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Mr. Shushkevich's presentation was in Russian without translation. An edited English translation of his comments appears below.

Belarus: Statehood and Security

In 1995 I came across a book published by Harvard University Press in 1956 called *The Making of a Nation* by N. Vakar. The book contained some systematic facts, figures, and materials about Belarus and the Belarussian nation, many of which I had begun to become familiar with in 1989, when by chance I got involved in politics. I was pleased to find out that people at Harvard were able to form their idea of the Belarussian nation and statehood based on historical and literary documents. Harvard academics in the 1950's were able to formulate ideas that are being taught today by social science professors at Belarussian universities instead of the old communist dogmas. However, I have to mention that this substitution of the communist ideas by the ideas of national determination and state sovereignty is not often smooth and effortless. Many of those social science professors used to be specialists in the communist science theory, Marxist-Leninist philosophy, and political economy. Today they have become advocates of Belarussian history and politics without getting rid of their Bolshevik prejudice and pro-Russian orientation.

On the Road To Independence

Belarussians are one of the oldest Slavic nations in Europe. The formation of the Belarussian state dates back to the beginning of the second millenium. Belarussian book printing precedes Russian book printing by 50 years. The resurrection of Belarussian statehood is resisted today both by communist internationalists in Belarus itself, as well as by various political groups in Russia. For many years, Belarus was a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Belarussian was the official language of the duchy. The Code of Laws of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was written in Belarussian in 1526 and became one of the first European constitutions. Just over 200 years ago, after the division of

Poland, Belarus was incorporated into the territory of the Russian Empire. The Belarussian language was prohibited, and Belarussian insurrections against the oppressors were violently suppressed. Only in the beginning of the 20th century, when the revolutionary movement in Russia began to threaten the monarchy, did the anti-Belarussian pressure subside for a short while. On March 25, 1918, the people of Belarus proclaimed the creation of their own state: The People's Republic of Belarus. On January 1, 1919, the Bolsheviks abolished it and established the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic, which in 1922 became one of the members of the newly-formed USSR. Under the pretext of fighting the counter-revolutionaries in the 30's, the Bolsheviks gradually began to exterminate the Belarussian intelligentsia. Between 1937 and 1939 tens of thousands of well-educated Belarussians were wiped out or sent into exile. It has been officially proven and documented that 370 innocent writers, publicists, philologists, historians, and poets who wrote in Belarussian were shot. The national intelligentsia was anathema to the Bolsheviks everywhere. While the so-called "writing intellectuals" were eliminated in Russia and Ukraine, Belarus suffered most from the purges because of its relatively small population.

During World War II, one fourth of the 10 million citizens of Belarus died. During the war years in Afghanistan, Belarus lost more citizens per capita than any other Soviet republic. After the Chernobyl accident in Ukraine, 70% of the radioactive fallout settled on the territory of Belarus. Traditionally the Belarussians were a very friendly nation. For many years they lived in harmony with other nations that settled on the Belarus territory, namely: Russians, Poles, Germans, Tatars, Jews. The Belarussians never blamed other nations or the national minorities that resided on its territory for Belarus' own problems. But in many instances this confidence was breached. Only 3% of Russians lived in pre-WWII Belarus. By the 1990s this number had grown to 20%. Meanwhile, Belarussian young people were often pushed into large-scale projects to build communism. Those projects included the cultivation of virgin lands in Kazakhstan, construction of the Baikal-Amur Transsiberian Railroad, and exploration of the Far Northern and Far Eastern regions.

On July 27, 1990 the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus adopted a declaration of state sovereignty. Belarus obtained de jure independence in December, 1991, but this time Belarus' independence was recognized by Russia, which had ratified the Belovezh agreements. The Belarussians had regained sovereignty but faced a weakened national intelligentsia and a population that had lost its national identity because of the forced russification and a high percentage of Russian migrants. Under these difficult conditions, Belarus had to strengthen its independence, begin to build a democratic, civil society, and conduct market economic reforms. Belarus proclaimed its territory a neutral zone and removed all nuclear weapons. Some preliminary economic reforms were implemented, including the introduction of private land ownership. Today 14% of construction and agricultural lands in Belarus are privately owned.

Russia's Claims

The mutual interests of contemporary Russia and Belarus are outlined in the thesis of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy of the Russian Federation. Belarus and Russia agree that they should jointly deter NATO from its expansion to the east, to prevent the formation of the so-called the Black Sea-Baltic Sea Russian isolationist rim. The means to this end is to increase military capability by uniting the Russian and Belarussian armies. Other strategic plans include the removal of the Kaliningrad special defense region from military-defense isolation, and the creation of a united military-industrial complex.

Russia does not conceal its desire to absorb Belarus but continues to call this process "unification." Russia wants this unification to be swift and considers the union with Belarus very advantageous from a geopolitical point of view and worth certain economic sacrifices. The Russian leadership is well aware of the acceleration of the process of national determination in Belarus and thinks that this would play right into the hands of the opponents to unification with Russia. That's why they are trying to ratify and implement the union between Belarus and Russia as soon as possible. The Kremlin also believes that the Belarussians' concern over such factors as low living standards,

increasing crime rates, and the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster distract Belarus' attention from the process of integration. In other words, Russia is interested in the expansion of its empire by suppressing the national identity of the Belarussians and using Belarus' economic poverty to its (Russia's) advantage. Russian politicians all want their country to be in the avant-garde of the civilized world, but none of them has the courage to admit that Russia first has to achieve social well-being for its own citizens, and only then attempt to educate others politically and economically. I cannot help but be reminded of the words of the famous Belarussian writer Ales Adamovich, who asked, in effect, how those can teach who have yet to learn themselves. One should beware the strong imperial mood in Russian society. The one hope that remains is that future president Vladimir Putin will abandon his earlier imperial statements once he officially becomes Russia's president. It is obvious that Russia cannot aspire to become an example of economic achievements when the average Russian earns one tenth the average income of an American, when Russia's GDP is one fifth that of China, and when under current conditions, it would take at least 15-20 years for an average Russian to achieve the standard of living of an average Portuguese.

It would be wrong to say that Russia's imperial claims are based only on its nuclear capability. Russia understands that maintaining its nuclear arsenal at the mutually assured destruction level would mean higher taxation for an average Russian and delays with the reforms aimed to improve the economy and living standards in the country. Many Russians hoped that Putin would clearly see the distinction between simply living in a country with a high standard of living, and living in a great imperial superpower in poverty. But to completely abandon superpower and great empire aspirations in favor of the well being of the Russian population would mean to lose the chance to be elected Russia's president. Unfortunately this is the strategy of the Russian electorate. Putin did not dismiss these expectations, and on January 10, 2000 he issued a decree reasserting the concept of the national security of the Russian Federation. According to this decree, Russia would continue to contribute to the formation of a multi-polar world and would counterbalance the domination of various Western groups and alliances headed by the United States. Any attempts to ignore Russia's interests would undermine international

stability and security. In other words, Putin was saying that, despite the fact that we (the Russians) are weak and poor, we are still great and may serve as an example to others on how to live. Those who reject this statement will undermine the international stability. The only form of political power that can preserve political stability within a country, even though it is based on contradictory postulates, is a dictatorship. Thus, one may say that Russia could become a dictatorship state after the forthcoming elections. Politicians from different camps, including the supporters of democracy, market economic reforms and advocates human rights and freedoms, have decided that only strong central power and a well-educated and patriotic dictator can put Russia on the correct path towards prosperity. To strengthen their position, they bring the examples of other countries where economic difficulties were overcome through a strong dictatorial regime. But where is the guarantee that after his election, a dictator will make economic development and improvement of the well-being of average Russians his political priority? As strange as it may seem, the hope that under Putin's presidency Russia will continue its movement towards market economy and civic society is supported by Andrei Sakharov's observations concerning the positive characteristics of the KGB's cadres. According to Sakharov, they are less corrupt and genuinely elitist, because professionalism is a must in their organization.

Nevertheless, strong doubts remain and the Belarus experience only intensifies them. In Belarus itself, intelligent and well-educated people appointed a dictator hoping that they would remain the major think tank and that he, due to his inexperience in political science and economy, would execute their decisions with an iron fist. It turned out the other way around. Those who were not able to find the courage to leave the government which unlawfully held power, continue to carry out unsystematic and contradictory directives. Those directives are being issued by the dictator whom they had elected and whose goals are to restore communist order, with the only difference being that now all the major functions of the Communist Party Central Committee belong to a single person.

Belarus Power and Society

The supporters of Belarus' independence were never Russia's enemies. They understood well that the public relations in today's Russia are more democratic than in Belarus, and that the real economy is more liberalized. But they also understand that Russia's future is too unpredictable and it would be irrational for Belarus to join Russia's uncertainties. The regime that established itself in Belarus is dictatorial, despite the fact that the so-called constitution of 1996 guarantees such values as parliamentary assemblies, legal opposition, freedom of speech, and even the distinct separation of powers. Political opposition and independent mass media formally exist, but they cannot exert much influence the situation, since the activities of the democratic opposition are forcefully suppressed by the regime, including by means of political terror. Belarus has become a police state and has the highest number of the members of power structures (the police forces and the army) per capita (125 thousand policemen and 85 thousand of servicemen per 10 million citizens). Prominent political leaders simply disappear; members of parliament who are protected by parliamentary immunity get arrested; independent lawyers get stripped of their rights to act as defense advocates; and the courts have become a mere farce. This all is actively supported by Russia. The series of 6 unification agreements between Russia and Belarus signed between April 1996 and December 1999 remain a mere statement of intentions. Bells ringing in Moscow and the symbolic smashing of crystal goblets in the Granite Chamber of the Kremlin drown out the calamities and the war in Chechnya and the economic problems in Russia. It is worth mentioning that the present democratic and liberal reforms in Belarus would not have been possible within the framework of the old Soviet constitution. The country needed a new system of constitutional law. However, no one sensed deeply the significance of the new constitution. The specialists who formulated the document, stated repeatedly that it would not be surprising if each clause of the new constitution had different interpretations. The process of writing the new constitution was long, and the deadline for its completion was extended again and again. True to Bolshevik tradition, the communist opposition majority accelerated the process and adopted a final draft of the constitution which contained a number of drawbacks. One of them was the absence of a ban on any

legally unbalanced, contradicting proposals submitted to a popular referendum that would allow different interpretations by the executive branch.

The Belarussian Economy

In 1997 the Belarussian regime announced 10% growth in gross domestic product, 17% growth in the industrial production, 19.5% growth in capital investments, and 5% growth in per capita income. Real economists treated this 10% GDP growth announcement as a bluff. It is difficult to conceal the deep economic crisis in Belarus. In 1999 inflation in Belarus remained at 350%. The Belarussian ruble dropped to 1/225th of the value of the Russian ruble. The decrease in the number of people living below the poverty level from 83% to 27% in 1998 is also not accurate. The Belarus Labor Department simply changed its methods of determining the poverty level. In 1998 the poverty line in US dollars was \$2, and the average income was \$37. In neighboring Lithuania in June 1998 the poverty line was \$105, while the average income was \$256. The Russian leadership continues to support the Belarussian regime despite Russia's own economic difficulties. Russia's dream of incorporating Belarus into its territory remains the only area of agreement for various political groups and factions in Russia, from communists and fascists to market democrats. The immoral nature of such an approach is obvious. Lukashenka is using the situation and is flirting with Russia's reds and browns. He publicly offended Yeltsin on many occasions, and Yeltsin's cronies had to console Boris Nikolaevich by urging him to disregard the ambitious dictator of a small nation.

Ways Towards Democracy

The majority of Belarus' political parties and movements are supporters of democracy. They are quite familiar with the methods of transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy. The most popular way to accomplish such a transition is by the opposition gaining the upper hand over the government. A good example of such a counterbalance would be the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1990. This option is hardly possible in today's Belarus, as it would require mass propaganda campaigns aimed at the

population, but the Belarussian opposition does not have access to the electronic mass media. Moreover, certain opposition circles are not interested in changing their current status, since they enjoy considerable support from Western funds and organizations. Some opposition organizations have been infiltrated by special agents of the regime. Mass lumpen-proletariat tendencies in Belarussian society exacerbate the situation, because lumpens are generally hostile towards democracy. Another possible scenario for democratic reform is the transformation of existing power. This would be possible if there were already a circle of reformers in the government. A similar situation existed in Spain between 1975 and 1977. Unfortunately, such a scenario is also inapplicable for Belarus, where there is no party of power that could have a reformist wing. The regime finds support among people who personally depend upon the dictator, not among experienced specialists and politicians. Anyone who tries to question or challenge the regime gets dismissed from the government. Lukashenka himself would never try to implement any democratic reforms. The most suitable model for Belarus in its search for democracy could be the so-called “mixed model.” Sociological polls show that the level of trust and confidence towards the current government is low and continues to decline. Even in bureaucratic circles, people are well aware of the lack of economic perspectives for the country. Every government official knows that at any moment he or she can be arrested and lose his job. It is also obvious that the regime contributes to Belarus’ international isolation, and without foreign assistance the country will not be able to overcome the current crisis. That is why the majority of the bureaucratic apparatus is interested in the collapse of the dictatorial regime. The leaders of the police and army support this opinion. If the opposition is able to awaken the activist segment of the population, and the bureaucrats realize that the regime is not eternal, then the situation could change radically. In this case, the support of the international community would be of paramount importance.

International Efforts

To coordinate the Western community’s actions and aid in Belarus, the permanent committee of the OSCE, which was formed in September 1997, created a consultative-

observation group in Minsk in January 1998. During the OSCE summit in Istanbul, this group presented materials documenting human rights violations and the government monopolization of the mass media in Belarus. The OSCE members expected the elections in Belarus to establish a climate of trust and lead to the adoption of a new election law after intensive negotiations with the opposition. The international community was to recognize the legitimacy of the elections only if the election commissions were independent and their composition reflected political pluralism. However, the work schedule of OSCE and the “consensus minus one” decision formula preclude any effective influence on a regime that resists democratization. The OSCE group’s efforts to achieve unanimity among the opposition forces on their policy toward the government distracted the opposition from other activities and eventually proved counterproductive. Belarus’ case has proved that OSCE, just like the UN, has yet to come up with peaceful, effective measures to deal with a regime that violates human rights. It is with sadness that I report that Belarus remains a trump card in the hands of several countries that are trying to use it to their economic or political advantage.

Perspectives

It will be difficult to stop the process of nation formation in a country that has its own language, culture, literature, and governance traditions. Belarus will eventually construct a democratic, civil society. This process will be difficult and lengthy, given the existing information blockade. The international community treats the situation in Belarus with restraint and in fact gave it away to the political vultures. The Belarus democratic opposition understands that it will take a very long time to overcome the economic crisis. Economic improvement will be possible only with considerable Western economic assistance, and Belarus has plenty of investment opportunities because of its convenient geographic location and highly qualified, cheap labor force. Belarus’ inner political forces should initiate positive reforms in the political and economic sectors. Only concrete, positive results achieved by the Belarussians themselves will convince the West to offer a new Marshall Plan. The less optimistic prognosis is based on the fact that the attempts to re-integrate Belarus and Ukraine into the Russian Empire began at the very

moment of the de jure recognition of those countries' independence, when Russia's president signed the Belovezh Agreement and Duma ratified it. The major incentive for Yeltsin to sign that agreement was to boost his popularity among the electorate and to become Russia's legitimate president. Yeltsin was probably profoundly confident that the newly independent states would not be able to survive without Russia and would eventually ask for the restoration of the union or to be incorporated into Russia proper. Ukraine declined such options. In Belarus, after a long Russian political infiltration and interference, pro-Russian imperial desires took over. These pro-imperial and pro-Russian forces are confident that the preparations for the incorporation of Belarus into Russia are complete because:

- 6 agreements concerning the integration were signed. None of them has any legal power but the number itself indicates the intensity of the desire to unify
- 1,560 kilometers of the Russian-Belarusian border are open
- Belarus' economy is in deep crisis and is totally dependent on Russia
- All the key positions in the Belarus government (prime minister, deputy prime minister for economic policy, defense minister, the chief of police, foreign minister, and the KGB chief) are occupied by Russian citizens
- Practically all political forces in Russia itself support the incorporation, including "Yabloko," which formed the most anti-Belarusian NGO "Belarusian Yabloko"
- All of the broadcast media, and the majority of the press mass media have been monopolized by the existing regime

When making prognoses about Russia, many political scientists say that dictatorship is coming. This dictatorship will have to demonstrate considerable victories and achievements. Victory in Chechnya is impossible. It will be impossible to force Chechnya to love Russia, which has suppressed the country for so many years. Russian intellectuals will not help either, since over the past 200 years they have portrayed the Chechens either as sinister outlaws with knives or bandits from a guerilla military group. There will be no rapid economic improvements, for it will be impossible to bring together the Duma politicians and the economic reformers and prevent the oligarchs from robbing

the country. Belarus is the only available means that is left. You may declare unification by decree, or one may organize a referendum, the results of which will be similar to the results of Hitler's referendum concerning the *Anschluss* of Germany or Czechoslovakia. Just like Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia became independent after the collapse of the USSR, Belarus will become independent as a result of the disintegration of Russia. Belarus' integration into Russia will only aggravate existing economic and political problems and accelerate this disintegration.