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Article

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Suggested Citation: Wojcieszak, Łukasz (2017) : Specifics of the Polish-Belarusian economic relations in the 21st century, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 9, Iss. 4, pp. 613-627

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/198529>

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Specifics of the Polish-Belarusian economic relations in the 21st century

Łukasz WOJCIESZAK*

Abstract

The article deals with the relations between Poland and Belarus in the 21st century in the light of the recent events showing the re-rapprochement between the two countries. The aim of the paper is to present the importance of economic cooperation and the development of trade relations for the strengthening of the relations between these countries. The author emphasizes cooperation in the energy sector. He describes how crucial trade and economic cooperation is in overcoming crises in political relations. The author stresses the role of Poland in supporting the economic transformation of Belarus creating an alternative to the cooperation between Belarus and Russia. In this article the author uses descriptions, as well as the predictive methods.

Keywords: Poland, Belarus, economic relations

Introduction

In Polish-Belarusian relations periods of relatively deep cooperation have been interwoven with phases of poor collaboration for years. In the first decade of the 21st century, the conflict around the Union of Poles in Belarus has negatively influenced the Polish-Belarusian relationship and has hindered the rapprochement between the neighbouring states for several years. At present, a certain thaw in bilateral relations can be observed, with economic factors playing a special role aimed at supporting the weakening Belarusian economy and at limiting the Russian influence as much as possible. The purpose of this paper is to present Polish-Belarusian relations in the 21st century, thus showing both periods of good co-operation as well as apparent lack of collaboration.

A change in the relations between the European Union and Russia triggered by Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine was crucial for a certain rapprochement between Poland and Belarus in 2016. Poland's policy towards Belarus is part of a broader concept of Polish Eastern policy, reflected in the Eastern Partnership program. Belarus, as a state linked relatively closely with

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Russia, stands out, however, against other former Soviet Union republics. This is one of the fundamental reasons why Poland's policy towards Belarus faces many difficulties.

Poland has been trying to pursue an active policy towards the former Republics of the Soviet Union for years (an example of such an action is the Eastern Partnership or the Three Seas Initiative). Poland is one of the important trade partners of Belarus, this is supported by the close proximity as the countries are neighbours. The following thesis can be stated: the Polish-Belarusian relations became warmer at the beginning of the second half of the present decade. The relations between Poland and Belarus have partially improved mainly because of the economic cooperation.

1. Fundamentals of cooperation

The relations between Poland and Belarus have faced recurring crises since 1991. They occurred mainly because both sides were influenced by the historical legacy, numerous stereotypes and reminiscences of the conflict between neighbouring Poland and Belarus. Both the objective factors, arising from e.g. geopolitical determinants, as well as subjective ones, originating in cultural differences, fuelled the reluctance of both sides. The requirements of the current domestic and foreign policies of both countries had further impact. The stereotypes about the political system of power in Belarus, and specifically the attitude of the society towards President Alexander Lukashenko, played a particularly negative role. The perception of Belarus as a "seasonal state" was also problematic (Gieorgica, 2012, pp.12-13).

Its location makes Belarus an arena for a clash between the EU and Russia. Both the EU and Poland are concerned about the possibility of the annexation of Belarus by Russia's via military means, thus it is important to minimize the risk of this scenario taking place. Economic support for Belarus aims to increase the stability of this country and this could prevent Belarus to have the same fate as that of eastern Ukraine. The relations between Poland and Belarus are not stained with conflicts that have often started few hundred years ago as in the case of Russia, Ukraine or Lithuania (Iwańczuk, 2009, p. 130). The shared past becomes a connecting factor rather than a separating one. The joint statehood in the First Polish Republic and close cultural ties strengthen the mutual relationship. In the independent states, Poland and Belarus, periods of improvement intersperse with phases of deterioration in the bilateral relations. Thus, the Polish-Belarusian relations can be divided into four periods:

1. First period (1990 – 1994) – includes the time when the treaty base was build and a good neighbourly cooperation was developed;

2. Second period (1994 – 2008) – covers systematic deterioration of the relations and sharp polemics;
3. Third period (2008 – 2012) – contains symptoms of normalization and the development of neighbourhood co-operation, including the framework of the Eastern Partnership proposed by the EU (Zięba, 2010, 225);
4. Fourth period (2012 – 2016) – marked by a strong deterioration of the relations and the lack of action that could actually improve them.
5. Is there going to be another period? – it remains an open question. It could be initiated by economic rapprochement between the states while political issues are put aside.

The Declaration on Good Neighbourhood, Mutual Understanding and Cooperation signed between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Belarus in October 1991, thus constituting the basis for future collaboration, was the first significant step towards closer relations between Poland and the independent Belarus. Another important agreement was the Treaty of Good Neighbourhood and Friendly Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Poland, signed in Warsaw on June 23rd, 1992 (Traktat między Republiką Białoruś a Rzeczpospolitą Polską o dobrym sąsiedztwie i przyjaznej współpracy, 1992). In the relations with Belarus, Poland was mainly concerned about tightening political cooperation in order to move the country away from Russia (like Ukraine) and link it to the West. To achieve this, Poland supported democratic and independent activities in Belarus. The authorities in Minsk, however, were more interested in the pragmatic economic cooperation with Poland, in particular in obtaining the possibility to transit their goods through the territory of Poland to Western Europe. The bilateral relations developed so dynamically that the cooperation was even extended to the area of defence (Zięba, 2010, pp. 227-228). However, in the first half of the 1990s, problems related to the well being of the Polish minority in Belarus came to light.

The deterioration of Polish-Belarusian relations was caused by several factors, among which the most important ones were related to closer cooperation between Poland and the West (and especially with NATO) and the integration of Belarus with Russia. Both states maintained dialogue, although mutual relations got worse when the dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenka consolidated. Poland's attitude towards Belarus is referred to as "critical dialogue" (the president of the Polish-Belarusian Association Bolesław Chmieliński defined this concept as a policy of psychological pressure on a neighbouring country) (Czachor, 2011, p. 140).

Poland's strategy towards Belarus was based on the assumption that closer relations with that country should be linked to the respect for democratic principles and human rights by the Minsk

authorities. Poland sought different ways to influence the governance system in Belarus, including via the European Union. The authorities in Warsaw have sought to intensify a revival of bilateral contacts, but expected democratic changes to be introduced in that country. However, this hasn't led to the expected breakthrough, and Belarus remained internationally secluded. Even though Belarus agreed to a dialogue with Poland, it rejected Polish "interference" in its internal affairs. It is worth emphasizing that at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century trade between Poland and Belarus developed well, and in April 2004 the countries signed a new economic cooperation agreement. A significant deterioration of bilateral relations took place in 2005, when a dispute over the Union of Poles in Belarus broke out, and Polish diplomats were removed from the Republic of Belarus (Zięba, 2010, p. 236-238).

The breakdown of bilateral relations made Poland the main target of Belarus's attack. There were several reasons to choose Poland as the main opponent:

- historically and culturally Poland is the most active and influential European state when it comes to shaping a common EU and NATO policy towards Belarus;
- Poland is the main supporter of the Belarusian opposition (also within the EU),
- there is a relatively large and well organized Polish Diaspora in Belarus, which is supported by the Polish authorities,
- in Poland many Belarusians can most easily learn and work, and also move to Western Europe, which makes the Polish life style competitive for the Belarusian one (Gieorgica, 2012, p. 15).

In 2008 the Polish-Belarusian relations began to slightly improve. One of the most important problems at that time was the Polish Card, but the dispute around it was mitigated relatively quickly. Moreover, the Belarusian authorities ceased to repress the political opposition at that time and to limit the freedom of media, and also declared their desire to improve relations with the West (Zięba, 2010, p. 239). This created an opportunity for cooperation with Belarus, also within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. Such kind of activity was linked to multi-vector politics and it was included in the official documents of the state (*Об утверждении*, 2005).

As George Paweł Gieorgica observed, Polish policy towards Belarus did not have any strategy, doctrine, or clearly defined objectives. Polish political elites seemed to regard for a long time the "Solidarity"²⁰ approach leading to the free market and democracy, as in case of Poland, as the only natural approach for the transformation of Belarus. This understanding of the possible systemic changes indicated the complete ignorance of the different geopolitical conditions, political

²⁰ The Independent Self-Governing Labour Union Solidarity became a symbol of democratic changes in Poland, which were possible after opposition and communists reached an agreement.

culture issues as well as various economic determinants. According to the aforementioned researcher, this could have been a reason why the Eastern policy of Poland remained astonishingly inconsistent in defining and realizing its national interest as well as in executing its own objectives towards Belarus within the EU less actively (Gieorgica, 2012, p. 14).

Poland's policy towards Belarus has been multidimensional for many years. First and foremost, close relations between the Polish and Belarusian societies are important - Poland seeks to issue more visas for Belarusian citizens. An important element of the Polish policy towards Belarus is the development of contacts at the technical level between non-governmental organizations (in the area of culture and regional cooperation), financing scholarships for Belarusian students who cannot study in Belarus for political reasons (the Konstanty Kalinowski program) as well as conveying objective information to the Belarusian society - in this respect Belsat TV and Radio "Racyja" play a significant role (*Polityka Polski*). The situation of the Polish minority in Belarus has been a problem for years and its position has been weakened by the dispute over the Union of Poles in Belarus. Another issue in the bilateral relations was the Polish Card confirming the belonging to the Polish nation. The government of Law and Justice (PIS – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)²¹, created in 2015, placed an emphasis on improving relations with Belarus, supporting pragmatism in mutual relations. During his exposé, the Polish Foreign Secretary Witold Waszczykowski, stated that Poland hopes to intensify cooperation in the field of infrastructure, including the enhancing of the border crossing capacity and simplifying traffic rules, mainly through the implementation of the agreement on the local border traffic (*Pełna treść*, 2016).

2. Economic relations as an important area of cooperation

The cooperation between Poland and Belarus has been subject to numerous changes since the early 1990s, as a result of the influence of political and economic factors, primarily due to the fact that these two countries had different integration centres: Poland – the West (EU) and Belarus – the East (Russia). Despite the level of cooperation between the two states at the government level, which has been dependent on political turmoil, the cross-border collaboration has developed well over the years, with Belarus and Poland participating in the Euro regions Bug, Neman and Białowieża Forest (Wojcieszak, 2010, pp. 169-171). The prospects for economic cooperation between Poland and Belarus have been detailed by their governments in the following way:

²¹ A conservative party, created 2001.

- a. cooperation to stabilize the Polish-Belarusian border, including the modernization and opening of new border crossing points, and winning EEC funds for these aims,
- b. opening of new possibilities to settle trades through the introduction of settlements in Polish złoty (PLN),
- c. joint activities to create infrastructure on the East-West freight corridor, the Europe-Asia railway connection, and the development of shipping using Polish seaports,
- d. development of cross-border co-operation in Euro regions "Bug" and "Neman",
- e. co-operation in the area of fruit and vegetable processing, electrical engineering, agricultural machinery, medical apparatus or construction materials (Żukowska, Żukowski, 1999, pp. 26-27).

The positive results of the trade between Poland and Belarus in the mid-1990s confirmed the growth trend, that started in 1994. It was important for the co-operation of the two countries that the Polish investors were increasingly interested to be present on the Belarusian market. As a result, Polish-Belarusian companies and representative offices fully owned by Polish investors were created. In 1995 the turnover of goods between Poland and Belarus amounted to 471 million USD, including exports from Poland to Belarus - 233.6 million USD, and imports from Belarus to Poland - 237.4 million USD (Żukowska and Żukowski, 1999, p. 27). In 2015 trade turnover between Belarus and Poland reached over 1.8 billion USD (*Ambasada Republiki*). In 2008, before the Eastern Partnership was launched, Poland was among the most important trading partners of Belarus, and imports included a variety of goods (Малашенкова, 2009, pp. 149-150). In 2015, according to Belarusian sources Poland was in the eighth place among countries exporting their goods to Belarus (Chouneiko, 2016). Currently, however, according to the economist Jarosław Romańczuk, the import of Belarusian goods to Poland, as well as the demand for it, is small (Гапеева, Марчук, 2016).

The working group on energy within the framework of the commission for Belarus-Poland trade and economic cooperation resumed its activity in the autumn of 2014, after a four-year break. In November 2014 in Brest there were discussions at the level of deputy ministers about cooperation in the field of electricity, energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, oil and gas as well as mining and mining machinery.

Such cooperation seems to be of more interest for Belarus. The authorities in Minsk hope to sell a part of the nuclear power produced in the Astravyets nuclear power plant to Poland. In this regard, it would be possible to launch two inactive power lines (Białystok – Roś overhead power line with operating voltage of 220 kV and Brześć - Wólka Dobryńska line with an operating voltage of 110 kV), but they are not really significant for Belarus. However, it is more important to renovate

and expand the first of these lines. It is worth noting that the Belarusian authorities gained support of the Polish businessman, Jan Kulczyk, for the investment, but he withdrew from the cooperation in early 2011, resigning also to build a coal power plant in the Grodno region. According to the plan, the electricity from the power plant was to be delivered to both the Belarusian and Polish markets (Czerniewicz 2015). Belarus wanted to build a cross-border line with operating voltage of 400kV but the Polish side was not interested in its construction.

Belarus got into a long-term economic crisis as a result of a prolonged economic recession in Russia, the main economic partner for Belarus, as well as a drastic drop of fuel prices on the world markets, which is one of the key items of Belarusian exports. A further significant issue was the failure of the Belarusian economic model. In the middle of the second decade of the 21st century in Belarus, the symptoms of the crisis were very strong, especially because, for the first time in almost twenty years, the GDP fell, which was mainly a consequence of a significant decrease in the production and exports. As a consequence, the foreign-exchange reserves were significantly reduced and the Belarusian ruble was more and weaker (Kłysiński 2016).

The import of Belarusian energy to Poland may become an important field of cooperation between the countries. This might be encouraged by the nuclear power plant in Astravyets as one of its two units is planned to be completed in 2019. The Belarusian administration reported that after the launch of the facility they intend to stop the imports of energy from Russia. A further result is an energy surplus that might be exported on a broader scale in the north-west direction including Poland. The Belarusian Energy Minister, Vladimir Patupczyk, said that Warsaw is interested in importing electricity, and the aim is to turn this plan into tangible projects. A noteworthy idea is to build an efficient power line with Belarus. The existing Białystok – Roś line has low capacity and is currently not in use. The Kulczyk Holding was interested in this investment as a part of the investment plans for the Belarusian energy sector and the plan was to build a new power plant together with the state-owned Bielenergo Group and to sell electricity produced to Poland. For this purpose, however, it was necessary to build an energy bridge, which the state-owned operator objected to as this would generate significant costs (Maciążek 2015).

3. Significance of Russia's policy

When analyzing relations between Poland and Belarus, it is important to mention Russia's role. Belarus is of a great geopolitical significance for Russia, mainly thanks to its transit role (Snapkowski, 2006-2007, p. 64) and this determines its position in the Russian foreign policy strategy. Under Alexander Lukashenko Belarus and Russia have integrated more closely and a more

institutionalized result was the establishment of the State Union of Belarus and Russia. However, the Eurasian Economic Union is of much more practical significance and it also integrates among others both countries. Notwithstanding any political and legal aspects of the cooperation, Belarus operates in a very serious dependence on Russia. In particular, this manifests in the Belarusian dependence on the supply of energy resources from its eastern neighbour. Whilst the co-operation between Belarus and Russia is multidimensional, it is not free from tensions, which, together with growing opposition to Russia's numerous international actions (especially in relation to Ukraine), allow the Minsk administration to reorient its foreign policy.

Since the independent Belarus has been created, there have been frequent conflicts with Russia regarding the imports of natural gas and crude oil. Supplies of cheap energy resources are essential for the Belarusian economy (Zawadzki, 2010, p. 122). Belarus processes Russian oil (refineries are located in Mazyr and Novopolotsk), and exports it to the West, which constitutes a very important source of the state income. Meanwhile, Russia gradually reduces supplies of raw materials, which is a serious blow for the Belarusian economy. Another problem is the Russian embargo on food imports from Belarus, which re-exports to Russia many products that the Kremlin authorities embargoed claiming that these products were Belarusian products (*Były radca Ambasady RP*, 2017). However, the military cooperation between Russia and Belarus develops well, which often disturbs Poland, in particular (especially exercises that take place near the Polish borders simulating a fight against the western enemies). Nevertheless, the growing distrust between Belarus and Russia, makes the Zapad-2017 exercise and the associated presence of significant Russian forces a threat for the state governed by Alexander Lukashenko.

The idea to lift the visa requirements for the citizens of 80 countries (including Poland), which constituted a rather unexpected step taken by the Minsk government, alarmed Russia, which had closed its border with this western neighbour (*Były radca Ambasady RP*, 2017). In the context of this next phase in the relations of Belarus to the West (or its "play on two fronts"), it is therefore possible for an "ideologically struggle" for that country to take place, and one of the main opponents of Russia might be Poland (Kłysiński and Żochowski, 2016, p. 21). A very significant drop in oil prices has seriously undermined Russia's economic potential, and this drop does not make Russia an attractive partner for Belarus today, as it has been so far. This peculiar "rivalry for Belarus" brings significant benefits to President Lukashenko, who has kept his power for many years skilfully playing with both the East and the West partners while being the de facto guarantor of the Belarusian separateness from its Russian neighbour. Any attempts to weaken ties between Belarus and Russia, regardless of the effects of these efforts, would provoke in the present reality more or a less strongly articulated opposition of the Moscow authorities.

4. Examples of cooperation development in 2016

In 2016, several important senior Polish officials visited Belarus and other events took place as well confirming the rapprochement between Poland and Belarus. In May 2016, the Polish Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Krzysztof Jurgiel met his Belarusian counterpart in Shanghai. The Ministers reaffirmed their willingness to deepen cooperation between the two countries in the field of agriculture and to support actions to increase mutual trade in agri-food products. The Polish Minister Krzysztof Jurgiel emphasized that Belarus is a very important economic partner for Poland, and that the proximity of the two countries and the existing traditional ties should be used to strengthen the partnership. The Polish Minister also indicated the need to lift restrictions imposed by Belarus on imports from Poland (Rozmowy polsko, 2016). In June 2016, Minister Jurgiel took part in the "Belagro 2016" exhibition in Belarus. The Polish minister, among other initiatives, opened a stand promoting Polish food (it should be noted that in the first quarter of 2016 the exports of Polish food products to Belarus increased by 56% compared to the same period of the previous year (Opłaca się, 2016).

Another important event was the meeting of the Polish Minister Witold Waszczykowski with the Belarus Deputy Foreign Minister Alena Kupczyna as it was an opportunity to discuss bilateral issues (including economic relations and problems of the national minorities in Poland and Belarus), regional security and the rearrangement of the treaty basis. Moreover, the parties discussed issues in the relations between Belarus and the European Union, also in the context of the ongoing works to reform the European Neighbourhood Policy (*Polsko-białoruskie*, 2016). This meeting prepared the ground for further diplomatic activities of both states. It should, however, be noted that a number of important issues were not clarified.

In October 2016, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Development and Finance, Mateusz Morawiecki, visited Belarus. The trip of the Polish minister was a sign of positive changes in Polish-Belarusian economic relations. These relations continued despite the nearly frozen diplomatic relations and Poland became Belarus's third largest trading partner, ahead of Germany and China. The expected increase in investment is remarkable - as many as 230 Polish entrepreneurs came to Minsk for the 20th Economic Forum "Good-Neighbourhood 2016" in Minsk. At the same time there are currently about 350 companies with Polish capital and about 2800 with Russian assets (*Międzymorze: Romaszewska*, 2016). It would be important for Polish companies to engage in privatization processes of companies in Belarus, but it is currently difficult to predict what results such actions may bring.

During his visit in Belarus, the Deputy Prime Minister Morawiecki met, among others, with President Lukashenko and with Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov, and he also participated in the opening of the 20th Belarusian-Polish Economic Forum “Good- Neighborhood 2016”. When concluding his visit to Belarus, he stated for “Sovetskaya Belorussiya- Belarus Segodnya” newspaper Morawiecki that the Polish government was taking steps to develop Polish-Belarusian cooperation, which was a part of the process aimed at improving relations between the European Union and Belarus and, more broadly, between the West and Belarus. According to Minister Morawiecki, Poland believes that the normalization of mutual relations should be comprehensive and should cover all aspects; and even in the cases of the more difficult issues, it would be possible to develop the most promising areas as well as solve all problems. Furthermore he mentioned that over the past 25 years, “there were various periods in our relations, but one fact did not change: Poland and Belarus were, are and will be neighbours that respect each other” (Prus, 2016).

When referring to the importance of Polish-Belarusian cooperation, the Minister Morawiecki pointed out that in the first half of 2016 Poland was Belarus's third trading partner, third among exporters and the ninth in terms of investment. For Belarus, Poland is the sixth largest export market. At the same time, exports of Polish agri-food products increase, and the logical consequence should be investment in the food processing sector, the creation of joint enterprises and the transfer of equipment and technology. Moreover, the Polish politician mentioned the good prospects for cooperation in the logistic and transport areas, due to the geographical location of Poland and Belarus: the development of communication routes linking the East to the West and the North to the South. He also indicated that there was a possibility to join together the China’s New Silk Road as well cooperate locally (the project to build the Dnieper-Vistula Canal and facilitate the access of Belarusian goods to Polish ports). Further Morawiecki stressed that more than 100 Polish companies took part in the Polish-Belarusian Business Forum "Good Neighbourhood 2016" including many that still do not operate in Belarus, but saw great potential in the Belarusian market (Prus, 2016).

When summarizing the meeting of Polish and Belarusian representatives, the journalist Dzmitry Krat, stated that then it was justified to talk about a new level in the quality in Belarusian-Polish economic cooperation. According to Krat, business circles collaborated successfully, as confirmed by the growing trade, but until recently economic cooperation had not been correlated with the official diplomatic relations between the countries. That fact, however, in his view, didn’t negatively affect the cooperation and then when the official relations between Belarus and the West were warmer, the economic collaboration between Belarus and Poland developed well, as proved by the meeting of President Lukashenko with Deputy Prime Minister Morawiecki. Both politicians

agreed that the economy should be the foundation of a new rapprochement between the two states, and via the Minister Morawiecki “Poland sends a signal of its constructive attitude” (Prus, 2016).

Belarus regards Poland as its nearest western state and the Belarusian authorities want to show that they have very good relations with a representative of the West. Moreover, Belarus wishes to send a message to Russia that it will now work more closely with the West, i.e. with Poland. As Russia is currently in a poor economic situation, it is not particularly willing to financially support Belarus. The authorities in Minsk use this situation and show that they are free to act. On the other hand, there is a problem to introduce local border traffic, although the relevant agreement has been concluded and ratified by both states. Another matter of dispute is the situation of the Poles in Belarus or the difficulty to contact the Polish consul. The situation of the Poles in Belarus or the difficulty of accessing the Polish consul is a matter of dispute. Teaching Polish is a further problematic issue. (Wandas, 2016).

In December 2016, the Marshal of the Polish Senate, Stanislaw Karczewski, went on a three-day trip to Belarus. This visit, in addition to the earlier visit of the Deputy Prime Minister Morawiecki, represented a "new level of quality" in relations with Belarus. During the meeting Marshal Karczewski and President Lukashenko discussed issues of economic, commercial, scientific and cultural cooperation. Further, they talked about the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus (President Lukashenko suggested to unite both unions of Poles: the legal one and the one not recognized by the Minsk authorities). For Belarus that struggles with economic difficulties, it is essential to tighten economic relations. The Belarusian authorities approved the proposal to organize an economic forum of the regions (Bielecki, 2016). Furthermore, it was important that the agreement reached between Poland and Belarus on cooperation in educational matters was unanimously ratified by the Belarusian Parliament. For Belarus, the TV channel “Belsat”, criticized by the Belarusian authorities, created a problem. Following the suppression of protests in Belarus in March 2017 the bilateral relations partially worsened. However, hopefully, progress made in the Polish-Belarusian relationship will help to solve problems in the future.

Conclusions

As presented earlier in this paper, there is a warming up of relations between Poland and Belarus and the thesis stated in the introduction has been confirmed. A certain rapprochement between the two states is another opportunity for closer cooperation, however, is it not clear how the relations will develop in the long run. The Polish-Belarusian relations have improved to some

extend because the confidence in Russia has declined and the prospect of further favourable cooperation between those two countries has worsened. The repression of the protesters who demonstrated against the policy of the Belarusian authorities in March 2017, however, has significantly slowed down further efforts to strengthen relations between the countries.

The relations between Poland and Belarus bring significant challenges for both states. Poland has sought to support democratic activities in Belarus for many years, however, notwithstanding these objectives, economic cooperation is of particular importance. At the same time, as indicated, in the bilateral energy relations (and more strictly, in the power sector), there are still difficult problems to solve. Belarus recognizes how important the collaboration with Poland is and perceives this country as a potentially important partner to enable cooperation with the West. For Poland it could be an opportunity to get involved in the re-privatization processes taking place in Belarus.

As indicated, both authorities have sought to emphasize the warming of bilateral relations. In particular, the meetings of high officials and the interests of business circles are noticeable. It can be assumed that the tightening of economic ties could lead to a closer rapprochement between the two countries. In this context, it is important to highlight the great commitment of the Polish diplomacy to improve mutual relations. Poland has managed to succeed only partially in this regard, this commitment, however, constitutes a basis for further activity.

When referring to the thesis, it should be noted that economic cooperation plays an important role in the improvement of relations between Poland and Belarus, and its role could continue to grow in the future. However, both the influence of Russia and the internal conditions of Belarus create obstacles. It is currently difficult to foresee how realistic it is to intensify the bilateral relations, or how feasible it is that Poland will participate in the privatization of Belarusian companies. However, the Polish efforts to warm up relations with Belarus need to be recognized.

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