



# ANNUAL REPORT

2016

Ostrogorski  
Centre

# About the Ostrogorski Centre

The Ostrogorski Centre is a think-tank devoted to analysis and policy advocacy for problems which Belarus faces in its transition to a market economy and the rule of law.

The Centre was established by Western-educated Belarusians based in Belarus and abroad. Its analysts, who work in Minsk, London, Warsaw, Stockholm, and Berlin, understand the challenges of transition in the region because they have lived through it. Educated at the world's leading universities, the Centre's analysts have cultivated the culture and technical skills required for Western-style analysis. Our analysts regularly publish in Belarusian, Russian, English, German, Polish, and French.

The Centre's deep knowledge of life in Belarus is crucial for addressing complex analytical tasks. What's more, our culture of openness and broad scope of expertise enables us to navigate complicated issues and topics with ease, all in a transnational context. The mission of the Ostrogorski Centre is to shed light on transition processes in Belarus and learn from the experience of other countries.

The Centre aims to promote reform and inspire the kind of thinking which will help the economy become more competitive and governance more efficient. The Centre also prioritises integrating Belarusian scholars and analysts in the pan-European and global media and scholarly networks.

## Areas of work of the Ostrogorski Centre

- Analytical articles and papers on Belarusian domestic politics and foreign and security affairs, particularly relations with Russia and the EU.
- Translations of Belarus Digest articles into Belarusian and Russian as well as publications on the Ostrogorski Centre's activities.
- Maintenance of a searchable database of the most influential individuals in Belarus.
- Maintenance of a searchable database of all public research papers commissioned by Belarusian think tanks and analytical centres.
- Regular digests of developments in civil society, the state-controlled media, foreign policy, security, and the Belarusian economy.
- The Journal of Belarusian Studies, which publishes academic articles on Belarusian literature, linguistics, foreign relations, civil society, history and art, as well as book reviews.

# Introduction from the Director



**Yaraslau Kryvoi**

2nd Annual Conference on Belarusian Studies in London, 2017. Photo credit: Ales Susha

In 2015, we bolstered our core projects and increased our visibility in Belarus by publishing more in Belarusian and Russian as well as organising high-profile events in Minsk. In 2015, the Ostrogorski Centre started accepting interns, launched *Ostro.by* (an analytical outlet in Belarusian and Russian languages), and released three analytical papers. In addition, the Centre continued to provide daily analysis of events related to Belarus through the Belarus Digest and keep the Belarus Policy and Belarus Profile databases up to date.

This year, the Ostrogorski Centre also strengthened its team – Alesia Rudnik, a graduate of Stockholm University with significant experience in a number of civic projects in Belarus joined the Centre as an analyst. We also trained several interns, including Alena Mikhalkovich from New York University Abu Dhabi, and Katsiaryna Borsuk, MA in International Relations from Dublin City University. Jeremy Coppock who is currently working on an International MA in Russian and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow and Jagiellonian

University in Krakow, became the new language editor of the Belarus Digest.

The Belarus Digest welcomed several new authors. Our national security and defence dimension was strengthened by Arseni Sivitski, director of the Centre for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies. Dr Aliaksandr Filipau from the Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts contributed to foreign and public policy topics. Social and human rights issues received wider coverage thanks to Dr Lizaveta Kasmach from the University of Alberta, Canada, and Galina Dzesiatava, who is based in the United States.

## **New and existing projects**

Our main project, the Belarus Digest, has become a reliable and popular source for understanding Belarus-related topics. This is proved by the growth of its audience; since 2012 the number of visitors to the website has tripled. Our audience on social networks has also been growing steadily.

In 2016, the Ostrogorski Centre launched the new project *ostro.by*, which publishes translations of Belarus Digest articles into Belarusian and publications on the activities of the Centre.

We have continued to update the *BelarusPolicy.com* research database, which contains information on policy-related research conducted by major Belarusian analytical institutions,

# Introduction from the Director

and Belarus Profile, a searchable online directory of Belarus's most influential people.

The 2016 issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies largely resulted from a conference organised by the Ostrogorski Centre and the UCL School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies in London in March 2016.

In February-May 2016, the Ostrogorski Centre, in cooperation with Pontis Foundation (Slovakia) and Mott Foundation (USA), implemented a grant competition for research in the areas of foreign policy, security, and education.

On 29 June, the Ostrogorski Centre held the first Ostrogorski Forum, a conference on foreign policy and security in Minsk. On 13 December, the Centre organised a conference on education as a human right in cooperation with the Embassy of the Netherlands and the Embassy of Poland. The Centre also continued to organise the annual London Conference on Belarusian Studies, which took place on 25 February.

In 2016 the Ostrogorski Centre released three major analytical papers.

## Plans for 2017

Education is one area where Belarus requires significant reform and more input from Western-qualified Belarusians. The Centre will work on bringing their own expertise to Belarusian universities as well as the informal education sector. In 2017, the Ostrogorski Centre will focus on its new educational project – the Ostrogorski Academy.

The Ostrogorski Academy is meant to serve as an online educational platform based on a series of lectures on important and engaging topics.

Each lecture series will be read by well-known Belarusian academics and analysts based both abroad and in Belarus; courses will also feature graphic illustrations, transcripts of lectures, e-books, podcasts, and links to additional sources of information.

The Centre will continue to organise its three flagship annual events. The Annual London Conference in February will primarily be dedicated to Belarusian national figure Francis Skaryna: his work and legacy. The 2017 Ostrogorski Forum in June will focus on Belarus-EU relations, security in the region, and identity policy after the 2014 Ukraine crisis. The annual conference on education in December will consider the possibility of transferring best practices of western legal education to Belarus.

# Our projects

## BELARUS DIGEST

WWW.BELARUSDIGEST.COM

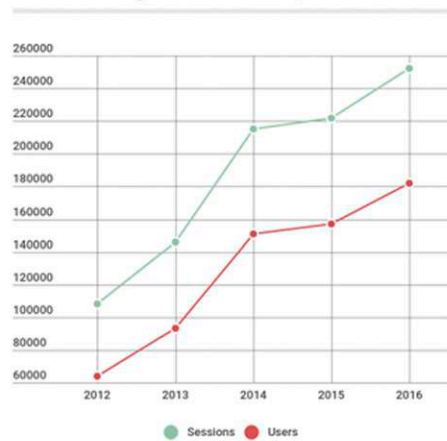


The [Belarus Digest](#) provides non-partisan analysis of Belarus-related events written by Belarusians specifically for an English-language readership. In addition to the daily analytical pieces published on Belarus Digest

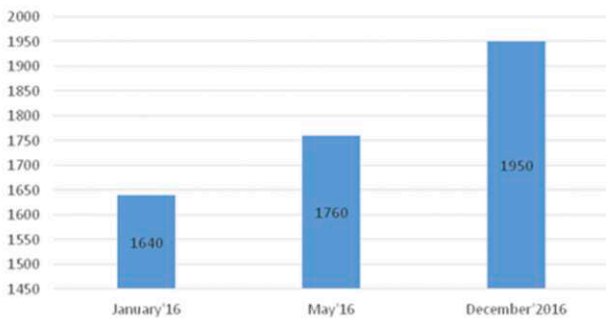
we also offer monthly columns such as Belarus Foreign Policy Digest, State Press Digest, Digest of the Belarusian Economy, and updates on civil society activities and Belarusian analytics.

In recent years, the Belarus Digest has become a reliable and popular source for understanding Belarus-related topics. This is proved by the growth of its audience. In 2016, the Belarus Digest attracted a record number of readers: the website has tripled its number of viewers and increased the number of sessions 2.5 times since 2012. Its audience on social networks has also been growing steadily. In 2016, the Belarus Digest published about 250 articles.

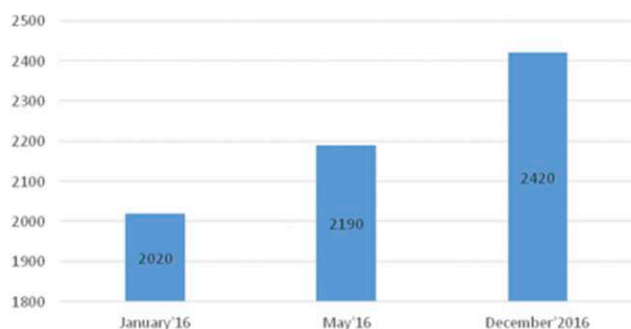
Belarus Digest audience, 2012-2016



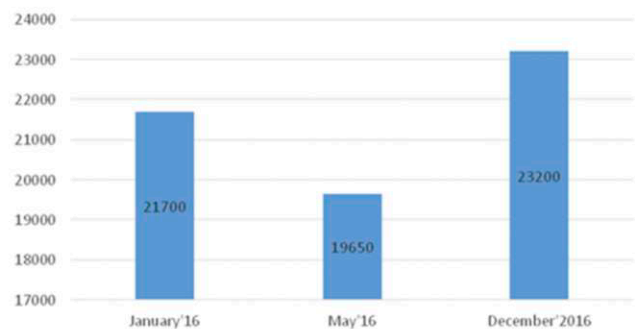
Followers on Facebook



Followers on Twitter



Number of monthly sessions



# Our projects

The high-quality analysis provided by the Belarus Digest is also proved by numerous references to its articles in the world's leading think tanks and media sources:

Foreign Policy

Al Jazeera

The Guardian

Forbes

Carnegie Endowment

Centre for European Policy Analysis

European Council on Foreign Relations

Jamestown Foundation

Council of Europe

Globsec Policy Institute,

El Confidential

Hoover Institution

Aftenposten

Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Centre for Strategic Assessment and Forecast

Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Centre

huffingtonpost.com

Kyiv Post

World Affairs

Pakistan Defence

Eastbook.eu

The Diplomat

Transitions Online

New Eastern Europe

inosmi.ru, The Politicon

Russia Insider

Russian Insight

Eurasianet.org

International Business Times

Esglobal

East Journal

Centre for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies

Eastbook.eu

politykaglobalna.pl

East Journal

Naša Niva

Radio Racyja

Polish Radio for Abroad

Radio Liberty

Belarus in Focus

udf.by

Nashe Mnenie

eurobelarus.info

eastjournal.net

eurasianet.org

ideaby.org

charter97.org

belaruspartisan.org

thinktanks.by

and others

## OSTRO.BY

WWW.OSTRO.BY



In March, the Centre launched the new project [ostro.by](http://ostro.by), whose initial purpose was to translate Belarus Digest articles into Belarusian.

It now also publishes original Belarusian-language articles and publications on the Ostrogorski Centre activities.

The authors seek to shed light on the complex issues of Belarusian politics in a simple and understandable way. At the same time, the articles exhibit a high standard of analysis and provide a balanced and evidence-based view of the political context.

The Centre has published about 100 translations of its articles since the beginning of the project.

# Our projects

## BELARUS PROFILE

WWW.BELARUSPROFILE.COM

[Belarus Profile](#) provides up-to-date information on nearly 450 influential people from all walks of life in Belarus.

Containing biographical listings of people who have an impact on life in Belarus,

including politicians, opposition activists, civil servants, and notable figures from academia, business, civil society, and other areas, its ambition is to become the most respected reference source for biographical information.

Each listing is in Belarusian, Russian, and English and contains basic personal information, details of education and career, and relevant internet links. In 2016 over 100 new profiles appeared on Belarus Profile and 150 were updated. Currently, Belarus Profile remains the most complete database of the Belarusian elite available online.

## BELARUS POLICY

WWW.BELARUSPOLICY.COM

[BelarusPolicy.com](#) is a joint project of the Ostrogorski Centre and the Belarusian Research Council. This platform gathers information on all Belarusian public research and analytical institutions.

Containing over 300 research papers from 14 leading Belarusian think tanks in the area of governance, foreign policy, security and social sciences, the database presents a unique source of policy research on Belarus available online.

# Our projects

## THE JOURNAL OF BELARUSIAN STUDIES

WWW.BELARUSJOURNAL.COM



### [The Journal of Belarusian Studies](#)

publishes academic articles on Belarusian literature, linguistics, foreign relations, civil society, history and art, as well as book reviews. Yarik Kryvoi serves as the Journal's editor.

The Journal's Advisory Board consists of Arnold McMillin (UK), Jim Dingley (UK), Andrej Kotljarchuk (Sweden), Curt Woolheiser (USA), David Marples (Canada), Iryna Dubianetskaya (Belarus), Alastair Rabagliati (Belgium), and Andrew Wilson (UK).

### Contributors for the 2016 issue

- Peter Braga (United Kingdom)
- Veranika Laputcka (Poland)
- Dźmitry Papko (Poland)
- Aleksandra Pomiecko (Canada)
- Ina Shakhrai (USA)
- Andrew Wilson (United Kingdom)



# Our projects

## OSTROGORSKI FORUM 2016



On 29 June 2016, the Ostrogorski Centre held the first Ostrogorski Forum, a conference on foreign policy and security at Drazdy Club in Minsk. This year's conference theme was 'Inertia, strengthening neutrality, or change the foreign policy orientation? Foreign policy of Belarus at the present stage'.

The conference programme featured prominent Belarusian experts, both pro-government and independent, as well as academics from state universities and government officials. The programme included researchers from the Ostrogorski Centre, the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, the Political Sphere Institute, the Centre for European Studies, and the Belarusian Analytical Workroom, all of whom presented papers on foreign relations and security.

The conference featured five studies conducted in spring 2016 with grant support from the Mott Foundation and Pontis Foundation, implemented jointly with the Ostrogorski Centre. The speakers discussed the issues of Belarusian soft power in the region, Belarusian-Russian relations after the conflict in Ukraine, the foreign policy of Belarus in the context of the CIS, the potential of Belarusian neutrality, and the geopolitical orientation of Belarusians.

The conference is expected to become an annual event to promote professional and respectful dialogue between experts with different political views. Videos of all conference sections (in Belarusian and Russian) are [available online](#).

# Our projects

## THE 4TH ANNUAL DUTCH-BELARUSIAN-POLISH CONFERENCE: EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT



On 13 December 2016, Minsk hosted the 4th Annual Dutch-Belarusian-Polish Conference 'Education as a Human Right: Modernising Higher Education to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century'. The conference was organised by the Ostrogorski Centre in cooperation with the Embassy of the Netherlands and the Embassy of Poland.

Improving higher education was the focus of the discussion-oriented conference. As with other conferences co-organised by the Ostrogorski Centre, it brought together people with different views and backgrounds to engage in respectful dialogue.

The speakers included representatives of educational institutions from the Netherlands, Poland, and Belarus, as well as Belarusian government agencies and NGOs.

The conference was live streamed and recorded. Video of the conference, brochure with speaker biographies and three analytical papers are available [here](#).

# Our projects

## SECOND ANNUAL LONDON CONFERENCE ON BELARUSIAN STUDIES



The conference 'Belarusian Studies in the 21st Century' and Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies took place in London on 23-24 March 2016.

The conference served as a multidisciplinary forum of Belarusian studies for researchers of Belarus in the West covering a wide range of topics – from history and foreign policy of Belarus to public art and digital engagement.

The Ostrogorski Centre and the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies organised the conference in partnership with Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum, Anglo-Belarusian Society, and the Journal of Belarusian Studies.

The conference gathered around 20 speakers and moderators from the United Kingdom, Germany, United States, Canada, Poland and France.

## ELEMENTS OF NEUTRALITY IN BELARUSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY



On 25 October 2016, the Ostrogorski Centre released the [first major publication on neutrality](#) in Belarusian foreign and national security policy. Its authors are Siarhei Bohdan and Gumer Isaev.

Belarus has moved closer towards authentic neutrality over the past decade. For a long time, Minsk's position has been misinterpreted as opportunism with regards to Moscow and the West. Yet by the mid-2010s, signs of neutrality coalesced into a reliable element of Belarusian foreign and national security policy.

This naturally leads one to question whether neutrality is a viable option for the Belarusian state. So far, Moscow has accepted this, but other countries are refusing to take it seriously. However, this may be the only way for Belarus to survive as a state under the current circumstances.

## BELARUS-RUSSIA RELATIONS AFTER THE UKRAINE CONFLICT



On 1 August 2016, the Ostrogorski Centre released an [analytical paper on shifts in Belarus-Russia relations](#) authored by Ryhor Astapenia and Dzmitry Balkunets.

Since the Russian-Ukrainian conflict began, the Kremlin has persistently tried to expand its control over Belarus, a process that has had quite the opposite effect as Belarusian government policy became more independent in 2014-2015. There has always existed a paradox in the simultaneous contingency and estrangement in Belarusian-Russian relations.

# Analytical papers

Today, estrangement seems to be the most dominant tendency. This is evidenced by the decrease in Belarus's military dependence on Russia and its refusal to allow the establishment of a Russian military base on its territory, the reduction of the Russian economy's role in Belarus, discrepancies in the foreign policy and media spheres, and conflicts between the political elites of both countries.

## NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN BELARUS: EXPANDING THE LEARNING SPACE



On 2 November, the Ostrogorski Centre published the paper [Non-formal education in Belarus: expanding the learning space](#).

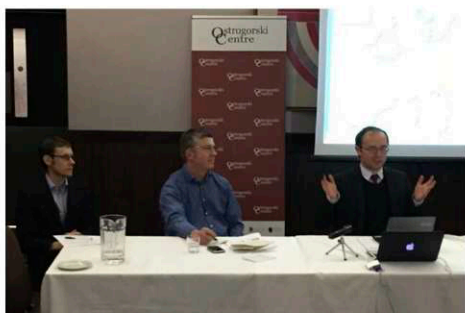
The Belarusian state has long perceived non-formal education as a threat to the existing authoritarian political regime and thus created a restrictive environment for its operation. The authorities have established ideological control over university disciplines in which a certain interpretation of politics has particular significance. In this context, spreading non-dogmatic and non-politicised knowledge has become an essential task for non-formal education institutions in Belarus.

In order to become more attractive and relevant for Belarusians given the political and economic situation in the country, non-formal education providers should promote specific skills which are useful on the labour market, introduce new business models to improve fundraising, seek recognition from formal institutions, and rely more on modern technology and distance learning.

# Selected activities in 2016



Yaraslau Kryvoi at EBRD consultations, March 2016



Siarhei Bohdan at the Annual London Conference on Belarusian Studies, March 2016



Yaraslau Kryvoi at the annual Lennart Meri conference in Tallinn, May 2016



Artyom Shraibman at the Chatham House discussion in London, June 2016

**February-May 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre, in cooperation with Pontis Foundation, implemented a grant competition for research in the areas of foreign policy, security, and education. The papers were presented at the [Ostrogorski Forum 2016](#).

**March 2016:** Yaraslau Kryvoi took part in consultations in Minsk on the political climate in Belarus with Acting Vice President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Alain Pilloux and the head of EBRD Belarus office Francis Delaey.

**March 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre and UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies [organised a conference](#) entitled 'Belarusian Studies in the 21st Century' and the Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies in London.

**April 2016:** Freedom House published [a report on political transition](#) in Belarus prepared by Yaraslau Kryvoi. According to the methodology of Nations in Transit 2016 the reports are written by country experts and country ratings are determined by Freedom House.

**May 2016:** Yaraslau Kryvoi participated in the annual Lennart Meri conference in Tallinn.

**June 2016:** Artyom Shraibman spoke at the 'Belarus: Quo Vadis?' discussion, organised by the Chatham House Russia and Eurasia Programme in London.

**June 2016:** Vadzim Smok took part in consultations with a group of advisers to the Board of Directors of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

**June 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre held the first Ostrogorski Forum, a conference on foreign policy and security at Drazdy Club in Minsk. The conference gathered prominent Belarusian experts, both pro-government and independent, as well as academics from state universities and government officials.

# Selected activities in 2016



Ryhor Astapenia speaking at the Ostrogorski Forum 2016 in Minsk, June 2016



Yaraslau Kryvoi and Vadzim Smok organise a seminar at Belarusian State University, June 2016



Ostrogorski Centre team at the 6th International Congress of Belarusian Studies in Kaunas, October 2016



Education as a Human Right Conference in Minsk, December 2016

**June 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre and School of Business and Management of Technology of Belarusian State University jointly organised a seminar in Minsk on higher and non-formal education in Belarus.

**August 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre published an analytical paper '[Belarus-Russia Relations after the Ukraine Conflict](#)' by Ryhor Astapenia and Dzmitry Balkunets.

**August 2016:** Igar Gubarevich met with Tana de Zulueta, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission at the 2016 parliamentary elections in Belarus, and Stefan Szwed, the Mission's political analyst to share his expert opinion on the current political situation in Belarus.

**October 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre team took part in the Sixth International Congress of Belarusian Studies (Kaunas, Lithuania), the largest annual conference on social sciences and humanities.

**October 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre released the first major [publication on neutrality](#) in Belarus foreign and national security policy authored by Siarhei Bohdan and Gumer Isaev.

**November 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre released an analytical paper called '[Non-formal education in Belarus: expanding the learnin space](#)' by Yaraslau Kryvoi and Vadzim Smok. The paper offers recommendations to enhance the non-formal education in Belarus.

**December 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre in cooperation with the Embassies of the Netherlands and Poland organised the [4th Annual Dutch-Belarusian-Polish Conference](#) on education as human right

**December 2016:** the Ostrogorski Centre published the [2016 issue](#) of the Journal of Belarusian Studies

# Our partners and contributors

## SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

- The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- Embassy of the Republic of Poland
- Open Society Foundations
- Mott Foundation
- Pontis Foundation
- Online Magazine Idea
- Polish Radio for Abroad
- Belarusian Research and Outreach Centre BEROCC
- Belarus Research Council
- Anglo-Belarusian Society
- School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL
- Radio Racyja



## CONTRIBUTORS AND COLLABORATORS

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- Aliaksandr Filipau
- Arseni Sivitski
- Artsiom Tkachuk
- David Marples
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- Galina Dzesiatava
- Juljan Jachovic
- Lizaveta Kasmach
- Marta Kochetkova
- Maryja Kavalčuk
- Maryja Rusak
- Masha Cheriakova
- Michael Murphy
- Nicolò Fasola
- Nigel Roberts
- Olga Karatch
- Paul Hansbury
- Serge Kharytonau
- Siarhei Leskiec
- Tatsiana Kulakevich
- Veranika Laputska



# Our team



**Yarik Kryvoi** is the director at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: education, international public law, commercial dispute resolution, business climate.



**Vadzim Smok** is an analyst and Project Coordinator at the Ostrogorski Centre in Minsk. Areas of expertise: public policy, society, local government, national identity.



**Siarhei Bohdan** is a research director at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: security, Middle East, Central Asia, Belarus foreign policy.



**Igar Gubarevich** is a senior analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre based in Minsk. Areas of expertise: Belarus foreign policy, business climate in Belarus, Western Europe, United States, international organisations.



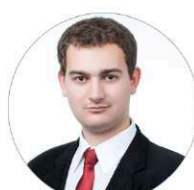
**Ryhor Astapenia** is development director at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: Belarusian foreign policy, security, Belarus' political system.



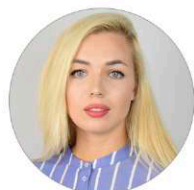
**Volha Charnysh** is an analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: identity politics, migration, historical legacies, ethnic conflict.



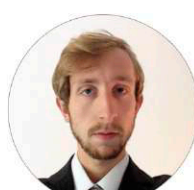
**Paula Borowska** is an analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: national minorities, religious studies, Belarus-Poland relations.



**Artyom Shraibman** is an associate analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: Belarus-EU relations, domestic policy of Belarus, Belarusian media.



**Alesia Rudnik** is an analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: civil society of Belarus and Eastern European countries, advocacy in non-democratic states, political system of Belarus.



**Jeremy Coppock** is an intern at the Ostrogorski Centre. Areas of expertise: Belarusian nation-building, identity, and Belarusian migration.