lost confidence in the regime	22
3.2.2 Their geopolitical preferences remain malleable and pragmatic	23
3.3 DIVIDING LINES WITHIN VARIOUS SEGMENTS OF THE BELARUSIAN SOCIETY	25
3.3.1 How monolithic the ruling elite?	25
3.3.2 How divided the opposition?	26
3.3.3 How unlikely a popular uprising?	26
3.4 TIME TO MEDIATE A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY	28
4. STEPPING UP SECOND TRACK DIPLOMACY: EMPOWER CIVIL SOCIETY	29

4.1	PRIORITY NUMBER 1: DELIVER ON MOBILITY PROMISES (VISA FACILITATION)	29
4.2	EU DEMOCRACY-PROMOTION INSTRUMENTS: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT	30
4.3	PROVIDE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS WITH A SAFE HAVEN	31
4.3.1	Focus on 'virtual' spheres for freedom: new media and social networks	31
4.4	TOWARDS A GOVERNMENT IN EXILE TO REPRESENT THE 'OTHER' BELARUS ABROAD	32
4.5	TIME TO DRAFT A MODERNISATION ROADMAP FOR BELARUS	32
5.	ANY CHANCE FOR APPROXIMATION?	33
5.1	THE 'RUSSIA FACTOR'	33
5.2	THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IS DEAD – LONG LIVE THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP!	34
5.2.1	Assessment of trends and prospects for approximation with the EU	34
5.2.2	Opportunities for further regional cooperation with other Eastern Partners	36
6.	CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	37
6.1	TRACK 1: DESIGN A MORE CONSTRAINING AND COHERENT SANCTIONS POLICY	37
6.2	TRACK 2: DEVELOP AN ATTRACTIVE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY	39
6.3	TRACK 3: TURN THE 'DIALOGUE' (WITH THE OPPOSITION) FOR MODERNISATION INTO A REAL 'PARTNERSHIP' (WITH BELARUS AS A COUNTRY)	40
ANNEXES		43
	TABLE 1 BELARUS' MAIN TRADING PARTNERS IN 2011	43
	TABLE 2. MAIN ORIGIN COUNTRIES OF BELARUSIAN IMPORTS IN 2011	44
	TABLE 3. EVOLUTION OF BELARUSIAN RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON GEOPOLITICAL OPTIONS BETWEEN 2003 AND 2011	45
	TABLE 4. DISTRIBUTION OF BELARUSIAN RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON GEOPOLITICAL OPTIONS BY AGE, LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND ACCESS TO THE INTERNET IN JUNE 2011	45
	TABLE 5 EVOLUTION OF BELARUSIAN RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON ACCESSION TO THE EU BETWEEN 2002 AND 2011	46
	TABLE 6. INDEX OF BELARUS' CONVERGENCE WITH THE EU AS COMPARED TO OTHER EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES IN JUNE 2011	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY		48

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Radical changes occurred in 2011 in Belarus. Isolated from its traditional creditors, the country faced a socio-economic crisis that made a dent in the state-built myth of a 'Belarusian economic miracle'. Alexander Lukashenka's regime appeared unable to service its part of the so-called 'social contract' whereby Belarusians would cross fundamental freedoms off their list in exchange for state protection against the alleged woes of liberalism.

A majority of the population is now willing for liberal reforms however. Belarusians want change because they lost trust in Lukashenka, whose rating dropped by half (to little over 20 %) within 9 months after his last rigged re-election in December 2010. However, sociological data show that Belarusians do not recognise themselves in the political alternative on offer: divided and lacking a coherent programme, the opposition does not appeal to the wider public. Brainwashed by propaganda and fearing chaos as much as repression, a majority of people remains unwilling to mobilise in defence of fundamental rights. Meanwhile, the pro-Western minority is losing hope in the EU's capacity to break the deadlock and grant Belarus a democratic, European future.

The dominant feeling is that Brussels got entrapped in its own isolating policy, amid sanctions' inability to trigger positive transformation in the regime's behaviour. Additional dilemmas undermine the very legitimacy of the EU's coercive diplomacy. For failure to deliver on its promises regarding enhanced mobility into the Schengen space, the EU is also losing Belarusians as friends. This, in turn, fuels a pragmatic interest in Russia's own Eurasian integration offer.

The EU needs to assess the setbacks of its hard conditionality policy towards reluctant neighbours. Brussels failed to eradicate the last dictatorship of Europe for lack of a long-term and ambitious strategy. Policy tools are not adapted to Belarusian realities, whereas real challenges, such as regime change, are left unaddressed. This doldrums mainly results from EU internal divisions however. In 2011 the EU27 managed to reach but minimal consensus on symbolic half-measures. The impact of sanctions was cancelled out by free riding logics and increased trade with Belarus, which ultimately contribute to extending the regime's lifespan.

Persisting misunderstandings of Belarusians' mentality and social needs only partly result from the regime's information blockade. Brussels lacks a competent taskforce able to amend the current conditionality package on Belarus, which is based on unrealistic expectations, and can but provoke bitter reactions. The EU is also too confident in the attractiveness of its governance model. Whereas Lukashenka cannot democratise without damaging the very foundations of his autocratic power, the EU still needs to admit that Belarusians are not ready to swap their neo-Soviet governance model for a Western one just yet. The Eastern Partnership is not a 'juicy' enough carrot to sustain approximation with EU standards, if only because Belarus, irrespective of Lukashenka's stratagems, has a tough balancing act to maintain with Moscow. The 'Russian factor' indeed limits the EU's ability to foster systemic transformation in Belarus: objectively, as Russia's economic integration offer is more attractive than the EU's, but also as a psychological variable preventing EU member states from challenging Russia's alleged influence in the shared neighbourhood.

The EU should not give up on Belarus though. Assessing people's objective needs and their receptivity to Brussels' rhetoric, the EU should extend a tailored partnership offer to Belarus *as a country*. This implies concessions from Brussels as well. Renewing a principled dialogue with official Minsk should build on realistic conditionality yardsticks, applicable to all non-candidate Eastern neighbours.

– **The EU must rationalise its 'first track' policy: be consistent, ignore Lukashenka**

Democracy promotion requires the EU to remain true to its own values. The escalation of the diplomatic crisis in February 2012 sent the right signal that the EU is united, sticks to its principles and does not give up to Lukashenka's blackmail. The EU should not get entrapped in its sanctions policy however: conciliatory steps from official Minsk should be met by shifting the paradigm towards a more constructive dialogue, albeit one limited to economic issues and with the segments of the ruling elite supportive of liberalisation. In parallel, European officials should fully ignore Alexander Lukashenka. Even if *threatening* to deprive Belarus of the hosting of the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championships obviously puts pressure on him, *politicising* this sports competition will surely exacerbate the anti-Western feelings of average Belarusians. A more consistent approach would be to let the regime hold the event, thus giving people-to-people contacts a chance to develop, whereas European officials should fully boycott it if there still are political prisoners in Belarus by then.

– **There remains room for improvement along the 'second track' as well, should the EU design a proactive strategy independently from those readily benefiting from its aid**

Targeting massive support on the anti-Lukashenka opposition and human rights activists did not bring about the desired changes so far. The EU should thus energise the *institution-building* component of its democracy-promotion policy and step up efforts towards civil society at large. More flexible funding opportunities should be redirected to NGOs and even public institutions able to form the backbone of an autonomous civil society. Democratisation being a learning-by-doing process that requires practical training, upon envisaging a post-Lukashenka future for Belarus the EU needs to understand the population's apprehensions and adopt a more inclusive approach of the challenges awaiting the country on the road to de-Sovietisation. The best starting point would be to unilaterally liberalise the Schengen visa regime.

– **Opening a 'third track' is the only way for Brussels to remain in the geopolitical race**

Breaking the current deadlock, bypassing traditional dilemma in EU-Belarus relations and challenging Russia's influence requires a paradigm shift. The 'third track' strategy should lead to extending a pragmatic but principled partnership offer to Belarus *as a country*. Prior to this, the EU should widen its own, independent and critical expertise base for sorting out information influxes on and from Belarus. Recruiting advisers to second the special EU Representative for Belarus, whose appointment is also recommended, should be a priority.

– **Fostering reforms should build on the dynamics launched through the Eastern Partnership**

The Civil Society Forum in particular weeded best practices that need to be energised further. Pro-democratic civil society organisations (CSOs) readily drafted ambitious but realistic roadmaps which in some sectors imply a negotiated change acceptable by the authorities. Brussels should explore the potential of some low policy niches, such as environment issues, to serve as testing grounds for a constructive cooperation between European bodies, neighbouring Eastern Partners, Belarusian civil servants and civil societies at large. Cross-border cooperation should be encouraged, as it truly enhances the diffusion of European values and standards through benchmarking.

– **Normalisation EU-Belarus relations should be made conditional upon a prior renewal of dialogue between State institutions and the population**

Other demands, such as the full legal rehabilitation of political prisoners whom Lukashenka considers as personal enemies, or the holding of free and fair elections, are unrealistic. Hence the EU should not pay attention to the upcoming electoral farce (and refrain from sending electoral observers to Belarus next September) and call instead for the holding of roundtables involving representatives of the public sector and CSOs.

– **Extending a pragmatic cooperation offer should energise the EU's re-engagement policy**

The EU27 should make room for mutually beneficial cooperation with Belarus for the shared purpose of reforming its governance structures through modernisation. Rationalising the EU's neighbourhood policy implies admitting that Belarusians aspire to peaceful coexistence and economic integration with the EU... as much as with Russia. Democratic transition is a lengthy and bumpy road that will not necessarily result in Belarus complying with EU standards. Yet, meanwhile, the EU should seize its chance to at last yield some success in 'partnership-building' with the Belarusian society.

1. INTRODUCTION: BELARUS, A CHALLENGE FOR THE EU

Under the authoritarian leadership of Alexander Lukashenka, in 17 years Belarus gradually turned into a 'black hole' right at the centre of Europe and, as such, remains a headache for policy-makers. **The 'last dictatorship in Europe' is a test case for European policies in many respects.** Belarus' reluctance to engage in a conditioned partnership with the EU challenges the magnetism, if not the legitimacy altogether, of the EU's soft power model and values-based discourses in its Eastern neighbourhood. In terms of realist power games, the regime's constant swing between Russia and the West defies Brussels' ability to withdraw Belarus from Moscow's sphere of influence and turn it into a stable, democratic and pro-EU partner.

Is this at all possible, should it be the EU's goal and would Belarusians support it? Answering these questions is a prerequisite for drafting a realistic policy towards Belarus. Brussels may have a neighbourhood policy that keeps trying to formally encompass Belarus – the Eastern Partnership – but it still lacks clear objectives and strategic ambitions regarding Belarus' European future. No engagement policy could succeed in the absence of this framework strategy however.

At the root of the problem is an enduring misunderstanding of Belarusians' mentality and worldviews. In the absence of reliable sociological data, no study could provide a faithful portrait of the society's preferences regarding reforms and geopolitical alternatives. Dealing with a dictatorship is arguably a difficult exercise. A misleading assumption would be to believe that removing a single evil individual would automatically put the country back onto the 'right' track. When envisaging a democratic, post-Lukashenka future for Belarus, one should remember that post-Soviet transition is a chaotic road paved with obstacles and dangers of setbacks, and that the itinerary Brussels wishes to impose is not a panacea in the eyes of most Belarusians.

Still, the EU cannot remain true to its very purpose if it fails to eradicate an authoritarian regime that is prospering right at its doorstep, even if it happens to also be in Russia's backyard. Acknowledging the many dimensions of the problem, including those stemming from their own mistakes, the EU and its member states should devise an ambitious strategy for returning to 'Realpolitik' in relation to the regime, rationalising support to civil society (the 'second track' diplomacy), while investing in the 'third track' of a real partnership aimed at Belarus *as a country*.

Prior to convincing Belarusian society of engaging in systemic transformation, the EU should identify what are its real needs and the constraints that make it resistant to change. **The present study provides keys for understanding Belarusian society** and suggests ways to enhance the positive impact of the EU on the country's transition. To start with, it critically assesses EU policies (or lack thereof) and recommends a paradigm shift for bypassing traditional dilemmas.

1.1 The four dimensions of the 'Belarus problem'

At the time of writing (May 2012) the foreign policy challenge that Belarus represents for the EU is a '4D' one. These four dimensions encompass the following stakes.

1.1.1 Deadlocks

Bilateral relations between Brussels and official Minsk hit rock bottom since the last rigged re-election of Alexander Lukashenka as president on 19 December 2010. The West condemned the regime for the disproportionate use of force against protesters that night, rather than the fact that, in securing 79,65 %

of the vote for himself, Lukashenka had broken his promise of holding free and fair elections.¹ The subsequent (and ongoing) crackdown against the political opposition, independent journalists and human rights defenders gave the West good enough reasons to re-enact sanctions against the regime. The 'thaw' in EU-Belarus relations that started in October 2008 was thus short-lived: **since January 2011, the West returned to coercive diplomacy vis-à-vis official Minsk.** With little result though other than pushing Lukashenka to step up repression, head towards an open confrontation with the EU and fall back into Russia's orbit.

For Washington and Brussels, resuming dialogue is conditional upon the prior release and full rehabilitation of all political prisoners,² **a demand Lukashenka cannot satisfy without losing the face.** In claiming that the ball is now in Lukashenka's camp, the West has ironically become hostage of Lukashenka's 'dictaplomatic' manoeuvres again. Breaking the current deadlock indeed depends on his goodwill, and will happen only when he will consider the move to be at his own advantage.

The 'Russian factor' is determining in this regard. In November 2011 Moscow renewed its economic support to Belarus in exchange for Lukashenka's loyal adherence to Putin's Eurasian Union project. This made it more complicated – if at all possible – for the EU to influence official Minsk with 'sticks' and 'carrots'. In virtually saving Belarus from bankruptcy, Russia's support is thus incomparably more attractive and concrete than the EU's could ever be.³

In sliding back into authoritarianism, Lukashenka's regime has allegedly 'self-isolated' from Europe. **In fact, the EU is 'self-constrained' by its isolation policy.** Deprived of an institutional framework for high level dialogue, Brussels can only rely on alternative negotiation channels: intergovernmental relations, maintained with the regime by some member states on the one hand, and secret talks, conducted by EU emissaries on a limited agenda, on the other.

1.1.2 Dilemmas

Dealing with the acting Belarusian regime causes a case of conscience: how to pressure an authoritarian regime to comply with democratic standards without coercive means (sanctions) harming the very interests of the population they intend to protect? To solve the riddle, the EU followed Washington's stance and segmented its Belarus policy in two tracks: limiting relations with officials, while intensifying contacts with the opposition. **The regime quickly became an expert in outsmarting the West however,** using a trick known to all dictatorships: in claiming that 'external enemies' (the West) and 'internal' ones (dissidents) are two sides of the same coin it can call democratic opposition forces a 'fifth column' endangering State security. The diplomatic row of 28 February 2012 is a case in point: while conflict escalation⁴ positively reshuffled the cards, the regime retaliated in blacklisting opponents who advocated stricter sanctions, to forbid them to *exit* Belarus.

¹ Doubts over the accuracy of this official figure stemmed from the fact that OSCE observers assessed the vote count as 'bad and very bad' in almost half of the 162 observed polling stations. Independent pre- and post-election surveys ranged Lukashenka's real score between 38 and 57% however.

² After 24 were 'pardoned' in August and September 2011, and two more (presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov and his aide Dmitri Bondarenka) in mid-April 2012, there remains in Belarusian jails four prisoners of conscience according to the European Parliament, and 13 according to local human rights organisations.

³ On 24 November 2011, three major deals were signed: on the sale of the remaining 50% share of *Beltransgas* (the operator of Belarus' gas pipelines) to *Gazprom* for a very good price (\$2,5 bn); on a \$10bn loan for building a nuclear power plant; and on rebate prices for Russian gas in 2012 (\$164 per 1000 cubic meters).

⁴ The day after the EU Council added 21 names on the visa ban list, Lukashenka 'recommended' that the ambassador of Poland Leszek Sherepka and the head of the EU Delegation Maira Mora 'return to their capitals for consultations'. In diplomatic language, this amounts to an expulsion. The EU's prompt and cohesive response came as a surprise: to show

Lukashenka is an expert in geopolitical outmanoeuvring. Since 2004 the regime balances between the Eastern and Western vectors, a 'clumsy geopolitical shopping' (Jarábik and Silitski 2008: 107) which results in Lukashenka successfully increasing the bid for his (fake) loyalty to either Moscow or Brussels. As a result, **any attempt at pressuring him to democratise pushes Belarus back into Russian embrace**. This poses a double challenge: although as a matter of principle the EU cannot but wish Belarus to remain independent, in terms of regional security balance however some EU member states would accommodate with a (re-)absorption of Belarus by Russia.

The fear of such a scenario arguably motivated the EU to extend Belarus an invitation into the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a joint Polish-Swedish initiative promptly endorsed by the EU Council following the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008. The move re-actualised another dilemma however: **how to attract Belarus into the EU's 'ring of friends' without compromising with the regime on core EU values?** Here again, Lukashenka outplayed the EU, distributing promises of democratisation he easily reverted in December 2010. Brussels was right not to compromise. Yet in boycotting the EaP Summit in Warsaw in September 2011 to protest 'discrimination', the Belarusian regime revealed that EU efforts at 'partnership-building' had failed miserably: one cannot sell a cooperation offer and simultaneously subject its beneficiaries to sanctions.

1.1.3 Disinformation

An additional factor limiting the EU's impact in Belarus is the information gap. The regime holds an almost absolute control over the informational sphere. Lukashenka's anti-Western propaganda sabotages the EU's communication efforts. The impact of such a blockade is actually two-fold.

- the West has no means for communicating directly to the Belarusian population

Belarusians have been brainwashed by state propaganda for 17 years. Weeding it out is a huge challenge for the EU to advocate democratic change and enhance its own profile (Rotman and Veremeeva 2011). Most Belarusians misunderstand the purpose of sanctions because **propaganda systematically distorts the EU's messages** so as to turn the country itself (not its leadership) into a victim of ostracism. The West lacks channels for explaining what universal democratic values mean and why the Belarusian 'model', as such, violates them.

Enhancing the EU's outreach requires an effort to demonstrate how Belarusians would benefit from living by EU standards. As subversive as it may sound, **Brussels must show Belarusians what rewards the regime deprives them of in refusing to abide by democratic rules.**⁵ Bypassing the regime's information blockade should be a priority: a 2010 poll showed that 'access to alternative sources of information about the EU and possibility of free travel within the Union secure a 20 % to 30 % growth in pro-European attitudes in each and every social group' (BISS and NOVAK 2010: 2).

- **the information gap limits the availability of reliable data on the situation inside Belarus**

The absence of independent sociological data and statistics complicates policy advocacy and decision-making on Belarus. **Methodological obstacles are many and almost insurmountable**, unless one works with official, and therefore biased, data. Conducting unauthorised surveys exposes pollsters to criminal liability. In addition, EU structures and most national foreign ministries lack a professional

their 'unity and solidarity', all EU countries having ambassadors in Minsk recalled them for consultations, pushing Belarus to do the same with its ambassadors in EU countries.

⁵ For a record of violations performed in 2011, see Human Rights Watch report, cf. www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-belarus. Last accessed 08/03/12.

enough taskforce of experts on Belarus. The average knowledge-based capacity of most Western embassies and intelligence networks in and on the country is obviously insufficient.

As a result policy-makers rely on information mainly provided by Belarusian opponents, human rights activists and journalists – some of whom are independent and democratic in name only. In fact, being politicised and West-oriented, most of these agents of influence are not representative of Belarusian public opinion. Off the record, some observers raise concerns about the **partiality of information inputs that EU structures base their decisions on**. In their view, the EU all too often follows the advice of human rights defenders blindly, although these 'grant-seekers' would lose their main source of revenues – Western aid – if the regime made progress towards compliance. Cynically enough, the argument that dissidents bias Brussels' views is exploited by the regime for discrediting the EU and accusing CSOs of 'spreading false information that could harm state or public interests' – now a criminal offence in Belarus.

1.1.4 Deadlines

The fourth dimension of the challenge is a temporal one. For a decade now most people somehow admitted the dictatorship as permanent, whereas a new generation of Belarusians having only lived under Lukashenka's reign is now reaching voting age.

Time is also of the essence for sanctions to reach their goal. All through 2011, experts claimed that the currency crisis in Belarus gave *economic* sanctions a chance to be effective. Due to bureaucratic slowness and internal divisions, the EU failed to adopt coercive enough measures in a timely manner however: by the time the EU Council agreed on 'targeted' economic sanctions in June 2011, the regime had built up strengths to escape their impact. Now that Lukashenka secured Russian subsidies for the coming years – experts estimate that the last deals with Moscow represent a \$2,7bn yearly gain for Belarus (ie. a third of what is needed to make Lukashenka's unsustainable economic model run) – he can confidently ignore Western demands and consolidate his autocratic rule until the 2015 presidential elections. This may not be a sustainable strategy in the long run, but tactically it is enough for him to fulfil his main aspiration: remaining in power.

Meanwhile **the reputation of the EU kept degrading in Belarus**. The pro-democratic minority is disappointed that Brussels refrained from radical steps in response to the unprecedented brutality of the crackdown. Conversely, confidence in the Eastern vector grew again towards the end of 2011. Putin recently confirmed Moscow's readiness to 'rescue' Belarus from the threat of an economic downturn or an Orange revolution. This promise was meant to secure stability in Russia's backyard during the last election campaigns, but now that he is back in power, Putin might well resume pressures for Belarus to liberalise its economy and open it to Russian investors. When Moscow cuts its subsidies, Lukashenka will start courting the West again for alternative credit lines, if only to service Belarus' booming external public debt (64 % of GDP in 2011).

Although Western firms and banks should know that any investment in Belarus currently amounts to putting the rogue regime on a drip, **keeping out of the upcoming privatisation race reduces the potential for the EU to orient future transformations**. Betting on a positive, albeit delayed, spill-over effect from economic liberalisation to political democratisation, the EU should instead work out a principled way of doing business with selected, reform-minded partners in Belarus.

The clock is ticking because 2012 is yet another electoral year in Belarus, with parliamentary elections to be held by 23 September. The EU should not be lured by the diplomatic 'tricks' Lukashenka traditionally uses in pre-electoral cycles. Although EU leaders seem aware of the trap, there is no sign that they designed contingency plans to avoid falling in it again. **The EU should quickly work out a**

way out of the vicious circle however, because things could well evolve from bad to worse anyway. Deterioration to a full-fledged Cold War scenario should not be excluded *a priori* now that, and as long as, Lukashenka enjoys the Kremlin's backup. Henceforth, the EU should readily equip itself with an ambitious *Realpolitik* able to survive a worst case scenario. Keywords for this alternative '4-Ds strategy' should be to **dream, design, develop and deliver a comprehensive policy framework to (re-)engage with Belarus as a country.**

1.2 Time for a paradigm shift

The lack of an overall and purposeful EU strategy on Belarus has long been criticised by the expert community (Klinke 2007). It also leaves unsolved the problem that, irrespective of Lukashenka's lifespan, **Belarus dramatically needs Western support to modernise itself. Hence strict 'less for less' conditionality will get the EU nowhere – unless Brussels admits it already 'lost' Belarus.**

EU policy is on a self-defeating path and, ironically enough, most European diplomats and bureaucrats seem to accept this as a given. They know that full isolation ultimately plays in favour of the regime... and Moscow. The EU's leverage being way too limited, **expanding the sanctions has 'turned from a policy instrument into a policy substitute'**.⁶ This strategic mistake trapped Brussels in the escalation process it started after the December 2010 elections, and on which it apparently lost control, with the unanticipated result of benefiting Putin's Eurasian bloc-building strategy

Since both coercive diplomacy and engagement failed to trigger positive change in Belarus, **bypassing the dilemma requires a paradigm shift: opening the 'third track' of a real partnership** is the only alternative (Bosse and Korosteleva-Polglase 2009; Marin 2011a). A haphazard policy mix of 'critical engagement' with the regime, and open support for its opponents, can but exacerbate mutual distrust - at the expense of the population. In endorsing Poland's 'modernisation package' initiative, Brussels recently showed its readiness to incentivise cooperation.⁷ Unfortunately the conditions that it requires the regime to meet – rehabilitating political prisoners, dialoguing with the opposition, organising democratic elections – are currently unrealistic. Yet bridging the gap between state and society that the 'two-track' policy contributed to widening not only requires that the EU's dialogue with Belarus be open to the most reform-minded segments of the ruling elite (Jarábik 2011): it should be **conditional upon the prior resuming of a domestic dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and civil society at large.**

– Assessing the situation, the EU must admit that its own model is not a panacea for Belarus

Brussels should rethink its neighbourhood policy and make room for direct land neighbours which aspire to a mere *economic* cooperation with the EU. This, of course, contradicts the philosophy of the ENP. Yet acknowledging that Belarus is not candidate to EU accession might well save the EaP from total disaster. Further differentiation is needed: alleged forerunners of 'approximation' with the EU (Solonenko 2011) must be positively singled out to show other 'willing' partners where the yardsticks are and what rewards await them down the road. **Stigmatising 'unwilling', non-candidate countries such as Belarus is counter-productive** however. It might lead to the point when Belarusians will find it more rational to become Russian citizens so as to enjoy the benefits of cooperation with the EU – free of

⁶ Vladimir Socor 'And the winner is'...: Belarus and EU recall each other's ambassadors', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 9, issue 43, 01/03/12.

⁷ 'EU-Belarus modernisation package – food for thought', Polish non-paper, January 2012. EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle officially announced the launching of the 'European Dialogue on Modernisation' with Belarus on 29 March 2012.

democratic conditionality and even visa requirements soon – rather than to develop integrative neighbourhood relations with the EU independently.

– **Conceding that democracy is a learning-by-doing process, the EU must review its conditionality policy**

Save for the chaotic 1991-1994 period, Belarusians never lived in a democratic system. Democracy remains alien to a majority, or it bears a negative connotation, associated with painful market reforms, the rise of oligarchs and State impotence against anarchy. **Democratisation cannot be ordered and less so imposed from outside** upon post-Soviet societies: it is an incremental, lengthy 'learning-by-doing' process which requires practical training rather than improbable convictions.

The 'sticks and carrots' metaphor (Western 'hard' and 'soft' conditionality) is thus ill-suited. Sanctions (sticks) and incentives (carrots) make a stubborn donkey move in an imposed direction. The Russian equivalent of *knut* (whip) and *priannik* (biscuit) at least reminds of old means for *educating* a child. For such an imagery to promote democracy in Belarus however, the West should make it clearer that the whip is for the dictatorship's henchmen, whereas biscuits are a reward for the people. Alternative catchwords must also be invented: **accountability, social responsibility, transparency and *adekvatnost'*** ('adequacy') are conditions that would resonate better to a Belarusian ear. These are claims people might even stand and fight for.

To be practically feasible, EU conditionality rhetoric should focus on the essentials – respect for freedom of speech, human rights and the rule of law – and be shifted down to the people's level. The honour of opponents who knew what risks they were taking in not playing by the regime's rules might need to be sacrificed for the higher stake of drawing Belarus back to the negotiation table. **Belarusians would surely find democratic standards acceptable if there was a pragmatic interest in daily operating by them rather than neo-Soviet or Russian ones.** Convincing Belarusians that there is a better governance model than Lukashenka's (or Putin's), and that the EU can help them adapt it to their needs, is a prerequisite.

The moment is not favourable for ground-breaking experiments and initiatives though. The EU faces a dramatic economic and legitimacy crisis at home due to the Greek debt crisis. High security issues in the Middle East call its attention rather onto the Southern neighbourhood. Under the Council presidency of Denmark, Cyprus and Ireland, the Eastern vector has little chance of standing high on the EU's agenda in the coming year. **Yet sticking to the current 'dual track' diplomacy is heading to disaster, if only because sanctions policy failed.**

2. WHY IS SANCTIONS POLICY FAILING?

Coercive diplomacy is successful when sanctions 'bring about targets' steps towards compliance with their stated aims' (Portela 2011: 488). In the case of Belarus, lack of consensus as to the aims of EU sanctions – teaching Belarus democracy, freeing it from political prisoners or suffocating its leadership? - led to mere symbolic measures, with an equally minimal impact.

Empirical studies evidenced that Belarus' steps towards compliance are motivated by *economic* rationales (*op. cit.*). **In 2008-2010 the regime made cosmetic, revertible improvements to please the West when it sought to compensate for its degraded relations with Moscow.** The early release of opposition candidate Alexander Kazulin from prison in August 2008 arguably occurred as a result of

Washington's *economic* pressures⁸, not of Brussels' 'naming, blaming and shaming' declarations. Similarly, the *threat* of extending economic sanctions contributed to the liberation of Andrei Sannikov in the current post-electoral cycle.

2.1 Half-measures bring about half-results

Alongside traditional scepticism that sanctions can have a 'boomerang effect' for those enacting them, the EU's current 'restrictive measures' package arouses criticism on three grounds.

– too little, too late

The key for impactful sanctions lies in an adequate proportionality. Given the disproportionate violence and arbitrariness of the crackdown since 19 December 2010, the West had good enough reasons to adopt a brutal shock treatment as well. Yet on 31 January 2011 the EU Council merely re-enacted travel restrictions and assets freeze against 158 regime officials, thus ignoring innovative measures proposed by the European Parliament in its 20 January resolution.

Self-righteous concerns that introducing *economic* sanctions would harm the interests of the Belarusian population were raised by Belarus' closest economic partners. **Brussels' strategic mistake was to believe in the forbidding effect of gradually extending the visa-ban list** each time member states, upon meeting to examine the situation, had to admit that the Belarusian regime was not complying. In rejecting full-fledged economic embargo, the EU's toolbox is **instrumental for expressing mere condemnation**. Such half-measures could hardly foster democracy in Belarus, not to mention regime change – which was never stated as a goal anyway.

Time wasted plays in Lukashenka's favour. Coercion could have had a dissuasive effect, had the EU sanctioned judges right after they adopted arbitrary, politically-motivated or abusive sentences for example. Consensus on introducing so-called targeted restrictive measures against three companies that contribute directly to Lukashenka's shadow funds was reached only in June 2010 however.

Delayed Western reactions allowed the regime to consolidate at home and cultivate alliances abroad, as the year 2011 dramatically illustrated. Whereas a window of opportunity opened in the first semester due to the currency crisis, for failure of mobilising before official Minsk recovered Russia's financial support **the EU missed the chance of delivering the regime a real blow**. Subjecting the authorities to more intensive pressure earlier could have forced them to compromise and free political prisoners. The regime was then simultaneously confronted with a deep economic crisis, rising popular discontent and double diplomatic isolation. In 2012 the sole remaining discomfort is isolation from the West, which causes Lukashenka minimal damage, whereas he can use the stigmatisation effect to his advantage: the regime actually accommodates well with being singled out as a 'pariah' as it fuels its populist anti-Western propaganda.

– double standards

The very decision to isolate Belarus arouses criticism on grounds legitimate enough to be reminded here: why does the EU apply the same democratic conditionality to Eastern neighbours aiming at EU accession and those, like Belarus, which do not? Brussels' expectations on democratic standards are arguably lower in relation to Azerbaijan, another Eastern Partner not applying for EU membership, and are almost absent from the EU's preferential partnership with Russia.

⁸ In November 2007 the US froze the assets of Belarus' State oil consortium 'Belneftekhim', one of the country's largest industrial complexes.

In fact, **all three regimes are listed as 'authoritarian'** in the 2011 *Democracy Index* compiled by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Russia slipped from the 107th (still 'hybrid regime' category) to the 117th rank between 2010 and 2011. Belarus kept ranking slightly better (139th in 2011) than Azerbaijan (140th) in a rating that counts 167 positions. The *Press Freedom Index* of Reporters Without Borders for its part puts Azerbaijan and Belarus in the same basket of 'not free' countries, ranking them 152nd and 154th (out of 178) respectively in 2010.

Discrepancies in the application of democratic conditionality to 'banana dictatorships' on the one hand, and 'dictatorships with hydrocarbons' on the other, ultimately make the EU's neighbourhood policy appear to be based on self-interest rather than a principled concern for *universal* democratic values. **There are only two ways out of the double standards trap:** a pragmatic one (softening the stance on Lukashenka) or a principled one (extending sanctions to countries with an equally bad democratic track record). Whereas the first option would lead the EU to lose the face and strengthen Lukashenka's bargaining position, the second option is economically and diplomatically too costly. Henceforth, the EU should try and rationalise its overall coercive strategy towards neighbours in 'depoliticising' what can be regarding Belarus. Whereas bilateral relations must remain principled – ignore and punish dictators –, softening conditionality within the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership could gradually bring about positive change in and with Belarus.

2.2 How Member States undermine the coherence of the EU's coercive diplomacy

Consensus on sanctions is difficult to build due to the very nature of the EU's common foreign policy machinery. Yet, on Belarus reaching optimal decisions long proved almost impossible: **the declared and especially the non-displayed interests of EU member states are too divergent.**

2.2.1 Internal divisions among EU member states play in Lukashenka's favour

The failure of the EU to impose efficient sanctions mainly stems from the persistence of selfish national foreign policy objectives on the part of EU member countries.

– When dealing with Belarus, too many member states go it alone

Far from being a sound division of labour, preference for bilateralism leads to contradictory policies that cancel each other out, thus sabotaging the EU's attempts at 'speaking with one voice' to official Minsk (Marin 2011b). Since 1997, **Lukashenka has learnt to exploit the EU's 'values vs. interests' dilemma** in maintaining relations with member states which have business interests in Belarus.

The usual suspects are well known: **Germany for example is Belarus' oldest and main EU trade partner.** Whereas it is the only country with enough diplomatic weight to influence the Belarusian leadership, Germany refrained from jumping on Poland's bandwagon in favour of stricter sanctions because Berlin has a tough balancing act to maintain with Moscow.

France's diplomatic thinking is biased by a 'Russia-first syndrome' as well, more for historical reasons though. The terms on which each member state is with Russia oftentimes explain internal EU divisions. Amid the 'gentlemen's agreement' among the 27 to prioritise the 'strategic partnership' with Russia, opinions diverge as to how much to challenge Russia in the shared neighbourhood. **As a result, member states can only reach minimal consensus.**

This, in turn, undermined Poland's attempts to build a 'coalition of the willing' for energising the EU's policies on Belarus. Among the concerned few, Poland is arguably the EU country with the strongest interest in fostering the democratisation of Belarus. A significant Polish minority was left in Belarus after World War II border changes and Warsaw ambitions to play a role in the EU's 'Ostpolitik' to

remedy its old security fears with regards to Russia. Hence, the Polish government found support in Lithuania, Sweden and Germany for its Eastern Partnership initiative. Once the 'critical engagement' policy hit a wall in December 2010, Poland lost most of its credibility in the EU on Belarus-related matters however. Since Lukashenka has personal scores to set with Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, any initiative coming from Warsaw is probably doomed to be met aggressively in Minsk.

– **Lack of cohesion among member states lead to free riding**

In 2009-2010 several EU countries, notably Lithuania and Italy, launched an almost uncritical *rapprochement* with the Belarusian regime. Others kept a lower profile, although they had evidently maintained good enough contacts to come up with offers for new 'carrots', as did Bulgaria in August 2011. **Some governments vetoed the adoption of harsher sanctions to defend their own business interests.** Baltic countries legitimately feared that boycotting Belarusian exports of refined oil or potash would cause a price rise on their own markets. No morally acceptable explanation was provided by Slovenia however for vetoing the addition of crony businessman Yuri Chizh on the visa-ban list in February 2012.⁹ In fact, one could suspect the corrupting power of Belarusian (and Russian) 'dirty' money of being in part to blame for the failure of the EU's sanctions policy.

2.2.2 Increased trade exchanges with Belarus cancel out the impact of sanctions

Incoherent implementation and free riding ultimately resulted in a paradox situation whereby **the EU economically contributes to the regime's survival.** Belarus' leading EU trade partners in 2011 were, in order of importance, the Netherlands, Latvia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Estonia, which all spent over half a billion dollars on buying Belarusian goods (see table 1 in Annex). On the suppliers side, the main EU countries of origin of Belarusian imports (see table 2 in Annex) were Germany (30 % of all EU exports to Belarus in 2010), Poland (18,3 %), Lithuania (12,3 %), followed by Italy (5,8 %), France, the Netherlands and the UK (Marin 2011b: 4).

Trade figures show that EU countries now import more from Belarus than Russia does. Lukashenka's 'balancing act' between Moscow and Brussels is meant to extract rents from Russia while making the EU a guarantor of Belarus' political sovereignty. Yet, as argued in a report for Human Rights Watch, 'converting Russian perks into hard cash is only possible through trade with the West' (HRW 2012: 14). In spite of 'isolation', EU exports to Belarus more than doubled in 2011, up 221 % in value compared with 2010 (€6,7bn). The report reminds that 'under the existing system of state-run corruption no one [in Belarus] can do business abroad without a personal permission from Lukashenka' (HRW 2012: 11; 23). Given that export revenues represent 30 % of Belarus' official state budget, whereas foreign investments and sales of government bonds abroad¹⁰ bring substantial external revenues to the regime, in the past years **EU countries contributed to the wealth of the Lukashenka clan through increased trade and investments.**

2.3 Time for smarter sanctions

The expert community is oftentimes requested to assess the efficiency of existing sanctions, but the question of their pertinence and legitimacy is seldom asked however. In the light of the on-going carnage in Syria, and the degrading human rights situation in most CIS countries, singling out Belarus is indeed quite cynical.

⁹ This earned Ljubljana accusations of collusion with Lukashenka's bagmen. Cf. R. Solash & R. Jozwiak 'Why did Slovenia spare Belarusian mogul from EU sanctions?', *RFE/RL*, 28/02/12.

¹⁰ In the first half of 2011, emitting Eurobonds brought official Minsk much needed cash. The sale was organised by four *European* banks: Deutsche Bank, BNP Paribas, Raiffeisen Bank and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

The efficiency of the EU's 'hard' conditionality policy is constrained by structural factors: EU internal inconsistencies and power plays on the one hand, and the Belarusian regime's resilience and retaliation on the other. Henceforth and unless they can speak with one voice, **EU officials had better not speak to Lukashenka at all: ignoring him is a humiliating sanction which should actually be upgraded to a policy level.** The most coherent diplomatic declaration from Brussels in 2011 was after Lukashenka insulted José Manuel Barroso in calling him an 'ass' (*koziol*). A spokesperson signified that 'the Commission does not comment on the statements of ordinary citizens'. Denying Lukashenka the attention a legitimately elected President normally derives from his function is surely hurtful for him. Other ways of improving the impact of sanctions include the following:

– **Coalition-building: convince other countries to align with EU coercive diplomacy**

The current sanctions package on Belarus is supported by most of the EU's neighbours: Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein, candidate countries (Croatia, FYROM, Montenegro, Iceland and Serbia) as well as Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. However **non-EFTA micro-States (Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City) and Turkey stand out as exceptions.** EU diplomats should strive to convince their governments to align with the EU's sanctions policy, if only to avoid loopholes in the assets freeze. Alignment should not be expected from Eastern Partners however. Georgia for example cannot risk damaging its relations with Belarus, as Lukashenka could retaliate in recognising the independence of the Abkhaz and South-Ossetian break-away republics.

The major breach in the EU's 'fortress' for black-listed Belarusian officials lies elsewhere though: in the clause that **travel ban is without prejudice of granting visa on demand of an intergovernmental organisation.** This allowed Interior Minister Anatoliy Kuleshov to get a French visa for attending an Interpol meeting in Lyons in January 2012 for example. Should they wish to implement sanctions more coherently, the EU and its allies should ensure that this provision does not create loopholes the Belarusian regime could take advantage of.¹¹

– **Practice self-restraint: limit exports of EU goods that the ruling elite is fond of**

EU businessmen and banks should know that investing in Belarus currently means extending the regime's life expectancy. Unfortunately, this is not always the message conveyed in diplomatic circles. Should the EU wish to suffocate the regime's leadership, rather than hopelessly trying to push it to comply, targeting economic sanctions better would require restricting EU trade exchanges with Belarus in a number of selected sectors.

Firstly, the EU should maintain its **embargo on armaments**, meaning that EU countries must be banned from delivering weapons, ammunitions and torture tools which could be used against the Belarusian population. A strict application of this embargo recently led a German contractor to refuse supplying the Belarusian Biathlete Federation with cartridges, thus handicapping Belarusian biathletes preparing for the World Championship. This has set them and their supporters against the EU, illustrating a dilemma typical of embargo policies: either they should be applied with sound judgement to avoid discriminating innocent people, or have such amplitude that the population mobilises to demand that its leaders comply with the conditions attached to the sanctions.

Secondly, although EU companies cannot be banned from exporting to Belarus, **the EU could control what goods are delivered to which Belarusian customers.** Since no business can develop in Belarus

¹¹ Belarus is a member of the following international institutions with headquarters in an European country: OSCE and UNIDO (Vienna), EBRD (London), WCO and NATO's EAPC (Brussels), OPCW and PCA (The Hague), UNWTO (Madrid), UNESCO (Paris), Interpol (Lyons), WFTU (Athens), IOC (Lausanne). In addition, black-listed officials are entitled to obtain US or Swiss visas to attend meetings of UN bodies Belarus is a member of.

beyond a certain scale without the approval of Lukashenka himself, the wealthy few in Belarus are necessarily in good terms with the regime. As elsewhere, this *nomenklatura* is fond of luxury clothes from Italian and French brands, German cars and Swiss watches, to mention but a few goods which could be subject to quotas.

As 'nomenklatura privatisation' develops, currency will be illegally siphoned out from Belarus for buying imported goods and services (expensive cars, holiday trips, private education abroad) and purchasing real estate in EU capitals. In light of the case with the Ben Ali family in Tunisia, the EU should monitor multi-digit transactions involving Belarusian *nouveaux riches*, to facilitate the recovery and restitution of ill-gotten assets after Lukashenka's downfall. Brussels could also introduce withdrawal limits on bank accounts held by shady Belarusian individuals in countries to which Belarusian capital is known to escape (in particular Switzerland, Austria, Latvia, Benelux, Cyprus, the UK and Malta). High fee-paying universities in EU capitals should also be encouraged to scrutinise more closely the pedigree of Belarusian 'golden' children applying for enrolment.

– **Hit where it hurts: cut the funding channels of the regime**

'Smarter' economic pressures should target in priority West-oriented exporting sectors which provide the regime with hard currency through 'an obscure system of contributions to Lukashenka's personal funds' (HRW 2012: 12). **The main caveat against an oil embargo however is that some EU countries are dependent on refined oil imports from Belarus**, which is not an irreplaceable supplier in other sectors however: steel products (13,7 % of all EU imports from Belarus), potash fertilizers (8,4 %) and industrial trucks and tractors for example.

Responsible and discriminate judgement should be required from EU banks doing business in and with Belarus. This concerns first and foremost the EBRD, which EU stakeholders should prevent from providing new loans to the Belarusian government. Pressure can also be exerted on international financial institutions to make sure that Belarus uses loans to invest in structural reforms, not to stabilise its \$7bn balance of payments deficit. Some of the 11 foreign banks currently operating in Belarus have long been dealing with the shady 'bagmen' of the regime. Raiffeisen Bank's subsidiary in Belarus, Priorbank, is known for example to manage the money transfers of the gambling business – controlled by Alexander Lukashenka's son Victor and oligarch Vladimir Peftiev (HRW 2012: 15).

Sanctions enforcement on the corporate and asset-freeze side can still be improved. EU countries should monitor more closely how their banks comply with the ban, as proxies of blacklisted Belarusians holding the strings of the regime's purse abroad may use corruption or fraud to bypass the freeze. Suspicions go on countries with a 'tarnished financial probity reputation, such as Cyprus'.¹² Transparency on compliance remains imperfect in countries which tolerate bearer shares, such as the UK. Judicial cases against Lukashenka's 'bagmen' in Austria and Malta recently sent the right warning. Should EU financial polices be coordinated, a snowball effect could go down to Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania and non-EU countries where the regime is believed to hold dodgy bank accounts, including within the Customs Union. Given that banned Belarusian companies can easily re-register on Russian territory, Norway recently warned EFTA countries to beware of loopholes in the Eurasian Economic Space that official Minsk could exploit.

Yet the biggest obstacle to 'smartness' in Brussels' sanction policy is that only 24 % of Belarusians support it whereas the rest somehow team up behind their leader in front of what they perceive as an unjust Western aggression.

¹² Andrew Rettman 'EU sanctions not as tough as they sound', *EUObserver.com*, 20/02/12, <http://euobserver.com/24/115303>.

3. UNDERSTANDING BELARUSIANS' WORLDVIEWS

What social reality do the numerous myths built by Lukashenka's regime dissimulate? How do Belarusians see themselves and the world around them? What real dividing lines cut across Belarusian society? Answers to these questions illustrate that **two Belaruses have come to coexist** on one territory: one made of people whose life depend on the perpetuation of the current system and find an incarnation in 'Batka' (Lukashenka's nickname, meaning 'father' in Russian); and an 'other' Belarus, whose alternative development has been hampered for 17 years by the absolute domination of the first one. **Lukashenka's dictatorship weeds out potential contest originating from the 'other' Belarus.** The latter is still looking for a saviour, whom it cannot find among the political opposition. Understanding the factors that underpin this situation is a prerequisite for the EU to identify how it could help this forgotten and denigrated 'other' Belarus earn a right to exist, before even envisaging that its elites access to or seize power positions.

3.1 The structuring forces and composition of Belarusian society

A number of structural features deriving from Lukashenka's neo-Soviet leadership durably affect the sociology and preferences of the Belarusian population. As a result, **Belarus looks pretty much like Lukashenka wishes it to be:** an orderly, egalitarian and atomised society abiding by the iron rule of an omnipresent paternalistic state; a peaceful, tolerant and depoliticised nation apparently free of ethno-linguistic or religious conflicts, aspiring to no more than living in harmony with its neighbours, (especially Russia); and a loyal, apathetic, patriotic people attached to its glorious Soviet past and thus unwilling for democratic changes and liberal economic transformation. How do these stereotypes constrain the daily lives and the mobilisation capacity of social actors in Belarus?

3.1.1 The constraints of the 'power vertical': state-built myths and repression

Lukashenka is holding the country thanks to an alleged 'social contract' with his population, whereby Belarusians would be voluntarily giving up their freedom in exchange for his protection. Through anti-intellectualism, infantilisation and brainwashing he managed to depoliticise society. Popular wisdom and peasant values are idealised as the essence of true Belarussianness, which are best embodied in the President himself (Lallemand and Symaniec 2007).

The mechanisms of Lukashenka's dictatorship include erecting state ideology to the status of a social science (*op. cit.*). Soviet values (collectivism, discipline, emulation through work and sport) are glorified as a cornerstone of Belarusian modern identity, the other one being Eastern Slavism, in which Belarusians would be 'Russians, but with a quality label' as Lukashenka puts it. **The image of Belarus as a shield protecting Eastern Slavic civilisation against the contamination of perverted Western values** is rhetorically constructed and, as such, contested by nationalists. Their discourses valorising alternative, 'European' founding elements of Belarusian identity (Belarus' history as part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) are systematically downgraded by the regime. (Wilson 2011).

One 'trick' for maintaining Belarusians undemanding of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms is to systematically distort the very definition of democracy: **for Lukashenka, democracy is the right to have a job, earn a living and feed one's family.** Personal safety and social order are better secured, he argues, by authoritarian means, especially in Belarus where inexperienced people would not be able to do anything good of their freedom. By the same token, freedom (of entrepreneurship, of speech, of conscience, of association and assembly, etc.) is depicted negatively, as it would necessarily bring about anarchy, inequality, wild capitalism and so on.

All these woes are said to come from the West of course, making it easier for Lukashenka to discard external attempts at dictating him democratic and market reforms. At the same time, a permanent conflict with the West through well-orchestrated diplomatic scandals provides a useful outside enemy to emulate patriotism and demonise domestic opposition (Lallemand and Symaniec 2007: ch. 8).

Another way to provide Belarusians the illusion that Lukashenka's governance model is 'the most democratic on earth', as he claims, is **to imitate democracy** (Karbalevich 2010). Soviet-like elections fulfil this purpose, but on a daily basis duplicating democratic institutions (via GoNGOs and other fake public organisations) facilitates, in addition, processes of infiltration, informing and ultimately purging of true civil society from its most free-minded elements. Power is concentrated in the president's hands because a monolithic system is presented as more solid than one based on a separation of institutional powers. The only tolerated opposition must be 'in-system', organised and managed by the president himself in a pocket Parliament dominated by faithful followers all bearing the 'independent' label. As for reforms, they should be distilled sparsely and limited to partial privatisation, on Singapore's model.

In claiming to personify the Belarusian state Lukashenka virtually hijacked it. This allows him to tightly control every single production, deal or appointment made in the country, through an autocratic power vertical maintained with arbitrary repression. All social spheres are concerned by state interference infringing on freedoms. As a result of the on-going crackdown, a totalitarian climate of fear has spread upon Belarusians, who seem more apathetic than ever. Sharing the regime's siege mentality multiplies their Orwellian double-thought reflexes.

3.1.2 Sociological composition of the Belarusian society

Belarus suffered a dramatic demographic decline during World War II, when its population dropped from over 9 million (1940) to 7,7 million (1951). Having reached 10 millions in 1986, it steadily declined since 1993, to 9,473 million (2011). Thanks to the maintaining of Soviet-like support for the elderly, life expectancy at birth is relatively high (70 years). According to 2009 estimates, 14,5 % of the population is over 65 and in this age group the sex ratio is 0,47 male per female. **Babushki (grandmothers) are indeed the social category most faithful to Lukashenka:** pensioners form half of his 25 % 'indefectible' support basis, complemented by peasants, factory workers, civil servants and the military – the other strata benefiting from his generous social policies and who will not simply disappear due to cyclical generation change.

– The illusion of full employment

Like in Russia, the negative population rate growth in Belarus is mainly due to a combination of declining fertility (now 1,5 child per woman) and a negative migration rate. **The country officially loses 3 % of its population each year due to emigration**, but things might be worse. The regime built the myth that Belarus, contrary to European countries, does not suffer from unemployment. To keep the rate artificially low (1 %), it adjusted to the economic downturn without massive layoffs, by imposing more flexibility onto workers. Yet, as a result of inflation (110 % in 2011) and two devaluations, real wages were cut by half in 2011. With the average salary down to \$260 equivalent per month, many Belarusians decided to search for a job in a neighbouring CIS country: **in 2011 alone an estimated 250 000 would have left to work in Russia and over 90 000 in Ukraine.**

Belarus' working population is engaged in majority in the service sector (51,3 % of the workforce), whereas 34,7 % is employed in industry and 14 % in agriculture. Although the share of tertiary employment is rather low compared to OECD countries, an even more significant feature is that **2**

million Belarusians (44,2 % of the active population) are employed in state-owned companies¹³, which provide 70 % of the country's GDP.

Given that Belarus' economy is largely unreformed, most Belarusians who are not formally 'state-employed' actually work for the public sector or companies fully dependent on state commands. This dominant segment of the population is hostile to systemic changes and privatisation as they could directly harm their interest. However, with the Customs Union now functioning and since Russia joined the WTO on its own, a growing number of people realises that the Belarusian economy is not competitive.

– **The myth of a class-less society**

Private ownership and independent entrepreneurship are poorly developed in Belarus. **This prevents the formation of a middle-class in demand of political liberalisation.** Conversely, two social groups will remain ferociously opposed to any attempt at challenging the status quo, whether from inside of the regime (the 'technocrats' minority in government) or from outside (the opposition): 'red directors' heading state factories, and the '*nomenklatura*'.

The regime has always been careful not to let a wealthy class prosper in Belarus: in principle nobody can earn over 3,5 times more than an average worker. In reality however, *nouveaux riches* appeared over the past years. Since they owe their wealth and position to the regime itself, this privileged class is totally faithful to Lukashenka, as are the 50 or so 'proto-oligarchs' who contribute to the economic survival of his clan (HRW 2012). Contrary to Russia or Ukraine however, nobody is allowed to indecently display his richness, thus preserving the myth of an egalitarian society.

3.1.3 A 'denationalised' nation? On Belarusian identity

Belarus has no history as an independent nation-state: it only emerged out of the transnational civilisational whole of 'Russianness' in the 1990s. Whereas the Belarusian nation is in its infancy, Lukashenka's pro-Russian and neo-Soviet policies pushed Belarus to become one of the eight nations Zbigniew Brzezinski now considers as 'geopolitically endangered species'.

In spring 1991 the Moscow-based VTsIOM pollster evidenced that 69 % of ethnic Belarusians considered themselves primarily as citizens of USSR, and only 24 % as citizens of the Belarusian SSR (Drakochrust 2012). A stable 40 % of respondents still claim not to see any difference between Belarusians and Russians and in March 2010, almost 75 % identified as 'nearer to Russians than to Europeans' (and only 19,4 % the opposite). In spite of this poor national self-identification, **Belarusians do not want their nascent identity to be 'dissolved in the Russian sea'** (*op. cit.*): hence, the EU should advertise its purpose as a defender of national cultures, regional identities and minority languages against such a 'dilution'.

Belarus has often been depicted as a 'denationalised nation' (Marples 1999) unable to break away from Russia's sphere of influence due to 'natural' factors such as geographic continuity, linguistic proximity and a shared sense of belonging to the East Slavic and orthodox cosmogonic 'whole'. Belarusianness has little to build upon: there never was a proto-Belarusian state, no Belarusian Galicia, few Belarusian war heroes or poets, and even Minsk is not Belarus' historical capital city (Wilson 2011).

¹³ *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus 2011*, table 4.1.5, p. 113.

The fact that **Russian remains the vehicular language for daily communication**¹⁴ is diagnosed as an obstacle to the construction of a distinct Belarusian identity. Added to demographic realities, Lukashenka's linguistic practices and policies systematically downgrade the Belarusian language. Yet the number of people who prefer to use Belarusian even outside of the family circle or for written correspondence significantly increased over the past two years. In 2011 this spontaneous **linguistic 'Belarusianisation' of the public space accelerated; more than ever, it is associated with resistance to the regime**. Belarusian is not limited to circles of intellectuals, nationalists and dissidents anymore – it is conquering the blogosphere and social networks and is increasingly being used by diplomats or at academic events, even the less politicised ones. This unexpected trend signals an awakening of a non- (or possibly anti-)Lukashenka patriotic fibre.

3.2 What do recent opinion polls tell us about the evolution of Belarusian society?

Studying Belarusian society is complicated by the drastic lack of data. The only non-state pollster which publishes the results of its sociological surveys is the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS, also known by its Russian acronym NISEPI).¹⁵ Closed down in April 2005, it kept on conducting polls in Belarus almost clandestinely from its exile base in Vilnius. Some express reserves as to the reliability of the data-gathering methods and the objectivity of conclusions deriving from them. In the absence of other open sources the present study mainly builds upon IISEPS data.

3.2.1 Belarusians lost confidence in the regime

Polls reveal that a radical turn around in public opinion occurred in 2011, notably during the summer months. Hit hard by the currency crisis, the devaluation of the Belarusian rouble (by 56 % in May) and their aftermaths (hyperinflation, falling purchasing power and growing unemployment), **people lost faith in the 'Belarusian economic miracle'**.

The **astonishing drop in Lukashenka's electoral rating**¹⁶ – from 53 % right after December 2010 elections to 29,3 % in June and 20,5% in September 2011 – can be **interpreted as a direct repercussion of the economic crisis**. *Political* factors such as electoral fraud, the post-electoral crackdown and the worsening of the geopolitical situation did not have as direct an impact on opinion. In September 2011 87,6 % of respondents agreed with the statement that 'the economy is in crisis' and 52,7 % expected the situation to worsen in the coming years. This concern was reflected in the fact that 73,7 % of respondents considered their personal socio-economic situation had 'worsened over the past three months', a figure up from 26,9 % in March.

Towards the end of the year, opinion trends reverted as a result of both 'negative adaptation' and (perceived) improvement of the situation following announcements that Belarus had recovered the economic support of 'Mother Russia'. Consequently, the share of respondents considering that 'the situation is evolving in the wrong direction' diminished from 68,5 % to 55,7 % between September and

¹⁴ According to IISEPS polls, in June 2011, 57,1% of respondents claimed to speak exclusively Russian, a share up 20 points compared to 1995. Every fourth Belarusian uses 'trasyanka', a creole mix of Russian and Belarusian which is widespread in rural areas. Another 15,9% alternatively use both languages, whereas only 1,9% said they spoke only Belarusian on a daily basis, down from 7,1% in 2004.

¹⁵ Polls are conducted over a 10-day period in the beginning of each trimester, using the 'face-to-face' interview method, and encompass on average a representative sample of 1503 respondents, with a 3% margin error. Data (in Russian) is available on IISEPS website, www.iiseps.org.

¹⁶ This popularity index accounts for the share of people answering 'Lukashenka' to the multiple-choice question 'If presidential elections would take place tomorrow, who would you vote for?'. The drop was reflected in another indicator, the approval rating (Y/N answer to the question 'do you trust the President?'): by September 2/3 of respondents answered 'no'.

December; yet only 17 % thought it was evolving 'in the right direction'. **Three additional conclusions can be derived from polls' analysis:**

- **most respondents incriminated the *President*** for the degraded situation (61,2 % in September, 53,7 % in December 2011);
- **a majority thinks *policy changes are necessary***: in December 67 % believed that 'market reforms are needed' (only 16,5 % did not) whereas 57,7 % wished for 'cardinal changes in domestic and foreign policy in the coming years'. However almost 2/3 think that changes are impossible or improbable, or would not fight for them anyway.
- **Belarusians would be willing for a political *alternative***, but the offer is not there. Even if in December 2011 28,3 % of respondents thought of themselves 'in opposition to the authorities' (up 10 points year-on-year) and 44,6 % 'would vote for a candidate able to compete with Lukashenka in the next elections if they knew of one', every second Belarusian does not recognise himself in the current opposition parties.

In 2011 the striking correlation between the degradation of living standards and calls for reforms jeopardised Lukashenka's rule, which a third of respondents now see as 'authoritarian or dictatorial'. Yet most people obviously accommodate with dictatorship when it again delivers on its socio-economic promises.

3.2.2 Their geopolitical preferences remain malleable and pragmatic

How does Belarusians' (dis)trust in the regime reflect on their geopolitical preferences? Socio-demographic variables (age, level of education and access to free media, cf. table 4 in Annex) roughly segment Belarusian society in two categories:

- **the elderly, rural and less educated part of the population**, which massively supports the so-called Eastern vector of Belarus' foreign policy (towards uniting with Russia), and
- **the younger, urban and educated segments having access to independent information** (internet), which favours instead the European integration vector.

This reflects social divisions among Lukashenka's traditional supporters and critics. As for the geographical variable (place of residence of respondents, ie. nearer to the Eastern or Western borders of Belarus), in the absence of regionally ventilated data one cannot (in)validate the idea that, contrary to Ukraine, there is no clear East/West segmentation of public opinion in Belarus.

- **Belarusians are sceptical about a union with Russia as they see further integration along the Eastern vector as an absorption process threatening Belarus' sovereignty**

Although in 1999 a majority of Belarusians (38 %) still wished for the restoration of USSR, their share steadily declined ever since. Views on the 'Union State' project launched in the Yeltsin years fluctuated in the 2000s, but turned negative as Putin made it clear that integration meant the six *oblasti* of Belarus joining the Russian Federation, on the German reunification model. Opposition to such a prospect illustrates that **in spite of cultural 'nearness' with Russians, Belarusians are growingly attached to their country's sovereignty** (Drakochrust 2012). Yet, when asked 'what is more important: the improvement of Belarus' economic situation or the country's independence?', in December 2011 65 % favoured the first option (up 6 points compared to 2007). Henceforth, the EU cannot only count on the Russian fear factor to raise pro-Western views among the population: a most tangible benefit must also be on offer.

Respondents' opinions obviously **oscillate in close correlation with Lukashenka's own foreign policy shifts** (see table 3 in Annex). The 'gas war' between Minsk and Moscow which erupted in spring 2007 is echoed in answers to the question 'If a referendum on a union of Belarus and Russia took place

today, how would you vote?': in September 2007, for the first time ever, respondent gave more negative answers (47,4 %) than positive ones (33,8 %). Opinions momentarily reverted in the summer of 2008, but since December 2008 a large majority of Belarusians would vote 'against' a hypothetical union with Russia. The largest gap was registered in March 2011 when 53,1 % opposed the union with Russia and 29,2 % supported it. It kept narrowing since then however. Although half of respondents believe it was wrong for Belarus to sell Beltransgas to Gazprom, people are aware that they owe Russia the current improvement of their personal economic situation.

Answers vary, however, when pollsters offer a geopolitical alternative (EU accession). It is hard to say whether the correlation between official and popular foreign policy preferences is due to Belarusians' receptiveness to the regime's rhetoric and subsequent propaganda, or whether they autonomously identify where their country's best interests are. One thing is sure: **opposition to 'unification' (encompassing now integration within the Eurasian Economic Union) decreases when Moscow renews its financial support to Belarus.** So it did in late 2011 when Belarus, drowned in an economic crisis, could expect no salvation from the West. Hence the share of those 'against' union with Russia dropped from 47,8 to 42,9 % between June and December 2011. This decrease was compensated mainly by a rise in the share of 'I would abstain from voting' answers (20,3 %) though.

– **Support for a hypothetical accession to the EU also stems from pragmatic considerations**

EU discourses and foreign policies have much less influence on Belarusian public opinion than Russia's do (Popescu and Wilson 2011), or they impact negatively on variations due to inadequate knowledge about the EU (BISS and NOVAK 2010). Opinions favourable to the EU plummeted following the 2004 EU and 2007 Schengen enlargements, which led to a virtual closing down of Belarus' border with Poland and the Baltic states. Whereas 60 % supported integration along the European vector in 2002 and only 10 % opposed it (shares were similar in Ukraine), the gap between 'pros' and 'cons' narrowed to null in 2008-2010. This strong polarisation contrasts with the generally pro-EU moods of other Eastern Partnership countries (minus Azerbaijan).

When pollsters offered an alternative (integration with Russia or the EU), the European vector became attractive again following the EU's May 2009 invitation to join the Eastern Partnership (see table 3 in Annex). The most notable increase in positive answers to the question 'If tomorrow a referendum on Belarus' accession to the EU was held, how would you vote?' occurred between March 2009 (34,9 % 'for' and 36,3 % 'against' against accession) and September 2009 (44,1 % vs. 32,8 %). Yet every fourth Belarusian remains unwilling or incapable of choosing which direction to go.

The aftermath of the December 2010 elections was a turning point. As Lukashenka's popularity rating dropped as of March 2011, support for the EU raised to historical heights, resulting in an 18 points interval between supporters (48,6 %) and opponents (30,5 %) of accession to the EU (see table 5 in Annex). The gap narrowed and turned negative since then (35,9 % 'for' vs. 36,9 % 'against' in December 2011). This trend might signal pro-EU Belarusians' disappointment with Brussels' mitigated response to the crackdown and overall incapacity to 'save' Belarus from Russia's embrace. Support for alternative integration along the Eastern vector arithmetically grew since then: in March 2012 no less than 47 % of respondents said they would prefer unification with Russia rather than integration with the EU (37,3 %).

Revealing of Belarusians' genuine interest in maintaining 'good-neighbourly relations with all their neighbours', as goes the official mantra, is that, when offered four geopolitical options – a union with Russia, accession to the EU, none of the two and both at the same time – according to a 2010 survey

28,2 % would have rather lived 'in the EU and in an union with Russia simultaneously'¹⁷ (BISS and NOVAK 2010: 22). However unrealistic, this interest in a dual integration should be kept in mind upon designing the EU's next partnership offer, which should complement rather than challenge Russia's.

3.3 Dividing lines within various segments of the Belarusian society

There are no open 'conflicts' in Belarus apart from the one opposing Lukashenka to those who disobey him. Given the unbalanced distribution of forces and dissidents' reluctance to recourse to violence, even the word 'conflict' is not appropriate for characterising the desperate struggle of political opponents and CSOs against the system. Belarus is not a fully atomised society however.

3.3.1 How monolithic the ruling elite?

Lukashenka installed a pyramidal, highly centralised governance system in which he dominates thanks to constant cabinet reshuffles, sacking any ambitious subordinate who could challenge his authority. He also appointed loyal followers – fellow 'red directors' from Mohilew *oblast'*, his elder son Victor – to strategic positions (Wilson 2011). His court is not monolithic however.

A fight is going on under the carpet between two ideologically opposed groups: the 'technocrats', best represented by Prime Minister Mikhail Miasnikovitch, and the *siloviki* (members of 'force structures'), led by the KGB head Vadim Zaitsev but growingly controlled by Victor Lukashenka and his clan of 'young wolves', who challenge old guard *chekists* for Lukashenka's rewards. Since 2010 the power balance shifted in favour of the *siloviki* (the main orchestrators of the repressions) and away from those who had led the 'rapprochement' with the West – namely Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov and the head of the Presidential Administration Vladimir Makei.

Disagreements on economic policy grew in 2011 between the government and the Administration of the President. Their divergences came out public in November 2011 when Miasnikovitch and the Economy minister advanced plans to change (liberalise) the policy course, arguing there was no other way out of the crisis. Lukashenka angrily dismissed their proposals *en bloc*, advised them to stick to his orders and distributed 'rewards' to *siloviki* instead, in the form of a law legalising the use of weapons by security forces in the event of mass protests.

The main function of the *siloviki* is to filter information inflows to Lukashenka and propaganda outflows from the government. Their goal is to monopolise access to Lukashenka for maintaining the status quo and thus protect their shady business (HRW 2012: 30; Wilson 2011: ch. 12).

The mythical 'Belarusian social contract' suffered from the crisis and turned into a 'loyalty for rewards' scheme limited to the ruling elite. In privileging the *siloviki*, the leadership also signals to lower civil servants the regime's rising disinterest in their fate. **Technocrats for their part have increasingly been talking to outside experts**, including from think tanks such as the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS). Even ideology-driven members of the President's Operational and Analytical Centre (OATs) now turn to 'dissident' experts for advice on how to combine limited economic openness, closer ties with Europe, and as limited political reform as possible. One should not expect them to advocate full-fledged liberalisation, least so democratisation. Yet the very fact that they open up to outside influence validates the idea that **the West should talk more to bureaucrats** (Jarábik 2011). This includes 'disappointed' middle-class civil servants hit hard by the crisis (May 2011) and possibly

¹⁷ This unrealistic option gathered slightly less support than that of living 'in a union with Russia' (30,2%) but more than active neutrality, as 20,4% of respondents would rather live 'in an independent Belarus that is not a member of any union'. In such a multiple-choice poll, the EU vector only got a 17,2% support.

diplomats in post abroad, at least those unhappy with Lukashenka's geopolitical choices and who might want to defect before the ship sinks (CEPA 2011: 23).

3.3.2 How divided the opposition?

The proverbial fragmentation of the Belarusian opposition has long been pointed out, alongside other flaws, to explain the failure of a democratic alternative to consolidate in Belarus (EESC 2010: 39). Yet lack of unity is not the central problem anymore: lack of coordination and lack of alternative programs are. Most political 'colours' are represented on the Belarusian ideological arena. Due to numerous constraints imposed by the regime, **no political party has ever been able to launch a dynamic of change**. This, in turn, limited the democratic opposition's capacity to get through to society, as voters cannot identify with any of these parties, collectively and pejoratively referred to as 'the' opposition by state propaganda. In addition, no Belarusian businessman would run the risk of financing any such party, thus seriously limiting their overall capacity to campaign.

One significant progress in this regard was the 'Tell the Truth!' campaign launched by presidential candidate Vladimir Neklyayev in 2010, allegedly with financial support from Moscow. The initiative created a positive dynamic in mobilising ordinary Belarusians on defending a simple value: accountability. People were encouraged to anonymously denounce to the President himself corruption and embezzlement cases or the 'inadequate' arbitrariness of law enforcement bodies. **Fighting the mounting corruption can potentially make opposition movements converge in Belarus**, as do a couple of other issues currently debated at civil society level. Petitions are being gathered for example to call for the organisation of a **referendum on restoring the election of local and regional authorities**.¹⁸ In the regions a grass-root movement also emerged demanding that Belarus adopts a number of Council of Europe conventions. The abolition of death penalty has also been discussed recently on TV sets as well as in seminars held in State universities.

Current debates within the opposition proper coalesce around the dilemma of whether to participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections or to boycott them (and how). Both options are equally self-defeating¹⁹, but campaigning creates a space for political expression and gathering of forces. The 'Coalition of the Six'²⁰ failed to agree on a declaration to withdraw its candidates in case political prisoners have not been released by the time of the vote. The last hope for some alternative political platform to take shape before the elections is the planned meeting of the Congress of Democratic Forces, which could come up with a joint program, proposals and measures. The opposition also needs new leaders and more 'democratic' statuses. By the next presidential elections, it should also be advised to organise primaries, as in Venezuela ahead of the October 2012 presidential elections.

3.3.3 How unlikely a popular uprising?

Repeated violations of fundamental freedoms and self-censorship make a wide popular contestation very unlikely in Belarus. Administrative constraints and penal sanctions immunised the country against the democratic contamination of 'colour revolutions' Lukashenka is dreadfully afraid of. **Belarusians' proverbial apathy** reflects in surveys, which show with astonishing constancy that 70-75 % would *not*

¹⁸ Since 1995, governors and mayors are appointed by the President. According to a December 2011 IISEPS poll, 72,8% of Belarusians believe that they should be elected directly by the population however.

¹⁹ Dzianis Melyantsou and Alexei Pikulik 'Elections or boycott as elements of the opposition Zugzwang', *Belarus Headlines*, issue VI, February 2012, p. 5, <http://democraticbelarus.eu/node/14487>

²⁰ This coalition involves the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), the Just World Belarusian Left Party, the United Civic Party (UCP), the Movement For Freedom (MFF), the organizing committee on creation of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party (BCHD), and the Tell the Truth! campaign.

take part in a public protest action (meeting, demonstration or strike), whereas only 10-15 % would. Yet never did 1 million people (14 % of the population) hit to 'the square'.

Nonetheless in May 2011 a spontaneous protest movement emerged that illustrated Belarusians' capacity to mobilise... when their personal welfare is at stake. The triggering element was a gasoline price rise which led an association of car-owners to organise a slow-down in Minsk. Spontaneous popular solidarity with the 'Stop benzin' action was exploited by young activists for launching a **'revolution through social networks'** (via *Vkontakte*, the Russian equivalent of *Facebook*): for 9 Wednesdays in a row, thousands of Belarusians gathered to manifest their opposition to the government's economic policies, silently or in clapping hands.²¹

This short-lived 'silent revolution' was void of clear political slogans due to obvious security risks as the regime arrested and beat hundreds. **Yet this dead-born 'Arab spring' gathered people from all social strata and throughout 40 towns across Belarus.** Opposition parties did not try to exploit this popular movement, but their 'youth' aisles did. Innovative protest means were brainstormed online and eventually gained visibility offline when performers managed not to get arrested.²²

Since December 2010 the regime is obviously in panic mode: it pre-emptively reacted to a threat of popular upsurge in building up forces. New restrictive laws were adopted, one banning the organisation of mass gatherings through the internet and another extending the right to use force against protesters. Yet analysts interpret this as a concession to prevent defection and denunciation of policemen and KGB forces: *siloviki* do not want to be held accountable of *illegal* violence.

Belarusians are indeed a peaceful and law-abiding people. In 2011 they invented original mobilisation means, but due to constraints they can best express discontent against state arbitrariness in courts – albeit with limited chance of success. Among the issues Belarusians could mobilise on to defend their rights (and eventual benefits) by legal means are:

- **family policy**, which is almost inexistent in Belarus (Lallemand and Symaniec 2007);
- **education**, notably for the de-ideologisation of higher education institutions and reforming the University system, a precondition for Belarus to join the Bologna process and give young Belarusians more opportunities to study in the EU (Matskevich 2011: 64);
- **ecological issues** and related health protection challenges (eradicating the woes of Chernobyl remains a case in point, but in Western regions the most active mobilisation came from nature-lovers protesting the construction of a hydroelectric plant on Neman river);
- **workers' rights** and the independence of trade unions in big factories;

In spite of the information blockade, Belarusian civil society is not impermeable to the influence of EU values. Repressive conditions hamper the autonomisation of a still embryonic civil society, but they do not totally stifle people's socio-economic aspirations. Amid infringement on freedom of association, or because of it, most civil society organisations (CSOs) developed innovative survival strategies to re-conquer room for manoeuvre over the regime and its GONGOs. Yet, since December 2010, all politically-coloured CSOs are doomed to operate in a quasi-Cold War environment (Vadalazhskaya and Yahorau 2011). How could the EU help them?

²¹Links to statistics and video footage of these protests are available in the author's blog entry 'Belarus: the silenced revolution', *FIIA Column*, 15/08/11, www.fiaa.fi/en/blog/390/belarus_the_silenced_revolution/.

²² The youth aisle of 'Tell the Truth!', 'Smena', regularly organises flash-mobs and actions to provoke critical thinking on the dictatorship and ridicule the police. It recently staged 'silent' protests of toys and teddy bears in front of the government building, with placards calling for the release of political prisoners. Toys were 'arrested', and later on two 'Smena' activists were sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest.

3.4 Time to mediate a dialogue between the State and civil society

Apart from better-targeted aid (cf. 4.2 *infra*), what Belarusian CSOs need now is an opportunity to dialogue with the authorities and suggest gradual, realistic reforms in selected priority fields. Previous attempts at mediating such a dialogue were made by the OSCE already in the 1990s. They met some positive long-term results, but following the expulsion of the OSCE's office from Minsk on 1 January 2011, responsibility for launching this process virtually shifted onto the EU Delegation. Already before the remaining political prisoners are released, the EU should send a number of signals:

- **make re-engaging with Belarus conditional upon the establishment of a constructive dialogue between the state and civil society**

Other demands, such as the holding of free elections or the 'full rehabilitation' of those opponents whom Lukashenka considers as his personal enemies – such as Andrei Sannikov, whom he warned that he could be jailed again if he misbehaved – are unrealistic. Taking Lukashenka at his word, the West should remind him of his September 2011 suggestion to **hold roundtables ('round or square, never mind' he said), and accept his invitation to come and monitor discussions.**

Considering Lukashenka's aversion for Belarusian opposition leaders, the 1989 Polish precedent should not be taken as a model. The government might accept instead to talk to a delegation of representative CSOs, lobbyists, trade unions and associations – which in the current conditions also include the democratic and pro-EU 'opposition' anyway. Pursuant of a 'third track' partnership offer to Belarus, **Brussels could request an interlocutor who would be representative of the interests of the country**, meaning that these interests would first have to be agreed upon by the regime and its population, ideally via the mediation of CSOs, rather than through the opposition.

The best way for the EU to encourage and support such a dialogue is to **use the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum as a platform** (Lang and Koopmann 2011: 27). Belarusian CSOs have been active in the CSF since its creation in 2009. Designed as 'a platform to enhance multilateral dialogue, cooperation, exchange of best practices and benchmarking among non-state actors in all six Eastern Partner countries', the CSF eventually turned into an arena for dialogue among Belarusian CSOs themselves. The Belarusian National Platform to the CSF thus became instrumental for structuring and mobilising civil society at home (Marin 2011c).

This dynamic could be developed by turning the National Platform into an emissary entitled to 'bridge the gap' between the 'third' (non-governmental) sector and public institutions. Leading coalitions such as the Assembly of Democratic NGOs and the EuroBelarus Consortium could be the standard bearers in this process. The EU for its part will have to be more transparent about what is being negotiated with the Belarusian authorities in the EaP platforms.

- **mediate the dialogue at three complementary levels:**
 - **horizontally**, in enhancing the existing link between Belarusian pro-reform think tanks and the 'breakthrough group' of consolidated NGOs (Yahorau 2011: 47)
 - **upstream** with the disappointed reform-minded segments of the regime (Jarábik 2011). Not every bureaucrat working in the state sector is a Lukashenka loyalist; unless the West invests in socialising civil servants in Europe and muscling up their institutional capacity, the Belarusian governance system will remain impermeable to democratisation.
 - **downstream** with the population, in entitling Belarusians to circulate in the EU more freely. Cheaper and more multi-entry visas in particular should be granted *bona fide* travellers, especially elderly people in border villages and young people willing to study in the EU.

Catalysing democratic change in Belarus requires that civil society becomes conscious of its own existence and organises itself as an autonomous sphere able of mobilising individuals to hold the regime accountable. EU civil servants should admit that they cannot substitute themselves to Belarusians in this process, but merely mediate and arbitrate it. EU support should serve to enhance the ability of pro-reform opinion leaders to obtain from the authorities that they behave 'adequately', while also talking more to the Belarusian population. **The EU thus needs to multiply channels for communication from 'outside-in' to Belarusian opinion.** Should the EU reform (debureaucratise) its institutions and tailor its instruments better (to local realities and needs), people would even be more inclined to support the idea of a rapprochement with the EU.

4. STEPPING UP SECOND TRACK DIPLOMACY: EMPOWER CIVIL SOCIETY

The EU has made considerable and laudable efforts over the past two decades to support civil society in Belarus. Pursuant to the 'dual track' policy, much of the ENPI aid that Belarus could be entitled to receive has been redirected away from the government²³ and towards the opposition, CSOs and the wider population. Following the crackdown, in 2011 EU donors stepped up their efforts along this 'second track'.²⁴ There is still room for qualitative and quantitative improvements however.

4.1 Priority number 1: deliver on mobility promises (visa facilitation)

Belarusians see EU borders as walls (the 'Schengen fortress') rather than bridges. In the absence of an EU-Belarus visa facilitation and readmission agreement, Belarusians are the only Europeans who pay €60 for a Schengen visa. In addition, applying for a visa implies cumbersome procedures, not to mention humiliating requirements in picky EU consulates. Belarusians perceive this treatment as unfair segregation: Russian citizens pay only €35 and some Latin Americans travel to the EU visa-free. Moreover – and this is a side-effect of poor explanation from the EU regarding its sanctions policy – **most Belarusians do not dissociate the Schengen visa restrictions applied to them from the visa ban policy imposed on their leadership.**

This situation is counter-productive. **Offering facilitated travel in the EU is the best leverage at hand for Europeanising Eastern neighbours** (through socialisation of young people in particular). A more open-border policy could also enhance the EU's image in fulfilling a promise of the ENP to foster good neighbourhood through increased people-to-people contacts.

Following the crackdown in early 2011 Poland, the Baltic States and Germany unilaterally waived consular fees for *national* visas to Belarusians. This is a good measure, but a symbolic one only, since it concerns limited categories of people and those applying for a long-term visa to work in an EU country (and which is usually paid by the employer anyway). Similarly, the recent entry into force of the first **local border-traffic agreement** between Belarus and an EU country (Latvia) provides for travel permits which are cheaper than Schengen visas (€20, and valid for up to five years), but it concerns only some hundred thousands of residents living less than 30-50km from the Latvian border.

²³ For the budget period 2007-2010 for example, ENPI aid to Belarus was twice less than that earmarked for Azerbaijan: €31 million (about 81 cents per capita and per year). This represents 0,5% of the total funding available for the EU's neighbours (Russia included) and only 2,56% of the total earmarked for Eastern Partners.

²⁴ At the International Donors' Conference 'Solidarity with Belarus' held in Warsaw in February 2011, the Commission renewed support from €4 million to €15,6. It also pledged to continue providing support for the European Humanities University (EHU) in exile in Vilnius (€1 million until 2013).

Average Belarusians would like to apply for tourist visas however, yet simplifying Schengen procedures is subject to the conclusion of the visa facilitation and readmission agreement. This should not be expected before at least two years since negotiations between the Commission and official Minsk started only in February 2011 and are apparently going nowhere.²⁵ Meanwhile, EU member states could make some goodwill gestures. **The Schengen Code leaves them the latitude to grant *bona fide* travellers more multi-entry visas than they currently do** (1/3 of Schengen visas issued to Belarusians are multi-entry visas). Ultimately, the decision to entrust applicants to a long-term, multi-entry or free of charge visa rests in the hands of the Consul alone.

Another mobility-related issue concerns young Belarusians willing to travel to the EU for studying. Whereas school-age children have a chance to travel to Poland or Germany through well-established cooperation agreements (school twinning, Chernobyl rehabilitation programs), a tacit discrimination leaves older Belarusians outside of the main circuits for academic grants in most other EU countries. The bad reputation of Belarus' leadership and the widespread ignorance in Europe about the country itself implied that Belarus is often not in the list of ex-Soviet countries whose students are eligible to apply for funding or enrolment. **The number of students and young researchers receiving Erasmus Mundus grants is very small, although the needs are high,** especially in the social sciences which have long been undervalued in Lukashenka's Belarus.

As a result, only Poland, Germany, Lithuania and Estonia offer tailored fellowship schemes for Belarusian students, notably those expelled from state universities due to their political ideas and activities. In 'older' EU countries and even in some Nordic states, **student mobility programmes have reduced their funding and most academic institutions ceased to operate in or with Belarus.** Most foundations followed suit, thus aggravating the discrimination. Whereas new initiatives such as the Open Europe Scholarship Scheme emerged, there remains room for a more generous EU offer, whether 'nationally' – through increasing communication with and information flows on Belarus within member states – or multilaterally, in establishing a Fulbright-style fellowship program for Belarusian students.²⁶

4.2 EU democracy-promotion instruments: a critical assessment

The EU invested a lot in Belarusian opposition CSOs but its efforts are still too disparate, ideology-driven or unfocused. **The burden is unequally shared among EU countries and EU aid is said to circulate in close circuit far too often.** Local stakeholders complain for example that EU money either stays inside the EU, when the winners of calls for funding are well-established EU-based NGOs, or it is 'captured' by the few CSOs that have enough knowledge of EU procedures and jargon to be the winners in each and every round of calls. Taking into account local realities, the EU should better tailor its support to a wider sample of CSOs.

– Support institutional capacity-building

Some Western countries such as the United States, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden and Slovakia have been proactive to develop the institutional capacity base of Belarusian CSOs. However this has been done mainly through *national* NGOs and foundations so far, whereas too many EU countries remain uninvolved in the process.

²⁵ The official stepping stones are disagreement over readmission (Belarus does not control crossings at its border with Russia), and the waiving of visa fees for diplomats. Official Minsk has objectively no interest in visa facilitation however: the more Belarusians travel in EU countries, the less docile they will be upon returning; plus a reciprocal €60 fee for granting EU citizens a Belarusian visa brings good earnings to the budget.

²⁶ Edward Lucas, 'What the West gets wrong about Belarus,' *Central Europe Digest*, 02/05/11.

Regarding the efficiency of EU instruments, stakeholders assess the EIDHR rather positively, yet better streamlining is needed for it to meet the specific needs of Belarusian CSOs. According to experts, **so far the focus of the EIDHR has been primarily on human rights issues at the expense of projects intended to support the building of democratic institutions from the grassroots** (Řiháčková 2010). In the case of Belarus, however, a rebalance should be advocated: systemic transformation cannot succeed if public institutions are prevented from applying for aid. Increased coordination between EU instruments for cross-border cooperation (ENPI CBC), donors and international organisations and financial institutions should also increase the added-value of EU-funded projects. Each competent member state could activate its own networks, including informal ones with selected Belarusian bureaucrats, in order to reach that goal.

Given the hostile domestic conditions under which Belarusian CSOs are forced to operate, **more flexibility is also needed for EU instruments to meet their goal**. PADOR registration for example is too cumbersome for little NGOs with limited institutional capacity. The EU aid machinery should also be amended to allow for re-allocating funds from one project or even one organisation to another. The establishment of the Civil Society Facility, designed to provide funding for non-state actors, is clearly a progress for that matter. Local stakeholders also expect much of the announced European Endowment for Democracy (EED), since it would allow for funding non-registered NGOs. Most of the 500 CSOs 'de-registered' in Belarus over the past years would be eligible.

When it comes to EU programmes for Europeanisation 'by socialisation', the EU through its Delegation in Minsk should encourage **twinning agreements, professional mentoring and training projects, including towards civil servants**. Among the bureaucracy, 'easier' targets for socialisation would be the reform-minded bureaucrats within local and regional administrations, notably those readily involved in CBC projects, Euroregional and sister-city agreements with neighbouring EU countries.

4.3 Provide civil society actors with a safe haven

Typical of a dictatorial regime is the fact that **the state apparatus leaves almost no room for people to interact with the outside world**. The constraining 2005 legislation on the re-registration of public organisations, together with the high taxation rate of private and foreign funding to Belarusian CSOs, dramatically limited their access to foreign technical aid and EU cooperation programmes. An additional law recently made it illegal for CSOs and parties to receive funds from abroad altogether.

4.3.1 Focus on 'virtual' spheres for freedom: new media and social networks

Internet is currently the last stronghold where some freedom of speech is still technically possible. The crackdown on online media remains circumscribed to harassing and intimidating critical journalists with 'warnings' and limiting access to 'sensitive' information websites from computers in public institutions. Although they succeeded in pushing many 'online' protesters to exile, the authorities understood that they cannot cut tamper with the internet and social networks on a permanent basis.

Internet thus remains the sphere where active resistance to infringements on the freedom of speech in Belarus is getting organised, and from where a revival of civil society could take root. Independent media outlets supported by the EU, such as radios in exile in neighbouring countries, have a very poor outreach inside Belarus proper. Given the worldwide evolution of popular information consumption, **it would make sense to focus counter-propaganda efforts on the 'virtual' sphere of the internet by supporting and protecting cyber-dissidents**. US Foundations understood long ago that the best way to help a harassed CSO when its offices are raided and its computers are seized is to quickly provide

activists with replacement electronic devices. Awareness-raising campaigns could help mobilise NGOs, charity and volunteers' networks in more EU countries for the same purpose.

4.4 Towards a government in exile to represent the 'other' Belarus abroad

Intimidation and repression pushed most pro-democratic CSOs to go underground or find refuge in neighbouring countries, as did the European Humanities University, in exile in Vilnius since 2005. Thousands of journalists, intellectuals, artists and political activists critical to the regime emigrated over the past decade. Cities like Warsaw, Vilnius, Kiev, Prague and Moscow host a numerous diaspora which relays information and tries to organise resistance to the regime from abroad. **Could these émigrés form the backbone allowing the 'other' Belarus to get back on its feet** or contribute on the contrary to a further 'Cubanisation' of Belarus? Should the EU readily envisage providing a future Belarusian 'government-in-exile' a safe haven and a platform for action in a neighbouring EU country, in spite of the conflict escalation risk that such neo-irredentism entails?

Belarus has the oldest existing government-in-exile in the world: the parliament (Rada) of the short-lived 1918 Belarusian National Republic, which represents the 'historical' Belarusian diaspora (descendants of the 1918 émigrés). The Rada never enjoyed much legitimacy in the eyes of people who remained in Belarus however, and apart from nationalists like Zianon Pazniak, few of the Belarusians who fled Lukashenka's regime joined the ranks of the BNR or support its agenda.

Yet if Belarus becomes fully locked down, the channel of recognising an organisation of the Belarusian diaspora as the true representative of the 'other' Belarus should be explored. An obscure Warsaw-based 'Shadow Cabinet for the National Revival of the Republic of Belarus' (mainly composed of ex-KGB officers) recently claimed such a legitimacy.

4.5 Time to draft a modernisation roadmap for Belarus

The influence of the Eastern Partnership rhetoric unexpectedly spread in Belarus. 'Roadmap', 'flagship', 'platforms' became catchwords used within the Belarusian national platform to the EaP Civil Society Forum, but also in different ministries where the EaP was discussed and initiatives coined (Marin 2011c: 11). Building on the ideas developed within the multilateral track, launching a 'partnership for modernisation' could help the EU save the **mobilisation and dialogue dynamics triggered under the umbrella of the EaP initiative**.

The main task for the EU will be to lend an ear to proposals from the grassroots. Over the past 3 years, several Belarusian CSOs did a remarkable job to produce assessment needs reports, conduct SWOT analyses and design realistic guidelines for 'step-by-step' reforms in their respective field of activity (Matskevich 2011; Yahorau 2011). In each sector, CSOs designed their own 'roadmap' for reforms: in education, media freedom, the judiciary, family policy, handicap management, labour law, etc. **The EU should learn from this corpus of initiatives and endeavour to advocate their implementation in its future sector negotiations with the Belarusian authorities**.

Drafting a roadmap is an iterative process: criteria, goals, agenda and tools need to be negotiated together with habilitated civil society representatives. **The EU will need to specify the 'give and take' deal that it offers Belarus for each sector of cooperation**: 1) what should be corrected to allow for reforms? 2) which obstacles to cooperation will the EU lift in exchange?; 3) how would transformation directly benefit the people? The first 'hot' issues that could be raised, would trigger civil mobilisation and that the authorities can hardly refuse to address (while some bureaucrats would be openly supportive of reforms in these fields) are **higher education (university reforms)**, accession to Council

of Europe conventions concerned with local and regional autonomy, transparency on civil nuclear projects, and even a memorandum on the death penalty.

Realistic goals should be set regarding the extent of transformation deemed necessary for the EU to grant each sector (eg. education, energy efficiency, tourism development...) and institution (eg. state universities, micro-credit institutions, regional budgets...) material support. **The responsibility for drafting the roadmap, setting the good governance standards and monitoring the implementation of reforms should lie with Belarusian CSOs, including think tanks.**²⁷ They should also be entitled to measure 'progress' with yardsticks adapted to the Belarusian situation, judging on Belarus' point of departure rather than on an abstract finish line set by the Commission's in its all too often abstruse jargon.

5. ANY CHANCE FOR APPROXIMATION?

The EU does not have enough leverage for weakening the Lukashenka regime nor incentivising democratic reform in Belarus because its 'sticks' are too small to hurt, whereas 'carrots' are not juicy enough to convince a wide enough spectrum of the population to swap its neo-Soviet model of development for the EU's. Russia has arguably more leverage. Against this background, can the EU still attract Belarus into its 'ring of friends' and would the Eastern Partnership still be of any help?

5.1 The 'Russia factor'

The attractiveness of the Eastern Partnership is shadowed by Russia's 'Eurasian' integration offer

Moscow offers CIS countries a deepening of military integration processes within the CSTO and increased economic integration within the Customs Union between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, the Eurasian Economic Space and potentially a 'Eurasian Union'. As Russia's closest 'Slavic brother' and most traditional ally, Belarus always enjoyed a special status in Moscow's (re-)integrative ambitions for the post-Soviet space. **For Lukashenka's Belarus, integration along this 'Eastern' vector is in the natural order of things** due to shared history and culture as well as economic interdependence ties with other post-Soviet countries. Being the second cornerstone of the Eurasian Union brings official Minsk material benefit at a low cost – insofar as honouring its engagements does not lead to significant liberalisation or unacceptable symbolic concessions (such as abandoning the Belarusian currency for the Russian rouble).

Yet Belarusians know that Russia made the most concessions so far. Its current 'bailout' might be temporary. **The Kremlin and Russian oligarchs will surely step up pressures to conquer the Belarusian market**, spreading fears that Belarus becomes a *de facto* offshore for Russian oligarchs imposing their Mafioso rules and stripping the country of its main industrial assets, if not its political sovereignty altogether. Proof that the Belarusian leadership is also aware of this risk is the fact that it refrains from making clear steps towards adapting Belarusian legislation to the Customs Union or launching reforms to increase Belarusian industries' resistance to the heightened competition from partners within the Eurasian Economic Space and due to Russia's WTO accession.

²⁷ The five think tanks that the Polish 2012 non-paper proposes to associate to the EU-Belarus 'modernisation package' comprise the most competent and active advocates of reforms, each within its own field: the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS), the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (NISEPI), the Centre of European Transformation (CET), the IPM research Centre (a joint project of the Institute for Privatisation Management and CASE) and the Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre (BEROC). The individual experts standing behind them also form a fairly representative panel of the various ideological approaches to Belarus' challenges one finds among the politicised segments of civil society.

Russia arguably enjoys much more 'soft power' than the EU in the post-Soviet space (Popescu and Wilson 2011). In Belarus it wins the tug of war thanks to its businesslike approach. Russia's economic and military might should not be overestimated however. Belarus' importance as a transit corridor is evidently declining. **Brussels should therefore use the momentum to push up the bid with its own, pragmatic integration offer.** Considering current trends, there indeed remains some opportunities for Belarus' convergence towards the EU within the Eastern Partnership framework.

A political reform in Belarus is not in Russia's immediate interest. In fact, Moscow's 'strategy' on Belarus could be interpreted as an alternative between, or possibly a succession of three approaches that all exclude the democratisation of Belarus (EESC 2010: 47-48):

- - **an economic approach**, currently realised through 'Gazprom diplomacy' for the sake of pumping out valuable assets from Belarus (in return for having subsidised it for decades);
- - **a geopolitical approach**, meant to maintain Belarus as an outpost 'shielding' Russia from the West and promoting the Russia-led 'Eurasian Union' project;
- - **an integrative approach**, aiming at the full incorporation of Belarus back into the Russian matrix.

Amid difficulties to 'handle' him, **for Moscow Lukashenka is and will probably remain instrumental** for fulfilling the first two scenarios. As for the third one, which supposes renewing the Belarusian ruling elite, it will involve at some point swapping Lukashenka for a pro-Russian 'puppet'. This option may not be what the Belarusian population wants sovereignty-wise, but few will fight to prevent this scenario from unfolding. A growing part of the pro-reform (though not as pro-democratic and pro-EU as it used to be) Belarusian intelligentsia is now favouring this option as 'the least of two evils' since it is the quickest way to get rid of Lukashenka. Aware that this awaits him, Lukashenka might also pre-emptively pick his successor himself among the loyal 'technocrats'. **A successor cannot be simultaneously to Moscow's and to the EU's liking however.** Meanwhile, can the EU still count on the EaP to 'win the hearts and minds' of Belarusians?

5.2 The Eastern Partnership is dead – long live the Eastern Partnership!

Belarus formally joined the Eastern Partnership in May 2009. Due to its non-compliance with EU conditions and the fact that it is not a member of the WTO, **Belarus is entitled to take part only in the multilateral track** however. Even within this framework, Belarus' participation remained virtually limited to one EaP institution: the Civil Society Forum (CSF). In snubbing the Warsaw Summit in September 2011, official Minsk signalled its reluctance to cooperate as long as EU conditionality prevails on another founding principle of the EaP: joint ownership (Marin 2011c). Given that the ENP review resulted in a toughening of democratic conditionality (the 'more for more' principle announced by the Commission on 25 May 2011), the chances that the EU steps back and compromises are little.

Yet concessions are indispensable from the EU's side given the circumstances: the EaP is currently the only option for normalising bilateral relations that Belarusian bureaucrats might be receptive to. As early as 2008, they have been supportive of a pragmatic, depoliticised dialogue and ready for reforms on issues of mutual interest. True, their views are reconcilable on few topics. Yet the EU cannot afford to miss the cooperation opportunities that a constructive partnership entails, since granting Belarus a legitimate status in the EaP is the only way to foster Europeanisation and structural reforms in the country.

5.2.1 Assessment of trends and prospects for approximation with the EU

Few data is available for assessing the extent of Belarus' convergence with EU standards. Some useful qualitative studies highlighted that Belarusians, like their leadership, wish to 'cooperate with the EU on the basis of common interests rather than strict convergence with its norms and values' (Rotman and Veremeeva 2011: 90). Trade, energy transit, transport infrastructure, education, people-to-people contacts and energy efficiency are believed to be fields of 'mutually beneficial interest' in which Belarus and the EU could indeed be cooperating more.

Quantitative evaluation of the approximation eventually reached by Belarus is lacking, even on standardisation in sectors covered by the EaP platforms Belarusian authorities have been most active in (platforms 2 on 'economic integration and convergence with EU policies' and 3 on 'energy security'). Pursuant to the EU's isolation policy, the Commission updates its Belarus webpage mainly with statements on Belarus' lack of compliance with EU standards and subsequent EU sanctions. At the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Belarus desk aware of possible developments within the multilateral track of the EaP ignored the author's requests for sharing information regarding Belarus' eventual 'approximation'. Be it due to the EEAS' unwillingness to publicly admit that either Belarus indeed made efforts and progress, or that the EaP failed to trigger any change, such a lack of transparency should prompt the European Parliament and EaP bodies to request an internal audit based on data the EEAS alone holds.

Hence the present assessment builds mostly on the only external analysis conducted so far by researchers of the Soros-backed Ukrainian charity organisation 'Renaissance' (Solonenko 2011). They elaborated an '**Integration index for measuring and comparing the level of convergence** reached by the six Eastern Partnership countries based on three evaluation criteria: the amount of **linkages** among them; the level of **approximation** of these countries' institutions, legislation and practices with those of the EU; and the evolution of their **management** structures towards the EU's. The index grades convergence on a scale of 0 (worst performance) to 1 (best), based on a number of quantitative and qualitative criteria. The purpose of the index is to allow for comparisons in time and space for guiding the application of the 'more for more' principle instituted by the 'new' ENP in May 2011.

Not surprisingly, Belarus ranks worst in all three dimensions (see table 6 in Annex). It performs best in terms of 'approximation' with a 0.37 grade, meaning that in spite of limited interest and political will, Belarus made efforts to cover 37 % of the road to full convergence already. For the record, the alleged forerunners (Georgia and Moldova) still have a way to go as well (they are graded 0.63 and 0.67 respectively). Belarus performs poorly (0.20) on management, although for this criterion it does not lag far behind Azerbaijan (0.28) and Armenia (0.32). As for the linkage criteria, Belarus' counter-performance (0.19) illustrates that the country is very poorly connected to other EaP countries, notably and surprisingly so in the 'Trade and economic integration' subcategory (0.10).

Interestingly enough, Belarus outperforms all other countries in the 'environment' sub-category, for which its efforts at approximation, as evaluated by the Yale University Environmental Performance Index, were graded 0.67. The authors of the study attribute this relative success to Belarus' 'centralised management' of environmental issues (Solonenko 2011: 11, 16). The pilot study is not fully satisfactory however, since it does not explain the relatively high level of approximation allegedly reached by Belarus in terms of 'democracy' (0.20), 'governance quality' (0.35) and 'market economy' (0.43). Conversely, progress at convergence that the Belarusian government claims to have done in the field of integrated border management and fighting cross-border crime does not reflect in the grade attributed for the 'Freedom, Security and Justice' subcategory (0.43), especially compared to Azerbaijan's score (0.76).

The fact that the potential for institutional and legislative approximation with the EU has mainly been realised in the environmental field concurs with conclusions drawn from other empirical studies that **environment has the potential of furthering the European integration of Belarus** (Marin 2011d). In fact, amid the Belarusian government's disregard for basic ecological safety concerns, notably those of its neighbours (cf. plans to build a nuclear power plant near the Lithuanian border in violation of international Conventions), Lukashenka himself singled out environment as one driving belt for Belarus' modernisation. Since the mid-2000s much was invested for developing 'agro-eco-villages' and the attractiveness of Belarus' natural parks and waterways for (Western) 'green tourism' adepts. Taking him at his word, **the EU should investigate the potential of environment, a common good and wealth-multiplier *per se*, to be a pilot low policy field for Belarus' approximation with the EU.**

5.2.2 Opportunities for further regional cooperation with other Eastern Partners

The authors of the 'Integration index' assume that 'increased linkages and approximation mutually reinforce each other' (Solonenko 2011: 8). This echoes the ideas underpinning the Eastern Partnership, but it did not meet much support in Belarus. Objective favourable preconditions for regional cooperation exist with Ukraine, Belarus' sole direct land neighbour. In spite of initial enthusiasm, the EaP did not result in consolidating much 'linkages' with any other Eastern Partner however, a counter-performance apparently due to the politicisation of Belarus' 'outlaw' status among the EU's neighbours.

Official Minsk sees enhanced regional cooperation within the EaP mainly as a chance to reduce its energy dependence on Russia, hence disappointments that the EaP did not deliver. Belarus being landlocked, diversifying energy deliveries means connecting with neighbours with maritime oil terminals, namely Ukraine (Odessa), Lithuania (Klaipeda) and Latvia (Ventspils). The Belarusian government, in an effort to swap Russian deliveries for imports of Venezuelan crude oil, expected the EU to finance the development of Baltic-Black Sea transit capacities through Belarus. In September 2010 Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania came up with five priority projects in need of investments: the extension of the Odessa-Brody pipeline with sidelines to the Mozyr oil refinery; the *Viking* connection (Odessa-Klaipeda); the modernisation of the Vilnius-Kiev highway and the Minsk-Vilnius railway (as part of Trans-European Network IX) and an integrated regional electricity grid (Marin 2011c). **There is a need for inter-modal transport connections and modern transport infrastructures, but the EU lacks the financial means for such big investments.** Ultimately negative conditionality disqualified Belarusian initiatives, or EaP decision-makers were not impressed by Minsk's covert advances and left the proposal unanswered.

Regardless of shortcomings in economic fields where integration seemed mutually beneficial, what do current trends in Belarus' relations with other EaP countries tell us about the potential for further regional integration? Unexplored opportunities for cooperation within the EaP framework include **confidence-building and deepening good-neighbourhood relations**. This would include a number of 'low policy' initiatives in the field of culture, youth, education, health, people-to-people contacts and cross-border cooperation – both a mean and an end of the EU's neighbourhood policy.

The EU should encourage launching a **regional dialogue among EaP countries on contentious issues inherited from the common Soviet past**. Participating in historians' seminars and joint research projects with Ukrainians would give Belarusian scholars a chance to confront Lukashenka's historiography guidelines with other visions of historical truth. Inviting Poles and Lithuanians as well would surely spice up the debates. Among the most recent painful memories shared by all these neighbours is also the Chernobyl accident. Given the regime's persistent neglect of the health hazards caused by on-going contamination in adjacent Belarusian regions (Lallemand and Symaniec 2007: ch. 7), Ukraine should be asked to mediate European concerns and methods regarding food safety

standards or ecological transparency standards. Energy efficiency can also be a challenge enhancing the need for 'linkage' between Belarus and its neighbours.

The most promising field, however, is that of cross-border-cooperation (CBC). Belarusian border regions are eligible to take part in two ENPI CBC programmes: Poland-Belarus-Ukraine and Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus.²⁸ Assessing the level of integration reached within these programmes is probably premature, as most concrete projects were launched only in late 2009. One thing is sure however: **multilateral cooperation projects within the EaP framework could be better interconnected with existing, small-scale CBC projects, including within Euroregions (Marin 2011d).** In fact, Belarusian regions readily cooperate with their Ukrainian neighbours in the framework of two Euroregions (out of five involving Belarus): *Bug* and *Dniepr*.²⁹ The EU should seek to work more closely with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), in which *Bug* is a member and *Dniepr* has observer status, to develop these Euroregions' institutional capacity. Entitling eligible Belarusian regions to fully benefit from the support of the Regional Capacity-Building Initiative (RCBI) and InterAct would be instrumental in this regard.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chances for optimising EU policies depend upon one main cyclical factor, namely Moscow's (financial) support to Lukashenka's unsustainable economic system. EU sanctions and incentives cannot overshadow the economic influence Russia exerts on Belarus through a seasonal energy blackmail which is far more efficient for obtaining concessions from Lukashenka than the EU's half-measures are for improving the human rights situation in Belarus (Gaidelytė 2010). But honeymoons never last forever: Moscow will stop subsidising Belarus soon, since Lukashenka does not deliver on his promises of economic liberalisation. Meanwhile, **the EU should rationalise its own policy arsenal.** While aiming at more cohesion and coherence in the art of whip handling (track 1), the EU also needs innovations to energise the 'positive' dimension (biscuits for the people, track 2) of its policies. As for the 'third' track – the 'dialogue for modernisation' opened by the EU – its aim should be to gradually develop into a real partnership with Belarus *as a country*.

6.1 Track 1: design a more constraining and coherent sanctions policy

The main priority of the EU's re-engagement policy should be that principled EU emissaries talk to everyone *except* Lukashenka and those who directly depend on him. The room for manoeuvre is limited, unless the EU turns some of its weaknesses into strengths. First on the list is the **persisting division among member states regarding the priorities and instruments of the EU's Belarus policy.** A sounder division of labour and assigned leadership for a coalition of the willing should be agreed upon within the EU Council, under the close scrutiny of the other EU institutions that developed an expertise on Belarus. Even if they can bear fruits to free political prisoners, individual initiatives and secret talks between national diplomats and the Belarusian leadership should remain exceptional, since they ultimately comfort Lukashenka in his 'divide and rule' strategy towards the West. In this context, the best the European Parliament, the Commission and the EEAS could do is to:

- **hold individual member states morally responsible for defending EU values.**

²⁸ More information on these programmes is available on the websites maintained by their managing authorities (www.pl-by-ua.eu and www.enpi-cbc-eu respectively).

²⁹ Euroregion *Bug* was established in 1995 by Polish border regions and Ukraine's Volhyn *oblast'*; Brest *oblast'* joined it in 1998. *Dniepr* was formally created in 2004 as the first 'Slavic only' Euroregion, involving the *oblasti* of Briansk (Russia), Chernihiv (Ukraine) and Gomel (Belarus).

Since 'free riding' strategies on the part of some MS prevent the drafting of a purposeful collective strategy, one should admit that the main responsibility for thoroughly implementing any policy on Belarus ultimately lies with EU member states themselves. Rationalising the EU's sanctions policy is of utmost importance, as argued recently by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET). In a proposal of resolution, it called the 27 to commit to 'speak with one voice on the matter of condemning authoritarian regimes' and 'ensure that sanctions are applied consistently (...) regardless of political colour or geography'.³⁰

Countries which have been astonishingly passive on Belarus-related issues over the past years should mobilise and catch up, whereas those which kept silent on human rights violations, while at the same time conducting juicy business with Belarus, should be held accountable. **Since the interests of member states are hardly reconcilable, the duty of EU watchdogs such as the European Parliament should be to facilitate a rational division of tasks** and to monitor that no free riding tactics lead to policies cancelling each other out. This, in turn, requires investing in the EU's own expertise base on Belarus and muscling up the EU's democracy-promotion capacity in the neighbourhood.

- **call for a special EU official to be appointed for monitoring national foreign policies on Belarus and coordinating them with the EU's overall neighbourhood strategy**

Appointing an EU special Representative for Belarus, entitled to maintain dialogue along both tracks *and* to coordinate EU as well as member states' efforts and commitments, was already advocated in 2008 by the German Marshall Fund and some Central European countries (ICDT 2008). Following the February 2012 near-rupture of diplomatic relations, his appointment is even more necessary. His task would be to control the application of sanctions, monitor progress and canalise dialogue resumption. Able of holding member states accountable, he would reinforce the EU's policy cohesion and diplomatic outreach. Heading a pool of experts on Belarus, this emissary (who need not be a career diplomat) should **be entitled to talk to both the Belarusian authorities and representatives of civil society**. Resisting the lobbying of human rights activists and businessmen alike, his duty should be to tailor EU policies so that they meet the needs of Belarusians at large.

- **ignore Lukashenka: refrain from attending his masquerades**

Dictators like to be in the spotlight. Hence refusing to attend their 'masquerades' (an election farce, a politically-laden sports event or some other authoritarian propagandist ritual) is the best way for Western officials to signify their disdain.

The EU should not expect the upcoming legislative elections to comply with democratic standards. Therefore, **the best strategy for the EU would be to condition the deployment of electoral observers upon the prior satisfaction of the request that roundtables be held, resulting in the formal engagement of the regime to let opposition candidates run.** Warned against any short-term tactics from the regime, the EU should make it clear that it steps out of the vicious circle and **not commit itself to sending election observers to Belarus next September unless there are irreversible guarantees that the voting process will be fair and transparent.**³¹ Recent statements by Lidia Yermoshina, the head of the

³⁰ 'Report with a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on a consistent policy towards regimes, against which the EU applies restrictive measures, when their leaders exercise their personal and commercial interests within EU borders', (2011/2187(INI)). Rapporteur: Graham Watson (ALDE), 09/01/12, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2012-0007&language=EN#title1

³¹ There should be guarantees that opposition candidates are free to run and campaign; that domestic observers can monitor the counting process; that electoral commissions are pluralistic and independent enough to eventually decide on a ballot recount; and that independent judges may invalidate the election results altogether in case of frauds.

Central Electoral Commission, that the electoral legislation does not need to be amended, and by Lukashenka himself that there should be 'no room for chatterboxes' in the next legislature, augur ill of the chances for the process and outcome of the elections to differ from previous ones.

Sending OSCE observers grants the elections some legitimacy *ex ante*, whereas propaganda will surely be mobilised *ex post* for blurring or discrediting the OSCE's predictably negative assessment. Hence the most rational way for EU member states to spend the money they usually dedicate to seconding observers to the OSCE is to **invest massively in training domestic observers instead, building on the experience acquired in Armenia and Azerbaijan**. Video films showing how ballots are counted in democratic elections should be circulated through the internet: this would have a pedagogical added value for domestic observers, but also for the civil servants who compose electoral commissions at precinct level, and potentially on voters themselves.

Regarding the 2014 Ice Hockey World Championships, **lobbying for the International Ice Hockey Federation to deprive Belarus of its host country status is not recommendable**. In fact, this would, once again, raise the average Belarusian against the EU. A more constructive approach would be to give Belarus (as a country) a chance to recover some international respectability in defending its colours in this discipline where its sportsmen perform quite well. Taking Lukashenka at his word, the EU should let Western citizens have a chance to enter Belarus visa-free for attending the competition. Remaining true to their principles, EU officials for their part should indeed boycott the event and in particular all official ceremonies if there are still political prisoners in the country by then.

6.2 Track 2: develop an attractive European perspective for civil society

In exposing Belarusians to European values, through increased people-to-people contacts, the EU can help create the conditions for democratic change in Belarus. However, a rethink is necessary in order **to identify the social actors and fields of cooperation which should be prioritised**. This should be based on a thorough evaluation of people's actual needs and better targeting of instruments, rather than on an extension of the EU's own agenda.

As recommended by late Vitali Silitski, in order to make the 'second track' more efficient Western **donors must 'have a sense of the balance between the opposition and civil society**, and between politics and non-politicised initiatives that foster social change and build up pro-reform communities. If that means extending support to those elements of officialdom, academia, and the administration that were not responsible for political repression, so be it.³² In other words, the EU needs to reach out to other categories than traditional supporters it already convinced, meaning start talking with bureaucrats within the government and the diplomatic corpus interested in a normalisation of relations with the West.

Contacts with and support to the Belarusian opposition did not help it structure itself or become a force able to canalise change: no single candidate galvanising the support of the masses ever emerged since Lukashenka hijacked this position for himself. Analysts deplore that Western aid favoured the emergence of 'donor-driven' strategies in the ranks of the opposition, which distracts them from their main goal of winning popular support at home. Election campaigns, whatever their shortcomings have at least the advantage of encouraging the opposition to go back to the field and dialogue with voters. **Political parties in EU countries and in the European Parliament could help them more in sharing experience for training cadres and militants**. Yet the EU should not wait for this 'learning' strategy to

³² Vitali Silitski 'The wrong role model for Belarus', *European Voice*, 17/02/11.

bear fruit soon: in the current institutional situation Belarusian opposition candidates remain as unlikely as ever to conquer seats in Lukashenka's 'pocket parliament'.

The EU can still do more to support emerging civil society actors however: Brussels' top priority should be to help them play the pivotal role of driving forces and 'watchdogs' of a transition desirably negotiated with the regime and supported by its most reform-minded segments (Jarábik 2011). The EU and member states should mobilise institutional capacity-building instruments such as the EDIHR to **help CSOs conquer autonomy from the state, but also legitimacy in the eyes of the Belarusian population**, which still associates dissident CSOs with the discredited opposition.

The paradigm shift advocated in this paper would open a 'third track' in the EU's policy toolbox, paving the way for a mutually beneficial partnership with Belarus *as a country*. Success will be conditional upon depoliticising technical dialogue on approximation and better tailoring EU instruments, notably the long-awaited European Endowment for Democracy (EED) to local needs.

6.3 Track 3: turn the 'dialogue' (with the opposition) for modernisation into a real 'partnership' (with Belarus as a country)

Building on sociological surveys and a critical assessment of the potential for approximation of Belarus with the EU, this study recommends EU decision-makers to:

- **admit that, the most consensual interest being in developing economic relations with Belarus, a pragmatic offer should be extended to Belarus...**

Transition theories consider that closer trade and business relations strengthen authoritarian regimes at a systemic level, but are indispensable to trigger a transition from a managed economy to a free market. Therefore, **through exposure to a liberal economic model, trade with the EU can help undermine Lukashenka's economic model at the worker level** and provide valuable outside experience for Belarusian companies (EESC 2010: 37). The EU should thus encourage this 'outside-in' transformation, provided that it also holds the business actors involved accountable. The latter should be informed of the human rights situation in Belarus and asked to comply with basic principles regarding workers' rights, the independence of trade unions, etc. Previous efforts at 'moralising' the activities of EU companies in China could serve as a benchmark.

Given that a pragmatic offer is the only one that the acting regime would accept, the EU should also contend that this would satisfy the expectations of a majority of Belarusians who are interested in a mere *economic* partnership with the EU (Rotman and Veremeeva 2011). Several member states actually share this interest in developing trade connections with Belarus. They are followed in that (and oftentimes preceded) by their respective national economic champions, which are eager to establish business contacts with Belarusian partners and start investing in the country as soon as official Minsk will launch the long-promised privatisation process.

As argued by a collective of Lithuanian researchers **'the 'hunger' for FDI and technologies remains one of the most important potential levers in the hands of the EU'** (EESC 2010: 37). The EU should see this as an asset for winning the heart and minds of Belarusians. Notwithstanding Minsk's renewed honeymoon with Moscow, most Belarusians know that following the Russian model of 'modernisation' will lead Belarus to partial economic opening but to no major structural reforms. Moreover, they know that an influx of Russian capital will result in growing corruption benefiting only the emerging oligarchic elite.

Russia and China might provide funds, but only the West has the technologies for a full-fledged modernisation (de-sovietisation) of Belarus' industrial base. The EU should take up the challenge –

without compromising on basic European values however. **Extending Belarus a pragmatic cooperation offer, Brussels should label it a 'partnership for modernisation'**. This catchword has more style than meaning attached to it in EU-Russia relations, but at least it echoes the 'dialogue for modernisation' with the authorities advocated by some Belarusian CSOs and think tanks over the past year (Vadalazhskaya and Yahorau 2011).

- ... based on a 'good behaviour Charter' that all interested governmental, non-governmental and business structures would be requested to endorse and comply with

EU funding for the implementation of cooperation projects within the framework of this 'partnership for modernisation' should be made **dependent upon the regime's acceptance to re-engage dialogue with civil society** (not the political opposition as such). In other words, the EU should try and mediate a constructive dialogue between the authorities and Belarusian civil society, sector by sector, within each administration, each company and each public association. All those ready to sign and legally commit themselves to upholding a good behaviour Charter should be entitled to take part.

The Charter should specify the conditions deemed absolutely necessary for a principle-based cooperation to unfold – conditions which are different in each and every sector. In practical terms, it means for example that universities willing to develop exchanges with EU partners, apply for Erasmus funding or join the Bologna process should comply not to expel students on political grounds; in the economic sphere, the leadership of a company willing to do business with EU partners should prove that it does not limit the rights of independent trade unions; regional authorities applying for capacity-building funding should engage to work with local CSOs, etc.

Targets should not only be the traditional 'pro-EU' segments of the population – the democratic opposition, politicised CSOs and reform-minded youth – but **all public institutions forming the socio-economic backbone of the country**. In other words, efforts should now turn onto individuals and institutions snubbed by the West until now because they are but mechanisms in the state machinery – the little bureaucracy, 'red' directors, state-dominated academic and associative circles, etc. Yet, no attempt at reforming the country can succeed without them. To help them bypass their fears of being sanctioned for participating, **the EU should convince the reform-oriented minority within the technocratic segment of the *nomenklatura* to defend the transformation process against backsliding and instrumentalisation**.

Summing up, Brussels must design a strategy that combines subversive, 'Cold War time' range of activities, and an ambitious, openly-stated 'transformation through modernisation' offer extended to Belarus *as a country*. However attractive it may be to Belarusian elites, **the offer does not guarantee that the EU's efforts at democratising and Europeanising Belarus will succeed** any time soon. As this study demonstrated, several structural factors will tamper the EU's attempts, even after Lukashenka's eventual downfall.

If the West concludes that imposed regime change is the only option left at this stage, then should it be ready to join forces with Moscow in order to enforce a 'knock-down-drag-out' plot against Lukashenka? Toppling him down would require an intelligence operation that Western countries do not seem ready for yet.³³ This has little chance of succeeding without the Kremlin's tacit, if not tactic support: any attempt at ejecting Lukashenka is doomed to fail unless it has Russia's avail. Yet an alliance between the EU and Putin's Russia would be both unnatural (the two blocks defend values that are not reconcilable) and amoral, as it would necessarily remind of the Soviet-Nazi pact. **The longer things are left to rot**

³³ Andrew Rettman, 'EU fine-tuning next round of Belarus sanctions,' *EU Observer.com*, 16/05/11.

however, the less leverage the EU will have on future developments in a hypothetical post-Lukashenka Belarus. Since Lukashenka does not consider an EU-Russia dialogue likely, even suggesting that it can be conducted above his head could create a shockwave.

Summing up, **time has come for the EU to change paradigm in relation to Belarus.** Rationalising Brussels' coercive diplomacy tactics requires efforts towards more coherence at the implementation stage, meaning mainly within the EU proper. A still to be drafted EU strategy on Belarus cannot be solely based on sanctions however: without calling for their lifting, this study advocated exploring the 'third' track of a mutually beneficial partnership void of 'hard' conditionality. Based on a behaviour charter agreed upon by those players willing to play by more democratic rules to enjoy the EU's material support, the new format for relating with Belarus as a country requires the EU to make some concessions to convince the Belarusian bureaucracy (on visas, political prisoners, etc.).

The potential of the advocated approach to balance the EU's schizophrenic 'dual track' policy depends on the ability of Belarusian CSOs to earn, in the eyes of the regime as well as public opinion, the legitimacy that opposition leaders never managed to get. This, as argued in this study, can be achieved within the EaP framework and through turning the EU's 'dialogue for modernisation' with the opposition into a 'partnership for modernisation' offer. The reform-minded segments of the ruling elite would be supportive of gradual liberal reforms. Determining the likelihood for a critical mass of the population to shift their allegiance from autocracy/Eurasia to democracy/EU remains a difficult task given the lack of reliable sociological data in and on Belarus however.

ANNEXES

Table 1. Belarus' main trading partners in 2011

RANK (among all trading partners)		TURNOVER		EXPORTS		IMPORTS		BALANCE
		thsd US dollars	As % of 2010*	thsd US dollars	As % of 2010*	thsd US dollars	As % of 2010*	thsd US dollars
	TOTAL	77 811 873,00	147,1	36 509 927,10	163,7	41 301 945,90	135	-4 792 018,80
2	Netherlands	5 719 528,00	210,3	5 352 484,50	218,8	367 043,50	133,8	4 985 441,00
4	Germany	3 973 423,70	158	1 678 192,90	x 4	2 295 230,80	109,7	-617 037,90
5	Latvia	2 962 659,90	x 3,3	2 859 159,80	x 3,5	103 500,10	117,8	2 755 659,70
7	Poland	2 219 480,90	125,7	1 041 381,40	126,6	1 178 099,50	125	-136 718,10
9	Italy	1 291 969,10	155,1	452 679,50	247,4	839 289,60	129,2	-386 610,10
11	Lithuania	1 021 663,90	164,7	753 880,00	186,2	267 783,90	124,2	486 096,10
14	United Kingdom	713 542,00	82,3	402 455,40	68,3	311 086,60	112,1	91 368,80
15	Estonia	609 461,90	x 3,4	543 474,90	x 4,6	65 987,00	105,9	477 487,90
17	France	451 027,90	116,7	61 862,90	117,3	389 165,00	116,6	-327 302,10
19	Belgium	432 578,50	137,2	159 470,90	174,2	273 107,60	122	-113 636,70
20	Czech Republic	408 308,20	116,6	101 159,00	120,3	307 149,20	115,4	-205 990,20
23	Austria	263 370,30	142,1	24 978,30	86,5	238 392,00	152,4	-213 413,70
24	Sweden	255 145,40	110,5	85 687,50	121,9	169 457,90	105,5	-83 770,40
26	Slovakia	246 846,00	158,4	93 828,60	164,7	153 017,40	154,8	-59 188,80
27	Spain	223 909,70	122,6	18 113,30	214,8	205 796,40	118,2	-187 683,10
34	Hungary	197 474,90	104,1	70 335,10	119,3	127 139,80	97,3	-56 804,70
36	Finland	188 046,20	120,4	58 321,70	121,7	129 724,50	119,8	-71 402,80
38	Romania	151 804,20	128,6	113 706,50	146,8	38 097,70	93,8	75 608,80

46	Denmark	113 139,60	109	14 866,30	59,3	98 273,30	124,8	-83 407,00
50	Greece	85 157,50	x 4,6	67 907,40	x 35	17 250,10	104,6	50 657,30
52	Bulgaria	79 098,40	152,3	31 920,00	190,8	47 178,40	134,1	-15 258,40
53	Cyprus	75 296,00	126,6	57 366,60	148,4	17 929,40	86,2	39 437,20
54	Slovenia	69 702,80	98	10 604,20	129,4	59 098,60	94	-48 494,40
76	Ireland	24 523,30	92,8	2 155,50	87,5	22 367,80	93,3	-20 212,30
82	Portugal	17 904,40	172,1	3 997,60	x 11	13 906,80	138,4	-9 909,20
86	Luxembourg	16 272,60	164	3 865,10	139,3	12 407,50	173,6	-8 542,40

Source: Official preliminary data for January-November 2011, http://belstat.gov.by/homep/en/indicators/foreign_trade_preliminary_data.php, last accessed on 06/03/12.

Table 2. Main origin countries of Belarusian imports in 2011

COUNTRY	IMPORTS FROM in thousand US dollars	EVOLUTION in % of Jan.-Nov. 2010)	COUNTRY (ctd)	IMPORTS FROM in thousand US dollars	EVOLUTION in % of Jan.-Nov. 2010)
TOTAL	41 301 945,90	135	Belgium	273 107,60	122
Russia	22 380 945,60	140,1	Lithuania	267 783,90	124,2
Germany	2 295 230,80	109,7	Switzerland	247 019,20	164
China	1 966 001,30	133,4	Austria	238 392,00	152,4
Ukraine	1 857 479,70	112,8	Japan	213 198,80	134,3
Poland	1 178 099,50	125	Spain	205 796,40	118,2
Venezuela	1 043 217,20	103,4	Korea, Republic	170 494,00	140,9
Italy	839 289,60	129,2	Sweden	169 457,90	105,5
Azerbaijan	754 651,50	x 139	India	155 230,40	112,3
United States	472 176,50	125,1	Slovakia	153 017,40	154,8
France	389 165,00	116,6	Argentina	150 498,90	85,6

Netherlands	367 043,50	133,8	Finland	129 724,50	119,8
Brazil	361 588,60	250,5	Kazakhstan	127 972,30	39,5
United Kingdom	311 086,60	112,1	Hungary	127 139,80	97,3
Czech Republic	307 149,20	115,4	Latvia	103 500,10	117,8
Turkey	284 399,60	126	Taiwan (China)	100 117,10	116,9

Source: Official preliminary data for January-November 2011, http://belstat.gov.by/homep/en/indicators/foreign_trade_preliminary_data.php, last accessed on 06/03/12.

Table 3. Evolution of Belarusian respondents' opinions on geopolitical options between 2003 and 2011

Question: 'If you had the choice between a union with Russia and accession to the EU, which one would you chose?'

Possible answers (%)	09'03	06'04	09'05	06'06	12'07	03'08	06'08	09'08	12'08	03'09	06'09	09'09	09'10	03'11	06'11	09'11	12'11
Union with Russia	47.6	47.7	59.2	56.5	47.5	45.3	50.3	54.0	46.0	42.4	42.1	38.3	34.9	31.5	35.3	41.5	41.4
Accession to the EU	36.1	37.6	28.6	29.3	33.3	33.4	32.4	26.2	30.1	35.1	41.4	42.7	41.7	50.5	44.5	42.0	39.1
Don't know / no answer	16.3	14.7	12.2	14.2	19.2	21.3	17.3	19.8	23.9	22.5	16.5	19.0	23.4	18.0	20.2	16.5	19.5

Source: www.iiseps.org, agglomeration of results from various opinion polls. Method: face-to-face interview. Average number of respondents: 1503. Error margin: 3 %.

Table 4. Distribution of Belarusian respondents' opinions on geopolitical options by age, level of education and access to the internet in June 2011

Question: 'If you had the choice between a union with Russia and accession to the EU, which one would you chose?'

Criterion	AGE GROUP	LEVEL OF EDUCATION			DO YOU USE INTERNET?		
				specialised higher,	Yes, several times...	No,	Don't

Options (%)	18-29	30-59	> 60	elementary	incomplete secondary	general secondary	secondary (vocational)	incl. incomplete	daily	weekly	monthly	yearly	never	know what it is
Union with Russia	18.9	35.5	51.4	61.5	50.9	34.6	32	27.8	19.6	24.7	35.6	35	44.5	63.6
EU accession	67	45.2	20.4	6.3	22.6	45.5	49.4	55	67.4	56.6	43.6	55	31.3	12.7
Don't know / no answer	14	19.4	28.2	32.3	26.4	19.9	18.6	17.2	13	18.7	20.8	10	24.2	23.6

Source: ISEPS data, quoted in Drakochrust (2012), p. 7 www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Spiral-nezavisimosti-15464

Table 5. Evolution of Belarusian respondents' opinions on accession to the EU between 2002 and 2011

Question: 'If tomorrow a referendum on the accession of Belarus to the European Union was held, how would you vote?'

Possible answers (%)	12'02	03'03	09'05	12'05	11'06	09'07	12'07	09'08	12'08	03'09	06'09	09'09	12'09	03'10	09'10	03'11	06'11	12'11
For	60.9	56.4	38.0	32.0	36.0	29.9	37.1	26.7	30.1	34.9	41.4	44.1	40.7	36.2	42.2	48.6	45.1	35.9
Against	10.9	11.9	44.0	26.8	36.2	46.7	35.0	51.9	40.6	36.3	39.8	32.8	34.6	37.2	32.5	30.5	32.4	36.9
I would not vote	n/d	n/d	n/d	20.4	15.5	12.5	n/d	12.2	n/d	n/d	n/d	14.8	n/d	n/d	15.9	12.1	14.9	19.0
Don't know / no	n/d	n/d	n/d	20.8	12.3	10.9	n/d	9.2	n/d	n/d	n/d	8.3	n/d	n/d	9.4	8.8	7.6	8.2

answer																		
--------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Source: www.iiseps.org, agglomeration of results from various opinion polls. Method: face-to-face interview. Average number of respondents: 1503. Error margin: 3 %.

Table 6. Index of Belarus' convergence with the EU as compared to other Eastern Partnership countries in June 2011

Country						
Dimension of convergence	Moldova	Georgia	Ukraine	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus
Linkage Connections between Eastern Partners	0.70	0.53	0.60	0.42	0.32	0.19
Approximation of the country's institutions, legislation and practices with those of the EU	0.67	0.63	0.57	0.57	0.49	0.37
Management Evolution of the country's management structures towards those of the EU	0.88	0.92	0.68	0.32	0.28	0.20

The European Integration index elaborated by the International Renaissance Foundation in cooperation with the Open Society Foundations evaluates each Eastern Partnership country's convergence with the EU on a performance scale of 0 (worst approximation) to 1 (best approximation). Data as of June 2011.

Source: Solonenko (2011), table p. 9, www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/euro/eap%20index%20pilot%20edition.pdf

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BISS and NOVAK (2010), 'Belarus and the world: geopolitical choice and security in the context of economy and culture', *BISS Study* (Minsk: Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies & NovAK axiometral research laboratory), SA#01/2010EN, 1 June, http://belinstitute.eu/images/doc-pdf/sa_010610_en_geopolit.pdf.
- Bosse, Giselle and Korosteleva-Polglase, Elena (2009), 'Changing Belarus?: The Limits of EU Governance in Eastern Europe and the Promise of Partnership', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 44 (2), 143-65.
- CEPA (2011), 'Democratic change in Belarus: a framework for action', (Washington: Belarus Working Group, a joint project by the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) & Freedom House), September, www.cepa.org/publications/view.aspx?record_id=175.
- Drakochrust, Yuri (2012), 'Spiral nezavisimosti [The spiral of independence]', *Rossiya v Global'noy Politike [Russia in Global Affairs]*, 1 (January-February), www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Spiral-nezavisimosti-15464.
- EESC (2010), 'Belarusian challenge to the new EU policy: ignorance equals legitimation', *Analytical Review* (Vilnius: Eastern Europe Studies Centre), no. 2(1), www.eesc.lt/en/activities/analytical_reviews?id=435.
- Gaidelytė, Rasa (2010), 'The link between EU sanctions and repressions in Belarus', *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 24, 41-80, www.lfpr.lt/index.php?id=127.
- HRW (2012), 'International Support for the Democratic Future of Belarus: Time Should not be Wasted', *2011 Report by the Working Group on Investments of the Committee on International Control over the Human Rights Situation in Belarus* (Minsk: Belarus Human Rights Watch), 30 January, unpublished document (72 p.).
- ICDT (2008), 'A European Alternative for Belarus, report of the Belarus Task Force', (Budapest: International Centre for Democratic Transition,), October, www.icdt.hu/publications/2008/a-european-alternative-for-belarus.
- Jarábik, Balász (2011), 'Belarus beyond sanctions', *FRIDE Policy Brief* (Madrid: Foundation for International Relations and External Dialogue), no. 72, April.
- Jarábik, Balász and Silitski, Vitali (2008), 'Belarus', in Richard Young (ed.), *Is the European Union Supporting Democracy in its Neighbourhood?* (FRIDE & ECFR), 101-20, http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/ecfr_fride_working_papers_democracy_promotion.
- Karbalevich, Valeriy (2010), *Aleksandr Lukashenko. Politicheskiy portret* (Moscow: Partizan).
- Klinke, Ian (2007), 'The European Union's Strategic Non-Engagement in Belarus Challenging the Hegemonic Notion of the EU as a Toothless Value Diffuser', *Perspectives. The Central European Review of International Affairs*, 14 (27), 25-43.
- Lallemand, Jean-Charles and Symaniec, Virginie (2007), *Biélorussie: mécanique d'une dictature* (Paris: Les Petits matins).
- Lang, Kai-Olaf and Koopmann, Martin (2011), 'The EU and Belarus - a relationship with reservations', in Hans-Georg Wieck and Stephan Malerius (ed.), *Belarus and the EU: from isolation towards cooperation* (Vilnius: Centre for European Studies & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung), 22-33, www.kas.de/belarus/en/publications/28814/.

Marin, Anaïs (2011a), 'How to deal with an unfriendly neighbour? Belarus in the Eastern Partnership: five Steps for a paradigm shift', *EaPCommunity Analysis* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies), 20 October, www.easternpartnership.org/publication/politics/2011-10-20/how-deal-unfriendly-neighbour-belarus-eastern-partnership-five-steps.

--- (2011b), 'Divided we fail. Time for the EU to speak with one voice to Belarus', *FIIA Briefing Paper* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs), No. 85 (June), www.fii.fi/en/publication/196/.

--- (2011c), 'Saving what can be: what the Eastern Partnership could (still) bring to Belarus', *Eastern Partnership Review* (Tallinn: Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership), No. 3 (November), www.eceap.eu/ul/Review_No3.pdf.

--- (2011d), 'From breach to bridge: the Augustów canal, an ecotourism destination across the EU's border with Belarus', *Articulo - Journal of Urban Research*, 6, <http://articulo.revues.org/1705#text>.

Marples, David (1999), *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers).

Matskevich, Svetlana (2011), 'Education in Belarus: reform and cooperation with the EU', in Hans-Georg Wieck and Stephan Malerius (ed.), *Belarus and the EU: from isolation towards cooperation* (Vilnius: Centre for European Studies & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung), 53-69, www.kas.de/belarus/en/publications/28814/.

May, Marie-Lena (2011), 'How to deal with Belarus? New Approaches in EU-Belarus Relations', *DGAPanalyse kompakt* (Berlin: German Council on Foreign Relations), No. 2 (May), <https://dgap.org/en/think-tank/publikationen/dgapanalyse-kompakt/how-deal-belarus>.

Popescu, Nicu and Wilson, Andrew (2011), 'Turning Presence into Power: Lessons from the Eastern neighbourhood', *ECFR Policy Brief* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations), No. 31 (May), www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR31_ENP_AW.pdf.

Portela, Clara (2011), 'The European Union and Belarus: Sanctions and partnership', *Comparative European Politics*, 9 (4-5), 486-505.

Řiháčková, Věra (2010), 'A long and winding road? The quest for 'flexible' EU democracy funding', *PASOS Policy Brief* (Prague: Policy Association for an Open Society), No. 2 (April), <http://pasos.org/137/a-long-and-winding-road-the-quest-for-flexible-eu-democracy-funding/>.

Rotman, David and Veremeeva, Natalia (2011), 'Belarus in the Context of the Neighbourhood Policy: Between the EU and Russia', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 27 (1), 73-98.

Solonenko, Iryna & ali. (2011), 'European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries', (Kiev: International Renaissance Foundation in cooperation with the Open Society Foundations), Pilot edition, www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/euro/eap%20index%20pilot%20edition.pdf.

Vadalazhskaya, Tatiana and Yahorau, Andrei (2011), 'Strategy-2012: from a dialogue among democratic forces to a dialogue with the regime', *Policy Paper* (Minsk: Center for European Transformation & EuroBelarus), February, http://old.eurobelarus.info/images/stories/2011_February_Strategy_12_eng.pdf.

Wilson, Andrew (2011), *Belarus. The last European dictatorship* (Yale University Press).

Yahorau, Andrei (2011), 'Civil society: an analysis of the situation and directions for reform', in Hans-Georg Wieck and Stephan Malerius (ed.), *Belarus and the EU: from isolation towards cooperation* (Vilnius: Centre for European Studies & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung), 34-52, www.kas.de/belarus/en/publications/28814/.

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT

Role

Policy departments are research units that provide specialised advice to committees, inter-parliamentary delegations and other parliamentary bodies.

Policy Areas

Foreign Affairs
Human Rights
Security and Defence
Development
International Trade

Documents

Visit the European Parliament website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies>



ISBN 978-92-823-3738-7
DOI 10.2861/80947

ISBN 978-92-823-3738-7

