
2018 saw two important developments for the Journal of Belarusian Studies. We welcomed Alena Marková from Charles University in Prague and Siarhei Bohdan from Free University of Berlin as the Journal’s co-editors.

Second, the Journal has been accepted for inclusion in the SCOPUS database, the world’s largest citation index of peer-reviewed literature. This will no doubt improve the journal’s attraction for both readers and authors. The Journal is already indexed by EBSCO, ERIH PLUS, Google Scholar and other databases.

This issue features contributions from Belarus, the Czech Republic, Germany and the United Kingdom. Our authors look at a variety of topics, although on this occasion the content mostly relates to the Soviet period of Belarusian history – including coverage of protestant communities in Soviet Belarus, the cult of Stalin, nation-formation in Belarus, and Belarusian émigrés in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Thomas Bohn and Rayk Einax from Justus-Liebig-University in Germany draw on extensive sources and analyse how the Pentecostals of Soviet-era Belarus managed to succeed in preserving their common faith, despite a restrictive environment that brought constant pressure from the militia and KGB. They argue that the Pentecostals’ perseverance and ‘moral courage’ posed one of the biggest challenges for the Soviet state at its periphery and the Soviet rulers failed to force them into submission.
Alena Marková from Charles University in Prague wrote her article on the basis of the Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies, which she delivered in March 2018. She argues that *Belarus’s processes of nation-building and nation-formation* are unique in the context of other European national movements. She contrasts them to post-Soviet neo-Belarusization, which took place from 1990 to 1995. Despite these both being rather brief periods, they had a profound effect on the formation of the Belarusian national and state.

Aliaksandr Huzhalouski from the Belarusian State University analyses *the cult of Stalin in Belarus*. He discusses its peculiar tools such as everyday political education and various political campaigns, the cult in literature and art, as well as the strengthening of it through place names. He points out that Stalin’s cult of personality formed within the confines of a much broader Soviet society-building project which was based on paternalistic, illiberal and authoritarian values. However, Soviet Belarusian society was not monolithic in exhibiting its fawning devotion to the dictator and the author analyses the resistance to the establishment of Stalin’s cult of personality.

Daniela Kolenovská from the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic examines *the history of Belarusian émigrés in interwar Czechoslovakia*. These emigres went through different stages in their relations with the Czech authorities. The article concludes that the anti-Soviet nature of the new Belarusian programme was politically anchored in Germany while the Czechs preferred Stalin’s antifascism to Hitler’s anticommunism. This split caused a fatal lack of Czech or Slovak willingness to protect Belarusians against Soviet despotism after the Second World War.

Book reviews in this issue cover the *Ballads of Uladzimier Arloŭ* written by Arnold McMillin, a review of a new book *Politics and Politicians in Soviet Belarus* by Angelika Pobedonostseva Kaya, as well as Adam Coman’s review of a book...
on “the Jewish Revolution” in Belorussia and its impact on economy, race and the Bolshevik power. The issue also includes a traditional annual overview of activities of the Anglo-Belarusian Society written by its chairman Brian Bennett.

The Journal of Belarusian Studies continues to accept submissions on a rolling basis and welcomes contributions from both younger and established academics on all aspects of Belarusian studies.


Yaraslau Kryvoi

Editor-in-chief

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The 4th Annual Belarusian Studies in the 21st Century will take place on 29 March 2019 at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) in London, UK. The Ostrogorski Centre co-organizes the conference in cooperation with University College London and the Belarusian Francis Skaryna Library and Museum. To view a provisional programme for this year’s conference, please click here.

This year, the Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies will be delivered by Dr Anaïs Marin (France), Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus. Dr Marin will speak about the Belarusian nationalism in the 2010s
and the outcomes of the so-called ‘Soft Belarusianisation’. Other speakers will include academics from distinguished European universities and practitioners from state and civil society organisations. The topics will include both historical and contemporary Belarus-related issues.

Topics and speakers

The conference will feature a number of distinguished speakers from Belarus, Czech Republic, Hungary, France, Poland, and the United Kingdom. This year’s speakers represent a range of well-reputed education institutions, including Charles University, Central European University, University of Glasgow, and University College London. Moreover, the conference will feature several speakers representing state organisations and civil society initiatives, in particular, Kacper Wanczyk from Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Paul Hansbury from the Minsk dialogue initiative.

The conference will cover both history and contemporary Belarus-related issues. James Robertson-Major from the University of Glasgow will speak about the memory of Chernobyl in post-Soviet Belarus. Alena Marková from Charles University will present her research about the national emancipation and post-soviet Belarusization of the 1990s. Paula Borowska from the University College London will discuss traditional forms of social capital in Belarus.

As for contemporary Belarus-related issues, the conference will focus on foreign policy and social-economic problems. Paul Hansbury from the Minsk Dialogue initiative will speak about the current events in the Belarusian foreign-policy. Hanna Danilovich from Middlesex University will cover multi-age discrimination in personnel management practices in Belarusian manufacturing companies. Kacper Wanczyk from Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs will discuss the situation of the Belarusian “patrimonial” economy at the edge of chaos.
2019 Annual London Lecture

The Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies will be delivered at 6 pm on 29 March 2019 by Anaïs Marin (France), Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus. The topic of this year’s lecture is Belarusian nationalism in the 2010s, a case of anti-colonialism? Origins, features and outcomes of ongoing ‘Soft Belarusianisation.’ Dr Marin will speak about the phenomenon of ‘Soft Belarusianisation’ and its potential outcomes. The abstract of Dr Marin’s lecture is available below.

Dr Anaïs Marin. Source: Spring96

The past decade has seen the emergence of a new type of nationalism in Belarus, aka ‘soft Belarusianisation’. This trend differs from earlier, mostly top-down (elite-led) episodes of nation-building – the Belarusisation of the 1920s, the nationalists’ movement that followed perestroika, and the “Creole nationalism” incarnated by A. Lukashenka since the mid-1990s. Instead, Soft Belarusianisation appears as a bottom-up process stemming mostly from civil society. It would be wrong to consider it as a traditional revivalist or genuinely grassroots phenomenon, however.

Whereas signs of a timid national awakening appeared back in the early 2010s, two sets of factors contributed to shaping
and accelerating soft Belarusianisation: exogenous factors, notably Russia’s efforts at re-establishing its domination over the so-called “Russian World”; and domestic ones, mainly the Belarusian regime’s benevolence towards soft Belarusianisation, the rally-around-the-flag potential of which Minsk is obviously seeking to instrumentalise.

Would Soft Belarusianisation, therefore, amount to an anti-colonialist process? Russian opinion-makers, who label it as “anti-Russian”, certainly perceive it as such. Against this backdrop, the Annual Lecture will explore the possible outcomes of the current soft Belarusianisation: can it help to consolidate Belarus’s sovereignty against Russian appetites, or, conversely, does it carry with it the threat of increased Russian aggressiveness?

Dr Anaïs Marin is a political scientist specialized in international relations, Russian-Eurasian, and border studies. She holds her PhD from Sciences Po Paris, where she studied international public law and comparative politics with a focus on post-communist transformations in Central and Eastern Europe. As a Belarus expert, she has worked with several European think tanks, notably the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA, Helsinki, 2011-2014), the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW, Warsaw) and the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS, Paris) as a non-resident associate fellow (2017). Since November 2018 she also holds the pro bono mandate of UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2012.

Conference’s Programme
Friday, 29 March 2019

- 10.00- 11.30 Social Movements
- 11.45 – 13.15 National Identity
- 14.45 – 16.00 Foreign Policy
- 16.00 – 17.15 Economy and Society
- 17:15 – 18:00 Presentation of the new Issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies
- 18:00 – 19:15 Annual Lecture on Belarusian Studies by Dr Marin followed by Q&A

Saturday, 30 March 2019

- 11.00 – 13.00 Belarusian Literature Section and tour of the Skaryna Library and the Belarusian Church

All ticket proceeds will support the funding of the conference and lecture. This event is a non-profit. If you are unable to afford the price of the ticket or more information on the Annual London Lecture or the conference, feel free to email belauk2018@gmail.com.

- A provisional conference’s programme is available here.
- The registration is available here.
Crackdown on media, online casinos and IT squad – Belarus civil society digest

Belarusian authorities initiated a new wave of journalists’ detentions. Blogger detained in Hrodna for cooperation with Belsat TV.

TBM called to list Belarusian as native language during the upcoming census. Expert communities released Belarusian Yearbook 2018.


Belarusian army recruits for IT squad. Belarus legalises online casinos.

This and more in the new edition of Belarus civil society digest.

Civil society

Media crackdown in Belarus. Last week, the police raided the newsrooms of several leading media outlets, including the Belarusian major independent media TUT.BY portal and BelaPAN news agency, and detained at least 18 journalists. An unprecedented wave of journalists’ detentions started on August 7 under a criminal investigation into alleged unauthorized access to paid services of the government-owned BelTA news agency. By 10th August, all the detained journalists were released.

Bloggers and journalists under pressure. A criminal case has
been opened against Brest blogger Siarhey Pyatrukhin on the charge of “an insult inflicted in a public statement”. Blogger from a Homiel region Andrey Pavuk was detained for cooperation with Belsat TV. In Hrodna, the police seized equipment from journalists working with Belsat.

**Belarus’ MFA is the most open state body of the country.** The Ministry of Education is the most closed, according to a study by the Political Research Institute *Political Sphere*. The findings are based on 21 in-depth interviews with Belarusians CSO representatives.

Belarusian studies

*TBM calls to list Belarusian as native language during the upcoming census*. Head of the Belarusian Language Society (TBM) and MP Alena Anisim addressed to the Belarusians to recall that the next census would be held in 2019. She urged the citizens to claim the Belarusian language as native that contributes to strengthening the independence and national security of Belarus.

**Belarusian Yearbook 2018 released.** The annual edition presents a comprehensive analysis of the key developments and current status of the main sectors of the state and society in 2017. The book is published under the aegis of the Agency for Social and Political Expert Appraisal and *Nashe Mnenie (Our Opinion in English)* expert community.

**International Congress of Belarusian Studies will not take place in 2018.** The preparatory work has been conducted for the Congress to take place in Belarus since late 2017; however, the organizers met ‘technical and organizational obstacles’. Like all previous events, in 2019, the 8th Congress of Belarusian Studies will be held outside of Belarus.
Ecological activities

**Project on monitoring of small rivers started in Polesse.** The participants will monitor a condition of rivers, lakes, and wells and conduct 20 campaigns on water examination and coasts cleaning in border regions of Belarus and Ukraine. The project is co-funded by the EU and implemented by Pinsk executive committee and *Interakcia* Foundation from Belarusian side.

A landscape of Belarusian Polesse. Source: sputnik.by

**Alternative Energy Market environmental forum** was held on July 27, in Minsk. An event was dedicated to renewable energy sources in their most unexpected manifestations and organized by the cultural centre *KORPUS* and *EcoDom* CSO. The forum’s program includes a fair of eco-initiatives, a demonstration site, real stories of users of renewable energy sources, an environmental film festival, etc.

**Business Bicycle contest kicks off in Minsk.** The goal is to find and encourage companies that prefer to use environmentally friendly transport, a bicycle. From August 1 to August 31, the contest organizers will monitor the activities of companies in social networks and award the best. The contest is organized by the Minsk Bicycle Society and the
Summer festivals

Sprava festival took place on August 4-5. International community engagement festival Sprava (Deal in English) is meant to celebrate Belarus’ historical and natural landmarks, modern art and music. The organizers are a group of enthusiasts who together with local residents turn a peninsula near Lake Chereiskoye into a new cultural venue.

CSOs presented themselves at FSP festival. Freaky Summer Party (FSP) is one of the most popular festivals in Minsk that gather thousands of people. On July 28-29, a zone of public partners presented various civic initiatives: from a public campaign against homophobia to improvisational theatres. For example, at a Green Network spot, it was possible to sign and send a postcard about the climate change.

Women’s Business Festival in Brest was held on August 4. Women who already had a business and would have liked to present it at the festival were invited to the participation. According to the organizer, Brest Regional Development Fund, one of the
objectives of the event was the unity of values, thoughts, and ideas of the women’s business community.

Other

Belarus is the best friend of Ukraine. 74% of Ukrainians treat Belarusians positively – this is the best indicator among all countries in the world. Earlier, Russians similarly spoke about Belarus.

Cyberwarfare IT squad to appear in Belarusian army. Up to 60 people are to be recruited for the information technology company of the Belarusian army. The IT trend in Belarus is to be taken to another level. Belarus Security Blog welcomes the establishment of IT squad as a positive, albeit belated.

Belarus climbs to 38th position in E-Government Development Index (EDGI). The country has moved 11 positions up to make it to the top 40 countries in the Very-High-EGDI level group for the first time. The UN E-Government Survey is compiled for 193 countries every two years.

Belarus legalizes online casinos. The new presidential decree will help to minimize the capital outflow to other countries. It will limit the Belarusian citizens’ access to online games, which are organized outside the national segment of the Internet.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.
Established in 1965, the Journal is oldest periodical on Belarusian Studies in the English language.

**Between Local and National: the Case of Eastern Belarus in 1917**

The 2017 issue of the Journal begins with an article authored by Lizaveta Kasmach. Her recently completed PhD, written at the University of Alberta in Canada, deals with the Belarusian nation-building in the context of the First World War and Revolution. Her article here analyses the challenges of national mobilisation of Belarusians in eastern Belarus in 1917. At that time the February Revolution in Russia opened up new opportunities for national activists to engage in politics.

Lizaveta highlights two key obstacles which prevented activists from succeeding: the legacy of decades of Russification and the local (rather than national) identity of the Belarusian population. During that period, people were avoiding clear-cut national identities and instead identifying themselves with a certain region or settlement. In accordance with people’s strategies for survival, they did not imagine themselves as members of a separate Belarusian nation.
Belarus in the Congressional Record 1873–1994

Tatsiana Kulakevich from Rutgers University analyses Belarus in Congressional Record between 1873 and 1994. The author highlights the importance of diaspora activities in the United States, which helped to place Belarus on the world map in the minds of the American political elite. From a voiceless territory under Russian influence Belarus became a separate country suffering from Communism and deserving the right to national independence.

Doctor Francis Skaryna and the Heavens: Astrology in the Life of a Sixteenth-Century Book-Printer

Uладзімір Кананоўчык writes about Francis Skaryna, one of the first East European book printers, who laid the groundwork for the development of the Belarusian language. Although the profile of Skaryna has been analysed in the literature, his interest in astrology has not been properly explored. Francis Skaryna was also a medical practitioner with a keen interest in astrological prognostication.
The appearance of the symbol of a sun charged with a crescent moon in his most famous engravings may be attributed to Regiomontanus’s influence on Skaryna as well. The article of Uladzimir Kananovich resulted from his presentation at the second annual conference of Belarusian Studies which took place in London in March 2017. The conference was organised by the Ostrogorski Centre in cooperation with University College London and the Belarusian Francis Skaryna Library and Museum.

Speakers from Belarus, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, the United States and other countries presented and discussed Belarus-related research. The conference panels covered Francis Skaryna’s work and legacy, problems of Belarusian national identity, the foreign policy of Belarus and comparative politics, social and political movements, and Belarusian language and literature.

The main conference was followed by the Annual Lecture on Belarusian Studies, delivered last year by Dr Ales Susha, deputy director of the National Library of Belarus and chairman of the International Association of Belarusian Language and Culture Specialists. The annual lecture, as well as podcasts of all conference panels, can be found online on Soundcloud.
Reviews


This issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies also includes the annual report of the Anglo-Belarusian Society prepared by its chairman and former British ambassador to Belarus Brian Bennett.

The journal accepts submissions on a rolling basis and welcomes contributions from younger and established academics on all aspects of Belarusian studies.


On Saturday 25 February, Ostrogorski Centre organised the Second Annual London Conference on Belarusian Studies in cooperation with University College London and the Belarusian Francis Skaryna Library and Museum.

Speakers from Belarus, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, the United States, and other countries presented and discussed Belarus-related research. The conference panels covered
Francis Skaryna’s work and legacy, problems of Belarusian national identity, foreign policy of Belarus and comparative politics, social and political movements, and language and literature.

The main conference was followed by the Annual Lecture on Belarusian Studies, delivered by Dr Ales Susha, Deputy Director of the National Library of Belarus and Chairman of the International Association of Belarusian Language and Culture Specialists.

Selected papers from the conference will be published in the Journal of Belarusian Studies. The conference programme is available here and pictures from the event are here.

Podcasts from the conference are available below.

Prof. Yarik Kryvoi, Introductory remarks

Dr Iryna Dubianetskaya, Belarusian Bible translations in the European cultural process

Uladzimir Kananovich, The Prague Slavonic Bible by Francis Skaryna (1517-1519): between the market and personal devotion.

Prof Sergejus Temcinas, The Right-Hand Sign on Skaryna’s Portrait: A New Interpretation.

Vitali Byl, When a single word matters: the role of Bible
translations in the witch-hunt in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Dr Nelly Bekus, Building commonality and politics of re-statisation in the conditions of hegemonic states: case of Belarus.

Dzmitry Suslau, Historical simulacrum: The Minsk upper town reconstruction.


Dr Simon Lewis, Towards a cosmopolitan history of Belarusian culture: Belarus in the nineteenth century literary imagination.

Stephen Hall, Learning a new normal: did the Euromaidan begin to liberalise the Belarusian regime.

Peter Braga, Belarus–China relations.

Kristiina Silvan, Echo of Komsomol? The development of
Belarusian youth organisations in the post-Soviet era.

Aliaksandr Herasimenka, Transformation of the Belarusian political landscape in the era of digital platforms.

Viktorija Rusinaite, Transnational subjectivities of Belarusian political nomads.

Prof Arnold McMillin, The border between Poland and Belarus as depicted in the work of contemporary writers.

Shiori Kiyosawa, Language status planning and national language policy in Belarus: the legal protection of the Belarusian language.

Kristian Roncero, Why West Polesians have the most original anniversaries, or the noun “year” across Slavonic languages.

Dr Alexander Susha, Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies
The 2016 issue of the Journal largely resulted from a conference organised by the Ostrogorski Centre and the UCL School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies in London in March 2016.

The conference gathered around 20 scholars of Belarus from the United Kingdom, Germany, United States, Canada, Poland, and France. Three papers were selected for publication alongside the annual lecture on Belarusian Studies delivered by Professor Andrew Wilson.

**Banditry in the North-Eastern Regions of the Second Polish Republic in the 1920s**

In the issue’s first article, Aleksandra Pomiecko of the University of Toronto writes about the bandit-partisans of West Belarus in the 1920s. She notes that the history of the Second World War has often overshadowed less well-known parts of Belarusian history, such as the anti-Bolshevik movements on the territory of Belarus.

The article analyses portrayals of bandits in newspapers to understand local perceptions in Belarus. The bandit Ataman Mukha exemplifies the ‘heroic’ and ‘cultlike’ effect of bandit organisations, and his portrayal illuminates local sentiments and perceptions. Collectively, the article seeks to describe local sentiments towards this phenomenon in the borderland
region, which has traditionally been viewed in historiography from the perspective of occupational forces.

### World War II Criminals in Belarusian Internet Mass-Media: The Cases of Anthony Sawoniuk and Vladimir Katriuk

Veranika Laputska of the Polish Academy of Sciences analyses Nazi war criminals in Belarusian Internet media discourse, discussing the cases of Andrei (Anthony) Sawoniuk and Vladimir Katriuk. The author distinguished between state-owned, ‘neutral’, and oppositional media coverage of the two war criminals.

![Image of two men in military uniform](image-url)

The author concludes that Russian propaganda wields profound influence on the Belarusian mass-media. She notes that rather than coming up with their own explanations, Belarusian state mass-media often merely echo the Russian media. This differs from the approach of ‘neutral’ and opposition newspapers, which in the majority of cases try to remain objective or oppose the messages of the Russian mass-media.

### When Autocracies Have No Respect for the Nobel Prize

Ina Shakhrai of Humboldt University in Berlin examines the reactions to Alexievich’s 2015 Nobel Prize win in Belarus and Russia. She focuses on the interconnections between the common Soviet past of the countries and the spread of nationalist sentiments in the post-Soviet space following the Ukrainian crisis. She argues that Alexievich’s dismissal of autocratic regimes, alongside her identity – encompassing Soviet, Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian elements – prevents her from becoming a unifying figure in Belarus and Russia.

### Belarus: from a Social Contract to a Security Contract?

Professor Andrew Wilson of University College London looks at how Belarus has transitioned from a social contract to a
security contract after the start of the crisis in Ukraine. He observes a triple shift since 2014 as Russia became more aggressive towards its neighbours and Lukashenka shifted in a more statist direction, followed by part of the old opposition.

Belarus has not been invaded, but a sense of threat, and a desire to avoid conflict, has led to a certain closing of ranks. Professor Wilson notes that it would be much easier for Russia to impose their own man at the top rather than break the bonds between the leader and the elite, or between the leader and society.

Reviews

Dźmitry Papko of Warsaw University reviews a new collection of texts by Valiancin Akudovič, one of the most renowned Belarusian philosophers. According to the review, Akudovič proves that Belarusian language, history, and culture are less important to the process of constructing the nation’s collective identity than the mere existence of the Belarusian state.

Peter Braga of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies analyses three articles on Belarus-China relations and the commitment of the Belarusian authorities to a high-risk strategy to bring in Chinese investment. The Secretary of the Anglo-Belarusian Society Brian Bennett also gives an annual account of the most important activities of the Anglo-Belarusian Society.

- The paper version of the Journal is available to purchase here.

Audio podcasts from the conference ‘Belarusian Studies in the 21st Century’ held in London in March 2016 became available online.

The conference served as a multidisciplinary forum of Belarusian studies for researchers of Belarus in the West covering a wide range of topics – from history and foreign policy of Belarus to public art and digital engagement.

The Ostrogorski Centre and the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies organised the conference in partnership with Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum, Anglo-Belarusian Society, and the Journal of Belarusian Studies.

The conference gathered around 20 speakers and moderators from the United Kingdom, Germany, United States, Canada, Poland and France. The conference panels focused on Belarusian history, politics, foreign policy and political science. Selected papers will appear in the new issue of the The Journal of Belarusian Studies.

Several presentations from the conference are available below as podcasts.

The Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies, Professor Andrew Wilson, UCL SSEES. Explaining Lukashenka's Survival.
Aliaksandr Herasimenka, CAMRI, University of Westminster, United Kingdom. **Comparing digital engagement and mobilisation in Belarus and Ukraine.**

Yuliya Brel, School of Public Policy and Administration, University of Delaware, United States. **Belarus – a modern dictatorship.**

Ina Shakhrai, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany. **When autocracies have no respect for the Nobel Prize.**

Stephen Hall, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, United Kingdom. **The lessons given by the bison to the bear: Belarus teaching Russia authoritarianism.**

Peter Braga, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, United Kingdom. **In search of a third wing? Belarus–China relations and balancing amid the Russia–Ukraine conflict.**

Siarhei Bohdan, Freie Universität Berlin and Ostrogorski Centre. **To survive in the shadow of Big Brother: increasing elements of neutrality in Belarusian foreign and security policies in the 2010s.**
Paul Hansbury, St Antony's College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom. *An awkward partner of Moscow: some thoughts on Belarus-Russia foreign relations.*

Dzmitry Suslau, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, United Kingdom. *Constructing urban narratives: contemporary public art in Minsk.*

Lena Borise, Harvard University, United States. *Pretonic Prominence in the Aŭciuki Dialect of Belarusian*


Air Base Suspended, Seeking Support in Asia and Africa, Belarusian Studies —
Ostrogorski Centre Digest

In December and January the Ostrogorski Centre analysts are busy analysing Minsk’s complicated games in foreign policy and security affairs, finalising the most recent issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies and organising a conference on Belarusian studies.

It appears that Belarus continues to cooperate with Ukraine on the issues where Belarus can gain financially and technologically, while keeping its distance from aggressive Russian foreign policy. Minsk has also managed to win the standoff over a Russian air base in Belarus.

Siarhei Bohdan argues that Minsk consistently avoids supporting Moscow in Ukraine and Syria. Belarus is continuing its active collaboration with Kyiv, aimed not only at business deals but also at acquiring the military technology which Russia has failed to provide it with. At the same time, Minsk seems to be winning the ongoing game over a Russian air base. A base will, it seems, not appear in Belarus in the near future, and on top of that Belarus will soon have Russian warplanes at its disposal.

Igar Gubarevich in his foreign policy overview shows that despite his renewed right to travel to Europe, Lukashenka’s “social circle” has so far remained limited to authoritarian countries. While visiting and hosting Asian and African colleagues, the Belarusian leader had to postpone his most important foreign trip to Moscow because of disagreements over relations with Turkey and the Russian air base in Belarus.

Ryhor Astapenia analyses the performance of Belarusian industry in 2015. While many enterprises, such as Kamvol, are poised on the verge of bankruptcy, others like potash exporter Belaruskali have saved the Belarusian economy, allowing inefficient industries to be subsidised.
Comments in the media

Siarhei Bohdan in an interview with the Belarusian service of Radio Liberty comments on the normalisation of Belarus-EU relations and their future in 2016. According to Bohdan, Belarus is trying to pursue a neutrality policy in a quiet manner and is seeking to boost trade cooperation with the EU. However, warming of relations will not change domestic politics significantly, as it will be dominated by Russian and Ukrainian factors.

Aljazeera quoted director of the Ostrogorski Centre Ŷarik Kryvoi, who analysed the reasons why the Belarusian authorities refrain from large-scale privatisation and its associated social costs. The Aljazeera piece also cited Ostrogorski Centre associate analyst Alieś Aliachnovič’s article on BelarusDigest dedicated to the role of Russia’s subsidies in the Belarusian economy.

Ryhor Astapenia together with several well-known experts summed up the year 2015 on Radio France Internationale. Among the most important events of the year Ryhor mentioned was Svetlana Alexievich’s Nobel Prize, which put Belarus in the focus of world media, and the October presidential election, which demonstrated people’s disappointment with politics and the economic crisis in the first years of Lukashenka’s new term in power.

According to the experts, the European Union should increase its presence in Belarus to be able to influence the situation from the inside.

Siarhei Bohdan discussed with the Belarusian Programme of Polish Radio current trends in the development of the Belarusian Armed Forces. Despite the declared military union with Russia, the Belarusian army is seeking more autonomy and hampering major bilateral military projects.
Yarik Kryvoi and the Ostrogorski Centre’s senior analyst Siarhei Bohdan commented on the role of sanctions in Belarus’ relations with the west for *WorldECR*, the Journal of Export Controls and Sanctions. According to the experts, the European Union should increase its presence in Belarus to be able to influence the situation from the inside. Patient critical engagement and economic modernisation can ultimately strengthen Belarusian statehood and improve the human rights and democracy situation.

Vadzim Smok took part in a discussion titled *In What Ways Can We Talk about the Nation and Nationalism Today?*, organised in Minsk as a part of the *Debates on Europe* programme and supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. The experts exchanged ideas on various models of nation-building in today’s Belarus and the role of nationalism in this process.

The Belarusian government allows the existence of a sizeable shadow economy because its main revenue comes from outside the country.

Siarhei Bohdan discussed with *Radio Racyja* the problem of the shadow economy in Belarus. The Belarusian government allows the existence of a sizeable shadow economy because its main revenue comes from outside the country, mainly from Russian hydrocarbons. Many businesses operate via illegal schemes, and the authorities turn a blind eye to them in exchange for political loyalty.

**Belarusian Studies in the 21st century conference**

The Ostrogorski Centre and the UCL’s School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) invite proposals from established academics and doctoral researchers for individual papers and panels to discuss various aspects of contemporary
Belarusian studies.

The conference will take place on 23-24 March 2016 at the SSEES in London. The Annual Lecture on Belarusian Studies will follow the main conference panels. The conference will serve as a multidisciplinary forum of Belarusian studies in the West and offer a rare networking opportunity for researchers of Belarus. The conference call for papers is available here and the deadline is 15 February 2016.

The 2015 issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies

The Ostrogorski Centre presents the 2015 issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies. The new issue of the journal focuses on the Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderland and the period stretching from the uprising of 1863 to the inter-war period of the 20th century when the territory of today’s Belarus was split between the Soviet Union and Poland.

Two longer articles are followed by several essays which resulted from a conference held by the Anglo-Belarusian Society and other London-based organisations at University College London in March 2014.

This issue also includes the transcript of the first Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies, and two book reviews – one by Stephen Hall examining the meaning of Europe for the Belarusian and Ukrainian authorities, and the other by Siarhej Bohdan looking at relations between various ethnic groups in
Eastern Poland in the inter-war period, which is now Western Belarus.

The issue features authors from Estonia, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Belarus and Sweden.

Belarus Profile

The BelarusProfile.com database now includes the following personalities: Aliena Arciomienka, Andrej Parotnikaŭ, Uladzimir Kaltovič, Dzmitryj Markušeŭski, Juryj Caryk, Kiryl Koktyš, Aliaksandr Aŭtuška-Sikorski, Andrej Rusakovič, Siarhei Vazniak, Uladzimir Kavalkin.

We have also updated the profiles of Stanislaŭ Kniazieŭ, Anton Kudasaŭ, Valiery Kulakoўski, Aliaksandr Lahviniec, Dzmitry Lazouški, Žana Litvina, Anatoĺ Liš, Ihar Laciankaŭ, Alieh Latyšonak, Paviel Latuška, Viktar Lukašenka, Anatoĺ Liabiedźka, Anatoĺ Marazievič, Viktar Marcinovič, Siarhiej Maskievič, Andrej Šorac, Andrej Hajeŭ, Uladzimir Amaryn, Maksim Jermalovič, Dzmitry Charytončyk.

Belarus Policy

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

- Kaciaryna Korzun. Public-private partnership in Belarus:
what is after the law? BIPART, 2014.
- Anastasija Luzhina. *Pension benefits as a component of the social security system.* BEROC, 2015.

Any partner organisation of BelarusPolicy.com can submit its research for inclusion onto the database by completing this form.

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* and *BelarusProfile.com*. Follow all the news from the Ostrogorski Centre on Facebook.

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**Academics Debating Belarus in Philadelphia: Between Facts and Fictions**

The 47th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), held on 19 – 22 November 2015 in Philadelphia, offered new interpretations of the contemporary situation in Belarus.
Reflecting on the presidential campaign of 2015 and a lack of genuine interest from the West in its outcome, discussions highlighted the impact of the unstable international situation in the region on the political attitudes of the Belarusian society.

Belarusian Topics in Philadelphia

ASEEES conventions rank among the most significant international conferences in the field of Slavic studies. Spanning over four days and 14 sessions, with over 40 panels running simultaneously during each session, this year's Convention represented a global platform for the exchange of ideas, networking, and dissemination of the newest research trends.

In 2015 the Belarusian theme surfaced at the Convention in various contexts. For instance, the prestigious Kulczycki Book Prize in Polish Studies has been awarded to Per Rudling's book *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906 – 1931*, published by the University of Pittsburgh press in 2014. However, only one panel at this year's ASEEES was dedicated entirely to Belarus.

The 2015 theme of the Convention was “Fact,” encouraging the participants to focus on accuracy, objectivity, and high-quality research. The emphasis on the need to keep distance
from the ideological considerations appeared to be especially relevant for discussions in the field of Belarusian studies, which revealed two trends: first, the field remains underrepresented at academic events of this scale, and second, it is not always free from the influence of subjective approaches.

“Understanding Belarus”

Organised by Grigory Ioffe, professor of geography at Radford University (US), the panel “Understanding Belarus” fell into the interdisciplinary category. The panelists included Ioffe himself, Stephen White of the University of Glasgow (UK), and Oleg Manaev, affiliated with the University of Tennessee and the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS, Belarus). The panel dealt with the analysis of the 2015 presidential electoral campaign and the impact of the Ukrainian crisis on regional and international politics.

Drawing on the Convention's overarching theme of “Fact,” the presentations of Stephen White and Oleg Manaev relied heavily on numerical data and results of sociological polls and surveys. Seeking explanations of the reasons for the political stability of the Belarusian regime, White turned to the social aspect and the unique scheme employed by the Belarusian government in order to maintain its positive image.

White’s presentation relied on the recent sociological surveys of the Belarusian society, conducted by David Rotman at the Centre for Sociological and Political Studies of the Belarusian State University. Regrettably, the methodologies and reliability of these sources have not been addressed in a sufficient manner. The current regime's reliance on “market socialism,” a rejection of austerity measures, and keeping social differences in check, along with the maintenance of social justice principles emerged as preconditions of its longevity.
At the same time, White noted that according to the recent survey data, Belarusians were becoming less egalitarian, compared to other post-Communist states, thus suggesting that the government’s scheme on continued reliance on the “social state model” might not hold as strong as previously, especially in the conditions of growing economic problems.

Oleg Manaev offered his interpretation of Lukashenka's dominance on the Belarusian political scene. His analysis of the recent electoral campaign was based on the independent opinion polls conducted by the IISEPS.

Manaev tried to answer the question of whether elections of 2015 represented a so-called “point of bifurcation,” or in other words, whether the Belarusian regime has reached a critical point beyond which it could turn unstable. Expectedly, conclusions were negative.

Despite continuing decrease of incomes during 2015 and considerable levels of anxiety amongst the Belarusians about the future, the foundations of the Belarusian political regime remained stable. According to the poll data, the majority of people tended to blame external actors, such as Europe and Russia, rather than seeing the faults of the Belarusian regime.

Manaev demonstrated a more critical approach to the sociological surveys in Belarus, addressing a problem of the
post-Soviet mentality of the Belarusian people, which influenced their perceptions of opinion poll questions. For instance, about one half of respondents expressed confidence that elections would be free and fair, yet obviously their understanding of “free and fair” could not conform to the commonly accepted standards in the democratic states.

Facts or Fictions?

Grigory Ioffe's contribution, entitled “Belarus and its East Slavic Neighbourhood” appeared to have been more controversial and problematic. Ioffe attempted to offer highlights of the Belarusian regime's achievements in 2015, to the detriment of a more critical analysis. Noting the influence of the Ukrainian crisis and growing instability in the region, he suggested that Belarus managed to extract all possible benefits from this situation and that it had overcome its international isolation.

Unfortunately, Ioffe's argumentation did not offer a lot in terms of the Convention's theme of “Fact.” For instance, the provocative assertion that Belarus apparently is “more culturally Russian than Russia itself,” only paraphrased the notorious words of Lukashenka, failing to provide a proper historical justification for such claims.

Even more surprising was the argument for a successful ongoing Belarusian rapprochement with the West, solely based on the examples of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's and French President Francois Hollande's visits in Minsk in February 2015. Yet Ioffe chose to omit the circumstances of the visits, since the only purpose of the latter were negotiations to settle the Ukrainian crisis, while Belarus merely served as a host to the talks.

Finally, the optimistic comment on the end of Belarusian isolation did not specify that asset freeze and travel bans
have not been lifted, but only temporarily suspended as a reaction to the release of political prisoners in August. That serves as an encouragement of further progress in the human rights situation and not as a recognition of the Belarusian regime. In this context, Ioffe's optimistic belief that “Western funding would be resumed” appeared to lack a proper argument, leaving the audience pondering over the question, whether “understanding Belarus” could be that straightforward.

Despite the obvious trends towards generalisations, the panelists agreed that the current political regime, and to a lesser degree the majority of the population, continue to think in terms of internal stability and reluctance to venture out of the existent status quo, especially given the changing geopolitical situation in 2015.

Next Convention of ASEEES is scheduled to take place in Washington, DC in November 2016. It will be centred on the theme of “Global Conversations.” Online submissions of proposals, including individual papers, panels, and roundtables are due by 15 February 2016.


The 2015 issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies released today is almost entirely about history. It focuses on the Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderland and the period stretching from the uprising of 1863 to the inter-war period
of the 20th century when the territory of today’s Belarus was split between the Soviet Union and Poland.

Two longer articles are followed by several essays which resulted from a conference held by the Anglo-Belarusian Society and other London-based organisations at University College London in March 2014.

The issue opens with an analysis of humour as a weapon of the political forces in Eastern Poland, what is now West Belarus, in the interwar period. The article, by Anastasija Astapava from the University of Tartu in Estonia, explains the historical context of the 1920s and how various political groups were struggling for the minds of Belarusians by ridiculing political realities of that time. Rare pictures from interwar periodicals richly illustrate the article.

Felix Ackermann, a DAAD Associate Professor at the European Humanities University in Vilnius, devotes his article to the Lukiskės prison in Vilnius. The prison was a hotbed of political struggle in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

It was a place of detention for scores of Belarusians, Lithuanians, Poles and other activists fighting for their causes in multi-ethnic Vilnius at that time. It was the only prison in the Russian Empire to incorporate Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Jewish places of worship at the heart of its infrastructure.

Kastus’ Kalinouški Conference
Proceedings

The subsequent four shorter articles resulted from the Kastus’ Kalinouški and the Nation-Building Process in Belarus conference, which brought together over a dozen of scholars from Belarus, the United Kingdom, Lithuania and Poland. Kastus’ Kalinouški is a national hero of Belarus who led the 1863–1864 uprising against tsarist Russia.

Aliaksandr Smaliančuk, a Belarusian historian from Hrodna who is currently affiliated with the Polish Academy of Sciences, analyses the research problems which historians face when they tackle the historical role of Kastus’Kalinouški in Belarusian nation building. He argues that Kalinouški should not be seen as a creator or even a bearer of the Belarusian national idea but instead as a link in the gradual evolution of the Lithuanian idea in the ‘Belarusian direction’.

Dorota Michaluk from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Poland analyses the Polish-language clandestine press published under the patronage of Kastus´Kalinouški around the time of the uprising against the tsarist authorities in 1863–1864. One of her findings is that the periodicals did not promote the idea of separatism of in Lithuania and Belarus but instead called for national unity and the restoration of the whole of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Uladzislaŭ Ivanouč from the European Humanities University in Lithuania looks at the role of Belarusian old Believers in the Kalinouški uprising. Old believers were a Christian Orthodox sect who refused to accept church reforms in Russia in the 17th century and who after being persecuted settled in the territory of Belarus. The author shows how the old believers tried to reconcile their ‘Russianness’ with their ‘Belarusianness’.

AndrusˇUnučak, Head of the Department of Belarusian Statehood
at the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, focuses on the image of Kalinouški in the official discourse of Soviet Belarus. According to the official line of the Belarusian Communist Party, Kalinouški supported a federation with Russia while the Belarusian intelligentsia tried to use the image of Kalinouški to strengthen Belarusian national consciousness.

Reviews

This issue also includes the transcript of the first Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies, which was hosted by the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies of University College London in March 2015. Per Anders Rudling from the University of Lund in Sweden tracks the development of the Belarusian national idea from the 18th century to modern day Belarus.

The issue also includes two book reviews — one by Stephen Hall examining the meaning of Europe for the Belarusian and Ukrainian authorities, and the other by Siarhej Bohdan looking at relations between various ethnic groups in Eastern Poland in the inter-war period, which is now Western Belarus. Brian Bennett, Chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society and a former British Ambassador to Belarus prepared an overview of activities of the Anglo-Belarusian Society in 2014.
Fr Alexander Nadson

On 15 April 2015 Fr Alexander Nadson, a spiritual leader of the Belarusian diaspora in the West, a member of the Advisory Board of the Journal of Belarusian Studies and a former chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society passed away in London. Fr Alexander left a legacy of not only religious texts and translations but also books and articles on various aspects of Belarusian studies.

Fr Alexander authored the first article in the first issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies on the writings of St. Cyril of Turaŭ in 1965 and since 1973 served on its editorial board. His last article in the Journal was published in 2013. Jim Dingley’s obituary and a bibliography of his works in English concludes this issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies.

The EHU Saga: Building A Future for Belarus, Not Just Selecting a Rector

As a member of the Board of Governors of the European Humanities University and a member of the current search committee, I read with interest but also distinct concern Mr. Kharytonau’s recent article “EHU Rector Selection: Time to Fix Mistakes and Improve Credibility.”

I reacted with interest because an alumnus of the University cared enough to write the article and because it is always time to “fix mistakes and improve credibility.” I read the article with concern because the level of critical thinking
and analysis his essay displayed did not rise to the level I have come to expect from my exposure over the years to hundreds of EHU graduates.

Mr. Kharytonau’s main concern about EHU’s future is primarily that EHU is weakening or abandoning its Belarusian mission – a position for which he provides no evidence, a position that ignores that every major change Anatoli Mikhailov, as EHU’s founding Rector, has enacted over the past four years, was designed explicitly to strengthen EHU’s capacity to pursue its Belarusian mission for the long term and a position that ignores the founding Rector’s role as an observer and advisor in the search process.

Having access as a member of the EHU Board to “primary” material on which to base my judgments, I certainly have an advantage over Mr. Kharytonau. On the other hand, a commitment to critical thinking involves pro-active, open-minded inquiry informed by evidence. I am not aware of any effort on the part of Mr. Kharytonau’s to seek such evidence from those directly involved. On the other hand, his article is prima facia evidence that the Board has failed to communicate clearly with one of its most important constituencies. It is for that warning that I am most grateful to Mr. Kharytonau. While I disagree with his conclusions, I hope this response will help close that communication gap.

the “Belarusian focus” or mission has been and remains rooted in the vision and leadership of Anatoli Mikhailov

After pro-forma criticism of process and motive, Mr. Kharytonau asserts that “the critical point in this whole discussion is how the Belarusian focus of the institution has lately become somewhat of a marginal idea.” As evidence of this marginalization, he notes only that the concern about such a lost focus has been discussed widely in Belarus. He ignores actual events and actions that point strongly to a
greater, not lesser focus on the Belarusian mission.

First and foremost, the “Belarusian focus” or mission has been and remains rooted in the vision and leadership of Anatoli Mikhailov, in his willingness to see the shortcomings of his own work and his insistence that the Board and he had to correct those shortcomings if the Belarusian mission was to be fulfilled. Mr. Kharytonau and many others simply concluded that such self-criticism and change must mean an abandonment of the Belarusian mission. They have completely overlooked the very rare quality Professor Mikhailov has demonstrated as a founding entrepreneur and rector to be self-critical and to insist on change in order to keep faith with the original mission.

Professor Mikhailov began making the case over four years ago that EHU was approaching a critical juncture. It had survived the traumatic process of closing and re-establishing itself in exile but had not yet created a university with a curriculum and level of research of the quality needed to fulfill the longer term task of establishing a democratic society in Belarus, let alone to meet Lithuanian and European accreditation standards. He argued that nurturing and restoring the historic capacity of Belarus to be open to and to absorb the best of many cultures while forging its own cultural identity was a task of decades not just years. To serve the long-term goal of building a healthy, vibrant Belarusian state and culture required the existence of an independent, quality university that could hold its own at the highest levels in a European as well as global context. EHU had to become more than a safe haven and loose collection of scholars fleeing a closed-minded, autocratic ruler who viscerally feared any institution that promoted academic freedom and critical thinking.

The Board, whose members come from a seven countries including Belarus, have led large universities and strong liberal arts colleges, have experience with large and small not-for-profit
institutions, have business and government experience. All serve as volunteers without any remuneration and all concurred fully with Professor Mikhailov’ assessment.

At that time, Professor Mikhailov also insisted that, given his age and the demands necessary to effect such change, he would need help in leading such transformation. The Board agreed and still agrees. This process of transformation has been massive. It began with changes to the Rector’s office and the leadership structure and expanded to a full restructuring of the faculty, bringing the institution into full compliance with Lithuanian labor laws. Faculty governance was reorganized, so that faculty appropriately could play a leading role in restructuring the curriculum and aligning it with the needs of Belarus and 21st century institutions. Financial sustainability to preserve independence and recruitment are other critical issues that must be addressed in realistic and rigorous ways.

lasting success must also be measured by whether Belarusian students have access to an education that is comparable to that available to the best of their peers globally

Central to every step in this process has been an evaluation of what the changes will do to support EHU’s Belarusian mission. Some critics judge EHU’s commitment to a Belarusian mission by the percentage of our faculty who are Belarusian (88%), or even by some absolute percentage of Belarusian students enrolled (96%) or by the amount of research its faculty produce. But serious, lasting success must also be measured by whether Belarusian students have access to an education that is comparable to that available to the best of their peers globally and that will give them the courage and means to transform their society. That standard requires that we must find a way to make EHU financially accessible while also preserving the institution’s independence. The challenge is immense.
The Board and the Founding Rector know well the pain, conflict, and difficulty of carrying out the changes needed to build a quality university that could be independent from state control, compete globally, and represent the best of Belarusian culture. Many in the EHU community now recognize that to fulfill its mission while remaining fiscally responsible, EHU could no longer be primarily a refuge for scholars seeking academic freedom as vital, necessary, and noble as that phase was for the university. I wish both the pain and the private and public anger could have been avoided.

Certainly, there have been both missteps and mistakes in this transformation process. The most poignant for me has been our inability to find a means to recognize and to express adequately our thanks for all of those scholars who stood for academic freedom and joined the first EHU faculty in exile. They modeled for the citizens of their country what it means to live in an open society. There was no way all could be included in the restructuring of EHU or to have their academic careers supported to the extent they deserved to be. The Board’s gratitude to them is genuine even, if at this point, inadequately expressed. Our goal is to create a future that will justify the sacrifices the founding faculty have made and recognize what they have given to EHU and to Belarus.

to fulfill its mission while remaining fiscally responsible, EHU could no longer be primarily a refuge for scholars

In this process, the Board has made extraordinary demands on the administration, faculty and students and, in so doing, contributed to occasional missed deadlines for payrolls, inadequate training, and lack of timely information on student services and admissions. While I regret that pressure, I remain incredibly impressed and grateful that the dedication and commitment in the community to the vision of the university has prevailed as all have worked under this pressure.
We on the Board also failed to recognise in a timely way that we had failed to explain adequately and thereby persuade representatives of the donor nations that the “front-end” investment in budgetary resources we were recommending to carry out this major transition was the wisest way to proceed. I for one thought we had made the case that incurring budgetary deficits now offered less long-term risk than maintaining a balanced budget during the transition, but in the end we failed. The situation is a microcosm of the larger debate taking place in the European Union, and, as with that situation, the cost-cutting will be painful but it will be done.

The passionate involvement of students, faculty, and other members of Belarusian society demonstrate the importance of EHU to Belarus and to the Belarusian mission. For the Board, the critical issue is to set EHU on the shortest possible path to resume full operations in Belarus and to EHU’s long-term survival as an institution that is strong, innovative, fiscally responsible, and capable of helping to shape Belarus’s future as a democratic country that can take its rightful place within Europe.

Gregory Prince

Member, EHU Governing Board, President Emeritus of Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, USA, and author of Teach Them to Challenge Authority, Educating for Healthy Societies, a book that in part celebrates EHU and its mission and argues its importance for the Unites Sates as well as for Belarus.
Ostrogorski Centre Launches 2014 Issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies

On 27 June the Ostrogorski Centre launched the latest issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies during a gathering of the Belarus Research Council in Vilnius. Additionally, Ryhor Astapenia presented the Centre's Belarus Profile project to Belarusian researchers – an online directory of influential people in Belarus.

The Belarus Research Council (BRC) is an umbrella organisation that facilitates the development of independent analytical think tanks in Belarus. Established in 2012, BRC is a loose network of Belarusian think tanks, polling agencies and donors supporting social science research in Belarus.

Ostrogorski Centre

The Ostrogrski Centre, formerly known as the Centre for Transition Studies, presented its first project under its new name. Named after a Belarus-born political science scholar and historian Moisei Ostrogorski (1854-1921), the Centre seeks to bring together Western-educated scholars and journalists living in Belarus and elsewhere in Europe.

In addition to Belarus Digest and the Journal of Belarusian Studies, the Centre's projects also include Belarus Profile, an online directory of influential people in Belarus and the CIS Arbitration Forum, a platform devoted to dispute resolution in former members of the Soviet Union.

The Belarusian independent TV channel Belsat called it one of the most promising analytical centres in its coverage of the meeting of the Belarus Research Council.
New Issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies

The Journal of Belarusian Studies is the oldest peer-reviewed journal devoted exclusively to Belarusian studies. Since 1965 it has been published in London in English and Belarusian.

The 2014 issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies features articles covering a range of topics – from the history of Belarusian statehood to relations between Belarus and Iran, and the activities of government-organised NGOs in Belarus.

Per Rudling of Lund University and Dorota Michaluk of Nicolas Copernicus University open the issue with a study of the development of the idea of a Belarusian state during the German occupation of Belarusian lands in 1915-1919.

They observe that the German administration regarded Belarusian nationalism as a useful political commodity which they supported as a counterweight to other regional nationalisms. They note how historical Lithuanian and Western Rus’ ideas of statehood dominated the minds of Belarusian intellectuals at the time.

Furthermore, they demonstrate that the establishment of the Soviet Belarusian Republic appears to have been directly tied to and dependent on the 25 March 1918 proclamation of the founding of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR), without which it seems plausible to argue that the Bolshevik leadership would have simply adjoined Belarusian lands to Soviet Russia.

Siarhei Bohdan of the Freie Universitaet Berlin analyses relations between Belarus and Iran, ties which have undergone a series of quantitative and qualitative changes since their establishment in 1993. The rise of the United States as the world's sole super-power and its efforts to try isolate the Iranian regime has had an important impact on Belarus-Iran relations.
Belarus has managed to reach a number of deals with Iran despite the West's opposition thanks, in large part, to its alliance with Russia, who has defended and supported Belarusian foreign policy in many directions, including its move into the Middle East.

He concludes that the pattern of relations with Iran demonstrate the flexibility of the current Belarusian leadership, who are more interested in seeking out beneficial outcomes for itself rather than a regime trying to challenge the existing international order in any serious manner.

Anastasiya Matchanka focuses on the role of ‘pro-government non-governmental organisations’ in Belarus. Unlike genuine independent non-governmental organisations, government-backed NGOs work with direct support from the state.

The article looks at the extent to which the activities of pro-democratic organisations are copied by government-backed entities as well as to what degree the substitution of authentic civil society with government-organised non-governmental organisations takes place in Belarus.

She concludes that under the conditions of a repressive and consolidated authoritarian regime, reinforced by a weak civil society, substitution leads to distorted perceptions of civil society and NGOs.

This issue also features a book review by Vitaut Kipel of Living with a Scent of Danger: Adventures at the Fall of Communism. Arnold McMillin reviews 100 Words About Contemporary Belarusian Literature, while Lizaveta Kasmach looks at Soviet Belarusiasation on the Path to Nationhood and Ryhor Astapenia reviews The History of the Great Duchy of Lithuania: Belarus’ Medieval Origins.

Jim Dingley, the former Chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society, gave his account of Belarusian events organised recently in London, including a conference which brought
together scholars from Belarus, the United Kingdom, Poland and Lithuania.

Publication of this issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies coincides with the arrival of Brian Bennett, the former UK Ambassador to Belarus, as the new Chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society.

As with the previous issue, articles from the Journal can be downloaded online or purchased as hard copies.

Pictures from the launch organised at the Belarus Research Council meeting are available at ostrogorski.org.

Svetlana Naumova Awards – Belarus Civil Society Digest

In the context of the high level political scandals a surprising number of new civil society developments takes place in Belarus. Belarusian NGOs launched new campaigns moving on social responsibility and institutionalising its networks. The civil sector activities covered education, business, targeted better social inclusion as well as police misconduct.

Svetlana Naumova awards. On 1 March, the awards ceremony named in honour of Svetlana Naumova, a prominent political scholar who passed away last year, took place in Minsk. The award was established by the civil campaign "Tell the Truth" and given in three categories – "Journalism", "Analytics" and "Hope." This year winners are Svetlana Kalinkina, chief editor of the Narodnaya Volya Valeria Kastsyuhova, editor of the website "Nashe mneniye", and Nasta Palazhanka, deputy
chairwoman of the "Young Front".

**National platform institutionalised.** 34 Belarusian civil society organisations signed a Memorandum of Cooperation and became permanent members of EaP CSF National Platform. Now they have the opportunity to vote on the procedural and strategic issues of the National Platform. Among the signers there are Consortium "EuroBelarus", Ecodom, Legal Transformation Centre, Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers, Association for Long-Life Education, Human Rights Center "Viasna", RADA, etc.

Education & Research

**OEEC round table.** On February 29, Office of European expertise and communication (OEEC) together with the Brussels-based "Office for Democratic Belarus" held a round table "European support for higher education in Belarus" in Minsk. The debate between the governmental bodies and NGOs has shown that there is no unity in the understanding of the principles of the Bologna process in the Belarusian academic community.

**Hrodna Center "Third Sector" presents an educational program BY_HUB.** On 17-18 March Hrodna hosts a training "How Internet technologies can help to achieve personal and organisational goals", which launches an educational program BY_HUB. The program invites to participation NGO representatives, journalists, bloggers who are interested in learning of modern communication technologies.

**International Congress of Belarusian Studies.** On 28-30 September International Congress of Belarusian Studies will take place in Kaunas (Lithuania). It is an annual meeting of Belarusian and foreign scientists, experts, analysts, representatives of public institutions engaged in Belarusian studies. International Congress of Belarusian Studies is organised by a Consortium of academic and expert organisations.
of Belarus, Lithuania, Poland and other countries, including Institute of Political Studies “Political Sphere”, BISS, Internet newspaper “New Europe”, etc.

Business

**Assembly of business circles.** On 29 February, Minsk hosted XIII Assembly of Business Circles of Belarus "To modernization – Together." The event was attended by businessmen and representatives of 46 business associations. The event was organised by Minsk Capital Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers, Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship, with the support of the Council for Business Development. The Assembly adopted a draft "National Business Platform of Belarus – 2012" developed to facilitate improvement of business climate in the country.

**The right on social responsibility.** On 28 February, International Socio-Economic Foundation "Idea" conducted a talk show "1% Project: The Right to Social Responsibility". The talk show’s participants discussed the need for a law on social responsibility, and also got acquainted with the results of national research "Social Responsibility of the Modern Belarusian Business" commissioned by the Fund at the end of 2011. The talk-show, covered on the national television, was attended by representatives of business companies, NGOs, government agencies and journalists.

Police

**The chiefs of the colonies can be added to the EU blacklist.** Non-profit institution Platforma declares that it will ask EU to include in a travel ban list representatives of prisons and detention centres, involved in torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against Belarusians.

**Legal experts, rights defenders criticise Belarusian police.** On 1 March, prominent legal experts and rights defenders voiced criticism of the Belarusian police at a conference in
Minsk. In particular, Mikhail Pastukhow, a former judge of the Constitutional Court, stressed that the Belarusians 'must think about how to make the police safe for the public, how to make them serve public interests and law exclusively.'

Social inclusion

**Review "Poverty and Social Inclusion in Belarus."** The most important social issues were analysed in a pilot study, "Poverty and Social Inclusion in Belarus", prepared by economists of the IPM Research Center. Economists have analysed the poverty level in Belarus, identified the most vulnerable groups, and also examined the effectiveness of existing social transfers.

**Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities launches a No Barriers banner campaign.** On 1 March 2012 the Disability Rights Office launched a No Barriers banner campaign on four major Belarusian websites: tut.by, ej.by, naviny.by and interfax.by. The banners will appear on a daily basis on at least two of these website (rotating), except for weekends and holidays. Over the next month the total of four banners will call Belarusian citizens’ attention to mental and physical barriers, as well as issues that persons of disabilities are facing in employment and education.

Belarus Digest prepared this overview on the basis of materials provided by Pact. This digest attempts to give a richer picture of the recent political and civil society events in Belarus. It often goes beyond the hot stories already available in English-language media.
Rethinking Belarus After 20 Years of Independence

On 23 September 2011 the first annual congress of Belarusian social science scholars will begin in Lithuania. It will bring together a wide spectrum of political scientists, historians, sociologists and experts from other disciplines. Belarus Digest is the event's partner. We interviewed Andrei Kazakevich – who chairs the organizing committee of the first International Congress of Belarusian Studies.

BD: Why do you organise this Congress and why outside Belarus?

Initially, we planned to organize an annual event only for political scientists. But then we found out that there were no regular social science conferences for Belarusian social science scholars. In the past, there were similar conferences on Belarusian philology and linguistics. But political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, historians and representatives of other disciplines do not have any regular congresses. We decided to broaden the congress concept and to offer space for public and professional communication to all scientists engaged in Belarusian studies. political science, history, sociology and history of ideas will constitute the core of the Congress.

The event will be held in Lithuania because it was impossible to find an academic institution in Belarus, which would be willing to host such event without considerable organisational and ideological obstacles. We did not want to have any restrictions of topics and participants. The only way was to look for partners abroad.

Vitautas Magnus University In Kaunas agreed to become the main academic partner of the congress. Kaunas is home to a number of scholars interested in Belarusian studies. In addition, the
location is convenient for many participants.

**BD: What were other challenges you faced?**

Formulating the main idea of the congress was challenging. We wanted to bring together as broad community of specialists as possible. Last year we also tried to establish connections with the Belarusian National Academy of Science and other state-controlled academic institutions. Prior to 19 December we had promising discussions. But after the presidential elections it all stopped. As a result, we will not have a full-scale cooperation with state institutions, which could facilitate better communication between researchers. However, there will be researchers from state institutions in their individual capacity.

**BD: Is there enough interest in the event?**

Initially we wanted to attract around 100-130 scientists, experts and analysts. But following the announcement the interest was much greater. Currently we have over 230 applications. The largest number of participants comes from the following countries – Belarus, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Lithuania and United Kingdom. Other countries also have representatives. We even have applicants from rather exotic countries for Belarusian studies such as Japan and Turkey.

**BD: Would you be able to accommodate all interested to participate?**

We have not decided what to do with such a high interest. Nearly all people are established researchers, almost no students. We have very limited financial resources and currently looking for additional support to accommodate all participants. Unfortunately, income of Belarusian scholars have doped dramatically as a result of economic crisis and it became much more difficult for them to cover travel and accommodation expenses.
BD: What do you expect as the main outcome of the event?

The main goal of the Congress is to create a platform for wide communication between social scientists and experts, to improve their regional and European engagement, to increase professional mobility. The target group is Belarusian research community in the wider sense – inside and outside of Belarus. People will be able to present their projects, to meet each other, to discuss new ideas and initiate joint projects.

The deadline to submit materials for presentation had already passed. Preliminary program of the Congress will be available on the Congress web site in late August. Those who want to participate in the congress without making a presentation should contact the organizers at icbs@palityka.org to register. We do not charge any fee on participants.

We hope to welcome many of Belarus Digest readers at the Congress in September.