

Belarus in the time of Crisis: towards the Year(s) of Quality?



Elena Korosteleva, Department of International Politics

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Structure

- ◎ Global financial crisis: what crisis?
- ◎ Political change: some critical signposts
- ◎ A new discourse: towards the year of quality
 - *President's* state of the nation address (2008-10)
 - *Elites*: bipolarity vs multi-vectoredness
 - *Population*: the lingering of Russia
 - *Youngsters*: knowledgeable but lost?
- ◎ Conclusions

ESRC-funded project

‘Europeanising or Securitising the outsiders?
Assessing the EU’s partnership-building
approach with Eastern Europe’, 2008-2010
(RES-061-25-0001)

Methodology:

- ⦿ Surveys: published in EU and conducted in EE
- ⦿ Interviews (across the border): government officials, MPs, Presidential Administration, journalists, think-tanks, civil servants, academics
- ⦿ Focus groups
- ⦿ School essays on Europe

For more information:

<http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en/research/EKPproject/index.htm> or
www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/minisites/widereurope/index.html

Global Financial Crisis: what crisis?

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Real growth GDP (% growth)	8.6	10.0	-0.3	3.8	4.4	5.3	6.3	6.9
Nominal GDP (billion Belarusian Ruble)	97.2	128.8	138.4	157.4	178.5	203.0	233.1	269.1
Inflation, end of the period (% growth)	12.1	13.3	10.5	8.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
Current account balance	-6.8	-8.4	-11.0	-7.2	-5.6	-4.9	-4.0	-3.4
Export of goods	53.7	54.8	44.3	50.6	50.7	50.4	50.5	50.7
Import of goods	-62.7	-64.9	-56.3	-59.1	-57.7	-56.5	-56.3	-56.1
Balance of trade	-9.0	-10.0	-12.0	-8.5	-6.9	-6.2	-5.8	-5.3

Source: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr1031.pdf>.

Global Financial Crisis: what crisis?

VOLUME INDICES OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

	2001	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	<i>As percentage of the previous year</i>					
Azerbaijan	109,9	126,4 ¹	134,5 ¹	125,0 ¹	110,8	109,3
Armenia	109,6	113,9	113,2	113,7	106,8	85,6
Belarus	104,7	109,4	110,0	108,6	110,2	100,2
Georgia	104,8	109,6	109,4	112,3	102,3	92,2 ²
Kazakhstan	113,5	109,7	110,7	108,9	103,3	98,5 ³
Kyrgyzstan	105,3	99,8	103,1	108,5	108,4	102,3
Moldova	106,1	107,5	104,8	103,0	107,8	92,3 ³
Russia	105,1	106,4	107,7	108,1	105,6	92,1
Tajikistan	109,6	106,7	107,0	107,8	107,9	103,4
Turkmenistan	...	113,3	...	111,6	110,5	...
Uzbekistan	104,5	107,0	107,3	109,5	109,0	108,1
Ukraine	109,2	102,7	107,3	107,9	102,3	84,1 ⁴
CIS average*	106	107	108	109	106	93

Source: <http://www.cisstat.com/eng/>

Political consequences of the crisis

- ⊙ the new search for **diversification**; and
- ⊙ the reinvigorated **sense of sovereignty** and **independence**

...This is the last time I openly state that if necessary we will go underground, as 65-70 years ago, but we will survive. We survived then, and have now survived the financial crisis. And for this I should be grateful *not* to our motherland Russia. But instead, to our, in inverted commas, 'enemies': the IMF, Europe, the West. They gave us those billions to help us survive. **THEY** supported us...
(Lukashenko, 20 April 2010)

Some Political Signposts

- ⊙ Gas-and-Oil war (2004; 2006/7; 2010?)
- ⊙ Sugar war (June 2009)
- ⊙ Milk & Meat war (July 2009)
- ⊙ Agricultural machinery war (2009)
- ⊙ Nuclear plant project (2009-)
- ⊙ Political issues:
 - Abkhazia & Ossetia
 - CSTO problems
 - Kyrgyzstan
- ⊙ Eastern Partnership; and other engagements

New Discourse of Sovereignty?

◎ Presidential Address:

- 2010: A dynamic breakthrough to a new quality of life
 - 2009: survival, discipline and order
 - 2008: we are now complete as a sovereign nation
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- ◎ *Only* discursive mention of Russia; and clear emphasis on sovereignty/independence

Fieldwork results 2009-10

- ⊙ Elites: bipolarity vs multi-vectoredness
- ⊙ Population: the lingering of Russia
- ⊙ Youngsters: knowledgeable but lost?

Conclusions

Belarus in the time of crisis:

- ⦿ it has coped better than anticipated;
- ⦿ it is learning to survive

Two critical changes in politics:

- ⦿ active diversification: economic and political;
- ⦿ the reinvigorated discourse of sovereignty: WE ARE THE BELARUSIANS!
- ⦿ Finally: 'To be honest, I've had enough... If you could find another president, then I would not fear. In any case, sooner or later, he will have to be found. If you find him now – good.... The only thing I hope is that when I am no longer president, and would ask for bread, I hope you would not refuse me, as I'd never refused you when you asked...' (27 April 2010).