

Roundtable Discussion

Change in Belarus – EU Relations: A New Horizon or a Tactical Shift?

*Organised by the Soros Foundation – Latvia and the policy centre EuroCivitas
in cooperation with the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels)*

November 2nd, 2009, Riga. Venue: Reval Hotel Ridzene, 1 Reimersa

In March 2009, the European Union approved the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, originally proposed by Poland and Sweden in 2008, extending it to Belarus. This has been one of Europe's gestures towards the country, reacting to a series of signals from Minsk hinting at a possible readjustment in the Belarusian foreign policy. Both these signals, as well as the expectations of a domestic political and economic liberalisation remain inconclusive. As a close neighbour, Latvia has a political and economic stake in the EU's engagement with Belarus, while as part of the European value-based community, Latvia is interested in supporting a European and democratic future for this country.

Even with the EaP offered to Belarus, the question remains: what to make of, and how to respond to the Belarusian leadership's overture to Europe. Does the recent change open a new horizon for the Belarus-EU relations, or is it merely a tactical shift?

13.30 Registration, coffee served

14.00 Opening remarks

Andris Aukmanis, Executive Director, Soros Foundation – Latvia

Olga Stuzhinskaya, Director, Office for a Democratic Belarus

14.15 ***Session One:*** *Changes that have taken place in Belarusian society and the political regime are obvious and have been noticed by external observers. The meaning of these changes, however, remains unclear. Are we witnessing a gradual regime opening? Has there been improvement of political and social freedoms, or is such improvement in sight?*

Dzyanis Melyantsou, Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies

Aleksandr Feduta, independent journalist and writer, Belarus

14.55 ***Session Two:*** *What are the economic reasons for Belarus's turn towards Europe and vice versa? Is an economic Europeanization of Belarus viable and is it a way out of the difficulties? How has the current global economic crisis affected Belarusian economy? Are there any prospects for a more open economy and a better business environment?*

Dzmitry Kruk, Institute for Privatization and Management, Belarus
Anastasiya Glambotskaya, expert on business and economics, Belarus

15.35 *Session Three: While the Belarusian regime for many years has been perceived as Russia's closest ally, it is now seen as balancing between Russia and Europe, trying to preserve its autonomy internationally, as well as its power domestically. How have the Belarus – Russia relations changed in the recent years and how does the Russia factor affect Belarusian policy vis-à-vis EU? What can the EU and its Eastern Partnership initiative offer in order to make the European option more readily available for Belarus?*

Kirill Koktysh, MGIMO University, faculty of Political Science, Russia

16.15 Refreshments

Discussion moderator: **Mr. Victor Makarov**, director, policy centre *EuroCivitas*
Working languages: English and Russian, simultaneous translation provided.

ABOUT THE ORGANISERS

The **Soros-Foundation – Latvia** (SFL) is a non-profit organization which supports democracy, rule of law, tolerance and sustainable development in Latvia and in Europe. The Foundation's activities are funded by the Open Society Institute founded by philanthropist George Soros, as well as other sources. The Soros Foundation – Latvia has four main working areas: sustainable development; rule of law and good governance; human rights and social integration; and wider Europe with a view towards eastern neighbors.

EuroCivitas is a Latvia-based NGO policy centre. Its mission is to develop and promote ideas and actions that advance a larger Europe based on values of democracy and open society. The focus areas are europeanization of the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, EU-Russia relations and development of European values and identities in Latvia.

The Brussels-based **Office for a Democratic Belarus** is a non-profit organization run by Belarusians living abroad. The Office's task is to strengthen ties between the Belarusian pro-democratic groups, including NGOs, political parties and the Belarusian independent media, and the EU institutions, the Council of Europe, NATO, the United Nations, international human rights groups and international press.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Anastasiya Glambotskaya is Researcher at the IPM Research Center, Minsk. She has got her MA in International Political Economy from the University of Manchester, UK. Anastasiya's main areas of research are business development and regulation in Belarus, sectoral and infrastructural development (insurance sector and telecommunications), international trade and investments and international business.

Aleksandr Feduta holds a PhD in philology and is a political analyst. He is the author of the book *Lukashenko: A Political biography*. («Лукашенко. Политическая биография», Moscow, 2005) and co-ordinator of the *Belarusian Yearbook* («Белорусский ежегодник», 2003 – 2007) and *Who is Who in Belarus* project («Кто есть кто в Беларуси», 1999 – 2009). He currently works as a political consultant in Russia and Ukraine. He was member of Alexander Lukashenko's first campaign headquarters during the 1994 presidential election.

Kirill Koktysh is Associate Professor, political theory department, MGIMO University, Russia and holds PhD in political science. His sphere of interests includes social transformation processes, networks and hierarchies, decision-making, cognitive approach, Belarus and Eastern Europe. Kirill Koktysh has more than 50 publications in scientific and public editions and four monographs.

Dzmitry Kruk is researcher at the IPM Research Center. He got his MA in Economics and Finance from the Belarusian State University. He is currently working on his Ph.D

thesis. Dzmitry's main research interests are monetary economics, financial systems, economic growth, economic policy in transition countries and macroeconomic modelling. He has a number of publications on these topics and has co-authored the elaborated Macroeconomic Model of the Belarusian Economy, which is the main forecasting tool used by the IPM Research Center.

Dzianis Melyantsou is acting deputy director of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies. He pursued Masters' studies at the European Humanities University (Program on European and Transatlantic Studies), and the International Relations departments at the Belarusian State University. After the closing down of the EHU in Minsk, Dzianis studied Political Science and International Relations at the Institute for International Relations and Political Sciences in Vilnius (Lithuania), where he defended his M.A. thesis in 2006. Among his recent publication in English are 'Belarus' relations with Ukraine and Lithuania before and after the 2006 presidential elections' (with Andrei Kazakevich, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 20/2008), 'The Change of Generations within the Belarusian Opposition: Is There a Conflict?' (with Andrei Kazakevich, in *The Generation Gap, or Belarusian Differences in Goals, Values and Strategy*. Edited by Andrej Dynko. Warsaw 2008) and 'Belarus-EU Relations: Dialogue in Hard Times' (Belarusian Yearbook 2008. Minsk 2009).