

# Sylwia Maria Zakrzewska

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## Belarusian-Russian relations and their influence on Belarusian sovereignty

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**Sylwia Maria Zakrzewska**

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

## **BELARUSIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON BELARUSIAN SOVEREIGNTY**

### **ABSTRACT**

The evolution of the Belarusian-Russian relations in the course of the last several years and the integration processes that occurs between these states justify asking a question to what extent Belarus is an independent – sovereign – state. Author in this paper analysing economic and military the Belarusian-Russian cooperation and influence of this relation on Belarusian sovereignty.

### **Key words**

sovereignty, Belarus, Russia, economy, military cooperation

### **1. Introduction**

The evolution of the Belarusian-Russian relations in the course of the last several years and the integration processes that occurs between these states justify asking a question to what extent Belarus is an independent – sovereign – state. In order to answer this research problem one should define the research category, which in this case is sovereignty, and analyse relations between the discussed entities. Due to the vastness of the subject, the author shall limit her analysis to only a few selected aspects of bilateral relations, which according to the author determine Belarusian sovereignty.

### **2. Sovereignty – Evolution of the Notion, Definitions**

Sovereignty constitutes a significant research category not only for political scientists. The discussed notion is derived from Latin *superanus* meaning “the highest”. The idea of sovereignty evolved over the course of ages. It was a response to changes that took place in the sphere of development of states as well as in

international relations<sup>1</sup>. In spite of the passage of time, its evolution is not yet complete. It results from such occurrences as introduction of new entities, such as international corporations and international organizations, to politics. In one of his articles devoted to the notion of sovereignty Jerzy Kranz notices that “the notion of sovereignty shows remarkable adaptive tendencies corresponding to the historical evolution of national and international reality”<sup>2</sup>.

However, Włodzimierz Anioł while examining the evolution of sovereignty in the course of the past several dozen years stated that “(...) many researchers pay attention to weakening, erosion, obsoleting, decline, or even demise of the state as a participant in international relations”<sup>3</sup>.

Next, Robert Jackson “summarises” the history of sovereignty development in the following words: “Sovereignty was initially asserted by kings against medieval popes and emperors, and against rival monarchs and other independence-minded rulers. It was subsequently claimed by parliaments in political contests with monarchs for supreme authority in the state, by absolute rulers and dictators in asserting their will to power against embryonic parliaments, by anti-colonial nationalists in rebellions and wars against foreign imperialists, by constituent ‘states’ or provinces of federations in seeking to become independent, by federal authorities in asserting their primacy over ‘state’ or provincial authorities, and by people in laying claim to state legitimacy and legality – or more precisely by those who claimed to speak in the name of the people”<sup>4</sup>.

Researchers regard Jean Bodin as the author of the modern definition of sovereignty. In the most well-known book of this author – *The Six Bookes of a Commonweale* – we may read that: “a commonwealth is the rightly ordered government of a number of families and of those matters which are their

<sup>1</sup> R. Jackson, *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea*, Cambridge 2007, p. xii.

<sup>2</sup> J. Kranz, *Jak rozumieć suwerenność? Próba opisu* [How to Understand Sovereignty? An Attempt at Description] [in:] *Przemiany w Europie Środkowej. Teoria i praktyka* [Transformations in Central Europe. Theory and Practice], P. Mazurkiewicz, R. Zendeowski (eds.), Warszawa 2011, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> W. Anioł, *Państwo postsuwerenne? Rozproszenie władzy w środowisku międzynarodowym* [Post-sovereign State? Power Dispersion in International Environment], “Sprawy Międzynarodowe” [International Affairs] 2002, No. 4, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> R. Jackson, op.cit., p. 8. See A. Pieniążek, *Suwerenność – problemy teorii i praktyki* [Sovereignty – Problems of Theory and Practice], Warszawa 1979, p. 14, “The justification of the monarchs disputing with the empire was based on three main arguments: global power of emperors never *de facto* existed, there are no grounds to recognize such power *de iure*, and there is no philosophical or moral justification to back such a power”.

common concern, by a sovereign power”<sup>5</sup>. Further reading brings the reader to a conclusion that a sovereign power is: indivisible, continuous, unlimited, inalienable, unconditional, and independent<sup>6</sup>.

Sovereignty constitutes a crucial element shaping the state, as noticed by Georg Jellinek. According to him, the state is a “corporation of settlers equipped with direct, natural superior authority, or (...) territorial corporation equipped with direct, natural superior authority”<sup>7</sup>. States differ in terms of competence, political system, as well as other features. Nevertheless, as the German scientist stresses, they are equal in terms of sovereignty as a qualitative feature that determines their power over a given territory with the population that inhabits it<sup>8</sup>.

The principle of sovereign equality of states was also put in the Charter of the United Nations<sup>9</sup> and the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations<sup>10</sup>. According to the Declaration, “All States enjoy sovereign equality. They have equal rights and duties and are equal members of the international community, notwithstanding differences of an economic, social, political or other nature. In particular, sovereign equality includes the following elements: (a) States are judicially equal; (b) Each State enjoys the rights inherent in full sovereignty; (c) Each State has the duty to respect the personality of other States; (d) The territorial integrity and political independence of the State are inviolable; (e) Each State has the right freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems; (f) Each

<sup>5</sup> S. Filipowicz, *Historia idei politycznych: wybór tekstów* [History of Political Ideas: Selection of Documents], Vol. I, Warszawa 1995, p. 313.

<sup>6</sup> S. Sagan, S. Serzhanova, *Nauka o państwie współczesnym* [Contemporary State Theory], Warszawa 2010, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> G. Jellinek, *Ogólna nauka o państwie* [General Theory of the State, Berlin 1919], Warszawa 1924, p. 50. See J. Kostrubiec, *Próba współczesnej interpretacji klasycznej definicji państwa Georga Jellinka* [An Attempt at Modern Interpretation of Georg Jellinek’s Classic Definition of State] [in:] *Doktryny polityczne i prawne u progu XXI wieku* [Political and Legal Doctrines at the Verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century], M. Maciejewski, M. Marszał (eds.), Wrocław 2002, pp. 375–382.

<sup>8</sup> J. Kranz, *Unia Europejska – zrozumienie konieczności i konieczność zrozumienia* [The European Union – Understanding of Necessity and Necessity of Understanding], “Sprawy Międzynarodowe” [International Affairs] 2006, No. 1, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.unic.un.org.pl/dokumenty/karta\\_onz.php](http://www.unic.un.org.pl/dokumenty/karta_onz.php) [access: 27.09.2012].

<sup>10</sup> 2625 (XXV) Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 24 October 1970, [http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/dokument,8,Deklaracja\\_zasad\\_prawa\\_miedzynarodowego\\_24\\_X\\_1970.html](http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/dokument,8,Deklaracja_zasad_prawa_miedzynarodowego_24_X_1970.html) [access: 27.09.2012].

State has the duty to comply fully and in good faith with its international obligations and to live in peace with other States”<sup>11</sup>.

Distinguishing two aspects of sovereignty – state and national – is important. They are closely connected<sup>12</sup>. The latter, called also internal, one should understand as relations between the nation (the people) and state (state authorities) that is related to the freedom of the nation to decide about their fate (self-determination). Otherwise, it would be possible to say that an entity, such as a nation, decides on creating and shaping the state, in particular the relations with state bodies and terms and conditions of exercising that power (control function)<sup>13</sup>.

In its internal aspect sovereignty is a legal term. On the one hand, it means dependence of state bodies on the nation; while on the other hand, it characterises their governing competence in this entity. State bodies do not have above themselves an authority that would be higher in terms of hierarchy and in this sense their authority is determined as the highest. However, their power is not unlimited, since it is limited by law.

Sovereignty of the state in the external (international) aspect is connected with the international and legal status of a state and its relation with other entities on the arena of international relations<sup>14</sup>. This aspect of sovereignty we may link with legally independent performance of sovereign competences on a state's territory. Focusing on the negative aspect of the discussed issue, understood here as independence, does not exhaust the entire subject. The positive aspect, understood as an ability to freely pursue domestic and foreign politics, is equally important. It is important not to equate external sovereignty with supreme power over other entities in the international law.

The globalization processes, as well as processes of European integration are a kind of a response to the former and necessitate defining sovereignty with the inclusion of the growing interdependences. These connections do not lead to the

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<sup>11</sup> Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, [http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/dokument,8,Deklaracja\\_zasad\\_prawa\\_miedzynarodowego\\_24\\_X\\_1970.html](http://www.stosunkimiedzynarodowe.info/dokument,8,Deklaracja_zasad_prawa_miedzynarodowego_24_X_1970.html) [access: 27.09.2012].

<sup>12</sup> S. Sowiński, *Suwerenność, ale jaka? Spór o suwerenność Rzeczypospolitej w polskiej euro debacie* [What Sovereignty? The Dispute over Sovereignty of the Republic of Poland in the Polish Euro Debate] [in:] *Kwartalnik. Studia Europejskie* [European Studies Quarterly], S. Sowiński (ed.), Warszawa 2004, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> J. Kranz, *Unia Europejska...*, op.cit., p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 38.

loss of sovereignty, but they make execution of state powers much more complex. Thus, they indirectly affect national sovereignty<sup>15</sup>.

Passing over all other features and focusing on the context relevant to this article, states differ in terms of competences and political systems. However, one should emphasize that they are equal of in terms of sovereignty understood as a qualitative feature which determines their power<sup>16</sup>.

One should emphasize that a state strives to occupy the most favourable position and to conduct an active policy towards entities on the international arena. To that end it takes various actions, taking into consideration public good and interests of its citizens. Among the lawful forms of activity available to this significant entity in the international arena one can distinguish: maintaining diplomatic and consular relations and entering into agreements. A state in partially relinquishing its right to make independent decisions as a result of entering into bi- or multilateral agreements may obtain a greater possibility of economic, civilizational, or social development, as well as strengthen its security. If a state does it voluntarily and the treaty contents do not entail submitting to the interests of the other party, then sovereignty of a state may be strengthened. Stability of a country and its security are a part of exercising power on a given territory. In such a way we may perceive integration processes that occur in the European Union. How do the Belarusian-Russian relations look like in this context?

### 3. Economy, as one of the tools of submission

During the entire period of holding the office of President, Alexander Lukashenko has been using economic and political support of Moscow. In the course of the past twenty years, however, the method of payment for these has changed. While Boris Yeltsin was the President of the Russian Federation, the Russian side was satisfied with political gestures of support on the part of Minsk, the purpose of which was confirming reintegration of the post-Soviet region,

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<sup>15</sup> J. Kranz, *Wspólnoty i Unia: ponadnarodowość, federalizm, subsydiarność i suwerenność* [Communities and Union: Supranationality, Federalism, Subsidiarity, and Sovereignty] [in:] *Drogi do Europy* [Roads to Europe], J. Kranz, J. Reiter (eds.), Warszawa 1998, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 40.

rebuilding of the Russian power<sup>17</sup> and rightness of the geopolitical objectives of Moscow<sup>18</sup>. A change of authorities in Russia also brought changes in the policy towards Belarus. Vladimir Putin, who succeeded B. Yeltsin as president, started to consider relations with Belarus in a pragmatic manner, and the policy change initiated by him towards the neighbouring state is continued till today.

In the course of the past several years A. Lukashenko for the political and economic support granted him by the Russian side had to agree to the Russian claims which are a crucial element of the policy of the Kremlin towards Belarus and which are aimed at exerting influence over the functioning and policy-making of the Belarusian authorities. The Russian side for a long time aspired to take over enterprises that are of strategic importance from the point of view of the Belarusian economy. Favourable circumstances appeared after the presidential election in Belarus that took place in December 2010. This presidential election, in spite of prior declarations of Belarusian authorities that it will be conducted in a democratic manner, was held in violation of all democratic principles. Opposition candidates and citizens protesting against electoral fraud were imprisoned. Countries of the European Union condemned this act of violence and implemented sanctions both towards members of the regime<sup>19</sup>, as well as enterprises supporting it<sup>20</sup>. The Belarusian side had only one vector of foreign policy to turn to – the eastern direction.

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<sup>17</sup> Integration activities that occurred in the second half of the 1990s: 1996 – Treaty On the Formation of a Community of Russia and Belarus, 1997 – Treaty on Russia-Belarus Union, 1999 – Treaty of the Formation of a Union State. See P. Foligowski, *Białoruś – trudna niepodległość* [Belarus – Difficult Sovereignty], Wrocław 1999, S. Owsiani, J. Striekowa, *Białoruś 1991–1998* [Belarus 1991–1998], Warszawa 1998, A. Eberhardt, *Gra pozorów. Stosunki rosyjsko-białoruskie 1991–2008* [A Game of Appearances. Russian-Belarusian Relations 1991–2008], Warszawa 2008.

<sup>18</sup> See B. Cichocki, *Rosja wobec Białorusi 1992–2007* [Russia towards Belarus 1992–2007], “Bezpieczeństwo narodowe” [National Security] 2007, No. 5–6, pp. 259–260.

<sup>19</sup> January 31, 2011 – The Council of the European Union decided upon visa restrictions on the members of the Belarusian regime, See Council Implementing Regulation (EU) No 84/2011 of 31 January 2011 amending Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 concerning restrictive measures against President Lukashenko and certain officials of Belarus, Official Journal of the European Union L 28/17

<sup>20</sup> See *UE wprowadza sankcje wobec białoruskiego reżimu* [EU Introduces Restrictive Measures against Belarusian Regime], <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2011-02-02/ue-wprowadza-sankcje-wobec-bialoruskiego-rezimu> [access: 28.09.2012]; *Pierwsze unijne sankcje gospodarcze wobec Białorusi* [First EU Economic Sanctions towards Belarus], <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2011-06-29/pierwsze-unijne>

The poor economic situation of Belarus mainly resulting from a lack of structural reforms of all branches of economy<sup>21</sup> and the desire of Alexander Lukashenko to maintain power causes that Belarus turns to Russia for assistance in times of crisis.

Belarusian-Russian economic cooperation is very important for Belarus. Russia is the main economic partner for Minsk; it is with Russia that Belarus has the largest trade exchange. In 2011 export to Russia constituted 35.03% of the Belarusian export<sup>22</sup>, while import from Russia constituted 54.48% of the entire Belarusian import<sup>23</sup>. Belarus main import from Russia are fuels. Dependence of Belarus on fuel supply is particularly visible in the case of gas import. Russian concern Gazprom in 2005 became the only supplier of this fuel on the territory of Belarus<sup>24</sup>. From the point of view of Belarusian energy security it is a very uncomfortable situation. The Russian side may at any time, through regulation of gas flow or its prices, influence the state of Belarusian economy which is one of the most energy-intensive ones<sup>25</sup>.

Maintaining preferential prices of fuel supply has always been one of the main priorities of the Belarusian authorities' policy. Belarusian economy growth relied on cheap supply of Russian fuels and the possibility of their re-export. Attempts to raise prices of gas by the Russian side caused the greatest crises in the mutual relations between Russia and Belarus.

The first energy crisis between these two countries took place in 2002. It was then that Minsk, in exchange for maintaining intra-Russian prices of gas supply, agreed to give the Russian side partial control over Beltransgaz [50%], an enterprise which manages gas transmission infrastructure on the territory of

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sankcje-gospodarcze-wobec-bialorusi [access: 28.09.2012]; *Ograniczone sankcje ekonomiczne UE wobec Białorusi* [Limited EU Economic Sanctions towards Belarus], <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2012-03-28/ograniczone-sankcje-ekonomiczne-ue-wobec-bialorusi> [access: 28.09.2012].

<sup>21</sup> The global economic crisis revealed more about the weakness of the Belarusian economy.

<sup>22</sup> *Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь. Статистический сборник*, Mińsk 2012, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48

<sup>24</sup> Газовая промышленность Белоруссии, <http://www.cdu.ru/articles/detail.php?ID=300388> [access: 29.09.2012].

<sup>25</sup> W. Konończuk, *Konflikt energetyczny Białoruś-Rosja: gra nadal trwa* [Belarus-Russia Energy Conflict: The Game is Still On], "Analiza Fundacji Batorego" [Policy Brief Batory Foundation], Warszawa 2007, p. 1, <http://www.batory.org.pl/doc/konflikt-energetyczny-bialorus-rosja.pdf> [access: 01.10.2012].

Belarus<sup>26</sup>. For a long time the Belarusian side managed to delay the privatization of this strategic enterprise. Another crisis followed in 2004.

As a response to repeated energy crises the Belarusian administration prepared a concept, the main goal of which was diversification of energy supplies. The concept of energy security was adopted in the decree of the Belarusian President on August 25, 2005<sup>27</sup>.

However, after adopting this document the Belarusian authorities did not take action aimed at realization of this concept. Only after the largest energy crisis to date between these states that took place at the turn of 2006 and 2007, the Belarusian side started to take action aimed at searching alternative energy sources. Among the planned undertakings was the construction of a nuclear power plant. Interest in the construction was expressed by the following enterprises: Atomstrojeksport (Russia), AREVA (Germany/France), and Toshiba-Westinghouse (Japan/USA)<sup>28</sup>.

Choosing the Russian enterprise as the main contractor and the need to finance this undertaking with credit obtained from Russia caused that the Belarusian side became even more dependent on its eastern neighbour in terms of energy resources. Analysing the benefits of constructing a nuclear power plant, the political elites of Belarus hoped that it would be possible to export a surplus of energy to the countries of Central Europe, mainly Poland but also the Baltic states. Another part of the new Belarusian energy policy was the construction of a coal power plant. Kulczyk Holding and Belarusian enterprise Grodnoenergo signed a cooperation agreement in August 2010 on the construction of a 920 MW power plant in Zelwa and a cross-border transmission line with a back-to-back converter. The power plant was to be constructed until 2014<sup>29</sup>. Due to events

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<sup>26</sup> A. Eberhardt, *Gra pozorów*, op.cit., pp. 173–180.

<sup>27</sup> Указ Президента Республики Беларусь 5 августа 2005 Г. № 399 об утверждении Концепции энергетической безопасности и повышения энергетической независимости Республики Беларусь и государственной комплексной программы модернизации основных производственных фондов белорусской энергетической системы, энергосбережения и увеличения доли использования в Республике собственных топливно-энергетических ресурсов в 2006–2010 годах.

<sup>28</sup> *Budowa elektrowni atomowej na Białorusi – wzrost zależności energetycznej od Rosji?* [Constructing a Nuclear Plant in Belarus – A Growth of Energy Dependence on Russia?], <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2012-07-23/budowa-elektrowni-atomowej-na-bialorusi-wzrost-zalezności> [access: 30.09.2012].

<sup>29</sup> *Kulczyk Holding buduje elektrownię na Białorusi* [Kulczyk Holding to Construct a Power Plant in Belarus], <http://www.pb.pl/2194289,63694,kulczyk-holding-buduje-elektrownie-na-bialorusi> [access: 30.09.2012].

of December 2010 Kulczyk Holding withdrew from the planned investment. Management of the Holding substantiated their decision with the fact that in the current political situation they will not be able to find sources of financing for this investment<sup>30</sup>.

The Belarusian economy greatly suffered from the world-wide crisis. In 2011 the Belarusian rouble fell sharply in value and inflation in December 2011 amounted to 110%<sup>31</sup>. The need to save the economy from collapse caused the authorities to seek the possibilities of supporting it with foreign credit. In 2011 Belarus received a credit of 3 billion USD from the Eurasian Economic Community Anti-Crisis Fund (EURASEC). Aid funds granted by this credit were to be transferred in several million tranches in the course of 3 years<sup>32</sup>. The EURASEC Anti-Crisis Fund is controlled by Russia, which results in greater and greater dependence of Belarus on the Russian side.

Until recently Belarus was able to limit to some extent its enormous dependence on the supplies of Russian fuels owing to the control of transit infrastructure that transferred gas and oil to the territories of Central and Western European countries. When in 2011 Gazprom took control over the Belarusian Beltransgaz<sup>33</sup> due to bad economic situation in the country and the need for gathering funds for the functioning of the state, the Belarusian authorities had lost an important bargaining card in negotiations with Russia. The credit granted to Minsk by the Russian side may cause that in the future, in the event of requests for their immediate repayment, the need to sale other strategic Belarusian enterprises may arise. Such a situation is extremely dangerous and starts to threaten the sovereignty of the Belarusian state.

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<sup>30</sup> *Kulczyk: trudno byłoby pozyskać środki na budowę elektrowni na Białorusi* [Kulczyk: It Would Be Difficult to Obtain Resources for Building a Power Plant in Belarus], <http://biznes.onet.pl/kulczyk-trudno-byloby-pozyskac-srodki-na-budowe-el,18512,4311060,news-detal> [access: 30.09.2012].

<sup>31</sup> A. Chubrik, *The New Old Choice for Economic Policymakers in Belarus*, "CASE Networks E-brief", No. 8/2012, [http://www.case-research.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2012-08\\_Chubrik.pdf](http://www.case-research.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2012-08_Chubrik.pdf) [access: 29.09.2012].

<sup>32</sup> *Bezprecedensowa dewaluacja białoruskiego rubla i rosyjski kredyt*, [Unprecedented Devaluation of the Belarusian Rouble and Russian Credit], <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2011-05-25/bezprecedensowa-dewaluacja-bialoruskiego-rubla-i-rosyjski-kredyt> [access: 30.09.2012].

<sup>33</sup> *Gazprom pochłonie białoruski Bieltransgaz* [Gazprom to Absorb Belarusian Beltransgaz], <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/gazprom-pochlonie-bialoruski-bieltransgaz/x82f7> [access: 29.09.2012].

#### 4. Military cooperation as a tool of submission

In the “National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus” from 2010 one of the major objectives of security in the sphere of the military was the development of Belarusian-Russian military cooperation, including technical cooperation<sup>34</sup>. Belarusian-Russian military cooperation, similarly to economic cooperation, constitutes an important component of bilateral relations. Belarus and Russia are joined by an uniform system of air defence, joint military exercises of both armies are conducted periodically, and officers are also trained in Russia. Anatoli Rozanov thinks that the views of Belarusian authorities on the issue of European security mirror the position (concepts) of Russia<sup>35</sup>.

The establishment of the Union State of Russia and Belarus necessitated standardization of many elements crucial to functioning of both states. A number of priorities were chosen including tasks from different fields, together with the military. Pursuant to the provisions of the Treaty on establishing the Union, among the shared competences of the Union State there is cooperation in the field of defence policy, while exclusive competences of the Union State include functioning of regional concentration of troops and uniform border and customs offices<sup>36</sup>. As a result of cooperation within the framework of the Union State the Regional Groupings of the Armed Forces of Belarus and Russia were established.

Belarus is an important partner from the point of view of Russian security. Maintaining Belarus in its area of influence results in Russia having a several hundred kilometres of a buffer zone and hastening the potential strike of the Russian army and coordination of military operations in the Kaliningrad Oblast and other Russian territories<sup>37</sup>. On the territory of Belarus there are military installations significant for the defence of Russia, i.e. the radar station of the

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<sup>34</sup> Раздел II Современный Мир и Национальные Интересы Республики Беларусь, Указ Президента Республики Беларусь 09.11.2010 № 575 Концепция национальной безопасности Республики Беларусь, <http://pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=P31000575&p2={NRPA}> [access: 29.09.2012].

<sup>35</sup> A. Rozanov, *Belarus, Russia, and a New European Security Architecture* [in:] *Russia's Place in Europe: A Security Debate*, K. Spillmann, A. Wegner (eds.), Zurich 1999, pp. 113–127.

<sup>36</sup> See Статя 17 и 18 Договора от 8 декабря 1999 года О Создании Союзного Государства, <http://www.mchs.gov.ru/document/389796> [access: 29.09.2012].

<sup>37</sup> Owing to cooperation with Belarus, the road for Russian troops to the Kaliningrad Oblast is 80 kilometres long and not several hundred kilometres, which would be the case when Belarus would not be in the Russian sphere of influence.

anti-ballistic missile system (near Baranovichi) and naval communication centre near Vileyka. These buildings are leased by Russia free of charge<sup>38</sup>. The fact that strategic elements of the Russian defence system was repeatedly used by Alexander Lukashenko as an argument in the negotiations over the prices gas and petroleum supply.

In the beginning of February 2009, Russia and Belarus decided to create a common missile defence system and system of external borders protection of the Union State. Relevant agreements were signed on these subjects. Russia committed itself to deliver appropriate devices and missiles which were to be positioned on the territory of Belarus. Investments of Moscow in the establishment of the common defence system is financially advantageous due to the fact that establishing such a system alongside its own borders would consume billions of dollars<sup>39</sup>. Another instance of Belarusian-Russian cooperation in the field of the military was the agreement on creating a common system of military information signed on April 21, 2009. All these actions result in the fact that independent Belarusian defence is not possible. A significant reduction of numerical strength of the Belarusian and giving control over a considerable portion of it to the Russians causes a gradual loss of control over the Belarusian army which *de facto* constitutes a part of the Russian army.

A visible sign of cooperation in the field of military are military manoeuvres that take place every two years. They are carried out as part of Regional Groupings of the Armed Forces of Belarus and Russia. The military exercises took place in 2009 under the code "West 2009", while in 2011 the codename was "Union Shield 2011". They are a demonstration of the excellent Belarusian-Russian cooperation in the field of the military and the strength of these states<sup>40</sup>.

Not only the army, but also the Belarusian industrial plants producing all kinds of military equipment are dependent on Russian support, since the largest

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<sup>38</sup> M. Mrozek, *Białoruś Rosją silna* [Belarus Strong with Russia], <http://stosunki.pl/?q=node/135> [access: 29.09.2012].

<sup>39</sup> A.M. Dwyer, R. Śmigielski, *Perspektywa współpracy wojskowej Rosji i Białorusi* [The Future of Military Cooperation between Russia and Belarus], "Biuletyn PISM" [The Polish Institute of International Affairs Bulletin] 2011, No. 1, p. 2, <http://www.pism.pl/index/?id=fcdf25d6e191893e705819b177cddea0> [access: 29.09.2012].

<sup>40</sup> *Od piątku rosyjsko-białoruskie manewry "Tarcza Związku-2011"* [Russian-Belarusian Exercises "Union Shield 2011" Begin on Friday], [http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,10280449,Od\\_piątku\\_rosyjsko\\_białoruskie\\_manewry\\_\\_Tarcza\\_Związku\\_2011\\_.html](http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,10280449,Od_piątku_rosyjsko_białoruskie_manewry__Tarcza_Związku_2011_.html) [access: 29.09.2012].

portion of their export is destined to the Russian market. Limiting supplies to Russia may cause a major crisis in this branch of the Belarusian economy<sup>41</sup>.

## **5. Conclusions**

Russia exerts significant influence in the sectors which are significant for the smooth functioning and management of the Belarusian state. A. Lukashenko, in his aspiration to maintain power at all costs, placed Belarus in a difficult position in terms of geopolitics and geo-economy. The growing dependence of Belarus may cause that in the foreseeable future it will lose every last of the elements that were used to balance Russian expansion. Russian support is an instrument aimed at subordinating its Western neighbour, and having even more influence over the choices of Belarusian authorities in the long run. Such an activity of the Russian centre may cause that Belarus will become a “puppet” in hands of Russia and its sovereignty will become illusory.

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<sup>41</sup> A.M. Dyner, R. Śmigielski, *op.cit.*, p. 2.