Belarus

2016 Country Review

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Chapter 1

Country Overview

Country Overview

BELARUS

After seven decades as a republic of the USSR, Belarus attained its independence in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has retained closer political and economic ties to Russia than any of the other former Soviet republics. Since his election in July 1994 as the country's first president, Alexander Lukashenko has steadily consolidated his power through authoritarian means. Belarus' economy is highly industrialized and largely dependent on imported energy and raw materials mostly from Russia and other CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries. With limited market-oriented reforms, Belarus retains many features of a planned economy, and restrictive economic policies have held out foreign investment.

Key Data

Key Data	
Region:	Eastern Europe
Population:	9438526
Climate:	Transitional between continental and maritime Cold winters Cool, moist summers
Languages:	Byelorussian Russian
Currency:	Belarusian rubel (BR)
Holiday:	Independence Day is 27 July (1991), Constitution Day is 15 March
Area Total:	207600
Area Land:	207600
Coast Line:	0

Belarus

Country Map

Eastern Europe

Regional Map

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Chapter 2

Political Overview

History

The origins of present-day Belarus can be traced from the emergence in the late ninth century CE of Kyivan Rus', the first East Slavic state. After the death of its ruler, Prince Yaroslav the Wise, in 1054, Kyivan Rus' split into a number of principalities, each centered on a city. One, Polatsk (Polotsk, in Russian), became the nucleus of modern-day Belarus.

In 1240, after the Tatar overthrow of Kyiv, the dominant principality of Kyivan Rus', Byelorussia and part of Ukraine came under the control of Lithuania. The resulting state was called the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus' and Samogitia. Because territories inhabited by East Slavs made up about 90 percent of the Grand Duchy, they exerted a great cultural influence on the new state. Official business was conducted in a Slavic language (a predecessor of both Belarusian and Ukrainian) based on Old Church Slavonic, and the law code was based on that of Kyivan Rus'.

The Union of Krevo (1385), which joined Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus', and Samogitia in a confederation, hinged on Lithuanian Grand Duke Jogaila's conversion from paganism to Roman Catholicism and his subsequent marriage to Queen Jadwiga of Poland. Thus, he became Wladyslaw II Jagiello, king of Poland. In 1569, the Union of Lublin united Poland and the Grand Duchy into a single state called the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

When Roman Catholicism became the official religion of Lithuania shortly after Jagiello's conversion, the Lithuanian and Belarusian nobilities began converting from orthodoxy to Catholicism and assimilating Polish culture (including the language), a process accelerated by the Union of Lublin. As a result, those who ruled Belarusian farmers shared neither the farmers' language nor their religion, Eastern Orthodoxy.

The Union of Brest (1596), which united the Roman Catholic Church with the part of the Orthodox Church that was within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was viewed favorably by both the Polish king, Sigismund III, and a number of Orthodox bishops, clergy, and faithful.
The new "Uniate Church" acknowledged the supremacy of the Roman Catholic pope and accepted articles of Roman Catholic religious doctrine. In return, the Uniate Church retained its traditional Orthodox rites and customs as well as a measure of autonomy in non-doctrinal matters; it was also given the same rights and privileges as the Roman Catholic Church. Fear of the new church's becoming Latinized and "Polonized" however, caused many of the Orthodox faithful to reject the

union, and the Orthodox Church continued to exist alongside the Uniate Church in an often bitter struggle. ("Polonization" was the process of changing the national identity of non-Poles to one culturally similar to that of Poles).

In the aftermath of the Union of Brest, both civil and religious authorities persecuted the Orthodox Church and supported the Uniates in their takeover of Orthodox property. Social conditions deteriorated; there was a large-scale revolt against Polish landowners in 1648-54 (coinciding with the Khmel'nyts'kyi rebellion in Ukraine); and many Belarusians fled to the Ukrainian steppes to join the Kozaks (Cossacks). There was little economic development in Belarusian lands, and the vast majority of the Belarusian population lived on subsistence agriculture.

Belarus (Byelorussia) remained a part of Poland until Russia, Prussia and Austria carried out the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795. After the last partition, the entire territory of Byelorussia found itself part of the Russian Empire, with the exception of a small piece of land in the west, which was held by Prussia. Orthodox Russia tolerated the Uniate Church to a certain degree, but in 1839, when three-quarters of all Belarusians were Uniates, Czar Nicholas I (with the support of the Russian Orthodox Church) abolished the Uniate Church and forced the Uniates to reconvert to orthodoxy. He also banned the use of the name "Byelorussia" and replaced it with the name "Northwest Territory" (Severno-zapadnaya tyerritoriya, in Russian). Overall, the state pursued a policy of Russification.

When serfdom was abolished in the Russian Empire in 1861, Byelorussia (Belarus, Belarusian, Byelorussia and why we use them interchangeably: Belarus is the Belarusian form of the country, which was universally readopted by the populace and the world after 1991. Byelorussia is the Russian form) was essentially a nation of farmers and landlords. Although they gained their freedom, the farmers had little else: they remained poor and largely landless. The imposition of the Russian language, the Orthodox religion, heavy taxes, and military service lasting 25 years made Polish rule seem better than that of the czars.

It was those memories that Kastus' Kalinowski (1838-64) tried to evoke in his clandestine newspaper Muzhytskaya Prawda (Peasants' Truth), which he published to inspire an uprising in solidarity with the Polish-Lithuanian insurrection against Russia in January 1863. The insurrection failed, and the Polish territories and people were absorbed directly into the Russian Empire. Kalinowski, today considered the founding father of Belarusian nationalism, was hanged in Vilnius.

Despite the industrial development that took place in Byelorussia during the 1880s and 1890s, unemployment and poverty were widespread, giving impetus to large-scale migrations. In the 50 years leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution, almost 1.5 million people emigrated from Byelorussia to the United States and to Siberia.

Following the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905, strikes and

rural disorders erupted throughout the Russian Empire. To stem the unrest, the czar granted, and then extended, civil liberties. Russian authorities were forced to relax their repressive policies on non-Russian ethnic groups, prompting a national and cultural flowering in Byelorussia. The ban on the Belarusian language (and other non-Russian languages) was lifted, although there were still restrictions on its use. Education was expanded, and farmers began to attend school for the first time. Belarusian writers published classics of modern Belarusian literature. The weekly newspaper Nasha Niva (Our Field), published by the Belarusian Socialist Party, lent the name "nashanivism" to this period (1906-18) of Belarusian history.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 turned Byelorussia into a zone of strict martial law and military operations, and brought great destruction. Large German and Russian armies fought fiercely and caused the expulsion or departure of more than one million civilians from the country. The Russian government's inept war efforts and ineffective economic policies prompted high food prices, shortages of goods, and many needless deaths. Discontent in the cities and the countryside spread, leading to strikes, riots, and the eventual downfall of the czarist government.

The two revolutions of 1917-the February Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution-gave nationally conscious Belarusians an opportunity to advance their political cause. Bolshevism did not have many followers among the natives of Belarus. Instead, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Mensheviks, the Bund, and various Christian movements in which the clergy of both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Polish Catholic Church played significant roles dominated local political life. The Belarusian Socialist Party, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Leninist Social Democratic Party and various nationalist groups advocating moderate forms of socialism represented the Belarusian political cause.

In December 1917 more than 1,900 delegates to the All-Belarusian Congress (Rada) met in Minsk to establish a democratic republican government in Belarus, but Bolshevik soldiers disbanded the assembly before it had finished its deliberations. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 put most of Belarus under German control, but on March 25, 1918, the Central Executive Committee of the Rada nullified the treaty and proclaimed the independence of the Belarusian National Republic. Later that year, the German government, which had guaranteed the new state's independence, collapsed, and the new republic was unable to resist Belarusian Bolsheviks supported by the Bolshevik government in Moscow. The Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, also called the Belarusian SSR, was established on Jan. 1, 1919, by force of arms.

For the next two years, Belarus was a prize in the Polish-Soviet War, a conflict settled by the Treaty of Riga in March 1921. Under the terms of the treaty, Belarus was divided into three parts: the western portion, which was absorbed into Poland; central Belarus, which formed the Belarusian SSR; and the eastern portion, which became part of Russia. The Belarusian SSR was incorporated into the Soviet Union when it was founded in December 1922.

The territory of the Belarusian SSR was enlarged in both 1924 and 1926 by the addition of Belarusian regions that had become part of Russia under the Treaty of Riga. The area of the republic was expanded from its original post-treaty size of 51,800 square kilometers to 124,320 square kilometers, and the population increased from 1.5 million to almost 5 million persons.

The New Economic Policy, also known as the NEP, was established by Vladimir Lenin in 1921 as a temporary compromise with capitalism, stimulated economic recovery in the Soviet Union. By the mid-1920s, agricultural and industrial output in Byelorussia had reached 1913 levels.
Historically, Byelorussia had been a country of landlords with large holdings, but after the Bolshevik Revolution, middle-class landholders replaced these landlords; farm collectives were practically nonexistent. When forced collectivization and confiscation began in 1928, there was strong resistance, for which the rural community paid a high social price: farmers were allowed to starve in some areas, and so-called troublemakers were deported to Siberia. Because farmers slaughtered their livestock rather than turn it over to collective farms, agriculture suffered serious setbacks. The rapid industrialization that accompanied forced collectivization, however, enabled the Moscow government to develop new heavy industry quickly in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

During the period of the NEP, the Soviet government relaxed its cultural restrictions, and Belarusian language and culture flourished. But in the 1930s, when Stalin was fully in power, Moscow's attitude changed, and it became important to Moscow to bind both Belarus and its economy as closely to the Soviet Union as possible. Once again, this meant Russification of the people and the culture. The Belarusian language was reformed to bring it closer to the Russian language, and history books were rewritten to show that the Belarusian people had strived to be united with Russia throughout their history. Political persecutions in the 1930s reached genocidal proportions, causing population losses as great as would occur during World War II - more than two million people.

Belarusian territory under Poland experienced its own drama. The new Polish state, where ethnic minorities, including Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews and Germans, made up one-third of the country's population, began as a democracy. The country's 3.5 million Belarusians were able to open their own primary schools, high schools and teachers' colleges; the government supported cultural activities; and Belarusians elected three senators and eleven deputies to the Polish parliament, or "sejm," in 1922.

By 1924, however, Poland's policy toward ethnic minorities had changed drastically. Under the guise of combating communism, most Belarusian schools were closed, and publications in the Belarusian language were banned. The government encouraged ethnic Poles to settle in the Belarusian region, while at the same time neglecting the overall economic development of the area. The Belarusian region became an agricultural appendage to a more industrialized Poland, and unemployment and land hunger were widespread. Between 1925 and 1938, some 78,000 people

emigrated from this part of Poland in search of work, mainly to France and Latin America.

In May 1926, war hero Marshal Józef Pilsudski established an authoritarian regime in Poland. The following year, when the Belarusian Farmer and Workers' Union spearheaded a widespread protest against the government's oppressive policies in the Belarusian region, the regime arrested and imprisoned the union's activists. Further governmental policies toward the so-called Eastern Territories (the official name for the Belarusian and Ukrainian regions) were aimed at imposing a Polish and Roman Catholic character on the region.

In 1935, Poland declared that the League of Nations treaty on ethnic minorities no longer bound it, arguing that its own laws were adequate. That same year, many Belarusians in Poland who opposed the government's policies were placed in a concentration camp at Byaroza-Kartuzski (Bereza Kartuska, in Polish). The Belarusians lost their last seat in the Polish Sejm, parliament, in the general elections of 1935, and the legislation that guaranteed the right of minority communities to have their own schools was repealed in November 1938. The government then attempted to "Polonize" and subordinate the Orthodox Church.

Germany attacked Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. Two and one-half weeks later, Soviet troops moved into the western portions of Belarus and Ukraine. Ignorant of, or disbelieving the existence of, mass persecutions under Stalin, most Belarusians welcomed the Red Army, only to learn quickly of the harsh reality of communism. Arrests and deportations were common, and the so-called flourishing of national culture was strictly circumscribed by the ideological and political goals of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, also known as the CPSU. About 300,000 persons were deported from western Belarus to Soviet labor camps between September 1939 and June 1941, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union.

In June 1941, when German tanks swept through Byelorussia toward Moscow, many Belarusians actually welcomed the Nazis, thinking that they would free the Belarusian people from their communist oppression. The Nazis' designs for the occupied territories became known soon enough, however. They "Germanized" and assimilated 25 percent of the Belarusians and either ousted or destroyed the remaining 75 percent. Germany parceled out Belarusian territory to the Lithuanian and Ukrainian administrative divisions and to East Prussia, while making the central part of Belarus the "Weissruthenische Generalbezirk" (Belarusian Military District), and placed the eastern portion of Belarus under the German military regime.

Although the front was far to the east, military operations continued within Belarus. During the three years of Nazi occupation, guerrilla warfare, retaliatory burnings of entire villages by the occupiers, mass executions of the Jewish population, and two movements of the front through the area caused enormous devastation. More than two million lives were lost and more than one million buildings destroyed. An American observer, after six months of travel across Belarus, called it "the most devastated territory in the world." Major cities, such as Minsk and Vitsyebsk (Vitebsk,

in Russian), were in ruins.

One of the political consequences of the German occupation was an upsurge of Belarusian nationalism, which the German authorities used for their own ends. Once the Red Army and Soviet administrators fled Belarus ahead of the Nazis, Belarusians began to organize their own police forces and administration, which the Nazis encouraged. Belarusian anticommunist political refugees who were permitted to return from Germany assisted Belarusians living in Belarus. The Nazis permitted the Union of Belarusian Youth to organize in mid-1943. The Belarusian Central Council, a self-governing auxiliary body, was formed in December 1943, and mobilized a Belarusian Land Defense force in March 1944. The All-Belarusian Congress was permitted to meet in Minsk to rally resistance to the Russian communists in 1944. None of those measures, however, changed the negative attitude of the Belarusians toward the brutal occupation regime.

To counterbalance the Belarusians, the Nazis allowed a number of Russians back from political exile in German-occupied countries in Europe. In addition, they encouraged Poles who had settled in Belarus during the time of Polish control (and who were frequently at odds with the Belarusians) to become involved in the government.

When the eastern front began moving westward, many Belarusians had to choose between two evils: life with the Soviets or departure into exile with the Nazis. Many Belarusians decided to flee, and tens of thousands of them found themselves in Germany and Austria toward the end of World War II. Some of those who had been deported as forced laborers to Germany agreed to go back to Belarus, only to be re-deported by the communists to Siberia or other remote places in the Soviet Union. Those who fled voluntarily to the West eventually settled in Germany, other Westerm European countries, or overseas.

The country's misery did not end in the summer of 1944, when the Red Army "liberated" it from the Nazis. Stalin ordered sweeping purges and mass deportations of local administrators and members of the CPSU, as well as those who had collaborated with the Nazis in any way. Also included in the purges and deportations were those who had spent the war in slave labor and prison camps in Germany and were now "ideologically contaminated" in Stalin's view, those who were suspected of anti-Soviet sentiments, and those who were accused of "bourgeois nationalism." Only in 1971 did the Belarusian SSR return to its pre-World War II population level, but without its large Jewish populace.
The wartime devastation of Belarus-the loss of people, homes, animals, public buildings, educational and cultural resources, roads, communications, health care facilities, and the entire industrial base-was complete. To make up for the industrial loss, Stalin ordered the building of new factories and plants, more efficient than most of those elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

One of the devices Stalin used to shield Belarus (and the rest of the Soviet Union) against possible Western influences was a program of intensive Russification. Consequently, Russians sent from

elsewhere in the Soviet Union filled most key positions in Minsk, as well as in the western provincial cities of Hrodna (Grodno, in Russian) and Brest. The Belarusian language was unofficially banned from official use, educational and cultural institutions, and the mass media, and Moscow suppressed Belarusian national culture. This so-called cultural cleansing greatly intensified after 1959, under Nikita S. Khrushchev. When students, writers and intellectuals in Minsk resisted during the 1960s and 1970s, they were harassed by the Committee for State Security, more commonly known as the KGB, and fired from their jobs.

The early days of Mikhail S. Gorbachev's perestroika in Belarus were highlighted by two major events: the Chornobyl disaster of April 26, 1986 (the Belarusian SSR absorbed 70 percent of the radioactive contaminants spewed out by the reactor), and a December 1986 petition sent by 28 intellectuals to Gorbachev expressing the Belarusian people's fundamental grievances in the field of culture ("a cultural Chornobyl").

Fourteen years after the world's worst nuclear accident occurred at the Chornobyl Nuclear Energy Station, located some 90 miles north of Kyiv (Kiev), nearby Belarus, Ukraine and Russia are still struggling to overcome the aftereffects of nuclear fallout on their lands and populations. On the eve of the human and environmental tragedy, April 26, 2000, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in a special 32-page report that the worst health consequence are yet to materialize.

Writing in the foreword to the report, titled "Chornobyl: A Continuing Catastrophe," United Nations (U.N.) Secretary-General Kofi Annan lamented, "Chornobyl is a word we would all like to erase from our memory." Annan added, "More than seven million of our fellow human beings do not have the luxury of forgetting. They are still suffering, everyday, as a result of what happened." "Not until 2016, at the earliest, will be known the full number of those likely to develop serious medical conditions." (Because of delayed reactions to radiation exposure.) While the exact number of victims may never be known, the U.N. report estimated that three million children would require treatment and "many will die prematurely."
U.N. figures show that millions of people in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia continue to live on contaminated land. The U.S. Energy Information Administration, citing a 1996 International Atomic Energy Agency report, reported that the total amount of radioactive material still present in the environment 10 years after the accident was about one percent of the total amount originally released, while the rest had decayed.

The lasting effects on public perception in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia may be tremendous. Fear of radioactive sickness is widespread, and public confidence in the safety of nuclear power continues to sag as Ukraine's nuclear power plants age and decay.

Whereas the full impact of the physical effects of Chornobyl was kept secret for more than three years, the "cultural Chornobyl" became a subject of hot discussion and an inspiration for

considerable political activity. The petitioners pleaded with Gorbachev to prevent the "spiritual extinction" of the Belarusian nation and laid out measures for the introduction of Belarusian as a working language in party, state and local government bodies and at all levels of education, publishing, mass media and other fields.

The document embodied the aspirations of a considerable part of the national intelligentsia, who, having received no positive answer from the CPSU leadership either in Moscow or in Minsk, took to the streets. A number of independent youth groups sprang up, many of which embraced the national cause. In July 1988, the Organizational Committee of the Confederation of Belarusian Youth Associations called for "support of the radical restructuring of Belarusia."

In June 1988, mass graves, allegedly with up to 250,000 of Stalin's victims, were found near Minsk at Kurapaty. This sensational discovery fueled denunciations of the old regime and brought demands for reforms. An October demonstration, attended by about 10,000 people and dispersed by riot police, paid tribute to these victims and expressed support for the Belarusian Popular Front, which had been formed earlier in the month in hopes of encouraging reform.

The group of activists who called for reform was relatively small; most people, although angry about the mass killings, remained both attached to Soviet ways and politically apathetic, believing that all these public activities would make no difference in the long run. The March 1990 elections to the republic's Supreme Soviet illustrated the extent of political apathy and ideological inertia. Of the 360 seats in the legislature, 15 were unfilled (at least 11 remained so more than a year later); of those elected, 86 percent belonged to the Communist Party of Byelorussia**,** also known as the CPB. This conservative majority was not alone in slowing the pace of reforms. Eighty-three percent of the republic's population also voted conservatively in the March 17 all-union referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union. This took place despite the fact that the Supreme Soviet of the Belarusian SSR adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic on June 27, 1990 (following the Russian example of some two weeks earlier).

A series of strikes in April 1991 put an end to the Belarusian SSR's reputation as the quietest of the European Soviet republics. The demands were mainly economic (higher wages and the cancellation of a new sales tax), but some were also political (the resignation of the Belarusian government and de-politicization of republic's institutions). Certain economic demands were met, but the political ones were not. Increasing dissent within the party, however, led to 33 CPB deputies joining the opposition as the Communists for Democracy faction.

Following the 1991 uprisimg in Moscow and declarations of independence by Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine, the Supreme Soviet in Minsk declared the independence of Belarus on Aug. 25, 1991. The Declaration of State Sovereignty was given the status of a constitutional document, and the country was renamed the Republic of Belarus.

Liberals and nationalist reformers used the disorientation that overtook the communists in the wake of the coup to advance their cause. The Supreme Soviet forced the resignation of its chairman, Mikalay Dzyemyantsyey, and replaced him with his deputy, Stanislaw Shushkyevich. All CPB property was nationalized, and the CPB was temporarily suspended while it was investigated.

Shushkyevich's support for the continuation of some kind of union culminated on Dec. 8, 1991, in his signing of the Minsk Agreement, which established the Commonwealth of Independent States, or CIS. On December 21, 11 former Soviet republics expanded the CIS by issuing the Almaty Declaration, and Minsk became the headquarters of the CIS.

After much negotiation and considerable revision, the Supreme Soviet adopted a new constitution, which went into effect on March 30, 1994. The new document created the office of president and a constitutional court; declared Belarus a democracy with separation of powers; granted freedom of religion; and proclaimed Belarus' goal of becoming a neutral, non-nuclear state. Belarusian was declared the official language, although Russian was retained as the language of inter-ethnic communication.

Note on History: In certain entries, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used. A full listing of sources is available in the Bibliography.

Political Conditions

The winner of the 1994 presidential election was Alyaksandr Lukashyenka (or Aleksandr Lukashenko), whose pro-Russian sentiments and policies seemed destined to reunite Belarus with Russia in some way.

With the exception of the new office of the president and the constitutional court, the government structure of independent Belarus changed little from that of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. In the campaigning for the May 1995 parliamentary elections, continuing censorship of the media's campaign coverage demonstrated the less-than-democratic nature of the state. Due to the lack of information and continued political apathy on the part of the populace, two rounds of elections failed to elect enough deputies to seat a new Supreme Soviet. President Lukashenko continued to augment his power through appointments and dismissals.

In early 1996, after securing power over the media and police forces, President Lukashenko began

negotiating a treaty with Russia that would bind the two nations politically, economically, and militarily. The Treaty on the Formation of a Community of Sovereign Republics was strongly opposed by thousands of demonstrators. Clashes between the opposition and the government increased after the signing of the treaty in April 1996. The Supreme Soviet criticized the president for human rights abuses and control of the media, as he continued to increase his control over Belarusian political life.

In the fall of 1996, a constitutional referendum was proposed to increase the president's power, extending the president's term two years and granting him the authority to appoint members of the judiciary. The Chairman of the Central Election Commission refused to approve the elections and was dismissed. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers then resigned. President Lukashenko stifled all media coverage of these events and was criticized widely by foreign observers. The Supreme Soviet began presidential impeachment proceedings. The referendum, however, was carried out, with 70 percent of voters supporting Lukashenko. (Electoral violations were alleged). The impeachment proceedings were halted. The president's term was extended two years, and he was granted authority over judicial appointments.

The Supreme Soviet split following the referendum, with both sides claiming legal authority. The supporters of President Lukashenko abolished the Supreme Soviet and established a bicameral "Natsionalnoye Sobranie" (parliament). Then, in January 1997, the opposition shadow "Public Coalition Government-National Economic Council" emerged from the remnants of the former legislature.

Despite serious criticism from the Council of Europe and other international observers, President Lukashenko continued to implement changes to the government and appoint ministers and members of the judiciary. Opposition demonstrations were common throughout 1997, many of which resulted in arrests, including the arrest of opposition leaders, and, in at least one case, violence. Lukashenko gradually gained complete control over the government and the media. Both Human Rights Watch and the United Nations (U.N.) Commission on Human Rights were highly critical of the government of Belarus.

In September 1997, the Belarusian Liberation Army openly claimed responsibility for the bombing of the Minsk District Court, emphasizing their demands for the implementation of the 1994 constitution.

On May 16, 1999, the opposition, through a self-declared Central Election Commission, held presidential elections in keeping with the provisions of the1994 constitution. Since Lukashenko was elected in July 1994, under the 1994 constitution, he would have stood for re-election in 1999. The opposition, however, refused to recognize the constitutional reforms of November 1996 that extended Lukashenko's term an additional two years. In turn, the government refused to recognize the May 1999 election. As well, the Justice Ministry warned all political parties, opposition groups

and individuals taking part in the election that it was illegal.

Days later on n May 19, 1999, the chairman of the Central Election Commission, Viktor Gonchar, said government interference and harassment had prevented people from casting their ballots freely. He then declared the election results invalid.

Nearly one year later, in early March 2000, the situation between the government and the opposition had not improved. Lukashenko had tightened his grip on society by curtailing human rights, limiting opposition demonstrations and arresting key dissidents.

In a report on the status of human rights in Belarus, Amnesty International said President Lukashenko continued to exercise total control over most aspects of government. The main law enforcement bodies - the Committee for State Security, or KGB, and Ministry of Internal Affairs, or MVD - are both answerable to the president. Political unrest, in the form of protests and demonstrations, increased and the authorities responded with violence, forcibly breaking up peaceful opposition demonstrations.

Amnesty International called for the immediate and unconditional release of all Belarusian prisoners of conscience, including demonstrators detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly. It urged prompt and impartial investigations into allegations of ill treatment and for anyone responsible for abuses to be brought to justice. The organization also called on the Belarusian authorities to stop the practice of censuring and silencing human rights lawyers by taking away their licenses and attempting to disbar key activists.

In addition to the tense situation between the government and opposition, there was also trouble within the government itself. In 1999, President Lukashenko harshly criticized government officials in the cabinet for failing to reduce inflation. In response, Prime Minister Sergei Ling asked President Lukashenko either to give the cabinet a chance to rectify matters by the beginning of July or to sack the cabinet. Amidst various cabinet reshuffles, Prime Minister Ling's tenure lasted until mid-February 2000, when President Lukashenko dismissed him. It was reported that former Prime Minister Ling requested the dismissal. President Lukashenko had named Vladimir Yermoshin, the mayor of Minsk, as the new acting prime minister.

Parliamentary elections, held in Belarus on Oct. 15, 2000, failed to chart a democratic course for the country. Pro-Lukashenko candidates continued to control the national legislative body. Opposition forces had called for a boycott of the elections, which seemed to be successful in the major cities but were unheeded in the government-supported rural communities. Nonetheless, since the overall voter turnout was more than 60 percent of the country's 7.3 million eligible voters, the Electoral Commission declared the elections valid. Lidiya Yermoshina, head of the Electoral Commission, said most of the 82 out of 110 constituencies declared valid had failed to produce winners with a clear majority and would require a run-off in two weeks. Only a 25 percent turnout

was needed in the second round. The outcome produced a parliament with not many more than the 73 members required to start work and decide constitutional issues. It was also void of representatives from major cities.

Belarusian opposition leaders challenged the validity of parliamentary elections, contesting the government's turnout claims. Independent observers claimed that ballots were falsified and others were destroyed, and they reported numerous other violations. In the capital Minsk, only a thin trickle of voters arrived at booths through the day. Meanwhile, international organizations called the balloting undemocratic. Three organizations that usually monitor elections in post-Soviet Eastern Europe refused to send full-fledged delegations. Still, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe sent a so-called technical assessment mission to investigate Belarus' elections process.

For his part, President Aleksandr Lukashenko was not disturbed by the West's condemnation of the elections. Lukashenko saw the parliamentary elections as a prelude to presidential elections in 2001 as he boasted to journalists: "Don't you worry. I'll be president in 2001."

The presidential elections in Belarus on Sunday, Sept. 9, 2001 turned out to be just as the international community and internal opposition had feared: unfair and undemocratic. Nonetheless, the unfazed incumbent, President Aleksandr Lukashenko, dubbed Europe's last Stalinist dictator, claimed a landslide victory. "Our people are victorious. They chose their president in the first round," Lukashenko, who had secured the country's top office for another five years, told a news conference on election day: "This is a glittering victory. It is elegant and beautiful."

The Belarusian election commission confirmed Lukashenko's victory the next day, announcing that he had won 75.6 percent of the votes. His nearest rival, Vladimir Goncharik, a trade unionist who was favored by the democratic opposition, won 15.4 percent, while a centrist politician, Sergei Gaidukevich, got 2.5 percent of the votes cast. Some 84 percent of eligible population went to the polls, the election commission reported.

Goncharik claimed fraud. He said an independent count showed Lukashenko won only 46 percent to his own 40 percent. "It's not an "elegant victory," as Lukashenko put it, but an elegant forgery," Goncharik said, calling for a new election. "We do not agree with the official result, the falsification was outrageous. We demand the election is declared invalid," Goncharik told a crowd of several hundred supporters in a square in the center of the capital following the election. To cheers of "Long live Belarus" and "Goncharik for president," he urged the opposition parties to galvanize citizens into a mass demonstration later in the day. A protest overnight attracted around one thousand, mainly young, people. The crowd waved the red and white Belarusian nationalist flags banned by Lukashenko. Several burned the president's photo.

Lukashenko received calls of congratulations from certain key allies, such as Russian President

Vladimir Putin. He also appointed Gennady Novitsky to the position of prime minister. Shortly after these post-election developments, a crackdown on the opposition began.

Activists, political opponents, business leaders and journalists found themselves persecuted, fined and arrested for offenses varying from defamation to bribe-taking and fraud. Radio Free Europe reported that by the end of November 2001, within a period of two weeks, 210 criminal cases were brought to court and 720 arrest warrants issued. Arrests continued into 2002. By Jan. 14, 2002, the opposition began asking Western powers to place economic and political sanctions against Lukashenko.

Meanwhile, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Belarusian government continued to clash. The government of Belarus alleged that the OSCE had financed the political opposition; the OSCE condemned the results of the autumn election and criticize the human rights situation. The OCSE adamantly maintained that the necessary democratic and social reforms had to be met for the Belarus to continue close relations with the OSCE. But then in April 2002, a defiant President Lukashenko refused to extend the visa of the acting head of the OSCE Belarus mission, Michel Rivollier, and ordered him to leave the country. Several months later in November 2002, fourteen European countries (all members of the EU), as well as the United States, imposed travel ban on President Lukashenko and several members of his government in protest of the explusion of OSCE officials, as well as Belarus' abysmal human rights record.

In March 2003, several opposition leaders organized protests and demonstrations in Minsk demanding the resignation of President Lukashenko. Many of these opposition leaders were arrested and briefly imprisoned for their efforts.
In April 2003, the travel ban on members of the Lukashenko government, as well as the president himself, was lifted. The EU and the United States, however, continued to decry the human rights record of Belarus.

As the geopolitical dissonance was playing out, there were other challenges emerging on the political scene. In mid-2003, members of the Jewish diaspora across the globe were horrified to discover that a Jewish cemetery in the town of Grodno were being excavated to make room for the construction of a new football stadium. The action was viewed as a crass desecration of the memory of many Jews. Given Belarus' dubious historical legacy in regard to the country's treatment of Jews, this development was not well-regarded either by Jewish groups or by international human rights agencies. Indeed, the cemetery was the resting places for thousands of Jews killed in the Holocaust. Officials in Grodno, however, said that they did not accept that the area being excavated included a cemetery and they did not see the need for consultation on the matter. In response, Jewish groups across the world staged several protests at the embassies and consulates of Belarus across the world. Jewish groups were hoping that high level diplomacy could help to resolve the matter.

Indeed, a delegation of European Union ambassadors visited the cemetery in July 2003 and urged the authorities to cease the work. As well, 22 United States congressmen sent a letter to the Belurasian president to get the excavations stopped. The authorites responded in mid-August 2003 by finally halting the controversial renovation work on the stadium, agreeing to change the building plans and reburying all the human remains exposed. Further, the Associated Press reported that as part of the agreement signed by authorities, a memorial would be created indicating that a Jewish cemetery was located on the site, and stipulating that any work on and around the stadium would require the approval of the Jewish community.

In early 2004, a dispute between Belarus and Russia emerged over a gas deal. Russia cut off its entire supply of gas to Belarus saying that payments had not been made in a timely manner. Russia also wanted to put a new agreement into effect for its provision of gas. The terms of the agreement were not acceptable to Belarus, thus possibly leading to non-payment and the eventual cut-off of gas supplies. Indeed, Belarus angrily responded by saying that Russia had allowed people to suffer during the winter months. Moreover, Belarus charged that Russia hoped to take control of the pipeline carrying gas through Belarus to markets further west. Regardless, a new agreement was forged allowing for the resumption of gas supplies at the original terms of agreement. Still, it was generally regarded as inevitable that a new deal would have to be reached, most likely on Russia's terms.

In April 2004, Belarus came under fire from the Council of Europe, which condemned the country's human rights environment. At issue was the disappearance of four high-profile opponents of President Lukashenko. In the report, the government of Belarus was accused of blocking an official investigation into the disappearance of the men. The report went so far as to identify several government officials -- including the president -- as being involved in blocking the investigation and even ordering a "cover up." The Council of Europe was poised to call on member states to institute sanctions against Belarus, however, Russia warned that such a measure would be ill-advised. Russian officials said that taking such a hard stance would only result in the isolation of Belarus.

Meanwhile, on the domestic political scene, opposition forces criticized the arrest of Mikhail Marinich, a former minister, ambassador and mayor of Minsk, on charges of stealing officials documents and handling firearms. Opposition representatives said the arrest was illustrative of the increasing political repression taking place in Belarus.

In July 2004, the issue of political repression was heating up. A Russian media outlet was shut down in Belarus after it reported mass anti-Lukashenko demonstrations during the commemoration celebrations of the 10-year anniversary of the president being in power. The authorities in Belarus charged that the Russian media had inflated the size of the protests in its reporting.

In October 2004, a referendum passed that allowed the president to serve more than two terms in

office, effectively removing the provisions for terms limits. The referendum took place at the same time as parliamentary elections in which the opposition did not win a single seat. International observers warned that the election had not been free or fair. As a result, mass protests ensued and clashes between protestors and police took place.

In response to these developments, by the close of the year, the European Union had again issued travel restrictions on government officials of Belarus and the United States followed suit with sanctions.

In April 2005, international relations were at the forefront of the political spectrum when United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called Belarus the "last dictatorship in Europe" during a trip to Europe. These comments came during Rice's meeting with members of Belarus' opposition as well as a number of dissidents. During that meeting, Rice promised there would be "a road to democracy in Belarus" and defended the notion of public protests, which had recently been seen in the recent developments in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia.

The country's pro-government media reacted with outrage. Indeed, one television announcer said the United States wished to "unleash mayhem and banditry in Belarusian cities." In another media report on state-run television, Rice's comments were called "unprecedented" and she was accused of ignoring international law. Overall, her statements were characterized as a meddlesome attack of sorts on the country's sovereignty.

Voters in Belarus went to the polls in March 2006 to vote in the presidential election. State media in Belarus reported that exit polls showed a victory for President Alexander Lukashenko with 82 percent of the votes cast. The Electoral Commission said the election returns fell in line with the exit poll data and reported that Lukashenko had won 82.6 percent of the vote compared with six percent for Alexander Milinkevich. Whether or not such findings were actually reliable was unknown since the government of Belarus banned many international election monitors and foreign journalists from observing the election. Nevertheless, pre-election polling did indeed show strong popular support for Lukashenko.

After the polls closed, thousands of protestors gathered in Oktyabrskaya Square in the capital city of Minsk, waving banned flags and charging that President Lukashenko had rigged the election. Since voter turnout was more than 90 percent, there was no chance that the election could be found invalid in accordance with election law requiring at least 50 percent participation.

The main opposition candidate in Belarus, Milinkevich, responded to the charges of vote-rigging by calling for a re-run of the presidential election. He addressed the crowds in the public square saying, "We demand new, honest elections. This was a complete farce." Such a move (a new election) would not be without precedent in the post-Soviet region of Eastern Europe where only a few years prior, mass protests led to a re-run of the Ukrainian election and the ousting of a regime

in Georgia. Still, the level of protests had not reached those reminiscent of the popular uprisings of Ukraine and Georgia.

For his part, President Lukashenko vowed to crush any popular action that might take place. Close to Oktyabrskaya Square where the demonstrators were gathered, police and other security detail quietly observed the situation to ensure tensions did not escalate. While their presence was understated, it was well-publicized that protesters who got out of hand could be deemed a destabilizing presence, and they would be duly treated as terrorists who ran the risk of facing the death penalty.

In the week that followed the election, demonstrations were ongoing. Although they had waned in size over the course of several days, they nonetheless carried on continuously, ultimately leading to the detainment of 500 people by police. Complicating matters was the fact that among those arrested was opposition leader Aleksander Kozulin. The European Union and United States expressed shock at the arrest of Kozulin and other detainees, demanded their release, and announced the imposition of sanctions as a result of the hardline stance by the autocratic regime headed by Lukashenko.

As exemplified by the statements made by the United States Secretary of State (noted above), Lukashenko enjoyed little support from the West, which believes he has imposed authoritarian rule in Belarus. Lukashenko's avowal to "break the neck" of anyone who dares to challenge his power have not helped his image in the West. Indeed, observers noted that such vituperative language has only served to reinforce concerns by the European Union and the United States about the leadership of Belarus. Moreover, the Helsinki Commission, a human rights entity, has warned that Lukashenko's hardline stance and provocative language against his detractors could well spur violence. Underscoring the sentiment of the West for Lukashenko's regime, the European Union imposed a visa ban on the leader of Belarus, as well as several cabinet ministers and other top officials, in April of 2006.

Undeterred by the actions and attitude of the West, the government of Belarus was carrying out a crackdown on opposition figures in the spring of 2006. Of particular note was the fact that Alexander Milinkevich -- the presidential candidate who had been defeated by Lukashenko at the polls -- was arrested and jailed for over two weeks. His arrest and detainment came on the heels of his attendance at a rally to commemorate the Cherobyl nuclear disaster of neighboring Ukraine. Other noted leaders of the country's opposition were also arrested and imprisoned for the same reason.

By mid-2006, opposition leader, Alexander Kozulin, who had been arrested shortly after the presidential poll, went on trial for charges related to his involvement in post-election mass protests (discussed above).

Latvia and Belarus were involved in a diplomatic fracas in mid-2006. Belarus state television showed hidden camera footage of what was presented to be a Latvian diplomat involved in intimate and private sexual activities. The Latvian Foreign Ministry reacted furiously by accusing Belarus of carrying out an "unprecedented attack" on one of its diplomats, with the clear objective of provocation and humiliation. To this end, Artis Pabriks, the Latvian Foreign Minister said, "This is a very strong provocation, which shows what kind of justice system exists in this dictatorship." Pabriks went on to state, "It is in breach of the Vienna Convention, because it was a violation of the private space of our diplomat." He also denounced Belarus for failing to deal with the situation saying, "There is no co-operation whatsoever from the Belarussian side."

Soon thereafter, Latvia declared the first secretary of the embassy of Belarus in Riga to be persona non grata and issued 24-hours notice for the official to leave the country. Latvia did not go into details about its decision, saying only that the diplomat was being expelled for actions "incompatible with the status of a diplomat."

Late 2006 and early 2007 were marked by an imbroglio involving Russia and Belarus. In late 2006, an agreement was forged in which Belarus was largely compelled to accept Russian gas supplies at double the previous price. Belarus subsequently retaliated by imposing a new tax on Russian oil shipments that traversed the country, while Russia reacted by refusing to pay the new taxes.

The situation became increasingly heated in the second week of January 2007 when the Russian state-owned pipeline firm Transneft closed the Druzhba or "Friendship" pipe. Russia also accused Belarus of siphoning off oil supplies as an illicit means of payment for unpaid taxes and duties. Representatives of the two countries held talks and the situation was eventually resolved. The flow of Russian oil resumed, and assurances were advanced that such stoppages would not occur again.

The situation was reminiscent of Russia's earlier argument with various other countries in Eastern Europe, which was also spurred by the increased price of gas supplies. As in those cases, Russia said that the price increase was in keeping with market rates, while other countries complained that the new pricing structure was untenable.

In August 2007, Russian said it would decrease its gas supplies to Belarus by half as a result of prevailing debts -- that is, the outstanding payment for energy supplies. Two months later, President Lukashenko said that his country would construct nuclear power facilities to meet energy demands in light of the Russian energy issue.

Meanwhile, the domestic front in Belarus was not friendly to the president. Earlier in the year -- the spring of 2007 -- protestors and oppositions supporters took to the streets of the capital city of Minsk at a mass rally calling for the close of rule by President Lukashenko.

In May 2007, Belarus failed to win a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council. Given the country's dubious record of human rights, this development was hailed as a necessary development within the international community and maintained the council's credibility.

Belarus' relations with Russia took center stage later in the year (2007) over gas supplies. At issue was Belarus' unpaid debt to Russia for energy. In response, Russia said it would only provide Belarus with half the normal amount of gas. Soon thereafter, President Lukashenko said that Belarus would be forced to construct a nuclear power plant in order to meet his country's energy needs.

But Belarus struck a cooperative tone with Russia, offering at the close of 2007 to allow Russia to host missiles on its soil if the United States moved forward with a controversial plan to build military bases in Poland and the Czech Republic.

A year later in May 2008, the geopolitical landscape was at the forefront of people's attention in the region when Belarus decided to withdrew its ambassador from Washington and called on the United States to remove its own ambassador from Belarussian territory. At issue was Belarus' contention that the United States was recruiting citizens as spies. Tensions were not helped by the threat of sanctions on the United States' side, as well as Belarus' decision to expel several other American diplomats on the basis of United States' criticism of Belarus' human rights record. To that end, both the United States and the European Union have called on Belarus to release its political prisoners, including former presidential candidate, Alexander Kozulin.

Belarus held a parliamentary election on September 28, 2008. The people of Belarus were looking to elect 110 members to the House of Representatives from the following parties (detailed below). Members are elected to serve four-year terms and the Council of the Republic has 56 members that are appointed.

Ahead of the elections, parliament passed laws that would notably restrict the online reporting and also affect funding of private media. Critics said that the move was aimed at controlling the transmittance of free information at a time when people required political education ahead of the voting. Such contentions did not help prevailing anxieties about Belarus' respect for human rights and freedom.

The parties contesting the election included --

Communist Party of Belarus, the Agrarian Party of Belarus, the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus, the People's Coalition 5 Plus (including the Belarusian Labour Party, Belarusian Popular Front, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party-Assembly, Party of Communists of Belarus, and the United Civil Party of Belarus), Democratic Centrist Coalition (including Republic, Young Belarus,

European Coalition Free Belarus, Belarusian Social Democratic Party-People's Assembly, and the Belarusian Women's Party Hope), Conservative Christian Party, Social Democratic Party of Popular Accord, Belarusian Socialist Sporting Party, Republican Party of Labour and Justice, and Non-Partisans.

It should be noted that although there are many political parties that participated in the election, most of the National Assembly in Belarus has been composed of non-partisans. That said, all 110 seats of the House of Representatives in Belarus occupied by these non-partisans, in actuality, have backed President Lukashenko.

Leading up to the election, President Alexander Lukashenko was coming under political attack from other countries, including the United States, for holding of several political prisoners. Many political analysts and a United States Ambassador to Belarus believed that said prisoners could be released prior to the elections in September in the hopes that the move has a positive affect on the outcome. Indeed, in an effort to convey a sense of legitimacy to the election, given the history of seriously flawed elections in this country, the president ordered the political prisoner to be released and allowed around 70 opposition candidates to stand for election. Lukashenko also allowed election monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to observe the election. Perhaps railing from an unfavorable characterization by the United States that he is the "last dictator in Europe," Lukashenko appeared intent on showing that he was moving in the direction of democratic reforms.

Advance voting in Belarus was condemned by the leader of the Communist Party, Sergei Kalyakin, who said it would only give the government an opportunity to cheat. Meanwhile, opposition leader Alexandr Kozulin indicated that he had no hope of a legitimate election result; Kozulin said he was only participating "to show the international community that the elections are fraudulent." But the chairwoman of the Central Election Commission, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, denied the charges wholesale.

With the votes finally counted on, unofficial results showed that, as before, opposition politicians won no seats. Central Election Commission head, Lidia Yermoshina, explained the result by saying, "The voter is afraid of losing what he has." But Anatoly Lededko, head of opposition United Civil Party, said, The dictator has shown his true face." He continued, "There was no election in Belarus. It was an electoral farce for the West." He also called on the European Union and the United States not to recognize the results of the election. International monitors concurred that the election was not in keeping with democratic norms and international standards, however, they noted an improvement in the conduct of the vote in comparison with the previous elections.

Following the elections, in a move the signified a potential thawing of relations with the West, the United States said it would lift some sanctions against Belarus to show approval for Belarus' decision to release some dissidents, as noted above. As well, the European Union moved to lift its travel ban on President Alexander Lukashenko. The European bloc said its decision was aimed

at moving Belarus further along the path of democratic reform.

But regional relations concerning Belarus were not easily improved for the long-term. In May 2009, President Lukashenko decided to reject an invitation from the European Union to attend the "Eastern Partnership" summit with six former Soviet states in Prague. Then, a month later, tensions rose with Russia when that country imposed a ban on dairy products from Belarus out of health concerns. In response, Belarus moved to establish a customs post on the border of the two countries -- a move intended to denote symbolic meaning in the wake of the embargo. While the respective moves by Belarus and Russia were subsequently reversed in a bid to decrease tensions, dissonance flared again at the start of 2010 when Belarus threatened to cut electricity supplies to the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad. At issue was an ongoing dispute with Russia over oil supplies to Belarus. That matter was subsequently resolved by denominating a specific amount of duty-free oil from Russia to Belarus.

On Sept. 14, 2010, the lower house of the Belarus National Assembly said that the country's presidential election would be held on Dec. 19, 2010. Of the 110 legislators present at the parliamentary session, 108 members voted in favor of the resolution. On the matter of who would be contesting the election, incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko -- who has been the head of state of Belarus since 1994 -- has said that he wanted a chance for another term in office. However, at the time the date was set for the election, there was official statement on the matter.

By Sept. 23, 2010, President Lukashenko officially announced that he would contest the presidential poll in December 2010. Lukashenko's main rival was expected to be Alexander Milinkevich but in mid-September, Milinkevich suggested he would cancel his application to run in the election, saying that he had no confidence in the fairness of the election process. Nevertheless, President Lukashenko would not be unopposed in his bid for re-election. In fact, there would be 16 opponents in December 2010 election, according to the electoral commission. Among the top candidates opposing the incumbent president were former Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Sannikov, opposition leader Aleksey Mikhalevich, economist Yaroslav Romanchuk, and the deputy head of the Green Party, Yury Glushakov.

Meanwhile, President Lukashenko was making it clear that the election would not be influenced either by Russia or the West. He said, "The keys of the polls are not in the Kremlin, but in the pockets of the Belarusian people." To date, tensions between Moscow and Minsk have been ongoing over the cost of energy to Belarus from Russia, as well as Belarus' refusal to recognize the Russian-backed Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. At the same time, the West, led by the United States, has long criticized Lukashenko for his autocratic rule of Belarus. Thus, it was possible that Russia and West could well be united in their support for an opposition candidate in the impending election.

At the broader level, the Belarus Central Election Commission said that invitations would be

extended to "appropriate international organizations," presumably for the purpose of monitoring the voting.

On Nov. 18, 2010, the Belarus Central Election Commission said that 10 candidates, including President Alexander Lukashenko, were officially registered to contest the presidential elections. Campaign speeches were to be broadcast from Nov. 22, 1010 to Dec. 3, 2010 on a phased basis. As well, televised debates would take place on Dec. 4 and Dec. 5, 2010. Finally, observers form the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe were expected to arrive in Belarus to monitor the election.

Note that on Nov. 27, 2010, President Lukashenko released his election manifesto, which claimed that Belorussians should expect to become wealthier under his stewardship. The president also promised further development of the country's infrastructure and protection of Belarus' independence. In the manifest published in the Soviet Belarus newspaper, he said: "Belarus should become one of the top fifty countries with the highest human potential development index, and the living standards in Belarus will approach European ones by 2015."

On Dec. 19, 2010 -- election day -- Belarusians went to the polls to vote in the country's presidential election. The Central Election Commission (CEC) validated the presidential election by confirming that voter turnout exceeded the requisite 50 percent; indeed, voter turnout was reported to be just over 65 percent even though a favorable outcome for incumbent President Lukashenko was anticipated. In the early afternoon on election date, exit poll data indicated that the president was headed for a convincing victory with about 79 percent of the vote share; his rivals were registering support in the single digit range. Not surprisingly, Lukashenko was soon declared to be the winner of the presidential election with a landslide victory -- 89 percent of the vote share.

Opponents of the president soon took to the streets of Minsk to register their discontent. In Independence Square, tens of thousands of people gathered and railed against the authorities, accusing them of vote rigging and vote fraud. The protests turned violent as police used clubs to beat and subdue the crowds. Several opposition candidates were reported to have been arrested; others, including Vitaly Rymashevsky, were reported to have been violently beaten by riot police. Meanwhile, opposition leader, Vladimir Neklyayev -- who had also been beaten during the post-election clashes -- was taken from a hospital against his will by individuals to an unknown destination. Candidate Yaroslav Romanchuk characterized the crackdown as follows: "Repression and arrests have stopped the wave of protests. "Street democracy is over."

For his part, President Lukashenko said that Belarus looked to maintain an "excellent" relationship with Russia and "good" ties with the United States in the future. He was more circumspect on the prospect of improving relations with the European Union (EU) saying that Belarus had such hopes. In truth, Belarus has, in recent times, endured a contentious relationship with Russia over the price of Russian gas and oil. Only in December 2010 did the two countries agree to a deal in which Russia would drop tariffs for oil earmarked for export to Belarus. As well, the West has long

condemned Belarus for its atrocious human rights record and repressive governance. The fact that Belarus was striking a more conciliatory tone toward the EU while casting potential ties with the United States in positive light was, indeed, a sharp contrast from the past. It was yet to be seen in the post-election chaos in Belarus at the close of 2010 would have an impact on the domestic landscape for the longer term, as well as in the realm of foreign relations.

Note that Belarusian Lukashenko appointed Mikhail Miasnikovich to be the country's new prime minister in a government reshuffle. Miasnikovich was set to replace Syarhey Sidorsky, who had been the country's prime minister since 2003. The move came in the aftermath of the presidential election, discussed just above. Miasnikovich, who headed the presidential administration from 1995-2001, is a well-known and respected figure on the political scene in Belarus.

On April 11, 2011, an explosion rocked a central subway station in the Belarusian capital of Minsk during the evening rush hour. At least seven people died and more than 50 were wounded at the Oktyabrskaya subway station as a result of the explosion. At the time, there was no explanation for the blast although speculation ran from theories of accidents to terrorism. The latter rationale gained some traction, given the location of the subway station, which was close to both the residence of President Alexander Lukashenko and the famed Palace of the Republic.

On May 14, 2011, an opposition leader Andrei Sannikov was jailed for five years for organizing post-election protests. Since the presidential election in December 2010, which returned authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko to power in what was regarded as a non-competitive vote, political tensions have been on the rise in Belarus. While the opposition movement in Belarus has typically lacked influence in a country controlled by the strong fist of authoritarian President Lukashenko, the country has seen some large-scale protests in the aftermath of the 2010 disputed election. For his part, Sannikov has been regarded as one of the most well-known opposition figure and a particular target following a crackdown by the Lukashenko in the post-election period when protests and anti-government sentiment was on the rise. Sannikov's trial and sentence have been regarded as something of a politically-motivated sham by the international community.

At the close of September 2011, a diplomatic summit between Belarus, the European Union, and former Soviet era neighbors, ended abruptly when Belarus withdrew from the Eastern Partnership summit meeting, complaining that it was being subject to discrimination. Ironically, the summit had been aimed at improving relations between the parties. A serious issue of contention has been the condemnation by Western powers of Belarussian President Aleksandr Lukashenko for his autocratic tendencies, manifest by harsh repression of political opponents and critics. Indeed, the European Union has been adamant in its demands that Belarus release its political prisoners so that negotiations on financial aid and economic ties could commence. However, Belarus's Foreign Ministry countered with its own complaints that President Lukashenko had not been invited to attend the talks and that the Belarussian delegation had been excluded from certain events.

Former Belarusian presidential candidate and opposition politician Andrei Sannikov was reported to have vanished from a penal colony without a trace in mid-November 2011. The human rights group, Free Belarus, said in a statement: "Andrei Sannikov has disappeared from Babrujsk colony, neither his relatives nor his lawyer were told of the move." According to Amnesty International, Sannikov has been "a prisoner of conscience." The disturbing news of his disappearance was likely to bolster accusations that the autocratic rule of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has, at times, delved into the waters of tyranny in the face of dissent or opposition. For his part, Lukashenko has pointed to the fact that he declared pardons for 11 opposition activists who were detained during post-election violence in Minsk 2010. However, it should be noted that none of 11 detainees were considered political rivals of Lukashenko.

On Jan. 19, 2012, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko hinted towards the possibility of political reform following forthcoming parliamentary elections set for later in the year. At a meeting which was convened to celebrate 20 years of diplomatic relations between China and Belarus, Lukashenko said he would seriously consider reforming the country's political system. That being said, pro-democracy advocates were not expected to heartily applaud this news since Lukashenko said that he would use China as an example in these efforts. Indeed, he said that China could provide guidance in the handling of internal affairs, the forging of relations with Western countries, and also as regards control over the Internet. Accordingly, reform in Belarus was not expected to augur much of a departure from the current climate of repression under autocratic rule.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko announced that parliamentary elections would be held on Sept. 23, 2012. Perhaps anticipating international criticism about the freedom and fairness of the impending vote, given Belarus' reputation was one of the least democratic countries in Europe, President Lukashenko said: "We won't conform to anyone from the outside. Elections are held for the Belarusian people and solely in the interest of the nation."

At stake in Belarus would be the composition of the bicameral "Natsionalnoye Sobranie" or parliament. In the 64-member "Soviet Respubliki" or Council of the Republic, eight members are appointed by the president, and 56 indirectly elected by deputies of local councils for four-year terms. Accordingly, the real election action would e in the 110-member "Palata Predstaviteley" or House of Representatives where members are elected by popular vote in single seat constituencies for four-year terms. In the previous elections held in September 2008, opposition politicians won no seats while the president's party retained full control of the entire country. As was the case in previous elections, there were charges of grave irregularities, complaints about the lack of influence afforded to the opposition, and an overall political climate unfavorable to dissent.

In 2012, ahead of the latest parliamentary vote, President Lukashenko warned against political provocations aimed at destabilizing the country; he promised that such perpetrators of instability

would be brought to justice. The alternate interpretation of this warning was that dissent would not be tolerated in a country without a serious opposition on its way to the ballot box.

Mid-2012 saw a diplomatic row erupt between Belarus and Sweden in regard to Minsk's atrocious human rights record. At issue was the case of a Swedish-chartered plane dropping approximately 800 teddy bears over Belarus, each conveying a message that the Belarusian government should "show greater respect for human rights." Belarus reacted to the move by expelling Stefan Eriksson -- the Swedish ambassador in Minsk. Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt responded by announcing that the Belarusian ambassador was not welcome to Sweden. But the diplomatic "teddy bear" row leaked into the realm of domestic politics in Belarus when on Aug. 20, 2012, President Lukashenko dismissed Sergei Martynov of his duties as foreign minister. While the Belarusian leader gave no reason for this shake-up, the conventional wisdom was that it was linked to the imbroglio with Sweden.

As noted above, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko announced that parliamentary elections would be held on Sept. 23, 2012.

Perhaps anticipating international criticism about the freedom and fairness of the impending vote, given Belarus' reputation was one of the least democratic countries in Europe, President Lukashenko said: "We won't conform to anyone from the outside. Elections are held for the Belarusian people and solely in the interest of the nation."

At stake in Belarus would be the composition of the bicameral "Natsionalnoye Sobranie" or parliament. In the 64-member "Soviet Respubliki" or Council of the Republic, eight members are appointed by the president, and 56 indirectly elected by deputies of local councils for four-year terms. Accordingly, the real election action would be in the 110-member "Palata Predstaviteley" or House of Representatives where members are elected by popular vote in single seat constituencies for four-year terms. In the previous elections held in September 2008, opposition politicians won no seats while the president's party retained full control of the entire country. As was the case in previous elections, there were charges of grave irregularities, complaints about the lack of influence afforded to the opposition, and an overall political climate unfavorable to dissent.

In 2012, ahead of the latest parliamentary vote, President Lukashenko warned against political provocations aimed at destabilizing the country; he promised that such perpetrators of instability would be brought to justice. The alternate interpretation of this warning was that dissent would not be tolerated in a country without a serious opposition on its way to the ballot box.

Ahead of election day, the country's two main opposition parties -- the United Civic and the Belarusian Popular Front or BPF parties -- called on voters to boycott the polls because of alleged fraud. They urged voters to refrain from participating in "pseudo-elections" that would simply usher in a House of Representatives whose task would be to validate or "rubber-stamp" President

Lukashenko's agenda.

Nevertheless, on Sept. 23, 2012, it seemed that sufficient citizens of Belarus went to the polls to legitimate the election exercise, irrespective of the boycott. According to the Central Election Commission, more than 50 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the elections for all 110 seats in the "Palata Predstaviteley" or House of Representatives, which meant that the 50 percent threshold was met. The Central Election Commission issued a statement declaring that voter turnout was 65.9 percent and noting that the election was "valid." Although opposition entities called on the international community to disregard the vote in Belarus, election observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States asserted that the elections met international standards.

In January 2015, cracks began to form in the normally strong Russia-Belarus alliance. With Russia backing pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and annexing Crimea a year earlier, Belarus -- like many of Russia's neighbors -- was suddenly wary of Russia's imperial ambitions, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's apparent hopes to reconstitute the Soviet empire.

Former Soviet republics, such as Belarus, now had a firm sense of sovereignty and independence and were not willing to return to their Soviet past, regardless of seemingly strong relations with Russia. Still, it came as something of a surprise when Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko declared in vociferous language that his country would never be part of the "Russian world" -- a term adopted by the Russian Kremlin as Moscow seeks to draw its former republics back under its umbrella.

The most immediate tactic Moscow has adopted in drawing its former republics back into its orbit has been via economic deals. Indeed, it was precisely Russian pressure on the Yanukovych presidency of Ukraine to abandon its association agreement with the European Union, to and sign onto a customs deal with Russia instead, which spurred the Ukrainian Maidan and ultimately the ongoing crisis.

It should be noted that Belarus has played a key regional role in the Ukrainian crisis, hosting talks that led to the (now collapsed) Minsk ceasefire agreement of 2014. But as Russia has sought to extend a controlling hand over Belarus' assets, the Belarusian president was keen to draw the proverbial line in the sand. For Belarus, suspicion of Russia was sparked when Moscow tried to retrict exports in violation of the regulations ensconced within the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Belarus warned that if the rules of the Eurasian Economic Union were not observed, it would withdraw from the alliance.

Known infamously as "Europe's last dictator" because of his autocratic governing style, President Lukashenko has long been regarded as a stalwart of Russia. However, it would seem that even "Europe's last dictator" had his own limits when it came to an alliance with Russia. Thus, President Lukashenko made it clear that Belarus' independence would have to be respected as he

declared, "Those who think that the Belarusian land is part as what they call the Russian world, almost part of Russia, forget about it!" He continued, "Belarus is a modern and independent state."

Lukashenko went one step further, noting that he wished to normalize ties with the West. It was a move certain to infuriate Moscow, which seeks the opposite outcome. However, as Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine exists, it has stood as reminder to surrounding countries of their own vulnerability, and concomitantly driven stalwart allies, such as Belarus, in a Westward direction.

Nevertheless, the Belarus capital of Minsk was the venue for fresh peace talks on eastern Ukraine in February 2015. It was to be seen if the new agreement would be sustainable and if stability would return to eastern Ukraine.

A presidential election was set to be held in Belarus on Oct. 11, 2015. In Belarus, the president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The incumbent president of Belarus was Aleksandr Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994. He was expected to defend his presidency at the polls in 1999; however, the November 1996 constitutional referendum extended the president's tenure in office an additional two years. He was re-elected again in 2001, and then another referendum in 2004 allowed the president to run for more than two terms, effectively ending term limits. He won re-election in 2006 and 2010 and was expected to contest the 2015 voting exercise.

Of course, it should be noted that elections in Belarus are not competitive affairs, with the political landscape favoring the strongman incumbent President Lukashenko -- largely regarded as one of Europe's few autocratic leaders. To this end, Belarusian election officials have banned an opposition figure -- Mikolay Statkevich -- from contesting the presidential election. In fact, Statkevich would have had significant obstacles in running for president since he was serving a six-year prison sentence for orchestrating riots in the aftermath of the 2010 presidential election. It should be noted that Lukashenko pardoned Statkevich and several other political prisoners in mid-2015 in a fairly transparent bid to improve his reputation internationally. Still, because Statkevich had a criminal record, he was barred from contesting the election. In this way, there was not even a slight possibility that Lukashenko might be challenged by one of his more well-known rivals.

Instead, Lukashenko would have perfunctory opposition in the election contest in the form of three approved candidates including Belarus's first female presidential candidate, Tatsyana Karatkevich, an activist from the opposition movement Havary Pravdu (Tell the Truth). The other two candidates in the mix were the chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party, Syarhey Haydukyevich, and the leader of the Belarusian Patriotic Party, Mikalay Ulakhovich.

The people of Belarus went to the polls on Oct. 11, 2015, and after the votes were counted, to the surprise of no one, President Lukashenko was re-elected to power handily with more than 80 percent of the vote share. The election was monitored by representatives from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who were expected to advance an elections report on the

conduct of the 2015 elections in Belarus.

Editor's Note:

Belarus has the dubious distinction of being home to one of Europe's last dictatorial bastions under the rule of President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Belarus also has seen declining levels of democratization and respect for human rights, manifested most clearly by the Lukasheno regime's harsh repression of political opponents and critics. However, as of 2015, with the encroachment of Russia into neighboring nation states, Belarus was intimating that it was interested in improving its ties with the West.

*** Note that the next parliamentary elections would be held in 2016. ***

-- January 2016

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com. See Bibliography for research sources.

Political Risk Index

Political Risk Index

The **Political Risk Index** is a proprietary index measuring the level of risk posed to governments, corporations, and investors, based on a myriad of political and economic factors. The Political Risk Index is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on varied criteria* including the following consideration: political stability, political representation, democratic accountability, freedom of expression, security and crime, risk of conflict, human development, jurisprudence and regulatory transparency, economic risk, foreign investment considerations, possibility of sovereign default, and corruption. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the highest political risk, while a score of 10 marks the lowest political risk. Stated differently, countries with the lowest scores pose the greatest political risk. A score of 0 marks the most dire level of political risk and an ultimate

nadir, while a score of 10 marks the lowest possible level of political risk, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater risk.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4
Algeria	6
Andorra	9
Angola	4
Antigua	8
Argentina	4
Armenia	4-5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	4
Bahamas	8.5

Bahrain	6
Bangladesh	3.5
Barbados	8.5-9
Belarus	3
Belgium	9
Belize	8
Benin	5
Bhutan	5
Bolivia	5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	4
Botswana	7
Brazil	7
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	6
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	3
Cambodia	4

Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9
China	7
China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8
Colombia	7
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3
Congo RC	4
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5
Croatia	7
Cuba	4-4.5
Cyprus	5

Czech Republic	8
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	7
Dominican Republic	6
East Timor	5
Ecuador	6
Egypt	5
El Salvador	7
Equatorial Guinea	4
Eritrea	3
Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	5
France	9
Gabon	5

Gambia	4
Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	6
Greece	4.5-5
Grenada	8
Guatemala	6
Guinea	3.5
Guinea-Bissau	3.5
Guyana	4.5
Haiti	3.5
Holy See (Vatican)	9
Honduras	4.5-5
Hungary	7
Iceland	8.5-9
India	7.5-8
Indonesia	6
Iran	3.5-4

Iraq	2.5-3
Ireland	8-8.5
Israel	8
Italy	7.5
Jamaica	6.5-7
Japan	9
Jordan	6.5
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	7
Korea, North	1
Korea, South	8
Kosovo	4
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	4.5
Laos	4.5
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5.5

Lesotho	6
Liberia	3.5
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9
Madagascar	4
Malawi	4
Malaysia	8
Maldives	4.5
Mali	4
Malta	8
Marshall Islands	6
Mauritania	4.5-5
Mauritius	7
Mexico	6.5
Micronesia	7
Moldova	5

Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	6
Morocco	6.5
Mozambique	4.5-5
Namibia	6.5-7
Nauru	6
Nepal	4
Netherlands	9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	5
Niger	4
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7
Pakistan	3.5
Palau	7
Panama	7.5

Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6.5-7
Peru	7
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5
Qatar	7.5
Romania	5.5
Russia	5.5
Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	8
Samoa	7
San Marino	9
Sao Tome and Principe	5.5
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	6

Serbia	5
Seychelles	7
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8
Slovenia	8
Solomon Islands	6
Somalia	2
South Africa	7
Spain	7.5
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3.5
Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5

Tanzania	6
Thailand	6.5
Togo	4.5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	6
Turkey	7
Turkmenistan	4.5
Tuvalu	7
Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	9
United States	9.5
Uruguay	8
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	7
Venezuela	4

Vietnam	5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5
Zimbabwe	3

*Methodology

The Political Risk Index is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. political stability (record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of government to stay in office and carry out policies as a result of productive executive-legislative relationship, perhaps with popular support vis a vis risk of government collapse)

2. political representation (right of suffrage, free and fair elections, multi-party participation, and influence of foreign powers)

3. democratic accountability (record of respect for political rights, human rights, and civil liberties, backed by constitutional protections)

4. freedom of expression (media freedom and freedom of expression, right to dissent or express political opposition, backed by constitutional protections)

5. security and crime (the degree to which a country has security mechanisms that ensures safety of citizens and ensures law and order, without resorting to extra-judicial measures)

6. risk of conflict (the presence of conflict; record of coups or civil disturbances; threat of war; threats posed by internal or external tensions; threat or record of terrorism or insurgencies)

7. human development (quality of life; access to education; socio-economic conditions; systemic concern for the status of women and children)

8. jurisprudence and regulatory transparency (the impartiality of the legal system, the degree of transparency within the regulatory system of a country and the durability of that structure)

9. economic conditions (economic stability, investment climate, degree of nationalization of

industries, property rights, labor force development)

10. corruption (the degree of corruption in a country and/or efforts by the government to address graft and other irregularities)

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically -- has affected the ratings for several countries across the world.

North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Zimbabwe -- retain their low rankings.

Several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. The worst downgrades affected Syria where civil war is at play, along with the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamist terrorists who have also seized control over part of Syrian territory. Iraq has been further downgraded due to the rampage of Islamist terrorists and their takeover of wide swaths of Iraqi territory. Libya has also been downgraded further due to its slippage into failed state status; at issue in Libya have been an ongoing power struggle between rival militias. Yemen continues to hold steady with a poor ranking due to continued unrest at the hands of Houthi rebels, secessinionists, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, and Islamic State. Its landscape has been further complicated by the fact that it is now the site of a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Conversely, Tunisia and Egypt have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, Zimbabwe continues to be one of the bleak spots of the world with the Mugabe regime effectively destroying the country's once vibrant economy, and miring Zimbabwe with an exceedingly high rate of inflation, debilitating unemployment, devolving public services, and critical food shortages; rampant crime and political oppression round out the landscape. Somalia also sports a poor ranking due to the continuing influence of the terror group, al-Shabab, which was not operating across the border in Kenya. On the upside, Nigeria, which was ineffectively dealing with the threat posed by the terror group, Boko Haram, was making some strides on the national security front with its new president at the helm. Mali was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. But the Central African Republic was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels and a continued state of lawlessness in that country. South Sudan -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. Burkina Faso, Burundi and Guinea have been downgraded due to political

unrest, with Guinea also having to deal with the burgeoning Ebola crisis.

In Europe, Ukraine was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. Russia was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Strains on the infrastructure of southern and eastern European countries, such as Serbia, Croatia, and Hungary, due to an influx of refugees was expected to pose social and economic challenges, and slight downgrades were made accordingly. So too, a corruption crisis for the Romanian prime minister has affected the ranking of that country. Meanwhile, the rankings for Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Italy were maintained due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. Greece, another euro zone nation, was earlier downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, no further downgrade was added since the country was able to successfully forge a bailout rescue deal with creditor institutions. Cyprus' exposure to Greek banks yielded a downgrade in its case.

In Asia, Nepal was downgraded in response to continuous political instability and a constitutional crisis that prevails well after landmark elections were held. Both India and China retain their rankings; India holds a slightly higher ranking than China due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in Pakistan resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating. Meanwhile, Singapore retained its strong rankings due to its continued effective stewardship of the economy and political stability.

In the Americas, ongoing political and economic woes, as well as crime and corruption have affected the rankings for Mexico , Guatemala, and Brazil. Argentina was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. Venezuela was downgraded due to its mix of market unfriendly policies and political oppression. For the moment, the United States maintains a strong ranking along with Canada, and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean; however, a renewed debt ceiling crisis could cause the United States to be downgraded in a future edition. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to Cuba due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the Unitd States.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Political Stability

Political Stability

The **Political Stability Index** is a proprietary index measuring a country's level of stability, standard of good governance, record of constitutional order, respect for human rights, and overall strength of democracy. The Political StabilityIndex is calculated using an established methodology* by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse. Threats include coups, domestic violence and instability, terrorism, etc. This index measures the dynamic between the quality of a country's government and the threats that can compromise and undermine stability. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of political stability and an ultimate nadir, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of political stability possible, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater stability.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5-5
Algeria	5
Andorra	9.5
Angola	4.5-5
Antigua	8.5-9

Argentina	7
Armenia	5.5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	6
Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	8
Benin	5
Bhutan	5
Bolivia	6
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Botswana	8.5
Brazil	7

Brunei	8
Bulgaria	7.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5-5
Cameroon	6
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4.5
Chile	9
China	7
China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8
Colombia	7.5
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3

Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	9.5
Cote d'Ivoire	3.5
Croatia	7.5
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	8
Czech Republic	8.5
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	5
Dominica	8.5
Dominican Republic	7
East Timor	5
Ecuador	7
Egypt	4.5-5
El Salvador	7.5-8
Equatorial Guinea	4.5
Eritrea	4
Estonia	9

Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	6.5
France	9
Gabon	5
Gambia	4.5
Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	7
Greece	6
Grenada	8.5
Guatemala	7
Guinea	3.5-4
Guinea-Bissau	4
Guyana	6
Haiti	3.5-4
Holy See (Vatican)	9.5

Honduras	6
Hungary	7.5
Iceland	9
India	8
Indonesia	7
Iran	3.5
Iraq	2.5
Ireland	9.5
Israel	8
Italy	8.5-9
Jamaica	8
Japan	9
Jordan	6
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	8
Korea, North	2
Korea, South	8.5

Kosovo	5.5
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	5
Laos	5
Latvia	8.5
Lebanon	5.5
Lesotho	5
Liberia	3.5-4
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	9
Luxembourg	9.5
Madagascar	4
Malawi	5
Malaysia	8
Maldives	4.5-5
Mali	4.5-5
Malta	9

Marshall Islands	8
Mauritania	6
Mauritius	8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	8
Moldova	5.5
Monaco	9.5
Mongolia	6.5-7
Montenegro	8
Morocco	7
Mozambique	5
Namibia	8.5
Nauru	8
Nepal	4.5
Netherlands	9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	6
Niger	4.5

Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7
Pakistan	3
Palau	8
Panama	8.5
Papua New Guinea	6
Paraguay	8
Peru	7.5
Philippines	6
Poland	9
Portugal	9
Qatar	7
Romania	7
Russia	6
Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	9
Saint Lucia	9

Saint Vincent and Grenadines	9
Samoa	8
San Marino	9.5
Sao Tome and Principe	7
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	7.5
Serbia	6.5
Seychelles	8
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	9
Solomon Islands	6.5-7
Somalia	2
South Africa	7.5
Spain	9
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3

Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5
Tanzania	6
Thailand	6
Togo	5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	5
Turkey	7.5
Turkmenistan	5
Tuvalu	8.5
Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7

United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	8.5
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	8.5
Venezuela	4.5-5
Vietnam	4.5
Yemen	2.5
Zambia	5
Zimbabwe	3

*Methodology

The Political Stability Index is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. record of peaceful transitions of power (free and fair elections; adherence to political accords)

2. record of democratic representation, presence of instruments of democracy; systemic accountability

3. respect for human rights; respect for civil rights

4. strength of the system of jurisprudence, adherence to constitutional order, and good governance

5. ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse (i.e. government stability versus a country being deemed "ungovernable")

6. threat of coups, insurgencies, and insurrection

7. level of unchecked crime and corruption

8. risk of terrorism and other threats to national security

9. relationship with regional powers and international community; record of bilateral or multilateral cooperation

10. degree of economic strife (i.e. economic and financial challenges)

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically -- has affected the ratings for several countries across the world. The usual suspects -- North Korea, Afghanistan, and Somalia -- retain their low rankings. The reclusive and ultra-dictatorial North Korean regime, which has terrified the world with its nuclear threats, has exhibited internal instability. Of note was a cut-throat purge of hundreds of high ranking officials deemed to be a threat to Kim Jung-un. Despite their attempts to recover from years of lawlessness, war, and warlordism, both Afghanistan and Somalia continue to be beset by terrorism and turmoil. In Afghanistan, while international forces have seen success in the effort against the terror group, al-Qaida, the other Islamist extremist group, the Taliban, continues to carry out a vicious insurgency using terrorism. In Somalia, while the government attempts to do the nation's business, the terror group, al-Shabab continues to make its presence known not only in Somalia, but across the border into Kenya with devastating results/ Also in this category is Iraq, which continues to be rocked by horrific violence and terrorism at the hands of Islamic State, which has taken over wide swaths of Iraqi territory.

Syria, Libya, and Yemen have been added to this unfortunate echelon of the world's most politically unstable countries. Syria has been mired by the twin hazards of 1. a civil war as rebels oppose the Assad regime; and 2. the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamic State, which also seized control over vast portions of Syrian territory. Meanwhile, the post-Qaddhafi landscape of Libya has devolved into chaos as rival militias battle for control -- the elected government of the country notwithstanding. Rounding out this grim triad is Yemen, which was dealing with a Houthi rebellion, secesionists in the south, as well as the threat of terrorism from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula as well as Islamic State, while also being the site of a proxy war between Shi'a Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, and

Bahrain were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. All three of these countries have stabilized in recent years and have been upgraded accordingly. In Bahrain, the landscape had calmed. In Egypt, the secular military-backed government has generated criticism for its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood; however, the country had ratified the presidency via democratic elections and were on track to hold parliamentary elections as the country moved along the path of democratization. Perhaps the most impressive story was coming out of Tunisia -- the country whose Jasmine Revolution sparked the entire Arab Spring -- and where after a few years of strife, a new progressive constitution was passed into law and a secular government had been elected to power. Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, the Central African Republic was downgraded the previous year due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels. Although the country has been trying to emerge from this crisis, the fact of the matter was that it was difficult to halt the precipitous decline into lawlessness in that country. Zimbabwe has maintained its consistently poor ranking due to the dictatorial regime of Mugabe, who continues to hold a tight grip on power, intimidates the opposition, squashes dissent, and oppresses the white farmer population of the country. Moving in a slightly improved direction is Nigeria, which has sported abysmal ratings due to the government's fecklessness in dealing with the threat posed by the Islamist terror group, Boko Haram. Under its newly-elected government, there appears to be more of a concerted effort to make national security a priority action item. Mali was also slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Political instability has visited Burkina Faso and Burundi as the leaders of those countries attempted to side-step constitutional limits to hold onto power. In Burundi, an attempted coup ensued but quelled, and the president won a (questionable) new term in office; unrest has since punctuated the landscape. In Burkina Faso, the political climate has turned stormy as a result of a successful coup that ended the rule of the president, and then a putsch against the transitional government. These two African countries have been downgraded as a result.

It should be noted that the African country of South Sudan -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. Guinea has endured poor rankings throughout, but was slightly downgraded further over fears of social unrest and the Ebola heath crisis.

In Europe, Ukraine was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. Russia was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Serbia and Albania were slightly downgraded due to eruptions of unrest, while Romania was slightly downgraded on the basis of

corruption charges against the prime minister. Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Italy were downgraded due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. Greece, another euro zone nation, was downgraded the previous year due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, the country successfully forged a rescue deal with international creditors and stayed within the Euro zone. Greek voters rewarded the hitherto unknown upstart party at the polls for these efforts. As a result, Greece was actually upgraded slightly as it proved to the world that it could endure the political and economic storms. Meanwhile, Germany, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries continue to post impressive ranking consistent with these countries' strong records of democracy, freedom, and peaceful transfers of power.

In Asia, Nepal was downgraded in response to continuous political instability well after landmark elections that prevails today. Cambodia was very slighly downgraded due to post-election instability that has resulted in occasional flares of violence. Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in Japan in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both India and China retain their rankings; India holds a slightly higher ranking than China due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in Pakistan resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating.

In the Americas, Haiti retained its downgraded status due to ongoing political and economic woes. Mexico was downgraded due to its alarming rate of crime. Guatemala was downgraded due to charges of corruption, the arrest of the president, and uncertainty over the outcome of elections. Brazil was downgraded due to the corruption charges erupting on the political landscape, the stalling of the economy, and the increasingly loud calls for the impeachment of President Rousseff. Argentina was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. Venezuela was downgraded due to the fact that the country's post-Chavez government is every bit as autocratic and nationalistic, but even more inclined to oppress its political opponents. Colombia was upgraded slightly due to efforts aimed at securing a peace deal with the FARC insurgents. A small but significant upgrade was attributed to Cuba due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the Unitd States. Meanwhile, the United States, Canada, Costa Rica, Panama, and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean retain their strong rankings due to their records of stability and peaceful transfers of power.

In the Pacific, Fiji was upgraded due to its return to constitutional order and democracy with the holding of the first elections in eight years.

In Oceania, Maldives has been slightly downgraded due to the government's continued and rather relentless persecution of the country's former pro-democracy leader - former President Nasheed.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Freedom Rankings

Freedom Rankings

Freedom in the World

Editor's Note: This ranking by Freedom House quantifies political freedom and civil liberties into a single combined index on each sovereign country's level of freedom and liberty. The initials "PR" and "CL" stand for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, respectively. The number 1 represents the most free countries and the number 7 represents the least free. Several countries fall in the continuum in between. The freedom ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Status	Trend Arrow
Afghanistan	6 ?	6	Not Free	
Albania*	3	3	Partly Free	
Algeria	6	5	Not Free	

Andorra*	1	1	Free	
Angola	6	5	Not Free	
Antigua and Barbuda*	3 ?	2	Free	
Argentina*	2	2	Free	
Armenia	6	4	Partly Free	
Australia*	1	1	Free	
Austria*	1	1	Free	
Azerbaijan	6	5	Not Free	
Bahamas*	1	1	Free	
Bahrain	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Bangladesh*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Barbados*	1	1	Free	
Belarus	7	6	Not Free	
Belgium*	1	1	Free	
Belize*	1	2	Free	
Benin*	2	2	Free	
Bhutan	4	5	Partly Free	
Bolivia*	3	3	Partly Free	

Bosnia-Herzegovina*	4	3	Partly Free	
Botswana*	3 ?	2	Free	
Brazil*	2	2	Free	
Brunei	6	5	Not Free	
Bulgaria*	2	2	Free	
Burkina Faso	5	3	Partly Free	
Burma	7	7	Not Free	
Burundi*	4	5	Partly Free	⇑
Cambodia	6	5	Not Free	⇓
Cameroon	6	6	Not Free	
Canada*	1	1	Free	
Cape Verde*	1	1	Free	
Central African Republic	5	5	Partly Free	
Chad	7	6	Not Free	
Chile*	1	1	Free	
China	7	6	Not Free	
Colombia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Comoros*	3	4	Partly Free	

Congo (Brazzaville)	6	5	Not Free	⇓
Congo (Kinshasa)	6	6	Not Free	⇓
Costa Rica*	1	1	Free	
Cote d'Ivoire	6	5	Not Free	
Croatia*	1 ?	2	Free	
Cuba	7	6	Not Free	
Cyprus*	1	1	Free	
Czech Republic*	1	1	Free	
Denmark*	1	1	Free	
Djibouti	5	5	Partly Free	
Dominica*	1	1	Free	
Dominican Republic*	2	2	Free	⇓
East Timor*	3	4	Partly Free	
Ecuador*	3	3	Partly Free	
Egypt	6	5	Not Free	
El Salvador*	2	3	Free	
Equatorial Guinea	7	7	Not Free	
Eritrea	7	7 ?	Not Free	

Estonia*	1	1	Free	
Ethiopia	5	5	Partly Free	⇓
Fiji	6	4	Partly Free	
Finland*	1	1	Free	
France*	1	1	Free	
Gabon	6	5 ?	Not Free ?	
The Gambia	5	5 ?	Partly Free	
Georgia	4	4	Partly Free	
Germany*	1	1	Free	
Ghana*	1	2	Free	
Greece*	1	2	Free	
Grenada*	1	2	Free	
Guatemala*	4 ?	4	Partly Free	
Guinea	7	6 ?	Not Free	
Guinea-Bissau*	4	4	Partly Free	
Guyana*	2	3	Free	
Haiti*	4	5	Partly Free	
Honduras	4 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	

Hungary*	1	1	Free	
Iceland*	1	1	Free	
India*	2	3	Free	
Indonesia*	2	3	Free	
Iran	6	6	Not Free	⇓
Iraq	5 ?	6	Not Free	
Ireland*	1	1	Free	
Israel*	1	2	Free	
Italy*	1	2	Free	
Jamaica*	2	3	Free	
Japan*	1	2	Free	
Jordan	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free	⇓
Kenya	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Kiribati*	1	1	Free	
Kosovo	5 ?	4 ?	Partly Free ?	
Kuwait	4	4	Partly Free	
Kyrgyzstan	6 ?	5 ?	Not Free ?	

Laos	7	6	Not Free	
Latvia*	2	1	Free	
Lebanon	5	3 ?	Partly Free	
Lesotho*	3 ?	3	Partly Free ?	
Liberia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Libya	7	7	Not Free	
Liechtenstein*	1	1	Free	
Lithuania*	1	1	Free	
Luxembourg*	1	1	Free	
Macedonia*	3	3	Partly Free	⇑
Madagascar	6 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	
Malawi*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Malaysia	4	4	Partly Free	
Maldives*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Mali*	2	3	Free	
Malta*	1	1	Free	⇓
Marshall Islands*	1	1	Free	
Mauritania	6	5	Not Free	

Mauritius*	1	2	Free	
Mexico*	2	3	Free	
Micronesia*	1	1	Free	
Moldova*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Monaco*	2	1	Free	
Mongolia*	2	2	Free	⇑
Montenegro*	3	2 ?	Free ?	
Morocco	5	4	Partly Free	⇓
Mozambique	4 ?	3	Partly Free	
Namibia*	2	2	Free	
Nauru*	1	1	Free	
Nepal	4	4	Partly Free	
Netherlands*	1	1	Free	
New Zealand*	1	1	Free	
Nicaragua*	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Niger	5 ?	4	Partly Free	
Nigeria	5	4	Partly Free	⇓
North Korea	7	7	Not Free	⇓

Norway*	1	1	Free	
Oman	6	5	Not Free	
Pakistan	4	5	Partly Free	
Palau*	1	1	Free	
Panama*	1	2	Free	
Papua New Guinea*	4	3	Partly Free	
Paraguay*	3	3	Partly Free	
Peru*	2	3	Free	
Philippines	4	3	Partly Free	⇓
Poland*	1	1	Free	
Portugal*	1	1	Free	
Qatar	6	5	Not Free	
Romania*	2	2	Free	
Russia	6	5	Not Free	⇓
Rwanda	6	5	Not Free	
Saint Kitts and Nevis*	1	1	Free	
Saint Lucia*	1	1	Free	
Saint Vincent and Grenadines*	2	1	Free	

Samoa*	2	2	Free	
San Marino*	1	1	Free	
Sao Tome and Principe*	2	2	Free	
Saudi Arabia	7	6	Not Free	
Senegal*	3	3	Partly Free	
Serbia*	2 ?	2	Free	
Seychelles*	3	3	Partly Free	
Sierra Leone*	3	3	Partly Free	
Singapore	5	4	Partly Free	
Slovakia*	1	1	Free	⇓
Slovenia*	1	1	Free	
Solomon Islands	4	3	Partly Free	
Somalia	7	7	Not Free	
South Africa*	2	2	Free	
South Korea*	1	2	Free	
Spain*	1	1	Free	
Sri Lanka*	4	4	Partly Free	
Sudan	7	7	Not Free	

Suriname*	2	2	Free	
Swaziland	7	5	Not Free	
Sweden*	1	1	Free	
Switzerland*	1	1	Free	⇓
Syria	7	6	Not Free	
Taiwan*	1 ?	2 ?	Free	
Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free	
Tanzania	4	3	Partly Free	
Thailand	5	4	Partly Free	
Togo	5	4 ?	Partly Free	
Tonga	5	3	Partly Free	
Trinidad and Tobago*	2	2	Free	
Tunisia	7	5	Not Free	
Turkey*	3	3	Partly Free	⇓
Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free	
Tuvalu*	1	1	Free	
Uganda	5	4	Partly Free	
Ukraine*	3	2	Free	

United Arab Emirates	6	5	Not Free	
United Kingdom*	1	1	Free	
United States*	1	1	Free	
Uruguay*	1	1	Free	
Uzbekistan	7	7	Not Free	
Vanuatu*	2	2	Free	
Venezuela	5 ?	4	Partly Free	
Vietnam	7	5	Not Free	⇓
Yemen	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Zambia*	3	4 ?	Partly Free	
Zimbabwe	6 ?	6	Not Free	

Methodology:
PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating. The ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

? ? up or down indicates a change in political rights, civil liberties, or status since the last survey.
⇑ ⇓ up or down indicates a trend of positive or negative changes that took place but that were not sufficient to result in a change in political rights or civil liberties ratings of 1-7.

* indicates a country's status as an electoral democracy.

Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2010 edition.

Available at URL: http://www.freedomhouse.org

Updated:

Reviewed in 2015

Human Rights

Overview of Human Rights in Belarus

After more than 70 years as a part of the former Soviet Union, Belarus gained its independence in 1991. Since independence, the government has worked to consolidate presidential power by systemically undermining the country's democratic institutions and passing undemocratic laws and regulations. Indeed, since independence, the human rights record of Belarus has steadily declined.

The government of Belarus is accused of functioning in ways contrary to international laws and norms. Numerous complaints have been registered. For example, the government denies its citizens the right to change the government through free and fair elections, suppresses opposition political parties through extrajudicial measures, and interferes with the internal affairs of ethnic minority organizations. The government has also closed several independent media outlets, harassed journalists and members of independent unions, and failed to account for the disappearance of several opposition party figures and journalists who "disappeared" in recent years.

Peaceful protestors are often harassed and some are detained because they choose to exercise their supposed freedoms of assembly and expression. Arbitrary arrest and detention of dissenters, lack of judicial independence, and accounts of police and prison official brutality, are also areas of concern. Societal discrimination against the Roma (Gypsy) community and homosexuals is tacitly endorsed by the government as well.

In 2007, Belarus failed to win a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council. Given the country's dubious record of human rights, this development was hailed as a necessary development within the international community and maintained the council's credibility.

In 2008, Belarus decided to expel several other American diplomats on the basis of United States' criticism of Belarus' human rights record. To that end, both the United States and the European

Union have called on Belarus to release its political prisoners, including former presidential candidate, Alexander Kozulin. Its later decision to release some political prisoners ahead of elections may have paved the way for a thawing of relations with the West, which was hoping that Belarus would make progress in terms of democratization and human rights reform.

On May 14, 2011, an opposition leader Andrei Sannikov was jailed for five years for organizing post-election protests. Since the presidential election in December 2010, which returned authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko to power in what was regarded as a non-competitive vote, political tensions have been on the rise in Belarus. While the opposition movement in Belarus has typically lacked influence in a country controlled by the strong fist of authoritarian President Lukashenko, the country has seen some large-scale protests in the aftermath of the 2010 disputed election. For his part, Sannikov has been regarded as one of the most well-known opposition figure and a particular target following a crackdown by the Lukashenko in the post-election period when protests and anti-government sentiment was on the rise. Sannikov's trial and sentence have been regarded as something of a politically-motivated sham by the international community.

At the close of September 2011, a diplomatic summit between Belarus, the European Union, and former Soviet era neighbors, ended abruptly when Belarus withdrew from the Eastern Partnership summit meeting, complaining that it was being subject to discrimination. Ironically, the summit had been aimed at improving relations between the parties. A serious issue of contention has been the condemnation by Western powers of Belarussian President Aleksandr Lukashenko for his autocratic tendencies, manifest by harsh repression of political opponents and critics. Indeed, the European Union has been adamant in its demands that Belarus release its political prisoners so that negotiations on financial aid and economic ties could commence. However, Belarus's Foreign Ministry countered with its own complaints that President Lukashenko had not been invited to attend the talks and that the Belarussian delegation had been excluded from certain events.

Former Belarusian presidential candidate and opposition politician Andrei Sannikov was reported to have vanished from a penal colony without a trace in mid-November 2011. The human rights group, Free Belarus, said in a statement: "Andrei Sannikov has disappeared from Babrujsk colony, neither his relatives nor his lawyer were told of the move." According to Amnesty International, Sannikov has been "a prisoner of conscience." The disturbing news of his disappearance was likely to bolster accusations that the autocratic rule of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has, at times, delved into the waters of tyranny in the face of dissent or opposition. For his part, Lukashenko has pointed to the fact that he declared pardons for 11 opposition activists who were detained during post-election violence in Minsk 2010. However, it should be noted that none of 11 detainees were considered political rivals of Lukashenko.

Mid-2012 saw a diplomatic row erupt between Belarus and Sweden in regard to Minsk's atrocious human rights record. At issue was the case of a Swedish-chartered plane dropping approximately

800 teddy bears over Belarus, each conveying a message that the Belarusian government should "show greater respect for human rights." Belarus reacted to the move by expelling Stefan Eriksson -- the Swedish ambassador in Minsk. Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt responed by announcing that the Belarusian ambassador was not welcome to Sweden. But the diplomatic "teddy bear" row leaked into the realm of domestic politics in Belarus when on Aug. 20, 2012, President Lukashenko dismissed Sergei Martynov of his duties as foreign minister. While the Belarusian leader gave no reason for this shake-up, the conventional wisdom was that it was linked to the imbroglio with Sweden.

Editor's Note:

Belarus has the dubious distinction of being home to one of Europe's last dictatorial bastions under the rule of President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Belarus also has seen declining levels of democratization and respect for human rights, manifested most clearly by the Lukasheno regime's harsh repression of political opponents and critics.

Human Development Index (HDI) Rank:

See Social Overview of Country Review for full list of rankings.

Human Poverty Index Rank:

Not Ranked

Gini Index:

30.4

Life Expectancy at Birth (years):

71 years

Unemployment Rate:

1.6%

Note-This number does not include the large number of underemployed workers

Population living on $1 a day (%):

N/A

Population living on $2 a day (%):

N/A

Population living beneath the Poverty Line (%):

27.1%

Internally Displaced People:

N/A

Note-There are currently some 8,000 refugees in Belarus

Total Crime Rate (%):

N/A

Health Expenditure (% of GDP):

Public: 4.7%

% of GDP Spent on Education:

6.0%

Human Rights Conventions Party to:

• International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
• International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
• International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
• International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
• Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
• Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
• Conventions on the Rights of the Child
• Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

*Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index that measures the level of well-being in 177 nations in the world. It uses factors such as poverty, literacy, life-expectancy, education, gross domestic product, and purchasing power parity to assess the average achievements in each nation.

It has been used in the United Nation's Human Development Report since 1993.

*Human Poverty Index Ranking is based on certain indicators used to calculate the Human Poverty Index. Probability at birth of not surviving to age 40, adult literacy rate, population without sustainable access to an improved water source, and population below income poverty line are the indicators assessed in this measure.

*The Gini Index measures inequality based on the distribution of family income or consumption. A value of 0 represents perfect equality (income being distributed equally), and a value of 100 perfect inequality (income all going to one individual).

*The calculation of the total crime rate is the % of the total population which has been effected by property crime, robbery, sexual assault, assault, or bribery (corruption) related occurrences.

Government Functions

Constitution

The constitution of Belarus was promulgated on March 15, 1994.

Note: The 1994 constitution was revised by national referendum in 1996, giving the presidency greatly expanded powers; the constitution was revised again in October 2004 removing presidential term limits.

Executive Authority

According to the 1994 constitution, the president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term of office and is the head of state and of the executive branch of government. The president adopts measures to guard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity; appoints and dismisses the chairman and members of the Cabinet of Ministers; appoints judges; heads the country's National Security Council; and serves as commander in chief of the armed forces. The president can be removed by a two-thirds vote in the parliament under certain circumstances, such as violating the constitution or committing a crime. The president, however, cannot dismiss the parliament or other elected governing bodies. The executive branch also includes the Cabinet of Ministers.

Legislative Authority

The bicameral "Natsionalnoye Sobranie" (parliament) was established by the 1996 constitutional referendum. The parliament consists of the "Soviet Respubliki" (Council of the Republic) and the "Palata Predstaviteley" (House of Representatives). The "Soviet Respubliki" has 64 members; the president appoints eight members; local council deputies elect 56. All members serve four-year terms. The "Palata Predstaviteley" has 110 members.

Judicial Authority

Judicial power is vested in a court system headed by the Constitutional Court, which consists of 11 judges nominated by the president and appointed by the Supreme Soviet. Several different state officials may request a Constitutional Court review of the constitutionality of international agreements or obligations to which Belarus is a party. These officials include the president, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, the permanent committees ofthe Supreme Soviet, a group of at least seventy deputies of the Supreme Soviet,the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court, and the Procurator General. TheConstitutional Court also reviews the constitutionality of domestic legal acts; presidential edicts; regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers; the constitution; laws; legal documents; and regulatory decisions of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court and the Procurator General. The Constitutional Court's decisions are final and not subject to appeal.

The mid-level courts are the regional courts; and then there are district courts. Judges appointed directly by the president preside over these courts. Trials in all courts are open. The parties involved in a case have the right to appeal judicial decisions, sentences, and other rulings. An appeal, however, consists merely of a higher court's review of the protocol and other documents of the original trial. In actual practice, decisions are rarely overturned. There is a separate system of military courts. Military judges are appointed directly by the president.

The Procuracy is a combination of a police investigative bureau and a public prosecutor's office. It investigates crimes, brings criminals to trial and prosecutes them. The Procuracy also supervises courts and penal facilities within its jurisdiction, reviews all court decisions in both civil and criminal cases, supervises investigations conducted by other government agencies, and ensures the uniform application of law in the courts.

The procurator general, appointed by the Supreme Soviet, heads the Procuracy. The procurator general then appoints each officer of the Procuracy, known as a procurator. The constitution states that the procurator general and his subordinate procurators are to function independently, yet the procuratorgeneral is accountable to the Supreme Soviet. Procurators are independent of regional

and local government bodies because they derive their authority from the procurator general. Procurators are generally quite influential because they supervise all criminal investigations; courts are extremely deferential to the procurators' actions, petitions, and conclusions.

Administrative Divisions

In addition to the government of the republic, there are six oblasts (provinces), rayons(districts), cities directly under oblasts, and towns, villages and settlements that make up the districts.

Government Structure

Names:
conventional long form:
Republic of Belarus
conventional short form:
Belarus
local long form:
Respublika Byelarus'
local short form:
Byelarus'
former:
Belorussian (Belarusian) Soviet Socialist Republic

Type:
Republic; authoritative in function

Executive Branch:
Head of state:
President Aleksandr LUKASHENKO (since 1994; re-elected in 2001, in 2006, in 2010, and in 2015); initially elected by popular vote for a five-year term; most recent elections held in 2015.

Note that following the 1994 elections, another election was expected to be held in 1999.

However, the November 1996 constitutional referendum extended the president's tenure in office an additional two years; another referendum in 2004 allowed the president to run for more than two terms, effectively ending term limits.

Primer on 2015 presidential election in Belarus:

A presidential election was set to be held in Belarus on Oct. 11, 2015. In Belarus, the president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The incumbent president of Belarus was Aleksandr Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994. He was expected to defend his presidency at the polls in 1999; however, the November 1996 constitutional referendum extended the president's tenure in office an additional two years. He was re-elected again in 2001, and then another referendum in 2004 allowed the president to run for more than two terms, effectively ending term limits. He won re-election in 2006 and 2010 and was expected to contest the 2015 voting exercise.

Of course, it should be noted that elections in Belarus are not competitive affairs, with the political landscape favoring the strongman incumbent President Lukashenko -- largely regarded as one of Europe's few autocratic leaders. To this end, Belarusian election officials have banned an opposition figure -- Mikolay Statkevich -- from contesting the presidential election. In fact, Statkevich would have had significant obstacles in running for president since he was serving a six-year prison sentence for orchestrating riots in the aftermath of the 2010 presidential election. It should be noted that Lukashenko pardoned Statkevich and several other political prisoners in mid-2015 in a fairly transparent bid to improve his reputation internationally. Still, because Statkevich had a criminal record, he was barred from contesting the election. In this way, there was not even a slight possibility that Lukashenko might be challenged by one of his more well-known rivals.

Instead, Lukashenko would have perfunctory opposition in the election contest in the form of three approved candidates including Belarus's first female presidential candidate, Tatsyana Karatkevich, an activist from the opposition movement Havary Pravdu (Tell the Truth). The other two candidates in the mix were the chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party, Syarhey Haydukyevich, and the leader of the Belarusian Patriotic Party, Mikalay Ulakhovich.

Note on election result:

The people of Belarus went to the polls on Oct. 11, 2015, and after the votes were counted, to the surprise of no one, President Lukashenko was re-elected to power handily with more than 80 percent of the vote share. The election was monitored by representatives from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who were expected to advance an elections report on the conduct of the 2015 elections in Belarus.

Head of government:

Prime Minister Mikhail MYASNIKOVICH (since December 2010); the prime minister and deputy prime ministers appointed by the president.

Note that Belarusian President Lukashenko appointed Mikhail Miasnikovich to be the country's new prime minister in a government reshuffle. Miasnikovich was set to replace Syarhey Sidorsky, who had been the country's prime minister since 2003. The move came in the aftermath of the presidential election, discussed just above. Miasnikovich, who headed the presidential administration from 1995-2001, is a well-known and respected figure on the political scene in Belarus.

Cabinet:
Council of Ministers

Legislative Branch:
Bicameral "Natsionalnoye Sobranie" (Parliament):
Consists of the "soviet Respubliki" (Council of the Republic) and the"Palata Predstaviteley" (House of Representatives)

"Soviet Respubliki" (Council of the Republic):
64 members; 8 appointed by the president, 56 indirectly elected by deputies of local councils for four-year terms

"Palata Predstaviteley" (House of Representatives):
110 members; elected by popular vote in single seat constituencies for four-year terms

Primer on 2012 parliamentary elections in Belarus
Sept. 23, 2012 (next elections to be held in 2016) --

Perhaps anticipating international criticism about the freedom and fairness of the impending vote, given Belarus' reputation was one of the least democratic countries in Europe, President Lukashenko said: "We won't conform to anyone from the outside. Elections are held for the Belarusian people and solely in the interest of the nation."

At stake in Belarus would be the composition of the bicameral "Natsionalnoye Sobranie" or parliament. In the 64-member "Soviet Respubliki" or Council of the Republic, eight members are appointed by the president, and 56 indirectly elected by deputies of local councils for four-year terms. Accordingly, the real election action would be in the 110-member "Palata Predstaviteley" or House of Representatives where members are elected by popular vote in single seat constituencies for four-year terms. In the previous elections held in September 2008, opposition politicians won no seats while the president's party retained full control of the entire country. As was the case in previous elections, there were charges of grave irregularities, complaints about the lack of influence afforded to the opposition, and an overall political climate unfavorable to dissent.

In 2012, ahead of the latest parliamentary vote, President Lukashenko warned against political provocations aimed at destabilizing the country; he promised that such perpetrators of instability would be brought to justice. The alternate interpretation of this warning was that dissent would not be tolerated in a country without a serious opposition on its way to the ballot box.

Ahead of election day, the country's two main opposition parties -- the United Civic and the Belarusian Popular Front or BPF parties -- called on voters to boycott the polls because of alleged fraud. They urged voters to refrain from participating in "pseudo-elections" that would simply usher in a House of Representatives whose task would be to validate or "rubber-stamp" President Lukashenko's agenda.

Nevertheless, on Sept. 23, 2012, it seemed that sufficient citizens of Belarus went to the polls to legitimate the election exercise, irrespective of the boycott. According to the Central Election Commission, more than 50 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the elections for all 110 seats in the "Palata Predstaviteley" or House of Representatives, which meant that the 50 percent threshold was met. The Central Election Commission issued a statement declaring that voter turnout was 65.9 percent and noting that the election was "valid." Although opposition entities called on the international community to disregard the vote in Belarus, election observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States asserted that the elections met international standards.

Judicial Branch:
Supreme Court; judges appointed by the president; Constitutional Court; half of the judges appointed by the president and half appointed by the House of Representatives

Constitution:
March 30, 1994; revised in 1996 and 2004 to provide for expanded presidential power and no limits on presidential tenure

Legal System:
Based on civil law system

Administrative Divisions:
Six voblastsi (singular - voblasts) and one municipality* (harady, singular- horad):
Brestskaya (Brest), Homyel'skaya (Homyel'), Horad Minsk*,Hrodzyenskaya (Hrodna), Mahilyowskaya (Mahilyow), Minskaya, Vitsyebskaya(Vitsyebsk)

Note:
Administrative divisions have the same names as their administrative centers. Exceptions have the administrative center name in parentheses.

Political Parties:
pro-government parties:
Belarusian Agrarian Party or AP [Mikhail SHIMANSKIY]
Belarusian Patriotic Party [Nikolai ULAKHOVICH]
Belarusian Socialist Sporting Party [Vladimir ALEKSANDROVICH]
Communist Party of Belarus or KPB [Igor KARPENKO]
Liberal Democratic Party or LDP [Sergey GAYDUKEVICH]
Republican Party [Vladimir BELOZOR]
Republican Party of Labor and Justice [Vasiliy ZADNEPRYANIY]

opposition parties:
Belarusian Christian Democracy Party [Pavel SEVERINETS] (unregistered)
Belarusian Liberal Party of Freedom and Progress [Vladimir NOVOSYAD] (unregistered)
Belarusian Party of the Green [Oleg NOVIKOV]
Belarusian Party of the Left "Fair World" [Sergey KALYAKIN]
Belarusian Popular Front or BPF [Aleksey YANUKEVICH]
Belarusian Social-Democratic Assembly [Stanislav SHUSHKEVICH]
Belarusian Social Democratic Party ("Assembly") or BSDPH [Irina VESHTARD]
Belarusian Social Democratic Party (People's Assembly) [Nikolay STATKEVICH] (unregistered)
Christian Conservative Party or BPF [Zyanon PAZNYAK]
United Civic Party or UCP [Anatoliy LEBEDKO]

Suffrage:
18 years of age; universal

Principal Government Officials

Cabinet and Leadership of Belarus

The spellings of names of Belarusian officials reflect widely recognized Russian spellings --

Pres.
Aleksandr LUKASHENKO
Prime Min.
Mikhail MYASNIKOVICH
First Dep. Prime Min.
Vladimir SEMASHKO
Dep. Prime Min.
Anatoliy KALININ
Dep. Prime Min.
Petr PROKOPOVICH
Dep. Prime Min.
Mikhail RUSYY
Dep. Prime Min.
Anatoliy TOZIK
Min. of Agriculture & Food
Leonid ZAYATS
Min. of Architecture & Construction
Anatoliy NICHKASOV
Min. of Communications & Information Technology
Nikolay PANTELEY
Min. of Culture
Borys SVETLOV
Min. of Defense
Yuriy ZHADOBIN
Min. of Economics
Nikolay SNOPKOV
Min. of Education
Sergey MASKEVICH
Min. of Emergency Situations
Vladimir VASHCHENKO
Min. of Energy
Aleksandr OZERETS
Min. of Finance
Andrey KHARKOVETS
Min. of Foreign Affairs

Vladimir MAKEY
Min. of Forestry
Mikhail AMELYANOVICH
Min. of Health
Vasiliy ZHARKO
Min. of Housing & Municipal Services
Andrey SHORETS
Min. of Industry
Dmitriy KATERINICH
Min. of Information
Oleg PROLESKOVSKIY
Min. of Internal Affairs
Igor SHUNEVICH
Min. of Justice
Oleg SLIZHEVSKIY
Min. of Labor & Social Security
Marianna SHCHETKINA
Min. of Natural Resources & Environmental Protection
Vladimir TSALKO
Min. of Sports & Tourism
Aleksandr SHAMKO
Min. of Taxes & Duties
Vladimir POLUYAN
Min. of Trade
Valentin CHEKANOV
Min. of Transport & Communication
Anatol SIVAK
Chief, Presidential Admin.
Andrey KOBYAKOV
Chmn., Ctte. for State Security (KGB)
Valery VAKULCHIK
State Sec., Security Council
Leonid MALTSEV
Prosecutor Gen.
Aleksandr KONYUK
Chmn., National Bank
Nadezhda YERMAKOVA
Permanent Representative to the UN, New York
Andrey DAPKYUNAS

-- as of 2016

Leader Biography

Leader Biography

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS	
Name	Alexandr Grigorjevich Lukashenko
Date of Birth	August 30, 1954
Place of Birth	Kopys, Vitebsk
Civil Status	Married
Children	Two sons

Education	
Previous Positions	
Present Positions	
	History teacher

Foreign Relations

General Relations

In late 1992, more than 100 countries had recognized Belarus, and nearly 70 of them had established some level of diplomatic relations. Belarus, however ,had a limited number of embassies abroad because its diplomatic activities were financially constrained. There was also a shortage of experienced diplomats who were Belarusian citizens; international relations had been the purview of Moscow during the Soviet era and continued to be mainly the purview of ethnic Russians residing in, but not citizens of, Belarus.

Belarus is actively working to become a full member of the international community. Under an arrangement with the former Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.), Belarus was an original member of the United Nations. Belarus is also a member of: the Commonwealth of Independent States, a group of 12 former Soviet republics also called the CIS, and its customs union; the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; NATO's Partnership for Peace; the North Atlantic Cooperation Council; the International Monetary Fund; the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank); and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The government has supported CIS and OSCE efforts to resolve regional disputes; Minsk serves as the headquarters of the CIS.

Belarus also has observer status at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and its successor, the World Trade Organization. In 1995 however, the Council of Europe declared Belarus to be ineligible for membership because of shortcomings in its electoral procedures and laws, including restrictions on mass media coverage of the spring 1995 parliamentary campaign and restrictions on candidates' campaign expenditures.

Belarusian authorities, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have been trying to promote the widest possible contacts with Belarusians living abroad (and particularly in the West), with an eye to developing economic and cultural cooperation. The Belarusian domestic media have devoted an increasing amount of attention to the life of émigrés, including their past and present activities. A number of cultural exchanges, conferences, and joint ventures took place during the early 1990s; a World Reunion of Belarusians was held in the republic's capital in 1993.

These initiatives are not, however, universally sanctioned throughout the republic. From the ultraconservatives came denunciations of the émigrés for their alleged collaboration with the Nazis duringWorld War II, and their employment by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. In response, the democratic opposition groups have engaged in their own cooperative efforts with Belarusian émigré organizations, through which they have reached out for contacts with Western politicians and governments.

Regional Relations

On Mar. 29, 1996, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan signed an accord calling for closer political, economic, trade and cultural integration, similar to the European Union. A common market of goods and services, unified transport, joint communications and a common currency are envisioned. The agreement is valid for five years and may be extended.

Leaders from Belarus, Russia and four other former Soviet republics have considered plans for a regional rapid reaction force. The countries are seeking ways to avert what they say is a threat from Islamic extremism and drug smuggling in Central Asia. Russian President Vladimir Putin met in May 2001leaders of Belarus, Armenia and the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for a two-day summit, during which they discussed the creation of a regional rapid reaction force.

The six countries are signatories of a 1992 treaty on collective security loosely tied to the Commonwealth of Independent States, a wider 12-memberpost-Soviet grouping. The security situation in Central Asia was very threatening due to the risk of Islamic extremism, the participants observed. Kyrgyz Defense Minister Esen Topoyev said the force's headquarters would be in his country's capital city. It would be formed from battalions from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Russia under a Russian commander.

The security grouping initially consisted of nine members, but Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan withdrew, saying it was ineffective and too strongly dominated by Russia. With the military success of the radical Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan, Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan and Krygyzstan, have sought stronger security co-operation. Russia has also used fears of Islamic extremism to justify its military campaign in Chechnya, saying rebels there were trying to form a Muslim state. It has highlighted what it calls an arc of extremism, including Afghanistan, Kosovo and Chechnya.

In 2009, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine joined the Eastern Partnership, an entity which was facilitated by the European Union (EU).

Note:

Latvia and Belarus were involved in a diplomatic fracas in mid-2006. Belarus state television showed hidden camera footage of what was presented to be a Latvian diplomat involved in intimate and private sexual activities. The Latvian Foreign Ministry reacted furiously by accusing Belarus of carrying out an "unprecedented attack" on one of its diplomats, with the clear objective of provocation and humiliation. To this end, Artis Pabriks, the Latvian Foreign Minister said, "This is a very strong provocation, which shows what kind of justice system exists in this

dictatorship." Pabriks went on to state, "It is in breach of the Vienna Convention, because it was a violation of the private space of our diplomat." He also denounced Belarus for failing to deal with the situation saying, "There is no co-operation whatsoever from the Belarussian side."

Soon thereafter, Latvia declared the first secretary of the embassy of Belarus in Riga to be persona non grata and issued 24-hours notice for the official to leave the country. Latvia did not go into details about its decision, saying only that the diplomat was being expelled for actions "incompatible with the status of a diplomat."

Other Significant Relations

Relations with Russia

Since declaring its independence from the former Soviet Union, the Republic of Belarus has pursued greater economic and other integration with Russia. Since his election in July 1994, President Lukashenko has taken several steps to create closer political, economic, and military links with Russia. One prominent measure was the signing of a Belarus-Russian Union Treaty on April 2, 1997. The agreement provides for close coordination of foreign, military, and economic policies between the two countries, including freedom of movement of its citizens, right of residency, property ownership, and participation in local elections. One year earlier (1996), a treaty on the formation of the Community of Belarus and Russia declared similar goals, including measures to harmonize customs, labor, energy, tax and investment policies in the two countries.

On April 27-28, 1999, President Lukashenko met with Russian President Boris Yeltsin. While their discussion fell short of committing the two states to a definitive treaty of unification, they did sign 11 agreements concerning border controls, their customs union, and joint security and defense. President Lukashenko said that while he was disappointed with the slow pace of unification, the talks had been constructive, and negotiations between the two states would continue.

Some eight years after declaring its independence from the U.S.S.R., Belarus reverted to building a dependent relationship with Moscow. Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed in December 1999 a treaty to create a formal confederation between the two countries.

Under the treaty, the two countries will create High Council consisting of their presidents, prime ministers and parliamentary speakers, although it is not clear what powers this body will have. The agreement also proposes the eventual merger of the two countries' currencies, but does not set any time frame.

The closeness of relations between Russia and Belarus has prompted Moscow to defend its Minsk

ally against international accusations of human-rights abuses. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, visiting the Belarusian capital Minsk accused the West of treating Belarus unfairly. In comments broadcast by Belarusian radio and reported by the BBC, Ivanov said there was much bias against Belarus, just as there was in relation to the situation in Chechnya.
In late December 2000, President Lukashenko and President Putin of Russia began to intensify efforts aimed at uniting Belarus and Russia. The first step was to adopt a common currency.

Some tensions flared between the two countries in 2004 regarding a gas deal. As well, in July 2004, a Russian media outlet was shut down in Belarus after it reported mass anti-Lukashenko demonstrations during the commemoration celebrations of the 10-year anniversary of the president being in power. The authorities in Belarus charged that the Russian media had inflated the size of the protests in its reporting.

But also in 2004, Russia dissented from the Council of Europe's call for sanctions against Belarus over its human rights situation. Russia cautioned that a hard line approach would only serve to isolate Belarus.

Late 2006 and early 2007 were marked by an imbroglio involving Russia and Belarus. In late 2006, an agreement was forged in which Belarus was largely compelled to accept Russian gas supplies at double the previous price. Belarus subsequently retaliated by imposing a new tax on Russian oil shipments that traversed the country, while Russia reacted by refusing to pay the new taxes.

The situation became increasingly heated in the second week of January 2007 when the Russian state-owned pipeline firm Transneft closed the Druzhba or "Friendship" pipe. Russia also accused Belarus of siphoning off oil supplies as an illicit means of payment for unpaid taxes and duties. Representatives of the two countries held talks and the situation was eventually resolved. The flow of Russian oil resumed, and assurances were advanced that such stoppages would not occur again.

The situation was reminiscent of Russia's earlier argument with various other countries in Eastern Europe, which was also spurred by the increased price of gas supplies. As in those cases, Russia said that the price increase was in keeping with market rates, while other countries complained that the new pricing structure was untenable.

In August 2007, Russian said it would decrease its gas supplies to Belarus by half as a result of prevailing debts -- that is, the outstanding payment for energy supplies. Two months later, President Lukashenko said that his country would construct nuclear power facilities to meet energy demands in light of the Russian energy issue. But Belarus struck a cooperative tone with Russia, offering at the close of 2007 to allow Russia to host missiles on its soil if the United States moved forward with a controversial plan to build military bases in Poland and the Czech Republic.

In June 2009, tensions rose with Russia when that country imposed a ban on dairy products from Belarus out of health concerns. In response, Belarus moved to establish a customs post on the border of the two countries -- a move intended to denote symbolic meaning in the wake of the embargo. While the respective moves by Belarus and Russia were subsequently reversed in a bid to decrease tensions, dissonance flared again at the start of 2010 when Belarus threatened to cut electricity supplies to the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad. At issue was an ongoing dispute with Russia over oil supplies to Belarus. That matter was subsequently resolved by denominating a specific amount of duty-free oil from Russia to Belarus.

Relations with the United States; Europe Union

In November 1996, Belarus went through a major constitutional crisis caused by President Lukashenko's holding a binding referendum on a new constitution extending his presidential term to 2001 and giving him near absolute power including control over the parliament and the courts. The referendum was widely considered to be undemocratic and flawed.

Following the referendum, worsening human rights problems, and a lack of significant market reforms, the United States (U.S.) announced the suspension of all U.S. government-funded assistance to the government of Belarus and state-run institutions. This suspension included a travel ban on Belarus government officials at the deputy-minister level and above.

A subsequent travel ban on President Lukashenko and several government ministers were put into place in 2002 after officials from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were expelled. (Several European Union countries also established a travel ban in response to this action.) Although the U.S. and the European Union (EU) lifted the ban in 2003, they continued to decry Belarus' human rights record and political repression in 2004.

In response to the results of elections deemed to be fraudulent in 2004, the European Union had again issued travel restrictions on government officials of Belarus and the United States followed suit with sanctions.

In April 2005, international relations were at the forefront of the political spectrum when United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called Belarus the "last dictatorship in Europe" during a trip to Europe. These comments came during Rice's meeting with members of Belarus' opposition as well as a number of dissidents. During that meeting, Rice promised there would be "a road to democracy in Belarus" and defended the notion of public protests, which had recently been seen in the recent developments in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia.

The country's pro-government media reacted with outrage. Indeed, one television announcer said

that the U.S. wished to "unleash mayhem and banditry in Belarusian cities." In another media report on state-run television, Rice's comments were called "unprecedented" and she was accused of ignoring international law. Overall, her statements were characterized as a meddlesome attack of sorts on the country's sovereignty.

Earlier, the U.S. government also advised potential American investors to seek trade and investment opportunities in neighboring countries due to the high risk of doing business in Belarus.

The arrest of opposition leader Aleksander Kozulin just after the election of 2006 was met with shock by the EU and the U.S. They announced the imposition of sanctions as a result of the hardline stance by the autocratic regime headed by Lukashenko. As well, the European Union imposed a visa ban on the leader of Belarus, as well as several cabinet ministers and other top officials.

As noted above, Belarus failed to win a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2007 as a result of its dubious record of human rights.

A year later in May 2008, the geopolitical landscape was at the forefront of people's attention in the region when Belarus decided to withdrew its ambassador from Washington and called on the United States to remove its own ambassador from Belarussian territory. At issue was Belarus' contention that the United States was recruiting citizens as spies. Tensions were not helped by the threat of sanctions on the United States' side, as well as Belarus' decision to expel several other American diplomats on the basis of United States' criticism of Belarus' human rights record. To that end, both the United States and the European Union have called on Belarus to release its political prisoners, including former presidential candidate, Alexander Kozulin.

Belarus held a parliamentary election on September 28, 2008. Ahead of the election, parliament passed laws that would notably restrict the online reporting and also affect funding of private media. Critics said that the move was aimed at controlling the transmittance of free information at a time when people required political education ahead of the voting. Such contentions did not help prevailing anxieties about Belarus' respect for human rights and freedom.

Leading up to the election, President Alexander Lukashenko was coming under political attack from other countries, including the United States, for holding of several political prisoners. Many political analysts and a United States Ambassador to Belarus believed that said prisoners could be released prior to the elections in September in the hopes that the move has a positive affect on the outcome. Indeed, in an effort to convey a sense of legitimacy to the election, given the history of seriously flawed elections in this country, the president ordered the political prisoner to be released and allowed around 70 opposition candidates to stand for election. Lukashenko also allowed election monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to observe the election. Perhaps railing from an unfavorable characterization by the United States that he is the

"last dictator in Europe," Lukashenko appeared intent on showing that he was moving in the direction of democratic reforms.

Following the elections, in a move the signified a potential thawing of relations with the West, the United States said it would lift some sanctions against Belarus to show approval for Belarus' decision to release some dissidents, as noted above. As well, the European Union moved to lift its travel ban on President Alexander Lukashenko. The European bloc said its decision was aimed at moving Belarus further along the path of democratic reform.

Regional relations concerning Belarus were not easily improved for the long-term. In May 2009, President Lukashenko decided to reject an invitation from the European Union to attend the "Eastern Partnership" summit with six former Soviet states in Prague.

Diplomatic "teddy bear" row between Belarus and Sweden

Mid-2012 saw a diplomatic row erupt between Belarus and Sweden in regard to Minsk's atrocious human rights record. At issue was the case of a Swedish-chartered plane dropping approximately 800 teddy bears over Belarus, each conveying a message that the Belarusian government should "show greater respect for human rights." Belarus reacted to the move by expelling Stefan Eriksson -- the Swedish ambassador in Minsk. Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt responded by announcing that the Belarusian ambassador was not welcome to Sweden. But the diplomatic "teddy bear" row leaked into the realm of domestic politics in Belarus when on Aug. 20, 2012, President Lukashenko dismissed Sergei Martynov of his duties as foreign minister. While the Belarusian leader gave no reason for this shake-up, the conventional wisdom was that it was linked to the imbroglio with Sweden.

Special Entry

Cracks form in Russia-Belarus alliance as Belarusian President warns Russia against territorial encroachment

In late January 2015, cracks began to form in the normally strong Russia-Belarus alliance. With Russia backing pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and annexing Crimea a year earlier, Belarus -- like many of Russia's neighbors -- was suddenly wary of Russia's imperial ambitions, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's apparent hopes to reconstitute the Soviet empire.

Former Soviet republics, such as Belarus, now had a firm sense of sovereignty and independence and were not willing to return to their Soviet past, regardless of seemingly strong relations with Russia. Still, it came as something of a surprise when Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko

declared in vociferous language that his country would never be part of the "Russian world" -- a term adopted by the Russian Kremlin as Moscow seeks to draw its former republics back under its umbrella.

The most immediate tactic Moscow has adopted in drawing its former republics back into its orbit has been via economic deals. Indeed, it was precisely Russian pressure on the Yanukovych presidency of Ukraine to abandon its association agreement with the European Union, to and sign onto a customs deal with Russia instead, which spurred the Ukrainian Maidan and ultimately the ongoing crisis.

It should be noted that Belarus has played a key regional role in the Ukrainian crisis, hosting talks that led to the (now collapsed) Minsk ceasefire agreement of 2014. But as Russia has sought to extend a controlling hand over Belarus' assets, the Belarusian president was keen to draw the proverbial line in the sand. For Belarus, suspicion of Russia was sparked when Moscow tried to retrict exports in violation of the regulations ensconced within the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Belarus warned that if the rules of the Eurasian Economic Union were not observed, it would withdraw from the alliance.

Known infamously as "Europe's last dictator" because of his autocratic governing style, President Lukashenko has long been regarded as a stalwart of Russia. However, it would seem that even "Europe's last dictator" had his own limits when it came to an alliance with Russia. Thus, President Lukashenko made it clear that Belarus' independence would have to be respected as he declared, "Those who think that the Belarusian land is part as what they call the Russian world, almost part of Russia, forget about it!" He continued, "Belarus is a modern and independent state."

Lukashenko went one step further, noting that he wished to normalize ties with the West. It was a move certain to infuriate Moscow, which seeks the opposite outcome. However, as Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine exists, it has stood as reminder to surrounding countries of their own vulnerability, and concomitantly driven stalwart allies, such as Belarus, in a Westward direction.

Nevertheless, the Belarus capital of Minsk was the venue for fresh peace talks on eastern Ukraine in February 2015. It was to be seen if the new agreement would be sustainable and if stability would return to eastern Ukraine.

Editor's Note:

Belarus has the dubious distinction of being home to one of Europe's last dictatorial bastions under the rule of President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Belarus also has seen declining levels of democratization and respect for human rights, manifested most clearly by the Lukasheno regime's harsh repression of political opponents and critics. However, as of 2015, with the encroachment of

Russia into neighboring nation states, Belarus was intimating that it was interested in improving its ties with the West.

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com; see Bibliography for research sources.

National Security

External Threats

Belarusdoes not face any immediate threats from foreign nations. Its precise boundaries remain ill-defined; however, undermining the country's territorial integrity, and poor relations with donor nations have hampered development. A 1997 border treaty between Belarus and the Ukrainehas yet to be ratified due to an unresolved financial dispute between the two countries. Consequently, their mutual border has not been officially demarcated, contributing to frequent incursions. Likewise, boundaries with Latvia and Lithuaniahave yet to be demarcated.

Poor relations between Belarus and the United States (U.S.) in particular, as well as several Western European nations, have inhibited progress. President Alexander Lukashenko was elected into office in 1994. His authoritarian style of rule has thwarted the emergence of democracy in the fledgling republic. He has a particularly poor record on human rights. He provoked a diplomatic row by confiscating several diplomatic residences, including those of the U.S., France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and the International Monetary Fund and refused to pay compensation. Thus, Lukashenko has not exactly ingratiated himself to traditional donor nations, impeding Belarus' overall development.

U.S. economic aid to Belarus has decreased substantially and most now flows through non-governmental organizations, rather than Belarus' central government. In addition, the U.S also has a policy of selective engagement towards Belarusand only lower level diplomatic visits occur.

Crime

Crime poses a risk to public safety in Belarus. Foreigners and foreign cars are the popular targets of petty street crimes. It is also not uncommon for the police to unlawfully detain or beat those

who participate in un-sponsored rallies. Politically motivated kidnappings also occur. Trafficking of persons is also becoming a substantial problem. In addition to these actions, the cultivation and trafficking of illicit substances occurs on a limited scale in Belarus. Small amounts of opium poppy and cannabis are grown, mostly for domestic consumption. Belarus is also a transit point for narcotics en route to the other Baltic States, Russia and Western Europe.

Insurgencies

At present no insurgent movements threaten the authority of Belarus' central government. Organized and spontaneous demonstrations do occur, however, especially in Minskand other larger cities.

Terrorism

Belarushas not traditionally been a target of terrorist violence, nor is it a direct sponsor of terrorism. However, according to the U.S. State Department, Belarus has sold arms, as well as related equipment and services, to countries that the United States has labeled as state-sponsors of terrorism including Libya, Syria, and the Iraq, prior to the ousting of Saddam Hussein. Given Belarus' economic plight and Cold War-era inventory of weapons, such transfers are likely to pose an ongoing threat to global security. On a positive note, per agreements entered into after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Belarusreportedly relinquished the last of its nuclear weapons in 1996.

In an effort to help join the global war on terror, Belarusjoined the EuroAsian Group for the prevention of legalization of criminal profits and financing terrorism.

Defense Forces

Military Data

Military Branches:

BelarusArmed Forces: Land Force, Air and Air Defense Force, Special Operations Force

Eligible age to enter service:

18

Mandatory Service Terms:

12-18 months for conscripted service

Manpower in general population-fit for military service:

males age 16-49: 1,693,626

females age 16-49: 2,102,401

Manpower reaching eligible age annually:

male: 51,855

female: 48,760

Military Expenditures, percentage of GDP:

1.3%

Chapter 3

Economic Overview

Economic Overview

Overview

As part of the former Soviet Union, Belarus had a relatively well-developed industrial base, which it retained following the breakup of the U.S.S.R. As a result, Belarus' economy today is highly industrialized and largely dependent on imported energy and raw materials mostly from Russia and other CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries. The industrial sector, trade and services are the main sources of economic growth. With limited market-oriented reforms, Belarus retains many features of a planned economy, and restrictive economic policies have held out foreign investment.

Despite lagging structural reforms, Belarus experienced rapid economic growth in the ten years up to 2008, underpinned by high investment, high export prices, strong growth in trading partners, and large energy subsidies from Russia. However, the reversal of these factors put Belarus in a highly vulnerable position when the global economic crisis started in late 2008, as the country dealt with falling external demand, reduced gas subsidy from Russia, and difficulties in accessing external finance. Against this backdrop, in January 2009, the Belarus government launched a new economic program supported by the IMF Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) aimed to facilitate adjustment to external shocks and reduce vulnerability. Also in 2009, Belarus devalued the ruble more than 40 percent and tightened some of its fiscal and monetary policies. As a result of implementing the SBA program, Belarus has so far escaped a significant drop in output despite a sharp fall in external demand. Although growth has declined, the economy is stabilizing with economic activity supported by strong domestic demand. There has in particular been an uptick in housing construction, financed under government programs. On Jan. 1, 2010, Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus jointly launched a customs union, with unified trade regulations and customs codes still under negotiation Then, in December 2010, Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement to form a Common Economic Space and Russia removed all Belarusian oil duties. Excessive government spending in the run-up to the 2010 presidential election led to a balance-of-payments crisis in 2011.

By March 2011, Belarus was reportedly seeking $3 billion in loans from Russia and an emergency fund that links ex-Soviet republics - $1 billion from Russia and $2 billion from the emergency fund, which is mainly financed by Russia and Kazakhstan. The loans would be contingent upon Belarus implementing structural reforms to its centrally controlled economy, and on privatization. Also in March 2011, the International Monetary Fund issued a harsh warning to Belarus, noting that the country's expansionary economic policies had made the current account gap unsustainable and

difficult to finance without reforms. The IMF also called for immediate and long-reaching policy adjustments as a form of damage control against recent public wage increases, overspending by the government on housing, agriculture and other sectors, and foreign currency borrowing from domestic banks. In November 2011, Belarus and Russia reached an agreement to drastically reduce the price of natural gas in exchange for selling to Russia the remaining share of Beltransgaz, the Belarusian natural gas pipeline operator. Government-directed salary hikes unsupported by commensurate productivity increases triggered a financial crisis in 2011. The crisis was compounded by an increased cost in Russian energy inputs and an overvalued Belarusian ruble, and eventually led to a near three-fold devaluation of the Belarusian ruble in 2011. The situation has since stabilized short-term thanks to a $3 billion loan from the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Community Bail-out Fund, a $1 billion loan from the Russian state-owned bank Sberbank, and the $2.5 billion sale of Beltranzgas to Russian state-owned Gazprom.

By March 2012, the IMF was noting that the Belarus government and the National Bank had made progress in reducing inflation and narrowing external imbalances. It also praised the country for adopting sound policies, including a balanced budget, tight limits on lending under government programs, and firm control over credit. But the IMF warned that a consistent plan for the economy needed to be developed while inflation needed to be further contained. In May 2012, Standard & Poor's revised its outlook on Belarus to stable from negative, citing an "improving economy and liquidity." Also in May, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko called for dialogue with the European Union, which had tightened sanctions against the country. By year's end , despite positive developments, the Belarusian currency had lost more than 60 percent of its value.
Standard & Poor's again revised its outlook on Belarus in April 2013 – this time to "positive from stable," citing strengthening economic stability resulting from tightened monetary and fiscal policies. The ratings agency pointed out that the government's moves to cut public spending and raise interest rates drastically reduced the country's inflation rate in 2012 compared to more than 100 percent in 2011.

However, the country was still not heeding IMF calls for deep market reforms. In January 2013, Belarussian exports declined 13 percent year-on-year , leading to a 71 percent dip in the trade surplus. In early 2013, the government sought a $2 billion loan from Russia to finance its plan of buying new equipment to upgrade existing industrial facilities in an effort to boost productivity. But critics of the plan charged that even with new equipment, managers of state-run companies would need more incentives to improve efficiencies. After reaching new highs in 2011 and 2012, inflation calmed down in 2013 – although it remained in double digits. Overall, the country saw slow growth in 2013.

As of January 2014, the final tranche – about $440 million - of the EurAsCE loan had been delayed due to non-compliance with about ten obligations stipulated by the loan program, most importantly the privatization obligation. However, in December 2013, Russia announced it would loan up to $2 billion to Belarus in 2014. In the first few months of 2014, the Belarusian ruble

declined by 3.15 percent to the U.S. dollar.

Notwithstanding foreign assistance, the Belarusian economy continued to struggle under the weight of high external debt servicing payments and trade deficit. In mid-December 2014, structural economic shortcomings were aggravated by the devaluation of the Russian ruble and triggered a near 40 percent devaluation of the Belarusian ruble. Belarus entered 2015 with stagnant economic growth and reduced hard currency reserves, with under one month of import cover.

In early January 2015, Belarus continued to defend itself from economic turmoil in Russia, again devaluing its currency - by about 7 percent - for the second time that week, raising its main refinancing rate and imposing a new export tax on potash.

In March 2015, the government said it would ask the IMF for a new financing package. Later in the month, the IMF's chief envoy to Minsk said that Belarus would have to allow a flexible currency rate to receive further financial support from the IMF, predicting the country's economy would shrink by two percent in 2015. To secure a new IMF program, Belarus needed to express at the highest level its intentions of carrying out a comprehensive package of measures, the IMF's David Hoffman said at a briefing in Minsk as quoted by Reuters.

In a May 2015 report, the IMF noted that Belarus' economic model continued to make it highly vulnerable to economic shocks. This was illustrated once more by the turbulence in foreign exchange and debt markets in late 2014, to which the authorities initially responded with administrative measures before allowing partial exchange rate adjustment. With Russia in recession, a large projected current account deficit, sizable debt repayments, limited market access, and presidential elections in November, risks remained high.

Economic Performance

Belarus' centralized economy experienced rapid growth in the past decade, which owed much to favorable terms for imported energy from Russia. The resulting large and increasing terms-of-trade gains had been redistributed, financing rapid wage increases and budgetary support to enterprises and large-scale investment projects. Strong growth and rising incomes strengthened consumer confidence, further contributing to increasing domestic demand. As a result, real GDP growth was in the range of 8-10 percent. However, the global economic crisis resulted in large falls in external demand and export prices, leading to declining growth. Nevertheless, Belarus has avoided a sharp fall in output that has hit most of its neighbors, as strong domestic demand supported by government-financed housing construction program has offset the weakness in exports.

According to CountryWatch estimated calculations for 2014:

Real GDP growth rate was: 1.5 percent
Inflation was measured at: 18.5 percent

The fiscal deficit/surplus as percent of GDP (%) was: 0.1 percent

Updated in 2015

**Please note that the figures in our Economic Performance section are estimates or forecasts based on IMF-based data that are formulated using CountryWatch models of analysis.*

Supplementary Sources: Reuters, Standard & Poor's, International Monetary Fund

Special Entry

Summary of 2008 credit crisis

A financial farrago, rooted in the credit crisis, became a global phenomenon by the start of October 2008. In the United States, after failure of the passage of a controversial bailout plan in the lower chamber of Congress, an amended piece of legislation finally passed through both houses of Congress. There were hopes that its passage would calm jitters on Wall Street and restore confidence in the country's financial regime. With the situation requiring rapid and radical action, a new proposal for the government to bank stakes was gaining steam. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic in Europe, a spate of banking crises resulted in nationalization measures for the United Kingdom bank, Bradford and Bingley, joint efforts by the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg to shore up Fortis, joint efforts by France, Belgium, and Luxembourg to shore up Delia, a rescue plan for Hypo Real Estate, and the quasi-bankruptcy of Iceland's economy. Indeed, Iceland's liabilities were in gross excess of the country's GDP. With further banks also in jeopardy of failing, and with no coordinated efforts to stem the tide by varying countries of the European Union, there were rising anxieties not only about the resolving the financial crisis, but also about the viability of the European bloc.

On Sept. 4, 2008, the leaders of key European states -- United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy -- met in the French capital city of Paris to discuss the financial farrago and to consider possible action. The talks, which were hosted by French President Nicolas Sarcoxie, ended without consensus on what should be done to deal with the credit crisis, which was rapidly becoming a global phenomenon. The only thing that the four European countries agreed upon was that there would not be a grand rescue plan, akin to the type that was initiated in the United States. As well, they jointly called for greater regulation and a coordinated response. To that latter end, President Nicolas Sarkozy said, "Each government will operate with its own methods and means, but in a coordinated manner."

This call came after Ireland took independent action to deal with the burgeoning financial crisis.

Notably, the Irish government decided days earlier to fully guarantee all deposits in the country's major banks for a period of two years. The Greek government soon followed suit with a similar action. These actions by Ireland and Greece raised the ire of other European countries, and evoked questions of whether Ireland and Greece had violated any European Union charters.

Nevertheless, as anxieties about the safety of bank deposits rose across Europe, Ireland and Greece saw an influx of new banking customers from across the continent, presumably seeking the security of knowing their money would be safe amidst a financial meltdown. And even with questions rising about the decisions of the Irish and Greek government, the government of Germany decided to go down a similar path by guaranteeing all private bank accounts. For his part, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said that his government would increase the limit on guaranteed bank deposits from £35,000 to £50,000.

In these various ways, it was clear that there was no concurrence among some of Europe's most important economies. In fact, despite the meeting in France, which called for coordination among the countries of the European bloc, there was no unified response to the global financial crisis. Instead, that meeting laid bare the divisions within the countries of the European Union, and called into question the very viability of the European bloc. Perhaps that question of viability would be answered at a forthcoming G8 summit, as recommended by those participating in the Paris talks.

A week later, another meeting of European leaders in Paris ended with concurrence that no large institution would be allowed to fail. The meeting, which was attended by leaders of euro zone countries, resulted in an agreement to guarantee loans between banks until the end of 2009, with an eye on easing the credit crunch. The proposal, which would apply in 15 countries, also included a plan for capital infusions by means of purchasing preference shares from banks. The United Kingdom, which is outside the euro zone, had already announced a similar strategy.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy argued that these unprecedented measures were of vital importance. The French leader said, "The crisis has over the past few days entered into a phase that makes it intolerable to opt for procrastination and a go-it-alone approach."

Europe facing financial crisis as banking bail-out looms large

In early 2009, according to the European Commission, European banks may be in need of as much as several trillion in bailout funding. Impaired or toxic assets factor highly on the European Union bank balance sheets. Economist Nouriel Roubini warned that the economies of Ukraine, Belarus, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania appeared to be on the brink of disaster. Overall, Eastern European countries borrowed heavily from Western European banks. Thus, even if the currencies on the eastern part of the continent collapse, effects will be felt in the western part of Europe as well. For example, Swiss banks that gave billions of credit to Eastern Europe cannot look forward to repayment anytime soon. As well, Austrian banks have had extensive exposure to Eastern

Europe, and can anticipate a highly increased cost of insuring its debt. German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrueck has warned that as many as 16 European Union countries would require assistance. Indeed, his statements suggested the need for a regional rescue effort.

European Union backs financial regulation overhaul

With the global financial crisis intensifying, leaders of European Union countries backed sweeping financial regulations. Included in the package of market reforms were sanctions on tax havens, caps on bonus payments to management, greater hedge fund regulation, and increased influence by the International Monetary Fund. European leaders also backed a charter of sustainable economic activity, that would subject all global financial activities to both regulation and accountability by credit rating agencies.

These moves were made ahead of the Group of 20 summit scheduled for April 2, 2009, in London. It was not known whether other countries outside Europe, such as the United States, Japan, India and China, would support the new and aggressive regime of market regulation. That said, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in Berlin that Europe had a responsibility to chart this track. She said, "Europe will own up to its responsibility in the world."

Leaders forge $1 trillion deal at G-20 summit in London

Leaders of the world's largest economies, known as the "G-20," met in London to explore possible responses to the global financial crisis. To that end, they forged a deal valued at more than US$1 trillion.

Central to the agreement was an infusion of $750 billion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was aimed at helping troubled economies. Up to $100 billion of that amount was earmarked to assist the world's very poorest countries -- an amount far greater than had been expected. In many senses, the infusion of funding to the IMF marked a strengthening of that body unseen since the 1980s.

In addition, the G-20 leaders settled on a $250 billion increase in global trade. The world's poorest countries would also benefit from the availability of $250 billion of trade credit.

After some debate, the G-20 leaders decided to levy sanctions against clandestine tax havens and to institute strict financial regulations. Such regulations included tougher controls on banking professionals' salaries and bonuses, and increased oversight of hedge funds and credit rating agencies. A Financial Stability Board was to be established that would work in concert with the IMF to facilitate cross-border cooperation, and also to provide early warnings regarding the financial system.

Aside from these measures, the G-20 countries were already implementing their own economic

stimulus measures at home, aimed at reversing the global recession. Together, these economic stimulus packages would inject approximately $5 trillion by the end of 2010.

United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown played host at the meeting, which most concurred went off successfully, despite the presence of anti-globalization and anarchist protestors. Prime Minister Brown warned that there was "no quick fix" for the economic woes facing the international community, but he drew attention to the consensus that had been forged in the interest of the common good. He said, "This is the day that the world came together to fight back against the global recession, not with words, but with a plan for global recovery and for reform and with a clear timetable for its delivery."

All eyes were on United States President Barack Obama, who characterized the G-20 summit as "a turning point" in the effort towards global economic recovery. He also hailed the advances agreed upon to reform the failed regulatory regime that contributed to the financial crisis that has gripped many of the economies across the globe. Thusly, President Obama declared the London summit to be historic saying, "It was historic because of the size and the scope of the challenges that we face and because of the timeliness and the magnitude of our response."

Ahead of the summit, there were reports of a growing rift between the respective duos of France and Germany and the United States and the United Kingdom. While France and Germany were emphasizing stricter financial regulations, the United States and the United Kingdom were advocating public spending to deal with the economic crisis. Indeed, French President Nicolas Sarkozy had threatened to bolt the meeting if his priority issues were not addressed. But such an end did not occur, although tensions were existent.

To that end, President Obama was hailed for his diplomatic skills after he brokered an agreement between France and China on tax havens. The American president played the role of peacemaker between French President Sarkozy and Chinese Premier Hu Jintao, paving the way for a meeting of the minds on the matter of tax havens.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said the concurrence reached at the G-20 summit were "more than we could have hoped for." President Sarkozy also credited President Obama for the American president's leadership at the summit, effusively stating: "President Obama really found the consensus. He didn't focus exclusively on stimulus ... In fact it was he who managed to help me persuade [Chinese] President Hu Jintao to agree to the reference to the ... publication of a list of tax havens, and I wish to thank him for that."

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel also expressed positive feedback about the success of the summit noting that the new measures would give the international arena a "clearer financial market architecture." She noted the agreement reached was "a very, very good, almost historic compromise." Finally, Chancellor Merkel had warm words of praise for President Obama. "The American president also put his hand into this," said Merkel.

Note: The G-20 leaders agreed to meet again in September 2009 in New York to assess the progress of their agenda.

Nominal GDP and Components

Nominal GDP and Components					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Nominal GDP (LCU billions)	297,157.70	530,355.50	649,110.70	778,455.50	952,238.75
Nominal GDP Growth Rate (%)	80.669	78.476	22.392	19.926	22.324
Consumption (LCU billions)	147,185.30	243,535.50	324,240.90	413,619.10	497,641.49
Government Expenditure (LCU billions)	41,387.30	74,705.10	90,886.70	109,917.60	132,246.21
Gross Capital Formation (LCU billions)	111,791.30	187,644.40	255,101.80	260,553.40	323,008.91
Exports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	241,080.90	431,395.50	391,236.60	445,313.10	526,349.85
Imports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	244,287.10	406,925.00	412,355.30	450,947.70	527,007.70

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015

Population and GDP Per Capita

Population and GDP Per Capita					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2**
Population, total (million)	9.481	9.465	9.464	9.468	9.
Population growth (%)	-0.2000	-0.1688	-0.0106	0.0423	-0.
Nominal GDP per Capita (LCU 1000s)	31,342,442.78	56,033,333.33	68,587,352.07	82,219,634.56	101,07

Real GDP and Inflation

Real GDP and Inflation					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Real Gross Domestic Product (LCU billions 2005 base)	156,290.21	158,996.62	160,624.45	163,174.96	157,373.25
Real GDP Growth Rate (%)	5.543	1.732	1.024	1.588	-3.5555
GDP Deflator (2005=100.0)	190.132	333.564	404.117	477.068	605.083
Inflation, GDP Deflator (%)	71.181	75.438	21.151	18.052	26.834

Government Spending and Taxation

Government Spending and Taxation					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Government Fiscal Budget (billions)	102,584.52	206,057.30	273,070.58	311,945.38	417,099.81
Fiscal Budget Growth Rate (percentage)	48.309	100.866	32.522	14.236	33.709
National Tax Rate Net of Transfers (%)	38.761	40.530	41.155	40.296	41.395
Government Revenues Net of Transfers (LCU billions)	115,181.90	214,951.30	267,142.51	313,683.49	394,180.92
Government Surplus(-) Deficit(+) (LCU billions)	12,597.38	8,894.00	-5928.0740	1,738.10	-22918.8980
Government Surplus(+) Deficit(-) (%GDP)	4.239	1.677	-0.9133	0.2233	-2.4068

Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment

Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Money and Quasi-Money (M2) (LCU billions)	111,195.32	161,293.76	193,306.78	239,442.73	292,896.19
Money Supply Growth Rate (%)	121.239	45.054	19.848	23.867	22.324
Lending Interest Rate (%)	13.575	19.492	19.133	18.742	19.255
Unemployment Rate (%)	0.6720	0.6190	0.5150	0.5150	0.5150

Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate

Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Official Exchange Rate (LCU/$US)	4,974.60	8,336.96	8,880.01	10,224.14	15,353.74
Trade Balance NIPA ($US billions)	-0.6445	2.935	-2.3782	-0.5511	-0.0428
Trade Balance % of GDP	-1.0790	4.614	-3.2535	-0.7238	-0.0691
Total Foreign Exchange Reserves ($US billions)	7.863	8.095	6.655	5.068	4.790

Data in US Dollars

Data in US Dollars					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Nominal GDP ($US billions)	59.735	63.615	73.098	76.139	62.020
Exports ($US billions)	48.462	51.745	44.058	43.555	34.282
Imports ($US billions)	49.107	48.810	46.436	44.106	34.324

Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units

Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Petroleum Consumption (TBPD)	175.939	166.108	171.305	223.515	225.088
Petroleum Production (TBPD)	30.832	29.822	30.575	29.354	29.706
Petroleum Net Exports (TBPD)	-145.1064	-136.2855	-140.7307	-194.1614	-195.3820
Natural Gas Consumption (bcf)	750.091	738.790	786.818	772.666	805.482
Natural Gas Production (bcf)	7.777	7.334	7.431	6.462	6.686
Natural Gas Net Exports (bcf)	-742.3137	-731.4558	-779.3868	-766.2044	-798.7958
Coal Consumption (1000s st)	192.904	223.769	226.371	252.320	255.497
Coal Production (1000s st)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Coal Net Exports (1000s st)	-192.9045	-223.7692	-226.3711	-252.3195	-255.4971

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nuclear Production (bil kwh)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Hydroelectric Production (bil kwh)	0.0420	0.0690	0.1380	0.1380	0.1449
Renewables Production (bil kwh)	0.2147	0.1330	0.1769	0.1779	0.1671

Energy Consumption and Production QUADS

Energy Consumption and Production QUADS					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Petroleum Consumption (Quads)	0.3757	0.3547	0.3658	0.4773	0.4806
Petroleum Production (Quads)	0.0658	0.0641	0.0655	0.0641	0.0507
Petroleum Net Exports (Quads)	-0.3098	-0.2906	-0.3003	-0.4131	-0.4299
Natural Gas Consumption (Quads)	0.7651	0.7536	0.8026	0.7881	0.8216
Natural Gas Production (Quads)	0.0079	0.0075	0.0076	0.0067	0.0058
Natural Gas Net Exports (Quads)	-0.7572	-0.7461	-0.7950	-0.7814	-0.8158
Coal Consumption (Quads)	0.0039	0.0045	0.0045	0.0050	0.0051
Coal Production (Quads)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Coal Net Exports (Quads)	-0.0039	-0.0045	-0.0045	-0.0050	-0.0051
Nuclear Production (Quads)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Hydroelectric Production (Quads)	0.0004	0.0007	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014
Renewables Production (Quads)	0.0021	0.0013	0.0018	0.0018	0.0017

World Energy Price Summary

World Energy Price Summary					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Petroleum-WTI ($/bbl)	95.054	94.159	97.943	93.112	48.709
Natural Gas-Henry Hub ($/mmbtu)	3.999	2.752	3.729	4.369	2.614
Coal Thermal-Australian ($/mt)	121.448	96.364	84.562	70.130	57.511

CO2 Emissions

CO2 Emissions					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Petroleum Based (mm mt C)	8.393	7.924	8.172	10.662	10.737
Natural Gas Based (mm mt C)	12.170	11.986	12.765	12.536	13.068
Coal Based (mm mt C)	0.1106	0.1282	0.1297	0.1446	0.1464
Total CO2 Emissions (mm mt C)	20.673	20.038	21.067	23.343	23.952

Agriculture Consumption and Production

Agriculture Consumption and Production					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Corn Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	1,287.26	1,048.90	1,204.39	691.561	607.587
Corn Production (1000 metric tons)	1,210.88	951.580	1,115.22	608.612	567.231
Corn Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-76.3816	-97.3148	-89.1703	-82.9491	-40.3561
Soybeans Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	9.128	4.031	2.559	1.961	1.680
Soybeans Production (1000 metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Soybeans Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-9.1280	-4.0310	-2.5590	-1.9607	-1.6805
Rice Total					

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Consumption (1000 metric tons)	0.0120	0.0000	0.0049	0.0000	0.0000
Rice Production (1000 metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Rice Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-0.0120	0.0000	-0.0049	0.0000	0.0000
Coffee Total Consumption (metric tons)	121.000	138.000	79.000	71.852	64.803
Coffee Production (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Coffee Net Exports (metric tons)	-121.0000	-138.0000	-79.0000	-71.8521	-64.8034
Cocoa Beans Total Consumption (metric tons)	6,911.00	6,750.80	6,940.25	6,897.02	7,088.59
Cocoa Beans Production (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Cocoa Beans Net Exports (metric tons)	-6911.0000	-6750.8016	-6940.2520	-6897.0206	-7088.5876

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Wheat Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	2,149.93	2,738.18	2,145.76	2,968.79	2,398.97
Wheat Production (1000 metric tons)	2,127.63	2,567.09	2,097.89	2,933.68	2,590.89
Wheat Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-22.3020	-171.0943	-47.8641	-35.1142	191.921

World Agriculture Pricing Summary

World Agriculture Pricing Summary					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Corn Pricing Summary ($/metric ton)	291.684	298.417	259.389	192.881	169.750
Soybeans Pricing Summary ($/metric ton)	540.667	591.417	538.417	491.771	390.417
Rice Pricing Summary ($/metric ton)	458.558	525.071	473.989	425.148	386.033
Coffee Pricing Summary ($/kilogram)	5.976	4.111	3.076	4.424	3.526
Cocoa Beans Pricing Summary ($/kilogram)	2.980	2.392	2.439	3.062	3.135
Wheat Pricing Summary ($/metric ton)	316.264	313.242	312.248	284.895	203.177

Metals Consumption and Production

Metals Consumption and Production					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Copper Consumption (1000 mt)	1,413.84	9,893.82	177.277	611.214	511.174
Copper Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Copper Net Exports (1000 mt)	-1413.8370	-9893.8170	-177.2770	-611.2140	-511.1738
Zinc Consumption (1000 mt)	4,913.02	7,316.32	7,001.42	4,900.66	4,226.17
Zinc Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Zinc Exports (1000 mt)	-4913.0210	-7316.3190	-7001.4190	-4900.6570	-4226.1738
Lead Consumption (1000 mt)	214.633	214.633	214.633	214.633	214.633
Lead Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Lead Exports (1000 mt)	-214.6334	-214.6334	-214.6334	-214.6334	-214.6334
Tin Consumption (1000 mt)	176.163	237.084	161.183	119.309	106.433
Tin Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Tin Exports (1000 mt)	-176.1630	-237.0840	-161.1830	-119.3088	-106.4326
Nickel Consumption (1000 mt)	411.172	325.368	222.474	217.538	168.285
Nickel Production (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Nickel Exports (1000 mt)	-411.1720	-325.3680	-222.4740	-217.5380	-168.2848
Gold Consumption (kg)	1,691.22	1,743.79	1,801.09	1,921.90	1,621.71
Gold Production (kg)	847.742	874.092	902.817	963.375	929.743
Gold Exports (kg)	-843.4785	-869.6965	-898.2770	-958.5300	-691.9651
Silver					

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Consumption (mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Silver Production (mt)	4,551.58	4,775.82	4,853.03	5,022.26	4,615.59
Silver Exports (mt)	4,551.58	4,775.82	4,853.03	5,022.26	4,615.59

World Metals Pricing Summary

World Metals Pricing Summary					
	2011	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Copper ($/mt)	8,828.19	7,962.35	7,332.10	6,863.40	5,510.46
Zinc ($/mt)	2,193.90	1,950.41	1,910.26	2,160.97	1,931.68
Tin ($/mt)	26,053.68	21,125.99	22,282.80	21,898.87	16,066.63
Lead ($/mt)	2,400.81	2,064.64	2,139.79	2,095.46	1,787.82
Nickel ($/mt)	22,910.36	17,547.55	15,031.80	16,893.38	11,862.64
Gold ($/oz)	1,569.21	1,669.52	1,411.46	1,265.58	1,160.66
Silver ($/oz)	35.224	31.137	23.850	19.071	15.721

Economic Performance Index

Economic Performance Index

The Economic Performance rankings are calculated by CountryWatch's editorial team, and are based on criteria including sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus, unemployment and structural imbalances. Scores are assessed from 0 to 100 using this aforementioned criteria as well as CountryWatch's proprietary economic research data and models.

	Bank stability risk	Monetary/ Currency stability	Government Finances	Empl./ Unempl.	Econ.GNP growth or decline/ forecast
	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	%
North Americas					
Canada	92	69	35	38	3.14%
United States	94	76	4	29	3.01%
Western Europe					
Austria	90	27	30	63	1.33%
Belgium	88	27	19	23	1.15%
Cyprus	81	91	16	80	-0.69%
Denmark	97	70	45	78	1.20%
Finland	89	27	41	33	1.25%

France	87	27	18	27	1.52%
Germany	86	27	22	21	1.25%
Greece	79	27	5	24	-2.00%
Iceland	90	17	2	34	-3.04%
Italy	85	27	37	24	0.84%
Ireland	92	27	11	10	-1.55%
Luxembourg	99	27	28	66	2.08%
Malta	77	27	41	51	0.54%
Netherlands	91	27	26	74	1.30%
Norway	98	44	10	76	1.08%
Portugal	77	27	13	20	0.29%
Spain	83	27	9	3	-0.41%
Sweden	94	72	54	32	1.23%
Switzerland	97	86	55	77	1.53%
United Kingdom	85	12	9	37	1.34%
Central and Eastern Europe					
Albania	44	60	33	6	2.30%
Armenia	45	59	49	30	1.80%

Azerbaijan	56	4	84	99	2.68%
Belarus	59	21	83	98	2.41%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	34	68	69	N/A	0.50%
Bulgaria	58	75	88	49	0.20%
Croatia	69	68	94	9	0.18%
Czech Republic	80	89	29	70	1.67%
Estonia	72	90	66	92	0.80%
Georgia	36	60	53	56	2.00%
Hungary	70	66	26	54	-0.16%
Latvia	67	100	65	44	-3.97%
Lithuania	65	91	87	79	-1.65%
Macedonia (FYR)	53	69	56	2	2.03%
Moldova	23	36	81	67	2.50%
Poland	74	74	38	12	2.72%
Romania	62	56	70	62	0.75%
Russia	73	18	90	8	4.00%
Serbia	48	49	52	5	1.97%

Montenegro	39	27	73	1	-1.70%
Slovak Republic	80	62	30	14	4.06%
Slovenia	81	27	36	65	1.12%
Ukraine	41	11	57	N/A	3.68%
Africa					
Algeria	57	18	96	7	4.55%
Angola	49	1	97	N/A	7.05%
Benin	19	91	20	N/A	3.22%
Botswana	68	58	76	N/A	6.33%
Burkina Faso	16	91	13	N/A	4.41%
Burundi	2	91	6	N/A	3.85%
Cameroon	26	91	91	N/A	2.58%
Cape Verde	52	87	4	N/A	4.96%
Central African Republic	9	91	32	N/A	3.18%
Chad	22	91	89	N/A	4.42%
Congo	52	87	87	N/A	12.13%
Côte d'Ivoire	25	91	82	28	2.98%
Dem. Republic					

Congo	4	91	47	N/A	5.44%
Djibouti	31	76	50	N/A	4.47%
Egypt	37	20	24	69	5.01%
Equatorial Guinea	82	91	85	N/A	0.94%
Eritrea	1	3	1	18	1.81%
Ethiopia	6	45	8	N/A	6.96%
Gabon	64	91	96	N/A	5.36%
Gambia	8	48	86	N/A	4.82%
Ghana	9	11	69	N/A	4.50%
Guinea	10	7	91	N/A	3.03%
Guinea-Bissau	5	91	46	N/A	3.47%
Kenya	20	41	59	N/A	4.11%
Lesotho	13	40	12	N/A	2.98%
Liberia	12	73	74	N/A	5.92%
Libya	73	2	94	N/A	5.22%
Madagascar	4	22	24	N/A	-1.02%
Malawi	7	25	55	N/A	5.96%
Mali	20	91	82	N/A	5.12%

Mauritania	15	13	93	N/A	4.58%
Mauritius	65	52	56	55	4.10%
Morocco	37	72	48	26	3.23%
Mozambique	12	23	71	N/A	6.45%
Namibia	40	39	62	N/A	1.70%
Niger	10	91	21	N/A	4.41%
Nigeria	30	6	61	N/A	6.98%
Rwanda	21	40	68	N/A	5.39%
Sao Tome & Principe	1	61	100	N/A	3.40%
Senegal	24	91	63	N/A	3.44%
Seychelles	60	67	97	N/A	4.01%
Sierra Leone	5	10	39	N/A	4.77%
Somalia	2	38	59	N/A	3.19%
South Africa	61	37	70	N/A	2.59%
Sudan	16	5	73	N/A	5.52%
Swaziland	32	44	79	N/A	1.09%
Tanzania	15	45	32	N/A	6.17%
Togo	8	91	92	N/A	2.56%

Tunisia	50	61	44	39	4.00%
Uganda	11	17	54	N/A	5.59%
Zambia	29	20	49	N/A	5.84%
Zimbabwe	0	8	16	N/A	2.24%
South and Central America					
Argentina	66	3	80	36	3.50%
Belize	47	76	80	N/A	1.00%
Bolivia	32	51	61	81	3.99%
Brazil	71	47	78	11	5.50%
Chile	78	25	92	73	4.72%
Columbia	47	52	34	47	2.25%
Costa Rica	60	42	39	57	3.45%
Ecuador	43	76	75	64	2.51%
El Salvador	35	76	67	N/A	1.04%
Guatemala	46	59	58	N/A	2.52%
Honduras	27	47	58	N/A	2.00%
Mexico	69	42	52	61	4.07%
Nicaragua	23	49	42	N/A	1.75%

Panama	66	76	72	45	5.00%
Paraguay	35	46	66	16	5.27%
Peru	59	66	75	22	6.33%
Suriname	58	26	81	59	4.02%
Uruguay	70	26	27	N/A	5.71%
Venezuela	55	1	28	13	-2.63%
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	72	76	15	N/A	-2.01%
Bahamas	74	76	45	87	-0.50%
Barbados	67	76	33	15	-0.50%
Bermuda	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cuba	45	76	18	95	0.25%
Dominica	53	76	65	N/A	1.40%
Dominican Republic	54	39	43	4	3.50%
Grenada	63	76	48	N/A	0.80%
Guyana	28	56	17	N/A	4.36%
Haiti	11	27	89	N/A	-8.50%
Jamaica	42	9	85	19	-0.28%

St Lucia	55	76	67	N/A	1.14%
St Vincent & Grenadines	49	76	95	N/A	0.50%
Trinidad & Tobago	82	37	77	72	2.13%
Middle East					
Bahrain	84	76	62	91	3.48%
Iran	51	19	40	58	3.01%
Iraq	48	9	8	N/A	7.27%
Israel	87	62	12	48	3.20%
Jordan	41	51	3	N/A	4.10%
Kuwait	96	4	99	N/A	3.10%
Lebanon	63	54	2	N/A	6.00%
Oman	76	16	88	N/A	4.71%
Qatar	99	16	83	N/A	18.54%
Saudi Arabia	76	8	98	N/A	3.70%
Syria	61	24	40	N/A	5.00%
Turkey	75	23	27	60	5.20%
United Arab Emirates	96	24	98	94	1.29%

Yemen	28	2	78	N/A	7.78%
Asia					
Afghanistan	17	70	74	N/A	8.64%
Bangladesh	13	43	25	N/A	5.38%
Bhutan	24	55	5	N/A	6.85%
Brunei	78	19	99	75	0.48%
Cambodia	18	67	42	N/A	4.77%
China	54	90	19	68	11.03%
Hong Kong	89	76	14	82	5.02%
India	31	38	34	35	8.78%
Indonesia	42	46	37	31	6.00%
Japan	88	89	6	71	1.90%
Kazakhstan	62	13	76	42	2.40%
Korea North	18	65	23	N/A	1.50%
Korea South	83	63	22	85	4.44%
Kyrgyz Republic	24	15	84	88	4.61%
Laos	17	54	7	N/A	7.22%
Macao	91	76	14	82	3.00%

Malaysia	68	65	44	90	4.72%
Maldives	44	55	17	N/A	3.45%
Mongolia	33	5	77	93	7.22%
Myanmar	3	41	72	N/A	5.26%
Nepal	3	14	25	N/A	2.97%
Pakistan	19	15	31	41	3.00%
Papua New Guinea	75	50	11	N/A	7.96%
Philippines	30	48	53	43	3.63%
Singapore	93	75	63	40	5.68%
Sri Lanka	38	22	10	N/A	5.50%
Taiwan	84	88	35	89	6.50%
Tajikistan	6	6	60	97	4.00%
Thailand	56	64	90	96	5.46%
Turkmenistan	51	53	68	N/A	12.00%
Uzbekistan	40	10	60	100	8.00%
Vietnam	25	12	20	N/A	6.04%
Pacific					
Australia	96	63	31	46	2.96%

Fiji	46	53	3	N/A	2.06%
Marshall Islands	27	76	46	N/A	1.08%
Micronesia (Fed. States)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Caledonia	96	73	51	52	2.00%
New Zealand	98	73	51	52	2.00%
Samoa	34	88	64	N/A	-2.77%
Solomon Islands	14	71	1	N/A	3.36%
Tonga	26	57	38	N/A	0.60%
Vanuatu	33	58	47	N/A	3.80%

Source:

CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

This material was produced in 2010; it is subject to updating in 2012.

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Chapter 4

Investment Overview

Foreign Investment Climate

Foreign Investment Assessment

Belarus officially encourages foreign investment. However, as perhaps the most staunchly "Soviet" of the former republics, it does not offer a particularly hospitable investment climate. In addition to Belarus' lack of infrastructure, the central government displays a general distrust of private enterprise, posing two significant obstacles to would-be investors.

Industries

Metal-cutting machine tools, tractors, trucks, earthmovers, motorcycles, television sets, chemical fibers, fertilizer, textiles, radios, refrigerators

Import Commodities

Mineral products, machinery and equipment, chemicals, foodstuffs, metals

Import Partners

Russia 65.8%, Germany 7.1%, Ukraine 3.1%

Export Commodities

Machinery and equipment, mineral products, chemicals, metals; textiles, foodstuffs

Export Partners

Russia 49.1%, UK 9.4%, Poland 4.4%, Germany 4.2%, Netherlands 4.2%

Ports and Harbors

Mazyr

Telephone System

The Ministry of Telecommunications controls all telecommunications through its carrier (a joint stock company) Beltelcom which is a monopoly; waiting lists for telephones are long; local service outside Minsk is neglected and poor; country code: 375

Internet Users

1,391,900 in recent years; on the increase

Labor Force

4.8 million

Judicial System

Belarus' legal system is highly inadequate and ill equipped to resolve business disputes

Corruption Perception Ranking

See Belarus' ranking in the listing from Transparency International, from least to most corrupt, in this Country Review. Typically, Belarus is ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

Cultural Considerations

Greetings are limited to handshakes and pronouncements of one's name (usually only the surname). Non-locals should respond in kind, avoiding phrases such as "how are you?" Belarusians enjoy speaking about politics, economics and social issues, and so these topics are entirely

appropriate. They also are interested in the countries of the West, especially the United States, and so topics of intercultural and international import are perfectly acceptable subject matter.

Country Website (s)

www.belarusembassy.org

Foreign Investment Index

Foreign Investment Index

The Foreign Investment Index is a proprietary index measuring attractiveness to international investment flows. The Foreign Investment Index is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's economic stability (sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus), economic risk (risk of non-servicing of payments for goods or services, loans and trade-related finance, risk of sovereign default), business and investment climate (property rights, labor force and laws, regulatory transparency, openness to foreign investment, market conditions, and stability of government). Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of foreign investment viability, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of foreign investment viability, according to this proprietary index.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5
Algeria	6

Andorra	9
Angola	4.5-5
Antigua	8.5
Argentina	5
Armenia	5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9-9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	7.5
Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	7.5
Benin	5.5
Bhutan	4.5
Bolivia	4.5

Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Botswana	7.5-8
Brazil	8
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	5.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5
Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9
China	7.5
China: Hong Kong	8.5
China: Taiwan	8.5

Colombia	7
Comoros	4
Congo DRC	4
Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5
Croatia	7
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	7
Czech Republic	8.5
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	6
Dominican Republic	6.5
East Timor	4.5
Ecuador	5.5
Egypt	4.5-5
El Salvador	6

Equatorial Guinea	4.5
Eritrea	3.5
Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Former Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia	5
France	9-9.5
Gabon	5.5
Gambia	5
Georgia	5
Germany	9-9.5
Ghana	5.5
Greece	5
Grenada	7.5
Guatemala	5.5
Guinea	3.5
Guinea-Bissau	3.5

Guyana	4.5
Haiti	4
Holy See (Vatican)	n/a
Hong Kong (China)	8.5
Honduras	5.5
Hungary	8
Iceland	8-8.5
India	8
Indonesia	5.5
Iran	4
Iraq	3
Ireland	8
Israel	8.5
Italy	8
Jamaica	5.5
Japan	9.5
Jordan	6
Kazakhstan	6

Kenya	5
Kiribati	5.5
Korea, North	1
Korea, South	9
Kosovo	4.5
Kuwait	8.5
Kyrgyzstan	4.5
Laos	4
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5
Lesotho	5.5
Liberia	3.5
Libya	3
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9-9.5
Madagascar	4.5
Malawi	4.5

Malaysia	8.5
Maldives	6.5
Mali	5
Malta	9
Marshall Islands	5
Mauritania	4.5
Mauritius	7.5-8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	5
Moldova	4.5-5
Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	5.5
Morocco	7.5
Mozambique	5
Namibia	7.5
Nauru	4.5
Nepal	4

Netherlands	9-9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	5
Niger	4.5
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9-9.5
Oman	8
Pakistan	4
Palau	4.5-5
Panama	7
Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6
Peru	6
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5-8
Qatar	9
Romania	6-6.5

Russia	6
Rwanda	4
Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	7
Samoa	7
San Marino	8.5
Sao Tome and Principe	4.5-5
Saudi Arabia	7
Senegal	6
Serbia	6
Seychelles	5
Sierra Leone	4
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	8.5-9
Solomon Islands	5
Somalia	2

South Africa	8
Spain	7.5-8
Sri Lanka	5.5
Sudan	4
Suriname	5
Swaziland	4.5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2.5
Tajikistan	4
Taiwan (China)	8.5
Tanzania	5
Thailand	7.5-8
Togo	4.5-5
Tonga	5.5-6
Trinidad and Tobago	8-8.5
Tunisia	6
Turkey	6.5-7

Turkmenistan	4
Tuvalu	7
Uganda	5
Ukraine	4.5-5
United Arab Emirates	8.5
United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	6.5-7
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	6
Venezuela	5
Vietnam	5.5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5-5
Zimbabwe	3.5

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the global economic crisis (emerging in 2008) had affected many countries across the world, resulting in changes to their rankings. Among those countries affected were top tier economies, such as the United Kingdom, Iceland, Switzerland and Austria. However, in all these

cases, their rankings have moved back upward in the last couple of years as anxieties have eased. Other top tier countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Italy, suffered some effects due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. Greece, another euro zone nation, was also downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, Greece's position on the precipice of default incurred a sharper downgrade than the other four euro zone countries mentioned above. Cyprus' exposure to Greek bank yielded a downgrade in its case. Slovenia and Latvia have been slightly downgraded due to a mix of economic and political concerns but could easily be upgraded in a future assessment, should these concerns abate. Meanwhile, the crisis in eastern Ukraine fueled downgrades in that country and neighboring Russia.

Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in Japan in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both India and China retain their rankings; India holds a slightly higher ranking than China due to its record of democratic representation and accountability.

There were shifts in opposite directions for Mali and Nigeria versus the Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, and Burundi. Mali was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Likewise, a new government in Nigeria generated a slight upgrade as the country attempts to confront corruption, crime, and terrorism. But the Central African Republic was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Seleka rebels and the continued decline into lawlessness in that country. Likewise, the attempts by the leaders of Burundi and Burkina Faso to hold onto power by by-passing the constitution raised eybrows and resulted in downgrades.

Political unrest in Libya and Algeria have contributed to a decision to marginally downgrade these countries as well. Syria incurred a sharper downgrade due to the devolution into de facto civil war and the dire security threat posed by Islamist terrorists. Iraq saw a similar downgrade as a result of the takeover of wide swaths of territory and the threat of genocide at the hands of Islamist terrorists. Yemen, likewise, has been downgraded due to political instability at the hands of secessionists, terrorists, Houthi rebels, and the intervention of external parties. Conversely, Egypt and Tunisia saw slight upgrades as their political environments stabilize.

At the low end of the spectrum, devolving security conditions and/or economic crisis have resulted in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Zimbabwe maintaining their low ratings.

The United States continues to retain its previous slight downgrade due to the enduring threat of default surrounding the debt ceiling in that country, matched by a conflict-ridden political climate. In the case of Mexico, there is limited concern about default, but increasing alarm over the security situation in that country and the government's ability to contain it. In Argentina, a default to bond

holders resulted in a downgrade to that country. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to Cuba due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the Unitd States.

Source:

CountryWatch Inc. www.countrywatch.com

Updated:

2015

Corruption Perceptions Index

Corruption Perceptions Index

Transparency International: Corruption Perceptions Index

Editor's Note:

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index is a composite index which ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials. This index indicates the views of national and international business people and analysts about the levels of corruption in each country. The highest (and best) level of transparency is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower numbers.

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
1	New Zealand	9.4	6	9.1 - 9.5
2	Denmark	9.3	6	9.1 - 9.5
3	Singapore	9.2	9	9.0 - 9.4
3	Sweden	9.2	6	9.0 - 9.3

5	Switzerland	9.0	6	8.9 - 9.1
6	Finland	8.9	6	8.4 - 9.4
6	Netherlands	8.9	6	8.7 - 9.0
8	Australia	8.7	8	8.3 - 9.0
8	Canada	8.7	6	8.5 - 9.0
8	Iceland	8.7	4	7.5 - 9.4
11	Norway	8.6	6	8.2 - 9.1
12	Hong Kong	8.2	8	7.9 - 8.5
12	Luxembourg	8.2	6	7.6 - 8.8
14	Germany	8.0	6	7.7 - 8.3
14	Ireland	8.0	6	7.8 - 8.4
16	Austria	7.9	6	7.4 - 8.3
17	Japan	7.7	8	7.4 - 8.0
17	United Kingdom	7.7	6	7.3 - 8.2
19	United States	7.5	8	6.9 - 8.0
20	Barbados	7.4	4	6.6 - 8.2
21	Belgium	7.1	6	6.9 - 7.3
22	Qatar	7.0	6	5.8 - 8.1

22	Saint Lucia	7.0	3	6.7 - 7.5
24	France	6.9	6	6.5 - 7.3
25	Chile	6.7	7	6.5 - 6.9
25	Uruguay	6.7	5	6.4 - 7.1
27	Cyprus	6.6	4	6.1 - 7.1
27	Estonia	6.6	8	6.1 - 6.9
27	Slovenia	6.6	8	6.3 - 6.9
30	United Arab Emirates	6.5	5	5.5 - 7.5
31	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	6.4	3	4.9 - 7.5
32	Israel	6.1	6	5.4 - 6.7
32	Spain	6.1	6	5.5 - 6.6
34	Dominica	5.9	3	4.9 - 6.7
35	Portugal	5.8	6	5.5 - 6.2
35	Puerto Rico	5.8	4	5.2 - 6.3
37	Botswana	5.6	6	5.1 - 6.3
37	Taiwan	5.6	9	5.4 - 5.9
39	Brunei Darussalam	5.5	4	4.7 - 6.4

39	Oman	5.5	5	4.4 - 6.5
39	Korea (South)	5.5	9	5.3 - 5.7
42	Mauritius	5.4	6	5.0 - 5.9
43	Costa Rica	5.3	5	4.7 - 5.9
43	Macau	5.3	3	3.3 - 6.9
45	Malta	5.2	4	4.0 - 6.2
46	Bahrain	5.1	5	4.2 - 5.8
46	Cape Verde	5.1	3	3.3 - 7.0
46	Hungary	5.1	8	4.6 - 5.7
49	Bhutan	5.0	4	4.3 - 5.6
49	Jordan	5.0	7	3.9 - 6.1
49	Poland	5.0	8	4.5 - 5.5
52	Czech Republic	4.9	8	4.3 - 5.6
52	Lithuania	4.9	8	4.4 - 5.4
54	Seychelles	4.8	3	3.0 - 6.7
55	South Africa	4.7	8	4.3 - 4.9
56	Latvia	4.5	6	4.1 - 4.9
56	Malaysia	4.5	9	4.0 - 5.1

56	Namibia	4.5	6	3.9 - 5.1
56	Samoa	4.5	3	3.3 - 5.3
56	Slovakia	4.5	8	4.1 - 4.9
61	Cuba	4.4	3	3.5 - 5.1
61	Turkey	4.4	7	3.9 - 4.9
63	Italy	4.3	6	3.8 - 4.9
63	Saudi Arabia	4.3	5	3.1 - 5.3
65	Tunisia	4.2	6	3.0 - 5.5
66	Croatia	4.1	8	3.7 - 4.5
66	Georgia	4.1	7	3.4 - 4.7
66	Kuwait	4.1	5	3.2 - 5.1
69	Ghana	3.9	7	3.2 - 4.6
69	Montenegro	3.9	5	3.5 - 4.4
71	Bulgaria	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.5
71	FYR Macedonia	3.8	6	3.4 - 4.2
71	Greece	3.8	6	3.2 - 4.3
71	Romania	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.3
75	Brazil	3.7	7	3.3 - 4.3

75	Colombia	3.7	7	3.1 - 4.3
75	Peru	3.7	7	3.4 - 4.1
75	Suriname	3.7	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Burkina Faso	3.6	7	2.8 - 4.4
79	China	3.6	9	3.0 - 4.2
79	Swaziland	3.6	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Trinidad and Tobago	3.6	4	3.0 - 4.3
83	Serbia	3.5	6	3.3 - 3.9
84	El Salvador	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.8
84	Guatemala	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.9
84	India	3.4	10	3.2 - 3.6
84	Panama	3.4	5	3.1 - 3.7
84	Thailand	3.4	9	3.0 - 3.8
89	Lesotho	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.8
89	Malawi	3.3	7	2.7 - 3.9
89	Mexico	3.3	7	3.2 - 3.5
89	Moldova	3.3	6	2.7 - 4.0
89	Morocco	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.9

89	Rwanda	3.3	4	2.9 - 3.7
95	Albania	3.2	6	3.0 - 3.3
95	Vanuatu	3.2	3	2.3 - 4.7
97	Liberia	3.1	3	1.9 - 3.8
97	Sri Lanka	3.1	7	2.8 - 3.4
99	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.0	7	2.6 - 3.4
99	Dominican Republic	3.0	5	2.9 - 3.2
99	Jamaica	3.0	5	2.8 - 3.3
99	Madagascar	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
99	Senegal	3.0	7	2.5 - 3.6
99	Tonga	3.0	3	2.6 - 3.3
99	Zambia	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
106	Argentina	2.9	7	2.6 - 3.1
106	Benin	2.9	6	2.3 - 3.4
106	Gabon	2.9	3	2.6 - 3.1
106	Gambia	2.9	5	1.6 - 4.0
106	Niger	2.9	5	2.7 - 3.0
111	Algeria	2.8	6	2.5 - 3.1

111	Djibouti	2.8	4	2.3 - 3.2
111	Egypt	2.8	6	2.6 - 3.1
111	Indonesia	2.8	9	2.4 - 3.2
111	Kiribati	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Mali	2.8	6	2.4 - 3.2
111	Sao Tome and Principe	2.8	3	2.4 - 3.3
111	Solomon Islands	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Togo	2.8	5	1.9 - 3.9
120	Armenia	2.7	7	2.6 - 2.8
120	Bolivia	2.7	6	2.4 - 3.1
120	Ethiopia	2.7	7	2.4 - 2.9
120	Kazakhstan	2.7	7	2.1 - 3.3
120	Mongolia	2.7	7	2.4 - 3.0
120	Vietnam	2.7	9	2.4 - 3.1
126	Eritrea	2.6	4	1.6 - 3.8
126	Guyana	2.6	4	2.5 - 2.7
126	Syria	2.6	5	2.2 - 2.9
126	Tanzania	2.6	7	2.4 - 2.9

130	Honduras	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8
130	Lebanon	2.5	3	1.9 - 3.1
130	Libya	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8
130	Maldives	2.5	4	1.8 - 3.2
130	Mauritania	2.5	7	2.0 - 3.3
130	Mozambique	2.5	7	2.3 - 2.8
130	Nicaragua	2.5	6	2.3 - 2.7
130	Nigeria	2.5	7	2.2 - 2.7
130	Uganda	2.5	7	2.1 - 2.8
139	Bangladesh	2.4	7	2.0 - 2.8
139	Belarus	2.4	4	2.0 - 2.8
139	Pakistan	2.4	7	2.1 - 2.7
139	Philippines	2.4	9	2.1 - 2.7
143	Azerbaijan	2.3	7	2.0 - 2.6
143	Comoros	2.3	3	1.6 - 3.3
143	Nepal	2.3	6	2.0 - 2.6
146	Cameroon	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.6
146	Ecuador	2.2	5	2.0 - 2.5

146	Kenya	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.5
146	Russia	2.2	8	1.9 - 2.4
146	Sierra Leone	2.2	5	1.9 - 2.4
146	Timor-Leste	2.2	5	1.8 - 2.6
146	Ukraine	2.2	8	2.0 - 2.6
146	Zimbabwe	2.2	7	1.7 - 2.8
154	Côte d´Ivoire	2.1	7	1.8 - 2.4
154	Papua New Guinea	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Paraguay	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Yemen	2.1	4	1.6 - 2.5
158	Cambodia	2.0	8	1.8 - 2.2
158	Central African Republic	2.0	4	1.9 - 2.2
158	Laos	2.0	4	1.6 - 2.6
158	Tajikistan	2.0	8	1.6 - 2.5
162	Angola	1.9	5	1.8 - 1.9
162	Congo Brazzaville	1.9	5	1.6 - 2.1
162	Democratic Republic of Congo	1.9	5	1.7 - 2.1
162	Guinea-Bissau	1.9	3	1.8 - 2.0

162	Kyrgyzstan	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.1
162	Venezuela	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.0
168	Burundi	1.8	6	1.6 - 2.0
168	Equatorial Guinea	1.8	3	1.6 - 1.9
168	Guinea	1.8	5	1.7 - 1.8
168	Haiti	1.8	3	1.4 - 2.3
168	Iran	1.8	3	1.7 - 1.9
168	Turkmenistan	1.8	4	1.7 - 1.9
174	Uzbekistan	1.7	6	1.5 - 1.8
175	Chad	1.6	6	1.5 - 1.7
176	Iraq	1.5	3	1.2 - 1.8
176	Sudan	1.5	5	1.4 - 1.7
178	Myanmar	1.4	3	0.9 - 1.8
179	Afghanistan	1.3	4	1.0 - 1.5
180	Somalia	1.1	3	0.9 - 1.4

Methodology:

As noted above, the highest (and best) level of transparency with the least perceived corruption is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower

numbers.

According to Transparency International, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) table shows a country's ranking and score, the number of surveys used to determine the score, and the confidence range of the scoring.

The rank shows how one country compares to others included in the index. The CPI score indicates the perceived level of public-sector corruption in a country/territory.

The CPI is based on 13 independent surveys. However, not all surveys include all countries. The surveys used column indicates how many surveys were relied upon to determine the score for that country.

The confidence range indicates the reliability of the CPI scores and tells us that allowing for a margin of error, we can be 90% confident that the true score for this country lies within this range.

Note:

Kosovo, which separated from the Yugoslav successor state of Serbia, is not listed above. No calculation is available for Kosovo at this time, however, a future corruption index by Transparency International may include the world's newest country in its tally. Taiwan has been listed above despite its contested status; while Taiwan claims sovereign status, China claims ultimate jurisdiction over Taiwan. Hong Kong, which is also under the rubric of Chinese sovereignty, is listed above. Note as well that Puerto Rico, which is a United States domain, is also included in the list above. These inclusions likely have to do with the size and fairly autonomous status of their economies.

Source:

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index; available at URL: http://www.transparency.org

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

Competitiveness Ranking

Competitiveness Ranking

Editor's Note:

The Global Competitiveness Report's competitiveness ranking is based on the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), which was developed for the World Economic Forum. The GCI is based on a number of competitiveness considerations, and provides a comprehensive picture of the competitiveness landscape in countries around the world. The competitiveness considerations are: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication, and innovation. The rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey.

Country/Economy	GCI 2010 Rank	GCI 2010 Score	GCI 2009 Rank	Change 2009-2010
Switzerland	1	5.63	1	0
Sweden	2	5.56	4	2
Singapore	3	5.48	3	0
United States	4	5.43	2	-2
Germany	5	5.39	7	2
Japan	6	5.37	8	2
Finland	7	5.37	6	-1
Netherlands	8	5.33	10	2
Denmark	9	5.32	5	-4
Canada	10	5.30	9	-1
Hong Kong SAR	11	5.30	11	0

United Kingdom	12	5.25	13	1
Taiwan, China	13	5.21	12	-1
Norway	14	5.14	14	0
France	15	5.13	16	1
Australia	16	5.11	15	-1
Qatar	17	5.10	22	5
Austria	18	5.09	17	-1
Belgium	19	5.07	18	-1
Luxembourg	20	5.05	21	1
Saudi Arabia	21	4.95	28	7
Korea, Rep.	22	4.93	19	-3
New Zealand	23	4.92	20	-3
Israel	24	4.91	27	3
United Arab Emirates	25	4.89	23	-2
Malaysia	26	4.88	24	-2
China	27	4.84	29	2
Brunei Darussalam	28	4.75	32	4
Ireland	29	4.74	25	-4

Chile	30	4.69	30	0
Iceland	31	4.68	26	-5
Tunisia	32	4.65	40	8
Estonia	33	4.61	35	2
Oman	34	4.61	41	7
Kuwait	35	4.59	39	4
Czech Republic	36	4.57	31	-5
Bahrain	37	4.54	38	1
Thailand	38	4.51	36	-2
Poland	39	4.51	46	7
Cyprus	40	4.50	34	-6
Puerto Rico	41	4.49	42	1
Spain	42	4.49	33	-9
Barbados	43	4.45	44	1
Indonesia	44	4.43	54	10
Slovenia	45	4.42	37	-8
Portugal	46	4.38	43	-3
Lithuania	47	4.38	53	6

Italy	48	4.37	48	0
Montenegro	49	4.36	62	13
Malta	50	4.34	52	2
India	51	4.33	49	-2
Hungary	52	4.33	58	6
Panama	53	4.33	59	6
South Africa	54	4.32	45	-9
Mauritius	55	4.32	57	2
Costa Rica	56	4.31	55	-1
Azerbaijan	57	4.29	51	-6
Brazil	58	4.28	56	-2
Vietnam	59	4.27	75	16
Slovak Republic	60	4.25	47	-13
Turkey	61	4.25	61	0
Sri Lanka	62	4.25	79	17
Russian Federation	63	4.24	63	0
Uruguay	64	4.23	65	1
Jordan	65	4.21	50	-15

Mexico	66	4.19	60	-6
Romania	67	4.16	64	-3
Colombia	68	4.14	69	1
Iran	69	4.14	n/a	n/a
Latvia	70	4.14	68	-2
Bulgaria	71	4.13	76	5
Kazakhstan	72	4.12	67	-5
Peru	73	4.11	78	5
Namibia	74	4.09	74	0
Morocco	75	4.08	73	-2
Botswana	76	4.05	66	-10
Croatia	77	4.04	72	-5
Guatemala	78	4.04	80	2
Macedonia, FYR	79	4.02	84	5
Rwanda	80	4.00	n/a	n/a
Egypt	81	4.00	70	-11
El Salvador	82	3.99	77	-5
Greece	83	3.99	71	-12

Trinidad and Tobago	84	3.97	86	2
Philippines	85	3.96	87	2
Algeria	86	3.96	83	-3
Argentina	87	3.95	85	-2
Albania	88	3.94	96	8
Ukraine	89	3.90	82	-7
Gambia, The	90	3.90	81	-9
Honduras	91	3.89	89	-2
Lebanon	92	3.89	n/a	n/a
Georgia	93	3.86	90	-3
Moldova	94	3.86	n/a	n/a
Jamaica	95	3.85	91	-4
Serbia	96	3.84	93	-3
Syria	97	3.79	94	-3
Armenia	98	3.76	97	-1
Mongolia	99	3.75	117	18
Libya	100	3.74	88	-12
Dominican Republic	101	3.72	95	-6

Bosnia and Herzegovina	102	3.70	109	7
Benin	103	3.69	103	0
Senegal	104	3.67	92	-12
Ecuador	105	3.65	105	0
Kenya	106	3.65	98	-8
Bangladesh	107	3.64	106	-1
Bolivia	108	3.64	120	12
Cambodia	109	3.63	110	1
Guyana	110	3.62	104	-6
Cameroon	111	3.58	111	0
Nicaragua	112	3.57	115	3
Tanzania	113	3.56	100	-13
Ghana	114	3.56	114	0
Zambia	115	3.55	112	-3
Tajikistan	116	3.53	122	6
Cape Verde	117	3.51	n/a	n/a
Uganda	118	3.51	108	-10
Ethiopia	119	3.51	118	-1

Paraguay	120	3.49	124	4
Kyrgyz Republic	121	3.49	123	2
Venezuela	122	3.48	113	-9
Pakistan	123	3.48	101	-22
Madagascar	124	3.46	121	-3
Malawi	125	3.45	119	-6
Swaziland	126	3.40	n/a	n/a
Nigeria	127	3.38	99	-28
Lesotho	128	3.36	107	-21
Côte d'Ivoire	129	3.35	116	-13
Nepal	130	3.34	125	-5
Mozambique	131	3.32	129	-2
Mali	132	3.28	130	-2
Timor-Leste	133	3.23	126	-7
Burkina Faso	134	3.20	128	-6
Mauritania	135	3.14	127	-8
Zimbabwe	136	3.03	132	-4
Burundi	137	2.96	133	-4

Angola	138	2.93	n/a	n/a
Chad	139	2.73	131	-8

Methodology:

The competitiveness rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey, a comprehensive annual survey conducted by the World Economic Forum together with its network of Partner Institutes (leading research institutes and business organizations) in the countries covered by the Report.

Highlights according to WEF --

- The United States falls two places to fourth position, overtaken by Sweden and Singapore in the rankings of the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011
- The People's Republic of China continues to move up the rankings, with marked improvements in several other Asian countries
- Germany moves up two places to fifth place, leading the Eurozone countries
- Switzerland tops the rankings

Source:

World Economic Forum; available at URL: http://www.weforum.org

Updated:

2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

Taxation

Corporate tax

The standard corporate tax rate is 24 percent, although a 30 percent rate is applied to insurance companies, and a 40 percent rate is applied to securities transactions. As of 2006, banks are subject to a general corporate profits tax at the 24 percent rate instead of the corporate income tax.

Individual tax

Individual taxes are progressive and range from 9 percent to 30 percent. Dividends are taxed by a 15 percent withholding tax.

Capital gains

Capital gains are generally taxed as income.

Indirect tax

There is a value-added tax (VAT), which is applied to most goods, services and transactions at the standard rate of 18 percent. For certain food items, agricultural goods, and medicines, the effective rate is 10 percent. There are exemptions for banking and financial arenas, insurance, educational arenas and legal services. VAT is calculated on the total value of the goods, including customs duty and excise tax, where applicable (in other words, after all other charges have been added to the customs value of the shipment).

Stock Market

Stock exchanges in Belarus include the Belagroprambirzha (the Agro-Industrial Trade and Stock Exchange), the Belarusian Stock Exchange, the Belarusian Universal Stock Exchange, and the Minsk Stock Exchange.

Partner Links

Partner Links

Chapter 5

Social Overview

People

Ethnographic Composition

Today, ethnic Belarusians (Byelarusians) comprise approximately 78 percent of a total population of just under 10 million. About 13 percent of the population is ethnic Russian. Ethnic Poles and Ukrainians account for four percent and three percent of the population, respectively.

Belarusians are a Slavic people; their official language, Belarusian, is a Slavic linguistic derivative, closely related to Ukrainian and Russian. Russianis also widely spoken.

In terms of religious affiliation, as is the case for many Slavic peoples, the Eastern Orthodox Church is predominant. There are also Belarusian Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims.

Human Development

Recent estimates determined that Belarusians have an average life expectancy at birth of 70.9 years (65.3 years for males, 76.9 years for females).The infant mortality rate is 6.34 deaths per 1,000 live births. An estimated 99.6 percent of the total population, age 15 and older, can read and write (99.8 percent of males, 99.4 percent of females). About 4.5 percent of GDP is spent in the country on educational expenditures. About 5.8 percent of GDP is spent on health expenditures. Access to sanitation, water, and health care is considered to be generally good.

One notable measure used to determine a country's quality of life is the Human Development Index (HDI), which has been compiled annually since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main arenas of human development: longevity, knowledge and education, as well as economic standard of living. In a recent ranking of 169 countries, the HDI placed Belarus in the high human development category, at 61st place.

Note: Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI, which is calculated and updated annually, offers a wide-ranging

assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators.

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, www.countrywatch.com; see Bibliography for research sources.

Human Development Index

Human Development Index

Human Development Index (Ranked Numerically)

The Human Development Index (HDI) is used to measure quality of life in countries across the world. The HDI has been compiled since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a regular basis. The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main arenas of human development: longevity, education, and economic standard of living. Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators. For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this review.

Very High Human Development	High Human Development	Medium Human Development	Low Human Development
1. Norway	43. Bahamas	86. Fiji	128. Kenya
2. Australia	44. Lithuania	87. Turkmenistan	129. Bangladesh
3. New Zealand	45. Chile	88. Dominican Republic	130. Ghana
4. United States	46. Argentina	89. China	131. Cameroon

5. Ireland	47. Kuwait	90. El Salvador	132. Myanmar (Burma)
6. Liechtenstein	48. Latvia	91. Sri Lanka	133. Yemen
7. Netherlands	49. Montenegro	92. Thailand	134. Benin
8. Canada	50. Romania	93. Gabon	135. Madagascar
9. Sweden	51. Croatia	94. Surname	136. Mauritania
10. Germany	52. Uruguay	95. Bolivia	137. Papua New Guinea
11. Japan	53. Libya	96. Paraguay	138. Nepal
12. South Korea	54. Panama	97. Philippines	139. Togo
13. Switzerland	55. Saudi Arabia	98. Botswana	140. Comoros
14. France	56. Mexico	99. Moldova	141. Lesotho
15. Israel	57. Malaysia	100. Mongolia	142. Nigeria
16. Finland	58. Bulgaria	101. Egypt	143. Uganda
17. Iceland	59. Trinidad and Tobago	102. Uzbekistan	144. Senegal
18. Belgium	60. Serbia	103. Micronesia	145. Haiti
19. Denmark	61. Belarus	104. Guyana	146. Angola
20. Spain	62. Costa Rica	105. Namibia	147. Djibouti
21. Hong King	63. Peru	106. Honduras	148. Tanzania

22. Greece	64. Albania	107. Maldives	149. Cote d'Ivoire
23. Italy	65. Russian Federation	108. Indonesia	150. Zambia
24. Luxembourg	66. Kazakhstan	109. Kyrgyzstan	151. Gambia
25. Austria	67. Azerbaijan	110. South Africa	152. Rwanda
26. United Kingdom	68. Bosnia and Herzegovina	111. Syria	153. Malawi
27. Singapore	69. Ukraine	112. Tajikistan	154. Sudan
28. Czech Republic	70. Iran	113. Vietnam	155. Afghanistan
29. Slovenia	71. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	114. Morocco	156. Guinea
30. Andorra	72. Mauritius	115. Nicaragua	157. Ethiopia
31. Slovakia	73. Brazil	116. Guatemala	158. Sierra Leone
32. United Arab Emirates	74. Georgia	117. Equatorial Guinea	159. Central African Republic
33. Malta	75. Venezuela	118. Cape Verde	160. Mali
34. Estonia	76. Armenia	119. India	161. Burkina Faso
35. Cyprus	77. Ecuador	120. East Timor	162. Liberia
36. Hungary	78. Belize	121. Swaziland	163. Chad

37. Brunei	79. Colombia	122. Laos	164. Guinea-Bissau
38. Qatar	80. Jamaica	123. Solomon Islands	165. Mozambique
39. Bahrain	81. Tunisia	124. Cambodia	166. Burundi
40. Portugal	82. Jordan	125. Pakistan	167. Niger
41. Poland	83. Turkey	126. Congo RC	168. Congo DRC
42. Barbados	84. Algeria	127. Sao Tome and Principe	169. Zimbabwe
	85. Tonga		

Methodology:

For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this Country Review.

Reference:

As published in United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report 2010.

Source:

United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index available at URL: http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using ranking available; reviewed in 2015

Life Satisfaction Index

Life Satisfaction Index

Life Satisfaction Index

Created by Adrian G. White, an Analytic Social Psychologist at the University of Leicester, the "Satisfaction with Life Index" measures subjective life satisfaction across various countries. The data was taken from a metastudy (see below for source) and associates the notion of subjective happiness or life satisfaction with qualitative parameters such as health, wealth, and access to basic education. This assessment serves as an alternative to other measures of happiness that tend to rely on traditional and quantitative measures of policy on quality of life, such as GNP and GDP. The methodology involved the responses of 80,000 people across the globe.

Rank	Country	Score
1	Denmark	273.4
2	Switzerland	273.33
3	Austria	260
4	Iceland	260
5	The Bahamas	256.67
6	Finland	256.67
7	Sweden	256.67
8	Iran	253.33
9	Brunei	253.33

10	Canada	253.33
11	Ireland	253.33
12	Luxembourg	253.33
13	Costa Rica	250
14	Malta	250
15	Netherlands	250
16	Antiguaand Barbuda	246.67
17	Malaysia	246.67
18	New Zealand	246.67
19	Norway	246.67
20	Seychelles	246.67
21	Saint Kitts and Nevis	246.67
22	United Arab Emirates	246.67
23	United States	246.67
24	Vanuatu	246.67
25	Venezuela	246.67
26	Australia	243.33
27	Barbados	243.33

28	Belgium	243.33
29	Dominica	243.33
30	Oman	243.33
31	Saudi Arabia	243.33
32	Suriname	243.33
33	Bahrain	240
34	Colombia	240
35	Germany	240
36	Guyana	240
37	Honduras	240
38	Kuwait	240
39	Panama	240
40	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	240
41	United Kingdom	236.67
42	Dominican Republic	233.33
43	Guatemala	233.33
44	Jamaica	233.33
45	Qatar	233.33

46	Spain	233.33
47	Saint Lucia	233.33
48	Belize	230
49	Cyprus	230
50	Italy	230
51	Mexico	230
52	Samoa	230
53	Singapore	230
54	Solomon Islands	230
55	Trinidad and Tobago	230
56	Argentina	226.67
57	Fiji	223.33
58	Israel	223.33
59	Mongolia	223.33
60	São Tomé and Príncipe	223.33
61	El Salvador	220
62	France	220
63	Hong Kong	220

64	Indonesia	220
65	Kyrgyzstan	220
66	Maldives	220
67	Slovenia	220
68	Taiwan	220
69	East Timor	220
70	Tonga	220
71	Chile	216.67
72	Grenada	216.67
73	Mauritius	216.67
74	Namibia	216.67
75	Paraguay	216.67
76	Thailand	216.67
77	Czech Republic	213.33
78	Philippines	213.33
79	Tunisia	213.33
80	Uzbekistan	213.33
81	Brazil	210

82	China	210
83	Cuba	210
84	Greece	210
85	Nicaragua	210
86	Papua New Guinea	210
87	Uruguay	210
88	Gabon	206.67
89	Ghana	206.67
90	Japan	206.67
91	Yemen	206.67
92	Portugal	203.33
93	Sri Lanka	203.33
94	Tajikistan	203.33
95	Vietnam	203.33
96	Bhutan	200
97	Comoros	196.67
98	Croatia	196.67
99	Poland	196.67

100	Cape Verde	193.33
101	Kazakhstan	193.33
102	South Korea	193.33
103	Madagascar	193.33
104	Bangladesh	190
105	Republic of the Congo	190
106	The Gambia	190
107	Hungary	190
108	Libya	190
109	South Africa	190
110	Cambodia	186.67
111	Ecuador	186.67
112	Kenya	186.67
113	Lebanon	186.67
114	Morocco	186.67
115	Peru	186.67
116	Senegal	186.67
117	Bolivia	183.33

118	Haiti	183.33
119	Nepal	183.33
120	Nigeria	183.33
121	Tanzania	183.33
122	Benin	180
123	Botswana	180
124	Guinea-Bissau	180
125	India	180
126	Laos	180
127	Mozambique	180
128	Palestinian Authority	180
129	Slovakia	180
130	Myanmar	176.67
131	Mali	176.67
132	Mauritania	176.67
133	Turkey	176.67
134	Algeria	173.33
135	Equatorial Guinea	173.33

136	Romania	173.33
137	Bosnia and Herzegovina	170
138	Cameroon	170
139	Estonia	170
140	Guinea	170
141	Jordan	170
142	Syria	170
143	Sierra Leone	166.67
144	Azerbaijan	163.33
145	Central African Republic	163.33
146	Republic of Macedonia	163.33
147	Togo	163.33
148	Zambia	163.33
149	Angola	160
150	Djibouti	160
151	Egypt	160
152	Burkina Faso	156.67
153	Ethiopia	156.67

154	Latvia	156.67
155	Lithuania	156.67
156	Uganda	156.67
157	Albania	153.33
158	Malawi	153.33
159	Chad	150
160	Côte d'Ivoire	150
161	Niger	150
162	Eritrea	146.67
163	Rwanda	146.67
164	Bulgaria	143.33
165	Lesotho	143.33
166	Pakistan	143.33
167	Russia	143.33
168	Swaziland	140
169	Georgia	136.67
170	Belarus	133.33
171	Turkmenistan	133.33

172	Armenia	123.33
173	Sudan	120
174	Ukraine	120
175	Moldova	116.67
176	Democratic Republic of the Congo	110
177	Zimbabwe	110
178	Burundi	100

Commentary:

European countries, such as Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria resided at the top of the ranking with highest levels of self-reported life satisfaction. Conversely, European countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine ranked low on the index. African countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Burundi found themselves at the very bottom of the ranking, and indeed, very few African countries could be found in the top 100. Japan was at the mid-way point in the ranking, however, other Asian countries such as Brunei and Malaysia were in the top tier, while Pakistan was close to the bottom with a low level of self-identified life satisfaction. As a region, the Middle East presented a mixed bad with Saudi Arabians reporing healthy levels of life satisfaction and Egyptians near the bottom of the ranking. As a region, Caribbean countries were ranked highly, consistently demonstrating high levels of life satisfaction. The findings showed that health was the most crucial determining factor in life satisfaction, followed by prosperity and education.

Source:

White, A. (2007). A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being: A Challenge To Positive Psychology? Psychtalk 56, 17-20. The data was extracted from a meta-analysis by Marks, Abdallah, Simms & Thompson (2006).

Uploaded:

Based on study noted above in "Source" ; reviewed in 2015

Happy Planet Index

Happy Planet Index

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is used to measure human well-being in conjunction with environmental impact. The HPI has been compiled since 2006 by the New Economics Foundation. The index is a composite of several indicators including subjective life satisfaction, life expectancy at birth, and ecological footprint per capita.

As noted by NEFA, the HPI "reveals the ecological efficiency with which human well-being is delivered." Indeed, the index combines environmental impact with human well-being to measure the environmental efficiency with which, country by country, people live long and happy lives. The countries ranked highest by the HPI are not necessarily the ones with the happiest people overall, but the ones that allow their citizens to live long and fulfilling lives, without negatively impacting this opportunity for either future generations or citizens of other countries. Accordingly, a country like the United States will rank low on this list due to its large per capital ecological footprint, which uses more than its fair share of resources, and will likely cause planetary damage.

It should be noted that the HPI was designed to be a counterpoint to other well-established indices of countries' development, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures overall national wealth and economic development, but often obfuscates the realities of countries with stark variances between the rich and the poor. Moreover, the objective of most of the world's people is not to be wealthy but to be happy. The HPI also differs from the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures quality of life but not ecology, since it [HPI] also includes sustainability as a key indicator.

Rank	Country	HPI
1	Costa Rica	76.1

2	Dominican Republic	71.8
3	Jamaica	70.1
4	Guatemala	68.4
5	Vietnam	66.5
6	Colombia	66.1
7	Cuba	65.7
8	El Salvador	61.5
9	Brazil	61.0
10	Honduras	61.0
11	Nicaragua	60.5
12	Egypt	60.3
13	Saudi Arabia	59.7
14	Philippines	59.0
15	Argentina	59.0
16	Indonesia	58.9
17	Bhutan	58.5
18	Panama	57.4
19	Laos	57.3

20	China	57.1
21	Morocco	56.8
22	Sri Lanka	56.5
23	Mexico	55.6
24	Pakistan	55.6
25	Ecuador	55.5
26	Jordan	54.6
27	Belize	54.5
28	Peru	54.4
29	Tunisia	54.3
30	Trinidad and Tobago	54.2
31	Bangladesh	54.1
32	Moldova	54.1
33	Malaysia	54.0
34	Tajikistan	53.5
35	India	53.0
36	Venezuela	52.5
37	Nepal	51.9

38	Syria	51.3
39	Burma	51.2
40	Algeria	51.2
41	Thailand	50.9
42	Haiti	50.8
43	Netherlands	50.6
44	Malta	50.4
45	Uzbekistan	50.1
46	Chile	49.7
47	Bolivia	49.3
48	Armenia	48.3
49	Singapore	48.2
50	Yemen	48.1
51	Germany	48.1
52	Switzerland	48.1
53	Sweden	48.0
54	Albania	47.9
55	Paraguay	47.8

56	Palestinian Authority	47.7
57	Austria	47.7
58	Serbia	47.6
59	Finland	47.2
60	Croatia	47.2
61	Kyrgyzstan	47.1
62	Cyprus	46.2
63	Guyana	45.6
64	Belgium	45.4
65	Bosnia and Herzegovina	45.0
66	Slovenia	44.5
67	Israel	44.5
68	South Korea	44.4
69	Italy	44.0
70	Romania	43.9
71	France	43.9
72	Georgia	43.6
73	Slovakia	43.5

74	United Kingdom	43.3
75	Japan	43.3
76	Spain	43.2
77	Poland	42.8
78	Ireland	42.6
79	Iraq	42.6
80	Cambodia	42.3
81	Iran	42.1
82	Bulgaria	42.0
83	Turkey	41.7
84	Hong Kong	41.6
85	Azerbaijan	41.2
86	Lithuania	40.9
87	Djibouti	40.4
88	Norway	40.4
89	Canada	39.4
90	Hungary	38.9
91	Kazakhstan	38.5

92	Czech Republic	38.3
93	Mauritania	38.2
94	Iceland	38.1
95	Ukraine	38.1
96	Senegal	38.0
97	Greece	37.6
98	Portugal	37.5
99	Uruguay	37.2
100	Ghana	37.1
101	Latvia	36.7
102	Australia	36.6
103	New Zealand	36.2
104	Belarus	35.7
105	Denmark	35.5
106	Mongolia	35.0
107	Malawi	34.5
108	Russia	34.5
109	Chad	34.3

110	Lebanon	33.6
111	Macedonia	32.7
112	Republic of the Congo	32.4
113	Madagascar	31.5
114	United States	30.7
115	Nigeria	30.3
116	Guinea	30.3
117	Uganda	30.2
118	South Africa	29.7
119	Rwanda	29.6
120	Democratic Republic of the Congo	29.0
121	Sudan	28.5
122	Luxembourg	28.5
123	United Arab Emirates	28.2
124	Ethiopia	28.1
125	Kenya	27.8
126	Cameroon	27.2
127	Zambia	27.2

128	Kuwait	27.0
129	Niger	26.9
130	Angola	26.8
131	Estonia	26.4
132	Mali	25.8
133	Mozambique	24.6
134	Benin	24.6
135	Togo	23.3
136	Sierra Leone	23.1
137	Central African Republic	22.9
138	Burkina Faso	22.4
139	Burundi	21.8
140	Namibia	21.1
141	Botswana	20.9
142	Tanzania	17.8
143	Zimbabwe	16.6

Source: *This material is derived from the Happy Planet Index issued by the New Economics Foundation (NEF).*

Methodology: *The methodology for the calculations can be found at URL: http://www.happyplanetindex.org/*

Status of Women

Gender Related Development Index (GDI) Rank:

53rd out of 140

Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Rank:

Not Ranked

Female Population:

5.2 million

Female Life Expectancy at birth:

77 years

Total Fertility Rate:

1.2

Maternal Mortality Ratio (2000):

35

Total Number of Women Living with HIV/AIDS:

2,400-13,000

Ever Married Women, Ages 15-19 (%):

6%

Mean Age at Time of Marriage:

23

Contraceptive Use Among Married Women, Any Method (%):

50%

Female Adult Literacy Rate:

99.4%

Combined Female Gross enrollment ratio for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools:

91%

Female-Headed Households (%):

N/A

Economically Active Females (%):

59%

Female Contributing Family Workers (%):

N/A

Female Estimated Earned Income:

$4,842

Seats in Parliament held by women (%):

Lower or Single House: 29.4%

Upper House or Senate: 31.6%

Year Women Received the Right to Vote:

1919

Year Women Received the Right to Stand for Election:

1919

*The Gender Development Index (GDI) is a composite index which measures the average achievement in a country. While very similar to the Human Development Index in its use of the same variables, the GDI adjusts the average achievement of each country in terms of life expectancy, enrollment in schools, income, and literacy in accordance to the disparities between males and females.

*The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a composite index measuring gender inequality in three of the basic dimensions of empowerment; economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources.

*Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is defined as the average number of babies born to women during their reproductive years. A TFR of 2.1 is considered the replacement rate; once a TFR of a population reaches 2.1 the population will remain stable assuming no immigration or emigration takes place. When the TFR is greater than 2.1 a population will increase and when it is less than 2.1 a population will eventually decrease, although due to the age structure of a population it will take years before a low TFR is translated into lower population.

*Maternal Mortality Rate is the number of deaths to women per 100,000 live births that resulted from conditions related to pregnancy and or delivery related complications.

*Economically Active Females are the share of the female population, ages 15 and above, whom supply, or are able to supply, labor for the production of goods and services.

*Female Contributing Family Workers are those females who work without pay in an economic enterprise operated by a relative living in the same household.

*Estimated Earned Income is measured according to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in US dollars.

Global Gender Gap Index

Global Gender Gap Index

Editor's Note:

The Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum ranks most of the world's countries in terms of the division of resources and opportunities among males and females. Specifically, the ranking assesses the gender inequality gap in these four arenas:

1. Economic participation and opportunity (salaries and high skilled employment participation levels)
2. Educational attainment (access to basic and higher level education)
3. Political empowerment (representation in decision-making structures)
4. Health and survival (life expectancy and sex ratio)

	2010 rank	2010 score	2010 rank among 2009 countries	2009 rank	2009 score	2008 rank	2008 score	2007 rank
Country								
Iceland	1	0.8496	1	1	0.8276	4	0.7999	4
Norway	2	0.8404	2	3	0.8227	1	0.8239	2
Finland	3	0.8260	3	2	0.8252	2	0.8195	3
Sweden	4	0.8024	4	4	0.8139	3	0.8139	1
New Zealand	5	0.7808	5	5	0.7880	5	0.7859	5
Ireland	6	0.7773	6	8	0.7597	8	0.7518	9
Denmark	7	0.7719	7	7	0.7628	7	0.7538	8

Lesotho	8	0.7678	8	10	0.7495	16	0.7320	26
Philippines	9	0.7654	9	9	0.7579	6	0.7568	6
Switzerland	10	0.7562	10	13	0.7426	14	0.7360	40
Spain	11	0.7554	11	17	0.7345	17	0.7281	10
South Africa	12	0.7535	12	6	0.7709	22	0.7232	20
Germany	13	0.7530	13	12	0.7449	11	0.7394	7
Belgium	14	0.7509	14	33	0.7165	28	0.7163	19
United Kingdom	15	0.7460	15	15	0.7402	13	0.7366	11
Sri Lanka	16	0.7458	16	16	0.7402	12	0.7371	15
Netherlands	17	0.7444	17	11	0.7490	9	0.7399	12
Latvia	18	0.7429	18	14	0.7416	10	0.7397	13
United States	19	0.7411	19	31	0.7173	27	0.7179	31
Canada	20	0.7372	20	25	0.7196	31	0.7136	18
Trinidad and Tobago	21	0.7353	21	19	0.7298	19	0.7245	46
Mozambique	22	0.7329	22	26	0.7195	18	0.7266	43
Australia	23	0.7271	23	20	0.7282	21	0.7241	17
Cuba	24	0.7253	24	29	0.7176	25	0.7195	22

Namibia	25	0.7238	25	32	0.7167	30	0.7141	29
Luxembourg	26	0.7231	26	63	0.6889	66	0.6802	58
Mongolia	27	0.7194	27	22	0.7221	40	0.7049	62
Costa Rica	28	0.7194	28	27	0.7180	32	0.7111	28
Argentina	29	0.7187	29	24	0.7211	24	0.7209	33
Nicaragua	30	0.7176	30	49	0.7002	71	0.6747	90
Barbados	31	0.7176	31	21	0.7236	26	0.7188	n/a
Portugal	32	0.7171	32	46	0.7013	39	0.7051	37
Uganda	33	0.7169	33	40	0.7067	43	0.6981	50
Moldova	34	0.7160	34	36	0.7104	20	0.7244	21
Lithuania	35	0.7132	35	30	0.7175	23	0.7222	14
Bahamas	36	0.7128	36	28	0.7179	n/a	n/a	n/a
Austria	37	0.7091	37	42	0.7031	29	0.7153	27
Guyana	38	0.7090	38	35	0.7108	n/a	n/a	n/a
Panama	39	0.7072	39	43	0.7024	34	0.7095	38
Ecuador	40	0.7072	40	23	0.7220	35	0.7091	44
Kazakhstan	41	0.7055	41	47	0.7013	45	0.6976	32
Slovenia	42	0.7047	42	52	0.6982	51	0.6937	49

Poland	43	0.7037	43	50	0.6998	49	0.6951	60
Jamaica	44	0.7037	44	48	0.7013	44	0.6980	39
Russian Federation	45	0.7036	45	51	0.6987	42	0.6994	45
France	46	0.7025	46	18	0.7331	15	0.7341	51
Estonia	47	0.7018	47	37	0.7094	37	0.7076	30
Chile	48	0.7013	48	64	0.6884	65	0.6818	86
Macedonia, FYR	49	0.6996	49	53	0.6950	53	0.6914	35
Bulgaria	50	0.6983	50	38	0.7072	36	0.7077	25
Kyrgyz Republic	51	0.6973	51	41	0.7058	41	0.7045	70
Israel	52	0.6957	52	45	0.7019	56	0.6900	36
Croatia	53	0.6939	53	54	0.6944	46	0.6967	16
Honduras	54	0.6927	54	62	0.6893	47	0.6960	68
Colombia	55	0.6927	55	56	0.6939	50	0.6944	24
Singapore	56	0.6914	56	84	0.6664	84	0.6625	77
Thailand	57	0.6910	57	59	0.6907	52	0.6917	52
Greece	58	0.6908	58	85	0.6662	75	0.6727	72
Uruguay	59	0.6897	59	57	0.6936	54	0.6907	78

Peru	60	0.6895	60	44	0.7024	48	0.6959	75
China	61	0.6881	61	60	0.6907	57	0.6878	73
Botswana	62	0.6876	62	39	0.7071	63	0.6839	53
Ukraine	63	0.6869	63	61	0.6896	62	0.6856	57
Venezuela	64	0.6863	64	69	0.6839	59	0.6875	55
Czech Republic	65	0.6850	65	74	0.6789	69	0.6770	64
Tanzania	66	0.6829	66	73	0.6797	38	0.7068	34
Romania	67	0.6826	67	70	0.6805	70	0.6763	47
Malawi	68	0.6824	68	76	0.6738	81	0.6664	87
Paraguay	69	0.6804	69	66	0.6868	100	0.6379	69
Ghana	70	0.6782	70	80	0.6704	77	0.6679	63
Slovak Republic	71	0.6778	71	68	0.6845	64	0.6824	54
Vietnam	72	0.6776	72	71	0.6802	68	0.6778	42
Dominican Republic	73	0.6774	73	67	0.6859	72	0.6744	65
Italy	74	0.6765	74	72	0.6798	67	0.6788	84
Gambia, The	75	0.6762	75	75	0.6752	85	0.6622	95

Bolivia	76	0.6751	76	82	0.6693	80	0.6667	80
Brueni Darussalem	77	0.6748	77	94	0.6524	99	0.6392	n/a
Albania	78	0.6726	78	91	0.6601	87	0.6591	66
Hungary	79	0.6720	79	65	0.6879	60	0.6867	61
Madagascar	80	0.6713	80	77	0.6732	74	0.6736	89
Angola	81	0.6712	81	106	0.6353	114	0.6032	110
Bangladesh	82	0.6702	82	93	0.6526	90	0.6531	100
Malta	83	0.6695	83	88	0.6635	83	0.6634	76
Armenia	84	0.6669	84	90	0.6619	78	0.6677	71
Brazil	85	0.6655	85	81	0.6695	73	0.6737	74
Cyprus	86	0.6642	86	79	0.6706	76	0.6694	82
Indonesia	87	0.6615	87	92	0.6580	93	0.6473	81
Georgia	88	0.6598	88	83	0.6680	82	0.6654	67
Tajikistan	89	0.6598	89	86	0.6661	89	0.6541	79
El Salvador	90	0.6596	90	55	0.6939	58	0.6875	48
Mexico	91	0.6577	91	98	0.6503	97	0.6441	93
Zimbabwe	92	0.6574	92	95	0.6518	92	0.6485	88
Belize	93	0.6536	93	87	0.6636	86	0.6610	94

Japan	94	0.6524	94	101	0.6447	98	0.6434	91
Mauritius	95	0.6520	95	96	0.6513	95	0.6466	85
Kenya	96	0.6499	96	97	0.6512	88	0.6547	83
Cambodia	97	0.6482	97	104	0.6410	94	0.6469	98
Malaysia	98	0.6479	98	100	0.6467	96	0.6442	92
Maldives	99	0.6452	99	99	0.6482	91	0.6501	99
Azerbaijan	100	0.6446	100	89	0.6626	61	0.6856	59
Senegal	101	0.6414	101	102	0.6427	n/a	n/a	n/a
Suriname	102	0.6407	102	78	0.6726	79	0.6674	56
United Arab Emirates	103	0.6397	103	112	0.6198	105	0.6220	105
Korea, Rep.	104	0.6342	104	115	0.6146	108	0.6154	97
Kuwait	105	0.6318	105	105	0.6356	101	0.6358	96
Zambia	106	0.6293	106	107	0.6310	106	0.6205	101
Tunisia	107	0.6266	107	109	0.6233	103	0.6295	102
Fiji	108	0.6256	108	103	0.6414	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guatemala	109	0.6238	109	111	0.6209	112	0.6072	106
Bahrain	110	0.6217	110	116	0.6136	121	0.5927	115

Burkina Faso	111	0.6162	111	120	0.6081	115	0.6029	117
India	112	0.6155	112	114	0.6151	113	0.6060	114
Mauritania	113	0.6152	113	119	0.6103	110	0.6117	111
Cameroon	114	0.6110	114	118	0.6108	117	0.6017	116
Nepal	115	0.6084	115	110	0.6213	120	0.5942	125
Lebanon*	116	0.6084	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	117	0.6059	116	125	0.5907	119	0.5948	109
Nigeria	118	0.6055	117	108	0.6280	102	0.6339	107
Algeria	119	0.6052	118	117	0.6119	111	0.6111	108
Jordan	120	0.6048	119	113	0.6182	104	0.6275	104
Ethiopia	121	0.6019	120	122	0.5948	122	0.5867	113
Oman	122	0.5950	121	123	0.5938	118	0.5960	119
Iran	123	0.5933	122	128	0.5839	116	0.6021	118
Syria	124	0.5926	123	121	0.6072	107	0.6181	103
Egypt	125	0.5899	124	126	0.5862	124	0.5832	120
Turkey	126	0.5876	125	129	0.5828	123	0.5853	121
Morocco	127	0.5767	126	124	0.5926	125	0.5757	122
Benin	128	0.5719	127	131	0.5643	126	0.5582	123

Saudi Arabia	129	0.5713	128	130	0.5651	128	0.5537	124
Côte d'Ivoire*	130	0.5691	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mali	131	0.5680	129	127	0.5860	109	0.6117	112
Pakistan	132	0.5465	130	132	0.5458	127	0.5549	126
Chad	133	0.5330	131	133	0.5417	129	0.5290	127
Yemen	134	0.4603	132	134	0.4609	130	0.4664	128
Belarus	n/a	n/a	n/a	34	0.7141	33	0.7099	23
Uzbekistan	n/a	n/a	n/a	58	0.6913	55	0.6906	41

*new country 2010

Commentary:

According to the report's index, Nordic countries, such as Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden have continued to dominate at the top of the ranking for gender equality. Meanwhile, France has seen a notable decline in the ranking, largely as a result of decreased number of women holding ministerial portfolios in that country. In the Americas, the United States has risen in the ranking to top the region, predominantly as a result of a decreasing wage gap, as well as higher number of women holding key positions in the current Obama administration. Canada has continued to remain as one of the top ranking countries of the Americas, followed by the small Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, which has the distinction of being among the top three countries of the Americans in the realm of gender equality. Lesotho and South African ranked highly in the index, leading not only among African countries but also in global context. Despite Lesotho still lagging in the area of life expectancy, its high ranking was attributed to high levels of female participation in the labor force and female literacy. The Philippines and Sri Lanka were the top

ranking countries for gender equality for Asia, ranking highly also in global context. The Philippines has continued to show strong performance in all strong performance on all four dimensions (detailed above) of the index. Finally, in the Arab world, the United Arab Emirates held the highest-rank within that region of the world; however, its placement near the bottom of the global list highlights the fact that Arab countries are generally poor performers when it comes to the matter of gender equality in global scope.

Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum.

Available at URL:

http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/Gende

Updated:

Based on latest available data as set forth in chart; reviewed in 2014

Culture and Arts

Culture and Arts of Belarus

Music

Despite the poor economy and low wages, concert halls and music venues are filled daily, particularly in the larger cities such as Minsk. Important composers of the past and present are Yawhen Hlyebaw (1929 – 2000), Yawhen Tsikotski, Kulikovich Shchahlow and Serguei Kortes who is the composer and Artistic Director of the National Opera Theatre.

While classical music is thriving, there has been a concern that the recognition of contemporary Belarusian music (primarily rock/pop) has been neglected and often ignored by Belarussians themselves due to the influences of Russian bands and more importantly the dominance of the Russian language. Folk music is sung in the Belarusian language but many critics are afraid that even that this traditional music form will fade out as Western culture begins to influence the music

market in Belarus.

Rock bands such as Ulis, Bonda, Krama, Novaje nieba, and N.R.M are popular. Drum XTC and Autism produce dance music. Kriwi has received international recognition for their unique sound, which blends folk and electronic music together. The national folk group, Pesneyary, has been performing Belarusian folk music both in Belarus and abroad for over thirty years.

Belarusian Music Source:
http://belmusic.hypermart.net/

Musicians Gallery: Belarusian Opera:
http://www.musiciansgallery.com/start/halls/belarusian_opera_theatre.html

Art

The most famous Belarusian born artist is Marc Chagall (1887-1985) who is responsible for starting the Art School in Vitebsk, which has left a lasting impression on the world of art. El Lissitzky (1890 –1941) was born in Russia, but moved to Belarus where he founded the Suprematist movement in Vitebsk. Kazimir Malevich (1878 – 1935) is another important Suprematist artist. Some established and up and coming living artists are Leon Bakst and Ruslan Vashkevich.

Literature

National identity has been a crucial theme of Belarusian literature since the turn of the twentieth century. This theme is particularly seen in poetry where the natural world and rural life are praised. Belarusian poetic movements will both glorify the traditions and memories of the past and morn over the cultural oppression of the present.

Since the nineteenth century there have been a number of cultural renaissances represented in the works of writers, the most recent is a result of the 1991 break with Russia. Due to powerful neighboring countries occupying Belarus throughout it's history the key determining factor in these renaissances is the use of the Belarusian language in literature rather than the language of the dominant country i.e., Poland, Lithuania, and Russia, and consequentially, it is though the use of the Belarusian mother tongue that writers find that sense of national identity.

Jan Chachot (1796-1847) is considered to one of be the first writers responsible for paving the way for a Belarusian cultural renaissance. At a time when Belarusian was considered the language of the lower classes, Chachot collected and published Belarusian folk songs, studied the Belarusian linguistics and wrote poetry in the Belarusian tongue. Francisak Bahusevic (1840-1900) is another

important poet that greatly influenced a revival in Belarusian culture.

The two writers considered to be the founders of modern Belarusian literature are Yakub Kolas (1882-1956) and Yanka Kupala (1882-1942), who both wrote in the Belarusian language. Other important writers include Natalla Arseneva (1903-1997 who wrote Beneath the Blue Sky and Vasil Bykau, a Nobel Prize nominee, who is considered the "the conscience of the nation".

Note: Francishak Alachnovic (1883-1944) and the satirist Kandrat Krapiva (1896-1991) are important Belarusian playwrights.

Cultural and Educational Profile on Belarus: Literature and Language of Belarus:
http://artemis.simmons.edu/~usova/belarus/literature.html

The Virtual Guide to Belarus:
http://www.belarusguide.com/main/index.html

Cuisine

Food shortages have resulted in restaurants offering a rather limited menu. Potatoes, pork, soups, beets, mushrooms are the basic ingredients for several dishes. Belarusian specialties include dracheny (potatoes with mushrooms), draniki (potato pancakes with sour cream), and mochanka (a thick soup).

Belarusian Cuisine:

http://knihi.com/bel/cuisine.html#1

Etiquette

Cultural Dos and Taboos

1. Belarusians are not effusive people in public. Greetings are limited to handshakes and pronouncements of one's name, and usually only the surname is used in these instances. Non-

locals should respond in kind, avoiding phrases such as "how are you?"

2. Among friends and relatives, embraces or double-cheeked kisses are happily given. Handshakes among men and women is normative.

3. The traditional title of respect used in Belarus is Professor. It is liberally used to denote erudition for doctors of science, experts in various other fields, as well as teachers.

4. Belarusians enjoy speaking about politics, economics and social issues, and so these topics are entirely appropriate. They also are interested in the countries of the West, especially the United States, and so topics of intercultural and international import are perfectly acceptable subject matter.

5. Invitations to someone's home are a high sign of respect and honor; invitees should always accept, eat and rink plentifully, and arrive bearing gifts. Suggested gifts include watches, pens, lighters, electronic devices, cigarettes or cigars. Baseball caps, pins or scarves are acceptable pieces of apparel to offer as gifts, while flowers, soaps or perfumes are fine gifts to offer to a female host or the wife of a host. Children are usually present at dinners at home.

6. Although invitations for dinner may be issued for a specific time, guests usually take time (up to an hour) to actually gather before dinner.

7. Belarusians tend to offer toasts at dinners. The most common toast is given to one's health, but it is advisable that visitors learn how to offer at least one toast.

8. Whistling is inappropriate behavior as it denotes disapproval. Spitting in public, however, is not uncommon. In general, Belarusians possess a complex constellation of gestures, curses and practices that should be understood. Visitors should find a local to explain the local practices fully to them.

9. That said, foreigners can benefit from their status as outsiders by receiving preferential treatment and willing help from locals.

10. Business attire is formal and conservative, although not necessarily fashionable. Dress for a dinner invitation can extend from casual wear (blue jeans etc.) to a well-tailored suit. Regardless, layered clothing is advised since buildings are not always consistently (or properly) heated in the winter.

Travel Information

Please Note: This is a generalized travel guide and it is intended to coalesce several resources that a traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination. As such, it does not include travel warnings for specific "hot spot" destinations.

For travel alerts and warnings, please see the United States Department of State's listings available at URL: http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html

Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these warnings, is ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precautions:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Honduras, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories of West Bank and Gaza, Philippines areas of Sulu Archipelago, Mindanao, and southern Sulu Sea, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen.

International Travel Guide

Checklist for Travelers

1. Take out travel insurance to cover hospital treatment or medical evacuation. Overseas medical costs are expensive to most international travelers, where one's domestic, nationalized or even private health insurance plans will not provide coverage outside one's home country. Learn about "reciprocal insurance plans" that some international health care companies might offer.
2. Make sure that one's travel insurance is appropriate. If one intends to indulge in adventurous activities, such as parasailing, one should be sure that one is fully insured in such cases. Many traditional insurance policies do not provide coverage in cases of extreme circumstances.
3. Take time to learn about one's destination country and culture. Read and learn about the place one is traveling. Also check political, economic and socio-cultural developments at the destination by reading country-specific travel reports and fact sheets noted below.
4. Get the necessary visas for the country (or countries) one intends to visit - but be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry. A number of useful sites regarding visa and other entry requirements are noted below.
5. Keep in regular contact with friends and relatives back at home by phone or email, and be sure to leave a travel itinerary.
6. Protect one's personal information by making copies of one's passport details, insurance policy, travelers checks and credit card numbers. Taking copies of such documents with you, while leaving another collection copies with someone at home is also good practice for travelers. Taking

copies of one's passport photograph is also recommended.
7. Stay healthy by taking all possible precautions against illness. Also, be sure to take extra supplies of prescription drugs along for the trip, while also taking time to pack general pharmaceutical supplies, such as aspirin and other such painkillers, bandages, stomach ailment medication, anti-inflammatory medication and anti-bacterial medication.
8. Do not carry illicit drugs. Understand that the punishment for possession or use of illegal drugs in some countries may be capital punishment. Make sure your prescription drugs are legal in the countries you plan to visit.
9. Know the laws of one's destination country and culture; be sure to understand the repercussions of breaking those laws and regulations. Often the transparency and freedoms of the juridical system at home is not consistent with that of one's destination country. Become aware of these complexities and subtleties before you travel.
10. For longer stays in a country, or where the security situation is volatile, one should register one's self and traveling companions at the local embassy or consulate of one's country of citizenship.
11. Women should take care to be prepared both culturally and practically for traveling in a different country and culture. One should be sure to take sufficient supplies of personal feminine products and prescription drugs. One should also learn about local cultural standards for women, including norms of dressing. Be aware that it is simply inappropriate and unsafe for women to travel alone in some countries, and take the necessary precautions to avoid risk-filled situations.
12. If one is traveling with small children, one should pack extra supplies, make arrangements with the travel carrier for proper seating that would adequately accommodate children, infants or toddlers. Note also that whether one is male of female, traveling with children means that one's hands are thus not free to carry luggage and bags. Be especially aware that this makes one vulnerable to pickpockets, thieves and other sorts of crime.
13. Make proper arrangements for accommodations, well in advance of one's arrival at a destination. Some countries have limited accommodation, while others may have culturally distinctive facilities. Learning about these practicalities before one travels will greatly aid the enjoyment of one's trip.
14. Travel with different forms of currency and money (cash, traveler's checks and credit cards) in anticipation that venues may not accept one or another form of money. Also, ensuring that one's financial resources are not contained in one location, or by one person (if one is traveling with others) can be a useful measure, in the event that one loses a wallet or purse.
15. Find out about transportation in the destination country. In some places, it might be advisable to hire a local driver or taxi guide for safety reasons, while in other countries, enjoying one's travel experience may well be enhanced by renting a vehicle and seeing the local sights and culture independently. Costs may also be prohibitive for either of these choices, so again, prior planning is suggested.

Tips for Travelers

• Some foreign citizens require visas both to visit and to transit through Belarus. Visas should be obtained prior to travel.

• Check with your embassy, consulate, or appropriate government institution related to travel before traveling.

• There is no longer a concession for holders of other CIS/FSU country visas to transit Belarus without a Belarusian visa.

• Visitors must register with the police station in the district in which they staying. However, visitors staying in hotels will be automatically registered.

• It is compulsory for all foreign visitors to purchase a local medical insurance policy. These policies can be purchased at ports of entry but should not be considered an alternative to a comprehensive travel insurance policy. Once purchased, keep with your passport.

• Keep belongings in a safe place.

• Carry at least a copy of your passport at all times.

• Enter next of kin details into the back of your passport.

• Credit cards are not widely used but can be used to withdraw cash at major hotels and banks. Some large stores and restaurants will take them.

• Sterling is not widely accepted for exchanging into Belarusian Rubles, carry a mix US currency and travelers checks. Ensure you have enough money for the duration of your stay.

• Only exchange foreign currency at Government licensed booths. These can be found in or near major stores, hotels, banks and all shopping centers. Non-compliance can result in fines and/or arrest.

• Don't overstay your visa.

• Don't carry drugs penalties are severe.

Note: This information is directly quoted from the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Sources: *United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

Business Culture: Information for Business Travelers

For information on etiquette in Belarus see our Cultural Etiquette page.

Online Resources Regarding Entry Requirements and Visas

Online Resources Regarding Entry Requirements and Visas

Foreign Entry Requirements for Americans from the United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html

Visa Services for Non-Americans from the United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html

Visa Bulletins from the United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_1360.html

Visa Waivers from the United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html - new

Passport and Visa Information from the Government of the United Kingdom
http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/

Visa Information from the Government of Australia
http://www.dfat.gov.au/visas/index.html

Passport Information from the Government of Australia
https://www.passports.gov.au/Web/index.aspx

Passport Information from the Government of Canada
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/passport_passeport-eng.asp

Visa Information from the Government of Canada
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/visas-eng.asp

Online Visa Processing by Immigration Experts by VisaPro
http://www.visapro.com

Sources: United States Department of State, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Canada Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Useful Online Resources for Travelers

Country-Specific Travel Information from United States
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html

Travel Advice by Country from Government of United Kingdom
http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/

General Travel Advice from Government of Australia
http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/General

Travel Bulletins from the Government of Australia
http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/TravelBulletins/

Travel Tips from Government of Australia
http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/index.html

Travel Checklist by Government of Canada
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/checklist_sommaire-eng.asp

Travel Checklist from Government of United Kingdom
http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/staying-safe/checklist

Your trip abroad from United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1225.html

A safe trip abroad from United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html

Tips for expatriates abroad from United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing_1235.html

Tips for students from United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/studying/studying_1238.html http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/broc

Medical information for travelers from United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html

US Customs Travel information
http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/

Sources: United States Department of State; United States Customs Department, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia; Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Other Practical Online Resources for Travelers

Foreign Language Phrases for Travelers
http://www.travlang.com/languages/
http://www.omniglot.com/language/phrases/index.htm

World Weather Forecasts
http://www.intellicast.com/
http://www.wunderground.com/
http://www.worldweather.org/

Worldwide Time Zones, Map, World Clock
http://www.timeanddate.com/
http://www.worldtimezone.com/

International Airport Codes
http://www.world-airport-codes.com/

International Dialing Codes
http://www.kropla.com/dialcode.htm
http://www.countrycallingcodes.com/

International Phone Guide
http://www.kropla.com/phones.htm

International Mobile Phone Guide
http://www.kropla.com/mobilephones.htm

International Internet Café Search Engine
http://cybercaptive.com/

Global Internet Roaming
http://www.kropla.com/roaming.htm

World Electric Power Guide
http://www.kropla.com/electric.htm
http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm

World Television Standards and Codes
http://www.kropla.com/tv.htm
International Currency Exchange Rates
http://www.xe.com/ucc/

Banking and Financial Institutions Across the World
http://www.123world.com/banks/index.html

International Credit Card or Automated Teller Machine (ATM) Locator
http://visa.via.infonow.net/locator/global/
http://www.mastercard.com/us/personal/en/cardholderservices/atmlocations/index.html

International Chambers of Commerce
http://www.123world.com/chambers/index.html

World Tourism Websites
http://123world.com/tourism/

Diplomatic and Consular Information

United States Diplomatic Posts Around the World
http://www.usembassy.gov/

United Kingdom Diplomatic Posts Around the World
http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/embassies-and-posts/find-an-embassy-overseas/

Australia's Diplomatic Posts Around the World
http://www.dfat.gov.au/missions/
http://www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html

Canada's Embassies and High Commissions
http://www.international.gc.ca/ciw-cdm/embassies-ambassades.aspx

Resources for Finding Embassies and other Diplomatic Posts Across the World
http://www.escapeartist.com/embassy1/embassy1.htm

Safety and Security

Travel Warnings by Country from Government of Australia
http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/

Travel Warnings and Alerts from United States Department of State
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html

Travel Reports and Warnings by Government of Canada
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/menu-eng.asp
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/updates_mise-a-jour-eng.asp

Travel Warnings from Government of United Kingdom
http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/
http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/?action=noTravelAll#noTravelAll

Sources: United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the United States Department of State, the Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Other Safety and Security Online Resources for Travelers

United States Department of State Information on Terrorism
http://www.state.gov/s/ct/

Government of the United Kingdom Resource on the Risk of Terrorism
http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044011304926

Government of Canada Terrorism Guide
http://www.international.gc.ca/crime/terrorism-terrorisme.aspx?lang=eng

Information on Terrorism by Government of Australia
http://www.dfat.gov.au/icat/index.html

FAA Resource on Aviation Safety
http://www.faasafety.gov/

In-Flight Safety Information for Air Travel (by British Airways crew trainer, Anna Warman)
http://www.warman.demon.co.uk/anna/inflight.html

Hot Spots: Travel Safety and Risk Information
http://www.airsecurity.com/hotspots/HotSpots.asp

Information on Human Rights
http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/

Sources: The United States Department of State, the United States Customs Department, the Government of Canada, the Government of United Kingdom, the Government of Australia, the Federal Aviation Authority, Anna Warman's In-flight Website, Hot Spots Travel and Risk Information

Diseases/Health Data

Please Note: Most of the entry below constitutes a generalized health advisory, which a traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination.

As a supplement, however, reader will also find below a list of countries flagged with current health notices and alerts issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these 3 levels of warnings, is ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precaution:

Level 3 (highest level of concern; avoid non-essential travel) --

Guinea - Ebola
Liberia - Ebola
Nepal - Eathquake zone
Sierra Leone - Ebola

Level 2 (intermediate level of concern; use utmost caution during travel) --

Cameroon - Polio
Somalia - Polio
Vanuatu - Tropical Cyclone zone
Throughout Middle East and Arabia Peninsula - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)

Level 1 (standard level of concern; use practical caution during travel) -

Australia - Ross River disease
Bosnia-Herzegovina - Measles
Brazil - Dengue Fever
Brazil - Malaria
Brazil - Zika
China - H7N9 Avian flu
Cuba - Cholera
Egypt - H5N1 Bird flu
Ethiopia - Measles
Germany - Measles
Japan - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)
Kyrgyzstan - Measles
Malaysia -Dengue Fever
Mexico - Chikungunya
Mexico - Hepatitis A
Nigeria - Meningitis
Philippines - Measles
Scotland - Mumps
Singapore - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)
South Korea - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)
Throughout Caribbean - Chikungunya
Throughout Central America - Chikungunya
Throughout South America - Chikungunya
Throughout Pacific Islands - Chikungunya

For specific information related to these health notices and alerts please see the CDC's listing available at URL:
http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices

Health Information for Travelers to Belarus

Food and waterborne diseases are the number one cause of illness in travelers. Travelers' diarrhea can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, which are found throughout Eastern Europe and can contaminate food or water. Infections may cause diarrhea and vomiting (*E. coli*, *Salmonella*, cholera, and parasites), fever (typhoid fever and toxoplasmosis), or liver damage (hepatitis). Make sure your food and drinking water are safe. (See below.)

Malaria is a preventable infection that can be fatal if left untreated. Prevent infection by taking prescription antimalarial drugs and protecting yourself against mosquito bites (see below). Risk for malaria exists only in small southern border areas of Azerbaijan and Tajikistan. Travelers to these areas should take chloroquine to prevent malaria. For more detailed information about malaria in this region, see Malaria Risk and Prevention in Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (http://www.cdc.gov/travel/regionalmalaria/easteurp.htm).

A certificate of yellow fever vaccination may be required for entry into certain of these countries if you are coming from a tropical South American or sub-Saharan African country. (There is no risk for yellow fever in Eastern European and NIS countries.) For detailed information, see Comprehensive Yellow Fever Vaccination Requirements (http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yelfever.htm).

An outbreak of diphtheria is occurring in all the states of the former Soviet Union. Travelers to these areas should be sure that their diphtheria immunization is up to date.

Tickborne encephalitis, a viral infection of the central nervous system occurs chiefly in Central and Western Europe. Travelers are at risk who visit or work in forested areas during the summer months and who consume unpasteurized dairy products. Vaccine for this disease is not available in the United States at this time. To prevent tickborne encephalitis, as well as Lyme disease, travelers should take precautions to prevent tick bites (see below).

Because motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury among travelers, walk and drive defensively. Avoid nighttime travel if possible and always use seat belts.

CDC Recommends the Following Vaccines (as Appropriate for Age):

See your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before your trip to allow time for shots to take effect.

• Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).
• Hepatitis B, if you might be exposed to blood (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, stay longer than 6 months, or be exposed through medical treatment.
• Rabies, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.
• Typhoid, particularly if you are visiting developing countries in this region.
• As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria, measles, and a one-time dose of polio vaccine for adults. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for 11- to 12-year-olds who did not receive the series as infants.

To Stay Healthy, Do:

• Wash hands often with soap and water.
• Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes. If this is not possible, make water safer by BOTH filtering through an "absolute 1-micron or less" filter AND adding iodine tablets to the filtered water. "Absolute 1-micron filters" are found in camping/outdoor supply stores.
• Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Remember: **boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.**
• If you are going to visit risk areas for malaria, take your malaria prevention medication before, during, and after travel, as directed. (See your doctor for a prescription.)
• Protect yourself from insects by remaining in well-screened areas, using repellents (applied sparingly at 4-hour intervals), and wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into boots or socks as a deterrent to ticks.
• To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot.
• Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

To Avoid Getting Sick:

• Don't eat food purchased from street vendors.
• Don't drink beverages with ice.
• Don't eat dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.
• Don't share needles with anyone.
• Don't handle animals (especially monkeys, dogs, and cats), to avoid bites and serious diseases (including rabies and plague).

What You Need To Bring with You:

• Long-sleeved shirt and long pants to wear while outside whenever possible, to prevent illnesses carried by insects.
• Insect repellent containing DEET (diethylmethyltoluamide), in 30%-35% strength for adults and

6%-l0% for children. The insecticide permethrin applied to clothing is an effective deterrent to ticks.
• Over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicine to take if you have diarrhea.
• Iodine tablets and water filters to purify water if bottled water is not available. See above for more information about water filters.
• Sunblock, sunglasses, hat.
• Prescription medications: make sure you have enough to last during your trip, as well as a copy of the prescription(s).

After You Return Home:

If you have visited an area where there is risk for malaria, continue taking your malaria medication weekly for 4 weeks after you leave the area.
If you become ill after your trip-even as long as a year after you return-tell your doctor where you have traveled.

For More Information:

Ask your doctor or check the CDC web sites for more information about how to protect yourself against diseases that occur in Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (NIS).

For information about diseases-

Carried by Insects
Lyme disease, Malaria

Carried in Food or Water
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy ("mad cow disease"), Cholera, *Escherichia coli,* diarrhea ,Hepatitis A, Typhoid Fever

Person-to-Person Contact
Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS

For more information about these and other diseases, also check the Diseases (http://www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases.htm) section and the Health Topics A-Z (http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm).

Note:

Belarus is located in the Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States (NIS) health region.

Sources:

The Center for Disease Control Destinations Website:
http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm

Chapter 6

Environmental Overview

Environmental Issues

General Overview

During the Soviet era, Belarussuffered the deleterious effects of heavy industrialization. These problems were grossly exacerbated by the Chernobylnuclear power plant disaster in 1986. Belarus was the most widely affected part of the former Soviet Union: the Chernobylcatastrophe contaminated approximately 20 percent of the entire country, both economically and in terms of the potential for human habitation. In comparison, about ten percent of the Ukraine and less than one percent of Russiawas affected.

Belarushas implemented numerous measures to deal with the accident, including resettling people, investing in housing and social amenities, removing land from agricultural use, treating soil, replacing livestock, etc. Despite these clean-up efforts, many parts of the affected area have not significantly improved. The nuclear fallout continues to affect Belarusin the form of an overall deterioration in human health, with up to 20 percent of all human illnesses attributable to environmental factors.

Current Issues

-nuclear radiation negatively affects up to one-fifth of the country
-oncology, bio-genetic disorders, as well as a host of other illnesses plague a substantial portion of the national population (up to 20 percent) as a result of exposure to nuclear radiation
-overall deterioration in air quality as a consequence of environmental degradation
-land and water contamination as a result of mining activities, the use of toxic chemicals and petrochemicals, as well as industrial effluent from the construction sector
-soil pollution from pesticide use

Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Mtc)

21.5

Country Rank (GHG output)

51st

Natural Hazards

N/A

Environmental Policy

Regulation and Jurisdiction:

The regulation and protection of the environment in Belarus is under the jurisdiction of the following:

- Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection

Major Non-Governmental Organizations:

- Belarusian Society for Nature Protection
- Ecoline
- Green Arrow
- Green Region
- Nature Conservation Center
- Small Rivers International Association
- Sphere Ecological Association
- Western Belarusian Society for the Protection of Birds

International Environmental Accords:

Party to:

- Air Pollution
- Air Pollution-Nitrogen Oxides
- Air Pollution-Sulfur 85
- Bio-diversity

- Climate Change
- Environmental Modification
- Marine Dumping
- Nuclear Test Ban
- Ozone Layer Protection

Signed but not ratified:

- Law of the Sea

Kyoto Protocol Status (year ratified):

Not a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol

Greenhouse Gas Ranking

Greenhouse Gas Ranking

GHG Emissions Rankings

Country Rank	**Country**
1	United States
2	China

4	Russia
5	Japan
6	India
7	Germany
8	United Kingdom
9	Canada
10	Korea, South
11	Italy
12	Mexico
13	France
14	South Africa
15	Iran
16	Indonesia
17	Australia
18	Spain
19	Brazil
20	Saudi Arabia
21	Ukraine

22	Poland
23	Taiwan
24	Turkey
25	Thailand
26	Netherlands
27	Kazakhstan
28	Malaysia
29	Egypt
30	Venezuela
31	Argentina
32	Uzbekistan
33	Czech Republic
34	Belgium
35	Pakistan
36	Romania
37	Greece
38	United Arab Emirates
39	Algeria

40	Nigeria
41	Austria
42	Iraq
43	Finland
44	Philippines
45	Vietnam
46	Korea, North
47	Israel
48	Portugal
49	Colombia
50	Belarus
51	Kuwait
52	Hungary
53	Chile
54	Denmark
55	Serbia & Montenegro
56	Sweden
57	Syria

58	Libya
59	Bulgaria
60	Singapore
61	Switzerland
62	Ireland
63	Turkmenistan
64	Slovakia
65	Bangladesh
66	Morocco
67	New Zealand
68	Oman
69	Qatar
70	Azerbaijan
71	Norway
72	Peru
73	Cuba
74	Ecuador
75	Trinidad & Tobago

76	Croatia
77	Tunisia
78	Dominican Republic
79	Lebanon
80	Estonia
81	Yemen
82	Jordan
83	Slovenia
84	Bahrain
85	Angola
86	Bosnia & Herzegovina
87	Lithuania
88	Sri Lanka
89	Zimbabwe
90	Bolivia
91	Jamaica
92	Guatemala
93	Luxembourg

94	Myanmar
95	Sudan
96	Kenya
97	Macedonia
98	Mongolia
99	Ghana
100	Cyprus
101	Moldova
102	Latvia
103	El Salvador
104	Brunei
105	Honduras
106	Cameroon
107	Panama
108	Costa Rica
109	Cote d'Ivoire
110	Kyrgyzstan
111	Tajikistan

112	Ethiopia
113	Senegal
114	Uruguay
115	Gabon
116	Albania
117	Nicaragua
118	Botswana
119	Paraguay
120	Tanzania
121	Georgia
122	Armenia
123	Congo, RC
124	Mauritius
125	Nepal
126	Mauritius
127	Nepal
128	Mauritania
129	Malta

130	Papua New Guinea
131	Zambia
132	Suriname
133	Iceland
134	Togo
135	Benin
136	Uganda
137	Bahamas
138	Haiti
139	Congo, DRC
140	Guyana
141	Mozambique
142	Guinea
143	Equatorial Guinea
144	Laos
145	Barbados
146	Niger
147	Fiji

148	Burkina Faso
149	Malawi
150	Swaziland
151	Belize
152	Afghanistan
153	Sierra Leone
154	Eritrea
155	Rwanda
156	Mali
157	Seychelles
158	Cambodia
159	Liberia
160	Bhutan
161	Maldives
162	Antigua & Barbuda
163	Djibouti
164	Saint Lucia
165	Gambia

166	Guinea-Bissau
167	Central African Republic
168	Palau
169	Burundi
170	Grenada
171	Lesotho
172	Saint Vincent & the Grenadines
173	Solomon Islands
174	Samoa
175	Cape Verde
176	Nauru
177	Dominica
178	Saint Kitts & Nevis
179	Chad
180	Tonga
181	Sao Tome & Principe
182	Comoros
183	Vanuatu

185	Kiribati
Not Ranked	Andorra
Not Ranked	East Timor
Not Ranked	Holy See
Not Ranked	Hong Kong
Not Ranked	Liechtenstein
Not Ranked	Marshall Islands
Not Ranked	Micronesia
Not Ranked	Monaco
Not Ranked	San Marino
Not Ranked	Somalia
Not Ranked	Tuvalu

* European Union is ranked 3rd
Cook Islands are ranked 184th
Niue is ranked 186th

Global Environmental Snapshot

Introduction

The countries of the world face many environmental challenges in common. Nevertheless, the

nature and intensity of problem vary from region to region, as do various countries' respective capacities, in terms of affluence and infrastructure, to remediate threats to environmental quality.

Consciousness of perils affecting the global environment came to the fore in the last third or so of the 20th century has continued to intensify well into the new millennium. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, considerable environmental progress has been made at the level of institutional developments, international cooperation accords, and public participation. Approximately two-dozen international environmental protection accords with global implications have been promulgated since the late 1970s under auspices of the United Nations and other international organizations, together with many additional regional agreements. Attempts to address and rectify environmental problems take the form of legal frameworks, economic instruments, environmentally sound technologies and cleaner production processes as well as conservation efforts. Environmental impact assessments have increasingly been applied across the globe.

Environmental degradation affects the quality, or aesthetics, of human life, but it also displays potential to undermine conditions necessary for the sustainability of human life. Attitudes toward the importance of environmental protection measures reflect ambivalence derived from this bifurcation. On one hand, steps such as cleaning up pollution, dedicating parkland, and suchlike, are seen as embellishments undertaken by wealthy societies already assured they can successfully perform those functions deemed, ostensibly, more essential-for instance, public health and education, employment and economic development. On the other hand, in poorer countries, activities causing environmental damage-for instance the land degradation effects of unregulated logging, slash-and-burn agriculture, overgrazing, and mining-can seem justified insofar as such activities provide incomes and livelihoods.

Rapid rates of resource depletion are associated with poverty and high population growth, themselves correlated, whereas consumption per capita is much higher in the most developed countries, despite these nations' recent progress in energy efficiency and conservation. It is impossible to sequester the global environmental challenge from related economic, social and political challenges.

First-tier industrialized countries have recently achieved measurable decreases in environmental pollution and the rate of resource depletion, a success not matched in middle income and developing countries. It is believed that the discrepancy is due to the fact that industrialized countries have more developed infrastructures to accommodate changes in environmental policy, to apply environmental technologies, and to invest in public education. The advanced industrialized countries incur relatively lower costs in alleviating environmental problems, in comparison to developing countries, since in the former even extensive environmental programs represent a rather minuscule percentage of total expenditures. Conversely, budget constraints, lagged provision of basic services to the population, and other factors such as debt service and militarization may

preclude institution of minimal environmental protection measures in the poorest countries.

A synopsis for the current situation facing each region of the world follows:

Regional Synopsis: Africa

The African continent, the world's second-largest landmass, encompasses many of the world's least developed countries. By global standards, urbanization is comparatively low but rising at a rapid rate. More heavily industrialized areas at the northern and southern ends of the continent experience the major share of industrial pollution. In other regions the most serious environmental problems typically stem from inefficient subsistence farming methods and other forms of land degradation, which have affected an increasingly extensive area under pressure of a widely impoverished, fast-growing population. Africa's distribution of natural resources is very uneven. It is the continent at greatest risk of desertification, especially in the Sahel region at the edge of the Sahara but also in other dry-range areas. Yet at the same time, Africa also harbors some of the earth's richest and most diverse biological zones.

Key Points:

Up to half a billion hectares of African land are moderately to severely degraded, an occurrence reflecting short-fallow shifting cultivation and overgrazing as well as a climatic pattern of recurrent droughts.

Soil degradation is severe along the expanse directly south of the Sahara, from the west to the east coasts. Parts of southern Africa, central-eastern Africa, and the neighboring island of Madagascar suffer from serious soil degradation as well.

Africa contains about 17 percent of the world's forest cover, concentrated in the tropical belt of the continent. Many of the forests, however, are severely depleted, with an estimated 70 percent showing some degree of degradation.

Population growth has resulted in continuing loss of arable land, as inefficient subsistence farming techniques affect increasingly extensive areas. Efforts to implement settled, sustainable agriculture have met with some recent success, but much further progress in this direction is needed. Especially in previously uninhabited forestlands, concern over deforestation is intensifying.

By contrast, the African savanna remains the richest grassland in the world, supporting a substantial concentration of animal and plant life. Wildlife parks are sub-Saharan Africa's greatest tourist attraction, and with proper management-giving local people a stake in conservation and controlling the pace of development-could greatly enhance African economies.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of northern, southern and eastern Africa are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in Mauritania and Madagascar is even further compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these two countries currently under threat.

With marine catch trends increasing from 500,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 3,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Water resource vulnerability is a major concern in northeastern Africa, and a moderate concern across the rest of the continent. An exception is central Africa, which has plentiful water supplies.

Many Africans lack adequate access to resources, not just (if at all) because the resources are unevenly distributed geographically, but also through institutional failures such as faulty land tenure systems or political upheaval. The quality of Africa's natural resources, despite their spotty distribution, is in fact extraordinarily rich. The infrastructure needed to protect and benefit from this natural legacy, however, is largely lacking.

Regional Synopsis: Asia and the Pacific

Asia-earth's largest landmass-and the many large and nearly innumerable small islands lying off its Pacific shore display extraordinarily contrasting landscapes, levels of development, and degrees of environmental stress. In the classification used here, the world's smallest continent, Australia, is also included in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 9 of the world's 14 largest urban areas, and as energy use for utilities, industry and transport increases in developing economies, urban centers are subject to worsening air quality. Intense population density in places such as Bangladesh or Hong Kong is the quintessential image many people have of Asia, yet vast desert areas such as the Gobi and the world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas, span the continent as well. Forested areas in Southeast Asia and the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines were historically prized for their tropical hardwood, but in many places this resource is now severely depleted. Low-lying small island states are extremely vulnerable to the effects of global warming, both rising sea levels and an anticipated increase in cyclones.

Key Points:

Asian timber reserves are forecast to be depleted in the next 40 years. Loss of natural forest is irreversible in some areas, but plantation programs to restore tree cover may ameliorate a portion

of the resulting land degradation.

Increased usage of fossil fuels in China and other parts of southern Asia is projected to result in a marked increase in emissions, especially in regard to carbon dioxide. The increased usage of energy has led to a marked upsurge in air pollution across the region.

Acidification is an emerging problem regionally, with sulfur dioxide emissions expected to triple by 2010 if the current growth rate is sustained. China, Thailand, India, and Korea seem to be suffering from particularly high rates of acid deposition. By contrast, Asia's most highly developed economy, Japan, has effected substantial improvements in its environmental indicators.

Water pollution in the Pacific is an urgent concern since up to 70 percent of the water discharged into the region's waters receives no treatment. Additionally, the disposal of solid wastes, in like manner, poses a major threat in a region with many areas of high population density.

The Asia-Pacific region is the largest expanse of the world's land that is adversely affected by soil degradation.

The region around Australia reportedly suffers the largest degree of ozone depletion.

The microstates of the Pacific suffer land loss due to global warming, and the consequent rise in the levels of ocean waters. A high-emissions scenario and anthropogenic climate impact at the upper end of the currently predicted range would probably force complete evacuation of the lowest-elevation islands sometime in this century.

The species-rich reefs surrounding Southeast Asia are highly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of coastal development, land-based pollution, over-fishing and exploitative fishing methods, as well as marine pollution from oil spills and other activities.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of China and south-east Asia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in India, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and parts of Malaysia is even further compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these countries currently under threat.

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern in areas surrounding the Indian subcontinent.

Regional Synopsis: Central Asia

The Central Asian republics, formerly in the Soviet Union, experience a range of environmental problems as the result of poorly executed agricultural, industrial, and nuclear programs during the Soviet era. Relatively low population densities are the norm, especially since upon the breakup of the U.S.S.R. many ethnic Russians migrated back to European Russia. In this largely semi-arid region, drought, water shortages, and soil salinization pose major challenges.

Key Points:

The use of agricultural pesticides, such as DDT and other chemicals, has contributed to the contamination of soil and groundwater throughout the region.

Land and soil degradation, and in particular, increased salinization, is mostly attributable to faulty irrigation practices.

Significant desertification is also a problem in the region.

Air pollution is prevalent, mostly due to use of low octane automobile fuel.

Industrial pollution of the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, as a result of industrial effluents as well as mining and metal production, presents a challenge to the countries bordering these bodies of water.

One of the most severe environmental problems in the region is attributable to the several billion tons of hazardous materials stored in landfills across Central Asia.

Uzbekistan's particular problem involves the contraction of the Aral Sea, which has decreased in size by a third, as a consequence of river diversions and poor irrigation practices. The effect has been the near-total biological destruction of that body of water.

Kazakhstan, as a consequence of being the heartland of the former Soviet Union's nuclear program, has incurred a high of cancerous malignancies, biogenetic abnormalities and radioactive contamination.

While part of the Soviet Union, the republics in the region experienced very high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, as a consequence of rapid industrialization using cheap but dirty energy sources, especially coal.

By contrast, however, there have recently been substantial reductions in the level of greenhouse gas emissions, especially those attributable to coal burning, with further decreases anticipated over the next decade. These changes are partially due to the use of cleaner energy technologies, such as

natural gas, augmented by governmental commitment to improving environmental standards.

Regional Synopsis: Europe

Western Europe underwent dramatic transformation of its landscape, virtually eliminating large-scale natural areas, during an era of rapid industrialization, which intensified upon its recovery from World War II. In Eastern Europe and European Russia, intensive land development has been less prevalent, so that some native forests and other natural areas remain. Air and water pollution from use of dirty fuels and industrial effluents, however, are more serious environmental problems in Eastern than in Western Europe, though recent trends show improvement in many indicators. Acid rain has inflicted heavy environmental damage across much of Europe, particularly on forests. Europe and North America are the only regions in which water usage for industry exceeds that for agriculture, although in Mediterranean nations agriculture is the largest water consumer.

Key Points:

Europe contributes 36 percent of the world's chlorofluorocarbon emissions, 30 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, and 25 percent of sulfur dioxide emissions.

Sulfur and nitrogen oxide emissions are the cause of 30 to 50 percent of Central and Eastern Europe's deforestation.

Acid rain has been an environmental concern for decades and continues to be a challenge in parts of Western Europe.

Overexploitation of up to 60 percent of Europe's groundwater presents a problem in industrial and urban areas.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of western Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity on the Iberian Peninsula is even further compromised with over 40 percent of the mammal species in this region currently under threat. As a result, there has been a 10 percent increase in protected areas of Europe.

A major environmental issue for Europe involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Some estimates suggest that up to 50 percent of the continent's fish species may be considered endangered species. Coastal

fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species.

Fortunately, in the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Recently, most European countries have adopted cleaner production technologies, and alternative methods of waste disposal, including recycling.

The countries of Eastern Europe have made air quality a major environmental priority. This is exemplified by the Russian Federation's addition to the 1995 "Berlin Mandate" (transnational legislation based on resolutions of the Rio Earth Summit) compelling nations to promote "carbon sinks" to absorb greenhouse gases.

On a relative basis, when compared with the degree of industrial emissions emitted by many Eastern European countries until the late 1980s, there has been some marked increase in air quality in the region, as obsolete plants are closed and a transition to cleaner fuels and more efficient energy use takes place.

Regional Synopsis: The Middle and Near East

Quite possibly, the Middle East will exemplify the adage that, as the 20th century was a century fixated on oil, the 21st century will be devoted to critical decisions about water. Many (though far from all) nations in the Middle East rank among those countries with the largest oil and gas reserves, but water resources are relatively scarce throughout this predominantly dry region. Effects of global warming may cause moderately high elevation areas that now typically receive winter "snowpack" to experience mainly rain instead, which would further constrain dry-season water availability. The antiquities and religious shrines of the region render it a great magnet for tourism, which entails considerable economic growth potential but also intensifies stresses on the environment.

Key Points:

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern across the entire region. The increased usage of, and further demand for water, has exacerbated long-standing water scarcity in the region. For instance, river diversions and industrial salt works have caused the Dead Sea to shrink by one-third from its original surface area, with further declines expected.

The oil industry in the region contributes to water pollution in the Persian Gulf, as a result of oil

spills, which have averaged 1.2 million barrels of oil spilt per year (some sources suggest that this figure is understated). The consequences are severe because even after oil spills have been cleaned up, environmental damage to the food webs and ecosystems of marine life will persist for a prolonged period.

The region's coastal zone is considered one of the most fragile and endangered ecosystems of the world. Land reclamation, shoreline construction, discharge of industrial effluents, and tourism (such as diving in the Red Sea) contribute to widespread coastal damage.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of the Middle East are currently threatened.

Since the 1980s, 11 percent of the region's natural forest has been depleted.

Regional Synopsis: Latin America and the Caribbean

The Latin American and Caribbean region is characterized by exceedingly diverse landforms that have generally seen high rates of population growth and economic development in recent decades. The percentage of inhabitants residing in urban areas is quite high at 73.4 percent; the region includes the megacities of Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The region also includes the world's second-highest mountain range, the Andes; significant expanses of desert and grassland; the coral reefs of the Caribbean Sea; and the world's largest contiguous tropical forest in the Amazon basin. Threats to the latter from subsistence and commercial farming, mineral exploitation and timbering are well publicized. Nevertheless, of eight countries worldwide that still retain at least 70 percent of their original forest cover, six are in Latin America. The region accounts for nearly half (48.3 percent) of the world's greenhouse gas emissions derived from land clearing, but as yet a comparatively minuscule share (4.3 percent) of such gases from industrial sources.

Key Points:

Although Latin America is one of the most biologically diverse regions of the world, this biodiversity is highly threatened, as exemplified by the projected extinction of up to 100,000 species in the next few decades. Much of this loss will be concentrated in the Amazon area, although the western coastline of South America will also suffer significant depletion of biological diversity. The inventory of rainforest species with potentially useful commercial or medical applications is incomplete, but presumed to include significant numbers of such species that may become extinct before they are discovered and identified.

Up to 50 percent of the region's grazing land has lost its soil fertility as a result of soil erosion, salinization, alkalinization and overgrazing.

The Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean have all been contaminated by agricultural wastes, which are discharged into streams that flow into these major waters. Water pollution derived from phosphorous, nitrates and pesticides adversely affects fish stocks, contributes to oxygen depletion and fosters overgrowth of aquatic vegetation. Marine life will continue to be severely compromised as a result of these conditions.

Due to industrial development in the region, many beaches of eastern Latin America and the Caribbean suffer from tar deposits.

Most cities in the region lack adequate sewage treatment facilities, and rapid migration of the rural poor into the cities is widening the gap between current infrastructure capacity and the much greater level needed to provide satisfactory basic services.

The rainforest region of the Amazon Basin suffers from dangerously high levels of deforestation, which may be a significant contributory factor to global warming or "the greenhouse effect." In the late 1990s and into the new millennium, the rate of deforestation was around 20 million acres of rainforest being destroyed annually.

Deforestation on the steep rainforest slopes of Caribbean islands contributes to soil erosion and landslides, both of which then result in heavy sedimentation of nearby river systems. When these sedimented rivers drain into the sea and coral reefs, they poison the coral tissues, which are vital to the maintenance of the reef ecosystem. The result is marine degradation and nutrient depletion. Jamaica's coral reefs have never quite recovered from the effects of marine degradation.

The Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) suffers the effects of greatly increased ultraviolet-B radiation, as a consequence of more intense ozone depletion in the southern hemisphere.

Water resource vulnerability is an increasingly major concern in the northwestern portion of South America.

Regional Synopsis: North America

North American nations, in particular the United States and Canada, rank among the world's most highly developed industrial economies-a fact which has generated significant pollution problems, but also financial resources and skills that have enabled many problems to be corrected. Although efforts to promote energy efficiency, recycling, and suchlike have helped ease strains on the environment in a part of the world where per capita consumption levels are high, sprawling land development patterns and recent preferences many households have demonstrated for larger vehicles have offset these advances.

Meanwhile, a large portion of North America's original forest cover has been lost, though in many cases replaced by productive second-growth woodland. In recent years, attitudes toward best use of the region's remaining natural or scenic areas seem to be shifting toward recreation and preservation and away from resource extraction. With increasing attention on the energy scarcity in the United States, however, there is speculation that this shift may be short-lived. Indeed, the energy shortage on the west coast of the United States and associated calls for energy exploration, indicate a possible retrenchment toward resource extraction. At the same time, however, it has also served to highlight the need for energy conservation as well as alternative energy sources.

Despite generally successful anti-pollution efforts, various parts of the region continue to suffer significant air, water and land degradation from industrial, vehicular, and agricultural emissions and runoff. Mexico, as a middle-income country, displays environmental problems characteristic of a developing economy, including forest depletion, pollution from inefficient industrial processes and dirty fuels, and lack of sufficient waste-treatment infrastructure.

Key Points:

Because of significantly greater motor vehicle usage in the United States (U.S.) than in the rest of the world, the U.S. contribution of urban air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, is disproportionately high in relation to its population.

Acid rain is an enduring issue of contention in the northeastern part of the United States, on the border with Canada.

Mexico's urban areas suffer extreme air pollution from carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and other toxic air pollutants. Emissions controls on vehicles are in their infancy, compared to analogous regulations in the U.S.

The cities of Mexico, including those on the U.S. border, also discharge large quantities of untreated or poorly treated sewage, though officials are currently planning infrastructure upgrades.

Deforestation is noteworthy in various regions of the U.S., especially along the northwest coastline. Old growth forests have been largely removed, but in the northeastern and upper midwestern sections of the United States, evidence suggests that the current extent of tree cover probably surpasses the figure for the beginning of the 20th century.

Extreme weather conditions in the last few years have resulted in a high level of soil erosion along the north coast of California; in addition, the coastline itself has shifted substantially due to soil erosion and concomitant landslides.

Agricultural pollution-including nitrate contamination of well water, nutrient runoff to waterways, and pesticide exposure-is significant in various areas. Noteworthy among affected places are California's Central Valley, extensive stretches of the Midwest, and land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Inland waterways, especially around the Great Lakes, have substantially improved their water quality, due to concentrated efforts at reducing water pollution by governmental, commercial and community representatives. Strict curbs on industrial effluents and near-universal implementation of sewage treatment are the chief factors responsible for this improvement.

A major environmental issue for Canada and the United States involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Coastal fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species. In the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Due to the decay of neighboring ecosystems in Central America and the Caribbean, the sea surrounding Florida has become increasingly sedimented, contributing to marine degradation, nutrient depletion of the ecosystem, depletion of fish stocks, and diseases to coral species in particular.

Polar Regions

Key Points:

The significant rise in sea level, amounting 10 to 25 centimeters in the last 100 years, is due to the melting of the Arctic ice sheets, and is attributed to global warming.

The Antarctic suffers from a significant ozone hole, first detected in 1976. By 1985, a British scientific team reported a 40 percent decrease in usual regeneration rates of the ozone. Because a sustained increase in the amount of ultraviolet-B radiation would have adverse consequences upon all planetary life, recent environmental measures have been put into effect, aimed at reversing ozone depletion. These measures are projected to garner significant results by 2050.

Due to air and ocean currents, the Arctic is a sink for toxic releases originally discharged thousands of miles away. Arctic wildlife and Canada's Inuit population have higher bodily levels of contaminants such as PCB and dioxin than those found in people and animals in much of the rest of the world.

Global Environmental Concepts

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1. Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases

The Greenhouse Effect:

In the early 19th century, the French physicist, Jean Fourier, contended that the earth's atmosphere functions in much the same way as the glass of a greenhouse, thus describing what is now understood as the "greenhouse effect." Put simply, the "greenhouse effect" confines some of the sun's energy to the earth, preserving some of the planet's warmth, rather than allowing it to flow back into space. In so doing, all kinds of life forms can flourish on earth. Thus, the "greenhouse effect" is necessary to sustain and preserve life forms and ecosystems on earth.

In the late 19th century, a Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, noticed that human activities, such as the burning of coal and other fossil fuels for heat, and the removal of forested lands for urban development, led to higher concentrations of greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide and methane, in the atmosphere. This increase in the levels of greenhouse gases was believed to advance the "greenhouse effect" exponentially, and might be related to the trend in global warming.

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, after industrial development took place on a large scale and the total human population burgeoned simultaneously with industrialization, the resulting increase in greenhouse gas emissions could, many scientists believe, be significant enough to have some bearing on climate. Indeed, many studies in recent years support the idea that there is a linkage between human activities and global warming, although there is less consensus on the extent to which this linkage may be relevant to environmental concerns.

That said, some scientists have argued that temperature fluctuations have existed throughout the evolution of the planet. Indeed, Dr. S. Fred Singer, the president of the Science and Environment Policy Project has noted that 3,000-year-old geological records of ocean sediment reveal changes in the surface temperature of the ocean. Hence, it is possible that climate variability is merely a normal fact of the planet's evolution. Yet even skeptics as to anthropogenic factors concur that any substantial changes in global temperatures would likely have an effect upon the earth's ecosystems, as well as the life forms that inhabit them.

The Relationship Between Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases:

A large number of climatologists believe that the increase in atmospheric concentrations of "greenhouse gas emissions," mostly a consequence of human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, are contributing to global warming. The cause notwithstanding, the planet has reportedly warmed 0.3°C to 0.6°C over the last century. Indeed, each year during the 1990s was one of the very warmest in the 20th century, with the mean surface temperature for 1999 being the fifth warmest on record since 1880.

In early 2000, a panel of atmospheric scientists for the National Research Council concluded in a report that global warming was, indeed, a reality. While the panel, headed by Chairman John Wallace, a professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington, stated that it remained unclear whether human activities have contributed to the earth's increasing temperatures, it was apparent that global warming exists.

In 2001, following a request for further study by the incoming Bush administration in the United States, the National Academy of Sciences again confirmed that global warming had been in existence for the last 20 years. The study also projected an increase in temperature between 2.5 degrees and 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. Furthermore, the study found the leading cause of global warming to be emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, and it noted that greenhouse gas accumulations in the earth's atmosphere was a result of human activities.

Within the scientific community, the controversy regarding has centered on the difference between surface air and upper air temperatures. Information collected since 1979 suggests that while the earth's surface temperature has increased by about a degree in the past century, the atmospheric temperature five miles above the earth's surface has indicated very little increase. Nevertheless, the panel stated that this discrepancy in temperature between surface and upper air does not invalidate the conclusion that global warming is taking place. Further, the panel noted that natural events, such as volcanic eruptions, can decrease the temperature in the upper atmosphere.

The major consequences of global warming potentially include the melting of the polar ice caps, which, in turn, contribute to the rise in sea levels. Many islands across the globe have already experienced a measurable loss of land as a result. Because global warming may increase the rate of evaporation, increased precipitation, in the form of stronger and more frequent storm systems, is another potential outcome. Other consequences of global warming may include the introduction and proliferation of new infectious diseases, loss of arable land (referred to as "desertification"), destructive changes to existing ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and the isolation of species, and concomitant adverse changes in the quality of human life.

International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and

global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.

2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

*** See section on "International Environmental Agreements and Associations" for information related to international policies related to limiting greenhouse gases and controlling climate change emanating from historic summits at Kyoto, Copenhagen, Doha, and Paris. ***

2. Air Pollution

Long before global warming reared its head as a significant issue, those concerned about the environment and public health noted the deleterious effects of human-initiated combustion upon the atmosphere. Killer smogs from coal burning triggered acute health emergencies in London and other places. At a lower level of intensity motor vehicle, power plant, and industrial emissions impaired long-range visibility and probably had some chronic adverse consequences on the respiratory systems of persons breathing such air.

In time, scientists began associating the sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides released from coal burning with significant acid deposition in the atmosphere, eventually falling as "acid rain." This phenomenon has severely degraded forestlands, especially in Europe and a few parts of the United States. It has also impaired some aquatic ecosystems and eaten away the surface of some human artifacts, such as marble monuments. Scrubber technology and conversion to cleaner fuels have enabled the level of industrial production to remain at least constant while significantly reducing acid deposition. Technologies aimed at cleaning the air and curtailing acid rain, soot, and smog may, nonetheless, boomerang as the perils of global warming become increasingly serious. In brief, these particulates act as sort of a sun shade -- comparable to the effect of volcanic eruptions on the upper atmosphere whereby periods of active volcanism correlate with temporarily cooler weather

conditions. Thus, while the carbon dioxide releases that are an inevitable byproduct of combustion continue, by scrubbing the atmosphere of pollutants, an industrial society opens itself to greater insolation (penetration of the sun's rays and consequent heating), and consequently, it is likely to experience a correspondingly greater rise in ambient temperatures.

The health benefits of removing the sources of acid rain and smog are indisputable, and no one would recommend a return to previous conditions. Nevertheless, the problematic climatic effects of continually increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases pose a major global environmental challenge, not as yet addressed adequately.

3. Ozone Depletion

The stratospheric ozone layer functions to prevent ultraviolet radiation from reaching the earth. Normally, stratospheric ozone is systematically disintegrated and regenerated through natural photochemical processes. The stratospheric ozone layer, however, has been depleted unnaturally as a result of anthropogenic (man-made) chemicals, most especially chlorine and bromide compounds such as chloroflorocarbons (CFCs), halons, and various industrial chemicals in the form of solvents, refrigerants, foaming agents, aerosol propellants, fire retardants, and fumigants. Ozone depletion is of concern because it permits a greater degree of ultraviolet-B radiation to reach the earth, which then increases the incidences of cancerous malignancies, cataracts, and human immune deficiencies. In addition, even in small doses, ozone depletion affects the ecosystem by disturbing food chains, agriculture, fisheries and other forms of biological diversity.

Transnational policies enacted to respond to the dangers of ozone depletion include the 1985 Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The Montreal Protocol was subsequently amended in London in 1990, Copenhagen in 1992 and Vienna in 1995. By 1996, 155 countries had ratified the Montreal Protocol, which sets out a time schedule for the reduction (and eventual elimination) of ozone depleting substances (OPS), and bans exports and imports of ODS from and to non-participant countries.

In general, the Protocol stipulates that developed countries must eliminate halon consumption by 1994 and CFC consumption by 1996, while developing countries must eliminate these substances by 2010. Consumption of methyl bromide, which is used as a fumigant, was to be frozen at the 1995 in developed countries, and fully eliminated in 2010, while developing countries are to freeze consumption by 2002, based on average 1995-1998 consumption levels. Methyl chloroform is to be phased out by 2005. Under the Montreal Protocol, most ODS will be completely eliminated from use by 2010.

4. Land Degradation

In recent decades, land degradation in more arid regions of the world has become a serious concern. The problem, manifest as both "desertification" and "devegetation," is caused primarily by climate variability and human activities, such as "deforestation," excessive cultivation, overgrazing, and other forms of land resource exploitation. It is also exacerbated by inadequate irrigation practices. Although the effects of droughts on drylands have been temporary in the past, today, the productivity and sustainability of these lands have been severely compromised for the long term. Indeed, in every region of the world, land degradation has become an acute issue.

Desertification and Devegetation:

"Desertification" is a process of land degradation causing the soil to deteriorate, thus losing its nutrients and fertility, and eventually resulting in the loss of vegetation, known as "devegetation." As aforementioned, "desertification" and "devegetation" are caused by human activities, yet human beings are also the greatest casualties. Because these forms of land degradation affect the ability of the soil to produce crops, they concomitantly contribute to poverty. As population increases and demographic concentrations shift, the extent of land subject to stresses by those seeking to wrest subsistence from it has inexorably risen.

In response, the United Nations has formed the Convention to Combat Desertification-aimed at implementing programs to address the underlying causes of desertification, as well as measures to prevent and minimize its effects. Of particular significance is the formulation of policies on transboundary resources, such as areas around lakes and rivers. At a broader level, the Convention has established a Conference of Parties (COP), which includes all ratifying governments, for directing and advancing international action.

To ensure more efficacious use of funding, the Convention intends to reconfigure international aid to utilize a consultative and coordinated approach in the disbursement and expenditure of donor funds. In this way, local communities that are affected by desertification will be active participants in the solution-generation process. In-depth community education projects are envisioned as part of this new international aid program, and private donor financing is encouraged. Meanwhile, as new technologies are developed to deal with the problem of desertification, they need to be distributed for application across the world. Hence, the Convention calls for international cooperation in scientific research in this regard.

Desertification is a problem of sustainable development. It is directly connected to human challenges such as poverty, social and economic well-being and environmental protection as well. Broader environmental issues, such as climate change, biological diversity, and freshwater supplies, are indirectly related, so any effort to resolve this environmental challenge must entail coordinated

research efforts and joint action.

Deforestation:

Deforestation is not a recent phenomenon. For centuries, human beings have cut down trees to clear space for land cultivation, or in order to use the wood for fuel. Over the last 200 years, and most especially after World War II, deforestation increased because the logging industry became a globally profitable endeavor, and so the clearing of forested areas was accelerated for the purposes of industrial development. In the long term, this intensified level of deforestation is considered problematic because the forest is unable to regenerate itself quickly. The deforestation that has occurred in tropical rainforests is seen as an especially serious concern, due to the perceived adverse effects of this process upon the entire global ecosystem.

The most immediate consequence of deforestation is soil degradation. Soil, which is necessary for the growth of vegetation, can be a fragile and vital property. Organically, an extensive evolution process must take place before soil can produce vegetation, yet at the same time, the effects of natural elements, such as wind and rain, can easily and quickly degrade this resource. This phenomenon is known as soil erosion. In addition, natural elements like wind and rain reduce the amount of fertile soil on the ground, making soil scarcity a genuine problem. When fertile topsoil that already exists is removed from the landscape in the process of deforestation, soil scarcity is further exacerbated. Equally significant is the fact that once land has been cleared so that the topsoil can be cultivated for crop production, not only are the nutrient reserves in the soil depleted, thus producing crops of inferior quality, but the soil structure itself becomes stressed and deteriorates further.

Another direct result of deforestation is flooding. When forests are cleared, removing the cover of vegetation, and rainfall occurs, the flow of water increases across the surface of land. When extensive water runoff takes place, the frequency and intensity of flooding increases. Other adverse effects of deforestation include the loss of wildlife and biodiversity within the ecosystem that supports such life forms.

At a broader level, tropical rainforests play a vital role in maintaining the global environmental system. Specifically, destruction of tropical rainforests affects the carbon dioxide cycle. When forests are destroyed by burning (or rotting), carbon dioxide is released into the air, thus contributing to an intensified "greenhouse effect." The increase in greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide is a major contributor to global warming, according to many environmental scientists. Indeed, trees themselves absorb carbon dioxide in the process of photosynthesis, so their loss also reduces the absorption of greenhouse gases.

Tropical rainforest destruction also adversely affects the nitrogen cycle. Nitrogen is a key nutrient

for both plants and animals. Plants derive nitrogen from soil, while animals obtain it via nitrogen-enriched vegetation. This element is essential for the formation of amino acids, and thereby for proteins and biochemicals that all living things need for metabolism and growth. In the nitrogen cycle, vegetation acquires these essential proteins and biochemicals, and then cyclically returns them to the atmosphere and global ecosystem. Accordingly, when tropical rainforest ecosystems are compromised, not only is vegetation removed; the atmosphere is also affected and climates are altered. At a more immediate level, the biodiversity within tropical rainforests, including wildlife and insect species and a wealth of plant varieties, is depleted. Loss of rare plants is of particular concern because certain species as yet unknown and unused could likely yield many practical benefits, for instance as medicines.

As a result of the many challenges associated with deforestation, many environmental groups and agencies have argued for government policies on the sustainable development of forests by governments across the globe. While many countries have instituted national policies and programs aimed at reducing deforestation, and substantial research has been advanced in regard to sustainable and regenerative forestry development, there has been very little progress on an international level. Generally speaking, most tropical rainforests are located in developing and less developed countries, where economic growth is often dependent upon the exploitation of tropical rainforests. Timber resources as well as wildlife hunting tend to be particularly lucrative arenas.

In places such as the Amazon, where deforestation takes place for the construction of energy plants aimed at industrialization and economic development, there is an exacerbated effect on the environment. After forests are cleared in order to construct such projects, massive flooding usually ensues. The remaining trees then rot and decay in the wake of the flooding. As the trees deteriorate, their biochemical makeup becomes more acidic, producing poisonous substances such as hydrogen sulphide and methane gases. Acidified water subsequently corrodes the mechanical equipment and operations of the plants, which are already clogged by rotting wood after the floodwaters rise.

Deforestation generally arises from an economically plausible short-term motivation, but nonetheless poses a serious global concern because the effects go beyond national boundaries. The United Nations has established the World Commission on Forest and Sustainable Development. This body's task is to determine the optimal means of dealing with the issue of deforestation, without unduly affecting normal economic development, while emphasizing the global significance of protecting tropical forest ecosystems.

5. Water Resources

For all terrestrial fauna, including humans, water is the most immediate necessity to sustain life. As the population has increased and altered an ever-greater portion of the landscape from its natural

condition, demand on water resources has intensified, especially with the development of industrialization and large-scale irrigation. The supply of freshwater is inherently limited, and moreover distributed unevenly across the earth's landmasses. Moreover, not just demand for freshwater but activities certain to degrade it are becoming more pervasive. By contrast, the oceans form a sort of "last wilderness," still little explored and in large part not seriously affected by human activity. However, coastal environments - the biologically richest part of the marine ecosystem-are experiencing major depletion due to human encroachment and over-exploitation.

Freshwater:

In various regions, for instance the Colorado River in the western United States, current withdrawals of river water for irrigation, domestic, and industrial use consume the entire streamflow so that almost no water flows into the sea at the river's mouth. Yet development is ongoing in many such places, implying continually rising demand for water. In some areas reliant on groundwater, aquifers are being depleted at a markedly faster rate than they are being replenished. An example is the San Joaquin Valley in California, where decades of high water withdrawals for agriculture have caused land subsidence of ten meters or more in some spots. Naturally, the uncertainty of future water supplies is particularly acute in arid and semi-arid regions. Speculation that the phenomenon of global warming will alter geographic and seasonal rainfall patterns adds further uncertainty.

Water conservation measures have great potential to alleviate supply shortages. Some city water systems are so old and beset with leaking pipes that they lose as much water as they meter. Broad-scale irrigation could be replaced by drip-type irrigation, actually enhancing the sustainability of agriculture. In many areas where heavy irrigation has been used for decades, the result is deposition of salts and other chemicals in the soil such that the land becomes unproductive for farming and must be abandoned.

Farming is a major source of water pollution. Whereas restrictions on industrial effluents and other "point sources" are relatively easy to implement, comparable measures to reform hydraulic practices at farms and other "nonpoint sources" pose a significantly knottier challenge. Farm-caused water pollution takes the following main forms:

- Nitrate pollution found in wells in intensive farming areas as a consequence of heavy fertilizer use is a threat to human health. The most serious danger is to infants, who by ingesting high-nitrate water can contract methemoglobinemia, sometimes called "blue baby syndrome," a potentially fatal condition.

- Fertilizer runoff into rivers and lakes imparts unwanted nutrients that cause algae growth and eventual loss of oxygen in the body of water, degrading its ability to support fish and other

desirable aquatic life.

- Toxic agricultural chemicals - insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides - are detectable in some aquifers and waterways.

In general, it is much easier to get a pollutant into water than to retrieve it out. Gasoline additives, dry cleaning chemicals, other industrial toxins, and in a few areas radionucleides have all been found in water sources intended for human use. The complexity and long time scale of subterranean hydrological movements essentially assures that pollutants already deposited in aquifers will continue to turn up for decades to come. Sophisticated water treatment processes are available, albeit expensive, to reclaim degraded water and render it fit for human consumption. Yet source protection is unquestionably a more desirable alternative.

In much of the developing world, and even some low-income rural enclaves of the developed world, the population lacks ready access to safe water. Surface water and shallow groundwater supplies are susceptible to contamination from untreated wastewater and failing septic tanks, as well as chemical hazards. The occurrence of waterborne disease is almost certainly greatly underreported.

Marine Resources:

Coastal areas have always been desirable places for human habitation, and population pressure on them continues to increase. Many types of water degradation that affect lakes and rivers also affect coastal zones: industrial effluents, untreated or partially treated sewage, nutrient load from agriculture figure prominently in both cases. Prospects for more extreme storms as a result of global warming, as well as the pervasiveness of poorly planned development in many coastal areas, forebode that catastrophic hurricanes and landslides may increase in frequency in the future. Ongoing rise in sea levels will force remedial measures and in some cases abandonment of currently valuable coastal property.

Fisheries over much of the globe have been overharvested, and immediate conservation measures are required to preserve stocks of many species. Many governments subsidized factory-scale fishing fleets in the 1970s and 1980s, and the resultant catch increase evidently surpassed a sustainable level. It is uncertain how much of the current decline in fish stocks stems from overharvesting and how much from environmental pollution. The deep ocean remains relatively unaffected by human activity, but continental shelves near coastlines are frequently seriously polluted, and these close-to-shore areas are the major biological nurseries for food fish and the smaller organisms they feed on.

6. Environmental Toxins

Toxic chemical pollution exploded on the public consciousness with disclosure of spectacularly polluted industrial areas such as Love Canal near Buffalo, New York. There is no question that pollutants such as organophosphates or radionucleides can be highly deleterious to health, but evidence to date suggests that seriously affected areas are a localized rather than universal problem.

While some explore the possibilities for a lifestyle that fully eschews use of modern industrial chemicals, the most prevalent remediative approach is to focus on more judicious use. The most efficient chemical plants are now able to contain nearly all toxic byproducts of their production processes within the premises, minimizing the release of such substances into the environment. Techniques such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) dictate limited rather than broadcast use of pesticides: application only when needed using the safest available chemical, supplemented as much as possible with nontoxic controls.

While heightened public awareness and growing technical sophistication suggest a hopeful outlook on limiting the damage from manmade environmental toxins, one must grant that previous incidents of their misuse and mishandling have already caused environmental damage that will have to be dealt with for many years to come. In the case of the most hazardous radioactive substances, the time scale for successful remediation actually extends beyond that of the recorded history of civilization. Moreover, in this era of high population density and rapid economic growth, quotidian activities such as the transport of chemicals will occasionally, seemingly inevitably result in accidents with adverse environmental consequences.

7. "Islandization" and Biodiversity

With increased awareness regarding the adverse effects of unregulated hunting and habitat depletion upon wildlife species and other aspects of biodiversity, large-scale efforts across the globe have been initiated to reduce and even reverse this trend.

In every region of the world, many species of wildlife and areas of biodiversity have been saved from extinction. Nationally, many countries have adopted policies aimed at preservation and conservation of species, and one of the most tangible measures has been the proliferation of protected habitats. Such habitats exist in the form of wildlife reserves, marine life reserves, and other such areas where biodiversity can be protected from external encroachment and exploitation.

Despite these advances in wildlife and biodiversity protection, further and perhaps more intractable challenges linger. Designated reserves, while intended to prevent further species decline, exist as closed territories, fragmented from other such enclaves and disconnected from the larger ecosystem. This environmental scenario is referred to as "islandization." Habitat reserves often

serve as oversized zoos or game farms, with landscapes and wildlife that have effectively been "tamed" to suit. Meanwhile, the larger surrounding ecosystem continues to be seriously degraded and transformed, while within the islandized habitat, species that are the focus of conservation efforts may not have sufficient range and may not be able to maintain healthy genetic variability.

As a consequence, many conservationists and preservationists have demanded that substantially larger portions of land be withheld as habitat reserves, and a network of biological corridors to connect continental reserves be established. While such efforts to combat islandization have considerable support in the United States, how precisely such a program would be instituted, especially across national boundaries, remains a matter of debate. International conservationists and preservationists say without a network of reserves a massive loss of biodiversity will result.

The concept of islandization illustrates why conservation and preservation of wildlife and biodiversity must consider and adopt new, broader strategies. In the past, conservation and preservation efforts have been aimed at specific species, such as the spotted owl and grizzly bear in North America, the Bengal tiger in Southeast Asia, the panda in China, elephants in Africa. Instead, the new approach is to simultaneously protect many and varied species that inhabit the same ecosystem. This method, referred to as "bio-regional conservation," may more efficaciously generate longer-term and more far-reaching results precisely because it is aimed at preserving entire ecosystems, and all the living things within.

More About Biodiversity Issues:

This section is directly taken from the United Nations Environmental Program: "Biodiversity Assessment"

The Global Biodiversity Assessment, completed by 1500 scientists under the auspices of United Nations Environmental Program in 1995, updated what is known (or unknown) about global biological diversity at the ecosystem, species and genetic levels. The assessment was uncertain of the total number of species on Earth within an order of magnitude. Of its working figure of 13 million species, only 13 percent are scientifically described. Ecological community diversity is also poorly known, as is its relationship to biological diversity, and genetic diversity has been studied for only a small number of species. The effects of human activities on biodiversity have increased so greatly that the rate of species extinctions is rising to hundreds or thousands of times the background level. These losses are driven by increasing demands on species and their habitats, and by the failure of current market systems to value biodiversity adequately. The Assessment calls for urgent action to reverse these trends.

There has been a new recognition of the importance of protecting marine and aquatic biodiversity. The first quantitative estimates of species losses due to growing coral reef destruction predict that

almost 200,000 species, or one in five presently contributing to coral reef biodiversity, could die out in the next 40 years if human pressures on reefs continue to increase.

Since Rio, many countries have improved their understanding of the status and importance of their biodiversity, particularly through biodiversity country studies such as those prepared under the auspices of UNEP/GEF. The United Kingdom identified 1250 species needing monitoring, of which 400 require action plans to ensure their survival. Protective measures for biodiversity, such as legislation to protect species, can prove effective. In the USA, almost 40 percent of the plants and animals protected under the Endangered Species Act are now stable or improving as a direct result of recovery efforts. Some African countries have joined efforts to protect threatened species through the 1994 Lusaka Agreement, and more highly migratory species are being protected by specialized cooperative agreements among range states under the Bonn Agreement.

There is an emerging realization that a major part of conservation of biological diversity must take place outside of protected areas and involve local communities. The extensive agricultural areas occupied by small farmers contain much biodiversity that is important for sustainable food production. Indigenous agricultural practices have been and continue to be important elements in the maintenance of biodiversity, but these are being displaced and lost. There is a new focus on the interrelationship between agrodiversity conservation and sustainable use and development practices in smallholder agriculture, with emphasis on use of farmers' knowledge and skills as a source of information for sustainable farming.

Perhaps even more important than the loss of biodiversity is the transformation of global biogeochemical cycles, the reduction in the total world biomass, and the decrease in the biological productivity of the planet. While quantitative measurements are not available, the eventual economic and social consequences may be so significant that the issue requires further attention.

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Online resources used generally in the Environmental Overview:

Environmental Protection Agency Global Warming Site. URL: http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming

Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations: Forestry. URL: http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/sofo/en/

Global Warming Information Page. URL: http://globalwarming.org

United Nations Environmental Program. URL: http://www.unep.org/GEO/GEO_Products/Assessment_Reports/

United Nations Global Environmental Outlook. URL: http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/

Note on Edition Dates:

The edition dates for textual resources are noted above because they were used to formulate the original content. We also have used online resources (cited above) to update coverage as needed.

Information Resources

For more information about environmental concepts, CountryWatch recommends the following resources:

The United Nations Environmental Program Network (with country profiles)

<http://www.unep.net/>

The United Nations Environment Program on Climate Change

<http://climatechange.unep.net/>

The United Nations Environmental Program on Waters and Oceans

<http://www.unep.ch/earthw/Pdepwat.htm>

The United Nations Environmental Program on Forestry: "Forests in Flux"

<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/flux/homepage.htm>

FAO "State of the World's Forests"

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/FO/SOFO/SOFO99/sofo99-e.stm>

World Resources Institute.

<http://www.wri.org/>

Harvard University Center for Health and the Global Environment

<http://www.med.harvard.edu/chge/the-review.html>

The University of Wisconsin Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment

http://sage.aos.wisc.edu/

International Environmental Agreements and Associations

International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:

Introduction

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.

2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

Following are two discusssions regarding international policies on the environment, followed by listings of international accords.

Special Entry: The Kyoto Protocol

The UNFCCC was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and entered into force in 1994. Over 175 parties were official participants.

Meanwhile, however, many of the larger, more industrialized nations failed to reach the emissions' reduction targets, and many UNFCCC members agreed that the voluntary approach to reducing emissions had not been successful. As such, UNFCCC members reached a consensus that legally binding limits were necessitated, and agreed to discuss such a legal paradigm at a meeting in Kyoto, Japan in 1997. At that meeting, the UNFCCC forged the Kyoto Protocol. This concord is the first legally binding international agreement that places limits on emissions from industrialized countries. The major greenhouse gas emissions addressed in the Kyoto Protocol include carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and methane.

The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol stipulate that economically advanced nations must reduce their combined emissions of greenhouse gases, by approximately five percent from their 1990 levels, before the 2008-2010 deadline. Countries with the highest carbon dioxide emissions, such as the United States (U.S.), many of the European Union (EU) countries, and Japan, are to reduce emissions by a scale of 6 to 8 percent. All economically advanced nations must show "demonstrable progress" by 2005. In contrast, no binding limits or timetable have been set on developing countries. Presumably, this distinction is due to the fact that most developing countries -- with the obvious exceptions of India and China -- simply do not emit as many greenhouse gases as do more industrially advanced countries. Meanwhile, these countries are entrenched in the process of economic development.

Regardless of the aforementioned reasoning, there has been strong opposition against the asymmetrical treatment assigned to emissions limits among developed and developing countries. Although this distinction might be regarded as unfair in principle, associations such as the Alliance of Small Island States have been vocal in expressing how global warming -- a result of greenhouse gas emissions - has contributed to the rise in sea level, and thus deleteriously affected their very existence as island nation states. For this reason, some parties have suggested that economically advanced nations, upon returning to their 1990 levels, should be required to further reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by a deadline of 2005. In response, interested parties have observed that even if such reductions were undertaken by economically advanced nations, they would not be enough to completely control global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming.

As such, the Protocol established a "Clean Development Mechanism" which permits developed countries to invest in projects aimed at reducing emissions within developing countries in return for credit for the reductions. Ostensibly, the objective of this mechanism is to curtail emissions in developing countries without unduly penalizing them for their economic development. Under this model, the countries with more potential emissions credits could sell them to other signatories of the Kyoto Protocol, whose emissions are forecast to significantly rise in the next few years. Should this trading of emissions credits take place, it is estimated that the Kyoto Protocol's emissions

targets could still be met.

In 1999, the International Energy Outlook projected that Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Newly Independent States, as well as parts of Asia, are all expected to show a marked decrease in their level of energy-related carbon emissions in 2010. Nations with the highest emissions, specifically, the U.S., the EU and Japan, are anticipated to reduce their emissions by up to 8 percent by 2012. By 2000, however, the emissions targets were not on schedule for achievement. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates forecast that by 2010, there will be a 34 percent increase in carbon emissions from the 1990 levels, in the absence of major shifts in policy, economic growth, energy prices, and consumer trends. Despite this assessment in the U.S., international support for the Kyoto Protocol remained strong, especially among European countries and island states, who view the pact as one step in the direction away from reliance on fossil fuels and other sources of greenhouse gases.

In 2001, U.S. President, George W. Bush, rejected his country's participation in the Kyoto Protocol, saying that the costs imposed on the global economic system, and especially, on the US, overshadowed the benefits of the Protocol. He also cited the unfair burden on developed nations to reduce emissions, as another primary reasons for withdrawal from the international pact, as well as insufficient evidence regarding the science of global warming. Faced with impassioned international disapproval for his position, the U.S. president stated that his administration remained interested in dealing with the matter of global warming, but would endorse alternative measures to combat the problem, such as voluntary initiatives limiting emissions. Critics of Bush's position, however, have noted that it was the failure of voluntary initiatives to reduce emissions following the Rio Summit that led to the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol in the first place.

In the wake of the Bush administration's decision, many participant countries resigned themselves to the reality that the goals of the Kyoto Protocol might not be achieved without U.S. involvement. Nevertheless, in Bonn, Germany, in July 2001, the remaining participant countries struck a political compromise on some of the key issues and sticking points, and planned to move forward with the Protocol, irrespective of the absence of the U.S. The key compromise points included the provision for countries to offset their targets with carbon sinks (these are areas of forest and farmland which can absorb carbon through the process of photosynthesis). Another compromise point within the broader Bonn Agreement was the reduction of emissions cuts of six gases from over 5 percent to a more achievable 2 percent. A third key change was the provision of funding for less wealthy countries to adopt more progressive technologies.

In late October and early November 2001, the UNFCC's 7th Conference of the Parties met in Marrakesh, Morocco, to finalize the measures needed to make the Kyoto Protocol operational. Although the UNFCC projected that ratification of the Protocol would make it legally binding within a year, many critics noted that the process had fallen short of implementing significant

changes in policy that would be necessary to actually stop or even slow climate change. They also maintained that the absence of U.S. participation effectively rendered the Protocol into being a political exercise without any substance, either in terms of transnational policy or in terms of environmental concerns.

The adoption of the compromises ensconced within the Bonn Agreement had been intended to make the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol more palatable to the U.S. In this regard, it failed to achieve its objective as the Bush administration continued to eschew participation in the international accord. Still, however, the Bonn Agreement did manage to render a number of other positive outcomes. Specifically, in 2002, key countries, such as Russia, Japan and Canada agreed to ratify the protocol, bringing the number of signatories to 178. The decision by key countries to ratify the protocol was regarded as "the kiss of life" by observers.

By 2005, on the eve of a climate change conference in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair was hoping to deal with the problems of climate change beyond the provisions set forth in the Kyoto Protocol. Acknowledging that the Kyoto Protocol could not work in its current form, Blair wanted to open the discussion for a new climate change plan.

Blair said that although most of the world had signed on to Kyoto, the protocol could not meet any of its practical goals of cutting greenhouse gas emissions without the participation of the United States, the world's largest polluter. He also noted that any new agreement would have to include India and China -- significant producers of greenhouse gas emissions, but exempt from Kyoto because they have been classified as developing countries. Still, he said that progress on dealing with climate change had been stymied by "a reluctance to face up to reality and the practical action needed to tackle problem."

Blair also touted the "huge opportunities" in technology and pointed toward the possibilities offered by wind, solar and nuclear power, along with fuel cell technology, eco-friendly biofuels, and carbon capture and storage which could generate low carbon power. Blair also asserted that his government was committed to achieving its domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent by 2010.

In the United States, President George W. Bush has said that global warming remained a debatable issue and despite conclusions reached by his own Environmental Protection Agency, he has not agreed with the conclusion that global warming and climate change are linked with human activities. Bush has also refused to ratify Kyoto on the basis of its economic costs.

Australia, an ally of the United States, has taken a similarly dim view of the Kyoto Protocol. Ahead of the November 2005 climate change meeting in Canada in which new goals for the protocol were to be discussed, Australia 's Environment Minister, Ian Campbell, said that negotiating new greenhouse gas emission levels for the Kyoto Protocol would be a waste of time.

Campbell said, "There is a consensus that the caps, targets and timetables approach is flawed. If we spend the next five years arguing about that, we'll be fiddling and negotiating while Rome burns." Campbell, like the Bush administration, has also advocated a system of voluntary action in which industry takes up new technologies rather than as a result of compelling the reduction of emissions. But the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has called on its government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, to establish a system of emissions trading, and to set binding limits on emissions. Interestingly, although it did not sign on to Kyoto , Australia was expected to meet its emissions target by 2012 (an 8 percent increase in 1990 levels in keeping with the country's reliance on coal). But this success has nothing to do with new technologies and is due to state-based regulations on land clearing.

Note: The Kyoto Protocol calls for developed nations to cut greenhouse emissions by 5.2 percent of 1990 levels by 2012.

Special Entry: Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen (2009) --

In December 2009, the United Nations Climate Change Summit opened in the Danish capital of Copenhagen. The summit was scheduled to last from Dec. 7-18, 2009. Delegates from more than 190 countries were in attendance, and approximately 100 world leaders, including British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and United States President Barack Obama, were expected to participate. At issue was the matter of new reductions targets on greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

Despite earlier fears that little concurrence would come from the conference, effectively pushing significant actions forward to a 2010 conference in Mexico City, negotiators were now reporting that the talks were productive and several key countries, such as South Africa, had pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The two main issues that could still lead to cleavages were questions of agreement between the industrialized countries and the developing countries of the world, as well as the overall effectiveness of proposals in seriously addressing the perils of climate change.

On Dec. 9, 2009, four countries -- the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico and Norway -- presented a document outlining ideas for raising and managing billions of dollars, which would be intended to help vulnerable countries dealing with the perils of climate change. Described as a "green fund," the concept could potentially help small island states at risk because of the rise in sea level. Bangladesh identified itself as a potential recipient of an assistance fund, noting that as a country plagued by devastating floods, it was particularly hard-hit by climate change. The "green fund" would fall under the rubric of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, for which developed countries have been committed to quantifying their emission reduction targets, and also to providing financial and technical support to developing countries.

The United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico and Norway also called for the creation of a new legal

treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol. This new treaty, which could go into force in 2012, would focus largely on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. But Australia went even further in saying that the successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, should be one with provisions covering all countries. Such a move would be a departure from the structure of the Kyoto Protocol, which contained emissions targets for industrialized countries due to the prevailing view that developed countries had a particular historic responsibility to be accountable for climate change. More recently, it has become apparent that substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions demanded by scientists would only come to pass with the participation also of significant developing nation states, such as China and India. Indeed, one of the most pressing critiques of the Kyoto Protocol was that it was a "paper tiger" that failed to address the impact of the actions of emerging economies like China and India, with its focus on the developed economies.

Now, in 2009, China -- as the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter -- was responding this dubious distinction by vocalizing its criticism of the current scenario and foregrounding its new commitments. Ahead of the Copenhagen summit, China had announced it would reduce the intensity of its carbon emissions per unit of its GDP in 2020 by 40 to 45 percent against 2005 levels. With that new commitment at hand, China was now accusing the United States and the European Union of shirking their own responsibilities by setting weak targets for greenhouse gas emissions cuts. Senior Chinese negotiator, Su Wei, characterized the goals of the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter -- the United States -- as "not notable," and the European Union's target as "not enough." Su Wei also took issue with Japan for setting implausible preconditions.

On Dec. 11, 2009, China demanded that developed and wealthy countries in Copenhagen should help deliver a real agreement on climate change by delivering on their promises to reduce carbon emissions and provide financial support for developing countries to adapt to global warming. In so doing, China's Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei said his country was hoping that a "balanced outcome" would emerge from the discussions at the summit. Echoing the position of the Australian government, He Yafei spoke of a draft agreement as follows: "The final document we're going to adopt needs to be taking into account the needs and aspirations of all countries, particularly the most vulnerable ones."

China's Vice Foreign Minister emphasized the fact that climate change was "a matter of survival" for developing countries, and accordingly, such countries need wealthier and more developed countries to accentuate not only their pledges of emissions reduction targets, but also their financial commitments under the aforementioned United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. To that end, scientists and leaders of small island states in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, have highlighted the existential threat posed by global warming and the concomitant rise in sea level.

China aside, attention was also on India -- another major player in the developing world and a country with an industrializing economy that was impacting the environment. At issue was the

Indian government's decision to set a carbon intensity target, which would slow emissions growth by up to 25 percent by the 2020 deadline. This strong position was resisted by some elements in India, who argued that their country should not be taking such a strong position when developed wealthy countries were yet to show accountability for their previous commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The matter grew so heated that the members of the opposition stormed out of the parliament in protest as Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh defended the policy. But the political pressure at home in India was leaving the Indian delegation in Copenhagen in a state of chaos as well. In fact, India's top environmental negotiator refused to travel to Copenhagen in protest of the government's newly-announced stance.

China and India were joined by Brazil and South Africa in the crafting of a draft document calling for a new global climate treaty to be completed by June 2010. Of concern has been the realization that there was insufficient time to find concurrence on a full legal treaty, which would leave countries only with a politically-binding text by the time the summit at Copenhagen closed. But Guyana's leader, President Bharrat Jagdeo, warned that the summit in Denmark would be classified as a failure unless a binding document was agreed upon instead of just political consensus. He urged his cohorts to act with purpose saying, "Never before have science, economics, geo-strategic self-interest and politics intersected in such a way on an issue that impacts everyone on the planet."

Likewise, Tuvalu demanded that legally binding agreements emerge from Copenhagen. Its proposal was supported by many of the vulnerable countries, from small island states and sub-Saharan Africa, all of whom warned of the catastrophic impact of climate change on their citizens. Tuvalu also called for more aggressive action, such as an amendment to the 1992 agreement, which would focus on sharp greenhouse gas emissions and the accepted rise in temperatures, due to the impact the rise in seas. The delegation from Kiribati joined the call by drawing attention to the fact that one village had to be abandoned due to waist-high water, and more such effects were likely to follow. Kiribati's Foreign Secretary, Tessie Lambourne, warned that the people of Kiribati could well be faced with no homeland in the future saying, "Nobody in this room would want to leave their homeland." But despite such impassioned pleas and irrespective of warnings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that the rise in sea level from melting polar ice caps would deleteriously affect low-lying atolls such as such as Tuvalu and Kiribati in the Pacific, and the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, the oil-giant Saudi Arabia was able to block this move.

Meanwhile, within the developed countries, yet another power struggle was brewing. The European Union warned it would only agree to raise its target of 20 percent greenhouse gas emissions reductions to 30 percent if the United States demonstrated that it would do more to reduce its own emissions. It was unknown if such pressure would yield results. United States President Barack Obama offered a "provisional" 2020 target of 17 percent reductions, noting that he could not offer greater concessions at Copenhagen due to resistance within the United States

Congress, which was already trying to pass a highly controversial "cap and trade" emissions legislation. However, should that emissions trading bill fail in the Senate, the United States Environment Protection Agency's declaration that greenhouse gases pose a danger to human health and the environment was expected to facilitate further regulations and limits on power plants and factories at the national level. These moves could potentially strengthen the Obama administration's offering at Copenhagen. As well, President Obama also signaled that he would be willing to consider the inclusion of international forestry credits.

Such moves indicated willingness by the Obama administration to play a more constructive role on the international environmental scene than its predecessor, the Bush administration. Indeed, ahead of his arrival at the Copenhagen summit, President Barack Obama's top environmental advisors promised to work on a substantial climate change agreement. To that end, United States Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said at a press conference, "We are seeking robust engagement with all of our partners around the world." But would this pro-engagement assertion yield actual results?

By Dec. 12, 2009, details related to a draft document prepared by Michael Zammit Cutajar, the head of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action, were released at the Copenhagen climate conference. Included in the document were calls for countries to make major reductions in carbon emissions over the course of the next decade. According to the Washington Post, industrialized countries were called on to make cuts of between 25 percent and 40 percent below 1990 levels -- reductions that were far more draconian than the United States was likely to accept. As discussed above, President Obama had offered a provisional reduction target of 17 percent. The wide gap between the released draft and the United States' actual stated position suggested there was much more negotiating in the offing if a binding agreement could be forged, despite the Obama administration's claims that it was seeking greater engagement on this issue.

In other developments, the aforementioned call for financial support of developing countries to deal with the perils of climate change was partly answered by the European Union on Dec. 11, 2009. The European bloc pledged an amount of 2.4 billion euros (US$3.5 billion) annually from 2010 to 2012. Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren of Sweden -- the country that holds the rotating presidency of the European Union at the time of the summit -- put his weight behind the notion of a "legally binding deal." Meanwhile, Yvo de Boer, a top United Nations climate change official, focused less on the essence of the agreement and more on tangible action and effects saying, "Copenhagen will only be a success if it delivers significant and immediate action that begins the day the conference ends."

The division between developed and developing countries in Copenhagen reached new heights on Dec. 14, 2009, when some of the poor and less developed countries launched a boycott at the summit. The move, which was spurred by African countries but backed by China and India, appeared to be geared toward redirecting attention and primary responsibility to the wealthier and more industrialized countries. The impasse was resolved after the wealthier and more

industrialized countries offered assurances that they did not intend on shirking from their commitments to reducing greenhouse gases. As a result, the participating countries ceased the boycott.

Outside the actual summit, thousands of protestors had gathered to demand crucial global warming, leading to clashes between police and demonstrators elsewhere in the Danish capital city. There were reports of scattered violence across Copenhagen and more than 1,000 people were arrested.

Nevertheless, by the second week of the climate change summit, hopes of forging a strong deal were eroding as developed and developing nations remained deadlocked on sharing cuts in greenhouse gases, and particularly on the matters of financing and temperature goals. In a bid to shore up support for a new climate change, United States President Barack Obama joined other world leaders in Copenhagen. On Dec. 14, 2009, there was a standoff brewing between the United States and China. At issue was China's refusal to accept international monitoring of its expressed targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The United States argued that China's opposition to verification could be a deal-breaker.

By the close of the summit, the difficult process eventually resulted in some consensus being cultivated. A draft text called for $100 billion a year by 2020 to assist poor nations cope with climate change, while aiming to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. The deal also included specific targets for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and called for reductions by developing countries as a share of their economies. Also included in the agreement was a mechanism to verify compliance. The details of the agreement were supported by President Barack Obama, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

This draft would stand as an interim agreement, with a legally-binding international pact unlikely to materialize until 2010. In this way, the summit in Copenhagen failed to achieve its central objective, which was to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions.

Editor's Note

In the background of these developments was the growing global consciousness related to global warming and climate change. Indeed, as the Copenhagen summit was ongoing, it was clear there was enormous concurrence on the significance of the stakes with an editorial on the matter of climate change being published in 56 newspapers in 45 countries. That editorial warned that without global action, climate change would "ravage our planet." Meanwhile, a global survey taken by Globescan showed that concern over global warming had exponentially increased from 1998 -- when only 20 percent of respondents believed it to be a serious problem -- to 64 percent in 2009. Such survey data, however, was generated ahead of the accusations by climate change skeptics that some climate scientists may have overstated the case for global warming, based on emails

derived in an illicit manner from a British University.

Special Entry: Climate change talks in Doha in Qatar extend life of Kyoto Protocol (2012)

December 2012 saw climate talks ensue in the Qatari city of Doha as representatives from countries across the world gathered to discuss the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks to minimize greenhouse gas emissions. The summit yielded results with decisions made (1) to extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2020, and (2) for wealthier countries to compensate poorer countries for the losses and damage incurred as a result of climate change.

In regards to the second matter, Malia Talakai of Nauru, a leading negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States, explained the necessity of the compensation package as follows: “We are trying to say that if you pollute you must help us.”

This measure was being dubbed the "Loss and Damage" mechanism, and was being linked with United States President Barack Obama's request for $60 billion from Congress to deal with the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy months before. The sight of a hurricane bearing down on the northern Atlantic seaboard, along with the reality of the scope of reconstruction, appeared to have illustrated the economic costs of climate change -- not so much as a distant environmental issue -- but as a danger to the quotidian lives of people. Still, there was blame to be placed on the United States and European countries -- some of world's largest emitters -- for failing to do more to reduce emissions.

To that latter end, there was in fact little progress made on the central issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Had those emissions been reduced, there would have been less of a need to financially deal with the devastation caused by climate change. One interpretation was that the global community was accepting the fact that industrialization was contributing to global warming, which had deleterious effects on the polar ice caps and concomitantly on the rise of sea level, with devastating effects for small island nations. Thus, wealthier countries were willing to pay around $10 billion a year through 2020, effectively in "damages," to the poor countries that could be viewed as the "collateral damage" of industrial progress. But damages today could potentially be destruction tomorrow, leaving in place the existential challenges and burdens to be born by some of the world's smallest and least wealthy island countries.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the representative for the small island nation states at the Doha summit responded with ire, characterizing the lack of progress on reducing emissions as follows: "We see the package before us as deeply deficient in mitigation (carbon cuts) and finance. It's likely to lock us on the trajectory to a 3,4,5C rise in global temperatures, even though we agreed to keep the global average temperature rise of 1.5C to ensure survival of all islands. There is no new finance (for adapting to climate change and getting clean energy) -- only promises that something might

materialize in the future. Those who are obstructive need to talk not about how their people will live, but whether our people will live."

Indeed, in most small island countries not just in the Pacific, but also the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have been dominant themes with dire life and death consequences looming in the background for their people. Small island nations in these region are already at risk from the rise of sea-level, tropical cyclones, floods. But their very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming were also at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Increasingly high storm surges can wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Accordingly, the very existence of island nations, such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map. Yet even with the existential threat of being wiped off the map in the offing, the international community has been either slow or restrictive in its efforts to deal with global warming, climate change, economic and ecological damage, as well as the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees.

A 2012 report from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Pacific Regional Environment Program underlined the concerns of small island nations and their people as it concluded that the livelihoods of approximately 10 million people in Pacific island communities were increasingly vulnerable to climate change. In fact, low-lying islands in that region would likely confront losses of up to 18 percent of gross domestic product due to climate change, according to the report. The report covers 21 countries and territories, including Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga, and recommended environmental legislation intended to deal with the climate crisis facing the small island countries particularly. As noted by David Sheppard, the director general of the Pacific Regional Environment Program that co-sponsored this study: “The findings... emphasize the need more than ever to raise the bar through collective actions that address the region's environmental needs at all levels."

Regardless of the failures of the summit in Qatar (discussed above), the meeting did facilitate a process starting in 2015, which would bind both wealthy and poor countries together in the mission of forging a new binding treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol and tackle the central causes of climate change.

For more information on the threats faced in small island nations by climate change and the measures being undertaken to lobby for international action, please see the Alliance for Small Island States available online at the URL: http://aosis.org/

Special Report

COP 21 summit in Paris ends with historic agreement to tackle climate change; rare international consensus formed on environmental crisis facing the planet (2015) --

In mid-December 2015, the highly-anticipated United Nations climate conference of parties (COP) in Paris, France, ended with a historic agreement. In fact, it would very likely be understood as the most significant international agreement signed by all the recognized countries of the world since the Cold War. Accordingly, the Paris Agreement was being distinguished as the first multilateral pact that would compel all countries across the world to cut its carbon emissions -- one of the major causes of increasing greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to global warming, and its deleterious effects ranging from the dangerous rise in sea level to catastrophic climate change.

The accord, which was dubbed to be the "Paris Agreement," was the work of rigorous diplomacy and fervent environmental advocacy, and it aimed to address the climate change crisis facing the planet. As many as 195 countries were represented in the negotiations that led to the landmark climate deal. Indeed, it was only after weeks of passionate debate that international concurrence was reached in addressing the environmental challenges confronting the world, with particular attention to moving beyond fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The success of the COP 21 summit in Paris and the emergence of the landmark Paris Agreement was, to some extent, attributed to the efforts of France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who presided over the negotiations. The French foreign minister's experience and credentials as a seasoned diplomat and respected statesman paid dividends. He skillfully guided the delegates from almost 200 countries and interest groups along the negotiations process, with ostensibly productive results and a reasonably robust deal to show for it.

On Dec. 12, 2015, French Foreign Minister Fabius officially adopted the agreement, declaring: "I now invite the COP to adopt the decision entitled Paris Agreement outlined in the document. Looking out to the room I see that the reaction is positive, I see no objections. The Paris agreement is adopted." Once Foreign Minister Fabius' gavel was struck, symbolically inaugurating the Paris Agreement into force, the COP delegate rushed to their feet with loud and bouyant cheers as well as thunderous applause.

In general, the Paris Agreement was being hailed as a victory for enviromental activists and a triumph for international diplomats, while at the same time being understood as simply an initial -- and imperfect -- move in the direction of a sustainable future. China's chief negotiator, Xie Zhenhua, issued this message, saying that while the accord was not ideal, it should "not prevent us from marching historical steps forward."

United States President Barack Obama lauded the deal as both "ambitious" and "historic," and the work of strenuous multilateral negotiations as he declared, "Together, we've shown what's possible when the world stands as one." The United States leader acknowledged that the accord was not "perfect," but he reminded the critics that it was "the best chance to save the one planet we have. "

Former United States Vice President Al Gore, one of the world's most well known environmental advocates, issued a lengthy statement on the accomplishments ensconced in the Paris Agreement. He highlighted the fact that the Paris Agreement was a first step towards a future with a reduced carbon footprint on Planet Earth as he said, "The components of this agreement -- including a strong review mechanism to enhance existing commitments and a long-term goal to eliminate global-warming pollution this century -- are essential to unlocking the necessary investments in our future. No agreement is perfect, and this one must be strengthened over time, but groups across every sector of society will now begin to reduce dangerous carbon pollution through the framework of this agreement."

The central provisions of the Paris Agreement included the following items:

- Greenhouse gas emissions should peak as quickly as possible, with a move towards balancing energy sources, and ultimately the decrease of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century
- Global temperature increase would be limited to 1.5 degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels and would be held "well below" the two degrees Centigrade threshold
- Progress on these goals would be reviewed every five years beginning in 2020 with new greenhouse gas reduction targets issued every five years
- $100 billion would be expended each year in climate finance for developing countries to move forward with green technologies, with further climate financing to be advanced in the years beyond

It should be noted that there both legally binding and voluntary elements contained within the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the submission of an emissions reduction target and the regular review of that goal would be legally mandatory for all countries. Stated differently, there would be a system in place by which experts would be able to track the carbon-cutting progress of each country. At the same time, the specific targets to be set by countries would be determined at the discretion of the countries, and would not be binding. While there was some criticism over this non-binding element, the fact of the matter was that the imposition of emissions targets was believed to be a major factor in the failure of climate change talks in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2009.

In 2015, the talks faced challenges as several countries, such as China and India, objected to conditions that would stymie economic and development. In order to avoid that kind of landmine, a system Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) was developed and formed the basis of the accord. As such, the Paris Agreement would, in fact, facilitate economic growth and development, as well as technological progress, but with the goal of long-term ecological sustainability based on low carbon sources. In fact, the agreement heralded as "the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era." As noted by Nick Mabey, the head of the climate diplomacy organization E3G, said, "Paris means governments will go further and faster to tackle climate change than ever before. The transition to a low carbon economy is now unstoppable, ensuring

the end of the fossil fuel age."

A particular sticking point in the agreement was the $100 billion earmarked for climate financing for developing countries to transition from traditional fossil fuels to green energy technologies and a low carbon future. In 2014, a report by the International Energy Agency indicated that the cost of that transition would actually be around $44 trillion by the mid-century -- an amount that would render the $100 billion being promised to be a drop in the proverbial bucket. However, the general expectation was that the Republican-controlled Senate in the United States, which would have to ratify the deal in that country, was not interested in contributing significant funds for the cause of climate change.

A key strength of the Paris Agreement was the ubiquitous application of measures to all countries. Of note was the frequently utilized concept of "flexibility" with regard to the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the varying capacities of the various countries in meeting their obligations would be anticipated and accorded flexibility. This aspect presented something of a departure from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which drew a sharp distinction between developed and developing countries, and mandated a different set of obligations for those categories of countries. Thus, under Kyoto, China and India were not held to the same standards as the United States and European countries. In the Paris Agreement, there would be commitments from all countries across the globe.

Another notable strength of the Paris Agreement was the fact that the countries of the world were finally able to reach consensus on the vital necessity to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Centrigrade. Ahead of the global consensus on the deal, and as controversy continued to surface over the targeted global temperature limits, the leaders of island countries were sounding the alarm about the melting of the Polar ice caps and the associated rise in seal level. Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga of Tuvalu issued this dismal reminder: “Tuvalu’s future … is already bleak and any further temperature increase will spell the total demise of Tuvalu. No leader in this room carries such a level of worry and responsibility. Just imagine you are in my shoes, what would you do?” It was thus something of a victory for environmental advocates that the countries of the world could find cnsensus on the lower number -- 1.5 degrees rather than 2 degrees.

A significant weak point with regard to the Paris deal was a "loss and damage" provision, which anticipates that even with all the new undertakings intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move to a low carbon future, there would nonetheless be unavoidable climate change consequences. Those consequences ranged from the loss of arable land for farmers as well as soil erosion and contamination of potable water by sea water, to the decimation of territory in coastal zones and on small islands, due to the rise in sea level, with entire small island countries being rendered entirely uninhabitable. The reality was that peoples' homes across the world would be destroyed along with their way of life.

With that latter catastrophic effect being a clear and present danger for small island countries, the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) demanded that the developed world acknowledge its responsibility for this irreversible damage.. Despite the fact that greenhouse gas emissions and the ensuing plague of global warming was, indeed, the consequence of development in the West (the United States and Europe) and the large power house countries, such as Russia, China and India, there was no appetite by those countries to sign on to unlimited liability. Under the Paris Agreement, there was a call for research on insurance mechanisms that would address loss and damage issues, with recommendations to come in the future.

The call for research was being regarded as an evasion of sorts and constituted the weakest aspect of the Paris Agreement. Not surprisingly, a coalition of small island nations demanded a "Marshall Plan" for the Pacific. Borrowing the term "Marshall Plan" from the post-World War II reconstruction effort, the coalition of Pacific island nation, which included Kiribati, Tuvalu, Fiji, and the Marshall Islands, called for an initiative that would include investment in renewable energy and shoreline protection, cultural preservation, economic assistance for economies in transition, and a plan for migration and resettlement for these countries as they confront the catastrophic effects of the melting of the Polar ice caps and the concomitant rise in sea level. The precise contours of the initiative remained unknown, unspecified, and a mere exercise in theory at the time of writing. Yet such an initiative would, at some point, have to be addressed, given the realities of climate change and the slow motion calamity unfolding each day for low-lying island nations across the world.

As noted by Vice President Greg Stone of Conservation International, who also functions as an adviser to the government of Kiribati, “Imagine living in a place where you know it’s going to go away someday, but you don’t know what day that wave’s going to come over and wash your home away." He added, “It’s a disaster we know is going to happen.” Meanwhile, the intervening years promised to be filled with hardship for small island nations, such as Kiribati. Stone explained, “For every inch of sea-level rise, these islands lose 10 feet of their freshwater table to saltwater intrusion,” Stone explained. “So it’s not just about the day the water finally goes over the island; it’s also about the day that there’s just not enough water left and everyone has to move off the island.” Presaging the future for island nations that could face submersion, Stone said, “If you look ahead 50 years, a country like Kiribati could become the first aqueous nation. possibility of migration. That is, they own this big patch of ocean, and they administer it from elsewhere.”

Foreign Minister Minister Tony Debrum of the Marshall Islands emerged as the champion advocating on behalf of small island nation states and a loose coalition of concerned countries from the Pacific to the Caribbean, but with support from the United States. He addressed the comprehensive concerns of small island nations regarding the weaknesses of the deal, while simultaneously making clear that the Paris Agreement signified hope for the countries most at risk. In a formal statement, Debrum declared: "We have made history today. Emissions targets are still

way off track, but this agreement has the tools to ramp up ambition, and brings a spirit of hope that we can rise to this challenge. I can go back home to my people and say we now have a pathway to survival." Debrum highlighted the imperatives of Pacific island nations, saying, "Our High Ambition Coalition was the lightning rod we needed to lift our sights and expectations for a strong agreement here in Paris. We were joined by countries representing more than half the world. We said loud and clear that a bare-bones, minimalist agreement would not fly. We instead demanded an agreement to mark a turning point in history, and the beginning of our journey to the post-carbon era."

Debrum of the Marshall Islands espoused the quintessential synopsis of the accord and its effects for those most likely to be affected by climate change as he noted, "Climate change won't stop overnight, and my country is not out of the firing line just yet, but today we all feel a little safer."

Editor's Entry on Environmental Policy:

The low-lying Pacific island nations of the world, including Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, Fiji, among others, are vulnerable to the threats posed by global warming and cimate change, derived from carbon emissions, and resulting in the rise in sea level. Other island nations in the Caribbean, as well as poor countries with coastal zones, were also at particular risk of suffering the deleterious effects of climate change.

Political policy in these countries are often connected to ecological issues, which have over time morphed into an existential crisis of sorts. Indeed, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have also been dominant themes with life and death consequences for the people of island nations in the Pacific. Indeed, the very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming remain at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Yet even so, these countries are threatened by increasingly high storm surges, which could wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Moreover, because these are low lying island nations, the sustained rise in sea level can potentially lead to the terrain of these countries being unihabitable at best, and submerged at worst. Stated in plain terms, these countries are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map and their plight illuminates the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees. In these manifold senses, climate change is the existential crisis of the contemporary era.

Since the time of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, there have been efforts aimed at extending the life of that agreement, with an eye on minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, and thus minimizing the effects of climate change. Those endeavors have largely ended in failure, as exemplified by the unsuccessful Copenhagen talks in 2009 and the fruitless Doha talks in 2012 respectively. The success of the COP 21 talks in France, with the adoption of the landmark Paris Agreement in 2015, was regarded as the first glimmer of hope. Not only did the Paris Agreement signify the triumph of international diplomacy and global consensus, but it also marked the start of the end of the fossil fuel era, with the path forward toward a low carbon future reliant on greener

technologies. Most crucially, the Paris Agreement stood as the first significant response in recent times to the central challenge of climate change and its quotidian effects on the lives of real human beings across the world.

1. Major International Environmental Accords:

General Environmental Concerns

Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, Espoo, 1991.

Accords Regarding Atmosphere

Annex 16, vol. II (Environmental Protection: Aircraft Engine Emissions) to the 1044 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, Montreal, 1981

Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP), Geneva, 1079

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), New York, 1002

Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, Vienna, 1985 including the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Depleted the Ozone Layer, Montreal, 1987

Accords Regarding Hazardous Substances

Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movements and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, Bamako, 1991

Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Caused during Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road, Rail and Inland Navigation Vessels (CRTD), Geneva, 1989

Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (Basel Convention), Basel, 1989

Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, Helsinki, 1992

Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes

within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention), Waigani, 1995

European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR), Geneva 1957

FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides, Rome, 1985

2. Major International Marine Accords:

Global Conventions

Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention 1972), London, 1972

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by Protocol of 1978 relation thereto (MARPOL 73/78), London, 1973 and 1978

International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage 1969 (1969 CLC), Brussels, 1969, 1976, and 1984

International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage 1971 (1971 Fund Convention), Brussels, 1971

Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea (HNS), London 1996

International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Co-operation (OPRC), London, 1990

International Convention Relation to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties (Intervention Convention), Brussels, 1969

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Montego Bay, 1982

Regional Conventions

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft (Oslo Convention), Oslo, 1972

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution from Land-based Sources (Paris Convention), Paris, 1974

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention), Paris, 1992

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (1974 Helsinki Convention), Helsinki 1974

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Conventions within the UNEP Regional Seas Programme

Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution, Bucharest, 1992

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, Cartagena de Indias, 1983

Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region, Nairobi, 1985

Kuwait Regional Convention for Co-operation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution, Kuwait, 1978

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Region of the Mediterranean Sea (Barcelona Convention), Barcelona, 1976

Regional Convention for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment, Jeddah, 1982

Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region, Noumea, 1986

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Area of the South-East Pacific, Lima, 1981

Convention for Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region, Abidjan, 1981

3. Major Conventions Regarding Living Resources:

Marine Living Resources

Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), Canberra, 1980

International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Rio de Janeiro, 1966

International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), Washington, 1946

Nature Conservation and Terrestrial Living Resources

Antarctic Treaty, Washington, D.C., 1959

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Freshwater Resources

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4. Major Conventions Regarding Nuclear Safety:

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Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident (Notification Convention), Vienna, 1986

Convention on Nuclear Safety, Vienna, 1994

Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage, Vienna, 1963

5. Major Intergovernmental Organizations

Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

European Union (EU): Environment

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds (IOPC Funds)

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Environment Policy Committee (EPOC)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

World Bank

World Food Programme (WFP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

6. Major Non-Governmental Organizations

Atmosphere Action Network East Asia (AANEA)

Climate Action Network (CAN)

Consumers International (CI)

Earth Council

Earthwatch Institute

Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI)

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI)

Greenpeace International

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)

International Solar Energy Society (ISES)

IUCN-The World Conservation Union

Pesticide Action Network (PAN)

Sierra Club

Society for International Development (SID)

Third World Network (TWN)

Water Environment Federation (WEF)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

World Federalist Movement (WFM)

World Resources Institute (WRI)

World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF)

7. Other Networking Instruments

Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED)

Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE)

Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS)

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Methodology Note for Demographic Data:

The demographic numbers for cities and national populations listed in CountryWatch content are derived from the Geoba.se website, which analyzes data from the World Bank. The current demographic numbers displayed on the Countrywatch website are reflective of the latest available estimates.

The demographic information for language, ethnicity and religion listed in CountryWatch content is

derived from a mix of sources including the Altapedia, Central Intelligence Agency Factbook, Infoplease, and State Department Background Notes.

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-- See also list of News Wires services below, which are also used for research purposes. --

Note on Edition Dates:

The earlier edition dates are noted above because they were used to formulate the original Country Reviews and serve as the baseline for some of the information covered. Later editions have been used in some cases, and are cited as such, while other more recent online resources (cited above) contain recent and ever-updated data sets used for research.

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Methodology Notes for Economic Data:

Estimates by CountryWatch.com of GDP in dollars in most countries are made by converting local currency GDP data from the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook to US dollars by market exchange rates estimated from the International Monetary Fund International Financial Statistics and projected out by the CountryWatch Macroeconomic Forecast. Real GDP was estimated by deflating current dollar values by the US GDP Implicit Price Deflator.

Exceptions to this method were used for:
- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Nauru
- Cuba
- Palau
- Holy See
- San Marino
- Korea, North
- Serbia & Montenegro
- Liberia
- Somalia
- Liechtenstein
- Tonga
- Monaco
- Tuvalu

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Methodology Notes for the HDI:

Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme, in concert with organizations across the globe, has produced the Human Development Index (or HDI). According to the UNDP, the index measures average achievement in basic human development in one simple composite index, and produces from this index a ranking of countries. The HDI is a composite of three basic components of human development: longevity, knowledge and standard of living. Longevity is measured by life expectancy. Knowledge is measured by combination of adult literacy and mean

years of schooling. Standard of living is measured by purchasing power, based on real GDP per capita (in constant US$) adjusted for differences in international living costs (or, purchasing power parity, PPP). While the index uses these social indicators to measure national performance with regard to human welfare and development, not all countries provide the same level of information for each component needed to compute the index; therefore, as in any composite indicator, the final index is predicated on projections, predictions and weighting schemes. The index is a static measure, and thus, an incomplete measure of human welfare. In fact, the UNDP says itself the concept of human development focuses on the ends rather than the means of development and progress, examining in this manner, the average condition of all people in a given country.

Specifically, the index is calculated by determining the maximum and minimum for each of the three components (as listed above) and then measuring where each country stands in relation to these scales-expressed as a value between 0 and 1. For example, the minimum adult literary rate is zero percent, the maximum is 100 percent, and the reading skills component of knowledge in the HDI for a country where the literacy rate is 75 percent would be 0.75. The scores of all indicators are then averaged into the overall index.

For a more extensive examination of human development, as well as the ranking tables for each participating country, please visit: http://www.undp.org

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In some CountryWatch Country Reviews, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used.

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Note: Some or all these news services have been used to research various sections of this Country Review.

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For items in a "Works Cited" list, CountryWatch.com suggests that users follow recommended patterns forindentation given in the *MLA Handbook*, 4th edition.

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Examples:

Youngblood-Coleman, Denise. *Country Review: France*. 2003. Houston, Texas: CountryWatch Publications, 2003. *Country Review:France*. Online. Available URL: http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_country.asp?vCOUNTRY=61 October, 12, 2003.
Note:
This is the citation format used when the print version is not used in the reference.

Parts of Works

Basic form, using an Internet protocol:

Author/editor. "Part title." *Title of Print Version of Work*. Edition statement (if given). Publication information (Place of publication: publisher, date), if given. *Title of Electronic Work*. Medium. AvailableProtocol (if applicable): Site/Path/File. Access date.

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This is the citation format used when the print version is not used in the reference.

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