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**BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST: SECURITY  
POLICY BALANCING BY BELARUS SINCE 1991**

Frolova, Natalia

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
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SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST: SECURITY  
POLICY BALANCING BY BELARUS SINCE 1991**

by

Natalia Frolova

December 2018

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**BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST: SECURITY POLICY BALANCING BY  
BELARUS SINCE 1991**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(EUROPE AND EURASIA)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the involvement of Belarus in European and regional security organizations with respect to its relationship to the Russian Federation and the West. Modern Belarus's geopolitical situation, history, relatively stable government, and need to seek its own development path makes this case study distinct in terms of European security. To analyze Belarus's shifting behavior, a comparative case study approach is used. Special attention is given to Belarus's history and the evolution of its relations between the East and the West, with an emphasis on the country's domestic events, cooperation with regional security organizations, and changes in its foreign policy. The research demonstrates that, despite its turbulent history and uneasy process of self-determination, modern Belarus's foreign policy and national security posture are based on a commitment to neutrality and peacemaking efforts within Europe. Ties with Russia and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's Soviet heritage are two major constraints preventing Belarus from developing closer relationships with Western security organizations and the United States. However, current trends show that Minsk is becoming more open to developing relations with the West, while maintaining prudent relations with Russia, thus possibly serving as a future bridge between East and West within Europe.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>A. BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>B. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>C. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>D. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>E. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>F. RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>13</b>
	<b>G. THESIS OVERVIEW .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>BELARUS BEFORE LUKASHENKO: A BRIEF OVERVIEW .....</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>A. BELARUS’S ORIGINS.....</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>B. BELARUS UNDER THE USSR.....</b>	<b>29</b>
	<b>C. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>BELARUS AND THE EST .....</b>	<b>39</b>
	<b>A. THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND THE END OF THE WARSAW PACT .....</b>	<b>39</b>
	<b>B. THE CIS .....</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>C. THE BRIEF PERIOD OF BELARUS’S WESTERNIZATION IN 1991–1994 .....</b>	<b>44</b>
	<b>D. BELARUS’S UNEASY RE-INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA UNDER LUKASHENKO.....</b>	<b>48</b>
	<b>E. BELARUS’S NATIONAL SECURITY .....</b>	<b>54</b>
	<b>F. BELARUS’S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION (CSTO) .....</b>	<b>56</b>
	<b>G. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>BELARUS AND THE WEST .....</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>A. BELARUS AND THE OSCE.....</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>B. BELARUS AND NATO .....</b>	<b>67</b>
	<b>C. BELARUS AND THE EU .....</b>	<b>77</b>
	<b>D. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>85</b>
	<b>A. BELARUSIAN POLICY MOTIVATIONS AND TRENDS.....</b>	<b>85</b>
	<b>B. LUKASHENKO’S IMPACT ON BELARUS’S DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLICIES SINCE 1994 .....</b>	<b>88</b>

1.	Movement towards the East.....	88
2.	Search for Dialogue with Putin in 2001-06.....	88
3.	Economic Wars 2007–2014 .....	89
4.	The Period of after the Crimean Crisis to the Present .....	89
C.	BELARUS’S SECURITY POSTURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND THE WEST .....	90
D.	WHAT IS NEXT FOR BELARUS?.....	91
LIST OF REFERENCES.....		95
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....		107

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BSA	Belarusian Socialist Assembly
BSSR	Belarusian Soviet Social Republic
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EU	European Union
FSC	Forum for Security Cooperation
GDL	Grand Duchy of Lithuania
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)
MANPDS	man-portable air-defense systems
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDN	Northern Distribution Network
NEP	New Economic Policy
OSCE/ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
PARP	Planning and Review Process

PfP	Partnership for Peace
TLE	treaty-limited equipment
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWI	World War I

# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND

For the United States, as a member of NATO, European security is of particular importance. In contrast with the United States, Europe is a very old and historically turbulent region with a prolonged history of devastating wars. This legacy manifests itself in the continuous existence of local conflicts: Kosovo, Crimea, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Donbass just to name a few in the past decades, so security concerns are constantly present in the region. Belarus is not currently involved in any ongoing conflicts. However, if we look at security in the European region as the combination of geopolitical and historical factors, individual states' foreign policies, and international organizations' performance, Belarus presents itself as a valuable case study.

Geopolitically, Belarus is a buffer state between Russia and NATO. Historically, Belarus tended to appear in most major military conflicts in the region either territorially or as a state. Belarus's foreign policy was historically influenced by its strong neighbors, chiefly Russia. The USSR's Iron Curtain distanced Belarus from the West, but did not decisively break cultural, economic, and historical connections with it. Therefore, the process of rebuilding cooperative relations between Belarus, as a young independent state, and the West is of interest for detailed study. Belarus's activities within the context of international security organizations also affect European security. As a member of many regional and international security institutions, Belarus energetically participates in the spheres of international security, peacemaking activities, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and disarmament and arms control.<sup>1</sup>

European security organizations have a common goal to provide overall security and stability in the region. However, certain tensions between organizations exist, as some bodies can be viewed as "Western" (aligned with the United States or major Western European states as key actors) or "Eastern" (with Russia as the key actor). After the

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<sup>1</sup> "Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 08, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/organizations/>.

dissolution of Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the international security landscape changed considerably, and the newly independent Republic of Belarus, just like any other post-Soviet republic, faced the security dilemma of balancing its defensive ambitions between the West and Russia. Today, the key features of Belarus's foreign policy are neutrality, peacemaking, and stability. Moreover, modern Belarus has continuously sought Western support and acknowledgement while maintaining positive relations with Russia.

Through the entire history of Belarus, its people have always suffered from control by neighboring powers and never had a state of their own until beginning of the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Yet, geographically Belarus is a relatively large country with a land area of 207.6 thousand square kilometers and a population of about 9.5 million.<sup>3</sup> Belarus is ranked as 84<sup>th</sup> in the world for its land area and 92<sup>nd</sup> for its population, and is sixth for its land area and fifth for its population among the post-Soviet countries.<sup>4</sup> Belarus and Russia have deep and rich economic, political, and cultural ties. Belarus's desire to keep close relations with Moscow after the USSR dissolution was logical. First, Russia was basically its sole energy supplier; 90 percent of Belarusian goods were exported to Russia. Second, Belarus's geographical position dictated a Moscow-oriented foreign policy. Finally, Belarus and Russia have deep cultural roots and a long common history.

Belarus's historical, geopolitical, economic, and cultural ties place the country in a unique position between Russia and the West. Despite the fact that in recent decades Belarus's foreign policy has become more pragmatic, the country's historical connections with Russia still strongly influence Belarus's modern foreign policy. In the past 27 years, following the collapse of the USSR, Belarus's foreign policy has been shifting between West and East. These considerations lead to the following questions:

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<sup>2</sup> Andrei Tsygankov, "Defining State Interests after Empire: National Identity, Domestic Structures and Foreign Trade Policies of Latvia and Belarus," *Review of International Political Economy* 7, no 1 (2000): 111.

<sup>3</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, *Belarus in Figures, 2016* (Minsk, 2016), 6.

<sup>4</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 6.

- What drives Belarus's oscillating behavior in the international arena, particularly the country's relations with international organizations?
- How much leverage does Russia have on Belarus?
- How does Belarus's security posture affect the interests of the West and the United States?

After gaining independence in 1991, the country became a member of many regional and international institutions. It is one of the few countries that participate in both Western and Eastern security organizations. In its pursuit of balancing between the West and the East. However, the Belarusian government has periodically shifted the country's allegiance toward various international organizations, alternating between support and criticism. Also, Belarus's public self-presentation has differed over time and depending on the audience. Typically, this appearance has been more democratic and liberal when dealing with Western countries and more fraternal and pro-Slavic when dealing with Russia.

## **B. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

This thesis will examine the involvement of Belarus in European and regional security organizations, notably with respect to its relationship to the Russian Federation and the West. As explained in the preface of this chapter, Belarus is a good case study to examine European security's general patterns, such as confronting hostile power projection, dealing with multilateral security threats, establishing a balance of interests, and managing dependence on macro-economic factors just to name a few. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), NATO, and the European Union (EU) are the institutions to be examined, as they play critical roles in European security. It is worth noting that Belarus is a member of a number of other international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the



Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>5</sup> However, to limit the scope of this thesis, an overview and analysis of Belarus's involvement with these institutions will not be conducted.

Belarus's posture in the international arena organically affects relations between Belarus and the United States, which have been uneasy since the establishment of diplomatic relations in December 1991.<sup>6</sup> Their evolving bilateral cooperation was interrupted by 1996's referendum in Belarus, which amended the constitution of Belarus and gave President Alexander Lukashenko almost unlimited power at the expense of legislature and judiciary.<sup>7</sup> The negative reaction from the West was addressed by Lukashenko in the form of temporarily expelling the U.S. and EU ambassadors (the U.S. ambassador was permanently recalled in 2008).<sup>8</sup> In turn, the United States adopted a selective engagement policy and implemented a number of sanctions toward Belarus and its top officials, which further degraded Belarus-US relations.<sup>9</sup> Belarus's recent slight changes in economic and domestic policies eased the United States' approach, and Belarus-U.S. relations have been slowly recovering.<sup>10</sup>

### C. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Relative to the events in Ukraine and other parts of the post-Soviet space that have received broad coverage by the media, Belarus's foreign policy and its involvement in international security organizations have been understudied and are often overlooked. However, Belarus's geopolitical situation is paramount to maintaining peace and security

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<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, "Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations."

<sup>6</sup> "Countries and Regions/USA and Canada," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/>.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Widner, "Constitution Writing & Conflict Resolution," accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.princeton.edu/~pcwcr/reports/belarus1996.html>.

<sup>8</sup> "U.S. Relations with Belarus," U.S. Department of State, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5371.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, "Countries and Regions/USA and Canada."

<sup>10</sup> Grigory Ioffe, *Reassessing Lukashenka: Belarus in Cultural and Geopolitical Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 87–97.

in Europe: Belarus is bordered by Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, and, therefore, provides a natural buffer between Russia and NATO members.

Modern Belarus's geopolitical situation, history, relatively stable government, and need to seek its own development path makes this case study distinct from other potential examples. This combination contributes to the Belarusian government's wide-ranging and, sometimes, inconsistent initiatives. Minsk's desired foreign policy of neutrality and peacemaking often confronts problems in balancing the interests of all stakeholders. All of these factors make Belarus's security posture an interesting case to analyze from the point of development and security in the region, and modeling possible future scenarios allows one to analyze effects on the broader European security landscape. Moreover, modern Belarus's attempts to develop relations with international organizations are important as they may serve as an example of a peaceful and constructive way to find solutions in the service of regional security and East-West cooperation.

Belarus also plays a significant role in the context of other countries, especially in regard to Russia. Not only does Russia have a strong influence on Belarus's posture both domestically and internationally, but, in turn, Belarus's behavior affects Russia. While sometimes the chain reaction remains between Russia and Belarus alone, often, Moscow's responses to Minsk's actions affect the whole region. Moreover, Belarus provides military support to Russia in different aspects of its defense activities. One of the most important is Russia's large "Zapad" (West) military exercise, which takes place every four years and was held jointly with Belarus in 2009, 2013, and 2017.<sup>11</sup> In addition to joint military exercises, two Russian military facilities are operating in Belarus: a radar station at Gantsevichi and a naval communications center in Vileyka.<sup>12</sup> Neither facility is an official

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<sup>11</sup> "Russia-Belarus: Belarussian Military at Zapad-2017 Exercise Achieves Goals Set – Lukashenko," *Asia News Monitor*, September 21, 2017, <http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/1940529128?accountid=12702>; "Zapad-2013 Strategic Military Exercises," *Russian Government News*, September 26, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19290>; "Russia, Belarus Kick Off Joint Military Exercise," *Xinhua News Agency*, September 8, 2009, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/12A9E2B10BA1A558?p=AFNB>.

<sup>12</sup> "Russia: Belarus Regards Presence of Russian Military Installations as Beneficial," *Asia News Monitor*. Bangkok: Thai News Service Group, January 18, 2018, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1988172234/?pq-origsite=primo>.

military base, and Belarus does not charge fees for their use by Russia. Notably, this arrangement expires in 2020 and it is unclear if Belarus will renew the agreement on the same terms.<sup>13</sup>

Underneath Belarus's apparent stability, however, tensions can be discerned. While President Lukashenko's authoritarian regime has proved adaptable to many of the economic and political challenges the country has faced, some impending changes need to be considered that might affect Belarus's status quo: Lukashenko is aging; a successor for the presidency in the event of his sudden death is unclear; and the country lacks a sustainable economic model. For Western policymakers, these elements pose uncertainty and unpredictability in Belarus's international posture.

Belarus's foreign policy, while stressing the importance of neutrality and the country's peacemaking role in the region, is sensitive both to Russian interests and to Western attitudes. Understanding the challenges and the underlying causes that drive Belarus's behavior in the international arena will help Western policymakers in their assessments and decision-making processes.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The general consensus in the current literature is that Belarus is tilting towards the West, while seeking to maintain good relations with Russia. On the one hand, there is a common view in the literature that while Russian-Belarusian relations are degrading, these historically resilient ties are likely to continue. On the other hand, these scholars also argue that Belarus is seeking to improve relations with its Western neighbors and Western international organizations.

This thesis's first task is to understand the history of Belarus and the evolution of the country during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. While the literature focused on Belarus's foreign policy is limited, there are numerous articles and books on Belarus's history, the country's Soviet-era development, and the evolution of contemporary Russian-

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<sup>13</sup> "Russia: Belarus Regards Presence of Russian Military Installations as Beneficial," *Asia News Monitor*. Bangkok: Thai News Service Group, January 18, 2018, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1988172234/?pq-origsite=primo>.

Belarusian relations. However, most of the literature on Belarusian history in English comes from Soviet and Russian historians, whose views on the history of Belarus differs from Belarusian historians.

In this research, works of two Belarusian scholars, Petr Brigadin and Petr Chirnegov, were used by the author to provide an overview of the history of Belarus from the country's own perspective. Petr Brigadin's *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekzij* [The history of Belarus in the context of European history. A course of lectures] and Petr Chigrinov's *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomosch' abiturientam* [The history of Belarus. A study guide for college applicants], both originally in Russian language and translated by the author of this thesis, complement each other and provide a comprehensive overview of Belarusian history.

Monumental works on the history and post-Soviet development of the post-Soviet republics, including Belarus, are presented in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* and in the *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: documents, data, and analysis*, compiled by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Sullivan Paige.<sup>14</sup> Published in 1969-1978 in the Russian language, the third edition of the *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia* [The Great Soviet Encyclopedia] provides a Soviet perspective on Belarus's historical development in volume three: *Belorusskaya Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika* [The Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic].

The extensive collection of documents such as agreements, treaties, articles and so on, as well as tables and maps produced by Brzezinski and Paige at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, is a useful resource for the Belarus's posture in the post-Soviet era.<sup>15</sup> The chief source that these authors utilized is the Foreign Broadcast International Service (FBIS).<sup>16</sup> The book presents the evolution of bilateral and multilateral agreements among the former USSR republics until the end of 1995 and constitutes an

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<sup>14</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, Paige Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*.

<sup>16</sup> Marcia Sprules, "Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis," *Library Journal*, (June 1997), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/196819486/>.

important reference for Belarus's early development and the evolution of Russian-Belarusian relations.<sup>17</sup>

Among other authors, Grigory Ioffe asserts that modern post-Soviet Belarus is getting more and more Western-oriented, while simultaneously viewing Russia as an historical ally and friend.<sup>18</sup> One of the most prominent and informed observers of Belarus and its president Lukashenko, Ioffe, in his multiple publications asserts that Lukashenko's policies, both foreign and domestic, have historically reflected Belarusian ties with Russia.<sup>19</sup> However, Lukashenko's warmth towards his powerful neighbor looked different in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of his reign, Lukashenko had great ambitions about a Belarusian-Russian union and mutual cooperation across the political-social-economic spectrum. But, over time, his enthusiasm has degraded due to multiple disputes and misunderstandings between himself and Putin. With the loss of strong support from Russia, Lukashenko has been looking towards the West with much more interest.

Artyom Shraibman believes that Belarus's recent focus on becoming the world's peacemaker is an attempt to establish a desired balance between the West and Russia for the country.<sup>21</sup> Starting with the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Lukashenko's regime had offered Minsk as a site for peacemaking negotiations.<sup>22</sup> After hosting Russian-Ukrainian negotiations, Belarus suggested that talks on the resolution of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict could take place in Minsk as well.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Lukashenko and Belarus's top officials are promoting an ambitious idea to host Helsinki-2 process.<sup>24</sup> As a journalist and political commentator specializing in Belarus's foreign and domestic

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<sup>17</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*.

<sup>18</sup> Grigory Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 8 (2003): 1241–272. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/3594506>.

<sup>19</sup> Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity."

<sup>20</sup> Ioffe.

<sup>21</sup> Artyom Shraibman, "V Pogone za Nishej. Pochemu Minsk Sdelal Mirotvorchestvo Osnovoj Vneshnej Politiki" [In Pursuit of Niche. Why Minsk Made the Peacemaking a Basis of Its Foreign Policy], May 28, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76455> (translated by the author).

<sup>22</sup> Shraibman, "V Pogone za Nishej."

<sup>23</sup> Shraibman.

<sup>24</sup> Shraibman.

politics, Shraibman suggests that the “peacemaking role allows Lukashenko to align what was irreconcilable before--the West’s recognition and authoritarianism; [and] participation in a few agreements with Russia while having a different position from Russia in foreign policy.”<sup>25</sup> Minsk’s maneuvering behavior has now become expected rather than annoying.<sup>26</sup>

Shraibman further asserts that Belarusian politics have undergone three significant changes.<sup>27</sup> First, Belarus notably boosted its self-identity through domestic and foreign affairs.<sup>28</sup> At home, Belarus’s independence and national identity are being cultivated; abroad, Belarus’s foreign policy portrays, along with its independence, the country’s interest in maintaining a neutral, peace-oriented position between the West and Russia.<sup>29</sup> Second, Belarus’s foreign policy is affected by its declining economic relations with Moscow.<sup>30</sup> Lukashenko’s interest in Eurasian economic integration has faded and is being replaced with the more enthusiastic steps towards the West, as he seeks greater financial stability for his country.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Belarusian citizens, while generally pro-Russian, place their independence and newly found national identity above Russia’s domestic and foreign interests.<sup>32</sup>

Vladimir Socor’s expert observations reiterate Belarus’s complex relations with international security organizations. A senior Fellow of the Jamestown Foundation in Washington and its flagship publication, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Socor provides skilled analysis of Belarusian, Russian, and Western policies.<sup>33</sup> His analytical articles in the realm of

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<sup>25</sup> Shraibman.

<sup>26</sup> Shraibman.

<sup>27</sup> Artyom Shraibman, “The House That Lukashenko Built. The Foundation, Evolution, and Future of the Belarusian Regime,” April 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/2018/04/12/house-that-lukashenko-built-foundation-evolution-and-future-of-belarusian-regime-pub-76059>.

<sup>28</sup> Shraibman, “The House That Lukashenko Built.”

<sup>29</sup> Shraibman.

<sup>30</sup> Shraibman.

<sup>31</sup> Shraibman.

<sup>32</sup> Shraibman.

<sup>33</sup> “Contributors/Vladimir Socor,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, accessed June 7, 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/contributor/vladimir-socor/>.

regional security concerns, chiefly on NATO, OSCE, and EU policies and programs, provide an important perspective on Belarus's behavior in the international arena.

An alternative view on Russian-Belarusian relations is that the political and economic influence of Moscow is preventing Minsk from "Westernizing." One proponent of this view is Thomas Ambrosio, an associate professor of political science at North Dakota State University.<sup>34</sup> He argues that, despite the existing tensions between Putin and Lukashenko, relations between two countries and the emergence of the Union State of Belarus and Russia are a political success.<sup>35</sup> The Agreement on the Establishment of the Union State of Belarus and Russia was signed on 8 December 1999 by the heads of state and laid out a legal basis for Belarus's and Russia's gradual integration process.<sup>36</sup> Putin benefits from the Russian-Belarusian alliance by preventing Belarus from becoming a Western democratic country, thus protecting his borders from further NATO expansion and spread of democracy.<sup>37</sup> Lukashenko, in turn, is able to run the country without political and economic reforms, and preserve his dictatorial regime. In this way, political and economic support from Russia helps Lukashenko to stay in power.<sup>38</sup>

Such a view provides an important perspective on Russian-Belarusian relations, but is controversial. On the one hand, this opinion might seem outdated. The Union State of Belarus and Russia is no longer very active and does not provide meaningful benefits to either side. Additionally, Lukashenko's recent warmth towards West is undeniable. On the other hand, as recently as November 2017, President Lukashenko, during the meeting with the governor of Kalinigrad region, said: "We [Belarus and Russia] are not strangers, we share the same homeland. We do not divide Russia and Belarus by borders but we try to

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, "The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations: Insulating Minsk from a Color Revolution," *Demokratizatsiya* 14 (3), (2006): 407–434.

<sup>35</sup> Ambrosio, "The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations."

<sup>36</sup> "Russia and Union State," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 08, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/russia/>.

<sup>37</sup> Ambrosio, "The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations."

<sup>38</sup> Ambrosio.

build something new--we call it the Union State [of Belarus and Russia].”<sup>39</sup> Thus, perhaps the Union State might regain its influence and importance in the region at some point.

#### **E. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

The fundamentals of Lukashenko’s foreign policy can be drawn from his speech during the meeting with Central European Initiative’s foreign ministers: “For our country, it is equally important to develop cooperation with the East and the West and not to make an artificial choice between them.”<sup>40</sup> Over the past decades, the focus has shifted back and forth between the West and the East, and the trend in foreign policy of portraying Belarus as a neutral and peaceful state was established. In the security sphere, Belarus favors a pragmatic approach of simultaneous dependence on the Russian military and cooperation with Western security organizations.

On the face of it, the most plausible explanations suggest that three major factors have affected modern Belarus’s political posture. First, historically, Russian foreign and domestic policies have had a strong influence on Belarus’s behavior in the international arena and has pushed Belarus toward the East. Second, the unreformed economy has created financial difficulties in the domestic sector that have driven Lukashenko to seek for commerce and export alternatives to Russia globally. Third, sanctions by the West posed on Belarus for international legal violations, particularly in the area of human rights, and the unwillingness of Soviet-minded Lukashenko to Westernize Belarus, compel the Belarusian leader to pursue support from Russia.

Russia’s activities, both domestically and internationally, heavily influence Belarus’s behavior. Russia’s aggressiveness toward the West makes Minsk very cautious in forming Belarus’s policies and in publicizing its official views on points of tension between Russia and the West. The Crimean crisis is one of the most recent conflicts that

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<sup>39</sup> “Lukashenko: go to head-on with NATO activation” [Lukashenko: Soprikasaemysya lob v lob s aktivizatsiej NATO], *Sputnik News Agency*, November 13, 2017, (translated by the author).

<sup>40</sup> “Vstrecha s glavami MID stran-chlenov Zentral’no-Evropejskoj iniciativy” [The Meeting with Central European Initiative’s Foreign Ministers], President of the Republic of Belarus, accessed February 13, 2018, [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/vstrecha-s-glavami-mid-stran-chlenov-tsentralno-evropejskoj-initsiativy-16463/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-glavami-mid-stran-chlenov-tsentralno-evropejskoj-initsiativy-16463/). (translated by the author).



made Minsk very uncomfortable. Lukashenko did not support Russia's aggression in Ukraine, saying during a speech on 22 April 2014 at the Belarus Parliament: "I did not like it."<sup>41</sup> However, during the same speech he insinuated that Ukraine is partly to blame: "Ukraine 'gave up Crimea without a fight' because it does not consider the territory as its own."<sup>42</sup> During several interviews and speeches later on, Lukashenko asserted that Crimea is de facto Russian territory.<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, this fence-sitting by Lukashenko about the Russian annexation of Crimea shows his efforts not to upset either the West or Russia. On the other hand, such a position portrays Belarus as a neutral state, which seeks peacemaking in the region by non-aggressive means.

Much-needed Belarusian economic reforms have still not been enacted. Lukashenko, when he came to power in 1994, introduced a deviation from the former Soviet Union's planned economy called "market socialism."<sup>44</sup> The idea of market socialism was a mixture of private and state ownership. Lukashenko slowed the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-demanded reforms, including the privatization program.<sup>45</sup> This has led to an economy with a large and stagnating state-led sector. Yet Russia continues to support Belarus through low oil prices and financial support.<sup>46</sup> During the April 2017 meeting between Lukashenko and Putin, after the prolonged debates over

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<sup>41</sup> "Lukashenko: Ukraina "Sdala Krym bez Boja" Potomu Chto ne Schitaet Etu Territoriy Svojei." [Lukashenko: The Ukraine "Gave up Crimea Without a Fight" Because It Does Not Consider It Its Own Land], RT TV Channel, video, 2:39, April 22, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGLvTtK3ERA> (translated by the author).

<sup>42</sup> "Lukashenko: Ukraina "Sdala Krym bez Boja" Potomu Chto ne Schitaet Etu Territoriy Svojei." [Lukashenko: The Ukraine "Gave up Crimea Without a Fight" Because It Does Not Consider It Its Own Land].

<sup>43</sup> "Lukashenko o Kryme: Rossia Narushila Dogovor." [Lukashenko About Crimea: Russia Broke the Agreement], ONT Channel, video, 1:24, October 22, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mTPrHu1qLE> (translated by the author); "Bat'ka Lukashenko priznal Krym v sostave Rossii, [Lukashenko recognized Crimea's annexation by Russia], BELTA TV, Channel, video, 4:20, March 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgkZEKsx3C3Q> (translated by the author).

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Savchenko, "Toward Capitalism or Away from Russia? Early Stage of Post-Soviet Economic Reforms in Belarus and the Baltics," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 61, no. 1 (January 2002), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/217668843/>.

<sup>45</sup> Savchenko, "Toward Capitalism or Away from Russia?"

<sup>46</sup> International Monetary Fund, Republic of Belarus: Article IV Consultation-Staff Report; Staff Supplement; and Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussion March 2011 (Washington, DC, 2011).

gas and oil prices, an agreement was reached not only on energy prices and supplies, but also on a 1 billion USD loan.<sup>47</sup> Belarus's continued deep financial dependence on Russia is a matter of concern for Lukashenko and is the reason for his pursuit of alternatives to sustain his country's economy.

Western criticism of Lukashenko's "last dictatorship in Europe," and political and economic sanctions that the United States and the EU imposed on Belarus, are viewed by Minsk as overly harsh and unfair.<sup>48</sup> Despite Western views of the Belarusian president as a dictator, Lukashenko receives public support from many Belarusian citizens, and the opposition in the country is weak and unpopular.<sup>49</sup> Human rights violations by the Belarusian government, while silenced domestically, have triggered a harsh reaction from the West in the form of political isolation and economic sanctions. However, when compared to the rest of the post-Soviet space, Belarus's violations do not represent unprecedented humanitarian disasters; the penalties posed by the West, nevertheless, are exclusive to Belarus (perhaps because of its proximity to NATO and the EU).<sup>50</sup> Despite these reactions from the West, which are perceived by Belarus as unjust, Minsk is still trying to reduce its dependence on Russia and is seeking to develop closer relations with European organizations.

## **F. RESEARCH DESIGN**

To analyze Belarus's shifting behavior, a comparative case study methodological approach will be used. Belarus's participation in Western-led versus Russian-led security organizations will be compared through Belarus's level of involvement, level of cooperation, formal opinions, and informal comments. Belarusian official statements, reports, and public opinion will be evaluated to determine their Western or Eastern inclination in relation to certain international security organizations. Additionally, these

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<sup>47</sup> Alla Leukavets, Kamil Kłysiński and Andreas Heinrich, "Russian Relations with Belarus," *ETH Zurich Research Collection* 206, (September 2017). <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000200132>.

<sup>48</sup> Ioffe, Reassessing Lukashenka.

<sup>49</sup> Ioffe.

<sup>50</sup> Ioffe.

analyses will provide clarity on Minsk's public standing versus private attitudes and hidden support of opposition to certain issues.

The available literature, including the current press, will be scrutinized. Many Western scholars have written studies on Belarus's history and the country's course under Lukashenko's rule in the early 2000s. For example, Britain's ambassador to Minsk in 2003-2007, Brian Bennett, relies on his own experiences in describing and analyzing *The last dictatorship in Europe: Belarus under Lukashenko*, a book published in 2011.<sup>51</sup> In the same year, Andrew Wilson, an award-winning journalist and author, published a book on Belarus's origins, history, and post-Soviet evolution.<sup>52</sup>

The content of the official websites of various international security organizations will also be utilized in the analysis. Moreover, reports on interviews with Belarus's president, top Belarusian officials, as well as interviews with officials from international security organization will be examined to develop a better understanding of Minsk's behavior. A number of online informational agencies provide a wealth of raw material for analysis as well, including original interviews and speeches from top Belarusian, Russian, and Western officials. Asia News Monitor, Belapan news agency, Belarus Independent News, Belarusian Telegraph Agency, Sputnik News Agency, RIA News, and Xinhua News Agency are a few venues most relevant to the thesis. *The Jamestown Foundation Journal* also offers reliable and most up to date articles on Belarus, Russia, and their interconnections. *The European Council on Foreign Relations* journal is another reliable source of information and analytical articles with European perspective. Russian and Belarusian security journals and magazines, published in Russian language will be analyzed as they present valuable Eastern-oriented perspective on the security in the region.

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<sup>51</sup> Arnold McMillin, "Review of Brian Bennett's *The Last Dictatorship in Europe: Belarus under Lukashenko*," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 90, No. 4 (October 2012): 782-785,

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.90.4.0782>.

<sup>52</sup> McMillin, "Review of Brian Bennett's *The Last Dictatorship in Europe: Belarus under Lukashenko*."

## **G. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The thesis will be organized by chapters, correlating with Belarus's Western and Eastern inclinations. After the introduction, the second chapter will provide a brief history of Belarus and the country's Soviet developments. The third chapter will be devoted to analysis of Russian-Belarusian relations after the collapse of Warsaw Pact on 1 July 1991 and Belarus's involvement with the CSTO.<sup>53</sup> The fourth chapter will be devoted to Belarus's involvement and cooperation with Western security organizations, such as the OSCE, NATO, and EU. Finally, the fifth chapter, will focus on an analysis of Belarusian policy motivations, trends, and possible future directions, as well as how Belarusian policies may affect the United States and NATO.

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<sup>53</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*.

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## II. BELARUS BEFORE LUKASHENKO: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In order to understand modern Belarus, it is important to first outline the country's origins. Knowing history helps the observer to comprehend causes of modern events and makes it easier to analyze and assess the country's history. Belarus has a long history, and its population consolidation and development of socio-economic and political institutions took place in line with Eastern Slavic and pan-European civilizations.<sup>54</sup> What makes Belarus's history unique is that, until 1991, the country always was under the rule of another power: historically, Russians and Poles had the most influence on the country's developments. Thus, the tensions in Belarus's place between the East and the West existed over the course of history. Also, the country saw numerous devastating wars with enormous human losses. Such a dramatic development reflected on Belarusian national identity and, in turn, shapes Belarus's modern foreign policy.

### A. BELARUS'S ORIGINS

The Belarusian people started to form when Slavic tribes arrived to Europe and settled on modern Belarus's lands along with Baltic and other Finno-Ugric tribes.<sup>55</sup> However, the first signs of primitive people are about one hundred thousand years old, and active inhabitation of the area started in the late Paleolithic era.<sup>56</sup> Indo-European tribes reached modern Belarus's lands at the turn of third and second millenniums B.C.<sup>57</sup> In the 6<sup>th</sup> century Slavic tribes had encroached on eastern European lands, in the process divided into the Eastern, Western, and Southern Slavic groups.<sup>58</sup> The Eastern Slavic tribes are the ancestors of Belarusians, Russians, and Ukrainians.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Petr Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam* [The History of Belarus. Study Guide for College Applicants] (Minsk: Polymia, 2002), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Petr Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij* [The History of Belarus in the Context of European History. Course of Lectures] (Minsk: State Institute of Management and Social Technologies, Minsk State University, 2007), 16.

<sup>56</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Brigadin, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Brigadin, 15.

<sup>59</sup> Brigadin, 15.

In the tenth century, the Kyivan Rus was established, which is commonly viewed as a chronological starting point for the mutual cultural and historical developments of the Russian, Belarussian, and Ukrainian nations.<sup>60</sup> Kyivan Rus was a large empire of the unified princedoms ruled by the Scandinavian princes of the Rurikid dynasty.<sup>61</sup> The head of the state was the grand duke of Kyiv, who resided in the capital of the state Kyiv.<sup>62</sup> Prince Volodimir, grand duke of Kyiv (980–1015), introduced Byzantine Christianity as the official religion of Kyivan Rus.<sup>63</sup> Religion strengthened unity of the state, shaped a shared vision of the world, moral values and norms, helped establish certain behavioral trails, and enhanced the cultural development of Eastern Slavs.<sup>64</sup>

Under the conditions of economic development, the growth of cities, and progress in trade, the politico-economic amalgamations (or principalities) of Polotsk–Minsk, *Galicja–Volhynia*, and Vladimir–Suzdal were formed, which prompted the consolidation of the Belarussian, Ukrainian, and Russian nationalities, respectively.<sup>65</sup> Belarussian, along with Ukrainian and Russian, nationalities developments took place during the 13th-16th centuries.<sup>66</sup> The distinguishing feature of these nations' developments was that the inhabitants of each principality shared a common language, religion, cultural heritage, traditions, customs, and ceremonies and, therefore, enjoyed brotherhood-like feelings towards each other.<sup>67</sup> However, the Mongol invasion of 1237–40, which ended the Kyivan Rus, was a turning point in the disintegration of the three nationalities.<sup>68</sup> On the one hand, the invasion brought Northern Slavs under Mongol rule for the next three hundred years;

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<sup>60</sup> Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 14–15.

<sup>66</sup> Chigrinov, 15.

<sup>67</sup> Chigrinov, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 50.

on the other hand, the rest of the Rus territory came under the control of Lithuanian and Polish rulers.<sup>69</sup>

In the 13th century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) was formed, which shaped Belarusians as a distinctive nation.<sup>70</sup> Founded by Lithuanian Grand Duke Mindaugas (Mindaugas), the state further expanded under the rule of Grand Dukes Gediminas and his son Algirdas, and covered Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and some parts of Russia.<sup>71</sup> Under the GDL, ethnic Belarussian territory was shaped; settlement patterns and the development of trade and economic relations enhanced a common domestic market, social structure, and economy of the state.<sup>72</sup> Political and economic factors influenced ethno-cultural developments of different regions of the GDL with the common cultural traditions.<sup>73</sup> The Belarussian ethnicity started to form.<sup>74</sup>

Multilingualism in the GDL led to the emergence of the Belarussian language as a variety of the Indo-European language family.<sup>75</sup> In the 13th–14th centuries, the Belarussian language was used to sign such important documents as the treaties of Polotsk, Vitebsk, and Smolensk.<sup>76</sup> In the 14–17th centuries, Belarussian became an official state language of the GDL (the Statute of 1588 legalized the role of the Belarussian language).<sup>77</sup> However, growing influence of Poles in the GDL affected the usage of the Belarussian language, and it was diminished and gradually replaced by Polish. In 1696, the Polish language became the official state language of the GDL.<sup>78</sup> This development can be considered as the first attempt to Westernize Belarusians.

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<sup>69</sup> Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 50.

<sup>70</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 48.

<sup>71</sup> Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 85.

<sup>72</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 64.

<sup>73</sup> Brigadin, 64.

<sup>74</sup> Brigadin, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Andrii Danylenko, “A Missing Chain? On the Sociolinguistics of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania,” *Acta Baltico-Slavica* 41 (n.d.): 31–57, <https://doi.org/10.11649/abs.2017.002>.

<sup>76</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 64.

<sup>77</sup> Brigadin, 64.

<sup>78</sup> Brigadin, 64.



The GDL's involvement in a number of wars in the 16th and 17th centuries, which led to enormous human and material losses, and growing dominance of the Polish elite within the state, slowed the development of Belarusian identity.<sup>79</sup> On July 1, 1569, in Lublin, Poland, the Union of Lublin was signed and the single state of Poland and Lithuania was created: *Rech Pospolitaia (Речь Посполитая)*, or the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>80</sup> This union with Poland gave Poles a leading role in the state's affairs, and infiltration of Polish culture into the GDL's society degraded dynamic development of Belarusian identity.

One of the major effects of the GDL's union with Poland was rapid integration of Catholicism into the religious sphere of the state's inhabitants. The power of the Orthodox Church started to weaken as early as the late 14th century, when the Union of Krewo was signed in 1385, starting the long-lasting shared history and bilateral relations between Poland and Lithuania.<sup>81</sup> The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's pro-Polish government promoted Catholicism over Orthodox Christianity, which further deepened ethno-sectarian and social conflicts within the state's population.<sup>82</sup>

In the attempt to unify the multi-religious society the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's government promoted the idea of a united Catholic-Orthodox church, and in 1596 Brest's Church Council established the first Uniate Church.<sup>83</sup> While this new church promoted Catholic dogmas and Orthodox worships, in practice it meant the abolition of the Orthodox Church.<sup>84</sup> The wave of protests by the Orthodoxy clergy and believers forced the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's government to officially recognize the Orthodox Church.<sup>85</sup> The five-hundred-year old Orthodoxy was preserved in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's territory; however, Catholicism has contributed

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<sup>79</sup> Brigadin, 65.

<sup>80</sup> Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nation*, 85–90.

<sup>81</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 67.

<sup>82</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 123.

<sup>83</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 89.

<sup>84</sup> Brigadin, 89.

<sup>85</sup> Brigadin, 89.

immensely to the evolving Belarusian identity and culture.<sup>86</sup> Belarusians desire to accommodate both the East's and the West's values can be traced down to this example of the attempt to create the Uniate Church.

The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth continued to lose its power during the 17th and 18th centuries due to unceasing conflicts and wars both domestically and internationally. The Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky led a major Cossack revolt in 1648, which ended the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's eastward expansion, stimulated Russia's expansion to the West, and triggered a series of wars.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, in a context of political, economic, social, cultural, and religious developments, Khmelnytsky's uprising set off the long-lasting interaction between the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia and greatly influenced Belarusian identity development.<sup>88</sup>

The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's multiple armed conflicts in the 17th–18th centuries with the Ottoman Empire, Muscovite Rus, Sweden, and Crimean Tatars had catastrophic implications for the state: the population decreased almost twice in size from 2.9 million to 1.4 million people and its economic and political systems were distressed.<sup>89</sup> As a result, civil war broke out, which weakened the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth even further.<sup>90</sup> The Great Northern War of 1700–1721 took place largely on the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and resulted not only in devastating losses of human lives but also in loss of political influence in Europe and strong dominance of Russia over the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's territory.<sup>91</sup>

In 1795, after multiple unsuccessful attempts to restore the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's power and international influence, the state was officially dissolved.<sup>92</sup> After another war with Russia and several domestic revolts, in October 1795 the final

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<sup>86</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 125.

<sup>87</sup> Ploky, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 161.

<sup>88</sup> Ploky, 161.

<sup>89</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 98–99.

<sup>90</sup> Brigadin, 99.

<sup>91</sup> Brigadin, 101.

<sup>92</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 128.

division took place: almost the entire territory of modern Belarus, a large part of Lithuania, and the Duchy of Courland (Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth’s vassal state in the Baltic region) were lost to Russia; a small part of Belarus (west of Grodno), part of Polish territory, and the western part of Lithuania were lost to Prussia.<sup>93</sup> The once mighty Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist.

The incorporation of Belarus’s lands into the Russian Empire marked a historic turning point in the fate of Belarusians. Catherine the Great’s vision was full integration of Belarus’s lands into the Russian Empire.<sup>94</sup> Belarus’s inclusion into Russia had positive effect, promoting the economic, political, social, and cultural development of Belarusians.<sup>95</sup> The agricultural market, Belarus’s main economic sector, expanded significantly, with Russians being additional consumers.<sup>96</sup> Catherine II had significantly strengthened monarchical power, increased the nobility’s privileges, and weakened the power of the church through secularization of the convent lands.<sup>97</sup> Russia’s policy regarding religion was vectored on undermining the Catholic Church and promoting Orthodoxy.<sup>98</sup> Belarus was turning to the East.

However, the Patriotic War of 1812 was not only another enormous disaster for the Belarusian people, but brought another wave of Belarus’s Westernization. When Napoleon invaded Russia on 12 June 1812 (the Patriotic War of 1812), Belarus’s land became a battleground.<sup>99</sup> By July 1812, almost all of Belarus’s territory was occupied by the French army and its allies.<sup>100</sup> Napoleon’s promise to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania led Belarus’s nobility to support Napoleon and even to join the French army.<sup>101</sup> Local

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<sup>93</sup> Chigrinov, 145.

<sup>94</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 117.

<sup>95</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii*. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch’ Abiturientam, 176.

<sup>96</sup> Chigrinov, 176.

<sup>97</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 118.

<sup>98</sup> Brigadin, 118.

<sup>99</sup> Brigadin, 123.

<sup>100</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii*. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch’ Abiturientam, 179.

<sup>101</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 123.

governments, along with the occupier's authorities, were supplying the French army with food and, as a result, impoverishing Belarus's peasant households.<sup>102</sup> In addition, peasants' initial expectations that Napoleon would bring abolition of serfdom, as he did earlier in Poland, were dashed, and peasants ran into the woods and started the guerrilla war against French army.<sup>103</sup> Napoleon's final defeat, which started a retreat from Moscow in October 1812, was completed on Belarus's land.<sup>104</sup> Overall, Belarus lost one million people on the battlefields and due to starvation and epidemics.<sup>105</sup> Vitebsk, Polotsk, Grodno, Minsk, and many other towns were looted and burned.<sup>106</sup> Livestock and sown lands were reduced by 50 percent.<sup>107</sup>

The effect of Westernization that the Patriotic War of 1812 had on Belarus can be traced through an increase in the gentry's activity with the main goal to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, to eliminate feudal practices, and to democratize the society.<sup>108</sup> Driven by ideas of the Polish national liberation movement and Russia's Decembrists, Belarus's students started to create clandestine organizations.<sup>109</sup> The main notions of these secret societies were the abolition of serfdom, constitutional forms of government, and developing a middle class from the nobility.<sup>110</sup> Following the Warsaw uprising in 1830, Belarus's revolutionaries took up arms in the beginning of 1831, but the rebellion, led by nobles without support from peasants, was suppressed first in Belarus, and then in Poland.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Brigadin, 123.

<sup>103</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam* 180.

<sup>104</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 123.

<sup>105</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 181.

<sup>106</sup> Chigrinov, 181.

<sup>107</sup> Chigrinov, 181.

<sup>108</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 131.

<sup>109</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 182.

<sup>110</sup> Chigrinov, 182.

<sup>111</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*.

The 1830–1831 uprising showed the Russian government how significant the Polish influence was in Belarus.<sup>112</sup> Russian Tsar Nicholas I took a number of steps to strengthen Russian power in the region.<sup>113</sup> Nobles, involved in the uprising, were deported to Siberia with their estates confiscated, more than ten thousand noble families lost their titles, and peasants from Russia were relocated to Belarus to further promote Russification.<sup>114</sup> The church was affected by the Tsar’s repressions: in 1832, of 304 existing Catholic monasteries, 191 were closed, and sermons in churches were censored.<sup>115</sup> State administration seats were filled by Russian officials, all official documentation had to be conducted in the Russian language, and courses in the Polish language were banned.<sup>116</sup> Thus, between the East and the West, powerful and devastating repressions from the East triumphed over Western inspirations.

Russia’s politics towards Belarus saw some liberalization at the beginning of the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881), which nourished pro-Polish aspirations.<sup>117</sup> Amnesty was granted to all sentenced for political crimes in 1830–1831.<sup>118</sup> Belarusian-born citizens were allowed to hold civilian posts, the Polish language was allowed in schools, and the building of new Catholic churches was granted.<sup>119</sup> A widely popular was the project of the Lithuanian gentry to petition the Russian Tsar for the annexation of Lithuania and Belarus to Poland.<sup>120</sup> Belarusian society started to radicalize, and the Russian government began losing control over its western territories.<sup>121</sup>

Another factor that fueled revolutionary feelings within Belarusian society was the fact that the Industrial Revolution, which transformed chiefly agrarian, rural societies in

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<sup>112</sup> Brigadin, 133.

<sup>113</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch’ Abiturientam*, 186.

<sup>114</sup> Chigrinov, 187.

<sup>115</sup> Chigrinov, 187.

<sup>116</sup> Chigrinov, 187.

<sup>117</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch’ Abiturientam*, 190.

<sup>118</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 133.

<sup>119</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch’ Abiturientam*, 186.

<sup>120</sup> Chigrinov, 191.

<sup>121</sup> Chigrinov, 191.

Europe and America into *industrial*, urban, and democratic, had been slow within the Russian Empire. Economic development has lagged due to traditional feudal relationships, serfdom, the overexploitation of the peasantry, and Belarus society's cultural inferiority.<sup>122</sup> To avoid a looming crisis, the Russian government undertook a series of peasantry reforms in Belarus that eased peasants' living conditions and emancipated a large number of peasants from serfdom.<sup>123</sup> On 19 February 1861, Russian Tsar Alexander II signed the Emancipation Manifesto, declaring the abolishment of serfdom in the Russian Empire.<sup>124</sup> While the Emancipation Manifesto made peasants free men who were now allowed to own property, to sue in court, and even to participate in local elections, peasants still were attached to the land.<sup>125</sup>

In 1863, Belarus underwent another major uprising. Similar to the 1830–1831 revolt, the national liberation uprising in Warsaw in January 1863 motivated Belarus's counterparts to start their own rebellion.<sup>126</sup> Led by Vykenty Konstantin Kalinovsky, a member of the extreme left wing and an organizer of the first Belarusian-language newspaper *Peasant's Truth*, rebel groups were formed from nobles, students, artisans, and peasants.<sup>127</sup> Advocating the social and national liberation of the Belarusian people, Kalinovsky's motto "the people are not for the government, but the government is for the people" became the revolutionaries' principal objective.<sup>128</sup> The revolutionaries' demands included the overthrow of autocracy, the establishment of the authority of the people, liquidation of the landowners as a class, the transfer of land and all means of production to the people, and the creation of the new social order based on a reformed peasants' community.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 128.

<sup>123</sup> Brigadin, 128.

<sup>124</sup> Brigadin, 136.

<sup>125</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 164.

<sup>126</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 146.

<sup>127</sup> Brigadin, 147.

<sup>128</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii*. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam, 193.

<sup>129</sup> Chigrinov, 191.

Again, the uprising was suppressed by the Russian Empire and, similar to the outcome in 1830–1831, repressions were taken by the Russian government to tighten its power and influence in the region.<sup>130</sup> Kalinovsky was arrested and publicly executed by hanging in March 1864.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, Russia was seeking to create a positive image for itself as the savior of Belarusians from foreign oppressors and carried out a number of activities to ease living conditions for Belarusians and to promote the Russian gentry.<sup>132</sup>

After 1870s, revolutionary movements in Belarus were developing in parallel to the ones in Russia. In 1870–1880s there were the Populists—Herzen and Chernyshevsky’s idea of the peasants’ socialism.<sup>133</sup> In the 1890s, Marxist ideas started to dominate among Belarus’s revolutionaries.<sup>134</sup> In March 1898, in Minsk an all-Russian revolutionary socialist political party was founded: Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, also known as the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party or the Russian Social Democratic Party.<sup>135</sup> In 1903 the Belarusian Socialist Assembly, BSA (Belarusian: Беларуска-сацыялістычная грамада, Belarusian Socialist Hramada, BSH) was founded.<sup>136</sup>

In the 20th century, Belarus’s history was closely intertwined with that of *the* Russian Empire. The Russo-Japanese war 1904–1905 sharpened social discord in the Russian Empire, including in Belarus.<sup>137</sup> The increasing working class movement was becoming more and more politicized and Lenin’s Bolsheviks’ influence was significant.<sup>138</sup> Bloody Sunday of 9 January 1905, a massacre of peaceful demonstrators in St. Petersburg, which started the first Russian Revolution of 1905, provoked a wave of strikes, demonstrations, and protests in Belarus.<sup>139</sup> However, unlike in Russia, revolutionaries’

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<sup>130</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 149.

<sup>131</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii*. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch’ Abiturientam, 197.

<sup>132</sup> Chigrinov, 197.

<sup>133</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 148.

<sup>134</sup> Brigadin, 149.

<sup>135</sup> Brigadin, 149.

<sup>136</sup> Brigadin, 169.

<sup>137</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii*. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch’ Abiturientam, 243.

<sup>138</sup> Chigrinov, 243.

<sup>139</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 171.

activities in Belarus did not grow into armed rebellion.<sup>140</sup> Local government acted proactively and constructively, making a number of arrests, introducing a state of emergency, and redeploying armed forces into the most troubled regions.<sup>141</sup>

Russian Tsar Nicholas II's October Manifesto from 17 October 1905, which promised basic civil liberties and creation of a Duma (a legislative body with popularly elected members, without whose approval no laws were to be enacted), weakened the revolutionary movement in Russia, and had a similar effect in Belarus.<sup>142</sup> Belarus's first and second Dumas had little political success, and, with the revolution's end in December 1907 in Russia, Belarus's revolutionary movement became feeble.<sup>143</sup>

By the beginning of the World War I (WWI) Belarus's post-revolutionary period of political repression, arrests, retaliatory expeditions, and searches had given way to another rise of worker and peasant movements.<sup>144</sup> But massive strikes and protests were interrupted by WWI, which brought another devastating "hurricane" to Belarus's lands.<sup>145</sup> The battle line in the Belarus's territory was along the cities of Dvinsk, Postava, Baranovichi, and Pinsk; the western part of Belarus with about 2 million citizens, was occupied by the Germans, and the Russian army deployed about 1.5 million soldiers in the eastern part of Belarus.<sup>146</sup> In the course of WWI, Belarus lost part of its territory.<sup>147</sup> Agriculture had fallen into ruin, factories had to be evacuated from the occupied territories, and about 1.5 million citizens fled from Belarus.<sup>148</sup> The collapse of the economy led to

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<sup>140</sup> Brigadin, 171.

<sup>141</sup> Brigadin, 171.

<sup>142</sup> "October Manifesto," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 1, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/October-Manifesto>.

<sup>143</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 171.

<sup>144</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 250.

<sup>145</sup> Chigrinov, 250.

<sup>146</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 179.

<sup>147</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe Posobie v Pomosch' Abiturientam*, 151.

<sup>148</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 179.



inflation, speculation, a real threat of famine, and social unrest.<sup>149</sup> As a result, widespread protests against the government broke out all over the Russian Empire.

The February Revolution of 1917 in Russian Empire gave a boost to political activities in Belarus. Local Belarusian authorities recognized the Russian Provisional Government and the Council of Worker's and Soldier's Deputies that had been proclaimed.<sup>150</sup> The October Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd brought Lenin and his Bolshevik's Communist Party to power in Russia. In Belarus, the confrontation between Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and other representatives from both the left and right wings continued throughout 1917–1918. On 25 March 1918, Belarus declared its independence and creation of the Belarus People's Republic within its ethnic borders; however, this decision was not recognized by either the international community or Russia.<sup>151</sup> The end result of this political turmoil was the Manifesto of Creation of the independent Belarusian Soviet Social Republic (BSSR) on 1 January 1919.<sup>152</sup>

Belarusian nationalists' attempts to endorse independence of the BSSR from Russia failed. The ruling elite in Minsk was under direct pressure from Moscow and Soviets had no interest in given Belarus independence. On a contrary, Soviets perceived Belarus as a buffer in the process of spreading socialist revolution globally due to Belarus's geographical location between Russia and the West. Moreover, during the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–1921, Belarus territory became a battleground for two foes. In March 1921, the Soviet Russia and Poland signed The Treaty of Riga, which ended the Polish–Soviet War. After the war, a big part of the Red Army remained on Belarus's territory, manifesting Soviets' dominance in the BSSR. The Treaty of Riga also divided Belarus between Poland and Soviet Russia: the Western part of Belarus became a part of Poland and got the unofficial name of Western Belarus.<sup>153</sup> As residents of Poland, Western Belarusians had

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<sup>149</sup> Brigadin, 180.

<sup>150</sup> Brigadin, 180.

<sup>151</sup> Brigadin, 190.

<sup>152</sup> Brigadin, 191.

<sup>153</sup> Vladimir Kozlyakov, *V Bor'be za Edinstvo Belarusskogo Naroda [In the Struggle for Belarus's National Unity]* (Minsk: Belarusian State Technological University, 2018). (translated by the author)

been subject to discrimination and forced polonization.<sup>154</sup> Only after the Red Army invaded Poland in September 1939, in accord with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact's secret protocol, was Western Belarus returned to the BSSR.<sup>155</sup> The Soviets' military presence and political dominance in Belarus made the Belarusian elite to support Moscow and, in turn, to lose its brief independence.

## **B. BELARUS UNDER THE USSR**

After the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in December 1922, Belarus naturally became a part of the union under Soviet rule.<sup>156</sup> The Soviet government faced the huge challenge of rebuilding this multinational country with a ruined economy after a devastating period of war and revolutions.<sup>157</sup> The state adopted the New Economic Policy (NEP).<sup>158</sup> NEP was a mixture of a free market and a state-controlled economy; agriculture and petty commerce belonged to the former, and heavy industry and credit to the latter.<sup>159</sup> The new Statute of the BSSR State Planning Committee, headed by a chairman, was implemented in April 1922.<sup>160</sup> The goal of the BSSR Planning Committee included “analysis of state economic bodies’ plans, formation of BSSR’s economic plan and its coordination with the USSR economic plan, fulfillment of the BSSR’s economic plan, and the development of electrification, regionalization, national resources plans, and scientific support for the economic plan.”<sup>161</sup>

Belarus’s peasants and workers took advantage of this new system, in 1923, Belarus’s commercial establishments belonged to private capital, and there were 3,212

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<sup>154</sup> Kozlyakov, V Bor’be za Edinstvo Belarusskogo Naroda.

<sup>155</sup> Kozlyakov.

<sup>156</sup> Kozlyakov.

<sup>157</sup> Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 1.

<sup>158</sup> Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 139.

<sup>159</sup> Malia, 139–167.

<sup>160</sup> “1920-1940 Creation of State Planning Committee and Its Role in the Development of BSSR National Economy,” The Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus, accessed December 8, 2017, <http://www.economy.gov.by/en/history-1920-en/>.

<sup>161</sup> The Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus, “1920-1940 Creation of State Planning Committee and Its Role in the Development of BSSR National Economy.”

private companies.<sup>162</sup> However, NEP was viewed by the Communist leaders as a capitalist system and an obstruction to the road of socialism, and, under Stalin, NEP was abandoned.<sup>163</sup> Instead, Stalin presented two new pillars of the USSR's economy: the Five-Year Plan and collectivization, which were introduced to all of the Soviet republics at the end of 1920s and the beginning the 1930s.<sup>164</sup>

Under the Five-Year Plan economy, Belarus experienced accelerated industrialization.<sup>165</sup> Stalin moved exclusively to a centralized command planning economy and introduced Gosplan (the central economic plan). Gosplan was an institution, which had numerous branch departments (for coal, ferrous metals, machine building, and the like) and various summary departments (the departments of finance and costs, the department for the annual national economic plan, and the department of capital investment.)<sup>166</sup> All 15 Soviet republics, to include Belarus, had branches of Gosplan.<sup>167</sup> In Belarus, automotive, tractor, machine-building, radio and electronic, oil-producing, petroleum refining, and petrochemical industries were established.<sup>168</sup> Automatic production lines, computers, low-voltage equipment, potassium fertilizers, and wood-based composites, such as particle board and fiberboard, were also introduced.<sup>169</sup> Big cities such as Minsk, Vitebsk, Mogilev, etc., became large industrial centers.<sup>170</sup>

Collectivization in Belarus, as in the rest of the USSR, met with strong peasant opposition, but created a large agricultural industry; within a decade, 87.5 percent of

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<sup>162</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs keczij, 217.

<sup>163</sup> Malia, *The Soviet tragedy*, 174–175.

<sup>164</sup> Malia, 177–190.

<sup>165</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs lekcij, 217.

<sup>166</sup> Paul R. Gregory and Robert C. Stuart, *Soviet Economic Structure and Performance* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 157.

<sup>167</sup> Gregory and Stuart, *Soviet Economic Structure and Performance*, 157.

<sup>168</sup> Vladimir Borisenko, "Towards the Development of Trade and Economic Relations of Belarus with Foreign Countries (1971—1985)," *Belarusian Journal of International Law and International Relations*, no. 4 (April 2000).

<sup>169</sup> Borisenko, "Towards the Development of Trade and Economic Relations of Belarus with Foreign Countries (1971—1985)."

<sup>170</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs lekcij, 219.

Belarus's peasant farms were collectivized.<sup>171</sup> Collectivization was Stalin's policy of the forced transformation of private peasant households into collective farm systems called "kolkhozes"; peasants had to bring everything they own to the kolkhoz: machinery, tools, equipment, animals, etc.<sup>172</sup> The Soviet government had to use economic and non-economic means to force collectivization. Economically, tax allowances and money credits for kolkhozes were established.<sup>173</sup> Non-economic practices included a campaign against the kulaks (in theory, wealthy peasants, but in practice, peasants who had anything worthwhile in their own possession), repression (during collectivization about 600–700 thousand of peasants were deported), and administrative punishments for peasant-smallholders.<sup>174</sup>

To recognize national self-determination within its vast new borders and multi-national population, the Soviet Union adopted a federal structure, which meant that the republics were to have nominal ethnic autonomy and the official native languages.<sup>175</sup> Soviet Russia and Soviet Belarus signed bilateral agreements covering the most important political and economic issues.<sup>176</sup> During the 1920s to 1930s, the Belarusian government pursued a nation-building policy.<sup>177</sup> In practice, it meant the development of Belarusian culture, the use of Belarusian language in official documents, and the nomination of Belarusians into government and social organizations.<sup>178</sup> However, in late 1920s, national policy changed radically: the USSR's campaign against national democrats brought repressions against Belarus's intelligents.<sup>179</sup> Almost all members of Belarus's national movement, most members of the Writers' Union, and members of the Academy of Sciences

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<sup>171</sup> Brigadin, 221.

<sup>172</sup> Gregory and Stuart, *Soviet Economic Structure and Performance*, 177.

<sup>173</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekcij*, 220.

<sup>174</sup> Brigadin, 221.

<sup>175</sup> Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 213.

<sup>176</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekcij*, 190.

<sup>177</sup> Brigadin, 223.

<sup>178</sup> Brigadin, 223.

<sup>179</sup> Brigadin, 223.

were labeled as enemies of the people and sentenced, deported, or killed.<sup>180</sup> A totalitarian regime was established in the USSR.

World War II devastated Belarus, which experienced immense human losses and fierce and prolonged fighting. Nazi Germany occupied the land at the very beginning of the war and retained Belarusian territory until 1944.<sup>181</sup> Belarusian lands yet again became a battleground, this time between Germans and the Soviet Union.<sup>182</sup> The Nazis introduced a “new order” in Belarus, whose goal was to destroy Soviet rule and to pillage its natural resources and national wealth.<sup>183</sup> In accordance with the Generalplan “Ost” (Hitler’s plan for large-scale genocide, ethnic cleansing, and colonization of Central and Eastern Europe by Germany), only 25 percent of Belarusians were to be left on Belarus’s territory as a labor force, the other 75 percent were to be killed or deported.<sup>184</sup> In practice, the new order meant the local population’s genocide, violence, terror, and looting.<sup>185</sup> About one million people were killed in 260 death camps, built on Belarus’s territory.<sup>186</sup>

As Timothy Snyder asserts in his book *Bloodlands*, “Minsk was a centerpiece of Nazi destructiveness.”<sup>187</sup> Germans bombed Minsk to the ground before occupying the city and then transferred it into the assembly of ghettos, concentration camps, prisoner-of-war camps, and killing sites.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, the Nazi Holocaust in Minsk was horrifyingly unique in the way the Germans mocked, tortured, and murdered Jews.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Brigadin, 224.

<sup>181</sup> Alexandra Goujon, “Memorial Narratives of WWII Partisans and Genocide in Belarus,” *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 1 (2010), 6–25.

<sup>182</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 225.

<sup>183</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekcij*, 253.

<sup>184</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomosch’ abiturientam*, 345.

<sup>185</sup> Chigrinov, 345.

<sup>186</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekcij*, 253.

<sup>187</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 225.

<sup>188</sup> Snyder, 225.

<sup>189</sup> Snyder, 225.

Belarus was famous for its partisan warfare, which started from the first days of the war and became a nightmare for Germans.<sup>190</sup> Massive in its nature, partisan warfare counted about 1,255 squads, more than 370 thousand soldiers, and about 70 thousand underground activists.<sup>191</sup> The partisans' actions, while they were effective militarily, also subsequently caused deaths among the civilian population.<sup>192</sup> Hitler, in the name of counteractions against partisans, offered no legal responsibilities for his soldiers' behavior toward the civilian population, and the horrifying manner, with which Nazis dealt with Belarusian civilians, was comparable to the way they dealt with the Jews.<sup>193</sup>

The end of WWII brought shattered Belarus back under Soviet rule. On 3 July 1944, during the operation "Bagration," the Soviet Army liberated Minsk, and Belarus was freed from German occupation.<sup>194</sup> In Belarus, WWII destroyed 209 cities and towns, 9,200 villages, about ten thousand industrial facilities.<sup>195</sup> About half of the Belarusian population was either killed or deported.<sup>196</sup> The republic lost about half of its national wealth.<sup>197</sup> On the other hand, Belarusians' devastating losses and sacrifices during the WWII were recognized by the West and gave Belarus a chance to be seen and heard on international arena. Belarus became a founding member of the United Nations in 1945; in 1954, Belarus joined the International Labour Organization; and, in 1957, it joined the International Atomic Energy Agency.<sup>198</sup>

Belarus's economic, political, and social recovery after the war took place in the new bipolar world with two major nuclear superpowers: the United States and the USSR. Being a part of the latter, Belarus's economic reconstruction was fortified by Moscow's

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<sup>190</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs lekcij, 253.

<sup>191</sup> Brigadin, 255.

<sup>192</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 238.

<sup>193</sup> Snyder, 234.

<sup>194</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs lekcij, 258.

<sup>195</sup> Brigadin, 261.

<sup>196</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 251.

<sup>197</sup> Snyder, 261.

<sup>198</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs lekcij, 283.

financial aid, German reparations, and equipment, commodities, and livestock procurements.<sup>199</sup> The atmosphere in Belarus was highly patriotic; people were working both in cities and in kolkhozes with enthusiasm; liberal attitudes and hopes for relaxation of the pre-war were in the air.<sup>200</sup> About 15 million Soviet citizens returned to Belarus; many of these Red Army soldiers and repatriates had seen life outside the USSR, and brought Western ideas to Belarusian society.<sup>201</sup> However, Stalin strengthened ideological controls and brought back repressions and punitive policies.<sup>202</sup> A totalitarian regime was restored in Belarus.

After Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, the USSR's leaders eased the totalitarian regime, but communist ideology, the planned economy, and repressions (though much more relaxed compared to Stalin's) comprised the country's life.<sup>203</sup> Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev (1953-1964) was a true believer that communism, in general, is good, and innovations were needed mostly to improve living conditions-- that more food and housing would solve all the issues in Soviet society. Khrushchev brought the "thaw"—a relaxation of censorship and repressions, destalinization, and some Westernization of the country. The "thaw" led to rehabilitation of political prisoners in the USSR, and between 1956 and 1961 about 60 thousand former detainees in Siberian labor camps returned to Belarus.<sup>204</sup>

The "thaw" affected the USSR's international posture as a whole and Belarus's international position in particular. Khrushchev drafted the Warsaw Pact, which was signed by the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia on 14 May 1955 in Warsaw.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, Khrushchev implemented

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199 Brigadin, 281.

200 Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomoshch' abiturientam*, 365–366.

201 Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekzij*, 283.

202 Brigadin, 284.

203 Brigadin, 284.

204 Brigadin, 286.

205 Richard J. Samuels, "Warsaw Pact," *Encyclopedia of U.S. National Security* (2006), <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952446.n645>.

important foreign policy changes. First, the possible peaceful coexistence with the West, particularly with the United States; second, the possibility of avoiding war; and third, the idea that there are different ways for countries to become socialist, which suggested that the Soviet example was not mandatory for all.<sup>206</sup> Khrushchev also developed the idea that nuclear weapons made the Soviets' and the United States' coexistence obligatory.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, he thought that superior economic production would inherently make communism win over capitalism, which, in turn, meant that war was avoidable.<sup>208</sup>

During the “thaw,” Belarus was able to extend its international contacts. The Belarusian government, in addition to its membership in the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the International Atomic Energy Agency, created the Belarusian Committee for Peace, the Belarusian International Friendship and Cultural Relations Society, and the Committee of Youth Organizations.<sup>209</sup> Additionally, Belarus joined the international twinning movement.<sup>210</sup> Belarus's increased foreign contacts contributed to the shaping of partnerships in research, industry, and culture.<sup>211</sup>

Overall, these changes in foreign policy and the loosening of the iron curtain affected not only Soviet domestic policies, but also created friction in the cohesion of international communism.<sup>212</sup> However, Khrushchev's many economic reforms, mainly in agriculture, proved to be ineffective and, coupled with continuous changes in all the spheres of the country's life, frustrated many Communist Party members. In 1964, the Politburo removed Khrushchev and replaced him with Leonid Brezhnev.

Brezhnev's rule between 1964 and 1982 took place in the heat of the Cold War, but brought rational and successful reforms to the economy, which in turn helped to improve Belarus's economic situation. In international arena, Belarus was mostly pursuing the

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<sup>206</sup> Mark Frankland, *Khrushchev* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1967), 1–6.

<sup>207</sup> Frankland, *Khrushchev*, 154–171.

<sup>208</sup> Frankland, 154–171.

<sup>209</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekzij*, 283.

<sup>210</sup> Brigadin, 283.

<sup>211</sup> Brigadin, 283.

<sup>212</sup> Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 327.



interests of the USSR, but, using the United Nations rostrum, it presented itself as an ambassador of different nations' goals of peaceful coexistence.<sup>213</sup> Economically, during this period, a number of large industrial enterprises were built in Belarus, including refineries, chemical and fertilizer plants, heavy machinery factories, and power generation facilities.<sup>214</sup> Despite heavy investments from Moscow, the “extensification” of agriculture during this period led to shortages in food for the population and commodities for industries.<sup>215</sup>

The beginning of the 1980s has become known as the period of stagnation, when, despite the fact that economic performance declined and a shortage of labor occurred across the USSR, including in Belarus, the country leaders were comfortable with the status quo.<sup>216</sup> Starting in the late Brezhnev years and extending into the administrations of Yuri Andropov (1982–1984) and Konstantin Chernenko's (1984–1985), this period brought no significant changes. During this period, Belarus underwent steady but slow development in the spheres of industrial production, agriculture, education, and science. By the end of 1980s, Belarus had established robust a machine-building, radio-electronic, and chemical complex with about 1,500 factories.<sup>217</sup>

In April 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and Belarus, along with the rest of the world, entered a new era of history. Due to political forces unleashed by Gorbachev's new policies and reforms, famously known as glasnost and perestroika, the fifteen constituent republics eventually broke away from the center and declared their independence. On 27 June 1990, the Supreme Council of the BSSR adopted the Declaration of Independence.<sup>218</sup> On 19 September 1991, the BSSR's Supreme Council agreed on renaming the BSSR as “the Republic of Belarus”; a Belarusian flag and coat of arms were

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<sup>213</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomosch' abiturientam*, 389.

<sup>214</sup> Chigrinov, 364.

<sup>215</sup> Chigrinov, 371.

<sup>216</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii. Kurs lekzij*, 294.

<sup>217</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomosch' abiturientam*, 293.

<sup>218</sup> Chigrinov, 293.

legislated.<sup>219</sup> Finally, in December 1991, the USSR ceased to exist. Independent Belarus's modern history has begun.

### C. CONCLUSION

Two major points stand out from analyzing the origins and history of Belarus: 1) the country's deep dependence on Russia and 2) Belarus's desire for peace. Ethnic ties with Russia and other Slavic tribes were heavily used in Minsk's official statements to emphasize the deep historical connection with the East. Moreover, Russia's continued governance and control over Belarus's territory, which started with Catherine the Great's attempt to fully integrate Belarus's lands into the Russian Empire at the end of the 18th century, brought heavy economic and political dependency on Russia for modern Belarus. Belarus's history shaped the country's main foreign policy objectives: neutrality between East and West and peacemaking. Throughout history, Belarus had been a middle ground for devastating wars, and Belarus witnessed its population being decimated numerous times. Such experiences molded Belarusian's perspective on the importance of peaceful coexistence both domestically and internationally.

Modern Belarus's foreign policy and national security inherited the country's unique history. Lukashenko's attempts to find a balance between the East and the West have deep historical roots, which are monitored throughout Belarus's history. Until 1991, Belarus always had external strong and powerful rulers, representing both the East and the West. However, the Westernization proved short-lived among Belarusians and the East, particularly Russia, had long controlled Belarus's development. As long as it is not economically dangerous for Belarus, Lukashenko supports Western activities. Moreover, Belarus's defense relies heavily on Russian support, and Belarus is not interested in changing the status quo in the security sphere. As the next chapter will show, Belarus today is trying to straddle between the West and Russia in search of internal economic stability and peaceful coexistence with both sides.

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<sup>219</sup> Chigrinov, 305.

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### **III. BELARUS AND THE EST**

This chapter examines Belarus's relationship with the East, particularly with Russia as the key actor in the region. Despite a number of disputes largely driven by economic concerns, Minsk and Moscow remain political, economic, and security allies, though on a more pragmatic basis than before the dissolution of the USSR. This chapter, organized thematically, starts with the end of the Cold War and the end of the Warsaw Pact. Next, this chapter overviews the creation and functions of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The chapter then surveys the brief period of Belarus's Westernization in 1991–1994. After the first presidential election in Belarus in 1994, the country took a pro-Russian course and, while it tried to present itself as progressive and pro-Western state, it retained strong ties with Russia. Moving forward, this chapter takes a closer look at Belarus's post-USSR political, economic, and security relationship with Russia, including the Union State of Belarus and Russia initiative. Separate segment of this chapter is dedicated to Belarus's national security. Finally, Belarus's involvement with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is analyzed, as this is a major security organization in the East that ties Belarus's security to Russia.

#### **A. THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND THE END OF THE WARSAW PACT**

After Belarus declared its independence in June 1990, the republic faced unique challenges related to the need to reform all aspects of the country's governance, both domestic and international. At home, Belarus's leaders had to restructure the country's economic and political systems to be independent from Moscow. Internationally, establishing Belarus's foreign policy and addressing security issues were two top priorities of the newly elected Belarus government. After a brief Westernization period led by the first head of the independent state, Stanislau Shushkevich, Belarus pivoted back to Russia under pro-Russian President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

President Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost gave way to radical changes in the USSR's political and economic systems and democratized society; they also

affected the relationships between the Soviet republics and Moscow. The first Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union in May-June 1989 formed a fulltime parliament—the new Supreme Soviet, and allowed a political opposition group to be formed for the first time.<sup>220</sup> Still under the control of the center, the republics were allowed to form bilateral economic relations between each other and with other countries and to participate in international organizations.<sup>221</sup> As it moved in contradictory directions, the USSR's economy began to enter into a serious decline, which led to a decline in production and in standards of living, as well as the disruption of the provision of food, manufactured goods, and services to the population.<sup>222</sup>

Meanwhile, Soviet society started to radicalize, with strikes and demonstrations were spreading across the country. Belarus was no exception. The first democratic elections to the BSSR Supreme Soviet took place on 4 March 1990, and the first session of the Belarus's Supreme Soviet was held in May 1990.<sup>223</sup> During this session, a number of laws were adopted, including on the transition to a market-based economy, strengthening the social protection of the population, and dealing with the consequences of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident.<sup>224</sup> However, Belarus, like the rest of the republics, was still largely under Moscow's control.

The August 1991 coup in Moscow highlighted the need for a new federal structure between the republics and the center and created more favorable conditions for the republics to strengthen their independence.<sup>225</sup> On 18–21 August in Moscow, the Communist system's old guards attempted to overthrow President Gorbachev.<sup>226</sup> The coup failed, bringing down the USSR's old political regime and giving way to new political

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<sup>220</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs lekcij, 295.

<sup>221</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii*. Uchebnoe posobie v pomoshch' abiturientam, 400.

<sup>222</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v kontexte Evropeiskoj istorii*. Kurs lekcij, 295.

<sup>223</sup> Brigadin, 295.

<sup>224</sup> Brigadin, 295.

<sup>225</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii*. Uchebnoe posobie v pomoshch' abiturientam, 400.

<sup>226</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 13.

freedoms.<sup>227</sup> After the victory, Boris Yeltsin, the first popularly elected president of Russian Federation, his allies, and the Russian Parliament started to shape a new political landscape seeded with ideas of freedom and democracy.<sup>228</sup> For the Soviet republics, the way was open to withdraw from the Soviet Union and become completely independent states.<sup>229</sup> On 25 August 1991, an extraordinary meeting of the Superior Council of Belarus proclaimed the political and economic independence of the BSSR.<sup>230</sup>

## **B. THE CIS**

Building upon the tradition of being the neutral ground for negotiations, Belarus hosted the notorious meeting of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian leaders in the elite hunting lodge in the west of the country on 7–8 December 1991.<sup>231</sup> Despite the fact that the meeting took place on its territory, Belarus's role felt less important than that of the other two Slavic republics.<sup>232</sup> New to politics and with no meaningful support from Belarus's political elite, Shushkevich represented the smallest country with the weakest economy of the three.<sup>233</sup> On 8 December 1991, the three Slavic leaders signed an agreement creating the CIS, effectively announcing the dissolution of the USSR.<sup>234</sup> To formally acknowledge that the USSR no longer existed, the preamble of the agreement started with the following:

We, the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and the Republic of Ukraine as founder states of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which signed the 1922 Union treaty, further described as the high

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<sup>227</sup> Vladimir Gel'man, *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>228</sup> Gel'man, *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes*, 1.

<sup>229</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 14.

<sup>230</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomosch' abiturientam*, 400.

<sup>231</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 158.

<sup>232</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 158.

<sup>233</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 158.

<sup>234</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 43–44.

contracting parties, conclude that the USSR has ceased to exist as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality.<sup>235</sup>

The Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus ratified the CIS agreement on 10 December 1991.<sup>236</sup>

The idea was implemented to replace the USSR with the free union of former Soviet republics sharing a common defense and economic space. However, Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian leaders hoped for fundamentally different outcomes.<sup>237</sup> Yeltsin saw the CIS as a new form of the old union and used the dissolution of the USSR to dismiss his rival, the leader of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev. Leonid Kravchuk, the newly elected first president of Ukraine, saw the CIS as a transit vehicle from the USSR to complete independence. Belarus's leader Shushkevich was more aligned with Yeltsin, but envisioned Belarus's leading role in the union and the revival of the country's national identity.<sup>238</sup> After receiving the assurance of parity within the new union from the leaders of Slavic states, eight more republics joined the CIS; on 21 December 1991, the Alma-Ata declaration was signed by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>239</sup>

The CIS's core framework consisted of the Commonwealth Charter, the Economic Union Treaty, and the Collective Security Treaty.<sup>240</sup> The political landscape of the CIS rested on the Commonwealth Charter. It was debated during the January 1993 CIS summit, and signed and ratified by all members of the CIS except Ukraine and Turkmenistan.<sup>241</sup> Belarus's ratification excluded the collective security article because Minsk was dissatisfied with Russia's leading role.<sup>242</sup> The Collective Security Treaty, which was

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<sup>235</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 44.

<sup>236</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomosch' abiturientam*, 401.

<sup>237</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 41.

<sup>238</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 41.

<sup>239</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 42.

<sup>240</sup> Chigrinov, *Istoria Belorusii. Uchebnoe posobie v pomosch' abiturientam*, 505.

<sup>241</sup> Chigrinov, 414.

<sup>242</sup> Chigrinov, 415.

discussed during the 15 May 1992 Tashkent summit, mainly represented Russian defense policy and originally was signed only by six members of the CIS.<sup>243</sup> The Economic Union Treaty, which strengthened economic integration within the CIS, was a reaction of the CIS member states to their collapsing economies.<sup>244</sup> Under the treaty, the Interstate Economic Committee was created with the major function of managing the customs and payments unions.<sup>245</sup>

The CIS's practical effectiveness has always been questionable, even among top CIS officials, and now it is more a symbol than an active body.<sup>246</sup> Russia's ambitions to dominate the CIS and its vision as a default leader of the CIS, and a number of disagreements among the CIS members led to very slow implementation of any treaties or agreements. In the early 2000s, the CIS's relevance declined even further. From about 1,500 signed documents, only ten percent were actually implemented, and the CIS summits were losing their importance.<sup>247</sup> President Putin's words in March 2005 in Yerevan summarized the common attitude towards the CIS:

If anyone expected some special achievements from the CIS, for example regarding the economy or cooperation in political, military or other spheres, this indeed did not happen, nor could it have happened. There were declared aims, but in reality the CIS was established so as to make the process of the USSR's dissolution the most civilized and smooth one, with the fewest losses in the economic and humanitarian spheres... The CIS has never had economic super-tasks, such as economic integration... This is a very useful club for mutual information and the clarification of general political, humanitarian and administrative problems.<sup>248</sup>

Nevertheless, Belarus was an active CIS participant and Minsk played an important role in the CIS's integration processes throughout the period of the formation and

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<sup>243</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 442.

<sup>244</sup> Katlijn Malfliet, Lien Verpoest and Evgeny Vinokurov, *The CIS, the EU and Russia The Challenges of Integration* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 13.

<sup>245</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 369.

<sup>246</sup> Malfliet, Verpoest, and Vinokurov, *The CIS, the EU and Russia The Challenges of Integration*, 14.

<sup>247</sup> Malfliet, Verpoest, and Vinokurov, 14.

<sup>248</sup> Malfliet, Verpoest, and Vinokurov, 15.



development of the union.<sup>249</sup> It is not coincidental that the CIS's headquarters are located in Minsk.<sup>250</sup> By 2013, Belarus signed and ratified about 90 percent of the CIS's adopted documents.<sup>251</sup>

While the CIS still exists, in practice its role is more a symbolic union among the former USSR republics. The CIS fulfilled its role as a transit station from the USSR to complete independence, but a number of bilateral and multilateral unions have been created by the former Soviet republics to foster economic cooperation and promote political and security integration.

### **C. THE BRIEF PERIOD OF BELARUS'S WESTERNIZATION IN 1991–1994**

The major goal of the CIS was to keep the economic, political, and security domains of the former USSR republics together, however, during the 1991–1994 period, Belarusians has been able to experience a brief period of Westernization. One of the significant implications of the August coup on Belarus was the dismissal from the chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet of the career Communist Party apparatchik Nikolai Dementrei, and the election of the pro-Western university professor of physics Stanislau Shushkevich as the new leader of the country.<sup>252</sup> Shushkevich had nationalist views and wished for Belarus to have its own identity, independent from Russia. Under Shushkevich's leadership, the independent Republic of Belarus pursued a multidimensional foreign policy approach through the development of trade, economic, and political relations with international and regional partners and promoting Minsk as the world's peacemaker.<sup>253</sup> Shushkevich advocated the concept of a nuclear-free and neutral state.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Vladimir Garkun, "Belarus Igraet Veduschuy Rol' v Integrazionnyh Prozessah v SNG" [Belarus is Playing a Leading Role in the CIS's Integration Processes], CIS's Executive Committee, accessed 12 March 2018, <http://www.cis.minsk.by/news.pphp?id=1328> (translated by the author).

<sup>250</sup> Garkun, "Belarus Igraet Veduschuy Rol' v Integrazionnyh Prozessah v SNG."

<sup>251</sup> Garkun.

<sup>252</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii*. Kurs Lekzij, 305.

<sup>253</sup> Brigadin, 311.

<sup>254</sup> Brigadin, 311.

However, being an unexperienced politician with no contacts or allies within the old system, Shushkevich had little power, and his attempt to Westernize Belarus was limited.<sup>255</sup> With the Communist Party losing its position, too, real power drifted to the executive branch, and pro-Russian Prime Minister Vyacheslav Kebich, who was promoting integration with Moscow, was able to limit Shushkevich's actions.<sup>256</sup> Battling with his pro-Russian, integrationist counterparts led by Kebich, Shushkevich offered the idea of a "belt of neutral states" in April 1993, consisting of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and possibly the three Baltic states.<sup>257</sup> Shushkevich asserted that this arrangement would be a "security guarantee for member-states and serve as a model for the world."<sup>258</sup> However, his proposal found little support either in Europe or in Belarus.

Belarus's leaders understood the importance of economic development and implementation of national security, but Shushkevich's approach to do this independently from Russia was counterbalanced by Kebich's integrationist ambitions. Belarus's defense heavily relied on the CIS agreement. Moreover, even among the CIS member states, the debates around the armed forces (both strategic and tactical) were lengthy. The Alma-Ata declaration states: "The strategic forces across the CIS must remain unified, but the armed forces should be divided."<sup>259</sup> The CIS agreement's Article 5 guaranteed the territorial integrity of each member, and Article 6 stated that participating countries would remain under a unified command and control of their military-strategic space.<sup>260</sup>

The CIS Tashkent summit of 1992 had important implications for Belarus's security. First, Shushkevich, in his pursuit of an independent Belarus, decided not to sign the CIS Collective Security Treaty.<sup>261</sup> On 9 April 1993, however, following Kebich's

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<sup>255</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 158.

<sup>256</sup> Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus a Perpetual Borderland* (Leiden, Netherland: Brill, 2009), 157.

<sup>257</sup> Adrian G.V., Hyde-Price, *The International Politics of East Central Europe* (Manchester University Press, 1996), 239.

<sup>258</sup> Hyde-Price, *The International Politics of East Central Europe*, 239.

<sup>259</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 47–48.

<sup>260</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 44.

<sup>261</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 42.

endorsement of the CIS Collective Security Treaty, Belarus signed the pact.<sup>262</sup> Second, all CIS members, including Belarus, signed the Tashkent Statement on Armed Forces Cutbacks, which was an agreement on the reduction of armed forces and armaments.<sup>263</sup> Third, Belarus became a party to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE treaty), which was originally signed between members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Paris on 19 November 1990.<sup>264</sup> The CFE treaty's chief goal was deep cuts in weapons holdings; the agreement imposed on Belarus the destruction of 3,127 heavy weapons (tanks, armored combat vehicles, and aircraft).<sup>265</sup>

In the economic sphere, during 1991–1994, Belarus, despite attempted liberalization and reformation, continued to be dependent on Russia. After the collapse of the USSR, the Belarusian economy suffered tremendously. The demand for its manufactured products fell sharply because its production was focused on specific agricultural and industrial products for the Communist bloc market, which was rapidly collapsing after 1991.<sup>266</sup> Lacking free market experience and educational capacity, the country tried to keep its planned economy system in order to maintain traditional communist control and discipline.<sup>267</sup> To some extent, Belarus adopted price liberalization and freed prices from administrative controls to facilitate reforms.<sup>268</sup> Unlike other post-USSR countries, however, Belarus was committed to retaining the ruble as its national currency and postponed the introduction of its own currency until late fall 1991 with the

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<sup>262</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 42.

<sup>263</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 41.

<sup>264</sup> Jeffrey D. McCausland, "The Future of the CFE Treaty—Why It Still Matters," *EastWest Institute* (June 2009), [https://scholar.dickinson.edu/faculty\\_publications/385/](https://scholar.dickinson.edu/faculty_publications/385/).

<sup>265</sup> Fedorov. "Belarus's Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security."

<sup>266</sup> Marek Dąbrowski and Rafal Antczak, "Economic Transition in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus in Comparative Perspective," *CASE Network Studies and Analyses*, no. 50 (July 1995), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1476782>.

<sup>267</sup> Antczak Rafal, and Marek Dabrowski. "Economic Transition in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus in Comparative Perspective," *CASE-Center for Social and Economic Research*, No. 50 (1995), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1476782>.

<sup>268</sup> Rafal and Dabrowski. "Economic Transition in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus in Comparative Perspective."

hope of continued subsidized energy support from Russia.<sup>269</sup> In July 1992, Belarus joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>270</sup> The IMF provided loans and technical assistance to Belarus to help the country in developing its private sector and also to find ways to reduce state subsidies.<sup>271</sup> However, the development of a market economy was hindered by the inherited communist political system.<sup>272</sup> Belarus still relied heavily on energy imports from Russia, which supplied 90 percent of Belarus's oil and gas.<sup>273</sup> Russia did not hesitate to use this as leverage to gain political and military concessions from the near abroad.<sup>274</sup> By mid-1993, an economic crisis had engulfed almost all of the CIS countries and the only solution was deepening economic integration.<sup>275</sup>

Belarus's government, pursuing an open foreign policy and a liberalizing society, seemed to be satisfied with an unreformed economy. The adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus on 30 March 1994 was Shushkevich's last attempt to make the country more independent from Russian influence.<sup>276</sup> Article 17 of the constitution made the Belarusian language the only official language, listing the Russian language as a "language for international communication."<sup>277</sup> Additionally, Belarus's national symbols

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<sup>269</sup> Rafal and Dabrowski.

<sup>270</sup> International Monetary Fund, *Republic of Belarus: Recent Economic Developments and Selected Issues* November 1993 (Washington, DC, 1993), 79.

<sup>271</sup> International Monetary Fund. *Republic of Belarus: Recent Economic Developments and Selected Issues* November 1993, 65.

<sup>272</sup> David R. Marples, "National Awakening and National Consciousness in Belarus," *Nationalities Papers* 27, no. 4. (December 1999): 565–578.

<sup>273</sup> Marples, "National Awakening and National Consciousness in Belarus."

<sup>274</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 345.

<sup>275</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 345.

<sup>276</sup> Brigadin, *Istoria Belorusii v Kontexte Evropeiskoj Istorii. Kurs Lekzij*, 307.

<sup>277</sup> Wikisource, "Konstitutsia Respubliki Belarus/Pervonachalnaya Redaktsiya" [Constitution of the Republic of Belarus / First Edition], last modified August 13, 2018, [https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F\\_%D0%A0%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8\\_%D0%91%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%8C/%D0%9F%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F\\_%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F](https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F_%D0%A0%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8_%D0%91%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%8C/%D0%9F%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F_%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F) (translated by the author).

were introduced.<sup>278</sup> In 1994, the Prime Minister Kebich proclaimed that his government had “managed to stem the tide of reformist euphoria. Thanks to this our people were not hungry, had their homes heated in winter, produced goods, tilled the soil.”<sup>279</sup> However, in practice, the average Belarusian citizens’ living conditions were declining, the consumer market was in crisis, and citizens were given “consumer’s business cards” for purchasing industrial goods and coupons for purchasing food items.<sup>280</sup> Belarus’s society was looking for changes as public tensions were growing, which directly impacted the first Belarusian presidential election on 20 July 1994.

#### **D. BELARUS’S UNEASY RE-INTEGRATION WITH RUSSIA UNDER LUKASHENKO**

Alexander Lukashenko’s ascension to power was another pivotal point in Belarus’s history, which moved the country away from the Westernization and democratization. Lukashenko’s agenda, which led him to a presidential victory, was anti-imperialist, anti-corruption, and USSR-nostalgic.<sup>281</sup> Despite nationalist opposition, Belarus’s new president decided that establishing an economic, political, and military union with Russia was the best way for the country to move forward, and Russian-Belarusian integration became official state policy. In the mid-1990s, agreements on economics, Customs union, and military integration were reached.<sup>282</sup> In January 1995, Moscow and Minsk signed the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty and a number of bilateral agreements, unifying Belarus and Russia in the economic and military spheres.<sup>283</sup>

Belarus’s new pro-Russian leader started to pivot the country back to the East and away from previously emerging democratization processes. In November 1996,

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<sup>278</sup> Wikisource, “Konstitutsia Respubliki Belarus/Pervonachalnaya Redaktsiya.”

<sup>279</sup> Savchenko, *Belarus a Perpetual Borderland*, 170.

<sup>280</sup> Rafal and Dabrowski. “Economic Transition in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus in Comparative Perspective.”

<sup>281</sup> Rodger Potocki, “Darks Days in Belarus,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 4 (2002): 142–156.

<sup>282</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 294.

<sup>283</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 295.

Lukashenko held a referendum that gave him almost unlimited power.<sup>284</sup> The constitution of Belarus was amended and the president amplified his power at the expense of the legislature and judiciary.<sup>285</sup> Article 17 was amended and the Russian language became an official language on a par with the Belarusian language.<sup>286</sup>

The official political and economic re-integration began in 1996, when Yeltsin and Lukashenko agreed on the creation of the Union State of Belarus and Russia.<sup>287</sup> The Agreement on Establishment of the Union State of Belarus and Russia was signed on 8 December 1999 by the heads of state.<sup>288</sup> According to the agreement, Belarus and Russia defined a series of major goals, including fostering peaceful and democratic development; establishing a single economic and customs area and proper legal framework; pursuing cooperative foreign, defense, and social policies; ensuring security; and fighting against crime.<sup>289</sup> The Union State agreement laid out a legal basis for Belarus's and Russia's gradual integration.

The Union State of Belarus and Russia proved to be more effective than the CIS. The goal of the organization was to create a common state run by the "High Council" of both presidents, prime ministers, and parliamentary speakers, to create a provisional customs union, to introduce a common currency (with no specific timeframe), and to unify the two countries' policies.<sup>290</sup> In practice, however, convergence of currencies occurred, the Customs union existed only until 2001, and no governing integration took place.<sup>291</sup> Still

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<sup>284</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, 295.

<sup>285</sup> Jennifer Widner, "Constitution Writing & Conflict Resolution," accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.princeton.edu/~pcwcr/reports/belarus1996.html>.

<sup>286</sup> "Constitution of the Republic of Belarus of 1994," National Center of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://law.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=V19402875e>.

<sup>287</sup> Rodger Potocki, "Darks Days in Belarus," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 4 (2002): 142–156.

<sup>288</sup> "Russia and Union State," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 08, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/russia/>.

<sup>289</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, "Russia and Union State."

<sup>290</sup> "Russia and Belarus Form Confederation," *BBC News*, December 8, 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/555384.stm>, 29.

<sup>291</sup> Savchenko, *Belarus a Perpetual Borderland*, 29.

more effective than the CIS, the Union proved to be much less productive in terms of the economic integration than expected.

When Putin came to power in 2000, relations between Belarus and Russia became more pragmatic. The Russian president, using Minsk's dependence on Russian oil and gas supplies, manipulated Belarus's economic and political decisions towards his own agenda.<sup>292</sup> In 2006, the Russia-Belarus energy crisis unfolded, which soured relations between Moscow and Minsk further. The renewed energy supply agreement between Belarus and Moscow, signed at the last minute on 31 December 2006 under pressure from Moscow, prompted a very negative reaction from Belarus's president.<sup>293</sup> The new agreement included Gazprom's \$2.5 billion acquisition of 50 percent of Beltransgaz, the Belarus pipeline network, a gradual increase of Gazprom's gas prices for Belarus, and a requirement that 70 percent of the refined oil products' tax revenues be transferred to Russia.<sup>294</sup> Additionally, Russia imposed a customs fee of \$53 per ton for crude oil deliveries to Belarus, which were previously duty-free.<sup>295</sup>

Lukashenko reacted furiously to this agreement, calling the Russian behavior shameful.<sup>296</sup> In early January 2007, Belarus stated that Russia had not been paying the customs fee for transferring oil through Belarus and began legal action against Russia.<sup>297</sup> This led to the shutdown of the Druzhba pipeline, one of the world's biggest pipelines that delivers crude oil to the European Union and runs through Belarus.<sup>298</sup> Russia later said it had to cut off supplies through the Druzhba pipeline because Belarus had begun siphoning

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<sup>292</sup> Alla Leukavets, Kamil Kłysiński and Andreas Heinrich, "Russian Relations with Belarus," *ETH Zurich Research Collection* 206 (September 2017). <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000200132>.

<sup>293</sup> Steven Myers, "Belarus and Russia Trade Accusations Over Crude Oil Cutoff," *New York Times*, last modified January 9, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/09/world/europe/09belarus.html>.

<sup>294</sup> Myers, "Belarus and Russia Trade Accusations Over Crude Oil Cutoff."

<sup>295</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Russia Changes Terms of Oil Supply to Belarus," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 4, no. 10 (January 2007), <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-changes-terms-of-oil-supply-to-belarus/>.

<sup>296</sup> Myers, "Belarus and Russia Trade Accusations Over Crude Oil Cutoff."

<sup>297</sup> Myers.

<sup>298</sup> Myers.

off oil as tax payment.<sup>299</sup> Moscow, in turn, threatened to impose taxes on all Belarusian imports.<sup>300</sup>

The situation deescalated when Russia promised duty-free supplies of crude oil identified for domestic consumption.<sup>301</sup> Belarus's authorities reacted accordingly, when Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky announced: "The government, taking into consideration bilateral agreements with the Russian government, has taken the decision . . . to cancel the state duty for the transit of oil along the state pipeline network."<sup>302</sup> This supply agreement was changed again in January 2010, reassuring the subsidies on oil imports from Russia, but cutting the amount by half.<sup>303</sup>

The tensions between Moscow and Minsk continued. Putin, in a TV interview in October 2012, replied to a question about what he thought about President Lukashenko: "Despite our relationship with the Belarusian government--there are sparks between us from time to time--, I should say that the Belarusian government is clearly and firmly heading towards economic integration with Russia. Such a choice deserves support and respect."<sup>304</sup> Clearly, Putin did not show any cordial signs towards Lukashenko, as he did not even call Lukashenko by his name. Moreover, the oil and gas conflict resurfaced at the beginning of 2016, when Minsk, without any agreement with Moscow, significantly cut actual payments for gas to Russia.<sup>305</sup> According to Minsk, Belarus deserved lower domestic prices on Russian gas due to Belarus's membership in the Eurasian Economic

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<sup>299</sup> Myers.

<sup>300</sup> Luke Harding, "Belarus Yields to Pressure from Moscow in Oil Dispute," *The Guardian*, last modified January 11, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/jan/11/oilandpetrol>.

<sup>301</sup> International Monetary Fund, Republic of Belarus: Fourth Review Under the Stand-By Arrangement April 2010 (Washington, DC, 2010).

<sup>302</sup> International Monetary Fund. Republic of Belarus: Fourth Review Under the Stand-By Arrangement April 2010.

<sup>303</sup> International Monetary Fund, Republic of Belarus: Article IV Consultation-Staff Report; Staff Supplement; and Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussion March 2011 (Washington, DC, 2011).

<sup>304</sup> "Putin o Lukashenko." [Putin about Lukashenko], Russia 1 Channel, video, 5:19, October 18, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTm\\_-0Pi5al](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTm_-0Pi5al) (translated by the author).

<sup>305</sup> Leukavets, Klysiński and Heinrich, "Russian Relations with Belarus."



Union (EEU).<sup>306</sup> Russia's retaliatory decision to decrease the oil supply had a damaging impact on Belarus's economy because of Belarus's budget dependence on oil re-export income.<sup>307</sup> Frustrated, Lukashenko did not attend the OSCE summit and skipped the Supreme Council of the EEU in Russia, which postponed Belarus's signature on the EEU's new Customs Code.<sup>308</sup>

In February 2017, Belarus introduced visa-free entrance (for no more than five days) for seventy-nine countries (including the United States), causing another negative reaction from Moscow.<sup>309</sup> Even before the new visa-free policy took effect in Belarus, Russian authorities introduced a "full-fledged border-protection regime," establishing Russia-Belarus physical border controls and security zones.<sup>310</sup> Moscow defended its decision by the rhetoric of the national security protection.<sup>311</sup> Russian authorities issued a statement underlying their position:

We would like to emphasize that no border regime has been introduced but border zones have been set up in the areas adjacent to the border as it is necessary to regulate the visits of other countries' citizens.... Neither Russian nor Belarusian nationals, who are citizens of the Union State, will be affected by this measure.<sup>312</sup>

Minsk, on the other hand, insisted that establishment of the border controls violates the border agreement of the Union State of Belarus and Russia.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, 2.

<sup>307</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, 3.

<sup>308</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, 3.

<sup>309</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, 3.

<sup>310</sup> Russia Establishes Security Zone On Belarusian Border, *Radio Free Europe With reporting by TASS and Interfax*, 01 Feb 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-belarus-border-security-zone/28273799.html>. Last accessed 05 November 2018.

<sup>311</sup> "Russia Establishes Security Zone on Belarusian Border," *RFE/RL*, February 01, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-belarus-border-security-zone/28273799.html>.

<sup>312</sup> "Kremlin: No Border Regime Introduced Between Russia, Belarus," *TASS*, 03 February, 2017, <http://tass.com/politics/928910>.

<sup>313</sup> Max Seddon, "Belarus's Lukashenko Slams Russia Over Border Controls," *Financial Times*, last modified February 03, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/4eeeb5ca-ea1f-11e6-893c-082c54a7f539>.

Russia's continuing border controls seem to irritate Belarus's president, but they did not stop him from extending the visa-free entrance policy. During his recent border control points visit on 1 June 2018, Lukashenko articulated his attitude towards Russia's border control policy: "If they close [the border], we must also impose border controls," but added that he would not implement any changes and would wait for Moscow's next step.<sup>314</sup> Nevertheless, on 27 July 2018, Lukashenko signed another decree allowing citizens of seventy-four countries, generally only excluding countries with which Belarus has bilateral visa-free agreement, to stay in Belarus visa-free for thirty days.<sup>315</sup>

This prolonged confrontation re-emerged in the dairy sector, which is another export-sensitive area of Belarus's economy, when Russia accused Belarus's dairy producers of violations of health standards.<sup>316</sup> Almost mimicking the 2009 two-week ban on dairy products imports, on 26 February 2017, Russian food standards institution Rosselkhoznadzor prohibited import of many Belarusian dairy products into Russia.<sup>317</sup> Belarus's dairy farmers, affected by the restrictions in a variety of forms from strict monitoring to complete embargo, were forced to extend their dairy export market to other countries, including China.<sup>318</sup> This move was publicly interpreted by Moscow as Belarus taking advantage of the Russian import limitations due to Western sanctions.<sup>319</sup> The situation started to de-escalate in April 2017, when the two leaders met in St. Petersburg

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<sup>314</sup> "Belarusian Leader Says May Reinstate Russian Border Controls," *RFE/RL*, June 01, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-lukashenka-says-could-reinstate-border-controls-with-russia/29266349.html>.

<sup>315</sup> "Information on Visa-free Travel via the Checkpoint "Minsk National Airport," Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed November 7, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/visa/visafreetravel/e0ced19bb1f9bf2c.html>.

<sup>316</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, "Russian Relations with Belarus," 3.

<sup>317</sup> Clifford Levy, "Russia Ends Dairy Ban On Belarus," *New York Times*, last modified June 17, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/18/world/europe/18belarus.html>.

<sup>318</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, "Russian Relations with Belarus," 3.

<sup>319</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, 3.

and agreed on energy supply issues.<sup>320</sup> In June 2018, the dairy conflict was resolved between the two countries, but the question is, for how long?<sup>321</sup>

In Lukashenko's search to balance Belarus's economic interests, the recent spike in Belarus-China relations is worth mentioning. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) triggered its interest in Belarus.<sup>322</sup> Located between Asia and Europe, Belarus naturally became an important part of the BRI's transportation system.<sup>323</sup> Not prepared for the proposed increases in traffic, Belarus's transportation infrastructure required investments. China readily stepped forward.<sup>324</sup> China has invested into the manufacturing sector as well. Two major recipients are the Midea Group, a microwave oven and water heater manufacturer, and the Great Stone Industrial Park.<sup>325</sup> Such collaboration between Belarus and China not only stimulates Belarus's economic development, but also diversifies Minsk's efforts in the Eastern direction.

#### **E. BELARUS'S NATIONAL SECURITY**

Despite continuous confrontations between Minsk and Moscow, Belarus relies heavily on the Russian-Belarusian bilateral military alliance.<sup>326</sup> Belarus provides military support to Russia in different aspects of its defense activities. One of the most important is Russia's large "Zapad" (West) military exercise, which takes place every four years and was held jointly with Belarus in 2009, 2013, and 2017.<sup>327</sup> In addition to joint military exercises, two Russian military facilities are operating in Belarus: a radar station at

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<sup>320</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, 3.

<sup>321</sup> "Belarus, Russia Sign 'Road Map' to Resolve Dairy Row," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union* (June 2018), ProQuest.

<sup>322</sup> "Belt and Road Initiative: The Role of Belarus," *HKTDC Research*, April 20, 2018, <https://hkmb.hktdc.com/en/1x0adphg/hktdc-research/belt-and-road-initiative-the-role-of-belarus>.

<sup>323</sup> HKTDC Research, "Belt and Road Initiative: The Role of Belarus."

<sup>324</sup> HKTDC Research.

<sup>325</sup> HKTDC Research.

<sup>326</sup> "Priorities of The Foreign Policy Of The Republic of Belarus," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 10, 2018, [http://mfa.gov.by/en/foreign\\_policy/priorities/](http://mfa.gov.by/en/foreign_policy/priorities/).

<sup>327</sup> "Russia-Belarus: Belarussian Military at Zapad-2017 Exercise Achieves Goals Set – Lukashenko," *Asia News Monitor*, September 21, 2017, <https://search.proquest.com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/1940529128?accountid=12702>.

Gantsevichi and a naval communications center in Vileyka.<sup>328</sup> Both facilities have official military base status and Belarus does not charge fees for the lease of the facilities. Notably, this agreement expires in 2020, and it is unclear if Belarus will renew it on the same terms.<sup>329</sup>

Belarus's heavy reliance on Russian support for national security is clearly evident in Belarus's National Security Concept. The National Security Concept was adopted on 27 March 1995 as the first conceptual document that laid out the national security framework of independent Belarus.<sup>330</sup> In general, the document outlines the means and methods of defense of the individual's, society's, and country's vital interests.<sup>331</sup> Particularly, the concept points to the need for promoting cooperation with the Russian Federation within the Union State of Belarus and Russia's framework practically in all spheres.<sup>332</sup>

While Belarus's national security relies on support from Russia, Lukashenko still tries to straddle between Moscow and the West. Belarus's reaction to Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and subsequent annexation of Crimea was two-sided. On the one hand, Lukashenko "did not like it," as he said during a speech on 22 April 2014 at the Belarus Parliament and did not officially recognize the annexation.<sup>333</sup> On the other hand, during several interviews and speeches later on, Belarus's president asserted that Crimea is de

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<sup>328</sup> "Russia: Belarus Regards Presence of Russian Military Installations as Beneficial," *Asia News Monitor*. Bangkok: Thai News Service Group, January 18, 2018, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1988172234/?pq-origsite=primo>.

<sup>329</sup> Asia News Monitor. Bangkok: Thai News Service Group, "Russia: Belarus regards presence of Russian military installations as beneficial."

<sup>330</sup> Vladimir Puzikov, *Osnovy Teorii Obespecheniya Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti: Kurs Lekzij* [National Security Protection Fundamentals: Course of Lectures] (Minsk: GIUST BGU, 2013), 211.

<sup>331</sup> Puzikov. *Osnovy Teorii Obespecheniya Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti: Kurs Lekzij*, 212.

<sup>332</sup> Puzikov, 212.

<sup>333</sup> "Lukashenko: Ukraina "Sdala Krym bez Boja" Potomu Chto ne Schitaet Etu Territoriy Svojej." [Lukashenko: The Ukraine "Gave up Crimea Without a Fight" Because It Does Not Consider It Its Own Land], RT TV Channel, video, 2:39, April 22, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGIvTtK3ERA> (translated by the author). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGIvTtK3ERA> (translated by the author).

facto Russian territory and even partly blamed Ukraine for the crisis.<sup>334</sup> Additionally, Lukashenko's regime, in pursue of its agenda as the world's peacemaker, offered Minsk as a site for Russian-Ukrainian negotiations.<sup>335</sup> Such independent behavior, which led to Western warmth towards Minsk, made Russian-Belarusian relations even less friendly.<sup>336</sup>

#### **F. BELARUS'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION (CSTO)**

In 1992, Belarus joined the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).<sup>337</sup> The CSTO is a purely military alliance and all six of this military alliance's members are former Soviet Union republics: Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.<sup>338</sup> The CSTO originated from the Collective Security Treaty (Tashkent treaty).<sup>339</sup> In 2002, the CSTO was restructured as a military alliance.<sup>340</sup> While the fundamental objective of the organization lies in the military and military-technical spheres, CSTO members also address environmental security, the drug trade, human trafficking, and organized crime.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> "Lukashenko o Kryme: Rossia Narushila Dogovor." [Lukashenko About Crimea: Russia Broke the Agreement], ONT Channel, video, 1:24, October 22, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mTPrHu1qIE> (translated by the author); "Bat'ka Lukashenko priznal Krym v sostave Rossii, [Lukashenko recognized Crimea's annexation by Russia], BELTA TV, Channel, video, 4:20, March 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgkZEXsx33Q> (translated by the author).

<sup>335</sup> Artyom Shraibman, "V Pogone za Nishej. Pochemu Minsk Sdelal Mirotvorchestvo Osnovoj Vneshnej Politiki" [In Pursuit of Niche. Why Minsk Made the Peacemaking a Basis of Its Foreign Policy], May 28, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76455> (translated by the author).

<sup>336</sup> Leukavets, Kłysiński and Heinrich, "Russian Relations with Belarus."

<sup>337</sup> Roy Allison, Stephen White and Margot Light, "Belarus between East and West," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21, no. 4 (2005): 487–511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270500363411>.

<sup>338</sup> "Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed September 6, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/organizations/membership/list/d49411bc2db48e63.html>.

<sup>339</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, "Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe."

<sup>340</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>341</sup> Adam Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization," *Whitehead J. Dipl. & Int'l Rel.* 8 (2007): 167.

President Lukashenko has criticized the CSTO on several occasions and, at some points, even threatened to cease funding its activities.<sup>342</sup> Lukashenko complained when the CSTO failed to support the Kyrgyz government during its civil unrest in spring 2015.<sup>343</sup> In May 2004, during a meeting between Lukashenko and General Secretary of the CSTO Nikolai Bordyuzha, the Belarusian president proposed direct CSTO-NATO consultations, an idea that was never implemented.<sup>344</sup> This step was in response to Lukashenko's early-2000s perception of growing support of NATO among the CIS states, including Russia.<sup>345</sup> In June 2009, Lukashenko boycotted the annual CSTO summit in Moscow.<sup>346</sup> His explanation for this was Moscow's economic pressures against Belarus and conflict over oil and gas.<sup>347</sup> The Belarusian foreign ministry stated that

there is an overt economic discrimination by a CSTO member country against Belarus. Such actions undermine economic security, which is a foundation for stability and a pillar of comprehensive security... [Belarus' participation in the summit] would mock common sense against the backdrop of trade wars waged by some CSTO members against others. In this situation, Belarus has no choice but to cancel its participation in the CSTO summit in Moscow. Belarus will sign the package of documents on the rapid reaction force only when comprehensive security will have been restored within the CSTO.<sup>348</sup>

Nevertheless, Lukashenko's more recent statements suggest his continuing support to the organization, with a grain of salt. In November 2017, Belarus held a session of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO, where Lukashenko welcomed all of the CSTO's heads of states. During his opening speech, President Lukashenko said, "Belarus is a consistent supporter of vigorous cooperation within the framework of the CSTO, a

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<sup>342</sup> Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization."

<sup>343</sup> Allison, White and Light. "Belarus between East and West."

<sup>344</sup> Allison, White and Light.

<sup>345</sup> Allison, White and Light.

<sup>346</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Belarusian President Boycotts Moscow's CSTO Summit," *The Jamestown Foundation. Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no 114 (June 2009).

<sup>347</sup> Socor, "Belarusian President Boycotts Moscow's CSTO Summit."

<sup>348</sup> "Lukashenko Ne Vidit Smysla v Uchastii v Sammite ODKB v Moskve" [Lukashenko Sees no Point in Attending the OSCE Summit in Moscow], RIA Novosti ITAR-TASS, last modified June 14, 2009, <https://ria.ru/politics/20090614/174320729.html> (translated by the author).

supporter of the more productive operation of the organization, and a backer of stronger authority of the organization on the international scene.”<sup>349</sup> Belarus’s president showed some positive emotions during the session, saying, “There are no countries closer and dearer to each other [than the members of the CSTO] in the whole world.”<sup>350</sup> During his February 2018 Belarusian Security Council meeting speech, Lukashenko criticized Russia for its lack of support in the effort to modernize and arm the CSTO members’ militaries: “Russia is modernizing its armed forces by itself. Other members [of the CSTO] are trying to arm, modernize, and so on. But only by themselves.”<sup>351</sup>

## G. CONCLUSION

For Belarus, Russia is its number one trade partner, its chief oil and gas supplier, an ethnic Slavic brother, and its main geopolitical neighbor. The two countries are historically intertwined in all spheres of life, both politically and culturally. The ties between Minsk and Moscow remain strong and, while they cannot prevent future conflicts, they preserve Russia’s involvement into Belarus’s affairs, including foreign policy and security concerns. But relations between Lukashenko and Putin remain strained especially in the political and economic spheres, yet their strong military alliance is the main bulwark of Belarus’s security and continues to exist through joint major military exercises and Russia’s military presence on Belarus’s territory. The CSTO’s efforts are led by Russia.

Lukashenko’s Soviet inheritance and Belarus’s Russia-dependent economic legacy have strongly influenced Minsk’s domestic and international policies. Domestically, Lukashenko is reluctant to liberalize the economy and to Westernize its society. At the same time, the Belarusian president does not support strong nationalist movements within the country and is trying to keep Belarusians pro-Slavic– and pro-Russian–minded. The

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<sup>349</sup> “CSTO Collective Security Council Summit,” President of the Republic of Belarus, accessed September 15, 2018, [http://president.gov.by/en/news\\_en/view/csto-summit-17552/](http://president.gov.by/en/news_en/view/csto-summit-17552/)

<sup>350</sup> RIA Novosti ITAR-TASS, “Lukashenko Ne Vidit Smysla v Uchastii v Sammite ODKB v Moskve.”

<sup>351</sup> “Zasedanie Soveta Bezopasnosti Respubliki Belarus” [Belorussian Security Council Meeting], President of the Republic of Belarus, accessed February 13, 2018, [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/zasedanie-soveta-bezopasnosti-respubliki-belarus-18096/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/zasedanie-soveta-bezopasnosti-respubliki-belarus-18096/) (translated by the author).

brotherhood with Russia is accentuated on 2 April, when Belarusians celebrate the Day of Unity of Peoples of Russia and Belarus (the day when the first Commonwealth agreement between Russia and Belarus was signed).<sup>352</sup> The leadership even tries to keep Soviet traditions alive. Major Soviet holidays are still celebrated in Belarus, including: the October Revolution on 7 November, Fatherland Defenders and Armed Forces day on 23 February, Victory Day on 9 May, Labor Day on 1 May, and Women's Day on 8 March.<sup>353</sup>

Internationally, Belarus actively pursues the agenda of a neutral and peaceful state, carefully counterbalancing Moscow's ambitions with calculated responses from Minsk. Nevertheless, the Belarusian president is constantly searching for the most beneficial compromise for Belarus between the West and the East. Belarus's recent interest in Chinese investment, which was briefly reviewed in this chapter, helps to counterbalance Minsk's sympathy with the West, but also provides it with relief from Moscow's economic pressure tactics. In the next chapter, Belarus's relations with Western organizations will be reviewed, paying specific attention to NATO, the OSCE, and the EU, as these three institutions are critical for the security and stability of this region located between East and West.

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<sup>352</sup> "Belarus National Holidays," *BELTA*, accessed November 06, 2018, <http://www.belarus.by/en/about-belarus/national-holidays>.

<sup>353</sup> *BELTA*, "Belarus National Holidays."



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## IV. BELARUS AND THE WEST

As emphasized in the previous chapter, Belarus pursues a foreign policy of neutrality and peacemaking, balancing the country's interests between Russia and the West. Belarus is involved in a number of regional and international organizations, but, in this chapter, only the OSCE, NATO, and the EU will be examined, as they play critical roles in European security. Starting with a brief overview of the OSCE's historical role in the region's security during the Cold War, the chapter examines Belarus's fluctuating interest in the OSCE. Next, the chapter surveys Belarus's evolving interaction with NATO, including the development of cooperation between Belarus and the United States. Finally, this chapter examines Belarus's relationship with the EU, which has been complex since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992.<sup>354</sup>

Minsk's strong belief in the importance of Belarus's neutrality in the international arena and its role as a peacemaker are reflected in the country's foreign policy and, along with strong ties with Russia, affects its relations with the OSCE, NATO, and the EU. With all three organizations, Belarus is interested in cooperation in the economic and security arenas, but, at the same time, reserves its rights to develop its country in its own unique way without Western intrusions. Lukashenko continues to resist attempts from the West to democratize Belarusian politics and society and to reform the country's economy, but, simultaneously, he has supported initiatives to develop cooperation with the OSCE, NATO, and the EU.

### A. BELARUS AND THE OSCE

The OSCE's inclusive membership rules allowed Belarus to become a full-fledged member in January 1992, but Minsk's degree of involvement and interest in the organization has fluctuated under Lukashenko's rule.<sup>355</sup> Moreover, the Belarusian

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<sup>354</sup> "Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 08, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/organizations/>.

<sup>355</sup> "Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed September 6, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/organizations/membership/list/d49411bc2db48e63.html>.

government's attitudes and reactions are also carefully crafted to avoid drawing disapproval from Moscow. Belarus acknowledges the important role the OSCE plays in regional security and maintains relations with the organization, but Belarusian officials do not hesitate to criticize some of the OSCE's actions.

A brief overview of the OSCE is necessary to clarify the organization's important role in the European security setting. The OSCE is the largest regional security organization in the world, with fifty-seven participating states, including Belarus.<sup>356</sup> Started as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1973, the meeting was a reaction to the developments of the Cold War.<sup>357</sup> The chief purpose of the CSCE was to promote security and peace in the Euro-Atlantic area, given the atmosphere of confrontation between the United States and the USSR.<sup>358</sup> Following two-year-long negotiations among the European countries, the USSR, and the United States, known as the Helsinki Process, in 1975 the Helsinki Final Act initiated the CSCE.<sup>359</sup> The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union transformed the conference into an organization, and the CSCE was renamed the OSCE in December 1994 during the Budapest Summit of Heads of State.<sup>360</sup>

As the European security landscape changed dramatically in the post-Cold War era, the OSCE's agenda altered as well. As the organization's website announces: "the OSCE addresses issues that have an impact on our common security, including arms control, terrorism, good governance, energy security, human trafficking, democratization, media freedom and national minorities."<sup>361</sup> With NATO and EU enlargements, the OSCE's relevance in providing stability in the region has diminished, but with the Russian Federation and the United States as two key actors, it is still perceived by OSCE member

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<sup>356</sup> "Who we are," OSCE, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/who-we-are>.

<sup>357</sup> David J. Galbreath, *The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2007), 1.

<sup>358</sup> Galbreath, *The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*, 1.

<sup>359</sup> Galbreath, 9.

<sup>360</sup> "History," OSCE, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/history>.

<sup>361</sup> OSCE, "Who we are."

states as a respected forum and security organization with many field offices around the region.<sup>362</sup>

OSCE membership requires a number of commitments, and these commitments are not always met by Belarus. Some of the country's commitments to the OSCE, like the reduction of conventional weapons under the CFE treaty, destruction of man-portable air-defense systems (MANPDS), or efforts in non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Belarus was unable to meet due to a lack of resources, knowledge, and experience, and assistance from the international community was necessary.<sup>363</sup> However, some OSCE obligations, especially in the realms of democratization and human rights, were often ignored by Minsk. Belarus's failure to meet the OSCE's requirements feeds tensions between Minsk and the organization.

The positive relations between Minsk and the OSCE show themselves mainly in the area of arms control. Belarus, left with a large surplus of arms after the dissolution of the USSR, requested OSCE assistance in fulfilling its CFE Treaty obligations to destroy a large amount of weapons (discussed in Chapter III).<sup>364</sup> The OSCE's Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC), established in 1992, was responsible for arms destruction support and established assistance projects in 1996.<sup>365</sup> In 2003, under the OSCE's Small Arms and Light Weapons stockpile security and management project, Belarus started to destroy its MANPADS surplus.<sup>366</sup> In June 2018, a multi-year highly toxic fuel components removal project, led by the OSCE, was completed, leaving Belarus free from these hazardous chemicals.<sup>367</sup> According to a U.S. Department of State report from 2018, Belarus is in

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<sup>362</sup> Marc Perrin Brichambaut, "The OSCE in Perspective, Six Years of Service, Six Questions and a Few Answers," *Security and Human Rights* 23, no. 1 (2012): 31–44.

<sup>363</sup> Pál Dunay, "The OSCE in Crisis," *Chaillot Paper* no. 88 (April 2006).

<sup>364</sup> Galbreath, *The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*, 60.

<sup>365</sup> Galbreath, 60.

<sup>366</sup> "Belarus Destroys Shoulder Fired Anti-Aircraft Missiles in Co-Operation with OSCE," OSCE PA, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/fsc/46449>.

<sup>367</sup> "OSCE Completes Removal of Highly Toxic Rocket Fuel in Belarus," OSCE PA, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/384042>.

compliance with the country's CFE Treaty obligations, in large part because of the OSCE assistance.<sup>368</sup>

Belarus's commitment to being a nuclear-weapon-free, neutral state is supported by the OSCE through the OSCE's involvement in the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1540 implementation.<sup>369</sup> The resolution, aimed at prohibition of the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and means of delivery of weapons of mass destruction, was adopted by participating states in 2004.<sup>370</sup> Given the complexity of UNSCR 1540, international experience and joint activities are essential components for successful implementation of the resolution.<sup>371</sup> Belarus used the FSC as an international platform for developing its own action plan and strategy.<sup>372</sup>

The tensions between Minsk and the OSCE are prominent in the sphere of human rights and freedoms. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), which is responsible for elections observations, legislative reviews, and also advisory support on democratic processes and human rights, has been closely monitoring Belarus's elections and governmental activities related to human rights.<sup>373</sup> The 1994 presidential elections were received by the OSCE observers as fair, with only "minor procedural difficulties," a strong turnout, and balanced media coverage.<sup>374</sup> However, subsequent OSCE observers' reports have not been so positive. The 1996 referendum's execution and results (discussed briefly in Chapter III) were not received well by the OSCE. Not only did the OSCE leadership question the legality of the referendum, but a

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<sup>368</sup> The U.S. Department of State, Compliance With The Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces In Europe Condition (5) (c) Report, January 2018 (Washington, 2018).

<sup>369</sup> "OSCE Supports States to Stop Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction," OSCE PA, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/fsc/91950>.

<sup>370</sup> OSCE PA, "OSCE Supports States to Stop Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction."

<sup>371</sup> OSCE PA.

<sup>372</sup> OSCE PA.

<sup>373</sup> "OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights," OSCE/ODIHR, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/odihr>.

<sup>374</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, *Highlights of ODIHR Activities in 1994/Presidential Election in the Republic of Belarus, July 1994*, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/20535?download=true>.

number of voting violations were registered by the observers during the referendum itself.<sup>375</sup>

All subsequent presidential elections in Belarus were viewed by the OSCE, again, as unfair. For example, the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report from 2010 states:

The presidential election indicated that Belarus has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments for democratic elections. There was a lack of independence and impartiality of the election administration, an uneven playing field and a restrictive media environment, as well as a continuous lack of transparency at key stages of the electoral process.<sup>376</sup>

Lukashenko was dissatisfied with his Western critics. In his TV interview in 2012, he asserted:

The [OSCE] organization would be needed if it had adhered to what was declared at its creation. The problem is that the West and the United States were interested in [the OSCE] when they were confronted by the mighty Soviet Union. Today they no longer need this organization. It is completely unnecessary for us too because [the OSCE] failed in its responsibilities. This is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The OSCE does not deal with security and its cooperation is focused on disintegration.<sup>377</sup>

As presidential elections were approaching in 2015, Lukashenko made an effort to create an appearance of compliance with the OSCE obligations. The Belarusian government's welcoming approach to OSCE observers, its peaceful campaign and Election Day, and the release of six incarcerated opposition figures prior to the elections, were positive moves noted by OSCE representatives. However, according to the OSCE report, "the legal framework remained essentially unchanged"; the biggest concerns were about

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<sup>375</sup> "OSCE Troika Ministers Issues Statement on Belarus," OSCE PA, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/node/52453>.

<sup>376</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, Election Observation Mission Final Report. Republic of Belarus Presidential Election 19 December 2010 (Warsaw, 2011), 1.

<sup>377</sup> "Lukashenko o Deiatel'nosti OBSE v Nastoiashee Vremya." [Lukashenko About the OSCE's Current Actions], ONT Channel, video, 1:45, November 6, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mTPrHu1qIE>. (translated by the author).

counting of votes and tabulation of election results.<sup>378</sup> While the OSCE did not see the 2015 presidential elections in Belarus as democratic, Lukashenko asserted his devotion to the will of the West: “Everything the West wished for, everything the West wished to see during the presidential elections in Belarus, I admit—we did it all.”<sup>379</sup>

Over the years, a number of human rights violations in Belarus have been registered by OSCE observers. The violations include arrests and imprisoning of civilians, journalists, and members of the opposition, raids on the opposition’s media and other civilian offices, and use of force in dealing with peaceful demonstrations. One of the most recent large-scale examples of the human rights violations by the Belarusian government is the events of 25 March 2017. Peaceful demonstrations in observance of Freedom Day, involving anywhere between 1,000 and 3,000 people, were aggressively broken up by Belarus’s security forces.<sup>380</sup> Several hundred people were detained just on the grounds of looking like protesters.<sup>381</sup> Most of detainees were released after a few hours, but the pictures of Belarus’s security forces’ violent actions against peaceful demonstrators continued to circulate via social media and caused a strong negative reaction by the West and the OSCE in particular.

Nevertheless, pursuing the Belarus world peacemaker policy, on 5–9 July 2017 Belarus hosted the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for its 26th<sup>th</sup> Annual Session with about 260 representatives from North America, Europe, and Asia.<sup>382</sup> The theme of the session was “Enhancing mutual trust and co-operation for peace and prosperity in the OSCE

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<sup>378</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, Election Observation Mission Final Report. Republic of Belarus Presidential Election 11 October 2015 (Warsaw, 2016).

<sup>379</sup> “Uluchshit Otnoshenia s Zapadom Mozhno Tolko Pri Zhelanii Samogo Zapada” [Relationships Improvement with the West Is Possible Only if the West Wants It], video, 0:54, posted by *BelaPAN*, October 10, 2015, [https://naviny.by/rubrics/elections/2015/10/11/ic\\_media\\_video\\_623\\_9554](https://naviny.by/rubrics/elections/2015/10/11/ic_media_video_623_9554). (translated by the author).

<sup>380</sup> Yauheni Preiherman, “Illusions and Lack of Reason Revealed by New Protests in Belarus,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 14, no. 41 (March 2017), <https://jamestown.org/program/illusions-lack-reason-revealed-new-protests-belarus/>.

<sup>381</sup> Preiherman, “Illusions and Lack of Reason Revealed by New Protests in Belarus.”

<sup>382</sup> “26th Annual Session, Minsk, 2017,” OSCE PA, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.oscepa.org/meetings/annual-sessions/2017-minsk-annual-session>. (translated by the author)

region.” It ended with the adoption of the Minsk Declaration.<sup>383</sup> In his opening speech to the plenary session on 5 July 2017, Lukashenko stated that “[the OSCE PA] is the most effective forum in the OSCE and in Europe in general.”<sup>384</sup> As recently as January 2018, Lukashenko re-assured OSCE members of his country’s commitment and loyalty to the organization: “Belarus is open to discuss any concerns and questions. Belarus will continue to be a good pillar in the center of Europe.”<sup>385</sup>

However, Minsk always is cautious about how Moscow will perceive Belarus’s active support of and participation in Western organizations. To obscure the level of its involvement with the OSCE, the Belarusian government issued statements critiquing the OSCE. For example, a controversial opinion was voiced by Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs Victor Makei during his speech at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting on 07 December 2012 in Vienna, where Makei pointed out the OSCE’s inability to provide security and stability in the region: “the deep crisis of European security is continuing, polarization is growing, trust is eroding, and challenges are multiplying.”<sup>386</sup> Makei underlined the weakened political role of the organization, unresolved conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine, and the importance of strengthening the OSCE’s involvement in combating growing and expanding international threats such as terrorism, human and drug trafficking, uncontrolled migration, and cybercrime.<sup>387</sup>

## **B. BELARUS AND NATO**

Belarus’s relations with NATO, while improved significantly from the 1990s to the present, continue to fluctuate and depend largely on Russia’s behavior. The Soviet-era perception of NATO as a mortal threat has evolved into complex, but cooperative relations with the alliance. However, Belarus’s historical connections with Russia strongly influence

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<sup>383</sup> OSCE PA, “26th Annual Session, Minsk, 2017.”

<sup>384</sup> OSCE PA.

<sup>385</sup> “Lukashenko: v ODKB Seriezno Nedoozenivayt Opasnost’ Skadyvayuscheisya Situazii.” [Lukashenko: the OSCE is Not Taking Seriously Current Situation], BELTA Channel, video, 2:54, January 12, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIIINhMc64k>. (translated by the author).

<sup>386</sup> *24th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council*, (2017) (statement of V. Makei, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus).

<sup>387</sup> Makei, statement at the 24th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council.



Belarus's security posture and its approach towards NATO. Public criticism, intended for Russia, coexists with quiet cooperation with NATO, intended for the West.

While the post-World War II Soviet vision of the “inevitability of war” between socialism and capitalism evolved into a more pragmatic view of the state of deterrence and co-existence between two systems, NATO was viewed by Soviet leaders as a military threat against the USSR.<sup>388</sup> NATO strategic plans, including expansion of American military bases in Europe, were perceived by the Soviets as acts of aggression towards the USSR, not a legitimate defense.<sup>389</sup> The military opposition between the Eastern bloc, including Belarus, and NATO members continued throughout the Cold War. During the Soviet era, NATO was perceived by the Belarusian population as a mortal threat due to extremely active Soviet propaganda.<sup>390</sup>

After 1991, the new European security order included NATO as the only military alliance in Europe and Russia as the only state that, to some extent, could counter the Alliance.<sup>391</sup> Nevertheless, in this context, Belarus plays an important role because of its geopolitical situation: Belarus is bordered by Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, and therefore provides a natural buffer between Russia and several NATO members. Despite Western expectations that the post-Soviet states would turn to the West, Belarus was reluctant to adopt democratic ideas and kept its strong ties with Russia. NATO-Belarus relations did not see the significant improvements that the West had expected in the 1990s. Almost forty years of pro-Soviet and anti-NATO Soviet propaganda had taken root in the minds of the Belarusian population, including those in power.

Between 1991 and 1994 (before Lukashenko took power), independent Belarus started to develop relations with NATO with positive aspirations. Shushkevich, as indicated in Chapter III, had nationalist views, wished for Belarus to have its own identity,

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<sup>388</sup> Klaus Eugen Knorr, *NATO and American Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/reader.action?docID=4070933&ppg=10>.

<sup>389</sup> Knorr, *NATO and American Security*.

<sup>390</sup> Andrei Fedorov, “Belarus’s Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security,” *Demokratizatsiya* 8, no. 3 (2000): 300–310.

<sup>391</sup> Fedorov. “Belarus’s Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security.”

independent from Russia, and showed an interest in a dialogue between Belarus and NATO.<sup>392</sup> Official relations between NATO and Belarus commenced on 10 March 1992 in Brussels, when Belarus joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council – EAPC since 1997).<sup>393</sup> Numerous meetings and visits between NATO and Belarusian officials took place. Meetings between Belarusian and NATO members’ prime ministers were held in March 1993 and May 1994 at NATO headquarters.<sup>394</sup> High-ranking officials, including NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner, visited Minsk in the period of 1992–95.<sup>395</sup> The main issues discussed during those meetings were “disarmament problems, confidence-building measures, conversion of defense industries, and civil-military relations.”<sup>396</sup>

Under Lukashenko, however, the relations between the country and NATO started to deteriorate.<sup>397</sup> Lukashenko’s strong pro-Russian orientation precludes Belarus from being openly NATO-friendly. Despite the “sparks” that exist between Russia and Belarus, Lukashenko assured Russia that “Belarus is an outpost on the border with NATO... and it will always defend not only itself but also Russia, even if Russia does not assist [Belarus] with military defense.”<sup>398</sup> At the same time, Belarus has adopted conciliatory gestures towards NATO and is involved with NATO more than Minsk would loudly proclaim. In 1995, the Republic of Belarus, among the last post-Soviet countries, became a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.<sup>399</sup> President Clinton already in January 1994 (at the cradle of the PfP’s creation), during his short visit to Minsk, invited Belarus to “join with NATO in a partnership that will permit us together to provide for the common

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<sup>392</sup> Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 42.

<sup>393</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, “Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations.”

<sup>394</sup> Fedorov, “Belarus’s Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security.”

<sup>395</sup> Fedorov.

<sup>396</sup> Fedorov.

<sup>397</sup> Fedorov.

<sup>398</sup> Roy Allison, Stephen White and Margot Light, “Belarus between East and West,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21, no. 4 (2005): 487–511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270500363411>.

<sup>399</sup> Fedorov, “Belarus’s Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security.”

security... I hope Belarus will give careful consideration to this Partnership.”<sup>400</sup> Presidential elections in July 1994 and financial difficulties were among chief reasons for Belarus’s hesitation and stalling.<sup>401</sup> Belarus’s participation in the PfP was not energetic: the first Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program came into effect only in July 1997; the country’s representative to the partnership was not appointed until 1998; and Belarus did not participate in any joint military exercises until 2005.<sup>402</sup>

In the 1990s, four stumbling blocks appeared between NATO and Belarus: NATO enlargement, Belarus’s failure to meet the obligations of the CFE treaty, Lukashenko’s proposal for a nuclear-weapons-free zone, and the Kosovo conflict. For the first stumbling block, NATO enlargement, Belarusian authorities saw a potential breach of trust and growing tensions in international relations, increasing military expenditures, and cuts in social programs.<sup>403</sup> The old Soviet fear of NATO as enemy number one and concerns of the political-military destabilization of Europe disturbed Belarusian society.<sup>404</sup> Lukashenko’s statement on 9 May 1996 highlighted the attitude of the country towards the enlargement: “We cannot look calmly at this terrible monster approaching the borders of our blue-eyed Belarus.”<sup>405</sup>

Belarus’s hostile reaction to NATO enlargement was connected both with the country’s own security concerns and Russia’s strong negative position on the issue. Internally, the enlargement meant that Poland would become a NATO member. Since Belarus and Poland border each other, this would bring the potential foe right to Belarus’s

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400 “U.S. Supports Reform in Belarus (address by President Clinton, Minsk, Belarus, January 15, 1994), (The Trip of President Clinton to Brussels, Prague, Kiev, Moscow, Minsk, and Geneva, January 9–16, 1994) (Transcript),” U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of State Dispatch 5, no. SUPP 1 (January 1994): 33.

401 Fedorov, “Belarus’s Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security.”

402 Andrei Rusakovich, “Osnovnye Problemy Vsaimootnoshenij Mezhdyy Respublikoy Belarus i Organizaziej Severoatlanticheskogo Dogovora v 1990-x Godah.” [Key challenges between the Republic of Belarus and NATO in 1990s], *Belarusian Journal of International Law and International Relations* 2, (2003) (translated by the author).

403 Rusakovich, “Osnovnye Problemy Vsaimootnoshenij Mezhdyy Respublikoy Belarus i Organizaziej Severoatlanticheskogo Dogovora v 1990-x Godah.” [Key challenges between the Republic of Belarus and NATO in 1990s].

404 Rusakovich.

405 Fedorov, “Belarus’s Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security.”

doorsteps.<sup>406</sup> Sergei Kostyan, deputy chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Belarusian parliament, representing the attitude of Minsk at the time, stated, “If Poland joins NATO, and it will, we can become Polish lands.... If Belarus is not eager to join NATO and puts up any resistance, then the West will provoke a conflict in the territories of Grodno and Brest oblasts and after that will bring in NATO troops to defend its citizens.”<sup>407</sup> In accord with Russia, Minsk supported the main Russian lines of opposition to enlargement, such as the direct threat to Moscow and the disturbance of the existing security order in Europe.<sup>408</sup> Lukashenko showed his solidarity with Yeltsin (Russian president at the time) and rejected NATO’s 1997 Madrid summit invitation, when Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were invited to join the allies.<sup>409</sup>

The second stumbling block was the CFE Treaty’s obligations, which proved to be a burden for Belarus and weakened Belarus-NATO relations. Belarus’s violations included not only failure to comply with the CFE-established ceiling on the treaty-limited equipment (TLE), but also provided only partial access to the treaty’s inspection teams.<sup>410</sup> Belarus exchanged almost 150 tanks to active units from about 300 that were “awaiting export” in 1996, thus casting doubts on its export intentions.<sup>411</sup> During some inspections, representatives were denied full access to the TLE holding sites.<sup>412</sup> NATO enlargement and Russia’s constant complaints about adjusting its equipment limits led to a newly modified CFE treaty, which was signed on 19 November 1999 (still not ratified by all parties).<sup>413</sup>

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406 Fedorov, “Belarus’s Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security.”

407 Fedorov.

408 Fedorov.

409 Robert E. Hunter, “Maximizing NATO: A Relevant Alliance Knows How to Reach,” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 3 (1999): 190–203.

410 Wade Boese, “CFE Compliance Report Issued; Treaty Adaptation Talks Continue. (Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty),” *Arms Control Today* 28, no. 5 (June 1998): 30.

411 Boese, “CFE Compliance Report Issued; Treaty Adaptation Talks Continue.”

412 Boese.

413 Boese.

The third stumbling block, NATO's refusal of Lukashenko's idea of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe, had a negative effect on Belarus-NATO relations. Lukashenko sent a personal letter to NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana inviting NATO to join Belarus in this initiative.<sup>414</sup> However, while Solana applauded Belarus for its efforts in denuclearization of the country, his overall response was that the alliance's policy towards nuclear weapons precluded them from supporting Lukashenko's proposal.<sup>415</sup> Russia's initial support waned after signing of the NATO-Russia Act, and the nuclear-weapons-free zone idea seems to be abandoned for the foreseeable future.<sup>416</sup>

The fourth stumbling block was the conflict in Kosovo, in which NATO and Belarus took opposite sides. Even before NATO's armed "humanitarian intervention" in 1999, Belarus was in accord with Russia in supporting Milosevic and warning against military actions by NATO.<sup>417</sup> A Belarusian delegation visited Yugoslavia during the crisis, offering political, economic, and technical assistance.<sup>418</sup> After NATO deployed its armed forces to Kosovo, Belarus's statements became even more hostile, calling NATO's actions acts of aggression, challenges to common sense, and expansionism.<sup>419</sup>

Despite such severe differences in interests, in practice the relationship between Belarus and NATO started to improve, especially after the Kosovo conflict had receded. In April 1998, Belarus opened its Permanent Mission to NATO in Brussels.<sup>420</sup> Moreover, in November 2004, Belarus sent its representatives to attend the military committee of the Euroatlantic Partnership Council.<sup>421</sup> In June 2005, a Belarusian detachment joined the

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<sup>414</sup> Boese, "CFE Compliance Report Issued; Treaty Adaptation Talks Continue."

<sup>415</sup> "NATO Cool on Lukashenko's Nuclear-free Zone Idea," *The Jamestown Foundation. Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3, no. 22 (January 1997).

<sup>416</sup> Fedorov, "Belarus's Relations with NATO and Russia in the Context of European Security."

<sup>417</sup> Fedorov.

<sup>418</sup> Fedorov.

<sup>419</sup> Fedorov.

<sup>420</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, "Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations."

<sup>421</sup> Allison, White and Light, "*Belarus between East and West*," 493.

NATO-led exercise in Ukraine.<sup>422</sup> In 2004, Belarus started to participate in the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP).<sup>423</sup> As a part of these evolving improvements in Belarus and NATO relations, exchanges of delegations started to occur on a regular basis to design and assess the implementation of the Partnership Goals.<sup>424</sup> The PARP's intention is to prepare Belarus's armed forces to participate in NATO-led search and rescue, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.<sup>425</sup>

Two more initiatives highlighted improvements in relations between Belarus and the allies in the 2000s. First, the PfP Trust Fund project, completed in 2007, was a joint effort with Canada and Lithuania designed to destroy about 700,000 anti-personnel mines in Belarus.<sup>426</sup> This project helped Belarus to comply with the Ottawa Convention's obligations on "the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction."<sup>427</sup> Second, cooperation in the scientific and environmental fields is notable between Belarus and NATO. Belarus received about 40 grant awards under NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme; over seventy-five of Belarusians scientists were able to study in NATO countries under science fellowships.<sup>428</sup>

Another example of Belarus's quiet NATO support is the country's participation in NATO's Northern Distribution Network (NDN) for NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.<sup>429</sup> In 2004, Belarus opened its air space for NATO flights supporting the Afghan mission.<sup>430</sup> Belarus, interested in participating in the

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<sup>422</sup> Allison, White and Light, 493.

<sup>423</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, "Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations."

<sup>424</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>425</sup> Allison, White and Light. "Belarus between East and West," 493.

<sup>426</sup> "Relations with Belarus," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated April 07, 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49119.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49119.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>427</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Relations with Belarus."

<sup>428</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Relations with Belarus."

<sup>429</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Silent Partner: Belarus in NATO's Northern Distribution Network," *The Jamestown Foundation. Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, no 148 (August 2013).

<sup>430</sup> Socor, "Silent Partner: Belarus in NATO's Northern Distribution Network."

profitable logistics projects, extended the country's support further in 2009–13, by allowing two-way transit of NATO freight (both combat and non-combat materiel) utilizing Belarus's railroads.<sup>431</sup>

In his NATO criticism, Lukashenko consistently expresses his discontent with NATO's eastward enlargement and its continuous militarization. When seven more countries, including Baltic states, joined NATO in March 2004, almost 1,500 km of Belarus's border faced NATO countries.<sup>432</sup> Out of five neighboring states, three of them—Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania—are NATO members, leaving only Russia and Ukraine as non-NATO. Lukashenko's public reaction was aggressive and assertive. In April 2004, during his annual parliamentary speech, Lukashenko stated, “We have stated openly and honestly that NATO's expansion is unacceptable for Belarus. We have maintained this position for 10 years.”<sup>433</sup>

Lukashenko consistently promotes the idea that NATO continues its aggressive policy of military expansionism. As recently as 22 February 2018, during his speech at ceremonial meeting dedicated to the one hundredth anniversary of the Belarusian Armed Forces, Lukashenko asserted, “Militarization is being progressively implemented in Eastern Europe, where additional military contingents are being deployed. As a result, these countries military spending will significantly increase this year.”<sup>434</sup> On 13 November 2017, during the meeting with the governor of Kaliningrad, the Belarusian president said “Belarus and Russia are face-to-face with NATO activities along their borders.”<sup>435</sup> In response, Russia and Belarus perform a joint military exercise, Zapad, every four years on

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431 Socor.

432 Socor.

433 “Poslanie Prezidenta Belorusii Aleksandra Lukashenko Parlamentu” [Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko's message to the Parliament], President of the Republic of Belarus, accessed March 17, 2018.

[http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/poslanie-prezidenta-belarusi-aleksandra-lukashenko-parlamentu-5831/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poslanie-prezidenta-belarusi-aleksandra-lukashenko-parlamentu-5831/).

434 “Lukashenko Zayavil o Militarizatsii Vostochnoi Evropy,” [Lukashenko Claimed Easter Europe to be Militarized], RIA News, February 22, 2018, <https://ria.ru/world/20180222/1515165122.html>, (translated by the author).

435 “Lukashenko Zayavil o Militarizatsii Vostochnoi Evropy.” [Lukashenko Claimed Easter Europe to be Militarized].

the borders of the Baltic states and Ukraine. Officially, the military training scenario features a terrorist attack on Russian or Belarusian territory and Russian-Belarus forces' joint response to this attack.<sup>436</sup> However, Western observers asserted that Russian forces organized a defense against a coalition of NATO states led by the U.S.<sup>437</sup>

At the same time, Lukashenko used Zapad-17 as a tool in his balancing act between NATO and Russia. Moscow ignited NATO members' perception that Russia could use Zapad-17 similarly in some shape or form to Zapad-13 (which was a prelude to the Crimea annexation) by concealing the number of participating troops and by “[menacing] NATO with adversarial rhetoric.”<sup>438</sup> Minsk, on the other hand, while hosting and fully supporting this large joint exercise with Russia, presented Belarus as a transparent and cooperative ally with the West. Dozens of NATO monitors were allowed to watch the exercise, and the exercise locations were moved away from Poland's and Lithuania's borders.<sup>439</sup> In the aftermath interview, Lukashenko summarized Zapad-17's intentions: “We were not hiding the exercise from anyone. We showed the capabilities of the armed forces of Russia and Belarus in defending the Union State and the interests of our states. It really was a demonstration of our capabilities.”<sup>440</sup>

Minsk's desire to establish a balance between the West and Russia influenced Belarus's historically complex relations with NATO. Minsk's current official view on these relations is as “an important tool to strengthen cooperation in the political, military, economic, scientific and legal fields with NATO as a whole as well as with individual

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<sup>436</sup> “Zapad 2017 Russian-Belarusian Strategic Exercise Launched in Russia and Belarus,” The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, September 14, 2017, [http://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12142199@egNews](http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12142199@egNews).

<sup>437</sup> Michael Kofman, “Zapad 2017: Beyond the Hype, Important Lessons for the U.S. and NATO,” European Leadership Network, 27 October 2017.

<sup>438</sup> Fredrik Wesslau, Andrew Wilson, “So Far from God, So Close To Russia: Belarus and the Zapad Military Exercises,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified September 2017, [https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/so\\_close\\_to\\_russia\\_belarus\\_and\\_the\\_zapad\\_military\\_exercise\\_7221](https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/so_close_to_russia_belarus_and_the_zapad_military_exercise_7221).

<sup>439</sup> Wesslau and Wilson, “So Far from God, So Close To Russia: Belarus and the Zapad Military Exercises.”

<sup>440</sup> “Lukashenko: Zapad 2017 goals achieved,” Belarus news, September 20, 2017, <http://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-zapad-2017-goals-achieved-105103-2017/>.



NATO member states.”<sup>441</sup> However, Lukashenko continues, in accord with Russia, to criticize NATO enlargement. Just in April 2018 Lukashenko asserted during his speech at the “Eastern Europe: In Search of Security for All” forum: “NATO should assume a more responsible position. A lot of problems we have faced, have been caused by NATO’s eastern enlargement. I have the right to stress it, because I have seen these developments with my own eyes.”<sup>442</sup>

Nevertheless, the dialogue between Minsk and Washington, the key NATO member, has been recently given new impetus; in it Belarus reiterated its neutral attitude on the international arena. The visit of the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Aaron Wess Mitchell on 31 October 2018 gave decisive new momentum to Belarus-US relations.<sup>443</sup> During the meeting with Assistant Secretary Mitchell, Lukashenko demonstrated Minsk’s optimistic attitude toward emerging positive trends between Belarus and the United States, saying that he “hope[s] the relations between Belarus and the United States will gradually improve,” and “promise[s] you [the United States] that Belarusians will be the most reliable, honest and sincere partners of yours [the United States].”<sup>444</sup> Mitchell, in turn, stated that the United States is interested in developing economic and political relations with Minsk and that the U.S. values and supports Belarus’s independence and stability.<sup>445</sup> It was noteworthy that this meeting coincided with the Munich Security Conference Core Group Meeting, held in Minsk on 30 October-1 November, 2018.

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441 “Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/>.

442 “Many Problems in E. Europe Caused by NATO Enlargement - Belarusian President,” *Sputnik News Agency*, May 24, 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201805241064768806-problems-nato-enlargement-lukashenko/>.

443 “Meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Aaron Wess Mitchell,” President of the Republic of Belarus, accessed November 15, 2018, [http://president.gov.by/en/news\\_en/view/meeting-with-us-assistant-secretary-of-state-for-european-and-eurasian-affairs-aaron-wess-mitchell-19788/](http://president.gov.by/en/news_en/view/meeting-with-us-assistant-secretary-of-state-for-european-and-eurasian-affairs-aaron-wess-mitchell-19788/)

444 President of the Republic of Belarus, “Meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Aaron Wess Mitchell.”

445 President of the Republic of Belarus.

Following Mitchell's visit, Lukashenko met with high-profile American foreign policy analysts on 5–6 November 2018, highlighting nascent progress in Belarus-US relations.<sup>446</sup> During this meeting, Lukashenko emphasized Belarus's security reliance on Russia, but at the same time stressed the important role of the United States in European security. On the one hand, the Belarusian president asserted that "we are in a military-political alliance with Russia," reassuring Belarus's loyalty to Russia.<sup>447</sup> On the other hand, Lukashenko's statement that "we are convinced that the security of the entire continent depends on the unity of countries in the region and the preservation of the military and political role of the U.S. in European affairs. We do not exaggerate. Unfortunately, we will not handle any issues, including the Ukrainian conflict, here without the US," confirming the U.S. role in the European security.<sup>448</sup>

Despite Russia's continuous influence on Belarus-NATO relations, cooperation between Minsk and the allies improved significantly from the 1990s to the present. Belarusian officials have attended numerous meetings and conferences, conducted by the allies. Furthermore, Lukashenko consistently offers Minsk not only as a place for conferences and meeting, but also as a platform for uneasy discussions between Eastern and Western actors. Despite existing confrontations, Belarus's relationship with NATO, including re-energized relations with the United States, has the potential for continuous improvement.

### C. BELARUS AND THE EU

Belarus's inconsistent relations with the EU, just as with the OSCE and NATO, have been complex since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, and Minsk's level of cooperation is determined by bilateral politics with regard to Russia.<sup>449</sup> The EU, on the other hand, demonstrated its continuous desire to improve Belarus's political

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<sup>446</sup> Grigory Ioffe, "Lukashenka Meets American Analysts," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15, no 161 (November 2018), <https://jamestown.org/program/lukashenka-meets-american-analysts/>.

<sup>447</sup> Ioffe, "Lukashenka Meets American Analysts."

<sup>448</sup> Ioffe, "Lukashenka Meets American Analysts."

<sup>449</sup> "Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, accessed June 08, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.by/en/organizations/>.

situation and to reform the Belarusian economic system because the organization is interested in a strong and competitive market in Belarus.

Developments toward cooperation with the EU that Shushkevich had promoted between 1992 and 1994 were extinguished when Lukashenko took office in 1994. Since then, the EU has criticized Belarusian leadership as being non-democratic and even funded the opposition.<sup>450</sup> Lukashenko's November 1996 referendum was the last straw for the EU, and Belarus became the only country in Europe without a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which was established between Belarus and the EU in 1995 and frozen with the EU initiative in 1997.<sup>451</sup> The EU, while it indicated its interest in improving relations with Minsk, always provided conditions in terms of Belarus's continued democratization.<sup>452</sup> Since Belarus failed to democratize, additional EU restrictions were imposed on Belarus, including a ban on top-level political contacts, a travel ban for a number of senior Belarus officials (including Lukashenko himself in 2006), and the freezing of almost all external assistance and cooperative programs.<sup>453</sup>

Nevertheless, the EU continued to make efforts to establish positive relations with Belarus. Belarus was nominated as an EU European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) partner in 2003; however, due to the country's continued undemocratic policies and actions, it was never accepted into the ENP.<sup>454</sup> In November 2006, another attempt was made by the EU with the publication of an unofficial action plan "What the European Union could bring to Belarus."<sup>455</sup> The publication included both the advantages and the requirements for Belarus in increased bilateral cooperation with the EU.<sup>456</sup> The unfolding energy conflict with

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<sup>450</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, "The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations: Insulating Minsk from a Color Revolution," *Demokratizatsiya* 14 (3), (2006): 407–434.

<sup>451</sup> Ambrosio, "The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations."

<sup>452</sup> Hans-Georg Wieck and Stephan Malerius, *Belarus and the EU: From Isolation Towards Cooperation* (Center for European Studies, 2008), 24.

<sup>453</sup> Ambrosio, "The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations."

<sup>454</sup> Wieck and Malerius, *Belarus and the EU*, 24.

<sup>455</sup> Wieck and Malerius, 24.

<sup>456</sup> Wieck and Malerius, 24.

Russia at the end of 2006 complemented the EU's warm attempt to catch Minsk's attention, and contributed to changing Lukashenko's attitude towards the EU.

In 2008–10, the relationship between Belarus and the EU resumed and frozen disputes between the two thawed. After the release of political prisoners by the Belarusian government in 2008, the EU started a rapprochement process.<sup>457</sup> The EU restrictions on Belarus, such as a travel ban on high-ranking officials, were lifted.<sup>458</sup> Moreover, the European Commission opened a diplomatic mission in Minsk.<sup>459</sup> Visits, discussions, and contacts by high-level politicians from both sides were reestablished and intensified.<sup>460</sup> Additionally, Belarus became a full-fledged participant of the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) multilateral cooperation framework.<sup>461</sup> The EaP was established in 2009 by the EU, and its framework includes the EU member states and six Eastern European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.<sup>462</sup> EaP developed four working platforms: “democracy, good governance and stability,” “economic integration and approximation with EU sectoral policies,” “energy security,” and “contacts between people.”<sup>463</sup> Belarusian representatives take part in all four initiatives, but, at the same time, the cooperation is pragmatic.<sup>464</sup> Minsk's unwillingness to democratize its political system and liberalize its economy led to continued alienation with the EU. Unfair presidential elections and imprisonment of opposition leaders in 2010 proved Belarus's reluctance to democratize, and the EU re-imposed some of the previous restrictions, added new economic sanctions, and even toughened the Belarusian visa ban on top officials.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Wieck and Malerius, 24.

<sup>458</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, “Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations.”

<sup>459</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>460</sup> Wieck and Malerius, *Belarus and the EU*, 29.

<sup>461</sup> Wieck and Malerius, 29.

<sup>462</sup> “EU-Belarus Relations,” European Union, 2017, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/35606/EU-Belarus%20relations](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/35606/EU-Belarus%20relations).

<sup>463</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, “Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations.”

<sup>464</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>465</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Another ongoing point of tension between Belarus and the EU is the death penalty policy. Belarus is the only country in Europe where the death penalty is still legal.<sup>466</sup> In response to the EU's grievances, Lukashenko refers to the 1996 national referendum (the same referendum that gave the president almost unlimited power), when the majority of Belarusians voted against the abolition of the death penalty: "We are called to abolish the death penalty. We are hearing the proposals. But not a single country can oppose the people's will, the overwhelming part of which voted at the referendum for its application."<sup>467</sup> According to Article 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, "until its abolition, the death penalty may be applied in accordance with law as an exceptional measure of punishment for especially grave crimes and only in accordance with a court sentence."<sup>468</sup> "Especially grave crimes" are, according to the officials, exclusively premeditated murders with aggravated circumstances.<sup>469</sup> Given the history of Belarusian people being destroyed over and over again during times of war (see Chapter II), the overwhelming support for the death penalty can be explained as a historically established mentality of self-defense reflected at the state law level.

The relationship between Belarus and the EU saw slow improvements in 2012–16. The EU gradually reduced its sanctions, top-level official contacts resumed, and, in 2016, the EU lifted most of its restrictions.<sup>470</sup> The major factor was yet another release of political prisoners on 22 August 2015.<sup>471</sup> Furthermore, in 2016 the EU-Belarus Coordination Group was created, which made possible the cooperation at the senior officials' level.<sup>472</sup> During his meeting with EU Special Representative for Human Rights Stavros Lambrinidis, on 9 March 2016, Lukashenko stressed that Belarus and the EU have finally abandoned head-

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<sup>466</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>467</sup> "Belarus Preserving Death Penalty at People's Will-President Lukashenko," *Sputnik News Agency*, 07 May 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201707051055252506-belarus-death-penalty-people-will/>.

<sup>468</sup> "Constitution of the Republic of Belarus of 1994," National Center of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://law.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=V19402875c>

<sup>469</sup> Sputnik News Agency, "Belarus Preserving Death Penalty at People's Will-President Lukashenko."

<sup>470</sup> Sputnik News Agency.

<sup>471</sup> European Union, "EU-Belarus Relations."

<sup>472</sup> European Union.

on confrontation.<sup>473</sup> The Belarusian head of state stated: “[the EU and Belarus] built an unnecessary wall between each other and did not even talk over this fence, just exchanged statements.”<sup>474</sup> Additionally, EU-Belarus trade relations are very important to both sides. Recently, a Dialog on Trade was established between the EU and Belarus that facilitates discussion of domestic procedures, improvements in mutual trade regulations, and other trade concerns. Belarus’s WTO accession process resumed with the EU’s support.<sup>475</sup>

Always uneasy, the relationship between the EU and Belarus continues to change. The EU’s major concerns are promoting human rights, freedoms, and the rule of law in Belarus, which preclude bilateral political and economic cooperation.<sup>476</sup> In 2017, Lukashenko was invited to the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels for the first time since 2009.<sup>477</sup> The Belarusian president, instead, went to the Buda–Koshelevo region of Belarus for a long-planned visit:

They [the EU] finally realized that there is no Europe without Belarus. The German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Gabriel said to me: “You are the center of Europe. What kind of Europe is there without Belarus!” But everything was planned ahead. I postponed my trip to Buda-Koshelevo three times already. Well, should I have to delay it again?<sup>478</sup>

No other official explanations were given by Belarusian authorities, but some speculations include Lukashenko’s cautious attitude toward European politicians, journalists, human rights activists, and Russia’s possible negative reaction.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> “Lukashenko Hails Improving Relations between Belarus, EU,” *BELTA*, March 09, 2016, <http://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-hails-improving-relations-between-belarus-eu-89505-2016/>.

<sup>474</sup> *BELTA*, “Lukashenko Hails Improving Relations between Belarus, EU.”

<sup>475</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, “Multilateral Cooperation/International Organizations.”

<sup>476</sup> European Union, “EU-Belarus Relations.”

<sup>477</sup> Artyom Shraibman, “Why Belarus’s Leader Rejected a Long-Awaited Invitation to Brussels,” December 5, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/74907>.

<sup>478</sup> “Pochemu Lukashenko ne Pochal na Sammit Vostochnogo Partnerstva.” [Why Lukashenko Ignored East Partnership Summit], *BELSAT News*, November 24, 2017, <http://belsat.eu/ru/programs/pochemu-lukashenko-ne-pochal-na-sammit-vostochnogo-partnerstva/>. (translated by the author)

<sup>479</sup> Shraibman, “Why Belarus’s Leader Rejected a Long-Awaited Invitation to Brussels.”

Ironically, Lithuania complicates the constructive dialogue on bilateral agreement between Belarus and the EU. The issue at stake is the Belarusian nuclear power plant project Astravets. The power plant, financed by Russia, should be finished in 2019, but faces strong opposition from Vilnius.<sup>480</sup> The Lithuanian government's major concerns are safety and national security, as Astravets is located just about sixty kilometers from Vilnius.<sup>481</sup> Advocating strongly against Belarus's power plant, Lithuania, as a member of the EU, has ignited a political confrontation between Belarus and the EU. Beyond statements of opposition, Vilnius is blocking the Belarus-EU bilateral negotiation process by adding conditions relating to the Belarusian power plant.<sup>482</sup>

Despite existing inconsistencies, Minsk's internal assessment of the recent changes in relations between Belarus and the EU is that they are satisfactory. For example, Lukashenko stated that Belarus should not miss developing more favorable conditions and should dig deep into the European market, saying: "Further normalization of relations with the EU is among our most important foreign economic priorities. We must not let this opportunity pass."<sup>483</sup> Foreign Minister Makei further reiterates Belarus's position towards the EU: "Minsk is ready to work on bilateral agreements with the EU. The Belarusian president has clearly identified a course of promoting normal relationships with the EU."<sup>484</sup> Top official statements reaffirm Belarus's interest in intensifying trading, political, and humanitarian relations with the EU.

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480 "Lithuania Urges EU to Pressure Belarus over Nuclear Safety," *Reuters*, accessed July 4, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-baltics-energy/lithuania-urges-eu-to-pressure-belarus-over-nuclear-safety-idUSKBN1JUIQ4>.

481 Reuters. "Lithuania urges EU to pressure Belarus over nuclear safety."

482 "Minskij Barometer. Monitoring Vneshnej Politiki I Regionalnoj Bezopasnosti" [Minsk Barometer. Foreign Policy and Regional Security Monitoring], *Minskij Dialog*, accessed November 15, 2018, [http://minskdialogue.by/Uploads/Files/research/reports/pdf/MB\\_5%20ru.pdf](http://minskdialogue.by/Uploads/Files/research/reports/pdf/MB_5%20ru.pdf). (translated by the author)

483 "Lukashenko Zayavil chto Belarus Dolzna Vgryzatsia v Evropejskij Rynok." [Lukashenko Claimed Belarus Must Bite into European Market], *RIA News*, July 11, 2017, <https://ria.ru/economy/20170711/1498270362.html> (translated by the author).

484 Minskij Dialog, "Minskij Barometer."

## D. CONCLUSION

The fundamentals of Belarus's foreign policy, focused on the country's neutrality and role as a peacemaker, can be drawn from Lukashenko's speech during the EaP's Foreign Ministers meeting in June 2017: "For our country, it is equally important to develop cooperation with the East and the West and not to make an artificial choice between them."<sup>485</sup> The cooperation between Belarus and Western organizations is based on mutual interests in political, economic, and humanitarian spheres, but Minsk always keeps in mind its Slavic roots, knowing that Belarus's economy and security are heavily dependent on keeping a good relationship with Russia.

The Crimea crisis in 2014 drew the West and Belarus closer together. For the allies, Russia's intervention in Ukraine, subsequent annexation of Crimea, and support of separatists in the Donbass are violations of international law.<sup>486</sup> The fence-sitting by Lukashenko about the Russian annexation of Crimea, which was discussed in Chapter III, shows Minsk's efforts not to upset either the West or Russia. In contrast to NATO's tactical response of imposing economic sanctions on Russia and providing aid to Ukraine, Lukashenko's regime had offered Minsk as a site for peacemaking negotiations.<sup>487</sup> After hosting Russian-Ukrainian negotiations, Belarus suggested that talks on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could take place in Minsk as well.<sup>488</sup> Furthermore, Lukashenko and Belarus's top officials are promoting an ambitious idea to host the Helsinki-2 process.<sup>489</sup> All these initiatives emphasize Belarus's international posture as a neutral state and a peacemaker.

Despite the fact that Belarus's relationships with the OSCE, NATO, and the EU are deeply weakened by human rights issues, progress in cooperation in the economic and

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<sup>485</sup> President of the Republic of Belarus, "Meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Aaron Wess Mitchell."

<sup>486</sup> Andrew T. Wolff, "The Future of NATO Enlargement after the Ukraine Crisis," *International Affairs* 91, no. 5 (September 2015): 1103–1121.

<sup>487</sup> "NATO Can Not Recognize Annexation of Crimea by Russia," *Interfax-Ukraine*, January 30, 2017, <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/399612.html>.

<sup>488</sup> Interfax-Ukraine, "NATO Can Not Recognize Annexation of Crimea by Russia."

<sup>489</sup> Interfax-Ukraine.



security spheres with all three organizations is evident. With the OSCE, Belarus, notwithstanding volatile rhetoric, uses the organization's resources for the country's security needs. With NATO, although careful not to upset Russia, in words maybe less than in deeds, Belarus's actions point to a limited convergence with the United States and allies. Finally, with the EU, disagreements in the political arena have had only a limited effect on economic relations and Belarus's aggressive discourse does not prevent Minsk from beneficial cooperation with the organization. Belarus, in pursuit of a constructive attempt balance between West and East that would benefit the country's economy and security, and in context of heavy reliance on Russia, is moving forward in broadening economic, political, and security relations with the West.

## V. CONCLUSION

As the international security picture changed substantially with the dissolution of Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the USSR, the Republic of Belarus was left with a security dilemma of balancing its defensive ambitions between the West and Russia. Minsk's policy of neutrality and peacemaking and Lukashenko's persistent rhetoric that Belarus is an "oasis of stability" have been key factors shaping modern Belarus's posture in the international arena.<sup>490</sup> Belarus has continuously sought Western support and acknowledgement while maintaining positive relations with Russia.

### A. BELARUSIAN POLICY MOTIVATIONS AND TRENDS

Five major factors affecting Minsk's modern foreign policy and security can be drawn from analyzing Belarus's history and relations with Russia and the West. First, Belarus is relatively inexperienced in being a self-governing state because, as discussed in Chapter II, the country gained its independence for the first time only after the dissolution of the USSR. Second, stability and security are of high value for Belarusians, given their experience in multiple devastating wars. Third, as inferred in Chapter II, Belarus's society is very adaptable to changes in politics, economy and social life. Fourth, as underlined in Chapters III and IV, Belarus pursues a policy of peace and peacemaking in both Eastern and Western directions. Fifth, as highlighted in Chapter III, modern Belarus's economic and military dependence on Russia limits the extent of its engagement with the West.

Belarus is a relatively young state, and the country did not acquire much experience in the realms of domestic governance or international relations. As discussed in detail in Chapter II, the country has enjoyed its independence for a short twenty-seven years (since 1991), and its current territory for only seventy-nine years (since 1939). Before 1991, Belarus always had external rulers and tended to rely on other, stronger and more

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<sup>490</sup> "Alexandr Lukashenko i Ostrovok Stablnosti" [Alexander Lukashenko and the Island of Stability], *Newsbel.by*, accessed November 06, 2018, <https://newsbel.by/01/02/aleksandr-lukashenko-i-ostrovok-stablnosti-1/> (translated by the author).

developed states. Therefore, it is premature to expect its rapid advancement of independent democratic policies both domestically and internationally. Moreover, Lukashenko and his office are representatives of a Soviet-minded, old guard political elite. Thus, Belarus needs to raise a new generation of independent-minded political elites before significant changes to current foreign policy are likely to be observed.

Belarus's attachment to stability and security is deeply rooted in the country's history, which is reflected in Chapter II. Only occasionally has Belarusian territory changed its rulers. Chapter II illustrated how long periods of governance by the GDL, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire, and the USSR instilled a tradition of maintaining a long-lasting ruling elite. This tradition correlates not only with stability, but also indicates perceived levels of security, both domestically and internationally. Despite existing tensions and disagreements between Belarus and Russia and the West, the status quo in modern Belarus's governance suits, more or less, all parties involved. Both Russia and the West are not interested in a rapid power shift in Belarus; instead, they are taking advantage of its currently stable political conditions. This approach brings predictability and opportunities for building constructive relations, which does not prevent the West from encouraging Minsk's more active movement towards democratization.

Chapter II revealed that another distinct feature of Belarusians is adaptability, which brings flexibility into Belarus's international politics. Taking into account the numerous periods of war that Belarus has experienced, the nation's survival and reconstruction abilities have been impressive. This flexibility and an ability to balance various interests and intents in foreign policy are embedded in Belarus's history. This idea is reflected in Belarus's National Security Concept, reviewed briefly in Chapter II. Belarus, while it values its independence immeasurably, is open to developing relations with any nation (if, of course, it does not threaten Belarus's security and sovereignty).<sup>491</sup>

Belarus's key value “Абы не было войны” (Aby ne bylo voiny, only let there be no war), strongly influences both its domestic and international policies. Given its history,

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<sup>491</sup> Vladimir Puzikov, *Osnovy Teorii Obespecheniya Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti: Kurs Lekzij* [National Security Protection Fundamentals: Course of Lectures] (Minsk: GIUST BGU, 2013), 202.

Belarus is a survivor, and modern peacemaking attempts are ingrained in Belarusian identity. Chapter II revealed that Belarus's peacemaking tradition can be traced as far back as the thirteenth century, when the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) was formed, which united different ethnicities under one rule. It is, therefore, not surprising that Lukashenko's portrayal of Belarus as a peacemaker in the international arena finds strong support among Belarus's society, is welcomed by both the East and the West, and is not objected to by the local opposition.

Modern Belarus depends on Russia financially and militarily, which was elaborately examined in Chapter III. Russia has accompanied Belarus since the eighteenth century and, ever since, has had a significant influence on Belarus's affairs. Belarus's dependence on Russia continues to exist today, especially in the economic and security spheres. In the economic sphere, despite Minsk's attempts to loosen this dependency, Lukashenko, unwilling to reform Belarus's economy, continuously faces the Soviet economic legacy. Russia, on the other hand, does not hesitate to financially extort the Belarusian government when Moscow finds Minsk's political behavior inconvenient. In the security sphere, as Chapter III disclosed, Belarus and Russia formed a military alliance, which is reflected in Belarus's National Security Concept, and through the Union State of Belarus and Russia and the CSTO agreements.<sup>492</sup> This historical legacy hampers the current Belarusian government's search for geopolitical balance.

The country's turbulent history offers modern Belarus a number of benefits. Belarus's neutrality makes the country open for proactive cooperation with both Russia and the West. Moreover, when faced with the problem of balancing interests, Belarus has the opportunity to choose and adjust its position, depending on existing conditions. Additionally, Minsk exploits its geographical location between the East and the West to advance its own interests. Finally, Belarus has the ability to constrain the country's dependence on Russia's defense through the cooperation with the West.

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<sup>492</sup> Vladimir Puzikov, *Osnovy Teorii Obespecheniya Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti: Kurs Lekzij*, 211.

## **B. LUKASHENKO'S IMPACT ON BELARUS'S DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLICIES SINCE 1994**

As Chapter III revealed, after a short period of Westernization in 1991-94, Belarus's government took a course toward re-integration with Russia. The chief apologist of this movement was the first president of the Republic of Belarus, Lukashenko. Lukashenko's actions have had a major impact on Belarus's political development. His governance, which has influenced Belarus's political course as a whole and the relations with the East and the West in particular, can be presented by four major milestones: the movement towards the East, the search for dialogue with Putin in 2001-06, the economic wars in 2007-14, and the period of after Russia's Crimea invasion to the present.

### **1. Movement towards the East.**

Before Putin took power in Russia in 2000, Lukashenko was actively promoting re-integration with the Russian Federation. The process of integration accelerated considerably after the referendum of 1996, discussed in detail in Chapter III. The referendum removed internal impediments for Lukashenko to implement his integrative agenda and, with his initiatives, the Union State of Belarus and Russia was created, the Customs Union was signed, and security cooperation has been strengthened significantly between the two countries. Minsk's balance of interests undoubtedly shifted toward the East, which naturally weakened relations with the West. However, pro-Eastern politics were heartily supported by the Belarusian society, which, complemented by Lukashenko's strict domestic politics, made it very difficult for a strong opposition to emerge and to generate a different course of development for the country.

### **2. Search for Dialogue with Putin in 2001-06.**

Lukashenko's and Putin's different visions of Belarusian-Russian cooperative development led to the integration processes' deceleration. Using its economic leverage, Russia started to suppress Belarus's attempts at bilateral political dialogue, which ultimately led to the energy conflict between the two countries, described in Chapter III. Minsk, in retaliation, started to look for alternatives outside of its relations with Russia, which affected Belarus's domestic and international policies. The national security sphere,

however, was an exception, as both Belarus and Russia had vested interests in the continued integration. Despite Lukashenko's maneuvers towards the West, Belarusian society displayed no interest in a change of power as their living conditions were improving (Lukashenko's impressive 82.6 percent of vote in the 2006 presidential elections is a good indicator, even admitting voting irregularities).<sup>493</sup>

### **3. Economic Wars 2007–2014**

The ongoing economic conflicts between Belarus and Russia, described in Chapter III, spurred Belarus's search for new export markets. To ensure Belarus's economic security, Lukashenko was compelled to turn to the West, making Minsk's international posture appear more pro-Western. For all his pro-Russian orientation, Lukashenko saw the necessity of promoting a dialogue between Belarus and the West, particularly the United States and NATO.

### **4. The Period of after the Crimean Crisis to the Present**

The events in Crimea seemed to influence Lukashenko's thinking more than Minsk displayed publically through its official statements. In practice, as can be drawn from Chapter IV, cooperation with the West, the United States, and other countries like China, continued to improve. These efforts brought positive results: the EU's sanctions were lifted, high-level official contacts were reestablished, and Belarus got invited to various international forums, conferences, meetings, and events, discussed in detail in Chapter IV. Moscow's intervention in Crimea and Russia's overall aggressive behavior in different parts of the world caused tensions in Belarusian society and created an opportunity for a possible shift to a more Western-oriented political course.

Lukashenko's fortification of the Belarus's pro-Russian integrationist politics in the 1990s did not conclusively destroy the possibility for the positive development of relations with the West. As discussed in Chapter IV, the Belarusian president is easing his rhetoric and is demonstrating an increasing openness towards the West and the United States. Good

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<sup>493</sup> Elena Korosteleva, "Was There a Quiet Revolution? Belarus after the 2006 presidential election," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, no. 2–3 (2009): 324–346.

indicators of these positive developments are Lukashenko's recent meetings with United States representatives, as detailed in Chapter IV. This is not a course towards democracy and full liberalization yet, but more a compromise with Western demands, as a minimum for considering improved relations.

While balancing the country interests within Belarus's politics, Lukashenko faces the possible risk of the radical democratization of the society, which could potentially lead to Lukashenko's loss of power or the loss of the country's sovereignty, due to Belarus's economic dependency on Russia. This situation poses a threat for the stability in the country and complicates Belarus's political landscape. Lukashenko faces the challenge of carefully managing the pace and direction of acceptable change, when making choices in the economic, foreign policy, and security areas. For the West, however, this is a window of opportunity to cooperate more closely with Belarus through economic channels and in international organizations, perhaps building a basis for a new, mutually beneficial, format of relations.

### **C. BELARUS'S SECURITY POSTURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND THE WEST**

Belarus's current security posture as a neutral and peaceful state invites deeper cooperation with the United States and the West. It is important to note that Belarusians have tended to detach the United States from the West in a negative way, chiefly because of their Soviet heritage, in which the United States was enemy number one. This mentality affects Belarus's foreign policy and national security posture and refines its approaches to international security organizations. Moreover, in the light of events in Crimea, Belarus's official rhetoric emphasizes the importance of the country's sovereignty and the integrity of its territory.<sup>494</sup> Finally, Belarus's focus on becoming the world's peacemaker is an attempt to establish a desired balance between the West and Russia, which provides opportunities for the West's deeper engagement with Belarus.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Newsbel.by, "Alexandr Lukashenko i Ostrovok Stabilnosti."

<sup>495</sup> Artyom Shraibman, "V Pogone za Nishej. Pochemu Minsk Sdelal Mirotvorchestvo Osnovoj Vneshnej Politiki" [In Pursuit of Niche. Why Minsk Made the Peacemaking a Basis of Its Foreign Policy], May 28, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76455> (translated by the author).

Chapter IV analysed relations between Belarus and three Western security organizations: the OSCE, NATO, and the EU. It revealed current progress in mutual cooperation, but also problems created by human rights and freedoms concerns. Moreover, Belarusian government attitudes and reactions towards the organizations are designed not to alienate either Moscow or the West. The evolving cooperation between Belarus and all three organizations is laying an encouraging groundwork for deeper collaboration. The OSCE continuously supports Belarus's efforts in the disarmament process. Belarus-NATO relations, which in the past suffered in large part because the United States is a key player in the organization, might benefit from current positive developments in the relations between Belarus and the United States. Finally, the EU, despite disagreements in the political arena, continues to demonstrate its readiness to engage with Belarus, especially in the area of commerce.

Belarus's geopolitical location, stable government, and peace-making initiatives provide a good framework for further maneuvers towards the West, including closer interactions with the United States. However, Belarus's direct communications with the United States might be perceived as a threat by Russia. Therefore, for the United States, the primary means of cooperation with Belarus should be through continued dialogue via international organizations, such as the OSCE, NATO, and the EU. Despite the high risk of Russia's intrusion in the evolving convergence trends between Belarus and the West, Minsk is continuing to seek ways to make this cooperation with the West serve the country's own interests.

#### **D. WHAT IS NEXT FOR BELARUS?**

Three possible scenarios are plausible for Belarus: an Eastern Ukrainian-type takeover, a Baltic-type independence, and a self-directed path. The Eastern Ukrainian scenario would be if Russia would threaten Belarus's independence. The Baltic scenario would be if power moves to pro-Western liberal government. The self-directed scenario would be if Belarus takes its own unique course of development.

The Eastern Ukrainian scenario involves such strong economic pressure from Russia on Belarus that there is nothing left for Minsk to do but surrender, i.e., to lose its



independence. Military intervention, while possible, is not necessary: taking into account Minsk's large foreign debt and the major Russian stake in Belarusian financial institutions, a Russian policy of economic annexation of Belarus is conceivable. In this scenario, Belarus would lose its independence, more likely peacefully, and become dependent on Russia not only economically and militarily, but politically as well. The expected Western negative reaction, which could be molded from the Eastern Ukrainian experience, would not be an impediment for Russia's actions. This scenario would be possible in the case if Minsk were to fail to find an alternative export market to ease Belarus's economic dependence on Russia. Russia's currently aggressive policy might cause the loss of security stability in the Eastern Europe, which, in turn, might expedite the Eastern Ukrainian scenario's occurrence for Belarus.

Opposite to the Eastern Ukrainian case, the Baltic scenario would be if a new, pro-Western Belarusian political elite seized power in Minsk. Democratization processes and economic reforms would be reintroduced and Belarusian society would be liberalized. While attractive for the West, such a development could cause a strong negative reaction from Russia. The very slim possibility of a Baltic scenario succeeding would be greater if the changeover were to occur very quickly, Belarus enlisted Western support beforehand, and Russia did not have sufficient time or interest to react. But the long history of continuity in governance reduces the chance for the Baltic scenario. Internal factors would affect the probability of this scenario occurring. One factor would be that the role of individual Belarusian politicians might be strengthened domestically and in the international arena. A good candidate would be Minister of Foreign Affairs Makei, who has a political background and vast experience in foreign relations, enjoying a decent reputation both domestically and internationally.<sup>496</sup> Another factor would be the growth of private capital, which is interested in the liberalization of the economy, cooperation with more advanced countries, and foreign currency inflows.

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<sup>496</sup> "Biographia Vladimira Makeia" [Vladimir Makei's biography,] *RIA Novosti ITAR-TASS*, last modified August 20, 2012, <https://ria.ru/spravka/20120820/727395241.html>. (translated by the author)

The self-directed scenario implies Minsk's further maneuvering behavior and development of a beneficial balance for Belarus between the East and the West. Belarus, to the extent possible, would not extend its existing debt but, instead, would rely on investments in human capital and international commerce. A stable source of state income could be drawn from its own people by liberalizing and reforming the economy and political system, as well as from beneficial strategic and trade alliances. This liberalization process would not have to be democratic, however. The self-directed scenario progression might be similar to Russian developments, when the economy was liberalized more than political system. Overall, though, this would be a uniquely Belarusian course, unparalleled in European history. This scenario would be possible both with Lukashenko or with other, more pro-Western, government. The reality is that Belarus's rapid deliverance from deep economic dependence on Russia is very unlikely, and Belarus would likely have to continue its friendship with Russia for some time. The decisive factor in the self-directed scenario would be the smart handling of Belarus's external debt. Belarus foreign policy's angle, as well as internal balance of power, would depend on the country's choice of its principal creditors.

The implications for the United States and the West are few with the self-directed scenario, and intensify with either the Baltic or Eastern Ukrainian scenarios. With the self-directed scenario, Russian interests would not be threatened and the Western involvement might be minimal, which could leave Belarus relations with Russia and the West largely unchanged. The Baltic scenario would require considerable investment from the West, which would shift Belarus's balance of interests away from Russia. If it felt threatened, Russia's response could be quite unpredictable. The Eastern Ukrainian scenario suggests that Belarus, no longer an independent country, would be under Russia's political and economic control. In this scenario, the West would lose a neutral peace-making buffer state and the European security landscape would be altered.

Modern Belarus's foreign policy and national security posture are based on the commitment to neutrality and peacemaking efforts. Ties with Russia and Lukashenko's Soviet heritage are two major constraints that constrain Belarus's development of closer relationships with Western security organizations and the United States. However, current

trends show that Minsk is getting more open to developing relations with the West, while maintaining prudent relations with Russia.

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