

# Foreign Policy, Security, and Education Policy in Belarus



Abstracts of analytical papers  
by Belarusian researchers



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# Challenges in Belarusian foreign policy and the post-Soviet area post-2008

## Summary

This research was conducted with support by the Mott Foundation and was jointly implemented by the Pontis Foundation and the Ostrogorski Centre.

## Introduction

This study aims toward a better understanding of the political relations in the former Soviet Union through an analysis of the individual parameters of regional cooperation and cooperation outside the bounds of the region, necessary for an evaluation of the challenges and opportunities in Belarusian foreign policy.

**Time frame:** 2008 – 2015

**Region and countries.** The main focus of the study will be directed toward the countries of the “Eastern Partnership”, as well as Belarus’ partners within the EEU (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan).

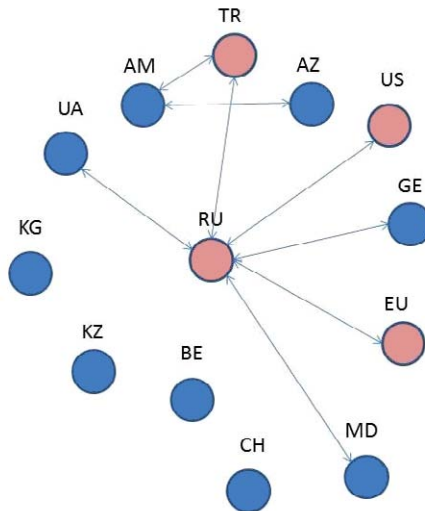
**External centers of power.** The dynamics of relations with Russia, the European Union, the US, China, and, in specific cases, Turkey will also be included in the analysis.

## I. Security issues and political cooperation.

**Lines of conflict.** The conflict network, topped by the countries analysed, where the presence of acute conflicts is represented by lines (Fig.1), is provided below.

Fig 1

Conflict network in the post-Soviet region (taking into account external actors), 2008–2015

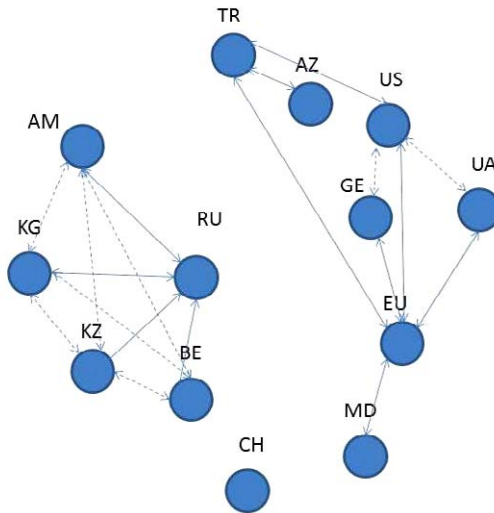


There is a total of eight lines of conflict, including 6 related to Russia. They feature conflicts between Russia and Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, the USA, the EU, and Turkey as well. It must be noted that Russia not only has open conflicts with three countries of the region, but in fact with all of the foreign countries, which have influence in the post-Soviet region, other than China.

**Lines of close cooperation.** All the countries of the analysed region, as well as the primary external players (except for China), combine to form two groups. The first group includes the countries associated with Russia within the CSTO and the EEU: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Fig. 2

Lines of close cooperation in the post-Soviet region

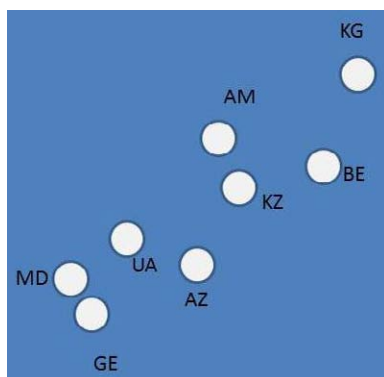


The second group of countries includes Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, as well as the US, the EU, and Turkey. The EU in this group takes center stage. Specific individual relations, such as Georgia-United States and Ukraine-United States relations should be noted as well.

The presence and stability of such groups may also be distinguished in an analysis of joint military exercises in the region (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3

Participation of post-Soviet countries in joint military exercises  
(the smaller the distance, the smaller the number of various countries that participated in such exercises).



**Potential of influence in the region.** Russia, featuring a range of allies in the region, is involved in a number of direct conflicts as well as one potential conflict. At the same time, the conflicts with Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova are more long-term. Wiggle room in relations with Azerbaijan is also limited due to its allied relations with Armenia. In addition, Russia finds itself in a conflict with other important players in the region – the US, the EU, and Turkey. It can be said that Russia has reached its peak of political influence and in fact features no prospects for the further expansion.

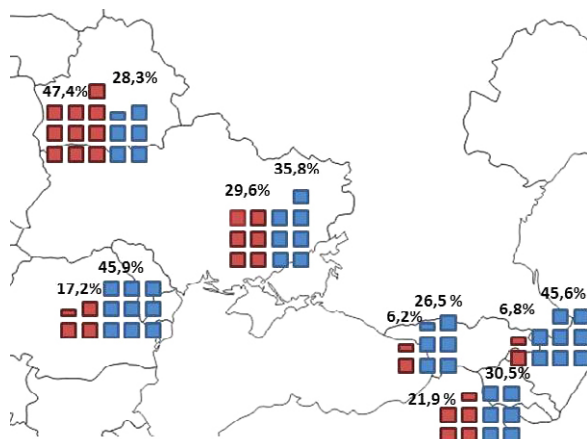
The EU and the US have no conflict relations with countries of the region except for Russia. Given the range of partners and allies they still have an opportunity for the expansion of their economic and political influence in what happens in Kazakhstan and Armenia.

## II. Economic relations and potential

**EU vs. Russia.** The figure reflects the average of the EU's and Russia's share in the turnover of individual countries in the region during 2008–2014 (see. Fig. 3). In this case, the average value was taken within the timeframe beginning in 2008 in order to reduce the impact of short-term factors in the analysis of the economic and political environment.

Fig. 4

The share of the EU (blue) and Russia (red) in the turnover of countries of the "Eastern Partnership", 2008–2014



It is worth mentioning the obvious leading economic positions of the EU. The EU has the greatest importance for Moldova and Azerbaijan, 45.9% and 45.6% respectively. The turnover share of the EU features the following values for the rest of the countries: Belarus (28.3%), Ukraine (35.8%), Armenia (27.4%), and Georgia (26.5%).

As already noted, Belarus features the largest turnover share, regarding Russia (47.4%). It varies within a range of 18–26% for three countries (Ukraine: 29.6%, Armenia: 22.9%, Moldova: 17.2%), meanwhile it is below 10% for two countries (Azerbaijan: 6.8% and Georgia: 6.3%).

**Exports and Imports.** The EU is an important sales market for products manufactured in countries of the region. The EU's share represents more than half (52.5%) of Azerbaijan's exports, meanwhile it represents about half of Moldova's exports (49.5%). The EU also buys 41.7% of Armenian production. This figure is 27.5% for Ukraine and 35.8% for Belarus. The lowest export share to the EU is in Georgia (21%).

The dominance of Russia as a sales market is most notable only in Belarus, which figure is approximately equal for Ukraine (22.5%). It should also be noted that in 2014 and 2015 this figure has decreased to 18.2% and 12.7% respectively. Armenia features a sufficiently high level (18.5%), although it is two times less than the EU. A similar situation may be observed for Moldova (24.4%), meanwhile the Russian share with respect to Azerbaijan's and Georgia's exports is minimal – 3.6% and 4.1% respectively.

Thus, in terms of the importance of the sales market, the EU has a clear advantage over Russia, in the cases of four out of six countries: Azerbaijan (by 17 times), Georgia (by five times), Armenia (double), and Moldova (double). The value of exports to Russia and the EU is approximately equal only in Belarus and Ukraine, taking into account the Russian advantage in Belarus and a persistent Russian drop in Ukraine.

Viewing imports separately, the EU share in it is approximately equal for all countries and is 27–33%. Moldova is the only exception with a figure of 44.5%. In regards to Russia, it features an advantage only in Belarus (56%), while there is a relative parity in Ukraine – 33% versus 39.5% for the EU. Meanwhile, when it comes to Moldova, the Russian share is two times less (14.2%). It is also two times less for Azerbaijan (16.1%) and five times less for Georgia (6.5%).

In summary, it can be stated that the EU boasts clear economic domination in the region. Whereby, this dominance not only pertains to total turnover and imports, technological advantage, and aggressive export policy, but also the EU's importance as a sales market. Russia prevails only in Belarus.

## Conclusions

1. The EU is the most significant economic force in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. The EU is Kazakhstan's main trade partner. In most cases, the EU is the primary economic partner and, more importantly, the most important sales market as well.
2. Russia can not compete with the EU in economic terms. It is still important, but nevertheless only a secondary force behind the EU. In some countries, including Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, Russia's value is equivalent to that of Turkey. Russia is the main economic partner only for Belarus.
3. Considering security and political cooperation, the positions of the EU/ US appear to be stronger than the positions of other players. The EU and the United States do not have any open conflict with any aqueous country in the region except Russia. They feature close partnership relations with Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan as well. Individual partnership relations with Kazakhstan and Armenia are under development. A normalisation of relations with Belarus has taken place.
4. Russia's position is limited. With regards to CSTO allies, it is still in conflicts with Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, the EU, the US, Turkey, and potentially Azerbaijan. In this situation, there are no clear opportunities it may exploit for external influence. The results, achieved within the CSTO/EEU may be considered the maximum influence it is capable of reaching.
5. Practical military cooperation through participation in military exercises confirms the schemes listed above. There is a range of CSTO countries, in which Russia



occupies a leading role, as well as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova aiming for cooperation with the EU/NATO. Kazakhstan and Armenia are also actively developing cooperation with NATO.

6. There have been positive dynamics (except the CIS) observed since 2008 in the field of cooperation with international and intergovernmental organisations. The EEU was established, the "Eastern Partnership" was launched, the EU has concluded three agreements on association (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia), as well as agreements on the expansion of partnership and cooperation (Kazakhstan). There was the normalisation of EU and US relations with Belarus. The countries have had an increased interest in the region for cooperating with the SCO.

## Recommendations

1. In the molding of Belarusian foreign policy, it should be taken into account that Belarus is the country that is most dependent on Russia out of all countries in the post-Soviet region in economic and politic terms. That signifies that the primary direction of Belarusian foreign policy should be the diversification and search for new balance in order to provide for the sustainable development of the state. Even remaining in a system of Eurasian integration, Belarus' level of political and economic dependence on Russia should not be higher than for other partner countries.
2. The determination of Belarusian foreign policy should be based on the fact that the EU dominates directly or indirectly in Eastern Europe, including its role as a sales market for finished products. Ignoring this fact may lead to significant economic losses, instability in economic development, and a technology gap.
3. Russia's foreign policy features a breadth of conflicts. Not only relations with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan are characterised by conflicts, but this also relates to other important forces in the region: the EU, the US, and Turkey. With an eye to minimise the negative effect of and prevent involvement in conflicts, Belarus should distance itself from Russia's foreign policy and strive to develop and deepen relations with all important countries. Especially considering that Belarus is far behind its partners within the CSTO/EEU in this area.
4. Belarus must develop mechanisms of individual cooperation with the EU, the US, NATO, China, and other partners, which may be a single counterweight to the relatively narrow EEU market as well as compensate for the limited political and military potential of the CSTO.

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# Belarusian-Russian relations in light of the conflict in Ukraine

(study summary)

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Minsk 2016

Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Kremlin has exerted aggressive efforts toward improved control over Belarus, which has yielded instead the opposite result - during the 2014-2015 biennium, the policies of the Belarusian government have grown more independent, as evidenced by its decrease in military dependence and refusal to establish a military base on Belarusian land; the decrease in the role of the Russian economy in Belarus; differences in the countries' foreign policy and media opinions; and conflicts between the political elites of both countries.

The reason for the misunderstanding has been that Belarusian authorities desire formal integration with economically strong and politically tolerant Russia, which has ceased to be so. Despite the closeness of the relationships and the formal construction of the "Union State", which also includes the current integration processes, in many ways Belarus and Russia are drifting apart<sup>1</sup>.

There are two reasons that explain this. First of all, the Kremlin's policy towards Ukraine has led to rethinking by Belarusian authorities of the range of possible steps that could possibly be taken in Russia against Belarus. Secondly, the decline of the Russian economy calls into question the Kremlin's role as the guarantor of prosperity in Belarus. In the context of the decline in prices of energy resources, the contraction of the domestic market, the drop in GDP, and international reserves in Russia, the diversification of the Belarusian economy has taken a turn from beautiful expectations toward vital necessity. In addition, a process of self recovery is still ongoing in Belarus, therefore its state institutions and foreign policy are becoming more independent of Russia.

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1 Valeria Kostyugova, 2010. Russian-Belarusian relations: conditions, status, prospects, <[http://belinstitute.eu/images/doc-pdf/Research\\_Kostiugova.pdf](http://belinstitute.eu/images/doc-pdf/Research_Kostiugova.pdf)> [accessed on 27 May 2016].

# Belarusian-Russian conflicts in light of the war in Ukraine

## Military disintegration: how to say “no” to an ally

Military cooperation has always been a “sacred cow” of Belarusian-Russian integration. The unified anti-aircraft system is one of the grounds for such determination<sup>2</sup>, which launched in 2016 according to statements by Russian military officers. The actual agreement itself on the establishment of this system was signed in 2009 and thus does not encompass anything new in the way of Russian-Belarusian military cooperation. It seems that the announcement of the system’s operation is designed to mitigate the refusal of Belarus to establish a Russian military airbase<sup>3</sup>.

Refusal to establish the air base reflects a broader trend of attempts to reduce Belarus’ military dependence<sup>4</sup>. The training of Belarusian military officers in Russia always mentally unified Belarusian and Russian troops, but as of now there is a decrease in the number of Belarusian military officers being trained in the Russian military academies – 447 for the past academic year and 374 this year. One and a half times less military officers participated in joint exercises “Union Shield” in 2015 than in “Union Shield 2011” or “West 2013” (~8 thousand military officers as opposed to ~12 thousand). Considering that previously exercises were almost impossible to perform without Russia, now Belarussian troopers are being practiced every year with Chinese military officers. China has generally been a notable military partner for Belarus. This has been most noticeable in the joint development of arms held between Minsk and Beijing as well as the rocket system “Polonaise” as an example.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Leonid Spatkay, 2015. *Belarus’ and Russia’s Air Defence System*, <<http://www.bsblog.info/regionalnaya-sistema-pvo-belarusi-i-rossii/>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

3 Siarhei Bohdan, 2016. *Does the Single Air Defence System Bring Belarus Closer to Russia?*, <<http://belarusdigest.com/story/does-single-air-defence-system-bring-belarus-closer-russia-25295>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

4 Siarhei Bohdan, 2015. *Belarus-Russia Military Cooperation: Can The Kremlin Dictate The Terms?*, <<http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-russia-military-cooperation-can-kremlin-dictate-terms-23814>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

5 Denis Lavnikovich 2015. *“Polonaise” with a Chinese accent*, <<http://www.bsblog.info/polonez-s-kitajskim-akcentom/>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

Fig. 1

Belarusian-Chinese military exercises in June 2015



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## Failure of the EEU and economic cooperation

The first year of the Eurasian Economic Union can hardly be called successful for Belarus. Firstly, the integration project has adopted almost all of the attributes of the Customs Union (about 600). About 2/3 of goods and services are excluded from the total EEU market through such mechanisms. Secondly, there has been decrease of economic interaction between the countries. According to the Eurasian Economic Commission, the trade of goods between Belarus and countries of the EEU reached in 2015 74.8% of the amount in 2014.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Eurasian Economic Commission, 2016. 'Mutual trade in goods. Statistics of the Eurasian Economic Union', Moscow.

Volume of goods exports of members of the Eurasian Economic Union to other countries of the union		
Country	Volume of exports in 2015 (\$ million)	Comparison of the volume in % of the volume of 2014 exports
Belarus	10,998.1	68.0 %
Russia	28,718.6	77.9 %
Kazakhstan	4,886.8	68.3 %
Armenia	236.6	73.0 %
Kyrgyzstan	539.7	84.7 %

Own based on: Eurasian Economic Commission, 2015. "Mutual trade in goods. Statistics of the Eurasian Economic Union", Moscow.

Thirdly, although Belarus has accepted incisive measures for Eurasian integration, including a tax increase on imported cars<sup>7</sup>, the regulations of the economic union serve the political purposes of Russia as evidenced by continued economic wars<sup>8</sup>. Fourth, the value of oil and gas, which has played a role as one of the most important motivators in the Belarus' accession to the EEU<sup>9</sup> has sharply decreased<sup>10</sup>.

## Differences in foreign policy

Russia's dangerous policy and economic decline has become one of most important motivators for the Belarusian authorities to normalise relations with the West. Data of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS)<sup>11</sup> show that since 2013 Belarus has intensified its relations with the European Union and the rate of contacts with the EU now exceeds its level of relations with Russia.

7 Prior to July 1, 2011, the duty on imported cars ranged from €0.35 to €5 per 1 cubic cm, depending on engine capacity. Since then, it became equal to the Russian duty - from € 3 to € 5.8.

8 In fairness, it should be noted that Eurasian integration itself mainly corresponds to the economic interests of Belarus.

9 Ryhor Astapenia, 2015. *Belarus and the Eurasian Economic Union: The view from Minsk*, <[Http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_belarus\\_and\\_the\\_eurasian\\_economic\\_union\\_the\\_view\\_from\\_minsk](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_belarus_and_the_eurasian_economic_union_the_view_from_minsk)> [accessed 27 May 2016]; Irina Tochitskaya, Robert Kirchner, 2014. *Belarus' participation in the Eurasian Economic Union*, <[Http://www.get-belarus.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/pp2014r05.pdf](http://www.get-belarus.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/pp2014r05.pdf)> [accessed 27 May 2016].

10 Belarus is almost 100 % dependent on Russia, as far as fuel supplies and energy resources are concerned.

11 The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies estimates every two months positive contacts between Belarus and other countries on a scale of 1 to 7 and the negative contacts on a scale of -1 to -7. The details of the methodology are presented at the end of each issue of "the Belarusian Foreign Policy Index": <<http://belinstitute.eu/be/analyticscomments/belarus-foreign-policy-index>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

**The intensity of the development of Belarus' foreign policy contacts during 2012–2015**

Vector	First half, 2012	Second half, 2012	First half, 2013	Second half, 2013	First half, 2014	Second half, 2014	First half, 2015	Second half, 2015
Russia	117	88	113	86	79	69	55	52
EU	-6	-1	49	66	49	69	65	69
China	11	48	32	49	41	34	48	64
"Developing" countries	38	24	45	44	45	54	42	33
Ukraine	3	11	8	14	21	28	14	15

Own work based on the "Foreign Policy Index" of the BISS:

<<http://belinstitute.eu/be/analyticcomments/belarus-foreign-policy-index>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

The BISS data reflect that Belarus began normalisation of relations with the European Union and building relations with "developing countries"<sup>12</sup> at the start of 2013, together with the support of Ukraine's European integration.<sup>13</sup> This is evidence of the fact that the increased dialogue with the West began not through the expansionist policy of Russia but rather for its own reasons. Although, of course, the increase in differences between the foreign policy of Minsk and Moscow for 2014–2015 occurred largely due to the Kremlin's policy.

## Why there will be no divorce between Belarus and Russia

Despite the disintegration phenomena in relations between Moscow and Minsk, Belarus has not taken any fundamental measures for a geopolitical turn toward the West. A large rupture of relations would seem even more unrealistic. First of all, despite Russia's decreased role, Belarus still remains significantly dependent on Russia in terms of crediting, "subsidies" from Russia, and access to their common market, and cheap oil and gas. Secondly, Belarus remains "the most important country for Russia in Europe in terms of strategic importance"<sup>14</sup>, therefore the Kremlin would not allow a full disintegration of the countries. Thus, maintenance of close relations

12 Andrey Eliseev, 2015. *Belarus and developing countries: in search of new "Venezuelas"*, <[Http://nmbny.eu/yearbook/2014/page11.html](http://nmbny.eu/yearbook/2014/page11.html)> [accessed 27 May 2016].

13 Ryhor Astapenia, 2013. *Lukashenka Helps Bring Ukraine Closer to the EU*, <[Http://belarusdigest.com/story/lukashenka-helps-ukraine-get-closer-eu-15779](http://belarusdigest.com/story/lukashenka-helps-ukraine-get-closer-eu-15779)> [accessed 27 May 2016].

14 Dmitri Trenin, 2001. *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization*, Moscow, p. 160

serves the interests of both countries, despite the fact that these interests seem robust and correspond to Belarus and Russia, no matter who governs them.

For the time being, the alienation process will continue, which is partially due to generation changes within societies. The formation of the political class in Belarus, which is accustomed to sovereign power in terms of independent decision making, has been the most significant change.

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# Conditioning factors in entrepreneurial activities of Belarusian students

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NATALJA APANASOVICH

## 1. Introduction

Stimulating entrepreneurship within universities and the consequent development of entrepreneurial universities against the backdrop of global reduction of governmental financial support<sup>1</sup> is one of the current foci of academics, university authorities and policy makers from all around the world.

Observing the role of universities in promoting entrepreneurship and creating entrepreneurship capital in the USA and Western Europe, policy makers in many countries with transition economies, such as the Republic of Belarus, have realized that such entrepreneurial transformation at universities is needed to respond to the challenges of the global knowledge economy. However, unlike many western higher education systems, universities in post-Soviet economies are being transformed not by state actions, but, paradoxically, by state inaction.

In this regard, the aim of this paper is to explore the influence of certain organizational factors in entrepreneurial activities of students in the post-Soviet context.

## 2. Qualitative and quantitative analysis

University-related factors such as an entrepreneurial environment within a university and entrepreneurial learning may change attitudes, perceived norms and behavioural control of students and thereby influence their intention towards entrepreneurship<sup>2</sup> through teaching, inspiring and developing a positive image of venture creators. Therefore, universities are requested to play a critical role in creating an environment that encourages students to bear uncertainty, promotes alertness and risk-taking perception as well as the propensity to evaluate and exploit business opportunities.

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- 1 Kwiek, M. (2001). Social and cultural dimensions of the transformation of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. *Higher Education in Europe*, 26(3), 399 – 410.
  - 2 Fayolle, A., Gailly, B., & Lassas-Clerc, N. (2006). Assessing the impact of entrepreneurship education programmes: a new methodology. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 30(9), 701–720.

Due to the complexity of the phenomenon under consideration in the context of transition economies, a case study methodology seems the most appropriate for our analysis. Specifically, a single case study method with a mixed data collection approach was selected to explore the factors that condition entrepreneurial activities at the Belarusian State University (BSU). We have combined case study methodology and Structural Equation Modelling to embrace two levels of analysis: organizational (the university) and individual (students) levels. We have benefitted from the survey of 316 BSU students that was based on the GUESSS methodology<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. Results

Several circumstances evinced in our analysis make the BSU “entrepreneurial” contribution more modest than it could have been based on its resources and capabilities.

The most important lessons learned from the qualitative study are as follows:

1. Being a leading Belarusian university, BSU has at its disposal the necessary human, physical, financial and commercial resources to create a benevolent entrepreneurial environment. However, BSU is not capable and lacks role models to harness these resources for entrepreneurial organization and the fostering of an entrepreneurial attitude and intention among students and faculty.
2. There are no clear and generally accessible mechanisms, procedures and support measures to transform abundant knowledge, ideas and intention into entrepreneurial activities.
3. Even though there are some scattered “entrepreneurial hubs” such as the School of Business and Management of Technology (SBMT), the Start-up Center etc., their influence on the university environment is still negligible.
4. Moreover, entrepreneurship as a mission, a part of a strategy or an approach to current activities is not acknowledged at the top management level.
5. Trying to respond to social and economic changes, BSU still enjoys its outstanding reputation and state resources mostly available to maintain the status quo – confirming the notion that flagships of higher education systems can be slower in transforming their governance, culture and attitudes.
6. Since the curricula of the majority of BSU students do not include any entrepreneurship or business courses providing them with at least some relevant knowledge, the high proportion of potential entrepreneurs may not be transformed into entrepreneurship capital.

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3 Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students’ Survey GUESSS is an international research project using a geographical and temporal comparison to investigate the entrepreneurial intention and activity of students. Website: <http://guesssurvey.org/>

Fig.1  
BSU organizational factors



In summary, Figure 1 aggregates the findings of our qualitative analysis demonstrating both positive (in blue) and negative (in red) constituents of the university-related factors.

The most important results obtained from the quantitative analysis is that entrepreneurial learning and a perceived entrepreneurial environment at BSU are significantly and positively related to 3 of the most important predictors of entrepreneurial intention, namely the attitude towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. This implies that the university environment at BSU significantly and positively influences entrepreneurial activities of students.

## 4. Implications

Based on our discussion, we propose several initiatives to be implemented at BSU to develop an entrepreneurship-friendly environment at university level.

First and foremost, BSU needs to adopt and coordinate an apparent and shared strategy across its critical activities: teaching, research and production to integrate organizational units. A strategic plan should empower entrepreneurial actions, synergies and cooperation among individuals, organizational units as well as university-business relations.

Next, peripheral units such as educational establishments and innovative enterprises, which are the nimblest structures, should be treated as contributors to university development in a broad sense rather than income generators.

In the same vein, BSU should be concerned about the development of the periphery. Thus, extensive support (IP management, business planning, marketing, PR etc.) should be given to entrepreneurial teams (including students and alumni) attracting and motivating the participation of existing units.

In addition, BSU should concentrate its efforts on providing all members of the academic community with entrepreneurship-specific education to equip them with relevant knowledge and competences as well as with entrepreneurial alertness and risk-taking assets.

Similarly, SBMT can be considered as an umbrella organization integrating and coordinating the entrepreneurship-related activities of organizational units and the university in general in pursuit of BSU strategic goals.

Another rudiment of the Soviet higher education system that should certainly be pruned is the promotion and remuneration system, which still only focuses on teaching and research activities.

BSU is not able to manage such striking changes by itself. Firstly, it needs state approval and support. Secondly, only foreign universities that have experienced

such transformation can draw a road map for the transformation and adaptation to a global knowledge based economy. Consequently, a substantial effort should be made at BSU to participate in international programs and projects targeted at enhancing higher education systems.

At the state level, there also several important implications drawn from the present study.

First, the state may consider opportunities for creating preferential terms for university-based enterprises. This may stimulate business creation by students and faculty as well as bring established businesses to a university for spinoff development.

Second, the state may allocate resources not only for research activities, but also for business development including joint ventures with the business-sector. Examples of these initiatives are inviting mentors and consultants to launch university-based ventures and reducing taxes for university hi-tech spinoffs.

Third, the state should promote entrepreneurship-oriented educational trajectories that enable students and faculty from different departments to work together on real life projects.

Fourth, the state should stimulate the development of entrepreneurship centres at universities. A certain share of budget appropriation has to be invested in such units for which specific and measurable goals should be set up.

Fifth, from a policy perspective, further efforts need to be made to extend entrepreneurship education or some facets of it to all specialties in order to equip university graduates with the competences, attitudes and motivation for being leaders in innovative development.

## 5. Conclusions

The mandate of universities to play an active role in fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and intention among the academic community is arguably more critical in the context of post-Soviet economies and, in particular, Belarus, which are characterized by an unsupportive institutional environment and an underdeveloped entrepreneurial sector.

The main contribution of this paper consists of demonstrating how organizational factors shape a university's entrepreneurial environment in the context of post-Soviet economies and how this environment influences the entrepreneurial intentions of students.

The general conclusion to be drawn from this study is that underdeveloped entrepreneurial and business competences and the Soviet heritage still visible in attitudes and values restrain the employment of the abundant human and physical resources

of BSU to contribute to economic development not only by educating job-seekers but by fostering job-creators and transforming research activity into economic value.

To conclude, BSU, as with all Belarusian universities, needs to take serious strides to catch up with Western universities in terms of creating entrepreneurial ecosystems and thereby being contributors to the socioeconomic development of regions and countries.

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Areas of expertise: modes of innovation, innovation systems, SME innovative performance, SME R&D management, SME knowledge management.

# Elements of Neutrality in Belarusian Foreign Policy and National Security Policy

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## Foreword

It was around 2006 that the first signs of neutrality-oriented decisions appeared both in the sphere of foreign and security policies of the Belarusian government and this trend has gradually increased in the recent decade, especially after 2013. For a long time, the elements of neutrality were interpreted in another vein: as Minsk moving back and forth between Moscow and the West or tactically balancing different directions of its policy.

However, as elements of neutrality became a stable component of Belarusian foreign policy and national security policy by the mid-2010s, the question about neutrality as an option for the future development of the Belarusian state has arisen.

Neutrality needs a definition. For the purposes of this study, it shall be defined as policies aimed at maintaining distance from political and military blocks and parties to conflicts, although that distance may differ depending on specific circumstances. It may include even some formal membership in associations of political and military integration, as well as bilateral security-related arrangements as long as they do not crucially affect the political position of the country.

Given the extent of Belarus-Russian entanglement, this paper focuses on differences between Minsk and Moscow as the reference point in study. All Belarusian attempts to assert neutrality involve Minsk's positioning itself with regards to Moscow's policies.

The study looks into the issues on which Minsk took a line which differed with Russia without siding with its opponents. The paper analyses them in a broader international context and assesses how opportunist or principled they might be. The paper concludes with the examination of the prospect of emerging Belarusian neutrality and offers some political recommendations.

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## Elements of neutrality in Belarusian foreign policy and national security policy

To assess the role of neutrality in Belarusian policies, this paper identifies major decisions and developments in Belarusian foreign policy of the recent decade which fit into the pattern of neutrality. These decisions and developments are then characterised concerning their importance for the major parties involved: Belarus, Russia and the West.

In Speaking about the importance of an issue for a specific party, I mean how much this issue *per se* matters for this party. Thus, for instance conflict in Eastern Ukraine is an important issue for Belarus because it creates a direct threat to it and hence Minsk perhaps primarily responds to the conflict on the basis of its immediate interests. The Belarusian government can act on such an issue and is even willing to accept a backlash in relations with other countries, even Russia.

On the contrary, for Minsk a refusal to give up contact with Turkey *per se* means, unlike for Moscow, little or no immediate interests of Belarus are involved in that situation. In such a situation, where there is little immediate importance for Belarus but significant immediate importance for Russia and Minsk chooses to refuse to support Russia, this reflects a principled decision away from the alliance with Russia

As follows from the study, in the recent decade the Belarusian government has pursued its own policies which indeed differed from Russia's on a number of major issues relating to international politics and/or bilateral relations. Since 2008 Minsk has been willing to regularly ignore Moscow on foreign policy issues which have had high importance for Russia. However, some of these issues had little importance for the West and cannot be interpreted in the terms of Minsk playing Russia and the West against each other.

Moreover, in some of these cases Minsk avoided siding not only with Russia but also refused to support its opponent, i.e. Belarus did not change sides or switch loyalties yet tried to stay neutral and find a middle way. The situation in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea can be two cases in point.

Although the question of extent, mechanisms and dynamics of Belarusian neutrality remains to be investigated in a larger study, even this brief analysis indicates a) a constant presence of major elements of neutrality in Belarusian foreign policy in the period 2006–2016; b) its emergence in 2006–2007, strengthening in 2008 and major rise after 2013; c) the Belarusian government's tendency to enhance these elements to enable the nation to shape the contours of a fully-fledged and formalised neutrality.



*National security policy.* The national security policy expectedly provides a more mixed picture as far as the general striving for neutrality is concerned. Belarus still participates in numerous military agreements with Russia and is party to the CSTO. Minsk still hosts two Russian technical military facilities and in recent years it has been negotiating the possibility of hosting a Russian air base.

However, since the early 2010s, and especially since 2013, there has been a clear tendency towards gaining some distance from Russia in the military sphere. As part of this tendency, some developments have emerged which can be qualified as a cautious movement toward neutrality (diversifying international contacts in the defence domain, a refusal to host a Russian airbase and other forces in Belarus, ignoring the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, etc.).

Still, Minsk has had to be extremely cautious in distancing itself from Moscow in the military sphere due to the sensitivity of the issues involved. Russia has vital security interests related to Belarus, in particular those which result from the immediate vicinity of Belarus to the core Russian regions and capital Moscow. The Belarusian army are also greatly dependent on Russia in many technical, doctrinal, historical and even human respects and any radical moves could easily cause extreme consequences.

## Future of Belarusian neutrality

Belarus has effectively started to implement a neutrality clause in its Constitution. That does not mean automatic acceptance of this neutrality by others. In the eyes of many Russian politicians Belarus can either be with Moscow on all issues or against it. It cannot simply be an ally with its own position on some issues, even if this is a neutral position which does not oppose Russia.

This is no wonder, given the importance of Belarus for Russia's security and Russian suspicions and the fact that neutrality might be used as a cover for drifting toward the West. But the problem is that Belarusian neutrality might not be recognised by its other partners either, nor in the West.

Nonetheless, neutrality may provide a reason to fight for at least a significant part of Belarusian elites, including those currently in control of the state. Lukashenka and other Belarusian officials have demonstrated that Belarus refuses to follow Putin's policies which have already entangled Russia in a risky confrontation with numerous countries. As political commentator Valer Karbalevich noticed recently, "Russia, which has been a source of support, has turned into a source of problems. It is time to swim away from [Putin's drowning] *Titanic*."

That would be a difficult task given the irreplaceable role played by Russia in the Belarusian economy. Nevertheless, it is possible. Minsk has already succeeded in

distancing itself from risky endeavours by Russia and other countries in international politics by referring to international law.

In order to succeed in that endeavour, Belarusian politicians should start approaching neutrality as a serious long-term option of national development. An appropriate neutrality model should be constructed mostly *ad hoc*, taking into account national and regional circumstances and not emulating neutrality models of other countries.

Minsk cannot continue constructing its neutrality without an additional sophisticated conceptual framework however, this should not be prescriptive. On the contrary, it should explain what has already been done, help the government make neutrality acceptable for Belarus' neighbours – first of all Russia. It should also help convince them that Belarusian neutrality is just that – a refusal to join confrontation – and not just a trick to hide the fact that Belarus is drifting to another block.

Explanation, certainly, is not enough, and Minsk should also look for appropriate arrangements with foreign governments and consolidate these through explicit agreements. In particular, Minsk has to accommodate vital Russia's security and other interests. Last but not least, constructing neutrality requires more pluralistic and participatory governance, because only in this way the national consensus on neutrality can be achieved and maintained. Without such consensus – joined by major domestic political forces, Belarusian neutrality will not be convincing for foreign actors.

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# Revisiting Non-Formal Education in Belarus

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## 1. Introduction

In most countries non-formal education is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider, which seeks to complement formal education within the process of lifelong learning of individuals.<sup>1</sup> In Belarus, however, non-formal education exists in a restrictive environment without any support from the state or business and relies primarily on western donors. This makes Belarus different compared to other European countries, where civil society is viewed as a partner of the state in delivering public goods and sustaining communities.

The main purpose of this paper is to recommend how to make non-formal education in Belarus more efficient. The recommendations are based on interviews with non-formal education instructors and students and the analysis of literature on the state, purpose and trends in non-formal education in Belarus. Interviews have been conducted with leaders of three academic non-formal education projects – Belarusian Collegium, the Flying University and ECLAB, as well as students of these projects.

## 2. The role of non-formal education in Belarus

Social sciences and humanities in Belarus saw a steep decline after the consolidation of the authoritarian regime in the late 1990s. The authorities established ideological control over university disciplines, which have particular significance in the interpretation of political reality, such as political science, history, sociology, philosophy,

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1 Schneider, Silke L., 2013. 'The International Standard Classification of Education 2011', in Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund (ed.) *Class and Stratification Analysis (Comparative Social Research, Volume 30)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.365 – 379.

journalism and economy.<sup>2</sup> Purges of dissenting academics became common place in universities in the 2000s<sup>3</sup> and ideological classes were introduced throughout the educational system.

In this situation spreading non-dogmatic and non-politicised knowledge became an essential task of non-formal education institutions. Academic non-formal education providers also acted as harbours for academics and were dismissed from their universities for political reasons. With very limited resources, particularly compared to state universities, non-formal education providers managed to make education attractive outside state-run institutions.<sup>4</sup>

The authorities, at least until the past few years, have been cultivating many Soviet traditions, preserving the status quo rather than promoting reforms, strengthening ties with Russia rather than the European Union. In an environment where the state does little to shape the national identity and where until recently rather pursued a clear Russification policy, non-formal education projects play the role of transmitters of pro-Belarusian national and European identity.

This is why one viewpoint is that civil society in Belarus should cultivate a new Belarusian civic identity on a national level, which includes promoting the study of Belarusian history, a wider use of the Belarusian language, understanding what makes Belarus different from other countries and its uniqueness in the European context.

Although Belarusian society is relatively homogeneous when it comes to ethnic and racial composition (over 80 % of people are Belarusian), there is no consensus about basic values. One part of the society is in favour of a strong state and does not appreciate the role that democracy and market economy can play in society. The other part of the society strongly believes in the need for democratisation, integration with the European Union and liberalisation. One of the goals of non-formal education institutions in Belarus is to increase the number of people who have a democratic mentality and to give people the necessary skills to live in a contemporary society.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Kazakievič, Andrej, 'Empiryčnyja dasljedavanni Bielarusi dazvoliać pieraadolic' situacyju pieryfieryi', 13 August 2011, <[http://neurope.eu/tables/2011/07/13/andrei\\_kazakevich\\_%E2%80%999Cempiryčnyja\\_dasljedavanni\\_bielarusi\\_dazvoljats\\_peraadolets\\_situa](http://neurope.eu/tables/2011/07/13/andrei_kazakevich_%E2%80%999Cempiryčnyja_dasljedavanni_bielarusi_dazvoljats_peraadolets_situa)> [accessed 15 May 2016].

3 Smok, Vadzim, 'Belarusian Academics Sacked For Writing Books And Fairy Tales', *Belarus Digest*, 12 October 2012, <<http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarusian-academics-sacked-writing-books-and-fairy-tales-11658>> [accessed 15 May 2016].

4 Borowska, Paula, 'Non-Formal Education In Belarus: Unleashing The Civil Society Potential', *Belarus Digest*, 18 November 2014, <<http://belarusdigest.com/story/non-formal-education-belarus-unleashing-civil-society-potential-20186>> [accessed 10 April 2016].

5 Vialička, Ulad, 2004. 'Niefarmalnaja adukacyja doroslych u bielaruskim trecim siektary: asablivasci razvicia', *Adukatar*, No. 1., P.4

Finally, the state higher education system in Belarus is often detached from the real needs of the market; this is where non-formal education can fill the gap.<sup>6</sup> Helping to develop new skills could be the logical aim of non-formal education providers.

### 3. Problems of non-formal education in Belarus

One of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of civic education in Belarus is legislative and factual inequality of education institutions.<sup>7</sup> State bodies treat non-formal education initiatives with suspicion even when they deal with apolitical topics, which in no way contradict the authorities. This is in contrast to most countries where the state financially supports non-formal education.<sup>8</sup>

Another problem which all non-formal education projects face relates to funding. Raising funds inside Belarus is extremely difficult, because of the restrictive political environment. Those who work in the area of non-formal education have to rely increasingly on foreign aid and in the light of very unfavourable treatment of foreign gratuitous aid their activities often remain non-transparent.

In Belarus NGOs have been experiencing difficulties in getting external funding for activities other than democratisation and political activism. Western donors have had a rather short-sighted approach to democratising Belarus and usually were oriented towards political change through overthrowing the government or training political activists and parties.

One of the problems regarding the scope of non-formal education in Belarus is its excessive concentration in the capital. Most activity happens in Minsk and even regional centres with a few hundred thousand inhabitants have few opportunities to attend such studies.

### 4. Recommendations

Many Belarusian practitioners agree that the strategy of non-formal education in Belarus should have three consecutive actions – Desovietisation, Belarusisation and Europeanisation.<sup>9</sup> However, it is also important to develop skills for people to operate successfully in a market economy.

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6 'Adukacyja, navučannie, asveta ŭ trecim sektary: stan i perspektyvy razvicia', 2005, *Adukatar*, No. 4, P. 3.

7 Matskevich, Svetlana, 2006. 'Istoria i aktualii grazhdanskogo obrazovania v Belarusi. Pragmatika, paradigmatica, sintagmatika', *Adukatar*, No. 7, P. 9.

8 See, for example, cases of developing countries in Mehboob, Dada and others, 2006. *Synergies between formal and non-formal education: an overview of good practices*, UNESCO.

9 Kalitenia, Leonid, 2012. 'Perezagruzka grazhdanskogo obrazovania, kratkoe osmyslenie programy "Grazhdanstvennost.by"', *Adukatar*, No. 22, P. 22 – 23.

Charging fees for courses offering practical skills can help non-formal education providers alleviate one of their main problems namely – the lack of funds. Current students of non-formal education projects demonstrate a readiness to pay for education that helps them become financially independent, develop entrepreneurial skills and acquire new competences.

According to one view, the key needs of NGOs in the field of civic education in Belarus include the need for an increased number and quality of professional trainers, better organisational development of NGOs and networks of civic education, particularly at the regional level.<sup>10</sup> This is why it is important to focus on the multiplier effect, meaning to focus on those who could spread the knowledge and skills further and who have functional access to a wider audience. These groups include school-teachers, university academics, social workers, doctors and so on.<sup>11</sup>

Working more actively with traditional media and social media to make non-formal education more fashionable and explain its usefulness for state institutions is essential. A modern and well-structured website and active accounts in social media are a must for any project that seeks to reach young people.

Non-formal education providers can boost their potential through building effective partnerships with state institutions, NGOs and business. Although the Belarusian state remains quite a reluctant and suspicious partner, emerging cases indicate that the authorities are increasingly open to engagement with civil society in areas of mutual interest.

If recognition of non-formal education by Belarusian authorities or higher education institutions in Belarus remains difficult for political reasons, it could be worth exploring such recognition with education institutions abroad, particularly those which run Belarus-related programmes. Obtaining a certificate from a recognised higher education institution may carry more prestige than non-formal education.

Given that Belarus is one of the leaders in offshore software development<sup>12</sup> and has one of the highest European fixed broadband subscriptions as a percentage of population, it would be a logical step for providers to use the Internet and other new technologies in education. Technology could play a particularly useful role in shaping partnership relations with universities in the European Union, which could validate and recognise the knowledge obtained in Belarus, if official Belarusian universities are reluctant to do so for ideological or other reasons.

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10 Zhurakovskiy, Valeriy and others, 2013. *Analiz sektora Respubliki Belarus', subjecty kotorogo zani-maiutsia grazhdanskim obrazovaniem*, Office for European Expertise and Communication, Minsk, P. 45.

11 Chernov, Viktor, 2004. 'Regionalnye uchitelskie iniciativy kak subjekt grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v Belarusi,' *Adukatar*, No. 2, P. 19.

12 Volha Charnysh, 'Belarus – An Outsourcing Haven?' 2 September 2014 <<http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-outsourcing-haven-19134>>, [accessed 19 May 2016].

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# Modernization of higher education in the Republic of Belarus: social sciences and humanities

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## 1. Acknowledgements

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## 2. Introduction

The first decade of the millennium was marked in Belarus by “optimization” of teaching humanities in higher education. It brought radical cut in hours of teaching social sciences and humanities. Since the academic year 2012/2013 major transition took place in training in a number specialisms in the four-year programs, taking into account the emergence of graduate and undergraduate degrees.

The most significant changes took place in higher education institutions with technical specialism where modular system was introduced in social sciences and humanities: social sciences and humanities are taught as integrated modules that are linked to the following subjects: philosophy and foundations of psychology and pedagogy, economic theory and sociology, political science and the foundations of Belarusian state ideology, and history of Belarus in the context of European civilization.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Educational standard of higher education. Level 1. The cycle of social and humanitarian disciplines. <http://nihe.bsu.by/index.php/ru/norm-doc> (Accessed: 21.05.2016.)

2012 brought an introduction of electives in social sciences and humanities, though the choice is very limited. At universities, humanities, despite the cut in teaching hours, were left more free to develop their courses.

The changes in the education system were advocated to the public through an argument of Belarus joining the Bologna Process. Following lengthy negotiations, Belarus was accepted in the Bologna process in May 2015, under certain caveats. There is a road map that highlights the need to provide “academic freedom and institutional autonomy” to Belarusian universities.

Independent experts and academics at state institutions have expressed criticism with regard to what is currently taught in social sciences and humanities in Belarus. Experts from the state institutions responsible for the development of the reform, however, argue that the reduction in the humanities passes “international standards.”

*This study gives voice to academics directly engaged in teaching of social sciences and humanities in higher education institutions in Belarus.* It attempts to identify the attitude among teachers and students towards a number of aspects related to the system of teaching social sciences and humanities in higher education institutions, and to the changes: the specific formation of educational plans and programs in terms of changes, the process of communication between teachers and students in the context of the reduced teaching hours, and the teaching methods.

The study particularly focused on teaching the subjects included in the educational standard that have been exposed to the greatest changes (particularly in technical colleges): philosophy, sociology, history, cultural studies, psychology, pedagogy, etc..

The study was included five focus groups consisting of students, teachers and graduates of eleven Belarusian higher educational institutions, including two of the leading universities in the country – Belarusian State University and Belarusian National Technical University.

### 3. The main issues in teaching humanities and social sciences: analysis of focus groups

1. Ideas about the system of human knowledge, the role of humanities in the society, mission of university consist of theses, partly borrowed from the Soviet era (with its ideas of “fundamental education” and “Enlightenment mission of” the importance of humanities for “intelligent person” and “fully developed personality”) and from the post-Soviet neo-liberal conceptions of universities, as market entities that provide “educational services”. In the latter case, the mission of a university and the importance of education take a wholly utilitarian character. Hence the emergence

of the extreme points of view about the place of humanities and social sciences in higher education – by denying them the need of “sacralization”.

2. The study has showed that the implementation of educational reforms focused on the Bologna process, in conjunction with the legacy of the Soviet system of higher education, leading to specific results and “hybrid” forms of educational practices that do not provide the desired results – improving the quality of education, accessibility, etc.
3. The legacy of the Soviet system of education has not been critically reviewed in Belarus. The new practices related to the Bologna process were mechanically incorporated into the old system. The two approaches are likely interfere with each other.

The participants of the focus groups of teachers believe that the transition to a two-tier system in Belarus (the transition to a four-year training) resulted in a decrease in the quality of higher education and, in particular, the level of teaching. Reduced hours led to a significant simplification of the content of lessons. Teachers have little effect on curriculum development and programs.

All students in the focus groups believe that the freedom of choice of courses for students is very relative in their universities.

The participants of the focus groups of teachers believe that the quality of education is only secured by administrative measures.

The criticisms raised by the student focus group identified a limited number of hours dedicated to the study of foreign languages and humanities. They also showed skeptical or even negative attitude to the modular system. The respondents also said that the nobody teaches writing academic texts and, if such a course is available, it is taught merely as a formality.

Speaking of the forms in which most classes are held in humanities, the respondents referred to the traditional form of a lecture and seminar. This discontent among students arose from the fact that most of lectures are delivered as dictation and seminars involve teachers reading written answers prepared beforehand.

1. One of the outcomes of the study is the criticism arising among students and teachers about communication between teachers and students.
2. Communication with teachers is, according to student focus groups, quite asymmetrical, hierarchical in nature. This communication model reflects the overall “discipline” and “bureaucratic” oriented approach throughout the higher education system: the idea of control over teachers and students implies vertical rather than horizontal relationship model.

Belarus has a significant and indeed excessive degree of political, ideological, bureaucratic and economic control over the system of higher education.

A separate aspect of communication and education process is associated with gender dimension and stereotypes that arise in learning and teaching environment. The stereotypes are established and are at times also manifested by sexual harassment. Belarus has no legal mechanisms and methods to solve such problems at universities (public hearing and court statements).

## 4. Recommendations

The content of educational policy, the task of which is modernization of higher education, should be negotiated between all stakeholders – the government, experts, public initiatives, teachers, students, employers, parents, etc.. The key topics for the dialogue include the legacy of the Soviet education system, the results of reforms of the recent years, a reflection on the mission of a university, and the role of humanities.

Courses in social and humanities ought to be adjusted and brought in sync with contemporary requirements. One way to achieve this is to conduct an independent examination of the programs, courses and content of individual subject areas with the assistance of international experts. At the moment, a set of courses and program content is determined by the already established conservative structure of departments and courses. Most teachers are afraid of losing jobs and are unwilling to participate in the reform process (including in the Bologna system, etc.), as the only direction these changes in Belarus – cutting the teaching hours, reduction of teaching staff and increased burden on the remaining lecturers.

Modular system that mixes apples and pears should be changed, whilst the principles of interdisciplinarity in education should not work in a mechanical way. There is a number of ways to solve the problem: the emergence of Belarusian universities in the education system based on the principle of liberal arts, introduction of courses addressing social and humanitarian challenges faced by the modern Belarusian society from different disciplinary perspectives, etc..

The need for decentralization of education management system is important to provide universities and teaching staff with the opportunity to create their own curricula and offer a wide range of new courses, which differ in different institutions.

Patterns of communication between teachers and students can only be changed in an environment of non-authoritarian view of higher education system and its functioning.

Changing the approach to the issue of the quality of education is linked to the reduction of administrative resources and the use of other methods of quality control, including course evaluation. Nonetheless, given the severe political and ideological control over universities, evaluation can be used as a tool of repression directed

against individual lecturers. The currently available monitoring methods do not reveal the actual situation.

One of the goals is the continuous monitoring and information campaign about the need to overcome gender stereotypes in education system.

There is a need to increase the number of hours dedicated to language training, to promote academic exchanges of students and teachers, an invite practitioners to the universities.

The choice of subjects by students has be real, not formal, after students will have become being acquainted with the course program. There is also a need for a more careful selection of applicants, the introduction of oral entry examination for applicants for humanities.

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# Belarusian geopolitical consciousness – variability and media relationship

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## Introduction

Belarus is geographically located between the two major centers of power – the European Union and Russia, and the issue of foreign policy priorities and civilizational choice is not purely hypothetical for the country. Three post-Soviet republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) have become full-fledged members of the EU, three more countries (Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia) aimed at joining the European Union and have recently signed with the EU the Association Agreement and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Meanwhile, Belarus, along with Armenia and a number of Central Asian countries expressed preference for integration with Russia. At the same time, despite the significant media control in Belarus and the lack of pro-European parties in higher politics, the number of supporters of integration with the EU in the country is quite significant.

For about 20 years there has been an absence in Belarus of competitive elections and foreign policy decisions are made by Alexander Lukashenka and his closest associates. Belarusian authorities have never stated their intention to strive for EU membership. On the contrary, it subscribes to multi-vector foreign policy and the clear foreign policy priority is the development of relations with Russia. The Agreement on the Establishment of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, which came into force in 2000, and the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEC) that came into force at the beginning of 2015 deserve a special mention in the context of Belarusian-Russian integration agreements. At the same time, since 1997 relations with the EU have generally been tense, with sporadic introduction of EU sanctions against representatives

of the Belarusian ruling elite. Belarus remains the only country among the post-Soviet republics, which still has no legal base of the bilateral treaty or trade agreement with the EU.

The official line on the development of integration with Russia and other countries within the framework of the EAEC is supported by state media that dominate the media space of Belarus. The integration in the European Union (as does indeed the unification with Russia) does not figure high in socio-political agenda of the day. Because of significant control of print media, FM-radio broadcasting and television by the state, there are currently no alternative media with a large public coverage in Belarus.

Based on the lack of a real political process, difficulties with access to alternative information, the lack of a genuinely independent executive and influential socio-political institutions, **the effect of the dominant media in Belarus on public opinion is very high.** Given the absence of opinion leaders, Belarusian public often has to use the information it receives directly, without qualitative interpretations.

This study investigates the dynamics of geopolitical preferences of Belarusians at the beginning of 2016. It is based on the analysis of empirical data obtained in two national representative surveys, conducted on 6–18 April and 15–24 May 2016. Within the framework of the national survey project, regular monitoring is conducted by [mediametrics.ru](http://mediametrics.ru) twice a day – morning and evening – to identify which media reports were very popular among Belarusian users of social networks.

Respondents were asked, *inter alia*, to offer an opinion, what would be a preferred option for Belarusians: European Union membership or an alliance with Russia, what affects the formation of their views on the EU and Russia, and to indicate the sources from which they mostly obtain information. A series of questions helped to explain the attitude of Belarusians to contradictory trends in the former Soviet Union: the growing aggravation of Russian–Ukrainian relations on the one hand, and the expansion of the EAEC on the other hand.

Sociological survey data show the dynamics of change in the geopolitical orientation of the population of Belarus, as well as socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, type of settlement, education, etc.) based on their geopolitical preferences.

Respondents in shaping their geopolitical orientation refer to the media, as has been indicated by responses to the question: “What are the sources you find out information?” In answers they mention state print media, public television, public radio, Internet sites of the state media, non-governmental print media/non-state TV/radio non-government, non-government websites media, social networks/blogs, friends/relatives. The analysis of the geopolitical orientation changes depending on the current events in Belarus and world.



The study was structured as follows. The first section is devoted to the review of selected earlier studies into geopolitical preferences of Belarusians. The second section provides an analysis of data from the national population surveys conducted in April and May, respectively. In order to facilitate the perception of information graphic information is given in graphs and charts. The third section examines answers to open-ended questions that identify the cause of the changes in the perception of the European Union or Russia. The fourth section explores the scale of the influence of media on public opinion of Belarusians about foreign policy priorities. Key findings are presented in the Conclusion.

## Recommendations

The main hypothesis suggests that the dynamics of geopolitical preferences are shaped by the media has been confirmed, whilst it is the Russian media that have the major effect on the people of Belarus. As the Belarusian respondents answered the open questions, they often precisely relayed key messages from the Russian media.

It is obvious that Belarusian mass media are losing to Russian information sources. Survey data indicate that the interpretation of international events coming from Russian sources dominates Belarusian public mind. In connection with the more aggressive foreign policy of Russia, Belarusian authorities should treat this trend very seriously. Belarus should provide qualitative media response not only domestically, but also in context with foreign policy developments.

In the context of the increasing financing of Belarusian information sources by Russia, the concern is, first, about the lack of quality of the Belarusian state media. Second, there is the trend to cut funding earmarked for Belarusian independent media by Western donors. If these trends continue, the high proportion of the population of Belarus that interprets events in unison with the Russian state-controlled media, is unlikely to decline.

## Conclusion

The research into geopolitical orientations of Belarusians has been conducted within the context of the increased threat of a hypothetical state union of Belarus by Russia. It is shown that, if there isn't the obvious need to redirect the political-economic reorientation of Belarus to the West, then, at least, there is a need to normalize relations with the European Union.

At the same time, according to the national survey, the EU communication strategy remains extremely weak in Belarus. It is significant that, despite the latest tendency to warm the relations between the EU and Belarus (the EU sanctions were frozen in

October 2015), the April survey shows that half of Belarusians (52.5%) are against the rapprochement with the EU.

Probably a number of reasons influenced the weakening of the pro-Russian vector in May (15.3%), compared to April. Hence the decline in the number of media messages related to Russian achievements in the international arena. In particular, in connection with the cessation in mid-March of the 6-months Russian military campaign in Syria, the corresponding victorious media reports were stopped. The April survey still showed strong media effect on the perception of the Russian operation in Syria which was indicated by answers by the Belarusian respondents to an open question, such as "saved Syria from ISIS," "showed its power, raised its authority in the world."

The reason for the weakening of pro-Russian vector, was apparently the media disagreement on the price of Russian gas for Belarus. Countries have different interpretations on the current contract on gas supplies. Belarus started to pay Russia less for the than is demanded by Russia. The Russian side claims that, by mid-May, the debt of Belarus to the Russian supplier amounted to USD 125 million. Yet the controversial situation is being dealt with in quite a peaceful and civilized manner: a peaceful, civilized way: the parties shall refrain from sharp statements, Gazprom has filed a lawsuit at an arbitration court in Minsk, seeking payment of the debt the Belarusian companies.

In comparison, in May 2010, similarly controversial situation connected with Russian gas supplies to Belarus and its transit was handled in a much more tense atmosphere. In general, the Belarusian-Russian relations in 2010 were more tense than usual. As part of the enforcement of deeper Eurasian integration, Russia in 2010 significantly reduced energy subsidies for Belarus, and increased political pressure through Russian national channels through a series of broadcasts critical of Lukashenka ("Godfather Dad"). In turn, the state-controlled Belarusian media often ran critical reports on Russia. As a result, at the end of 2010 and in the early 2011 pro-European attitudes in Belarus were higher than the pro-Russian.

The improvement of Belarusian-Russian relations and the deterioration of relations with the EU affected the rapid turn in geopolitical attitudes of Belarusians. In general, the overall pattern of bilateral economic and political relations has a great influence on the attitude of the population of Belarus to cooperate with Russia.

As the [mediametrics.ru](http://mediametrics.ru) monitoring shows, the media content of social networks used by the Belarusians are primarily filled with Belarusian problems, which is quite natural. Significantly enough, Belarusian foreign policy is also on the orbit of interest among the Belarusians. The second most popular theme is Russia and its domestic and foreign policies present the second most popular theme, as is business and show business, followed by Ukrainian developments and the policy of the West towards Belarus.

The issue of Russian military successes in the period between the two national surveys rarely appeared in the media, which resulted in the absence of memories of the “Russian power” in the open answers of respondents in the results of the May survey. That affected the decline in the share of supporters of the union with Russia in Belarusian public. The issues of refugees and migration crisis in the EU did not attract any significant interest. Lukashenka’s visit to Rome and the Vatican, and Russian reluctance to cut gas price for Belarus were likely to affect the decline in pro-Russian views among Belarusians as shown in the results of the May survey against those of April.

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# “Soft power” of Belarus in the region: capacity assessment

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## Introduction

This study presents preliminary analysis of potential (resources) of “soft power” of Belarus in neighboring countries, to be used to improve its international image and the implementation of its foreign policy objectives.

The authors applied the concept of “soft power”, as formulated by Joseph Nye Jr.<sup>1</sup> in 1990 and developed in 2004 in *Soft Power: The Tools of Success in World Politics*.

The following methods were used to assess the resources of “soft power” within the framework of this research:

- review of sociological research into the attitude of the population of five neighboring countries towards Belarus and Belarusians;
- analysis of the international ratings including Belarus to clarify the position of Belarus with respect to these other countries,
- an analysis of online research related to Belarus,
- content analysis of two media in each of the five countries over the period of 1 year (May 2015 – April 2016) to clarify the main issues covered in these publications related to Belarus.

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1 Joseph Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 2005.

## 1. The perception of Belarus and Belarusians in neighboring countries

The analysis of sociological studies conducted in neighboring countries shows that Belarus is seen as most attractive among the population of its Eastern Slavic neighbors – Russia (84%) and Ukraine (37%). Here, Belarus is considered a friendly country; they are prepared to render it military aid and develop trade and economic relations. In Russia, Belarus is highly attractive in terms of goods and labor.

A different picture emerges in the neighboring countries that have joined the European Union. The public in Lithuania and Poland overall deem Belarus and Belarusians to be unfriendly, although the situation tends to improve. The public in Latvia perceives Belarus and Belarusians more positively, though still nowhere near as good as that in Russia and Ukraine.

## 2. Belarus and neighboring countries in cross-country ratings

Country ratings by various indicators describing the state of the economy, political and social life serve as the basis for the development of image of a given country. The assessment of “soft power” includes not only cooperation with other countries, but also the efficiency of the state that affects the attractiveness of the country. On the other hand, comparative international ratings can serve as the basis for shaping and promoting the image of the country in the eyes of the public and the authorities of other countries in the region.

Among the key international rankings in which the position of Belarus is traditionally high, it can be considered as the HDI. According to the index, which takes into account the expected duration of schooling, per capita GDP and life expectancy, in 2013 Belarus ranked 53<sup>rd</sup> (out of 187 participants), fitting within the group of countries with “high human development”. Only the Baltic countries ranked higher among the former Soviet republics.

The country ranks high globally in a range of parameters. For instance, in the number of fixed broadband subscribers it scored 25<sup>th</sup> out of 195 countries. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization consider Belarus to be the market leader in beef and pork production; it ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in the world in the production of butter, just behind New Zealand and the EU; and is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest producer of cheese.

The ease of doing business is one of the most important indicators, the dynamics of which can have a positive impact on the image of the country. Since 2012, Belarus

has risen from 58<sup>th</sup> to 44<sup>th</sup> into the first group: that was affected by “property registration” (7<sup>th</sup> in the world) and “company registration” (12<sup>th</sup> in the world).

In the Gini index Belarus ranks the lowest among the countries within the region (26.0, followed by Lithuania scoring 35.15). Revenue distribution can be mentioned here as well: Belarus has the lowest rate in the region, with the share of revenues at 10 % among the richest (21.54 %, followed by Poland with 25.63 %), and the highest proportion of revenue among the 10 % of the poorest (4.05 %, followed by Poland with 3.31 %), as there are no residents with income below the subsistence minimum of USD 1.9 per day.

### 3. Research analysis

Along with the public opinion polls, research queries are among the sources of information about what the residents of the neighboring countries are interested in with reference to Belarus. Analysis of research queries using Google Trends provides quantitative data on the intensity of interest in a particular country and its dynamics, as well as qualitative data on the contexts in which Internet users search for information about Belarus. Queries from the beginning of 2013 to the end of March 2016 were examined to assess the dynamics.

Research analysis has shown that sports are the key attractive feature of interest in Belarus among the neighboring countries. Sports is indeed the common context in which the public in the other countries looks for information about Belarus. Major sports events can trigger major online search. This is affected by the fact that not only people connected with Belarus, but also the wider population is beginning to take an interest in the country.

Apart from sports, specific search queries raised by residents in the neighboring countries varies. In case of Russia, there is interest in automobile market, medical tourism/recreation in sanatoria, and in the case of Ukraine there is the search for work since 2014.

Among Poles, Lithuanians and Latvians the word “Belarus” is firmly connected with the tractor brand. As the popularity of this type of the query presents a slightly inferior alternative, it can be suggested that the brand (probably the use of tractors and spare parts) represents is Belarus for the people in neighboring countries.

### 4. Media content analysis

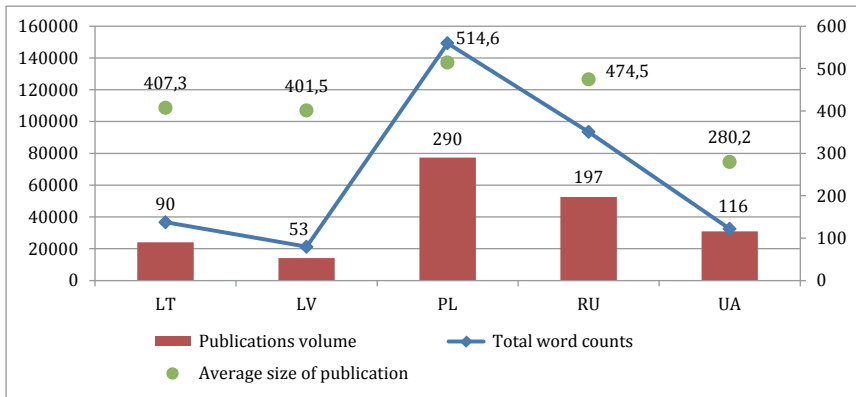
Polish media are those that most often write about Belarus (Internet sites of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzecz Pospolita*) showing 290 publications. Russia scores the second (Internet sites of *Vedomosti* and *Kommersant*) with 197 publications. This is followed by Ukraine (*Segodnya.ua*, *Obozrevatel*), Latvia (*delfi.lv* and Internet site of newspa-

per *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, NRA) and Lithuania (website of newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas* and *delfi.lt*) with 116, 53 and 58 entries, respectively.

In terms of the volume of publications, which indirectly points to the significance of consideration of the issue and the depth, Belarus is the most serious topic in the Polish media. Ukrainian media are most superficial in addressing topics related to Belarus.

Fig 1

Distribution of the number and volume of publications by country



The representation of image of Belarus in the media is quite varied. International media tend to be interested in Belarus largely in terms of international trade.

If Belarus is mentioned in connection with international relations, it is largely unrelated to any particular country, but to the maneuvering between the two poles – Russia and the EU. It is the topic of interest in the media of neighboring countries.

Belarus is most often represented by one character – President Alexander Lukashenko. Other politicians and public figures are not apparently popular in neighboring countries.

## 5. Recommendations

Belarus has a significant potential of “soft power.” It already enjoys a highly attractive image among the population in Russia and Ukraine, which is used in economics and politics.

Based on the analysis of international rankings, Belarus enjoys its rightful place among its neighbors, excelling in a number of positions. This can be used in the posi-



tioning of the country and promoting its image especially in Poland and Lithuania, where Belarus is still perceived as a hostile.

To enhance the resource of “soft power” of Belarus in relation to neighboring countries (especially EU Member States) the following measures can be explored:

1. Increase the number of economic and cultural events in the neighboring countries (especially in Poland and Lithuania) in order to disseminate information about Belarus and strengthen contacts between people;
2. To promote the influx of tourists from neighboring EU Member States through the provision of free or preferential visas, creating attractive tourist routes connected with a common historical memory, to enhance information outreach;
3. In terms of development and promotion of a positive image of Belarus attention should be given to the following areas in which Belarus shows strong performance in accordance with international ratings: the Gini index, Internet coverage, high level of educational attainment, lower infant and maternal mortality, high share of heavy industry in the value added, high proportion of exports associated with computer technology services, high rates of improvement in business environment, vast forested areas, low levels of air pollution;
4. Pay more attention to hosting international sports events in Belarus, which not only attract inward tourism, but help visitors learn about the actual situation, but also dramatically increase the number of online search requests, which leads to further disseminate information on Belarus.
5. Establish a regular media visits for journalists from neighboring countries to more systematically improve the country image. To promote the opening of bureaus of major international media in Belarus.

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