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The invitation of A. Lukashenka to the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague has recently been the main topic in Belarus. Even those who are not particularly interested in Belarus could notice the dilemma of the Czech EU Presidency – to invite all the leaders of the Eastern Partnership countries or to bypass the legitimization of the authoritarian decade in Belarus.

The internal situation in Belarus is even more complex. Due to the internal political circumstances, substantial part of the Belarusian opposition's activities used to be focused outwards, mainly to the European Union. Now the opposition has to find ways to reform its political strategies since it has ceased to be a single legitimate representative of Belarus and its society. Thus Belarusian opposition has its reasons to object the dialogue that the EU started with the official Minsk under the current political situation in Belarus. The first contribution by Pavel Usov analyses in detail the controversies regarding the EU-Belarus relations and opposition's role in it.

The discussions on external environment would be incomplete disregarding the "Russian factor".

Though official Moscow welcomes the initiative, the Russian goodwill cannot be overestimated. Anatol Pankovski studies Russia's diminishing "energy superpower" ambitions, which eventually should lead to a softer attitude towards the CIS countries, including Belarus.

The Eastern Partnership is assumed as an opportunity for Belarus transforming the longstanding status quo. However, its success or failure depends on all the actors to be involved. The varying opinions are presented in this issue to better understand the tensions inside the country.

This edition also includes the supplement with a list of the Belarusian media platforms: online magazines, analytical portals and websites that unite various clusters of independent Belarusian experts. We believe these websites will contribute for a more comprehensive picture of the country that is once so close and so far from Europe.

Julija Narkeviciute, Editor

AUTHORITIES AND OPPOSITION IN BELARUS: NEW PERSPECTIVES OR NEW THREATS IN THE CONTEXT OF EU-BELARUS DIALOGUE

Pavel Usov, New Europe

The inclusion of Belarus into the Eastern Partnership and the invitation of members of the Belarusian ruling elite to the summit in Prague provoked a broad discussion and debate in the opposition and the analytical community. As usual, opinions differ.

Some representatives of the Belarusian opposition claim that the dialogue with A. Lukashenka will result in enforcing "the failing Belarusian ruler"¹

and that the dialogue is but a betrayal of the democratic ideas.²

Apparently, despite a number of political defeats revealing its incompetence, the Belarusian opposition has not yet exhausted its optimism and faith in its own strength. It believes that had the EU put just a little more pressure, the regime would have collapsed under the democratic forces. Alternatively, it would have at least given way to the Belarusian opposition and would have launched a liberalization process (possibly granting admittance into power).

1 Анатолий Лебедеко. Переговоры. Нужна перезагрузка, [http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2009/03/30/
ic_articles_410_161904/](http://naviny.by/rubrics/opinion/2009/03/30/ic_articles_410_161904/)

2 Белорусские демократы: Приглашение диктатора на саммит в Прагу – «индульгенция» его режиму, [http://
www.charter97.org/be/news/2009/3/16/16200/](http://www.charter97.org/be/news/2009/3/16/16200/).

The political rhetoric of a number of opposition leaders and online discussions suggest that the Belarusian opposition has chosen the EU as its scapegoat.

Speculations like that are illusive and self-deluding. First of all, taken as a whole or severally, the opposition is no longer ready to exert any influence on the Lukashenko regime, let alone to win power. Its expectancy upon the West is but another evidence. Secondly, its becoming increasingly obvious that the opposition forces expect to resolve internal political issues and decide on Belarus' fate beyond its borders and at the expense of the influence coming from Moscow and Brussels. Thirdly, it is also obvious that under no conditions will Lukashenko share his power with anyone.

The political rhetoric of a number of opposition leaders and online discussions suggest that the Belarusian opposition has chosen the EU as its scapegoat. Now all the blame for political failures of the Belarusian opposition as well as its own impotence can be placed safely on the shoulders of the European Union since the expected social revolution aided by the EU and scheduled, according to A.Kazulin, to summer-autumn 2009, might not take place.³ Therefore it is the EU to blame that it has contributed to the preservation of the political regime in Belarus.

The other part of the opposition members is less optimistic in assessing its own potential as well as the opposition on the whole, deeming it "failing and marginal"⁴, and therefore, incapable of presenting and defending its political interests. Coincidentally it positively assesses the dialogue initiated between the EU and Belarus.

The debate over the "necessity" or "needlessness" of the dialogue between the EU and Belarus within the Belarusian opposition is used as a mechanism to earn political capital in the run-up to the presidential campaign 2011 and to discredit opponents.

To give a balanced view of the new dialogue "the EU-Belarus" and its perspectives as well as to provide an overall assessment of the current relationship between the two political actors one must have a general understanding of the geopolitical and internal political state of Belarus.

There is no doubt that, as a result of a thaw in the relations with the European Union, the regime of A. Lukashenka harvests a number of political and economic dividends. Of course, one can hardly expect that with the beginning of the dialogue Belarusian economics will instantly become attractive for the European investments and business. Belarus has not yet created enough favourable conditions while the EU faces its own internal economic problems brought about by the global crisis. That is why it takes little interest in the economic problems of Belarus.

For A. Lukashenka the dialogue with Europe has primarily a political meaning as it will remove the stigma of an outlaw off him. However, the Belaru-

sian ruler has never laid particular stress on it. One may state with confidence that the "dialogue" will be used by the authorities for internal propaganda as a proof that the regime has pursued a proper internal socioeconomic policy, which has been acknowledged by the EU.

Besides, the improving bilateral relations will deprive the opposition of a very important bargaining issue which it uses for its internal information struggle with the regime. To be more precise, it will no longer be able to present the Belarusian regime as a dictatorship which civilized countries do not want to talk to. It should be pointed out that the dialogue will allow expansion of maneuvering in the relations with Russia, even though the regime will not change sharply its geopolitical preferences so that not to provoke Russia's harsh reaction.

Nevertheless, despite apparent benefits for the political regime, benefits for Belarus are also obvious, especially when viewed in a long-term perspective.

First, one should acknowledge that to date there are no internal threats in the country presenting danger to the stability and security of the regime. The regime has substantial political resources to suppress any moods of social protest. Should the crisis strike all elements of the economic system, national emergency situation could be introduced.

Second, the opposition is weak and divided, which denies it the opportunity of being a feasible political actor in Belarus. It is incapable of consolidating and acting as a united camp despite, as it might seem, favourable socioeconomic conditions created by the crisis. In the foreseeable future there will be no consolidation of the opposition. Therefore, even if elemental revolts broke out in the country, it would not be able to coordinate them. Naturally, given the political isolation of the country, the opposition would remain the only legitimate mediator or representative of Belarus in Europe; however, it would serve its own personal interests and by no means the interests of the country. Coming to terms with the political regime, Europe has divested the opposition this status, i.e., the possibility to position itself as a political force on the international arena. However, Belarus' destiny must depend neither on Lukashenka's games, nor on those of the opposition.

Finally, as has already been noted, the opposition expects and hopes that the deterioration in the socioeconomic situation of the country will result in its citizens, primarily workers, taking to the streets so that the "democratic forces" will be able to head them. However, according to social surveys, 72% of Belarusians do not intend to take part in the events of this sort⁵ (since in the country there is no proletariat which has nothing to lose). In addition, even given the situation of the "presumed instability", the opposition acts as a passive subject that merely waits for the society to move yet is unable to set up a propaganda and mobilization campaign. Besides,

3 Аляксандр Казулін: «Вельмі хутка Лукашэнка можа страціць уладу»,

<http://www.charter97.org/be/news/2009/3/14/16155/>.

4 Аляксандр Милинкевич: Оппозиция стала маргинальной, слабый, http://www.newsdate.by/politics_104512.html.

5 НИСЭПИ, Логика тревожных ожиданий. <http://www.iiseps.org/12-08-01.html>.

as is known, last year it was decided to turn to the evolutionary form of fighting the regime.

In this way, the isolation of the regime would not bring about any substantial changes inside the country, and even given comprehensive political influence of the West, the opposition would not sit at the "table of power". This is why sooner or later the European Union would have to review its policy towards the regime. Otherwise the EU would have to isolate Belarus until A. Lukashenka has died. Yet given the increasing pressure from Russia, absence of other geopolitical perspectives could lead to lamentable consequences for Belarus.

This is why the dialogue between Europe and Belarus must be viewed on the basis of geopolitical rather than political aspects. It is obvious that the dialogue which has begun between Belarus and the European Union certainly does not mean that A. Lukashenka will fly to Europe's arms and will turn Belarus into a real European state. This will not happen while the present regime holds power. Nevertheless this dialogue will be a constraining factor for A. Lukashenka so that he does not fly into Russia's arms once and for all. To date it is Russia that presents more danger to Belarus than A. Lukashenka himself. Should the process of integration with Russia develop, the incorporation of Belarus through a variety of geostrategic unions would destroy it as a state. The present regime has itself created favourable conditions for Russia to incorporate Belarus in the sphere of Russia's influence and now seeks to change the situation, pursuing its own interests and not those of the country. However, it would be impossible to find a way out of the geopolitical and economic dependence on

Russia had it not been for Europe, an alternative counterpoise to Russia.

Until now Belarus has found itself in several geostrategic and economic projects with Russia (the Russia-Belarus Union, CSTO, CIS, EurAsEC), but in none with Europe, even a formal-strategic one. In terms of the geopolitical influence Russia's domination on Belarus has been boundless and lacking alternative. This means that at any moment it could and still can interfere into internal political processes in Belarus. Given these conditions, even if changes had taken place and A. Lukashenka had been subverted, there would be no guarantee that the national, Europe-oriented political elite would come to power. Similarly, there would be no guarantee that Russia would not introduce a limited military commitment in order to "protect interests of its citizens". Moreover, under the conditions of a limited geopolitical maneuver and lengthy geopolitical isolation, the new leadership would not be able to redirect the country towards Europe, since this would require time, which Russia could use to its own advantage.

Expanding the dialogue with Europe here and now prepares favourable ground for the development of the relations with the EU and a progressive geopolitical estrangement from Russia. In future, should the authorities change, this will also contribute to prompt inclusion of Belarus into integration processes with the European Union.

PARTICIPATION OF BELARUS IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Anna Krevskaya, Independent Expert Community, www.expertby.org

April 2009 has become a fateful month for Belarus. This was predetermined in the end of 2008 when Europe decided to change its approach towards the regime in Belarus. According to the Europeans themselves, three crises forced them to give thought to such a change: the military conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine in January 2009 and the global economic crisis.

The reason of two above mentioned crunches was Russia. Therefore, it is evident that the purpose of the new European policy towards Belarus is to take it out from the Russian sphere of influence and include it into the orbit of European politics. The Eastern Partnership initiative was proposed as a mechanism for this. A substantial obstacle on the way to its implementation was the image

of the regime in Belarus. Thus April 2009 was set as a deadline for the regime to improve it. It was obvious that Europeans are decisively minded about the restoration of the contacts with the government of Belarus. In case Belarus refrains from human rights violations and does not make any hasty decisions, like a recognition of the independence of the separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the door to Europe will be opened to Belarus and it will be expressed in the invitation of A. Lukashenka to the summit of European leaders in Prague. However, the question of Belarus was still left open, or at least there was a wish to believe in that. Therefore, discussion about the Eastern Partnership initiative became one of the most relevant topics in political life of Belarus.

It is obvious that the Eastern Partnership initiative will be filled in with a number of concrete programmes in different spheres of cooperation. Since the initiative is still developing, it is too soon to speak

“Therefore it is evident that the purpose of the new European policy towards Belarus is to take it out from the Russian sphere of influence and include it into the orbit of European politics”.

For many it was especially uncomfortable to conceive that Europe legitimized the regime of A. Lukashenka since legitimation means surrender of the positions of those people who were eliminated from the political scene or from life.

about them. Without having a clear perception to what extent Belarus will have a possibility and wish to participate in these programmes, representatives of Belarusian oppositional political parties and civil society together with Belarusian officials were following the essential intrigue: will A. Lukashenka be invited to Prague, or not.

There were reassurances from the EU that the invitation to Belarus depends on how far the country moves towards democratization. Commenting the resolution on Belarus approved on the 2nd of April the head of the European Parliament delegation for relations with Belarus Jacek Protasevich stated that the relations between the EU and Belarus would normalize only after systemic changes in the country. Deputy of the EP claimed that the refusal to implement reforms would close the window of opportunities that needs to be kept open by the Belarusian authorities¹.

However, on the 17th of April A. Lukashenka received the invitation from the minister of foreign affairs of the Czech Republic K. Schwarzenberg to the constitutive summit of the Eastern Partnership initiative.

A number of representatives of the oppositional forces in Belarus saw their opinion ignored. The thing is that there were no real steps made by the Belarusian authorities towards freedom and democracy. This is evidenced by the dispersal of the solidarity actions on the 16th of April, by the prohibition to organize a commemoration of the Chernobyl tragedy in the centre of the capital and the relocation of the event to the outskirts of the city as well as by the threatening to refuse the oppositional party BNF the rent of its seat. Furthermore, a national Saturday collective assistance (so called Subbotnik - voluntary unpaid work performed collectively under the example of the collective assistance Saturdays organized in the USSR) was organized on the 11th of April. The government infringed the right of its citizens by forcing them to "voluntary" work for the state without being paid. What is more, it violated the right of Catholics to celebrate the Holy Saturday. Noticeable is the fact that "subbotnik" was organized namely on the Catholic Holy Saturday hereby the equality of religious confessions was offended.

For many it was especially uncomfortable to conceive that Europe legitimized the regime of A. Lukashenka since legitimation means surrender of the positions of those people who were eliminated from the political scene or from life. For example, tenth anniversary of the tragic death of Gennadiy Karpenko, a politician who challenged A. Lukashenka, was commemorated on the 6th of April. The official reason of his death was heart attack, yet his death was too useful to the authorities. The purpose of his political activities was the implementation of reforms directed to the formation of democratic,

pluralistic society. "G. Karpenko saw the way out of the constitutional crisis not only in the solution of the legitimacy, but also in the institutionalization of the democratic rights and freedoms such as the right to freedom of assembly as well as freedom of speech", - Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus H. G. Wiecek wrote about the G. Karpenko in the newspaper *Narodnaya Volia* on the 16th of September 1999. Unfortunately, the problems of legitimacy, rights and freedoms of Belarusian citizens are still not solved in Belarus. What is more, the article on criminal responsibility for activities in the unregistered organization came into force.

G. Karpenko believed that democratic norms, respect of human rights, establishment of the rule of law and prosperity of the people as a result of economic development can be achieved by organizing free and fair election recognized by the international community. Therefore Belarusian democratic forces need assistance of democratic countries situated close as well as far from Belarus. The question whether inclusion of Belarus into the Eastern Partnership initiative supports Belarusian democratic forces is now being discussed by Belarusian expert community, political leaders and representatives of civil society.

On the one hand, the above mentioned actors see the participation of Belarus in the initiative as a legitimization of the authoritarian regime, as a rendering of space for maneuver for A. Lukashenka as well as a possibility to receive credits for the preservation of the regime. On the other hand, it is an opportunity for Belarus to escape from the total Russian control and to integrate into the system of European energetic security in terms of the diversification of gas supplies. The latter issue is principal not only for Belarus but for Europe as well. Moreover, the participation in the initiative gives an opportunity to join the European political and cultural processes that would eventually lead to the pervasion of European values in Belarus that might ultimately change of the political model in Belarus.

Experts come to the conclusion that authorities in Belarus understand the possibility of such changes. Thus a full participation of Belarus in the initiative is not likely. The participation will be selective and local.

It is vital for the European politicians to properly conceive the political situation in Belarus as well as the personality of A. Lukashenka in order to prevent the overweight of the negative outcomes of participation for Belarus. Addressing the nation and the deputies of the National Assembly on the 23rd of April A. Lukashenka named the opposition the "enemies of the people" which is a serious signal to everybody who has ears. Namely from such a wording repressions began in 1937 that resulted in numerous USSR citizens' lives ruined in camps, members of their families labeled "family member of the enemy of the people", the rest compelled to live in fear and absence of legality. Labels "enemies

1 Яцек Протасевич Отказ от реформ закроет то окно возможностей для Беларуси,

<http://www.zasvobodu.net/news/jacek-Protasevich-Otkaz-ot-reform-zakroet-to-/?date=2008-11-16>.

of the people”, “fascists” appeared just after A. Lukashenka was invited to Prague. Hereby A. Lukashenka pointed that Belarus was invited without any improvements towards democratization. A. Lukashenka does not hide his triumph and takes the invitation as a victory. Besides, his contemptuous speeches towards Russia demonstrate that he supposes to have found a new source of legitimation and means to survive. Earlier such a source was Russia, now, he assumes, it will be Europe. While building relations with Belarus, it is essential to have in mind personal peculiarities of A. Lukashenka.

In order to properly assess the situation in Belarus as well as the future course of the realization of the Eastern Partnership programme, it is essential to maintain close contacts with civil society and opposition parties and movements in Belarus. That’s

particularly true when the potential of the civil society is growing. The latter fact can be evidenced by the internet campaign against the full-scale dactylography that is currently taking place in Belarus in the atmosphere of pressure and intimidation.

Moreover, it is important to let citizens of Belarus understand that their opinion will be heard and their interests will be the priority of the EU. This would help to overcome the disunity in the society that emerged as a result of the invitation of A. Lukashenka to the EU summit.

It is necessary to work out a mechanism of cooperation with civil society and political parties in Belarus as well as to set the instruments of diplomatic leverages on the existing regime in order to ensure the success of the Eastern Partnership.

PRAGMATISM AND MORALITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: CASE OF BELARUS

Andrei Fedarau

The invitation of Alexander Lukashenka to participate in the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague has become the mostly discussed subject in Belarus. It seems that discords over this point have definitively split the Belarusian opposition.

Disagreement over how to assess the cooperation of the EU with the official Minsk has appeared among the democratic forces even before Belarus was officially invited to take part in the new initiative. Thus, the visit of Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, to Minsk was assessed rather negatively by almost all the members of the United Democratic Forces presidium. According to Anatoly Lebedko, chairman of the United Civil Party, the visit could be named an event-disillusionment of the year 2009: “What did the country see? Solana in an agony of suspense Lukashenka’s waiting room. What did Belarus hear? Solana, who declared that he was leaving Belarus with optimism”¹.

On the other hand, Alexander Milinkevich, leader of the movement *For Freedom*, pointed out: “Solana had demonstrated a great attention of the EU and sincere interest in Belarus participation in the Eastern Partnership programme. I personally consider it as a good chance for our country”².

But after information about the invitation has appeared, much more rigid judgments could be heard. There were even comparisons with the sadly known Munich agreement of 1938, and “betrayal

of the ideals” has become the softest determination of Brussels behavior³.

The major part of the Belarusian analytical community perceives the EU’s rapprochement with Belarusian government as far from being pleasant but objective reality. The mostly common argument has been formulated by Alexander Feduta: “Inconsequential ‘thaw’ is better than consequent authoritarianism gradually transforming into dictatorship”⁴.

Who is right? In other words: to what extent the interests and principles, or pragmatism and moral, are correlating in today’s international politics?

The position of the adherents of moral politics looks very noble and therefore exceedingly attractive. By a quirk of fate the article *Dual-Purpose Morality* by a Russian essayist Aleksei Melnikov has recently appeared in the media. Claims to the EU, similar to those expressed by the Belarusian “partisans of morality” are formulated there with the utmost clarity.

For instance, it is impossible not to agree with the following assertion of the author: “Europe, that criticizes Russia for the lack of democracy, corruption, criminality, gladly scatters the questionable money of the Russian oligarchs, peacefully buys Russian gas using non-transparent schemes, and for the sake of its own advantage is ready to shut the eyes to any Kremlin’s “pranks”. Or with another one: “One Europe sincerely wants Russia to be transformed into liberal European democ-

“Inconsequential ‘thaw’ is better than consequent authoritarianism gradually transforming into dictatorship”.

1 Анатолий Лебедев, Переговоры. Нужна перезагрузка, <http://www.ucpb.org/?lang=rus&open=20273>.

2 Санкции как фигура умолчания, <http://www.belmarket.by/ru/15/30/946>.

3 Андрей Санников За визитом Соланы в Беларусь видна тень Мюнхена, www.charter97.org/ru/news/2009/2/19/15310/.

4 Александр Федута Партнерство и оттепель, <http://nmbny.eu/pub/0904/17j.html>.

Situation with human rights in contemporary China is much worse than in Belarus.

racy, another personalized in Jacques Chirac and Gerhard **Schroeder** rewards Vladimir Putin with the Legion of Honor and takes open service with authoritarian Russian regime”⁵.

One can make even more revealing examples of the discrepancy between the claims for moral foreign policy and reality. Say, situation with human rights in the Soviet Union during stagnant times (far from the most gloomy in its history) was much worse, than in current Belarus. Even the most irreconcilable opponents of today’s Belarusian authorities will not deny it.

However, Brezhnev was not included into any “blacklist”, he met Richard Nixon, and Helmut Schmidt, and Georges Pompidou. Far from all Western countries have refused to participate in Moscow Olympiad. And serious economic sanctions were not imposed on the USSR.

Situation with human rights in contemporary China is much worse than in Belarus. However, its leaders freely travel around the world, and heads of all leading democratic states do not shun visiting them. Finally, it is needless to speak about the scale of economic cooperation.

Then the natural question arises: have these facts only now become known to the Belarusian zealots of moral politics? On what grounds these critics are expecting Europe to take a moral position exceptionally in the case of Belarus?

True, Europe itself to a large extent promoted these illusions by taking considerably harder measures against Belarusian regime than, e.g. Turkmenistan or Azerbaijan, which are obviously not “better” in terms of their democratic standards.

Standing of the West is rather correctly explained by the known German analyst Alexander Rar: “Lukashenka is not Hussein and not Milosevich. He wages war with no one except the opposition parties, and simply did not reach the level of a global dictator, who has to be punished by the West. Nobody there wants to support Lukashenka but the fact is that he does not threaten the West... From the moral point of view, all this harassment of the opposition is terrible, it is criticized in the West but Lukashenka does not transgress the line

behind which much harsher politics and reaction can follow”⁶.

It is worth noticing that in autumn 2006 *The Economist* has predicted the current situation: Belarusian opposition, which moral superiority is evident, will interpret the Western contacts with Lukashenka as a betrayal. They are good people who were beaten and imprisoned, who have lost their relatives and fellow-men. In fact, the West will tell them: “Sorry, brother. From the geopolitical point of view, it is a sin not to use this chance”. For the time being it looks noble to reject Lukashenka’s intention to closer relations. Possibly it is true. But events in Belarus are developing very dynamically and soon the moment can come when debarred observation will be the worst, not the best variant⁷.

In defense of the EU one can say that an ideal behavior cannot be expected from any politician. The interests of their own countries and their own constituencies will always be closer to noble, but remote principles. Moreover, the West has already done a lot for the Belarusian democracy. Who knows, for example, what internal political situation would be in Belarus without its constant pressure over the regime.

However, there is one more, probably the most important circumstance - a threat for Belarus to be incorporated into Russia. Although there are no doubts that the Belarusian authorities do not favour the idea of a common state, in the case EU’s harsh measures or too strict conditions for cooperation Belarus will have no other choice but to move towards Moscow. It seems that such development would hardly satisfy the West and even less – the Belarusian democrats.

Regrettably, those who insist on maximally harsh attitude towards the Belarusian regime, either do not consider it to be a danger, or are not aware of its probability. But then much more efforts are required from those who are conscious of this jeopardy in order to prevent such development and cooperation with the regime cannot be excluded with one condition: the struggle for the democracy and human rights cannot be given up.

5 Алексей Мельников Мораль двойного назначения, http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2009/04/21_a_2977018.shtml.

6 Александр Рар Способы свержения Лукашенко себя исчерпали, <http://www.belgazeta.by/20061016.41/010190141>.
7 <http://www.inosmi.ru/translation/231842.html>.

OLD NEW RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARDS ITS BORDERLINE TRANSIT COUNTRIES

Anatol Pankovski, Nashe Mnenie

The term “old new” Russia policy towards those CIS countries which also form its borders refers to the return, though at a new level, to Yeltsin’s modification of the foreign policy regional strategy. In general terms, this marks the end of the period

of the “pragmatic turn”, i.e., implementation of the Putin doctrine.

At first sight the differences between the first and the second strategies are negligible: in both cases the economic or, to be more precise, the politico-economic lever (finances, energy supplies, trade

“Russia has encountered itself in isolation or semi-isolation after rolling back essentially to the borders that used to exist prior to Peter the Great”.

preferences based on political contracts or tacit conventions, speechless agreements of habits) was used as the main means to keep potential allies under control. This is a moment of continuity. Meanwhile, intonations accompanying the application of this measure are changing, since buying loyalty no longer needs validation of the benefit, pragmatics, and immediate commercial returns from collaboration, as used to be in the Putin era; yet again, as at the times of Yeltsin's rule, it appeals to affinity of a higher order. Points of application change too. While in Yeltsin's times the CIS countries were regarded as Russia's regions with all ensuing consequences: energy sources supplies sold at the prices of the internal Russia market, goods procurement paid for from the federal and local budgets, etc., the Russia of the third president already rests on the foundation of interstate relations constructed during the rule of the second president, and thus uses cheap credits rather than direct subsidies, discounts and special forums rather than internal Russia's prices for raw materials. This is a moment of estrangement.

Approved in 2008, the strategy of Russia's foreign policy had been created prior to the crisis, therefore, to take it as a guide would be shortsighted, to say the least. Firstly, due to the fact that it was based on the pre-crisis trends extrapolated into the future. It primarily applies to the environment of energy markets. Secondly, an inevitable gap emerges between the formal concept and its implementation in reality. Thus, for example, an ideological cliché “energy superpower”, which was on the minds of Russia's political class personified by Gazprom “General” Putin, has never been mentioned in the foreign policy strategy. In short, this document should have at least been read between the lines.

At the same time the main factors which Russia employs to construct its policy towards CIS countries under Putin were the following. First of all, the tendency to raise prices for energy supply has formed “superincomes” for the national budget as well as the budget of basic material companies. Secondly, this has given rise to the creation of a reserve that could be used as investment, including one into technological innovations and infrastructure. Thirdly, the growth of opportunities was equal to the growth of ambitions: ambitious infrastructure projects aiming to “directly” supply Europe and Asia with Russian energy resources, game of blocking alternative transit routes and so on - all this lead to the formation of a phantasm of an “energy superpower” and made one discern European countries as main Russia's partners rather than CIS states.

However, the next round of “the rape of Europe”¹ has concluded in a nearly traditional way: a global crisis that menaces Russia a profound political crisis

1 “The rape of Europe” – is a metaphor offered by Russian researcher Vitaly Tsymbursky to refer to the strategic focus of the Russian Empire starting with the times of Peter the Great until present. The essence is in ignoring internal spaces and aiming to absorb the Western limitrophe (Eastern Europe) in pursuit of dominance over Europe in general. Any cycle of “the rape of Europe” concludes with a cast-back to the borders situated eastward from the preceding ones.

(since the pyramid of energy companies' managers has almost converged with the pyramid of power), then – a series of minor “victorious” wars with the use of traditional and basic material weapon (Georgia, Ukraine), after which Russia has suffered a substantial fiasco, as even partners from CIS and CSTO, by resorting to the tactics of avoidance have not wished to legitimize the outcomes of the Russia-Caucasus campaign.

The subsequent changes in Russia's foreign policy might be predicted.

Russia has encountered itself in isolation or semi-isolation after rolling back essentially to the borders that used to exist prior to Peter the Great, and which it does not possess (see below). One should point out in passing that a sudden activation of the dialogue between Belarus authorities and the West started on August 12, 2008, when Russian ambassador A. Surikov blamed Belarusian leadership in non-performance of ally obligations (Belarus refused to acknowledge the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia). On the same day A. Lukashenka directed the head of the MFA to immediately improve the relations with the USA and Europe. Deficit of financial resources is, generally speaking, a background circumstance which stimulates the dialogue, but is far from rushing it. Russia's loss of the “civilizing” potential is quite a different matter. We believe that the Caucasian campaign made post-Soviet elite consider seriously two things. The first one is security, and Russia is not at all its source. The second one is legitimacy, and Russia is its doubtful source. We admit that A. Lukashenka uses the term “legitimacy” differently from the way it appears in political analyses. However it would be quite reasonable for Belarusian President to think in the following way: if Mr. Kokoity and Mr. Bagapsh are acknowledged by Moscow as Presidents of independent states on the same grounds as Mr. Karimov and Mr. Lukashenka, then where is justice? Or, is Moscow's acknowledgment not enough?

Secondly, the economic boom in Russia came to an end very quickly. During the last years consumption grew rapidly together with production of consumer goods and services. Yet as for traditional and new communications (roads, railways, pipelines, seaports, air carriage, telephony, etc.) as well as high technologies (e.g., new types of weapon), the situation was not so bright. One must admit that progress has undoubtedly been made in these directions. In particular, developments were made in the sphere of the new pipeline designs, new kinds of weaponry and so on. However, many of them await implementation in the nearest years and it makes their realization not likely due to the financial and economic crisis. The launch of the second high-speed route Moscow – Nizhny Novgorod is planned for the year 2009. The beginning of the construction of the Baltic Pipeline System-22 is scheduled for 2009, the Eastern Pipeline3 – for 2009,

2 Oil pipeline of the Baltic pipeline system.

3 Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean oil pipeline.

NEGP4 - for 2010. The rearmament of the Russian army with new types of weapons is scheduled for 2010 – 2015. Activation of the spaceport “Eastern” is planned for 2015. The list of major infrastructure projects whose implementation is now being questioned is much longer than has just been provided. The accomplishment of these projects could have severely decreased the significance of transit countries which surround Russia from all sides, and would have ensured the latter’s defense self-sustainability, without partners from CSTO.

The convergence of the two aforementioned tendencies provides for a dramatic collapse in the increased “pragmatism” of the Putin era. As has been said before, Russia is cast back to the borders which it does not have. Russian Federation has full-fledged state borders with Lithuania and China, equipped with a neutral zone, infrastructure, etc., whereas borders with Belarus, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Kazakhstan are virtually non-existent, since there only treaties on the state borders have been signed. However, the boundaries have not been demarcated, and even delimitation of the borders is still “to be completed”. The borders are not protected and are only equipped with elements of border infrastructure (customs terminals, border entry points are frequently “mobile”, set on the more developed communication routes). Had Russia managed to

settle a large-scale detour of the transit buffer, its next stage would be to create regular borders, which would make the decision-making regarding tariff regulations as well as other issues relatively easy. Now, forced to turn to countries functioning as its borders, Russia seems to be going back to Yeltsin’s times: “Brothers, may we pass with the goods?” Meanwhile, it is increasingly difficult to blackmail Belarus and Ukraine with the project BPS-2 and to hint allusively to Kazakhstan that “Baikonur” will only be closed in five years.

Given these circumstances a tactical-strategic choice emerges: one may use the weapon factor (Georgia, Ukraine), or to resort to the well-trying method of purchasing allies. Eventually Russia is beginning not so much to absorb the Post-Soviet space, as is frequently suggested, but rather is forced to use or develop defense (e.g., a unified air defense system with Belarus) and other infrastructure of neighbouring countries, to allot them credits and so on.

In this way, with respect to Belarus, the economic crisis does not at all mean abrupt shutdown of preferences of all sorts from Russia’s side. On the contrary, it means slowing down the process of refusing to use these preferences as a negotiations lever in a broad spectrum of issues. It is done so for the mere reason that as of today, the opportunities of blackmailing policy dealing with the detour are limited.

4 North-European Gas Pipeline.

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LIST OF BELARUSIAN ANALYTICAL CENTRES AND MEDIA PLATFORMS¹

JOURNAL *ARCHE*

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Website: <http://www.arche.by>; <http://arche.bymedia.net/>

Contacts: arche@arche.org.by; valer@arche.by; bulhakau@arche.org.by

Contact person: Valery Bulhakau, editor in chief, historian, philologist

WEBSITE *BELARUSSKIY PARTISAN (BELARUSIAN PARTISAN)*

Sphere of Activity: comments and analysis of current political events

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Contacts: bp.redactor@gmail.com

Contact persons: Pavel Sheremet, Svetlana Kalinkina (skalinkina@mail.ru)

NEWSPAPER *NASHA NIVA*

Sphere of Activity: Political and social developments in Belarus, challenges for Belarusian society

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Spheres of Activity: Domestic, foreign and security policies of Belarus, regional developments, European Neighborhood Policy, European and Euro-Atlantic integration, NATO, Eurasian and international security

Types of Activities: analysis and research, comments and interviews, round tables, seminars and conferences

Periodic Publications: E-Bulletin *Security Aspects* (Since 2009); E-Journal *Wider Europe Review* (since 2004); selected materials (paperback series – 3 issues)

Website: www.w-europe.org (with a special section of the Project *Windows on NATO* <http://nato.w-europe.org>)

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¹ Media platform is an online magazine/journal/website/portal that rounds up a cluster of independent Belarusian experts. Due to political circumstances in Belarus a number of independent experts have gathered around such media platforms.

The list is not exhaustive. To complement the list, please contact Julija.narkevičiute@eesc.lt.