

## **Belarus-Russia Relations: The Role of Energy Politics and External Factors**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Paper aims to analyse the relations between Belarus and Russia through the prism of major speculative approaches. It would be an essential task to account for the role of external factor, how it shapes foreign policy, through the changing dynamics of regional geopolitics and geo-economics. However, it becomes clear that Belarus' energy security environment is indeed one of the most critical security issues of the country. This study has been focused on how energy security of Belarus has emerged as a major issue, impacting on the economic growth of Belarus. The study also undertakes the role of a gas pipeline in the shaping of Belarus policy towards Russia. As a result, Belarus is getting maximum benefit for geographical location. It understands the place of Russia and EU in the multi-vector foreign policy of Belarus. It clarifies the relation between geostrategic positions, energy and politics in Belarus with a particular focus on Russia. And the work has analysed why energy is a determining factor for Belarus and Russia's relations? The work purely base on secondary data with contextualizing from articles, published thesis, books, country official governmental sites, ministry data and other diverse sources.

**Key Words :** Energy Politics, Geopolitics, NATO, Soviet Union, security, pipeline, oil, gas, renewable, customs union, authoritarianism, Belarus, democratization, European Union, external factors, Russia.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The foreign policy of Belarus took a paradigm shift with the breakdown of Soviet Union. It started facing a significant challenge by being a newly born country. Russia today is encircled by former republics of USSR. The policies of Russia spontaneously influence the neighbouring countries, once a part of USSR. Belarus too had to go through some economic strains, but the crucial geostrategic location with Russia ensured outstanding bilateral partnership with Russia. Belarus is a landlocked country mostly gets persuaded by the policies of EU as well as Russia. It would be fair to say that Belarus has been on the path of Neo-realism. Neoclassical Realism can be seen as the third generation of realism, coming after the classical authors of the first wave which is what adopted by Belarus. It has been cordial towards both EU and Russia. Under this backdrop, the present chapter would try to penetrate into the conceptual nitty-gritty of the third generation Neoclassical and realism and try to understand the transition and the beginning of Belarus's foreign

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policy vis-s-vis big power centres. Though crises have occurred in 2004, 2006-07 and 2010 due to a shortage in Russian oil supply, it was sorted out by the mature and pragmatic step taken by Putin administration and his Belarusian counterpart. Belarus is embroiled in the conflict between Russian Federation and EU. On one side it tries to establish its European identity and on the other unable to recover from the nostalgia of Soviet ideology. Energy is crucial for the survival of the Belarusian state and at the same time asserting its national identity and maintaining sovereignty regarding foreign policy is another challenge in the light of assertive Moscow.

### **Geographical dimension:**

Belarus which is strategically located between Russia and Poland is the shortest route between Russian energy fields and Western European markets, making it an important player in European energy transit. These characteristics have also made the country one of the most important transit countries for Russian energy exports to Central and Western Europe, transporting 20 per cent of Russia's gas exports and 50 per cent of oil exports outside the CIS and Baltic's. Some of the most important oil and gas pipelines connecting Russian fields with Western European customers pass through Belarus. Belarus' role as an important transit route for Russian energy is set to increase further as a result of the completion of the Yamal gas pipeline, called by many 'the project of the century' which was started in 1994, signifies Belarus' most important gas transit project to date. It is also at the Centre of a veiled struggle between Belarus and Russia for control of the country's gas transit capacity (Balmaceda, 2006 and Rosner, 2006).

Therefore, Geo-political plays also the prime role in the development of the country's foreign policy with West, Russia, CIS and the East countries. Belarusian foreign policy has always included ties with both Russia and the West because it is the country that has possessed a small number of mineral resources and an unreformed economy. But the situation of the country is in the centre of Europe and close to Russia. So it has dependent on Russia for massive subsidies without significant economic liberalization. So Belarus is trying to close with neighbour countries through Russia.

### **Belarus-Russia energy relations:**

Energy is crucial for the economic development of a nation and for improving the living standard of the people. At the most basic level, energy security means having access to adequate, affordable and reliable energy fuel and services for all consumers. Energy security is multidimensionally ranging from production, exploration, and transportation to, strategic reserves and the making of foreign policy.

Belarus highly dependent on imported oil and gas supplied from Russian Federation. It is the biggest problem of Belarus that it highly depends on a single supplier that is Russia. Therefore Russia's strong influence in the region might affect Belarus's political situations. Despite every possibility of any deescalating of the relationship with Russia, Belarus will remain in advantageous position because of its strategic location. The Yamal pipeline which acts as an alternative to the Russian gas supply to central and western Europe via Ukraine will play a check and balance with Russian Federation. The worse the bilateral ties between Russia and Ukraine, the more advantage Belarus will gain out of this situation and hence the Crimea crisis raised the status of Belarus as a reliable partner of Russia over Ukraine. Balmaceda (2006) argues that gas is a significant source of energy for Belarus, more essential than other energy sources. Throughout the post-Soviet period, Belarus has relied upon Russia for over 80 per cent of its energy supplies through gas imports. Because gas is a significant energy source for Belarus, the relationship between the countries is

even more critical. However, the energy issue becomes politicised, and the lower prices could negotiate. Energy weapon is now a comprehensive tool of Russia's foreign policy and Belarus trying to get maximum benefits (Baihuzhakava, 2015). There are so many times pipeline disputes have been taking place. In 2006, 2007, 2010 Russia was cut the pipeline due to the payment issues and internal political conflicts. Belarus is not paying the payment in right times to Russia and demanding more subsidies. But Russia always wants to make good relations with Belarus. However, Russia is getting Military and political benefits from Belarus. Nevertheless, Belarus is taking oil gas subsidies from Russia because of the transit route. Belarus is the only reliable and shortest route for the Russian Oil, and gas pipelines to western and European market. After the Crimeacrisis, Ukraine has broken the agreements with Russia so now; all the pipelines are passing through Belarus. Which as a result Belarus is getting heavy oil and gas subsidies from Russia. Belarus have own oil Refinery Company and Belarus using it make petroleum products and selling it in the western markets. Though Belarus doesn't have own natural energy resources still can not manage to produce sufficient renewable resources too. Lack of technical management and policies country is facing difficulties to get adequate sources. Therefore both countries are interdependent with each other.

#### **External relations:**

After the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991, Belarus has been trying to maintain closest relations with Russian Federation. In April 1993, Belarus signed the CIS Treaty on Collective Security and accorded on closer economic co-operation with CIS states. In April 1994, Belarus and Russia had agreed on an eventual monetary union. In March 1996, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia signed the Quadripartite Treaty, which has always envisaged a mutual market place and a customs union amongst the four countries, as well as joint transport, energy and communication systems (Kumar, 2003).

In April 1996, Belarus and Russia concluded the far-reaching and controversial Treaty on the formation of a Community of Sovereign Republics, providing for closer economic, political and military integration. On 2nd April 1997, a further Treaty of Union was signed by Yeltsin and Lukashenka in Moscow, and a Charter of Union, detailing the process of integration, was also initiated. The stated vision of the central union was that the 'voluntary unification of the Member States,' including the development of a common infrastructure, a single currency, and joint defence policy (Belarusian, 1999). The Executive Committee was to be appointed by Supreme Council. The Parliamentary Assembly (provision for which had been made in the 1996 Treaty), was convened in March and comprised of 36 members from the legislature of each country. The charter was submitted for a nation-wide discussion in both countries, before being signed in Moscow on 23rd May. Endorsement of the documents by the respective legislatures took place in June, and the first official session of the Parliamentary Assembly followed shortly afterwards, with the Assembly adopting the anthem of the former USSR (Struyked, 1999).

In June 1998, a diplomatic overhaul resulted from the reinforcement of eviction, for 'essential repairs,' of 22 diplomatic families from their residences outside Minsk. This structural violation of Vienna convention, guaranteeing the sacredness of diplomatic applets in the residences, led to the recall of Ambassadors of Belarus back from EU countries, as well as some the other European States, the USA, and Japan. Similarly, Belarusian envoys were rushed from the EU in June, and in the following month, Belarusian officials (including the President) were blocked from entering member states. The ban was once again adopted by some EU member state countries and the

USA. However, in December Belarus took up heavily measured compensative procedures for those that had been forced to relocate and Lukashenko gave further assurances, that, from now onwards he would go with international agreements. All heads of diplomatic missions are given accreditation to Belarus, except the US ambassador, returning Minsk in January 1999. The EU ban on Belarusian official entering its territory was repealed in February, and the ambassador returned to Minsk in September (Kumar, 2003).

Relations with Poland deteriorated sharply in February 1998, when Poland introduced visas for travellers from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine in preparation for EU membership and the standardization of controls. The possibility of accession to EU caused several countries to reconsider their entry requirements. Romania annulled its visa-free travel agreement with Belarus on 1st July 2000, and in November, Slovakia and Hungary announced plans to implement similar measures from January and May 2001, respectively. For its part, from 15 May 2000, Belarus introduced regulations requiring foreign travellers with visas for the CIS States to obtain a transit visa in order to pass through its territory. In November, the Prime Ministers of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia signed an agreement granting citizens the right to visa-free travel among those states (Lgicka and Sword, 2001).

In late 2000, International organizations, continued to recognize the former Supreme Council as the legitimate legislature of Belarus. The OSCE, however, opposed a bureau in Minsk in February 1998, the mission of which was to encourage democratization, to promote a dialogue between the Government and the opposition and to monitor human rights. In September, Belarus became one of the permanent members of non-aligned Movement (Pravda, 1999). Belarus-Russia relations have been predisposed by several factors such as external, internal, by the international organisation, domestic factors and so on.

### **European Union (EU):**

EU is central to the Belarus-Russia relations. EU plays a vital role among the Belarus-Russia relations in political, social and also an economic sphere. In his tenure, Lukashenko at the helm of Belarus has always tried to maintain cosy relations with Russia because it was an absolute necessity for his political survival. Some of his pro-Russian but anti-Western philosophical adoptions like hard handedness in managing affairs of governance, limited media freedom, harassment of NGO's and activists, ill-treatment with political prisoners and excessive state interference in matters of civil society and business kept its relations with EU relatively cold. This breach of values and norms which EU always advocates and propagates made the Belarus- EU relations value divergent, prominently until 2008 (Keller, 2010). The policy of critical engagement is active on the part of EU towards Belarus. Although Belarus is covered well under European vicinity Policy, it does not participate in it fully (EU External Action; Europa, 2014). EU Country Strategy Paper 2007-13 for Belarus states that:

“EU- Belarus Relations are governed by successive Council Conclusions stating, for example, that contacts “will be established solely through the Presidency, SG/HR, the Commission and the Troika” and that “Community and Member States’ assistance programmes will support the needs of the population and democratisation, notably by humanitarian, regional, cross-border cooperation and by projects supporting directly or indirectly democratisation and democratic forces in Belarus” (EU Country Strategy Paper 2007 Page, 13).

The principal objective of co-operation of EU with Belarus is to support the needs of the population, supporting democracy (direct or indirect means) and to ease the effect of the self-

isolation of Belarus on its people. For the period 2007-11, a total of € 46.07 million has been allocated to Belarus (EU CSP- Belarus: 2007-13).

### Strategic Objectives :

For Belarus, the long-term goal of EU is striving for a prosperous, stable and reliable democratic partner. EU has aspirations not only to share borders with the state but also a common agenda driven by shared values. In 1995, Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was negotiated by EU with Belarus. But, the authoritarian system of power establishment by Lukashenko during 1996/97 froze the conclusion and ratification of the PCA. Based on General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) conclusions, the approach of EU towards Belarus is of two tracks. The tracks are constructed on (i) Restrictions on political contacts and (ii) Links with and assistance for other actors in civil society. This attitude was recognized by the GAERC conclusions of 07th November 2005, whereby the GAERC “reaffirms its policy on limited ministerial contacts agreed on 22-23 November 2004 but highlights its willingness to engage with Belarusian officials” (EU CSP- Belarus: 2007-13).

**Table 1 : EU- Belarus Engagement On Dual Track**

Track One	Track Two
(Primary) GAERC of November 2004: Bilateral Ministerial contacts established solely through the Presidency, SG/HR, The Commission and the Troika. (Foreign Affairs Ministers holding Presidency of Council of Ministers; Secretary General of the Council of the EU and European Commissioner for External Relations composes EU Troika.)	(Primary) Same GAERC: Community and Member States Assistance Programmes: (i) Supporting needs of population & democratisation. (ii) Through Humanitarian, regional Cross Border cooperation & Projects supporting directly/indirectly democratisation and democratic values in Belarus.
(Secondary) Engagement of Communication and both side media briefing at regular intervals.	(Secondary) (i) Intensifying People to People contacts (ii) Across the Border peaceful neighbourly relations.

Source: Self Prepared Scheme extracting points from EU Country Strategy Paper for Belarus: 2007-13).

“Both the EU and Russia are seeking to shape Belarus’s domestic normative environment. EU policy implies that Belarus needs to discover (or recover) its European identity, which has been suppressed by its Soviet heritage and the current regime. The rationale for integration with Russia is a common history and cultural affinities which is a part of a single Slavic civilizational space” (Nice, 2012: 1).

Belarus is well covered under European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), but no recent action plan is foreseen for the country. Access to the full benefit of ENP by EU for Belarus is conditional depending on promotion and adherence of democratic values, norms and the rule of law by the later. EU has made efforts to help Belarus to embark on the transition towards a stable democracy that will ensure respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms in line the with its UN and OSCE commitments (EU CSP- Belarus, 2007- 13). The European Commission (EC) Paper “New message to the People of Belarus” published in November 200 the 6 is a clear outline of EUs intentions for the country if it adheres to fundamental values of human rights, the rule of law and democratization. In case of a significant development scenario on the part of Belarus, EU clearly states to provide additional support in some key policy areas in which it is not engaged right now.

### West Factors:

In geopolitical positions, Belarus reflects itself to be between East and West, with all the costs and benefits of in-built in being a 'bridge,' a buffer and an 'advance post.' In present-day, this means that Belarus is stuck between the EU and the CIS –Russia conglomerate. In particular, Belarus's foreign policy is 'multi-directional,' but in practice, it is increasingly becoming pro- CIS and pro- Russia (Rotman *et al.*, 2011). However, in 1992-93 a multi-directional character was signed, in Belarus, for cooperation with both Europe and Russia. However, the Collective Security Treaty of the CIS area was accompanied by attempts to move closer to the nation of Eastern and central Europe by participating in OSCE, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the Northern Dimension (Ibid: 9). Regarding Huntington's theory of civilisations, Belarus sits on both sides of the divide: its Western regions fall within the world of Western Christianity. But its Eastern reasons into the world are of Orthodox Christianity and Islam. The West is opposing Russia's expansion as well as the running leadership of Belarus at the same time leading to a loss on both the fronts. The policy of EU does not isolate Belarus. It further decreased its influence in the country. (Belarus Reality Check, policy review: June 2013). After the collapse of the USSR, Belarus move towards the presidential government and Western Politician described it's the actual dictatorship of in the heart of Europe (Rice, Interview with CNN 20<sup>th</sup> April 2005). After got independence in 1991. Belarus moved towards the West, surrendering its nuclear weapons, joining the Partnership for Peace and negotiating a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement with the European Union (Roy Allison, Stephen White and Margot light, 2000: 488). However Russia offered in April 1993, Belarus and Russia signed the CIS Treaty on Collective security and accorded on closer Economic co-operation, with CIS member states. However, Russia doesn't want Belarus to join in NATO.

### Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS):

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the supreme council of the BSSR declared itself a sovereign state on 27 July 1990. However, soon after the Common Wealth of Independent state (CIS) was created as a result of signing the Belovezha Treaty by Belarus, Russia and Ukraine on 8 December 1991 (Rotman *et al.*, 2011). The breakup of the USSR led to the creation of Commonwealth Independent States (CIS). CIS aimed to maintain and develop relationships among the former member states. In spite of sharing a collective political and economic past, these countries are quite mixed, and their success in executing market reforms and holding a globally competitive environment has been mixed. This report sheds some light on the recent economic and political developments in a subset of the post-Soviet economies, including Armenia, Uzbekistan Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan Moldova, and henceforth referred to as "frontier CIS1" countries.<sup>1</sup>

The relations of Belarus with Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are gradually strengthening. A comprehensive legislative basis of cooperation with these countries has been created. Trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation is developing. Close contacts are maintained on inter-agency and inter-regional levels. Intergovernmental commissions for trade and economic cooperation with the countries in the region have been set up. The meetings of commissions are held on a regular basis. Belarus has had good relation with Azerbaijan Since 1991. These two countries established diplomatic relations on June 11, 1993. Both the states have great potential for

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1. Cis Frontier Countries - Dbresearch.com.(n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.dbresearch.com/PROD/RPS\\_EN-PROD/PROD000000000451953/CIS\\_frontier\\_co](https://www.dbresearch.com/PROD/RPS_EN-PROD/PROD000000000451953/CIS_frontier_co)

further cooperation in industry, construction, education, science, industry, energy, and culture ((Ministry Of External Affairs Of Belarus). Belarus and Georgia established diplomatic relations in January 1994 (Ministry of External Affairs of Belarus). Belarus and Kazakhstan have maintained close ties with each other, and it further strengthened when integrated with CIS and have established - fruitful channel of communication. Regular Bilateral high-level visits have become daily practice between both nations. Diplomatic relations amongst two countries were established on September 16, 1992. In 1997 the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus was founded and had been functioning since July 2002 in Almatyand., the embassy of Kazakhstan was recognized in 1995 (Ibid). Kazakhstan and Belarus have maintained cooperative relations for the development of economic relations through the Customs Union.

### **Objectives of the CIS towards Belarus-Russia relations:**

The CIS try to keep good relations with each other. The relationship among them is based on certain principles like economic and natural resources sharing. Therefore Russia- Belarus relations are still interdependent. The priorities of their bilateral cooperation involve relations with the Commonwealth Independent States. These priorities are influenced by some historical, financial, political and cultural factors (Ministry Of External Affairs Of Belarus). The energy-rich CIS states are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (AKTU) and try for development cooperation with the resource-poor countries on the periphery of CIS (Akram Esanov, Martin Raiser, and Willem Buiters).

### **NATO:**

In 1990 Lukashenko's resentful criticism of NATO comprised expressions of remorse that Belarus had given up its nuclear weapons. And Minsk has interested to Moscow agreement to counter NATO's Eastward extension. This rhetoric permitted Lukashenko to be existent himself as a steadfast supporter of Slavic-Orthodox unity, which was supposedly threatened by the West in the form of NATO. Lukashenko used this rhetoric, in part, for resolves of domestic legitimacy. Nonetheless, during periods of pressure in Russian-NATO dealings it also endorsed Belarus to present itself as a safeguard for Russian security on its Western side and effectively to trade this for commercial benefits (Roy Allison, Stephen White and Margot Light 2000: 487-488). Both Russia and Belarus have also perceived NATO's 'aggression' in the post-Soviet space as 'counter to their interests' (Wallander, 2004: 85). Its missions 'against Serbia and in Kosovo' were vehemently opposed by both Russia and Belarus and further compounded the new aggressive strategy of NATO (Wallander, 2004: 85). This 'new strategic out of area military action' proclaimed by NATO, enabled the organization to carry out 'military operations in non-NATO member countries,' thus suggests that the organization could intervene in 'conflicts in the CIS or even within Russia itself' (Light, 2001: 425).

This enhances weight to the sight that the West is indeed a common threat to both Russia and Belarus, which in turn emphasises the enormity of the EU's task in improving the image of the West, and furthermore, its ability to extend its governance to Belarus (Loughborough University, Module 09euc640 Dissertation: 27).

### **Belarusian Threat Perceptions of Belarus *vis-à-vis* Russia:**

Although the relationship between Belarus and NATO is not favourable, the right relationship between Russia and NATO compels Belarus to keep relation with NATO. However, the Government

has consistently stressed on the Belarusian position under the Declaration of State Sovereignty, of a neutral and non-nuclear state. Accordingly, in May 1992, Belarus signed the Lisbon protocol on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, under which it pledged to transfer all nuclear missiles to Russian Federation by 1999. In February, the Supreme Council ratified the first 'Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty' (START-1). Substantial amounts of financial and technical aid were placed by the USA to help Belarus to dismantle its nuclear arsenal. The last remaining nuclear warheads were transported to Russia in late November 1996. In 1998, Belarus signed the International convention on nuclear safety, adopted in June 1999 at Vienna, Austria. As a result, despite setbacks in political and economic integration, Russia under President Putin continued to accelerate military-integration processes between the two states. These include regular sessions of the Joint Collegium of the Belarusian and Russian defence ministries; joint air defence forces operations; mutual logistical support for the regional group of troops of the Russian and Belarusian armed forces; conduction of joint military exercises and the transfer of Russian weaponry to Belarus. Consequently, in Russia's security perception, Belarus remained the key geostrategic and military ally on the western flank and constituted a platform for early warning of a possible attack, while military cooperation under the Union State counterbalanced NATO's threat (Golani, 2011).

### **Conclusion:**

Many times we have seen that problems are created or growing because of the relations and conditions, created by a third party state or organization, mostly when big power enters or interferes between these two countries. The consequence may be good or bad but, the Belarus-Russia relations have been too close due to the signing of membership treaty with leading organization as well as due to sharing of prominent military weapons. Connecting through the gas pipeline is one of the significant factors for maintaining a good friendship. History has also shown that good relations exist between the two countries and the signing of the friendship treaty between them is an excellent example of it. EU is playing a significant role between these two countries from the very beginning of its history which has been explained above in the concerned article. On the other hand, the changeability of, Lukashenko's foreign policy symbolises a more profound continuity in the alliance of Belarusian statehood and its identity as an independent state. The problem for the EU which has a notice in promoting Belarusian sovereignty is that this has been conducted within the context of an authoritarian system. However, the geographic proximity with neighbouring countries has also shaped a Belarus foreign policy. Geographical position, Centre to the Russia and European Union has also been affecting 'up' and 'down' relation with Russia. As a result, strategically Belarus is bound to keep a good relationship with Russia above all the reasons, and also Belarus is the shortest route of Russia for energy fields. By Belarus, Russia is importing and exporting of western market. Russia also has the same interest to keep bound with Belarus because Russia's business route is Belarus.

In the early 1990s, Belarus wanted to expand its international relationships, and in late 1992, the republic had been recognized by more than a hundred countries as it had become a member of various important international organizations. Belarus's closest relations though continued to be with the member states of the CIS, in exacting the neighbouring Russian Federation. In April 1993, Belarus and Russia contracted the CIS Treaty on Collective security and accorded on closer Economic co-operation, with CIS member states. In April 1994, Belarus and Russia agreed on an eventual monetary union. In March 1996, President Lukashenko of Belarus and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed the Quadripartite Treaty with the Presidents of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It envisaged a common market and a customs union between the four countries, as well as joint



transport, energy and communication systems. Regarding energy security, Belarus should use manual wastes to produce energy and maintain energy balance between production and consumption. For consumption of more energy, it should focus on production of renewable energy resources like wind power energy, solar energy and also hydroelectric potential. It will not only reduce the vulnerability of Belarus for being too much dependent on Russia but boost the energy security of the country. As per the economic and political relation is concerned, both the countries have a very high degree of financial relationship regarding trade practices. However, it is also found that Russia is the primary export partner to Belarus than rest of the world. Several economic organizations and co-operation integrate the financial soundness of both nations. Finally, it concludes that Belarus highly dependent on imported oil and gas supplied from Russian Federation. It is the biggest problem of Belarus that it highly depends on a single supplier that is Russia. Therefore Russia's strong influence in the region might affect Belarus's political situations. Belarus should implement the modern technical instruments to produce renewable resources and to keep good relations with Russia. Though both the countries are depending on each other, still Belarus is less experienced and financially weak which is mainly dependent on the Russian oil and gas subsidies. Whereas, Russia doesn't have enough substitute route to pass the energy pipelines and trade exchanges to outside the country because Belarus is laying both transit route and buffer zone for Russia.

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