

Research Contest Winners, EBRD, Conference on Belarusian Studies – Ostrogorski Centre Digest

In March Ostrogorski Centre (OC) analysts discussed a variety of issues in the fields of foreign policy, religion and migration. As the economic crisis unfolds in Belarus and Russia, many Belarusians will seek refuge in the west, where Poland is providing increasingly attractive conditions for migrants from the former USSR.

Sweden is changing its approach towards cooperation with Belarus, shifting from only supporting civil society and the opposition to engaging the government.

Meanwhile, inside Belarus the authorities continue to search for an identity that could save them from the “Russian World”. They may try to reanimate the independent Greek Catholic Church.

Vadzim Smok [analyses](#) the **Card of the Pole** – the Polish authorities’ instrument to attract a young labour force from former USSR countries. As the negative demographic trend in Poland increases and the economic crisis across the post-Soviet space continues, an increase in the migration flow of Belarusians to Poland seems very likely. Many Belarusians see it as an opportunity to work and study in Poland with the prospect of getting EU citizenship. The Belarusian authorities definitely dislike the initiative, but have proved unable to counter it so far.

Ryhor Astapenia [highlights](#) the Belarusian authorities’ seeming change in attitude towards the **Greek-Catholic Church in**

Belarus, which has long been on the margins of public life. The situation is difficult because it has been criticised by the Orthodox Church, which commands the largest following in the country, and shunned by the Catholic Church, which is concerned that the Greek Catholics could undermine its already fragile relationship with the Orthodox Church.



Igar Gubarevich [discusses](#) the recent visit and talks of a delegation of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) with Belarus officials. SIDA used to have democratic activists and NGOs as its preferred partners in Belarus, but the situation seems to be changing. The Belarusian government has been stressing its greater openness to cooperation with Europe, and **Sweden** may try to see whether greater involvement of government actors in cooperation can be a more effective means of triggering policy change in Belarus.

Director of the Ostrogorski Centre Yaraslau Kryvoi takes part in consultations in Minsk on the political climate in Belarus with Acting Vice President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (**EBRD**) Alain Pilloux and the head of EBRD Belarus office Francis Delaey (pictured).

Winners of research contest announced

On 15 March in Minsk the Ostrogorski Centre delivered a training session on writing up research for winners of a competition organised in cooperation with the Pontis Foundation and the Mott Foundation (pictured).

The selection panel approved five research projects on

Belarusian foreign policy and education:

- Belarusian Analytical Workroom, **‘Geopolitical orientations of Belarusians: sociological analysis and survey’**
- Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, **‘Belarusian soft power in the region: evaluation of its potential and impact’**
- Belarusian State University, School of Business and Management of Technology, **‘Conditioning factors of entrepreneurial activities of Belarusian students’**
- Centre for European Studies, **‘The problem of modernisation of higher education in Belarus: social sciences and humanities’**
- Political Sphere Institute, **‘Challenges for Belarusian foreign policy and the post-Soviet space after 2008’**.

‘Belarusian Studies in the 21st Century’ Conference

Organisers released the programme for the Belarusian Studies in the 21st Century conference and Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies which will take place on 23-24 March 2016 in London. The conference will serve as a multidisciplinary forum of Belarusian studies in the West and offer a rare networking opportunity for researchers of Belarus.

It is organised by University College London’s School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) and the Ostrogorski Centre in partnership with Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum, the Anglo-Belarusian Society and the Journal of Belarusian Studies. For those who complete the registration form before 22 March 2016, attendance is free. The programme is available [here](#). The registration form is [here](#).

Comments in the media

- Ryhor Astapenia, analyst of the Ostrogorski Centre, explains to [Polish Television 24](#) why **Belarus detained major oligarch Jury Čyž**. According to Astapenia, Čyž's arrest is part of a struggle between different factions of the Belarusian regime and an attempt by the authorities to find money inside the country.
- Siarhei Bohdan discusses with the Belarusian Programme of [Polish Radio](#) **the current situation in and around Syria**. Bohdan sees the breakup of Syria as a likely scenario, as Kurds are receiving support from all over the world and Assad's army has made no major breakthrough, even with Russian support. He thinks that Iran's relations with the west will play a key role in determining the fate of Syria.
- Igar Gubarevich gives [Polish Radio](#) a foreign policy forecast for 2016. He predicts that **relations with the EU and US will get better**, but will not lead to high-level mutual visits. Belarus will continue its old brotherhood game with Russia while at the same time trying to reduce dependence on it, and will make efforts to enhance cooperation with China.
- Siarhei Bohdan discusses with the Belarusian Programme of [Polish Radio](#) **the current situation around Iran** and sanctions against this country. Influential groups in all countries are interested in rapprochement with Iran, yet many hindrances still remain.
- Ryhor Astapenia in a comment to [Polish Radio](#) opines that **the role of the opposition and civil society** in the dialogue between Belarus and the West will decrease as a result of EU sanctions being lifted. In contrast, contact between officials and business will grow. However, this step will not bring more democracy to domestic politics in Belarus, as the authorities will continue to carry out occasional repression.

Belarus Profile

The BelarusProfile.com database now includes the following personalities: [Jaŭhien Šastakoŭ](#), [Paviel Vinahradaŭ](#), [Aliaksiej Šein](#), [Arciom Šrajbman](#), [Voĺha Šparaha](#), [Paviel Šaramiet](#), [Aliaksandr Smaliančuk](#), [Iryna Vidanava](#), [Siarhiej Nikaliuk](#), [Alieś Suša](#).

We have also updated the profiles of [Natallia Ejsmant](#), [Mikałaj Jafimčyk](#), [Andrej Jahoraŭ](#), [Andrej Švied](#), [Siarhiej Kaliečyc](#), [Uladzimir Makiej](#), [Mikałaj Samasiejka](#), [Hienadź Svidzierski](#), [Paviel Sieviaryniec](#), [Anatol Sivak](#), [Siarhiej Sidorski](#), [Halina Skarachod](#), [Alieh Sližeŭski](#), [Viktar Sniażycki](#), [Valiancin Čakanaŭ](#).

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:

- Aliaksandr Autuška-Sikorski. [Improving the country competitiveness of Belarus: what the state development programs miss](#). BISS, 2016.
- Uladzimir Akulič, Uladzimir Valietka, Darja Suškievič, Sierž Naŭrodski, Alieś Aliachnovič. [CASE Belarus Macroeconomic Review of Belarus \(Is. 4, February 2016\)](#). CASE Belarus, 2016.
- Maryja Akulava. [Foreign investment: a focus on borrowing](#). BEROC, 2014.
- Voĺha Biełskaja, Darja Urucina. [Belarusian business associations: problems and potential for development](#). BEROC, 2012.
- Ihar Pielipaś. [Is inflation in Belarus inertial?](#) BEROC, 2012.

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](#), [BelarusProfile.com](#) and [Ostro.by](#).

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Anti-Reform Camp Wins, Analytical Papers – Ostrogorski Centre Digest

In February Ostrogorski Centre (OC) analysts commented on the lifting of EU sanctions, Belarus' new military doctrine and the economic challenges the Belarusian government is facing amid the deepest crisis since 1990s.

As the repercussions of the continuing economic crisis become more obvious for both the authorities and the population, the struggle within the Belarusian leadership over the future of the national economy has been intensifying. The authorities appear to have taken a strategic decision not to launch comprehensive reforms, while probing the population's reaction to certain social and economic problems.

Ryhor Astapenia [analyses](#) the pro and anti-reform camps within the Belarusian elite following the recent statement by

President Alexander Lukashenka that no economic reforms will be carried out in Belarus. The anti-reform coalition includes heads of state-owned enterprises, officials who work in the ministries and bodies tasked with coordinating the state sector, and supervisory agencies that benefit from arcane rules and regulations. While they currently seem to have won over Lukashenka, the president is also giving senior positions to liberals and allowing them to engage in open debate with the old guard.

Vadzim Smok [analyses](#) the recently updated energy security concept, according to which Belarus remains a country with a critical level of energy dependence. 90 per cent of Belarusian energy imports come from a single supplier – Russia. Moreover, a third of export revenue is traditionally generated by refining Russian oil. The authorities prefer to retain the status-quo as an easier and conflictless strategy, but the need to strengthen statehood will sooner or later require a solution to this deep problem.

Lizaveta Kasmach [discusses](#) a new Belarusian government initiative to decrease maternity leave from three to two years. Considering the challenges that the Belarusian economy is facing in 2016, with falling oil prices and the ongoing recession, the state is trying to find ways to optimise the inefficient social security system as a means of stabilising its expenditures. However, Belarusian mothers are not yet ready to accept the reform, as the state lacks the necessary infrastructure to organise adequate childcare.

**The Pontis Foundation and
Ostrogorski Centre invite**

proposals for analytical papers

Within the framework of their systematic support of social and political analysis, the Pontis Foundation and the Ostrogorski Centre announce a call for proposals for funded research studies in the areas of foreign policy, security and education.

The main goal of the proposed activities is to stimulate a dialogue between Belarusian analysts, experts, journalists and representatives of civil society. It also aims to increase their ability and capacity to participate and contribute to the policymaking process through stimulating discussions on selected topics – in Belarus and internationally.

Deadline – 23 February 2016. [Read more here.](#)

Comments in the media

[Bloomberg](#) quotes OC senior analyst Igar Gubarevich in an article on the EU's recent decision to scrap sanctions on Belarusian officials. Igar argues that the EU is most concerned with issues of regional security and so is reluctant to rebuke Belarus, which has recently acted like a fairly independent player, and push it into Russia's embrace.

[Polish Radio](#) interviews OC senior analyst Siarhei Bohdan on Belarus' gradual distancing from Russian policies. Minsk has been building alternative ties across the world to ensure protection from an increasingly assertive Russia. Belarus is becoming a more independent player on the international scene.

Belarusian newspaper [Naša Niva](#) republished an article by OC senior analyst Siarhei Bohdan on Belarus' new military doctrine. Triggered by Putin's policies in the post-Soviet

space, this document reveals fundamental changes in the mindset of the Belarusian establishment, Siarhei argues. Belarus now identifies Russia as one of the major threats to its national security.

Belarus Profile

The BelarusProfile.com database now includes the following personalities: [Vadzim Mažejka](#), [Siarhej Patapenka](#), [Alieh Butkievič](#), [Paviel Cieraškovič](#), [Kaciaryna Barnukova](#), [Aliona Zujkova](#), [Anastasija Luzhina](#), [Aliaksandr Pažniak](#), [Aliaksej Dziermant](#), [Andrej Beliakoŭ](#).

We have also updated the profiles of [Ihar Pielipaś](#), [Uladzimir Panciuchoŭ](#), [Andrej Naumovič](#), [Siarhiej Nalivajka](#), [Viktar Nazaranka](#), [Uladzimir Niakliajeŭ](#), [Michail Puzikaŭ](#), [Natallia Piatkievič](#), [Jaraslaŭ Ramančuk](#), [Agnieszka Romaszewska Guzy](#), [Ihar Račkoŭski](#), [Kiryl Rudy](#), [Anatoł Rusiecki](#), [Maksim Ryžankoŭ](#).

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:

- Andrei Yahorau, Volha Lashkevich, Andrej Shutau, Aliona Zujkova, Sviatlana Antashkevich. [Capacity of youth non-governmental organizations and initiative groups for cooperation in addressing common objectives](#). CET, 2016.
- [Situation in the field of national security and defence \(December 2015\)](#). Belarus Security Blog, 2015.
- Dzmitry Kruk. [The effect of direct lending on long-term economic growth](#). BEROC, 2012.
- Ihar Pielipaś. [Dynamics of inflation and monetary aggregates in Belarus: stationary process or a random correlation?](#) BEROC, 2011.

- Hleb Shymanovich, Katsiaryna Barnukova, Aliaksandr Chubrik. [The estimation of equivalence scales for Belarusian households and its impact on the definition of socially vulnerable groups in the population.](#) BEROC, 2011.

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