

the early 1960s. It is remarkable just how marginal other issues (such as nationalist ideas) came to be in this context. Improving living conditions became the most important element shaping the Belarusian view of their republic and the Soviet system.

Einax devotes a great deal of space (more than 100 pages) to analyzing the anti-religious policies of the Khrushchev era, and the situation of believers of various faiths during this period. The eradication of religion was held up as a measure of Soviet society's modernity, but the intensity of the pressure exerted on religious believers by the authorities in Belarus is evidence that, contrary to the standard Polish assumptions regarding this issue, it would be wrong to assume that de-Stalinization also meant liberalization.

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Margarita M. Balmaceda, *Living the High Life in Minsk: Russian Energy Rents, Domestic Populism and Belarus' Impending Crisis*. Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2014. 219 pp.

Energy politics endures as one of the thorniest elements in Belarus–Russia relations since 1991, with Belarus remaining one of the most gas dependent states in the world. Paradoxically, the Belarusian authorities long viewed dependence on Russian energy as an opportunity rather than a threat. As this book insightfully observes, the goal of diversification of the energy mix was absent from state policy until 2007.

Margarita Balmaceda explores the role of energy rents in Aliaksandr Lukashenka's survival. She argues persuasively that manipulating these rents is crucial in explaining his consolidation and maintenance of power. In doing so, Balmaceda does not overlook other factors such as the strategic importance of Belarus to Russia, or the role played by favorable international circumstances at key moments. She contributes to both our understanding of authoritarian resilience, and also our understanding about the levers of influence weaker states possess in asymmetrical power relationships.

The book's strength derives from its treatment of energy policy at two distinct levels of analysis. First, Balmaceda demonstrates how Lukashenka extracted energy rents at the international level. Secondly, she shows how he manipulated the distribution of rents domestically to bolster his legitimacy and regime stability. The disaggregation of both Belarus and Russia into their component actors provides the author with analytical leverage missing from much of the writing about the topic. It allows the author to make connections between Lukashenka and corporate actors in both states as she analyzes policies around gas transit and oil refining, rather than seeing ties exclusively at the bilateral state-level.

Balmaceda divides her study into two periods, using 2004 as the pivotal moment. In that year Gazprom cut supplies to Belarus for the first time, and announced the end of supply to Belarus at Russian domestic prices. The choice of pivot is sensible because gas is more central than oil to the Belarus–Russia relationship. Moreover, although Gazprom is a private company, Balmaceda rightly points to the Russian state's significant ownership stake and control, and notes in contrast that Russian oil companies are more overtly privately controlled.

A preliminary chapter provides the context, noting amongst other things the collapse in demand for Belarusian export goods after the breakup of the USSR, which exacerbated dependence on Russia. The chapter also relevantly remarks that Russification during the Soviet period was widely embraced as necessary rather than oppressive in the post-war era, which has implications for the close relationship between the two independent states that emerged after 1991.

The next two chapters analyze the “high years” of 1994–2004, during which Belarus received heavily subsidized oil and gas. Chapter 3 focuses on macro-level rents—in other words, rents accrued to the economy as a whole—and the centrality of energy in state foreign policy is well elaborated. It is interesting to note that, in a largely unreformed economy, the government prioritized the modernization of its oil refineries to increase production of EU-standard oil products and gasoline. The chapter also explains how Belarus was able to turn debts owed to Russian suppliers into prof-

its through barter, and argues that Lukashenka's tendency to politicize oil and gas disputes played well to domestic audiences, but also during this period to Russian audiences. The rhetoric of "Russia's last ally" appealed to the latter's sense of lost empire.

The following chapter focuses on micro-level rents—"the concrete benefits received by specific economic actors." Public details about corruption trials concerning officials provide evidence of the competition for rents inside the Belarusian Presidential Administration. The research undertaken for this chapter is impressive, although necessarily relies on a degree of inferential reasoning and accordingly some of the conclusions cannot have a high level of certainty. The chapter also argues that Lukashenka strengthened the political system by effectively redistributing rents to crucial support groups inside Belarus.

Chapter 5 analyzes the "low years" of 2004–2009, while Chapter 6 analyzes 2010 and 2011. This period saw the reduction of subsidies to Belarus, public energy disputes between Belarus and Russia, as well as the gradual and reluctant sale of the state-owned gas transit pipeline operator, Beltransgaz, to Russia's Gazprom. This was also a period marked in the region by the aftermath of the "color revolutions," and in Belarus by the improvement and then souring of relations with the EU before and after the former's 2010 presidential elections, as well as a serious economic crisis in 2011. For all of these reasons, Lukashenka's survival through this period is more problematic than in the earlier period, and the briefer treatment is arguably the main weakness of this otherwise excellent book.

Balmaceda has studied energy politics in the post-Soviet landscape for many years, and her previous book (published 2013) provides the comparative analysis of the Belarusian case with Lithuania and Ukraine. She once more succeeds in making the technical aspects of energy politics comprehensible to readers interested in the region but not necessarily versed in the language of the oil and gas business. There are still relatively few books about contemporary Belarusian politics and international relations, and *Living the High Life in Minsk* offers a painstaking analysis of a difficult research subject. It penetrates the workings of the Belarusian state

apparatus and its “*nomenklatura* players” very well. Indeed, its rudimentary efforts to prise open the black box of the Presidential Administration are a noteworthy contribution.

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Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931*. Pitt Russian East European Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015. 448 pp.

In his thorough and comprehensive study, Per Anders Rudling narrates the story of the development and decline of Belarusian nationalism from the establishment of the periodicals *Nasha Dolia* (Our Lot) and *Nasha Niva* (Our Field) in 1906 through to the suppression of the national communism in the Soviet Union by 1931. He chooses, quite in tune with the endeavors of Belarusian intellectuals of the last two decades, to look at Belarus as a borderland, characterized by cultural polyvalence (4) and engagement (rather forced than voluntary) into political processes that took place in the region (7–8).

The book's strong focus on the ways in which events outside the territory of Belarus exerted their influence on developments within the country can be perceived as a highly positive development in Belarusian studies. In this book, the general tendency among both Belarusian and émigré historians to confine their scholarly interest to events taking place within the borders of Belarus has certainly been successfully overcome. Rudling's account demonstrates that Belarusian nationalism was by no means secluded; he shows its correlation with the history of other ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians) within the collapsing Russian Empire and, on the other hand, its dependence on the decisions of the bigger powers. Other particularly impressive aspects of the book include its treatment of the history of the Belarusian Jewry