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BELARUS: ASSESSING THE AFTERMATH

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Introduction:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. HILL: Ladies and gentlemen? Just checking that the microphone is on. Can everybody hear at the back? No, you can't hear? Let me see. It seems like it's on, right?

I'll try this again. Is the volume at the back of the room -- can you hear? It needs to be up a bit further? Maybe it's just the mic needs to be up a bit further. Larry, can you speak into yours as well?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Testing, one, two, three. Can you hear?

MS. HILL: You can hear? Okay, very good. Apologies, a quick technical intermission there.

I'm Fiona Hill, the director for the Brookings Center on the United States and Europe. And obviously we've got a pretty big turnout today for our discussion here on Belarus.

I just wanted to explain that this is, while not an unusual event for Brookings, but perhaps not something that we do so frequently. But this is really an event in collaboration with our friends, colleagues, and neighbors here on Massachusetts Avenue from SAIS. And we're very excited that in fact we can do a cross-generational meeting today, because it's not often that SAIS students find themselves on a podium with the likes of those elderly types over here.

Larry was just complaining he was feeling older right now. Not that the State Department is always the repository for those kinds of

feelings. There's also young and dynamic, but this is --

MR. SILVERMAN: Or old and dynamic.

MS. HILL: -- across the new generation of future policymakers that are being trained across the road and on the same side of Massachusetts Avenue here at SAIS. And we're really delighted that we were able, with the help of our colleague Mitch Orenstein, who is going to just speak in a few minutes, who is heading up the European Cities Program at SAIS, to be able to do this event today to bring some fresh perspective to an issue that, of course, is in the news but is also not such a new issue after all. The question of the future of Belarus, its relations with European Union, with Europe, and with the United States.

And of course we're focusing on the critical issue of the aftermath of the recent presidential elections in Belarus. The events of December 19th, the crackdown on the elections, and then the various statements that we've had from the EU and the United States. And in fact, just today in Warsaw -- it'll be already the night approaching in Warsaw -- there's been a major donors' conference on Belarus in which some of Larry's colleagues from the State Department and many other European heads of state and representatives of the EU have been taking part. And a number of statements have also been issued for this.

Some of you who are also here in the audience will remember about a year ago here in the room next door we had a major event marking the launch of the European Union's Eastern Partnership program. That event was in November of 2009, and the European

Foreign Ministers had their first meeting in the context of the Eastern Partnership Program in December of 2009. And in many respects a year on from that, the reaction and response to the Belarusian elections is the first major challenge of that program.

Recent Senate hearings here in the United States led to a lot of questions from U.S. members of Congress. And then later, indeed an article by Senators Kerry and Lieberman asking whether the EU should, in fact, suspend its EU partnership program, outreach to Belarus. I mean, this obviously is not Larry's topic, but this is an issue that is now at the forefront also of these discussions. The EU has so far said that in fact they still see this as a valid tool of engagement with Belarus. They don't want to cut off all ties, even though the EU has joined the United States in a series of sanctions.

So all of these critical issues are now on the table. And of course there is also, as our TV screens -- I'm not sure if it's still on, but I was glued to CNN a little bit earlier with scenes playing out in Egypt and a statement by Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, one that is rather -- Radek Sikorski, of course, for all of those who remember him from his days here at AEI, was always one for the bon mot, the rather flamboyant phrase, and made some references to linkages between Egypt and Belarus, which may seem a little farfetched, but with the events unfolding on the screens around us, this obviously is somewhat uppermost in some people's minds, anyway, of whether this is just the aftermath -- as we have billed this -- or perhaps a beginning.

Anyway, with all of these hot issues on the table I'd like to invite Mitch Orenstein, our colleague from SAIS, up to the podium to give a little context about why SAIS students have been so interested in Belarus. And then we'll hand over to our colleagues here, Monica and Edward, who are going to talk about their study trip to Belarus, and then hand over to Larry to talk about the U.S. response.

Mitch, please.

MR. ORENSTEIN: Well, thanks, Fiona. As the organizer of a trip to Minsk in January, I can attest that I can't understand exactly why SAIS students wish to go on this trip, but I think they'll tell you that themselves.

I'd like to welcome everyone to this seminar on Belarus: Assessing the Aftermath. This seminar discussion of recent developments starts with SAIS student presentations. Of the results of a study trip that I led on January 11th to 16th, in the aftermath of the electoral protests of December 19th, and their violent suppression.

At the time, a number of people questioned our judgment in undertaking such a trip. I and the students felt, however, that nothing could really replace an opportunity to view such a complicated situation close-up. And we were very richly rewarded with the insights and the impressions that our SAIS students will share with you today.

I'd like to just thank very briefly all the people who made this event and the trip possible. First, I would like to thank Fiona Hill for inviting us here to Brookings, which is very kind of you, and Andy Moffatt

for putting the program together. Thank you. Likewise, to Larry Silverman of the U.S. State Department, who has been a friend over the years and who has agreed to offer his expert comments. And also, Chargé Oleg Kravchenko of the Embassy of Belarus for facilitating our visas, our visit, and our meetings in Belarus.

With that I would like to thank everyone for coming. It's a great audience today and I'd like to turn the floor back over to Fiona Hill for what promises to be a very timely and engaging discussion.

MS. HILL: Thank you very much. And as I have mentioned, I hope that this will be another part in where we can pull in students and others from SAIS for future events.

I'd like to now turn over to Monica Sendor, who will give the first of our brief presentations on the findings of the SAIS group, and then to Edward Wrong, who will offer some additional commentary.

Now I think this is probably our first time at a Brookings podium. And our audience is very nice and friendly here, usually. In any case, if you would like to take the podium, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Thank you very much.

Monica, you might want to move the --

MS. SENDOR: Good afternoon, everyone.

Well, to borrow Minister Sikorski's analogy, I'm going to start off in a similar vein. Thousands of people marching peacefully in the streets, president unwilling to step down, a state clamping down on telecommunications networks and shutting down opposition websites.

You'd be forgiven if you were thinking that I'm speaking about Tunisia or Egypt. But just a few weeks ago very similar scenes were seen on the streets of Belarus. The clampdown on the opposition was swift and brutal, and 7 of the 9 presidential candidates and 700 protestors arrested and interrogated by the KGB.

Our meetings with exiled human rights groups provided us with raw accounts of the nights of December 19th, and included a harrowing tale of escape across the border by a student our own age. We heard firsthand accounts from election observers about rampant ballot fraud, including one story of an observer spoiling her ballot by writing "Sanja for the Hague," Sanja being Lukashenko's diminutive, only to find it later in the pile for Lukashenko.

Time and time again we heard that the polls of early voting had shown low levels of support for the incumbent, primarily from pensioners, the elderly, women, and rural populations. But instead of triggering a second round of voting, these results triggered an overreaction by an administration that needed to maintain the visage of popular support as a mandate for leading the country.

We were unsure of what to expect in Minsk, given the violent and unexpected crackdown on the opposition. And we discussed the possible ramifications of our trip. Would we be threatening the people that we met with with possible consequences and further interrogations? Would our visit be manipulated for propaganda purposes?

Looking back on our four days in Belarus, I can't say with

certainty that our expectations or our fears were fully realized. However, I can share with you some of the group's impressions of Belarus.

Our first and most immediate impressions were of surveillance and control. In Minsk, there were noticeable signs that the events of December 19th occurred, or that the arrest of opposition members were still occurring. And yet, an invisible set of handcuffs limits the rights and actions of Belarusian society. The strongest form of state control is retaliation for political activism. Those who go against the regime can be expelled from university, lose their housing, and even their jobs.

There are no independent universities with the last, the European Humanities University, expelled from the country in 2004. Students at the state-sponsored universities cannot understand how American students could hold public protest without immediately suffering expulsion from university.

Belarusian students explained that when protests occur, strict attendance is taken, absences are noticed, and students face expulsion if they are not able to provide an accepted excuse. At the same time, they stress that their social and daily activities were parallel to those of their European counterparts. Their one restriction was forsaking political engagement with voting being the exception to this unspoken rule.

State-owned television remains a primary way information is disseminated. All non-domestic TV stations, including Russian channels, are broadcast on a delay so the regime can carefully censor any material

it deems dangerous. Only about 30 percent of the population has access to the internet, compared to 50 percent in neighboring Lithuania. And while it is uncensored, users' activities are closely monitored and social network accounts have been reported to be hacked.

The extent of total information control was most evident and most crystallized in a discussion with students from the Belarusian State University who suggested that as visitors, we should take in the Belarus Free Theater while we were in Minsk. The students were unaware that the troupe had recently escaped the country and was now performing in New York, which had been a major item in the Western media.

The constraints of the government were felt by and exasperated our group of students from SAIS as our every move, both physical and digital, was monitored. Our hotel rooms searched and our seats at restaurants pre-determined. We were surprised to be offered a guide at the start of our meetings in Belarus, and she attended all but one of our scheduled meetings in Minsk.

Which brings me to my second set of impressions from Belarus, those of suppression and manipulation. Initially, the presence of our guide made us cautious and somewhat restrained in our discussions. But by the second day, we appreciated and marveled her ability to hold a whispered conversation on the phone while just sitting two feet away from us during our meetings and to navigate our large group around town using public transportation and a cadre of taxi cabs.

In contrast to the Western tendency of combining internal

persona, which I call or I associate with my Facebook profile, and with the external persona, like your LinkedIn profile, we combine them together here in Western culture to present ourselves in society. Our guide exemplified the Belarusian tendency of switching hats between these two personas, depending on the level of interaction and the level of trust.

Government officials had no problem promoting their statistics, such as .7 percent unemployment rate, while wearing their official hat. But then putting on their personal hat to admit that, unofficially, unemployment fluctuates up to 2.5 percent. Even this assertion, one of the few exceptions of surprising frankness we encountered, we felt was unfounded and we couldn't take it seriously.

There was a stark example of this over reliance on government-determined statistics in our conference with students from the Belarusian State University. The Belarusian students immediately pointed out that there were significant differences between the statistics the Western and the European students used in their presentation and those used by the Belarusians in discussing EU and Belarusian relations.

And they inquired about our sources. They were surprised to hear that we used nongovernmental sources, such as think tanks and international organizations for our economic statistics, and, more importantly, that we're not required to cite government statistics in our research papers.

Our third set of impressions concerned the unfulfilled promise of education. The emphasis on education in Belarus has led to

an exponential growth of highly-educated labor force. A minority of this labor force has studied or worked outside of Belarus and so has been exposed to economic and political systems that differ from that of Belarus.

However, competition for jobs is cutthroat. And we spoke with students who acknowledged that a system of nepotism helps a privileged few accelerate their careers while others are stuck in low-paying jobs for which they are overqualified.

Recent graduates that go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can expect to earn only \$180 a month. Even worse, there is little job security as most people are employed on short, one-year renewable contracts. Short contracts are a powerful tool for political and labor suppression. What better way to silence an employee than to remind him or her of their expendability?

Our fourth impression and our main question regarding Belarusian international relations was, Russia or EU? Lukashenko's claim that Belarus is a bridge between Russia and Europe. But really, we felt that it was a tug of war as he plays Russia and the EU off of each other to get what he wants.

As an American official observed, in the summer Lukashenko is pro-Europe and in the winter pro-Russia. As Belarus' largest trading partner, Russia's influence on Belarus' economy was obvious in our meetings with the Ministry of Economy and the national bank. However, Belarusian economists also recognize Russia as an economic threat for two reasons. The first is Belarus' dependence on

Russian oil, which makes up 40 percent of its export market and 20 percent of its GDP. And secondly, Russia's deep pockets for investment. Any privatization or liberalization of Belarus' economy is closely managed due to fears of Russian investors buying up key sectors in Belarus.

Belarusian exceptionalism, if you can call it that, was a repeated theme. Belarus is not Russia, it is not the EU, it is European. There is a Belarusian model of political economy unique from that of the Chinese model or the Swedish model. However, significant differences -- let's not call them factions -- exist within the government between those who are security-minded and those who are more westward leaning. The cultivation of this divide is a reflection of the administration's tendency to flip-flop between the economic promise to the EU and the security guarantee of Russia.

So, in conclusion, I want to raise the point one commentator at the Vilnius University adeptly brought up, is that you can't want what you don't know. While this captures the mindset of older generations of older Belarusians, a growing sector of society -- the young, the educated, the traveled -- are able to compare their life in Belarus with those living in the Baltics and Poland. And because they come to know democracy, they want the ability to choose it for themselves.

We've been told that Belarus turns in under external pressure. That sanctions don't work, and the U.S. has no leverage in Belarus. But these are just statements that encourage acceptance of the status quo.

Belarus is a country that is brimming with potential. We saw it in our trip, we heard it in our discussions. It has a geography that places it at the geopolitical and economic nexus between EU and Russia. And it has a hearty people who have not only survived waves of authoritarian rule but have become sophisticated in managing their lives in such an atmosphere of repression.

In the long run, the Belarusian government is at a disadvantage because they wish to liberalize their economy without offering their experts full access to information and outside ideas. There are and will continue to be economic consequences for the government's decision to suppress civil society. And we should not confuse economic liberalization for political and social progress.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. WRONG: Good afternoon. If anything positive emerged from the failed election in Belarus, it was that there is a ticking clock on the Lukashenko administration. The real news wasn't the fraudulent vote, which was largely expected, but that the Belarusian people would take to the streets to protest it.

In a police state that has been ruled by the same man for 16 years, a demonstration on this scale is generally the first toll of the bell. Democratic change cannot be affected in Belarus without substantial support from the population. And the protest of December 19th show that the support now exists on the inside.

But of course we are here to talk about how we on the

outside can foster that movement on the inside. What are the options open to us? The first option, sanctions, were announced on Monday by the United States and the European Union. Sanctions are certainly a necessary measure to show the Belarusian people that the world hears their protest and to show the government that we will not tolerate their continue human rights abuses while a visa ban and an asset freeze on Lukashenko and 158 others associated with the election crackdown is a clear signal and will prevent Lukashenko from taking any more ski vacations in the Alps. The sanctions are largely ineffective at weakening his administration.

Coordinated economic sanctions between the United States and the European Union could have a chance at weakening the president, Lukashenko's, image and perhaps his bank account. But while the United States did impose sanctions on several subsidiaries of state-owned company Belneftekhim, the European Union did not, making the utility of these sanctions overall questionable. Since the European Union is Belarus' second-largest trading partner after Russia.

On Tuesday the headline in Belarus did not read "EU and U.S. Impose Visa Ban on President Lukashenko." It read, "EU Decides Not to Impose Economic Sanctions on Belarus." Truly effective sanctions would need to get Russia onboard in the first place, and that seems unlikely.

These sanctions would need to be targeted at the energy sector and would need to be severe, embargoing business with all state-

owned companies in the energy sector. However, since Russia is highly unlikely to impose sanctions for such trivialities as fraudulent elections, and since the European Union appears unwilling to sacrifice Belarusian oil, there can be no useful sanctions in the immediate future.

I mentioned that sanctions were the first option we have in promoting change in Belarus. The second option comes back to the fact that it was the Belarusian people who set this ball in motion by taking to the streets on December 19th. As Monica said earlier, the opposition movement in Belarus is stemming from those who have some perspective in a country where information is strictly controlled. Those who travel read foreign media and have realized, perhaps, that status quo leaves something to be desired.

In essence, the second option comes down to soft power. Television and radio remain the primary media in Belarus. People do not use the Internet for information, either because it is monitored or because they do not have access to it. And because of the state-controlled media, the headline "EU Decides Not to Impose Economic Sanctions" will likely be the only one most Belarusians saw yesterday.

What independent media outlets exist operate in exile at the moment from Poland, mainly. However, the number of independent radio stations available in Russian or Belarusian will be down to two once the BBC closes its Russian language service on the world service. A recent independent TV news channel, Belsat, is now available also operating from Poland, but it only reaches 10 percent of the population through

satellite subscription.

While the European Union and the U.S. have provided financial support for all of these independent voices, they have not invested the Cold War soft power effort needed to make a significant impact on the national psyche. By increasing the number of independent news sources, we will simultaneously be decreasing the legitimacy of the state, and consequently Lukashenko as well. But perhaps the most immediate measure that can be taken to encourage exposure to democratic norms is to lift visa restrictions on ordinary citizens while maintaining the sanctions on Lukashenko and those officials responsible for the abuses of December.

Allowing regular citizens to travel freely and perhaps even work within the European Union would enable a huge amount of the population to be exposed to how the rest of Europe and the former Soviet Union lives without a command economy and without an authoritarian government. While many people were hoping that these visa restrictions on the general populace would be lifted concurrently with the sanctions announced on Monday, they were, unfortunately, not included, despite Polish lobbying.

Aside from these proactive measures, we must be aware of how diplomatic actions play in Belarus. Lukashenko cannot take five steps back and then be rewarded for taking two steps forward. In other words, sanctions should have no contingency on the release of political prisoners, as was stated by the EU previously. Sanctions were originally

lifted by the EU because of democratic improvements in the years before the election in a showing of opposition, at least, before this last election.

Completely backtracking on this progress, Lukashenko cannot stave off repercussions by releasing these political prisoners and yet still leaving the country far behind where it was on December 18th. If so, it sends a message that he can continually shuffle back and forth and stay within the lines. Additionally, within Belarus this will give the impression that he is untouchable.

The course for the West now is to hold President Lukashenko and responsible officials accountable for their transgressions while promoting civil society in the general population. This seems unlikely now that any political progress will be made, at least in the immediate future. Overly harsh economic sanctions, on the other hand, will only antagonize the Belarusian people towards the West while too much economic engagement will only boost Lukashenko's domestic popularity, and likely his bank account.

Belarus is a unique country in today's world, isolated and yet at the crossroads of the new Europe in the 21st century and it will require a unique approach.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SILVERMAN: Fiona, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the opportunity to come and talk with you today about Belarus and about U.S. policy. And our calculations and our thinking even before the elections of December 19th, but certainly --

MS. HILL: You might want to move it up a little bit.

MR. SILVERMAN: Is that better? Can you hear better?

No?

Not only before -- not only since the December 19th crackdown, but also before the elections and the run-up to the election. There's -- this is not a new policy that we have, and matter of fact this is a thread that I'd like to lay out to you of U.S. policy. And then -- we'll go back down. (Laughter) And then I do want to say a word about U.S.-EU coordination because I think it's important not only with respect to what's going on in Belarus, but as a more general principle and as a general factor.

Let me say, also, that I commend Mitch Orenstein and Monica and Edward for going. You made the right -- I think, personally, you made the right decision in going and seeing for yourselves and to talk to the people on the ground. There is no replacement, even with all the access we have to information.

The other thing I would say in terms of introduction is that there's a lot on the public record. So I don't want to bore you a lot with what we're doing. Because, frankly, there have been, you would almost argue, an unprecedented set of statements. We had a statement -- in terms of the U.S. Government, the statement from our embassy in Minsk first, the statement from the White House on December 20th. A joint statement by Secretary of State Clinton and the EUI representative Ashton on December 23rd, a later statement by the spokespersons for these two

for our two principles, as we call them, and numerous other remarks on the record from our spokespeople -- from your spokespeople. Testimony last Thursday that you may have seen from Assistant Secretary of State Phil Gordon before the Senate Foreign Relations committees, European subcommittee, which both had a public panel and a private panel. So the record is all quite clear.

And then culminating on Monday with the chronologically -- first, the conclusions, as they call it, of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, and our own announcement regarding additional sanctions.

I should have said right at the top that I also bring greetings and regrets from Deputy Assistant Secretary Dan Russell, who literally I just spoke to just before coming here, and really was at the Warsaw conference, and couldn't be here today.

You might want to turn it down a little bit.

But the -- sanctions are not an objective. They're not a policy, they're a tool. Engagement is a tool. And as we approached -- as the Obama administration approached Belarus, both Belarus government and the issue of Belarus and our relations, -- when it came in it started from a policy of engagement. That is why this -- is the Secretary Gordon went to Minsk in August of 2009 and laid out what we would like to see if relations were able to improve. I'm not going to go through all the history, you heard some of it here going back to 2006, 2007, 2008. But there was a track record of serious problems on democracy and human rights in Belarus stemming from elections and otherwise, not just from elections

and sanctions as a foreign policy tool.

And we had hoped, frankly -- and I think probably everyone in this room can share the view -- that we had hoped that things would have been better. Although to be honest, we -- the local elections in April of last year were -- did not nearly meet international standards. But it was relatively positive sign that the OSCE was invited to monitor with as many people as they wanted, wherever they wanted to go.

And there was almost doubly unfortunate, but we -- first of all, that we had what we would consider unacceptable. And I'm going now by the OSCE, the preliminary assessment and conclusions of the OSCE monitoring the effort: serious deficiencies, faults, flaws in the vote counting process, which led us to -- and now I say speaking as the U.S. Government, to consider the results -- the announced results of the vote counting. We could not consider those results legitimate.

And then, of course, we move to the events of the night of December 19th and beyond. You've heard some of the details. We reacted immediately in the rhetorical sense, obviously with the statements that we had. But you could see a very close thread where we had sanctions imposed previously. These sanctions that involved the oil and chemical state company Belneftekhim, as well as travel restrictions, as well as an assets freeze over the years 2006, 2007, 2008. And we did that in reaction to that, and with the hope that there would be changes. And then, when there were changes -- some changes in August of 2008 -- culminating in August of 2008 with the release of political prisoners, we

reacted. So that you would have, again -- it's a tool. It's a means to try to achieve a better end.

And when we saw some positive results -- meaning the release of the last political prisoners in 2008 -- we reacted by allowing a -- what is called a general license. It's not important, the term. Allowing American entities to do business with two of the subsidiaries of Belneftekhim. We kept our travel restrictions, we kept our assets freeze.

The EU lifted its travel restrictions, but kept its assets freeze. And as was said, they didn't have the sanctions on the companies.

So, we have always tried to take an approach to this which said if there can be progress, we can reciprocate. And if there are problems and further negative actions, then we are obligated to act. And that's what we said, of course, in this case.

You know what we've done. And now we 37 people -- well, now some released over the weekend -- over the past weekend, detainees released but still under charge. And as you know, it's our firm position and the firm position of the EU and, for example, the UN Secretary General and many, many others bilaterally as well -- that there needs to be an immediate release of all of the detainees without charges. The "without charges" is arguably the most important part, because as Assistant Secretary Gordon mentioned about 10 days or so ago, you cannot draw another conclusion except that detainees that are charged basically are political prisoners. Amnesty International has declared 16 of them already as prisoners of conscience or political prisoners.

And again, this thread -- to follow the thread when we and the European Union made the positive steps in 2008 in reaction to some positive steps by the government, we said, of course, this is dependent on no further -- no new political prisoners. So, we are watching this very closely. If -- you saw the announcement, I won't -- you know what the sanctions are. I think -- although I'm happy to talk about them further.

And you know that both we and the European Union are keeping this under review, which means if things get worse, there's a potential for further action. And if, you know -- and we can react the other way as well. But we have -- it's not just about detainees, as was mentioned. It's also about the opening up of political space or whatever you want to call it. It's about giving real freedom to independent media. It's about allowing civil society to operate. And we can get into specifics about legislation that we've asked to be changed for many, many years that restricts and tightens the -- and takes away the freedoms of civil society, of nongovernmental organizations. We were very specific and explicit. We have been and we will continue to be.

So, where we are now is it's really in the government of Belarus' hands to react to the reaction, and to step back from where it is. To take back some of the steps it has taken, but then to move forward. Because, of course, we weren't living in a perfect world before this crackdown. As a matter of fact, we were in a very imperfect world, obviously, in Belarus, which is why we did not have a normal relationship. And now it is worse, and we will see what happens now.

We will keep all of this under review -- under constant review, obviously. It's a symbol -- it's an issue of intense interest. You know that Secretary Clinton met with both Belarusian activists and Belarusian-American activists here in Washington on January 6 and was very happy to do so to get out that message and to hear from them. First, in some cases -- firsthand accounts of what happened. And others taking advice.

The U.S. Congress is obviously very interested in this from the hearings. There has been a reintroduction to what's called the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act that will now start working its way through Congress. There have been Congressional letters that have focused actually on more recommendations to the EU, actually, than to the U.S. administration.

And that leads me, because I really do want to have as much of a discussion as possible, an important point that is not only important for Belarus and what's going on in Belarus, I should say, but the larger point. That I would argue that we've seen unprecedented coordination between the United States and Europe on Belarus. I mean, to have two joint statements, to have -- it's no accident, obviously, that we announced both of our packages on Monday, January 31st.

And it is no accident, by the way, and I should have mentioned this earlier -- this is not about -- this is not meant as any kind of negative move. The sanctions are not meant in any way -- quite the opposite -- in any way as related to the Belarusian people, for whom we

want to expand access. Europe wants to expand access. You heard a little bit about the visa liberalization efforts, we support those because Belarus is a European country. It has not had -- its citizens have not had as much access as they could, or as they might like. And so we applaud the efforts, the initiative of the Polish government today in organizing this donor's conference, which raised, I guess, about \$120 million, in dollar terms.

Our assistance -- by the way, we announced -- will be ramped up around 30 percent, which will be roughly up to around \$15 million. Most of which goes to supporting civil society. There's some immediate assistance for those that we feel are most in need, whether legally or in a humanitarian sense. But also to aid -- independent media to aid civil society, human rights activists, youth, and environmental groups -- it goes across the board. And independent or democratic political parties, as well.

And that positive component is also very much a factor in Europe as well. So there's a positive component. Don't focus only on the sanctions that have been imposed.

But there really was unprecedented coordination, and there will continue to be a very close coordination between Washington and Brussels on this issue. Because, in fact, our message is no different to -- our message to the government is no different. The ball is in their court. It is their decision that needs to be taken now to reverse the course -- not only to reverse the crackdown, but to go back and get on a path to the

reforms that we have asked to see.

And unfortunately, in things like commitments made on the electoral code, commitments made to the OSCE, and now the ending of the mandate, the government's decision to basically close down the office of the OSCE by March 31, we have asked and will continue to ask for that decision to be reversed.

The mandate -- contrary to what the government has said, the work of the OSCE in Belarus is not over. It was not over before December 19th. Certainly not over after December 19th. But I -- it is very important that the international community speak with one voice, and I think the international community is speaking with one voice. It is true, we do not have exactly the same sanctions. It's been mentioned about -- the element of it is a U.S. element, but not an European element on state companies.

There have been calls by various people or groups for Europe to consider that, for the EU to consider it, for individual member states to consider it. This is their decision. We saw it as a means of making the case of how important it was, how serious we were, and that there are benefits to the reform and costs to; in fact, costs if there is not only a lack of reform, but, certainly, movement afterwards. But we're appreciative of, rather, the coordination that we've had with our European colleagues. And we fully expect to be sending the same message to the -- both to the authorities in Belarus and to the people of Belarus.

So let me leave it there. Thank you.

MS. HILL: Thank you very much, Larry.

I can see a lot of people in the audience who I know will have some comments. Obviously not just questions for the panel here. There's a number of people who work on Belarus and related issues. I see representatives here from various embassies, and we wanted to acknowledge the Chargé from the Belarusian Embassy who has personally been extremely generous in his assistance to the group in their travel there.

I see here Taras Kuzio, who many of you will know from his work on Ukraine, the first hand up. And so we'll invite here commentary and questions. You just -- he was just there. We'll just put the mic -- standing up here. And then, gentlemen -- oh, can't quite see over here. Thank you.

MR. KUZIO: Yeah, I just have a quick comment and then a question. My comment, I think I'd be more sanguine about the kind of impression that the speakers have given about Belarus being on the verge of a tipping point towards some kind of democratic revolution.

First of all, democratic revolutions -- as we saw Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia -- happen in semi-authoritarian, not authoritarian regimes like Belarus. And secondly, I think what we shouldn't underestimate, as we've seen in Ukraine, is that there's a large constituency of voters -- maybe up to 40 percent or so -- who are Lukashenko voters.

Western studies on Belarus have shown that Soviet national

identity is very prevalent in Belarus. And may be more popular than a western or ethnic Belarusian identity. And if, you know, if 40 percent of Ukrainians are going to vote for Yanukovich, then, you know, a similar type of voter in Belarus is also going to be in large numbers.

And of course, if you add to that the problem that the democratic opposition has in that part of the world, except in 2004 in Ukraine is they tend to be disunited. And there's no one leader whereas the authorities always have one guy, one person, around whom they rally. And so the opposition need to really get their act together in terms of putting forward one united leader, as they did in Ukraine in 2004, and then they can maybe at least face off the authoritarian leader. So that's my kind of view about sort of the problem with Belarus.

Of course, where the authoritarian leaders like Lukashenko or Putin are afraid he's going into a second round because that removes the problem of divided Democrats because then you just have one Democrat versus one authoritarian, and they don't want that because it's dangerous, potentially. But even then, Lukashenko could win then. So, I think it's -- I'm a bit more sanguine.

And just some background, in the Soviet era, Belarus had no dissident movement. It was the only European Soviet country with no dissident movement.

On my kind of question to Lawrence Silverman and maybe a more broader kind of question just in question is, there are eight authoritarian regimes defined by Freedom House as authoritarian in the

CIS. Belarus is one of them. These unprecedented actions by the EU and U.S. -- sanctions, visa denials -- only apply to Belarus. Should they be applied to all aid? Why is it just to Belarus? And if Ukraine holds fraudulent elections in 2012, will Ukraine be treated like Uzbekistan or Russia, or like Belarus?

Thank you.

MS. HILL: Now there was another question over here.

Sorry, thanks.

MR. BERRY: Yeah, I'm Bob Berry. Actually, speaking about generations, 20 years ago I was the first director of the Office of Coordination of Assistance to Eastern Europe, but more recently I just spent 40 days in Belarus as an election observer for the OSCE. And as such, I think we got an unusual amount of contact outside of Minsk in the countryside. In my case, it was mostly around Brest, which is one of the more sophisticated parts of Belarus because it's on the border.

I was extremely struck by the number of very well-educated young people, very well interconnected on the Internet, using all of the social media, and how influential they are and probably could be. I came away more or less like Sikorsky with a sense of the fragility of the regime. And even before events in Europe, I was saying maybe this regime will not last more than a couple of years.

But the question is, putting out a hand to these young people, who are mostly college graduates, but have a very difficult time studying abroad because getting things like the graduate record exam,

two full things like that, getting advice on how to get out. They can get out, they can get visas to get out and study. I remember back in the days of my office directorship, we had a lot of money to give to students who we brought to the United States. Many went on to be foreign ministers and things like that. So I would hope that maybe as part of what you're planning to do that you could have more of an outreach to the young people who are, I think, the future of the country. At least the urban young people. The rural young people are the Lukashenko voters, but not the urban young people.

MS. HILL: Thank you. If you would like to make some comment in this, and then our colleague from the Belarusian Embassy, Mr. Kravchenko, would like to say something.

MR. SILVERMAN: First, on the specific question of the students. That is part of it, and I didn't get into that level of detail in my remarks. But there will be probably increased assistance on the student side. And that's also a big -- I think it's going to be a significant facet of European assistance as well. So that in addition to actually assistance funding, I know that several states have already talked about scholarships or, you know, just allowing Belarusian youth to come and study elsewhere. And that hopefully they go back. And like you said, you know, they can benefit their country. So that's definitely part of it. And I'm sure it was a great experience.

We had actually, even, people from my own office -- or one person from my office -- as a monitor, actually, as well. And there was

quite a broad variety of experiences during that. They did have some interaction with voters. And, you know, part of the -- I think the problem that the monitors found most, as I said, was in the vote counting process. But then also, we do have -- we did have a problem, we do have a problem with the system of advanced voting, too, and the ability to monitor the five days of advanced voting and the count from those days as well as the one that -- one day, if you want to call it, of official voting.

To Taras Kuzio's question. Your second question is a hypothetical, and so I can say I can't answer a hypothetical about what might happen down the road in Ukraine in 2012. I think we've been clear on the record about local elections there, the last -- the past local elections, and on democracy in general and not wanting to see, as we call it, backsliding or backwards movement in democracy. And we've been very intensively raising our concerns in Ukraine and here in Washington as well. And they will feature, also, during the upcoming strategic partnership commission that we'll have.

But I have to say that I do believe that the sanctions that have been imposed and were, in fact -- as well as the continuation of those that had been in place against Belarusian authorities beforehand -- are very much appropriate to the situation in Belarus. And it's unusual situation and it's -- and the further deterioration of that situation. I fully believe that what happened in 2008, for example -- the little bit of opening, for example. You have registration of two newspapers. Why not have registration of more than two independent newspapers? And you can't

distribute a newspaper in the state-owned facilities unless you're a registered newspaper. Why some NGOs and not other NGOs?

That it was appropriate, in our case, to leave on most of our sanctions in 2008. But to find something that we thought was meaningful in exchange for something that was meaningful, the release of political prisoners. But now we have a situation where we have many more either real or potential political prisoners. So I would just not equate Belarus with others in that sense. And I think that what happened on December 19th and, arguably, just as importantly or more importantly, since December 19th because we have a continuation of actions, the crackdown went beyond just trying to deal with something that happened December 19th, and that's the problem. It's the suppression, it's the closing of the space for what we obviously consider are legitimate activities, whether they be by political parties, by civil society groups, by NGOs, and by independent media.

MS. HILL: Thanks, Larry. Would you like to make any comments based on your own interactions on the?

MR. WRONG: Well, just one thing. Just in response to Taras Kuzio's comment about how we sort of talked about and how December 19th was a tipping point in terms of starting towards a revolution. And Mr. Kuzio pointed out how Belarus is a completely authoritarian country compared to semi-authoritarian things that happen in Ukraine and other places.

And obviously, I mean, I just think I'd like to clarify. This is

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just really an unprecedented action and it points to the fact that changes may be coming. I mean, in a complete policy state where everything is controlled and where people who did protest are, in fact, going to jail or losing their jobs in place of university, to show this kind of defiance of the regime may be still perhaps 5 years, 10 years down the road. But it certainly shows a change in attitude in the general population in terms of what they're willing to tolerate and what the repercussions might be for the crackdowns.

MS. SENDOR: And if I could just add to that, also, that many of the people we spoke with -- human rights groups and civil society organizations -- they recognize that Lukashenko does have that 30 to 40 percent of popular support. So, there is a constituency that supports him. And they shouldn't be diligent in favor of stating, point blank, that there's going to be some kind of democratic upheaval.

However, if he did have 30 to 40 percent, what we found puzzling was, why not let it go to a run-off? And even if the opposition united and presented one candidate and he still won, that would have meant he played by the rules. But something happened that night that changed his -- that changed the way that he reacted to the situation. And that, I think, was what was most shocking, most prevalent for us and for the people we spoke with. Is that even with the support, he had -- like, that's a comfortable margin. Here 51 percent is a mandate from the people. But in Ukraine -- not in Ukraine, in Belarus, 30, 40 percent, that's still a lot. So, I am just echoing your comments.

MS. HILL: That was actually an interesting point. And I won't put Mr. Kravchenko on the spot to respond to this. But something did seem to change and, in fact -- I mean, what we're talking about here about the unprecedented openness, in fact, for the monitoring. The fact that, in fact, you were encouraged to go on your study trip and the Belarusian embassy here and many others urged many of representatives of think tanks and others to go to monitor the elections. I mean, we at Brookings and many of our colleagues were approached and asked to send monitors, as the State Department and others were. It suggests certainly on the surface that there was an intention for this to go somewhat differently.

I said, we won't ask you to comment on that. I think that's an unfair question to put to you. But we would be interested in hearing your responses to the panel and to the comments from the floor. And then I'll throw it back to others here for their commentary.

MR. KRAVCHENKO: Thank you very much. Thank you very much for having invited me here. And I, of course, commend Professor Orenstein and the group of students from SAIS to go to Belarus despite all the negative publicity that we -- that Belarus has been receiving lately here and to see for themselves.

I do think that we're missing very important element here while talking about what happened on December the 19th. There was an actual attempt of the violent storm of the building of the government and the Parliament. So it was not exactly that the people took it to the streets

to protect the elections and the authorities just decided to attack them for that.

The demonstrators actually gathered at one square and then they moved to another square. And the gathering at this -- another square, the Independence Square, was not authorized, which in itself, from the point of view of the law enforcement, requires action. But action was not taken. So, only when a group of demonstrators started to actually smash and break the windows and the doors of the governmental building where at this time the central electoral committee was working, only then the law enforcement decided to intervene, to engage, and to stop this action.

So, this is, again, one very important element that I would like to be, well, recognized at least. And my -- it may be a rhetorical question in this regard would be, what the law enforcement of any other country, including the U.S., would do in this situation when a group of demonstrators actually started to storm a major federal building.

Secondly, the elections itself as assessed by the OSCE observation mission were better than the previous elections in Belarus. The assessment, if to read it carefully and to compare with the previous assessments, were much better with comparison with the, again, previous assessments of elections in Belarus.

We don't agree dissensions are effective and productive tool of the foreign policy. We do believe dissensions are counterproductive. They only alienate the people, and they are also harmful not only for the

Belarusian people, but also for American businesses. There is a group of about 30 American businesses that rely solely on the imports of the products of one of these two enterprises that have been, again, sanctioned.

At the same time, I would like to confirm that Belarus is still ready to cooperate with the U.S. and to work with the U.S. together. Even on the sensitive issues. I would like to inform you that just two and a half weeks ago there was the first echelon of cargo for ICFE, for NATO troops in Afghanistan that went through the territory of Belarus. So we actually are helping the NATO and the U.S., of course, in Afghanistan. And we are ready to further develop this cooperation. The Department of State is certainly aware of that.

So, once again, thank you for this invitation and for the opportunity to speak.

MS. HILL: Thank you. I think there was actually an important point in something you said about different perceptions in different countries of attacks by demonstrators on federal buildings or government buildings. In fact, in my original home country in the UK, there was in fact -- during student demonstrations over university cuts pretty serious attacks, as people will remember, including on members of the royal family who happened to be driving inadvertently. And they're in the midst of student demonstrations. And the law enforcement reacted in a very different way, clearly, from what happened in Belarus.

However, if you're in the general neighborhood of the former

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Soviet Union and you have in your mind what happened in Kyrgyzstan with the storming of government buildings, elsewhere, you might have a different perception. You know, the scenes that you've described have happened in Paris, they've happened in Athens as a result of the economic downturn.

So there has been a number of these kinds of incidents. But obviously they've been dealt with in different ways and have different consequences because of the perceptions just in the sea of the state, or of the leadership. I mean, this is something, I think, for a more deeper discussion here perhaps as we go on that these kinds of incidents are perceived very differently in very different settings. In fact, there wouldn't be the same reaction across countries to these kinds of events.

But Larry, let's hand it over to you if you want to make any comments on this? And otherwise, I will ask --

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I'll keep it very brief. Obviously, the reaction would be very different. I can't agree there. The reaction to any such scenario would be very, very different here. But the systems are entirely different, and so the access of people and the rights of people are, obviously, entirely different. And so I don't think we can compare these situations.

MS. HILL: No, and I think people also read the situations very differently and the context in which they see them.

I saw a hand at one point. Yes, Andre Leon right at the back here, from the Cato Institute.

MR. LEON: Thank you. I would like to ask the panel and also maybe participants in the audience to try to address this issue of what exactly happened, not maybe only what exactly happened, because we have some knowledge about it, but why it happened.

And especially based on the last comments given by the representative of the Belarusian Embassy. Because all these crackdowns on protesters was organized after the very clear provocation of the special services, and there is overwhelming evidence how it has been done with video, with pictures, with interception of radio communication or special sources, how they stormed the building instead of demonstrators. So that is why it's not a secret anymore for all the millions of people who have watched these video pictures and listened to this interception.

So, that is why it is very clear that it was a very well set up provocation by the special services of Belarus to show us it would be demonstrators who stormed this building. The question, why? Why these provocations have been organized? And it is especially interesting because -- and actually about this provocation. Those who are interested in Belarusian affairs were informed at least one week before the December 19th. At least myself, I was talking to several people in Belarus. They told me that special services are preparing it, at least on December 12th, so a week before that, and very detailed. So, that is -- it was quite known to many people.

The question, why? It is very well known that Mr. Lukashenko was building so-called bridges to Europe and to the United

States for at least a couple of years before that. And just honestly speaking, there were some changes in the policy towards your positions, towards some kind of slight signs of liberalization and democratization in Belarus. Maybe very small steps, but nevertheless, some steps. And Mr. Lukashenko himself invested heavily in some kind of establishing new types of relations with the Western countries. And the relation with the Russian leaders were not quite well, not quite good as they were before.

So, why for Mr. Lukashenko and for Belarusian authorities?

It was so easy to destroy fruits of their very long-term strategy for two years or even more just to establish much better relations with the Western countries.

MS. HILL: Would you like to hazard a guess, Andre, as to why? You certainly sound as if you have some thoughts on this and we'd be interested to hear them.

MR. LEON: (inaudible) because without understanding this part of the story, it would be rather hard to produce any coherent recommendations what we're doing in this particular situation because it's quite -- not obvious. It's not the -- some kind of systematic policy of many -- of some other regions that have been mentioned today. It's a quite different situation.

MS. HILL: Well, let's just go around, colleagues from SAIS. If you heard any thoughts on this from the people that you talked to while you were there? And, Mitch, I don't know if you want to come in on any observations.

MS. SENDOR: Would you like to comment on?

MR. WRONG: I would --

MS. HILL: Yeah, so if you'd like to offer some thoughts based on the discussions that you had when you were on the ground and then we'll ask --

MR. WRONG: (inaudible)

MS. HILL: We're handing over to Mitch Orenstein here.

MR. ORENSTEIN: Yeah. I'm not sure if this is on or not.

MS. HILL: Yeah, I think you're there.

MR. ORENSTEIN: I mean, it's a subject which, obviously, came up a lot in our conversations, in both Vilnius and Minsk. I neglected to mention that we actually began our trip in Vilnius, in part because that gave us an opportunity to speak with a broader spectrum of people than we thought we would be able to meet directly with in Minsk.

I think that one of -- there are a number of different theories about this that are bandied about and discussed. And of course, we can't know for sure what the decision-making process was. But some of the theories that I liked were -- one was a sort of more conspiratorial, I suppose, theory that had this kind of connected to gas deals or oil deal that somehow was struck a week before the election with Russia. That somehow enabled Lukashenko to tip a bit towards Russia and to, therefore, ignore Western, you know -- Western ideas and ignore the type of Western norms that would have suggested greater freedom in the elections.

So, the idea is essentially that -- of course, Russia had been putting pressure on Lukashenko in the months before the election. In particular, by trying to raise the costs of oil coming into the country. And a deal was reached in the week before the election that enabled some sort of reconciliation. That reconciliation was felt, by some, may have given the regime a greater ability to crackdown than it would have had it needed to rely to a greater extent on the West.

I think another prominent theory is simply kind of an overreaction theory that certain events, and it's not clear what events, but certain events triggered a kind of surprise within the regime. Some people felt that it may have been the early election turnouts, because as was mentioned a number of people are forced to vote or asked to vote in the five days prior to the elections. And the counting of these ballots, early ballots, is very unclear. But it's also seems that the regime may use this as a sort of indication of what's going to happen.

And some people felt that the early returns showed a very low support for Lukashenko and a rather higher support than was expected for the opposition. This may have triggered a kind of concern. Other people feel that on the day of, the sort of size of the demonstrations may have triggered some concern.

You know, but, on the other hand, people point out that the sort of repression of effort was rather well planned. It was and it wasn't, right? It sort of seemed like they had things under control on the day, but then it also seemed like a lot of the repressive efforts kind of unfolded over

a period of weeks afterwards in terms of trying to find, locate, and figure out how to deal with a variety of opposition members. So that gave an impression of some planning, but also some muddling through, if you will.

So, we can't say for certain. But I think that probably to some extent both of those theories made some sense to me, in any case.

Do you have additional things you want to add to that?

MS. SENDOR: If I could just add one -- I think I have one -- emphasize one thing, and that's something that we heard over and over again. Is that everything in Belarus is so controlled and the Charge, in fact, mentioned that these protestors did not have authorization. Well, if I spontaneously decide to want to protest here in one day in Washington, D.C., and a group of my friends go down together, we're not going to have to deal with any consequences of that if our protest is peaceful and does not affect anyone.

And so, hearing that there were rules that need to be followed and that the motivation for the repercussions was because rules weren't followed, in addition to being sort of caught by surprise, that just -- that adds to the complexity of the situation that we encountered in Belarus. And it complicated our understanding.

When we came in, we had a set of expectations, and when we left nothing was black and white. Everything was sort of a gray. And I think that's one thing we can definitely pull away from this trip, is that going there and experiencing the country and talking with people has no replacement. That's true.

And that things from outside are never are exactly what we think they are, really, on the ground. So, like echoing, we don't know for sure what happened, but it's clear that there was some confusion and a lot of surprise.

MR. WRONG: I would just add on the two areas that Professor Orenstein mentioned. In terms of greater Russian engagement, I think that's been shown by the announcement last week that Russia is restarting crude oil shipments to Belneftekhim. And to another extent, we've met with IRI in Vilnius and they seemed to be very convinced of this area, that it was a large -- an overreaction.

They estimated that Lukashenko won 30 percent of the early voting and the crackdown was a panicked response to that. And more importantly, a show for Lukashenko to show Belarusian people that he still maintained power and control over the country. And to show the West that he could do whatever he wanted within his sovereign territory.

MS. HILL: Kind of a point out there. I can see three more hands, and then we'll go back to the panel again.

The lady at the back. Gentleman here, and then Taras Kuzio, you had a two-fingered comment. So if we just take the three of you together and then we'll come back to the panel and wrap up. Thank you.

MS. SHERTOVA: I'm Katij Shertova. I don't have a question, I just have a comment that might strive to answer the last question.

I also went on the trip, and one of the things that I noticed was that sort of contrary to what most Western media perception is, Belarus isn't a monolith. Even the state is not a monolith. So we went into these different meetings with government organizations and the ministries and their official statements -- and even from one meeting to the next, you could really tell the difference in tone and in perception, and also reaction to our presence.

And so, you know, some ministries that you would think would be aggressive towards us were very aggressive and were very mocking towards us, and others were very open towards engaging us and actually giving us truthful information in answering our questions.

So if I would venture a guess, I would also say that in addition to what Professor Orenstein said is that I think there are these competing elements within the Belarusian government. And that within the past two or three years, we've seen sort of a move towards the West because the competing elements that want that move were sort of -- had the upper hand. And then as we were approaching the elections, and especially with the early voting, I think that the factions within the government or the competing elements within the government, particularly with the security forces, started to see trends that were negative towards their interests. They became more fearful of the consequences of the election, and therefore overreacted even before the elections were over.

So if I might venture, that would be possibly another explanation.

MS. HILL: That's a great comment. Thank you very much. The gentleman here, and then Taras Kuzio and then we'll come back -- actually, the two gentlemen here. Thank you.

MR. NITTAN: Hello. My name is Jeremiah Nittan and I am from the Turkish Embassy.

MS. HILL: Sorry, could you speak up slightly, sir?

MR. NITTAN: Like this?

MS. HILL: Just speak up slightly.

MR. NITTAN: Louder.

MS. HILL: Louder, yes. That's it, thank you.

MR. NITTAN: Okay. My name is Jeremiah Nittan and I am from the Turkish Embassy. I think I have two questions to Mr. Silverman.

First one is, I would request his assistance to U.S. view on how big is the business that has been done under the temporary license for the U.S. to the business with Belneftekhim, like to give us a figure to understand how the sanction will be effective, kind of yearly volume of the trade, or business being done under this license.

And second question is, U.S. authorities are saying that the sanctions are being closely coordinated with the EU, but there are always no economic sanctions from the EU. So, can you give us a little bit of insight what happened? I mean, is the close coordination continued to get them onboard on this? And just give us some information on that.

And the last one is, in your statement regarding the sanctions, you said on the asset freeze you are studying on to get more

people under this sanction. So, how many people or institution are currently under this sanction? And when do you think that your further study will end, you know?

Thank you very much.

MS. HILL: Okay, the gentleman next to you and then Taras Kuzio, please. Thank you.

MR. PULLMAN: This is more of a quick statement. My name is Mitchell Pullman. I've participated in, I think, OSCE monitoring missions, so I have experience with governments giving their own spin on what the OSCE says. And I'm just looking in response to what the Chargé said so that there's no misunderstanding.

The OSCE's preliminary statement says Belarus still has considerable way to go in meeting OSCE commitments, despite certain improvements. And the improvements they're referring to are exclusively about the number of candidates and the media situation leading up to the day of the election. Not the voting process or the post-election period.

MS. HILL: Thank you. Taras?

MR. KUZIO: Yeah. (inaudible) this debate as to why he overreacted. To me it was telling a clip I saw on the BBC news where a policeman was standing -- a middle-aged policeman was standing with protestors arguing with other policeman, the riot policeman. It immediately brought back memories of 2004 Ukraine. And because once the guys with the guns become divided, the regime starts to panic.

And we don't know what intelligence Lukashenko is

receiving about maybe this kind of mood for change, which is what, as we saw in Tunisia and Egypt, is the same thing. When you have a mood for change growing and that spreads to the security forces, they can become neutral and passive.

So I was saying that that image stuck in my mind. It resembled, to me, more 2000, 2001 Ukraine than 2004. So I agree with you, you have a few more years to come.

MS. HILL: I think that's also very good point. And that's when in other recent events in Kyrgyzstan when Bakiyev was overthrown, and the same with Akayev. It was, again, the same phenomenon where the police forces, security services, and some of the army went off in different directions. It think that's a very good point to be making.

We'll turn back over, now, to Larry for some response to these very specific questions. Then we'll ask Monica and Edward and Mitch, if he wants to, to make some final observations and we'll wrap up.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay. I don't have with me the figure, the specific figure, of the business that's done with the two subsidiaries. It's not insignificant for those companies. I mean, there is a penalty for this. There is lost business.

Bilateral trade between the United States and Belarus has fallen off a lot, of course, over these past several years. And it's very much smaller, of course, than trade between Belarus and Europe, of course, and even many individual European countries. And it's not a decision that we take lightly.

But it -- we felt at the time that we imposed the original sanctions on Belneftekhim and it's subsidiary -- and Belneftekhim added its subsidiaries -- that it was an important signal to send. And that it would affect people, it's true. It would affect people here -- I mean, American companies. But that there are also -- the point had to be made. And that it is a significant issue, and you do a significant act in response to what we're significant negative acts. But I can't cite the exact figure.

On the Europeans, you really have to, of course, ask them. There have been a lot in the public groups, private groups, others calling for economic sanctions. When I say economic sanctions I mean, again, sanctions against state-owned companies, state-owned entities.

And there were some countries who called for it publicly. But there were others who didn't want that. And that's up to them. I think high -- Representative Ashton was actually asked this question today, or yesterday. It may have even -- may have been today, and the one press account I saw she responded, well, you know, things remain -- everything remains under review. So, you really -- that's a question that you have to pose to them for their internal dynamics on this situation with respect to that specific issue.

The number of individuals currently under the assets freeze is in the teens, I should say. And I can't say how many it would be. It's a process that has been started and it's been started in order to review and consider, obviously, additional names. I don't know what -- where we will wind up. I do know that the things that we're looking at, obviously -- and

when you go back and look at the original executive order and the presidential proclamations at the time, these are for obviously what we consider very well-founded circumstances that involve the repression of democracy and for human rights abuses. Whether they had been in place before, obviously stemming somewhat related to the 2006 elections before, now there can be some that are related to what happened in the wake of the elections this time. But it's a very serious process, we take it very seriously. And we will, you know, judge -- that's the criteria. The criteria that I cited to you are the ones that we look at in adding, but I can't tell you exactly where that review will come out, except that we have decided to review and take a look at that. And that there would be additions.

MS. HILL: Thanks, Larry. And Edward and Monica, some final thoughts?

MR. WRONG: Well, I would just say I think sanctions are very important as a symbolic action. And we clearly do have this problem with the fact -- because these countries provide employment for so many Belarusians who, in many ways, don't have a choice of where they end up being employed, but it's necessary to take into account these considerations.

But I think, as well as also important to remember that the sanctions have no huge affect on these countries, particularly from the United States, but just because we are a very small trading partner in comparison with anybody else, and even when we were in Belarus

officials were fairly blasé about sanctions. They noted how exceptions were made for Boeing after lobbying for glass fiber exports. And they've also pointed out that they can always go to new markets and turn to China and, for instance, they now have an oil exchange deal with Venezuela which just went into effect, I believe.

MS. HILL: Monica?

MS. SENDOR: Mine will be less about comments and more about making sure recognition is due. I want to thank all the organizations that risked meeting us and those that were willing and wanted to meet with us, both in Vilnius and in Minsk here before we left. I want to shout out to all the students here who went on the trip and are here showing their support. We had an amazing time learning about these countries, and not only Vilnius and Minsk, but there was a pre-trip and a post-trip to Estonia and Latvia and Ukraine. So, just exploring the region.

I also wanted to thank Brookings for hosting this event and Chargé Kravchenko for all his work in facilitating our trip. We really appreciated your help with our visas, especially with our visas. And our SAIS community that helped sponsor the trip, and the EU, that also played a role in facilitating our trip.

And we -- I think I want to conclude, at least, with a comment that now we know more about Belarus. And just as I hope that one day all Belarusians will have more access to information and come to learn more about America, I intend and I know many in the group intend to remain vocal supporters of the Belarusian people.

MS. HILL: Mitchell?

MR. ORENSTEIN: Just a couple -- just I wanted to mention a couple things that didn't come up, actually so much.

I mean, I think that it's important to recognize that the Lukashenko regime did have and probably does have, among some people, certain legitimacy. And in part, this legitimacy has been based on the perception that whether or not there were fair elections, they were getting a majority of the vote, first of all.

And second of all, that there was a social model in Belarus that was effective. It was effective in preventing the type of Wild East capitalism that emerged in Russia, preventing kind of major collapses of companies, employment spots, providing a certain standard of living -- it was rather low, but nonetheless guaranteed -- and jobs and also, a lack of corruption, which was actually pretty evident. That was one thing I really noticed as a big difference. You don't see the type of petty corruption in Belarus, perhaps, that you do in a lot of other places.

To me, I think that this election was a turning point because I think both of those things seemed rather weakened at this moment. On the one hand it appears that there's a lot of evidence that there wasn't a majority victory in the election for the regime. That rather, that they did not gain a majority.

And secondly, it appeared to me that -- I expected to be more impressed with the economic model than I was. I found that wages looked very low. I found that it seemed increasingly hard on the ground to

believe a lot of the official statistics that were coming out. That comment that was made before about the fact that Belarusian university students are meant to cite only the government statistics indicates that there may be a political use of statistics.

It seemed to me that there were a lot of people who were economically frustrated in the sense that they may have believed a few years ago that having the type of social guarantees that, indeed, the regime produced were valuable. But it made the decision that in looking at some other places nearby that the economic dynamism wasn't there. And to me that seems to be the big challenge. If I were to look forward over the next year and say, what do we expect to see out of Belarus, certainly we're going to see this continue and, you know, issue the sanctions and all that.

But I think what one should look forward to is that the regime is going to have to make some efforts to produce economic modernization. And we're going to see how strong those steps are and see if they work. So, that's what I would say looking ahead to possibly concentrate on future discussions.

MS. HILL: Thank you very much, Mitch. And I think this was a good opportunity to have a fresh perspective on an issue that is being much talked about here in D.C. And we're very glad that everyone was able to join us. And as I said, I hope we can make a bit more of a pattern of reaching out to our friends and our colleagues on Massachusetts Avenue to bring in a different perspective on some of the ongoing

debates.

And so thank you very much, everyone, again for joining us today. And thank you, Mr. Kravchenko, for taking the time to come as well.

Thank you. (Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

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