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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Case No.: 200701753

MAR 25 2010

I refer to your letter dated March 11, 2007 regarding the release of certain Department of State material under the Freedom of Information Act (Title 5 USC Section 552).

We searched for and reviewed the self study guides that you requested and have determined that all except one of them may be released. They are on the enclosed disc. One of the guides is being released with excisions.

An enclosure provides information on Freedom of Information Act exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made excisions, the applicable exemptions are marked on each document. With respect to material withheld by the Department of State, you have the right to appeal our determination within 60 days. A copy of the appeals procedures is enclosed.

We have now completed the processing of your case. If you have any questions, you may write to the Office of Information Programs and Services, SA-2, Department of State, Washington, DC 20522-8100, or telephone us at (202) 261-8484. Please be sure to refer to the case number shown above in all correspondence about this case.

We hope that the Department has been of service to you in this matter.

Sincerely,

for Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures:
As stated.

63934 Federal Register/Vol. 69, No. 212
Rules and Regulations

Subpart F – Appeal Procedures

§171.52 Appeal of denial of access to, declassification of, amendment of, accounting of disclosures of, or challenge to classification of records.

(a) *Right of administrative appeal.* Except for records that have been reviewed and withheld within the past two years or are the subject of litigation, any requester whose request for access to records, declassification of records, amendment of records, accounting of disclosure of records, or any authorized holder of classified information whose classification challenge has been denied, has a right to appeal the denial to the Department's Appeals Review Panel. This appeal right includes the right to appeal the determination by the Department that no records responsive to an access request exist in Department files. Privacy Act appeals may be made only by the individual to whom the records pertain.

(b) *Form of appeal.* There is no required form for an appeal. However, it is essential that the appeal contain a clear statement of the decision or determination by the Department being appealed. When possible, the appeal should include argumentation and documentation to support the appeal and to contest the bases for denial cited by the Department. The appeal should be sent to: Chairman, Appeals Review Panel, c/o Appeals Officer, A/GIS/IPS/PP/LC, U.S. Department of State, SA-2, Room 8100, Washington, DC 20522-8100.

(c) *Time limits.* The appeal should be received within 60 days of the date of receipt by the requester of the Department's denial. The time limit for response to an appeal begins to run on the day that the appeal is received. The time limit (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) for agency decision on an administrative appeal is 20 days under the FOIA (which may be extended for up to an additional 10 days in unusual circumstances) and 30 days under the Privacy Act (which the Panel may extend an additional 30 days for good cause shown). The Panel shall decide mandatory declassification review appeals as promptly as possible.

(d) *Notification to appellant.* The Chairman of the Appeals Review Panel shall notify the appellant in writing of the Panel's decision on the appeal. When the decision is to uphold the denial, the Chairman shall include in his notification the reasons therefore. The appellant shall be advised that the decision of the Panel represents the final decision of the Department and of the right to seek judicial review of the Panel's decision, when applicable. In mandatory declassification review appeals, the Panel shall advise the requester of the right to appeal the decision to the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel under §3.5(d) of E.O. 12958.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

(b)(1) Withholding specifically authorized under an Executive Order in the interest of national defense or foreign policy, and properly classified. E.O. 12958, as amended, includes the following classification categories:

- 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
- 1.4(b) Foreign government information
- 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
- 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
- 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
- 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
- 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
- 1.4(h) Information on weapons of mass destruction

(b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency

(b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:

ARMEX	Arms Export Control Act, 22 USC 2778(e)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
EXPORT	Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 App. USC 2411(c)(1)
FSA	Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4003 & 4004
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f)
IRAN	Iran Claims Settlement Act, Sec 505, 50 USC 1701, note

(b)(4) Privileged/confidential trade secrets, commercial or financial information from a person

(b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product

(b)(6) Information that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy

(b)(7) Information compiled for law enforcement purposes that would:

- (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
- (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
- (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
- (D) disclose confidential sources
- (E) disclose investigation techniques
- (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual

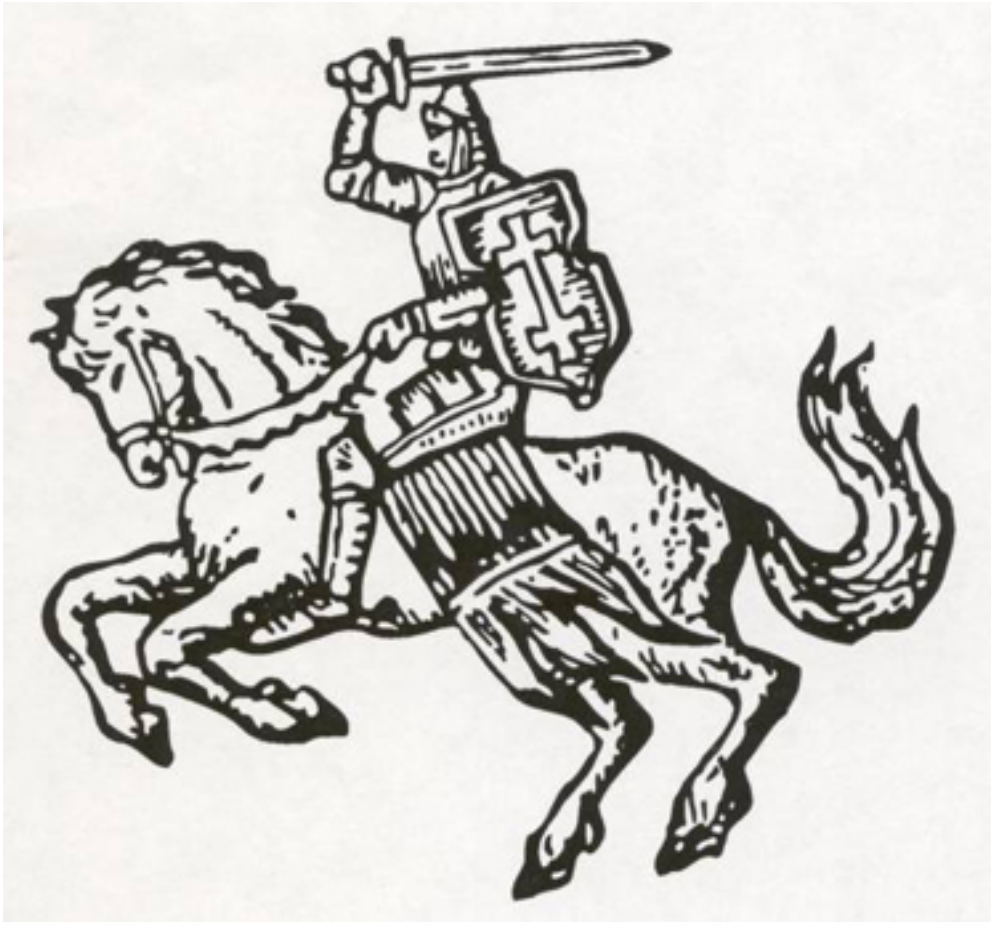
(b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions

(b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request, excised with the agreement of the requester

Self -Study Guide to Belarus



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School of Professional and Area Studies
Foreign Service Institute
U.S. Department of State

The *Self–Study Guide : Belarus* is intended to provide U.S. government personnel in the foreign affairs community with an overview of important Belarus' issues related to history, culture, politics, economics, security and international relations. This guide should serve as an introduction and a self-study resource. Belarus' affairs are far too complex and broad to be covered in any depth using only the text in this guide. The reader is encouraged to explore the questions and issues raised in the guide by referring to the books, articles, periodicals and web sites listed in the appropriate sections. Most of the referenced material can be found either on the Internet or in the Foreign Service Institute or Main State Libraries.

The first edition of the *Self-Study Guide* to Belarus was prepared by Dr. Martyna Fox, chair for Russian and Eurasian area studies at FSI. The views expressed in this guide are those of the author or of attributed

sources and do not necessarily reflect official policy or position of the U.S. Department of State or the National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

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June, 2002

Table of Contents

Early Belarusan nationalism
World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution

4. The Soviet Era
Belorussian SSR
Belarusans in Poland

5. The Experience of World War II
The Holocaust on Belorussian territories
Partisan warfare
Belarusan dispersion

6. The Road to Independence
Political context: Glasnost'
Chernobyl and its impact
Independence movement in Belarus

Part III

Belarus Today

1. Constitutional Structure
A Parliamentary Republic: 1991- 1994
A Presidential Republic: 1994 - Present

2. Domestic Politics
The Presidential Apparatus
Political Parties and Opposition
The Mass Media
The NGO's
The Problem of Democratization

3. Economy
Government Policy on Reforms
Privatization
Agriculture
Energy Issues
Foreign Trade and Investment

4. Society
Demography
Health Issues: Chernobyl after-effects, HIV/AIDS crisis
Women's Issues: Trafficking in Women
Environment

6. National Security

Note on Spelling:

In an attempt to balance the established English language spelling of adjectives referring to things Belorussian with the spelling preferred by contemporary Belarusan scholars, names of historical territories up to and including the Soviet era will preserve the traditional English spelling, while adjectives referring to the culture, language, nationality or developments in contemporary Belarus will adopt the other.

Part I: The Land and the People

1. Land

The **Republic of Belarus** is a landlocked country in north-eastern Europe with the territory of 207,600 sq km. It borders five states: the Russian Federation to the East, Latvia to the North East, Lithuania to the North, Poland to the West, and Ukraine to the South. The capital of Belarus, Minsk, is located in the center of the country and has a population of 1,700,000.

Topographic features

The landscape of the country is glacier-shaped. Belarus is predominantly flat, with low hills in the north-east (the highest point is 364m) and swampy lowlands in the south.

Network of rivers

With over 20,000 small and medium rivers and 11,000 lakes, Belarus' dense network of waterways is unique in Europe. Four major rivers link it to the Baltic and the Black Sea basins: in the North, the Neman and West Dvina empty into the Baltic Sea; the Dnieper and its tributary, Pripyat', flow into the Black Sea. These rivers have been instrumental in providing access to the cultures and economies of East and West throughout the history of the region.

Today, Belarus's waterways have been augmented by a network of canals providing it with a relatively easy access to the Baltic Sea (Belarus has an agreement with Poland providing access to the port facilites at Gdynia).

Climate

Belarus lies above 50* longitude, that is on the level of Manitoba. Yet the relative proximity of the Atlantic Ocean and the Baltic Sea tempers its continental climate. Summers, lasting up to 150 days, bring moderate temperatures between F 60 - 70*, and in winters temperatures fall to between -5 and 32*F. Precipitation is abundant, averaging 550-700 mm a year.

Soils and agriculture

One third of Belarus' territory is covered by forests. The most impressive the Belovezha National Forest (1,450 sq km) and the Naliboki National Forest (1,400 sq km) include the last stands of primeval forests in Europe.

The country's swampy soils are poorly suited to agriculture; consequently, Belarus has specialized in raising cattle. Today, its main agricultural products include meat, dairy products, potatoes and flax.

*(See the section on the environment for the impact of Chernobyl on agriculture in Belarus).

Natural and mineral resources

Belarus has very few mineral resources, consisting of small deposits of iron ore, nonferrous metal ores, potash and rock salt.

Because it lacks coal, oil or other energy products, Belarus is dependent on energy imports from the Russian Federation. For its production of electric power, Belarus relies on 22 thermal power plants and 9 small hydro-electric plants.

2. The People

In 2000, the population of Belarus comprised just over 10,000,000 people, with a density of approx. 50 persons per sq km.

Largest Cities:

Minsk: 1,672,000 inhabitants
Gomel: 501,000
Mogilev: 367,000
Vitebsk: 356,000
Grodno: 302,000

(Source: EIU Country Profile for Belarus, 2001/2002)

Ethnic origins

Belarusans are grouped with the East Slavic family of languages together with the Russians and the Ukrainians. However, many scholars believe that the Belarusan ethnogenesis began with the fusion of the Slavic and Baltic populations native to the area.

Ethnic structure

The 1989 population census (the Soviet Union's last) provided the following ethnic breakdown for the Republic of Belarus:

Belarusans: 77.8%
Russians: 13.2%
Poles: 4.1%
Ukrainians: 2.9%
Others: 2.0%

A large percent of the ethnically Russian population came to Belarus after WW II and is concentrated in the urban and industrial centers. Ethnic Poles live in the Western part of Belarus, close to the border with Poland. The Ukrainians, by contrast, are concentrated in the south.

Other ethnic groups in Belarus include the Lithuanians, Latvians, Tatars and Jews.

Jewish History in Belarus

Jews first settled in the Belorussian territories at the end of the 14th century. Early royal charters allowed them to live in the cities of Brest and Hrodna and to engage in financial operations as well as in trade and crafts. With the expansion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (within which Jews had achieved prominent positions), Jews from Germany and Poland arrived to settle in central and eastern Belarus. Administratively, the Jewish settlements were organized into *kahals,* or self-run religious communities. Religious and cultural life flourished, with a number of yeshivas (Brest, Mir) and religious movements achieving diaspora-wide fame.

When Belorussian territories became part of the Russian empire at the end of the 18th century, the official Pale of Settlement was established. It prohibited the Jews from living, working or owning real estate east of the former Polish-Russian border. Consequently, the Belorussian lands held one of the largest concentrations of Jewish population in Europe (1.2 million in 1897). By the end of the 19th century, most Belorussian cities had ethically Jewish majorities: 58% in Minsk, 53% in Viciebsk, 61% in Hrodna. Despite occasional outbreaks of anti-Semitism, and the official policy of Russification, Jewish centers of life in Belarus remained vigorous in the late Tsarist empire.

This entire community and way of life was destroyed during World War II as a result of Nazi genocide. Of Belarus' 2.2 million victims in WW II, the vast majority was Jewish. Frequently, whole populations of Jewish towns and villages were exterminated on the spot; relatively few were sent to concentration camps. (See permanent exhibits at the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC).

In 1989, there were 112,000 Jews in Belarus. It is estimated that since then about 40 to 50% have emigrated. Nonetheless, in 1991, the Belarusan Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities was established to promote a renewal of Jewish cultural and religious life and to defend the rights of the Jewish minority.

Identity

Belorusan identity is rooted in religion, language and folk culture. Whereas the ethnic and cultural identity of the Belarusans is quite strong, their national awareness was weakened by a history first as a 'stateless' people, and more recently, as a 'compound' state.

Contemporary Belarus comprises territories which were historically controlled by the Lithuanian/Polish

state in the west and north, and by the Russian state in the south and east. Consequently, the Belarusan population has been subject to centuries of Polonization on the one hand and Russification on the other. As a result of these pressures, cultural and political elites among the Belarusans tended to adopt either the Polish or the Russian culture as their own, leaving the task of preserving Belarusan language and culture largely to the peasants.

Another factor was the presence of many other ethnic minorities within Belarus. As has been mentioned, in the 19th century most Belorussian cities had Jewish majorities as well as influential Polish and Russian minorities. Thus, Belarusan culture had a limited geographic and class reach, and Belarusan identity played a limited political and nation-building role.

The multi-ethnic character of the Belorussian lands is well illustrated by the continued and wide-spread bilingualism: 63% of the population of Belarus is bilingual, including 70% of ethnic Belarusans. However, whereas 70% of ethnic Belarusans living in the cities considered Belarusan to be their native language, 97% of those living in the countryside did so. **Nationalism and Nation-building**

In the 19th century the Belorusan national idea was predicated on political independence, democracy, and social justice. Political independence would put an end to the cultural pressures from the outside, while democracy and social justice would allow the Belarusan identity of the peasants to replace that of the Polonized or Russified elites.

This essentially defensive nationalism was no match for the Soviet system. During the Soviet era, despite the outward symbols of statehood, Belarusan national awareness was further undercut by the official policies of Sovietization which, as a practical matter, meant once again the Russification of all spheres of public life. This process only intensified in the wake of World War II, when Belarus' population losses caused Moscow to resettle large numbers of ethnic Russians there.

The decisive point for the awakening of national awareness among the Belarusans was the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. The radioactive fallout and its calamitous consequences combined with the obtuse behavior of Moscow sparked the rise of the Belarusan Popular Front. Thus the independence movement in Belarus contained once again a mixture of environmental and social as well as nationalist elements.

The process of nation-building in today's Belarus has been complicated first and foremost by the lack of democratization. Belarusan national awareness continues to be hampered by the fact that the country's policymaking elite, centered on President Alexander Lukashenka, is more Russified than the population. Its policies (especially that of seeking a closer union with the Russian Federation) have further encouraged bilingualism and other manifestations of a dual, Russo-Belarusan culture.

3. Culture

Language

The Belarusan language belongs to the East Slavic family of languages and is closely related to both Russian and Ukrainian. Belarusan contains many loan words from Polish and from Russian, reflecting centuries of cultural pressures from these neighbors. The standard literary Belarusan language, codified in 1918, is based on a central Belarus dialect and is written in the Cyrillic alphabet.

The 1920's and the early 1990's were the only periods during which the Belarusan language flourished and was promoted as the official language of the country. In the Soviet era, Stalinization and the growing predominance of Great Russian nationalism reversed the gains of Belarusan language. The official Soviet policy of Russo-Belarusan bilingualism resulted by 1992 in 60% of Belarusans preferring to use Russian in daily life, and 75% preferring bilingualism in public life.

More pernicious, however, has been the emergence of the so called *trasyanka*, (translated as "mixture of hay and straw') which is a lexical and grammatical mixture of Russian, Belarusan, Ukrainian and Polish. *Trasyanka* is used widely in rural areas and has emerged as the "popular" language of the country.

The issue of language has become highly politicized during Alexander Lukashenka's tenure. Although the Constitution confirms in Article 17 that "the state language is Belarusan," a Lukashenka-supported referendum reintroduced official bilingualism in 1995. Currently, the official media portray those using Belarusan as opposition members seeking to destabilize the country (the Belarusan Language Society, for instance, was expelled from its offices in 1998). The President, by contrast, speaks almost exclusively in Russian and insists that the majority of Belarusans are Russophones.

Belarus or ***Belorussia***? The Spelling Dilemma

What's in the spelling of a name? Historical, as well as the established English language usage, refers to the country as *Belorussia* or *Byelorussia*, and to its people and culture as *Belorussian*. However, since 1991, the preferred usage among most scholars of that country is ***Belarus/Belarusan*** – as in the official name of the Republic of Belarus. This shift is due to the fact that the older spelling (*Belorussia*) was perceived as Russocentric, reflecting the view that "*Belorussians*" (i.e. White Russians) were but a branch of the Great Russian nation.

Consequently, this guide will retain the older spelling in reference to the historical lands up to and including the Soviet era. But in reference to the culture, people, or contemporary developments, the current *Belarusan* version will be used.

Religion and religious minorities

Belarus has historically been a multi-confessional country, reflecting both its multi-ethnic character and the varying cultural influences of the neighbors.

In 1996, there were 26 registered religious denominations:

Orthodox:	938 parishes/centers
Catholic:	373
Pentecostal:	261
Baptist:	192
Old Believer:	31
Jewish:	15
Muslim:	15
Greek Catholic:	11
Jehova's Witnesses:	11

Orthodoxy: Christianity in its Eastern Orthodox form was introduced in Belarus at the end of the 10th century from Kiev. After the Mongol invasion, the center of gravity for Eastern Orthodoxy moved to Moscow, which became the sponsor and defender of the Orthodox church in Belarus. After the absorption of Belorussian lands into the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, the Orthodox church faced strong Catholic pressures. The Union of Brest, concluded in 1596, put the Belorussian Orthodox Church under the control of the pope while allowing it to preserve its hierarchy and Byzantine rite. The resulting Greek-Catholic (or Uniate) Church was the predominant church in Belarus until it was abrogated by Tsar Nicholas in 1839. After that date, the Uniate Belarusans were forcibly converted to Orthodoxy by the Russian authorities. The Orthodox Church suffered heavy persecution during the Soviet era; only during the perestroika did religious revival take place. In 1989, the Moscow Patriarchate elevated Minsk to be the Belarusan exarchate, recognizing the Belarusan Orthodox Church's separate status.

Catholicism spread to Belarus in the 14th century, after its territories became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Most of the culturally Polonized noble elite adopted Catholicism and by the 18th century 15% of Belarusans were Catholic (although subsequently those numbers have decreased). In Western Belarus, where the ethnically Polish minority is concentrated, Catholicism and Polish identity has continued to be firmly intertwined. Today, the Catholic Church in Belarus has grown considerably and is the second largest denomination after the Orthodox Church.

Protestant Denominations: Although the first Protestant communities, the Calvinists and the Lutherans, arose in Belarus already during the Reformation, for the most part they remained small. In modern Belarus, by contrast, the Baptists and the Pentecostals have been the most quickly growing denominations, despite the fact that under the Soviet rule these denominations were singled out for particularly harsh persecutions. As a result, during the 1970's, a number of Belarusan Baptists and Pentecostals emigrated to the United States.

Jews: Until the 20th century, the lands of Belarus held one of the largest concentrations of Jewish population in the world. It was also a great center of religious learning and the birthplace of several religious movements within Judaism, such as the Hassidic movement. As a result of the Holocaust in

World War II, this religious community has almost completely disappeared. Today, 15 religious Jewish communities survive.

Islam: Muslims in Belarus are mostly ethnic Tatars who settled in those regions in the 15th and 16th centuries. In 1996, the Muslim Religious Union of Belarus counted 13,000 members.

Culture

The culture of Belarus, like its history, reflects the great role of geography and natural conditions. In a country of thick forests and wide marshes, Belarusan folk culture was deeply traditional and permeated with ancient customs and beliefs. Despite formal Christianization in the 10th century, pagan holidays survived into the 19th century, with some Christianized pagan holidays, like *Dziady* (or All Saint' Eve), celebrated even today. This folk culture and rural themes, more broadly remained the chief source of inspiration for nationally-minded Belarusan writers, such as Yanka Kupala (1882 - 1942) or Yakub Kolas (1882 - 1956).

At the same time, Belarus' geographic location turned it into a cultural crossroads: Western influences were brought in by the Polish, Jewish and Baltic elements, those of the East by the Russians, Ukrainians and even the Tatars. Most of these cultural imports were limited to the urban dwellers and social elites; still, they contributed to the emergence of an essentially inclusive and multifaceted cultural outlook among the Belarusans.

Questions and Issues:

What has been the impact of Belarus' geographic location on its people?

How did the natural conditions of the Belarusan lands shape the popular culture?

What was the role of Belarus' ethnic and religious minorities in its history?

How did the outside influences shape the Belarusan language? What is its situation today?

Sources for Further Study:

Belarus and Moldova Country Studies, ed. J. Zaprudnik, (Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995);

Jan Zaprudnik, ***Historical Dictionary of Belarus*** (The Scarecrow Press, London, 1998);

Nationalities Papers (Association for the Study of Nationalities, vol.27, no.4, 1999)

Part II: History and its Legacies

1. Timeline

600-700 A.D. Arrival of Slavic tribes on today's Belarusan territories

700-900 Merging with the Balts

980 Emergence of first city centers, dominated by Kiev

988 Christianization of Kievan lands

1044 Erection of St. Sophia Cathedral in Polacak

1236-63 Absorption of Belarusan lands into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

1569 Establishment of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania

1580's Arrival of Catholic missionaries, Orthodox resistance

1596 Establishment of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church

1696 Replacement of "Rusan" by Polish in official documents

1772 I Partitions of Poland; Eastern Belarus incorporated into the Russian Empire

1795 Final partition puts all Belarusan territories under Russian rule

1839 Forcible return of Uniates to the Russian Orthodox Church

1863 Anti-Russian uprising in Poland, Lithuania and Belarus followed by extensive repressions and Russification

1906 Publication of Belarusan weekly *Nasa Niva* – first nationalist publication

1915 German occupation

1918 All-Belarusan Congress establishes Belarusan Democractic Republic (disbanded by Bolsheviks)

1919 Establishment of the Belarussian Socialist Republic

1920 Russo-Polish war results in partitions of Belarussian lands

1937 Beginning of Stalinist purges and creation of the Kurapaty death camp

1938 World War II begins, Soviet Union annexes West Belarus

1940's German occupation; guerilla warfare and extermination of the Jewish communities

1945 BSSR one of the founding members of the United Nations

1986 The Chernobyl plant accident

1989 Belarusan Popular Front established

1991 Belarus declares independence in wake of August coup

1994 Election of Alexandr Lukashenka

2. Early and Modern History

Emergence of the Belorussian lands

Between 8th and 13th centuries, two important processes helped form early Belarus. First, the fusion of the Slavic and Baltic populations along the upper Dnieper and Dvina rivers lay the foundation for the Belarusan language and cultural identity. Second, the process of Christianization, started in 988, brought literacy and political contacts with the trading centers of Kiev in the south and Novgorod in the north, and eventually, the emergence of the first Belorussian city-principalities.

Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Conflicts with the German religious orders settling along the Baltic coast (the Livonian Order and the Teutonic Order) brought a new era to the Belorussian lands. To oppose these Orders, a Lithuanian Duke Mindaugas began consolidating and expanding his rule over most Belorussian territories. Throughout the 13th and 14th centuries, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus' and Samogoitia, as it came to be known, continued its territorial growth and came close to bridging the Baltic and the Black Seas. Since the Lithuanian ruling house converted to Eastern Orthodoxy, Belarusan language became the official language of record of the Grand Duchy; it preserved that status until 1696.

Belarus and the Polish state

In 1386, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland were joined in a dynastic union. The Lithuanians officially converted to Catholicism (most of the population had remained pagan until then). Within a few years, Catholic churches began appearing on the Belorussian territories, while the Orthodox Church of the Grand Duchy and Poland became independent from Moscow in 1472. Other Western influences quickly followed, especially in political institutions and education. Growth of self-governing cities encouraged crafts and trade. Reformation itself also left a deep imprint on the religious beliefs and culture. This period came to be seen as the “golden age” of Belorussian lands.

However, further political union with Poland and the pressure of the Catholic Church increased religious tensions in Belarus. The Union of Brest, concluded in 1596, founded the Uniate Church and undermined the position of Orthodoxy in Belarus. This only added to the growing cultural cleavage between the Polonized elites and the Belarusan people.

3. Belarus and the Tsarist Empire

Partitions of Poland

Continuous wars and the concomitant weakening of the Polish state in the 17th and 18th centuries led to its partition among the neighboring states. By 1795, all Belorussian territories became part of the Russian empire. In one of the first edicts directed at Belarus, Catherine II established a Pale of Settlement on its territories to prohibit the Jewish population from living or working east of the former Polish-Russian border.

Early Belorusan nationalism

In the 19th century, all religious and ethnic groups in Belarus were subject to official Russification policies, but their impact was the greatest among the Belarusans. In 1839, the Uniate Church was abolished and Belarusan Uniates were forcibly converted to Orthodoxy. Belarusan language was declared a “dialect” of Russian and the name of Belarus was officially changed to “the Western gubernias, ” (although even that ancient name (translated as White Rus’). This was taken as a proof that the Belarusans were but a branch of the Great Russian nation). After a large number of Belarusans joined in the Polish uprising against Russia in 1863, severe reprisals were taken and Russification of Belarus only intensified.

As among other subject nationalities in the Tsarist empire, a nationalist movement arose among the Belarusan intelligentsia in reaction to the repressive Tsarist policies. From the outset, this movement was grounded in the revival of Belarusan language and the development of its literature (see for instance the writings of poet Francisak Bahusevic). It also developed a strong socialist and populist leaning, since the majority of ethnic Belarusans belonged to the peasant and lower classes. For example, the banner newspaper of Belarusan cultural and political life, *Nasa Niva*, was founded by the Belarusan Socialist Union in the wake of the Revolution of 1905.

World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution

For most of the duration of World War I, the Eastern front divided Belorussian territories, with one third of Belarus falling under German control. After the Revolution of 1917, the first All-Belarusan Congress decided to establish a democratic, independent government in Belarus, but the Bolshevik forces quickly subdued this movement. Another chance was seized when the Germans occupied Minsk in 1918: in March, the same All-Belarusan Congress proclaimed the founding of the Belarusan Democratic Republic. This fait accomplis forced the Bolshevik regime in 1919 to support the creation of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Between 1919 and 1920, the Belorussian territories became a bone of contention between Poland and the Bolshevik government. As a result of the Polish-Russian war, Belarus was officially partitioned under the Treaty of Riga (1921). Poland received Western Belarus (40% of territory and 38% of population). The remaining territory constituted the Belorussian SSR.

4. The Soviet Era

Belorussian SSR

The first years of Soviet rule in Belarus were marked by relative liberalism in both the linguistic/cultural and economic areas. In 1924, for instance, equal rights for the four main languages of the Republic (Belarusan, Yiddish, Polish, and Russian) were guaranteed. Belarusan language itself gained a number of institutions of higher learning, as well as numerous literary clubs and local publications. The New Economic Policy allowed for a strong recovery, especially in the agricultural sector. But collectivization imposed by Stalin after 1928 had calamitous consequences for the landholders of Belarus most of whom had middle-size holdings. Hundreds of thousands of those peasants (identified as the so called “kulaks”) were sent to camps, soon to be joined by large numbers of Belarusan intelligentsia. By the 1930’s, Stalinist purges and peasant persecution in Belarus reached catastrophic proportions. Data remain scarce, but the discoveries of mass graves in the Kurapaty Forest (by Zenon Pozniyak, a founder of the Belarusan Popular Front in the 1990’s) confirm the tragic scale of Stalinist repressions in Belarus.

Kurapaty Forest

In 1988, a team of archeologists under the leadership of **Zenon Poznyak** discovered an execution site in the Kurapaty Forest near Minsk. Used from 1937 until 1941 (when Nazi troops occupied the area), Kurapaty consisted of mass graves of 100,000 to 250,000 civilians killed by the Soviet secret police, or NKVD.

Poznyak’s discovery became a symbol of Stalinist and Soviet repression in Belarus. It helped spark the Belarusan Popular Front and played an important part in the formation of an independence movement in Belarus at the end of the 1980’s.

Belarusans in Poland

Whereas the position of ethnic Belarusans in Poland was fundamentally better than the position of those in the USSR, between 1921 and 1939 their treatment worsened considerably. Growing authoritarianism of the Pilsudski government led to a general shift in the treatment of all ethnic minorities and decreased the Belarusan representation in the Polish Parliament. Many Belarusan schools and newspapers were closed and the Polish population was encouraged to settle in Belorussian territories. Even the economic development lagged behind that of central Poland.

5. The Experience of World War II

For the Belarusans, World War II began with the German attack on Poland in September, 1939. Within weeks, the Soviet troops also moved into Poland to occupy Western Belarus and Ukraine, which under the terms of the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact were to be incorporated into the Soviet Union. Mass arrests and deportations followed, concentrating on ethnic Poles, but also the intelligentsia and Polish army personnel of any background. By June 1941, when the Nazi forces attacked the Soviet Union, many Belarusans welcomed them hoping for an end to the Communist persecutions.

The Holocaust on Belorussian territories

The Nazi plans for Belarus essentially called for the elimination of both the country and its population. First, the Belorussian territories were once again fragmented: some portions were folded into other political entities (Lithuania, Ukraine and East Prussia), while central and eastern Belarus came under direct German military rule (*Weissruthenische Generalbezirk*). Second, the Nazi occupiers planned to eliminate the people itself by Germanizing about a quarter of the most “racially acceptable” Belarusans and exterminating the rest.

That, first and foremost, meant the genocide of the Jewish population. Over 260 concentration camps were established, often overlapping with the existing Jewish ghettos. Thus, in the Minsk ghetto, over 100,000 Jews were killed, in Brest 34,000, in Babrusk 20,000, in Viciebsk 20,000. Since most Belorussian cities had Jewish majorities, all of them became sites of genocide. Frequently, smaller Jewish towns or villages were surrounded and massacred on the spot.

In addition, death camps were created to exterminate not only the local population, Jewish or Belarusan, but also victims brought in from the West. The most infamous camps included Trascianiec (206,000 victims), Minsk, Azarycy, Babrujsk, Bierazavac, and Kaldyceva.

Partisan warfare

Although a portion of the population in Belarus worked with the Germans to organize their own police force and administration structures, the majority sided with the growing resistance movement. The partisan forces were organized by Moscow and were frequently headed by either communist leaders or by

commanders parachuted in from the other side of the front. Belarus' natural conditions deep forests and marshes favored guerrilla-style warfare. At its peak, over 350,000 people were involved in the partisan movement. But this widespread support brought the price of severe reprisals: wholesale burnings of villages and massacres of their populations.

Belarusan dispersion

All in all, between 1939 and 1945 Belarus lost more than 2.2 million inhabitants, with 209 leveled cities and 9,200 destroyed villages. 380,000 laborers were deported to Germany before 1945; tens of thousands of others fled with the retreating German army in fear of Soviet reprisals. Finally, in the first post-war years over 450,000 Belarusan Catholics and ethnic Poles resettled in Poland. It has been estimated that as a result of these losses, the demographic deficit for Belarus for 1939-1959 topped 6 million people.

The dispersion of the Belarusans in the wake of World War II is at the roots of the relatively large diaspora. By 1990 an estimated 3.5 million Belarusans and their descendants lived outside the borders of Belarus, including 600,000 in the United States.

Belarusan Diaspora:

Russia: 1,200,000
United States: 600,000
Ukraine: 440,000
Poland: 250,000
Kazakhstan: 183,000
Argentina: 150,000
Latvia: 120,000
Lithuania: 63,000

6. The Road to Independence

Political context: Glasnost'

Throughout the era of Brezhnevite stagnation, the Belarussian SSR was characterized by relative economic stability (the republic enjoyed one of the highest living standards in the USSR), but also a profound conservatism of the Communist ruling elite. The coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 however marked a new period in Soviet domestic politics. His policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (public openness) created new expectations among the Belarusans.

Chernobyl and its impact

The first test of perestroika came when the world's worst nuclear disaster struck in Chernobyl on April 26, 1986. Although the power plant was located just across the border with Ukraine, the prevailing winds

carried over 70% of the radioactive fallout into Belarus, contaminating over 46,500 square kilometers, or 23% of Belarusan territory. Yet, both Moscow and Minsk authorities remained silent about the accident for several days, at one point going as far as to confiscate all Geiger counters from the population. This cover-up led to large protests and demonstrations in the Homiel region the most severely afflicted area.

Eventually, the authorities resettled 24,700 people from the 30-kilometer radius around the reactor (in the next 8 years, the number of those resettled would reach 130,000 people). But the immediate medical, social and economic cost was overwhelming.

Independence movement in Belarus

As a result of the Chernobyl disaster, segments of the Belarusan intelligentsia became more politically mobilized. From 1986 through 1988, petitions were circulated demanding that not only the physical fallout from Chernobyl be attended to, but also "the cultural Chernobyl" that is the destruction of Belarusan culture and language. Nationalist and cultural groups began to emerge.

This process was further spurred by the discovery of mass graves in the Kurapaty Forest in 1988. The dual grievances: Chernobyl and Kurapaty, became the rallying cry for the emerging nationalist movements. In October 1988 the Belarusan Popular Front was formed to encourage national renewal and political reform. (See the sidebar on Kurapaty Forest and Zenon Poznyak.)

At first, the politically mobilized Belarusans remained in minority. The March 1990 elections to the Belorussian Supreme Soviet still gave 86% of seats to the Communist Party of Belarus, and 83% voted for the preservation of the Soviet Union. But unrest spreading throughout the Soviet Union found its echoes in Belarus as well. In April of 1991, a series of strikes shook the entire republic. The CPB itself was beginning to show strains and divisions. Finally, after the unsuccessful putsch in Moscow in August 1991 brought declarations of independence from Belarus' immediate neighbors (Latvia, Estonia, and Ukraine), the Supreme Soviet in Minsk declared the independence of Belarus on August 25, 1991. On September 25, 1991, the Soviet officially changed the name of the state to the Republic of Belarus, adopting a new national flag and a new coat of arms.

Rise of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Despite the declarations of independence sweeping the USSR in the wake of the August coup, both Moscow (now under Yeltsin's leadership) and Minsk (led by the new head of the Supreme Soviet, Stanislav Shushkyevitch) were hoping to preserve some sort of union, at least among the three Slavic republics. Consequently, the leaders of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine met in the Belovezha Forest (in Belarus) in December of 1991 to dissolve the Soviet Union and to establish a commonwealth.

By December 21, this union was joined by the five Central Asian states, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and was officially named the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Questions and Issues:

What were the positive and the negative legacies of Belarus' relations with Poland and its culture?

What was the role of the Orthodox worship in Belarus (be it under the Uniate or Orthodox Church)?

How did the Tsarist rule impact Belarusan identity?

How successful was the policy of Sovietization and Russification in Belarus? In what areas in particular?

What was the impact of World War II on the population of Belarus?

How did Chernobyl mobilize the Belarusan population?

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Part III: Belarus Today

1. Constitutional Structure

A Quasi-Parliamentary Republic: 1991- 1994

From August 1991 through the end of 1994, political power in Belarus was concentrated in the hands of the undemocratically elected Belarusan Supreme Soviet. (See above on the elections of March, 1991). The Communist- dominated Soviet rejected wide-spread calls for disbanding, setting instead the deadline for the new elections for the spring of 1994. Meanwhile, both the Supreme Soviet and the government of

Prime Minister Kyebich steered a very conservative course in relation to political and economic reforms. For instance, a privatization law (passed in 1993) protected the existence of collective farms, it also delayed privatization of state-owned enterprises until 1995. In the political arena, the Communists and the apparatchik allies of Prime Minister Kyebich ousted Stanislav Shushkyevich from chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet in January 1994. The opposition forces, centered around the Belarusan Popular Front, remained largely powerless to affect the scope and the speed of reforms.

A Presidential Republic: 1994 - Present

On March 30, 1994, the Supreme Soviet adopted a new constitution for the Republic of Belarus. Assuming that Prime Minister Kyebich would win the presidential elections, his allies in the Soviet pushed for a strong presidential system. But in a surprise victory, an anti-corruption candidate, Alexander Lukashenka, won more than 80% of the vote in the elections of June 1994.

After an initial “grace period” from the opposition, Lukashenka and the parliament went at loggerheads over the limits of presidential power. The most important issue was the president’s right to dissolve the parliament. After a national referendum on this question was forced by Lukashenka in 1995, a hunger strike by the opposition deputies was led by Zyanon Poznyak, the leader of the BPF. In the end, the opposition deputies were forcibly removed from the building of the parliament, and the national television and radio were cordoned off and put under direct control of the Lukashenka administration. Hastily called parliamentary elections fell well short of the standard for free and fair process.

Two other questionable referenda (in 1995 and 1996) granted Lukashenka the mandate to disband the Soviet (which he did in 1996, replacing it with a handpicked bicameral National Assembly) and to adopt a new constitution granting him sweeping powers over other branches of the government. Thus the Republic of Belarus currently has two constitutions and, arguably, two parliaments, since many members of the disbanded Supreme Soviet continue operating a vocal shadow parliament, albeit outside the official political structure.

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus

Officially proclaimed on July 27, 1994, the Constitution established a presidential republic with a pluralist political system. The right to vote was extended to all Belarusan citizens 18 and older.

The national government consisted of three branches of the government: legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislature consisted of a unicameral body (the Supreme Soviet) of 260 deputies, elected every 5 years. Its duties included calling national referenda, interpreting the constitution, and scheduling parliamentary and presidential elections. The Supreme Soviet also elected members of high-level courts, the Procurator General, and the members of the board of the National Bank of Belarus. Finally, the Soviet had the power to confirm the state budget and to ratify international treaties.

The president was to be elected every five years through a popular vote. The president is both the head of

state and the head of the government. As commander in chief, the president is in charge of "taking measures to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The judicial branch consisted of three courts: the Constitutional Court (nominated by the president and appointed by the Supreme Soviet), the Supreme Court (with its lower level courts), where cases are open to all, and finally, the Supreme Economic Court.

In 1996, several key amendments were adopted through a controversial referendum. They included creating a new bicameral National Assembly (110 deputies and a senate), extending the presidential term to 7 years, giving the president the right to annul decisions of local councils, to set election dates, to appoint Constitutional Court judges, and to appoint for life 1/3 of the senators in the National Assembly. The referenda also approved re-adopting the old Soviet Belarusan flag and granting the Russian language equal official status with Belarusan.

The Belarusan Constitution also officially sanctions the system of mixed economy and pledges full employment to all citizens.

2. Domestic Politics

The Presidential Apparatus

Under Lukashenka's authoritarian rule his executive apparatus proved to be a most valuable political tool. As the head of the government, Lukashenka appoints and dismisses the prime minister, and directly supervises the Council of Ministers and the National Bank. This puts him firmly in charge of the economic and fiscal policies. As the commander-in-chief and the head of the National Security Council, Lukashenka also has complete control over the armed forces and such power institutions as the Belarusan KGB (which officially retains that acronym).

Lukashenka's overwhelming powers of incumbency were brought to stark relief in the presidential elections of August 2001.

Political Parties and the Opposition

Although nearly 30 political parties have been legalized since 1990, only about 2 to 5% of the population belong to any of them. Due both to the apathy of the voters and to Lukashenka's manipulation of the electoral process, political parties have not proven to be effective political organizations.

The fundamental division among parties in today's Belarus lies between the allies of President Lukashenka and the opposition parties. Among the most important pro-government parties are the Communist Party of Belarus, their ally the Agrarian Party, the left-leaning Party of Popular Accord and the Party of All-Belarusan Unity. The pro-reform camp includes the United Civic Party, the Social Democratic Hramada, and the Belarus Christian-Democratic Party.

The Belarusan Popular Front remains the most widely supported opposition party despite internal tensions and splits. Founded by Zyanon Poznyak in 1988, the BFP was Belarus‘ first political movement. The party was committed to a nationalist ethos, the defense of Belarus’ independence, and support for a Belarusan cultural revival. After Zyanon Poznyak’s exile in 1996, the more nationalist-minded wing split from the BFP, leaving the party’s leadership in the hands of the more pragmatic and reform-oriented Vintsuk Viachorka. Since the split, the party has regained its status as the main center of opposition and proved very successful at building coalitions with other opposition forces.

The last parliamentary elections (in October 2000) only reinforced the hostility between the opposition and the Lukashenka government. The opposition was characterized by the government as “criminals plotting against the country” and was denied access to the state-controlled media. Consequently, the majority of opposition parties boycotted the elections. Most new deputies to the National Assembly have no party affiliation.

Leading Political Figures:

Alyaksandr Lukashenka: a former state farm director, gained prominence as head of the Supreme Soviet’s anti-corruption committee. Since his election in 1994, Lukashenka has relied on heavily censored media and a “personality cult” to maintain popularity in the country.

Zyanon Paznyak: a historian who uncovered the Kurapaty Forests massacre site, Paznyak was the founder of Belarus’ first opposition party, the Belorusan Popular Front. An outspoken critic of the Lukashenka regime, he left Belarus in 1995 after an arrest warrant for him was issued by the authorites. Living under political asylum in the United States. Zyanon Paznyak remains a key figure in the nationalist movement and heads the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusan Popular Front.

Uladzimir Hanczaryk: leader of the Belarusan Federation of Trade Unions, was the joint opposition parties candidate in the presidential elections of September 2001.

Vintsuk Viachorka: a veteran opposition politician, active in the nationalist movement since the 1980’s, one of the founders of BPF. Since October 1999, when the more strongly nationalist wing broke away from BPF (see Paznyak’s Conservative Christian Party), Viachorka proved successful at coalition-building among all opposition forces. Credited with revitalizing the opposition movement in the run-up to the presidential elections of October 2001.

Mass Media

Despite existing legislation that guarantees freedom of the press, the state remains in firm control of the mass media in Belarus. It directly funds many publications and controls such resources as printing plants, broadcast facilities, paper supply, and distribution networks. This indirect control was demonstrated for instance in 1995 when several independent Belarusan newspapers including the most popular, *Svaboda*

were forced to move their printing operations to Lithuania. By 1997, these newspapers were banned altogether. The pro-government newspaper with the largest circulation is *Sovyetskaya Belorussiya*. But the declining income of the population has sharply pushed down newspaper readership in general: it fell from 29 copies per 100 people in 1991 to 11 in 1999.

Electronic media, both state-owned and privately-held are under even tighter supervision. For instance, state law stipulates that radio and television must cover all statements and appeals by the president, the speaker of the parliament, or the prime minister. By contrast, officially registered opposition parties were denied access to mass media during the elections despite international pressure (even the OSCE unsuccessfully tried to negotiate a compromise over media access for the presidential elections of 2001).

In addition to the state-owned national Belarusan Television channel, several privately-owned cable outlets also exist, although they do not provide news coverage. Most Belarusan homes are however within the reach of the Russian national media, such as ORT or NTV. The most important independent radio station *Racyja* uses programs produced by independent Belarusan journalists, but is broadcast from facilities in Poland.

On May 2, 1997, the United Nations General Assembly named Belarus as one of the 10 worst offenders of freedom of the press.

The NGO's

By 1996, about 900 non-governmental organizations had been registered throughout Belarus. They included educational, women's, cultural, environmental, youth, religious, and business groups. Their membership is estimated between 75,000 and 100,000. U.S. and other Western organizations have provided technical and other assistance to many of these groups, especially those working in the health, environment and social areas, such as the United Way of Belarus, or the Fund for the Children of Chernobyl.

The Belarusan NGO's, however, are not allowed by the government to take any part in the political process. Consequently, many of them resort to public demonstrations as the most direct way of publicizing group interests.

Independent trade unions in Belarus were probably the most widely supported non-governmental democratic organizations in the country. The two most important trade unions are The Free Trade Union of Belarus and the Belarusan Independent Trade Union. A number of other independent trade unions were banned in 1995.

The Problem of Democratization

Lack of democratization and civic society remains the most important stumbling block not only in the political arena, but also in the economic development of the country. Lukashenka's hold on the extensive

state bureaucracy, as well as on the rural and older segments of the population, helps him retain popularity. It also enables him to push through (albeit with high degree of manipulation) national referenda which appear to give him official mandate for his policies. However, the rule of law and law-abiding state institutions are entirely lacking in Belarus, further undercutting prospects for a developed civic society and a vigorous economy.

Questions and Issues

What were the roots of the presidential system in Belarus?

Why are political parties in Belarus relatively weak?

What is the basis of Lukashenka's popular support? What are his main constituencies?

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3. Economy

Government Policy on Reforms

Under the banner of the "Belarusan economic model," the administration of President Lukashenka has blocked fundamental reforms of the Belarusan economy. Since high employment remains a constitutional responsibility of the state, all large industrial enterprises of the Soviet era continue operating under state control and account for the bulk of the country's industrial output. Widespread subsidies and cheap credit have led to shortages of goods and a spiraling inflation (average of 114% per year in 1996-2000). These policies have also led to the suspension of the IMF financing and other IFI programs.

Privatization

The privatization process in Belarus has been among the slowest in the former Soviet Union. It has been concentrated in housing (30% of housing units), small business, banking, service, trade, and

transportation. Yet, even in those sectors, the government frequently either remains a major stock-holder or appoints veto-wielding members to the boards of joint-stock companies. Overall, it is estimated that the private sector accounts for 15% of Belarusan GDP.

No private land ownership rights have yet been established.

Agriculture

In agriculture, state and collective farms continue to dominate, with less than 1% of arable land in the hands of individual farmers.

Current agricultural output is at 65% of the 1989 levels. Part of this decline is due to the fact that Belarus' agriculture specialized in meat and dairy products and was dependent on fodder and grain deliveries from the other republics. It was thus particularly vulnerable to the economic disruptions that followed the breakup of the USSR. The continuing reliance on state and collective farms perpetuates the inefficiency of this sector and requires heavy state subsidies.

Energy

Since Belarus lacks natural energy resources, it currently imports 100% of its coal and 90% of oil and gas. Belarus also has to import electricity from Russia and from Lithuania. It has recently postponed plans to build its own nuclear energy plant.

Russia serves as the main supplier of Belarus' energy needs, and provides them at a preferential rate. Even so, Belarus' energy debts topped $250 million in 2000. Despite periodical threats from the Russian gas monopoly, *Gazprom*, Russia has generally adopted a lenient policy towards Belarus, frequently accepting write-offs or refinancing of debt.

Foreign Trade and Investment

Russia remains Belarus' largest trading and investment partner, not only because of the surviving manufacturing and trade ties from the Soviet era, but also because of Belarus' position as the transit corridor between the Russian Federation and Europe. Both Belarus' agriculture and manufacture depend on Russian raw materials and energy supplies. Consequently, over 30% of its imports come from Russia, while almost 50% of Belarusan exports go there. This dependence on the relatively unstable Russian economy further undermines Belarusan economic performance. The chief non-CIS trading partners of Belarus are Germany and Poland.

Foreign direct investment remains low: the cumulative level since 1991 reached $290 million. Foreign-owned firms employ less than 2% of the workforce and account for 9% of the industrial output. The most important investors come from Germany (12%), the Netherlands (10%), and Russia.

Sources for Further Study:

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4. Society

Demography

The demographic structure of Belarus is characterized by two negative trends: the decline and the ageing of the population. Death rates have exceeded birth rates since 1993, resulting in a population loss of 400,000 between 1993 and 2000. The after-effects of Chernobyl contribute significantly to these trends, both in lowering the fertility rate and in increasing infant, child, and adult mortality rates. Falling birth rates cause in turn the graying of the population. The population of less than working age (currently at 21%) is falling as a proportion of the total and equals now the percentage of those over working age.

Rapid post-World War II urbanization of Belarus brought the number of rural inhabitants from 57% in 1970 to just 30% in 1999.

Health Issues: Chernobyl after-effects, HIV/AIDS crisis

Health levels have deteriorated since 1991. Life expectancy at birth now stands at 67 for all, with that for men falling to 62. This decline is attributable partly to decreased health spending (4.9% of GDP in 1999) and partly to the continuing effects of the radioactive contamination after Chernobyl. For instance, in two towns most seriously affected by the accident, Gomel and Mogilev, thyroid cancer among children rose from 2 new cases in 1987, to 50 by 1991, and 90 in 1995.

Another serious health crisis in Belarus involves increased incidence of HIV/AIDS. These cases are due to much increased intravenous drug use and spread in the heterosexual population.

Women's Issues: Trafficking in Women

Belarus is one of the Slavic former Soviet republics where trafficking in women has become an issue. Low economic standards and expectations encourage many to seek work abroad, but women are particularly vulnerable to entrapment by organized crime.

Environment

The chief environmental issue in Belarus remains the post-Chernobyl contamination. In addition to the 30 km exclusion zone around the Chernobyl plant, many "hot spots" were revealed throughout the late 80's and 90's, and population continued to be relocated. The more pernicious and long-lasting effects, however, have to do with agriculture: loss of arable land, impact on livestock and animal products,

finally, impact on widely-consumed forest products (berries, mushrooms).

Questions and Issues

What was the overall impact of the Chernobyl disaster on Belarus? Look at the political, environmental, health, social, and economic areas.

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Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women web site: http://www.inet.co.th/org/gaatw

5. National Security

Nuclear Weapons

Belarus was briefly a nuclear power as a result of the collapse of the USSR. All tactical nuclear weapons were withdrawn to Russia by 1993 and the present Belarusan constitution declares the country to be a non-aligned and non-nuclear power. The Belarusan parliament has also ratified the START-1, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the 1992 Lisbon Protocol, under which it pledged to remain a non-nuclear state.

Armed Forces

Belarus' armed forces totaled 83,100 in 2000, including 43,500 ground forces and an air force of 22,500. The additional reserves count almost 300,000 men. The defense budget in 2000 fell to $100,000,000.

The 1996 revisions of the Treaty on Coventional Forces in Europe limit Belarus to 1,800 tanks, 2,600 armored personnel carriers, 1,615 artillery pieces, 260 combat aircraft, and 80 attack helicopters.

Among other power ministries, the Ministry of Internal Affairs controls 23,000 men, including 11,000 of its own troops and 12,000 border guards. The precise number of people working for the Belarusan KGB is not known.

Part IV: External Relations

Belarus is and will be an important player in Eastern Europe, although not on the basis of its size or economic potential but as a result of its crucial geopolitical location. On the East-West axis, the country is situated between the Russian Federation and the NATO countries; on the North-South axis, it lies half-way between two important subregions: the northern grouping of the Baltic States and Poland, and the southern grouping of Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

1. Belarus and the Russian Federation

Belarusan foreign policy has been firmly focused on Russia since Alexander Lukashenka's election in 1994. Three areas of the Russo-Belarusan relations that are particularly relevant are political, military, and economic.

Russo-Belarusan Integration

First steps toward a greater integration of the Russian Federation and Belarus were taken in 1995, when Alexander Lukashenka and Boris Yeltsin signed a treaty on friendship and cooperation. Further treaties extending that cooperation came in 1996 and 1998. The latest and most comprehensive treaty the Belarus-Russia Union Treaty was signed in 1999. It envisages the creation of a supra-national union state with its own legislative bodies, and close coordination in defense, economic, and monetary policies.

The new Union bodies are to include the Supreme State Council (comprised of the leaders of both countries), a joint Council of Ministers, and a bicameral union parliament. Both countries would wield a veto and each will take turns to chair the Councils. The joint Council of Ministers would supervise the creation of a common economic space, and coordination of the fiscal, monetary, and credit policies. Tariffs and monetary systems are to be harmonized only in 2005.

The Union Treaty stops well short of surrendering either country's sovereignty to these new institutions (a step with little value for the Russian Federation). Furthermore, the accruing economic and political burdens of the current union with Belarus make it unlikely that Russia will be interested in deepening the unification process.

Military Cooperation

Military cooperation with Russia was close even before the 1999 Union Treaty. It appears particularly closely coordinated in the area of air defense. For instance, Russian strategic missile forces operate a new early warning radar in Baranovichi, only 140 km from the Polish border. Russian military forces are also allowed to use other Belarusan military infrastructure, such as airfields (including for Russian strategic bombers and long-range cruise missile carriers), roads, and communication centers.

Yet, despite the fact that work is progressing on a joint Russo-Belarusan military doctrine, the Russian Federation appears unwilling to fully coordinate with Belarus such areas as the land forces; it has also not

shown interest in using Belarusan territory for the deployment or storage of nuclear weapons.

Economic Ties

As detailed in the section on trade and investment, Russia remains Belarus' most important trade partner, export market, and the chief source of energy supplies. But beyond these mutually beneficial aspects lies the thornier issue of a common monetary and tariff system. Belarus' policy of cheap state credit and the concomitant inflation has made the coordination of fiscal and monetary policies a sticking point in negotiations with Russia.

2. The CIS

The early mission of the Commonwealth of Independent States was to fill the institutional vacuum left by the dissolution of the USSR. The CIS was to help coordinate economic, social, and foreign policy activities through bi-annual meetings of its chief body, the Council of the Heads of State. Minsk was chosen as the seat of the Executive Committee, which was to act as the secretariat of the CIS.

However, with different CIS countries beginning to focus on other regions and international organizations, the role of the CIS became more limited. Numerous CIS agreements are signed, but few are enforced. Among the most significant agreements are the 1992 Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security, the 1995 Customs Union among Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, and the Eurasian Economic Community agreement of 2000.

Economically, the most important CIS countries for Belarus are Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

3. Belarus and its other Neighbors

Relations with Ukraine

Belarusan relations with Ukraine have been largely a function of both countries' relationship with Russia. Kiev decided early on that its own relations with Minsk especially in the security area would become more limited as the integration process deepened between Belarus and Moscow. One area of successful cooperation involved the demarcation of the common border, which was completed and officially ratified by May 1997. Other areas include joint work on environmental issues (especially on the Chernobyl-related problems), and development of economic relations between border regions in both countries. Military cooperation remains on a slow track, largely because of the fundamental difference of view on NATO and its potential expansion in the region.

Relations with Poland

Poland's relations with Belarus are largely colored by two factors: the common (and not often happy)

history, and the opposing strategic orientation of both countries.

At present, Poland is both a member of NATO and an applicant for the EU. With that in mind, Poland views Belarus as a major geopolitical and military issue, and second, as a potential source of political, economic and social instability in the East European region.

Polish-Belarusan security relations must thus be seen as an element of Russo-European relations and of the overall European security structure. However, a host of ethnic and border issues have a direct impact on their bilateral relations. The approx. 0.5 million ethnic Poles in Belarus remain a concern for both countries. The worsening economic and political conditions in Belarus may mean a much increased legal and illegal economic migration into Poland. At the same time Poland's efforts to prepare for the EU membership have included much stricter border controls, since the Polish-Belarusan border will in fact become the external boundary of the European Union. In the short and medium term, these border control issues are likely to create difficulties in maintaining economic and cultural ties with Belarus. A small number of regional cooperation initiatives involving Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Russia (especially the Kaliningrad exclave) have been promoted recently to help balance the Polish-Belarusan relationship and further the stability in the region.

Relations with Lithuania and the Baltic States

Among the Baltic States, Lithuania has the most extensive relationship with Belarus, not only as a neighbor but also as a historically related entity. Yet, even that relationship is closely interwoven with the broader relations between Russia, Poland, Ukraine, and Western Europe.

As a potential candidate for NATO as well as the EU, Lithuania shares some of Poland's concerns in regard to its security relations with Belarus. It notes, for instance, that while the three Baltic States with a total population of 8 million currently have among them 15,000 military troops, Belarus boasts 113,000. Lithuania has also been concerned with the increasingly authoritarian bend of the Lukashenka administration.

Despite these concerns, Lithuania and Belarus have chosen to focus on the more pragmatic aspects of their bilateral relationship. Those include transfer of Belarusan exports through the Klaipeda seaport, sale of electric power to Belarus from the Lithuanian nuclear power plant at Ignalina, terms of transit from Belarus to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, and finally, the mutual readmission of refugees (specifically, the large number of Asian immigrants seeking acces to Europe who have been let out of Belarus into Lithuania).

In February, 1995, Lithuania and Belarus signed the Treaty on Cooperation and Good-Neighborly Relations and the Treaty on the Border between the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Belarus.

4. Belarus and Western Europe

Belarus and the European Security Structure

Belarus' constitution defines it as a non-nuclear, non-aligned state. Although Belarus is part of the 1992 Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security, its fundamental security guarantee lies in its military relationship with the Russian Federation.

Belarus' relationship with NATO remains frozen since 1997 by the decision of the North Atlantic Assembly. Not surprisingly, Minsk has declared numerous times that it vehemently opposes expansion of NATO membership, especially to the Baltic States. Clearly, though, Minsk's views on this matter take a distant second place to those of Moscow. Russia, in turn, has hinted that further NATO expansion may result in redeployment of Russian forward forces on Belarusan territory.

As a signatory of the CFE treaty, Belarus was behind schedule in meeting its conventional arms reductions, but should meet the revisions to that treaty passed in 1996/1997.

Belarus and the OSCE

Belarus and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have had strained relations since 1995. As a chief European institution charged with monitoring democracy and human rights, the OSCE has been at the forefront of criticism of the Lukashenka regime. For instance, the OSCE has refused to recognize the results of the 1996 referenda on presidential powers and most recently it proclaimed the presidential elections of 2001 seriously tainted. It has also protested the phenomenon of "disappearing" prominent opposition activists in the run up to the national elections.

Belarus and the EU

The European Union has been somewhat less vocal in criticizing Belarus' domestic record, but it also limited its economic and political ties with Belarus. For instance in 1996, the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Community suspended its provisional trade agreement with Belarus in protest over the forced referendum. Perhaps the lowest point of Belarus' relations with the EU countries came in 1997, when under a pretext of sewer repairs, Lukashenka evicted EU ambassadors from their residences. Most of them were then recalled, eventually returning several months later.

5. Relations with the United States

Nuclear Weapons

The high point in the U.S. - Belarus relations came in February 1993, when the Belarusan Supreme Soviet ratified the START 1 Treaty and the Lisbon Protocol, committing the country to remove all nuclear weapons from its soil and thus achieving the overriding U.S. policy goal in Belarus. In January 1994, President Clinton visited Belarus largely as a gesture of gratitude to Minsk for close cooperation in solving the problem of nuclear proliferation.

Democratization and Technical Assistance

In the period between 1991 and 1994, Belarus was a recipient of humanitarian, technical, economic and democratization assistance from the U.S. in keeping with the patterns for the entire Former Soviet Union. However, with the coming to power of Alexandr Lukashenka, the relationship between the U.S. and Minks became increasingly strained. The 1995 shooting of the American team of balloonists by the Belarusan air force, the controversial nature of the 1996 referenda, and finally the eviction in 1997 of the U.S. (as well as EU) ambassador from his residence all led to severe limitation of official relations with Belarus: by the end of 1997, the U.S. ambassador was recalled for consultations for almost 12 months and even the $32 million in Nunn-Lugar funding for further nuclear cleanup was suspended.

Two additional trends which influenced the U.S. view of Belarus were human rights violations and the concomitant growth of Lukashanka authoritarianism, and also the aggressive push on the part of the Belarusan president for a deepened integration with Russia. While the latter was officially described by the U.S. policymakers as strictly a matter between the Russian Federation and Belarus, it has become clear that the U.S. no longer saw Belarus as a potential independent player in the East European region. The U.S. policy was by then described as one of "selective engagement," where focus of U.S. contacts would lie with civic and non-governmental groups, rather than with the Belarusan government itself.

Since Lukashenka was reelected to a new term as president in October of 2001, prospects for changes in the U.S. -Belarusan have dimmed once again.

Source for Further Study:

Sherman Garnett, R. Levgold, edts. ***Belarus at the Crossroads*** (1999)

Part V : Resources

Journals and Periodicals

Nationalities Papers (also available online)

Post-Soviet Affairs

Problems of Post Communism

Demokratizatsia

East European Constitutional Review

Current History

Foreign Affairs

Web and Online Resources

Transitions

RFE/RL Reports

Johnson's List

Economist Intelligence Unit www.fggm.osis.gov/EIU