



Dzianis Melyantsou is Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, Minsk. A graduate of History Department at the Mahilou State University, he then studied Political Science and International Relations at the Institute for International Relations and Political Sciences in Vilnius (Lithuania), where he defended his M.A. thesis in 2006. From 2006 until 2009, Mr. Melyantsou lectured at the European Humanities University in Vilnius.

Andrei Yahorau is director of the Centre for European transformation. He graduated from Belarusian State University, department of political science, and holds a master's degree in political science. Andrei Yahorau is one of the founders of the only specialized political science magazine in Belarus "Political sphere" ("The Palitychnaja Sfera") and he is the magazine's deputy editor. Since 2005 he has been an expert and the head of analytical group of the Humanitarian Techniques Agency.

CONTENTS

1	UPCOMING VILNIUS EAP SUMMIT: WHAT CAN BELARUS EXPECT?
1	WHAT THE EU SHOULD DO WITH BELARUS?
3	THE BELARUSIAN ISSUE IN RUN-UP TO THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SUMMIT IN VILNIUS

UPCOMING VILNIUS EAP SUMMIT: WHAT CAN BELARUS EXPECT?

The third Eastern Partnership summit will take place in Vilnius this November. As the EaP front-runners such as Ukraine or Moldova are dealing their internal political issues to reach the maximum in the summit, Belarus looks more passive than ever. At the same time Western diplomats and politicians are arguing should Belarus be represented in the summit at all. If yes, who could be the one, so the message of the EU would be clear: Belarus will not get "more for less".

It is well known that Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime uses the European integration vector as a tool to deal with its Moscow partners. While EU does not have really effective instruments to change the game in Belarus, the best you can get is not pushing it deeper into Kremlin's hands. Thus, this Bell issue is dedicated to the analysis of what could be expected in Vilnius summit this November.

In the first article an expert from Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies Dzianis Melyantsou states

that six EaP countries differ by three characteristics: geographic region, willingness to integrate into EU and political regimes. These factor help to understand it better why the countries reached different level of agreements with the EU in the recent years. Later, D. Melyantsou names the expectations of the EaP of Belarus and shows that current situation is far from it. Finally, some recommendations on what to do with Belarus are given.

In the second article an expert from Center for European Transformation Andrei Yahorau argues that EU had not enough tools and wishes to really implement the wanted changes in the EaP countries. EU understands that it is not wise to isolate Belarus, so the author says that the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs must not be included in a black list and it should not depend on who takes the place. A. Yahorau lists the tools that EU used on Belarus and sums up that no big deal regarding Belarus should be expected in November.

Vytautas Keršanskas, Editor

WHAT THE EU SHOULD DO WITH BELARUS?

Dzianis Melyantsou, BISS

Discussions have reemerged about the efficiency of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) program and ways to reform it in run-up to the third EaP Summit. The Summit can serve as an effective tool for Belarus to resume political relations with the EU if the country's leadership is ready for goodwill gestures and if Brussels shows patience and comes up with attractive incentives for cooperation.

Modest accomplishments of the EaP

Having set a goal of bringing six post-Soviet countries closer to the united Europe and helping them with reforms, the EaP initiative was a definite breakthrough in external policies of the EU. However, regardless of some progress in visa issues and negotiations on deep and comprehensive free trade agreements, the partner countries have hardly moved towards ambitious goals of the EaP during the last four years. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova - all originally seen as champions of the

Eurointegration - have been demonstrating setbacks in reforms during the last year, something irritating Brussels and putting new agreements to deepen the integration with the EU into a question.

What went wrong?

The European Neighborhood Policy was at the time criticized for its homogeneous approach to all neighboring countries with no consideration of regional and country peculiarities. Supposed to correct this shortcoming, the EaP has actually reproduced it on a smaller geographical scale.

The six EaP countries are divided by at least three characteristics: they represent two different and weakly interconnected geographic regions (Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus); they differ by a degree of willingness to integrate into the EU and, correspondingly, by their degree of readiness for reforms; EaP countries represent different po-

Having set a goal of bringing six post-Soviet countries closer to the united Europe and helping them with reforms, the EaP initiative was a definite breakthrough in external policies of the EU.

The Belarusian government was enthusiastic about the EaP at first; it joined the Prague Declaration and positively covered the new EU initiative in state media. But interest of Minsk in the EaP faded away later.

litical regimes: democracies, hybrid and authoritarian systems.

Regardless of the differences, the countries of the region are offered, in general, the same set of tools for cooperation and motivation, something provoking immediate criticism from certain partner countries. Naturally, the transformation potential of the EaP proved much higher for aspirant countries (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia), as compared to countries that are not aiming at the EU membership. However, even for these countries approximation with the EU was associated with major challenges for domestic political stability. And this is a reason behind fairly modest results of reforms.

For countries that are not willing to join the EU, the conditionality approach does not fully work, since it does not ensure sufficient stimuli for transformation. Metaphorically, the EaP is on the fence between two EU policies: that of expansion and an external one (the latter being in infancy).

The declared but de facto not respected values of relations with the partner countries constitute another large problem for the EaP (as well as the whole EU's foreign policy). The EU reviewed its neighborhood policy (ENP) in 2012, introducing 'more for more' concept. Applied also to the EaP, the concept meant more support to neighboring countries if they demonstrate progress in reforms. Nevertheless, Brussels is inconsistent in its policies vis-à-vis neighbors, primarily because of geopolitical and economic considerations. For example, the EU continues providing support to some countries, even if they do a poor job on their reform commitments, and introduce restrictive measures against others, if they appear less important for Brussels. Political prisoners in Belarus served a reason for sanctions against officials and enterprises, while political prisoners in Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Russia do not constitute a ground for the EU to at least limit high level contacts.

The contradiction between the geopolitical rationality of the European policy and the pro-democratization idealistic rhetoric of European politicians undermine both the EaP tools (e.g. the 'more for more' concept) and the image of the EU as a global player in general. Post-Soviet autocrats find many similarities between this contradiction and their own practices, becoming even more assured that neither demands nor tough statements of Brussels should not be taken too seriously.

Belarus in the EaP: expectations and reality

The Belarusian government was enthusiastic about the EaP at first; it joined the Prague Declaration and positively covered the new EU initia-

tive in state media. But interest of Minsk in the EaP faded away later. Today, no activities are taking place in the framework of the initiative, except for some flagman projects. What stands behind the dissatisfaction of Minsk?

First, the overall deterioration of political ties between Minsk and Brussels after the Presidential elections'2010 significantly influenced the cooperation in the EaP. The EU has resumed practices of coercive diplomacy towards Belarus (limited contacts, sanctions against officials, journalists and private businesses), something seen by Minsk as an attempted interference in internal affairs and a policy of double standards. Still, it is by far not the only reason.

Second, Minsk did not get what it expected from the EaP, namely the promised macro financial assistance and funds for infrastructural projects in multilateral dimension. The European Commission has never responded to joint proposals submitted by Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine. What came as a response was a demand to comply with political requirements as a condition for further cooperation.

Third, Belarus has never become a fully institutionalized participant of the initiative and, as a result, still feels discriminated. Belarus cannot participate in the bilateral dimension of the EaP, since the policy covers Belarus only partially; Belarus is excluded from the interparliamentary cooperation (Euronest) because of the non-recognition of the Belarusian parliament, though e.g. Azerbaijani MPs participate in the Euronest regardless of electoral problems in their country; Belarus is not represented at the highest political level at the EaP summits, contrary to other partner countries.

What to do with Belarus?

The Belarusian government is not expecting something extraordinary from the upcoming summit: they would definitely like an invitation at the highest level, no preaches on human rights violations in the country, and initiatives for more pragmatic cooperation. In current conditions, one can hardly expect breakthroughs in Belarus-EU relations, even if the government meets the main provisionary condition of Brussels and releases the political prisoners.

One should note that Minsk is not looking upon ties with the EU as an alternative to those with Russia, and has never done so. Brussels is not capable of giving Belarus what Russia is giving: multi-billion subsidies in exchange for demonstrative integration and assurances of everlasting friendship. What relations with the EU have always been for Minsk is an argument in negotia-

In current conditions, one can hardly expect breakthroughs in Belarus-EU relations, even if the government meets the main provisional condition of Brussels and releases the political prisoners.

tions with Moscow and a possible source of extra income and investments. This is why it is not realistic to expect the Belarusian government to limit its own powers in the country for modest suggestions of the EU in the framework of the conditionality policy. One should also admit that the EU has nothing to offer to Belarus today with a goal to stimulate quick reforms. So, goals should be adequate to opportunities.

Once political change occurs in Belarus, it will come as a result of a lengthy process of the society transformation, including the transformation of the elites. The EU can only make its contribution to this process at the current stage, by reaching out to the Belarusian society and rebuilding mutual trust with the government. The last point is very likely to be vital for effective work of the EU with Belarusian people. The experience of the EaP and the Dialogue on Modernization has clearly demonstrated this. Therefore, double-track approach could be appropriate in EU's relations with Belarus, but with a different meaning from what is usually meant by this term: on one hand, political relations with the government should be halted

down, something that will also broaden opportunities for civil society's activities in the country; on the other hand, communication with the Belarusian society must be reinforced by using every chance to facilitate programs for people-to-people contacts, educational and academic exchange, and, in a degree possible, to unilaterally liberalize procedures of issuing Schengen visas to Belarusian nationals. This could be a way for the EU to simultaneously pursue two goals: to socialize the Belarusian society and elites without pushing Belarus further to Russia's grasp.

In general, the EU needs to regain trust for the 'more for more' concept at the level of the EaP, by adding transparency and consistency to it. Conditionality policy must also be reconsidered by offering partner countries different sets of incentives for transformation with a view on their foreign policy aspirations and internal realities. With these conditions met, the Summit in Vilnius can provide a new substantial momentum for EU's Eastern policies rather than a mere display of another failure of one more European foreign policy initiative.

THE BELARUSIAN ISSUE IN RUN-UP TO THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SUMMIT IN VILNIUS

Andrei Yahorau, The Center for European Transformation

Strong weak neighbor

Improving relations with the EU's Eastern partners is among the priorities of the Lithuanian presidency. Scheduled for November, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit in Vilnius is of particular importance in this context, with the issue of Belarus inevitably on the agenda. Though not a central issue, it will be one of the focuses. The closest Eastern neighbor of Lithuania is still a black hole on the map of states neighboring the EU. Having no normal contractual relations with the EU, Belarus takes limited part in the European Neighborhood Policy and is lagging behind all the partner states in terms of approaching the EU. Belarus' falling out of the general trend is still a major challenge for the efficiency of the EU's Eastern policies. Only if Belarus showed some progress out of the stalemate, one could definitely speak about the success of the EaP.

However, it is not the only problem in the field. The overall dynamics of relations with the Eastern neighbors can hardly be called fully satisfactory. Solitary breakthroughs, similar to one with Moldova or, earlier, with Ukraine, frequently lead to a period of setbacks. The situation in all the partner countries with both rather authoritarian and rather democratic regimes depends predominantly on

their domestic context. The impact of EU policies on their developments is minimal and, something proved by the recent history, rarely sustainable. Achieving greater sustainability and effectiveness in its foreign policies is one of the most relevant problems of the EU. For this, a stronger focus on instrumentalization of EU's approach towards neighboring countries is needed. The EU should, first, develop proactive instruments of impact on domestic situation of the Neighborhood countries; second, adapt country-specific packages of measures, with a view on unique features of each neighbor; third, stimulate pro-European trends by using its potential of presence in the EaP region. Along with Russia, the EU is in fact a major trade and political partner for all Eastern neighbors; one could not imagine life and politics in these countries without taking into consideration relations with the EU. Ironically, the EU stays a weak neighbor. Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson have put it as a very successful metaphor, saying that the EU needs to turn its presence into influence.

Not a main question: should a minister be invited?

The level of political representation of Belarus at the EaP Summit in Vilnius is the most discussed and probably the least politically significant ques-

According to the logics that isolation of Belarus is not acceptable, the minister of foreign affairs should be excluded from the EU travel ban list.

If the European Parliament fails to contribute significantly to the content of proposals, the Belarusian issue is going to be discussed in a traditional rhetorical way.

tion regarding Belarus. The EU has resumed its restrictive measures against Belarus after events of 2010, including prohibition of high-level contacts. However, as compared to the previous period of sanctions, the package contained an exemption: the EU left an opportunity for contacts with Belarus through the minister of foreign affairs. Siarhei Martynau, the then-minister, was never under the European sanctions. It was a right decision on the side of the EU to demonstrate its openness to constructive dialogue with Belarus by keeping a channel for contacts. When Uladzimir Makei was appointed a minister of foreign affairs of Belarus, a collision emerged. On one hand, a channel for contacts and negotiations with Belarus was necessary. On the other hand, Makei had been black-listed by the EU as the-then Head of the Administration of the President for his involvement in the events of December 2010. The only channel left for a purpose of normal communication was automatically closed.

According to the logics that isolation of Belarus is not acceptable, the minister of foreign affairs should be excluded from the EU travel ban list. Such an exception should be done only for the minister of foreign affairs, whoever occupies this position. It enables the EU to stick to its values and avoid lowering the level of demands on Belarus and people who are personally involved in rights violations, but also to demonstrate good will and leave the doors open for Belarus. In terms of political effectiveness, inviting the minister of foreign affairs to the Summit in Vilnius and excluding him from the ban list is the most correct step. However, it will definitely cause a wave of negative reactions both in Belarus and the EU from the politicians who rhetorically adhere to the idea of 'non-cooperation' with Lukashenka's regime.

The main question: how should EU build its policy vis-à-vis Belarus?

The overall approach of the EU towards Belarus is more important and politically significant. In today's situation, the EU is using a following package of foreign policy tools to impact Belarus. Tool 1 is the restrictive measures against the officials responsible for human rights violations as well as businessmen and enterprises presumably linked to supporting Lukashenka's regime. Tool 2 is a set of measures to support the civil society and political opposition in Belarus. And finally, tool 3 is the technical cooperation of the EU with the Belarusian state, including the so called sectoral dialogues of the European Commission with correspondent Belarusian ministries on energy, economy, regional development etc. This package of tools has obviously failed to change situation for the better in Belarus during the last two and a half years since December 2010.

The European Dialogue on Modernization (EDM) constitutes another attempt to grabble new tools for work with Belarus. However, after its launch a year and a half ago, the EDM has never turned into a space or a process to generate new ideas or approaches towards Belarus. Twofold position of the European Commission and the European External Action Service was one of the reasons behind it. On one hand, they declare commitment to the strategy of engagement with civil and political organizations of Belarus through multi-stakeholder exchange and the dialogue primarily "by Belarusians, for Belarus, about Belarus". On the other hand, any proactive attempts by pro-European public actors and stakeholders of Belarus to influence goals, the idea and concept of EDM were limited in any possible way. Yet, what comes as the weakness No. 1 of EDM is an inability of the Belarusian civil and political forces to express a consolidated position and agree on actions in the framework of the Dialogue. EDM as it is now has never gone beyond the concept of a study circle for a pool of experts. It has never included state representatives, state experts or properly members of civil and political forces. The Dialogue participants now sadly represent no one but themselves, so far away from the original idealistic concept of multi-stakeholder exchange. Therefore, with no new acceptable package of tools towards Belarus by now, the Summit in Vilnius becomes a hostage of developments in Belarus. Should a significant improvement of human rights situation occur in Belarus by September, the EU will be able to return to its previous package of tools, which was in action during the 'thaw' period in 2008 to 2010. If such an improvement does not happen, the current tools will stay in place with all the doubts considering their efficiency.

Parliamentary debates

Hypothetically, a proactive strategy of relations with Belarus can be formulated at the stage of drafting a report by the European Parliament. The process was initiated in the EP Committee on Foreign Affairs in the autumn of 2012 by Justas Paleckis, a Lithuanian MEP from the group of socialists. The provisional version of the report has since then gone through the first round of discussions in the Committee, facing the traditional problem of polarity of European politicians' views on Belarus. In fact, there are three groups of opinions in the EP. First: the Belarusian regime controls the situation in Belarus and enjoys silent support from the majority. The EU should take it as it is and try to build cooperation with the regime or to identify pro-European regime officials and engage with them. The second group of opinions focuses on a need to stimulate multilateral public dialogue of civil society and Belarusian authorities in the country. With the civil society

Just like the EU, Russia apparently has no sufficient leverage of impact on Belarus' domestic situation. So, the factor of the Eurasian Union will not be determinative for EU-Belarus relations during the upcoming Summit

obviously incapable of such a dialogue, the efforts should be made to support the civil society players. The third group of opinions sees the current regime in Belarus as an absolute evil, so the EU must take all measures possible to cast it down. This group adheres to the harshest rhetoric of rejecting any contacts with the Belarusian establishment and acts as a supporter of tough measures, including the economic blockade.

These divisions perfectly fit the divisions inside Belarus where civil and political actors share very similar views on possible ways forward for the country. This situation is a major obstacle for developing a new package of tools vis-à-vis Belarus. The European Parliament can hardly be expected to come up with a well-articulated concept of the EU policy towards Belarus by September. A new attempt to integrate the contradictory beliefs is likeliest to result in some solution which strongly resembles the current policy.

The regional aspect

If the European Parliament fails to contribute significantly to the content of proposals, the Belarusian issue is going to be discussed in a traditional rhetorical way. The EU will have to publicly evaluate the situation in Belarus, with a note on the situation of democracy and human rights in the country. The Declaration on Belarus fulfilled this role at the previous Summit in Warsaw. The document was met negatively by the Belarusian authorities and not backed by other EaP countries, as the EU proved unable to engage with EaP countries against the Belarusian regime. The interests of regional cooperation prevailed over the interests of political association with the EU even for the countries where the EaP is a success story.

Given the negative experience, the EU is unlikely to repeat an attempt to win support of EaP countries for a joint position vis-à-vis Belarus. The two years since the previous Summit saw no indications on the side of EaP countries to follow the EU on Belarus rather than their own interests of bilateral cooperation.

The emerging Eurasian Union is another part of the context for the Vilnius Summit. Russia is constructing a geopolitical alternative to the EaP, seeking to regain the geopolitical leadership in the EaP region. Belarus can only be interested in this initiative provided Russia continues the policy of subsidies to the Belarusian economic model. It is already clear today that Belarus will make every effort to postpone signing political agreements and their practical implementation if they do not meet the country's pragmatic interests. Just like the EU, Russia apparently has no sufficient leverage of impact on Belarus' domestic situation. So, the factor of the Eurasian Union will not be determinative for EU-Belarus relations during the upcoming Summit.

The minimum program

To summarize all the aspects, we can argue that the upcoming Vilnius Summit is highly unlikely to bring some comprehensive decisions on Belarus. The maximum program of reframing the overall set of tools vis-à-vis Belarus is unrealistic. So, the minimum result achievable in today's circumstances is to ensure a symbolic participation of Belarus in the EaP context, to demonstrate that it has a place in the orbit of the European policies, and to reopen the channel of diplomatic communication on the level of a minister of foreign affairs.



TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEXT ISSUE OF
"BELL", PLEASE CONTACT:

Vytautas Keršanskas

Phone: +370 5 2705993

Fax: +370 5 2736953

Email: vytautas.kersanskas@eesc.lt

EASTERN EUROPE STUDIES CENTRE

This publication has been produced with the financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the coordinators of the study and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Nordic Council of Ministers, nor of the Eastern Europe Studies Centre.