SUPPORT FOR BELARUSSIAN YOUTH ACTIVISTS: COOPERATION OR CO-OPTATION? PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRATIZATION IN BELARUS

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ABSTRACT

The process of transition in post-Soviet Belarus is caught between two opposing forces: nostalgia for the past on the one hand, and young people with no such nostalgia on the other. Contemporary youth began their socialization under Gorbachev, so consequently had only limited exposure to Soviet communism (Titarenko 2009, 413). Over the past 20 years, different currents of youth activism has simultaneously supported and challenged Belarus’ political regime. Belarus in many ways has been swallowed by neighboring Russia. Despite almost 20 years of independence, it retains a Soviet mentality clinging to the past, with a national culture (until recently) that is suppressed by the regime’s Russification policies. The resulting neo-Soviet mentality, monolithic culture and presidential corporatism, do not permit space for public discussion, let alone youth activism, in the search for policy solutions or to building compromise.

This paper analyzes the complicated relationship between youth in Belarus, Western donors and the Lukashenko regime. Because of the complex funding policies of Western donors and the tenuous financial position of youth groups in Belarus, donors exercise immense influence over the organizations that they fund. While it would be difficult for these groups to function unaffected by the policies of
both western donors and the regime, I will explore to what degree donors and the
regime have created artificial incentives for the groups to function. The donor
community and the regime have, to a significant extent, created artificial youth
movements that lack genuine impetus and support from youth. In order to
overcome this phenomenon, I will propose solutions and recommendations to the
Western donors and major players, such as the European Union and the United
States, on future funding strategies for Belarusian youth movement and the
Lukashenka regime.

In order to understand the effectiveness, the activism, and the motivation of
youth movements in Belarus, it is necessary to evaluate the political culture in
which these groups have evolved and have been functioning. This paper is
composed of four chapters that examine various aspects of this issue. The first
chapter focuses on the political and cultural developments that took place in, and
affected, Belarus during and after the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
(USSR). The second examines pro-regime organizations in Belarus, focusing
primarily on pro-Lukashenko youth movements and evaluates its funding and
support. The third chapter looks at the structure and relations of the pro-democratic
youth movements in Belarus, and their affiliations with pro-democratic institutions
both at home and abroad, in order to investigate the possibility of cooptation versus
cooperation. The fourth chapter evaluates whether the donor – recipient
relationship has the potential to compromise the idea of democracy, since when
money and politics are combined it represents a lethal concoction with the risks of
those having money interests exercising undue influence over the recipient. At the same time, delineates current trends and extrapolates the impact of a variety of policies that could be adopted by the international community vis-à-vis Belarus as prospects for democratization in Belarus.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN BELARUS
OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS

Political Point of View

Belarus: Background

Belarus, previously annexed to Kievan Rus, eventually came under the control of Lithuania in the fourteenth century, and became fully integrated into the Polish-Lithuanian Grand Duchy. Four hundred years later, Belarus came under the control of the Russian Empire, a period during which Belarus would become culturally and linguistically distinct from Eastern Russians and Ukrainians in the South (Zaprudnik 1993, 20-24). During this period, Poles and the Jews controlled trade in the region leaving most of Belarus poor and uneducated (Zaprudnik 1993, 20-24). Once Poland was partitioned off in 1772, 1793 and 1795-96, Belarus became increasingly controlled by Russia and was exposed to Russian policies and culture.

In March of 1918, during the First World War, Belarus came under German control and enjoyed a relatively brief period of independence in the form of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (Levy 1998, 17-30). The Red Army soon took control however, with the result being that the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was established. The Treaty of Riga signed on March 18, 1921 by Poland, Soviet Russia, and Soviet Ukraine ceded Belarus’ Western half to Poland bringing Polonization and armed Belarusian resistance (Levy 1998, 17-30). In the Eastern
half of Belarus, the Bolsheviks took control and by 1922, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic became a founding party of the USSR.

Initially in the 1920’s, Soviet authorities encouraged Belarusian culture and literature (Masters 2007, 77). However, by the 1930s, under Stalin, Belarusian culture literature, and national identity was forcefully suppressed with harsh consequences for those who dared to oppose this new course. During the era of the 1930’s, agricultural collectivism and industrialization took shape and waves of purges resulted in hundreds of thousands of executions particularly in the Kurapaty Forest near Minsk (Smolicz and Radzik 2004, 511-528).

By 1939, Poland lost control of Western Belarus to the Red Army (Marplcs, 1999, 12). In 1941, during Nazi Germany’s invasion of Russia, Belarus, situated on the front line, suffered devastating loss and destruction. German occupation was brutal and came to an end in 1944 when the Red Army finally forced the Nazis out. In Minsk, the devastation was remarkable with countless villages completely destroyed. Approximately two and a half million Belarusians lost their lives between the years 1939 and 1945 (Levy 1998, 26). Following the Second World War, Western Belarus remained under Soviet control and Belarus became one of the Soviet Union’s most successful republics.

In 1986, one of the nuclear reactors at Chernobyl in the Ukraine (and on the Belarus border) exploded and “sent vast clouds of radioactive dust, the equivalent of 150 Hiroshima bombs, northward into Belarus” (Levy 1998, 27). Seventy
percent of the radioactive fallout descended upon Belarus. Complicating matters, two and a half million Belarusians were impacted and clouds emanating from the fallout covered all of Belarus. Approximately one fifth of Belarus’ land was contaminated, with effects that linger even now. Belarus will be examined in greater detail once the Post-Soviet scenario is dealt with in order to put Belarus in its proper perspective.

The Disintegration of the USSR and the Consequences for Belarus

Under Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980’s, a number of new policies and substantial changes occurred in the USSR. However, these changes had minimal impact in Belarus, “one of the least liberal of the Soviet republics” (Levy 1998, 28). In 1988, a Belarusian demonstration was eradicated by authorities very efficiently. However, in 1989, the Belarusian Popular Front came to light in Vilnius, Lithuania and this group was able to launch effective campaigns for the Belarusian language to be re-established in schools.

By February 1990, much of Eastern Europe had become influenced by democratic ideals with the result that the USSR abandoned its one-party political regime (DeFronzo 2007, 62). This move would entail the Communist Party’s competition with other political parties in general elections. In June 1991, the USSR hosted its first multi-candidate presidential election for the Russian Federation in which Boris Yeltsin was elected. DeFronzo explains:

This event created a remarkable political incongruity in that the president of the USSR’s largest component republic (as well as the
presidents of several other republics) could claim a higher level of political legitimacy than could Gorbachev, the president of the entire Soviet Union, who held power by virtue of the old Communist Party-dominated political process rather than through a totally democratic election. (DeFronzo 2007, 62)

In line with the new democratic influences throughout Eastern Europe, Gorbachev conducted a referendum in which the issue of the preservation of the USSR was considered. The referendum took place in Russia and an additional eight USSR republics. The results of the referendum revealed that at least 76 percent of the respondent citizens were in favor of reform (Rutland 2006, 739). In response to these results, Gorbachev negotiated with a number of USSR republic leaders for a new and more decentralized constitution. Just days before the ratification of the new constitution, Gorbachev, who was on leave in Crimea, was placed under house arrest by a coup that had been organized by a number of top ranking Soviet officials. The coup’s official announcement indicated that Gorbachev was ill and that as a result, the coup’s leaders would therefore assume power.

Yelstin and the Russian Republic’s parliament refused to recognize the coup’s authority. Yelstin went further and condemned the coup, referring to it as comprised of criminals and encouraging Russian citizens to vigorously “defend the government of the Russian Republic” (DeFronzo 2007, 62-63). At the Russian White House, the coup and their tanks on orders to seize the White House were met by “massive peaceful popular resistance and the refusal of most military
commanders around the country to acknowledge their authority” (DeFronzo 2007, 63). After just three days, the “coup plotters” surrendered and were subsequently arrested.

Although the coup failed in its objective to prevent the democratization of the USSR, the Coup resulted in the USSR’s complete destruction. Each of the USSR republics’ respective parliaments had grown apprehensive and took the view that a similar coup could take place in the future and force upon those republics the reintroduction of the previous totalitarian state. Fortified in this belief, the USSR’s republics immediately announced plans to secede from the USSR.

By December 31, 1991, the USSR no longer existed. In its place were fifteen independent nations, which included Belarus. With the disintegration of the USSR, Gorbachev’s presidential status over the USSR became obsolete and as a consequence Gorbachev became no more than a private Russian citizen (McFaul 1994, 313-319)

**Formation of New Political and Governmental Structures**

The final event giving rise to the collapse of the USSR was the results of a referendum commenced in Ukraine on December 1, 1991 which reflected that at least 90 percent of the popular vote favored independence (Rutland 2006, 740). What followed was a meeting of Slavic republic heads who ultimately agreed to explore alternatives to Gorbachev’s union plan.
On December 8, 1991, heads of state from the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian Republics met and ratified the Belavezha Accords which essentially proclaimed the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the implementation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Hough 1997, 449-489). On December 12, 1991, Russia’s secession from the USSR was formalized by virtue of the Congress of Soviets of RSFSR which ratified the Belavezha Accords and rejected the 1922 Treaty that initially created the Soviet Union.

On December 17, 1991, twelve of the fifteen independent Soviet republics together with other European nations signed the European Energy Charter as sovereign states. On December 21, 1991, all member states with the exception of Georgia signed the Alma Ata Protocol confirming the authenticity of the Belavezha Accords (Hough 1997, 449-489). Likewise, each of the former Soviet republics, except for the three Baltic States, endorsed the CIS. On December 24, 1991, the Russian Federation replaced the now defunct USSR in the United Nations. Unopposed, the replacement was formalized on December 31, 1991. By this time, all previous USSR institutions were dissolved and replaced by the authority of central government attached to individual republics.

Restructuring was commenced by Boris Yeltsin along the lines of a market-based economy, which essentially meant less government ownership of property and a more democratic distribution of wealth. Yelstin introduced what was termed a “shock program” in which subsidies for faltering farms and industries were
relaxed, price controls were abrogated, and the ruble rendered convertible (Hough 1997, 449-489).

Following the disintegration of the USSR, the Party Communists of Belarus (KGB) immediately declared itself Belarus’ “main political force” (World of Information 1999, 40). Moderate reformist Stanislau Shushkevich was selected to head the Supreme Soviet, a “body dominated by old-guard communists.” However, in 1994, Shuskevich was removed from office in January and by March was greatly influenced by the “creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)” (World of Information 1999, 40). Shortly afterward in June 1994, Belarus had its first “free presidential elections” and Aleksander Lukashenko won by virtue of 80 percent of the vote (World of Information 1999, 40).

**Involvement of the US and Europe in the Formation of These New Political and Governmental Structures**

Although the dissolution of the USSR resulted in the end of the cold war and the removal of the U.S.’ main enemy, the U.S. remained very interested and engaged in developments in the former Soviet region. The fact is, Russia remains a significant power with respect to its nuclear abilities, geographic size, population size, and natural resources. As a result, the entire former Soviet region remains of great interest to the European Union (EU) and the U.S. Ukraine in particular has been a point of keen interest for both the EU and the U.S. This is because Ukraine, with a population of over fifty million, sits in a geographically strategic location
and remains a pivotal nation in the Eastern Europe region. Moreover, Ukrainian-Russian relations are essential for the success of the CIS (Haran 1995).

The U.S. appears to have had a guarded approach to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, particularly since Ukraine and Belarus had been perceived as the strongest supporters of the Kremlin and were viewed as loyal to the Soviet Union (Mandelbaum 1991, 12-14). When Lithuania announced its independence from the USSR in March 1990 and Gorbachev responded with economic sanctions, the US’ criticism of Gorbachev was rather minimal. In fact, the only real response was a month-long delay in signing the treaty that granted the USSR the most favored nation status (Mandelbaum 1991, 12-14).

The US’ guarded stance was exemplified by an October 1990 Council on Foreign Relations’ symposium on Soviet nationalities and American foreign policy (Haran 1995). It was projected that the continuing secessions from the USSR would only complicate matters for the West with respect to “nuclear proliferation, Russian fascism, Islamic fundamentalism, Balkanization and mass emigration” (Haran 1995). It was decided that the US would take an entirely activist approach to the new developments in the Soviet republics. More specifically, Washington would not subscribe to “a policy of linkage that makes the Kremlin access to US markets (including credit markets) contingent on its agreement to wholesale decolonization” (Mandelbaum 1991, 55). Moreover, it was acknowledged that
Gorbachev “had become part of the problem” and could no longer be regarded as “the solution” (Mandelbaum 1991, 62).

To this end, the U.S. determined that it would become entirely necessary to position U.S. officials in each of the republics with a view to providing assistance directly and not via the centre (Mandelbaum 1991, 61). The U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union was compromised in January 1991 when “bloody provocation in the Baltics continued with the Gulf War” (Haran 1995). The EU responded by withdrawing $1 billion (USD) in Soviet aid and the U.S. cancelled its US-Soviet summit in February (Haran 1995). Underlying the U.S. position was a lingering loyalty to Gorbachev and guarded anticipation that the Soviet Union was on the verge of inevitable collapse therefore requiring some measure of loyalty to Yelstin (Beschloss and Talbott 1993, 87).

In any event, both the US and EC adapted a policy in which they each widened their communications and contacts with the Russian republics (Haran 1995). Robert Zoellick, Counsellor of the Department of the State explained:

We do not support the ‘break-up’ of the Soviet Union, and I cannot, speculate on the criteria of circumstances under which the US might ‘recognize’ the independence of entities that might emerge...there is a different situation, obviously with the Baltics, whose aspirations for independence we back. (Haran 1995)

Immediately following the failed August 1991 coup, each of the member states within the EU recognized the independence of the Baltic States (Haran 1995). The U.S. however, not wanting to alienate Gorbachev, opted to delay recognition
until after the Soviet Union’s official recognition of the Baltic States’ independence. Even so, the U.S. recognized the Baltics on September 2, 1991 and the Soviets recognized the Baltics on September 6, 1991 (Haran 1995).

The EU and the U.S., via the auspices of the G-7, organized aid in the form of food and medical supplies to the Soviet Union, although approximately 70 percent of this aid originated from the EU (Beschloss and Talbott 1993, 443). In any event, US Secretary of State James Baker articulated five aspects of the US policy with respect to the republics. He called for a peaceful resolution of the secession by the implementation of democratic elections, adherence to human rights and more especially “equal treatment of minorities” (Beschloss and Talbott 1993, 446). In addition, Baker made a plea for a “central authority” that could work with the US and its allies (Beschloss and Talbott 1993, 446).

Ultimately, both the U.S. and the EC adapted a three-tiered approach to the restructuring of the Soviet Union. This approach prioritised the following:

- Military and nuclear security.
- Democratization.
- A market-based economy. (Haran 1995)

This position was adopted after having received a “positive response from the Ukrainian government” (Haran 1995). Once Gorbachev resigned on December 25, the US went on to recognize the sovereignty of Ukraine, Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.
Industrial and Economic Point of View

The disintegration of the Soviet Union occurred as a result of economic decline (Bradshaw and Lynn 2005, 349). The 1980s, in particular, had been a difficult time for the USSR’s economy. The decade commenced with a recession and “ended with a dramatic economic collapse” (Ellman and Kontorowich 1992, 1). Fewer goods were produced and were so difficult to come by that by the end of 1990 basic consumer goods were rationed. Supplies were so low that in some cases rations coupons would not always be redeemable.

By the end of 1990, a nation-wide practice developed where rations were only capable of redemption in exchange for other goods. The trickle-down effect was a decline in labor as wages were not as important as time spent in the ration queues. More surprisingly, the USSR, the world’s largest petrol producer, suffered shortages so acute that domestic flights were typically cancelled and motorists were finding it increasingly difficult to purchase petrol (Ellman and Kontorowich 1992, 1). It is against this backdrop that the post-Soviet economy and industries are analysed. In order to understand the economic and industrial position of Belarus, it is first important to look at Post-Soviet states in general. This way, Belarus’s economic, industrial and political situation in the Post-Soviet era can be put in its proper perspective.
Natural Resources; Agriculture

The former Soviet region is notorious for its bioclimatic natural resources which are a well distributed portion of “soil and natural vegetation” (Cole 1996, 149). Cole describes this aspect of the Soviet’s Union’s natural resources as follows:

In the extreme north of the former USSR is an extensive zone of tundra (cold desert), which merges southwards into coniferous forest. Further south the forest thins out and disappears, to make way for steppe (grassland). Further south again are areas of semi-desert and desert. Wherever they occur, the higher mountain regions interrupt the broad west-east zones of vegetation, bringing colder conditions south. (Cole 1996, 149)

Additionally, the former Soviet Union’s natural resources are made up of a number of “reserves of many economic minerals” (Cole 1996, 149). Unfortunately, a vast majority of these deposits are located far from population centres and the industry as well as from the railways and the coast. Moreover, the former USSR contains 5 percent of the world’s population, yet “its approximate share of natural resources” exceeds 5 percent (Cole 1996, 149). For example, the former USSR maintains at least 10 percent of the world’s “freshwater resources”, 16 percent of the world’s “productive land,” 17 percent of the world’s non-fuel minerals and 23 percent of the world’s fossil fuels (Cole 1996, 150).

According to Nikita Fedorovich Glazovsky, Deputy Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources in the Russian Republic, the former USSR’s natural resources have been compromised by environmental damages (Glazovsky 1992, 452).
According to Glazovsky, at least 20 percent of the former USSR’s land has suffered some degree of ecological/environmental damages (Glazovsky 1992, 452). Moreover, the damaged areas are home to at least 40 percent of the population. In fact, a number of the former USSR’s regions expose between 5 and 6 percent of the population to “unfavourable environmental conditions caused by anthropogenic pollution” (Glazovsky 1992, 452).

In 570 cities where air pollution is monitored, each of the cities is exposed to some level of air pollution to the extent that “some maximal permissible concentrations (MPC) of air pollution are exceeded” (Glazovsky 1992, 452). In a survey conducted in these cities, it was discovered that each city’s level of MPCs for carbon-bisulphide, phenols, benzopyrene and ammonia “were exceeded” (Glazovsky 1992, 452). In 90 percent of the cities, “oxides of nitrogen were exceeded” (Glazovsky 1992, 452). In 77 percent of the cities, exposure to carbon monoxide is also exceeded. Glazovsky goes on to explain that “in 19 populated areas with a total of 5.5 million people, extremely high air pollution is observed with exceedances of MPC’s more than 50 times a year” (Glazovsky 1992, 452).

In addition, both water pollution and soil contamination are widespread throughout the former USSR. As a result Typhoid is increasing and has been on the increase for the last fifteen or so years in Kazakhstan and other regions in the central Asian republics. In 16 percent of the former USSR’s land tested for soil contamination, the banned pesticide DDT was discovered. Glazovsky notes that “it
is estimated that 20-50 percent of foods contain chemical weed killers, or heavy metals or other dangerous pollutants” (Glazovsky 1992, 452).

The natural resources of the former USSR are further compromised by inefficient use. 120 to 160,000 miles of land in the former USSR is damaged by soil erosion. Forest damage is also occurring as a result of excessive cutting and contamination in general Mining “has disturbed approximately 64,000 miles of land” (Glazovsky 1992, 452). This is so because mining rocks “produces excessive waste, and oil extraction is very inefficient” (Glazovsky 1992, 452).

Previously, agriculture in the USSR had been the subject of a state and collective system of farming referred to as sovkhozes and kolkhozes. Up to 1972, the USSR had been one of the world’s largest producers of cereal. But in 1972, poor harvests obviated the need for imports, a trend that reoccurred in 1975. The introduction of a five-year plan from 1976 to 1980 emphasised agriculture and the USSR produced record harvests in cotton, sugar beets, potatoes and flax in 1978 (Fainson 1970, 570).

Despite its massive land resources, the USSR suffered a number of setbacks to its collective farming system which relied entirely on the issuing of passports to farmers which effectively kept them on the farms. The system was such that landowners were replaced by farmers. Imprisoned by farms, farmers initially responded by killing and eating their livestock. Resentment eventually gave way to low worker incentive and motivation. The increased use of machine production,
the spread of chemical industries and climate difficulties compromised the collective system of farming and famines would plague the USSR resulting in millions of deaths (Hubbard 1939, 117-118).

From about 1917 to 1990, the agricultural land holdings in the former USSR were state owned and this obviated the need for privatization in the transition to a market-based economy. Gorbachev spearheaded the transition at the end of 1989 when he introduced the 1990 Law of Land Reform which permitted private ownership of land and the introduction of non-state businesses referred to as co-operatives. The general idea was to facilitate the transition to a democratized market-based economy (Lerman and Brooks 1996, 48-58).

**Legal Point of View**

Until the introduction of the 1990 Law of Land Reform, private farms were not permitted under the legislative framework of the USSR. This practice was predicated on the concept that large mechanized farming would produce food more expeditiously and expediently than small, un-mechanized farms (Hubbard 1939, 117-118). In transforming the world’s largest communist nation to a state-based economy, the legislative framework would focus on liberalization, privatization and stabilization (Milanovic 1998, 186-190).

As for Belarus, the “judicial power” vests in the country’s courts (World of Information 1999, 40). The Constitutional Court determines whether or not law is ultra vires the constitution (World of Information 1999, 40). The Prosecutor
general is charged with the responsibility of ascertaining that laws and executive orders are “executed properly and uniformly” throughout the “state bodies and local Soviets” (World of Information 1999, 40).

Legal System

The reformation of the former USSR began in 1988 with Gorbachev’s goal of implementing a “socialist law-governed state” (White, Gill and Slider 1993, 212). The party’s 19th Conference subscribed to this ideology and by the middle of 1988, plans for the transformation were publicized. Gorbachev’s rule was characterized by the introduction of glasnost (openness), perestroika (restructuring), demokratizatsiya (democratization) and uskoreniye (economic development).

In implementing these strategies, a number of legislative provisions were necessary and would have to take into account “virtually all aspects of life” (White, Gill and Slider 1993, 212). To this end “the Gorbachev leadership sought to construct a legal framework which perestroika could be encapsulated” (White, Gill and Slider 1993, 212).

Transition under a decentralized legal system was far more problematic than anticipated. To start with, the USSR had previously been “tightly integrated into a well-defined state schemata” which relied on the authority of the Communist Party and its agents for supervision and guidance (Dawisha 1197, 334). Once the Communist Party was ousted in December 1991, unexpected challenges would emerge, since the “new polity had not fully emerged” (Dawisha 1997, 334).
Internal power struggles arose between legal institutions and leaders. Dawisha explains:

Institutional futures, and most certainly budgetary viability in the turbulence of transition, became dependant now on the political skills of procurator-generals, justice ministers, chief justices and others. (Dawisha 1997, 334)

The inevitable result of transition was the tension between those that embraced the changing legal system and those that were resistant to change. This state of affairs rendered the legal system fragile with respect to institutional reform.

Even so, changes occurred, particularly economic reformation in which privatization replaced collectivism with the result that the legal system found itself challenged by new demands. This was especially so with the reform of property ownership and the “rise of new commercial relationships” (Dawisha 1997, 334). To this end, the reform of the arbitrazh courts were implemented in the post-Soviet era. These courts were successors to the state arbitrazh, properly termed gosarbitrazh, which were “quasi-administrative” agencies that functioned to resolve disputes between “state enterprises and were entirely “ politicized” (Dethier 2000, 421). As Dethier explains, the gosarbitrazh “...operated within the confines of the administrative-command system, which means that the underlying goal was always plan fulfilment” (Dethier 2000, 421). Ultimately arbitrators focused their attention on the impact of their decision on the economy rather than on the rule of law (Dethier 2000, 421).
It was obvious with the introduction of property reformation that the gosarbitrazh was not particularly conducive to a new breed of property disputes. The result was the introduction of new procedural rules that were necessary to determine disputes between citizens and enterprises against the government. Hence the introduction of the arbitrazh courts (Dethier 2000, 421).

Other legal system reforms took place during in the years leading to the post-Soviet era. Gorbachev had a vision in which the reformed legal system would facilitate his democratized political and economic reforms. To this end, legal reformation honed in on widening the jurisdiction of the courts, fostering judicial independence and buttressing criminal defence mechanisms (Solomon Jr. and Foglesong 2000, 8). Even with these reforms, very little changed and many law students and academics expressed the view that participation in criminal trials by defence council was no more than a formality (Savitsky 1987, 3).

The transition to a democratic legal system from the Soviet legal system commenced with the Conception of Judicial Reform, a blueprint for judicial reform which was put together by Russian criminal law scholars in 1991 (Reynolds 1997, 376-377). Chief among the recommendations for an overhaul of the post-Soviet legal system was a call for jury trial. The reception was not altogether promising with some maintaining that the jury trial system was a tool best suited to the Anglo-American legal systems and had no real place in the post-Soviet legal tradition. Even so, by October 1993, the Russian Legal Code made provision for jury trials
although the opposition was successful in undermining funding for jury trials and the objective nature that characterizes Western concepts of jury trials (Galligan and Kurkchiyan 2003, 45).

By 1995, at least nine regions in Russia had a jury trial system in place and the acquittal rate was ten times higher than the previous acquittal rate. Moreover, Russian jurors were more inclined to disregard improperly obtained evidence. Jury trials were also faster and officials began to advocate for the introduction of jury trials in other regions within Russia (Zapodinskaya 1995, 5).

Despite the success of jury trials in Russia, jury trials are only conducted in very few cases in post-Soviet USSR. The jury trial process is limited to cases involving charges of treason, violent rape and murder. This leaves room for the pre-existing cooperation between Soviet judges and procurators which provides the prosecuting state with advantages over the defendant in a criminal trial. Even so, the limited extent to which juries are used, some legal standards are held and contain the measure of cooperation in those trials that permit jury trials (Solomon and Fogleson 2000, 33-34).

Although Vladimir Putin introduced a bill endorsing jury trials in 2004, the lack of judicial independence continues to compromise the democratization of the post-Soviet legal system. The, judges’ reappointment is entirely a matter for the Kremlin and as such forces a measure of loyalty to the Kremlin. Another difficulty for the democratization of the post-Soviet legal system is the relatively low salaries
and the overburdened workload of judges. As a result, incentive is undermined and the risk of corruption runs rampant (Mereu 2004).

For Belarus, the development of a new political and legal regime was compromised by the election of the communist-dominated Supreme Soviet in 1990 (Smith 1996, 207). In 1992, approximately 442,000 citizens signed a petition demanding early elections, but this referendum was banned by the Supreme Soviet. In the meantime, Belarus continued to operate within the strictures of the Brezhnev-era 1978 constitution. The legislative branch refused to be pro-active with the result that power passed to the executive branch and the government’s ruled was characterized by a series of decrees. The only legislative progress came in the form of bankruptcy laws, military service laws and a decree which circumvented privatization claiming that it “fostered corruption” (Smith 1996, 207). This state of affairs persisted, in that economic reforms were stymied until 1993 when the Supreme Soviet passed a land ownership law and governed “the distribution of vouchers for privatization” (Smith 1996, 208). As Smith explains, this new move represented a piecemeal victory for both state and collective farms as noted below:

> It recognized the right of collectives and state farms to own and use land and limited the redistribution of land to smallholdings and private homes, thus preventing forced transference of state land to private ownership. (Smith 1996, 208)

**Rule of Law**

The rule of law in post-Soviet states has taken on the “core elements of a viable constitutional order” but the elements are not progressing and remain in
danger of regression (Eckstein, Ahl, Bova, Flerson and Roeder 1998, 144). The elements include a democratic legislature, a judiciary, and a party-oriented political system. Although present in the post-Soviet states, they are “progressing very unevenly in the regions and localities” (Eckstein et al. 1998, 144). The only viable change it that Russians have been enjoying greater freedom from a previous legal framework in which the government was intrusive and used the notion of the rule of law to maintain almost complete control over society. Even so, the current system of law is not conducive to the measure of freedoms that are generally afforded in a democratic society. Ultimately, neither the post-Soviet state nor its society appears to “respect or be restrained by law” (Eckstein et al. 1998, 144).

In August 1995, Yelstin himself acknowledged the mechanics of the rule of law and its role in democratization as follows:

> Until we have a strong rule of law, until we have a developed system of legal protection for human rights (including protection against the arbitrariness of officials), until we have a middle class (the bedrock of stability), and until constitutional values become part of people’s self-awareness, we will not be able to talk seriously about democracy. (Eckstein et al. 1998, 145)

It is obvious that the rule of law in post-Soviet states remains mired in a Soviet polity and in some cases can be said to be thriving in some states. The oligarchic rule\(^1\) remains prevalent at both “national and sub-national levels” (Eckstein et al. 1998, 145). Eckstein et al. describes the oligarchic rule as “a

\(^1\)This is a political system in which political power is exercised by a small elite faction of society. (Wesson 1972, 315)
self-serving symbiosis between political and economic elites” (Eckstein et al 1998, 145). Other remnants of the Soviet polity thwarting the democratic rule of law are, a weakening and politicized judiciary, “environmental degradation”, “male chauvinism,” “Russian discrimination against non-Russians”, and the general population’s “inability or unwillingness to distinguish between rule by law and the rule of law” (Eckstein et al 1998, 145). Even so, never before in the history of the Soviet Union has there been so much attention to the establishment of the rule of law, specifically, “enforcement, courts and accountability” (Sievers 2003, 87). In the final analysis, a successful rule of law reformation relies in great part on modifying people’s belief in the law as a whole and their belief in the changing legal institutions (White 2009, 1). Over the past 10 years, international donors and banks alike have invested millions for the reformation of “post-communist judiciaries in Central Asia and Europe” (White 2009, 1). These investments are influenced by an overriding confidence in the belief that “economic growth and democracy depend upon the ‘rule of law’” (White 2009, 1). The rule of law itself depends upon “a well-functioning and independent judiciary” in which individual members of the community and the business community can rely on courts to be fair, predictable and consistent (White 2009, 1).

Even after ten years of legal reform, much of Central Asia is mired in increasing authoritarianism and the judicial systems in both Central Asia and Eastern Europe are characterized by corruption. The end result is that the rule of
law and democracy remain elusive aspirations (White, 2009 1-2). Individual belief in the legal system and the rule of law remains largely influenced by the previous Soviet system and this impacts the actors and their approach to the rule of law and thereby undermines public acceptance and confidence.

The rule of law in Belarus has commanded particular attention from Washington. In the U.S. State Department’s 2008 Annual Country Report on Human Rights Practices, the US State Department described the rule of law in Belarus as poor (Dow, 2009). The report alleges that as of the date of publication, the Belarusian government “failed to meet its commitments for free and fair elections” and continued to restrict civil liberties such as freedom of speech freedom of assembly, use of “unreasonable force to disperse peaceful protesters”, harassed and prosecuted political parties and NGOs, “closed or fined religious institutions”, “abused prisoners and detainees,” as well as “imposed many other human rights violations” (Dow, 2009).

President Lukashenko was the target of the State Department’s attack claiming that since his office began in 1994 he has “consolidated his power over all institutions and undermined the rule of law through authoritarian means, manipulated elections, and arbitrary decrees” (Dow, 2009).

The U.S. State Department goes on to report that Belarusians who “actively support opposition movements” endure serious consequences (Dow, 2009). For example:
Multiple demonstrations, from the peaceful ‘Freedom Day’ rally in Minsk, to the small-business owners who assembled to protest a presidential order restricting hiring practices, have ended not only in arrests, but also with participants being savagely beaten by riot police. (Dow, 2009)

The State Department goes on to describe other barriers to the rule of law within the Belarusian legal systems. For instance, when individuals report abuse by security officials, those complaints are typically not investigated (Dow, 2009). The criminal justice system is no less corrupt and selective and is inundated with “corruption, inefficiency and political interference” (Dow, 2009). Although there is a Constitutional Court specifically established to determine constitutional matters and to scrutinize the legitimacy of laws, it remains under the control of the president who “appoints six of the” 12 members to the court (Dow, 2009).

The rule of law in Belarus is further compromised by the fact that defence council is not at liberty to have access to police evidence, cannot attend the investigation of suspects or review prosecutor files prior to the case being placed before the courts. In addition, suspects are generally convicted (Dow, 2009). Prisoners and those detained pending trial are remanded in inhuman and squalid conditions (Dow, 2009). These conditions are described as containing poor or no ventilation, limited feeding, medicine, warm clothing and bedding as well as below standard sanitation. As a result, prisoners commonly contract tuberculosis, pneumonia “and other communicable diseases” (Dow, 2009).
Under the current legal framework in Belarus, freedom of speech is virtually non-existent and a new law passed last year permits further restrictions on the media (Dow, 2009). In general, Belarusians fear the consequences of voicing criticisms of the Belarusian government. Authorities record and monitor political meetings, block websites that oppose Lukashenko and the media are “warned against reporting on certain subjects” (Dow, 2009). NGOs and other human rights organizations are snubbed by the Belarusian government and are subjected to “frequent inspections”, remain under constant threat of dissolution and their correspondence is monitored (Dow, 2009). Over the last four years, the government either closed or forced the closure of at least 300 NGOs in Belarus.

**USSR’s Constitution**

Eckstein et al. explain that the post-Soviet constitution contains a mix of “rhetoric about a strong democratic state” and “the political realities of a weak authoritarian state” (Eckstein et al. 1998, 145). The constitution confers upon the president sufficient power to “shape his own programs” and at the same times holds him accountable to the people (Eckstein et al. 1998, 145). A new constitution was adopted following the disintegration of the USSR. The new constitution is a mixture of a French semi-presidential system and a German federal structure and a measure of representation in the lower house (The State Duma).

The new constitution was formally adopted in December 1993 after a referendum was conducted. Under the new constitution, the new Federal Assembly
contained two houses. The State Duma which had 450 deputies, half of whom were elected via national parties and the other half by virtue of singular seats. The second house, the upper house, or Federation Council contained 178 deputies, two from each of Russia’s regions (The State Duma).

Under the 1993 Constitution, power is divided among the executive branch and the legislative branch. Noticeably absent among the distribution of power is the judiciary who would under a democratic system serve as a bastion between the people and government. Compromising democratization, Articles 80-93 of the Constitution confers upon the president the power to veto legislative provisions and to dismiss parliament if it failed to subscribe to the president’s choice of prime minister on three consecutive occasions. The president, by virtue of the 1993 Constitution, is also at liberty to hire and fire ministers, pass decrees where they are not provided for by law and generally function as the constitution’s guardian (The State Duma).

By virtue of Article 105 of the 1993 Constitution, the State Duma is authorized to enact laws, amend the constitution by a two thirds majority, to revoke a veto by the Federation Council by a two thirds majority and to reverse a veto by the presidents by a two thirds majority and a three quarters majority from the upper house. Moreover, by virtue of Article 103 of the 1993 Constitution, the State Duma may appoint and dismiss Human Rights commissioners and Central Bank and Audit heads (The State Duma).
Under Article 105 of the 1993 Constitution, the Federation Council, by a majority of three quarters may approve laws as well as constitutional amendments. Any bills that involve the budget, international conventions and treaties and a declaration of war are required to be instigated by the lower house. The upper house have however, rejected at least 23 percent of all bills submitted by the Duma from 1996 to 1999. The Federation Council also has the residual authority to alter borders, approve presidential emergency declarations, call presidential elections, impeach the incumbent president, appoint and discharge the procurator-general, appoint judges to preside in the Constitutional, Supreme and Higher Arbitration courts and to deploy the military outside of the Russian borders (The State Duma).

**Belarus’s Constitution**

The drafting of a new Belarusian constitution lagged as a result of political tensions between the executive branch and parliament (Smith 1996, 208). Eventually by May 1993, a completed draft was placed before parliament and 88 of the 153 proposed articles were adopted. The most contentious item was the question of whether or not Belarus would accede to a presidency. The debate was between the pro-reformists and the conservatives, and largely depended on who appeared to be the possible winner of the presidential office each time (Smith 1996, 208).

On March 15, 1994, the Supreme Soviet endorsed the constitution, declaring that the Republic of Belarus was a “unitary, democratic, socially oriented
state based on the rule of law” (Smith 1996, 208). The constitution allotted the president as head of state as well as head of the executive branch. With this power, the president is empowered to appoint Cabinet Ministers, although the most significant ministers such as the Prime Minister, Ministers of foreign affairs, internal affairs, finance and defence ministers as well as State Security Committee’s chairman require the Supreme Soviet’s confirmation (Smith 1996, 208).

The Belarusian president also functions in the post of commander-in-chief and can, in emergencies, declare martial law. Even so, the 1994 Constitution does not confer upon the Belarusian president the authority to dissolve the parliament (Smith 1996, 208). Moreover, by virtue of a two-thirds majority, the Supreme Soviet may oust the president if it is satisfied that the president contravened the provisions of the constitution, is guilty of criminal conduct or for reasons relating to his health is unable to continue in office (Smith 1996, 208).

Other constitutional provisions designed to foster impartiality prohibit the president’s alignment with a political party while serving in the capacity of president (Smith 1996, 208). The president is also only permitted to serve for two terms of five years each. As will be explained below however, Lukashenko later amended the constitution in a controversial manner that extended the term of presidency.
The Overall Consequences for Belarus

Belarus, the focus of this thesis, is bordered by Poland, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania (Cherp 2000, 26). Belarus’ economy was particularly hard hit by the disintegration of the USSR. During the Soviet era, as part of a Soviet unification strategy, Belarus assembled goods that originated from all over the Soviet Union. Once the USSR was dismantled, the consequence for Belarus was the failure of its components’ assembly market. Belarus was left to find a new market and new suppliers for its assembly industry.

The current socio-political status in Belarus is largely steeped in Soviet tradition and shows no signs of changing. This is largely due to Belarus’ strong ties to the past, the president’s personal popularity, his strong control of the media and his propensity for punishing opposition (Marples, 2006, 351). More importantly perhaps is the fact that Russia is largely supportive of Belarus’s commitment to dictatorship and the lingering loyalty to Soviet type leadership and institutions (Marple, 2006, 351).

Complicating matters for Belarus is its relative disconnect with its neighbors. For instance, its northern and western neighbours, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania are now members of the European Community (Roberts 2008, vii). This makes it virtually impossible for Belarus to find a market in these areas since the EC maintains a number of regulatory regulations designed to favour trade within and among the EC as a priority. Moreover, the Russian Federation and Ukraine,
Belarus’ Eastern and Southern neighbours are moving toward westernization and free and open market economies (Roberts 2008, vii). Meanwhile, Belarus appears to be deeply mired in a fierce loyalty to the “ideals of Soviet communism” (Roberts 2008, vii).

Often referred to as “Europe’s black hole”, today’s Belarus is characterised by its dictator Alexander Lukashenko and the environmental devastation of the Chernobyl Disaster of 1986 (Videnava 2009). The Chernobyl Disaster had the greatest consequences for Belarus, damaging at least 70 percent of its land (Roberts 2008, vii). Complicating Belarus’ transition following the disintegration of the USSR was the country’s failure to effect political and economic changes (Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh 2003, 54).

Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh explain as follows:

“The perfect integration of the Belarusian elite into the Soviet power system presented the emergence of a new political elite in Belarus as well as any possibility of rapid adaption of the former elite majority to the ideas of national independence and democratic reform.” (Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh 2003, 54)

Another debilitating factor was the fact that up to July 1994, “the old conservative elite” continued to control Belarus’ primary political institutions despite the country’s independence (Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh 2003, 54). The failure to affect both economic and political reform during this period of transition compromised Belarus’ ability to transfer power and authority from the old political elite to “new political institutions” (Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh 2003, 54).
2003, 54). Changes should have implemented a “presidential institution” and an electorate system that promoted a majority rule regime (Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh 2003, 54).

When political change finally came in Belarus, it moved Belarus further away from the idea of democratic reform. The election of Aleksandr Lukashenko resulted in the replacement of the political elite based on “personal loyalty rather than professional competence” (Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh 2003, 54). In the final analysis, Belarus systematically remained submerged in a “Soviet-style ideology and Stalin-era authoritarianism” (Plokhy 2006, 123).

In a report released by FreeMuse and prepared by Lovas and Medich in January 2007, the fierce loyalty of the Belarus regime to Soviet and authoritarian politics is evident in the non-democratic control systems within the country (Lovas and Medich, 2007). The report alleges that Belarus is a place “where freedom of information and expression have become the unrelenting victims in an increasingly destructive battle for political control” (Lovas and Medich, 2007).

Evidence of Soviet and authoritarian control of citizenry is evidenced by the suppression of Belarus’ “rock musicians” (Lovas and Medich, 2007). In the two years leading up the Freemuse report, Belarusian rock musicians were precluded from media outlets with concert license applications refused and state press interviews denied as well (Lovas and Medich, 2007). The unofficial campaign
against the rock musicians is a part of President Lukashenko’s bid to remain in power and to suppress political opposition and the press (Lovas and Medich, 2007).

Lovas and Medich explain that the suppression of Belarusian rock musicians marks:

. . . the beginning of a more deliberate use of music as a political tool in the ideological battle between the authorities and the opposition, clearly dividing Belarusian musicians into pro-government ‘official’ and pro-democracy ‘unofficial’ camps. Now that rock and Belarusian language music in particular have come under fire, it has become a central rallying point for the beleaguered political opposition. (Lovas and Medich, 2007)

The fact is that the Belarusian political regime views music as a tool for rebellion, resistance and unrest, a pattern witnessed in Ukraine during 2004 (Lovas and Medich, 2007). As a result, Belarus implemented a system designed to restrict broadcasting by virtue of legislative incentives and censorship with the result that musicians are by and large no different from the previous “Soviet era dissidents” (Lovas and Medich, 2007). The current tenure reflects a movement that views “language and culture” as “key components” of the “social and political opposition to President Lukashenko” (Lovas and Medich, 2007).

There are two primary approaches to government music censorship in Belarus today. They are as follows:

- The purposeful placing of pressure on musicians which includes banning their participation in the media and severe restrictions on live performances. (Lovas and Medich, 2007)

- Governmental control over the media and any organization that can be used as an instrument to promote government propaganda through music as
means of advancing the government’s ideology and party loyalty. (Lovas and Medich, 2007)

These two strategies combine as follows:

“…the revival of the deeply ingrained culture of compliance and fear reminiscent of Soviet times means that independent music-making in Belarus today is an increasingly difficult risky enterprise.” (Lovas and Medich, 2007)

Relations with the US are particularly problematic for Belarus and its people because of two important factors:

- The U.S. Department of State’s support of pro-democratic non-government organizations.
- The Belarusian government’s resistance to these kinds of organizations.

(Embassy of the Untied States, Minsk, Belarus)

U.S. government assistance to Belarus began in 1997 with the US funding US$19.5 million which included private donations of US$10 million for humanitarian supplies (Embassy of the Untied States, Minsk, Belarus). The U.S. government subscribed to a tenet of “selective engagement” with respect to its assistance to Belarus. This policy promulgates the following:

. . . no new U.S. Government assistance will be directed to the Government of Belarus and, whenever possible, assistance will be channelled through non-government organizations, particularly those elements of Belarusian society that, despite the current regime, are trying to introduce democratic and free-market principles. (Embassy of the Untied States, Minsk, Belarus)

The U.S. Belarus Democracy Act 2004 authorizes the continuation of funding to pro-democracy organisations in Belarus (US Belarus Democracy Act 2004). Despite strained relations with the U.S., the Belarus government cooperates
with the U.S. on matters relating to intellectual property, human trafficking and technology crimes as well as disaster relief (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus).

Belarus’ relations with the EU are also strained with the EU imposing a travel ban on Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko on account of his poor human rights record (BBC News). The ban extends to seven Belarusian ministers (BBC News). Despite these strained relations with the EU, Belarus maintains relationships with EU member states. Belarus has a number of trade agreements with EU states which includes EU members, Latvia, Poland and Lithuania (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus: Foreign Policy).
CHAPTER TWO

COOPERATION OR CO-OPTATION, AND PRO-LUKASHENKO YOUTH MOVEMENT IN BELARUS

Starr and MacMillan (1990) explain the relationship between cooperation and cooptation in the context of “resource acquisition” for “new ventures” (1990, 79). The issue for consideration is whether or not outside influences are subtly using cooperation for social contracting “as a means to resource cooptation” (Starr and MacMillan 1990, 79-92). Cooptation is “an approach to resource acquisition which is especially suited to the particular constraints of new ventures.” (Starr and MacMillan 1990, 79-92).

With this understanding of the dynamics of cooptation and cooperation, this chapter examines the democratic organizations in Belarus, focusing primarily on pro-Lukashenko youth movements and evaluates its funding and support. Ultimately the question for consideration is whether various funding agencies are helping the Belarus democracy movements assert their own ideologies (cooperation) or are using them to promote their own agenda (cooptation). In this chapter the same question relates in the same way to pro-Lukasheenko youth support. Another question necessarily arises and that is whether the Belarusian regime in a subtle attempt to stymie the democratic movement is encouraging youth growth by supporting pro-Luskashenko youth movements or merely taking measures to form “constraining to cooptation” as a means of dismantling these movements altogether (Gershman and Allen 2006, 36).
While the third chapter is committed to examining the pro-democratic youth movements in Belarus in the context of cooptation and cooperation, this part of the paper will also provide more details on the relative position of the political history and developments in Belarus. Just as there is confusion about the cooptation and cooperation dynamics of the pro-democracy youth groups, there is confusion surrounding the anti-democratic youth movements.

**Background: Belarus’ Political Structure**

In order to understand the youth movement in Belarus, the country’s political history and development should be explored in greater detail first. Belarus’ history is mired in a long and protracted period of foreign domination. This foreign domination can be traced back to 1772 during the partition of Poland when Belarus started a long period of assimilation into Russian and then Soviet influence. During the 19th century, Belarus made its first attempt to distinguish its national identity from the Russian Empire. In 1918 during the First World War and in the days that followed, Belarus established a short lived period of democracy, establishing itself as the Belarusian Democratic Republic. Within a year, the Soviet Red Army invaded the new democracy and established in its place the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. By 1922, Belarus became one of the four founding fathers of the Soviet republics (Zaprudnik 1993, 45-74).

Belarus’ Communist Party gained a reputation as one of the Soviet Union’s most conservative parties, a trait that rebounded to the citizens of Belarus. In a

Belarusian elections to the Belarusian SSR’s Soviet were conducted in March 1990, at which time the communist power headed by Stanislau Shushkevich was returned to office. Shushkevich was in favour of free market reformation and distinguishing Belarus from Russia. As a result, he endorsed the treaty dismantling the Soviet Union and the treaty that formed the Commonwealth of Independent States together with the Ukraine and Russia in December 1991. Shushkevich’s plans to widen the gap between Belarus and Moscow resulted in his removal from office in January 1994.

In March 1994, Belarus adopted its first post-Soviet constitution which established a bicameral Parliament, Constitutional Court and a Presidency. In July 1994, presidential elections ended with the election of Aleksander Lukashenko whose campaign promises included plans to fight to corruption and economic alignment with Russia. Amid national protest, a referendum granting Lukashenko increased power and extending his term to 2001 was passed in November 1996. International observers and Belarus’ opposition factions referred to the referendum as palpably flawed and illegal (Hill 2004, 1-16).

The European parliament in particular voiced concerns that Lukashenko had employed entirely illegitimate mechanisms solely for the purpose of gaining
absolute power. The Prime Minister, the chairman of the electorate commission and other state officials registered they disenfranchisement with Lukashenko’s referendum by resigning their respective posts. Lukashenko responded by arresting, intimidating or fining a number of opposition members. From the perspective of the international community and Belarus’ internal opposition, Lukashenko’s term in office officially and legitimately ended on July 21, 1999 (Hill 2004, 1-16).

By virtue of the referendum, Lukashenko officially dissolved the Supreme Soviet and formed a new, smaller parliament consisting of himself and his loyal deputies. Each of the new members is elected for a four year term. The president also appoints the Supreme Court judiciary, thereby compromising the separation of powers.

Elections held in September 2001 resulted in Lukashenko’s return to power despite opposition candidates Vladimir Goncharik and Segei Gaidukevich’s strong show of opposition. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) called the election process flawed and charged that it “failed to meet international standards.” Russia, made a public spectacle of congratulating Lukashenko, and Russian President Vladimir Putin personally offered his congratulations and support. Another referendum was passed in 2004, abrogating the term fixed for presidential office and thereby allowing Lukashenko to run for office again in 2006 (Parker 2007, 177).
In 2005, Lukashenko announced and confirmed his bid for re-election the following year with the result that unprecedented opposition factions campaigned for a candidate (Collin 2005). On October 16, 2005, political organizations Zubr and Third Way Belarus got behind all opposition parties encouraging them to lend their support to a single candidate running opposite to Lukashenko in the upcoming 2006 elections. Ultimately, Alaksandar Milinkievic was selected to oppose Lukashenko. Lukashenko responded in a manner true to his reputation and warned that those engaged in opposition tactics would end up having their necks wrung “as one might a duck” (Telegraph). Despite an official commitment to temper protests and unrest, an unprecedented crowd of protesters rallied in the wake of the 2006 election, and protests and demonstrations continued daily in Minsk. Kamanau described the election night protest “the gathering was the biggest the opposition had mustered in years, reaching at least 10,000 before it started thinning out” (Karmanau, 2006).

Predictably, Lukashenko was returned to office by a large majority. The international response to the election process was likewise predictable. The US Department of State states Lukashenko’s action as follows:

Permitted State authority to be used in a manner which did not allow citizens to freely and fairly express their will at the ballot box…a pattern of intimidation and the suppression of independent voices…was evident throughout the campaign. (Kramer, 2006)
Likewise the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe noted that the Belarus election “failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections” (Peoples Daily, 2006).

Despite these observations from the US and the UN, observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States took a different view, maintaining that “the election complied with Belarus' election law and voter turnout was high. CIS observers view the Belarusian presidential vote as open and transparent” (Peoples Daily, 2006).

Likewise, representatives from the Russian Federation were of a vastly similar opinion stating that, “there is every reason to believe that the election has been held in conformity with the universally-recognized standards, and its legitimacy is beyond any doubt” (Peoples Daily, 2006).

Parliamentary elections followed in 2008 with vastly similar results. Lukashenko was returned to office amidst opposition, internal protests and international acrimony and suspicion. Even so, no opposition candidates were successful at the polls, leaving Lukashenko and his loyal deputies to fill all 110 parliamentary seats (BBC 2008). Once again, the international community commented on the lack of authenticity of the elections and the Commonwealth of Independent States stood by them (National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus, 2008).

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The Pro-Lukashenko Youth Movement

In the background of the division between the youth movement and the senior movements, there is a less subtle attempt at cooptation on the part of the Belarus regime with respect to the youth in Belarus (Maksymiuk, 2008). The approach taken is reminiscent of pre-Soviet manipulation of the youth in Poland where the government courted the youth, luring them away from politics with vodka, sex and rock and roll (Maksymiuk, 2008). Although Belarusian officials have not taken this particular approach, they have used a comparable method of enticement away from the political arena.

For instance, youth movement members who engage in election-monitoring exercises are typically arrested, charged and prosecuted under the Criminal Code for criminal conduct “relating to terrorism” (Maksymiuk, 2008). On the other hand, young persons aligning themselves with the “state-sponsored” Belarusian National Youth Union receive accolades during their stay at universities and during their vocation following university (Maksymiuk, 2008). The young persons were described as follows:

. . . major Belarusian rock musicians, who were previously banned from appearing on radio and television, are unexpectedly invited to the presidential offices and offered clemency in exchange for their refusal to perform at opposition events. (Maksymiuk, 2008)

The Belarusian approach to youth is unambiguously an attempt at cooptation and this alone compromises the authenticity of their cooperation with the current government. To this end, the results of a survey conducted in Belarus by the
Vilnius-registered Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies in March 2008 (Maksymiuk, 2008). Not that the results were rigged, but there is some question about the respondents honesty considering the government’s cooptation methods prevalent among the youth movements and by extension the general population.

The results of the survey revealed that 64 percent of the Belarusian respondents feel that improving the Belarusian economy takes precedence over maintaining an independent state. Only 24 percent of the respondents felt that independence was more important than improving the national economy. More interesting perhaps was the fact that 71 percent of the respondents aged 18-29 agreed that economic improvement was more important than independence compared to 22 percent who thought otherwise (Maksymiuk, 2008).

Maksymiuk explains the significance of these survey results as follows:

The Belarusian opposition continually asserts that Lukashenko's policies will lead to the economic -- and, consequently, political -- annexation of Belarus by Russia, but the NISEPI results suggest that the overwhelming majority of Belarusians are not worried about this possibility. What is more, the youngest generations -- more socially mobile and better educated than the others -- seem to be even less concerned about the country’s independence than their older compatriots. (Maksymiuk, 2008)

These results, particularly among the youth, tend to suggest that cooptation is effective in that the Lukashenko approach has succeeded in creating and cultivating a primarily pragmatic youth who “care more about their stomachs than national pride” (Maksymiuk, 2008). On the other hand, the survey may simply
reflect genuine cooperation with Lukashenko in that the youth by and large do not agree with the opposition’s assertion that the threat to independence is an issue for them personally nor for the country as a whole. The main focus is economics, a primary concern in most of the world today regardless of a country’s political system. In the final analysis, whether or not the youth are co-opted or simply cooperating with the Belarusian regime, the results of the survey demonstrate that the vast majority of youth in Belarus are not behind the opposition.

The line between cooptation and cooperation is intrinsically blurred with regard to Lukashenko’s courting of the youth in Belarus. Maksymiuk (2008) notes that Lukashenko:

... has something essential and desirable to offer to the younger generations in exchange for the measure of political conformism he expects from them. The regime's major "gifts" to youths are free education, freedom of movement (including foreign travel), and increasingly attractive prospects for pursuing professional careers within the country, in an economy that slowly but inevitably is undergoing "authoritarian" modernization. (Maksymiuk, 2008)

The Belarusian Republican Youth Union is the largest youth movement in Belarus and is sponsored by the Belarusian regime. The group was formed in 2002 and represents the amalgamation of other youth groups on Belarus and succeeds the Leninist Communist Youth League formerly of the Byelorussian Republic. The movement’s goals and objectives are the promotion of patriotism and the fostering of moral values among Belarus’ youth (Belarusian Republican Youth Union).
The Belarusian Republican Youth Union is sponsored and funded by the Belarusian government primarily via the auspices of the Ministry of Education and the president’s administration (The Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus). In a 2003 address to the nation, President Lukashenko emphasised the significance of the Belarusian Republican Youth Movement in Belarus stating as follows:

The youth — our major pillar — is at the heart of our plans and targets. We have hardly used its powerful potential yet. We often "brush aside" youth's initiatives. Many managers avoid direct contact with the youth, they are afraid of acute questions. They are incapable of involving young people into useful public activities. We should work in this direction. It will help avoid a number of negative phenomena in the youth environment. This situation calls for a greater role of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. It should demonstrate its abilities as an organizer, a leader of the national youth movement. (The Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus)

The Belarusian Republican Youth Union has spread its reach throughout Belarus. Headquartered in Minsk, the organization maintains regional offices in Brest, Vitebsk, Homirl, Grondo and Mogilev and an estimated 6,803 other branches in Belarus (Dube, 2001). Unlike the NGOs and the Assembly, the Belarusian Republican Youth Union is centralized rather than democratic with the Central Committee at the reigns with the latter’s first secretary maintaining ultimate control (BRSM). In the chain of command, the second secretariat to the Central Committee and the Chairman of the Central Investigation Committee form the leadership of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BSRM). Although the
precise amount of funding received by the Belarusian Republican Youth Union is unknown, the Belarusian government provides most of its funding (The Official Internet Portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus).

To become a member of the organization, the applicant is required to be between the ages of 14 and 31 with members between 14 and 16 required to obtain parental or guardian permission before membership can be considered (BSRM). In 2003, membership stood at 120,000 (BSRM). By virtue of self-funding, membership fees are paid one time only and are 1,400 Rubles which is the equivalent of .65 cents. Fees are modified however to correspond with the member’s income, and orphaned and disabled children are exempted altogether (BSRM).

The U.S. State Department reports that information coming out of Belarus indicates that the government employs cooptation as a means of increasing membership. These claims allege that the government either uses coercion or the lure of promises to obtain membership to the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. Cooptation measures include promises of discount at designated businesses, provision of better dormitories and job assistance following graduation after completing college (U.S. Department of State, 2007). The U.S. Department of State reports that they have received credible reports the following:

. . . military conscripts were ordered to join the BRYU, and university students reported that proof of BRYU membership was often needed to register for popular courses or acquire a dormitory room. (US Department of State, 2007)
Human Rights Watch Group has been vastly similar in its condemnation of the seemingly co-opted youth group. In a 1999 report, Human Rights Watch Group reported of the youth movement the following:

. . . although [the BPSM are] ostensibly politically neutral, the centralization of appointments of rectors and the increasingly institutionalized position occupied by the BPSM in student life have created a campus environment conducive to propagation of political orthodoxy and the squelching of independent views rather than one conducive to the open-ended inquiry and expression essential to academic excellence. (Human Rights Watch, 1999)

Likewise, the United Nations has observed that the Belarusian government has either by direct or indirect means created NGOs for the specific purpose of advancing its own agenda. In a 2003 report, the UN maintained that the Belarusian Republican Youth Union is at risk of being used by Lukashenko as an instrument for government recruits.
CHAPTER THREE

COOPERATION OR CO-OPTATION, AND PRO-DEMOCRATIC YOUTH MOVEMENT IN BELARUS

According to the UN’s 2003 report, aside from the Belarusian Youth Republican Union, other youth movements are struggling to obtain funding and are increasingly confronting issues with school expulsions with the result that they are forced to subscribe to the Belarusian Youth Republican Union (United Nations 2003, 135).

Despite the relatively smaller faction of democratic youth movements in Belarus, they too are equally committed to their respective causes for democratic liberties. Considering the blurred line between cooptation and cooperation with respect to the pro-communism youth attitudes, it is possible that the pro-democratic youth movement is likewise caught in the cross-wires of cooptation and cooperation. In order to investigate the possibility of cooptation over cooperation, it is necessary to examine the nature of donations and funds accorded these organizations. This invariably means looking at the structure and relations of the pro-democratic youth movements in Belarus and their affiliations with other democratic institutions both at home and abroad.

The Main Democratic Movements Within Belarus

The Main democratic movements in Belarus are as follows:

- Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs.
- Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions.
Belarusian Helsinki Committee.
Belarusian Organization of Working Women.
Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) Youth.
Charter 97.
Movement For Freedom.
National Strike Committee of Entrepreneurs.
Partnership NGO
Perspektiva Kiosk Watchdog NGO.
Political Council of Democratic Forces
United Civil Party (AHP)
Women’s Independent Democratic Movement.
Young Belarus
Youth Front.
Zubr Youth Group. (Exxun, 2009)

Washington Post journalist Philip Kennicott (2005) offers some valuable insight into the struggles these democratic movements/organizations are confronting in attempting to organize democratic change in Belarus. Stifled by an autocratic government and trapped within a pro-Soviet regime, these movements are denied the basic tools of the information age. The result is they are unable to get their respective messages out there in a way consistent with modern technology. They
have resorted to the use of printed communications and even those tools are
confiscated by the government in frequent raids (Kennicott 2005, A14).

Kennicott (2005) writes the following:

The authoritarian president has shut down so much of civic life that
the opposition has been forced to use tools that are primitive in
comparison with those of democratic movements elsewhere. Cell
phones, satellite television, the Internet and instant messaging – all of
which played a role in popular uprisings in Ukraine, Lebanon and
Georgia – are too closely monitored by the government to be reliable,
opposition figures said. (Kennicott 2005, A14)

Confined to the use of printing press tools as the primary means of mass
communication, even those printing presses are illegal unless a licence is obtained
from the Ministry of Information and Press (Kennicott 2005, A14). The difficulty
with constraints on communication tools for the democratic movement was
manifested by its quest to obtain the requisite 150,000 signatures to nominate an
opposition candidate in the 2006 elections (Council for a Community of
Democracies, 2009).

The state of official suppression with respect to the democratic movements
in Belarus obviates the need for outside support. Rasa Jukneviciene, a Homeland
Union of the Lithuanian conservative party MP, told the Baltic Times at an
international seminar on Belarus that the primary question was “whether the
European Union needs an independent and democratic Belarus” (The Baltic Times,
2005). Jukneviciene maintained that the European Union’s current donations of
138,000 Euros was insufficient for “Belarus’ democratization” (The Baltic Times, 2005).

In determining when, how much and whether to fund these democratic movements, two important issues arise. The question for the western powers, such as the EU and the U.S., is whether or not these democratic factions can actually effect change and whether or not funding and support will be used for the intended purpose (Meckel 2006, 30). In the final analysis, the question of funding raises complex issues of the tensions between cooptation and cooperation.

On the one hand, outside assistance appears to be emanating from a particularly selfish goal: a goal aimed at ousting the current authoritarian leadership which can only be achieved through internal movements (cooptation). On the other hand, outside help may just as likely have an entirely unselfish goal and that is to help Belarus’ internal democratic movements obtain freedom and respect for human rights in the tradition of Western democracies. In order to understand these tensions, the internal mechanisms of Belarus’ democratic movements require closer examination.

**Separate Internal Committee**

The main democratic movements in Belarus function under its own internal governance but in tandem with other factions both inside and outside of Belarus. This is primarily accomplished through the auspices of the Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs. This part of the paper will look at some of the major youth
parties’ internal management committees and its connections both internally and externally. This is important for understanding their effectiveness and how each of these parties influences whether or not funding is motivated by donors who are fuelled by cooptation or cooperation. While this paper focuses on the Belarusian youth movement, it is necessary to first examine the Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs since youth movements also function within this group.

The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs

The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs is an association of non-governmental organizations “and public initiatives” within Belarus formed for the purpose of promoting joint interests as well as defending mutual rights and democratic values. The underlying goal is to bring these ideals within the political structure of an independent Belarus. The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs is comprised of 220 NGOs and affiliated public, and was formed in 1997. Cumulatively, the Assembly promotes and advocates the following interests:

- Education
- Culture
- Social Issues
- Human Rights defence
- Youth Activities
- Publishing Initiatives
- Local History
The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs is made up of “voluntary membership and independence of member organisations” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009). The heads of each of the individual organizations head the committee of the Assembly, and function on a policy that does not interfere with the “inner policy” of its “member organizations” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009). The organization operates on a purely democratic platform regarding each organization with equal participation based on a concept of “solidarity and co-operation” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009).

The following stated objectives speak to the inner democratic mechanisms of the Assembly:

- Unification of members within the organization along the lines of cooperation.
• To advocate for common interests and to “defend rights of Belarusian NGOs.” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009)

• To present and develop a “positive image of organizations.” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009)

• To promote freedom of information between the organizations.

• To ensure that organizations are apprised of the “latest events concerning the third sector.” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009)

• To foster and cultivate “cooperation between Belarusian and foreign NGOs.” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009)

• Protection of the rights of “member-organizations.” (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009)

• To provide legal aide to organizations.

• Consultation with “member-organizations” on a “variety of issues. (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009)

Solidarity, a key theme of the Assembly, is characteristic of the self-government platform of democracy. Although the Assembly was formed in 1997, it commenced vigorous action following the forced closure of several dozen NGOs across Belarus by the Government in the Spring of 2003 (The Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, 2009). It was at this time that the Assembly placed a specific emphasis on solidarity.

Recent developments indicate that the Assembly, although unified within the organization, is still disregarded by the Belarusian regime. A report released by the Assembly earlier this month notes that despite efforts by Chairman Asyarhei Matskeich of the Working Group within the Assembly and Ales Byaltytski, council
head of Nasha Viasna human rights NGO, they failed to secure the approval of the Ministry of Justice for registration of the Assembly (Ministry of Justice Didn’t Register Assembly of NGOs). The letter of denial signed by Minister of Justice Alyaksandr Simanau was received April 10, 2009 (Ministry of Justice Didn’t Register Assembly of NGOs).

Youth Movements in Belarus

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports that the youth of Belarus are the driving force behind democratic change in that country (Youth Driving Democratic Change in Belarus). Siarhel Salash, chairman of youth NGO Skryzhavanne, and Olga Stuzhinskaya, coordinator of youth movement We Remember, speaking in Washington, maintained that the youth in Belarus are actively working to bring about change within the Belarusian society with a view to establishing a democratic government (Youth Driving Democratic Change in Belarus).

Separate and apart from restraints of freedom of exchange of information and human rights in general, there are essentially three major obstacles to the success of youth movements in Belarus. Zudr, a major pro-democracy youth movement in Belarus, for instance, has endured a very difficult beginning in Belarus primarily because its membership did not fully appreciate Lukashenko’s popularity among the Belarusian electorate. A second obstacle arose out of efforts on the part of the political elite who went so far as to fund and co-opt significant
factions of the Belarusian youth by virtue of state sponsored youth groups and movement (Kennan Institute, 2009).

Political analyst Jan Maksymiuk (2008) explains that the pro-democratic Belarusian Youth primarily function in the shadows of the senior opposition. To start with, many opposition candidates and party members were prominent political, social or cultural members of Belarus prior to Lukashenko’s rise to power in 1994 (Maksymiuk, 2008). A short list was devised by Maksymiuk and is summarized as follows:

- Stanislau Shushkevich was signatory to the treaty dismantling the Soviet Union and was previously the chairman of Belarus’ Supreme Soviet.
- Lyavon Barshcheuski, a member of the Belarusian Popular Front, was previously a people’s deputy in 1991-1995.
- Alyaksandr Kazulin, a social democrat was previously a depute education minister under Prime Minister Vyachasilau Kebich’s regime.
- Alyaksandr Milinkevich, was previously engaged as a provincial professor at universities in Belarus as well as deputy head of Hrodna’s city administration.

Despite youth engagement, these opposition politicians appear to be losing their influence over the populace. Previously, they were able to gather up to 50,000 people to form a protest against the current regime, but in recent years, it has
become a mammoth task to gather more than 2000 protesters (Maksymiuk, 2008).

Maksymiuk explains the following:

Without a doubt, an objective generation gap between the veteran leaders of the opposition and younger Belarusians is responsible to a significant degree for the dramatically weakened public appeal of opposition parties in Belarus. (Maksymiuk, 2008)

Maksymiuk, (2008) backtracks a little and explains that some of the blame for the disconnect between the youth movement and the senior opposition leaders and their seemingly collective ineffectiveness in Belarus can be placed on the opposition’s failure to devise an effective political strategy and the regime’s consistent and successful attempts at addressing the “essential needs and expectations of the younger generation” (Maksymiuk, 2008).

Perhaps more significantly is the fact that the senior opposition party members and NGOs primarily control the funding both internally and from international sources. While the sponsors’ funds are used on elections, campaigns and referendums, the youth movement’s relative low profile widens the gap between senior opposition members and joint goals of achieving democracy for Belarus. As Maksymiuk explains the following:

It is unsurprising that during the above-mentioned presidential campaigns the role of younger opposition activists was confined to collecting signatures, distributing campaign materials, and, primarily, participating in street protests. Their older colleagues made decisions about the allocation of campaign resources and represented the Belarusian opposition abroad. There was hardly any space for young oppositionists to develop or test their own political ambitions. (Maksymiuk, 2008)
Lukashenko has employed a measure of negative cooptation with respect to the democratic youth movements by systematically arresting demonstrators, and severing their relationships with the international community. In 2007, there were a series of arrests of youth activists for belonging to an illegal organization (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity). These groups are finding it increasingly difficult to gain access to funding with the introduction of Decree No. 8 “On Certain Measures of Regulation of the Procedure of Receipt and Use of the Foreign Charitable Aid” (International League for Human Rights, 2001). Decree No. 8 lists a number of group activities that are eligible for foreign aid. Those activities do not include human rights, ecological, youth and educational activities which precludes each of the pro-democracy NGOs and pro-democratic youth movements” (International League for Human Rights, 2001).

Lukashenko, ever mindful of the youth influence in the revolution in Ukraine has specifically targeted the youth in Belarus in his determination to avoid a Ukraine like revolution in Belarus. Young Belarusians are arrested almost automatically at demonstrations and often sentenced to labor and exiled to remote locations. In Belarusian universities, pro-democratic youth members are systematically facing expulsion. Meanwhile students are being bribed or coerced into joining the Belarusian Republican Youth Union (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).
Separate and apart from the co-opting of youth membership away from politics, the cutting off of funds from outside sources has become particularly problematic for the youth movement and opposition organizations in general. In order to be effective, the youth movement needs support and financial resources. Where that money comes from also helps to establish or breakdown the group’s legitimacy. For instance, lessons learned from Georgia and Ukraine indicates that foreign funding compromises the youth group’s domestic acceptance. Western newspapers tend to question whether or not the movement is a result of Western cooptation and genuinely a national movement. On the other hand, domestic views tend to refer to the movements as “a collection of Western lackeys” (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).

Be that as it may, the various youth movements in Belarus are receiving funding from various factions. Yury Karetnikau, leader of the Right Alliance, reports that his organization obtains at least 90 percent of its funding from its members with the remaining 10 percent originating from domestic businesses. Karetnikau maintains the following:

We make it a condition for our members, if you feel that you are a friend of the organization, then you pay sladki, donations. That is 3,000 rubles (about 1 euro) a month, but there are people who give more, about 5-10,000 rubles. (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005)

Zubr’s leader Jauhen Afinagel was less forthcoming, claiming only that most of his organization’s funds come “from our friends, in Belarus and outside Belarus” (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005). However, this comment leaves open the
question as to how much funding comes from inside Belarus and how much originates from outside (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).

Malady Front’s leader reports the following:

For five years we have been cooperating closely with the Swedish Social Democrats. Through Ukraine, we have big plans for cooperation with the Soros Foundation which is interested in the Enough! Campaign; the foundation has helped bring together many youth organizations, covering the whole of Belarus. (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005)

The National Endowment for Democracy, a U.S. organization has made the most significant donations to the youth movements in Belarus (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005). Other active donors are a “Polish organization” and the East European Democratic Centre (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).

Donations have also been coming from the U.S. government but the nature of those donations is not altogether clear. Marina Shubina from the US Embassy in Minsk only said the following:

. . . the US government supports a broad range of youth groups and believes that the development of democratic values among youth is a priority of US government assistance (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005)

Former and then U.S. Secretary Condoleezza Rice had a conference with representatives from Zubr in Lithuania in April 2005. This youth movement has been known to be the recipients of donations from the U.S. State Department (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).
Although the European Commission has declined to fund Belarusian political activities, it has advanced funds to NGOs via the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and the Decentralized Cooperation Program (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005). A Zubr representative maintained however, that the source of funding is not the most important factor. The Zubr official went on to say the following:

The United States and the EU will support democratic changes, but their influence is not the main thing. Everything will depend on our people, and not on external factors. (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005)

Evidence of cooptation from the U.S. might explain why external funding has not been effective with respect to the youth movement in Belarus. The U.S. donors typically provide the funds with specific instructions as to its use. For instance in 2001, the U.S. government proposed funding on condition that the funds be used for support of the opposition’s campaign and mirroring the Serbian street demonstrations in 2000. Models of these demonstrations had been successful in Ukraine, Georgian and Kyrgyzstan (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005). Even so, the protests did not succeed in Belarus and Lukashenko was triumphant at the polls in 2001 (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).

Having followed the U.S. mandate for use of the funds and failed the consequences for the youth movement and NGOs in general were detrimental. Lukashenko has taken a particularly hard line with respect to political protests and has become “increasing intrusive and menacing” (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski,
Lukashenko responded to the protests by “strengthening the security forces, effectively elevated the position of the secret police”, by providing them with increased powers of “defence forces and border guards”, wider “legal powers of the KGB” permitting secret service officials to “enter homes at will,” as well as to wire tap telephones “more extensively” and the implementation of new statutory provisions which permit the police to shoot during times of peace upon executive orders (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).

Ironically, Lukashenko’s response to outside influence has only increased the risk of outside attention focusing more keenly on Belarus. Yury Karetnikau of the Right Alliance notes the following:

In 2001, when Lukashenko won, there were those horrible terrorist attacks in America and during the last referendum (in 2004) there was the tragedy in Beslan. The Major powers were then distracted from Belarusian events. But now I can see the attention from the West, so they should do what they promised to do about Belarus (regarding democratization). (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005)

The greatest example of cooperation comes from the relationship between the youth movements in Belarus and the Ukraine. Ukraine’s activists have been conducting seminars and training exercises for the activists in Belarus. Belarus’s youth movement Malady Front has perhaps the closest relationship with Ukraine activist. Malady Front’s members have travelled to the Ukraine frequently and while doing so have appeared in the media several times. Malady Front members have also met with the Ukraine’s political elites, government representatives,
members of Parliament and the foreign minister. Moreover, Malady Front is receiving funds from private entities in Ukraine. When Malady Front members were expelled from Belarusian universities, Ukraine’s foreign minister admitted those expelled members to Kyiv National University (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).

Be that as it may, Lukashenko responded in late August 2005. Two activists from Kmara, a Georgian youth movement, were arrested in Belarus after making contact with Belarusian youth movements. Ultimately the result was that Georgians may not enter Belarus without first having to obtain a visa. Prior to the arrest of the Kmara activists, five members of the Ukraine’s youth movements had been arrested in Minsk for allegedly participating in an illegal anti-government demonstration in Belarus (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005).

Although memberships within the pro-democratic movements are increasing within Belarus, it is not nearly as large as the membership of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. The membership is not emanating from the “opposition’s traditional recruitment grounds, schools and universities” (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005). Students run the risk of “heavy cost for joining the opposition” (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005). Iryna Vidanava of youth movement Stedenskaya explains the following:

Belarusian youth live in a society in which schools and universities are closed at whim by the administration, and students arbitrarily expelled. (Schipari-Aduriz and Kudrytski, 2005)
A common thread runs throughout both the state-sponsored and the foreign-sponsored youth movements within Belarus. Each faction relies on external support for their existence. While the state-sponsored youth movement is more obviously a creation of cooptation, it is less obvious with respect to the foreign sponsored youth movements. While there is a case to be made for cooptation with respect to U.S. involvement, it is not as obvious as the case of the Belarusian involvement with the state sponsored youth organization. What makes it particularly difficult to assess the U.S. involvement is its outside presence.

There is little doubt however, that Ukrainian and Georgian aid is predicated on cooperation as these groups are whom the Belarus youth movement have modelled their agenda. Assistance from these youth groups has been along the lines of direct and obvious cooperation to the extent of active participation in the Belarusian youth movement’s activities. Be that as it may, there is a case to be made for the concept that when funds change hands the recipients often feel obliged to give something in return.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

“He Who Pays the Piper Calls the Tune?”

“He who pays the piper calls the tune” is a phrase used to promote the ideology that a person who pays for a service is entitled to demand his the money’s worth. When money and politics are combined, it represents a lethal concoction with the risks of those having money interests exercising undue influence over the recipient. This alone has the potential to compromise the idea of democracy, the underlying goal of the pro-democracy youth movements in Belarus.

There is a residual difficulty with funding political organizations in general. There is always the perception that the donor can influence the political organization’s policies. There is always the suspicion that a member of the organization can be persuaded to change his or her views to correspond with the donor’s views. The absence of checks and balances make this possibility a real probability (Jones 1999, 300).

Money is said to purchase a right to speak louder than others in terms of donations to organized groups. In every day politics, it provides the donor with the purchase of politics: the larger the donation, the larger the influence. The lack of regulation gives way to secrecy and leaves off the possibility of accountability and transparency, hallmarks of the concept of democracy.
In the context of Belarusian youth movements, the chances for secrecy and the absence of accountability are greater. This is so particularly because of Decree No. 8 which excludes these groups as legitimate recipients of foreign aid, and thus from disclosing received donations from the outside. In order to ensure that their donors keep them secret, there is an even greater incentive to adhere to their donor’s wishes. Many Belarusian youth have expressed the opinion that change cannot come by merely observing elections and taking to the streets in protest. However, their approach to change has been characterized by just those strategies. This leaves one with the impression that these youth movements have been subjected to co-optation rather than cooperation from their U.S. donors, at least.

Belcher and Abbas explain the following:

There are two distinct roles for aid at the political level. One may be seen in terms of expected gain in diplomatic influence or leverage by the donor over the recipient. In this case the aid-giver is attempting to impose its notion of desirable political behaviour for the recipient in the latter’s domestic and international affairs. (Belcher and Abbas 2005, 130)

For the purpose of this discussion, the second aspect which relates to influencing economic policies is not relevant. In both cases of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union and the pro-democracy youth movements, cooptation by virtue of donations is obvious in the sense described by Belcher and Abbas. Each of the donors have attempted to “impose” their respective notions of “desirable political behaviour” on the recipient.
The state sponsors of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union are determined to lure the youth away from democratic movements and to gain their support for the current regime. In this sense, the cooptation is tantamount to bribery, as this is often accompanied by the knowledge that the youth may either join the state-sponsored group or refuse, with dire consequences. The pro-democracy youth groups have been directed by the U.S. as to what is “desirable political behaviour” in the sense that they were provided funds to effectuate a specific approach to the U.S.’s own agenda to oust the Belarusian president from office.

The U.S.’ approach is particularly problematic because there is an obvious divide between the U.S. officials and the Belarusian youth and populace in general. Belarusians in general are not threatened by Communism and do not view it the way that the Americans do. Moreover, in a country that is struggling economically, Belarusians have placed economic priorities over politics.

In both the case of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union and the pro-democracy youth movements, the influence of their Belarusian and U.S. donors is plagued by inequality and imbalance. The youth are clearly the weaker parties, almost entirely at the mercy of their stronger leaders/donors. The years of taking instructions from such a strong world leader also has the potential to create dependency and complacency when there is a clash in priorities. Inevitably, the younger recipient will give way to the stronger, more independent, and influential
Since this can happen to even the most seasoned politician who must rely on funding to seek office, it is almost certain to happen to the younger, less experienced politician.

Clarke (1993) identifies the main ways that donors and governments may impact non-government organisations:

- Quality and nature of the organization’s governance
- The organization’s legal regime
- Imposition of taxes (when the government aids the group)
- Collaboration with the NGO
- Policy impact
- Coordination
- Contracts

Another factor that contributes to cooptation is competition among the various non-profit organizations, under which pro-democracy movements such as the youth movements fall. In Belarus, as of the year 2005, there were 2,300 registered public non-profit organizations alone. Twenty-five percent of those organizations are purportedly aimed at “social protection and rehabilitation” (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 1). When one factors in the number of youth movements and NGOs in Belarus that were and continued to be denied registration this percentage rises significantly.
A vast majority of the activities conducted by organizations in Belarus depends on “international donors and foreign partners” (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 2). The result is that the “…donor-recipient relationship overshadows most of the interaction between NGOs and their constituents, including needs analysis, continuous communication and accountability” (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 1).

Perceptions are that competition to obtain foreign funding leads to a dependency syndrome where the recipient’s commitment is to financial accountability to donors rather than a sense of social/civil responsibility. The focus is therefore on pandering to the political and social designs of various donors so as to justify receipt of funding in a non-profit market where the competition is stiff. The social and civil needs of Belarus are therefore largely assessed by outsiders who have no real substantial knowledge of the internal turmoil.

Foreign influence becomes a major factor since locally it is quite difficult to raise funds on account of economic, political and legal elements. The competition among all these humanitarian and political movements within Belarus becomes fierce and a great measure of dependency necessarily follows. The political movements in particular are dependent on foreign donors not only for funds, but for information sharing and communication. With this kind of dependency, it is difficult to operate on the basis of self-selected policies. In the end, the foreign donor directs the mode of change and the methods employed for pursuing it.
Another problem has infected the independence of Belarusian political and social movements as a result of their growing dependence on foreign donations. Ramasheuskaya observes that international donors have increasingly:

- Started to develop projects that set specific standards of effectiveness and transparency and also introduce ethical and operational norms for assistance. These measures are expected to encourage greater accountability among international organizations toward their beneficiaries. (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 3-4)

In cases where organizations rely heavily on foreign aid, their legitimacy and priorities become compromises. The primary difficulty for Belarusian political and civil movements, particularly the youth movements, is that these movements have not really had a chance to formulate and effect their “own priorities, gain legitimacy and build trust” (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 4). In the end, their policies and goals become those of the foreign donor for whose funds they are required to compete.

A shift in policy is also perpetuated by a need to represent an ongoing crisis both at home and abroad as a means of obtaining foreign funding. As Ramasheuskaya, (2005) explains, the need to attend to “crisis” mode takes the focus off “setting realistic goals and carefully planning activities” (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 4). The result is that the local movements are more concerned with “sustaining the feeling of permanent crisis among both their international partners and their domestic beneficiaries” (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 4). At the end of the day, the main focus is on receiving foreign funding because of the following:
Past experience shows that terminating relatively stable foreign funding often leads to a spontaneous struggle for survival, a shift in mission and the implementation of ideologically unconnected projects. (Ramasheuskaya 2005, 4)

The consequences of Decree No. 8 were detrimental to Belarusian pro-democratic movements. The Decree heightened the urgency among local movements to compete for foreign aid, since these donations are now monitored and subject to scrutiny and taxation. It also increases the level of dependency on the foreign donors who must necessarily find secret means for sending donations to Belarusian political movements (Lipskaya, 2002).

Prior to the implementation of Decree No. 8, there were no real differences between the origins of financial aid in the sense that it did not make a difference if the funds originated at home or abroad. Following the implementation of Decree No. 8, significant problems for local political movements were immediately obvious. As Lipskaya (2002) explains the following:

After the Decree came into force, the recipients of free foreign aid were required to register the aid, apply for tax exemption, keep this money in a separate bank account, and, if tax exemption was not granted, pay profit tax on the aid (in most cases, at a reduced rate of 15%). This is not to mention the need to convince the authorities that the aid received would be spent exclusively on statutory goals of a high-minded nature and to negotiate with bank and tax office employees. (Lipskaya 2002)

The difficulty for the pro-democracy youth movements in Belarus are obvious. Not only are they excluded from the criteria for receiving foreign aid, those funds, if they are approved, are subject to accountability to the government,
an anti-democratic regime. The end result is a cut-back on the foreign aid coming into Belarus, increasing the competition among the political movements for access to foreign aid. The fact is demand does not correspond with supply.

The obstacles to receipt of foreign aid are obviated by the restraints perpetuated by Decree No. 8 which can be summarised as follows:

- Mandatory registration of foreign aid with the Department of Humanitarian Activities which is situated in the President’s Office. To this end, registration is evidenced by certificate of registration so that utilizing these funds prior to receipt of a certificate of registration is illegal. The difficulties that NGOs that advocate for democracy have had in obtaining registration as a lawful organization indicates that they suffer even greater difficulty with obtaining registration for receipt of and use of foreign aid.

- Mandatory deposit of foreign funds in a separate and distinct bank account within five days of receipt. The bank account is required to be located at a Belarusian bank ensuring that the government is at liberty to scrutinize and tax the income.

- Tax and customs exemptions are entirely discretionary and granted on a case-by-case practice by the president himself. The youth movements which have been targeted by the president are at an increased risk of taxation even if they were permitted to receive foreign aid.

- Foreign aid can only be received in limited circumstances, which entirely excludes pro-democracy movements. The limited circumstances are scientific research, disaster relief, medical aid, environmental protection, preservation and protection of historical and cultural treasures, aid to the needy and any other activity or goal that the president in his discretion might deem worthy.

- Foreign aid is not permitted for goals that are designed to alter the constitutional order, oust the government, incite anti-government activities, and activities calculated to incite, religious, national or racial hatred, activities relating to elections, organized meetings, demonstrations and protests, strikes and seminars regarded as
acrimonious to the government. This list of forbidden activities excludes the entire breadth of pro-democracy youth movements and all democratic movements altogether. (Lipskaya, 2002)

Further obstacles to the receipt of foreign aid by Belarus’s youth movement are manifested by the range of penalties encapsulated under Decree N. 8. These penalties are summarised as follows:

- Utilizing foreign aid in the absence of a certificate for legitimate receipt, or using those funds for non-statutory purposes or prohibited purposes, failure to make the required deposit within the stipulated time for doing so can result in an attachment of earnings for a period ranging from 20 to 300 months.

- A one-time violation on the part of politically motivated movement can result in liquidation of the organization.

- Foreign organizations in Belarus who violate Decree No. 8 are also subject to having their activities suspended in Belarus. Moreover, foreign individuals can face automatic deportation. (Lipskaya, 2002)

The United Way Belarus conducted a survey in August 2002 to assess the consequences of Decree No. 8 on NGOs in Belarus. The survey was conducted by virtue of e-mail and the following difficulties were reported:

- Within the first 3 months of the Decree taking effect, NGOs’ conditions worsened so that many had to cease their activities altogether.

- NGOs experienced increased difficulties carrying out activities such as meetings and seminars, as these activities were excluded from the list of prohibited activities under Decree No. 8.

- The difficulties with having to tailor the organization’s goals so that they corresponded with the goals allowed under Decree No. 8. So in many ways Decree No. 8 secures cooperation from NGOs and youth movements by virtue of negative cooptation.
• Many NGOs responding to the survey reported feeling obligated to reject foreign aid having received registration and no concurrent tax and customs’ exemptions or benefits.

• Many NGOs also reported having to defer participation in projects.

• Others reported feeling forced to alter their projects so that they were not inconsistent with the goals set forth in Decree No. 8. (Lipskaya, 2002)

The obvious implication for youth movements, and NGOs in general, is a dual obligation to account to both foreign donors and the state, whose priorities and policies are at odds with one another. The overall consequences for NGOs in general are that they are increasingly deterred in their goals and are forced to carry out the goals of their government and the foreign donor who has lost confidence in the utility of sending donations. In general the consequences are the following:

• A decline in pro-democratic activities.

• Wasted time and effort.

• Increased expenses.

• Loss of confidence in the movement’s ability to advance the goals of society.

• Donors’ lack of faith in the movement’s ability to carry out its goals, particularly since foreign donations are regarded as taxable profits. (Lipskaya, 2002)

Decree No. 8 is obviously another means of marginalizing the anti-government movement in Belarus. It stands as just another instrument of repression of anti-government movements as well as the destruction of their structures. Decree No. 8 becomes even more detrimental to the cause of the youth
movement and all other anti-government movements when one considers that communications channels to the masses have been all but cut off. Cumulatively, these methods of state repression have weakened youth movements, making them more vulnerable to cooptation rather than cooperative parties with respect to foreign aid.

The result is that the youth movement has become insulated and its groups dependent on one another, only able to identify with those within their close-knit group. Moreover, so much time and effort is spent in trying to obtain foreign aid that effective communication with the masses is compromised. The end result is that far too much reliance on the inner circle and foreign aid has alienated these anti-government movements from the Belarusian general population.

Last October, the Belarus Task Force of the International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT), in a report titled A European Alternative for Belarus, evaluated the consequences for the domestic anti-government movement’s reliance on foreign aid (A European Alternative for Belarus 2008, 13-14). The report maintains that anti-government forces have placed so much reliance on foreign aid that they have become incapacitated against state oppression, and according to ICDT these groups did the following:

. . . relied so much on foreign aid that they have not developed their own strength to withstand the repression, but instead pinned their hopes too much on foreign help. (A European Alternative for Belarus 2008, 14)
Foreign assistance is absolutely necessary since it is virtually impossible to raise all of the necessary funds locally as a result of state repression and local economic conditions. However, foreign organizations and governments are powerless to stop state repression and marginalization. In the end, all that foreign aid has been able to accomplish is to facilitate the anti-government movements “into the marginal niche which Lukashenko has allowed for it” (A European Alternative for Belarus 2008, 14).

The various Belarusian pro-democracy youth movements are particularly vulnerable to cooptation and weak structures since they rely on foreign aid, senior opposition aid, and direction as well as membership fees for legitimacy. A good example of the youth movement’s dependence on leadership from senior opposition candidates and the inference of cooptation is manifested by the case of 18-year-old Vital Dabranach (Vidanava, 2009).

Dabranach claims to have become active in the youth democratic movement in 2000 when he and his young cousin started passing out “an opposition newspaper” (Vidanava, 2009). According to Dabranach, having passed out several thousand copies of the newspaper in a short period of time, he and his cousin were rewarded for their troubles by a Belarusian rock music CD and as a result they asked for more newspapers for distribution (Vidanava, 2009).

Following this experience, Dabranach maintains that he became involved with a number of major youth movements and finally formed his own organization,
Voka in 2004 (Vidanava, 2009). Voka, like most of the other youth movements, is primarily focused on political campaigns, which is ironic since he takes the position that change in Belarus requires focusing on young Belarusians “who are smart, educated, and in love with Belarus” (Vidanava, 2009).

What can be gleaned from Dabranach’s experience with youth movements is that cooptation has compromised his own vision and policies. Rather than promoting Belarusian culture and human rights for the young, Dabranach has aligned himself with politics, the focus of foreign donors whose primary goal is the dismantling of the current regime and of the internal opposition candidates who have essentially the same goal as the foreign donors. Although the rock music CD is a small reward for cooptation, it is cooptation all the same. The organization formed by Dabranach is cultural rather than political. The fact that he was drawn to the opposition’s political cause in the first place and persuaded to continue with the political cause speaks clearly to cooptation. Had it not been for the reward, it is doubtful that Dabranach would have passed out another opposition newspaper.

Clearly, cooptation is counter-productive because it attracts actors who are not entirely committed to the main cause. Dabranach is aligned with the political campaign, but his beliefs are far removed from the mere toppling of the current regime. He clearly wants to establish a sense of Belarusian cultural and national identity and he cannot do that alone. He is convinced that he needs the youth to accomplish this goal. Perhaps he is merely riding on the coattails of the opposition,
with the hope that should they succeed in taking political office, he might be permitted the freedom and the resources to advocate for Belarusian cultural and national identity through youth programs.

While Dabranach is not representative of all youth movement members, his position within the youth movement is demonstrative of the consequences of depending on outside influences in the form of donations from abroad and reliance on the strong leadership role of the opposition members. As noted previously, these opposition candidates were prominent members of Belarus’ political and social culture. These leaders in turn depend largely on foreign aid and by extension the youth movement is either directly or indirectly the benefactor. However, the youth do not call the shots and their goals are overshadowed by the goals of the opposition leaders and their collective foreign donors. The end result is inescapably cooptation rather than cooperation.

Youth engagement in political processes is particularly important for fostering and encouraging a code of responsible citizenship. By maintaining the right balance between youth enthusiasm and activism, it permits the young to make meaningful contributions to their respective communities and societies. By encouraging youth engagement in political processes is a means of acknowledging and identifying their strengths, abilities and interest and likewise encourages development of these elements. It enables the youth to strike a fair balance
between their rights and their responsibilities, all the while striving for community and society improvement.

The difficulty for the Belarusian youth is the lack of leadership and mentorship. The opposition leaders are themselves struggling for strategy and definition and are beholden to foreign donors who primarily plot the political cause for a culture they cannot and do not identify with. The Belarusian youth are bit players in the struggle for power. The state-sponsored youth movement has made it impossible for targeted youth to develop their own interests and strengths. Their only options are allegiance to the state with personal benefits or face unwarranted sanctions. It is not difficult to imagine what choice a youngster would make. Likewise, the foreign-funded youth NGOs are stifled by the interest and policies of foreign donors. In this regard, cooptation trumps cooperation with respect to Belarus’ youth movements.

There is evidence however, to the contrary. Even without funding there are any number of reports coming out of Belarus that indicate that many Belarusian youth have been willing to sacrifice life and limb for the sake of the pro-democratic movement in Belarus. In one report published on November 9, 2007, it was revealed that Zmitser Dashkevich, a member of the youth movement Young Front, an organization founded on Christian ideals, was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment for his “activities in an unregistered democratic youth movement” (Belarus, 2007). Complicating matters for Dashkevich, he refused to cooperate
with officials when asked to identify the names as well as activities of his friends and associates in the Young Front (Belarus, 2007). Zmitzer had therefore been fined for his refusal to cooperate and in order to meet the fine, his parents were forced to sell personal possessions (Belarus, 2007).

This case indicates that cooptation may not be typically a factor, and that youth groups are relentlessly attempting to move forward with campaigns for democratic reforms in Belarus. Unfortunately, as the Belarusian government puts more pressure on the youth through its various law enforcement departments and in the courts, the drive becomes more sustained. The difficulties with obtaining financing fuels the necessity of sacrificing life and limb.

Having analyzed the conditions in which the youth movement in Belarus functions and the issues confronting young people who are interested in the country’s democracy, I would argue that the influence of funding, both foreign and domestic, has been to co-opt these groups, distort their incentives and change their behavior. As a result, the prospects for genuine change through ground-up youth activism in Belarus have been seriously compromised. The first-best option for change would be a climate in which youth groups receive no support, from neither the state nor from the West; however, this is unlikely to happen, as the Lukashenko regime, fearing change, will tend to continue funding pro-government youth groups. Therefore, as a second-best option, the West is correct to continue engaging with youth activists, to balance the effect of Lukashenko’s support for
pro-government forces, in order to sustain the possibility of change. However, it would be more productive to shift the nature of that support from co-optation to cooperation, in order to develop democratically-oriented youth activists with the capacity to support themselves on their own, and to make better inroads with the population at large. In the following postscript, I lay out some ideas for how such cooperative support might be structured.

**Postscript: Recommendations on Strengthening Youth Activism in Belarus**

The root of the problem with respect to democratic reform in Belarus is the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation provides Belarus with natural gas and helps to sustain its economy (Jurkonis and Narkeviciute, 2009). Moreover, Russia has openly expressed support for the current regime, as previously noted. A decade of Western powers’ sanctions and pressure on the Belarusian regime to effect democratic reform has been entirely ineffective. At the same time, Russia has eclipsed Belarusian national identity by enforcing and supporting further use of the Russian language instead of letting the people of Belarus maintain their native language. The leaders of this major power understand that language is a symbol of independence and sovereignty, a powerful tool to nation-building, thus at the root of the problem for prosperous democratization of Belarus.

It is entirely possible that Belarus is not threatened by U.S. and EU alienation as long as it has the Russian Federation’s financial and political support. Russian support therefore provides Lukashenko with an economic lifeline so that
sanctions from the U.S. and the EU do not disadvantage Belarus to a point where Belarus feels pressured to undertake real legal and political reforms. In other words, with financial support coming from Russia, the U.S. and the EU have very little leverage in terms of bargaining with Belarus for change. Secondly, with Russia, a world power, supporting Lukashenko’s authority as Belarus’s president, Lukashenko has the legitimacy that fuels his power.

It therefore follows that Western powers such as the E.U. and the US should turn their attention to Russia. There is also evidence that Belarus is increasingly maintaining relations with China (Jurkonis and Narkeviciute, 2009). Rather than putting pressure on opposition candidates and NGOs to take to the streets in protest and to monitor elections, the U.S. and the EU might find it entirely more productive to meet with Chinese and Russian officials and undertake serious diplomatic dialogue about obtaining their support for pressuring Belarus to undertake serious democratic reforms.

Theoretically at least, if Belarus is confronted with the prospect of losing its two most powerful allies and support from the Russian Federation, Belarus is far more likely to undertake substantial democratic reforms. The direct threat to Lukashenko’s power only increases his tenacity to jealously guard his position and to hold onto it. This approach by the U.S. backfires and only functions to fortify Lukashenko’s commitment to authoritarian rule. As a result, youth movements, NGOs, and opposition candidates in Belarus are increasingly marginalized,
compromising any hope of democratic reform. History and conventional wisdom dictate that since Lukashenko cannot silence his international critics, he silences their Belarusian actors.

The information age, however, places significant restraints on Lukashenko’s ability to silence the pro-democratic youth groups and at the same time increases the latter’s ability to promote its cause. For instance, an internet website, studenty.by, is a website launched by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) which is aided by a grant awarded to the Belarusian Students’ Association in 2003. The website gained in popularity and developed into being independently operated by youth who manage an interactive tool. With the assistance of NED, studenty.by is now Belarus’s most popular youth internet site. Over 935 users have registered and approximately 3-5 new users register each day. Users typically enjoy forums committed to student life, education and assistance. Over 590 subjects have been debated. News stories are exchanged and have been published in independent mediums such as Tut.by, Charter 97, BelaPAN and RFE/RL (Live Journal).

Studenty.by reported on the events of the 2004 parliamentary elections as well as the referendum and drew attention to incidents of university faculty members forcing students to vote a particular way. In 2005, opposition representatives and NGOs engaged in educating voters and organizing political
campaigns in advance of the 2006 presidential elections consulted with studenty.by for advice with respect to working with the youth (Live Journal).

The youth movement in Belarus continues to make inroads via the media. Narodnye Naviny Vitebska which is run by youth democratic activists and journalist is the only “regional news web-site in the top 30” (Vidanava, 2005). The youth are breaking into the media in a variety of ways. A number of independent Belarusian radio and television stations have commenced “broadcasting from abroad as well as Internet TV and radio projects” and are “gaining more and more popularity in Belarus” (Vidanava, 2005). Belarus’s youth forms the core of the independent media. Journalists and disc jockeys at European Radio for Belarus are typically between the ages of 21 and 22.

The media has become an instrument for awareness and promotion of the pro-democratic youth movement in Belarus. For example, Generation.By specifically targets Belarus’s youth (Vidanava, 2005). Generation.By attempts to focus its topics on cultural life and youth as a means of increasing youth awareness. Particular attention was given to Zmicier Zhaliznichenka after he was expelled from university and drafted into the army in 2007. Generation.By committed a series of items at their website to Zhaliznichenka, portraying him as a role model for the youth. His insistence on speaking Belarusian in the army was portrayed as an admirable quality (Vidanava, 2005).
Generation. By heightened awareness further when Tatsiana Khoma was expelled from another Belarusian university following her election to the Board of the European Students’ Union (Vidanava, 2005). Generation. By commenced a wide information campaign on an international and national level, getting the news out. This had the effect of heightening awareness of the manner in which the youth are targeted in Belarus by the regime and the need for democratic reform.

The democratic youth are being used as “pawns in a larger game” and are being “captured left and right” (Vidanava, 2008). Despite these barriers, they continue to soldier on. All indications are that the youth movement holds the keys to democratic reform in Belarus for a number of reasons. They are not mired in Soviet tradition and sentiments, they are in touch with the outside world and they are heightening awareness at home and abroad.

Internally, the pro-democracy youth movements can ultimately ensure a socially and politically secure future. However, if the current regime has its way, there is no real stable future for the youth unless they effectively reach the masses and stand together against the current regime. This is essentially impossible with Lukashenko’s current bribe and sanction policy which trades education for politics. To this end, the youth in Belarus can only choose between being apolitical or educated.

In order to overcome this difficulty, U.S. and EU officials together should conduct diplomatic discussions with Lukashenko about the possibility of funding a
university for the youth in Belarus. The university would be entirely controlled by the donors and would provide opportunities for the young pro-democracy students to obtain a post-secondary education without fear of intimidation on the basis of political affiliations.

The U.S. and EU should conduct talks with the president of Belarus and should invite key members of the National Assembly and token members of the youth pro-democracy movement. These talks can be conducted in the form of a mediation where both sides can voice their respective concerns and negotiate for some freedom of expression. So far, the U.S. and the EU have alienated Lukashenko, to the detriment of democratic reform and the youth movement in Belarus. For instance the U.S. Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 pointedly calls Lukashenko out on his human rights abuses and specifically demands the release of political prisoners (Belarus Democracy Act of 2004).

The Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 also directly challenges the legitimacy of Lukashenko’s presidency. Section 2(3) states as follows:

In November 1996, Lukashenko orchestrated an illegal and unconstitutional referendum that enabled him to impose a new constitution, abolish the duly-elected parliament, the 13th Supreme Soviet, install a largely powerless National Assembly, and extend his term of office to 2001. (Belarus Democracy Act 2004)

A diplomatic approach in which Lukashenko’s office is respected but his methods are not, might at least persuade him to relax his marginalization. If the
youth movement is going to be effective, they are going to have to be permitted fundamental freedoms.

Change will not come over night, and diplomacy will not effect a complete turn-around. But Lukashenko’s desire to hold onto office appears to be the key to how he rules. If he feels respected as the leader, he might be more inclined to loosen his strangle on democratic freedoms. This will pave the way for a transition to democracy, if not under Lukashenko, under his successor. Diplomatic talks should deal with the important issues. For instance, Decree No. 8 should be repealed and by involving all parties, discussions could at least lead to some modifications of the Decree. Other important issues that need to be addressed are the strict controls on communications. This is entirely impractical in the information age.

Recognizing the importance of encouraging youth participation in political processes, opposition leaders should play a more active role in mentoring the youth rather than using them to spread their own political messages. Moreover, foreign donors should have no say in the political strategies and methods employed by any pro-democracy organization in Belarus. While they might be entitled to accountability as a means of safeguarding against fraud, they are not in a realistic position to plan a course of action conducive to the political and national culture of Belarus. Strategizing should be left entirely up to the Belarusian actors.
The youth movements should also consider forming a coalition or network rather than the current series of disconnected youth groups. One large and united organization would be a more effective. Further, it would lend credence to its legitimacy. Unity presents a stronger, more appealing movement in that the perception is that the youth have a common goal. By presenting this image, more young Belarusians might be inclined to join the youth movement, with the consequence that Lukashenko might be forced to accept that popular opinion is against his repressive regime.
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