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Belarusians between East and West

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Belarus has a divided identity that reflects its complex history and culture. A mixed-methods investigation incorporating focus groups and national representative surveys conducted over a decade or more suggests that Belarusians themselves are more likely to regard themselves as "European" than their counterparts in Ukraine and Russia, but less likely to do so than in other European countries. There is substantial support for a hypothetical European Union membership, particularly among younger respondents, but there is also strong and widely distributed support for a closer association with the other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Consistently, it is the "multidirectional" foreign policy promoted by the current leadership, which seeks closer relations with East and West at the same time, that finds the greatest support. But a "Slavic choice" is also popular, and much more so than a "Western choice" or isolationism.

Keywords: Belarus foreign policy; European integration; Eurasian integration; mixed methods

Belarus has always been difficult to classify. It helped to establish Kievan Rus in the ninth century, but then became a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which merged with Poland in the sixteenth century into the massive Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Later, after the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century, it was entirely absorbed within the Russian Empire, and later still it became one of the founding republics of the USSR. But western Belarus was under Polish jurisdiction for the entire interwar period, and it remained a country that was divided geographically and culturally between its two immediate neighbors, with the attachments of its citizens distributed on a very similar basis. "Poles" (Catholics) drew their inspiration from the Grand Duchy and leaned toward western Europe, whereas "Russians" (Orthodox) were more inclined to emphasize the cultural affinity with their Slavic neighbors toward the east (Ioffe 2008, 68). Divisions of this kind meant that there was little sense of nationhood, or shared identity of any kind, before the "essentially top-down imposition" of a Belarusian identity in the Soviet period (Ioffe 2011b, 115; see also Bekus 2010).

In terms of Huntington's influential classification, Belarus, like Ukraine, is a "cleft country," with substantial numbers of its peoples on different sides of the

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fault lines that separate the world's major civilizations. In this case, they were both divided by the "great historical line that ha[d] existed for centuries separating Western Christian peoples from Muslim and Orthodox peoples," a line that ran from the border between Finland and Russia in the north to the border between Slovenia and Croatia and the rest of Yugoslavia in the south, and which was in effect the "cultural border of Europe" (Huntington 1996, 158). The western regions of Belarus, and of Ukraine, were on the Christian side of this divide, but their eastern regions were a part of the world of Islam and Orthodoxy, to such an extent, Huntington believed, that national unity might be impossible to sustain (Huntington 1996, 137). These divisions were not entirely eliminated by two hundred years of incorporation within the Russian Empire, and later the USSR, although it was notable that there was no widely supported independence movement during the 1980s, and Belarus was the Slavic republic that gave the strongest support to the USSR in the referendum on the "renewed union" that took place in March 1991.[1]

Some of the dimensions of this complex inheritance are set out in Table 1. Belarus, like Ukraine and Russia, is a post-Soviet republic, and culturally Slavic. The three republics together account for more than 60% of the world's Eastern Orthodox believers, and more than 95% of its Russian speakers (Kaz'mina 2000, 801; Aref'yev 2007). The local ethnic group predominates in each of them, although in Belarus (and still more so Ukraine) there are substantial Russian minorities. But there are also important differences. Russia and Belarus are overwhelmingly Russian-speaking countries, but in Ukraine it is Ukrainian that

Table 1. Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia: societies and cultures, 2000s.

	Area (km^2)	Population	Ethnicity (%)	Language use (%)	Religion (%)
Belarus	207,560	9,503,807	Belarusian: 84 Russian: 8 Polish: 3 Other: 5	Russian: 86 Belarusian: 9 Other: 5	Orthodox: 78 Catholic: 12 None: 9 Others: 1
Ukraine	603,628	48,457,102	Ukrainian: 78 Russian: 17 Other: 5	Ukrainian: 68 Russian: 30 Other: 3	Orthodox: 67 Catholic: 7 None: 15 Others: 11
Russia	17,075,400	142,905,200	Russian: 80 Tatar: 4 Ukrainian: 2 Bashkir: 1 Other: 13	Russian: 98 Tatar: 1 Other: 1	Orthodox: 83 Muslim: 2 None: 12 Other: 4

Sources: Areas derived from standard reference works; census populations from www.belstat.gov.by (for Belarus in 2009), www.ukrstat.gov.ua (for Ukraine in 2001), and www.gsk.ru (for Russia in 2010); ethnicities from the censuses of 2009 in Belarus, of 2001 in Ukraine (www.nbuv.gov.ua), and of 2002 in Russia (www.perepis2002.ru); language use is derived from responses to the question "What language do you usually use at home?" in the authors' survey in Belarus in 2011, from the 2001 Ukrainian census, and from the authors' survey in Russia in 2014; and religious affiliations from responses to the question "What is your religious denomination?" in the same surveys in Belarus and Russia, and in the authors' Ukrainian survey in 2010.

predominates; in addition to the recognized Slavic languages, other hybrids are in use, especially *trasyanka* (a mixture of Russian and Belarusian) and *surzhik* (a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian). Very large majorities in each of the three countries, equally, are members of the Orthodox community (these were responses to survey questions that asked about affiliation, rather than observance or belief). But "Orthodox" did not necessarily mean "Russian Orthodox" (about 3% of our Belarusian respondents in 2011 were affiliated with other Orthodox churches); another 12%, in the same survey, identified themselves as Roman Catholic, and 9% subscribed to no religious faith of any kind.

Belarus was distinctive in political terms as well, set against an uneven "democratization" across the post-communist region as a whole. Initially, there were moves toward the West, as a newly independent republic surrendered its nuclear weapons, joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in January 1995, and concluded a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the European Union (EU) in March of the same year. But a referendum that took place in May 1995 approved President Aleksandr Lukashenka's policy of closer economic integration with Russia and equal status for Russian as a state language, and a further referendum in November 1996 strengthened the powers of the presidency itself and extended Lukashenka's term of office. The result was denounced on grounds of constitutional propriety by the Belarusian opposition and by Western governments. The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly suspended the guest status that Belarus had enjoyed in January 1997, the European Council refused to ratify the PCA the following September, and from 1998 onwards Belarusian politicians found themselves increasingly prevented from traveling to Western countries. The relationship with Boris Yeltsin's Russia was moving at the same time in quite the opposite direction, first toward a "community," then a bilateral "union," and finally, from 1999, a "union state."

One reason for a "Slavic choice" of this kind was that it reflected a wider human community. Not simply were there linguistic and religious affinities: there were also close associations of an interpersonal kind. More than half (54%) of our Belarusian respondents, in 2011, had at least one close relative living in Russia, and 42% had at least one close relative living in one of the other post-Soviet republics. Twenty years after independence, this was also where most of our respondents had traveled. More than three-quarters (76%) had visited Russia, and nearly as many (72%) had visited Ukraine; substantial numbers had also visited Poland (37%) or one of the Baltic republics, such as Lithuania (36%). But fewer than 5% had visited Hungary, and only 3% had ever visited the USA. There were strong commercial ties as well. Indeed, within the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Georgia, Belarus had the largest share of its foreign trade with other members in 2010 (Table 2), and more than twice as much as with the member states of the EU – a legacy, among other things, of the lengthy period in which it had been the "workshop of the Soviet Union."

But there was also a basis for a "Western choice" that drew on the country's "Polish" inheritance, still more so after the EU extended its boundaries in 2004 and Belarus became the immediate neighbor of three of its new member states:

Table 2. Trade of the CIS countries and Georgia with the EU, CIS, and others (2010).

	Trade with CIS (%)	Trade with EU-27 (%)	Trade with others (%)
Belarus	58	25	17
Ukraine	37	32	31
Tajikistan	37	5	58
Uzbekistan	36	16	48
Moldova	34	52	14
Kyrgyzstan	31	4	65
Armenia	30	32	38
Kazakhstan	25	29	46
Georgia	25	32	43
Turkmenistan	25	16	59
Azerbaijan	15	47	38
Russia	11	47	42

Source: Adapted from "Belarus. EU bilateral trade and trade with the world," http://www.trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113351.pdf, last accessed July 15, 2014.

Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania. Although the EU criticized the conduct of the 2006 presidential election at which Lukashenka was successfully returned with nearly 83% of the vote, official statements made clear that a much closer relationship was possible if Belarus conformed more closely to the Union's requirements in terms of competitive politics and the rule of law (Ferrero-Waldner 2006). Belarus had been excluded from full participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy, launched in 2004, with a membership that included the Union's closest neighbors in Europe and North Africa, but in October 2008 the European Council decided that "some progress" had been made in the parliamentary election that had taken place the previous month, and that it would accordingly be appropriate to develop a "dialogue" with the Belarusian authorities that might lead to a "gradual re-engagement." In the first instance, this meant a relaxation of the travel ban on "certain leading figures" that had been imposed in 2004 (European Council 2008).

Just a few months later, Belarusian representatives were invited to take part in the conference in Prague that launched the EU's "Eastern Partnership" (European Council 2009), and a broader pattern of interaction began to be established. In April 2009, Lukashenka made his first visit to the West since 1996, to the Vatican, where he met the Italian prime minister and foreign minister as well as Pope Benedict XVI (the previous policy of isolation, the foreign minister conceded, had "not been productive") (Medvedev 2010, 230 and 231). In June 2009, the EU foreign affairs commissioner traveled to Minsk, in another visit that was the first of its kind; she was followed by the high representative for the common foreign and security policy, and then in November 2009 by Silvio Berlusconi, the first leader of a major Western country to visit in more than 14 years (Medvedev 2010, 231 and 232, 234 and 235). There had been no change in the country's multidirectional foreign policy, Lukashenka explained: "we simply want to have normal partnership relations with the West" (*Izvestiya*, May 14, 2009, 4). All the same, relations with Belarus's European neighbors appeared to be

moving "from estrangement to honeymoon" (Ioffe 2011a), and it was Western rather than Russian influence that appeared to be winning an intensifying competition for effective control over the entire post-Soviet region (Zaiko 2006; Trenin 2009).

One reason for the "turn to Europe" was an increasingly difficult relationship with Russian energy providers – with Gazprom about the price at which Russian gas would be made available, and with Transneft' about the charges that would be levied for the oil that crossed Belarus in the Druzhba pipeline. The first open dispute was in the early months of 2004, when the supply of gas was suspended for a single day; supplies were interrupted again at the end of 2006, and once again in the summer of 2010. On top of this there were "micro-wars" about sugar (in 2009), milk and meat (in 2009 and 2010), agricultural machinery (in 2009), and nuclear energy (in 2009–2011), and media polemics in which Lukashenka openly accused the Russian authorities of an "imperialist perspective" in terms of which Belarus would simply be incorporated into their "sphere of influence" (Korosteleva 2011, 571–575). The "union state," meanwhile, remained something of a fiction (Marples 2008), and the Belarusian authorities made no move to recognize the proto-states of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia after Russia had done so in September 2008. They ignored a summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in 2009, sheltered Kyrgyz President Kurmambek Bakiyev after he had been ousted by a Moscow-friendly insurgency, and began to import oil from Venezuela in a demonstrative attempt to become more independent of Russian suppliers (Korosteleva 2011, 572).

But the relationship with Russia moved closer again at the end of 2009 when the two republics, together with Kazakhstan, established a customs union, and both republics were part of the ambitious Eurasian Economic Union that was announced two years later and formally established in May 2014 (*Rossiyskaya gazeta*, May 30, 2014, 1). At the same time, the rapprochement with the West became more problematic after the December 2010 presidential election was followed by the arrest of many of Lukashenka's leading opponents and the forcible dispersion of demonstrators (Padhol and Marples 2011). The EU's high representative for foreign affairs condemned the "violence" that had taken place and described the detention of opposition leaders as "unacceptable" (European Council 2010); Russia's President Dmitriy Medvedev, by contrast, expressed no view on the suppression of domestic opposition and congratulated Lukashenka on his victory (*Belarus' segodnya*, December 28, 2010, 2). Belarus, Lukashenka explained in his 2011 presidential address, had its "own place in Europe, which defines the necessity of balanced cooperation with two centers of power." Russia, on the one hand, was a "key strategic partner" with whom they had all kinds of direct associations; the EU, on the other, was a "very close neighbor" with whom relations would surely improve after the "time-out" they were currently experiencing. The strategy of "equal closeness" would meanwhile "remain unchanged" (Lukashenka 2011, 7).

And it was the same "balanced and multidirectional foreign policy" that Lukashenka sought to justify in his later presidential addresses, based on a

"dialogue with the countries of the West as much as the countries of the East" (*Belarus' segodnya*, July 5, 2014, 1). The three Slavic nations, as he explained in his 2014 address, were united by a "common historical background, great common victories, and a common Orthodox spiritual tradition." The Russian language itself was neither Russian, nor Ukrainian, nor Belarusian, but the "common property" of the Slavic peoples. How could they share out, for instance, Dostoevsky, whose family origins were in Belarus? Or Gogol', between Russia and Ukraine? Russia itself had always been their "strategic ally," and the maintenance of their partnership was a "foreign policy priority." But they would also be developing their relations with the EU, with a particular emphasis on economic cooperation and the struggle against transnational threats. In spite of political disagreements, the EU was one of their "main trading partners" and an "important source of credits and investment," while Belarus, for its part, was a "key state" for the EU and a "gateway" to the developing markets of the future Eurasian Economic Union. In due course, he believed, the EU and indeed the USA would themselves come to appreciate the importance of a more normal relationship (*Belarus' segodnya*, April 23, 2014, 5).

In the study that follows, we examine these competing international orientations through a mixed-methods strategy that combines a qualitative (focus group) with a quantitative (survey) dimension. Focus groups themselves remain a relatively novel form of investigation in post-Soviet research, although their potential is increasingly recognized (see for instance Mickiewicz 2008, 2014; White and Feklyunina 2011; Wilson 2012). They can make no claim to be representative, but they have at least one outstanding virtue, which is that they can "provide meaning to reports of attitudes or behaviour," particularly as an "interpretive aid to survey findings" (Bloor et al. 2001, 9, 11). Surveys, by contrast, allow us to examine the distribution of opinion within and across national populations and within a defined margin of error, but the "meaning that respondents attach to their answers is not always easy to understand: the context is always bracketed off and can only be fully appreciated by conducting depth interviews or so-called 'focus groups'" (Morozov 2014, 12 and 13). A mixed-methods approach, ideally, allows us to combine the strengths of both methodologies into a more satisfying synthesis that some have regarded as a methodology in itself (Creswell 2011, 271); indeed it reaches back to some of the foundational studies in comparative politics such as Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* of 1963, which combined nationally representative surveys with extended life-history interviews.

We draw in our own study, first of all, on a series of focus groups that were conducted in Minsk and Brest city and region in May–June 2011. There were eight groups, each of which had between five and nine participants distributed approximately equally between males and females, and all of working age. The discussion was guided by a local moderator on the basis of a list of prompts that had been agreed beforehand with the investigators, and a full transcript was provided for subsequent analysis.[2] We combine these insights with the evidence of the distribution of opinion across the country as a whole that is provided by our

national surveys, the most recent of which was conducted by the Center for Sociological and Political Research of the Belarusian State University between 5 and 22 March 2011 in all of the country's six administrative-territorial regions and in the capital city using a multi-stage methodology that identified progressively smaller units at each level of the state system. A total of 1000 interviews was conducted in respondents' homes, and responses were weighted for gender, age, and education.[3] We look first of all at the kind of society that our respondents believed Belarus to be; then at the nature of the support for a "Western" or a "Slavic choice," respectively; and finally, at the changes that have taken place in the overall distribution of opinion since the start of the new century.

What kind of society?

After more than 70 years of Soviet rule and 20 years of independence, where did ordinary Belarusians feel they belonged, in the early years of a new presidential term? For many, there was no obvious answer. For Mariya, for instance [2; references hereafter are by first name and group number], it was a "Slavic-European country with a Soviet past," or a kind of "symbiosis"; you just had to "choose the best." There was no need to reject the Soviet past, and in any case it was impossible to do so; "terrible things" had happened during the Soviet years, but many clever and talented people had made their contribution to the development of the system that existed at the time, and they had "created a lot that is good – space and so forth." Nor could you simply write off a "whole generation that lived in a faith, with their own thoughts and their achievements"; they were also a part of the contemporary society. In any case, asked Elena [2], what was a "European"? "There's such a variety of cultures and countries that it's very hard to say who belongs"; even if they were to say "Slavic," there were so many different Slavic peoples in various parts of Europe – "Slovaks, Slovenians, and others." It was simply "good to live here" (*mne komfortno zhit' zdes'*).

But the view was widely shared that Belarus remained, at least for the moment, deeply Soviet. "Yes," said Galina [3], "we still feel we are Soviet people, and that the situation here is the same as it was at the time of the Soviet Union." Indeed there were tours of Belarus being organized for those who wanted to "visit the Soviet Union." Katya, in the same group, agreed with her: "Yes, many people say that if you want to remember the Soviet Union – go to Belarus" [3]. For Svetlana, in another group [1], they were "still a very Soviet country, we have a lot of laws, very many directives of all kinds and in our work, and it seems to me that we operate more according to Soviet laws than European ones" (insofar as she could judge, as she had never been there). Vera [3] agreed that Belarus was still "more like a Soviet country; we like the Soviet way more, and I think we live according to Soviet laws, or close to them." Inna [2] thought Belarus was "stuck in the mud of the Soviet past [*Sovdepiya*] and trying to show it deserves better"; but "Europe doesn't want us, and Russia is trying to extract all it can." There were still "European features," she thought, but "well hidden by a Soviet mask."

The same view came from other groups. Belarus, Mariya [4] believed, was

> still living in the Soviet Union in which it used to live. The same *blat* or connections, the same attitude to work, and to receiving benefits of whatever kind. That is to say I don't see any kind of European culture of life.

It was more than anything else a matter of everyday experience. In shops, for instance, or in dealings with government, or even in dealings between people themselves, "nothing has changed, there's the same disrespectful attitude." Tamara [4] agreed: "Belarus is no different, it seems to me; it remains the same as it was during the Soviet Union." For Ol'ga [4], it all depended on what had the greater influence: people themselves, or the environment in which they lived.

> I think our infrastructure is no worse than in our neighbors Russia and Ukraine [she went on], and in some respects even more developed than in other neighboring countries. But it's more a matter of raising our own cultural levels. We can say as often as we like that litter has to be put in the urns that are everywhere and not thrown on the street, that you mustn't swear or use foul language. But as long as people themselves don't understand that, as long as it's not fixed in their mentality, we won't achieve anything. I'd say that Belarus in its development is very like the countries of the Soviet Union; our education system has even remained the same as it was in the Soviet Union, or very similar.

A variant on this was that Belarus had its own, distinctive features, no longer Soviet but not yet clearly post-Soviet. For Andrei [4], for instance, the Soviet period had passed:

> but we haven't reached the European level, and we find ourselves at some point in a Slavic type of development. I somehow think we are more Slavic on the whole. Because that period finished, but the new one hasn't started, so I would call this period some kind of our own, special Belarusian one.

Younger participants were particularly likely to find themselves in this indeterminate position. Ol'ga [4], for instance, a school secondary school graduate, had been born when the USSR was disintegrating, and there were few people of her age who still thought of themselves as Soviet citizens. But they could hardly think of themselves as Europeans either, not least because they had little opportunity to take part in European society or to experience European culture at first hand. "We are most likely a distinct, independent Belarusian culture," she concluded, although "close to the Russian or Ukrainian, so more Slavic than anything else." There could be tensions between the generations on such matters, as parents were "still in the Soviet Union" [Katya, 3], while "young people [wanted] to live normally" [Il'ya, 3].

For many, Belarus was "somewhere in the middle between Russia and Europe" [Nikolay, 1], just as it was "in between" a Soviet and a post-Soviet stage of development. Sergey [3], for instance, traveled abroad a lot, and had been to the Czech Republic and Slovenia. He "felt a certain closeness to us, and I feel it now, that these countries, Slavic countries, that is, are the same as me." This meant, for some, a particular affinity with Ukraine. Lyudmila [1], for instance, thought they were "perhaps somehow closer to Ukraine"; some, indeed, had been born there [Nikolay, 1], or had a Ukrainian parent [Elena, 2]. But more often, it meant a much

larger association with the Slavic peoples as a whole. "Russia, Belarus, Ukraine – we're all Slavs," Nikolay explained, "so we're in some ways deeply similar, but all the same there are probably some national particularities and differences." Russia was so big that it was difficult to compare with the other two, he continued, "but if you take history, there are common roots" [1]. Either way, insisted another member of the same group, they had to be independent, with their own government (*svoya vlast'*), and "God help us, not under the Poles," or else they would "always be slaves"!

As these cross-border references suggested, regional differences could be important. As Il'ya [3] explained, "those who are closer to Poland lean towards Europe, and those who are closer to Russia lean towards Russia." For Katya [3], that was Belarus's entire history: "eternally under Poland, or under Lithuania, or someone else." In other words, there was "no Belarus as such" [Il'ya, 3]. All the same, those who took part in our focus groups in Brest, on the Polish border, did not necessarily emphasize their differences. "Belarus isn't such a big state," explained Ol'ga [4], "and in principle the same kind of people live throughout the territory, with the same character and mentality." Many had spent large parts of their lives in various of the other Soviet republics. And they had all shared a set of formative experiences. During the Soviet years, explained Tamara [4],

> all these countries, Ukraine, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, lived together and went to war, we defeated a great enemy, we don't know the European Union but we know these [other Soviet peoples]. So I would like friendship between Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

"It seems to me we would be richer," commented Elena [4]. "Yes, and freer," added Tamara. "We could travel to Russia and everywhere else, and they to us. And let the European Union stay where it is" [4].

On the survey evidence, Belarusians were increasingly likely to think of themselves as "modern Europeans" and much more likely to do so than their Russian or Ukrainian counterparts. According to the Independent Institute for Socio-Political and Economic Research (IISEPS),[4] 36% of Belarusians thought of themselves in this way in 2006 and more than 47% in 2012. At the same time, a diminishing but very similar proportion still thought of themselves as "Soviet" (52% in 2006, and nearly 46% in 2012). And a substantial 68% "felt they were closer" to Russians than to Europeans (31%) (IISEPS 2012). According to our own evidence, a very similar 46% of Belarusians thought of themselves at least occasionally as "European" in 2011 (Table 3); this was a much larger proportion than the 27% who thought of themselves as European in Ukraine in 2010, and the 26% who did so in Russia. Those who thought of themselves as "European," indeed, were almost as numerous in Belarus as those who did so "rarely" or "not at all"; by contrast, those who "rarely" or "never" thought of themselves as European in Ukraine and Russia were between two and three times as numerous as those who did so "often" or "occasionally."

A single question about "Europeanness," clearly, would hardly establish its relative importance as compared with other attachments, and so we asked an additional set of questions about a wider repertoire of identities in a way that

Table 3. "Feeling European," 2000–2014.

	Belarus					Ukraine						Russia					
	2000	2004	2006	2009	2011	2000	2004	2006	2007	2010	2012	2000	2005	2008	2010	2012	2014
Yes, often	16	9	11	10	13	8	6	6	5	8	9	18	7	8	5	7	7
Yes, sometimes	34	25	29	30	33	26	20	22	23	19	20	34	18	19	21	21	22
Rarely	38	17	30	21	21	57	14	16	15	21	20	28	14	16	17	18	20
Not at all		37	24	31	28		49	50	49	47	40	19	54	47	49	44	45
DK/NA	12	13	7	8	5	8	12	7	8	5	12	2	8	11	8	9	6
N	1090	1599	1000	1000	1000	1600	2000	1600	1200	1200	1197	1940	2000	2000	2000	1605	1602

Notes: The wording of the question was "Do you think of yourself as a European [*oshchushchayete sebya yevropeytsem*]?"; rounded percentages. DK, do not know; NA, no answer.
Source: Authors' data.

overlapped with the regular Eurobarometer surveys and allowed some cross-national comparison. In this case, a range of options was provided, and respondents were invited to select not only the first identity with which they associated themselves, but also the second. The Eurobarometer is primarily concerned with the salience, across its member states, of a "European" as compared with a "national" identity. We posed a wider set of options, reflecting the historical experience of the post-Soviet republics. Not only did we ask if our respondents felt "European" as a primary or secondary identity, but we also wanted to know if they thought of themselves as "Soviet citizens" or "Eurasians," as citizens of their own country, or as residents of their region or their town or village. Similar questions have been asked by, for instance, the European Social Study, which allows respondents to be a "resident of the world," but again does not engage with identities that are more relevant to the post-Soviet experience.[5]

Taking into account this wider range of possible attachments, Belarus again emerges as the most "European" of the ex-Soviet Slavic republics (Table 4); a "European" identity was much more widely distributed than in Ukraine, and in Russia there were more who still thought of themselves as "Soviet citizens" than as Europeans. But in each case, it was overwhelmingly with their own country that our respondents identified, than with their local area, and after that the region in which it was located. Nearly always, these were much stronger associations than with "Europe," Eurasia, or the former USSR. And it was striking that levels of "European" identity were much lower than in other European countries, whether or not they were members of the EU, and whether or not they were a part of the continental territory. The largest proportion who saw themselves as at least partly "European" in the three Slavic republics was in Belarus, at 25%. The average, across the EU member states that were surveyed by the Eurobarometer in 2006, was 55%; the average in Bulgaria and Romania, which joined the following year, was 53%; and even in Turkey, an overwhelmingly Asian and Muslim country with no immediate prospect of membership, it was 29%.[6]

A "European choice"?

What, then, about membership of the EU itself? Or at least a closer, more formal association? Opinions, once again, were mixed, and there was little feeling that membership – even if it was available – would necessarily resolve their domestic difficulties. A closer relationship was certainly desirable, thought Il'ya; it would give them "money and stability," and greater employment opportunities [3]. They would be able to "travel around Europe without a visa – that's an enormous advantage," added Sergey [3]. Indeed if they had made a different choice in 1994, when Lukashenka had first been elected president, lamented Svetlana [2], they would be in the EU already, with their difficulties far behind. "We're very well placed for tourism and all kinds of other things," she thought, and compared with Russia and Ukraine, they had an "even better chance of becoming an economically developed country." Instead they had just "gone backwards on the Soviet road." "I very much regret that," she continued,

Table 4. The repertoire of identities, 2004–2014.

	Belarus				Ukraine					Russia				
	2004	2006	2009	2011	2004	2006	2007	2010	2012	2005	2008	2010	2012	2014
European	16	20	16	25	10	12	11	10	14	8	11	8	11	11
Eurasian	2	3	2	4	2	2	1	2	2	3	4	5	6	5
Soviet citizen	10	12	8	11	11	9	11	9	10	13	14	18	15	12
Citizen of own country	72	85	76	77	69	68	69	76	66	76	70	76	67	68
Citizen of own region	18	25	24	24	27	33	31	34	37	29	36	38	41	44
From own settlement	65	50	67	53	69	64	62	63	59	69	64	55	57	58
N	1599	1000	1000	1000	2000	1600	1200	1200	1197	2000	2000	2000	1605	1602

Notes: The wording of the question was "Which of the following do you think of yourself to be first of all? And secondly?" Figures show all who gave a corresponding response as their first or second choice, in rounded percentages; other choices and those who failed to respond account for residuals.
Source: As Table 3.

> because today we would be [better] dressed, we would be able to travel, our salaries would be higher, there would be opportunities. If there was no work here – you could go there to work. There would be more economic as well as political freedom.

Comparisons with their immediate neighbors impressed others, including Andrey [2]:

> At least life is better there, I can judge on the basis of Lithuania and Poland .... Ordinary people live a bit better than us, and pensioners a lot better. You don't see pensioners in our cafes and restaurants, but there pensioners are sitting in all the cafes and restaurants, having their breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It's not a problem, as it is for us. There are certainly poor people there, but they're somehow not visible .... That's what I saw for myself in Vilnius.

For Natal'ya [2], in the same group, the EU was simply a more powerful economy, which meant it would be able to support them; she herself had relatives in Poland, who were clearly able to live better than she was able to do in Belarus, although she had never thought of emigrating. For Svetlana [2], similarly, there was more to be gained than to be lost from a closer association. It was people, rather than countries, that really mattered; in this case, it was "like joining a particular party," and after all, "our neighbors, the Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, are the people who live there." How could you isolate yourself in any case, asked Galina [3]? "It would be like living in a communal apartment and not communicating with one of the other residents."

But either way, there was no indication that membership was a serious prospect ("Absolutely no-one needs Belarus now," as Katya [2] told the same group). And many were opposed to a closer relationship in any case. The EU was actually much the same as the former Soviet Union, suggested Il'ya [2]: for instance, in the industrial standards it imposed throughout its member states. "Could anyone find five differences?" "Maybe someone would gain out of it," thought Lyudmila [1], "but for Belarusians as a whole it would bring no good." And the EU had been trying to finance the overthrow of Lukashenka. Andrey, in another group, drew lessons from the accession of the three Baltic republics [4]. In the event, their populations had fallen, as substantial numbers had taken the opportunity to go and live in one of the other member states. "In other words there's no work after joining the EU, salaries are low, but fortunately there's free movement, so people simply leave." Was this good or bad? "Probably bad," as if the people of working age left, who would pay the pensions of those who remained? They couldn't close themselves off within their own territory; "we certainly have to integrate." But "everything depends on what kind of economic situation we have, how strong we are industrially and politically."

The experience of EU membership in neighboring countries was a discouraging one for several others. Mariya [2] pointed out what had happened to Lithuania: "They destroyed its entire agricultural industry, because they didn't want a strong competitor." For Nikolai [1], the EU had expanded in recent years, for the most part by adding the former socialist countries, but so far as he could establish the problems they had were "very big, even compared with their situation before they joined." Everything had to be carefully evaluated. "But if [membership] brings no positive

advantages, for ordinary people particularly, so that people live better, then certainly not." Meanwhile, integration with their eastern neighbors was steadily advancing and agreements were being made about economic assistance and the removal of customs barriers, all of which would lead to higher levels of trade and a certain amount of economic growth. To be a very junior member of a much larger union was not necessarily an attractive alternative. They had seen, for instance, what had happened when Lithuania joined the EU, and how the German Chancellor Angela Merkel had conducted herself as President of the European Council [Mariya, 2]. Smaller and weaker countries, evidently, would "just be treated as a market."

Ol'ga and her younger contemporaries hadn't actually seen much evidence of the EU in their daily lives, at least up to that point [4]. Cooperation with Ukraine and Russia was "more promising and more advantageous, because we have a lot more to do with them and we have firmer links than we have with the countries of the EU." There were more opportunities to study or work in Ukraine or Russia, and it was easier to make a career than in the EU countries because they were "one big family [*rodstvennyye narody*]; I know the language and what people are like." For Elena [2], the EU had "simply nothing to do with me," and she had no idea what took place within its various structures; she had of course read about it on the Internet and in the newspapers, but it was "hard to draw any kind of conclusions." Occasionally, there were developments that made the headlines, as when Libyan refugees arrived in Italy, but her reaction was to the position of the individuals concerned, and not to the fact that they happened to be located in one of the EU member countries. "I just remember the name European Union, that there is such an association, that it does something, but it's as if it has nothing to do with me personally," she went on. "The European Union, is that Russia?," asked another participant [Svetlana, 3].

Popular attitudes, in fact, were broadly positive toward the possibility of EU membership (Table 5). More than 60% thought it would be a "good" or "very good" idea, in our 2011 survey. Ukrainians were similarly enthusiastic, Russians much less so. All the same, attitudes could vary considerably over time, and considerable numbers were undecided. Other sources indicate that support for a hypothetical EU membership had been as low as 27%, between 2005 and 2014, and as high as 44%; opposition had varied between 27% and 52%. But in the summer of 2014, popular opinion was clearly opposed, and by a decisive margin: 27% were in favor but 51% opposed, the largest difference in opinion that had yet been recorded (IISEPS 2014).

If Belarus all the same became an EU member, what would be the likely consequences? For a clear majority of our respondents (63%), it would stimulate economic development, and substantial numbers thought it would also increase political stability (50%) and personal incomes (42%). The main disadvantage was that it would raise levels of unemployment (28% agreed, 25% disagreed), although a still larger proportion (32%) found it impossible to offer an opinion of any kind.

Who were the "Europeans"? We set out our evidence in Table 6, which presents estimates from an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equation

Table 5. Attitudes toward EU membership in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia, 2000–2014.

	Bel 00	Bel 04	Bel 06	Bel 09	Bel 11	Rus 10	Rus 12	Rus 14	Ukr 10	Ukr 12
Very positive	23	26	17	17	22	8	7	4	21	21
Positive	32	34	30	35	39	23	17	14	37	29
Negative	11	8	18	19	17	10	11	15	15	19
Very negative	5	3	8	10	5	4	9	15	9	10
DK/NA	31	30	28	19	17	15	16	12	18	21
N	1090	1599	1000	1000	1000	2000	1605	1602	1200	1197

Notes: Wording of the question was "If our country in the future were to join the EU, what view would you take of it?"; rounded percentages. DK, do not know; NA, no answer.
Source: As Table 3; the Russian surveys in 2010 and 2012 included a "neutral" option (41%).

Table 6. Support for EU membership, 2011 (OLS regression estimates).

	Supports EU membership	
	Partial (*b*)	*β*
Social background		
Gender (female)	−0.00	−0.01
Age (decades)	−0.02**	−0.09**
Urban resident	0.08**	0.12**
Married	0.06*	0.08*
Tertiary education	0.01	0.02
Belarusian nationality	−0.01	−0.02
Belarusian language	−0.02	−0.02
Economic conditions		
Belarus economy improved past year	0.01	0.02
Family economy improved past year	0.04**	0.11**
Family economy good at present	0.01	0.02
Satisfaction with contemporary Belarus		
Satisfaction with things going in Belarus	−0.03**	−0.13**
Satisfaction with democracy in Belarus	−0.04**	−0.13**
Constant	0.73	
Adj. R^2	0.10	
N	1000	

Notes: OLS regression analysis showing partial (*b*) and standardized (*β*) coefficients predicting support for EU membership, which is coded 1 = strongly approve, 0.75 = approve, 0.5 = do not know, 0.25 = disapprove, 0 = strongly disapprove. The social background variables are all scored zero or one unless otherwise noted. The economic conditions over the past year variables are scored from 5 = much better, 4 = somewhat better, 3 = stayed the same, 2 = somewhat worse, 1 = much worse. The family economy at present variable is scored from 5 = very good, 4 = good, 3 = average, 2 = bad, 1 = very bad. The satisfaction variables are scored 4 = very satisfied, 3 = satisfied, 2 = not very satisfied, 1 = not at all satisfied.
*Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ and **statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.
Source: As Table 3.

predicting support for EU membership from a series of independent variables representing social background, economic conditions, and satisfaction with Belarusian society and politics. As the dependent variable is scored from zero to one through five nominal categories, the partial coefficients can be interpreted as percentage probabilities (a partial coefficient of 0.08 for urban residents, for instance, suggests that they were 8% more likely to support membership of the EU than non-urban residents, net of other circumstances). On this evidence, gender made very little difference, nor did educational level, nationality, or language use. But being married, as well as urban residence, raised levels of support; age was even more important, in the opposite direction (every additional 10 years of age reduced support for EU membership by 2%). Economic attitudes, however, were the most important of all: a perception that household circumstances had been improving raised support for membership, and so did dissatisfaction with the state of Belarusian politics and society. These, indeed, were the strongest predictors in the entire equation.

A Slavic choice?

If attitudes were cautious about the possibility that EU membership might offer a way forward, there was at least as much skepticism about the possibility that a greater degree of integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States, with its headquarters in Minsk itself, might offer a more promising alternative. Andrei [4] had certainly heard about it, but "it hardly improves our daily lives": its forms of taxation were based on added value in the receiving country, which meant that Belarusians lost out, and as for the budget of the union state, "no one knows how it's spent." Mariya, in the same group, had heard nothing about it, and had no idea if it was advantageous to them or not: "as an ordinary person, I simply can't say" [4]. For Ol'ga [4], it was something like the Soviet Union ("I have the feeling we are returning to that system"); but the Soviet Union was larger and more powerful, the CIS was a sort of "little model of what used to be." She heard a lot about the CIS in the media, about the signing of documents and communiqués, mostly on economic matters, all of which, in principle, might be of some benefit. But it seemed to have no connection with their daily lives.

Others were no more complimentary. For Anna [2], the CIS headquarters was in Minsk – "but so what?" It had been established by "three drunken *muzhiki* in the Belovezh forest .... They decided to establish it, and so they did! And there's no economic or political benefit from the union whatsoever!" There used to be borders and customs, and there still were. "We're simply chasing the Russian rouble. Now we've collapsed together with this Russian rouble – it's time to stop running after them!" "We don't feel it and we don't see it. It gives us nothing," declared Tamara [4]. Another view was that unification was itself desirable ("*kogda my vmeste – eto sila*"), but "not with Russia as it is today. That is, the policy of unification is fine, but not using the methods that are being used at the moment" [Svetlana, 2]. For others, the CIS was simply a form of "nostalgia for the Soviet Union". Perhaps it was just too soon to say – the EU had itself taken a long time to evolve [Elena, 2]. And in any case it was a "question for economists" [Natal'ya, 2].

The relationship with Russia was more of a reality, but again attitudes were quite varied. "With our own dear Russia we're not so close, we're not needed, with our problems, with our little difficulties [*bolyachkami*]," thought Sergey [3]. And Belarus was just a small country, a "small family, in which everyone is friends" [Il'ya, 3]: If they joined up with Russia, he was "afraid Russian business will come here and we will die out or disappear." There was an even greater risk that the society as a whole would "dissolve," and that ordinary people would "become alien to each other." In Belarus, business was "all the same based on human feelings," but in Russia it was just "hard cash" [*sukhiye den'gi*]. In a Belarusian shop, explained Il'ya, there was still a "homely atmosphere" [3]. But if they were integrated with Russia, there would be "empty shelves, things nobody needs, and everyone would be fired as they would say the atmosphere was not businesslike. And what's worst of all, we would lose our individual Belarusianness" [*vnutrennoye belorusskoye*]. As for industry, Russia was simply "unwilling to allow Belarus to develop as an independent country."

All of this, in any case, had to be seen in a longer-term perspective. For Sergey [3], there had always been something "imperial" about Russia, and Belarus itself had "always been an appendage." For Il'ya [3], the problem was more specifically that they had always been a "workshop," rather than a producer. Russia still supplied them with components, which they assembled, and as long as they were part of a larger association of this kind, they would always be a Russian workshop. Galina was another who was conscious of the legacy of the past [3]: Russia "always wants to make us a province, in other words, doesn't see us as an equal partner." And "when we become a [Russian] province," added Il'ya, "they'll pump the last resources out of us, and we'll be as moribund as all the others." The same view was widely shared. For Mariya [2], for instance, Russia had always been a "gatherer of lands," and it did not always play by the rules. For Svetlana, in the same group, it had "imperialist ambitions under the Tsars, and then under Soviet rule, and today the same kind of imperialist ambitions. Seize and dissolve and that's it" [2]. Belarus had been a Russian province in the past, as Natal'ya put it [2], and that was what it might become in the future.

As for the Union of Belarus and Russia, it all depended what kind of union. For Vera [1], the union had to be strengthened, if that was possible: "But not the way Russia wants, to grab everything, leaving us with nothing, and subordinating us to them, we don't want that! We have our president, and they have theirs. But we have to be friends." Svetlana [1] took a similar view:

> Yes, we have such a country in which agriculture is very well developed, all our fields are cultivated, there's not a bit of ground that's left empty, but all the same maybe we don't have such major resources as oil or gas, because of which we are considered a poor country. And because of that we can't deal with serious problems without some kind of good friend. We are Slavs and Russians are Slavs, so we'd very much like to resolve some of these problems together. Because there are some issues on which we can help the Russians, and some on which they can help us.

There were Belarusian milk products, for instance, that were so good that Russians queued up for them. "But it would all have to be resolved on a friendly basis, without pressure, and without subordinating one side to the other".

The Union, others thought, had brought some cultural and economic advantages [Mariya, 4]. At any rate, that was what was reported, and what seemed to have been the case in earlier years [Andrey, 4]. But it was a "complicated situation" that kept changing all the time; and this was most unsettling, as ordinary people just wanted to get on with their daily lives [Mariya, 4]. "We're told there's progress, that there are concessions on gas, that we are paying less," Ol'ga [4] explained, "and then literally overnight it's reported that there's no agreement after all, or that we weren't able to sign it. Probably it depends most of all on the political leaders." Another participant [Svetlana, 3] explained: "We want to be close to Russia, we want to be the way we were in the [Soviet] Union, we want to be together," but somehow "it doesn't work out ... and so for the moment we're left alone in this Union." In Andrey's [2] view, it was actually quite possible to cooperate with Russia without a union of any kind. And even if you thought something was desirable, such as a union of the two states, explained Svetlana [3], when it didn't work out, "you don't want it any more."

If the survey evidence was any guide, Belarusians were not unhappy that the USSR had been dissolved: Just over half (54%) expressed little or no regret, in our 2011 inquiry, as compared with 39% who took a different view, and Soviet nostalgia had steadily declined over the course of the decade. Nor did they have any wish to form the kind of association with the Russian Federation that President Vladimir Putin appeared to have in mind. One possibility, he told Lukashenka in 2002, was for Belarus to join the Russian Federation on the basis of its existing constitution; another was a looser form of integration along the lines of the EU, with higher-level institutions taking decisions that would have to be confirmed by the parliaments of each of the member countries (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, August 15, 2002, 1). Speaking at a Kremlin youth camp in 2011, Putin reiterated that a return to Soviet-style unity was "possible, very desirable and entirely dependent on the will of the Belarusian people" (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, August 4, 2011, 6). From our evidence, there was little support in Belarus itself for a resolution of the bilateral relationship that would involve such far-reaching integration, or even a closer relationship of the kind that existed within the EU. Increasingly, it was the status quo, based on the existing union treaty, that had the most popular support (Table 7).

At the same time, there was strong support for a closer association with the wider post-Soviet region that would continue to respect Belarusian state sovereignty. Relatively few, by 2011, wanted to reestablish a union state of a kind that would resemble the former USSR. But there was clear and consistent support for the idea that the former Soviet republics within the CIS should cooperate more closely than in the past, or at least as closely as before, and there were very few who wanted to cooperate less closely, or dissolve the CIS entirely (Table 8). Predictably, those who had relatives in Russia were more likely than others to favor a closer association, or even a single state; so were those who had relatives elsewhere in the CIS. Both groups were also more likely to regret the demise of the USSR; those who did so were in turn more likely to support a greater degree of

Table 7. Attitudes concerning unification of Belarus and Russia, 2004–2011.

	2004	2006	2011
Enter the Russian Federation as a subject	10	8	6
Create an interstate union	47	37	30
Retain the status quo	12	32	34
Against unification	18	13	24
DK/NA	13	10	6
N	1599	1000	1000

Notes: The wording of the question was: Which variant of Russia and Belarus unification, listed below, would you personally prefer? That Belarus should enter the Russian Federation as seven subjects of the federation (each of the six Belarusian regions and Minsk would form separate Russian regions); that Belarus and Russia should form an interstate union similar to the European Union; that the current situation based on the existing version of the union treaty should remain; I am against the unification of Belarus and Russia rounded percentages. DK, do not know; NA, no answer.
Source: As Table 3.

Table 8. Integration within the CIS, 2004–2011.

	2004	2006	2009	2011
Form a single state	25	17	12	10
Cooperate more closely	52	52	56	56
Cooperate as at present	8	19	22	21
Cooperate less	1	1	2	4
CIS should be dissolved	5	1	1	4
DK/NA	10	9	7	5
N	1599	1000	1000	1000

Notes: The wording of the question was: "Should the republics of the ex-Soviet Union that entered the CIS interact more closely with each other or not?"; rounded percentages. DK, do not know; NA, no answer.
Source: As Table 3.

integration among the post-Soviet republics. But it was overwhelmingly the consensus view – of males and female, of young and old, of town and country, of rich and poor – that a greater degree of integration of this kind was to be welcomed even if it was only a small minority who wished to take it as far as the re-establishment of a unitary state.

Who were the "Slavic choicers"? All other circumstances being equal, age was once again a powerful predictor, although in the absence of longitudinal data we cannot necessarily assume that these are more than life-cycle changes (we return to the question of change over time in our final section, where we compare a series of cross sections). Younger respondents, in responses to other questions, were also less likely to regret the demise of the USSR, and less likely to favor the formation of a more far-reaching union with the Russian Federation in which Belarus would cease to exist as an independent state. Gender, again, made little difference, nor did educational level; however, nationality and language use were important variables, with the predictable effect that those who identified themselves as ethnic Belarusians or Belarusian speakers were less likely, other things being equal, to favor a closer degree of integration across the CIS member states. Unlike attitudes toward EU membership, personal economic circumstances and perceptions of national economic performance had no statistically significant effects; but the more respondents were satisfied with the "level of democracy" that had been made available to them by the Lukashenka leadership, the more they supported a greater degree of integration across the larger post-Soviet space (Table 9).

East or West, East *and* West?

If there were reservations, in our focus group discussions, about EU membership or an even closer relationship with Russia, there was little dissent from the view that there should be friendly relations with as many other states as possible as long as national sovereignty was adequately protected. Mariya [4] admitted to a "schizophrenic attitude" about the EU in this connection. They did not want to come under Russian domination again, but they could slip into some other kind of

Table 9. Support for CIS countries uniting in a single state (OLS regression estimates).

	Supports CIS integration	
	Partial (*b*)	β
Social background		
Gender (female)	0.02	0.01
Age (decades)	0.06**	0.11**
Urban resident	−0.01	−0.01
Married	−0.02	−0.01
Tertiary education	0.02	0.01
Belarusian nationality	−0.18**	−0.08**
Belarusian language	−0.32**	−0.11**
Economic conditions		
Belarus economy improved past year	0.04	0.05
Family economy improved past year	−0.02	−0.02
Family economy good at present	−0.02	−0.02
Satisfaction with contemporary Belarus		
Satisfied with things in Belarus	−0.03	−0.04
Satisfied with democracy in Belarus	0.10**	0.10**
Constant	3.89	
Adj. R^2	0.05	
N	946	

Notes: OLS regression analysis showing partial (*b*) and standardized (β) coefficients predicting support for CIS countries uniting to form a single state, coded 5 = the CIS countries should unite into a single state, 4 = there should be closer cooperation but countries should remain independent, 3 = the CIS countries should interact at the present level, 2 = the CIS should continue to exist but cooperation should be reduced, 1 = the CIS should be dissolved. See Table 6 for scoring of other variables.
*Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ and **statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.
Source: As Table 3.

dependency, politically and economically. It would be much better to "cooperate sensibly with all sides." "When there's a big family it's easier to deal with any difficulties," explained Svetlana [1]. But Belarus had to retain its individuality, whoever they agreed to unite with, and they must always be citizens of Belarus, independent of any of the neighboring countries. "The more friends we have, the better," as one of our other participants put it; "we're a peaceful people" [Andrey, 4]. "You have to make friends, and unite, and develop, and go further," explained another, "but do it intelligently, remaining independent, while copying whatever is good from the experience of other countries" [Svetlana, 1].

Who, in fact, were their most obvious "friends" in the outside world? For Svetlana [1], Ukrainians were very close, whatever the relations between their governments might be. Russians and Kazakhs were also friendly, indeed they were surrounded by friendly countries much like themselves, but they also had good relations with people who lived much further away, such as Armenians and Azerbaijanis. For Lyudmila [1], Ukrainians were "best of all," Kazakhs as well, and for Svetlana, it was Russians and Ukrainians. If politics did not get in the way,

explained Nikolai [1], then all of them, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians, should be friends and live together ("as we were when we lived in the Soviet Union," added Vera [1]). "Everyone has family relationships of some kind, including ordinary people," Nikolay [1] continued, "and if politicians find it difficult to relate to each other, it's ordinary people who will once again lose out." Ordinary people were very hospitable in Georgia as well, even though it was far away. And there were "very good people" in Azerbaijan, where one of our participants had lived for 18 years [Vera, 1]. But most often, it was Ukrainians who were seen as the friendliest [Sergei, 3], or Russians and Ukrainians – "we're in between them, in the middle," Katya [1] explained.

These were views that were very close to the official policy of "multidirectionality" (*mnogovektornost'*); and so it was not surprising that Belarusian foreign policy was very positively evaluated. In early 2011, 46% of our respondents thought Belarusian foreign policy was oriented primarily toward the CIS, 33% thought it was equally oriented toward the CIS and the West, and just 9% thought it was primarily oriented toward the West. Either way, it was a policy that had the support of a popular consensus. More than 61% approved of it, in our survey, and just 21% were disapproving. Predictably, Lukashenka supporters were even more enthusiastic than others: among those who supported the President, 78% approved of the conduct of Belarusian foreign policy; among those who had voted for him at the December 2010 election, exactly the same proportion were approving. But support was very widely distributed across the entire society: men and women were almost equally enthusiastic; more than half the younger respondents were positive, though older ones were even more so; urban respondents were almost as positive as their rural counterparts, and poorer respondents almost as positive as richer ones.

All the same, if choices had to be made, would ordinary people choose East or West? On our own evidence, a "Slavic choice" in which national independence would be retained was consistently more popular than either EU membership or a merger with the Russian Federation. We asked, for instance, if Belarus should develop partnership relations with the West, or with the CIS, or equally with both. More than two-thirds (69%) wanted both; but of those who made a specific choice, the CIS countries (20%) were more popular than their Western counterparts (9%). Other research found the same to be true, when the choice was offered between joining the EU and becoming a part of Russia: about one-third (33%) expressed a preference for the EU in such circumstances, but rather more (47%) were inclined to seek a formal union with Russia (IISEPS 2014). The same was also true when we asked about the relative importance of East and West in maintaining the country's national security. Again, a very large majority wanted to do so by a closer association with both of them (62%); but if a choice had to be made, 26% identified with the CIS and only 8% with the USA and Western Europe.

We asked, similarly, about the foreign countries with which our respondents thought it was most important for Belarus to have good relations. By a very large margin and over an extended period, it was the Russian Federation (Table 10). Which foreign countries were the friendliest, in the view of our respondents, and

Table 10. The importance of good relations with foreign countries, 2000–2011.

	2000	2004	2006	2011
Russia	69	63	65	67
EU countries	37	43	34	38
Poland	n.d.	38	28	33
Germany	36	33	30	27
USA	32	28	21	19
UK	25	23	20	16
China	21	22	29	32
N	1090	1599	1000	1000

Notes: The wording of the question was "With which countries, in your opinion, is it most important for Belarus to have good relations?" (response: "very important"); rounded percentages.
Source: As Table 3.

which were seen as the most hostile? It was Russia (47%) and Ukraine (45%), in our 2011 survey, that were seen as the most positively disposed. China was also friendly (34%), but much less so Poland (22%), Lithuania (19%), Germany (17%), or the UK (15%), and least of all the USA (8%). The same was true of the country's security environment. Fewer than 9% saw Russia as a security threat of any kind; just 13% viewed the member countries of the EU as a threat of this kind (the same as Iran), but much larger numbers saw the USA (23%) or NATO (25%) in these terms. Predictably, there was very little support for the idea that Belarus should itself become a NATO member; the latter was most commonly identified as a "bridgehead for Western expansion," although similar numbers were willing to regard it as a peacekeeping organization and many had no opinion.

Overall, had opinion changed over time? In this concluding section, we identify four distinct positions and trace their evolution over the period since 2000 (see Figure 1). We divided our respondents, first of all, into those who favored EU membership and those who were against it. And then we divided them into those who favored a closer association with the member countries of the CIS, up to and including the re-establishment of a single state, and those who opposed it. We defined those who favored both as "multivectoralists"; they were about 40% of the entire sample in 2011, which was by far the most popular position. We labeled those who favored neither as "isolationists"; they accounted for no more than 1% of the entire sample in 2011, which was by far the least popular position. We defined "Slavic choicers" as those who favored a closer association with the member countries of the CIS, up to and including the restoration of a unitary state, but rejected EU membership (they were 16% of the entire sample in 2011). And finally there were "Western choicers," who favored EU membership but rejected a closer association with the member countries of the CIS. They accounted for 5% of the entire sample in 2011.

These figures suggest some rather clear conclusions. A "multivectoral choice," on our evidence, is consistently the most popular foreign policy position, except in 2000, when a slightly different wording of the question was employed. A "Slavic choice," according to our surveys, is clearly the second most popular foreign

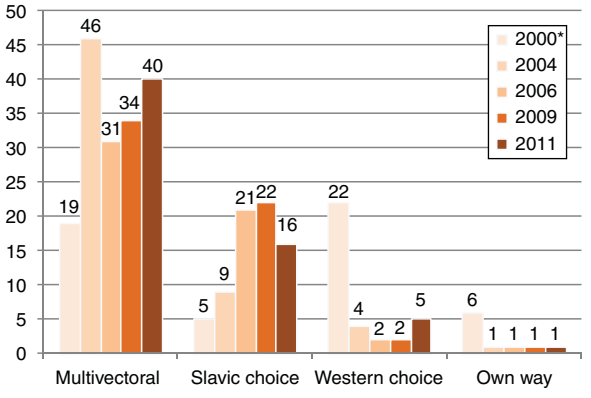

Figure 1. Foreign policy positions in Belarus, 2000–2011. Figures are reported as rounded percentages. *The wording of the question in 2000 was: What do you think about the unification of all the member countries of the CIS? Much better to leave state boundaries as they now are; Somewhat better to leave state boundaries as they now are; Wouldn't make any difference; Somewhat better to form a single state; Much better to form a single state; Other; Don't know; No answer.
Source: As Table 3.

policy position, except in 2000. A "Western choice" was popular in 2000, but since then has accounted for a very small proportion of the adult citizenry. Least popular of all, throughout the period, was the "isolationist" position, which was more or less the exact opposite of the multivectoral position with which the regime itself was most closely associated. Indeed, "multivectoralists" and "Slavic choicers" were the only positions that had substantial support from 2004 onward; they accounted for 56% of the entire sample in 2011, of whom 62% could be allocated to one or other of these four categories. In other words, of all those who had a coherent position on foreign policy issues, more than 90% were "multivectoralists" or (less often) "Slavic choicers"; fewer than 10% were "Western choicers" or "isolationists."

Another way of stating the same conclusion was to note how closely the distribution of foreign policy preferences reflected official policies, in this case *mnogovektornost'*. There was no domestic obstacle to a closer relationship with "Europe," provided it was one that respected state sovereignty and yielded practical benefits. But there was virtually no support for a decisive shift in that direction and away from the cooperative structures that had been developing across the post-Soviet republics. Their foreign policy strategy, Lukashenka told an audience at Belarusian State University in 2008, was based on three principles: political sovereignty, economic openness, and partnership relations with other countries. The "golden rule" was "multidirectionality and an interest in mutually advantageous contacts"; they did not cut themselves off from anyone behind an iron curtain, "on the contrary, we are actively seeking cooperation with all other states" (*Belarus' segodnya*, February 14, 2008, 2). There could be no suggestion, after the 2010 presidential election, that the Belarusian leadership was based on

the freely expressed consent of the governed. But it might all the same attract the support of a substantial proportion of the electorate, and its policies might reflect their preferences. A multidirectional foreign policy might indeed unite leadership and society even if there were few means at their disposal by which the wider society could ensure that its preferences were the ones that ultimately prevailed.

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Notes

1. Huntington (1996, 164), indeed, thought it had become a "part of Russia in all but name."
2. Our focus group discussions took place in the Brest region on 28 May 2011 in two parts, with five participants; we have designated these groups 1 and 2. There were further discussions in Minsk on 30 May 2011, also in two parts, with eight participants (we have designated these groups 3 and 4), and on 31 May 2011, again in two parts, with five participants (we have designated these groups 5 and 6). Our final discussions took place in the city of Brest, on 5 June 2011, again in two parts; we have designated these groups 7 and 8. More complete details, including the occupational backgrounds of participants, are available from the authors on request.
3. A more detailed technical report is available from the authors on request.
4. The Institute was originally established in 1992 under the direction of Oleg Manayev and is currently based in Lithuania. Further details of its work are available at www.iiseps.org.
5. In this case, Belarusians were most likely to think of themselves as a "resident of their town or village" or as a "citizen of Belarus" in the first instance (43% in both cases in 2008); just 3% thought of themselves as a "resident of Europe," fewer (8%) thought of themselves as a "resident of the world as a whole" (Bulynko, Danilov, and Rotman 2009, 227).
6. *Eurobarometer* no. 64, June 2006, 41–43 at http://www.ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64_en.pdf, last accessed October 4, 2014. Bulgaria and Romania, which became EU members in 2007, reported figures of 47% and 59%, respectively; in Croatia, which acceded in 2013, the corresponding figure was 64%.

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