

GLOBAL EUROPE CENTRE SURVEY BRIEF

*Belarus between the European Union
and the Eurasian Economic Union:
A national values survey 2016*

Principal Investigator: Professor Elena A Korosteleva
March 2016



BELARUS' NATIONAL VALUES SURVEY 2016: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three particular trends are observable in the opinion of the Belarusian respondents:

- There is a high-level understanding and appreciation of the EU as an international partner, underpinned by a *growing sense of common interest* and partnership in a number of areas
- Differences in normative associations between Belarus, the EU and the EEU continue to persist. At the same time, fostering economic welfare may present a common ground for convergence
- Perceived rivalry and strategic overlap between the EU and the EEU are becoming more pronounced. Public reasoning however is currently swayed in favour of economic cooperation with the EEU.

Thematic Block I: The EU-Belarus relations under the EaP: perceptions, interests and expectations

- There are a *growing interest* and *importance* of the EU for the Belarusian respondents
- At the same time, emotively the EU now less associates with *hope* (-4 since 2013), and *enthusiasm* (a twofold decrease), and more with *mistrust* (+7) and *anxiety* (a twofold increase)
- The EU-Belarus relations are seen as stable and prospering predicated on *common economic, political and security interests*
- There is a *growing sense of self-worth* among the respondents, reflected in more positive perceptions of themselves abroad. This comes in sharp contrast to a similar (and very critical) Self-evaluation in the 2013 survey
- Two thirds of the respondents believe that Belarus should develop a *new framework for relations* with the EU, which would prioritise economic and trade relations (48%), as well as visa liberalisation and financial aid (20%). Only 8% consent that Belarus could benefit from the EU's experience of democracy and good governance (an over twofold decrease since 2009)



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Thematic Block II: Belarus' values and normative associations

- Public *awareness* levels about the EU and the EEU are exceptionally high and stable
- At the same time, there are persistent *normative differences* in public perceptions of their greater neighbours: while the *EU* continues to associate with a model of *liberal democracy*; the *EEU* presents a *hybrid case* of 'social democracy,' with a mix of liberal and socialist (egalitarian) values – which is closer to 'the hearts and minds' of the Belarusians
- For the first time however, *market economy*, a prevalent feature in both models, is seen as a ground for closer convergence between the two normative models
- There is a perceivable *overlap* in the benefits that the EU and the EEU could offer, which exacerbates a sense of rivalry between the two powers, in the eyes of the respondents. Trade and economic development are prioritised in the relationship with both, but more opportunities for cooperation are seen with the EEU

Thematic Block III: Geopolitics – Belarus between the EU and the EEU

- While both partners are seen as strategically important for Belarus, twice as many respondents believe that *the EEU* should be their *principal partner*
- A growing plurality of respondents believe *the EU* and *the EEU* may not be able to *work together* in helping to modernise Belarus
- There is a perceivable *growing sense of rivalry* between the two neighbours which is further attested by a sense of their overlapping competencies
- Over 50% respondents believe that the country's foreign policy is firmly anchored on Russia and the EEU; with *two thirds* approving of *this course of development*

A list of acronyms:

EU	European Union
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
BY	Belarus
EaP	Eastern Partnership Initiative
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy

BELARUS' NATIONAL VALUES SURVEY 2016: MAIN FINDINGS

Thematic Block I: EU-Belarus relations under the EaP: perceptions, interests and ambitions

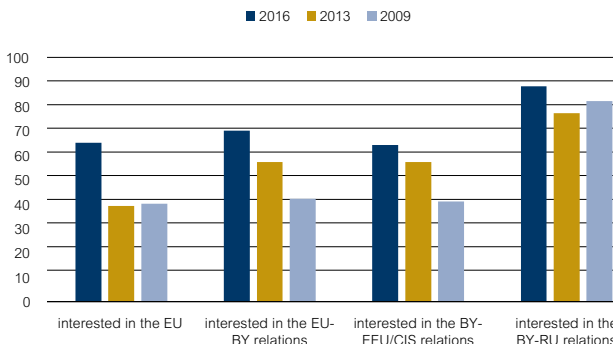
There is a growing sense of understanding and acceptance of the EU as a strategic partner, reflected in higher levels of *awareness* and *cognizance* of the EU as a polity, more *interest* in EU affairs, more perceivable *commonalities* with the EU as a partner, and stronger *acknowledgement and appreciation* of the EU contribution to Belarus' development. Our findings suggest that the EU's continued and enhanced engagement with the country have had a positive impact on the public perception of the EU, especially in terms of developing common interests in economic, political, security and other areas of cooperation.

In particular, our cross-temporal analysis of public surveys undertaken in 2009, 2013 and 2016 demonstrates continually high and stable levels of *awareness* about the EU (96%) and the EEU (84%) by the Belarusian respondents. Furthermore, respondents also display comparably higher *cognizance* in detailing the EU structure, functions, and policies, as compared to any other international organisation cited in the poll (except for NATO, which attracted slightly higher public awareness owing to its historicity and recent media publicity). This is further reinforced by almost a twofold increase of *interest* in EU affairs (65%; +25 since 2009) and Belarus-EU relations in particular (70%; +22 since 2009). This is however, in par with similar levels of interest in the EEU/CIS (64%; +21 since 2009) and Russia (88%, +6 since 2009).

At least two thirds of the respondents are now *familiar* with the EaP initiative (~60%; a threefold increase since 2009) and also believe that a new and *stronger framework* of cooperation with the EU is now necessary (60%). This cooperation should focus primarily on strengthening the Belarus-EU economic and trade relations (48%), as well as liberalisation of the visa regime (20%) and delivering financial support (19%) to the country. At the same time, only 8% consent that the EU's experience of democracy and good governance could be beneficial for Belarus, which is a twofold decrease in public expectations since 2009.

In terms of the details of cooperation, the respondents can now discern a range of stable and successful forms of cooperation with the EU, amongst which they especially note trade partnership (37%), cross-border cooperation (36%) and student exchange and education reforms (32%). A third of respondents believe that strengthening relations with the EU reflects the interests of the country and its government (29%); rather than the EU alone, as indicated in the previous surveys. The majority of respondents (54%; +12 since 2009) see the relationship with the EU as *very positive*, with a third highlighting its progressive nature.

How much are you...



Furthermore, a plurality (46%; +13 since 2009) now point out that the EU is *actually* interested in pursuing closer ties with Belarus, to help the country stabilise and modernise.

The perception of the *nature* of this relationship demonstrates a significant *substantive change*: the majority (50%; +16 since 2009)

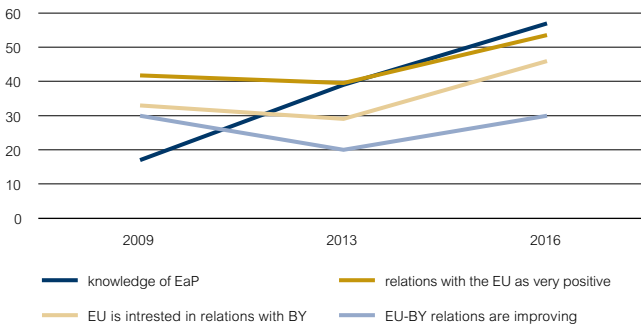
now believe the Belarus-EU relations are now found on common (rather than the EU's) values and interests; among which joint economic (47%; +13), security (and 45%; +10) and legal international (52%; +9) interests explicitly prevail. Moreover, a quarter of respondents contend that the Belarus-EU relations are of reciprocal and equal nature (+4

since 2009), which once again comes in a stark contrast with the previous findings.

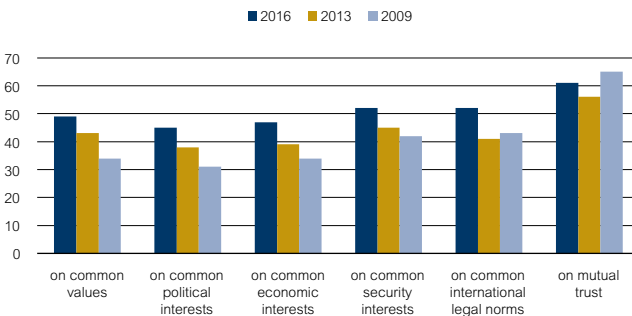
There is a *growing sense of self-worth* among the respondents, which is comparable to the 2009 findings, but comes in a sharp contrast to the 2013 findings. That year the respondents seemed particularly self-critical and negative about their government and external perceptions. The 2016 findings reflect the rising numbers of interviewees (36%; +4 since 2013) insisting that Belarus is now more (deservedly) positively perceived in Europe. This is further reiterated by a range of self-esteem measures, associated with being seen as more peaceful (+6); developed (+4); spiritual (+5); open (+10); democratic (+3); lawful (+7), EU partner (+10) and friendly (+11) country.

A closer affinity with Europe is further corroborated by the respondents' emotive evaluation of the EU, whereby a fifth of them continue to associate 'hope' (-4 since 2013) and 'enthusiasm (a twofold decrease) with the EU. At the same time, a rise in mistrust (+7) and anxiety (a twofold increase) towards the EU since 2013 are also instructive and could possibly be connected to the events in Ukraine and the EU problematic relations with Russia.

Changes in public knowledge and perceptions of the EU



BY-EU relations are based on



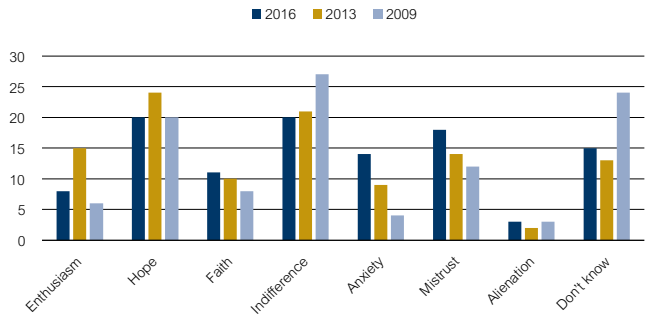
BELARUS' NATIONAL VALUES SURVEY: MAIN FINDINGS (CONT)

In summary, seven years on (2009; 2013; 2016) public legitimization of the EU remains positive and strong evidenced by substantive changes in the respondents' growing awareness and shared interest. If in 2009, the survey showed that the population was largely uninterested and uninformed about the EU: every fifth respondent had difficulty in naming EU Member States, every second failed to locate the EU headquarters. This has substantively altered by 2016, attesting to the efforts of and benefits from the EU continued engagement with the country. Belarus respondents look forward to taking their relationship with the EU to a new level.

Thematic Block II: Belarus values and normative associations

While the attitudes towards the EU are becoming more positive and affirmative, the same cannot be said about the *normative underpinnings* of these relations. On the one hand, the Belarus-EU relations are progressively driven by more common interest and positive perceptions of each other. This is particularly reflected in how the respondents see Belarus externally (36%, comparable to 2009) and the EU – internally (49%, +23 since 2009, as well as in growing interest, awareness and a sense of partnership congruent with the Belarusian interests. On the other hand, especially if taken from the perspective of a cross-temporal evaluation, some critical disconnects become more observable.

Which emotions do you associate the EU with



First, while many respondents indicated a shift toward more common interests and values in the EU-Belarus relations, captured in their 20% rise in public opinion since 2009; this, however, may be more to do with having joint aspirations, than real practices and changes in public behaviour. In particular, temporal comparison of *normative associations* reveals *no change* in values patterns which respondents attribute to the EU, the EEU and their own country, and significant differences in social democratic modelling continue to prevail. In particular, the EU determinedly associates with a *liberal democracy* model (Kurki 2010:372), premised on the values of market economy (48%), democracy (42%), economic prosperity (31%), human rights (29%), and personal freedoms (27%) – an astonishingly similar response to that in 2009 and 2013,

which suggests a firmly endured model that the respondents apply to the case of the EU. A model which respondents connect with the EEU as a new entity, offers a curious mix of qualities, a *hybrid case*, which however, is closer to how the respondents depict their own country – what is known as the case of a *social-democratic model* in the wider scholarship (Ibid: 373):

Liberal Democracy (EU)

- market economy (48%)
- democracy (42%)
- economic prosperity (31%)
- human rights (29%)
- personal freedoms (27%)

Hybrid case (EEU)

- market economy (32%)
- peace/stability (25%)
- multiculturalism (24%)
- economic prosperity (22%)
- don't know (20%)

Social Democracy (BY)

- peace/stability (61%)
- security (46%)
- multiculturalism (38%)
- tolerance (26%)
- cultural heritage (30%)

Interestingly, in relation to the EEU or Belarusian respondents do not seem to refer to 'democracy' as a value, but instead prioritise stability, security and cultural traditions, which is broadly reflective of the survey findings in 2009 and 2013. The above thus indicate a *profound normative gap* in the associative models of democracy which the respondents continue to distinguish all three cases by.

Second, for the first time, *market economy* as a value came to the top, to describe the EEU case in the eyes of the respondents – a minor and yet important change. It infers closer proximity between the EU and the EEU normative models, and may pave the way to reducing perceived *incompatibility* and facilitating closer convergence between them, on the grounds of economic (market) cooperation between the two regional blocs. Another interesting observation is the rise of 'Don't Knows' (+7) in the respondents' description of the EEU which runs in contrary to their rising awareness about the polity. This may reflect recent and more assertive changes in Russia's foreign policy, which until lately had been seen as a beacon of stability and peace (survey 2013).

Third, there is a growing perception of *overlapping competencies* between the EU and the EEU, in the respondents' opinion. If before there was a strong sense of differentiation and ensuing complementarity between the two greater neighbours: while the EU's main competencies were seen as lying with the 'know-how' for economic development, trade, democracy and good governance; the EEU (as a Customs Union) was seen as able to deliver primarily on trade, tourism, energy and employment opportunities. Hence, cooperating with both powers was seen as prudent and essential for the survival of the Belarus economy reflected in the so called 'balancing' strategy. The 2016 survey however revealed that both powers are now perceived as equally able (and thus competitive) of delivering the same benefits for economic reforms and trade, with the EEU however favoured over the EU almost by threefold (65%:23%), and nearly by twofold in economic development (56%:33%). Furthermore, benefits of cooperation with the EU seem to be restricted to trade economic development only; benefits of aligning with the EEU however are seen as wider and more diverse, to include tourism (39% – often for recreational purposes), energy security (26%), employment/pension benefits (25%) and education (23%). In sum, the 2016 survey sees the rise of the cooperation dilemma for Belarus, which becomes ever more tangible when juxtaposed with what respondents see as the most pressing issues for the country these days: living costs (37%), and employment/pension opportunities

(20%). The market to help satisfy those needs for now clearly lies with the EEU. These differing and now almost binary associations are profound in their implications, especially for the policy implementation and sustainable dialogue with the country at the strategic level: The EU and the EEU are no longer seen as complementary projects, rather they are increasingly perceived as overlapping and dichotomous – a trend that became observable as early as 2013. In light of the still strong pragmatic interest, but dwindling emotional affinity with the EU, the newly revised ENP needs to carefully recalibrate the format of its proposed engagement, to gain traction with the country and remain effective especially in terms of practical measures and instruments to help reinstate a sense of complementary and congruence in the EU-Belarus-EEU cooperation.

Thematic Block III: Geopolitics – Belarus between the EU and the EEU

The age of geopolitics is clearly back on the agenda, in the perception of the respondents. Although many display a growing interest, awareness and appreciation of the EU as an important regional player, with whom they now share many common interests and even values; the hard rational choice preferences nevertheless seem to firmly lie with Russia and the EEU as a market of easier opportunities and quick-fix solutions.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

BELARUS' NATIONAL VALUES SURVEY: MAIN FINDINGS (CONT)

The EU is strongly perceived as an important and yet, compared to the EEU, clearly a 'second-rated' partner (73%) with whom, the relations are now predicated on common interests (53%, +1 since 2013), and whose support is vital for Belarus' stable economic future (72%, -5 since 2009), and democratic development (48%, -10). These figures however become less reassuring when cross-examined with similar perceptions of Russia and the EEU. Notably, the EEU is seen as an important partner (80%, -8), with whom cooperation is premised on joint interests (74%, -10), and whose support is vital for Belarus economy (77%, -8), and democracy (51%, -9). At the same time, while the EEU clearly enjoys a much higher endorsement for cooperation by the respondents, this endorsement however is also in decline, which may suggest that perhaps some re-evaluation of

priorities connected to the Self-identity search and a choice of future direction, is currently occurring. This re-evaluation, in light of the perceived overlap in competencies between the EU and EEU, may potentially be divisive and destabilising for the country's status-quo and the region more broadly.

A sense of *rivalry bordering incompatibility* between the EU and the EEU is becoming more acute for the respondents. They become increasingly split on the prospects of their possible cooperation and dialogue, thus jeopardising Belarus' strategy of balancing between the two neighbours. A strong plurality of respondents (40%) insist that the EU and EEU's approaches to reform are too different to reconcile; another third insist that these polities are absolutely incompatible; with the remainder hoping for a dialogue or expressing no opinion (32%).

A majority (50%) believe that partnership with Russia and the EEU is far more beneficial for the country (a rise by 14% since 2013), which is juxtaposed with 11% of those who prefer partnership with the EU. A twofold decrease (18%) is observable in the prospect and the benefit of the reciprocal cooperation with both the EU and the EEU. 52% contend that Belarusian foreign policy is and should be oriented towards Russia and the EEU, with only 2% (-2) consenting it to follow the EU/West direction, while a further third purporting a multi-vectored policy. An overwhelming majority (2/3 of the respondents) support and approve of the government's current course of development.

There is an almost twofold rise in the respondents who would choose cooperation with Russia and the EEU (39%) over strengthening cooperation with the EU (10%, -5) if a referendum were held tomorrow; while 39% (-9) trust cooperation with both would be beneficial for the country. At the same time, if they had to choose between the EU and the EEU, 37% (+5) would be in favour of the EEU, reducing support for the EU to less than a quarter (24%, -9).

In conclusion, the above cross-temporal comparisons (2009, 2013, and 2016) reveal some crucial and substantive changes in public perceptions of the EU, the EEU and the Self. While strong and stable positive perceptions towards the EU abound reflecting its better visibility and presence in the country, this state of affairs is far from enduring.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

On the one hand, partnership with the EU has acquired an important interest-driven and self-incentivising modus of cooperation ensuing some feasible outcomes in a number of areas of successful cooperation. On the other hand, the EU's position and importance for the Belarus remains volatile and conditional.

The 2016 survey indicates that preferences for stable and predictable cooperation with the EEU and Russia have now reverted to its pre-2013 default position. The EEU especially is now favoured as the Belarus' principal partner, with two thirds of the population approving of this course of direction. Furthermore, a sense of deeply divisive rivalry, attested to by an increasing overlap in competencies and benefits offered individually by the EU and the EEU, is now firmly on the agenda, thus jeopardising Belarus's conventional strategy of balancing between the two greater neighbours.

Furthermore, normative differences in governance continue to persist, with Belarus feeling closer to the EEU and Russia's model of democratic government. At the same time, for the first time ever, economic cooperation (market economy) has presented itself as a 'shared (aspirational) value' which if anything could offer a fertile ground for developing cooperation and convergence, which may lead to the reappraisal of the EU-EEU relations and their individual benefits for Belarus and the 'shared region'.

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INFORMATION

Professor Elena A Korosteleva is the Principal Investigator of this survey. She was commissioned the 2008-11 project on the Eastern Neighbourhood (including Belarus) by the ESRC (RES-061-25-0001) and the 2013 survey by the ODB.

Professor Elena A Korosteleva (Principal Investigator) is Director of the Global Europe Centre (Professional Studies), Jean Monnet Chair in European Studies at the University of Kent, and a Professorial Visiting Fellow at the Belarusian State University. Her main research interests include EU foreign policies, European External Action Service, European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, EU governance, democracy promotion and the concepts of democracy.

Elena's main research interests include EU foreign policies and EU relations with the eastern neighbourhood, democracy promotion and democratisation. Amongst her recent monographs are *The EU and its Eastern Neighbours: towards a more ambitious partnership* (2014 paperback); *EU Policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood: the practices perspective* (2014, with M Natorski and L Simao); *Eastern Partnership: towards a more ambitious partnership?* (2012) – all published with Routledge.

Global Europe Centre

The Global Europe Centre (GEC) is an interdisciplinary research centre at the University of Kent focusing on Europe, its international relations, and its place in a changing world. The Centre brings together leading international academics from politics and international relations, economics, law, business, and European culture in order to explore the contemporary policy challenges to Europe and its nation states. GEC is based within the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR) and at the Brussels School of International Studies (BSIS). GEC closely collaborates with its partner institutions in the eastern region, including Belarus (Centre for Political and Social Research), Ukraine (SOCIS), Moldova (OPINIA), Russia (CSR MGU) and the Caucasus (GORBI).

This research has been conducted by the Institute of Management and Social Technologies BSU, under the supervision of Professor David Rotman.

ODB Brussels (Belgium)

ODB is a Brussels-based non-profit organisation promoting cooperation between the EU and Belarus and other countries from the region, empowering local institutions, non-commercial organisations, and professional associations in Belarus by employing best European practices. For 10 years, ODB has facilitated dialogue between professionals from civil society and government, contributed to harmonisation of national programmes and legislative norms in Belarus with the best EU/Eastern Partnership standards and practices; strengthened the capacity of local Belarusian CSOs to increase their qualitative participation in international programmes and assisted the integration of universal values into their everyday work.

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The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)

Sida is a government agency working on behalf of the Swedish parliament and government, with the mission to reduce poverty in the world. SIDA works in order to implement the Swedish development policy. Additionally, Sida is conducting reform cooperation with Eastern Europe including Belarus.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SURVEY:¹

This survey examines public attitudes of the Belarusian respondents towards the European Union (EU) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). It is organised along the three major blocs of questions, including:

- EU-Belarus relations: perceptions, interests and expectations
- Belarusian values and normative associations
- Geopolitics: Belarus between the EU and the EEU

This nation-wide representative survey is *cross-temporal*, undertaken with reference to the two analogous surveys conducted in 2009 and 2013 for comparative purposes.² The findings are comparable with the other available data, including the EU Neighbourhood Barometer East (Autumn 2012)³ and the IISEPS polls.⁴

This survey was conducted between 18 January and 7 February 2016 in Belarus, as part of the ODB Brussels project EU-Belarus Task Force, with the assistance of the Institute for Management and Social Technologies (GIUST), Belarusian State University (Professor David Rotman). The project was financially supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), Global Europe Centre (GEC) and Jean Monnet Chair, University of Kent.

The survey involved all six regions of Belarus, covering 52 selected residential areas. The sampling was multi-staged, stratified, and random, and included 1000 respondents (1643 contacts were attempted in total). The surveyed selection was representative of the population aged 18+ (urban and rural) by nationality, sex, region, age and education. The interview lasted on average 40-50 minutes using local languages for interlocution. The sample representation error was no more than + 3%. The survey included 12% random quality control on completion, undertaken by the Principal Investigator. 81 interviewers were involved in undertaking the survey. They had on average 3-10 years of polling experience, and received relevant training in social research skills.

Documents available for further inspection, on separate request:

- Completed questionnaires (1000 copies)
- Reports from regional headquarters (7 copies)
- Itinerary lists completed by interviewers (94 copies)
- Instructions for interviewers and regional leaders
- Technical report of the survey

¹ This survey is commissioned by ODB Brussels (ODB) under the Belarus-EU Task-Force Programme and financially supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and Global Europe Centre/Jean Monnet Chair. The findings are the copyright of the ODB Brussels and the University of Kent: Please cite accordingly

² The first nation-wide survey was conducted in 2008-9 as part of a large ESRC project (ESRC 061-25-0005) titled 'Europeanising or Securitising the outsiders: Assessing the EU's partnership-building approach to the neighbours' (2008-11) – for more information see

www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/europeanising-securitising-outsideers/. The second was commissioned by the ODB in 2013 and deployed the same questionnaire for comparative purposes. Its results are available at http://odb-office.eu/expertise_/research/public-opinion-poll-belarus-and-eastern-partnership-national-and-european-values

³ http://euneighbourhood.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/ENPIreport_wave2_East.pdf

⁴ www.iiseps.org/tag/31

FURTHER INFORMATION

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