

A Transatlantic Approach to Democracy in Belarus

David J. Kramer

US policy toward Belarus is straightforward: The United States wants to see Belarusians chart their own future path, exercising the freedom to choose a government. As simple as these aspirations may seem, they have been repeatedly thwarted by a regime that appears determined to silence the opposition and hold onto power at all costs.

At a time when freedom is advancing around the world, Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime has turned Belarus into an outpost of tyranny in the heart of Europe. His government has isolated Belarus from its neighbors and the international community, seemingly dedicated to moving backwards while the world around him moves forward.

Despite tremendous obstacles thrown up by the regime, many Belarusians continue to struggle courageously for a democratic future. The events surrounding the March 19 election showed that pro-democracy forces are increasingly unified and have a message of hope that resonates with the population. The post-election demonstrations were the largest such events in Belarus in years – a remarkable achievement given the regime's efforts to create a climate of fear around the election. The United States will continue to stand with the people of Belarus in their aspirations for democracy.

The United States is hardly alone in attempting to shine a light on Belarus. We have and will continue to work with our allies and partners to assist those seeking to return Belarus to its rightful place among the Euro-Atlantic community of democracies. There is no place in the Europe of today for a regime of this kind. The US and European Union are working closely together in promoting freedom and democracy in Belarus.

The conduct of the election was the latest sad chapter in more than a decade of dictatorial rule by Lukashenka's regime. From the announcement of the early election to the balloting itself, we saw a regime bent on utilizing the theatrical props of a democratic process for a clearly undemocratic end. We saw a regime use the tools of fear and lies to consolidate power in a nation where independence is thwarted and ideas are seen as dangerous.

The world saw the process for what it was. From the European Union to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to the White House, the global democratic community criticized the elections as fatally flawed – not even close to free and fair. And we have subsequently seen Lukashenka's

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security forces come down hard on peaceful protesters, dragging hundreds off to jail.

While dictators have long justified crackdowns in the name of preserving peace and stability, Lukashenka's security forces were blunt in their purpose. By waiting until 3am to sweep in and cart away hundreds of peaceful protestors from Minsk's main square, the regime made clear that they were dedicated only to silencing the voice of the opposition. That is why the efforts of the united democratic opposition are so impressive. They offer inspiration that a different, brighter future lies ahead for Belarus.

The Regime We Face

Over the past 15 years we have seen the face of Europe change, as free peoples across the Frontiers of Freedom have stood up to take control of their destiny. As a result, the Europe of 2006 bears little resemblance to the divided continent of the past. Debate and dialogue are the norm; integration and prosperity are the trends. From the Baltics to Central Europe to the Balkans, hope is on the rise – but the government of Belarus is attempting to move in the other direction.

Lukashenka's actions threaten the realization of a Europe that is truly whole, free and at peace. His government introduces an element of unpredictability and potential instability in Europe. With his history of sham elections, "disappearances" of opponents, trumped-up charges against opponents and attacks on anything resembling a free press, Lukashenka has demonstrated that he is incapable of leading Belarus toward a democratic future. Furthermore, as Belarus' self-imposed isolation intensifies, Lukashenka is increasingly seeking partners from other states of concern.

Most troubling are the increased contacts between Belarusian authorities and Iran. During last September's United Nations General Assembly, Lukashenka met with Iranian President Ahmadinejad and echoed some of his most troubling rhetoric with a speech of his own, expressing Belarus' solidarity with Iran, North Korea and Cuba. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Presidential Envoy Mehdi Safari visited Belarus in November 2005, gaining Belarusian public support for Iran's position on the nuclear issue in the International Atomic Energy Agency. And the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament led a delegation to Minsk in December 2005, publicly suggesting that Belarus and Iran increase their nuclear cooperation.

Lukashenka's regime has also reached out to increase contacts with Sudan and Syria seeking to increase economic, scientific and cultural exchanges - all this at the same time that Lukashenka stepped up verbal attacks on Poland and other European neighbors for their support for an open press and democratic dialogue.

Apart from its well-documented penchant for suppressing the opposition

and its troubling foreign policy partners, the Lukashenka regime has made corruption and self-enrichment hallmarks of its presidential administration. The Presidential Reserve Fund is separate from and unaccountable to the main state budget. Lukashenka himself has admitted that such funds are worth roughly \$1 billion and were drawn from secret arms sales. According to former regime insiders, Lukashenka has profited from expensive gifts from supporters and business people, making him one of the richest men in the CIS.

US and EU United

We have no candidate, we support no platform, but believe that Belarusians have the right to choose their own leaders in a free and fair process. And we believe that with free speech, open debate and a fair election the country would move forward, beyond this dark chapter. It is in no-one's interests for Belarus to remain an island of corrupt, dictatorial rule amid a continent of strengthening democracies.

Our beliefs, in fact, mirror those of the European Union. In the months prior to the March election, the United States and the EU worked closely to seek means of supporting the people of Belarus in their efforts to promote democratic change. Together, we wanted to break the regime's stranglehold on information, allowing Belarusians to receive objective sources of news and information via radio, Internet and other means. And working with the OSCE, we continually urged the regime to provide conditions conducive to a truly free and fair election process.

To say we were disappointed by the March 19 process would be an understatement. The elections did not reflect the expression of the will of the people. Therefore, the results cannot be accepted as legitimate.

The OSCE was clear in its language: "The conduct of the 19 March presidential election failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections." It cited "the climate of intimidation and atmosphere of insecurity on the eve of the election", charging Lukashenka with using his security apparatus "in a manner which did not allow citizens to freely and fairly express their will at the ballot box".

As the United States spoke out against this fraud, so did Europe. From Austria, the Foreign Minister called Belarus "the sad exception" to the democratic trend. In France, the Foreign Minister immediately called for sanctions against the regime and support for the civilian population. EU High Representative Javier Solana echoed the same commitment to strengthening support for Belarusians while speaking out strongly against the regime. He said, "I very much regret that by consolidating its authoritarian hold on Belarus, the government stands in the way of a brighter future for the country's population."

Those who live closer to the Frontiers of Freedom have spoken the most clearly. Leaders in Lithuania and Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, among many

others, have been extremely outspoken in their condemnation of the election and their support for democratic forces in Belarus.

Not all of Belarus' neighbors have been so outspoken. Unfortunately, Russia has supported Lukashenka's fraudulent victory, setting itself apart from virtually every other member of the international community. Belarus should not be an issue that divides Russia and us – promoting democracy in Belarus should instead be a common interest.

United in What?

On the eve of the March 19 elections, as it became more and more clear that Lukashenka had no intention to allow anything more than a sham election, we began hearing more and more questions about what, exactly, the United States and Europe can do. Shining a light is all good and well, skeptics would say, but what can you do?

As this book goes to press, the reply to that question is becoming clear. We are working intensively with our European allies and partners to take a united approach in dealing with Belarus, as we did in the months before the election and as we will continue to do over the long run.

We have identified a growing number of Lukashenka's co-conspirators, and we are taking action against them. Specifically, we are expanding travel restrictions on those responsible for the election fraud and human rights abuses. These people will simply not be able to travel the way they used to.

In a similar way, we are discussing ways to go after the assets of key people in the regime. The United States and the EU are dedicated to making sure that the regime's key players pay the price for their abuses. Our net is cast carefully, as we want to ensure that we do not harm innocent Belarusians, but we will continue to expand the number of people on our lists as we confirm their identities and learn of their activities.

A Concrete Collaboration

This US-EU collaboration is a concrete example of the new reality in transatlantic relations. The United States welcomes a strong, activist European Union as a partner in getting things done. Our relationship is not about the relationship anymore. It is about putting that relationship to work. In the past, when issues divided the United States and Europe, we were left with a moral fog. Standing together – speaking and acting in unison – that fog is lifted, and the bright light of the globe's center of democratic legitimacy shines clearly.

The story of Belarus and the aspirations of freedom-loving Belarusians did not end with the March elections. On the contrary, it began a new chapter. The weeks, months and even years ahead may not be easy. At the same time,

change may come sooner than many people think. Either way, we and our European allies remain united on Belarus.

The United States will continue to stand for the principles of democratic debate and government by the people. In 2006, we have provided substantial assistance to implement programs aimed at building democracy, ranging from improving access to information to strengthening civil society. The European Union – in helping set up a radio service for Belarus and in supporting those who dare to dream of democracy – is our essential partner.

Together, we are dedicated to support the brave Belarusians who have dared to speak out, despite the repressive environment. The road ahead is not yet mapped, and it may not be easy, but history as well as the power of democracy's proponents tell us that Lukashenka's days are numbered.

A European Strategy towards Belarus: Becoming “Real”

Dov Lynch

The presidential elections that occurred on March 19, 2006 in Belarus produced the predicted result: Alyaksandr Lukashenka won the vast majority of the votes after a campaign that was heavily controlled by the government, featuring harassment of the opposition, censorship of the media and general repression of Belarusian civil society. Once again, the European Union (EU) faces the same question it has sought to answer since 1996: how to influence political developments inside Belarus and how to support the democratization of this EU neighbor? Almost ten years after this question was first raised the European Union needs new thinking and a new strategy.

The Problem

The problem with our attempt to influence political developments in Minsk is that Alyaksandr Lukashenka could not care less. The freshly “reelected” Belarusian president does not respond to the “carrots” or the “sticks” proffered by the European Union because the logic of his reign is contrary to the nature of the EU model. Indeed, the essence of Lukashenka’s rule goes against the grain of mainstream European approaches to politics, economics and societal development. So, why on earth do we expect Lukashenka to change his behavior and open his regime in a direction that is utterly alien to him?

There is no evidence that would indicate he might be ready to do so. Since 1996, Alyaksandr Lukashenka has not deviated in the slightest from his objective of building an authoritarian regime in Belarus. Nothing the EU or the international community has done has been able to alter this fundamental drive. In fact, it would seem that external pressure has only served to deepen Lukashenka’s determination. The Belarusian president has regularly raised the bogeymen of “massive foreign pressure” and “external interference” as justifications for stronger actions to strengthen the Belarusian “state” – for “state” we must read “his rule”.

And his position is strong. Despite the fielding of a single and a strong candidate for the March 19 presidential elections, the opposition in Belarus remains nascent, without the means yet to challenge Lukashenka’s ability to seduce, persuade and control. In the words of the EU presidency, the March 2006 presidential elections were “fundamentally flawed”. The opposition was

systematically harassed, detained and censored in the run-up to voting. And yet, however strange it may seem, Lukashenka does have strong support inside the country, which draws on the fact that Belarus has avoided many of the difficulties of “transition”, witnessed in other countries in its neighborhood. Lukashenka has also presided over reasonably impressive growth rates that have allowed Minsk to increase minimal wages and to sustain social structures.

Belarus is not Georgia and Ukraine before the Rose and Orange revolutions. Differences lie at three levels. First, both Georgia and Ukraine had developed strong civil societies, with numerous active non-governmental organizations, and a balance of views across the political spectrum. Civil society in Belarus is becoming increasingly active, but it remains relatively nascent. Secondly, in Georgia and Ukraine, incumbent leaders at least pretended to play by the rules of the democratic game. This locked them into responding to massive popular pressure through legal and constitutional processes, which in the end weakened their ability to maintain personal power. Lukashenka does not pretend to play by these rules, and there is no legal or constitutional framework standing above him to which the opposition may appeal. Finally, incumbent leaders in Georgia and Ukraine were in the end not prepared to authorize the use of force to “restore law and order”. Lukashenka has shown that he has no such qualms. Before their revolutions, Ukraine and Georgia were weak states that acted within the democratization paradigm of politics. In 2006, Belarus is a stronger state that is authoritarian.

What should the European Union do? The framework for current EU policy towards Belarus was established in 1997, and it has changed very little since then. In essence, the policy framework may be summarized as follows: the EU has limited contacts with the regime in Minsk and has provided assistance to civil society with the aim of pressuring the government and of inducing positive change through the prospect of renewed ties. Almost ten years on, the policy has not succeeded.

In thinking about a new European strategy towards Belarus, we must keep two points in mind. The first is strategic, while the second is tactical. First, the EU does not really “exist” yet for Belarus. Put bluntly, the EU is not seen as a credible prospect by most Belarusian citizens and elites. Membership of the EU is seen as being unrealistic by most people. And this membership is often interpreted in geopolitical terms, with the European Union seen as an association of potentially, if not already, hostile states to Russia and Belarus. Belarusian reliance on Russia is founded on a bleak assessment of the country’s future, which is seen fatalistically as having little choice but closer association with Russia. Moreover, for many inside the country, the prospect of moving in the direction of the EU seems to be full of obstacles. Under Lukashenka, Belarus has avoided the real difficulties of “transition”, but the path towards the EU would seem to produce only “losers”. Thus, the EU faces the challenge of becoming “real” for Belarus – a real partner, a real alternative and a real model. Certainly, this is no easy task.

Second, since 1997, EU policy has reacted to the electoral moments in Belarusian

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politics, with every successive election being seized as an opportunity to call upon Lukashenka to alter his behavior and lead the regime towards democracy. Every election has seen EU hopes shattered, and highlighted ever more sharply the authoritarian logic of politics in Minsk. It is natural that the EU fixes on the prospect of change with each successive election. By 2006, however, it should be clear that “elections” in Belarus are not elections, as the EU understands them. In current conditions, these controlled “plebiscites” offer little hope for democratization. Also, our focus has been episodic, sequenced to follow the rise and fall of each election. This cycle must be broken. The EU must give continued attention to Belarus, independently of the country’s “electoral” process.

The argument in this article is two-fold. First, the context around the “Belarus question” is reviewed in order to understand its importance for the EU. Second, options for a new European strategy towards Belarus are explored. This article proposes a framework for EU policy that navigates between the extremes of full engagement and serious coercion.

The difficulties that the EU faces in promoting democratization in Belarus have much wider relevance. Indeed, Belarus raises a question about the ambition of the EU as a foreign policy actor. The central message of the European Security Strategy agreed by all EU member states in December 2003 is the EU’s desire to build a rule-based international society of states: “The quality of international society depends on the quality of the governments that are its foundation. The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states”. According to the EU Security Strategy, the EU’s main ambition should be the promotion of democracy beyond its borders. Through successive waves of enlargement, the EU has an unbroken record of exporting democracy and importing democracies. However, enlargement is not yet conceivable for a country such as Belarus. The question facing the EU in 2006 has, therefore, become: How can the EU best promote democracy in a country to which it cannot (now) offer the perspective of enlargement? While the case of authoritarian Belarus is acute, the EU faces this same question in other important countries on its borders and further afield. An adequate answer has not yet been found.

A New Context

Belarus does not pose a direct challenge or a hard security threat to the EU. In some respects, the argument may be made that the EU could afford to continue its current policy, betting on the hope that some day the people of Belarus will topple their leaders and return the country to the European fold.

And yet, the context around the “Belarus question” is changing dramatically. The framework for current policy was set in 1997. At that time, the EU was preoccupied with enlargement and other pressing housekeeping chores. Relations with Russia were quite positive, which seemed to posit a standoffish

position from Brussels on Belarus. In addition, the EU did not have the policy tools necessary to engage with Belarus; the European Neighborhood Policy (launched in 2004) and the European Security Strategy were still to come. In some respects, therefore, Belarus was “forgettable” in 1997. In 2006, the EU can no longer afford to ignore this country. The context has changed at four levels, which, taken together, press for a new European strategy.

First, a new Europe is in the making around Belarus. The security architecture that Europe inherited from the Cold War is transforming and a new order is emerging. This order remains nascent and uncertain, but deep trends are becoming clear. For one, NATO is becoming more globally oriented, with less direct involvement in European security. At the same time, the OSCE has entered a crisis, with Participating States debating its enduring relevance and utility. Meanwhile, the EU is rising as Europe’s security provider, with growing capacities and ambitions. What does this mean? For one, as a result of these changes, the EU will find it difficult to rely on the OSCE as the framework for policy towards Belarus. Also, the EU can consider options towards Belarus that were not available in 1997.

Second, in the wake of the revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, a more forceful US agenda is emerging towards the countries of the former Soviet Union that seeks to stimulate and direct the change that is occurring. From the perspective of Washington, the former Soviet Union is in “movement” again, after the stagnation the region had fallen into by the late 1990’s. This movement is seen as an opportunity to be exploited in US policy. The sharpening of US policy must be factored into EU thinking.

A third change concerns the Russian Federation. The Russia of 2006 is different to that of 1997. For many European countries, this is not the Russia that had been hoped for in the 1990’s. What is more, relations with Russia today are different to those of 1997, a highpoint of optimism in EU – Russia interaction. By 2006, many member states have become concerned with domestic trends inside Russia as well as with elements of Russian foreign policy. At the same time, the EU remains deeply interested in developing cooperative relations with Russia, especially in the new shared neighborhood between the enlarged European Union and the Russian Federation. Belarus stands out in this new neighborhood. Under Vladimir Putin, Russian-Belarusian relations have become troubled, but Belarus is still seen by many in Moscow as a strategic ally. With the recent revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, and the changes in Moldovan foreign policy, this ally has gained importance for Russian interests. The EU faces the challenge of striking a balance between seeking strategic cooperation with Russia and promoting its interests in countries on the EU’s borders.

Finally, the region around Belarus has changed dramatically since the 1990’s. Belarus’ immediate neighbors of Lithuania, Latvia and Poland have joined NATO and the EU. Ukraine and Moldova seem intent on integrating into mainstream Europe. However fragile the results of the Ukrainian and Georgian revolutions may be, they may mark the start of a period of upheaval across the post-Soviet space, with the rise of nationalist and European-oriented regimes that come

to power through significant demonstrations of popular support. Certainly, the inertia of the post-Soviet order of the 1990's seems to have broken. This regional context is increasingly uncomfortable for the regime in Minsk. Events show that people will go out into the streets, regimes can be toppled in weeks and change can occur. The regime in Minsk no longer seems inevitable.

This means that in 2006, the EU can no longer leave Belarus to its own devices. The presidential elections in March 2006 place the “Belarus question” ever more sharply before the EU. How should the EU respond to a regime that is increasingly authoritarian? How should the EU interact with a regime whose legitimacy it does not recognize? The electoral process also showed the burgeoning strength of civil society in Belarus and the unity of opposition forces. How can the EU support these developments? These are tough questions.

Becoming “Real”

In theory, the EU could either adopt a policy of coercion against the regime in Minsk or rather accept the limits of reality and engage with the regime in order to prepare the ground for long term change. Rather than choosing between these options, EU policy should become active at different levels in order to embed positive change in the region surrounding Belarus and to catalyze change inside the country. In the view of this author, the essential objective leading a new European strategy should be to become a real actor for this country. Becoming “real” has several levels.

Firstly, the EU must become a “real” actor for the regime. Since 1996, Lukashenka has blatantly ignored all EU injunctions and statements, with few costs or penalties. In order for this to change, the EU must take actions that are heard in Minsk.

Secondly, the EU must become a “real” actor in support of Belarusian civil society and opposition forces. EU assistance until now has been limited and difficult to obtain. The scale and forms of EU assistance must be rethought.

Finally, the EU has to become “real” in terms of the alternative and future model of development it can propose to Belarusian society as a whole. For now, the EU seems unrealistic and distant. For the EU to develop traction inside the country, it must convince the Belarusian people that the EU can “exist” for them too. Achieving these objectives requires the EU to act at all three levels.

A Regional Policy

First, the EU should seek to tie Belarus to the positive changes that are occurring around it in Eastern Europe, in Ukraine and Moldova. In this, it is vital that the European Neighborhood Policy be given sufficient resources to support the movement of Ukraine and Moldova towards greater integration with the EU, if

not full membership thereof. Real progress in Ukraine and Moldova would alter the immediate neighborhood around Belarus fundamentally. Their success would make credible the alternative that the EU could present to Belarus in contrast to other external models. Significant progress in Ukraine and Moldova could act as a magnet to Belarusian society and parts of the political elite.

Secondly, Belarus must be an element of EU – Russia dialogue. The EU has sought to place Belarus on the agenda of political dialogue with Moscow, but with great difficulty. The importance of Belarus for the enlarged EU makes it all the more important for Belarus to feature in EU – Russian discussions, especially in light of any eventual future crisis. The agreement at the Moscow 2005 Russia – EU summit on a roadmap for building a “common space on external security” offers an opportunity for increased dialogue on areas “adjacent” to the EU and Russia. Belarus is a prime candidate.

Thirdly, the EU should seek to embed Belarus more deeply into the region that surrounds it. The European Neighborhood and Partnership Programs offer instruments with which to start developing a regional approach to Belarus that would advance a range of EU interests at the regional level, such as cross-border issues, questions of Justice and Home Affairs and transport and infrastructure concerns. These programs also have the advantage of not being Minsk-centric.

Policy towards Belarus

The EU must abandon the learned helplessness it has developed towards Belarus since 1996, in which little is done because everything is seen as impossible. The reality is that the EU is already doing a lot. Many member states, and not only new ones, have active programs supporting civil society, culture, education and healthcare in Belarus. The EU is a vital trading partner of Belarus. Put simply, the EU already does a lot: it should do more and should do it better.

First, the EU should consider how to increase pressure on the Minsk regime. The actions of the current regime leave no alternative to stepping up the pressure. The targeted visa ban should be widened greatly to include other members of the top leadership who were involved in the fraudulent elections. The question of investigating and freezing assets (estimated at several billions of US dollars) held in Europe and abroad by Lukashenka and his circle must now be considered seriously. At the same time, the EU should combine such pressure with measures to simplify visa regulations for certain categories of Belarusian citizens (especially scholars, students and members of civil society).

Secondly, the EU should seek to open an office in Minsk, composed initially of at least three to four *chargés d'affaires* and with the perspective of opening a full delegation. Having a presence on the ground would provide the EU with a “face” in Belarus. This office would also be important in providing well-

founded and up-to-date analysis of domestic Belarusian developments for EU structures.

Thirdly, an assessment of the activities of Belarusian NGOs during the elections and EU assistance to them should be undertaken in order to understand clearly what worked and what did not. The EU should exploit the flexibility offered by the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Decentralized Cooperation Instrument in terms of funding and supporting non-registered NGOs and undertaking other measures without the explicit support of the central government.

Fourthly, the EU could develop a Belarus-specific student exchange program, as part of *Tempus Mundus*, which widens the possibilities for student and scholar visits and exchanges. Even if the Belarusian government cracks down on these exchanges, the onus should fall on Minsk for being afraid of such contacts and not on the EU for not proposing enough.

Fifthly, EU and member state officials must support the development of a more effective and professional opposition in Belarus, through high level contacts, support for capacity-building and public statements in their favor.

Finally, it should be admitted that, while there is much that the EU can do in Belarus, member states can do more. It is imperative that member states pick up where the EU leaves off. Member states are already deeply involved in Belarus, with a range of programs supporting civil society and cultural activities. An inventory should be taken by the EU of member states activities to share information and avoid duplication. Following this, the EU should consider framing the creation of a Belarus Task Force, composed of willing member states, to coordinate approaches. Increased member state activity could include funding for radio and television broadcasting from outside Belarusian borders, forging ties between European trade unions and Belarusian structures and varied forms of support for the Belarusian opposition. The role for the EU should be to provide a framework for member state activities and to help their coordination.

An Agency for Democracy

Within the framework of enlargement, the EU has developed an excellent track record of promoting and supporting the democratization of neighboring countries. Outside of enlargement, however, the EU record is poor, without strategy and with few resources. How can the European Union promote democracy in neighboring countries without offering enlargement and without having the tool of conditionality at its disposal?

This question gains salience because it arises at a time when the EU has to reinvent itself as a foreign policy actor that advances its values and interests abroad without using the policy of enlargement. In the 1990's, enlargement was a surrogate for a genuine EU foreign policy, wherein the EU advanced

its values and interests with states on its borders by transforming them into mirror images of itself. As a foreign policy tool, enlargement was luxurious because it relied on the full cooperation of the candidate state and placed the EU in a deeply asymmetrical relationship. With enlargement, European values and interests were advanced at one and the same time with neighboring states, with no need to find a balance between them. The EU did not have to distinguish between strategic and tactical interests: they were the same. Nor did the EU have to untangle the order of priorities for its interests with a neighbor, as these were set forth uniformly in the thirty-odd chapters of the *acquis communautaire* that each candidate had to close.

Genuine foreign policy is something different. It operates in a world that is the opposite of luxurious, defined first of all by constraint: constrained resources, constrained ambitions, and a constrained ability to control foreign partners. In foreign policy, your foreign partner rarely wants to become like you and only sometimes wants the same thing as you do. In the current climate in Europe, there can be no talk for now of enlarging beyond the pledges already made. In Belarus and throughout the EU neighborhood, therefore, the EU faces the challenge of developing a real foreign policy.

The EU has started the process. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) reflects the birth of the EU as a post-enlargement foreign policy actor. With ENP, the EU is moving beyond the straitjacket of enlargement thinking about advancing its interests without offering accession, and by acting with means that are more than technical assistance but less than membership. But only the first steps have been taken. The hard work of crafting a post-enlargement foreign policy still lies ahead.

Promoting democracy in its neighbors should be a key part of EU foreign policy. The EU already has some tools in this area (EIDHR, etc.), but they are not yet up to the task at hand. It is time, as the case of Belarus demonstrates, for the EU to create a European Democracy Agency (as proposed by the European Parliament) dedicated to supporting the democratization of EU neighbors. This agency should be funded to the scale of the task at hand, and could be placed under the joint leadership of the European Council, European Commission and European Parliament. What is more, the regulations for projects funded by this democracy agency must be tailored to the difficulties of promoting democracy in harsh circumstances.

In sum, the “Belarus question” for the EU is not one of enlargement but of foreign policy. The issue of Belarus joining the EU one day is beside the point for now. In contrast, the EU must develop genuine foreign policy strategies and tools towards Belarus. In this sense, Belarus poses a challenge of strategic importance for the EU.

A European Foundation for Democracy

Markus Meckel

Democracy and freedom are among the founding values of the European Union. Its stability and prosperity are built upon the consolidation of democracy, both within the European Union and outside it. It is in the interests of the EU and its member states to promote democracy and, thus, to contribute to security and sustainable economic development in the world. However, there are deficiencies in the EU's foreign policy instruments that aim at promoting democracy. Democracy assistance should become a more visible and more effective element in the EU's external policies. Therefore, the EU needs to establish a "European Foundation for Democracy".

In the enlargement framework, the EU, through its pre-accession strategy, contributed considerably to the development of democracy and the rule of law in those transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which have now become members. Without a doubt, the enlargement and integration process has become an effective tool for democratic development and stability in Europe and its immediate neighborhood. Yet the EU lacks instruments to effectively promote democratic change in countries which have no perspective for membership in the near future. This counts especially for countries subject to authoritarian and dictatorial rule.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, EU programs in third countries are generally implemented in cooperation with the government of the country concerned and funds are often disbursed via the government. Hence, where the government of a recipient country has no interest in cooperating with the EU in the field of democracy and human rights, the programs cannot be adequately applied. Secondly, even where the European Commission decides independently and can give funds directly to NGOs and civil society, application procedures and the system of financial control are so complex and bureaucratic, that the programs become rigid. This, for example, is the case with the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which has an annual budget of €100 to €130 million. At present, the time lapse between project proposals being submitted and contracts being signed is between 12 and 24 months. And, it takes even longer for the funds to be paid.

The program has received a lot of criticism from the NGO community, politicians and experts. Recently, the European Commission decided to streamline the application process and to decentralize the program. Now, the EU missions abroad can also grant funding. However, the tendency is still to finance "macro-

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projects" with a budgets of €300,000 and more and whose application process takes significant periods of time. Small NGOs often do not stand a chance.

Belarus, unfortunately, is an example of the poor record of the EU to directly promote democratic development and to support civil society. One reason for this is that EU assistance within the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) framework required the Belarusian government's consent. Furthermore, civil society in Belarus was not the target of EIDHR until 2004. In 2005, the European Commission decided to fund a €2 million TV and radio broadcasting program, after a long EU internal debate about where the money should come from. The projects include a 60-minute radio information magazine entitled "Window to Europe" and a weekly half-hour TV magazine-style program in Belarusian and Russian languages. These TV and radio broadcasts follow a smaller €138,000 EU-funded broadcasting project which was already underway, implemented by *Deutsche Welle*. Both projects were met with criticism from Belarusian democrats, among others, who say that the programs' effectiveness leaves a lot to be desired and that they will have little impact. The EU also provides €600,000 in sponsorship to the European Humanities University, which had to leave Minsk due to pressure from Lukashenka's regime and which is now operating from Vilnius in Lithuania. There are also some further calls for tender for projects under the umbrella of the European Neighborhood Policy and the budget line for Decentralized Cooperation and EIDHR, for which Belarusian NGOs are eligible.

In general, however, Belarusian democratic forces and NGOs complain that flexibility to provide small-scale and short term assistance and to react to the often difficult situation of NGOs is lacking, especially when the EU is dealing with unregistered entities. For example, the joint candidate of the democratic forces for the presidential elections, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, once complained that his election team did not have enough cash to pay for the petrol needed to run a proper election campaign in rural areas, although he did receive a lot of moral and political support from the EU and the United States. At the same time, the EU decided to sponsor a €2m TV and radio project for Belarus, which started to operate in February 2005, only a few days before the elections.

A European Foundation for Democracy

In order to correct the EU's deficiencies in this area, it should step up its efforts to support civil society in establishing an autonomous "European Foundation for Democracy" (EFD) as a new instrument of European foreign policy. By way of autonomously deciding on the allocation of funding to projects, this foundation would be intended to internationally promote the development of democracy, a strong civil society, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. The foundation would complement the current range of tools that exist within EU foreign policy, allowing for flexible cooperation, free of red tape, with the civil societies of other countries, underpinning their efforts, thereby

promoting democratic development. At the same time, it would lend weight to the Europeans' ambition to play an important role in the development of civil society and the promotion of democratic change in Europe and beyond, and would enhance the EU's visibility as an international political player.

Already in autumn 2004, on the basis of a Polish initiative, the establishment of a "European Democracy Fund" was discussed, the idea being to incite the EU to boost its activities in promoting democracy and civil and political human rights vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbors in the framework of its European Neighborhood Policy. Many experts dealing with the European Neighborhood Policy have asserted the need for a flexible and autonomous European Fund for Democracy Promotion. At that time, the Polish initiative met with considerable resistance and now has scant chance of playing a role in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy.

The present initiative for the establishment of an EFD follows on from these efforts, but is wider in scope. The initiative foresees an instrument which would not be restricted to the European Neighborhood Policy and would not replace current instruments, but instead would provide the EU with an effective and flexible instrument which can be used across the world. Experience gained until 2001 with the European Human Rights Foundation can be used in structuring such a foundation. In addition, consideration should be given to whether the EuropAid Co-operation Office set up since then to administer the EU's external aid would need to be complemented.

The instrument provided by a new autonomous foundation of this kind would increase the flexibility of European foreign policy and allow a more individualized approach. It would be like an additional arm, able to act in a complementary fashion as an independent player – on a common basis yet autonomously – without disrupting or impeding official diplomatic relations between the EU and the states in which the foundation was active.

This European Foundation for Democracy is intended to provide support for civil society activities and structures in other countries in order to boost the spread of democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights across the world. Its activities would, therefore, be essentially aimed at supporting long term processes of change. The idea is to fund as many activities as possible, run by not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations with a direct impact on society and the general public. Such projects might concern building up and supporting independent media, or independent trade unions, or support for churches and social projects or community organizations, or – in authoritarian systems – support for democratic forces. Where competent and experienced partner organizations, such as foundations, exist in the countries concerned or in neighboring EU Member States, or in member states with a particular commitment, the EFD should, where possible, cooperate with these organizations in selecting and running projects.

Experience in Europe since 1989 has shown that political reform processes sometimes unexpectedly take on a dynamic of their own. Every process of

democratization offers short term "windows of opportunity" in which the potential for democratization is particularly large. For this reason, long term strategic work to underpin democratic institutions and procedures should be complemented by a "rapid reaction facility", allowing for swift and flexible reaction to opportunities for short term democratic change or acute human rights crises.

The Foundation should recognizably be an EU institution. It should be set up by the European Commission and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and control by the European Parliament should be guaranteed. Working on the basis of structures used in the private sector, and tried and tested by many foundations, it would seem sensible to have a director responsible for the day-to-day management, along with a managing board to play a central role in decisions on the work program and priorities. This board would also take decisions on the award of contracts for projects up to a certain ceiling and implement a process of pre-selection and assessment of project applications for larger funding volumes. In addition, the Foundation would have a board of trustees, or a "supervisory board", which would set general guidelines for the Foundation's work and decide on project applications with a particularly large volume of funding.

Consideration should be given to appointing to the Foundation's bodies not only members of European Parliament and representatives of other EU institutions, but also persons who have gained similar experience in the member states as national parliamentarians or actors of civil society. The decision making structures of the Foundation must be structured in such a way as to also permit more small scale funding (compared with the amounts of funding otherwise usual in the EU) to be provided to smaller NGOs, since it is these NGOs in particular which often play an important role in situations of change and in democratic transformation processes.

The EFD should be funded by means of lump sum allocations from the EU budget. Furthermore, it should be possible for it to receive additional funding from third parties, for example, from other foundations, private companies or member states and use this to provide support in the framework of the Foundation's aims. The EU could couple allocations from its budget to conditions concerning the use of the funds, such as the distribution amongst a) individual countries, b) regions or c) certain issues.

Will the European Union Move Forward?

There is some hope that the EU will step up its momentum of assistance to democratic development outside its borders since it is currently reviewing its strategy in this area. At the end of 2006, the EU's current financial arrangements expire, and there is not yet agreement on what will replace the current instruments for democracy promotion. Nevertheless, there is awareness in the European Parliament, in the European Commission and in the

Council of Ministers that something has to be done. The European Commission has recently issued a communication on human rights and democracy, and the European Parliament has stated in a report that it “considers it useful to establish a special European fund to support, in an efficient and flexible manner, initiatives promoting parliamentary democracy in neighboring countries” (Resolution on the EU’s Neighborhood Policy on January 18, 2006). In the context of discussions on the next 2007 to 2013 financial perspective, the European Parliament also calls for a separate instrument of financing or budget line for the promotion of democracy and human rights. This could form the basis for allocations to the Foundation. In order to have an impact internationally, an allocation from the EU budget of around €50 to €70 million should be aimed at in the medium term, in addition to the volume of EIDHR.

Further, on the initiative of Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the European Parliament, the all-party “Democracy Caucus” of the European Parliament developed a proposal for a “European Fund for Democracy through Partnership” (March 2006), which is very similar to the initiative proposed here. This proposal calls for a Foundation which “[...] should provide a flexible funding instrument to support democratic reform processes and programs, capable of operating at a greater level of suppleness, responsiveness and risk than would be appropriate for the EU institutions themselves. The Foundation would enhance the European profile in worldwide democracy assistance and could at the same time enrich the debate about democracy within Europe”.

There are also some members of the European Parliament and experts who are arguing for the establishment of European political foundations, which are affiliated to the parliamentary groups in the European Parliament, rather than a multi-party foundation. This debate is to be welcomed. Political foundations would not constitute a contradiction to the establishment of an autonomous EFD. In countries under transformation with a politically differentiated and more developed civil society, political foundations find partners and actors for their work. Where this is not the case, the work of politically independent actors can be more efficient.

It is hoped that such initiatives will come to fruition. The EU would be in a better position to react to new challenges such as the support of democratic movements in Belarus and elsewhere. From today’s perspective, the political future of Belarus looks bleak. The dictatorial regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka seems to be firmly in place. Lukashenka has secured a third term using a fraudulent presidential “election”. He continues to suppress civil society and democracy. Independent newspapers have been closed, the opposition is deprived of free access to state TV and radio, NGOs are required to register with the state authorities, and many of them have not been able to continue working because of newly imposed restrictions. Opposition leaders are constantly being harassed and some of them or their aides have been imprisoned, as are people who peacefully demonstrated against the election fraud.

On the other hand events during and after the pseudo-elections in March 2006 also show signs of hope. We did not witness a color revolution, as in

Serbia, Georgia or Ukraine, but thousands of Belarusians stood up for freedom and democracy, protesting on October Square in Minsk and elsewhere in the country against the falsified election result. The democratic opposition has a common and credible leader, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, and, in contrast to previous elections, is more united. The election campaign was much more professional, and especially many young people seem to see their future in a free and democratic Belarus rather than in a country ruled by someone who takes away their rights and destroys their perspectives for the future.

It is not only in the interest of the EU to support democratic movements outside the EU, it is also its duty. A European Foundation for Democracy would signal to the people of Belarus, but also to other people across the world, who are standing up for freedom and democracy, that the EU takes its self proclaimed aspirations seriously.

Making Civil Society Support Central to EU Democracy Assistance

Kristi Raik

In recent years, the European Union (EU) has begun to realize the key role that civil society can play in the democratization of Belarus. Raising the awareness of the local population and pro-democracy activity among citizens is rightly seen by the EU (as well as other Western donors) as one of the main opportunities for promoting democratic change in the neighboring dictatorship. The EU's new emphasis on civil society reflects a broader shift of paradigm in Western policies of democracy promotion. Since the collapse of the Soviet system in the late 1980's, the importance of civil society for democratization has become widely acknowledged, and hence bottom-up, voluntary civic activity has been included in the democracy assistance programs of most donors. The central role of peaceful civic activity in bringing about political change was reaffirmed by the recent cases of transition to democracy in Georgia and Ukraine.

While the EU acknowledges the need to support civil society in Belarus, there is currently a wide gap between its rhetoric and practice. Since 1991, the EU has been the largest Western donor to Belarus (with a modest total of €222 million in assistance from 1991 to 2005), with only a maximum of 5 percent of that assistance going to civil society. The United States has given many times more aid to Belarusian NGOs than the EU. Even Sweden, one of the main supporters of Belarusian civil society, has contributed almost as much to this sector as the EU. Civil society has also been of minor significance in EU assistance to other Eastern European countries, including Ukraine and Moldova, where NGOs have received only a small percentage of the total funds available (2 percent and 5 percent respectively from 1998 to 2004). The low level of assistance to civil society is particularly problematic in the case of Belarus, because in an authoritarian regime democracy assistance has to be directed to non-state actors, whereas in Ukraine and Moldova, the EU has been able support democratic reforms carried out by the government.

Civil Society as a Force for Democratization

In the midst of the flourishing rhetoric about civil society among democracy promoters, it is worth recalling briefly why independent civic activity is so essential for democracy and democratization. To begin with, it is one of the

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key features of democracy that people act together in an organized manner in order to formulate and express their interests, values and identities. Civil society is the sphere where such organized bottom-up activity takes place. It is by definition autonomous from the state and the business sector and includes a wide variety of civil society actors that do not necessarily share more with each other than the core characteristics of being voluntary, independent, not-for-profit, open, public, legal and non-violent. The existence of civil society obviously requires a democratic political system that guarantees the civic freedoms of association, opinion and speech. On the other hand, the functioning of democracy requires civic activity, and the quality and strength of democracy are defined, among other things, by the level of activity and development of civil society.

From the viewpoint of the citizen, civil society is first and foremost a channel for protecting and promoting personal values and interests. In addition to policy advocacy that aims to directly influence policy making, civic activity also has the broader function of shaping public opinion and bringing the views of different groups to the attention of the general public. Secondly, it is a classical function of civil society to exercise control over power holders and to prevent the concentration and misuse of power. In this watchdog and countervailing role, NGOs complement the media, as they scrutinize the work of public officials, demand openness and accountability, and expose possible misbehavior. For example, NGOs have a significant role in the fight against corruption. Another important task of NGOs in democratizing countries is to observe the election process, as they did for example in Ukraine during the presidential elections in 2004. In Belarus, on the other hand, independent domestic NGOs were not allowed to observe the recent elections. Thirdly, NGOs can perform social tasks such as taking care of children and the elderly, helping disadvantaged groups and promoting public health. This may be particularly valuable in poorer societies where the state has limited resources. NGO activity in the social sector is to some extent allowed in Belarus and other authoritarian regimes, whereas the first two functions of civil society are systematically suppressed by authoritarian leaders.

From the viewpoint of the democratic system, an active, well-organized citizenry may enhance the stability of democracy and the effectiveness and efficiency of decision making in many ways. NGOs and interest groups provide public authorities with valuable information and expertise on the problems and needs of the society. Civic activity also has an educative function: it teaches responsible social and political action and respect for the common public interest. People are more likely to approve public decisions and comply with common rules and norms if they take part in public life themselves and feel that they have a say in decision making affecting their lives. Furthermore, civil society is a channel for the state to communicate its decisions and policies to the people.

Under the conditions imposed by an authoritarian regime, where democracy and civic freedoms do not exist or are severely restricted, there is limited space,

if any, for an open, public, legal and independent civil society. The primary task of civic activity is, therefore, to work for democratic political change that can create the conditions for the normal functioning of civil society. It is first and foremost politically oriented civic activity (politically is meant in a broad sense, as aimed at having an impact on public life and the functioning of a certain aspect of society) that helps to establish democracy. It stands close to two other sectors that are also essential for democracy: the media and political parties. The media, however, is often commercial as opposed to the not-for-profit nature of civil society. And political parties, unlike civil society organizations, strive for the attainment of power in state institutions.

Democracy assistance to Belarus should focus on these three sectors: politically oriented civic activity, independent media and democratic parties. It is essential for pro-democratic groups in Belarus to maintain independent communications and try to reach a broader public through alternative media. This is needed above all for spreading information about their own goals and activities in order to mobilize support and make people believe that they offer a credible alternative to the authoritarian regime. It is also necessary to delegitimize the incumbent leader by making available uncensored information about repressions and violations of human rights.

If the state does not allow democratic freedoms, civic activity cannot be fully open and it may have to ignore or violate the non-democratic legislation imposed by the regime. Instead of taking place in the public sphere, politically oriented civic activity is forced underground and treated by the regime as criminal. Under such circumstances, civil society entails, first, dissident groups that are not allowed to act publicly, but that work for democratic change more or less in secret and second, non-political organizations that are allowed by the regime to be active, but are autonomous and do not work for the regime. Thirdly, there are fake NGOs, established and supported by the regime, which do not, of course, qualify as part of civil society, for example, the Belarusian Republican Youth Union that takes its orders from President Lukashenka.

These specifications cause some difficulty for making a distinction between civil and un-civil society, and between true NGOs that are bottom-up and autonomous, and fake NGOs that are established by and dependent on the government. Pro-democratic groups may be forced to violate the law, which makes them vulnerable to being discredited by the regime. On the other hand, criminals and other groups that are un-civil according to democratic standards may try to portray themselves as victims of the repressive system and seek legitimacy in the eyes of external actors. It is a complicated but all the more essential task for external donors in such circumstances to find reliable partners and to deliver assistance to independent pro-democratic forces. Obviously, external actors can do very little through formal channels of assistance that are approved by the non-democratic regime. Assistance to pro-democratic groups often has to be given in secret or indirectly, and is, for example, channeled through neighboring countries or NGOs based outside the target country.

In order for civil society to initiate transition to democracy, it needs to organize a united opposition front that is able to mobilize the masses, as it did in the recent revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, and even more broadly in the late 1980's in East-Central Europe. At this stage of democratization, large-scale civic engagement is probably most important. The democratic opposition is more likely to succeed if the following preconditions are in place: the regime is not fully authoritarian, but allows some civic freedom (note, for instance, the effect of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* in the Soviet Union); the incumbent leader is unpopular; there is at least some independent media; independent NGOs are able to monitor elections; and the regime is not united and cannot rely on the military, police and security forces in case of mass demonstrations.

All these factors contributed to change in Ukraine and Georgia, but they all seem to be absent in Belarus. Western support is needed there, first of all, to make people realize and believe that there are alternatives to the current regime, alternatives that may be better than the stability of today, and that it is possible for the citizens to contribute to positive change. Many Belarusians know little about life in the democratic neighboring countries and may be encouraged to pursue democracy once they see how much better off people in, for example, the Baltic countries are. In order to open the eyes and minds of Belarusians, external donors should support as many grass-root contacts as possible. It may indirectly contribute to democratic change if one helps to bring a football club from a Belarusian town to play a match with their fellow club in, say, a town in Latvia, to invite Belarusian biology students to a summer camp in Poland, or to help a Belarusian choir or rock band tour Europe. It also strengthens civil society if individuals (instead of organizations) receive support to study and travel abroad. In general, all forms of linkages with the outside world tend to undermine the authoritarian leadership, whereas policies of isolation and sanctions are not likely to have a democratizing impact.

The Shortcomings of European Union Assistance to Civil Society

During the past years, the legal and political conditions for organized civic activity in Belarus have become increasingly difficult, as President Lukashenka has used new restrictions and repressive measures to prevent the recent wave of color revolutions from reaching the country. It has also become more and more complicated to support Belarusian NGOs from outside, and representatives of many donors have left the country. At the same time the EU has increased democracy assistance to Belarus (€8.7 million was earmarked for this sector in 2005). While it is difficult for any foreign donor to promote democracy in an authoritarian environment, the EU is particularly badly equipped for this kind of activity. To a large extent, this is explained by broader shortcomings in the Union's democracy assistance policy, as well as in the neighborhood policy.

First, the EU lacks a specific strategy for supporting civil society. The European

Neighborhood Policy (ENP) launched in 2003 pays more attention to civil society than any earlier EU policy instruments for its Eastern neighbors (excluding candidate countries). However, the ENP does not contain a specific analysis or vision of the role of civil society and ways for supporting it. This is part of a broader problem: the inconsistency and ineffectiveness of EU democracy promotion (again, excluding enlargement). It should be positively noted, however, that recent discussions in both the European Commission and the European Parliament, as well as among the member states, foresee a stronger role for civil society in EU democracy promotion in the future.

Second, the EU is not clear about its overall strategic aims in the Eastern neighborhood, and there is a lack of political will on the side of some member states to develop a more proactive strategy. While the new EU member states are eager to give all possible support to the democratization of Eastern neighbors, including the prospect of membership in the EU, some old members are skeptical about stepping up the EU's engagement in the region. One of the main reasons for caution, shared in particular by the large and old member states, is that Belarus and other new Eastern neighbors have traditionally belonged to the Russian sphere of influence. Promoting democracy in Belarus is by far less important for many member states than good relations with President Putin.

The third major obstacle to effective civil society support is bureaucracy, and in particular, the overly strict Financial Regulation of the EU. Several recent studies analyze in detail the problems caused by the Regulation for NGOs that are supported by the European Commission. In brief, the system is criticized for raising the costs, increasing uncertainty and reducing the effectiveness of NGOs that seek funding from the European Commission. Since the process is extremely slow, laborious and costly, it is particularly difficult for small NGOs to apply for EU funding. The procedure for applying for assistance takes such a long time, usually several years from programming until actual payments are made, that local conditions and needs may change radically during the period, and few NGOs are able to plan their work so far in advance. The Regulation imposes tight financial controls with auditing rules that are far stricter than the usual standards in both the public and private sectors. The extensive and complicated reporting requirements pose a further extra burden on recipients of assistance.

It is particularly difficult for the EU to support civil society in non-democratic countries where its bureaucratic rules often pose insurmountable obstacles and political agreement among its institutions and member states is particularly difficult to reach. The EU is not alone with this challenge: the aid of Western governments is also focused on democratizing countries, while much less is done in non-democratic countries. However, the current EU assistance programs are more rigid than those of other donors. For example, it is essential in an authoritarian environment that civil society assistance is independent from the approval of the recipient country's government. This principle is followed by the EU under a specific democracy program, the European Initiative for

Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), but not under the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States program (TACIS) that has been the major assistance program for the CIS countries, including Belarus. Even in non-authoritarian countries the involvement of government in civil society assistance contradicts the very idea of civil society as a sphere that is independent from government. It is, thus, most welcome that the European Commission has recently acknowledged the need to assist civil society directly, without the involvement of recipient country governments. Under the new system of EU external assistance, to be applied from 2007 onwards, it would be crucial to make this principle a rule in all civil society assistance.

Another obstacle to supporting Belarusian civil society is that most independent NGOs in the country have been closed down by the authorities and are, thus, not officially registered. The EU, however, can only support registered organizations. Furthermore, the EU does not support political groups, since this is considered illegitimate involvement in the internal affairs of other countries. Yet it is essential for democracy promotion in authoritarian environments to support pro-democratic political forces.

As it has become virtually impossible to allocate EU funds to civil society in Belarus, most of the money is used for activities outside the country, such as the work of the European Humanities University that is in exile in Vilnius, and TV and radio programs broadcast by German, Polish, Lithuanian and Russian channels. This kind of indirect support to democracy can be valuable and is practiced by many other donors. It should not, however, replace assistance to groups working inside Belarus, but should rather be complementary.

Channeling European Union Aid through European NGOs

Even if the EU substantially reforms the rules governing assistance, it will still be difficult for the European Commission to work extensively with NGOs in foreign countries, and in particular authoritarian ones, for both political and institutional reasons. Small-scale support to NGOs is very laborious and in authoritarian environments it is also politically sensitive. Hence, the EU needs to create new mechanisms for democracy assistance. There are at least two possibilities to enhance support to civil society in Belarus and other similar countries.

First, as discussed in more detail by Markus Meckel in this volume, the EU should establish a European foundation to support democratization and civil society. International practice suggests that private foundations that receive regular public funding are one of the best ways of supporting civil society. A foundation could work more effectively, especially in non-democratic countries, since it would not be constrained by the same bureaucratic requirements as the European Commission. It could be designed according to the model of the

United States National Endowment for Democracy and the Eurasia Foundation or the German *Stiftungen*. In addition, following the German model, some assistance, in particular to pro-democratic political forces, could be channeled through party groups in the European Parliament.

Second, the EU should develop long-term partnerships with European NGOs that support democratization outside the EU. The European Commission is to some extent already working with NGOs in this field, but the cooperation is hampered by its bureaucratic rules, so a reform of the rules is necessary also from this perspective. Again, there are good models among the member states. In a manner comparable to the foundation system, some governments have long-term partners among domestic NGOs that function as channels to allocate external assistance to non-state actors in other countries. (Where foundations exist, it is one of their tasks to support democracy promotion and development projects of domestic NGOs.) The NGOs that work as partners of government are more independent than the foundations, although they are also accountable to public authorities for the public funding that they receive. The division of labor is the same in both cases: in the field of democracy promotion, governments work mainly with institution building, and foundations and/or NGOs support civil society.

A good example is Sweden, one of the largest contributors to democracy and civil society in Belarus since the mid 1990's. Sweden's total assistance to Belarus has constantly increased, reaching over €3 million in 2005 and is expected to rise above €4 million in 2006. The main reason for the increase is the deteriorating state of democracy and human rights in the country. Close to half of Swedish assistance is directed to this sector, the other main targets being health and education. Belarusian NGOs have received support under both democracy and social programs of the Swedish governmental aid agency SIDA. From 1998 to 2004, NGOs received almost one third of the total assistance disbursed.

SIDA delegates a considerable share of external assistance to NGOs through Swedish NGOs, among others *Forum Syd*, an umbrella organization of close to 200 Swedish organizations working with development assistance. SIDA has supported numerous projects of cooperation between Swedish and Belarusian NGOs, including for instance anti-drugs and HIV/AIDS projects. It became increasingly difficult to start such projects in 2005 because of the registration process required by the Belarusian authorities. One way to avoid registration has been to support activities taking place outside the country. For example, the Belarusian Association of Journalists has taken part in seminars funded by SIDA that have taken place in Sweden, Ukraine and Russia. Local politicians from Belarus have also been trained in Sweden. On the whole, and in comparison with the EU, SIDA has worked in a faster and more flexible manner, reacting to changing circumstances in Belarus and cooperating with numerous partners from Sweden, Belarus as well as other countries.

The most complicated task for donors is to support pro-democracy groups in Belarus that are not registered and would definitely not be allowed to receive

foreign aid through the formal registration procedure required by the Belarusian authorities. The programs of Western foundations and governmental agencies are flexible enough to allow some funds to be disbursed clandestinely and to informal groups. Giving out public information about such assistance would be counterproductive and dangerous for its recipients.

The two channels of civil society assistance – a democracy foundation and European NGOs – are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the EU should aim to pluralize its aid mechanisms and could both create a new foundation and develop partnerships with European NGOs. Whatever model will be chosen, it is obvious that in order to make civil society a more important priority of external assistance and especially democracy assistance, the EU must adjust its aid mechanisms considerably. The case of Belarus exposes the limitations of EU foreign policy in a way that undermines its credibility as an international actor and as the soft, normative power that it claims to be. One can only hope that the tightening dictatorship in Belarus will speed up the reform efforts in the EU.

Assisting Democratic Transition in Belarus: Lessons from Pre-1989 Poland

Jacek Kucharczyk

The outcome of the Belarusian elections of March 19, 2006 opens up the prospect of a prolonged struggle between Lukashenka's dictatorial regime and the forces of democratic opposition and politically awakened parts of the civil society. In view of the brutal repression of protesters against the fraudulent elections and anyone daring to challenge the regime, the question arises as to what will be the best tactics and strategies for pro-democracy activists and their supporters in the West.

The degree of repressiveness of the Lukashenka regime, its methods combining soft and hard power, eludes comparison with pre-Orange Revolution Ukraine. Indeed, some Belarusian activists are inclined to draw comparisons between the situation in Belarus and Poland after martial law was imposed in late 1981. This article will examine such comparisons more closely, and will reflect on useful lessons that can be drawn from the struggle of Poland's "Solidarity" movement by those who wish to see a free, democratic and Western-oriented Belarus. Such comparisons will also provide clues as to instruments of democratic assistance that could effectively be applied by those wishing to support democracy in Belarus.

Let Them Know the World is Watching!

The imposition of martial law in Poland sent shockwaves around the world, even though reactions from the democratic world were less than consistent. Strong condemnation by US President Ronald Reagan of the unfolding drama were accompanied by complicity in Western Europe, best exemplified by "the sigh of relief" from German chancellor Helmut Schmidt upon hearing the news that "Solidarity has been prevented from starting the third World War". This seems to sum up the way that pro-democratic activists perceived and remembered the world's reactions: words of encouragement from the US and opportunism on the part of German and other European politicians, preoccupied "not to wake the Russian bear".

The pro-Americanism of the Polish post-1989 elites, so difficult to understand

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to politicians and opinion makers of "old Europe", can to a large extent be traced back to those reactions to the banning of "Solidarity" and the imprisonment of its activists. European leaders should draw a lesson from this: strong criticism of the Lukashenka regime today is an investment in good relations with the future leaders of Belarus.

In view of the fact that the EU is emerging as a regional political (and not merely economic) centre of gravity, the key responsibility here falls on European institutions and the capitals of those member states that – in the public eye – are most closely associated with Europe, such as Germany. The imprisoned and persecuted democracy activists in Belarus have every right to expect a clear and unambiguous voice of support from Europe, and they will certainly reciprocate as democratic politicians in the future.

It is very encouraging to see the involvement of a number of new member states, most notably Lithuania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, in supporting democracy in Belarus. In addition to conducting their own activities, these countries should combine their efforts in order to mobilize other EU players. No less important is the involvement of non-member states of the EU, such as Ukraine and Georgia, whose own experience with recent democratic change should be tapped to build broad-based international support for Belarus.

Such assistance also needs to go beyond vague statements about supporting the "democratic process in Belarus". What is needed is general recognition of Alyaksandr Milinkevich and other opposition leaders as genuine representatives of the other, the democratic, Belarus. Here another Polish experience can be informative. The award of the Nobel peace prize to Lech Walesa increased the visibility of the "Solidarity" struggle at a time when the world was beginning to shift its attention away from Poland. Likewise, it should be ensured that concrete names and faces of Belarusian opposition leaders remain in the focus of any policy related to Belarus. All gestures of recognition by governments as well as by international and civic organizations are welcome and important.

"Fanning the Flames of Freedom"

It will be important to make sure that the recent high levels of international attention do not give way to "Belarus fatigue" by the democratic world. It would, therefore, be advisable for the EU to undertake regular monitoring activities on the situation in Belarus, publish regular reports and statements and perhaps appoint a high ranking rapporteur charged with day-to-day assessment of developments in the country.

Keeping Belarus and pro-democracy activists domestically and internationally visible and recognized is also a task for the international media and foreign diplomats residing in Minsk. Poland's experience under martial law suggests that the ability to speak to foreign correspondents was an important political asset for "Solidarity" activists. This was not only a way to criticize and embarrass

the regime vis-à-vis an international audience, but also to communicate with Polish society through the Polish-language radio programs, such as *Radio Free Europe*, *BBC*, *Voice of America*, *Radio France Internationale* and others. This established a communication circuit, alternative to the official media, whose accessibility went well beyond the politically awakened segments of society to those who were not willing to directly challenge the regime and yet wanted to have access to information banned from government-controlled media. Reaching out to such an audience, and breaking the “Lukashenka spell” over parts of the Belarusian society, is a crucial task for democracy activists. International media presence and interest in developments in Belarus deserve encouragement.

Foreign embassies should also become meeting spaces and resource centers for the opposition and certain segments of the society, such as students. In Poland under martial law, the American embassy was a place where one could read Western press and books, as well as watch *CNN*. Despite the regime’s efforts to discourage the users of the library facilities, it was broadly used and served as an important channel of information. Both the American library and the British Council served as “windows on the West”, and embassies in Minsk should strive to provide as many such windows as possible in Belarus today.

The embassies in Minsk should also remain open for democracy activists. Inviting the oppositionists to all formal and informal events organized by embassies (such as national holidays, conferences, etc.) should become the rule rather than the exception. This is not only a way of increasing the recognition and legitimacy of those activists, but also a way of creating a meeting ground for the opponents of the regime and its representatives. Providing such a channel of communication between the two sides of the conflict may help part of the *nomenklatura* to develop acquaintance with “the enemy” and thus prepare possible future interactions and “round tables”.

“Actions Speak Louder than Words”

Certainly, more is needed and should be expected than strong words. The scale of the repression following the protests against the elections is clear grounds for sanctions against the Lukashenka regime. The most obvious instrument of sanctions is a visa ban to the EU, and the recent EU decision to expand the blacklist from its current six to possibly four hundred names of people involved in repressions is a start in this respect, however inadequate. For comparison, it is estimated that 40,000 foreign persons are currently blacklisted by the Belarus authorities, including politicians, journalists, experts and NGO activists. The EU should use the principle of reciprocity to expand its blacklist to a similar level. It should insist that the visa ban covers entire categories of regime officials, including police, special forces, civil servants in some ministries, in other words, all the groups without whose support the regime would not last a fortnight. Moreover, the visa ban should also affect

the immediate family members of officials. To achieve EU consensus on such a radical move will not be easy and will take time but as a first impulse in this direction, individual countries, such as Lithuania, Poland and possibly Ukraine, could unilaterally expand the blacklist to a level where it could make a difference.

The visa ban should provide a powerful incentive for the *nomenklatura* to reconsider their support for Lukashenka. They should not be able to enjoy open borders but keep the rest of society locked up under an authoritarian system. At the same time, the EU border regime has to be kept friendly and permeable for the ordinary citizens of Belarus. From this point of view, recent proposals to raise visa fees to €60 after the impending expansion of the Schengen area to include new EU member states are very unfortunate, since it would make even short trips to Poland and Lithuania unaffordable to most Belarusians.

Depending on the further development of the domestic situation in Belarus, the imposition of economic sanctions should not be ruled out. While it is true that the regime would try to use the sanctions as a propaganda tool against the West, again judging by Polish experience, such propaganda is not necessarily effective. American sanctions against Poland after the imposition of martial law did not cause an upsurge of anti-Americanism. On the contrary, official posters denouncing Ronald Regan’s “crusade against Poland” became cult-objects and were quickly snatched up by collectors. The imposition of sanctions may have had a limited economic impact but was an important symbolic signal to opponents of the communist regime.

In the case of Belarus, the economic sanctions should be targeted against the companies closely associated with, and subsidizing, the current regime. The growing dependence of Belarus on trade with the EU, especially in oil and natural gas derivatives, makes this country susceptible to economic pressure. Such targeted sanctions would hurt the regime and *nomenklatura* more than ordinary citizens. In depriving the regime of much-needed revenues, economic sanctions will make it difficult for Lukashenka’s government to uphold the *façade* of economic stability and prosperity that is so effectively portrayed in official propaganda.

In turn, the large scale of protests and repression following the March 19 elections also necessitate an increase in direct assistance to victims of repression and their families. Important and needed support includes scholarships for studies abroad for those students who were banned from Belarusian universities for their civic activism. Special “advanced studies” fellowships should be provided for academics unable to continue their work in Belarus for political reasons. Such students and scholars could be affiliated with EU universities but also with policy think-tanks, where they could work on public policy analysis and development. In building necessary expertise, such work will be crucial once the democratic breakthrough is achieved in Belarus.

Information Channels: Creating Alternatives to Government-Controlled Media

One of the striking features of the Polish democratic opposition in the 1980's was the degree to which it could challenge the regime's media monopoly. The diversity of printed information material (from leaflets to lengthy volumes) made it possible to reach different target groups, and the diversity of different independent sources and channels of information was difficult to suppress. The underground press was also a school of independent journalism and seriously contributed to the development of free media in Poland after 1989, with *Gazeta Wyborcza* as the most spectacular, yet not unique example.

Technological progress since the 1980's should make the supply of independent information easier and assistance in this area to democratic activists in Belarus needs to be a priority. New technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones, should be used to the fullest, while "old-fashioned" print materials, such as leaflets or newspapers, must not be forgotten to reach the less technology-aware segments of society.

Two more aspects of the Polish experience with alternative media are worth stressing here. Firstly, one should keep in mind that the influence of clandestine print media was magnified through foreign radio broadcasts to Poland, which duly reported the contents of such publications and made them accessible to a broader audience. This also means that new broadcasting initiatives for Belarus should, to a larger extent than to date, rely on informational materials produced by Belarusians inside the country. In so doing, such broadcasts would be perceived as Belarusian programs from abroad rather than EU, Polish or Lithuanian broadcasts in the Belarusian language.

The second important lesson from the Polish struggle for information in the 1980's is that although the government monopoly in electronic media (especially TV) cannot be broken, its credibility can be greatly reduced by concerted efforts of the opposition. In Poland under martial law there were a number of initiatives of this type, and the slogan *Telewizja kłamie!* ("Television lies!") was familiar even to the most politically passive Poles. The slogan was popularized through leaflets, graffiti and stickers on trams and busses. Other initiatives, such as the act of individual citizens to put their TV sets in the windows of their apartments or conspicuous "TV walks" during official evening news broadcasts further weakened the spell of state propaganda. Convincing the average Belarusian citizen that what they see on TV is not necessarily what really happened will be crucial to winning the propaganda war against Lukashenka.

Instruments of Assistance: Flexibility, Pluralism and Decentralization

Polish "Solidarity" has often been described as a *sui generis* movement which, judged by political criteria, was at the same time socialist, liberal and conservative. The hybrid ideological nature of "Solidarity" made it easier to seek and find supporters in various places in Poland and outside, among people with very different ideological inclinations, from conservatives to anarchists, from Western trade unions to the Reagan Republicans. Therefore, it is advisable to build the broadest-possible support for the cause of democracy in Belarus across the political and ideological spectrum in the EU and the US. This also implies that assistance should be provided by a broad variety of institutions, both national and supranational.

The US is and will long remain the country with the most experience, will and resources in the field of assisting democracy. However, in view of the controversies surrounding US attempts to establish democracy in Iraq as well as suspicions towards America among the populations of the former Soviet Union, which had long been subdued by anti-American propaganda, it is necessary to expand the basis of support for pro-democracy activists. The EU and individual member states can and should be more pro-active in assisting democrats in Belarus, beyond the European response to date that has remained below expectations. As if believing that "if you break it you own it", some European leaders seem hesitant to take the responsibility for encouraging democratic transformation in Belarus. The example of Ukraine, where the spectacular victory of the Orange Revolution was also a clear "European choice" of its citizens, demonstrates that once democracy prevails in Belarus, its citizens too will start knocking on EU doors. At present this seems to be something many in the EU would rather avoid.

Although the recent eastward enlargement was the biggest-ever EU success in strengthening new democracies, prospects for countries such as Ukraine or eventually Belarus to enjoy similar EU support are limited, if not absent altogether. The European Neighborhood Policy, created as an alternative to enlargement for countries without clear prospects of membership, is hardly appropriate for effectively assisting democracy in Belarus or elsewhere. Clearly, new instruments are needed.

The idea of establishing a European Democracy Fund deserves both attention and support. Such a foundation should focus on assisting democracy activists under adverse conditions and should, therefore, be based on the principle of maximum flexibility. It should be staffed with people with broad field experience, rather than Eurocrats. For this reason, the new foundation should be established and overseen by the European Parliament rather than the European Commission, and it should work closely with NGOs in those member states, which have a demonstrable track record in building democracy at home

in recent years. This experience, especially strong in new EU member states, should be tapped for assisting democrats in Belarus and beyond.

Another, and complementary rather than competing, idea is to allow factions of the European Parliament to establish political foundations, along the lines of the German party foundations (Konrad Adenauer, Friedrich Ebert, Heinrich Böll, etc.) or the American National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute. Their primary objective should be to consolidate the EU-wide political party scene, and an additional task would be to work with democratic parties outside the EU, in an effort to project European political values, strengthen democratic discourse, and influence the policy agendas of their counterparts in new and fledgling democracies.

Conclusion: Keep Europe Open

The collapse of communism in Europe in 1989 surprised most Sovietologists, who thought that they would spend a lifetime trying to fathom the outcome of the power struggles in the Soviet politburo by studying the line-up of party apparatchiks during May 1 parades. Somewhat in a similar vein, albeit less spectacularly, the international community was taken by surprise by the pace of events and the degree of societal mobilization during the Orange Revolution. Likewise in Belarus, and the recent March elections already provided a glimpse, the victory of democracy may be closer than we think even when the forces of the regime seem overwhelming. This is why, while trying to be as realistic as possible in evaluating the chances of success of the democratic opposition in Belarus, we should also prepare plans and scenarios for the day after Lukashenka.

In fact, the first lesson from democratic revolutions, more recently in Ukraine, more remote already in Poland, is that democratic forces and their partners abroad can never be sufficiently prepared for taking over responsibility for a country. The case of post-revolutionary Ukraine should be a warning. The victors of the Orange Revolution failed to move quickly to consolidate their victory by implementing ambitious and far-reaching political and economic reforms. Similarly, the reaction of the Western democracies, which enthusiastically welcomed the outburst of civic activism in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities, has been disappointing when it came to assisting Ukrainians in their European choice. The icy silence as regards EU membership prospects for Ukraine from most European capitals and the failure to liberalize visa restrictions for travel to the EU (a relatively simple and effective method of “rewarding” Ukrainians for making a good choice) are testimony to the political opportunism, lack of political vision and leadership failure haunting Europe today.

In this respect, Poland was certainly more fortunate than Ukraine. Not only did Leszek Balcerowicz introduce his reforms while social support for the first non-communist government was at its height, but also reactions from both Europe and America were unambiguous: they indicated clearly that the West was keen

to see a democratic, stable and European Poland. As early as 1991, for example, visas were abolished for Poles and other Central Europeans to travel throughout Europe without restrictions. In 1993 already Poland negotiated and signed its association agreement with the EU and unilaterally declared its intent to join this organization. The EU action plan for Ukraine, by contrast, was hardly even modified in the wake of Yushchenko’s victory, and any membership prospects, however vague and remote, fell on deaf ears in the European Council, the European Commission and national capitals in the EU.

For Belarus, one can only hope that the West and especially Europe, follows the path it took in the case of Poland. It is of the utmost importance that a strategy for assisting democratic transition in Belarus includes generous EU and US support for the democratic opposition struggling with Lukashenka but also a vision, plans and offers for the day after Europe’s last dictator is removed from power. 25 years after the creation of the “Solidarity” movement in Poland, Europe was celebrating the first anniversary of EU membership of eight former-communist countries. Their transformation from communist dictatorships to countries characterized by democracy, respect for human rights, and functioning market economies is one of the most spectacular recent achievements of European integration and transatlantic cooperation. This success should encourage democrats in Europe and in the West more broadly to design effective assistance for those still struggling to achieve democracy in Belarus and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Sanctions for Lukashenka's Regime!

Milan Horáček

Alyaksandr Lukashenka is one of the last dictators in Europe. For more than a decade he has managed to remain in power by systematically disregarding human rights, in particular the right of access to information, and by increasing pressure on opposition forces. Belarus' self-imposed isolation within Europe has reached its peak with the fraudulent elections of March 2006 and Lukashenka's reelection for a third term as principal leader of a self-made dictatorship. But, this most recent period of self-isolation began with the Rose and Orange revolutions that took place in Georgia and the Ukraine, respectively.

In particular since the transition to democracy in neighboring Ukraine, the leadership in Belarus has reacted ever more sharply to any sign of political criticism within the country. Demonstrations have been broken up by force (for example, the one on April 26, 2005 to commemorate the anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster), Ukrainian sympathizers towards the opposition in Belarus have been locked up for days, and leading opposition figures, such as Vintsuk Vyachorka, have been arrested.

Countries such as the member states of the EU, the US and others have refused to recognize the results of the Belarusian election, which officially saw a landslide victory by Alyaksandr Lukashenka but were characterized as fraudulent by observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The pressure from abroad on the presidential administration in Minsk is, at the moment, still greater than that from the structurally weak opposition. The demonstrations of opposition and pro-democracy protesters at October Square in the Minsk have faced continuous police repression. The fact that opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin was arrested on March 25 while marching towards a jail where other demonstrators were being held and that activists and volunteers of the Belarusian youth organizations have been arrested for participating in peaceful protests on March 28 are alarming signs of the intent of the Lukashenka regime. The European Union demanded the immediate release of Kazulin. As commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner put it: "I urge the Belarusian government to adhere to the rules of democracy". The authorities in Minsk rejected this demand. For them, the EU and the US with their "anti-Belarusian hysteria" are attempting to destabilize the country from abroad. A statement from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry declared "It is self-evident to objective observers that the situation in Belarus is absolutely calm".

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Given these two quite opposite perceptions of the situation in Belarus, one would be forgiven for thinking that the players were speaking about two different countries. Given the fact that the ad-hoc delegation of the European Parliament to the presidential elections in Belarus was refused visas to enter the country after a "bureaucracy marathon", resulting in the elections being monitored from afar, one can only conclude that (as indeed the ad-hoc delegation itself concluded in the aftermath of the elections) the elections were neither fair nor democratic. This cannot be without consequences for EU policy towards Belarus.

Negative Sanctions

Josep Borrell, president of the European Parliament, declared "The failure to respect international electoral standards in combination with a steadily deteriorating political situation and persistent violations of the fundamental rights of the Belarusian people will not remain without consequences for relations between the EU and Belarus". The consequences President Borrell is talking about are sanctions. In the wake of the recent election fraud, the European Union has declared the sanctions on Belarus already in place as still valid and is now seeking to extend their application.

Sanctions are measures against a state, which is considered by other states to be violating international law. They are introduced to ensure that a state acts in conformity with international law. To avoid the use of armed force in a conflict between different states or in order to maintain or restore certain values, sanctions can be decided either unilaterally or collectively. The sanctions that are most commonly used are various restrictions on international trade, financial flows or the movement of people through visa bans. Other less popular sanctions consist of the withholding of diplomatic recognition, the boycotting of athletic and cultural events and the sequestering of property of citizens of the targeted country.

On December 13, 2004 the European Council ordered that visa bans be extended to include a further two high officials. However, such visa restrictions have questionable effectiveness if limited to a very small number of top-level officials. They are effective, however, when extended to all levels of the regime. Every official, police officer and judge who actively participates in the Lukashenka regime and in the oppression of non-governmental organizations, political parties, the independent media and students or who has taken part in the falsification of the elections in October 2004 and more recently in March 2006 should be the target of sanctions. Even officials from the regional level, who may not consider themselves as a real part of the "Lukashenka-machinery", and journalists who work for the state-controlled media or pro-regime newspapers, should be included in an extended blacklist. This list could even be published inside Belarus, through independent media. Blacklisting "ordinary citizens" as well as high-level officials could act as a deterrent to others. Given latest

developments, it appears the European Parliament will soon extend the visa ban to a list of around thirty persons, among them ministers, members of parliament, representatives of the presidential administration and Lukashenka himself.

Extending the visa ban to those actively involved in oppression is a first step. Another complementary measure is to make it easier for ordinary and innocent citizens to obtain visas to travel abroad: students, representatives of civil society, opposition leaders and even tourists should not be punished for the excesses of the Lukashenka regime. Today, the cost in Belarus of obtaining a visa to enter many European countries is approximately €60. This deters ordinary people from traveling, as they do not have much money. Giving those people the chance to come to European countries is crucial, as in the absence of independent and correct information, they can only get to know about what is happening in the world and how democracy functions outside their own country. An extension of this logic is to also find arrangements for those students who, due to their involvement in the protests, have been deprived of their right to attend university in Belarus, to study abroad, through scholarships and study programs.

Other sanctions are economic in nature. According to members of the opposition, economic sanctions are seen as effective on the condition that they are imposed selectively and precisely. In the case of Belarus, sanctions against the arms trade would be effective and the least harmful to ordinary citizens. Such sanctions could take the form of freezing the bank accounts of high officials and companies, which take part in illegal arms exports. Belarus is known to be trading arms with Iran and some African states, and even if unofficially, with Libya, Syria, North Korea, Russia and representatives of Chechnya.

For many scholars, there is an ethical problem with economic sanctions, because they almost always have an effect on the rights of people, as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They are often at the origin of important disruptions to the distribution of nutrition, pharmaceuticals and sanitation supplies. They can put at risk the quality of food and the availability of clean drinking water. They also interfere to a high extent with the functioning of basic health and education systems and they undermine the right to work. A counter-productive effect of economic sanctions can also be that they lead to the reinforcement of the power of oppressive elites and the establishment of a black market, which only strengthens the corruption of elites and of the rich at the expense of the population at large.

The United Nations (UN) Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights points out that "economic sanctions most seriously affect the innocent population, in particular the weak and the poor, especially women and children, (and) have a tendency to aggravate the imbalances in income distribution already present in the countries concerned". But, as mentioned previously, if economic sanctions are imposed selectively and precisely, society at large can be protected from their most negative consequences.

In order to avoid suffering among innocent members of the population, negative sanctions have to be accompanied by positive sanctions and programs addressed to easing their situation.

Positive Sanctions and Supportive Programs

In August 2005, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations, declared that the European Union would use all means at its disposal to promote the values of democracy and pluralism in Belarus.

Concretely, several actions can be taken. Coordination between the EU and Russia on a neighborhood policy towards Belarus has to be stepped up. The EU should try much harder to engage Russia on the question of Belarus. In this perspective, the EU should insist that the issue of Belarus is on its agenda with Russia in their dialogues, and the Russian chairmanship in the G-8 group in 2006 should be used as an opportunity to demand that Russia acknowledge its shared responsibility for democratic development in the region.

In particular, Germany must assert its special responsibility in such a coordination process, as one of Poland's closest EU neighbors and as Russia's important trading partner. In this perspective, bilateral Russo-German summits must be used to the best effect. True, this might have been easier in the past when Gerhard Schröder was still in power, due to his special relationship with Vladimir Putin. However, in his position as former chancellor he could still involve himself actively in mediating between Belarus and the EU by using his friendship with Putin. Furthermore, Chancellor Angela Merkel could, given her different approach to Russia and Vladimir Putin himself, also find a way to prevail upon Russia to play a more constructive role. The EU should convince Russia that it is in its own interest to support democracy in its immediate neighborhood.

Like the Orange Revolution, the situation in Belarus exposes the dramatic need for coordination in the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The EU's neighborhood policy in Central and Eastern Europe needs to be reconsidered and made more precise, taking into consideration the experience of Poland and Lithuania and deciding on a common and joint approach. Back in November 2004, the European Council underlined how important it is "(...) that Belarus, as a direct neighbor of the European Union, has the opportunity to be an active partner of the EU in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy". Nevertheless, for action in this field to become possible certain conditions have to be met by Belarus, such as basic democratic standards and respect for human rights, and this is unfortunately not the case at the moment. And since the aim is not to punish the population but rather the regime, it is important to support NGOs inside the country, as well as continuing to involve Belarus in the European communication process.

For the moment, the only program of the European Commission designed to support the development of civil society and democracy is the so-called

Decentralized Cooperation. This program is particularly important since it does not require the agreement of the country's government to provide financial support to civil society organizations (which was one of the main problems with the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States, or TACIS program). The main problem, however, is that the €1 million the Decentralized Cooperation currently provides is not nearly enough for the country's needs. Furthermore, the process of selection should be better elaborated. For the time being, around ten organizations benefit from the program. Only two of those are involved directly in the democratization process in Belarus. The other organizations are social, health or environmental organizations. As much as such issues are of paramount importance, for the time being the main concern should be democratization, and support to organizations involved in pro-democracy activities should be extended.

The European Union should also focus on the promotion of the activity of Belarusian society, the consolidation and strengthening of opposition forces and the development of pro-European attitudes. The European Commission should support and implement projects that help the free media to develop, in particular electronic media broadcasting from abroad. Examples of this already exist. The EU has started in February 2006 with the broadcasting of radio (*Deutsche Welle*) and TV programs. They are part of a wider €2 million project that will cover internet, support to the Belarusian written press and the training of journalists, in addition to radio and TV broadcasts. The Lithuanian radio station *Baltic Wave* broadcasts news for one hour daily in Belarus (financed by the EU). The Polish radio station *Radio Racja* broadcasts every day for two hours, a project of the Belarusian minority in Poland. These initiatives are a first good step. However, for mainly technical and organizational reasons, these programs do not reach a large number of Belarusians. For instance, the *Deutsche Welle* program is broadcast on short wave and for only one hour, making it hard to reach a lot of households and easy to miss.

What seems to be needed at this point is a massive information campaign using all possible media. Such a campaign would allow the population at large to find out more about what is happening inside and outside Belarus, to explain why sanctions are being imposed (this is very important in order to avoid that Lukashenka turns the introduction of sanctions against the West), and to inform the population about texts adopted concerning Belarus by, for example, the European Parliament (such as the resolution on the presidential elections in Belarus of April 2006) and their consequences for the country. So far, *Euronews* seems to be the most popular international channel. This success has to be used and extended to other broadcasts.

Another important step is to find a way to create and open European exchange programs to students from Belarus. This has to be done independently of both the Belarusian government and the school administrations since they are an integral part of Lukashenka's repressive regime.

The Commission should create a direct representation in Minsk and should have a Special EU Representative for Belarus, who would inform all the European

institutions of the current situation in the country, propose actions towards Belarus and provide information on EU – Belarus relations on an ongoing basis. The person chosen could also act as a contact person for civil society and the opposition.

The establishment of a new instrument, a "European Democracy Fund", could become a useful tool for the promotion of democracy not only in Belarus, but also in other non-democratic regimes. Its advantage is that it could act without the permission and agreement of the country in question. The same approach can already be seen in political foundations, for example, the German party foundations such as the Heinrich Böll Foundation, which support the development of democracy in countries such as Belarus. Since they work independently from the government and in cooperation with local actors their actions are very effective. Some have argued that such political foundations would be in competition with a "European Democracy Fund". However, it seems to be more appropriate to see both instruments as complementary, since it is obvious that there remains more than enough work for several organizations if democracy is to become a universal reality.

The EU has to formulate a new policy towards Belarus, as the previous policy has not been effective in the least. While it is important that the European Union reacted and continues to react to developments in Belarus, it remains a problem that EU policy in relation to the country seems to be more about reaction than actual action. What is needed now is a strategy, developed for the short-, medium- and long-term. And, whatever the proposed policy might be, it may have to be decided unilaterally, as there is little chance that Lukashenka would agree to cooperate.

What could this policy look like? The European Union must declare that the promotion of democracy and the gradual integration of Belarus into Europe are among its highest priorities within the EU neighborhood policy. The EU should not only react to current events and the current political situation, but has to establish a proper strategy with the ultimate goal of democratizing Belarus. Since "elections" just took place, the medium and long-term strategy should mainly consist of supporting the development of civil society. Therefore, better cooperation has to be developed and a joint position needs to be forged by the European Council, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the member states. Those countries neighboring Belarus, the Central and Eastern Europe – Visegrad group and other EU member states should establish relationships of cooperation in order to build a broader coalition within the EU to support democratization in Belarus.

The level of coordination between the EU and the United States also has to improve. Both the EU and the US have as a goal supporting democratic developments within dictatorial systems. According to NGOs in Belarus, the rules of the Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights of the European Commission are very complex and do not leave any margin for flexibility, thereby failing to support and strengthen civil society. On the contrary the same NGOs declare that American institutions, such as the National Endowment for Democracy,

have managed better to get the money to the right people. Such good practices should serve Europe as examples for how to finance in a flexible way the most deserving NGOs. With better cooperation and, in particular by learning from the American example, Europe could maximize its potential for success.

Quo Vadis Belarus – Quo Vadis Europe?

More than ten years of experience show that cooperation with Lukashenka's regime is not an option. The EU has again and again declared that it desires true democracy in Belarus. However, it is important to admit that EU policy in this regard has not been very successful. As a result, the EU has to develop a new approach, focusing primarily on civil society and direct cooperation with non-governmental actors. It is in the non-state sector that impulses for democratic change in Belarus can emerge, not in the governmental realm, which at present is the primary recipient of EU technical assistance. Hence, the main partner for the EU should be non-governmental structures and initiatives.

Belarus is also a member of several international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition to that, Belarus applied for membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and aims to join within the next five years. The situation in Belarus begs the question: How can a country, which abuses all democratic principles, be represented in all these internationally recognized and respected organizations?

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to point only at Lukashenka and his totalitarian regime and not to apply some self-criticism. We should also ask ourselves why we criticize some countries and why we stay silent as concerns others. It is most laudable to fight for human rights and democracy, against social exclusion and for respect. Those are honorable values. But, first of all we should look at our own countries and check if all those values we seek to be upheld in other countries are respected in our own. A further consideration is the political expediency of such a moral stance. It does not always suit us to uphold all the values we stand for all the time. The European Union depends on other countries outside its borders. Gas and oil pipelines run through Belarus, coming from Russia, and the EU needs those supplies. Is it not contradictory that sanctions are not applied in a more consequent manner? The EU is Belarus' main trading partner outside the CIS, but trade with Belarus is rather marginal for the EU. Should we not use this fact to mount pressure on the Lukashenka regime? Should we not be more consequent in our actions?

It might be that after the recent elections, people outside Belarus have become more aware about the distinction between Lukashenka's anti-Western and

pro-Russian official stance and the opinions of Belarusian society. Despite official propaganda against the West and the European Union, more than half of Belarusians are in favor of close cooperation with the EU. Nevertheless, making a distinction between the regime and civil society is only one part of a bigger picture. Seeing the need to support civil society and enforce democracy and respect for human rights is another and crucial part.