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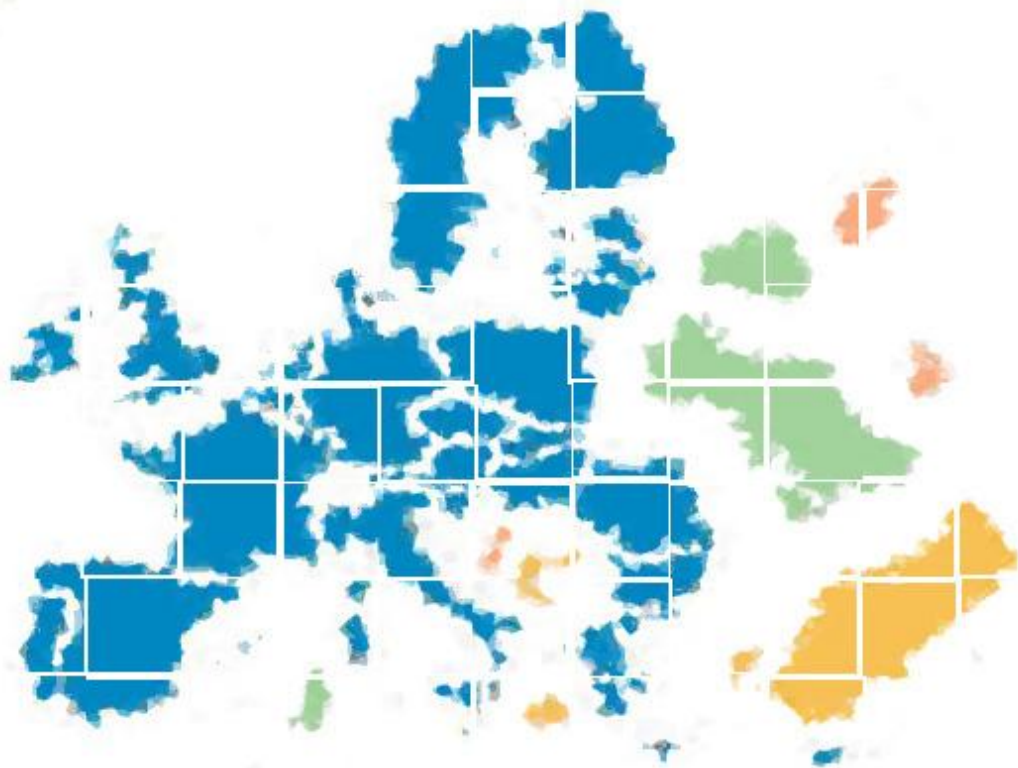
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EU Towards Belarus

Go Hard and Lose It or Go Smart and Gain It

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EU Towards Belarus

Go Hard and Lose It or Go Smart and Gain It

Background

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Belarus was faced with the need to determine its foreign policy agenda and political affiliation. While Belarusian European tradition and far-reaching historic ties with European civilization¹ are equipping Belarus in its European bid, the post-Soviet economic dependency and strong military ties are pushing Belarus further into the Russian sphere of influence.

Belarus has the highest level of internal stability² and human development in the post-Soviet space.³ It is an important transit and security partner for the EU.⁴ The highly mobilized army⁵ and strong border control facilities are paramount assets for the strengthening of European neighborhood stability. Belarus is a depository of natural resources, such as forest and water,⁶ which will be highly relevant in future.

Belorussian pro-European policy was reversed with the referendum of 1995, which consolidated Lukashenka's powers, and which marked the beginning of the so-called "cold war" between the EU and Belarus.⁷ The alteration of the Belarusian constitution in 2004 left many EU officials and the general public without hope in terms of the prospects for Belarusian democratization.

However, the pragmatic turn in Russian foreign policy and the increase in gas prices initiated by Putin's administration⁸ in 2009 made Belarus rethink its European policy and search for new partners, particularly among energy-rich countries.⁹ Such a foreign policy focus becomes crucial for Belarus with respect to Russian negligence with regards to the Yamal-

¹Vitali Silitsky, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*. Joint publication of CES and KAS sponsored by the European Parliament. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011.

http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_28814-1522-2-30.pdf?111121161603, p.15 Accessed: December 10, 2012

²Valery Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*. International Project co-financed by the European Commission. Fostering Mutual Understanding and Co-operation of the EU with Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine 2008-2012. Gomel, Belarus: Educational Institution Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperatives, March 2012.

<http://ebookbrowse.com/gdoc.php?id=366192928&url=bd667bfc2a2d1554a0bd1aa7c7c47488>, p. 86; Accessed: March 30, 2013

³The Republic of Belarus stands in the 65th place in the HDI ranking for 2011, and is still ahead of all other members of Commonwealth of Independent States

⁴Garnett Sherman, and Robert Legvolt. "Introduction: Assessing The Challenge of Belarus." In *Belarus At The Crossroads*, 199. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Press, 1999.

⁵Silitsky, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 14

⁶Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*. p. 46

⁷Ibid, p. 26

⁸Ibid, p. 5

⁹George Dura "The EU's Limited Response to Belarus' Pseudo 'New Foreign Policy'". Center for European Policy Studies, February 2008. <http://aei.pitt.edu/7543/1/151.pdf>.

Europe¹⁰ pipeline and constructing “bypass” transit routes (the North Stream and the South Stream), which constitute a direct threat to Belarus’ transit country status.¹¹ Energy independence will remain the major factor defining both Belarusian and European policy in the years to come. Thus, the EU and Belarus have a common interest in establishing new sources of energy apart from Russia.

The 2-year EU-Belarusian engagement period was suspended with the crackdown on public demonstrations in 2010,¹² which embodied the end of the “democratic experiment”.¹³ The violent suppression surprised Belarusian political opposition¹⁴ and horrified most Europeans.¹⁵ More than 600 people were arrested, among them 4 former presidential candidates who were imprisoned; many more were beaten by the police.¹⁶ In the aftermath of the election, the government policy followed a strong pro-Russian track with the creation of a common economic space and greater support for Eurasian integration.¹⁷ Thus, despite the long-standing ties with Europe, Belarus is steadily moving into the Russian orbit.

Currently Belarus is covered by the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership initiative, however, due to political considerations, its involvement in the above-mentioned structures is limited.

The European Union cannot repeat Roosevelt’s mistake. (The United States and the United Kingdom made major concessions in recognizing the Communist-regimes in Eastern Europe, sacrificing the substance of the Yalta Declaration). Taking into consideration the current geopolitical realities and the strengthening of Russian imperialism, the EU has to take a decisive approach towards the Belarusian integration into the family of friendly European nations. Further incorporation of Belarus into the Russian political edifice would have detrimental consequences for the political affiliation of neighboring states, such as Ukraine and Moldova, and would create preconditions for the restoration of the “Soviet” Empire.

Belarusian accession to the EU is not viable in the near future, thus all the outlined alternatives are focused on closer cooperation. The special features of the Belarusian case imply a carefully designed approach in cooperation devoting more attention to the actions of the EU side rather than that of Belarus. Thus, this policy brief is created to give a two-sided evaluation of the current state of affairs and to illustrate the possible courses of action with the summation of the proposed policy recommendations.

¹⁰ Major pipeline running through Belarus territory supplying gas to the EU

¹¹ Silitsky, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 17

¹² A large protest rally was organized the evening after the December 19 Presidential election at October Square in the center of downtown Minsk

¹³ David Marples, “EU and Belarus: What Next?”, January 19, 2011, open Democracy edition.

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/david-marple/eu-and-belarus-what-next>.

¹⁴ Giselle Bosse, “The EU and Belarus: Perpetual Tango All Over Again”. European Policy Center, September 24, 2012. http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_2940_the_eu_and_belarus.pdf; Accessed: December 10, 2012

¹⁵ Marples,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 100

Preliminary Hearing

When formulating any policy, it is important to consider the position of all the stakeholders. Equally, in crafting the European policy towards a neighbor state, it is crucial to know not only the attitude and consideration of the EU, but also the position of the state in relation to Europe and to other countries, as well. This section is divided into two parts: the first one displaying the European view on the Belarusian problem, and the second showing Belarusian foreign policy considerations.

How the EU Sees It

1) Strategically

Belarus is a country, which possesses unique geopolitical features. Its pivotal location makes it a perfect mediator between the East and the West, but it also faces the threat of being engulfed by Russian imperial ambitions. The Belarusian position is very similar to that of Ukraine, with the exception of different geopolitical orientations in the states themselves.¹⁸ While Ukraine serves as a bridge between Russia and the EU, Belarus is effectively playing the role of the bridge between Russia and Ukraine.¹⁹ By joining the Customs Union, Belarus became more aggressive in its attempts to influence the Ukrainian foreign policy vector.²⁰ Further incorporation of CIS states into the Russian economic and political sphere creates challenges to the sovereignty and identity of these countries. Lukashenka's assurance on the reciprocal stationing of Russian tactical weapons in Belarus²¹ is an alarming sign for regional security.

Europe has to at least maintain the current balance of power in the region and in the future ensure the pro-European direction of Belarusian politics. Moreover, it can try to persuade Belarus that the alternatives are largely disadvantageous to the Belarusian nation with the prospect of losing their identity and being dissolved in the greater conglomerate of Russian peoples. The recent acquisition of Beltransgaz by the Russian company, Gazprom, as well as Putin's proposal to turn the Russian Federation into 6 new regions²² proves the insatiability of Russian imperial ambitions.

2) Economy-wise

In spite of the worsening political cooperation, the EU-Belarus bilateral trade in goods has been growing steadily over the past years with

¹⁸Hrihorij Perepelitsa. "The Belarus Factor in the European Policy of Ukraine." In *Independent Belarus: Domestic Determinants, Regional Dynamics, and Implications for the West*, 483. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 303

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Hrihorij Perepelitsa. "Belarusian-Russian Integration and Its Impact on The Security of Ukraine." In *Belarus At The Crossroads*, 199. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Press, 1999, p. 89

²¹Dura, "The EU's Limited Response to Belarus' Pseudo 'New Foreign Policy'", p. 6

²²Silitsky, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation.*, p. 6

Belarusian exports to the EU increasing by more than 20 times since 2000.²³ The positive trade balance with the EU²⁴ speaks loudly for the European future of the Belarus economy. Ceaseless European efforts in the area of the Eastern Partnership to create a sustainable and strong Belarusian economy, eliminate social disparities and develop regional projects should not be overlooked. The EU remains the largest donor of technical help²⁵ previously through the Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS)²⁶ and currently the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) in the vanguard of economic restructuring, sustainable cross-border development and information exchange.

3) Political Reality

Belarus is a party to numerous international treaties and agreements. The greatest disappointment is its reluctance to maintain mutually agreed obligations and further deterioration of economic and democratic freedoms. The current access to the Russian market and inexpensive energy sources give Lukashenka the opportunity to maintain influence over the state without engaging in painful and unpopular reforms. He is reluctant to allow large-scale privatization and foreign direct investment,²⁷ which would have given him the chance to reduce the long-standing dependency on Russian subsidies and Russian political whims, but would have undermined his authoritarian grip on power at the same time.

In Their Shoes

The Belarusian state sees the current geopolitical situation as a mere struggle for resources and commodity markets²⁸ in which the EU is nothing more than a rapacious political player eager to use Belarus to its full potential. Belarus is sure about the European mercantilist approach and the ambition to use Belarusian territory for the safe transit of Russian hydrocarbons. Despite a certain level of suspicion, the bilateral relations are well preserved in certain areas. The success story (one of the few) of the EU-Belarus cooperation in border security is a well-cut example of European

²³Dura, "The EU's Limited Response to Belarus' Pseudo 'New Foreign Policy', p. 4

²⁴Alexandr Chubrik, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*. Joint publication of CES and KAS sponsored by the European Parliament. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_28814-1522-2-30.pdf?111121161603, p. 135; *Balance of Foreign Trade in Goods of the Republic of Belarus*. Statistics. National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, January 2013. http://belstat.gov.by/homep/en/indicators/trade_balance.php; Accessed: December 10, 2012

Belarus: EU Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World. Statistics. EUROSTAT. EU Commission; DG Trade, December 11, 2012. http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113351.pdf;

Foreign Trade of Belarus. Statistics. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, 2013. http://www.mfa.gov.by/en/foreign_trade/.

²⁵Vyachaslau Paznyak, *Belarus Facing Dual Enlargement: Will the EU Squeeze Harder?* Base data report. Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency, May 2003. http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00001374/01/31906_0859-belarus.pdf, p. 7

²⁶The Community's TACIS program encourages democratization, the strengthening of the rule of law and the transition to a market economy in the New Independent States (NIS), created as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union

²⁷Bosse, "The EU and Belarus: Perpetual Tango All Over Again"

²⁸Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 14

neighborhood security strategy.²⁹ Nevertheless, Belarus is becoming more aware of its expenditures in this field and makes statements on the need for expenditure compensation. “Belarus is not going to shoulder the full burden of ensuring European security”, declared Lukashenka in one speech.³⁰

Belarus is dissatisfied with the absence of a unified European position on Belarus.³¹ The consequence of this is a predominant disaffection towards ENP and EaP initiatives.³² The Belarusian government sees these as strategic tools for the advancement of European interests. The overbearing policy of conditionality and political pressure creates greater aversion in Belarusian political circles, especially taking into consideration the absence of immediate results.³³

The economic sanctions adopted in 2011³⁴ and the EU’s restrictive policies towards Belarusian agricultural and industrial goods³⁵ were met with uproar among the Belarusian population at large.³⁶ Even though trade between the EU and Belarus is constantly growing, the increase in Belarusian exports to the EU is overshadowed by its quality, with 70% constituted of semi-raw oil and iron materials and potash fertilizers.³⁷

The restrictive visa policy³⁸ exercised towards the Belarusian population has contributed to the formation of a new “Iron curtain” between European and Belarusian nations.³⁹ The soaring of European integration support is an obvious consequence of high visa prices and the increasing rate of visa denials to Belarusian citizens.

According to recent polls, 30% of the economically active population wants to leave Belarus to seek employment.⁴⁰ The adherence to the Bologna process and the liberalization of the education system is going to affect the already dire demographic situation and can lead to brain drain.⁴¹

On the other hand, the integration with former Soviet states is viewed as a way for success in Belarusian government circles.⁴² A strong military and technical cooperation, as well as a common language and religious

²⁹Nikolae Idu., “The Larger EU and the New In-Between Lands: Ukraine and Belarus.” In *The Strategic Implications of European Union Enlargement*. Esther Brimmer, Stefan Frohlich. Washington DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, John Hopkins University, 2005, p. 85

³⁰President of the Republic of Belarus. 24 October 2002

³¹Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 71

³²Grzegorz, Gromadzki., “How to Deal with Troublesome Neighbors.” In *European Neighborhood Policy: Challenges for the EU-Policy Towards the New Neighbors*, 129–141. Johannes Varwick, Kai Olaf Lang. Warsaw: Barbara Budrick Publishers, 2007, p. 56

³³Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 30

³⁴Economic sanctions were applied to 29 Belarusian companies, who are deemed as supporters of the regime; Julia Korosteleva, *Impact of Targeted Sanctions on Belarus*. Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union. Belgium, May 2012.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/fr/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=73753>, p. 11;

Accessed: March 28, 2013

³⁵Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 92

³⁶Ibid. p. 36

³⁷Leonid, Kalitenya. *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*. Joint publication of CES and KAS sponsored by the European Parliament. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011.

http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_28814-1522-2-30.pdf?111121161603, p. 124

³⁸Yekaterina Glod, “Can Belarusians Expect Fair Play on the Issue of Visa?” European Dialogue (n.d.). <http://eurodialogue.org/eastern-partnership/Can-Belarusians-Expect-Fair-Play-on-the-Issue-of-Visas>.

³⁹Ibid. p. 37

⁴⁰Kalitenya. *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 115

⁴¹Svetlana, Matskevich, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 68

⁴²Bondarenko., *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 8

heritage create a strong foundation for successful cooperation. Belarus cannot overestimate the fact that the Russian Federation supplies nearly 100 % of Belarusian gas and oil.⁴³ The impressive gas discounts were the main factor for Belarusian economic growth in the years of independence and were bringing Belarus around \$3 billion per year.⁴⁴ The Belarusian authorities believe that the cooperation with Eurasian structures gives them the chance to perform the role of the subject of decision-making, while the constant EU requirements and sanctions leave no other choice than being the object of European government craftsmanship.⁴⁵

In the light of such a situation, Belarusian reluctance to sustain European friendship to the detriment of Russian relations⁴⁶ seems rather reasonable. However, the recent Russian gas policy⁴⁷ made Belarus aware of the existing asymmetric dependence and led to the decrease in energy consumption and ambitious projects to reduce energy intensity by 60% by 2020.⁴⁸

What Next?

This section outlines the possible alternatives of further EU actions towards Belarus. These alternatives can be classified as 1) taking a harsher position towards Belarus, 2) continuing current policies and 3) softening the stance in the view of current political realities. In the light of the low success of the former two strategies, the EU should adhere to the third strategy as the most viable and efficient at the given moment of time.

1) Screwing the Bolts

The head of the EU delegation to Belarus, Maira Mora, on her October visit to Minsk, characterized the current state of the relationship between the European Union and Belarus as “rather gloomy”.⁴⁹ When watching the President’s speeches and declarations about the “overarching European hand” it is hard to formulate a different opinion.

The EU decisions on freezing the negotiations on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, Interim Trade Agreement and on suspending high level political contacts⁵⁰ are partly following the outlined hard course. However, clearly, there is neither consistency in the approach nor uniform compliance by all Member States.⁵¹ The Belarusian opposition is alleging that despite the declamatory political sanctions, the EU-share of Belarusian

⁴³Garnett Sherman, and Robert Legvolt. “Introduction: Assessing The Challenge of Belarus.” p. 30

⁴⁴Bondarenko. *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations.*, p. 106

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 15

⁴⁷Russia increased gas price in 2007 from \$46 to \$100 per 1000 m³

⁴⁸Chubrik, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 147

⁴⁹Syarhey Karalevich, “Current State of Belarus-EU Relations Is Rather Gloomy, EU Ambassador Says”, October 18, 2012, sec. BelaPAN. http://en.belapan.com/archive/2012/10/18/en_22361018m/. Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁵⁰Dura, “The EU’s Limited Response to Belarus’ Pseudo ‘New Foreign Policy’”

⁵¹Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 70

trade is constantly growing,⁵² thus giving additional impetus to the credibility of the regime.

According to recent data, 243 persons and 32 companies are currently subjected to the EU sanctions.⁵³ Unfortunately, the EU provision that smart sanctions can be invoked against any individual supporting the Lukashenka regime is very general and creates a good opportunity for arbitrary application.⁵⁴ Thus, the outlined criteria should be specified. Currently not all European states are adhering to the existing “black list”.⁵⁵ The exceptions are Slovenia, Poland, Lithuania, which due to economic reasons and long-standing contacts are reluctant to sacrifice their relations for the sake of a political game. The situation is unacceptable and should be converted to complete uniformity in order to reach maximum efficiency.

The EU is worried about the situation regarding media freedom⁵⁶ and the oppression of national minorities in Belarus.⁵⁷ Politically motivated imprisonments as well as numerous uninvestigated deaths and disappearances of journalists and leaders of opposition⁵⁸ should be the cornerstone of the EU attitude with respect to the hard-line policy option. If the EU is going to take the idealistic approach and pursue the hard-line policy alternative with the aim of overthrowing the current regime, it can request the following actions:

1. Release political prisoners
2. Conduct proper investigations concerning the disappeared and dead journalists and opposition
3. Establish a moratorium on the death penalty
4. Reform the correctional system
5. Increase independence of the judiciary

Notwithstanding the fact that such requirements were constantly spelled out by the EU, the outlined hard-line approach implies the imposition of tough economic measures and trade restrictions, all the way up to an economic embargo. Taking into consideration the export orientation of the Belarusian economy, as well as the level of bilateral trade with the EU states, Belarus would experience an intense economic shock as a result of such a policy. Thus, the EU should make sure it has some kind of a “magic package” to propose to Belarus when its economy collapses and new leaders come to power.

Evaluating the first alternative, it is worth mentioning that the existing sanctions and trade restrictions while promoting democratization have so far yielded minimum results.⁵⁹ Apart from weakening the regime, the

⁵² Ibid, p. 76

⁵³“European Union: Restrictive Measures (sanctions) in Force.” European Commission, February 21, 2013. http://eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/sanctions/docs/measures_en.pdf; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁵⁴Bosse, “The EU and Belarus: Perpetual Tango All Over Again”

⁵⁵Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations.*, p. 80

⁵⁶Mikhail Pastukhou, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 97

⁵⁷Poland had accused Belarus of persecuting the 400,000 Poles who have been a part of Belarus since her borders were moved westward after the [Second World War](#)

⁵⁸Pastukhou, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 107

⁵⁹Dura, “The EU’s Limited Response to Belarus’ Pseudo ‘New Foreign Policy’”

outlined economic sanctions have led to irreparable losses in Belarusian perceptions of the European Union and the increase of pro-Russian sympathies among the Belarusian population. More than this, the creation of a "second Cuba" in the light of a strong Russian backing is not impossible and will definitely cease to provoke a change of regime in the foreseeable future.

2) *More for More*

The second outlined alternative is generally falling in line with the current pragmatic institutional approach of conditional democratization and critical engagement.⁶⁰ This approach implies an increase of interaction as a result of further liberalization of Belarusian government policies.

The pragmatic approach can be embodied by the targeted involvement in the spheres of mutual interest, while deliberately leaving out the political element. According to the outlined alternative, the EU is capable of interaction in the areas of transit, transport, power, environment conservation, as well as tackling general border problems.⁶¹ The clear-cut examples of such cooperation can be the completed drug trafficking prevention (BUMAD-1, 2)⁶² and border management assistance programs (BOMBEL 1,2)⁶³ as well as EU-funded Tempus⁶⁴ education program⁶⁵ and former TACIS program of technical assistance. In line with the second alternative, the EU can be recommended to continue sponsorship in areas of common interest, such as gas storehouses, energy safe plants and renewable energy sources.

Apart from the above-mentioned external assistance projects, the EU is to lobby the Belarusian government on the necessity of privatization and foreign direct investment as a viable precondition for the decrease of Russian financial dependency and a successful economic restructuring. Regarding the visa issue, the EU should adopt the Polish proposal on visa asymmetry (Poland does not charge a visa fee if Belarus waives its visa regime) for the neighboring Member States.

In terms of media freedom and human rights, the EU can keep its current position with regards to the Copenhagen criteria⁶⁶ and the Dialogue on Modernization.⁶⁷ The following should be among the pressing demands on the EU's side:

1. Equal economic conditions for media of different types of ownership

⁶⁰http://eeas.europa.eu/belarus/index_en.htm; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁶¹Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 89

⁶²The BUMAD program is an umbrella program benefiting Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. The overall objective of this program is to reduce drug trafficking from and through these countries towards EU Member States

⁶³Enhancing Border Management in the Republic of Belarus

⁶⁴Tempus supports the modernization of higher education and creates an area of co-operation in countries surrounding the EU; http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/tempus_en.htm; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁶⁵Matskevich, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 58

⁶⁶Standards that must be met before a country can join the EU, as set down at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993

⁶⁷The European Dialogue on Modernization is a multi-stakeholder exchange of views and ideas between the EU and representatives of the Belarusian civil society and political opposition on necessary reforms for the modernization of Belarus and on the related potential development of relations with the EU, as well as possible EU support in this regard

2. Removal of barriers to accreditation
3. Judicial review for denial of accreditation
4. Modification of the infamous Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (political parties, public associations and religious organizations are subject to the mandatory state registration)

In terms of the second alternative, it is obvious that the approach of liberal institutionalism pursued by the European Union so far has met little response among Belarusian people and in higher echelons. The number of European institutions and initiatives has no correlation to the amount of Belarusian sympathy.⁶⁸ For example, the European call for democratization, in particular the notorious non-paper,⁶⁹ which urged increased economic engagement in return for expanding democratic rights and procedures, was met with a cold shoulder among the Belarusian population.⁷⁰ The authorities' response to European claims was expressed in partly symbolic steps,⁷¹ such as the release of prisoners, which can be attributed to the visit of the Bulgarian minister, anyway.⁷² Taking into consideration the low effectiveness of the outlined alternative, it should not be adopted as the overarching EU strategy for future engagement.

3) *Mind Attack*

The third policy alternative is crafted with regards to the peculiarities of the Belarusian political situation and targeted at the subconscious level of people's perceptions. The common mistake of the EU democratization efforts was the flawed perception of Belarusian people as voiceless masses incapable of influencing the major government line.⁷³ The EU support of civil society initiatives is claimed to be only formal⁷⁴ and the concentration of pro-EU NGOs in the capital to be largely inefficient.⁷⁵ With a view to the existing situation, the third policy alternative is designed to expand European coverage to the Belarusian provinces as well as to concentrate on real projects with substance and broad reach.⁷⁶

The heightened sensitivity of the Belarusian government to any criticism and political accusation prove it is necessary to concentrate largely on apolitical and socially oriented projects. The EU has been constantly criticized by the Belarusian authorities for its involvement in "undemocratic practices" of the suppression of alternative (mainly pro-Russian) points of

⁶⁸Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 21

⁶⁹http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/documents/eu_belarus_non_paper_1106.pdf. Accessed: March 27, 2013

⁷⁰Dura, "The EU's Limited Response to Belarus' Pseudo 'New Foreign Policy'"

⁷¹Silitsky, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 33

⁷² August 26, 2011 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria Nikolay Mladenov had a secret meeting with Alexander Lukashenka. The meeting lasted, allegedly, more than two and a half hours; <http://news.tut.by/politics/248473.html>; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁷³Colton, Timothy. "Belarusian Public Opinion and The Union With Russia." In *Independent Belarus: Domestic Determinants, Regional Dynamics, and Implications for the West*, 483. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 21

⁷⁴Andrei Yahorau and Alena Zuikova. "Europe's Belarus Failure." Index: The Voice of Free Expression (September 18, 2012). <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2012/09/belarus-europe-failure/>. Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁷⁵Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 38

⁷⁶Bosse, "The EU and Belarus: Perpetual Tango All Over Again"

view, especially in the framework of the Dialogue on Modernization initiative.⁷⁷ Thus, the main policy recommendation projected by the third policy approach is the equal representation of all voices in Belarusian political spectrum during the EU-Belarus dialogue.

According to recent social polls, support for Russia among the Belarusian population is now 10% higher than support for the EU.⁷⁸ Not only does it prove the necessity to engage Russia in the dialogue to further European goals, but this should also serve as a clear indication for the necessity of a large-scale PR campaign aimed at the restoration of the tarnished EU reputation⁷⁹ among Belarusians.

As to the first point, it is useful to recall Alghirdas Gricius' quote: "Without Russian assistance the EU has slim possibility of influencing internal politics in Belarus".⁸⁰ Acknowledging the high level of Belarus' responsiveness to Russian foreign policy, the consideration of the third policy alternative should encourage the EU to look for a common ground with Russia with regards to Belarus' internal development, without compromising the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Belarus.

Elaborating on the second point, European officials should be reminded that almost two-thirds (58.3%) of Belarusians do not have access to the Internet.⁸¹ This hard fact should be taken into consideration when developing the European promotion campaign. The EU should focus on the production of independent TV and Radio programs with non-political agenda. The low level of people's exposure to the existing pro-European media can be explained by its low entertainment value and insufficient integration in Belarusian society.⁸² The creation of engaging TV series on the life of average Europeans and Belarusians (the convergence of both would be perfect) could be an effective move towards the winning of Belarusian hearts and minds.

A crucial element of the third approach will be the focus on the education and cultural sphere, in particular the creation of a positive EU image through the organization of information campaigns on the expanding role of the EU's significance in the world (EU is currently considered to be the largest economy in the world) – as well as on its successful attempt at creating a deep political and economic integration while preserving the sovereignty and identity of its small constituent nations.⁸³

Belarusian youth is a major source of discontent towards the current government. The EU can capitalize on this and promote cultural exchanges. In its cultural and education contributions, the EU should adopt the long-standing, German approach of fostering humanitarian contacts and creation of apolitical education initiatives such as the Goethe Institute and DAAD exchange programs.

⁷⁷Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations*, p. 123

⁷⁸Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, March 2012: www.iiseps.org

⁷⁹Idu, Nikolae. "The Larger EU and the New In-Between Lands: Ukraine and Belarus." p. 79

⁸⁰Garnett and Legvolt. "Introduction: Assessing The Challenge of Belarus, p. 10

⁸¹ Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) National Poll: "Trends of change in Belarusian public opinion about some social-economic and political problems" (<http://www.iiseps.org/etrend.html>), Graph 9, Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³Silitsky, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 20

65% of the Belarusian citizens have never been to Europe or to other countries outside the Former Soviet Union.⁸⁴ In the meantime, statistical analysis shows that frequent visits to the EU lead to a greater support for EU integration in all age groups.⁸⁵ Apart from that, the applicants' assessment of the burden of the visa procedure depends, to a great extent, on the attitude of consular officers towards visitors rather than on such "objective" factors as the waiting time or the percentage of rejected applications.⁸⁶ As a matter of fact, the EU should review its visa policy towards Belarusians in the shortest possible term if it is to maintain any positive influence on the minds of Belarusian citizens.

Hands-on Recommendations

After a careful consideration of various positions on the issue and the possible alternatives in terms of action, it looks like the European Union would achieve most by pursuing the third outlined alternative. While advocating several conventional suggestions, I propose to concentrate on the more subtle strategies of persuasion and target the subconscious level of the Belarusian population. This includes the predominant focus on apolitical projects and cooperation with Russia.

1. General Focus

The policy of isolation and political condemnation towards the Belarusian government has proved to be rather unsuccessful. The European attitude seems to be giving Lukashenka's government a good excuse for silencing pro-European sentiments and crafting a largely Eurasian policy. Taking into account the EU's desire to prevent Belarus from becoming a part of a revived Russian empire, the EU might illustrate the importance of Belarus by welcoming it into the main European structures, such as the Council of Europe, as well as concluding the major framework agreements, such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and a joint EU-Belarus ENP Action Plan. The restoration of the Generalized System of Preferences for Belarus and EU's lobbying for its inclusion in the World Trade Organization can bring fruitful results in terms of the irreversible strengthening of economic relations between the two sides.

In order to help Belarus with its energy dependence, the EU should work on the common interest of finding new sources of energy apart from Russia. Taking into consideration the low productivity of the requirements' imposition, the EU will be better off when engaging new mediators in the EU-Belarusian political dialogue and capitalizing on personal contacts (an example can be Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Nickolay Mladenov, who

⁸⁴Kalitenya, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation*, p. 118

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 116

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 114

negotiated the release of a number of political prisoners during his secret meeting with Lukashenka).⁸⁷

If the EU wants to make sure its actions are not perceived as superficial and unnecessary, it should concentrate on concrete projects in various apolitical spheres (using TAIEX,⁸⁸ ISTC,⁸⁹ Tempus) and on promoting its activities among the Belarusian population. Among others, the EU can extend the provision of the Final Report on the Future of Europe⁹⁰ on tackling unemployment in the neighboring areas and work together with the Belarusian government on the creation of employment centers.

Taking into account the low coverage of European efforts in the rural areas, the EU is advised to refocus its attention on the provinces of the country and capitalize on the existing successful regional development initiatives - such as Euroregions. The EU should aim at achieving concrete, sizeable results (like the Norwegian association development of a national park in the Ignalina region, international youth ecological camps⁹¹).

2. Civil Society

It is quite hard to find a common ground with the current Belarusian government. This is not to suggest that it should not be attempted, as the EU needs to maintain its focus on the empowerment of civil society in Belarus. The EU should continue cooperation in the framework of the EaP Civil Society Forum⁹² in Belarus. However, it has to be more focused in its actions and make sure it is doing necessary social work as well as getting credit for it. Thus, it would be important to identify the leaders from existing social initiatives and work with them to the benefit of Belarus society. In order to improve the quality of civil society initiatives, the EU has to engage more qualified experts in the work of civil society groups and research the existing problems in Belarus society in order to be able to target the local needs rather than the interests of donor organizations. The EU can also foster the creation of idealistic civil society organizations⁹³ as the hotbed of socially active and ideological people. If the EU wants to avoid accusations of planting the seeds of the second "Orange Revolution", it will be of paramount importance to cooperate with the Russian Federation on the creation of joint social projects.

⁸⁷<http://belarusdigest.com/story/slow-release-political-prisoners-politics-civil-society-digest-5578>; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁸⁸Technical Assistance and Information Exchange; instrument of ENPI

⁸⁹An intergovernmental organization founded by the European Union, Japan, Russia and the United States in November 1992, aiming at the integration of CIS scientists into global scientific community; <http://scienceportal.org.by/en/cooperation/>; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁹⁰The report focuses on two aspects in particular: to overcome the debt crisis and long-term proposals for the future of Europe; http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/westerwelle_report_sept12.pdf; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁹¹Bondarenko, *Analysis of the EU-Belarus Relations.*, p. 40

⁹²The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is a gathering of representatives of civil society from EaP countries and EU Member States which will follow the agenda of the EaP and will prepare its comments, input to discussion, recommendations and will also oversee the implementation of EaP agreements; <http://www.epd.eu/eastern-partnership-civil-society-forum>; Accessed: March 30, 2013

⁹³Civil society organizations that: (a) exercise self-defined goals and objectives and (b) mobilize for their own ends their time, monetary and labor resources; http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_28814-1522-2-30.pdf?111010140834; Accessed: March 30, 2013

3. Education

Education and culture are, probably, the only spheres in Belarus where the EU can safely promote its political agenda. However, taking into consideration Belarusian suspicion towards foreign-sponsored programs and initiatives, the EU has to make sure its actions are not viewed as the imposition of one's own values and criteria. Thus, the learning programs should be reciprocal with the creation of EU cultural studies centers in Belarus universities, as well as on Belarusian studies in the universities of the EU. In order to increase the knowledge and relevance of the EU among Belarusian intelligentsia, the EU might consider financing publications of employees of Belarusian high schools and scientific research institutes on the analysis of geopolitical and geo-economic problems of the European integration as well as the translation of educational materials about the European Union into Belarusian or Russian and their publication in Belarus. The EU should further encourage language training and hold various EU-themed competitions with the ultimate goal of engaging Belarusian government nomenclature in the process. The probability that the Belarusian education system is going to make a decisive shift towards European standards during Lukashenka's governance is close to zero. However, this does not mean that the EU should abandon its activities in these sphere altogether. Rather than setting an agenda for the current government, the EU can focus on achievable elements of European education system, such as the promotion of independent assessment of education, while realizing an unostentatious lobby of the Bologna process.

4. Media

The EU is advised to devote special attention to the creation of media products capable of educating the Belarusian population about modern Europe (the recommendation must be carried out very carefully in order to make sure that the EU does not cultivate the image of a dominant superior society) as well as to work closely with churches for the promotion of European values and achievements.

5. Legal and Economic Sphere

The establishment of a Belarusian Human Rights Ombudsman will be a great gain on the way to improving the current human rights situation in Belarus. In relation to the economic sphere, the EU should focus on mutually beneficial areas, such as privatization and foreign direct investments.

6. Visa Policy

The EU should establish a more favorable visa policy towards Belarusian citizens, in particular, focusing on the quality of service and addressing the problem of the unfriendly attitude of consular officers, long

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queues, the incomprehensibility of the visa procedure, voluntarism with respect to lists submitted and the lack of explanations for denials. In order to encourage more exposure to European values the EU should reduce its visa fee from 60 to 35 euros, expand the list of privileged categories, simplify the required set of documents and establish the right to appeal visa denial.

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