

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to provide the reader with an overview of the phenomenon of Russian-Belarusian integration. It is remarkable that such an important and highly contested issue as the attempt to build a common state between Russia and Belarus has received so little scholarly attention. The discussion has been largely limited to the policy-making circles of both states, media publications and fierce exchanges of opinions between the supporters and opponents of the creation of the Union State. Few people in both countries have been left unaware of the raging polemics. Notwithstanding, the sense of the process was difficult to determine. Open public discussion never took place. The Belarusian regime was able to privatize the integrationist discourse and to exclude interpretations, other than its own, of integration from the public domain. The electorate was left largely with the official interpretation of events, which was political and economic integration with the Russian Federation to the furthest extent possible, ultimately aimed at building a common state. However, the preservation of Belarusian sovereignty was said to be unquestionable, a challenging task indeed.

The Russian side was presented with the unconditional loyalty of Belarus in international matters in return for Russia's economic support. Russia was also presented with the myth of the Belarusian people's unanimous desire to live in a Union state with the Russian

Federation. The Belarusian opposition portrayed integration with Russia as a betrayal of Belarusian sovereignty and national interests and labeled the whole process an issue of Russian neocolonialism. The Russian government, especially during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin has seen integration with Belarus as a chance to score points with certain segments of the Russian electorate, nostalgic for the Soviet Union, and was willing to support the unreformed Belarusian economy for quite a long time. Russia also perceived Belarus as an important ally in its Western borderlands. The presidency of Vladimir Putin began a new era in the field of integration, signaling the end to the protracted and abstruse process of building a common state.

This book is essentially the first attempt at a systematic scholarly analysis of the phenomenon of Belarusian-Russian integration. The authors are Belarusian scholars, who focus upon the political, economic, cultural, legal and strategic aspects of this process. However, this work should not be conceived only as a Belarusian interpretation of an essentially bilateral process between two countries. The contributors to this volume attempted to analyze all aspects of this phenomenon as objectively as possible, looking at this contested issue from different angles. The reason why the chapters focus more on the Belarusian perspective is rather simple. In Belarus integration is conceived as an element of domestic politics, rather than an element of its foreign policy, as in Russia. Integration is also very important, and probably the most salient issue in Belarusian politics.

Before turning to look at the phenomenon of Russian-Belarusian integration in order to set the background for the chapters to follow, two issues should be addressed. This is the English language edition of the highly acclaimed first version, published in Belarusian in 2002. Its contributors hope that the present edition will bridge the language barrier and reach an international audience. We did not expect the heated debate about the future of integration that took place after the previous edition had already been published. Thus we feel compelled to brief the reader about this debate that allowed many to reconsider the very foundations of the integration process on both sides. We realize that events continue to unfold as this volume goes to print and the reader may need to turn to the media for information concerning the

latest developments, due to the fact that the issue continues to receive attention.

The seemingly teleological process of the Russian-Belarusian integration has experienced certain ebbs and flows, but for any student of this integration, it has been a very dull subject up to now. The two parties convened ad nauseum, signed seemingly meaningless protocols and integration limped on further. However, integration has recently garnered an unprecedented amount of attention in the media, both heads of states exchanged highly critical personal remarks as well as in regard to future prospects of the Union State. In August 2002 the future of the integration project began to look increasingly dire. However, looking at this mutation, any informed observer would wonder to what extent problems between two countries comprised the very cornerstones of integration, which were laid down as early as 1995. Indeed, how one might marry the concept of unconditional sovereignty and complete integration with another state, as advocated by Alyaksandr Lukashenka? The changes that have occurred in the official integration discourse might have been a surprise to many but not to the contributors of this volume. The analysis presented in this book had been undertaken before these events took place and as the reader will see, we were able to identify the major controversies in the project long before the major actors voiced them.

Two points are particularly worth making in connection with these changes that took place in the summer of 2002. First, the inauguration of Vladimir Putin in 1999 signaled the coming of a new leadership in Russian politics, rational and pragmatic, not willing to concede economic interests to geopolitical gains. No longer was Russia willing to unconditionally support the unreformed Belarusian economy. Instead the Russian government tried to protect and promote the interests of its business groups in neighbouring states, and even employ diplomatic pressure if needed.

Dynamics of Russian relations with the West changed after September 11, 2001. President Putin immediately seized the opportunity to reverse the Clintonian world order, in which Russia was squeezed from the ranks of leading powers to the rank of a Third World country. The Russian president firmly established the Russian

Federation as a power that the United States would need in its War on Terror both as a partner and a guarantor of Eurasian stability. No less important, Mr. Putin asserted Russia as a country that does not seek an alternative to Western values. One can still argue about the extent and the future flows of these transformations. However, suffice it to say that Russia is more pragmatically Western-oriented since September 11 than it used to be under President Yeltsin. This is manifested *inter alia* in the new NATO format, with Russia having a consulting role within the Alliance — an event probably unthinkable some time ago.

Belarus, on the other hand, seems to have missed the significance of the changes taking place on a global arena. Its international orientation is directed towards non-Western states, like China, India, Syria, and more importantly, towards the so-called rogue states of Iraq and Cuba. Its foreign policy can be summarized briefly as manifestly non-Western. Indeed, Belarus is the only European country that is still not a member of the Council of Europe. Notwithstanding its geopolitical position Belarus even did not consider applying for either EU or NATO membership and relations with OSCE are far from perfect. Even under Russian international patronage, which has been virtually unquestionable until recently, but which Belarus cannot take for granted any longer, Belarus is likely to be restrained in its international non-aligned position due to new Russian international initiatives.

Integration has been proceeding quite smoothly since 1995, with both sides repeatedly committing themselves to the cause of Slavic unity allegedly lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the Belarusian side receiving important economic concessions and the Russian side receiving political dividends among a nostalgic electorate. This seeming tranquility was violated in the summer of 2002. At the beginning of the year, Alyaksandr Lukashenka voiced his opinion about the changing attitudes of the Russian elites towards Belarus, asserting that the country was not going to mindlessly gallop behind the Russians, even in the year of the Horse (according to the Chinese calendar — *cit. omit.*). As if in order to support his statement, a series of scandals followed, involving the cancellation of a contract with the Russian brewery “Baltika.” The company had already invested

considerable funds in the modernization of a local brewery, taking for granted the word of the President that the contract would be honored. This scandal served as an important warning to Russian business circles prepared to invest in Belarus. Since then, events began unraveling in a geometrical progression. In June 2002 President Putin publicly voiced his objections over Belarusian aspirations to live at the expense of the Russian taxpayers and in August Alyaksandr Lukashenka was presented a final blow — a rather ponderous choice of either agreeing to absorption by Russia, integration following the EU-model or calling integration off altogether.

The Belarusian President publicly denounced these Russian proposals and even went as far as to employ some of the opposition’s pro-independence rhetoric. Even worse, reluctant to concede the monopoly on the integration issue, the cornerstone of its official policy, the Belarusian regime scandalously proclaimed *persona non grata* two leading Russian politicians, Mr. Nemtsov and Mrs. Khakamada from the Union of Rightist Forces, who flew to Minsk to take part in a conference on Russian-Belarusian integration. Simultaneously the hostage taking scandal in Moscow prevented the Kremlin from immediately responding, but soon thereafter the Russian gas monopoly “Gazprom” refused to provide Belarus with cheap gas and suggested obtaining it at world prices instead. The odds for establishing the Union State seemed to be bad for the two allies, when Mr. Lukashenka announced his readiness to seek new allies in the West and to visit the NATO Summit in Prague in December 2002. This move proved to be a mistake — the president was refused a visa almost immediately on the grounds of his human rights record. Consequently, he had to go to Moscow, abandoning his previous stance altogether and be prepared to accept any concessions that the Russian side might have demanded.

Since then relations between the two states seem to have fallen back to the pre-August starting positions. In public, the leaders repeat the old mantra about their allegiance towards the creation of the common state and more thorough integration in all spheres. In reality, President Putin took a firm stance on the single emission center for the common currency, which would mean the *de facto* loss of

Belarusian sovereignty in the future and he advocated a more pragmatic approach on economic issues. The Belarusian side seems to have lost its bargaining position and Mr. Putin firmly has held the initiative on integration ever since. This seeming change to the status quo ante can be attributed to the fact that the Russian side did receive a number of concessions from Mr. Lukashenka, and more importantly, it also managed to show its ally the prospects of what might happen should the Belarusian regime be left to its own devices. One should also bear in mind the Parliamentary elections in Russia that are scheduled for the end of 2003, when the parties will have to court the Russian electorate and the issue of integration with Belarus could play an important role.

As events continue to unravel while this volume goes to print, it is difficult to predict the possible course Belarus and Russia will take regarding the Union State. It is already clear that Russia is not prepared to provide Belarus with a free lunch and could cut subsidized gas deliveries and other concessions to Belarus, unless the latter is ready to make its own concessions to Russian business. It is also clear that the Belarusian attitude towards the Union State will never be the same again and the position established in 1995 is now history. Meanwhile Mr. Lukashenka continues to replace Russian media channels broadcasting in Belarus with local media outlets in order to pursue his own domestic political aims.

Conceptual Framework

We argue that the phenomenon of Belarusian-Russian integration can be explained through three theoretical models: political economy of both countries after the fall of the Soviet Union (employing political economy program itself, world-systems theory and regionalism/integration strands), a post-colonial discourse explanation, and last but not the least, the trajectories of democratization that both countries have chosen since 1991. By no means do we assert that other explanations are not capable of providing an account of the phenomenon in question. It also does not mean that the aforemen-

tioned research programs are treated separately in this volume. Indeed, a post-colonial explanation analyzes cultural, political and economic aspects of the phenomenon. The world-systems theory touches upon national identities and even languages. Hence, the argument is rather about what takes precedence in the analysis. The contributors to this volume employ a somewhat multifaceted approach to the phenomenon and they utilize different theoretical models interchangeably. We argue that an understanding of these three models provide a necessary background for the sections to follow.

Political Economy

First, the dynamics of Belarusian-Russian integration can be analyzed in terms of regional and international economics. Integration is seen as an interaction between vested interests within states and the core actors in this interaction are state institutions and interest groups within the domestic economies of these states. After the fall of the Soviet Union both countries faced the problem of transitioning from a centralized command economy to a market economy. Within the post-Soviet territory, the leaders of new nation-states attempted to preserve some sort of a trading bloc or economic union through the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Although a number of further steps were taken to go further — some of its members signed Customs Treaty, treaties on military cooperation and fighting organized crime — the Commonwealth remains a somewhat amorphous organization, not comparable to the European Union or NAFTA.

However, Belarus and Russia went much further than other post-Soviet states, setting as their ultimate goal the formation of the Union State. Belarus, probably the wealthiest republic in the Soviet Union, had an economy largely dependent on external markets and supplies from other republics, primarily the Russian Federation. After the fall of the Soviet Union, rather than follow the path of the Baltic republics and choose a radical model of reforms, orienting its economy towards European markets, Belarus failed to mobilize its elites and mass

support for a market economy and attempted to revitalize the socialist economy and links with Russia. Between 1991 and 1994, the year Alyaksandr Lukashenka came to power, the Belarusian nomenklatura failed to improve the living conditions of the people and its limped rule involved widespread corruption and inflation. After 1994, the economy was turned eastwards, refueled by cheap supplies of energy and access to the large and, at that time, non-competitive Russian market. For a moment it seemed that the restoration of a Soviet-style command economy was feasible and successful. However, Russia eventually reformed its economy and opened its markets to Western investors that doomed the Belarusian experiment. In a free market environment the Belarusian economy is not competitive enough and faces inevitable reforms.

Borrowing from Wallerstein's research program of world-systems, it can be said that both Russia and Belarus have been cast somewhere between the semi-periphery and periphery of the world-system after the fall of the Soviet Union. One might also argue that the Soviet Union has never ceased to be a part of the world economy, but the nature of the transformations in the 1990s is undeniably revolutionary. The driving force behind the world-system is the continuous accumulation of capital where the countries of the world gravitate either to the core (characterized by the democratic governments, high wages, high investments, imports of raw materials and exports of manufactures), the periphery (non-democratic governments, exports of raw materials and imports of manufactured goods) or the semi-periphery (authoritarian governments, mixed imports-exports, low wages). According to Wallerstein, the core largely exists at the expense of the world periphery. Within this system, institutions such as the family, ethnic groups and states are continuously being created and changed; nothing is stable, everything is in flux.

It is a challenging task to locate Belarus according to this theory. While its Baltic neighbors gravitated towards the core of the world-system, it was initially rather difficult to classify Belarus due to its largely manufacturing-oriented economy, but definitely non-Western orientation. However little doubt currently remains that Belarus is increasingly shifting to the periphery, while Russia is trying to join

the core of the world economy, a daunting task indeed, especially in light of its over-reliance on raw materials. Should Belarus continue its integration with Russia rather than EU, Belarus and Russia may be able to claim a favorable position, at best, within the semi-periphery. The research program of the world systems permits us to locate the phenomenon of Russian-Belarusian integration on a global scale and see that everything is relative, *inter alia*, the rise and demise of the Soviet Union, international alliances, integration and disintegration, Belarusian nation-state building project and, sadly, Belarusian ethnicity. It is the capital flows of the world-system that matter.

The name of this book itself suggests one more venue of analysis. Each chapter illustrates to some extent the dynamics and dilemmas underlying the process of regional integration. The phenomenon of Russian-Belarusian integration falls into the domain of regional integration studies, most thoroughly analyzed in the context of EU integration. However, this phenomenon cannot only be attributed to the EU, and increasingly greater efforts at cooperation on a regional basis can be seen across the globe. Free trade is encouraged by employing various tariff reductions, with or without moving towards establishing central institutions. Regional integration should not be seen as a political or economic phenomenon only; it is also manifested in ever-increasing mobility across borders, cross-border contacts between cultural and educational institutions and civil societies. Interestingly enough, although according to the official rhetoric of both states cultural contacts are supported, little is actually being done apart from merely sustaining the cross-border contacts established well before the fall of the Soviet Union. Likewise, there is little exchange between the representatives of the civil societies of both states. While Belarusian civil society is by and large oriented towards the West and sustains contacts with its counterpart organizations in Europe or the US, Russian civil society organizations are either self-centered or sustain their own separate contacts with Western counterparts. Therefore, one should not be surprised by the fact that the integration discourse is privatized by officialdom. Indeed, Belarusian NGOs regard their Russian counterparts as imperialistic-minded, while it appears Russian NGOs are simply not interested.

As can be seen, the phenomenon of integration as such is nothing unique or inherently good or bad, it is a reality of the modern world and can serve both as an important shield against the perils of globalization, and as a vehicle to deliver the good brought by this same globalization. More importantly, Belarus cannot sustain the status quo for long, unless it wants to degenerate to the status of a rogue state (of the North Korean type). The entire book deals with this issue, looking at the problem from political, economic, cultural and strategic angles. Since Russia is aspiring to join the WTO, it has to resign from providing concessions so vital to Belarusian economy. Ultimately, the logic of global interdependence dictates that Belarus would have to choose between integrating into the Russian economy in some form or another or into the European Union.

Post-Colonialism and Nation-State Building

The second theoretical model that helps to explain integration is based on the assumption that the Soviet Union, and its successor, the Russian Federation, can be conceived as a metropolis and Belarus as its former colony. Then Belarus becomes a post-colonial state, striving to establish democracy, its own nation-state and economy. Therefore, relations between the two countries are not conceptually different between those of the European colonial powers and African or some Asian states. After the collapse of the USSR fifteen new states came into existence. The former Soviet republics demanded independence and access to the world market on their own terms, which they hoped would provide a better negotiating position in the international marketplace. Ultimately, they received the desired secession and a chance to form their own nation-states.

In the normative sense, the term nation-state implies that a state represents a people. It is assumed that a distinct people existed for a long time, going back to some founding moment, real or imagined, in the past. The achievement of national independence and of separate statehood can be seen as the culmination of its history. In many newly emerged states, nationalism as an ideology and a social movement

served as an engine driving state building. According to the famous definition of Ernest Gellner, nationalism is a political principle, which asserts that nations exist, that they should coincide with political communities and that they should be self-ruling (*cit. omit.*). Hence nationalism can serve as a strong component of a state-building project and fuel a common national identity. However, nationalism failed to play this role in Belarus. Moreover, it has been bedeviled and pushed out of the official sphere and the entire state-building project was cleansed of the nationalistic discourse to the greatest degree possible. Instead, Belarusian state-builders attempted to link state ideology and the common identity of the people only to the Soviet past, and ultimately to the neighboring Russian state. The Belarusian nation-state project not only remains unfinished, but it is drifting towards being incorporated into a larger state. To understand the peculiarity of the Belarusian nation-state project and integration with Russia, one needs to study the background against which current events continue to unravel.

Belarus, the military stronghold of the Soviet Union, was home to a large proportion of Russians who had a somewhat hazy vision of their homeland. They did not perceive a real difference between Russia as a metropolis and Belarus as a colony. Even more crucial, a large proportion of ethnic Belarusians have an extremely weak sense of national identity, sometimes difficult to distinguish with that of the ethnic Russians. This can be attributed to the peculiarities of urbanization and immigration during the period of the Soviet Union, the policies of Sovietization, the virtual complete extermination of an already weak national intelligentsia by Stalinist purges and a certain affinity between both cultures. Therefore, when the Soviet empire disintegrated, the majority of the Belarusian population, both ethnic Russians and Belarusians with a weak identity, found themselves having to readjust to the existence of an independent Belarus and the necessity of building their own nation-state. Ironically, the republic's titular nation found itself in the minority. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of its population speaks Russian as the everyday language. However, initially the Belarusian-speaking minority attempted to change the political discourse in the country and to impose the ethnic

model of citizenship on the Belarusian polity. For some time, it seemed that the Belarusian post-colonial project would entail the successful transformation of the post-Soviet mentality into a new national and independent identity. However, the dream was short-lived as the polity “revolted,” electing Alyaksandr Lukashenka as its first President. The President almost immediately dismantled the national project, blaming “national democrats” for the failure of the economy. He immediately dominated the political scene and used important issues, such as the contribution of Belarus to the victory in the World War II, preservation of the social safety net, law and order as well as fighting corruption, in order to bolster his position. Opponents were pushed outside the political framework and have constituted “the other” ever since.

Integration with Russia plays a crucial role in the official discourse and all attempts to claim the right to participate in the discussion are conceived as a threat to the current status quo. Mr. Liabedzka, the leader of the opposition United Civic Party has been seriously reprimanded for his attempts to encroach on this “natural monopoly” after a series of steps to establish separate contacts between the Belarusian opposition and the Russian political *beau monde*. Interestingly enough, President Lukashenka claims allegiance to both separate nationhood and full integration with Russia. This fact can be attributed not only to the whims of the current power-holder, but also to broad structural context of the country location. Indeed, Belarus is a borderland state, squeezed between two large civilizational blocks. The whole history of the country (or the territory that the current state occupies) is nothing else but the fluctuation between the West and the East. It has been manifested in the political rhetoric, international allegiances, cultural politics and even country insignia. Thus, the adoption of the national symbols and the drive to implement a new national language policy after 1991 can be seen as an attempt to manifest the allegiance to the West. As it stands for now, however, the tables have turned and Belarus gravitates strongly towards its Eastern neighbor. It can be argued, that integration with Russia plays an even larger role in the official state ideology of Belarus than the parallel phenomenon of creating a European identity among EU member states in the West. Indeed, integration with Russia is the object

of primary loyalty and one can argue that it is also embedded in the state symbols adopted after the 1995 referendum (slightly redesigned Soviet insignias were adopted replacing the national insignias introduced in 1991). The issue of integration with Russia is even more than a symbol, it is the current political system’s very cornerstone of legitimacy.

On the Russian side, Belarusians are perceived as “the younger brothers” that accidentally left the Russian homeland. During the 1990s the Russian nation experienced a severe identity crisis due to the loss of their superpower status and disintegration of the empire. Hence all attempts of Belarus to reestablish links with Russia were encouraged and gladly accepted. It also remains as an undeniable fact that, for the reasons of stability, the West tacitly acquiesced to Russia’s exercise of power within the former USSR. The Russian language is still utilized as the lingua franca in post-Soviet states. The Russian economy is by far the strongest and the largest in this part of the world, hence the development of its media and its cultural dominance over Belarus. Russia’s cultural influence over its Western neighbor is strong, multiplied by the fact that many Belarusians do not perceive their own culture as a separate culture. The shared Soviet past led to a shared common language, beliefs and practices, history and religion that almost completely eroded separate blocks of culture. The Belarusian cultural scene clearly lacks strong cultural projects able to compete with Russian ones on an equal footing. Russian projects are also more accessible due to the widespread usage of the Russian language in Belarus and the lack of state support for Belarusian culture. Russian cultural dominance is also fueled by the all pervasive Russian media in Belarus, a fact that helps to secure a common cultural space and helps Belarusians to easily associate themselves with their Eastern neighbors. Despite the above, we do not argue that Belarusian culture is extinct in Belarus — truly original cultural projects do exist. There are separate cultural values and practices in Belarus, but without state support it is difficult for them to reach the masses. Moreover, it is sometimes not feasible to isolate the influences exerted by different cultures due to their dynamic nature. Indeed, as it will be argued in the cultural section of this volume, to a large extent what is considered

Russian projects is to a large extent simply second-hand Western projects, passed on to Belarus via Russia.

What is the future of the Belarusian nation-building project? There is a widespread belief inside the international community that there are enough states in the world and to add more would entail additional disorder in an already unbalanced system. The fall of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the resulting formation of a number of independent states is seen as the end of the process that reached its peak in Africa in 1960 and has since been gradually losing its appeal. Increasing reluctance to accept more states into the international community is manifested in the changing attitudes towards Kosovo's independence, the unresolved Palestinian problem and the like. This trend probably suggests that the chance Belarus got in 1991 was truly unique and should the process of integration with Russia proceed further, Belarus may be unable to regain its independence. The principle of national self-determination is a two-fold concept, it signals both that the people have a right to decide to be independent or choose to be a part of a larger entity. The future is to decide.

Democratization and Political Processes

An equally important factor in understanding the phenomenon of Belarusian-Russian integration is the political developments that these countries have been experiencing. If one employs an actor-centered approach to transitions, the events might be described as follows. After the failure of the August coup in 1991, Belarus was left to its own devices. Although the communist nomenklatura at that time was weak and divided, the democratic camp was even weaker. The "moderate" Shushkevich, elected Parliament chairman, was a progressive pro-Western leader, however he lacked mass support. The national opposition failed to mobilize for the first presidential election. Alyaksandr Lukashenka was elected on a platform of fighting corruption, integration with the Russian Federation and revitalizing the economy. The elected president quickly consolidated his grip on power, attracted the former communist nomenklatura and established authoritarian

rule. Ever since, Belarus has steadily moved towards a consolidated dictatorship, rather than consolidated democracy, unlike its Western and Eastern neighbors. After the 1996 controversial referendum on amendments to the Constitution, president Lukashenka consolidated the executive, legislative and judiciary branches in his hands, successfully becoming the truly dominant actor on the asymmetric political scene. He enjoys steady popular support at between 30 and 40%. His opponents have failed to unite and to provide a single alternative policy platform. Integration with Russia is absolutely necessary for the president. It has provided and continues to provide him the opportunity not to reform the economy – a situation that might lead to the dissatisfaction of the electorate or to the emergence of a new powerful class able to challenge his rule. The regime also scored with an electorate nostalgic for the Soviet Union. It is no surprise that integration remains the most salient issue in Belarusian politics. The regime successfully capitalizes on its hold on this issue during each plebiscite. With unconditional Russian support, the Belarusian regime remains unconcerned about the outcry of Western governments and international organizations concerning its democratic record. Interestingly enough, integration also gave ample opportunities for the Belarusian ruler to market himself in Russia, and if Mr. Putin had not been elected in 2000, a number of possibilities might have been entertained here.

The dynamics of Russia's transition in the 1990s allowed integration to develop as it did. Yeltsin's semi-authoritarian Russia provided Belarus with a universe of economic opportunities for its corrupted, rapidly unraveling federal structure to capitalize on. Likewise, certain Russian groups also widely utilized the geopolitical place of Belarus to pursue their business interests. However, the protracted and unstable Russian transition eventually gave rise to a relatively open political and economic system, with the country's slow but steady progression towards a more open polity. As a result of the geopolitical turn towards the West, Russia is increasingly reluctant to back the Belarusian regime on the international arena. No less important is the fact that the unreformed Belarusian political and economic system is an obstacle to Russian economic interests that are ready to invest their capital in the country.

As it turned out, the proclaimed formula of the Belarusian leader, that “Belarus is ready to go as far in its integration as Russia is willing to go,” is far from being valid. Alyaksandr Lukashenka is willing to integrate as far as it serves Belarusian economic interests but not as far as to endanger his grip on power. Belarus is encircled by countries that are all more democratic and open. In order to sustain its political regime, Belarus would have to integrate further with a more democratic Russia, begin liberalizing its economy or face complete isolation. Alternatively, it might attempt to liberalize its political regime and turn to the European Union – a perspective that is increasingly more unlikely. If the theory of democratic diffusion holds, the effect of more democratic neighbors, closeness to the West and relative openness of the country predicts that it is more likely than not that the country would begin the process of democratization sooner or later.

Volume Review

Most of the articles in this volume focus upon the economy or political economy of Belarusian-Russian integration.

Vitali Silitski takes a rather different view and analyzes the Belarusian economy as a failure of transition and an outcast among the liberalizing neighboring states. The status of the economy is pre-determined by the nature of the political regime in power. The so-called “Belarusian economic miracle” has been fueled by anti-reform measures and therefore has been rather transient and illusory. He also attempts to place the Belarusian case within the context of transition literature, making a comparison with the Chilean experience under president Allende.

Maksim Tumilovich’s analysis of the monetary politics of both Russia and Belarus provides an important foundation for understanding the current controversies concerning the establishment of a single currency between the two states. He looks at the exchange regimes, common currency, the possibility of a single emission center and repercussions for the economies of both states if integration

proceeds further. His major conclusion is that the unreformed Belarusian economy is not prepared to integrate and the entire process appears driven only by politics.

Alyaksandr Hatowski focuses on trade between two countries. He argues that the continuing over-reliance on Russia and the lack of heterogeneous trade partners renders the trade policies adopted by Belarus after 1991 as erroneous and even dangerous in the future.

Natalya Tahanovich focuses on the Belarusian energy market, its over-reliance on Russian sources and the prospects of privatization.

The second part consists of one chapter on the cultural aspects of the Belarusian-Russian integration. **Andrei Yekadumaw** prefaces his analysis with consideration of the implications of Russia’s non-official culture on Belarus during perestroika. He asserts that it served as an agent of Russian cultural influence both in the Soviet and in the early period of independent Belarus. He proceeds with his argument further, looking at the sources of Russia’s current cultural influence. Mr. Ekadumaw labels them, rather convincingly, as a “cultural second-hand,” where Russia serves as an intermediary between Western products, already devalued, and the recipient, Belarus. He also analyzes the politics of Russification, the Russian language factor in Belarusian culture and concludes that the political regime is again an element that forestalls the development of Belarusian culture. Although it is a very good piece of analysis, the mere fact that this chapter is the only contribution to the section on culture makes it seem lacking in comparison with other sections. Unfortunately, the entire subject of national identity is not considered in this work. As argued above, Belarusian-Russian integration can be analyzed in terms of a post-colonial discourse, which should have also been placed in this section. As the editor of this volume **Valer Bulhakaw** argues in the conclusion that, in the final analysis, the source of all problems is the unfinished process of nation-state building in Belarus.

Vitali Silitski opens the third, political section of the volume with his brilliant analysis of the economics of integration. Mr. Silitski

accepts the potential implications of integration on political developments, however he argues for an actor-centered approach in the study of the Belarusian transition in general, and integration in particular. The author analyzes the multifaceted process of integration in all its dynamics, examining the issue from various angles. Ultimately, he tries to analyze how it became possible that Mr. Lukashenka managed to establish his authoritarian state, while at the same time proclaiming the loss of Belarusian independence as his ultimate aim. According to the author, the answer is very simple — Mr. Lukashenka never intended to give up power, he simply used integration as an opportunity to turn Russian resources and internal market into life support system for his political regime. Mr. Lukashenka was perhaps also entertaining the possibility of entering Russia's political stage under the weakening regime of Boris Yeltsin. After the election of President Putin, the tables turned on the Belarusian regime and Mr. Silitski makes a number of important conclusions about this at the end of the chapter. The article is in fact an entire volume in miniature. Therefore, should the reader require a brief comprehensive account of the issue, we recommend Mr. Silitski's analysis.

In another splendid article, **Juras Likhtarovich** attempts to deconstruct the structure of the Russian elites in regard to integration with Belarus, looking at the diversity of interests behind the seemingly homogenous façade. He argues that the nature of relations between the Russian and Belarusian elites is clientelistic, and similar in nature as relations within Russia between the center and periphery. Sadly enough, the Russian political elites still have imperial, post-colonial attitudes towards Belarus.

Iryna Yekadumava unravels the bureaucratic structure of the Union State, revealing its chimerical, obstructive institutional design. She concludes her analysis questioning whether the Belarusian side ever wanted to seriously integrate the country's economy, which was so incompatible to the Russian economy. In her second article Ms. Yekadumava focuses on budgeting aspects of the Union State and comes

to somewhat similar conclusions. Her third piece of analysis focuses on regional cooperation between Belarus and the Russian regions. She lauds regional integration, arguing that integration is more complete on the regional level, where the partners are able to sustain their old contacts and to launch specific business projects.

Alyaksandr Tsikhamiraw looks at the foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards its Western neighbor. He argues that throughout the 1990s Russia needed Belarus as a reliable ally in an important geopolitical region, willing to support its loyalty with economic concessions. However, after 1999 the situation gradually began to change. In his second article Mr. Tsikhamiraw looks at Belarus' foreign policy towards Russia. He argues that Belarus has yet to conceptualize its policy towards its neighbor and remains largely opportunistic and personality-driven.

Iryna Yekadumava focuses on the customs union and concludes that in its current form it is largely ineffective and hinders Belarusian trade with other countries.

Yan Mikalaew focuses on military cooperation between the two states as well as on Russian military and geopolitical interests in Belarus. It comes as no surprise that integration between the two states is the most advanced in the military sphere.

In conclusion, **Valer Bulhakaw** provides his account of Belarusian-Russian integration. He believes that the Union State is nothing more than a mere "institutional phantom," which allows both sides to veto decisions that might endanger the existing balance of power. Mr. Bulhakaw believes that integration is simply impossible between two countries with such strikingly different political and economic systems. Perhaps most remarkable is that the author was able to forecast that, if forced to choose, Mr. Lukashenka would choose "independence" rather than "integration" — a forecast that proved accurate in August of 2002, following the first edition of this volume.

This book concerns the dynamics of Russian-Belarusian integration

from its outset in 1995. It is a remarkable collection of analytical articles on the economic, political, geopolitical, foreign policy, legal and cultural developments in the field of Russian-Belarusian integration. We sincerely hope that this book will serve as an important contribution to this largely neglected area within the fields of transition literature and international relations.

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