

Journal 'Political Sphere' Inviting Submissions



The Editorial Board of the peer-reviewed journal of political studies *Political sphere (Palitychnaja Sfera)* is currently inviting submissions for Issue 14 (spring 2010).

The main focus of the issue is nation, national project, idea of nation, ethnic conflicts.

Deadline: March 22, 2010.

Text may be submitted in Belarusian, Russian or English.

Articles on other topics are welcome as well.

Only the texts not published before neither as a part of monograph nor as a separate article can be submitted.

Articles received by the editorial board are put to mandatory anonymous scientific review (peer-review).

You can find more details of general and format requirements [here](#).

Political Sphere was founded in 2001 by a young generation of Belarusian political scientists. In 2001-2005, the Journal was published on the base of the Political Science Department of the Belarusian State University in Minsk. In 2005, as a result of increasing suppression in the Belarusian academia, the Journal moved to the European Humanities University in exile in Vilnius.

At present, *Political Sphere* is the only professional journal of political studies in Belarus. It has evolved into a vibrant community of Belarusian social scientists with its own

seminars and research projects.

The Journal aims to encourage the study of Belarusian politics, stimulate research and analytical activities in Belarus, and integrate Belarusian social scientists into the international academic community.

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- Idea of nation as a political community (historic and theoretical perspective)
- Idea of nation in Eastern and Central Europe
- National projects as cultural and political phenomena
- History of Belarusian nationalism
- History of nationalism in Eastern Europe
- Nationalism and cosmopolitanism as social phenomena
- Nation, ethnicity, tradition
- Ethnic conflicts, migration

Belarusian Visa Price Has Risen to EUR 180 if Issued at the Airport



The main aim of a visa regime is to regulate migration flow and to prevent eventual illegal immigrants from entering the country. What kind of illegal immigrants could come to Belarus from the EU or the USA?

How is Belarus going to become one of the world's top 30 economies by easiness of doing business, which the government has declared as its goal, if it has one of the most expensive visas in the world? The solution should definitely be to ease the visa regime or even its de-facto cancellation, as it has been done in Ukraine and Georgia.

The explanation for this Soviet-styled decision, however, seems simple: the West is still seen by the Belarusian government as a potential threat and a potential source of danger for the regime. In the past, visa issues have been used as a tool to [force several Polish Catholic priests from Belarus](#). Along with Polish priests, who have presumably been promoting Polish nationalism instead of doing their primary spiritual work, foreign journalists, human rights activists and observers can easily be forced away from the isolated country in the middle of Europe.

However, if investment attraction is priority for Belarus, the visa regime for the EU and the US should definitely be liberalized. Besides, the EU itself could initiate this by lowering the Schengen visa price for Belarusians from the current EUR 60.

Starting 2010 the price for a Belarusian visa has risen to 180 euros for the citizens of the EU. First of all this concerns those who receive visas at the airport upon arrival to Belarus, the consular department of Belarusian Foreign Ministry told. The cost increase for Belarusian visas is due to new amendments to the Tax Code of the Republic of Belarus.

As explained in the Consular Section of the Minsk National Airport, potential tourists from the European Union, who wanted to come to Belarus, could previously have received a single journey short-term visa for USD 60. The new visa price is EUR 180. Long-term visas for citizens of the EU and the United States cost more than EUR 200.

Since the New Year the Belarus authorities charge for visas in Euros, not US dollars. Another change was introduction of three types of visas: transit, short-term and long-term. There is no separation between tourist and business visas, the Belarusian edition of RFE/RL reported.

“They have a choice, either to get the visa at an embassy of Belarus in their country for EUR 60 or at the airport for EUR 180,” – representatives of the consular department of Belarusian Foreign Ministry said.

In the consular at the airport “Minsk-2” noticed that foreign nationals are paid and the new tariffs. “Nobody yet refused”, – reported at the airport.

Tourism agencies say that foreigners are beginning to refuse to travel to Belarus because Belarusian visas are among the most expensive visas in the world.

[Read the original story at Telegraf.by](#)

AČ

**2000s for Democracy in
Belarus: a Decade of
Disappointment**



An article by one of this website's authors for the on-line magazine Novaja Europa:

January 1, 2010 will not be just the beginning of a new year but the beginning of a new calendar decade. It is a formal and conventional event, but that's the way our perception is constructed – it is easier for us to view history in decades. Swinging Sixties, Greedy Eighties, Noxious Nineties. The 2000s (or “noughties”) will be a separate segment in systematized history of mankind.

For Belarus, it was a decade of dictatorship. The first full calendar decade under the unlimited authoritarian power of Aliaksandr Lukašenka.

We have entered 2000 under the red-green flag of the Lukašenka regime and leave 2009 with it still over our heads. In the 1990s the key year for Belarus was 1996, when, after the infamous [referendum](#), Belarus turned into a country where the whole power is concentrated in the hands of one man. 2006, with its tragic and disgraceful defeat of the opposition at the [presidential elections](#), has become a landmark year in the 2000s. The lesson we should learn from these years is that 2016 is either unlikely to become the year of Belarus' liberation from dictatorship.

In 2000, that seems so recent, one might have thought that Lukašenka is there for not a long time. A year, or two, or three, and Belarus will at last be free. Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004 has spread much hope that was not destined to turn into reality. The noughties have been a decade of disappointment for Belarus, a decade which has completely turned Belarus into a very special country on the European continent.

Thirteen years have passed since the coup d'état of 1996. During this time a whole new generation of Belarusians has grown up – another generation of people with Soviet mentality, even though it's been almost twenty years since the Soviet Union itself doesn't exist any more. We may remind ourselves of 1957, thirteen years after the Nazi occupation of Belarus has been replaced back by Soviet occupation. By that time the anti-Soviet partisan movement in Belarus and neighbouring Soviet republics has almost completely vanished. Perhaps, this was not least because the society had realized that the Soviets came to stay. The same can be said about today's Belarus, with its tired, demoralized and split opposition; with the fact that Belarusians have mainly concentrated on consumption and primitive physical survival so that even the economic crisis does not initiate political protest.

In 1999 there could still be doubts, but the noughties have proven one thing to us. Belarus might have gained juridical independence simply following the trend set by Baltic countries and Ukraine, who had really struggled for it. However, we couldn't have got democracy the same way. A whole range of specifically Belarusian problems came into play: weak national self-identification of the people, lack of political culture and absence of national elite, the unfinished process of formation of the Belarusian nation as such. All the dark legacy of the Soviet age, which might not be so noticeable to an outside observer, has realized its potential in the 1990s and became institutionalized in the 2000s.

Belarus enters 2010 as a very specific European country. A political system that rather resembles the relationship of a feudal and his serfs. An archaic economy, where the government has woken up with reforms twenty years after liberation of the socialist camp and where it is not clear, if there is still something to be reformed. A nation that missed the train of 20th century's romantic nationalisms and represents a mechanistic community of pragmatic and indifferent people

without native language and historical memory.

Any difference is a potential advantage. Belarus may be able to transform its difference into an advantage, to realize its potential as a land untouched by investors in the middle of Europe or as a cradle for a post-nationalistic pluralistic traditionalism. Otherwise this potential will be spent in vain with sad consequences for the country. There is no third option, and there's not much time left till we find out the answer. It is, of course, necessary to hope for the better, but it may be far more useful to be prepared for the worst.

[Read the original story in Belarusian](#)

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Companies from Nottingham to erect a residential complex near Minsk



An interesting example of Belarusian-British cooperation. Minsk authorities largely develop the city via construction of Socialist-styled flat-blocks.

Surrounding villages that get incorporated into the city are gradually being destroyed and replaced with the same depressive flat blocks.

It would be good if they would find some replacement for Soviet architecture. The story appeared on

www.thisisnottingham.co.uk:

IT COULD be one of the biggest residential projects that Nottingham has ever seen, with homes for 20,000 people and all the shops, offices and hotels that go with it. But the city won't notice any difference even if this giant, up-market, 700-acre project goes ahead. That's because Residential Complex Nottingham is more than 1,100 miles away on the outskirts of Minsk, the capital of Belarus, the former Russian state which borders Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine and Russia. Since the 1960s, Minsk has been twinned with Nottingham, a link which saw the Ambassador of Belarus come to Nottingham earlier this year to see whether the city might help with the new project. Artist's impressions of this £500m scheme feature buildings which might look at home in the original Nottingham.

[read full story](#) The project was presented in Minsk earlier this year. Read more at the developer's [site](#).

EU Sanctions: the Longer the More Surreal



Members of the European Parliament agreed to prolong sanctions against Belarus while at the same time postponing their application. A resolution adopted Dec. 17 delays the imposition of travel restrictions on top Belarusian officials until Oct. 2010.

The EU also promises to lift the restrictions “at any time, in light of actions by the Belarusian authorities in the sphere of democracy and human rights,” to discuss easing visa rules for Belarusian citizens, and even to negotiate a new bilateral cooperation accord with Minsk. As soon as it holds free and fair parliamentary elections, Belarus will also be invited to participate fully in the Eastern Partnership Assembly.

While some see the adopted measures as punishment, the carrots seem to by far outweigh the EU sticks. The recent decision may well be another feather in the cap of the Belarusian president, who is skillfully balancing between the East and the West, receiving substantial economic benefits in exchange for symbolic gestures, and half-hearted measures.

The signs of progress that the EU is referring to are releasing a number of political prisoners, allowing the distribution of two independent newspapers, and ensuring “constructive and active participation” of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership.

There seem to be even more things belonging on the EU’s naughty list, however:

1. Refusal to register political parties (e.g. Belarusian Christian Democracy), NGOs (Viasna) and independent media (TV Belsat).

2. Continued repression of political opposition.
3. A violent crack down on a demonstration of solidarity with the families of disappeared politicians in Minsk on Oct. 16.
4. Continued imposition of death sentences (most recently, a rejection of an appeal from Andrej Žuk).
5. Violation of freedom of religion (in particular, persecution of the New Life Church).
6. Failure to protect the rights of minorities (in particular, refusal to recognize the Union of Poles).
7. Lack of progress in the areas of electoral code reform.

Based on the track record of the Belarusian authorities, suspending the application of sanctions seems reasonable only if one admits that the sanctions have been useless. Indeed, the effect of the EU sanctions is hard to discern. Cosmetic changes that have occurred in Belarus resulted from the economic crisis and the rising tensions between Belarus and Russia rather than from the Western pressure.

Unlike the regular Belarusians, who have to pay nearly twice as much as Russians to obtain Schengen visas and are too broke to afford leaving the country anyway, the Belarusian ministers barred from traveling to Western Europe have plenty of warmer places to enjoy during the holiday season.

So far even the US sanctions against Belarus' state-controlled company Belneftekhim did not hit the nail on the head. Freezing Belneftekhim's assets and prohibiting US companies to do business with it did little more than inconvenience the staff of the US embassy in Minsk, who were given hours to leave before being declared personae non gratae.

[Read more at Radio Liberty/ Radio Free Europe](#)

The Times: Hugo Chávez defends the 'bad guys' of the world



Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez tightens bonds with US foes: from Castro to Lukashenka, the influential British newspaper The Times states.

Hugo Chávez defends the 'bad guys' of the world

By Hannah Strange

Published: November 23, 2009

President Hugo Chávez has risked international ire by lauding Carlos the Jackal, the Venezuelan terrorist notorious for a series of bombings, kidnappings and hijackings across Europe, as a "revolutionary fighter" unjustly imprisoned for trying to defend the Palestinian people.

The leftist Venezuelan leader praised Carlos – whose real name is Ilich Ramirez Sánchez – as "one of the great fighters of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation", denying he was a terrorist and claiming his lifetime imprisonment in France was unfair.

"I defend him," he said during a speech on Friday night. "It doesn't matter to me what they say tomorrow in Europe."

Ramirez was incarcerated for life in France in 1997 for the 1975 murders of two French secret agents and an alleged

informant, after being captured in Sudan three years earlier by French agents acting on a CIA tip and whisked to Paris in a sack. Mr Chávez said that this amounted to "kidnap".

He has admitted to leading a 1975 attack on the Opec headquarters in Vienna that killed 3 people, and has been linked to the 1976 hijacking of an Air France jet en route to Uganda. He is also blamed for a series of bomb attacks in Paris and a grenade attack on the English headquarters of an Israeli bank.

Most famously, it is believed that he was the "godfather" behind the murders of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972.

Ramirez has also expressed support for al-Qaeda and spoken of his "relief" at the 9/11 attacks. It is not the first time that Mr Chávez has waded into controversy over Carlos the Jackal, who retains a small but ardent following in socialist Venezuela.

After taking office in 1999, the former paratrooper provoked international uproar when he wrote to Ramirez in prison, addressing him as "Dear Compatriot", and has previously described him as a friend. Addressing Friday's gathering of socialist politicians from 40 countries, Mr Chávez claimed that Ramirez had paid the price for his defence of the Palestinian cause. "How many Palestinians keep dying?" he added. "They accuse him of being a terrorist, but Carlos really was a revolutionary fighter," he said.

The fiery anti-American leader sought to defend leaders he said were wrongly branded "bad guys", heaping praise on Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is to visit Venezuela later this week, and the Zimbabwean leader Robert Mugabe, who he called "brothers".

He drew the wrath of Ugandans after casting doubt on the crimes of the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. "We thought he was a

cannibal,” said Mr Chávez of Amin, whose regime was notorious for torturing and killing suspected opponents in the 1970s. “I have doubts ... Maybe he was a great nationalist, a patriot.”

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni’s secretary, Tamale Mirundi, reminded Mr Chávez on Sunday of the brutality of the Amin regime, under which around 300,000 Ugandans died, including one of Mr Mirundi’s wives.

Never one to shy away from controversy, Mr Chávez has during his decade in office built up close alliances with foes of Washington around the globe, most famously the former Cuban leader Fidel Castro, whom he regards as his ideological mentor.

He recently hosted Mr Mugabe at a summit on Margarita Island in Venezuela and invited the Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir to Caracas after claiming that the international warrant for his arrest over the genocide in Darfur was based on racism.

He has also forged ties with President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, often said to be Europe’s last dictator, and has built a military alliance with Moscow, visiting both countries as part of a recent tour that also included Iran, Syria, Algeria and Libya.

Belarus United 70 Years Ago



Yesterday was the seventieth anniversary of yet another alteration of the Belarusian borders. On September 17, 1939, Western Belarus was reunified with Eastern Belarus and the Red Army marched into Poland. The reunification was made possible by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, concluded between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany a month earlier.

Eighteen years earlier, at the end of the Polish-Soviet War, Belarusian territories were divided between Poland and Soviet Russia under the terms of the Peace of Riga. Poland acquired Hrodna and Brest oblasts as well as the parts of today's Minsk and Vitebsk oblasts.

How did the Belarusians fare under the 18-year-long Polish rule? Immediately after the Peace of Riga, a Belarusian party was able to obtain seats in the Polish parliament. Starting in 1923, Belarusian courts and schools were able to officially use the Belarusian language, which was taught in all Polish gymnasia in areas inhabited by Belarusians. However, by the late 1920s the relationship between the Belarusian minority and Polish authorities soured. Many Orthodox churches and Belarusian schools were closed and political opposition suffered state repressions.

This is why in September 1939 the majority of the Belarusian people welcomed the Red Army waving both red and white-red-white flags. However, the Soviet terror soon disabused them of their enthusiasm. In total, over 100,000 people were deported from West Belarus to the eastern parts of the USSR.

A few months after the unification, the Belarusian borders

were altered again. Joseph Stalin ordered Vilnius transferred to Lithuania, which was then annexed by the Soviet Union. After the World War II, Belarusian borders were moved eastward as some of the annexed territory was returned to Poland.

In its history, the map of Belarus endured more changes than the map of any other European nation. Some of the Belarusian people had lived in three different countries without ever changing their addresses. Others lived in no fewer states because they were exiled or deported.

The most recent attempt to unify Belarus with another country failed. The Belarus-Russia Union State, the foundation of which was laid with the signing of the Treaty on the Union between Belarus and Russia in April 1997, never came into existence. It was the first attempt at unification conducted on a voluntary basis. The Union did not actualize not because Belarus stood up to its imperious neighbors, but because the plans of the larger of the uniting countries, Russia, changed.

Read more about the reunification of Belarus:
<http://www.euroradio.fm/en/975/reports/38375/>

Greetings from the Axis of Evil

The Soviet past taught Minsk that guns and oil are the most powerful instruments for shaping the international politics. Arms transfers to client governments allowed the Soviet Union to recruit allies and expand its strategic influence. Belarusian heavy industry constituted 25 percent of Soviet machine production, and when the Soviet Union collapsed, Minsk started exporting arms independently – only not so much to

advance its strategic goals as to simply survive. In 1997, profits from selling the warehouses of the former Soviet Army reached \$500 million, securing Belarus ninth place among the world's ten largest arms exporters. The Soviet Union funded the decades of military and economic aid to allies through millions of barrels of oil exported in petroleum and natural-gas products. Belarus cannot emulate the USSR in this respect because its oil reserves are negligible and it has to import 75% of its oil from Russia. After the Soviet implosion, its deference earned Minsk generous energy subsidies. However, Moscow eventually raised the gas prices and in June 2009 started building a new pipeline, which will cut Belarus from a key supply route to Europe. Last summer, the Kremlin went as far as to stop supplies to Belarus altogether after Minsk had expressed discontent. Chavez's overtures have come at the time when Belarus is looking to diversify its fuel supplies. On Lukashenka's visit to Venezuela in 2007, Chavez promised to supply the oil needs of Minsk for years to come and this promise seems close to fulfillment. Venezuela is one of the world's richest countries in oil reserves, which are estimated at 77.7 billion barrels. In return, Belarus will supply weapons and technological expertise. Partnership with Caracas will give Minsk access to South America's defense industry market. Having recently launched a military modernization program, Venezuela is interested in purchasing an anti-aircraft defense and portable missile systems. The two states are also considering joint design and manufacture of new military and technological equipment and transfer of technology. Like Russia, Venezuela is not shy about exploiting energy dependency of its customers. Chavez has already warned of cutting off oil exports, should the United States become aggressive. This matters little to Belarus, however, as Caracas will be less sensitive than Moscow about Lukashenka's overtures with the European Union. Lukashenka has been seeking closer ties with the European Union and the United States, but made merely cosmetic changes to his behavior at home and abroad. If the marriage of Belarusian arms to Venezuelan oil

succeeds, he may change his mind about improving Minsk's relationship with the West and revert to old ways.

The IMF Asks the Belarus Government to Weaken its Grip over the Economy



WASHINGTON – Having concluded another round of consultations with Belarus authorities, the International Monetary Fund urges the Government to sell state assets, curb lending and raise utility prices to cope with the most serious economic crises in more than a decade.

The IMF recommendations sharply contrast with the views of Sergey Tkachev, one of Belarus President's most influential economic aides. In an interview given earlier this week, privatization of state property is described as a "craze" and the movement towards economic liberalization as shameful. (The full text of Tkachev's [interview](#) as well as a [compilation](#) of its most controversial parts are available online in Russian.)

However, privatization and liberalization is exactly what the IMF expects from Minsk. Here is the Concluding Statement of the IMF Mission to Belarus:

Belarus is confronted with the urgent task of overcoming the current economic crisis and longer-term challenge of resuming rapid economic growth. To improve the external current account balance and preserve reserves, the authorities need to maintain a tight macroeconomic policy stance and contain domestic demand. The measures that are needed to achieve this

will be an important subject for discussion during the mission's continuing work on the second review of the SBA. The Article IV consultation discussions have focused on the longer-term issue of how Belarus can resume the growth performance of recent years. The mission believes that high and sustainable growth in future can be achieved with improvements in productivity and increased foreign direct investment. Economic liberalization and accelerated privatization efforts can produce these results. The exchange rate level and regime appear appropriate, but a move to a more flexible system would be warranted once a strong institutional framework is in place to support it.

1. Belarus achieved an average 7.5 percent annual growth in the ten years up to 2008, benefiting from its inherent strengths and favorable external conditions. High investment-to-GDP ratios and productivity gains from a well-educated and disciplined labor force were the main contributors to growth. The favorable external environment—including strong growth in Russia and the rest of the world, easy access to the Russian market, and low-cost energy imports from Russia—also allowed the economy to grow rapidly.

2. However, the global economic crisis has exposed the economy's vulnerability. The external current account has registered a sizable deficit for most of the past decade as savings fell short of investment, leading to precariously low international reserves. Concentrated exports, destined mainly to the Western European market for oil products and the Russian market for non-energy products, were hard hit when demand in both markets fell drastically as a result of the global financial crisis. The situation was exacerbated by reduced subsidies on energy imports.

3. Belarus has made progress in economic adjustment in 2009, which will help restore the country's external stability. The 20 percent devaluation of the rubel against the U.S. dollar and the adoption of the peg to a basket of currencies in

early 2009 helped improve Belarus's external competitiveness. The authorities' willingness to widen the band in June and to allow flexibility of the exchange rate within the trading band has made the system better positioned to absorb further external shocks. Disciplined wage policy has also contributed to restoring external competitiveness, and future wage increases should be consistent with maintaining external competitiveness.

4. Nevertheless, boosting domestic demand when the country's balance of payments remains fragile would risk undermining the objective of reducing external vulnerability through building international reserves. Credit to the economy continued to grow strongly in the first seven months of 2009, driven by lending under government programs, often at subsidized rates. In addition to crowding out normal commercial credit and imposing fiscal costs, the lending programs boosted domestic demand, which increased the trade deficit and has led to loss of reserves in recent weeks. These lending programs need to be curtailed and the resulting changes reflected in the government programs under which they take place, to alleviate reserve losses.

5. The authorities' commitment to a balanced budget in 2009 has been an important source of strength for the economic program. To realize this target, the government needs to closely monitor the collection of revenue in an environment of lower income, profits, consumption, and trade activity. It would be advisable to defer a public wage increase, while providing targeted social assistance to shield the poorest from the impact of the crisis. It is also important to keep the deficit of the local governments under control.

6. A prudent fiscal position in 2010 is necessary to consolidate macroeconomic stability. Tax reforms envisaged in 2009, which would help reduce distortions in the system, need to be followed through. In the meantime, utility tariffs should be raised toward cost recovery level, and social

assistance reform completed.

7. The NBRB needs to tighten credit policy in the near term. Given the already high level of interest rates, strict limits should be set on lending under government programs. This would not only reduce import demand but also contribute to more effective risk management in banks. It will also be important to strengthen the operational independence of the NBRB through legislative changes which would facilitate monetary policy implementation and effective banking supervision. Any easing of the policy stance should be conditional on continued decline in inflation and recovery in reserves.

8. While the banking sector is less susceptible to global deleveraging, it remains vulnerable to a rise in non-performing loans (NPLs) and domestic liquidity risk. The NBRB should continue monitoring the asset quality and liquidity situation closely, and enforce prudential regulations.

9. Increasing the commercial orientation of the banking sector would be essential to improve risk management and reduce banks' vulnerabilities. Transferring existing bank loans under government programs to the proposed Financial Development Agency would help clean up the banks' balance sheets. The agency should take over existing government-directed loans and associated state funding from commercial banks, and could eventually become the exclusive source of funding for government programs, with its lending financed from the budget and banks disengaged from such lending. At the same time, efforts should be made to strengthen governance of the state-owned banks and prepare them for privatization.

10. Looking ahead, the economy is expected to grow at lower rates than recently registered for the foreseeable future in the context of a weak global recovery. GDP is expected to contract this year, largely because of spillovers from the

deep recessions in Russia and the European Union. In 2010, benefiting from a gradually recovering global economy, output is expected to register a modest rebound.

11. In the longer run, several external constraints may hinder a return to the growth path prior to the current crisis. Both the GDP level and potential growth rate of Belarus's main trading partners are likely to be lower in the aftermath of the crisis, reducing external demand for Belarus's products. Easy access to the Russian market is no longer guaranteed. Belarus would not benefit to the same extent as in the past from preferential prices on oil and gas imports from Russia. This would have significant costs for Belarus.

12. Domestic factors could also hold back the country's potential growth. Domestic savings have been lower than investment, putting pressures on an investment-driven growth model as external financing is likely to be less accessible and more costly following the global crisis. In addition, there are indications that the returns from investment have declined, not only because the level of investment is already very high, but also much of the recent investment has been in residential construction. Like some other countries with aging populations, the labor force is likely to shrink reflecting demographic trends. Due to these factors, long-term potential growth in Belarus could be 2-3 percent lower than the pace observed in the past decade.

13. To repeat the remarkable growth performance of recent years, it would be essential for Belarus to strengthen its growth factors by carrying out structural reforms. Significant productivity gains would be necessary to resume high economic growth given the limited scope to increase capital and labor input from domestic sources. In this respect, the emphasis on public expenditure on education should be maintained. Experience in other countries that have undergone economic transition proves that better allocation

of resources, a larger and more dynamic private sector, and increased use of foreign capital can help boost productivity growth. Belarus has much to gain from market-oriented reforms given the fact that Belarus is still in its early stage of transition, and its structural reforms can focus on yielding state control to market forces, and steadfastly pushing ahead with privatization.

14. To allow market forces to play a major role in the allocation of resources, state intervention in the economy should be significantly reduced.

- Price controls need to be reduced to the minimum so that the price signal can direct the flow of resources and help adjust excesses and shortages in the economy, and most retail trade margins should be abolished in line with the government's agreement with the World Bank;*

- Wages need to be liberalized to reward high productivity, and the labor market developed so that workers can move to jobs where they are most productive;*

- Mandatory quantitative targets at the macroeconomic and enterprise levels need to be abolished as it has become more difficult to manage an increasingly sophisticated economy through central planning; and*

- The banking system shall be allowed to make lending decisions based on the profitability and risks of the projects rather than government directions or recommendations.*

15. Productivity growth will also benefit tremendously from the emergence of a strong private sector.

- Conditions for setting up new private businesses should be simplified, as experience in other countries indicates that jobs created by the private sector can provide employment opportunities for workers laid off as a result of state*

enterprise reforms. New businesses might be created by spinning off parts of existing state enterprises.

- The regulatory burden on the private sector should be further reduced, and greater flexibility in setting prices, wages and margins allowed.

- The expansion of the private sector would benefit from financial sector reforms that help increase the private sector's access to credit resources;

- These benefits can be amplified by the participation of foreign investors.

- An ambitious and transparent privatization agenda that is open to foreign investors would help bring capital, technology, and management and marketing skills. This, combined with a high-quality and better motivated labor force, holds the promise of greatly increasing total factor productivity. Foreign investment can also help diversify Belarus's production base and export market, and spread good business practices to the rest of the economy;

- To attract investors, both foreign and domestic, conditions attached to new investment, including the requirement to keep the current employees and wage scale should be reduced;

- Learning from other countries' experience, the renewed drive can start with the enactment of a modern Privatization Law and establishment of a Privatization Agency charged with preparing enterprises for privatization, with the power to hire professionals from the market to support the process. Privatizing a few enterprises through an open, transparent, and competitive tender early next year would help demonstrate the government's commitment and help build capacity.

16. Providing social security can help reduce the negative impact of, and sustain popular support for the structural reforms. A social safety net can be established to give

subsistence and vocational assistance to the temporary dislocated labor force, until they are re-absorbed by the labor market. Privatization proceeds and fiscal savings from reduced subsidies to inefficient production can help finance the safety net.

17. The exchange rate level and regime appear appropriate, but a move to a more flexible system would eventually be warranted. At present, the current peg to a basket of currencies with flexibility around a central parity offers the best prospect of maintaining external stability. Over time, and when a supporting institutional framework is in place, Belarus can move further in the direction of exchange rate flexibility. A flexible exchange rate regime would better enable Belarus to handle the real sector shocks to which it is subject. It would require an alternative nominal anchor (such as an inflation targeting framework) and an independent central bank capable of implementing credible monetary policy.

Source: the [IMF](#) web site.

CBS International Summer School for Belarusian Studies in Poland

The Center for Belarusian Studies at Southwestern College (Winfield, KS) invites undergraduate and graduate students to participate in its first International Summer School for Belarusian Studies from **July 6 to August 7, 2009**. The program, to be co-sponsored by the Poland-based Belarusian Historical

Society, will be held at the **Belarusian Lyceum in the town of Hajnówka in the Podlasie region of northeastern Poland**, an area of great natural beauty and home to Poland's ethnic Belarusian minority – an ideal setting for the study of Belarusian language, history and culture, as well as for the study of a broad range of issues relating to cultural diversity and minorities policies in the expanded EU.

Coursework will include intensive Belarusian language instruction (beginning and intermediate levels and individual advanced-level tutorials) and lectures in English and Belarusian on Belarusian history, literature, contemporary politics and society. The program will also include a regional studies component, with lectures and events focusing on the history, culture and current status of the Belarusian minority in Poland, as well as of the Podlasie region's other ethnic groups, including Poles, Jews, Tatars, Lithuanians, and Russian Old Believers. Faculty will include instructors from Białystok University and the Belarusian Lyceum in Hajnówka, as well as Hrodna University in Belarus. Additional guest lectures on Belarusian history, politics and culture will be given by visiting researchers from Europe and North America. Students will have a choice of dormitory accommodations at the Belarusian Lyceum, or homestays with Belarusian-speaking families in Hajnówka.

Coursework will be supplemented by a rich and diverse cultural program, including visits to Belarusian minority cultural organizations and media outlets, meetings with Belarusian writers and artists, films, concerts, theatrical performances, and excursions to important sites related to Belarusian and Orthodox culture and other attractions of the Podlasie region: the city of Białystok, the recently restored Orthodox monastery in Supraśl, the Białowieża (Belaveža) National Park (the largest and ecologically most diverse remnant of the primeval forests of the Northern European plain), the historic town of Bielsk Podlaski, the Holy Mountain of Grabarka (the

most important Eastern Orthodox pilgrimage site in Poland), and the Borderland Foundation in Sejny, a unique institution dedicated to preserving the rich multicultural heritage of the borderland region and promoting dialogue and new forms of cooperation between its many ethnic groups and cultures. In mid-July students will also have the opportunity to attend Basovišča, the annual festival of Belarusian rock music organized by the Belarusian Students' Association in the town of Gródek (Haradok) east of Bialystok.

At the end of the program, from August 8-19th, students will have the option of traveling to Belarus on a tour including Hrodna, Navahrudak, Slonim, Niasviž, Mir, Minsk, Połack, Viciebsk, Mahiloŭ, Pinsk and Brest. The program cost, including tuition, room, board, cultural program and excursions is \$2,900 (the cost of the optional Belarus tour at the end of the program will be announced as details become available). For further information and application materials, please contact the program director: Dr. Curt Woolhiser, Harvard University, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Barker Center 327, 12 Quincy St. , Cambridge MA 02138-3804; e-mail: cwoolhis@fas.harvard.edu; tel. (617) 495-3528. Please note that the due date for all applications is **May 15, 2009**.

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Eurasia Daily Monitor on Economic Crises in Belarus



WASHINGTON – Eurasia Daily Monitor has published an article

about the impact of economic crises on Belarus and whom Belarusians tend to blame for the crises:

Economic Problems Beset Belarus

March 13, 2009 To date, there has been little other than optimistic prognoses from Belarusian government circles about the state of the economy. Unlike the situation in neighboring states, Belarus is not facing recession, and economic growth continues. Moreover, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has assured citizens of government protection, should the situation become difficult.

The Belarusian economy has a unique structure, in which state intervention has been common until recently; and the official media has proclaimed a specific Belarusian path to prosperity. Is it possible that the country has been unaffected by the international recession that is affecting its neighbors such as Poland, Ukraine, and Russia so strongly?

The answer is that the Belarusian government is treading a fine line between myth and reality. Nothing is quite as it seems. While its leader Lukashenka, aided by the head of the presidential administration Uladzimir Makey and Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski, make overtures to the European Union and fulfill the requirements for the next tranche of an IMF loan, they also seem to be drawn irrevocably further into the Russian orbit, not only politically—as a base for Russian anti-missile defense—but in particular economically.

And its population is increasingly anxious about the economic situation the country finds itself. In late February the Belarusian authorities reported an anticipated growth in GDP of 2 percent in 2009, though the rise for the

manufacturing industries will be only 1 percent (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, February 24). That figure stands in contrast to the fall of GDP in neighboring states, even though the GDP growth overall is significantly less than in previous years.

The country also announced that in 2009 it would have a balanced budget without deficits. As a result, the IMF was happy to disburse the first tranche (\$800 million) of the \$2.46 billion "standby arrangement" agreed to last January (Belapan, March 10). In April an IMF team will visit Belarus to ensure that it is adhering to the stringent conditions. In addition to its negotiations with the IMF, Belarus has begun to open up to its European neighbors as well. Yet in other respects, the state seems to be drawn back to Russia.

First of all, Russia has become a virtual banker to Belarus. In 2008 it loaned Belarus \$2 billion, and it received a request from its smaller neighbor for a further \$3 billion for 2009 before the midway point of the first quarter of the year had even been reached (www.bloomberg.com, March 2). The government has requested loans from other sources, including the United States; but the fact remains that it is indebted most of all to Russia.

In the winter of 2008-2009 Belarus avoided the sort of unseemly row that occurred over gas prices between Russia and Ukraine. Belarus currently pays \$140 per thousand cubic meters for Russian gas and is confident that the price could fall to \$100 by the end of the year. In the long term it has resolved to circumvent its dependence on Russia for energy imports by building its own nuclear power plant, the construction of which will begin in 2010.

Russia, however, is set to provide the funding, materials, and even fuel for this station; and the Russian firm Atomstroyexport has been accepted as the "prime contractor," according to Russian Ambassador to Belarus Aleksandr Surikov. There is some logic to using Russian technology, given Russia's proximity and experience in nuclear energy; but this choice draws Belarus further into the Russian economic orbit.

The Russians have offered a \$5 billion loan for the completion of the station, which, in contrast to earlier reports, will now be built in Astravets, in Hrodna region, close to the border with Poland and Lithuania (www.naviny.by, February 6). In a recent survey conducted by the Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Research (IISEPS) in December 2008, 1,500 respondents from different regions of the country were asked what the most serious problem "facing our country and its citizens" was.

Over 82 percent stated price rises, well ahead of the next three categories, which predictably were impoverishment of the population, unemployment, and the collapse of production (37.8 percent, 35.7 percent, and 31.7 percent, respectively). Incidentally, the answer "fear of the loss of Belarusian independence" was the choice of only just over 5 percent. More than one-third of respondents maintained that their personal economic situation had worsened over the past three months, and almost half (46.4 percent) anticipated serious shocks for the Belarusian economy in the future.

As to who was responsible for the economic deterioration in the country, 52 percent declared it was the government, 42.5 percent the president, and only 27.4 percent blamed "the West" (www.iiseps.org/eopros53.html).

Thus, the Belarusian leaders, despite a more benign international political climate, are facing two growing problems: increasing indebtedness to and reliance on Russia, Lukashenka's rhetoric notwithstanding; and a loss of public faith in the government. The survey elicited the most negative reactions in many years, and it suggests that the public is no longer satisfied simply to accept official statements that there is no economic crisis in Belarus.

For many of them, the crisis is already manifest. The shock of the 20.5 percent currency devaluation in January has been followed by a further 10 percent drop in the value of the Belarusian ruble, which is now traded at 2,880 to the dollar (3,000 on the black market). Discontent with the Lukashenka regime is rising. –David Marples Source: [Eurasia Daily Monitor](#)

Full Text of Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006



This is the final text of Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act adopted by the U.S. Congress in 2006 and signed into law in 2007.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the `Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006`.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Section 2 of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) is amended to read as follows:

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) The Government of the Republic of Belarus has engaged in a pattern of clear and uncorrected violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

(2) The Government of Belarus has engaged in a pattern of clear and uncorrected violations of basic principles of democratic governance, including through a series of fundamentally flawed presidential and parliamentary elections undermining the legitimacy of executive and legislative authority in that country.

(3) The most recent presidential elections in Belarus held on March 19, 2006, failed to meet the commitments of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for democratic elections and the arbitrary use of state power and widespread detentions show a disregard for the basic rights of freedom of assembly, association, and expression, and raise doubts regarding the willingness of authorities in Belarus to tolerate political competition.

(4) The regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka has maintained power in Belarus by orchestrating an illegal and unconstitutional referendum that enabled him to impose a new constitution, abolish the duly-elected parliament, the 13th Supreme Soviet, install a largely powerless National Assembly, extend his term of office, and remove applicable term limits.

(5) The Government of Belarus has failed to make a credible effort to solve the cases of disappeared opposition figures Yuri Zakharenka, Viktor Gonchar, and Anatoly Krasovsky in 1999 and journalist Dmitry Zavadsky in 2000, even though credible allegations and evidence exist linking top officials of the Lukashenka regime with these disappearances.

(6) Political opposition figures Aleksandr Kozulin, Tsimafei Dranchuk, Mikalay Astreyka, Artur Finkevich, Mikalay Razumau, Katsyaryna Sadouskaya, Zmitser Dashkevich, Mikhail Marynich, Mikalay Statkevych, Pavel Sevyarinets, Andrei Klimau, Valery Levaneusky, and Siarhei Skrebets have been imprisoned or served `corrective labor' sentences because of their political activity.

(7) Hundreds of pro-democratic political activists have been subjected to frequent harassment and jailings, especially during, and in the aftermath of the fatally flawed March 19, 2006, presidential elections in Belarus.

(8) The Government of Belarus has attempted to maintain a monopoly over the country's information space, targeting independent media for systematic reprisals and elimination, while suppressing the right to freedom of speech and expression of those dissenting from the regime.

(9) The Belarusian authorities have perpetuated a climate of fear in Belarus by mounting a systematic crackdown on civil society through the harassment, repression, and closure of nongovernmental organizations and independent trade unions.

(10) The Lukashenka regime has increasingly subjected leaders and members of minority and unregistered religious communities to harassment, including the imposition of heavy fines, denying permission to meet for religious services, prosecutions, and jail terms for activities in the practice of their faith.

(11) The Belarusian authorities have further attempted to silence dissent through retribution against human rights and pro-democracy activists through threats, firings, expulsions, beatings and other forms of intimidation.’.

SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

The Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) is amended—

(1) by striking section 8;

(2) by redesignating sections 3 through 7 as sections 4 through 8, respectively; and

(3) by inserting after section 2 the following new section:

SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It is the policy of the United States—

(1) to call upon the immediate release without preconditions of all political prisoners in Belarus;

(2) to support the aspirations of the people of the Republic of Belarus for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;

(3) to support the aspirations of the people of the Republic of Belarus to preserve the independence and sovereignty of their country;

(4) to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in Belarus, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in that country;

(5) to refuse to accept the results of the fatally flawed March 19, 2006, presidential elections held in Belarus and support the call for new presidential elections;

(6) to refuse to recognize any possible referendum, or the results of any referendum, that would affect the sovereignty of Belarus; and

(7) to work closely with other countries and international organizations, including the European Union, to promote the conditions necessary for the integration of Belarus into the European community of democracies.'.

SEC. 4. ASSISTANCE TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN BELARUS.

(a) Purposes of Assistance- Section 4(a) of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking `regaining their freedom and to enable them' and inserting `their pursuit of freedom, democracy, and human rights and in their aspiration';

(2) in paragraph (2)—

(A) by striking `free and fair' and inserting `free, fair, and transparent'; and

(B) by adding at the end before the period the following: `and independent domestic observers'; and

(3) in paragraph (3), by striking `restoring and strengthening institutions of democratic governance' and inserting `the development of a democratic political culture and civil society'.

(b) Activities Supported- Section 4(c) of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended-

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (6) and (7) as paragraphs (7) and (8), respectively;

(2) by striking paragraphs (1) through (5) and inserting the following new paragraphs:

(1) expanding independent radio and television broadcasting to and within Belarus;

(2) facilitating the development of independent broadcast, print, and Internet media working within Belarus and from locations outside the country and supported by nonstate-controlled printing facilities;

(3) aiding the development of civil society through assistance to nongovernmental organizations promoting democracy and supporting human rights, including youth groups, entrepreneurs, and independent trade unions;

(4) supporting the work of human rights defenders;

(5) enhancing the development of democratic

political parties;

(6) assisting the promotion of free, fair, and transparent electoral processes;'; and

(3) in paragraph (7) (as redesignated), by inserting `enhancing' before `international exchanges'.

(c) Authorization of Appropriations-

(1) AMENDMENT- Section 4(d)(1) of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended by striking `2005 and 2006' and inserting `2007 and 2008'.

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION- The amendment made by paragraph (1) shall not be construed to affect the availability of funds appropriated pursuant to the authorization of appropriations under section 4(d) of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 (as redesignated) before the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 5. RADIO AND TELEVISION BROADCASTING TO BELARUS.

(a) Purpose- Section 5(a) of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended by striking `radio broadcasting' and inserting `radio and television broadcasting'.

(b) Authorization of Appropriations- Section 5(b) of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended by striking `radio broadcasting' and inserting `radio and television broadcasting'.

(c) Conforming Amendment- Section 5 of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended in the heading by striking `radio broadcasting' and inserting `radio and television broadcasting'.

SEC. 6. SANCTIONS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF BELARUS.

Section 6 of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended to read as follows:

SEC. 6. SANCTIONS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF BELARUS.

(a) Application of Sanctions- The sanctions described in subsections (c) through (f) should apply with respect to the Republic of Belarus until the President determines and certifies to the appropriate congressional committees that the Government of Belarus has made significant progress in meeting the conditions described in subsection (b).

(b) Conditions- The conditions referred to in subsection (a) are the following:

(1) The release of individuals in Belarus who have been jailed based on political or religious beliefs.

(2) The withdrawal of politically motivated legal charges against all opposition activists and independent journalists in Belarus.

(3) A full accounting of the disappearances of opposition leaders and journalists in Belarus, including Victor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky, Yuri Zakharenka, and Dmitry Zavadsky, and the prosecution of those individuals who are in any way responsible for their disappearances.

(4) The cessation of all forms of harassment and repression against the independent media, independent trade unions, nongovernmental organizations, youth groups, religious organizations (including their leadership and members), and the political opposition in Belarus.

(5) The prosecution of senior leadership of the Government of Belarus responsible for the administration of fraudulent elections.

(6) A full accounting of the embezzlement of state assets by senior leadership of the Government of Belarus, their family members, and other associates.

(7) The holding of free, fair and transparent presidential and parliamentary elections in Belarus consistent with OSCE standards and under the supervision of internationally recognized observers and independent domestic observers.

(c) Denial of Entry Into the United States of Senior Leadership of the Government of Belarus- Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the President may exercise the authority under section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act ([8 U.S.C. 1182\(f\)](#)) to deny the entry into the United States of any alien who—

(1) holds a position in the senior leadership of the Government of Belarus;

(2) is an immediate family member of a person inadmissible under subparagraph (A); or

(3) through his or her business dealings with senior leadership of the Government of Belarus derives significant financial benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, or corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus.

(d) Prohibition on Loans and Investment-

(1) UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FINANCING- It is the sense of Congress that no loan, credit guarantee,

insurance, financing, or other similar financial assistance should be extended by any agency of the Government of the United States (including the Export-Import Bank of the United States and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation) to the Government of Belarus, except with respect to the provision of humanitarian goods and agricultural or medical products.

(2) TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY- It is the sense of Congress that no funds available to the Trade and Development Agency should be available for activities of the Agency in or for Belarus.

(e) Multilateral Financial Assistance- The Secretary of the Treasury should instruct the United States Executive Director of each international financial institution to which the United States is a member to use the voice and vote of the United States to oppose any extension by those institutions of any financial assistance (including any technical assistance or grant) of any kind to the Government of Belarus, except for loans and assistance that serve humanitarian needs.

(f) Blocking of Assets and Other Prohibited Activities-

(1) BLOCKING OF ASSETS- It is the sense of Congress that the President should block all property and interests in property, including all commercial, industrial, or public utility undertakings or entities, that, on or after the date of the enactment of the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006-

(A) are owned, in whole or in part, by the Government of Belarus, or by any member or family member closely linked to any member of the senior leadership of the Government of

Belarus, or any person who through his or her business dealings with senior leadership of the Government of Belarus derives significant financial benefit from policies or actions, including electoral fraud, human rights abuses, or corruption, that undermine or injure democratic institutions or impede the transition to democracy in Belarus; and

(B) are in the United States, or in the possession or control of the Government of the United States or of any United States financial institution, including any branch or office of such financial institution that is located outside the United States.

(2) PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES- Activities prohibited by reason of the blocking of property and interests in property under paragraph (1) should include-

(A) payments or transfers of any property, or any transactions involving the transfer of anything of economic value by any United States person, to the Government of Belarus, to any person or entity acting for or on behalf of, or owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by that government, or to any member of the senior leadership of the Government of Belarus;

(B) the export or reexport to any entity owned, controlled, or operated by the Government of Belarus, directly or indirectly, of any goods, technology, or services, either-

(i) by a United States person; or

(ii) involving the use of any air carrier (as defined in [section 40102 of title 49, United States Code](#)) or a vessel documented

under the laws of the United States; and

(C) the performance by any United States person of any contract, including a contract providing a loan or other financing, in support of an industrial, commercial, or public utility operated, controlled, or owned by the Government of Belarus.

(3) PAYMENT OF EXPENSES- All expenses incident to the blocking and maintenance of property blocked under paragraph (1) should be charged to the owners or operators of such property. Such expenses may not be paid from blocked funds.

(4) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION- Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to prohibit any contract or other financial transaction with any private or nongovernmental organization or business in Belarus.

(5) EXCEPTIONS- Paragraphs (1) and (2) do not apply to-

(A) assistance authorized under section 4 or 5 of this Act; or

(B) medicine, medical equipment or supplies, food, as well as any other form of humanitarian assistance provided to Belarus as relief in response to a humanitarian crisis.

(6) PENALTIES- Any person who violates any prohibition or restriction imposed under this subsection should be subject to the penalties under section 6 of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act ([50 U.S.C. 1705](#)) to the same extent as for a violation under that Act.

(7) DEFINITIONS- In this subsection:

(A) AIR CARRIER- The term `air carrier' has the meaning given that term in [section 40102 of title 49, United States Code](#).

(B) UNITED STATES PERSON- The term `United States person' means-

(i) any United States citizen or alien admitted for permanent residence to the United States;

(ii) any entity organized under the laws of the United States; and

(iii) any person in the United States.'.

SEC. 7. MULTILATERAL COOPERATION.

Section 7 of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) (as redesignated) is amended-

(1) by striking `to coordinate with' and inserting `the support of'; and

(2) by striking `a comprehensive' and inserting `for a comprehensive'.

SEC. 8. DEFINITIONS.

Section 9(3) of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 ([22 U.S.C. 5811](#) note) is amended-

(1) in subparagraph (A), by inserting `governors, heads of state enterprises,' after `Chairmen of State Committees,'; and

(2) in subparagraph (B)-

(A) by striking `who is' and inserting the following: `who-

(i) is’;

(B) by striking ‘and’ at the end and inserting ‘or’; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new clause:

(ii) is otherwise engaged in public corruption in Belarus; and’.

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Vice President of the United States and

President of the Senate.

New York Times: U.S. and Belarus in Dispute Over Inmate

The New York Times

Ellen Barry of New York Times wrote this article on the fate of Emanuel Zeltser. The American lawyer has been jailed by Belarusian KGB for almost a year on charges of possessing forged documents and commercial espionage. The article suggests that Zeltser has become a victim of a battle for assets of a Georgian-born tycoon Badri Patarkatsishvili who died in London under mysterious circumstances in 2008.

It is estimated that Mr. Patarkatsishvili’s assets are worth around \$15 billion. Mr. Zeltser's defence alleges that their

client has become a victim of Boris Beresovsky, a former Russian tycoon now based in London. The U.S. Government and Amnesty International so far have been unsuccessful in pressing the Belarusian Government to release Mr. Zeltser.

“It’s very exceptional,” said Jonathan M. Moore, the United States chargé d’affaires in Belarus. “This is the only time in my knowledge that a citizen of any country was arrested immediately upon arrival, held by the KGB, sentenced in a closed trial and has been held for so long when the state of his health is such a concern.”

Read the full text of the article in [New York Times](#).

The Jamestown Foundation: Will Lukashenka Be Welcomed in Prague?

✘ WASHINGTON – David Marples has written on the most recent developments in EU-Belarus relations in the Jamestown Foundation’s Eurasia Daily Monitor.

Since last October, the European Union, through an Eastern Partnership Program originally initiated last summer by Poland and Sweden, has taken several steps to normalize relations with Belarus. For some members of the opposition, the maneuvers appear to abandon the EU’s former insistence on democratization prior to the renewal of relations and the end of Belarus’s isolation.

The EU thus appears to be establishing a buffer zone of friendly countries on its eastern border while ignoring some

of the more unsavory aspects of the Belarusian state. A particular source of interest to many observers is whether Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka will be invited to the forthcoming EU summit in Prague in April (the Czech Republic holds the chairmanship of the EU until June), in what is called the 27+6 format, that is, the full members of the EU, plus Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, and, possibly, Belarus.

Speaking in Minsk on January 26, Lukashenka linked the closer political relations with the development of business, welcoming the opening of a European Commission office in Minsk and the invitation to his country to participate in the Eastern Partnership Initiative [EPI] (Interfax, January 26). He had declared a few days earlier that "Belarus is a predictable, honest, and consistent partner in the international arena and makes a serious contribution to security and stability on the European continent" (Zvyazda, January 20).

To facilitate and hasten the improvement of relations, on October 13, 2008, the EU issued a six-month suspension of the travel ban on Lukashenka and 35 leading officials (Reuters, October 13, 2008). It has now reduced its original 12 requirements for improving relations with Minsk to five: an end to the detention of political prisoners; changing the electoral code; resolving the issue of restrictions on independent newspapers and the law on the mass media; improving working conditions for NGOs; and freedom of assembly and political associations (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii, January 23).

Several steps have been taken to date by Minsk, including the release of political prisoners (so designated by the United States), signing the Framework Agreement and Protocol of the EPI, consulting with the OSCE about changes to the electoral code, and the registration on December 17, 2008, at its

fourth attempt, of the "For Freedom" movement led by former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich (www.by.milinkevich.org, December 18, 2008). Two leading opposition newspapers, *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Volya*, are now sold in kiosks, although they are still difficult to find even in central Minsk, minimal copies are available, and the prices have been raised substantially by state agencies.

The EU has chosen to drop or shelve seven other requirements for Belarus, including investigations of the disappearance of several prominent figures in 1999 and 2000, the abolition of the death penalty, ending arbitrary arrest and detention, and guaranteeing the rights of national minorities. Several opposition figures have expressed their anger at such apparent largesse, including Stanislav Shushkevich, a former parliamentary chairman; Lyavon Barcheuski, the leader of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front; and Andrei Sannikau, the international coordinator of Charter 97 (for example, www.charter97.org, Jan 26).

In an interview with the Ukrainian newspaper *Zerkalo Nedeli*, Shushkevich commented that "Some politicians in the West are indifferent to whether we have democracy" and stressed that Lukashenka should not be invited to Prague (*Zerkalo Nedeli*, January 24-30). Likewise, Volha Kazulina, daughter of former political prisoner Alyaksandr Kazulin, maintains that the regime's measures have thus far been merely for the sake of appearances and do not represent any fundamental change (www.charter97.org, Jan 29).

Other opposition figures are prepared to give the new relationship a chance to succeed, including Anatol Lyabedzka, the leader of the United Civic Party, and Milinkevich, who has already announced his candidacy for president in the elections scheduled for 2011 (www.naviny.by, January 14). Ending the isolation of Belarus within Europe could open up potential opportunities for opposition politicians. It could, however, also serve to maintain the authoritarian regime in

power indefinitely without addressing most of the issues that led to European and international concern about the political environment within Belarus.

Despite pressure from the EU for improvements, the parliamentary elections of 2008, like all elections since 2001, were seriously flawed according to monitors from the OSCE (RIA Novosti, September 29, 2008); but the EU has decided to reassess the suspended Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Belarus that has been shelved since 1996, when Lukashenka amended the constitution to enhance presidential powers.

Moreover, the talks and discussions between Minsk and Brussels may founder on the issue of Belarus's tightening economic and military-security links to Russia. Numerous questions arise. Will Belarus abandon its commitments to the Eurasian Economic Community with its free trade zone, the CIS, the generally dormant but not yet defunct Russia-Belarus Union, dismantle the two Russian military bases on its territory, and cease to purchase Russian weapon systems? Will the struggling Belarusian ruble be devalued further, or will Lukashenka finally succumb to using the Russian ruble in Belarus? Although Belarus trades as much with the EU as with Russia, the latter is the chief buyer of Belarusian manufactured goods and sugar as well as the country's chief creditor and supplier of energy resources.

In short, can the EU really extract Belarus from the Russian orbit into which it is increasingly drawn despite official rhetoric from the president and Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski? Partnership, after all, is an alternative to, rather than a form of preparation for membership, which has never been on the table. Finally, if Lukashenka is invited to Prague, will this "erase" his past misdeeds?

Source: www.jamestown.org

AFP: IMF approves 2.46 bln dlrs loan for Belarus

✘ WASHINGTON (AFP) – The International Monetary Fund gave final approval Monday to an emergency loan of 2.46 billion dollars to help Belarus cope with the global financial crisis.

The IMF said the 15-month standby credit was approved by its executive board “in support of the country’s efforts to adjust to external shocks” and will allow the eastern European nation to draw some 787.9 million dollars immediately. The remainder will be made available subject to quarterly reviews.

The IMF loan is unusually large, representing about four times Belarus’s quota, the maximum amount an IMF member country pays to finance the Washington-based institution. Normally an IMF member country can draw up to 100 percent annually of its quota, and 300 percent cumulatively. However, the IMF has granted exceptional access to financing to distressed countries, such as a [quick loan for bad credit](#) to Georgia in September after its armed conflict with Russia.

“Belarus is experiencing serious economic problems,” said Takatoshi Kato, IMF deputy managing director. “External vulnerabilities have been exposed by adverse terms of trade movements, falling demand from trading partners, and difficulties in securing external finance, leading to a decline in international reserves. In the face of these shocks and the adjustment needed to contain them, the economy is likely to slow in 2009.”

Officials in Minsk have said the IMF loan was needed to make up for lost export revenues because foreign countries were having trouble paying for its goods amid the global credit

crunch.

Belarus agreed to a 20 percent devaluation of its currency to “help restore competitiveness and address external imbalances,” the IMF said.

“The adoption of the new currency basket and wider band will leave the economy better able to adapt to external shocks, thus making it less likely that further exchange rate adjustment will be needed,” an IMF statement said.

The country will also make other reforms, including price and wage liberalization, the IMF said. It added that deregulation, and privatization “are also needed to underpin better medium-term growth, and should be undertaken as fast as market conditions allow.”

Juha Kahkonen, IMF mission chief for Belarus, said, “The IMF believes the Belarussians have implemented a strong economic program,” adding that this includes “shifting to a more market-based financial system.”

Belarus, a state on the European Union’s eastern border with a Soviet-style economy, had initially requested a two-billion-dollar loan from the IMF but increased the request later, IMF officials said.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko last year threatened to pull out of the IMF if the loan had been rejected.

The United States, by far the largest voting power in the 185-nation institution, has branded Belarus “Europe’s last dictatorship.” But US officials said last week relations had improved with Belarus.