

Editorial

This issue of the *Journal of Belarusian Studies* features articles of established academics and young researchers, Belarusian and Western authors covering a range of topics – from the history of Belarusian statehood to relations between Belarus and Iran, and activities of government-organised NGOs in Belarus. It also includes four book reviews by authors from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Poland.

Dorota Michaluk of Nicolas Copernicus University (Toruń) and Per Anders Rudling of Lund University open the issue with a study of the development of the idea of a Belarusian state during the German occupation of the Belarusian lands in 1915-1919. They observe that the German administration regarded Belarusian nationalism as a useful political commodity which they supported as a counterweight to other regional nationalisms. Also noted is how historical Lithuanian and Western Rus' ideas of statehood dominated the minds of Belarusian intellectuals at the time.

Siarhei Bohdan of Freie Universität Berlin analyses relations between Belarus and Iran which have undergone a series of quantitative and qualitative changes since their establishment in 1993. The rise of the United States as the sole superpower and its efforts to try isolate the Iranian regime has had an important impact on Belarus-Iran relations. Belarus managed to reach a number of deals with Iran despite Western opposition thanks to its alliance with Russia which has protected and supported Belarusian foreign policy in many directions, including its move towards the Middle East.

Anastasiya Matchanka focuses on the role of 'pro-government non-governmental organisations' in Belarus. Unlike genuine independent non-governmental organisations, government-backed NGOs work with direct support from the state. The article looks at the extent to which the activities of pro-democratic organisations are copied by government-backed entities as well as to what degree the substitution of authentic civil society with government-organised non-governmental organisations take place in Belarus.

This issue also features book reviews by Vitaut Kipel, President of the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Science in New York, Arnold McMillin of University College London, Lizaveta Kasmach of the University of Alberta and Ryhor Astapenia of the University of Warsaw. They deal with personal memoirs, Belarusian literature, Belarusianisation policy in the 1920s and the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Jim Dingley, the outgoing Chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society, gives an account of Belarusian events organised recently in London, including a conference on the role of Kastuś Kalinoŭski in nation-building of Belarus which attracted scholars from Belarus, the United Kingdom, Poland and Lithuania.

Publication of this issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies coincides with the arrival of Brian Bennett, the former UK Ambassador to Belarus, as the new Chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society. Another notable development is that the Centre for Transition Studies, which publishes the Journal for the Anglo-Belarusian Society, has changed its name to the Ostrogorski Centre. Moisei Ostrogorski (1854-1921) was a prominent Belarusian political scientist, politician and historian who made a great contribution to the study of politics and law in transition.

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