THE INFLUENCE OF SMALL STATES:
BELARUS'S FOREIGN POLICY AND STATE IDENTITY

Abstract

In exploring the question of Belarus's influence on Russia and the EU by the non-material means of state identity, the research has developed the Composite State Identity as a theoretical framework to examine the dynamics of influence. It argues that congruence and engagement of state identity, conceptualised as a composite of three temporal components, which are related to the past, the future, and the present, vis-à-vis the Other, help understand the dynamics of influence of Belarus, a smaller state, vis-à-vis its larger neighbours, Russia and the EU. Specifically, the engagement of at least one component of state identity which is externally congruent with the Other positively contributes to the influence, which the Self is able to wield. The thesis seeks to show how Belarus constructed its state identity in the three decades after its independence vis-à-vis two external Others, Russia and the EU, and how the change in state identity constituted Belarus's influence, both successful and not.

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Chronology of key political and historical events

862	Polatsk mentioned for the first times in chronicles.
1263	Belarusian lands became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus, and Samogitia (GDL).
1569	The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is formed.
1772 - 1795	Three Partitions of Poland between Austria, Russia and Prussia with all Belarusian territories incorporated into the Russian Empire.
1863 - 1864	Polish Rebellion against the Russian Empire led by the Belarusian Kastuś Kalinoŭski.
25 March 1918	The Belarusian People's Republic is declared independent.
1922	Belarus becomes a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).
22 June 1941	Nazi Germany invades the USSR.
1941-1944	Belarus is occupied by Nazi Germany.
3 July 1944	Minsk is liberated by the USSR's army.
26 April 1986	Chernobyl nuclear power station accident that contaminates Belarus severely.
27 July 1990	Belarus declares state sovereignty.
25 August 1991	Belarus declares independence.
19 September 1991	The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) changes its name to the Republic of Belarus and adopts a new national flag and new state symbols.
15 March 1994	Belarus adopts a new Constitution.
23 June and 10 July 1994	Victory of Alexander Lukashenko in both rounds of presidential elections (44,82% in the first round, 80,34% in the second round).
14 May 1995	A four-question referendum, held in conjunction with parliamentary elections, assigns the Russian language equal status with Belarusian, changes national symbols back to the Soviet-style ones, sets Belarus's foreign policy course towards economic integration with Russia, and gives

	the president the power to dissolve the parliament in case of its violation of the constitution.
24 November 1996	A seven-question referendum changes the date of the independence day (from the 27th of July, when Belarus declared sovereignty, to the 3rd of July, when Minsk was liberated), amends the constitution changing the laws on the sale of land (rejected), the abolition of the death penalty (rejected), and increases the presidential power by giving presidential decrees the force of law, more control over the budget, and extending Lukashenka's term in office to 2001.
1998	The Drozdy diplomatic dispute with EU and US ambassadors in Minsk.
February 2004	Russia suspends gas supplies to Belarus.
October 2004	The referendum removes presidential term limits.
January 2007	Russia stops oil supplies to Belarus and raises the gas price for Belarus by 100 per cent.
2008	Russia's war with Georgia.
May 2009	Belarus is included in the Eastern Partnership (EaP).
2014	Russia's war with Ukraine.
2016-2017	The Belarus-Russia energy dispute.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The international order(s) is changing as new actors rise and old ones re-affirm themselves. While there appears to be agreement on the major shift that is taking place,[1] the arrangements for the new international order(s) are debatable. The ensuing changes may provide new opportunities for smaller states to play an important role in shaping global politics as they have more room for manoeuvre, autonomy, and a broader geopolitical context.[2] Small states increasingly act behind the back of great powers and against international order arrangements as their behaviour is still 'informed by the great power policies' but can no longer be 'reduced to those policies'.[3] Small states' role becomes even more pronounced in what seems to be the emergence of a multi-order world that envisages greater power dispersion with multiple and diverse actors coming to the fore.[4] One of such actors is Belarus, a small post-Soviet state geopolitically positioned in highly asymmetrical relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia.[5] Possessing few resources of its own, stigmatised as 'the last dictatorship in Europe',[6] and heavily dependent on Russia's economic and political support - having little to bargain with, Belarus has nevertheless managed to navigate this complex political landscape with a relative success and perseverance, in the period of 1991-2017, steadily growing in its self-esteem and, as it is argued in this thesis, in projection of its influence on both the EU and Russia in their policies.

[1] De Bruijne & Meijnders (2017); Christensen & Xing (2016)
[2] Shlapentokh (2012)
[3] Shlapentokh (2014: 165)
[4] Flockhart (2016); De Bruijne & Meijnders (2017)
[5] While China may seem to be a rising actor in the region, this thesis is limited in its focus on the EU and Russia for historical and geopolitical reasons.
[6] Bennett (2011), also Wilson (2011); besides, Spillmann & Wenger (1999: 113) describe Belarus as 'the least independent minded of the former Soviet republics.'

Belarus has been manipulative of Russia in the context of the integration projects, such as the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), in trying to sustain and even seize the status quo. It refused to ratify the Agreement on the ECU Customs Code in 2010 and to sign the EAEU Customs Code in December 2016, as well as boycotted the summits of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 2009 and 2016. In all cases, the delay helped Belarus secure deals with Russia on favourable terms. Belarus has resisted the EU's democratisation demands and, on some occasions, has come closer to what it wanted – differentiated and equal partnership negotiations. By adopting a neutral position and hosting high-profile international meetings to help resolve the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict, Belarus succeeded in projecting itself as 'neutral' and 'a conflict mediator' in the region. Hence, the case study of Belarus provides an instructive example of small states' role and influence in the changing world order. The repressions following the August 2020 presidential elections nullified Belarus's foreign policy successes vis-à-vis Europe and the 'West' more broadly,[7] while Belarus's pro-democracy protests revived the democratic movement in Europe which has been considered sidelined or derailed.[8]

The discussion of small states' influence seems almost inconceivable in the realist and liberal traditions of International Relations (IR). Small states are defined by the population size of up to 15 million for economically advanced states and up to 30 million for under-developed states.[9] They also have a limited quantity of economic and military resources at their disposal. Therefore, small states are expected to be devoid of independent influence and inconsequential. In the words of Waltz (1979: 73) 'concern with international politics as a system requires concentration on the states that make the most difference'. Indeed, scholars devoted far more

[7] The events surrounding the presidential elections of 2020 are outside the scope of the present analysis due to their recency.
[8] Illarionov (2021)
[9] Vital (1967: 8)

attention to larger states at the expense of states of smaller sizes, despite the prevalence of them in the international system. And yet, small states have not always turned out to be as powerless as originally anticipated.[10] Large states increasingly found small states very hard 'to defeat' in political interaction. On occasion, small states exerted influence on the behaviour of great powers, and in ways that did not conform to strictly material capabilities.[11] The changes observed in the large states' policies occurred in no small measure due to particular foreign policy strategies of small states.[12] Among such strategies is the reliance on non-material resources. Drawn on literature review, small state scholarship brings attention to the fact that small states' leverage increases when they rely on non-material, ideational elements of ideas, identities, and norms. Indeed, in the globalised world, small states are less preoccupied with survival, and they expand their foreign policies and make their influence over the external environment feasible and sustainable - despite their limited material capabilities. Coupled with the argument that the number of small states significantly increased in recent history - one third of the United Nations members are small states and so are most NATO member states - such developments make the subject area of 'small state influence' an interesting and timely research issue in international politics.

Outlined in the next section, the present thesis examines the cases of Belarus's influence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU, both successful and not, to understand their constitution by state identity. Thereby, the thesis draws on a concept which is central to the constructivist viewpoint. In some research work,[13] Belarus's identity is briefly mentioned as playing a role in its projection of influence, while mostly it does not appear to play a critical role in Belarus's foreign policy choices. In contrast, the present thesis argues that state identity matters, and a

[10] Lindell & Persson (1985)
[11] Ingebritsen (2002)
[12] Barston (1973: 14): 'A government's foreign policy is the range of external actions pursued to achieve certain defined objectives or goals of which these may or may not have internal cognizance or approval'.
[13] Shlapentokh (2012); Balmaceda (2014)

persistent theme of ‘a common sense of being Slavic brothers’ in Belarus’s discourse vis-à-vis Russia or its conviction that both the EU and Belarus would start a ‘friendly and mutually respectful dialogue’ is instrumental. To analyse its relations with the much larger political actors, Belarus is contextualised in the small states literature to account for its disadvantages of low capabilities and high dependencies. While influence of the developed EU small member states is widely covered, research on the influence of non-EU, developing, and authoritarian[14] states that are in Russia’s ‘sphere of interest’ is rare. Success in international relations and foreign policy, a popular yardstick and a typical component in the small states literature, is particularly difficult to achieve for small states, such as Belarus, Georgia, or Armenia. It is argued that the factor of newness of their independent statehood is enough to explain these small states’ disadvantage.[15] Besides their newness, it is their geography and history that ‘force them into the role of a frontier zone or continental turnstile with security concerns remaining the most consistent factor in their foreign policies’.[16] The present thesis builds on the identified - in the academic literature and the media - cases of Belarus’s influence and analyses them by focusing on state identity as the (re)source of influence. These cases are covered briefly in different sources while encompassing research that deals specifically with the issue of Belarus’s influence is lacking.

1.1. The research puzzle

While Belarus is a small and materially weak state, new in its independent statehood, and geographically positioned in highly asymmetrical position between large and competing actors, it managed to wield influence on both the EU and Russia in their policies.

[14] Freedom House (2020): Belarus is an authoritarian police state.
[15] Hiepko-Odermann (2009: 24)
[16] Hiepko-Odermann (2009: 24)

In the 1990s, Belarus's influence on Russia consisted in a successful reinstalment of the policy of economic support from Russia. For Belarus, the pro-Russia orientation in the years after the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or the Soviet Union was economically lucrative: the Russian economic assistance amounted to 30 percent of Belarus's GDP, and it was described as 'vast' and 'a startling'.[17] Belarus maintained the high level of economic support from Russia in comparison to other post-Soviet states. Specifically, Belarus had customs-free imports from Russia, including duty-free oil refined in Belarus and exported to Europe, gas imports at Russia's domestic prices, and subsidies in the form of stabilization programmes and financial support. At the same time, Belarus resisted selling Russia its key economic assets, such as oil and gas pipelines, refineries, electric grids, and railways. Also, Belarus resisted the pressure to renounce its currency for the sake of the Russian rouble. Belarus's successful re-instalment of the policy of economic support from Russia is especially impressive if high dependency of Belarus's economy on Russia is considered: in the 1990s, Belarus's exports to Russia reached 60 percent; it relied for 100 per cent of its gas and 92 per cent of its oil on Russia, displaying the most asymmetrical interdependence.[18] Belarus remained one of the most energy-dependent states in the post-Soviet space and one of the most gas-dependent states in the world.[19]

Belarus's successful influence in its relations with Russia in the 1990s comes at stark contract with Belarus's foreign policy failure in exercising influence on the EU in the same period. The repeatedly announced goal to preserve the achieved level - in the first half of the 1990s - in bilateral relations was not accomplished. Belarus was unable to complete the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, which remained signed but not ratified. Furthermore,

[17] Way (2015. A: 138), Way (2015. B: 697)
[18] Korosteleva (2011: 568)
[19] Balmaceda (2009) in Korosteleva (2011: 568)

bilateral relations worsened to the extent to be labelled as 'the policy of (partial) isolation'. Tensions ensued over the dubious referenda of 1995 and 1996,[20] the mission of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Minsk (Advisory and Monitoring Group operated from 1998 to 2002), the eviction of Western diplomats from their residencies in Minsk in 1998, and the undemocratic and unrecognised parliamentary and presidential elections, which took place in Belarus in 2000 and 2001.

Only in 2007, the relations with the EU started to improve. The latter suspended sanctions, resumed contacts with Belarus's high-ranking officials, and reduced the number of democracy-related demands for Belarus. Belarus was invited to participate in the newly launched Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP), a Joint Interim Plan for enhanced relations in trade and economy, and in negotiations for Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements that envisioned visa fee cuts and their waiver for certain categories of travellers. The efforts fell short vis-à-vis the relaunch of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Belarus made some concessions too: it authorised a European Commission Delegation in Minsk, released the last internationally recognised political prisoner Alexander Kozulin, a candidate in the 2006 presidential elections, launched a privatisation programme, and allowed two independent newspapers to access state-controlled distribution networks. However, Belarus's steps did not cover all the demands of the EU and did not match most of them. The EU changed its policy towards despite the lack of

[20] A four-question referendum on 14 May 1995, which was held in conjunction with the first round of the parliamentary elections, assigned the Russian language equal status with Belarusian, changed national symbols back to the Soviet-style ones, decided on the country's direction towards economic integration with Russia as its main vector, and gave the president the power to dissolve the parliament in case of its violation of the constitution. A seven-question referendum of 24 November 1996 changed the date of the independence day (from 27 July, when sovereignty of Belarus from the Soviet Union was declared, to 3 July, when Belarus was liberated in World War Two in 1944), amended the constitution changing the laws on the sale of land (rejected), the abolition of the death penalty (rejected), and increased the presidents' power by giving presidential decrees the force of law, more control over the budget, and extended his term to 2001. Both referenda violated the international standards according to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (1995: 1): 'Because of weakness in the regulations, inappropriate government involvement, the general lack of public information on the elections, and the extensiveness of irregularities in the polling stations, the Belarus Parliamentary elections were not considered by the delegation to have met conditions for free and fair elections'.

democratic progress in the country. Belarus succeeded in bypassing the EU conditions for rapprochement and in changing its policy towards the benefit of Belarus. It achieved what it failed in the 1990s, namely, to wield influence over the EU, even if it was short-lived and lasted until the next wave of repression in the 2010 presidential elections. Belarus also secured the benefit of its formal participation in the Eastern Partnership Initiative. This allowed a low-level, sector-based, and technocratic engagement of the EU with Belarus's population and local government in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership to continue under the circumstances of a legally (de jure) limited political dialogue.[21] And even after that, Belarus insisted on a tailored and equal partnership in the framework of the EaP, prioritising areas of its own interests – transportation, logistics, education, and IT - and making the EU to consider a new framework of engagement.[22]

Belarus's case of influence vis-à-vis Russia in the 2000s is more pronounced but no less turbulent. Well into the 2000s, Belarus continued importing the Russian oil and gas at below market prices and exporting the products manufactured from the cheap tax-free Russian oil at market prices. These factors accounted for 'unprecedented' 10 per cent GDP growth rates in Belarus in 2004-2006 and constituted around 40 per cent of its budget amid the unreformed state of Belarus's economy.[23] Belarus also enjoyed Russia's support of its political projects, which raised European concerns, such as the referendum of 2004 abandoning the presidential term limit and the presidential elections of 2006 and the violent way the ensuing protests were tackled. At the same time, Belarus diverged from its obligation of diplomatic alignment with Russia: it did not support it in the war with Georgia and did not recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent republics. Also, it successfully managed to restore relations with the

[21] Korosteleva (2016)
[22] Korosteleva (2016)
[23] Leshchenko (2008: 1427)

EU from 2007 onwards. Gradually, Russia became more assertive in its relations with Belarus demanding higher political loyalty and economic profitability in the relations. It cut oil and gas deliveries multiple times throughout the 2000s and engaged in economic 'micro-wars' forcing Belarus to pay more and to sell Russia its gas transport company, one of Belarus's main assets. Belarus supported Russia in participating in its Customs Union with Kazakhstan and in other integration projects with Russia in military and defence areas. Still, Belarus's payments for Russian oil and gas were much lower compared to other post-Soviet or European states. Besides, it continued to secure Russia's cheap loans, and political international support, especially after the 2006 and 2010 presidential elections. Tellingly, Belarus was called 'a petrostate without resources', which it received from Russia as if from its 'colony'.[24]

Moving to the 2010s, Belarus took advantage of the opportunity to reframe itself as a conflict mediator and a neutral state and to change and influence EU policies. The opportunity arose out of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which cast doubt on the efficacy of the EU's policy of 'critical engagement' with Belarus and unsettled its policy agenda. In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Belarus adopted a neutral position and hosted high-profile international meetings to help resolve the conflict. Thereby, Belarus carved space for itself as a mediator, which was difficult to do in the asymmetry of relations with Russia.[25] Furthermore, Belarus extended its reach by nominating itself as an intermediary in wider Europe responsible for re-launching a new Helsinki Process on international security.[26] Belarus's efforts resulted in improving its relations with the EU. Arguably, Belarus was rehabilitated as a member of the security architecture in Europe with increased international standing, reputation, and legitimacy.

[24] Illarionov (2021)
[25] Since 1992, Belarus has been a permanent member of the OSCE Minsk Group and provided a forum for negotiations towards a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict according to the OSCE website available at <https://www.osce.org/mg>, accessed 22 April 2021.
[26] Tut.by (21.11.2016). 'Lukashenko proposed Minsk as a platform for the regulation of relations between the East and the West.'

Though the EU kept sanctions on Belarus in place (albeit reduced) and framed its changed policy as 'a decrease in tensions' rather than a full normalisation of relations, its concessions to the elite in power outweighed the negative aspects. The reputational value from the dialogue, that the EU officials led exclusively with their Belarusian counterparts at the expense of the Belarusian opposition, is difficult to overestimate. Besides, Belarus managed to limit relations with the EU to economic interests at the expense of human rights and democratic values - the goal Belarus had hitherto unsuccessfully pursued in its relations with the West. EU actions were described as a 'compromise on EU values',[27] especially evident in 2016, when the EU lifted almost all restrictive measures against Belarus in spite of the fact that Belarus did not comply with conditions attached to sanctions, such as free and fair presidential elections, the rehabilitation of political prisoners, moratorium on death penalty, dialogue with civil society, and freedom of speech.

Vis-à-vis Russia, Belarus resisted the proposed model for regional integration, by delaying the launch of the ECU[28] and by carefully treading the newly created Eurasian Economic Union framework, to secure concessions and benefits in the vital for Belarus areas of growth and sustainability, such as oil export duties, heavy machinery, chemicals, and agricultural products. Belarus joined forces with Kazakhstan, another member of the EAEU, to withstand Russia's dominance, especially in negotiating institutional balance, customs tariffs, and access to the joint market.[29] The joint efforts of both countries limited the scope of a political union envisaged by Russia to economic cooperation only: as a result, the organisation was named the Eurasian Economic Union instead of the Eurasian Union. Both countries did not support Russia's actions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014). Later, in 2016, Belarus initiated a gas

[27] Marin (2016: 2)
[28] Frear (2013: 125-126). Specifically, Belarus delayed the final ratification of the ECU Customs Code, the agreement on which was signed in November 2009 and ratified by Belarus in July 2010 after a gas dispute with Russia and Belarus bringing the case of oil export duties to the Court of EvrAzEs in April 2010.
[29] Delcour et al. (2015)

dispute with Russia to change the terms of its economic and political engagement. Violating the intergovernmental agreement with Russia, Belarus unilaterally lowered the imported gas price, increased transportation charges for Russian oil through its territory, and decreased gasoline supplies to Russia. In response, Russia reduced its oil supplies to Belarus and threatened to proceed with reductions. Thereby it hit the most profitable export item of oil and oil products, which had provided a third of Belarusian export revenues for at least two decades. In response, Belarus diversified its energy resources buying oil from Iran and Azerbaijan, the delivery of which involved regional cooperation with Ukraine and the Baltic states. The conflict was resolved fifteen months later. Belarus's influence in the period consisted in preserving its existing economic benefits, defending its independent course of foreign policy, and preserving sovereignty and independence of its statehood. As argued by a Belarusian analyst, Belarus managed to remain a sovereign state 'by miracle'.[30] By initiating the conflict, Belarus acted as an agenda-setter and carved out a larger autonomy for itself.

1.2. Conceptual Premise

The outlined cases raise a question of how to understand Belarus's influence on Russia and the EU. Although Belarus is a small state, reliant on Russian economic support, its relations with Russia have not been one-sidedly asymmetric. Belarus has also defied the EU's democratisation demands.

Most books on Belarus are not grounded in explicit theories, and the analysis is not conducted according to a clear research design. Some authors find it difficult to remain ideologically neutral and express their own normative commitments, distancing their work from the standards of academic analysis. Predominantly, contributions on Belarus take the whole

[30] Melyantsou (2021)

country with its history, politics, economy, and culture as a single unit for analysis which impedes a more through inquiry. Marples (1999) examines the situation in Belarus in politics, society, and the economy in the period 1985-1996. The examination is historical. One chapter analyses Belarus's relations with Russia from independence to the conclusion of the Union Treaty in 1997. Danilovich (2006) examines the process of unification between Belarus and Russia in the theoretical framework of the two-level games model, thereby drawing on the interface between international relations and comparative politics. The model is complemented by the theory of leadership politics. Danilovich explains international relations through the lens of domestic politics, namely, that of the political leadership and its domestic struggle for power with the help of foreign policy. The author argues that traditional realist theories of balance-of-power and alliance formation as well as economic interdependence theories fail to explain why the Belarus-Russia unification remained unfulfilled and 'a matter of symbol rather than one of substance'.[31] The author presents a Russian perspective and therefore one side of the story. Belarus is treated as a unitary actor. The book follows a chronological mode of presentation from the year 1994 up to the year 2003. Ioffe (2008) addresses Belarus's history, economy, politics, and society, including the national identity and its manifestation in language usage. He argues that Belarusian national consciousness has been being subjected to influence by Belarus's neighbours, Orthodox Russia and Catholic Poland. He also discusses Belarus's economic policy in post-Soviet period and the success of Lukashenko in spite of domestic 'marginalised' nationalist opposition and the governments of Western countries. Wilson (2011) adopts a case study approach to Belarus's history and politics in order to answer the questions whether Belarus is a proper country and why Lukashenko remains in power. The section on history traces the origins of the Belarusian nation, the development of national identity, and its path to statehood. The section on politics studies the Belarusian politics from the late 1980s

[31] Danilovich (2006: 5)

onwards, including the Belarusian national movement in the 1980s, the emergence of independent Belarus and the political regime under Lukashenko. The concept of national identity is an explanation of the nondemocratic regime. Balmaceda (2014) analyses Belarus's bargaining power as a weak state vis-à-vis a stronger partner using the case study of energy relations between Belarus and Russia. She argues that Belarus successfully exacted the energy rents from Russia due to a combination of tailor-made rhetoric and the provision of tangible and intangible goods, such as the geopolitically important location of Belarus, military cooperation, and the prospects of privatising Belarus's transit infrastructure. In other words, Belarus exploited its military and strategic importance for Russia. Frear (2018) focuses on domestic politics of Belarus and the consolidation of a non-democratic regime there. He adopts adaptive authoritarianism as a conceptual framework for the case study of Belarus and seeks an answer to the question of how the current political system in Belarus functions in practice. The book consists of thematic chapters which cover institutions, patron-client relations, legitimacy, tactics of coercion, and the opposition and its activities.

The existing explanations of Belarus's ability to wield influence and act in defiance of the interests of great powers are scarce and based on materialist logic. Besides Balmaceda (2014) and her argument of Belarus's successful leverage vis-à-vis Russia, Shlapentokh (2012) demonstrates how Belarus increasingly behaved in defiance of the interests of great powers, and had influence on Russia, Iran, and China, helping solidify the nascent elite regime in Russia and helping Iran avoid diplomatic isolation and improve its economy. Hancock (2006) argues that Belarus's relation-specific assets, such as fuel and fuel pipelines, the military-industrial complex, and its geographic position left Russia vulnerable to Belarus and gave Belarus a means for 'mutual hostage-taking', threatening to harm the partner in one area in response to being threatened to be harmed by it in another area; it is concluded that Belarus successfully resisted Russia, refusing to delegate much of what Russia has demanded.

Thus, Belarus's successful influence on Russia in terms of exacting political and economic benefits and on the EU in terms of defying democratisation demands, has received scarce attention in academic literature. The described above shortcomings and 'knowledge gaps' in the existing literature prompt the present research to focus on just one element in the political system of Belarus, namely, its state identity, and to conduct the research according to a clear research design.

The recourse to ideational sources of influence of small states leads the present research to social constructivism because the approach which problematises social meanings and ideational factors, including the process of identity construction and the understanding of foreign policy as shaped by it. Namely, it helps capture how a state identity is used as a discursive source by the elite to influence another state's external policy. Also, constructivism highlights the process of mutual constitution of the Self and the Other, and it accounts for the presence of other states.

The 'ideational underpinnings' of Belarus's influence are briefly mentioned in some academic work,[32] but a consistent analysis of Belarus's influence vis-à-vis influential actors, if not great powers, is lacking. From these originates the idea for the present project to focus on ideational resources of Belarus, which finds itself in highly asymmetrical relationships and still manages to resist and to exert influence.

Belarus is conceptualised as a small state to account for the characteristic security problems and foreign policy dilemmas it faces as the weaker part in terms of power disparity relative to

[32] Balmaceda (2014); Leshchenko (2008)

major neighbouring states.[33] The term 'small state' is used as a focusing device to study not the quality of smallness of a state per se but the relationship of power disparity and asymmetry it engages in and the manner of coping with it. A small state is defined in this dissertation by a combination of traditional material factors, such as population size, and subjective ones, such as perception: the state is small if it perceives itself as such via its foreign policy elite and/or the public.[34] According to both criteria, Belarus is a small state, and especially so if it is considered in relation to the much larger actors of Russia and the EU. Interchangeably, the term of 'a smaller state' is used in the text.

Being a conspicuously smaller state in comparison to Russia and the EU, Belarus's cases of influence are positioned in the small states literature as a first analytical step. This literature is mostly based on (neo)realist and (neo)liberal approaches, and it accepts as its point of departure the weakness of small states in material resources, mostly in population size, military strength, and GDP level. Smallness, as a rule, is treated as a liability, and small states are considered to be at the receiving end of power politics. They rely on strategies that protect their autonomy and limit the influence of great powers, in other words, on strategies aiming at 'damage control'.[35] The present thesis builds on the small states scholarship that challenges small states' limited action space and examines the strategies they pursue to maximise their influence over international affairs,[36] both in the institutionalised environment of the EU and in an

[33] Knudsen (1996: 5) uses smallness as a focusing device rather than an analytical category: the focus is not on the unit of the small state itself but on 'the problems which characteristically occur more often in the experience of small states… notably 'the precariousness of survival – physical as well as political – for small political units which makes this a significant and captivating area of study'. Wivel et al. (2014: 9) define a small state as 'the weaker part in an asymmetrical relationship unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on its own'.

[34] The attributive definition of smallness by Geser (2001); also Browning (2006: 674) 'it is actors' understandings that become the focus of attention'; others include subjective factors in a small state definition like Rothstein (1968), Keohane (1969), and Thorhallsson (2006).

[35] Grøn & Wivel (2011: 530)

[36] Arter (2000); Wivel (2005); Browning (2006); Björkdahl (2008); Jakobsen (2009); Grøn & Wivel (2011); Panke (2012); Bailes & Thorhallsson (2013); Wivel & Smed (2017). Arter (2000) equates being smart with being influential and coins the term 'honest broker' on Edmund Burke. The other strategies identified by Arter are an innovative initiative promoter and network-building. Panke (2012) outlines the conceptual framework that

international environment of weaker institutional arrangements of minimal commitment and binding constraints, such as those of the EAEU.[37] Indeed, the constructivist tradition in the small states literature addresses small states' immaterial resources: it argues that small states construct more favourable identities, such as an 'honest broker' or a 'norm entrepreneur', to overcome their material limitations and exercise international influence. They resort to ideas as 'a crucial foreign policy instrument to achieve foreign policy objectives'.[38] Small states advocate and strengthen the global codes of appropriate behaviour or norms on counter-piracy cooperation (Denmark),[39] on conflict prevention (Sweden),[40] on environment, multilateral security, and global welfare (the Scandinavian states),[41] on good governance derived from economic competence (Singapore) or religiously informed ethics (Vatican City State/ the Holy See).[42]

To situate the case of Belarus's influence in the small states literature is both analytically refreshing and challenging. The common focus of this literature is on the small states which are European and liberal democracies. They are argued to increase their standing in world politics because of the following factors: globalisation and interdependence, which reduce the salience of traditional material and military resources; institutionalisation of the international system, which binds larger states by international norms; digitalisation and technological advances in communication, which increase visibility of small states; and the post-Cold War move towards multipolarity. These factors result in small states being able to increase their

analyses the strategies pursued by the small states in the framework of the EU. They are divided into capacity-building and shaping strategies, and the latter are divided into persuasion-based and bargaining-based strategies.

[37] The Eurasian Economic Commission has been weakened by the removal of its power on monitoring the compliance of the member states. Similarly, the EAEU Court has been weakened by the exclusion of its decisions from the category of 'law of the Union'. See more in Dragneva & Wolczuk (2017)

[38] Gigleux (2016: 4-5), also see Goetschel (2013)

[39] Wivel & Smed (2017)

[40] Björkdahl (2008)

[41] Ingebritsen (2002)

[42] Chong (2010)

assets and competencies of the intellectual, environmental, institutional, and ideational natures. The case of Belarus's influence testifies and reinforces the validity of the arguments presented in the small states literature. What makes Belarus's case study analytically justifiable is the fact that Belarus is a European country, but non-democratic and developing, and though independent, its high and multiple dependencies on Russia make some scholars question the viability of its independence. To add to this list the geographical vicinity of Russia and the EU, makes the case of Belarus's influence and especially by the means of ideational factors, more deserving of academic attention. Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 and its meddling in internal affairs of and territorial dispute with Moldova underlines the low chances of the small states in the sphere of Russia's interest, termed its 'near abroad', to exercise influence on Russia. Indeed, these small states struggle 'to preserve their independence and to save their territories from becoming battlegrounds for the great powers'.[43] Under such circumstances, studying Belarus's influence on Russia and the EU is especially pertinent.

The recourse to ideational sources of influence of small states leads the present research to *social constructivism* as an approach which problematises social meanings and ideational factors. One of the ideational factors that makes small states 'influential' in asymmetrical relations and that is singled out to constitute the theoretical and empirical focus of the present thesis, is the concept of '*state identity'*. The present research argues that Belarus's case is explicable by the ideational factor of state identity. Specifically, ruling elite' ideas about state identity help understand a smaller state' influence despite its lack of material capabilities, territorial limitations, and vulnerability to external factors. The language deployed by the elite in relation to their construction of state identity becomes an important resource for small states

[43] Baker Fox (1959: 4)

to draw upon.[44] The focus on the elite discourse allows to explore the role of agents in promoting specific understandings of social reality and their interpretation of state identity and interests. It is acknowledged that these understandings and interpretations, which are articulated by the political actors in power, are themselves shaped by domestic social structures of meaning and the ensuing dominant discourses. Thereby, the research analyses a small state's non-material resource of its state identity, which is articulated by the elite but also conditioned by the dominant discursive structures of meaning at the level of the society and by their legitimation of the elite in power. The thesis firstly draws on the insights of the small states literature to contextualise and understand Belarus's influence as that of a smaller state vis-à-vis its larger neighbours.[45] Besides its contribution to the small state studies, the present work engages with social constructivism to understand the dynamics of Belarus's influence.

There are two disclaimers to be made. Firstly, the thesis acknowledges that state identity is constituted not only by the political elite but also by the general public; however, it considers that in developing and autocratic states like Belarus the elite are more instrumental in defining foreign policy and state identity. Therefore, the focus of the thesis is on state identity as constructed by the political elite only. Secondly, the choice of presidential speeches as the main source base raises questions about the ritualism behind the rhetoric as well as contradictions.[46] It also leads to a simplification of the political processes and choices of the electorate. Indeed, in all three decades of Belarus's independence, there have been two narratives and two identities: the official and alternative Belarusianness.[47] The opposition narrative has never been peripheral but rather prominent: it roughly represented a quarter of the Belarusian population prior to the August 2020 presidential elections. The thesis does not exclude other actors of

[44] Neumann & Gstöhl (2004)
[45] Fox (1969); Rothstein (1968); Keohane (1969); Vital (1967, 1971); Handel (1981, 1990); Katzenstein (1985); Ingebritsen et al. (2006) and also the literature on the small states in the EU.
[46] Kindly noted by the external examiner David Marples in December 2021.
[47] On the official and alternative Belarusianness see Bekus (2010)

identity construction – the general public and the opposition; rather, it treats them as outside the scope of its analysis due to space constraints.

To emphasise the role of language in the process of social construction, the present research draws on the method of *discourse analysis*. The method allows researchers to analyse subjective meanings, which actors attach to the world, and to gain insights into their understandings of social reality through their own voices. Its application is consistent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the constructivist methodologies, which are 'inductive, interpretive, and historical'.[48] Ontologically, the dissertation adopts as its starting point the assumption that the social world of international relations is constituted by both the material structure of the international system and by the ideational structure of language, ideas, and concepts. Epistemologically, it applies an interpretative understanding of social action.

Drawing on the cases of Belarus's influence and its conceptual premises, the dissertation seeks answers to several analytical questions. The key research question is: *What has made it possible for Belarus, a small European state, to wield foreign policy influence on both Russia and the EU?* The secondary questions are: How does the domestically constructed identity of the Self condition the foreign policy of the Other? What are the dynamics of influence in terms of state identity construction? What does it tell us about the role of small developing states in current international affairs?

The *argument* made in this thesis, is that Belarus's varying influence on Russia and the EU can be understood through the way Belarus constructs its state identity: specifically, as a composite of three temporal components related to the past, the present, and the future, and their variation in terms of internal and external congruence and the extent of their engagement vis-à-vis

[48] Feklyunina (2018: 15)

external Others. These aspects of state identity result in different configurations and ensuing influence. Certain configurations of state identity grant a state the ability to exercise more influence than other configurations. Specifically, it matters what events of Belarus's historical memory are invoked in the official discourse, what kind of vision for the future of the country is constructed, and the ways current events are explained and accounted for. To exercise influence, it matters if the past, the present, and the future components of a state identity conceptually fit together among themselves and with the state identity of the Other. In other words, if they are in congruence among themselves and with the Other, and if the congruent components of state identity are frequently mentioned or, in other words, engaged in official state identity narratives vis-à-vis the Other. The dynamics of influence by the means of state identity is captured in the model of 'Composite State Identity' that the present thesis introduces and develops.

1.3. Why Belarus?

Belarus is a small state and as such it received less academic attention than larger states. Indeed, 'available case studies in International Relations heavily concentrate on great powers, and thus look only at one particular sample of states'[49] and 'sorely neglect'[50] to study small states. The pursuit of small states to maximise their influence is also 'a relatively neglected subject in the study of international relations'.[51] Moreover so in the case of influence of small states, which are non-democratic, non-Western, which share a traumatic experience of being part of the Soviet Union, and which are located in the vicinity of a likewise undemocratic and therefore unreliable large state with ambitions to the status of a great power. The small states literature predominantly analyses foreign policy strategies of the developed and West European small

[49] Neumann & Gstöhl (2004: 2)
[50] Handel (1990: 18)
[51] Wivel & Smed (2017: 81)

states, which they typically pursue within the EU in order to maximise their leverage.[52] Little research has been carried out on the post-Soviet countries from the perspective of the small states studies.[53] They represent particularly interesting cases as due to their geographical location, they are positioned in heavily asymmetrical relations between two large and competing actors and their integration projects, Russia's Eurasian Economic Union and the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership. The thesis studies bilateral relations with large states from the perspective of a small state at its greatest disadvantage and introduces new insights to the existing literature about its behaviour and influence.

Belarus has been chosen among other post-Soviet states as a case study because it presents a paradox of a relatively resourceless and materially weak state, a European outcast in terms of its autocratic rule and leadership, which has still been able to exercise substantial influence in international relations. It is a critical case for the traditional interpretation of small states' foreign policies. Namely, the schools of (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism explain small states' foreign policy as conditioned by primarily structural factors, such as great powers' competition,[54] at the expense of domestic factors, such as the political regime of the country.[55] Primarily, small states pursue the policy goal of survival,[56] which is usually achieved through an effective alliance policy: small states are more likely to bandwagon with a threatening great power than to balance against it, especially when it is geographically proximate and has a strong offensive capacity while alternative alliance options are unavailable.[57] It is assumed that small states, which are located within the sphere of influence of large states, follow a passive or

[52] Björkdahl (2008), Jacobsen (2009), Groen & Wivel (2011), Panke (2011), Bailes & Thorhallsson (2013), Wivel & Smed (2017)
[53] Gvalia et al. (2013) explains Georgia's foreign policy as driven by domestic factors such as ruling elite's ideas about identity and purpose of the state. Shlapentokh (2014) approaches Turkmenistan and Belarus's foreign policies as defined by their smallness.
[54] Wolfers (1962), Rosenau (1966), Jervis (1978), Snyder (1991), Schweller (1992) in Elman (1995: 175-177)
[55] Handel (1990), Vital (1967), East (1973), Waltz (1979)
[56] Handel (1981)
[57] Walt (1985, 1987)

defensive policy, and their influence, if any, is narrow.[58] Apart from the goal of survival, small states lack any substantial set of interests, which results in a highly limited foreign policy activity, mostly restricted to their immediate neighbourhood and a number of priority areas.[59] Equating smallness with weakness, the (neo)realist and (neo)liberal perspectives make small states irrelevant in International Relations.

Belarus has been nothing short of being prominent in the region: it enjoyed economic success amid the financial crisis of 2008, secured a niche for itself as a conflict mediator in 2014, hosted the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in 2017, and nominated itself as an intermediary in wider Europe responsible for re-launching a new Helsinki Process on international security – even though it did not come closer to being democratic.[60] Indeed, Belarus bandwagoned with Russia, but was a recalcitrant and unreliable ally: it refused to recognise independence of the newly separatist and backed by Russia regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and later Crimea as Russia's, did not support Russia in the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, boycotted integration summits (the EAEU, the CSTO in 2016) and delayed ratification of agreements (the ECU Customs Code in 2010, the EAEU Customs Code in 2016), as well as diversified away from Russia whenever it was possible.[61] Furthermore, Belarus did not follow either passive or defensive foreign policy, and its influence was not insubstantial.

[58] Vital (1967: 117-22)
[59] East (1973: 556-76) tests a conventional model of small state behaviour against an alternative model based on a communications perspective, which considers a limited organisational capacity of small states and their ability to monitor international affairs adequately. These result in a lack of information, an inability to perceive situations at an early stage, and a tendency to employ high-commitment, high-risk types of behaviour. East concludes that small states engage much more in conflictual nonverbal behaviour, they do not minimise risks as the conventional model predicts, and they utilise economic techniques of statecraft more frequently than large states in their foreign policy behaviour, which means that economic factors are more important for small states.
[60] Tut.by (21.11.2016). 'Lukashenko proposed Minsk as a platform for the regulation of relations between the East and the West.'
[61] Korosteleva (2011: 575)

Besides being weak in terms of material resources,[62] Belarus is also more than any other post-Soviet republic heavily dependent on Russia's economy and its energy resources.[63] In 2019, the share of Russia in Belarus's exports amounted to 41.3 per cent while imports amounted to 54.8 per cent.[64] If the comparison is drawn to another post-Soviet country, such as Ukraine that shares similar politico-economic legacies and geographical location in Europe and next to Russia just as Belarus, the share of Russia in Ukraine's exports constitutes only 10.25 per cent. Belarus is also almost exclusively dependent on Russia for its energy needs: 100 per cent of Belarus's gas imports come from Russia and around 85 per cent of its oil imports.[65] Apart from economic interdependencies, Belarus is reliant on Russia's political support as the Belarusian leadership has experienced multiple setbacks in the relationship with the EU and the West more broadly: Belarus has been stigmatised as 'the last dictatorship in Europe',[66] continually sanctioned by the EU, and as 'the least independent minded of the former Soviet republics' obediently tiptoed Russia.[67]

Belarus and the other ex-Soviet republics have further disadvantages, namely, they became independent very recently and to a certain degree carry on the historical legacy of the Soviet Union, of which they were part of. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Belarus initially followed the course of national revival with multiple goals including the prospect of joining the European Union. However, after several years, it reverted to authoritarian tendencies and a pro-Russia orientation. Looking into the transitional period of the other former USSR republics, their pursuit of goals and choice of strategies can to a certain degree be understood by their

[62] The Observatory of Economic Complexity (2019): Belarus is the world second largest exporter of potassic fertilizers: 17.2 % of world exports compared to Canada's 32.6%, which constitute 8.8% of all exports of Belarus in 2019 and take a second place after refined petroleum at 17.8%; its largest importers are Brazil 21.1%, China 14.2%, India 11.4%, and Indonesia 6.58%.
[63] Belarus's economy is described as 'easily rendered helpless' according to Marples (2008)
[64] International Trade Centre (2019)
[65] Frear (2013: 121)
[66] Bennett (2011); Wilson (2011)
[67] Spillmann & Wenger (1999: 113)

shared historical experience in the Soviet Union, which necessitates the analysis of the role of ideational factors in their foreign policies. The case of Belarus may speak to other cases in the wider post-Soviet region.

Presumably, an easy case for the traditional approaches, Belarus's behaviour defies the logic of small states being weak and their relations with large states as lacking influence. Despite 'immense international meddling',[68] material weakness, and high dependencies, the Belarusian leadership was able to preserve sovereignty of the country, stabilise its economic well-being, avoid a conflict on its territory (unlike the Eastern Partnership countries of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), defend its space of autonomy, and pursue an independent foreign policy course as both large neighbours failed to determine the outcome or control the course of events in the country. Belarus also translated its available capabilities into a bargaining power and built the capacity to project influence.[69] The examples of influence projections are as follows. In the 1990s, Belarus exercised influence vis-à-vis Russia by successfully reinstalling, in comparison to other post-Soviet states, a high level of economic support from Russia in the form of energy subsidies and macroeconomic assistance, which amounted to a third of the Belarusian government revenue.[70] In the 2000s, Belarus continued to maintain a high level of economic support from Russia which accounted for 10 per cent GDP growth rates in Belarus in 2004-2006. Even after the 2006-2007 energy conflict, Belarus's payments for Russian oil and gas were much lower compared to other post-Soviet or European states. Belarus also enjoyed the Russian political support in the 2004 referendum and the 2006 presidential elections. In 2016, Belarus initiated a gas dispute with Russia to preserve its existing economic benefits as well as defend its statehood and an independent course of its

[68] Parker (2007: 122)
[69] Shlapentokh (2012); Balmaceda (2014); Hancock (2006); Leshchenko (2008)
[70] Way (2015. A, B)

foreign policy. It achieved its goals by wielding influence on Russia. In the 2000s, Belarus's influence on the EU consisted in bypassing the EU conditions for rapprochement and changing its policy towards the benefit of Belarus. Namely, in 2007, the EU suspended sanctions and resumed contacts with Belarus's high-ranking officials despite the lack of democratic progress in the country while Belarus's concessions did not cover all the demands of the EU and did not match most of them. Again in 2016, the EU lifted almost all restrictive measures against Belarus although Belarus did not comply with conditions attached to sanctions, such as free and fair presidential elections, the rehabilitation of political prisoners, moratorium on death penalty, dialogue with civil society, and freedom of speech. The present research argues for a need to focus on the ideational and social factors to understand the described cases of Belarus's influence vis-à-vis the larger actors of Russia and the EU.

Within the post-Soviet region, few papers are devoted to Belarus: it is one of the six post-Soviet countries geographically located in Europe and west from Russia. Yet in contrast to the three Baltic States, Ukraine, and Moldova, Belarus has oriented its foreign policy for decades predominantly towards Russia and has consistently insisted on equality and parity in relations with large states like Russia, the EU, the US, and China. Also, scholars recognise the need for an analysis that adopts the Belarusian perspective on the relations with larger states, such as Russia and the EU.[7172] While the existing research focuses on the material means of Belarus's influence, the present thesis explores non-material resources that a small state like Belarus relies on in its exercise of influence on the larger actors of Russia and the EU. Specifically, the thesis engages the analytical concept of 'state identity' as a focal point for understanding the dynamics of influence Belarus wields. The thesis starts with the small state studies and adopts social constructivism as its theoretical framework. While Belarus's cases of influence and their

71

72 Vieira (2017)

non-material underpinnings are briefly mentioned in some academic work, the consistent analysis of Belarus's influence, and especially vis-à-vis influential actors in their own rights, is lacking. A broader picture could be drawn of Belarus's relations with two large actors when conceptualising and contextualising its influence.

The case of Belarus is especially relevant in light of the recent events that brought Belarus to the news headlines around the world in terms of its demand for democracy, brutality towards the protesters, the central role of women in the protests against the incumbent, the hijacking of a European plane to seize an opposition representative, and the continuous precarious struggle that has been taking place amid unprecedented repression of civil society and the oppositional media outlets since presidential election in August 2020. Before, Belarus's elite had succeeded in wielding influence on Russia and the EU relying on the dynamics of state identity. However, these discursive constructions stopped working once domestic legitimisation of the elite and their discourse was put under question by the alternative identity discourse. The lack of legitimisation led to the rupture of links between the elite, their state identity discourse, and influence. The present research is of value for the new elite that will come to power one day in Belarus. It fills the gap in the literature on Belarus's foreign policy vis-à-vis large actors, specifically the extent, strategies, conditions, and the dynamics of Belarus's influence vis-à-vis larger actors. It engages the small states and constructivist literature, which is predominantly focused on Western liberal democracies, on new grounds of post-Soviet countries. The thesis adds to the academic debates that explore the influence of small states in an international setting and to the constructivist approaches on the role of ideational factors, including state identity, in international politics. It demonstrates once again that small states matter and how they can rupture the bigger politics around them. However, it is also important to stipulate that the analysis of recent events, while taken into account, is not included in this thesis, because of their recent nature, space constraints, and the fact that the present research analyses state

identity as a (re)source of influence which is achieved through public legitimation, and which has been disrupted by the events in summer 2020.

1.4. Methodology, Timescale, and Thesis Structure

The thesis's research design is a single case study, which allows to consider different factors that help answer the research question. High internal validity comes at a cost of low external validity. Moreover so, since the methodological position of the research is constructivist, and there is caution about relevance for other studies and validity claims because of the belief that knowledge is socially constructed rather than a reflection of an independently existing social reality. This basic assumption represents a methodological challenge for constructivists. As an option, the findings can be applicable to other case studies after some further research in the future. The research adopts the interpretive logic of enquiry and the constitutive causality. It seeks 'to explain events in terms of actors' understandings of their own contexts', [73] and to focus on how humans conceive of their worlds and the language they use to describe them. Instead of tracing measures of cause and effect and the mechanistic causality, the research explores the relationship of *constitutive construction*, how things are made up and constituted and therefore endowed with meaning.

The methods employed are discourse and content analysis of the official narratives of the elite, and of secondary sources, such as media and analytical publications, national security, military, defence, and foreign policy strategies. These are the most relevant documents that manifest the decision-making elite's perception of the country's role vis-à-vis its external environment.[74] Discourse and content analysis are complemented by some interviews, which were conducted

[73] Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 52)

[74] The Concept of National Security of the Republic of Belarus (2010); The Law 'On Defence' (1992); The Concept of Territorial Defence (2001); The Law 'On the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus (1992); The Law 'On the Martial Law' (2002).

in 2019 but suspended first due to Covid-19 and then due to the worsening political situation in the country surrounding and following the presidential elections in August 2020, that limited access to the hitherto tight-lipped representatives of the elite. In the end, it became physically dangerous to conduct interviews with any policymakers still in power, for both sides, in terms of their security and the researcher's well-being.

The time period for the analysis starts in 1991, when Belarus became an independent sovereign state, up to 2017 when the contentious joint military exercises with Russia named 'Zapad-2017' exposed the full extent of Belarus's interdependencies and limited possibilities. The proposed time period is justified by the fact that Belarus's foreign policy has been heavily asymmetrical vis-à-vis its neighbourhood and hence least likely to exert influence according to traditional approaches in IR. In contrast to these expectations, Belarus attempted to project influence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU and in some cases was successful: it reinstalled and maintained a high level of economic and political support from Russia in the period of 1994-2017 as well as managed to bypass the EU's conditions for rapprochement in 2007 and 2016. The dissertation argues that Belarus's state identity, which is constructed domestically and relationally in interaction with the Other, helps understand Belarus's foreign policy behaviour and its outcomes. The focus on the interpretation of state identity as a resource and the concept of smallness as subjective rather than as objective and a liability increases the possibilities for influence of Belarus vis-à-vis larger actors.

The thesis has been divided into seven chapters that deal with the way Belarus exercises influence vis-a-vis its large neighbours. Chapter 1 introduces some of the key aims and themes of the research. It highlights the research questions and arguments that guide the research, introduces the conceptual premise, and discusses the dissertation's justification and contribution to the existing academic debate. Chapter 2 conceptualises the key variables of the

research, such as ‘a small state’ and discusses different definitions and approaches to the definition of smallness. It also analyses the existing small states literature in International Relations and small states’ influence and its explanations. Chapter 3 concentrates on synthesizing a theoretical approach, which can adequately identify and help understand Belarus’s influence vis-à-vis large actors. It also specifies the research methods used, explains the logic behind the research design, the case selection technique, and the data used for analysis. The following three chapters 4, 5 and 6 are thematic chapters, each exploring the cases of Belarus’s influence over the three decades after its independence. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the study with the main arguments and suggestions for further research on the small states’ influence.

1.5. Conclusion

As a relational concept, state identity is constructed by the ruling elite in interaction with the outside world and its own society ‘out of many discourses that constitute that society’.[75] The elite draw on the intersubjective knowledge and culturally established meanings of their society - the social imaginary - of a given state. While the elite largely shape the foreign policy agenda, public opinion ‘sets the bounds of what is deemed acceptable’.[76] Public legitimation is necessary for a given state identity to be employed as a (re)source of influence. If state identity fails a legitimacy test, and its acceptability is put under question by an emerging contesting state identity, its function as a (re)source of influence is disrupted. While public legitimacy should be considered in the analysis too, the present research focuses exclusively on state identity constructed by the elite and takes for granted the fact that in the analysed years the elite

[75] Hopf (2002: 294)
[76] Gvalia et al. (2013: 107)

enjoyed public support. It acknowledges the one-sidedness of the analysis and the need to embrace the factor of public legitimacy in future research endeavours.

State identity as the source of influence is problematised in the next chapters and then applied to the new grounds of a developing, European, non-democratic, and post-Soviet small state, which is furthermore located in a highly contested environment between two centres of EU and Russian powers. First, the literature review on small states sets the rationale for the research question, its relevance, and novelty. Second, the theoretical framework of social constructivism is engaged as a platform to develop a model of state identity that helps understand the dynamics of influence. It will be termed the Composite State Identity and conceptualised as consisting of three temporal components, which connect to the Other to different degrees of quality and quantity in different time periods. The following three empirical chapters apply the model to the cases of Belarus's influence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU.

Chapter 2. Contextualising Small State Influence in International Relations

'If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito' (an African proverb).[77]

2.1. Introduction

Belarus is defined in the present thesis as a small, developing, and a post-Soviet autocratic state. To specify its influence, Belarus is firstly situated within the field of small state studies. This contextualisation in the rich theoretical tradition on small states highlights specific constraints and opportunities, which Belarus faces due to its smallness. Primarily, it directs the scholarly attention to immaterial resources that Belarus can utilise amid the constraints of systemic level factors, which are not within the reach of a small state even in the current international system of global interdependencies, moral responsibilities, and the general acceptance of norms that temper and restrict the recourse to certain material resources. The thesis is informed by the main argument of the small states literature that size matters and small states are different in terms of needs, opportunities, and challenges and that results in their different logics of behaviour and different theoretical tools needed to interpret and understand them. For example, the recalcitrant behaviour of Belarus in relation to its main political, economic, and socio-cultural partner Russia is difficult to comprehend via existing theories in IR. The small states literature, however, provides an explanation of such behaviour, which is indeed typical for a small state: the increased to a certain optimal point tension between a large state and a small state results in more possibilities for a small state to exert influence. The other immaterial instrument of influence for a small state is its identity. Identities are associated with

[77] Cooper & Shaw (2009: 26)

a constructivist reading and constitute the second and main building block of the present research, which follows this chapter.

To emphasize, Belarus has not received enough scholarly attention in the small states literature, which is predominantly focused on small Western and developed democracies. Besides being non-Western, studying Belarus's case also leaves room for theoretical innovation in terms of its system of a non-democratic government[78] and its post-Soviet legacy. However, itself, Belarus defined as a democratic state, 'a donor of international and regional security', which implemented 'a model of a socially oriented market economy': 'Belarusian socio-political model is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law'.[79] This lip service to democratic standards strengthened Belarus's position vis-à-vis the EU and Russia (until August 2020). Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the other post-Soviet states covered by the EU's EaP, Belarus is geographically situated in the centre of Europe and borders the EU. Unlike Moldova and Ukraine, Belarus remains a non-democratic state amid hopes of imminent change under way. Like Armenia, the most common country of comparison, Belarus lacks any substantial material resources and is hence materially weak. Belarus's case is an 'anomaly': it has limited natural resources, debateable military capabilities,[80] it is economically dependent on Russia, and almost exclusively dependent on it for its energy needs. In the face of multiple weaknesses and disadvantages, the thesis assumes that state identity is *a significant explanatory factor* in Belarus's influence vis-à-vis its powerful neighbours.

Small states' relationship with larger states remains a key concern for the small state studies, and this thesis is not an exception.[81] The pursuit of small states to maximise their influence is

[78] Freedom House (2020): Belarus is an authoritarian police state, its global freedom status is Not Free, its overall score awarded for civil liberties is 19 out of 100.
[79] The Concept of National Security of the Republic of Belarus (2010)
[80] Goble (2018)
[81] Neumann & Gstöhl (2006: 26) cites Handel (1981): A small state can manipulate the power of a larger state, 'depending on the conditions of tension and conflict between the powers and the rigidity of their spheres of influence'.

'a relatively neglected subject in the study of international relations',[82] especially in the case of small post-Soviet states in the vicinity of Russia as they struggle to preserve their independence and the territorial integrity. The thesis fills the gap by examining the immaterial, ideational underpinnings of Belarus's influence on its larger neighbours in the timespan of three decades. Classified as developing and in the upper-middle income category by international organisations as well as authoritarian, heavily shaped by its post-Soviet experience, materially weak, unambiguously European, and bordered from the north and the west by the EU member states, Belarus represents the least likely case of influence, moreover so, if the influence on its much larger neighbours of Russia and the EU is considered. This puzzle of Belarus's influence is addressed in the present chapter by the insights from the small states literature.

The present research believes that to define what a small state is, to explain its behaviour and understand its influence, material factors should be complemented by ideational factors.[83] Notwithstanding material constraints, small states can activate resources of a state identity: instead of focusing on its smallness and disadvantages of material weakness, the state identity of a small state can be interpreted as a resource and applied in shaping the security environment to a small state's preferences. Whether a state exploits its material smallness as a liability or its state identity a resource for influence depends on the way state identity is constructed by foreign policy elite, and the role they believe a state can play in global and regional politics. Personal, institutional, and socio-psychological experiences can easily override material calculations.[84] In other words, the foreign policy of a small state is largely dependent on the interpretation and construction of the identity of the state itself.[85] Exposed to temporal and

[82] Wivel & Smed (2017: 81)
[83] Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006)
[84] Reiter (2006: 231-272)
[85] Szalai (2017); Wivel & Smed (2017); Grøn & Wivel (2011); Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006)

political changes, state identity is fluid and subject to change, especially in the case of post-Soviet countries where identity formation took place mainly after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and especially so in the case of Belarus where the process of nation-building has been delayed.[86]

2.2. Justification for Small States' Studies

The question posited in 1975 by Peter Baehr whether small states could be considered an analytical category, and the conclusion he makes that there is no sharp dichotomy between large and small states and therefore no need to attribute a special role to small states, sounds preposterous to many scholars of international politics nowadays.[87] Yet, using the example of military, political, and economic relations between Russia and the Baltic states, Lamoreaux (2014) claims no difference in the behaviour of large and small: 'small state expectations are not actually unique to small states, and that there is not much difference in small- and large-state actions provided similar circumstances'.[88] Drawing from the existing expectations about small state behaviour in the international system - sovereignty as the primary goal that embraces language or ethnic identity, the appeal of international laws and norms and hence membership in organizations that uphold these norms, alliances with larger states and/ or the option of neutrality - the scholar argues that both large Russia and the small Baltic states justify their actions on the similar grounds of protecting the basic values of sovereignty and identity in their military alignments and political decisions, while in economic and energy spheres it is a typical business relationship regardless of state size. However, Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine, the right to intervene in internal affairs of small states and dispute their territorial integrity – these issues are not addressed by the author evoking questions as to why and how.

[86] Ioffe (2007: 49)
[87] Baehr (1975)
[88] Lamoreaux (2014: 567)

While it may be true that 'these are not small-state expectations: rather, they are expectations for any state facing a perceived threat to its sovereignty and identity', however the level of threat is very different.[89] For a small state, it translates into an imminent possibility of war and the loss of part of its territory, which is obviously not a risk that a large state like Russia contemplates. Also, the means of protecting sovereignty differ significantly depending on the size of the polity engaged in the action.

The thesis argues against the 'insufficiency of the concept' of a small state as an analytical category.[90] Not least so because avoiding categorisation and conceptualisation of smallness allows to disparage small states and ignore the specific challenges and opportunities that they face, but also to lose on advantages that could be gained from their experiences of relying on unique capabilities, institutions, and identities. Especially their historical legacies merit academic attention: even if the challenges and opportunities for small states like Belarus underwent change, their past historical experiences, deeply ingrained, still have repercussion for today's behaviour. State identity is 'a product of past behaviour and images and myths linked to it which have been internalised over long periods of time by the political elite and population of a state'.[91] Indeed, small states' identities incorporate the historically contingent perception of vulnerability, which received historical interpretation and still guides small states' behaviour.[92] Specifically, it translates into the commitment to a 'multilateral and non-military approach to security policy based on ideals of conflict resolution, peaceful coexistence and a just world order'.[93] Therefore, smallness 'remains the major determinant in the response of these states to external events and, thus, deserves further attention'.[94] The way ideas about

[89] Lamoreaux (2014: 568)
[90] Baehr (1975: 466)
[91] Goetschel (1998: 28) in Gigleux (2016: 30)
[92] Lee (2006) in Gigleux (2016: 30)
[93] Wivel (2005: 395) in Gigleux (2016: 30)
[94] Kassimeris (2009: 89)

the nation and its size are constructed in the domestic discourse 'can have significant impact' on states' behaviour.[95] Also, the material factors are argued to be 'the initial prerequisites to any analysis of small states' and downgrading them leads to 'partial explanations'.[96] While the present thesis prioritises identity and ideational explanations, the materialistic motivations underpinning the behaviour of small states are not ignored. If Belarus's influence on larger actors, like Russia and the EU, still raises doubt and bewilderment, this underlines the *relevance* of the small state concept as *a focusing device* to explain research puzzles about 'the experience of power disparity and the manner of coping with it'.[97]

Besides justifying small states as an analytical category, their need to be studied in a line with other categories of states should be emphasised as well. Half a century ago, scholars complained that 'the study of the foreign policies of small states is a neglected aspect of the discipline of international relations'.[98] Still, decades later, small states remain 'undeservedly neglected',[99] their under-representation in IR literature persists,[100] '[t]he available case studies in IR heavily concentrate on great powers, and thus look only at one particular sample of states',[101] and the study of small states itself is 'plagued by a lack of cumulative insights' and 'a paucity of coherent debate'.[102] As aptly expressed by Kassimeris (2009): 'The literature of IR has amassed a wealth of 'great power' studies, but needs to consider the contribution of small states/powers for these states too are an integral part of the international system, no matter how awkward their role may be, so as to […] further develop the sheer essence of this discipline'[103] and contribute to its advancement.[104] States should be studied in their diversity,

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[95] Gstöhl (2002) & Waever (2002) in Gigleux (2016: 30)
[96] Waever (2002: 22) in Gigleux (2016: 30)
[97] Archer et al. (2014: 9)
[98] Barston (1973: 13)
[99] Neumann & Gstöhl (2006: 3)
[100] Kassimeris (2009: 87) 1
[101] Neumann & Gstöhl (2004:2)
[102] Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 652)
[103] Kassimeris (2009: 87)
[104] Neumann & Gstöhl (2006: 4)

especially since small states are 'too numerous': by different estimates, out of 191 UN member states 'all but one or two dozen' in the 2000s[105] and half in the 2020s[106] fall into the category of small states.

It is argued that the basic IR assumption that states with powerful material capabilities will inevitably use them and are therefore prioritised in academic study is questionable since states in the current international order are bound by norms of appropriate behaviour.[107] With increasing institutionalisation of the international system, large states become more laden with responsibility, which help secure small states' viability. The factors of globalisation, interdependence, and the post-Cold War move towards multipolarity reduce the importance of traditional military resources and allow small states to increase assets and competencies not necessarily connected to material capabilities, such as of an intellectual, environmental, and institutional nature. Moreover, digitalisation and technological advances in communication considerably increase visibility and support and make them less vulnerable. Their significance in international relations is growing as they 'are acquiring a greater degree of freedom of expression, choice, and action in their domestic and foreign policies'.[108] Small states are strengthening their reputation as a force for progressive development and international law. As a result and as proof, today '[s]mall states […] enjoy more international prestige and visibility than at any other time in history'.[109] They have 'a rather good record of survival', and in many cases also wealth and wellbeing.[110] Today, small states are 'far more influential than the old-fashioned Cold War definitions suggest'.[111] Expectedly, the small state research is coming back

[105] Neumann & Gstöhl (2006: 3)
[106] Brady & Thorhallsson (2021: 2)
[107] Neumann & Gstöhl (2006: 3)
[108] Jargalsaikhan (2018: 407) writes that the 20th century saw three waves of increase in the number of small states: after each of the two World Wars and at the end of the Cold War.
[109] Hey (2003: 1) in Archer et al. (2014: 6)
[110] Archer et al. (2014: 13)
[111] Kassimeris (2009: 93)

into fashion, and it is reflected in the increase in the small states literature.[112] The complaint is raised about a scarcity in encompassing theories on small states amid multiple case studies on specific small states: 'there is a dearth of simple abstract frameworks for thinking intelligently about small states' with scholars relying instead on realist, liberal, and constructivist theories in their studies of smallness.[113] The present thesis addresses this critique with introducing the model of Composite State Identity.

2.3. Conceptualisation of Small States

The concept of 'small state' and its theorising has a record of almost one century long, starting with Jones' research on the Scandinavian states and the League of Nations in 1939.[114] A 'genuine school' of the small states studies originated in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.[115] Though the concept is 'rather old and established',[116] there is a range of definitions by which to categorise a state as small and little agreement on how to conceptualise and operationalise it.[117] The ways in which small states influence in international relations,[118] and the behavioural characteristics which are typical for them are left without answer too.[119] Overall, small states are rarely acknowledged as influential. What is emphasised instead is their weakness and vulnerability: smallness is regarded in a negative light as a source of multiple constraints, including the inability to pursue an ambitious foreign policy course. It has not always been like that: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries writings of European scholars, Renaissance city-states of Venice, Florence, and Delft were economically and often military developed to

[112] Lamoreaux & Galbreath (2008), Ingebritsen et al. (2006), Archer et al. (2014), Brady & Thorhallson (2021)
[113] Brady & Thorhallsson (2021: 4-5)
[114] Jones (1939), Van Roon (1989), Rothstein (1968), Baker Fox (1959), Vital (1967, 1971), Keohane (1969), Bauwens et al. (1996), Reiter and Gärtner (2001) in Pantev (2010: 103-113)
[115] Nasra (2010: 2)
[116] Wiberg (1987: 339) in Kassimeris (2009: 89)
[117] Amstrup (1976), Archer & Nugent (2002), Hey (2003), Maass (2009), Steinmetz & Wivel (2010), Archer et al. (2014)
[118] Antola & Lehtimäki (2001: 13-20), Knudsen (2002: 182-185), Archer & Nugent (2002: 2-5)
[119] Archer et al. (2014: 5)

the extent that allowed them to compete with nations rich in natural resources, much larger in geographic, demographic, and any other measure of size.[120] Rather, smallness is a dynamic characteristic, and its impact changes with time.

Traditionally and according to the (neo)realist reading of smallness, 'small states are defined by what they are not'.[121] The *material power definition* of size (also called 'a capabilities definition' and 'a power possession definition') is based on certain objective and quantifiable criteria, such as population and territory size, economic weight, diplomatic network size, as well as military expenditure and capabilities in absolute or relative terms.[122] They are easily applicable and make clear 'the identity of the subject of the study'.[123] To define a state's size, either one criterion or a combination of them is used: the existing power indexes of the realist IR literature evaluate the aggregate power of states and are adapted to the analysis of small states.[124] The focus on these material resources, or rather the lack of them, links smallness to power in its conventional understanding. The criterion of population size is 'the most common yardstick'.[125] The upper limit of a small state is defined at 10-15 million population in the case of economically advanced countries and at 20-30 million in the case of under-developed countries.[126] Another definition sets the threshold of smallness for European states at the population size of the Netherlands in 2001 which was 16 million.[127]

[120] Giovanni Botero (1590), Antonio Serra (1613), Hall (1999), Landes (1999: 45-59), Reinert (2007) in Kattel et al. (2010): economic development was born in small and even city-states.
[121] Ingebritsen et al. (2006: 6)
[122] Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 653-654) builds this on Hans Mouritzen & Anders Wivel (2005: 3-4), also Thorhallsson (2006: 8-14) and Crowards (2002) in Browning (2006: 670)
[123] Vital (1967: 9)
[124] Kennedy (1987), Schweller (1998), Wohlforth (1999) in Archer et al. (2014: 6). Handel (1981) offers a dynamic, multi-criteria definition of small states based on the categories of population, area, economy, military power, interests, and influence in the international system. The power or weakness of a small state is measured on the continuum of various types of power, from military to economic. A small state is not necessarily weak.
[125] Brown (2000: 13) in Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 653)
[126] Vital (1967: 8)
[127] Neumann & Gstöhl (2004), Thorhallsson (2006: 10). Nugent (2003: 2-3) in Kassimeris (2009: 88) notes that 'European Union politics dictate that member-states with a population less than 40 million are considered small'.

Critics argue that demarcation of states into categories along the line 'large-small' is arbitrary and 'frankly subjective'.[128] Many states fall somewhere in the grey area between these two categories and cannot be classified as clearly.[129] Also, the definition is tied to traditional power resources and 'naturally leads' to an exclusive focus on military capabilities, which are paramount in survival but overshadow the possibilities of small states in other areas where they are not weak,[130] and where traditional power resources are less important and economic flexibility, diplomatic competence, and discursive power matter more'.[131] Small states are often more stable, more democratic, more efficiently governed in comparison to larger states, and this should be considered.[132] Luxembourg, Switzerland, and the Netherlands are in the group of the least vulnerable states according to various indices that measure vulnerability.[133] Their material weakness matters less than 'the effectiveness of different strategies to counter it'.[134] Besides, the definition says nothing about soft power, which is 'the way in which foreign policy will be conducted in future'.[135] As a result, the proper analysis of small states' behaviour is circumvented.[136] Increasingly, the size of a state's cyber defence, maritime and space boundaries, national resilience and unity, and digital diplomacy capacity are considered.[137]

An alternative understanding is *relational* according to which a small state is defined to be so by the power it exercises in a specific spatio-temporal context.[138] Small states participate in different spatio-temporal power configurations with other states, and they can be weak in one relation but powerful in another. Different geographical or issue areas are used as a reference

[128] Vital (1967: 7)
[129] Geser (2001)
[130] Archer et al. (2014: 7)
[131] Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 658)
[132] Rostoks (2010: 87-101)
[133] Griffiths (2014: 46-65) in Archer et al. (2014: 11)
[134] Griffiths (2014: 46-65) in Archer et al. (2014: 11)
[135] Hill (2003: 135)
[136] Joenniemi (1998: 62) in Browning (2006: 670)
[137] Brady & Thorhallsson (2021: 2)
[138] Mouritzen & Wivel (2005), Steinmetz & Wivel (2010), Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006); Rothstein (1968), Toje (2010) in Archer et al. (2014: 8)

point.[139] Depending on the geographical area, Turkey plays the role of a hegemon in the near East and the Caucasus but only a marginal role in Europe; or Canada has a considerable territory and population size, but it is often referred to as a small state due to the dominance of the US in its external relations. Likewise, depending on the policy area, a state acts as small and weak in security policy but large and powerful in trade or environment.[140] Switzerland and Saudi Arabia are small states but great powers with considerable influence in the area of global finance in the case of the former, and oil export in the case of the latter. 'Different contexts favour different variables', and the number and identity of small states varies with the issue area.[141] The concept of a small state acquires a rather fluid nature, and smallness becomes not a general characteristic of the state, but 'a comparative … idea'.[142] Smallness and greatness become context and issue specific. Not tied to attributes possessed by the unit, the relational perspective shifts the focus from the power that a state possesses to the influence it exercises; hence, it allows a less rigid and arbitrary assessment of a state.[143] A small state is defined as being the weaker part in an asymmetric power relationship, and that weakness manifests itself in a specific nature of challenges and opportunities, unique security problems and foreign policy dilemmas that a state faces,[144] and the manner of dealing with them.[145]

The other definition of smallness is *subjective* based on self-perception and understandings of foreign policy elite and the public on the size and proper role of the state in global and regional

[139] Geser (2001: 95): 'Diese relationale Sichtweise impliziert, dass derselbe Staat je nach seinem aussenpolitischen Bezugsfeld Kleinstaat, Mittelmacht oder Grosstaat sein kann'. This relational view implies that depending on the reference point of a geographical area the same state can be viewed as small, middle, or large.
[140] Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006), Neumann and Gstöhl (2006) in Browning (2006: 672)
[141] Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 656-658) singled out three clusters of variables drawing on the theories of realism, liberalism and constructivism as alternative identifiers of the type of states in different issue areas in the framework of the European Union. A state is small according to the realist and conventional power possession definition and it is relevant for traditional security issues; the liberal theory highlights the role of domestic interest groups in the areas of trade, economy and labour, and constructivists point to the importance of discourse and identity politics.
[142] Steinmetz & Wivel (2010: 7)
[143] Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 654), Mouritzen & Wivel (2005)
[144] Mouritzen & Wivel (2005), Thomallsson & Wivel (2006), Rickli (2008), Wivel (2005), Grøn & Wive1 (2011), Steinmetz & Wivel (2010) in Archer et al. (2014: 9)
[145] Kattel et al. (2010: 66)

politics.[146] Subjective perceptions and interpretations might not be objectively true, but they determine the behaviour of actors and thereby have effects. In this sense a state is small because it either considers itself small and/ or is considered as such by other states. Keohane (1969) defines a small state as a state 'whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system'.[147] The scholar puts forward the classification based on the systemic role that a given state plays as perceived as such by its leadership. Accordingly, system-determining, -influencing, -affecting, and -ineffectual states correspond to traditional categories of 'great', 'secondary', 'middle', and 'small' powers. Small states are system-ineffectual, and they are perceived as such by their leadership.[148] When Belarus nominated itself to act as an intermediary in wider Europe responsible for re-launching a new Helsinki Process on international security, it aspired to significantly influence the nature of an existing system. However, Belarus's aspiration failed to find a response.

Rothstein (1968) also believes that size is a matter of perception, and a small state definition should cover 'the set of psychological expectations about the limits of possible and effective action.[149] Small states 'earn their title not only by being weak but by recognizing the implication of that condition' and other states' agreement on that.[150] A small state is 'a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so; the Small Power's belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be

[146] Mouritzen & Wivel (2005), Rothstein (1968), Toje (2010) in Archer et al. (2014: 8)
[147] Keohane (1969: 296)
[148] Keohane (1969: 295-296): 'a 'system-determining' state plays a critical role in shaping the system'; 'system-influencing' states 'cannot expect individually to dominate a system but may nevertheless be able significantly to influence its nature through unilateral as well as multilateral actions'; 'system-affecting' states 'cannot hope to affect the system acting alone' but 'can nevertheless exert significant impact on the system by working through small groups or alliances or through universal or regional international organizations'; 'system-ineffectual' states 'can do little to influence the system-wide forces that affect them, except in groups that are so large that each state has minimal influence and which may themselves be dominated by larger powers'.
[149] Rothstein (1968: 27)
[150] Rothstein (1968: 29)

recognized by the other states involved in international politics'.[151] The different nature of small states stems from the inferior power status, and consistent patterns of behaviour as a response to that situation.

Nowadays, scholars, in order to explain the increasing impact of small states, *combine objective and subjective definitions* of small states. In order to account for the cases of Belgium and the Netherlands, geographically small but quite influential internationally, Thorhallsson (2006) combines objective and subjective categories in his conceptual framework: the categories of perceptual size and preference size along with the traditional categories of population, territory, military, and economic size.[152] Perceptual and objective measurements are believed to be equally important: '[i]n the new globalized arena, the opinions of relevant domestic and foreign actors and their influence on states' behaviour … may shape the notion of states' size and their action capacity'.[153] The perceptual size is about how domestic and external actors assess the state's size and its capacity. The preference size category includes ambitions and priorities of the governing elite and their ideas about the international system, especially the ability to have an influence within it.[154] It is acknowledged that the elite are restricted by material resources and the structure of the international system.

To circumvent the link between smallness and weakness, Browning (2006) proposes *a discursive approach* to small states' identification which 'highlights the contingency entailed in telling identity narratives, thereby leaving open the possibility that smallness can be told … positively…'.[155] It is about meanings attached to 'smallness' in constructing state identities,

[151] Rothstein (1968: 29) notes that definitions based on objective criteria fail to explain the increased influence of small states in world politics.
[152] Thorhallsson (2006) provides six categories for determining a state size: the fixed size both in terms of territory and population, the sovereignty size in terms of a state's ability to maintain its own sovereignty, the political size in terms of military, administrative capabilities, internal cohesion, and external unity, the economic size in terms of GDP, market size, and a state's level of development.
[153] Thorhallsson (2006: 28)
[154] Thorhallsson (2006: 26-27)
[155] Browning (2006: 673)

and it entails a move away from the positivist framework and adoption of 'a more interpretivist methodology where it is actors' understandings that become the focus of attention'.[156] The notion of 'smallness' and of being a small state can be narrated in different ways: 'A small state identity need not always be equated with weakness and limited capacities of action'.[157] If smallness is conceptualised positively as a resource, states may strategically choose to identify themselves as small to gain more influence over their environment. Namely, they reconstruct identity through the discursive practices and create opportunity for broader possibilities for foreign policies and impact. For example, Finland went through different stages in its discursive construction of the Self from a small and weak state in the Cold War period pursuing neutrality and being precariously positioned next to a great power, to a small and exceptional bridge-builder between East and West; Finland's geopolitical position was reconceptualised from a weakness to a resource. The discursive approach to smallness relies on a 'performative' understanding of language. Instead of seeing language as neutral and referring to a world out there, the language is believed to be constitutive of the world. Representations of identity 'do not [just] state a point of view or report on a reality but constitute a certain kind of conduct'.[158] Smallness told positively leads to a state's foreign policy becoming performative of the narrative.

The present thesis categorises Belarus as a small state based on a combination of objective/ material, and subjective/ psychological factors. In many respects, Belarus is an archetypal small state. Its population of less than 10 million (9.467 million in 2019) places it in the category of small states for an economically developing country. Moreover so, if the spatio-temporal context is considered: Belarus's geographical position between large actors of Russia and the

[156] Browning (2006: 674)
[157] Browning (2006: 674) suggests that 'more positive renderings of smallness in constructing state identities will entail broader possibilities for foreign policies'.
[158] Butler (1997: 17-18) & Mark Laffey (2000) on performative understanding of language, identity, and action in Browning (2006: 674)

EU places the in-between state in the category of small states. Besides a modest population size and a precarious geopolitical location, Belarus has limited military capabilities and few natural resources. Regarding the subjective definition, in the official discourse, Belarus's elite are ambiguous: in some situations, they define their country's size as non-small, and in other cases, they acknowledge Belarus's smallness, often conceptualising it positively as a resource to broaden possibility for foreign policy and to gain influence on the international environment.[159] It should be noted that small states are interchangeably referred to in the present study as 'smaller states' to underscore their relational and relative nature rather than their definition being based solely on quantifiable material power. Also, the term 'smaller' is preferable to 'small' as 'the so-called 'small state' is the typical state size'.[160] The differentiation introduced by Handel (1981) between small states, weak states, and small powers is relevant for the thesis too.[161] The first term is a territorial concept; the second term highlights the lack of power in terms of material capabilities and political influence and represents an anarchic and problematic Cold War definition; and the third term, 'a small power', is about the power to wield international influence, and as such it delivers a more accurate description for a case study like Belarus. The last remark concerns Belarus's categorisation as a developing country according to the classification of intergovernmental organisations, such as the OECD, the UN, and the World Bank:[162] it is in the category of the upper middle-income countries, based on its gross national income per capita of $ 6,290 in 2019.

[159] Chapters 4-6 of this thesis.
[160] Baldacchino (2009: 23)
[161] Handel (1981: 11) in Kassimeris (2009: 89)
[162] According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 'developing states' are those eligible to receive official development assistance (ODA); they are low- and middle-income countries based on gross national income (GNI) per capita as published by the World Bank. The OECD List of ODA recipients is consistent with the World Bank practice, and it also includes the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as defined by the United Nations (UN). Belarus is in the category of the Upper Middle-Income Countries and Territories, which are not LDCs, and its per capita GNI is within the range between $3,956 and $12,235 per year.

2.4. Small States' Foreign Policy Behaviour

> *"It's small states' responsibility for a decent security environment in Europe... The lesson from the Cold War is that small states matter a lot."*[163]

The list of foreign policy behaviours attributed to small states is 'too long to be useful and often contradictory'.[164] Thus, small states have a low level of participation in world affairs, address a narrow scope of foreign policy issues, limit their behaviour to their immediate geographic area, accentuate international law, join multinational institutions, follow neutral positions, rely on great powers for protection, employ diplomatic and economic foreign policy instruments, and avoid conflict with other states.[165] Since small states differ from large states in terms of needs, opportunities, challenges, and the logics of behaviour, they employ specific strategies to deal with an international environment. Early works deal with the question of survival of small states: their typical behaviour is adaptation to external environment,[166] and it is explained by systemic factors, such as the structure and state of the system and the prevailing norms within it.[167] In later years, research addresses small states' influence through membership in international organisations.[168] Indeed, small states maximise their impact by targeting regional and international organisations.[169] Nowadays, small states are described to utilise specific strategies to 'mitigate the effects of structural constraints', which are impossible or very

[163] Dr Reinhard Krumm, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Uptake Training School, 10 January 2018
[164] Long (2017: 145)
[165] Hey (2003: 5)
[166] Amstrup (1976: 178), Christmas-Møller (1983: 40) in Archer et al. (2014: 6)
[167] Vogel (1983) and Lindell & Persson (1986) in Nasra (2010). Lindell & Persson (1986) present two groups of propositions that explain small states' influence over great powers: the first group of the 'power base' factors includes the structure of the international system, the state of the international system, international norms, and actors' internal qualities. The second group of 'alternative choices of action' covers alignment policy, exploitation of great power weaknesses, and diplomatic and negotiation strategies and tactics.
[168] Antola & Lehtimäki (2001: 13-20), Archer & Nugent (2002: 2-5), Hey (2003), Knudsen (2002: 182-185), Panke (2010: 15), Steinmetz & Wivel (2010: 4-7) in Archer et al. (2014: 6)
[169] Rothstein (1968), Keohane (1969), Vital (1971), East (1973), Hey (2003) in Nasra (2010: 2)

difficult for them to change.[170] These strategies are 'voluntary' and not 'structurally determined', and they often result in small states' successful behaviour aimed beyond survival towards impact and influence.[171] Overall, small states are argued to have four options: to seek protection from a great power, to join an alliance with other small states, to join an international organisation with great powers, or to remain neutral or non-aligned to avoid a conflict.[172]

(Neo)realists argue that the distribution of material resources in the system of the 'balance of power' determines what is considered rational action for smaller states. Changes in the system, initiated by the changes in the balance of power between large states, determine changes in smaller states' behaviour. Therefore, the latter is a function of systemic factors and is responsive to events rather than of domestic factors and the ability to shape those events. However, (neo)realists' primary concern are large states and power politics, which makes their arguments imprecise for analysing small states.[173] They ignore the fact that historically or culturally conditioned conceptions of Self and Other are important in a state's foreign policy too.[174] Treating identities and interests as externally given and identical and excluding domestic politics from consideration, (neo)realism fails to explain differences in smaller states' foreign policies.[175] Post-modern solutions to relational asymmetry go beyond traditional bandwagoning, ranging from national partnerships to multilateral security organisations, such as the case of the five Nordic states, the three Baltic states, and the Western Balkan states in Europe.[176]

The most recent framework developed in the small states studies is *shelter theory*.[177] In terms of understanding small states' policies and outcomes, it claims superiority over traditional and

[170] Ingebritsen et al. (2006: 10) in Nasra (2010: 2)
[171] Nasra (2010: 2)
[172] Kassimeris (2009)
[173] Brady & Thorhallsson (2021)
[174] Ruggie (1998: 863)
[175] For example, the European choice of foreign policy of Georgia.
[176] Archer et al. (2014)
[177] Brady & Thorhallsson (2021)

constructivist approaches. Constructivism is criticised for being a framework for thinking about social facts and failing to provide a comprehensive theory about international politics: 'no consistent lessons … can be drawn from constructivism about small states, unless care is taken to craft specific theories about small states rooted in constructivist theory'.[178] Shelter theory, on the opposite, provides explanation of small states' general patterns of behaviour. It holds that small states share unique problems, to overcome which they seek political, economic, and societal shelter provided by larger states and international organisations.[179]

Globalisation, the increasing economic and military security interdependence, wider and more diverse trans-frontier security concepts, such as energy security, societal security, and environmental security,[180] and the focus on soft power result in a change in the priorities and strategies of small states. Nowadays, the exercise of military power, at least between EU member states, is out of the question. In place of concert-style rule by the great powers in nineteenth century Europe, "mutually overlapping 'concerts' in different issue areas" are created with smaller states.[181] Consequently, few scholars would argue that the existence of small states is under threat. Most European small states prioritise influence and active engagement by participating in international organisations like the UN, NATO, and the EU. Within those contexts, small states exert 'considerable influence'; their role 'has been magnified to an extent where their number alone may come to signify powerful coalitions capable of resisting and even curbing the influence of what are traditionally perceived as larger powers'.[182] Belarus, a small state under investigation in the present research, is not an

[178] Brady & Thorhallsson (2021: 5)
[179] 'The shelter theory framework is derived from the challenges and needs that the literature documents as unique to small states, as well as the literature on the actions that small states have tended to take to alleviate the burdens and satisfy the needs that come with smallness'. Brady & Thorhallsson (2021: 5)
[180] 'More fields of life, such as economic management, energy supply or health, have been brought within the scope of security or have been recognized as including security dimension' according to Alyson Bailes, Jean-Marc Rickli, and Baldur Thorhallsson (2014: 26-45) in Archer et al. (2014: 10)
[181] Wivel (2010: 24)
[182] Kassimeris (2009: 96)

exception: it is a founding member of multiple integration initiatives in the post-Soviet space, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and the Eurasian Economic Union. It is also a founding member of the UN (to be more precise, it was the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic that was a founding member state of the UN in 1945) and a participant of the Eastern Partnership Initiative of the EU.[183] Arguably, Belarus's impact extends beyond resisting and curbing the influence of larger states: it aims for influence, which is defined in the thesis as the ability to change external policies of larger actors to its own benefit. The analysis of Belarus enriches the existing research on small states' influence in wider Europe.

Three issues need to be addressed in relation to small states' influence. The first relates to the kind of influence that small states are able to wield, namely, whether it is resistance against larger actors' demands or influence in terms of securing one's own preferences. While both kinds are viable, the thesis focuses only on the latter since resistance received enough academic attention elsewhere.[184] The second issue relates to the theoretical perspective. According to the (neo)realists reading, material resources are the primary determinant of small states' behaviour. Small states have limited material resources, and therefore limited influence, they have to accept the authority of larger states and stay at the margins of international politics. According to the constructivist reading, non-material resources, such as ideas, beliefs, and norms are the main determinant of small states' behaviour and the source of their influence. 'Different theories shed light in different places',[185] and the historical context of globalisation improves the applicability of constructivism to the small states studies. The third issue is compatibility of ideational factors with a rationalist logic of action. Indeed, a constructivist understanding can account for strategically motivated behaviour. Ideational elements can be compatible with

[183] Euractiv (2021): Belarus suspended its membership in the EaP in June 2021.
[184] Ioffe (2008)
[185] Archer et al. (2014: 5)

a rationalist logic of action, and actors can draw on ideational elements strategically to exercise influence on other actors. Small states' behaviour is understood by socially constructed identities and norms as well as by rationally calculated reasons.[186] Actors calculate their behaviour to maximise utility and act in accordance with socially constructed roles and norms.[187] State identity is then a strategy for small states to gain influence on issues that they expect to fail to affect due to their lack of traditional material resources. Accounting for the rationalist logic of action lets constructivists account for the materialistic motivations which underpin small states' behaviour.[188] It is argued that constructivists have yet to specify the conditions under which small states act normatively and when they pursue material self-interest.[189] However, the two ways of acting need not be exclusionary, and the dichotomy between norms and interests is false.

2.5. Small States' Influence

'How can the small state exercise power in international politics?'[190] The question posited in 1959 by Baker Fox, a scholar of the first wave of theorising on impact of small states in international relations, is more relevant today than ever. In academic research, in the span of forty years, small states transitioned from being at the receiving end of politics and exercising influence, which is local and 'narrow in 'domain',[191] to influence spreading beyond their immediate survival and which is global in scope and expanding over wider areas. There is a

[186] According to another argument, their behaviour is explained by socially constructed identities, roles, and institutional rules rather than by utility-maximizing and rationally calculated reasons pursued in line with the requirements of the international system. Pollack (2005: 22-25), Tonra & Christiansen (2004) in Nasra (2010: 3).
[187] An induced compliance due to a narrow self-interest (to reap the benefits), the 1st and 2nd degrees of internalization of the norm but not the 3rd degree of a strong internalization according to Wendt (1999).
[188] Gigleux (2016: 5)
[189] Gigleux (2016: 5)
[190] Baker Fox (1959: 4); Baker Fox (1959: 752) suggests differentiating states into the classes of actors - such as developing, new to diplomacy, unstable internally, pressing for more recognition - by the means of conducting relations with other states, and the values they strive to secure.
[191] Baker Fox (1959: 3), also cites Lasswell & Kaplan (1950: 77) on small states' power being narrow in 'domain'.

proliferation of studies on small EU member states, which specify the conditions under which small states can yield substantial influence, including in the area of EU foreign policy,[192] and strategies used by them to leverage their position in world affairs.[193] In relation to small EU member states the conclusion is reached that they are 'small in terms of resources but not necessarily in terms of influence', and they have wider leverage than previously expected and can outsmart larger states.[194]

The issue of influence of small states in world politics was raised in scholarly literature after the Second World War: small states enjoyed favouritism in relations with the great powers, belittling the great powers and trying to regulate them through international organisations. The international system was argued to be favourable to small states' needs, but voicing those needs failed to have an effect and produce change.[195] In 1959, Baker Fox refuted the traditional stereotype of a small state being 'a helpless pawn in world politics' and the existing belief that 'the great powers determine the course of world politics and the small powers can do little but acquiesce in their decisions'.[196] She argued that small states had the capacity to resist the demands of other states though rarely to secure their own interests, which were restricted to their own and immediately adjacent areas. Indeed, small states have a historical record of successfully resisting larger states, including the cases of intervention, such as Finland's resistance against Russia's invasion in 1939-1940, Vietnam against the US, and the Soviet Union's failed war in Afghanistan in 1979-1989.[197] It was argued that larger countries could not 'take for granted emerging victorious from conflicts with small states', and they found it safer to treat small states as equals.[198] In this classic approach, material power was prioritised,

[192] Arter (2000), Kronsell (2002), Björkdahl (2008), Bunse (2009), Jakobsen (2009) in Nasra (2011)
[193] Moosung (2004), Magnette & Nikolaidis (2005), Pace (2002), Archer & Nugent (2006), Goetschel (1998, 2000), Knudsen (2002) in Kassimeris (2009: 87)
[194] Nasra (2011: 164)
[195] Baker Fox (1959)
[196] Baker Fox (1959: 2)
[197] Rostoks (2010)
[198] Rostoks (2010: 97)

small states' influence was understated, as they were vulnerable, had a smaller margin of time and error, and a limited room for manoeuvre. They accommodated great powers and aimed their policies primarily to ensure their security and survival. The link between smallness and minimal influence was frequent.[199]

In 1969, Keohane argued that despite minimal leverage and limited participation in world affairs, small states were able to influence the system: '... Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them…'.[200] Their smallness was equated with weakness but the latter did not 'entail only liabilities, it also creates certain bargaining assets'.[201] In 1971, Keohane titled his paper tellingly 'The Big Influence of Small Allies' to show that as a member of an alliance with a large state, such as the US, 'a small indulgent ally may exert a more powerful claim on American resources than poor, unorganised Americans'.[202] Small allies, which were closely tied to large states' military and diplomatic structures, were able to secure their economic and political support by the means of direct lobbying, mass opinion, high organisation of domestic groups, and their self-consciousness. This was the cases with Israel, which was able to influence American foreign policy towards the Middle East in the 1970s, and Spain, which secured $1 billion US aid between 1949-1964 and favourable policies towards the Franco government. Thereby, small states elicited 'excessive solicitude' for themselves to the detriment of large states' own interests. Interestingly, Keohane characterised small states' pursuit of influence as 'sensible, indeed almost essential' because in an asymmetrical alliance it was 'better for that dependence to be mutual rather than one-sided'.[203] Small states can achieve mutual dependence by becoming involved in bargaining within a large state, such as the US. Namely, small states acquire supporters in the US government and among

[199] For example, Jervis (1978) in Archer (2014)
[200] Keohane (1969: 310)
[201] Keohane (1971: 162)
[202] Keohane (1971: 182)
[203] Keohane (1971: 181)

the public. Keohane argues that 'no small ally makes a profound impact by itself … but the cumulative impact which forty allies can have on American policy is substantial'.[204]

The recent research on small states' influence is explained by a combination of domestic and systemic factors. The research on EU small states 'almost entirely' focuses on domestic sources to explain their behaviour and influence.[205] It is argued that the ways ideas about a state are constructed in the domestic political discourses have an impact on a state's foreign policy behaviour.[206] However, domestic explanations prove their importance along with external and systemic factors.[207] The *integrated analytical framework*, which embraces both systemic and domestic factors, is used by scholars to study small states, including their foreign policy.[208] In her study, Fendius Elman (1995) emphasises the closely interwoven explanatory power of domestic level factors and systemic/ structural conditions.[209] From the analysis of the pre-1900 US domestic regime change and foreign security policy, the scholar concludes that while in the early stages of a small state's newly gained independence external factors provide a better explanation of its foreign policy choices, in later periods, domestic explanations prove their superiority.

Contrary to the widespread belief in 'the causal primacy of international explanations of small state behaviour … even the most vulnerable states may display foreign policies explicable only in terms of domestic politics', which is especially true for democratic small states.[210] Likewise, Nasra (2010) utilises the systemic and the state levels of analysis to explain the success of small EU member states' behaviour: it depends on the active pursuit of specific national strategies in the circumstances of *the window of opportunity*, which is conditioned by larger states and

[204] Keohane (1971: 181)
[205] Arter (2000), Kronsell (2002), Romsloe (2004), Brörkdahl (2008), Jakobsen (2009) in Nasra (2010: 3)
[206] Gstöhl (2002), Waever (2002:21) in Gigleux (2016: 5)
[207] Fendius Elman (1995: 211)
[208] Nasra (2010) examines the role of Belgium and Greece in EU foreign policy towards the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Turkey respectively; also Vogel (1983), Lindell & Persson (1986) in Nasra (2010)
[209] Fendius Elman (1995)
[210] Fendius Elman (1995: 211)

systemic factors. Small states keep track of their external environment, and, specifically, 'the degree to which that environment is receptive and amenable, or, alternatively hostile and resistant to its purposes'.[211] 'Whereas being small is a characteristic of states at a systemic level, i.e. states that are unable to change the conditions for policy-making, the difference between small and big can be significantly reduced when it comes to a state's actions and strategies', such as commitment, network capital, immaterial resources, and the capacity to deliberate.[212] For example, Belarus turned to a specific immaterial resource of state identity when the window of opportunity of the Russia-Ukraine conflict presented itself. It rebranded itself as 'a neutral state' and 'a conflict mediator' to exercise influence primarily on the EU, but also on Russia and a wider region. Unable to change the conditions of policymaking of larger actors, Belarus changed their policies: the EU resumed the dialogue with Belarus in spite of the fact that it did not comply with EU conditions of democracy and human rights.

The existing research also highlights such an aspect of small states' influence as *the role of individuals*. In the comparative case study, Iceland and Malta succeeded in protecting their interests in confrontations with the UK in the early 1970s while Tuvalu, the Maldives, the Seychelles failed to do so.[213] The key to success of their diplomacy is argued to lie in *'heroic' individuals or power brokers*, who undertake a more focused and bold diplomacy without protracted consultations and deliberations inherent in larger democratic states. The other contributing factor is *international sympathy*: in the analysed cases, it is reluctance to be seen as bullying a small state and a smaller stake in the matter for a larger state and hence possibility for compromise.[214] The complaint is raised that when large states portray small states as victims

[211] Vital (1967: 121)
[212] Nasra (2010: 14)
[213] Baldacchino (2009)
[214] Baldacchino (2009: 35). However, in addition to bilateral rather than multilateral diplomacy with the small state commanding the moral high ground, small states' diplomatic success is limited to financial and economic issues. On the environmental issue of global warming and sea-level rise the smaller island states are losing not because they 'have limited policy capacity, but mainly because no larger country has been embarrassed to act

of global trends, such as climate change and trade liberalisation, small states are conceptualised as foreign policy recipients rather than fully-fledged actors. This *negative identity* ensures access to 'official development resources' but stops short 'from appreciating capacities for proactive action and foreign policy initiatives'.[215] Both aspects of small states' influence - the role of individuals and international sympathy - are applicable to the case of Belarus. Being authoritarian, Belarus's president was able to undertake a focused and often bold diplomacy vis-à-vis both Russia and the EU. Notably, Belarus urged the EU to build relations on equal terms, which contradicted the 'Acquis Communautaire' of the EU. Belarus also initiated energy conflicts with Russia, such as in 2016, in order to set the terms of cooperation and drew to it international and regional attention and sympathy, especially of other post-Soviet states, which Russia considered and valued as its sphere of influence.

Thus, small states' success is believed to go beyond resisting the pressure of great powers and a general vulnerability to having a wider impact. Building on Keohane's argument that smallness and weakness can create bargaining assets, and Handel's assertion that smallness is not necessarily synonymous with weakness,[216] nowadays, scholars[217] concur that a 'lack of capability can mean vulnerability, but it can also be translated into opportunity',[218] and 'small does not necessarily mean weak'.[219] It depends on the power a state exercises rather than on the power it possesses.[220] Besides, the level of development of international norms and the degree of institutionalisation of the system and its maturity is considered: it is not 'a foregone conclusion that … the weak would suffer what they must'.[221]

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through its failure to respond to smaller state concerns, and no larger country has deemed its own economic or strategic interests unduly threatened by the slow sinking' of small island states, such as Tuvalu and the Maldives.

[215] Baldacchino (2009: 34)

[216] Handel (1981), Keohane (1969)

[217] Schmidl (2001), Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006), Horscroft (2007), Cooper & Shaw (2009) in Chong (2010)

[218] Wivel & Smed (2017: 92)

[219] Hirsch (2010: xvi)

[220] Mouritzen & Wivel (2005: 4), Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 654)

[221] Neumann & Gstöhl (2004: 15)

To understand the influence that a small state exercises, IR theorising moves its focus from material capabilities and interests to the role of ideas and identities. Small states are argued to socially construct more favourable identities - such as 'honest brokers' and 'norm entrepreneurs' - in their relationships with larger states to overcome limitations of material power and to exercise international influence. Small states' foreign policy behaviour is increasingly explained by non-material power, which is believed to be as important as the traditional material power: 'material factors matter, but ideas often determine how and how much they matter'.[222] Within the EU, smaller states draw on a *'smart state'* strategy, which allows them to maximise their influence over selected issues.[223] The strategy consists of three aspects: proposals of small states are recognised by most relevant actors as of common interest; small states channel their resources to 'low politics' issues of economy, culture, or climate; and they position themselves as 'honest brokers'. Besides, they allocate sufficient resources and focus on issues where they have a comparative advantage. Small states are efficient as 'honest brokers' when they act independently of any of the EU member states' interests and promote the general interests of the Union. They are also considered to be efficient mediators because they lack resources 'to pursue their own interests without taking into account the position of others'.[224]

Ingebritsen (2002) argues that small states exercise *'social power'* by acting as norm entrepreneurs in the international community and thereby influence more powerful states and the international system at particular moments and in specific issue-areas - they engage in global agenda-setting.[225] For example, the social power of Scandinavian small states consists in providing alternative models of engagement or norms in world politics. Namely, they

[222] Gvalia et al. (2013: 109 - 110)
[223] Wivel (2010)
[224] Wivel (2010: 25): the Finnish Northern Dimension Initiative as well as Denmark's and Sweden's successful attempt to influence the enlargement of the European Union with central and eastern European countries.
[225] Ingebritsen (2002) understands 'social power' as soft power - the ability to create norms and act as norm entrepreneur by ideational means.

develop and strengthen global social norms of sustainable development, peaceful conflict resolution, and foreign aid provision. In these issue areas, Scandinavia participates in the construction of international political discourse[226] and acts as a norm entrepreneur in international politics. Its influence is of a social nature, and it does not correspond to strictly economic and military capabilities. This is what Belarus resorted to after successfully repositioning itself as a neutral platform for negotiations and an intermediary in the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict: in 2017, at the 26th annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk, Belarus voiced its wish to act as an intermediary in wider Europe and re-launch a new version of the Helsinki Process, a dialogue on regional and international security.[227]

Similarly, small states are argued to project *soft power* when they promote models of good governance and diplomatic mediation, and thereby enlarge their political economy potential.[228] Soft power is also analysed under the labels of 'new public diplomacy' and 'foreign policy in global information space'.[229] Thus, the small states studies address social power,[230] soft power,[231] and normative power.[232] These conceptions of power are interrelated and rest on the power of ideational factors, such as ideas and norms, and are associated with a constructivist reading. The constructivist approach enables a novel conception of the small state, which is not solely based on material capabilities but rather on ideational factors.[233] Ideas, identities, and preferences, including the ruling elite' ideas about identity, are argued to play a role in small

[226] Ingebritsen (2002), Björkdahl (2008)
[227] BelTA (2017)
[228] Chong (2010: 383)
[229] Melissen (2005) in Chong (2007), Chong (2010)
[230] Ingebritsen (2002)
[231] Melissen (2005) in Chong (2007), Chong (2010)
[232] Björkdahl (2008) regards normative power as a complement to traditional conceptualizations of power, and it rests on the power of ideas and norms, and it is related to the concepts of civilian power, soft power, and ideational power.
[233] Neumann & Gstöhl (2004: 15)

state influence.[234] For small states, 'ideas are both constitutive to their national identity (as for other states too) and a crucial foreign policy instrument to achieve their foreign policy objectives'.[235] Small states' influence wield successful influence advocating and strengthening global codes of appropriate behaviour or norms on counter-piracy cooperation (the case of Denmark),[236] on conflict prevention (Sweden),[237] on environment, multilateral security, and global welfare (the case of Scandinavian states),[238] on good governance derived from economic competence (the case of Singapore), or from religiously informed ethics (the case of Vatican City State/ the Holy See).[239]

The present thesis focuses on the immaterial resources of small states activated at the state level. The domestic level factors are represented by societal groups, self-interested state actors, and institutions. State- and individual-level factors find expression in the elite' ideas about identity and have explanatory leverage when it comes to the foreign policy behaviour of small states. How the foreign policy elite perceive and interpret external challenges and opportunities help explain how small states respond to changes in its external environment and have impact. The small state's foreign policy preferences and alignments, including the alignment of its state identity - with whom and against whom - are a function not only of its material capabilities but also of the ideas of its elite. Relevant for the present thesis is the argument that in developing states, such as Belarus, the political elite are more instrumental in defining foreign policy than the general public.[240] A similar argument is applicable to the concept of state identity, which is constituted by the elite and the general public. Beliefs of the elite 'largely shape the foreign policy agenda… public opinion sets the bounds of what is deemed acceptable'.[241] Identities

[234] Gvalia et al. (2013: 107)
[235] Goetschel (2013: 262) in Gigleux (2016: 4-5)
[236] Wivel & Smed (2017)
[237] Björkdahl (2008)
[238] Ingebritsen (2002)
[239] Chong (2010)
[240] Gvalia et al. (2013: 107)
[241] Gvalia et al. (2013: 107)

and preference of the elite 'matter most in interpreting the state's interests and best course'.[242] They are explored and conceptualised in the next chapter.

2.6. Conclusion

To summarise, the chapter contextualises Belarus in the tradition of small states studies, and the following conclusions are warranted. Small states are worth studying as a separate category of states: they are materially weak and that leaves a mark on their distinct needs, opportunities, and challenges, as well as unique security problems and foreign policy dilemmas; these precipitate a different logic of behaviour and specific tools needed to understand it. To circumvent their material weakness, small states draw on the immaterial power on account of its accessibility and the changing shift of the international order(s) towards wider institutionalisation and tighter interdependencies. Thereby, the foreign policy of small states increasingly extends beyond their preoccupation with survival to influencing different issue areas around the globe. To account for their increasing impact in world affairs, the small states studies focus on ideational factors, expand the definition of power to include the social aspect, and extend the small state definition to encompass the subjective dimension of smallness. Identities become an important foreign policy instrument for small states to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

The present thesis acknowledges the attribute of smallness and material weakness to Belarus, a developing and non-democratic state, as its starting position to subsequently develop the main argument about its influence: it focuses on the non-material resource of state identity as a (re)source of influence that Belarus draws on in relations with its larger neighbours. Belarus's influence is understood by non-material power, and it is believed to be as important as the traditional material power: 'material factors matter, but ideas often determine how and how

[242] Gvalia et al. (2013: 107)

much they matter'.[243] It will be argued that Belarus constructs a more favourable identity to overcome the constraints of material power and to exercise influence. This leads to the next chapter on state identity, the research on which is associated with social constructivism, and which represents the other building block of this thesis.

[243] Gvalia et al. (2013: 109–110)

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

This chapter constitutes the second building block of the research design, drawing on the previous chapter that contextualises Belarus in the field of small states research. It paves the way for the following three empirical chapters. The main objective of this chapter is to define the theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and empirical scope of the study. The phenomenon under investigation is the influence that a smaller state like Belarus exercises in relation to its larger neighbours - Russia and the EU. Following the chapter on the small states studies, the conclusion is reached that small states' influence can be understood by ideational resources: ideas, identities, and preferences, including ruling elite' ideas about identity.[244] Ideas are constitutive of identities and 'a crucial foreign policy instrument' for states to achieve their foreign policy objectives'.[245] The present research focuses on state identity activated at the state level by the elite who 'largely shape the foreign policy agenda' within 'the bounds of what is deemed acceptable' by public opinion.[246] State identity is thus co-constituted by the political elite and the public, but only the former find reflection in the thesis. The small state's foreign policy preferences and alignments, including the alignment of its state identity, are a function of its material power and of the ideas of its elite. Small states' elite construct more favourable identities in their relationships with larger states to overcome the constraints of material disadvantage and to exercise international influence.

[244] Gvalia et al. (2013: 107)
[245] Goetschel (2013: 262) in Gigleux (2016: 4-5)
[246] Gvalia et al. (2013: 107)

The present research therefore unpacks what kind of influence Belarus exercises, to what extent it can be understood by state identity, and the dynamics behind it.[247] In seeking an answer to the central research question, the dissertation adopts *social constructivism* as its conceptual and theoretical framework. It builds on the claim that social constructivism provides 'the most logical base' from which to revitalize the study of foreign policy analysis, including that of small states.[248]

The theoretical premise of the thesis is informed by social constructivism for several reasons. Firstly, the approach problematizes the understanding of foreign policy as shaped by an ideational factor of *state identity*.[249] Constructivism captures how a state identity is used as a discursive tool by the elite to influence another state's external policy. It underscores the identity of the Self, the process of identity construction, and how this contributes to how the Self conducts its foreign policy and with what outcomes.

Secondly, constructivism highlights the process of *mutual constitution* of agents and structures and does not intend to privilege one at the expense of the other: human beings or agents shape social reality, and they are influenced by the structures they create. The elite construct state identity in interaction with the outside world and its own society, namely, from *the intersubjective knowledge of their societies*, and the constructed identity has influence on the elite, in its turn. The Self, the Others, and the domestic ideational structures are mutually constitutive.

The third aspect that constructivism brings in is a relational one: it accounts for the presence of other states. The Self needs *the Other* for its identity construction, and it also needs to

[247] The language of mechanisms and conditions of influence puts the discussion on a causal footing; to avoid this, the thesis talks about the dynamics of influence.
[248] Houghton (2007)
[249] The research follows 'the scholars who study foreign policy from within the constructivist tent' in Houghton (2007: 35)

understand the Other to better respond to the challenges from the outside and to have influence. In constructing its identity, the Self evokes certain memories, formulates aspirations, and addresses practicalities of the current situation - the prevailing domestic and international conditions a country faces at the moment, and this takes place in relation to the Other(s).

Lastly, constructivism underscores a social construction of much of the political world and its *intersubjectivity*: 'anarchy', as an institutional fact, 'is what states make of it'.[250] Constructivism's emphasis on (state) identity, the Other, the process of mutual constitution, and subjectivity is relevant for the present research.

The dissertation takes as its starting point a constructivist premise that international relations and foreign policy outcomes are linked to and shaped by the identity of states,[251] which is (re)produced at least in part in domestic political and cultural contexts,[252] but also relationally in interaction with other states.[253] The way the elite of a smaller state construct its state identity domestically and relationally in interaction with external actors, contributes to a smaller state's ability to change the outcome of policies of external actors directed towards the smaller state and thereby to the smaller state's ability to exercise influence on them. The thesis is concerned with examining a corresponding change in terms of how a state speaks about itself versus the change that takes place in its relations vis-à-vis other states. More specifically, *how identity narratives - that state elite draw on – constitute influence*. The 'smallness', which is understood as the limitation of material resources that a state possesses, is not at the heart of this analytical relationship. Instead, the dissertation analyses how 'smallness' goes hand in hand with the recourse to immaterial resource of state identity to wield external influence.

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[250] Wendt (1992)
[251] Checkel (2008); Katzenstein (1996); Reus-Smit (1997); Berger (1998); Ruggie (1997); Hall (1999); Neumann (1999) in Hopf (2002: 290)
[252] Hopf (2002); Jutta Weldes (1999) argues that identities are constructed by more than systemic or interstate relations.
[253] Wendt (1992)

To understand the process and dynamics of small state influence, the thesis develops a theoretical framework built on the concept of *Composite State Identity (CSI)*. The CSI is conceptualised as a configuration composed of three temporal components or Selves related to the past, the present, and the future: they are referred to as the Historical Self, the Aspirational Self, and the Situational Self respectively. The CSI helps understand a small state's influence and its dynamics as it accounts for change in state identity' components vis-à-vis the Other: how state elite invoke certain memories of the past, construct a vision for the future, and account for the current situation in order to change external policies of other actors or to exert influence. While every state draws on the three components in its identity-building process, it will be argued that it is the extent to which identity components *are engaged and congruent with the Other* that allows a state to have influence on the Other. State identity undergoes two kinds of change in the process of influence: a content change in one or more of the three Selves that triggers change in compatibility or congruence of the Self with the Other, and a change brought in by accentuating or engaging one or more Selves in a state identity construction.

The main objective of this study is to understand *how identity of a state constitutes influence* or, more specifically, *what configurations of state identity deployed by state officials contribute to a state's ability to affect the policies of other states*, and ultimately to change that state's relationship with the outside world. Problematising a state identity in this way and as a gateway to influence addresses a range of issues: it introduces the understanding of identity as a composite of certain components, which allows researchers to identify different dynamics between them, to recognise some components as being prevalent in a particular time period, or even pivotal in shaping the foreign policy agenda of the Self and Others, to examine how these components change the configuration of state identity over time, and how, finally, different identity configurations constitute a state's capacity to exert influence on other actors.

Regarding the outline of the chapter, the first section lays the ground for the theoretical focus of the investigation, the constructivist approach, framed by the research question. The second section introduces the concept and model of the Composite State Identity, which marks the conceptual scope of this study. The third section elaborates on methodology and methods and delineates the empirical focus of the research - the analysis of Belarus's state identity in its post-Soviet period, which is carried out in the subsequent three empirical chapters.

3.2. Constructivism

Constructivism is 'the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world'.[254] These interpretations involve attaching (social) meaning to the material world or cognitive framing of the world and are conditioned by the human capacity for reflection or learning. They represent collective understandings and shared knowledge, ideas, and beliefs about the world produced by human consciousness. Collectively shared and social, they are intersubjective rather than subjective and held privately. These ideational facts constitute social ideational structures that shape state preferences and actions. As such, the causal force lies in the intersubjective rather than in objective material conditions alone. Socially constructed values, cultural practices, norms of behaviour, identities, and discourse structure the ways in which actors understand what is important and valuable and what kind of action is effective, appropriate, and legitimate.[255] The study of International Relations (IR) becomes primarily the study of social facts and ideational structures, which represents a contribution of constructivism to the field of IR.

[254] Adler (1997: 322)
[255] Keohane (1988) in Finnemore (1996: 15)

Constructivists do not contest the existence of material factors and of the reality external to thought; they acknowledge that 'material forces do exist and may have independent causal effects on actor behavior'.[256] But they hold that 'material factors alone do not account for outcomes' and explore the degree to which the material factors are constituted by ideational processes.[257] Some constructivists believe that material structures 'gain their meaning only through discursive practices'[258] and have no meaning 'independent of the discourses in which they are constituted as objects'.[259] Those constructivists who emphasize the ontological reality of intersubjective knowledge and acknowledge the existence of the material world occupy the middle ground between rationalists and the more radical interpretivists, attempting 'to build a bridge between the widely separated positivist/materialist and idealist/interpretive philosophies of social science'.[260] Arguably, it leads to a 'fundamental tension' within constructivism since it is difficult to make it compatible with rationalism.[261]

To note, constructivism is a social theory[262] or a philosophical approach of social science,[263] rather than a theory of international politics like realism and liberalism: 'it does not offer general explanations for what people do, why societies differ, how the world changes'.[264] It is not a single, homogenous theoretical approach. Due to different meta-theoretical,

[256] Copeland (2000: 191), also Wendt (1999), Finnemore (1996), Dessler (1989), Bukovansky (1997) believe that material structures gain their meaning only through discursive practices and Wendt in his earlier work was closer to this more extreme constructivist position.
[257] Houghton (2007: 29)
[258] Copeland (2000: 191)
[259] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 12)
[260] Adler (1997: 323)
[261] Zehfuss (2001: 318) Identity needs to be constructed for different anarchies to be constructed, which is fundamental to Wendt's argument and departs from rationalist or mainstream theory, but at the same time, identity needs to be in some ways given - because Wendt proposes a 'scientific theory of the international system, which makes it necessary, in Wendt's view, to take states as given - the necessary givenness can only be upheld by excluding dimensions of constructedness.
[262] Adler (1997: 323) 'Constructivism, unlike realism or liberalism, is not a theory of politics per se. Rather, it is a social theory on which constructivist theories of international politics – for example, about war, cooperation, and international community – are based'.
[263] Ruggie (1998: 856)
[264] Onuf (1998: 58)

philosophical, and sociological positions, there are different variants and strands of constructivism in IR literature.[265]

What unites constructivists of different strands is their understanding that knowledge and the world are socially constructed, contingent, and to various degrees contestable.[266] *'Socially'* means that greater weight is given to the social as opposed to the material. The existence of the material matters not so much as the social context (of friendship or enmity and everything in between) that gives meaning to that particular material (capability).[267] *'Constructed'* means that the world is not a pre-given entity that exists out there but rather comes into being - 'becoming rather than being'.[268] The world comes into being through a process of *'mutual constitution'*,[269] which takes place during interaction between agents, such as individuals, states, and non-state actors, and the structures of their broader environment defined by social norms or discourses. Ideational structures and agents *co-determine* or *co-constitute* each other: ideational structures constitute actors leading them to redefine their interests and identities, and in their turn, these structures are reproduced and altered by the discursive practices of agents. Actors create structures, which take a life of their own, and these in turn shape subsequent actions of actors. Interests and identities can be transformed too, and the sources of transformation are *discursive practices*. According to structural constructivists, state identities and interests are not exogenously given[270] by human nature or domestic politics but are 'in

[265] Adler (2013); Kubalkova et al. (1998: X), Price and Reus-Smit (2000: 1811) in Cho (2012)
[266] Checkel (2008: 72); Adler (2013: 113); Vucetic (2017: 1). The key constructivist propositions are the belief in the social construction of reality; the focus on ideational as well as material structures and the importance of norms and rules; the role of identity in shaping political actions and a 'logic of appropriateness'; and a belief in the mutual constitutiveness of agents and structure and an emphasis on practice, action, and intersubjective understandings according to Flockhart (2012: 82)
[267] Wendt (1995: 73-74)
[268] Adler (2013: 113)
[269] Adler (2002: 95)
[270] Copeland (2000: 190): 'Unlike rationalist theorists of neorealism and neorealism, which hold interest and identities constant in order to isolate the causal roles or power and international institutions, constructivism considers how ideational structures shape the very way actors define themselves – who they are, their goals, and the roles they believe they should play'.

important part' constructed by social structures.[271] Other constructivists argue that identities are constructed at the domestic level[272] or by a combination of systemic/interstate and domestic relations.[273] The role of state officials is underscored as they 'shape national interests and identities by defining the world surrounding them'.[274] In either way, social reality is a project under constant construction.[275]

The other core component of the constructivist ontology is the concept of '*inter-subjectivity*'. While the intersubjective nature of structures was established as a counterweight to their material conception first,[276] recently scholars acknowledged the fact that intersubjective understandings comprise both structures and agents in the international system.[277] Social phenomena such as norms, rules, languages, and cultures create identities and guide behaviour.[278] They predicate expectations about how the world works, what type of behaviour is legitimate, and what interests and identities are possible.[279] Norms and rules establish habitual practices and procedures that shape how people see the world, influence their goal formation, and actions to be undertaken. However, they need to be accepted by the people as *shared and collectively held*, that is as *intersubjective understandings*, and the people need to define themselves in reference to them. Intersubjective reality exists through the medium of social communication. Meanings are contested, and they evolve. Particular meanings become stable over time, creating *social orders* - structures and institutions. They constitute *interpretive dispositions* and *a particular subjectivity* or a mode of being - a background of social and

[271] Wendt (1994: 385)
[272] Hopf (2002)
[273] Weldes (1996)
[274] Houghton (2007: 37)
[275] Flockhart (2012: 82)
[276] Wendt (1994)
[277] Klotz & Lynch (2007)
[278] Klotz & Lynch (2007: 7)
[279] Klotz & Lynch (2007: 8)

discursive practices and meanings. Interpretive dispositions create certain possibilities and preclude others and make possible the social actors themselves.[280]

The intersubjective structures are 'portions of the real world, objective facts in the world that are only facts by human agreement'.[281] As such they are the product of the human mind, especially of language. Once such objective facts are collectively produced, their reality becomes 'predicated on the fact that they can have real consequences' - they acquire ontological reality.[282] Intersubjective meanings have structural attributes in that they do not 'merely constrain or empower actors' but they also 'define their social reality.'[283] They exist as *collective knowledge* of many individuals, and they are not (only) the aggregation of the beliefs of individuals. Intersubjective meanings are not 'dependent on the thoughts of any one person',[284] but represent the knowledge, which is 'shared' by those 'who are competent to engage in or recognize the appropriate performance of a social practice or range of practices'.[285] The intersubjective knowledge 'persists beyond the lives of individual social actors, embedded in social routines and practices',[286] and it is produced by all those who participate in the process of social construction. Thus, constructivists believe that intersubjective/ collective ideas, beliefs, and representations are more important than individual/ idiosyncratic ones.

Constructivists diverge on the questions they ask about *foreign policy*[287] and the methods they employ to answer them.[288] Following its meta-theoretical stance, conventional constructivism

[280] Doty (1993: 298) in Houghton (2007: 35)
[281] Searle (1995: 1, 12) in Adler (1997: 328)
[282] Adler (1997: 328)
[283] Adler (1997: 327)
[284] Copeland (2000: 192)
[285] Cohen (1987: 287) in Adler (1997: 327)
[286] Adler (1997: 327)
[287] Houghton (2007): Doty (1993), Hopf (2002), Weldes (1996) are constructivists who examine foreign policy.
[288] Checkel (2008): Historically, research on the role of social norms and identities in shaping foreign policy practice and the uncovering of constitutive and causal relationships between them was examined by the so-called North American constructivists. The other strand of constructivism represented by European constructivists examined the role of language in mediating and constructing social reality, including foreign policy. The differentiation became less vivid though as norm and identity research became a dynamic area of study in European constructivism.

is considered to be epistemologically positivist, and it treats identities as explanatory variables.[289] Critical constructivism is post-positivist, and it argues that identities are to be explained to make sense of political phenomena.[290] Critical constructivism explores the role of language in mediating and constructing social reality, including foreign policy:[291] it explores 'the background conditions and linguistic constructions (social discourses) that made [certain phenomena] possible in the first place'.[292] It addresses 'how-possible questions', which are constitutive in nature: 'how the subjects, objects, and interpretive dispositions were socially constructed such that certain practices were made possible'.[293]

Constructivist approaches are often *criticized* for their lack of generalizations and a general theory of international relations.[294] Also, different questions about international relations and foreign policymaking, and different methods employed to answer them, make it difficult to understand constructivism's main arguments and points of contestation.

The problematic issue in relation to conventional constructivism is that 'combining an emphasis on social being (constructivist ontology) with an empiricist approach to the generation of objective knowledge (positivist epistemology)' is not consistent.[295] The middle ground between rationalists and poststructuralist approaches is challenged by constructivists who believe that a social ontology and social epistemology are inseparable. Drawing on the linguistic turn in philosophy of social science, they argue that constructivism is also an epistemological position as it problematises the connection between word and thing, a symbol and the symbolized.[296] According to the constructivist epistemology, the language cannot be separated from the material object as it cannot be compared with what it describes. The

[289] Cho (2012)
[290] Weldes et al. (1999: 11) in Cho (2012: 301)
[291] Checkel (2008)
[292] Checkel (2008: 73) in Cho (2012: 301)
[293] Doty (1993: 298) in Houghton (2007: 35)
[294] Reus-Smit (2013: 230)
[295] Fierke (2016: 167-168)
[296] Palan (2000: 4) in Fierke (2016: 168)

language cannot be detached from the context in which it has meaning and use. 'Language is bound up in the world rather than a mirror of it'.[297] Critical constructivists are arguably more consistent in their theoretical and epistemological foundations. They assume that the world exists 'independently' of human minds, and it cannot be recognised in a pure and direct fashion, but it is always already organized and formed by certain categorical and theoretical elements.

The ontology/epistemology issue is connected to a concern about constructivism's status as an approach, a 'theory',[298] or 'a way of studying social relations'.[299] But 'if constructivism and positivism rely on differing assumptions about the nature of 'reality', then building a constructivist theory on a positivist epistemology is inconsistent.'[300] Also, it is misleading to consider constructivism as a theory in the same sense as realism, which makes claims about actors and how they operate and follows positivist assumptions about an objective world, material power, and a competitive anarchy.

Poststructuralists argue that conventional constructivism is state-centered, and it reifies the state itself while criticising neorealism for reifying the structure of international anarchy.[301]

Neorealists are skeptical about the importance that constructivism assigns to norms since norms are routinely disregarded, especially by larger states. Besides, neorealists put into question the possibility for states to be peaceful due to their social interaction: the structure of anarchy of international system and uncertainty forces states to behave egoistically.[302] The other problems are difficulty in obtaining trustworthy information and the fact of deception between states:

[297] Fierke (2016: 168)
[298] Wendt (1999)
[299] Onuf (1989: 1) in Fierke (2016: 168)
[300] Fierke (2016: 168)
[301] Weber (2010), Wendt (1992) in Behravesh (2011)
[302] Mearsheimer (1995), Copeland (2000) in Jackson & Sørensen (2010: 176)

'are states really peaceful or do they merely pretend to be peaceful?'[303] Neorealism remains 'the main contender and intellectual opponent' for constructivism.[304]

Neorealists also criticize the constructivist view of change: constructivists fail to explain 'how norms are formed, how identities are shaped, and how interests are defined as they do… [Constructivism] does not, by itself, tell us anything about the expected content of foreign policies or international relations'.[305] Constructivists provide 'few insights on why discourses rise and fall… [therefore, they] say little about why realism has been the dominant discourse, and why its foundations are so shaky'.[306] Constructivists elaborate on particular factors that 'might lead to changes in international relations discourse', but they argue that those changes in discourse are driven by changes in the material world'.[307]

The question of why and how state identity changes over time represents one of the difficulties that constructivism experiences.[308] The problem with change is that social practices play a central role in the mutual constitution of structures and agents: they reproduce and reify 'the inter-subjective meanings that constitute social structures and actors alike' and thus preclude change as actors have 'a profound reluctance to change what is a reassuringly stable situation'.[309] That is why it is important to address the issue of change in research.

Furthermore, constructivist approaches are accused of having no theory of agency. They tend to prioritise (social) structure over agency though both agency and structure are assumed to be mutually constituted and therefore deserving equal analytical attention and treatment: 'constructivists endorse co-constitution in principle, but in practice, much constructivist works

[303] Jackson & Sørensen (2010: 176)
[304] Jackson & Sørensen (2010: 178)
[305] Jervis (1998: 976) in Jackson & Sørensen (2010: 177)
[306] Mearsheimer (1995b: 369) in Jackson & Sørensen (2010: 177)
[307] Mearsheimer (1995b: 369) in Jackson & Sørensen (2010: 177)
[308] Flockhart (2016)
[309] Flockhart (2016: 89)

favors structure'.[310] The 'underspecified theoretical apparatus'[311] and the need to focus more on agency and domestic level processes are acknowledged by some constructivist. Indeed, 'actors have agency, can be strategic, are aware of the cultural and social rules that presumably limit their practices, and as knowledgeable actors are capable of appropriating those cultural taproots for various ends'.[312] This argument is especially relevant for non-democracies, and the present thesis addresses it. It argues that state identity is constructed through strategic calculation by the elite, and thus agency, and it relies on rationalist notions of strategic action.

Related to the structure-agency inconsistency is the drawback that constructivism provides little conceptualisation and theoretical mechanism to how the social is constructed, contested, and negotiated. Namely, how ideational factors 'operate within individuals' belief systems and are aggregated to the social level via institutional, cultural, and small group rules, norms, and processes'.[313] At the same time, constructivists advance little theoretical mechanism for how societal identities influence the elite and their policymaking choices. They assume 'a strong connection' between culture at the mass level and policymaking at the elite level via a single national identity that is shared on both levels.[314] At the very least, national identities residing at the societal level constrain the elite from adopting certain foreign policies.[315] If the elite represent society and reflect identities, 'a convincing account' is lacking on how those identities are 'linked to state behaviour'.[316] The present thesis indeed assumes that the elite represent society and reflect shared identities, and identities reside at the societal level and constrain elite, however, it neither specifies how identities are contested nor how they are aggregated to the social level. Elite framing and manipulation in non-democratic Belarus

[310] Flanik (2011: 9) in Kaarbo (2015: 201)
[311] Zürn & Checkel (2005: 1072) in Kaarbo (2015: 202)
[312] Barnett (1999: 7) in Kaarbo (2015: 201)
[313] Ilgit & Özkeçeci-Taner (2012), Wiener (2007) in Kaarbo (2015: 201)
[314] Bancoff (1999), Duffield (1999), Catalinac (2007), McCourt (2011) in Kaarbo (2015: 202)
[315] Berger (1998), Duffield (1999) in Kaarbo (2015: 202)
[316] Ilgit & Özkeçeci-Taner (2012: 96), Wiener (2007) in Kaarbo (2015: 202)

undermine the arguments on shared identity and cultural constraints and point to the complicated relationship between the elite and cultural values, which represents a venue for further research.

Despite its shortcomings, constructivism introduces the argument, on which the present thesis builds itself - namely, that international relations and foreign policy outcomes are shaped by the identity of states, and that a state identity as a discursive capacity constitutes influence. What is state identity, and how it functions as a dynamic of influence is researched next.

State Identity

The other core component of the constructivist ontology is the concept of 'identity'. Used primarily at the level of the collective, *identity*[317] is broadly defined as 'the agent's understanding of self, its place in the social world, and its relationship with others'.[318] Identities are *subjective* as they stem from an actor's self-understanding, but they are also *intersubjective* as they depend on other actors and their recognition.[319] Identities are 'constituted by the interaction of internal and external ideas'.[320] As strands of meaning, they arise out of the interaction and participation of actors in institutional contexts both at the international and domestic levels.[321] State identity is defined as 'a conception of what the country is and what it represents',[322] 'as a relational concept that denotes the social meanings and practices through which an actor becomes distinctively recognizable or known as such',[323] a state's self-understanding,[324] and the understanding of oneself in relationship and interaction to others.[325]

[317] Checkel & Katzenstein (2009), Mitzen (2006), Risse (2000) in Adler (2013: 113) as examples of research on identity and its strategic consequences.
[318] Flockhart (2016: 87)
[319] Wendt (1999)
[320] Finnemore & Sikkink (2001: 399)
[321] Finnemore & Sikkink (2001: 399) in Tidy (2012: 537); Tidy (2008: 16) in Altoraifi (2012: 42)
[322] Ashizawa (2008: 585)
[323] Towns (2010: 35)
[324] Wendt (1999: 230)
[325] Telhami & Barnett (2002: 8)

Providing a descriptive character of a state, state identity reflects the existence of the Other, and therefore it is a *social* and *relational* conception.[326] State identity is linked to the state apparatus, i.e. 'government' or 'state leadership', and it does not necessarily rule out the rationality of the people who act in the name of state.[327] Different actors seek to impose certain representations of the state for different reasons, for example, to advance self-interest, or to seek power and influence.

Allowing to assign meaning both to themselves and to others, identities impose some order upon the world and make it more intelligible, often for a limited time period as identities are always - according to critical constructivists - in the process of construction and reconstruction being neither fixed nor given a priori significance: 'Collective identity is an ever-lasting negotiation about who an individual is, how the who comes about, how individuals become a party to it, and how it is reproduced over time.'[328] As the agent's understanding of the Self is 'a condition that is always in a process of reconstitution', it is 'supported by a narrative to ensure biographical continuity that makes any changes seem natural'.[329]

Identities perform certain functions: in telling oneself and others who you are and telling oneself who others are, 'identities strongly imply a particular set of interests or preferences with respect to choices of action in particular domains, and with respect to particular actors'.[330] Agents consider options for action reflectively as to which action is the most appropriate behaviour for their identity. In such case they act from a '*logic of appropriateness*' rather than a 'logic of consequences' and try 'to follow rules that associate particular identities to particular

[326] State identity is understood as 'the corporate and officially demarcated identity linked to the state apparatus' (Telhami & Barnett 2002: 8), while national identity relates to 'a self-concept of individuals that have derived from their knowledge of their membership of the nation' (Ashizawa 2008: 575).
[327] Alexandrov (2003: 41)
[328] Neumann (1999: 46-47): This relational understanding of identity moves the research in the direction of a constitutive analysis away from the causal approach that excludes the question of identity formation ipso facto.
[329] Flockhart (2016: 87)
[330] Hopf (1998: 175)

situations'.[331] The logic of appropriateness is driven by social structures of norms and rules. These structures define the kinds of actors who will contemplate and take action, as well as the kinds of action that will be contemplated and taken. Rule-guided behaviour is guided by the intention to 'do the right thing' at the expense of utility maximising behaviour driven by actors, who make means-ends calculations and seek material gain.[332] It is not irrational since rules, norms, and routines may be followed for carefully considered reasons. However, the reasoning processes of the two logics differ: reasoning by analogy and metaphor ('What am I supposed to do now?') contrasts with reasoning about means and ends in consequentialist action ('How do I get what I want?'). As the present study of Belarus's influence shows, the two logics are intimately connected and in any given situation may both play a role. Political behavior is 'governed by notions of duty and obligation as much as by notions of self-interest and gain'.[333]

Different theoretical strands of constructivism offer distinctive accounts of identity and state behaviour. Two of them are addressed in this chapter: norm constructivists and critical constructivists. According to *norm constructivists*, state identities are constructed at the domestic level, and they matter primarily as a determinant of national interests. Specifically, identity is constituted by domestic norms and culture and is constitutive of national interests, which in turn condition an agent's action, including its foreign and security policy behaviour. Norms first need to be integrated into state interests, and only after that they can shape behaviour following the logic of appropriateness. The most important dynamics for the reproduction of identity is not role[334] or norm but habit and practice.[335] Norm constructivists explain how a domestically constructed identity through national interests influences, shapes,

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[331] March & Olsen (1989: 951)
[332] Towns (2010:26); Finnemore (1996: 30)
[333] Finnemore (1996: 29)
[334] On roles see Fearon (1999), Kratochwil (2006), McCourt (2012). Identities are believed to be made through the playing of roles, which give action its meaning' (McCourt 2012: 372). A role is 'the part played or assumed by a person in society', and while it is 'the inherently social concept', identity is 'explicitly individualist in nature' (McCourt 2012: 373).
[335] Hopf (2002: 10)

and regulates foreign policy.[336] How states see themselves and other states is central to understanding what states actually do.[337] Accordingly, identity is relatively stable over time but changes subject to domestic re-construction. There does not need to be a single state identity: 'Understandings of Self are constructed domestically out of the many identities that constitute the discursive formations that, in turn, make up the social cognitive structure of that society'.[338] In other words, identities of a state are produced in interaction with its own society out of many discourses that constitute that society.[339] Discursively constructed and habitualised, state identity is 'implicit' and 'taken-for-granted' rather than negotiated based on cost-benefit calculations.'[340] Besides the emphasis on being constituted domestically primarily through state-society dynamics, norm constructivists bring *agency* into foreign policy analysis: 'all the impetus for change is hinged on the deliberate efforts of activists' or norm promoters/ entrepreneurs.[341] However, identities conceptualised as domestically produced reify the boundaries between inside and outside, which are sought to be understood and problematised.[342] Moreover, critics of the approach underscore that identity plays a more significant role than a status of 'in-between' interests and behaviour. Besides, treating identity as an inherently domestic product disregards the fact that "a 'domestic' domain is impossible other than in relation to an 'international' one".[343]

The constructivist literature is divided over the significance of difference in identity construction. While norm constructivists argue that identity does not need to be articulated in relation to difference as it is a product of social norms,[344] *critical constructivists*, who draw on

[336] Finnemore (1996), Hopf (2002), Katzenstein (1996), Wendt (1999)
[337] Katzenstein (1996), Klotz (1995), Kubálková et al. (1998)
[338] Hopf (2002: 37)
[339] Hopf (2002: 294)
[340] Vucetic (2017: 9)
[341] Towns (2010: 28)
[342] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 16)
[343] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 5)
[344] Wendt (1999), Finnemore & Sikkink (2001), Klotz (1995), Tannenwald (2007). Rumelili (2004: 34): the Self and the Other 'are not used to denote actors in a relationship of constitutive difference, self/other interaction has

post-structuralism, posit that identity is constructed only through difference, it is constituted in relation to difference.[345] They argue that identity emerges and changes through the process of differentiation vis-à-vis multiple Others: 'It is only through contrast and differentiation from that which is unlike that the like can be identified and known as such.'[346] As the origins of identity are assumed to lie in the relationship between the Self and the Other, the Other is necessary for the Self to generate its own identity. Difference is thus 'intrinsically involved' and 'inherent in the logic of identity',[347] it is 'implicated in the construction of identity',[348] and 'a requirement built into the logic'[349] of identity, including that of the state. In other words, 'demarcations between domestic and international, identity and difference, or Self and Other are exactly what constitute identity'.[350] Such demarcations take place through 'the inscription of boundaries',[351] and foreign policy is then 'a specific sort of boundary producing political performance' and is constitutive of the state.[352] The literature then explores the identity/difference nexus. The manner in which the Other relates to the Self shows what the Self is, how its identity is constructed, and what boundaries constitute it.[353]

Identity is 'intertwined with oppositional structuring' and presupposes the existence of alternative identities, even if it fails to involve the agency and discourse of outsiders.[354] For example, the identity category of democracy presupposes the existence of its opposite – non-democracy – even though this opposite of the Self may not be actively engaged in drawing the

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been studied as relations between any two distinct states, not as the relationship between self and its constitutive other'.

[345] Neumann (1999); Rumelili (2004)
[346] Towns (2010: 35)
[347] Towns (2010: 35)
[348] Rumelili (2004: 33)
[349] Connolly (1991: 9) in Towns (2010: 35)
[350] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 5)
[351] Campbell (1998: 9) in Towns (2010: 36)
[352] Ashley (1987: 51) in Towns (2010: 36)
[353] Campbell (1994, 1998), Connolly (1991), Neumann (1996), Rumelili (2004), Wodak et al. (2009) in Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 5); also Towns (2010: 36)
[354] Doty (1996) in Rumelili (2004: 31)

boundary between the Self and the Other.[355] Similarly, 'the performance of a democratic state identity entails representational practices that differentiate the democratic self from others constructed to be non- (or less) democratic'.[356] Contesting Wendt's argument that pre-social or corporate identities are 'constituted by self-organizing homeostatic structures', and as such they are 'exogenous to Otherness' and 'there is no particular Other to which the Self is related',[357] Rumelili argues that identity is reconstituted by the Other whether the Self recognises and acknowledges the Other or not, whether boundary-drawing involves 'the agency and discourse of outsiders' or not.[358]

The Other denotes 'the bearer of constitutive difference' by 'embodying the alternative and different identity'.[359] The Other defines what the Self '*is not* and what it seeks to distance itself from…'[360] The formation of the self is 'always dependent on an 'other' for its constitution'[361] and 'inextricably intertwined with the formation of its others'.[362] The Other does not need to be necessarily oppositional; it can take many different forms.[363] The Other is often treated as a threat to the Self resulting in an identity relationship that is inevitably conflictual. However, the relationship must neither be conflictual as there are other ways of relation to difference, including comparison and integration;[364] nor necessarily be between the Self and another individual or group. The relationship can be between the Self and an idea or history or place: 'imagined' Others, such as characters from the state's past and cultural narratives, or historical Others, or generalized Others.[365] The Other that the Self positions itself in relation to and

[355] Rumelili (2004: 32)
[356] Campbell (1992) in Rumelili (2004: 31)
[357] Wendt (1999: 224-225; 74) in Rumelili (2004: 31)
[358] Rumelili (2004: 32)
[359] Rumelili (2004: 30)
[360] Flockhart (2006: 94)
[361] Flockhart (2016: 87)
[362] Neumann (1999: 35)
[363] Waever (1998), Neumann (1999), Onuf (2003), Odysseos (2007), Guillaume (2010), Epstein (2011), Keith & Pile (1993), Abizadeh (2005), Lebow (2012) in Vucetic (2017: 3).
[364] Abizadeh (2005), Guillaume (2011), Rumelili (2004) in Hagström & Gustafsson (2015)
[365] Hopf (2002: 9)

chooses to interact with may also show the pursuit of some common purposes, such as learning from the Other. Indeed, the potential for a behavioural relationship of Othering between the Self and the Other is not always realised: instead of otherness, the relations of difference can be transformed into representations of self/other as leader/partner and guardian/child. These notions of difference are more complex and are cast in less negative terms. The relationship between the Self and its constitutive Other can be accompanied by the discourse of fear and identity threat or by less negative representations.[366] Thus, different self/other relationships are possible within the overall logic of identity/difference: 'the discursive dependence of identity on difference does not necessarily entail a relationship of Othering between self and other'.[367] Still, critical constructivists call to consider the sources of potential tension in the self/other behavioural relationship due to its ontological base.

By analysing how a state's identity is constructed 'through the drawing of boundaries vis-à-vis several Others and in multiple contexts',[368] conclusions can be reached about certain behaviour and by extension the foreign and security policy a state is enabled or constrained to pursue: 'the mapping of a certain discourse' might not provide 'unambiguous templates for action'; what it can do is to 'illuminate the overall past policy direction' and 'to make negative predictions' about the unlikely course of action to be implemented in future.[369]

Identity is a condition that is only relatively stable as it is constantly in a state of flux, and its reconstitution is 'always supported by a narrative to ensure biographical continuity that makes any changes seem natural'.[370] In contrast to norm constructivists, which presume identity to be relatively stable over time with intentional episodes of change, some critical constructivists

[366] Rumelili (2004: 36)
[367] Rumelili (2004: 36)
[368] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 2)
[369] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 14)
[370] Flockhart (2016: 87)

theorise a state as 'an ongoing process of constitution'.[371] Stability of the state should be understood as an effect of 'regulated process of repetition' rather than inertia.[372] This leads to the tendency to analyse identity for its own sake, with research questions revolving around the formation, maintenance, and transformation of collective identities such as 'state' and 'nation'.[373] Scholars working in this approach[374] in contrast to norm constructivists, are interested in identity construction and pay less attention to the impact of identity on behaviour.

Thus, according to Weldes (1999), identity is a *relational* concept that 'denotes the social meanings and practices through which an actor becomes distinctively recognizable or known as such'.[375] Identities, sitting 'at the heart'[376] of national interests, are 'social constructions created as meaningful objects out of the intersubjective and culturally established meanings with which the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it, is understood'.[377] These meanings originate in 'the security imaginaries' of states or a depository of 'the cultural raw materials',[378] out of which representations of states, of relations among states, and of world politics are constructed. National identities emerge 'out of situation descriptions and problem definitions – through which state official and others make sense of the world around them.'[379] Hence identities are constructed and shaped by state officials and others in the process of defining the surrounding world - identifying the Self and Others and positing relations between them. Historical, cultural, political, and social contexts are the factors that contribute to the construction of identity and interests.

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[371] Towns (2010: 35)
[372] Campbell (1998: 10) in Towns (2010: 35)
[373] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015)
[374] Campbell (1994, 1998), Connolly (1991), Neumann (1996), Rumelili (2004), Wodak et al. (2009) in Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 5)
[375] Towns (2010: 35)
[376] Weldes (1999: 19)
[377] Weldes (1999: 10)
[378] Weldes (1999: 10)
[379] Weldes (1999: 280) in Houghton (2007: 36-37)

To overcome differences in approaching identity by norm and critical constructivists, a link has been established between discursively constructed identities and propensity for action.[380] Namely, *the relational approach* helps analyse behaviour or policy that discursively produced identities enable or constrain by delineating the 'range of imaginable conduct'.[381] Action can be understood from the viewpoint of identity: '… even if one acknowledges that states are constructions of the imagination that come into being through the collective meaning-making of human beings, for example, through foreign and security policy, it is reasonable to ask what consequences such identity constructions might have for foreign and security policy'.[382] There is a connection between discursively constructed social identities and propensity for action:[383] 'The question is thus not only how identities emerge as a product of narratives and discourses but also how emergent subjects 'live out their identities and act''.[384] The present research sympathises with the relational approach that embraces both the identity/difference issue and the impact of identity on foreign policy action. The issue of a relative stability of state identity over some period of time followed by intentional episodes of change is also relevant. The view that state identity is always in a state of flux directs the scholarly attention to the ongoing process of its reconstitution and sidetracks from its behavioural consequences.

State identity is understood to be articulated in narratives. It is argued that an understanding of oneself is 'always an interpretation, which finds in the narrative one of its most complete media of expression'.[385] Narratives also become a way of accessing identity, but they are not equivalent to identity. A closely related concept is discourse. Discourses are 'structures of signification that construct social realities'.[386] However, it is difficult to argue that discourse is

[380] Doty (1993: 298) in Hagström & Gustafsson (2015)
[381] Doty (1993: 299) in Hagström & Gustafsson (2015); Hagström & Gustafsson (2015)
[382] Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 13)
[383] Doty (1993:298), Howarth & Stavrakakis (2000:12), Phillips & Hardy (2002:21) in Hagström & Gustafsson (2015:13)
[384] Howarth & Stavrakakis (2000: 12) in Hagström & Gustafsson (2015: 13)
[385] Martin (1995)
[386] Milliken (1999: 229)

controlled by any combination of single and collective actors. Narrative, on the other hand, is a smaller analytical unit within discourse. It has an analytical advantage as it brings in and accentuates agency and allows to capture how individuals attempt to shape new social meanings and how the ruling elite constructs a state identity. By constructing identity narratives, the elite manipulate events and turn them into influence opportunities. Thereby, narratives contribute to influence: individuals as agents construct identities through the practice of narration and that can lead to change in other actors' policies or influence. In the present study, narratives as a means of identity articulation are analysed to reconstruct a state's identity at the micro-level against the background of discourses located at the macro-level.

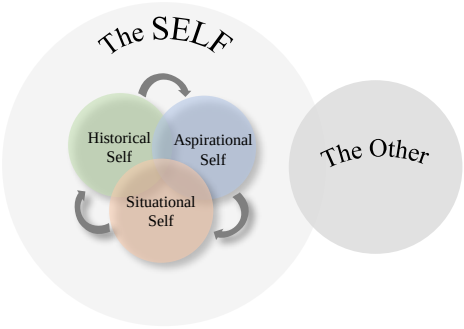
With the knowledge gained about the concept of state identity and the choice made about how to address it, the next section of the research introduces the concept of 'Composite State Identity', which captures influence of the Self on the Other, and helps understand its dynamics.

3.3. Model of Composite State Identity

'Each identity has associated with it a collection of discursive practices'.[387]

Graph 3.1. Model of state identity

[387] Hopf (2002: 1)



Source: author

In this work, state identity is defined as *a set of broadly accepted by a given society discursive representations of the state that are related to the past, the present, and the future, and through which an actor becomes distinctively recognizable as such*.[388] It is understood as a temporal and relational composite that denotes social meanings, practices, and narratives.[389] Two considerations are due. Firstly, the definition is in alignment with the theoretical view that state identities are constructed domestically and relationally in interaction with other states. They are constrained by the intersubjective shared stock of knowledge and culturally established meanings, which are specific to a given country and its society. Decision-makers make sense of the world with categories and values drawn from it.[390] Social constructions, including state identities and interests, drive state behaviour; at the same time, the political elite play a significant role in using identity discourses to their own purposes: 'actors strategize rationally to reconfigure preferences, identities, or social context'.[391] The elite use state identity strategically within the confines of widely shared ideas of the masses, those which structure

[388] Based on a definition of state identity by Alexandrov (2003: 39): 'a set of broadly accepted (often symbolic or metaphorical) representations of the state, in particular in its relation to other states, together with the corresponding beliefs about the appropriate behaviour, rights or responsibilities'.
[389] Towns (2010)
[390] Hopf & Allan (2016)
[391] Finnemor & Sikkink (1998: 888)

mass common sense, to intentionally change the outcome of a policy in relationship with another state or to exert influence on the Other. Though state identity is produced domestically in a relationship with difference vis-à-vis domestic and international Others, only the latter find reflection in this research: the thesis examines how the Self constructs its identity in relation to the Other.

Secondly, state identity is conceptualised as consisting of three temporal components: the Self's interpretation of its past, its historical memory or the Historical Self, its future aspirations or the Aspirational Self, and its treatment of situational issues of the present or the Situational Self. Thus, state identity is based upon particular collective memories, which are defined by broad historical stories or narratives (the Historical Self).[392] These narratives encompass not only an internally produced account of origin, but also an account of the future. Historical memory is about the past, but its purpose is to promote a certain normative image of the future (the Aspirational self).[393] Also, state actors 'reconstruct the past as they debate the future',[394] and they do it in the present (the Situational self). The strands of meaning that emerge out of historical, aspirational, and situational continuities constitute a collective and composite sense of the Self.[395]

The temporal dimension of state identity originates in the argument that 'in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and of where we are going'.[396] This implies that any collective identity - states, nations, ethnic communities, and religious institutions - needs to have a temporal continuity as an entity that 'moves through time'.[397] To reinstate one's identity, one needs to perceive a group to which one belongs as

[392] Barnett (2002: 65-69) in Tidy (2012: 537)
[393] Ioffe (2019)
[394] Barnett (2002: 68) in Tidy (2012: 537)
[395] Tidy (2012)
[396] Taylor (1989) in Sani et al. (2007: 1131)
[397] Reicher and Hopkins (2001) in Sani et al. (2007: 1118)

having continuity across time.[398] Specifically, scholars underscore that identity narratives can 'relate to the past, to a myth of origin; they can be aimed at explaining the present, and, above all, they function as a projection of a future trajectory'.[399] Arguably, the past plays a dominant role in state identity construction: 'Memory is a main, if not the main, channel through which the imagined communities of nations are shaped'.[400] It is described as the most sedimented layer of identity construction that is difficult to change. Being built in difference to the Other, identities specify possible relations with Others and give value and meaning to these relations.[401]

Clunan (2009) emphasises the role of the current situation in explaining national identities. Namely, identity undergoes a legitimacy test in which the political elite examine how well the selected national self-image corresponds to the existing international and domestic circumstances. Only national identities that are perceived as effective, realistic, and practical under current conditions are considered to be legitimate. The elite make reasoned judgments about the practicality of a national identity, taking into consideration the present environment and relations with other states. However, agency is limited by aspirations that condition legitimacy of a national identity along with current conditions. The political elite employ aspirational versus situational logics to construct a national identity (and interests).

Thus, the construction of the Self is influenced by the way policymakers evaluate historical legitimacy, situational practicality, and aspirations. The temporal dimension is especially pertinent since identity construction is primarily an ongoing process related to time.

In the present research, state identity is constituted by three temporal components, which are in turn constituted by a specific set of different elements. The Historical Self is constituted by

[398] Sani et al. (2007: 1131)
[399] Yuval-Davis (2006: 202)
[400] Bekus (2019: 1604); Anderson (1991), Assmann (1995) in Bekus (2019: 1604).
[401] Martin (1995)

two pillars. The first pillar consists of values and norms that have origins in the past and are interpreted and transmitted from the past into the present by the political elite. The second pillar of the Self consists of interpretations of past events, periods, and the historical path of development of the Self – the historical memory. Also included in the construction of the Historical Self is a historical rendering of the Others by the Self. The Aspirational Self is constituted by a sense of common vision of the future Self and the related goals to achieve the vision. It consists of two pillars: beliefs about a state's appropriate system of governance and mission or, in other words, its political purpose, and ideas about a state's international status, namely its rank, rights, and obligations. Being constructed vis-à-vis the Other, the Aspirational Self also includes a common vision of the Others that are involved in its construction. The Situational Self is constituted by practicalities of the current situation or, in other words, the prevailing domestic and international conditions the country faces at the present moment. It is a real time element of the Self that reacts to changes that take place 'now'. Situational issues propel the Situational Self to re-construct its own elements on an ongoing basis. The other components of the three Selves can also be re-aligned to the new interpretation of domestic and external circumstances to avoid contradiction in interpretation between all pillars and elements.

State identity is divided in three parts for analytical purposes. In real life, these parts are overlapping: each one of them has a location in particular historical memories, each relates to the future vision of the Self, and to its political purpose and international status.

According to the constructivist interpretation of political life, intersubjective interpretations of the material world such as beliefs, ideas, and identities, constitute social structures and shape state actions. The present research argues that the ability of the Self to bring the intersubjective interpretation of its state identity closer to the Other helps the Self shape actions of the Other and to exercise influence in terms of policy output of the Other to its benefit of the Self. Specifically, the three components of state identity are internally and externally congruent to

various extents as well as differently engaged vis-à-vis the Other/s, and these correspond to the influence that a state wields. Looking at the dynamics of interaction and co-constitution between the three Selves, it will be argued that to exert influence, firstly, the Self needs to be internally and externally congruent vis-à-vis the Other, and secondly, the congruent components of the Self need to be engaged.

Congruence is about resonance and compatibility of identity discourses at different levels, such as the national and the EU level or the level of the Self and the Other.[402] In sociology, congruence is interpreted as cohesion or the extent of connectedness and unity among groups, the fit, absence of social conflict, and the presence of strong social bonds.[403] In cognitive psychology, congruence is internal alignment on core meanings, and it refers to 'how well elements seem to conceptually fit together in the human mind'.[404] Extending this concept to state identity, congruence is understood in the present research in two ways: how well the three components of the Self are conceptually connected with each other and how well state identities of the Self and the Other conceptually fit together. A smaller ideational distance between core meanings attached to identities means greater congruence between identities and a greater possibility for influence. Besides congruence, the model of Composite State Identity integrates the extent of engagement or frequency of references of state identity components. Certain identity configurations augment a state's capacity to exert influence on other states. These reflections are translated into *three more specific arguments*.

Firstly, the three Selves need to be internally coherent, cohesive, mutually interacting,[405] and speak to the same kind of goals: the Situational Self needs to correspond to collective memories of the Historical Self and future objectives of the Aspirational Self; the Aspirational Self needs

[402] Marcussen et al. (1999), Tiilikainen (1998) in Thorhallsson & Wivel (2006: 657)
[403] Eisenberg (2007) in Flint et al. (2018)
[404] Alina & Ioan (2013) in Flint et al. (2018: 69)
[405] Interaction between different elements of state identity allows to see how identity constructions emerge, how they are maintained, and how they transform.

to be aligned to the past by historical memories and to the present by interpretations of situational issues; the Historical Self needs to meet the requirements and explanations of current events and future objectives or aspirations. The more internally congruent the Self is, the more assertively it can project itself vis-à-vis the Others and the more influence it can exert.

Secondly, internal congruence can be supplemented by external congruence of the Self with the Other. The Self can be constructed in such a way as to create a feeling of connectedness with the Other. Congruence in this sense means that the Self attempts to connect to the identity of the Other. The more externally congruent the Self's three components are vis-à-vis the Other, the more influence the Self is likely to exert.[406]

Thirdly, in different time periods one component of the Self can be more engaged in terms of frequency of references than the other two Selves: in certain periods, memories of the past play a more important role in identity construction than future goals or current issues; in other periods, it is aspirations for the future that sideline the historical memory or the practicalities of the present. If the engaged component is congruent with the Other, it carries a pivotal role in shaping a state's foreign policy agenda and contributes to the Self achieving influence vis-à-vis the Others. If, however, the engaged component is misaligned with the Other, it decreases and impedes influence of the Self resulting in failed influence and the worsening of relations. The more engaged and congruent the three Selves are with the Other, the more influence the Self exerts on the Other. In other words, the high engagement of congruent components of the Self vis-à-vis the Other increases the chances of the Self to wield influence on the Other.

The three Selves can find themselves in a hierarchical relationship to each other. The identity construction can then be conceptualised as a hierarchical composite of three mutually interacting layers, in which identities are institutionalised to different degrees: the fundamental

[406] In its own perception of its congruence with the Other.

layer is a key narrative matrix and the most sedimented layer of identity construction that is difficult to change - as a rule, it corresponds to the Historical Self; the middle layer consists of concrete demarcations or self-descriptions whose importance varies depending on the context and in relation to particular Others, and it corresponds to the Aspirational Self; the least institutionalised layer is where policies are discussed and agents operate, and it corresponds to the Situational Self. This leads to the sub-argument that the more the most sedimented component of the Self is congruent and engaged with the Other, the more influence the Self is able to exercise and maintain on the Other.

Drawing on the above, internal congruence of the three Selves, their external congruence vis-à-vis the Others, the extent of their engagement, especially of the most sedimented component, enhance the understanding of and correspond to the Self's influence vis-à-vis the Others. The temporal conceptualization of state identity and its attributes of congruence and engagement allow to account for a state's influence. This is captured and represented as *the model of the Composite State Identity*, that the present thesis introduces and applies to the case study of Belarus. The model embraces a temporal complexity of state identity and the dynamics of its qualitative content (measured as the extent of congruence) and quantitative usage (measured as the extent of engagement) to understand the dynamics of its influence. Conceptualising identity as a composite and simultaneously constituted on mutually interacting levels of intersubjective meaning-making helps analyse how change and continuity relate to agency and structure within the same analytical framework and the role of entrepreneurs in it.

The three empirical chapters of the thesis study the interaction of the three Selves of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis its significant Others, the EU and Russia, over three periods of time, to understand Belarus's varying influence, which is manifested in the changed policies of the Other(s) towards the Self. Namely, state identity's components are analysed in terms of their

internal congruence among themselves, their *external congruence* vis-à-vis the Other, and their *engagement* vis-à-vis the Other in different iterations of the Self. According to the arguments developed in the chapter, to change the external policy of the Other or to exert influence on it, state identity of the Self needs to be internally and externally congruent in its three components vis-à-vis a state identity of the Other (measured qualitatively). Also, the engagement of congruent components of state identity contributes to influence on the Other (measured quantitatively by the number of references). Regarding *internal congruence* of state identity, a fuller internal alignment or conceptual fit among core meanings of the components of the Self related to the past, the future, and the present increases internal congruence of the Self and its capacity as the dynamics of influence vis-à-vis external Others. Regarding *external congruence* of state identity, a smaller ideational distance between core meanings of the Self and the Other attached to historical memories, aspirations for the future, and explanation of current events means higher congruence between identities and more possibility for influence. Lastly, the *high engagement* of congruent components of the Self vis-à-vis the Other increases the chances of the Self to exert influence on the Other while *the low engagement* of congruent components of the Self decreases the ability of the Self to influence the Other as well as the high engagement of components of the Self with negative congruence.

To define congruence of Belarus's Self with the Other, certain criteria are used that are related to the Self's temporal dimension of the past, the present, and the future. Every component of Belarus's state identity is represented by references to certain events and ideas that are associated and congruent with the Russian Other, the European Other - or both or neither. For example, Belarus's aspiration to build its own model of state development, authoritarian in nature, aligns with neither the Russian Other nor the European Other. To compare, Belarus's aspirations to remain sovereign and independent and its intention to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy intersects with the goals of the EU and hence with the European Other. The

criteria to assess congruence of the three Selves of Belarus in official identity discourse with the two Significant Others of Russia and the EU are summarised in the table.

Table 3.1. Congruence of Belarus's state identity with Russia and the EU

	Congruence with Russia	*Congruence with the EU*
The Historical Self	Russian roots of Belarus's historical memory such as: • Belarus as part of Tsarist Russia until 1917 • The Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 or the Bolshevik Revolution. • Soviet Belarus as part of the Soviet Union (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic 1922 - 1991). • the Second World War • the Soviet Union	European roots of Belarus's statehood such as: • Polatsk Duchy (the 10th – the 13th centuries).[407] • The Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[408] • The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) • The 1863 uprising against Russia.[409] • The Belarusian People's Republic of 1918.
The Situational Self	• Pragmatic relations devoid of demands for democratic standards, prioritising economic issues over political ones. • Denial of the EU sanction policy. • Insistence on equality and respect towards Belarus's existing politico-economic system.	• Democratisation and liberalisation, rehabilitation and release of political prisoners, international standards in the field of human rights, freedom of the press and of speech, and free and fair elections. • Since 2014, Belarus's role as a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution in Ukraine.
The Aspirational Self	• Belarus's being part of Russia's post-Soviet integration structures.	• Democratised Belarus as a member or in close partnership with the EU.

[407] Polatsk was first mentioned in chronicles in 862. At the 14th century, the Duchy of Polatsk was incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but it preserved its autonomous status until 1504.

[408] The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus, and Samogitia (GDL) existed from 1230s to 1795. It included territories of Belarus and Lithuania throughout the whole period, the territory of Ukraine from the 14th century to 1569, and parts of Russia until the 1530s. The capital was Navahradak until 1323 and then Vilna or Vilnius.

[409] Wilson (2011: 68-69), Rudling (2014: 36-38), Zaprudnik (1993), Silitski & Zaprudnik (2010). The 'mainly Polish' Rebellion of 1863-64 was led by Kastuś Kalinoŭski (1838-64), who is called the first Belarusian national activist (The Kalinoŭski Myth) but not in the modern sense of the word. Kalinoŭski did not represent the modern Belarusian idea and did not think of Belarus as a separate nation. There was no national movement on the lands yet. Belarusians, participated in the rebellion to improve their social conditions.

	• Belarus's integration with Russia within the Union State.	• The multi-vector goal of the foreign policy of Belarus. • Sovereign and independent Belarus. • Belarus's aspiration towards neutrality in the early 1990s and since 2014.

Source: Author

The thesis's argument is supported by the following observations: firstly, state identity is not the only but an important factor to consider, and the research shows how it plays a role. Secondly, state identity leads to influence in a process of mutual constitution, rather than in a cause-effect relationship. In line with an inside-out perspective,[410] congruence and engagement are determined by the analysis of Belarus's official narratives.

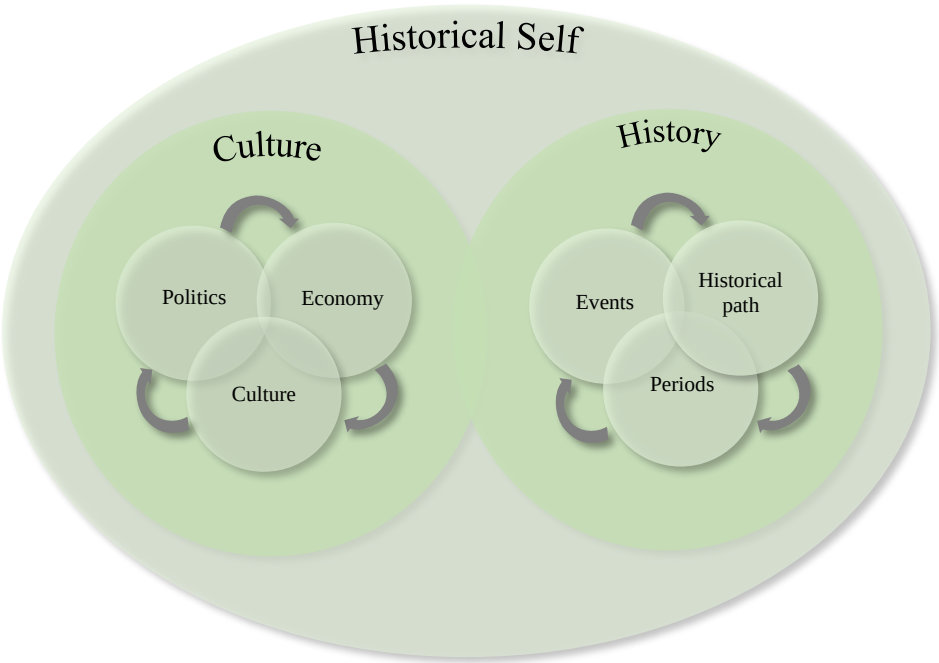
Thereby, *three contributions* to the constructivist research agenda are made. First, the model describes the dynamics behind identity continuity and change filling a gap in capturing why and how state identity changes over time.[411] Second, the model outlines how agents' identity is constituted.[412] The present research offers a delineation of state identity's constitutive parts based on the temporal dimension of the past, the present, and the future: it considers the role that aspirations about the future, memories about the past, and the current domestic and international conditions play in state identity construction. Third, the focus of the research is on agency and its theorising, which counterbalances the predominant orientation on structure.

Thus, state identity is composed of three parts that are constitutive, mutually interacting, intersubjective, and engaged and congruent to different degrees in different time periods. The construction of state identity is a dynamic process involving the interaction of three Selves

[410] Ingebritsen (2006)
[411] Checkel (1998: 339) in Flockhart (2016: 89)
[412] Epstein (2011: 331) in Flockhart (2016: 89)

among themselves and vis-à-vis external Others and to different degrees without complete rejection or adoption of one dimension. The next sections explore the temporal components of state identity in more detail.

The Historical Self



Graph 3.2. Model of the Historical Self

Source: Author

The Historical Self is socially constructed; therefore, it has a selective and malleable nature. At the same time, it is sedimented and stable. As the identity keystone, it connects the past with the present and the future. The Historical Self is conceptualised as consisting of two elements related to the past: cultural meanings and historical events. It is constructed domestically and relationally vis-à-vis the Other, which is incorporated into the domestic construction of the Self. A state's identity cannot be constructed alone but in interaction with a particular Other.[413]

[413] Wendt (1999: 147)

The Other might have disappeared nominally and materially but can still form a discursive relationship with competing national self-images: 'interaction need not involve the co-presence of two actors… it is the relationship between the knowledge each has of the other, not physical colocation, that derives the construction of identity'.[414] Meaningful Others exist both at home and abroad. Either domestic or international context dominates in the construction of state identity, which is nevertheless a product of both, while meanings have no boundary within and outside the state's official borders. The present research focuses on the Self vis-à-vis external Others. It analyses state identity constructed by the elite and treats domestic Others as either incorporated into the dominant state identity discourse or excluded from it and hence reduced to the secondary role. Because the domestic regime in Belarus is non-democratic and has been stable in that quality for several decades, the state identity discourse is considered to be constructed primarily vis-à-vis external Others. Its contestation by domestic Others is assumed to be insignificant.

The Historical Self is the most important component in an identity construction.[415] It is referred to as the keystone of national identity as it helps make sense of the past, illuminate the present, and serve as a basis for aspirations and vision of the future.[416] This Self builds on the collective memory that has a more lasting imprint on how the elite and population view themselves: 'Actors attribute far deeper meanings to the historical battles that define collective identities than to the transient conflicts of daily politics.'[417] Since it has some time effect to it, it shapes generations, and it is more resistant to change. The collective memory can be re-constructed with changing times and needs, and it is also malleable as different identity-building projects can concentrate on different readings of the past.

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[414] Hopf (2002: 290)
[415] Hopf (2002)
[416] Halbwachs (1992), Hilton & Liu (2008), Kammen (1991) in David & Bar-Tal (2009: 369)
[417] Katzenstein (1996: 3)

The collective memory is defined as 'knowledge that is passed on to members of a certain society through social communication channels regarding that society's past'; from that knowledge a given society infers the significance of past events.[418] As such, the collective memory includes everything remembered or forgotten by the nation. However, the collective memory is not an objective history of the past but a story about the past that is biased, selective, and distorted. Though it has some basis in actual events, the collective memory is 'a socially constructed narrative',[419] that may include 'foundational myths' along with 'shared societal beliefs'[420]. The collective memory is constituted by memories of and beliefs about those events as interpreted and re-interpreted by political actors.[421] Though it does not provide an objective history of the past, the story it gives is about the past that is 'functional and relevant to the society's present existence and future aspirations'.[422]

As the collective memory connects the past, the present, and the future, so the carriers of the collective memory that form social groups are also temporally extended and defined. Social groups are 'temporally constituted and enduring communities stretching back into the past and forward into the future'.[423] To perceive a group as an entity or as a cohesive whole, it is necessary to perceive in the first place its temporal continuity.[424] The temporal continuity constitutes an antecedent for the group to be perceived as an entity: 'everyone needs a sense of self-continuity to qualify as a person at all',[425] and "a sense of continuity is a 'constitutive' condition of the coming into being of the self".[426] The basic feature of the Self is that it is 'being experienced as temporally extended' and as 'a singularity that moves across time'.[427] The sense

[418] Connerton (1989), Gillis (1994), Margalit (2002), Zerubavel (1995) in David & Bar-Tal (2009: 368)
[419] David & Bar-Tal (2009: 369)
[420] David & Bar-Tal (2009: 364, 369, 371)
[421] Katzenstein (1996: 2)
[422] David & Bar-Tal (2009: 369)
[423] Sani et al. (2007: 1119)
[424] Campbell (1958), Sani et al. (2005) in Sani et al. (2007)
[425] Cassirer (1923) in Sani et al. (2007: 1119)
[426] Habermas (1991) in Sani et al. (2007: 1119)
[427] James (1890/1981), Neisser (1988) in Sani et al. (2007: 1119)

of the Self 'as diachronically persistent' is grounded on two perceptions: firstly, the Self has a 'deep, inherent essence that remains the same through time', despite obvious changes that the Self sustains in its life-span. Secondly, the other perception concerns a sense that, although the Self is 'fluid and ever-changing, the different phases it goes through during its existence are meaningfully interconnected: they are part of a coherent, intelligible story'.[428]

The collective memory has two main dimensions: a cultural dimension of the continuity of norms and traditions, on the one hand, and a historical dimension of the continuity of historical phases/ages and events, on the other hand.[429] The first dimension means that a collective identity has 'deep, essential cultural traits that have a degree of permanence'.[430] It is concerned with the perceptions that core values, beliefs, customs, habits, mentalities, and inclinations are trans-generationally transmitted within the group and inherited from previous generations. They are expected to be transmitted to future generations. The second dimension is related to the perception that different ages, periods, and events in the history of the group are causally linked to one another, and they form a coherent narrative.

In line with the existing research on perceived collective continuity, in the present thesis, the collective memory of state identity is theorised to be constituted by two dimensions: cultural and historical. The cultural dimension will refer to those values, beliefs, traditions, customs, practices that draw on the past, while the historical dimension will be related to past events, periods, ages, and persons. These subcomponents of state identity are not defined in the present research due to time constraints but suggest a basis for future research on state identity as the dynamics of influence. The further research can also embrace the topic of the collective memory found in commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices.[431]

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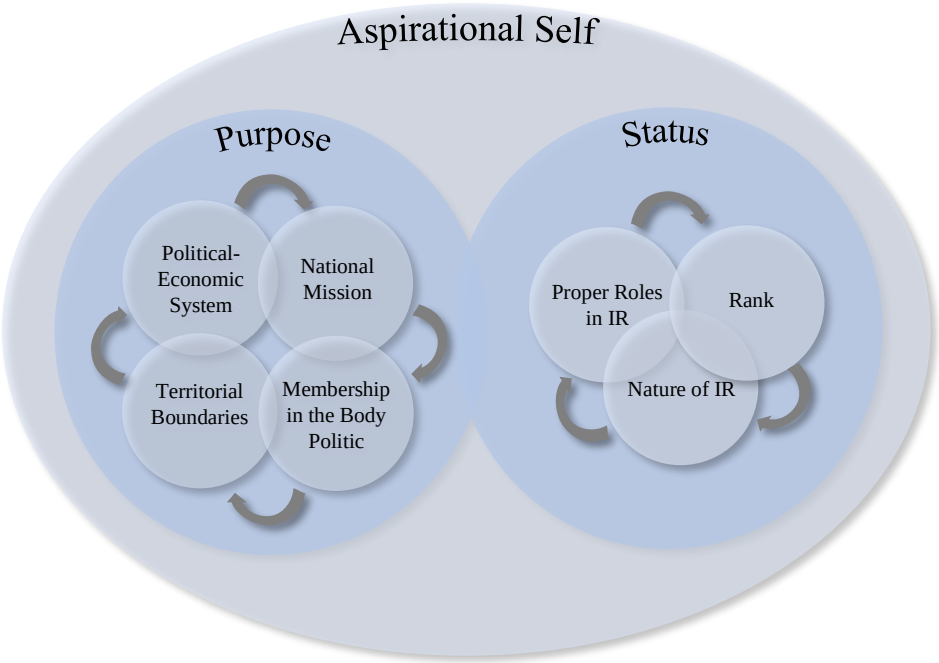
[428] Sani et al. (2007: 1120) based on Chandler et al. (2003)
[429] Based on Sani et al. (2007)
[430] Sani et al. (2007: 1120)
[431] David & Bar-Tal (2009: 368-369)

The Aspirational Self



Graph 3.3. Model of the Aspirational Self

Source: Author

The Aspirational Self is more open to change, and more malleable than the Historical Self as it is concerned with future goals and aspirations. It describes what the Self 'admires and strives to become'.[432] The Aspirational Self is constituted by a sense of common vision of the Self in the future and consists of two pillars: a state's political purpose and ideas about its international status. It entails historical judgements about the state's past domestic and international experiences as well as assessment of the present conditions. It reflects interpretation of cultural meanings and political and social events that a given nation-state regards as good and just.

Aspirations play an important role in the creation of national identities and interests according to Clunan (2009). Building on social and cognitive psychology, she posits that identity is

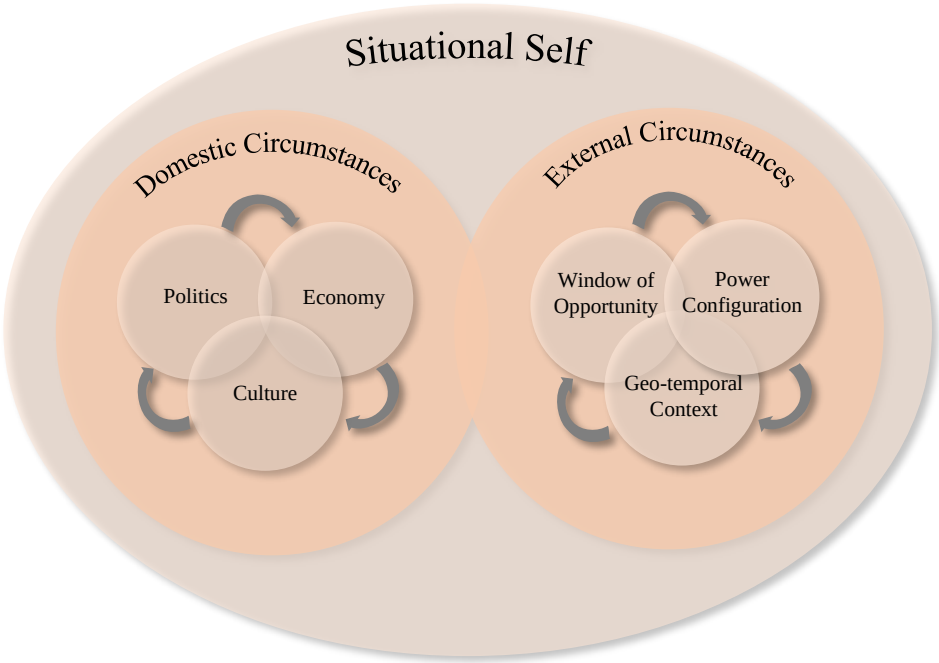
[432] Flockhart (2006: 94)

'largely a product of people's efforts to enhance their self-esteem and their understanding of themselves and the world'.[433] Motivated by the human need for collective self-esteem, the political elite develop aspirations for the future which they base firstly on common historical memories, specifically on dominant memories of the high and low points in their country's past. Aspirations condition which historical legacies are incorporated into national identities and interests, and which are discarded. The present situation that the political elite face is also considered as well as the role of human agency in order to explain how the combination of the political elite perceptions of the past and the present shape current national identity and interests. 'Identity formation is a process that is shaped by past and present and by human reason - it is not fixed for all time, and it can be reduced mono-causally neither to historical traditions and culture nor to present conditions'.[434]

The Aspirational Self of state identity consists of two pillars: a state's political purpose or beliefs about a state's appropriate system of governance and mission as well as a state's international status or its international rank, rights, and obligations.[435] A state's political purpose is derived from elite views on the proper form of the politico-economic system, territorial boundaries, membership criteria, and the national mission. A state's status is conditioned by elite preferences regarding a state's role, rank, and the nature of international relations.

[433] Clunan (2009: 12)
[434] Clunan (2009: 8)
[435] Clunan (2009)

The Situational Self



Graph 3.4. Model of the Situational Self

Source: Author

The Situational Self is the least institutionalised component of identity and the most responsive to change. It is related to the current context and therefore equally malleable to the developments in the current domestic and international environment of politics, economy, and culture. As the most responsive to the context with challenges and opportunities that emerge on a daily basis, the Situational Self encompasses the everyday process of identity constitution. This Self shows what a state thinks about its identity at any given point in time interacting with different actors in different issue areas, but also interacting with the two other Selves.

The Situational Self explains the present. It is constituted by practicalities of the present and their explanations. The Self works in a real time mode and represents a reaction to changes that take place 'now'. The legitimacy of the past and aspirations of the future restrict and impact

how the present is explained. And vice versa, the practicalities and needs of the present propel the Self to re-align its other components to the new interpretation of events and cultural meanings or not. In the latter case, the explanations provided for the present events contradict and differ to understandings and interpretation of those events by the other two Selves of identity construction, the Historical Self and/or the Aspirational Self. For example, such was the case of Belarus's diplomatic conflict with the EU and the US in 1998, called the Drozdy conflict: the Belarusian authorities violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and intruded on the territories of the residencies of foreign ambassadors in the Drozdy diplomatic compound on the outskirts of Minsk, which led to the departure of the EU and US ambassadors from Belarus in June 1998 and travel restrictions on the Belarusian state officials. The Drozdy conflict corresponded to Belarus's situational needs but contradicted its aspirational goals and did not lead to their realignment.

The three elements of state identity are mutually interacting to varying extent. The Situational Self is agile and responds to challenges but is conditioned by collective memories of the Historical Self and objectives for the future of the Aspirational Self. The dynamics between the Selves is such that one Self can be actualised in terms of congruence and frequency of engagement more than other Selves in a particular context and time period. The three parts of identity play different roles in different situations as one Self could have more bearings in certain situations than the two other Selves.

To conclude, in understanding Belarus's influence on larger actors, the analysis relies on the model of the Composite State Identity, which represents a state identity conceptualised in innovative way. It involves re-construction of Belarus's state identity in the state's official discourse, the identification of its discursive elements related to the past, the present, and the future, as well as their individual congruence and engagement, especially of congruent components, with the Other. The internal congruence of the three components of state identity

among themselves as well as their individual contribution to identity construction is measured too. The findings augment the argument of a small state's ideational influence since, firstly, the more internally congruent among themselves, secondly, the more externally congruent vis-à-vis the Other, and, thirdly, the more engaged the congruent components of state identity are, the more influence a state wields.

Before embarking on the empirical analysis of Belarus's post-independence state identity discourse, methodological considerations of the research are needed to be addressed first.

3.4. Theoretical premises and methodological considerations

This section delineates the empirical scope of the study and specifies the methodological, ontological, and epistemological premises of the research.[436] The starting point is methodology or the logic of enquiry. This refers to the presuppositions concerning ontology and epistemology which inform the methods or the tools through which the research design and its logic are enacted.[437] The methods can be informed by different methodological presuppositions. As such, they can be imbued with different epistemological and ontological commitments about the nature of knowledge (what is regarded as appropriate knowledge) and how it can be obtained and examined, as well as assumptions about the nature of social reality and the phenomena to be investigated.[438]

The present study follows a qualitative research strategy, and its *epistemological position* is described as *interpretivist/interpretive*. It focuses on the understanding of the social world by studying the interpretation of that reality by its participants: 'qualitative researchers are involved in interpretations of the interpretations of those on whom they conduct their

[436] On ontology and methodology see Halperin & Heath (2017: 26) and Schwartz-Shea &Yanow (2012: 4).
[437] Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 4)
[438] Morgan & Smircich (1980: 491) in Bryman (2012: 619)

investigations'.[439] Rather than believing in a singular 'truth', the approach assumes the existence of multiple, intersubjectively constructed 'truths' about a particular event.[440] Scholars utilizing the interpretivist epistemology avoid 'making truth claims that are supposed to represent an objective reality' and restrict the generalizability of the claims of their findings.[441] Their research is anchored in the language of constitutive construction and constitutive meaning-making, instead of hypotheses testing, evidence, and variables.[442] It is closer to post-positivism and seeks answers to the 'how possible' question and not to 'why' questions, speaks about co-constitution and not about causality, and discards hypothesis testing as inappropriate. The differences, which are generated by distinct epistemological positions, are not rigidly applied, and causal answers to constitutive questions are possible and vice versa.[443] The *ontological position of the present study is constructionist/constructivist,* which means that the social reality is considered to be the outcome of the interaction between individuals and cannot be separated from them as they are involved in its construction.[444] The understanding of the social reality 'can only be accessed, or co-generated, through interactions between the researcher and the researched as they seek to interpret' the social reality and make the interpretations legible to each other.[445] This thesis is informed by the constructivist-interpretivist methodological approach, and it recognised an interpretive research as a distinct logic of inquiry.

The meta-theoretical positioning of the thesis is to understand rather than to explain, and to engage in a constitutive rather than a causal analysis. *Constitutive analysis* seeks understanding of how actors within a specific setting apprehend their context, either explicitly or implicitly,

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[439] Bryman (2012: 381)
[440] Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 4)
[441] Houghton (2007: 36)
[442] The positivist end of the constructivist spectrum in Checkel (1997, 2006); Lupovici (2009) in Feklyunina (2018: 15)
[443] Feklyunina (2018: 15)
[444] Bryman (2012: 380)
[445] Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 4)

and why they behave in particular ways.[446] It is about the relationship of constitutive construction: how things are made up or constituted and therefore endowed with meaning. "The 'why' takes the form of 'constitutive' causality, which engages with how humans conceive of their worlds, the language they use to describe them and other elements constituting those social worlds, which make possible or impossible the interactions they pursue."[447] Constitutive causality seeks to explain events in terms of actors' understandings of their own contexts, rather than in terms of a more mechanistic causality, tracing measures of cause and effect and producing abstract accounts of events.

Being a qualitative study, this research approaches theory as an outcome of an investigation, when theory emerges out of the collection and analysis of data, rather than something that precedes it. It is acknowledged that *external validity*, as the criteria that establishes and assesses the quality of qualitative analysis, is problematic since this thesis employs a single case study and small samples, and its findings might not be applicable across social settings. Indeed, the research does not aim to develop generalizable answers to the empirical puzzle but rather to provide *nuanced understandings of identity narratives* sustaining this puzzle. *Internal validity* is a strength of qualitative research, including this one, since a detailed investigation of the social reality ensures high congruence between the researcher's observations and the concepts and theoretical ideas s/he develops. The method compromises *reliability* of the research: unless the findings are the same and the methods produce the same results and from different paths, the research fails *equifinality reliability test*.[448] As there are similar problems with *external and internal reliability* of qualitative research,[449] alternative criteria of *trustworthiness* and

[446] Schwartz-Shea &Yanow (2012); Klotz & Lynch (2007)
[447] Schwartz-Shea &Yanow (2012: 52)
[448] Hopf & Allan (2016: 39-40)
[449] 'External reliability is the degree to which a study can be replicated which is difficult since it is impossible to suspend a social setting and circumstances of the initial investigation; internal reliability is the degree to which members of the research team agree about what they see and hear' (Bryman 2012: 389-393).

authenticity can be employed.[450] The present research supports the argument that the results are valid and reliable to the extent to which they are plausible to other researchers: in other words, 'if the researcher explains how s/he came up with the analysis in a way that the reader can make sense of'.[451]

Interpretive research subsumes different research methods to qualitative data analysis. The present research applies a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis: *primary and secondary document review, interviewing, discourse analysis,* and *quantitative content analysis*. Discourse analysis allows to account for the role of language in the process of social construction. It is particularly appropriate to constructivist research since it captures 'the creation of meanings and accompanying processes of communication'. [452] Content analysis is equally important in order to locate political actors' understandings of social reality in relevant 'cultural and historical' contexts.[453] Concerned with the study of text itself but also sensitive to the context in which texts are produced, content analysis allows for an interpretive form of analysis which uncovers (hidden or underlying) meanings, motives, and purposes in textual content:[454] 'interpretive research focuses on context-specific meanings, rather than seeking generalized meaning abstracted from particular contexts'.[455] Specifically, the analysis in the present research is concerned with identifying representations of state identity in 'influential public discourses'[456] of the elite and correlating them with the identified cases of Belarus's foreign policy influence. The other method of data collection that the present research draws on is *interviewing* which allows to obtain detailed, often specialized information from a single

[450] Bryman (2012: 390)
[451] Halperin & Health (2017: 355)
[452] Feklyunina (2018: 16)
[453] Feklyunina (2018: 17)
[454] Halperin & Health (2017: 346)
[455] Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012: 23)
[456] Halperin & Health (2017: 336)

individual or small number of individuals.[457] Interviews help gain deep knowledge and understanding about what the person in question thinks.

The present research argues that Belarus's influence on external actors' policies (directed towards Belarus) can be understood by state identity discursive practices employed by its state elite. Belarus's influence is constituted by state identity: it is about a corresponding change in terms of how Belarus speaks about itself, how its state identity is constructed, and the policy changes that take place in its relations vis-à-vis the Significant Others, the EU and Russia.[458] In case a change in identity narrative of a smaller state takes place at the same time as a change in a larger state's policy towards that small state, the thesis catalogues this as an instance of small state influence constituted by its state identity. As a (re)source of influence, state identity is conceptualised as having a temporal dimension and two attributes of congruence and engagement. Specific identity configurations are assumed to change the outcome of Belarus's external engagement with the Others. The analysis of Belarus's foreign policy influence consists in identification of the discursive elements of state identity related to the past, the present, and the future and their patterns of congruence and engagement vis-à-vis the Other. Congruence means a conceptual fit or an ideational distance between core meanings of identities of the Self and the Other. Engagement means the frequency of their usage in official discourse. Before the analysis is carried out, certain events and elite' narratives that accompany them are singled out that lie at the basis of Belarus's attempts at influence.

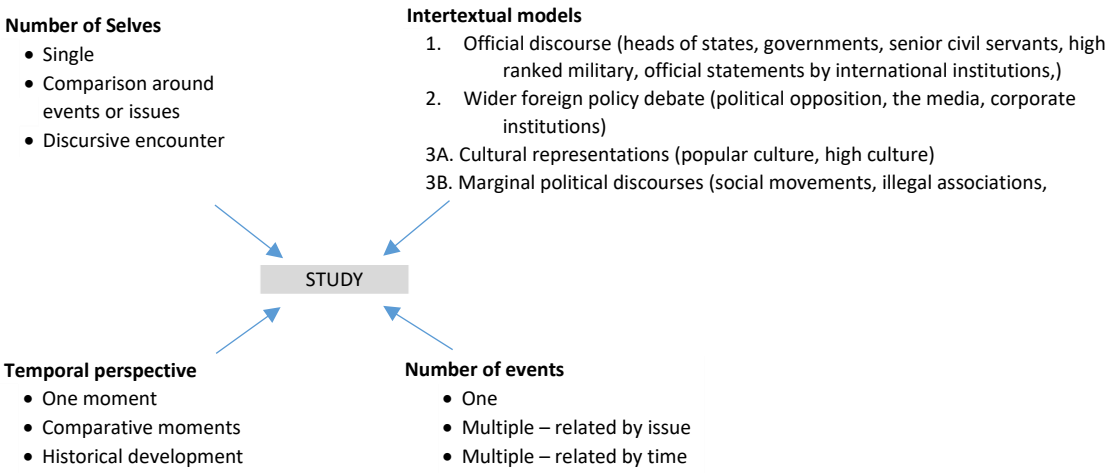
3.5. Research Design

[457] Halperin & Heath (2017: 285-312)
[458] Significant Others are defined as the countries with which the Self compares itself; the present research focuses on two Significant Others, Russia and the EU.

The present thesis adopts a poststructuralist research design introduced by Hansen (2006).[459] It involves making choices along four dimensions that structure the analytical focus: intertextuality, the number of Selves, the number of events, and the temporal perspective. The first choice concerns intertextual analysis or the size of the 'shared textual space' under analysis:[460] whether to study official foreign policy discourse or expand the scope to include the political opposition, the media, and the marginal political discourses of social movements, illegal associations, academics, and non-governmental organisations. Frequently, foreign policy analysis draws on 'policy texts which stipulate official policy or chronicle its parliamentary or bureaucratic genesis and implementation', but a focus could be expanded to a wider set of actors and texts.[461] The second choice concerns the number of Selves whose foreign policy discourse to study. The last two choices are about focusing on either one particular moment in history or a longer historical development, and on the number of issues or events that are put under analysis. Finally, one needs to decide which material to select as the object of analysis. The intertextual models and the three additional dimensions form the basic structure of Hansen's research design. The advantage of the design is that it entails a comparative dimension, and it helps study the articulation of foreign policy by a wide set of actors within the broader conception of political debate, across different Selves and vis-à-vis different Others, over several moments in time, and through a series of events within these moments.

Figure 3.1. Hansen's research design

[459] Hansen (2006)
[460] Hansen (2006: 49)
[461] Hansen (2006: 59)



Source: Hansen (2006: 57, 72)

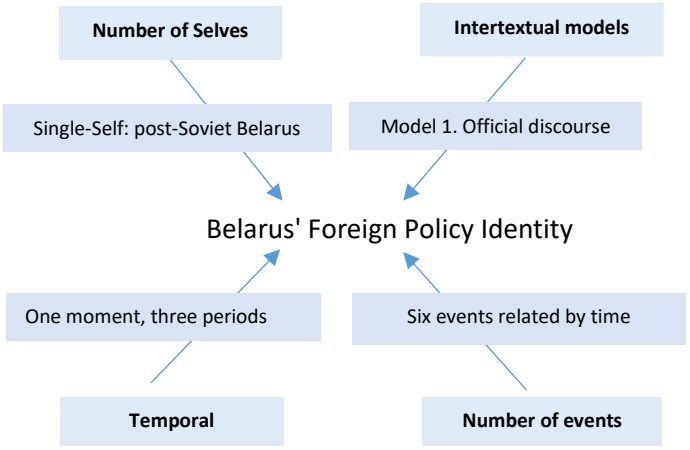
The present research analyses Belarus's foreign policy within the intertextual model of the official discourse since the goal is to investigate official state identity construction and its influence on external Others. The analytical focus on official discourse is carried out at the expense of the political opposition, the alternative media, and marginal discourses. The choice is influenced by political and analytical salience since other discourses have had less influence on the official discourse of non-democratic Belarus in the analysed years of Lukashenko's rule. Therefore, firstly, the research centres on political leaders with official authority to sanction the foreign policies pursued, and secondly, on officials with central roles in executing these policies, such as high-ranking military staff, senior civil servants, including diplomats and mediators, and heads of international institutions. The research engages the texts produced by these actors, namely speeches, political debates, interviews, and news articles.[462]

[462] Hansen (2006: 60): Besides investigation of the identity construction within official discourse, the goal can be expanded to include analysis of the way in which intertextual links stabilise the discourse, and, if possible, to examine how official discourse 'encounters criticism'. Intertextual links can be identified when they are explicitly made by political leaders or secondary sources can argue them, 'thereby creating a story of intertextual influence which further heightens the intertextual salience of the text quoted'. Also, intertextual references can be made either in support of a proposed policy or in response to critical events or contestations of the official policy.

Regarding the other dimensions of the research design, the thesis studies a single Self - Belarus's state identity - within the intertextual model of official discourse. The number of Selves whose foreign policy discourse is analysed is singular, although the Self is conceptualised as constituted by three components. The thesis addresses one particular moment as its temporal perspective. Namely, the political development of independent Belarus in its post-Soviet period is defined as one moment but analysed through three 'sub-moments' or periods, characterized by subtle alterations in official foreign policy discourse. The present study addresses a certain number of events within that particular moment and located across a historical span of three decades of post-Soviet Belarus. Those events are selected which represent the attempts at influence of Belarus on Russia and the EU.

Two cases of Belarus's influence within each of the three periods are selected which allows to organise and analyse the official discourse systematically and meticulously. The events surrounding them are located not far apart in time to make a comparison possible and analytically informative. Multiple events studies help trace the evolution of foreign policy discourse and state identity over time and identify patterns of transformation, reproduction, discursive changes, and repetitions. Thus, the present research is defined as a single-Self study of one moment and multiple events related to the issue of influence and as reflected in official state identity discourse.

Figure 3.2. Thesis's research design



Source: author based on the model by Hansen (2006)

The analysis of the collected data is carried out in a qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo, in four stages. The goal is to analyse the elite's narratives in terms of state identity and its two attributes of congruence and engagement. First, the blocks of narratives, one sentence or a paragraph, are singled out; they contain the relevant concept and are related to the historical memory, situational issues, or aspirations for the future of Belarus's state identity. In the later stages of the research, the conclusion is reached that all sentences of the narratives should be allocated to one of the three components of state identity, to the Historical, Aspirational, or Situational Selves.

Second, the categories of state identity are inductively recovered, and the blocks of narratives are coded with them. The coding is *context-oriented* that allows to assess qualitatively whether phrases like the 'EU' are mentioned in a positive or negative light and whether there is congruence or not of the Self with the Other. Some coding is straightforward in terms of congruence like the word 'brotherly' is a code for 'brotherly Russia', which is congruent with the Russian Other. In other cases, it is necessary in the analysis to go back to historical, aspirational, and situational narratives to assess qualitatively whether phrases like the 'EU' are mentioned positively or negatively.

Several points are to be mentioned: one general category is assigned to similar but slightly different in terms of grammar and meaning subcategories; in some cases, to determine its congruence, a category is combined with an explanatory word; also, due to the specificity of the subsequent analysis in WordCloud NVivo, compound categories consisting of several words are combined into one word without a space. For example, the sentence 'Life has fully confirmed the correctness of the statement that a multi-vector foreign policy is the only correct one for Belarus, which is located at the crossroads of Europe and has an open economy' is coded as 'multi-vectoredness', the concept that relates in the context of this sentence to the Situational Self of Belarus's state identity.

Third, the coded categories are analysed quantitatively in word frequency query WordCloud in NVivo in order to identify the most frequently used categories and thereby determine their level of engagement in official discourse: the programme selects 1000 most frequently used categories, consisting of both single words and a group of words.

Fourth, the most frequent categories are analysed qualitatively in terms of their congruence or its lack vis-à-vis the Others. For example, the engagement of the Historical Self of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the European Other post-1994 was not only low, but its congruence was negative since European historical roots of Belarus, when mentioned at all, were denounced.

The analysis involves a certain procedure of data collection, which starts with selection of the material germane to the research question and proceeds with the analysis of identity categories. Some categories are predefined and some categories are inductively recovered out of the data. The recording units are documents in their entirety, which allows consistent assignment of the text segment to a single category. When a 'paragraph embraces too many ideas for there to be consistent assignment of the text segment to a single category', it is cross-referenced to multiple

categories.[463] Data collection is a two-stage coding process because the analysis of categories is accompanied by identification of their levels of congruence and engagement with the Other. The goal to catalogue all subcategories of state identity is not pursued, and a consistent set of coding categories is not provided.[464] The researcher works as an analyst and an interpreter to make choices about which identity categories matter and to what temporal components they are related. The analysis of qualitative data is conceptual: it involves identifying and describing categories and their relationships to each other and relies on quotations and narrative as the primary modes of presentation. Next, the research design of the investigation is explicated.

Text Selection

This thesis operationalises narratives of state identity as a sample of President Lukashenko's statements, speeches, and interviews as well as those of other political elite in power in the 1991-1994 period. It is argued that political identities and political decision-making are constrained by the intersubjective shared stock of knowledge, and the elite make sense of the world with categories and values drawn from it.[465] Identity narratives are produced by the elite, and they provide access to identity narratives which are reflected among the masses and to widely shared ideas which structure mass common sense. Nevertheless, the elite play a significant role in constructing discourses to their political purposes, especially so in the case of non-democratic states. To reconcile the two approaches, the research believes that rationality and normative influence or normative change are intimately connected, and under the logic of appropriateness all social constructions, including identity, drive behaviour as well as self-interest and agent choice.[466] In many processes of social construction, 'actors strategize

[463] Halperin & Heath (2017: 348)
[464] Hopf & Allan (2016: 39-40)
[465] Hopf & Allan (2016)
[466] Finnemor & Sikkink (1998: 888, 913)

rationally to reconfigure preferences, identities, or social context'.[467] Though collective identities are always contested, some of them are dominant. The analysis is based on a set of texts by authorized speakers of a dominant discourse. The dominant discourse is propagated by the state and pertains, inter alia, to the public speeches of the political elite.

The study of state identity begins within states though it is also shaped by interactions with other societies and international politics. The present research recovers the central identities that circulated in official foreign policy discourse in the years 1991-2017. It builds on the research design that gives epistemological and methodological priority to the study of primary texts such as presidential statements, speeches, and interviews. However, secondary sources, such as discussions of primary texts by analysts, journalists, and academics are also included in the analysis. Besides, the research integrates the researcher's own interviews, which can be used as an additional qualitative method to discourse analysis.

The primary textual material is selected based on the following criteria: it is widely read and attended to by politicians, the public, and by governments of other states, and it is articulated by a formal political authority that defines a political position.[468] Some types of text like the State of the Nation Address by Belarus's president, meet all three criteria. Other types of text score high on one criterion but low on the other, such as legislation, resolutions, and statements. These texts are often not very explicit in their articulation of identities and are therefore coupled with texts more directly articulating identities to produce a 'full discourse'.[469] For media texts, the third criterion of formal political authority is irrelevant except the cases when the government controls the newsagent. A newspaper or a media channel with national distribution meets the criterion of media texts widely read and responded to.

[467] Finnemor & Sikkink (1998: 888)
[468] Hansen (2006: 85)
[469] Hansen (2006: 85)

The primary textual material for the present research has been selected within the intertextual model of official discourse. Therefore, firstly, it centres on texts by political leaders with official authority to sanction the foreign policies pursued. Within the official discourse in Belarus this role belongs chiefly to the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko. He delivers annual recurring speeches called 'The State of the Nation Address' or 'The Address of the President to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly'.[470] Their analysis is complemented by the analysis of the President's New Year TV addresses to the Belarusian population and his interviews delivered to different Belarusian, Russian, and Western media channels, such as 'The Independent', BBC, the Russian TV company 'Russia Today', and the Russian channel 'Russia 24'. The official documents of Belarus's national security and military doctrines are also analysed, such as the Concepts of National Security of the Republic of Belarus of 2001 and 2010, the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Belarus of 1992, 2002, 2016, the laws on Defence (1992, amended in 2002), on the Armed Forces (adopted in 1992 and amended in 1996, 1999, 2002), and the Concept of Territorial Defence of 2001.

Secondly, the present study analyses the texts (speeches, statements, interviews, articles) produced by Belarusian officials with central roles in executing foreign policies, such as prime ministers[471], ministers of foreign affairs[472], high-ranking military staff, senior civil servants, including diplomats and mediators, and heads of international institutions. Thirdly, the research embraces the opinion papers by the think tanks and researchers whose political position is closely aligned with the official government position, such as the Minsk Dialogue Initiative.

[470] Selected from 1996 until 2017, there are 22 the State of the Nation Addresses to be analysed. Their transcripts of the years 2006-2017 are available at the portal 'www.pravo.by' and of the years 2001-2005 at the portal 'www.president.gov.by'.

[471] With terms in office: Andrei Kobyakov (2014-2018), Mikhail Myasnikovich (2010-2014); Syarhei Sidorski (2003-2010); Henadz Navitski (2001-2003); Syarhei Linh (1996-200), Mikhail Chyhir (1994-1996); and Vyachaslaw Kebich (1991-1994)

[472] With terms in office: Vladimir Makei (2012-present), Syarhei Martynau (2003-2012), Mikhail Khvastou (2000-2003), Ural Latypau (1998-2000), Ivan Antanovich (1997-98), Uladzimir Syanko (1994-97), Pyotr Krauchanka (1990-94)

Table 3.2. The outline of textual material for analysis

	Temporal location
Material	*Time of study*
Primary (analysed qualitatively and quantitively in NVivo and WordCloud)	The annual addresses of the President, Alyaskdanr Lukashenko, to the Belarusian People and the Parliament, the National Assembly were analysed over 22 years in the period from 1996 to 2017. On average, each speech was around 15,000 words in length. The annual addresses were complemented by other available sources of the Presidential discourse, such as interviews, press conferences with journalists, and speeches at events, such as ceremonial meetings, congratulations, summits, and meetings with diplomatic institutions.
Primary (analysed qualitatively for the historical period layout)	National security and military doctrines. High-ranking officials' statements, interviews at home and abroad. Opinion papers of journalists closely aligned with the government position. Own interviews with government officials.
Secondary	Discussions of primary texts by analysts, journalists, and academics.

Source: author

Periods and Landmark Events

The present research focuses on the post-Soviet period of Belarusian foreign policy through the lens of its relations with Russia and the European Union. Based on their differences, the post-1991 foreign policy of Belarus is delineated into three periods. The periods rather than case studies were selected to provide an organic, historical reading of Belarus's foreign policy not disrupted by case studies' temporal and conceptual constraints. The periods that feed in the subsequent empirical chapters secure a holistic understanding of Belarus's foreign policy evolution.

The first half of the 1990s was the period of Belarus's 'spontaneous search' of itself and its place in the world.[473] The parliament of the republic proclaimed the sovereignty of Belarus on the 27th of July 1990 by issuing the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). In the referendum on the future of the Soviet Union, held on the 17th of March 1991, nearly 83 percent of Belarusians voted in favour of upholding the USSR.[474] Five months later, on the 25th of August 1991, Belarus declared independence (the vote to do so was almost unanimous with only one parliamentarian against) and changed its name to the Republic of Belarus. The focus of the political elite was directed towards an internal struggle for power and culminated in the adoption of a new constitution, the introduction of the post of presidency, and the ascendance to power of Alexander Lukashenko in July 1994.

In the second half of the 1990s, Belarus was actively engaged in integration projects with Russia at the expense of faltering relations with the EU. Since 1993, Belarus's foreign policy had been directed predominantly towards military-political alliance and economic integration with Russia in the frameworks of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Russia-Belarus Union State, the key milestone events of the period. The official discourse reasserted Belarus's affinity with Russia and the intention to be in a union with Russia rather than with the EU. If, in the beginning, Belarus considered the option of a closer cooperation with the EU and potential membership, it went for the 'safer' option of closer integration with Russia in the end. Described as the closest ally of Russia, Belarus participated in multiple integration projects on the post-Soviet space, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Belarus's political system changed significantly in this period with the turn towards a more authoritarian form of government in the wake of Lukashenko's 'reforms', which constituted greater alignment with Russia.

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[473] Danilov & Rotman (2018)
[474] Mihalisko (1997: 242)

The second period captures the 2000s when, in the official discourse, Belarus moved in the direction of a multi-vector foreign policy and became more defensive of its sovereignty, especially after Russia suggested an incorporation of Belarus. Multi-vector policies are explained to be those of cooperation and co-habitation with all regional powers. The phenomenon of 'multi-vector' foreign policies of smaller states is observable in the context of competing regional powers, like Russia, the EU and to an increasing extent China. Multi-vector states bargain with competing external actors over the terms of cooperation: on some occasions, they accommodate the demands of a more powerful actor in order to alleviate external pressure; on other occasions, they maneuver between competing regional actors in order to negotiate more favourable deals.[475] At the same time, in the 2000s, Belarus further pursued military-political and economic integration with Russia and other post-Soviet states resulting in the 2010 Eurasian Customs Union and the 2012 Eurasian Economic Space.

The third period covers the 2010s when Belarus's foreign policy set the priority towards 'situational neutrality'[476] after the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict.[477] Belarus also continued the policy of maneuvering between Russia and the EU against the background context of the sharp deterioration in relations between Russia and the West. This period also marks Belarus's participation in the further integration project with Russia and other post-Soviet states, namely the 2015 Eurasian Economic Union, and more active involvement in the 2008 European Union's Eastern Partnership Initiative. In this period, Belarus searched for ways to preserve (foreign policy) independence from Russia.

[475] Gnedina (2015: 1009)
[476] Melyantsou (2017)
[477] Rozanov (1995:194): The principle of neutrality and the intention to be free of nuclear weapons formed the foundation of the security policy of the Republic of Belarus that was introduced in the Declaration of State Sovereignty on 27 July 1990. The principle was confirmed in the constitution adopted by the legislative body of government, the Belarusian Supreme Soviet, on 15 March 1994.

3.6. Conclusion

To answer its central research question '*What has made it possible for Belarus, a small European state, to wield foreign policy influence on both Russia and the EU?*', the thesis adopts social constructivism as its conceptual and theoretical framework. The concept of 'state identity' that social constructivism problematises, helps approach the phenomenon of a small state's influence on larger actors. Thereby, the focus of the research is on immaterial, ideational resources that small states like Belarus draw on to achieve their foreign policy objectives. Small states' ruling elite construct more favourable identities in their relations with larger states to overcome the constraints of material disadvantage and to change the outcome of policies of external actors directed towards smaller states. Building on the argument that state identities constitute influence, the thesis traces the cases of Belarus's influence and its connection to state identity development and change. At the heart of this theoretical framing lies the model of Composite State Identity that the thesis develops in order to examine and understand the dynamics of Belarus's influence. Having a temporal nature, it is comprised of three components related to the past, the present, and the future. The thesis argues that it is internal congruence of the three components of state identity among themselves, external congruence of the three components of state identity vis-à-vis the Other, and the level of their engagement vis-à-vis the Other, especially the engagement of those components which are externally congruent, ensures influence that a (smaller) state successfully wields. Guided by an interpretive-constructivist methodology, the meta-theoretical positioning to understand by engaging in constitutive analysis, and supplied with the model, which allows to understand influence of a small state by the means of its state identity, the dissertation applies the knowledge to the empirical cases of Belarus's varying influence on Russia and the EU in the three time periods of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, which are spread over the next three empirical chapters.

Chapter 4. Belarus's Foreign Policy in the First Decade of Independence

4.1. Introduction

The chapter examines the cases of Belarus's influence,[478] or the lack thereof, vis-à-vis Russia and the EU in the 1990s through the lens of state identity. Belarus's influence on Russia consisted in monetary assistance to Belarus in the form of Russian energy subsidies and macroeconomic assistance,[479] and also in political support. Belarus's lack of influence on the EU consisted in the failed contractual relationship with the EU as a legal basis for cooperation and Belarus's inability to retain the achieved level in bilateral relations in the second half of the 1990s.[480]

The chapter is structured in two sections. The first section addresses the historical context of the period, encompassing the events in Belarus's relations with Russia and the EU in the 1990s and the cases of Belarus's influence identified in the existing literature. The second section analyses Belarus's discursive practices related to its state identity construction. The three Selves of state identity – the Historical, the Situational, and the Aspirational Selves – are used as analytical tools throughout the chapter. They are analysed using the theoretical and methodological framework laid out in chapter 3. The aim is to understand how different iterations of the Self were addressed, namely, to determine internal congruence of Belarus's state identity components, their external congruence vis-à-vis the Other, the extent of their

[478] To recall, the present research defines influence as a discursive ability to intentionally change the outcome of a policy of an external actor. Influence can be determined through two indicators of goal achievement and resistance. Belarus's foreign policy was the exercise of instrumental rationality on the part of state elites as they used state identity purposively to achieve their preferences vis-à-vis larger actors.
[479] Belarus is accused of being a parasitise on Russia's subsidies.
[480] Belarus is the only member of the former Soviet Union that does not have a contractual relationship with the EU.

engagement, especially the congruent ones, vis-à-vis the Other, and to decide which component of state identity received more attention and was dominant, if any.

4.2. Historical Context of the Period: the 1990s

4.2.1. Belarus-EU Relations

Belarus-Europe relations initially developed successfully in 1991-1995. The parties signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1995 and the Interim Trade Agreement in 1996. Belarus was included into the European Generalised System of Preferences - preferential trade regime - in 1993. In 1992-1993, Belarus established relations with the CSCE (later the OSCE) and NATO's North Atlantic Cooperation Council (later the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council) and applied for membership in the Council of Europe. Also, Belarus disposed of its nuclear weapons inherited from the USSR, and that was welcomed by the West. Belarus had the fourth largest nuclear weapons force in the Soviet Union and was the deployment site for around five percent of all Soviet military forces, which occupied ten percent of the territory. According to Western media opinion, Belarus was to be praised for its social stability 'among the debris left after the collapse of the Soviet Union'.[481] It undertook reforms of 'soft, evolutionary character'.[482] Belarus's pro-Russian geopolitical orientation, its pursuit of integration, and restoration of former economic links were explained by the centuries of common history. The pro-Russian foreign policy helped maintain Belarus's socially oriented economy: state policies of free education and healthcare, as well as preservation of social guarantees and payments remained the leading principles of post-Soviet Belarus.[483]

[481] Van-Berst (1994)
[482] Van-Berst (1994)
[483] Bekus (2014: 55)

From 1996 to 1998, Belarus-EU relations transitioned from mutual estrangement to escalation and open hostility.[484] After coming to power in July 1994, President Lukashenko started the process of side-lining and silencing the opposition: the state media was censored, independent newspapers were closed, and opposition activists faced significant harassment from the police and security services. The first controversial referendum in 1995 on constitutional amendments made Russian another official language, replaced the Belarusian national flag and coat of arms with Soviet prototypes, approved the actions of the President aimed at economic integration with Russia, and gave him the power to dissolve the parliament.[485] The President further consolidated his power: he imposed a strict centralized system of economic control and prevented the emergence of oligarchs by prosecuting and jailing heads of state and private enterprises.[486] Belarus became unique among post-Soviet states in that the development of political democratisation and economic liberalisation resulted in the de-composition of both: a backslide to authoritarianism took place parallel to the de-liberalisation of economy towards the sustenance of state-owned enterprises.[487]

As a result of the second constitutional referendum in November 1996, the uncompliant parliament (the unicameral Supreme Soviet) that pushed for Lukashenko's impeachment was dissolved. In addition, the official count gave 70 percent in favour of a new version of the constitution offered by the President. Accordingly, Lukashenko's term in office was extended by two years (to 2001 rather than 1999), he was permitted to issue decrees with the force of law, higher than parliament's laws, and to appoint half the members of the Constitutional Court and the Central Election Commission, eight out of sixty members of the newly created upper

[484] Guicherd (2002: 319)
[485] 'Do you agree with the necessity of the introduction of changes into the acting Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, which provide for early termination of the plenary powers of the Supreme Soviet by President of the Republic of Belarus in the case of systematic or gross violations of the Constitution?'
[486] Way (2015. A: 140): 'In the mid-2000s, an estimated 20 percent of prison inmates in Belarus were former heads of state and private enterprises'.
[487] Pikulik (2007: 195)

house of the parliament, the Council of the Republic, as well as the lower chamber of the parliament, the House of Representatives, was to consist of 110 deputies. The alternative version of the constitution, which had been proposed by the Supreme Soviet and which would have limited the President's authority, received 7.93% of the votes. Besides the impeachment proceedings, the 1996 referendum was accompanied by protests on the streets in Minsk, resignation of the Prime Minister Mikhail Chigir (Chyhir), and the intervention of the Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin to broker a compromise. Following the referendum results, the Supreme Soviet was shut down, the Constitutional Court was dissolved, and 110 deputies of the House of Representatives were appointed by the President's decree. The country 'lost its democratic constitution'.[488]

The 1996 referendum evoked EU's criticism: in September 1997, the EU imposed its first sanctions on Belarus and suspended political contacts above the rank of deputy minister and any cooperation apart from the issues pertaining to tackling the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident.[489] The EU also introduced the policy of political conditionality or the 'step-by-step' approach.[490] To gradually lift the 1997 'restrictive measures',[491] the Belarusian authorities were to embark on economic, democratic, and legal reforms, to respect human rights and freedom of the press and speech (Table 4.1). In its list of conditions, the European Parliament demanded for Belarus to allow free and fair presidential elections in the year 1999: according to the 1994 Constitution, which the EU considered as illegally changed in the 1996 referendum, free and

[488] Silitski (2003: 46), also see Marples (1999: 89-106), Wilson (2011: 168-193), Parker (2007: 52-73)
[489] Ioffe (2011: 219)
[490] Schimmelfennig (2005: 21); Ulakhovich (2003: 113); Korosteleva (2009: 333); Van Elsuwege (2002: 8-9); European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. Belarus. Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013 and National Indicative Programme 2007-2011 (2006: 7) in Yakouchyk (2016)
[491] The Council of the European Union (2000: 96): 'Ministerial contacts to be established only through the Presidency; halt to EU and Member States' technical assistance programs, except those in support of human rights and the democratisation process; no conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation agreement'.

fair presidential elections were to take place in 1999 because the head of state's mandate expired in July 1999. But that did not happen.[492]

Moreover, the year 1999 and 2000 became known as the years of the 'disappearances' of Lukashenko's opponents: Yuri Zakharenko (Yury Zakharanka), the former interior minister fired by Lukashenko, Victor Gonchar (Viktar Hanchar), the former head of the central Election Commission, and his business associate Anatol Krasowski, later Dmitry Zavadsky (Zmitser Zavadzki), the cameraman who filmed Lukashenko at official events, and finally the death in mysterious circumstances of Gennady Karpenko (Henadz Karpenka), the initiator of Lukashenko's 1996 impeachment.

Table 4.1. The conditions set out by the European Parliament in 1999 based on the 'Resolution on the situation in Belarus's[493]

1	The Belarusian authorities had to do everything in their power to locate and ensure safety of such opposition figures, as Tamara Vinnikova,[494] Yuri Zakharenko, and Victor Gonchar.
2	The Belarusian authorities had to release all political prisoners who were sentenced for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and especially Members of Parliament Andrey Klimov and Vladimir Kudinov.
3	The Belarusian authorities had 'to restore international standards in the field of human rights and freedom of the press and of speech' according to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Paris Charter for a new Europe, to which Belarus was a signatory.
4	The Belarusian authorities had to undertake economic and democratic reform, respect international standards of good governance and human rights, not to hinder implementation of the TACIS civil society development programme.
5	The Belarusian President and the Belarusian opposition were urged to engage in dialogue 'so as to avoid deeper divisions'.

[492] The opposition under the umbrella of the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces organised the alternative presidential elections in May 1999 but failed to elect the leader.
[493] The European Parliament (1999)
[494] It turned out later that she had gone abroad after giving an interview about illegal arms sales.

6	The President Lukashenko was to allow free and fair presidential elections in 1999 and parliamentary elections in 2000, with unhindered access to the mass media for the opposition.

Source: Author

In July 1998, in response to the 'bizarre confrontation'[495] at Drozdy in Minsk,[496] the Council of the European Union imposed further sanctions on Belarus, specifically a visa ban on the President of Belarus, the Presidential Office, and other high-ranking officials. The Belarusian authorities undertook 'certain measures… affecting the residences of ambassadors at the Drozdy diplomatic compound in Minsk' and making 'use of the residences impossible'.[497] Namely, the Belarusian authorities intruded on the territories of the residencies of foreign ambassadors at Drozdy, on the outskirts of Minsk, declared the compound as the property of the government (it became later a residence for the president of Belarus), and shut it down for repairs. Thereby, the Belarusian authorities violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations: it was 'the unprecedented violation of the recognised standards of treatment of foreign diplomats'.[498] In protest, the ambassadors of 22 Western states left the country in June 1998. After months of confrontation and impasse, Belarus agreed to pay compensation. The travel restrictions were rescinded in February 1999. According to the website of the US Embassy in Belarus, the diplomats returned to Belarus after 'the resolution of the compensation issue and additional assurances by the Belarusian government that it would strictly abide by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in the future'. Besides, Belarus agreed to accept an OSCE consultative and monitoring mission in Minsk.

[495] Bassuener (2013: 339)
[496] Piontek (2006: 539)
[497] Council of the European Union (1998)
[498] The US Embassy in Belarus

Belarus entered the 2000s with an 'abnormally low level'[499] in its bilateral relations with the EU. In 2000, in the wake of parliamentary elections in Belarus, the European Troika consisting of the EU, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe[500] formulated four basic criteria Belarus had to meet to normalise its relations with the EU: such as, to revise the electoral code adhering to the criteria of democratic elections; to observe a period of political peace without persecuting opposition; to provide access to electronic mass media for the democratic opposition; and to extend powers of the parliament.[501] The Council of the European Union urged European officials to elaborate the ways 'to engage with the Belarusian authorities' as it was in the long-term interest of the EU.[502]

The EU's attempt at reviving its policy towards Belarus coincided with Belarus's own attempt at upgrading the relations. In May 2000, Belarus adopted a 'concept document' that aimed to improve relations with the EU. In autumn 2001, it expressed an interest in concluding an association agreement.[503] Until autumn 2002, on the website of its Foreign Ministry, Belarus's intentions regarding the EU were described as follows: 'Associate membership with the perspective of joining the EU is a long-term strategic goal of Belarus. Considering the expansion of the EU to the East, the rapprochement with the EU takes priority, which is at present one of the largest economic partners of Belarus.'[504] On its side, the EU did not exclude the membership perspective for Belarus: 'No one is questioning the fact that Belarus is a European nation, which could raise the issue of its membership in the EU'.[505]

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[499] Ulakhovich (2002: 42)
[500] The EU had a presence in Belarus in the form of a 'parliamentary troika' consisting of the representatives of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament.
[501] Schuette (2002: 33), the OSCE (2000: 6)
[502] The Council of the European Union (2001. A: 5)
[503] Guicherd (2002: 329)
[504] Ulakhovich (2003: 107)
[505] Allison et al. (2005: 489-99): in the words of the EU Enlargement Commissioner Guenther Verheugen in a meeting with a Belarusian delegation, 25 May 2004.

The efforts to resume relations at a high political level failed, however. Neither parliamentary (in 2000), nor presidential (in 2001) elections of Belarus corresponded to the standards of democratic elections formulated in the 1990 Copenhagen Document.[506] The EU intended to maintain the 1997 restrictive measures in place and 'to pursue the step-by-step approach, mapped out in April 1999'.[507] It 'will not move toward Belarus, until Belarus clearly expresses its wish to improve its relationship with the West and will not confirm it except by taking concrete measures. We are ready for dialogue, but this dialogue should be bilateral.'[508] The pressure could not be softened as 'to weaken our stand would hardly favour free and fair elections' but 'undermine the credibility of the EU'.[509] The EU intended to continue to support Belarus's democratic institutions,[510] that could one day result in the normalisation of Belarus's relations with the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the OSCE.[511] The EU reiterated in 2001 that 'a policy of isolation would be counterproductive and would serve only to destabilise the region'.[512] That would be an especially undesirable outcome in light of the forthcoming enlargement.[513]

In 2002, the EU began to develop the 'Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood Strategy', which later changed its name to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It was first outlined by the European Commission in March 2003 and was designed to bring Europe and its neighbours closer to each other after the 2004 enlargement. Belarus was considered as a partner or 'subject'

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[506] On the presidential election see: OSCE/ODIHIR Limited Election Observation Mission. Final Report. 04.10.2001. On the parliamentary elections see: OSCE/ODIHIR Technical Assessment Mission. Final Repot. 30.01.2001

[507] The Council of the European Union (2001. B: 121)

[508] Schuette (2002: 34). Rolf Schuette was Head of the Department of affairs with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Germany.

[509] The Council of the European Union (2001. A: 2)

[510] Yakouchyk (2016: 203): The EU policy was significantly supported by the OSCE, which obtained permission in 1998 to set up the Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Minsk to serve as a platform for dialogue between the authorities and the opposition in light of a reduced level of the EU's engagement with Belarus. In 2002, Belarus withdrew authorisation of the OSCE and the AMG.

[511] The OSCE (2000: 16, 26)

[512] The Council of the European Union (2001. B: 121)

[513] Elsuweger (2002: 8)

of the policy from the start.[514] The EU set the goal to upgrade the PCAs with Ukraine and Moldova while Belarus remained a 'different partner', 'yet still a central focus of the Union's efforts to engage more actively in resolving problems on its doorstep'.[515] A clear strategy for engagement with Belarus was not articulated, however. The EU faced a choice over Belarus: 'either to leave things to drift… or to engage, and risk sending a signal of support for policies which do not conform to EU values'.[516] The EU chose to engage Belarus step-by-step, to create conditions for free and fair elections, and after that to integrate Belarus into the neighbourhood policy, without compromising the EU's commitment to common and democratic values. Officially launching the ENP in 2004, the EU excluded Belarus from the package of full benefits and postponed contractual links until the time when 'Belarus has established a democratic form of government' and when 'fundamental political and economic reforms take place'.[517] There were neither Country Reports, nor Action Plans for an implementation of the ENP with Belarus in contrast to most partner states, including the Mediterranean and the South Caucasus.[518]

In 2004, simultaneously with parliamentary elections, Belarus held a referendum on constitutional amendments that removed the existing limit on holding the office of president for two terms. In response, the OSCE highlighted Belarus's violation of 'the most basic human rights' and reinforced 'a priori' exclusion of Belarus from the ENP.[519] The EU concurred: assessing the parliamentary elections and referendum as fraudulent and condemning the repression of peaceful demonstrations, it upgraded the existing sanctions with a visa ban on responsible officials.[520] Two years later, after the presidential elections in March 2006, the visa

[514] Korosteleva & Bosse (2009: 148)
[515] Patten & Solana (2002: 3-4) in Korosteleva & Bosse (2009: 148)
[516] European Commission (2003: 15)
[517] European Commission (2004: 4, 11)
[518] Korosteleva & Bosse (2009: 148)
[519] Dura (2008: 2)
[520] The Council of the European Union (2004)

ban was expanded, and a freezing of assets was applied to those in the blacklist, including the president of Belarus.[521] The EU also terminated the application of the Generalised System of Preferences to Belarus because of the lack of freedoms of trade unions.[522] Secondary sanctions followed, which concerned 'the ill treatment' of Western diplomats and disappearance of three Belarusian politicians and a journalist.[523] The 2004 Eastern enlargement of the EU turned out to be 'a wasted opportunity' for Belarus.[524] In 2006, the Commission published a non-paper, an unofficial document, addressed to the people of Belarus and that enumerated the benefits of a 'deeper relationship'.[525] For that to happen, the Belarusian authorities had to implement democratisation measures, which were succinctly set out in twelve clauses.[526] Until Belarus met the conditions, the EU could not offer Belarus full participation in the neighbourhood policy and other improvements. However, the non-paper 'passed largely unnoticed' by the wider Belarusian population while the elite 'did not attach any importance to it'.[527]

Belarus remained the only country of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood that did not have its own Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU.[528] As the formal basis for cooperation, Belarus-EU relations were regulated by an outdated agreement signed by the Soviet Union in 1989 and subsequently endorsed by the Socialist Soviet Republic of Byelorussia. Belarus also stood out among its European neighbours as the country that showed the least interest in joining the EU.[529]

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[521] The Council of the European Union (2006: 2)
[522] Portela (2011: 492)
[523] The Parliamentary Assembly (2004). According to the Pourgourides Report: 'The Parliamentary Assembly has been concerned for over two years by the disappearances of Yuri Zakharenko, former Minister of the Interior (disappeared on 7 May 1999), Victor Gonchar, former Vice-President of the Parliament of Belarus (disappeared on 16 September 1999), Anatoly Krasovski, businessman (disappeared with Mr Gonchar) and Dmitri Zavadski, cameraman for the Russian TV channel ORT (disappeared on 7 July 2000)'.
[524] Sahm (2010: 125)
[525] European Commission (2006: 24)
[526] European Commission (2006)
[527] Dura (2008: 2)
[528] European Commission (2014)
[529] Rontoyanni (2005)

Thus, in the first half of the 1990s, amid strong pro-Russian integration narratives, Belarus strengthened ties with the West as the bilateral relations swiftly developed from practically non-existing level in 1992 to the level of PCA and Interim Agreements in 1995, and notwithstanding the fact that Belarus undertook few changes to its political and economic systems.[530] In the second half of the 1990s, as Belarus started its slide towards authoritarianism, it openly challenged the EU's value promotion agenda: it resisted the EU's democratisation agenda,[531] refused to 'reconsider its position', and 'move forward towards respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'.[532] On the one hand, Belarus aimed at good neighbourly relations based primarily on economic cooperation, rather than the pursuit of close relations or an EU membership.[533] In its national ideology introduced in 2003, Belarus defined the 'European choice' with the ultimate goal of joining the EU as impractical.[534] On the other hand, Belarus was the first country to counteract and challenge the EU's policies of value promotion in relations with its near abroad. The EU was 'surprised' that a small country rejected European values.[535] There are some arguments that Belarus forced the EU to re-consider its policy and make concessions. Indeed, in 1999, the EU attempted to remodel its policy towards Belarus by introducing a 'step-by-step approach'.[536] Portraying Western institutions as external enemies with a disguised aspiration to subdue the country, Belarus had justification to bypass Western demands for democratic procedures and freedoms, and to be released from EU conditionality.[537] Thereby, Belarus withstood Western democratic pressure and limited its influence 'to the extent, that they have virtually no leverage in the country'.[538] Belarus also

[530] Piontek (2006)
[531] Klinke (2007)
[532] Council of the European Union (1997: 11-13)
[533] Rontoyanni (2005)
[534] Allison et al. (2005: 494)
[535] Interview with Tikhomirov, October 2019
[536] Schimmelfennig (2005: 21)
[537] Leshchenko (2008: 1426): 'to withstand Western democratic pressure', 'Lukashenko combined the Soviet ideological hostility to the West and the new rhetoric of Belarusian national independence'.
[538] Leshchenko (2008: 1426)

played off the interests of Russia and the West to ensure support from both.[539] It used its relationship with Russia to dissuade Western actors from more severe pressure to democratise, which would push Belarus further 'into Russia's arms'.[540] Belarus believed that its foreign policy was highly successful: Belarus was ruled 'neither from Moscow, nor from Washington, nor from Brussels'.[541] 'No engagement – no influence' as aptly expressed by Belarus's Foreign Minister when the EU resorted to the policy of isolation.[542]

Though Belarus resisted the EU's pressure, it failed to wield influence on it. It is an analytical challenge to understand the role of state identity of Belarus's discursive narratives vis-à-vis the EU and Russia amid Belarus's failure to preserve good relations with the EU reached in the first half of the 1990s but not so in the case of Russia.

4.2.2. Belarus-Russia Relations

'... the Belarusian model resembles a petrostate without resources, which is however capable of receiving the necessary resources from Russia as from its colony...'[543]

In the first years of independence, Belarus[544] sought military-political neutrality and undertook steps towards associating itself with Central Europe in terms of a geopolitical identity.[545] By 1993, however, Belarus re-directed its foreign policy priorities to a close alignment with Russia. Belarus's elite sought a way to return to a rouble zone and to an economic partnership with Russia.[546] In 1993, Belarus signed several bilateral integration agreements with Russia,

[539] Leshchenko (2008: 1429)
[540] Way (2015. A: 138)
[541] Foreign Minister Martynov (2004) in Leshchenko (2008: 1429)
[542] Martynov (2002: 311) in Leshchenko (2008: 1426)
[543] Pikulik (2007: 212)
[544] In the thesis, the name 'Belarus' equates with 'the Belarusian authorities' due the research focusing on the foreign policy formulated by the elites.
[545] Zinovyev et al. (2017)
[546] Korosteleva (2002: 55)

including the Collective Security Treaty. Since then, the key priority of Belarus's foreign policy of integration with Russia had remained unchanged for decades to come.[547]

Belarus-Russia relations in the 1990s were intense. Belarus signed a succession of agreements and treaties with Russia: the agreement 'On the Unification of Monetary Systems',[548] a 'Customs Union' agreement of 1995,[549] followed a year later by the Treaty on the Formation of a Community of Belarus and Russia, superseded in 1997 by the Treaty on the Union between Belarus and Russia, and reformed later to 'The Union State'.[550] To re-integrate its military structures, Belarus signed the Treaty on Military Cooperation (1997), the Agreement on Joint Guarantee of Regional Security (1998), and the 'Tashkent' Collective Security Treaty (1993), which was developed into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 2002.[551] The CSTO, the military alliance, coordinated actions of its members in foreign, security, and defence policies, and envisaged a joint military command, a rapid reaction force, and integrated air defence systems.[552] In 1999, the two states signed and ratified the Programme of Economic Cooperation for the next ten years. As part of the Union State Development Programme, monetary integration was scheduled for 2005. By 1999, over two hundred agreements had been signed between Russia and Belarus.[553]

In 1995, Belarus signed agreements with Russia and Kazakhstan on the establishment of the Customs Union, which was later joined by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In 1999, the five

[547] Tikhomirov (2017: 35), Rontoyanni (2005)
[548] under the Prime Minister Kebich
[549] under the 1994-elected president Lukashenko
[550] Rontoyanni (2005. A)
[551] The military alliance of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan (withdrew in 1999, 2012), Azerbaijan (withdrew in 1999), and Georgia (withdrew in 1999)) by ratifying the 1992 'Tashkent' Collective Security Treaty. Felgenhauer (2009): The joint staff training programmes of the Regional Forces Group of Belarus and Russia were launched in February 2009 under the agreement of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force.
[552] Allison et al. (2005: 494)
[553] Nechyparenka (2011: 22-23)

countries signed the Treaty on the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space. Above all, Belarus was integrated with Russia on a bilateral basis in the Russia-Belarus Union State.

For Russia, Belarus believed to be acting as a buffer country between the West and the East: 'We are the last window of Russia to the West'.[554] Belarus provided cheap transport and transit routes for Russian fuel to Europe and an 'air safety shield' for the Russian air defence systems stationed on its territory.[555] Belarus was also an attractive economic partner for Russia to expand its industrial outputs, and it supplied cheap and unique goods, such as components for weapon systems production. Besides, Belarus helped mitigate the isolation of the Kaliningrad Oblast' as NATO and later the EU expanded to the Baltic states and Poland.[556] Furthermore, Belarus provided reputational benefits for Russia: it set an example for post-Soviet states as a beneficiary of close cooperation with Russia.

With its influence diminishing in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, Russia valued Belarus as an economically stable partner and an ally in diplomatic and military spheres.[557] Military cooperation was considered as one of the most important reasons for Russia's interest in Belarus: it was crucial to the 'geopolitical imperative to counter advancement of the West at the expense of Russia's influence in its immediate vicinity'.[558] In the area of defence policy the Russian-Belarusian integration proceeded rather successfully compared to the declared but less successful objectives of the Union State. Belarus's image of 'the last defender of the USSR' appealed to Russia's self-esteem as it considered itself to be the successor of the Soviet Union with claims on its lands as Russia's sphere of influence. According to Russian media, Belarus was a catalyst of the reintegration of former Soviet republics.[559] Like no other post-Soviet state,

[554] Grishan (1994)
[555] Balmaceda (2007: 211)
[556] Rontoyanni (2000: 7)
[557] Schmidtke & Yekelchyk (2008:73)
[558] Rontoyanni (2000: 5)
[559] Ovcharov (1994)

Belarus was praised for its inter-ethnic relations: a million and a half Russians living in Belarus were fully-fledged citizens of the country, and 80 percent of Belarusians considered Russian to be their mother language. These issues were in the life interest of 'two blood related peoples'.[560] In case of an alternative nationalist government, one could expect fleeing Russian immigrants, the revision of borders with Russia,[561] and Belarus leaving the CIS and the CSTO, and, instead, joining the Baltic-Black Sea community of states. The indicators of an alternative future were embodied in the fact that an economic and monetary union with Russia was referred to by Belarus's opposition as an 'immoral and treacherous step' and Russian military forces in Belarus as an 'occupational army'.[562]

Since the early 1990s, Belarus underscored its position as an independent state linked in a special way with Russia. The 1994 monetary agreement with Russia was described as the only way forward for Belarus to overcome the financial crisis.[563] The widely spread opinion was that Belarus was ready to renounce its sovereignty and independence for economic and political benefits.[564] It was also opined that sovereignty served the needs of the president's own political ambitions.[565] Until the ascendance of Putin to power in 2000, the possibility remained of Lukashenko presiding over the Russia-Belarus Union.[566] A merger of the two states remained an option throughout the 1990s although the orientation towards sovereignty and independence was also strong. The overriding goal of Belarus consisted in building its own model of development with a strong power vertical, the president at the top, without opposition in power, and with state control of the economy.[567] Russia was favoured because it provided support in

[560] Ovcharov (1994)
[561] Reclaim of Smolensk, Pskov, Bryansk regions of Russia.
[562] Ovcharov (1994)
[563] Kebich (1994. J)
[564] Interview with Tikhomirov, October 2019
[565] Interviews with Tikhomirov and Snapkovsky, October 2019
[566] Yeltsin (2000)
[567] Interview with Tikhomirov, October 2019

contrast to the West and the EU.[568] To offset its predominant economic dependence on Russia, Belarus developed relations with China, Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba, and Ecuador), Iran, India, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates.

Indeed, alliances with Russia, and especially in the framework of the Union State, brought Belarus political and economic benefits. It is observed that small states that 'depend largely on aid or preferential treatment from more powerful partners' can 'navigate and manipulate these relationships to their own benefit'.[569] Vis-à-vis Russia, Belarus is argued to have 'gained leverage over the dominant state' and 'exercised powerful bargaining power'.[570] More specifically, it was able to maintain a high level of economic support from Russia: more than to any other post-Soviet country, Russia provided Belarus with 'vast economic assistance'.[571] For Belarus, channels of income were created through customs-free imports from Russia, energy resources at Russia's domestic prices, subsidies in the form of currency stabilization programmes in the framework of the integration process with Russia, advantageous credits, and export markets for Belarus's goods in Russia.[572] Indirectly, Belarus received income from Russia's duty-free oil refined in Belarus and exported to Europe.[573] By different estimates, the combined effect of the customs-free imports, cheap energy, and a favourable exports regime led to the situation that Russia subsidised Belarus by $1.5-$2 billion annually until 1998.[574] Other sources quote 'a startling' 10 to 30 percent of Belarus's GDP and a third of government revenue in the late 1990s and the early 2000s.[575] Low oil and gas prices Russia managed to

[568] Interview with Tikhomirov, October 2019
[569] Balmaceda (2014: 7)
[570] Hancock (2006: 132-133)
[571] Way (2015. B: 697)
[572] Way (2015. B: 697), Leshchenko (2008: 1427)
[573] Balmaceda (2007: 212), Balmaceda (2014: 77)
[574] Selivanova (1998: 324) in Leshchenko (2008: 1427)
[575] Åslund (2002), Karol (2006) in Way (2015. A: 138); Åslund (2002: 182) in Way (2015. B: 697)

amend in early 2007 when it signed a plan for 'the gradual introduction of energy prices at market level with Belarus's.[576]

Belarus resisted Russia's encroachment on its sovereignty: it succeeded in negotiating unification agreements on terms of equality and parity, refused to sell off its major bargaining asset - key pipelines, refineries, electricity grids, and railways, and successfully resisted pressure to renounce its currency for the sake of the Russian rouble in the late 1990s.[577] These were considerable achievements for a country that depended on Russia for fuel, military-industrial and other exports, transit revenues, credits, and political support.

As a means of influence, Belarus is argued to have used fuel pipelines and its critical geographic position for the Western markets: Belarus underscored high reputational costs for Russia vis-à-vis Western Europe in case of energy transit problems. Weak nationalism and lack of democratic norms contributed to Belarus's ability to pursue a more coherent and focused foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia. Besides, Belarus's rhetoric helped rally domestic support for the foreign policy course and exact political, economic, and ideological benefits from Russia.[578] Belarus was acknowledged to have achieved and maintained its policy preferences vis-à-vis Russia by exercising discursive or skilled negotiation tactics, such as the strategy of underlining Belarus's strategic value as Russia's 'last ally' in the post-Soviet area and 'the last defender of the USSR'.[579] The strategy evoked Russia's enduring Soviet pride and a sense of collective self-esteem. The other discursive strategy was to accuse Russia of its disloyalty to memory of the Great Patriotic War (the name by which the World War Two is known in post-Soviet countries) and to the Union State of which Belarus was an initiator. These appealed to Russia's

[576] Leshchenko (2008: 1427)
[577] Hancock (2006)
[578] Leshchenko (2008)
[579] Shraibman (2019)

legitimation as a great power with a special position in the post-Soviet space.[580] Russia's support was arguably driven also by Belarus's 'uniquely strong cultural ties with Russia'.[581] The role of state identity in Belarus's influence and the encompassing research on Belarus's influence on its larger neighbours of Russia and the EU eluded a consistent analysis, however.

The following section analyses Belarus's state identity narratives constructed around its three Selves vis-à-vis the EU and Russia.

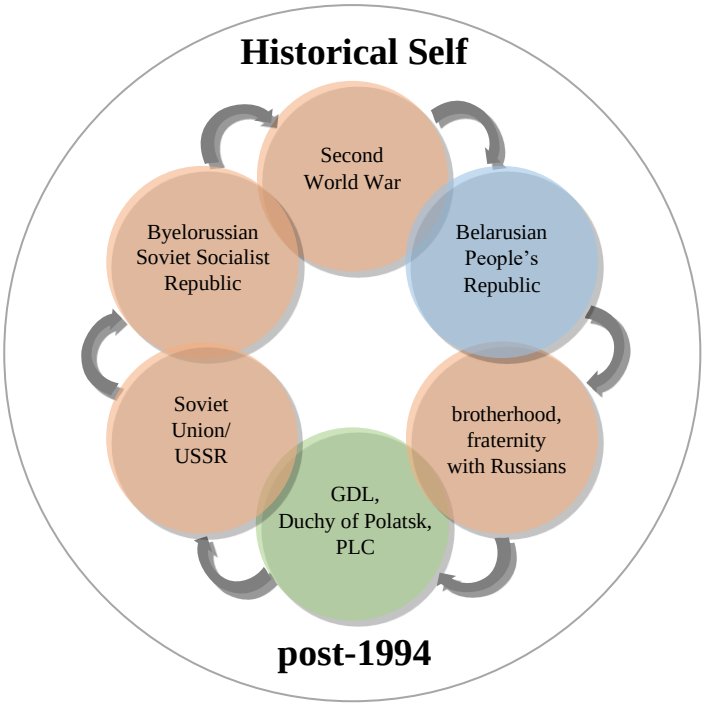
4.3. Belarus's State Identity: Official Narrative

4.3.1. The Historical Self

> *"You can put border pillars and even for a while, like the river flooding in summer, cloud the consciousness of the people, but the soul will take its toll and, like a bright spring through the depths of the earth, it will be cleansed by the depths of memory…" (about integration with Russia)*[582]

Graph 4.1. Dominant categories of the Historical Self and their congruence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU in the second half of the 1990s

[580] Balmaceda (2014: 124-5)
[581] Way (2015. B: 697)
[582] Ovcharov (1994)



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 4.1. The components, related to the Russian period of Belarus's history and which are congruent with Russia, are given in red; the components, related to the European roots of Belarusian statehood and congruent with the EU, are indicated in green; the components, congruent neither exclusively with Russia nor with the EU, are indicated in blue. GDL - The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, PLC - The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

To recall, the Historical Self of state identity is constituted by the strands of meaning that emerge out of historical continuities specific to a country. It is related to the past, to the historical memory, and to a myth of origin. The Historical Self reflects the assessment of historical events by the elite, and it is used by them in pursuit of their political goals.

In the first half of the 1990s, the Historical Self of Belarus's state identity was multi-faceted. It was constituted by the references to the Second World War, albeit not numerous: 'together we defeated fascism, together we will step out of crisis, together we must go to the future!'[583] It was also constituted by the references to the first historical forms of Belarusian statehood, such as the Principality of Polatsk and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL).[584] The Belarusian Popular Front (BPF),[585] an oppositional political movement, in its party programme relied heavily on the GDL as an exemplary state. The 12th century Principality of Polatsk was considered to be the precursor of Belarus's statehood and nationality. In 1994, a reference was made to Euphrosyne of Polatsk, a saint of the Orthodox Church and a daughter of the prince of Polatsk. She was described as 'the patroness of all Belarus's lands' and the symbol of brotherhood of all Slavic nations on the first page of the oldest daily newspaper in Belarus (it was first published in 1927).[586] The Historical Self was also constituted by the issue of independence and a union with Russia and Ukraine. The reference was also made to Nesvizh Castle of the Radziwill family, one of the most important and wealthy families of 16th-18th centuries Belarus. Nesvizh had a strategic location on the East-West route in the centre of Europe. Its economically successful manufactured handicrafts, run by the Radziwills for almost 300 years, competed on an equal footing with the best manufacturers of Western Europe and brought Belarus world fame.[587] Nesvizh Castle was also the cultural centre of 18th century Belarus with its ballet, opera, drama troupes, symphonic orchestra, and the famous Lithuanian

[583] Kebich (1994. A)
[584] The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a European state that existed from the 13th century to 1795, when its territory was partitioned among the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Austria. The Grand Duchy, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, included what is now Belarus and parts of Ukraine, Latvia, Poland, and Russia. In the 15th century, it was the largest state in Europe.
[585] Poznyak (1994) in Gurinovich (1994): According to the leader of the BPF 'Adradzhenne' and the parliamentarian Zenon Poznyak, 'The movement was born in 1988 on the basis of the struggle against the totalitarian system and for the purpose of national revival'. The BPF was represented by 10 per cent in the Supreme Soviet. 'Russia was, is and will be the enemy of Belarus's independence and our freedom'. Neutrality of Belarus. Equal existence with Russia.
[586] Belinform (1994)
[587] Kebich (1994. B)

Archive. The first book printed in Belarus originated in Nesvizh Castle's typography. The other elements of the Historical Self related to the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the policies of Russification and assimilation, and the 1863 Uprising against Russia led by Kastuś Kalinoŭski. In his programme for presidency, Belarus's prime minister underscored that 'a government for the people, not the people for a government, was this principle of the national hero Kastuś Kalinoŭski, and I consider it to be the main one in the formation of a new system of government'.[588]

After 1994 – a watershed year in Belarusian politics that saw the inauguration of Lukashenko – the contents of the Historical Self of Belarus's state identity changed. The historical memory of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) and the Soviet Union, of which it was a constituent part in 1922-1991, underwent revision and resulted in their unconditionally positive re-estimation and prioritisation. According to the official discourse, Belarusians felt 'acute pain' thinking about the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which 'they created with their own callous hands' and defended on the 'fire fields of battle with their own blood' in the Second World War.[589] It was reminded that in 1991, 82.7 percent of Belarusians in the union-wide referendum overwhelmingly voted for the preservation of the Soviet Union as a renewed federation of equal and sovereign republics.[590] This was based on the common sense and wisdom: 'people felt in their hearts that both Chernobyl and other hardships could be overcome easier and faster as part of a great country and together with fraternal people'.[591] The decision to dissolve the Soviet Union was compared to Nazi Germany's actions: 'having ignored the

[588] Kebich (1994. A)
[589] Lukashanka (1999. B)
[590] Rudling (2008: 60)
[591] Lukashanka (1996. B)

will of the people in every possible way, they easily signed a piece of paper in Viskuli[592] and thereby did what the huge military machine of Nazi Germany failed to achieve'.[593]

The most salient historical myths of the period became intimately tied to the Soviet Union.[594] The Soviet past of the country was revived, and 'the prevalence of the good' of the Soviet Union was emphasised.[595] The BSSR was rebranded as a good country and 'was drawn in pink colours'.[596] References to a high quality of the BSSR's educational system, collective farms system, and economic policy surfaced in the official discourse. Predominantly, the past constructed was Soviet in nature. Belarus approached the issue of sovereignty in the following way: 'We need no less sovereignty than we had in the Soviet Union'.[597]

Closely linked to the Soviet Union and the BSSR narratives was the historical memory of the Second World War. Of all the history of Belarus, the perspective on this prime event underwent little revision in the official discourse in nearly three decades of the country's independence: the victory, the traumatised experience, the partisan warfare,[598] the feat of the people, and an encompassing refrain of 'you all owe us'. The Second World War, 'the greatest', had taken the central place in Belarus's state identity construction since 1994.[599] The most common references were to the following: joint efforts of Belarusians and Russians against foreign invaders bound the countries together in one unbreakable whole;[600] one third of Belarusians[601]

[592] Viskuli is a hunting estate in Belavezhskaya Pushcha in Belarus where the Belavezha Accords were signed on December 8, 1991. According to the accords, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics effectively ceased to exist, and the Commonwealth of Independent States was established in its place as a successor entity.
[593] Lukashanka (1996. B)
[594] Way (2015. A: 122)
[595] Way (2015. A: 122)
[596] Interview with Snapkovsky, October 2019
[597] Interview with Tikhomirov, October 2019
[598] The partisan warfare is a resistance movement that fought a guerrilla war against the Axis forces during the Second World War in the Soviet Union.
[599] Lukashenko (1999. B)
[600] Lukashenko (1996. A)
[601] The number of losses of the ancestors of today's Belarusian population in the war is 'wildly' distorted: it was 'around one million, or between one-ninth and one-eleventh of the 1940 population', if the elimination of the Jews is excluded from the count (Marples 2014: 15-16).

perished in the war and 'were rotting in the trenches with brotherly Russians';[602] therefore, Belarusians called Russians 'brothers' and referred to Russia as a 'brotherly Russia'.[603] The Belarusian partisan warfare against the Nazis in the war constituted 'the central trope of post-war Belarusian culture'.[604] They constituted the historical myths that founded and tied the history of Belarus to the Soviet Union.[605] Arguably, a more balanced account of the war was needed though: the one covering the topics of Holocaust and Belarusian collaborationism.[606]

The myths originating in the Second World War and the Soviet Union constituted the historical understanding of the Self and corresponded to the prevalent discursive formations and intersubjective beliefs that made up the social cognitive structure of Belarusian society in the period, namely the Soviet nostalgia and a positive regard of ethnically close Russians against the backdrop of low level of national consciousness.[607] To recall, in the 1950s-1970s Belarus underwent enormous growth in literacy, industrialization, and urbanisation under the Soviet rule. It was transformed from a predominantly peasant society into an advanced industrial society at the expense of downgrading its own language and losing a sense of national identity, in other words, at the expense of being de-Belarusified.[608] Belarusians predominantly voted for a return to the Soviet-era symbols (75 percent) and the Russian language (83.3 percent) in the 1995 referendum. Along with the historical myths, Belarus's state identity became intimately tied to Russia.[609] The historical discourse of Belarus's elite became Russophile and pro-Soviet.

The pro-Soviet historical narrative closely linked Belarus with Russia through the feeling of brotherhood and shared historical memory, and it warranted the decision to re-integrate Belarus

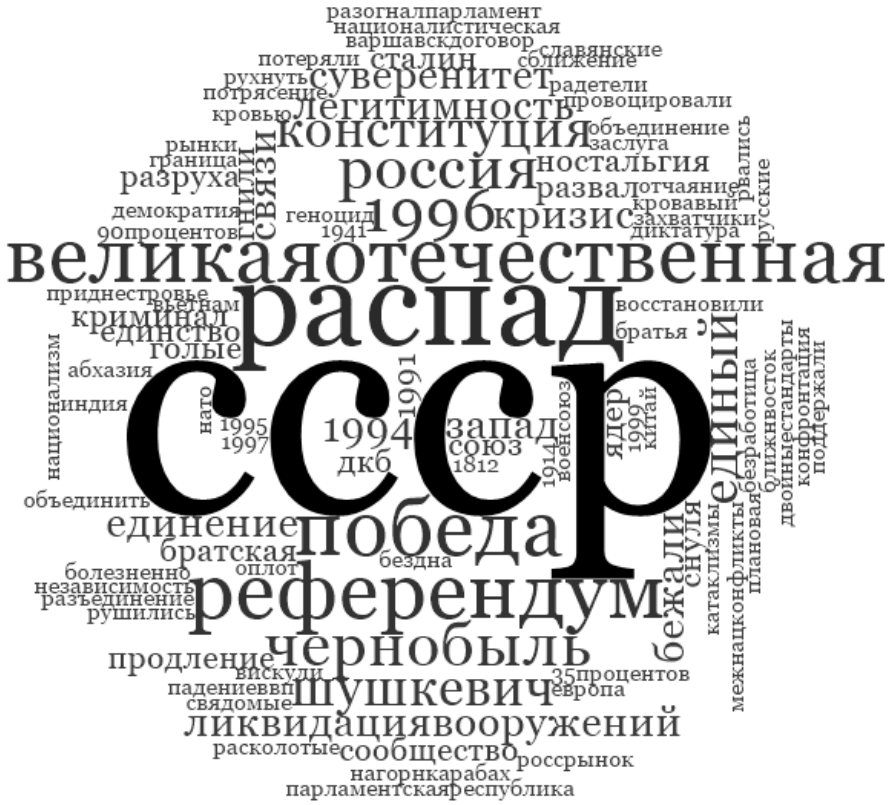
[602] Lukashenko (1999. B)
[603] Lukashenko (1999. B)
[604] Wilson (2011: 114)
[605] Way (2015. A: 122)
[606] Interview with Snapkovsky, October 2019
[607] Hopf (2002: 37): 'Understandings of Self are constructed domestically out of the many identities that constitute the discursive formations that, in turn, make up the social cognitive structure of that society'.
[608] Mihalisko (1997: 235), Guthier (1977: 275) in Way (2015. A: 122-123)
[609] Way (2015. A: 123)

and Russia in the Union State. Close alignment and re-integration with Russia were widely associated with 'improved economic prospects and standards of living.[610] It was to correct the mistake of 1991 that disunited the people of the two countries. Because Belarus bore 'huge [war-related] losses' throughout its history when there was no agreement between Russia and the West,[611] it was 'inherently against any new confrontation', and it underscored that 'concepts of equilibrium, coalition thinking or models of 'spheres of influence' had never led to lasting security and stability'.[612] Instead, countries of all sizes had 'the right to be heard', and their position 'must be taken into account'.[613]

The other previously important elements of the Historical Self, such as the references to the GDL and the Belarusian People's Republic (BPR), were sidelined and muted in the post-1994 historical narrative. While the reference to the GDL remained without value judgements, the BPR was unequivocally denounced as a puppet state of Nazi Germany.[614] The other change was brought about by whitewashing the Russian Empire which was argued to have saved Belarus from Poland and Polonisation.[615]

Chart 4.1. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Historical Self in the 1990s

[610] Rontoyanni (2005: 133) in Way (2015. A: 123)
[611] Syanko (1996)
[612] Syanko (1996)
[613] Syanko (1996)
[614] In 2018 on its centenary, the BPR was officially acknowledged as a first attempt at revival of Belarusian statehood. For the first time the rally to the occasion of the BRP was allowed by the authorities.
[615] In 2010, the Russian Empire was declared as a form of Belarusian statehood and Belarusians as a part of the Russian ethnos.



Source: Author

Notes to Chart 4.1. The highly engaged words and phrases that bring the Historical Self in congruence with the Russian Other are ‘the Soviet Union’ and its ‘collapse’, the subsequent ‘crisis’, economic ‘downfall’ and ‘criminality’, ‘the Great Patriotic War’ and the ‘Victory’ in it, ‘Stalin’, ‘Chernobyl’, ‘nostalgia’, and ‘unity’ with ‘brotherly’ Russians with whom Belarusians ‘rot in the trenches’ in the Second World War. There are words that indirectly contribute to congruence with the European Other, such as Belarus’s emphasis on ‘sovereignty’, ‘independence’, and ‘constitution’, its mention of ‘democracy’, ‘Europe’, and cooperation with ‘NATO’. Overall, however, the European roots of Belarus’s historical memory, such as ‘Polatsk Duchy’, ‘The Grand Duchy of Lithuania’, and ‘The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’, do not find reflection in the graph as their frequency and engagement is low.

Regarding its engagement and congruence vis-à-vis the European Other, in the first half of the 1990s, Belarus's Historical Self was moderately engaged in terms of frequency of references. It was also congruent with the European Other in terms of ideational distance between core historical meanings of the Self and the Other. Belarus's Historical Self was constituted by references to the European roots of Belarus's statehood, such as the Principality of Polatsk, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the 1863 Uprising against Russia, and the Belarusian People's Republic of 1918 as the first formation of Belarus's statehood. Congruence and engagement of the Historical Self vis-à-vis the European Other contributed to Belarus's capacity to establish dialogue with the EU and wield some influence.

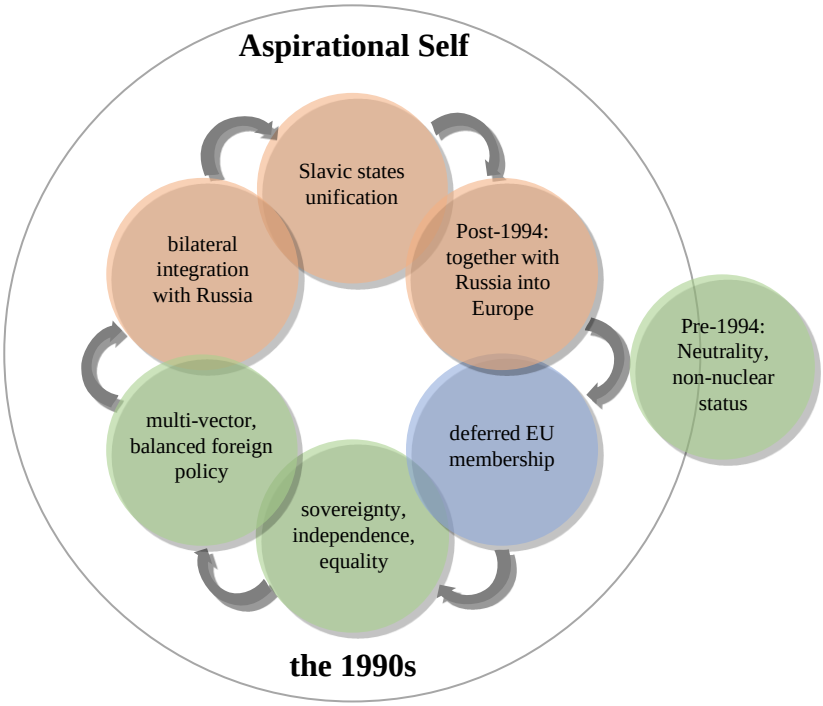
In the second half of the 1990s, the contents of the Historical Self underwent change. The most recent historical experience of Belarus's being part of the Soviet Union was brought to the front. The historical memory of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was emphasised to have arguably the strongest influence on post-Soviet, independent Belarus because of its recent character. The emphasis on this historical memory was justified by the fact that Belarus had still to deal with its consequences, such as a high percentage of the Russian population residing in Belarus, the dominance of the Russian language as a means of communication, and a close alignment with Russia in military, economic, and cultural areas. The European historical memory of Belarus was sidelined, muted, and often degraded, as was the case of the 1918 Belarusian People's Republic labelled as 'a Nazi Germany puppet state'. Overall, the Historical Self retained some congruence with the European Other, but it stopped being engaged: it was not evoked in the historical narratives and therefore did not contribute to Belarus's influence on the EU. Belarus stopped engaging the elements of its Historical Self that corresponded to and conceptually connected it with the EU's historical memory. Thus, vis-à-vis the EU, the Historical Self retained its engagement and congruence in the first half of the 1990s but had almost completely lost its engagement and retreated in the face of the alternative historical

memory of the Soviet past after 1994: it had played a limited role in the Composite State Identity vis-à-vis the European Other since then and had not contributed to Belarus's wielding influence on the EU. Still, Belarus's failed contractual relationship and a conflict with the EU in the second half of the 1990s cannot be attributed solely to the Historical Self's low engagement and congruence.

Vis-à-vis Russia, Belarus's Historical Self was highly engaged and congruent, especially since 1994. The historical links to Russia increasingly received reinterpretation and a special emphasis. Belarus emphasised its Soviet past, especially so after 1994: namely, the 'shared' historical experience in 'The Great Patriotic War' where Belarus and Russia fought together and the shared co-existence in the Soviet Union with its industrialisation, agricultural collectivisation, and a cultural revolution. Moreover, Belarus set the agenda in the bilateral relations by linking that experience with the need to establish the Union State in the interest of both countries. The Union State channeled economic benefits to Belarus and satiated the population's Soviet nostalgia in both countries. The historical precedent of fighting the war and bearing the brunt of it justified Belarus's insistence and ultimately success in securing de jure equal terms in the Russia-Belarus Union State. Belarus's influence came short of reaching the deal with Russia concerning free access to Russia's energy resources. Still, Belarus's independence was strengthened, and Russian economic support secured. Overall, the Historical Self helped secure Russia's support to Belarus.

4.3.2. The Aspirational Self

Graph 4.2. Dominant categories of the Aspirational Self and their congruence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU in the second half of the 1990s



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 4.2. The components of the Aspirational Self that link the future of Belarus to Russia are indicated in red; the components that link the future of Belarus to the EU are indicated in blue; the components related to the specifically Belarusian goals for the future, that are neither exclusively Russian or European or are in the interest of neither or both, are indicated in green. The graph serves an illustrative purpose only.

In the first half of the 1990s, Belarus's Aspirational Self in the narratives of the elite was unambiguous. Belarus's main goal was to unite with Russia, and also to establish a union of three Slavic states with Russia and Ukraine. The European narrative of a close cooperation with the EU was present but rather on the periphery. Predominantly, the aspirational narrative was constructed around the course towards unification and integration with Russia. Belarus argued that without Russia, it faced economic collapse, loss of its sovereignty, ethnic conflicts,

and even wars. Belarus's large enterprises[616] processed raw materials and semi-finished products and depended thereby on supplies from all regions of the former Soviet Union but foremostly Russia: 'We had a single economic body the parts of which were torn artificially apart and nowadays they are in urgent need of resuscitation'.[617] Indeed, for more than half a century, Belarus had been involved in complex economic ties with Russia within the framework of a single planned economy. After the Soviet Union disintegrated, Belarus's strategic goal became to 'do everything possible' to prevent bankruptcy of large enterprises; it was decided to do that by integrating with Russia.[618] Russia 'showed us who feeds whom' as it increased the oil price for Belarus a thousand times within one year, 1993-1994.[619] Belarus's elite reasoned that if 'a natural and civilized' cooperation of Belarus and Russia was to be stalled, then a sharp deterioration in living standards and dissatisfaction of the population could have resulted in ethnic conflicts and wars.[620] It was reminded that the Soviet Union disintegration was not in the interest of Belarus, and its national product dropped by half of what the country produced in pre-Gorbachev years.[621] Population 'must be fed, clothed, and the conditions must be created for productive labour', only after that the market economy as a new economic policy could be set as a goal and pursued.[622] At the same time, the attitude towards the market economy was starkly negative: 'only dishonest people can seek in stock exchanges, funds, and banking operations salvation from devastation'.[623] Belarus feared that the forthcoming monetary union and a rouble zone with Russia would burden Belarus with Russian economic troubles, such as high inflation, and 'other delights of the market'.[624] That

[616] Belarusian Autoworks (BelAZ), Belaruskali, Minsk Automobile Plant (MAZ), Minsk Tractor Works (MTZ), Belarusian Steel Works (BMZ), Belshina, Naftan, Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant (MZKT), Belkommunash, Atlant, Gefest, Hi-Tech Park, Adani, Orsha Linen Mill, Milavitsa, Mark Formelle, Conte, and others.
[617] Kebich (1994. E)
[618] Belinform (1994. B)
[619] Belinform (1994. B)
[620] Belinform (1994. B)
[621] Dubko (1994)
[622] Dubko (1994)
[623] Dubko (1994)
[624] Ivanchikov (1994)

could have been especially disappointing since the description of 'economic miracle' applied to Belarus more than to any other country of the CIS: the decline in industrial production was minimal and the social situation did not cause concern.[625] Nevertheless, Belarus believed that the union with Russia with its rich resources served Belarus's long-term goals: 'If we are left without Russia, then for us it will be a collapse. Yes, the Russian economy is also sick, but by no means lifeless. And today, an alliance with it gives Belarus a real prospect to stop the decline in production by 1995'.[626]

In the second half of the 1990s, Belarus's economic, political, and military cooperation and integration with Russia continued to take a special and predominant place in its foreign policy. Friendship with Russia was described as the guarantee of Belarus's sovereignty. [627] In 1997, the relations with Russia were defined as the priority area, the main direction of Belarus's foreign policy that was to undergo 'multi-aspects' deepening and expansion.[628] In 1998, the bilateral relations were described as the foremost natural priority in Belarus's foreign policy.[629] Russia was 'a natural strategic ally of Belarus's and its 'brother'.[630] In his 1999 annual speech to the Belarusian parliament, the President described the integration of Belarus with Russia as 'of tremendous geopolitical significance'; meanwhile, Western countries exercised the politics of pressure due to their global ambitions.[631] The rapprochement with Russia had 'no alternative', and Belarus greeted it with 'an open heart'.[632] According to Boris Yeltsin, the Treaty on the Union between Belarus and Russia gave equal rights to citizens of both states in the freedom of movement, economic activity, property ownership, employment, compensation, education, medical care, and other social guarantees, while at its core was the economic part:

[625] Ivanchikov (1994)
[626] Kebich (1994. E)
[627] Lukashenko (1996. B)
[628] Lukashenko (1997. A)
[629] Lukashenko (1998. A)
[630] Lukashenko (1997. A)
[631] Lukashenko (1999. A)
[632] Lukashenko in Lyushkevich (1997)

Belarus was to become a high-tech partner of Russia.[633] Russia 'has been, is now, and will be our strategic partner', and this was a 'principled unchangeable position' declared Lukashenko in his address to the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia, the State Duma in autumn 1999.[634]

According to the official discourse, unification and integration with Russia did not mean that Belarus was to surrender and lose its sovereignty and independence:[635] 'In politics, one must be realistic and remember that the wheel of history can only rotate forward, not backward'.[636] The USSR, as it had been, was 'impossible and unnecessary to reanimate'; only reunification following a confederation format met the interests of the peoples of the countries.[637] It would be an economic union of two Slavic peoples.[638] According to Vyacheslav Kebich, the first Prime Minister of Belarus, the alliance with Russia was to be on equal terms: 'a reliable, strong, and equal alliance with Russia is the goal of the policy that I pursue'.[639] Belarus was a smaller state compared to Russia, but it had a 'very powerful economy', and besides, the two countries 'have an equal number of votes in the decision-making process' of the Community of Belarus and Russia, which was signed in 1996 and preceded the 1997 Treaty on the Union between Belarus and Russia.[640] Integration with Russia was not a merger of two states, and sovereignty and independence of Belarus were to remain intact.[641] According to the President, 'deep integration in the framework of the Union State with an unconditional preservation of sovereignty and independence of Belarus is in the core national interests of the country.'[642] The

[633] Yeltsin in Lyushkevich (1997)
[634] Lukashenko (1999. B)
[635] Belinform (1994. B)
[636] Belinform (1994. B)
[637] Kebich (1994. H)
[638] Belinform (1994. C)
[639] Kebich (1994. C)
[640] Lukashenko (1996. C)
[641] Lukashenko (1997. A)
[642] Lukashenko (1998. A: 43)

Union State was to create a precedent for further integration and development of a great Slavic civilisation.

Furthermore, the union with Russia would help protect Belarus's sovereignty by halting economic decline and by suppling duty-free Russian oil, cheap materials, and low retail prices; left without Russia, 'Belarus will collapse',[643] and it would lose its sovereignty. In April 1994, Belarus's debt for Russian gas and oil was more than 600 billion Russian roubles,[644] while Russia accounted for 60 percent of Belarus's exports 'considering only this factor, we should have unified our monetary systems' by an interstate bank, which would have regulated money supply and considered the interests of both countries'.[645] Without a close alliance with Russia, there could be 'no talk of any true sovereignty… Independence in a vulgar sense will only lead to collapse. This is already understood by everyone who is not blinded by nationalist ideas'.[646]

Once, Lukashenko, the then parliamentarian and chairman of an anticorruption committee, declared that Belarus's statehood 'is not a small coin for change, however it is not an icon either' but an asset to manage for the benefit of population.[647] In most presidential narratives, however, the aspiration was towards a confederation with Russia on a mutually beneficial and equal basis and decided in referendum; Lukashenko refuted rumors of Belarus becoming a province of Russia: to turn the future president of Belarus into a governor was a propaganda hype emanating from political opponents inside Belarus.[648] In a speech delivered to the Russian Duma in spring 1994, he stated that the overwhelming majority of deputies and the absolute majority of Belarus's population considered 'restoration of brotherly relations with Russia… as the prime human and political task', and there was 'a strong desire of Belarusians to return

[643] Belinform (1994. B)
[644] Vysotskaya (1994)
[645] Tikhinya (1994)
[646] Kebich (1994. E)
[647] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[648] Grishan (1994)

to the days when we [Russia and Belarus], in a spiritual sense, lived as one family.'[649] However, unification with Russia would have guaranteed that Belarus remained sovereign and independent. In the words of Vyacheslav Kebich, 'the overwhelming majority of our population understands that we cannot exist without Russia':[650] the signed agreement with Russia on a monetary union was to help stabilise and improve the situation in Belarus.[651] Rapprochement with Russia was described as 'a natural and civilised process'.[652] Besides economic reasons, cultural proximity played a role too: 'Especially with Russia and its people we share the spiritual and blood unity'.[653] According to the deputy of the Supreme Soviet (the unicameral legislature of Belarus between 1991 and 1996) Valery Tikhinya, Belarus was 'destined to be united first of all with Russia – this fact is beyond doubt for me'.[654] The benefits for Russia from bilateral integration were that Belarus established business partnership relations with the Western countries and was socially and economically stable.[655]

The alliance of three East Slavic countries was also planned.[656] In 1994, the Prime Minister considered it his duty to 'restore the closest ties at least with Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus's[657] and potentially with other states of the CIS: 'we pay a high price for the break of the ties between nations which have lived for centuries together'.[658] Belarus was to serve as a springboard for the unification process because of its social stability and national consensus in society.[659] With Russia's 'full understanding', Belarus's leadership set itself the goal of 'achieving in the near future the entry into force of the treaty on a single rouble zone' and

[649] Lukashenko (1994. B)
[650] Romashkevich (1992)
[651] Kebich (1994. G)
[652] Belinform (1994. B)
[653] Kebich (1994. E)
[654] Tikhinya (1994)
[655] Kebich (1994. G)
[656] Kebich (1994. C)
[657] Kebich (1994. H)
[658] Kebich (1994. H)
[659] Kebich (1994. H)

without changing the Constitution of the country.[660] An economic union of two Slavic peoples, Russians and Belarusians, was to make possible higher integrational forms of cooperation among states of the former Soviet Union: 'We simply have no other way to go today'.[661]

Belarus's prospects were only in a close union with Slavic states and their peoples, but that did not mean that Belarus had to isolate itself from other countries.[662] According to the 1994 election programme of Lukashenko, one of the three goals of Belarus was to restore on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, 'ineptly destroyed ties with the countries of the former Soviet Union, foremost Russia and Ukraine', which was required not only by the economy, but 'by life itself'.[663] In the words of the chairman of the National Bank of Belarus, 'in the near future, the production potential of Belarus can only be used in circumstances of a deep integration with Russia and Ukraine and an access to their markets'.[664] It was underscored that independence and equality were as important as unification of fraternal republics. Belarus acknowledged that 'regretfully, the Russian side was not ready to unite on equal terms'.[665] The messages from Belarusian politicians were contradictory and ambivalent: an aspiration towards a union with Russia on equal terms, which Russia was expected not to agree with.

The other narrative of the Aspirational Self was connected to Europe. The integration of Belarus into European and international systems was mentioned in the election programmes of the candidates for presidency in 1994.[666] Belarus's path towards a 'real' independence presupposed a 'comprehensive integration' into Europe and strengthened relations with Russia, Poland, and the Baltic states.[667] Belarus was to follow the example of Poland, Hungary, and

[660] Kebich (1994. I)
[661] Kebich (1994. E)
[662] Kebich (1994. F)
[663] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[664] Bogdankevich (1994)
[665] Bogdankevich (1994)
[666] Kebich (1994. I)
[667] Shushkevich (1994)

the Czech Republic in terms of democracy and 'civilized' market relations.[668] In the framework of this pro-Western narrative, Belarus's national revival, historically European state symbols, an independent media, and the Belarusian language were underscored and prioritised. The aspiration towards neutrality and the non-nuclear status of Belarus were present in the pre-1994 discourse: 'we will ensure consistency and irreversibility of our steps towards neutrality and achieve its recognition from the leading countries in the world'.[669] The eventual accession to the EU was discussed as an option by the Belarusian government. In March 1994, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Peter Kravchenko, declared that by 2005 Belarus would have met the Maastricht requirements and joined the EU. The narrative was sidelined and muted, however. Nevertheless, close relations with Russia did not preclude the development of relations with other countries, and the West in particular. Belarus aspired to build neighbourly relations, strong and good, with European countries. It aspired to join the Council of Europe, which would 'help the country to part with the post-totalitarian past', especially in the area of human rights.[670] Also, joining the World Trade Organisation was acknowledged as 'a responsible paramount task': the period from 1996 to 2000 was to become decisive in the course of Belarus's accession to the organisation.[671] In 1996, the EU integration was labelled as 'the major path of civilisational development' and an example to replicate in Belarus-Russia relations in terms of supranational institutions, common legislation, and a single currency.[672] Belarus described itself as the geographical centre of Europe with its own strategic interests.[673] It had peaceful relations with its neighbours and no border disputes with them.[674] Due to these facts, Belarus felt to be a significant country, especially in the context of the EU's enlargement.

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[668] Shushkevich (1994)
[669] Shushkevich (1994); according to its Constitution of 15 March 1994, Clause 18, Belarus aimed to make its territory a nuclear-free zone, and the state – a neutral one.
[670] Rakovskaya (1996)
[671] Myasnikovich (1996)
[672] Lukashenko (1996. B)
[673] Sheiman (1997)
[674] Sheiman (1997)

Predominantly, however, the West was criticised. Belarus complained that the Western countries provided it with small quotas for selling goods in the West, in particular for textiles and potash salts; in contrast, European industries traded freely in Belarus without any quotas.[675] The West 'doesn't need us with our Chernobyl disaster, and our raw materials are cheap labour', and it 'will not grant us access to foreign markets'.[676] Relying on the West did not justify itself, and Ukraine served as an example. It cut its economic ties with Russia to please the West, which resulted in the most difficult crisis in the country: 'a hand outstretched to the West for help hangs in the air'.[677] Belarus was ready for an economic partnership with the EU but acknowledged that its produce was not competitive in the Western market.[678] Belarus believed that the pro-Western orientation would destroy its industry and reduce it to 'a banana republic', and that Belarus would be a source of cheap labour for the West and a market for Western goods of poor quality.[679] In contrast, the pro-Russian orientation helped Belarus retain sovereignty, develop its own industry, and preserve its high scientific potential. Only through integration with Russia, Belarus could restore and improve its economy. After that, Belarus would have been able to enter the Western market as an equal partner: 'What can Belarus sell in the West today? Sales markets have long been divided there'.[680] 'At the moment', the pro-Western orientation meant 'obedient adherence to the recommendations of the West', which could have led to a social and material stratification of population, aggravation of interethnic relations, and the disruption of centuries-old ties with Russia and other former Soviet republics'.[681]

[675] Kebich (1994. D)
[676] Dubko (1994)
[677] Ivanchikov (1994)
[678] Kebich (1994. C)
[679] Kebich (1994. C)
[680] Kalyakin (1994)
[681] Babosov et al. (1994)

The EU was accused of exercising 'double standards' towards Belarus: Belarus's rapprochement with the EU would have been treated positively in Europe, however, Belarus's integration with Russia received a negative reaction in Europe. Belarus rejected the dilemma 'either together with Russia against the West or together with the West against Russia'.[682] The other manifestation of 'double standards' was related to nuclear weapons: Belarus's decision to dispose of its nuclear weapons was welcomed by the West, but Belarus's request for a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe failed to cause reaction in the West. 'Double standards' also prevailed in the EU's assessment of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO): NATO expansion to the East was acceptable, but not attempts in the East to build a similar military structure to counter-balance NATO. Its 'mechanical enlargement' [683] to the borders of Belarus was called 'the historical mistake' that led to a 'split of the continent' and a new confrontation line along Belarus's borders.[684] NATO needed to build a dialogue with Russia in order to avoid 'new dividing lines in Europe'.[685] The security model where NATO represented the core of the system was imposed on Belarus. Regarding security, Belarus took into account the position of Russia, which was a 'natural, strategic ally' of Belarus.[686] NATO was not an exclusive guarantor of security, and Belarus considered the Treaty and the Charter of the Union of Belarus and Russia as a regional contribution to the Euro-Atlantic security structure.[687] At the same time, Belarus assessed the situation pragmatically and considered NATO institutions of high value as forums for consultation on good neighbourhood relations. Belarus was ready for a constructive dialogue – it announced its intention to join the Partnership for Peace[688] - and was committed to its international obligations and to the process of disarmament.[689]

[682] Lukashenko (1996. B)
[683] Sheiman (1997)
[684] Lukashenko (1997. A)
[685] Syanko (1996), Sheiman (1997)
[686] Lukashenko (1997. A: 2)
[687] Sheiman (1997)
[688] Warren (1994): Belarus has just announced its intention to become the twenty-fourth Partner of the Alliance.
[689] Syanko (1996)

Belarus acknowledged that while it wanted to deepen cooperation in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and assessed positively 'good neighbourly and constructive relations with NATO', it was not ready for a full-blown military interaction with the Alliance.[690]

In 1996, the concept of a multi-vector (multi-directional), balanced foreign policy or a balanced multilateralism was introduced as the basic principle of Belarus's foreign policy at the All Belarusian People's Assembly that took place for the first time that year.[691] It entailed building relations within 'the belt of good neighbourliness' with the neighbouring states of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia.[692] It also embraced integration of three levels and speeds on the post-Soviet space: of Belarus and Russia, of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, and in the framework of the CIS. Belarus's foreign policy was to be balanced by cooperating in equal proportions with both traditional partners in the East and with the Western states.[693] Belarus was also to build relations with the countries of transition economies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. However, as integration with Russia and within the CIS intensified, Belarus's foreign policy became misbalanced and one-sided. It was 'overwhelmingly, if not exclusively',[694] oriented towards Russia and the CIS. It was argued that few countries in the world had such a 'clear one foreign policy vector' as Belarus: at least, there were no such states in Europe and in the post-Soviet space.[695] According to another opinion, the concept of a multi-vector foreign policy did not presuppose an equal weight of different vectors, with the Russian vector arguably being justly predominant.[696] In 1999, Belarus rekindled the concept of the 'multi-vectoredness' as the basic principle of its foreign policy. This time, it was promoted

[690] Martynov (1998)
[691] Lukashenko (1996. B)
[692] Lukashenko (1997. A)
[693] Lukashenko (1997. A)
[694] Rontoyanni (2005: 47)
[695] Kazakevich (2020)
[696] Interview with Snapkovsky, October 2019

under the slogan ‘together with Russia into Europe’. It was supposed to target both the electorate voting for closer relations with Russia and appealed to those with aspirations to rapprochement, if not membership, with the EU.[697]

Chart 4.2. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Aspirational Self in the 1990s

Source: Author

Notes to Chart 4.2. The words and phrases that make the Aspirational Self congruent with the Russian Other are ‘The Community of Belarus and Russia’, ‘Belarus-Russia Union’, ‘Russia’, ‘integration’, ‘unification’, ‘common currency’, ‘The Commonwealth of Independent States’, ‘The Collective Security Treaty’, ‘The Union of Four’, and ‘The Union of Twelve’. These congruent components were highly engaged (as can be seen by the size of the words). Congruence vis-à-vis the European Other was constructed with the words and phrases, such as

[697] Guicherd (2002: 329)

the ‘United Nations’, ‘NATO’, ‘democracy’, ‘Europe’, and the concept of ‘good neighbourhood belt’. Indirectly, the congruence was intensified with Belarus’s pursuit of the principle of ‘multi-vectoredness’ in its foreign policy, the aspiration towards ‘neutrality’, its regard towards its ‘constitution’, and insistence on ‘sovereignty’ and ‘independence’. There were fewer congruent words vis-à-vis the European Other; their engagement was lower too.

To conclude the analytical assessment of Belarus’s official narratives of the 1990s, Belarus’s Aspirational Self was constituted by different narratives in the first and second half of the decade, the watershed being the election of the first president of Belarus to the newly created post in 1994. In the period from Belarus’s independence in 1991 until the ascendance to power of Lukashenko in 1994, the aspirational discourse was constituted by multiple goals: the pronounced intention to integrate with Russia, the muted aspiration to join the EU, and the goal towards neutrality for the far future. The aspiration towards integration with Russia predominated. Belarus intended to preserve its independence in the union with Russia and enjoy equality there. The attitude towards independence as an asset for trade was rare but present. Moreover, the unification with Russia was to protect Belarus’s independence and prevent its economic collapse. Also, Belarus postulated a goal of a comprehensive integration into Europe and, eventually, membership in the EU. The aspirations towards neutrality and a non-nuclear status of Belarus were also addressed. Overall, the Aspirational Self was in more congruence and engagement with the Russian Other than with the European Other.

That congruence and engagement increased in the second half of the 1990s and at the expense of the European Other. The Aspirational Self was constituted by the narratives of a multi-vector and balanced foreign policy with a predominant orientation towards cooperation and integration with Russia. Belarus constructed its state identity for the future through the prism of its relations with Russia. The projected image of Belarus was about being an integral but

independent part in Russia's integration projects, including in the bilateral Union State, and also being a partner of the West and the EU. The predicament was that any kind of integration with Russia was to impede not only a multi-vector foreign policy but also Belarus's statehood, making it conditional on Russia's choice in foreign policy. Belarus also acknowledged the unwillingness of Russia to accommodate Belarus's wish to unite on equal terms due to their differences in size. Though de jure equal, Belarus's future independence in the Union State with Russia came under question since Russia had claims to a great power status and little compromise.

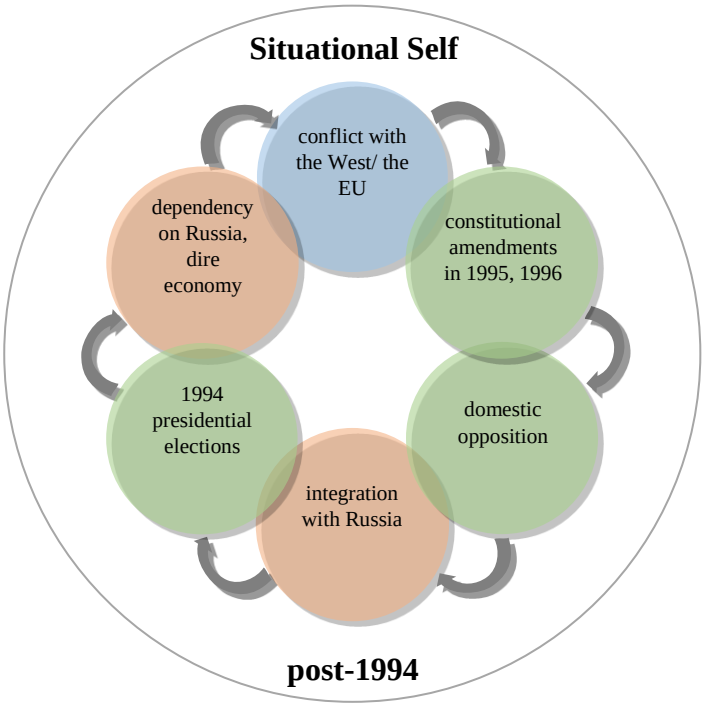
As Belarus's foreign policy became increasingly tied to Russia and the relations with the EU worsened, the intended balance in the multi-vector foreign policy was not achieved. Also, the destination point of Belarus remained ambiguous and inconsistent as it incorporated the mutually exclusive goals of independence from and integration with Russia, of a multi-directional foreign policy and the predominant focus on post-Soviet space and Russia, 'good relations' with the EU and its criticism, as well as questionable intentions, such as to move 'together with Russia into Europe'. The Aspirational Self reflected these contradictions: Belarus's dependency on Russia's energy resources and political support but fear to lose independence. As Belarus's influence on Russia reached significant levels in the second half of the 1990s, it was predominantly conditioned by the Historical Self with its strong level of engagement and congruence with Russia. The contradictory character of the Aspirational Self indicated its secondary but still a considerable role in Belarus's state identity construction.

The parts of the Aspirational Self, such as the aspiration towards a multi-vector and balanced foreign policy, the intention to preserve 'good relations' with the West, and Belarus's insistence on independence in a union with Russia were in congruence with the European Other and facilitated Belarus's influence on the EU. Belarus's Aspirational Self contributed to Belarus's

goal of preserving the same level in relations with the EU reached in the first half of the 1990s. Belarus's failure to reach the goal cannot be attributed and understood solely by the way Belarus constructed its Aspirational Self. Rather, the Situational Self was to blame: the EU was accused of double standards, the Cold War mentality, and criticised for trade quotas, severe competition, and uncompromising economic policy that threatened Belarus's industry. The next section of the thesis turns to the analysis of Belarus's situational discourse.

4.3.3. The Situational Self

Graph 4.3. Dominant categories of the Situational Self and their congruence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU in the second half of the 1990s



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 4.3. The components that relate Belarus to Russia are given in red, the components that relate Belarus to the EU are given in blue, and the green components indicate

the situational issues that are specific to Belarus and not exclusively to Russia or the EU. To remind, the Situational Self is constituted by the explanations of the current issues that the country faces, and it reflects the demands of the 'present' situation and can contradict or reinforce the narratives of the Historical and Aspirational Selves.

In the first half of the 1990s, Belarus's Situational Self was constituted by regrets about the collapse of the Soviet Union - 'the traditional ties of fraternal peoples have been cut alive',[698] 'the tragedy of the past that the whole society is trying to critically rethink as well as the meaning of real sovereignty while those who call themselves national patriots live in medieval illusions'[699] – and its dire economic consequences for the country: the 'storming blow' of Gaidar's reforms in Russia 'when strong and well-adjusted economic ties between Russia and Belarus were broken off instantly', Belarus's enterprises were 'out of the saddle', and the country 'became hostage' to the 'ill-conceived economic reforms and the resulting crisis'. [700] The exchange rate of the Belarusian rouble against the Russian rouble was 18 to 1.[701] The severed economic ties, foremost with Russia but also with other post-Soviet countries, placed Belarus 'in the most difficult circumstances of deficit in almost everything'.[702] Belarus further 'fault and misfortune' consisted in the fact that it failed to join the world economy, a new socio-economic system of its society organisation was not formed, and the legislative basis for deep transformations was not created.[703] Belarus's years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union were characterised as 'the failed policy of a bankrupt government'.[704]

[698] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[699] Kebich (1994. J)
[700] The Russian government under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin and Yegor Gaidar carried out economic reforms in January-December 1994, primarily, the liberalisation of retail prices and foreign trade and the tax system reform. The reforms brought radical change and marked Russia's transition to a market economy.
[701] Kebich (1994. H)
[702] Kebich (1994. C)
[703] Kebich (1994. A)
[704] Lukashenko (1994. A)

The way out of this situation Belarus saw neither in 'Baltic-Black Sea utopias' nor in the help from the West, but - 'of course' - in the economic integration with Russia: 'our entire market infrastructure has been tied to it for decades… our economic and intellectual potential has always been focused on it… a reliable, strong, and equal alliance with Russia is the goal of the policy that I pursue…'[705] 'Today, the way out of the crisis has been determined – it is the restoration of ties with Russia and other member of the CIS'.[706] However, it was 'impossible to enter the same river twice', and the integration of the Soviet type was hardly possible.[707] The common Russia-Belarus market working at its full capacity envisioned the agreements on financial relations, the banking system, and on the energy resources. For Belarus, that meant stabilisation of its production: for example, as Russia-Belarus customs duties were abolished, the export prices of Belarus's television sets and refrigerators were reduced by 15-20 percent, and their export increased.[708] The unification was perceived by the heads of industrial enterprises of Belarus and Russia as a 'serious factor in overcoming the economic crisis in both countries'.[709] The unification of monetary systems was possible only after the change in Belarus's constitution but was 'humiliating and enslaving' as Belarus's National Bank would become a part of the Russian Central Bank, a single budget would be formed by the Russian State Duma, Belarus would 'completely lose sovereignty and transfer the national economy into the hands of Russia'.[710] Still, the unification of monetary systems was 'part of the policy of rapprochement with Russia and particularly with Russia and its people we have spiritual and blood unity'.[711] Russians were close to 'us, Belarusians, in spirit and blood', and 'regardless of

[705] Kebich (1994. C)
[706] Kebich (1994. E)
[707] Kebich (1994. E)
[708] Kebich (1994. C)
[709] Osipov (1994)
[710] Philipenko (1994)
[711] Kebich (1994. E)

the will of politicians, peoples want to live together'.[712] Thus, 'together with Russia we defeated fascism, together we overcome the crisis, together we will go to the future'.[713]

To reiterate, in 1994 and before the first presidential elections, Belarus's government set the primary goal of 'a strong, mutually beneficial alliance with Russia, and in the long-term, an alliance of three Slavic states' with the restoration of 'broken ties'.[714] Foremost with Russia and Ukraine, the ineptly destroyed ties were to be restored on an equal and mutually beneficial basis; cooperation with Russia and Ukraine did not need justification: 'it is not so much the economy that requires it, but life itself'.[715] 'Without a close alliance with the former republics of the USSR, first of all with Russia, there can be no question of any development and hence of true sovereignty… independence in the vulgar sense will only lead to destruction… this is already understood by everyone who is not blinded by nationalist ideas'.[716] Belarus was a part of 'the geopolitical space Russia – USSR – CIS', and it constituted the 'coordination system of its true sovereignty', and 'a natural condition for development of Belarus and the cooperation that has been built for centuries within out common home'.[717]

Regarding its relations with the EU (and the West), some Belarus politicians intended to continue the process of 'comprehensive integration of Belarus into Europe, which began after the declaration of independence'.[718] Other politicians were more cautious: they thought that Belarus was 'ready for a market partnership, and we will build it up, but not now as we are not competitive in the Western market'.[719] Belarus was not satisfied with the current situation when the West provided Belarus with 'very small quotas' for the sale of Belarusian there, in

[712] Kebich (1994. E)
[713] Kebich (1994. A)
[714] Kebich (1994. C)
[715] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[716] Kebich (1994. E)
[717] Ponomarev (1994)
[718] Shushkevich (1994)
[719] Kebich (1994. C)

particular, for textiles and potash salts, which were in high demand in Europe while European companies traded freely in Belarus without quotas in automobile, confectionery, radio electronic equipment, beer, and tobacco.[720] Also, according to Belarus's discourse, the pro-Western orientation for Belarus meant destruction of its own industry and scientific potential, a source of cheap labour for the West and a sales market for its poor-quality goods.[721]

There were also narratives regarding the intention to ensure 'consistency and irreversibility' of steps towards neutrality and the non-nuclear status of Belarus: 'we will achieve recognition and guarantees of neutrality from the leading countries in the world'.[722] Yet, 'only we, ourselves, rolling up our sleeves, can create a miracle'[723] – to bring the country out of the crisis and 'to take the state and the people away from the abyss'.[724] Lukashenko saw it as the primary task of the president.[725] The Belarusian leadership considered it necessary to prioritise economic interests over political ones and 'to create a system of civilized management of the economy without administrative restrictions'.[726]

The conditions for the revival and development of the national culture and the Belarusian language were promised to be created.[727] Of special concern would be the Belarusian national culture – 'the basis of our statehood'.[728] The principle of 'the government for the people, not the people for the government' was cited as belonging to Kastuś Kalinoŭski, 'the national hero', and it was the main principle to follow in public administration.[729] At the same time, the 'harmonious' development of the Belarusian nation was not envisioned 'in isolation from the

[720] Kebich (1994. D)
[721] Kalyakin (1994)
[722] Shushkevich (1994)
[723] Shushkevich (1994)
[724] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[725] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[726] Kebich (1994. A)
[727] Kebich (1994. A)
[728] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[729] Kebich (1994. A)

great Russian culture and the Russian language'.[730] Every Belarusian would have 'a real opportunity to speak in the language in which s/he was brought up', and there would be no compulsion regarding this issue.[731] 'I speak Russian with you and this alone explains my attitude towards languages', and the dual citizenship should be an option.[732]

The characteristics of Belarusians such as hard work, kindness, mutual respect, and self-control were singled out as the ones to be encouraged and promoted.[733] Compared to its neighbours, Belarus managed to preserve social peace without the crisis and to avoid decline in production as in Lithuania, a complete stagnation of industrial output and hyperinflation as in Ukraine, and wars and interethnic conflicts as in the Caucasus.[734] Belarus's reforms were slow but without imitation, 'rushed' privatisation, and an ensuing 'terrible' collapse.[735] The aspirations to 'strengthen democracy' and to respect human rights and freedoms were 'the main goals of our people and state'.[736] The areas of concern were corruption, bureaucratisation, and crime. Crime was a large problem in the turbulent years after the Soviet Union's collapse: 'to defeat organised crime and curb corruption'[737] was to become 'the first decree of the first president of Belarus's.[738] Also, there was the needs 'to develop a system of long-term loans for individual housing construction and to set up the voucher privatisation mechanism;[739] to create 'favourable conditions for the formation of a multi-party political system';[740] and to tackle the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster – 'the largest in the history of

[730] Kebich (1994. A)
[731] Lukashenko (1994. A)
[732] Kebich (1994. H)
[733] Kebich (1994. C)
[734] Kebich (1994. C)
[735] Kebich (1994. C)
[736] Kebich (1994. A)
[737] Shushkevich (1994)
[738] Kebich (1994. C)
[739] Kebich (1994. C)
[740] Shushkevich (1994)

mankind', such as the resettlement of the population from the contaminated areas in Belarus: the disaster was 'a heavy burden, which the republic was practically left alone to deal with'.[741]

From the analytical perspective, the Belarusian leadership attitude towards market reforms – 'wild market criminal recipes'[742] - was critical: on the one hand, economic reform and market relations were planned, on the other hand, they were sabotaged: in the words of the Prime Minister of Belarus 'there is a chronic shortage of medicines and medical equipment; at the same time, we are advised and pushed towards market reforms; if there is no medicine for a sick child, a disabled or elderly person – should they run to the market or to a commercial pharmacy to buy it with dollars? I take a tough stance here – the social guarantees of free medicine must be provided, at least the most essential ones'.[743] 'The capitalist market can provide low growth similar to the pre-reform 1989 level, and not earlier than in one and a half to two decades, the national income increase in the BSSR was several times higher than in the capitalist countries; therefore, introduction of capitalist or socialist market by itself does not solve anything, nor does independence; Belarus needs other reforms'.[744] Belarus's government 'restrained the impending chaos, shock liberalisation and landslide privatisation – the elements of the free market, which could destroy any economy and society'; while Belarus's national reformers 'pushed the economy into the abyss with a triple thrust', destroyed the Soviet Union and imposed 'the criminal recipes of the wild market'; if the government followed advice of the national democrats, 'there would be no industry, no agriculture, and no modern economy, which was created in Belarus before the current reforms'.[745] Belarus had to 'persistently, step by step, collect into a single whole all that we have so easily lost'.[746] The agricultural and

[741] Kebich (1994. A)
[742] Kebich (1994. E)
[743] Kebich (1994. C)
[744] Kebich (1994. E)
[745] Kebich (1994. E)
[746] Kebich (1994. E)

industrial sectors – 'the very sources of life for the republic' - were to stay unreformed;[747] rather, the focus was on the preservation of collective farms and large enterprises, their state support, and 'reasonable transformations'.[748]

It was also the time of adoption of a new constitution, the introduction of the post of presidency, and the first presidential elections in June-July 1994: 'today we are choosing not just a person of a first president, we are choosing the fate, the future of Belarus's.[749] Regarding the post of presidency, Belarus's elite believed that the state had to have a strong power as 'democracy without limits and collective responsibility' never strengthened the state and its economy but led to collective irresponsibility, and that had been proved by the period of perestroika and reforms.[750] Kebich, the first prime minister of Belarus,[751] among the first laws to implement in his foreseeable post as President, named the laws on crime, the vertical of power, and a referendum on the state language, symbols, citizenship, and private property: again, the strong power of the executive was emphasised which was opposed to uncontrollability and irresponsibility.[752] The presidency protected democratic norms and revived economy: 'today, I don't see any other effective way out of the crisis into which the society has been pushed too deeply'.[753] Presidency also allowed to act faster and more decisively, and in Belarus in its current state it was unacceptable to delay the decision-making and implementation processes.[754] Belarus's leadership set the example of China: it retained a strict control of the state and the power vertical, maintained a high level of social protection of the population, a large public sector in industry and agriculture, and created conditions for entrepreneurship:

[747] Kebich (1994. H)
[748] Kebich (1994. A), Lukashenko (1994. A)
[749] Kebich (1994. E)
[750] Kebich (1994. E)
[751] In office 19.09.1991 – 21.07.1994, the first prime minister of Belarus, was succeeded by Mikhail Chyhir.
[752] Kebich (1994. H)
[753] Kebich (1994. E)
[754] Kebich (1994. E)

'what is bad about the Chinese economic model which allows to predict that by 2000 China will have become the richest superpower?'[755]

In the second half of the 1990s, the Situational Self was represented foremostly by the issue of economic dependency on Russia's subsidies and resources: Belarus relied for 100 percent of its gas on Russia, for 92 percent of its oil on foreign sources, mainly Russia,[756] and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, 80 per cent of Belarus's production output was sold to Russia. According to Belarus's academic opinion, the dependence on Russia conditioned Belarus's choice of close cooperation with Russia and its specific model of political and economic development at the expense of democratic freedoms.[757] Economic troubles of Belarus were at the front in situational narratives. Of all varieties of problems facing the country, 'I would first of all single out economic issues: how to raise the standard of living, to prevent unemployment, and to provide for elderly people - these questions are the main ones for me'.[758]

The Situational Self was further represented by discussing the opposition and its Western support: the Belarusian opposition was accused of damaging international public opinion by labeling Belarus as a dictatorship.[759] It was also constituted by the discussion of amendments to a new constitution and the structural changes to the parliament from unicameral to bicameral, as well as by current challenges of economic, social, and political issues, such as the need to diversify Belarus's export market, to protect Russians in Belarus, or to withstand pressure that Belarus faced due to Russia's integration demands.

The other facet of the Situational Self was Belarus's confrontation with the EU. Though the postulated goal was to strengthen relations with the EU, Belarus evicted diplomats from their

[755] Kebich (1994. E)
[756] Balmaceda (2009: 80) in Korosteleva (2011: 568)
[757] Interview with Tikhomirov, October 2019
[758] Lukashenko (1996. B)
[759] Lukashenko (1996. B)

official premises in Minsk in 1998. That served a short-term situational need to retaliate against the EU for sanctions imposed on Belarus and contradicted Belarus's aspiration to preserve good relations with the EU. A year later, in 1999, Belarus searched for ways to normalise its relations with the West though its discourse remained hostile.

It is argued that while the young Belarusian statehood experienced upheavals, the EU's reaction to the emerging difficulties in the country in the form of suspending formal ties and official cooperation with the government of Belarus 'was definitely not sophisticated enough'.[760] Namely, due to the seventy years of its Soviet past, Belarus had 'many hurdles to overcome to bring its standards up to the European level'.[761] Belarus positioned itself as a country with its own path of development: to avoid 'shock therapy', ill-thought-through reforms, and corrupt privatisations, Belarus needed in the first place 'a sound economic and legislative basis'.[762] After that, it could develop 'normal, civilised market relations', which would preserve the social safety net, and rely on administrative resources, rigid discipline, and 'a very demanding policy at all levels of the executive'.[763] According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belarus was 'ready' to consider recommendations of the European institutions; in its turn, it expected the opinion of Belarusian officials to be considered by the EU, and the EU to take 'positive reciprocal' steps towards Belarus 'without preliminary conditions attached'.[764] Belarus believed that cooperation with the EU had to be based on a compromise from both sides and on issues of mutual interest.[765]

Belarus complained that the closer Belarus-Russia relations became, the more pressure the West exercised over Belarus ('terrible pressure'), and the more it was necessary for Belarus to

[760] Piontek (2006: 532)
[761] Martynov (2002: 306)
[762] Martynov (2002: 307)
[763] Martynov (2002: 307)
[764] Ulakhovich (2001: 339)
[765] Ulakhovich (2001: 339)

'calm down' the West.[766] In the words of the President, the West 'throws a stone at our hand' that 'is outstretched towards Russia', 'we got kicks', and 'feel trapped between the hammer and the anvil'.[767] In its foreign policy, Belarus pursued the strategic partnership with Russia along with a balanced multidirectional foreign policy that was built on strong national independence and good neighbourly relations.[768] Belarus issued warnings: 'we would not let anyone - domestic destructive powers or their foreign masters and henchmen - change it'.[769] The last reference was evidently directed towards the EU and the US. Furthermore, Belarus was not easily scared by 'blackmail, or direct pressure, including those from the side of 'the so-called' teachers of democracy in quotation marks'.[770] As of isolating[771] Belarus, there was 'no need to teach us democracy: we as a state are democratic enough'.[772] The West was accused of exercising 'double standards' in terms of difference in attitudes towards Belarus and to the 'no more democratic' Azerbaijan. Belarus's cooperation with the West, which was carried out in the beginning of the 1990s,[773] was described as an 'ugly skewed nationalist policy' that led to Russians fleeing their 'practically home country', Belarus.[774] Instead, the West had to remember the fact that the Soviet Union saved the West from 'the brown plague' in the Second World War, and for that the West, 'standing on its knees', had to express gratitude to Belarus and Russia and to avoid the topics of human rights in Belarus and of domestic terrorism in Russia.[775] Thus, Belarus's Situational Self was not congruent with the European Other in the second half of the 1990s.

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[766] Lukashenko (1999. B)
[767] Lukashenko (1999. B)
[768] Lukashenko (2000. A)
[769] Lukashenko (2000. A)
[770] Lukashenko (2000. A)
[771] Schimmelfennig (2005: 21) believes that EU's measures towards Belarus led to 'the isolation of Belarus'.
[772] Lukashenko (2000. A)
[773] by the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and the first head of state Stanislav Shushkevich (August 1991 – January 1994)
[774] Lukashenko (1999. B)
[775] Lukashenko (1999. B)

Chart 4.3. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Situational Self in the 1990s

Source: Author

Notes to Chart 4.3. The most frequent words and phrases that make the Situational Self congruent with the Russian Other are ‘Russia’, ‘The Belarus-Russia Union’ and its ‘The Statute’, ‘The Supreme Council’, ‘integration’, ‘The Community of Belarus and Russia’, ‘the military union’, and ‘the single currency’. Overall, the Situational Self was highly engaged vis-à-vis Russia. There are fewer most frequent words and phrases that make the Situational Self congruent with the European Other, such as ‘Europe’, ‘The European Union’, ‘The West’, ‘NATO’, ‘democracy’, the ‘US’, ‘Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe’, and ‘human rights’. ‘Sovereignty’, ‘equality’, ‘nuclear disarmament’, and ‘balance in foreign policy’ indirectly contributed to that congruence too. Derogatory attitude towards domestic

opposition, the referendum of 1996 that changed the constitution to the benefit of the president, depiction of EU sanctions as the attempt to 'put Belarus on its knees' distorted that congruence.

To conclude the analysis, overall, the Situational Self was congruent with the Russian Other in the 1990s: it was constituted by the issues of economic dependence on Russia, the dire economic situation in the country, and Belarus's population choosing economic stability at the expense of freedoms and national revival. There was also an emotional narrative that emphasised the cultural affinity with Russians, the common historical heritage, and the will of two peoples 'to live together'. Russia and the Soviet Union were characterised as the coordination system of Belarus's 'true sovereignty'. Belarus's situational discourse was strongly opinionated in its orientation towards integration with Russia and 'restoration of broken ties'. It was disrupted by Belarus's introduction of the principle of multi-directionality and balance in its foreign policy and the increasing focus and insistence on its independence. There were narratives on neutrality and 'comprehensive integration' of Belarus into Europe – albeit rare and few. Thus, the Situational Self was highly engaged and overall congruent with the Russian Other thereby contributing to Belarus's influence vis-à-vis Russia.

Vis-à-vis the EU, Belarus's situational narrative was constituted by Belarus's negative attitude towards market reforms, complains about Belarus's exports having quotas and the EU's 'double standards'. The Situational Self was not congruent with the European Other and contradicted the aspirational goal to preserve the achieved level of 'good neighbourly' relations with the EU. Moreover, it hindered Belarus influencing the EU. While the 1995 and 1996 constitutional amendments and the 1998 diplomatic conflict in Drozdy with eviction of Western diplomats alienated the West, harassment of Belarus's opposition was perceived negatively also by Russia. Rather, the Situational Self served the short-term interests of the elite instead of being aligned with long-term goals of the country or its historical narratives.

Contradicting both, it distorted an existing congruence of Belarus's state identity in its Aspirational and Historical components with the European Other and further decreased Belarus's possibility to influence the EU.

4.4. Conclusion

During the 1990s, Belarus's state identity contributed to Belarus exerting influence on Russia by securing substantial economic and political benefits but fell short of a contractual relationship with the EU as a legal basis for cooperation. Belarus also failed to retain the level of bilateral relations with the EU reached in the first half of the 1990s, but it was able to resist the EU's policies and democratisation requirements with no influence on the bloc.

Vis-à-vis Russia, Belarus practised straightforward approach towards constructing the three components of its state identity. The Historical Self was engaged and highly congruent with the Russian Other: it underlined a common history and Belarus's achievements in the Soviet Union; it invoked the feelings of kinship with 'brotherly' Russians. The Aspirational Self was constituted by an aspiration to a common future with Russia in a union of two fraternal peoples. The Situational Self was constituted by the explanations of the current difficulties in the economy, culture, politics as caused by the 'broken ties' with Russia and the Soviet Union. Predominantly, the orientation was towards an alliance with Russia and restoration of ties, and that was fortified by the emotional narrative of common cultural roots with Russians. The only caveat was that Belarus insisted on independence in the Union State with Russia and introduced the principle of multi-directionality in its foreign policy, and these distorted congruence of the Aspirational and Situational Selves with the Russian Other. However, the insistence on independence was not well pronounced and the multi-directionality was not well implemented, yet. Thus, Belarus relied on the three Selves and especially the Historical Self of its state identity in influencing Russia. Had Belarus's Aspirational and Situational Selves been more

congruent with the Russian Other, Belarus would have achieved more in terms of influence, such as free access to Russia's energy resources.

Vis-à-vis the EU, the Historical Self was not engaged, although the alternative European narrative of Belarus's historical memory, congruent with the European Other, existed. The Aspirational Self served the goal of rapprochement with the West since Belarus's independence was in the interest of the EU, and the aspiration towards good neighbourly relations with the EU was recurrently voiced. However, Belarus's aspiration towards the Union State with Russia, the controversial institutional amendments in 1995 and 1996, the harassment of domestic opposition, and the 1998 diplomatic conflict contradicted Belarus's aspiration to preserve the achieved level of 'good neighbourly' relations with the EU and distorted the Aspirational Self's congruence vis-à-vis the European Other. Rather, the Situational Self impeded the aspirational and historical narratives and further decreased Belarus's influence on the EU. The Situational Self served the short-term interests of Belarus's elite rather than long-term goals of the country or constructed historical narratives. It was engaged in a negative sense but not congruent with the European Other, thereby not contributing to influence.

Therefore, regarding its external congruence, Belarus's state identity components were much more congruent vis-à-vis Russia than the EU. Especially the Historical Self, and but also the Aspirational and Situational Selves were congruent with the Russian Other and were used instrumentally by Belarus's elite to wield influence on it. Vis-à-vis the EU, the ideational distance between core meanings of Belarus's three Selves and the EU was larger. The Historical Self was partly congruent but not engaged: rather, it resulted from Belarus's historical narratives lingering from its period of national awakening of 1991-1994. The Aspirational Self was partly congruent due to its core meaning of aspiration towards normalisation of relations with the EU. The Situational Self had the negative congruence,

however, and that led to an overall low congruence of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the EU and low chances of wielding influence on it. Regarding engagement, vis-à-vis Russia, the three Selves were highly engaged, above all the Historical Self, which lacked any contradictions and was in congruence with the Russian Other. Vis-à-vis the EU, the Aspirational and Situational Selves were engaged but the former was partly congruent and therefore partly contributed to influence, while the latter had a negative congruence due to its negative character and therefore impeded the process of influencing and even decreased it. The Historical Self was not engaged, although it had congruence with it. Regarding internal congruence, Belarus's state identity had an internal congruence on core meanings of the Historical, Aspirational, and Situational Selves vis-à-vis the Russian Other. The three Selves were in congruence among themselves: the Historical Self, based predominantly on the Soviet past, was conceptually connected with the Aspirational and Situational Selves, with only one contradiction in their trajectories to integration and independence. In exerting influence on Russia, internal congruence played a role. The internal congruence vis-à-vis the European Other was limited: the Historical Self constituted by the European historical memory was sidelined and not engaged, and the Situational Self spoilt the congruence of the Aspirational Self and a chance to influence.

Table 4.2. Engagement and Congruence of the Selves vis-à-vis the Others in the 1990s[776]

the 1990s	*Russia*			*The EU*		
	Historical Self	←Aspirational Self	←Situational Self	Historical Self→	Aspirational Self →	**Situational Self**
Congruence	**+**	+/-	+/-	**-**	+/-	**-**
Engagement	**+**	+	+	**-**	+	+/-

Source: Author

[776] Notes to Table 3. The signs 'plus' and 'minus' reflect the extent of congruence and engagement of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the EU and Russia. 'Plus' means the high extent of congruence and/or engagement of a component of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the Other, 'minus' means low congruence and/or engagement, 'plus/minus' means some congruence and/or engagement, and of a higher extent than congruence/ engagement expressed by 'minus/plus'. The arrows point to the prevalence of a certain (in bold) Self in the given time period.

Chapter 5. Belarus's Foreign Policy in the Second Decade of Independence

5.1. Introduction

Moving from the cases of Belarus's influence in the 1990s, successful vis-à-vis Russia and unsuccessful vis-à-vis the EU, the present chapter focuses on the second decade of Belarus's independence. It analyses the cases of Belarus's influence that amounted to the changes in EU and Russian policies towards Belarus, and the corresponding change in Belarus's state identity narratives. The focus is on how Belarus constructed its three components of state identity related to the historical memories, aspirations for the future, and practicalities of the present as well as their internal and external congruence and engagement with the Russian and the European Others. Following the thesis's line of argument, Belarus's varying influence on the EU and Russia can be understood by Belarus's discursive practices related to its state identity construction. Specifically, varying engagement and congruence of the Self vis-à-vis the Others help understand varying influence of a smaller state on its larger neighbours.

After an introduction to the chronological development of Belarus's relations with the EU and Russia, the chapter focuses on two cases of Belarus's influence. The first case is the Belarus-EU rapprochement in 2007-2010.[777] Though postponed and short-lived, it took place 'despite the lack of democratic progress'[778] and small concessions on the part of Belarus regarding the EU's demands for free and fair elections and human rights.[779] Besides, even when the bilateral relations worsened after the 2010 presidential elections, Belarus 'had already secured the ostensible benefit of its formal participation in the EU's Eastern Partnership programme, which shows that its foreign policy had obtained an intended outcome'.[780] The second case is about

[777] The EU suspended the targeted sanctions for six months in 2008, which was the first 'thaw' in the relations.
[778] Yakouchyk (2016: 204)
[779] Ioffe (2011): The Belarusian opposition accused the EU of 'double standards'.
[780] Hansbury (2017: 236)

Belarus's 'unprecedented' and 'effective' economic and political benefits from Russia in the 2000s, especially evident in the gas and oil dispute in 2006-2007.[781]

5.2. Historical Context of the Period: the 2000s

5.2.1. Belarus-EU Relations

The year 2007 became 'the turning point'[782] in Belarus-EU relations as they started to improve.[783] The 'enhancement of communication channels' was swiftly followed by 'the breakthrough in relations' as Belarus set up 'structured discussions' with the European Commission on energy and granted authorisation for the opening of a European Commission Delegation in Minsk.[784] It introduced measures to attract foreign investment, launched a privatisation programme, released the last internationally recognised political prisoner Alexander Kozulin, a candidate in the 2006 presidential elections, and allowed two independent newspapers to access state-controlled press and distribution networks.[785] However, a comparison of these accomplishments with the list of twelve conditions set by the EU 'clearly' revealed that political change in Belarus had not matched European demands.[786] Thus, the OSCE called the 2008 parliamentary elections 'largely unsatisfactory'[787] as they 'fell short of OSCE commitments for democratic elections' while 'the election environment in Belarus … still did not allow genuine political competition and equal treatment of election

[781] Leshchenko (2008: 1427); Frye (2011: 748): 'Much of the Belarussian economic 'miracle' of the last 20 years was due to the simple transfer of resources from Russia to Belarus'; Åslund (2011) in Frye (2011: 748): 'roughly 15 percent of Belarus's GDP'; Balmaceda (2006).
[782] Sahm (2010: 128)
[783] Portela (2011); Dura (2008); Ioffe (2011)
[784] Portela (2011: 494)
[785] Sahm (2010)
[786] Ioffe (2011: 228)
[787] Sahm (2010: 128)

competitors by the authorities', namely 'access to a plurality of views' was restricted and there was 'a minimum in terms of meeting venues, campaign financing and access to the media'.[788]

Nevertheless, the EU-Belarus engagement policy was officially launched in October 2008.[789] The Council of the EU suspended for six months travel restrictions on 36 out of 41 Belarusian officials, including President Lukashenko, and restored contacts with Belarus's authorities.[790] It resumed foreign ministers' troikas, and launched a human rights dialogue, while the Commission set up technical dialogues in customs, transport, agriculture, environment, and energy.[791] The EU also reduced the number of its demands towards Belarus from twelve to five: the reform of electoral legislation, guarantees for freedom of assembly and expression, improvements for the media and NGOs, and the abolition of political prisoners.[792] The diplomatic contacts between Belarus and the EU increased. In 2009, Belarus was invited to participate in the multilateral track of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP). The same year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided new credits to Belarus amounting to 3.5 billion US dollars, and the Council approved the mandate of the Commission for the negotiation of a Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreement with Belarus. In addition, the European Commission developed a Joint Interim Plan that served as a roadmap for enhanced bilateral relations in trade and economic sectors. A re-launch of the PCA was discussed by some Member States, but the initiative failed to convince the majority.[793]

It is argued that similar to 'the politics of isolation' of 1997, 'the bench-mark approach' of 1999, and the '12-point acquis' of 2006, a six-month 'technical trial' of 2008[794] represented the same 'hard conditionality' framework with sanctions and a strict visa regime targeting

[788] OSCE/ODIHR (2008: 1-2)
[789] Marin (2011: 3)
[790] The Council of the European Union (2008). The exception was made in regard to those officials who allegedly participated in the disappearance of opposition politicians.
[791] Portela (2011: 495)
[792] Sahm (2010: 128)
[793] Bosse (2017: 292)
[794] Korosteleva (2009: 333)

Belarus's leaders and financing ('money-pampering') the opposition.[795] It was associated with limited incentives for Belarus's elite and little interest in the needs and views of a partner state. This 'badly conceived' conditionality could only result in 'political suicide' of the elite and was unacceptable a priori.[796] Moreover, the policy reinforced 'wall-building' against 'Western offenders'[797] and facilitated 'the gradual shift'[798] of Belarus towards authoritarianism. The elite accused the EU of 'double standards': compared to Azerbaijan, Belarus was not less democratic but was subjected to sanctions in contrast to the latter.[799]

The EU's policies also failed to consider Russia's political and economic backing of Belarus,[800] which continued to play 'a far more important role… than any dialogue, sanctions and conditionality exercised by the EU and the US'.[801] Russia's subsidies and loans, cheap energy supplies, and political links allowed Belarus's elite to ensure stable standards of living of the population, and hence to secure their electorate's support.[802] Russian support was 'critical in the resilience'[803] of the Belarusian government.[804] Fundamentally, the 'hard conditionality' framework failed to account for the unfinished nation-building of Belarus:[805] the population with low levels of national awareness chose personal security, material well-being, and stability over national credentials.[806] Arguably, the EU had high expectations for Belarus in its democratisation demands because it considered the country to be geographically European; however, Belarus remained psychologically 'one of the most Soviet of the Soviet republics'.[807]

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[795] Dura (2008: 2): EU financial assistance in 1991-2005 totalled 'a mere €221 million'. Portela (2011: 492): The EU's approach evolved from being timid to becoming more assertive with coercive elements dominating.
[796] Korosteleva (2009: 333)
[797] Korosteleva (2009: 333)
[798] Portela (2011: 492)
[799] Sahm (2010) in Portela (2011)
[800] Korosteleva (2009: 334)
[801] Korosteleva (2009: 334)
[802] Korosteleva (2009: 334)
[803] Portela (2011: 493)
[804] Zurawski (2005) in Portela (2011)
[805] Ioffe (2008) and Ioffe (2006) in Korosteleva (2009: 334)
[806] Korosteleva (2009: 338)
[807] Kryvoi & Wilson (2015: 2)

All in all, the EU's dual-track approach of imposing sanctions parallel to promoting democratisation and contesting the legitimacy of the regime, yielded minimal results and failed to change the political situation in Belarus.[808] Moreover, it was 'smartly exploited' by Belarus's authorities.[809]

The 2007-2010 EU-Belarus rapprochement revealed Belarus's ability to bypass the EU's conditions of rapprochement. It represents the case of Belarus's ability to wield influence on the EU. Belarus achieved success changing the EU's policy despite 'the lack of democratic progress' in the country,[810] and despite 'overwhelming odds' and powerful international forces of the EU and later also Russia 'set against' it.[811]

Belarus's influence is explained by the 2006 energy dispute between Russia and Belarus,[812] and later by the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008,[813] when unexpectedly and contrary to Russia, Belarus refused to recognise independence of the newly separatist and backed by Russia regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Belarus's successful impact is also explained by the EU internal divisions and the inability to speak with one voice.[814] Indeed, the 2006-2007 energy dispute with Russia, and Belarus's rapprochement with the EU took place at the same time: 'from unconditional support to Russia to an approximation to the EU'.[815] It was reasoned that the rationale for Belarus's rapprochement with the EU was the decline in Belarus's relations with Russia.[816] Belarus did not intend to distance itself from Russia, but rather to increase its leverage vis-à-vis Russia.[817] Arguably, it was not EU conditionality that initiated

[808] Dura (2008)
[809] Marin (2011: 3)
[810] Yakouchyk (2016: 204); Ioffe (2011)
[811] Ioffe (2011: 235)
[812] Ioffe (2011: 220)
[813] Bosse (2017: 292); Ioffe (2011: 220)
[814] Marin (2011: 3)
[815] Portela (2011: 494)
[816] Portela (2011)
[817] Portela (2011); Jarabik & Silitski (2008)

the process of change.[818] The rapprochement was also facilitated by active lobbying by the OSCE, which remained the only European organisation with Belarus as a full member.

State identity discourse has been excluded from the potential reasons of the 2007-2010 EU-Belarus rapprochement. Meanwhile, it remains to be explored how Belarus constructed its state identity vis-à-vis the EU in the period and the role it played in Belarus's exercise of influence.

5.2.2. Belarus-Russia Relations

> *In the geopolitical aspirations of Russia, Belarus occupies an exceptional place … Belarus can be called a Russian pistol attached to the belly of Europe. This, in particular, explains the unprecedented economic support that Russia is providing to it. And not only economic, but also political in the most varied spheres - from international to domestic.*[819]

Russia became assertive in its relations with Belarus when Putin ascended to presidency. In 2002, when Belarus brought up the issue of equality of the two countries within the Union State, Putin suggested that 'flies and meatballs [be treated] separately';[820] instead, he proposed building integration similar to the 1991 post-war German unification, namely, to incorporate Belarus on the basis of the Russian constitution rather than building a confederative structure with equal rights in decision-making.[821] Belarus unequivocally rejected the proposal. For the first time, the bilateral integration put under question Belarus's independence and became to be perceived as a threat to it.[822]

Russia also announced the new doctrine of 'pragmatisation' of its foreign policy, according to which Russia's relations with Belarus were to become economically beneficial to Russia.[823]

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[818] Portela (2011); Sahm (2010)
[819] Zaostrovtsev (2021: 3)
[820] The meaning similar to the idiomatic expression 'separate the wheat from the chaff'.
[821] Baev (2008) in Vieira (2017); Plugataryov (2002) in Klinke (2008: 118-119): 'Belarus Will Become Federation's 90th Member'.
[822] Vieira (2014, 2017)
[823] Vieira (2017: 45): announced by Security Council Secretary Sergey Ivanov in 2001.

The cost of integration with Belarus, which amounted to subsidizing its economy, was believed to be too high.[824] However, it took Russia over four more years to sign a plan with Belarus for a gradual increase in energy prices to their international market level. It was accompanied by high tensions throughout the 2000s: gas deliveries to Belarus were interrupted in April 2002, January 2004, August 2007, and June 2010, while oil deliveries were affected in January 2007 and June 2010.[825] Besides, 'micro-wars' took place in a series of confrontations in response to Russian restrictions on Belarusian imports, such as those affecting sugar, confectionery, and alcohol in 2006 and sugar, milk, meat, and agricultural machinery in 2009-2010.[826]

Nevertheless, until 2006, Belarus exacted 'unprecedented' economic and political support from Russia.[827] Russia supplied Belarus with gas at a preferential level in the range of 30-55 dollars per thousand cubic metres in 2001-2006. To compare, Germany paid 96-296 dollars in the same period.[828] In addition, Russia provided stabilisation loans and trade schemes including barters that helped Belarus pay its energy debt. A major part of Belarus's revenues came from processing Russian oil bought at below market prices and exporting it tax-free abroad at market prices. It was maintained that Russian subsidies and trade revenues accounted for Belarus's 'unprecedented' 10 per cent GDP growth rates in 2004-2006.[829] While Belarus's economy remained unreformed, it boasted stable wages, low unemployment, and extensive social benefits. Belarus also received Russia's political support which ensured legitimacy of Belarus's government: in 2004, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement describing the Belarusian referendum that had changed the constitution and removed restrictions on president's term in office, as Belarus's 'internal affair'.[830] In 2001 and 2006, Russia supported

[824] Danilovich (2006)
[825] Vieira (2017)
[826] Korosteleva (2011), Balmaceda (2014)
[827] Leshchenko (2008: 1427)
[828] Vieira (2017: 44)
[829] Korosteleva (2009: 238); Marin (2016: 2): 'Russian subsidies account for up to 16% of GDP'; Korosteleva & Bosse (2009): '11-14 per cent of national GDP'.
[830] Klinke (2008: 117)

Belarus's presidential elections: it discarded the Council of Europe's criticism and defended Belarus's crackdown on opposition demonstrations.[831] Russia also censured the United States' attempts to impose sanctions on Belarus and blocked the issue of human rights abuses in Belarus from the UN Security Council's agenda.

The year 2006 became a watershed in Belarus-Russia relations.[832] After a series of tensions throughout 2006, Russia raised the gas price for Belarus by 100 per cent, from 55 dollars per thousand cubic metres to 118, effective from January 2007.[833] Also in January 2007, Belarus was brought into the international spotlight: due to its oil dispute with Russia, 'for the first time in history', Russia stopped its oil supplies to the EU via Belarus.[834] Furthermore, Belarus was for the first time to pay export duties to Russia on Russian crude oil and on Belarus's oil products refined from Russian oil and sold to the EU. On top of the tensions, came Russia's reluctance to offer another loan to Belarus. Ultimately, in late 2006, Belarus had to compromise the ownership of its state-owned gas company Beltransgas, the operator of the pipeline, which transported Russian gas to Central Europe. Though not as important as oil, gas represented a sensitive issue for Belarus. Russian Gazprom bought half of Beltransgas shares for 2.5 billion US dollars.[835]

Even in such restricted circumstances, Belarus managed to exact concessions from Russia. Firstly, regarding the gas agreement, its contractual basis was weak.[836] Because of spoken agreements, the actual prices charged to Belarus remained below the contractual values foreseen by agreements: at the end of 2008, they reached $127,9/tcm instead of the agreed $220 (or a 67 percent of European prices), and in 2009, they remained at $126/tcm, instead of the

[831] Borodin (2006) and Lavrov (2006) in Klinke (2008)
[832] Korosteleva (2011)
[833] Vieira (2017), Balmaceda (2013), Balmaceda (2014)
[834] Balmaceda (2014: 132)
[835] Klinke (2008), Vieira (2017), Korosteleva (2009)
[836] Balmaceda (2014: 135)

$210. Also in this period, Russian gas subsidies to Belarus increased given the rise in European prices compared to those charged to Belarus. Belarus continued to receive gas free from Russian export duties comprising 30 percent of the sale price to other markets. Both oil and gas subsidies reached $5-6 billion per year in early 2008. Furthermore, Belarus secured a Russian $1.5 billion loan on favourable conditions in December 2007.

Secondly, regarding the oil agreement, the tariff on Russian oil exports to Belarus constituted 35.6 per cent of the tariff on Russian oil exported to other countries until the end of 2009; after that, Belarus remained 'the only buyer of Russian oil that enjoyed a duty-free regime on oil purchased for domestic consumption'.[837]

Thirdly, regarding the purchase agreement of Beltransgas, it was 'favourable' as it provided a gradual timeline for gas price increases to Belarus, and the purchase price was be paid in cash.[838] Belarus also limited Russian Gazprom's joint control of Beltransgas by obliging to submit Beltransgas' profits in non-tax contributions to Belarus's Ministry of Energy's Innovation Fund, which constituted 19 percent of the value of products and services in 2007. Also, Belarus reduced Beltransgas' gas prices for final consumers thus reducing Beltransgas' profits that were to be shared with Gazprom.[839]

It is argued that Belarus exacted concessions for its commitment to integrate with Russia in the Union State.[840] The integration became labelled 'virtual integration', as it took place primarily in the sphere of the rhetoric of the elite.[841] The Union State stipulated a full economic and

[837] Ioffe (2011: 218)
[838] Balmaceda (2014): According to the agreement, from 2007 to 2010, Gazprom was each year to acquire 12.5 percent of Beltransgas' shares, until it reached ownership of 50 percent of shares. By 2012, Russian ownership rose to 100 per cent; in exchange, Russia reduced the gas price for Belarus (to $165/tcm, a yearly saving of £3b compared to the 2011 gas bill) and approved a $3 billion loan from the Stabilization Fund of the Eurasian Economic Community.
[839] Balmaceda (2014: 136)
[840] Klinke (2008)
[841] Danilovich (2006), Rontoyanni (2003), Nesvetailova (2003)

political union with supranational institutions,[842] a joint citizenship, a common currency, no border between the two countries, and a common defence policy with a Regional Military Group for joint military exercises.[843] In action, only the integration in the military sphere was successful. The elites of both countries failed to proceed with the fundamental issues of the Union State, such as a common currency. The agreement on a monetary union, signed in November 2000, was arguably the most far-reaching document on economic integration of Belarus and Russia: an ambitious goal of a common currency set to be implemented by January 2005 was postponed in 2006, 2007, and abandoned in 2008. Also, for Russia, implementation of half of the articles of the 1999 Union Treaty required the amendment of 11 out of 27 articles of its Constitution.[844]

In the context of NATO expansion and the coloured revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004),[845] Belarus's elite seized the opportunity to consolidate the existing concessions from Russia by the rhetoric which found reflections in the Russian media: in 2001, the prominent Russian newspaper, Vremya NM, advised against losing 'the only remaining allied geopolitical space on Russia's western borders, the only reliable 'fraternal' transit route to Europe, and a real, 'substantive' guarantee that NATO won't be on Smolensk's doorstep a few years from now'.[846] In 2006, Pavel Borodin, the State Secretary of the Union State, described Belarus as Russia's 'most consistent and reliable ally', and 'a geopolitical bridge between Europe and Asia, which … consolidates the positions of Russia as a great power'.[847] Besides, Belarus was underscored to be of strategic importance as a transit route of Russia's exports to Europe and a link to Kaliningrad, Russia's exclave.[848]

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[842] A Supreme State Council, a Parliament, a Council of Ministers, a Court, a Board of Audit, and a Standing Committee.
[843] Danilovich (2006), Kłysiński (2018), Vieira (2017), Klinke (2008), Nesvetailova (2003)
[844] Vieira (2017)
[845] Nechyparenka (2011), Balmaceda (2006)
[846] Klinke (2008: 118)
[847] Klinke (2008: 118)
[848] Rozanov (1999), Gromadzki & Kononczuk (2007)

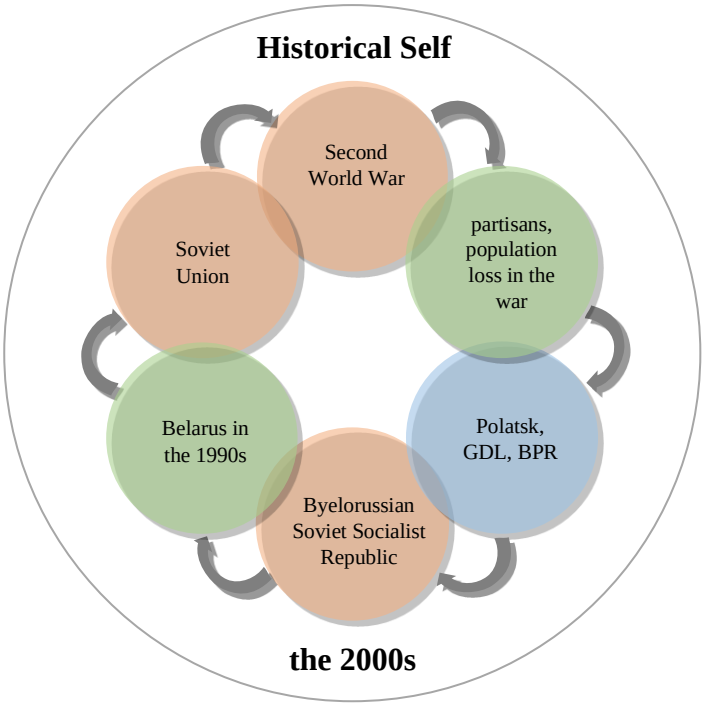
It is also argued that to exact concessions vis-à-vis Russia, the Belarusian leadership played on Russia's sentiments by describing the dissolution of the USSR as a historical mistake and portraying the history of Belarus as predominantly Soviet and a positive experience.[849] Arguably, after 2006, the rhetoric of the Slavic unity was curtailed, and Belarus's leadership turned into 'the most vociferous defender' and 'a living symbol of national independence'.[850] The rhetoric overlapped with the state's foreign policy actions: Belarus boycotted the CSTO summit in 2009, refused to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent republics, and it did not support Russia in the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. Belarus also granted refuge to Kyrgyzstan's President Bakiyev ousted from his country in the 2010 revolution, which was supported by Russia. Also, Belarus set the course towards diversification of its foreign policy: it established cooperation with developing countries, such as Venezuela, China, Iran, and intensified cooperation in the Non-Aligned Movement, which it joined back in 1998. It started negotiations on an interim agreement with the EU and participated in the Eastern Partnership Initiative in 2009. These and the facts that the efforts of Belarus to 'diversify away from Russia quietly continued'[851] and the ability of Belarus to diversify at all, considering its high dependence on Russia, highlight Belarus's space for manoeuvre and opportunities for influence.

5.3. Belarus's State Identity: Official Narrative

5.3.1. The Historical Self

Graph 5.1. Dominant categories of the Historical Self in the 2000s and their congruence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU

[849] Leshchenko (2008)
[850] Korosteleva (2011: 576)
[851] Korosteleva (2011: 575)



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 5.1. Red components are related to the Russian period of Belarus's history, blue - to the European roots of Belarusian statehood, green components are specifically Belarusian.

In discursive narratives of the period, as in the previous decade, the Historical Self of Belarus's state identity was constituted predominantly with reference to two events that were recurrently raised in the official discourse - the Soviet Union and the Second World War. The binary conceptualisation of the Historical Self consisted in Belarus interpreting its history through the prism of its contribution and sufferings in the Second World War and Belarus's 'positive' experience as a part of the Soviet Union. Describing its development as a state, Belarus relied almost exclusively on the historical memory of its Soviet past and characterised itself as a young sovereign state. Thereby, it denied the historical memory of the most recent attempt to create a Belarusian state in 1918-1919 and excluded the European roots of its earlier statehood.

The European history of Belarus's statehood was rarely mentioned in official narratives. It concerned the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1236 - 1795), the Principality of Polatsk (10^{th} – 13^{th} century), the Belarusian People's Republic (1918-1919), Belarus being part of imperial Russia (mentioned with a negative connotation), and the Kievan Rus' (879-1240). Yet, according to the oppositional discourse (of the Belarusian People's Front), the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Principality of Polatsk, and the BPR were legitimate political institutions of the past, and the nation-state was to be constructed in continuity with them.[852]

The Soviet Union and its constituent part the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (1922-1991) served as a reference point in Belarus's discourse on education, military, economy, and history throughout the whole period: 'We returned all the best that was in the Soviet Union',[853] 'independent Belarus is a worthy successor to the Soviet Belarus, to its best traditions and historical achievements',[854] 'we achieved a lot in the Soviet Union … our most important contribution is that we laid the strong economic basis for independence'.[855] The collapse of the Soviet Union represented 'a geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century', leading to 'a catastrophic fall in living standards'.[856] The Soviet history was claimed to have formed the psychology of Belarusians, which was 'Moscow is behind us':[857] Russia needed Belarus's protection, and Belarus could rely on Russia's support. The aspiration to be in a union with Russia was based on the historical memory that 'together we are strong and invincible'.[858]

Similar to the 1990s, especially the second half of it, the Second World War constituted the other central reference in the historical narrative of Belarus: 'the greatest' which is in 'the common [with Russia] history', 'the moral core that supports us', 'the cornerstone of our

[852] according to the ethno-cultural concept of the nation in Burkhardt (2016: 151)
[853] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[854] Lukashenko (2006. D)
[855] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[856] Lukashenko (2002. E)
[857] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[858] Lukashenko (2004. B)

history', and 'the greatest asset of our people'. Independence and the victory in the war were interlinked and described as the basic values of Belarus, around which a national consensus existed: both the young generation, who grew up in independent Belarus, and the older generation, who experienced the war, supported independence.[859] Indeed, called inside Belarus 'The Great Patriotic War', it was the defining element of Belarus's historical memory and the basis for the formation of a modern collective identity of Belarusians.[860] It also became the founding myth of Belarus's national ideology, which was officially designated in March 2003 and which relied heavily on the historical memory of Belarus's participation in the Soviet partisan warfare against Nazi Germany.[861] The Second World War had two dimensions for Belarus: the war between the Soviet Union and Germany, in which Belarusian soldiers were mobilised as part of the Soviet Union army, and the partisan warfare in Belarus, which made Belarusians world famous.[862] However, in academic literature, it is argued that the model of Belarusians' strong resistance to the occupation was imposed by Russia, and the population of Belarus did not accept the partisan warfare as such.[863] Belarus blamed the Second World War as the reason of its small size; it would not have been a small state by its population size if it had not lost a quarter (or as argued by Lukashenko – a third) of its citizens in the War: [864] 'We are not a small country! We are quite a large country by European standards … We have a third of the population of what it should be'.[865] Lukashenko argued that one third of population was

[859] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[860] Marples (2012)
[861] Leshchenko (2008: 1420): the principles of Soviet collectivism, ethnic inclusiveness, and anti-liberalism are characteristic to Belarus's national ideology. Partisans are not tainted by ethnic affiliation.
[862] Marples (1999: 16): 'Partisan warfare was centered largely in the territory of the occupied BSSR and by November 1943 there were some 122,600 partisans operating there'.
[863] Akudovich (2007: 64); also, Marples (1999: 16): '… some 78% of partisans began their operations in 1943' and Marples (1999: 15): '… many residents of the BSSR welcomed the invasion. Some recalled the German occupation of 1918 and compared it favorably with the rule of Poles and Soviets'.
[864] Marples (1999: 16): 'There is general consensus among historians about the harsh results of German rule. The official Soviet figures report that during the period of occupation, Belarus lost 2,219,316 of its population, one of the heist proportions of any area in the war. A total of 209 cities (out of 270) and 9,200 villages had been ruined.'
[865] Lukashenko (2008. E)

lost in the war and one third died of wounds afterwards.[866] Due to its input in the war, Belarus deserved to play the leading role in world politics: 'On the altar of Victory, we put every third person'.[867]

Belarus also addressed the dramatic experience of its first years of independence following the Soviet Union's dissolution. It transitioned from the euphoria of regained independence to the desperation of the economic and social crisis to the stability of its political and economic systems.[868] In the beginning, Belarus was not fully independent because its society was in a state of public and economic 'mess', 'political chaos', and it 'balanced itself on the edge of the abyss'.[869] 'Without trousers, we were trying to sew new trousers for almost every one while fighting the fifth column (opposition) from inside and the 'benefactors' from outside' (the West).[870] Belarus restored the destroyed state 'crumb by crumb': 'We raised the nation from the knees'.[871] Belarus's development path turned out successful with gross domestic product (GDP) growth since 1996 the highest among of all other CIS countries. Moreover, sixty percent of Belarus GDP came from exports, making Belarus comparable to a European country of the highest level of economic development.[872] That made the claim of Belarus's isolation by the West groundless.[873] Comparing itself to energy-rich countries, such as Russia, Belarus achieved the results with its own 'mind, head, and hands' and not from the earth resources which came 'from the God'; it was even more impressive, since Belarus had been predicted collapse of its economy since 1995: 'until very recently with inviable constancy every year we had been predicted to experience collapse of our economy'.[874]

[866] Lukashenko (2004. F)
[867] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[868] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[869] Lukashenko (2001. A)
[870] Lukashenko (2001. A)
[871] Lukashenko (2001. A)
[872] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[873] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[874] Lukashenko (2004. D)

In the official discourse, Belarus addressed the European Other casually on a constant basis, which testified to its significance for the country. Accordingly, Belarus raised the issue of democracy: it interpreted democracy differently due to its Soviet Union experience and the instilled values of solidarity and collectivism. Belarus's elite believed that based on its historical and cultural traditions, as well as on its level of societal development, the model of 'a liberal weak state' which was imposed from the outside was unacceptable for Belarus.[875] Instead, Belarus followed its own Socio-Economic Model of development, which was premised on collective ownership and on the traditions of 'human solidarity, collectivism, and mutual help'.[876] The national traditions were predominantly Soviet ones.

There were very rare references to the historical memory beyond the Soviet Union when Belarus assessed itself as historically located in two traditions at the same time, the European and Russian ones. Belarus defined the dilemma 'East or West' as a wrong one: 'we don't choose East or West, we choose Belarus's, which was economically, historically (in this case acknowledging and embracing European history of Belarus), geographically, culturally, and mentally located in two places at the same time – in the East and in the West.[877] In the 2002 official discourse, which was delivered in Belarusian - an extremely rare occasion - the Belarusian leadership tentatively acknowledged the European origins of the Belarusian statehood in 'ancient Polatsk, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the heroes of the Battle of Grunwald'.[878] At the same time, Belarus's statehood was 'inextricably linked with the ideas of Slavic unity, fraternity, and cooperation among peoples',[879] and the first real national Belarusian state was Soviet, namely the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, which was established in January 1919 by the Bolsheviks. Belarus's elite denied the experience of the

[875] Lukashenko (2002. A)
[876] Leshchenko (2008: 1423)
[877] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[878] Lukashenko (2002. E)
[879] Lukashenko (2002. E)

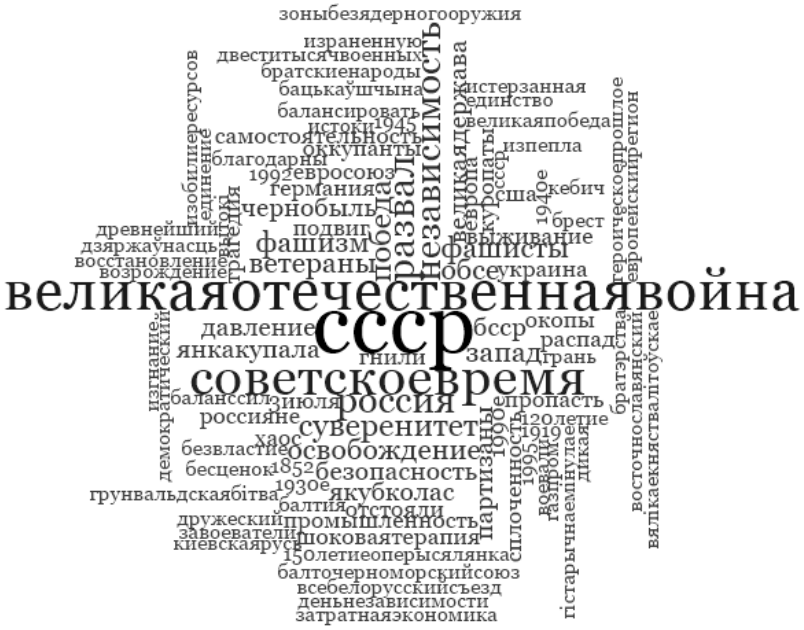
Belarusian People's Republic (BPR), which was established by the nationally minded Belarusian political organisations and groups in 1918. In 2008, the ninety years of the BPR was mentioned in the official discourse in the same sentence as the Kiev Rus', the Principality of Polatsk, the Duchy of Lithuania (Ruthenia and Samogitia), and Turov lands (the Principality of Turov of 10th-14th centuries) as the periods when Belarusian ancestors strived to be free.[880] Again in 2008, the Belarusian leadership touched upon, however fleetingly, the historical events beyond the Soviet Union: 'the whole history of our country - when our people in bast shoes, tattered, and ragged were thrown into another country, then another, as was the case with our lands becoming part of Poland, Lithuania, the Russian empire'.[881]

It is argued in literature that the 'normative disjunction' between the West and Belarus is not 'a projected discourse of autocratic governments in an attempt to justify their authoritarian policies', but is deeply rooted in the historical values of the society which were epitomized by Lukashenko and which the Belarusian population perceived as different from the Western values.[882] Indeed, the values of a state-controlled economy and a high level of social benefits were different. Yet, 'respect for states, their independence and sovereignty, their right to choose their own way, the right of citizens to elect their leaders, the rights to life, free labour, decent pay, equality before the law, free expression of opinion in accordance with the law' were identical to the values of the EU.[883] Twisting to its advantage, Belarus enumerated the values of the EU that were alien to Belarus: 'the freedoms to use military and economic force against undesirable states, to kill civilians, and to have no moral obligations - these values are not ours, we don't need them'.[884] Belarus had 'a wider list of human rights, including respect for basic social and economic rights', but it had a handicap: it lost a third of its population and had to

[880] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[881] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[882] Korosteleva (2012: 49; 51)
[883] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[884] Lukashenko (2006. E)

rebuild the country; the war was still ‘yesterday for us, but long ago for them’.[885] Belarus repeatedly connected its values to the Second World War: ‘the EU and the US have no monopoly over the values. After all, our people paid for these values much more in the past’.[886] The West did not have the right to ‘teach us human rights’, because the ‘bad’ Soviet Union saved the world in the War.[887] Indeed, ‘there is not only our Russia, but also our Europe’.[888]

Chart 5.1. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Historical Self in the 2000s



Source: Author

Notes to Chart 5.1. The historical narratives of the Second World War were highly engaged and congruent with the Russian Other with words and phrases, such as ‘The Great Patriotic War’, and ‘great’ ‘victory’ in it, ‘veterans’, ‘partisans’, ‘eviction’ of ‘fascists’, ‘occupants’, ‘liberation’, Belarusians ‘rotting in trenches’ and ‘fighting’ in ‘unity’ together with ‘Russians’,

[885] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[886] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[887] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[888] Lukashenko (2006. E)

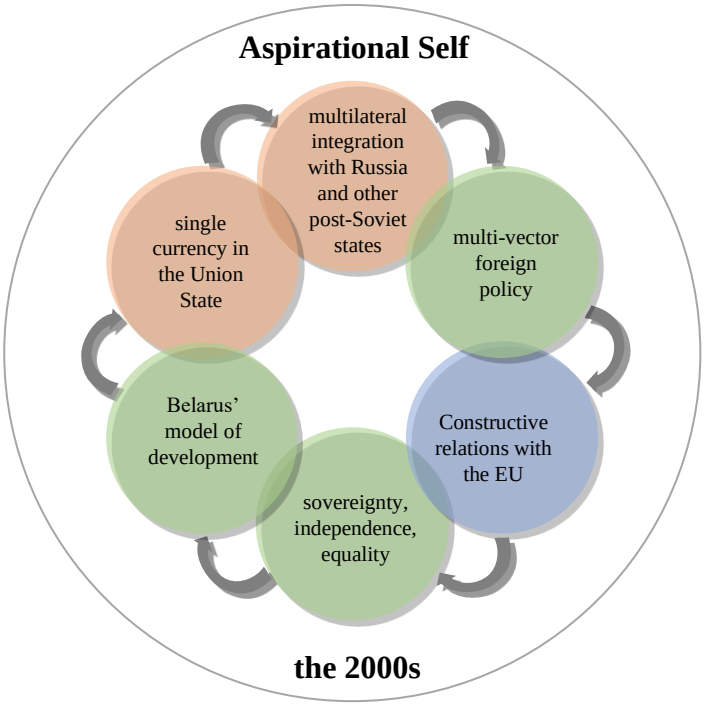
‘fraternity’ with ‘Russia’, and its ‘fraternal people’. The other theme, engaged and congruent with the Russian Other, was about the ‘Soviet time’ and its ‘abundance of resources’, the ‘Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic’ of ‘1919’, ‘Chernobyl, the ‘USSR’ - ‘the great power’ - and its ‘collapse’, and the ensuing ‘chaos’. Belarus’s ‘nuclear disarmament’, ‘democratic’ ‘referenda’, ‘balancing’ in its foreign policy, the ‘UN’, the ‘OSCE’, ‘independence’, and ‘statehood’ – these topics were engaged too and brought the historical narrative in congruence with the European Other - ‘Europe’, the ‘European Union’, and the ‘West’. Briefly and scarcely engaged, Belarus’s ‘heroic past’ - beyond the Soviet Union and in congruence with the European Other - was mentioned: ‘Polatsk Duchy’, ‘The Grand Duchy of Lithuania’, ‘Kiev Rus’, the ‘Battle of Grunwald’, and the Belarusian poets of Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas.

To conclude the analytical assessment of Belarus’s Historical Self, it was constituted by the discursive narratives of the common heritage with Russia, memories of the Second World War and the Soviet Union, and the difficulties of state restoration after its collapse in the first years of Belarus’s independence. There was less emphasis on Russians as ‘brothers’ and fraternity between the states than in the previous period. Despite the fact that the EU shared the experience of the War, the way Belarus constructed its historical narratives in relation to the War increased its congruence with the Russian Other rather than the European Other. In comparison to the second half of the 1990s, more emphasis was put on Belarus’s specific experience in the War, not shared with Russia. Namely, Belarus as part of the Soviet Union saved Europe in the War. Also, Belarus was more afflicted by the war: due to its in-between location, it lost one third of its population and was left with a heavily destroyed infrastructure. According to the official discourse, the war for Belarus was still ‘yesterday’ as it left a profound imprint on the country. Constructed in such a way, the Historical Self allowed Belarus to be defiant of the EU, its sanctions, and human rights demands. Belarus believed that Europe’s contribution to the victory in the War was less significant than the Soviet Union’s contribution.

Compared to the 1990s, the Historical Self became tentatively more engaged and congruent vis-à-vis the European Other and at the expense of the Russian Other. Still, it remained much more engaged and congruent with the Russian Other than with the European Other, which was low but present. Besides rare references to its European past, the other addition to the historical memory was Belarus's appreciation of its first decade of independence. That eroded the tight congruence of the Historical Self with Russia. Lastly, in comparison to the 1990s, the Historical Self became less engaged in Belarus's state identity construction, especially after 2006.

5.3.2. The Aspirational Self

Graph 5.2. Dominant categories of the Aspirational Self in the 2000s and their congruence



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 5.2. The red components of the Aspirational Self link the future of Belarus to Russia; the blue components - to the EU; the green components are related to the specifically Belarusian goals for the future, which are in the interest of neither large neighbours or both.

In the second decade of its independence, Belarus's Aspirational Self vis-à-vis the EU was constituted by the muted aspiration towards the EU membership in the beginning of the 2000s and since then by the intention to have 'constructive relations on acceptable terms'. In 2002, Belarus believed that being part of Europe, it 'should be' in the European Union.[889] It would be 'the most profitable partner and member of the EU':[890] without Belarus, Europe couldn't 'effectively carry out the European policy'.[891] However, it was not ready to compromise: 'to shout that we want to jump into the EU and to launch the campaign for that … to crawl on knees… to implement unpopular measures within a state… I consider humiliating for myself and my country. For me, this is not an end in itself.'[892] By 2004, Belarus stated that it sought cooperation and partnership with the EU, not the membership: 'we are building and will be building Europe at home, in our own country'.[893] Namely, Belarus intended to establish relations 'on acceptable terms' with the EU, and the bilateral trade was the foundation of them.[894] The change took place at the time when Russia made its first claim on Belarus's independence; that could have made Belarus more cautious in its relations with the EU in order not to provoke Russia. In 2006, Belarus repeated that it did not aspire to join the EU, 'the powerful neighbour', and 'frankly, no one is there to invite us'.[895] In 2008, it did not see itself in the European Union because 'nobody calls us there'.[896] Belarus offered the EU *a mutually*

[889] Lukashenko (2002. G)
[890] Lukashenko (2002. G)
[891] Lukashenko (2002. I)
[892] Lukashenko (2002. G)
[893] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[894] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[895] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[896] Lukashenko (2008. E)

beneficial partnership: 'that is our position today and for the foreseeable future'.[897] At the same time, according to Belarus's narratives, some EU member states believed that Belarus was more ready to join the EU than any other state, even if 'they don't like our political system'.[898] If there had been 'an honest admission' into the EU, Belarus would have been the first to join: it did not have 'excessive demands and problems', such as low levels of economic development.[899] Belarus was 'decent' and did not create 'problems for anyone'; if it had joined the EU, only Russia would have objected: 'Russia would not have understood us'.[900] For now, the EU was not 'ready for an honest partnership with Belarus's, and Belarus did not wish to impose itself on the EU.[901] Yet, Belarus's discourse vis-à-vis the EU was emotional; it revealed Belarus's defiance and, presumably, its underlying wish to be part of the EU.

Belarus acknowledged political difficulties in its bilateral relations with the EU but thought strategically about them. In the future, Belarus believed that they would improve - 'normalise'[902] - because the existing problems were not 'insurmountable' but rather misunderstandings. Besides, the values of Belarus mostly corresponded to the European Union's values. In any case, Belarus intended to develop 'not just good, but very good relations' with the EU and to live 'in peace and harmony'.[903] Two additional points to consider: firstly, Belarus envisioned itself in the common economic space of the EU and Russia as its interests lay on their intersection: it was described as 'the main strategy for tomorrow'.[904] Secondly, Belarus believed that the EU was to build relations with its new Eastern neighbours, including Belarus, following the example of the countries of the European Economic Area,

[897] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[898] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[899] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[900] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[901] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[902] Lukashenko (2002. I)
[903] Lukashenko (2004. A)
[904] Lukashenko (2004. D)

such as Norway and Switzerland.[905] Indeed, Belarus did not need to rush to join the EU, or any other block, but be instead like Switzerland, 'a quiet haven for investors'.[906]

Vis-à-vis Russia, Belarus's Aspirational Self was constituted by the intention to preserve 'brotherly' relations. That meant to remain Russia's partner in the sphere of economy with access to Russia's cheap energy and its sales market, and to have Russia as an ally in political and military spheres. Belarus underscored the historical and cultural nature of its intention to integrate with Russia, playing down the economic rationale. Thus, the aspiration to be with 'Mother-Russia', Belarus's 'strategic partner and ally', was based on the feelings of 'friendship, brotherhood, unity', rather than on Belarus's self-interest and material calculations.[907] Belarus was interested in integration with Russia 'because of our common history in the Soviet Union': 'we will become closer to Russia ...we don't exclude this scenario completely'.[908] A close cooperation with Russia was envisioned within the framework of the Union State but with Belarus preserving its independence and participating on equal terms. The Russia-Belarus Union State was based on 'the principle of the sovereign equality of its member states', and it guaranteed 'stable existence and sustainable development of Belarus in the system of international relations'.[909] It was not the restoration of the Soviet system, the USSR, in its entirety, which was 'absolutely impossible', but the restoration of a common market and an interconnected economy – such a system benefited all former Soviet republics: 'a certain union is possible but on a fundamentally different basis, on the conditions of equality and mutual respect'.[910] The strategic orientation towards strengthening its alliance with Russia remained 'the unchangeable foreign policy priority' for Belarus.[911] It was 'the union of two

[905] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[906] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[907] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[908] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[909] Lukashenko (2002. E)
[910] Lukashenko (2002. C)
[911] Lukashenko (2002. D)

fraternal countries and peoples' united 'by a common history and a shared future'.[912] Describing the Union as 'the only working body, albeit with shortcomings, of all the post-Soviet integration structures that are difficult to remember',[913] Belarus intended to 'follow the spirit and letter of the agreement'[914] and 'to fully fulfil the potential of Belarus-Russia integration'.[915] High achievements were emphasised in the areas of freedom of movement, equal rights of citizens, and trade. Russia was underscored to be the number one trading partner for Belarus while Belarus was the number two trading partner for Russia after Germany and ahead of China.[916]

However, Belarus considered it premature to start 'an urgent restructuring' of the Union and advised to put aside the contentious issues of a common currency and the Constitutional Act.[917] In another narrative, Belarus was ready to go ahead with a common currency but on the basis of equality.[918] Belarus acknowledged that its intention to unite with 'fraternal' Russia following the principles of international law, equality, and sovereignty [919] contradicted Russia's intention. Belarus kept repeating that integration was not to curtail Belarus's independence: 'Belarus is and will remain independent… independence is not a bargaining chip, but a sacred and enduring value,[920] and Belarus 'will never become part of another state'.[921] Belarus defended its sovereignty despite the 'most severe and brutal pressure' from within - meaning domestic opposition, and from outside - meaning the EU's sanctions: 'We proved that the Belarusian people cannot be strangled and manipulated'.[922] Independence and sovereignty of Belarus were 'unshakable': 'The country must be preserved at all costs! … Even if we have to fight for

[912] Lukashenko (2002. B)
[913] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[914] Lukashenko (2004. A)
[915] Lukashenko (2006. A)
[916] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[917] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[918] Lukashenko (2002. F)
[919] Lukashenko (2002. A)
[920] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[921] Lukashenko (2002. C)
[922] Lukashenko (2006. A)

independence, we must be ready for this… Europeans, Russians, Americans must clearly understand this.'[923] Regarding the post-Soviet integration structures with Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) looked completely 'listless, helpless, and without will'.[924] Nevertheless, Belarus's position remained unchanged: it supported the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and the Single Economic Space of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan – all Russia-led multilateral intergovernmental structures.

After the August 2007 twofold increase in Russian gas price for Belarus, the discursive narratives of the previous years did not disappear. Belarus still intended to build the Union State with Russia and to provide security protection for Russia. It was stated emotionally: 'tanks through Belarus to Moscow won't pass, we will not open Belarus for this, because our people live in Russia, our blood brothers'. [925] Russians still remained a fraternal nation: 'We will never be enemies to anyone. … Especially to our Russia, these are our people. We operate in one state. We defend our lands together, consume resources from Russia, and deliver most of our products there. In the end, today we are not foreigners in Russia, nor are they in Belarus. Only fraternal states can cooperate in this way.'[926] However, Belarus's insistence on independence, sovereignty, and equality became more urgent and pronounced. Belarus underscored that it did not 'trade its sovereignty'.[927] The Union State was and would be based on the 'healthy' principle of equality, which was legally enshrined in bilateral agreements,[928] such as equal rights of two sovereign states and equal economic conditions. The Constitutional Act and a common currency did not correspond to Belarus's requirement of equality, however. With the delegation of authority to interstate structures, the Union was to be about compromise

[923] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[924] Lukashenko (2004. A)
[925] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[926] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[927] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[928] Lukashenko (2004. D)

and concessions.[929] This would 'truly' reflect the intention of 'our brothers in Russia' to build the Union on an equitable basis.[930] Belarus gauged the success of the Union by an increase in powers delegated by its members to interstate structures, by 'the amount of mutual concessions', and by open borders without customs control – important issues since trade turnover had increased by four times since 1993.[931] To compare: the trade turnover between CIS members decreased by three times.[932] To refute predictions of Belarus's disappearance from the political map of the world, which had been voiced since 1991 both in the East and in the West, the Belarusian leadership emphasised that Belarus was and would remain independent in Europe; it considered sovereignty and independence to be of 'a sacred and enduring value' that belonged to the citizens and not to a president or a government.[933] To be against joining Russia was not equal to be against joining the Union: 'in the words of the president of Russia, do not confuse flies and cutlets'.[934] 'We have done a lot in building the Union State and if the question of our accession to Russia had not been raised, we would have gone further'.[935] Those who predicted the Union's collapse were wrong: 'Russia is becoming more powerful, and Belarus is gaining in strength, which means that our Union is growing stronger'.[936]

Chart 5.2. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Aspirational Self in the 2000s

[929] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[930] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[931] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[932] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[933] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[934] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[935] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[936] Lukashenko (2008. A)

Source: Author

Notes to Chart 5.2. The words and phrases that make the Aspirational Self congruent with the Russian Other are ‘Belarus-Russia Union State’, the ‘CIS’, ‘Eurasian Economic Space’, the ‘CSTO’, ‘integration’, ‘brotherly Russia’, ‘common currency’. They were highly engaged. Congruence vis-à-vis the European Other was constructed with the words, such as the ‘OSCE’, the ‘UN’, the ‘NATO’, ‘democracy’, ‘democratisation’, ‘Europe’, the ‘EU’, ‘Europeans’, ‘dialogue’, ‘European Council’, ‘non-proliferation of nuclear weapons’, the concept of ‘good neighbourhood’, ‘reforms’, ‘IMF’, ‘partnership’. References to the ‘OSCE’, the ‘UN’, ‘democracy’, ‘civil society’, and ‘political parties’ were as frequently engaged as the ‘Belarus-Russia Union State’ and the ‘CIS’. Overall, the engagement of congruent words and phrases vis-à-vis Russia was as high as engagement of congruent words and phrases vis-à-vis the EU.[937]

[937] Some concepts indirectly increased congruence of Belarus’s Aspirational Self vis-à-vis the European Other, such as ‘independence’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘statehood’, ‘equality’, the ‘multi-vector foreign policy’, ‘political parties’ while others decreased it, such as ‘All-Belarusian People’s Assembly’, ‘public forums, and a ‘liberal weak state’.

To conclude the analytical assessment of Belarus's official narratives, the Aspirational Self retained its congruence and engagement with the Russian Other in the beginning of the 2000s, but the existing contradictions, ambiguities, and inconsistences intensified and decreased the congruence in the course of the decade. It was constituted by two components: firstly, Belarus intended to remain the main 'strategic and reliable ally' of Russia. It intended to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy, but Russia remained the 'unchangeable foreign policy priority'. Secondly, Belarus intended to remain an active participant of Russia-led integration structures, including the Union State. However, Belarus's insistence on independence and equality in the Union State and its aspiration to integrate following the model of a confederative structure *openly*, in contrast to the 1990s, contradicted Russia's intentions and decreased congruence of its Aspirational Self with the Russian Other. This and Belarus's indecisiveness in respect of integration plans and depth of integration were in the interest of the EU and improved congruence of Belarus's Aspirational Self vis-à-vis it. That came in conflict with Belarus's congruence with the Russian Other and decreased it further.

Vis-à-vis Russia, Belarus's aspirational discourse of the 2000s was similar to the aspirational discourse of the second half of the 1990s with the difference that it became more poignant and pronounced with time in regard to the issue of independence and equality of Belarus in the Union State with Russia. As Russia cut its economic subsidies to Belarus and suggested incorporating it as one of its federal subjects, Belarus's independence came under threat. Independence as an asset to 'trade' was not mentioned in contrast to the 1990s. Instead, it became described as 'unshakable'. Discursively, the ambiguity in Belarus's intentions towards Russia - 'Mother-Russia' - remained. Belarus intended to build the Union State but was not ready to compromise its independence – 'a sacred value' - in the process. Also, Belarus's attitude toward a common currency with Russia fluctuated but its 'brotherly' discourse

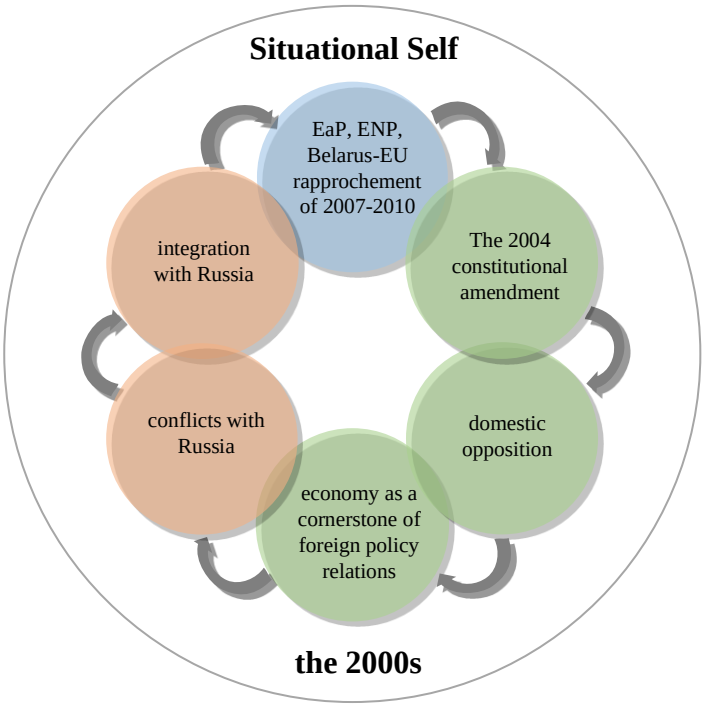
remained stable, if not more pronounced. The Aspirational Self was more engaged vis-à-vis Russia in contrast to its engagement vis-à-vis the EU.

Vis-à-vis the EU, Belarus's Aspirational Self was constituted by the aspiration towards partnership and constructive relations on 'acceptable' terms. The aspiration towards EU membership had been dropped by 2003. The economy was placed at the cornerstone of the relations at the expense of the political issues. Belarus's offer of a mutually beneficial partnership, the intention to have 'very good relations', the emphasis on comparable values, an unobtrusive attitude towards Europe, a sense of its own value, its self-description as an unproblematic and eager European country, and the fact that Belarus envisioned itself as a bridge between two centres of power – all these were in alignment with the EU and made Belarus's Aspirational Self congruent with the European Other. The discursive congruence was deceptive, however. The EU demanded democratisation of Belarus – the critical issue of the relations with the EU, while Belarus intended to maintain its political and economic model of development, the one of an undemocratic system of government.[938] The intention disrupted the closer alignment of future goals of the EU, a democracy promoter, and Belarus, a consolidating autocracy. However, this problematic issue was not focused on, in Belarus's official discourse. When the opportunity presented itself, the existing discursive congruence of aspirations of Belarus and the EU provided a basis for the relations to improve, as they did in 2007-2010, despite the contested issue of human rights and democratic freedoms. The Belarus-EU rapprochement can be explained by Belarus's consistent and unwavering belief that its relations with the EU would improve in the future as well as by its offer of a mutually beneficial partnership. This positive aspirational narrative contributed to Belarus's wielding influence on the EU.

[938] Lukashenko (2004. F), for example

5.3.3. The Situational Self

Graph 5.3. Dominant categories of the Situational Self in the 2000s and their congruence vis-à-vis Russia and the EU



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 5.3. The red components are congruent with Russia, the blue components – with the EU, and the green components indicate the situational issues that are specific to Belarus and not exclusively to Russia or the EU.

Belarus's Situational Self vis-à-vis Russia was constituted by the discourse on independence, the specific issues related to the Union State, such as a common currency and the Constitutional Act, and Russia's policy of pragmatisation towards Belarus, that found expression in energy price increases, Russia's pressure to sell Belarus's gas pipeline and other major Belarusian

enterprises, as well as Russia's suggestion for incorporating Belarus. Vis-à-vis Russia, in the 2000s, Belarus characterised itself as a 'respectable ally' and 'a reliable friend' of Russians and the Russian state: 'In this respect, no policy changes are observed, and we will not sway from side to side'.[939] Russians were described in positive terms as 'the closest relatives', a 'brother-nation', and the 'closest brothers' of Belarusians with no force to separate them: 'This feeling of brotherhood is in the blood of Belarusians'.[940] Belarusians 'sacredly respected friendship and fraternity' with Russians and believed that 'to be together was destined by fate itself'.[941] If a question was raised about 'the closest and most reliable ally of Russia, everyone would name Belarus, and asked about the closest ally of Belarus, the assured answer would be - Russia'.[942]

Comparing its relations with Russia and the EU, Belarus acknowledged that it 'went a little too far in terms of flying on one wing', paying more attention to Russia in its foreign policy and being 'not very polite towards Western Europe'.[943] Belarus explained the cause of this behaviour: 'Russia and the Russian leadership have always understood us. They always supported us. The West did not want to understand us. They always pressed us… to do as they do'.[944] To analyse these claims analytically, Russia's pressure to sell Belarus's key enterprises was not a good reason for doubting the bilateral relations but the EU pressure to democratise was. The Belarusian leadership confirmed coordination of its foreign policy with Russia: 'closely linking our foreign policy aspirations at present and in the future'; Belarus also thanked Russia for supporting Belarus in foreign policy issues 'everywhere': 'We feel this support'.[945]

Belarus criticised Russia on a number of occasions: apart from its suggestion for incorporating Belarus and put under question the principle of 'legal equality' in the Union State, Belarus

[939] Lukashenko (2002. D)
[940] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[941] Lukashenko (2004. A)
[942] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[943] Lukashenko (2002. G)
[944] Lukashenko (2002. G)
[945] Lukashenko (2002. H)

lamented Russia's pressure to sell the Belarusian gas pipeline and other key enterprises at a bargain price as part of the development of the Union State: Russia had to stop looking at Belarus through the prism of the gas pipeline.[946] During the first gas dispute with Russia in 2002, Belarus underscored that the low gas price for Belarus 'was not a gift' as Belarus provided transport, military, and defence services to Russia.[947] Regarding the 'flies and cutlet' incident, the Belarusian leadership condemned Russia's suggestion for 'absorbing' Belarus into the Russian Federation: 'How can we agree to that? The leadership of Russia demonstrated today that it doesn't want an equal union with Belarus… they say 'we feed them, they are small, we are big'.[948] Russia's suggestion was 'offensive' and 'a big surprise' to the Belarusian people as 'our sovereignty has never been and cannot be negotiated'.[949] Belarus's sovereignty, 'like the sovereignty of Russia, is resolute.'[950] In 2001, before the first official disagreement with Russia, Lukashenko underscored that 'for the first time in the long history of our people, Belarus realised itself as an independent state' and sovereignty and independence were 'the dearest' concepts for Belarusians.[951] Still, Belarus remained Russia's 'brotherly state, a kindred state and with Putin or no Putin, these states will be together'.[952]

After the 2004 energy dispute, Russia was still acknowledged as an ally and a strategic partner – 'Russia meets us halfway in all areas. In all!'[953] – but some dissonance surfaced. Belarus struggled to come to terms with Russia's 'policy of pragmatisation' towards Belarus: 'our relations became more pragmatic … we need to balance them out'.[954] For Belarus, the economy was 'the foundation',[955] 'the main thing',[956] the 'basis' which meant 'production, jobs… a

[946] Lukashenko (2004. A)
[947] Lukashenko (2002. D)
[948] Lukashenko (2002. F)
[949] Lukashenko (2004. A)
[950] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[951] Lukashenko (2001. A)
[952] Lukashenko (2002. G)
[953] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[954] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[955] Lukashenko (2006. G)
[956] Lukashenko (2008. A)

strong state and stability':[957] 'I, of course, always proceed from the economy, if there is economy, politics will follow…'[958] However, Belarus found the relations based primarily on the logic of cost-benefit as lacking.

The August 2007 twofold increase in gas price for Belarus was *'a turning point'*: 'I don't want to say big words but what happened last year is not an ordinary situation. This is crucial… a turning point'.[959] Belarus's elite narratives showed defiance and resentment: 'We did not only survive. We clenched our teeth and endured. Those who consider themselves masters of the world are trying to punish those who defend their position and national interests'.[960] The incident was linked in the discourse to Belarus's independence: 'Belarusians proved to themselves and the world: we became a politically and economically independent nation. This awareness must be strengthened and protected in every way'.[961] As a sovereign state, Belarus had 'a solid foundation' to develop 'vigorously and efficiently in all directions'.[962] It became 'an independently minded and proactive subject of international relations'.[963] Independence formed the foundation of Belarus's foreign policy and its state identity discourse. Also, Russia's place in the official discourse changed: Russia became increasingly placed in the same range of importance as the EU and China. Russia along with China were Belarus's 'strategic allies'.[964]

Vis-à-vis the EU, the Situational Self was constituted by references to good but problematic bilateral relations, 'double standards' applied by the EU towards Belarus, European sanctions, Belarus's defiance and its rejection to 'bend' to 'the dictate' of the EU, as well as Belarus's European geographical and cultural location. Belarus assessed its size contradictory: one the

[957] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[958] Lukashenko (2006. G)
[959] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[960] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[961] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[962] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[963] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[964] Lukashenko (2006. E)

one hand, it defined itself as a medium European country as measured by the territory and population size.[965] It believed that it was not a small state, as was often and mistakenly assumed. It was one of the countries with the highest military capabilities, which was 'a necessity in the world' where 'the weak', meaning Belarus, were ignored.[966] Mostly, however, Belarus described itself as 'an island of stability and peacefulness',[967] 'a little patch of the planet',[968] and 'a little corner of the world',[969] and it believed to be recognised as such. The need to uphold interests of small states, especially those subjected to external pressure and aggression, was emphasised.[970]

Belarus underscored that regarding its geopolitical location it was unequivocally European and a bridge between the East and the West.[971] It explicitly defined its location 'at the heart of Europe', in 'a geographical centre of Europe'[972], at the very centre of Europe, in the North of the planet,[973] and at 'the centre of the continent'.[974] Belarus's location 'at the crossroads',[975] at 'the most sensitive geopolitical crossroads', was 'a blessing' due to trade and transit revenues.[976] That allowed Belarus to play a leading position in Europe in the areas of economy, security, illegal migration, and antiterrorism.[977] Belarus believed that its geopolitical location was of high importance - 'hence the external pressure on us' - but it 'did not have and could not have global geopolitical ambitions' but rather geopolitical interests such as state security

[965] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[966] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[967] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[968] Lukashenko (2008. C)
[969] Lukashenko (2006. A)
[970] Lukashenko (2006. F)
[971] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[972] Lukashenko (2002. B)
[973] Lukashenko (2006. F)
[974] Lukashenko (2008. E)
[975] Lukashenko (2002. G)
[976] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[977] Lukashenko (2002. G)

and economic development.[978] Still, Belarus intended to leave the group of 'catching up' states and became a member of the leading group of states'.[979]

Regarding its political system, Belarus characterised itself as a young sovereign state with its own political system and its own traditions.[980] It was a 'young democracy' that needed further improvement: 'not a single democratic state was established in one day'.[981] Belarus vowed to be committed 'to the ideals of democracy' and defined itself as a peaceful, neutral, and democratic state with a high level of stability of the political system,[982] and where 'the power of the law dominates'.[983] The concept of democracy Belarus interpreted as state control over economy, politics, and the social-cultural sphere; the control was considered as 'an objective necessity' in a society, which was undergoing profound transformations.[984] The elements of market economy, such as 'egocentrism, unemployment, and the substantial stratification of the population'[985] were alien to Belarus.[986] Its foreign policy was described as 'truly multi-vector':[987] Belarus was ready to maintain constructive relations with the US and friendly relations with China, India, Turkey, and Arab states.[988] Without diversification, 'the Russian economy will manage the Belarusian economy' with 'our independence only on paper'; still, the main partner remained Russia, 'our great Eastern neighbour'.[989]

In 2002, Belarus characterised the political relations with the EU as 'not very good' because the EU lacked objective information about Belarus and had 'little desire' to receive such

[978] Lukashenko (2006. E)
[979] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[980] Lukashenko (2006. C)
[981] Lukashenko (2001. A)
[982] Lukashenko (2002. A)
[983] Lukashenko (2002. E)
[984] Lukashenko (2002. A)
[985] UNDP (2006) in Leshchenko (2008: 1423): The social homogenisation among the population was preserved; the GINI coefficient, the degree of social inequality, for Belarus stood at 0.29 in 2006, the lowest in the world.
[986] SEP (2001, part 3) in Leshchenko (2008: 1423)
[987] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[988] Lukashenko (2004. B).
[989] Lukashenko (2004. D)

information; instead, the Western policy towards Belarus was based on the information which was 'undoubtedly distorted and untrustworthy' and received from the opposition forces - 'stealing and bankrupt politicians'.[990] Instead, the West was urged to 'patiently suggest, recommend, explain but don't try to put me on my knees, and impose its will'.[991] Besides, the West was urged to avoid 'double standards' towards Belarus: 'The West is friends with other countries where freedom of speech is completely absent, where there is no opposition at all, but there is oil and gas. Why? How is my policy different from the policy of Russia's president? No difference. Then why is Russia's president a friend of the West and I am not?'[992]

In 2008, at a time of rapprochement with the EU, Belarus underscored that it was geographically located in Europe, and therefore it sought to have good relations with both the East and the West. The EU was named the 'strategic', 'important', and the second largest trading partner of Belarus. The economic cooperation was understood by Belarus to be the main component of the bilateral relations.[993] Moreover, Belarus was a key transit country for the EU.[994] Belarus fulfilled its 'partnership and neighbourly' responsibility, and the prompt resolution of the 2002 gas dispute with Russia served as a proof of that: 'we [Belarus] moved away from the confrontation [with Russia] only because behind our backs, in the West, people began to freeze'.[995] Besides economy, Belarus was connected by 'thousand threads of common challenges' with Europe that were to be solved together.[996] Such as security: Belarus contributed to European security and remained a significant and reliable partner for Europe in the area of illegal immigration, human trafficking, and border security as it held back illegal

[990] Lukashenko (2002. C). Belarus accused the West of financing the Belarusian opposition.
[991] Lukashenko (2002. C)
[992] Lukashenko (2002. C)
[993] Lukashenko (2004. B). Lukashenko (2004. D). The EU's share in Belarus's export reached 40 percent in 2003 and was comparable with the share of Russia in Belarus's export.
[994] Belarus provided the transit route to Europe for half of the Russian oil and 25 percent of its gas.
[995] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[996] Lukashenko (2008. A)

immigration flows into Europe.[997] For that, Europe 'had to pay' Belarus instead of instructing, 'hammering us' in information 'wars', pressing, and frightening us'.[998] Belarus did not see 'insurmountable' or 'antagonistic' problems with the West, but only 'misunderstanding, mutual claims, and certain roughness'; they were to be reduced by working together and not by 'ultimatums and sanctions'.[999] Belarus would not bargain on fundamental things: 'We always open our souls, our hearts: come and see and let us work together. But we will not tolerate commands and take instructions from no one.'[1000] In contrast to Russia, the EU made demands on Belarus's shortcomings: 'why do you, in the West, allow yourself such a thing?'[1001] Belarus complained about economic barriers: 'Today they are preoccupied with the issue where else to impose some barriers'.[1002] Belarus understood cooperation with the EU as 'mutually beneficial' and 'not a one-way street, but with two-way traffic.'[1003] Belarus approved the concept of 'a new neighbourhood' developed by the EU in 2004 because it recognised a high degree of interdependence between the EU and neighbouring countries. The EU's goal to build 'a ring of friends' and 'a zone of stability and prosperity' along its borders corresponded to the intention of Belarus of 2000 to build 'a belt of good neighbourhood and security'.[1004]

Chart 5.3. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Situational Self in the 2000s

[997] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[998] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[999] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[1000] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[1001] Lukashenko (2008. A)
[1002] Lukashenko (2004. B)
[1003] Lukashenko (2004. D)
[1004] Lukashenko (2004. D)

Source: Author

Notes to Chart 5.3. The words and phrases that made the Situational Self congruent with the Russian Other are ‘Belarus-Russia Union State’, ‘CSTO’, the ‘CIS’, the ‘Soviet Union’, ‘Russia’, ‘brotherly Russia’, ‘integration’, ‘unity’ with ‘Russians’, the ‘East’, the ‘Russian language’, the ‘Eurasian Economic Community’. The reference to the suggestion of Russian ‘incorporation’ of Belarus and the emphasis on Belarus’s ‘dependence’ on Russia distorted congruence though kept the Russian Other engaged. The Situational Self remained congruent with the European Other with the frequently engaged words: the ‘West’, ‘Europe’, the ‘EU’, ‘democracy’, the ‘US’, the ‘NATO’, ‘Europeans’, ‘partnership’, ‘dialogue’, ‘OSCE’, the ‘UN’, ‘civil society’, ‘security in Europe’. Some words and phrases distorted the congruence, such as the West’s attempt to ‘crush’ Belarus, ‘to put it on its knees’, ‘to dictate’ its terms, the EU’s ‘double standards’ in treating Belarus ‘more autocratic’, and ‘financing the opposition’. Some other words and phrases indirectly contributed to congruence of the Situational Self vis-à-vis EU, such as ‘independence’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘statehood’, ‘stability’, the ‘Belarusian language’,

‘equality’, ‘multi-vector foreign policy’, ‘nuclear disarmament’, and ‘trade unions’, while others decreased it, such as the ‘Non-Aligned Movement’ and the ‘All-Belarusian People’s Assembly’. To note, the words and phrases that were congruent with the European Other were as engaged as the words and phrases that were congruent with the Russian Other. However, the congruence of them was lower vis-à-vis the EU as Belarus criticised it more.

To conclude the analytical assessment, both the European and Russian Others’ presence in situational discursive practices of Belarus’s state identity was high: the Situational Self was engaged both vis-à-vis Russia and the EU. Regarding the congruence of the Situational Self, it was problematic vis-à-vis both Russia and the EU but more congruent vis-à-vis Russia. Compared to the previous decade, the Situational Self became more congruent vis-à-vis the European Other and less congruent vis-à-vis the Russian Other.

Belarus defined itself as economically successful, European with its location ‘at the heart of Europe’, and democratic and these contributed to the Situational Self’s congruence with the European Other. As well as Belarus’s acknowledgement of ‘thousand threads of common challenges’ and interdependencies, such as in security, illegal immigration, trade, and transit, and Belarus’s approval of the EU’s project of a good neighbourhood and a ‘zone of stability and prosperity’ along its borders. However, Belarus’s strong criticism of the EU’ ‘dictate’, ‘commands’, ‘pressure’, ‘hammering in information wars’, sanctions, ‘double standards’, the EU financing the Belarusian opposition, the EU’s economic and political barriers – these narratives decreased congruence of the Situational Self. Still, compared to the 1990s, the Situational Self was less confrontational: the emotional references to ‘terrible pressure’ transformed to ‘severe pressure’, ‘problematic issues’ were not ‘insurmountable’ but rather ‘misunderstandings’, which were to be reduced by ‘patient recommendations’ rather than by ultimatums, sanctions, and the EU imposing its will. Belarus characterised its specific path of political (‘democracy in the making’) development as its ‘shortcoming’ that was to be tolerated.

In the 2000s, Belarus described itself as ‘a young democracy’ that needed time for ‘further improvement’.

Belarus’s situational narratives vis-à-vis Russia also underwent change in the 2000s. The multiple energy disputes, Russia’s uncompromising behaviour in terms of equality in the Union State, its ‘policy of pragmatisation’, and the pressure to subjugate Belarus’s economically and politically, to the point of its incorporation, undermined Belarus’s discourse of fraternity and led to it sidelining. Russia’s suggestion of incorporation, Belarus found ‘offensive’ and ‘a big surprise’ as Belarus’s sovereignty was ‘resolute’, not open for negotiation, and ‘the dearest concept’ to be ‘protected in every way’. Moreover, Russia became downgraded in its importance for Belarus: it became discursively framed as an important partner in line with China and the EU. Still, multiple factors contributed to Belarus’s state identity retaining congruence with the Russian Other: Russia ‘supported and understood’ its smaller neighbour, and it did not subject it to its dictate, Belarus’s criticism of the EU’s sanctions and its isolation policy (‘severe’ pressure from the outside), as well as Belarus’s political, economic, and cultural dependence on Russia and fraternal discourse towards it – ‘the most reliable ally’, ‘the closest brothers’, ‘sacredly respected friendship and fraternity’, and ‘to be together was destined by fate itself’- these narratives contributed to the Situational Self’s congruence with Russia.

5.4. Conclusion

In the 2000s, Belarus’s influence on Russia consisted of exacting ‘unprecedented’[1005] economic and political benefits. Belarus’s influence on the EU consisted of their rapprochement ‘despite the lack of democratic progress’[1006] in Belarus and its small concessions regarding free and fair

[1005] Leshchenko (2008: 1427); also, Frye (2011: 748)
[1006] Yakouchyk (2016: 204)

elections and human rights. The chapter argues that Belarus moved its state identity closer to the European Other, while its congruence with the Russian Other fluctuated as the existing contradictions intensified. This explains Belarus's influence on the EU, though postponed and short-lived, and its waving influence on Russia. Belarus's Historical Self retained its congruence with the Russian Other as Belarus drew on its Soviet past while the European origins of its statehood were sidelined and muted: it was constructed around the historical experiences of the Second World War and the Soviet Union. However, the Historical Self became less engaged in the second half of the decade. The Aspirational Self also retained its congruence with the Russian Other as Belarus continued to aspire towards integration with Russia albeit with its independence intact. At the end of the 2000s, the State Union became one of the scenarios that 'might' develop and the nascent relations with China received impetus. Compared to the 1990s, other aspirations surfaced, which increased the Self's congruence with the European Other at the expense of the Russian Other. These included Belarus's foreign policy of multi-vectoredness, its aspiration to act as a bridge between the East and the West, and its self-identification as a democracy. After 2002, Belarus's aspirations changed from EU membership towards partnership in trade, and that corresponded to the EU's vision of bilateral relations, if demands for democratisation were to be ignored. Also, the Situational Self became increasingly less congruent with the Russian Other and more congruent with the European Other, and its engagement and contribution to the overall congruence of state identity construction in the context of exerting influence increased too. Belarus was critical and more appreciative of current issues in its relations with the EU. It criticised the EU's 'pressure' and 'dictate', its policy of isolation and sanctions, 'double standards', and it also called on the EU to be patient towards its 'specific' political and economic 'shortcomings' while Belarus was undergoing 'profound transformation' as a 'young democracy' that needed time to develop and improve. It believed that 'misunderstandings' in the relations would be overcome as both

Belarus and the EU were united by 'thousand threads of common challenges', including the EU's neighbourhood policy. During the 2000s, the Situational Self was becoming less of a barrier and more of a contributor in the bilateral relations. While certain situational issues remained within the confines of the Situational Self (the postponement of a common currency and of the Union State's Constitutional Act), some issues had a deeper impact and caused a change in congruence and engagement in the other two Selves. The situational issues Belarus acknowledged as a turning point in bilateral relations were Russia's twofold increase in gas price for Belarus in 2007 and its suggestion for incorporating Belarus. These decreased congruence and engagement of the Aspirational and Historical Selves with the Russian Other which was to the benefit of the European Other. The three Selves did not contribute in equal measure to influencing the EU: the Aspirational and the Situational Selves were becoming the leading components in Belarus's state identity construction; they were more aligned with the European Other as Belarus tried to counter-balance its foreign policy tilted heavily towards Russia. Internal congruence of Belarus's state identity was problematic vis-à-vis both Others.

Table 5.1. Engagement and Congruence of the Selves vis-à-vis the Others in the 2000s[1007]

the 2000s	*Russia*			*The EU*		
	Historical Self	**Aspirational Self**	**Situational Self**	Historical Self	**Aspirational Self**	**Situational Self**
Congruence	+	+/- ↓	+/- ↓	-/+	+/- ↑	+/- ↑
Engagement	+/- ↓	**+**	+	**-**	**+**	+

Source: Author

[1007] Notes to Table 5. The signs 'plus' and 'minus' reflect the extent of congruence and engagement of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the European and Russian Others. The sign 'plus' means the high extent of congruence and/or engagement of a component of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the Other, the sign 'minus' means lack of or low congruence and/or engagement, the sign 'plus/minus' means that there is some congruence and/or engagement, and that it is of a higher extent than congruence and/or engagement expressed by the sign 'minus/plus'. The arrows reflect the dynamics of change compared to the previous decade. The down-turn arrow means a decrease in congruence and/or engagement compared to the 1990s. The up-turn arrow means an increase.

Chapter 6. Belarus's Foreign Policy in the Third Decade of Independence

6.1. Introduction

To follow through the thesis's argument, the present chapter analyses the discursive practices of Belarus's state identity construction in relation to two cases of Belarus's influence in the 2010s: the rapprochement with the EU in 2014-2016 and the energy conflict with Russian in 2016-2017. Arguably, Belarus improved its relations with the EU in 2014 and restored them fully two years later when sanctions were lifted despite the fact that Belarus did not comply with the conditions attached to sanctions, despite the lack of democratic progress, and the 'deeply flawed'[1008] presidential elections of 2015. Namely, Belarus did not undertake any steps towards democratisation: released prisoners were only conditionally free, and they were excluded from politics and not rehabilitated.[1009] Belarus did not address the issues of excessive control over civil society, the death penalty, and freedom of speech.[1010] The EU accepted the conditions of the Belarusian authorities, and intensified bilateral cooperation nevertheless.[1011] Secondly, as will be argued, Belarus exacted economic and political benefits from Russia in the 2016-2017 energy conflict despite being a recalcitrant and an independently-minded ally.[1012] De jure, Belarus refused to recognise Crimea as Russia's and to side with Russia in the conflict. Despite an agreement to coordinate measures in respect to third parties in the framework of the EAEU, Belarus refused to join Russia's countersanctions (embargo) against the EU's imports,[1013] and it did not support Russia's decision to introduce import duties on

[1008] Freedom House (2016)
[1009] Tut.by (11.07.2014): Brussels imposed sanctions on Belarus six times: in two cases the EU conditions were met, in two cases they were partially met, in two cases they were not met at all.
[1010] Tut.by (17.09.2014) 'How will the European thaw turn out for Belarusians?': Nothing changed inside the country in terms of the politico-economic system according to the opposition politician Pavel Severinets.
[1011] Tut.by (29.07.2014). 'In the near future, one should expect a pilgrimage of European delegations to Belarus.'
[1012] Balmaceda (2014), Ioffe (2011) on Belarus winning in energy conflicts in previous decades.
[1013] Tut.by (16.02.2017): Russia imposed sanctions on goods from the West unilaterally, without agreement with Belarus, though both were the Union State members.

Ukrainian goods.[1014] After a short introduction of Belarus's relations with Russia and the EU in the third decade of Belarus's independence, the chapter lays out the official state identity discourse with an emphasis on two cases of Belarus's influence: the rapprochement with the EU in 2014 and the energy dispute with Russia in 2016-2017.

6.2. Historical Context of the Period: the 2010s

6.2.1. Belarus-EU Relations

Belarus entered the year 2010 with restored relations with the EU: it was included in the EaP initiative, received an IMF $3.5 billion loan, and negotiated Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements and a Joint Interim Plan for enhanced cooperation in trade and economy. In contrast to previous years, EU high officials visited Belarus.[1015] More financial assistance was promised in return for free and fair presidential elections in 2010.[1016]

Indeed, the 2010 electoral presidential campaign was relatively free with ten candidates approved for candidacy. However, the election itself was marked by a mass protest that was forcibly dispersed,[1017] with hundreds of protestors arrested, among them seven presidential candidates. In response,[1018] the EU imposed visa bans and an asset freeze on Belarusian officials responsible for the 'fraudulent presidential elections of 19 December 2010 and the subsequent violent crackdown' and reinstated the travel restrictions 'in relation to the elections in 2004 and 2006 and the crackdown on civil society and democratic opposition, which had

[1014] Tut.by (28.06.2014): At a meeting of the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission that took place on 23 June 2014, Russia suggested Belarus following suit, but Belarus declined (as well as Kazakhstan).
[1015] Such as the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle and the foreign ministers of Germany, Guido Westerwelle and Poland, Radosław Sikorski.
[1016] Rettman (2010) in Yakouchyk (2016: 204)
[1017] The expression adapted from Ioffe & Yarashevich (2011) as opposed to the usual 'violently repressed'.
[1018] Bosse (2017: 292): 'but with a significant delay'.

been suspended since 13 October 2008 in order to encourage progress'.[1019] Further sanctions followed: in June 2011;[1020] in October 2011;[1021] in February 2012;[1022] and in March 2012.[1023] In October 2012, they were prolonged until 31 October 2013.[1024] The total number of penalised individuals reached 243, including 32 companies that financed Belarus's government, as well as an arms embargo, a trade ban on arms-related services, and financial restrictions.[1025] The development of the EU's relations with Belarus became conditional on its progress towards respecting and implementing the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights; for the lifting of the restrictive measures Belarus would have to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, to progress towards further reforms of the Electoral Code, and to follow the freedom of expression and of the media and the freedom of assembly and association; the EU reiterated its continued commitment to the policy of critical engagement, including through the Eastern Partnership.[1026] This allowed a low-level, sector-based, and technocratic engagement of the EU with population and local government to continue under the circumstances of a de jure limited political dialogue. The new approach resulted in better visibility of the EU by the Belarusian population and as an alternative to Russia. According to the 2013 survey, one third of respondents supported integration with Russia and one-third - integration with the EU.[1027]

[1019] The Council (2011. A: 12): 'The restrictions on movement that were suspended in 2008 have been reinstated. In total almost 160 individuals are now subject to restrictive measures', a visa ban, and an assets freeze.'
[1020] The Council (2011. B: 18): The Council 'decided to designate additional persons to travel restrictions and assets freeze', 'to impose an embargo on Belarus on arms and on materials that might be used for internal repression', and 'to freeze the assets of three companies linked to the regime'.
[1021] The Council (2011. D: 1): The EU prolonged the existing restrictive measures until 31 October 2012, which subjected 192 existing individuals in addition to 16 new individuals to a visa ban and an assets freeze in response to their violations of international electoral standards in 2006 and 2010 elections and crackdown on opposition.
[1022] The European Parliament (2012: 4): the European Parliament 'welcomes the Council's decision of 28 February 2012 to strengthened restrictive measures' and to add 21 persons to the list of travel ban and asset freeze'.
[1023] The Council (2012. A): 'The Council added 12 persons to the list of those targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze.' It also froze the assets of 29 entities, which are controlled by persons who supported the regime.
[1024] The Council (2012. B)
[1025] Marin (2016: 2), Vizgunova (2015: 1)
[1026] The Council (2011. A: 11)
[1027] Korosteleva (2016: 686)

In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, in 2014, Belarus adopted a neutral position and claimed the role of a conflict mediator. Even before the conflict, in autumn 2013, Belarus supported the European aspirations of Ukraine and did not join in Russia's economic sanctions against Kyiv.[1028] Belarus spoke in favour of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and its position towards the referendum in Crimea was ambiguous, recognising the results in words but not on paper.[1029] De jure, Belarus refused to recognise Crimea as Russia's and to side with Russia in the conflict. The decision of Ukraine to sign an economic part of the Association Agreement with the EU on 27 June 2014, Belarus considered to be Ukraine's sovereign right.[1030] Despite being partners in the EAEU and in agreement to coordinate their measures in respect to third parties, Belarus did not join Russia's sanctions against the EU's imports, and it did not support the decision to introduce import duties on Ukrainian goods.[1031] In contrast to Russia, Belarus did not question the legitimacy of a new government in Ukraine. It assured Ukraine of no military aggression from Belarus's territory. Belarus's President was the first to congratulate Petro Poroshenko on his election as president and was invited to the inauguration. Commonly perceived as Russia's ally, Belarus on that occasion stipulated an independent path in its foreign policy.

In the conflict, Belarus undertook the role of a conflict mediator.[1032] Namely, it offered to function as a platform for dialogue to facilitate negotiations of the Minsk peace agreements to halt the conflict in Ukraine by hosting summits of the OSCE Trilateral Contact Group and of the contact group of experts on Ukraine.[1033] Thereby, Belarus strengthened its international weight and reputation.[1034] Later, this allowed it to organise a high profile meeting of heads of

[1028] Astapenia (2013)
[1029] Tut.by (26.08.2014) 'Poroshenko and Putin in Minsk: the meeting place was not chosen by chance'.
[1030] Tut.by (26.06.2014) 'Belarus' MFA: Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU is a sovereign matter of a sovereign country'.
[1031] Tut.by (28.06.2014) 'Belarus will not be left behind in the economic union of Ukraine and the EU'.
[1032] Kłysiński (2018)
[1033] Tut.by (30.08.2014): the first meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group took place on the 31st of July 2014.
[1034] Tut.by (01.08.2014) 'The British Ambassador: A sharp improvement in EU-Belarus relations may not be to Russia's liking.'

states to negotiate the conflict in Minsk.[1035] The presidents of the Customs Union (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan), of Ukraine, and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton[1036] met in Minsk. The arrival of high-ranking EU officials was a significant event in itself, which Belarus had not experienced for the four preceding years - the last high-level EU official, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, visited Belarus in November 2010. Also, Belarus called for an international peacekeeping mission to eastern Ukraine and asked the United States to contribute to the efforts of terminating the military actions there.[1037] At the 26th annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk, Belarus tabled a proposal to act as an intermediary in wider Europe and launch a new version of the Helsinki Process, a dialogue on regional and international security.[1038] Due to its actions, Belarus's foreign policy became defined as 'situational neutrality'.[1039] Belarus's positioning as a neutral platform for negotiations and an intermediary between Russia and the EU brought tangible benefits for the country. It resulted in the rehabilitation of Belarus as a member of the security architecture in Europe,[1040] its legitimacy was accepted, and it secured and institutionalised a niche for itself as a platform for a tripartite contact group on Ukraine. Belarus also increased its international standing and received a chance to improve its relations with the West and the EU.

By summer 2014, EU-Belarus relations were in full swing.[1041] Representatives of Belarus's foreign ministry exchanged visits with their European counterparts.[1042] The agenda of the

[1035] To discuss Ukraine's implementation of an association agreement and its consequences for the Eurasian Customs Union, Russia's embargo on European agricultural goods, supply and transit of Russian gas to Ukraine and Europe, the energy security, and the stabilisation of situation in Donbass.
[1036] Also, the European Commissioners for trade and energy Karel De Gucht and Guenther Oettinger.
[1037] Kryvoi & Wilson (2015)
[1038] BelTA (2017)
[1039] Preiherman (2019)
[1040] Breault (2016)
[1041] Tut.by (05.08.2014) 'Opinion of Dzianis Melyantsou: Minsk won the war of nerves and forced the West to take it as it was.'
[1042] Tut.by (03.06.2014) 'The dialogue between Belarus and the EU is gaining momentum: Kupchina in Vienna spoke with her Austrian colleague and made an appointment with him for Makei.'

dialogue was based primarily on two areas, namely, simplification of the visa regime (and reduction of visa costs to 35 euros) and economic modernisation.[1043] To underscore the increased legitimacy of Belarus's elite, visits of EU officials to Belarus took place exclusively with the Belarusian authorities at the expense of the Belarusian opposition: 'This is a new stage in Brussels diplomacy when negotiators take place in half-closed format. Their main interlocutor is the government.'[1044] Also, a new format of dialogue called the Interim Phase was launched with the EU, which envisioned a full cooperation agreement in future.[1045] To recall, Belarus was the only country in Europe that did not have an agreement on cooperation with the EU. The EU underscored, however, that the Interim Phase did not mean a full-fledged normalisation of relations and the further development of deeper ties was under question.[1046] It was not a 'warming' in relations, but rather a decrease in tensions of the political crisis.

Indeed, Belarus's release of one political prisoner, human rights activist Aleś Bialacki,[1047] led the EU to reduce the blacklist for Belarus,[1048] but to keep sanctions and restrictive measures in place in line with its policy of critical engagement with Belarus. The EU extended sanctions in October 2014 for another year due to the fact that the situation in Belarus with 'respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles has not significantly improved', in particular 'not all political prisoners have been released and rehabilitated'.[1049]

[1043] Tut.by (04.11.2014): Belarus announced that it counted on further normalisation of relations with the European Union. Tut.by (14.11.2014): The dialogue urged EU investors to come to Belarus as the EU sanctions were lifted.
[1044] Tut.by (19.11.2014) 'EU representative meets Makei, the opposition is unhappy': According to the United Civil Party's leader Anatoly Lebedko. Tut.by (19.11.2014) 'Negotiations on visa facilitation to be held in Brussels next week'.
[1045] Tut.by (18.06.2014) 'European Union – Belarus: Minsk resumed dialogue with Brussels. Melyantsov and Galina Petrovskaya.'
[1046] Tut.by (18.06.2014): The European Parliament deputy from Lithuania Petras Auštrevičius.
[1047] Tut.by (21.06.2014) 'Bialacki is free: Lukashenko needs 'a second wing''.
[1048] The Council (2014. B) and The Council (2014. A): In October 2014, the EU removed 24 persons and 7 entities from the list of those subject to restrictive measures and left 18 legal entities and 201 persons in the list. An arms embargo and an embargo on equipment for internal repression remained unchanged. The sanctions list was formed in 2004 in relation to the disappearance and the subsequent cover-up of four well-known persons, substantially extended in 2006, suspended in autumn 2008, and reintroduced and expanded after the 2010 presidential elections.
[1049] The Council (2014. A)

The EU urged Belarus to impose a moratorium on the death penalty[1050] and reiterated that without the release of political prisoners and significant improvement in democratic standards, it would be impossible to deepen political cooperation.[1051] The EU position in that respect did not change: 'We took satisfaction, hope and interest in the release of Aleś Bialacki. This is a good step. But this is not enough. We will be happy when all political prisoners are free'; the role, which Belarus played in the Ukrainian crisis, was not connected to the EU policy towards Belarus itself: 'These are two completely different things… We do not give up our values or principles'.[1052] The hope of Belarus's authorities that their participation in the resolution of the Ukrainian conflict would help remove sanctions failed. Their extension for another year was 'an indicator that the inertia of the past still determines the European Union's policy towards Belarus's; 'our principled position regarding the unacceptability of building relations on the basis of sanctions and pressure remains unchanged. We hope that our European partners will … finally abandon the logic of sanctions in favour of a mutually respectful dialogue.'[1053]

The ongoing Belarus-EU dialogue, Belarus's improved international standing and legitimacy, and its status as an intermediary all served as a proof that the EU accepted Belarus as it was.[1054] It was argued that given Belarus's neutral position on the Ukrainian issue, that took the West by surprise, and the EU's fear to push Belarus further away (and towards Russia), the EU 'turned a blind eye to the negative sides'[1055] of its relationship with Belarus,[1056] such as the

[1050] Tut.by (13.10.2014). 'The EU called on Belarus again to introduce a moratorium on death penalty'.
[1051] Tut.by (14.10.2014) 'The head of the German-Belarus parliamentary group in the Bundestag Oliver Kaczmarek: Belarus can become a bridge between Russia and the EU'.
[1052] Tut.by (28.10.2014). 'Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland: Ukrainian crisis became a catalyst for cooperation with Belarus.' Arguably, Belarus's relations with the EU received impetus after the Russia-Ukraine war but the improvement in relations began earlier, before the summit in Vilnius in 2013.
[1053] Tut.by (30.10.2014). 'Foreign Ministry: inertia of the past dominates European politics'
[1054] Tut.by (31.10.2014). ''Amplitude': the EU and the US realised that Lukashenko will stay for a long time, and they will not rock the situation in the country'.
[1055] Tut.by (09.06.2014). 'Melyantsov: EU foreign policy failures amid ambitions disappoint citizens.'
[1056] Tut.by (10.06.2014): According to Lukashenko, in contrast to Ukraine, Belarus maintained peace and stability, kept its borders closed, and ensured uninterrupted transit: 'they understood that it was better to have a more or less stable Belarus than a war… no guarantee that the conflict in Ukraine will not spread to neighbouring states… Europe has probably sobered up... At least they say hello and talk to me. This is also a great progress.'

issue of political prisoners,[1057] and resumed the dialogue. Values were argued to have been 'once again' sacrificed to economic interests.[1058] As negotiations with the EU took place at the level of Belarus's government responsible for the economy (and the opposition was ignored by the EU), Belarus achieved its aim: to limit relations with the EU exclusively to economic issues.[1059] Belarus-EU relations were described as 'a nomenclature dialogue': the issue of respect for human rights ceased to be fundamental.[1060] Belarus won 'the battle of nerves' and forced the West to accept Belarus as it was without democratic and liberal transformation inside the country.[1061] To compare, in 2010, Belarus made significant concessions to the West: it released political prisoners, did not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and participated in the Eastern Partnership parallel to Eurasian integration. Belarus believed that it did not succumb to 'wind blowing from the East or the West but had its own opinion'; 'we believe that not a superpower should dictate how nations develop but the people should decide for themselves. We stand for diversity of development paths, and not for the unipolar development of the world'.[1062] Belarus acknowledged that its 'position on Ukraine seems to have been an impetus… for the West to have the opportunity to declare cooperation with us. They took advantage of it'.[1063]

In February 2016, the EU first suspended and then lifted almost all restrictive measures against Belarus,[1064] and in November 2017, for the first time since 2009, the president of the country was invited to Brussels. According to official documentation,[1065] the EU lifted sanctions in

[1057] Tut.by (18.06.2014); Tut.by (19.02.2014) 'EU representative: a new format of dialogue with Belarus is being prepared to be launched'.
[1058] Tut.by (11.08.2014). 'Belarus-Baltic States: between Brussels policy and economic benefits.'
[1059] Tut.by (18.06.2014). Marin: EU-Belarus: Minsk resumed dialogue with Brussels.'
[1060] Tut.by (17.09.2014). 'How will the European thaw turn out for Belarusians?' Tut.by (17.09.2014). 'Foreign Ministry: Belarus is ready to discuss political and economic issues with the EU and the USA.'
[1061] Tut.by (05.08.2014), Tut.by (31.10.2014)
[1062] Tut.by (29.06.2014). 'Makei believes that there is no need to expect any special changes in relation of the West towards Belarus after the release of Bialiatski.'
[1063] Lukashenko (2014. C)
[1064] Euractiv (2016)
[1065] Delegation of the European Union to Belarus (2016)

response to positive political developments in Belarus, such as the release of six political prisoners, and the fact that Minsk hosted 'important ceasefire talks',[1066] and performed a 'constructive role in the region'.[1067] EU actions could also be interpreted as a compromise on EU values and a 'unilateral goodwill gesture' as Belarus did not comply with the conditions attached to sanctions: the 2015 presidential elections were democratically unsatisfactory, and the released political prisoners were not rehabilitated as demanded by the EU but granted a presidential pardon.[1068] Rather, as the argument goes, the EU's approach towards Belarus was a response to geopolitical considerations.[1069] While concerns for values and principles limited the scope for the EU's engagement with Belarus, and economic interests had an impact on the choice of the EU's restrictive measures, geopolitical interests had the strongest influence. Both the 2008 Russia-Georgia and the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflicts prompted the EU, out of security reasons, to increase its level of engagement with Belarus.

The role and impact of Belarus's discursive narratives and state identity in them, the focus of the present research, has been largely ignored, however. The present chapter argues that Belarus's state identity played a role and contributed to successful resumption of bilateral relations in the 2010s, when the EU revisited its policy towards Belarus and resumed the dialogue – this change of EU policy towards Belarus is defined as the case of Belarus's influence. The following sections of the chapter analyse Belarus's state identity construction regarding its three components, followed thereafter by conclusions on a corresponding change in Belarus's state identity construction and the change in Russia/EU policies towards Belarus.

[1066] Bentzen (2017)
[1067] The Council (2016)
[1068] Marin (2016: 2)
[1069] Marin (2016: 1); Bosse (2017)

6.2.2. Belarus-Russia Relations

Against the backdrop of the stalled Russia-Belarus Union State, the Eurasian project had been gaining momentum. By 2010, Belarus settled its gas and oil conflict with Russia and formally participated in launching the Customs Union together with Russia and Kazakhstan.[1070] The union applied common import/exports tariffs, lowered non-tariff trade barriers, and removed the customs barriers. In 2012, the three countries established a Single Economic Space (SES) and set up the Eurasian Economic Commission. In 2015, the Customs Union and the SES were replaced by a more advanced form of regional integration - the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Its design was premised on a single market for goods, services, labour, and capital.[1071]

De jure equality of member states was secured in the set-up of the two-tier Eurasian Economic Commission and Court and was reflected in the law of the EAEU. Member states were equally represented in the governing bodies with an equal distribution of votes, and decisions were reached by consensus. Only the lower tier of the Commission – the Eurasian Economic Commission Collegium - could adopt certain acts by a two-thirds majority. However, the scope of such acts was limited, and all politically sensitive decisions were reserved for the Eurasian Economic Commission Council. If a consensus was not reached, any of the Council members could refer the matter to the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council. This procedure gave more rights to smaller partners and was a step forward compared to the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) formed back in 2000.[1072] Thus, formal provisions of the EAEU assured members of their 'nominal parity' within the union.[1073]

[1070] The Eurasian Customs Union treaty was signed in 2007.
[1071] Movchan & Emerson (2018)
[1072] Yesdauletova & Yesdauletov (2014: 11)
[1073] Dragneva & Wolczuk (2017: 13)

It is argued though that the institutions barely channelled inter-state disputes to their effective resolution.[1074] Belarus's membership in the EAEU Court brought negligible results: on the only occasion when the country submitted a case against Russia in 2011, it served as a bargaining strategy to bring Russia to the negotiating table.[1075] Similarly, when in 2017 Belarus turned to the Commission to verify compliance of Belarus's meat products with EAEU standards, the regulator body acknowledged Belarus's right but failed to make Russia remove its punitive measures.[1076] The Commission's power to monitor the compliance of member states was limited: according to the Astana Treaty that established the EAEU, it was not entitled to bring a country before the Court in case of non-compliance.[1077] The deeper institutionalization of cooperation also failed to restrict Russia's instrumental imposition of trade barriers.[1078] In 2009, 2013-2014, 2016-2017,[1079] and 2018, Russia imposed import restrictions on Belarus's sugar, meat, dairy, and potash on the basis of an allegedly sanitary and phytosanitary breach of requirements. Belarus viewed the restrictions as politically motivated and discriminatory. By 2019, the EAEU have been characterised as 'a hybrid project, something between a geopolitical project and a real emerging economic association' with multiple conflicts of interest, informal institutions, and opaque negotiation processes.[1080]

Despite significant asymmetry,[1081] Belarus had certain means to influence the policy outcomes, such as forming alliances, relying on institutions (Court 2011, Commission 2012, 2017), and resorting to delay and boycott. In 2014, Belarus together with Kazakhstan, succeeded in limiting the scope of the integration project to economic cooperation only and to include the

[1074] Dragneva et al. (2018: 16)
[1075] Dragneva et al. (2018: 16)
[1076] Sidorskiy (2017)
[1077] Dragneva & Wolczuk (2017: 15)
[1078] Vieira (2017); Dragneva & Wolczuk (2017)
[1079] Sidorskiy (2017)
[1080] Turarbekava (2019: 17)
[1081] World Bank (2011): In 2011, GDP of Russia was around $1,591bn, of Kazakhstan $159bn, of Belarus $62bn, of Armenia $10bn, and of Kyrgyzstan $5bn.

word ‘economic’ in its title:[1082] originally, Russia was intent to found a politico-economic organisation of the ‘Eurasian Union’.[1083] Likewise, Russia’s suggestion of launching negotiations on a monetary union failed to find response from Belarus and Kazakhstan. In 2012, when Russia attempted to introduce legislation limiting foreign textiles on its domestic market,[1084] Belarus brought the case to the Commission Collegium and claimed that Russia’s intention violated the bilateral agreements on free movement of goods and the Customs Union’s and SES’s legislation.[1085] Also, Belarus resorted to informal means of influence. Since high-level political bargaining was characteristic of the decision-making within the union,[1086] Belarus turned to delay and boycott. In 2010, Belarus refused to ratify the Agreement on the Customs Code signed in November 2009.[1087] In December 2016, Belarus boycotted the EAEU and CSTO summits and did not sign the EAEU Customs Code until April 2017. In both cases, the delay helped Belarus secure new deals with Russia on favourable terms.

For Belarus, the major disappointment of the EAEU was the postponement until 2025 of the common energy market. Common tariffs for oil and gas could have provided Belarus with the institutionalised access to petrochemicals and helped bypass the need for negotiating delivery prices and terms with Russia on a yearly basis. Its exclusion from the EAEU negotiation package was a serious disappointment as it showed Russia’ unwillingness to consider Belarus’s interests.[1088] It weakened Belarus’s commitment to the project and prompted it to resort to tacit resistance and covert diversification in the process of a closer integration with Russia within the EAEU.[1089]

[1082] Delcour et al. (2015: 12), Popescu (2014)
[1083] Putin (2011): On October 4, 2011, the then Prime Minister Putin published an article in a Russian Daily newspaper ‘Izvestia’ on the launch of the Common Economic Space and the envisaged Eurasian Union.
[1084] Frear (2013: 126-127)
[1085] Manenok (2012)
[1086] Dragneva & Wolczuk (2017: 13)
[1087] Frear (2013)
[1088] Vieira (2017: 49)
[1089] Korosteleva (2016)

In 2016, unilaterally, Belarus entered into an energy conflict with Russian: it decided that 'there is every reason that the price of gas should decrease considerably from January [next year]'.[1090] Given the fall in gas and oil prices for Europe,[1091] Belarus expected to receive the gas at a lower price[1092] although that contradicted the existing intergovernmental agreement with Russia.[1093] The fourth largest importer of Russia's gas and the leader in the post-Soviet space, Belarus retained the lowest gas price in Europe ($132 per 1,000 cubic metres) second only to Russia and Kazakhstan.[1094] Belarus also reminded that since it generated about 90 percent of its electricity by gas, in order for its electricity to be competitive in the common electricity market - planned for July 2019 within the EAEU - the common gas market had to precede the formation of the common electricity market.[1095]

The following months brought no change in gas price negotiations.[1096] In May 2016, Gazprom filed a lawsuit against Belarus's regional gas supplying organisations,[1097] which had been underpaying for the Russian gas since January 2016. Belarus refused to recognise the gas debt,

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[1090] Tut.by (16.12.2015). 'Semashka [the Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus] sees the grounds for a significant reduction in Russian gas price for Belarus from 1 January.'

[1091] Tut.by (13.01.2016). 'For the first time since 2004, the world price of Brent crude oil fell below $30 per barrel'. Tut.by (28.01.2016). 'Brent crude oil hits a psychological low of $35', decreasing by nearly 40 percent.

[1092] Tut.by (18.04.2017) 'Gas bonuses for Belarus: it all depends on the world oil price'. Tut.by (03.03.2017) 'Gazprom announced a new gas price for Belarus'. In 2017, it was $141.1 per 1000 m^3, for Europe - $180-190.

[1093] According to the existing agreements, the gas price formula for Belarus was tied to the gas price in one of the main Russian gas producing regions, the Yamal-Nenets autonomous okrug ($32.4 per 1,000 m^3), in addition to transportation and storage costs. The gas price formula was untied from oil coefficients at the request of Belarus and therefore falling world oil prices had no effect on it.

[1094] Tut.by (20.02.2017); Tut.by (27.06.2016); CEIC Data (2017). Belarus imported 17 billion m^3 of gas in 2017.

[1095] Tut.by (20.05.2016) 'Russia advised Belarus to wait for equal profitable gas prices for another 9 years'. Nashe Mnenie (31.10.2016) 'Hydrocarbon Rent: Challenges and Prospects for Russia and Belarus'. Tut.by (30.05.2016) 'The gas dispute between Russia and Belarus: what is at stake?' Tut.by (12.09.2016) 'Lukashenko set the task to reach an agreement with Russia on energy in two days'. Tut.by (07.10.2016) 'Lukashenko on the gas conflict with Russia: we are ready for compromises, but this must be done honestly'. Tut.by (24.05.2016) 'Minister of Energy: In order to maintain low tariffs for the people, it is important to reduce gas prices'.

[1096] Tut.by. 26.02.2016. 'The Ministry of Energy of Belarus and Russia are working on a new formula for determining the price on Russian gas'. Tut.by. 04.03.2016. ''Kommersant': Belarus offers Russia a temporary option for gas discount'. Tut.by. 10.04.2016. 'The Secretary of State of the Union State is ready to intervene in the dispute between Belarus and Gazprom'. Tut.by. 09.06.2016. 'Ambassador of Russia: Belarus needs to agree on how to change the gas contract by executing it'.

[1097] Tut.by. 04.05.2016. 'Gazprom: By filing a lawsuit against Belarusian companies, we protect our interests'. Tut.by. 03.05.2016. 'Russia accuses Belarus of underpayment for natural gas'.

which amounted to $200 mil. by May.[1098] It insisted that it paid in accordance with the intergovernmental agreement with Russia, but interpreted it differently: namely, the gas price for Germany and Ukraine minus customs duties and transportations costs. Indeed, Belarus not only insisted on the gas price change but unilaterally decided to pay at its own rate of 73 dollars per thousand cubic metres of gas: 'The Russian side believes that there is 'a Yamal price formula', but we believe in a fair market price of 73 dollars per thousand cubic metres of gas according to our estimates.'[1099]

Rescinding its previous agreement,[1100] Russia announced reduction in oil supplies to Belarus (from 23 to 18 million tonnes which cost $1.5 billion)[1101] as a partial compensation for its gas (oil products) losses:[1102] 'our Belarusian friends do not pay in full for the gas, this affects Russia's budget as Gazprom is a large taxpayer, so we are forced to seek compensation'.[1103] To remind, Belarus paid no duties on Russian oil according to the Union State agreements, which stipulated equal economic conditions for the subjects of the two countries and preferential oil supplies.[1104] As a result of oil cuts, Belarus had to decrease its re-export of Russian oil and oil products[1105] and to a large loss: the GDP decreased by 0.2 percent.[1106] Belarus's petrochemical industry provided a third of export revenues, and oil and oil products

[1098] Tut.by (31.05.2016). 'Gazprom announced an increase in the gas debt of Belarus to $200 million'. Tut.by (30.03.2017). 'Novak: Belarus is not ready to pay off the gas debt of more than $700 mil'. Tut.by (31.03.2017). 'Belarus denies having the debt for Russian gas'.
[1099] Tut.by (12.05.2016). 'Equal profitability price - $73. Russia estimated Belarus's debt for gas at $125 mil'.
[1100] Tut.by (16.06.2016). 'Recouped on oil? Russia announced a reduction in supplies in the third quarter'.
[1101] Tut.by (09.08.2016). 'Experts: resolution of the gas dispute with Russia will cost Belarus dearly'. Tut.by (09.01.2017). 'Russia plans to cut oil supplies to Belarus'. Tut.by (28.01.2017). 'Dvorkovich: Belarus's debt to Russian gas reaches $550 mil'. Ostro.by (13.01.17). 'Does Belarus have a chance in a new oil war with Russia?' Tut.by (21.02.2017). 'Kobyakov told how much Belarus lost in the oil conflict…'
[1102] Tut.by (17.06.2016). 'Oil and gas conflict with Russia will cost Belarus 2 million tons of 'brotherly' oil'.
[1103] Tut.by (16.06.2016). 'Dvorkovich: Reduction in oil supplies to Belarus is caused by underpayment for gas'.
[1104] Tut.by (16.02.2017). 'Mikhail Chepikov: People's fears. What is happening in the relations...' In 1995, Belarus and Russia signed a package of agreements which were valid in 2016-2017: Belarus was to preserve two Russian facilities on its territory – a radar station and the communication point of the Russian Navy and to provide access to infrastructure in case of a military threat. In exchange, Russia was to provide duty-free access of Belarusian goods to the Russian market and cheap oil and gas. Price dispute had been taking place since 1996.
[1105] Tut.by (30.11.2016). 'Export puzzle: what Belarus loses and what it unexpectedly gains'. Tut.by (13.07.2016). 'Did Belarus take a break in fuel export shipments?' In January-September 2016, its export fell by 15.7 percent.
[1106] Tut.by (23.08.2016). 'Reduction in oil supplies cost Belarus 0.2% of GDP'.

remained the most profitable export item.[1107] Processing duty-free Russian oil at Belarusian refineries had been the main pillar of Belarus's economic model for almost two decades.

In autumn 2016, Belarus started negotiations with Iran on alternative oil supplies[1108] and received a cargo train of Azerbaijani oil,[1109] which was delivered by tankers, Ukrainian ports, and railways. It had high transportation costs[1110] and low profitability but contributed to Belarus's energy security.[1111] The alternative oil deliveries were used as a leverage to influence Russia: Russia disapproved of Belarus's regional cooperation to diversify its energy sources.[1112] Meanwhile, Belarus demonstrated to other countries the feasibility of alternative oil supplies. It also announced construction of an oil pipeline to the Baltic Sea.[1113]

Despite the gas and oil conflict, Belarus coordinated its steps with those of Russia at the level of the UN and other international organisations: 'on almost all issues, the foreign policy approaches of Moscow and Minsk coincide, they are close'.[1114] Belarus did not vote on the resolution of the OSCE parliamentary assembly[1115] and blocked the discussion at the UN General Assembly[1116] that condemned Russia's violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea, including in respect to Crimea Tatars, as well as an illegal annexation and a change in the status of Crimea: 'We must find inner strength to resist the temptation to blend politics and human rights and treat each other as equals'.[1117] Belarus also received a second

[1107] Ostro.by (13.01.17). Does Belarus have a chance in a new oil war with Russia? Nashe Mnenie (31.10.2016). 'Hydrocarbon Rent: Challenges and Prospects for Russia and Belarus'. It also provided about 30 percent of industrial output and half of Belarus's exports of goods.
[1108] Tut.by (07.10.2016). 'Belarus negotiates with Iran on oil supplies'. In January 2017, Belarus purchased 84,000 tonnes of Iranian oil that was delivered via Ukraine. In 2016, Belarus imported 560,000 tonnes of Azerbaijan oil.
[1109] Reuters (16.02.17). 'Belarus buys Iran crude oil to replace Russian barrels'.
[1110] Tut.by (24.01.2017). 'An alternative to Russian oil – political populism or a new strategy?' Alternative oil could not replace Russian oil because of the quality of oil and transportation costs: Belarusian refineries could process Russian lighter oil but not heavier varieties, transportation by train was more expensive than by pipelines.
[1111] Belarus Digest (15.11.16). 'How Belarusian oil imports change geopolitics in Eastern Europe.'
[1112] Belarus Digest (15.11.16). 'How Belarusian oil imports change geopolitics in Eastern Europe.'
[1113] Tut.by (07.10.2016). 'Belarus negotiates with Iran on oil supplies.'
[1114] Tut.by (22.11.2016). 'Makei: Foreign policy approaches of Belarus and Russia coincide on almost all issues.'
[1115] Tut.by (06.07.2016). 'Belarus did not vote on OSCE PA resolution on violations of human rights and freedoms in Crimea.'
[1116] Tut.by (28.11.2016). 'Minsk may lose the status of a negotiating platform on Ukraine.'
[1117] Tut.by (16.11.2016) ''Dead end of hospitality'. How and why Belarus tried to block the resolution on Crimea'.

instalment of $300 million of $2 billion planned for three years in seven instalments from the Eurasian Fund of Stabilisation and Development (EFSD).[1118] Besides, a draft EAEU Customs Code was agreed to be signed in December 2016. It did not happen as planned, though.[1119]

To solve the energy conflict, Belarus unilaterally raised tariffs for oil transportation services through its main pipelines by 10.4 percent violating thereby the agreement of tariffs that had to be jointly approved with Russia.[1120] Also, Belarus's decreased supply of gasoline to Russia,[1121] again in violation of the existing agreement.[1122] The decrease prompted Russia to threaten Belarus with reduction in oil supplies by five times.[1123] Also, problems with Belarus's food export (dairy, meat,[1124] tomatoes and pears[1125]) to Russia took place.[1126] For example, Russia found falsification of skimmed milk powder[1127] with cheaper side ingredients, such as

[1118] Tut.by (09.08.2016). 'Experts: resolution of the gas dispute with Russia will cost Belarus dearly'. Tut.by (29.07.2016). 'The Eurasian Fund allocated another $300 million to Belarus.'
[1119] Tut.by (26.12.2016). 'Kyrgyzstan signed nonetheless the new Customs Code of the EAEU'. Tut.by (01.03.2017). 'Sidorskiy explained why Belarus had not signed the EAEU Customs Code'. Tut.by (27.12.2016). 'Yuri Drakokhrust: Lukashenko's 'kiss' and four Belarusian fronts'.
[1120] Tut.by (22.01.2016). 'Belarus increases tariffs for Russian oil transportation services by 10.4%'. Tut.by (02.10.2016). 'Belarus raises tariffs for oil transit by 50%'. Tut.by (04.10.2016). 'The Russian side refused to sign an agreement on an increase in oil transit tariffs'. Tut.by (25.11.2016). 'Attempt number 2. Belarus intends to increase the price for the transit of Russian oil by 20%'. Tut.by (23.12.2016). 'Moscow offers Minsk to seriously moderate its appetite for an increase in oil transit tariffs'. Tut.by (26.12.2016). 'Polotsk coordinated transit tariffs with Transneft, Gomel – no'. Tut.by (28.12.2016). 'Moscow persuaded Minsk to a modest increase in Russian oil transit tariffs'. Tut.by (05.01.2017). 'Moscow offered; Minsk agreed: Belarus increased tariffs for oil transit'.
[1121] Tut.by (28.01.2016). 'Belarus stops supplying gasoline to Russia due to unprofitability'. Tut.by (08.04.2016). 'There was no shortage: Russia will not punish Belarus for its failure to supply gasoline'. Tut.by (01.04.2016). 'Kobyakov believes that Belarus overpays Russia for gas'.
[1122] Tut.by (29.01.2016). 'Russian Ministry of Energy: Belarus violates TASS gasoline supply obligations'. Russia was to provide 23 million tonnes of duty-free oil in 2015. Due to a low value of the Russia rouble.
[1123] Tut.by (02.02.2016). 'Russian Ministry of Energy: in response to shortages of gasoline supplies, Russia has the right to reduce the volume of oil supplies to Belarus'.
[1124] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'Lukashenko proposed to initiate a criminal case against the head of the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Control'. Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'Russia stops beef supplies from Minsk region'. Tut.by (08.02.2017). 'Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Control will check suspicious yields of vegetables and fruits in Belarus'. Tut.by (08.02.2017). ''There is no proper quality control'. Russia threatens to ban the imports of Belarusian beef'. Tut.by (13.02.2017). 'Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Control introduces additional requirements for the import of pork from Belarus'.
[1125] Tut.by (16.11.2016). 'Rosselkhoznadroz again suspected Belarus in re-export of sanctioned products. This time – tomatoes and pears'. Tut.by (22.11.2016). 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs about claims to Belarusian products: contentious issues should be resolved by experts, in a calm manner, and not through the media'.
[1126] Tut.by (22.06.2016). 'Rosselkhoznadzor again threatened Belarus with a ban on its milk products import'. Tut.by (06.07.2016). 'Quality of Belarusian milk was discussed in Moscow'. Tut.by (10.07.2016). 'The ministry of agriculture and food has temporarily suspended the export of mixed feed of Belarusian largest producer'. Tut.by (20.12.2016). 'Surikov: the head of Rosselkhoznadzor Dankvert will be reprimanded'.
[1127] Tut.by (01.05.2016). 'After Russia lifts the embargo, Belarusian dairy producers need to be ready for a marketing war'. Tut.by (16.02.2017). 'The price of the issue is $3.7 billion. What is at stake in the food battle'.

flour and chalk.[1128] Russia also sent back Belarusian cheese due to excessive levels of preservatives.[1129] Dairy products occupied one of the five key positions in Belarusian exports after potash fertilizers, oil, and oil products[1130] with more than 90 percent of dairy exported to Russia. Russia also complained about Belarus's export of exotic fruit and fish to Russia: in August 2014, Russia banned western food imports whose country of origin applied economic sanctions against Russia for its decision to annex Crimea; Belarus was used as a transit route for sanctioned products helping Russian consumers bypass Russian sanctions.[1131]

Multiple Belarus-Russia energy conflicts of 2004, 2006, 2007, and 2010 validate the argument about the highly politicised character of bilateral relations in the energy sphere. With no other country, were the relations accompanied by as many conflicts.[1132] To compare, in early 2016, Russia provided a gas discount for Armenia twice.[1133] Arguably, in these conflicts Belarus won every other time though it lost strategically becoming increasingly dependent on Russia.

In 2017, on the Second of April, the Day of the Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia, the gas conflict of fifteen months has been resolved at the meeting of the presidents: 'To date, we have no unresolved questions'.[1134] The results were a compromise: 'I cannot say that we managed to achieve those results and reach the goal that we originally set for ourselves. It was a compromise, but a very beneficial for us'.[1135] Oil supplies were to be resumed in the amount

[1128] Tut.by (19.02.2016). 'After Rosselkhoznadzor's accusations, the amount of preservative in Belarusian cheeses was reduced as much as possible'. Tut.by (09.12.2016) ''Such figures like Dankvert will spit, slander and cheat'. Lukashenko responded to the head of Rosselkhoznadzor'.
[1129] Tut.by (09.02.2016). '190 tons of white cheese not allowed into Russia - excess of preservatives sodium nitrate
[1130] Tut.by (01.05.2016). 'After Russia lifted the embargo, Belarusian dairy expects a marketing war'. 93.2 percent
[1131] Tut.by (02.10.2015). 'Rosselkhoznadzor: since introduction of the embargo, supplies of 'Belarusian exotic fruits' have increased 10 times'. Tut.by (02.02.2016). 'Belarusian ambassador to Russia: We supply exotic goods to Russia without breaking the rules'.
[1132] Reuters (07.07.2016). 'Russia reminds wayward ally Belarus of its economic muscle'. Tut.by (25.07.2016). 'Yuri Drakokhrust: What is similar between Lukashenko and Trump?'
[1133] Nashe Mnenie (31.10.2016). 'Hydrocarbon Rent: Challenges and Prospects for Russia and Belarus'.
[1134] Tut.by (03.04.2017). 'Lukashenko and Putin: there are no unresolved issues between our countries'.
[1135] Tut.by (07.04.2017). 'Lukashenko about the meeting with Putin and words of fiction of Russian officials: 'it did not work out the way they wanted''.

of 24 mil. tonnes per year until 2024 and delivered by pipelines.[1136] Besides, until 2018, 18 mil. tonnes were to be processed at Belarus's oil refineries, while 6 mil. tonnes were to be duty-free and re-sold by Belarus at its discretion[1137] with export duties going to its budget -[1138] they were to compensate $1.2 billion that Belarus lost due to the reduction in oil supplies by Russia.[1139] However, the new Russian VAT with reduction of mining tax and customs duty meant price increase in Russian oil. Also, Belarus was no longer obliged to supply 1 mil. tonnes of oil products to Russia saving $150 mil. a year from that. Regarding the gas price, Belarus was to receive 'a discount with a reduction factor' - less than 20 percent - for 2018 and 2019. After that, it would depend on negotiations.[1140] For 2017, the gas price was fixed at $130.[1141] By January 2025, Belarus was promised to have the same or very close to it the gas price that existed in the Russian regions bordering Belarus and in Moscow. Also, Gazprom stopped being the only Russian supplier of gas to Belarus according to the new terms of the agreement.[1142] Also, Russia promised Belarus a $1 billion loan on 'good terms', to transfer the third (deterred from autumn 2016) and the fourth instalments of the EFSD loan,[1143] and to refinance Belarus's interstate loans ($750-800 mil.). On its side, Belarus fully repaid its debt to Gazprom in the amount of $726.2 mil.[1144] and signed the EAEU Customs Code that it refused to sign in December 2016.[1145] It failed to tie the gas price to the neighbouring Smolensk region: it remained tied to the Yamal-Nenets' gas price. Altogether, the benefit for Belarus was estimated

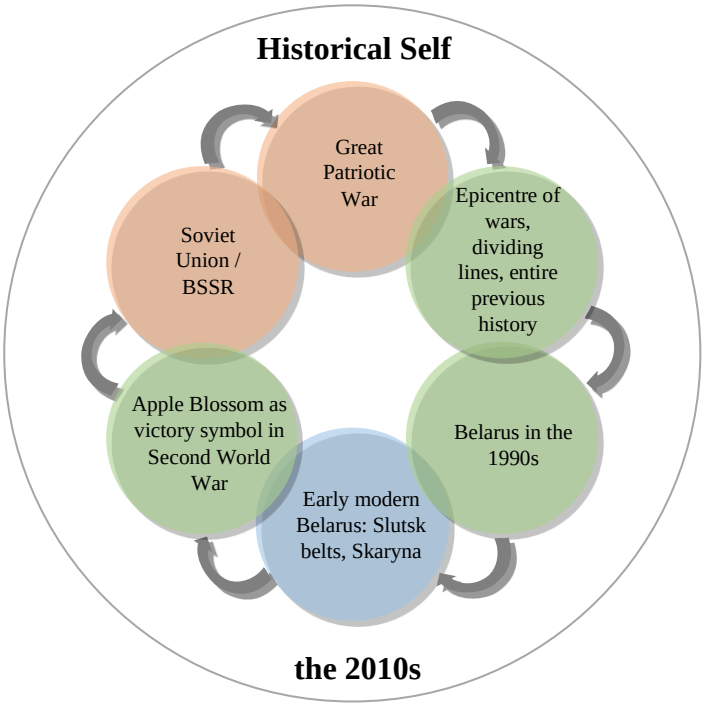
[1136] Tut.by (04.04.2017). 'Semashko: Russia will supply Belarus with up to 24 million tonnes of oil per year'. Tut.by (16.04.2017). 'Semashko's optimism: oil dispute resolved until 2024, gas price is reduced'. Belarus will receive 23 mil. of oil to be delivered by pipeline, 1 mil. - by train with extra costs of $60-70 per tonne.
[1137] Tut.by (14.04.2017). 'Media: gas discount for Belarus will be less than 20 percent'.
[1138] In the amount of about $570 mil. a year (Urals for $55 per barrel). Kommersant (14.04.2017). 'Gazprom gave discount for Belarus. monopoly losses will amount to about $500 million'.
[1139] Belrynok. by (18.04.2017). 'Gas bonuses for Belarus: it all depends on the world oil price'.
[1140] Tut.by (13.04.2017). 'Russian government approved the terms of oil and gas supplies to Belarus'.
[1141] for 2018-2019 - $129; it will cost up to $500 mil. to Gazprom; to compare, Smolensk region received gas for $83.5; for the usual 19 billion m^3 volume of supplies to Belarus, savings are $490 million a year from discount.
[1142] Tut.by (14.04.2017). 'Media: gas discount for Belarus will be less than 20 percent'.
[1143] Tut.by (09.04.2017). 'Russia will provide Belarus with a $1 billion loan on 'good terms'.
[1144] Tut.by (13.04.2017). 'Belarus paid off debt of $726 million for Russian gas'.
[1145] Tut.by (12.04.2017). 'President of Belarus signed the Customs Code of the EAEU'.

at $500 mil. in 2017 and at $800 mil. in 2018 and in 2019.[1146] The total benefit reached $2 billion in the period of 2017-2019.[1147] The material gains were rather small if Belarus's losses were considered: oil reduction loss of more than $1.2 billion in addition to food embargoes to Russia.

6.3. Belarus's State Identity: Official Narrative

6.3.1. The Historical Self

Graph 6.1. Dominant categories of the Historical Self in the 2010s and their congruence vis-à-vis the Russian and European Others



Source: Author

[1146] Belrynok. by (18.04.2017). 'Gas bonuses for Belarus: it all depends on the world oil price'.
[1147] Kommersant (05.04.2017). 'Belarus is dear for us. Minsk succeeded to receive maximum oil and gas benefits'.

Notes to Graph 6.1. Compared to the 2000s, the number of components related to the Russian period of Belarus's history – indicated in red – decreased, while the number of components related to the specifically Belarusian history, some of them are implicitly European – indicated in green for the former and blue for the latter – increased. 'Green' components differed in their Belarusianness: for example, while the component of 'Belarus in the 1990s' was specifically Belarusian, the component of 'epicentre of wars' embraced Russian and European periods of Belarus's history, the component 'Slutsk belts' – Belarusian and European, and the 'Apple Blossom' is specifically Belarusian but refers to the Russian period of Belarus's history. The events of the European historical period are not addressed explicitly but rather implied. The graph serves an illustrative purpose only.

In the 2010s, Belarus's Historical Self underwent change in terms of the frequency of references to historical events, which decreased, and its content, which expanded. Firstly, historical memory was less evoked and relied on in the official identity narrative compared to the 1990s and the 2000s. Secondly, Belarus diversified and extended its historical memory drawing on Russian, but also European, and specifically Belarusian historical heritage. The most common historical references were to the Second World War, the Soviet Union, and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986.[1148] The historical narrative also evoked the occasions of the 7th of October Revolution Day and the 2nd of April, the Day of the Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia.

Each year on the 9th of May, Belarusians were congratulated to the victory in the Second World war, 'which we will not give away to anyone, and we will do everything for a young generation

[1148] Chernobyl rallies - 'Chernobylski Shliakh' - took place every year on 26 April, the anniversary of the disaster: they consisted of the procession and the floral tribute to the Chernobyl chapel. The Belarusian authorities have repeatedly prohibited the processions and arrested their participants. The Chernobyl procession became to be associated with the Belarusian democratic opposition as it started in 1989 as a protest movement and promotion of a national identity at the time of the collapse of the USSR.

to remember the victory and three millions of perished Belarusians'.[1149] It was 'the major event of the year'.[1150] Existing since the liberation of Minsk in 1944, Belarus reopened the museum of history of the Great Patriotic War in a new location in 2014, and, according to the official discourse, it was a unique object on the post-Soviet space, in the world, and in Europe. Belarus and Russia were not 'strangers to each other but were connected by a centuries-old history, common spiritual values, and folk mentality'.[1151] They defended their lands in the Second World War from the 'fascist enslavement', and they won the Great Victory.[1152] The end of the war was 'the Great Victory, our common victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War'.[1153] 'The unfading glory of victorious heroes, pride in them, were unshakable pillars of our national identity. Today the memory of the victory became the spiritual force that unites us in our devoted love for the motherland. Let us all take care of it together in order to pass on to our children and grandchildren a peaceful, free, and prosperous country'.[1154]

Because Belarus lost a third of its population in the war, Russia had to support Belarus economically. Russia's threat that Belarus could pay for gas at the European price level meant that Belarus was a 'freeloader'[1155] in Russia, and the low gas price was Russia's gift to Belarus. However, 'if we pay as in Europe, Russia will also have to pay for something. And the price will be incredibly higher than the price of natural gas. … we need to go to the middle of the last century when we lost a third of the population'.[1156] Belarus's total gas dependence on Russia was not its choice but resulted from Chernobyl, 'the greatest tragedy of the Belarusian people in peacetime': after the accident in 1986, the fifth Minsk heating power plant, which had been initially designed and built as a nuclear power plant, was converted to working on

[1149] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1150] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1151] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1152] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1153] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1154] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1155] «нахлебник» in Russian
[1156] Tut.by (09.03.2017) 'Lukashenko expects Russia to fulfill its obligations and not to reduce the gas price.'

gas fuel. Also, due to environmental reasons, Belarus's key power plants Novalukoml and Berezovskaya were switched to gas consumption instead of oil. Furthermore, Belarus had to redirect resources to overcome the consequences of the Chernobyl as two thirds of the radioactive fallout had fallen on Belarus which reduced its agricultural lands in use by 18 percent; the direct and indirect damage of Chernobyl reached 200 billion dollars.[1157] Due to these reasons, Russia's accusations in its excessive support of Belarus were redundant. As Russia positioned itself as a successor of the USSR, it had to help Belarus. According to Lukashenko, 'I would like our scientists to invent a new source of energy, so that we do not crawl on our knees even in front of our brothers, begging them, and asking for a tonne of oil or cubic metre of gas'.[1158]

Regarding the Day of the Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia (the 2nd of April), the occasion 'symbolises strong historical ties, and common interests of our people. The Union State has a solid foundation in a rich spiritual and cultural heritage and a huge economic potential for cooperation'.[1159] It was a symbol of lasting value of Russia-Belarus friendship. Belarus's discourse underscored that the common historical memory and mutual support were above any mercantile considerations: 'It is our common duty to remain faithful to this fateful choice, which meets the expectations and aspirations of the peoples of Belarus and Russia'.[1160]

In 2016, the autumn celebrations were represented by the official and oppositional interpretation of the past with diametrically opposite meanings and symbols. On the one hand, the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917, the official holiday in Belarus, brought 'accessible social benefits, ideals of equality, peace, and interethnic harmony relevant to this

[1157] Tut.by (13.03.2017) Valer Belsky in 'The Eurasian Union loses value for Belarus without the convergence of energy prices.'
[1158] Tut.by (21.03.2017) 'President: I would like scientists to invent a new source of energy, so that we do not have to crawl on our knees.'
[1159] Lukashenko (2017. B)
[1160] Lukashenko (2017. B)

day' to Belarus; the Soviet Union made 'a powerful breakthrough in the development of agriculture, industry, energy, space, technology', and its success in sport and culture 'became the property of all mankind'; 'We are proud today of labour exploits, military heroism, and scientific discoveries of the Soviet area'.[1161] At the same time, contrary to the official discourse, the opposition commemorated the burial place of victims of Stalinist repressions at Kurapaty where NKVD (the interior ministry of the Soviet Union) killed the Belarusian intelligentsia in the Great Purge of 1937-1941 and which 'greatly affected the fate of Belarus's.[1162]

In response to criticism of the West regarding democratic standards in Belarus, it was recalled that in the 1990s, the beginning of the path of 'radical liberalism' and 'shock therapy' (meaning the national revival in Belarus in 1991-1994) was rejected by the population of the country as it contradicted the historical path of Belarusians, their mentality, and traditions.[1163] Instead, Belarusians voted for 'non-shock exposure to market laws and fierce competition': 'we stopped this robbery by the request of the population… we decided for quiet normal policies in the country'.[1164]

Amid the usual references to the Second World War and the Soviet Union, Belarus brought to light other historical events thereby broadening the base of its historical memory. Such as an attempt to revive the historical memory of early modern Belarus with its symbolical craft of Slutsk belts and Belarus's experience in the first years of its independence. While the historical events had previously exclusively encompassed those related to the Soviet period of Belarus's existence, with anything beyond mentioned briefly in one sentence, in 2012, the reference to the events that had happened several centuries ago occupied some paragraphs. Namely,

[1161] Tut.by (07.11.2016) 'Lukashenko: We have invaluable experience of previous generations, which means that we can handle a lot'.
[1162] Tut.by (30.10.2016). 'Avoid another Kurapaty'. A procession in memory of ancestors 'Dzyady' took place'. Tut.by (29.10.2016). 'In Minsk, near KGB an action was held in memory of the victims of Stalinist repressions. Not without detentions.'
[1163] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1164] Lukashenko (2012. A)

Belarus's cultural symbol of Slutsk belts, an item of dress, patterned weave-work, attributed to the nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th – 18th centuries and which was produced in Slutsk in what Belarus is nowadays. According to the narrative, 'many centuries ago, Belarus was known in the most distant lands by its luxurious Slutsk belts', and nowadays 'we should revive the ancient craft and make it a modern brand … that would glorify Belarus's.[1165] This cultural symbol of 'greatness' and a 'unique' custom represented a marker of an ethnic form of national identity, which was a rare occasion for Belarus's official discourse built predominantly on civic nationalism of 'shared ideologies, class ties, and loyalty to the state, not language or kinship'.[1166] This was all the more striking as the discussion on the need to revive the custom took a prominent place in the official narrative, and Slutsk belts were described as just the beginning on the path of spiritual development of a nation. The next step was to revive castles of 'our shlyakhta' - referring to a privileged noble class in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as well as other crafts and cultural and historical symbols so that the people could 'touch this shrine, even if hand-made and created in the modern world' and with that 'cultivate patriotism, love and respect for their homeland' with the ultimate goal 'to form and develop the national idea'.[1167] The passage on patriotism construed as 'sincere love for the motherland, the land of ancestors and its people' was also built on ethnic nationalism.[1168] The tradition of Slutsk belts was to remind Belarus of its past and to signify that Belarusians were the people who knew where they came from and what they wanted. By 2014, the Slutsk belts had become the asset and heritage of Belarusian society that it managed to recreate.[1169]

The official narrative also dwelled upon the anniversary of Belarus's typography in honour of one of the first book printers in Eastern Europe - Skoryna from Polatsk, who laid the ground

[1165] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1166] Buhr et al. (2011)
[1167] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1168] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1169] Lukashenko (2014. A)

for the development of the Belarusian language. Belarusians felt 'like a single distinctive family, who value freedom and independence… We hold dear our expressive language, which must be protected, studied, and developed. We inherited a heroic history that must be remembered and filled with new achievements in order to pass with dignity to future generations of Belarusians.'[1170] To notice, neither the heroic history nor its achievements were specified. The annual festival of the Belarusian writing was to be held on the ancient land of Polatsk. It was to contribute to the preservation of the country's spiritual heritage. In 2017, the celebration was symbolic as the year marked the 500th anniversary of the Belarusian printing. Five centuries ago, the first book of Belarus's 'enlightener and educator' Skoryna was published; his work declared to whole Europe that there were such people like Belarusians.[1171]

Belarus's narrative on its European historical memory was partly offset by references to the historical events that linked Belarus to Russia, such as the February Revolution in 1917, the memory of the Kievan Rus' as the cradle of three peoples of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, the Great Patriotic War Museum in Minsk as the symbol of heroism of the peoples of the Soviet Union, and 'centuries of historical brotherhood and common history with Russia'.[1172] Thus, the Belarusian leadership linked and compared privatisation of Belarus's industrial assets (which the EU required) to the land ownership of 1917, when peasants in Russia seized lands and 'a civil war unfolded and [people] went on each other for land'.[1173]

However, the interpretation of the past was such that it underscored Belarus's independence and its right to its own historical memory, separate and distinct from that of others, Russia primarily. Arguably, Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 stimulated Belarus to tread carefully regarding its historical memory reading. It aimed to distance itself from Russia. For example,

[1170] Lukashenko (2017. A)
[1171] Lukashenko (2017. A)
[1172] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1173] Lukashenko (2012. A)

Kievan Rus' was not only the cradle of three Slavic peoples, but it was also emphasised in the discourse as the forerunner of Belarus's own statehood that Belarus's great-grandfathers 'shed blood' to live 'freely on its own land'.[1174] It was also European: 'Our cradle was Kievan Rus' - a powerful and proud European state with a capital located on the river Dnieper. The history so decided that the three fraternal distinctive peoples grew out of a common spiritual Orthodox cradle, from Holy Russia'.[1175] Each of them built its own state. Belarus was not pro-Russian, pro-Ukrainian, or pro-Polish: 'we are not Russians - we are Belarusians, and our country is White Rus', and a country where Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, Tatars and many others live together peacefully. They are the children of White Rus', the citizens of one country.'[1176]

Even before Belarus's neutral position towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Historical Self of Belarus's state identity was more engaged and congruent with the EU, in contrast to the previous decade. Belarus acknowledged that its interest in the EU was conditioned by the reason of geographical, cultural, and historical proximity - 'to normalise relations with the EU was Belarus's natural desire as of a European country'.[1177] Accepting the credentials of the EU ambassadors, Belarus's President announced that he looked forward to a constructive approach of the EU countries in assessing the situation in Belarus: 'Belarus and European countries are connected by a spirit of community, common history, culture, and this is a reliable foundation for the development of bilateral relations in the spirit of mutual respect'.[1178]

After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the reference to the Second World War found re-interpretation: Belarus separated its own experience in the war from the Russian one while independence and sovereignty received more attention. Belarus sought to balance the Soviet

[1174] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1175] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1176] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1177] Tut.by (29.01.2014) 'The EU is not ready to compromise with the Belarusian authorities on the issue of political prisoners.'
[1178] Tut.by (12.12.2014) 'Lukashenko spoke with foreign ambassadors'.

history of Belarus that linked it closely to Russia, and the need to preserve sovereignty and to keep distance from Russia's geopolitical pursuits, especially pertinent after the events in Ukraine and Crimea. Firstly, Belarus introduced its own symbol of the victory in the Second World War – the Apple Blossom, which was to co-exist with the Russian symbol of St George's ribbon. The symbol is important since the war and victory in it constituted the central theme for Belarus's identity to rely on. The official discourse underscored that Belarus and Russia were 'connected by a centuries-old history, common spiritual values, and mentality'.[1179] They defended their lands in the war from 'fascist enslavement' and won the Great Victory.[1180] The seventieth anniversary of the war end was described as 'the Great Victory, our common victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War'.[1181] 'The unfading glory of victorious heroes, pride in them, are unshakable pillars of our national identity. Today the memory of the victory became the spiritual force that unites us in our love for motherland. Let us all take care of it together in order to pass on to our children and grandchildren a peaceful, free, and prosperous country'.[1182] Yet, as a sovereign and independent state, Belarus had the right to have its own traditions and symbols, such as the Apple Blossom ribbon. Secondly, the Great Patriotic War Museum that was unveiled in a new location in 2014 re-directed attention to Belarus's own history and disconnected it from the Russian history. Subtly, Belarus tried to appropriate the glory of the war. Thirdly, in 2019, for the first time, Belarus indirectly accused Russia as a country along with European countries that was responsible for starting wars, thereby further distancing its historical memory from Russia: 'all these wars were not our wars: the Patriotic War of 1812 … the First World War … the World War II…. foreign wars… I emphasize again: these were not our wars'.[1183] Belarus raised the issue of historical sufferings of Belarusians as

[1179] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1180] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1181] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1182] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1183] Lukashenko (2019. A)

caused by both neighbours, to the West, and to the East. Because of the dynamics in relations of Europe and Russia: 'we have already been tilted and had to run and keep up'.[1184]

Fourthly, Belarus extended its historical memory base by alluding ambiguously to its past without connecting it to specific historical events and specifying the reference point of its historical memory, as in 'our entire previous history', 'we always fought for physical survival', or 'experience of being an epicentre of dividing lines and wars'.[1185] Belarusians have a 'harsh history': 'Life never indulged Belarusians' as they always fought for physical survival.[1186] They were 'ancient and at the same time very young people who perhaps doesn't know the limits of its capabilities'.[1187] Belarus attributed the importance it placed on independence to its 'too long' (and hence European too) historical path toward achieving it: 'Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers shed too much blood and tears fighting numerous invaders for the right to live freely on their own land and decide their own fate. Therefore, this right is of a huge lasting value for us'.[1188] Belarus would resist, fight for its patch of land, if some tried to 'bend', 'strangle', and 'put Belarus on its knees'.[1189] It was not clear, however, which historical events were evoked. The value of independence was emphasised: Belarus's Historical Self embraced the element of independence as a result of centuries of torment, 'long-suffering', and 'heroic history'.[1190] However, the heroic history was not specified. 'For centuries, our people have been tormented, robbed, destroyed, or ignored at best. They always dreamed of freedom that would allow Belarusians to live with their own minds, to take care of their own land, develop national traditions and culture, work peacefully for the benefit of the long-suffering homeland: The dream came true. We live in an independent state. It was incredibly difficult to win this

[1184] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1185] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1186] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1187] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1188] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1189] Lukashenko (2017. A)
[1190] Lukashenko (2017. A)

freedom and much more difficult to defend it'.[1191] Belarus relied on the Historical Self of its state identity to bring Belarus-Russia energy conflict to its resolution on the 2nd of April in 2017, the Day of the Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia. It reminded Russia that on this day in 1996 and 1997, the agreement on the formation of the Community of Russia and Belarus and the Treaty on the Union State were signed: 'This day is a confirmation of a spiritual closeness of two fraternal peoples, a close political and economic partnership'.[1192]

All in all, compared to the previous decade, Belarus's Historical Self was increasing in congruence with the European Other at the expense of the Russian Other. Belarus's European memory was explicitly and implicitly addressed. Moreover, Belarus's emphasis on its own historical memory as distinct from the Russian memory approximated its Historical Self with the European Other. Belarus's Historical Self was decreasing its congruence with the Russian Other mainly because of its split character compared to the previous decades of unequivocally Russia orientation. However, Belarus's Historical Self in its pro-Russian component was still explicitly addressed and could have been still relied on as a source of influence.

Chart 6.1. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Historical Self in the 2010s

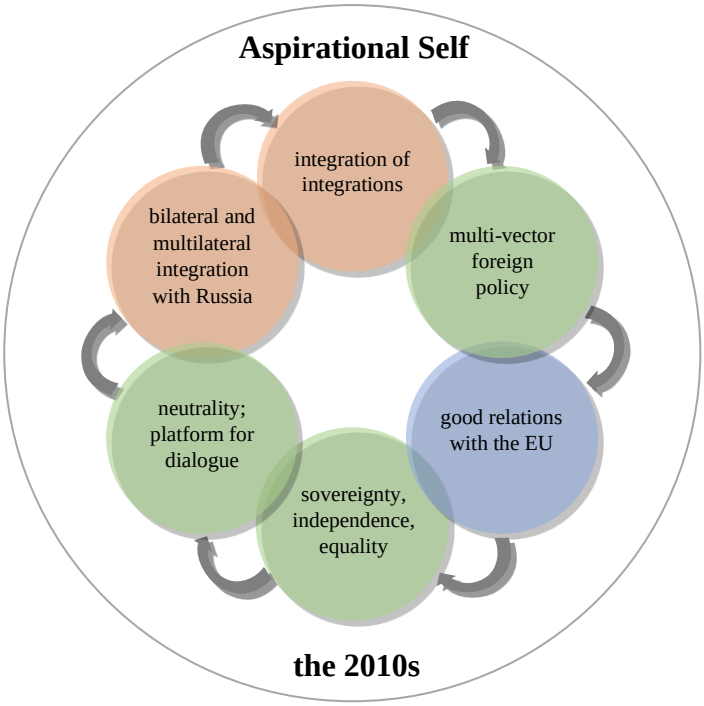
[1191] Lukashenko (2017. A)
[1192] Lukashenko (2017. B)

Source: Author

Notes to Chart 6.1. The words that predominate bring the Historical Self in congruence with the Russian Other, such as ‘Soviet’, ‘Union’, ‘Patriotic’ and ‘Great’ (referring to the Second World War), ‘Russia’, ‘Union’ (referring to the Union State of Belarus and Russia), ‘Eastern’ (referring to the Eastern neighbour of Belarus - Russia), ‘brotherly’ (referring to Belarus-Russia relations), ‘Victory’ (referring to the victory in the Second World War), ‘not subsidized’ (referring to the economic status of the BSSR). There are fewer words that are in congruence with the European Other, such as ‘independence’ and ‘sovereignty’ (referring to Belarus’s intention to preserve independence). Most concepts that are congruent with the European Other do not find reflection in the graph as their frequency is low, such as ‘Polatsk Duchy’, ‘The Grand Duchy of Lithuania’, and ‘The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’.

6.3.2. The Aspirational Self

Graph 6.2. Dominant categories of the Aspirational Self in the 2010s and their congruence vis-à-vis the Russian and European Others



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 6.2. The number of components of the Aspirational Self that link Belarus to Russia in the future – indicated in red – is limited in number, while the number of components related to the specifically Belarusian goals, that are neither Russian nor European, – indicated in green – predominates. Similar to the previous decade, there is only one component that link Belarus's future to the EU, and it is indicated in blue.

In the 2010s, Belarus's Aspirational Self was constructed along a number of dimensions: relations with Russia, the EU, and China, the concept of 'integration of integrations', the multi-directional foreign policy, neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and Belarus as a place for conflict mediation. Compared to the previous two decades, Belarus's promotion of itself as a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution were new. Belarus's aspiration to reach a balance in relations with Russia and the EU was not: Belarus envisioned itself as a country equally

distanced from both larger neighbours, as ‘a connecting link, a bridge, and a corridor’.[1193] To effectively use the country’s geographical position, transit, and industrial potential, Belarus aspired towards ‘a balanced interaction with two centres of power’, and aimed at the strategy of ‘equal proximity’ to the East and the West.[1194] Addressing both Russia’s threats to incorporate Belarus and the EU’s complaint of its tight relations with Russia, Belarus declared that it was not ‘going anywhere: neither to Europe nor to Russia. We must live here! … and cooperate with Europe but not to destroy what we have with Russia’.[1195] Belarus set the goal to avoid a peripheral status and chose a peacekeeping role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

With the EU, Belarus envisioned relations based on mutual interests. It did not intend to ‘flirt to please the EU’ but to develop relations based on economic interests and geographic proximity.[1196] The EU remained one of the most important vectors of Belarus’s foreign policy. It was number one trade partner for Belarus’s export, and number two partner for total trade turnover after Russia: 70 percent of Russian oil and one third of Russian gas were transported through Belarus to the EU, and ‘that firmly connects us with Europe, in the centre of which Belarus is located’.[1197] The EU also remained an important source of credits and investments even against the backdrop of difficult political relations.[1198] Therefore, Belarus pursued a ‘pragmatic policy’ towards the EU, which was based on economic cooperation and collaboration against transnational crimes.[1199] Moreover, it was interested in intensifying and bringing bilateral relations to a new high-quality level of cooperation.[1200] In its turn, Belarus believed that it was important for the EU as a key transit country, and a gateway to a ‘huge and

[1193] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1194] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1195] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1196] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1197] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1198] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1199] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1200] Lukashenko (2015. A)

promising' market of the Customs Union and the forthcoming Eurasian Economic Union.[1201] Belarus hoped that the EU would realise that it was important to normalise relations with Belarus, despite the negative image of the country promoted by some politicians.[1202] It urged the EU to build relations on equal terms 'without imposing any model of development and the format of cooperation'.[1203] The EU and Belarus 'looked differently on certain issues of societal organisation' but these differences were to be overcome through dialogue and negotiations not through 'useless and ineffective' sanctions and bans.[1204] Belarus welcomed the Eastern Partnership initiative which involved it in 'pan-European processes'.[1205] Belarus bore 'no hostility' towards the EU, and it focused on 'what united them' and on the future.[1206] Regarding democracy and civil society, Belarus was 'firmly' moving towards them but needed time for the values to 'germinate in the minds' of 'responsible citizens', and it 'could not happen in a day with a stroke of a pen', while 'pushing and urging us along this path is pointless and useless'.[1207] The argumentation in regard to democracy has been the same in Belarus's official discourse for three decades, while the goal has increasingly become unattainable.

After the presidential elections of 2010, Belarus planned to deepen dialogue with Europe, but 'strange' European politics disrupted the process: 'the West and the fifth column[1208] launched an attack on our country through pressure and sanctions… This is the way to a dead end'.[1209] Belarus believed that the EU's sanctions on Belarus were temporarily as both neighbours needed each other.[1210] This highlighted Belarus's belief in its own ability to exert influence vis-à-vis the EU. Belarus was positive about a renewal in relations with the EU: as 'everyday

[1201] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1202] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1203] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1204] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1205] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1206] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1207] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1208] meaning domestic opposition
[1209] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1210] Lukashenko (2011. A)

practice showed, the West retained considerable interest in cooperation with Belarus's.[1211] On its own part, Belarus was ready to seek common grounds with European partners and intended to invite them to visit Belarus in order to receive objective information about the country from 'first hands', as some in the EU 'thought about Belarus as some kind of reserved land with dictators on every square metre and flourishing cannibalism'.[1212] However, according to the official narrative, Belarus-EU relations should not be built at the expense of the Russian vector of Belarus's foreign policy because in Russia 'our people live there and that is it'.[1213]

Amid the energy conflict with Russia in 2016, the official discourse became increasingly congruent with the European Other. Belarus was confident that it would build multi-faceted bilateral relations with the EU.[1214] The removal of sanctions, even before it took place in February 2016, Belarus considered as 'a closed chapter in our minds' with the next stage being a legal framework for cooperation, such as a partnership and cooperation agreement.[1215] According to the Foreign Minister, 'our partners, I hope, will understand an urgent need to work on a new core document between Belarus and the European Union'.[1216] Belarus was convinced that the parties could start a 'friendly and mutually respectful dialogue'.[1217] The EU was of 'huge' interest: 'We are interested in developing relations with the EU in all areas', foremost in trade and economy.[1218] Belarus was also ready for a dialogue with the EU on sensitive issues of democracy and human rights: 'the key task for the future is full normalisation of relations'.[1219] Good relations with the EU did not mean that 'tomorrow we want to become a member of the EU, although no one knows what will happen in 10-15 years'.[1220]

[1211] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1212] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1213] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1214] Evdochenko (2016)
[1215] Evdochenko (2016)
[1216] Makei (2016. A)
[1217] Evdochenko (2016)
[1218] Makei (2016. B)
[1219] Lukashenko (2016. E)
[1220] Makei (2016. B)

According to Belarus's official discourse vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbour, Russia was to remain Belarus's main strategic partner and an ally 'due to multifaceted ties between our peoples'.[1221] Belarus was of a 'firm conviction' that it would 'never live outside of the cultural Slavic world of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians'.[1222] Unlike Russia, Belarus resolved the issue of 'to be or not to be with Russia' at the 1995 referendum, and 'this way we will always follow!'[1223] Russians were brothers of Belarusians; Belarus's loss of Russia's good attitude would be unforgivable; to maintain and strengthen the strategic partnership with 'historical ally Russia' was a priority task of Belarus's foreign policy.[1224] The 'great' Russian language would develop freely in Belarus as well as the native, 'the mother' language, Belarusian: 'If we lose the Russian language, we will lose our mind! If we forget how to speak Belarusian, we will cease to be a nation'; representative of different nationalities and religions would feel at home in Belarus: 'Belarus is their home, the home of all citizens of our state regardless of their faith and blood'.[1225] With Russia's help, Belarus implemented the most significant projects in its history: a new nuclear power plant at Astraviec and military-industrial complex modernisation.[1226] Belarus planned to strengthen cooperation within the CSTO and to continue a close military-technical interaction with Russia. Every year, Belarus carried out more than forty joint military trainings with Russia. No other country had such military-political unity. Belarus acknowledged that it could not confront the challenges of the modern world alone: it pinned its hopes on the Eurasian Economic Union.[1227]

In the aspirational narrative, certain claims are to be separately evaluated. First, Belarus indirectly accused Russia of being not as loyal as Belarus in their relations. Secondly, Belarus

[1221] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1222] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1223] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1224] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1225] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1226] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1227] Lukashenko (2017. A)

brought up the issue of the Belarusian language, which was a rare occasion and drew attention to Belarus's discursive attempts to counterbalance its dependence on Russia amid the latter's aggressive actions in Ukraine. It was ironic though given the number of closures of Belarusian-language schools by the state in the time period. Thirdly, Belarus emphasised its wish to stay independent. For example, in one sentence, Belarus avowed that it would always support Russia 'shoulder to shoulder', and they would always be together but as independent states; Russians were 'our people …we are brothers, but we want to have our own place… We are a sovereign and independent state…';[1228] it would 'enter into unions on equal terms'.[1229] Fourthly, Belarus indirectly threatened Russia to ease its pressure on Belarus. According to Belarus's official discourse, Russia 'realised' that the policy of high energy prices for Belarus would 'never again' make Belarus support Russia, therefore Russia 'neatly retreated' and would not 'step on this rake for the second time';[1230] at the same time, Russia had always been, remained, and would be Belarus's strategic partner. To clarify, this was the understanding drawn by the Belarusian leadership. Fifthly, Belarus's narratives vis-à-vis Russia were emotionally coloured and the historically conditioned common future was emphasised.

With Russia, the comprehensive cooperation was to dynamically develop at the inter-state and regional levels.[1231] Belarus envisioned 'the highest level'[1232] of cooperation in the Union State and in the Eurasian Economic Union. It urged to preserve and strengthen the achievements reached in the frameworks of 'the most advanced integration project on the post-Soviet space' - the Union State and the Customs Union: among 'the most striking examples' of these achievements was the provision of equal rights to the citizens of Belarus and Russia and the unified system of social guarantees.[1233] Belarus believed that Eurasian integration would allow

[1228] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1229] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1230] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1231] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1232] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1233] Lukashenko (2011. A)

it to increase resilience.[1234] Therefore, it was the initiator of all integration processes on the post-Soviet space, though it underscored that the basis of integration was to be equality not incorporation.[1235] In 2010, Belarus considered the regional economic integration within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community, especially the Customs Union, as one of the most important foreign policy objectives for the future, but only if it was based on equal terms and took into account the interests of all its members;[1236] the market of 170 million people was beneficial for Belarusian export and could provide equal access to raw materials and energy sources.[1237] Five years later, in 2015, Belarus believed that the regional economic integration in the Eurasian Economic Union increased sustainability of its national economy; Belarus was a founding country in the union, and that gave it 'enormous advantages'.[1238] It opened up the prospect of a fundamentally new level of interaction with world economic unions [the European Union] and allowed it to 'avoid new diving lines in Europe'.[1239]

In its aspirational narratives, Belarus promoted the concept of 'integration of integrations' - a common economic space of Europe and Eurasia that would unite the two largest integrational projects on the continent, the EU and the Common Economic Space of Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan. Belarus aspired to be at the epicentre of it. A new common economic space 'would stretch from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and Belarus would be among the founders of one of them'.[1240] Belarus's leadership believed that the Central European states had a mission: namely, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic had to unite the West and the East, and that was their new historical vocation and a special role; moreover, Russia and Kazakhstan shared the same belief.[1241] The Eurasian integration was

[1234] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1235] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1236] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1237] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1238] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1239] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1240] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1241] Lukashenko (2012. A)

assessed as a step towards a trans-continental integration, in which Belarus planned to participate in order to avoid turning into a periphery between the East and the West. Belarus believed that its idea of 'integration of integrations' was promising despite 'the current aggravation of the geopolitical situation': 'in the end, we will come to a real rapprochement of the EU and the EAEU and towards building Greater Europe from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans'.[1242]

It was underscored that the 'fundamental' basis of Belarus's foreign policy was multi-vectoredness: 'it was and will be'.[1243] Every vector complemented and not contradicted relations with other key partners.[1244] Belarus considered the two main vectors, Russian and European, to be complemented by having allies and partners in Asia (China, India, Vietnam), Middle East (United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, Syria), and South America (Brazil and Venezuela). These multiple vectors were of 'fundamental importance' for Belarus, and 'let them not criticise us that we are small, 'shrivelled up', and still go to Africa and America.'[1245] The 'invaluable' experience of cooperation with Venezuela and China demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperation with geographically remote states.[1246] For long-term stability, Belarus was building the third pillar in 'the Global South', primarily in China, but also in Uzbekistan in Central Asia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus. Belarus considered China its strategic partner that was to counterbalance both Russian and European vectors in its foreign policy. China served as an example to follow as its path was more appropriate for Belarus's circumstances.[1247] Belarus found it good 'to rely on the shoulder of friendly China'; China 'made a decision' that Belarus was a friend, publicly promised neither to offend nor to abandon Belarus, and considered Belarus's democracy as not worse than the Western one: 'nowhere in

[1242] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1243] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1244] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1245] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1246] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1247] Lukashenko (2012. A)

the world did China make such statements. We must treasure this friendship'.[1248] Without China, it was impossible to resolve any issue in the world.[1249]

After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Belarus believed that its future depended on how effectively it could defend its sovereignty, prevent the penetration of violence from outside, and avoid mistakes of its neighbours, such as in Ukraine, which was in chaos, its society in turmoil, citizens attacked each other with machine guns, and could not live in peace on their own lands.[1250] Belarus had to save its main assets, which were peace, stability, inter-ethnic and inter-faith harmony, and openness to cooperation. It planned to play a more active and significant role in world politics, and 'world powers demanded Belarus to perform that role'.[1251] Namely, the West asked Belarus to play the role of a mediator in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It was 'fundamentally important' for Belarus to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe, and to contribute to the relationship between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union for them to be complementary, not mutually exclusive.[1252] Belarus intended to continue to facilitate negotiation on Ukraine as the conflict directly affected Belarusians and the state.[1253] Ukraine was described as a brotherly country and a brotherly people; Belarus continued to host immigrants from Ukraine: 'We will do everything so that there is peace!'[1254] The global and regional events demonstrated the relevance of Belarus's initiative for a new dialogue between the East and the West similar to the Helsinki process*:* 'Once again, I want to confirm, if this is necessary and the world is interested in this, Minsk is ready at any moment to become a place for dialogue aimed at understanding new rules of the world order'.[1255] Belarus intended to do it collectively, through membership in the CSTO and the Union State.

[1248] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1249] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1250] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1251] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1252] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1253] Lukashenko (2017. A)
[1254] Lukashenko (2017. A)
[1255] Lukashenko (2017. A)

Amid the Belarus-Russia energy conflict of 2016-2017, the Aspirational Self of Belarus's state identity was at the front of the official discourse. Belarus and Russia confirmed their intentions to continue bilateral cooperation in all areas, including security and the international agenda.[1256] According to Belarus, Russia made a decision to support the Belarusian economy during the 2016 gas conflict 'no matter how difficult it is for Russia',[1257] because Russia's interests 'lie in Belarus, we are largely dependent on Belarus's.[1258] Belarus was positive about the future development of bilateral relations: the Union State was to act as 'a powerful platform for mutual cooperation and support the Eurasian Economic Union'; moreover, 'Belarus-Russia friendship' was of 'enduring value', and 'the absence of any misunderstandings and mistrust between our countries demonstrates unity and strategic partnership in this difficult time'.[1259] Belarus was 'absolutely convinced' that the countries would 'dynamically build up cooperation and overcome any contradictions and disagreements like partners, in partnership, in the spirit of genuinely allied relations' and through a constructive dialogue 'as it befits the Union State'.[1260] According to Belarus's vision of the future, 'by joint efforts, we will be able to effectively overcome any difficulties, open new opportunities for economic development, increase the welfare of our peoples and nations', and continue integration processes on the principles of equality and mutual trust.[1261] Belarus believed that the union had 'a huge potential' for the economies of both Belarus and Russia: 'United by close cooperation, complementarity of our industrial and agricultural complexes, and strong contacts at the regional level, we must work harder towards a full-fledged single economic space without any barriers'.[1262]

[1256] Tut.by (05.02.2016) 'Putin to Lukashenko: 'I am very glad to see you. We have something to talk about''.
[1257] Lukashenko (2016. B)
[1258] Lukashenko (2016. C)
[1259] Lukashenko (2016. D)
[1260] Lukashenko (2016. D)
[1261] Lukashenko (2017. B)
[1262] Lukashenko (2017. B)

Chart 6.2. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Aspirational Self in the 2010s

Source: Author

Notes to Chart 6.2. Most frequented words and the concepts that stand behind them are congruent with both the Russian and European Others. In the case of the former, they are ‘Eastern’, ‘ally’, ‘CSTO’, ‘Russians’, ‘Eurasian’, ‘EAEU’, ‘Eurasia’, ‘union’, meaning the Union State, ‘integration’, ‘unity’, ‘brotherly’, and ‘brotherhood’. In the case of the latter, they are ‘EU’, ‘European’, ‘Europe’, ‘normalisation’, ‘rapprochement’, ‘constructive’, ‘multi-vector’, ‘strategic’, ‘partner/s’, ‘cooperation’, ‘democracy’, ‘equal’, and ‘partnership’.

To conclude the analytical assessment of Belarus’s discourse, it should be noted that before Belarus’s neutral position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the aspirational narrative brought to light Belarus’s confidence in its foreign policy influence vis-à-vis both the EU and Russia. Vis-

à-vis its Western neighbour, Belarus believed that the EU's sanction policy towards Belarus was of a temporal nature and the EU would realise its policy's failure in the near future. In 2013, a year before the Russia-Ukraine conflict transformed Belarus into a conflict mediator, and on the bidding from the EU no less, Belarus described its relations with the EU as 'about to come to be restored'.[1263] Belarus was moving towards democracy and believed that together with the EU it would solve the problems and restore relations to the full. It intended to 'demonstrate to the EU and the entire world that it was a country to be loved, appreciated, and cherished'.[1264] Vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbour, Belarus believed to exercise an upper hand in the relations: it was significant as an ally of Russia, a defender of the Russian language and the Russian people living in Belarus, a supporter of Russia's post-Soviet integration pursuits, and a necessary part in Russia's great power image and status restoration goals.

After Belarus's neutral position on the Ukrainian issue and its refusal to side with Russia in its policies towards Ukraine, the Aspirational Self still retained its congruence with the Russian Other. However, the aspirational narrative carried out by Belarus vis-à-vis the European Other in that period competed with the aspirational narrative vis-à-vis Russia. Belarus's confidence in 'full normalisation' of the bilateral relations with the EU, its readiness to address the 'sensitive' issues of democracy and human rights, and its statement of the possibility to become a member of the EU in the future increased congruence and engagement of Belarus's Aspirational Self with the European Other. Discursively, Belarus was prepared to compromise on EU demands.

Belarus's intention to provide a platform for negotiations to resolve the Russia-Ukraine and any other future regional conflicts, its aspiration towards neutrality, and its intention to be a bridge between the East and the West increased the congruence further. Furthermore, Belarus

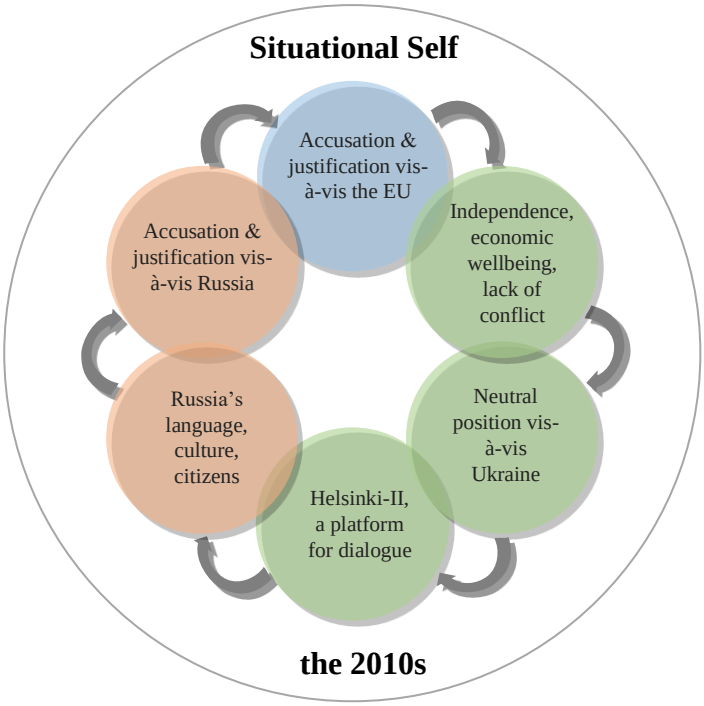
[1263] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1264] Lukashenko (2014. B)

was proactive and ahead of the curve in its dialogue with the EU, introducing the topic of a basic agreement, setting it on the agenda, and inviting the EU to negotiations. Compared to Belarus's narratives vis-à-vis Russia, there was no 'brotherhood' talk of 'enduring value of friendship', 'unity and strategic partnership', or 'the spirit of genuinely allied relations'. Rather, Belarus acknowledged that geopolitics was behind the decisions of 'our European partners… whatever the slogans it all hid'.[1265] Still, the Aspirational Self vis-à-vis the European Other was engaged and congruent and competed with the aspirational discourse vis-à-vis Russia and weakened it. This and Belarus's intention to be in close integration with Russia were in contradiction. Compared to the previous two decades, Belarus's Aspirational Self vis-à-vis the EU became more engaged, more congruent, and in competition with the aspirational narrative vis-à-vis Russia. By pursuing multiple goals simultaneously, the congruence of the Aspirational Self with both Others was not complete. Belarus's aspirations in the 2010s were neither exclusively in congruence with Russia or the EU, but rather increasingly focused on Belarus itself.

6.3.3. The Situational Self

Graph 6.3. Dominant categories of the Situational Self in the 2010s and their congruence vis-à-vis the Russian and European Others

[1265] Evdochenko (2016)



Source: Author

Notes to Graph 6.3. The red components relate Belarus to Russia, the blue components - to the EU, and the green components indicate the situational issues that are specific to Belarus and not exclusively to Russia or the EU. The shift towards the middle position vis-à-vis larger actors gains in strength.

In the 2010s, both Russia and the EU found reflection in Belarus's situational identity narratives. In some years, the Situational Self was constructed predominantly vis-à-vis the EU, while in other years, predominantly vis-à-vis Russia, still in other cases, the references to both Others were balanced. Belarus described itself as a reliable partner of both Russia ('giant Russia'[1266]) and the West. Belarus was 'leaning' neither to Russia nor the EU: ''I am the President, and I am banned in the West… I have nowhere to lean… having lived for more than

[1266] Lukashenko (2014. A)

20 years in this country as President, it is utter stupidity to say that I leaned somewhere'.[1267] The choice between Russia and the West was a wrong one: 'We have no such choice, and it cannot be!'[1268] In the renewed Military Doctrine of Belarus, relations with the EU were described as 'good, neighbourly' and 'mutually beneficial', and the Union State with Russia, the CSTO, and the CIS were named as 'priority areas in coalition politics'.[1269]

The EU was underscored to remain Belarus's number two or 'even number one' trading partner.[1270] Belarus aspired to have 'good' relations[1271] and 'constructive cooperation' with it.[1272] Belarus made the EU a reference point to be compared with, and thereby its Situational Self was highly engaged. For example, when discussing agriculture, Belarus's regions were compared to Western European regions, 'where the land is privately owned'.[1273] Belarus emphasised the split in the EU's attitude towards Belarus: while some EU states condemned Belarus's policies, the others actually supported it.[1274] The EU's sanctions against Belarus caused indignation: 'someone' was trying to 'bend' and 'pressure' Belarus, 'destabilise the situation', 'wreak havoc', 'strangle the country', 'intervene in internal affairs', and to 'dictate the rules'.[1275] Belarus would never 'kneel before someone'.[1276] If the West put the choice for Belarus to be with Russia or the West, 'then we will not have a conversation at all' as 'our colossal interests lie in the Russian Federation'.[1277] Only through dialogue, not dictate, the European countries could succeed in building relations with Belarus.[1278] Belarus also aligned its position on democracy with that of the EU by explaining that it fully shared democratic

[1267] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1268] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1269] Tut.by (26.07.2016). 'Conflicts, extremism, internal threat: a new military doctrine came into force'.
[1270] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1271] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1272] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1273] Lukashenko (2012. A)
[1274] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1275] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1276] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1277] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1278] Lukashenko (2012. A)

ideas and values but had to counterbalance them with its own traditions and mentality and therefore its path towards democratisation was 'slow but without jumps and extremes'.[1279]

Before Belarus's neutral position towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Belarus's Situational Self vis-à-vis the European Other had little congruence. Though both sides were interested in good working relations, the conditions put forward by Belarus and the EU restricted their achievement. Belarus insisted that cooperation with the EU was only possible on the basis of an equal and mutually respectful dialogue, 'without sanctions and pressure, without preconditions and requirements, without artificial obstacles'.[1280] It underscored that its 'equal and non-discriminatory participation' in the Eastern Partnership[1281] was an important tool for improving the relations and bringing them to a new level.[1282] Besides, Belarus called for a pragmatic approach in the relations. It suggested cooperating in sectoral dialogues on ecology, customs, transport, energy, economy, and finance and to continue successful cooperation in international technical assistance and cross-border cooperation programmes. Belarus complained that it was extremely demonised by Europe.[1283] The EU imposed sanctions on Belarus after presidential elections of 2010 though Belarus imprisoned those people who were involved in organising unrest and attacking government buildings. Besides, the situation in other EaP countries 'was neither worse nor better', as in Ukraine.[1284] Belarus had doubts that the issue of political prisoners would help restore relations: it was not 'the only obstacle and if removed, a happy future will come in our relations with the EU, we will become good friends with the EU, and European money fall on us… Too much negativity accumulated'.[1285] Belarus emphasised that it was highly interested and ready to undertake 'any' steps to normalise

[1279] Lukashenko (2011. A)
[1280] Tut.by (29.01.2014). 'The EU is not ready to compromise with Belarus on the issue of political prisoners'.
[1281] Belarus's parliament was not represented in Euronest, bilateral relations were frozen, sanctions were in place.
[1282] Tut.by (12.02.2014). 'Review of foreign policy and activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2013'.
[1283] Makei (2014. A)
[1284] Makei (2014. A): 'in unofficial talks, European colleagues agreed that the situation in other EaP countries is neither worse nor better'.
[1285] Tut.by (29.01.2014). 'MFA: The EU is not ready to compromise on the issue of political prisoners'.

relations with the EU: 'We cannot get away from each other. We have to live together, as neighbours'.[1286] It believed that the EU's interest in Belarus was conditioned by the need in a stable and predictable country on the borders with the EU. It was convinced that 'sooner or later Belarus and the EU will solve the problems and our European partners hold the same point of view'.[1287] The Situational Self was constructed in such a way as to underline Belarus's benefits to the EU and warn it of their possible disruptions. Belarus described itself as 'the most decent' state located in the centre of Europe.[1288] That location conditioned Belarus's role as 'a reliable link connecting East and West' and as a gateway to 'the huge and promising' market of the Eurasian Economic Union.[1289] Belarus was a peaceful region and that made it valuable as a transit route for the EU, Russia, and China: 'What else is needed?'[1290]

On its side, the EU demanded that Belarus undertook the steps towards democratisation and the rule of law, such as the release of political prisoners, a moratorium on the death penalty, and the termination of administrative arrests as an instrument of pressure. The main obstacle on which the EU was not ready to compromise was the issue of political prisoners. They were to be unconditionally released and rehabilitated: 'it remains important for the EU that all political prisoners be released, new ones do not appear, and the human rights situation improves'.[1291] Besides, the EU demanded that Belarus join the universal moratorium on death penalty as a first step towards its complete abolition, and administrative arrests as an instrument of pressure, especially of representatives of civic society and opposition, were to be terminated. While the bilateral relations developed 'very positively', to restore them fully, certain

[1286] Lukashenko (2013. B)
[1287] Makei (2014. A)
[1288] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1289] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1290] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1291] Tut.by (10.03.2014). 'The European Parliament considers 11 Belarusian citizens to be political prisoners'. Tut.by (19.05.2014). 'The EU condemns detentions and arrests of activists in Belarus.'

conditions had to be met: 'Here, on our side [the EU], I do not see an opportunity for a compromise'.[1292]

That changed in 2014, when Belarus adopted a neutral position towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict, refused to side with Russia in its policies towards Ukraine, and volunteered to become a neutral platform for conflict negotiations. The EU welcomed the decision and Belarus's (situational) neutrality.[1293] As a part of its mediation efforts, Belarus organised in Minsk a high profile meeting of heads of states to negotiate the conflict.[1294] The event was described as belonging to the category of fantastic.[1295] The bilateral meeting of Ashton, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Lukashenko was 'impossible to imagine'[1296] as well as the fact that the EU acknowledged Belarus's constructive role[1297] for hosting the conflict resolution summit in October 2014. Belarus was recognised by the EU as playing one of the most important security functions in the region. It did not ask to be an intermediary but appreciated the fact that it was chosen for the role and by those who 'never considered us before': 'You will be surprised that the proposal of the Minsk format came from them [the EU]'.[1298] In the words of the EU officials, in the future, Belarus's role could be of 'a new bridge' between Russia and the EU.[1299] Belarus was advised to extend and strengthen the role it played in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.[1300]

[1292] Tut.by (29.01.2014). 'MFA: The EU is not ready to compromise on the issue of political prisoners'.
[1293] Tut.by (01.08.2014). 'The British Ambassador: A sharp improvement in EU-Belarus relations may not be to Russia's liking'. The EU welcomed Belarus's decision to provide a neutral territory for negotiations on the situation in Ukraine (exchange of prisoners) and on the crash of flight MH17 (access to the crash site of Malaysian Boeing).
[1294] To discuss Ukraine's implementation of the EU association agreement, its consequences for the Eurasian Customs Union, Russia's embargo on European supply of agricultural goods, supply and transit of Russian gas to Ukraine and Europe, the energy security, and the stabilisation of the situation in Donbass.
[1295] Tut.by (25.08.2014). 'Expert's opinion: What to expect and what not to expect from the summit in Minsk.'
[1296] Tut.by (27.08.2014). 'Melyantsov: 'Amplitude'. The key to ending the war in Ukraine is in Moscow, Brussels and Washington. In Minsk, it was only a picture.'
[1297] Tut.by (26.08.2014). 'Lukashenko to Ashton: 'If there is no peace, there will be no economy. The meeting in the format 3+1+1 (the Eurasian Troika of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, as well as Ukraine and the EU).
[1298] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1299] Tut.by (14.10.2014). 'The head of the German-Belarus parliamentary group in the Bundestag Oliver Kaczmarek: Belarus can become a bridge between Russia and the EU.'
[1300] Tut.by (03.12.2014). 'The future of Belarus-EU relations was linked to the liberalization of the visa regime.'

Belarus's participation in the negotiations of 'a global dispute' – meaning the Russia-Ukraine conflict - and its status as a platform for dialogue were called by Belarus's political analysts 'a personal political triumph of President Lukashenko' and the merit of Belarusian diplomacy.[1301] It happened despite the existing tensions and mistrust and the fact that Belarus's close alliance with Russia meant that it was not a completely independent party in the conflict.[1302] Belarus was argued to have managed to limit Russia's influence in the country too.[1303] In the European discourse, Belarus transitioned from being the last dictatorship in Europe and a European outcast to an intermediary, a mediator, and a peacemaker with a unique status of a platform for negotiations between Russia, the EU, and Ukraine.[1304] In 2016, Belarus reported with 'a great pleasure' that the bilateral relations underwent 'a serious turning point', and the EU first suspended and then lifted almost all restrictive measures against Belarus.[1305] In 2017, Belarus assessed its 'dialogue with the EU' as having the potential 'to be a great success under the condition that certain practices were to be discarded, such as bias, distrust, double standards, and preconditions'.[1306]

Indeed, Belarus acknowledged that the EU and Belarus 'found strength' to change the situation, and good relations between European states and Belarus were established.[1307] The withdrawal of the EU sanctions provided new opportunities to normalise and diversify political relations, and 'it is a sin not to use it'.[1308] As a reciprocal step, in January 2017, Belarus abolished visas for citizens of 80 countries, including European, for entry into Belarus for a period of up to 5 days: 'We position ourselves as the centre of all civilization, of all Europe - how can the centre

[1301] Tut.by (20.08.2014). 'Melyantsov: The meeting of Ukraine, the EU, and the Customs Union in Minsk: Lukashenko's triumph or a mere coincidence?'
[1302] Tut.by (20.08.2014). 'Kazakevich: The meeting of Ukraine, the EU, and the Customs Union in Minsk: Lukashenko's triumph or a mere coincidence?'
[1303] Tut.by (26.08.2014). 'Poroshenko and Putin in Minsk: the meeting place was not chosen by chance.'
[1304] Tut.by (24.08.2014). 'Ashton: Putin's meeting with Poroshenko in Minsk is a chance not to be missed.'
[1305] Lukashenko (2016. A)
[1306] Lukashenko (2017. A)
[1307] Tut.by (30.06.2016). 'Lukashenko: The current situation is characterized by the establishment of good relations between Belarus and the EU.'
[1308] Lukashenko (2016. E)

be isolated?'[1309] In response, Russia set up a border zone with Belarus in order to regulate third-country nationals crossing the border; Belarus considered it a 'purely political attack'.[1310]

As antagonism between the EU and Russia increased, Belarus proposed to work as a platform for regulating relations between the East and the West - 'for an honest exchange of views on the causes of the crisis in international relations' and to understand 'the new rules of emerging multi-polarity with unconditional respect for each other's interests'.[1311] Belarus believed that it was perceived as a pole of stability in the region and was the only EaP country without a military or frozen conflict on its lands.[1312] Belarus emphasised its input into the conflict resolution in 'brotherly' Ukraine'.[1313] Besides, the Helsinki process needed an update and a launch of a new peace process, the Minsk process, was suggested.[1314]

Vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbour, the discourse was emotional. Russia was as an ally, 'we were together with Russia, and we will always be!' 'shoulder to shoulder', 'we are brothers',[1315] Russia was 'an older brother' for Belarus but the one 'who will never offend a younger brother',[1316] 'we are part of the Russian culture',[1317] 'the Russian language is ours', a living asset of all of us, including Belarusians',[1318] and 'we are like them'.[1319] Russians and Belarusians were 'a single whole, one tree'.[1320] Belarus could not exist without Russia, 'just as' Russia 'could not throw Belarus under someone's foot': this was 'a holy law' that nobody could break, 'neither Lukashenko, nor Putin, nor Medvedev, nor anyone else'.[1321] Therefore,

[1309] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'Lukashenko on Russia's decision of a border zone with Belarus: 'You can't do that.'
[1310] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'Lukashenko on Russia's decision of a border zone with Belarus: 'You can't do that.'
[1311] Tut.by (08.12.2016). 'Makei invited Russia, the US, the EU and China to Minsk for a frank conversation.'
[1312] Tut.by (21.11.2016). 'Lukashenko proposed Minsk as a platform for regulation of relations between the East and the West.'
[1313] Tut.by (08.12.2016). 'Makei invited Russia, the US, the EU and China to Minsk for a frank conversation.'
[1314] Tut.by (21.11.2016). 'Lukashenko proposed Minsk as a platform for the regulation of relations between the East and the West.'
[1315] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1316] Lukashenko (2010. A)
[1317] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1318] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1319] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1320] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1321] Lukashenko (2013. A)

Belarus would not turn away from Russia: 'This will never happen!'[1322] Russia remained the main strategic partner of Belarus, cooperation with which developed progressively and dynamically, especially in the framework of the Union State. Belarus reminded that it was the first country in the post-Soviet space to give Russian the status of a state language along with Belarusian. Belarus 'highly valued the great Russian culture' and did not separate itself from it: 'we are part of this culture'.[1323] The benefits of close relations were 'undeniable': 'together, we make a great contribution to social guarantees and equal rights of Belarusians and Russians… A high level of trust allows us to work closely in foreign policy and security'.[1324]

However, Belarus and Russia were closely connected with each other but as independent states: Russians were 'our people and we are their people. We are brothers, but we want to live in our own separate flat… to have our own place… Never could we be deprived of that. Never!'[1325] Belarus would defend by any means its main value, which was independence of the country, the first independent statehood in history, about which Belarus's ancestors dreamed about for many centuries: 'the holy right to live on our land and decide our own destiny'.[1326]

Amid the rounds of failed oil and gas negotiations in 2016,[1327] initiated by Belarus in its exercise of the 'diplomacy of scandal' (when it acted as an agenda setter and initiated a

[1322] Lukashenko (2013. A)
[1323] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1324] Lukashenko (2017. B) 'The President congratulated Belarusians, Russians and Putin on the Day of Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia.'
[1325] Lukashenko (2015. A)
[1326] Lukashenko (2014. A)
[1327] Tut.by (29.07.2016). 'Russia notes positive 'shifts' of the gas issue with Belarus.' Tut.by (21.07.2016). 'Kommersant: after Belarus pays off gas debt, oil supplies will return to their previous levels.' Tut.by (26.08.2016). 'Kommersant: Russia and Belarus have agreed on a new formula for calculating the gas price.' Tut.by (29.08.2016). 'Yuri Drakokhrust: In the backyard there is cheap gas, and in Kiev – Makei.' Tut.by (08.09.2016). 'Deputy Prime Minister of Russia refuted the news about the new formula for gas price for Belarus.' Tut.by (11.09.2016). 'Lukashenko: Belarus and Russia have practically settled the gas issue.' Tut.by (12.09.2016). 'Lukashenko set the task to reach an agreement with Russia on energy in two days.' Tut.by (14.10.2016). 'Russia has promised to supply Belarus with 5 million tons of oil by the end of the year.' Tut.by (10.10.2016). 'Russia will resume oil supplies, and Belarus will cancel new transit tariffs.' Tut.by (10.10.2016). 'Semashko: the cost of Russian gas for Belarus will be significantly reduced.' Tut.by (10.10.2016). 'Medvedev denied Minsk's allegations about a discount on gas.' Tut.by (10.10.2016). 'Belarus is ready to pay for gas at the same prices in exchange for a subsidy from Russia.' Tut.by (11.10.2016). 'Media: Belarus will save $ 400 million on gas in 2016, and the price for 2017 will be lower by a quarter.' Tut.by (20.12.2016). 'Kobyakov: We hope for a compromise, but we are looking for alternatives to Russian oil supplies.' Tut.by (10.11.2016). 'Debt increased, but Russia

conflict), Russia was accused of pressure, of a protracted nature of the dispute, the decline in oil supplies, and the restrictions on Belarusian food imports to Russia: '… our high-quality products at affordable prices delivered to Russia compete and hit hard 'pockets' of Russian agriculture oligarchs who put pressure on the government … The overt pressure on Belarus is taking place… I will not tolerate it and Belarusians too'.[1328] Belarus threatened to put under question Belarus's participation in the EAEU:[1329] 'the critical mass of accumulated questions causes us in Belarus to worry about the prospects of not only the CIS, but the EAEU too'.[1330] A further development of integration projects, especially of the Union State and the EAEU, depended on the gas dispute resolution.[1331] Belarus wished that there was 'less friction between our countries', and the problems were solved in 'a partnership and brotherly manner'.[1332] Belarus demanded that its business entities and people be placed in equal conditions in the State Union according to the letter and spirit of the Union Treaty: 'We don't require anything extra from Russia. … This is the only thing we demand'.[1333] Belarus acknowledged that 'although we have moved further than everyone else in our relations, there are nuances that

announced that it reached a consensus with Belarus on the gas issue.' Tut.by (22.11.2016). 'From one side, then from the other side, different crises roll over.' Lukashenko and Putin met in Moscow.' Tut.by (28.11.2016). 'Minsk is pumping the tariff. Belarus threatens Russia with an oil transit price increase.' Tut.by (08.12.2016). 'A goodwill gesture'. Belarus has made an advance payment for the Russian gas.' Tut.by (16.12.2016). 'The Union State. Russia will again provide Belarus with discounts and compensations for its gas and oil.' Tut.by (17.12.2016). 'Russia returned Belarus the advance payment for the gas and is waiting for a full debt repayment.' Tut.by (15.12.2016). 'Surikov announced the imminent resolution of the controversial issues on oil and gas.' Tut.by (16.12.2016). 'Kommersant: Russia will give Belarus discounts and compensations for gas and oil.' Tut.by (07.12.2016). 'Belarus did not receive the third tranche of the promised loan from the Eurasian Fund for Stabilisation and Development: economy or politics?' Tut.by (20.12.2016). 'Kobyakov: we hope for a compromise, but we are looking for an alternative to oil supplies from Russia.' Tut.by (29.12.2016). 'Semashko: a compromise on the oil and gas issue should be found no later than the first quarter of 2017.' Tut.by (16.02.2017). 'Already the twentieth option'. Semashko and Dvorkovich agreed on the ways to resolve the gas conflict.

[1328] Tut.by (20.09.2016). 'Lukashenko on gas dispute and Belarus's export restrictions: 'This is the borderline!'' Lukashenko: 'I will not hide: there [is] too much criticism of the bilateral integration and the EAEU ... We supply large export volumes to Russia but at prices half lower. The profitability of Belarus from this? Almost none'.

[1329] Tut.by (20.09.2016). 'Lukashenko on gas dispute and Belarus's export restrictions: 'This is the borderline!''

[1330] Tut.by (28.10.2016). 'President on the implementation of the agreement on a free trade zone: Protectionism and aggravation of relations.'

[1331] Tut.by (07.03.2017). 'Kobyakov complained about the expensive gas and received a tough rebuff from Medvedev: No one keeps anyone in the EAEU.' Tut.by (09.03.2017). 'Lukashenko expects Russia to fulfill its obligations and not to reduce the gas price.' Tut.by (13.03.2017). 'The EAEU loses its value for Belarus without the convergence of energy prices'.

[1332] Tut.by (30.10.2016). 'The agreement was reached ... Belarus will continue to pay 132 dollars for gas.'

[1333] Tut.by (10.11.2016). 'Debt increased, but Russia announced that it reached a consensus with Belarus on gas.'

alert us, the country's leadership, and offend Belarusian population'.[1334] Such as the lack of equal economic conditions for the EAEU member states and internal exemptions and restrictions: from the Customs Union to the Single Economic Space, and to the EAEU.[1335] The other problem was the falling internal trade turnover.[1336] The energy conflict Belarus described as 'exacerbation' that happened not for the first time: 'after all, Russia often grabbed the gas pipe, the oil pipe, this is already a habit… although not publicly, they always acknowledged to me, 'yes, we got overexcited''.[1337] Without Russian gas and oil, Belarus needed to import petrochemicals from other countries, the supplies from which were unprofitable and inefficient, but 'freedom and independence could not be monetarised'.[1338] Belarus offered to buy a Russian small oil company to exact oil and process it - 'we are brothers' - but Russia did not agree to that; meanwhile, Belarus exacted oil in Venezuela, planned to do the same in Canada and Iran, so 'why do we not produce oil in Russia?'[1339] Belarus believed that the fault was on Russia's side: 'We had to agree before the first of January last year. Our ministers travelled to Russia, but the Russian side refused to talk to them, this is just a matter of total indifference'.[1340] Meanwhile, Belarus sued Russia over reduced oil supplies, and the court trial between two 'brotherly' states was not normal. Belarus threatened that its gas debt to Russia of $500 mil. would lead to escalation in many directions. It believed to have been paying for gas in line with the existing interstate agreement with Russia.[1341] The problem could be that the parties interpreted it differently.[1342] In Russia and Belarus, the practice of non-written arrangements

[1334] Tut.by (19.07.2016). 'Lukashenko: Belarus and Russia with the collapse of the USSR lost the system that had no equal in the world.'
[1335] Tut.by (31.05.2016). 'Lukashenko again criticized the EAEU for exemptions, restrictions, and the lack of equal conditions. The number of the exemptions and restrictions had not changed and remained at 600.'
[1336] from $65 bil. in 2012 to $45 bil. in 2015
[1337] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'President: 'Probably, Russia has a certain suspicion that Belarus will go to the West'.'
[1338] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'President: 'Probably, Russia has a certain suspicion that Belarus will go to the West'.'
[1339] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'President: 'Probably, Russia has a certain suspicion that Belarus will go to the West'.'
[1340] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'The President on negotiations with Russia on gas and oil: 'We could not agree, the rigmarole began'. «Наплевательское отношение».
[1341] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'Oil fell to $40… so the price of natural gas fell too. The government reports that we pay $107 for 1000 m^3. The oil price should be $83. They accused us that we underpaid. It is mockery!'
[1342] Tut.by (16.02.2017). 'People's fears: relations between Belarus and Russia in questions and answers.'

was popular, and conflicts emerged out of ambiguous terms of the existing agreements: if there were purely market relations, there would be no claims against each other.

At that time, Belarus was ideologically attacked by the Russian media:[1343] three Russian journalists were detained and persecuted in Belarus for putting Belarus's sovereignty under question, insulting Belarusians, their history and culture, for calling the Belarusian language a dialect of Russian, and for inciting ethnic hatred by calling Belarusians as a local identity of Russians and Belarus an 'under-state' and an 'under-nation'.[1344] Arguably, the Russian media's attitude towards Belarus did not change that much, but rather Belarus's reaction to it changed.[1345] Belarus underscored that it was the only ally of Russia that created joint military troops with it, the only country in the world that recognised the Russian language as its state language, the only European state that did not join either directly or indirectly blocs and coalitions hostile to Russia, and the only former USSR republic that openly placed integration with Russia at the centre of its policies. Belarus believed it was punished for its improved relations with Europe, for the so called 'flirting with the West', and for disobeying Russia.[1346]

Belarus underscored that it did not prioritise its relations with the EU 'either at the expense of Russia or to the detriment of our relations with it; Russia remains the main trade and economic partner and a political and military ally'.[1347] Belarus meant neither to break ties, nor turn away from Russia: 'we are not breaking away from Russia'.[1348] To the contrary, 'we intend to

[1343] Tut.by (25.11.2016). 'We have not read it, but we condemn it.' On Russian TV, the history and future of Belarus was discussed with curses and shouts. The major Russian TV channel Regnum hosted a provocative talk show about whether Belarus was trying to distance itself from Russia following the example of Ukraine.
[1344] Tut.by (09.12.2016). ''They put sovereignty of Belarus under question'. Ministry of Information on the arrests of the authors of the Russian media'.
[1345] Tut.by (26.12.2016). 'The head of Belarus's parliament criticised the EAEU and the bilateral relations'. Belarus summoned Russia's ambassador regarding the insulting statements of Russian General Reshetnikov against Belarus; the Chairman of Belarus's Parliament made a statement that 'in Russia the image of Belarus and Belarusians is changing. From the best friends and loyal allies, they try to present us as insincere and dependent partners who live at the expense of Russia and who can become Russophobes and repeat the path of Ukraine'.
[1346] Reuters (07.07.2016). 'Russia reminds its wayward ally Belarus of its economic muscle'.
[1347] Tut.by (20.05.2016). 'MFA: Minsk will not build relations with the EU to the detriment of Russia'.
[1348] Tut.by (11.10.2016). 'Makei in Poland: We want to get away from a strong dependence on Russia'.

strengthen those ties' in economy, politics, and in the military sphere. Improved Belarus-EU relations did not mean a refusal to cooperate with traditional allies: 'We have always respected and will continue to comply with our obligations under the CSTO, within the framework of the EAEU, and even more so within the framework of the Union State and the CIS'.[1349]

However, as Belarus was 'not a large country', 'without natural resources and minerals', it needed to diversify its economic relations while remaining 'strongly attached' to Russia.[1350] Belarus intended to find and exercise 'a reasonable, positive balance' in its relations with all 'friendly countries and continents'.[1351] Trade and energy conflicts with Russia made Belarus aware of its excessive economic dependence.[1352] 'If you depend on one big partner, this will not lead to anything good. We must strive to ensure that in the future we can mitigate these economic problems by having normal, equal relations with all our main partners'.[1353] As Belarus bought around 85 percent of its energy in 'friendly Russia',[1354] 'we are not going to break ties with our traditional partners, but the situation is such that it is vital for Belarus to have normal relations with the EU, the US, and other key players in various regions'.[1355]

Yet, Belarus believed that 'small problems' that arose in the bilateral relations, were of a temporal character.[1356] Despite difficulties, Belarus and Russia had come a long way and would not break apart, but preserve the relations and remain 'close friends':[1357] 'We have a lot of problems… a difficult way, but we pass it with dignity albeit with some roughness… We

[1349] Tut.by (22.05.2016). 'Makei: no need to be afraid of some kind of 'turn' of Belarus in one direction or another'.
[1350] Tut.by (20.05.2016). 'MFA: Minsk will not build relations with the EU to the detriment of Russia'.
[1351] Tut.by (11.10.2016). 'Makei in Poland: We want to get away from a strong dependence on Russia'.
[1352] Tut.by (11.10.2016). 'Makei in Poland: We want to get away from a strong dependence on Russia'.
[1353] Tut.by (30.06.2016). ''Belarus and the EU have the same goals.' Makei met head of Czech Foreign Ministry'.
[1354] Tut.by (26.07.2016). 'Semashko counts on the World Bank assistance in attracting investors to Belarus'.
[1355] Tut.by (05.09.2016). 'Makei: the oil and gas dispute is not related to Belarus's relations with the West'.
[1356] Tut.by (12.10.2016). 'Makei: we want to preserve and strengthen our ties with Russia'.
[1357] Tut.by (03.02.2017). 'The President: 'Probably, Russia has a certain suspicion that Belarus will go to the West''. According to Belarus's President, he still considered Putin as his friend: 'We have brilliant relations with Putin. Brilliant. We will pick up the time and we will meet. If there are any problems, we will solve them. Without intermediaries, just two of us will decide and we don't need any mediation. We are brothers…'. Though the common ground was often difficult to be found: 'We are really good friends, although we quarrel more than any other presidents… We are so close! And not only with Russia, but also with Ukraine and Kazakhstan'. Ukraine being in conflict with Russia, the country seems to be evoked to irritate Russia's President and placate the West.

probably did not understand Russia in certain things. Russia grabbed the gas pipe, then the oil pipe, then blocked our goods. We, probably, did not behave correctly in certain things, although we tried neither to offend nor anger 'our big brother''.[1358] The countries were described as very close allies and partners with over 200 agreements and treaties concluded between them.

Russia responded positively to the problems with Belarus: 'Questions arise between any states and allies … and we always understand each other, although sometimes solutions are not found in one day'.[1359] Russia was grateful to Belarus for providing a platform for the meetings of the contact group to resolve the armed conflict in Ukraine.[1360] Besides playing that constructive role, Belarus also contributed to the normalisation of its relations with the EU.[1361] Russia underscored that it provided economic, political, and other assistance to Belarus to the detriment of itself.[1362] Namely, it lost $22.3 billion in the period of 2011-2015 from duty-free oil supplies, which was a direct and indirect support of 'the allied Belarusian state'.[1363] Moreover, Russia allocated more than $6 billion in loans to Belarus. Russia called on Belarus to resolve the controversial issues in 'a calm manner and in business negotiations'.[1364] According to Russia, its relations with Belarus were the most advanced in the post-Soviet space: 'We pay much attention to economy and social issues… that certainly benefits our citizens… we are ready to strengthen this attitude'.[1365] If the states decided to create the EAEU, then they were 'close and strategic states', and there was 'a basis for an alliance, such as trust, respect, historical roots, and economic benefit'.[1366] Russia's president underscored the relevance of the Union State for Russians and Belarusians, and the accumulated experience of

[1358] Tut.by (06.09.2016). 'Lukashenko: We didn't understand Russia - it grabbed the gas pipe, then the oil pipe'.
[1359] Tut.by (16.05.2016). 'Lukashenko asked Lavrov to bring him up to date 'on some recent events''.
[1360] Tut.by (16.05.2016). 'Lavrov will discuss security, trade in Minsk and Putin's June visit to Belarus'.
[1361] Tut.by (15.05.2016). 'Guseletov: Belarus's position to the EU should be treated with understanding'.
[1362] Tut.by (03.02.2017). ''Russia lost 22 billion dollars while helping Belarus.' Kremlin responded to criticism'.
[1363] Tut.by (03.02.2017). ''Russia lost 22 billion dollars while helping Belarus.' Kremlin responded to criticism'.
[1364] Tut.by (03.02.2017). ''Russia lost 22 billion dollars while helping Belarus.' Kremlin responded to criticism'.
[1365] Tut.by (08.06.2016). 'Lukashenko has once again hinted Putin on exemptions and restrictions'.
[1366] Tut.by (04.06.2016). 'Matvienko: The Presidents of Russia and Belarus will take part in the Forum of Regions in Minsk'.

more than 20 years in joint work that helped find solutions to any issues, and a further development of mutually beneficial relations. Russia criticised the Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP) and its purpose to tie the post-Soviet countries to the West and to put an intermediary between Russia and the EAEU members.[1367] Russia believed that the EaP 'is not entirely harmless': attempts to turn it into something constructive were overtaken by the intentions to spite Russia, 'to befriend our neighbours in order to challenge us'.[1368] Instead, the EAEU could become one of the centres of a wider integration project of a Eurasian partnership,[1369] which would be open to European countries too.[1370] Russian opinion polls showed that Belarus was considered to be the closest friend to Russia by 50 percent of Russians – the highest rating among the countries suggested for selection.[1371]

Chart 6.3. Chart of 1000 most frequent words that constituted the Situational Self in the 2010s

[1367] Tut.by (07.06.2016) 'Speaker of the Russian Federation Council Matvienko criticised the Eastern Partnership in Minsk'.'So far there has not been any practical advantages from the EaP, and intermediaries are not needed'.
[1368] Tut.by (16.06.2016) 'Lavrov: The Eastern Partnership is not entirely harmless'.
[1369] With participation of the EAEU, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, the countries of the CIS and other interested states and organisations: the negotiation on a comprehensive trade and economic partnership between the EAEU and China due to start in June 2016 was the first step towards the creation of a large Eurasian partnership.
[1370] Tut.by (17.06.2016) 'The EAEU plans the Eurasian partnership with China and wants a dialogue with the European Union'.
[1371] Tut.by (02.06.2016) 'Poll: the closest friend of the Russian Federation is Belarus, and the main enemy is the United States'.

Source: Author

Notes to Chart 6.3. Both the European and Russian Others competed in their level of engagement and congruence in Belarus's official narratives. The following words and concepts increased Belarus's state identity congruence with the European Other: 'democratic', 'democratisation', 'neutral', 'partnership', 'EaP', 'balance', 'independence', 'intermediary', 'restore', 'dialogue', 'constructive', 'cooperation', 'bridge', 'counterbalance', and 'diversify'. The following words contributed to congruence of Belarus's Situational Self with the Russian Other: 'ally', 'friendly', 'brotherly', 'brother', 'Union State', 'Eurasian', 'EAEU', 'CIS', 'pipe', 'energy', 'assistance', 'integration', 'benefits', and 'traditional'. Such words as 'dictate', 'sanctions', 'preconditions', 'antagonism', 'demonised', 'destabilise' decreased congruence of the Situational Self vis-à-vis the European Other. Similarly, 'restrictions', 'dispute', 'obstacle', and 'attacked' that were used in reference to Russia, decreased

congruence of the Situational Self vis-à-vis the Russian Other, unless Belarus relied on them to shame Russia and force it to concede.

To conclude the analytical assessment, the official narrative of the 2010s shows that the EU moved to the same level of frequency of references for Belarus as Russia.[1372] Compared to the previous two decades, the situational narratives of Belarus became more congruent vis-à-vis the EU in its core meanings and on certain issues. Primarily, Belarus's neutral position towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 brought a new dimension to Belarus's construction of its state identity. As Belarus refused to side with Russia in its policies towards Ukraine and volunteered to become a platform for negotiations of the conflict, its Situational Self increased its congruence with the European Other. The EU welcomed Belarus's 'constructive role' in the conflict resolution and Belarus's 'situational' neutrality in it – Belarus was urged to strengthen its role as an intermediary and continue to play the security function in the region.[1373] Belarus's proposal to launch a new peace process, Helsinki-II, to regulate the international relations, also contributed to Belarus's congruence vis-à-vis the EU. This congruence was enough for the EU to suspend and then lift almost all sanctions against Belarus. Thereby, Belarus managed to wield influence on the EU. The other issues, such as the EU demands for democratisation and the rule of law, including Belarus's political prisoners, the death penalty, and administrative arrests of civic society and opposition, Belarus continued to call 'pressure', 'dictate', 'intervention in internal affairs', and 'destabilisation of the situation' with little congruence between Belarus's Situational Self and the European Other. As in previous decades, Belarus continued to insist on its movement towards democratisation, to demand an 'equal and mutually respectful dialogue', to call for a pragmatic approach in the relations, and to accuse

[1372] The detailed analysis of the presidential discourse during 2010-2017 is in the appendix.
[1373] Tut.by (01.08.2014). 'The British Ambassador: A sharp improvement in EU-Belarus relations may not be to Russia's liking.' According to UK ambassador to Belarus Bruce Backnell, the EU welcomed Belarus's decision to provide a neutral territory for negotiations on the situation in Ukraine (exchange of prisoners) and especially on the crash of flight MH17 (access to the crash site of the Malaysian Boeing).

the EU of double standards. Belarus underscored its value as ‘a peaceful region’, ‘a pole of stability in the region’ bordering the EU, its ‘high interest’ in ‘constructive cooperation’ with the EU, and its readiness to ‘undertake any steps to normalise the relations’. Also, the shift towards Belarus’s middle position vis-à-vis larger actors gained in strength and contributed to Belarus’s congruence with the European Other. Compared to the previous decades, the focus remained more consistently on Belarus itself: in reference to its role as a platform for conflict negotiations, its independent stance towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Belarusian language, a foreign policy of ‘multi-vectoredness’, and an increasing cooperation with China.

Belarus relied on the Situational Self of its state identity to bring the 2016 Belarus-Russia energy conflict to its resolution. The Situational Self was constituted by the narratives on brotherhood, strategic partnership, support and sharing of the Russian language and culture, and a high level of trust between two states. The narratives were intensified with emotions such as: with Russia ‘we will always be’, Belarus will ‘never turn away from Russia’, the two peoples were ‘a single whole, one tree’, Belarus could not exist without Russia and that was ‘a holy law’. The contentious issues were Belarus’s insistence on preserving its independence, its complaint about the lack of equal economic conditions, internal exemptions, and restrictions in the integrational projects with Russia, which Belarus found ‘offensive’, and the insulting ideological attack by the Russian media. Furthermore, Belarus considered the energy conflict a threat to its independence and freedom, which ‘could not be monetarised’.[1374] In return, Belarus threatened Russia not to participate in the Eurasian Economic Union and to stall the development of the Union State. It also sued Russia in court over reduced oil supplies. Those contentious issues decreased state identity’s congruence with the Russia Other. Still, Belarus

[1374] Tut.by (03.02.2017). ‘President: ‘Probably, Russia has a certain suspicion that Belarus will go to the West’.’

believed those were ‘small problems’ and ‘of a temporal nature’; in its pursuit of ‘a positive balance’ in foreign policy, Belarus intended to remain ‘strongly attached’ to Russia.

Thus, in the official narrative, Belarus’s Situational Self underwent changes in terms of its engagement vis-à-vis Russia and the EU. In the 2010s, it became more congruent with the European Other compared to the 2000s, though it was still less congruent with the European Other than with the Russian Other. More congruent with Russia than with the EU but significantly more congruent with the EU than in previous decades, the Situational Self of Belarus’s state identity played a larger role in Belarus’s ability to exert influence on the EU in the 2010s. Because the European Other was consistently addressed and Belarus’s role as a platform for conflict negotiation corresponded to the EU’s interest, the Situational Self contributed to the overall congruence of Belarus’s Self with the European Other and thereby played an active role in the process of influencing the EU. This and Belarus’s increasing focus on itself, as a middle ground between Russia and the EU, decreased the weight of the Situational Self and its contribution to the process of wielding influence on the Russian Other.

6.4. Conclusion

A corresponding change in Belarus’s state identity and its relations with larger neighbours leads to the argument that identity constituted influence: it plays a role in helping Belarus intentionally change the outcome of policies of the EU and Russia towards itself or, in other words, to exert influence. In the 2010s, a shift in Belarus’s state identity towards the EU took place: all three Selves acquired more congruence with the European Other at the expense of the Russian Other. The shift was brought about by the Russia-Ukraine conflict: specifically, by Belarus’s neutral position toward it and its mediation efforts to resolve it. In its situational narratives, Belarus positioned itself to occupy the middle ground between Russia and the EU. Belarus’s aspirations for the future changed too as it envisioned itself as a neutral state, an

intermediary, and a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. In its historical narratives, Belarus underscored its unique standing as a descendent of both European and Eurasian trajectories of historical development and as a recently formed independent state to be treated equally and without discrimination. Belarus's neutrality and mediation efforts increased the congruence of Belarus's state identity with the European Other and contributed to Belarus's ability to reach out to the EU and conduce it to compromise on its demands of democratisation and liberalisation – that is to influence the EU. In 2014, the EU restored relations with Belarus albeit staying short of lifting sanctions, and in 2016, the EU resumed full-scale relations with Belarus and removed sanctions. If Belarus's neutral position on the Ukraine-Russia conflict and its refusal to side with Russia was a situational issue, Belarus's international positioning as a conflict mediator and a platform for dialogue since 2014, signalled a change in its aspirations for the future, namely its move towards neutrality. It came to compete with the aspirational narrative of a close integration with and orientation towards Russia. The Aspirational and Situational Selves were engaged and dominated in state identity construction.

In the 2016-2017 energy conflict with Russia, Belarus material gains were negligible. Rather, it managed to keep some of the existing economic benefits, defend its independent course of action, and preserve independence of its state. By initiating the conflict, Belarus acted as an agenda setter and carved out more autonomy for itself: it decided unilaterally to pay a lower price for the Russian gas in 2016 and in violation of the existing agreement with Russia. Compared to the previous decades, the congruence of Belarus's state identity with the Russian Other became less solid and decreased. Belarus's aspiration towards neutrality contradicted its existing military arrangements with Russia and undermined Belarus's ability to exact benefits. The Situational Self became less congruent with the Russian Other with Belarus's role as a platform for negotiation and conflict resolution and an increasing focus on itself as occupying a middle ground between great powers. Thereby, Belarus's influence on Russia was decreasing

and the negligible material gains testify to the argument. Regarding Belarus's state identity construction in its entirety, the Aspirational and Situational Selves increased their significance and presence compared to the previous decades. The Historical Self remained little engaged and sidelined; ultimately, it started to change too. While in the previous decades, the Historical Self played the dominant role in helping exercise influence on Russia, in the 2010s, the other two Selves came to dominate Belarus's state identity resulting in increased influence on the EU and decreased influence on Russia. In all three Selves, the components that signify Belarusianness, such as a specifically Belarusian' historical path of development, its approach to situational issues independent of other actors' interests, and neutrality and a platform for dialogue as the goals for the future, predominated. Belarus was constructing its state identity that was increasingly moving further away from Russia. It moved Belarus towards becoming an actor with its own independent path in foreign relations. The Russia-Ukraine conflict provided Belarus, commonly perceived as Russia's ally, with an opportunity to buttress its aspiration for neutrality and more space for foreign policy manoeuvrability. Internal congruence of state identity was to the benefit of the European Other.

Table 6.1. Engagement and Congruence of the Selves vis-à-vis the Others in the 2010s[1375]

the 2010s	*Russia*			*The EU*		
	Historical Self	**Aspirational Self**	**Situational Self**	Historical Self	**Aspirational Self**	**Situational Self**
Congruence	+/- ↓	+/- ↓	+/- ↓	+/- ↑	+/- ↑	+/- ↑
Engagement	+/- ↓	+	+	+ ↑	+ ↑	+ ↑

Source: Author

[1375] Notes to Table 6. The signs 'plus' and 'minus' reflect the status of congruence and the extent of engagement of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the EU and Russia. 'Plus' means that state identity was congruent with the Other, 'minus' – lack of congruence, and the representation of both signs at the same time means certain extent of congruence parallel to certain extent of lack of congruence. 'Plus' in terms of engagement means that a particular component of state identity was highly engaged, 'minus' – not engaged at all, and both signs mean the medium level of engagement. The arrow reflects the dynamics of change compared to the previous decade. The down-turned arrow means a decrease in congruence and engagement compared to the 2000s. The up-turn arrow means an increase. While the extent of congruence was assessed qualitatively, the extent of engagement was determined through the quantitative analysis of the most frequent words in NVivo.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

Throughout the period of nearly three decades of its existence as an independent republic, Belarus developed an ability to wield influence on its larger neighbours - changing their policies to its own benefit. Its state identity construction underwent changes too. The thesis unites the two processes of identity change and varying influence in an analytical pursuit to understand their constitutiveness. Namely, it problematises and analyses state identity in the official discourse to understand its instrumental use by the elite as the source of influence, both successful and not. State identity is conceptualised as consisting of three temporal components - the Historical, the Aspirational, and the Situational Selves. The thesis analyses their internal congruence with one another and their external congruence and engagement vis-à-vis external Others. The temporal three-layer nature of state identity and its properties of congruence and engagement is captured by the model of Composite State Identity which the thesis introduces. The model theorises state identity as the source of influence of the Self vis-à-vis external Others. The thesis argues that state influence is the strongest when the identity of the Self is internally aligned and congruent, its three components enjoy congruence vis-à-vis the external Other, and the congruent components are discursively engaged in relations with the Other. This is an ideal configuration of state identity that corresponds to state influence at its maximum. As a state's influence varies from success to failure so does internal and external congruence and engagement of its state identity vis-à-vis the Other(s).

The country under investigation is Belarus and its varying influence on its larger neighbours of Russia and the EU over three decades. In the 1990s, Belarus's influence vis-à-vis Russia and the 'vast' and 'startling' economic support from it, came in stark contrast to the foreign policy failures vis-à-vis the EU with its policy of 'partial isolation'. In the 2000s, Belarus was more successful in its foreign relations with both actors: it continued reaping benefits of Russia's

'unprecedented' and 'long-lasting' economic and political support and succeeded in not meeting the EU conditions for democratic progress in the country with only small concessions. Though the rapprochement was postponed and short-lived, Belarus 'secured the ostensible benefit' of the participation in the EaP for the years to come. In the 2010s, the situation reversed to some extent as Belarus's influence on the EU was more easily achieved than its influence vis-à-vis Russia. Spurred by Belarus's neutral position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its mediation efforts to resolve it, Belarus's influence vis-à-vis the EU accelerated. Belarus was 'rehabilitated as a member of the security architecture in Europe',[1376] its reputation and legitimacy were restored, and EU sanctions were lifted. Moreover, Belarus managed to limit the bilateral relations to economic issues only without making concessions in the areas of human rights and democratic freedoms. It did not comply with the conditions attached to sanctions, and its presidential elections of 2015 were 'deeply flawed'.[1377] Belarus's case of influence vis-à-vis Russia, though successful, came with a considerable effort: Belarus resorted to a prolonged energy dispute with Russia in order to preserve the existing economic benefits and, importantly, defend its independent course in foreign policy and independence of the country overall.

The thesis argues that varying influence of Belarus was constituted by its state identity construction and its dynamics in the same time period. The analysis was carried out along the dimensions of the historical memories invoked, the aspirations for the future envisioned, and the way the current events were explained and accounted for in the elite's official discourse. The narratives of the Historical Self, the Aspirational Self, and the Situational Self were assessed and compared throughout the 1990s, the 2000s, and the 2010s in terms of their external congruence vis-à-vis the European and Russian Others and in terms of frequency of

[1376] Breault (2016)
[1377] Freedom House (2016)

their references in the discourse. This was followed by the assessment of internal congruence of the three components between themselves in each of the three periods.

The thesis argues that Belarus, being a small state, managed to translate its smallness and material weakness into an opportunity to maximise its influence vis-à-vis larger polities. By constructing a favourable identity of 'conflict mediator' and a 'neutral' state in the 2010s, Belarus relied on an ideational resource, called social or soft power. Indeed, identities become a crucial foreign policy resource for (small) states to achieve their foreign policy objectives. They are shaped by the ruling elite with public opinion setting the bounds of what is deemed acceptable. In the past, smallness was firmly equated with weakness and was regarded in a negative light as a source of multiple constraints and liabilities. In the current international order, characterised by increasing globalisation, interdependencies, and global norms, small states are able to increase their assets and competencies connected to social - intellectual, environmental, and institutional – power. Nowadays, smallness can create certain bargaining assets as its visibility and significance increases. The present research contributes to the understanding of the processes of transformation that small states are undergoing.

7.1. Research Findings

The research findings were compilated by analysing the cases of Belarus's influence on Russia and the EU and Belarus's construction of its state identity in the same time periods. The two processes and dynamics were brought together following the argument of the research that identity constitutes influence. The research findings support the argument postulated in the theory: the extent of Belarus's influence is the highest when its identity is internally aligned and externally congruent – that is, each of its three components enjoys external congruence vis-à-vis the external Other, and the externally congruent components are discursively engaged

vis-à-vis the Other. Such an ideal configuration of state identity was lacking in Belarus's state identity discourse, though the configuration of three components that came closest to that was constructed vis-à-vis Russia in the second half of the 1990s. Over the course of the decades examined, the growing contradictions within three Selves vis-à-vis the Russian Other have decreased congruence of Belarus's state identity and its capacity to influence Russia. Congruence was distorted first by Belarus's denunciation of Russia's policy of pragmatisation and its suggestion for incorporating Belarus in the 2000s, and later, by Belarus's aspiration towards neutrality and an independent foreign policy course amid attempts at distancing its historical memory from Russia in the 2010s. A different process has been observed in relation to Belarus's state identity construction and influence vis-à-vis the EU. The 'negative' congruence of the situational narrative, that disrupted the overall congruence of Belarus's state identity vis-à-vis the EU in the 1990s, transformed first into a positive congruence of aspirations towards partnership with the EU and towards democratic practices in the 2000s. Later, in the 2010s, congruence increased further as Belarus projected itself as neutral and a conflict mediator in the region. Ultimately, an attempt was made to change the most sedimented historical component of Belarus's state identity and to embrace the European historical roots of Belarus's statehood. These changes increased congruence of Belarus's state identity and its capacity to influence the EU.

More specifically, in the 1990s, Belarus's successful influence on Russia was accompanied by external congruence and engagement of all three Selves of its state identity construction as well as by their internal congruence. The pivotal component was the congruent and engaged Historical Self. It was constituted by the historical memory that tied it close to Russia and, specifically, by the events that took place recently in time and invoked nostalgia among the population: such as, the USSR or the Soviet Union; its constituent part the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic; the Second World War and the victory in it; and the historically conditioned

brotherhood and fraternity with Russia. The other two components of state identity - the Aspirational and Situational Selves - were also engaged and congruent with the Russian Other, but with some contradictions.

Belarus's lack of influence on the EU in the period can be understood by situational narratives that disrupted internal congruence of Belarus's state identity and external congruence of its other two Selves vis-à-vis the European Other. The European historical memory of Belarus was sidelined and even degraded in the second half of the 1990s. The Historical Self retained some conceptual congruence with the European Other, but it was not engaged: it was not evoked in the historical narratives and therefore did not contribute to influence. The Aspirational Self was congruent with the European Other to some extent: there were narratives of a comprehensive integration into Europe, the prospect of eventual EU membership, and the recurrent intention to preserve 'good relations' with the EU. Belarus's intention to pursue a multi-vector and balanced foreign policy as well as to preserve independence in integration projects with Russia also contributed to Belarus's congruence vis-à-vis the EU. Belarus's foreign policy failure vis-à-vis the EU as exemplified by its policy of 'partial isolation' is rather understood by Belarus's Situational Self – namely, by its complete lack and even 'negative' congruence with the European Other. Belarus's situational narratives were constituted by such descriptions of EU policy towards Belarus as 'blackmail' and 'direct pressure' as well as by the stark criticism of the EU's 'double standards', export quotas, market reforms, and sanctions.

The Belarus-EU rapprochement of 2007-2008, though short-lived and postponed, can be understood by increasing congruence of Belarus's Aspirational and Situational Selves with the European Other, the muted character of the Historical Self, and the more engaged Situational Self. Belarus's Historical Self continued to be congruent with the Russian Other: it was built on the narratives of the Second World War and the Soviet Union. However, it became less

engaged and did not ‘disturb’ the other two components’ congruence with the European Other. The Aspirational Self was constituted by certain aspirations that increased its congruence with the European Other, such as a multi-vectored foreign policy, a wish to act as a ‘bridge’ between the East and the West, and the goal towards partnership with the EU. The Situational Self also became congruent with the European Other compared to the previous decade: it became constituted by the narratives of Belarus’s Europeanness, improvements of its fledgling democratic practices, and common challenges with the EU, which Belarus addressed in its good neighbourhood project. However, Belarus’s criticism of the EU put limits to that congruence. Belarus’s successful influence on Russia in the 2000s, in terms of receiving ‘unprecedented’ benefits from it, is understood by all three Selves of Belarus’s state identity. They continued to retain congruence with the Russian Other, but increasingly decreased it after Russia introduced the policy of pragmatism and increased its energy prices for Belarus as well as suggested incorporating it. Also, the Historical Self became less engaged and more focused on Belarus’s own historical experience, detached from the Russian one.

The Belarus-EU rapprochement of 2014-2016 and the Belarus-Russia energy conflict of 2016-2017 were to the benefit of Belarus, and they represent the cases of Belarus’s successful influence on both the EU and Russia. The Historical Self tentatively increased its congruence with the European Other: the European historical roots of Belarus’s statehood were not openly voiced but rather hinted at as Belarus tried to position its Historical Self between Russia and the EU, in complete congruence with neither and in some congruence with both. The Aspirational and Situational Selves were also double-edged: on the one hand, they were congruent with Russia as in the previous decade. On the other hand, Belarus’s role as a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution for the Russia-Ukraine conflict and potentially for a wider regional security, as well as its pursuit of the so-called ‘situational neutrality’, brought the two Selves in more congruence with the European Other than in the previous decades.

To understand Belarus's dynamics of influence vis-à-vis the European and Russian Others more closely and to reflect on the trajectory of its development in the future with implications for Belarus's state identity discourse as a source of influence, the evolution of each Self of Belarus's state identity throughout the three decades after its independence is traced in more details next.

Belarus's Historical Self has undergone a significant transformation over three decades. In the 1990s, it played a pivotal role for Belarus exercising influence on Russia. Both countries were undergoing the painful post-Soviet transformation with the future unclear, the present calamitous, and the past as the only anchor to rely on. As Belarus progressed into its independent statehood, the Historical Self started changing. In the 2000s, from being predominantly pro-Russian, it embraced specifically Belarusian historical experiences, recent and innocuous that allowed Belarus to keep its Historical Self tied to Russia though slightly less than in the 1990s. For example, Belarus increasingly relied on the experience in the first decade of its independence in the historical discourse, and it did not distort its congruence with the Russian Other. In the 2010s, the Historical Self moved further away from its congruence with Russia as specifically Belarusian constitutive components expanded and became more pronounced: Belarus introduced its own symbol of the victory in the Second World War, which was distinct from the Russian one, and diversified and expanded its past to its European origins, that had been suppressed in the official discourse heretofore. It did not openly acknowledge the European forms of its statehood, which were focused on in the first half of the 1990s, such as the Polatsk Duchy, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Belarusian People's Republic. Instead, the official discourse raised artefacts and figures that were associated with Europe, such as the Slutsk belts and Skoryna. It also accused both Russia and Europe of initiating centuries-old wars and conflicts that ripped Belarus apart and

devastated its population and well-being. In the third decade, the Historical Self became increasingly less engaged.

In line with the Historical Self, Belarus's Aspirational Self, the component of state identity related to the future, underwent its own change. During the 1990s, its congruence with the Russian Other developed from its initial outline state to a full-blown one. In the beginning of the 1990s, Belarus aspirational discourse was constituted by multiple goals that pulled it in different directions with little consistence and congruence: integration with Russia, a long-term goal of membership in the EU, neutrality, independence, and the non-nuclear status as a project to replicate in Central Europe. In the second half of the 1990s, Belarus's foreign policy matured into a solid pro-Russia one: the bilateral integration in the Union State was described as 'the foremost natural priority' that Belarus greeted 'with an open heart'. Russia was defined as 'a strategic partner', and that would remain Belarus's 'principled unchangeable position'. The undermining contradiction was that Belarus acknowledged Russia's forceful and questionable position towards Belarus's independence and resisted it. To mitigate its dependence on Russia, Belarus introduced the principle of multidirectionality in foreign policy but ended up with its foreign policy heavily eschewed towards Russia with no balance in sight. The effort to rectify it with the aspirational discourse towards a comprehensive integration into Europe and eventual EU membership brought the opposite results: the relations with the EU worsened. Belarus's failed attempt at influence vis-à-vis the EU cannot be attributed only to the Aspirational Self, however. The aspiration towards a multi-vectoredness, the intention to preserve 'good relations' with the West, and Belarus's insistence on independence in a union with Russia were in congruence with the European Other and facilitated Belarus's influence on it. The congruence of the Aspirational Self with the Russian Other, with some contradictions regarding the issue of Belarus's independence, constituted Belarus's successful attainment of economic

and political benefits from Russia. It was buttressed by Belarus's Historical Self with its strong level of engagement and congruence with the Russian Other.

In the 2000s, Belarus's Aspirational Self decreased its congruence with the Russian Other as the ambiguity of Belarus's goals for the future intensified and Belarus's influence vis-à-vis Russia faltered. As Russia suggested incorporating Belarus as one of its federal subjects and decreased its economic subsidies to the country, Belarus insisted on integration with Russia in the Union State without compromising its independence and its own currency as well as tried to keep Russia's energy prices for Belarus at a preferential level. At the same time, Belarus's intention to have 'very good' relations and a mutually beneficial partnership with the EU, to remain 'an unproblematic and eager' European country with comparable values and becoming a bridge between two centres of power increased Belarus's Aspirational Self's congruence vis-à-vis the European Other. The narratives did not touch upon the problematic issues of Belarus's intention to keep its model of an undemocratic system of government. The discursively undisrupted congruence of the Aspirational Self with the European Other provided a basis for a tentative improvement in bilateral relations in 2007-2010.

In the 2010s, the congruence of Belarus's Aspirational Self vis-à-vis the Russian Other came to compete with the congruence of Belarus's aspirational narrative vis-à-vis the European Other. Discursively, Belarus announced the possibility of its membership in the EU, its readiness to compromise on EU demands and address the 'sensitive' issues of democracy and human rights. These and Belarus's intention to provide a platform for negotiations to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its aspiration towards neutrality further increased congruence of its Aspirational Self vis-à-vis the European Other. Belarus's narratives vis-à-vis Russia were constituted by the intention to remain Russia's ally, to defend the Russian language and the Russian people living in Belarus, to support Russia's post-Soviet integration pursuits,

and to preserve the ‘enduring value of friendship’ and ‘the spirit of genuinely allied’ relations. By pursuing two conflicting goals simultaneously, congruence of Belarus’s Aspirational Self vis-à-vis both Others was not complete.

The third component of Belarus’s state identity, the Situational Self, in the 1990s, had a strong congruence with the Russian Other. Belarus’s situational problems of economic crisis, consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, revival of the Belarusian language and culture, shock liberalisation, privatisation, the ‘wild market’, and ‘democracy without limits’ – all these issues were thought to be solved by economic integration with Russia, fraternal and close to Belarus ‘in spirit and blood’. The ‘tragedy’ of the Soviet Union’s disintegration had to be rectified and ‘the severed’ ties restored. Independence ‘in the vulgar sense’ could only lead to destruction, and the cooperation with the West was the consequence of ‘the ugly skewed nationalist policy’ which led to Russians fleeing their ‘practically home country’ Belarus. The congruence was disrupted by the principle of multi-directionality in Belarus’s foreign policy and by Belarus’s insistence on its independence. Vis-a-vis the European Other, the Situational Self had no congruence: it was constituted by a starkly negative attitude towards market reforms, criticism of the EU and its export quotas for Belarus, and Belarus’s produce being not competitive in the Western market and therefore not having a deserving place in the EU; later, the hostility of the situational narrative increased due to Belarus’s constitutional amendments of 1995 and 1996, condemned and sanctioned by the EU, due to Belarus’s harassment of its domestic opposition, and, ultimately, due to the Drozdy diplomatic conflict that alienated the West. Belarus perceived the EU’s actions as ‘blackmail and direct pressure’ and accused it of exercising ‘double’ standards. The hostility was high on both sides and congruence was lacking.

In the 2000s, the Situational Self began increasing its congruence with the European Other and decreasing it with the Russian Other. Belarus’s narratives became less confrontational vis-à-

vis the EU: Belarus acknowledged to have gone ‘a little too far in terms of flying on one wing’ of its pro-Russian foreign policy; it characterised itself as European, geographically located at the heart of Europe, and a ‘young democracy’ that needed time for ‘further improvement’ as it was undergoing ‘profound transformations’. Meanwhile, Belarus believed that its economic and political shortcomings should be tolerated and not be subjected to European pressure, ultimatums, and sanctions. Belarus defined the existing problems with the EU as ‘misunderstandings’, which are to be reduced by working together at ‘common challengers’ and interdependencies in trade and security. Vis-à-vis Russia, Belarus’s narratives became more confrontational. Russia’s policy of pragmatisation, the ensuing multiple energy disputes, and the pressure to sell Belarus’s gas transit company as well as Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008 decreased congruence of the Situational Self with the Russian Other. Especially Russia’s suggestion to incorporate Belarus and the twofold increase in gas price in 2007 were acknowledged as having a strong impact: they were characterised as a turning point and caused changes in Belarus’s Aspirational and Historical Selves that surfaced at the end of the 2000s and led to decrease in their congruence with the Russian Other in the 2010s. Still, Belarus’s situational narratives continued to retain their congruence vis-à-vis Russia: for example, fraternity and brotherhood of the two countries were ‘sacredly respected’, Belarus was ‘the closest and most reliable ally’, and ‘to be together was destined by fate itself’.

In the 2010s, the Situational Self further increased its congruence with the European Other and decreased it with the Russian Other. Vis-à-vis the EU, there was no significant progress on the issues of democratisation – such as, political prisoners, the death penalty, civil society, and opposition oppression - and the rule of law and hence little congruence. However, Belarus’s neutral position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its role of a platform for conflict negotiations corresponded to the EU’s interest. The issues of Belarus’s multi-vectored foreign policy, its policy of ‘soft’ revival of the Belarusian language and culture, and its wish to

‘undertake any steps to normalise’ relations with the EU contributed to the Situational Self’s congruence and hence Belarus’s influence vis-à-vis the EU. Vis-à-vis Russia, the Self was constituted by the narratives of brotherhood, strategic partnership, trust, and the two peoples being ‘a single whole’ by ‘the holy law’. Congruence of the Situational Self was disrupted by Belarus’s insistence on its independence, its discontent with unequal economic conditions in the integration projects and the energy conflicts, as well as by an ‘excessive’ economic dependence on Russia to be mitigated by the relations with the EU. Still, Belarus discursively framed these issues as ‘small problems’ and ‘of a temporal nature’ and intended to remain ‘strongly attached’ to Russia. Compared to the 2000s, the Situational Self became more congruent with the EU, though it was still less congruent with the European Other than with the Russian Other.

To recall, the political elite construct identity narratives strategically in the pursuit of their political purposes. However, they are constrained by the intersubjective shared stock of knowledge, and they make sense of the world and state identity within categories and values drawn from it. Identity narratives are produced by the elite, and, at the same time, they provide access to identity narratives which are reflected among the masses. The loss of legitimacy, which Belarus’s government has been experiencing since the summer of 2020, undermined the identity discourse of the elite in power, and as a source of influence as the alternative state identity discourse of the 2020 protest movement rivals the existing state identity discourse. The turbulent confrontation will come one day to an eventual resolution, resulting either in a transition of power and a partial co-optation of the opposition or in an overhaul of the type of political system and a transformation of the present government with the ensuing change of identity discourse.

Once the situation stabilises, in either way, Belarus's state identity will undergo changes. In order to retain legitimacy, the elite will have to account for the oppositional identity discourse. If new elite replace the current regime, they will have to accommodate the previous structures of historical memory, practicalities of the present, and aspirations for the future. Specifically, they will have to consider those identity discourses of the previous political elite that still resonate with the masses or, in other words, 'structure mass common sense'.[1378]

State identity's components are institutionalised to different degrees, with the most sedimented component – a key narrative matrix – being difficult to change. It is of a fundamental nature, deeply ingrained and slow to change. As a rule, this most sedimented component corresponds to the Historical Self, and in Belarus's state identity discourse, it is represented by the experience of the Second World War. It can be argued that the recent attempts to change the strands of meaning related to the historical memory of the Second World War[1379] - undertaken by the elite to discredit the protest movement and its supporters by associating the red-white flag with Belarusian Nazi collaborators - are doomed to failure due to the sedimented nature of historical memory and its myths. The aspiration towards neutrality of the country and the value attached to its 'peaceful' character correspond to the Aspirational Self. Also, they have roots in the historical memory of Belarus and are of a fundamental nature for the widely shared ideas of Belarusians and as such, are difficult to change too. The other areas of sedimentations are the Russian language and the 'positive', 'brotherly' attitude to Russia. If Lukashenko's rule remains, it will continue the trajectory of state identity development and gradually embrace the rivalling elements in order to assimilate the oppositional state identity discourse and restore legitimacy of its rule.

[1378] Hopf & Allan (2016: 33)
[1379] The Guardian (22.08.2020). 'How the two flags of Belarus became symbols of confrontation'.

7.2. Contributions, relevance for other studies, and limitations

The thesis makes several contributions to the field of knowledge: theoretical, conceptual, and empirical. The *theoretical contribution* consists in the fact that the thesis engages with the small states literature and problematises influence which small states achieve by an ideational resource of state identity. It challenges the assumption that small states' influence on larger states has been negligible, including influence of small non-democratic developing states. It argues that ideational factors matter, and identity constitutes influence.

The thesis makes *a conceptual contribution* to social constructivism on which it builds its theory of a small state's influence. It constructs the link between influence and state identity and traces varying influence and the way it is constituted by the evolution of state identity. The dynamics of state identity configuration and the extent of its components' congruence and engagement with the Other condition the extent of influence a small state wields vis-à-vis a larger state. To capture the process, the thesis develops the analytical framework of Composite State Identity. Because of state identity's components, how they are configured, how they change, how they are congruent, how they are engaged - these kinds of dynamics shape the extent to which Belarus can influence the EU and Russia. Thereby the thesis underscores the process of identity construction: the ability of the Self to construct its identity and how this contributes to how the Self conducts its foreign policy and with what outcomes.

Three contributions to the constructivist research agenda are made. First, the model describes the dynamics behind identity continuity and change filling a gap in capturing why and how state identity changes over time.[1380] Second, the model outlines how agents' identity is constituted. State identity is conceptualised in an innovative way as a composite of three

[1380] Flockhart (2016: 89)

temporal components of future aspirations, historical memories, and current situation, which allows a more nuanced approach to account for its internal and external dynamics in wielding influence vis-à-vis the Other. Third, the focus is on agency and its theorising, which counterbalances the predominant orientation on structure in the constructivist approaches.

Lastly, the research makes *an empirical contribution* as it studies Belarus's influence as its case study. Small states like Belarus eschew academic attention as they are routinely considered to exercise less agency and be under the influence of larger states. By contextualising Belarus in the small states studies, drawing on constructivism as its theoretical framework, and interpretive methodology as its logic of enquiry, the thesis allows to place Belarus in a new light of a smaller country with the ability to exercise influence over considerably larger polities.

Regarding the relevance for other studies, the theoretical framework of state identity as a (re)source of influence can be applied across other contexts, especially to the countries with a post-Soviet legacy. Most of them are small states, and the factors of newness of their independent statehood, geography, and history place these states into additional disadvantage and into the role of a frontier zone with security concerns remaining imperative in their foreign policies vis-à-vis large polities, such as Russia and the EU. How they construct their state identities and the extent of influence they wield is an analytically challenging task.

For example, Armenia is a small state with population of 2.9 million people. It lacks any substantial material resources, and it is positioned in a difficult geopolitical context with Iran, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey as its only direct neighbours. The latter two countries blockade Armenia, which is involved in a conflict with Azerbaijan regarding the Armenia-populated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia has strong relations with Iran, Russia, and the EU. It functions as a transit platform between Iran, Europe, as well as Russia and its Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), of which Armenia is a member. For this membership,

Armenia forewent an Association Agreement with the EU but was able to secure the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU in 2017. At the same time, Armenia receives the Russian gas supplied at below-market price levels and discounted weapons while Russia remains the primary destination for Armenian migrant workers and the largest source of remittances to Armenia. Armenia remains the only member of the EAEU that has a strategic agreement with the EU. How does Armenia, a small state, construct its state identity vis-à-vis much larger actors of Russia, the EU, and Iran to be able to secure the benefits of friendly relations with them, such as the membership in the EAEU, the CEPA, as well as trade with Iran? How has Armenia constructed its historical memory, aspirations for the future, and the situational discourse vis-à-vis these actors in the process of achieving a greater strategic balance? How has Armenia's state identity discourse changed relative to the changes in Armenia's exercise of influence on Russia, the EU, and Iran?

Regarding the limitations, the present research is a single case study which allows to consider different factors that help answer the research questions and to provide nuanced understandings of identity narratives sustaining the research puzzle. However, its findings are not relevant across social settings, and the applicability of the thesis's arguments to other case studies remains under question. The methodological position of the research is constructivist, and it is believed that knowledge is socially constructed, and therefore it differs from case to case rather than reflects an independently existing social reality. The other limitation of the present research is the fact that it is state centred and excludes domestic Others from its theory framework. The size and scope of the shared textual space under analysis can be expanded to include the political opposition, the alternative media, and marginal discourses - to a wider set of actors and texts. The thesis's analytical focus on official discourse was justified by the political significance of the type of the governing style of non-democratic Belarus in the analysed years of Lukashenko's rule as well as by space constraints. Still, alternative identity

narratives can help avoid a simplification of the political processes and choices of the electorate, as well as augment the overall understanding of the processes of change – precisely, what constructivism is criticised about, the issue of why and how identity changes over time. Moreover so, since in Belarus, the opposition narrative has never been peripheral but quite prominent representing about a quarter of the population prior to summer 2020.

Regarding the current context, it should be noted that the research conclusions apply specifically to cases when the elite have legitimacy and exercise the monopoly on state identity discourse. State identity helps understand the dynamics of influence when it is used instrumentally by the elite who enjoy popular support at least to a certain extent. In the events following the 2020 presidential elections, the Belarusian elite lost the legitimacy and with it the ability to rely on state identity in influencing other states' foreign policies as an alternative version of democratic Belarus came to dominate a considerable part of the public discourse. Though legitimacy of the elite has always been contested, in 2020 they experienced the most significant contestation or even one would argue a complete rupture compared to the previous cases of protests that followed the 2006 and 2010 presidential elections. Before 2020, Lukashenko had no threat of defeat in fair elections: according to independent polls, 51.1% of respondents voted for Lukashenko in 2010 compared to 17.6% - 21.2% voted for him in 2020.[1381] Even if the support of security forces, state employees, and the elderly population of the countryside provides 20-25% for Lukashenko,[1382] the defeat at the 2020 presidential elections and the 'appalling violence'[1383] towards the protesters, civil society, and journalists further eroded that number and made the loss of legitimacy more obvious. To compare, the protests following the December 2010 presidential elections resulted in 15 political prisoners

[1381] Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) (2010); 17.6% according to the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) (2021); 21.2% according to Chatham House (2021).
[1382] Glod (2020: 9)
[1383] Amnesty International (2020)

a year later, including three presidential candidates, and the presidential elections of 2020 led to the prolonged process of politically motivated criminal prosecution, which as of the end of July 2021, is still ongoing with 603 political prisoners according to the human rights centre Viasna.[1384] Moreover, at least 32,000 people went through administrative arrests and more than 4,200 criminal cases have been initiated against the protesters but none against torture and physical and psychological violence exercised by the prison authorities.[1385]

Fundamentally, a transformation of the Belarusian society has taken place: its view on the role of the state changed. In the span of ten years, 2008-2018, the number of respondents who shared the principles of market economy increased twofold and reached 40% while the number of those preferring a job at a state-owned company decreased from 60% to 20%.[1386] Accordingly, the demand for change of Belarus's political system rose, which constrained people's ambitions and motivated them to protest against barriers encountered in 'all fields', be it the IT sector, preschool education, or manual labour.[1387] These underpinnings explain the 'unprecedented', in terms of size and geographical spread, protests that followed the 2020 presidential elections.[1388] They also shed light on the radical difference of the current situation from previous crises of legitimacy that the Belarusian elite experienced.

To conclude, the thesis's analytical framework of Composite State Identity crafts a specific theory about smaller states, which is rooted in constructivist theory, and which helps understand how a weaker state achieves influence vis-à-vis a more powerful state in an asymmetrical relationship. However, this argument needs a further research based on other case studies. Potentially, the framework can be applied to the situation of conflict and its

[1384] Freedom House (2012), Human Rights Center 'Viasna' (2021. B)
[1385] Human Rights Center 'Viasna' (2021. A)
[1386] Mia Research. 2019. Study on the values of Belarusian society. http://kef.by/en/publications/research/the-survey-investigate-the-values-of-belarusian-society/ in Glod (2020)
[1387] Shelest (2021) in Belarus in Focus (2021)
[1388] Glod (2020: 5)

resolution by one state vis-à-vis another state. The extent of state identity's congruence with the Other - or an ideational distance between core meanings attached to their state identities' historical memories, aspirations for the future, and the practicalities of the current situations - can help identify the areas for mutual understanding and conflict resolution. State identity is constructed by the elite, and, at the same time, it is constrained by the intersubjective shared stock of knowledge. Its components are institutionalised to different degrees, and the most sedimented component is difficult to change, in the short term. How much sedimented is the aspirational component? What is the relationship between the intersubjective stock of knowledge and the different degrees of institutionalisation of state identity components? How do the elite approach the narrative matrix in order for state identity to be used instrumentally as a source of either influence or conflict resolution? Is it the most or least sedimented component that warrants attention in the first place? The future research can address these avenues of enquiry.

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