The Intersection of Foreign Influence and Democratization: A Case Study of Eurasian Powers Influence on Belarus’ Democratic Movement Since 2020

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An honors thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the distinction of Honors in the International Studies Department in the College of Arts and Sciences

By: Dalton Maggs

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Abstract

In 2020, the world took notice of Belarus’ dictator, Alexander Lukashenko’s brutal repression of the Belarusian people, demonstrating their wish to topple his hybrid authoritarian regime to make way for a liberated and democratic Belarus. While that wish has yet to be achieved, the question of “How do the regional powers of Eurasia influence the internal democratization struggle of Belarus?” has been vital to understanding geopolitics over the past three years. Through analysis of government reports, statements, and interviews with experts in the Eurasian region, I showcase the foreign policies of the U.S., EU, Russia, and China relating to Belarus. The findings from this data showcase the polarity of influence between the West and East in their work in Belarus. In the democratic West, the U.S. and EU have assisted the movement through their second-track diplomacy with Belarusian groups and economic policies that attack Lukashenko’s regime and propose large-scale economic aid for a reformed democratic future. In the hybrid-authoritarian East, Russia and China have continued enabling Lukashenko’s regime by entrenching Belarus with cultural, security, and economic policies that hinder any democratic movement or national liberating future. By analyzing the unique policies of these four powers, I showcase the contrarian perspectives that played a role in the democratization of the past three years, providing insight into the future of Belarus.

Keywords

Democratization, Democracy, Foreign Influence, Eurasia, Europe, Belarus, United States, European Union, Russia, China, Geopolitics, Regionalism
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
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<td>BPD</td>
<td>Belarusian Popular Front</td>
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<td>BSDP</td>
<td>Belarusian Social Democratic Party</td>
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<td>NH</td>
<td>National Hramada</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<td>MFARF</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Russian Federation</td>
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<td>MFACCP</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Chinese Communist Party (PRC)</td>
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<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China (China)</td>
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<td>BRI</td>
<td>Belt and Road Initiative</td>
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<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>US Agency International Development</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>USDoS</td>
<td>US Department of State</td>
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<td>ACE</td>
<td>US Assistance to Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia</td>
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Introduction

Lukashenko presented himself as a populist against the corrupt system of Belarus's new nation after the fall of the Soviet Union in the first democratic presidential race in 1994. Yet, ever since, he has established himself as the authoritarian ruler of Belarus with the nickname “The Last Dictator of Europe.” Over the past thirty years, the country has been under Lukashenko’s rule, where he has played a vital part in Central and Eastern European (CEE) Affairs. For a long time, his foreign policy focused on maintaining favorable relations with the West, the European Union, and the United States while increasing his dependency on Russian support to maintain his government. All of this changed in 2020 following the presidential election. The election that year was fraudulent, as shown by Lukashenko winning an overwhelming majority of the votes even though there were strong opposition candidates. Lukashenko followed his personal playbook for elections as 2020 was the same case for every election since 2001, with Lukashenko winning roughly 80% of the votes with claims of election irregularities since 2006. After the election, the Belarusian people demonstrated across the country in support of their democracy and called the election a sham. The Belarusian people were standing behind their opposition candidates and remembering the horrible political repression of the country that has occurred, with thousands of dissidents being sent to prison in years past or being exiled to nearby Lithuania that year and previous years. A key opposition candidate during the 2020 demonstrations was the “runner-up” of the election, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, whose story began with her husband Syarhey (Sergei), a Youtuber who spoke and originally ran against Lukashenko, being imprisoned after his announcement. Whereafter, Sviatlana ran in his place, winning a sizeable amount of votes in 2020, coming second behind Lukashenko, and is now the President In Exile for the Belarusian diaspora. Since that election,
ties between Belarus and the West began to break as the West saw it as fraudulent. Eventually, relations between Belarus and the West were severed by Belarusian support of Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, by allowing the Russian military to use Belarus’ border with Ukraine as a jumping-off point for the initial Kyiv campaign that failed.

In 2020, during the anti-Lukashenko demonstrations, I remember seeing news about what was happening and comparisons to the 2016 election. I had never before heard of Lukashenko or his infamous title of the “Last Dictator of Europe.” Since hearing that title, I have been fascinated by Belarus and the CEE region, with its unique culture, history, and geopolitics. This interest has only grown as the world has been more focused on the region since the invasion of Ukraine, another historical moment that I saw play out in the news and is still a topic in most of my classes at the University of San Francisco. Both events have occurred an ocean and a continent away, but thanks to the internet, I have seen what has happened on the ground and been lucky enough to study Belarus, Ukraine, and CEE.

With this paper, I have studied my own government’s influence and other Eurasian powers to understand better the intersection of foreign influence and democratization in Belarus. The methodology focuses on the analysis of policies, reports, and statements of four Eurasian powers, the U.S., EU, Russia, and China, over the past three years alongside interviews with experts in the region to answer the research question of “How do the regional powers of Eurasia influence the internal democratization struggle of Belarus?” The two-pronged analysis of secondary sources, government policies, reports, and statements provides critical data enhanced by interviews with experts specializing in Belarus or the Eurasian region. The research has been insightful in learning more about how these governments support or hinder democratization in Belarus, as the Eurasian powers are divided ideologically and strategically in their approaches.
The polar division is based on supporting the Belarusian democratic movement led by Sviatlana Tsikanovskaya or maintaining the Belarusian hybrid-authoritarian movement in power with Lukashenko. The idea of a bi-polar or multipolar world has been a hot topic in geopolitical discussions, separated by the democratic or rules-based West and the hybrid authoritarian East. That discussion is practiced in reality for Belarus, with the two poles applying their influence to the ideologically divided Belarus to maintain their interests, making the country a pivotal case study in geopolitics to examine the intersection of foreign influence and democratization within the contemporary geopolitics of the Eurasian powers.

My research takes a glimpse into the case study of Belarus to showcase the strategies of the Eurasian powers’ influence on the democratization struggle within the country. The first section is this paper’s literature review, which will outline research on democratization theory and previous research on Belarus within the scope of geopolitical regionalism. Next will be the methodology, outlining the analysis of government statements, reports, and interviews with experts on the region to understand the range of government programs’ assistance or hindrance toward Belarus's democratization. The following section will begin with the research following the four Eurasian Powers highlighted public statements providing the government's stance on Belarus and Lukashenko. Then, there will be a focus on the programs and policies of the West with the United States (U.S.) and a quick sidebar highlighting political prisoners in Belarus, then the EU’s monetary policies concerning Belarus. The final section will analyze the East with Russia and China’s government policies in Belarus. Each section highlights a different means and mechanism that has influenced the Belarusian struggle for democracy over the past three years to give a broad perspective that is beneficial to understanding the assistance and hindrances to the democratization of the four Eurasian powers.
Literature Review

Previous research into democratization and regional geopolitics is vast in its approaches and periods of research in Belarus. Democratization provides the theoretical framework alongside the analytical framework of regionalism in Eurasia, allowing an interdisciplinary scope of literature. The following section defines these two frameworks and highlights key literature that applies to the discussion on Belarus. Each framework’s literature provides perspective into the multi-layered efforts over the thirty years that are crucial in understanding the struggle for democracy in Belarus.

Democratization

Belarus identifies itself as a democracy where the people vote for their president and representatives through free and fair elections. However, Alexander Lukashenko has won each election cycle, with consistent mass mobilization by Belarusians against those results. Each election over the past two decades falls into this cycle with varying levels of mass mobilization. In the most recent election in 2020, Lukashenko claims to have won 80% of the vote while “A parallel and independent vote count using the mobile phone application Golos, with data from nearly 23 percent of polling stations, revealed that [his opponent Sviatlana] Tsikhanouskaya likely received 13 times more votes than were reported (Freedom House, 2022).” Freedom House, a non-profit that indexes countries based on political rights and civil liberties registered Belarus as not free in their 2022 Country Report with the country's 8 out of 100 score. With this in mind, the country of Belarus falls within the scope of previous literature on democratization, which for this paper will be defined as a government transition that allows for a democracy with free and competitive elections for representatives. Following that definition, democratization
creates a framework to examine aspects of government that restrict or assist a democracy. Previous literature within the democratization framework has created concepts that apply to Belarus and illustrate the power disparity that causes previous democratization attempts to fail.

To start, democratization examines the power disparity between the top-down (the government and elites) and the bottom-up (the citizens) to define the type of government in democratization theory. For Belarus, the critical concept from previous literature is sultanism, described as a government led by a single ruler (the sultan) who controls their government in totality as all governmental officials (the servants) serve them rather than the electors. (Linz and Stephan, 1996, p.52–54) Sultanism, defined in this way, shows the misuse of democracy by specific leaders who utilize a top-down approach to oppress their citizens. Any government transition by the citizens' vote is restricted, as the ruler and their officials are the main benefactors in maintaining an oppressive status quo.

The status quo, under sultanism, disregards its citizens and will impact any transitions of government during a revolution (flashpoint). The parties involved in any democratization revolution are divided into four groups with two sub-groups: sub-group one is authoritarian incumbents (top-down), who get separated into 1) hardliners and 2) soft liners; and sub-group two are the democrats (bottom-up), who get separated into 3) radicals and 4) moderates (Schedler, 2002, p.118). Sultanism creates unique power dilemmas for these players in a democratic transition as “...a relatively peaceful and domestically generated regime change via the classic “four-player game” of democratization theory (in which soft-liners from the regime and opposition work together to sideline the regime and opposition hard-liners) is virtually impossible.” (Linz and Stephan, 2013, p.26) To simplify, democratic transitions caused within a revolution are usually done by the authoritarian soft-liners from the top-down work with the sub-
group of democrats from the bottom-up, both democrats and moderates, to overthrow the
authoritarian hard-liners. Creating this oppressive regime through sultanism maintains the status
quo of the leader within the “four-player game,” as authoritarian softliners cannot undermine
their loyalty to the sultan. However, two separate actors may sideline this effect through their
influence towards transitioning the government or bringing about the four-player game. Those
two actors are the nation’s military and foreign nations supporting democracy (Linz and Stephan,
2013, p.26-27). The military may “…pushback… if officers come to believe that continued
support for the sultan will harm their core interests,” leading to a new authoritarian government.
(Linz and Stephan, 2013, p.26) Foreign governments supporting a democracy play a role in
creating “a fairly peaceful four-player game [which] might ensue and lead to a reasonably rapid
democratic transition (Linz and Stephan, 2013, p.27).” These two actors play a significant role in
transitioning a government under sultanism as it creates a possibility of democratization that,
without them, is virtually impossible. The concept of sultanism demonstrates a power disparity
between the top-down and bottom-up that, within democratization theory’s “four-player game,”
restricts any government transition without the two actors (domestic military and foreign
governments) who play a role in making democratization more feasible.

Lukashenko’s government falls into the sultanism category, affecting democratization's
practicality in Belarus, as previously discussed. Ronda provides the defining example that proves
that Belarus falls within sultanism as

Belarusian bureaucrats [(the servants)] during the December 2010 voting [taking] orders
from the president’s administration [(the sultan)] to forge the presidential elections were
dutifully passed down the executive vertical. The officials realized that their performance
in carrying out the orders would be closely monitored and severely judged, with terrible
personal consequences. So, out of fear of losing their posts, the 72 officials were willing
to take extreme measures to do what was expected by the leader. (2012, p. 71-72)
The framework of sultanism is provided through the example of the 2010 elections being forged
by top-down officials out of fear, which creates a “sultanistic style of relationships between the
Belarusian leader and his officials: they could be characterized as relationships between a
[sultan] and his servants (Rouda, 2012, p. 72).” Lukashenko’s relationship with the top-down
officials within sultanism restricts the possibility of government transition for Belarus due to
their intertwining and exclusion of the bottom-up. The bottom-up is also intertwined with this
government because “[Lukasheko] also had to take strict measures to disperse a peaceful
opposition protest rally on the election day and to arrest the most active opposition candidates so
as to escape fair competition with some of them (Rouda, 2013, p. 64).” Provided the punishment
for each member of the “four-player game” Lukashenko controls any ability to establish any
transition of governance away from the status quo.

However, democratic transitions take time as not even “...Poland’s Solidarity in 1981
succeeded in immediately creating a democracy. Yet each of these historic movements eroded
forever the legitimacy of the dictatorial regime that it challenged (Linz and Stephan, 2013,
p.29).” Poland today remembers the 80s for the consistent efforts in a democratic revolution that
continued to erode the communist authoritarian government until the nation became free in 1989.
Revolutionary attempts that erode a government's legitimacy become key in nations as two
actors, military and foreign nations, may influence the ability for a democratic transition through
their own means with less legitimacy. Although for Belarus, even though

various Western international and transnational institutions relentlessly lobbied by the

“bureaucracy” of the Belarusian democratic movement headed by Tsikhanouskaya...The
presence of a sultan makes negotiation so difficult. This helps to see even more clearly that the democratization of sultanism in Belarus is highly unlikely. (Kulakevich and Kubick, 2023, p. 833; 834)

Thus, sultanism creates a deadlock of failed revolutionary attempts after elections orchestrated by Lukashenko and his servants, which are unlikely to lead to a transition to democracy.

The historical importance becomes key as sultanism describes modern government but also connects to comparative analysis of other authoritarian regimes in history, the previously mentioned Polish democratic transition. Kulakevich and Kubick (2023) compare Lukashenko’s sultanism to the communist totalitarianism within Poland between 1956 and 1989 to showcase the successful stages of democratization within post-Soviet nations. These phases are emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline within the comparative framework of the two nations. Emergence applies to the general atmosphere of resistance that occurs within the nation against the oppressive system. It exists in both: “As in Poland, everyday resistance, mobilizing efforts, and protests against the Lukashenka regime were erupting with varying intensity for over two decades (Kulakevich and Kubick, 2023, p. 826).” Coalescence applies to the unification of the people in mass behavior, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Belarus, after the 2020 election, is in the bureaucratization stage due to the government in exile of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the other applicable institutions created by Belarusian expats with limited organizational capacities across the world (Kulakevich and Kubick, 2023, p. 831).” “While in Poland during the bureaucratization phase, the opposition to the regime was eventually forced underground,” which created a difference in application compared to prosecution of Belarussian under their sultanistic regime (Kulakevich and Kubick, 2023, p. 826). The uniqueness of the sultanism in Belarus contributes to the failure of regime change as Lukashenko
continually acts unprecedentedly, enhancing the regime's oppression that contributed to the almost Sisyphean task of creating a government transition. Thus, there are only a limited comparative analysis between Belarus and other post-Soviet nations to learn from within democratization theory. The literature proposes that any attempt will fail to change the status quo under the theoretical framework of sultanism without assistance from domestic military or foreign governments, which still have to address the oppressive top-down application of that framework and the historical uniqueness of Belarus. The struggle to attempt a democratic revolution is crucial as it leads to changes in the bottom-up populace that may lead to drastic changes for Belarusians.

**Bottom-Up Revolutionary Attempts**

Over the past thirty years, revolutionary attempts have produced a large portion of literature examining the revolutions against Lukashenko’s sultanism. The fundamental strategy in each attempt against Lukashenko lies in

‘democracy from below’, all these revolutionary activities shared a common strategy: targeting the removal of incumbency through mass protests occurring within a constitutional framework (non-violent), focusing on allegedly fraudulent electoral procedures and drawing on young and enthusiastic activists to form the core for mobilizing larger crowds by conventional and other means, including popular entertainment and modern technology (use of mobile phones, internet and media resources). (Korosteleva, 2011)
Hundreds of thousands of Belarussians over the past three decades have used this strategy against Lukashenko’s regime to democratize their nation. Scholars have examined their struggle from the 2006 ‘colour revolution’ to the recent 2020 attempt described as the new 1989.

In 2006, following the fraudulent election of Lukashenko and spurred by the ‘first generation’ of successful ‘colour revolutions’ like the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine, 10,000 young revolutionaries, many previously trained in regime subversion tactics in Ukraine and Serbia, held a public protest against the election (Korosteleva, 2011). For five days “…under physically and emotionally strenuous conditions, occasional clashes with riot police, and over 1000 arrests in the aftermath of the event,” the revolutionaries camped in Minsk protesting the fraudulent election (Korosteleva, 2011). Yet this ‘electoral revolution’ failed to have mass mobilization even though 70% of Belarussians conversed about the topic (Korosteleva, 2011). The problem with this attempt comes from the post-communist state's views of democratization. Two structural factors influence the people’s resolve to mobilize for an ‘electoral revolution;’”(1) the strength of a country's ties with the West and (2) the strength of the incumbent regime's autocratic party or state (Way, 2008).” These two factors were crucial in the 2006 revolutionary attempt as they explain why democratization failed at that time. Korosteleva (2011) describes how Lukashenko manufactured Belarus to separate itself from the West towards a pro-Lukashenko and anti-democratic perspective institutionally, culturally, ideology, and tactically that distanced the Western ties and strengthened his regime. The cultural pro-Lukashenko sentiment provides insight into these factors. Lukashenko created a nationalism base with his citizens pointing to the stable economy and public awareness focused on his triumphs, alongside a solely soviet patriotism that excludes any pre-Soviet identity (Korosteleva, 2011). Altogether, it created a cultural distinction focused on his or Soviet regime that endorses
authoritarianism, excluding any democratic or pro-Western sentiment the country has within its history. A crucial fact is that Belarus provided pro-Western and democratic sentiments and symbols in its recent past, such as its first flag calling back to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and saw Russia as the “aggressive brother (Portnov, 2012, pg.371).” With each of the previous factors, the government applied the two structural factors that “…developed an enviable immunity to democratic change, associated with the wave of ‘coloured revolutions’ in the neighborhood (Korosteleva, 2011).” Thus, within the scope of the aforementioned “four-player game,” the 2006 ‘election revolution’ spurred by the U.S., a foreign nation, that used “assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other organizations as well as from experts in non-violent protest… are credited with stimulating transitions…” in Belarus with both opposition parties failed to oppose Lukashenko’s regime (Way, 2008). While this attempt was made almost a decade ago, the literature provides a framework for analysis of structural factors at play in revolutionary attempts that have developed and changed over that time. Additionally, it provides perspective on the previously mentioned theoretical framework of the “four-player” game of intervention, and aid by foreign governments played a factor. However, it was still negated by these structural factors from a robust oppressive regime that distanced itself from the West.

In 2020, spurred by another fraudulent election, Belarussians took to the streets en masse, with the series of protests being described as “the new 1989,” referring to the successful democratization of other post-soviet eastern European countries, such as Poland, that year. Literature on this attempt focuses on various aspects of the bottom-up revolutions by the democratic actors with large scale public protests. This highlights a distinction to the ‘election revolution’ 2006 as the protests combat Way’s structural factors and the sentiments Lukashenko
manufactured for his country. The first structural factor focused on the lack of Westernism in Belarus. In studying the 2020 attempt by Onuch and Sasse studied a portion of Belarussians, finding that many were in support of increasing pro-EU policy rather than Russian integration, 44.6% compared to 36.6%, and were on the streets participating in the revolution, 68%, within their group 17,500 Belarussians (2022). That is a dramatic leap from the 10,000 protestors in 2006, with now a majority of Belarussians not only just speaking about the protests but participating in it. While the geopolitical views of the individuals may differentiate that participation, it provides a fundamental change in the people rising up even though they are under the same threat of attacks by police or jail time. A change that combats the cultural narratives manufactured by Lukashenko addresses Way’s second structural factor of a robust oppressive regime. Bekus would focus on the cultural movements within the protest movement in 2020 as they combatted Lukashenko’s narrative with call-backs to restricted history. The main rallying symbol of the revolution was and is the white and red line flag, sometimes with a knight riding a horse, which calls back to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and combatted the pro-Soviet patriotism by revealing the historic tragedies caused under the U.S.S.R, returning to the idea of the “aggressive brother of Russia” which is now against the emboldened and heroic imagery of Belarussian opposition (Bekus, 2021). The protest's focus on these factors undermines the previous cultural supremacy under Lukashenko through the people's emphasis on anti-Sovietism and more pro-Western symbols that exemplify Belarus’own cultural heritage distinct from either. These two distinctions shown by statistics and symbols in the 2020 protest undermine the structural factors brought up by Way. The effort for increased Western cooperation against Way’s first structural factor and a return to previous cultural symbolism that combats
Lukasehnko’s cultural control within his state against Way’s second structural factor by weakening Lukashenko’s cultural repression by his regime.

However, the movement of Belarus still has the hurdle of party fragmentation to address in the post-election period. A period after the mobilization of the protestors falls into the aforementioned bureaucratization period from Kulakevich and Kubick (2023) within the “four-party game.” The two bottom-up parties begin to get separated not based on hardliners and softliners but because of imprisonment or exile. Ash (2011) focuses on this division by pointing to two previous opposition leaders from election phases in 1999 and 2004. In 1999 the opposition leader, Pozniak, for the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) had to flee the country for safety which led to his party fragmenting due to their opinions on whether Pozniak should be able to lead the party out of the country, creating another opposition party, the Conservative Christian Party (Ash, 2011). The 2004 referendum showcases the political fragmentation from the dimension of foreign aid due to imprisonment. The leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP)/ National Hramada (NH) named “Statkevich was charged and sentenced to prison time for organizing the protests (Ash, 2011).” Before being imprisoned, the leader went up against his rival in the party, Kozulin, who wanted to lead the party due to the impending imprisonment of Statkevich (Ash, 2011). Statkevich, while imprisoned, would keep international aid going to his party while Kozulin would form a new BDP party named Hramada (Ash, 2011). The two parties would not reunite and instead went on to become separate presidential races in the 2008 election cycle (Ash, 2011). The fragmentation of dominant parties after an election leads to separate opposition parties and further separation of funding mechanisms like foreign aid which adds to the expanding list of individuals attempting to oppose Lukashenko but with varying visions that do not unify under one leader. While the literature on
this topic is limited it will be key. The fragmentation causes an internal opposition to struggle both in modern bureaucratization and within the “four-player game,” as the two opposing parties get fragmented each election cycle with different interpretations of democratization and bureaucracies in exile or internally by the new parties, weakening the democratic revolutionary players. The fragmentation still applies today even more so and provides another note of analysis that interacts with the theoretical frameworks.

Examining previous revolutionary attempts shows that Belarus has changed drastically in the attempts of revolution against the sultanism of Lukashenko. Previous literature showcases that the movement is improving but still has lessons to examine. While it has failed to succeed, it shows a continuing push for democratization that still exists today and has only grown in numbers and new tactics domestically, not to mention the continued efforts of foreign governments in assisting or hindering democratization.

**Regionalisms’ Influence in Belarus**

Previous literature has applied Democratization to focus on the fact that, when connected to regionalism, it proves that regional pressure for liberalization will inevitably lead to the creation of a democratic state, like many other post-Soviet nations in the 1980s-90. The concept of regionalism is described best by Ambrosio in 2012, where “..regionalism refers to the relationship between a state’s internal political process and the values and norms that dominate its geographic region (p. 409).” For Europe, especially EU member states, the norm of liberalization is the dominant concept. Liberalization, as defined by Linz and Stephan in 1996, is defined as political and social changes that allow freedom for individuals and opposition groups. (p. 3) As shown previously, liberalization is not occurring in Belarus. There is no allowance for
opposition unless it benefits Lukasheko in his sultanistic regime. This fact does not disprove the connection of regionalism to liberalization, as recent literature focuses on the hybrid authoritarian Eastern influence in Belarus, not the democratic West. Kuleszewicz (2018) studied the changes in electoral politics over the past 25 years to find that Lukashenko has made an extremely powerful presidential power with him as the indispensable ruler, which in turn, entices more “...intense relations with the countries of strong presidential power, such as Russia and Kazakhstan, with which Belarus has been creating the Eurasian Customs Union since 2010 (p. 625).” The Eastern regionalism focus becomes especially highlighted by the fact that Russia helps maintain Lukashenko’s influence in his country. As Rouda (2012) put it, “Vladimir Putin and Russian bureaucracy is afraid to lose Belarus and Aliaksandr Lukashenka’s removal from power (p. 68).” Ultimately, Russia tries to integrate Belarus more and more through its foreign policy and maintaining Lukashenko in power (Rouda, 2012, p.70). Additionally, this integration applies to the subjugated media of the two countries that have been intertwined. As Manaev (2022) described, the two media industries unify anti-western narratives and bolster support for the two authoritarian leaders after the election of 2020. The integration of the two states has been a mainstay, with the recent examples showcasing it. After the fall of the U.S.S.R., Lukashenko and Yeltsin, Russia’s first president, signed the Union State Treaty that re-emboldened the two countries' national identity connections and established an EU-like treaty for trade and transportation. The treaty is more symbolic and based on rhetoric. However, Ambrosio showcases the reason regionalism for Belarus is the dominant authoritarian of Eurasia rather than Western liberalization as the treaty’s
prospects for reintegration [with Russia] serve to insulate the Lukashenka regime from the democratic trends in Europe by providing Belarus with both an alternative to Western integration and the means to resist Western pressure (2012, p.414) ‘

Regionalism applies to a democratization study of Belarus as it focuses on the fact that if Lukashenko is out of the picture, a key strategy previously mentioned, it will likely require a change in Russia and Eurasia. The integration of Belarus with other regional hybrid authoritarian regimes means that without large-scale democratization or liberalization efforts at opportunities for change, sultanism will remain a mainstay in Belarus even without Lukashenko.

**War in Ukraine**

For more than the past 500 days, at the time of writing, Russia has been at war with Ukraine, where Lukashenko holds a unique position in the war. Before the 2022 invasion, he touted himself as “the most reliable partner” of Ukraine (Mudrov, 2022). Only for him to drastically change his tune by “choos[ing] to fully ally with Russia, allowing the free passage of the Russian Army through the territory of Belarus and the use of necessary infrastructure by Russian forces (Mudrov, 2022).” This change cannot be understated as it shows a critical shift in Belarus’ foreign policy as he had minor integration with the West and no integration with the West due to increased sanctions. The drastic change highlights the previous point of the integral intertwining of Russia and Belarus, as Lukashenko’s foreign policy can only go East. Further highlighted by the fact that Lukashenko's

Accepting Russian nuclear weapons further limits Belarusian foreign policy, as the Lukashenka regime becomes tied even more firmly into Russian decision-making.
[where] Belarus' sovereignty is being seriously undermined, with Russian security forces stationed to guard the nuclear weapons indefinitely. (Oxford Analytica, 2023)

The war in Ukraine highlights the worsening circumstances in Belarus for democratization efforts as there little to no opportunity for integration with the liberal West. This is a crucial change in the upcoming 2025 election and the potential democratization attempts in the future.

Way’s first structural point concerns the need for a domestic Belarusian connection to the West, which is almost completely gone. The “four-player game” that can be spurred by foreign influence against Lukashenko’s sultanism now will have difficulty integrating within Belarus’ borders.

Current literature focuses on a Belarus that looks distinctly different from the Belarus of today. The revolutionary movement is no longer just non-violent with a functional bureaucratization but also a violent revolutionary wing of the Kastus Regiment fighting in Ukraine. While under Putin’s thumb for the past two decades, Belarus has become increasingly intertwined with Russia since the fraudulent election of 2020. The economic dependency on Russia and other Eurasian hybrid-authoritarian regimes as the West is no longer in the picture for most goods or any foreign cooperation, Russian nukes, and the Chinese industrial parks currently housed within Belarus today. Each of these recent factors significantly changes the geopolitical factors at play within Belarus that will affect any democratization movement and the policies of Western aid in the next election. I will address these new factors within the aforementioned frameworks of democratization theory and geopolitics of the Eurasian region to add to the academic literature on Belarus.
Methodology

To examine the question, “How do the regional powers of Eurasia influence the internal democratization struggle of Belarus?” it is vital to define and operationalize the concepts that will be analyzed. For this paper, democracy will be defined as: a form of government where citizens vote in free and competitive elections for their representatives. The operationalization of this data shall be done by examining the implementation of democracy as a form of government through elections and their results, while also examining the shortcomings of that implementation by post-election reactions and demonstrations by the citizens within a democratic government. This definition of democracy is crucial as it is the groundwork for the question as Belarus self-identifies as a ‘democracy,’ thus providing the fundamentals of the internal power struggle within the country. Regional powers shall follow Ambrosio’s (2012) definition of governments whose policies dominate the region by contributing to internal political processes, values, and norms. Within the parameters of this paper, the definition provides context for focusing on the regional powers of Eurasia. Those being the democratic West made up of the U.S. and European Union (EU); for the purpose of brevity, this paper will majorly focus on Europe as a whole through the EU but will potentially point to outliers within the CEE/ post-soviet region, and the hybrid-authoritarian East made up of Russia and China. These four regional powers hold immense power in the internal struggle of Belarus as they have conflicting interests in support of a more democratic or maintaining the hybrid authoritarianism currently found in Belarus. To properly examine regionalism, this paper will examine the diplomatic ties and foreign policy strategies taken by those powers to Belarus to showcase the differing perspectives and conflicting collaborations that occur in or on the topic of Belarus. Influence is a key dimension to study within this paper that is intertwined with democracy and
regional powers. Influence for this paper will be defined as the power to shape policy or affect the populous’ behavior/ actions. I focus this definition on the influence of democracy in Belarus by the regional powers in both the nation and citizens of Belarus. Influence will be operationalized by focusing on the internal policies and views of the citizens of Belarus that have changed that support or hinder liberalization due to the actions of the regional powers. Liberalization will be the concept that showcases the scale of democracy being influenced by Belarus. Liberalization is defined as government policies that lead to a more democratic nation, which can be shown through the rights or lack of rights of opposition parties, media control, and the rights of political prisoners.

To provide data for these concepts, this paper shall are based on two strategies of methodology: interviews and publicly available statements by the regional powers and reports created by regional powers, think tanks, and news sources. These two strategies will focus on the past three years of politics in Belarus in the hopes of answering how Eurasian regional powers influence the democratization of Belarus. I was lucky enough to speak to three experts on the topic of Belarus; three western academics and one working at an American non-governmental organizations. These experts, give a good outside-in perspective of Belarus to note the differing strategies of Eurasia regional powers and note these strategies' general influence in the country. They discussed an out of country perspective on the situation in Belarus to see how influential the Eurasian regional powers' strategies are to the democratization struggle in the country. The sampling for both categories was done through snowballing via connections and reaching out for potential interviews via email. Each interviewee was asked whether they want their identity to be anonymous or shared for this paper, which one did. Publicly available statements and reports will be supplemental sources that will add to the interviews and showcase the key chapters over
the past three years. I analyze statements by the regional powers to showcase their strategies that support or oppose Lukashenko. These reports and statements were selected based on their significance in representing strategies during key events over the past three years. The data came from the governments themselves, including leaked documents or analysis from recognized newspapers, that provide context for strategies of supporting or oppressing the democratization in Belarus. The numerous reports add to the statements and interviews provided to highlight the differing strategies used by Eurasian regional powers and their significance on the ground in Belarus in influencing the policies or citizens. Sampling was done with the acknowledgement that I was be constricted based on my language knowledge and the capability of translating documents through digital tools. Still, I examined both sides of the regional powers with sources from their nations that highlight their contrasting perspectives, policies, and strategies that influence the liberalization of Belarus.

My own positionality on this topic is as a foreign observer of the situation in Belarus. I am an American citizen with no familiar relation to Belarus and have not traveled to Belarus before. I have lived in democratic countries my entire life, meaning I have no personal frame of reference for living in a hybrid authoritarian country like Belarus. My citizenship has also affect a power relation with some interviewees, especially those from Belarus, as the U.S. may aid groups interacting with interviewees. My bias supports democratic movements that empower people to be represented through free and fair elections. This bias will appear in this paper, but I will note the contrasting viewpoints fairly. As an American who supports democracy, I am interested in this topic as Belarus is one of a few states in Europe that is not democratic. I am also interested in how my government and other regional powers in Eurasia support or hinder democratic movements.
Findings

Why are these four Eurasian powers interested in Belarus?

First, it is vital to understand why the four Eurasian powers, the U.S., EU, Russia, and China, have positions in Belarus. The fundamental positioning of these regional powers will enable a better examination of their distinct means and mechanisms used over the past three years to implement their influence in Belarus. To understand these unique positions, this paper shall focus on the regional powers’ statements on Belarus within the past three years to see their main public points of contention regarding their support of the country or people while also examining the regional geopolitics at the center of the power’s interest in Belarus from their Eurasian foreign policies.

The U.S. and the EU will be put together as their alliance creates transatlantic solidarity in their statement and policies towards Belarus that may vary in ideology or focus but still emphasize the same point towards a rules-based world order that maintains democracies across the globe. The EU will be used as a broad term to recognize foreign policy and interests of its European member states. To emphasize the U.S., the most recent statement on Belarus given by the Department of State was by department spokesperson Mattew Miller on September 7th, 2023, which said that “The United States remains in close consultation with our European allies and the Belarusian democratic forces led by Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya about ways to help Belarusians abroad who are affected by this punitive decree.” The statement clearly defines the cooperation between the U.S. and the EU that exists to this day. It showcases the efforts to enhance the democratically elected government in exile of Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, as Lukashenko recently declined to give passports to Belarusians overseas, which has affected
hundreds of thousands of Belarusians within the diaspora that have stood against Lukashenko and escaped his repressive regime. In reaction to the same event, five days later, Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, during a Plenary Session, brought up that the “The European Union will also continue to keep the situation high on the global agenda in the international fora, and to promote efforts aimed at ensuring accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations (2023).” These two quotes showcase the Western public standpoint that emphasizes human rights and solidarity for Belarus within their affairs. It also showcases their divide as the US is a dominant player in Eurasia but is geographically removed, keeping the power of solidarity in the EU within the US’s guidelines. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry brushed off these statements by emphasizing that “Belarusians, in principle, do just fine without their valuable advice on how to live and build their independent state… [The US and EU] strange logic is probably intended for banana republics.” (Glaz, 2023) Re-introducing a soviet narrative that harkens back to the Cold War to emphasize his nation’s sovereignty while avoiding the implications of the policy on his citizens abroad. The dialogue and differences between the US and EU stem from their different geopolitical stances yet are heard by Lukashenko’s government to showcase today's polarization that, while not the same as the Cold War, rhymes in its narratives.

To understand the reasoning behind these efforts to the international rules-based world order for human rights and democracies, it is essential to remember the Cold War within the modern context of CEE politics. For the past three decades, NATO has enlarged to include many CEE nations, including former Warsaw Pact members like Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, within the two post-Cold War waves of 1999 and 2002 (NATO, 2023). These countries' accession into NATO was for two main reasons known to the public: the new
democratic countries wished to be included, and NATO saw this as an advantage to secure stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic region (NATO, 2023). During the 20th century, the CEE region stood as a buffer between Russia and the West. Yet, at the start of the 21st century, it acted as the inverse, keeping Russia away from the enlarging NATO. This inversion created a security guarantee for CEE nations that Russia will not invade them as the Soviet Union did in the event of a democratic revolution, for example, in 1956 Hungary or the Prague Spring, that were engraved in the generations that led the freed countries and in the minds of western leaders interested in keeping safe borders as the buffer zone increased. NATO is a dominant player in maintaining security against Russia for the West. It has always included more democratic nations to increase the security guarantees of the West against a threatening Russia. While lacking due to its closeness with Russia, Belarus has always been a thought in the back of Western minds and Belarusian democratic activists to increase its security by drawing new polar lines that push Russia back even further. Beyond the polarity, the US and EU have stood for peace within the Eurasian region as OSCE members that, during the conflicts after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the '90s, stood to “manage crises and re-establish peace… [and] support the process of democratic transition. (OSCE Factbook, n.d)” While democracy does not necessarily mean support for the West or increased security, it coincides with support for multilateralism to solve problems and maintain regional security. Establishing a principle of expanding democratic nations in the context of EU and US foreign policy, especially in Eurasia. The principle has been fundamental to the US and EU as they work within the institutions they helped create during the Cold War that still exist in today's polarized world.

On the opposite side of the polarity of the West are the hybrid-authoritarian East of Russia and China. These two nations will not be clumped together as their reasons for supporting
Belarus differ, and the two nations collaborate differently than the EU and US, as shown in their public statements.

For Russia, the statements show that Belarus acts as a diplomatic sword to attack the West for similar reasons the U.S. or the EU has attacked it, at least in publications that are in English. A recent statement given by the Russian government highlights this particularly well as Belarus diplomatically attacked the hypocrisy of the US and the EU in their domestic policy that the two nations call out Belarus on. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Russian Federation (MFARF) via a statement of

The aim of both studies (one from Belarus and the other from the UN) is not to label or make unsubstantiated accusations against the countries in question, but to analyse impartially the human rights situation in those states that claim to be flagships in the development of democracy and the rule of law. (MFARF, 2023)

Now, let me be clear: every state is allowed to highlight the problems of the West as they are numerous. The main problem with the report given explicitly by the foreign Ministry of Belarus, highlighted by the previous MFARF statement, is that the positionality highlights a spin narrative. A spin narrative meant to guide the reader to problems with the West to avoid issues within its own country, in this case, Russia and Belarus, by highlighting hypocrisy while not naming their own. Additionally, Russia and Belarus are common nations in the modern day with numerous cooperative treaties and institutions: the Union State, the CSTO, the EAEU, the CIS, and the SCO. The MFARF highlighted this commonality up on Belarusian Independence Day 2023, highlighting the second world war against nazism, that

Over the years, we have had many chances to see that together we can overcome all challenges. Our strength was tested in August 2020 and in June of this year. Each time,
solidarity, fraternal unity the mutual support of our peoples, and our presidents’ firmness helped us overcome challenges that came our way. I am confident that we will overcome any other challenges that may arise in our common future. We have developed so many joint projects and programs as part of the Union State that our future is now common. (MFARF, 2023)

Russia’s public statements from the MFARF highlight the cooperation between Belarus and Russia both in global diplomacy and regional collaboration. While it is evident from previous literature and interviews that Moscow is the puppet master of Minsk, these statements emphasize the why. Russia needs a more neutral ally to provide diplomatic coverage within institutions like the United Nations (UN). Additionally, the Cold War ideals are still present in Russia to maintain a buffer against the West as Belarus is central to Russia’s security sector, with a Red Line stance in maintaining a pro-Russian foothold in the country (Ambrosio, Personal Communication, 2023). The Russian focus returns to a unity that has continued since the USSR, even after the “democratization” of both states.

China is unique when compared to all previous Eurasian regional powers. It is similar to the United States in distance, yet in influence; it is not a significant player but a sub-player with strategic economic importance to maintain Lukashenko’s power for their hopes in the region. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC) provided a statement about their cooperation with Belarus on its independence day in 2023 that provided insight that

…under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, the political mutual trust between China and Belarus has been continuously consolidated, Belt and Road cooperation has been steadily advancing, and bilateral relations are at their best in history…Belarus is ready to work with China to take the establishment of an all-weather
comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries as an opportunity to deepen bilateral cooperation in various fields and make Belarus-China relations more beneficial to the two peoples. (PRC, 2023)

To expand on this quote, it is crucial to understand that within the focus of Belarus and China the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) train route alongside industrial projects have been the main focus. Additionally, it is important to note the fact that Lukashenko has been a supporter of the BRI since its inception as Lukashenko came to China in May 2017 to attend the first "Belt and Road" International Cooperation Summit Forum (MFACCP, 2023). That fact only showcases the bond between the two countries as Lukashenko utilizes Chinese soft power institutions to bolster infrastructure projects within his borders. To highlight other Chinese-Belarus projects the Chinese government brought up

On 21 October, the China-Belarus Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation held its 14th meeting in Beijing. The project of three cement production lines and the phase 1 of the railway electrification project undertaken by Chinese companies in Belarus were successfully completed. Projects such as the China-Belarus Industrial Park and "Beijing Hotel" progressed smoothly. (PRC, n.d)

These two statements provide insight into the collaboration of China in Belarus as another avenue of labor and transportation for China as it hopes to expand its workforce and global influence. Within the CEE region, China has decreased its efforts to create the infrastructure that has established its soft power since COVID-19, yet it still exists and is being made. China hopes to utilize the Port of Piraeus, where it owns a major stake, in Greece, to provide goods up through Montenegro to Serbia through its BRI land routes and through EU members with relations with China, especially Poland and Hungary, to disperse Chinese goods (Maggs, 2022).
Belarus fits into this CEE strategy as a land route to get goods into Belarus that will go onto railways into Poland for a similar disbursement to the Balkans for the BRI. The Chinese statements also look into the job sector of Belarus in creating the “Beijing Hotel” and its nearby attractions for tourists in Minsk. The hotel also creates a foothold for Chinese cultural power by creating this area uniquely to showcase Chinese culture. Chinese soft power has been growing in Belarus over the past couple of years to make the Chinese government an ally to Lukashenko but not a major player like Russia.

A key differentiating factor in the statements of the four regional powers highlights their polar divide, with the U.S. and EU on one side compared to Russia and China. The US and EU statements focused on their support for democratic forces against human rights abuses that have been occurring in the country since 2020 and support Sviatlana Tsikanouskaya. By contrast, Russia and China have focused on their continued connection and integration with Belarus without addressing the numerous human rights abuses perpetrated by Lukashenko. The divide between these two sides of the four Eurasian powers will become more evident by focusing on the means and mechanisms of their foreign policies as they showcase the application of these statements.

**Pro Sviatlana Tsikanovskaya**

U.S. ‘The major player an ocean away’

The United States has been a fundamental player in CEE for the past thirty years. It has helped post-Soviet countries establish their democracies and capitalist economies through shock therapy reforms that have had some successes. The Baltics are a modern marvel within their technological market, playing a role on the global stage, and most CEE post-Soviet countries
rank favorably for Freedomhouse’s democracy scores from 56 to 80, with the outlier of Hungary at 43 (Freedomhouse, 2022). While the U.S. is not the sole reason for these countries existing in this way, it has been a beneficial partner in corresponding these growths from communism to capitalism. Within the same space, Belarus stands as the significant outlier that has a score of 2, marking it as a consolidated authoritarian regime. Yet, it has also been separate from the U.S. foreign policy, outside of a few cases when Lukashenko deems collaboration beneficial. Over the past three years, the U.S. and Belarus have cut ties due to Lukashenko’s undemocratic regime and the fact that Belarus kicked out U.S. diplomats in 2021 due to their support for democracy in the country, which was contrary to the Lukashenko regime (USAID, 2021). To maintain a democratic foothold in Belarus, the U.S. has changed tactics while maintaining economic sanctions on Belarusian individuals and companies that benefit Lukashenko’s regime as they commit human rights abuses.

For the U.S., the focus is on second track diplomacy, or government interaction with foreign citizens to embolden their positions through training and cooperative events. Before 2021, the U.S. commitment to assisting democracy in Belarus with second track diplomacy, or to use USAID terminology “to stand by the Belarusian civil society,” the U.S. assists Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) through programs like grants, networking events, and training and consultation (USAID.gov, 2021). These programs began back in 2014 and lasted till 2021 and achieved notable success. A USAID report highlighted these facts as the staff was exiting.

From 2014-2017, USAID supported grassroots and experienced CSOs in combining programmatic activities with strategic development. CSOs, with small grants support, organized 191 public events to serve their constituencies for 5,866 participants, in
addition to 138 internal events to strengthen their organizational capacity with the participation of 2,539 people.

With USAID support CSOs introduced 47 new services for the population.

From 2014-2017, representatives of 180 CSOs were trained in different competencies. CSOs completed over 11,000 hours of training and received over 2,500 hours of individual consultations. (USAID.gov, 2021)

Not only those key stats, the US “trained 100 leaders across the country who mobilized 10,000 residents to address local issues leading to positive changes (USAID.gov, 2021).” These stats highlight the fundamental mechanism of on-the-ground support for democratic ideals in Belarus done by the U.S. staff/policy in the country. To add to these points, the funding for the U.S. government's in-country policy in Belarus was $9.7 million in the Fiscal Year of 2020, with $6.3 million focused on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (ACE, 2021). In 2020, these programs trained an unknown amount of young people and leaders to demonstrate against Lukashenko’s regime, but it is key to note that the key opposition Presidential candidates, like Tsianovskaya, were separate from these programs. All of that is to say that while there may be a ripple effect in the U.S. benefiting the 2020 demonstrations. However, that ripple effect is not the U.S. forcing citizens to demonstrate. Rather, it was by the second track diplomacy empowering the people to demonstrate their own ideals of self-determination against Lukashenko’s regime.

To put this into perspective of democratization theory these programs assist the “bottom-up” democratic players of the “four player game” by assisting their efforts against Lukashenko’s sultanist regime.

Over the past two years, the U.S. has changed how it supports democracy in Belarus as grassroots programs that benefited the struggle for democracy have changed from being in-
country, within the borders of Belarus pre-2021, to being out of the country, benefiting the Belarusian diaspora that is mostly centralized in Lithuania, the northern border country of Belarus, since 2021. While there have been no reports on the scope of out-of-country programs over the past two years, likely, the U.S. has only kept up their programs in Lithuania. The democratic-leaning Belarusian Diaspora has been consolidated under Sviatlana Tsikanovskaya following their exile in 2020 with its distinct democratic government in exile. The consolidation of representation allows for easier access for the U.S. government and institutions that assist in democratization. These efforts have not decreased even if their reports have been less transparent over the two years. To gain insight into these out-of-country programs, I was lucky enough to interview an expert from the International Republican Institute, a nonpartisan institute that works within democratization programs for Belarusians, who, for this paper, will go under the pseudonym Nancy. During the interview, Nancy highlighted that the U.S. gives aid to their institution to assist in the democratization of Belarus through similar programs to USAID that assist Belarusian organizations' capabilities while also countering Russian influence in the country (Nancy, Personal Communication, 2023). For IRI and similar non-partisan institutions, it is business as usual, no matter the political situation at home in D.C., yet for both an official U.S. Ambassador and additional news on Belarus, that would be beneficial assistance to organizations like IRI (Nancy, Personal Communication, 2023). The politics of domestic America have agreed on their bipartisan stance in aiding Belarus and its democratic movement, especially over the past two years. Meaning that over the past three years the U.S. continues to work with assisting the democratization struggle of the Belarusian diaspora through similar tactics of empowering and assisting.

Political Repression Side-Bar
The IRI and similar organization have to work within the boundaries of the fear factor of the Belarusian government’s targeting, to keep their people and their partners safe (Nancy, Personal Communications, 2023). This is why it is crucial to speak in broad terms about the involvement of these groups, and the same is likely true for the U.S. government officials or partners in Lithuania and the greater Belarusian diaspora. Especially with crackdowns over the past two years, any dissident involvement that the Lukashenko’s government catches will be met with horrible jail time for the person or their families. The punishment by Lukashenko’s regime has been harsh, with jail time and conditions as the DoS Country Report on Human Rights in Belarus in 2022 highlighted the case of human rights activists shown in the table below.

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<td>Vsayna Leaders: Ales Byalyatski (A 2022 Nobel Prize Winner), Valiantsin Stephanovich, and Uladzimir Labkovich</td>
<td>July 2021</td>
<td>tax evasion (later dropped), smuggling in foreign currency, financing protests</td>
<td>Sent to a Penal Colony; Each to different ones across Belarus; Penal Colony numbers 9, 12, and 15</td>
<td>Ongoing (12 year Sentencing) Ongoing (10 Year sentence) Ongoing (7 Year Sentence)</td>
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<td>13 activists of the For Freedom NGO</td>
<td>November 2021</td>
<td>Collaborates with the NGO</td>
<td>Forced to sign a document stating that they would not “engage in high treason.”</td>
<td>Released</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Constanta activist Nasta Loika (Woman Human Rights Defender of the Year)</td>
<td>September 2021</td>
<td>1. Being an activist in a CSO 2. Minor Hooliganism 3. Spying</td>
<td>“Loika said police bludgeoned her with a stun gun, forced her to spend eight hours at the station’s yard without warm clothes on, and denied her food, hygiene products, and medical assistance.” Her first lawyer in her Trial, a fellow Activist was also imprisoned and then her second was disbarred</td>
<td>Sep. 6th-Oct 6th Oct 28th- November December for the next seven years</td>
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These three stories have been from NGOs and pro-human rights/democratization groups in the country for the past two years showcase the brutal oppression that occurs in the show trials for even interacting or advocating for their own self-determination. These three are alongside hundreds of their anti-Lukashenko counterparts in spirit by being spread across penal colonies but cannot forget the hundreds of political dissidents who have been killed for their views. Such was the case for

Dzmitry Uskhopau was brought to the hospital by authorities in a life-threatening state after his 11 p.m. arrest at a bus stop earlier that night. By 1:20 a.m. on January 1, Uskhopau was certified dead. Family members reported that when they saw his body, his clothes were visibly torn, he was drenched in water, had a wound on his forehead, and his wrists were blue. The family believed the injuries were inflicted by authorities during his detention and were the cause of his death. (USDoS, 2022)

These stories are but a glimpse inside the reality of the terrifying fear factor that exists in the heart of every Belarusian as each of these stories has a website dedicated to their stories. It is also key to be reminded of the fact that Sviatlana Tsikanovskaya’s husband was imprisoned because of his YouTube channel. Lukashenko and his regime have continued this practice since the 2000s and any dissident, supported by any country, remembers these stories, just as a Western audience trying to support them should. These are the casualties of democratization, one that began by Belarusians for Belarusians and is supported, not controlled, by the U.S. or the EU.
EU ‘Money, Money, Money’

In this section, the EU will be a beacon to shine a light on how the West holds Belarus accountable within economic means. The U.S. and EU, in this regard, have solidarity sanctions {that, at the time of writing, have no distinct outliers in the people or organizations}. They work in tandem with each other to urge a change by the Belarusian Elite that assists economically to democratize the country. Returning to the concept of the “four-player game” these policies try to cause a change by the authoritarian softliners of the Belarusian elite. The economic foreign policy of the EU works in two ways: the carrot (providing benefits) and the stick (attacking the economy) to the financials of Belarus.

The EU remains idealistically hopeful for change in Belarus. The Carrot proposes to give three billion euros to aid Belarus if they have free and fair elections that will assist the country. The plan of the multi-branch three billion Euro aid is stated by EU President Ursula von der Lin as “When – and we believe it is a case of when, not if – Belarus starts its peaceful democratic transition, the EU will be there to accompany it. (ec.europa.eu, 2021)” that is still on the table today. The package acts as a proposed reformation of the economy of Belarus that is more Western via the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation criteria to establish a free and fair election system alongside structural reform in Belarus (ec.europa.eu, 2021). This plan is a unique policy proposed by the EU to create a new neighbor for the country.

While the carrot in this plan is unlikely to be taken by Belarus, the option for this will be key when a revolution occurs, which may come sooner or later depending on the resolution of the War in Ukraine. It is also key to showcase that there is an element of shock therapy in these reforms that may not be as drastic as it was in the 90s, it is still crucial to note that reforms of any type have unintended consequences that will likely need to be addressed in the future should it be
applied. There are economic and fiscal problems attached to the application of large-scale loans amounting to 1.5 billion Euros which will likely create a substantial amount of debt on a new democratic nation. A problem is present in the post-Soviet space, noting Ukraine in dealing with Western loans that create a debt cycle almost every five years. In any case, the carrot should be further discussed compared to case studies in the post soviet space’s shock therapy or debt recycling.

If the idealism of the EU does not have a noticeable impact the Belarusians, I have not found a public response from the Belarusian leaders since 2021 on the carrot proposal. Moving on to The Stick, which is the economic sanctions that attack members of the Belarusian elite, including Lukashenko himself. In two separate rounds from the 2020 election and 2022, Russian troops utilized Belarus as a jumping point to invade Ukraine, which focused on economic pressure. The First round in 2020 focused on 223 Individuals and 37 different entities, including President Aleksandr Lukashenko, Viktor Lukashenko (National Security Advisor and son of President Lukashenko), propaganda outlets, senior officials of the ministry of the interior and its troops, the Chair of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus, the Prosecutor General, the Chairman of the national state television and radio company (consolium.europa.eu, 2023)

In the second round of sanctions, the EU expanded on the previous round, including individual and economic sanctions targeting 22 people [on top of the previous 223], restrictions on trade, a SWIFT ban for five Belarusian banks, a prohibition on transactions with the Central Bank of Belarus, limits on the financial inflows from Belarus to the EU, a prohibition on the provision of euro-denominated banknotes to Belarus (consolium.europa.eu, 2023)
These two rounds of sanctions have completely exiled Belarus from the Western-dominated financial market by attacking the purses of 245 Belarusian elite and by cutting them off from the market entirely after the SWIFT ban. The sanctions have only emboldened Belarus’s brass in its anti-western sentiment as their ‘Black Knight’ from the Pro Hybrid-Authoritarian states have been able to negate the full weight of these impactful sanctions in creating a democratic change. They still highlight solidarity and an economic effort to give a choice to Belarus should the country lose its ‘Black Knight’ of Putin.

**Pro Lukashenko**

*Russia ‘The Union State’*

To start, it is vital to understand that Russia exists as the ‘Black Knight’ for Belarus. The term ‘Black Knight’ was used by Professor Kulakevich and Augsburger in their paper *Contested elections, protest, and regime stability: Comparing Belarus and Bolivia*. The term in this paper is utilized within the context of Belarus to describe Russia; as an authoritarian external actor that acts as a guardian of Lukashenko’s autocracy due to economic and cultural dependency, enabling Lukashenko’s regime to survive against Western pressures that were mentioned in the previous section. This section focuses on how Russia has expanded its black knight status in Belarus over the past three years as Lukashenko’s ties with the West have been dwindling while highlighting the ‘black knight’ connection via the Union State Treaty.

The starting point for this discussion will be the Union State Treat between Belarus and Russia, as it was one of the first treaties after the fall of the USSR that emphasized the ‘black knight’ paradigm. The Union State Treaty was first signed in 1999 between Yeltsin and Lukashenko as they were “Guided by the will of the peoples of Russia and Byelorussia
[Belarus] to unify and relying on the commonality of their historical fate, and concerned for the vital interests of their citizens” (treaties.un.org, n.d, pg.109) established the Union State Treaty between the two countries. A treaty that has been the backbone of Russian-Belarus relations that, as the Belarussian nation press Belta highlights after the full-invasion of Ukraine 2022, that

In general, the economies of Belarus and Russia are strong precisely by interaction,... In this format, it is not only easier to resist sanctions, but also to enter the markets of third countries. (belta.by, 2022)
The treaty acts both as a powerful kin-state connection and as an economic entrenchment between the two states, yet it is asymmetric as Russia holds all the cards.

Lukashenko often danced around this entrenchment by meeting Western leaders to showcase his independence, contrary to Putin. On February 7th, 2020, Secretary Mike Pompeo met with his Belarusian counterpart, Vladimir Makei, in 2020 to discuss diversifying the Belarusian oil market as Lukashenko presumably disagreed with his deal with Russia. In a joint press briefing between the two, Pompeo stated

[Pompeo first quoting Lukashenko]“Belarusians have your own country, that you’re sovereign and independent and that you can’t be part of some other country and can’t betray you or dissolve Belarus,”...The United States wants to help Belarus build its own sovereign country. Our energy producers stand ready to deliver 100 percent of the oil you need at competitive prices. We’re the biggest energy producer in the world, and all you have to do is call us. (Pompeo, by.embassy.gov, 2020)
The statement by the U.S. showcases a fundamental strategy by Lukashenko to diversify his foreign policy against Russia as Makei would state at the same briefing, “...we would welcome the more active role of the United States here in Belarus... (Makei, by.embassy.gov, 2020).” The
West was a fundamental player in ensuring that Lukashenko got what he needed from Russia by acting as a counter-balance to the asymmetric entrenchment. Nevertheless, as shown in the U.S. section, the U.S. that same year would establish an active role in Belarus. After the 2020 election and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the entrenchment between Belarus and Russia has only expanded as the West applies Sanctions and no longer buys Belarusian goods. The entrenchment, focusing back on the Union State Treaty, has only increased in application and has had experts worried about future applications.

Before framing the Union State Treaty as an impending boogeyman, it is vital to discuss what it has done in the past three years with the increasing entrenchment. This paper shall examine statements from the Permanent Committee of the Union State that highlight how it fills out its mission of “…creat[ing] a politically and economically integrated community in order to unite the material and intellectual potential of the two states (посткомсг.рф, n.d)” over the past year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>General Theme</th>
<th>Key Integration</th>
<th>Influence on Belarus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/30/2023</td>
<td>Security Statement made by politician</td>
<td>38% raise in Union State Funding to “Improving the military infrastructure of the regional grouping of troops and forces” located on the territory of Belarus. And “Modernization of the logistics infrastructure” of the same military group. As well as the program that has already begun to be implemented to ensure a different, fundamentally more successful level of border security.”</td>
<td>“By opposing the unjust unipolar world, which the national leaders of Belarus and Russia oppose, millions of people who do not agree with what is being imposed on them, how to live, how to act.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/05/2023</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>“Grodno region. – We have two languages on equal terms – Russian and Belarusian. Look how many people are carriers of Russian culture and how widespread the</td>
<td>“Our land, like a magnet, attracts tourists who want to get to know the unique region. Today, the Grodno region, like our entire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Belarusian language is. The two languages exist side by side without conflict or discrimination.”  

**10/18/2023**  
**Security A statement made by Generals**  
“the parties exchanged views and made decisions on important issues of joint defense policy, expanding military cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries for the benefit of ensuring the military security of the Union State”  

Unknown as the Statement did not explain what was discussed nor the themes of the conversation of cooperation

It is important to note that the three statements from the Permanent Committee of the Union State examined were taken over the past month and are publicly available. They were skewed to focus on diplomatic messaging for a Russian reading audience of Belarus and Russia, or like me, the Google translating audience, and focused on the impacts on the citizens of both states. They still showcase a primary function of Russian relations that is key to understanding democratization. The Union State’s public image is spread across the web/Telegram to a Russian-speaking audience that notices the propaganda of Russia-Belarusian integration. An integration within these statements opposes the West. The first statement was given by the Union State Secretary Dmitri Menzetsev, in which he also highlights the point that “The words of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin that the West and the political leaders of the United States are demonstrating a colonial approach, which is expressed in the requirement to maintain an order based on rules…(посткомсрг.рф, 2023)” rules that break the Union States sovereignty. The ideas of these statements are the ideas of the ruling class both in Russia and Belarus as they integrate their countries more and more through their shared language, culture, and security situation against the West. Highlighted by the second statement, the official is focusing on the Grodno region, west of Minsk on the border of Lithuania and Belarus, to highlight the ability of the
Belarusian and Russian people to integrate due to their tolerance to interact with similar cultures that are showcased in the region. The Treaties modern application contends against the US and EU by placing their programs as negative. The Union State emphasized this in August 2020, during the period of large-scale protests done by the Belarusian people, by stating that “The actions of the US and a number of EU states are interference in the internal affairs of Belarus (посткомсг.рф, 2023).” While the security and cultural integrations are not scary, their application allows for a continuation of the ‘horizontal learning’ as Professor Stephan Hall describes, that allows the authoritarian-hybrid regimes of the two states to learn from each other to have effective control and means of oppression (Personal Communication, 2023). In the case of Russia and Belarus, there is no need to be taught new means of oppression as they have effective control of both their national security network by the FSB and media control, which likely speaks the messages examined by the Union State focusing on further integration (Hall, Personal Communication, 2023). The Union State has played a role in the oppression democratization in the past three years as its statements have been pro-Lukashenko or pro-Russia to highlight the integration that has only entrenched the two countries. If Russia, and subsequently, the Union State, collapse in the future, then a liberated Belarus will still have to address the concerns of the integration of the past two decades. The Union State’s integration provides a soft power instrument for Russia that has manifested itself in the state narratives that hold weight in the country now and within any future, hypothetical or real, advocating for hybrid authoritarianism via Lukashenko and Putin.

In the past three years, the treaty’s public application has not been scary, but it is the real face of the entrenchment seen from inside information and perspective that haunts Belarus’s
future. Sviatlana Tsikanovskaya, the democratically election president in exile of Belarus, head of the diaspora government in Lithuania, stated that

The ‘Union State’ is a threat for the Belarusian people and Belarusian statehood,”…It is not a union of equals. It is a roadmap for the absorption of Belarus by Russia. Since our goal is to return Belarus to the path of democracy, it will be impossible to do so in a Union State with Russia. (Weiss et Roonemaa, 2023)

As stated before Russia holds most of the cards of integration within the frame of security and culture, highlighting its economic resources and cultural influences that have shaped Belarus rather than a focus on what Belarus, its unique language or military aiding Russia in either theme. That lack of reinforcement adds to Tsikanovskaya’s statement by focusing on the asymmetric status of the Union State that is deadly to any democratization movement. To highlight a leaked Kremlin report originally written in 2021 that was shared by news outlets in 2023, that was written under Putin’s presidential office whose focus is on exerting control over CEE nations. The document outlines a plan to establish

“sustainable pro-Russian groups of influence in Belarusian politics, military and business.” It also advocates the expansion of Russian military presence in Belarus and the introduction of a simplified procedure for issuing Russian passports to Belarusian citizens. (Weiss et Roonemaa, 2023)

In order to have effective control of the country by 2030. Russia does not need to establish any new mechanisms to achieve this goal, the Union State Treaty acts as a jumping off point to integrate the two countries. As in 2021 the two countries passed 28 different integration programs that included additions to military and border control mechanism (Weiss et Roonemaa, 2023). For Russia and Belarus the leaked document was downplayed as a fake proposal that even
if real was a hypothetical that needed its problematic edges cut as shown by a statement by Lukashenko, Putin’s statement was not found, where he even so spun the narrative as Belarus’ government does by stating

in response to proposals that Belarus should become part of Russia, I suggested that

Russia should become part of Belarus. In 2019-2020 if you remember, (belta.by, 2023)

He of course is referring to former rhetoric that similar to this statement, applies to his mocking/comedic side that points to the irony of either situation. The leaked report has not been fully shown to the public rather to selective press sites, which hits a tiny suspicious nerve as similar documents have often been shared with a majority of quotations or links to the subsequent leaked report like the Ukraine Dossier on the Minsk Agreement taken from a hack of Surkov in 2020 yet some experts confirm the 2021 report. The fear of absorption by Russia into Belarus due to their entrenchment is a real and present threat that is only heightened as Lukashenko has no more Western dance partners like Pompeo to maintain his sovereignty against Putin, his entrenched benefactor.

The ‘Black Knight’ role of Russia has shifted over the past three years in the context of democratization. As there are no longer large-scale Western interactions in the country Belarus is entrenched with a substantial majority of foreign relations relating to Russia through the media or via bilateral institutions like the Union State. The Union State before 2021, when Western groups were forced to leave, or during after the large scale anti-Lukashenko demonstration in 2020, showcasing the fear factor as dissidents and their families became political prisoners en masse, 1500 currently (state.gov, 2023), had to compete and maintain Lukashenko against a contrarian Western democratic focus. There is still currently pro-Democracy efforts in the country but they are not to the pre 2021 scale nor is their influence as Belarus has continually
rounded up dissidents in an Orwellian style for their counter-Lukashenko efforts. They have been able to land flights with reporters and journalists, as was the case for RyanAir 4978 in 2021 for journalist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend, or imprison Belarusians that post or message that reference calls to the democratic movement like “Long Live Belarus” or the response “Live Long” in Belarusian (USDoS, 2022). Meaning that while the ‘Black Knight’ paradigm still exists to counter the sanctions and other Western mechanisms it has been able to exist within the additional paradigm of establishing an entrenchment through integrations. These integrations, especially through the Union State, highlight the Russian expansion of these two dynamics that allow them to puppeteer any Belarus through their security, culture, and economics that asymmetrically intertwines Lukashenko to Putin. An entrenchment that must be addressed by any democratization movement that may succeed, which is likely after the de-thronement of Putin or of a severing of Russian connection with Belarus. Yet, that opens a separate can of worms relating to a similar shock-therapy reforms in the post-soviet space in the late 90s and early 2000s that have not always succeeded or been seen as beneficial. Especially for Belarus, as their populus will look to the corruption of Ukraine over the past 30 years or the post-Euromaidan Russophobia, to which Lukashenko narratively acts as a counter-weight by being a popular non-corrupt leader who did not modernize to the country after the fall of the USSR (Hall, Personal Communication, 2023). Russia exerts a foreign influence in Belarus to maintain its security by keeping Lukashenko in power as an asymmetric partner without any challenger over the past three years. Entrenching Belarus to eventually control the country without any consequences or democratically elected contradictions of the Belarusian populous that demonstrated their self-determination in 2020.
China ‘The sub player’

As mentioned in the why section, China acts as a sub-player in the background of Belarus. Enabling Lukashenko’s regime due to its regional strategic importance for the BRI and other infrastructure programs like the ‘Great Stone’ Industrial Park or through inclusion into their polar institutions like China-CEE, as an observer, or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as an ascending member. These interactions are still in a small waves phase, as while “China is the antithesis of America,” the small waves demonstrated by these integrations and statements are hands-off for China (Hall, Personal Communication, 2023). China will continue to focus on China, and right now, the two countries’ future is a puzzle, as brought up by interviews I had with experts in Belarus (Anna and Ambrosio, Personal Communication, 2023). For now, these small waves showcase a future economic cooperation by these small efforts. Perhaps China will be Lukashenko’s future dance partner should the Eurasian region balance out in favor for the authoritarian-hybrid regimes. In any case, an economic support in the face of human rights abuses undermines the democratization struggle by enabling future investments into Lukashenko’s future.

A key small wave to examine is the Great Stone Industrial Park from the project’s website. It is a developing industrial park almost 25km away from Minsk as a “a free economic zone coupled with unique tax and legislative advantages (en.industrialpark.by, n.d).” The residents (companies that work in the park) of the park are given the advantage of the park being close to land, sea, and air routes to export their goods; with the nearby Moscow-Berlin M1 highway for trucking, seaports that are less than 600km away from the park, by rail with both Russia and China, and Minsk International Airport (en.industrialpark.by, n.d). The park offers tax benefits to these residents to have foreign (non-Belarusian) workers with a 0% employer tax
on these workers, only a 146 euro per month employer wage tax cap, and only a 9% income tax for these residents (en.industrialpark.by, n.d). While looking at the list of 100 registered residents there are a lot of major Chinese, Belarusian, and Russian companies like Huawei, ZTE, and Zoomlion that are currently apart of the project. The status of Great Stone right now is still in the construction phase as the plan is massive and as of now, 2023, the “...infrastructure corresponds to a small city… and it continues to grow (en.industrialpark.by, n.d).” I am unable to find a number or report of current number of workers in the park this year. The Great Stone Industrial Park highlights Belarus as a country that will be able to bridge Chinese goods to the rest of Europe and a place for foreign workers. The current affect on democratization is negligible but showcases that China does have an interest in Belarus that will last and have prospectively impact Belarusian worker as they domestically compete against foreign workers that are preferred by companies involved in the project.

**Conclusion**

Lukashenko has become a corrupt official he fought against thirty years ago. Today, the Eurasian powers of the U.S., EU, Russia, and China each have unique policies’ influence on Belarus’ democratization by supporting Lukashenko or his opposition that won the 2020 election, Sviatlana Tsikanovskaya. As shown by the divide of public statements, these policies are polarly divided in their support of Lukashenko or the democratic Diaspora led by Sviatlana Tsikanovskaya. This polar divide is based on the ideological and strategic interests of the Eurasian power in Belarus and CEE, showcasing a modern West-East divide from the analyzed public statements. The West has maintained a foreign policy that supports democratization by assisting Belarus’ citizens, which has aided the attempts of a democratic revolution in Belarus in
the 21st century, and proposals to support a democratic change economically via the ‘carrot and stick.’ However, their efforts have been negated by Lukashenko’s authoritarian policies and support from the Russian and Chinese governments, creating an ideological and strategic division in foreign aid given by pro-Lukashenko and pro-Tskianovskaya support in the country. The West supports democratization from the bottom up, while the East continues to aid Lukashenko’s hybrid authoritarianism to restrict attempts at changing the status quo from the top down. Both parties hold regional security interests in Belarus with an ideological divide between democracy and hybrid authoritarianism. Belarus is an essential contemporary case study in establishing a modern democratic movement against an authoritarian regime within the geopolitics of Eurasian Affairs.

This research has been limited and is only a glimpse into the larger dynamics of the Eurasian powers' influence in Belarus. I could not do ethnographic research to see the on-the-ground implications of the programs analyzed by any powers. None of the research experts I interviewed were located in places that are the hubs for the context of this research, as none of them were based out of Minsk, the capital of Belarus, or Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, to give an on-the-ground analysis of what the populous or groups see the Eurasian powers’ influence is in their activities or lives. While that is partially due to various factors within this project's scope, it is also due to security concerns and groups being occupied with their work, such as lobbying for more Western support or recognition. For example, I had contacted Kastus Kalinouski Regiment’s public relations team with a quick response highlighting this dimension. They stated that they were actively fighting in a war against Russia and that I should contact the diaspora groups lobbying for aid in the EU. They will be more able to answer my questions as they are not fighting in a war [refind the telegram note and maybe quote]. The Kastus Regiment was the only
group that replied to my cold messages asking for an interview or resources about my topic. I also contacted Svetlana Tsikanovskaya’s public relations team, yet got no response. Similarly, I received no responses from groups that highlight an Eastern perspective, as I received no reply from the groups associated with their interests in CEE, such as the China-CEE institute, which is a Budapest-based institute that supports Chinese positions in the region and the China-CEEC otherwise know as the 17+1. These restrictions limit this paper’s available data and perspectives, as most of my resources were from Western out-of-country experts. I would recommend that future research highlight these two dimensions by being on-the-ground studies, should security and work concerns decrease, and/or diving into the Eastern narratives that provide reasons for their efforts that embolden Lukashenko’s hybrid authoritarianism while hopefully being critical.

It is also important to note that the China section of this paper is lacking, as the Great Stone Industrial Park is still being constructed. I recommend that those interested in the BRI or industrial parks as a form of soft power follow the project’s development. For democratization theory, the project is minimal for now. Still, future research could go into the foreign workers’ influence in their interactions with Belarusian workers and even the impact that might have on worker unions.

The data I have compiled from this project shows a noticeable difference in the effectiveness of the Western and Eastern policies in creating a large change over the past three years. The West lost its influence with Lukashenko as the U.S. and EU took strong positions against Lukashenko following the 2020 election and the Invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The West then continues to support the diaspora, with the EU utilizing a ‘carrot and stick’ monetary plan to propose a democratic change with sanctions, and the US and EU no longer act as a dance partner for Lukashenko as he tries to win concessions from Russia like years past. In the East, Russia
and China continue supporting Lukashenko’s hybrid authoritarianism through their continuing programs that empower him. With Russia’s continued presence militarily, culturally, and economically with the Union State Treaty that has only grown since the invasion of Ukraine that acts as a jumping-off point for further entrenching between the two nations that will be difficult to unbind following any further democratization that Russia does not support. With China becoming a new potential dance partner for Lukashenko, should the two interests align as the country acts as a land route to Europe for Chinese goods and as a new industrial hub from the Great Stone Industrial Park that focuses on a foreign workforce rather than a domestic one.

Furthering the Eastern power’s interests in the region, Lukashenko has been able to continue his dictatorial rule following the Western intervention, only to make the nation more dependent on the East, which will further hinder the democratization supported by the West that cannot unbind Belarus from the ‘Black Knight’ of Russia and now the sub-actor of China.

There is always more that Western nations can do. Still, the predicament is set in stone for the time being. There would need to be a flashpoint event to diminish the Eastern influence and allow any democratization to occur with Western support. Professor Ambrosio and the IRI expert brought up the importance of the current Russia-Ukraine war in allowing for destabilization of Russia to allow for a situation that breaks the entrenchment of Russia and Belarus. That situation would weaken Lukashenko massively as he depends on Putin’s support. While Lukashenko still has major repression capabilities, it is unlikely that they would survive long with large economic support, which other countries, including China, could not provide. China would not want to provide as they are more worried about their Indo-Pacific and less about Lukashenko. The Russia-Ukraine war is a flashpoint that could create a scenario like this. Still, the West should not become complicit and support Lukashenko in any capacity as he is
likely to make claims about not acting in or being forced into the war. These claims should fall on deaf ears as the democratic struggle of Belarus would still be repressed under Lukashenko even if he made concessions to the West. The West should continue its efforts of supporting both Ukraine and Belarus to benefit from future flashpoints that are likely to occur that weaken Lukashenko and the Eastern influence.
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