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Introduction

BELARUS – TOWARDS A UNITED EUROPE

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I

The following collection has come together as a result of many conversations and discussions with Alyaksandr Milinkevich and his colleagues during the last three years — from the time of the 2006 presidential elections in Belarus into late autumn, 2008.¹ We reached the conclusion that Belarus needs the elaboration of a mature “European strategy”, one which would be neither a one-time act of protest against the Belarusian authorities, nor become another form of political opposition activity. What is necessary is to foresee and forestall the events and problems which Belarusian society may see as it glances towards a united Europe. Nearly half of Belarusian citizens visit EU countries and many study and work in the West. Sociological investigations are showing with increasing clarity the pro-European orientation of this society. The Belarusian economy is growing ever more strongly interlinked with the EU market, and through its closest neighbours — Poland, Lithuania and Latvia — is becoming increasingly subjected to the active forces of the globalisation process. It is becoming ever clearer that cooperation with Brussels is becoming the dominant vector in Belarusian foreign policy, and that this must be taken into account by both the authorities in Minsk and the political and economical institutions of united Europe. The present collection of expert analysis is an at-

¹Discussions were also held in a wider circle of experts; these were documented in the Stefan Batory Foundation’s publication “The European Choice for Belarus”, available on the website (<http://www.batory.org.pl/english/intl/pub.htm>); in another example of these conversations, meetings were held under the College of Eastern Europe conference “Poland’s Eastern Policy”; see the publication “Polska Polityka Wschodnia”, Wrocław, KEW, 2008

tempt to embrace the issues and key areas which determine the relationship between Belarus and its integration with Europe. Reaching a little further and a little deeper than current political activities and events, over a dozen experts provide their analyses on how well prepared Belarus' authorities and society are to accept the EU as a close and lasting partner.

This enterprise coincided with the appearance of some positive signals from the Belarusian authorities regarding their willingness to enter into dialogue with the EU. As of the middle of 2008, the representatives of the Republic of Poland and senior members of EU bodies have been assured by Minsk of a readiness to deepen their collaboration with Brussels. Events on a more important and wider scale have occurred in parallel. The Polish-Swedish initiative entitled the "Eastern Partnership" has opened within the EU a new line of institutional activity in connection with its eastern neighbours, or, in other words, with the EU's "Eastern Dimension". United Europe, in its own well-understood interest, must open itself more to the countries of the post-Soviet region. This is firstly because these countries are situated within the geographical and cultural-civilisational boundaries of Europe, and secondly because our collective European strategic interests demand it, in such fields as security, economy, communications, the environment, and many others covered since 2003 under the European Neighbourhood Policy. The reaction of official Belarus to the Eastern Partnership initiative has been surprisingly positive. For the first time in a very long period, the authorities are speaking in one voice to the representatives of NGOs and civil society.

Of course there is still a degree of uncertainty on whether the Belarusian authorities' declared opening towards Europe will have a long-term character, and how the government, society, and ruling and intellectual elites will react to these "doors opening on Europe" as events play out. What factors will influence this reaction? What promises will they make and what threats will lie behind them?

The works presented here are an attempt to collect together the questions, indicating the differences in approaching the problems and an exposing at least some of the doubts.

II

After the collapse of the USSR, the societies of the post-Soviet region, on the whole, welcomed the widening of collaboration with the West with sincerity and hope. By the “West” I mean here not only the European Economic Community and political organisations (such as NATO and the Western European Union), but rather everything that together symbolised the prosperity, welfare, stability and modernisation of the Western countries.

However, a few years after the changes had taken shape, prosperity had not arrived. Instead of reform and equitable redistribution of the state’s property, the so-called “bad privatisation” happened. Stability and security stopped being the domain of the state, and were taken over by mafia structures and the “oligarchy”. Modernisation ground to a halt in an ideological desert, where it roams to this day, held up principally by the idea-less development of information technologies generally accepted as a kind of *ersatz* progress and modernity.

It is necessary to remember that in Soviet times, Belarus was recognised as the number one beneficiary of the communism-building process. It was in the Belarusian SSR that, in the course of 30 years, the transformation of the rural (in the language of the times, “backward”) person into the Soviet, “modern” citizen was carried out with most success.² As an effect of mass migration, society was relocated from rural and small-town environments to new metropolises and industrial centres. The generations born in the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s gained from the communist system the opportunity to receive an education, improve their material conditions and career perspectives. That is, at least, how it was seen at the time. The degree to which this conviction was widespread is attested by the relative paucity of the dissident movement in the Belarusian SSR, as well as the high support to this day of the post-Soviet regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. In connection with the high standard of living in the Belarusian SSR, acceptance of transformation and perestroika was low, and at the very beginning of the ‘90s social expectations for the new era were roused much more than in other countries; similarly, the level of assent to the Soviet system was higher than in the neighbouring republics of Ukraine and Lithuania. During the Yeltsin years, disappointment in the

² In 1955 the rural population comprised nearly 80% of the Belarusian Republic; in 1989, according to census data, the rural and small town populations made up less than 30% of the total.

West deepened while his offers of modernisation and potential for cooperation failed to meet the high expectations of the Belarusian public. It was not by coincidence that Lukashenka in his anti-Western rhetoric pronounced objections that the West only sought to exploit the cheap and well-qualified labour force, expand its market, and bring nothing worthwhile to the Belarusian economy. These expectations are described expertly in the wider context by Dimitri Simes in his essay in *Foreign Affairs*.³ The author concentrates mostly on USA-Russia relations, but accurately conveys the expectations regarding the West in the former USSR republics: a great deal of assistance, even a 'new Marshall Plan', and numerous guarantees of security. In political writings in the post-Soviet area, the refrain that "the West deceived us" is repeated to this day. They promised one thing, took another, and especially deprived us of our feelings of superpower-dom, which had allowed the average USSR citizen to "live with pride". For the average observer of international politics in the post-Soviet countries, it does not matter whether it was Washington who betrayed Russia, leaving it prey to economic and political hurricanes, or some vaguely understood 'Brussels' (NATO or the EU, it matters not) who, within a modest assistance package, offered "unnecessary" expertise and office materials for "improving administrative capabilities". In Ukraine it is to this day recalled with aversion, on the example of TACIS, how badly and thoughtlessly the huge resources for assistance have been allocated. The countries of the CIS were not prepared for such quick and violent political, social and economic change. Hence the feeling of shock. The statement that shock came without reform applies equally in relation to this aspect of the transformation.

Whether the West had some kind of duty to help remains a separate question. What obligations did it have before the USSR? What crimes to atone for? Did these mythologised obligations not arise simply from the excessive expectations and excited hopes of post-Soviet politicians, immersed in an ideological no-man's land, as the embodiment of the collapsing world of their "values"? The system of bipolar international politics, to which they become so strongly accustomed in the Brezhnev era, had ceased to exist because it was bound to dissipate sooner or later. Those who had no ideas on how to govern, other than by making empty promises, would of course have to be disappointed. Would we, however, succeed in untangling the knot of expectations and hopes by offering new forms of help? Do these expectations on the part

³Dimitri K. Simes, "Losing Russia", *Foreign Affairs* vol. 86, 2007, pp. 36-52

of the post-Soviet societies not stand at variance with their powerlessness in overcoming the problems resulting from neglect and lack of effective solutions in their very own region? Such questions can be stretched further — to what extent has an effective reckoning with the communist totalitarian past been achieved? After all, in Russia and many other countries of the area, we frequently hear that such a reckoning is unnecessary, even harmful. To the issue of the responsibility of the elites for the state, we can add another packet of questions: on the level of the elites' responsibility in general, on the scope of what is understood in the post-Soviet countries by the concept of 'responsibility' in the wider and narrower perspectives — towards the populace, the family, the nation, the state. And a last question: to what extent did the totalitarian system displace these concepts and impulses from public life?

As many Russian analysts emphasise, society has not matured to democracy, and what we refer to as a lack of social cohesion is the result simply of the problem of responsibility, a problem which reaches into the inner circles of society, i.e. into the family, clan and social group. A strong family, clan, or group bond is something different to the state and its institutions. In a certain fundamental aspect, we see this same problem in Belarus.

More recent experiences have added to the set of issues discussed above. In the last 5-8 years in Russia and the majority of other CIS countries, the conviction has strengthened that democratisation processes aimed at building a strong state do not need to correlate with a high level of empowerment and economic welfare among the population. In this atmosphere a set of new political idioms has appeared which serve to define the aims of governments, amongst which the term "sovereign democracy" is the most well-known example. This phrase was supposed to be an ideological antidote to the "colour revolutions", or, in the understanding of the authorities from Astana to Minsk, the threat to stability and prosperity. The boom in oil, gas and other resources gave Putin and his team (including the ideological figures in it, such as Gleb Pavlovsky and Vladyslav Surkov) the conviction that it would suffice to ensure financial welfare, and build a strong state, for society not to demand access to all of the instruments of democracy. It was assumed that people would not want the democracy and so-called civil freedoms offered by the West, if the state took them under its wing.

The Ukrainian breakaway from this post-Soviet condition, the symbol of which was the Orange Revolution, merely assured the dictatorial regimes of

the CIS that they need to defend themselves from the threat of “colour revolutions” through a broader sharing of the wealth within a new system of redistribution. The state-owned concerns and mega-corporations were to ensure a necessary minimum of well-being and social security. In Belarus, an element of this strategy is the ‘new social contract’, according to which ‘you, i.e. society, don’t get involved in politics, and We, i.e. the authorities, will give you a minimum of liberty and a social safety net beneath you.’⁴

III

Today it is increasingly clear that in Russia, Belarus and other CIS countries, the basis of state ideology is a set of non-negotiable “ideologemes” (Orthodox religion, language, Slavic kinship, the post-Soviet community, etc.). The community of post-Soviet states is constituted in solidarity against a foreign community of interests, especially solidarity against the West. This is upheld by certain phraseological devices composed using the same methods as in the times of the cold war. Can this still be effective?

An example of this construction of distrust is the ideological creation/maintenance of the image of NATO. This is carried out by feeding the fear of being under threat by NATO, reacting nervously to the installation of anti-missile systems in the Czech Republic and Poland and the propositions of NATO expansion to the East, etc. In this atmosphere of peril, built around the idea of a community of the disregarded and/or threatened, there is a whole set of matters which Russia describes as a transgression of the “red line”, and which the Orthodox church refers to as an incursion by foreign denominations into its territory.

For those members of the ruling elite who have kept the Soviet mentality, the offer of leaving aside the differences and searching for a common ground within a globalised international community is not overly enticing. Are certain signals nonetheless gradually beginning to appear? Is the so-called Medvedev Plan, perhaps clumsy in its form and vague in content, just such a signal? Is it an honest proposal, or just a game of appearances resulting from a feeling

⁴See materials from conferences organised by the Stefan Batory Foundation, especially the texts by V. Silicki, A. Chubrik and K. Khayduk (in Polish: <http://www.batory.org.pl/mnarod/wydarzenia.htm>); N.B. this project is a continuation of an earlier undertaking of the Foundation, “The European Choice for Belarus” of 2006.

of helplessness in the knowledge that the governments of Russia and other post-Soviet countries do not possess a set of values with which they can support their political projects, both large and small? Uncertainty about the honesty of Lukashenka and his recently announced “liberalisation” is based on the negative experiences of bygone years, when we were faced with constant manoeuvring between the commonality of interests and the commonality of values. The emphasis more often fell on the first. Real communism, whose construction was officially completed only twenty years ago, over many decades smashed society’s trust in any system of ideas which would bring any form of order to social relations. After communism, the post-Soviet states have seen the rise of “monstrosities” in the form of state ideologies, featuring the instrumentalisation of religion, the re-writing of history, the creation of personality cults, etc. Served up all together, what is offered is a ready meal with a sauce of pragmatism and *chekist* cynicism, where the accent is of course on the economy.

IV

At the same time — starting from the early ‘90s — a different part of Central and Eastern Europe set out to “catch up with Europe”, sometimes in a humiliating and ineffective manner, because this partly meant confessing to previous mistakes. In Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the three post-Soviet Baltic republics, there was a dominant conviction that integration with the structures of the West was an element of a profound and well-considered strategy, supported by a shared system of values, and only in the longer-term perspective by a shared system of interests. Even joining the community of the West, if not bound to be always profitable, was part of large-scale project aimed at a long-term docking in the “maternal harbour”. Today we would say that the difference between Poland and Belarus lies in our different interpretations of the need and/or necessity of “welding ourselves” on to the Western world.

A clear majority of Belarusians know what is involved in reaping the economic and other benefits of sharing their interests with the West. It is difficult, however, for politicians like Alyaksandr Milinkevich to reach out to society with the message that it is a matter of more than just economic well-be-

ing. Poland's joining of the European Community was embedded in a deeper tradition, which was accompanied by a conviction (sometimes anachronistic, causing pitying smiles among Western partners) that this was a matter of a civilisational leap, of joining the world of values whose basic ingredients are not always easily identifiable as an axiological system operating at the level of political discourse. This is where our activeness in Brussels derives from, up to engaging the entire EU in issues surrounding the world beyond its *limes*. There is in this something of a romantic responsibility for the "younger" neighbours in Europe. In the last few years a part of this discourse or argument was the geographical and historical expansion of the borders of Europe, above all in the consciousnesses of the politicians and civil servants of Brussels.

In the present collection of reports and analyses, we are not given an unequivocal answer as to whether and how Belarus has decided on its "European orientation". It is made clear rather that this is a process whose conclusion has not been decided and whose future course is difficult to foresee.

In March 2006, during the presidential campaign and in the course of political demonstrations, a clearer depiction than ever before was given of the methods and philosophies employed in the struggle for Belarusian identity. In a move never expressed more clearly and expressively by any Belarusian politician, Alyaksandr Milinkevich indicated the two roads the people of Belarus has before it. The first one is the conservation of the post-Soviet system and support for an authoritarianism upheld on some form of social contract. The second is the path tread by all the surrounding countries with the exception of Russia. The choice between a Soviet Belarus and a European Belarus is increasingly clearly the subject of general social reflection, and even forms part of the strategy of both the authorities and the opposition. Unfortunately this process is seen by many, mistakenly and superficially, as making a choice between Russia and the West.

V

In order to understand the causes and political background of the offer currently being extended to Belarusian society by Brussels,⁵ it is necessary to

⁵See the European Commission document of December 2006 "What the European Union could bring to Belarus"; http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/belarus/intro/non_paper_1106.pdf

reach back to the beginning of the cooperation, particularly to the TACIS programmes, starting from 1991. After the constitutional changes of 1996, cooperation with the countries of the West was systematically narrowed. Attempts to start a dialogue in the years 1998-2000 ended without success, as the condition set by the authorities was taking “control” of how EU programme resources would be distributed to non-governmental organisations (the most well-known example being the case of the Helsinki Committee in 2001). In 2003, Belarus entered the agenda of the European Neighbourhood Policy; official Minsk, however, did not answer this proposition for a variety of political reasons. The civil rights situation continued to worsen. In 2004, NGOs were “brought to account” for the donations (both real and alleged) that they had received from the EU; one of the results of this process was that many organisations were liquidated, contributing to the weakening of the third sector at the same time as consolidating the “freeze” of relations with the EU.

At the present time, Minsk’s positive reaction to the invitation to participate in the Eastern Partnership initiative must be consolidated by taking real steps towards liberalising the system. In the texts presented below, this demand is elaborated in a number of aspects. **Vyachaslau Pazdnyak** and **Yelena Rakava** analyse the tools and areas of collaboration which the EU has offered Belarus since the beginning of the 1990s. They describe in detail the opportunities available for using European resources towards developing infrastructure, administrative capabilities, and humanitarian assistance. The authors note, however, that the low level of utilisation of these funds is also a result of passivity and lack of will to cooperate on the part of the Minsk authorities. Projects on offer either had to be financed in their entirety from outside, or they were simply not realised at all because the Belarusian side did not invest its own resources. Meanwhile, humanitarian aid agencies and non-governmental organisations were also subjected to legal restrictions on the acceptance of funds; in many cases, donations were made taxable. Yelena Rakava’s recommendations for foreign institutions on how best to offer help to Belarus and what demands should be made on the Belarusian government are well worth noting.

Andrey Lyakhovich provides a sketch of the extent to which Belarus’ ruling elites are prepared for dialogue and cooperation with the European Union. Dr Lyakhovich presents the ideas of those Belarusian analysts who are moderately critical of the government, and leans towards the thesis that any

change in his country will come not as a result of opposition activity and civil disobedience, but rather as a product of a slow evolution of the ruling camp; the ruling group is increasingly displaying discourse characteristics more typical of the democratic groups of the beginning of the 1990s. Within this political landscape, president Lukashenka fulfils a vital role as the guarantor of rights and privileges. Lyakhovich asserts that his presidential power rests on three pillars: the first is the social contract binding him to the citizens, the second his contract with the *nomenklatura* (the guarantee of sharing power with them on condition of absolute obedience), and the third his exceptional ability to mould himself to any situation and balance the interests of the populace and the ruling elites.

According to Lyakhovich, official Minsk's relationship with the West was, until the middle of 2008, a function of the relationship between Belarus and Russia. After Russia's conflict with Georgia and the "turbulences" in its relations with Ukraine, both president Lukashenka and the loyal *nomenklatura* reached the conclusion that relations with the West should be built according to parameters grounded in Minsk, rather than Moscow. It can be said that an independent foreign policy, upheld by interests (profit and loss) rather than values, was embarked upon. In this context the *nomenklatura* is interested above all in insuring its own field of interests (e.g. having its share in the privatisation process, being protected from aggressive Russian business practices, etc.). These interests are identified with the necessity of cooperating with the West. Lyakhovich describes accurately the range of possible compromises, conveying with precision the particular mode of 'contractual' thinking employed by the Belarusian authorities. The issue remains that of whether the West and its institutions (financial, economic and political) will be able to maintain a coordinated and uniform strategy in relation to the Minsk government. It seems that, in relation to this particular country, the positive image of the cohesive policy of the European institutions and their executive capacity and decisiveness is at considerable variance with reality. Lukashenka himself would prefer to have on the Western front a partner/enemy more similar to that in Moscow. Yet the Western world is not a uniform entity and it is difficult to obtain from it the same kind of decisions and benefits which are offered by Moscow (gas tariffs, 'deals' on political decisions, etc.). Lukashenka's flirt with the West could end in disappointment for the president, because in the present financial crisis it is rather unlikely that high-value investments and

state-of-the-art technologies will start flowing into Belarus solely on the basis of his volition and his personal invitation to start doing business in the country. Nevertheless, the current opening up of the *nomenklatura* will favour the warming of ties with the West — and this is the biggest benefit equally for Belarusian sovereignty as for the process of building a modern society.

A comparative analysis of the conditions set by the EU upon the Belarusian government in December 2006 and of the human rights situation and political climate shows to what extent the Belarusian authorities are not fulfilling those conditions.

Yury Chavusau, analysing the state of civil activity from the perspective of the Belarus-EU relationship, points out the legal-political restrictions operating on civil society at present and also details the historical perspective (the maturing process, up to the point of “being and acting as if in Europe”) and the context of current events.

Iryna Vidanova analyses the Belarus-EU relationship from the point of view of society, family ties, group cultural endeavours and the influence of mass media outlets (both local and international). Her analysis of programmes aimed at the youth leads her to state that investing in contacts with the youngest layer of Belarusian society (scholarship programmes, cultural and entertainment events, internships and trips abroad) creates a unique base of beneficial collaboration both with the country’s immediate neighbours and the EU as a whole.

Ihar Lalkou presents the platforms of individual political parties in Belarus from the angle of their relations with the EU, whilst **Andrey Fyodarau** notes in his analysis that among the five countries bordering on Belarus, one (Russia) is a clear antagonist, three are EU members and the last (Ukraine) has declared its readiness to join the ranks of NATO. The author relates and describes all of the areas in which Belarus has cooperated with NATO, from 1992 onwards, which indicates, against all appearances, a rich infrastructure of contacts both of a political character and in military-technical and training aspects. In 1997, sociological studies showed an anti-NATO orientation among 30 % of the population. In the spring of 1999, after the alliance’s actions in Yugoslavia and a corresponding propaganda campaign in all official media outlets, this figure climbed to 47 %. It is worth adding that it was in this very period that Poland joined the alliance, and the authorities did not forego the opportunity to manipulate fears of a threat closing in on Belarus’ bor-

ders. The author cites data from the Independent Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS), headed by Prof. Manayeu, whose indicators have changed little to the present day. Certainly the distribution of percentages varies according to age group and level of education. Attitudes to NATO also have other contexts, which we do not always understand. The representatives of the administration and the ruling elites have emphasised repeatedly that after the retreat of the Soviet army from the GDR and the Eastern bloc countries, the West gave a solemn promise not to force its influence beyond the borders of the former USSR. Representatives of the Belarusian opposition and independent analysts hold the position that it is too early to talk of moving closer to NATO, not only with reference to the results of the sociological surveys which indicate an unwillingness and even hostility to the alliance. In the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus — both in the old version and the amended one from 1996 — there is a neutrality clause. Entering a military alliance with Russia was a violation of this requirement, as were the acceptance of obligations within the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus and entry into the Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

Authors in this volume also analyse selected aspects of the cooperation up to the present day of social actors and representatives of the administration with the EU and its institutions. The Bug Euroregion is among the subjects discussed.

In his work, **Syarhey Nikalyuk** reminds us of a series of surveys carried out in 1991 in a majority of Soviet republics, in which people's level of identification with the USSR and with their own nations (republics) was gauged. As many as 69 % of Belarusians identified the USSR as their home, while only 24 % indicated the emerging independent republic as their fatherland. In comparison, in Ukraine these proportions were 42 % and 46 % respectively, and for Estonians 3 % to 97 %. In the times of the USSR, in relation to the strong dynamic of development, the Belarusian SSR was recognised as the number-one beneficiary of the communism-building process. Between 1991 and the beginning of the 21st century, there were significant changes in people's attachment to the USSR and its attributes or substitutes (which is undoubtedly what Lukashenka's political project, with its inclinations towards the Union State, should be described as). Nikalyuk provides an overview of sociological studies from the angle of the dynamics of change in attitudes to the European Union, to the West in general, and also in the other direction: to the idea of

unification with Russia. A differentiation of opinion in favour of the West begins to appear only among younger age groups – for the generation for whom the USSR does not present a set of positive associations. In recent years, support for eventual entry into the European Union has appeared most noticeably among students, youths and representatives of the private sector. The idea of unification with Russia is seen to gain most acceptance among retired pensioners and employees of the public sector. At the end of this article, which is full of very interesting compilations of sociological data showing in cross-section the inclinations and preferences of Belarusian society during the last decade, we are given some encouraging news. The proportion of internet-users in 2008 was 36 % of the population, up from less than 10 % in 2001. The surveys show that internet-users tend to have a pro-Western orientation with much greater frequency than non-users.

Valery Karbalevich analyses the Belarus-EU relationship in the aftermath of the Russian-Belarusian disputes on the supply and transit of energy resources. In this author's opinion, it was only after the Russia-Georgia conflict that real diplomacy arrived on the scene in Belarus. This incident gave rise to a more refined and complex game using all the instruments available to participants of international politics. In this context, it becomes difficult to describe the parliamentary elections of September 2008 as a resounding success – the authorities did not exploit the opportunity to strengthen their position with regard to the West. Meanwhile, the West went against the Belarusian opposition by deciding to continue the dialogue with the West, not wanting to appear the loser in this particular round of the game.

A very interesting study is provided in **Anatol Lysyuk and Maryna Sakalouskaya**'s analysis of the relationship with the EU of local authorities in the border regions of Belarus. The authors give results from their own sociological investigations of populations in these areas, conducted under the aegis of Brest University. Their findings concluded, *inter alia*, that:

- over 70 % of respondents do not feel a threat emanating from Poland (13.6 % replied that there is such a threat, but this was found to be dominated by fears of contraband, crime and migration, rather than the proximity of NATO);
- over 60 % of respondents had visited Poland in recent years;
- 57.6 % of respondents believe that life in Poland is better than in Belarus;
- 36 % describe relations between Poles and Belarusians as friendly, 29.6 % replied that relations were more friendly than unfriendly, and nobody said

that the two nations were enemies; meanwhile, official relations between the two states are described as friendly by 16.8% and 13.6% replied that the two states were mutual enemies;

- attitudes to the EU are positive; a feeling of being under threat from the EU is felt by only 7.9% of respondents.

Alyaksandr Zhuchkou analyses the legal and political environment for local administrations engaging in relations with the EU. Belarusian self-government can benefit from many assistance programmes within the framework of cross-border cooperation, regional (including Euroregion) and wider national initiatives which, for example, foresee the development of administrative capabilities (training workshops for civil servants should not be formal and routine, but rather should take account of the many positive experiences provided by e.g. the Polish participation). N.B. Alyaksandr Zhuchkou is one of the founders of the concept of self-government reform in Belarus, and has been putting forward his ideas since the mid-1990s. The project has not yet met with success and has been effectively shelved until more a favourable political climate arises in the country. Basic conditions of reform are provided by the author at the end of his paper, in bullet-point format.

Finally, **Mikhal Zaleski** gives an overview of the economic infrastructure of Belarus and its potential for cooperation with the EU. The final questions on the manner in which the current global financial crisis and its effects in Belarus will affect Belarus-EU relations are of particular importance.

I believe that the collection presented here will serve to deepen understanding of the situation in Belarus, as well as provide a perfect opportunity for the redoubling of intellectual and organisational efforts, on the part of interested specialists of the EU and Belarusians alike, on the road to a united Europe.

Warsaw, February 2009