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# **The European Union Democracy Promotion in Belarus**

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Master's Degree Programme in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research

VARVARA BARYSEVICH: The European Union Democracy Promotion in Belarus

Master's Thesis, 77 pages, 2 appendices

Administrative Sciences

November 2014

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the study is to explore the mechanisms of democracy promotion employed by the EU in its relationships with Belarus. The mechanisms of democracy promotion employed by the EU were assessed from the perspectives of leverage, linkage and governance. Putting the governance mode under a special scrutiny the study seeks to prove that activities which are not directly aimed at democracy promotion can lead to a gradual transfer of democratic norms and values.

Neo-functionalist theoretical approach is used to explain potential norm transfer through functional cooperation by way of technical and expert assistance on a local level of public authorities in a case study of Belarus. The empirical part of the thesis explores to what degree participation in joint projects within Cross-Border Cooperation the EU makes Belarusian public officials acquainted with the norms of democratic governance. In so doing, realistic evaluation research method is utilized.

The results of the research corroborate the assumption that in the light of failure of traditional top-down forms of democracy promotion, the EU has intensified functional cooperation with Belarus on the bottom-up level. Analysis of the attitudes of the Belarusian officials involved and not involved in joint projects with the EU shows that public officials who have international experience are more prone to the values and principles of democratic governance. Therefore, the main finding suggests that transnational networks created for the purposes of functional cooperation can serve as channels where agents from authoritarian regimes learn democratic values and, as a result, can change their attitude and even behavior towards a more democratic model.

## **Key Words**

The EU, Belarus, democracy, democracy promotion, democratic governance, functional cooperation, cross-border cooperation, Eastern Partnership, European Neighborhood Policy

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## List of Abbreviations

AA – Association Agreement

BSR – Baltic Sea Region

CBC – Cross-Boundary Cooperation

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy CSF –Civil Society Forum

EaP – Eastern Partnership

EC – European Commission

EU – European Union

ENP – European Neighborhood Policy

ENPI – European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument

NCU - The TACIS/ENPI National Coordinating Unit

NIP – National Indicative Programme

LLB – Lithuania-Latvia-Belarus

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PBU – Poland-Belarus-Ukraine

PCA – Partnership and Co-operation Agreement

TACIS – Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States

TAIEX - Technical Assistance and Information Exchange

TCA – Trade and Co-operation Agreement

UN – United Nations

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of democracy promotion underpinned a number of state's foreign policies, as well as guiding the strategies of developmental and state-building policies. These activities are supported by the liberal ideas of democratic peace and the theory of modernization<sup>1</sup>. Adherents to the idea of democratic peace argue that democracy is the most effective system of governance to support and maintain international peace and security, because, as they argue, democratic states do not wage war against each other and strive to settle conflicts by peaceful means<sup>2</sup>. According to the theory of modernization, the democratic system of governance is the best precondition for economic and social development of the state. Therefore, democracy is upheld as a universal good, not only because of its core values and principles, but also because of its ability to advance prosperity and peaceful cooperation among states.

The end of the Cold War inaugurated the emergence of a number of newly established democracies in the world and provoked various policies aimed at democracy promotion in different parts of the world. Aim of democracy promotion, as well as the core principles constituting the notion of democracy have been referred to as 'universal values' in a number of international treaties, conventions, strategies, and declarations adopted by different international organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, the OSCE, and the European Union (EU). However, due to short history of such policies, ambiguous outcomes, issues of democracy as such, democratization, rules and mechanisms of democracy promotion, actors and policies have become a highly disputed and contested area of academic research.

Although the EU's democracy promotion in different parts of the world utilising different mechanisms has not avoided scholarly discussions, there has been little attention paid to practices towards its eastern neighbor Belarus. However, the case of Belarus represents a great challenge, not only to democracy promoters but to scholars as well, since the country has been rather insensitive towards all the policies employed towards it. At the moment, the political situation in Belarus is characterized by the oppression of the media, freedom of assembly, religion

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<sup>1</sup> See Lipset (1981).

<sup>2</sup> These assumptions underlie the basis of Democratic Peace theory. For more information see, for example, works of Doyle, M.W. and Rummel R.J.

and expression, the absence of free and fair democratic elections, an anti-Western ideology, growing economic and political dependency on Russian subsidies. The vast majority of the literature focuses on the analysis of the political regime, weak civil society, or the influence of third states where the main emphasis is put on EU-Russian relations but not towards the prospects of Belarus itself.

Democracy and human rights are given priority in the EU's development of relations with Belarus. This is stated in the majority of the official documents and rhetoric addressed to Belarus<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, it seems that the success of the EU to bring forth a democratic change, in one of the most difficult and reluctant cases, might be crucial to its future prospects as an efficient promoter of democracy. As one Belarusian civil society activist Vyachorka, explains that Belarus represents a 'special case' (2003: 35) in the extensive practice of EU policies.

In this thesis, the efficiency, strategies and instruments of EU policy in relation to Belarus will be assessed from the position of three modes of democracy promotion proposed by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011) which are leverage, linkage and governance. In order to contemplate on the EU's current political and economic conditionality in relation to democracy promotion in Belarus, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of direct modes of democracy promotion. A vast amount of literature addresses the top-down means deployed by the EU in its external policy. These top-down mechanisms are implemented using political conditionalities or 'leverages' (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011; Korosteleva, 2011; Reinhard, 2010).

The main empirical focus of this thesis, however, will be on the mode of governance. In particular, I will try to identify indirect bottom-up processes of democratization that follow the activities and functional cooperation, which are not aimed foremost at the promotion and transfer of democratic norms. Therefore, it will be argued that the cooperation networks of actors coming from a democratic environment with actors operating in authoritarian regimes have a democratizing potential at least on the level of the individual's attitude.

Due to the assumed low effectiveness of imposing the leverage model of democracy promotion in Belarus, it will be argued that European policy has started to gradually apply measures aimed at the development of network governance within sectoral cooperation. More voices in academia and the rhetoric of the Union itself stand for that functional engagement helps

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, European Commission's ENP Strategy Paper (May, 2004).

to socialize partners to basic democratic rules and practices, thus “planting the seeds of democracy from the inside” (Freyburg, 2010). The development of networks in a way that allows the avoidance of direct engagement with the regime might represent a more striking aspect of EU external governance. Nevertheless, despite this rhetoric and the increase in functional cooperation and network-building practices, the effectiveness of the policy to bring about socialization and the changing of attitudes of the officials towards democratic governance still remains highly under-studied and, consequently, a contested issue. Positive attitudes towards democratic governance do not approximate regime change. I believe these mechanisms are less tangible and visible. Democracy is what is rooted within society, its way of thinking and identity. Therefore, the socialization into democratic values is a long and gradual process that takes place at the individual level. Yet, in this way, the conditions for democratic consolidation and regime change are matured in the long-term.

Therefore, in this thesis, I will conceptualize notions of democracy promotion, theorise and hypothesize the connection between democratization and functional cooperation, and apply these theoretical considerations to the strategies of EU foreign policy in relation to one of the most reluctant cases, Belarus. In the end, I will assess the attitude of the state officials who have been involved in transnational cooperation with European organizations and those, who lack international experience, in order to evaluate whether socialization of the norms of democratic governance has taken place. The importance of democratic socialization is seen in the assumption that it could possibly create “domestic stakeholders in democracy” within an authoritarian environment (Levitsky and Way 2005: 24).

The final purpose of the research is to add to the existing knowledge of the social sciences. In particular, the thesis is related to International Relations (IR) and Administrative Sciences. It focuses on democracy promotion as an area of IR inquiry and as for Administrative Science inquiry, it examines issues of governance and managerial decision-making. Even though the outcome is unlikely to make a practical impact in the immediate future, it lays the foundation for further research or program innovations in a longer term, and could potentially inform the policy practices of the EU.



## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

In this thesis, a qualitative methodological approach will be employed. More precisely, qualitative methodology for this research refers to case study methodology to test the hypotheses and the realistic evaluation method to answer the main research question. These modes of analysis, their applicability and place in the research design will be discussed below in more detail. This chapter is supplemented with certain ontological assumptions which might seem to be of use to guide a discussion thread, because this part states the general perception on the actors, their actions and motivations.

The research design of the present study follows the general logic of inquiry common for any area of social sciences. The first important element is the theory, which are applied in the research to frame abstract terms and are intended to provide a point of identification and an explanation of examined patterns and regularities. Within the research design, the theoretical framework is intended to show how theoretical mechanisms are going to produce feasible outcomes. Within the case study and realistic evaluation methodology, the theory is an essential basis for contemplation, analysis and further theoretical development.

### 2.1. Theory development and case study

George and Bennett (2005: 73) identify three main phases of how to conduct case studies. In the first phase, the research objectives, design, and strategy are formulated. The second phase refers to the actual research conducted in accordance with the research design. Whereas the final concluding phase is about drawing implications of the findings from the case study and assessing their contribution to the achievement of the research objective. All the three phases are interdependent and cannot be completed alone, therefore it is vital for the success of the research to ensure that each phase is consistent with the other phases.

The first phase is considered to be vital for the whole research in order to frame the case study and serve as a point of reference when conducting the second phase. It should be carried out carefully and accurately, otherwise it might be difficult for the researcher to achieve the

research objectives. Therefore, this phase will be discussed in the present paper in detail, whilst the other phases will be implemented in other chapters of the thesis.

### **2.1.1. Research objective**

The objective follows from the problematics of the topic, which is related to under-researched field of indirect modes of democracy promotion. There is also insufficient academic and political attention on alternative and innovative ways of democratization processes in Belarus. The specification of the problem is motivated by the identification of gaps in the existing literature, as it is an under researched area of inquiry, and addresses contradictory theories. Regarding the research objective, George and Bennett (2005: 75-6) identify six different types of theory-building research objectives. It is crucial to formulate the research objective at the beginning of the research design, because the defined objective guides and constrains the whole process. Thus, this thesis focuses on one of the the 'plausibility probes' as a type of a research objective, because, putting in the words of George and Bennett (Ibid, 2005:75), it is suitable for "preliminary studies of relatively untested theories and hypotheses to determine whether more intensive and laborious testing is warranted". Therefore, the main research objective of this thesis is to probe whether the EU's functional engagement with actors on the bottom-up level has the potential to be an effective tool of democracy promotion through the governance model in Belarus.

### **2.1.2. Research strategy**

In this part hypotheses and their elements such as conditions and variables, as well as the main research question are formulated for further analysis in the corresponding chapters. There are two main hypotheses to be tested in this research, are as follows:

*(1) Functional co-operation as an instrument of the governance model of democracy promotion have a potential to be an effective tool to cause socializing into the values of democratic governance effect on the state officials involved into this cooperation in Belarus.*

*(2) In its policy of democratization in relation to Belarus the EU employs linkage, leverage and governance as modes of democracy promotion with a gradual intensification of the latest.*

Whereas this research deals with the modes of democracy promotion in Belarus, in the theoretical part of the study (Chapter 2) I will focus, first, on the analysis of common perceptions of democracy and direct and indirect modes of democracy promotion ascribed to the external governance of the EU in its relations with the neighbors and Belarus, in particular. The possibility of functional engagement to prompt democratic 'socialization' and adherence to the democratic mode of governance should be analysed first. Democratic socialization is directly connected with attitudes towards norms and principles of democratic governance, which will be revised from the positions of its integral parts, such as participation, accountability and transparency. In the Chapter 3 the concepts elaborated in the theoretical part will be applied to test the second hypotheses in the case study of Belarus, thus, putting under scrutiny EU democracy promotion policies in the country.

As for the empirical part in the Chapter 4, the analysis is conducted in order to answer the main research question of the thesis:

*whether and to what degree does the promotion of the governance model through functional cooperation with Belarusian officials on the bottom-up level enable socialization into democratic governance?*

The analysis is based primarily on relevant official documents, legislation and reports on the projects' initiatives and their implementation, as well as on interviews conducted with Belarusian governmental and non-governmental actors responsible for execution of the projects. In addition to officials involved in the implementation of joint programs, the interviews are conducted among uninvolved actors within the same field. This is done in order to compare their attitudes towards democratic governance and outline dependent variables. The measurement of their attitudes is made with the help of the realistic evaluation method, which will be described below.

The independent variables of this research are elements of democratic governance, i.e. transparency, accountability and participation. Dependent variables are attitudes of the state officials towards democratic modes of government. These variables are important elements of the strategy as they can help to reveal whether attitude change as a result of the acquisition of new knowledge and whether the experience has taken place and can be attributed to the policy itself (Gray, 2004: 167). Dependent variables are considered to be relatively fixed outcome variables which can be explained or predicted. Independent variables are assumed to have a direct effect on

the dependent variables. Changes made to the independent variables are expected to affect the dependent variables (George and Bennett 2005: 80-81).

### **2.1.3. Case selection**

The research design process includes also a selection of a case for the research which should be relevant to the objectives and the strategy of the study. It seems important to underline that notion of case is not understood simply like, for example, a country, historic event or a consequence of events, but rather as an 'an instance of a class of event' (George and Bennett, 2005) which constitute a scientific interest and intention to examine in-depth a chosen social phenomenon.

The overall case for the thesis as a focus of scientific inquiry is the relations between the EU and Belarus. The narrowing point of localization of the study is the modes of the EU democracy promotion in Belarus with a special attention on the governance model as an indirect mode of democratization. The focal case study for this thesis is the EU's functional cooperation with Belarusian officials in the activities which are not aimed at democracy promotion in the first place.

## **2.2. Evaluative methodology**

Evaluative research method will be employed for the empirical analysis. This method is expected to help to advance knowledge regarding bottom-up democratization as a side-product of the activities which are not primarily aimed at democracy promotion. Therefore, this method of evaluation can uncover and determine the extent to which the program (functional engagement) can produce particular effects (Rutman, 1984: 21).

The evaluative method in the research can be adopted when there is an goal to examine a change that can take place as a result of certain procedures and policies. Along with adding new knowledge, evaluation research helps to understand how existing knowledge can be used to guide practical action (Clarke, 1999). The evaluative method is useful, not merely for description of the events, but rather for interpreting what is actually happening. Additionally, it can provide a broader picture from the position of the recipients, or of objects of a certain policy (Gray, 2004: 157).

Evaluation measuring techniques are of a great importance within this methodology. Together with these evaluation techniques, the focus of evaluation as a research method should be oriented around issues of the object and target group of the evaluated program (Gray, 2004: 153). Therefore, the object of the evaluation is the change of the attitude towards democratic governance as a result of the engagement in joint projects with the EU. These programs are launched under the technical, expert and financial assistance of TACIS/ENPI instruments. The target groups are Belarusian officials which are engaged in the Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) programs.

The process of evaluation will take place on four different levels as Kirkpatrick (1959) distinguishes. These are reaction, learning, behavior, and results. On the reaction level reactions of a target group is evaluated. Learning stands for the measurement of transferred knowledge, skills and attitudes. Behavior refers to the measurement of whether the performance of the target group has been improved as a result of their involvement in a certain procedures. Finally, the results level relates to the measurement of whether and how effective the objectives of the procedures were achieved.

The aim of all levels is to provide tools necessary to evaluate different aspects of knowledge transfer. Firstly, there is a need to evaluate whether the transferred knowledge was understood by the recipient. Secondly, whether the recipient has obtained new skills and has become competent to apply these new skills in practice (Gray, 2004).

While evaluating, special attention should be paid to the context in which the evaluated policies take place. The context should include the reasons of launching the program, and different hidden and overt agendas, as well as the aims and objectives of the both parties and other stakeholders.

Besides the general patterns of the evaluative research, it will be supplemented by the ideas of realistic evaluation. Pawson and Tilley (1997) critically assess traditional evaluation practices and introduce a new approach. This approach is called 'Realistic evaluation' and is expected to contribute to greater validity and utility of the findings of the research. The main emphasis of the realistic evaluation approach is therecognition that alongside with scientific contribution it informs the thinking of practitioners and program participants. Therefore, recognizing real problems within the program can help to reflect upon realistic developments in policy making.

Pawson and Tilley (1997) introduce several methodological rules of conducting research using the realistic evaluation approach. First, the researcher should address the reasons and modes of change brought about by the program. Causation should be understood both internally and externally. External causation refers to mechanisms of the ability of the program to produce certain outcomes in regard to its recipients. Internal causation deals with reasons and resources that enable program participants to change. Therefore, consequences of the influence of the European counterparts on the Belarusian officials is seen as external causation, whilst the mechanisms of functional cooperation enabling democratic socializations are regarded as internal causation.

### **2.2.1. Realist causal proposition**

To answer the research question and to develop a theory on connecting links between functional cooperation and democratic socialization, the generative causation model will be applied. The generative causation model is widely used in experimental and control group designs in both natural and social sciences. Considering realism as a main ontological approach to assess the mechanisms that will be described below in this thesis, realist logic of generative causation seems rather useful. Its applicability to realistic evaluation was explained in detail by Pawson and Tilley (1997) in their “Realistic Evaluation” work.

In this fashion, realist generative causation consists of the following ingredients: outcome, mechanism, and context. These ingredients interconnected in a manner where “*casual outcomes follow from mechanisms acting in contexts*” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 58) constitute an axiomatic base for realistic explanation.

Within the realistic evaluation of a change as a result of a social program (or social intervention in the Belarus case) together with mechanisms and contexts, additional mechanisms such as embeddedness and regularities are provided. The outcome here is perceived as change.

This model provides a skeletal structure for further explanation in evaluation and theory development in order to answer the research question and to test the hypotheses. Therefore, within this section, a general outline of the model has been provided, whereas its application will be provided in the Chapter 4 of the study.

Particular mechanisms in particular contexts supplemented by the theory will help to explain the outcomes and causations. Later on in the thesis, the described model will be utilized

on two levels of analysis. Firstly, on the theoretical level it will help to distinguish certain mechanisms, i.e. functional engagement, that foster democratic socialization of the officials in authoritarian Belarus, i.e. context. The expected outcome of this level is the test of the hypotheses whether functional cooperation in an authoritarian context can actually foster democratic change. The second level of the analysis will be focused on the main research question and include the empirical part of the study. In particular, examining how determined, from the first part of the analysis, mechanisms operate in practice within the given context, i.e. within joint EU and Belarus programs. The outcomes of the evaluation refer to the effects of the program on the participants (Gray, 2004: 158). An expected outcome of the present study is to determine whether the 'mechanisms acting in contexts' can actually generate *change* in the attitude of officials.

### **2.2.2. Limitations of the evaluative methodology**

The chosen methodology, together with the case of Belarus imposes certain limitations, risks and preconditions the researcher should be aware of while conducting the research. The purpose of the research is to evaluate attitude change resulting from the processes which are not directly aimed at democratization. The examined change is expected to be a side-effect of the activities, rather than the main purpose of the engagement. Therefore, the main purpose of the evaluation used in this study is not to evaluate the program as such, but to catch the subtle mechanisms and influences that might follow from the program. Nevertheless, the above discussed patterns of evaluative research seem to be appropriate to utilize to achieve the objectives of the research.

Another limitation refers to all the levels of evaluation. The main purpose of this research is to determine whether an attitude change does actually take place as a result of learning and cooperation. The research is not aimed at analysis and the measurement of whether new knowledge and skills are applied in practice. The attitude measurement, however, can provide a useful estimation as to whether new knowledge has been transferred, and if the recipients will be able to utilize it under flourishing conditions.

## **2.3. Data collection**

The sources used are divided into two main types: primary and secondary. Official documents of the EU and Belarus such as European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instruments (ENPI), EU Country Strategy Papers and National Indicative Programmes for Belarus, as well as official press releases, speeches, and interview data will be analyzed. The secondary sources are books and articles on related issues. Data collection, however, has certain limitations and precautions. Due to security considerations and the lack of transparency in both European and Belarusian public administration and official web pages, it might be difficult to access all the necessary data and people.

### **Interviews**

To answer the research question, I will employ interviews as an essential tool of data collection. This is needed to obtain first hand necessary information for the evaluative analysis of the data and to bring some new data to the field. An interview is considered to be a 'conversation between people in which one person has the role of researcher' (Gray, 2004: 213).

As Gray (2004: 214) explains interviewing is generally the best approach to collect valuable data when there is a need to examine attitudes and feelings, because there is a need for in-depth opinion and perspective that would allow judging the attitude differences. Questionnaires, alternatively, as a form of data collection are more suitable for a large number of respondents. Whereas this research is aimed on evaluation of attitude of a small number of respondents, interviewing seems to be a better option to collect necessary data. In addition, the use of interviews allows the researcher to ask for a more detailed clarification of their responses, which is impossible with the use of a questionnaire.

In this regard, interviewing seems to be the most useful tool in methodological terms to supplement other methods, which can be used to gather information regarding people's values and attitudes, identify variables, and, most importantly, answer the main research question.

Semi-structured interviews are chosen as the format for conducting my interviews with the Belarusian officials both involved and not involved in joint project with European organizations. This type of interviews appears to be appropriate for the purposes of this research. On the one hand, a possibility to change the questions, their order, to ask additional questions that might arise from new discussed issues, gives a certain degree of freedom for the researcher during the



process of the interview. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews have certain organizational limitations that allow not losing the line of the interview.

The interviews were conducted with officials who are directly involved in cooperation with the EU actors and are primarily responsible for decision making within the organization they represent. In order to give a grounding for the evaluation of differences in attitudes, state officials who are not engaged in joint programs were also interviewed. For a more detailed description of the entire interviewing process, how they were organized and conducted, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Gray (2004) mentions one important point in relation to data on feelings, opinions, and attitudes as they remain highly subjective which in turn can negatively influence the results of the research. Although, this subjectivity might be seen beneficial for the present study. Whilst attitude is a highly subjective construct of a rational human being, the measurement of attitude change is mainly a measurement of the change of subjective preferences. However, due to the political situation in Belarus, there was a certain degree of reluctance of the officials to discuss the subtle issues of democratic governance and correspondingly they might deliberately provide deceitful data.

## **2.4. Ontological assumptions**

For the purposes of this research, rational choice together with constructivism are approached broadly, perceiving both not as theories, but rather as a set of assumptions about the world itself, human motivation and agency, or, in other words, ontology. For example, Wendt (1999: 5) states that this set of assumptions is concerned with ontological and epistemological questions such as 'the nature of human agency and its relationship to social structures, the role of ideas and material forces in social life, the proper form of social explanations and so on'. Much of the critique explains that rational choice and constructivist models are formulated in abstract and empirically intractable ways, consequently, they cannot be supported or refuted by empirical evidence. Additionally, there is a fundamental difference in the argumentation between the two models on the way they approach main actors. Thus, rationalist scholars concentrate on formal and informal rules according to which actors pursue their preferences. Conversely, constructivists

posit the role of incentives that shape actors' preferences and identities (Pollack, 2000: 14-5, Moravcsik, 1999: 670). In response to this critique, it is argued that controversy between rationalist and constructivist thoughts might be useful, whereas both models can supplement each other in a fruitful way for the research. They are suitable to give rise to testable theories and hypotheses, thus 'bridging the rational-choice/constructivist gap' (Checkel, 2000; Pollack, 2006: 31-33).

In such a manner, the basic ontology of this research is to be located within the rational-choice tradition with elements of constructivist thought. Briefly, according to the rational choice theory, actors are rational, intentional and self-interested. Constructivism views "the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world" (Adler, 2005:90). Constructivist assumptions pose actors as capable of learning. Thus involvement into the learning processes can result in a change of actors' preferences and attitudes.

Basic rational-choice approach stands that agents are rational in their performance. According to Pollack (2006: 32), actors "...calculate the expected utility of alternative courses of action and choose the action that is likely to maximize their utility". Thus, choices are not made randomly, but deliberately, whereas agents consider only those opportunities that would best fulfill their purposes. Doing so, agents are egoistic, and their behavior is guided by the logic of self-interest, provided the utility is maximized through strategic involvement and exchanges.

Rationalists pay much attention to how behavior is affected by incentives of the reality. Under different conditions and environments actors follow different logic and rationalities and thus their behavior can include different modes of action (Wendt, 1999: 33-34). This goes in line with constructivist thought. Yet constructivist assumptions can perfectly supplement rationalists with constructivist implications of agents that consciously behave according to their knowledge, experience and understandings. Moreover, constructivists underline agents' capacity to learn, and, therefore, their preferences and behavior is subject to change with new knowledge. It follows, that identities and interests of the agents are always in process.

Interacting, agents learn to cooperate, while, as rationalists argue, certain egoistic identities of actors remain quite constant (Niemann, 2006: 24-7). When certain cooperation

undermines egoistic identities, it may generate collective ones, thus making structural change easier. However, changes over the course of interaction are quite difficult to predict. Rationalism, Wendt states, suits for a short term analysis when change is less visible. In turn, constructivism is a useful model for a long-term perspective (Wendt, 1999: 333-4).

Another important aspect of constructivism that will be useful for future analysis is its emphasis on the role of non-state actors. It was noted that non-state actors (e.g. NGOs, transnational corporations, international institutions, private actors) can alter the beliefs of state actors, influence their behavior, as well as act as subjects in their own right (Slaughter, 2011).

The final aspect of the ontological framework of this thesis concerns the status of structure and agency. Whilst the main focus of the research will be centered on the agents, i.e. state and non-state officials; and neo-functionalism, integration and democratization theories deal primarily with structures, i.e. institutions, defining the ontological status of structure and agents seems to be crucial to define the status of agency and structure. Within his revised neo-functionalist framework, Niemann (2006) emphasized the interdependence of structures and agents, mutually constituting each other. Thus, agents are not merely servants of structures and they can influence and change aspects of structures. These Structures influence the constitution of agents and follow social practices. Therefore, I will follow Niemann's suggestion to assign structure and agents equal ontological status.

Rationalist and constructivist standpoints will be of use for the following discussions on theory applicability concerning different aspects of neo-functionalism and functional engagement, EU conditionality, democratization, impacts of learning, lesson-drawing and consequent difference of agents' incentives (towards democratic values).

## **Conclusion**

This paper highlights a research design and a methodological framework to be used in this thesis. The methodology is based on qualitative methods of research. Case study and evaluation method with adoption of the elements of realistic evaluation and generic causation aims to analyze direct and indirect modes of the EU democracy promotion in Belarus, theorize on the causation between functional cooperation and democratic socialization. Interviews are used as a tool in order to get primary data. The thesis is not theoretically driven, the main motivation

behind it is to explore a certain empirical problem that is whether this cooperation can bring a socializing effect and lead to change of the attitudes of Belarusian officials. Whereas the evaluation instruments are subject to different errors in the research which, consequently, can undermine its value and feasibility, the analysis should be made with a particular attention to potential sources of errors to maximize the accuracy of the study.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for the whole research and analysis. The first part comprises of a short discussion, and elaboration of the working understanding of the concept of democracy and democratization. The second part specifically relates to the models of democracy promotion applied by the EU in its external affairs and, particularly, in relation to its neighborhood. Special attention has been given to the instrument of conditionality, the ways how it works and the conditions for its effectiveness. Conditionality, so far, has been the main mechanism applied by the EU in its unsuccessful attempts to democratize Belarus. Therefore, it seems important to reflect upon the reasons for the ineffectiveness of this policy. The final part addresses this alternative model of democracy promotion and makes a theoretical contribution to the model of governance proposed by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011). The governance model implies indirect promotion of democratic governance (amounted by such principle elements as participation, accountability, and transparency) on the bottom-up, individual level. The main attempt has been made in its connection to functional cooperation and its potential to bring about a socializing effect and thus a possible change in the attitudes of public officials.

The general focus of the theoretical part is on strategies and behaviors, rather than on the motivations of the EU. As such, a normative critique of democracy and democracy promotion, its reasons and normative desirability, are not the focal point of this paper<sup>4</sup>.

#### 3.1. Common Perceptions on Democracy and Democratization

Before moving on to debates on democratization and democracy promotion, the conceptualization of what constitutes democracy itself should be considered. Democracy is fairly regarded as one of the most contested and ambiguous concepts which is followed by numerous disputes over its proper meaning, definition, measurement, characteristics, and application. Originating as far back as Ancient Greek political culture, and literally meaning ‘the rule by the people’, the term has undergone numerous re-conceptualizations and re-definitions. Even at

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<sup>4</sup> See Manners “Normative Power Europe” and its critique.

present, there is no single consensus of what constitutes the construct of democracy. Even the history of modern uninterrupted democracy in European countries is quite short, and it does not exceed more than 70 years (Huntington, 1991, 13-15). The debates over the issues of democracy and democratization received special attention since widespread attempts to move to democratic rule in the developing world during the 1980s and 1990s after the collapse of the socialist political systems. This move was labelled, by Huntington (1991), the 'third wave of democracy', implying that democratization as a process, and perceptions on democratization, have followed certain waves. Whereas this paper is not a study on democracy as such, a brief outline of the general and least contested perceptions of the concept will be provided below in order to elaborate on a working definition.

Scholars traditionally distinguish between two different approaches to democracy. The first track refers to 'formal democracy', or 'political democracy'; and the second one – to so called 'substantive' or 'social' democracy (Pridham, 2000; Bobbio, 1989). The vast majority of the literature on democracy is focused around the first approach. Definitions may vary, however, the main features appropriate to both types remain to a large extent similar. The notion of formal democracy<sup>5</sup> originates from the fundamental work of Dahl (1971) who established the term polyarchy<sup>6</sup>. Later on, this social construct served as a basis for the development of discussions on what constitutes democracy. The traditional understanding of the concept in its formal sense was elaborated by Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1999). According to them (Ibid, 1989: 6-7), democracy should meet three main conditions, namely:

- extensive and fair competition for governmental power;
- social inclusion of groups into political participation for governmental positions;
- certain civil and political freedoms and liberties within the society, such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations.

The formal approach to democracy emphasizes the development of a democratic institutional framework together with the establishment of rules and procedures. These rules and

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<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter borrowed from Pridham (2000) terms formal and substantive democracy will be applied.

<sup>6</sup> According to Dahl (1971: 3) eight main characteristics of polyarchy are the following: 1) freedom to form and join organizations, 2) freedom of expression, 3) right to vote, 4) eligibility to public offices, 5) alternative sources of information, 6) right of political leaders to compete for support, 7) free and fair elections and 8) institutions for making public policies dependent on votes and other expressions of preference.

institutional framework are regarded as a cornerstone for free and fair electoral competition. Other minimal conditions imply multi-party system, rule of law, and a separation of powers for the maintenance of checks and balances, and to allow parties to compete for the support of the electorate (Bobbio, 1989).

Nevertheless, the formal type of democracy is an incomplete form of democracy mainly because it is reduced merely to the delegation of powers. Another substantive, or social, form of democracy is more complicated, whereas it covers 'deeper dimensions of political life' (Pridham, 2000: 5). Therefore, this form refers to the processes outside the formal election process. Democracy should be supplemented with ongoing control by the society and the electorate should have opportunities to influence key political decisions. These elements are less tangible and related to the mechanisms that put policy processes under societal control, including primarily transparency, accountability, and active citizen participation. Later, the debates on substantive democracy were developed, but not limited to, discussions on the necessity to develop civil society to make progress towards full democracy. Nevertheless, more emphasis is put on other principles of substantive democracy, such as inclusive participation, civic awareness, the absence of corruption, channels for dialogue and consultation, and local ownership (UNDP, 2010; OSCE, 2004). Thus, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) emphasizes the day-to-day experience of democracy inside the society, stating the importance of the development of democratic culture, not merely on regional and national levels, but rather on local, or micro, level (OSCE, 2004).

In reality, however, it rarely happens that two types of democracy are fully present within one political entity. Therefore, the reliance upon the above mentioned conceptualizations is not sufficient enough to delineate the frontier between democratic and undemocratic regimes, because in most cases this frontier is very vague and blurred. These so-called hybrid regimes are characterized by existence of both democratic and non-democratic features within the society<sup>7</sup>. Thus, some fundamental human rights can be guaranteed by the state, but certain political rights relating to participation in political life of the society could be restricted. On the contrary, state authorities can exercise some democratic practices including regular elections, adoption of

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<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) were the first to introduce terms 'dectablanda' and 'democradura' to describe two types of the regimes with democratic deficits.

democratic constitutions, provision of some place for opposition, and relatively independent civil society. At the same time, certain democracy deficits can be viewed in the political sphere. More precisely, they can relate to the contested legitimacy of elections which are not always free and fair, a low level of political participation, the infringement of the rule of law, and high level of corruption. Additionally, a democratic deficit can be seen in the limitation of certain civil rights and liberties, especially in regard to freedom of expression and freedom of association (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986: 9; Schmitter, 1995: 16; Carothers, 2002: 9-10).

Within the scope and limitations of this research, democracy will be assessed as a system where the main elements of both 'formal' and 'substantive' democracies suggested by Pridham (2000) are present. However, it will be regarded not as much as political system, but rather as a value system capable of safeguarding fundamental human rights of every human being and the rule of law in governance (Tiihonen, 2004: 121).

### **3.1.2. Democratization**

The preconditions and processes of democratization underlie the mechanisms of democracy promotion. In order to provide further insights from these approaches and to identify modes and mechanisms of democratization, and relating it to functional cooperation,, general categories and variables of the concept should be considered.

It is generally implied that democratization is the process of changing from a non-democratic political regime to a democratic one (Pridham, 2000: 6). The process of democratization is aimed at the establishment and stabilization of substantive democracy. The final outcome of democratization, therefore, is more than establishment of a set of institutions; it is the extension of meaningful rights to all citizens. In that sense, democratization is an ongoing process (Sell and Schmitz, 2000: 25).

The discussion regarding democratization entails different closely linked, albeit, not similar processes of liberalization, transition, and consolidation (Schneider and Schmitter, 2004). The processes are used to mark democratization in chronological sequencing. Democratization, therefore, covers all these stages of the shift from an authoritarian regime into a democratic one (Pridham 2000: 16-24).



Liberalization is defined by Schneider and Schmitter (2004) as a process of the political opening of an authoritarian system through the redefinition and extension of political rights, making them efficient in order to protect individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by state officials or third parties. Besides the rule of law, liberalization implies a certain range of freedoms and liberties as well. This means that social groups and individuals are free to engage in different forms of behavior, whereas state authorities should refrain from coercive behavior that might infringe human rights and freedoms, including toleration with the opposition (Linz and Stepan, 1996:3). At this stage, the achieved level of proclaimed liberal freedoms is less important than explicit will and announcement to establish them. What is more, the announcement should have a certain degree of credibility that imposed changes can lead to a change of behavior of other actors (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 10). Liberalization, however, has certain limitations. Collective actions of citizens to hold the authorities accountable are beyond the scope of liberalization (Schneider and Schmitter, 2004). Additionally, the concept does not cover the possibility of the citizens removing the authorities by established procedures.

The term transition was introduced in O'Donnell and Schmitter's work on democratization in Southern Europe and Latin America, and has gained a strong presence within political studies. Democratic transition refers to the time interval between one political regime or system and another, when a certain change from non-democratic system to a democratic one can be observed, providing that the new regime satisfies the criteria of democracy (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986: 6). The interval takes place between the breakdown of an authoritarian regime, i.e. a regime no longer possesses certain fundamental aspects of authoritarianism; and the establishment of formal and informal rules and characters of the new regime. According to Baracani (2004), the main first successful indicator of the transition is the holding of free, competitive and fair elections, and/or adoption of a democratic constitution (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986: 6).

Thus, the consolidation of democracy is the final phase of democratization. One of the common understanding used in the literature on consolidation concerns the reduction of the likelihood of 'democratic breakdown' (Schedler, 1998a: 95-96). During this phase, according to Schneider and Schmitter (2004), within the political process, authorities become accountable to their citizens. What is more important during the process of the consolidation of democracy is that

its rules and principles become fully institutionalized. In this regard, it is important to define the end point of consolidation. Presumably, the process of democratization can be considered complete when both authorities and the majority of the population accept and incorporate democratic policies and practices in day-to-day governance, and when a return to undemocratic policies is costly and ineffective for all the parties (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 5).

Even though the democratization process hypothetically embraces all these stages, the core characteristics of the phases do not necessarily take place during democratization. The purpose of this research, however, is not to analyze the level of democracy in Belarus within these categories, rather to understand these categories as a useful tool to measure the progress which has already been achieved in terms of democratization.

#### *Theoretical approaches to democratization*

In the democratization literature, two principal approaches can be distinguished, namely structural and actor-centered approaches. The structural approach refers back to the modernization theory of democratization, with a primary focus on conditions that need to exist in a society for democracy to emerge and stabilize (Pridham, 2000; Merkel, 1999). This approach mainly deals with the connection of economic development and well-being with the stabilization of democracy. Economic development is followed by more equal distribution of income, and an increase of welfare and education. In turn, it leads to a rise in political participation and civic engagement in associations, partnerships, and political life in general, thus, preventing ruling elites monopolizing power. Therefore, it is argued that economic development has a positive effect on the likelihood of democracy (Lipset, 1981).

Actor-centered approaches have gained much more attention amongst scholars aiming to analyze the behavior of various actors and examine how their cooperation can affect the democratization process in a favorable way. Some scholars examine the behavior of national elites (Pridham, 2000); however, recently appearing more in the literature are arguments that external actors, and factors acknowledging that activities of external actors, can considerably influence internal decision-making processes. Early studies addressed the role of the USA as an external actor in democratization processes in Latin America and Southern Europe (Pridham 1991; Carothers 1991).

Scholars differentiate between various instruments, targets, mechanisms, channels, and modes of democracy promotion. In regard to various instruments democracy assistance can be conducted in a form of political, financial, economic assistance, cooperation and dialogue, election observations, partnerships and associations, as well as peacekeeping interventions, sanctions and restrictions, etc. (Reinhard, 2010). The main focus of the instruments utilized by the EU lies on financial and technical support, aid, as well as other tools such as diplomatic instruments, the mobilization of civilian and military capabilities, humanitarian assistance, public information, advocacy and monitoring, multilateral initiatives, and much more (European Council of Ministers, 2006: 4). With regard to the concept of democracy promotion within the framework of this thesis it will comprise of all direct and non-violent activities of the EU that are intended to strengthen and support democracy in Belarus (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011: 888).

Different types of instruments are peculiar to different models of democracy promotion. Within the academic debate, different classifications of the models of democracy promotion are distinguished in regards to the general policy of the EU in this area. Carothers (1999; 2009) focuses upon state and civil society-oriented models, or political and developmental approaches; Kotzian (2011) distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up models; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011) talk about leverage, linkage and governance; Hahn (2011) emphasizes state and societal models and four modes of the European democracy promotion: integration, stabilization, association, and partnership; multilateral and bilateral models proposed by Pevehouse (2005). However, in general all of these concepts refer to two channels of democratic aid which is delivered either at the state, or at the societal level.

Therefore, democracy promotion occurs through a wide set of activities and varied strategies adjusted to diverse social and political contexts throughout the world. Carothers (2009) differentiates two different approaches to democratization, namely, political and developmental approaches. Each approach encompasses divers set of instruments. Consequently, the prevalence of one approach over the other determines which mode prevails in democracy assistance.

A political approach adopts a Dahlian narrow concept of democracy, i.e. 'formal' democracy, with a focus on fair elections, political struggle, and political and civil liberties. Within this approach democratization is seen as a process of political struggle between non-democratic and democratic political forces supporting the later. Therefore, democracy promotion can take

place by challenging the undemocratic government directly through economic and political sanctions or diplomatic pressure. This can also be done indirectly by supporting independent institutions, such as an independent judiciary, media, electoral commission, etc. The importance of supporting these institutions is seen in their ability to influence, check and guarantee the fairness of political procedures. Additional assistance can be lent to opposing political actors or politically oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the form of funding, training, advice or other kinds of support.

The developmental approach stems from a broader 'substantive' concept of democracy, implying a slow process of political and socio-economic developments with a stress on justice, equality, social and economic rights, and such basic elements of democratic governance as transparency, participation, and accountability. According to this approach, democratization is perceived as a "slow, iterative process ... marked by the gradual accumulation of small gains" (Carothers, 2009: 8). Therefore, democracy support measures are implemented in ways that promote social and economic development (through socio-economic reforms, support of civil society); strengthen state capacity and good governance (through, for example, strengthening local government or rule of law by assisting legal reforms); as well as help to build cooperative partnerships with nondemocratic governments.

Pursuing the developmental approach, policy makers tend to avoid direct political confrontation and engagement with incumbent power holders. Instead the main emphasis is made on "large-scale change and less politicized sectors" (Carothers, 2009: 10). Babayev (2013) argues that this sectorial engagement is possible even under very restrictive political conditions, and, what is more important, it does not challenge power holders. On the contrary, it opens a door for a longer-term cooperation and builds links between socio-economic and political reforms, whereas too confrontational manner of political engagement might provoke the loss of access to the non-democratic environment (Carothers, 2009).

Generally, the division between the two approaches seems to be very basic, since it originates from different ideas on democracy and democratization. Thus, the political approach is intended on the promotion of 'formal' democracy, whereas the developmental approach is oriented on 'substantive' democracy. Even considering that both approaches have some significant weaknesses and strengths, it would, therefore, be misleading to claim that one

approach is more efficient than the other. Conversely, given modern challenges to democracy assistance, there is a growing need for the application and study of more diverse and alternative approaches, such as, for example, the need to examine potential of functional, or sectoral, engagement on a grassroots level.

In order to clarify further use of terms throughout this thesis, the political mechanism of democracy assistance will be referred as the top-down method, i.e. targeted at the state level on state institutions, political elites, and in the political sphere. As for external activities targeted at societal groups, civil society, or local officials, i.e. those actors that have direct close contact with the citizens will constitute the bottom-up (developmental) approach to democratization.

### 3.2. Modes of the EU democracy promotion

Since the early 1990s the EU has positioned itself as a promoter of democracy. For further discussion and justification of the theoretical implementation of the EU will be referred to as an independent entity rather than to its separate member states and their activities. Therefore, the actorship of the EU as a promoter of democracy in the international political system is assumed *per se*. As noted by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011), EU policies work on various levels and through different causal mechanisms.

As an actor in the international arena the EU possesses a certain degree of power which it executes in its foreign policy. Joseph Nye (1990) introduced the concepts of 'soft' and 'hard' power. It is argued that the EU in its foreign policy uses soft power more than hard power. In other words, it strives to minimize the use of coercion and achieve its objectives through cooperation and partnerships, whereas hard power implies a wide use of restrictions, sanctions, political and military interventions.

The EU has constantly emphasized the importance of the presence of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as its policy objectives and essential conditions for establishment of institutionalized relationships with other countries.

Europe was the first to institutionalize the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in its legal instruments, but also in its external agreements. Indeed, the rhetoric that

emphasizes the *actorness* of the EU as a democracy promoter on the international sphere draws back to the Treaty on the European Union (Treaty of Maastricht 1992), when the promotion of democracy was explicitly set as a goal for EU foreign policy. Later on, in the Nice and Lisbon Treaties, this goal was extended to the inclusion of objective of promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms in all forms of co-operation, including trade agreements and associations, with other countries within a coherent external and internal policy of the EU. As Hahn (2011: 4-5) argues, the EU's promotion of democracy not so much constituted an independent area of activities, but rather embodied and constituted an integral and inalienable part of domestic and foreign logic of activities.

Furthermore, the European promotion of democracy and democratic governance falls within the framework of external governance. Youngs (2009: 895) argues that '[t]he external governance framework offers the prospect of capturing the way in which the EU has come to support democratic reform through extending the reach of EU rules and legislation'. In doing so, the EU applies different modes of governance: hierarchy and network governance. The latest research shows that the network mode of governance, i.e. multi-level and multi-actor character of policies, of the EU prevails over a vertical hierarchical mode (Youngs, 2009; Wetzel, 2011). Thus, the hierarchical mode is mainly adopted in the leverage model of democracy promotion in relation to strong conditionality. Essentially put, hierarchy can be seen, as the EU is a power capable of imposing punitive measures in the case of weak democratic performance.

Even though activities initiated under the network governance mode do not necessarily put democracy and democratic governance promotion in the forefront, or even do not presuppose it at all, they might still have the potential to establish functional ties and transfer rules and values by cooperating (Wetzel, 2011). Consequently, these functional ties form a sort of horizontal networks between public management of a targeted state and the EU, within a specific sector of public administration.

Even though Europe adopts both developmental and political approaches towards democracy-building, the developmental approach still prevails in its policy (Carothers, 2009; Youngs, 2009). To assess the democratizing activities of the EU in its neighborhood policy a three-type model presented by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011) will be applied. This model encompasses the main elements of other frameworks and is quite innovative since it broadens the

traditional state and civil society oriented models by introducing a new governance model, which examines activities with a potential to promote democratic governance. Thus, the framework concepts are leverage, linkage, and governance models of democracy promotion (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011). The analysis will focus mainly on leverage in a form of conditionality and governance models. The cultivation of a civil society as a key form of linkage will be beyond the scope of this thesis, though a brief overview of this model will be provided to illustrate a broad picture of the EU activities supporting democracy.

### 3.2.1. Linkage

Support, development and engagement with civil society within authoritarian state falls within bottom-up, or developmental approach to democracy promotion, primarily because the main activities take place without affecting state political actors. The linkage model is oriented directly at the support of democratic opposition, media, non-governmental organizations, and civil society in general, as well as indirectly – on modernization through transnational engagement. Put briefly, the linkage model is aimed at tackling mechanisms within the society that are conducive enough to link them to democracy. Thus, linkage is implemented by targeted domestic actors who are expected to represent a lobby group for democratization and become influential enough to prevent state imposed undemocratic practices within the society (Kubicek, 2011).

Direct support can be material in a form of funding the needs of the actors to perform their activities, or educational in a form of meetings, seminars, and training. The intensity of their involvement and allocated resources will influence the effectiveness of these programs. Indirect support is connected with promotion of economic development and education by additional investment, facilitation and the intensification of trade. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the linkage model decreases significantly when the activities of the external actor take place in an isolated country and are not welcomed by the political elites. Furthermore, civil society should possess some degree of autonomy and freedom of operation. Otherwise, the government can rigorously suppress any sign of civic activity in the society which might endanger its grip on power. In addition, the civil society itself is expected to support political liberalization. Therefore, linkage might be effective provided that the promoter of democracy, in this case the EU, has access to civil society, and that civil society enjoys a certain degree of freedom (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011: 890-2).

### 3.2.2. Leverage model and conditionality

Initially, the leverage model in the foreign policy of the EU has been attributed to the attractiveness of membership. Since the 1990s, and especially in regard to ENP countries, the EU largely manipulated with membership opportunities to bring about democratic change. The leverage model refers to “the top-down inducement of political elites towards democratic reforms through political conditionality” (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011: 895). The mechanism of political conditionality has been at the core of the democratization strategy since the end of the Cold War, and, especially, in relation to the membership candidate countries (Kubicek, 2011).

Conditionality can be defined as a process in which one actor (state or organization) lends its support to another actor strictly upon its compliance with conditions concerning the fulfillment of certain democratic criteria. This sort of agreement is expected to foster political and democratic changes in a the recipient country (Reinhard, 2010: 200). In regard to the different benefits that conditionality can imply, one can list the following: financial and technical assistance, association treaties, trade facilitating agreements, and so on. In pursuing its neighborhood policy, the EU has used as an incentive reward, membership in exchange for the democratic reform and establishment of democratic institutions and practices.

Conditionality can be regarded as a bargaining process of costs and rewards. This process corresponds with the rational choice ontology and the rational choice institutionalism theoretical approach. In such a case, adopting European rules and values, the targeted states are entitled to benefits upon the completion of the requirements or positive performance towards democratization.

Obviously, the general logic of conditionality is quite simple, in order to receive the desired benefits, the recipient is to comply with certain essential requirements. The logic behind this strategy might be, however, quite misleading. At first sight its effectiveness should be self-evident, whilst the results appear to be beneficial for all of the parties concerned, especially when it comes to EU membership. However, as evidence shows, the success of conditionality is largely dependent on a number of different factors; and some of them are hidden in the nature of conditionality itself.



The majority of scholars who have studied conditionality in democracy promotion practices mostly agree on the common factors that make it effective (Youngs, 2001; Schimmelfennig, 2008; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). Conditionality can be perceived as a process of bargaining between the agent of democratic change and the targeted state or region. Therefore, the outcome of the bargain are highly dependent on the bargaining powers and recipient's interest in the benefits of such a bargain. Rational choice institutionalism also represents this logic of effectiveness of costs and benefits paradigm. If a rational subject is interested in obtaining the benefits, it will aspire to fulfill the conditions. The promoter of democracy can either impose extra costs for poor performance, introduce extra benefits to influence behavior of the recipient, or deny any further assistance. Nevertheless, there are several factors influencing the behavior of the actors and, consequently, the effectiveness of conditionality.

Firstly, the benefits of compliance with the imposed requirements must be highly tangible to be an effective incentive to launch democratic reform. Nevertheless, however attractive the benefits are, all attempts may fail if the recipients sees high 'adoption costs' behind the incentive.

This is one of the main reasons of low compliance with conditionality residing in the nature of the mechanism. According to Schimmelfennig (2005: 5) "[t]he liberal democratic norms, which are the subject of political conditionality, usually limit the autonomy and power of governments. They prohibit certain undemocratic and illiberal practices on which a government may rely to preserve its power – such as suppressing opposition parties or civic associations, curbing the freedom of the press, or rigging elections". High adoption costs can affect the political elites hold on power, their identity, and even the integrity and stability of the state. Therefore, for effectiveness of leverage, the benefits should be tangible. For example, tangible rewards can be either in material or political forms, and include financial aid and economic assistance to improve security and the welfare of the state, market access, and, finally, EU membership opportunity. In other words, the rewards should exceed the adoption costs. Moreover, the effectiveness of leverage increases with the size of tangible rewards. Thus, the prospect of EU membership appears to be a higher incentive than the prospect of association or assistance (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011: 892-5). However, the requirements should have a direct correlation with the promised rewards. In other words, demands for quick democratic reforms implying the transformation of the whole system of governance and state institutions, in exchange for some

degree of financial assistance not supplemented with other promises like, for example, membership are unlikely to have a positive effect.

This cost-benefit paradigm represents the main weakness of leverage when it comes to democracy promotion in states governed by authoritarian regimes. Without any membership prospect, the high costs of compliance with democratic and human rights rules exceed the benefits, as the case of most of the ENP countries in general and Belarus in particular (Schimmelfennig, 2005).

The second proposition for the effectiveness of conditionality is the credibility of the rewards. This implies that the EU should be capable and willing to deliver the rewards. The rewards should not be very costly to the promoter and should not provoke internal tensions within the society or member states. Credibility also is also a case in negative conditionality when it comes to threats to suspend the assistance which is already being provided. As Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011) point out, the receiving government should be more interested in receiving the reward than the promoter is in giving it. The credibility of conditionality has been crucial in the case of the democracy promotion effort in Turkey which was proposed the prospect of EU membership in exchange for implementation of comprehensive democratic reforms in order to meet Copenhagen Criteria. Nevertheless, due to extended and unproductive negotiations, as well as a significant divergence of views among the EU member states, the credibility of the promised reward decreased, as has the general perception of the EU among the Turks. Thus, conditionality has been ineffective, because regardless of all the Turkish attempts, it appeared that it would unlikely join the EU due to the highly politicized and ambiguous membership process (Kubicek, 2011).

Thirdly, conditionality should be consistent, strong and clear enough to become a far-reaching incentive for a change and to prevent the recipient from taking advantage of ambiguity and thus conducting only partial reforms to receive rewards, or to refrain from conducting any reforms due to unacceptable conditions and demands. Finally, the effectiveness of conditionality can be critically low when the third power comes into play influencing the authoritarian government. Nevertheless, considering the limited scope of the research, consequences of the Russian influence on Belarus will not be considered in this research.

In relation between top-down and bottom-up approaches too strict political conditionality on the top level might impede functional engagement in non-political bottom areas of cooperation. Therefore, leverage in any form should be imposed in a sensitive manner for the political environment. Additionally, some can notice a certain ‘goal conflict’ and ‘inconsistency’ within the two-way democratizing policy (Schimmelfennig, 2005). However, this statement might be arguable, whereas pursuance of the both approaches guarantees a comprehensive engagement on all levels of society. In this case, the failure or ineffectiveness of conditionality to bring about democratic change does not automatically mean the failure of all democratization policies, because other mechanisms still remain in power. Moreover, this might be beneficial for intensification and diversification of democracy promotion practices and techniques, and serve as an incentive to introduce new mechanisms.

### 3.2.3. Governance model

The governance model is related to the ability of the EU to promote democratic principles through sectoral functional engagement with the target countries. Unlike linkage or leverage, the governance model is not oriented around cooperation with state officials or civil society, but rather with public managers, i.e. sub-units of the state administration (Wetzels, 2011). Therefore governance works not through formal monopolistic institutions exercising ultimate authority over a specified territory, i.e. states, but through informal arrangements of actors exercising some degree of control over diverse functions, i.e. networks” (Schmitter, 2007).

The suggestion to accentuate the EU’s primary attention to the promotion of democratic governance within this sectoral approach came from the European Commission:

“To promote human rights and democratization objectives in external relations, the EU draws on a wide-range of instruments [...] Some are more innovative, and potentially underused, namely *Community instruments in policy areas such [as] the environment, trade, the information society and immigration which have the scope to include human rights and democratization objectives*. These tools should be used in a coherent manner, to achieve synergy and consistency and to ensure maximum effective use of resources to promote sustainable development and respect for human rights and democratization world-wide” (European Commission, 2001: 6).

A few years later the same idea was presented, though in a more confident voice, affirming that that: "... the concept of democratic governance has to be integrated into each and every sectoral programme" within all dimensions, i.e. political, economic, social, cultural, environment, etc. (European Commission, 2006).

Therefore, the promotion of democratic governance as one of the primary objectives of the EU can take place through functional cooperation in different public sectors of the state, thus, avoiding direct contact with political elites. According to the governance model of democracy promotion, democratic governance is transferred through the interaction of EU actors and administrative officials in the targeted country. As a result, this co-operation is expected to strengthen transgovernmental ties and lead to "decentralization of administrative structures, empowerment of administrative officials, and openness towards contacts and co-operation with the administrations of international organizations and other countries" (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011: 897). The effectiveness of this model is preconditioned by a high level of sectoral interdependence and accessibility of administration (Ibid, 2011: 895-8).

For definition of public managers, (throughout the text referred to as civil servants or public or state officials), I will apply one suggested by a prominent scholar in the field of public management Mark H. Moore, who sees a great potential of public officials to serve as agents of change in society by creating and delivering public value. Thus, public managers are elected or appointed officials as well as assisting them senior officials, who are held accountable for their public performance and have direct authority over public resources under their responsibility (Moore, 1995: 3). Managers can hold positions in the executive branch or in independent public agencies.

In Moore's vision, managers are not expected to be simply obedient blind implementers of the will of politicians acting within the scope of established regulations, and performing assigned tasks. Alternatively, Moore argues that politics and administration are separate areas. Public managers are not merely performers but can also be explorers and innovators seeking to discover, define, and produce new public value (Ibid, 1995: 13-17).

Thus, in turn, sectoral, or policy-specific, engagement follows the logic of neo-functional and institutional approaches.

Devised in the early 1960s, neo-functionalism seeks to explain the early stages of European economic integration and the political consequences produced by integration. Neo-functionalists focus mainly on regional integration, whilst underlining the autonomous influence of supranational institutions, and the change in the attitudes of the elites (Niemann, 2006). Even though neo-functionalism is widely used to explain European integration and enlargement policy, the logic behind this approach can be applied to explain the very early stages of functional engagement and how it can change attitude and behavior of actors. Therefore, neo-functionalism is an important instrument to explain and identify mechanisms underlying sector-specific engagement within Belarusian organizations.

Neo-functionalism takes self-interest for granted and relies on it for delineating actor perceptions (Niemann, 2006). It assumes that actors, following the logic of rational choice are interested more in the benefits of co-operation. Therefore they seek solutions for common problems in economic or technical areas, i.e. which are, unlike political area, the least controversial and more likely to be negotiable. Whereas co-operation assumes also norms and rules transfer, thus following the logic of the constructivist approach, actors learn from each other co-operating on mutually-beneficial accounts. According to Haas (1964), negotiations are held on non-governmental level with experts in frames of specific sector area, which is favorable to lead to the further depoliticization of co-operation, learning, and building of trust. The neo-functionalist approach will be utilized to analyze EU sectoral engagement in Belarus at the bottom level and the way how this co-operation can influence the attitudes of public managers towards democratic governance.

As previously stated, the governance model is oriented around the inclusion of elements of democratic governance in sector-specific areas of cooperation between the EU and the target country. These main principles and elements of democratic governance include participation, transparency, and accountability.

*Participation* as one of the fundamental elements of democratic governance follows participatory democratic theories. The research shows that active citizen involvement into decision-making positively affects democratic development, while it contributes to an increase of knowledge, skills, and support for decisions among the participants (Michels, 2011). Here, public participation refers to the possibility and to the degree of involvement of citizens and other non-state actors into decision- and policy-making.

Participation, however, is not always successful in terms of active involvement of and the vivid interest of citizens in the activities of public administration, which can be considered as the weakest point in its attribution to the main principles of democratic governance (Michels, 2011). Nevertheless, as Schmitter (2007) believes, sufficient criteria for governance to possess some democratic characteristics would be the provision of opportunity for citizens to get involved; openness of the organization for public; as well as meaningful, i.e. not ceremonial or sham character of participation. In other words, participation might not be necessarily successful, but it must be provided so that citizens have access to public decision-making if they want. Only in this way, could participation contribute to better democratic governance.

In addition, Wetzel (2011) argues that the promotion of public participation can be influenced by sectoral interests.

The involvement of the public can take place in different ways. For example, a low level of involvement is a one-way relationship achieved by information delivery to the public. It can be either in the form of active communication or passive production of information available for those who are interested. Another level of involvement includes consultations with public. This is a more advanced type of involvement characterized as a two-way process. However, on this level the public is expected to address agenda proposed by public managers, and to provide its opinion on certain issues (Pollitt, 2003).

*Accountability*, another important element of democratic governance, implies the possibility of citizens to hold the authorities accountable for their performance and decisions made in the public sphere. A comprehensive definition proposed by Schmitter (2007: 4) will be utilized: “[a]ccountability is first a relationship between two sets of actors ... in which the former accepts to inform the other, explain or justify his or her actions and submit to any pre-determined sanctions that the latter may impose. Meanwhile, the latter who/that have become subject to the command of the former, must also provide required information, explain how they are obeying or not obeying the formers’ commands and accept the consequences for what they have done or not done”.

Therefore, public managers are expected to provide a justification of their decisions and actions, as well as explain any misconduct to public. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011: 895-6)

add that accountability can take place both between state agencies and between public administration and citizens.

The notion of accountability can be defined as “a relationship in which one party, the accountor, recognized an obligation to explain and justify their conduct to another, the accountee” (Pollitt, 2003:89). In other words, it stands for that civil servants are expected to be accountable to their superiors (decision makers) for the assignments they were entitled to implement.

In addition to superior/subordinate relationship, accountability implies that the accountee has access to some sort of sanctions over the accountor. Even though sanctions are aimed at fostering learning and performance improvement, Pollitt explains that sanctions can undermine accountability by shifting the relationship toward precautionary and more defensive behavior on behalf of the accountor (Pollitt, 2003).

In his contribution to analyze *transparency* Finkelstein (2000) addresses it from different fields of public policy, i.e. health care, environment, money budgeting, and education.. Transparency refers to information on the activities of the organization being accessible and available to all the requesters. Therefore, citizens will not be limited in their ability to access issue-specific data, and public managers themselves should not restrict access to the information regarding their decision-making and implementation activities (Freyburg et al., 2011). Finkelstein (2000) argues that it is rather challenging to test the transparency of policy and to the extent it contributes to the outcomes of the policy. Nevertheless, this thesis does not seek to evaluate the degree of transparency within a specific Belarusian organization, but rather to determine the openness of public managers to its implementation in practice and the idea of the transparency as such.

### **3.3. Socialization to democratic governance through functional cooperation**

This research addresses new avenues in the study of democratization. It is argued that during cooperation and engagement with actors in a non-democratic environment, the democratic international actor conveys democratic practices and mode of behavior which is expected to result in normative beliefs of the recipient (Hahn, 2011).

Applying institutionalism as a theoretical framework, Checkel (2005) addresses the issue of socializing potential of international institutions in public areas. Doing so, he broadens socialization from the macro, i.e. state level, to micro, i.e. individual agent, socialization level. Therefore, the socialization approach derives from the hypothesis that international actors interacting and cooperating with domestic partners can internalize and transfer norms and values. The outcome of socialization does not imply a consequent change of loyalty or identity - Type I or 'full socialization' as described by Checkel (2005: 804-5) - but rather a change of the attitude towards principles and practices underlying core every day activities of the public managers. This outcome is referred to as Type II socialization, whereby it is concerned with changes in values and interests. These changes take place as a result of newly acquired knowledge which is expected to make the actors reconsider their habitual knowledge on meaning and prerequisites of their performance (Ibid, 2005). This idea derives from rational choice and constructivist learning frameworks. Constructivist social learning and influence concepts go together with realist social and material incentives of reward such as, for example, status, financial assistance, trade opportunities. Thus, actors should learn to 'speak the same language' with counterparts in order to strengthen cooperation and increase benefits from it<sup>8</sup>.

In the assessment of the potential of external agents to socialize non-democratic counterparts into the modes of democratic governance, a reference point and a source of inspiration are credited to Tina Freyburg (2011; 2014). She introduced a new and rather innovative approach to determine the potential spill-over of democratic values during functional EU cooperation with the Moroccan officials. In a set of publications she has considered how this kind of cooperation is a site of socialization of the officials into democratic norms.

Socialization as such occurs during functional cooperation, when specialists from both democratic and non-democratic countries work together and "implement policy solutions and codify legal requirements that approximate the legal and administrative standards in the recipient countries to those of the donor countries" (Freyburg, 2012: 582). Whilst norms of democratic governance are common for the domestic environment of the external specialists, they were socialized into democratic management themselves adopting and implementing rules and norms in their every-day performance. Therefore, it is assumed that external actors will more likely apply

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<sup>8</sup> See Checkel (2005) for deeper insights on theoretical approaches applied to tackle mechanisms of socialization.



and transmit norms of democratic governance common for their domestic environment in their work abroad as well. The norms might include issues of participation, accountability, and transparency. In their turn, domestic public administrators will be introduced and become familiarized with practices and principles of new way of governance which have been unknown to them, or limited in authoritarian environment. Thus giving the officials an opportunity to compare democratic and domestic modes of government. Another important point is that foreign counterparts do not lecture or demand specific patterns of behavior from the domestic officials. Instead, they act out principles that are hoped to be transmitted. Therefore, functional cooperation is expected to foster the democratic socialization of public officials in authoritarian regimes.

Freyburg (2014) also argues that the governance model in a form of functional cooperation has a higher potential to impact upon the socialization of actors in non-democracies than standard linkage practices such as, for example, education and foreign media broadcasting. This argument is reasoned by closer contacts of the counterparts and opportunity to put the transmitted knowledge into practice.

### **Conclusion**

The presented theoretical framework is expected constitute a basis for the analytical discussions on the EU democratizing policy in Belarus. It has been constructed in such a manner to proceed from the broad issue of the models and mechanisms of democracy promotion to a much narrower question relating to the governance model which can seen as a prospective channel for EU engagement into Belarus. However, there is little research conducted evaluating both practically and theoretically the way this model works in actuality. Therefore, an attempt to provide further insights on the influences of functional cooperation on the public officials in terms of their democratic socialization has been presented. It is important to mention, that the governance model as such and mechanisms peculiar to it should not be considered independently from the other models, but rather seen as supplementing them due to long-lasting and lightweight democratizing potential.

## 4. MODES OF EU DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN BELARUS

### Introduction

This chapter will address the development of EU-Belarus relations with a special emphasis on different policies and instruments applied to Belarus. These instruments and policies will be examined from the standpoint of their democratizing potential. As argued above, the EU exercises soft and hard governance in its external policy and promotion of democracy. In order to evaluate its democratizing potential and the effects of the EU's activities in this field, they will be assessed and divided into two top-down and bottom-up categories. According to the modes of democracy promotion theorized by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009), top-down democratization attributes to leverage mode, while linkage and governance take place from the below of the society as well as local authorities.

### 4.1 Historical overview of the EU-Belarus relations

The collapse of the Soviet Union was an event that provoked a wave of radical changes in the world and constituted a new landmark in human history. Amongst numerous changes in different spheres of political, social, economic, and cultural life the event was marked by the emergence of fifteen new political entities on the world map. The Republic of Belarus being one of newly independent sovereign states which emerged as a successor of Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1991. After gaining independence it faced new challenges of searching for its own identities, policies, and strategies for future development as consequence from its new status. Belarus appeared in a specific geopolitical situation being positioned between two great and competitive powers, i.e. rapidly becoming more influential on the international area and strong European Union (then European Community) and the Russian Federation. Due to this, the priority dilemma Belarus faced was the choice of political development and central partners, or, in other words, 'where and with whom to go in the future' (Rotman and Veremeeva, 2011: 74). The EC countries as well faced the challenge of how to redefine its policy in relation to newly emerged entities.

Belarus was recognized as an independent state by the EC in 1991. During the first years of its independence 1991-1994 the prospects of EU and Belarus relations appeared to be quite

promising. The basis for mutual relations was put by the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) of 1989 concluded with the Soviet Union. Diplomatic relations between the two parties were established in 1992. Economic and political cooperation was enhanced by the conclusion of an Interim Agreement on Trade in 1994 and the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) a year later. These agreements were supposed to replace the TCA.

Intensification of cooperation was followed by Belarusian attempts to introduce democratic reforms of the state. Stanislau Shushkevich who was *de facto* head of state lobbied for the implementation of liberal reforms, including the adoption of democratic constitution in 1994; separation of powers; creation of a multi-party political system as opposed to the previous single Communist Party. Furthermore, the liberalization of the media and freedom of opinion could have been observed on the level of the society.

Positive trends in the development of EU-Belarus relations, however, were frozen when President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was elected in 1994, attempted to change the constitution in a referendum in 1996. The changes dealt with the extension of the presidential mandate and led to the concentration of state powers in the hands of Lukashenka. Thus, he obtained large powers to appoint members of the lower house of the Parliament, central and regional government administrators, the majority of the judges of the Constitutional Court, as well as extending his presidency period until 2001 (Schimmelfennig, 2005). All the changes were preceded by increased repression of the Belarusian opposition and media. The referendum of 1996 was also used to justify his integration with Russia, which became the most important and almost exclusive partner of Belarus. In this way, the political course taken by Lukashenka started to develop into the most autocratic regime in Europe (Korosteleva, 2012) and since 1997 became widely known and labeled as the 'last dictatorship in Europe'.

The reaction of the majority of the European states was not surprising. The referendum and following events initiatives were declared undemocratic and as violating fundamental human rights. As a result, the EU introduced a number of economic and political sanctions, and restricted movement to the countries of the EU for senior Belarusian officials. In addition, negotiations on ratification of the PCA and Interim Agreement on Trade were frozen by the Council of Europe. It stated in 1997 that "the EC and their Member States will conclude neither the interim agreement nor the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement due to the deteriorating political situation in

Belarus."<sup>9</sup> Ever since the EU-Belarus relations are regulated by the 1989 TCA which is quite outdated and does not cover many important areas of cooperation. On political level, the imposed sanctions restricted all political contacts to below ministerial level. Additional economic sanctions were related to the withdrawal of all trade preferences under Generalized System of Preferences (Bosse, 2009).

The main aim of the European negative conditionality and restrictive sanctions during this period was to coerce Lukashenka to meet democratic standards for free and fair elections. The EU continuously issued declarations and resolutions with a call for democratic changes. Nevertheless, this leveraging was of no effect. In fact the opposite occurred, as Rotman and Veremeeva (2011) state the country moved towards rapprochement with Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. The rapprochement was started because of the political factors, and all of the CIS states were undergoing a similar transition period and faced similar challenges. However, there were also significant economic factors, which consisted of Russia offering Belarus low-cost energy and credits. As such, these events underlined the beginning of a lasting period of the Belarusian isolation. However, the EU maintained attempts to create and define an instrumental and strategic basis for its relations with Belarus including it into several of its foreign policy initiatives.

#### *European Neighborhood Policy instrument*

The period of almost completely frozen relations between the two parties was interrupted by the EU's new foreign policy strategies and initiatives. New challenges and opportunities arose after its largest expansion to the east in 2004, when ten new countries, i.e. Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined the EU. The consequences of this unprecedented enlargement could have led to drawing new dividing lines on the European continent, as well as undermining stability and prosperity in the region (Commission of Europe, 2003). As a response to the challenges of a new eastern border, the EU set out its 'Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood Strategy' in 2003 and launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004. The new policy was applied to the EU's direct neighbors to the south – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria,

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<sup>9</sup> Delegation of the EU to Belarus, "Chronology of bilateral relations", retrieved 20 June 2014, [http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/eu\\_belarus/chronology/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/eu_belarus/chronology/index_en.htm).

and Tunisia; and six to the east – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Officially, “[t]he aim of the ENP is to avoid new dividing lines on the continent and deepen relations between the EU and its neighbors. The ENP is not about enlargement but it is about mutual interests in supporting reforms and modernization” (European Commission, 2003). The ENP was supposed to foster mutual activities in quite a broad area of cooperation, including political, security, economic and trade issues, as well as culture, environment, mobility, transport and energy networks (Ibid, 2003).

The design of the ENP presupposed that the EU would engage with each state individually. In doing so, Action Plans with most of the partner states were set out. These Action Plans covered the main priority areas of mutual cooperation, strategies and activities for implementation of the ENP policies. Belarus, however, appeared to be outside of the focal point of the EU’s attention, since no Action Plan for it was created. Belarus was not mentioned in the following “Strengthening the ENP” paper in 2006. The justification of such a move was provided in the paper, where it was stated that “the EU cannot offer to deepen its relations with a regime which denies its citizens their fundamental democratic rights” (European Commission, 2006a). The only document where the European strategy towards Belarus was expressed was a “Non-paper” with a list of the European demands for democratic reforms. The Non-paper was an attempt to elaborate a single approach towards Belarus. This response was provoked by deteriorating political situation in the state caused by new presidential elections of 2006 that failed to meet democratic criteria; new referendum falling short of the OSCE standards; cases on disappearance of political activists in Belarus; and a wave of color revolutions in Eastern Europe (European Parliament, 2008). The content of the Non-paper primarily concerned twelve conditions for the Belarusian officials, such as, for example, transparent elections, freedom of expression and association, fair treatment by the judicial system, and the release of all political prisoners. Solely upon completion of these conditions the EU could promise to enhance its cooperation with Belarus. Nonetheless, no specific actions and policies were mentioned that would follow upon compliance with the conditions, except this vague promise to ‘deepen relations’ (Commission of Europe, 2006b).

In general, despite the high aspirations as an important vector of the EU’s foreign policy, the ENP from the very beginning of its existence had a number of essential disadvantages. These disadvantages destined little success of the Policy not merely in Belarus, but in the neighborhood in general due to the lack of a clear strategy. Firstly, it was impossible to treat all the partners

equally because of significant geographical, political, identity, and historical differences between southern and eastern states. Secondly, the inequality of treatment was seen by different incentives for the partners. Whilst, the EU could manipulate with membership perspectives for the eastern states, such a reward was inconceivable for the southern neighbors. Thirdly, there was an inconsistency of opinions between the EU member states regarding how the European Neighborhood Policy should be implemented. While some of them focused mainly on free trade and economic issues, others prioritized issues of security, good governance, fighting against organized crime, energy and other pressing national issues (Schimmelfennig, 2008; Lapszynski, 2009; Korosteleva, 2011). The flaws of the policy were clear for the member states. Therefore, in order to overcome them and to strengthen relations and engage with neighbors in a more efficient manner, a new initiative of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was presented by Poland and Sweden in 2008.

#### *Eastern Partnership*

The EaP was officially launched in May 2009 and included six partner states of the EU's eastern neighbors, namely, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The idea of partnership was very promising, and it was expected that it will help to overcome the drawbacks of the ENP. According to the Commissioner for Enlargement and the ENP Štefan Füle, the new initiative with its range of original tools and resources is expected to become a better mechanism to 'support democratic and market-oriented reforms in partner countries, consolidate their statehood and bring them closer to the EU' (Füle, 2010). At that time a certain improvement in EU-Belarus relationship can be observed, there were negotiations held regarding the allocation of credit to stabilize the national economy, travel bans on certain officials were lifted, as well as the creation of an office for the EU Delegation in Minsk in 2008 which constituted an important milestone in mutual relations (Rotman and Veremeeva, 2011).

Therefore, the invitation of Belarusian delegation to the Summit on Eastern Partnership in Prague as a potential partner was welcomed by all member states. As a result, the Belarusian government signed the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit. Designing the initiative, European Union no longer applied to a strong language of conditionality, but rather stressed the notion of partnership 'founded on mutual interests and commitments' (Council of the European Union, 2009: 5). Although, even these claims did not result in the inclusion of Belarus to the full track of the partnership process, and the Belarusian initial participation was reduced to

multilateral track, and to the level of the technical and experts assistance with prospects of future enhancement, the initiative and a growing positive attitude towards Belarus could be regarded as a positive sign.

To understand the ways the EaP operates and how it can serve as a useful tool to strengthen relations with a partner countries, in this case Belarus, it is necessary to describe its structure first. The Partnership is based both on bilateral and multilateral tracks of cooperation. Multilateral framework of the EaP rests upon four thematic platforms on democracy: good governance and stability; economic integration; energy security; and contacts among people with twice-a-year official meetings (Council of the European Union, 2009). In order to support the activities of the thematic platforms flagship projects were suggested in such areas as energy, disaster relief, border management, environment, and small- and medium sized business. The idea behind these projects is to approximate regulations of the partner countries to the regulatory framework of the EU within the stated areas. Although Belarus lacks structural relations with the EU, the multi-lateral track seems to be an important channel to develop and strengthen relations with the EU. For example, Belarus is a participant of the following flagship projects: Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation Support programme; Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management Flagship Surveillance Capacity project; Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management Flagship Customs project.

The bilateral track takes the form of an Association Agreements (AA) constituting the most comprehensive form of cooperation. There are six bilateral aspects including new contractual relations, integration into EU economy, visa facilitation, energy and transport cooperation, economic and social development, as well as financial support. First and foremost, AAs are positioned as channels for gradual integration into the European economy, which entails the liberalization of market, non-tariff barriers to trade and regulatory alignment (Michalski, 2009). At the moment, only three AAs were signed in summer 2014 and undergoing ratification with the eastern partners of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine<sup>10</sup>. Azerbaijan concluded three agreements preceding the AA on issues of visa-facilitation, mobility and readmission, and currently is holding negotiations with the EU on the provisions of the AA. Armenia suspended the AA negotiations with the EU, because its conclusion would be incompatible with membership in the Customs

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<sup>10</sup>Full implementation of the AA with Ukraine was postponed until December 31, 2015.

Union, Union of Belarus, Russian Federation and Kazakhstan<sup>11</sup>. Belarusian participation in bilateral track is very limited due to its special status in the Partnership.

EU-Belarus relations were aggravated by the results of the Presidential elections in 2010 and following detentions and severe oppressions of the opposition activists (Council of European Union, 2011). These events marked the beginning of a new crisis and a step back in democratization process of Belarus. A new range of sanctions was placed on Belarusian officials and their businesses (Ibid, 2011). The EU, in its turn, was criticized for application of double standards by Lukashenka, who expelled a number of the EU diplomats out of the country<sup>12</sup>.

Nevertheless, recently some positive tendencies could be observed on the top level of the relationship as Belarus released some of the political activists, the EU withdrew some of the sanctions<sup>13</sup>. Within the EaP, even though Belarusian involvement to the bilateral track of cooperation was limited from the very start of the Partnership, there are some negotiations on enhancement people-to-people contacts held at the present moment. Thus, during the last Vilnius Summit in November 2013 the Prime Minister of Belarus propounded initiation of visa facilitation and readmission negotiations (Council of the European Union, 2013). The initiative was welcomed by the EU and negotiations were launched on 30 January, 2014<sup>14</sup>.

### **Leverage**

On the first stage of the EU-Belarus relations, since the proclamation of Belarusian independence until 1996, there was clear evidence of a policy of rapprochement and positive democratic tendencies within Belarusian society. Some researchers label this time period as the Europeanization period (see for ex. Korosteleva, 2012) for the EC tended to support Belarus in its attempts to direct its democratic development. In other words, European democratic assistance took the form of linking developing Belarusian regime to European principles and values.

The period between 1997 and 2007 can be described as the period of isolation. All official documents, strategy papers, country reviews and speeches addressed to Belarus reflect that the EU predominantly sought to influence the Belarusian regime from the top-down level by

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed country information see European Union External Action [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/index_en.htm)

<sup>12</sup> [http://naviny.by/rubrics/english/2012/10/08/ic\\_articles\\_259\\_179480/](http://naviny.by/rubrics/english/2012/10/08/ic_articles_259_179480/)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140621\\_01\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140621_01_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://naviny.by/rubrics/english/2014/06/16/ic\\_news\\_259\\_437560/](http://naviny.by/rubrics/english/2014/06/16/ic_news_259_437560/)



promoting democracy through leverage mode. The strong language of negative political conditionality was aimed at coercing Lukashenka to maintain minimum democratic standards and human rights protection. The instruments of conditionality were numerous political and economic sanctions which went all the way up to the termination of all high-level relations with the state.

Table 1 Belarus and Freedom House Data

| Year                 | Freedom rating (FR) |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1992                 | 3,5                 |
| 1995                 | 5                   |
| 1998                 | 6                   |
| 2005                 | 6,5                 |
| 2014                 | 6,5                 |
| <b>Deterioration</b> | -3                  |

The Table 1 in the text illustrates the deterioration of civil and political liberties in Belarus according to data provided by Freedom House<sup>15</sup>. The overall freedom rating results from the combination of ratings for political rights and civil liberties, where 1 point stands for the highest level of freedom, and 7 – the lowest. The evaluation of the state of political rights includes the assessment of the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, as well as the way the government functions. Ratings for civil liberties result from the evaluation of the state of freedom of expression, belief, association and organizational rights, the rule of law, personal autonomy and individual rights<sup>16</sup>.

During the first stage of EU-Belarus relations right after its independence, Belarus was a relatively democratic state. The situation started to worsen in 1995 with Lukashenka gradually increasing his political power, and reached its peak in 2005 with the poor Freedom rating of 6,5. The current state of democracy has not improved, which demonstrates that democracy in the state is generally weak or absent. If the EU's political conditionality, in relation to Belarus was not any effective, better ratings would have been expected. However, the deterioration of freedom measured by a 3 point drop, illustrates that no change has taken place, and the situation has worsened severely. The Belarusian government took small liberal steps, although these improvements did not last and were primarily made in order to receive benefits offered by the EU. This indicates that the application of the leverage mode, apart from not having sufficient incentives, has been inconsistent. Therefore, the EU has not affected the overall political and human rights situation in Belarus positively.

<sup>15</sup> According to Diamond (1996: 24), ratings presented by Freedom House are “the best available empirical indicator [s] of ‘liberal democracy’.”

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed report on each criteria see <http://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus#.VALfGTK1ZaY>

The EU imposed its hard mode of external governance by rejecting Belarusian involvement in the neighborhood policy until democratic reforms have been completed in the country. As previously mentioned, leverage is a bargaining process of costs and rewards between the parties. In case of the leveraging through the ENP mechanisms, the proposed reward for Belarus was its deeper involvement in the neighborhood policy and an increase of financial and technical assistance. The imposed cost on Belarus was the liberalization of the state political system. However, why has the leverage model has proved to be ineffective to bring about any democratic change in Belarusian society and lead the country even to a deeper isolation from the rest of the world?

The work from Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2012) can help to explain the main reasons for the failure of conditionality applied to Belarus through the ENP mechanisms. By that account, the rewards offered to the Belarusians were intangible and considerably vague to become a sufficient incentive for a democratic change. The Belarusian leadership did not welcome the idea of building a relationship with the EU around conditionality. The intangibility of rewards was confronted by high 'adoption costs' and, thus, compliance with the demands would have threatened the core basis which allowed Lukashenka to preserve his power. It can be assumed that as long as his aspirations for staying in power are high, the costs of meeting the requirements remain high as well. Therefore, leverage model of democracy promotion using language and instruments of 'hard power' without offering feasible rewards in return will unlikely result in any significant steps towards democracy. This conclusion proves that the above mentioned theoretical assumption that demands democratic reforms that would require the transformation of the whole system of governance which is not supported by equivalent rewards would unlikely be effective. Financial and technical assistance are not, however, considered as a sufficient reward. Therefore, Lukashenka simply ignored all the endeavors of the EU. A great prize has never been offered; and the policy of conditions has failed completely. Yet, apart from their ineffectiveness, imposed sanctions, and subsequent Belarusian isolation forced Belarus to turn to enhancement of cooperation with other autocratic regimes such as Russia, Venezuela, and a number of states in the Middle-East. Furthermore, the attitudes of the country's population towards the EU and its policy became very skeptical and distrustful, this is reflected in public opinion and its adherence to the opposite of Western European set of values (Rotman and Veremeeva, 2011; Korosteleva, 2011).

Giselle Bosse, who conducted comprehensive research on EU-Belarus relations, argues that failure of the EU to bring about any democratic change in Belarus using the leverage model can be explained by the so-called ‘values/security nexus’ (Bosse, 2009). This nexus states that there is a certain degree of contradiction in the EU external governance. The EU, on the one hand, strived to promote shared values; and, on the other hand, was highly preoccupied with securing its own strategic interests, such as, for instance, illegal immigration, cross-border crimes, and energy supply. Thus, the EU as a rational strategic player has constructed its democratizing policy in a way that puts interests of the Union and security of its people above Belarusian welfare and security of Belarusian citizens. Especially noticed in activities aimed at securing energy supplies to Western Europe. A consequence of the contradiction between the two objectives, according to Bosse, is that it is unclear how “... ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of Belarusian people can be reconciled with direct financial assistance for and engagement with the Belarusian government on soft security issues” (Ibid, 2009: 224).

The Belarusian side, however, has continuously stressed its readiness to cooperate with the EU on equal terms only, ‘without the EU’s imposing its alien values’ (Korosteleva, 2011: 12). In this light, due to the failure of governance through leverage, I believe that the EaP, as a notion of partnership, has more potential to minimize conditionality and top-down governance and pressure and focus on increase of functional engagement on the bottom level. Otherwise, the logic behind the EU’s external governance is “either cooperation on EU terms or no cooperation at all” (Korosteleva, 2011: 6).

#### **4.2 Bottom-up democracy promotion**

EU-Belarus relations, however, are much broader and clearly not limited solely to high level cooperation. In the following section, I hypothesize that in the light of the failure of the top-down leverage model of democracy promotion based on conditionality, the EU puts more emphasis on a wide range of different mechanisms capable of creating connecting links with Belarusian society from below. Democracy promotion on the bottom-up level takes place through linkage, i.e. direct external support of civil society, media, and opposition forces; and through governance. The democratizing potential of linkage is a well-researched area, and it would be quite an interesting task to assess it within a Belarusian contest. Nevertheless, between these two modes of democracy promotion this thesis seeks to concentrate primarily on the governance

mode. Therefore, conducting an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of linkage practices is beyond the scope of the research. However, in order to present the whole picture of the EU's democratizing activities in Belarus; an outline of the initiatives taken on this level will be provided briefly.

At the bottom level, cooperation is represented mainly by special financing instruments launched in order to provide financial and technical assistance for joint initiatives regarding collaboration on different matters. Before 2007, financial and technical assistance for Belarus was allocated via the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program. The assistance program was designed especially for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries in order to "promote the transition to a market economy and to reinforce democracy and the rule of law in the partner states" (Council of the European Union, 1999: Art 1). This was one of the first instruments that focused on, among other things, the promotion of sectoral cooperation. For example, cross-border cooperation was first mentioned in the TACIS program plans in order to assist border regions to overcome their problems, create linking of networks, and reduce trans-boundary environmental risks (Council of the European Union, 1999). This instrument was supported by the European Commission Strategy Paper in relation to the "support [of] civil society, democratization, independent media, the alleviation of problems in the areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster, humanitarian assistance as well as regional cooperation" (European Commission, 2004: 12).

TACIS was also designed to provide support for development of civil society. However, this assistance was harshly refused by Lukashenka on the grounds that the funding of opposition parties and media from outside the country constituted an intervention into the domestic affairs of the state<sup>17</sup>. This rhetoric, in relation to European engagement with civil society directly and, in particular, through governmental authorities has been steady up to the present.

Since 1 January 2007, TACIS was replaced by the new European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) program. The program covers both eastern and western dimensions of the ENP and Russia. For the East it supports initiatives both of the ENP and the EaP. The ENPI is basically a continuity of the TACIS, with a few new innovative features.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://en.ria.ru/world/20080429/106205263.html>

The main focus of the ENPI is put on financing actions in various sectors, for example, more equitable development; regulatory trade and reforms; the liberalization of certain sectors; justice and home affairs; energy; transport; information society; environmental sustainability; research and innovation. In addition, it can provide support for electoral observation, post-crisis missions, and to disaster readiness. Thus, the ENPI is an instrument designed to finance concrete assistance actions.

The main innovations of the ENPI compared to TACIS is financing of joint programs within the Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) of regions of the Member States and partner countries which share common borders, thus additional resources are allocated to support reforms on the improvement of good governance. The ENPI is supplemented by two new additional instruments, Twinning and Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX). The Twinning instrument is aimed at assisting partner countries acquiring the necessary skills and experience to adopt, implement and enforce EU legislation. TAIEX was designed to help foster political and economic co-operation in a number of areas, primarily regarding the approximation, application and enforcement of EU legislation (Regulation EC No 1638/2006). Therefore, the ENPI represents a more extensive cooperation on a wider set of issues comparing to precedent TACIS.

Belarus participates in CBC and TAIEX cooperation under the ENPI. The strategy of the ENPI for Belarus is contained in the Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013, National Indicative Programme (NIP) 2007-2011, and National Indicative Programme 2012-2013. The strategy focuses on the support of the needs of the population; direct and indirect support of democratization; mitigation of the effects of the self-isolation of Belarus on its society (Country Strategy Paper, 2006). NIP 2012-2013 has two priority areas with an equal allocation of money for both areas. These are good governance and people-to-people contacts; and economic modernization. The allocation of funds for ENPI during 2012-2013 was €41.50 million plus €15.19 million of the EaP top-up for some of the projects, which in total comes to an estimated allocation of € 56.69 million (EuropAid, 2011).

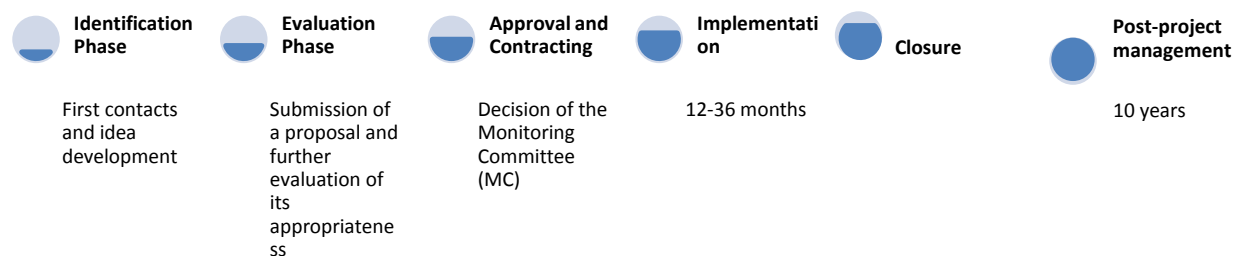
#### *Implementation and management of the ENPI*

The Implementation and management of the projects financed by the ENPI is carried out in accordance with both European and Belarusian regulation. The European level projects, depending on the participants, can be national, multi-country and joint cross-border projects. The characteristics, needs and achieved progress of the partner country determine the scope of the national and multi-country programs within regional or sub-regional cooperation. Geographical

restrictions, however, are tentative. Cross-regional cooperation with the involvement of third parties can take place provided the project is based on common interest issues. The cross-border dimension of the cooperation includes Member States and partners with a shared land or sea border. The partner countries sign financing agreements with the Commission and therefore additional approval from the member states is not needed (Council, 2006). The Commission adopts joint cooperation projects and further management is conferred on the joint established authority, generally located in a Member State. The duration of the projects varies from one to three years for multiannual indicative programs. In addition to funding allocated by the ENPI, projects can be co-funded from other sources, such as other instruments and bodies of the EU and organizations.

The management of the projects can be centralized or decentralized. If centralized, the Commission controls the management and provides an evaluation of the implementation of the project. The Committee can assist the Commission. The Council in its turn, can make a decision on suspension of the project if it is not in accordance with “the basic values of the EU and its relations with its partners” (ENPI 2007-2013). Table 2 illustrates an example of a life-cycle of projects implemented within Baltic Sea Region cooperation.

Table 3 Life cycle of the project. European regulation<sup>18</sup>



For the joint EU-Belarus technical and expert assistance projects, the TACIS/ENPI National Coordinating Unit (NCU) was established in Belarus in 1992. The NCU together with the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus constitute the main bodies entitled to assist and monitor the key stages of the programming and implementation of the projects. Its functions are regulated by Belarusian national law and the EU-Belarus Framework Agreement. The Belarusian national legislation regulates procedures of approval and registration

<sup>18</sup> Based on the Baltic Sea Region Project Manual 2007-2013. See at <http://eu.baltic.net/download.php?type=file&id=1600>

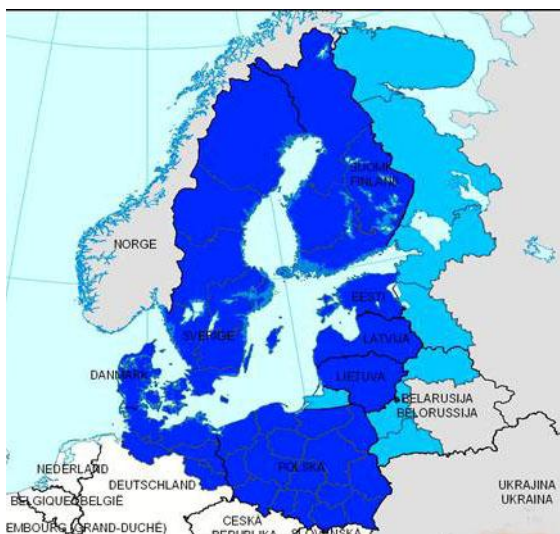
of the programs and these regulations are applied to every program whatever their time frame and size of the financial assistance. Firstly, the project should be approved by the Commission of International Technical Cooperation under the Council of Ministers of Belarus. Secondly, the project is registered by the Ministry of the Economy after it reviews its financial and economic justification. Thirdly, a list of goods, works, and services needed for the project implementation must be approved by the corresponding higher authority and the relevant higher authority responsible depends on the type of the project. Finally, every project must be approved by the Councils of Ministers of Belarus to be implemented, this procedure of approval is graphically presented in the **Table 3**.



*Table 3 Belarusian regulation of international projects<sup>19</sup>*

### ***Cross-Border Cooperation***

Figure 1 CBC participation of Belarus



Belarus participates in three cross-border cooperation areas financed by the ENPI: Poland-Belarus-Ukraine (PBU), Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus (LLB) and the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Joint projects address the following issues:

- Border management and customs;
  - Capacity and institution building for public administration;
  - Combating human trafficking, drugs and crime;
- 
- Justice reform;
  - Migration and asylum;
  - Mines destruction;

<sup>19</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus # 460, October 22, 2003 *On International Technical Assistance Provided to the Republic of Belarus*, and amendments to the Decree by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus #1522 November 21, 2003. See at <http://pravo.by/webnpa/text.asp?start=1&RN=C20301522>

- Culture;
- Education and youth;
- Science, technology, information society;
- Modernization;
- Agriculture;
- Energy, and
- Environment and sustainable development (NIP, 2012-13).

The statistical data regarding the LLB and PBU project implementation within the TACIS Neighborhood Programs 2004– 2006 and ENPI CBC 2007–2013 illustrates quite a curious dynamic. With regard to the LLB Program, for the period 2004-2006 the total EU contribution constituted €10,4 million. Out of 137 applications there were only 53 approved. The total budget for the ENPI CBC 2007-2013 LLB Program was €41,7 million. However, the number of approved projects was only 17 out of 110 applications. The amount of money allocated for the implementation of the PBU Program during the years 2004-2006 was €45,8 million for the implementation of 85 approved projects out of approximately 570 received applications. The budget for 2007-2013 planning years increased up to €186,2 million, 330 applications were received, and only 21 of them were approved and were implemented or are running at the moment<sup>20</sup>.

On average, with the launch of the ENPI the amount of money contributed for both of the programs increased up to €2,4 million per year for the LLB and €11,3 million for PBU. Nevertheless, there is a significant decrease in a number of applications received and especially in a number of the projects that were approved. While during the first period of the financial aid the percentage of the approved projects approximated to 39% and 15% for LLB and PBU correspondingly, the data for the 2007-2013 demonstrates that only 14,9% of applications were approved for the LLB Program and 6,9% - for the PBU. Interestingly, that the first timeframe falls within the temporal thaw in EU-Belarus relations up to the year 2006, and the second period from 2007 to 2013 corresponds with the deterioration of relationships after the presidential elections in 2006 and 2010. This dynamic in the statistics might also be attributed to the elaboration of a more clear strategy in the Strategy Paper for Belarus 2007-2013 compared with the one from 2004-2006. A more thorough approach towards engagement was represented in NIPs 2007-2011

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<sup>20</sup> Data taken from European Commission (2008) and LLB and PBU official websites: <http://www.enpi-cbc.eu/> and <http://www.pl-by-ua.eu/en>.



and 2012-2013 where there were four specified priority areas according to which money would be allocated. This resulted in the launch of a less projects on the one hand, although, on the other hand, competitiveness of the projects was increased. Another interesting dynamic noted by Khasson (2013), was that when regional and local organizations created so-called governmental NGOs in collaboration with NGOs from social and environmental fields in order to get more knowledge, experience, and support while applying for the EU funds.

The examples of the completed projects of technical cooperation include creation of International Training Center on Migration and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in 2007; improvements in border and customs control; support for capacity building on sustainable energy regulation and development; harmonization of electricity, gas and oil standards; support for implementation of Kyoto Protocol, and so on. (EuropAid, 2011). Therefore, the majority of the projects based on technical cooperation are aimed at transition and the approximation of Belarusian regulation in different areas to international standards. In turn, it is expected, that transition is accompanied with spillover effect, or rule transfer.

### **Linkage**

Linkage represents a traditional two-track way of democracy promotion. Alongside with the high political level, the EU has put considerable effort to 'win the hearts and minds' of Belarusian people, by engaging with political opposition and civil society from below. The 2004 Strategy Paper states that 'more can be done [...] in particular to support civil society, democratization, [and] independent media' (Commission, 2004: 4, 12).

Despite positive aspirations, however, the grass-root and NGO levels mechanisms of the ENPI are quite limited. Whereas, all the projects need to be registered with the central national authority, this process is quite lengthy and problematic. The number of refusals in registration of the projects is very high as well. In addition, according to Belarusian legislation, only registered organizations are considered as legal entities and can, therefore, participate in joint projects. Otherwise, members of such organizations fail under criminal liability. Belarusian legislation restricts external funding of non-governmental organizations without approval from the higher authority (Law on Public Associations, 1994). These provisions made the EU engage with Belarusian civil society and public from the outside of the country. Some of these initiatives include, for example, supporting Belarusian students by providing scholarships through the Kastus Kalinouski Scholarship Programme (2006), as well as supporting the European Humanitarian

University (EHU) located now in Vilnius; radio and television broadcast initiatives such as satellite television channel BELSAT (2007) broadcasting from Poland in order to provide access for the Belarusian population to independent sources of information. However, even these endeavors provoked a negative reaction from the Belarusian government, which accused the EU of interference into domestic affairs and funding Belarusian civil activists (European Parliament, 2008).

Before the establishment of the EaP there was no centralized and institutionalized instrument of engagement with civil society directly. Most of the activities were carried out by separate member states and had an occasional character. In order to overcome this drawback a special meeting platform for civil society organizations from the partner states, the Civil Society Forum (CSF) was established within the EaP. The applicability of the CSF could have been tested after presidential elections in 2010, when, following brutal oppression of protests and persecution of political and civil society groups' activists, the EU policy towards Belarus split into two directions. On the one hand, it strengthened its leverage by imposing additional economic sanctions and froze all macro financial aid, as well as imposing further travel restrictions and the freezing of assets of more than 150 Belarusian officials. In 2013, these sanctions were extended and are still in force at the time of writing (Council of Europe, 2013). On the other hand, whereas primary assistance was concentrated on the support of civil society, the CSF has played a significant role in it becoming a meeting platform for representatives of the Belarusian civil society (European Parliament, 2011: 2-3).

## **Governance**

While bilateral track of cooperation with Belarus at the high political level remains quite limited, the EU has been kept fostering and underlining the prevalence of the functional cooperation on 'low-politics' as a way to deepen relations (Bosse, 2012). The EU applies more differentiated range of instruments to engage with the country; finance and support technical and expert cooperation. These instruments, unlike traditional ones, do not put democracy promotion on the agenda.

TACIS/ENPI instruments have proved to be quite effective for technical and expert cross-border regional cooperation. The programs are launched under the ENPI as well and contained in NIPs. National Indicative Programs, however, do not represent thematic programs on democracy

and human rights, but concentrate on technical and expert assistance. These specific networks and platforms for meetings established by Belarusian and European partners within the joint projects give a space for EU soft governance.

Even though these subtle mechanisms of norm and values transfer do not require a policy of actively promoting democratic principles and practices, they still might bear a certain degree of a democratizing potential. The transfer of democratic values and rules of good governance appears automatically between the officials involved in the implementation of the projects throughout their cooperation. Moreover, functional cooperation between European and Belarusian partners take place through networks of governance; rule transfer takes place on the policy-making level, rather than on traditional institutional and strategic levels.

As a result, in the area of CBC and other technical assistance projects a high degree of depoliticization can occur. This finding was particularly emphasized by Bosse and Korosteleva (2009) who studied the depoliticizing effects of functional cooperation. The majority of their respondents from the European and Belarusian high ranking officials noted that technical and expert cooperation is becoming less and less politicized from both sides (Ibid, 2009: 150-2). The factors that led to depoliticization can be explained through the theoretical lenses of neo-functionalism.

Thus, the primary character of engagement is based on mutual pragmatic interests and corresponding mutual benefits. Raik (2006) claims that this pragmatism results in a small, albeit essential, socialization effect on the officials from the both sides. Socialization can be seen in adjustments to the negotiation and interaction styles, when the parties are made to go outside of 'the comfort zone'. Additionally, the concentration on issues of common interests might result in the blurring of political boundaries. Partners learn how to cooperate avoiding acute angles of dissimilarity. Therefore, rule and values are not transferred intentionally, but rather as an indiscernible effect of learning.

Within the neo-functional theoretical framework the possible socialization and value transfer takes place on the bottom level. However, the results of the research conducted by Bosse and Korosteleva (2009) has shown that at the top level of Commission and Belarusian officials meetings and negotiations on technical and expert cooperation which used to be characterized by

“formal exchanges of official political rhetoric” became “less political” (Ibid, 2009: 150). This can be seen as a depoliticizing effect of functional cooperation.

### ***Conclusion***

EU-Belarus relations have never been simple or easy. The EU to a certain degree has sought to include Belarus into its foreign policy agenda, making it part of such initiatives as the ENP and the EaP. Whilst aspiring to promote democracy in authoritarian Belarus, the EU has applied soft and hard modes of its external governance in its approach towards Belarus. On the one hand, there is a strict conditionality in relation to the regime officials which has been imposed as a form of hard governance. On the other hand, a soft mode of external governance can be seen in the EU's commitment to support the Belarusian population and thus financing a number of joint projects and initiatives in the non-political sphere.

As for the modes of democracy promotion, from the top-down level the EU exercises a leverage mode of democracy promotion through conditionality which has been ineffective and has not led to any significant change in Belarus. Due to the fact that Belarus could not significantly benefit from the ENP/EaP policies, whereas the EU conditioned the development of further relations with Belarus only on the condition of democratic reforms within the state. The imposed conditionality was not effective due to little incentive, intangible benefits, and high costs for Lukashenka's regime to agree on the reforms.

In parallel, the EU engages with Belarus on the bottom-up level through linkage and governance. Furthermore, a shift to the gradual institutionalization of functional cooperation with Belarus can be noticed. This shift was institutionalized in the Eastern Partnership policy mechanisms and the TACIS/ENPI financial assistance mechanisms. Therefore, these institutions serve as a channel through which the EU is able to execute the governance mode of democracy promotion. Previously, the EU lacked a clear democratization strategy in relation to its approach towards Belarus, being torn between promoting democratic values and securing its strategic interests, and applying the leverage model through strict conditionality. Nevertheless, the recently established new mechanisms and instruments allows the Union to promote democracy via leverage, governance and linkage independently and non-overlapping. This shift can be attributed

to diversified politics and an increased level of administrative, institutional and legal channels through which engagement and cooperation takes place.

The next chapter will address the issue whether and to what degree functional engagement and hypothesized transfer of democratic values affects attitudes of the Belarusian officials towards democratic governance.

## **5. EFFECTS OF THE GOVERNANCE MODE OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION THROUGH FUNCTIONAL COOPERATION ON THE ATTITUDES OF BELARUSIAN PUBLIC OFFICIALS**

### **Introduction**

To assess the potential and the effects that the governance mode of democracy promotion might have in practice, this study addresses transnational joint programs of the EU and Belarusian organizations. More precisely, it is expected to measure to what extent such cooperation can affect Belarusian officials in terms of socialization into the norms and values of democratic governance.

To gather empirical data for analysis I conducted several interviews with the Belarusian officials. Hence, this chapter will start from a general description of the interviewing process and challenges met by the author. Afterwards, the analysis of the interviews will be divided as follows: firstly, the general perceptions of the two respondent groups regarding EU-Belarus relations on both high political and local levels will be provided. Secondly, the inquiry will cover the attitudes and experiences of the officials who have been involved in joint projects and had close collaboration with European officials and partners. Next, the attitudes towards democratic governance of the respondents of Group 1 and Group 2 will be assessed comparatively. The standpoints for evaluation consist of three main elements of the democratic governance, i.e. participation, transparency and accountability. Additionally, a certain degree of attention will be placed on general feelings and opinions of the interviewed public managers while evaluating attitudes and the results of the interviews. The chapter will be concluded with general outcomes of the research which has sought to evaluate socializing effect of technical and expert cooperation with Belarusian partners through joint technical and financing projects.

### **5.1. Organization of the interviews**

#### **Data gathering**

To evaluate to what extent functional cooperation with organizations from non-democratic societies has a democratic socialization effect on the public managers an example of the

TACIS/ENPI technical assistance program within cross-border cooperation launched in Belarus is taken. The rationale for taking the Belarusian environment as a case study is preconditioned by the following reasons. First, Belarus has proved to be one of the most reluctant states to EU policies and initiatives aimed at democracy promotion within the European neighborhood. Traditional top-down leverage and bottom-up linkage modes of democracy promotion seem to have had a very limited impact on the regime, as has been shown in the previous chapter. Therefore, according to presented theoretical assumptions, the governance mode in the form of employment of functional engagement to solve common sectoral problems can 'open an additional door' for the promotion of democratic values and norms. Additionally, necessary mechanisms of functional cooperation seem to have already been elaborated by the EU in regard to its neighbors and to Belarus in particular. The second reasoning follows from the lack of a corresponding research on the democratizing effects of functional sectoral engagement in the state.

TACIS/ENPI programs on technical and expert assistance are the only EU programs implemented in Belarus that presuppose functional cooperation. Moreover, TACIS/ENPI instrument represents a tool of the most proximate engagement on the local organization-to-organization level. Whereas it has been implied that the policy exercised by the EU side *per se* incorporates elements of democratic governance and values related to accountability, transparency and participation, it is estimated that rule transfer is more likely to occur. In addition, under these circumstances project managers from both sides have an ability to communicate directly face-to-face, elaborate working relations on a day-to-day basis, as well as to make independent decisions during a considerable period of time. These preconditions, according to Kelley (2006: 39-40), are the most favorable to help to build trust and mutual understanding between the partners, as well as to help Belarusian officials familiarize themselves with the governance style and administrative practices common within the EU environment.

In order to evaluate the democratic socializing effect of such cooperation I have chosen to interview Belarusian public managers from organizations involved in the CBC projects on environmental issues. More specifically, the projects deal with water and river management and are initiated in several corresponding organizations located in different geographical regions in Belarus. The chosen organizations are involved into one or two joint initiatives. Environmental dimension of cooperation has been chosen for the following reasons. firstly, environmental issues

traditionally tend to be the least politicized. Secondly, the number of Belarusian organizations involved into the same project within environmental dimension is significantly higher than in any other area. This have allowed to get access to the officials who might share the same or similar international experience. Besides coordinating units, all the projects involve several organizations from one or more EU member states. However, the names of the projects, organizations involved and names of the public managers will not be disclosed in this study. This is done due to ethical considerations, and taking into account the regime's disfavor of raising any delicate topics of democracy, democracy promotion, or human rights, as well as officials' concerns to secure their position within the organization.

The expected outcome of the study is to find an answer to the research question whether and to what degree promotion of governance model through functional cooperation with the officials of the authoritarian Belarusian regime on the bottom-up level can foster socialization into democratic governance. In case if findings will be negative, undetectable or very low, it would seem to be appropriate to conclude that functional cooperation does not have any significant effect within less institutionalized networks located in politically less liberalized countries.

### **How were the interviews arranged**

Thus, to answer the research question and gather necessary data for the analysis I conducted several interviews with state officials working in similar spheres related to water management, protection or rendering of water supply services. The selection of the respondents was based on their post within the organization and geographical location of the organization, as well as their participation in the CBC projects. To provide comparison of the attitude towards democratic governance all the participants were divided into two groups, namely Group 1 and Group 2. All the officials are aged between 35 and 45 years old; Group 1 includes two women and five men, and Group 2 – one woman and four men.

Group 1 is composed of the respondents who hold a managerial position in an organization involved into one or several transnational projects with the EU under the CBC program. Seven interviews were conducted with public managers from four different organizations in the western Brest, Hrodna and Vitsebsk regions. Due to our different geographic locations it was first expected that the interviews would be conducted via e-mail or Skype communication. However, this mode



of communication appeared to be complicated by the fact that some of the officials did not have a personal e-mail but only corporate one. This had resulted in a minimal response to the inquiry. Additionally, Skype communication was not possible due to poor Internet connection in Belarusian organizations. Therefore, the interviews were arranged by phone and face-to-face meetings. In the end, I believe this was beneficial for the research, because personal meeting allowed to make the interviews more personal and trustful. In addition, since the purpose was to determine a subjective issue of the attitudes, face-to-face conversation made it possible to note the respondents' reactions, feelings and emotions in relation to different topics raised during the interviews. The response rate of the telephone inquiry was surprisingly high and generally public officials were cooperative and showed little reluctance to assist. As a result, the meetings with the officials were arranged during the period of August 4-15, 2014.

Respondents from Group 2 are public managers employed in organizations which have never been involved into transnational cooperation with counterparts from the EU. Geographically they come from the capital Minsk and eastern Mahilioŭ regions. In total five officials from four different organizations were interviewed during the same period of time. Notably, amongst the two focus groups the response level of the second one was remarkably lower in regard to the correlation of the number of the officials invited for the interview and the number of those who had agreed to participate in the research.

All the respondents were given a signed assurance of full anonymity and data confidentiality (see Appendix I). Since semi-structured interviews have been chosen as the interview type, the list, order and a character of the questions raised during the discussion were largely dependent on the flow of the conversation and the issues discussed. The list of approximate questions and topics offered for discussion can be found in the Appendix II. Questions addressed to the respondents from Group 2 which were related to the EU-Belarus network cooperation, were omitted due to their irrelevance. Instead, the focus was on general views on the EU and other international organizations in relation to Belarus.

## **5.2. Perceptions on EU-Belarus relations**

All the respondents from both groups unanimously identified development of relations with Russia and the Customs Union as a primary goal of the Belarusian foreign policy vector. These subjects were referred to as Belarusia's most important partners at the moment. Moreover, this

course of the foreign policy was approved and seen as the most reasonable by the majority of the officials. Growing economic and political dependence on Russia, shared history and similar identities were identified as main reasons for these considerations. Many respondents also outlined growing Russian influence on Belarus in the light of the current events in Ukraine.

Cooperation with the EU and its member states was recognized as the second priority area of Belarusian foreign policy. Even though the average level of cooperation was evaluated as low or very low, the opinions regarding the importance of the further development of mutual relations for Belarus were concurring. In regard to the positive consequences of such cooperation, opinions, however, varied. Acknowledging economic benefits for Belarus, the respondents from Group 1 emphasized the increasing of wellbeing of citizens, new solutions of social problems and better security of people and a state. Group 2 put new investment opportunities and the necessity of maintenance of a “multi-vector” foreign policy for the prestige of the country and growing investments in the first place.

Mutual relations at the high level were evaluated as bad and not progressing by both of the groups. The general policy of the EU towards Belarus is perceived as unstable and conditional. On the political level the EU is claimed to pay excessive attention on the country’s domestic affairs which hampers further development of the relations, especially in the spheres of the economy and trade. The respondents believe that partnership should be based on equal terms and mutual benefits with the EU’s acceptance of the current political system in Belarus. In general, both groups assume that the parties should do more to enhance people-to-people contacts and launch more projects at the regional and local levels, including cross-border cooperation.

These accounts looked much more promising for public managers involved in sectoral cross-border cooperation. Respondents from the Group 1 directly engaged in collaboration and emphasized a growing interest in elaboration of new joint projects from Belarusian and European sides. The relations on the local program level are optimistically perceived as generally ‘good’ or ‘very good’. Relations with the direct project partners were evaluated as ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’.

#### *Perceptions on the process of cooperation*

All the respondents held the same opinion that in order to maintain and further develop cooperation and the EU’s technical and expert assistance, the relations should be based on the

principles of partnership, parity and balance. Addressing the issue of the differences between the political systems of the EU and Belarus the respondents, who have experience in working with European partners, pointed out that they did not feel any pressure and attempts of the European partners to overtly impose ideology, values; or condition their affairs in any way. On the contrary, “we all have tried not to bring politics into business<sup>21</sup>.” The general attitude of the parties towards the above mentioned differences, as well as the way they reach reconciliation can be described with the words of one of the interviewed officials:

“[w]e do not touch upon political issues and do not let politics and relations between our states influence any significantly our work. It is true that our way of thinking and mentality and... hm... probably, values largely remain post-Soviet, or, I would say, pro-Russian nowadays. Europeans have their European thinking. We are different, but it does not affect our work. We do not judge each other and try to understand. When certain topics arise during formal or informal communication and meetings, we tend to treat our differences with humor<sup>22</sup>”.

Participation in cross-boundary networks made the Belarusian public managers become acquainted with modes of European governance. An analysis of the interviews with the officials allowed me to determine main particularities and challenges that follow from this governance, as well as officials’ overall feelings and perceptions of the governance employed by their counterparts.

Therefore, the first thing distinguished and mentioned by all the respondents was the leading role of the European partners in all organizational matters. They acknowledged that the main burden of implementation rests upon the counterparts. This was especially notable in the first stages of the implementation of the projects and in Belarusian organizations which did not have any previous experience in collaboration with international partners:

“[f]irst projects were very new for us. We did not have any experience. We had a lot of technological seminars, international tenders. We had to learn a lot of provisions and regulations<sup>23</sup>”.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with the Respondent 3 from the Group 1 taken 08.08.2014 in Hrodna, Belarus.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with the Respondent 2 from the Group 1 taken 08.08.2014 in Hrodna, Belarus.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with the Respondent 3 from the Group 1 taken 10.08.2014.

“We do not have necessary and sufficient experience. Even now we have to rely upon our partners in many-many issues, such as choice of contractors, decision upon the logistics, organization of work ...From our side we have to invite and engage with outside professionals and experts. This is time and money consuming. Additional work lies upon our own employees as well, whereas some of them have to perform extra tasks related to cooperation. For example, our chief technologist is in charge of all organizational matters and communication with the partners, although it is beyond his scope of responsibilities. We just do not have a special department on international affairs<sup>24</sup>”.

“We have a partnership relationship, and I cannot recall any serious conflict situations. Of course, there are some misunderstandings. Especially, we had a lot of them in the beginning of our cooperation. But all misunderstandings form just a part of the everyday working routine and are related merely to organizational questions. So far we have managed to settle them on the spot. All people [EU partners] we have been working with are kind, friendly and willing to help, teach and explain if needed<sup>25</sup>”.

Therefore, eventually, due to the lack of a proper experience in collaboration Belarusian public managers had to follow instructions, provisions and way of governance which is common for the EU area and incorporates a set of democratic norms and values. The experience and knowledge gap was bridged by a set of technical meetings, visits and training events presupposed by each program. The interviewees acknowledged that collaboration was an insightful learning experience, whereby it allowed them to become acquainted with what can be done and organized differently in order to reach a goal.

Another prominent example of the effects and influences of the rule transfer, I could name a case of one of the water management organizations in Hrodna region (voblast') which has been involved in several CBC programs. These have been mutually agreed upon by the ministry and local executive committee levels, the rules of one of the project include a specific condition to engage two supervising consultants from the EU's side. One special consultant is meant to be involved into the policy of the city development and the other is assigned to supervise the activities of the water management organization. The expected result of this supervision is a

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with the Respondent 2 from the Group 1 taken 08.08.2014.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with the Respondent 7 from the Group 1 taken 13.08.2014.

proposal with the restructuring of the whole organization in order to make its performance more efficient. Special scrutiny will concern reform of the personnel management. The provision of instructions with a detailed job description for each managerial position is an important condition of the outcomes of the consultant's supervision. According to the agreement, the organization can suggest its own amendments and recommendations upon restructuring; however, eventually it will have to accept the final proposal and start to implement the reforms. Therefore, experts involved from the EU work jointly to solve policy problems and improve policy performance on a daily basis.

Particularly, as some of public managers emphasized, they regret that the Belarusian public system has strict top-down hierarchy and lacks decentralized procedures of decision making. Even on the expert level, European professionals seem to enjoy more power for independent decision-making. "They could make some important decisions simply through a phone call. Here the same procedure for the same decision would take much more time, because we would have to make written appeals either to higher managerial personnel within the organization or even other institutions of public administration" – reasoned one of the project leaders. Although in some cases the European system of governance is characterized by simplified system of decision making, the demands towards information provided in all appeals and applications are claimed to be excessively detailed.

Additionally, the partners experience some difficulties on daily basis communication. These concern, for example, the poor knowledge of the English language of the Belarusian officials or the exchange of e-mails as a primary source of communication and recognition of the e-mail's legal value, which is still not very common among Belarusian public institutions.

As to traditional Belarusian mode of governance, it was stated that encouraged public governance is characterized by some of the interviewees by a hierarchical leadership style, and the tendency to appoint managers acting in accordance with authoritarian modes of decision-making. This does not seem surprising in the whole contest of management practices in authoritarian context (Freyburg, 2013).

In general, rising such topics as corruption, human rights, democracy and democratic governance, openness, however, were treated by both of the Groups quite suspiciously. Even though participants from the Group 1 were more collaborative and more open in expressing their

opinions, some questions were called 'provoking' by many of them. For example, the interview with one of the managers from the Group 1 was held in the presence of his assistant. It could have been observed that while the assistant was in the office, the interviewee was quite inhibited and reluctant to express his personal opinions and give abstract examples. The character of the answers was more formal and on the surface. There was an impression that the official tried to answer what is right and "acceptable" rather than tell what he really thought and felt. However, once his assistant had left the office, he became more talkative and ready to reflect upon topics he had tried to avoid in the presence of another person.

*Personal impressions of the officials on the influences of the cooperation*

The respondents' personal perceptions on the effects of cooperation were considered in relation to the impact on the department or organization as such and reflections upon individual impacts and benefits.

The outcomes for the organizations are presupposed by the initial primary interest of the Belarusian side in the engagement in functional cooperation, in which it is receiving financial and technological benefits (e.g. new expensive equipment) in order to improve the performance of the enterprise: "[o]ur main benefits are, of course, additional funding and technological modernization", stated one respondent.

With regard to individual impacts, the respondents highlighted professional growth and obtaining new professional skills and experience. However, the issues related to new skills and knowledge in management and involvement of citizens and public opinion were pronouncedly evaded or the significance of these benefits was perceived as low. Five of seven interviewees felt moral satisfaction with the work they have been doing, because of their personal involvement and role in development of the organization and 'making the country [Belarus] more Europeanized', as pointed out by one of the officials.

## 5.3. Attitudes of the public officials towards democratic governance

### 5.3.1. Participation

*Legal regulation.* In law citizen's right on public participation is acknowledged by the Constitution stating that they have a right to participate in "decision-making on state and public affairs" (Constitution, Art. 37). Belarus has also signed a number of international treaties, although some of them are still not ratified. In law, public participation in the decision-making takes part through referenda, discussion of the draft laws and other issues of national and regional importance, as well as through other more specific means established in subsequent law. Nevertheless, even regarding the national level of parliamentary and executive bodies there is still no legal regulation of proceedings requiring public participation. Nor is there an opportunity for the public opinion to be heard in the decision-making of the executive branch as is regulated by law.

Within the chosen environmental sector some regulations of the mechanisms of public participation in decision-making on environmental issues, can be found in The Law on the Protection of Natural Environment (Art. 5, 7) and the Law on State Environmental Review (Ecological Expertise). These provisions include:

- the right to initiate public environmental review (PER);
- the right for public representatives to participate in state environmental review;
- public hearing during the procedure of assessment of environmental impacts (OVOS);
- the right to make suggestions on and require in legal form the banning of the construction, operation, reconstruction, exploitation, etc. of the objects influencing adversely on the environment and human health.

Within the public sector public participation is primarily regulated by the Law on Citizens and Legal Entities Appeals (2011). The law applies to any public state institution both on national, regional and local levels. According to this Law, citizens, as well as legal entities (i.e. enterprises, institutions, organizations and public associations) enjoy the right to appeal to any public state

institution with any issue related to the competence of the institution (Art. 3). The appeal can be in a written, electronic or oral form. Additionally, the law prescribes every public state institution setting and regulation of the appointment hours for personal meetings of the managerial personnel with citizens. Further appointment hours are regulated in the constitutive documents of the organization. Every appeal must be considered with full thoroughness and the appellant must be provided with a comprehensive, reliable and timely response. The appeal can be on any matter within the competence of the organization.

Even though the formal rules ensure basic public participation, the law and regulation have some significant drawbacks. Firstly, even though legislation ensures citizens' right to appeal to public officials with the matter of their concern, question of public participation in decision-making on local institutional level remains outside legislative organization. Neither similar provisions are covered by internal organizational regulations<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, public participation is not officially encouraged and is left to a citizens' own initiative. Secondly, the legal provision concerning the possibility of the rejection of the appeal by public managers due to its irrelevance to their field of competences appears to be too broad and left to the manager's individual interpretation.

Therefore, in law the public inclusion into decision-making on the local institutional level remains quite limited. Public participation, however, is considered an essential part of democratic governance. For this reason, evaluating the attitudes of Belarusian public officials towards the participation of citizens would be quite an interesting area of inquiry. Both groups were assessed with similar questions that allowed the interviewees to reflect upon their vision of public participation.

The analysis of the gathered interview data has shown that officials' apprehension of the notion of participation is mainly reduced to the one that is provided by law and constitutive documents of their organization. This principally means that on the general level, the understanding of participation is limited down to the citizens' right to appeal and request. Public managers tend to treat this right and all the appeals they receive with full seriousness. This treatment, though, is rather preconditioned by possible punitive consequences from either higher

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<sup>26</sup> The author got an access to examine constitutional documents of three public institutions participating in the research.



or supervising (controlling) authorities than by individual perceptions on the role of the public managers. Another proclaimed reason for it, is related to the character of the some of the appeals, whereas they in many cases they might be treated as a weak performance of the public official:

“[w]e are, actually, afraid of the appeal. They are all documented and all managerial and organizational flaws can lead to sanctions against the manager. It is a scary thing<sup>27</sup>.”

The reflections of Belarusian officials from both of the groups regarding other aspects of public participation related to the inclusion into decision-making and taking into account public opinion vary to some degree. There is, however, a common tendency to treat citizens as common consumers of the services provided by the organization, and organization – as ‘a thing in itself’. Respondents from the Group 1 hold an opinion that in practice, the concerns of the public should be considered more thoroughly. As one of the interviewed officials pointed out reflecting upon his attitude towards appeals of the citizens:

“[t]he number of collective appeals increases. I think it is a good tendency, because this is the way how the issue can be heard and considered. After all, in the first place, we work for people to make their life more comfortable and we strive to provide them with better services. All these projects we are doing are people-oriented<sup>28</sup>.”

Participation in transnational networks seems to have had positive effects on the attitudes of the managers. The mechanism of the application for the financial support within the CBC is designed in such a manner that it forces the manager to reflect upon and consider the public within the project. Thus, the application form contains provisions to describe how the information about the project, its benefits and other related initiatives of the organization would be brought to the public, and how ordinary citizens might be involved into implementation of the project. The respondents admitted that at the beginning these provisions were surprising for them and it “took quite a while to figure out what exactly we were expected to state<sup>29</sup>.” As a result, though unwillingly, officials had to contemplate on the notion and possibilities for participation.

For example, in several organizations taking part in one CBC project, practical activities included organization of open public events for university and college students, where they could

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with a Respondent 1 from the Group 2 taken 11.08.2014.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with the Respondent 3 from the Group 1 taken 08.08.2014.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with the Respondent 5 from the Group 1 taken 12.08.2014.

have familiarize themselves with the activities of the organization and new innovations and initiatives. Additionally, all attendants were given an opportunity to present their thoughts and ideas on further development of the program and services provided by the organization. There were organized also meetings, conferences and festivals for public, city authorities and students both in Belarusian cities and in neighboring countries. The managers stated that it was an insightful event for them and they were “pleasantly surprised” by the active participation of the attendants in the events and the discussions. Furthermore, five out seven interviewed officials mentioned a general positive impression by the attention paid to the European regulations on the interests and needs of ordinary citizens. This has opened new perspectives for them on different modes of governance, as well as a need to be initiative and to think profoundly. This new self-consciousness, even though not necessarily implemented in practice, seems to be a strong indicator of the positive dynamics of descendant processes of socialization into democratic modes of governance.

There is still not, however, any single opinion on how the citizens could be involved more efficiently. The proposed ways of inclusion involved launch of different mechanisms of public comments via media, Internet, feedback polls. The overall lack of initiative and interest of the public in the specifics of the organization has been mentioned as an obstacle to more active participation. However, the initiation of public polls and comments on certain issues, decisions and politics is a rare, albeit still taking place, phenomena within the participating in the research organizations. As some of the officials shared:

“Citizens are not initiative. We mainly deliver our initiatives to them directly through some events or announcements and give them an opportunity to response in a way they can be heard. Even one complaint by a single citizen can become an indicator for us that other people might have the same problem<sup>30</sup>.”

“For example, there are appeals on the ... calculation appliances. Service providers were obtaining directly from the citizens some information which we used afterwards and, as a result, helped to make improvements into the process of installation and utilization of the equipment<sup>31</sup>.”

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with the Respondent 4 from Group 2 taken 12.08.2014

<sup>31</sup> Interview with the Respondent 5 from the Group 1 taken 12.08.2014

On the other hand, public participation is regarded quite ambiguously by the public officials, who have never been involved in transnational networks. On the one hand they treat public appeals very seriously, because this is an essential and prescribed by law part of their everyday duties. On the other hand, direct involvement with public is seen as an unwanted and even fruitless initiative:

“Even though we have to deal with public appeals, I do not think that bringing many things of our competence to public discussion would be fruitful, but rather it would turn out into ‘bazaar’ (bear-garden) because the majority of the population does not possess a necessary level of the expertise in our field. Moreover, in our system all the decisions are made ‘from above’ and public opinion does not have much of an influence. In reality some decisions are not favorable for the citizens and it is obvious that they would not be popular among the public and people would oppose. I believe, more often it is better not to ask people, but to act, especially when our decisions are preconditioned by common policy of the state. First and foremost, we are state servants and need to think of the well-being of the state. When economy is efficient, and there is stability in the state, people would be fine as well. So, yes, what we need to do is just to solve people’s problems they bring to us<sup>32</sup>.”

There is also a tendency observed among the officials of lower managerial personnel to offload responsibility for communication with public to the upper managerial personnel or even higher institutions, because “they possess all the information about what is happening in the organization and can make binding decisions”. Officials’ perception of participation turned out to be quite limited and conditioned.

### *Conclusion*

State officials from Group 1 are more inclined to participatory modes of governance that enable decisions close to the concerns and interests of the people than officials from the Group 2 whose understanding of participation not merely remains limited down to law prescriptions, but mainly perceived as an unpleasant part of the duties. Nevertheless, acquaintance with the modes of governance common for European environment which happens as a result of functional cooperation evokes in the Belarusian officials new ideas and thoughts about how management

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<sup>32</sup> REFERENCE

can be adjusted to become closer to the needs of people. Not necessarily implemented in practice, these ideas signify learning and the gradual adoption of values, i.e. socialization into new modes of governance. Public inclusion into managerial decision-making is, however, rarely implemented in practice of both of the Groups. Therefore, the difference between the groups can be drawn at least on the level of the attitudes.

### **5.3.2. Accountability**

As to accountability the vast majority of the participants in the research regard accountability solely in relation to accountability before other higher or controlling state institutions. Many explicitly mentioned the top-down hierarchical structure of the administration and that excessive control imposes additional pressure on them and sometimes prevents them from performing their duties. The requirements of different state institutions sometimes contradict each other. In the words of a 41 years old manager of technology,

“We even have inspections of the public prosecution, and every agency tries to find violations and impose sanctions for them, rather than support us. Managers are personally held responsible for many drawbacks or weak performance of the organizations, however compliance with all the requirements takes too much time and energy.”

Officials would appreciate it if instead of imposing the general policy of the organization, the role of state control would be reduced to an elaboration of concrete determinants or a basic policy framework with further evaluation of managerial or organizational performance not more often than twice a year.

Whereas, accountability to the citizens is seen as complicated because of the diversity of thought of the citizens on how public managers should act. Therefore, they see it is still more reasonable to be held accountable to superior agencies rather than the public. It is recognized, however, that elected officials should be held accountable to the citizens in the first place. Public accountability is also seen in a form of statistical data, reports, with final decisions delivered to the population.

*Conclusion*

Therefore, public accountability is barely appreciated by the public managers from both Groups. This is presupposed by a long-lasting tradition of direct hierarchical top-down control of the public officials by higher public institutions and the limited autonomy of the public sphere from state interference. Participants of the Group 1 generally would welcome the idea to lessen their accountability to the state and direct it closer to the population.

### 5.3.3. Transparency

As previous research indicated, the decision-making processes in the Belarusian administrative institutions are not transparent<sup>33</sup>. According to the report from the corruption monitoring NGO Transparency International for 2013, Belarus was ranked 129 place out of 177 on the level of corruption<sup>34</sup>.

Access to information is regulated by the Law on Information, Informatization and Protection of Information (2008). Citizens' right to obtain, gather and spread information is guaranteed by law. There are two types of information distinguished, i.e. open for public and information which provision is limited. The law also regulates what kind of information refers to each type. Thus, information on the activities of public state institutions is open for all unless it is proclaimed as secret or limited. These provisions appear to be working in practice of the accessed organizations, where much of the information is available for public either freely accessible or upon a request for information..

Besides free access to information, people's access to information regarding the decision-making process, i.e. planning of projects, strategies and priorities, is another aspect of transparency as an element of democratic governance. On the high state level of decision-making on Parliamentary and committee sessions public, i.e. citizens and public associations, can be involved only upon the decision of the members of the Parliament for a certain discussion or law drafting. In other cases, the public can merely observe, but not participate in discussions. Neither I could find any provision that would oblige public officials to make decision-making process open for public on the local and regional level of public institutions.

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Cherp and Krasney (2008).

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.transparency.org/country#BLR>

On account of making information on the activities of the organization publicly accessible and delivering it to the population, there are some of the officials' statements:

“We should ask people, but only on very important issues and decisions. Otherwise it can turn out, that people will offer to do impossible things.<sup>35</sup>”

“At least people should know how things are being done.<sup>3637</sup>”

Practices of all organizations under the Group 1 have shown to have a higher level of transparency and there is a general inclination of making information more accessible to the public than organizations from the Group 2. Moreover, public managers who have experience in participation in transnational networks would welcome it if strategies and projects would be more open for public discussion at least on the level of the elaboration of the core principles of future strategies and policies.

#### 5.4. Conclusions

The above presented data allows us to draw the following conclusions. Firstly, the necessity to cope with common issues and threats to environmental security in the cross-border region, as well as prospects of receiving financial and technical benefits from cooperation has led to the notable depoliticization of cooperation. This finding is in line with the assumptions of neo-functional theory. The parties seem to demarcate a line between politics and shifts in the EU-Belarus relations and relations between the partners on the local level. Therefore, politics on the high level does not intertwine with the implementation of projects related to the issues of mutual interest, which is environmental security of the cross-border region in our case. In addition, the less policy issues and cooperation is politicized the higher the possibility of democratic socialization. A low level of the politicization of cooperation also contributes to the establishment of more intense and trustworthy relations, which might increase the chances of democratic socialization.

Secondly, the EU side, nonetheless, keeps the position of a patron in mutual relations, which can be justified by more experience, and power that the EU employs. Whereas Belarusian

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with the Respondent 4 from the Group 2 taken 12.08.2014

<sup>36</sup> Interview with the Respondent 7 from the Group 1 taken 13.08.2014

<sup>37</sup> All the interviews were translated from Russian to English by the author.

officials have to follow the European mode of governance, which is presumed as democratic governance, as they had to intentionally or unintentionally apply its elements and provisions in their own managing activities while implementing the projects and partly in other everyday activities which are not related to the projects. Public managers from Group 1 appeared to be more prone to European 'thinking' than participants of the Group 2. This can signify that cognitive learning and consequent democratic socialization have taken place. Regarding the level of attitudes there are inclinations to imply that the public managers might have learned what kind of governance rules and practices are acknowledged as appropriate within the European environment. As Zürn and Checkel (2005) argue, 'talking the talk' is already a sign of a process of cognitive attitude change.

Thirdly, new perceptions on the main qualities of a good public manager could be observed. Thus, Group 1 has shown to be more inclined to value and consider in their every-day decision-making and performance of duties such principles as taking into account public concerns and opinions; guaranteeing their concerns have been heard and influenced the strategies and policies of the organization; provide reliable and relevant information about the organization and its policies; and make information more transparent and available for the citizens. In other words, officials who have experienced and had an opportunity to employ some of the models common for the EU modes of management, appear to be more socialized to democratic principles of governance than officials lacking this experience.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Throughout its long history the European Union has been a great defender and adherent to the value of the supremacy of law, human rights and democratic values. Since the last decade of the 20 century these principles have underpinned the whole essence of EU foreign policy, especially in relation to its closest neighbors. Various mechanisms and strategies were elaborated with a purpose to assist the states in transitioning to adopt rules and principles of democratic governance. Nevertheless, existing theoretical and empirical research assesses rather critically the democratizing potential of the Union. Conventionally, the issue of democracy promotion is approached from the top level of state-to-state relations which takes form of political conditionality and/or democratic assistance. These tools, however, have shown to have little effect to bring about a significant democratizing effect in states characterized with the stability and longevity of authoritarian regime. Belarus is not an exception from this rule.

Departing from these assumptions, the present study has had two aims. The first goal was a theoretical assessment of a possibility of functional cooperation as a mechanism of a governance model of democracy promotion to bring about a socializing effect on the officials coming from the authoritarian regime. In doing so, general perceptions of democracy and democracy promotion modes were assessed from the perspective of a rational choice institutionalism. These theoretical concepts were further applied to the case study of the paper – the EU democracy promotion in Belarus. In relation to this, the study has sought to determine what kind of external governance approach the EU has applied in relation to Belarus throughout time. Each external governance approach was supplemented with different modes of democracy promotion employed by the EU. The effects of the policy were analyzed from the perspective of three modes of democracy promotion elaborated by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig modes, i.e. leverage, linkage and governance. The governance model is employed through the building of transnational networks of functional cooperation with organizations located in authoritarian states. The main advantage of this model is that it helps to avoid the policy level and as such allows the focus on the lower level of public institutions, which are both executives of the state policy and service providers to the population. Being the least researched model of democracy promotion, it was put under scrutiny using a neo-functionalist theoretical framework. Specifically, it was regarded in relation to the potential of functional cooperation to prompt democratic ‘socialization’ and an adherence to the



democratic mode of governance. Democratic socialization has shown to be connected with the attitudes towards norms and principles of such integral parts of democratic governance, as participation, accountability and transparency.

Therefore, the analysis has shown that the EU has applied both hard and soft governance policies in relation to Belarus. As for the means of democracy promotion, leverage and linkage modes on the top-down level has shown no effectiveness to influence the regime. Leverage through the policy of conditionality has been ineffective due to poor incentives and high costs of implementation for Belarusian authorities to agree on the European conditions. The linkage model has been complicated by the limited access to civil society and other non-state actors in Belarus. Simultaneously with these two models, the EU seems to have intensified the application of mechanisms and strategies of the governance model through functional cooperation by way of technical and expert assistance on a local level of public authorities.

The second and primary goal of this thesis was to concentrate on the potential of the bottom-up governance mode of democracy promotion, as one of the yet little known and least researched approaches in the studies on democracy. The above mentioned findings provided both a theoretical and practical background for the empirical part of the study in which I sought to answer the main research question stated follows: *“whether and to what degree does the promotion of the governance model through functional cooperation with Belarusian officials on the bottom-up level enable socialization into democratic governance?”*. This enquiry has been largely inspired by previous research conducted by Freyburg in Morocco. In doing so, I conducted several interviews both with public officials who represent organizations which have experience in joint projects with the EU organizations within TACIS/ENPI technical and expert assistance programs and officials who lack international experience. This helped to gather enough analytical data to tackle the socializing effects of functional cooperation.

Thus, the analysis has shown that functional cooperation can be an effective site for socialization to occur when direct contacts are implied and opportunity to practice is provided. This supplements Freyburg’s arguments in favor of the effectiveness of the governance model: actors do not feel under the pressure and do not alienate foreign counterparts based on conflicting ideological assumptions. Activities do not bear an overt agenda of democratization. Socialization takes place merely as a side-effect of interaction.

Transnational networks created for the purposes of functional cooperation can serve as channels where agents from authoritarian regimes learn democratic values and, as a result, can change their attitude and even behavior towards a more democratic model and value system. Socialization into the values of democratic governance takes place as a side effect of the functional cooperation of Belarusian public managers with European partners. Socialization is connected with the change of attitudes. Even though the findings have shown that these mechanisms and influences are quite complicated to pin down, they are more perceptible within the professional realm of the officials and can be partly implemented in daily administrative practices. However, the extent of the implementation varies in different organizations. Therefore, determining the conditions favorable for such implementation would be beneficial for further research.

Public managers are prompted and encouraged to learn and socialize when the incentive to receive certain benefits for their organization is high. The form of the benefits can be both tangible and intangible depending on the nature of the project. The acquisition of new equipment and technology as well as additional financing and allocation of money refers to tangible benefits. Intangible benefits constitute new knowledge and experience, as well as creating a good reputation and image of the organization. In relation to intangible benefits, managers seem to prioritize knowledge and experience less than gaining a good reputation and image amongst other public institutions. This is preconditioned by the hierarchical Belarusian realities within the public sector, where public managers are held accountable before a wide range of different institutions. According to the results of the interviews of both groups, officials say that this excessive accountability makes them feel constantly under pressure and their position feels insecure. Whereas, outside funding and a good image signifies a good official's performance, he or she tends to value these incentives more than the other. Nevertheless, these incentives are possible to receive only provided that the official accepts, and to a certain degree, incorporates a governance model exercised by their European counterparts. In such a manner, either willingly or unwillingly, but rules and norms of democratic governance are still transferred and affect the attitudes.

*Final concluding remarks:*

- The EU policies have been developed from those aiming to externalize its normative rules for regulating public policy in each sector of political cooperation with Belarus to creation of new channels and procedural rules of bottom-up engagement within

sectoral policies that could make public actors to become more inclined to transparent, accountable and participatory modes of governance.

- Functional cooperation in the first place creates opportunities for democratization and democratic socialization, rather than this change of attitude is a side effect of engagement itself. Public officials receive an opportunity not merely to learn but also to practice democratic governance in their every-day administrative routine. Nevertheless, it has a strong positive effect on the attitudes of the public managers.

- Some implications of the exercise of democratic, mostly participatory and transparent modes of democratic governance, in day-to-day practices and decision making of the officials were observed.

- The absence of democracy in a state does not neglect the fact that democratic elements and governance can exist on the local levels.

*Implications for future research:*

As for implications for the future research it would seem to be quite curious to look at socialization effects from the psychological perspective, i.e. how individual characteristics of the officials (e.g. age, education, political views) affect socialization. From the institutional point of view, an analysis could be made to distinguish what kinds of conditions of cooperation as well as the kind of organization of the networks is the most favorable for socialization.

In the light of the last events on the political arena, the role of the third power in democratization could be put under close scrutiny, assessing in such a manner Russian influence on Belarus, and how Russia can change and intervene into the dialogue of the European conditionality.

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## APPENDIX I

### Confidentiality assurance

By this I, Varvara Barysevich, guarantee that all the data collected during our interview held in \_\_\_\_\_ (Place) on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) will be treated in strict confidence. This means, that neither your name, name of other employees, nor organization will be neither used nor published in any text in a way that would allow identifying you, organization, and the project as such. All answers will be used as a standardized data combined with data obtained from other respondents.

Thank you for your time and hope for your kind collaboration!

[Place], [Date]

[Signature]

Varvara Barysevich

### Заявление о конфиденциальности

Данной распиской я, Варвара Владимировна Борисевич, гарантирую, что, исходя из этических соображений проводимого мною исследования, вся информация, полученная во время интервью, в \_\_\_\_\_ (Место) \_\_\_\_\_ (Дата) будет использована с учетом всей необходимой конфиденциальности. Это значит, то ни ваше имя, ни имена ваших сотрудников, ни название организации не будут в открытую использованы или же опубликованы в любом виде в той мере, в которой позволили бы идентифицировать вас, организацию, а также сам проект. Ответы будут использованы в качестве стандартизированной информации на основе всех объединенных интервью.

Благодарю вас за ваше время и выражаю надежду на вашу благосклонность!

(Место), (Дата)

(Подпись)

Варвара Борисевич

## APPENDIX 2

### List of approximate questions for the interviews with public officials aimed to measure their attitudes towards democratic governance

#### Questions related to cooperation with Europe<sup>38</sup>:

- Do you think cooperation of Belarusian public organizations with foreign organizations such as, for example, the UN, World Bank, the EU, European Investment Bank is important for Belarus? Why?
- How do you estimate present level of cooperation?
- What are the current relationships between Belarus and the EU in your opinion? Do you see the potential in the EU to become an important partner? Do you trust the European partners and are you ready to cooperate further?
- What fields of cooperation could be the most efficient and mutually beneficial? (Ex. trade, environment, migration, security, anti-corruption).
- How did you establish first contact with your European counterparts?
- Do you have any challenges in mutual understanding? If yes, what kind of?
- How has cooperation with European counterparts affected the work of your department? (changes, obstructions, increased/decreased effectiveness, necessity to follow the rules imposed by the external counterparts?)
- Do you have any personal benefits from this cooperation? (Ex.: *in terms of new skills and knowledge, access to information, professional development/growth, new management skills, skills related to public inclusion and modes of governance*).
- What are essential differences in methods and ways of business management between Belarusian and European methods and ways of business management?

#### Questions related to day-to-day responsibilities and tasks

- Your position within the organization, age, previous work.
- What do you think being a good public official mean? What are the main qualities he or she should have for effective performance?

#### Accountability:

- What is the primary goal of the public official: is he/she foremost a state representative and state servant, or is he/she should serve the society on the first place to solve their problems?

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<sup>38</sup> In relation to Group 2 comprising from the state officials who are not involved in cooperation with European organizations, general questions on the EU and development of EU-Belarus relations were asked.

- Whom should public manager report his achievements and misdeeds on the first place?

**Participation:**

- To what extent should public management be dependent on state control and instructions and confirmations of higher authorities? And to what extent should public managers be interested in involvement of experts, citizens, other public and private entities?
- Do you take into account public opinion in the decision making? (when they demand additional information about decisions and policy of the organization)
- Should public manager take into account worries and concerns of the citizens?
- In what circumstances and conditions can citizens informally participate in governance and decision-making?

**Transparency:**

- Should all the information about activities of the organization be available to public and upon request of the citizens?