Belarus has a historically divided identity and presently finds itself ‘in between’ the European Union member states and Russia. An analysis of official statements, focus groups and survey results suggests that foreign and security policy is made overwhelmingly by the country’s powerful presidency, and that it is often more pragmatic than at first sight appears. Official statements avoid an unambiguous commitment to ‘east’ or ‘west’. This duality is also apparent within the foreign policy community, and at the popular level. Western governments have for the most part condemned the Lukashenko regime as ‘Europe’s last dictatorship’ and reduced official contacts to a minimum; a policy of ‘constructive engagement’ might be less likely to push it towards a ‘Slavic choice’ including a greater degree of integration with the Russian Federation and the CIS.

Belarus has always been difficult to classify. It is predominantly Orthodox, but with substantial Catholic and – historically – Jewish minorities. It formed part of Kievan Rus, but was later absorbed within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which merged with Poland in the sixteenth century; later still, after the partitions, it transferred into the Russian Empire. In terms of Huntington’s civilizations, Belarus sits on both sides of the divide: its western regions...
fall within the world of Western Christianity, but its eastern regions into the world of Orthodox Christianity and Islam. These ambiguities were not entirely eliminated by two hundred years of incorporation in the Russian Empire, and later in the USSR, although it was notable that there was no widely supported independence movement during the 1980s, and Belarus was the Slavic republic that gave the strongest support to the USSR in the referendum on the ‘renewed union’ that took place in March 1991.

Developments since the collapse of the USSR have raised new questions about the place of Belarus among the nations. In the context of a wider ‘democratization’ of political life across the region, Belarus has appeared to move in the other direction: towards an increasingly repressive form of presidential government that allowed Western politicians to describe it as ‘the last remaining true dictatorship in the heart of Europe’. There were comparable changes in international orientation. Initially, a newly independent Belarus moved towards the West, surrendering its nuclear weapons, joining the Partnership for Peace, and negotiating a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement with the European Union. But the referendum that took place in November 1996, which strengthened the powers of the presidency and extended Alexander Lukashenko’s term of office, was poorly received in Western capitals, and official policy moved towards a much closer association with Russia, first in a ‘community’ and then in a bilateral ‘union’. These developments themselves took place within a broader context of change as NATO and the European Union extended their borders, bringing some of Belarus’s immediate neighbours into both organizations. The question of a ‘European’ or a ‘Slavic choice’ became more acute than ever before.

We bring several bodies of evidence to bear in analysing the issues that arise for a country that is quintessentially ‘in between’ an expanding European Union and a contracting Russian Federation. In the first instance, we draw on the reported views of the regime itself; but beyond this, upon a series of interviews with a broader foreign policy community, including opponents of the current administration and academic specialists, conducted in 2000 and again in early 2005. In addition, we explore the popular dimension through a series of focus groups, the most recent of which were conducted in early 2005, and upon opinion surveys conducted in 2000, 2004 and early 2005 (further details are provided in an appendix). A conclusion draws some larger lessons from this discussion, and suggests some implications for Western policy.

**Foreign Policy: Regime Perspectives**

The official position of Belarus on major international issues, including policies towards the EU, NATO and Russian-sponsored multilateral structures
as well as national threat perceptions, is ultimately determined and formulated by President Lukashenko. Government ministers, especially Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynaw (Sergei Martinov) and Defence Minister Leanid Maltsaw (Leonid Mal’tsev), make important declarations on their country’s behalf. However, not only the substance but also the idiom of these declarations often duplicate previous statements made by Lukashenko, and it is this that gives them their authority. Lukashenko’s penchant for populist rhetoric and self-aggrandizing verbal flourishes, however, is often far removed from the diplomatic language needed for the practical business of inter-state relations. In fact this rhetoric can be misleading, as in various fields Belarus has conducted a more pragmatic foreign and security policy than might be suggested by Lukashenko’s diatribes. Statements of this kind seem frequently to be intended as a rallying cry for domestic support, as a way to project the president’s image as a staunch defender of beleaguered state interests.

_Belarus, Europe and the EU_

Belarus borders the EU, which represents a very considerable source of potential future investment, on the west, and Russia, which is by far its largest current trading partner, to the east. For these economic reasons, if no other, it is natural that the Belarusian leadership has sought to avoid a choice between ‘east’ and ‘west’ and has presented its heritage in Slavic or Eurasian and not only in ‘European’ terms. As Lukashenko himself has put it, ‘we choose ... neither east nor west – we choose Belarus. Belarus, which because of its economy, its history, its geography, its culture and mentality will be Eastern and Western’. The testy and rather distant EU–Belarus relationship under the Lukashenko presidency is certainly consistent with the country’s unwillingness to promote its identify in terms of an unambiguously ‘European choice’.

In January 1997 the Council of Europe embargoed all high-level political co-operation with Belarus in response to the referendum on amendments to the Belarusian Constitution that had taken place in November 1996. The deterioration in EU–Belarusian relations in turn created a political context in which the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA), signed by the two parties in 1994, could not come into effect. The EU has a presence in Belarus in the form of a ‘parliamentary troika’ consisting of the representatives of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament; however, they have had little success in their objective of persuading the Belarusian government to relax domestic norms in accordance with generally accepted democratic principles, and this severely limits EU–Belarus interaction. The EU has tried to support ‘Belarusian democratic forces’ and affirms the country’s ‘European character’. In the words of the EU Enlargement Commissioner in May 2004, ‘No-one is questioning the fact that
Belarus is a European nation, which could raise the issue of its membership in the EU. But it is unclear if this vague prospect creates real incentives that provide the EU with some ‘normative pull’. The present Belarusian leadership, on the evidence of its official statements, views the effects of EU enlargement with some caution and has probably no expectation of being drawn into this process in the foreseeable future.

President Lukashenko seems to understand the phenomenon of the EU in broad terms, but tends to overstate the degree of integration it has achieved, at least up to the present. In his state of the nation address in May 2004 he declared: ‘We are yet to fully realize the theoretical and practical importance that the creation of the united states of Europe [sic], with its single foreign and economic policies, holds for Belarus’. He accepted that bilateralism between Belarus and major European states was limited by the fact that ‘national capitals in Europe [were] no longer capable of adopting major decisions and shaping policies’, and called on his government for an in-depth analysis of all aspects of Belarusian relations with the EU. ‘Our relations with the united Europe’, he enthused, ‘should not just be good, but very good’.

This assessment was prompted by the May 2004 round of EU enlargement, which left Belarus, in Lukashenko’s words, between ‘the world’s economic giant, the EU’, to the west, and ‘a Eurasian giant, Russia’, to the east. In this new configuration, Lukashenko is emphatic that ‘Belarus is not a buffer state and is not a vassal of either the European Union or Russia’. Rather Belarus can act as a bridging territory for the EU. It is described as a ‘key transit country’ for the EU, on grounds of the short distance involved to reach Russia, the developed Belarusian transport infrastructure, and the ostensible lack of crime in the country. Lukashenko notes in particular that the EU is interested in expanding its energy partnership with Russia, and claims that this will not be effective and stable without the participation of Belarus.

Lukashenko does not characterize Belarus as reaching out to west and east in equal measure, perhaps because this does not fit his political rhetoric on Belarus’s political union with Russia. But clearly ties to the eastern part of the enlarged EU are important, and the Belarusian president has also emphasized the importance of preserving and developing the country’s previous cultural and economic contacts with Poland, the Baltic states and other new EU members. At the same time Belarusian officials are disturbed that Poland, which they claim ‘has always sought the role of a conduit of the EU’s eastward policies and Belarus’s advocate’, is adopting a more critical tone. For example, Poland joined the Baltic states and the Czech Republic in backing EU condemnation of the Belarusian referendum in October 2004 that enabled Lukashenko to run for a third or indeed any number of further terms.

Belarus, senior officials make clear, wishes to be actively involved in the EU’s new neighbourhood policy. Belarus views the new neighbourhood
concept positively, Lukashenko has indicated, since the country’s interests correspond to ‘the EU goal of forming a “ring of friends” and a zone of stability and prosperity along the whole perimeter of its borders’. EU policy, he argues, correlates directly with Belarus’s aim of creating ‘a belt of good neighbourly relations and security’. But the Belarusian leadership does not wish this to occur at the expense of various ‘integration processes’ to the east. Belarus, Lukashenko claims, ‘thanks to our integration achievements, is already in a united economic space with Russia’, although in the future a common economic space of ‘Russia–Belarus–EU’ could be formed. Indeed, he affirms that the creation of a common EU–Russia economic space will not be possible without Belarus. The rather fuzzy vision promoted is that of ‘an organic combination of integration efforts on the European space’.

Looking ahead, Lukashenko is ambiguous about the possibility of eventual Belarusian accession to the EU. On the one hand, he emphasizes that ‘we are not asking to enter the EU. Neither we nor they are ready for it ... We do not try to impose ourselves on them’. But he has also predicted that ‘as soon as we [the EU and Belarus] strike a compromise, as soon as our interests coincide ... Belarus will probably become an EU member’. He may have little real understanding of EU accession criteria, but this latter statement indicates that situating Belarus within the EU zone could become an approved ambition, even if one that somehow needs to be reconciled with Belarusian ‘integration’ in various Russian-led structures.

Like Russia, Belarus has tended to be dismissive of the EU as a framework for security co-operation, and officials in Minsk seem to devote little thought to an EU role in strengthening European security. The chairman of the Belarusian committee for state border troops, for instance, has argued that the expanding EU is ‘an economic–political entity and thus does not present direct threats to Belarus’. Lukashenko, indeed, has rejected the idea that Belarus is a source of soft security threats to the EU zone and argued on the contrary that ‘in terms of migration, trafficking in drugs, trade in arms and many, many other illegal things, we are a barrier for ... the EU’. He may have hoped to use EU ‘gratitude’ for this service to deflect EU concerns over internal developments, and to prompt a practical dialogue over such border management issues. His fixation on NATO, however, appears for the moment to have eclipsed any attention to the potential wider EU role in crisis management or peace support operations.

**Belarus and NATO**

Lukashenko’s virulent criticism of NATO in the 1990s included expressions of regret that Belarus had given up its nuclear weapons and an appeal to form a Minsk–Moscow–Beijing axis to counter NATO’s eastward enlargement. This rhetoric allowed Lukashenko to present himself as a steadfast
defender of Slavic–Orthodox unity, which was supposedly threatened by the West in the form of NATO. Lukashenko used this rhetoric, in part, for purposes of domestic legitimacy. But during periods of tension in Russian–NATO relations it also allowed Belarus to present itself as a bulwark for Russian security on its western flank and effectively to trade this for economic benefits.

In practice, however, the Belarusian administration assumed a quite conciliatory tone towards NATO after the tensions over the Kosovo campaign had subsided. This was reflected in attempts to conclude a framework agreement formalizing its interaction with the alliance, which were abandoned only after NATO had made clear that it did not wish to extend the special contractual relations it had with Russia and Ukraine. Russia’s positive view of the active dialogue that has developed within the NATO–Russia Council (NRC) has also tended to mute the sharpest Belarusian criticisms. But Minsk is unsure how far it can really rely on Russia acting on its behalf in the NRC and has therefore has been careful not to close off other channels for co-operation.

The March 2004 enlargement of NATO meant that three of Belarus’s five neighbour states are now NATO members, accounting for almost 1,500 km of its external border. Lukashenko has been alarmist about these developments in statements aimed at Russian and domestic audiences, but quite conciliatory in other cases. He has complained that Belarusian territory is now ‘pierced from one end to another by technical reconnaissance means’ and that NATO airplanes now patrol Belarusian air borders. In this context he has warned that even countries of Belarus’s size can create defence systems able to damage a possible aggressor. He has implied that there may be ulterior motives behind the decision to transfer American bases from Germany to Poland – the transfer of modern air forces and air defence forces to Belarus’s western neighbour. Lukashenko has also called on Russia to ‘pay attention to the fact that Belarus is an outpost on the border with NATO’ and has grandly promised that ‘Belarus will always defend not only itself but also Russia, even if Russia does not assist us with military defence’. He has pressed to obtain Russian S-300 air defence systems for a joint Russian–Belarusian defence arrangement, and in April 2005 an exercise in Belarus involving Russian strategic aircraft was rather openly characterized as preparation for military operations in the ‘western sector’. On the other hand, the Belarusian military leadership was quite conciliatory following the new round of NATO enlargement. It affirmed that ‘the military cannot imagine that NATO should be called an enemy today’ and supported the objective of making the border with NATO ‘a border of trust, good-neighbourly relations and a border for the mutual resolution of security tasks in Europe’ – a goal also affirmed by Lukashenko. This approach partly
reflects a concern that Belarus has been wrong-footed by Russia’s partial rapprochement with NATO through the NRC (despite Moscow’s continued opposition to NATO enlargement) and by growing ties between NATO and a number of other CIS states. Lukashenko has expressed frustration that Russia ‘is proceeding towards co-operation with NATO, but we are finding it out from the mass media’. He has complained about Armenia’s and Kazakhstan’s contacts with NATO – and implied that such relations should have been discussed in advance within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), where Belarus has a voice. Indeed, he has proposed direct CSTO–NATO consultations. But this has not happened and Belarus has had to accept the need to forge some kind of bilateral relationship with the alliance.

A particularly difficult dilemma has been how to establish relations with NATO on practical security issues that divert Western demands for changes in Belarusian domestic politics. Lukashenko’s tactic is to argue that in this respect and ‘in contrast to some new NATO members, we are not supplicants but donors’. He points to Belarus’s geographical position and suggests thinking about how to ensure the safety of critical infrastructure, including oil and gas pipelines, power stations, nuclear power plants and pan-European transportation corridors. He proposes securing borders against ‘terrorists, illegal migrants, drugs and illegal shipments of arms, including nuclear ones’, which would be impossible for NATO and Western states, he argues, without co-operation with Belarus.

This case may be overstated, but it is likely to have been a factor in the improvement that has been taking place in NATO–Belarus relations. Belarusian officials, for instance, attended the military committee of the Euroatlantic Partnership Council in November 2004. A Belarusian detachment was assigned to take part in NATO’s Co-operative Best Effort–2005 exercise in June 2005 at the Yavoriv training centre of the Ukrainian armed forces. Belarus also agreed to take part in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) planning and review process to achieve operational compatibility between allocated Belarusian troops and unified NATO forces. This is intended to prepare Belarusian troops to take part in multinational search and rescue operations and also in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.

Lukashenko is equivocal about whether Belarus should take the further step of acceding to a status of forces agreement with NATO member states and other states involved in the PfP programme. This would be a precondition for the participation of Belarusian troops in any peacekeeping operations or exercises under the auspices of NATO on the territory of other countries, and for the organization of such exercises at some future point in Belarus itself. In early 2005 Lukashenko informed the Belarusian Security Council that ‘We could invite NATO troops [to Belarus]. We do not want them to think that Belarus is an aggressive state in the centre of Europe that has
something to hide’. But the opposition of leading Western states to Lukashenko’s authoritarian rule makes it unlikely that this modest NATO–Belarus rapprochement will gather further momentum.

Belarusian Participation in International Structures with Russia

In its official policy Belarus has placed considerable priority on its involvement in international structures and frameworks that represent ‘CIS integration’, and on the goal of an integrated post-Soviet region. Slavic solidarity and the perceived need to join the bandwagon of the far more economically powerful Russia help explain this orientation. But it also seems to have reflected the practical conclusion that the ‘European choice’ – ultimately geared to the goal of accession to the EU – is impractical for Belarus, as for other CIS countries.

This judgement appears less conclusive since the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine in late 2004, and as evidence has mounted of growing lack of cohesion in CIS structures. The Belarusian leadership seems to be torn between its traditional advocacy of an eastern form of integration and scathing assessments of the lack of progress achieved in this direction. In his state of the nation address in April 2004 Lukashenko described the CIS as ‘listless and lifeless’ compared with ‘the dynamic EU’. Over the previous year, he noted, the CIS had ‘not resolved a single important issue’. A few months later he predicted that if the CIS continued to work inefficiently, ‘it will stay there, but only as a political club where presidents meet to discuss things without taking any decisions’. A positive role model, he suggested, was the G8: the CIS should be a kind of G8 for the CIS region, with real influence. The ineffectiveness of CIS multilateralism and dissatisfaction with practical co-operation is confirmed by official views of the work of lower-level CIS structures – for example, assessments of the 2005–07 programme on fighting international terrorism, drafted by the CIS anti-terrorism centre.

A core group of CIS countries are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. In May 2002 Russia agreed with Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to create this body. At its launch a year later it was charged with ambitious security tasks: to address new threats and challenges through a joint military command in Moscow, a rapid reaction force, a common air defence system and ‘coordinated action’ in foreign, security and defence policy. As the dominant state in the CSTO, Russia has clearly hoped to use it as a macro-regional platform to support its standing as ‘security manager’ for the CIS region. A CSTO summit in June 2005 for the first time revealed that the Russian military plans to hold joint ground forces’ exercises in the organization’s ‘western region’, that is in Belarus, in 2006. However, the CSTO has always had more of a Central Asian than a European focus.
Although it is a signed-up member of the CSTO, Belarus relies militarily on the Russian–Belarusian joint military group – a purely bilateral arrangement – and has been increasingly sceptical of the achievements and functions of the larger organization. If the CSTO is not seen as beneficial, Lukashenko has warned, Belarus will not fund its activities. He complains about the lack of real ‘collective’ discussion in the CSTO and berates fellow member states for inviting NATO troops on to their territory without asking Belarus for its view about this in advance. Foreign Minister Martynaw has confirmed that Belarus has no plans for its forces to become involved in conflicts that might arise on the territory of CSTO member states. On the other hand Lukashenko complained that other CSTO states failed to rally behind the Kyrgyz leadership at the time when President Akayev was trying to stem opposition to his rule in spring 2005. This will have made clear to Lukashenko that the CSTO cannot be relied on for support against any domestic pro-democracy protests that he might face in the future.

Much more important in Belarusian official discourse is the Russia–Belarus Union. This bilateral integration process towards a union state envisages the operation of institutions, arising from integration treaties that are loosely modelled on the EU. But the repeated failure to implement provisions related to legal harmonization and economic integration means that the Union has rather a virtual character. This is reinforced by a lack of administrative capacity and resources for this project, and divergent approaches to economic reform by the two presidents. It has been easier to place formal emphasis on the security dimension of the Union. After a meeting in the Kremlin in April 2005, the two presidents announced that the budget for the union state for 2005 had been approved; they reported that the union’s Higher State Council had adopted a programme of agreed actions in foreign policy, and examined the possibility of deepening co-operation in military and security matters. However, plans for bilateral military co-operation can be and have been concluded without any need for the institutional framework of the union.

In general, however, Lukashenko wavers between concerns that Russian conceptions of the union are threatening to Belarusian sovereignty (and his personal rule), and concerns that the Union Treaty may be watered down into complete ineffectiveness. On this first issue he has been sensitive to possible attempts by the Putin leadership to absorb Belarus into the Russian state. In 2004 he declared that ‘we cannot return to the humiliating suggestion of Belarus being incorporated into Russia’, and that ‘an Anschluss and a union are completely different things’. But he also opposed the idea of adopting a constitutional act of the union, which would be weaker than the Union Treaty, and submitting it to a referendum. Lukashenko rejects any amendments to agreements that have already been signed ‘which disembowel these agreements and seek to transform the Union of Belarus and Russia
along [ineffective] CIS lines’; he none the less supports the idea of introducing the Russian rouble as legal tender for the union only at the end of the integration process, once all previous agreements with Russia, particularly those in the economic and social fields, have been fulfilled. The common currency, therefore, is at best a distant prospect.34

In the shadow of frustrations over the Russia–Belarus Union, Lukashenko has been sceptical about the formation of the single economic space (SES) of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, based on an agreement signed in September 2003. This agreement provides for the establishment of a free trade zone, the creation of conditions for the free movement of goods, services and capital and the workforce, and a single tariff policy. ‘We’ve lived without the SES and we can keep living without it’, Lukashenko has observed; ‘membership of this structure does not yield much’.35 In principle, however, the successful implementation of the SES would be extremely beneficial for Belarus. This would require first the transfer of authority to an agency charged with facilitating the SES; second, ‘all countries involved, just like EU members, should regard as binding a single set of rules governing economic co-operation’. In practice, however, Lukashenko considers the current situation as ‘untenable’, as ‘a repetition of the worst CIS traditions’, since ‘certain countries tend to abide by certain provisions, which they see as the most beneficial and ignore those they do not like’.36

In October 2000 the presidents of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed a treaty upgrading their customs union and renaming it the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC). The functions of the EAEC included the following: to further the creation of a free trade regime and unified customs regulations; to co-ordinate trade preference systems and tariffs; to establish common rules of trade; to co-ordinate contacts with the World Trade Organization; and ‘to ensure economic security on the outer border of the community’.37 The founding treaty envisaged the creation of an EAEC standing executive committee, the Integration Committee; an EAEC Parliamentary Assembly; and an EAEC Arbitration Court – the latter located in Minsk. Lukashenko has appealed for concrete projects and programmes to underpin the ambitions of the EAEC, towards the goal of creating a common economic space. At the same time he views the EAEC as a means to assist member states to enter the global trade system.38 But as in the cases of the SES and CSTO, his integration rhetoric seems to coexist with real doubts about the efficacy of the EAEC as a multilateral structure.

**Belarusian Threat Perceptions**

The most authoritative document on official Belarusian threat perceptions is the military doctrine of Belarus, which passed into law in January 2002 and replaced the doctrine of December 1992. This lists the main external threats
to Belarusian security in general terms. Traditional military–strategic concerns include the following: ‘existing and future hotbeds of local wars and other armed conflicts; the expansion of military blocs and alliances . . . and opposition to the formation of a system of collective security involving the Republic of Belarus; the creation . . . by certain states (groups of states) of a military offensive-strike potential, leading to a rupture in the existing balance of power’. The threat of interference in the internal affairs of Belarus is specified as an external threat. Some soft security threats are also included: ‘the activation of international terrorism and transnational crime, growth in the illegal trade in weapons [and] narcotics . . . as well as the illegal migration of people’.

By comparison the list of internal threats in the military doctrine is quite short. They include:

the possible appearance and provocative activity of extremist organizations, aimed at destabilizing the internal political situation in the country and the forceful overthrow of the constitutional order; organized crime, illegal trade . . .; the illegal distribution on the territory of the Republic of Belarus of weapons [and] narcotics . . . which could be used to carry out terrorist acts and other illegal actions.  

The traditional military–strategic threats noted in the military doctrine are not prioritized. Clearly, however, Belarus is far from the zones of local conflicts that afflict CIS states in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, and such conflicts can only indirectly affect Belarus (through the CSTO, for example). NATO enlargement or American policies may be viewed as threatening in an existential sense, but the Belarusian military leadership has spelt out recently that NATO is not necessarily regarded as an enemy. Lukashenko’s rhetoric against Western states has become less strident since the 1990s. Moreover, this rhetoric seems to have been deliberately alarmist over the years to rally domestic support and to make Belarus appear more valuable for the military defence of Russia’s western flank, which could be used to attract Russian economic subsidies. In present circumstances Belarus recognizes that ‘there is no real threat of armed attack’. But it offers an indirect argument, criticizing tendencies to create a unipolar world system that may lead certain states to regard war as an acceptable instrument of foreign policy. This is then used to justify the need to create a Belarusian–Russian ‘common defence space’ to bolster regional security.

Soft security and internal threats seem to have more immediacy and to attract more attention from the Belarusian leadership. In October 2004 Lukashenko indicated that terrorism was the most serious among new threats. In this context he claimed that no Belarusians had been involved in
terrorist acts and pointed to the need to keep Belarus out of ‘international adventures’, which to some extent could threaten Belarusian security.41

Belarus does not seem especially vulnerable to terrorism. But Lukashenko, like the leaders of some other states, has recognized that the global focus on terrorism can be used expediently. At a meeting of the Belarusian National Security Council dedicated to combating terrorism he suggested Belarus’s social and economic stability as the antidote to terrorism, but argued that it could be damaged by two factors: first, ‘the right–radical nationalist activity that our opposition is trying to manipulate’ – this justified further repression of opposition political forces, which Lukashenko could characterize as extremist organizations aiming to destabilize the internal political situation; second, the large numbers of illegal migrants who were detained every year attempting to reach Europe through Belarus – this point is the basis of a demand for funding from Western states to prevent such migration as well as for combating ‘the proliferation of arms, including nuclear weapons and nuclear materials that are being transported across our border to Europe’.42

Official Belarusian threat perceptions, therefore, serve a variety of functions, related to regime security as much as national security and are also used to shape political or even economic relations with international actors.

Foreign Policy: Regime and Opposition Perspectives

Somewhat to our surprise, there was in the interviews we conducted a substantial unity of opinion between the Belarusian authorities and the various elements that constitute the political opposition. Both, on the evidence of our interviews, are committed to the country’s continued sovereignty and independence.43 Both are in favour of good relations with the European Union, and there is also general agreement that, whatever happens, Belarus must have good relations with Russia. The differences between them primarily concern the best means of achieving these aims. In a long foreign policy speech in July 2004, Lukashenko redrafted Clausewitz’s celebrated dictum that war is the continuation of politics by other means to read that ‘foreign policy is the continuation of domestic politics, but by other means’.44 This is not reflected in the policy aims of the authorities and the opposition, however, in that they have very different views about the best domestic policies for Belarus, but there is little difference between their stated foreign policy aims.

We were particularly concerned to establish whether Belarus could be considered part of Europe; what the effects had been of EU and NATO enlargement; how EU–Belarusian and NATO–Belarusian relations should develop in the future; and how effective the CIS and the other regional international organizations in the post-Soviet space had been. Comparing
our 2005 interviews with those we conducted five years earlier, there were several clear differences. First of all, there is now more certainty that Belarus is indeed part of Europe. There is also less anxiety about the effects of EU and NATO enlargement, now that these have taken place. There is a widespread belief that Belarus must have good relations with the EU, and more readiness than before to contemplate a co-operative relationship with NATO; and there is a very general scepticism about the CIS and the other international frameworks to which Belarus is a party, not excluding the union with Russia.

There was general agreement, in 2000 and 2005, that Belarus is a European country. But there was less uncertainty in more recent interviews that Belarus can remain a sovereign and independent European state, and less emphasis on past relations with the USSR and Russia. A foreign ministry official insisted, for instance, that ‘Belarusians are European’; while for a businesswoman, in another interview, Belarus was ‘absolutely a European country, not only geographically, but also because of its mentality and shared European values’.

In 2000 there was a great deal of apprehension about the further enlargement of the EU, and what the consequences might be if Belarus were excluded from traditional markets and from its citizens resident elsewhere. Five years later there were few who believed that Belarussian interests had suffered any significant damage following the May 2004 enlargement and the incorporation of Poland and the Baltic countries. We spoke to a well-placed journalist on both occasions. In 2000 he told us that the consequences for Belarus of Polish membership would be ‘severe’; a visa regime would be introduced that would ‘split families’; and the cross-border shuttle trade would be affected. Five years later, he was unperturbed by the effects of Polish membership. Indeed, he thought there had been no consequences at all, and noted that cross-border trade was continuing unabated.

A foreign ministry official confirmed that in the run-up to enlargement there had been fears that trade would be affected adversely, but agreed that the practical consequences had been very limited. He was still anxious that the new EU members might be ‘more Catholic than the Pope’ because, he argued, the foreign policies of Riga, Warsaw and Vilnius would no longer be made in those capitals but in Brussels. In fact, it is clear that Belarussian trade with the EU and the rest of Europe has increased over the past decade, and that the effect of EU enlargement has been to raise it still further. According to Lukashenko,

the role of the EU and of Europe as a whole in our foreign trade is steadily increasing. If 10–12 years ago it accounted for no more than 8–10
per cent of Belarusian exports, now its share is already about 40 per cent. That is about as much as our trade with Russia.\textsuperscript{45}

How did the foreign policy community see the future of Belarusian relations with the EU? In 2000 there was a clear division between official opinion, which was sharply critical of the EU, and an opposition that was very much in favour of Belarus making a ‘European choice’. At present, everyone favours a good relationship with the EU. Officially, the view is that the EU is now a neighbour and, as a foreign ministry official put it, claiming to be quoting Lukashenko, ‘with neighbours one should get on better than with relatives’. Lukashenko, in fact, goes even further, calling the EU Belarus’s ‘strategic partner’.\textsuperscript{46} In keeping with this, our interviewees in 2005 showed little concern about the EU developing its security profile. Some expected EU assistance in strengthening the EU–Belarus border and on crime and drugs. Nor was there concern about possible EU rapid reaction forces. A businessman even noted that as a centre of power, the EU was ‘obliged to have a military function’.

We found no one among the opposition who disagreed with the view that Belarus should have good relations with the EU. However, a number of opponents of the Belarusian leadership were in favour of EU sanctions against Belarus, all of them welcomed the European Parliament’s critical resolution of March 2005, in which Belarus was characterized as a ‘dictatorship’ and Lukashenko personally as a ‘dictator’,\textsuperscript{47} and all wanted the EU to change its rules so that it could bypass the Belarusian government in order to fund civil society groups (like themselves).

Views on NATO in 2000 were still influenced by the aftermath of the Kosovo campaign, which aroused widespread condemnation in Belarus as in Russia. But by 2005 a more sanguine attitude to NATO prevailed, despite a continued tendency in official propaganda to define NATO in Cold War terms. Some simply described NATO as a military defence alliance, with the same values it had before, and as an organization that is likely to become redundant if the EU develops its security dimensions. But more liberal experts now describe NATO as not just a military alliance, but also an influential political organization that provides useful technical and other assistance.

By 2005 the NATO enlargement of 2004 seemed to be accepted as a \textit{fait accompli} by the Belarusian foreign policy community. We were told that most ordinary people still do not understand what NATO is and why it enlarged and so still perceive it to be hostile. On the other hand our elite interviewees affirmed that the last round of NATO enlargement had had no negative consequences for Belarus, and that none was identified even in the official press. They noted that NATO was unlikely to threaten Belarus or Russia, and most reasonable people understood this. The future of NATO–Belarus
relations, the editor of one of the few remaining liberal newspapers suggested, depended on the Russian factor: when the Russians relaxed and became less anxious about NATO, then NATO would cease to be a problem for Belarusians as well, and then Belarus would swiftly move towards NATO. In this vein, we were told that Lukashenko shows that he is pro-NATO (or pro-EU) if he wishes to threaten Russia a little. But aside from such geopolitical manoeuvring, both officials and opposition figures in 2005 agreed that as neighbours NATO and Belarus should have transparent relations. Even those who stated bluntly that there was no possibility of Belarus joining NATO accepted that PfP co-operation should take place. The leader of one Belarusian political party was explicit that Belarus has a number of common security interests with NATO.

Compared with five years earlier, in 2005 both regime and opposition commentators played down traditional threat perceptions and external threats. One journalist claimed that the political class in Belarus was divided into those who saw threats everywhere, including from Russia (a ‘fortress Belarus mentality’), and those who saw no threats from anywhere. We found more nuanced perceptions. Yet, our group of interlocutors generally found it difficult to identify external threats. Even international terrorism and the Islamic factor were mostly not viewed as representing a particular danger. Russia was not described as a threat per se, although one specialist noted that the realization of the Russia–Belarus union state would extinguish the Belarusian state. Immigration and emigration were presented more as problems than real threats, although some viewed transit immigration, smuggling and drug-trafficking more seriously.

Not surprisingly, for most opposition and liberal commentators the main current threats to Belarus are firmly political: government incompetence and the unsustainability of its authoritarian policies. From this perspective the main threat is the survival of the incumbent regime, which is conducting a policy of self-isolation. This, we were told, is accompanied by the growth of suspicion towards neighbouring countries and the absence of civil society, which leads to dangers of isolation from democratic and positive economic processes. A vicious circle then arises from economic and political deficits, as the poorer the people are, the more dependent they are on the political leadership. This gloomy perspective was undoubtedly reinforced by the contrasting model of political development in Ukraine since the ‘Orange Revolution’ – an important positive role model in Belarus for those opposed to Lukashenko.

There was a notable change of positions between 2000 and 2005 in relation to the CIS and the other international organizations that had come into being in post-Soviet space. In 2000, officials who supported Lukashenko were enthusiastic about the CIS and optimistic about the Belarus–Russia Union. The opposition were extremely negative about both. We were struck, in our
2005 interviews, by the indifference and sometimes even derision that was aroused by any mention of the CIS, and not just among the opposition. It was for instance ‘an ephemeral organization, a form of soft divorce’; it was a ‘corpse’; it was ‘useless, but also ineffective’; it was a ‘club of presidents that has no policies and produces no benefits’; ‘no-one thinks it is important’; ‘as an organization, it simply doesn’t work’; ‘it is an overseas club’. Even Lukashenko, in recent statements, appears to have lost heart, complaining about the ‘duplication, inefficiency and non-fulfilment of not just verbal but written agreements’. Responses to questions about the Eurasian Economic Community and the single economic space were, if anything, even more sceptical. The Collective Security Treaty Organization was not quite written off by our respondents, since it is connected to Russian strategic interests and Russia needs it. But even this structure, we were told, was more relevant to the Central Asian states than to Belarus’s concerns, and was more about intention than implementation.

What was even more surprising was how little enthusiasm there was about the Belarus–Russia Union. Nor was it simply the opposition who were sceptical. Lukashenko talks of the ‘low effectiveness of particular elements of the system of the Belarusian–Russian Union’. He maintains that he and President Putin have ‘agreed to put off, to “put on the back burner”, the unrealized schemes and problems that for the moment we are unable to resolve’; they had also agreed to ‘concentrate on some of the more concrete issues that had emerged in Belarusian–Russian relations’. The only good thing we heard about the Belarus–Russian Union was that it had produced a ‘super-computer’; no one appeared to believe that it would adopt a single currency or that the union state would ever exist, although it might continue endlessly to be ‘constructed’.

In general, there was a far stronger sense of independence and identity in 2005 than there had been five years earlier. Like Lukashenko, many members of the foreign policy community believe Belarus is a transit zone, and there is a strong perception that its location is, in itself, a strategic resource in Belarus’s relations with both Russia and the EU. Among the foreign policy community, there was also far more enthusiasm for Europe and the EU than for any organization in the post-Soviet space. Elite perceptions, accordingly, present no obstacles to an improvement in EU–Belarus relations; indeed, in this as in other respects, there was a far greater unity of purpose between the Lukashenko presidency and its political opponents than their domestic differences would have suggested.

**Foreign Policy: Popular Perspectives**

How far were these views shared at the popular level? Do the Belarusian leaders, and those who oppose them, express a minority opinion, or a larger national
consensus of a kind that might suggest the continuation of present policies even under a post-Lukashenko leadership? We explored issues of this kind at two levels: through a series of focus groups, in 2000 and in the first half of 2005, and through nationally representative surveys in 2000 and again in 2004. In what follows we draw particularly upon the focus group evidence that we collected in March 2005; we monitored two focus groups at this time, both of them in Minsk, each consisting of about eight adults of working age, with equal numbers of males and females. The proceedings were chaired by agency staff, with a video link, and a tape and transcript were made available for subsequent analysis. Mass publics rarely have precise and informed views about foreign policy matters; but we were more interested in orientations – where our participants placed themselves in cultural as well as geographical terms, what images they had of ‘Europe’, Russia and the CIS, and indeed which foreign policy issues elicited a coherent response and which had little resonance.

Our focus group participants mostly thought of themselves as part of the Slavic world, rather than ‘Europe’, but differed in their explanations. For some, it was the fault of their leaders, and of one leader in particular; but more of them thought it was the whole society, and its mentality, that had most to do with it. Nikolai, an engineer at a tractor factory, for instance, regularly met Russians, Finns, Swedes, Germans and others. The reason Belarus was a quiet backwater was less a particular leader, than their ‘stubborn inertia – people are just like that’. For Andrei, a safety inspector in the Philharmonia, it was still the old principle “‘I’m the boss, you’re a fool”'. As it had been under the Little Father Tsar, as it was under the communists, that’s how it always has been and always will be’. Attitudes of this kind were partly generational, according to Pavel, another engineer: the older generation was still very ‘Soviet’ in its upbringing. But there was a much more general indifference, an expectation that everything would be done for them, and a fear that if they did anything for themselves ‘the boss would sort them out’. This was particularly true of those who were Orthodox, rather than Protestant or Catholic; for the Orthodox, the head of state ran everything, including public organizations and religions, in a ‘sort of Asiatic or Byzantine style of management’.

There were other differences in the way that Belarusians worked and spent their free time; not least, in the amount of alcohol they consumed. For Valerii, a welder in the tractor factory, ‘In the quantity of alcohol that’s drunk it’s a Slavic country, not at all European’. Europeans spent their time differently, remarked Yaroslav, the head of a research laboratory, who had spent a lot of time in Germany. Europe had its drunks and addicts as well, ‘but the general level of life, the general culture of life is very different from ours’. Most of all, this was apparent in the way they worked, in most cases for themselves. There was little sense of this in Belarus. And what about time off? ‘People come home, turn on the television – and that’s it. But in Germany
there are cafes, people sit there and drink coffee and talk, and interact not only with their relatives, but with friends and acquaintances. Overall, a very big difference, very big’. For Melita, a librarian in her forties, there were different attitudes in different parts of Belarus: it was dirty in the east, cleaner to the west, and cleanest of all near the Polish border – ‘I don’t know why’. But for Nina, a businesswoman whose younger son was studying in Moscow, Belarus as a whole was actually less European than the European parts of Russia; Europe was ‘as far off as the moon’.

Not all, however, took this view, and for some Belarus was more European than Russia, or at least a kind of ‘special civilization’ that connected east and west and drew on the qualities of both of them. Natal’ya, a housewife in her forties, drew attention to Belarusians’ greater tolerance, and their willingness to work hard. Her brother travelled regularly to Russia. There beside the road were a mother and daughter, the mother selling cucumbers and the daughter selling herself. ‘We have a higher, more European culture’, Natal’ya believed. ‘I think we have a civilized state, a civilized, peaceful, European state’. She was one of those who thought Belarus a special civilization, a ‘sort of buffer platform between Europe and Asia’. ‘We’re a special “in between” nation’, thought Melita; ‘we’re like people from outer space, probably’. Others again thought there was no need for Belarusians to place themselves anywhere in particular. It was easy to see why Russians might wonder if they were Eurasian, for instance, but why should Belarusians be particularly concerned? ‘We’re not something special, we’re simply Belarusians’, insisted Andrei, a businessman and co-operative pioneer. Another simply confessed that he hadn’t ever been further than Poland, so how could he tell?

What about the European Union, within this context? There were different views, a minority leaning towards a suspicious, ‘Soviet’ approach but a larger number who welcomed the idea of closer relations with an expanded EU and looked forward to co-operating with their new neighbours (‘we’ll be friends, we’ll help’). Poland, for instance, was an instructive example, with pensioners driving around in new Fiats and average pay about $600 a month, and food prices that were lower than in Belarus. In Belarus itself prices were at a European level, and families spent up to 80 per cent of their income on food. Some, in the countryside, were making do on $40 a month; in Grodno people thought they were fortunate if they earned $70 a month, but ‘that’s poverty’. In Poland again, older enterprises that were losing money had closed down but ‘new, normal ones that work and develop’ had opened in their place. Polish workers had gone abroad in search of higher wages, and Europeans had begun to invest in Poland itself. The same was true in the former GDR, where the German government was now investing heavily.
From this point of view, there were obvious advantages if Belarus itself were to become a member of the EU. And not just economic advantages. Svetlana, a telephone engineer, used to go regularly to Poland for shopping, but now it had become more expensive; if they joined the EU she would be able to travel freely. Yaroslav, similarly, used to travel to Poland without any difficulty, but now he needed a visa. ‘If we lived on the territory of the European Union, I would have the right to cross frontiers freely, from the Belarusian–Polish to the Portuguese ... That’s why there is nostalgia for the Soviet Union, because our mother country was from Brest to Vladivostok, go wherever you want, no problem’. There was a danger of isolation, of losing a ‘feeling of development’. But the general view was that membership was not an immediate or perhaps even a more distant prospect. ‘I’d be glad to join’, declared Nikolai, a military pensioner now working in security, ‘but nobody will let us in’. ‘We wouldn’t be accepted’, declared Andrei, Nina and others. And ‘Russia would be entirely against it’.

Membership, in any case, might be premature. If he closed his eyes, as Yaroslav put it, he would vote with his two hands to join the EU as soon as possible. ‘But when I begin to think what we would get from it, it becomes more complicated’. For others, it might be better to resolve their own difficulties first of all, without joining up with anyone else. But ‘we aren’t ready yet, morally or economically. We aren’t ready economically, as everyone will rush there to earn money, and Belarus will fall even further behind. We should make use of our geographical situation’. There were concerns about competition: before, Belarus had been able to export its goods to the Baltic countries, who were satisfied with their quality, but now those markets had been flooded with higher-quality goods from elsewhere. ‘Let’s wait and see’, suggested Tamara, a schoolteacher in her thirties. And at least for some there was a danger that Belarus would lose its independence in a European Union, becoming ‘vassals, dependencies of the Americans and Germans’. From this point of view Lukashenko had been right to erect a barrier against them.

If EU membership was the ‘Western choice’, there was also a ‘Slavic choice’, towards Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. For many, Belarus’s ‘historic roots are in the west’, and a closer association with Russia was not, at the moment, an attractive prospect. ‘It’s Babylon’, declared Natal’ya. For Yaroslav, it was a ‘black hole’. ‘There’s still no order there’, Natal’ya went on, ‘and won’t be in the near future’. For Pavel, ‘if it takes Belarus 60 years to establish some form of order, it will take Russia 300 years’. ‘I like Putin’, Natal’ya explained, ‘but that’s not a reason for unifying. All the same we have to go with the Europeans’. But others were less willing to move away from their big neighbour. Melita, for instance: her mother and father were Russian, from Smolensk, and Russian was her native language. ‘How can I just leave them with their problems?’ For
others, Russia was still a massive market, and the best place to invest their money.

There was no disagreement that a close and constructive relationship with Russia was desirable, indeed unavoidable. But there were considerable misgivings about a ‘union state’, and some doubt as to whether the CIS offered a practical form of co-operation or had any real existence. There was understandable concern that Belarusians should not be drawn into the Chechen war, as they had been drawn into the Soviet war in Afghanistan, but should carry out their military service in Belarus itself. In any case, for the moment, a meaningful union with Russia ‘[did] not exist’, military or otherwise. Nor did it appear likely that there would be a single state, or that the rouble would become a common currency, although some of our participants would have welcomed it. As another of our participants observed, there was no particular closeness between Lukashenko and Putin, who kept the Belarusian leader ‘at a distance’. Putin, others explained, ‘didn’t need Belarus’, and ‘had no particular interest in interacting with Lukashenko’. In Belarus itself, they tended to hear about the union state when a power struggle was going on, then it went quiet. In any case, their own bureaucracy would be reluctant to lose their positions of influence within a larger entity.

As for the CIS, the general reaction was that it also ‘exist[ed] only on paper’. It had been established as no more than ‘a mechanism for the civilized divorce of the republics that had formed part of the USSR’, remarked Igor, the head of a shift at the Integral electronics factory, and was of ‘no practical value’. Others found it hard to tell if it even existed. ‘I still don’t feel anything from that union’, remarked Valery. ‘I work as I worked before, and get kopeks as I got before’. It was an ‘abstract organization’, added Yaroslav, ‘which just seems to exist’. He had been travelling back from Ukraine in the summer with some litres of wine. There on the road was a customs post. Between two members of a union? The CIS was a sort of fiction: it seemed to be there, but at the same time not to be there. It was certainly an important market; but the market would still be there whether there was a CIS or not.

Actually, there was no need to ‘unite’ with anyone, observed Nikolai, with Russia or with Europe. There should just be normal relations with everyone. ‘One way or another we’ll still be Belarusians, and Russians will still be Russians. We can’t be merged into a single nationality’. For Galina, a factory worker, they would remain an independent state, and had ‘as it were, left Russia’. It would be better to have relations with the EU, and the CIS, and Russia as well, but not join any of them, and then Belarus would flourish. Here, as elsewhere, the primary commitment was to independent statehood, whatever policies might be followed domestically and whatever choice of partner might be made in international affairs.
How far were these views representative of the wider society? Our survey results suggest, for a start, that Belarusians are somewhat more ‘European’ in virtually all respects compared with their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts (see Table 1). They were more likely to think of themselves as Europeans, and more likely to identify ‘European’ as one of their various identities. They were also the most likely to support membership of the European Union, although attitudes were generally very favourable across the region. Belarusians, in addition, were the most knowledgeable about the EU and its institutions. They were more likely to be able to identify the EU headquarters from a list of five European capitals, and they were more likely than Russians or Ukrainians to identify the EU itself from a list of international organizations, real or (in one case) imaginary. This reflected a population that could more readily travel abroad, for instance to the Baltic states, and one that followed political developments more closely than its counterparts in the other Slavic republics. There was less enthusiasm for NATO, and there were few among our focus group participants who regarded it as a priority or indeed as an issue that was worth considering.

At the same time, there was little inclination – any more than in our focus groups – to choose ‘Europe’ rather than Russia (see Table 2). There were few

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<th>Belarus</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Ukraine</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feel European to a significant/some extent</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel European seldom/not at all</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel a European identity</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favour EU membership</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can identify EU</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can identify EU headquarters</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe country should join NATO</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
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Source: Authors’ surveys (see appendix).

Question wordings were (i) ‘Do you think of yourself as a European?’ (ii) ‘Which of the following do you think yourself to be first of all? And secondly?’ Figures show all who gave ‘European’ as their first or second choice. (iii) ‘If our country were to join the European Union, would you be …?’ Figures show those who somewhat or entirely supported membership. (iv) ‘Which of the following is the most accurate characterization of the European Union?’ Figures show those who chose the correct one of four options. (v) ‘As you probably know, 25 states of Western Europe have united in the European Union. Do you know in which city the headquarters of the European Union is located?’ Figures show those who chose the correct one of five options. (vi) ‘If our country were to join NATO, would you be …?’ Figures show those who somewhat or entirely supported membership. Figures in all cases are rounded percentages; don’t knows and no answers account for residuals.
who thought Belarus could best develop on its own; but even fewer who
thought it should rely primarily on the EU and the United States. For about
a third, it was relations with Russia that should have priority; and for about
a half, good relations with Russia were just as important as good relations
with the EU and the United States. This was, in fact, close to the ‘multi-
vector’ foreign policy, developing good relations with neighbours in all direc-
tions, to which the Lukashenko administration has been consistently
committed.

Some Conclusions

Belarusian foreign policy reflects the nature of an authoritarian political
system in which the president, although acknowledged to have widespread
support, is the only legitimate source of policy (‘Why have a survey in
Belarus?’, as one Western scholar suggested to us; ‘you just need to know
one opinion’). Beyond this, it relates to Belarus’s geopolitical situation, and
its heavy dependence on its Russian ally – not only economically, but as
the ultimate guarantor of its wayward president. It is perhaps a reflection of
these external ‘givens’ that domestic opinion varies relatively little, and
indeed reflects the regime’s own belief that it should seek to establish good
relations with its neighbours to the west as much as the east, and wherever else.

Our evidence, drawn from different sources, suggests a striking measure of
consensus across official, elite and popular opinion within this international
context. The strength of ‘Europeanness’, at the popular level, might appear
difficult to reconcile with an official position that is strongly oriented
towards a ‘Eurasian’ choice, including the development of the union with
Russia and of CIS integration more generally. Official statements, in fact,
contain a surprising degree of ambiguity, and of pragmatic responses to

| Better to have good relations with Russia | 31 |
| Better to have good relations with the EU and the US | 6 |
| Better to have good relations both with Russia, and with the EU and the US | 52 |
| We have sufficient resources of our own for development | 8 |

Source: National representative survey conducted by NISEPI (Vilnius) and the Pontis Foundation
(Bratislava) in May 2005, n = 1,510.

Question wording was: ‘Some people think that in foreign policy it’s best for Belarus to have good
relations with Russia, others – with the EU and US, others still – both with Russia, and with the
EU and US, and others again think we have enough resources to develop on our own. What do you
think?’
circumstances rather than *a priori* ideology. Belarusian relations with ‘Europe’, in particular, are a response to EU positions and not simply a posture that is taken in advance and maintained without modification. This suggests that a policy of ‘constructive engagement’, rather than the stiffly hostile attitude that still prevails on both sides, might produce greater results.

Our interviews and focus groups took place in the immediate aftermath of the successful challenge to the Ukrainian presidential election in late 2004, and ‘coloured revolutions’ not only in Ukraine but in Kyrgyzstan and, before that, in Georgia. Without prompting, our focus group participants suggested there was little likelihood of a ‘Ukrainian scenario’ in their own country: partly because the authorities would prevent it, but also because living standards were less catastrophic, and official corruption less out of hand. The effect of ‘coloured revolutions’ in the region is in fact more likely to reinforce the resistance of the Belarusian presidency to engage in a political dialogue with its own society, and with the wider world.

In the event of change, our evidence suggests that there would be a receptive attitude to a greater recognition of Belarus’s ‘European’ as well as its ‘Slavic’ identity. But equally, continued attacks on the admitted shortcomings of Belarusian political institutions and the exclusion of Belarusian representatives from international organizations, still more so the financing of broadcasts from the West that are explicitly intended to bring about regime change, seem more likely to drive the Belarusian authorities in a ‘Eurasian’ direction. These choices are as much for Western publics and governments as for the Belarusian authorities and the foreign policy and citizen constituencies whose views we have considered in this article.

NOTES


8. Address to heads of Belarusian diplomatic missions, Belapan news agency, Minsk, 22 July 2004, BBC Mon KVU 220704 ch/vk.


24. Statement to Belarusian diplomatic corps, Belarusian Television, Minsk, 22 July 2004, BBC Mon KVU 220704 vs/ms. This argument was previously presented by Foreign Minister Martynaw: see interview in Sovetskaya Belorussiya, 10 July 2004, p.4.


28. Belapan news agency, Minsk, 8 Oct. 2004, BBC Mon KVU 081004 mvm/ms. It may be relevant to note that Belarus has a particular interest in the fortunes of the CIS, since that organization’s headquarters are located in Minsk.


32. For background, see Rontoyanni, ‘Union of Belarus and Russia’, pp.120–28.


34. Interview of Lukashenko on Belarusian Television, Minsk, 25 June 2004, BBC Mon KVU 250604/ig; state of the nation address, Belarusian Radio, Minsk, 14 April 2004, BBC Mon KVU 140404 gj/ir/ms/vk.

35. At a meeting with diplomats, Itar-Tass news agency, Moscow, 22 July 2004, BBC Mon KVU 220704/ig.
Appendix

Our Belarusian survey was conducted between 27 March and 18 April 2004 under the auspices of Russian Research. The number of respondents was 1,597, selected according to the agency’s normal sampling procedures; it was representative of the population aged 18 and over, using a multistage proportional representation method with a random route method of selecting households. Interviews were conducted face to face in respondents’ homes. The response rate was 66 per cent. The sample was then weighted in accordance with sex and age in each region, using the 1999 census adjusted on the basis of expert estimates as of the start of 2003. There were 288 sampling points, and 120 interviewers were employed; ten per cent of the interviews were randomly selected for checking. Our Russian survey was conducted between 21 December 2003 and 16 January 2004 under the auspices of the same agency; the number of respondents was 2000, selected and weighted according to the same procedures. In Ukraine our survey was conducted under the auspices of the same agency between 23 March and 2 April 2004; the number of respondents was 2000, once again selected and weighted according to the agency’s standard procedures.