

# **Vilnius: the New Mecca for Belarusian Shoppers and Activists**

On weekends, Vilnius looks like a Belarusian city.

Cars with Belarusian registration plates, crowds of Belarusians carrying shopping bags, even bus schedules to Belarus from big shopping centres. In 2012, according to the Lithuanian State Department of Tourism, 400,000 Belarusian guests visited Lithuania.

In politics, Lithuania maintains a critical position against Lukashenka's regime. A significant number of offices of foreign foundations and organisations which work with Belarusian civil society are located in Vilnius.

In 2012 the goods turnover between Lithuania and Belarus broke all records. In comparison with the previous year, it grew by 8% and reached \$2,3bn. Moreover, Lithuania has the positive balance. Belarusians come to Lithuania more and more often, not only for shopping but also to spend a weekend there.

Lithuania, somewhat paradoxically, remains one of the few countries which profits from Belarus' isolation. Thanks to the protectionist practises of the Belarusian regime, it has become much cheaper for Belarusians to pay for visas and transportation expenses, and to buy many goods in Lithuania, than at home.

The official Vilnius wants the status quo in Belarus' policies to change, but it will not pursue any changes at the expense of its economic benefits. In fact, the current situation in Belarus supports Lithuania's interests.

**Who Earns Belarusian Money in Lithuania?**

Lithuanian shopping centres remain the key destination point for many Belarusians. Most Belarusians visit centres like Akropolis and Ozas during the weekends. These shopping centres hold major advertising campaigns in Belarusian cities. According to a study conducted by the advertising agency AD Hunters Baltics, Belarusians bring 10-15% of Vilnius retail shopping income. In some shopping centres, this number has even reached 30%.

Lithuanian supermarkets owners even try to hire personnel that can speak Russian to their Belarusian clients. Clients can drop about \$450-600 in one visit to these Lithuanian shops. Belarusian visitors buy everything – clothes, food, household equipment, goods for children and cosmetics you can also find available at <https://lashbombusa.com/>. Some even come to Lithuania to change the tires on their cars. All this is cheaper than it is in Belarus. In addition, visitors return the VAT on the border.

Belarusians often call the Vilnius airport “Minsk-3”. According the director of the Vilnius airport air service department Edvinas Levaškevičius, 240-250 Belarusians use the services of the Vilnius airport daily, and the total number of Belarusian clientele reaches about 10% of all passengers of the airport.

This large intake at the Vilnius airport is a result of the Belarusian authorities’ protectionism. The Belarusian authorities protect the domestic air company “Belavia” and keeps low-price airlines away from the Belarusian market. Belarus does not belong to the EU–US Open Skies Agreement either which makes it complicated to open new routes and to lower ticket prices.

Hotels, cafes, restaurants, tourist and real estate agencies stay natural beneficiaries of the Belarusian visitors’ financing. Although most Belarusians visit Lithuania to shop, some of them go to Lithuania on holidays as well.

## **The Capital of Belarusian Civil Society**

It often seems that Vilnius is the capital of contemporary Belarusian civil society. Belarusian NGOs and several foreign foundations have more offices here than in Minsk. When Belarusian authorities refuse to register organizations in Belarus, activists often go to Lithuania and incorporate their NGOs there.

Most American foundations and organisations working with Belarus also chose Vilnius for their offices. Among the most influential are International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute and Freedom House. A major German Foundation, Konrad Adenauer, is also operating from Vilnius. Most of the aforementioned organisations are not able to operate legally in Belarus and consequently stay in Vilnius, just 30 km away from the Belarusian border.

Plenty of Belarusian civil society organisations, including the international consortium EuroBelarus and representatives of the Belarusian opposition work from Vilnius. Belarusian Human Rights House in Exile, also working from Vilnius, continues to impress with its ongoing activities. The House hosts almost year-round human rights schools, continuously attracting a large number of active youth.

One of the most important institutions for Belarus in Vilnius remains the European Humanities University. Belarusian authorities closed EHU in 2004, but thanks to Western aid the university resumed its activities in Vilnius in 2005. Well-known Belarusian public figures and journalists lecture at the university, including Siarhei Chareuski, Ales Lahvinets and Viktor Martsinovich.

In addition, Vilnius hosts numerous seminars, trainings and conferences for Belarusians. As a result a significant share of money directed to help Belarus lands in Vilnius.

## **Mutually Beneficial Cooperation**

The Lithuanian authorities provide statistical data that the trade turnover between the two countries in 2012 made up around \$2.3bn. \$1.4bn can be accounted for by Lithuanian exports and \$875m – for Belarusian exports. The goods turnover increased by 8% throughout the year.

Alongside this, the goods turnover does not include everything; for example, stores paying for Lithuanian port services. Last year, Lukashenka [threatened to use Russian ports](#) instead of Lithuanian ports but this threat remained merely words.

The Belarusian-Lithuanian cooperation is beneficial for both sides. It leads to a situation where Lithuania conducts a two-track policy with regards to Belarus. On the one hand, it supports the opposition and the civil society. On the other hand, it closely cooperates with the regime in the economic sphere. Some even call this hypocrisy.

In fact, Lithuania [has become a hostage](#) of its economic benefits and its ability to act on its obligation to react to the human rights violations.

### **The Future of the Belarusian-Lithuanian Relations**

Belarus and Lithuania will have to live with each other regardless of their political regimes. Their cooperation covers not just transit and big business, but also shopping centres, markets, airports, and accommodation. Belarusian and Lithuanian small businessmen strengthen their ties to one another and bring in profits for both countries.

Most likely bilateral relations that are “walking on one leg” – the economy – will continue. Relations at the higher echelons of politics will remain cold for a long time to come. Increasing contacts between people may facilitate changes in Belarus and economic benefits for Lithuania. That is why the decrease in visa fees and simplification of the visa procedures remains one of the few things that the European

Union can do to help Belarusian society.

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## **Sanctions vs Engagement: Is Belarus on the Western Agenda?**

As the next summit of the Eastern Partnership to be held in Vilnius in fall 2013 is approaching, the long-standing discussion on strategy towards the Belarusian regime reemerges. Last week, two figures from the western world publicly voiced opposite approaches to the Belarus problem.

During his visit to Lithuania, David Kramer, the head of the Freedom House NGO, stated that the language of sanctions is the only one the dictator understands and that civil society should be considered the only legitimate representative of Belarus to negotiate with.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius in his interview on TV expressed another vision of the problem. He said that cooperation serves the only way to influence the regime and the west should not build a wall on the border with Belarus.

The two figures represent different countries and sectors, and their positions can be understood from that point of view. But for the rest of the western world, Belarus seems not to be the issue on the agenda, and that is why no clear strategy has been elaborated so far.

### **David Kramer: No Mercy for Lukashenka**

In his interview with Delfi, a Lithuanian news portal, Kramer

stated that Belarus poses a serious threat to the free world. Western nations should stop any cooperation with Lukashenka and his government, and instead cooperate with Belarusian civil society only. Moreover, the EU should revise trade relations with Belarus, as boosting bilateral trade hinders the effects of sanctions.

Kramer claims that the policy of economic sanctions has proved the most effective. He gave the example of Aliaksandr Kazulin's release from prison, which in his opinion was possible due to economic sanctions in 2006-2008 under the Bush administration.

At the same time, Kramer realises that for the EU, and particularly for a neighbouring country like Lithuania, trade with Belarus presents a very hot issue. Moreover, Lithuania makes a good contribution by [issuing Belarusians a large number of Schengen visas](#) and supporting its civil society. Yet he urged minimising contact with Belarusian high officials and dealing primarily with the opposition.

### **Linus Linkevičius: Human Rights and Economy are Equally Important**

Linus Linkevičius, Lithuanian Foreign Minister, addressed the issue from a bit of a different angle. "We are not going to put economic interests above human rights, but Klaipeda cargoes are also important for both Belarus and Lithuania", he said.

The Minister pointed out that economic cooperation unites people, makes them talk more constructively and jointly think about the obstacles that restrict cooperation. The EU should not build walls on Belarus' border, but should try to influence its Belarusian colleagues, and extend bilateral relations and cooperation. Thus, an engagement strategy presents the best solution in his opinion.

Linkevičius also mentioned the visa issue and said that

Lithuania serves as a gate to the West for many Belarusians. According to him, Lithuania issues around 1000 visas daily to Belarusians, and thus lets them see the world and interact with Europeans.

## **Understanding the Differences**

Why do these two obviously pro-democratic figures advocate opposite approaches to the Belarus problem? It may become clearer if one takes a look at the context these men come from.

David Kramer represents the NGO sector. He is not elected by citizens and holds no responsibilities before them. He can freely speak his mind and take one side or the other in any discussion.

Moreover, he represents an NGO based in the United States. As Kramer fairly points out, economic relations between the US and Belarus are close to zero. No economic interests can be involved here and any public actor can develop their strategies regardless of any potential damage to bilateral economic relations.

Linas Linkevičius occupies a different position, in a polity, and therefore has to be careful with his words. He serves as a member of the current Lithuania government, formed by an elected coalition of parties. The parties are accountable to their voters and risk not being reelected if they take a purely moral stance on politics and ignore economic issues.

Economically, Belarus remains [one of the most important partners for Lithuania](#). Belarus uses the Klaipeda port and Lithuanian railways in its export logistics and accounts for around one-third of port freight. It gives jobs to thousands of Lithuanians, and the foreign minister has to care for them in the first place.

## **Still, How to Deal with Belarus?**

Kramer wants to see civil society and the opposition as the sole partners in negotiations on the Eastern Partnership agenda. But is this way of doing business possible in principle? Due to permanent repressions, the opposition has lost its links with voters, and therefore can hardly be seen as a legitimate representative of the Belarusian nation, despite the reason that led to such a situation.

In addition, the implementation of the Eastern Partnership policies requires decision-making and implementation at the governmental level. Opposition members do not hold any governmental offices, and if no representatives of the government participate in the event, how will it be possible? These are the questions which the proponents of hard line have to bear in mind.

Linkevičius looks wiser in this question, as cooperation with government can be the only start for further negotiations on issues like democratisation. But on the other hand, the position of Belarus government remains the same for years: we are eager cooperate in economic issues, but do not touch our domestic politics. After all, Belarus is a sovereign state.

There is no way for change of regime through negotiations, and [the West cannot offer the price high enough](#) for Lukashenka to sell himself. So, why cooperate if no effects will be ever achieved?

### **Is Belarus Really On the Agenda?**

The discourse of western strategy for Belarus democratisation has a long story already. Some politicians and experts speak in favour of [restrictive measures and sanctions](#), while others urge [engagement and cooperation](#). In Belarus, for instance, many [oppositional politicians](#) advocate sanctions, while most [think-tanks and experts promote cooperation](#). What they all agree about is that there is no coherent strategy towards Belarus problem in the West and that such strategy

must be elaborated.

Here, it is worth putting question differently: is the strategy towards Belarus on the western agenda today? Currently, the EU experiences major difficulties both domestically and externally. As economic crisis continues, European countries clash again and again over budgets and bailouts. Meanwhile, on the global scale Middle East draws the focus of world's leaders over recent years.

Clearly, there exists no big interest in Belarus in the West. Belarus-related western initiatives remain scarce and do not involve significant funds. The least the EU could do – unilaterally facilitate free visa access for common Belarusians – has not been done yet. No wonder the West has no solid strategy towards Belarus, which is at the bottom of its agenda.

*Vadzim Smok*

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## **Belarus Announces Pull Out from Latvian and Lithuanian Ports**

Alexander Lukashenka announced a re-orientation of Belarusian export cargo streams from Latvian and Lithuanian ports to Russian ports. The announcement came on 9 November at a meeting with the Governor of Russia's Leningrad region.

Belarusian authorities have started a new round of geopolitical games between the East and the West. On the one hand, Belarus is showing its loyalty to Putin. On the other,

it is showing its importance to Lithuania and Latvia. The experts say that this step will give no economic benefits to Belarus. Baltic ports offer much better conditions with regard to prices, quality and speed, than Russia could ever provide.

Putin of course warmly greeted this statement from official Minsk. However, he knows Lukashenka too well to trust him. The Belarusian ruler promised democratisation to the West, and the introduction of the Russian rouble to the East, many times. He has failed to keep either promise. Today's promise may also eventually turn out to be bluff.

### **No Economic Sense**

Today, the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda and the Latvian port of Ventspils conduct most of the transportation of Belarusian goods by sea. It makes good economic sense.

First, the Baltic ports are located closer to Belarus. Potassium fertilisers produced by Belaruskali pass 712km on their way from Salihorsk to Klaipeda. The distance between Salihorsk and St. Petersburg amounts to 998km.

Second, railway transportation for one tonne of cargo is cheaper in Lithuania than in Russia. Third, Lithuanian and Latvian railways offer better services. Fourth, additional logistic expenses always accompany any logistical re-orientation. And finally, ports in Russia's Leningrad region freeze, which leads to greater economic expense.

Belaruskali, which made up 16 per cent of the world's potassium production in 2010, used to make the decision on transportation through the Baltic ports by itself, based on its own economic interests. It concluded long-term agreements with Lithuanian and Latvian ports, beneficial for both parties.

The Baltics long for cooperation with Belarus, because Belarusians remain the main clients of their ports. If the decision to re-orientate is really undertaken, it will greatly

affect the economy of the Baltic States. For example, Latvia receives five to seven per cent of its own GDP from freight transportation on behalf of Belarus.

Today, Latvians want to make further concessions to the Belarusians. The Minister of Transport Aivis Ronis has promised to create milder conditions for the purchase and lease of the port facilities. This may partially explain why the Baltic States often stand against the European Union's economic sanctions with regard to Belarus.

## **Just Politics**

Lukashenka took the decision to re-orientate together with Putin and under his pressure. Lithuanian Minister of Transport and Communications Eligius Masulis said that "Russia set certain conditions in return for aid and Belarus has nowhere else to go". Indeed, Putin has strong leverage against Lukashenka.

First, Belarus and Russia are holding negotiations on prices for energy resources for the coming year. Minsk wants discounts as the economic stability of Belarus depends on these prices. The Russians want Belarus to ship 2-2.5m tonnes of oil products back to Russia rather than to the West. Belarusian oil processing plants can fulfil such task but they will have to work with no profit.

Secondly, the Belarusian authorities hope to receive another Russian loan. Belarus failed to fulfil Russia's demands on liberalisation and privatisation, so there may be no more loans. However, decision-makers rarely stick to the papers they have signed in Eastern politics. Re-orientation of exports to Russian ports may become an additional argument to help Moscow forget about other older commitments.

Thirdly, the re-orientation may also be the payment for the deceitful schemes of oil products export. This year, Belarus exported petrol [disguised as solvents](#). Thus Belarus avoided the obligation of paying the fees to the Russian budget. The Russians detected this scheme and demand that Belarus should

pay pack \$1.5bn. Belarus has no money to do that.

On the other side, official Minsk is displaying its importance to the Baltic States. Lukashenka's statement appeared as a powerful message to remind Lithuania and Latvia that they should do their best to defend the "mild approach" of the EU to Belarus.

This spring, Belarus already threatened Lithuania and Latvia with freight transportation re-orientation were the European Union to impose economic sanctions. Official Minsk wants the European Union to make concessions on democracy and political prisoners.

### **What Decision Will Official Minsk Take?**

Even Lukashenka probably does not yet know whether Belarus will transfer the export to Russian Baltic ports. Belarusian analyst Valer Karbalevich recalls that ten years ago Lukashenka promised that Belarus would transfer its export to the ports of Kaliningrad. It remains an empty promise.

Lukashenka likes to make promises and but not keep them. Very few politicians in the world still trust his words as a result. On the one hand, it would be logical if Belarus exported its goods through the Baltic ports as before. On the other hand, the Belarusian authorities are fully dependent on Russia today and will do their best to make the Russian leaders like them.

Lukashenka stands out as the only politician in the world who can play games with the Russian leadership so skillfully and openly. The Belarusian ruler has been manoeuvring between the EU and Russia for 18 years and he knows his stuff very well.

But this may not last much longer. The Belarusian ruling elite must demonstrate its loyalty. Otherwise, they will have to release political prisoners and to improve relations with the West – something which they are very reluctant to do.

*Ryhor Astapenia*

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# **Live Broadcast: 2nd International Congress of Belarusian Studies**

Around 200 scholars from around the world involved in studying Belarus and East-Central Europe are taking part in the 2nd International Congress of Belarusian Studies which takes place on September 28-30, 2012 in Kaunas, Lithuania.

The Congress brought together researchers of social sciences and humanities, and offer the discussion of regional development issues, Belarus relations with other countries, and other topical problems.

Belarus Digest broadcasted the event on 28-30 September.

For further details on the program of the Congress, its organisers and partners, please visit [web-site of the Congress](#).

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## **Paweł Kował: Treat Lukashenka**

# with Respect

Among those surrounding Lukashenka there are people waiting for changes. They should get clear signals that their position will be rewarded and appreciated, because the fate of the revolution, evolution or other change that will inevitably come to Belarus at a crucial moment may depend upon them.

Getting sulky does not make sense, it is better to look for the weak links in the chain surrounding Alexander Lukashenka to establish communication channels with the regime. European tirades against the Belarusian president, at best, backfire as seen in what happened a few weeks ago with Guido Westerwelle and Radoslaw Sikorski, and in the worst case they fuel domestic propaganda that "Belarus is under attack." Under the very worst scenario an European reproach provokes retaliatory measures against the opposition. Despite Lukashenka's peculiar behaviour, his policy deserves a solid response: not just ambiguous ridicules, but a list of concrete conditions.

Determination was expressed by actions, but not by public quarrels or a growing number of public statements

Did the US Secretary of State George Shultz and President Ronald Reagan shout or mock Wojciech Jaruzelski in the 1980s? No. There were a few harsh man-to-man comments and a long silence afterwards. Determination was expressed by actions, but not by public quarrels or a growing number of public statements. Lukashenka has to be treated with all seriousness: since prisoners may be tortured in Belarus, a large group of opposition activists live there in danger.

## **Let Us Build a Coalition**

This may sound surprising, but Poland can do much more to influence EU policy towards Ukraine than towards Belarus. With

regard to Minsk, after 2007 Polish diplomacy became a victim of European illusions, whose repeated discussions is a waste of space and time.

The balance of the Polish and EU policy towards Belarus after 2007 and, especially, after the falsification of the election on December 2010, proved to be negative. The policy unwittingly contributed to a deeper split within the Belarusian opposition and enhanced the dictatorial power in the coming years. The Union of Poles – the biggest non-Lukashenka social organisation in Belarus- is weakened, and Angelika Borys is gone.

It is worth mentioning that there were no talks about any serious sanctions other than the visa bans, which served only a symbolic function. Western diplomats openly discussed the possibility to persuade Minsk to engage in negotiations with any representatives of the opposition in order to justify another change of the course by the European Union. But Lukashenka seemed either not to understand the situation, or did not care for better relations with the EU.

Poland must have partners to build an effective policy towards Belarus, It will not happen without good relations and trust with Lithuania. European short-circuit arrays to Minsk must begin with the agreement of Vilnius and Warsaw: Minister Andronius Ažubalis must feel like a participant in the policy, now he says he finds himself on the sidelines.

Otherwise, Lithuania will make Brussels accustomed with the fact that this country has its own separate agenda for relations with Minsk

Otherwise, Lithuania will make Brussels accustomed with the fact that this country has its own separate agenda for relations with Minsk. In the context of Belarus it should be also applied the same manoeuvre as to Kyiv and further engage the head of Swedish diplomacy, Carl Bildt. Stockholm's policy

is driven, similar to Polish policy, more by human rights than investments: this is why co-operation of Sikorski with Westerwelle (they had slightly different objectives) to Minsk was not as efficient as could be effective in tandem with Bildt.

In any case, Lukashenka must know that Poland has partners who firmly stick to the European standards of conduct in humanitarian issues. It must be clear to him that political discussions with anyone from the European Union will not be possible until Ales Bialiacki and other political prisoners will remain imprisoned.

### **Diplomacy in Different Ways**

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For pursuing a policy in Minsk, one has to create unofficial channels of communication also with the authorities. In the case of the destruction of official channels of communication, some kind of by-passes are needed – at this level Lukashenka is treating seriously his partners from the former USSR.

Contacts with the regime should be maintained by through the Georgian and Ukrainian diplomatic missions – even for those countries serious fulfilment of this mission would be a good "European exercise". Both in the Ukrainian government and parliament, and the top positions in Tbilisi there are people who have the opportunity to talk to Lukashenka personally, like Victor Yanukovich and Mikheil Saakashvili. Lukashenka himself recently indicated another channel – the Catholic Church.

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Even in times of the most cooled relations with Minsk a

meeting with its representatives were nunciatures, like that led by the then Archbishop Joseph Kowalczyk in Warsaw. In this context the question remains, to what extent would Belarus Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz take a role as an intermediary, if he avoids politics in Minsk even more than he did in Moscow. If Lukashenka is not sending only confusing messages, but makes a serious offer, is he able to treat the Catholic community as a subject, as Wojciech Jaruzelski did thirty years ago in Poland?

Another problem is the relative weakness of the Belarusian Catholic Church and the lack of tradition with its political involvement: by the way, the predecessor of Kondrusiewicz, a very deserved Cardinal Kazimierz Swiatek, avoided like the plague any nonreligious activities.

### **Allies on Both Sides**

At an elegant French restaurant one of the members of the European Parliament tells a Belarusian anti-regime activist that the biggest problem in Belarus is the weakness of the opposition and divisions within it. We face a crucial question: what stance should adopt the European Union in relation to the opponents of Lukashenka?

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Voicing constant accusations and reproaches that the opposition is divided is unproductive and annoying for opponents who are already cowed. It simply cannot be otherwise in the circumstances where the Belarusian opposition activists have to work. And the case is even more mysterious that since as some observers point out Brussels (and also Warsaw) originally supported Alexander Milinkevich, whose name gathered activists associated from different groups . At some point, however, the competing candidates began to receive

similar support, including the one having contacts with Moscow – a poet and the leader of the campaign "Speak the Truth!" Uladzimir Niaklyaeu.

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Projects of above-mentioned activists were simultaneously supported by Brussels, Warsaw and Moscow. Eventually, Russia became the most important donor for democratic movements in Belarus. The post-Soviet world often tested the potential consequences of such policies, like most recently the colour revolution in Kyrgyzstan. While it is somehow possible to understand complains that the opposition is not uniform, the process of its further splitting is extremely difficult to accept. Three years ago, Milinkevich slowly matured into the role of leader; today we have several pocket leaders divided over the question of whether democracy should be "a-la Brussels" or "a-la Moscow".

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The truth is brutal: very few revolutions are made by revolutionaries themselves. Successive waves of transformation, especially so-called third waves including Poland, Hungary and Lithuania, but also the fourth – in Egypt and Tunisia show the sad truth. In Poland in 1989, Adam Michnik sought allies among the reformers in the Communist Party and the Kaczynski brothers. It is because the ruling elite will always have someone who does not want to end their political life with the fall of the dictatorship, and we need to "help" them. This policy has benefits but also costs.

In order for changes to start happening, in the last phase, co-optation of the current regime to the camp of the revolution takes place. It will be also like that in Belarus.

Something similar will also happen in Belarus. Therefore, in addition to a revised approach to the opposition, the second important vector of the EU policy should be to work with the current ruling elite, and there are many different ways to do so.

## **Take a Deep Breath**

Lukashenka will not conduct free elections (it is better for everyone to stop this wishful thinking), but one can push him to release prisoners and agree to some liberalisation of the media, abolition of censorship and the restoration of rights of national minorities.

Europe has to take a breath, stop being nervous and treat Belarus as a testing ground to implement the EU's foreign policy

Meanwhile, Europe has to take a breath, stop being nervous and treat Belarus as a testing ground to implement the EU's foreign policy. But they should do so without counting on quick profits, without procrastination, and without the conversion of freedom for hard currency.

Poland still has a chance to translate the Belarusian failure into a success – we are justified to exert far more of an impact on the European Union decisions than ever. It should be a consistent policy for years to come. And successes will come sooner than some people think.

*Pawel Kowal*

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# Top Ten Stories on Belarus Digest in 2011

Belarus Digest compiled a list of most read articles in 2011 and wishes you a Happy New Year!

1. [Cheap Booze For The People Of Belarus.](#) As the economic crisis deepens prices on nearly all products rise sharply in Belarus with one remarkable exception – alcohol. These days a bottle of vodka in Belarusian restaurants often costs less than a packet of orange juice – US\$3. In a supermarket half a liter of a cheap alcoholic drink with around 30% alcohol content costs around US\$0.65. Yesterday the government increased taxes on alcohol and tobacco, but the state policy of providing affordable alcohol and tobacco remains unchanged.

2. [The Consequences Of The April 11 Minsk Bombing.](#) The explosion in Minsk underground is the most tragic terrorist act, which Belarus has seen since the end of the Second World War. The bomb exploded at the busiest station of Minsk subway on Monday evening. Over two hundred people injured and eleven reported dead as a result of the rush hour bombing in the capital of Belarus. It was clearly a terrorist act. Who is behind it is a more difficult question. Belarus is not waging any wars, has a homogeneous population and no unsettled territorial disputes.

3. [Belarus Economy: In A Queue For US Dollars.](#) The Belarus Ministry of Statistics reports that the GDP growth for January-February was 7.8%. It could seem impressive but other indicators tell us a totally different story. The gross external debt for 2010 was already US\$28.5 bn, which makes 53% of GDP and it continues to rise. And the total foreign

reserves contracted to US\$4 bn (by 25% from December 2010), while the foreign currency reserves account has only US\$1.3 bn (see Belarus National Bank statistics). In January-February the deficit of trade balance was nearly US\$2 bn. It is only with Russia that it reached US\$1.3 bn in those two months. So the foreign currency reserves are barely enough to cover the monthly amount of import.

4. [The Black Tuesday Of The Belarusian Economy.](#) This year's devaluation of Belarusian currency was the largest in the world for the past 20 years, according to the World Bank. Independent media already called the day of official devaluation "the black Tuesday". However, Belarusian state media largely ignore this news focusing on the visit of Alyaksandr Lukashenka to Kazakhstan and the Cannes Festival in France.

5. [A Stab In The Back? Lithuania Leaks Information About Belarusian Activists.](#) Yesterday Mikalay Khalezin, the head of the Belarus Free Theatre accused Lithuania of handing information about accounts of Belarusian activists and NGOs in Lithuanian banks to the Lukashenka regime. At first it was hard to believe what Khalezin wrote in his blog. But on the next day the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice confirmed it.

6. [Belarusian Vice Prime Minister: The Situation In The Country Is A Shame.](#) On Thursday Nadzeya Yermakova, chair of the Belarusian National Bank, unexpectedly admitted that the government has almost no gold or foreign currency reserves. The National Bank only has USD 1.2 billion. The rest – 3/4 of the reserves – was borrowed from Belarusian commercial banks.

7. [No Belarusian Roubles Please.](#) If you are in Belarus and only have Belarusian roubles to pay for your ticket – be prepared to stay in the country a bit longer. AirBaltic and some other companies operating in Belarus no longer accept Belarusian roubles. Instead they insist on payments in Euros – a currency which is nearly impossible to buy legally in

Belarus. Today it became even more difficult as the National Bank of Belarus recommended commercial banks only to buy, but not to sell, foreign currency.

8. [Andrew Wilson On His Belarus Book And Lukashenka's Survival](#). Last month Yale University Press published Andrew Wilson's book "Belarus – The Last European Dictatorship". The book covers Belarusian history from Polatsk Principality to the present day Belarus and offers particularly interesting insights into Lukashenka's rise to power and the system which managed to help him survive for such a long time.

9. [The Hidden Problems Of The EurAsian Union](#). On 18 November presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia met in Moscow and launched the Single Economic Space. They also signed the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Commission. If three countries ratify these acts in the near future, on 1 July 2012 the Customs Union's Commission will be abolished and all its powers will be transferred to the Eurasian Economic Commission. The Eurasian Union founders use the European integration experience as a model. However, it is hardly possible that they will form a harmonious union because of a number of political, economic and intercultural problems.

10. [Belarus In Eurovision 2011: More Politics Than Music](#). Open political statements are not allowed at the Eurovision Song Contest, but to many this year's Belarusian contribution to the contest as pure politics. In Belarus, the first version of the Eurovision song stirred contradiction from the very beginning. Initially, the song's title was "Born in Belorussia". This song was allegedly alluding to the nostalgia about the good old times in the former Belorussian Soviet Republic. Very few were concerned that the young singer Anastasiya Vinnikova was born in 1991 and has therefore never lived in the former Soviet Union.

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# **EHU: Belarusian University In Exile or For Exile?**

Last month the Belarusian youth web site generation.by published a diagram showing that 2/3 of European Humanities University (EHU) graduates do not return to Belarus after completing their studies. According to generation.by, the data came from a poll of 2011 graduates of bachelors' programs published on the EHU website. The university described this information as false and explained that it was a mistake by their website administrator.

This has raised a heated discussion in Belarus in which many questioned whether it was a good idea to spend Western money to help people to leave Belarus. The argument is that the very reason for the existence of the EHU is to raise and nurture a new Belarusian elite rather than to stimulate immigration.

Established in 1992 in Belarus, the EHU had to move to Lithuania in 2005 because of pressure from Belarusian authorities. The exiled university found its new home in Vilnius, which is just a three-hour train ride from Minsk. According to a Radio Free Europe interview with the EHU Rector Anatoli Mikhailov, since 2006 the number of EHU students has risen tenfold. Currently around 1800 students are enrolled at EHU, more than 98% of whom are Belarusian.

## **EHU as an Exit Strategy**

Darius Udrys, EHU's vice-rector for development and international relations who took his position earlier this year, explained to Belarus Digest that the actual figures of those who return to Belarus are not so low. Surveys of

2009-2010 graduates of EHU's full residency BA programs showed that about 37% returned to Belarus after graduation. 43% chose to continue their studies, enrolling in MA programs and 26% of respondents enrolled in MA programs at EHU and 17% at other universities. Those who reside in Vilnius during their BA studies constitute a minority of EHU students.

It is not surprising that a significant number of EHU graduates prefer to pursue study and work opportunities abroad. The young and ambitious may have a hard time finding jobs in Belarus. Belarus today does not need people with strong knowledge of foreign languages and a Western education. The Belarusian state-owned economy is [subsidized](#) by Russia and does not have to be efficient to survive.

Foreign investors are scared to go to Belarus because of legal instability and pressure from some opposition groups which see them as "bailing out the regime". As a result many EHU graduates cannot find well-paid jobs in Belarus and look for more lucrative opportunities abroad. It is hardly possible to blame them or the EHU for this.

### **Incentives to Return**

A proper system of incentives could encourage students to return to Belarus and use their education for the benefit of their country. Students could be asked to work in Belarus for a year or two if they received financial aid for their studies. Such a requirement would not be unprecedented. For instance, a large number of academic visitors to the United States are subject to a two-year home-country physical presence requirement. This is how the United States ensure that the education of foreign students paid by the US tax payers in the form of scholarships actually benefits the students' home countries.

It appears that the money spent on the EHU may not be wasted even when EHU graduates decide not to return to Belarus immediately

after completing their studies. Changes will not happen overnight in Belarus and a long-term perspective requires the preparation of a new elite. The country's transition will be less painful if well-educated Belarusians who have studied and worked in democratic societies are in charge.

No other country will offer EHU graduates a better opportunity to work in senior government positions to implement changes than their own. However, EHU graduates are more likely to consider going back to Belarus in the long-run only if they are genuinely interested in Belarus, not just in learning technical skills and foreign languages. Is the EHU doing enough to cultivate such interest?

### **The EHU as a Belarusian University**

One of the hotly debated topic related to the EHU is the use of the Belarusian language and the identity of the EHU as a Belarusian institution. In an online conference on Radio Liberty in April, the Rector of the EHU Anatoly Mikhailov faced allegations that the university administration does not appreciate the value of the Belarusian language. Some argued that the EHU is a cosmopolitan Russian-speaking university without a focus on Belarus.

When the rector and two of three prorectors do not speak Belarusian, it is difficult to expect that they will encourage its use. A recently announced [vacancy](#) for the EHU Head of International Relations Unit mentions that the applicants should have knowledge of English, Russian and Lithuanian. Belarusian is not mentioned at all.

The Belarusian language is in a difficult situation today. According to the 2009 official census, 53.2% of Belarusian residents considered Belarusian to be their native language and 23% predominantly speak it at home. To illustrate the trend, in 1999 73.6% considered Belarusian their native language and 37% used it at home. The position of the language

is getting weaker, not least because the pro-Russian authorities of Belarus often openly discourage its use. Aliaksandr Lukashenka speaks Belarusian when he wants to mock opposition and human rights activists.

The lack of state support is one of several reasons why the majority of the urban population in Belarus understands Belarusian but speaks predominantly Russian. It is not surprising that some students find it difficult to study in Belarusian. Learning materials in Belarusian are hard to find and often nonexistent. Moreover, because the Belarusian national identity has been suppressed for such a long time, many simply [lack](#) the patriotic feeling and respect which most other nations of the region hold in relation to their native languages.

In the context of contemporary Belarus, the situation with the use of the Belarusian language at the EHU is not so bad. Darius Udryś explained to Belarus Digest that no university in today's Belarus offers more courses taught in Belarusian than EHU. According to him, about 25% of EHU classes are taught in Belarusian and the EHU's required core curriculum includes courses on Belarusian history and culture. Although some question the accuracy of the 25% figure already aired before by Anatoli Mikhaïlov, several classes, mostly related to Belarusian history and cultural heritage, are indeed taught in Belarusian.

Fr Alexander Nadson, who directs Belarusian Library in London and is regarded as a strong moral authority among Belarusian-speakers, also thinks that the situation of the Belarusian language and studies at the EHU is better than at most Belarus-based universities. His impression is that the university does permit instruction in Belarusian, and that its department of Belarusian studies is conducting a number of important projects. In 2008, the EHU awarded Fr Nadson an honorary doctorate.

Darius Udryś says that the university plans to replace Russian-language modules with English-speaking modules to respond to new trends and student demands. Student demands are indeed important but so are the reasons for establishing the EHU as a center of research and teaching activities focused on Belarus.

It appears that more English-language teaching should go hand in hand with the encouragement of the usage of the Belarusian language. With Russia's more assertive policy and uncertain prospects for a democratic Belarus, the [cultivation](#) of its national identity may be easier to achieve than democracy for Belarus. Belarus needs an elite with a well-articulated national identity to make its statehood sustainable and democratic.

### **Towards Belarusian Tilsit**

When British historian Norman Davies presented his new book "Vanished Kingdoms" earlier this year, he used Belarus as an example of a nation without a mature elite. According to him, a fragile Belarusian state emerged after World War I, and Stalin [purged](#) nearly all its national elite in the late 1930s. In his opinion this is the main reason why today Belarusians cannot govern themselves other than by a "teapot dictator" like Lukashenka. Norman Davies added that it usually takes time to form a demos and a self-sufficient political entity.

The role of exile intellectual centers is difficult to overestimate. For instance, in the period from 1890 to 1904, around 2,500 book titles in the Lithuanian Latin alphabet were published outside of today's Lithuania – mostly in Tilsit, a city in East Prussia. These publications and the Lithuanian intellectual movement in East Prussia played a crucial role in the formation of a modern national identity for Lithuanians and their statehood.

The EHU could conduct more serious research on current

political and social topics and go beyond giving technical and foreign language skills to its students. The university could not only tolerate but actually encourage the use of the Belarusian language in teaching subjects beyond Belarusian history and culture. This could be coupled with creating incentives for graduates to return to work in Belarus.

The Belarusian elite of that time lacked a similar safe haven, which made its nation-building task more difficult. With the EHU's help, Vilnius could become a Tilsit for Belarusians.

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## **Border Forever: Minsk Restricts Local Border Traffic with EU States**

On December 1, Belarus and Latvia took a new step toward opening up their common border. They signed a local border traffic agreement allowing their residents to visit each other's border regions for up to 90 days every six months without visas.

One could argue the achievement is modest: the eligible regions span no more than 30-50 km and visitors cannot travel to other parts of the host country or work there. Belarus gains little when compared to the Eastern European states that joined the EU and now enjoy Brussels' regulatory and funding support.

However, the agreement with Latvia is significant in other ways. Given Belarus's difficult experience with Europe, it represents a small step towards establishing normal communication with neighboring countries. More importantly,

Lukashenka's ambivalent attitude toward local border traffic agreements underlines their broader political significance.

### **Who Wants Belarus Out of Europe?**

For the residents of Belarus border regions, the border traffic agreement allows reestablishing old commercial and family ties disrupted by the more recent creation of national borders. The frontier with Poland dates back to the late 1940s, while the Lithuanian and Latvian borders only came into existence in the 1990s.

Unfortunately, broader political interests often obscure the Eastern European natural borders. The severity of EU visa requirements implies Belarusians somehow pose a danger to the EU security or economic interests. Such measures only exacerbate tensions with the Lukashenka regime which benefits politically from the country's closure. At the same time, European attempts to use visa restrictions as a means to force internal liberalization only serve to increase Minsk's resolve.

The peculiar nature of this dispute was captured in a December 7 statement by Štefan Füle, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. Mr Füle expressed his dissatisfaction that the Belarusian authorities have expressed no interest in the border issue. He said: “[W]e waited for Belarusian authorities to respond to our request to conclude such agreements for many months now [...] When such an agreement is concluded, there is no reason why we cannot move further towards a non-visa regime as our ultimate goal.” But Mr Füle's assumption – that Belarusian regime wants to remove visa barriers and open up the country – may be completely wrong.

Like the EU visa situation, agreements on local border traffic illustrate that the Belarusian regime is not keen to remove borders anytime soon. Ukraine has already ratified and

implemented a well-functioning local border traffic regime with some EU members. Belarus, by contrast, is trying to use such agreements as an instrument to confront the EU. Besides Latvia, Belarus has signed local border traffic agreements with two other neighboring EU nations – Lithuania and Poland. Officials and diplomats of these countries insist, however, that the Belarusian government delays further implementation.

On November 25, Lithuanian foreign minister Audronius *Ažubalis* said Lithuania could already have launched its local border traffic mechanism with Belarus in November if Minsk had not hampered the process. More frankly, Polish diplomats stated in November that Belarus had ignored ratification for more than 14 months. The Polish ambassador to Belarus even alleged that Lukashenka had signed the agreement in December 2010 yet Belarusian government was technically unprepared to implement it.

### **Polish Fears of the Belarusian Regime**

There is some logic behind Minsk's divergent approaches to opening its borders with neighbors. The agreement with Latvia, first of all, is most amenable to the Lukashenka regime because Latvia has not exerted much diplomatic pressure on Minsk in recent years. Indeed, Latvia has even supported Belarus in some of its disputes with the EU. Moreover, the Belarusian area bordering Latvia is sparsely populated, so the actual effect of the agreement is insignificant.

Border traffic agreements with Lithuania and Poland, however, are a different story. In the former, approximately 800,000 Lithuanians and 600,000 Belarusians would be allowed to visit each other without visas. Some major cities on both sides of the border would be affected – Hrodna, Lida, Ashmiany and Pastavy in Belarus, and Vilna, Ignalina, Varana, and Druskininkai in Lithuania. Even more dramatic would be the effect on border traffic between Belarus and Poland, covering a larger swathe of Belarus, including the provincial centers

Hrodna and Brest, and encompassing around two million people on both sides of the border.

But the Belarusian regime has its reasons for delaying the agreements with Vilnius and Warsaw. Relations with Poland are tense because of its resolute support for Lukashenka's opponents. Although relations with Lithuania are in much better shape, the country hosts numerous Belarusian opposition groups and events. Over the past decade, Vilnius has become for Lukashenka's opponents what Miami has always been for the opponents of Cuban dictators – a safe haven next door to the home country.

Second, Belarusian authorities maintain a Soviet era attitude to controlling borders. In the Soviet Union, entire regions along the borders were considered to be border security zones. They were strictly patrolled by KGB, and even Soviet citizens needed special documents to enter them. In early 2009, the Belarusian government finally reduced the size of border zones and abolished the special documents required for its own citizens to enter these areas. But old attitudes die hard.

Third, Lukashenka has always been suspicious of the 400,000-strong Polish ethnic minority in Belarus. For years, police and security agencies have led a coordinated struggle against the independent leadership of the Polish minority union. In this context, local border traffic could be suspected as a channel to strengthen potential opposition movements among ethnic Poles in Belarus.

### **Opening the European Union to Belarusians**

The very best sanction against Lukashenka's regime would be a unilateral opening of the European Union to Belarusian citizens. This would be a positive policy not linked to any bargaining game with the Lukashenka regime. Visa-free travel would be much more effective than border traffic agreements, which ultimately are just half-baked measures.

Without this, Belarus will remain closed to the West – its rulers are not at all interested in establishing more links with the rest of Europe, which they consider a threat to their own survival. The absence of freedom of movement to the West carries adverse geopolitical consequences not only for Belarus, but for Europe as a whole.

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## **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.

Vytautas 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](mailto: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.

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# EU Shows Support for Belarusian Gov't Before Elections



Amid tense waiting for presidential elections in Belarus and possible Russian attempts to influence the situation, 20 October, the President Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania visited Minsk. It was a good sign for Belarusian president Lukashenka. After talks, his Lithuanian counterpart made some meaningful [statements](#):

*Lithuania is an EU member and next year it will preside in the OSCE. Using it, we want to help Belarus, be alongside it during the elections. We want to help it to be more open and recognized in Europe.*

While Moscow is clearly continuing anti-Lukashenka information campaign and is allegedly trying to reign him in or even oust him altogether, such a visit from the EU and NATO country should be considered as a prudent support from European side. Due to particular nature of relations between Belarus and Russia the West cannot move too openly in supporting Minsk against Cremlin's pressure. Belarusian leader himself [admitted](#):

*We are in unfavorable conditions now, and we should think about how we could ensure our independence.*

In addition to general strategic support, Belarusian and Lithuanian leaders discussed more specific issues. Minsk has

recently enhanced and intensified its regional diplomacy and this time it declared the intent to increase trade with Lithuania up to one billion US dollars. What about democracy? Ms. Grybauskaitė [told](#) of her hopes for Belarus becoming more open and defend human rights after elections.

*Lithuania as well as the EU is hopefully looking to Belarus and new elections. Europe is willing to recognize the elections' openness, if you will demonstrate it.*

She elaborated more on it,

*For a decade Europe as if built a Chinese Wall between itself and Belarus, and it should not be there.*

There was also one more important point. Lukashenka publicly emphasized that two countries can successfully cooperate in energy. Lithuania could provide transit route for Venezuelan oil bought by Belarus to balance the country's dependence on Russian resources. While Venezuela is interested in new markets for its oil, it uses Belarus as a pilot partner to explore Eastern European market. Anyway, Lithuania could gain a lot on transporting oil for Belarus, though Lithuanian route is not definite choice since Minsk is also considering such transit option as Ukraine (dangerous one now that pro-Russian party came to power), Estonia and Latvia.

Of course, Russia does not like Belarusian oil endeavor, since Moscow is considering the region its own backyard. Interestingly, Lukashenka in his quest for non-Russian oil could really make some difference in the region, in particular by implementing his second oil idea – in the Middle East. Minsk could bring first oil by tankers, yet it is quite feasible to merge Caspian oil stream and Middle Eastern and send them for Europe.

Bringing Middle Eastern oil into pipelines meant for Caspian one would be a historical moment for the whole Europe. Especially easy it would be for Iranian oil – there is some

infrastructure in place already – but the US are strictly opposing any projects with Iranian involvement. There are nevertheless other sources of oil in that region as well – like in North Iraq. This project could not be implemented by Belarusian or any other single government, but it requires creation of an international consortium. Belarus, however, could show the way by importing Middle Eastern oil. It is not easy for a landlocked nation to use tanker option, but the energy security issues can interest the neighboring countries. The Lithuanian president showed interest in regional energy cooperation.

*It is, of course, the entire Baltic Sea region, where we can be useful for you [Belarus] regarding the sea access. Both Belarus and Lithuania are interested in energy independence, or at least in having choice regarding energy resources.*

Furthermore, she added,

*I am glad to find common language with the Belarusian president as for ensuring energy independence of both states. ... We are willing to openly cooperate. It does not contradict European interests. The EU is interested in energy independence and in maximal diversification of its [energy resources] shipments dependency.*

Regardless of oil ambitions, it seems that after a series of Russian moves, the EU finally decided to react and actively engage in Belarus. If so, a Great Game in Eastern Europe is going to be really big one.

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# A Guide to Eastern Europe's Most Tedious Arguments: Vilnius / Wilno / Wilnia

Edward Lukas in the Economist writes about the most contentious issues in Eastern Europe. The contemporary city of Vilnius is certainly one of those issues.

Very few people realise that as a result of the 1939 Stalin-Hitler agreement deviding Europe Lithuania got a seizable piece of land predominantly populated by Slavs – Belarusians and Poles.

Fortunately, the dispute between Lithuanian, Polish and Belarusian historians over Vilnius is peaceful. In early 1990-s Belarus and Lithuania had virtually identical courts of arms. Belarusian President even shared a [story](#) of his Lithuanian counterpart poining it to him that Belarus was using "their" symbols.

Lukashenka was happy to give up the more glorious version of the Belarusian history in exchange for oil and other benefits from Russia. Russian historiography had always supported the myth of ethnic Slavs being prosecuted in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – one of the most influential states of mediaeval Europe.

But as a matter of fact, for centuries the only official language of that state was old Belarusian and Lithuanians constituted only around 5 percent of the Vilnius region population according to a 1931 census. Edward Lukas writes in the Economist:

*All the arguments below are a) historically plausible and b) strike most outsiders as quite mad. ... Not many people realise this, but most of the people speaking Polish and Belarussian*

*in the area in and around Vilnius are not really Slavs but polonised Lithuanians, the legacy of centuries of forced assimilation. That is a terrible fate, so the right (and kindest) thing to do is to depolonise these people and relithuanianise them. A good way to start is to make sure that they do not get trapped into using foreign Polish letters and silly spellings when writing their names. It is Adomas Mickevicius, not Adam Mickiewicz. Let nobody forget it.*

Read 'You say Lwów, I say Lviv' in [the Economist](#).

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## **The Economist: The Borderlands of Europe Should not be Left Behind**

None of these claims can be definitive; finding Europe's middle depends on what you count as its edge—the Azores? Iceland? The Ural mountains? The methodology of some claims is unclear. The more exotic ones bear as little relation to geography as the Loch Ness Monster does to aquatic biology. In other words, their purpose is to attract tourists. But at least for the Ukrainians visiting Dilove to be photographed by the monument, this is as far west as they can get. “Where Europe Ends”, a powerful new film by Alina Mungiu Pippidi, a Romanian scholar and activist, shows the effect of the European Union's expansion in dividing Europe. [Read the full story](#)

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