

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE EASTERN NEIGHBORHOOD: THE CASE OF BELARUS

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Summary

According to the official definition, the main objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) are the mutual interest of the EU and its neighbours in promoting reform, the rule of law, stable democracy and prosperity – prosperity, security and stability – throughout the neighbourhood of the enlarged European Union. With the ENP the EU offers its neighbours an intensified political dialogue and a deeper economic relationship, based on shared values and common interests in tackling common problems. With this in mind, we can only conclude that with respect to Belarus, the EU policy and the ENP (in its limited size which is applied to the country) failed not only in promoting similar reforms as CEE countries have implemented but even in slightly improving the situation with regard to (parliamentary) democracy or human rights. However, this is not due to flaws in the ENP. The ENP is an efficient and flexible policy and a hand of help and support but only in a case when such help is needed and appreciated.

The problem with Belarus is a fundamental mismatch and contradiction in values, goals and instruments between the European and the Belarusian sides. Officially Belarus doesn't share the policy goals intended by the ENP. Therefore, stimulus and incentive effects hardly had any influence on necessary economic (market) or political reform implementations. Rather on the contrary, in Belarus the skeptical mood about the place of Belarus in a united Europe slightly increased. Indeed, even in the current economic and informational environment more than 30% of the population sees a future for their country as a member of a united Europe. And this number could considerably increase if people are provided with objective information.

Instead of an Action plan and ENP instruments the EU confronted Belarusians with a reduction in GSP subsidies, an increase in prices for visa, minimal cooperation in humanitarian and cultural spheres and, as a result, a further distance from European life in all spheres. Such isolation is neither in the interest of Europe, nor in that of Belarus. Isolation of Belarus (step by step approach) is nonproductive. The European strategy of power, according to which Belarus should first give in to a number of issues before the EU will make cultural and economic investments, didn't work until now.

On the other hand, for a long time Russia was the main center of influence and importance to Belarus, which promoted several variants of close integration between Russia and Belarus. However, there are basic disagreements on a common currency, supranational bodies of a hypothetic Union state and its powers, etc. between the Russian and Belarusian sides. After the turn from a policy of considerably subsidizing the Belarusian economy towards a more pro-market approach (through increasing prices for energy fuels) made by Russia, Belarus is showing more interest in improving their relationship with the EU. Therefore, the EU should elaborate specific instruments and a set of different policies for involving Belarus in Europe and promoting European values.

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1. THE CURRENT ROLE OF EU POLICY INSTRUMENTS IN AFFECTING BELARUSIAN DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND ECONOMICAL REFORM

The official position of the government in Minsk has always been that Belarus is not just a 'connecting link' between Russia and EU. Belarus is said to be an independent, sovereign, and equal partner to Europe. Minsk has always underlined its independence in the regional, European and world political arena's.¹ Although for a long time Belarus claimed Russia as a strategic partner, authorities always emphasize that close relations and integration with Russia doesn't mean Belarus is not an independent state.² Attempts to show a non-alignment attitude and to have a closer economic relationship with Latin American countries, China and countries in the Middle East are supposed to emphasize the independent, self-sufficient and multi-vectored character of Belarusian foreign policy. In reality, Belarusian foreign policy can be characterized by a tremendous lack of official contacts and visits. The results of the contacts that do take place are, besides some declamations and ceremonial visits, hardly noticeable since each side sticks to its own economic strategy. In addition, long distances make building and maintaining profitable trade links hardly possible. Cultural contacts are rather impossible due to the differences between these nations.

The government of Belarus has always stated that it is a reliable and stable partner with regard to providing European safety and stability, as well as enabling Russian transit to the EU (70% of all Russian export to the EU goes through Belarusian territory).³ Authorities claim a unique geopolitical position, being located between two strong economic centers and markets as Russia and the EU are, acting as a 'transit bridge' between West and East, as a 'buffer', defending the EU from transnational threats (drug traffic, illegal migration, terrorism etc.).⁴ Actually, canceling the flow of Russian oil in January 2007 shows that transit through Belarus is not that safe as most people and politicians used to think.⁵

It is worth to point out, that despite disagreement on the political and economic situation in Belarus, Belarusian authorities never hide that they would like to improve relations with Europe. Officially, the Ministry of foreign affairs promotes the concept of "responsible neighborhood with the EU", strengthening the importance of trade, economic, cultural etc. links and a good relationship with the EU in general⁶. Meanwhile, Belarusian authorities accuse the EU in most statements of having double standards with regard to Belarus.⁷ State mass media cover European events and life, but concen-

¹ <http://www.president.gov.by/press38711.html#doc> (A. Lukashenko's interview to the editor of the newspaper "Zavtra" A. Prohanov, 01.02.07), <http://www.president.gov.by/press13998.html#doc> (the speech of A. Lukashenko "Foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus in the new world" on the meeting with the heads of the Belarusian embassies and Belarusian foreign bodies, 22.07.04).

² <http://www.president.gov.by/press39040.html> (A. Lukashenko's interview to the informational agency Reuter, 07.02.07).

³ <http://www.president.gov.by/press39040.html> (A. Lukashenko's interview to the informational agency Reuter, 07.02.07).

⁴ <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=15> (Belarus is not the country which works under the pressure, an interview of the minister of foreign affairs S. Martynov, 01.07.2005).

⁵ The Russia-Belarus energy dispute began when Russian state-owned gas supplier Gazprom demanded an increase in gas prices paid by Belarus. It escalated on January 8, 2007, when the Russian state-owned pipeline company Transneft stopped pumping oil into the Druzhba pipeline which runs through Belarus because Belarus was siphoning the oil off the pipe without mutual agreement. On January 10, Transneft resumed oil exports through the pipeline after Belarus ended the tariff that sparked the shutdown, despite differing messages from the parties on the state of negotiations (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia-Belarus_energy_dispute, <http://research.by/pdf/BMER2007e01.pdf>). EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso stated that "The cut in oil supplies from Russia is unacceptable. It is unacceptable that supply or transit countries interrupt the flow of energy to the countries that are consuming the energy without prior consultation. This raises a problem, a real problem, of credibility",

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/01/f7a61d68-4fc7-453c-b6e8-38f173f01b98.html>

⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=policy/multicoop&id=6>, About the concept of neighbour cooperation with the EU, <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=policy/common&id=1>, The foreign policy of Belarus – traditions and modernity of pragmatic neighborhood.

⁷ <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=10>, "Our country doesn't react on pressure", interview of the foreign ministry of Belarus S. Martynov to the German newspaper Zuddeutsche Zeitung, 18.03.2006; <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=11>, interview of the foreign minister of Belarus S. Martynov to the informational agency Interfax, 17.03.2006;

trate on negative effects new member states close to Belarus experience as a result of their inclusion.

We can conclude that Belarus intends to keep its distance from both Russia and the EU, negotiating, trading and benefiting from its geopolitical position. The official position on improving relations with the EU is to have a dialogue without any preconditions (such as democratization, release of political prisoners, improving human rights etc. All these problems are seen as “internal matters”. So, according to the official point of view, Belarus is highly interested to cooperate with the EU in all spheres – economic, cultural, investment, and financial. It would like to widen cooperation to the political sphere as well but doesn’t seem to be sensitive to threats and blackmail.⁸

1.1. Sanctions, their results and perception

Meanwhile, the official EU position in terms of expectations and steps needed to be implemented by Belarusian authorities didn’t fundamentally change since 2000. In brief, the EU expects the Belarusian authorities to follow such principles as:

- Return substantial power to Parliament;
- Ensure the representation of opposition parties in electoral commissions;
- Provide opposition parties’ fair access to state media;
- Conform electoral legislation to international standards.

The parliamentary elections of 2000 and 2005, the presidential elections of 2001 and 2006 have shown the Belarusian position to be permanent. In these conditions, in November 2005 the Council confirmed its determination to intensify the EU’s support for democracy and human rights in Belarus. The EU increased its technical assistance and expanded programs for the development of a civil society. Moreover, before and after the last presidential elections the EU policy was slightly tougher, taking into account the latest official statements, visa ban to some officials, suspension of benefits within the Generalized System of Preferences, etc.).

In general, the step-by-step approach adopted by the EC and the OSCE generally didn’t result in any progress. The situation with regard to human rights, independent mass media, freedom of opposition, activity of many different NGO etc. was only getting worse.⁹ The peak of EU pressure occurred in 2004–2006 when President Lukashenko first conducted a referendum, which gave him the authority to change the constitution and be elected for a third term, and then immediately organized presidential elections. However, the statements and resolutions of different international organiza-

<http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=12> interview of the foreign ministry of Belarus S. Martynov to the informational agency Reuters, 13.03.2006;

<http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=56>, “The EU-Belarus: requirements of the time”, S. Martynov, Journal “Belarus in the world”, #2, 2002.

⁸ <http://russian.people.com.cn/31519/4552427.html>, http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2006/12/21/ic_news_112_264269/, <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=10>, <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=15>.

⁹ <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/09/12/belarus>, Human Rights Activists: Situation in Belarus Still Worsening; <http://www.un.org/russian/news/fullstorynews.asp?newsID=5329>, Human rights defenders called to stop violation of human rights in Belarus; <http://belpa.org/doc/?cat=manitoryngi&news=20070115062445>, Violation of human rights chronicle in 2006; <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGEUR490022006>, Belarus: Tightening the screws on dissent; <http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/blr-summary-eng>, Report 2005; <http://web.amnesty.org/appeals/index/blr-011106-wwa-eng>, Worldwide Appeal. BELARUS: Election monitors imprisoned (nov.2006); http://www.belarus-actions.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=83&Itemid=19, Statement by Adrian Severin (UN Special Rapporteur; http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/index.htm, http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2006/06/19393_en.pdf, <http://www.hrw.org/russian/reports/2007/world/belarus.html>, Human Rights watch, 2007, <http://www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/FramePage/country%20Belarus?OpenDocument&Start=1>, News on Belarus; <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta06/ERES1482.htm>, Resolution 1482 (2006), Situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election.

tions and the EU bodies couldn't considerably change the situation as official Minsk and the EU bodies 'operate in different orbits'. Both sides can afford to ignore and neglect each other. Despite all adopted documents some political activists were sent to a jail, some NGO's were closed, political parties and opposition leaders faced with numerous difficulties during electoral campaigns as it is in the nature of the political regime in Belarus and a necessary condition for holding elections with desirable and predictable results. And the EU is very limited in any measures that could considerable change the situation.

Due to the lack of progress in democratization in the country, the EU recently intensified different bans and punishments. After the last presidential elections some government officials faced a visa ban (the visa ban was extended in 2005 from 4 to 6, and in 2006 – to 31 persons). Later on, the Council also froze financial assets of these individuals.¹⁰ However, Belarusian officials and some international experts called such measures inefficient, insufficient or inconsistent.¹¹

First of all, due to the state propaganda and monopoly on major sources of information, ordinary Belarusians hardly learned about these bans. According to IISEPS, only 40% of population knew about the visa ban to 6 Belarusian officials, enforced in 2005 after Parliamentary elections and the referendum.¹² Among those people who knew about sanctions, 68% didn't know why such sanctions were implemented.¹³ 22% of people took such sanctions negatively, 36% – indifferent, 17% – positively. There are no recent surveys but there is a high possibility that people still don't know about widening the list to 31 persons, as official propaganda doesn't highlight it in state media.¹⁴

Secondly, tightening of EU policy gave the authorities the opportunity and legitimation to make "symmetric responses".¹⁵ Belarusian authorities made a list of European and American leaders to whom visiting Belarus is also banned. And, compared with the EU list, the Belarusian one is closed for the public.¹⁶ And the government, from time to time, uses this opportunity. The last example – a ban to come to Belarus for representatives of the German Bundestag and mass media for participating in the annual Belarusian-German conference "Minsk forum" in November 2006.¹⁷

Finally, these measures are considered too mild by some politicians and experts. According to popular opinion, many people were involved in falsification of the presidential election results, in manipulating public consciousness or creating an atmosphere of total fear (taking into account all members of electoral commissions, rectors of universities, heads of state media, etc.). By punishing only the top 20 the effect of such actions is limited and counterproductive. For example, A. Milinkevich, a candidate for the united Belarusian opposition said that "Only, we think that not dozens, but as a minimum, hundreds of people should be on that [travel ban] list. Why? It [should include] judges whose rulings are politically motivated, heads of universities who expel students for their political views, militia officers who beat people, and all those propaganda-mongers who are destroying freedom of thought in society. We do not have TV. We have a propaganda organ".¹⁸

A. Fedorov, Belarusian expert, said that these people (who face the visa ban) anyway didn't go to EU countries, so such sanctions would not cause any changes in the political situation or policy in Belarus.¹⁹ Another Belarusian political activist and a leader of the unregistered movement "Zubr"

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/#eu.

¹¹ <http://www.voanews.com/russian/archive/2004-09/a-2004-09-29-2-1.cfm>,
<http://telegraf.by/belarus/2007/01/26/president/>; <http://www.belreview.cz/articles/3021.html>.

¹² <http://www.iiseps.org/4-05-3.html>.

¹³ <http://www.iiseps.org/3-05-8.html>.

¹⁴ www.iiseps.org/3-05-8.html.

¹⁵ http://www.belembassy.it/index.aspx?lang=ru&cat_id=21&page_id=170&spage_id=192,
<http://www.charter97.org/rus/news/2006/06/08/stop>.

¹⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/news/newsid_5060000/5060106.stm,
<http://www.belgazeta.by/20060612.23/010010671/>.

¹⁷ <http://www.soyuz.by/second.aspx?document=24170&uid=6&page=9&type=Qualifier>.

¹⁸ <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/04/3db7798c-1850-4b28-814a-ba6726b1ca8e.html>.

¹⁹ http://www.ng.ru/cis/2006-04-12/5_minsk.html.

A. Sannikov claimed such a sanction as too mild. According to him, “this is not a measure but semi measure. Europe didn’t dare for adequate reaction on the criminal actions of the regime, which the world could observe. There should be the sanctions and measures of a completely different nature, not limits in traveling but an international court”.²⁰ E. Volk, head of the Russian department of the “Heritage” Foundation pointed out that the level of manipulation of public consciousness is so high, that such measures enable to change the public attitude to support the policy of Lukashenko.²¹ German expert R. Lindner, the Head of German-Belarusian society, also in his interview mentioned visa bans and freezing of assets as an insufficient punishment for Belarusian authorities.²² Besides all these critical comments, the list itself was made with some factual mistakes (the names or positions of persons were incorrect), which failed to gain respect from Belarusian authorities and made it an easy target for propaganda.²³

The European sanctions caused strong disapproval among Russian politicians. Russian Parliament made a statement “On inadmissibility of interfering to internal affairs of Belarus”.²⁴ Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the European Union was trying to isolate Belarus since President Lukashenko was reelected. “We are convinced that if the EU has questions concerning the activities of a country's government, these questions should be addressed in a dialogue, and not through attempts to isolate the country,” Lavrov told a news conference in the Slovak capital Bratislava.²⁵

By the end of 2006, the EU introduced some economic sanctions for the first time. Belarus had been a beneficiary of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for a long time. On December 29, 2003, the European Commission decided to initiate an investigation into violation of the freedom of association in Belarus. In July 2006 it proposed to remove Belarus from the GSP list for failing to respect fundamental rights defined by the International Labor Organization of which Belarus is a member. In December 2006 the EU suspended import-duty reductions for Belarus to protest alleged violations of trade union rights. The suspension of tariff benefits for Belarusian exports of wood, chemicals and textiles is due to take effect in six months (losses around EUR 300 m). The decision may still be revoked if Minsk carries out reforms on trade union rights before the June 2007 deadline, with the European Commission set to report in March on any progress.

The possible loss of EUR 300 m doesn’t seem to be substantial for the EUR 28 bn GDP economy and EUR 11 bn exports. However, it gave the authorities an opportunity to increase anti-European rhetoric and propaganda (loss of this money will hurt lots of ordinary people in terms of their working places, salaries, etc.).²⁶ Most of opposition politicians state that economic sanctions are not the way to solving the ‘Belarusian case’ since ordinary people should not suffer and be punished for the crimes of the regime.²⁷ Indeed, in general, the Belarusian population doesn’t know a lot about these sanctions, as official mass media didn’t devote much attention to them. Among the most important events in Belarus, abolishment of preferences took a fifth place with 13.4%.²⁸ On 21 November 2006 the European Commissioner for External Relations and ENP, Benita Ferrero-Waldner launched a document setting out what the EU could bring to Belarus if Belarus would make consis-

²⁰ http://www.ng.ru/cis/2006-04-12/5_minsk.html.

²¹ <http://www.voanews.com/russian/archive/2004-09/a-2004-09-29-2-1.cfm>.

²² <http://www.belgazeta.by/20061016.41/010190141/>.

²³ Among the 8 members of the Central Voting Commission which are on the list, 2 didn’t have anything to do with the last elections. Accounts of some other incorrect information can be found on,

<http://www.belgazeta.by/20060417.15/340040141/>, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.html?docId=673789>.

²⁴ <http://rian.ru/review/20060516/48206946.html>.

²⁵ http://english.people.com.cn/200604/06/eng20060406_256427.html, Russian FM accuses EU of trying to isolate Belarus.

²⁶ <http://www.prime-tass.ru/news/show.asp?id=645904&ct=news>, http://www.bkdp.org/news_1_95.htm.

²⁷ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/news/newsid_4881000/4881586.stm,

<http://charter97.org/rus/news/2007/02/07/pismo>, <http://news.belta.by/ru/actual/comments?id=135875>.

²⁸ <http://www.ucpb.org/?lang=rus&open=13341>.

tent progress in democratization, respect for human rights and rule of law.²⁹ The document states that if Belarus accomplishes some conditions (the so called 12 conditions concerning democratization, human rights, etc.), the people of Belarus would get such benefits as new trade opportunities to boost the Belarusian economy and create more and better job opportunities, improving healthcare and education and support for the most vulnerable in society, improved transport and energy networks, management of environmental issues, greater cross-border cooperation etc. Although the paper rightly states that “the people of Belarus are the first victims of the isolation imposed by the country’s authorities, and will be the first to reap the benefits on offer to a democratic Belarus”, the problem is that very few Belarusians know about the EIDHR. Statements of the Commissioner as “I hope the people of Belarus will see this paper as a chance to look towards a democratic future, and that the government of Belarus will take this opportunity to begin the reforms its people need, and end their isolation” would stay only in categories of wishful thinking without concrete PR actions and programs of active information among groups in society.

So, the EU political initiatives don’t find their way to the general public easily. Official propaganda and state control on mass media considerably reduce any propagandistic effect of EU sanctions and declarations. Most information available to ordinary people comes from state newspapers and television.

In general, people don’t believe that the EU itself could considerably change the situation in Belarus. For example, to the question “The European Parliament considers a program to increase pressure on Belarusian authorities and supports civil society development. If such a program is adopted, how it will change the situation in Belarus?” 46% of people answered, “it would not lead to any change in situation”, while 31% of people answered that it would have a positive impact and 22% – a negative one.³⁰

1.2. Belarus, ENP and technical assistance

Initially, Minsk authorities welcomed the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) concept.³¹ But later, the disagreement on the particular programs and specific areas for cooperation and further anti-democratic developments and human rights violations made it impossible for both sides to develop and widen the framework of the policy. The ENP is only efficient when both sides – European and local – want to strengthen and facilitate democratic and market reforms, where the criteria match and where there is the institutional environment to enable using different instruments and living up to agreements. One of the necessary mechanism is ratified PCA. In the case of Belarus it is different. Up to now such changes are not on the agenda of the present regime of A. Lukashenko. Rather on the contrary, the authorities consider them as a threat. Any discussions on alternative ways of development, strengthening of alternative sources of information or civil society growth. In the Belarusian institutional conditions the ENP and the EU policy in general can only fail.

For example, cross-border co-operation and communication plays a very important role in modern EU policy towards neighbors (mainly within ENP). One of the most popular and active forms of such activities is creation and development of Euro regions.³² Currently, on the EU borders with participation of Belarus are created four Euro-regions: “Bug” (1995), “Neman” (1997), “Ozerny kraj” (1998), and “Puszcza Białowieska” (2002). Euroregion “Dnepr” unites the Belarusian Gomel region with cross-border regions in Russia and Ukraine (2003). Up to now, compared with Moldova, Ukraine or Russia, Belarusian participation in Euroregions has had a very limited charac-

²⁹ <http://Europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1593&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

³⁰ ³⁰ <http://www.iiseeps.org/4-05-3.html>.

³¹ <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=policy/multicoop&id=6>, About the concept of neighborhood cooperation with the EU, <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=policy/common&id=1>, The foreign policy of Belarus – traditions and modernity of pragmatic neighborhood.

³² http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/areas_of_work/transfrontier_co%2Doperation/Euroregions/default.asp.

ter. Cross-border cooperation is narrowed down to irregular meetings and consultations, rarely joint projects within such spheres as security, migration, and cross-border trade.

Due to political disagreements with the official position of Belarus, EU technical assistance is limited to “humanitarian or regional projects or those which directly support the democratization process”. Among the main programs worth to mention are TACIS National programs and CORE program (Cooperation for rehabilitation). Also, some help is received from CBC (cross-border cooperation), Interstate/regional and the Nuclear safety Programs. In general in Belarus more than 200 projects have been implemented with a budget of around EUR 200 m.

Without underestimating the importance and necessity of EU support to the process of democratization and civil society development, it is worth to mention that such help sometimes is inefficient (another question is the general insufficiency of support). The main drawback of the current EU technical assistance is the institutional aspect, since all programs of technical assistance (TACIS) must be approved by the Belarusian government. As a result, the programs are not devoted to the issues of market reform, competitiveness of the country and other topics. Moreover, they include only experts and participants that are approved by the government.³³ So, all programs of TACIS have a limited character and are devoted mainly to modernization of border security, cross-border cooperation, etc.

Therefore, the EU continued to provide technical assistance to Belarus in 2005-2006, changing the goals and instruments and mainly focusing on programs that support civil society development, exchange of students internationally, cross-border cooperation and so on. Still, this support has also some drawbacks. For example, the requirements of the programs of *Decentralized Co-operation*, which are made by and for Belarusian civil society, have a complex and bureaucratic nature (and many NGO's cannot fulfill them), and the criteria of the relevant projects are questionable. So, in 2006 the guidelines for grant applicants responding to the call for proposals had the following priorities:³⁴

- 1) Development of social dialogue between local government and civil society organizations promoting social and cultural rights (which is rather difficult in the current Belarusian conditions);
- 2) Empowerment of grass-root organizations and vulnerable groups, by promoting partnerships between these groups and other decentralized co-operation actors;
- 3) Encouraging effective operation of the local democratic process (it is not clear what the local democratic process exactly is);
- 4) Actions in support of poverty reduction (while Belarus has the lowest poverty rate in CIS countries);
- 5) Promotion of cultural diversity and the fight against intolerance (while since the beginning of the independence of the country there is no religious, nationalist and ethnic conflicts).

It is difficult for any NGO to come up with a project that fits all or even some of these priorities. As a result, organizations as UNICEF, Red Cross etc. receive a considerable part of these funds. Certainly, activities of these organizations are highly important; but they don't help realize the goals set forward by EU policy makers with regard to a stronger civil society, economic or democratic reforms. According to the rules, Belarusian NGO's need a foreign partner from EU countries that sometimes takes a considerable part of the project budget. In other words, the EU itself, its regulations (technicalities) limit its impact given the specific features of its Belarusian partners.

³³ See A. Lukashenko's Resolution #460 on 22.11.2003 “On international technical assistance given to Belarus” and A. Lukashenko's Decree # 24 on 28.11.2003 “About taking and spending foreign voluntary help”. According to these documents Belarusian NGO's can get grants from international donor organizations only under conditions and for goals determined by the government and president. Any grant needs state registration.

³⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/Europeaid/tender/gestion/index_en.htm.

1.3. New informational products

Recently the EU started several programs providing products with alternative information on events in Belarus. Up to now it is quite difficult to estimate the actual effect (programs launched only in 2006, currently they have very few products devoted to Belarus, mainly on a weekly basis) but the potential effect is substantial. According to IISEPS, potentially half of the population watches one of the alternative TV channels (Table 1) and 10% listens to one of the alternative radio channels (Table 2).³⁵ However, it is difficult to analyze the effect of these programs. For example, to the direct question “Do you watch Euronews in Russian?”, 69% said no; 3.9% – every day, 11.9% – several times a week, several times a month – 7%, several times a year – 4.5%. But potentially people watch these channels. To the question “Soon a new independent TV channel will start working from the territory of Poland under support of the EU (in Russian and Belarusian). Would you like to watch its programs?” at the end of 2006, 64% of people said yes, while 25.1% – no. A potentially interesting source of providing alternative information is the Internet. 48% of Belarusians don’t use Internet; 16.7% doesn’t know what it is. Only 8.4% uses it every day, 6% – once a week. Support of different Internet projects doesn’t require that much resources as support of TV or radio would. Besides, it is more difficult for the authorities to block it. And it could considerably contribute to the public awareness and support alternative views on what is going on in Europe, world and Belarus.

Table 1

Distribution of the answers to the question: “Which TV channels do you watch?” (%)

	%
Belarusian TV (BT, ONT, STV and others)	90.5
Russian TV (ORT, RTR, NTV and others)	87.4
Local TV	47.1
Cable TV	35.9
Sputnik (satellite) TV	20.5
Polish TV	13.2
Russian Euronews	22.1
Special weekly program of RTVI for Belarus	7.0
Watch at least one alternative channel	50.9

Source: IISEPS.

Table 2

Distribution of answers to the question: “New radio stations from the EU have become functional for Belarus recently (on Russian and Belarusian). Do you listen to these programs?” (%)

	04'06	01'07
European radio for Belarus (Warsaw)	3.7	6.5
“Belarusian chronics” of radio Deutsche Welle (Bonn)	2.4	3.5
Belarusian program of radio “Polonia” (Warsaw)	3.1	4.3
Radio “Razcia” (Belostok)	1.9	4.4
Radio “Baltic hvalja” (Vilnius)	1.0	2.8
Listen to programs at least of one radio	7.2	10.4

Source: IISEPS.

The plan of European countries ‘to capture the country in a radio ring’ – to organize and support alternative television- and radio channels – would cause a strong negative reaction among Belarusian authorities. They consider it as a strong interference in the internal affairs of Belarus and a form of ideological war. And they claim to use all possible measures and steps against such countries.³⁶

³⁵ www.iiseps.org.

³⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=14>, interview of O. Esin, the press secretary of the Ministry of foreign affairs.

1.4. Summing up

- 1) Belarus always stressed its multi-vector foreign policy, however only in 2007, after changing the pattern of relationship with Russia, there are more declarations on the necessity of improving relations with Europe;
- 2) The step-by-step approach used by the EU and political sanctions didn't lead to any changes in Belarusian politics;
- 3) Europe has a very limited set of instruments for influence on Belarus as the PCA wasn't ratified and there is a very specific institutional environment on any projects devoted to economic or political reforms. The standard approach and technicalities narrow the efficiency and amount of help which Europe can provide to Belarus;
- 4) The ENP is a sound and efficient way of supporting European values and democratic changes in neighboring EU countries. However, there are some preconditions for the functioning of this policy. One of the main is signed and approved by both sides of the PCA – the intention and desire to develop a transition towards open markets and democracy. All this is not the case in Belarus. Therefore, the ENP and the EU policy have very limited possibilities to succeed in Belarus.
- 5) Without Belarusian agreement to move the country towards democracy, the ENP in its modern design, with all the required formalities and technicalities is doomed. The standard approaches and instruments are inapplicable to Belarus as its institutional conditions are very specific. So, the EU should either insist on signing PCA with a concrete plan of what is needed and possible to change in Belarus, or it should elaborate some new politics and its instruments especially for Belarus. The programs of Decentralized cooperation, other directions and instruments for supporting civil society and alternative sources of information are a good example of a design of this new policy.
- 6) Existing projects on alternative information campaigns are potentially efficient, but they need more time for promotion and more programs devoted to Belarus.

2. THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF EU POLICY INSTRUMENTS IN AFFECTING BELARUSIAN DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND ECONOMICAL REFORM

The ENP is not the only conceivable instrument to influence events in Belarus. The potential EU policy instruments in affecting the domestic political and economic policies in Belarus are:

- Council of Europe membership;
- Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) enforcement;
- Trade and economic relationship;
- Cross-border cooperation;
- ENP and its instruments (Action plan, Technical assistance, etc.);
- Programs on civil society development.

The current role of the EU in Belarus is weak and rather invisible. Political pressure has mainly neutral impacts, allowing both sides to stick to their positions and principles. Up to now economic sanctions have never been implemented (the Belarusian government has time till July to improve the situation with regard to independent trade union rights). On the contrary, despite political disagreements and very limited cooperation, trade turnover between Belarus and the EU is increasing. Again, TACIS and Decentralised cooperation programs, cross-border cooperation that are supposed to help finding common interests and values, are considerably limited due to technical and financial requirements from both sides.

Therefore, currently the EU policy doesn't have proper incentives (lack of both 'carrot and stick' instruments) with regard to Belarus. With such preconditions and in such an institutional environment EU policy instruments are far from effective.

The position and expectation of the Belarusian authorities are:

- 1) Despite current political disagreements, further trade relationship development;
- 2) Partnership programs development (like revival of the process of ratification of PCA and receiving the status of being specially invited to participate in PACE);
- 3) Shift from the policy of limitations and sanctions to constructive, positive and profitable cooperation in the processes connected with European integration. According to the Ministry of foreign affairs, the West and European countries should shift from the policy of artificial isolation of Belarus to a policy of involvement of the country in the processes of European integration. This will give to the EU much more possibilities to stimulate internal democratic reforms. So, involvement, not the isolation is the key for transformations in Belarus and strengthening its European choice. Besides, Belarus is highly interested in active involvement in the concept of ENP and in elaboration of the Action Plan. Belarus is ready for a dialogue and cooperation with the EU on the questions which have common interest for both sides – illegal migration, terrorism, trans-border crimes, drug traffic, energy transit, etc. as well as economic problems.³⁷

Giving more incentives, widening trade relations, facilitating travel; by satisfying some of these expectations and wishes, the EU can improve its position and provide a space for public dialogue on the position of Belarus in Europe. Only cooperation and intercommunication instead of isolation are the instruments of further promotion and development of European values in Belarus.

However, the authorities can't make a sudden strong turn towards Europe as the Belarusian population still largely favors Russia; a lot of values of ordinary Belarusians are still different compared to European. Indeed, Europe should continue this gradual work on supporting and promotion European values.

3. DO THE CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO RELATIONS WITH EU PLAY ANY ROLE AT ALL? HOW THIS ROLE COMPARES TO INFLUENCES OF OTHER CENTERS (RUSSIA, US, OTHER COUNTRIES)?

3.1. The Russian factor

For a long time Russia's dominance limited Belarusian dependence on the EU. The Russian factor could be seen as dominant in Belarusian foreign and internal policy formation. Russia is the main trade partner, providing Belarus with cheap energy resources and markets for industrial goods. The Belarusian economic model is designed to benefit maximally from its close relationship with Russia. This is best illustrated by the cheap imports of energy resources Belarus enjoys. According to some estimations, Belarus benefited by 2-3% of GDP from cheap Russian gas alone when compared with for example Ukraine and 8-10% when compared with Germany. Also, Belarus exported a large number of goods to Russia using the absence of duties (within the framework of the Customs Union). This position gave additional advantages with regard to price competitiveness of Belarusian goods compared with European, Chinese and other countries' goods.

Belarusian territory is covered by Russian mass media, first of all TV. The strengthening Russia's role and its attempts to be dominant in foreign policies of CIS countries, together with the worsening situation with regard to democracy in Russia itself, allowed Belarusian authorities to blame 'the West' in general for having double standards and to protect 'Belarusian specificity' in conducting elections. Only Russia and CIS observers agreed with the results of all Belarusian elections. The

³⁷ <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/index.php?d=publications/smi&id=30>.

position of Russian TV played a considerable role in misinforming the population about protests after presidential elections or ignoring and neglecting such electoral protests at all.

Trying to take full advantage of the creation of a Union state between Russia and Belarus, the latter never recognized the ‘junior’ position it has toward Russia. Disagreements on introducing a common currency, sharing governance of the Union State and President Lukashenko’s ambitions in the Russian political arena led to changing attitudes toward the Union in Russia. For a long time it was unthinkable that the government in Minsk would be able to disagree with its big neighbour or even make decisions that contradict Russian interests. Moscow has had many instruments of influence and even pressure to Belarus. Nevertheless, the attempts to adapt the relationship with Belarus towards a ‘pro-market’ character and the intended price increase for gas and oil led to a significant conflict. Up to now both sides are unable to announce the end of the Union State. But it is obvious that a shift from a subsidising approach to a more pragmatic one would have different short- and long-term political and economic consequences.

The last events have shown that Belarus could be a threat to European-Russian co-operation. Apart from the border issue (it is close to impossible to build a modern and well equipped border between Russia and Belarus, i.e. the importance of Belarus as a barrier for illegal migration, drug traffic etc. will remain high), Russian transit to Europe is becoming insecure. Furthermore, building an alternative transit infrastructure in order to circumvent Belarus is impossible on the short term. The new North-European Gas Pipeline (Nord Stream) cannot substitute the pipelines through Belarus (Jamal-Europe and Beltransgas capacities) as Nord Stream will be built for the gas from the Shtokman field (The Shtokman gas condensate deposit) while gas through Belarus is transported from other gas fields. The “Friendship” oil pipeline transits 80% of Russian oil to Europe. To transit 80 mn tons by St-Petersburg’s ports or by rail is either unprofitable or technically impossible. So, Russia can’t avoid Belarus in its transit to Europe through Belarus. Therefore, Russia is becoming highly interested in ‘Europization’ of Belarus. Structural economic and legal reforms in Belarus may solve a number of conflicts existing today. Such conflicts include the neglect and disrespect of property rights and contract obligations; and blackmailing Russia with energy transit in order to prevent a reduction of subsidies. The absence of market reforms, the central planning character of its economy and its dependence on Russian financial help makes the Belarusian system increasingly vulnerable for economic and social crises (when tax revenues drop and the government will be unable to cover all current social programs, money transfers to households, or to ‘buy’ nomenclature loyalty).

3.2. Neighborhood EU countries

After the EU enlargement Belarus has borders with three EU member states. Belarus has a long history of cultural, historical, economic and social ties with Poland and Lithuania. Many Belarusians are interested to know about the political situation in their neighbour countries. They have the opportunity to witness the economic success Baltic states and Poland enjoy today.³⁸ Poland, Baltic countries are after Russia and Ukraine in a list of most popular countries for traveling (approximately half of people didn’t visit any country for the last five years, Baltic countries visited 9%, Poland – 12%).³⁹ Simplified and cheap visa regime (one entry visa costs EUR 5 and doesn’t require any invitation, etc.) created a situation when there are huge lines in front of Polish or Baltic Embassies (mainly Lithuanian).

On the contrary, joining all CEE countries Shengen regime (zone), will cause many problems and disappointments for ordinary people. Although the costs for Belarusian citizens to leave the country are already considerable (15 USD for annual permit to go abroad and some other internal payments, plus visa costs), the increased formalities and costs of visa to EU countries would restrict the possi-

³⁸ <http://research.by/rus/surveys/a55e7d6acc77cea.html>.

³⁹ www.iiseps.org, <http://research.by/rus/surveys/a55e7d6acc77cea.html>.

bility to travel even more.⁴⁰ This, besides all state propaganda, made Belarusians aware that the EU has some disadvantages for them as well. The authorities could be expected to exploit these negative sentiments in the mass media in order to create a negative attitude towards the EU.

*Polish case*⁴¹

70% of population knows about the conflict between Belarusian and Polish authorities. This is a very high number. Its importance is explained by the close cultural and social relationship between both countries. However, only a bit more than 60% is able to explain what is the main reason for the conflict between Belarusian authorities and Union of Poles of Belarus. 25% of people answer that it is Poland and other Western governments that interfere in Belarusian affairs; 20% mention the Belarusian state and its wish to control this NGO; 9% think that old and new management failed in sharing money. And only 8.7% of people believed in the official version of the conflict – disregard of a law, which was found out by the Ministry of justice. For the question of who is to be blamed in this conflict, 19.7% blamed Belarusian authorities, 16.7 – Polish authorities, 14.7 – management of this NGO, 8.1% – the USA and 3.5% – the EU.

It is worth to mention, that despite the fact that only every fifth blamed Belarusian authorities, more people disapproved of the actions of Belarusian authorities. On the question about attitude to the steps of Belarusian authorities which didn't allow the members of European Parliament to enter the country – citizens of Poland – who wanted to solve the conflict, only 25% of people approved this, while 33% – disapproved (others don't know or don't care).

Other centers of political power

All other political forces as the US or Latin America are rather marginal in Belarus. The bad relationship with the US is used for creating the image of an enemy, double standards and interference of the US in the internal business of some other countries. Anti-American moods are high in Belarus. For example, in case of worsening relationship with Poland and problems with Union of Poles in Belarus, 8.1% of people blamed America, however the USA never had anything to do with it (see above).

The declared good relationship with Latin America countries and participation in the non-aligned movement are supposed to underline the multi-vector policy of Minsk, however they are nothing besides declamations. Belarusians' attitude to such alliances is rather skeptical or even negative. For example, in 2006 for the question "Did you want that Belarus created a Union with such states as Venezuela, Iran and China?" 28.4% said yes, while 53% – no.⁴²

So, it was only Russia that politically 'defended' Belarus from OSCE, CE, EC and other European organizations' criticism and, on the other hand, financially supported Belarus. Different estimations show that annual subsidization of Belarus by Russia amounted 10-15% of GDP (or higher). Re-

⁴⁰ The costs of Shengen visa for Belarusians increased since 2007 from EUR 35 to 60 while for Russians and Ukrainians it remained the same. Up to now Belarus has simplified visa regime with Baltic countries and Poland (in sense of speed, cost and formalities), as they are neighborhood countries (however, before May 2004 Belarusians didn't need any visa to Poland, they could buy vouchers). In 2008 these countries would join the Shengen zone, which implies strong restrictions, bureaucracy and higher prices for getting a visa. As a result, the possibilities of Belarusians to visit these countries would be considerable decreased. So, EU enlargement led to higher rates for visa and hence more difficulty for Belarusians to travel. <http://www.iri.org/eurasia/belarus/pdfs/2007-02-08-Belarus.pdf> increase in visa, p.4 <http://www.isp.org.pl/files/10000248710167351001127467269.pdf> – Shengen policy as a challenge for Polish policy towards neighbors, http://naviny.by/rubrics/tourism/2006/12/20/ic_news_126_264209/, <http://www.pda.tvr.by/eng/news.asp?id=21086&date=20.12.2006%2015:18:00>, Belarus would respond adequately for Ukraine and Russia it remained the same http://www.ng.ru/cis/2006-12-28///8_minsk.html, <http://www.data.minsk.by/belarusnews/042006/243.html>, <http://www.schengenspace.com/>, Lithuania asks EU to review visa policy on Belarus, Kaliningrad <http://www.data.minsk.by/belarusnews/102006/224.html>.

⁴¹ <http://www.iiseps.org/9-05-2.html>.

⁴² www.iiseps.org.

cently, President Putin estimated Russian support of the Belarusian economy by 45% of GDP taking into account only cheaper energy fuels delivery.⁴³

In the future, the relationship with Russia could continue to worsen and some experts expect even a new wave of Russian-Belarusian trade war. A. Lukashenko in one of his numerous interviews said that he would never agree on Russian conditions on creating a Union State.⁴⁴ Belarusian conditions are not interesting for Russia.

The majority of the elite and the population at large consider independence of the country as the main value and don't want integration of Belarus to Russia.⁴⁵ Therefore, theoretically, the importance and potential of Russian influence could decrease, while the potential of the European-Belarusian relationship could increase (at least recently the authorities claim so). In his interview to German newspaper Die Welt, A. Lukashenko gave a hint that European capital could participate in privatization of Belarusian energy sector enterprises.⁴⁶

3.3. Summing up

By claiming the desire to intensify the dialogue between Belarus and the EU, official Minsk tries to solve or ease many problems:

- Attraction of investments and attempts to start projects in order to solve economic problems;
- An attempt to try to abolish the exclusion from GPS;
- An attempt of scaring and blackmailing Russia
- Making a counterbalance to the worsening relations with Russia and showing to the population that authorities are against isolation of the country and that they are in favor of a closer relationship with Russia;
- In an ideal variant, the authorities dream about its own legitimization and end of all political sanctions without considerable rebates from the Belarusian side.

Yes, A. Lukashenko seems to want to normalize the relationship with the EU. Indeed, it is a question if he is ready to pay a price for this – in terms of political and economic reforms. The EU, with its 12 conditions shows the directions on which Belarus should go towards Europe. Will it be accepted by official Minsk or it will be an imitation of a movement towards democratic changes (setting some political prisoners free, introduction of the post of an ombudsman on human rights, implementation of a moratorium on capital penalty, etc.) will be clear after some period of time.

Besides, without any doubts, Lukashenko will look for some other political support and sources for supporting the unreformed Belarusian economy (as Arabic countries, Venezuela, some CIS countries as Ukraine, etc.) but such sources are rather limited in a political and economic sense.

On the other hand, it is rather difficult to imagine an effective single economic space between Russia and EU without Belarus involved. Moreover, the positions of Russia and the EU could coincide in case of deeper involvement of Belarus to European legislation standards, rules and procedures. Currently, Russia can't avoid Belarus as a transitor of its fuels to Europe; just as well it can't secure its transit through Belarus. So, involving Belarus in discussion and joining European rules of game (as Energy Charter, transit contracts etc.) is in both interests.

So, the positions of the all involved sides towards 'Belarusian issue' should be reconsidered. The new system of motivation, responsibilities, perspectives and punishment need to be elaborated.

⁴³ <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/rferl/2007/07-01-17.rferl.html#01>, <http://www.zhezhe.us/2007/01/15/russia-belarus-update-150107/>, <http://www.afn.by/news/docview.asp?id=834>, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press38516.html>.

⁴⁴ <http://www.president.gov.by/press39040.html>, <http://www.president.gov.by/press13522.html#doc>, <http://www.regnum.ru/english/775817.html>.

⁴⁵ www.iiseps.org.

⁴⁶ <http://www.president.gov.by/press38516.html>.

4. WHO CARES ABOUT THE EU RELATIONS: POLITICIANS, POPULATIONS AT LARGE, NOBODY?

In spite of widespread and active propaganda, including, for example, support for the Belarus-Russia integration, about 30% of Belarusian citizens favor European integration and choose Europe as the orientation of Belarus' further development. More than 40% positively treat the European Union. 54% of people claim that they would like to know more about what is happening in EU and its countries, as well as about activities of EU organizations.⁴⁷

In Table 3 one can see that the amount of people, who theoretically (tomorrow) are ready to vote for Belarusian integration to the EU, considerably reduced: from 53% in 2002 to 36% in the beginning of 2007 (however in 2006 there is a slightly increase). Among possible explanations of this decrease are: the failed referendum on the European constitution, anti-European propaganda in mass media: the conflict between Belarusian authorities and the Union of Poles in Belarus, the problems of new EU members in 'old Europe' (so called problem of the 'Polish plumber'), problems in the EU itself, other reasons. Still, it is worth to emphasize that there are many people who are hesitating or wouldn't want to take part in such a referendum (25%). It seems that if more arguments and information were provided, the amount of such people would considerably increase.

Table 3

Do you think that Belarus shall be a member of the EU? (%)

	03'05	05'05	09'05	12'05	04'06	06'06	08'06
Yes	52.8	47.4	38.0	36.7	32.4	31.5	36.5
No	44.4	35.4	44.0	38.3	33.8	49.2	41.3

Source: IISEPS.

Meanwhile, the amount of people who think that Belarus and Russia should create one state considerably decreased (Table 4).

Table 4

Distribution of answers to the question: "If today a referendum on creating a single state with Russia would be held, how would you vote?"(%)

	12'02	03'03	06'04	06'06	08'06	11'06	01'07
For integration	53.8	57.5	42.9	44.9	45.4	46.4	35.1
Against integration	26.3	23.8	25.0	28.9	34.2	33.5	39.3

Source: IISEPS.

Indeed, the number of people willing or not willing to vote for EU, depends on the formulation of a question: a significant amount of people is ready to vote for both variants of integration – with both Russia and the EU (although integration with both at the same time seems currently unlikely). A lot of Belarusians choose the option 'against any integration' (Table 5).⁴⁸ On the question "From Belarusian-Russian conflict many people make different conclusions. With which of them do you agree?", 28%, the biggest group, said that Belarus shall integrate with neither Russia, nor the EU and be really independent; 25% – it is better to integrate with Russia then to become closer with Europe; 22% – Belarus should get closer with the EU in order to be protected from the pressure of Russia; and only 15% – Belarus should create one state with Russia and therefore all energy problems will be solved.⁴⁹ This allows to some sociologists to conclude that isolationistic moods in Belarus could only increase in the future.

Nevertheless, currently, if people have to choose between close integration (union) with either Russia or EU (rigid choice), more than 50% chooses Russia, while 30% chooses the EU. More Belaru-

⁴⁷ www.iiseps.org.

⁴⁸ <http://www.iiseps.org/press6.html>.

⁴⁹ www.nmnby.org/pub/0702/13d.html.

sians choose integration with Russia as the closest country in terms of political, economic, trade, cultural relations (Table 6), however, the recent problems and informational war between Russia and Belarus on energy resources delivery and transit through Belarus, resulted in a slight decrease of a number of supporters of integration with Russia .

Table 5

Distribution of answers to the question “If today is a referendum on future development of Belarus, how would you vote?” (%)

	09'03	01'07
Integration with Russia	37.9	27.3
Integration with the EU	23.4	21.0
Neither this, nor this	23.2	16.4
For both variants	6.5	25.2

Source: IISEPS.

Table 6

Distribution of answers to the question “If you have to choose between integration with Russia or joining the EU, what you would choose?” (%)

	09'03	03'04	06'04	11'04	03'05	09'05	12'05	02'06	04'06	6'06	01'07
Integration with Russia	47.6	41.0	47.7	49.3	51.9	59.2	51.6	56.3	53.9	56.5	48.5
Integration with the EU	36.1	36.5	37.6	33.7	31.6	28.6	24.8	27.5	32.6	29.3	33.6

Source: IISEPS.

On the question, “Do you believe that one day Belarus would become a member of the EU”, 32% of people believe that Belarus would never become a member of the EU, 30% believe after more than ten years, 13% – within 10 years. 25% of respondents don't know.

Among the reasons, explaining why respondents want Belarus' accession to the EU, people mainly mention economic reasons: increase in living standard (14%), simplifying visa regime and possibility to travel to the EU countries (7%), economic development and widen trade (7%), possibility to work on the EU (2.2%), higher salaries (2%), possibility to get European education (1.1%), FDI attraction (1.6%). Democratic development and human rights mentioned 2.6%, natural right of Belarus to be a part of Europe – 2.5%; strengthening safety of Belarus – 0.4%. Among reasons explaining why Belarus should not be integrated with the EU are also economic reasons: Europe doesn't need us as our economy is lagging (underdeveloped) – 4%; fears of unemployment growth (3%), price increase (2.6%), getting poorer (2.9%), the end of Belarusian agriculture (0.8%), the end of Belarusian industry (1.2%), we will become cheap labour force for Europe (1.4%).⁵⁰

60% of Belarusians are unaware of the ENP. 83% of people have never been in any EU country and 59% didn't have any contacts with foreigners during the last 3 years. Still, 60% of Belarusians would like to know more about developments in EU countries, as well as about activities of EU organizations and European bodies (EC, European Parliament, Parliament Assembly of Council of Europe).⁵¹

The attitude of the elite representatives toward the EU differs from the attitude of other people in Belarus. Most of respondents support the idea of Belarusian accession to EU.⁵² 81% of representatives working in the non-state sector think that Belarus should be a member of the EU as opposed to

⁵⁰ www.iiseps.org, Dec. 2005.

⁵¹ www.iiseps.org.

⁵² All data are taken from the article of the head of IISEPS O. Manaev “Belarus: Undecided country in the center of Europe”, <http://review.w-Europe.org/7/2.html>. Note: here and further the results of an opinion poll, conducted in November 2005, are presented. More than 60 officials, mass-media leaders, scientists, experts and businessmen participated. The share of state and non-state sector is 50 to 50 (as a place of work). The survey is not representative, but still interesting, reflecting some trends and opinions.

77% in the state sector. 77% of respondents have heard about ENP. In contrast to the 50% of ordinary Belarusians who consider the ‘West’ as enemies, 97% of respondents that represented the countries’ elite don’t agree with such a point of view. Similarly with other groups, 85% of elite respondents would like to know more about the EU and European organizations (80% – state sector, 90% – non-state).

The majority of respondents would vote in favor of Belarus’ EU accession. The share of such people is higher among representatives of the non-state sector (Table 7).

Table 7

Distribution of answers to the question: “If you have to choose between a union with Russia or EU accession, what would be your choice?” (%)

	All respondents	Elites		Population	
		State sector	Non-state sector	December 2005	June 2006
EU accession	79	60	97	24.8	29.6
Union with Russia	18	33	3	51.6	52.3
I don’t know	3	7	—	23.6	18.1

Source: IISEPS.

Only 57% of state sector representatives mentioned they have been to EU countries during the last 5 years, while 100% visited EU countries among non-state sector representatives. Among the most often visited countries are Germany, Poland, and the Baltic countries. Most of elite representatives have friends, partners and colleagues abroad with whom they often communicate.

Sociologists stress that pro-European moods are highly connected with the desire of democratic changes for Belarus (electorate of alternative to Lukashenko candidates) while pro-Russian moods and sympathies are more correlated with support for A. Lukashenko.⁵³ However, although the number of supporters of close integration with Russia goes down, it is too early to expect it would transform into a mood of pro-European integration.

Mass-media, EU and Belarusian population

According to IISEPS, 45% of respondents believe that state mass media objectively and truthfully portray foreign state activities and life in Western countries.⁵⁴ According to the IPM Research Center data, more than 70% of Belarusians trust the information state mass media supply. 63% of Belarusians read state newspapers and magazines, while only 26% trust to their information, 31% of people use independent press while 8.7% trust them; Belarusian TV watch 82%, while 47% trust it; Russian TV watch 77%, trust – 31%.⁵⁵

With these preliminary remarks, let’s see how European topics are represented in Belarusian media and what part they play on shaping the Belarusian agenda.

The special research allowed making the following observations:⁵⁶

- 1) European topics are not high on the agenda of state mass media. Most of their information is devoted to the Russian-Belarusian relationship. In contrast, independent (non-state) newspapers write about the EU and its institutes approximately 10 times more than state media on the same topic.

⁵³ www.iiseps.org

⁵⁴ www.iiseps.org

⁵⁵ <http://research.by/rus/surveys/a55e7d6accc77cea.html>

⁵⁶ All results are taken from the report by P. Bykovsky “Presentation of European topics in Belarusian mass-media, <http://review.w-Europe.org/7/3.html>. The author studied all texts published on the Internet pages of the main Belarusian newspapers (state and independent) and information agencies during December 2004- December 2005 with the object to get know how different European topics are presented in Belarusian mass media.

- 2) In the printed mass media much more attention is devoted to bilateral relations between Belarus and individual EU countries (Germany, Poland, Sweden etc.) than to the EU and its institutes as a whole. EU key persons like heads of different institutes are presented only in the independent mass media.
- 3) Sources of information on the Internet with regard to representation of EU topics are a bit better (the ratio between used different ‘European’ words is 5 times better with independent mass media). Still, there are ‘figures and institutions of silence’. Among them Council of Europe, Strasbourg, Javier Solana etc.

Table 8 provides some insight in how EU topics were presented in the main state and independent newspapers in 2005 and confirms the above observations.

Table 8

**Frequency of some key words usage marking the presence of European topics
in Belarusian press**

Key words	State newspapers			Independent newspapers		
	SB	R	NG	BG	BDG	BM
EU	81	708	33	341	286	705
European Union	8	234	11	341	286	705
Council of Europe	12	371	8	41	186	95
Brussels	17	4	2	18	70	62
Strasbourg	3	9	--	6	92	28
European Commission	1	41	1	1	44	61
European parliament	1	5	--	8	52	84
European commissioners	--	--	1	10	8	3
Barroso	6	1	--	--	14	25
Javier Solana	2	1	1	4	36	17
ECB	--	--	--	5	4	3
Germany	48	163	39	182	146	211
Poland	35	440	33	160	111	223
Europeans	14	51	13	88	96	53

Note. SB – Sovetskaya Belarussia, R – Republica, NG – Narodnaya gazeta; BG – Belgazeta, BDG – Belaruskaya delovaya gazeta, Belarusy i Rynok.

Source: <http://review.w-Europe.org/7/3.html>.

Summing up

- 1) More than 30% of population is ready ‘tomorrow’ or in the nearest future to be a member of the EU and support a Belarusian choice for Europe. More than half of population think that Belarus should improve relationship with Europe;
- 2) The change in political situation in the beginning of 2007 shows that more and more people are not certain in their geo-political preferences as the share of people who chooses the option “I don’t know” is increasing. At the same time, the number of people who is willing to enter close integration with Russia is decreasing. However, it is too early to conclude that it is a beginning of a new trend.
- 3) Romantic views on the EU and place for Belarus there decreased. It was caused by both objective reasons (difficulties on adjusting new EU members, problems of labor migration, discussion on Turkey or Ukraine integration to the EU, etc.), as well as subjective (propaganda in mass-media);
- 4) Among main reasons explaining the wish for close integration with Europe (or the lack of such wish) are economic values and approach (to improve current economic state, to travel more, etc.), but not the democratic values (not European values as market, democracy, human rights, such values are not popular among majority of Belarusians);

- 5) Most of representatives of the elite support a European choice for Belarus and they are aware of the EU proposals and opportunities which the ENP could potentially offer. Indeed, although pro-European, the elite is skeptical about the efficiency of recent steps the EU took to bring about democratic changes in the country. 70% of the total number of respondents (77% of state sector representatives and 63% of non-state sector representatives) answered the following question negatively: “The European Commission elaborated a package of offers, which envisage economic support in exchange for the implementation of democratic reforms in Belarus. Do you think this offer would benefit the dialogue between Belarusian authorities and the EU?” Even though the question implies only the emergence of a favourable climate for the possibility of a future dialogue, still, most members of the elite flatly refuse to believe the package of offers would help.
- 6) Meanwhile, even having strong pro-European sympathies there is a very low level of knowledge and awareness of Belarusians about developments in Europe. Not even ordinary people, but even representatives of the elite confirm they know very little about political, economic, social and cultural events, problems and achievements of the EU in general and in particular countries.

5. IS IT POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY POLICY FIELDS WHERE EU CAN ACT AS A MAGNET/EXTERNAL FORCE MOTIVATING SOME POLICIES IN BELARUS? DO WE SEE SUCH INFLUENCES NOW?

As it was mentioned before the EU has limited political and economic power to influence the situation in Belarus and its politics. Strengthening of political sanctions has no material impact and lead only to a deteriorating relationship and provide less opportunity to influence Belarusian public opinion. Economic sanctions could be only partial and rather limited (as with GSP, which is around EUR 300 m).

Official technical assistance is limited due to political disagreements, as well as due to different views on what is needed for Belarus, and institutional factors (Belarusian authorities need approve all projects). As a result, the TACIS programs are narrowed down to some cross-border cooperation and investments in border infrastructure. The policy and instruments for civil society development is improving (however, still the criteria for eligible projects are hard to meet and the complexity of applications could be reduced), but due to the specific political environment civil society itself is small, unidentified and non-influential among the population at large. In any case, either immediate and comprehensive changes, or gradual and slight ones, both in economic and political spheres need considerable changes in instruments and resources of the ENP and the EU policy toward Belarus in general.

One of the policies which would not require resources from the EU and which could lead to changes in Belarus is *migration policy*. Migration is already a policy field Belarus and the EU seem to agree on. Both administrations cooperated in projects to strengthen borders against illegal migration. However, if the EU makes a first step in simplifying visa restrictions and its prices, in opening their borders for tourism, there is a permanent pressure on the Belarusian authorities and necessity somehow to respond, as people will see the differences between the EU and Belarus in terms of economic and cultural development, freedom of speech, human rights, etc. Such European values must be constantly and gradually be sown and nurtured in the Belarusian mentality.

Another field of activity is in the sphere of *involving Belarusian elites* (state officials, state companies directors, private business owners, entrepreneurs, independent experts) in a dialogue about the future development of the country and the possibility to compare the place of Belarus and its achievements with world and neighborhood countries trends. State officials don't travel too much to EU countries. Partly this is because of restrictions made by the regime (every official needs special permission on traveling abroad in working time), but partly it is because most of conferences, seminars, exchanges occur only with participation of NGO representatives. Involving all intellectual educated people in a dialogue, in Europe, showing them the advantages of a free society, of market

reforms implemented, preparing and educating different specialists could have a considerable gradual effect, especially in long run.

Information and communication is another relevant field. We have seen that 30–50% of people is interested in what is going on in Europe, consider Belarus as a European country and sooner or later see Belarus in EU. However, state propaganda and lack of independent mass media (in Belarus there are very few independent newspapers, and only 20% of people use Internet), and a state TV monopoly makes it very hard to get information about the EU and its goals. This makes it easier to manipulate the public consciousness and create different myths, fears and stereotypes. To avoid this, the EU needs to increase its presence in the country, first of all by providing appropriate Internet resources, TV and radio stations, independent newspapers, publishing more brochures, books, magazines etc. which will be interesting for ordinary people and provide them with more relevant and objective information.

6. WHAT WOULD NEED TO HAPPEN (WHAT INCENTIVES WOULD BE NEEDED) TO ESTABLISH SUCH INFLUENCES?

Generally, in order to create proper incentives, the EU should work out its own proper ideological, cultural, economic and political niche with Belarus. For this the EU should favor the following points:

- Maximally facilitate trans-European communication projects (starting from infrastructure – trans-European railways, motor-roads – to scientific research and exchange, cooperation and involvements in the projects in culture, environment, tourism, etc.);
- Develop economic links between enterprises, first of all private; support SME and entrepreneurship development;
- Support and maintain public dialogue among specialists on topical issues – economic, juridical, political reforms, possible choices, challenges, problems, advantages and disadvantages in the country's development and different paradigms of development;
- Promote European values by creating special projects in mass media (on the central and local levels) with more information about the EU, its organizing structure and institutes, life and ordinary events in the EU countries (first of all, new members).

If one agrees with the idea that reforms and changes in Belarus would have a slow and gradual character, then the only way is to create or promote creation of new elites in the country, which stand for market reforms and have a pro-European orientation. Besides, by means of considerable political changes in Belarus, there should exist consensus among main political groups and actors on the principal directions of political, judicial, economic reforms and further development of the country. For this all kind of instruments could be used. Among the main instruments are intensifying joint studies and participation in different seminars, trainings and conferences for both – official and non state participants – among scientists, analysts, experts etc. in Belarus, as well abroad. A very promising topic is the discussion and dialogue in society about economic development in the country, its competitiveness, private sector development and advantages it could bring to different groups. Numerous training programs and wide dialogue in society on ways of legal, economic, political system transformation, creating a group of well educated specialists (from both state and non-state sectors) will facilitate and ease future reforms.

Public awareness campaigns also look very promising. Sponsoring different TV and radio projects, internet resources, supporting publication of different books, brochures, newspapers, outlets, etc., devoted mentioned above topics, the EU policy, ordinary life, problems and achievements, values and principles in and of the EU are of high importance and relevance.

Ideally, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) should develop a new strategic concept to turn borders from lines of division into areas of cooperation. For this *the following kinds of incentives need to be created and maintained:*

- 1) Economic – more trade with Belarus, common projects on energy saving (efficiency), support of private sector development, especially the development of SME;
- 2) Institutional – dialogue and new pro-European elite creation (including young specialists). For creation of a group of educated and pro-European specialists the EU should support different projects on studying relevant EU criteria and legislation, discussions on possible ways and directions of unification of Belarusian legislation with *Acquis Communautaire*, assessing changes in Belarus needed to unify or converge Belarusian practices with European ones, training programs for state and independent experts in economics and legislation, etc. In case of beginning reforms, among different specialists there should be a clear understanding of what must be changed, what are the possible alternatives of development and reforms, consensus on the most important questions concerning constitutional reform, agenda for economic reforms, etc.;
- 3) Geo-political (dialogue with Belarus on Russian gas / oil transit through its territory and its security, involvement of Belarus in signing international obligations on transit safety, etc.);
- 4) Deepening and widening social and cultural relationships, different education programs and exchanges;
- 5) Cross-border cooperation (involving underdeveloped Belarusian towns and cities in such projects, creating incentives and proposals in order to feed Belarusian interest in such projects);
- 6) Legal – limit travel restrictions of Belarusian citizens to the countries of the EU (to make cheap or free visas in order Belarusians can travel to the EU).