

Arms deals, Ostrogorski Forum videos, economic forecasts – Ostrogorski Centre digest

In July, analysts at the Ostrogorski Centre discussed arms deals between Belarus and Russia, developments in Belarusian-Ukrainian relations and the smear campaign against Svetlana Alexievich in the Russian media.

We also uploaded video recordings of the Ostrogorski Forum 2017 – a conference on Belarus-EU relations, security, and identity that took place in Minsk in June.

The Belarus Policy database was updated with several economic papers, as well as analyses on human rights and education.

Ostrogorski Forum 2017

On 19 June, the Ostrogorski Centre held its 2nd Ostrogorski Forum, entitled ‘Belarus in the new environment: challenges to foreign policy, security, and identity after 2014’. The conference featured widely-respected experts with both independent and pro-government views and was aimed at establishing a respectful dialogue. You can see videos of each of the three panels with names of the speakers below.

Panel 1. The normalisation of relations between Belarus and the EU after 2014: results and problems.

Speakers:

Andrej Liachovič, director of the Centre for Political Education

[Sergey Kizima](#), Head of the Department of International Relations at the Academy of Public Administration

Moderator – [Valier Karbalievič](#), expert at Strategy Analytical Centre

Panel 2. National security and defence of Belarus in conditions of economic crisis and rising international tension: achievements and failures.

Speakers:

Alexander Gelogaev, military commentator

[Aliaksandr Špakoŭski](#), head of the Current Concept project

[Dzianis Mieljancoŭ](#), senior analyst of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies

Moderator – [Aliaksandr Aliesin](#), military commentator

Panel 3. The official policy of identity after 2014: has ‘soft Belarusianisation’ been implemented?

Speakers:

[Vadzim Mažejka](#), expert at the Liberal Club

[Andrej Dyńko](#), chief editor of NN.BY portal

[Piotra Piatroŭski](#), researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of NAS of Belarus

Moderator – [Valier Bulhakaŭ](#), chief editor of ARCHE Journal

Analytics

Siarhei Bohdan analysed [the recent arms deals](#) between Belarus and Russia. At first glance, Russia seems to be arming Minsk. This fits with conjectures that the Kremlin is becoming increasingly hawkish and Minsk and Moscow are colluding to put their regional and Western opponents under pressure.

However, a more scrupulous analysis of such arms deals and the armaments the Belarusian army already possesses paints a different picture. Moscow refuses to bolster the steadily declining Belarusian military's capacity to conduct offensive operations, including joint large-scale operations with Russia.

Alesia Rudnik discusses the [smear campaign](#) initiated against Svetlana Alexievich in the Russian media. The sharp reaction from Russian media outlets and politicians can be explained by the fact that many of her statements relate to 'sore points' of Russian politics: the war in Ukraine and Russia's role in it, the promotion of the concept of the 'Russian World', and confrontation with the West.

Alexievich, who writes in Russian, has made statements that completely contradict official Russian propaganda. Many public figures in Russia perceive this as a threat or an attempt to change Russian public opinion on issues important to the Putin regime.

According to Igar Gubarevich's [article](#), Lukashenka's recent visit to Kyiv demonstrates that Lukashenka and Poroshenko have developed a close personal rapport. The two countries' governments share an interest in stronger economic ties; they also have a fairly good understanding of how to build them. Belarus will never willingly jeopardise Ukraine's security. In return, Ukraine understands that it cannot realistically expect more than neutrality from Belarus in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Despite the fact that they belong to opposing geopolitical alliances, Belarus and Ukraine still need each other to withstand Russia's pressure. Their close bilateral cooperation will be instrumental in making both countries stronger.

Comments in the media

On the [Political Mirror programme](#) on Polish radio, Ostrogorski Centre analyst Ryhor Astapenia discussed whether Minsk managed to gain the sympathy of western states, the possibility of the Belarusian military joining international peacekeeping missions, and how arrests of top officials and businessmen help improve the economic situation in Belarus.

On Polish radio, Igar Gubarevich discussed the [state of Belarusian-Moldovan relations](#). Despite recent setbacks in bilateral trade, Moldova remains an important economic partner for Belarus in the post-Soviet space. Unlike Russia, Belarus has no objection to the geopolitical orientation of Moldova towards Europe. On the contrary, Minsk seeks to use this factor to its own advantage.

On Radio Liberty, Siarhei Bohdan discussed the [political implications of the new brand](#) of Lidskaje beer, which features a map of the Belarusian Popular Republic. According to Siarhei, it creates a destructive political myth and drives the debate on the BPR project into a populist and revisionist direction.

Belarus Policy

The Ostrogorski Centre continues to update its database of policy papers on BelarusPolicy.com. The papers of partner institutions added this month include:

- Alexander Chubrik. [Macroeconomic forecast for Belarus, No. 1 \(14\), July 2017](#). IPM Research Centre, 2017.
- Aleh Mazol. [The influence of financial stress on economic activity and monetary policy in Belarus](#). BEROC, 2017.
- Dzmitry Kruk, Dzmitry Kol'kin. [Belarusian Economic Review, Q1 2017](#). BEROC, 2017.

- Aliona Zuikova, Andrei Yahorau, Aksana Sheliest. [Belarusian human rights defenders' view on human rights activity and questions of cooperation between Belarusian human rights organisations](#). CET, 2017.
- [The analysis of the draft Code of Education](#). Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee, 2017.

Think tanks in Belarus are encouraged to submit their research for inclusion into the database by [emailing us](#).

The Ostrogorski Centre is a private, non-profit organisation dedicated to analysis and policy advocacy on problems which Belarus faces in its transition to market economy and the rule of law. Its projects include Belarus Digest, [the Journal of Belarusian Studies](#), [BelarusPolicy.com](#), [BelarusProfile.com](#) and [Ostro.by](#).