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

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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?

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

## Global Financial Crisis: what crisis?

**VOLUME INDICES OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>109,9</td>
<td>126,4</td>
<td>134,5</td>
<td>125,0</td>
<td>110,8</td>
<td>109,3</td>
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<td>113,9</td>
<td>113,2</td>
<td>113,7</td>
<td>106,8</td>
<td>85,6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>104,7</td>
<td>109,4</td>
<td>110,0</td>
<td>108,6</td>
<td>110,2</td>
<td>100,2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>104,8</td>
<td>109,6</td>
<td>109,4</td>
<td>112,3</td>
<td>102,3</td>
<td>92,2</td>
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<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>113,5</td>
<td>109,7</td>
<td>110,7</td>
<td>108,9</td>
<td>103,3</td>
<td>98,5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>105,3</td>
<td>99,8</td>
<td>103,1</td>
<td>108,5</td>
<td>108,4</td>
<td>102,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>106,1</td>
<td>107,5</td>
<td>104,8</td>
<td>103,0</td>
<td>107,8</td>
<td>92,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>105,1</td>
<td>106,4</td>
<td>107,7</td>
<td>108,1</td>
<td>105,6</td>
<td>92,1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>109,6</td>
<td>106,7</td>
<td>107,0</td>
<td>107,8</td>
<td>107,9</td>
<td>103,4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>113,3</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>111,6</td>
<td>110,5</td>
<td>...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>104,5</td>
<td>107,0</td>
<td>107,3</td>
<td>109,5</td>
<td>109,0</td>
<td>108,1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>109,2</td>
<td>102,7</td>
<td>107,3</td>
<td>107,9</td>
<td>102,3</td>
<td>84,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS average*</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As percentage of the previous year

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?

President 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

Only discursive mention of Russia; and clear emphasis on sovereignty/independence
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).