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# Belarusan—European relations: a history of unseized opportunities

Minsk  
Lohvinau Publishing House  
2012

UDK 327 (476+672EC) “1991/2012”

The “Belarus for Beginners” series was founded in 2008.

Translated from Russian by Andreï Bursau

The book presents an analysis of the relations of Belarus and the European Union since 1991 up to the present day. The authors scrutinize the problems of Belarus’ geopolitical choice, the changes of the foreign policy doctrines of independent Belarus, the historical development of European—Belarusan political interactions, their actual condition, and build the foundations and frameworks to program the European vector in Belarus’ politics. The basis of a new construct of the foreign policy is the proactive approach that makes it possible to raise the questions about Belarus as about a European problem, to revise the policy of the European Union with a view to Belarus’ development, to seek for the ways of influencing the EU eastern policy and to change it in the necessary direction, and to use the current European initiatives and programs in the national interests. The book is designed both for specialists in the field of the Belarusan foreign policy and international relations and for a wide audience interested in the questions of the Europeanization of Belarus.

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ISBN 978-985-562-021-2

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# Introduction

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Belarus has been forced to build independently its relations with the external world as an independent state. One way or another, Belarus had to define its relations with the nearest neighbors and to solve the questions of joining international political, military, and economic blocs. Due to the objective signs of the presence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic missions, and the highest official's trumpet-tongued threats to the external world, Belarus' foreign policy does exist, but it does not mean yet that such a policy is reasonable and built strategically. The whole history of the country's foreign policy relations looks like a reaction to situational challenges and casual decisions. Belarus is floating with no helm and sails in the dangerous world of international politics and right now it is not where it should be, but in the place where it has been brought to by natural processes. Of course, it is possible to explain such a state of affairs by various factors: the ambiguousness of the geopolitical guidelines of the Belarusian population that is torn apart almost half-and-half by the choice between Russia and Europe, the difficult political history of the newest period, or even the personal features of the first and meanwhile the only president of the country. Thus, it is possible to retrospectively rationalize and attribute some logic to these or those state decisions, but it does not help to avoid the repetition of committed errors. This book is aimed at not explaining why everything occurred the way it did, but at laying the foundation and frameworks for the future programming of Belarus' foreign policy.

Without professing to have across-the-board comprehension, we shall review the relations of independent Belarus with the European Union as an example of a possible forming-up of a reasonable foreign policy doctrine.

The European Union has a huge value for Belarus — both in the foreign policy aspect and for the internal life of the country. This thesis is obvious and does not need any special validation. However, the way we ourselves consider the European Union is important. In order to intelligently manage the foreign policy of Belarus, the EU should be considered as one of the factors of this policy. We can even make a statement which is paradoxical for traditional approaches — the condition of the existence of the European Union for the foreign policy of our country is the presence of ontological, activity-driven, and axiological perceptions of the EU in Belarus. Certainly, United Europe exists objectively, which is confirmed by the physical presence of the border with it, but for the Belarusians its existence is set by their thinking about this Europe. The European Union is being understood in Belarus in a different way, not like in Russia, Poland, or NATO, and it means that the EU requires another attitude to it, other approaches. The policy of Belarus concerning the European Union, thus, is defined not so much by its objective characteristics, but rather by the answers to the questions of what Belarus is, what its national interests are, and how the EU can correspond to them.

Among Belarusian analysts and experts, the exactly opposite attitude is dominating: Belarus is not considered at all from the subject point of view. The whole history of Belarusian—European interactions is explained by the guidelines of the European Union, the position of Russia, and other factors and subjects that are external in relation to our country, but not by the actions of Belarus itself or its internal agents because the latter are not considered in the active voice. Sometimes, by way of exception, in such a picture of the world, there can appear the Belarusian authoritarian regime, but also in terms of opposition to “Europeanization and democratization” or resistance to “external pressure” (depending on the point of view of an analyst). In this respect, there may be statements that the European Union is not interested

in Belarus, but in it there cannot appear statements, for example, that Belarus problematizes all actual foreign policy doctrines of the EU. As for us, we offer another approach in which the active beginning is transferred to Belarus. Then, it becomes possible to ask questions of Belarus as a European problem, to revise the policy of the European Union so as to develop Belarus, to search for the ways of influencing the EU eastern policy and changing it in a due direction, to use the EU actual initiatives and programs for the benefit of Belarus' national interests, etc. Thanks to the change of the way of consideration, we do not change the objective state of affairs, but we start to evaluate differently the situation — such evaluations lead to absolutely other decisions and actions. In the activity-driven, active voice, the inefficiency of the actual policy of the European Union concerning Belarus becomes not a reason for frustration and letdown, but on the contrary — an occasion to think of political steps of how to change it.

Such a proactive orientation is characteristic of the Cultural Policy program<sup>1</sup>. It defines another way of construction and a different character of the analytical picture of the mutual relations of the European Union and Belarus within the bounds of this program. In its turn, this picture becomes a basis for actions of cultural—political subjects. The successfulness and productivity of their activity indirectly confirms the appropriateness of the analytical picture, and, on the contrary, the failures and inefficiency of their activity can testify the inadequacy of these subjects' understanding of the situation. Since 2007, the International Consortium EuroBelarus<sup>2</sup>, which accepted as a basis the Cultural Policy program and its ideological expression in the form of the triad “desovietization — Belarusianization — Europeanization”, has been actively involved in the processes of interaction between Belarus and the EU. The dynamics of the development of the Consortium, as well as a number of its successes in the projecting and definition of the policy of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, the

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<sup>1</sup> More details about the Cultural Policy program are here: <http://methodology.by>.

<sup>2</sup> See the web-site of the International Consortium EuroBelarus:  
<http://eurobelarus.info>.

creation of the National Platform of civil society in Belarus, as well as the effective dissemination of this innovation in the other countries of the Eastern Partnership, proves that the cultural—political approach, at least, is worthy of attention. We cannot assert that the point of view that we suggest is the universal truth; however, it can be considered as one of bases of the programming of the foreign policy of Belarus.

In this book, we present a series of analytical materials written on the basis of the principles, methodological bases, values, and ideology of the Cultural Policy. These texts of different years bring together various aspects of the difficult architecture of interactions of independent Belarus and the European Union and we hope they provide its quite complete picture. Analytical documents always to some extent reflect the situation and time during which they were written; therefore, we have edited and updated them, having eliminated a part of irrelevant reflections, and included new data, corresponding references, and explanatory notes. As a result, it is rather a new text which analytically outlines the space of Belarusian—European relations that can help to deeper understand the foreign policy of Belarus; its ideas can be criticized or elaborated upon; it can also serve as a basis of developing more effective programs of actions.

Uladzimir Matskevich, Tatiana Vadalazhskaya, and Aksana Shelest are the real co-authors of this book. The authors specified in the title have supplemented these experts' reflections with their own texts and thoughts, as well as insignificantly corrected the initial texts, thus, being compilers and editors.

# Chapter I.

## Belarus' geopolitical choice: do we have any “third way”?

Belarus is practically always placed in a vague geopolitical space: on the border between the East (Russia) and the West (Europe). It initially sets the problematics of Belarus' historical way as a choice between these two cultural and civilizational spaces. Still, there are no objective circumstances of a historical, geographical, cultural, or any other plan that could unequivocally prove either its “Europeanness” or its “Eurasianness” (“Russianness”, “Slavness”)<sup>3</sup>. Half of facts testify to one thing and the other half — to another one, and they do not help Belarus' unequivocal self-determination at all. It means it is necessary to make a choice with the help of some other foundations. Or is it possible in general not to make it?

Feeling some complexity of this dichotomy, Belarusian intellectuals, politicians, and the whole nation that followed them, tried to evade the univocal solution of this question. Belarus was offered to mark differently the space of self-determination and to settle down on the border zone of the North and the South (Sergei Sanko), in Middle Europe (Igor Bobkov), or in the “center”, sticking to the neutrality

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<sup>3</sup> See U. Matskevich. *Belarus: Athwart Obviousness.* — Minsk, 1994.

concept (Stanislaŭ Šuškievič and a part of democrats of the early 1990s) or the uniqueness of the “Belarusan model” (contemporary official ideology). It made it possible to postpone the necessity of determining Belarus’ own way for some time. The problem here is only that Europe does exist as a cultural, economic, and political space on the border with our country and requires some attitude to it. All the proposed ideas were unsatisfactory because they allowed one to refuse certain decisions and actions, but did not allow one to project and make them. As a result, the history of relations of independent Belarus and the European Union looks like a series of missed situations where, in the absence of a well-defined reaction of the Belarusan party, the choice was made for it. It is possible, of course, to keep living like that, but these missed situations have their price which has to be paid by all the Belarusans.

Sooner or later, all the nations that are called European today had to solve the problem of their relations with Europe. In the 19th century, this question was topical for Germany and a century later — for the Central European nations (Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians). The belated formation of the Belarusans’ national consciousness and then the long existence as a part of the USSR led to the fact that Belarus faced this question only in the late 1980s — early 1990s. Here, the answers which were found by other nations do not help the Belarusans at all because each of these other nations has its own answer which contents and form are unique. To be a European in the 19th century is not the same as to be a European in the end of the 20th century and especially — in the early 21st century. Sooner or later, the Belarusans will have to present their own version of the solution of this problem. It is even possible to say that a nation becomes European in the course of the substantial filling of the answer to the question whether it is a European nation.

Still, we are not absolutely free in the variants of choice and the concrete contents of this choice — like all the countries that faced similar situations of transformation were not free in this choice. There is an example of Portugal which after the bloodless “Revolution of



carnations” in 1974 was compelled to define its further historical way. There were three variants: to move towards Europe and European democracy, to return to the corporatism policy of Salazar’s “New State”, or to search for a “third way”. The discussion among Portuguese intellectuals ended with the decision that Portugal had no “third way”. On mature deliberation, it becomes clear that Portugal did not have not only the “third”, but the “second way” either. And in the same way — there are no such ways for Belarus either. They do not exist because at this concrete moment of the present there is a limited set of variants of choice that are possible and could be thought of. This set is determined by the actual condition of the space, time, and thinking, which predetermine the choice itself, or — by the characteristics of the present.

Contemporaneity means a joint simultaneous coexistence of two phenomena. And the situation of a geopolitical choice is in the space of the coexistence of Belarus and something that exists simultaneously with it. Remembering the old Soviet joke that “Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev is a small politician of Alla Pugacheva’s epoch”, it is necessary to ask the question, “During what epoch does Belarus live today?” The epoch is seen as something absolute — something that influences and changes all in this world, but nothing in this world can influence or change this absolute. In the cultural—political approach, such absolute reality that has immanent characteristics of development is intellection (thinking). Changes of means and ways of thinking are the final reason of any changes in the world whereas their incipience is only possible as a process of thinking about thinking. Then, the present (contemporaneity) is set by the actual characteristics of thinking. Today, our epoch can be characterized as an epoch of **program thinking**.

The ideology of program thinking is presented as an answer to the crisis of the project approach to the organization of all human activity. Project thinking that dominated throughout the 20th century is based on the assumption that a projector can control all the initial conditions, the course of implementation, and the consequences of the

introduction of the project plan. Its development logically leads to the attempts of a rational arrangement of the social world according to the schemes considered to be right by a projector, which resulted, inter alia, in the Soviet social engineering and various ideas of a technocratic arrangement of society. The crisis of projecting and project activity starts to be realized in the 1960s—70s, in particular, in the works of the founder of the Club of Rome Aurelio Peccei<sup>4</sup>. He specified the global contradiction between the development of technical means of projecting and the retardation in the development of means of human thinking — there is a technical and industrial possibility to carry out any project, but a person has no possibility either to take into account the whole complexity of current conditions, or to predict its consequences. The program approach and programming do not pretend to know everything, unlike projecting; they are guided by the idea that the future is essentially open. Program thinking also predetermines a different way of the organization of activity. Simplifying, it is possible to say today that effective activity can only be organized programmatically. Thus, the answer to the problem of Belarus' geopolitical choice can also be given only in the program approach.

What differs programming from projecting? More often, this distinction has to do with the name, duration, and width of the purposes. All these concern distinctions, but are not the key moment. The basic distinction is *the distinction of objects a “program” and a “project” are aimed at.*

*Projects work with concrete objects* (they create, transform, etc.), *while programs work with processes* (they start, support, cancel, strengthen, etc.). This distinction is difficult enough and it is not in the nature of what projects and programs are aimed at, but in the way we think of it. It is possible to carry out a project of a reform of education and it is possible to carry out a program. In the first case, we should know precisely how education of “our dream” will look like and we have to move step-by-step towards its creation. The discrepancy between the pre-planned image and the result (at any stage) makes us change

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<sup>4</sup> See Aurelio Peccei. *The Human Quality*. — Moscow, 1980.

or cancel the project and create a new one. If to consider a reform of education as a program, it is important to plan not an image of the object, but processes which should take place in order to implement the reform: expert evaluation and criticism, dialogue development, professional training, a control system reform, etc. The basic efforts of the program are aimed at providing these processes and correcting them according to the present condition of education. In this case, the purposes are formulated more likely as values and principles the program should follow. Unlike the stage-by-stage approach in project thinking, in the program approach all processes are being thought in parallel. But for the organization of actions during each concrete moment of time, it is necessary to evaluate which of processes demands the biggest attention and investment and which one can meanwhile develop “naturally”.

The second important point of distinctions is *relations between actions and results*. In projecting, the results of an action (or a set of actions) and the result of a project coincide (“As a result of actions, X has been created, which was the purpose of the project”). By-effects, consequences, and changes of environment (positive and negative) are not the direct results of the project. The result of an action in a program is *a change of a process*. Thus, a change of a process is influenced not only by our action, but also a lot of other forces: one’s own development, contributory and counteracting factors, accumulating effects, etc. A concrete action in a program can change the intensity or even the direction of a process, but it is impossible to say that the process itself, what it has become, is the result of an action. Sometimes, a small, but precisely calculated action can become a catalyst of strong changes, although these changes cannot be described as a result of this very action.

For Belarus, the question of a geopolitical choice between Europe and Russia is formulated today as a choice between the present and the pastness. To be contemporary today is to think according to the program ideology and to formulate program answers to any serious challenges and problems. Program thinking today is European thinking,

no matter where geographically its physical carriers live. Its answers to the problems that need to be solved define a direction of the world's development. By launching the program of European integration in the post-war time, the European Union set a new configuration of the global world order.

Since then, there has been no program of development that can be compared to it as for its capacity and productivity. The emptiness, ideological dependence, and copying of the integration model of the European Union of those who build today the Eurasian Union is quite obvious and only confirms the leadership of Europe. It would be desirable to see certain unique models in the development of China or other countries, but it is necessary to admit that their progress has to do with the borrowing and introduction of the European economic and social institutions. Europe preserves and will preserve its leadership while it is able to be a leader in the organization of forms and institutions of thinking. For Belarus, the only choice is the choice between its inclusion in the course of this thinking or its refusal and disappearing in “non-thinking”. The second choice will actually mean its refusal from subjectness, i.e. the external forces and actors will be given the right to define the future of our country.

## 1.1. The European Union: cultural— political perspective

In order to build any relations, there must be an understanding of who you deal with, i.e. there must be a Belarusian concept of the European Union. This concept will allow Belarus to define its attitude to the EU's decisions and actions, as well as to build its relations with it. The state concept of the European Union existing now in Belarus reduces the EU actually down to the level of a trading and economic partner and a potential source of investments. In the speeches of Belarusian state officials, the European Union is also seen as a source of a threat to the existence of the present political regime and as a carrier

of some alien, destructive ideology. Such an attitude does not help to develop an adequate policy in relation to our western neighbor, and the existing crisis in the mutual relations of Belarus and the European Union, which started in 1995, is a vivid illustration of that. Moreover, the absence of a clear concept and understanding of the actions of the European Union leads to the fact that Belarus is constantly missing the appearing possibilities of the use of the European resources with a view of its own development.

In the cultural—political framework, the European Union is considered in two basic qualities: 1) as a party in the dialogue about the future of Big Europe; 2) as a tool or a potential source of development for Belarus. Unlike naïve Eurocentrism, here the purpose of movement for our country is not in the EU, but in Belarus itself. Inter alia, it means that the destiny of Belarus is not connected unequivocally with its entry into the European Union. The question of the coexistence of Belarus and the European Union, the Europeanization of Belarus, should be solved so that Belarus would become an equal member of the dialogue about the future of Europe. This requirement of equality is not formal; it sets substantial criteria which Belarus has to execute in order to occupy this place in the dialogue. First of all, Belarus should bring its contribution to the solution of all-European problems and become not only an acceptor of the technical assistance, investments, and other benefits of the European Union. Belarus' subjectness can be recognized by Europe when Belarus finishes the formation of its own institutions of thinking, state administration, economic independence, i.e. finishes its formation as a full-fledged European nation. Actually, for this very purpose, it is necessary to use the actual political initiatives and programs of the European Union. In the logic of the Cultural Policy program, such a complex task is expressed in the triad of consecutive steps: desovietization — Belarusanization — Europeanization.

The history of the formation of the European Union provides the grounds for such a consideration of Belarusan—European relations. The program of European integration proposed by Robert Schuman was aimed, first of all, at putting an end to military conflicts between

European states. The uniting of the resource basis of economies (coal and steel) made it impossible to struggle for resources and then transformed the united European market into a source of well-being for all countries of united Europe. The founding fathers of the European Union clearly saw the purposes and directed this integration to the formation of such a union where each separate country would receive a possibility of implementing its own interests not to the detriment of the interests of the other member states. By the beginning of the 1990s, when the EU faced the problem of how to form its relations with the former communistic countries, these purposes were already reality. The program of European integration was transformed into the policy of expansion which, in its turn, set all the contemporary bases of the European Union's foreign policy. The basic approach of the enlargement policy was the "conditional approach" when the structural assistance in the adaptation and approach to the European standards was rendered to the countries depending on their desire to join the EU and their aspiration to build democracy and market economy. Thus, the European Union offered itself and its possibilities as a tool of development for the post-communist countries of Europe.

The policy of expansion has become the latest visible foreign policy success of the program of European integration. By the early 21st century, the European Union faced new difficulties and challenges that problematized the EU's internal principles and the principles of its relations with the external world. In particular:

1) The EU enlargement policy principles that were transferred to the EU neighborhood policy (2003), obviously, do not provide any possibility to reach the outlined tasks (for example, democratization in the countries of the European neighborhood). In the actual situation, the European Union has no clear concept of a new foreign policy.

2) A number of processes of expansion of the European Union have received an uncontrollable, infrastructural character. It is obvious that the European Union has been widening its presence in the economies, transport and power infrastructures of the countries—neighbors, but cannot transform this presence into a political resource of influence.

3) The dissolution of the borders of the national states and the general crisis of civil and national identity has no answer in the concept of the European citizenship.

4) The bureaucratization and complicity of the structure of management in the European Union raises the question of the necessity to move towards federalization, which problematizes the principles of sovereignty of the EU member states.

5) The economic disbalances in the development of different member states lead to serious economic problems for the whole EU and they have no fundamental solutions today.

The problems of the European Union are the problems for all Europe, and the EU's substantial answer to them will define the construction of the future European space. While these problems are not solved, they set a new horizon of possibilities for Belarus. To see these possibilities today and to join their solution — this will allow Belarus to declare about itself as an equal subject of the dialogue about the European future.

## 1.2. Belarus as a problem for the European foreign policy

The mutual relations of the European Union and Belarus can be reviewed in various aspects, but one of them seems especially important to us. Belarus is a problem for all European politics. The problem — because the long existence and development of the Belarusian authoritarian regime in the zone of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) with its purposes of democratization and increase of the well-being of the countries—neighbors undermines the fundamental foundations of this policy. The successful and (it is even possible to say) triumphal wave of democratization, which covered Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, depleted its resources and stopped on the borders of Belarus. The ideology and programs of

democratization formulated in the 1980s led to the integration with United Europe of the countries of the former socialist camp, including the Baltic states, which received independence, but they have not touched Belarus and, to some extent, Ukraine, Moldova, and some Balkan states. If for Ukraine and the Balkan states, there are still some possibilities left, then the Belarusian situation becomes a real challenge for the former program of dissemination of the European values. It is necessary to understand that the start of this wave was preceded by a long and difficult work that included not only political steps, but also, first of all, the conceptualization of the “socialist world” which had to be democratized and Europeanized. The condition in which the countries that are a challenge for Europe are now cannot be described and understood in the former schemes and concepts any longer. The program of the authoritarian revanche in Belarus has created and continues to strengthen the new public relations which remain outside of any understanding and analysis. As a result, the European programs that were developed earlier, that proved their successfulness, and that were standardized, cannot be adequate to the new social, cultural, and political realities, in particular, in Belarus. New ideas and new programs are needed. And now is the most suitable time to begin to work them out. And it must be done not by armchair analysts and political scientists from European think tanks, but with the most active involvement of intellectual forces from Belarus. To propose new ideas, to formulate a new European program and doctrine — it is necessary not only within the scope of Europe’s relations with Belarus; it is necessary in Europe itself so that to continue the processes of democratization and reforms in the new countries of the European Union and, especially, to activate the policy in the regions in relation to which Europe suggests the policy of neighborhood. A new impulse, new ideas, and new meanings are needed by both United Europe and countries surrounding it.

The absolute failure of the European Neighborhood Policy concerning Belarus can be a good illustration to that. For its expansion in 2004, the European Union developed the European Neighborhood Policy aimed at creating around the EU a zone of stability and

prosperity. The ENP fixed at the official level for the first time the purpose of democratization of Belarus and other neighbors of the European Union as a task for the EU foreign policy.

For the time elapsed since the creation of the ENP, the European Union has tested two approaches concerning Belarus. During the first period (2004—2007), the EU actually isolated Belarus because one of the conditions of participating in the neighborhood policy was the partner countries' steady orientation to strengthen democratic mechanisms. Due to the fact that Belarus did not correspond to these parameters, it was excluded from the neighborhood policy until it would implement fundamental political and economic reforms.

During the second period (2008—2010), the European Union started to apply an integration approach. The visa sanctions were suspended; political contacts, official visits of European high-ranking officials to Minsk, and other forms of communication became more intensive. In 2009, the EU launched a new initiative — the Eastern Partnership (EaP) within the framework of which Belarus acquired the right to participate, despite the problems with democracy and human rights.

Neither first, nor second approach has been successful. The European Neighborhood Policy has existed for nine years, but Belarus still remains the weakest link in the “ring of the neighboring countries” — it is a state with very limited political contacts with the European Union, with the non-democratic government, non-market economy, and uncertain foreign policy orientation (European or Russian vectors). The problematic relations with Belarus are a challenge not only for the reputation of the ENP — they question the role of the European Union as an agent of distribution of democracy in the region. The unpredictability of Belarus threatens the safety of the EU in the field of energetics, transport infrastructure, economic stability, environment preservation, etc. Belarus appears to be an insuperable challenge for the present construction of the foreign policy of the European Union.

### 1.3. The European foreign policy: doubtful stimuli for democratization

Today, the European Neighborhood Policy formally regulates the relations of the European Union with Belarus, but the weakness and inefficiency of the ENP are caused by a problem in its preconditions and bases. The European Neighborhood Policy includes two semantic elements: on the one hand, it continues to support the transit to democracy, assuming that the countries in the neighborhood region will gradually become democratic states; on the other hand, the ENP was created to establish a special (institutionalized) regime of political and economic relations between the European Union and the neighboring countries.

The European Neighborhood Policy provides the partner countries with a prospect of participation in the EU inner market and further integration and liberalization for the development of the free moving of people, goods, services, and capitals. To establish such relations, the partner countries should bring their political, economic, legal, social, etc. systems in conformity with the European standards. The European Union acts in this process as a model and donor, providing its technical and financial help in the development of democratic institutions.

At the heart of the actual European policy, there is an assumption that the peoples and governments of the neighborhood countries would like to build democracy; this assumption was taken directly from the previous stage of the enlargement of the European Union (1991—2004). In 2008—2009, while initiating the Eastern Partnership, the European Union supplemented this approach with economic stimuli, believing that the integration with the EU is economically profitable for the rational governments of the partner countries. This benefit includes, at least, two forms: the gradual opening of access to the European market and the increase of European support to modernization of the countries. The degree of participation of the European Union in the transformation depends on the democratic evolution of the partner country.

As for Belarus, the assumption that there is a will to democracy happened to be erroneous. The fact that Belarus was not included in the European Neighborhood Policy is not perceived in a negative light because the government of Belarus does not care of democratization and Europeanization and it needs no structural help of the European Union. The economic stimuli did not justify themselves either. It is obvious that the Belarusian government does not have to carry out any political reforms expected by the European Union in exchange for prospective economic benefits. The analysis of Belarus' macroeconomic indicators, of its economic mutual relations with Europe, and of the place of Belarus in the regional dynamics of the Eastern Partnership shows a rather good pace of the country's development.

Until now, Belarus did not approach the European Union in the political plan — accordingly, there was no economic facilitation: unlike all other countries, between Belarus and the EU there are no bilateral contracts regulating their relations. One might expect that it should have a negative effect on economic relations and, consequently, negatively affect the economic well-being of Belarus. It could have vividly shown the economic costs of delaying transformations; however, the analysis of the data does not show any obvious losses.

First, Belarus has rather positive macroeconomic indicators. In Belarus, except for 2011, when the economic crisis took place, the indicators of the growth of the gross domestic product are quite good. As for the share of the gross domestic product per capita, Belarus is the richest country of the Eastern Partnership, twice exceeding the Ukrainian indicators (although Belarus' indicators are only about half of the same indicators of Poland and Lithuania) (see: Table 1, Fig. 1, 2). According to the OECD classification, Belarus is the only country among the other six of the Eastern Partnership that enters the group of the countries with the highest average income (this classification puts Moldova in the least developed countries list; the other four EaP countries are included in the average category of the countries with a lower average income).

Table 1

**Macroeconomic indicators of Belarus, EaP countries,  
and selected EU countries (2009—2011)**

	GDP dynamics, % of the previous year			GDP per capita, in US dollars		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
Azerbaijan	-7,12	20,02	20,55	4798	5713	6832
Armenia	-25,90	8,36	7,84	2647	2840	3033
Belarus	-19,00	12,22	5,29	5180	5824	6769
Georgia	-16,33	8,08	23,28	2455	2623	3210
Lithuania	-22,03	-1,45	16,92	11103	11116	13075
Moldova	-10,19	6,90	20,47	1527	1635	1969
Poland	-18,68	9,03	9,35	11275	12286	13540
Ukraine	-34,92	17,66	19,59	2550	3013	3621

*Source:* The authors' calculations on the basis of the data of the International Monetary Fund and the Ministry of Statistics of the Republic of Belarus.

**GDP dynamics, % of the previous year**

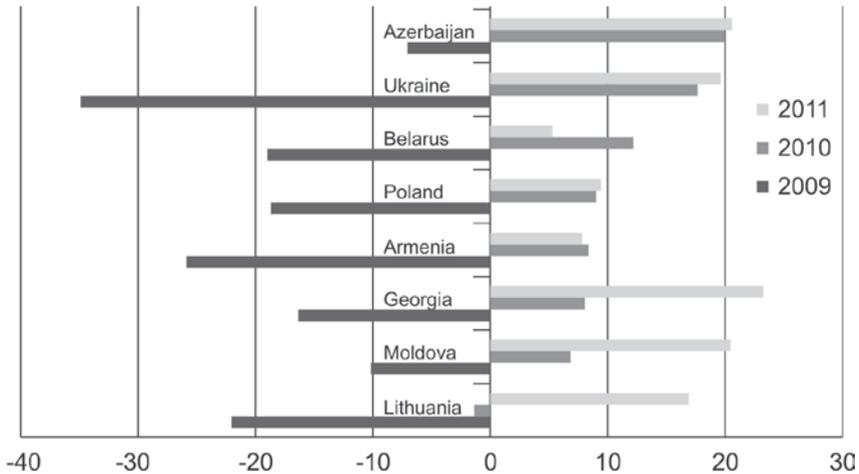


Fig. 1. GDP dynamics of Belarus, EaP countries, and selected EU countries (2009—2011)

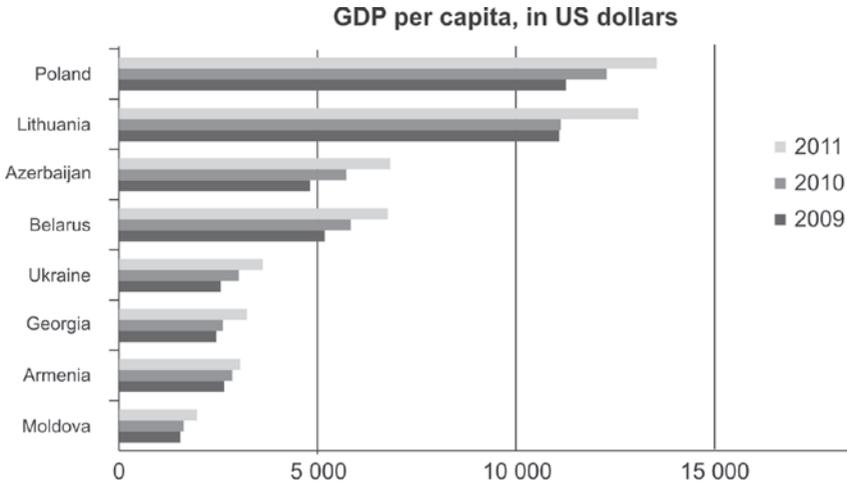


Fig. 2. GDP per capita, the indicators of Belarus, EaP countries, and selected EU countries (2009—2011)

Second, it is important to notice that Belarus' economy, successfully functioning, allows it to provide a satisfactory standard of living for its citizens while receiving rather insignificant support to the development of various sectors and infrastructures from the European Union. Due to the almost total absence of bilateral cooperation between Belarus and the EU, the assistance volumes are extremely limited: from the whole volume of the assistance, which is received by the six countries of the Eastern Partnership together, the share of Ukraine is about 30%, while Belarus receives 10 times less: 2,9% (see: Table 2). Thus, on the eastern border of the European Union, there is an economically successful state which costs European taxpayers practically nothing.

At last, it is possible to recall Belarus' rather slow trade with the European Union. But it is not true either. Since 2000, Belarus has a positive dynamics of export to the European Union countries<sup>5</sup>: from 8%

<sup>5</sup> The data on the diversification of export published on the web-site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus: [http://www.mfa.gov.by/en/foreign\\_trade/export/diverse/](http://www.mfa.gov.by/en/foreign_trade/export/diverse/).

Table 2

**Expenses of the EU on the development programs  
for the Eastern Partnership countries**

Year	Expenses on the Eastern Partnership, in total (million EUR)	Expenses on Belarus, in total (million EUR)	Expenses on Belarus, % of the expenses on the Eastern Partnership	Expenses on Ukraine, in total (million EUR)	Expenses on Ukraine, % of the expenses on the Eastern Partnership
2011	324,91	11,13	2,9	109,03	33,6
2010	388,87	11,5	3,0	115,53	29,7
2009	303,6	7,99	2,6	—	—
2008	323,46	12,05	3,7	—	—
2007	160,62	5,04	3,1	—	—
2006	215,04	12,32	5,7	—	—
2005	188,5	5,14	2,7	—	—

*Source:* The authors' calculations on the basis of the annual reports of EuropeAid. The data on Ukraine is for 2010—11, as an example.

in 2000, the EU share in Belarus' export has increased to 44% by 2009; in 2005—2009, the EU was the basic trading partner of Belarus, while Russia was only on the second place. In 2011, despite the deterioration of relations with the European Union, the export of goods to the West actually doubled in comparison with 2010, while the export to Russia increased less than 40%.

In comparison with Ukraine, Belarus' trade relations with the European Union have a high positive dynamics: Ukraine's export to Europe in 2011 increased just 33%; it is less than the growth of the same indicator in Belarus. Belarus, together with Ukraine and Azerbaijan, is in the top—50 trading partners of the European Union<sup>6</sup>. It turns out that Belarus' economic interrelations with the EU are rather good without any normal contract base whereas the progress in the political

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<sup>6</sup>The data of the Department of Trade of the European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/statistics>.

relations between Ukraine and the European Union has not brought Ukraine any new dynamics in mutual trade.

Thus, the economic benefits of European integration are not able to make Belarus' authoritarian government launch political reforms. The integration approach in the foreign policy does not provide a possibility to achieve a change of the political status quo in Belarus, which is so needed by the European Union.

## 1.4. The European foreign policy: a limited arsenal of means of influence

The present round of Belarusian—European mutual relations began after the presidential election which passed in Belarus on December, 19th, 2010. This election became another test of the efficiency of the Eastern Partnership policy and its integration approach of 2008—2010. After the unexpectedly severe actions of the Belarusian authorities, the European Union was in perplexity and did not know how to react. In January 2011, the EU High Representative, the European Commission, deputies of the European Parliament, and the EU Council discussed all possible tools of the answer to the events in Belarus<sup>7</sup>. However, in those circumstances, the European Union could neither make sharp steps, nor ignore the Belarusian events. There were no essential political (for example, expulsion from the Eastern Partnership) or economic sanctions applied against Belarus. In the arsenal of the European tools, there were only symbolical measures — visa sanctions known for a long time, as well as several innovative decisions such as pinpoint economic sanctions and a possibility to cancel the carrying-out of the World Hockey Championship in 2014 in Belarus. Symbolically, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Eastern Partnership EURONEST

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<sup>7</sup> See Zuikova A. Resolution of the European Parliament on the situation in Belarus: how the decisions were made? // the web-site of the Center for European Transformation: [http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/File/Zuikova\\_EP\\_resolution\\_Belarus.pdf](http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/File/Zuikova_EP_resolution_Belarus.pdf).

began its work without the Belarusian delegation. Without having a possibility to influence the situation directly, the European Union occupied a wait-and-see attitude and froze political mutual relations until the release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners.

For their part, the Belarusian authorities did not seek for rapprochement with the European Union; on the contrary — since December 2010, Belarusian—European relations were marked by a considerable number of conflicts: in September 2011, the Belarusian delegation left with scandal the Summit of the Eastern Partnership in Warsaw; the spring of 2012 was marked by a large-scale diplomatic conflict, and the scandal with Sweden burst in the summer of 2012.

The steps of the European Union do not render any expected influence on Belarus. The European actions are reflected as if in a “false mirror”, causing an asymmetric and disproportionate response of the Belarusian authorities — the introduction of symbolical visa sanctions led to the reciprocal restrictions of departure from Belarus for activists of civil society. Nevertheless, it is not possible to establish an exact correlation between the action (the EU sanctions) and the result (the changes in Belarus, actions of the authorities). It is not known whether the two political prisoners (Andreï Sańnikaŭ and Źmicier Bandarenka) were at last freed thanks to the introduction of the European visa sanctions or not.

The situation when the European Union has no “arms” threatens the pro-European players on the internal political field in Belarus (first of all, its civil society) and may lead to the development of a non-European vector of Belarus’ foreign policy. By estranging itself from the European Union, Belarus will have to deepen its economic and political cooperation with Russia.

## Chapter 2. Historical development. The European policy concerning Belarus: cycles of isolation and involvement

Belarusan—European relations can be analyzed as a matrix of two interconnected levels of politics. The first level is wider: Belarus joins a broad policy directed on a group of countries. Within the framework of this unified many-country approach, overall aims and tools are developed. The European policy at this level concerning the countries of Central and Eastern Europe consists of three phases: 1) the enlargement policy; 2) the European Neighborhood Policy, and 3) the Eastern Partnership.

At the second level, within the bounds of its policy directed on the region, the European Union cooperates individually with each country. Mutual relations serve to depict each country's specific way in the direction to the overall aims put at the regional level. It includes the analysis of the country's features and the adaptation of tools to the requirements of each of the countries.

The character of the mutual relations between Belarus and the European Union is defined by three factors: 1) the tools which are applied by the EU; 2) the policy of the Belarusian authorities, and 3) the level of the development of civil society in the country. The two levels of the policy and these three factors allow us to mention five rounds of Belarusian—European relations, cycles of isolation and integration. Each of them will be described with the reflection of its key characteristics.

## 2.1. Creating the form: PHARE and TACIS (1991—1996)

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the USSR, the countries of the socialist bloc received their political and economic independence. The European Union developed its tools of assistance aimed at supporting these countries in their movement to market economy and democracy. Two tools for two groups of countries were created — PHARE and TACIS.

The PHARE program included Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, GDR, Romania, Yugoslavia, Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovenia. In 1993, after the EU Council made a decision about the further enlargement of the European Union, PHARE became the basic financial tool to prepare the countries—applicants for their introduction. The uncertainty of the geopolitical orientations of Belarus during this period did not allow it to take advantage of this program.

The TACIS program was created for 12 countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Unlike PHARE, which served the requirements of the policy of expansion, TACIS was aimed exclusively at rendering support in these countries' democratic transit.

For the first several years of its existence, TACIS created the forms of organization and the principles of cooperation which have remained in

the European policy till now. Thus, within the bounds of TACIS, there were bilateral cooperation and multilateral (regional) programs. The European Union concluded bilateral agreements with each country; the first of which was the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Long-term indicative programs and annual plans of actions became the tools of implementation of these agreements. Multilateral programs promoted integration at various levels between the countries in the region of TACIS and with the countries of PHARE. The requirements of a country and the condition of its political and economic reforms were taken as a principle of calculation of the volume of the assistance rendered to it.

Belarus was actively included in the TACIS program in 1991—1996. In March 1995, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed between the Belarusian authorities and the EU authorities. The basic spheres of help for Belarus were: support of enterprises, manufacture and distribution of foodstuff, and transport. At the regional level, Belarus took part in the Tempus program and the program of nuclear safety; projects in the spheres of protection of environment, development of civil society, etc. were implemented. During these years, there was no need to support democratization because before Alexander Lukashenko came to power and before he began to create an authoritarian regime, Belarus had been in a democratic transit and received assistance in this process.

## 2.2. The cycle of isolation (1997—2007)

After the 1996 events in Belarus, it became obvious for the European Union that the Belarusian authorities were moving not to the democratic way of development. In reply, the EU froze its bilateral political contacts with the government of Belarus. As it did not render any due influence on Belarusian power and as the EU did not update its tools, the cycle of political isolation lasted for 10 years.

### 2.2.1. TACIS in authoritarian Belarus (1997—2006)

The following round of Belarusian—European relations began in 1996 with the appearance of the decision of the EU Council for the new financial period of 1996—1999. The countries of the European Neighborhood Policy developed new indicative programs and plans of actions. This decision introduced a new tool strengthening the conditionality principle: a possibility to suspend the rendering of assistance to a country if it breaks the key components of cooperation, in particular, democracy and observance of human rights<sup>8</sup>.

Belarus' non-democratic political development (infringements of the Constitution, violent crackdowns of rallies) led to the deep deterioration of relations with the European Union and to the political isolation of Belarus' government. In 1997, the EU Council made a decision to freeze political contacts in all forms. Thus, the further negotiations on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement became impossible; the indicative program and the plan of actions were not developed. As a consequence, in 1996—1999, the technical assistance to Belarus was suspended. Visa sanctions were introduced against Belarusian high-ranking officials<sup>9</sup>.

As the Belarusian authorities did not strive for democracy, bilateral cooperation could not be restored. Only in the beginning of 2002, in reply to some improvements in the protection of democratic principles and rights, the European Union made an attempt of gradual normalization of the relations, known as the “step-by-step approach”<sup>10</sup>. The negotiations about the steps, which were conducted by the EU representatives in Minsk, did not lead to any essential results, and

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<sup>8</sup> See European Parliament Press release (1996): “Council Adopts New Regulation To Launch TACIS 1996—1999 Programming Cycle”.

<sup>9</sup> See Kreutz, Joakim (2005). *Hard Measures by a Soft Power? Sanctions policy of the European Union 1981—2004*. Bonn International Center for Conversion, BICC.

<sup>10</sup> See Chronology of bilateral relations. EU-Belarus relations 2000—2002 // Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Belarus: [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/eu\\_belarus/chronology/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/eu_belarus/chronology/index_en.htm).

the end of this approach was the expulsion of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group from Belarus.

The EU Council did not want any further isolation of Belarus and left opened for the country its participation in regional programs (for example, TACIS Interstate, cross-border cooperation, nuclear safety) and in TACIS subprograms with a direct democratic orientation (Democracy, Tempus, LIEN, partnership between cities, etc.), as well as in the program of humanitarian help<sup>11</sup>.

Simultaneously with the political isolation of the government, the European Union increased the sizes of its support to civil society, believing that the viable NGOs sector will spur the process of democratization and will be able to hamper the antidemocratic revival occurring in Belarus, as well as in Kazakhstan<sup>12</sup>. For Belarus, besides the already existing tools (the program “Democracy”), the European Commission developed a special program of development of civil society. Within the bounds of this program, five million euros was intended exclusively to the organizations of the “third sector” (NGOs, mass media, youth initiatives).

Besides, the indicative program of decentralized assistance with the budget of 10 million euros was accepted for 2000—2003. It was accessible in the form of two tranches from the budgets 2000 and 2003. The indicative program was to support civil society, education and trainings, as well as activity aimed at overcoming the aftermath the Chernobyl catastrophe<sup>13</sup>.

The decisions of the EU Council in 1997 became a basic element of the further policy of the European Union concerning Belarus. All decisions during the next ten years follow their logic: despite the European Neighborhood Policy, which appeared in 2004, the format of cooperation created in 1997 had existed till 2007.

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<sup>11</sup> See TACIS Annual Report, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> See TACIS Annual Report, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> See Country strategy paper. National indicative Program. Belarus, 2005—2006. Adopted by the European Commission on 28 May 2004 // European External Action Service: [http://eeas.europa.eu/belarus/csp/05\\_06\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/belarus/csp/05_06_en.pdf).

## 2.2.2. The European Neighborhood Policy (2004—2007)

The European Union's enlargement changed the context of the EU's cooperation with the Western and Southern Caucasian states of the CIS. In 2003—2004, the European Union developed for them, as well as for the Mediterranean states—neighbors of the EU, a uniform political framework — the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Its key elements, according to the communiqué of the European Commission “Expansion of Europe” (2003) and the strategic document “European Neighborhood Policy” (2004), are:

- \* the development of the zone of prosperity and neighborhood with which the EU has close and peaceful relations of cooperation;
- \* the accurately expressed refusal in the long term of any memberships in the EU;
- \* the basis of the common values (in the spheres of the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, market economy principles, sustainable development);
- \* the steady aspiration of the partner countries to strengthen their administrative, institutional, and legal systems;
- \* the gradual and determined deepening of cooperation, new advantages in reply to the partner countries' progress in political and economic reforms;
- \* two various tools: 1) the basic tool is a plan of actions developed together with the government of the partner country, which establishes a “road map” of gradual consolidation of democracy; 2) the existing and future financial tools of rendering support in various areas to different types of agents, including civil society.

As a whole, the European Neighborhood Policy did not change essentially the existing cooperation between the European Union and the new countries—neighbors. In the political dimension, the ENP inherited bilateral cooperation in the form of the long-term planning

and annual plans of actions, as well as multilateral cooperation: cross-border cooperation and subprograms within the bounds of TACIS and the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Technically, TACIS remained a financial tool of the ENP till 2006, after that it was the ENPI.

The European policy concerning Belarus continued to be guided by the decisions of the EU Council of 1997. It was expanded and deepened; however, the basic elements remained the same: attempts to affect the behavior of Belarus' government through a combination of soft and pressure measures<sup>14</sup>. In the long-term prospect, Belarus was excluded from the ENP; in the absence of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and transitive agreements, the trading mutual relations between Belarus and the European Union were regulated by the out-of-date agreements concluded between the European Economic Community and the USSR in 1989. The visa sanctions against Belarusian officials were used by the EU as a flexible tool of urgent reaction, as a "stick" in reply to the non-democratic steps of the Belarusian authorities. A part of the programs of multilateral cooperation was opened for Belarus, and the European Commission continued to increase its support to civil society.

The European Neighborhood Policy provided the existing relations between the European Union and its neighbors with a political component. However, its principles, structure, and tools were directly inherited from the period of the TACIS program. It is the principal cause of the failure of the ENP: the approach and methods were not adapted to the new purposes and tasks of the policy.

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<sup>14</sup> See Lynch Dov (2005): "Catalyzing change", Chaillot Paper "Changing Belarus", 85, p. 97–124.

## 2.3. The cycle of involvement (2008—2010)

### 2.3.1. A change of geopolitical doctrines

Stability, as the main characteristic of Belarus, became already long ago an invariable element of the image of the country. The Belarusian regime is proud of stability in everything; it is mentioned by friendly states supporting the image and strategy of the regime. And it already became ordinary and stereotypic. Recently, this characteristic has begun to appear in absolutely new contexts and lips. The supporters of rapprochement with and recognition of the Belarusian regime in Europe also mention this stability as a positive factor, first of all, for economic relations with Belarus and as an argument in favor of the political recognition of the regime.

At times, it is hard enough to understand how such argument is possible at all. There is an impression that those who see stability in Belarus do not reckon with the fact that Belarus occupies very low places in the ratings of safety of investments and business dealing, of corruption, of human rights, including the right of property untouchability. What sort of stability is characterized by the fact that for many years none large investor has managed to agree with the government as for the investment and business dealing conditions in the country? But, this notwithstanding, there is a widely spread opinion about the stability of Belarus' economy which makes it favorable for investments and business dealing.

Alexander Lukashenko's long stay on the post of the head of the state and his total dominance in internal politics, probably, can also be considered by someone as political stability. Is it possible to consider it stability when he runs to an extreme when it comes to the relations with Russia? There are victorious propaganda statements about the signing of the Constitutional Act, the creation of the Union State and the Customs Union, the transition to the Russian ruble in

bilateral calculations, etc., and yet — every year there are local or large conflicts in Belarusian—Russian relations. The same roughness and drops characterize mutual relations with the neighboring European countries. Really steady and invariable are the bad political relations with the USA. It means that if we look narrowly then we shall see that there are not enough grounds to recognize Belarus as a stable country. And, nevertheless, stability is one of the main arguments of those political forces who lobby the recognition of the Belarusian regime, the removal of the sanctions and restrictions in relation to Belarus from the part of the European Union and the USA.

The evident absence of convincing grounds of such arguments means that these political forces are guided by some other motives. The “stability” is used because of the absence of more serious and powerful arguments. The appeals to the “stability” can be considered as a symptom of **a change of the doctrine of the European Union concerning Belarus**. Such a doctrine is not formulated anywhere in an open form, but we shall try to reconstruct the previous doctrine and the one that replaces it.

First of all, it is necessary to pay attention to the quantitative indicators of European—Belarusian interaction and their dynamics throughout all the existence of independent Belarus. If to compare the volumes of investments, technical assistance in all spheres (from military to humanitarian), it appears that these indicators are many times less than in the EU’s mutual relations with the other countries of the region where Belarus is located. It is even possible not to consider at all Lithuania and Latvia as these are the countries that are already integrated into the European Union; still, Ukraine and Moldova considerably outstrip Belarus in these indicators.

It is, first of all, the Belarusian regime that is responsible for the fact that the sizes of mutual relations and cooperation with the European Union are so insignificant. However, in any bi- and multilateral relations, the responsibility, nonetheless, is to some extent distributed between all the parties, and it is impossible to say that Europe, both European Union and its largest member states (Germany, France, and

Great Britain), was very active in the normalization of European—Belarusian relations. And this low activity has a very simple explanation. Since the early 1990s, Germany openly and other European Union countries — in a more veiled form — recognized Belarus as a sphere of interests of Russia. This recognition is the essence of the doctrine the European Union has been guided by until quite recently. It was thought that even democratization and the spread of market economy as the priority components of the Eastern European policy of the EU in Belarus were carried out by Russia or through Russia's intermediary. The domination of this doctrine has been immersing Belarus in the contexts of the Russian foreign policy and has adhered Belarus' economy to the Russian one. If at the times of President Boris Yeltsin this doctrine could have at least some grounds, then during the latest decade this doctrine has been preserved only due to the sluggishness of political thinking and bureaucratic institutions.

Proceeding from the described doctrine, Belarus' political relations with the European Union were limited to statements, resolutions, mutual requirements and claims. By 2008, it became obvious that the whole European policy in relation to Belarus, as well as the overwhelming majority of its components, including the TACIS program, help to civil society, political opposition, etc., was inefficient. Although this policy and its separate programs are inefficient, no alternatives have been proposed, and it requires some explanations. And as an explanation, a new doctrine is formulated. Now, the low activity of the European Union concerning Belarus is explained not by the fact that the EU leaves Belarus in the sphere of Russia's interests, but that the Belarusian nation supports Lukashenko's regime and this is the choice of the Belarusian people. This doctrine has two conclusions:

- 1) If the regime is supported by the Belarusians, then it is necessary not only to reckon with it, but also to recognize it as a legitimate one.
- 2) As the authoritarian essence of the regime does not change, then it is not necessary to activate political, economic, and humanitarian interaction with Belarus.

But, without having time to develop and to be formed, the new doctrine faced the first serious tests. The Russian—Georgian military conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia demanded a consolidated reaction of the world community. It was in the interests of the European Union not to allow the expansion of the practice of the military solution of problems and conflicts on the Russian borders and in the neighborhood zone. The policy of force often seems attractive to the governments and regimes in problem regions, and only a consolidated reaction of the international community can prevent such a policy from becoming a standard practice in such regions. The Belarusian regime used the developed international situation to strengthen the European vector of its international policy. Being the nearest military and economic partner and ally of the Russian Federation, it officially did not support the policy of Russia concerning Georgia and did not recognize the quasi-state formations supervised by Russia in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Such actions of the Belarusian government did not remain unnoticed in Europe and strengthened the political positions of the European supporters of the recognition of the regime; it led to the softening of the 12 requirements accepted by the EU in 2006 and the termination of the political isolation of the Belarusian regime. Finally, it resulted in the fact that the European governments and institutions began to “notice” some progress in the internal political dynamics of Belarus. However, as it was showed by the subsequent succession of events, this positive dynamics and stability was something they wanted to see rather than something that really existed.

The outlined turn of the European Union and European institutions towards the normalization of European—Belarusian relations was accepted positively by the governments and public of the countries that are the nearest neighbors of Belarus — for them their relations with Belarus are much more significant than for Western Europe. Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, among other things, are afraid of Belarus’ military cooperation with Russia as it draws their attention to the question of their own safety. At the same time, these countries do understand much better that the dictatorship and

authoritarian regime are not the basis of stability. On the contrary, dictatorial regimes are unpredictable because in the countries ruled by dictators such traditional mechanisms of solving problems and avoiding extreme measures as dialogue and negotiations do not work.

In the summer—autumn of 2008, there was an impression that all interested parties approve the normalization of European—Belarusan relations. However, the normalization process continued to remain far from Belarusan society that represented its political forces and public organizations. The rapprochement of the Belarusan regime with Europe was going to bring more troubles than advantages to Belarus' opposition and public sector. At least, it was thought so by the Belarusan public and political oppositional leaders. From the point of view of those who are compelled to experience the daily pressure of the dictatorship, it is quite reasonable. And even the fact that Belarus' opposition regularly shows its organizational, administrative, and political powerlessness, the fact that public and political leaders lose every year not only their influence on society, but even their connection with it, does not mean that one has to ignore absolutely the problems and requirements of this part of Belarusan society. The more so, as it is only this part of Belarusan society that appreciates the European values and has been trying to promote the country's integration into the all-European processes throughout the whole period of the existence of independent Belarus.

At the level of declarations and statements, European politicians promise not only to save the reached level of support to Belarus' civil society and opposition, but even to widen it. Especially active in this question are the nearest neighbors of Belarus who until recently were the basic addressees of this assistance and “objects” of the European programs. Nowadays, they are in the situation when they reconsider their role in the all-European processes and try to occupy the position of “subjects” of support and help, first of all, in their own region — Eastern Europe. In this connection, there is even a competition for

the regional leadership between Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia in the business of “advancement of democracy and European values” in the neighboring countries. In a sense, the implementation and successfulness of the new relations and European support to Belarus will fix simultaneously the places and roles of these states in United Europe.

In connection with such declarations, statements, intentions, and plans, it makes sense to evaluate the European programs of support to Belarus’ civil society and opposition. And we shall not reveal anything new by saying that all these programs are inefficient. Almost all analysts and political scientists, as well as the politicians and representatives of the European institutions, who were responsible for these programs, speak about it today. The most part of the means of this technical assistance, including those intended to support civil society, goes not to the Belarusian opposition and public organizations, but to the Belarusian regime directly or through pseudo-public organizations created by the regime or international structures (for example, the United Nations). During the years of the implementation of the European programs of support to civil society, Belarusian civil society has not developed and has not become stronger, but on the contrary — it has weakened essentially in comparison with the mid-1990s. Therefore, if the substantial filling of the programs of support to civil society, as well as the ways of this support, does not change, it is possible to assume that the increase of the volumes of financing of these programs will not lead to the increase of their efficiency.

Now, it is necessary to reconstruct and formulate two local strategies that have to do not with the general European—Belarusian relations, but only the international programs to support Belarus’ opposition and civil society. These doctrines have no accurate formulation either, but it is possible to call them by the names of their brightest representatives:

**1. Michael Kozak's doctrine.** He was the United States ambassador to Belarus in 2000—2003. This doctrine is reduced to

the support of radical opponents of the regime, to the diplomatic and economic pressure upon the regime through sanctions. It cannot be implemented to the full, first, because it is almost impossible to make the international community accept coordinated and consolidated sanctions, even against very dangerous and aggressive regimes, let alone such regimes as the Belarusian one. Second, any external support of the radical opposition is easily neutralized by actions of the authoritarian regime. Without any wide and massive, although not radical support, the radical opposition is nonviable.

**2. Hans-Georg Wieck's doctrine.** He headed the OSCE Mission in Belarus in 1997—2001. The core of this doctrine was a negotiating process which participants should be Belarus' government, on the one hand, and public organizations and political parties, on the other hand, through the intermediary of European institutions. The most serious attempt to organize such a dialogue in 1999—2000 was ignored by the majority of opposition parties and politicians who thought within the scope of the doctrine of Michael Kozak. During the following years, Belarus' civil society and especially political opposition weakened so much that today they cannot act as a party in negotiations at all, even with the most intensive and extensive support of any European institutions. Political leaders themselves speak about negotiations of the regime with Europe with the participation of the opposition. But it is already absolutely another format.

Thus, it is possible to say that both “big doctrines” of the relations of the European Union and Belarus and both “local strategies” of support to civil society and political opposition are incompetent and inefficacious. There are no new suggestions of any doctrines or programs formulated in the EU. And in this situation, there is an activization of European attention and expansion of support to civil society and political opposition. The dominant role in it is being played by the countries—neighbors of Belarus which, on the one hand, have no experience and adequate institutions and mechanisms and, on the other hand, have no sufficient authority and influence to set new guidelines and frameworks for the European programs.

### 2.3.2. The Eastern Partnership: instrumentalization of the EU policy

The official proposal about a new structure of multilateral relations called the Eastern Partnership was initiated by the European Commission on December, 3rd, 2008. This declaration of intent was a response to the difficult political situation in the relations of the European Union with its neighboring countries. This situation was created by the juxtaposition and entwinement of a number of problems: the general strategic problems of the EU enlargement, its relations with its nearest neighbors, the developing economic crisis, as well as the events that needed an urgent answer and an adequate political reaction: the Russian—Georgian crisis and the energy crisis. In this offer, there were the most general frameworks of the future program. The basic forms of cooperation were announced — structures for multilateral relations (four thematic platforms, ministerial meetings, summits), possibilities of development of mutual relations, and the Civil Society Forum as a place to “*develop contacts between civil society organizations and to support their dialogue with bodies of state power*”.

On March, 20th, 2009, the European Council confirmed the Eastern Partnership Declaration “which will involve a wide range of participants, including ministries and departments, parliaments, civil society, international organizations, financial institutions, and the private sector”. Since then, consultations in various forms with civil society concerning the organization of the Civil Society Forum were started.

On May, 7th, 2009, during the Prague Summit dedicated to the Eastern Partnership program, the heads of states and governments and representatives of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, representatives of the European Union, as well as the heads of states and governments and representatives of the EU member states, founded the Eastern Partnership and accepted the Joint Declaration. This declaration formulates the general conditions and principles that will build the mechanisms of new cooperation, first of all, at the

state and interstate levels. In the middle of June 2009, the work in the declared directions of the initiative, including the preparation for the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, was begun.

The incipency and development of the Eastern Partnership initiative for the organization of special relations with the six countries was the result of a thin balance of political forces, first of all, in Europe itself. It conditioned a number of characteristic features of the program, which are important for the understanding of its development:

**1) The principled substantial openness and flexibility of the program.** Both politicians and analysts repeatedly underlined that from the very beginning and practically till now the declared program represents only “a place and a possibility” which should be filled with the real contents and mechanisms. It is difficult to say whether this flexibility and openness were a conscious and circumspect step or it became an inevitable result of the precipitancy of political decisions. Still, it is obvious that this characteristic began to be cultivated in the course of the development of actions. Now, it is a basis for appeals and substantiations of these or those actions of all the subjects included in interactions within the bounds of the program. The structures of the European Commission, which are responsible for the implementation of the program, refer to this openness during the formation of concrete mechanisms of the whole program and, in particular, of the participation of civil society, specifying the absence of severe conditions and final decisions. The structures of civil society appeal to this openness to prove their right to make proposals and to be included in the process of the formation of the mechanisms of the program. The Belarusian authorities use this characteristic in order to hide their own steps or use this uncertainty in their propaganda against the Eastern Partnership.

**2) The dilemma of pragmatics and values.** Declaring the readiness for “new” relations with Belarus (as well as with other countries where political power is not focused either on Europe, or on the implementation of the European values, and walks its own way), the EU had to solve the question of establishing “new” relations with these

countries' civil society that was in political opposition. This question seemed the sharpest and most-discussed during the announcement of the Eastern Partnership initiative. As soon as the structures of the European Union establish official and civilized connections with the Belarusian state, they cannot, according to the international norms, have separate relations with the political opposition and civil society. Forms of such relations simply do not exist. Relations of partnership and cooperation mean that the Belarusian authorities are recognized to have ability to dialogue with their own civil society. Thus, everybody, including the European politicians, understood that instead of dialogue, at best, there will be imitation. The contradiction between the pragmatics of the situation and the axiological guidelines demanded a decision which turned into the Civil Society Forum as a place and a potential way of including civil society as a partner in multilateral relations.

A formal place was allotted for civil society's participation; however, there were no elaborated decisions concerning its inclusion in the general structure of relations. It potentially makes the Civil Society Forum a place for the incipency of a potentially new practice in international relations. The Forum's configuration actually develops as a result of the actions of civil society in the partner countries and at the level of the Eastern Partnership and in many respects depends on the direction of such actions. The Forum in a greater degree becomes a legitimate element in the structure of decision-making within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, but it can easily turn into another simulation of civic participation.

The dilemma of pragmatics and values hangs over the Eastern Partnership like the sword of Damocles. If civil society's participation becomes formal and simulative, it will question its conformity to the European values and guidelines, which will be used by the opponents of the activization of the eastern policy in the European Union. If civil society strengthens its positions and becomes a full-fledged partner in the relations between the countries, it will open a whole layer of new problems in the political practice, for which there are no ready solutions yet.

The Eastern Partnership initiative has created conditions to search for new forms of relations between civil society and state structures, to revise civil society's place and possibilities to influence political decisions. The Civil Society Forum formally presents a place and possibility for such a revision and for active actions aimed at implementing this possibility. Actually, it presents an open space to display ambitions, to implement potentials, and to spur the growth and development of civil society. It is especially important for Belarus where civil society is marginalized and has a very limited space for its development. It is an invaluable experience and a possibility of self-organization, for which there are a special place, time, and legitimate opportunities.

### 2.3.3. The Eastern Partnership: Belarusian players

Despite its weakness and problems, Belarus' civil society appeared to be the leader in the Eastern Partnership. On the one hand, it is a paradoxical result of the suppression of civil activity in Belarus. Even the illusive chances which are provided by the Eastern Partnership seem significant for the repressed civil society of the country. On the other hand, it is an effect of the pro-European mood of the majority of active players of the "third sector". It also means there is a significant potential of activity inside civil society.

During the basic events in the launch of the Eastern Partnership, there was a number of initiative actions aimed at consolidating and self-organizing civil society around this initiative. As a result of such activity, by the summer of 2010, in Belarus, the National Platform of the Civil Society Forum was created — it actually became a prototype for the creation of national platforms in all the other countries of the Eastern Partnership. Civil society's consolidation, which was inspired by the processes of the Eastern Partnership, became possible thanks to the high rate of development of the initiative. Less than for two years, the country's civil society has managed to pass from discussions concerning Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership to the formation of working structures of the National Platform and the

formation of the agenda for the Civil Society Forum. Against the background of the previous stagnant years, such a rate was too fast for the majority of civil society organizations. In order to remain in the context of events and to react adequately, it was required to make decisions very quickly. There was no time for their traditional internal “fights”. Many unsolved contradictions had to be put aside so as simply to catch those who during this or that moment became the leaders of the process. However, the delay of the rates of development and the state’s non-participation in the Eastern Partnership in 2011 has led to the increase of contradictions inside Belarus’ civil society and its National Platform.

Unlike civil society’s actions, the actions of the Belarusian state in the Eastern Partnership were characterized by an opposite dynamics. In public rhetoric, at the initial stage, officials tried to make an impression of a normal course of cooperation in which there were separate drawbacks and obstacles, but they had no principled character. They marked the positive character of the Eastern Partnership, but additionally underlined that the principle of equality of relations did not allow the European Union to invent any special conditions and requirements for Belarus. The state (separate state structures and institutions) generated a number of project proposals within the scope of the thematic platforms of the Eastern Partnership. The situation of “rhetorical liberalization” was also used to draw additional resources for the struggle against the economic crisis (the reception of credits from the European Reconstruction and Development Bank, IMF, World Bank, etc.). However, such actions had no development because of the inability of the Belarusian state to introduce the minimum standards of the democratic rule and to improve the situation with human rights.

Civil society as a separate player in the system of the Eastern Partnership has always been ignored and continues to be ignored by the state; therefore, in Belarus, two separate lines of cooperation with the European Union are developing: the EU — the government and the EU — civil society.

Except the described above players, in any situation of European—Belarusan interaction, there are tendencies which must be considered objective, at least, because they have a rhythmical and periodical character.

First, it is the change of the “bureaucratic” and “political” periods, which is inherent in any programs and initiatives of the European Union. During each concrete moment, the first place is occupied either by the political will and political decisions, which answer challenges and create new conditions and new situations, or by the implementation of the accepted decisions by officialdom when tools and mechanisms are debugged, etc. Quite often, during such debugging, the innovativeness and adherence to the principles of political decisions is essentially lost. The implementation routine by smoothly running officialdom brings to naught the subtleties of political games and, in a sense, checks the durability of the decisions. The time of political decisions in the Eastern Partnership ended after the Prague Summit. Then, there was a time for the bureaucratic implementation, during which the standard steps and ways of solving tasks were applied.

Second, Belarus’ foreign policy traditionally moves in a pendulum mode. After the thaw and improvement of Belarusian—European relations, it is necessary to expect their “cold snap” and a sharp change. These traditions of conducting policies create external conditions for civil society’s actions. At any moment, these conditions from difficult, but having prospects, can become extremely inauspicious, which actually occurred after the presidential election in December 2010.

#### 2.3.4. The Eastern Partnership: innovative components

In order to develop the Eastern Partnership initiative, it is necessary to advance its innovative potential which lies in the development of new ways of work with the partner countries and in the new views on the neighborhood, integration, and partnership. At the same time, this side of the new initiative is more often consciously and unwittingly

ignored. If the basic players stop showing their persistence in the search for new forms, revision and reform of the methods of work, the innovative potential of the Eastern Partnership will be lost. As a result, many organizational and political questions are closed with the help of standard answers; the initiatives applying for an innovation in the relations of the EU and the partner countries are reduced to the habitual forms, etc. Recently, we hear more and more often that the Eastern Partnership is a logic continuation of the European Neighborhood Policy. On the one hand, this statement is fair, especially concerning the preservation of the most general reference points and frameworks of the European policy. On the other hand, the Eastern Partnership was formulated as an answer to the recognition of the inefficiency of the neighborhood program.

Therefore, during the conceptual work and the search for the mechanism of the implementation of the purposes and priorities of the Eastern Partnership, it is necessary to pay more attention to the differences from the neighborhood program and to develop these differences. The main reason of the failures of the neighborhood program is that during the change of the purposes and tasks of the foreign policy the European Union did not change its approach to the formation of relations with the neighboring countries, the main principles, and work methods. There was no diversification of relations with different groups of the countries neighboring the EU. The bases for the formation of relations within the bounds of the neighborhood program was still the “conditional approach”, reactivity principle, intergovernmental level of relations, as well as the idea that the neighboring countries have the political will to strive for European integration and reforms (that was only fixed in the updating of the old principle of the neighborhood policy — “more for more” in 2012). And these principles covered all the countries, without dependence on what prospects of interaction exist for each of them.

All the basic guidelines of the EU countries’ relations with the countries of the European continent of the period of the EU’s active

enlargement, first of all, the principles of the PHARE program, were non-critically transferred to the programs of the neighborhood policy. This program “looked” at the world around through the prism of prospects of the introduction to the European Union. All the surrounding countries were “sorted” on the basis of their readiness to join the EU. This point of view generated the basic principles of the construction of relations. The neighborhood program declared the “non-obligatoriness” to join the European Union, but at the level of tools and working mechanisms it did not provide a variety of approaches to cooperation.

Within the bounds of this policy, there were no tools to work with the countries which express their unwillingness to correspond to the norms and standards offered by the European Union (especially in the field of political and public institutions). At the same time, in all the post-Soviet countries—neighbors of the EU, it was not possible to reach a stable effect and confidence in the real trend towards democracy. The effects of the revolutions were short-term and the possibilities of revanche were more and more realistic. These possibilities are supported by the growth of European pessimism in the new European countries, as well as by the “positive example” of Belarus which until recently did not accept ostentatiously the European influence on its way of life and socio-political structure.

The governments focused on reforms were considered as the main addressee and supporters of the neighborhood program. Still, the post-Soviet societies’ readiness to transformations was overvalued and the outlays of reforms happened to be higher than the benefits which were received by the countries that agreed to fulfill the conditions. The governments began to replace the long-term objectives with the satisfaction of their pragmatic interests. The space where the adherence to the European values and the orientation on reforms is being invariably preserved is civil society. Still, within the bounds of the approaches of the neighborhood policy, there is no possibility to include civil society as a partner at the level of the intergovernmental dialogue.

As a result, the purposes and reference points the European Union was striving for in the neighborhood policy (stable pro-Europeanly focused environment) appeared to be completely dependent on the changeable political life in the countries—neighbors, while the subjects and structures that tried to spread the European norms and values appeared to be deprived of effective tools of influence on the development of relations between the countries.

The Eastern Partnership initiative had potential possibilities to form a new type of relations with the neighboring countries. The six partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus) are considered not as potential members of the European Union, but as partners in the all-European space. In this sense, the statement that the Eastern Partnership is a way to bring to a halt and even to prevent the partner countries from their joining the EU is fair. Still, it does not mean a discrimination attitude, but the necessity to search for new principles of interaction in the all-European relations. The Eastern Partnership potential to launch and form new relations within the scope of United Europe is provided not only by the declared purposes and tasks, but also by the offered approaches and organizational forms: the proactive position, the tool approach, and the inclusion of civil society in the structure of the general dialogue. All these make it possible to liberate as much as possible the available potential aimed at forming the all-European space.

The development of the innovative potential of the Eastern Partnership lies in:

- \* the formation and development of the European region uniting the six partner countries (this task is being implemented, first of all, through the synchronization of the development of these countries, which is possible if the general regional reference points of such development are established and accepted and if the tools of correlation and coordination of movement are introduced);

- \* the strengthening and institutional securing of the place of civil society in the intergovernmental dialogue (the presence of civil society

is the guarantor of the preservation of the common European values and aspirations to form the common European space in this dialogue, without dependence on political changes in the partner countries);

\* the conceptualization and securing of new relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership region, built on the principles of “Common Europe” (probably, the introduction of mechanisms of coordination and adjustment of the priorities of the development of the EU and this region and a parallel start of conceptual work on the new bases of the all-European space).

The implementation of these directions has to do with the introduction within the framework of the Eastern Partnership of the Open Coordination Method (OCM) as a basic tool of the synchronization and coordination of the movement of the six partner countries, as well as the coordination of this movement with the European Union. The advantages of this method are:

1) The OCM presupposes to support a constant dialogue on the priorities and development of reference points;

2) Various subjects are included in the dialogue and the inclusion criterion is competence and ability to dialogue, but not some formal grounds;

3) The OCM provides the countries with wide opportunities of self-determination, assuming flexible and soft governance;

4) This method gains an increasing distribution in the EU (it means that the coordination and adjustment of movement with the European Union within the bounds of the common European space will be provided by common tools);

5) The suggested processes (the formation of the region, institutionalization of civil society’s participation in the program monitoring, etc.) can be launched by a series of actions:

a) The preparation of countries’ reports (in all the six partner countries) on the condition and dynamics of the advancement of the most important priorities specified within the bounds of the

thematic platforms of the Eastern Partnership. These priorities are based on a number of international documents (conventions and agreements which are a part of *Acquis communautaire*: Charter of Local Self-Government, Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, etc.), which are either accepted by the partner countries, or going to be accepted. The reports should be prepared as an analysis of the implementation of or readiness to implement these documents. The preparation of the reports should include:

- \* the presence of alternative reports on the part of the state structures and civil society;
- \* the inclusion of European experts in the structures of the groups that prepare the reports, as well as experts from the partner countries;
- \* the carrying-out of preliminary consultations and coordination of the methodology of the reports among all interested participants so as to provide cross-country comparisons and mutual criticism;
- \* the reports should pay special attention to the methodological substantiation and analysis of the data and materials acquisition system in each country.

b) The organization of a public discussion of the reports through a series of events: round tables, experts' evaluations, public hearings. It is important that these events should include experts, politicians, and representatives of civil society of the six partner countries, as well as the EU countries.

c) The formation of countries' "road maps" on each of the directions, taking into account the presented reports and their discussions. This task can be executed on the basis of the available platforms of the Eastern Partnership (intergovernmental meetings, meetings of the Coordinating Committee of the Civil Society Forum), by organizing their close interaction.

6) Today, Belarus' civil society is ready to propose this tool as a further development of the Eastern Partnership. The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership should become a platform for a start and development of this tool. "Road maps" on each of the platforms are being prepared for this purpose — they have to become the beginning for the introduction of the program monitoring procedure in the Eastern Partnership. The work on the thematic "road maps" can become a basis for the inclusion of civil society in the dialogue concerning the steps ("road map") in the relations between Belarus and the EU. The preservation of the initiative on the part of civil society has a strategic character for the development of the innovative potential of the Eastern Partnership.

What is necessary for the success of such an action?

A) **The readiness and competence of civil society itself.** The desire and understanding of the necessary steps do not guarantee yet the ability to make them. Even understanding today's meagerness of material, organizational, political, human, and intellectual resources, it is possible to say that the civil society of Belarus (and, we hope, the other partner countries) is able to initiate this process and to take the necessary steps. However, without a parallel active work aimed at increasing these resources, this initiative and civil society's full-fledged embeddedness in the program monitoring process have no prospects. Thus, making the first steps and understanding their meagerness, it is necessary to create the grounds in order to provide the resource base of normal work.

B) **The support to civil society by the European Union (European Commission and other structures).** This support should be aimed at not allowing civil society to be excluded from the dialogue (and from the program monitoring processes built on the basis of the OCM), but on the contrary — at spurring the increase of its potential. It is possible through the investment of representatives of civil society with powers and their support at the institutional level (the work of national platforms and program monitoring centers).

C) **The increase of the number of contacts and interaction between experts and politicians of the partner countries.** These contacts demand: resource support, creation and institutional fixation of a network of platforms (centers) aimed at organizing monitoring, inclusion of experts from the partner countries as representatives of the European Commission.

## 2.4. Between isolation and involvement: in search of a new form of relations (2010—2012)

### 2.4.1. The European dialogue on modernization

The European Union's optimism concerning the political liberalization in Belarus ended on December, 19th, 2010 — the same day when the last cycle of the involvement policy actually ended as well. The violent crackdown of protests in the evening of the presidential election and the unprecedented wave of political repressions, which followed, put an end to the EU's attempts to involve Belarus in the normal order of cooperation. Belarus was not able to demonstrate its political will to carry out the minimum steps on political liberalization and improvement of the situation with human rights, which closed for Belarus a window of opportunities within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. However, despite the fact that Belarus repeated the repressive scenario of the previous presidential election in 2006, the European Union did not return to the policy of isolation of Belarus.

The European Union strictly condemned the cruelty which occurred on December 19th, but remained attached to the logic of critical involvement<sup>15</sup>. Within 2011—2012, the EU Council renewed and gradually expanded its symbolical sanctions: visa restrictions,

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<sup>15</sup> See High Representative (2010): "Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the presidential elections in Belarus".

freezing of accounts, and separate economic sanctions. At the same time, Belarus was left in the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership; projects of technical cooperation were continued; in June 2011, Belarus was offered to open negotiations to simplify the visa regime with the EU. In March 2012, the EU Council formulated its formal political requirements so as to restore its relations with Belarus, having again reminded of the necessity to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners<sup>16</sup>. In March 2012, the European Union starts a new initiative for Belarus — the European dialogue on modernization with Belarusian society (EDM) — which, on the one hand, became a new attempt of the European Union to find other approaches and tools of work with the problem neighbor and, on the other hand, a new chance for Belarus to be included in the processes of interaction with the EU.

The official announcement of the beginning of the EDM was made on March, 29th, 2012 by Štefan Füle, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, at the meeting with representatives of Belarus' civil society and political opposition. For today, the EDM process is opened for participation for representatives of civil society, political opposition and, in the presence of the corresponding conditions, Belarusian power. On the part of the European Union, the EDM is being organized by the European External Action Service and the European Commission with the assistance of the EU member states. The European dialogue on modernization is urged to formulate a clear vision of contemporary democratic Belarus, to propose a package of reforms necessary for the modernization of the country, to define a potential and tools of possible support to reforms by the EU, and to include the practical experience of the EU countries' transition period in the process of Belarus' modernization.

The European dialogue on modernization is an essential and correct step of the European Union in the direction of the normalization of European—Belarusian relations, formation of additional bases for

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<sup>16</sup> See Foreign Affairs Council meeting 3117 (2011).

bilateral cooperation. However, for its successful development, it is necessary to take into account some basic moments.

First, **the parties' parity and equal participation.** It is necessary to provide a more open and wide format of the involvement of representatives of civil society, political opposition and, under certain conditions, Belarusian power in the EDM process at all its stages. It is important to organize public consultations among the involved stakeholders concerning the purposes, format, procedures, and contents of the EDM (by analogy with the consultations which took place before the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership). It is also necessary to provide a possibility of the EDM participants' access to the coordination of the agenda of the thematic seminars and meetings organized by the EU member states, as well as to working versions of accepted documents that for today happens only periodically and outside of the basic EDM process. In particular, the "loudest" meeting in Warsaw in April 2012 (on privatization subjects) did not include any preliminary consultations with the interested stakeholders in Belarus.

Despite the position presented by European Commissioner Štefan Füle concerning the equal involvement of representatives of both political opposition ("the six plus") and Belarusian civil society, the real course and order of the EDM lags behind this declaration. Actually, the interested actors from civil society organizations are not involved yet in the course of the EDM at the level of public subjects, unlike the political opposition. Public organizations are represented only by individual experts at the level of the EDM working groups. The leveling of this situation could foster the growth of the dynamics and public importance of the European dialogue on modernization.

Second, **the coordination and synergy with the processes within the scope of the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighborhood Policy.** The European dialogue on modernization can strengthen the processes and potential of the existing mechanisms and tools of the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighborhood Policy. Nevertheless, there is a danger of quite the opposite tendencies,

for example, in the form of a potential replacement and substitution of the legitimate institutions of the National Platform of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership for new coordination structures of the European dialogue on modernization. In order to avoid contradictions and disagreements, it is necessary to include the National Platform in the EDM structure as an equal institutional partner.

Third, **the concurrence of the EDM process with the course of the political process inside the country.** During the meeting on March 29th, European Commissioner Štefan Füle underlined that the EDM process begins not for the sake of the process itself, but it is focused on the joint working-out of effective tools of influence on the actual situation in Belarus. The contents of the European dialogue on modernization is defined not only by the situation “after the dictatorship”, but also the course of the current political process in the country. The developed projects of reforms should be accomplishable in the existing conditions and certain results can be achieved even today. However, it is necessary to understand that the implementation of full-fledged reforms will become possible only with the beginning in the country of the political dialogue of the authorities with the political opposition and civil society (“round table”). The European dialogue on modernization, in our opinion, is urged to promote this process, inter alia, by means of the coordination of positions between civil society and the political opposition in Belarus.

Fourth, **the necessity to pay attention to the organization of a direct dialogue of the EU with Belarusian society concerning a wide spectrum of socially significant topics, as well as the presence of a clear message addressed to the ordinary citizens of Belarus.** It would be expedient that the European Union sends Belarus’ society a clear signal about the European prospect for the Belarusian nation, by analogy with the 12 proposals accepted by the European Union in 2006.

The format and mechanism of the European dialogue on modernization potentially assumes a tripartite format of equal

participation of representatives of the European Union, Belarusian civil society, and political opposition, as well as the Belarusian authorities. The inclusion of the latter in the EDM does not seem possible in the actual conditions. Only in case of the beginning of political liberalization, the release of political prisoners, and the change of the conditions of the activity of civil society and political opposition, the participation of government officials will become real. There is a stable illusion that the inclusion of representatives of the Belarusian nomenklatura and officials in the EDM right now will make it possible to change the situation of reforms in Belarus or even spur democratization. But there is the total vertical dependence of all the levels of power and harsh centralization — none of them is able to make independent decisions and to represent the position of the Belarusian authorities in the EDM. Nonetheless, the format of the full-fledged tripartite dialogue is needed in the future because only in this case the possibility to implement modernizational reforms will be provided.

The European dialogue on modernization should be considered as a long-term and framework process. Nowadays, it is only a general basic structure for some future interaction with the start of separate processes inside of it (the work of expert groups to prepare reforms in the field of good governance, justice, education, economy, social sphere, trade). It is obviously necessary to supplement the work of expert groups with a parallel process of coordination and consultations with Belarusian civil society and political opposition concerning the further agenda and contents of the EDM.

The contents and concrete filling of the European dialogue on modernization results from several bases: the subjects of the joint intermediate plan, the purposes to achieve the common vision of European and democratic Belarus, the orientation on the full-fledged tripartite dialogue, and the account of the actual socio-economic and political situation in the country. The latter appreciably determines the admissible and possible forms of the European dialogue on modernization. There are three possible variants of the development of the EDM contents, depending on the internal political situation:

1) The **maximally propitious situation** for modernization and reforming comes in case of the beginning in the country of a public—political dialogue of the authorities with the political opposition and civil society. Only in this very case the projects of modernizational reforms and their instrumental support by the EU, defined in the course of the European dialogue on modernization, will be in-demand and have a chance to be carried out.

2) The **intermediate situation**: the liberalization of the conditions of activity for civil society and political opposition. In this case, representatives of the opposition and civil society can be provided access to the working-out of projects of state reforms as advisers and experts. The launch of this liberalization will also allow representatives of the authorities to become full-fledged participants of the structure of the European dialogue on modernization, which does not seem possible at all in the situation existing today. In this case, projects of reforms can be developed intelligently and discussed publicly. However, due to the absence of full-blown democratic conditions, the EDM participants will not have any guarantees of their normal implementation.

3) The **maximally unfavorable situation**: the absence of steps on liberalization on the part of the Belarusan authorities and/or the further deterioration of the conditions of civil society's activity. In such a case, the working-out of any packages of reforms within the framework of the European dialogue on modernization leads to the creation of non-realizable and unrealistic projects that have only theoretical importance. In the disadvantageous situation, the accent of the EDM should be placed from the questions of working out reforms to the questions of large-scale preparatory researches, monitoring of the corresponding thematic areas, and studying of the European Union's transformational experience so that, if there is a change of the situation in Belarus, the preparation of realizable projects of reforms could be started.

Besides actually modernizational plans, from our point of view, the European dialogue on modernization should spur the search for joint effective tools and actions of the civil society of Belarus and the

European Union aimed at changing the situation from maximally adverse to maximally favorable.

The European dialogue on modernization is a significant and potentially effective tool to start transformations in the country. However, its development faces the chronic problem of subjectness in Belarusian—European relations. On the one hand, the Belarusian authorities continue to exclude the possibility of their participation in the EDM on the conditions offered by the European Union, i.e. the equal participation of civil society and political opposition. Thereby, the Belarusian regime avoids in every possible way the situation created with the support of the EU when it will have to enter an equal dialogue with its opponents inside the country. On the other hand, the independent political groups themselves are not able to act as a united party in this dialogue. Also, the EDM reduces its intensity, facing the internal problems of the absence of full-fledged communication with Belarusian public—political groups (stakeholders) and society as a whole, with the disbalance of expert groups which look like consultative, but not like working expert groups, with the low presence in the EDM experts' work of actual researches of the spheres which are to be reformed, and with other questions.

The European dialogue on modernization is the last initiative among many other proposals and opportunities presented by the European Union for Belarus. Unlike the previous ones, the EDM contains the minimum conditions of joining for its potential participants, but it does not promise any big benefits either (in comparison with the Eastern Partnership). The EU offers Belarus not modernization, not its assistance in the necessary reforms, but a dialogue and conversation about it. Still, the Belarusian participants are not ready even for such a talk.

## Conclusion

In experts' opinions, disputes in pro-European public organizations, and even state propaganda, it is often possible to hear the argument that the European Union is not interested in Belarus. Ostensibly, today the EU is too busy with the solution of its inner problems and that it does not care at all of such a small country and its problems. This argument is used as an explanation of the deplorable condition of European—Belarusan relations and justification of the failures of Belarusians' actions in this direction. The European Union's "disinterest" is expressed today in tens of millions euros of technical assistance to the Belarusian state and public authorities, its help to civil society's development, reaction to all significant political events, mention of Belarus practically in all documents of the neighborhood policy, opening of special programs of cooperation... Certainly, it is possible to complain about the insufficiency of this assistance, to criticize wrong European approaches, the absence of a strategy concerning Belarus, to demand to immediately offer Belarus a prospect of membership in the EU, but, perhaps, the reason of the failures is not in Europe. The twenty years of the history of the relations of the European Union and Belarus show that the Belarusians themselves have missed, ignored, hindered, resisted, and have not been able to use the variety of possibilities to develop the European vector of relations.

The biggest problems in the relations between Belarus and the European Union have been caused by the uncertainty created by the

Belarusian party. In 1991—1992, independent Belarus and its parliament failed to express their desire to move towards Belarus' integration into the EU and, actually, missed their chances to use the tools of the EU enlargement policy. In the ensuing years, the window of opportunities to intensify these relations remained closed, but it was not noticed by the Belarusians. New possibilities appeared with the situation when the European Union was used as an intermediary in the internal political crisis in 1996—1999 and the unstable authoritarianism situation. Basically, these chances were not seized by Belarusian democrats because of their unreasonable hopes that this authoritarianism would fall soon and because they ignored the necessity of a public dialogue with the political regime. The EU neighborhood policy in 2003—2008 could not be used by Belarus in the whole completeness of its tools as the Belarusian authorities were not able to strive for democratic changes and because this policy ignored all other subjects, except for the state. The Eastern Partnership was used only partially by the civil society of Belarus with a view of its development; however, as a whole, this initiative was lost again. The European dialogue on modernization opened specially for Belarus in 2012 is one more potential tool of development, but there is nobody who can use it today. Neither state, nor structures of civil society independent of the state can participate in the EDM to the full extent: the former — because of the absence of the will to democratic changes and the latter — because of their inability to speak with Europe in a united voice. It seems paradoxical that the inflexible laggard multilayered and multi-subject European Union has managed to reconsider its policy several times, to change the set of its tools, and to propose new variants of cooperation, while the Belarusian approaches have remained basically the same.

And it does not have to do with the absence of democracy in the country, the political regime, and infringements of human rights, but with the chronic inability to form the actually independent Belarusian subjectness in Belarus. To think of ourselves as of being dependent on somebody (Russia, the EU, Belarusian power) is a characteristic national feature. Here, for many years, both Belarusian state and civil society structures behave the same, trying to shift their responsibility for the

country and for its foreign policy to somebody else. Such a situation paralyzes any interaction, any dialogue, which became a common norm of solving any problems in Europe. Dialogue demands a position, an answer from an independent subject who can speak on behalf of the country, the nation, or its significant part. However, all the attempts of the European Union to find out such subjectness do fail. In the polarized situation, the EU counts on a conversation either with the state, or with its opponents, but only if they (together or separately) represent the nation (or its part), possess jurisdiction (control or power) over the nation (or its part), and are responsible for the consequences of their decisions and actions. Thus, in Belarus, the state controls everything and even represents a part of society, but, unfortunately, it does not account for any consequences of its own actions. Its opponents do not account for anything, control nothing, and it is doubtful that they represent anyone; also, for many years, they evade any attempts to change such a situation and to reach a united and coordinated position. It is absolutely incorrect to blame the shortcomings of the EU approach concerning Belarus in such circumstances.

The solution of the contradictions in Belarusan—European relations can be found if there are changes inside Belarus and, probably, only at the expense of its national subjects. A national program, including the Europeanization of the country in the widest sense, can be an answer to the European challenge. The Cultural Policy program suggests only a possible, but, at the same time, meanwhile the only answer for Belarus.

## Annex. Aksana Shelest. Belarusan—European cooperation: news from the fields

*This text is written on the ground of the materials of the interviews carried out within the framework of the project “Support to develop the potential and network cooperation of Belarusian public associations and local authorities” in the end of 2007. Prominent representatives of public and state organizations that had participated in projects of the European Union and EU member states took part in the interviews (30 interviews). In a manner, we can see here the condition of opinions of Belarusian elites concerning cooperation with the European Union. We believe it necessary to place this text here as it is because during this time these opinions have not changed essentially.*

When we were working out a questionnaire for the interview concerning the problems and prospects of Belarusian—European cooperation, we vexed our mind with how to formulate questions for the people whose attitude to such cooperation might be negative. Our cautiousness happened to be unnecessary because among the respondents there was none of such people. All representatives of NGOs, social movements, and state structures, who were polled, treat

the cooperation of Belarus and Europe in a positive way, although with different degrees of enthusiasm and on different bases (from axiological to pragmatic ones), but — “*as a whole, positively*”. However, this is the only question which has got such rare unanimity.

**Cooperation between Belarus and Europe at the national level:  
the way the situation is seen**

Considering Belarusan—European cooperation to be a holistic process that includes a slew of directions subordinated, nonetheless, to a certain overall aim, it is necessary to understand the way the direct participants of this process realize these purposes, orientate in the situation which is common for all partners, correlate their activity with their understanding of this situation, and evaluate the development prospects. The prospects that open from our respondents’ positions, to tell the truth, do not inspire any optimism. However, at first, we shall talk about the purposes.

The perceptions of the purposes pursued by Belarus in its cooperation with Europe are quite various. The most often declared of them are:

- \* the development of democracy and civil society in Belarus (here, probably, it is possible to include desovietization, the overcoming of Belarus’ self-isolation and, it may be assumed, the “change of mentality”);

- \* European integration (in various variants — the introduction to the European Union, the European Council, the Europeanization of Belarus, integration with European institutions of civil society);

- \* Belarus’ economic development (including, the development of economic relations, investments, technologies, market outlets, etc.);

- \* the solution of a number of social and humanitarian problems (the quality of life, the environment preservation, help to children and the disabled, etc.).

The reconstruction of Europe’s purposes and motives of its interest in cooperation with Belarus, as it turned out, sometimes causes certain

difficulties. Nevertheless, the majority agrees that the purpose of Europe is to secure its own safety, while the concrete directions of cooperation (democratization, propaganda of the European values, ecology, etc.) are necessary for the “cultivation” of a “predicted and stable neighbor” that does not menace the “general safety” of Europe. The economic and foreign policy benefits of such cooperation, as well as the value for Europe of Belarus’ experience in separate spheres, are marked; one of respondents thinks that it is a norm of theirs, “They cannot live well while nearby there is someone who lives not well”.

In general, at the level of the purposes of Belarusian—European cooperation, which are declared by respondents, as a whole, everything is more or less clear. Still, some moments in their statements are disquieting, e.g. “Europe is culture; after all, we are Europeans”; “I do not know the exact purposes of Europe as I have never asked them about it”; “The purposes of Europe are not voiced”. Besides, despite the declarations of the necessity of cooperation and the positive attitude to the cooperation with Europe as a whole and with the EU in particular, participants’ personal attitude to the process of cooperation sometimes has an inconsistent, ambivalent character, “It is necessary to rethink the EU experience so as to understand if it is necessary to be on friendly terms with it or not”; “One of the purposes of cooperation for Belarus is to become a member of the European Union. Though, I am not sure if we really need it. It is necessary to think about it. On the other hand, what choice do we have? If we are not a member of the European Union, with whom are we then?”.

Now, we shall address the analysis of the current situation in the sphere of Belarusian—European cooperation at the state level. The majority of respondents do not want to conceptualize the experience of the latest years; however, the evaluation of the actual state of affairs is unequivocal enough: with few exceptions, the situation in the sphere of relations between Belarus and Europe is evaluated as a dead-lock. According to various opinions, this process started in 1996—2000; however, the basic stumbling block was the notorious “12 points” that created a rather ambiguous situation in the sphere of

Belarusian—European cooperation. Here, participants of the process of cooperation are divided into two opposite camps. One of them think that Europe should either soften, or cancel its requirements at all if it does not want the escalation of intensity both inside Belarus and in the sphere of relations between Belarus and Europe (however, practically everybody agrees that the requirements of Europe cannot be achieved in the nearest future and that they should be softened or formulated anew); the others think that the basic steps in the solution of this situation should be taken by the Belarusian party. Accordingly, different strategies of surmounting the current situation are offered.

The supporters of the first point of view place the biggest part of the responsibility for (and center their hopes on) the change of the situation on Europe. The Belarusian party (i.e. power) should also take some steps (more correctly — “small steps”), but such steps which will not cause cardinal changes and will not threaten its tranquil life. It is required from Europe to launch economic and humanitarian cooperation, to separate social programs from political ones, “not to interfere with Belarus’ internal affairs” and, at the same time, to increase the number of programs, allotted resources, etc.

The solution of the problem, from the point of view of the supporters of the second position, demands cardinal changes of the political situation in Belarus. The degree of the categoricalness and realness of the proposed steps in this direction is various; however, (apart from separate exceptions) the necessity of “dialogue”, “negotiations”, and even “trade” at the highest level is universally acknowledged. The basic problem is the subject of these negotiations (from the Belarusian party). It is admitted that there is only one political subject that is able to carry on negotiations at the state level in Belarus right now (sometimes, in different forms and with various degrees of blurring, among the mentioned ones, there are also the Presidential Administration, the Parliament, the Government, the Belarusian authorities, the state — as one of respondents characterized them — “the shadows of Belarusian power executed by citizen Lukashenko”). At the same time, for the majority of people, it is absolutely clear that with such

a subject it is impossible to come to an agreement on any real steps towards “democratization”, “change of legislation”, “construction of civil society”, etc.; therefore, the most realistic projects speak about a mutual “bargain” and “reciprocal concessions”, rather than any direct movement to the planned purposes. However, in the statements of two (!) respondents, there appears such a subject of changes at the national level as the “democratic community” and “civil society” of Belarus. Still, in the first case, it is admitted that it should be formed first and, in the second case, civil society is mentioned, most likely, simply as a rhetorical figure. The necessity of the formation of such a subject (civil society, opposition, or something else) is obvious, but it is impossible not to mention this topic because there is a flagrant absence of this theme in the statements of the respondents. Perhaps, it is caused by the frameworks of the interview dedicated to Belarusian—European cooperation. Maybe, the basic field of activity of the presented organizations has some relation to the solution of this problem. We would like to believe in it, although the conclusions are not going to be encouraging. We shall try to analyze this problem in more details.

One of the parts of the interview concerned the factors of the development of Belarusian—European cooperation, the analysis of the conditions and concrete actions, which could promote or hamper this process. First of all, the factors named by respondents had to be split in two groups:

- 1) those that constate the actual position, i.e. the conditions and features which are present right now and which render (will render in the future) a positive or negative influence on the development of the cooperation process;

- 2) those that make project conclusions about what changes (at different levels) would be able to affect the process of Belarusian—European cooperation in one way or another.

It is necessary to mark that the very modality of the answers to the questions of this part says much about the actual situation in the sphere of Belarusian—European cooperation. The overwhelming majority of the answers concerning the negative factors constate the current

conditions and existing problems in the implementation of cooperation from both Belarusian and European parties, while various changes which should take place in the future are mentioned as positive factors of development of cooperation. In other words, the things that exist right now are understood as negative factors, while the things that will have to be done are perceived as positive ones.

As a positive factor, from the Belarusian part, the interest of various subjects (“power”, local authorities, separate organizations, “Belarusians”) in cooperation is mentioned most often. However, as for the interest of the Belarusian authorities in cooperation with Europe, there is no single opinion: some respondents think that there is such an interest; others notice that the absence of the authorities’ interest in cooperation with Europe is one of the basic negative factors that hinder this process. According to some evaluations, the Belarusian authorities are forced to be interested in this sphere because of the negative tendencies of the development of their relations with Russia, economic problems, etc. (and the whole situation is described as a positive factor in the development of cooperation with Europe). Statements about the local authorities’ interest in cooperation (at least, in separate directions) can be met more often; however, the effectiveness of this factor is questioned by the very participants of European projects. When it comes to concrete situations of interaction, it is found out that the local authorities, even being interested (in name or in deed) in the implementation of joint projects and programs, do not undertake or cannot make any actions without permission “from above” and often refuse to have any relation to “doubtful” projects at all. By default, “doubtful” means everything which has to do with European initiatives and financing (even environmental projects) and if it concerns educational or informational programs, the local authorities’ reaction becomes predictable almost 100%.

Still, it is noticed that government officials get into a dual situation: on the one hand, at the level of state rhetoric and decrees sent “from above”, it is said that it is necessary to widen the sphere of cooperation with western partners, to draw the means of foreign funds in order

to solve specific tasks; on the other hand, one's participation in joint Belarusian—European projects is not only a troublesome business (especially considering multiplied bureaucratic obstacles), but also precarious. Therefore, any initiative in this area, first, should be coordinated at the “highest level” and, second, even if the answer is in the positive, it will be controlled by the authorities.

One more factor that spurs Belarus' development of cooperation is its geographical (geopolitical) position. Besides, one of respondents expressed an opinion that a positive factor is that the “Belarusians consider themselves to be Europeans” and another respondent said that in Belarus there is civil society which is formed and does exist and that it helps to build cooperation with Europe. Of course, both could foster Belarus' development and improvement of relations with the European Union; however, what such statements are based on is difficult to understand.

What should be changed in Belarus so that the situation in the sphere of Belarusian—European cooperation would cease to be dead-end and so that the process would start? Basically, rather global changes are suggested: from the “cardinal change of the political system” to the “change of the legislation” and the “opening of the borders” (which in our situation is almost the same). Some representatives of NGOs and especially officials from state structures anchor their hopes on the comprehension of the necessity to build cooperation with Europe on the top floors of power. In their opinion, the development of cooperation can be spurred by the “European choice of the Belarusian authorities”, “strengthening of contacts between parliaments” (still, it is not clear between which ones), and in general, eventually, “some reasonable people among the rulers of our country should be found one day”. Also, the development of cooperation with Europe would be spurred by society democratization (two mentions), the working-out of the “correct strategy” of cooperation, openness and readiness for cooperation (the subject is not specified), the building of cultural exchanges between countries. A possible opening of the Delegation of the European Commission in Minsk was mentioned two times as a

positive factor (still, it sounded somehow uncertainly, “Perhaps, the opening of the Delegation of the European Commission in Belarus will promote... If it opens, of course...”).

The list of the factors impacting negatively on the development of cooperation with Europe is much longer and substantial. Still, only two expressed comments concern the possibility of the further development of the situation, i.e. what changes in Belarus could hinder the cooperation process in the future, namely: the “strengthening of the totalitarian system” and the “authorities’ rigid reciprocal steps to democratization attempts”. The factors that today influence negatively the development of cooperation between Belarus and Europe, as for their sphere of action, can be split in three big groups. In the decreasing order of the frequency of their mentions, these are:

1) obstacles at the level of state structures (and in general — at the state policy level);

2) problems of development of the “third sector” and civil society of Belarus;

3) and, at last, the condition of the mass consciousness of the population of Belarus.

Besides, as a negative factor, one of respondents named the “absence of Belarus’ political self-determination”. It is possible to assume that it concerns Belarus as a whole.

At level of the state and state structures, the negative factors are fixed:

a) in the form of concrete purposeful (it is even possible to say ill-intentioned) actions complicating the implementation of cooperation with Europe: the creating of barriers and obstacles to organizations-participants of joint projects, prosecutions and pressure against active participants of the cooperation process, the total control of the activity of the organizations of the “third sector”, etc.;

b) in the form of the condition of the state management system and the existing state policy: “bureaucratism”, the “absence of the interest

in cooperation”, “legal nihilism at all levels of power”, the “absence of competent diplomats”, the “absence of the Belarusian authorities’ trust in European structures”, etc.

Basically, the majority of the expressed opinions concerning the obstacles on the way of the development of cooperation between Belarus and Europe have to do, one way or another, with the negative evaluation of the state policy in this sphere, i.e. the basic recognized player at the national level of cooperation is Belarusian power. The weakness of the positions of the “third sector” in Belarus is admitted by some representatives of NGOs, for example, “Even if all Belarusian organizations unite, even all of them together could hardly change the situation with the registration of projects. Different weight categories of the state and civil society”.

This notwithstanding, in the list of the negative factors working at the national level, it is possible to find out only four opinions concerning the conditions of the “third sector” and civil society in Belarus (the “absence of the unity of the third sector”, the “absence of public associations as a political subject”, the “activity imitation by some NGOs”, the “absence of the political elite and experts in Belarus”) and several opinions concerning the condition of the mass consciousness of the population of Belarus (mentality, stereotypeness of thinking, uncertainty in one’s own forces, etc.). Such an obvious “skewness” could be interpreted as a sign of the well-being and high degree of development of the “third sector” and civil society if not for the fact that among the positive factors promoting the development of cooperation they are mentioned as seldom as among the negative ones. If to remember that during the analysis of concrete steps in the development of Belarusian—European cooperation the state (power, authorities) is recognized as the basic (if not the only one) subject who has a possibility to influence the situation, then it is necessary to admit that at the national level of cooperation both civil society and NGOs (as those who represent its interests) are not presented at all (moreover, they are neither presented in reality, nor (with rare exception) present in dreams, i.e. in the reflection of the situation).

The evaluation of the factors which could spur or hamper the development of cooperation on the part of Europe does not provide any grounds for optimism. Among the positive factors promoting cooperation now, respondents mark the presence of the political will to cooperation, “democratism of Europe”, i.e. the ability to take into account various opinions, the responsibility of European partners, the understanding of strategic and economic benefits of cooperation with Belarus, as well as the allotment of resources to develop this cooperation. They outline the necessary changes which could affect positively the cooperation development such as the increase of the number and variety of programs for Belarus, the expansion of “contacts with civil society”, the perfection of the visa policy, the working-out of adequate approaches (as a variant — the “arrival of new people who are responsible for Belarus”), the incipiency of the “interest in Belarus as an independent political subject” (which is not very clear).

The basic negative factor hindering the implementation of effective cooperation, according to the pollees, is the European partner’s misunderstanding of the real situation in Belarus and of its cultural specificity, as well as the prejudgment and stereotypeness of perceiving Belarus. It has to do with common cultural factors (“the difference of mentalities” and “features of Belarus’ historical development”) and some technological aspects in the organization of the very process of interaction, which are insufficiently worked out. One of such aspects is the absence of “competent analytics” and monitoring of changes which should be put initially in the cooperation program. The second aspect is connected with the qualification and motivation of officials and experts who work within the bounds of the implementation of joint projects. The opinions of Belarusian participants of cooperation are various. There are purely emotional ones, “We need negotiations platforms, and not just a web-site; not only those all the same inefficient experts who have been coming to us from Europe for ten years in a row!”. There are many evaluative judgments resulted from the experience of the previous cooperation, “What hampered the cooperation? First of all, the European bureaucracy. Second, these questions were solved by the people who were not always competent in Belarus’ problems.

It means the question of competence leaves much to be desired”; “Sometimes, local experts’ competence is higher than that of “second-rate” European ones. Not always the smartest minds of Europe go to work in this sphere”; “Experts who come to Belarus come here for three days, they see you for the first time, and you see them for the first time”. One of the factors influencing this situation is the specificity of Belarus and the inability (or unwillingness) of European officials and experts to consider it, “Very often do we face the insufficiently qualified and interested work on the part of the officials who are directly engaged in it. The thing is that the work with the problems of Belarus is “single-piece”, i.e. it demands special attention, it is difficult to plan it, and it is badly predicted. Accordingly, it is inconvenient for any official because it does not keep within the habitual schemes, reports, etc. Therefore, there are people who are interested in and ready to invent some know-how, to approach it somehow creatively, but not always”; “And in Europe, there are simple officials who want to simply carry out projects as there is money allotted to these projects, and they have no time to understand our ideological subtleties”. There are also rather categorical statements, “A change of experts, a full and unconditional change of experts on Belarus — this is the first thing that must be done”.

The second frequent factor braking the process of Belarusan—European cooperation is the bureaucratism of European structures, the low rates of registration of projects, and in general the common “slowness” of communication processes while there are way too many papers to be submitted, approved, and signed. Besides, there are opinions that Europe imposes its interests on Belarus, has no complete vision of the development of the cooperation process, and consequently cannot carry out a consistent policy in relation to Belarus; “it is tied to the chariot of the Belarusan authorities”. There are also separate charges that at the expense of Belarus other countries’ interests are lobbied, as well as that some organizations—intermediaries act, to put it mildly, unfairly, “Intermediaries, both organizations and experts from the neighboring countries (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia), often, receiving money for us, receive it instead of us”.

The visa policy is also one of the most problem areas, often mentioned by respondents. The current EU visa policy causes different reactions among Belarusian participants of cooperation:

\* Bewilderment: “Sometimes, the logic of the delivery of long-term visas is not clear — oppositional politicians receive without problems and without queues long-term visas to European countries, while usual citizens should spend their time in long common queues. Why can’t I, the leader of a long-term, 2-year project, receive a visa for the term of more than three months?”;

\* Indignation: “I hate all these visa regimes which they have in all their embassies, except for the Swedish one”;

\* Suspicions of insincerity: “The huge barrier in the development of cooperation between organizations is visas. The procedure of receiving visas becomes more and more difficult, regardless of all the statements of the European Union concerning the opening of borders for simple Belarusians”;

\* Presentiment of problems in the long term: “After Lithuania and other countries are included in the Schengen Zone, it will be much more difficult to meet with partners; it will be more difficult to organize something and to go somewhere”.

Besides, the visa policy can be viewed in a wider context as one of the elements of the entire process of cooperation: “If the cost of visas raises and their reception procedure becomes more complicated, it will create bigger obstacles for contacts between people. And power will use it to form a negative image of Europe”; “The first thing that comes to mind is that it is necessary to simplify visa procedures, to lower the cost of visas, to refuse “the educational approach” in relation to Belarusian citizens, because power uses it very successively for its own benefit”. It leads to the following requirement, “It is necessary to change the visa regime, because right now to go somewhere, except Lithuania, is possible only through the oppositionists whom one knows”. We shall mark that the problem of the inadequacy of the visa policy in relation to Belarus and the need to revise it are also emphasized by partners from the European party who were polled during the project.

It is possible to separately mention a number of opinions, according to which a negative factor of the development of cooperation is Europe's support to political parties, "its orientation to support "political NGOs" ("Trojan horses", as one of respondents said), as well as Europe's unwillingness to cooperate with the Belarusian authorities. While there is a declarative recognition of the democratization of Belarus as one of the purposes of cooperation and the basic vector of the political development of the country, such statements look a little strange.

The perceptions of concrete steps, which should be made by Europe to overcome the existing negative tendencies, basically, cohere with the general vision of the situation by participants of Belarusian—European cooperation. Here, it is possible to specify several lines of activity.

First, it is a revision and updating of the position of Europe itself and of the European structures that are interested in cooperation with Belarus, the development of adequate approaches and of a complete and consecutive strategy of relations with the state structures of Belarus and with organizations of the "third sector". However, the vision of this strategy and priorities, which it should be based on, differs considerably. As a whole, here, it is possible to specify three quite accurately outlined positions:

- \* Supporters of the first position think that Europe has to refuse completely any forms of cooperation with the Belarusian regime and to direct its efforts to the expansion of contacts with the NGOs and civil society of Belarus.

- \* Supporters of the second position, who are more loyal to the existing power, are sure that it is necessary, first of all, "to build a dialogue" with the authorities, "to split social and political programs", to develop cooperation in concrete directions (the most "safe" ones, in the sense of their remoteness from the political process), and in general "not to interfere with the internal affairs of Belarus".

- \* The third position is a search for a compromise between the purposes of cooperation and the conditions of its implementation.

According to its supporters, the European policy in relation to Belarus should be aimed at spreading the democratic values and at Europeanizing Belarus, but simultaneously it has to be implemented not so rectilinearly. Here, the tool of solving the contradiction between the basic impossibility and the objective necessity to cooperate with the Belarusian regime is economic pressure and economic benefits (so to say, the carrot-and-sticks method). Real cooperation aimed at developing civil society and disseminating the democratic values should be carried out by means of the development of NGOs, independent mass media, etc.

The second line of activity concerns the direct interaction of European structures and funds with the organizations—participants of cooperation. According to respondents, the basic steps in this area should be a revision of the procedure of the selection and registration of projects, attraction of Belarusian experts, inclusion of representatives of NGOs and other interested parties in the planning of programs, improvement of professional skills of the European officials who are responsible for the implementation of concrete directions of cooperation. It is necessary to underline especially that one of the lines of activity which, according to some Belarusian participants of the cooperation process, Europe should pay particular attention to, is the formation of the unity of “the third sector”, “stimulation of the development of a consolidated position in Belarus”, which confirms both absence of such unity and indirect recognition of the inability of Belarusian public organizations and associations to independently consolidate and build relations with each other.

**The purposes, tasks, and circumstances of activity of the organizations—participants of Belarusian—European cooperation: problems and prospects**

The following level of the implementation of Belarusian—European cooperation, which has to be analyzed in order to receive an adequate picture of the process as a whole, is the organizational level, i.e. the level of activity of concrete organizations of various profiles that participate in joint projects. The purposes and tasks of the organizations—

participants of the cooperation process, which were voiced during the interview, can be split in the following groups:

\* First, it is **access to resources**, first of all, financial ones. The question of financing for Belarusian NGOs is extremely actual, and the European donors are frequently the basic (if not the only one) source of the survival of public organizations; therefore, it is no wonder that this position occupies the leading place in the rating of purposes (it is impossible not to quote a fragment of the interview of one of respondents, “What is your attitude to cooperation with Europe as a whole?” — “Positive. Thanks to it, we manage to survive”).

\* The following two (as for the frequency of their mention) groups of purposes have to do with **the development of the very organization—participant of cooperation** (expansion of a field of activity, increase of the professional level of workers of the organization, strengthening of the position of the organization at the international level, development of contacts, increase of its authority at the local level, etc.) and with **the studying of the European experience**, its application in the development of concrete fields of activity (entrepreneurship, women's movement, ecology, etc.).

\* Such purposes as **European integration** (Europeanization of Belarusian society, integration with civic institutions of Europe, representation of Belarus' interests in Europe, professional training for work in Europe on behalf of Belarusians) and **the construction of a democratic society in Belarus** (development of civil society, civic education, increase of legal culture, etc.) are mentioned less.

If to return to respondents' perceptions of the purposes of Belarusian—European cooperation as a whole, it is easy to find out that the gradation of the purposes at the level of organizations reflects the declared priority purposes of cooperation at the national level, only vice versa. The change of the priorities is obvious; in order to interpret it, we have to pass from the analysis of general perceptions of participants of cooperation to the analysis of the ratio of perceptions of various aspects of activity in each specific case.

The space of the activity described by means of the information received during the interview is set by the framework of Belarusian—European cooperation which demands to take into account the following contexts: the Belarusian, European and, at last, cooperation contexts, i.e. joint activity aimed at achieving purposes. This is way too obvious, but, nevertheless, necessary. (Otherwise, how, for example, to regard within such frameworks the opinions like “The purposes (of cooperation) are not voiced by Europe”? One thing is when this is an opinion of a simple person or the president of Belarus (they have the right to say that), but quite another thing is when this is said from a position of a participant of Belarusian—European cooperation. It means the purposes of partners not just do not coincide with our purposes, but they are simply unknown. Then, where do we cooperate?) Considering the set framework, as well as correlating the purposes of activity at different levels and the evaluation of the reached results, the analysis of the situation (circumstances of activity) and of the offered ways of its change, as well as axiological and motivational aspects, it is possible to mention the following types of activity (or types of actors?) presented in our empirical database.

**The highly specialized type.** To the greatest degree, it is characteristic of representatives of the organizations which are engaged in environmental and humanitarian projects. It is marked by a low degree of the actualization of perceptions of the purposes, tasks, and problems of Belarusian—European cooperation as such; the understanding of the cooperation purposes (from both sides) is limited to economic aspects and “an exchange of experience” in concrete fields of activity (in general, the terms “experience” and “dialogue” are pronounced so often and in such unexpected contexts that they become to look like incantations). Nobody reflects upon the situation in Belarus; they fix lots of negative factors complicating the implementation of purposes, however, they do not correlate these factors with the situation in Belarus (political, economic, and cultural—historical ones). It leads to the tremendous naivety of some opinions, for example, concerning programs of exchanges (“cultural, historical (?), linguistic, and others”): “It is necessary to

widen them as much as possible. If we are not allowed to go abroad, then let Europeans come to us". And then, probably, as a consequence of such programs of exchanges (as any other practical actions of the work with the population are not proposed): "I believe that in 5—10 years even in remote areas of Belarus nobody will say that someone "has sold his/her soul to the West" if he/she cooperates with Europe". The obstacles and difficulties in one's activity are basically explained by bureaucratic obstacles and formal—legal aspects of activity. Another obstacle is the political component of the process of Belarusian—European cooperation, which causes irritation and mistrust to Europe on the part of the national and local authorities, which, in its turn, touches other, "not political" projects and programs (the requirement "to separate political programs from social ones" appears in this very context).

In spite of that, it is necessary to do justice to ecologists and "humanists" — it is possible to trust the information received during the interview and they are really fans of what they do, they sincerely advertise the values which implementation their activity is aimed at. Still, the absence of a real situation assessment and of the ability to go beyond their specialization does not help to increase their efficiency and often simply brings all the results they have reached to naught. It has to do with the fact that they try to introduce the well-known "European experience" within the scope of ecological and humanitarian projects, but sometimes they forget that these projects are designed for Europeans who do have such conditions as the presence of local self-government, communities, initiative and responsibility of citizens, etc., i.e. the things that do not exist in Belarus and that have to be created, reanimated, or in general built from scratch.

However, within the framework of environmental and humanitarian activity, which really should be basically out of the political context, such self-restriction is explainable. But when representatives of the organizations, which are engaged in the development of civil society, human rights defending activity, and integration into the European educational system, start to pronounce such opinions, it

is necessary to pass to the following two revealed types of activity within the bounds of the cooperation process, which have to be called “imitating” and “avoiding”.

**The imitating type** is characterized by the obvious discrepancy of the declared and implemented purposes and values. When, say, while declaring the democratic values and acknowledging the presence of a dictatorial regime in Belarus, any activity of Europe aimed at supporting the programs directed on the change of the political situation is regarded as a negative factor. Thus, as a rule, separate thoughts look rational enough and, sometimes, even reasonable, but if we correlate them among themselves, there will be something antilogous. However, there are also “clinical” cases, which, for example, are reflected in this statement of one of respondents, “Belarusian officials are afraid of cooperation with public organizations. They do not know what it will turn into, what this organization is; what if it is some pro-American “Trojan horse” — we will let them in, and they will start destroying everything ... Officials are people, too; they are afraid of making decisions, of responsibility. It is necessary to make this process safe and comfortable for them”. As a “strategy” of building effective cooperation with Belarus, Europe is offered to establish “mutually beneficial” relations with the official authorities of Belarus, to refuse its attempts of influencing political processes, and to re-orient its efforts to cooperation in social and economic spheres. Thus (obviously or implicitly), it is proposed to play according to Belarus’ rules: “We have the vertical, and there is nothing to be done about it”. Through democratic rhetoric, there appear separate, quite illustrative phrases (the quote is long, but without a context it cannot be understood), “There were proposals to work not with Belarusian power, which is ostensibly illegitimate, but with youth and local officials, but it is useless. The authorities traced it at once and introduced draconian measures to limit students’ departure abroad. It was a reaction to this attempt of corrupting the youth”. Besides, it is said that there is a need to stop taking into account evaluations of the efficiency of activity of an organization presented by other public organizations (and in general “advisers from Belarus”) because they are competitors in the struggle

for financial resources. It is possible to assume that this very struggle is the only real purpose of this type of activity.

The following type of activity which can be found in the sphere of Belarusan—European cooperation can be called “**avoiding**”. While there is a rather adequate and rational understanding of the purposes and tasks of cooperation at various levels, it is characterized by a gap between the general understanding of the circumstances and conditions of activity in Belarus and the coordination of one’s own activity. There is an impression that when one passes from the analysis of the situation and strategy of one’s activity at the national level to the organizational level, one passes unconsciously to a “parallel world” where there are civil society, influential independent mass media, local self-government, etc. (meanwhile, in Belarus, according to the respondents themselves, none of these exists). However, at the level of the analysis of the conditions, which have developed in Belarus, our objective reality forces us to return from time to time to the earth, but, unfortunately, it does not lead to a change of the planning of the further activity and consideration of the real circumstances.

And, finally, the last type of activity (least presented in the database) — **Purposive Rational** (almost according to Weber). It is characterized by the accurate understanding of and adherence to the purposes of the whole process and by the understanding of one’s own place in it, taking into account the circumstances and restrictions imposed, on the one hand, by the context of the European values and immanent problems, which are in the bases of the European Neighborhood Policy, and, on the other hand, the actual situation in Belarus. According to it, there is a search for means and tools that are able to initiate a movement in the necessary direction. First of all, it says about the necessity of developing a complete long-term strategy of cooperation. “Complete” — i.e. to consider different spheres of cooperation and to provide the coordination and unity of activity of all subjects of transformations from both Belarusan and European sides, and “long-term” — i.e. it is admitted that the prospects of the achievement of the purposes are quite remote. One of the first necessary

steps (in the national scale) on this way is the creation of a system providing the analytics and monitoring of the situation in the sphere of cooperation and in general in the sphere of Belarus' movement to the democratic values and transformations. Besides, it is needed to create independent expert appraisal institutions both in Belarus and in European structures and to provide the publicity of their activity.

Of course, the presented constructs have an ideal—typical character (in the sense that they do not practically exist in the pure state in reality), although the first two exemplify real cases (the last of these types has the most ideal character). However, they can serve as a tool of diagnostics of the situation in Belarusan—European cooperation, updating the directions and working out programs of activity.

And the last thing. As a conclusion of the interview, respondents were offered to imagine that they had a possibility to make a short speech in the European Parliament so as to inform Europeans about everything they (respondents) would like to. In most cases, the contents of such speeches included generalities and offers of eternal friendship, or in general — they refused to voice any substantial statements, “They do know everything”. A rather insignificant part of the problems and drama collisions of the life of Belarus and of the “third sector”, which were mentioned during the interview, is included in these speeches. And it happens in the situation when one of the most often mentioned problems is the absence in Europe of the understanding of the real situation in Belarus and complaints that the voice of Belarus is not heard in Europe and there is nobody who could bring this voice there.



*Навуковае выданне*

Серыя “Беларусь для пачаткоўцаў”

**Ягораў Андрэй Генадзевіч**  
**Зуйкова Алёна Ўладзіміраўна**

## **Беларуска-эўрапейскія адносіны: гісторыя страчаных магчымасцяў**

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Падпісана ў друк 27.10.2012. Фармат 60x84/16.  
Папера афсетная. Друк афсетны.  
Ум. др. а. 4,9. Уч.-выд. а. 4,02.  
Наклад 150 экз. Заказ № 2230.

ІП Логвінаў Ігар Пятровіч  
ЛВ №02330/0494468 ад 08.04.2009.  
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ТДА “НоваПрынт”  
ЛД №02330/0552786 ад 25.02.2009  
Вул. Геалагічная, 59-4-10, 220047, г. Мінск.