

FINAL REPORT

Belarus Today: Democratic Openings, Security Implications
Proceedings and Analysis based on the September 21, 2006 Conference

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Abstract | 3 |
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 2. The Domestic Situation in Belarus Under President Lukashenka: Before and Since the March 2006 Presidential Elections | 5-7 |
| <i>2.1 Explaining the Success and Stability of the Lukashenka Regime (Marples)</i> | 5 |
| <i>2.2 Action and Reaction: Political Stability Through Repression (Wierzbowska-Miazga)</i> | 6 |
| <i>2.3 Identity Politics and the Regime (Leshchenko)</i> | 7 |
| 3. The Security Implications of Belarusian Policy: Perspectives from Russia, the EU, US and Canada | 8-10 |
| <i>3.1 Exclusion and Alienation through Transnational Narratives (Breault)</i> | 8 |
| <i>3.2 Belarus: The Hole in the Doughnut (Legvold)</i> | 9 |
| <i>3.3 Regional Economic Politics in the Broader Foreign Policy Context (Rutland)</i> | 9 |
| 4. Democracy Promotion: Canadian Support for a Belarusian Project | 11 |
| 5. Conclusion | 12 |
| <i>Appendix I: Questions after the First Discussion Panel</i> | 13 |
| <i>Appendix II: Questions after the Second Discussion Pane</i> | 15 |

Abstract

This paper contains summaries of various presentations on contemporary Belarus which were presented in September 2006 at the University of Ottawa during an international academic conference. The overall message of this conference is being able to gauge the implications of President Lukashenka's political success in the face of his regime's economic possibilities and its geopolitical situation. This paper argues for greater cooperation between the Canadian government, Belarus' neighbors, and the Belarusian diaspora in a) spreading information flows into the mainstream Belarusian society and, b) creating a democratic discourse that can counterbalance President Lukashenka's political control.

1. Introduction

On September 21st 2006 the Chair of Ukrainian Studies hosted an international academic conference, “*Belarus Today: Democratic Openings, Security Concern*,”. Sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and led by Professor Dominique Arel from the University of Ottawa, this conference consisted of two discussion panels. The first panel, “*The Domestic Situation in Belarus Under President Lukashenka: Before and Since the March 2006 Presidential Elections*”, was presented by David Marples (University of Alberta), Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga (Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, Poland), and Natalia Leshchenko (London School of Economics). The panelists explored possible reasons underlying Belarus’ relative internal stability, including the degree of President Lukashenka’s initial popular support, state repression throughout Belarus’ 2006 Presidential elections, and the contribution of state ideology and Belarusian nationalism to the maintenance of local compliance. The afternoon panel, entitled “*The Security Implications of Belarusian Policy: Perspective from Russia, the EU, the US, and Canada*” analyzed the tensions of Belarus’ geopolitical status as seen through the eyes of its neighbors. Belarus has successfully isolated itself from Western criticisms and economic-diplomatic sanctions, yet its geographical proximity to the EU raises security concerns with respect to Belarus’ control of its gas pipelines. The Belarusian regime can also dispose of its internal opposition by expatriating them into the EU via Poland. Presenting the second panel were Yann Breault (Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada), Robert Legvold (Columbia University, US) and Peter Rutland (Wesleyan University, US). The one-day conference took place in historic Tabaret Hall at the University of Ottawa. Over eighty observers attended the proceedings.

This conference was framed on the backdrop of contemporary events in Belarus. In particular, the 2006 presidential election and the region’s gas pipeline crises raised important questions with respect to Belarusian democratization and European security. At issue was the explanation of President Lukashenka’s stability and apparent support in the face of state repression against the Minsk protests in the aftermath of the elections. A corollary to Belarusian authoritarianism is the country’s adamant independence from excessive Russian and Western influence. Although some believe this isolationism might strangle the regime in the long-term, it can be argued that Belarus’ geopolitical location is well-suited to withstand pressures both regionally and internationally.

This paper will tackle two general themes. The first section, “*The Domestic Situation in Belarus Under President Lukashenka: Before and Since the March 2006 Presidential Elections*” will focus on Belarus’ domestic situation as understood before and since the March 2006 Presidential elections. The topics within this theme include a) the extent and explanation of Lukashenka’s actual popular support, b) the degree of political stability in Belarus as a result of state repression, and c) the state’s monopoly on identity politics as a means to exclude alternative ideologies in Belarus. These summaries will collectively illustrate the present obstacles for democratization in the region, and will recommend possible alternatives to increase democratic viability. The second section, “*The Security Implications of Belarusian Policy: Perspective from Russia, the EU, the US, and Canada*” will concentrate on Belarus’ geopolitical situation in Europe. This section explores a) Belarus’ perceived alienation by Western political narratives, b) the political and economic independence of Belarus as felt by Western and Russian perspectives, and c) the European Union’s economic and security concerns as a result of implications of the Polish (EU)-Belarusian border.

2. The Domestic Situation in Belarus Under President Lukashenka: Before and Since the March 2006 Presidential Elections

2.1 Explaining the Success and Stability of the Lukashenka Regime (David Marples)

David Marples examines Lukashenka's political base and the demographic factors that currently lend support for the Belarusian regime. The President depends on state symbols and anti-Western rhetoric to maintain the confidence of his electorate. When these measures fail the state turns to intimidation and threats to pacify any dissidents.

Although several countries voiced international concern against Lukashenka's allegedly fraudulent win, we observed that few Belarusians actually protested the electoral results. To explain this discrepancy, Marples draws attention to the interrelation between Belarus' demographic composition and the political leadership's usage of Soviet-styled tactics. The Belarusian population consists primarily of town-dwellers and the aging who are accustomed to Soviet-era "symbolic politics", including vocal outcries against suspected foreign influence. Lukashenka successfully founded his political platform on this discourse by denouncing NATO expansionism and Western IMF 'plots'.

Despite Lukashenka's use of symbolic politics, Marples nevertheless identifies structural factors that conceal dissenting voices. He compares Ukraine's Orange Revolution with the 2006 Belarusian election to distinguish the latter's oppositional fragility. In Ukraine the opposition was generally unified: Victor Yushchenko was well-known and had considerable standing in parliament. Ukraine also enjoyed some independent media control for opposition leaders to voice their platforms. In stark contrast, the Belarusian opposition lacks both unity and media access. When Aleksandar Kazulin (leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party) was attacked and beaten by the military on March 2nd, the Belarusian media turned a blind eye and continued to libel opposition parties as foreign-controlled menaces.

State repression is also a crucial indicator of Lukashenka's electoral victory. The government conveyed the message, particularly to the younger generations, that protest was futile—the student protesters were jailed, ejected from university, or relegated to unemployment. In the election over 600 protesters, including students, foreign journalists, and opposition leaders, were imprisoned. Finally, Lukashenka's support rests in his impressive cult status—his figure appears daily in the news and icons of him can be found in villages everywhere. His childhood has been rewritten to embody nationalistic heroism: a fatherless boy who took it upon himself to sacrifice family life for the good of his nation. Lukashenka personifies Belarus, given his pervading television appearances that convey the impression of a closely supervised society.

Lukashenka's regime is thus a blend of outdated party lines and the usage of coercion against dissenters. The regime clearly stresses a political monopoly in the media, which obstructs the Belarusian psyche from meaningful expression and digression from regime ideology. .

2.2 Action and Reaction: Political Stability Through Repression (Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga)

The central claim in this section is that President Lukashenka's popularity is exaggerated. His regime stability relies on repression and coercion. There is in fact a real, if disadvantaged, opposition movement in Belarus.

Wierzbowska-Miazga discusses issues of state repression and domestic discontent during and following Belarus' 2006 Presidential election. It seems that the March election scarcely threatened Lukashenka's power, as the regime ensured an array of preemptive strikes against

dissidents. Some time earlier Lukashenka also replaced virtually every high ranking member of the KGB with younger agents from the provinces, and several arrests took place before the election.

In addition to direct police initiatives against opposition activists, Lukashenka's state-controlled economy played an effective albeit indirect role of repression. Directors of state enterprises had to live up to Lukashenka's economic plans on pain of imprisonment. Such intimidation policies extended to regular workers as well. By employing people on contract based systems within state-run corporations, the Belarusian regime not only threatened dissident employees with termination, but it also hushed opposition sympathies in the workplace. These indirect mechanisms of coercion were later complemented with direct acts of repression, as evinced in the case of Alaksandar Kazulin (an opposition candidate sentenced to over five years labor in a prison colony).

In spite of these deterrents, however, Wierzbowska points out that the election period remained characterized with visible instances of popular protests. Despite the widespread fears of employment termination and police repression, the Minsk protests drew upwards of 20 000 people. Wierzbowska draws inferences that such oppositional measures provide reasonable grounds for believing that Belarus is on the threshold of a democratic transition.

The current regime legitimacy in Belarus is therefore questionable. Despite Lukashenka's pre-electoral measures in extinguishing political opposition, several thousand people took to the streets in Minsk to dispute the electoral results. There is thus still hope for democratic transition in Belarus, yet the political opposition is clearly in need of external support in order to counterbalance Lukashenka's leverage.

2.3 Identity Politics and the Regime (Natalia Leshchenko)

Leshchenko attributes the basis for Lukashenka's regime to two crucial pillars: nationalism and national ideology. The institutionalization of these elements has allowed the development of a stable form of authoritarian governance.

Leshchenko contends that the official state ideology as deployed by Lukashenka's regime helps support the political establishment. University programs reflect state ideology, as exemplified by mandatory ideological courses in special 'ideology days'. The three recurring themes in these courses are independence, unity, and national distinctiveness. Given Belarus' imperative of state independence, deemed a sacred feature of the nation, political dissent eventually came to be equated with disloyalty to the regime and to the nation. Any diverging traits from this distinctiveness continue to dissuade oppositionist and democratic sympathies. Belarus' outspoken blend of nationalism and national ideology clearly serve to legitimize state institutions along with their authoritarian values. Anyone in Belarus, regardless of ethnicity, can celebrate 'Belarusian values' that include 'building a strong and prosperous country'. Hence, the basis for political differentiation is a matter of the populace's stance vis-à-vis the regime.

Another trait for Belarusian nationalism is its uniqueness. Belarusians live a unique way of life, derived in part from centuries of living together in peace. This has important connotations. Neighboring states that have democratized successfully (e.g. Lithuania) promulgated the desire to adopt a "European Way of Life." However, previous attempts to modify Belarus' 'uniqueness' were perceived by the state as an assault on Belarus' particular way of life and hence on the nation. To the extent that Belarus can be separated in its ideology

from those of its neighbors, Lukashenka's regime can remain secure from internal, pro-democratic dissidents.

Belarusian national ideology propagates the message of regime support. Market reforms are viewed with suspicion, as they threaten to loosen the regime's stronghold on market egalitarianism. Opposition to the regime is also intolerable because it allegedly threatens national unity. In the midst of these realities Lukashenka has grounded his identity in the constructed Belarusian ideologies which he helped consolidate.

Leshchenko concludes by suggesting that future opposition leaders should promote a "Westernized Belarusian" identity before attempting to communicate ideas about political change. At present the Belarusian identity is bound to nationalism as institutionalized by state ideology.

3. The Security Implications of Belarusian Policy: Perspectives from Russia, the EU, US, and Canada

3.1 Exclusion and Alienation through Transnational Narratives (Yann Breault)

Transnational narratives help us to understand Belarus' alienation from Europe, and can explain why Belarus' foreign policy is more closely tied with Russia. Yann Breault draws attention to the manner in which pan-European discourse on identity has, due to the privileging of certain political and legal norms, excluded Belarus from the rest of the continent. In 1991 Belarus emerged as a neutral state in the post-communist transition. The subsequent endeavor to build bridges in the participation of a common European land was initially deemed vital for Belarus, given that its inhabitants were eager to break the Iron Curtain.

Nevertheless, Belarus emerged a 'non-European' nation after 15 years of independence. This is obvious in light of the expulsion of diplomats and the imprisonment of journalists during the March elections. These gestures demonstrate Lukashenka's unwillingness to bend out of his dictatorship for the West, much less to align Belarus with a common Western democratic culture.

The inclusion of Belarus into a European transnational collective identity has also been made problematic as a result of European identity discourses which emanated from Poland. Underlying these narratives are 'Russophobia', 'Romantic', and 'Messianic' conceptions that exacerbated the asymmetrical relation between Belarus and Europe. Breault contends that for Poland, European identity is predicated first and foremost upon the exclusion of Russia. Yet Belarus, owing to its close ties to the latter, is understood as situated on the borderlands of Europe, being neither fully European nor fully Russian. With regards to the Romantic notions of the West, Breault suggests that while the desire to share in a common European culture may have initially inspired Belarus to distance itself from Russia, Western support for such initiatives as Yeltsin's shelling of Parliament in October 1993 shattered any ideals of Western civilization that Lukashenka and his state elites may have held. Finally the 'messianic' quality of democratic discourse, or the idea that democracy must be imported from abroad, further serves to distance Belarus from Europe: the former suffered many invasions in its history, and thus the prospect of accommodating to the Polish mentality is tantamount to Belarus accepting yet another 'civilizing mission' undertaken by its Polish neighbors.

As Poland tried to keep up with its romantic discourse, Belarus declined to follow the ideal by supporting the Iraqis in the 2003 war. This contributed to the growing gap between Belarus and its closest Western neighbor. We are subsequently witnessing mounting tensions between Belarus and the West. Is Belarus preserving a Soviet-styled regime in its resistance to Western ideology? Certainly, maintains Breault. And to overcome this dialectical drama we should call into question the three conceptual definitions as listed above.

The Belarusian regime helped entrench Soviet-styled authoritarianism as a reaction to Western disregard and anti-Russian narratives. Relations between Belarus and Europe can thaw if we redress these narratives by way of accommodation and recognition.

3.2 Belarus: The Hole in the Doughnut (Robert Legvold)

Contemporary Belarus can be referred to as a ‘hole in the doughnut’. Belarus is unallied with any particular power and follows its foreign policy independently. This reality is as problematic for the West as it is for Russia.

For Legvold, Belarus is at the crossroads of European security. Most analysts still believe that problem-solving mechanisms in Central Europe lie solely in the hands of the West and Russia. However, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova are the new ‘lands-in-between’, and they enjoy some degree of political autonomy. These countries have essentially replaced the “buffer” roles of Poland and Czechoslovakia’s after WW1.

With Lukashenka’s 1994 acquisition to presidency, the West wrongfully assumed that the geopolitical implications in Belarus could be tackled simply. Nevertheless, Belarus’ democratic deficiency proved incompatible to what constitutes some fundamental principles of the European system. Legvold’s ‘hole in the doughnut’ metaphor refers to the increasing polarization between East and the West as a result of political tensions in the surrounding region. The role of Western intelligence agencies during the Color Revolutions has been interpreted by Easterners as a deliberate countercurrent aimed to decrease non-Western influence. Neither in Moscow nor in Minsk do they believe that the desire for democracy is intrinsic.

According to Legvold the West’s response to Belarus authoritarianism was ‘selective engagement’, namely, to isolate the regime while supporting its civil society programs. The US pursued a 2-track policy program in 1999 by rejecting Lukashenka’s regime, while engaging the top leadership in ongoing debates for a common European security. This policy failed, however, because the West ignored Belarus’ requests to explore special relationships with Brussels.

For Legvold the US continues to misrepresent Belarus. The notion that Belarus is feeling isolated and pressured is questionable at best. As Russia moves away from democratization, Lukashenka takes pride that his country did so earlier. In truth Lukashenka merely distanced himself from the US and Europe. His ‘Comfort Community’ includes individuals like Zimbabwe’s Mugabe and Venezuela’s Chavez. At the same time, Belarus represents the ‘other danger’ in Central Europe: it supports North Korea and Iran and makes common cause with them. Other major powers are also distancing themselves from the West, including China and India. All of these factors serve to reinforce the regime’s psychology in Minsk.

In terms of Western leverage, Legvold believes the “hole in the doughnut” is a fragile issue for Western nations. The West depends on the Belarus-Russian relationship, given the recent oil and gas crises. On the other hand, Belarus has ceased to rely on Moscow. It changes its agreements periodically, whether with the West or with Russia, for Minsk’s best interests.

Belarus is in a very interesting position in which it can bargain independently between two power blocs. Regime-change is thus in tension, particularly as Belarus asserts itself carefully in balance of its neighbors.

3.3 Regional Economic Politics in the Broader Foreign Policy Context (Peter Rutland)

Belarus warrants serious foreign policy attention from the international community now that it officially borders the European Union. It can also potentially disrupt European economies, as it controls its portion of the continental gas pipelines.

Commenting on the EU policy vis-à-vis Belarus, Peter Rutland argues that Belarus’ “last dictatorship in Europe” status is far more than Europe could have hoped for in 1991.

Nevertheless, cooperation, coexistence and osmosis with Belarus are exceedingly difficult. To date the OSCE is the only organization that Belarus shares with Europe. The poverty of such relations means that the EU suffers from a largely ineffectual foreign policy.

The Polish-Belarus border presently defines the EU external border. Although Poles have recently liberalized the borders for temporary and seasonal workers, Rutland believes this has increasingly promulgated smuggling, customs ringing, and illegal immigration. If the West is to criticize the Belarusian regime with derogatory statements, it must bear in mind that Lukashenka has several newfound possibilities at his disposal, such as sending off unwanted Belarusians, à la Castro, into the EU via Poland. The EU is starkly aware of this menace.

For US policymakers Belarus is arguably too distanced and of little strategic importance. The issue of who leads Belarus is of no great importance. This mentality obviously differs from that in 1990, as US strategists hurried to rid Minsk of its nuclear weapons. Be that as it may, the West must acknowledge that Lukashenka displays a good deal of rationality: he used state sovereignty for his purposes; his regime controls the territory, the police, and the fuel pipelines that cross through Belarus. Lukashenka will hold on to these aces, Rutland emphasizes, especially when confronted with an alien EU project that envisions borderless areas.

The present-day visa sanctions against Belarus arose out of happenstance yet they have arguably strengthened Lukashenka's authoritarian regime. Despite Western leverage mechanisms such as the freezing of assets, Lukashenka's regime is virtually unscathed. At present Belarus capitalizes on EU and Russian vulnerabilities with respect to the Russian-Belarusian fuel lines. In geopolitical terms Russia is currently focusing on its downstream consumer, Germany, and the transient countries, including Ukraine. In the midst of such economic transactions Belarus is placed in an interesting bargaining position. There is no way for Russia or the West to obtain a fair transportation price through the fixed Belarusian gas lines. Rutland concludes that a successful economy is the keystone to Lukashenka's success.

Economic interdependence in the region is thus a key factor to Belarusian stability. Belarus geographic situation is such that it indirectly benefits from the economic transactions of its neighbors.

4. Democracy Promotion: Canadian Support for a Belarusian Project

The relative political stability in Belarus can be characterized in two ways. The first deals with the consensual aspect for the Belarusian regime. Although it is difficult to measure the extent of actual popular support, demographics suggest that most rural and township Belarusians do not oppose the regime directly. Throughout most of the Lukashenka era we have seen few blatant disruptions at the political level. Most Belarusians thus seem to have at least partially accepted the regime's nationalistic rhetoric for Belarusian "uniqueness". The second aspect of political stability deals with the effects of state coercion in Belarusian life. From the university classes to the workplace, the state manipulates public fear by threatening expulsion or by terminating employments. The regime likewise controls the media, which it uses to promulgate ideology while shutting out alternative information sources. In critical moments the state resorts to imprisonment and public beatings, as was the case during the Minsk protests. In this sense, political stability is forcibly maintained at the expense of basic social freedoms.

Belarusian democracy must originate from the basis of its society. At the same time, it is clear that political alternatives cannot be devised in Belarus without external support. As such, measures must be taken to ensure some degree of information flows into Belarus. Given the paucity of information spreading to Belarus, initiatives can be taken to devise or increase independent Belarusian radio programming in neighboring Poland. Canadian foreign policymakers can then support such initiatives by sponsoring members of the Belarusian diaspora to coordinate a common democratic dialogue for Belarusians inside the Lukashenka regime.

Belarusian isolationist foreign policy has been affected by Western chastisement. Since the March 2006 elections Lukashenka has increasingly distanced himself from the West, while his regime secures profits from the continental gas pipelines. Diplomatic relations have been severed and Belarus continues to deflect political narratives that differ from its own. Taken together, these aspects a) allow Belarus to pursue greater political independence, and b) demonstrate the inefficacy of Western governments in pursuing traditional economic and diplomatic sanctions against Belarus.

Canada must look for innovative means to promote dialogue with Belarus. Ideally a communication a policy of engagement would include Belarusian leaders of the Belarusian opposition and communities of the Belarusian diaspora. The primary objectives of these dialogues should consist of framing a shared "Westernized Belarusian" identity discourse.

5. Conclusion

This paper summarized a collection of perspectives on Belarusian politics as presented during the international conference “*Belarus Today: Democratic Openings, Security Concerns*”. These lectures subdivided Belarusian politics into domestic and international situations. With respect to the former, it has been noted that President Lukashenka’s regime maintained political stability through a blend of state coercion, ideology and nationalism. Nevertheless, the current regime in Belarus is beginning to show signs of weakness from the March 2006 protests. We can thus observe traceable origins of democratization in Belarus. However, Lukashenka’s firm control of the media and the economy hampers political change from within. The latter section dealt with geopolitical concerns of Belarus’ neighbors. It has been shown that Belarus has politically isolated itself from Western states, which hints that Lukashenka will avoid a Belarusian Coloured Revolution at the expense of regional cooperation. Belarus also poses security issues for the European Community. The Polish (EU) – Belarusian border offers Lukashenka the means to dispose of his political opponents, which could then provide the regime with greater durability.

The overall recommendation in this paper is for Canadian policymakers to shift engagement measures from an exclusive focus on political elites to the grassroots level. This would include the Belarusian mainstream and opposition, as well as members of the Canadian-Belarusian diaspora. A democratic government does not disenfranchise, expatriate, or imprison its citizens for expressing conflicting political opinions. The Lukashenka regime is characterized by authoritarianism and, as such, does not inherently represent the will of the Belarusian people. Consequently, the Canadian government should redirect its energies to supporting the creation of a “Westernized Belarusian” discourse by engaging with free Belarusian agencies. The emergence of a Belarusian democratic consciousness could not only counterbalance President Lukashenka’s unilateral nationalism, but it could also provide alternative directions for the development of Belarusian society.

Appendix I: Questions after the First Discussion Panel

Professor Dominique Arel opened the discussion with inquiries as to the role of language following Belarus' and Ukraine's respective electoral crises. Leshchenko responded by contending that measures are being implemented in Belarus to make the language simpler, due in part to the influence of Russian residents, but also for the ideological imperatives of distinctiveness and independence. David Marples disagreed in part and suggested that language reform has been a disputed cause for several years now, as only twenty percent of Belarusian schools teach subject matters in Belarusian.

The following question broached proposed union of Belarus with the Russian Federation, and why it hasn't happened so far. Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga answered by emphasizing the nature of the proposed unification. The union was offered as in post-Soviet tones so that Russia and Belarus could meet practical needs. Lukashenka thus tried to draw on the vision to extend his leadership visibility, but the advent of Putin's presidency later brought frictions. At this point in time neither Lukashenka nor Putin are interested in a union proper. Russia's interests center on economic security, while Lukashenka's rhetoric on the union discourse is a token to merge Russian economic interests with those of Belarus'.

Veering to Lukashenka's successful linkages with Soviet symbols, the next query asked whether such systems that bred on political loyalty could be maintained in the absence of institutional setups, and whether this structurally weakens Lukashenka's power. Natalia Leshchenko responded underscored that although Belarus is no longer a Soviet society, the role of ideology in Belarus is significant. Belarus is not as institutionally potent as it was prior to independence. However, we can discern traces of a corporatist state with particular organizations vying to represent particular strata (youth movements, labor). Belarus is not unique with its advent of egalitarianism and inclusive nationalism – several states frame their ideologies in a similar fashion, particularly in Central Asia. David Marples added that Lukashenka is attempting to further consolidate power by attempting to merge both wings of the communist movements, and that it would not be unreasonable to expect a presidential Communist party in the future.

A member of the audience commented on David Marples' presentation by addressing the role of foreign observers in the last round of Ukrainian elections which have arguably prevented the type of repression as later seen in Minsk. He reiterated Wierzbowska's observations on how protesters in Belarus were driven off in "apathy and fear", noting that perhaps Belarusians lacked the Ukrainians' self-respect and NGO training that allowed them to 'own' certain issues. Lukashenka's final victory rested in the KGB's effective message that electoral dissent would be equated with terrorism. The irony, of course, is that Belarus' current national anthem begins with "Belarusians are a peaceful people".

Dominique Arel inquired whether Belarusian political discourse is becoming more ambiguous vis-à-vis Russia in order to further define Belarus' distinctiveness. David Marples shares this view positively: When Putin emphasized that a Russian-Belarusian union would probably mean Russia's annexation of Belarus, Lukashenka then began accusing the Kremlin of corruption. He also seized upon the Beslan incident, claiming that "we don't have this type of thing here in Belarus because I am the great protector".

The next inquiry sought answers as to the existence of relevant parallels between Lukashenka's personality cult and that of Kim Jon-Il's in North Korea. In general the panelists cautioned against the unpredictable nature of comparing regime issues of succession. In spite of this, it is not unreasonable to suggest that both regimes are antidemocratic, and that both deploy ideology quite well.

Concerning the extent of information and communication freedom in Belarus, an audience member commented on Belarus' purchase of technology from China as a means to tighten controls on state internet providers. Wierzbowska responded that although Lukashenka cares little for international opinion, he nevertheless endorses provocative acts of isolation, to the extent that Belarusian language books are primarily oeuvres of poetry or folklore, as opposed to mainstream novels of romance, crime, or translated works.

The final inquiry, for Marples and Leshchenko, involved Belarus' demographic makeup, the success of post-Soviet ideology, and the prevalence of the personality-ideology dogma in state politics. Leshchenko admitted that further studies need to be made to understand why both elites and the people support Lukashenka. David Marples addressed the demographic aspect of the question and stated that 20 000 protestors is an important threshold point and that more protestors can be expected with an emerging youth. The Chernobyl crisis provided thousands of youth with opportunities to recuperate in foreign cities, where they were able to imbibe alternate modes of thought – many of which are considered subversive by the state. Regarding the future, Marples cited Aleksandar Milinkevich, who apologized to a crowd of protestors for the lack of an organized movement, and suggested that the new plan was to forget elections and simply mobilize in the streets.

Appendix II: Questions after the Second Discussion Panel

Professor Dominique Arel asked Mr. Rutland how Russia's economic functions should be distinguished from that of Belarus'. Mr. Rutland specified that Belarus' economy is more directly controlled than in Russia, which results in a trade-off between high living standards for lowering political risks. Professor Arel then queried on the differences in the Belarusian economy compared to its performance during the late Soviet-era (where the prevailing economical tendency was either stagnancy or negative growth). To this Rutland replied that the 'short answer' was oil price: in 1985 oil prices dropped suddenly, whereas today the prices have reached up to \$60 a barrel. Belarus is capitalizing on this and it compares to Kuwait's position in 1991. The other part of the problem is the centralized control of economy and the role of nationalism. Russia began subsidizing gas after a substantial jump in prices from anywhere between twenty and thirty dollars a barrel. Lukashenka skimmed that gas into a slush fund that could otherwise have been used to prop up Belarus' collective agriculture.

A commentator took up Mr. Legvold's suggestion about whether there is really a need to talk about Belarus as a 'hole in the doughnut' for the very reasons elucidated by Mr. Rutland—the unpredictability of Belarus, its lack of transparency. The OSCE merit is that it relates to the common mutual recognition of democratic transparency, the freedom of the press, and the legitimacy of other nation states. By that token it can be argued that an OSCE country like Ukraine should take interest in Belarus for democratic issues. The second comment relates to the "How long will this last" question about the Belarusian regime. Perhaps both Putin and Lukashenka will lose their jobs if oil prices fall, but one must recognize the importance of infection between cross-border movements. Ultimately the fact that Belarus is now at the border of Europe, that its trade with Europe takes about 50% of Belarus' foreign trade, are important matters. We simply cannot tell how long it will take before the infections of democratic values and economic rights will move into the wider section of Belarus' population.

Mr. Legvold clarified his metaphor: the hole in the doughnut refers to abysmal security issues, including 1) how the West ignores Belarus, 2) how Belarus reinforced the polarization between Europe and Russia, 3) how the West created heightened risks for military cooperation between Belarus and Russia (including radar, conventional training), and 4) how Belarus contributes to global instability by assisting Iran, North Korea. Legvold proposes for comprehensive grounds on working with Russia in the area of Belarus, as well as finding common ground with respect to Ukraine. Governments talk quietly but seldom bear down to the root of what is separating them. Above all the West must remember that although Putin can no longer afford to give Belarus a free ride, he will not risk losing Belarus either.

The next inquiry referred to the effects on Belarus of the 1999 NATO bombing attacks on Belgrade and of the 2003 war in Iraq. Mr. Legvold replied that signs of fear in Lukashenka are visibly demonstrated by the recent beatings of demonstrators and by the waves of imprisonments. Also, economic indicators show primitive living standards in Belarusian villages, where poverty affects 7 out of 10 people. Society is declining by token of orphans (Chernobyl), alcoholism, and famine. Yann Breault, who studied Russian in Minsk during the Yugoslavian bombing, remarked that opposition leaders became disbanded for the very first time in 1999. For the populace observing newscasts, the West's moral authority simply evaporated in 1999.

Lukashenka thus capitalized on violence elsewhere to pursue political views in Belarus. This is widely ignored by Western analysts, which makes dialogue difficult.

Mr. Legvold's policy prescriptive point of view then came under scrutiny: linking countries together would bring greater risks, and there should be greater recognition for differentiation. The notion of "lands-in-between" seems to imply that Russia lies on the other side, yet we should offer Russia greater integration. Russia may still have a better cooperative relationship with Europe despite its authoritarian tones.

Legvold, again clarifying his viewpoint, does not refer to linking Ukraine with Moldova with respect to foreign policy. What he means is being interested in a dynamic Europe in which the major powers agree not to encourage countries to act as leverages against the other. What Legvold is encouraging is cooperation and a policy of reassurance over coercion. Yet Belarus' foreign policy reflects conservatism, and Russia is worried about Western influence. What we are looking for in the central states is non-alignment.

The final question pertained to the likelihood of Lukashenka enlarging his local military to deter or threaten Belarus' neighbors. Mr. Legvold stated nature of military collaboration between Belarus and Russia, both of which face burdens of dilapidated and outmoded equipment. Nevertheless, both countries share nuclear radars that monitor against forces coming from the Arctic, and both typically collaborate in military exercises. Yet in the long run everything depends on Russia's power. Russia's target for 2008 is that 80% of its military would consist of non-professional conscripts. More tellingly, Russia would prefer a professionalized military. In Chechnya the Russian military is 100 percent professional. This is relevant for Belarus. Shushkevich (who sued the Belarusian Social Security Ministry for allotting a mere \$1.80 monthly retirement pension plan for a former head of state) makes it clear that Belarusians do not want to serve elsewhere.