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NEIGHBOURLY DISCORD.

POLISH-BELARUSIAN RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF NATO

ENLARGEMENT, 1993–2004.

by

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Poznań.

Abstract
Since the mid-1990s, Warsaw and Minsk have held diametrically opposing viewpoints on the shaping of Europe's post-communist security architecture, particularly the evolution of NATO enlargement strategy. While Poland made NATO membership the cornerstone of its security policy and continues to support further eastward expansion, Belarus, in conjunction with Russia, has staunchly contested Western 'military encroachment' into Eastern Europe and areas of the former Soviet Union. This article aims to compare Polish and Belarusian attitudes towards the enlargement question and NATO in general. It will assess how the establishments in each country have reacted to key stages of the expansion process and examine the effect these processes have had on bilateral Polish-Belarusian relations during this crucial restructuring period (1993–2004). The topic is a relatively unexplored area of the enlargement story, yet it has been a vital component. The Polish-Belarusian border has effectively become a new line of division (and potential flashpoint) between a democratic institutionalized Euro-Atlantic community to the west and an unpredictable politico-military landscape stretching beyond the Urals to the east.

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A Brief History and Introduction

History has not been kind to the nations of Poland and Belarus. While the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth may have flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries enjoying periods of enlightenment and power, for much of the past two hundred years Poland has been under foreign domination. The simultaneous rise of the monarchial autocracies to the west, east, and south resulted in Poland's complete disappearance from the map of Europe in three successive partitions (1772, 1793 and 1795). Absorbed into Prussia, Russia and Habsburg Austria, for the next 125 years the Poles were a nation without a state. Two decades of independence during the inter-war years came to an end in September 1939 when German (Nazi) and Russian (Soviet) forces invaded in collusive action in what has become known as the 'fourth partition' of Poland. From 1945 to 1989, a semi-sovereign communist Polish state sat festering behind the Iron Curtain 'protected' by the USSR.

Belarus, Poland's north-eastern neighbour, has faired even worse. Having been fully absorbed into the Russian Empire and then constituting a subservient republic in the Soviet Union, the Belarusians were never permitted to determine their own fate. In fact, the very existence of the Belarusians has come under constant threat and as European nation building goes, they did not form a distinct national consciousness until relatively late (towards the end of the 19th century). Russia, in its various incarnations, never accepted the individual separateness of the Belarusians and has attempted (unsuccessfully) to liquidate their culture, language and traditions in the hope they would simply melt unnoticed into the Russian mass. At least 30,000 possibly up to 100,000 Belarusians were executed during Stalin's purges in the 1930s and thousands more sent to labour camps. In December 1991, as the USSR imploded, Belarus tentatively divorced

itself from Moscow and entered a brave new world as an independent state for the first time in its history.

Despite the relative similarities in the fate of the Poles and Belarusians over the past two centuries, relations between these two neighbouring peoples have not been cordial. Having both been dominated by stronger and rapacious neighbours, one might have expected them to join forces and face up to the common foe in unison. This failed to materialize as ethnic tensions, territorial rivalry, and the Poles' own 'superiority complex' over the Belarusians precluded any chance of constructive co-operation. During the struggle for independence in the 19th and 20th centuries the Poles, like their Russians oppressors, refused to recognize the Belarusians as a separate nation with legitimate territorial claims. For the Russian Tsarist authorities the people of Belarus were *istinno russki narod* ('an authentic Russian nation'), while the Poles classified them as *prosty lud naszych kresów* ('a simple people of our borderlands'). Poles regarded the Belarusian National Movement as nothing more than a 'cultural curiosity' and dismissed its territorial ambitions.[1] Polish nationalist politicians had already earmarked Belarusian ethnic territory, once wrestled back from the Russians, as belonging to a future Polish state.

Out of the ashes of the First World War the emergence of Soviet Russia to the east and the Second Polish Republic to the west squeezed out Belarusian hopes for independence. The Treaty of Riga, signed by the Poles and Russians to end the territorial Polish-Soviet War of 1919–21, divided the Belarusian lands between Poland and Soviet Russia, leaving over 2 million disgruntled Belarusians and 5 million Ukrainians within the new Polish state. Subsequent efforts by the Polish government to assimilate its minorities by denying cultural freedoms merely increased ethnic tensions and cemented Belarusian and Ukrainian antipathy towards the Poles. The Belarusians—treated with immense suspicion by the Polish authorities as 'communist sympathizers'—naturally turned to the USSR for solace. When the Soviets invaded eastern Poland in September 1939 to 'liberate the Belarusians and Ukrainians from the Polish yoke' many local Belarusians celebrated and under Soviet auspices committed countless atrocities against their Polish compatriots.[2]

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[1] Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Białorusini w Polsce, 1944–1949*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993. pp. 14–15.
[2] See: Jan T. Gross, *W zaborze sowieckim*. Poznań: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1981.

Following the end of the Second World War and the imposition of the Yalta Agreement (which shifted Poland's eastern border over two hundred miles westwards out of ethnic Belarusian and Ukrainian territory) mass population transfers ensued, which somewhat resolved, albeit inhumanely, the ethnic turmoil that had perpetually plagued Poland's borderland regions. In accordance with Moscow's *divide et impera* principle throughout the Cold War period Soviet propaganda continued to fan the flames of animosity between Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Lithuanians while simultaneously claiming credit for maintaining a system that enabled the socialist nations to 'live in peace and harmony'. The problem of how to regulate Poland's relations with its eastern neighbours was therefore left to émigré literary-political thinkers, most notably Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski writing in the Paris-based Polish journal *Kultura*, who argued that Poland would never find true peace and security in a democratic Europe without coming to terms with Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and eventually Russia. The traditional Polish chauvinistic mindset towards these peoples would have to undergo radical change. Poles would have to recognize their eastern neighbours as separate and legitimate nations with whom Poland would have to develop close relations in future. Failure to do so, they argued, would only work in Russia's favour.[3]

The collapse of socialist structures in Europe followed by the sudden meltdown of the USSR in the years 1989–91 ushered in gargantuan changes to Europe's geo-strategic landscape. Poland's new post-communist élite, made up almost entirely from anti-communist dissidents and former *Solidarność* members, was extremely savvy to the new thinking espoused by Giedroyc and Mieroszewski and quickly grasped the imperativeness of recognizing the independence aspirations of the Soviet republics and supporting their struggle for self-determination. Consequently in December 1991 Poland was one of the first nations in the world to recognize the independence declarations of Belarus, Ukraine and the Baltic States. The emergence of these new countries fundamentally and irrevocably changed Poland's geopolitical fate, removing the eternal dilemma of having the spectre of direct Russian power looming along its eastern border. This is not to say Russia had altogether disappeared from Warsaw's security concerns, but Moscow's very loss of empire significantly weakened its position in Central Europe thus fostering in Poland lower perceptions of threat. The independent existence of

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[3] See in particular: Juliusz Mieroszewski, *Materiały do refleksji i dumy*. Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1976.

Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was seen in Warsaw as an historic opportunity and a vital new component in Europe's new security architecture. Once it had secured its own foothold in the West and developed sufficiently influential diplomatic channels, Poland considered it essential to support and bolster the democratic and pro-European aspirations of these states, a strategy that became the corner-stone of Poland's 'Eastern Policy' throughout the 1990s.

The demise of the USSR allowed Poland to work towards developing normal relations with the Soviet successor states free of communist dogma and overt interference from Moscow. These changes presented Poland and newly-independent Belarus with the first opportunity in history to build bilateral interstate relations in a democratic Europe. Never having previously enjoyed independence and totally inexperienced in the realm of international relations, Belarus suddenly found itself thrust onto the world stage. Serious efforts would have to be undertaken to secure new friends in the region and throughout Europe. As Belarus' closest western neighbour, it seemed completely natural to expect Poland to play a major role in this equation. The new Belarusian Government—initially led by the pro-Western Stanislau Shushkevich and adopting neutrality as the basis of its security policy—was therefore very enthusiastic to do business with Warsaw, seeing in Poland a partner and possible counterweight Russian influence. As President Wałęsa's former advisor, Zdzisław Najder, argued at the time: 'For Belarus, Poland is the only window to Europe, and if we do not help the Belarusians to find themselves a place in the new Europe, who will?'[4] The Poles were therefore willing reciprocators and Polish-Belarusian relations initially evolved in an extremely cordial and constructive manner. Warsaw signed over twenty accords with Minsk between 1991 and 1993, more than it had penned with any other eastern neighbour at the time.[5]

In 1994, however, mutual relations began to sour. A major cause of this downturn can be traced to the election of Aleksandyr Lukashenka to the Belarusian presidency and his regime's subsequent slide into authoritarianism. All vestiges of democratic and economic reform were stopped as Lukashenka re-introduced a form of neo-communism to Belarus. Another reason, due in part to Lukashenka's pro-Moscow tendencies and his desire to 're-integrate' politically, militarily and economically with Russia, has been a

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[4] See: Stanisław Grzymski, 'Polskie wnioski z kryzysu', *Rzeczpospolita*, 30 August 1991.
[5] Piotr Kościnski, 'Polska chce suwerennej Białoruś', *Rzesczpospolita*, 29 June 1993.

fundamental divergence of opinion between Poland and Belarus on the issue of European security and, in particular, the consequences of NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe.

The aim of this article is not to produce an in-depth analysis of the NATO enlargement process itself, but rather to determine what effect it has had on Polish-Belarusian relations. It will span the years 1993–2004, essentially when the NATO expansion debate began until the completion of the second wave, and will look to explore Polish and Belarusian interpretations of NATO and how each country has reacted to key stages in the expansion process. The Polish-Belarusian dimension is relatively unexplored area of the enlargement story, yet in many ways it is a vital component. Where these two countries meet has effectively become a major boundary between a democratic, institutionalized Europe (NATO, EU) and a relatively unpredictable world stretching to the Urals. Poland would rather play the role of a bridge than a bulwark.

This general neglect of Belarus stems in part from the West's obsession with the Russian dynamic in European security debates and the tendency to view Russia as the *only* country in the East with legitimate concerns vis-à-vis NATO enlargement worthy of consideration. Belarus, like Russia, has had serious misgivings about the enlargement process yet scant attention has focused on analyzing the reasons behind these concerns. In fact, most Western states failed (and still fail) to give much consideration to the wider significance of Belarus in matters of Euro-Atlantic security. Since the Belarusian leadership has made a conscious choice to return to the Russian sphere of influence, western policy-makers have tended to regard Belarus as 'Russia's problem'. Although the West is clearly concerned about Belarus' retreat from democracy under Lukashenka's rule, the country has somehow slipped through the net in the shaping of Europe's political and geostrategic architecture. In the words of Sherman W. Garnett and Robert Legvold who wrote in 1999: 'In a Europe invigorated by the triumph of modern democracy over communist failure, a Europe that so many of the ex-socialist states are clamouring to enter, the major powers do not have much time for retrograde nations.'[6] Given that Poland shares a common border with Belarus stretching over 400 kilometers, ignorance and detachment to events occurring in Minsk are not attitudes Warsaw can afford to adopt.

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[6] Sherman W. Garnett & Robert Legvold (eds.), 'Assessing the Challenge of Belarus', in: Sherman W. Garnett & Robert Legvold (eds.), *Belarus at the Crossroads*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999. pp. 1–18 (1).

Polish and Belarusian Perceptions of NATO

From the perspective of national security gaining membership in NATO has been one of the most important events in Poland's recent history. The question of joining NATO has transcended all political divides and has been linked with perceptions of democracy, military modernization, and economic prosperity. Most importantly, given that the Poles have been attacked at some stage from nearly every direction, NATO provides Poland with a proven, robust security umbrella under which national independence can be maintained. Having spent over four decades of forced compliance in the Soviet Bloc, NATO expansion has had enormous symbolic connotations for Poland's post-communist elite. Not only has it reversed the injustice of continental division that had plagued Europe since the imposition of the reviled Yalta system in 1945, but joining NATO also signified the Poles' de facto acceptance into the Euro-Atlantic security system and therefore constituted a huge leap forward in their much publicized 'return to Europe'.[7]

Essentially, Warsaw considers NATO fulfilling two principle functions: the 'hard' function of a core defensive alliance (which underpins the territorial integrity of its member states and protects them from outside attack) and also, equally important, the 'soft' function of a general security institution (which guarantees the democratic status quo in Europe, strengthens trust among member states, respects human rights, and preserves internationally recognized standards of civic and economic freedoms proper for Western culture).[8] 'Security is of fundamental value to all states. It provides the necessary framework in which the well-being of their citizens can flourish and in which friendly co-operative international relations can develop,' said former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski in a speech in London in 1996: 'We are confident that Poland's accession to NATO will lead to a projection of stability and security into areas stretching beyond our eastern frontier.'[9] This belief in NATO's ability to 'project stability'

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[7] See: Aleksander Kwaśniewski, *Dom wszystkich Polska.* Warszawa: Perspektywy Press, 2000. pp. 213–235.

[8] Thomas Lane, 'NATO's Enlargement: The Implications for the Security of Poland and the Baltic States', *Working Paper*, No. 1 (16), University of Bradford, 1998; See also: Jan De Weydenthal, 'Poland Builds Security Links with the West', *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 24, 18 April 1994, pp. 28–30 (29).

[9] Aleksander Kwaśniewski, 'Poland and NATO Enlargement: Answers to Sensitive Questions', Address by President Aleksander Kwasniewski, at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, 24 October 1996, *Polish Embassy in London—Documents*, found at: <http://www.poland-Embassy.org.uk/gov/ak2410.html>.

eastwards has been the main driving force behind Poland's universal support for further expansion, especially Ukraine's aspirations for future membership.

From the Polish perspective, not only is NATO the most effective organization for maintaining regional stability in which the states of East-Central Europe can continue to develop and prosper, but it constitutes the *only* viable basis on which the Euro-Atlantic security system can be built.[10] Poland has therefore supported wholeheartedly the active role of the United States in European security dynamics and is not alone in maintaining such a view. The majority of other Central and Eastern European states that regained full independence from Soviet hegemony in 1991 agree that the North Atlantic Bloc plays a pivotal role in the preservation of European stability and security. From Estonia to Bulgaria nearly every state currently occupying the geopolitical space between Germany and Russia quickly set its sights on NATO membership or at least developing permanent and constructive relations with the Alliance.

The only countries in the region that have not shared this enthusiasm are Russia and its stalwart ally, the Republic of Belarus.[11] While the majority of Europe's fledgling democracies have been clamoring to join Western military structures, NATO's decision to expand has not been a cause for celebration in Russia or Belarus. In fact, NATO's 'encroachment' into the former Eastern Bloc has been portrayed by the Russian and Belarusian leaderships as a 'menacing security threat'. From the moment the populist former communist Alyaksandr Lukashenka won the presidential elections in July 1994, Belarus' foreign and security policy has been based almost entirely on (re)integrated military and economic ties with Russia with scant attention devoted to developing relations with the democratic West. In order to curry favour with Moscow, Lukashenka has on many occasions underscored his military's preparedness to defend the Belarusian-Polish border 'in order to guarantee Russia's security'.[12] Lukashenka's desire for greater integration with Russia has effectively bound Belarus' foreign policy to that of its huge neighbour. Belarusian policy *vis-à-vis* NATO enlargement has therefore closely followed

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[10] Speech by Aleksander Kwaśniewski, 'New Members of NATO: New Challenges, New Functions', delivered at the 1998 NATO Workshop, Vienna. *Center for Strategic Decision Research*, found at: <www.csdr.org/98book/kwas98.htm>.

[11] It should also be pointed out that until the downfall of Slobodan Milosevich in October 2000, Yugoslavia was also decidedly anti-NATO in outlook.

[12] 'Nie sprzeciwiamy się, ale nie chcemy', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 January 1996; 'Łukaszenko: rakiety w odpowiedzi na poszerzenie NATO', *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 January 1996.

Russia's lead, which has aimed at preventing or at least slowing down the expansion process.

President Lukashenka has insisted that Belarus' opposition to NATO expansion has not merely been a policy confined to leadership circles. In 1997 he claimed a staggering 90 percent of the population considered the North Atlantic Bloc a hostile organization.[13] This was perhaps an exaggerated figure, but it is hardly surprising that anti-NATO sentiment among Belarusian society has been successfully nurtured given the regime's virtual monopoly over the country's mass media. The Belarusian state media, which acts as the regime's primary propaganda tool and supports close 'brotherly' ties with Russia, has tended to base the country's collective patriotism on the 'glory' of the former Soviet Union and the ideological struggle it once waged with Western capitalism. At the same time, the small independent press sector which advocates tighter integration with the West and largely rejects Russia's paternalistic role as Belarus' 'eternal' protector, has been virtually eliminated and thus plays only a minor role in the opinion-making process among the Belarusian population.[14] The lack of objective information in Belarus about the Atlantic Pact and how it has changed since the end of the Cold War has therefore been a serious obstacle to changing attitudes in a society heavily indoctrinated through decades of Soviet propaganda to think of NATO in terms of a hostile aggressor. By manipulating the press and vilifying NATO as a 'mortal threat', Lukashenka has systematically channeled anti-Western feelings cultivated during Soviet times to drum up domestic support for deeper military and economic integration with Russia.

Apart from reverting to outdated modes of Cold War rhetoric, however, Minsk has not really produced any solid or consistent arguments to confirm exactly how NATO in its post-1991 form could eventually threaten either Belarus or Russia. The only exception has been a dogged reliance on a core Russian-Belarusian theme that the extension of military alliances through NATO enlargement would produce a new division

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[13] Hrihoriy Perepelitsa, 'Belarusian-Russian Integration and its Impact on the Security of Ukraine', in: Sherman W. Garnett & Robert Legvold (eds.), *Belarus at the Crossroads*, pp. 81–103 (99).

[14] For an informative insight into the fate of the independent press in Belarus under President Lukashenka, see: Miron Musiał, 'Białoruskie środki masowej informacji—kryzys permanentny?', *Środkowoeuropejskie studia polityczne*, 1, 2005, pp. 71–92.

in Europe that could eventually lead to confrontation between the 'opposing' blocs.[15] Lukashenka has repeatedly complained that NATO expansion would push Belarus to the outskirts of European politics and exclude it from vital security debates.[16]

Poland as a security threat to Belarus

A convenient target for Lukashenka's anti-NATO rhetoric since the expansion process began has undoubtedly been his western neighbour, Poland. In attacking Poland, Lukashenka has not run the risk of complicating his relations with Russia, since Russia's own relations with Poland over the NATO issue have been cool at best. Poland is the largest and arguably the most powerful of the former Eastern Bloc countries and Moscow has not held back criticizing Warsaw's drive to join the West's military structures, unable to fully grasp why the 'ungrateful' Poles have been so eager to turn their back on Russia. Likewise, Lukashenka believes that in striving to join NATO and other Euro-Atlantic institutions, Warsaw has sold itself to 'rotten Western capitalism' and has become a 'puppet' of the United States unable to make independent foreign policy decisions.[17] He has even blamed Poland for betraying the concept of 'Slavic brotherhood' and destroying the opportunity to unite the nations of Eastern Europe in a 'pan-Slavic bloc' to counterweight U.S. and NATO influence in Europe.[18] Lukashenka has tended to portray the question of joining NATO in strict ideological terms, a stark choice between 'us' (Russia, the East) and 'them' (NATO, the West), rather than pragmatically assessing the merits of enlargement for European stability or the security benefits Belarus could gain by co-operating with the Alliance.[19]

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[15] Beata Górka-Winter, 'Ewolucja NATO a stosunki polsko-białoruskie', in: Adam Eberhardt & Uładzimir. Ułachowicz (eds.), *Polska i Białoruś*. Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2003. pp. 59−69 (66).

[16] Anatoly Rozanov, 'Belarus: Foreign Policy Priorities', in: Sherman W. Garnett & Robert Legvold (eds.), *Belarus at the Crossroads.* pp. 19−35 (25).

[17] 'Lukshanka Holds 'Popular Congress'', *RFE/RL: Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report*, 22 May 2001, Vol. 3, No. 19, found at: <www.rfeel.org/pbureport/>.

[18] Stanisław Pawelski, 'Wesoły—smutny kraj: Białoruś pod rządami Aleksandra Łukaszenki', in: Piotr Kraszewski, Tadeusz Miluski & Tadeusz Wallas (eds.), *Zbliżanie się Wschodu i Zachodu*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe INPiD, 2000. pp. 161−176 (170).

[19] Joanna Konieczna, 'Popular Sentiment in Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania toward NATO and its Enlargement', *Center for Eastern Studies (Warsaw),* 4 January 2001, found at: <www.osw.waw.pl>.

Suspicions of NATO and Poland's intention to join were in fact already inherent among the Belarusian leadership even before the Lukashenka era, when Belarus was still a fledgling democratic state open to Western influences and enjoying excellent relations with Poland. This favourable balance began to change during the second half of 1993 when the pro-Russian former communists successfully regrouped and began reasserting influence on Belarusian politics. The first major indication that Belarus was about to alter its course in foreign and security policy occurred in April 1993 when the Belarusian Parliament voted in favour of signing up to the *Tashkent Treaty On Collective Security* thereby upgrading Belarus' hitherto neutral status to a full military partner in the security system of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).[20] During the two-day parliamentary debate that preceded voting, particular attention focused on the negative consequences for Belarus' national security if it remained a 'non-aligned' state while

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[20] The security system of the CIS—the *Tashkent Treaty On Collective Security*—was signed by six former Soviet Republics (Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) on 15 May 1992. The treaty guarantees its signatories mutual security, and like NATO's article 5, an attack on one member is regarded as an attack on all. Although Belarus had been originally invited to join the pact, the Belarusian delegation in Tashkent, headed at the time by the pro-Western Parliamentary Speaker Stanislau Shushkevich, refused to sign the document saying that it was a matter for the Belarusian Parliament to decide whether or not Belarus should commit to any military alliance. Shushkevich declared that entering into the Tashkent Pact ran contrary to the Constitution and contradicted Belarus' neutral status. Since attaining office in 1991, Shushkevich fought constant battles with pro-Russian Premier Vyacheslau Kebich over reforms and the direction of Belarus' foreign and security policy. Shushkevich advocated developing close relations with Poland and the Euro-Atlantic community, while Kebich preferred military and economic reintegration with Russia. The endorsement by Parliament in April 1993 to join the Tashkent Treaty was therefore a major defeat for Shushkevich and gave Kebich the green light to drive forward his integrationist plans—or in his words—'to do everything in his powers to ensure the restoration of the USSR in a remoulded form.' Belarus officially entered the *Tashkent Treaty On Collective Security* in December 1993. Highly significant in the process of Belarusian-Russian integration was the replacement of Shushkevich in January 1994 by Miacyslau Hryb, a pro-Moscow, hard-line former police chief and Chairman of the Commission on National Security. The removal of Shushkevich signified a defining victory for the conservative pro-Russian re-integrationists over the pro-European national reformist camp. Warsaw feared that Minsk would now abandon the implementation of vital democratic and economic reform essential for the nation-building process, which could in turn severely compromise the ability of Belarus to maintain its independence. It was feared that Belarus could even return to the status of a military satellite of Russia or, in a worse case scenario, be absorbed straight back into the Russian landmass, which brought with it the added anxiety for Poland of a large Russian military presence possibly being relocated on Belarusian territory close to the Polish border. See: Piotr Kościński, 'Bliżej Rosji, bliżej przyszłości', *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 January 1994; Przemysław Foligowski, *Białoruś— trudna niepodległość*. Wrocław: Alta2, 1999. p. 106; Aleksander Smaljanczuk, 'Kraj na rozdrożu. Z dziejów geopolityki białoruskiej w XX wieku', in: Jakubowski Maciej (ed.), *Polska i jej sąsiedzi wobec prezmian cywilizacyjnych i geopolitycznych:* Geopolitical Studies Vol. 4. Warszawa, 1998. pp. 111—126 (119); Jacek Sobczak, *Studia nad wyborami prezydenckimi i parliamentarnimi na litwie i Białorusi*. Poznań: Terra, 1997. p. 80.

NATO decided to expand eastwards. The pro-Russian communist bloc, headed by Premier Vyacheslau Kebich, portrayed Belarus as a country facing mortal danger should it fail to join Russia and other pro-Russian former Soviet Republics in a CIS-wide military alliance. It was argued—perhaps justifiably—that without military assistance and regular supplies of Russian equipment (which signing up to the *Tashkent Treaty* would guarantee) a newly independent Belarus would be in no position to effectively defend itself in the event of outside attack. Serious questions were raised concerning Warsaw's decision at the time to relocate a considerable military force from the west of Poland to the north-east close to the border with Belarus.[21] Defence Minister Paviel Kozlovskij even declared that because of its exposed position Belarus might become in future the subject of territorial claims by any one of its neighbours. While Kozlovskij refrained from naming any particular country as a potential security threat, his comments left no doubts among Polish observers that he had Poland in mind as cause for concern. One deputy even warned that should Germany ever begin pressing Poland for the return of Sląsk (Silesia) it would not take long before the Poles made similar claims for the return of the former eastern territories annexed by the USSR in 1939 now belonging to Belarus.[22]

A Prelude to Expansion: NATO's *Partnership for Peace* (PfP)

The fact Belarus was the last country in the region to sign up for NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme gives further proof of deep-rooted concerns in Minsk about strengthening ties with the West at the expense of loosening ties with Russia. Conceived by NATO's Defence Ministers in the German seaport of Travemunde in October 1993 on the initiative of the U.S. Secretary of Defence, the PfP was officially launched during a NATO summit in Brussels on 10–11 January 1994. Through events such as joint exercises, leadership visits, workshops, and security assistance programmes, it was

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[21] Warsaw rejected claims that the Polish military had purposely strengthened its presence along the border with Belarus, although did not deny troop movements had taken place. It was explained that because of former Warsaw Pact defence planning the bulk of Poland's armed forces had previously been located along the western border with Germany, but since the geopolitical and strategic situation in Europe had now changed it was necessary to redeploy those forces evenly in other parts the country. See: Cezary Goliński, 'Rola straszaka', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 April 1993.

[22] For a summary of this debate, see: Cezary Goliński, 'Neutralność w sojuszu z Rosją', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 April 1993.

designed as a means to increase stability and promote peace in Europe through the expansion of political and defence co-operation. A major goal of the PfP is to improve the military interoperability between NATO members and former Warsaw Pact countries and, ultimately, to better prepare prospective applicants for eventual membership.[23] Poland signed up to the initiative on 2 February. Ukraine, as the first CIS state, joined on 8 February. Belarus, like Russia, saw no reason to get excited and avoided making any commitments.

When Belarus eventually signed up for the PfP a year later in January 1995 it did so very reluctantly and only after Russia expressed a grudging willingness to participate. Minsk also announced that its military forces would only co-operate with PfP on a very limited basis because of 'financial constraints'. Consequently, unlike Poland, Ukraine and other states in the region, Belarus showed little desire in developing structural military co-operation with NATO within the PfP framework. According to Andrey Fiodorau of the Minsk-based International Institute of Political Research, it is not ruled out that the Belarusian authorities purposely limited contacts between its own army and NATO forces in order to prevent ordinary Belarusian troops seeing the level of professionalism and living standards of Western soldiers.[24] Belarusian reluctance to embrace the PfP initiative therefore negated at a very early stage the ability of Warsaw and Minsk to improve mutual transparency in military matters on both a bilateral and multilateral level.

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[23] In the words of Lieutenant Colonel P J F Schofield: 'Partnership for Peace, in political terms, is about achieving security, about removing barriers of fear and tension throughout Europe and the North Atlantic area. Pragmatically, and in military terms, PfP is about one thing: it is the preparation of nations outside NATO for operations with NATO forces. […] PfP extends practical military co-operation to the democracies of Central and Eastern Europe and beyond, striving to draw in those states of the former Warsaw Pact into the international fold and allow them to become interoperable with NATO'. See Lieutenant Colonel P J F Schofield, 'Partnership for Peace: The NATO Initiative of January 1994', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 141, No. 2, April 1996, pp. 8‒15; See also: NATO's official webpage, 'Partnership for Peace', found at: <http://www.nato.int/issues/pfp/index.htm>.

[24] See: Andrey Fiodorau, 'Białoruś i NATO—wystąpienie w czasie konferencji 'Białoruś a Unia Europejska: teraźniejszość i perspektywy', zorganizowanej przez Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej Polska-Białoruś, Fundacje im. K. Adenauera', *Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Wiedzy Filomaci z Mińska*, Białystok, 5‒6 April 2003, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

NATO's European Adversary: Aleksandyr Lukashenka

From the very beginning of the NATO expansion debate, which commenced almost immediately following the collapse of the USSR, Russia, still reeling from the loss of empire, was loathe to accept its former satellite states in Central Europe switching to the 'other side'. Moscow's primary concern was that if it failed to stem expansion early on, Russia would end up losing significant influence in Central Europe, something it was not prepared to accept. Neo-imperial forces in the Kremlin at the time claimed the region (Poland, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics) constituted its 'near abroad' and that NATO had no right doing business there. Projecting even further into the future, should any of the Soviet successor states such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine and Georgia then begin agitating for membership, Russia could end up having its western approaches to Europe completely surrounded by NATO member states, a geopolitical scenario almost unthinkable to most Russians.

The victory of Russophile Aleksandyr Lukashenka in the presidential elections of June/July 1994 presented Moscow with a much needed ally in its early efforts to stall or scupper NATO expansion. In February 1995 the Belarusian President suddenly announced that Belarus would halt the process of reducing its armed forces as stipulated by the *Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe* (CFE) because the planned expansion of NATO to embrace the countries of Central Europe would 'upset the military status quo in the region.'[25] Since the CFE treaty was (and still is) seen as one of the main pillars of European security[26] the decision aroused condemnation from European officials and caused particular disquiet in Poland.[27] The announcement came the day after Lukashenka ended an official visit to Moscow and the Polish media speculated that the action had been agreed upon during discussions with Russian officials to mirror the Kremlin's own decision to suspend its obligations *vis-à-vis* the CFE treaty.[28] The move was interpreted in Warsaw as the beginning of a concerted Russian-Belarusian anti-enlargement strategy

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[25] Cezary Goliński, 'Mińsk nie potnie czołgów', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28 February 1995.

[26] The CFE Treaty aims to enhance stability in Europe by reducing the regular armed forces of its signatories thereby lowering tension between states. It was signed on 19 November 1990 by the following countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republics, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Turkey, USSR, United Kingdom and the United States. See: 'Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces in Europe', found at: <www.osce.org/docs/english/19901999/cfe/cfetreate .htm#Anchor-Th-62201>.

[27] 'Kinkel krytykuje Białoruś', *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 February 1995.

[28] Cezary Goliński, 'Mińsk nie potnie'.

aimed at complicating the entry of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into NATO.[29] Belarusian concerns about Poland's NATO aspirations can be gauged at this time by the comments of then Speaker of the Belarusian Parliament, Miacyslau Hryb. In an interview with the Polish daily *Rzeczpospolita* in March 1995, Hryb stressed that although Minsk respected the individual right of any sovereign state to choose its military alliances, the desire of Poland and the Baltic States to join NATO was 'beyond comprehension' to most Belarusians. Hryb asked: 'Why is it necessary to expand NATO if the Warsaw Pact no longer exists? Is Belarus, a state many times weaker than Poland, in a position to threaten anyone?' He went on to say that the encroachment of the Alliance to the Polish-Belarusian border would create a new political-military barrier that would cause the marginalization of Belarus in European affairs.[30]

From 1995 onwards Poland's intention to join NATO soon began to dominate Polish-Belarusian meetings at the highest state level. During an official visit to Moscow to meet with Russian President Boris Yeltsin in May 1995, a Polish delegation headed by Premier Józef Oleksy was also obliged to meet with President Lukashenka who 'happened' to be in the Russian capital at the same time. Lukashenka told Oleksy in the frankest of terms that he could not understand the logic of Polish politicians who wanted to join the Atlantic Alliance at the soonest possible opportunity. NATO expansion should be a long and considered process that took into account the interests of all states in the region not just those wishing to join. It was inconceivable, he said, that Belarusian and Russian security concerns were being repeatedly ignored as Poland and NATO made decisions that 'threatened regional stability'. Lukashenka also used the occasion to criticize Poland's president at the time, Lech Wałęsa, by insisting the Polish leader ought to 'concentrate on developing friendly relations with Belarus' instead of seeking NATO membership at all costs.[31]

With the victory of Aleksander Kwaśniewski in Poland's presidential elections in November 1995, Warsaw's drive towards NATO membership continued unabated. When the new Polish President met Lukashenka in the famous Belarusian forest retreat of Belovezhskaya Pushcha in March 1996—in what turned out to be the only presidential

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[29] Paweł Swieboda, 'A Difficult Balancing Act Between East and West', *Transition*, Vol. 1, No. 14, 11 August 1995, pp. 23−27 (26); See also: Cezary Goliński, 'Mińsk nie potnie'.
[30] Piotr Kościński's interview with Miacyslau Hryb: 'Nie rozumiemy, dlaczego Polska chce być w NATO', *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 March 1995.
[31] Andrzej Łomanowski, 'Połowiczny sukces na Kremlu', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 May 1995.

summit ever to take place between the two leaders—the issue of NATO expansion dominated the agenda. Although Lukashenka stated that Belarus had no right to interfere in Poland's choice of military alignment, he made it clear that Minsk objected to a 'hurried and mechanical' expansion of the Alliance and would categorically oppose nuclear weapons being located on Polish territory.[32] Kwaśniewski replied that it was too early at this stage to discuss the details of Poland's security obligations in an enlarged NATO, including the possible deployment of nuclear missiles on Polish soil. The Polish President did nontheless promise that Warsaw would 'take into consideration Belarusian security concerns' and keep Minsk 'suitably informed' of developments concerning Poland's entry negotiations.[33]

One of the main issues that always vexed Polish politicians about Belarus' anti-NATO stance has been the constant and probably deliberate failure of the Lukashenka administration to grasp the ultimate purpose of NATO in the post-Soviet world. Particularly irritating for Poland has been Minsk's perpetual use of outdated Cold War rhetoric confirming that Belarusian geopolitical thought was still frozen in perceptions of bipolar military rivalry. In May 1996, for example, during a conference organized in Warsaw by the Euro-Atlantic Association entitled, *Belarus, Poland and Ukraine: A Safe Region in a Safe Europe*, Lukashenka's foreign policy advisor Syargey Posokhov called the Alliance 'a relic of a bygone age', which had 'lost its rationale'. He said enlargement would upset the 'political equilibrium' that was starting to take shape in Europe and result in the 'emergence of new divisions on the continent.' Posokhov asked: 'What international guarantees will Belarus obtain against the contingency of inter-bloc conflict? Won't NATO be targeted against Belarus? Won't its weapons be aimed in our direction?' Also present at the conference were representatives of the pro-Western Belarusian opposition, notably leader of the Belarusian National Front (BNF), Zenon Paznyak. In direct contrast to the views presented by the official governmental delegation, the BNF chief singled out Russia, not NATO, as the primary security threat to Belarus. Paznyak said NATO 'guaranteed stability and democracy in Europe' and that the best course of action for Belarus would be to integrate with the West.[34]

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[32] Piotr Kościński, 'Na różnych falach', *Rzeczpospolita*, 1 April 1996.
[33] Edward Krzemień, 'Białoruski Bilans', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1 April 1996.
[34] See: Edward Krzemień, 'Białoruś-Polska-Ukraina. Mikromodel Europy', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28 May 1996; Piotr Kościński, 'Pomiędzy NATO i Rosją', *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 May 1996.

Breakdown in Relations

As Lukashenka proceed throughout 1996 to strengthen his one-dimensional, Russian-orientated foreign policy and to consolidate his grip on domestic power through undemocratic means, opportunities for Warsaw to constructively engage Minsk were becoming increasingly few and far between. Constitutional alterations through 'popular' national referendums and alleged vote rigging on a mass scale empowered Lukashenka to do away with the trappings of parliamentary democracy and transform the office presidency into an all-powerful legislative organ. The elimination of the independent press, the mysterious disappearance of anti-government journalists, the persistent harassment of all political opposition, and police brutality against protesters made up the stark realities of Belarus under Lukashenka's authoritarian leadership. Such anti-democratic behaviour has brought his regime into permanent conflict with Poland and other Western states and is wholly incompatible with NATO's philosophy of preserving and expanding democratic values throughout the Euro-Atlantic community. While Polish Foreign Minister Dariusz Rosati may have claimed that Polish and Western politicians had committed 'a grave mistake' in neglecting Belarus for so long by failing to pull it into the European family of nations,[35] he nevertheless admitted that due to increasing breakdown of democratic governance in Minsk and the regime's rigorous anti-NATO stance the chances of achieving a positive breakthrough in mutual relations were virtually zero.[36]

Meantime, in May 1996, the Polish media picked up on an interesting article that appeared in *Biełaruskaja Dziełowaja Gazeta*, one of the few remaining opposition newspapers still publishing in Belarus. It reported that the increase of tension in Polish-Belarusian relations that had occurred since 1995 had been orchestrated by Moscow, which wanted to expose Poland in a bad light in the West in order to slow down its march to NATO. The paper believed that Belarusian state media organs had unleashed, at the Kremlin's insistence, a concerted 'anti-Polish campaign' in order to discredit the Polish Government. It claimed that comments at the time by Parliamentary Chairman Siemien

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[35] 'Wywiad Dariusza Rosatiego dla 'Warsaw Voice'', *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 April 1996.

[36] Dariusz Rosati, 'Poland's Return to Europe: Reflections on Foreign Policy in 1995–97', *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Winter 1999, pp. 9–22 (20); See also: 'Rozmowa z Dariuszem Rosatim, ministrem spraw zagranicznych Polski', *Wprost*, 1 June 1997.

Shareckij who publicly accused Poland of possessing a rich historical heritage of 'persecuting' Belarusians,[37] together with the arrest and deportation from Belarus of *Solidarność* leader Marian Krzaklewski for 'organizing an illegal gathering of a political nature' leading to a high-level diplomatic dispute, were the beginnings of a deliberate effort to stir up bad blood between Poland and Belarus.[38] Since NATO candidate states were obliged to maintain good relations with all neighbouring countries as a prerequisite for future membership, the publication claimed it lay in the interests of Russian strategists attempting to prevent NATO expansion to see problematic relations on the Warsaw-Minsk line.[39]

Poland made one final attempt at initiating concrete dialogue with Minsk in July 1996 in the Belarusian border town of Brest when Foreign Minister Rosati met his Ukrainian and Belarusian counterparts in a three-way summit devoted to regional security. During the post-summit press conference Ukrainian Foreign Minister Hennadij Udovenko stressed in the best diplomatic tones that 'despite the differences of opinion each side treated the viewpoints of the other with full understanding.' Rosati rather enthusiastically announced that the meeting marked the beginning of the so-called *Trójkat Brzeski* ('Brest Triangle'), a tri-lateral framework for expanding co-operation and intensifying diplomatic contacts.[40] In reality, Rosati failed to entice the Belarusians into any such structure or alleviate their apprehensions about Poland joining NATO.[41]

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[37] Speaking during a parliamentary session on 2 May, Shareckij accused the oppositionist Belarusian Popular Front leader Zenon Paznyak of making a gross error in expecting Poland to be a friendly country in future while portraying Russia as a nation constantly threatening Belarusian independence. In the opinion of Shareckij, it was not Russia that endangered Belarus' state interests, but Poland. 'Poland has always oppressed Belarus,' he said. Shareckij drew attention to the 'persecution' of Belarusians in inter-war Poland and claimed the revival of Belarusian national consciousness was only made possible thanks to the 'liberation' and 'unification' of Belarusian territory by Soviet forces in 1939. See: Maja Narbutt, 'Nie ufać Polsce', *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 May 1996.

[38] For details of the treatment and deportation of Krzaklweski from Belarus and the diplomatic scandal that ensued, see: Piotr Adamowicz, 'Aresztowanie i deportacja Krzaklewskiego', *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 May 1996; Cezary Goliński, 'Krzaklewski deportowany', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 May 1996; Bernadeta Waszkielewicz, 'Krzaklewski: oczekuję 'przepraszam'', *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 May 1996; Małgorzata Tryc-Ostrowska, 'Zatrzymanie zgodnie z prawem', *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 May 1996.

[39] See: Cezary Goliński, 'Moskwa chce nas pokłócić z Minskem?', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 May 1996; 'Russia Blamed for Minsk-Warsaw Fight', *Warsaw Voice*— *News*, No. 22 (97), 2 June 1996.

[40] Piotr Kościński, 'Trójkat Brzeski o euroregionie i wizach', *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 July 1996.

[41] Włodzimierz Malendowski, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa RP: Uwarunkowania–strategia–kierunki działania*. Poznań: UAM, 1998. p. 164.

Lukashenka's Nuclear Gambit

In opposition to NATO expansion the Belarusian leadership has not limited itself either to mere verbal protestations. As the inevitable began to sink in that Poland was resolved on joining NATO regardless of Belarusian objections, Minsk began resorting to veiled threats of a more sinister nature—namely nuclear blackmail—in an attempt to intimidate Warsaw into reconsidering its security policy. Probably with the avid approval of Moscow, Minsk first decided to play the nuclear card in September 1995 when Lukashenka announced he would suspend handing over to Russia eighteen SS-25 long-range nuclear missiles still located on Belarusian territory following the collapse of the USSR.[42] Unlike Kazakhstan and Ukraine, which had both relinquished their own nuclear arsenals by the end of 1993 in accordance with international agreements, Lukashenka had been constantly delaying the removal of the missiles under the pretext that Minsk had still not received the promised funds from Western coffers to execute the delicate and costly operation of transferring them to Russia.[43] Speculation reigned that he wanted to keep hold of the warheads indefinitely in the misguided hope of using them as a bargaining chip in future security-related negotiations or to blackmail the West into halting the NATO expansion process.[44]

In July 1996—in what was considered Belarus' first independent contribution to the debate on European security—Lukashenka proposed creating 'a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe' as means of ruling out the threat of nuclear confrontation. He suggested that it would serve a much better cause if Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic resigned from the 'dangerous and costly idea of joining NATO' and instead devoted the same amount of time, energy and finances towards helping the victims of the Chernobyl disaster. Although NATO was not planning to deploy nuclear weapons in Poland, NATO leaders rejected Lukashenka's idea because they did not want to strike up any formal deals with non-NATO states that could limit the Alliance's future freedom of action. Since the nuclear aspect plays an important role in NATO's strategic military planning, the de-nuclearization of any part of its zone of responsibility would

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[42] See: 'Łukaszenko: rakiety w odpowiedzi na poszerzenie NATO', *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 January 1996; 'Łukaszenko straszy rakietami', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 January 1996.

[43] Piotr Kościński, 'NATO niczego nie wyklucza', *Rzeczpospolita*, 30 August 1996.

[44] 'Głowic nie ma na pewno', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 November 1996.

effectively call into question the reliability of the Alliance as an instrument of collective defence.[45]

No doubt stung by NATO's refusal to give concrete guarantees, throughout the second half of 1996 Lukashenka reiterated his threats about retaining the SS-25 warheads on Belarusian soil and in a rousing speech to the Russian *Duma* in mid-November explicitly warned NATO not deploy nuclear missiles in bases throughout Poland or else Belarus would remain a nuclear state.[46] As it turned out, the threat was short-lived. On 27 November—merely days after Lukashenka forced through a highly controversial, anti-constitutional referendum giving him sweeping new presidential powers and a prerogative to dissolve Belarus' 'irrelevant' democratic Parliament—Moscow officially announced that all warheads previously held on Belarusian territory were now safely in Russian hands.[47] According to an *Economist* reporter, the Russians demanded their immediate return after Lukashenka gained his dictatorial mandate for fear the Belarusian President was becoming 'rather too feverish in the presence of such dangerous toys.'[48] What is sure, the removal of the missiles greatly irritated Lukashenka. Probably at a loss at having his trump card taken away, the Belarusian President constantly spoke of his thorough distrust of NATO pledges that nuclear weapons would not deployed in Poland after expansion and appealed to Russia not to withdraw its strategic warheads from Europe. In September 1998 he was to publicly lament the fact Belarus no longer possessed the SS-25s, calling the decision by the former leadership to surrender their possession 'a great strategic mistake, if not a crime.'[49]

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[45] See: Cezary Goliński, 'Strefa zamiast NATO', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 July 1996; 'NATO odrzuca propozycje Łukaszenki', *Rzeczpospolita*, 31 January 1997; 'NATO nie moze poprzeć', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 January 1997; Anatoly Rozanov, 'Belarus: Foreign Policy Priorities', in: Sherman W. Garnett & Robert Legvold (eds.), *Belarus at the Crossroads.* pp. 19–35 (29).

[46] Piotr Kościński, 'Łukaszenko zabiega w Moskwie o konfederację', *Rzeczpospolita*, 14 November 1996; Tony Barber, 'Belarus Warns NATO Over Nuclear Arms', *The Independent*, 14 November 1996.

[47] 'Białoruś bez rakiet', *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 November 1996.

[48] 'Stuffed', *The Economist*, 30 November 1996.

[49] See: 'Łukaszenka tęskni za rakietami', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25 September 1998.

Lukashenka Considers NATO 'An Enemy of the Belarusian People'

As the succeeding years of Lukashenka's authoritarian governance began securing Belarus' virtual isolation on the international stage his anti-NATO and anti-Western propaganda subsequently proliferated.[50] By 1997, as the issue of NATO enlargement had evolved beyond the 'if' stage to a question of 'when', Lukashenka began referring to the Atlantic Alliance as a 'scary monster'[51] and 'a sworn enemy of the Belarusian people'.[52] He continued to pour scorn on Warsaw's NATO aspirations, warning that Alliance expansion would contribute to a 'devaluation of the new moral climate in Europe.'[53] In June 1997 a special 'anti-NATO club' was even established in Belarus' Chamber of Representatives (the Lower House of Lukashenka's new two-tier Parliament) with an alleged 90 percent of all deputies becoming members.[54] The issue of NATO expansion was therefore dragged into the murky world of Belarusian domestic politics and the

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[50] One of the few occasions for Lukashenka to publicly assert his opposition to NATO on the international stage occurred during the Lisbon OSCE summit of 2–3 December 1996. The summit, attended by more than fifty heads of state, was largely dominated by the issue of NATO expansion and the event gave the Belarusian President a primary opportunity to express his views for the first time in front of such an illustrious gathering of Western leaders. As expected, both the Belarusian and Russian delegations spoke firmly against any proposed eastward enlargement with Lukashenka lambasting the West's 'shortsighted approach' in attempting to make NATO the cornerstone of the European security system. He said: 'A model of European security with NATO as its core will not serve equally the interests of all European states. The continent will become divided into two uneven groups—NATO member states and those outside. The Cold War is over. The Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union no longer exist.' Lukashenka also accused the West of failing to fulfill its side of the bargain concerning the proliferation of nuclear weapons in East-Central Europe. Leaving no doubt in the minds of many observers that the Belarusian President was pointing his finger at the Poles, Lukashenka commented: 'Delighting themselves in the news that Belarus has withdrawn the last of its nuclear missiles, they themselves refuse to commit to the principle of non-deployment of nuclear arms on their territory.' See: 'Statement by the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenka on the OSCE Lisbon Summit Meeting', 2 December 1996, found at: <www.belarus.net/president/statement_lisbon.htm>; Maria Wągrowska, 'Pod znakiem rozbieżności', *Rzeczpospolita*, 3 December 1996; Bartosz Węglarczyk, 'Lisbona: Rosyjsko-białoruski tandem NATO stoj!', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3 December 1996.

[51] Larisa Sayenko, 'Lukashenka Has His Own Answer to NATO', *Moscow News*, No. 23-24, 19 June–2 July 1997.

[52] Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska, 'Subregional Context of NATO Enlargement', *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1999, pp. 93–100 (94).

[53] 'Łukaszenko o NATO. Samopoczucie i klimat moralny', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8–9 February 1997.

[54] Cezary Goliński, 'Do NATO czy od NATO?', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 June 1997.

general rule simple: being pro-NATO meant being 'anti-regime', 'anti-Russian' and belonging to the 'fascist' opposition.[55]

Events, however, were moving fast in European international relations. By the second half of 1997 Russia began to slowly ease its opposition to Poland's prospective NATO membership as a result of the security guarantees contained in the NATO-Russia Founding Act.[56] Many Polish observers thought Belarus might follow Russia's lead and begin toning down its own anti-Alliance rhetoric. In fact, the opposite actually occurred with attacks and accusations against the West proliferating throughout 1997 and, as usual, Poland bearing the brunt of the regime's propaganda and paranoia. In March 1997, for example, Belarusian Air Force Commander Siergey Syadov wrongly reported that the U.S. Air Force had deployed a squadron of F-16 fighter aircraft near the Polish-Belarusian border and was in the process of training Polish pilots.[57] Lukashenka hijacked Syadov's 'intelligence coup' and in a scaremongering speech in Moscow during a CIS summit insisted the presence of these F-16 fighters marked the first step in NATO's plans to create permanent NATO military installations close to the Belarusian border, which he considered an 'overtly hostile act'.[58] Warsaw flatly rejected the claims and summoned Belarus' ambassador to Poland, Viktor Bursky, to the Polish Ministry of Defence to explain why Minsk had 'fabricated' such a story.[59] According to Anita Szarlik of the *Warsaw Voice*, Lukashenka and his generals may well have been mistakenly inspired by

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[55] Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska, 'Subregional Context', p. 95.

[56] After months of negotiations the NATO-Russia Founding Act was eventually signed in June 1997. NATO and Ukraine signed a similar treaty—the NATO-Ukraine Charter—the following month in July. In light of the negotiations with Russia and Ukraine, Lukashenka was clearly disturbed by NATO's lack of security proposals directed at Minsk. In March 1997 he stressed that Belarusian security interests should be similarly taken into account and proposed that Belarus and NATO begin their own series of one-to-one negotiations 'which would end in the signing of a bilateral treaty' similar to the one NATO had been negotiating with Russia and Ukraine. He said that trying to isolate a country the size of Belarus would be prove 'impossible'. Not surprisingly, his appeal fell on deaf ears and Western military leaders showed no urgency in developing a special NATO-Belarus relationship. It could be speculated that the West was purposely punishing Minsk for its democratic and human rights violations, its anti-Western rhetoric and possibly for the previous inflexibility shown on the issue of NATO enlargement. In virtually ignoring Belarus' security needs, it could also be speculated that the West simply did not consider Belarus important enough to warrant signing a separate security charter with Minsk. See: Maria Wągrowska, 'Białoruś za osobnym porozumieniem z sojuszem', *Rzeczpospolita*, 5 March 1997.

[57] 'Defence Ministry Asks Belarusian Envoy to Explain F-16 Story', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 18 March 1997.

[58] 'Belarusian President Believes NATO Warplanes Stationed Near Poland's Border with Belarus', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 31 March 1997.

[59] 'Defence Ministry Asks Belarusian Envoy'.

a report on Polish television showing the Deputy Defence Minister Andrzej Karkoszka in an F-16 cockpit during a recent visit to the United States.[60]

In another instance, some high-ranking Belarusian officials, such as former Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Antonovich, even began suggesting that Poland would use its NATO membership to press for a revision of its eastern border. He argued that all it would take would be a nationalist, anti-Russian government to come to power in Warsaw looking to reverse the historical misfortune the Poles had suffered at the hands of the Soviet Union. Buoyed by 'NATO's umbrella', Antonovich argued, the Poles would then begin agitating for the return of territory lost to the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic when the Red Army invaded eastern Poland in 1939.[61] Deputy Siergey Kostian even claimed that Warsaw might resort to stirring up ethnic unrest in areas of western Belarus heavily populated by Poles and then urge NATO to 'invade' under the slogan of 'minority protection'. Once under NATO 'jurisdiction', he said, Warsaw would then agitate to have the region officially 'annexed and absorbed' into the Polish state.[62]

As Poland's accession to NATO drew imminently closer the Belarusian President also became increasingly obsessed with an alleged spying threat his country faced as a result of NATO encroaching to its borders. In a lecture to the Russian Academy of Sciences in February 1998, Lukashenka accused Poland of 'compromising Belarus' national security' through a 'concerted campaign of espionage activity' that he believed was being co-ordinated at the behest of NATO.[63] Throughout 1998 he repeatedly condemned Poland for allegedly setting up three powerful radar stations along the common border capable of monitoring the whole of Belarus' territory as well as the western reaches of Russia.[64] Poland denied all knowledge of the installations and the incident put further strain on mutual relations that were already by now extremely tense thanks to a catalogue of other unrelated diplomatic incidents.

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[60] Anita Szarlik, 'Those Pesky Poles', *Warsaw Voice*, No. 14 (441), 6 April 1997.

[61] Andrey Fiodorau, 'Białoruś i NATO', p. 5.

[62] *Ibidem.*

[63] 'Belarusian President Distrusts NATO Over Nuclear Weapons Pledge', *RFE/RL*, 6 February 1998, in: *Chronology: Belarus Government and the West, January 1994—March 1998*, found at: <www. belarusian.com/chronology/West94-1q98.htm>

[64] 'Łukashenka tęskni za rakietami', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25 September 1998.

12 March 1999— Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic Join NATO

Despite numerous instances of provocation from the Belarusian side, Polish officials eager to avoid fanning any flames, seldom criticized Minsk publicly for its consistent opposition to NATO and Poland's wish to join. A rare exception, however, occurred on 10 March 1999 during a London conference to mark NATO's fiftieth anniversary—a mere two days before the official accession ceremony welcoming Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into the Alliance. Polish Defence Minister Janusz Onyszkiewicz used the occasion to strongly criticize the Belarusian leadership for pursuing policies that 'do not lead to conditions which benefit its neighbours.' Onyszkiewicz expressed particular concern over a bid by the Belarusian military to increase the number of troops and hardware it was allowed to maintain under the CFE Treaty making Belarus the only signatory wanting an increase its military forces instead of reducing them.[65]

The accession of Poland (together with Hungary and the Czech Republic) to NATO on 12 March 1999 marked the crowning glory of over seven years of intense military restructuring and exhaustive diplomatic activity, thus bringing to a successful conclusion in President Kwaśniewski's words 'one of the most important historical processes in Poland's history'.[66] Poland had now officially joined the world's most powerful military alliance being accepted as an equal partner in an exclusive Euro-Atlantic club of democratic nations. With regards to Belarus, Poland's late Foreign Minister Bronisław Geremek said Warsaw would make every effort to convince Minsk that Polish membership of NATO would 'help strengthen political stability in the region' and therefore benefit Belarus' security. He said that Polish policy towards Belarus would now concentrate on repairing the 'lack of trust' currently existing between the two countries as a result of the expansion process.[67] The Belarusian authorities remained unmoved by Geremek's assurances and several anti-enlargement demonstrations—organized mainly by various war-veteran associations and probably sanctioned and staged by the authorities—took place outside the Polish Embassy in

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[65] See: 'Poland, Ukraine Worried By Situation in Belarus', *Reuters*, 10 March 1999, in: *Chronology: Belarus Government and the West, January 1999–March 1999,* found at: <www.Belarusian.com/ chronology/west1q99.html>

[66] Aleksander Kwaśniewski, *Dom wszystkich Polska*, p. 213.

[67] Jan de Weydenthal, 'Poland: NATO Entry Impacts Relations With Neighbouring Countries', *RFE/RL*, 1 March 1999, found at: <www.rferl.org/nca/features/1999/03.html>.

Minsk and other consulates throughout Belarus.[68] Speaking a few days later during a visit to Kiev, Lukashenka said Belarus could 'not ignore the dangers' of bordering with a new NATO member state and would consult Russia with a view to 'counteracting the threat with adequate measures', although the nature of these 'measures' was not spelled out. He also urged Ukraine to join forces with Belarus and Russia in opposition to future NATO strategy.[69] Given that Ukraine itself has set its sights on eventual NATO membership, Lukashenka's 'offer' was swiftly rejected in Kiev. A communiqué issued by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry expressly stated that the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into NATO would 'enhance security and stability in Europe and consolidate the ideals of democracy and freedom.'[70]

It was widely believed among political commentators that once Poland had officially joined NATO and Minsk had time to digest the reality of expansion, the Belarusian leadership would lessen its hostile stance and seek to repair relations with the Atlantic Alliance for sheer lack of alternatives. In turn, such a move would only serve to benefit Polish-Belarusian relations since Minsk would be forced into seeking renewed dialogue with Warsaw, maybe not by choice, but certainly through considerations of geopolitical proximity. Although Poland supported NATO's bombardment of Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia in April 1999, which Lukashenka condemned in the strongest of terms,[71] an improvement in bilateral relations certainly seemed possible by June 1999 when Belarusian Foreign Minister Ural Latypau suggested in an interview with

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[68] Jerzy Stankiewicz, 'Stosunki z Białorusią', *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej* (Warszawa: Akademia Dyplomatyczna MSZ—Wydział Wydawnictw, 2000), p. 194.

[69] 'Slav Neighbours Have Conflicting Views on NATO', *Reuters*, 15 March 1999, in: *Chronology: Belarus and its Military and Nuclear Power, January 1998 March 2000*, found at: <www.belarusian.com/ chronology/nuclear.html>

[70] 'Belarus to Strengthen Forces to Balance NATO Enlargement', *Agence France-Presse*, 12 March 1999.

[71] In response to the air strikes, which aimed at ending the repression of ethnic Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo, Lukashenka referred to the Atlantic Alliance to a 'fascist' organization, calling the bombardment 'an overt act of aggression' and 'a direct threat to international security'. Minsk recalled its permanent mission from NATO headquarters and temporarily broke off bilateral contacts with NATO member states, including Poland. The bombing of Serbian targets, he said, was nothing other than an attempt by NATO member states 'to arrogate the right to punish whole countries and populations with no regard for laws and moral standards.' The effects of NATO bombing in Belgrade were equated to the devastation inflicted on Minsk during WWII and shown repeatedly on Belarusian state television. Such images provided Lukashenka with valuable domestic propaganda to reinforce earlier warnings that NATO was an 'aggressive organization' and that only a union with Russia could ensure Belarus' security. See: 'Belarus Suspends All Contacts with NATO', *RFE/RL*, 2 April 1999; 'Belarus Halts Co-operation with NATO', *Agence France-Presse*, 2 April 1999.

Rzeczpospolita that since Warsaw had now secured NATO membership the question of improving mutual relations would 'ultimately depend on Poland'. Latypau stressed that if the Polish authorities refrained from undertaking actions that threatened Belarus' security, such as creating new military structures along the border and concentrating large forces in eastern Poland, there was a significant chance of restoring transparency and trust between Minsk and Warsaw.[72]

As developments transpired, however, mutual relations failed to improve and in the succeeding years Belarusian accusations against NATO and Poland continued in earnest. For example, in May 2001 as part of a three-hour nationwide broadcast from the Second All-Belarusian People's Congress, Lukashenka accused NATO of 'blackmailing' the Belarusian nation and said that Poland was being prepared as a 'springboard' for a NATO-led attack on his country.[73] NATO intelligence services were accused of conducting 'anti-Belarusian operations' via the use of 'ultra, high-tech radar stations' that were allegedly being built in Poland. The Belarusian President said the only way to counter such 'threats' was to maintain a strong alliance with Russia because 'Moscow would not allow Belarus to be thrust on its knees.'[74]

Sudden Shifts in Belarusian Policy

By mid-2002 negotiations for the second wave of enlargement to admit Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria were gathering pace.[75] In the belief that further expansion would strengthen regional security and stability, Poland,

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[72] See: Piotr Kowalczyk's interview with Urał Łatypow: 'Chcą władzy, niech wygrają wybory', *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 June 1999.

[73] 'Najlepszi z najlepszych', *Rzeczpospolita*, 19–20 May 2001.

[74] *Ibidem*. In August 2001 Lukashenka severely criticized a fourteen-nation NATO military exercise—'Amber Hope 2001'—held six kilometers from the Belarusian border in Lithuania and questioned the motives of the U.S. in conducting such an exercise so close to Belarus. In response, he ordered the deployment of Belarus' Western Corps to the north and held his own 'Nyoman 2001' manoeuvres to coincide with the NATO exercise. This was the largest military exercise in post-Soviet Belarusian history, involving 10,000 troops, 1600 military vehicles, heavy weapons, aircraft and armour. According to Lukashenka, NATO observers of the Belarusian exercises were 'shocked' by the apparent competence of the Belarusian armed forces. He declared: 'After seeing our battle-ready army, [the West] will not think of starting war, another Yugoslav or any other scenario.' See: Taras Kuzio, 'Soviet-Style Election Held in Belarus' *PRISM—The Jamestown Foundation*, Vol. 7, Issue 9, 30 September 2001, found at: <www.jamestown.org/publications>.

[75] These seven countries were formally invited to begin accession talks in November 2002 during the NATO Prague Summit.

completely and without reservation, supported the aspirations of these countries to join. At this time a genuine shift can also be identified in Belarusian policy. Strong signals began to emerge from Minsk that Belarus might be prepared reassess policy with a view to improving relations with NATO. The Belarusian authorities suddenly began asserting that it now lay in their ultimate interests to a build pragmatic and balanced relationship with the Atlantic Bloc. In June 2002 Minister of Defence Leonid Maltsev not only expressed a willingness to broaden Belarusian participation in PfP initiatives, but even hinted for the first time at the possibility of conducting joint military exercises with NATO forces on Belarusian soil.[76] In keeping with this change of attitude, Belarusian National Security Advisor Siarhey Bulyhin stated that Belarus should avoid at all costs unnecessary conflicts with the Alliance in future and instead concentrate on ways to co-operate. Since Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic had already become NATO members and the Baltic States, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia were soon to join, Bulyhin said it was critical Belarus ended its policy of self-isolation because the country was 'not in a position to independently guarantee its own security.'[77]

Lukashenka seemed to confirm the new thinking in the Belarusian establishment around this time by telling his Security Council that he 'did not rule out' a significant change in Belarus' foreign and security priorities in light of existing circumstances in international politics and the alleged threat from global terrorism. Although he maintained that opposition to further NATO expansion would still represent Minsk's official line, the fact both Russia and Ukraine were drawing closer to the Alliance forced Belarus into adopting a new plan to prevent 'the creation of new dividing lines along its borders.' He ordered the Security Council to devise initiatives to secure the 'active participation [of Belarus] in building the international security architecture', but warned such moves to draw Minsk closer to NATO would have to be carefully considered since too sudden a shift would mean Belarus 'losing face.'[78] In April 2003 Lukashenka

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[76] 'Kiedy wspólne ćwiczenia wojskowe Białoruś-NATO?', *IAR*, 5 June 2002, found at:<www.bialorus.pl>.

[77] 'Zmiana polityki białoruskiej wobec NATO', *Radio Racja*, 16 July 2002, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

[78] 'Współpraca z NATO nie wykluczona', *Radio Racja*, 11 July 2002, found at: <www.bilaorus.pl>.

conceded that he wanted to 'find optimal forms of military and political co-operation with NATO' given that Belarus would soon be bordering with three member states.[79]

It was generally assumed that the motives behind Minsk's unexpected turnaround resulted from a belated realization that its hitherto belligerent, anti-enlargement strategy had succeeded only in guaranteeing Belarus' absolute disconnection from Euro-Atlantic affairs. Since mid-1997 both Russia and Ukraine had enjoyed 'special partnership' status with NATO and were regularly being consulted on security related developments. Belarus enjoyed no such luxury and had no official forum on which it could join the debate. A second wave of expansion to include its northern neighbours Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia had become fact and Belarus had virtually no say in the process or the means to prevent it. The West in fact cared little about the views of the Belarusian regime, which was by now largely ostracized and ignored for its continued assault on democratic norms inside Belarus. One can only suspect that Minsk began to realize that continuing a confrontational and self-isolationist policy while being surrounded by NATO member states to the west and north was both self-defeating and dangerous and that no choice existed other than initiating dialogue. Some analysts, however, pointed out that Minsk's sudden desire to begin co-operating with NATO stemmed not from newfound affection towards the West, but ultimately because of its own deteriorating relations with Russia.[80] Given that Moscow was beginning to close ranks with the U.S. and Europe around this time to confront the alleged threats posed by global terrorism, Belarus faced the unenviable prospect of complete pariah status in international affairs if it did not change tack. Lacking concrete security guarantees, virtually friendless in Europe, and its marriage to Russia appearing to turn sour, the combination of all these factors could well have compelled Minsk to seriously reconsider its security priorities.[81]

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[79] Anatol Razanau, 'Ewolucja NATO—Spojrzenie z Mińska', in: Adam Eberhardt & Uładzimir Ułachowicz (eds.), *Polska i Białoruś*. pp. 69–75 (69).

[80] Andrey Fiodorau, 'Białoruś i NATO', p. 6.

[81] Any hopes Lukashenka might have harboured concerning a warming of NATO-Belarusian relations were soon extinguished when the Czech Government (after pressure from Washington and Brussels) refused to grant him a visa to attend a NATO summit in Prague on 21–22 November 2002. The collective decision to prevent Lukashenka's participation was not only a distinct signal of Euro-Atlantic disapproval of his anti-democratic governance, but it also stemmed from a complete lack of basis on which talks with the Belarusian President could proceed. NATO chiefs feared that the unpredictable and boorish behaviour of Lukashenka could dominate the event, which was intended to celebrate the official invitation of seven new members and not to serve as a platform for opponents to express their objections. Minsk considered the move a 'wicked and unprecedented step' and a 'violation of

U.S. Forces in Poland

Although one can detect from 2002 onwards a positive shift in Belarusian policy towards NATO and the West, the complete banishment of Lukashenka's phobia after almost a decade of suspicion was perhaps too much to ask. The wider connotations of George W. Bush's 'war on terror' and Washington's dogged determination to remove tyrannical regimes by force in the name of 'advancing peace and democracy' clearly rattled Minsk. A few months into the U.S.-led campaign in Iraq, which Lukashenka fiercely condemned, the Belarusian President accused Poland of strengthening its forces along the border with Belarus in anticipation for a NATO-led attack on his country.[82] In August 2003 the Belarusian media claimed that Washington had already concocted a pretext for 'regime change' in Minsk and was considering a military strike just like it had done in Baghdad. The likely launch pad for this attack, it said, would be Poland. One report concluded that 'nationalist forces' in Poland and Lithuania were waiting in the wings to take advantage of any potential Washington-Minsk conflict with the intention of 'partitioning Belarusian territory and regaining their ancient eastern lands'.[83]

What is more, in the immediate months following U.S. intervention in Iraq, articles began circling in the Polish press about the possibility of American troops stationed in Germany being relocated to new military bases in Poland. Washington, it was reported, angered by Germany's opposition to the Iraq War, wanted to explore cheaper options for maintaining its military presence in Europe or to even punish its erstwhile German ally for a 'lack of loyalty'. The Americans considered Poland as an

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international law' because, as a fully-fledged member of NATO's Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the Belarusian President as Head of State had a right to attend the summit. Minsk also accused the West of deliberately insulting Belarus and humiliating its people. In the opinion of one Minsk-based political expert, the decision to prohibit the Belarusian President was a mistake for two reasons. First, Belarus' declining relations with Russia at the time, which was leading to a gradual re-thinking of Belarus' attitude to NATO, made the summit a perfect opportunity for Lukashenka to pledge a true desire for greater co-operation with the Alliance. Second, it provided Lukashenka with even more propaganda material to confirm to his nation what he had been saying all along that NATO is an 'anti-Belarusian' organization. See: Barbara Sierszuła & Jędrzej Bielecki, 'Łukaszenko persona non grata', *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 November 2002; Maciej Rybiński, 'Łukaszenko ante portas', *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 November 2002; Barbara Sierszuła, 'Kłopoty z wizą Łukaszenki', *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 November 2002; 'Krok NATO odnośnie Białoruś jest bezprecedensowy – uważa Siergiej Martynow', *IAR*, 21 November 2002, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

[82] 'Łukashenka: 'Niewolnicy są na granicy Polski z Białorusią, wojujący niewolnicy'', *PAP*, 5 August 2003, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

[83] 'Polska i Litwa, wspierane NATO-wskim bagnetami szykują się do rozbiorów Białorusi—pisze mińska prasa', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 August 2003.

ideal replacement site, it was claimed, because the Polish Government had not only backed U.S. policy over Iraq but had actually contributed troops to the military campaign. These reports, which turned out to be mere speculation, compelled Lukashenka to state unequivocally that Belarus would consider any such move to create U.S. bases on Polish territory to be an 'act of open hostility'. In a veiled threat that Belarusian missile batteries would target any such base, Lukashenka warned: 'We will not only keep an eye on [such bases] but will also, frankly speaking, keep them in our sights.'[84] He said the prospect of U.S. troops in Poland would constitute a 'direct threat to Belarusian national security' that would force Belarus to 'urgently monitor everything that was taking place on Polish territory.'[85] Some time later Polish radio reported on a meeting between Belarusian and Russian security officials in which both sides discussed the possibility of increasing the Russian military presence in Belarus as well as forming a specialized Belarusian-Russian Corps to be stationed along the Polish border in the event of American forces being transferred to Poland.[86]

The alleged threat to national sovereignty as a result of NATO's encroachment to its borders has been a constant theme in Belarusian propaganda throughout the past decade. It was bad enough that Poland, a Slavic neighbour, had joined NATO's ranks, but the idea of Washington deploying military forces on Polish soil seems to have been too much for Minsk to bear. In May 2003 the Belarusian press agency, *Belta*, published an analytical report which again described how Poland—with American backing—might begin at any moment to agitate for a re-adjustment of the Polish-Belarusian border. The report claimed: 'Warsaw can currently count on the United States, which is actively and firmly supporting Poland's foreign policy […]. One cannot rule out that Poland might ask for a return of its historical territory in the east.' It went on to say that the U.S. wanted to exploit the differences of opinion in Europe over the military campaign in Iraq by enhancing Poland's strategic importance at the expense of France and Germany, and for this reason, the Bush administration wanted to locate part of the U.S. Air Force on Polish territory. The report concluded: 'The events in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq show

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[84] 'Białoruś zakupi rosyjskie rakiety S-300', *Radio Svaboda*, 2 February 2004, found at: <www.bialorus .pl>; 'Belarusian President Warns Against Moving U.S. Bases to Poland', *RFE/RL Newsline: Central and Eastern Europe*, Vol. 7, No. 105, 5 June 2003, found at: <www.rferl.org/newsline/2003/>.

[85] 'Łukaszenko wziął na cel amerykańskie bazy w Polsce', *BDG/RIA 'Nowosti',* 4 June 2003, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

[86] 'Rosyjskie bazy bliżej Polski?', *RMF FM*, 5 February 2004, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

that the front line in contemporary warfare is not on the ground. […] Much depends on gaining supremacy of the skies and for this reason the presence of American aircraft in Poland cannot fail to alarm Belarus.'[87]

Reactions to NATO's Second Wave of Enlargement

On 29 March 2004—exactly five years since the admittance of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic—seven more Central and Eastern European states were added to NATO's ranks thereby expanding the world's most successful military alliance to twenty-six countries. In little under thirteen years after the collapse of communist structures in Europe, NATO had executed a remarkable expansion policy that transformed an exclusively 'Western' institution into a pan-European security umbrella embracing the width and breadth of the continent to include former Warsaw Pact enemies.

The entry of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria greatly enhanced the Poles' sense of security by solidifying NATO presence along Poland's southern and northern flanks. It also meant Belarus now bordered with three NATO member states, compelling President Lukashenka to vent even further anger towards the West. He said it was inconceivable after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact that NATO continued to expand. 'They have simply cheated us,' he bemoaned, stressing that Belarusians could 'not afford to bury their heads in the sand and forget about what is happening on [Belarus'] borders.'[88] Belarusian parliamentarians suggested Belarus and Russia ought to strengthen all military forces along the border with Poland and to the north with Lithuania and Latvia.[89] A direct result of these deliberations was perhaps the decision to re-deploy the Belarusian 302 Surface-to-Air Missile Brigade originally located in Maryina Horka in the Minsk military district to Damanava in the west, some ninety kilometres from the Polish border.[90] The inability of Lukashenka to see NATO as

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[87] 'Białoruś obawia się silniejszej Polski', *Belta/IAR/wp.pl*, 21 May 2003, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

[88] 'Łukashenka: 'Nas po prostu oszukano, NATO rozszerza się', *Charter 97*, 14 May 2004, found at: <www.bialorus.pl>.

[89] 'Białoruscy deputowani przestraszyli się NATO', *Charter 97*, 30 March 2004, found at: <www.bialorus .pl>.

[90] 'Belarus Moves Anti-Aircraft Unit Westward', *RFE/RL Newsline: Central and Eastern Europe*, Vol. 8, No. 75, 22 April 2004, found at: <www.rferl.org/newsline/2004/>.

anything other than a hostile organization was further confirmed during his annual address to the National Assembly on 14 April 2004. Speaking about the second wave of enlargement, he complained about being surrounded by NATO's military infrastructure: 'Our territory is being entirely swept by NATO's technical intelligence. And this concerns not only Belarus. Russia's territory too is being monitored right up to the Kremlin!' Lukashenka assured Parliament that even if the Belarusian Army could not match NATO's military potential it was still capable of 'waging a modern war.'[91]

Conclusion

In the broader context of Polish-Belarusian relations the issue of NATO expansion has been just one of a myriad of complex issues interlocking mutual contacts in the years 1993–2004. Diplomatic disputes, the absence of reform in Belarus, and a lack of compatibility between the Polish and Belarusian governments as a result of Lukashenka's anti-democratic leadership have all contributed to the stagnation, if not degradation, of Polish-Belarusian relations over the past fifteen years. However, one can boldly say that the conflict of interest over NATO and the expansion process has been one of the main sources of discord between the two neighbouring states, enhancing mutual distrust and contributing to the polarization of Warsaw and Minsk on the political level. This major difference of opinion has enhanced mutual distrust on a grand scale and contributed to the polarization of Warsaw and Minsk on the political level. The fundamental divergence in the national strategies of both countries since 1994, compounded by diametrically opposed viewpoints on European security and perceptions of the role of democracy and human rights in modern Europe, have brought about a gargantuan clash of interests, which has in consequence, seriously compromised Warsaw's ability to conduct a lucid and constructive foreign policy towards Minsk. Poland's drive to join NATO and its continued support of further eastward expansion to potentially include Ukraine has greatly angered the Lukashenka administration. Belarus has also remained perpetually loyal to Russia, whose strategic interests are often at odds with Poland's own vision of European security.

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[91] See: Jan Maksymiuk, 'Lukashenka Recounts Policies in Annual Address to Legislature', *RFE/RL: Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report*, Vol. 6, No. 17, 20 April 2004, found at: <www.rferl.org/ pbureport/>.

At the same time, Belarusian 'intransigence' and 'lack of understanding' about how NATO has changed since the Cold War has greatly irritated Warsaw. While Poland may consider NATO to be an organization representing a community of values that bind together like-minded states in the interests of preserving European stability and democracy, the Belarusian President has a very different perception, refusing to see NATO as a defensive organization created by 'civilized democratic nations' but rather a 'belligerent military anomaly' that threatens Belarusian and Russian security interests.[92] In its relations with NATO since the enlargement process began in 1994, Belarus has chosen the language of defiance and confrontation over the parlance of dialogue and co-operation. Polish frustration at this Belarusian attitude was aptly summed up by Poland's former Defence Minister Bronisław Komorowski in an interview with *Radio Svaboda* in April 2004 when he strongly attacked the logic of Minsk's continued anti-NATO rhetoric. He called the Belarusian President a 'man from another epoch' and urged Belarus to thoroughly rethink its policies in light of changing attitudes towards the Alliance in Ukraine and Russia and also because there was simply no other alternative to NATO in guaranteeing security and stability in Europe. Komorowski stressed: '[Lukashenka] has forgotten that the Warsaw Pact no longer exists and NATO is no longer the organization it was before 1989. Today NATO threatens no one. [...] But if he thinks strengthening military co-operation with Russia is the answer to NATO expansion then his ideas are rooted in the past.' According to Komorowski, the Belarusian President continues to treat NATO as a hostile threat primarily to distract his own people from the economic stagnation and lack of democracy in Belarus. 'When an external enemy exists, it is much easier to forget about one's own sins, mistakes and problems,' he said. The former Defence Minister concluded that as long as Belarus continued to consider NATO a hostile threat it would be virtually impossible for Poland as a member state to normalize relations with Minsk.[93]

Although by 2002 the regime in Minsk began toning down its rhetoric and probing the possibility of improving relations with NATO, Lukashenka has never managed to fully exorcise his anti-Alliance demons. Suspicions of NATO remained and

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[92] John Lowenhardt, Ronald J. Hill & Margot Light, 'A Wider Europe: The View from Minsk and Chisinau', *International Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 3, 2001, pp. 605–620 (610).
[93] 'Bronisław Komorowski o Białorusi w NATO', *Radio Swaboda*, 21 April 2004, found at: <www. bialorus.pl>.

still remain to this day. During a Warsaw conference in December 2003—*Where is Belarus' Place in Europe? Is a Real Partnership Possible Between Belarus, NATO and the EU?*—a representative from the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Belarusian-NATO dialogue resembled 'a conversation between a deaf and a dumb person.' A *Rzeczpospolita* journalist covering the conference commented that neither the Polish nor the Belarusian delegates had any clear notion of how Belarus could possibly improve relations with NATO and the EU and speculated, perhaps justifiably, that as long as Lukashenka resisted the introduction of democratic reform in Belarus and continued to treat Western institutions with contempt and suspicion no breakthrough in relations would ever occur.[94]

To this day, Warsaw and Minsk, despite being neighbours, have therefore failed to develop a climate of transparency in regional security issues and military matters. This situation differs sharply to the relationship Poland enjoys with its other eastern neighbours, Ukraine and Lithuania, with whom the Polish military regularly holds joint manoeuvres, officer exchanges and other trust-building initiatives, forms of co-operation that have culminated in the creation of joint Polish-Ukrainian (UKRPOLABAT) and Polish-Lithuanian (LITPOLBAT) battalions for participation in peace-keeping missions and humanitarian operations undertaken by the UN, EU and NATO.[95] In contrast, there exists no such military intimacy with Belarus. As long as Minsk continues to practice authoritarian governance and base its military and security policy on integrated ties with Russia combined with a hostile attitude to NATO, there will always be a strong element of tension along the Polish-Belarusian border, which in turn, will continue to compromise conditions for optimal regional stability and continent-wide security.

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[94] Piotr Kościński, 'Współpraca czy izilacja?', *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 December 2003.
[95] The Polish-Ukrainian joint battalion (UKRPOLBAT) achieved operational readiness in early 1999; the Polish-Lithuanian battalion (LITPOLBAT) in December 1998. The battalions have served in UN peace-keeping missions in Bosnia and Afghanistan respectively.

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